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Tribute to Rex Perschbacher (and Justice Cruz Reynoso)

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I have been asked to present tributes to two long time Inn of Court (“Inn”) members,² Dean Rex Perschbacher and Justice Cruz Reynoso.³ When I agreed to offer these tributes at this event, I told Judge Vasquez that my remarks would be brief and somewhat personal.

I could spend considerable time describing in detail the accomplishments of these very distinguished Inn members; however, in today’s age of instant information, you can find both of their bios on your phone and read them faster than I can recite them. More importantly, there is more than a touch of dissonance in a tribute extolling Rex and Cruz’s virtues. These are humble men. In a world sorrowfully saturated with bombast and self-adoration, they stand out.

¹ Redacted tribute originally presented at a dinner celebration of the Milton L. Schwartz/David F. Levi chapter of the Inn of Court, at which Dean Rex Perschbacher and Justice Cruz Reynoso received the same lifetime achievement award. The award was presented a short time before Rex passed away. I am sure Rex was proud to be in the company of Cruz in receiving his award.

² The Inn of Court is a legal society “dedicated to promoting the highest levels of professionalism in the practice of law.” AMERICAN INNS OF COURT, http://home.innsofcourt.org/AIC/About_Us/AIC/AIC_About_Us/About_Us.aspx?hkey=72647b55-4a23-4263-8a3e-817098c808fa (last visited Aug. 5, 2018).

³ Justice Cruz Reynoso served on the California Supreme Court from 1982 to 1987. He was a fellow Professor of Law at UC Davis and was the inaugural holder of the Law School’s Boochever and Bird Chair for the Study and Teaching of Freedom and Equality.

One cannot imagine either Rex or Cruz implying, much less proclaiming, that their efforts and achievements were all about themselves. Their life's work was always about helping others, serving causes, and building institutions. In some sense, focusing a tribute on Rex and Cruz misses a crucial aspect of why they deserve a tribute. Their work was never about either of them. It was about us, the people around them; the people who benefited from their energy, commitment, courage, kindness and decency.

Rex Perschbacher joined the King Hall faculty in 1981, the same year I did. Clearly, 1981 was a very good hiring year for the law school's recruitment committee. Rex was an excellent teacher and scholar, but for some reason that I never understood, he, like several of my other colleagues and friends, wanted to be a law school dean.

Rex served as Dean at King Hall for two terms. He is largely responsible for the renovation and expansion of our building, no small accomplishment in an era of limited funding for public institutions.

Rex was committed to King Hall having a diverse faculty. He rejected out of hand the excuses of law schools who defended their lack of diversity on the grounds that they could not find qualified candidates to hire. Today, King Hall is a majority-minority faculty law school. Modesty aside, no one could doubt the excellence of our teaching or the quality and quantity of our scholarship. Rex planted that seed and nourished it so that Kevin Johnson, the current Dean, had a firm foundation on which to continue to grow what Rex had cultivated.

Rex was a decent, soft spoken person, but there was steel in his values. When the Regents of the University of California proposed dramatic increases in professional school fees, Rex was the only University of California Law School Dean who challenged the Regents' retreat from publicly supported legal education to their face.

Rex was one of the earliest faculty members of this Inn. He particularly valued the Inn's focus on legal ethics. Rex taught professional responsibility, but he knew there was no substitute for King Hall students meeting veteran attorneys and learning firsthand that success in the legal profession is grounded in a commitment to abiding by, not circumventing, the requirements of professional ethics.

Rex loved King Hall and he is loved and admired by those of us who know him. When another one of my faculty colleagues and friends, Jim Hogan, passed away several years ago, I added a song in Jim's honor to a program I host for the King Hall Legal Foundation auction. It's a lament for a man named in pun, *Rosin The Bow*. There's nothing Irish about Rex, but the last stanza is universal in its sentiment.

*I hear that old tyrant approaching,
that cruel and remorseless old foe,
and I lift up my glass in his honor,
have a drink with old Rosin the Bow.*

So, I lift up my glass in your honor Rex as we pay tribute to you.