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## Memories In My Years as Dean

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# In My Years as Dean

by Peter G. Keane

**T**he past five years as dean of Golden Gate University School of Law have been one of the most professionally satisfying and personally rewarding periods in my life. This is a great law school with a wonderful tradition and a terrific future. I have been very much blessed to be a part of it.

A year ago, the university offered me a second five-year term as dean. I declined. I said I wanted to step down and teach as a full-time professor. I am a great believer in the importance of knowing when to leave. I have attended many ABA meetings during the last five years and have seen too many deans who stayed beyond their time. Five years as a law school dean is enough. I did everything I set out to do, so it is best to quit while I am ahead. Here are some of my thoughts as I do my swan song.

The most outstanding component of this school is, and always will be, the students. They have a gritty, upbeat determination that is more than admirable. They are here to become lawyers, but each also hangs on to that identity and individuality that makes him or her unique. There is no cookie-cutter quality to our students. Each has a fresh and genuine humanity that defies stereotyping. Best of all, they share the colorful richness of themselves while they are here, helping to create a vibrant atmosphere. In my opinion, the greatest defining attribute of this law school is that it allows students to nurture their own particular qualities and blend them all into the professional people they will become as practicing lawyers.



*Pictured above, top:* In January 2001, I traveled to Cuba with a delegation of lawyers, judges, and law professors. *Pictured above, bottom:* A film series organized by Adjunct Professor Terry Diggs (left), featured interviews with impressive newsmakers including Jeff Adachi, Fred Koramatsu, and Sox Kiteshima.



Attending alumni reunions was always a lot of fun. It was great to learn what our graduates were doing. **Pictured at left:** Fresno area alumni gathered for lunch in October 2000. **Pictured below:** I met some of our Bay Area alumni in June 2000 when Golden Gate University President Philip Friedman sponsored a luncheon at his home in Walnut Creek.



During the school year 2001-02, we completely renovated the Law School classrooms at Golden Gate. In February, the Dean's Advisory Board (**pictured at right**) met to tour the construction site.

On September 19, 2002, President Friedman and I (**pictured in middle**) unveiled the new classrooms with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

I enjoy teaching in the new, state-of-the-art lecture halls (**pictured above**).



During the 30 years I practiced law in San Francisco, I saw these special characteristics in lawyers who were alumni of Golden Gate. They have a fierce dedication to their clients and to their profession. They work hard and diligently because they know that success is not just going to drop into their laps. This in itself puts them ahead of the game in dealing with many of their colleagues from other law schools who do not have this signature, common-sense attribute that goes with a law degree from Golden Gate.

Our alumni also have an empathy for the problems of their clients and an understanding of the importance of helping out people who are struggling in life and having a difficult time of it. This empathy brings with it one of

the greatest skills that a lawyer can have: the skill of listening. Unfortunately, so many lawyers never develop this skill because they have the false idea that they are better than their clients—more intelligent and more important—merely because they are lawyers. The majority of Golden Gate lawyers never lose that common touch of democracy that goes with the Mission Street experience. This enormous talent serves them and their clients well.

So one of the great joys for me as dean has been the students. It is a true pleasure to watch the new students arrive, get to know them, follow their progress, talk to them, counsel them, learn from them and, finally, hand them their diplomas at graduation.

**One of the real pleasures of stepping down as dean will be full-time teaching as a law professor...**

It means greater day-to-day contact with the students. It means being more directly involved in shaping their legal training and molding them as lawyers. I look forward to this exciting and pleasurable time.

For me as dean, the next best thing has been getting to know the alumni. The alums are, after all, just the students who have shifted into drive gear and are out there displaying the benefits of this school. Over my five years as dean, I got to know, firsthand, the



In 2001 Golden Gate University School of Law celebrated 100 years in San Francisco with a variety of special events. **Pictured top left:** At the centennial alumni reception, my wife Nancy (far right) and I met with Hon. Anne Boutiane (80) and Adjunct Professor Hon. Maria-Elena James (second from left). **Pictured top right:** I presented a Power Point review of the history of the Law School.

**Pictured at right:** In the summer of 2002, I joined President Phil Friedman (left) and Associate Dean Sompong Sucharitkul (far right) at an alumni reunion at the Law School's annual summer study abroad program in Bangkok.



stories of hundreds of our alumni. To an Irishman like me who loves to talk and who loves to tell stories and hear them, a job that not only includes, but also requires, schmoozing and socializing with countless interesting people is an employment dream.

Much of the job of a dean is fundraising. Other deans around the country groan at the task. But I love fundraising. The alumni of Golden Gate University School of Law are incredibly generous. They recognize that they have an investment in this school—in the education it gave them, in the value of its reputation, and in the worth of its degree. They have always responded wholeheartedly when I've asked them to contribute to the school. I will always appreciate that great generosity. Even more, I feel deeply rewarded by the personal relationships and friendships I developed with alumni. I will cherish, build on, and nurture those relationships for a long time to come.

The staff of the School of Law never seems to get the credit they so richly deserve. They are some of the most dedicated people I have ever encountered. They are also some of

the brightest, most creative, and nicest people one could find anywhere. Most of them are awesomely overqualified but are driven by a love for the school and for the students. I have worked with them daily and am often awed by their commitment and enormous effort. If I could, I would triple the salary of most of the staff. The contribution they make to the success of the school is so outstanding, and often so selfless, that the rest of us could take a great lesson from their example.

As for the faculty, I know I need to tread lightly here since I will soon be one of them on a full-time basis. But from the vantage point of being dean, it is apparent that they are loved and admired by the students and by the alumni who credit them fondly, and deservedly, for so much of their success.

**We have a unique faculty here. Many of us come from considerable experience in the actual practice of law, not just from the hothouse nurturing of academia...**

They bring their understanding and mastery of the real world of law practice to their teaching. This quality gives our graduates a significant edge when they serve their clients and deliver legal services. It also distinguishes Golden Gate from just about every other law school in the country. It is also the most important thing that we must work hard to keep, if we are to stay true to our roots and to the value of our identity.

As I step down as dean, I can happily report that this law school is in excellent shape. We completed a \$20 million renovation of all of the Law School classrooms, auditoriums, and seminar rooms. We now have modern, state-of-the-art, technologically equipped facilities. We established an intellectual property program, which offers more than 25 courses and has blossomed into a rapidly growing LL.M. program.

In 2001, Golden Gate University School of Law celebrated its centennial, 100 years of providing a legal education in San Francisco. As part of our ceremonies, we sponsored a film series that featured impressive historical and political figures; a mock trial at the Palace Hotel set in 1906 after the San Francisco earthquake and featuring local celebrity Noah Griffin as opera tenor Enrico Caruso (who did indeed stay at the Palace that fateful night) suing the City of San Francisco; and an alumni banquet where graduates, faculty, staff, and students came together to celebrate.

Over the past five years, I made alumni relations and fundraising high priorities. One morning each week, I locked myself in my office to phone and talk to alumni. I constantly went to lunch and to other social events with alumni and with other friends of the Law School. On nights and weekends, I attended legal profession events and almost any other public event that I could. I never turned down a speaking invitation, no matter what the subject, unless I was already booked for another one.

On out-of-town trips, I gathered alumni together at receptions in New York, Chicago, Denver, Dallas, New Orleans, Albuquerque, Atlanta, Washington DC, Los Angeles, San Diego, Fresno, Modesto, Bakersfield, Portland, and Seattle. Alumni love these get-togethers. They reconnect to the school as they professionally and socially network with fellow alums who live and practice in their area.

**My media appearances have raised public awareness of Golden Gate University School of Law to a national level...**

The name "Golden Gate University School of Law" has been prominently featured on national TV and in *The New Yorker* magazine, as well as in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and a score of other newspapers. All of this is free advertising that a school could not buy—even if it spent millions of dollars to make itself an institution that everyone has heard of.

If this all sounds like blowing my own horn, it is, because I am immensely proud of all of these things.

I have loved being dean of this law school. It has been exhilarating for me and a lot of fun. In the future, hopefully for the rest of my professional career, I will still be a part of this law school. But I will do other things, as well. Whatever I do, I will try to make sure that it benefits our school. 📖

**I am immensely proud of all of these things. I have loved being dean of this law school.**



*Pictured at left: I had the honor of welcoming five graduating classes to the world of law.*



*Pictured at right: As part of the centennial festivities, we staged a mock trial of world-renowned tenor Enrico Caruso suing the city of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. I represented the city.*

PHOTO BY HEATHER KEANE