

Dean James E. Bond
2004 Retirement Speech

This has been an extraordinary day. Not as extraordinary, of course, as the day I married Georgana, or the day Garth was born, or the day I was baptized. Still, it has been quite extraordinary, and I shall never forget it. It has also been a long day. I'm an old man, and I'm tired (as I am sure are many of you - particularly of hearing me give speeches!). Nevertheless, I need to thank the University and my colleagues and friends for the many gifts you have given me over the past 18 years and particularly over the last decade. And so I ask you to indulge me one last time.

It might help you understand the depth and intensity of my gratitude if you knew where I was 24 years ago, almost to this day. I was at Columbia Presbyterian in New York City for three days of medical tests, under the direction of Dr. Lewis Rowland, then the country's leading medical authority on motor neuron diseases, including ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. At the end of the entrance interview, he asked me if I had any questions. I had one. Referring to a paper he had recently delivered at a conference on ALS, I asked him if I had understood its conclusion—namely, that people who presented my profile were usually dead within three years. He declined to answer, declaring: “Lay people should never read medical literature!” At the exit interview, I learned that I had understood that lecture all too well. Essentially, the good Doctor sent me home to die, suggesting only that I might want to subscribe to the ALS Newsletter, a monthly publication, which I soon learned featured each month yet another ALS victim, who, though trapped in a body that no longer responded to his command and no longer able to speak still managed to “communicate” by blinking or rolling his eyes.

As you can all imagine, I left Dr. Rowland's office in a state of shock. All I could think was “I'll never see another class of 1Ls graduate; I'll never write another book; I won't see my little boy grow up; I won't grow old with Georgana.” Fortunately, I did not have to return to Winston-Salem immediately. With my usual blitheness, I had made plans to spend the weekend on Long Island with old army friends. And though, as I rode the train out to Port Washington, I wondered how I was going to make it through the weekend with Jack and Sandy, it turned out to be a blessing. Somewhere between munching hot dogs at Coney Island and sunbathing on Jones Beach, I made two promises to myself. First, however I died, I was not going to drown in self-pity. Second, however many days I had left, I was going to regard everyone as a blessing.

I confess, as the years passed and my legs grew slowly but steadily weaker, but I did not die, I did not always keep that second promise. I simply lacked the character to re-imagine a day of four committee meetings or a day trapped in I-5 traffic as a blessing. The relevant point is that, a quarter century ago, I could never have imagined how wonderfully my life would unfold. Even more to the point, long after I had begun to dream again, I certainly could not have imagined the exciting opportunities the Law School and University would shortly offer me when my office phone rang on that Friday morning in November 1993. I picked up the receiver and heard a disembodied female voice say: “The UPS Board of Trustees is meeting tomorrow at SeaTac Airport, and the law school is the only item on the agenda.” Before I could utter a word, the caller hung up. Initially, I dismissed the caller as a crank; but the longer I mulled over her cryptic message, the more convinced I became that Seattle University had bought the law school. And yet the very idea seemed so ludicrous that I thought I must be crazy. I decided to call two persons who, I was sure, would know the truth of the matter and who would feel obliged, based on our close working relationship during my previous tenure as dean, to tell me what was going on. And they did, albeit indirectly since both had taken an oath to speak to no one of the sale until it was announced.

That weekend, Georgana and I must have talked about what the sale would mean for us; but I don’t recall those conversations. Still, I’m reasonably confident that neither of us ever imagined that my colleagues and Seattle University would within a year ask me to return to the deanship. (I suppose a modicum of decorum requires me not to dwell on the fact that I was a second choice, a desperate alternative to a failed dean search!)

I had loved the first six years of my prior seven-year “tour of duty” and had the new opportunity only given me the chance, once again, to help the faculty realize their hopes for the law school and to work with dedicated staff to that end, that would be cause enough for the gratitude I feel this evening. But leading the transition from a secular to a sectarian law school and the relocation to, and integration with, Seattle University posed a unique and more complicated set of challenges than had my first deanship. That made the task all the more daunting and thus all the more exciting. And that in turn made accomplishing the task all the more rewarding.

Knowing from my prior experience how talented and dedicated the staff were, I naturally looked forward, as I just said, to working, once again, with them. What I didn’t anticipate was that I would come, not just to respect and admire the five staffers with whom I worked most closely over those five years, but would grow to love them.

Working with them was, for me, a Camelot experience. Like all Camelot experiences, it came; and then it was gone. But the memories—and even more important, the friendships and love—they survive; and I shall treasure both forever.

Again, were this all that my colleagues and the University gave me, that would be cause enough for the gratitude I feel this evening. But you gave still more. You gave me the opportunity to do what Robert Frost says in *The Road Not Taken* we can almost never do: namely, return to that and follow it. And you gave me this opportunity not once, not twice, but three times! Let me explain.

As a young boy I wanted to be an architect. With my first earnings as a paper boy, I bought a drafting board and at-square so I could design homes for my parents. (I still love going to open houses, and I still buy plan books and while away time pouring over them, making various modifications to enhance them. . .) The opportunity to work with real architects was thus a dream come true! While I know in my lucid moments that Eric and the architects simply listened patiently to my suggestions and then dismissed them, I confess that this spring I've had an occasional Walter Mitty "moment" when I stood in the atrium and looked about me as the sun flooded it and felt a flush of pride in what I—er, we—wrought. We did good!

The second road not taken was teaching undergraduates. As a college senior I couldn't decide whether to go to law school or grad school. My advisor recommended law school, and so off I went. I hated it. Truly, my three years in law school have been the only unhappy years of my life. I stayed the course only because of the Vietnam War. Hoping against hope that the war would end, I applied to graduate school in the fall of my 3L year. I was admitted to the grad school of my choice and looked forward to working with a senior conservative scholar. (Yes, in those "by gone" days, Universities still had conservative professors!) But the war dragged on, my Selective Service Board refused to extend my student deferment, and I accepted an appointment in the JAG Corps. Assigned immediately to teach military law at the JAG School (I knew nothing about military law, of course; that experience has served me well throughout my subsequent teaching career). I fell in love with law teaching; and when I tumbled to the fact that law profs made a lot more than college profs, well, I never looked back. But I did wonder from time to time what teaching undergraduates would have been like. Now I know—because, once again—the University gave me that opportunity. I doubt John has ever had anyone say "yes, absolutely" as quickly as I did when he unexpectedly asked me if I wanted to teach half-time in the college. (Again, decorum requires that I not dwell on the fact that after John extended the offer to be

SU's first University Professor and I accepted, I belatedly suggested via an email that, if this appointment were to be a model for subsequent appointments, he might want to think about whether the appointment should include any "perks" such as a book budget, an enhanced travel fund, or an annual stipend for research. Reviewing these suggestions, I thought they looked a little self-serving and so added "and perhaps a term limit to the appointment." John replied immediately. Ignoring all the other suggestions, he said he thought the idea of limiting the appointment to three years was excellent!)

In any case, the three-year experience has been a joy. It has helped, of course, that Arthur and others have shilled for me, dragooning exceptional students to take my courses. These young men and women have so much energy and are so open that they are delightfully unpredictable. They also treat me with more respect than my law students, and I like that!

And finally and most importantly, but for the law school's affiliation with the University, I doubt I would have come to accept Christ as my savior. By the time I was eighteen, I had resolved all my questions about the transcendent in favor of reverent skepticism. (Yes—I am sure this will surprise you—I was arrogant even then.) My determination to make this odd couple marriage between a secular law school and sectarian University work led me to invite the Jesuits to offer a seminar on the Catholic intellectual tradition for law school faculty. And I thought I should set an example by attending myself. My motives in this, obviously, were purely instrumental. What I didn't anticipate was that Jesuits would charm me. And then the richness of tradition itself "hooked me." I found myself thinking about the transcendent again. At first I was reluctant to share my renewed interest with Georgana, lest I raise her hopes that we might wind up in the same place. (Actually, I wasn't quite sure how she'd react to that possibility.) But three years ago, I finally started attending church with her; and this past December I made my confession of faith and was baptized. But for the affiliation with Seattle University, I doubt I would ever have made that decision. I am thus once again thankful—indeed, eternally thankful.

And I now I must say goodbye. Excited as Georgana and I are to begin our new life in North Carolina, we know how much we are leaving behind. We are old enough and have moved often enough to know that, while we may visit here many times, we can never return. Whenever I contemplate that sad truth, I confess that I am deeply conflicted. Indeed, my emotions are so conflicted this evening that I don't trust myself to express them. So I am going to let my favorite American poet, Robert Frost, speak for me. In "The Sale of the Farm" he captures with more

nuance and eloquence than I can muster, the conflicted emotions of a man who has reconciled himself to his need and desire to move on and yet can't help but review one last time his enduring attachments to a place into which he has poured his heart and soul:

Well-away and be it so,
To the stranger let them go.
Even cheerfully I yield
Pasture, orchard, mowing-field,
Yea and wish him all the gain
I required of them in vain.
Yea and I can yield him house,
Barn, and shed, with rat and mouse
To dispute possession of.
These I can unlearn to love.
Since I cannot help it? Good!
Only be it understood,
It shall be no trespassing
If I come again some spring
In the grey disguise of years,
Seeking ache of memory here.