

4-1-2001

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## Recommended Citation

Roy Black, *The Benevolent Inquisitor*, 55 U. Miami L. Rev. 341 (2001)  
Available at: <http://repository.law.miami.edu/umlr/vol55/iss3/3>

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# University of Miami Law Review

VOLUME 55

APRIL 2001

NUMBER 3

## The Benevolent Inquisitor

BY ROY BLACK

Hausler, the name alone evokes that first anxious day. We self-consciously shuffled into classroom 103 for a course entitled contracts. The subject sounded benign enough, besides what could go wrong, it was only the first day of class. The bell rang, we glanced around, no professor. Five minutes slowly and quietly tick by, then we spied an elegant, whimsical-looking dandy, as light on his feet as Fred Astaire, exiting a first floor office, gracefully gliding towards us. At the threshold he paused, let the air fall silent and still, then descended the concrete steps into the room, all the while speaking softly, loving drawing out the sibilants, in a high alto, close to falsetto voice: "Firsssst casssse, let's sssssee . . . from the great ssssstate of Minnessssota . . . Mr. SSSSSos-tchinn. Poor Mrs. Carlill religiously inhaled that carbolic smoke ball, yet still contracted influenza. But, my goodness, how could an advertisement possibly be turned into a contract?" A stumbling answer, stuffed with scattered thoughts, and faulty conclusions, the detritus of an untrained mind. Once again raw material awaiting transformation.

I confess to being undisciplined. Like water, I seek the level of least resistance. (I'm shocked I managed to write this piece under the deadline.) I'm one of those students who squeaked by on native wit, picking the most likely of multiple choices. The Hausler-method jolted me into a rigorous regime of mental discipline, sort of Parris Island of the mind. None dared come unprepared. Yet, no matter how detailed the case note, all shifted nervously on their hard seats, crouching ever lower to evade his gaze as it swept across the room searching for the next victim.

The Hausler teaching method was an expressive form: part dance, part drama, part torture. Questions posed in a coquettish pantomime. The androgynous voice hiding cold steel, a weapon so devilish it should be banned by the Geneva Convention. Glowering silently, eyes narrow

with irritation, or wide-open in utter amazement at your stupidity. He pushed, prodded and shamed you into thinking.

Petulant, undisciplined students do not relish an inquisitorial system that exacts so much sweat, no matter how good for you. Only years later did I discover Hausler's secret; he didn't teach contracts, he taught the fundamentals: reading, writing, debating—the life blood of the lawyer.

Much later in life we became friends. Even though I taught at the school, I never presumed we were equal colleagues. Even in a casual conversation I picked my words carefully, testing them before they left my mouth, assuming he critiqued my thoughts like a Sigmund Freud searching for slips of the tongue. Yet, he was so personable and different from the task-master of the classroom, a true generous spirit. One of my prized possessions is a thoughtful house warming painting from him and Jeanette. This was the unknown Hausler, the humanity carefully masked in class, the first to visit a hospital bed, to help a student with free housing, or out of financial difficulty. I do not know this to be true, but I think it pained him to act tough, pulling on a hard shell to cover the soft core. The relentless inquisitor was only a role, developed for us to cultivate our minds.

Like all great teachers, Richard Hausler bequeaths a legacy, but like other charismatic professors, it is something indefinable. He did not write a raft of law review articles, or have his name emblazoned on over-priced West textbooks. Instead, he concentrated on the student. His metier was the classroom; he just taught and taught better than anyone else. Hausler stamped an indelible impression on generations of lawyers who possess the art of quick thinking, swift reflexes, improvisational wit, and who refuse anything but high standards.

For me, Richard Hausler is synonymous with the law school (hard to imagine one without the other). The school has lost its finest Socratic mind and its greatest character. A new semester dawns, and after a Monday class through the amber twilight with a gentle mist drifting across the quad, I watch several earnest sounding law students engaged in a spirited debate. For just a moment I feel sorry for them . . . they don't know what they are missing.