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In Memoriam Rafael C. Benitez

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IN MEMORIAM

RAFAEL C. BENITEZ

KEITH S. ROSENN*

In March of last year, Rafael Benitez, the founder of the *Lawyer of Americas*, the predecessor of the *Inter-American Law Review*, passed away at the age of eighty-one. He was a marvelous colleague, a dedicated teacher, and an institution builder. We shall miss him dearly.

“Rafe” or “Bennie,” as his friends on the faculty called him, was a man of multiple talents and multiple careers. He began as a naval officer and quickly worked his way up the ranks to become a Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy. In the middle of a very distinguished naval career, Rafe somehow managed to find time to graduate from Georgetown Law School. After he retired from the Navy in 1959, Rafe joined Pan American World Airways as a vice-president and legal counsel for Latin America. After retiring from Pan American, Rafe embarked on a third career, joining the faculty of the University of Miami Law School.

During the three years we overlapped at the University of Miami, I came to know Rafe well. We shared a common interest in Latin American law and the foreign graduate students. Rafe did an amazing job of launching a graduate foreign law program on a virtually non-existent budget. He dedicated a huge amount of his time to recruiting, selecting, counseling, and teaching the foreign lawyers. As director of the program, Rafe was an odd combination of Rear Admiral and Den Mother. Rafe believed that we had a

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moral obligation to take in a number of students of less developed countries despite their ill-preparedness for doing graduate legal work in English. To make sure they passed, he would take a number of the weaker foreign students under his wing each year and personally assure their academic viability through a wonderful combination of tutoring, holding feet to the fire, and course selection counseling. Any time I visited Rafe's office, a foreign student was invariably facing his desk. For Rafe, it was a labor of love. It was also a labor of love for Nancy, Rafe's devoted wife. Their home became home to the foreign students, and both Rafe and Nancy were dearly beloved by the alumni of the Graduate Foreign Law Program.

Rafe also inaugurated the *Lawyer of the Americas*, a law review that he and a group of his friends edited. Originally, it was designed to keep practicing lawyers informed about recent legal developments in Latin America and the Caribbean. Eventually, he turned it over to the students and converted his role into faculty adviser rather than editor-in-chief. Under his tutelage, the *Lawyer of the Americas* quickly became the premiere law review for scholarly articles dealing with Inter-American law. As with the foreign student program, Rafe launched this venture on a shoestring budget.

Somehow Rafe also found time to start a masters program in Inter-American Law for U.S. lawyers. Although I can fondly recall his prefacing most of our conversations with the Spanish phrase, *oiga me*, I must not have been listening when he explained the origins of that program. All I remember is that one day in 1982, when I was frantically trying to survive the most difficult year in my life as the academic dean, Bennie walked into my office and announced he was retiring again. This time it was for good. He was leaving Miami for real retirement in Maryland and had a few things he wanted to leave me. They consisted of a substantial number of Spanish law books, the graduate foreign law program, the masters program in Inter-American law, and the *Lawyer of the Americas*. He may have also left me the Inter-American Institute for Legal Studies, but I have never been able to find it. I am thankful he did not start any more programs for me to have to take over; there are only so many hours in a day. But Bennie seemed to have the magic to expand those hours. He crammed more into each year of his life than most of us manage to do in a lifetime. We

will always be the richer for the legacy he left behind at the University of Miami School of Law.

