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*Letters to Harvard's Griswold*TO A FELLOW DEAN,  
A WISE AND GENEROUS FRIEND

ERWIN N. GRISWOLD\*

When I undertook decanal duties in 1946, Wesley Sturges was already a legend. He had been teaching since 1920, and had been on the faculty of the Yale Law School since 1924. His reputation as a law teacher was impressive, to say the least. How anyone could make a course like Credit Transactions sparkle is beyond me. But Wes Sturges did it. Many graduates of the Yale Law School have told me that their greatest stimulus came from Wes Sturges, in this and other courses.

Sturges became Dean of the Yale Law School in 1945. When I became Dean in Cambridge in 1946, we were deep in the throes of the post-war accelerated program. Almost at once, I turned to Wes for advice and guidance. Late in the summer of 1946, I was invited to Yale to be one of the judges in a moot court competition there. I took advantage of this opportunity to have a long talk with him, about law school administration, legal education, faculty and staff problems, and so on.

From that time on, we constantly exchanged information and queries. Almost at once, we became involved in a question which arose when the Supreme Court of Ohio adopted a rule specifying a large number of courses which students must take in law school. It seemed to us that this was wrong in principle, because the courts should not undertake to run the law schools in detail. And it seemed to us that this was dangerous in practice, because the curricular subjects specified now would soon be out of date, yet the requirement might stand unchanged for a long time.

I wrote a pretty good lawyer-like brief to the Clerk of the Ohio Supreme Court urging that the rule be modified. Wes went out to Ohio and saw some people there. Shortly after his visit, the rule was modified, and our relations in Ohio have since been very good.

Although rivalry between the Yale and Harvard Law Schools is inevitable and desirable, it was clear to Sturges and to me that this should be kept on a healthy basis and that there was no reason why it could not be on that plane. From the beginning, we cooperated in various ways—as has been true with his successors, too. In 1948, as Sturges wrote me, the Yale Law School was “under investigation by the Yale Corporation, and there is open season for alumni and everybody else to take shots at us.” I was able to provide certain information about our

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operation which Sturges felt was helpful to him. On later occasions, I answered questions about our financial operations, and our relation to the central University administration and other parts of the University. I was even helpful on some occasions in giving him some information which assisted him in getting the approval for salary increases which he was recommending.

In 1949, we were considering the crucial question of the admission of women to the Harvard Law School. Yale Law School had been far ahead of us in this, and I wrote to Wes and asked him if he would let me have the benefit of their experience. I also asked him what proportion of women students Yale had had. Wes' response was encouraging. He indicated that the admission of women would not be a shattering experience. He also said that we could expect to have about 5 per cent women students. I believe that that has been Yale's experience more or less consistently.

We did admit women in 1950, and tried to accept them on a quite non-discriminatory basis. However, we only get about 3 per cent women students. I have suggested to some of my Yale friends that this is because they know that they will have to work harder with us than at Yale. This may not be the right explanation, but my Yale friends have never given me a better one.

Some of our exchanges related to other important matters, such as the provision of secretarial services for faculty members, and who gets keys to the law school building. Others related to faculty, including evaluations of persons whom we were each considering. In all of this, there was a free and generous interchange on Sturges' part. Both he and I felt that the relationship between the Harvard Law School and the Yale Law School should be one of friendship and esteem, and this has continued under his successors.

A number of our exchanges were quite lighthearted. In 1952, a judge, a graduate of the Harvard Law School, published an address in which he referred to me as the Dean of the Yale Law School. Wes called this to my attention, and asked when I had taken over his job. I replied, disclaiming any such pretension, and added: "However, I may say that the proposal is not without its attractions to me. To preside, with benign calm, over an institution with a mere handful of students where everyone gets the close personal attention of the Faculty, and is brought to bring out, at all points, the best that is in him—all of this, in place of my own lot of striving to keep the lid on a frustrated madhouse engulfed in mere numbers and utterly impersonal in all its dealings—how could I do anything but leap at the chance. It would be nice, too, to have a great University ready to absorb all my deficits instead of being required, as we are here, to make our way as best we can out of our own limited resources."

A few weeks later, I brought his attention to a report of the Oregon Supreme Court, relating to bar examinations, which referred to one of the courses at the Yale Law School as "largely civics." I was able to soften his response by pointing out that the author of the opinion was a Harvard Law School graduate.

After Wes' retirement as Dean, I had a letter from him dated October 16, 1955, which began: "I still have the greatest respect for deans; though I am glad that I am on the western side of such affairs." There was a postscript: "P.S. Please excuse my longhand and spelling—now not being dean = no good sec'y."

Wesley Sturges was a great legal educator and scholar. There can be no doubt about that. He was a fine companion, as many of his colleagues and alumni knew. I am glad to add that he was a real friend to a young law school dean, and a wise and kind and agreeable associate through eight years while he was Dean at the Yale Law School, and then in later years when he taught and became Dean at Miami. He left his mark on legal education and administration. Though he will be sorely missed, he will live on in the hearts of his friends.