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He Knew Why He Was Here

*D. Don Welch**

I will never forget the first time I encountered Hal Maier at Vanderbilt Law School. Hal had chaired a University-wide Reassessment Panel in the 1970s, and from my position in the Provost's Office I had the opportunity to work closely with him on that project for two years. Through those two years, he was full of creative insight, incredibly well-organized, an adept player of university politics, and a delightful colleague. When I came to the Law School in 1984, I was looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with Hal. One of my first assignments as a new junior dean was to find some space in the Law School building that could be reallocated, and I set about to probe all the nooks and crannies to familiarize myself with the building. I was poking around in the Transnational Legal Studies area when I reconnected with my friend. He spied me from the end of a long corridor and shouted: "What the hell are you doing down here!?"

Hal was passionate about his Transnational Legal Studies Program. He was brought to Vanderbilt in 1965 to build an international law program from scratch. In these days of globalization, it is difficult to remember how innovative his work was. In his first year, there were three international law courses at the Law School, all taught by him. There was a testy difference of opinion on campus about whether international law materials should be housed in the Law Library or remain in the University's Central Library . . . and there were not many materials in that collection. When Maier was named Director of the Transnational Legal Studies Program eight years later, ten international courses were being taught by six faculty members, a substantial international collection was growing in the Law Library, the Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law had been established, and the School's Jessup International Moot Court team coached by Hal, had won a national championship.

He was an immediate hit with students. In those days, the students organized an annual Law Day program with an invited speaker and other activities. They dedicated the day to someone each year, and in 1969 they dedicated it to the young Professor Maier, for the second time in three years. He was electrifying in the classroom. Hal did not think in straight lines, and the way he talked was a

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product of how he thought. This meant that students did not plod along through one case after another, but rather encountered a mind that challenged the normal channels of analysis. His students responded enthusiastically, voting him the school's outstanding professor award three times over the course of a decade.

Hal defies categories and labels. Whether in the classroom, on the floor of faculty meetings, or in curriculum committee meetings, Hal was unpredictable . . . in a good way. He does not allow himself to fall easily into predetermined conventions, and thus he forces all who hear him to tackle problems and issues in new and fresh ways. I do not know that Hal has ever considered himself an adherent to the Critical Legal Studies school of thought, or as a member of any other intellectual group as far as that goes. But he has often taken groundbreaking approaches that at the least identify him as a kindred spirit in that critical inquiry. Hal takes nothing for granted. For him there are no "settled" questions. Throughout his career he has demanded of himself and others a willingness to probe deeply and inquire broadly, rather than simply applying received wisdom or formulaic answers.

Clearly Hal is fascinated by legal questions. In his writing, in his teaching, in his conversations (sometimes with himself), his mind has always been at work looking for new angles and testing novel thoughts. He did not teach to fulfill an institutional obligation. And he did not write to add a line on his resume. He taught and he wrote because those activities were vehicles for exploring new possibilities and engaging others in that exploration. That's why he was a law professor.

While Hal has immersed himself fully in his roles as scholar and teacher, he has found passion and energy for other pursuits as well. He was the drummer in The Resurrection and Restatement of the Pigboy Crabshaw's Up-Tight, All-Night, Out-of-Sight, South Twenty-First Street Ambulance-Chasing and Marching Society Jazz Band, a faculty-student Dixieland band organized by faculty colleague Bob Covington that received front-page notice in the Wall Street Journal and raised money for law student scholarships. When the Peabody College Demonstration School was being closed, Hal was on the founding Board of Directors that saved the school by transforming it into the independent University School of Nashville. He served a term as President of the Board, but the more Maier-like assignment was his decade as Parliamentarian and Chairman of the Rules and By-Laws Committee. Around the Law School, there was never any doubt that Hal knew his rules, by-laws, and parliamentary procedures.

Hal is, indeed, a memorable character who has left an enduring legacy at this institution. I suspect I am not alone among Vanderbilt students, faculty, staff, and alumni in having distinct memories of my initial encounter with Harold G. Maier at the Law School. Doing justice to a forty-year career is an impossible task, especially a career

as far-flung as Hal's has been. Perhaps I can best pay tribute to Professor Maier, and serve the institution he worked so hard to help build, if from time to time I ask myself the question: "What the hell are you doing here?"
