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EARL BORGESON: DIRECTOR, MENTOR AND FRIEND

ORA EUGENIA ADDIS*

In the spring of 1978, I was one of the staff at Underwood Law Library who was eagerly anticipating Earl Borgeson's arrival, albeit with some feelings of trepidation for Earl was already an established leader in the law library profession. Most notably he had served at Harvard University as Law Librarian, at Stanford University as Associate Director of Stanford University Libraries, and at Los Angeles County Law Library as Associate Director. While at Harvard, Earl was president of the American Association of Law Libraries. Additionally, he had served as president of several regional law library associations, and he had supported the work of his profession by service on numerous committees. However formidable his experience might be, we soon discovered that he had that rare quality of making us feel at ease despite our awe of his reputation. Earl was one of the gang whether we were in a professional atmosphere, at library socials, or tailgating at football games.

When Earl came to SMU he was greeted by a staff of twelve which under his administration grew to twenty-two. In the last ten years, the volume count of Underwood has grown from 233,000 to 352,000. We have grown from a medium sized library to a large sized library. Earl's vision of a collection large enough to take care of the needs of the law school, its professors and stu-

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dents, as well as the law community of the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex has become a fact because of his imaginative management of funds and development ideas. His collection development has always been guided primarily by library goals rather than strictly by available funds.

While guiding the staff to strengthen its library skills, he reinforced each principle by his own example. He freely shared his professional experiences with us, expanding our spheres. Earl did not just teach us to perform as librarians, but to function within the entire university system. He encouraged us to contribute to librarianship beyond Underwood Law Library and into the total SMU library system as well as to the Dallas and Texas law library communities.

Orderliness and creativity were qualities Earl Borgeson brought to Underwood. He believed that an orderly environment was necessary to a successful library. His motto was, "Orderliness is our business as librarians. This makes it important to keep our surroundings in order." His dedication to order included not only the technical services department, which would be a model for any library, but also the basements and storerooms, offices and public areas. Thanks to Earl, Underwood probably has the neatest basement storage areas in the State of Texas! In keeping with this environment, Earl insisted on consistency in procedures and completion of tasks on a daily time schedule. He believed inconsistency in processes caused confusion and led to error.

With the time gained from streamlining procedures, Earl prodded the staff to plan. Whether it be time or space planning, creative use of personnel, or innovative approaches to budgets, he challenged us to plan for the ultimate, even if in five or ten year segments. He cautioned us never to restrict our accomplishments by limiting our planning to "putting out fires." Earl always encouraged his staff to think in the broadest terms, to let our imaginations soar, to set goals, to think creatively in order to accomplish what seemed impossible. He con-

vinced us that seeming impossibilities can become improbabilities, and sometimes even possibilities.

Earl Borgeson had tremendous impact on Underwood in the area of staff development. Writing to his son, Steven, he "acknowledged that his 'highest priority' in directing Underwood Law Library had been to 'provide the means for continually updating [the] skill of staff — people make [Underwood Law] Library work.'"¹ This interest in people has been a major emphasis of Earl's work at Underwood. Always a friend to his staff, he has encouraged us to have goals for our careers and a plan for achieving them while doing our best in our present positions. Of those who have passed through his tutelage at Underwood, two are head librarians at law firms and three are directors at law school libraries. Law firms in Dallas seek to hire his support staff, considered to be the best trained in the city. He urged his staff to participate in as many classes on campus as were offered to improve our supervisory and computer skills. He encouraged us to attend seminars conducted by various library groups or schools. He also suggested that we attend institutes sponsored by the American Association of Law Libraries or other national library associations.

Earl is a great believer in setting goals and striving to achieve them. He helped design a goal oriented evaluation system for the university. It challenges personnel to strive for better performance, to be creative in their jobs, and to participate in their own evaluation. Not only has Earl Borgeson developed the personnel who have worked for him at Underwood; but through his teaching for the Library School at Texas Woman's University and the SMU/Continuing Legal Assistant Program, he has advised, inspired and helped guide the careers of librarians, legal researchers and law librarians from all over the city and state. When Earl came to Dallas, his interest in librarianship and his belief in the duty of every librarian to assist

¹ Letter from Steven E. Borgeson to Dean Kenneth Penegar (March 24, 1988).

and encourage all who so aspired, led him to meet with librarians of law firms, corporations, and government offices and to become a member of their library association, the Dallas Association of Law Librarians. Many librarians in this organization will state that his encouragement, counsel and vision have made a difference in their careers.

Earl's interest in librarianship, not just law librarianship, embraced the SMU library community. He encouraged an environment of cooperative effort at all levels among the librarians from the various libraries on campus. This effort led to the establishment of the Council of Library Directors which has continued to bring to the forefront the common issues of the diverse libraries. A prime example of what can be accomplished by such action is our SMU library automation program. This integrated system will bring an online union catalog to the campus libraries, faculty offices, other campus locations and perhaps to the greater Dallas community. His awareness of the interests and needs of other departments on campus kept him constantly watching for information which might benefit them.

Throughout his years at SMU, Earl guided his staff with a sense of humor while adhering strictly to his goals for the library. His staff will remember him for the qualities he worked so hard to instill in us — the value of order and daily schedules, of cooperation and team work, the importance of setting our goals a little beyond the possible and then finding a way to achieve them. Earl's sense of humor permeated the atmosphere of the library. He gracefully accepted the ribbing about his predilection for order and time schedules, and his prolific memo writing, knowing that we all have benefited from his example the last ten years. I believe that members of the library system at SMU will remember him most for his untiring endeavor to bring about the highest quality of library service on campus through cooperative efforts. We have indeed had one of the great law librarians of this era in our midst.