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## A Saturday with Herman B. Wells

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## A SATURDAY WITH HERMAN B WELLS

DOUGLAS G. BSHKOFF\*\*

Herman B Wells retired as president of Indiana University a few months before I arrived on campus to join the law faculty. Accordingly, I have no firsthand information concerning his impact on the law school as university president.

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7. *Id.* at 216.

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However, since he continued on as university chancellor until his death, I had numerous contacts with him in connection with fund-raising activities. One incident, I think, merits retelling, as it illustrates his courage and his dedication to university affairs.

Early in my deanship, I became aware of the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Long of Detroit, Michigan, were potentially very large donors to the law school. Ben, a highly successful lawyer, had not received his law degree from Indiana University, but for some reason he had become interested in our school. He was serving on our Board of Visitors and was also a member of the Board of Directors of the Indiana University Foundation. While I do not know the extent of Ben's planned gift to this school, I believe it was well into seven figures. It was clearly the biggest promised bequest in the history of the school at that time, and Herman thought that it had the potential to affect the development of the school in a very significant fashion. Because of this, we did everything possible to strengthen the ties between the Longs and the school. An event totally beyond our control, however, soon caused the Longs to turn away from us.

The early 1970s, during which I served as Dean, were not happy times in Bloomington. There was a great deal of unrest on campus which manifested itself in various ways. One outburst of protest was prompted by the announcement that Ben and his wife planned to give a modest amount of money for gates at the entrance to the campus where the Sample Gates now stand. As soon as the proposed gift was announced, the Longs began receiving letters—some quite menacing in their view—demanding that the gate project be abandoned and the funds devoted to other uses, such as student scholarships and raises for university staff. The impact on the Longs was immediate and dramatic. The gate project was abandoned. Ben resigned his membership on the Board of Visitors and refused to continue as an Indiana University Foundation board member. He cut off all contacts with us and redirected the law school gift to another institution. Despite numerous efforts, Herman and I were unsuccessful in reestablishing a good relationship with the Longs. The only time I saw Herman in a depressed and discouraged state was the day he told me the Longs had changed their minds. He felt the loss of this gift very keenly.

A few years later, I heard that Ben had just died. Since he had severed his relationship with us, I assumed that any formal expression of sympathy was unnecessary and, perhaps, even inappropriate. The following Saturday morning, I was working in the garden when I was called to the telephone. It was Herman. He told me that this was the day of the Long funeral in Logansport. Did I plan to go? I had not even considered that possibility, but Herman saw things differently. Just because we had been unlucky was no reason to stay away. We had an obligation to attend. He was going and wanted me to accompany him. He said that his driver would be over to pick me up shortly and we would drive up together. I wasn't very enthusiastic about this suggestion, but Herman was insistent. So, I joined him on the journey to Logansport.

The funeral was in the afternoon. We arrived early, and Herman introduced me to many of those attending. He seemed to know almost everyone. After the funeral, we attended a buffet for out-of-town guests. Once again, Herman seemed to have a good word for everyone. He acted as if the Longs were still the best friends of Indiana University. But, on the return trip to Bloomington he was uncharacteristically quiet. We rode home in silence.

What is unusual about this day? I am sure that Herman must have attended other funerals of potential donors who changed their minds about giving to Indiana University—not an easy task, but a manageable one. However, this was Herman's

second funeral in a week. The Saturday before he had attended the funeral of his mother, who had lived well into her nineties. Attending a second funeral under these circumstances must have been a terribly painful experience. Nonetheless, he was able to put his grief aside and honor someone who had turned his back on Indiana University. I shall always admire the way he found the strength to act so graciously. It was a remarkable performance by a remarkable man.