Hi-Man!

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Hi-Man!

VIVIAN GARCIA†

Here are some facts—and a bit of hyperbole—that I shared with Jack Hyman the day I met him.

I had worked for the National Labor Relations Board for two summers during law school, Syracuse Law School. In the Regional Office for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, I had had the utter joy of handing out fat back-paychecks that resulted from unfair labor practices and it was, frankly, the best high I'd ever experienced. Representing neither the employer nor the union seemed like heaven to me and my goal was to become an administrative law judge.

I told Jack that when I gave the commencement address for my graduating class—which I hastened to add was my privilege not as a result of my grade point average, but as a result of successfully taking on the Dean and some of his ideas about our Commencement—I was one of the ones who had her future "all sealed up."

That summer, President Ronald Reagan gave a speech and, along with a few hundred other federal employees, I was RIF’d before I started full-time work at the Board. I never heard what became of the class action suit that some of the other lawyers commenced and that I was ambivalent about joining. Perhaps within six months, they too had been reoffered their positions, but at this point in time I was looking for a job.

After more than an hour in Jack's office with me mostly talking, talking, talking, (kinda like I'm doing now) and Jack mostly smiling, smiling, knowingly smiling, (kinda like he always did), but also asking questions and subtly underscoring the pieces he thought supported my goal, I left with some hope that I had a shot at the Assistant Dean job. I was clueless. I do not remember knowing that he had been the Dean before The Dean, Thomas Headrick, with whom I soon had an interview. If I had, I might not have been so me.

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By the time the NLRB regional folks begged me to come back as they cursed one of our presidents, they didn’t have a chance. By the time I had my opportunity to turn them down, I had already begun regularly seeing Jack in the halls of this building and—believing myself to be the only person whoever thought of doing so—I would greet him with a big smile and say, “Hi, Man!” Walking that tall walk of his, he would smile back every time. He never commented upon whether or not the appellation was novel. I think because he saw that I was so pleased with how funny I thought I was. I like to think that it actually did amuse him.

What I know is that when I walked into his office that day—thanks to a dear friend from law school—I had been writing letters, sending out resumes, and ultimately working for a temp secretary agency in town (without telling them about my law degree). Indeed, some of you might find it as amusing as Jack did, to hear that a pre-eminent law firm in town offered to send me to paralegal school! Yes, they were just astounded not only with the precision and speed of my typing, but at my apparent knack with the law and almost incredible proficiency with respect to detail. Jack laughed heartily at this piece of the story. I know you each remember it; his laugh was deep and rich. It was a million-dollar laugh.

It was Jack’s natural way, I found over the years, to nurture, not only in his mentoring of me but also with how he dealt with and respected students. He continued to shape my love for being an educator when he asked me to co-teach a couple of legal reasoning classes to those special 1Ls. As I watched him in action in the classroom, I only gradually learned the full measure of the substantive breadth of what he was delivering. I learned something every time Jack spoke. I knew it then. These were students who had not met all traditional standards for law school admission, with the exception of the legacies of course. Unlike a sitting United States Supreme Court Justice, however, most of them thought that the shot was all they needed. Jack made sure that they—and I—always felt that way. I suspect we are legion.

Over the years, I built my family, I got to share them with Jack and with Clarice. It was a simple matter to understand why Clarice and he were together, and I fell in love with her too. I would send Jack long—and short—letters about this or that disappointment or achievement. Over the years, I loved and appreciated him more and more.
As I suspect many of you know, he always wrote back. Always. He appeared constantly amazed at my courage and accomplishments. I have all of his letters.

Our friend and former colleague, Susan Carpenter, was hoping to be here today, but ultimately could not. This week in an e-mail she wrote:

Remembering Jack Hyman will be a very happy time, though missing his presence in the flesh will be sad. I know his Spirit will be there, and that you will feel it. It wasn’t until after I graduated from UB Law School that I realized what incredible work Jack had done in his life. They should have a seminar on The Jurisprudence of Jacob Hyman, but I guess his humanity overshadowed it.

You’re not kidding Susan.

“Hi, Man!”