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WALTER TRINKAUS: THE CONVERSABLE PROFESSOR

*Gerald F. Uelmen**

Among today's law professors, conversation seems to be a lost art. We rarely converse with each other, and even more rarely converse with our students. Social pleasantries may be exchanged, but the exchange of ideas is largely confined to the classrooms and the footnotes in law reviews. Samuel Johnson put it well, as quoted by Boswell: "We had *talk* enough, but no *conversation*; there was nothing discussed."

Walter Trinkaus was a great conversationalist because he *liked* to converse. A great conversationalist is a good listener. When you conversed with Walt, you knew you had his undivided attention. A great conversationalist draws on a depth of experience and breadth of reading to offer insights and perspectives you may not have considered before. Walt was deeply experienced, widely read, and brimming with anecdotes. A great conversationalist has a quick sense of humor. Walt's conversations were always punctuated with frequent chuckles. Most important, a great conversationalist is open and intimate. Interestingly, the word "conversation" was once synonymous with sexual intercourse. A legal action for "criminal conversation" was an action for adultery. That connotation has disappeared, but the modern meaning of "conversation" in the Oxford English Dictionary is "the action of living or having one's being *in, among*." My strongest memory of Walt Trinkaus will always be to picture him among us, in the faculty lounge, engaged in highly animated and intense conversation.

When one of my former colleagues at Loyola Law School called to tell me Walter was dying, the suggestion was made that I give him a call, that it might cheer him up. I must confess to a lot of trepidation when I made that awkward telephone call. You can't exactly say, "I'm calling to say goodbye before you die," but you both know that's the agenda. I shouldn't have worried. Walter Trinkaus was the conversable professor to the very end. He put me at ease with the same familiar chuckle, and we had a real *conversation*. Ideas were

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exchanged, but more important, we exchanged our *selves*. When we said our goodbyes, we both knew it was our final conversation, but I'm absolutely certain we were both smiling. Every conversation I ever participated in with Walter Trinkaus ended with everyone smiling.

The next time I go into the faculty lounge, I won't rush out with my treasured cup of steaming coffee and head back to my office to work on the latest article or book. I'll sit down and have a conversation with one of my colleagues. And I'll remember Walter Trinkaus. He is still among us.