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Deaning Redux -- Walking it Back

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DEANING REDUX—WALKING IT BACK

*Thomas C. Galligan**

The following Article is written in transcript format and recounts an interview between Dean Galligan and a hypothetical interviewer or inquisitor.

INTERVIEWER: So, you're back.

DEAN: Yes, I have been back for a couple of years.

INTERVIEWER: It's not typical for someone who was a law school dean and goes off and becomes a college president to come back as a law school dean again.

DEAN: I guess not, but it seems to have worked out so far.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you away from deaning?

DEAN: Ten years.

INTERVIEWER: What made you decide to do it again?

DEAN: Lots of things factored into it.

INTERVIEWER: Are you being evasive? Seems like you are and this pseudo-James Joyce dialogue style may contribute to the confusion.

DEAN: Well that may be but when I was a law school dean the first time, I wrote a bunch of these dialogues in this great symposium and every time, except once, I created characters and put them in places like the AALS annual meeting, the AALS recruitment conference, and the Southeast Association of Law Schools meeting. But this time, like one other time in the past, I didn't want characters. I didn't want to create places and voices other than my own—well, ours.

INTERVIEWER: Who you kidding? Everyone knows it's just you but in dialogue form.

DEAN: Yeah, but the Joyce thing makes it more stream of consciousness, yes?

INTERVIEWER: You said that. But let's get back to you being evasive. Why did you decide to seek and accept a deanship after ten years as a college president?

DEAN: First of all, ten years is a long time, and while longer tenures may work for some folks and some institutions, I think it was long enough for me and for the school. I wanted new challenges and a school needs new ideas and approaches. Plus, my contracts lasted five years, so I had two five-year contracts. A third would have meant 15 years or leaving in the middle of a term. I didn't think leaving in the middle of a term would be fair to anyone because it

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usually means an interim and interim presidents can be potentially problematic,¹ especially in challenging times.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and?

DEAN: And, my college did not have a law school. It was a wonderful liberal arts based college, but it did not have a law school and I am a law professor. I wanted to get back to a law school. When people would ask me what I missed about not being at a law school, I would always say how happy I was (after all, we were happy but, at the same time, you always have to show a positive attitude to the outside world), but if they pushed me, I'd say I missed teaching Torts to first-year law students.

INTERVIEWER: So you didn't teach at your college?

DEAN: No, I taught.

INTERVIEWER: What?

DEAN: Business Law—which is Sherman's march through law; U.S. Constitution; Media Law (lots of defamation and invasion of privacy!); Philosophy of Law—

INTERVIEWER: Oooooooh!

DEAN: Okay cut it out. I also taught a few U.S. History classes and a course on History and Film, which I taught with a good friend, who is a historian.

INTERVIEWER: But no teaching to law students?

DEAN: Correct. I did a bunch of CLE speeches, kept some of my books current, wrote a couple of law review articles, and even testified in Congress about the Deepwater Horizon disaster and the Death on the High Seas Act, but no teaching law students, except guest stints by Skype.

INTERVIEWER: Okay so you wanted to teach law students again but that doesn't mean you have to be a dean!

DEAN: Yeah I know, but I also was on the ABA Accreditation Committee while I was a college president so I learned a heck of a lot more about the world of legal education as a college president than I had learned as a dean. Jeez, when I was a dean, I knew there were ABA Standards but not much beyond that. So I thought I had something to contribute. I hope I was right.

INTERVIEWER: What else?

DEAN: Well the school where I started my teaching career, [Louisiana State University (“LSU”)], was looking for a dean. I had kept in touch with my friends at LSU and in the Louisiana bar and in the judiciary. Of our four kids, three were born in Baton Rouge. I still wrote and spoke about Louisiana law so it seemed like it could be a good match. And the food is the best indigenous food anywhere in America!

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever give any thought to another college presidency instead of law school?

DEAN: No, not really. I thought that would have been duplicating the same experience at a different place, and I didn't want that. And I was 60 when I got hired to return to LSU; another college presidency would probably have meant not returning to law school, and I really wanted to get back.

1. Interim Law School Deans can be great!

INTERVIEWER: Okay old man, but isn't becoming a dean again at a place where you taught duplicating an experience?

DEAN: No, I don't think so. Like I said, being on the ABA Accreditation Committee taught me a lot so I knew more. Plus, being a college president taught me a lot, especially about liberal arts education and its importance, especially for lawyers—writing clearly, speaking clearly, critical thinking, appreciating multiple perspectives and people, and acting ethically.

INTERVIEWER: So, you're back; how was it at first?

DEAN: It was great, but having been at LSU before, I had to remind myself not to assume I know what was going on. I had not been on the LSU faculty for 18 years, so I had to put all that old stuff out of my head. I had to make myself behave and think as if I had never been there before—except when connecting and reconnecting with alumni, 12 years of whom were my former students.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get ready to be a law school dean again? A lot has changed since you left your first deanship in 2006.

DEAN: You ain't kidding. Again, the ABA work really was the best preparation I could ever have had. And, while I had kept in touch with old friends, I learned as much as I absolutely could about LSU and the LSU Law Center, which is named the Paul M. Hebert Law Center in honor of a long-time and beloved dean.

INTERVIEWER: What else did you do?

DEAN: That's pretty much it.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

DEAN: Well yeah...

INTERVIEWER: What d'ya mean "well yeah...?"

DEAN: Well I guess I did do something else to prepare.

INTERVIEWER: What?

DEAN: Walked.

INTERVIEWER: Walked?

DEAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I recall in one of these Toledo dean dialogues before, you talked about running.

DEAN: I did, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So now you've regressed to walking?

DEAN: Hey, I'm older okay; but this was different; this was a long walk. I did the El Camino.

INTERVIEWER: You walked up and down California?

DEAN: No that's the El Camino Real. I did the El Camino in Europe. I did the El Camino de Santiago de Compostela—the Way of St. James.

INTERVIEWER: There's a movie about it, huh?

DEAN: Yes, it's called "The Way," based on a book. Emilio Estevez directed the movie, and he's briefly in it. His father, Martin Sheen, is the star.

INTERVIEWER: So where'd you go? How far? How long?

DEAN: We flew from Boston to Toulouse, France and rented a car and drove to Biarritz and then took a cab to St. Jean Pied de Port. We were

supposed to take the train from Toulouse, but the airline didn't get my bags in on time so we drove.

INTERVIEWER: Where is this St. Pete?

DEAN: St. Jean Pied de Port. It is in the Southwest corner of France at the base of the Pyrenees.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you there?

DEAN: One night. We got up in the morning, put our daypacks on, and walked into the Pyrenees and Spain. First day, my FitBit said I climbed over 500 flights of stairs. I don't want to say it was easy after that because it wasn't, but that was a hell of a day.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. You said daypacks?

DEAN: Yeah, we had baggage transfer. My backpacking days are over.

DEAN: The first night we slept in Roncesvalles and on our second morning we walked past a monument at the place where Roland allegedly blew his horn to let Charlemagne know there was trouble. You may remember from college—The Song of Roland.

INTERVIEWER: You said "we." Did you go with your wife?

DEAN: No, she wanted no part of that walk. I went with my friend, with whom I had taught the History and Film class.

INTERVIEWER: How long did it take?

DEAN: We were on the road for 40 days. We walked for 33 of those days. We had seven days "off" where we got to be tourists. We hadn't realized our booking agent had built in so many days off. When we did, we thought we didn't need them, but they were great: Pamplona, Burgos, Leon, Sarria. It was great.

INTERVIEWER: So how far did you walk?

DEAN: I think in the end it was like 486 miles. I'd say 500 because we always walked around the cities and towns where we slept and rested.

INTERVIEWER: What is the point of this thing?

DEAN: It is the Way of St. James. The route ends in Santiago de Compostela where there is a cathedral in which St. James is supposedly buried. So it is a pretty religious place—very Catholic. In the middle ages pilgrims from all over would walk to Santiago, so all along the route there were churches and cathedrals and all sorts of history and mythology and stories. There is also a New Age sort of phenomenon around the El Camino. People would ask me if I was doing it for religious reasons. I would say no. They would ask if I was doing it for spiritual reasons. I would say no. Then they would say, "Well then, why are you doing this?" For the walking, I would say. And that was the truth. But there are lots of folks doing the walk for other reasons—end of relationships, self-reflection, religious devotion, feeling the energy, because they had recovered from cancer. As an Australian pilgrim, who was a *counsellor*, told me in one of my skeptical moments, "Tom, a lot of people are doing this for very serious reasons. You must respect that."

INTERVIEWER: But not you?

DEAN: I was there for the walk. And a transition from one job to another.

INTERVIEWER: While your wife took care of your move?

DEAN: That's what she says; I do owe her.

INTERVIEWER: Any wisdom from all this walking?

DEAN: Wisdom is a lot to claim.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn some stuff?

DEAN: Yeah, I guess I did. Or at least, I had some things I thought

I knew re-enforced.

INTERVIEWER: Like?

DEAN: Sometimes you can't do it all in one day. On our very first day, we met a man from Connecticut. He's an actor. He was walking in the fog in the Pyrenees and as we came up on him, we stopped and exchanged pleasantries. We were talking and laughing, having done some serious climbing and thinking most of it was behind us. The actor asked us if he could walk with us because our pace seemed good and we sounded like we were enjoying ourselves. We said sure and were together for four weeks until we had a day off in Leon that he didn't. Anyway, there were times when we were walking together and he would just say, gosh, we have been walking for—you name it one week, two weeks, three weeks—and we are in the middle of rural Spain and we have barely put a dent in this thing. And, even though I sometimes felt exactly the same way, I would say, "You can't do this in one day. We have to take it one day at a time, one hour at a time. Our goal now is to get to the next rest stop." And we would go on.

INTERVIEWER: And?

DEAN: And, it is like that with a lot of stuff. You can't build a culture at a school in one day. You can't teach an entire course in one class. You can't write an article or a book in one day. It's a process and you can only do what you can do now.

INTERVIEWER: Live in the moment and don't set unrealistic expectations?

DEAN: Yes, I think so. But I also know and learned how important planning is. After all, we knew every morning when we got up, how far we had to walk, where we would stop, and we could figure out about how long it would take. Same thing applies to a semester or a year or a fundraising campaign. It takes planning.

INTERVIEWER: What else?

DEAN: No matter how much you plan, you can't plan it all. Things are never exactly as you think they will be, so, you have to be flexible. At the same time, no two days or places are the same. There was change every day and so we had to embrace that change and adapt to the circumstances.

INTERVIEWER: Anymore?

DEAN: Take advantage of the lay of the land. We figured out pretty early on that most of the towns we walked into—which had been around since at least the Middle Ages—were located by a water source and on a hill, with the town square—where the best cafés usually were—at the top of the hill. The folks who made those towns needed water so they settled by water and they built on a hill so they could defend the place. Lots of the towns had walls too, but they were built in strategic places in the first place. The walls added safety, but they weren't the be all and end all. Same deal at a law school, figure out what your strengths are and take advantage of them. If you have a great clinic, ride that

strength. If you have great Contracts teachers, take advantage of that. And, defend your strengths. It is a whole lot easier to build from your assets than to build from scratch.

INTERVIEWER: And?

DEAN: And, like I said before, lots of people we met on the road had their very own reasons for doing the walk. Some were hurting for whatever reason and looking to the walk to help ease the pain. In a law school, especially today, there are lots of people who may need help or need space. Be attuned to that and sensitive to it.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else?

DEAN: One last thing. There were days—40 days is a long time—that we probably got on one another's nerves. In fact, I am sure I got on my friends' nerves. And maybe there was a time or two they got on mine. Once or twice, I really wanted to say something, not necessarily something constructive, but I swallowed it. I bit my tongue because I knew it was better to keep a friend than to lose one or make one angry. Of course, having been married for 37 years, I should know this one but maybe I am a slow learner. Anyway, I realize that the same thing is true with my colleagues and my students. There are times I want to say something "smart" but I bite my tongue. If I can't be constructive, I should shut up.

INTERVIEWER: Any last thing?

DEAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What?

DEAN: The emails from my college were fewer and fewer as we walked west across Spain, and the emails from LSU became more and more frequent. I guess that's life!

INTERVIEWER: Last question: are you glad you're back?

DEAN: Extremely!

INTERVIEWER: And the best part?

DEAN: Impossible to say. The University is great; the faculty is fantastic; the staff is incredibly dedicated; the alumni have been unbelievably welcoming—

INTERVIEWER: You sound like a dean.

DEAN: I am.

INTERVIEWER: Pick one thing?

DEAN: One?

INTERVIEWER: One.

DEAN: Teaching Torts to first year law students.