

My Mentor, Robert Rines: A True Renaissance Man

By: Nancy Richards-Stower

Creating a Legal System for the Age of Technology

On November 1, 2009, in his apartment overlooking Boston's busy harbor, Dr. Robert H. Rines died and the world lost a giant. I lost my mentor, erstwhile law partner, and dearest of friends.

Bob Rines founded Franklin Pierce Law Center, which opened its doors in September, 1973. His efforts shaped the universe for the thousands that followed us pioneers into our now nationally recognized law school; it has graduated one-third of practicing New Hampshire lawyers. Even if you're not a "Franks" grad, you know many who are, and interact with them often. So, my mentor has changed your life, too.

How did Robert H. Rines, lawyer, author, inventor, musician, scientist, patent examiner, philanthropist, explorer (and, yes, Loch Ness Monster hunter) come to found a law school on a Concord hilltop in the fall of 1973? In brief, his goal was to create a new legal system peppered with scientists and doctors who understood the scientific technology involved in legal disputes, and the destructive ramifications of traditional litigation which continued even after the technology became obsolete.

He saw patents "shot down" by courts ill-prepared to grasp the science on trial, with the independent and small business inventors responsible for much of America's innovations crushed by the legal system. For 45 years he lectured entrepreneurial students at MIT, giving him a front-row seat on the future. As a patent attorney, he sought to protect true innovators. So, while practicing patent law with his father, David, Bob approached MIT with his proposal



*Nancy Richards-Stower
with her mentor and friend
Dr. Robert H. Rines.*

to create at MIT a technology legal dispute center. Unfortunately for MIT, (but fortunately for New Hampshire) a change in the presidency at MIT ended the planning.

Bob then looked at Dartmouth, for it had a world-class medical school from which to draw the science lawyers he wished to train. Dartmouth wasn't ready for a law school. Bob, age 50, pressed on, seizing on a chance conversation with the dean of Franklin Pierce College to plan a temporary, accreditation-savvy "marriage" with the Rindge, NH college: thus was born the moniker of New Hampshire's first law school, Franklin Pierce Law Center.

Law School in a Barn

For those who fuss over starting anything from scratch: Imagine establishing a law school and getting provisional ABA accreditation in a year! Bob was so successful in recruiting fellow legal education adventurers that the school was ready to open before it had a building in Concord (important to his plans because it was the home of the Supreme Court's law library).

When Concord farmland was co-zoned for education, Bob, with the help of the Academy of Applied Science (also founded by Bob), bought an old stud farm. Luckily, between the era of romancing cows and bulls, the building had been renovated into a secretarial school, but the edifice remained a barn.

My story centers on that old farm where the adjoining white farmhouse housed "Dean Rines" and his bride, Carol, and soon, their new baby named Justice (because there was so little else of it in the world). Anecdotes about our law school in a barn,

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located between working farms, are legend (Contracts I: negotiating with farmers to not spread manure during finals; Ethics I: what to do about the 7-foot marijuana plant growing in the dirt driveway; Administrative Law: why making turkey sandwiches atop the tiny fridge near the card catalog, while puffing a Marlboro, was acceptable library behavior in “the different law school”; International Law: EEC intellectual property policy explained by European leaders under a tent on the front lawn ; and Law and Science: Bob rolling into “Classroom I” a huge scale model of the Loch Ness Monster’s plesiosaur-like “fin” from his famous photo.

In Turbulent Times

Following Franks’ first year, the political times were turbulent: President Nixon was still in the White

House, the last helicopter would not rise from the American embassy in Saigon for another ten months, and America was still raw from the 1968 assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and the 1970 slaughter of student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State. But here, in Concord, atop

a mountain, it was quiet and peaceful as we studied law and enjoyed our beautiful view of Mt. Kearsage and acres of flowering meadow, some of which, we students tilled for vegetable gardens.

But I was broke. I lost my Maine student loans by getting married (a function of the residency laws) and got fired from my waitressing job after complaining about minimum wage violations (before I knew anything about employment law). I met with Bob to ask about dropping out and re-applying when I had the funds. Bob’s answer was to take out his checkbook and pay my tuition. He asked me to do research on the constitutional limitations of the Commerce Department. Thankfully, he never asked for my report.

Over the next 35 years, Bob Rines continued to support me in all my professional, political and personal choices. What an inspiration he was! As a child, he played a violin duet with Albert Einstein; while a teen, he invented important radar technology used in WWII and upon which ultrasound, LORAN and Patriot Missile inventions were based. As an adult, he

encouraged thousands of science careers through the Academy of Applied Science and its Research, Engineering Apprenticeship Program. He filed thousands of successful patents (including for Governor John Sununu and for a South African doctor who invented a cryogenic probe and operated on the eyes of Nelson Mandela), and, much like the multi-faceted Thomas Jefferson, even experimented with plants (using a rare plant’s growth enhancing, non-toxic oil as an alternative to pesticides).

From Broadway to Bangladesh

All the while, he had a twinkle in his eye for adventure, monsters, saving giant elephants, organizing medical sight-saving operations in poor nations, writing music and sharing an Emmy for his work in New York theater, and even helping the founding of a new democratic nation, Bangladesh, whose President, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury visited us in Concord to personally thank him.

But it was the law school which brought about the most change. Besides offering a J.D. program, Franklin Pierce Law Center attracted many third-world students to enroll in the Center’s Master of Intellectual Property (MIP) program. Established to teach the American patent and licensing systems, it paved the way for American technology transfers to improve the living standards in other countries, and to foster peace. In 1989, following the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Bob received a clandestine fax from one of his Chinese students. He wanted Bob to know that he had survived the slaughter and would continue to work for change. What a legacy.

I regret that future generations at Frank’s will never meet this true Renaissance man. His talents, personal kindnesses, sense of humor, and grace under pressure only begin to explain who he was. Bob’s mantra was, “Don’t tell me why I can’t; show me how I can.” Thus before him fell legal precedents and arose new ways of looking at all manner of innovations.

I am so lucky that in the summer of 1974 he paid my law school tuition so that I could continue to have him as teacher and mentor.

