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Richard N. Gardner: Memories

MICHAEL I. SOVERN*

Richard Gardner and I were colleagues for almost sixty years. The law faculty elevated us to its tenured ranks at the same meeting in 1959. We helped restore order after Columbia's 1968 turmoil, he as a member of a disciplinary tribunal, I as chairman of the Executive Committee of the Faculty. We served under eight deans together; he actually served under a ninth: me.

Our scholarly paths didn't cross, though I was, of course, aware of his important work—but we shared an abiding commitment to teaching. Dick didn't yield to advancing age and leave the classroom until his mid-eighties; his junior by several years, I am still lurching to the lectern. Dick's commitment to teaching was not limited to the classroom. I don't know how many students he mentored well into their careers: I know only that a legion of Gardner acolytes populates the practice of international law and has helped shape American foreign policy.

The most fascinating times I spent with Dick were extra-curricular. I visited him when he was Ambassador to Italy, a post in which he proved to be an extraordinarily successful diplomat. It didn't hurt that he was aided and abetted by his brilliant wife, Danielle, who had fled Italy with her family when Mussolini turned against Italian Jews.

The challenges were formidable even for so gifted a pair. As Dick subtitled his memoir, they were "On the Front Lines of the Cold War."¹ Most importantly, they had to help shape and implement a nuanced response to a political state of affairs in which Italy's Communist Party was within hailing distance of becoming a key part of the Italian government. It is no exaggeration to say that Dick managed this superbly.

Dick's time in Italy was also notable for the menace of the Red Brigades, an ultra-left group responsible for literally hundreds of terrorist acts in Italy. They captured world attention when they

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1. RICHARD N. GARDNER, *MISSION ITALY: ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE COLD WAR* (2005).

kidnapped former prime minister and probable future president Aldo Moro, killing his five bodyguards. Sadly, after weeks of holding him prisoner, they murdered him too.

The Gardners were not safe bystanders. The Red Brigades' stated targets included representatives of NATO. I got some inkling of what it was like to live in such circumstances when I visited Dick at the Villa Taverna, the ambassador's residence. Dick sent a car to pick me up at the airport, and when we were about a block from the Villa, my driver radioed ahead, announcing our imminent arrival. A moment later, two large steel doors swung open to admit us. Standing in the driveway were two armed guards with weapons at the ready. They didn't stand down until those steel doors were firmly closed.

Dick was, of course, unintimidated, conducting business as usual, though accompanied by security, and refusing to give up his jogging in the Villa Borghese. He and Danielle did, however, decide to send their children, Nina and Tony, home. As Dick explained to me during one of our walks in the beautiful Villa Taverna garden, it wasn't so much fear for their safety as the difficulty two teenagers would have being constantly accompanied by armed guards.

My time at the Villa Taverna is memorable for my tutorial in Italian politics. It's hard to imagine a more astute student of that subject than Dick Gardner, and he was happy to share his insights with me.

I had a similar experience years later when I stayed with him and Danielle at the ambassador's residence in Spain. He had returned to Columbia after the Carter administration and packed his diplomatic bags again when President Clinton appointed him Ambassador to Spain.

Dick took these assignments seriously. He was still polishing his Spanish when I visited, but he was already well-connected with the Spaniards who mattered. Happily, Spain was not as fascinating as Italy, but it was still a pleasure to learn a bit of what Dick had learned.

When the Gardners returned to New York my wife, Pat, and I would often dine with them. Their dinner parties were small—ten or a dozen people—but unfailingly rich in conversation. The guests might include Ted Sorenson, Paul Volcker, or, most memorably, Hans Blix. Few will remember that name, but he was the Chief U.N. Weapons Inspector who reported, before the invasion of Iraq, that his team of inspectors could find no evidence there of weapons of mass destruction.

A dedicated public servant, Blix was a Columbia alumnus who had been foreign minister of Sweden and head of the International Atomic Energy Agency before becoming Chief Inspector. To hear his findings first-hand at the Gardners' dinner table as they were being reported to the U.N. was an experience I'll never forget.

Danielle has been gone for eleven years, and now Dick is too. After Danielle's death, Pat and I would dine with Dick at Nicola's every month or so, where we would catch up on foreign affairs and family. It saddens me that Dick is no longer here after sixty years of comradeship but I remember what George Bernard Shaw said of William Morris: "You can lose a man like that by your own death, but not by his. And so, until then, let us rejoice in him."²

2. George Bernard Shaw, *William Morris: Morris as Actor and Dramatist*, 82 *Saturday Rev.*, 385, 387 (1896).