

President's Message

by Jon D. Huddleston



Diamonds Are Forever

THE HOLIDAYS ARE UPON US. The winter chill has shown up in my area too often—but I suppose, for me, any time that it arrives it is unwelcome. The holidays are about friendships and family, about reflecting on the year gone by and the promise of the year ahead. In our house, the Christmas decorations are up; well, some of them are, anyway. Perhaps, we will complete the task before Christmas day. Perhaps, we will pledge to do better next year. Inexplicably, two pumpkins remain on our doorstep, survivors of both Halloween and Thanksgiving. No one has questioned their existence or demanded their removal. The Christmas pumpkin concept has apparently caught on in our neighborhood, as no fewer than five neighboring homes also have holiday pumpkins on their doorsteps.

Where did the year go? It seems like yesterday that the Yankees had defeated the Phillies in the World Series—the real sign that summer has ended until life begins anew with spring training in March. It is December and my mind is on friendship and baseball.

It is funny. Baseball is no longer my favorite sport to watch. It is not the sport of my children, but it is the sport of my youth. I loved the St. Louis Cardinals. I studied box scores. I owned way cool Lou Brock tennis shoes, which really were so much faster than anything Keds or Converse had to offer. I still have all of my baseball cards. Well, all but one.

I have thought about that card a lot recently—a 1969 Topps Roberto Clemente card. It was my only Clemente card. I had Mays's cards, Gibson's, Aarons's, and Robinson's. But only one Clemente. As a child, I wasn't a fan

of Clemente. He was a Pirate. The Pittsburgh Pirates were the enemy, perpetually standing in the way of the Cardinals' rightful place atop the National League East Division. But, I did appreciate his greatness as a player. It was impossible not to. He was that good.

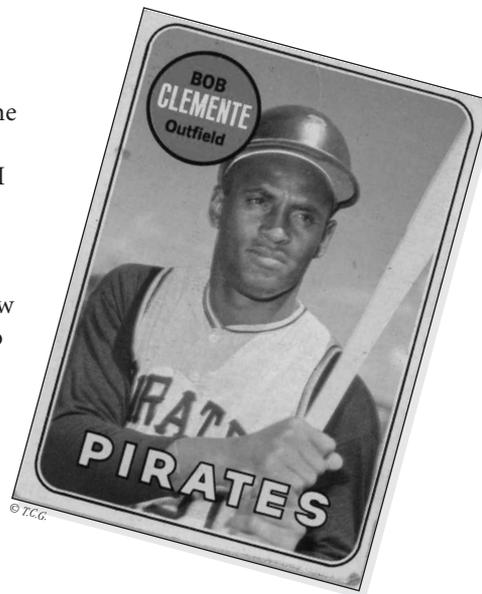
I knew of his tragic death on New Year's Eve in 1972, as he was trying to get humanitarian supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. But it was not until years later that I learned of the depth of his commitment to humanity and his extensive charity work in his native Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries.

Anytime you have a chance to make a difference in this world and you don't, then you are wasting your time on this earth.

I chose this wonderful quote by Clemente to use in my first President's Message and it has set the tone for our programs recognizing Virginia's good lawyers for their contributions to community service.

So what happened to the card? Well, that is where the friendship part comes in. Since the advent of baseball cards, there have been kids who have collected them. As long as kids have collected them, they have traded them with their friends. As long as there have been trades, there have been one-sided trades.

This particular bit of treachery occurred when we were fourteen or fifteen give or take a year. He was one of my best friends. We played countless hours of basketball. We attended



the same school and church. We went to summer camps together and conducted our share of fairly innocent mischief. And we both had lots of baseball cards, but only one of us had a Clemente.

This particular afternoon, we sorted a bunch of cards that might be subject to trade discussion, pulling out about 100 or more cards in two stacks. These were the cards that were to be considered. About twice as many cards were in his stack of cards as were in mine. Then, he made the offer—his stack for mine. There were some really good cards in his stack. I accepted. The deal was done. I was really thankful I had pulled the Clemente from the stack.

Except I hadn't. A deal was a deal. There it was, the first lesson in contracts. *Bargain, consideration, delivery.* It was also a lesson in honor. There was no renegeing. I could have checked the stack—another lesson that has served

me well over the years. It was not my finest moment, but it never affected our friendship. We continued to enjoy our summers. We got our driver's licenses and we continued to shoot a lot of hoops—we were a formidable duo on our home court, at least in our own minds.

Of course, college and adulthood changed things. We attended different colleges. Although we went to the same law school, he finished before I arrived. He did manage to leave specific instructions for his favorite law school professor to mercilessly torment a certain incoming first-year student, which were carried out with aplomb.

Weddings, children, jobs and job changes, life in different cities. All of the circle of life variables that pull us further from our childhood and away from our childhood friends pulled us apart.

Months turned into years. If we had an address, perhaps a Christmas card was sent. Perhaps, a lunch would occur if we were in the area. The friendship never died, only the contact. We both enjoyed sports. We coached our kids and hugged our families and practiced law. But he did it in his world and I in mine.

I last saw him after my mother's funeral several years ago. He stayed for hours. We talked about school and camp and our kids—and my mom. We hugged. For a moment, we returned to our childhood lives. Despite the years, we hadn't lost a beat.

It was a couple of years before we next spoke, when he phoned to tell me of an unspeakable tragedy that had hit his family, an accident that will forever mar his holidays. I was far less comfort to him and his family than he had been

to me. Life has a vicious side. Maybe through time we find comfort.

I had hoped he would be able to come see me installed as bar president last June but he was unable to make it. I did receive a note of regret a couple months later. It included a new address and a small gift: the 1969 Topps Roberto Clemente baseball card that he had held for me for the last thirty-five years. Another circle complete, but not ended.

Perhaps that is the lesson—that holidays mean family, that good friendships don't end no matter how interrupted, that spring will still bring baseball and that we must remember to make a difference in this world when we are given the chance.

MERRY CHRISTMAS to my old friend, and to each of you a joyous holiday season.

Lawyers serve on local boards. They build houses for Habitat for Humanity. They raise money. They coach our youth. They do it because they have a passion for their causes. They do it because they feel it is the right thing to do.

We are telling some of their stories.

Virginia is for good lawyers.

The Big Picture, a video project

<http://www.vsb.org/site/about/va-good-lawyers/#bigpicture>

on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/virginiastatebar>

Reflections, a collection of essays written by and about Virginia lawyers

<http://www.vsb.org/site/about/va-good-lawyers/#reflections>

Raising the Bar

The Virginia State Bar President's Blog

<http://www.vsb.org/site/blog/>

President Jon Huddleston on Twitter

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