

MEMORIES OF UCLA LAW SCHOOL

DOROTHY W. NELSON*

In the class of 1953, the second graduating class, there were only two women, Ann Mobley and me. Dean Dale Coffman made it very clear that we didn't necessarily belong in law school. We took his Torts class. The first day he announced that he would only call upon women on Ladies Day. Ann and I were thrilled because we knew we would only be called upon on the day he announced it would be, and so we were super-prepared on those days.

★ ★ ★

Dean Roscoe Pound taught a number of classes, all of which I took. I did well in his Common Law Actions class because I had had three years of Latin in high school. If you gave a particularly good answer to any of his questions in class, he made you a member of his "Tenth Legion," upon which he called to answer particularly difficult questions. We took turns driving him to school, stopping at a restaurant called Ollie Hammond's so he could have a bowl of "mush" that I called cream of wheat. Each time we

* Senior Judge, U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Pasadena, California; formerly Dean, USC School of Law. For further information, see the Editor-in-Chief's introduction on page 1 of this volume: 11 CAL. LEGAL HIST. 1 (2016).

drove him he would hand us a big cigar, and I still have stashed away in my attic my “Roscoe Pound” cigars. He was a wonderful mentor to me and recommended me for a research job at USC under a Professor Holbrook. We (with the assistance of two other research attorneys) wrote a book on how to reform the court system in Los Angeles County. During that time, I was asked to fill in for a professor teaching a law reform class and then invited to join the USC faculty as its first woman member.

★ ★ ★

When I became dean of the USC Law School, my connection with UCLA was greatly increased, for USC and UCLA had lived through the Kent State–Cambodia days, and experiments with the first affirmative action programs, together. I was on the phone, almost daily, with Dean Murray Schwartz (whose wife taught a course at USC on Law and Anthropology) and Dean Richard Maxwell, discussing strategy, and they became some of my nearest and dearest friends.

★ ★ ★

It was my feeling that Los Angeles, with three fine law schools — UCLA, USC and Loyola — should collaborate since we had some of the greatest legal talent in the U.S. in Los Angeles. We often exchanged faculty (I borrowed Professor Mel Nimmer for example) and had a number of joint faculty workshops. Together we created the Western Center on Law and Poverty. It was housed at USC. Unfortunately, when the Western Center Board decided to sue Police Chief Davis for harassment of Blacks in Los Angeles, a decision that the Center had made, having nothing to do with any of us as deans, the police chief went on public television calling me a “communist,” causing great unhappiness for the very conservative USC Board of Trustees. It was my friends at UCLA and Loyola law schools who helped me survive this crisis.

★ ★ ★

Perhaps the most significant thing to happen to me during my time at the law school was my introduction to the Baha’i Faith. Our freshman class had approximately seventy-two students, including two women (Ann Mobley and me) and one Black student. A professional fraternity invited the entire

class to join. We all did. Six weeks later, we were informed by letter that no women or Blacks could join. This was 1950 (before *Brown*). The president of our class, Donald Barrett, called us all together and suggested that we all resign and form the UCLA Law Association. We all agreed.

I had known Donald as an undergraduate, a very bright and a successful campus political figure — after all, he was our class president — but I honestly didn't think this was something in which he was interested. I approached him and asked him why he did it. He replied that his whole life was changing because he was going to Baha'i meetings in Westwood Village. I said, "Oh, is that Buddhist or Hindu?," for I had never heard the word Baha'i before. He said, "No, it is the latest of the world's revealed religions. It teaches the abolition of racism and prejudice of all kinds and such principles as the equality of men and women. Basically, he said that the Baha'i Faith believes Messengers or Manifestations of God appear every 500 to 1000 years to renew the spiritual teachings of God (Power of Prayer, Golden Rule, Fatherhood of God) that remain constant, and to update the social teachings as mankind matures. He called this progressive revelation, each Messenger writing the latest chapter in one continuous book. The latest Messenger is called Baha'u'llah (Arabic for the "Glory of God") who proclaimed his Message in Persia in 1863. Then Don said that there were no clergy in the Faith for this is the era when all on the face of the earth will be educated so that they may seek out truth for themselves. He asked if my husband and I would like to attend a meeting in Westwood, called a "fireside," where someone would speak and then questions and answers were entertained. I respectfully declined due to my activity in my Episcopal Church, but thanked him for his courageous action. To make a long story shorter, Don became a Baha'i our second year of law school and we watched and listened to him intensely. In the next ten years, members of our class and their families, seventeen in number, became Baha'is. It materially affected my life because Baha'is resolve conflict in over 180 countries (6 million members) through "consultation," a form of mediation, hence my specialty in mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution as an academic.