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## THE PIRATE HAT

*Carter Dillard\**

A law professor at another law school told me about David Bederman before I transferred to Emory. She studied with him at the University of Virginia and wanted me to take any course he offered. She described him as “very smart.”

It would have taken more than that to get me to take the course in admiralty he was teaching that semester, which seemed unrelated to any vision I had of myself as a lawyer. But I heard he would wear a pirate hat toward the end of the course and that seemed better than whatever a tax or trusts and estates professor might attempt to impress her students.

My doubts about admiralty aside, Professor David Bederman became the best educator I ever had. His Socratic lectures involved connecting the class to his thought process as he deliberately and publicly relearned the material. He would go through that process in front of students, tethered to them with questions and answers thoughtfully geared for the average learner as he bobbed ahead on the path of each case, inviting us to repeat what he was experiencing. He took us through his mental script, slowing where we had difficulty understanding the lines and even crossing out lines that made no sense to let us, his students, add new ones that improved the story.

But doing that, alone, did not give David Bederman the reputation he had then—and I suspect has now—among the students. Whatever scholarship his colleagues credited him for, or public service institutions recognized him for, students wanted to learn from Professor Bederman because he was unmistakably having fun bobbing ahead on that path, savoring his own experience of relearning, rather than describing, systems of rules and the stories from which they arose and to which they were applied. If he could do it, we could do it and should want to do it. Having someone ahead on the path to light the way and whose steps one can follow does not work well if that person is not enjoying the experience—and it seemed as though David Bederman always was.

And yes, the pirate hat never hurt.

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