

ARTICLE

Transformation

William Twining*

Emeritus Quain Professor of Jurisprudence, University College London, UK

*Corresponding author. E-mail: wtwining@gmail.com

Abstract

This brief paper is an account of Peter Fitzpatrick's appointment to the Faculty of Law at Queens University, Belfast, and his consequent transformation, personally and professionally, during his short tenure at Queens.

Keywords: legal education; Queens University Belfast; Fitzpatrick; legal biography; jurisprudence

In 1967, the Faculty of Law of Queen's University Belfast needed a commercial lawyer, especially to teach company law. Recruitment of such persons to academia is perennially a problem. We advertised a lectureship and one candidate stood out: a brilliant young Australian who had qualified as a solicitor while taking a part-time law degree at the University of Queensland. He was now working in London for the prestigious American law firm Baker and MacKenzie, and reading part-time for the LLM. He came for interview wearing a suit and tie, suitably coiffured and seemingly shy. He accepted our offer.

Peter and Shelby came over to Belfast to look for accommodation. We had heard of a flat almost opposite our house in Deramore Drive, quite suitable for a young city lawyer. Four of us went to inspect. We were met by the departing tenant, who was clearly inebriated. He insisted on showing us the bidet three times. The Fitzpatrick's took the flat and put goldfish in the bidet.

Peter's first year at Queen's seemed transformative. In addition to being in his first teaching job, this was the first time he had been a full member of a university community. He taught company law enthusiastically, attended many events, and he and Shelby seemed to be in the University Cinema (Arts) almost nightly. They were on what seemed to us to be an intellectual and cultural binge in a place that from London looked like a cultural desert. Shelby taught Karen (aet. 8) design and we still get beautiful photo montages from our daughter at Christmas and on special occasions.

One day, Peter asked me whether he could teach some jurisprudence, of which there was a lot at Queen's – surprising coming from a city solicitor, but we found space for him and he took over my course in legal philosophy when I spent a semester in the US. By now, the suit had been hung up, the tie had been discarded, the coiffure had changed and the goldfish kept dying, as goldfish do.

We soon had long intellectual conversations about law plus. We became friends as well as neighbours. He was intrigued by my time in Sudan and Tanzania, and questioned me closely. At the time, I was interested in legal anthropology, especially Llewellyn and Hoebel's *The Cheyenne Way* (1941), colonial-era legal anthropologists and attempts to 'restate' or 'reform' customary law in East Africa. I don't know how much Peter had already read in this area, but he was clearly intrigued and we had long discussions about it. In Belfast, Peter and Shelby were also friends with Abdul Paliwala and Loraine Blaxter, herself a lecturer in anthropology. Later, they were all together in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

One day, he consulted me about a possible job in PNG. I did not want to lose him, but nevertheless encouraged him. He got the job and took off. The rest is history.

Recently, I found a letter addressed to me in Philadelphia from Peter in Belfast dated 19 April 1971. He was about to leave for PNG. There was some gossip and admin. business, but the main purpose was

to send some editorial comments on the penultimate draft of my book, *Karl Llewellyn and the Realist Movement* (Twining, 1973). We had had very helpful discussions about this before and most of these notes were like those of a good copy editor. The letter also contains an account of his preparations for PNG. Interestingly, this shows that he was already thinking in terms of ‘law and development’ rather than legal anthropology:

‘I’ve given up on legal anthropology. Its proving to be of hardly any help or inspiration. It is only incidentally relevant to the study of new relationships in developing countries that are *already there* to be looked at. For the same reason the sterile debate about traditional and imported legal systems should be chucked out or, at best, relegated to an incidental place in the perspective of new relationships. Anyway, I’m finding the work of anthropologists and economists more congenial ... [H]ave mainly been immersed in reading, buying, brain racking and card noting for N.G. if only to give me some confidence.’¹

We ceased to be colleagues and neighbours but continued as friends for over 50 years. Memory is unreliable but special friends are not.

Conflicts of Interest. None

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References

- Llewellyn K and Hoebel E** (1941) *The Cheyenne Way: Conflict and Case Law in Primitive Jurisprudence*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Twining W** (1973) *Karl Llewellyn and the Realist Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹The letter ends: ‘Best wishes from us and (as far as we can gather) Teshar to y’all, Peter.’