

## LIFE LESSONS FOR A LAW SCHOOL

*George W. Prigge, PhD\**

### PREGAME: INTRODUCTION

**L**IKE most fathers (or mothers) I suppose, my dad had a bunch of little sayings that he would use in various situations. My family and I would repeat these sayings, often beating him to the punch when such a saying was appropriate. Even today, I find myself using them with my children. What's funny is that I never thought much about them while I was growing up, other than to expect to hear them frequently; but looking back, I realize they were indeed little life lessons that have applicability far beyond childhood.

My father, George Prigge, was a professional baseball player in his younger life. He signed with the New York Yankees right out of high school in 1949 and played in their minor league system until 1957.<sup>1</sup> As a result, many of these sayings have a baseball connection, and hence, these lessons are presented in a baseball format, over nine innings. I hope that after reading this you will reflect on your own life's lessons and share them with someone else.

### 1ST INNING: SPIT ON IT AND RUB IT IN THE DIRT

One of my father's favorite sayings was "Spit on it and rub it in the dirt." If you fell down and skinned your knee, "Spit on it and rub it in the dirt." If you fell off your bike, "Spit on it and rub it in the dirt." If you broke your arm, "Spit on it and rub it in the dirt." (In an effort at full disclosure, I should note that each of these specific examples did in fact happen to me multiple times, even the broken arm.) Seriously, you might ask, why on earth would anyone rub a skinned knee in the dirt? What about infection? While my dad might have used this phrase kiddingly in each of these situations, in essence he was saying, "Be tough. Don't let the other guy see that you're hurt. There's nothing so bad that you can't stand it."

You see this in just about every major league baseball game where a batter gets plunked by a pitcher. Unless the batter is seriously hurt, you usually see him just turn and go to first base. They don't rub the spot where they got hit. If they were knocked down as a result of the play, they usually don't even brush the dirt

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\* The author is the Associate Dean for Administration & Finance at Georgia State University College of Law. This article is for you, Pop. I miss you.

1. See *George Prigge Minor League Statistics & History*, BASEBALL REFERENCE.COM, <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=prigge001geo> (last visited Sept. 15, 2010) (providing the baseball career statistics for George Prigge).

off of their uniforms. They simply trot down to first base as if to say, "That didn't hurt."

There are many examples throughout history of people who exhibit this toughness. The first one that comes to my mind is Lou Gehrig. In 1925, Gehrig was inserted into the starting lineup of the New York Yankees to replace first baseman Wally Pipp.<sup>2</sup> He would not come out of the lineup until 1939, 2,130 consecutive games later.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this streak, Lou Gehrig played through both slumps and injuries, but he never wavered in his commitment to the team or in his ability to play the game. In fact, it was not until the onset of the disease which would later bear his name, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease),<sup>4</sup> that Gehrig was forced from the lineup. Lou Gehrig's streak of 2,130 consecutive games was a record that many thought would never be broken.<sup>5</sup>

I really think what my dad was trying to say every time he told me to "spit on it and rub it in the dirt" was this: Things are not always going to go your way. Sometimes an unlucky bounce does determine who wins or loses. Sometimes you'll get your heart broken. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Some things are simply out of your control. That's just life, so you can either sit there and feel sorry for yourself, or you can get right back out there and make the best of the situation and try again.

Noted German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "That which does not destroy me makes me stronger."<sup>6</sup> My dad's grandparents were all from Germany. Who knows, had Nietzsche been a baseball player, his famous quote might have been, "Spit on it and rub it in the dirt."

#### 2ND INNING: TAKE TWO AND HIT TO RIGHT

Another one of my father's sayings was "Take two and hit to right." The literal meaning of this is to look at the first two pitches and then make a conscious effort to hit the next ball into right field, thus allowing the runners on base to advance or even score. "Take two and hit to right" means that you have to have a plan and your plan is dictated by the situation. You don't just go up there swinging for the fences every at bat.

One area where this occurs is on the golf course. A golfer will encounter a situation where if he hits a perfect shot, he can clear a hazard and have the opportunity to make a birdie or an eagle.<sup>7</sup> Of course the downside to this is that

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2. *Biography*, LOU GEHRIG: THE OFFICIAL WEB SITE, <http://www.lougehrig.com/about/bio.htm> (last visited Sept. 16, 2010).

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. Gehrig's consecutive was eventually broken in 1995 by Cal Ripken, Jr. *Achievements*, LOU GEHRIG: THE OFFICIAL WEB SITE, <http://www.lougehrig.com/about/achievements.htm> (last visited Sept. 16, 2010).

6. FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE, TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS 8 (Wordsworth Editions Limited 2007) (1888).

7. Phil Mickelson did this on the 13th hole of the final round of the 2010 Masters where he hit the ball out of the trees to within about three feet of the hole. He would go on to make a birdie on

if the perfect shot is not struck, there is an even greater potential to hit the ball into the hazard and make a bogey or worse.<sup>8</sup>

My dad used the phrase “take two and hit to right” not just for baseball, but for everyday life. You can’t do the same thing for each situation you will encounter in life. You have to have a different strategy for different situations. You would not have the same discussion or dispense the same punishment to a teenager and a first grader for the same offense. Likewise, you might have a large tree in your yard that needs to be cut down. If that tree is not near anything, you might just cut it down without regard to where it falls. However, if that tree is within striking distance of something like your house, you would be much better off making sure to cut it down so that it falls into a safe area away from the house. Your plan will thus be dictated by the situation. Examining your options based on the situation at hand will help you define the best strategy for going forward. It just might be “take two and hit to right.”

### 3RD INNING: DROPPED SOMETHING, PRIGGE

“Dropped something, Prigge” is something I heard repeatedly growing up, whether it was dropping a ball in a game or just dropping my fork at the dinner table. Whatever it was, if it came out of your hands at my house, you heard, “Dropped something, Prigge.” To this day, I still say that to my kids when they drop something.

This is an acknowledgement of not being perfect. No one is. We all drop something every day. The record for most fumbles in NFL history belongs to none other than Hall of Fame quarterback Warren Moon.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the person who struck out more times than anyone else in major league baseball history is Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson.<sup>10</sup> Even the greatest are going to “drop something.” They’re going to fail. We have to be able to laugh at ourselves, accept this momentary failure, and move on. The key is how you respond to the failure that will ultimately determine how successful you will be.

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that hole and win the tournament. Joe Posnanski, *Michelson’s Guts, Talent Came Together for Shot that Defined this Masters*, GOLF.COM (Apr. 13, 2010), [http://www.golf.com/golf/tours\\_news/article/0,28136,1981169,00.html](http://www.golf.com/golf/tours_news/article/0,28136,1981169,00.html).

8. Phil Mickelson did this on the final hole in the final round of the 2006 US Open where a par would have won the tournament but he took a chance and ended up making a double bogey, losing the tournament to Geoff Ogilvy. Alan Shipnuck, *Michelson’s Epic Collapse at Winged Foot Paves the Way for Ogilvy*, GOLF.COM (Apr. 6, 2009), [http://www.golf.com/golf/tours\\_news/article/0,28136,1808386,00.html](http://www.golf.com/golf/tours_news/article/0,28136,1808386,00.html).

9. Warren Moon lost 161 fumbles during his NFL career (1984-2000). *All Time Records, 2010 NFL RECORD & FACT BOOK 558*, available at [http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/image/history/pdfs/Records/All\\_Time\\_Individual\\_Records.pdf](http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/image/history/pdfs/Records/All_Time_Individual_Records.pdf).

10. Reggie Jackson struck out 2,597 times in his major league career (1967-1987). *Reggie Jackson-BR Bullpen*, BASEBALL-REFERENCE.COM, [http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Reggie\\_Jackson](http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Reggie_Jackson) (last visited Sept. 16, 2010).

## 4TH INNING: TWO STEPS CLOSER TO FIRST BASE

I am right-handed by nature. I write right-handed. I throw right-handed. I golf right-handed. I swing a baseball bat, however, left-handed. When I was probably four or five years old and first picked up a baseball bat, my father taught me to hold it and swing from the left side instead of the right side. He would always say the reason for it was because “you are two steps closer to first base and therefore are more likely to be safe on a close play than if you had started from the right-handed batter’s box.” While he couldn’t hit the ball for me or run for me, he knew that I was better off leaving home plate from the left side of the plate than the right side, all things being equal. He wanted to provide me with an advantage that would allow me every opportunity to succeed compared to others.

Studies show that college graduates make more over a lifetime than high school graduates.<sup>11</sup> History also shows us that the earlier you start saving, the more money you’ll have at retirement. To be successful, we need to take advantage of the opportunities that are afforded to us to achieve that success. Career coaches will tell you that it is easier to get a job through networking than just sending in an application. In other words, it’s not always what you know but who you know that can be most beneficial.

We all have the opportunity to stand two steps closer to first base in many of the things we do in life. We just don’t always take advantage of those opportunities, whether through a lack of knowledge of the potential advantage or the lack of willingness to change. If a person is really going to give himself the best opportunity to succeed in life, he should always look to stand two steps closer to first base.

## 5TH INNING: LOOK IT UP

For most of my life, I thought my father was the smartest person in the world. Not many teenagers would ever admit that, but I readily would. I always felt like if I asked him a question, he would know the answer. In fact, all the way through high school, and even into college, if I was stumped on a homework problem, I knew I could always count on my father to help me solve it, regardless of the subject.

We had a set of *World Book* encyclopedias on our bookshelf when I was growing up, complete with two very large dictionaries. One way my father “helped” me to answer my questions was to tell me to “look it up.” Whenever he said that, I knew it was time to make a trip to that shelf to pull out the encyclopedias or dictionary. Looking back, I realize that my father was indeed helping me when he told me to look it up. He was instilling in me the skills of exploration and investigation. He was teaching me about research techniques. He was telling me to “Google it” long before PCs, much less the Internet, were

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11. JENNIFER CHEESEMAN DAY & ERIC C. NEWBURGER, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, PUB. NO. P23-210, THE BIG PAYOFF: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND SYNTHETIC ESTIMATES OF WORK-LIFE EARNINGS 2 (2002), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf>.

Spring 2011]

LIFE LESSONS FOR A LAW SCHOOL

653

available to the masses. He was applying the ancient proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” As I reflect on this, maybe he still is the smartest person I know, because he knew by telling me to “look it up,” I would develop my own curiosities and abilities to solve problems, and for that, I am grateful.

#### 6TH INNING: IT’LL PUT HAIR ON YOUR CHEST

As a child growing up, there are many things you don’t like to do but are forced to do because “they’re good for you.” Eat your spinach. Take your medicine. Take a bath. In our house, whenever my sisters or I encountered something we didn’t care for, my dad’s response was always “it’ll put hair on your chest.” This was code for “you may not like it, but you had better do it because it’s good for you.”

In life, each of us faces situations almost daily that we don’t necessarily enjoy but know we must do because they’re “good for us.” Respond to that summons for jury duty by going down to the courthouse. Make yourself get out the door to exercise when you would really rather stay on the couch and watch TV. Eat more greens and less fried food to lower your cholesterol. Whatever the case, we end up doing these things because they are good for us; otherwise we’re liable to face undesirable consequences. If we do it enough, it just might put hair on our chests.

#### 7TH INNING: DON’T HIT YOUR SISTER

My youngest sister is five years younger than me. Growing up, she used to annoy the fire out of me, as I’m sure anyone with younger siblings can relate. I would normally try to ignore her but more often than not, she would end up hitting me and I would then be “forced” to hit her back. Of course, she would then run and tell my dad that I hit her, which would bring the inevitable hand to my backside with the admonition not to hit my sister. Of course, my pleas of innocence and self-defense always fell on deaf ears. I was the older one. I should know better.

Isn’t that the way it is in life? Watch any football or hockey game where there is an altercation between two players and it’s usually the second player to throw a punch that draws the penalty. Retaliation is not allowed. The Golden Rule says “[D]o to others what you would have them do to you.”<sup>12</sup> The Bible also tells us that in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”<sup>13</sup> These are good rules to live by. Unfortunately, we live in a world where people are attacked, or worse, for “disrespecting” someone else. The world would be a much better place if more people lived their lives according to these principles. And it all starts by learning not to hit your sister.

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12. *Matthew* 7:12.

13. *Matthew* 5:39.

## 8TH INNING: THE WHISTLE (COME HOME)

When I was little, we lived across the street from a park where I would spend the better part of everyday playing baseball, basketball, football or kick-the-can. Whenever it was time for me to come home, whether for dinner or for the night, my father would always walk out to the front porch and let out a loud whistle that sounded like a whippoorwill's cry. Whenever I heard that whistle, I knew it was time for me to go home.

In 1958, legendary football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant left Texas A&M University for his alma mater, the University of Alabama, because as he said, "Mama called."<sup>14</sup> We all need a place to go home to, that place where we know we belong, that place where we are welcomed for who we are. Sometimes we lose our way. When we do, we should listen for that whistle that calls us home.

## 9TH INNING: BEEP BEEP (I'M HOME)

My father used to drive a VW Beetle. Stick shift, AM radio, no air-conditioning, which was not the best thing when you lived in Alabama. As I mentioned earlier, I spent most of my days in the park across the street from our house. When my dad came home from work or home from the golf course on the weekends, he would toot his horn as that Bug rolled past the park—"beep beep."<sup>15</sup> It was his way of telling me "I'm home." I would immediately know it was him and look up and wave. As time went on, I would find myself anticipating his arrival each day, constantly looking to the far end of the park around the time he would normally be home, anxiously awaiting that "beep beep." When I would finally see him, I knew all was right with the world. I took comfort in knowing my dad was home and our family was all together again.

Today, as a family with two teenagers, our lives are in constant motion. Between work, school activities, church activities, and just everyday life, it seems like we have something programmed for just about every day of the week. More often than not, however, we are able to sit down at the dinner table together, break bread, and discuss the day's events. As simple as that sounds, those are times I cherish the most. While it is important to have a place to go home to, it is equally important to have someone to go home to. For all of those special people in your life, toot your horn and let them know you're coming home.

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14. *Paul William "Bear" Bryant*, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ALABAMA, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org> (search "Search" for "Paul William 'Bear' Bryant"; then follow "Paul William 'Bear' Bryant" hyperlink) (last visited Sept. 16, 2010).

15. *Volkswagen Car Sounds*, SOUNDBOARD, [http://www.soundboard.com/sb/Volkswagen\\_Car\\_sounds.aspx](http://www.soundboard.com/sb/Volkswagen_Car_sounds.aspx) (last visited Sept. 16, 2010) (mimicking the distinctive VW horn sound).

## POSTGAME: FINAL THOUGHTS

These lessons I learned from my father are not only applicable to me as an adult, but they are also applicable to life in a law school. Below are a few examples of how some of these might apply.

There are many situations in the daily life of a law school where the appropriate advice might be to just “spit on it and rub it in the dirt.” You didn’t get that raise or promotion you were hoping for. The university cut your budget or there’s a hiring freeze and you can’t fill that critical position you need. Your star faculty member refuses to play nice with the rest of the college. Any one of these might drive a dean or staff person crazy, but what are you going to do? You can rest assured that tomorrow will come and the sun will rise in the east and that life will go on. You can’t let these situations get you down but instead must make the best out of them. So when you’re faced with a difficult situation at work, just spit on it and rub it in the dirt, and know that you’ll be able to handle it.

In law schools, being able to adjust your plans based on a particular situation is imperative. In a tight budget year, you might be more generous with junior faculty members who are on the promotion and tenure track to support their travel and scholarship than you might with more senior, tenured faculty. Likewise, if the university requires you to provide a plan to cut your budget by 10%, you must take into account different variables before making a final decision. Is this a one-time cut? Is it permanent? What are our chances of growing out of this budget crisis? Examining your options based on the situation at hand will help you define the best strategy for going forward. It just might be “take two and hit to right.”

In law schools, things are not going to go perfectly all the time. There will be times when someone drops something. The school may fail to notify students of the changes to an employer’s interview schedule. An important document or publication may go out with a typo on it. The sound system may go out during a big event. These things happen. It’s important to be able to handle them professionally, adapt to the situation, and move forward as an organization. The key is how you respond to the failure that ultimately determines how successful you will be.

Law schools are filled with competition. There is competition among prospective students just to get in. There is competition among current students for that all-important class ranking. There is competition between the law school and other units on campus for funding. There is competition between law schools for the best and brightest students and faculty. It’s not always those with the best skills that determine who wins, however. Instead, it’s often those who seek out and leverage opportunities that will give them a competitive advantage that rise to the top. Whether as an individual or an institution, you should always look for those opportunities that will provide you with that advantage and allow you to stand two steps closer to first base. Just remember, “don’t hit your sister” in the process.

There are many things you do at a law school that you don’t particularly enjoy but know you must do them for the good of the organization. I can think of

one in particular that happens every seven years or so: That group of evaluators from the ABA comes around for your sabbatical review.<sup>16</sup> As anyone who has been involved with preparing for one of these site visits can attest, they are not easy to prepare for. It can often take a year or more to pull together all of the information required by the review teams. Files have to be scoured for that archived document that is required to be included as appendix 4,395. You will often be forced to “look it up” to make sure you have the most accurate information. Through this experience, however, you may even identify ways to improve what you do, and in the end, it just might put hair on your chest.

Law students spend a tremendous amount of time in their law schools, often arriving by 8:00 a.m. and not leaving until the law library closes at 11:00 p.m. or later. As a result, we administrators want the law school to be as comfortable and welcoming as possible. We want this place to be their “home away from home.” And perhaps most of all, we want it to be a place they will want to return often after they graduate, always feeling welcome, always feeling like they’re home. If we follow these simple life lessons, they just might, and we’ll all be the better for it.

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16. All fully approved law schools are to be evaluated at least every seven years. ABA STANDARDS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHOOLS R. 12 (2009-2010), available at <http://www.abanet.org/legaled/standards/2009-2010%20Standards.pdf>.