

MY FRIEND, VED

I shall leave it to others to chronicle the remarkable and distinguished career of Ved Nanda—to do so would require a hefty tome.¹ But to me, Ved Nanda was a wonderful, valued friend and colleague. He was also the kindest man I ever met. I appreciate the privilege of recounting some of the more personal aspects of this great man, shared with me during our many conversations over the years.

I first met Ved in 1980 when I sought to transition from my career as a Naval JAG officer and trial attorney to the life of an academic. Ved was on a panel of Sturm College of Law (Sturm) Professors considering my application for a tenure-track position as a law professor. Even then I was most favorably impressed by Ved's kind demeanor. He showed great interest in my past experience and my new goals as an academic. It was soon after I gained a position at Sturm that Ved invited me to join him on several visits to various symposia—at which he was the featured speaker on international law. In the years following, Ved became an invaluable mentor and friend.

Ved was a member of a litany of professional, civic, and charitable associations (he was also incapable of declining any invitation to speak, of which there were many). One was the Rotary Club, a non-political, non-religious, charitable organization with over 35,000 member clubs worldwide, open to all people around the world regardless of race, religion, gender, or political affiliation. With its international connections, the Rotary Club provided an ideal forum for Ved's active participation. I was honored when, many years ago, he asked me to accompany him to the Denver Club's weekly luncheon meetings every Thursday.

Over the years, it was during these weekly runs downtown from the law school that I had the privilege of not only interfacing with Ved on a variety of current events and topics—many of which he wrote about in his weekly columns for the Denver Post—but also relating to one other our own personal life experiences. I would like to share just a few of the many stories Ved told me about his early life in India, how he came to America on a scholarship awarded by Northwestern University, met his devoted wife Katherine after coming to Sturm to teach international law, established the world-famous Ved Nanda Center for International and

1. A few highlights would necessarily include his service as the President of the World Jurist Association, United States Delegate to the World Federation of the United Nations Association, honorary Doctorates of Law from five major universities around the world, the highest civilian award bestowed by the President and government of India, and the American Bar Association's Louis B. Sohn Award conferred upon him for "distinguished long-lasting contributions to the field of public international law."

Comparative Law, and embarked upon his remarkable career as the world's premier expert on international law.

One of the many stories Ved told me was about when, at the tender age of twelve, he and his mother were fleeing by rail from their home in a region of India that had been allocated to Pakistan during its partition from India in 1947. The train on which young Ved and his mother were traveling to their new home in India was attacked by an armed mob. Thousands of the passengers, riding and hanging on to the top of the rail cars, were hacked to death. Ved and his mother survived only by chance—a number of soldiers had been assigned to their particular rail car and had the presence of mind to fire warning shots through the windows and lock down the rail car until reinforcements arrived to repel the attacking mob. After hearing Ved's harrowing story, I was reminded of the academy award winning film *Gandhi* that depicted a scene similar to the one Ved had described. I asked him if that scene was at all realistic. He said that it was. I can only imagine the impression that this experience left on young Ved.

Another story Ved told me, much more upbeat, was about a promise he made to himself during the early days of his career as an international lawyer and teacher. He had decided that it was not enough to read about international customs and law, he wanted to actually visit every country in the world to see for himself how people lived. When I asked him if he had been able to do that, he said that over a period of one and a half years he had successfully accomplished his goal. When with some incredulity I asked him if that was really true—"Come on, Ved, really? Every country in the world?"—he sheepishly confessed that, okay, he had not managed to visit two of the "stans" after they became independent states, but that he had visited even those areas before they became independent, and thus felt he had achieved his goal. Amazingly, he accomplished this feat on a limited budget, using an unlimited pass from an airline consortium for which he paid a flat fee, eating frugally, intermittently, and sparingly (in so many ways he reminded me of Gandhi) and prevailing on the kindness of local townsfolk he met along the way.

I could fill a book with stories from Ved's amazing life and career, but I will end with just one more. Ved was always being invited to speak at various functions, symposia, conferences, and conventions. Several years ago, when Fidel Castro was still alive, the Castro government invited international lawyers from around the world to attend a conference in Havana regarding the United States embargo placed on Cuba. The title of the conference was something along the lines of, "The Unlawful U.S. Embargo: Is it Genocide?" Ved had written many articles on the subject of genocide, ranging from the Holocaust to the Armenian Genocide, so he was a celebrated guest speaker at this conference. Undoubtedly, Castro and his officials were hopeful that Ved would support a finding that the United States' embargo constituted an attempt of genocide upon the Cuban people. When Ved was given the podium, he said that while he did not

support the embargo, he nevertheless did not believe it was “genocide.” Ved argued that as a matter of international law, the term “genocide” had a specific meaning, and the embargo did not fit within that definition. Several minutes after Ved gave his speech and sat down, a recess was called. During this recess, several men in leather trench coats approached Ved and asked him to follow them. They led him to a side conference room, where none other than the generalissimo himself, Fidel Castro, was waiting. For the next forty minutes or so, Castro regaled Ved with a diatribe in Spanish. Although Ved understood very little Spanish, he was able to pick out Castro’s displeasure that Ved was unwilling to describe the embargo as “genocide.” When Castro finally ran out of breath, a pause ensued while Castro apparently waited for Ved’s response. Ved had to think quickly about how he should respond; naturally, he was concerned that he not say anything to unnecessarily antagonize his host. On the other hand, he did not want to concede the point he had made during his presentation—that the embargo, whatever its effect on the Cuban economy, did not constitute genocide as a matter of international law.

Ved’s response was...well, classic Ved. Ever the polite diplomat, Ved finally responded, “Generalissimo, you know your country makes the best cigars in the world!” Castro, who speaks some English and understood, broke into a broad smile, and laughed. And so, Ved managed to diffuse what could have become an awkward situation.

More recently, when Ved and I were having dinner together, I asked him to tell the story again. This time he added a detail he had not mentioned the first time—as he left the room, he said softly enough that he was not sure if Castro heard it, “But it’s still not genocide.” At this I had to laugh. This added detail reminded me of how Galileo, brought before the Pope on charges of heresy for claiming that the earth was not the center of the universe but moved around the sun, finally confessed that he had been in error in order to save his life. However, history has recorded that witnesses heard Galileo mutter as he left the courtroom, “But still the earth moves.” At this, Ved laughed too, and the evening ended, as scintillating dinner conversations often did, with good humor and cheer.

I should also add that in the months after his wife Katherine’s passing, Ved was deeply affected by the loss of his beloved life companion of forty years. He told me that he had always assumed he would go first, given that she was much younger than he. When Katherine passed away so shortly after being diagnosed with what everyone thought was a treatable malady, Ved was not just distraught, but bewildered. For their entire marriage, Katherine had managed their affairs, leaving Ved free to concentrate on his scholarly work and writing. Nevertheless, even on the day after her funeral, Ved insisted on meeting his international law class. Several weeks later, as the fall term was ending, I was waiting for his last class to end so I could drive him home (as his mobility had been restricted by back problems and he was unable to drive). I was waiting in my office

when he called and asked me to come down and join his last class. His international students all adored him and were giving him a party to thank him for a wonderful semester.

A month later, complications ensued after several grueling operations on his back resulting from a fall at his home, and Ved asked to be put on hospice care. When I visited him in his last days at Swedish Hospital, he was surrounded by his beloved daughter Anjali, Katherine's sister, and family. Ved was barely conscious, but when the family said, "Ved, Bob is here!" I think I heard him say my name. At least I like to think he did.

The world has lost a towering figure at a time when it most needs the guidance and counsel of a man with Ved's knowledge and understanding of international law.

And I have lost a good and best friend. He will be forever in my thoughts.

*Robert Hardaway**

* Professor, University of Denver Sturm College of Law.