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Recollections of Vincent Broderick

Honorable Whitman Knapp*

Vin Broderick and I first ran into each other in 1950, when I left Frank Hogan's office and joined the firm which then became known as Hatch, Root, Barret, Cohen and Knapp. Vin had been with this firm (Hatch, Root and Barret) for a year or so and was assigned to be my assistant. Within about three weeks we had a new client: a very wealthy "nut" who loved to litigate, was being sued for lawyers' fees in the amount of \$350,000 (a lot of money in those days), had fired a series of attorneys (including two good friends of mine) and had the case against him peremptorily set down for trial before Judge Mathew Levy seven days after we first met. Vin and I managed to get a week's adjournment, and set to work. During the next four weeks Vin and I got very little sleep. By the time it was over, the firm's support staff had been able to pay off all their mortgages and other debts with their accumulated overtime, and Vin and I had come to know each other rather well. When I began to relax and recover my senses, I realized I had made the friendship of a truly wonderful man.

From then until 1954, when Vin left the firm to become Third Deputy Police Commissioner under Commissioner Adams, our friendship continued to mature. Thereafter our paths diverged, but our friendship continued. For example, when Vin was in charge of the National Association of Investment Companies, he saw to it that my daughter (then a student at Vassar) got a summer job which ultimately was the basis of her successful business career.

One can imagine my joy when, after Vin had served as Robert Morgenthau's Chief Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District (and Acting United States Attorney during Bob's brief flirtation with the idea of being Governor), Mayor Wagner appointed him Police Commissioner. Vin had

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never concealed the fact that his ultimate ambition was to be a United States District Judge. With Bob Kennedy, who had been Attorney General when Vin was serving in the United States Attorney's Office, as the Senator from New York, the appointment as Police Commissioner seemed like an ideal stepping stone. However, a big issue in those days was whether or not a civilian review board should be established to deal with allegations of police misconduct. Senator Kennedy passionately supported that proposition, and Commissioner Broderick passionately opposed it. I used to say to Vin, "Why don't you simply state your position and let it go at that? Why jeopardize your relationship with Bob Kennedy - and your chance of being a district judge - by continually denouncing his pet project?" Vin's response was "What you say may well be true, but I can only do one job at a time. Let the chips fall where they may." That was Vin in a nutshell.

The chips did indeed fall. All of us can remember Mayor Lindsay's first days in office. He was confronted with a transit strike that tied up New York City as it had never been tied up before. Television was constantly portraying the Mayor and his Police Commissioner working together, the Mayor obviously relying upon and getting support from his Commissioner. A few of us who thought we had some influence with Lindsay, headed principally by Beth Webster, who had for many years been his partner, tried to use this apparent opportunity to persuade him to keep Vin as his Commissioner. Lindsay's response was that the Civilian Review Board was in his judgment a major issue, and he could not have a Commissioner who opposed it.

Of course, I was an ultimate beneficiary of Lindsay's folly. Had he listened to Beth Webster and me, the Police Department would not have come apart at the seams as it did under the Commissioner he did appoint. When Serpico developed problems, Vin would have listened to him and dealt with them. There would have been no series of articles in the *New York Times*, no Knapp Commission, and no one would ever have heard of me.

When Vin finally became a colleague of mine in the District Court our early friendship bore a rather interesting fruit. As anyone who has ever served as my law clerk can tell you, I get all worked up when working on an opinion and tend to take it as

a personal affront if anyone disagrees with my views. This tends to make life difficult for my law clerks. When Vin came aboard, knowing me of old, he would comfort my law clerks, telling them "when he starts to shout at you, you know you are winning."

In the end, what can one say about Vin? All of us who have had an opportunity, however slight, to share friendship with Vin must realize that such sharing has immensely enriched our lives.