

HOW I GOT INTO YALE LAW SCHOOL - A Remembrance of Dean Tate

By Ronald W. Meister, '70

The LSAT scores were in, and they were satisfactory. The grades were good, too, so I was feeling confident about my chances for admission to the Law School. But confidence was not enough in those Vietnam days, when rejection meant not only unemployment, but a trip to Da Nang. So, I decided to avail myself of the service offered by Yale College to meet with law students and discuss the application process. I wasn't comfortable applying only to Yale and Harvard, I said. Don't bother with other schools, they told me. If you're really concerned, just walk up Wall Street and ask the Dean of Admissions if you'll get in. "I can do that?" I asked. Sure, they said, what have you got to lose?

So I put on my good tie and knocked on the door of Jack Tate, Dean of Admissions. I had my strategy: since my grades and LSAT scores were good, I would paint myself as well-rounded, not the nerdy scholar I suspected I really was. I was President of a student organization. I was in the Band. I wrote for a humor magazine. I was just the kind of all-around talent that Yale Law School would be happy to have.

What I hadn't learned yet was cross-examination. Dean Tate took up my strategy and proceeded to teach me my first law school lesson.



"So, I see your grades, and you say you can do a lot of things. Can you sing?"

"Only in the shower."

"Can you dance?"

"Not a step."

He was looking more skeptical by the moment. "How about art? Can you paint?"

"Hopeless."

"Cooking? Skiing? Magic tricks?"

No, no, no.

"Well," he said, sounding not only pessimistic but disappointed, "I can't speak for the Admissions Committee. We haven't even begun to meet. No one is guaranteed admission at this stage."

I was by now a hopeless blob, and not even a well-rounded one. All I wanted to do was get out of his office quickly enough that he would have forgotten who I was by the time my application crossed his desk. "Sure," I said. "Of course. What was I thinking? I'll just be going now."

My hand was actually on the doorknob when he said, in a quiet voice, "Don't waste your money on any other applications."

So I didn't.

Ron Meister has since learned a thing or two about cross-examination, but he still can't dance.

Originally published in Yale Law Report, July, 2012.