

Edited extract from Di Websdale-Morrissey's book *Blind Optimist: The Life of Lawrie McCredie CBE, AM* (2013) Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing:

During the next few years at Monash, Lawrie continued to take on an array of responsibilities, such as undergraduate enrolments, and preparation of lecture and tutorial timetables – a particularly tricky task that required him to guess at enrolment numbers for future course intakes. Also, with the Dean he was jointly responsible for allocating teaching duties to the academic staff. In 1988, he was given responsibility for administration of the undergraduate programme, and this required him to approve applications from potential graduate students.

A major portion of a Sub-Dean's work involves counselling. Lawrie was a natural at this side of his work. His compassionate nature and inherent interest in the human condition equipped him admirably for those times when a student poured his or her heart out in Lawrie's office. Through this work, he came to recognise a common theme across the stories he was hearing: difficulties with transition. Many undergraduate students were in the process of moving from teenager to adult and found the process confusing. Others were suffering from the transition between secondary school with its high degree of regulation and direction, and the more liberal university environment. Monash Law School attracted a significant cohort of Jewish students and many of them came from very orthodox homes and secondary schools, so struggled with their sudden immersion into the cultural and social melting pot of ideas that is tertiary student life. Lawrie often helped them to reconcile their upbringing with their exposure to the wider world and, in doing so, helped them to process the new with the old and to reach an outcome with which they could live and study.

Transition served as a rubric under which so many individual problems were expressed – financial, academic, cultural, relationship and identity. For those who struggle, university can be a lonely place, despite its thousands of people and colourful campus life. Such students needed a mentor and Lawrie happily filled the role. His guiding principle was to treat every student as he himself would want to be treated under the same circumstances, and thus the Law students at Monash were well served by a man who genuinely cared. The redoubtable Barbara was a partner in all this and helped many students herself.

Lawrie's acts of compassion lived on for those who benefitted from them. Several years after one such student has passed through Lawrie's care, Vicki was attending a social event at the school in which she taught. Suddenly the room was rocked by a full-throated roar of delight from a woman across the room. This woman had just been told that Vicki was Lawrie's daughter. 'Your father is Lawrie McCredie? My God, he is wonderful'. Grace was her name, and she told Vicki how, as a Chilean refugee, she had arrived in Australia with her parents at the age of thirteen. They lived in a high-rise Housing Commission flat and struggled to make a life for themselves. Grace had worked hard to learn English and to get good enough grades to go to University. The effort paid off, and she started an Arts degree at Melbourne University. As happens with so many young people, she realised during her undergraduate years that she had chosen the wrong course; in her case, it was Law that attracted her. Melbourne declined to allow her to transfer. Desperate, and believing that her accent and Housing Commission background had worked against her, Grace went to the Sub-

Dean of Law at Monash, and of course she found herself talking to Lawrie. He listened to her story and asked relevant questions. Grace says that one of the most transformational moments of her life was when Lawrie reached across the desk, shook her hand and said, 'Welcome to Monash Law'.

Lawrie still receives a Christmas card every year from one of Kuala Lumpur's law firms. Its principal is a former student of Lawrie's. The young man had struggled with six subjects over the summer semester and failed to reach the required standard. His name was tabled at the Academic Progress Board as someone who should be asked to leave. Lawrie understood that the young man had been overloaded with work and that this was his problem, not a lack of ability or application. He spoke up and the student was allowed to continue, later graduating with his class. The chair of the committee once told the members that, perhaps because of his lack of sight, Lawrie seemed to have a great insight into the human condition. In fact, it was generally believed in the Faculty that Lawrie would always defend a deserving student, no matter what.