

Wednesday, Apr 22, 2009

Posted on Wed, Apr. 22, 2009

Online Extra: Clemson vs. my family

By ANDREW PICKENS COLLINS

Guest Columnist

As the story goes, a battlefield general, in the face of discouraging developments, declared to his troops, "I feel sorry for the bastards that have us surrounded." Well, some of us in the Collins-Pickens family are beginning to identify with that type of scenario.

What follows are opinions about unpleasant goings-on at Clemson University that have slighted members of our family and leave us feeling insulted, degraded and unwelcome at our alma mater. Whatever Clemson's interpretation, it feels like a battle to us.

It all begins with Clemson alumnus and attorney Joel W. Collins Jr. of Columbia. Joel is solid in character, gifted in his work, and that reputation led Gene Troutman, a Clemson University employee, to seek Joel's representation in an effort to save his job. People deserve to know certain nuances about Troutman's situation, about how Joel eventually became involved in a lawsuit against his beloved school, and about ongoing responses by those representing Clemson.

Joel is my brother and a Clemson alumnus — as am I. Also, our father, two uncles, another brother, a brother-in-law, Joel's wife, his daughter, his two sons, his daughter-in-law and three nephews attended Clemson. Our mom, Anne Pickens Collins, was, in 1985, Clemson Mother of the Year. That totals 16 Clemson loyalists in our immediate family. With Gen. Andrew Pickens also included in our lineage, I believe anyone would conclude this family is steeped in Clemson loyalty and traditions, and with strong Upstate ties.

Now, back to the problem. Troutman had worked two years as executive secretary of the Clemson Board of Trustees, having been singled out from about 150 applicants who wanted that job. When important differences with his superiors led to the risk of losing his job, Troutman contacted my brother, felt comfortable with his style of representation and requested to become a client.

Joel only agreed to assist Troutman after careful deliberation — and with mixed emotions. Joel reasoned that a Clemson diehard had the best chance of resolving the differences in a manner that would result in the least disruption for Clemson and with the least duress for Troutman. And be aware of this also: No attorney when taking on a new client can know beforehand the nature of facts that will unfold.

However, the purpose of this piece is not to explore the merits of Troutman's case. In time his complaints will be adjudicated in a court of law before a jury of his peers. What needs to be revealed is how some at Clemson who are making decisions and calling the shots are choosing to personally isolate, attack and try to stigmatize my brother and therefore our entire family. One example (from a list): Joel was invited to attend the recent 2009 Clemson Alumni Distinguished Service Award ceremonies. Then, in a roundabout but obvious manner, Joel (and his distinguished-in-her-own-right wife, Rhonda) were "uninvited" and told not to appear — though he is himself a prior recipient of the award.

Joel has given generously of his time and money to Clemson over many years. Believe me, Clemson likely has never had a more loyal alumnus than my brother. Clemson representatives, on the other hand, are delaying, denying and attacking Joel, attempting to diminish him and quash his search for evenhandedness and truth. Prior Clemson presidents Sikes, Poole, Edwards, and Cox would never have let the school operate in a manner short of being fair, just and ethical.

My sense of this whole sordid situation is that the actions of some Clemson representatives against my brother have their basis in egomania — defenses of large egos that have been warped by too much power and too much money. Lord Acton warned, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." How sad it is when any authority approaches confrontations by attempting to deny claims and cloak facts in order to bring about a desired resolution. People intuitively know this: Facts are stubborn things grounded in truth, and truth is the fundamental concept of Western civilization.

My brother will be just fine. His resolve and history tell me that his critics will not be able to lessen him, and that in the end he will only be bolstered by this unfortunate style of embroilment.

My wish and prayer is that when all truths have surfaced, the outcome will not degrade the grand legacy of Clemson University.

Dr. Collins practices dentistry in Durham and Roxboro, N.C. Contact him at acollinsdmd@nc.rr.com.

© 2009 TheState.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.thestate.com/>