

THE LAWS OF SERVICE

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Everette Beasley

His Southern Indiana drawl resonates with good humor as Everett Beasley reflects upon his life of service in the rural area of his birth. A dedicated “ole’ country boy,” Beasley, who grew up on the family farm in northern Daviess County, served as a parole officer and as the Daviess County Sheriff in a career spanning nearly 30 years. But it was some time after his graduation from Indiana Central College in 1952 before Beasley discovered his calling in law enforcement.

Born in 1927 into a staunch United Brethren farming family, Beasley enlisted in the armed forces in 1945, following his graduation from high school. After fulfilling his military duty, higher education became the next imperative, one encouraged by his father. Continuing a family legacy, Beasley enrolled in Indiana Central, the church-related college from which his

older brother and other family members before him had graduated. But college life turned out not to be what he expected. “It was too quiet,” he remembers, and the college routine seemed too static. “I didn’t like to sit around all day,” he continues, “since I had been busy.” His life to date had been spent out of doors working on the farm and in the military. In comparison, classroom and campus life enclosed him, so he headed back to the farm.

Beasley’s father adamantly insisted that he return to college, declaring that the younger Beasley could not live on the family farm, “if [he was] too lazy to go to school.”

Moreover, his father contacted Beasley’s sister and younger brother, effectively closing off any alternatives for living arrangements to be made with family members. The elder Beasley’s stern resolution stemmed from his belief that his children should have career choices beyond farm life, even if securing those choices required a bit of compulsion.

Faced with no where to live, the young man returned to his studies in Indianapolis.

Several professors sought to make him feel more at home with college life, including Dr. Nathan Davis, who taught music, and Beasley grew more comfortable on campus, making friends and engaging in academic work more deeply. Yet, one barrier remained: his major. In his zeal to provide his son with a better life, Beasley’s father, who held great respect for teachers, had also chosen elementary education, a field the son intensely disliked, as his son’s formal major. His father encouraged him to follow his older brother in obtaining a teaching license and setting out on an educational career, adding that “if you don’t like it, you

can always do something else.” Persuaded more by the resolve than the substance of this proposition, since his “father was a very powerful person, really,” Beasley knew he would lose the argument, and so graduated as an elementary education major, still unconvinced that he should be a teacher.

He taught sixth grade for five years in the Indianapolis Fountain Square area, enjoying the human interaction with the students, but the old reaction to confined classroom spaces returned. Beasley felt tied down and desired something more from his career. One of his brothers worked as Assistant Superintendent of the Indiana State Reformatory, and discussions with him during frequent visits there directed Everett in changing his career path. As he notes, “I decided that I didn’t want to work in an institution, but I wanted to get into law enforcement.” After taking the state aptitude test, Beasley accepted a position as a parole officer.

At first, he was assigned to work in Indianapolis, a duty he found difficult. “It was like chasing snakes in a barrel,” he observes of the time he worked with parolees in the city. But the state officials assured him that he needed a year’s experience in such an environment to get acclimated to the job, after which they would transfer him to his home turf. So, after his training period, Beasley returned to Daviess County, where he would spend the next fifteen years as a parole officer for the ten-county region of southwestern Indiana. The job involved the supervision of inmates just coming out of prison, a task requiring an abundance of patience as he assisted parolees in obtaining jobs and adjusting to life within the community after their incarceration. Yet, despite its challenges, Beasley viewed this work primarily as service because he “really enjoyed helping people.” In fact, one of the most fulfilling aspects of

the job concerned listening to and facilitating the needs of parolees and their families as they struggled with all sorts of life issues. “I was like a family counselor,” he reflects, looking back on the challenges of smoothing out marital difficulties, financial crises, and other similar problems.

Most importantly, Beasley could live back home in the country. He purchased his father’s farm, operating it as he continued to work as a parole officer. With his life’s vocation in place, by the mid-1960s, Beasley had married and added four daughters to the family household. When the economic situation of his enlarged family demanded that he find a job that paid more than his current one, however, Beasley began to consider running for sheriff. After all, he was well acquainted with the inner workings of the area police and sheriff offices, and his hard work as a parole officer had earned him respect from his law enforcement colleagues as they shared experiences. The decision to enter the political world, however, had to be made by the entire family.

In the course of the family discussions, Beasley weighed the costs and benefits of such a step. His father immediately offered practical advice, telling Everett, “if you’re going to run for sheriff, you’re going to have to move to Washington, because that’s where the people are.” Such a move to the county seat would require the family to sell the farm. Conversely, Beasley also understood his deep vocational interest in law enforcement. He could see the positive and negative aspects of such work, coming to believe that he could do a better job than some of the men he observed. With his family’s blessing, Beasley sold the family farm in 1964 to move to Washington in order to launch his political career.

After six years of preparatory community work, Beasley ran for Sheriff of Daviess County in 1970, winning the election by a comfortable margin. He served for a total of sixteen years, starting with two terms from 1970 to 1978. After a four-year hiatus, he won re-election in 1982, serving as sheriff until his retirement in 1990. Although the position included a great amount of administrative work, it also satisfied Beasley's desire to serve his community through investigative and law enforcement activities. While burglary and other comparable offenses constituted the most common area crimes during this time period, more serious matters, including some murders, occurred during Beasley's watch. In each investigation, whether unraveling a homicide case or rounding up the usual local suspects in a petty crime, Beasley aimed to do his part in maintaining community order and security.

Indeed, the Beasley family lived what could be termed a very secure life since the sheriff and his family traditionally lived in an apartment within the county jail building.

Many friends and family members expressed shock when Everett explained that the family would be moving into the jail, but they lived there happily for eight years. Apparently, Beasley's work in law enforcement and the family's proximity to such service even influenced the children to some degree, since one of the four daughters chose a career of service in the welfare department and another became a nurse.

In fact, throughout his career as a parole officer and a sheriff, Everett Beasley has always believed that he served others by helping them. He defines service simply as "helping the people who need help. . . I had about an 80% success rate [as a parole officer]," he recalls, and his years of experience taught him to intuit "whether a guy was going to make it." Yet, despite his best efforts, occasional failures occurred. One such case concerned a former inmate who killed a little girl while on parole under Beasley's supervision. His voice still infused with pain, Beasley reflects that he "just didn't see" the inmate's potential for such a violent act. On the whole, however, Beasley focuses on the many joys of helping individuals successfully reconstruct their lives, observing that in such service "you can really help people in the community." Both as a parole officer and as sheriff, Beasley found his law enforcement work intensely fulfilling: "you feel good about what you've done at the end of the day."

Today, Everett Beasley, though retired, maintains a busy schedule of community service activities. After his last term in the sheriff's office ended, Beasley remained active, working for his U. S. congressman and setting up the local district offices. His mode of service shifted to helping the elected representative serve his constituents as effectively as possible. At a time in life when some would be tempted to relax into inactivity, Beasley constantly moves from work on one project to planning the next. He owns a portion of the family farm now, and raises cattle, reserving time to enjoy the countryside that he loves so much. In fact, he recommends his mode of living to those younger persons engaged in planning the future. "Do what YOU want to do," he



2

advises, pointing to his own lived experience as an example: "Of course, my dad wanted me to be a teacher, and that wasn't bad, but I had other interests, too. I liked the idea of law enforcement. You can really help people if you want to, especially in a small community."

Beasley urges students to realize that "when you start your career, it is often different than you think." After all, it would have been easy for him to stay in teaching, signing one contract after the next, but he didn't pursue this path because of his innate recognition of vocational calling. Although the change of career direction required courage, it paid off for Everett, because when "you're doing what you want to do, you do a good job." Such are the laws of service.