



UNC
SCHOOL OF LAW

NORTH CAROLINA LAW REVIEW

Volume 60 | Number 2

Article 5

1-1-1982

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Daniel H. Pollitt

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Recommended Citation

Daniel H. Pollitt, *Morris Reed Gelblum, a Personal Reminiscence*, 60 N.C. L. REV. 451 (1982).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.unc.edu/nclr/vol60/iss2/5>

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MORRIS REED GELBLUM, A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE



On January 1, 1982, Morris R. Gelblum, Special Assistant to the Dean, passed away after an extended illness. Mr. Gelblum joined the Law School Administration in 1968 and served as an Associate Dean for many years. The law school community is greatly saddened by the loss. Professor Daniel H. Pollitt, a long-time friend and colleague of Mr. Gelblum, remembers him.

I first met Mory Gelblum in September of 1939 when we were freshmen at Wesleyan University. I had taken the train from Washington, D.C. to Meridan, Connecticut, and then the bus to Middletown. I asked the driver to let me off at Wesleyan, and he suddenly stopped in what seemed to me the middle of a residential area. I had expected walls and a gate, and I knew not where to

turn. There I was, all alone, feeling somehow exposed. It had been a long trip. The day was hot; far too hot for the wool suit bought for the occasion. I began to lug my heavy suitcase (also newly bought for the occasion) up a strange walk-way. Then a large figure approached, asked if he could help, took my suitcase, and led me to my dorm. That was Mory. Suddenly I felt glad about myself and my situation.

Mory continued to shed gladness as we went through college together. In our sophomore year we were among a handful of students sharing a small dorm. It was Mory who led the late-night expeditions to the nearby tavern for a corned beef on rye and a draft of Bud. It was Mory who threw the first snowball across the street at the Phi Deltas; and woe to the innocent motorist who tried passage on High Street during the ensuing melee.

His effervescence enlivened the classes and seminars we shared, studying the ancient wisdoms; as all the while the guns boomed in Europe.

Then came Pearl Harbor. Mory opted for the Air Force; I for the Marines.

After the war there was law school; he at Harvard, I at Cornell.

Mory then chose a career in business and began in the Washington, D.C., branch of a large wholesale food concern based in Philadelphia. I was there practicing law; and there were many joyful evenings where, as I recall, we all excelled at charades (having begun the evening with very dry martinis). And there were many sober discussions of Joe McCarthy and Alger Hiss, and whether America might be losing its soul.

I embarked upon an academic career, Mory climbed the corporate ladder to the home office in Philadelphia. Thereafter our paths crossed on rare occasion. He was always, no matter the situation, joyful, most empathetic, and dependable without limit.

In the fall of 1968 John Scott (his law school roommate), Dick Phillips, Henry Brandis and I persuaded Mory to leave his very comfortable position in the Philadelphia business world and apply his managerial talents as the Associate Dean of the Law School at the University of North Carolina. For thirteen years he gave his very best to this job; and I take pride in this colleagueship.

His tasks included admissions, and he led the transition from what had been an almost entirely white male institution into one where women and minorities are welcomed and are graduated in ever-growing numbers. Night after night Mory went home to read admission applications. He cared about his job and took pride in the outcome.

Life was not all work. Tennis was his game, and he took full advantage of the opportunities and delights of an academic community: the art exhibits, the passing dance troupes, the lectures and discussions, the basketball games and the symphonies. His joys were eclectic, those of the Renaissance man.

The material gifts that he would have enjoyed most would have been a good seat at the New York opera or a World Series ticket to see his beloved

Phillies. But he made do, equally content with a can of tennis balls, a record (jazz, blues, or classical, it made little difference), or a book on obscure and little-known facts of baseball.

Mory's personality and demeanor were not sugary. He could be gruff on occasion; and sometimes he was adamant about little things. He was the faculty policeman, his job requiring that he enforce a series of negatives around the law school. But he was not a "shalt not" person. His life's performance was an affirmation of positive values. He was not sugary sweet; he was the salt of the earth.

A year ago last fall he was informed of a terminal cancer. He continued his life much as before: with pride in the law school, with delight in his tennis and music, with courage, with dignity, with genuine affection for those with whom he lived and worked. Never once did he complain. As Howard Lee commented at the overflow memorial service, "He showed us how to live, he taught us how to die."

In his last weeks, as in his entire life, he took justifiable pride and comfort in his family; in his wife Sibby with whom he shared more than thirty years of excitement and joy; with his sons Robby, Peter and Seth (all of whom followed in his footsteps through Wesleyan and on to law school); and in his beautiful and caring daughter Laura.

The Law School has established a Morris Gelblum Fund to be used for emergency loans for needy students. This personifies what Mory Gelblum was all about. He is gone, and I miss him.

DANIEL H. POLLITT

