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# EUGENE GRESSMAN: A CONTINUING INSPIRATION

JUDITH WELCH WEGNER†

Many have already spoken or written in praise of Gene Gressman. From perspectives much loftier than my own, they have noted his work as Supreme Court law clerk, his skill as advocate and adviser, and his special gifts as scholar and teacher. My acquaintance with Gene is, I fear, more limited, since it has been but six short years since I became his junior colleague at the University of North Carolina Law School. Nevertheless, my admiration and respect have tempted me to add these observations of my own.

I had expected the composition of a paean of praise to be a relatively easy task, in light of Gene's important contributions as teacher, mentor, and noted commentator on governmental institutions. I have found it instead extraordinarily difficult, but concluded that the greatest tribute may be to say just why.

Gene Gressman, in my mind, is ever in the present tense. "Retirement" is incongruous—past triumphs are but prologue to future challenges. Benjamin Cardozo wrote: "[t]he process of justice is never finished, but reproduces itself, generation after generation, in ever-changing forms, and today, as in the past, it calls for the bravest and the best."<sup>1</sup> Something very similar might well be said of my friend Gene.

Gene's life is marked by a fascination with the process of justice. He served for years as a Supreme Court clerk, and became an avowed Court-watcher, continually sharing his insights with novice and expert appellate attorneys about to come within the Supreme Court's bar. His attention in more recent years has focused upon the roles of all three branches of federal government entwined, as they may be, in interbranch disputes. This shifting perspective has led him to a close examination of the legislature and the executive, and to a growing acquaintance with congressional points of view.

Perhaps quite properly, his life's work is, and must remain, unfinished. Gene himself has defied convention, moving from clerkship to private practice, and, in his later years, to the groves of academe. He now begins yet another chapter, this time as a gypsy scholar traveling to New Jersey and beyond. As he goes, he touches the hearts and minds of numerous colleagues and a generation of law students who are, in their own turn, quite memorably transformed. For Gene, through his example, calls each of us to be the bravest and the best. A committed advocate, he stands behind unpopular positions with unstinting con-

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1. See Cardozo, *Law and Literature* in *SELECTED WRITINGS OF BENJAMIN NATHAN CARDOZO*, THE CHOICE OF TYCHO BRAKE (M. Hall ed. 1947).

viction. A master craftsman, he works and reworks ideas and words while shaping form and substance with his consummate skill.

In short, Gene continually reminds us, through his insight, resilience, wit, and wisdom, of all the best things we as lawyers, scholars, teachers, and students might hope to be. For this we salute and thank him—and only wish that in our own brief lifetimes we may strive but half as well as he.