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ROBERT HASLEY WETTACH

JOHN T. KILPATRICK, JR.*

No one knows a law professor in just the same way his students know him. Fellow faculty members and other colleagues may know him better, but the students use a different perspective. To the students, each professor looms larger than life. Personality traits are exaggerated. Any personal flaw, pretention or idiosyncrasy, whether real or imagined, is detached, analyzed, magnified and discussed at length in hundreds of student bull sessions. Myths are created and perpetuated. Only the finest teachers and men of completely natural sincerity survive this continuous searching, multiple scrutiny without distortion of their image. Robert H. Wettach was such a teacher and such a man.

In his teaching, he never made the law a mystery. He must have felt a sacred duty to give us thorough coverage of each subject with the utmost possible clarity. He took great care to explain patiently every complex legal concept in terms we could all understand. Such clear presentation reflected his profound knowledge, painstaking preparation for his classes and a great natural gift for teaching. He honestly enjoyed the teaching process, and like all champions, he made his most difficult accomplishments seem easy.

In his classrooms, there was fine rapport and mutual respect between teacher and student. We seemed to be engaged in a common search for knowledge of the law. There was never a hint that his teachings should be accepted without question because of his superior position or his vastly greater knowledge. Like all great teachers, he relied solely on the intrinsic validity and force of his ideas. Every student was inspired to think for himself and any difference of opinion was respectfully examined.

A great law professor does more than transmit a knowledge of the law. He creates an atmosphere, a feeling, a respect and love for the finest traditions of our profession. Robert Wettach's professional stature, his self-evident integrity and devotion to the law, his many public services to his state and to the nation provided an

* Editor-in-Chief, 1942-1943, THE NORTH CAROLINA LAW REVIEW.

inspiring example. From him we acquired a deep sense of dedication to the duties and responsibilities to be expected of us as lawyers.

In all contacts with his students as professor and as Dean of the Law School, Bob Wettach was invariably fair, patient and practical. Many hours of his own limited time were spent in counselling to give every possible assistance to all of the student body. His levelheaded wisdom always produced sound, responsible advice. In his Torts course, he explained the "reasonable man" criterion as a legal fiction, a convenient yardstick for determining liability but impossible to personify in any particular individual. In retrospect, it now seems that our sensible professor was perhaps himself the best concrete example of this abstract legal concept.

Robert Wettach became Dean of the Law School at a very difficult time—shortly before Pearl Harbor. He saw his student body rapidly decrease to a mere handful. The active faculty was cut in half by leaves for government and military service. In those days there was serious doubt as to whether the Law School could continue to function under the wartime attrition. Dean Wettach, however, overcame all obstacles and carried the Law School forward without interruption. Continuous publication of the *Law Review* was maintained and the Law School under his guidance operated throughout the War as a going concern. In those trying years, beset with all of the problems of presenting a complete curriculum with a very limited staff, his constant objective was to maintain without relaxation the highest standard of professional education. Those of us who were in school during that time will be forever grateful to Dean Wettach for his devotion to duty and perseverance which permitted us to complete our Law School careers. At the end of the War, his able administration smoothly handled the reverse problem of a greatly augmented student body expanded by returning veterans.

Dean Wettach's dedication to the Law School and the University of North Carolina, to say nothing of his many other services to his profession, his state and his country have left us all greatly in his debt. Robert Wettach, beloved Professor of Law, Dean of the Law School and personal friend to many generations of law students, is now an enduring legend. He has left his mark on all of us, and we shall miss him.