



1979

Joseph R. Wenk - Colleague, Scholar, and Friend

Donald W. Dowd

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.law.villanova.edu/vlr>



Part of the [Legal Biography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donald W. Dowd, *Joseph R. Wenk - Colleague, Scholar, and Friend*, 25 Vill. L. Rev. 4 (1979).

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.villanova.edu/vlr/vol25/iss1/3>

This Tribute is brought to you for free and open access by Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Villanova Law Review by an authorized editor of Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Digital Repository. For more information, please contact Benjamin.Carlson@law.villanova.edu.

JOSEPH R. WENK—COLLEAGUE, SCHOLAR, AND FRIEND

There is a natural order of things. Although painful, it seems reasonable and just that a younger colleague and former student should mourn the passing of an older teacher and mentor who leaves the Law School after a long and distinguished career. To mourn the passing of a former student and younger colleague, however, is doubly and unnaturally painful. Professor Wenk, whom I always think of and will refer to with affection as Joe, was in one or another of my classes in each of his three years at Villanova Law School. He worked hard, contributed freely in class, and wrote extraordinary examinations, as witnessed by the fact that he graduated summa cum laude and was the recipient of nine different awards. He clearly was a gifted young man with a brilliant future ahead of him.

Joe, however, did not regard his legal studies as a launching pad to high-powered, highly-paid legal positions. He had the scholar's curiosity to know how the law is put together and the reformer's urge to make it work better for those least able to protect and defend themselves.

His scholarly interest led him to seek and obtain a fellowship to continue his studies in Germany at the University of Freiburg in 1969-70, rather than accepting a prestigious clerkship or well-paid position with a major law firm. Upon returning from Germany, his concern for the poor and the despised led him to become an attorney for Philadelphia Community Legal Services, rather than going into private practice. As a C.L.S. lawyer, Joe was both involved in large-scale law reform cases—such as the suit brought to remedy the conditions in the Philadelphia prisons—and in the day-to-day representation of what some would think of as small people with small problems, but whom Joe recognized as very real people with very real problems. His clients frequently became his friends and he served them in a much broader way than by mere legal representation.

That part of Joe, however, which was student and scholar could not be stilled, and he came into teaching at the Law School in 1973. He hoped that in this profession he could combine both his love of the law in an intellectual sense and his practical concern that greater legal voice should be given to those who so often lack it. He did his best to achieve this. As a classroom teacher in courses such as Wills and Trusts, he enjoyed the play of ideas, the ordering of legal concepts, the uncovering of relationships that are not apparent. But he wanted to do and did more than this. In his course on Law and Poverty, he not only explored the law with the students, but inspired

1979-1980]

IN MEMORIAM

5

them with his own deep concerns. He developed a clinical course to work with the Delaware County Community Legal Services, he served on the Board of the Philadelphia Community Legal Services, Inc., and he also worked for the Addicts Rights Council.

I think of Joe, however, not only as a law teacher and law reformer, but as a long time, sometimes happy and sometimes sad friend. I think of his love for opera, his clicking camera, his pride in his origins (including his mock-heroic defense of all things Polish), his precious cats, and his kindness and loyalty to his friends. I think of long walks and longer talks. Most of all, I think of his loving care and devotion to his sisters and his parents. They, of course, suffer the greatest loss in his passing. But we who were his friends, colleagues, and students, share this loss in sorrow and sympathy with them. We all will miss him.

DONALD W. DOWD *

* Professor of Law, Villanova University School of Law.