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BOSS, MENTOR, AND FRIEND

Honorable Douglas P. Anderson[†]

I heard John's voice when he called me between the first and second days of the bar exam in 1975. He had obtained my resume from the placement office of the University of Minnesota Law School and decided to give me a call. His voice was marvelous, and when the conversation ended, I told my roommate that I had just spoken to an attorney who had to be a trial attorney. After interviewing, I was hired as an associate beginning in October of 1975.

John was not merely my boss: he was my mentor and friend throughout the five years that we practiced together, and he remained a friend and mentor until his death. I was always happy to see John and Doris when they passed through Little Falls on their way to their cabin on the Mississippi River just north of town.

The other partner that I joined in 1975 was Gordon Rosenmeier, a former state senator and often considered the most powerful politician in Minnesota between 1940 and 1970. Simonett had joined Rosenmeier in 1951 after graduating from law school. The affiliation came about because John had completed undergraduate studies at St. John's University in Collegeville. He asked Fred Hughes, an attorney in St. Cloud, for a law firm that might have need for an associate in central Minnesota. Hughes (who was also a state senator) suggested Rosenmeier, who was then a sole practitioner in Little Falls. Simonett traveled to the capitol in St. Paul to see and listen to Rosenmeier preside over committee hearings and senatorial debates. Impressed, Simonett wrote to Rosenmeier about a postgraduate job. Rosenmeier responded by sending an abstract of title to Simonett and asking him to prepare a title opinion. John did that, and they later spoke by telephone about the issues raised by the abstract. Rosenmeier made Simonett an

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employment offer, and thus began a partnership which lasted twenty-nine years until Simonett's appointment to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Rosenmeier was an honors graduate of Stanford Law School, a brilliant man, an excellent trial lawyer, and an acknowledged political leader in Minnesota. At Rosenmeier's death in January 1989, Simonett spoke about him in an interview with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*: "He was careful with language and had a brilliant legal mind, very incisive. He was a first-rate cross-examiner. They talk about his performance in the legislature—in the courtroom he was even more fearsome."¹

Simonett was president of the *Minnesota Law Review* and member of the Order of the Coif. With Rosenmeier, he formed perhaps the most talented law firm in outstate Minnesota that ever existed or ever will exist. I doubt that we will ever see another president of the *Minnesota Law Review* take a position with a solo practitioner in outstate Minnesota (or any other state, for that matter). John was different. He saw excellence in Rosenmeier and vice versa. Throughout his years in Little Falls, John was active in church and community affairs while raising a family and distinguishing himself in the legal profession. He saw Little Falls as a wonderful place to raise the family that he and Doris anticipated.

On my first day in Little Falls with the law firm, John walked me around town, introducing me to the county officials at the courthouse—the auditor, treasurer, recorder, and clerk of court. John remained true to his roots in central Minnesota. He wanted a small town for his family where he could be an active father while practicing law, which he loved.

John was honest, skilled, well prepared, and humble. He once said that had he not gone into law, he might have entered the theater. In one of his first bits of advice to me, he likened a trial to a play. Like a play, the trial had an opening scene, the development of action and characters, a climax, and a closing scene. John said, "A trial is like theater, and the play should be controlled by the attorney to the maximum extent possible. But, whether it ends in legitimate theater or farce is up to the lawyer."

1. Gary Dawson, *Ex-Sen. Gordon Rosenmeier Dies*, ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS, Jan. 18, 1989, at 1A, available at 1989 WLNR 1924629.

John left an indelible mark on Minnesota's bar and judiciary. His writings would effortlessly quote from writers as diverse as Burke, Cicero, Frost, Pound, Twain, and Vonnegut. But he could also preside at Rooney's Bar in Royalton on St. Patrick's Day, where he would recite *Casey at the Bat* and sing *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*.

While he had wonderful oratorical skills, John's legal philosophy was capsulized in a commencement address to William Mitchell graduates when he stated, "Technical ability, unless disciplined by proper attitude, work habits and moral values, does not produce high quality legal services."² John taught me that the most important attributes of a lawyer are to be fair and honest and to work hard, and that the law, next to God and family, is to be loved above all else.

In my opinion, the finest tribute that can be given to a lawyer or judge is that he or she was, at all times, a credit to lawyers everywhere. John Simonett was a credit to lawyers everywhere.

2. John E. Simonett, Commencement Address at William Mitchell College of Law (June 10, 1984), in *THE JUDICIAL CAREER OF JOHN E. SIMONETT* ch. 3, at 1 (Marvin Roger Anderson & Susan K. Larson eds., 1998).