

1995

A Tribute to Rosalie E. Wahl

Douglas R. Heidenreich

Mitchell Hamline School of Law, douglas.heidenreich@mitchellhamline.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr>

Recommended Citation

Heidenreich, Douglas R. (1995) "A Tribute to Rosalie E. Wahl," *William Mitchell Law Review*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol21/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Reviews and Journals at Mitchell Hamline Open Access. It has been accepted for inclusion in William Mitchell Law Review by an authorized administrator of Mitchell Hamline Open Access. For more information, please contact sean.felhofer@mitchellhamline.edu.

© Mitchell Hamline School of Law

A TRIBUTE TO ROSALIE E. WAHL

Douglas Heidenreich†

Those of us who have been in the teaching business for a while take some pride in the success of our former students. Although we avoid taking the blame for our failures, we delight in basking in the reflected light of our luminescent alumni, seldom admitting that our teaching can neither help a bad student very much nor hurt a good one very much, and that, talk as we will of role models, we can't make a good person out of a shabby one, nor can we debase an essentially noble personality.

And so it is that, over a companionable glass, I sometimes modestly, but not too modestly, let it be known that, yes, Justice Rosalie Wahl is one of my former students. When she entered William Mitchell College of Law, I was the Assistant Dean to then Dean Stephen R. Curtis. Rosalie was, even for those days, a bit unusual. True, the classes were studded with "older" students, many of whom had families, but women were something of a novelty, and women with several children were even more rare.

One day the future Justice Wahl appeared at the door of my tiny office (designed, in fact, to be a small study room in the library) and asked to speak to me in my capacity as Assistant Dean. She told me that a personal matter had made it necessary that she drop a course. I immediately launched into my standard spiel about how this would cause untold problems for her in scheduling her classes and extending her law school career, and how it was really an unwise thing to do unless it was absolutely necessary, and

"Well," she said, somewhat impatiently, thinking no doubt that the callow Assistant Dean in front of her, only a couple of years out of law school himself and younger in years than she, was pretty dense, "I'm going to have a baby." I told her that I had assumed that to be the case, but that it was important that she know what problems she would likely encounter as a result

† Professor of Law, William Mitchell College of Law.

of dropping a course in our rigid, lock-step program in which there was no summer session and no way of making up for lost course work other than by extending one's law school career. She politely thanked me for the advice, said that she had thought this all over and concluded that this was the best thing to do, and proceeded to rearrange her schedule accordingly.

Of course, she knew exactly what she was doing. Of course, she dealt with the scheduling problems, continued to raise her children, compiled an exemplary record, and graduated. Her ability to examine and analyze a problem and to deal with it efficiently and effectively was evident not only during her student days but throughout her professional career as a lawyer, teacher, and, ultimately, justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

As she neared graduation, Rosalie discovered that she would have a problem in meeting the requirements because she had yet to take the course in Sales (a required course at that time, now transmogrified into Commercial Transactions). Because the course would not be offered until the semester after she was scheduled to graduate, we arranged that she would take the course, one-on-one, from me.

Thus, for one evening each week during the semester, Rosalie Wahl and I would sit in my office (by then I had become Dean of the College with spartan but slightly more commodious quarters than those I had previously occupied), often drinking tea and discussing the gripping subject of the law governing the sale of goods—Article 2 of the Uniform Commercial Code.

Rosalie dutifully prepared for each class, and, as there was no one else to answer my questions, our two hours together were spent in a two-person dialogue, a discussion and debate about the law. As the semester, and the course, neared the end, we talked about what kind of an exam she might take. We agreed that it would be too much work for me to prepare and for her to take an exam in the normal way. So we concluded that she should prepare an exam herself, as if she were teaching the course, and submit with it an explanation of what issues she was hoping to raise and how those issues should be resolved. I don't remember what grade she received for that work, but I resisted the temptation to "borrow" that exam and administer it to a group of students in a later administration of the course; it was too tough. As I thought back on the experience, I conclud-

ed that while I had tried to “teach” something about the law of sales, I had learned more from Rosalie during our conversations over tea than she had learned from me.

After she left the law school, I frequently heard about Rosalie from people who had come into contact with her. Everyone who mentioned her name spoke of her as a talented lawyer and a kind, thoughtful, compassionate person. When, after a few years of practice, she joined Roger Haydock in developing the college’s clinical program, she immediately demonstrated the talents that had made her a fine law student and lawyer. To some extent, she and Roger had to make the program up as they went along. She accepted the challenges calmly and dealt with them efficiently and effectively, as she had done so often in the past. She was a delightful colleague, a respected teacher and an effective advocate throughout her tenure here at William Mitchell.

When she ascended to the bench, she wrote her opinions in clear language, so that everybody knew what she was saying. She demonstrated the same seriousness of purpose, the same ability to analyze a problem, determine what had to be done, and then quietly but effectively do it, that had marked every aspect of her career. She was, by her example, as much a teacher on the bench as she had been as a professor and as a lawyer.

Thus it is that, while I am proud of many former students who have achieved some measure of success, there is none of whom I am more fond as a person, none whom I hold in greater professional esteem, none who has brought to the William Mitchell College of Law more luster than Justice Rosalie Wahl. It is a pleasure to know her and to be able to call her a friend, fellow alum, and former student.

