

1994

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Recommended Citation

Jones, C. Paul (1994) "Justice Rosalie E. Wahl: A Tribute," *William Mitchell Law Review*: Vol. 20: Iss. 4, Article 1.
Available at: <http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol20/iss4/1>

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JUSTICE ROSALIE E. WAHL: A TRIBUTE

C. PAUL JONEST†

“Your honor, even a person who has actually committed a crime is entitled to a fair trial. Our United States and Minnesota Constitutions and laws guarantee this. To do less, to subjectively relax this standard, would put at risk of being convicted those innocent persons who have actually not committed a crime.”

These paraphrased words were promptly and forcefully addressed to a Minnesota Supreme Court justice during an appellate argument when the justice suggested there was no need to bother the court with such an issue. Attorney Rosalie E. Wahl, later Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Wahl, was the advocate who put the justice’s feet to the fire.

Attorney Rosalie E. Wahl was a tough-minded, bright, and practical lawyer who was always thoroughly prepared on the facts and the law. As one of Minnesota’s first assistant state public defenders, Rosalie E. Wahl was a prototype for the superb women and men who joined or followed her as state public defenders. As an attorney, she fostered a great counseling rapport with her clients.

Justice Wahl became a law professor at William Mitchell College of Law in 1973. Her students appreciated her patient one-on-one counseling and teaching in the clinical education program she helped organize. Today, she is recognized as among the “doers” of the American Bar Association in legal education.

As a justice, Rosalie E. Wahl extended this unique rapport—characterized as kind, understanding, considerate, thoughtful, courteous, and friendly—with the practicing bar. Just as important, if not more so, Justice Wahl maintains this rapport with persons of low or insufficient economic resources. Justice Wahl is a champion for the elimination of any semblance of racial or gender bias or discrimination within both the legal and general community.

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As she retires from the bench this year, Minnesotans can look forward to Justice Wahl's continued contributions to the legal profession and to the public in general. Justice Wahl's footprints of justice will never, never disappear.