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My Hero: Professor Roark Reed

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MY HERO: PROFESSOR ROARK REED

*Judge Jane J. Boyle**

I first encountered the unforgettable Professor Roark Reed during the scorching summer of 1980. It was during that summer of record heat that I learned from Professor Reed why I wanted to be a lawyer. Professor Reed or “Roark,” as we called him, was the Director of the Criminal Clinic Program at SMU’s Dedman School of Law and the person responsible for all that the title entailed. This included supervising second-year law students representing real-life defendants charged with real crimes in the Dallas County court system. This was no small feat, considering that most of our clients were facing jail time and Roark was the only person on the defense team with a law degree.

I was one of two students assigned to the Criminal Clinic that summer. I had never been in a courtroom—much less represented a client charged with a crime. I vividly remember Roark guiding us through the smoke-filled hallways of the Dallas County Courthouse for the first time. It was hard not to stare at the anxious people lining the halls sitting on the crowded the benches waiting for their lawyers. “So is the place where the casebooks come to life,” I thought. But really no casebook could capture the human side of what goes on in the courthouse. Pretty intimidating to see—first-hand—the weight of responsibility lawyers shoulder for their clients. More than that was the full realization of just how much those entangled in the legal system needed the assistance of a good lawyer. Roark understood this, exuded this, and, in so doing, taught us the honor in being a good lawyer.

Today, over thirty years later, Roark’s lessons still reverberate with me. That there is honor in providing good counsel to those with legal troubles—be they indigent defendants facing serious criminal charges or corporate executives ensnared in commercial litigation. That our profession is an honorable one, filled with men and women who stand-up for others, no matter their circumstances. Thank you, Professor Reed.

* District Judge, United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas. U.S. Attorney 2002–2004, Northern District of Texas. B.S. 1977, University of Texas at Austin; J.D. 1981, Southern Methodist University, Dedman School of Law.

