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Joe McKnight and the Oxford Summer Program

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JOE MCKNIGHT AND THE OXFORD SUMMER PROGRAM

*Lackland H. Bloom, Jr.**

JOE was unique and irreplaceable. Perhaps more than anyone over the past six decades, Joe was truly the heart, soul, and living embodiment of the School of Law. A conversation with Joe would often be lengthy, but it would also be engaging, animated, intelligent, and funny. Joe always had a sparkle in his eyes and a smile. In the thirty-eight years that I knew Joe, I can't ever remember him looking unhappy. Joe loved life, he loved the law, he loved the law school, and he wanted his joy to be contagious. With Joe you understood that you were in the presence of a great man but also a friend. The Dedman School of Law is the great institution that it is to a significant extent because of Joe. Joe was a joyful person to be around, but he was also a person with very high and demanding standards of excellence. Joe had the good manners to suffer fools gladly, but he certainly understood that they were indeed fools. Joe took legal education seriously. He understood that excellent legal education was not easily achieved and was the product of tireless effort.

In this short tribute, I would like to focus on Joe's crucial role in founding the Law School's summer program in Oxford in a close working partnership with Peter Winship. Joe initially came to Magdalen College Oxford in 1948 as a Rhodes Scholar and stayed for three years, earning B.A, B.C.L, and M.A. degrees. At Magdalen, Joe struck up a life-long friendship with Guenter Treitel, later Sir Guenter, who became England's leading authority on the law of contracts and visited the SMU law school several times. Joe loved Oxford and wanted SMU law students to have at least a taste of the educational experience that he had known.

When Joe and Peter considered a summer program in Oxford for the law school, they had the advantage of the existing undergraduate program at University College, then directed by Jeremy Adams and Bonnie Wheeler. Rather than launch a program from scratch, they were able to attach the law school program to the existing undergraduate program. Thirty-four years later, it is still going strong. Joe and Peter's initial vision was for two SMU professors to conduct the program. One would serve as director and the other would take over as director the following year. That plan did not last long, however. Peter and Joe did teach in the program in 1984, and Joe taught again the following year as program direc-

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tor. In its first year, the program only attracted eleven students, not enough to render it financially viable, and there was consideration by the faculty in the fall of 1984 as to whether it should be continued. It was continued, and within a short time it was able to attract approximately thirty-six students, where it has remained.

The plan for the program was to give the students a taste of the Oxford academic experience. Consequently, in addition to taking a class with one of the two SMU professors, the students would take an Oxford style tutorial with Oxford law professors as well. Joe played a significant role in locating and engaging some of the early tutors including torts scholar Martin Matthews and international law scholar Christine Gray. This basic structure of the program has remained in place ever since.

Joe did not continue to teach in the program, but his presence loomed large over it. He and Mimi rented a house in north Oxford every summer so they were generally in town while the program was in operation. Once each summer, Joe would host a party in his yard for the participants in the program. It was one of the highlights of the summer. In addition, Joe would show up at University College and conduct guided tours of Oxford for the students, punctuated with his wry observations. Moreover, Joe designed the program's field trip to legal London, arranging for young lawyers at a leading London law firm to squire the students to the courts and host a luncheon for them at the firm's offices. Joe would also lead the tours around legal London on occasion. When in Oxford, Joe loved to show up at University College to visit the program always dressed in suit and tie regardless of the heat or the rain.

As a faculty member I had the opportunity to participate in the program twice during its initial decade and appreciate first hand Joe's hospitality and charm. I simply can't walk around Oxford, especially past Magdalen College, without thinking of Joe. Joe had so many significant legacies that it would be difficult to list them all, but the establishment of the SMU Law School's summer program in Oxford is certainly among them. I write this tribute from Oxford as director of the program now in its thirty-fourth year once again filled to capacity with students delighted by this opportunity to experience Oxford, if only for six weeks. None of these students would have known Joe or have had the opportunity to take a class with him, but they are truly the beneficiaries of his vision as hopefully will be the case for years to come.