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Remembering John E. Kennedy

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REMEMBERING JOHN E. KENNEDY

by

*C. Paul Rogers III**

JOHN Edward Kennedy was the consummate law professor; he was teacher, scholar, lawyer, colleague, and friend. He was, whether he knew it or not, a tremendous role model for everyone in the law school community. The twinkle in John's eye and his warmth of character were difficult to overlook and are impossible to forget.

John's untimely passing saddens us greatly. In the months since John's death, I have in my travels throughout the country continually been reminded of the positive impact John had on the lives of the many people he touched. Scores of colleagues and former students throughout legal education and the legal profession admired and respected him. At SMU John was nothing short of a legend; he was beloved by deans, faculty colleagues, students and staff. We know that John's wonderful wife, Jan, and his children, John, Matthew and Megan, are strengthened by the knowledge that John was so special to so many.

John had very impressive academic and professional credentials: articles editor at the Notre Dame Law School; Master of Laws and Doctor of Juridical Science degrees from Yale; a judicial clerkship with a prominent federal judge; important work as a principal co-author on Moore's Federal Practice, the leading treatise in the area; and Reporter to the prestigious Devitt Committee on Standards for Admission to the Federal Court Bar.

Those accomplishments, however, do not begin to describe the contributions John made to the SMU Law School and to those of us fortunate enough to have worked, taught, and studied with him. John joined SMU in 1969 and was with us for 20 delightful, productive years. He was a master teacher, committed to the classroom and adored by his students. He had an exceptional mind; he was always inquiring and was excited and stimulated by the challenges of the law. His intellectual curiosity moved and motivated students and colleagues alike.

But what set John apart more than anything was his caring nature and his devotion to fair play and fairness. These wonderful qualities permeated his professional life, from his concern for the principles of due process to his insistence on common sense and equity on issues at the Law School. As a result, John was not only an intellectual leader of the Law School, he was also our center of reason, reflection, and compassion.

John was truly a unique individual. As I reflect upon his wonderful quali-

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ties and his approach to life, I am struck that no one reminds me of John and John reminds me of no one else. He simply was one of a kind: he possessed a great intellect and was consumed with a desire to make his part of the world a fairer, more tolerant, and more compassionate place. Even so, John retained the capacity to identify and to laugh at the ironies and paradoxes that seem to surround us.

John had a delightful, bemused sense of humor and was the original absentminded professor. One popular story involves John meeting two of his colleagues in the parking lot behind Storey Hall on the morning of the first day of exams. One colleague asked John when he had an exam to give, to which John replied after some reflection, "You know, I think I have one today." Then there was the time that he got into a deep discussion with a colleague about some fine point of procedural law, continued the discussion over lunch, and returned to his office only to discover that he had forgotten he had a 12 o'clock class.

Even saying hello or good morning to John was an experience. When I passed John in the hall or on the stairs, he would inevitably say "hello. . ." and, as often as not, I would hear some seconds later when John was well past me ". . . Paul". No one was ever offended that it took John several seconds to recall our names. We understood that John knew exactly who we were; it was just that his remarkable mind was functioning on another level and it took it a little time to shift gears.

Conversations with John were a wonder, not only because of their intellectual content but also because you were never quite sure when the conversation was at an end. I recall leaving John's office thinking we were through only to hear John start talking again even though I was out of eyesight. When that happened I always returned for fear that I would miss something. He was also the master of the false exit if he was in your office chatting. He would often leave only to return immediately to make another point. John would sometimes do this four or five times. And each return would produce some new insight or witticism.

John was born to be a law professor and we were truly blessed to have had him at SMU. John enriched us in ways which I am sure not even he could understand. He made all of us at the school more humane, more reflective, and less self-centered. Whenever one of us had an idea we thought to be of some consequence, whether it involved legal reform or a new law school policy, we sought John's counsel. We all valued his common sense, his judgment, and his unerring sense of fairness. John was to us a true treasure on earth.

John's gentle spirit and unshakable character affected all that he did and all with whom he came in contact. He made all of us better people, whether colleagues, students, lawyers, staff or the little girls that he coached for so many years in soccer. He was that rare person who touched us all. As we mourn the loss of John from our midst we should be warmed and comforted by his memory. Those of us fortunate enough to have learned from, worked

with, or known John have benefitted immeasurably; and his memory will endure in all of us.