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## Tribute to Professor Jeff Gaba

Jennifer M. Collins

*Southern Methodist University, Dedman School of Law*

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## TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR JEFF GABA

*Jennifer M. Collins\**

IT is my great honor to introduce this tribute issue to the remarkable Jeff Gaba. Professor Gaba received his J.D. from the Columbia University School of Law in 1976, where he was a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar and served as the Notes and Comments Editor for the *Columbia Journal of Environmental Law*. He also received a Master of Public Health from Harvard University's School of Public Health. Prior to joining the SMU Law faculty in 1981, Professor Gaba clerked for Chief Justice Edward Pringle of the Colorado Supreme Court and worked as an attorney for the Environmental Defense Fund in Denver. From 1977 to 1980, he served as an Attorney and Advisor in the Office of General Counsel for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and in 1981 he served the Agency as Acting Assistant General Counsel.

Professor Gaba has focused his career on issues related to environmental, property, and administrative law. He is the author of numerous articles on environmental law and the author of *Environmental Law* (West Black Letter Series) and co-author of the treatise *The Law of Solid Waste, Pollution Prevention and Recycling*. He is an editor of the West casebook *The Law of Toxic Substances and Hazardous Waste*. In 2013, he was honored with the M.D. Anderson Foundation Endowed Professorship in Health Law.

Professor Gaba was absolutely devoted to his students, and they adored him in return. His student evaluations are filled with comments like: "expert in his field," "great sense of humor," "energetic and enthusiastic," "cares about his students," "really passionate," "very helpful," and "provided meaningful feedback . . . much more feedback than any other professor I've had." One student's comments captured Professor Gaba beautifully: "Professor Gaba is extremely entertaining and engaging—one of my favorite professors. He clearly cares about the subject and wants to help his students understand. His teaching style is great and his willingness to answer questions and help after class/in office hours is one of the best things a student could ask for in a professor."

Fortunately for his colleagues, Professor Gaba was also devoted to SMU. He graciously and generously agreed to serve as Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and worked tirelessly in that role to improve all facets of the law school. He was an active participant in faculty meetings and a very wise advisor to the dean, with his wonderfully expressive

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\* Judge James Noel Dean and Professor of Law, SMU Dedman School of Law.

face always letting me know if my most recent idea had merit or had absolutely gone off the rails. Professor Tom Mayo shared a wonderfully appropriate anecdote in this regard:

Is there anyone in faculty meetings whose body language so explicitly conveys what he's thinking? It has always been thus. During Jeff's college days at UC Santa Barbara, it was the '60s and, like most other self-respecting colleges, UCSB was being roiled by regular student antiwar protests. There was a poster-sized news photo that Jeff proudly displayed in his office showing a crowd of protesters, smoke swirling every which way, with young Jeff Gaba standing in the middle of the crowd and smoke, arms across his chest, and the most disinterested—actually bemused—look on his face. Exactly the same expression he had when he heard something in a faculty meeting with which he disagreed (which was just about every meeting). The cool thing about Jeff is that he knows we can read him like a book, he knew how characteristic that expression was, and—never one to take himself too seriously—he posted it on his office wall.

Indeed, Professor Gaba's gently gruff exterior hides a very tender heart, and he was always first in line to support a colleague or student in need of extra assistance.

But as much as he loved his students and SMU, Professor Gaba's real love is Shakespeare—he was truly one of the Renaissance men among our faculty. Professor Gaba plans to spend his well-deserved retirement in New Mexico, a retirement we all hope is filled with the theater, literature, music, and family he loves so much. The entire law school community will miss Professor Gaba terribly, and we are profoundly grateful for all he has done for SMU.