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MONRAD PAULSEN: AN AFFECTIONATE APPRECIATION

Michael I. Sovern *

I have been an admirer of Monrad Paulsen since my first days as his junior colleague at the University of Minnesota Law School back in 1955. In retrospect, I recognize that my view of what makes a great law professor was profoundly influenced by the qualities I saw, and respected, in Monrad. For me, they began with collegiality—a personal interest in and a professional commitment to the welfare of the new boy. That first year at Minnesota was an enormously happy and productive apprenticeship for me, and Monrad helped make it so.

He left for Columbia as I began my second year, and, loyal friend, quickly urged my appointment to that faculty, assuring his new colleagues that I had done my share on a Columbia Law Review article we had written together. The assurance was greeted with laughter, since the academic rule of thumb is that the junior author is likely to have done most of the work. The issue was not how much I had done, but whether Monrad had held up his end. I am delighted, after all these years, to have a chance to return the compliment: the conception was his and so was more than a fair share of the implementing labor. In this, as in all other things, Monrad treated his juniors as partners, not subordinates.

His belief in the importance of scholarship was inspiring and the standards he brought to its evaluation were the highest. As the Editors of this Review know, no one assesses the work of law professors with a more discerning eye than law review editors. Fresh from that experience, I found a kindred spirit in Monrad and, unlike so many of us, his critical judgment has not eroded over the years. He remains one of the most rigorous critics of legal scholarship I know. Perhaps most importantly, much of his own prodigious production meets those high standards.

To qualify for my all-star team, a law professor must not only be an exemplary colleague and an outstanding scholar; he must also be a dedicated teacher. We still have a file on Monrad at the

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Columbia Law School, and, in preparing this piece, I browsed in it. Among my finds was a memorandum from Monrad to my predecessor asking for an exemption from the maximum teaching load at Columbia. He had taken on a new assignment and, as a result, a seminar of his had been dropped from his teaching responsibilities. His memorandum concludes: “Can I hope that it will be reinstated? I make the request with all the force which I possibly can.” He loves to teach and he loves to be with students. At Columbia, he hit the long ball in student-faculty softball games, was the star of the annual Law Revue, invited students far from home to share his table at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and in countless ways, in the classroom and out, helped generation after generation of students to grow.

As I make my rounds of our alumni, they remember Monrad with special affection. He remains for them the Zero Mostel of law teaching: who would have supposed that great hulk could harbor so subtle a talent, so graceful a man?

The complete law professor must have one more attribute—a concern for the world beyond the academy and the capacity to contribute to its welfare. Monrad has been a willing ally of wise law reformers everywhere he has taught, pioneering in the provision of legal services to the poor and attending to the rights of children long before they were in vogue.

When one celebrates a friend in a law review, one is not allowed quite the same latitude as a eulogist. This is a scholarly publication and truth must be served. I have kept that in mind, but I fear that I may nonetheless have strained the credulity of those who do not know my friend. To shore up my credibility, I conclude with the unanimous judgment of Monrad’s Columbia colleagues. In farewell, we said:

RESOLVED: That the Faculty of Law of Columbia University notes with pride and regret the appointment of Professor Monrad G. Paulsen as Dean of the University of Virginia School of Law. Professor Paulsen joined the Faculty in 1956, already well-launched upon a distinguished teaching career, and, in the succeeding years, his reputation has grown as large as the man himself in the fields of family law, criminal law, and their offspring—the juvenile courts. Blessed with prodigious energy, a restless and creative mind, and a felicitous pen, Professor Paulsen has endowed his chosen fields with an outpouring of impressive scholarship that will influence their
course for years to come. Airborne as often as grounded, he has carried our flag with distinction to the Salzburg Seminar, the Universities of Freiburg and London, and to lecture platforms throughout America.

As a member of the Faculty, Professor Paulsen has epitomized the word "colleague." There has been no man readier or wiser in his counsel, more giving of his time to student or fellow teacher, more devoted to the well-being and greatness of this institution. If the Danes are famed for their wit, warmth, and good fellowship, Professor Paulsen is truly a great Dane. After his departure, Baghdad-on-the-Hudson may never again seem quite so lively. We shall miss him. . . .