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Oliver Schroeder, Jr.:

An Appreciation

Others have written of Professor Schroeder's scholarship and of his pioneering work in founding and leading The Law-Medicine Center. I would like to comment on Professor Schroeder (henceforth Ollie) as a teacher.

Is it legitimate for a colleague to do this? Should not such an article be written only by a former student? Maybe so, for in most cases we law school professors know little about the teaching ability of our fellow faculty, and what we do know is usually based on hearsay. However, my experience with Ollie in the classroom was direct and personal. We worked together in designing a new law school course and taught it for three semesters as a team.

I came to the Western Reserve Law School in the fall of 1954, having spent three years in private practice and one year in graduate work at the University of Michigan Law School where I concentrated on the civil side of law and psychiatry (hospitalization and guardianship of the mentally ill and civil competency).

Ollie had been on the faculty since 1948, had started a new course for law students on Law and Medicine, and had started the Law-Medicine Center the previous year. Up until then the law school course, and the evening courses for practicing lawyers offered by the Center, had concentrated on the legal aspects of physical medicine. Almost as soon as he learned of my interests he began to plan a new course in the legal aspects of mental illness.

We started with a two-day institute, part of the CLE program offered by the Center, "The Mind: A Law-Medicine Problem," in which Ollie and I taught half the classes and the other half were taught by guest lecturers, all psychiatrists or psychologists. The following semester we expanded the institute into a regular semester course which we called "The Mentally Disabled and the Law." In each of the three semesters we taught the course, the students were evenly divided between third year law students and practicing lawyers (intermixed with a few psychiatrists and mental hospital administrators) who were either non-credit CLE students, or who were in the LL.M. program.

“Law and Psychiatry” is now an established branch of legal medicine and is the name of a course offered in all of the better law schools. In 1956 the field was new, and we had to develop our own teaching materials as we went along. With a new field, new materials, and 20-30 bright interested students each semester, Ollie was in his element. Some classes I taught, a few were taught by visiting experts, but no matter the specific format, Ollie was clearly the master teacher for each class, raising issues which the rest of us hadn’t thought about, responding to questions and inspiring us all. Working with Ollie in the classroom was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my professional career. I will never forget it.

All good things come to an end. In 1961 the law school shifted the course from the evening program to the day program, so we lost the mix of law students and professionals, and thereafter the course was taught by a single teacher rather than by “Ollie’s Team.” We did preserve the teaching materials we had developed by the traditional method, publication. “The Mind: A Law-Medicine Problem,” O.S. Schroeder, editor, W.H. Anderson publisher, 1961.

About ten years ago Ollie started a new seminar on the developing law of sea and space. I was in his office recently and he showed me an atlas compiled by NASA during the Apollo program consisting of detailed photographs of every part of the moon’s surface. Craters, canyons, and plains were all there as tangible evidence of the beginning of a new age of exploration. He did not say so, but I am just as sure as I am sure of anything that he had shared that atlas with his sea and space students. That’s the kind of teacher he is.

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