

1988

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### Recommended Citation

Geoffrey R. Stone, "Wally Tributes," 55 University of Chicago Law Review 721 (1988).

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# The University of Chicago Law Review

VOLUME 55 NUMBER 3 SUMMER 1988

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## Wally

*Geoffrey R. Stone*†

Fifty years ago last fall, Walter J. Blum entered the University of Chicago Law School as a first-year student. This was not Walter's first encounter with the University. To the contrary, by the time nineteen-year-old Walter Blum enrolled at the Law School, he had *already* spent some fifteen years at the University of Chicago as a student in its Laboratory Schools and College. Walter Blum is thus in the truest sense a child of the University of Chicago.

In his application for admission to the Law School, Walter maintained that he had the "interest, ability and training" necessary for successful legal study. As his record at the Law School quickly proved, that self-assessment was rather too modest. In 1941, Walter graduated first in his class and was editor-in-chief of the *Law Review*. In a letter to the Commandant of the United States Navy in early 1942, then-Dean Wilbur Katz described Walter Blum in terms less understated than Blum's own:

He is one of the very ablest students whom I have ever had in my entire teaching experience. He has keen analytical powers and a remarkable capacity to digest and organize quantities of material. He has ingenuity and resourcefulness. . . . He is

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† Dean of the Law School and Harry Kalven, Jr. Professor of Law, The University of Chicago.

very hard-working and has an attractive personality.

Following graduation, Walter accepted a position in the Office of the General Counsel of the Office of Price Administration. From 1943 to 1946 he served in the military. In the fall of 1946, after only a five year hiatus, Walter returned to the University as an Assistant Professor of Law. He has been here ever since.

In the more than forty years since his return to the Law School, Walter has played a central role in the evolution of the institution. In every conceivable way, Walter in his many guises—Assistant Professor, Professor, Wilson-Dickinson Professor, and now Edward H. Levi Distinguished Service Professor—has worked tirelessly to enhance the quality of legal education at Chicago.

As a teacher, Walter has dazzled generations of students with his masterful analysis and his subtle understanding of the intricacies of such complex subjects as taxation, reorganization, and bankruptcy. He wields the Socratic sword with unmatched deftness and precision. Like a magician enchanting his audience, Walter creates illusions of certainty and certainties of doubt that leave his students breathless. As usual, in last fall's student course evaluations, Walter Blum's course in taxation ranked among the top three courses in the entire Law School in "overall evaluation," the "extent to which the course challenged you," "the professor's command of the subject matter," "the professor's ability to guide discussion," and "teaching performance."

As a scholar, Walter's numerous articles and books have brought rigorous analysis and clarity of understanding to the fields of taxation, insurance law, reorganization, corporate finance, and bankruptcy. Walter's two books written with Harry Kalven, *The Uneasy Case for Progressive Taxation* (1953) and *Public Law Perspectives on a Private Law Problem* (1965), have attained the status of classics of legal commentary. They have had a profound impact on the continuing debate over the merits of progressive taxation and the structure of automobile compensation plans. Walter's brilliance as a teacher was reflected in the superb casebook he co-authored with Stanley Kaplan, *Materials on Reorganization, Recapitalization and Insolvency* (1968), one of the most original and influential casebooks of its time.

As a member of the profession, Walter's impact and influence are unsurpassed. Since 1947, he has served as a member of the Planning Committee of the University of Chicago Tax Conference and as a driving force behind that event, which is one of the nation's premier annual conferences on the law of taxation. He has

served as legal counsel to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists; consultant to the American Law Institute's Federal Income Tax Project; Trustee of the College Retirement Equities Fund; advisor to the Brookings Institution's Studies of Government Finance; consultant to the Treasury Department, the Department of Transportation, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Administrative Council of the United States; and in a host of other private and governmental positions.

As a citizen of the Law School, Walter's contributions are beyond counting. He has boundless energy, enthusiasm and curiosity. He is a constant source of ideas. At the faculty roundtable, at which members of the faculty meet for lunch three days each week, Walter often sets the agenda with questions about some new book or article he has just read. He probes, argues, thrusts and parries, always advancing the debate to a higher and more interesting level. Whether the topic is corporate finance or feminism, economic analysis or critical legal studies, politics or legal history, Walter always has something to add.

Over the years, Walter has served on virtually every faculty committee at the Law School. Most recently, Walter has chaired the Law School's Placement Committee, played a central role in planning the highly successful expansion of the D'Angelo Law Library (as he had in the planning of the original Laird Bell Quadrangle), and continued in his role as the most important and most active faculty supporter of the Law School's Mandel Legal Aid Clinic. Walter also holds the wholly non-existent (but wholly real) title of "Dean's Advisor Extraordinaire—Without Portfolio." Nary a day passes without a call or a visit to the Dean. Walter is never without a suggestion—perhaps a light bulb needs changing or an alumnus shouldn't be overlooked or a young member of the faculty needs attention. There's always something. Walter never lets it pass unmentioned. He cares. He is, as one of my predecessors once put it, the "Super-Dean." He is wonderful.

As a citizen of the University, Walter has truly earned the title "Distinguished Service Professor." Indeed, Walter has served the University with distinction in every conceivable way. He has served on countless committees and advised a long succession of Presidents. When it came time this year for President Hanna Gray to appoint a member of the faculty to chair the Committee that will plan the University's Centennial Celebration in 1991-92, it was hardly surprising that she selected Walter Blum for the job.

Walter's association with the Law School reaches back more than fifty years. His association with the University reaches back

sixty-five. When the history of the University of Chicago and its Law School is written, there will be many Johns and Williams and perhaps even Walters, but there will be only one "Wally." By his fierce intellect, limitless energy, constant curiosity, and unyielding loyalty, he has earned a unique place in the history of his Law School and his University. We are all in his debt.