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## A Tribute to Rosalie E. Wahl

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## A TRIBUTE TO ROSALIE E. WAHL

Roger S. Haydock<sup>†</sup>

Compassionate and caring. That was my first impression when I met Rosalie in 1972. This is the lasting impression Rosalie has left with me, and with all of us, for all time.

Rosalie was one of the creators and developers of the William Mitchell Law Clinic. She excelled at creating and developing a clinical curriculum for law students and their clients. Rosalie recognized the dual nature of clinical education. A clinical education not only provides law students with an excellent learning opportunity, it also provides legal services to those who would otherwise be without this invaluable help.

Rosalie was the first director of the William Mitchell Criminal Law Clinic. She offered courses that covered the spectrum of criminal lawyering, beginning with the initial client interview and concluding with the final word on appeal. She offered her students much more than the knowledge, analytical ability, and skills necessary to be an excellent lawyer.

Her students learned that they had a professional obligation to do everything reasonably possible, and then some, to be an effective advocate for their clients. They learned that their clients were important and integral participants in the criminal justice process. They learned to think, feel, and, to the extent possible, be their clients.

It became clear to me and others that Rosalie is a living demonstration of a professional creed for advocates. She taught all of us the principles of being professional, ethical attorneys through her teaching and practice. Her professional life was a living creed.

She viewed the practice of law as a learning profession. Dignity, civility, and courtesy formed her core professional values. She understood that it was both a privilege and a responsibility to be an advocate. We learned that it was a privilege and an honor to work with her.

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Her word was her bond. She defined integrity. Rosalie is one of those people you meet in life that are thoroughly honest and ethical. She may have been the best of them.

As an officer of the court, she demonstrated respect for the system and the law while she was doing her best to change them. She understood the system's abuses and misuses and changed it from within and without. Not all of the theories advanced by Rosalie and her students were accepted by the courts. But her continued efforts to present judges with issues of constitutional dimensions were a marvel of persistence.

Rosalie advanced the causes of her clients with great vigor. One of her primary goals was to make the legal system more accessible and responsive to the needs of everyone in our society. While much of her effort was on behalf of criminal defendants, her views about what our criminal justice system should be reflected the larger view of community values. Rosalie believed that if the government had an attorney, whomever they were advocating against should have an attorney. This position reflects the common sense perspective Rosalie added to her cases and to our profession.

Rosalie worked continuously to be the best possible advocate and the best possible role model for her students. On most accounts, she was successful and very effective. Sometimes her persistence would be perceived as stubbornness. Occasionally her compassion might be perceived as revealing too soft a position. Sometimes it appeared she might have cared too much about what happened to her clients. But from any perspective, Rosalie was a very well intentioned, highly principled professional.

Rosalie's life was a model of pro bono activities. The clients she primarily served were those who were unable to afford private counsel. She was proud to represent her clients. Her strong belief in our system of justice allowed her to understand her obligations and responsibilities to her clients. While many attorneys would much prefer to avoid representing some of the clients she represented, Rosalie was there for them regardless of what they did or might have done.

I recall one day sitting in Rosalie's office talking to her. Our students occasionally, or more than occasionally, complained about the problems clients had. I recall her saying in the midst of our conversation (I am paraphrasing) "We don't

have problems for clients, we have clients *with* problems.” To Rosalie, what we did as lawyers was not just to resolve problems, but to serve people. She did. She taught us all how. We are forever indebted to her. Her legacy to all of us is her caring and compassionate approach to being an advocate, and to being a person.

