

DEDICATION PIECE:  
PROFESSOR GABRIEL WILNER, 1938–2010

*Kevin Conboy\**

I honestly do not recall the first time I met Professor Wilner. My own law career at the University of Georgia School of Law was somewhat unusual: I began law school in the fall of 1974, completed my first year in 1975, and then took a two-year leave of absence to marry my wife Maureen and go to Kenya, East Africa, to teach for a couple of years. I returned in the fall of 1977.

With my interest in things international, I immediately became involved in the International Law Society, the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, and the Dean Rusk Center. I am sure that I took at least three of Professor Wilner's courses, even taking Admiralty Law.

My first significant interaction with Professor Wilner involved work I was doing for the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*. The Editorial Board of the *Journal* had accepted for publication, sight unseen, a submission on a fairly controversial subject from a prominent international specialist. In the fall of my second year, I was assigned the task of "spading" this article. English was not the author's native language, so it was not surprising that the writing was a bit rough, but as I spent additional time with it, rewriting sections, correcting mistakes, et cetera, I came to the conclusion that the article was sufficiently poor in quality that it should not be published. My conclusion was buttressed when, two-thirds of the way through the article, I came across a footnote in the text which cited as its support a source that stood for the directly opposite proposition. I put my pen down and went immediately to our Editor in Chief, and the two of us consulted with Professor Wilner. After listening to my description of the article and reading portions of it, Professor Wilner agreed that the acceptance had to be revoked, and he and Professor Rusk then did the difficult but right thing for our *Journal*.

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The United States economy in the summer of 1978 was in no better shape than it is now, and as a result, a middling UGA law student with an unusual resume like mine was not going to get a summer clerkship with one of Atlanta's prestigious law firms (or any other firm). As a result, I had the time to participate in the Southern Center for International Studies and Rusk Center-sponsored summer program, the Law and Institutions of the Common Market. While I had the time, I did not have the funds. Professor Wilner, working again with Professor Rusk, helped supplement my own meager resources and made it possible for me to go to Brussels, and then to the Hague (subsisting largely for the summer with my likewise impoverished colleagues on huge "Rijsttafel" lunches served in Belgian and Dutch-Indonesian-style restaurants).

In Brussels, at the Free University of Brussels, Professor Wilner devised and gently guided the summer program with a skillful hand.

Seeing my financial distress (and perhaps seeing *some* legal abilities in me), Professor Wilner also employed me for research on a variety of different projects, for what was then the very handsome sum of \$10 per hour.

During my second year, tying my studies back to my teaching in Kenya, I wrote a Note that was selected for publication.<sup>1</sup> Professor Wilner then suggested that I do something unusual: write during my third year of law school on a second Note topic that he suggested. Thus, during my third year of law school I wrote and published a second Note.<sup>2</sup> This second Note proved extremely valuable to me during the process of interviewing with federal judges for clerkship positions in the late spring and early summer of my third year. Having not one but two significant writing samples put me in an unusual position for a law student, and I believe this helped me obtain my first position after law school, clerking with distinguished Senior United States District Court Judge Marvin Shoob, Northern District of Georgia.

Professor Wilner was extremely gracious and generous with me and my wife, as well as other starving law students, frequently *sharing* his home and hospitality with us. His affection for his wife, Gisèle, was obvious and an inspiration to the young married couples who knew him.

I stayed in touch with Professor Wilner after law school, although not very well due to family (three daughters), and the pressures of private law practice at Powell Goldstein and then Paul Hastings. Stay in touch I did, however, and I suspect Professor Wilner had something to do with the invitation I received several years ago to join the Board of Trustees for the

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Conboy, *Detention Without Trial in Kenya*, 8 GA. J. INT'L & COMP. L. 441 (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Conboy, *The Group of 77 Draft Provisions Concerning Supplier Guarantees for the Proposed International Code of Conduct on Transfer of Technology*, 9 GA. J. INT'L & COMP. L. 69 (1979).

Rusk Center. Between that position and adjunct teaching, it was a pleasure in recent years to see more of Professor Wilner.

What made Professor Wilner special? In a word, Professor Wilner was always *kind*. He was good with his students, rarely critical, and never harsh with others (even those with whom he might have disagreements). It may seem unusual to describe him in this way, but few individuals I have known so clearly lived principles that Christians view as “Christian principles,” as this good, Jewish man. It speaks to his gentle nature and kindness that it was only at his funeral that I learned for the first time that Professor Wilner did not really like the nickname “Gabe,” but preferred to be called Gabriel by his friends.

Maureen’s and my condolences go out to Gisèle, and Professor Wilner’s family and friends. Gabriel Wilner was a good man, we will miss him, and we will not see his like again.