

TRIBUTE TO GABRIEL M. WILNER

FOREWORD

GABRIEL M. WILNER TRIBUTE ISSUE OF THE
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It is a privilege for me to introduce this issue of the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* which honors the memory of my late friend and colleague, Gabriel M. Wilner. Unlike several of the writers paying tribute to Gabe in this publication, I did not have the benefit of being his student. From the testimony given here and from conversations with many of his other former students who now practice international law around the world, I have learned to regret missing that experience. An important consolation for me, however, has been the friendship we shared for nearly four decades; for like those who sat in his classroom, I have profited immeasurably from his wisdom and generosity.

Dean Rusk—who had recruited Gabe to Georgia Law from the Office of Legal Affairs at the United Nations—introduced me to him as I was graduating from the law school and Gabe was arriving, in 1973. Through mutual interests in international law, state and national politics, admiration for Rusk, and support for Georgia Law, our paths crossed often over the ensuing thirty-one years, before I returned to join him at the Dean Rusk

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Center in 2004. During those years, he always impressed me as a bright international lawyer who embodied warmth, grace, and loyalty to his friends.

Yet it was over the last six years that I truly came to know Gabe and the genuine and rich quality of his character. For most of those years, my office was next to his and we shared the habit—despite frequent complaints from our spouses—of working, or at least staying, late into the evening. Invariably, before leaving he would step into my office, or I into his, and begin a rambling but fascinating conversation about politics, history, or world affairs. During the 2008 presidential primaries, we spent hours debating over our respective choices to lead the Democratic ticket. From these sessions and our other times together at the Center, I learned that he was not just a bright international lawyer but also a brilliant intellectual whose knowledge of American and world history, art, and literature seemed limitless. Whether he was talking about Belgian King Leopold's colonization of the Congo, Thomas Jefferson's character weaknesses, the surrealistic works of Dali and Magritte, the political humor of Jon Stewart, or the music of R.E.M., he seemed to have a photographic recall of everything he had read, heard, or seen in his unique life experience.

Indeed, it was this life experience that created his world view and passion for international law and politics. His heritage traced back to the Polish Jewish community and to the diaspora generated by the depression and world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Gabe's family members who remained in Poland perished in the Holocaust, as did his maternal grandparents who were living in Holland before the Nazis took them to Dachau. His paternal grandfather had migrated to Turkey before the war and managed to develop a number of textile factories in the Middle East, including in Beirut where Gabe was born. In the post-war turmoil of the late 1940s, however, his family's factories were nationalized and his father fled with him to the West. Stateless, they first went to Brazil, then to Ecuador, and finally through Panama to New York. With Polish passports, they were eventually able to obtain U.S. citizenship as refugees from the Communist Eastern Block.

When Gabe arrived in New York at the age of twelve, he spoke no English. Yet over the next several years, he proved himself a scholar at the College of William and Mary, the University of Exeter, and law school at Columbia University. At Columbia, he came under the inspiring tutelage of the eminent international law professor, Wolfgang Friedman, whose portrait Gabe kept over his desk until the day he died. Gabe led a group of students in creating the Jessup International Moot Court Competition, naming it after another Columbia professor, Philip Jessup, who had been appointed to the International Court of Justice. Coincidentally, Jessup was a close friend of Dean Rusk, who later became another of Gabe's mentors.

In a career that included law practice in Brussels (where he met Gisèle, his devoted spouse and best friend of thirty-eight years), eight years as a legal officer at the United Nations and UNCTAD, and almost forty years of teaching a broad range of courses in international law, Gabe left an important legacy in his chosen field. In addition to his long tenure at Georgia Law, Gabe taught and influenced law students for extended periods at other institutions ranging from The Hague Academy of International Law, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Université Jean Moulin (Lyon 3), Florida State, and Emory, among others. As Dean Rebecca White observes in her tribute in this volume, Gabe was passionate in his work, carrying a heavy course load and a high degree of administrative responsibilities until the end.

However, as will be manifest from all of the following tributes, his most prominent legacy is the lasting impact his friendship and counsel has had on the students, colleagues, and others blessed by the life of Gabriel M. Wilner.