

IN MEMORY OF GABRIEL M. WILNER

*Kenneth Klein**

Professor Gabriel M. Wilner of the University of Georgia School of Law was a mentor, and a friend, to hundreds of law students over three decades. He gave them a vision of what an international legal career could be, helped them achieve it, and nurtured them throughout their careers.

Shortly after the independence of the State of Israel in 1948, Professor Wilner's family's properties in Lebanon were confiscated and, as a young man, he was driven out of Lebanon and became stateless. His family moved to France, then to Brazil, and then to Ecuador. They were bound for Australia with a stop in the United States, when good luck allowed them to stay there and create a new home in New York City. One wonders whether this period of statelessness was instrumental in developing Professor Wilner's life-long love of the international rule of law and the United Nations, and the reason Professor Wilner's career was dedicated to the advancement of international law.

Professor Wilner graduated from Columbia Law School in 1962. Columbia Law School at that time had, and continues to have, one of the finest international law programs in the United States. Professor Wilner was fortunate to have as a mentor Wolfgang Friedmann, renowned Columbia Law professor and author of *The Changing Structure of International Law*, with which Professor Wilner assisted. Professor Wilner discussed and praised Professor Friedmann for decades after Professor Friedmann's untimely death. Professor Friedmann taught Professor Wilner more than international law; he taught him how to be a mentor, and it was a lesson Professor Wilner learned well.

At Columbia, Professor Wilner was Editor in Chief of the *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, the oldest student-edited international law

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journal in the United States. He also participated in the first Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, an honor of which he was very proud.

After graduating from law school, Professor Wilner worked in various capacities at the American Arbitration Association, the Hague Academy of International Law, and the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations. He also practiced law in Brussels, Belgium. While in Brussels, he met his wonderful and beautiful wife, Gisèle Wilner, who supported and guided Professor Wilner with great love, wisdom, and patience until the day he died.

In the early 1970s, Professor Wilner left his beloved New York City for Athens, Georgia. At that time, the University of Georgia School of Law had made the decision to substantially expand its international law programs. They brought on Professor Dean Rusk, the former Secretary of State and an important supporter of the creation of the United Nations. It was only natural that Professor Rusk suggested that Georgia Law hire Gabriel Wilner, also a great supporter of the United Nations, to help build one of the United States' best international law curriculums. Working together, Professor Rusk and Professor Wilner were the primary architects of a superb international law program that included the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, the Georgia Society of International and Comparative Law, and, ultimately, the Dean Rusk Center for International Law and Policy.

Professor Wilner was Faculty Advisor to the Georgia Society, the *Journal*, and the International Law Moot Court team for decades. He was the Executive Director of the Dean Rusk Center, whose mission is the promotion of international law and cooperation as a means for solving issues of global importance. He was Associate Dean of Graduate Legal Studies, working with numerous non-U.S. graduate law students from all over the world. He assisted in bringing numerous international scholars to Georgia to speak to, as well as to meet, Georgia Law students. The contacts that resulted from these programs broadened our minds and horizons, and encouraged many of us to seek international law careers.

Perhaps Professor Wilner's greatest institutional accomplishment was the creation of the Brussels Seminar, which gives students each summer intensive exposure to the law and institutions of the European Community. Many law students have described the Brussels Seminar as the single, most important influence on their early international legal careers.

Professor Wilner assisted dozens of law students, including me, in securing their first job, or their first international law job. He was always encouraging, always optimistic, always a friend, and always mentoring—continuing to provide guidance long after his law students had become lawyers. Professor Wilner was a long-time member of the American Society

of International Law (where he helped me get my first job as the 1976–1977 Fellow of the Society), and he also encouraged all of his law students to join.

With Gisèle always at his side, Professor Wilner appreciated and experienced the finer things of life, such as music, art, wine, and fine food. He loved New York City, Paris, and Brussels. While he never gave up his passion for New York City, he made Athens his home. Although Professor Wilner never made it to a Georgia football game, he remained an avid baseball fan. He and Gisèle were very generous, giving far more to others than most people would in the same circumstances.

I believe Gabriel Wilner's greatest personal accomplishment was his mentoring of law students. His influence as a mentor will continue indefinitely because, as Professor Friedmann was to him, his mentees have become mentors in their own right, continuing to pass along to new generations the vision of Gabriel Wilner.