

A RICHNESS OF LIFE: TRIBUTE TO
DEAN GABRIEL M. WILNER

*Terry Smith Labat**

After I met Professor Wilner during my first year at the University of Georgia School of Law, I never talked to him without learning something new, gaining a fresh insight into something that had seemed ordinary, or just having a laugh. I doubt many others did either. It was his depth and vastness of knowledge, honestly held and expressed views, humor, and generosity toward students and friends that made the richness of his life palpable to us.

Those of us fortunate to serve on the Editorial Boards of the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* experienced this more than most. From the *Journal's* inception in 1971, through the publication of Volume 38 in 2010, Gabriel advised the student staffs. His wise counsel and unwavering support for students, as well as his dedication to international law and legal thought, are major reasons for the continued success of this *Journal* and the successful careers of numerous law students who learned from their *Journal* experiences.

Gabriel's guidance not only stimulated many of our creative ideas, but also included Socratic-like conversations to help us ensure that those ideas were relevant and useful to practitioners and scholars alike. He guided and supported us through potential pitfalls of selecting articles for publication, office space problems, and the extreme dissatisfaction of one author. He championed integrity and excellence, and urged us to take opportunities that would improve our training, as well as further international legal thought and understanding.

But Gabriel's abilities as a faculty advisor were only part of what he offered us. I cannot think of him without acknowledging his considerable legal and teaching skills, as well as his qualities as a person. The topics of his books, articles, symposia, and lectures testify to the breadth of his work

* Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce; J.D., University of Georgia School of Law, 1976; Licence spécial en droit européen, Institut d'études européennes, Université libre de Bruxelles, 1977. Member of the Bars of the District of Columbia and the State of Georgia. Editor in Chief, *GA. J. INT'L & COMP. L.*, Vol. 4 (1975–1976).

and interests. He taught in classrooms from Athens, Georgia to Belgium to India, and more. His students came from all over the state of Georgia and areas of the United States, as well as China, Serbia, Australia, Israel, Argentina, Nepal, Canada, Africa, the European Union, and many other countries.

His teaching went beyond the classroom. Many of us can describe with great appreciation the time he took to talk and debate with us in groups and individually—often for hours—on a wide variety of legal issues and the practice of law in both private and public settings. He was a window into a world we wanted to learn about, no matter where we were from. He inspired us to be part of that wider world, and to meet the challenges and barriers it presented. In fact, many of my colleagues and I chose to study international law at the graduate level and to work in Washington, New York, Brussels, Rotterdam, and other cities in public and private international law fields.

His interests took us to areas outside the law, topics that gave us insight into how the law emanates from and needs to support just societies. Nothing was off limits—from social policies and national politics worldwide to the political commentary of Stephen Colbert and Rush Limbaugh; from the music of the Beatles, Jacques Brel, and R.E.M. to art, food, and wine; from the state of affairs in the Middle East to the histories of Europe and India and the day-to-day life in other cultures. And even, on occasion, football. I recall him saying that he and his wife, Gisèle, considered at least attending a game “between the hedges” when the Dawgs played the College of William and Mary, his undergraduate alma mater.

His generosity in sharing his ideas, his time, and his other many gifts merged with his respect for us as individuals and students, gave us a rich educational experience that catapulted us into practice with a superb foundation, ready to apply what we had learned. As his research assistant in the mid-seventies, I helped him on an article that examined foreign direct investment in Georgia.¹ The article examined the growing attraction of the state to foreign investors and the legal environment for their operations. It was a new topic of great interest then, and is even more relevant today as the Obama Administration works to increase trade to support jobs to help the United States recover from the greatest economic recession in decades. Professor Wilner developed the concept, directed me through the research and parts of the drafting, and completed the article, but insisted on including me as a co-author of the published article. He gave me more credit than I deserved and showed me what it could mean to support international commerce and to contribute academically. He was teacher of extraordinary

¹ Gabriel M. Wilner & Terry K. Smith, *Is Georgia on Their Minds?—Some Legal Aspects of Investment and Trade by Foreign Business Enterprises*, 27 MERCER L. REV. 629 (1976).

gifts and an unlimited willingness to share them with us. That is the foundation for the deep, lasting, and expansive impact that Gabriel Wilner has had on the *Georgia Journal*, the University of Georgia School of Law, the international community, those of us he taught, and all of us who valued his friendship.