

7-1-1979

Professor Joseph Laufer

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United States Court of Claims

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Recommended Citation

Oscar H. Davis, *Professor Joseph Laufer*, 28 Buff. L. Rev. 450 (1979).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol28/iss3/6>

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PROFESSOR JOSEPH LAUFER

HON. OSCAR H. DAVIS*

It is now some thirty years since I first met Joseph and Lily Laufer. At that time Joe and I were both in the Department of Justice in Washington, and though our separate fields of work did not push us together, we felt an immediate affinity which has lasted and flourished through the years, despite the many miles between Washington (where I have continued to live) and the Laufers' series of homes in the Boston-Cambridge-Watertown area, Israel, Montreal (when Joe taught at McGill), Buffalo, and now Florida. Without any direct experience of Joe as a teacher, I still know and want to help celebrate the special qualities that have made him great as a professor and, even more importantly, as a human being.

Perhaps above all there is Joe's unique combination of remarkable warmth, ability to communicate on the intellectual and deeper levels, keen sensitivity to both the felt and the true needs of students (and of the other participants in an interchange), exceptional capacity to project his ideas in straight rather than convoluted form, and his engaging power to stimulate thought in his hearers and readers.

These characteristics all reflect and implement his deep concern with the essential realities—the moral, social, institutional dimensions—of all problems he confronts. Not for him is the surface camouflage that conceals or avoids or floats away from the true issue or the true solution. Neither for him is the delicate traceries of an overly intellectualized architecture wholly unanchored to the foundations of the real world. His vision is clear, penetrating, and focussed because his eye never searches for the relevant alone, but always for the whole of the relevant. And never forgotten or neglected are the normative aspects of the problem.

It is warp-and-woof of this integrity of mind and heart that has impelled Joe Laufer to choose the harder path when he has felt it was right, to avoid the easy road of letting himself be pushed along by the merely popular steamrollers of the moment, and to face conflict when conflict was necessary to uphold the right as he saw it. He has never been a "trimmer" or a hanger-on of the reign-

* Judge, United States Court of Claims.

ing fashion. At the same time he has never been a "quitter." Proof enough of these qualities is his extraordinary and long-continued devotion to the extracurricular program at Buffalo for helping minority and other disadvantaged students in their law studies—a program designed to give useful help without coddling and without sacrifice of standards. This was for him a faithful labor of love undertaken and maintained despite obstacles and some carping.

The longest single segment of Joe's active professional life was at Buffalo and he enjoyed and relished it immensely. His relations with the students gave him great and continuing satisfaction though he was surely not uncritical or unaware of some of the rough patches in those interchanges. It was as if he were fated to be a law teacher, and in that role he reached fulfillment.

It would be incomplete and graceless of me, a personal friend, to end this capsule tribute to Joe without recalling the essential part in his life taken by Lily, whose practical wisdom in the affairs of this world and exceptional efficiency have been the necessary counterpoint to Joe's concentration on the professional and professorial way. I salute them both with profound affection and admiration.