

A TRIBUTE TO CAL*

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“How can you *try* to get a good grade in law school?” “What are you?” “Are you your grade?”¹ These are just a few of the many questions posed by Calvin A. Kuenzel; of course, he never answered them. These classic one-liners are just some of the many things I remember when I think about Cal. He could sum up a seemingly impossible “situation” in one profound quip. And he ALWAYS had one. He could clearly see things the rest of us pondered, muddled over, and argued about. Or maybe *he* just confused *us*. Who knows? Yet, when I received the letter requesting that I write an essay, I was truly flattered and to be honest, a little nervous. I mean, there are so many things to be said about Cal, I wasn’t sure I was cut out for the task. But then I remembered much of what I learned about law (and life), I learned from Cal Kuenzel. And with his encouragement, and needling, I figured I could do just about anything.

I am actually in a unique position — not only was I Professor Kuenzel’s student, but I had the opportunity to get to know Cal on the *other* side: as a colleague. There are so many words I could use to describe the man that I knew, both from a student’s perspective and from a peer’s. The one that keeps coming to mind, though, is the one I first took note of at his funeral service: SUCCESS. The poem titled “Celebration of Life”² describes what the word “success” means. And after reading it several times and keeping a copy in my office for months, I saw that it aptly described Calvin A. Kuenzel’s life. Below I will expound upon portions of the poem that I believe epitomize Cal.

To laugh often and love much . . .³

To anyone who knew him, it was clear that Calvin Kuenzel laughed often. I heard him do it several times in class alone, usually in response to one of the more arrogant student’s answers, because if he realized it wasn’t a strong-willed, confident individual,

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1. Calvin A. Kuenzel, circa 1988–89.

2. Unknown Author, Celebration of Life (poem received from the Loyless Funeral Home, Lutz Land O’ Lakes Chapel, on file with author) [hereinafter Celebration].

3. *Id.*

he would stifle any humor he saw in the scenario. If you look back, the humor encompassed in one of his classrooms, with its students clenching the table, white-knuckled, holding their collective breath, and praying that "today would not be the day that my name is called," it really was quite comical. You would have thought it was a matter of life or death to hear: "What do you think about that (dramatic and nerve-wracking pause) . . . Ms. Vaughan?" Dread. Yes, he laughed often.

Although his students may have overlooked it throughout the years, Professor Kuenzel loved the law, and really loved this institution. He worked for years and years to boost this school's reputation, and again, was successful. He loved his students, and (I know several readers will not believe this) he cared about them, getting to know them individually even before they stepped foot in his class.⁴ And his family, well just to see the twinkle in his eye when they were around tells all. Yes, he loved much.

To win the respect of intelligent persons
and the affection of children . . .⁵

This is an easy statement to comment on. All we have to do is look at his colleagues, the thousands of students he taught throughout the years, judges, lawyers, and professors alike. All respected Cal. No one can question that. And with regard to children, the gleam in the eyes of his youngest son, Cal Junior, when his daddy was around cannot be captured in words. No one could have ever believed he was SO grueling in class and in grading exams when they saw the two of them together. It reminds me of a typical Cal response to a question posed by a student right after Cal Junior was born: "Professor Kuenzel, how's the kid?" Cal's response: "Beats watching TV."⁶

To earn the approbation of honest critics . . .⁷

Now, although this is a light-hearted and truthful discussion,

4. For those who do not know it, Cal had a seating chart that not only had names on it, but also included pictures. He also spent several years on the Admissions Committee, becoming familiar with applicants even before they became students.

5. Celebration, *supra* note 2.

6. This Calvin Kuenzel original is compliments of Kip Umsted, Esquire, Class of 1991.

7. Celebration, *supra* note 2.

we must face the fact that graduates out there, who may have felt that they "were" in fact their grades, may not have the same feelings about Professor Kuenzel that I have portrayed. Yes, there were some he may even have insulted. He was no saint. But, in their honest critiques, I believe there would be some praise of his abilities, intellect, and talents. I may be wrong, but as they say, if *everyone* likes you, something must be wrong.

My favorite story along these lines actually occurred in Professor Kuenzel's Spring 1989 Contracts II class. Cal called on probably one of the nicest women in the class, who clearly became nervous and upset, and on a whim challenged "*the* Cal Kuenzel." She informed him that he made her very uncomfortable with his "teaching methods," and she could not understand why he would intentionally do so. She was to the point of utter frustration. Instead of berating or making her feel bad for questioning him, Cal simply asked her one of his infamous, unanswered questions: "What would you do if it were a judge who was asking the questions?," to which she responded (in a very respectful and shaky voice) "I don't believe a judge would intentionally treat me this way." Well, Cal did hold back his laughter that time, with some restraint, and the class as a whole was in shock because someone actually said something to Cal. Wow! He did make his point, however, by forcing her to understand what she *could* handle, rather than fearing what she couldn't. That woman did *not* go away with any resentment or hard feelings. In fact, to this day she holds him in the highest regard.⁸ Yes, if his critics answered honestly, they too would appreciate Cal.

To find the best in others . . .⁹

Although many of his students would never admit it, or just couldn't see it, Cal ALWAYS found the best in others. As in the example above, he helped that person to see that she was in fact strong enough to stand up to the judge or the opposing side; that she, which he knew better than we at the time, would be what she needed to be — a successful attorney. I know many of us look back at the grade we "earned" in Contracts and say, "He didn't see anything good in my exam much less the best in me." Again, though, we were not, and are not, our grade! But he did appreciate if a per-

8. Although I have not heard comment from that student, I will reserve this footnote for her take on the situation.

9. Celebration, *supra* note 2.

son could not “cut it” in this profession, and he was not afraid to tell a student that he or she had no business being here — out of concern for the person, not some evil desire to debilitate someone.

To give of oneself
To leave the world a bit better . . .¹⁰

I’m not sure if many outside the legal world would agree that ALOT of competent attorneys necessarily makes it a “better” world, but if it weren’t for Cal, Stetson University College of Law may not be able to take credit for so many of the best lawyers in the State. For forty years, Cal Kuenzel devoted his time and life to this school, and even though we walked out of class, daily, scratching our heads, and saying: “What in the world is he talking about . . . are we on the same planet?” — we somehow learned Contracts, how to think on our feet, how to deal with an adversary, what it feels like to be embarrassed, what it feels like to learn for *yourself* — I could go on. Yes, he did leave the world a lot better.

To know even one life has breathed easier
Because you have lived . . .¹¹

There are a lot more than *one* out there, and I think we can all admit that. Cal is truly missed, and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to know him, learn from him, and work with him. I am especially touched by the opportunity to write this story. If there are those remaining skeptics out there, who completely disagree with any or all of this, I will quote another of Cal’s famous one-liners: “You have a problem; I don’t know what it is . . . maybe it’s what you make it. I dunno.”

Yes, lives have breathed easier. Thanks, Cal.

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.*