

## CALVIN ARNOLD KUENZEL: MASTER TEACHER\*

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The crack of National Guard troops' gunfire and falling bodies of dead and wounded students at Kent State University were the tragic nadir of the Vietnam protest era of the late 1960s and early '70s. During that period, I was a recently-hired assistant professor of law at Valparaiso University, a church-related institution located in a small middle-class, midwestern town. The morning after the Kent State shootings, students at Valparaiso University set fire to the school's administration building. The building was destroyed, another victim of a tragic war. To say that the normally conservative and religious-oriented students were angered both by the Kent State killings and the torching of their school's administration building would be an understatement. But time softens all events. Even great tragedies eventually may produce a smile. When it comes to Kent State, I smile because I associate that memory with memories of my departed colleague, friend, and mentor of twenty years, Professor Calvin Arnold Kuenzel.

In January 1979, I was invited to St. Petersburg to interview with the Dean and Faculty of the Stetson University College of Law for the position of a visiting one-year professorship. At the time, I was a tenured faculty member at DePaul University College of Law in Chicago. The prospect of a year teaching in the warm Florida climate was inviting, especially since Chicago and I had just endured three successive colder and snowier than average winters.

The evening of my interview, my wife and I were dining with several Stetson law faculty members at the old Sunbird Restaurant in St. Petersburg. Somehow the decade-earlier Vietnam era came up. Sitting across from me was Professor Kuenzel. It was our first encounter, and one I would never forget. After describing how the

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Valparaiso students had committed arson in their angered response to the Kent State shootings, I asked Professor Kuenzel, "And, what did the students at the Stetson College of Law do after the Kent State incident?"

Without even a trace of a smile he replied, "Our boys enlisted in the National Guard." Wow! Silence. What kind of place is Stetson?, I thought to myself. Maybe I can endure yet another Chicago winter.

After several — for me — awkward seconds, I noticed the faintest beginnings of a grin take shape on Cal's otherwise deadpan face and I realized that I had been had. I was sitting across from a person who possessed the power to say *the most unexpected thing*. He took not only me, but generations of law students completely off guard time and time again. Later encounters made it clear that there was no way to win a battle of wits with this man. His comments and comebacks always were profound or enigmatic, or both.

Of course the "Stetson boys" had not enlisted in the National Guard. To set the record straight, "the boys and the girls" of Stetson, as Cal often referred to our students, happily burned no buildings, bridges, or even professors. And in Cal's quick, gentle but nonetheless in-your-face retort, he was simply giving me food for thought that would allow me to answer my own question. Although our Kent State discussion had lasted only a few moments, my first encounter with Cal Kuenzel was indeed of the strangest kind. He had stretched my mind over dinner.

As a mind stretcher, no one could be Cal's equal. He understood that real learning comes from within one's self, through one's own efforts. But the stage has to be set with the right comment or question. Cal wisely knew that merely to provide information or data, or to lay out the rules in a lecture would take away the students' own opportunity to develop their analytic abilities, to truly teach themselves. He refused for the most part to "answer" questions, understanding that true wisdom and learning come from within the questions when considered thoroughly by one's own mind, not from being told external pat answers. Cal taught students that they and only they are ultimately responsible for their education (or lack thereof). His message was simple: there are no excuses, either you learn or you don't, and the choice is yours alone. Perhaps he overstated this point a bit, but no one doubts that Cal imparted the meaning of personal responsibility. "You are your word," he repeatedly pointed out.

The better students in Cal's classes would teach themselves, using Cal's questions as focal points for deductive, inductive, analogical, and intuitive knowledge. The remaining students learned that not all grades are As, Bs, or even Cs.

Yes, it was true that not all students would succeed in his classes, that not all would benefit, at least not immediately. To some, Professor Kuenzel's teaching methodology seemed frustratingly obscure. For others, years would pass before the value of his method revealed itself.

Professor Kuenzel's teaching style put in practice the philosophy of education of one of the world's great mathematicians, educators, and philosophers, Alfred North Whitehead. In 1929, the year following Cal Kuenzel's birth, Whitehead published a little book titled, *The Aims of Education*.<sup>1</sup> In it, the author noted that a teacher's dispensing of "scraps of information" has nothing to do with what is truly valuable in education.<sup>2</sup> Rather, Whitehead suggested, it is the intellectual excitement in the classroom that really matters.<sup>3</sup> The classroom, given a master teacher, is where an "atmosphere of excitement" exists, where the teacher's imagination transforms knowledge.<sup>4</sup> "A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities."<sup>5</sup>

Whitehead's insightful 1929 book, I speculate, must have been dropped in Cal's baby crib. Several years later, Calvin Arnold Kuenzel would begin four decades of being an exciting, imaginative, and dedicated master teacher who imparted wisdom to successive generations of law students, in one case, literally a grandfather, his son, and his granddaughter. Each "had" Cal, the master teacher. Philosopher Whitehead described master teachers as having "the most fertile minds" and being "the more brilliant teachers."<sup>6</sup> Surely Whitehead in 1929 was anticipating young Cal's future when he wrote that a master of teaching displays "originality" and engages

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1. ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD, *THE AIMS OF EDUCATION* (The New Am. Library 1956) (1929).

2. *See id.* at 13. "A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth." *Id.*

3. *See id.* at 97.

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.* at 103.

his or her student in “personal discussion.”<sup>7</sup> Such teachers exercise, Whitehead noted, an immense “influence.”<sup>8</sup> Cal was, to say the least, an influential teacher.

Of the truly influential teachers in history, Whitehead added, “one of them is immortal — Socrates.”<sup>9</sup> Fortunately, for four decades of Stetson law graduates, another is immortal too — Calvin Kuenzel.

The sly smile, the dry wit, the constant probing, the enigmatic observations, the repeatedly turning of questions back to the questioner in true Socratic fashion, these made Professor Kuenzel a very special, very successful, and ultimately most influential teacher.

Moreover, Cal combined his vast pedagogical talents with a caring heart. With this orientation of care, Cal viewed each student as a blank canvas, understanding that each had within themselves infinite possibilities. And, for those who would really listen to his questions and seek to penetrate his comments, they would end up drawing whatever future they imagined on their own canvases. Cal had awakened their potentialities.

Some of us in the academic profession may be described as lecturers, others as skills implanters, teachers of doctrine, problem solvers, or theoretic scholars. Yet, Calvin Arnold Kuenzel was all of these. Above all, he was an enabler. Professor Kuenzel enabled students to learn how to take control of their own professional development and to bring out their own intellectual potentialities. He was a master teacher. His enormous influence remains with us all — students, graduates, faculty, and staff of the Stetson University College of Law. He will not be forgotten. Enlisted in the National Guard, indeed!

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7. *See* WHITEHEAD, *supra* note 1, at 103.

8. *See id.*

9. *Id.*