

ONE-OF-A-KIND*

Richard L. Brown**

“Husbands are fungible,” Professor Kuenzel joked to our class once, “Wives aren't. Right?”

Fortunately, a student two seats away had an electronic dictionary next to his copy of the Farnsworth casebook. He and the student seated directly next to me quickly conferred over its small LED screen. One leaned back in my direction and whispered, under the professor's watchful eye, “It means `interchangeable.” We smiled, the three of us, fairly confident that we were the only students in the room who understood his joke, and realized on a larger scale the self-effacing quality of the comment, and the man.

Disciplined, Professor Kuenzel was, and with strict discipline he taught us. One afternoon, three students in a row admitted that they were completely unprepared for the day's discussion. Professor Kuenzel shut his casebook, lifted his notes from the lectern, and walked out, announcing: “Well, I suppose we'll try again tomorrow, since no one bothered to read today.” It was an uncomfortable moment. Some of us laughed and left without hesitation. Others, myself included, felt an uneasy sense of humiliation for having let someone down when he was counting on you.

They say this was the way all professors were in “the good old days.” They say none of us have had to study as hard as the generation before us, that the standards are slipping, the reading load lightening, the work ethic waning. Maybe so, but Professor Kuenzel didn't seem to notice. True, we weren't wearing business attire to class anymore, and we didn't even have to stand up when we were called on, but Professor Kuenzel had a way of letting a class know what he expected. When his expectations weren't met, he wasn't shy about letting a class hear about it.

I ran into him on campus one afternoon and he asked me how I was. Trying to be clever, I said, “Confused!” He chuckled. I thought nothing of the encounter, until two hours later at the start of class,

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when he announced, "You know, confusion is just a racket," and began a lengthy and serious speech about class preparation and understanding the basic concepts of contracts law. Everyone listened attentively, even though they didn't know what prompted his lecture. I knew; I felt as if he were speaking directly to me, although he never even looked in my direction. He could have addressed me directly, but chose not to embarrass me in that way.

Unfortunately, these anecdotes haven't done the Professor justice. Only being in his presence could really convey the sense of grace that complimented his fabled discipline. He conveyed an aura of seniority to students, but he never acted condescending to us, he just knew where we were and the journey we had ahead of us, and he wanted to help us on our way. Discipline, yes, but tempered by generosity.

I received the lowest grades of my law school career in Contracts I and II, but I wouldn't hesitate to say that Professor Kuenzel taught me more about style and class, more about a disappearing breed of man, than any other professor I ever encountered.

Some professors are fungible. Calvin Kuenzel was one-of-a-kind.