

## IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR JOHN ROBIN BRADLEY'S RETIREMENT

*Chip Williams*

In the summer of 1973, while the Watergate hearings were being conducted before the U.S. Senate and the Vietnam War was being waged in Southeast Asia, my young wife died suddenly. She was diagnosed with a brain tumor on a Saturday morning hospital admission, and I lost her the following Tuesday evening. Actually, our family lost her. Sandy was twenty-five when she died. Our daughter was 10 months old.

We had returned to Oxford and the law school in January after my active duty in the Navy. Although a war was going on, my service had been mainly spent on tours aboard a destroyer sailing in the Caribbean and Mediterranean Seas. God had spared me the trials of death. My parents and siblings were healthy and my grandparents still alive. On the rare occasions that a friend or neighbor passed away, I had only made brief visits to the local funeral home to "pay my respects." Contemporaries who tragically died in the war were buried in foreign cemeteries. I had been to one funeral and no burials, until my wife died. Thereafter my callow life was changed.

The shock of the unexpected loss was so intense that I had notified no one, not even the law school classmate who also happened to be our next door neighbor. Whoever came to the funeral and whoever wrote condolences had learned the news from someone other than me, including those at the law school. After a week's absence, I returned to campus. The first day of my return to Lamar Hall a professor stopped me and expressed his sympathy. He then asked why I had not notified the school. He said he had only learned the day of the funeral when he read Sandy's obituary in *The Commercial Appeal*. I can only imagine the sight of devastation that came with my reply, or lack of reply. He also asked about completing the semester and his course. I said that was my intention. He said that it would be difficult for me and that I would need help. I had made a 3.5 in his

corporations class the previous spring semester. It seems strange I can recall that course and grade but do not remember the names of the two courses I was taking that summer. In fact, I only remember one of the instructor's names. That was the professor who spoke to me and offered his help: John Robin Bradley.

Every remaining day of the semester, either immediately before class or immediately following, Mr. Bradley and I would meet for 30 minutes or more over coffee in the old Alumni House cafeteria where he would ask if I had questions about the assignments, inquire about my child, and mostly just talk in friendship, giving me a chance to participate as I wished. Over me was that dark blanket of grief C.S. Lewis once described. Other than being me, I cannot imagine anything more painful than having been in my presence then. Beforehand, Mr. Bradley had loved to wisecrack. He was a little cynical; sometimes sarcastic. But those inclinations of his spirit were never part of our meetings. What a sacrifice it had to be for the man.

Certainly in the history of teaching it must be remarkable that a law professor offered, actually insisted, that he tutor his own student. Other than time spent with my infant daughter, those informal meetings collectively account my lone pleasant memory of that time. And whenever I think of what it means to be compassionate and dedicated, to this day I remember a noble law professor, Mr. Bradley.