

ROBERT A. WEEMS

Robert C. Khayat

In the summer of 1964, Bob and Janis Weems arrived at the Aventura Apartments in Oxford in a white Corvair two-door coupe. My wife Margaret and I lived in the same apartment development and quickly became close friends with the Weemses. As our families grew, we had daughters at about the same time, both of whom are named Margaret, and sons a little later, both of whom are named Robert. We have been close friends since that time.

Bob quickly established himself as one of the brightest students in the Law School. He was a product of Central High School in Jackson and Millsaps College, and a former ninth grade math teacher at Chastain Junior High in Jackson. As a member of the very capable and smart Weems family from Forest and later Jackson, Bob had excelled as an undergraduate student and public school teacher, was an outstanding basketball player, and was a veteran of three years as an enlisted man in the United States Army.

With his keen mind and intellectual curiosity, he put to good use the time he spent overseas as a soldier. Stationed in Turkey, he took advantage of opportunities to travel Europe. He used his basketball skills as a player on the Base team, which provided additional travel and exposure to that part of the world.

During his years as a law student he was, of course, at the top of his class. The coveted Am Jur awards had not arrived at that time but if they had, I am confident Bob would have "Am Jured" many of his courses. His naturally quiet and understated nature prevails until the time for him to speak occurs. Immediately, he is transformed into an enthusiastic, energetic, and demonstrative spokesman. He always thinks before he speaks, a trait that was evident when he was a student and continues to be a strength of his teaching.

Following graduation from law School in August 1967, twenty-seven months after entering school, he joined the Brunini

firm in Vicksburg. At that time, Brunini was clearly one of the top three firms in Mississippi with offices in Jackson and Vicksburg. Several of the partners served as mentors for the young lawyer, but I believe Frank Everett became Bob's role model, mentor, and friend. (Mr. Everett is the author of the "One Never Graduates from Ole Miss speech"). During the twelve years Bob was with the firm, he established himself as a capable lawyer and a "worthy" advocate. He was highly respected by the members of his firm, his clients, and the people of Vicksburg. He did, however, find time to fish at Eagle Lake.

As good as he was at practicing law, Bob Weems was "born to teach". We often use the words "think like a lawyer". Professor Weems has a greater ability to work comfortably in the grey world of law than anyone I have known. I was in classes at Yale and Ole Miss and have heard many practicing lawyers try cases and make presentations at Continuing Education Programs, and none have been better than Bob Weems as a teacher. He has an uncanny ability to identify the narrowest of distinctions and to eloquently explain complicated, difficult principles and rules to students and lawyers.

When he was invited to join the Law Faculty in 1978, he called me and asked what he would need to prepare to teach. My answer: a three-hole punch and a lot of courage. I knew his work ethic, I knew that he was extremely well organized, I knew that he was among the brightest people I had known, and I knew he would be "true to the law". There would be no half-baked fiction being presented in his classes.

What I did not know was that his enthusiasm his first year would be interpreted by some of his students as anger. On his teacher evaluations and in the student underground, he became known as "Belligerent Bob" which was so far off of the mark that it was laughable. Bob didn't laugh; he worried about failing as a teacher. He did not fail. Actually, in a very short period of time he became the Outstanding Law Professor and he has been chosen by the students for the award six times since 1980. He was also named Teacher of the Year for the University in 1994.

As he grew and matured on the faculty, he and Professor Guff Abbot began the annual Abbot and Weems Seminar for Practicing Lawyers. Presenting various updates on Mississippi

Law, the seminar attracted more participants each year for almost thirty years than any other Continuing Legal Education program in the state.

Utilizing spring vacation as the week for the seminar, presentations were made on the Coast, in Jackson, and in Tupelo each year. The program featured two very popular and knowledgeable law professors providing up to date summaries of Mississippi Law, which of course included any changes or modifications to existing law and new law from the previous year. Service along with teaching and scholarship comprise the tripartite mission of the University. Professor Weems stayed focused on that mission.

Regarding scholarship, *Wills and Administration of Estates in Mississippi*, by Weems, is the bible on that subject in Mississippi. It is well-written and updated annually. Additionally, he and his son Robert published a book on Mississippi torts law that has been as well received as the Wills book.

Part of a faculty member's responsibility is service to the university. Bob attended every campus wide faculty meeting every year. Of course, he actively participated in law faculty meetings just as faithfully. He never appeared in class or at a university event in casual dress, he wore a necktie in every class and during exams. Bob knows that the practice of law is a profession and he believes in behaving and dressing professionally.

Soon after becoming Chancellor, I asked Bob to chair the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics, a responsibility he took very seriously. The Chancellor and the Director of Athletics depend upon the Athletics committee for guidance and oversight. The hope is that the Athletics Committee will actively assist in assuring that we never lose sight of our commitment to academic quality as well as integrity in our intercollegiate athletic programs. Bob zealously led the committee, drafted the first set of by-laws the committee had ever adopted, and was an active member of the Southeastern Conference Faculty Athletics Representatives. He attended several meetings each year including the meeting of all Conference schools in May of each year. His compensation for that extraordinary, time consuming service was expense reimbursement and two complimentary tickets to all of the sports events.

Bob Weems is the most unassuming, humble man I know. He expects little or nothing for his extraordinary service, and he gives so much. He quietly reaches out to students in ways that are uncommon. For example, each year he makes a gift of dinner and two tickets to a football game for two students. He quietly supports the annual staff gift fund designed to provide annual bonuses for the custodial staff. He is a loyal team player, has served on virtually every law school committee, and has a near perfect attendance record in teaching his classes—including during infrequent random bouts with illness.

Speaking of illness, on several occasions over the years I have been seriously ill and heavily sedated—sometimes hospitalized for a week or more. Each time I would wake from a drug induced haze, Bob Weems was seated in my hospital room quietly watching me, ready to call for help if needed. When his friend Gerald Blessey faced politically driven difficulties in the courts in Harrison County, Bob Weems was in the courtroom supporting him (all of the cases were ultimately resolved in Gerald's favor). As they say, Bob Weems is a “stand up man”.

There is no way to measure his contributions to the Law School, to the lives of his students, and to the legal profession in Mississippi. His is a life well-lived, professionally and personally. The University, the Law School and the State of Mississippi are better and stronger as a result of the life of Robert A. Weems.