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Roger D. Groot: A Dedication

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Lee R. Goebes*

Truth be told, before starting law school I naively imagined that all law school professors would be like Professor Groot. That is, I expected to receive instruction from individuals who would be equally versed in the nuts-and-bolts aspects of practicing law as they would be at producing legal scholarship. What I experienced instead, in the large, was instruction from wonderful academics whose experiences in the actual practice of law were limited (indeed, in the case of many professors, this lack of practical experience was self-imposed). I say this not to belittle such professors or to slight the outstanding education I received at Washington and Lee. I merely comment that Professor Groot is a rare and seemingly endangered breed: a law professor who is equally at ease in the class-room as he is in the courtroom; an instructor who is equally adept at briefing the latest niceties of capital jurisprudence to the Virginia Supreme Court as he is at expounding in a niche journal on some arcane and thoroughly academic point of thirteenth-century British law.

Furthermore, rather than working at cross-purposes, Professor Groot's multi-pronged endeavors in the teaching, scholarship, and actual practice of law somehow serve to compliment each other. During my time in VC3, I witnessed time and again how Professor Groot's legal scholarship informed his litigation and clinical instruction (and vice versa). The *Capital Defense Journal* under Professor Groot's hand was perhaps the most visible manifestation of this phenomenon. Under Professor Groot's guardianship the Journal bridged the gap between theory and practicality and provided scholarly, law-review quality pieces that, unlike so much legal scholarship, are of actual utility to practicing lawyers.

This balancing of teaching, scholarship, and actual legal practice is not the only juggling act at which Professor Groot excels. Those who have not participated in a legal clinic perhaps do not understand the somewhat at-odds pressures faced by the clinical legal professor. A clinical instructor is, as a lawyer and member of the Bar, duty bound to provide lawyer-quality work product for the clinic's clients and, at the same time, is under an institutional mandate to provide a quality educational experience for the students in his charge.

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Now that I am out in practice and working with interns and law students, I see the temptation to micromanage and overbear the students with which I work—an outcome that, although arguably good for the ultimate work product, certainly diminishes the educational value of the students' experiences. The key to Professor Groot's genius in VC3 was his ability to compel his students themselves to produce the exemplary work product for the lawyers and capital defendants that VC3 serves. In retrospect, while Professor Groot's instruction never felt like hand-holding, I never felt like he left me floating in the wind; while my work product certainly felt like mine, I undoubtedly could not have produced it without him. The outcome Professor Groot allowed me to reach in VC3 is, of course, the ultimate goal of Socratic instruction—focused questioning and colloquy that forces the pupil himself to reach a logically coherent and legally defensible result.

Although the Clinic will certainly be poorer for his absence, Professor Groot will continue to benefit up-and-coming lawyers at Washington and Lee, plying his techniques to hone the skills of the students in his first year Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Courses. Further, considering that he is continuing to defend capital cases, his clients, and the Bar itself, can continue to enjoy the fruits of his creative and ample energies. And, as I continue my career and defend my clients (albeit in a (thankfully) non-death penalty jurisdiction), I will return time-and-time again to the lessons he gave and the skills I learned from him.

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