



2019

A Tribute to Professor Jonathan Rohr

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Recommended Citation

Melanie Wilson, A Tribute to Professor Jonathan Rohr, 70 *Hastings L.J.* 458 (2019).

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Those of us who are better for knowing Jonathan must endeavor to fulfill the promise of Jonathan's life. He will live on when we take the time to meet with a student even though we are up against a writing deadline; when we take an ethical stand even at great personal cost; when we delight in being swept away by an idea, alone or in conversation with a colleague; when we are true to ourselves—enthusiastically and unapologetically—and when, surrendering to the beauty of the moment, we let the music come to us.

He has touched us, he has changed us, and we will strive not let him down.

MELANIE WILSON[†]

Some people are gifted. Jonathan Rohr was among them. Jonathan spent only one year at the University of Tennessee College of Law, but his impact on me, my colleagues, our students, and the staff was as powerful as his baritone voice.

I first met Jonathan in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2016, when he interviewed for a faculty position in business law. Jonathan entered our interview suite, smiled warmly, shook my hand, and sat on the edge of the candidate “hot seat” with a look of enthusiasm. From the first two minutes, I was confident that he would be a good fit at Tennessee. By the end of our twenty-five minutes together, Jonathan was a unanimous favorite of the search committee. That theme—a unanimous favorite—continued for Jonathan's all-too-short time in our community. Jonathan connected with each of us because of his love for teaching, his respect for students, his talent for writing, his scholarly promise, and his genuine affection for the law.

During student orientation, Jonathan established a rapport with the anxious first-years, managing to position himself in the middle of them during receptions and on the night of the IL dinner. He shared stories, actively listened to theirs, and laughed freely with them—like old friends do. Jonathan also built close collegial relationships with a team of upper-level students when he coached them for a transactional law competition. The team expressed intense gratitude for his mentorship. It was his way. It was his pattern. Jonathan effortlessly created relationships with each of us. He made us feel special.

Jonathan enriched lives. He lifted spirits. His dedicated and thoughtful teaching gave students hope and built confidence. And, his singing commanded introspection, deep contemplation, and admiration. Jonathan was so smart, so loved, so likable, and so warm. Words are inadequate. We miss him deeply. His influence lives on.

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