

Missouri Law Review

Volume 47
Issue 1 *Winter 1982*

Article 9

Winter 1982

Tribute from the Faculty

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Recommended Citation

Grant S. Nelson, *Tribute from the Faculty*, 47 Mo. L. REV. (1982)

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Nelson: Nelson: Tribute from the Faculty
TRIBUTE FROM THE FACULTY

GRANT S. NELSON*

By the time our paths crossed in the fall of 1966, Joe Covington had already achieved national pre-eminence as a lawyer-educator. He had served with distinction as Acting President of the University of Arkansas and as dean of its law school. He had given the University of Missouri-Columbia over eight years of tireless and skillful service as dean of its law school. He had received numerous awards attesting to his professional contributions and stature.

I first heard of Joe Covington in a telephone conversation with William Lockhart, who was dean at my alma mater, the University of Minnesota School of Law, and who, like Joe, is a person to whom I will always be indebted in so many ways. I had informed Dean Lockhart of my interest in law teaching and had asked him to assess my chances of finding a suitable position. His response, as I remember it, was pleasingly direct. He asked my opinion of the State of Missouri. I replied that my only contact with the state had been eighteen months military service at Fort Leonard Wood, but that this experience, surprisingly, had been quite enjoyable. Then he said, and I remember these words precisely, "I know Joe Covington, the law dean at the University of Missouri. He is a good and solid person. Let me give him a call." Within a few days, I received a call from Joe inviting me to visit the UMC campus. During that visit, I was immediately impressed by the warmth and quality of the faculty and its dean. Consequently, I was especially pleased to receive and to accept a teaching offer from UMC for the 1967-1968 academic year. It was during the next fourteen years that I was to discover just how "good and solid" Joe Covington really is.

Because a law school's reputation is so closely related to the quality of its faculty, a dean inevitably is judged by the faculty appointments made during his tenure. While faculty share in this appointment process, the dean's role is always influential and frequently paramount. Among those added to the faculty during Joe's decanal tenure at UMC include John Divilbiss, Henry Lowe, James Westbrook, Elwood Thomas, Hal Bateman, Fred Davis, Robert Ross, and Jack Edwards. Joe can feel special pride in his role in having lured such fine teachers and scholars to UMC.

After stepping down from the deanship in 1969, Joe became the leading national advocate of a multistate bar examination. As a result of that advocacy, Joe shortly thereafter became the Director of Testing of the Multistate

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Bar Examination, and the UMC School of Law became its headquarters. During the next several years, Joe worked tirelessly to guide and nurture the Multistate from concept to reality. He succeeded in enlisting dozens of nationally respected scholars in the Multistate effort. More important, Joe's quiet, yet persistent, persuasion won over countless skeptical state judges and bar examiners to the Multistate concept. The use of the Multistate in forty-six states is, in large measure, a monument to Joe's skill and dedication. The University of Missouri-Columbia basks in Joe's limelight. His efforts have brought valuable national recognition to the UMC campus and its law school.

At a law school whose faculty has traditionally emphasized quality classroom teaching, Joe is one of its finest teachers. Students not only respect his substantive mastery of the law of contracts, they appreciate the quiet subtlety of his pedagogy. Joe's national prominence has seemed to reinforce his natural dedication to the classroom and his students.

Joe has also achieved the justifiable reputation among his colleagues as a faculty statesman. He has often been elected or appointed to important law school committees because he was respected for his sound judgment. While his advice is often sought, it is never imposed on his colleagues.

If the foregoing betrays a bias on my part, I readily admit to being biased about Joe Covington. Indeed, Joe Covington's personal traits are even more admirable than his professional accomplishments. He is kind and compassionate. Moreover, unlike Winston Churchill's description of Clement Atlee as a "modest man who has much to be modest about," Joe is a modest man who has much to be immodest about. For many of us, he has been a quiet confidant and, above all, a close friend. Joe will continue to be an influential force in the legal profession. Wherever his future efforts may lead him, the legal profession and each of us as individuals will benefit enormously from them. I am honored to be his colleague.