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Dykema, Gossett, Spencer, Goodnow & Trigg

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(AN ENTHUSIASTIC) TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR MARCUS PLANT

*Joel M. Boyden**

First, it was a tentative titter which tore at the tense atmosphere created by seventy-five or eighty nervous University of Michigan law school freshmen sitting through their initial exposure to the educational process represented by a law school lecture. Then a more audible group chuckle swept through the room as an unarticulated disbelief began to arise in those anxious minds. The silent thought was: "Hey, that was a *funny* comment. Must have been a mistake — no scholarly professor would start us out by injecting humor into this serious and competitive business of law school!"

But with the comedic instincts of Jack Benny performing one of those inimitable standup monologues, the professor went on to dispel all doubts about his intentions. His expert use of vocal inflection, the artfully turned phrase, facial expression and, most of all, exquisite sense of timing caused the Hutchins Hall lecture rooms to resound with appreciative laughter.

Thus it was, in the fall of 1959, as in many falls before and for two decades thereafter, Professor Marcus Plant introduced a class of fortunate freshmen students to his notion that the study of torts in particular and law in general did not require the leaving behind of one's sense of humor. As a person who had come rather tentatively to the whole idea of law and the legal profession, I recall that my first true, whole-hearted enthusiasm toward those areas of endeavor was sparked by Professor Plant's teaching style during his lecture to our fledgling law class.

Never, in my experience, has one man combined such high levels of academic prowess, knowledge, fluency, dedication and zest for his profession with such an abiding sense of humor. Classes taught by Marcus Plant, in addition to being an educational high, were just plain fun.

Probably because of my own background in varsity athletics during undergrad days at Michigan, I was particularly persistent in but-tonholing Mark in order to draw stories out of him about his more

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than twenty year experience as Michigan's faculty representative to the Big Ten Conference. In the course of those talks, we inevitably covered a wider variety of subjects, including, at one point during my Ann Arbor years, the question of whether law school was really worth all the strain and hassle and just what direction my career plans should take, with or without a legal education.

Mark paused — he was a master of the dramatic pause — and for a moment studied the wall of his office to my left, then turned and fixed me with a gaze directed over the top of glasses which had slid slightly down the bridge of his nose. He queried, in his characteristic fashion: “My boy, what makes a great athlete?”

Being accustomed to Marcus' somewhat rhetorical questions, I merely mumbled something about “dedication” and awaited what I was sure would be an erudite response. I was not disappointed.

“That's right. That's half of it — dedication *and* enthusiasm!” exclaimed Professor Plant, drawing out the “U” vowel in his last word. “And,” he went on, “enth-oo-siasm is the more important, because it's highly communicable. Those are the same qualities that make a stand-out in any field. Try it out.”

The more I have contemplated that thought in the years that have passed since that day, the more gut-level truth I find it to hold. But, significant as those words from Mark Plant might have been if uttered in a vacuum, they were more meaningful because of the example set by his dedication to high standards of excellence combined with his infectious enthusiasm for teaching and all other discernible aspects of life. I've never forgotten Professor Plant's guideline and have adopted it — enthusiastically!

That is just one small example of how, in countless ways, Mark Plant touched and placed an indelible, positive imprint upon the lives of those thousands of us who were fortunate enough to have been his students. Others to whom he selflessly gave his talents and energies could undoubtedly recount many similar stories. Suffice to say that for all of us he was both a great teacher and a great man. We shall miss him.