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## John W. Reed

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*U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan*

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## John W. Reed

*Douglas W. Hillman\**

Chesterton once said, "If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing badly." For me this little essay about my friend John Reed is worth doing, even if badly!

When I heard that John Reed was moving on to become Dean of the Wayne State Law School, the title of one of my favorite books came to mind: *The Best is Yet*, by Morris L. Ernst, a distinguished New York attorney during the first half of this century. Ernst explains in his introduction the title came from Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
the last of life, for which the first was made.

I join with John's many friends around the country in wishing him well and hoping his move to the Wayne State Law School will confirm that the best is yet to be.

I have never seen a list of qualifications for a dean and have known only a few, so I address the subject with some trepidation. Nevertheless, I can say unflinchingly, if I were a one-man committee seeking the most qualified individual from any place in the country to become dean of a top-flight law school, John Reed would head my list.

John is a true renaissance man. A bright, scholarly, magnificent teacher, John is worshipped by his students. He is unquestionably one of the finest after-dinner speakers around, possessing a marvelous sense of humor, unmatched by Johnny Carson, Mark Russell, or Joan Rivers! And speaking of humor, the longer I am on the bench, the more I realize how humor, properly used, can be an effective weapon in the courtroom as well as a powerful teaching tool. This, of course, is John's forte. In teaching students or in lecturing to lawyers, he frequently emphasizes an important point by use of a humorous anecdote. For example, not long ago I heard John lecture to over 1,300 lawyers in Ann Arbor. He pointed out the importance of demonstrating to the jury that a set of facts may not always appear the same to all people. He illustrated this truism with the following story at the expense, I might add, of my own hometown:

Not long ago a furniture salesman from Grand Rapids was at an outdoor cafe in Paris when he spotted a charming woman at the next table. Not

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\* Chief Judge, U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan. — Ed.

speaking French and wishing to communicate with her, he drew a picture of a bottle of wine on the back of an envelope and through the courtesy of the waiter, sent it to her. She looked at it, turned to the salesman and smiled. So he promptly sent over a bottle of wine. Sometime later, when the bottle was about empty, she sent him a folded napkin and when he opened it, he saw she had drawn on it a picture of a brass bed! When he got back to Grand Rapids the salesman said to his friend, "I never understood how that woman knew I was a furniture salesman!"

That's classic Reed.

John and I have been friends for many years. Initially we had a common link with Jim Carrigan, a federal judge in Denver who knew John years ago when John was Dean of the University of Colorado Law School. Also, I have worked closely with John over the years at the Advocacy Institute in Ann Arbor. Austin Anderson, the Institute's Director, will, I am sure, have more to say on that subject in his accompanying piece.<sup>1</sup> However, as both a participating lawyer and later as one of the presiding judges, I can attest that John's magnificent sense of timing, his ability during critiques to zero in on the very heart of the subject at issue, plus his warmth and light touch have contributed to make the Institute the finest in the country.

Some years ago I was president of the International Society of Barristers. This group is composed of trial advocates from around the country who accept the responsibility of working for the advancement of trial advocacy as a specialized skill. The organization was looking for an administrative secretary and editor for its *Quarterly*. Jim Carrigan and I buttonholed John in the parking lot before a Michigan—Notre Dame football game and literally held him hostage until he agreed to take on this responsibility. It will come as no surprise that the organization under John's leadership is thriving as never before. Bill Erickson, Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court and former president of the Barristers, wrote recently with understated modesty:

Today, the International Society of Barristers is recognized worldwide. As our former President Craig Spangenberg said, "The adage has it that a chain is as strong as its weakest link . . . [and the Society] has no weak links."

True or not, John has provided great leadership to the organization and in return his close association with Barrister superadvocates such as Carrigan, Erickson, and Spangenberg, plus the likes of Murray Sams of Miami, John Shepherd of St. Louis, Irving Younger of Minneapolis, Lee Kreindler of New York, Bob Cartright of San Francisco,

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1. See Anderson, *John W. Reed*, 85 MICH. L. REV. 1501 (1987).

and Ted Koskoff of Connecticut, has brought exciting tales of courtroom drama back to his students.

And finally, my wife Sally and I cherish an annual weekend visit from John and Dot Reed at our Lake Michigan cottage. We scrounge the countryside for the best and the brightest to come for dinner to match wits with our Ann Arbor guests. Initially we are regaled with John's most recent stories and then settle down for hours of heated discussion on such subjects as tort reform, required law school courses in trial advocacy, competency of counsel, hearsay (naturally!), and then move on to more mundane topics such as nuclear disarmament, abortion, and the latest East/West crisis.

If John, as the new Dean of Wayne State, can woo the students, state legislators, alumni, and faculty in the same manner he does our dinner guests, Michigan Law School had better watch out or its corridors and classrooms will be empty.

Not long ago, for some obscure reason which now escapes me, I looked up the definition of "gentleman." The word has several meanings but the one which best fits my thoughts of John Reed reads as follows: "A man of good breeding, courtesy, and kindness; hence a man distinguished for fine sense of honor, strict regard for his obligations, and consideration for the rights and feelings of others."

Although we will miss him at our alma mater, it is comforting to know that John is moving just down the block!