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L. Hart Wright

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L. HART WRIGHT

*Robben W. Fleming**

Hart and Phyllis Wright had been at the University of Michigan for twenty years (1947-67) before I arrived in 1967. For the next dozen years, while I was President of the University and a largely inactive Professor of Law, I knew him more as a friend and a citizen of the University at large than as a colleague in the Law School. Much of what I have to say therefore derives from a different context than those who will write of his distinguished contributions to the law.

Because he was part of that remarkable group of faculty members who came to the University immediately after World War II and are now retiring, it is impossible to separate him from them. The trauma and dislocations of the war years gave them a common bond, they shared common problems of acquiring housing, raising young families, and helping to cope with the problems of a university trying desperately to accommodate the veterans who were seeking an education.

Perhaps because they were caught up in the problems of the community as well as of the University, they were not only widely acquainted across colleges and departments, but were involved in a wide assortment of matters outside their own fields.

So it was that I came to know, respect, admire, and have a deep affection for Hart Wright. However engrossed in his own immediate work he might be, he never failed to respond to a request to help resolve other problems which the University might have. To take but one example, he was Chairman of the Board of Student Publications during much of the student turbulence of the late 1960's and early 1970's. A major function of that Board is to give "advice" to the editors of the student newspaper, *The Michigan Daily*. Since the period was characterized by many changes in student habits, mores and language, the task of giving "advice" to the headstrong editors of *The Daily* was unenviable to say the least. It absorbed endless hours and offered almost no rewards. It was the duty of his Board to preserve the precious liberties of the first amendment to the United States Constitution, to co-exist with the perennial desire of students

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to outrage their elders, and to try to see that the paper printed reasonably accurate information as opposed to totally inflammatory rhetoric. It took a strong person to cope with all of that and still retain a sense of perspective. Hart not only did it, he did it extremely well, and he did it longer than anyone had a right to expect. It was the kind of selfless contribution which makes the difference between whether a university can deal constructively with the many issues which divide its constituents or whether it becomes an indifferent bureaucracy, perhaps less turbulent but also less creative.

Hart's efforts with the Board of Student Publications were duplicated many times over, both within the University and in the community. To any assignment he brought vigor, an aggressive but sensitive presence, generosity of both mind and spirit, a delightful sense of humour, a sharp and incisive mind, and a firm set of values which came from his early years in Oklahoma, his family, his devotion to his country, and his unending quest for a better and more humane world for all of us.

He will be remembered by all his hundreds of students as one of the very best teachers they ever had; by his colleagues as a distinguished lawyer and a forthright opponent and proponent; and by his legion of friends as a presence felt as strongly in his absence as when he was with us.

Though taps have now been blown, those among us who knew Hart Wright will never forget him or fail to smile when, in countless ways, we feel his indomitable spirit in our midst.