

# Michigan Law Review

---

Volume 82 | Issue 3

---

1983

## L. Hart Wright

Sally Katzen

*Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, Washington, DC*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr>



Part of the [Legal Biography Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sally Katzen, *L. Hart Wright*, 82 MICH. L. REV. 407 (1983).

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol82/iss3/5>

This Tribute is brought to you for free and open access by the Michigan Law Review at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Law Review by an authorized editor of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

## L. HART WRIGHT

*Sally Katzen\**

*A professor is more than a teacher because in addition to teaching, a professor attempts to instill in his students important standards or values.*

Those words, as best I can recall, were the first words I heard in Tax II at 9:00 a.m. on a Thursday morning many years ago. L. Hart Wright went on to say that, while it might seem trivial, he thought punctuality was fairly important to budding lawyers, and that therefore he had been sorely grieved that one of his students in Tax I the preceding semester never — and that was not an overstatement or at least not much of an overstatement — seemed to be able to get to the class on time. He further explained that he had tried everything he could think of, including calling on her<sup>1</sup> as soon as she opened the doors, as she walked down the aisle toward her seat, or while she was taking off her coat. Sadly, he reported, he had not been successful in altering her tardy behavior. In desperation he sought the advice of his young daughter — without, of course, revealing the identity of the student — and, he told the class, she said, after reflection, “Daddy-o . . . you should be nice to her.” With that, he stepped back from the podium, pulling with him what appeared to be a drawer or a shelf. Within seconds, it became clear that he was carrying a tray, and as he came up the aisle to my seat I made out eggs, bacon, toast, juice, coffee, and fruit. In a second he was standing before me, saying “Sooo, pleaaasee . . . won’t you try to come to this class on time.”

\* \* \*

L. Hart Wright was a great Professor because he did more than teach. I vaguely remember one or two sections of the Code; I shall never forget his lesson on punctuality. I have the impression that we talked about what the law was; I recall quite clearly that we explored at length why it was that way and whether it should be that way. Hart was stimulating as a professor because he was interested in, and

---

\* Member, Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, Washington, D.C. B.A. 1964, Smith College; J.D. 1967, University of Michigan. — Ed.

1. At that time, women students comprised about 2.5% of the class, so the use of the female gender substantially narrowed the field of potential targets.

excited about, the subjects he taught, and he made them come alive with folksy analysis, anecdotes, and pure whimsy.

I have some difficulty distinguishing between Hart as a professor, as a counselor, and as a dear friend who was one of the main reasons I kept finding good cause to return to Ann Arbor after my graduation. But whatever the role, there were certain undisputable truths that came through loud and clear: there is room for common sense in our profession. There is much to be said for telling it like it is (well before that became a cliché). It never hurts to ask why (or why not). And everything improves with a dash of humor, best of all when it is directed at ourselves.

L. Hart Wright is best remembered not as someone who taught hundreds of would-be tax practitioners or revenue agents, but as someone who brought law to life and life to many lawyers. His unique blend of humor and humanity touched those who came in contact with him in many and varied ways. Case in point: an ex-student of his who always — and that's not an overstatement or at least not much of an overstatement — now gets to where she should be on time.<sup>2</sup>

---

2. At least I don't sign up for classes at 8:00 a.m. Wednesday through Saturday.