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Burton R. Lamb

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## DEDICATIONS TO DEAN WILLIAM L. WILKS

In re: Dean William L. Wilks,\* Who  
Achieved Great Things Without Boasting,  
and Suffered Inevitable Setbacks Without  
Making Excuse.

Burton R. Lamb, *Dean Emeritus*  
The Dickinson School of Law  
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It was the first day of September, 1970, and with a strong sense of smugness, I looked down at the fully executed contract of employment that glowed back at me from the top of my desk. On impulse I telephoned Judge Shughart, President of the Dickinson School of Law, and informed him that we had just hired an assistant professor of law named William L. Wilks, who was some day going to become dean of the law school.

Judge Shughart seemed pleased, and after asking me to thank the search committee for a job well done, added: "Now if you can get rid of the present dean, you will have my undying gratitude."

As predicted, William L. Wilkes did become dean of the law school on October 15, 1977.

Was the prediction of 1970 the result of a mysterious prescience, or of clairvoyance or inspired prophecy? It was none of these, of course. It was only that after working thirty-four years in a gray hospital for the treatment of corruption called a courthouse, I was able, with some degree of accuracy, to decipher the mysterious hieroglyphics of character; to separate the dross from the gold. In the case of William L. Wilks, the refinement was easy, for the gold was overwhelmingly predominant.

The faculty selection committee had hardly begun interviewing

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\* Dean William L. Wilks retired as Dean of the Dickinson School of Law on June 30, 1987.

candidate Wilks before it realized that the so-called interview was a two-way street with the candidate doing some serious probing of his own. His casual, polite questions concerning the faculty, the school, the curriculum and the organization of the institution were not those of a job-seeking youngster looking for a place to open a career; they were those of a keenly intelligent young man hunting for a medium of expression for his talents. His moving eyes took snapshots of places, equipment and personnel, and it was easy to see that if we were to get the services of this pleasant young man we had to be the salesman. Figuratively, the man was biting the dog!

When the future Dean visited the Dickinson School of Law and its environs, he brought with him his charming and intelligent wife and the two eldest of their four lovely children. At the search committee reception held that first night, I looked with pleasure at the adoring eyes of his children as they watched their father move from group to group. I also watched closely as the candidate's wife made a mental appraisal of the quality of the hosts. It was clear that this interview was a family affair and that no step would be taken by that family without a full membership consultation. It was also clear that the candidate, despite his affability was not flaccid; he was a man of compassion, fully aware of his own merits, confident but not arrogant. Of such stuff, great teachers are made.

From his curriculum vitae we knew, of course, that the candidate, armed with an academic scholarship, had entered a prestigious Ivy League college at a time when most persons of his age were still in high school. We also knew that in due course he had graduated from an even more prestigious law school, after which his country, finding that it needed him, cordially invited him to join the armed services. And as could be expected, the record was clear that he had discharged his duties satisfactorily. We also discovered that after leaving the army, he had joined a newly-formed but busy law firm in his home town of Fort Wayne, Indiana, becoming its principal trial attorney.

While the Wilks family was considering whether it liked Carlisle and the Dickinson School of Law, the search committee quickly decided that William Wilks had all of the necessary personal and academic qualifications to become a teacher of which any law school would be proud.

That appraisal was an accurate measure of the man who later, as a teammate of Judge Shughart, helped to bring the Dickinson School of Law into its present state of greatness. When the history

## DEDICATIONS TO DEAN WILKS

of the law school is finally written, these two men will be remembered as two of the brightest stars in its galaxy.

The prophets Nostradamus and Mother Shipton of Yorkshire may rest easily in their graves, for I shall not detract from their glory. Anyone of reasonable intelligence could have made the same prediction about William Wilks as I did, for even a dullard can see that when a bird walks it has wings.



# DEAN WILKS:

TEACHER

BUILDER

MODEL

FRIEND

*The Dickinson Law Review Staff*

