

## PROFESSOR ANTHONY RENZO: A REMEMBRANCE

Brian L. Porto\*

Tony Renzo's brave spirit watches over us and encourages us as we go about the important work of training lawyers at Vermont Law School. His continued presence became clear to me just a few weeks after his death, as I prepared for the spring semester by compiling a course packet for Legal Writing II, a course Tony taught often and well. Flipping through the completed packet to make sure the pages were in order, I happened to focus on the following words at the beginning of one Eighth Circuit case: "Anthony Renzo, Des Moines, Iowa for the Plaintiff." Missing the conversations I had enjoyed with Tony while we were colleagues, I smiled at seeing his name in print, consoled a bit by knowing that he would accompany my students and me through Legal Writing II, inspiring me to inspire them by setting high standards, yet offering warm encouragement.

The case that Tony argued before the Eighth Circuit featured a free-speech claim against an Iowa school district by a high school student who had been dismissed from the basketball team for criticizing her coach. Seeing his name among the participating attorneys reminded me of who he was and of the considerable assets he brought to the legal academy. Tony was a passionate defender of individual rights who cared deeply about the people he served and a veteran litigator whose advocacy skills had been tested repeatedly in courtroom combat. Law professors are often criticized for not having been "in the arena," but nobody could say that about Professor Renzo.

Indeed, Tony's experience as a litigator paid enormous dividends for his students upon his arrival at Vermont Law School in 2001. The best indicators of that are the testimonials to Tony's inspirational teaching offered by his former students.<sup>1</sup> The testimonials reveal that when he taught, Tony wielded a velvet hammer; that is, he demanded excellence and did not tolerate slackers or whiners, but he always cushioned his critiques with, in one former student's words, "a healthy dose of encouragement." Other former students have recalled Tony's "kind heart and indomitable spirit," "endless patience for questions," and "constant reminders to write clearly and succinctly." One graduate remembered his adherence to the famous maxim of Justice Louis Brandeis: "There is no such thing as great writing; there is only great rewriting." But Tony received perhaps the

---

\* Professor of Law, Vermont Law School. B.A., University of Rhode Island, 1974; Ph.D., Miami University (Ohio), 1979; J.D., Indiana University-Bloomington, 1987.

1. See *Tony Renzo Remembrances*, VT. L. SCHOOL, <http://forms.vermontlaw.edu/tonyrenzo/> (last visited Feb. 29 2016).

ultimate complement a legal writing teacher can ever receive from the former student who wrote, "I brood over words because of you."

Tony's considerable experience as a litigator enabled him to impart priceless lessons about oral and written advocacy to his students in Legal Writing II, Appellate Advocacy, and the Civil Rights Litigation seminar, and to the members of the Emory Moot Court Competition team, which he coached. As a professor, he transferred to his students the loyalty he had previously shown to clients, prompting the affectionate and grateful reminiscences noted here. But Tony also became a scholar, producing several probing articles like the one that follows. His writings remind us of the need for democratic societies to check government's urge to sacrifice individual liberties on the altar of security when faced with perceived external threats.

Thus, Tony's rich professional life encompassed the roles of advocate, teacher, and scholar. But I will also remember him as my colleague and my friend. Indeed, I will always remember his laughter, as we shared late-afternoon stories about places we had been, people we had met, and lessons we had learned earlier in life. Both of us were befuddled, and a bit chagrined, by the increasing dominance of technology in our daily work lives, but we usually ended up laughing about those feelings, too. And that is how I will remember Tony: smiling, laughing, and saying, "Have a good weekend, Partner." A deep humanity always tempered his professionalism, and that humanity makes me grateful to have known him.