

# Mercer Law Review Luncheon Symposium Remarks for Jack Sammons

by Harold S. Lewis, Jr.\*

Jack's career has been conventional only in his continuity at a single law school for almost thirty-five years. (As for his time at Antioch School of Law, Tim Floyd reminded us at the Symposium dinner last night that while at Antioch, Jack did pioneering and influential work on lawyer competency. It would be surprising if even Jack remembers he was there before arriving at Mercer Law School, determined to shake it up.).

Institutional longevity aside, Jack's career has been exceptional, marked by a multitude of concerns that he somehow wove together. Whatever the coursework or scholarly task at hand, his eye was also on the relationships among our students; the interactions among them, their teachers and the Law School administration; the School's role within the national academy (where he eschewed fashion); and the desirability of shaping course content and instruction not only to the larger purposes of law, but even more to its institutions of practice. Thus clinical education for Jack went well beyond a vehicle for skills training; it was a key part of the student's introduction to the better mores of a profession. Similar curriculum design, to which he recurrently returned in intense bursts at several critical times in his career, meant much more than collecting the subjects, concepts, and skills a hypothetical lawyer might need to know. It was instead a means to connect the particular students of *this* Law School to the right teachers, at the most fruitful moments, of what he viewed as just the first three years of a lifetime of legal study, practice, jurisprudence, and ethics.

---

\* Professor of Law Emeritus, Mercer University School of Law. Columbia College (B.A., 1969); Stanford University School of Law (J.D., 1972).

But there was struggle at the heart of his integration project. It was triggered by the tension between, on one hand, social habits that seemingly develop naturally among clusters of similarly minded individuals; and, on the other, the institutions that inevitably form to maintain those habits and expand their spheres of influence. Jack was always more at peace with the habits. In his view, Alasdair and Aristotle generally triumphed over Kant and Plato—except, as John O. Cole would remind us, when they didn't.

So the normative habits of good baseball players—those who seek the internal goods of the game by observing the customary practices of that particular endeavor—are unalloyed virtues in the world according to Jack. In contrast, the NCAA and professional leagues—institutions ostensibly dedicated to the propagation and preservation of such practices—are far more prone to corruption. This tension between the habits of colleagues and the institutions they construct around them is acute for legal and other professionals. We inevitably assemble an institutional structure, however minimal. For example, if our self-discipline fails, there is the discipline of other lawyers, the organized bar and ultimately the judiciary.

"Corruption." Jack was among the first to decry publicly the behaviors of large law firms, using that word to describe their evolution. I recall telling him at the time that he exaggerated. But if "corruption" refers to systematic, fundamental, unjustified departures from the virtuous foundational habits of such firms, surely he was prophetic. Were he teaching today, we might hope he'd extend the reach of this condemnation to many other important institutions, among them government, business, medicine, accounting, the clergy and education. Except he probably wouldn't, because his protocol requires him to stick to his own profession's knitting.

Even within the scope of a piece of academic writing, these would be quite a few considerations to juggle. Yet Jack, to as great a degree as any legal academic of his time, succeeded in regularly integrating them not only into his tightly reasoned scholarship but also into student advising; classroom and clinical teaching; faculty deliberations; law school administration; rulemaking, professional development, and adjudication in the organized bar; and community activism, not least his work on behalf of Macon's Ocmulgee tribe.

How did he do this? Maybe it had something to do with his typology on the Meyers-Briggs personality test. As I recall, Jack and Linda Edwards were one of the few members of our law faculty whom the test deemed creative. The rest of us stood in a crowded corner designated for those the test deemed better suited to work as security guards or

wardens. (I seem to recall Joe Claxton joining me in that clutch of frustrated law enforcers.)

In an era that mostly prized specialization, Jack was a Renaissance synthesizer. His students and his colleagues are very glad he was. He always saw his Law School, at least in potential, as a city on the hill. And he gifted his students, and us, with a remarkable sense of professional wholeness.

Congratulations, Jack. In thirty-five years, you have really done only one job. But it was a big one, with many important facets that you somehow held together, and you did it very, very well. The Law School and the profession thank you. We stand greatly in your debt.

\*\*\*