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**CHIEF JUDGE JOSEPH M. GETTY: THE MASTER OF
COLLEGIALITY**

BRYNJA M. BOOTH*

It has been a privilege to serve with Judge Getty on the Court of Appeals since I joined the Court in April 2019. Someday, when I look back on my judicial career, I am certain that one regret I will have is that our time on the bench together as colleagues was not longer. I first met Judge Getty after I was appointed to the Court. Almost instantly, he became a friend and mentor.

Having served as the most junior member of the Court for a nearly three-year-period, Judge Getty was more than happy to pass the “junior judge” torch to me. In my first month on the bench, he spent a great deal of time teaching me the ropes. He provided me with suggestions on how to tackle the monthly tasks of a Court of Appeals judge, from the seemingly endless stack of petitions for writ of certiorari, to preparing for oral arguments and monthly conferences. In relation to my role as the junior judge who must speak first at the Court’s monthly conference, he provided guidance on how to lead the discussion.

Judge Getty counseled me that, no matter how busy I became working on my own opinions, it was important that I show consideration to our colleagues by setting my work aside to give prompt consideration to our colleagues’ opinions when they were circulated. Given his love for history, he immediately lent me his copy of Carroll T. Bond’s book, *The Court of Appeals of Maryland, A History*, so that I would have a greater appreciation for the history of our Court.¹

He has taught me many things, but I will focus here on just one—the value of collegiality. I remember one of the first things he told me was that, upon *his* appointment, he was surprised at how isolating the job could be. With the geographic distance between each judge’s resident chambers and the intense workload, he mentioned that you had to make an intentional effort to interact with your colleagues and other members of the judiciary as a whole.

During my time on the bench, I have considered Judge Getty to be the “Great Unifier” of the Court and its various chambers. He united us through

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1. CARROLL T. BOND, *THE COURT OF APPEALS OF MARYLAND, A HISTORY* (1928).

food, practical jokes, history lessons, quizzes, and laughter. While others have discussed his love of history, I will share that Judge Getty has a fondness for nesting dolls. When a new judge joined the Court, he would bring out his set of nesting dolls of historic figures and give the new judge a “test” to see how many dolls they can correctly identify. I have it on good authority that, during law clerk interviews, he would occasionally pull out his nesting dolls and administered these quizzes to prospective clerks.

Judge Getty enjoys telling people that, in days of yore, our Court had a chef. Because the General Assembly saw fit to remove the Court chef from the judiciary budget many decades ago, Judge Getty often filled that role. I recall emerging from a Court conference and finding him in the kitchen ladling into bowls for his colleagues a delicious split pea and ham soup that he had made over the weekend. During the conference that had concluded minutes before our lunch, Judge Getty had circulated a dissenting opinion that exceeded the page length of the majority opinion. Although we disagreed on the ultimate outcome in that case, by his example, Judge Getty showed us how to leave our differences in the conference room and share one another’s company over lunch. After another conference, he presented a rhubarb pie that he baked using the rhubarb from his garden. In August, he was famous for distributing bags of tomatoes to colleagues and staff in quantities that could feed an army. Additionally, at our Court lunches, he always had the kitchen stocked with apples and chocolates.

Lunches with Judge Getty were not limited to his colleagues on the Court. He regularly organized lunches with law clerks from other chambers during which he would regale the clerks with history and geography lessons. Sometimes these lunches involved show-and-tell items, such as a historic “jury selection” box that he acquired at an auction in Crumpton. During a lunchtime lecture series, he explained to the law clerks that, back in the day, the wooden jury box had been used in the Circuit Court for Kent County where jurors were selected from random marbles placed in a box.

It was not unusual for me to find my law clerks studying for one of Judge Getty’s pop quizzes. An example of this occurred during one session of the Court when I went into my law clerks’ office to discuss a case and noticed that the law clerks had a Maryland map displayed on their computer screen with the various counties identified. When I asked them what they were doing with the map, they explained that, at the next lunch event, Judge Getty was going to give a quiz to see who could correctly name all the counties in the State. He thought that this was basic, but important, information that every law clerk should know, especially the clerks who grew up in another state. At this point, I should mention that all the Getty games and quizzes were voluntary—you could always say no. With that disclaimer in mind, another event might involve a chocolate tasting where the participants tasted different

chocolates to see which one was the best. However, prior to the tasting, Judge Getty might not disclose that one of the chocolates was 100 percent bittersweet dark cocoa. If you asked my law clerks to honestly answer the question of “what is the best part of the clerkship in the Booth chambers,” more than one of them would likely respond that “it was the time spent with the Getty chambers during our lunchtime discussions.”

After he became Chief, I observed Chief Judge Getty’s collegiality on display not just on the fourth floor of 361 Rowe Boulevard, but across the entire State. As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, in his role as Chief, he endeavored to interact on a personal level with all members of the judiciary and not simply the judges and staff of the appellate courts. He included me in some of these interactions that I referred to as the “Getty Magical Mystery Tour”² because, when you woke up in the morning, you never knew how the day would unfold. A typical day on the Getty Magical Mystery Tour might start with a 7:30 breakfast in Wicomico County and end with a visit to Cecil County in the afternoon. For those who are unfamiliar with the geography of the Eastern Shore, that’s covering a lot of miles. At each courthouse, Chief Judge Getty would meet with every person in the building, from the administrative judge to every employee. He thanked each employee for their service, and in particular, their hard work during the pandemic. He believed that it was important to convey to each member of the judiciary that their work was valuable and meaningful. I admired his desire to express his appreciation and have no doubt that these personal interactions have made a difference in the lives of many.

Judge Getty reminded us each day of the importance of collegiality—that it is important to take breaks from the work of the Court to interact with one another through laughter and fellowship. He taught us that our interactions around the lunch table were just as important as the interactions around our conference room table. I will be forever grateful for the many lessons that I learned from him, but especially, the art of collegiality, “Getty-style.”

I have it on good authority that Judge Getty is not going to disappear from the halls of the Court of Appeals building any time soon. Rumor has it that he might author the sequel to the Carroll Bond’s history of the Court, which concludes at the beginning of the twentieth century. There is no better person suited to write this history.

I hope to have the opportunity to continue to sit with Judge Getty in his capacity as a senior judge when one of my colleagues is unable to sit. I look forward to the benefit of not only his brilliant legal mind, but his friendship

2. The Beatles released the “Magical Mystery Tour” album on November 27, 1967. THE BEATLES, MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR (EMI 1967).

and fellowship, and lunch—where there will always be apples, and dark chocolate with a purity content of no greater than sixty percent.