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NEW LAWYER MEETS NEW JUDGE: A LAW CLERK'S REFLECTIONS

KAITLIN E. LEARY*

I had the honor, and the pleasure, of serving as Chief Judge Getty's law clerk during his very first term on the bench. This also happened to be my first job out of law school and, practically speaking, my first real job ever. During that year, I learned a lot about the law and how to be a good lawyer, as one would expect from a clerkship on Maryland's highest court. But I also learned a lot from Chief Judge Getty about how to be a good mentor, a good leader, and a good person. I write to share my observations and reflections on what makes Chief Judge Getty eminently qualified to hold that title.

The first word that comes to mind to describe Chief Judge Getty is *humble*. I can imagine him reading this right now and shuddering at my repeated use of the epithet "Chief Judge Getty." He would never introduce himself that way to others, instead insisting that everyone—including law clerks, interns, courthouse staff, and visitors—call him "Joe." And he really meant it, too. Being known as "Joe" always seemed more important to him than being known as "Judge." Out of respect for his title, I never heard anyone oblige with this request, but that didn't stop his insistence.

Another word that comes to mind when thinking about Chief Judge Getty is *welcoming*. He always made everyone feel welcome in his presence, but it was more than that. He didn't just welcome people to come and talk with him, he *invited* them to do so. And once you were there, he made you feel like he was genuinely interested in—and perhaps even excited about—what you had to say.

One example of Chief Judge Getty's welcoming nature is the fact that he would never—and I mean *never*—close the door to his chambers. I wouldn't call this an "open-door policy" so much as an "open-door practice." I hesitate to call it a "policy" because I never got the impression that this was something he had formally considered and intentionally adopted. Instead, leaving his door open to anyone—and everyone—who wished to come into his chambers was simply what he did; it was instinctual. This practice

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contributed to the extremely collegial and collaborative atmosphere that I consider to be a hallmark of my clerkship with Chief Judge Getty.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one cannot accurately describe Chief Judge Getty without using the word *fair*. He approached every case that came before him with a blank slate—no biases in favor of the plaintiff or the defendant, the petitioner or the respondent. He carefully considered the arguments put forth by each side, as well as the recommendations of his law clerks. And he never indicated how he intended to vote on a particular case until after oral arguments. Although he never expressly explained to me the rationale behind this practice (because I never asked), I always assumed it was because he thought it would be disrespectful to decide the outcome of a case before the attorneys had had every chance to present their arguments to the Court.

It's no secret that Chief Judge Getty disagreed with a number of my recommendations for how to resolve the cases that came before the Court during my clerkship. But whether he agreed with me or not, he always carefully considered what I had to say. And when he disagreed, he thoughtfully explained his reasoning so that I knew exactly how to write the first draft of the opinion to reflect his understanding of the case and the law. In those instances in which we initially disagreed on the outcome, Chief Judge Getty probably convinced me to change my views about as many times as I convinced him to change his—which is to say, not very many. But there was a deep mutual respect between us, and our contrasting views helped both of us to sharpen the legal analysis necessary to resolve these tough cases. I will always admire Chief Judge Getty for the thoughtful, respectful, and considerate manner in which he disagreed with me and anyone else with whom he disagreed.

Although his time as a judge was relatively short (six years), and his time as Chief Judge even shorter (less than a year), I think I speak for the majority of the Maryland legal community when I say that Chief Judge Getty's tenure has made a lasting impact on both the judiciary and the wider legal community. And, speaking only for myself, I can say with absolute certainty that he has made a lasting impact on me, both personally and professionally.