

Carl Hawkins, Teacher

BY MONTE STEWART, '76

Two phrases suggest the essence of Carl Hawkins as a teacher.

CALM MASTERY

The first one is “calm mastery.”

The “calm” was reflected in Carl’s even, unflappable ways throughout the class period. He was patient in awaiting student responses and then heard those responses out before following with another question or comment quietly put. This calm was so characteristic of him that the one deviation I ever saw is still vivid in memory. One day in the Federal Courts class, he put a question to a student. In the response, the ratio of bold bluff over utter lack of preparation was too great for even Professor Hawkins to endure calmly. It wasn’t that he raised his voice; he didn’t. And it wasn’t that he vented scorn or sarcasm; he didn’t do that either. But there was definitely an edge to his voice that conveyed a message beyond the few words he spoke; that message was a mixture of rebuke for not treating seriously what merits seriousness and of no tolerance for such a performance. On reflection, that message’s power (and it was powerful) surely derived in large measure from his otherwise constant calm in the classroom setting.

The “mastery” was there, too: a very large, unquestionable, virtually tangible reality. In Torts class, he had literally written the book (not to mention volumes of other stuff on the subject). In Federal Courts class, he used what he calmly announced to be the best law school textbook of all time, Hart

& Wechsler’s *The Federal Courts and the Federal System*, and although he had not written that book, he had mastered it. His experience in teaching these subjects was so vast and deep that no classroom exchange ever caught him off balance. He handled every pitch with, well, complete mastery, so much so that his classroom performance made me think of Ted Williams’ boast that he could always see and react to the rotation on a pitched ball, whether fastball, curve, or slider. Carl Hawkins was a living, breathing, walking embodiment of the old adage that a lawyer’s job is to know the law. And what that embodiment taught may well have been the most valuable fruit any student ever gathered in his classroom. By what he was, Carl taught what mastery means in the life of a striving professional.

PLAIN HUMILITY

The second phrase comes from the Book of Mormon: “plain humility” (Ether 12:39). To return to the notion of a ratio—this time, of achievement over air of superiority—Carl’s ratio is unmatched, with its huge numerator and *de minimis* denominator. Because of Carl’s plain humility, the students were not nearly as conscious of his achievements as they were of the achievements of other faculty members, although the faculty was certainly conscious of them. Rex Lee spoke truly when he said, as he often did, that Carl Hawkins’ decision to join the charter faculty was—after the Church’s commitment of adequate resources to create a first-rate law school—the most important step toward the school’s success. That is truth exactly because of Professor

Hawkins’ vast achievements in the world of legal scholarship while at the University of Michigan. That vast achievement (and to say this is not to diminish the contribution of the other charter members of the faculty) was, to again quote Rex, an “instant credibility builder” for the school. And yet, plain humility. What a remarkable quality this was in Carl Hawkins, and because of it, he was a better, more effective classroom teacher. In Carl Hawkins’ classroom, ego never competed with or got in the way of pure teaching.

INFLUENCE FOR GOOD

I suggest that Carl Hawkins’ finest moment as a BYU Law School teacher actually came some six months before the Law School opened its doors and while he was, technically anyway, still a University of Michigan law professor. February 1973 saw a quintessential Rex Lee promotional, recruiting, and fund-raising event. It occurred one evening in a room at the Wilkinson Center, and the turnout was impressive: prospective students, many family members, lawyers from a number of communities, a few members of the emerging charter faculty, and others with some interest in the new Law School. After Rex with his usual *savoir faire* led us through the preliminaries, he turned the remainder of the time over to Carl Hawkins.

Carl spoke calmly, in a conversational tone. He spoke a bit about his recently made decision to leave Michigan and help start the new Law School at BYU, yet the focus was never on himself but rather on the great enterprise of the new Law School. He spoke of find-

ing himself on a plane flight with a person he never named but whom we came to understand, through just a few of Carl’s words, to be one of the strong, preeminent “pillars” of the American legal profession. Their conversation turned to the new Law School at BYU (as Carl spoke, it was as if we were all standing a few feet away and listening in on them), and the pillar in deep seriousness said to Carl that years hence the founding of that school would rank as one of most important milestones in the progress of the profession.

To repeat, Carl’s tone throughout was calm and conversational. Yet his words still qualify, more than 37 years later, as the most effective advocacy I have ever witnessed. My father was present. His was the life of a cowboy, a construction worker, a businessman. “Two-fisted” was an adjective that he liked, and it applied to him. He was not easily impressed. As we walked out, he turned to me and said with utter conviction: “That man can be my advocate any time, any day, no matter what kind of fix I’m in.”

That evening, calm mastery and plain humility made for one of the great teaching moments of my life and, I suspect, of the lives of many others present. We were taught. We were edified. Our eyes were opened to see and understand what before we had not really seen nor understood. And the teaching moved us to action; many present that evening committed themselves to the great creative endeavor that was the new Law School. I express my heartfelt thanks to a man whose calm mastery and plain humility made him a teacher to influence the lives of so many of us for good.