

Oklahoma Law Review

Volume 34 | Number 1

1-1-1981

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Recommended Citation

Judson S. Woodruff, *Eugene Kuntz and Private Practice*, 34 OKLA. L. REV. 22 (1981),
<https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/olr/vol34/iss1/7>

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EUGENE KUNTZ AND PRIVATE PRACTICE

JUDSON S. WOODRUFF*

When I first entered private practice in 1963, my initial Oklahoma City interview was conducted by Gene Kuntz, a senior partner in what was then McAfee, Taft, Cates, Kuntz & Mark, which I later joined. The interview had been arranged some weeks earlier when my letter to the law school from out of state was answered by Professor Gene Kuntz. It was a little like an old Alec Guinness movie, with Guinness playing all the parts.

After I joined the law firm, I learned that Gene had for some years neatly divided his week, spending Monday through Wednesday in the law office handling with evident zest and uncommon skill enough work to fill an ordinary lawyer's total week, and on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday conducting a full class load at Norman. At the same time, I also learned, Gene was hard at work on his multi-volume treatise on oil and gas law; was serving as one of the two Oklahoma editors for the *Oil and Gas Reporter*; was an elder in his church; and played zither (so help me) in the OU Faculty Orchestra. That anyone could operate at any level of competence in so many demanding and diverse areas all at once would be impressive enough. For two reasons, I will always remember Gene's performance during this period, which ended when he was named Dean of the Law School in 1965, as dazzling.

In the first place, everything Gene did in the law office was done at a consistently high level of excellence, in every way comparable to the standards that he set in the law school, to which others will address themselves in this issue. Gene's academic background was a strong asset in his practice in those years. His broad and current knowledge of the law and his awesome power of recall were reflected in every aspect of his counselling and draftsmanship. Despite his renown in the oil and gas field, moreover, Gene's expertise extended to other areas, including taxation and estate planning. Equally important were his practical bent and his inventiveness. Although fully appreciating the limitations imposed by the relevant statutes and decisions, Gene was primarily concerned with his client's goals; he loved nothing more than finding a way—and it was often a brilliant new way—to “wire around the problem.” Added to these formidable strengths were Gene's in-

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valuable personality assets: his empathy and patience with clients, and his persuasiveness in the administrative and judicial cockpits where his practice often took him, to his personal delight. In the litigation arena, Gene was universally respected by both bench and bar (including his law partners) for his vigorous and effective advocacy. Gene was, in short, a Compleat Lawyer.

In the second place, and most impressive to me, although Gene operated under what must surely have been severe pressures caused by his compartmented life (I shudder to think of the problems involved in merely having to arrange with opposing counsel and courts to schedule all litigation conferences, hearings, and trials during the first three days of the week, just to mention one aspect of Gene's double life), Gene never appeared to be anything but calm and cheerful. His door was always open to even the youngest lawyer in the firm; he never seemed hurried; he never, not even once, lost his sense of humor. Whatever fires may have raged within, to all the world Gene remained outwardly and incredibly serene.

After Gene left the Dean's office in 1970, he rejoined our firm as counsel, and has been with us on every Monday since. The inevitable restrictions imposed by a one-day-a-week appearance have altered Gene's role but not lessened its value. Although we have been surprised at the significant number of client counselling and drafting jobs that can be accomplished within a single day each week, at least by Gene Kuntz, by far his most significant contribution has been his serving as the firm's guru (I wish we could list him that way on our letterhead). Like a file of ants, firm lawyers stream in and out of Gene's office every Monday seeking his knowledge and ideas on matters as disparate as the tax complications encountered in a large-scale acquisition, or the interpretation of an oil and gas lease provision, or the best way to "wire around" the Rule Against Perpetuities in a will, or a minor law firm administrative matter. Whoever the supplicant, and however involved or trivial his problem, Gene's reaction has remained constant: invariably friendly and invariably helpful.

Gene retires as a law teacher at the end of this school year. Others who write for this issue might understandably adopt a somber "end of an era" tone, perhaps even tinged with sadness. Not I. The lawyers in what is now known as McAfee & Taft are dancing in the corridors because upon his law school retirement, Gene begins a *four-day-a-week* law practice with us—easily the equivalent of any two ordinary (and good) lawyers, full time. I'll warn him, though; the line is already forming outside his office.