

Jeffrey Edwin Rockwell

Jeffrey Rockwell came to the Yale Law School in 1971, of an age with his classmates, but in many ways already a whole man. Jeff was a study of modesty and self-control. He had been born in New England but migrated with his family to Kansas, where he grew up. He had the style of the Connecticut Yankee, but enjoyed blending it with a certain midwestern understatement and dry humor. His composure, self-control and essentially sober, deeply dedicated approach to life were communicated clearly. Yet even in serious debate his eyes were quick with humor. A telling point would often be followed by a broad, warm smile.

Jeff's cultivated exterior was misleading. For all of his discipline and commitment to study, he had a deep sense of the importance of human relationships and a profound, almost mystical communion with nature. In his essay in his application to Yale he wrote, "If an individual is searching for a meaningful education, it is not to be found alone in university classrooms or library cubicles. . . . This is not to say, of course, that formal education is purposeless or dispensable; but unaugmented by significant outside experience, it is at best a shallow veneer. . . . There are constant inter-personal experiences in daily life; those of greatest value are often the experiences obtained from a closer affinity to nature. Whether with a group of friends or by oneself, the serenity of mind, the sense of accomplishment, the feeling for life and the knowledge of oneself that can be derived from mountaineering is unequalled in urban society."

Whatever reservation about the value of formal research he may have expressed on entering Yale, he worked hard on that aspect of his education and excelled. His Note in the *Yale Law Journal*¹ is as fine a testament to him as any person could inscribe. Jeff chose to write on the question of repatriation of prisoners of war. At the end of the Vietnam War, most Americans were interested in getting out, whatever the costs. But Jeff insisted that the political choices of POWs be respected as a matter of law, even if additional burdens were imposed on the United States. He reviewed the United States' record of treatment of POWs from the Second World War on, examined the

1. Note, *The Right of Nonrepatriation of Prisoners of War Captured by the United States*, 83 YALE L.J. 358 (1973).

basic human rights instruments of international law and quietly condemned any interpretation of the Geneva Convention which compromised the human rights of prisoners. His tragic sense of the likelihood of future wars in which the United States would be engaged pushed him to conclude his Note with the admonition that the United States "understand its responsibilities before it is again involved in a military action in which prisoners of war are captured, so that it can take the necessary steps from the outset to insure that the right of nonrepatriation is supported."

That Note and its message captured a good deal of its author: sharp intellect and keen analytical ability, always tempered by a concern for the consequences of choices on human beings. Jeff listened to the contentions of others carefully, always represented them fairly, but reached his own conclusions and stood by them. When Jeff first applied to Yale, one of his teachers at the University of Kansas gave it all cogent expression: "Mr. Rockwell maintained a wholesome and responsible attitude at a time when too many students had turned to cynicism and irresponsibility."

The correspondent concluded, "The universities of today need more students like Jeff Rockwell." And, one might add, more teachers like him too. All of us who knew Jeff are the richer for it; all of us who might have benefited from him as a friend, a lawyer or a teacher are the poorer because of his untimely death. His teachers and friends at Yale miss him and mourn him.

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