

room and talked as we had done in the old law building's hallways eighteen years ago. And even though he was not well, he was as intelligent and present as always.

Melvin Shimm was a role model for me in many ways. He was a scholar of great curiosity, of superior intellect, with a superior command of English. He was a gentleman—loyal and with a great sense of fairness and care for others. And he was a loving husband and a family man.

Melvin, I feel blessed to have known you, and I feel honored that you trusted me and called me your friend. I will miss you.

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One spring afternoon in 1953, Mel Shimm, serving a one-year fellowship at the University of Chicago Law School, ran into law professor Roscoe Steffen in the school's hallways. Steffen asked Mel what his plans were following the fellowship, and Mel replied he intended to find employment at a Chicago law firm. Steffen then told Mel that he had just spoken to a colleague of his at the Duke University School of Law and learned that Duke was looking for a new faculty member. He suggested Mel should consider it and later that afternoon called Joe McLean, Duke's dean at the time, to recommend Mel for the position. A very short time later, Mel was flown to Duke for an interview and returned to Chicago with an offer of employment to be an assistant professor of law.

The evening Mel returned, he reported the day's whirlwind events to his wife Cynia and carefully contemplated with her his new career options. The two were in their apartment's small bathroom, with Cynia sitting on the edge of the tub watching Mel unpack his toiletries from the short trip, when Mel said he thought he should take the Duke job and that the family should move to North Carolina. Cynia—who, like Mel, was most familiar with life in New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.—promptly began to cry. North Carolina. What kinds of Jews live in North Carolina?

Mel and Cynia together told me this story when I had the fortune to sit next to them at a recent dinner for the Duke Law faculty. I felt I could relate, somewhat, to the story. My wife and I had recently undergone our own academic job search. We were living in Boston, and before that San Francisco, had lived much of our lives in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., and believed that however whimsical the academic market would be, our most likely destination would be somewhere along the northeast corridor. When Duke called with an offer, we felt a mix of excitement and trepidation, the typical muddle of emotions when the winds of the academic job search land an entry-level candidate in an unfamiliar place. We were overjoyed at

the prospect of working with Duke's faculty and students, but North Carolina? What kinds of Jews live in North Carolina?

The answers to both the Shimms' question and to ours, asked almost precisely fifty years apart, invoke a rich history that begins long before 1953. But perhaps the most significant events in Durham's history occurred in recent decades, not just after Mel and Cynia arrived, but during the very time Mel occupied positions of leadership in the community. By the time my family and I arrived in the summer of 2003, we were met by a vibrant Jewish community with three lively synagogues, a Jewish day school, an active Jewish Federation, and countless cultural events. The community vitality we saw, and the comfort we felt after moving here, is in no small part a product of Mel's five decades of volunteer work.

When Mel and Cynia arrived in 1953, Durham's Jewish community was, as it had been since the turn of the century, home to a small but stable Jewish population of approximately three hundred and fifty people. Primarily descendants of immigrants from Eastern Europe, community members mostly worked as shopkeepers or workers in retail trades. Very few had any connection to Duke or to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and the Shimms were one of a very small number of Jewish families who exercised a strong commitment to the Jewish community while also expressing contemporary sensibilities and a preference for inclusive religious practice.

Growth and change came in the 1960s. From the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, the Durham-Chapel Hill area—driven by the achievements of its universities, the success of Research Triangle Park, and the erosion of segregation—experienced significant population growth, and, over this same period, the Jewish population more than tripled. Equally important, it was during this period that the community diversified. The occupations of community members stretched beyond the locus of small commercial enterprises, including expanding to embrace in significant numbers faculty at Duke and UNC-CH, and the community as a whole became more modern and cosmopolitan.

It was during this time of change that Mel assumed leadership responsibilities in the Jewish community. In 1967, Mel became president of Durham's conservative synagogue, which had been the arena that housed the community's internal debates between traditionalism and modernity. His deft intellect, very genteel manner, and long-time commitment to Jewish causes commanded respect from individuals in all camps, yet his leadership assertively directed the synagogue towards what he considered to be the community's future: one receptive to newcomers, open to pluralist expressions of Jewish practice, and eager to collaborate with university resources to build a vibrant cultural, intellectual, and religious—but not solely religious—community.

Mel's other contributions to Durham's Jewish community are well known. He served as Chairman of the Durham-Chapel Hill Jewish Federation from 1973–1975, he quietly inspired an impressive local effort during the worldwide campaign for Israeli Bonds during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and he returned to the synagogue's presidency—which one member likened to taking bitter medicine twice—from 1975–1978. He certainly was generous with his time and his talents. But those of us who came to Durham after the years of transition are particularly appreciative of his leadership.

Fifty years after Mel's arrival, Durham is still home to Jewish newcomers from the north, and they (we) are deeply grateful to find a vibrant community waiting.

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SPEECH: ON THE OCCASION OF MEL SHIMM'S RETIREMENT

APRIL 27, 1996

Those of us here tonight are part of a tradition we too seldom celebrate. Our tradition began in 1779, when George Wythe was appointed a professor of law in the College of William and Mary. It was only a few years later that our brother Shimm was appointed a Professor of Law at Duke. Because their careers were so close in time, it seems to me right to call attention tonight to certain similarities between the late Professor Wythe and our Mel.

George Wythe taught in all about two hundred law students. He instructed Jefferson that men are equal in their moral status and their right to participate in law and government and then assisted his student in drafting the Declaration of Independence. He taught his student John Marshall that the courts of Virginia had a duty to enforce the constitution of the Commonwealth and, as a judge, he provided an example of judicial review of legislation, invalidating an enactment supported by Virginia legislators, among whom was John Marshall. And he taught his student Henry Clay that the right of self-government requires forbearance. It is not imaginable that any other law teacher will ever teach three students whose careers made such a positive difference in the lives of so many people. Without all three of them, we would not be here tonight.

If it is not given to any one of us to teach men and women such as Jefferson, Marshall, and Clay, it is nonetheless proper on occasions such as this to remind ourselves of the importance of the tradition established by Wythe and of our part in that tradition, a part played so ably by our brother Shimm over the last forty-three years. His similarities to Wythe are numerous.