

RONALD D. ROTUNDA

*John Nowak**

— *“It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer.”*¹

As I await the birth of my first grandchild,² an event that will take place a few weeks after the writing of this tribute, I have had occasion to review a variety of children’s books. I discovered that one of the last sentences of *Charlotte’s Web*, quoted in the title of this tribute, describes, in part, why I am so thankful that I met Ronald Rotunda.

I suspect that anyone who is reading the articles dedicated to Ron already knows that he is a dedicated teacher, an outstanding scholar, and a true public servant. Yet Ron is more than all of his publicly known accomplishments: he is one of the most decent and kind individuals anyone is likely to meet; and he is the best friend anyone could have. Before I embarrass Ron by commenting on his personal traits, I should, in keeping with the genre of law review tributes, comment on his professional accomplishments.

Ron is a truly dedicated teacher. He spends considerable time preparing questions for each day’s classes, a task that, as the author of the casebook in every course he teaches, he could forego and still “get by.” After all, students are first-time course takers; they are easily fooled. If a law professor knows a little more than the students about the subject matter of the course, asks students easily anticipated questions, and gives high grades, that teacher can get excellent student reviews. But the easy path to student acceptance has never been Ron’s way. Instead, he carefully prepares course plans and class questions, so that his students get a worthwhile, as well as enjoyable, learning experience.

Ron has been an excellent, as well as prolific, scholar. The books and articles that we have coauthored are only a small part of Ron’s scholarship. Ron has written on a wide variety of topics and his writings have appeared in popular publications as well as scholarly journals. But

* *David C. Baum Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois College of Law; Williams Visiting Professor, Richmond University, The T. C. Williams School of Law.*

1. E.B. WHITE, *CHARLOTTE’S WEB* 192 (1952).

2. The most beautiful baby in history (Julia Moore Nowak) was born on (when else) February 24, 2003 (the 200th anniversary of *Marbury v. Madison*).

Ron has never written to be popular. Rather, Ron's publication record is the result of his belief that any professor worthy of that title has a duty to engage in scholarly discourse that advances the principles in which he believes, regardless of whether those principles are popular or unpopular. Ron's writings on corporate law focused on the need for openness and accountability in corporate governance, long before current corporate scandals made anti-insider management views popular. His writings on professional responsibility consistently advocate the creation of clearer rules to govern attorney behavior, so as to protect individual clients and the public. In constitutional law articles, he has written both in support and in opposition of rulings of the Burger and Rehnquist Courts. Whether he is writing about federalism or freedom of speech, he has always focused on how constitutional doctrines were meant to protect individual freedom. He may not be a libertarian, but Ron is a staunch defender of personal liberty.

In addition to his academic pursuits, Ron has been a public servant in the best sense of that phrase. Uncaring about how his activities might appear to political partisans, Ron served both on the staff of a Senate committee investigating a president who was a Republican (Nixon) and on the staff of a special counsel investigating a president who was a Democrat (Clinton). Ron has donated his time to the American Bar Association in a variety of capacities relating to the improvement of the model rules regarding the professional responsibilities of attorneys. Not limiting his public service to this country, Ron has aided eastern European countries in the drafting of constitutions and judicial codes, and he resided in Cambodia for months so that he could assist that country with the creation of its first democratic constitution.

As great as his achievements are in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and public service, Ron Rotunda is more than the sum of those achievements. I have never met anyone more concerned with acting in a charitable, honest, and moral manner than my friend Ron. Though we have often disagreed on minor matters (such as judicial appointments, politics, and Supreme Court decisions), he never let our disagreements affect our friendship. Indeed, I needed Ron's friendship more than he needed mine. Over the years, Ron has gone to great lengths to help me overcome ailments both small and great. He disregarded his own schedule and interests, when he tossed me in the back of his first Rolls Royce and drove me to the nearest hospital that could treat my kidney stones, which was 100 miles from Champaign. Ron took over my courses, without compensation, after I had a heart attack. His kindness to me over the years has been mirrored in his treatment of others. Ron is unfailingly honest and considerate. He is one of the finest people whom I have ever known. I never had a biological brother, but, in Ron, I had the best brother that anyone could want.