OVER the years, I've wandered into John McCoid’s office many times to discuss questions of common interest, sometimes at his invitation, more often by inviting myself. When I entered John’s office, usually I had a pretty good idea of what the question was, and if it was John’s question and not mine, about how to go about answering it. By the time I left, usually I didn’t. At least, all my preconceptions would have long since disappeared. Our colleague Tom Bergin used to tell me I was “often in error but never in doubt,” but more nearly the opposite was true when I left John’s office.

This sequence of events—the transformation of confident assertion into questioning puzzlement—occurred to me so frequently over my career that I should not have been surprised. I should have taken some question in Civil Procedure, or perhaps Conflicts of Law or Professional Responsibility, researched it thoroughly, and then walked into John’s office and asked him about it. That way, I might have escaped with my self-confidence intact. On the other hand, I can just see him now raising a question, reaching for a volume on his shelves, and puncturing that balloon too. This would have been really unsettling, but no less valuable for that.

No doubt some of John’s students have been unsettled in a similar way—and they have been similarly grateful. The very last class that John taught at the Law School was attended by members of the Class of 1971, who came to Charlottesville to recall their experience in a small section in Civil Procedure that John taught them in 1968. They tell me that he was called “the Cobra,” a nickname that must have been fastened upon him by students who were stung when they appeared unprepared in class. For the cobra, according to its dictionary definition, “is peaceably disposed, sel-

* O.M. Vicars Professor of Law, University of Virginia. John McCoid held this chair at the time he retired. I am honored to be his successor.
dom biting except in self-defense."¹ The first of these phrases accurately captures John's general demeanor and the second his intensity, although I have never found anything defensive—let alone offensive—in his relentless and exacting pursuit of the right answer to a legal question.

Nevertheless, John's students might have been misled in one respect. They might have believed that his use of the Socratic method was a purely pedagogical technique that he used only in the classroom. As one who has learned much from John, I think I can safely say that I learned it in the same way that his students did: by working through the questions and cases that we discussed together, not by relying upon some black-letter statement of legal rules. Even when John has given me the answer to a legal question—often the opposite of what I expected—he supplied the shading of doubts and qualifications that distinguish real understanding of the law from superficial acquaintance. In an era in which law professors try increasingly to construct general theories of the law, it is rare to find a law professor as interested as John in discovering what the limits of any general statement about the law might be.

Indeed, it is rare to find a law professor who knows as much law as John does. In characteristic fashion, he would never make any such claim for himself, but he doesn't need to. His careful and consistent work as a teacher, scholar, and colleague are sufficient to make this claim for him. For those who seek tangible evidence, his record of publication, from his leading articles on the Erie doctrine,² jury trial,³ and on multiparty disputes⁴ to his recent work on bankruptcy,⁵ is more than adequate proof. The articles on Civil

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¹ Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language 513 (2d ed. unabridged 1934).
Procedure formed my understanding of this subject—and the understanding of many others as well. Those on Bankruptcy are beyond my capacity to judge, but they saved me from several embarrassments when I attempted to write in a small corner of this field.

Despite the numerous articles that John has written on Bankruptcy, those of us who taught Civil Procedure, often using his casebook, have always regarded him as one of us. At some deep level, I think, the experience of having taught *Pennoyer v. Neff* has bound us irrevocably together. But our other colleagues on the faculty have also claimed John’s allegiance. As several of them wrote in a letter to John a few years ago: “Our law school prides itself on scholarship, and yet it is hard to name a single member of our faculty who exemplifies better than you what we refer to when we speak of the scholarly ethic, of serious thinking and writing, of free intellectual inquiry, and of ongoing productivity.”

Some in the legal profession aspire to positions of political power or influence, others to wealth or the control of powerful institutions, others to technical mastery and the esteem of their colleagues. “A lawyer’s lawyer” is the phrase reserved for those in the last group. Within the narrower profession of law teaching, some of us seek national recognition, others the appreciation of students, others the respect of fellow scholars. Many of us seek all three, and John, as much as any of us, has achieved them. But these goals, I think, are too narrow to characterize his career. The members of the Class of 1971 came back to attend his last class not just out of a sense of nostalgia for their days in the Law School, although no doubt they shared that sentiment; not out of the same high regard that my colleagues and I hold for John, although they shared that too. Instead, they came here to Charlottesville from


7 95 U.S. 714 (1877).

8 Letter from Saul Levmore, et al., to John McCoid (Nov. 21, 1991) (on file with author).
around the country because John exemplified their ideal of a law professor. If there are "lawyer's lawyers," then there are also lawyer's law professors. And John is one of them.