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## Robert Meisenholder

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## ROBERT MEISENHOLDER

George Neff Stevens\*

The time has come, with Bob's retirement, to investigate and confirm or lay to rest the rumor that floats through Condon's halls and classrooms that Professor Robert Meisenholder is indeed an absent-minded professor. For, if it be so, then it should be part of his legend. And, if not, it should be erased in spite of the warning that "The moving finger writes and having writ moves on."

To qualify as an investigator of things so intangible—to decide whether the rumor be ephemeral or legend—and so to place it in its proper niche, the investigator should have a long and reasonably close relationship with the suspect. I met Robert Meisenholder in the office of the Dean of the University of Michigan law School in the fall of 1939 where we were two of some dozen graduate law students. I lost track of him for a couple of years while he practiced law in New York City. But our paths crossed again while we were serving as officers in the United States Navy, stationed in Washington, D.C. We have been close friends since then. So, let's look at this rumor. Does Bob Meisenholder qualify for the appellation—Absent-Minded Professor?

First, a look at Bob's record as a teacher. So far as I know he never forgot to go to class, as some professors have; nor was he ever known to show up at the right class with the wrong notes, or at the wrong class no matter what notes. So, he fails this test.

He was never known to fall asleep while teaching a class. (I saw it happen once on a hot afternoon in a class I was taking.) Rather, Bob was an innovator, particularly in the teaching of evidence by the use of problems as opposed to the traditional case method. No evidence of absent-mindedness here.

Bob liked and enjoyed his students. I think he attended more student functions and spent more time visiting with students at their parties and in campus coffee lounges than any other faculty member I've known. No sign of absent-mindedness here.

His industry and scholarship speak for themselves. He was the first in our graduate law school group to earn the S.J.D. degree. He wrote his thesis while practicing with a prestigious New York City law firm—no mean accomplishment. His ability to engage in more than one activity at a time and never miss a beat is demonstrated by his research and writing in the

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fields of procedure and evidence, and in his outstanding contribution to the successful effort that led to the adoption of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for the State of Washington. Nothing absent-minded appears while he was engaged in these multiple activities.

In spite of his teaching, research, writing, and public service, Bob found time to engage in a number of interesting pursuits. He played the "licorice stick" (clarinet), and spent a summer, not so long ago, at Stan Kenton's summer camp for musicians. He collects old radios and radio tubes and fixes the radios so they play. He collects cut-glass. But he does not play bridge. His wife, Myra, is the expert in that area. Yet with all this activity, no sign of absent-mindedness.

But, in spite of this record, two incidents come to light and they must, in all fairness, be considered. Both happened a long time ago and before Bob became a law professor. On one of these occasions, back in 1940, Bob forgot to tell his bride of several months about a dinner invitation. On the other, in 1944 or 1945, Bob forgot to pick up a fellow officer who had been invited to dinner at the Meisenholder's. Absent-mindedness? Or was it simply the strain of graduate law study on the first occasion, and the strain of hours of translating Japanese documents on the other, that resulted in these incidents? Since Bob was not yet in teaching, I viewed them as indications of real potential for distinction in academic life, and that view has prevailed.

If you agree, we lay the ghost. Bob Meisenholder is not and never has been an absent-minded professor. Rather, he is a person who does what ever he is doing at the moment with an intensity that almost surpasses understanding. No wonder we admire and love him.