



Robert Bailey

The Professor

By Robert Bailey

Reviewed by Angie Cameron

Alabama football, rules of evidence and suspense—it may sound like a strange combination but Robert (“Bob”) Bailey has written a book that combines all three. Most book reviews in *The Alabama Lawyer* have been non-fiction, practical books about the practice of law, so I was intrigued by the assignment to read a “legal thriller” written by an Alabamian and fellow attorney. I am glad I took the assignment.

As the story opens, a young trial attorney, Tom McMurtrie, sits down at the Waysider restaurant (a familiar haunt for University of Alabama alums) with Coach (“The Bear”) Bryant to discuss his future. Not a bad start to the book for this Alabama graduate! The Bear is persuading his former player to return to Tuscaloosa and teach at the law school. Of course, McMurtrie obliges. As the book moves on, the reader may think this was just a fleeting reference to the main character’s football days, but as you will see, the end of the book does an excellent job of bringing it full circle.

Fast forward to the present day as Professor McMurtrie addresses his evidence class at the university. Following his meeting with Coach Bryant, Tom took the job as the evidence professor and has had a long distinguished career as a teacher. One of my favorite parts of the book was the description of the students in Professor McMurtrie’s class. It was very similar to my own evi-

dence class with Dean Gamble. Isn’t it funny how all law school classes have the same “characters?”

In addition to catching my attention by reminding me of my law school days, Bailey captures the reader’s attention in a different way with a horrible car accident. An 18-wheeler that is racing to make the next stop on schedule slams into another car turning into a gas station. The car contains a young family—mom, dad and young child. All involved die in the crash, and there is only one witness, the small-town gas station owner. The issue of who is at fault for the accident reappears later in the book, and this witness plays an important role.

The reader is brought back to the professor, who has been summoned before the board of trustees of the university. Although Tom has had a successful teaching career at the university, he finds himself in a little hot water because he lost his temper with a student during a trial ad competition. Despite his long tenure and good record, the university dean asks for his resignation/retirement. Tom is shocked and disappointed to learn that the person leading the charge behind this request is a former law school classmate, whom he considered a friend. To add insult to injury, Tom begins to have health issues and decides that this is an ideal time to resign and move to his family farm out in the country.

Before he can completely cut himself off from civilization, Tom receives a call from an old friend whose son and young family were the ones killed in the car accident involving the 18-wheeler. The friend is seeking advice about whether to file a lawsuit against the trucking company.

Tom decides the best referral for this case would be to a local lawyer with hometown connections. Ironically, the lawyer who comes to mind is the student with whom he had scuffle at the trial ad competition—the same student who essentially caused his forced retirement. Tom refers the case to the young attorney, Rick Drake. Unbeknownst to Drake, the professor arranges for one of his students to assist him in the trial preparations. As a recent graduate of law school, Drake is struggling to get his practice off the ground, and he is looking for the case that can make a name for him. The professor drops that case in Drake's lap. Initially, it appears that his ego is going to get in the way of accepting a case that he desperately needs, but his better judgment wins and he accepts the case from the professor.

As the story continues, the focus shifts from Professor

McMurtrie to Drake who is investigating and preparing for the biggest civil trial of his life—his first trial for that matter. The book does a great job of following the investigation and the hurdles that Rick and his young apprentice have to overcome to get the case ready. At times, a defense verdict seems like a forgone conclusion because there are no witnesses and no documents to support the plaintiff's theory of greed, in addition to the fact that the trucking company is a lawyer's worst nightmare. Intertwined with the facts, the legal team encounters arson, bribery, murder and extortion, adding intrigue to the story and complicating the evidence that would seal the trucking company's fate.

The ending is riveting as we see the reemergence of Professor McMurtrie on the verge of trial. I hope I have left out just enough to pique your interest!

It is an excellent book, worth the read and I found it hard to put it down. In fact, it is just as good, or better, than any Grisham novel, and it's written by a fellow state bar member and Alabama attorney. I highly recommend the book and hope others enjoy it as well. | [AL](#)



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