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Leonard Levin - 1924-1993

James Edward Maule

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In Memoriam

LEONARD LEVIN
1924 – 1993

To

LEONARD LEVIN
the Board of Editors of
THE VILLANOVA LAW REVIEW
humbly dedicate this volume.

LEONARD LEVIN — 1924–1993

The obituary in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* was titled “Leonard Levin, 69; he taught law at Villanova.” A title cannot paint pictures or sum up a life. A Dedication in the Law Review can do little more.

It is true that Leonard Levin taught law at Villanova, but he touched the law in so many other ways of equal significance to his role as a law school professor. In a sense, he taught law for forty-five years in so many different contexts throughout his adult life. He was a member of the Villanova faculty for less than half of that period.

Leonard Levin was born and raised in Philadelphia. During World War II, he interrupted his college education to serve in the Army Air Corps. Before completing college, he was admitted as a full-time law student. He was awarded his Bachelor of Sciences degree at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1949 and his Juris Doctor degree at the same University in 1950, where he was graduated Magna Cum Laude, ranking first in his graduating class. He served on the University of Pennsylvania Law Review and was admitted to the Order of the Coif.

Following graduation and admission to the Bar, he practiced

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law for nineteen years with his father, Robert Levin, and his brother, Russell Levin. The three partners co-authored a twenty-one volume, *Summary of Pennsylvania Jurisprudence* that other practitioners often used to start their legal research. In addition to practice, the Levins were involved in giving a Bar Review “cram” course throughout the Commonwealth. Leonard was involved in both the teaching of all subjects covered on the Bar examination and the writing of course materials. He loved both aspects. He had two kindred abilities: to simplify the complex and to appreciate the complexity of what seemed to be simple. The Levin, Sarner, Brown Bar Review course was recognized by many as the premier course offered in Pennsylvania during this period.

After his partners passed away, he continued practicing law as a solo practitioner. Throughout his twenty-three years in full-time practice, Leonard often took the cases that other lawyers had turned down—cases asserting the rights of the down-trodden and oppressed. More often than not he was successful. Even when the client’s position was not vindicated, the interests of the law were well served by Leonard giving representation. Often, he put more time into a file than would be justified on economic terms. When the successful client’s economic circumstances were tough, Leonard either would cut his fee or simply “forget” to send a bill. He did “pro bono” work before the term came into fashion.

He was always a teacher, although only in his later years was he a professor of law. Marilyn Levin, Leonard’s devoted wife of forty-three years, recounts events at the 1990 reunion of his law school class. Almost every former classmate told Marilyn that Leonard had taught him what he did not understand from his law school professors.

Professor Levin came to Villanova Law School in the Fall of 1972 as an adjunct lecturer following the death of Professor John George Stephenson, III. He became a full-time member of the faculty in the Fall of 1973. He was promoted to the rank of Professor of Law in 1976. Leonard Levin served for two decades as a full-time member of the faculty. During the early years, he was in awe of his colleagues. In his mind, the practical experience he brought to his teaching was of trivial benefit to academic pursuits. He questioned whether his writing would measure up to the high standards of his colleagues. He doubted that his writings would be cited by courts and other law teachers. In this respect he was wrong. He produced three books, a chapter of a fourth book to

be published later this year, seven law review articles, and a book review.

Leonard viewed the writing as a valuable component of the job and the teaching as the icing on the cake. He enjoyed preparing for class and loved his time in the classroom. Were the accrediting agencies not to limit the number of courses a law professor is permitted to teach, Leonard would have loved to teach five courses each semester and three during the summer. Whenever the opportunity arose at Temple or Southwestern Law School, he would teach during the summer. His knowledge of the law was encyclopedic in breadth. He could teach almost any basic law school course and all of the advanced courses in property, drafting, and fiduciary administration.

Leonard was a mentor to several of his younger colleagues. He took special care to see that the new members of the faculty got off to a good start in their teaching, writing, and interaction with their students. He offered friendship and counsel. Many invited him into their classes for evaluation and advice.

None of his activities interfered with his constant availability to his students. He was there to explain a case or rule of law, to review a prior examination question, or to go over a student's will drafting work-product or examination bluebook. The fact that Leonard was scheduled to teach a class during the next hour did not matter; Leonard was always prepared for the next class and was able to meet with the student anyway. If the student sought him out, he was available for as long as the student wanted.

Apart from law school related activities, Leonard participated in the Community Town Watch Program and belonged to the Masons. He and his devoted wife raised two children, both of whom he was very proud. Their daughter, H. Ann Liroff, was graduated from the law school and practices in San Francisco. Their son, Alan Levin, practices law in New York City. Each child parented a daughter, pictures of whom seemed always to be on Leonard's person and stories of whom caused him to delight in the telling. He received much pleasure from his family. He was completely dependent on his wife Marilyn, as she was on him.

Professor Levin enjoyed good health until he suffered a heart attack three weeks before his death. He seemed to be making a wonderful recovery, and was looking forward to a speedy return to his students. He died in his sleep, peacefully, on the morning of the last day of classes, April 26, 1993.

His passing stunned the school. There was an outpouring of

grief and disbelief. The initial shock has passed, but the void still remains. His courses will be taught, the faculty will expand, but Professor Leonard Levin will never be replaced. The Law School and the legal community will miss Leonard Levin. He gave so much of himself. But the loss to the members of his family is a thousand fold greater, and words cannot express the sadness we feel for each of them.

*Frederick P. Rothman**

LEONARD LEVIN

On the morning of April 28, my wife and I were privileged to join men and women from all over Pennsylvania and beyond to express our affection and admiration for a friend who would no longer be bringing his special light into our days. I was struck by the variety of titles of the people who would not have been anywhere else on that morning. They ranged from attorneys to doctors to judges to professors, and undoubtedly many more of which I was not aware. The only title that mattered on that morning was the one that cemented us together in our loss—friend of Leonard Levin.

It caused me to recall the many titles that my friend, Len, carried in his lifetime. The title of counselor at law was uniquely appropriate, because throughout his professional life, attorneys and judges, as well as clients, were the beneficiaries of his insightful and gentle counsel.

He wore with enormous happiness and conscientiousness the title of Professor. He dearly loved teaching, but he loved his students even more. They were seldom off his mind. I could not count the number of conversations with Len in which he was ruminating about ways in which he could make his classes more effective, his exams more fair, or his advice to advisees more useful. I do not believe he ever considered what he was doing to be a job, or even a profession. It was just something he was driven to do for his students. I realized that morning, and in conversations since that time, that the devotion was fully sensed and appreciated by those students.

In his personal life, Len's priorities were exemplary. He bore the title of father with tremendous pride; and it is a mark of Len's effectiveness in that role that both of his children chose to walk in

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his footprints as attorneys. In recent years, nothing brought him greater joy than his newly acquired title of Grandfather. It was a blessing that affected him deeply when less than a week before his death, he heard for the first time the new word of his beautiful granddaughter — “Grampa.”

Len had many titles that circumscribed the interests and devotions of his life, but none of them came close to the one that was his total happiness. The meaning, the direction, the core of his life lay in the title husband of his beloved Marilyn. Perhaps Len’s greatest testimonial was the fact that he was half of a marriage that radiated such solidity and love that those of us who were fortunate to be near them were warmed by it.

It is not easy to count the number of ways Len touched us for the better, and therefore the ways in which we shall miss him. But miss him we shall. Remembering him will make us better attorneys, professors, husbands, wives, and friends.

*John F. Dobbyn**

LEONARD LEVIN

What does one, in such limited space, write about a dear friend and colleague now gone? There was much in this man. One could look into any one of the facets of his life and speak long and eloquently of the virtues of Leonard Levin. He was a good husband, father, teacher, and, as I knew him best, a loyal and supportive friend. One could always count on Leonard to act with an open and honest heart. His knowledge, which was encyclopedic, was matched always by his good faith.

I have often referred to Leonard as a gentle man and, for the most part, he was, especially with his students for whom he would do anything and everything within his power. But I would be remiss if I did not add that he was also a man of passion. When he and I would talk of the Holocaust or some other outrage, a metamorphosis would occur. The gentle man became one of fire and fury, rallying to the cause of justice; firm in his resolve and combative in his speech. This gentle man became quite a fighter.

We are all complex creatures and Leonard was also. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Leonard was that in his complexity there was a consistent, unified thread—goodness. He was truly a good man.

* Professor of Law, Villanova University School of Law

There are so many personal experiences I could relate about Leonard Levin that I shall mention only one, the first one, lest my selection of experiences diminish others not noted here and not deserving to be minimized. During the first week, of the first semester, of the first year I served as Dean of the Villanova Law School, the first faculty member hired for the original Law School faculty died unexpectedly. There were courses without a teacher and students uncertain about their future. There was also a new Dean, me, looking nervously for a solution. I called upon Leonard to help me and us. Leonard responded with enthusiasm. In all the years that have gone by, I never once regretted having asked Leonard for help. Over all those years that we served together as friends and colleagues, never once did he fail me, the school, or his beloved students. He was truly a good man. I will miss him very much.

*J. Willard O'Brien**

LEONARD LEVIN

Leonard Levin was a very special and important person in the lives of many people. Literally thousands of us were favored with his overwhelming devotion to teaching and to helping, whether as family, as friends, as law school or bar review students, as colleagues, as clients, as neighbors, as tennis partners, or as readers of his professional publications. I was fortunate to have been one of those whose lives were enriched from knowing this kind and generous man.

At first, Professor Levin was my teacher. But soon Len became my friend and eventually my colleague. Throughout the years, he always cared, he always helped, and he always listened. For example, when I mentioned that I needed to refinish some hardwood floors, Len unhesitatingly put me in touch with someone who, he assured me, could be trusted to do the job correctly. When Len learned that the first course I would be teaching at another law school was Trusts and Estates, he volunteered a copy of his notes in Decedents' Estates and Trusts. When I returned to Villanova as a member of the faculty, Len offered to share whatever of his books, materials, or time I felt I needed. Len was like that. He hated to see people without what they needed. Giving was something in which he delighted.

Just as Professor Levin reached out to my classmates to sup-

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port them as they struggled with crises of every sort, so too as the years passed, my friend Len was quick to offer me whatever was needed as I encountered a variety of difficulties and challenges. After several of my first-year law school classmates and I learned that Professor Levin had gone far beyond the call of duty in helping another one of us whose remaining parent had died, one of my friends commented, perhaps not in these precise words, that "Levin's the kind of guy who would give you the shirt off his back." When I needed someone to listen, and even sometimes not knowing that I did, there was Len at the office door, asking how things were. Len was like that. He could not let pass an opportunity to help. Reaching out was one of his favorite endeavors.

Just as Professor Levin brought into the classroom an unbounded enthusiasm, a distinctive style, and a knack for the unexpected, so too did my colleague Len delight in describing to me his latest teaching experience, his newest writing project, or his contemplated examination questions. My classmates and I looked forward to our "Levin classes" because we knew we were watching a legend in the making. And although I thought that graduation would end my experiences with "Levin examinations," I must admit a sense of exhilarating challenge the first time Len asked me to review a draft of one of his examinations, while he stood there and questioned me as I discovered what would be happening to Blackacre that semester. He just could not stop teaching, he just could not stop bringing me exam drafts, and I just could not stop thinking that, but once, I would find all of the issues. Len was like that. He did not avoid the unusual, the provocative, the outlandish, or the shocking if that was what it took to open up the intellectual eyes of a student or the sometimes tightly closed mind of a colleague.

Among the happy memories of being one of Professor Levin's students are the many hours he and I spent discussing assignments, examinations, his practice experiences, employment interviews he arranged for me, his teaching philosophy, my aspiration to join the faculty, and numerous other things. Among the pleasant recollections of being one of Len's colleagues and one of his friends are the many hours he and I spent discussing our courses and other academic endeavors, home improvement projects, vacations, politics, children and grandchildren. He was full of ideas and craving for reactions. Len was like that. He en-

joyed conversing and was one of the most visible individuals in the halls of the school.

Together with those thousands of other students, I will miss Professor Levin. Together with those thousands of other friends, I already miss Len. We can take comfort in knowing that he was a happy man, forever whistling contentedly as he walked the halls, and constantly greeting with warmth everyone he encountered.

The twenty years that I knew Leonard Levin may seem so many, but yet they were too few. Our association in this life ended too quickly, and so unexpectedly. Life at the Law School has changed.

No more, Professor Levin, will the classrooms at Villanova echo with your familiar refrain, "Now class, last time" No more, Len, will I hear your "Good morning, Jim" ring down the hall as I enter the corridor from the stairwell. And no more, dear teacher and friend, will you be needing that magic telephone.

We say not goodbye, nor farewell, but Godspeed on that journey to rest in peace in the arms of our Creator.

*James Edward Maule**

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