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# A FACULTY MEMBER'S TRIBUTE TO SHELDON A. VINCENTI

MONIQUE C. LILLARD

Sheldon Vincenti has participated, over the years, in the hiring of every member of the current faculty at the University of Idaho College of Law. His vision and his character are infused in the bedrock of this institution as it now stands, this place that he often refers to as "The Best Little Law School in the West."

Sheldon as administrator presided over what he occasionally called a nest of porcupines. He would say that porcupines look prickly to non-porcupines, but that in their own nest they must somehow all get along. Sheldon set the tone to ensure that the collection of striking personalities in this building could function in an atmosphere of mutual respect. He applauded our individual strengths and encouraged our ideas, and in the process he taught us to appreciate and admire one another. Sheldon believed that an energized, self-directed faculty member did the best job. We on the faculty would be hard pressed to think of any occasion when Sheldon threw a wet blanket over our requests to undertake new projects or pursue fresh directions—even if more money was required. His refrain was, "I can figure out a way to work that out for you." And, true to his word, he was a genius at finding funds to make things happen. He saw the dean as a facilitator, winking out whatever the vigorous faculty needed to do their best. He often said that the pictographic charts of the College hierarchy were all wrong, because they placed the dean above the faculty. "The faculty is the governing body; the dean reports to the faculty. The faculty should be drawn above the dean."

Sheldon worked with generous friends of the school to design the Schimke and Shepard professorships. He increased faculty scholarly production by providing summer research stipends. Showing his non-directive but persuasive leadership style, he devised the rule requiring a project to be finished and published before subsequent stipends could be received.

Elsewhere in this journal, and in previous journals,<sup>1</sup> other admirers of Sheldon have chronicled the many contributions he made to life in this College as we know it. His hand helped design the layout of the Albert R. Menard Law Building and the structural setup of the Honor Court and the Board of Student Advocates. As dean he broadened the curriculum, institutionalized the legal research and writing program, and furthered interdisciplinary endeavors. He expanded the clinic to include some of its most distinctive offerings. His clear vision, practical fund-raising and astute planning has allowed the College of Law to continue as a place where students live the law. A place of quiet reflection, rigorous academic discourse, and direct contact with

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1. Dennis C. Colson, *Note of Recognition for Dean Sheldon A. Vincenti*, 32 IDAHO. L. REV. 1-3 (1995).

real clients. A place infused with collegiality. Perhaps the future will see the incarnation of some of his other ideas, like a law dormitory to house students, professors, and visiting scholars.

Sheldon helped form a large portion of the bar in Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. As chair of the admissions committee when he was associate dean, and later as the ultimate arbiter when he was dean, he gave well over 2000 people their chance at a legal education. Over his career he has taught countless students, and mastered numerous subjects in the catalogue—with more ahead if he continues his emeritus teaching assignments.

Sheldon wears cowboy boots and quotes Trollope. He is as much at home in Harvard Yard as in Harvard, Idaho; as far-sighted on Moscow mountain as on Capitol Hill. He can cite Lon Fuller, Charles Dickens, Ma and Pa Kettle, Nero Wolf or Frank Church. He knows how to parse sentences, play bridge, build houses, drive tractors, fight injustice, outline political strategies, and tell jokes with punch lines like "That's a knick knack, Patty Whack, give the frog a loan." He is a master at the Socratic method. His impressive intellect leads him to the end of a train of thought when many of us are still just laying the track. All this, and he was a master at running quick faculty meetings.

Sheldon is a gentleman. His voice remains calm and his language remains clean even when storms are raging. He can be fiercely unflappable, keeping his head when all about him are losing theirs. He never gossips or bad-mouths others. His quiet strength provides comfort. His office is a haven for civilized conversation. If you ask for advice, he offers subtle savvy. Otherwise he keeps his counsel—and all confidences. On several occasions his stalwart steadiness has single-handedly protected this institution from unjustified attack.

Sheldon is a loyal friend. Nearly every one of us on the faculty, at one time or another, has been championed by Sheldon. By encouraging, funding and respecting us, he has inspired us to reach higher than we envisioned possible. Sheldon's wisdom involves taking the long view and the human view. He is not just wise; he is very, very kind. We have all been his admiring students as he has taught, by his example, great lessons in law, in leadership, and in honor. We love him.

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