

IN MEMORIAM
REMEMBERING JOE SWEENEY

*William Michael Treanor**

Joe Sweeney was a giant in the history of Fordham Law—a gifted teacher of 15,000 students(!), a brilliant scholar who wrote leading works in aviation and maritime law and a superb biography of the Irish scholar and politician Arthur Browne, and a profoundly dedicated member of this community. While there have been many tributes to him on his passing, it is particularly fitting that this issue of the *Fordham International Law Journal* be dedicated to him.

Fordham’s leadership in the field of international law would not have occurred but for Joe. When he arrived at the law school in 1966, the law school had almost no curricular offerings in the international law field. As he later observed, “During my first semester, I realized that there was a dearth of international law at the school, except for a luncheon club of students, the International Law Society, and Dr. Teclaff’s course in Public International Law taught to third-year students in the Spring semester.” Joe, over the years, worked hard to ensure that the international law program was strong, and Fordham’s place as one of the preeminent law schools in international law is an important part of Joe’s legacy. As a new faculty member, he encouraged students to compete in the then new Jessup competition. He subsequently enriched Fordham’s teaching in the international area by adding international business transactions and international law, among other courses, to his teaching package. Additionally, he helped launch Fordham Law’s great summer program in Belfast and Dublin, teaching there in its early years. I will never forget how fun it was for me and my family to visit with Joe and his wonderful wife Alice at the summer program when I was dean. He was energized by introducing students to the worlds of Belfast and of Dublin.

Of course, he, along with Professor Ludwig Teclaff, was the founding moderator of the *Fordham International Law Journal* in

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1977. In fact, he served as the moderator for almost a generation. From my very first days at Fordham, I became aware of his love for the Journal. At the end of the academic year, at the final faculty meeting, Dean Feerick would ask Joe to summarize the Journal's activities for the year, and in his characteristically warm and avuncular style, he would discuss in great detail the volume's articles—article by article—and the Journal's leadership. His pride was obvious. It is wonderful and appropriate the *Fordham International Law Journal* office in the law school building now bears Joe's name.

So, Joe was a man of remarkable accomplishments, but what I remember above all about Joe was not the roster of his impressive achievements, but his spirit and the way in which he helped give Fordham Law such a great heart. Joe helped shape the kind of institution Fordham Law is—not just a great academic institution, but one dedicated to the well-being of all its members.

When I applied for a teaching job at Fordham in 1990, my interview lunch was with Joe Sweeney and Joe Perillo. Had they been different kinds of people, it would have been an intimidating experience. Joe Perillo was, of course, one of the nation's leading contracts scholars, and the treatise he and John Calamari had authored was the go-to source for every first-year contracts student when I was in law school. Joe Sweeney was equally eminent in admiralty law and aviation law—an acknowledged national leader in both fields. But rather than touting their expertise and achievement, the two Joes were warm, easygoing, and approachable, and they sang the praises of Fordham and its students. At a distance of more than thirty years, I still vividly remember that lunch and how the example that the two Joes set conveyed what a special place Fordham was.

When I started teaching, Joe was a mentor to me, as he was to all new faculty. His office was at the end of the first-floor faculty corridor, and it was a sea of books and papers. The door was always open. Whenever I passed, Joe would call out, welcome me in, and, in that beautiful mellifluous voice, ask about how I was doing. It was a pleasure to talk about what I was writing and what was going on at the law school. Of course, I wasn't the only faculty member whose scholarship he engaged with. He was interested in what everyone was doing. He was at every faculty workshop, often asking the first question. He displayed a deep knowledge of a broad range of legal fields and an encyclopedic knowledge of American history. I was always struck both by how widely read he was and by how lightly he

wore that knowledge. Joe modelled respectful academic discourse. He was always a generous reader, actively and thoughtfully engaged with the scholar presenting a work. Joe continued that engagement to the very end. I was recently speaking to John Feerick who told me about how Joe, although suffering from his final illness, had called John to discuss a small point of history in John's autobiography, *That Further Shore*. Joe was always reading and thinking. In faculty meetings, which (as any academic knows) can sometimes get heated, Joe showed how people should behave in a community. He never lost his temper. He was a listener. He spoke wisely and with humor. I learned a great deal about how to be an academic simply by watching Joe.

His students loved him. I knew that when I was a faculty member, and I became even more aware of it when I became dean and traveled the country on Fordham's behalf. Everyone asked about Joe and told me stories of his classes. I remember in particular an alum in Atlanta, a woman who had been an evening school student and who had sometimes brought her young daughter into Joe's torts class. Joe had welcomed the young visitor and made her feel at home. The alum told me that the child, sitting in the class and listening to Joe, had become fascinated with torts, and when the girl had her daily bath, she and the mother would discuss the principles of tort law covered in Joe's class.

When the law school had events in New York City, Joe and Alice always came. They were the most marvelous couple—Joe, outgoing and funny; Alice, warm and elegant—and alumni always crowded around them.

By his example and through his leadership as a member of the community, Joe helped define Fordham. He was warm, generous, smart, and caring, and Fordham Law is the great law school it is in large part because of Joe.

Joe had attended Harvard College and, one year, he and Alice hosted a birthday party for him at the Harvard Club. The room was, of course, full of admirers. There were many toasts, but I will never forget Gus Katsoris's. "The Harvard Admissions Dean may have decided Joe belonged at Harvard," Gus said, "but God decided Joe belonged at Fordham."

And we are all so lucky He did.

Rest in peace, Joe.

