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John Calamari--A Tribute

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TO almost forty years of Fordham Law School graduates, the phrases “John Calamari” and “Alma Mater” are functional equivalents. While he is nationally known as a writer of law books and other legal publications, has served as consultant to vital and prestigious state commissions, chaired various important law school committees, served on the faculty senate of the University and written briefs in noteworthy cases, nothing in his order of priorities has surpassed his dedication to the classroom—or, more accurately put, his dedication to the students of Fordham Law School. As his partner in a number of publications and other ventures, I can give concrete testimony of this dedication by revealing the genesis of the hornbook and casebook that bear our names.

The year is 1966. I am in my third year of teaching, he is in his fourteenth. We have adjoining offices. He visits my office to discuss the increasing demands of the contracts course. The Uniform Commercial Code has been enacted. New common-law issues have evolved. The evidence teachers have dropped the parol evidence rule from their courses. There is too much to cover. His suggested solution is to write up parts of the course to hand out to students, thus abbreviating the amount of class-


room time spent on topics selected for the handouts. My reply was that
we might as well write up the whole course and publish it. He was skep-
tical about the receptiveness of publishers, but we wrote two chapters of
a proposed hornbook and sent it to West Publishing, which signed us up
with alacrity. Thus, the hornbook stemmed from his concern about the
classroom.

So did the casebook. After the first publication of the hornbook in
May 1970, his reaction was to ask what should we do in the classroom
now that our lecture notes were in print? Again, the classroom was his
primary concern. I had no clear solution. He did. He spent the summer
of 1970 drawing up the initial set of problems that, after testing and revi-
sion, eventually went into *Cases and Problems on Contracts*, first pub-
lished in 1977. The problem method was not his invention. However,
while other coursebooks had used it in legal education, to my knowledge
none had used it in such a sustained and thoroughgoing way. This effort
has made an indelible mark in legal publishing; many other coursebooks
have followed its innovative approach. Thus, John Calamari’s influence
is felt in classrooms throughout the country.

He has taught two generations of law students the skill of cutting
through the most intricate factual situations to arrive at simple but accu-
rate statements of the legal issues involved. His students, with character-
istic ingratitude, have consistently questioned further, pressing to obtain
the solution to the issues he has taught them to identify. In the best neo-
socratic tradition, John Calamari has, to thousands of such questions,
replied, “Who knows?!” Students have never regarded this reply a con-
fession of ignorance. Rather, they have realized that he has brought
them to the frontiers of charted knowledge.

As befits a great teacher, he was a brilliant student. His receipt of a
cum laude degree from Fordham College was followed by an awesome
record at Fordham Law School. Awesome grades were not easily avail-
able at Fordham, then or now. There is external proof of this. When I
asked him on the occasion of his retirement, “What was your proudest
professional accomplishment?” he replied, “I received the highest grade
in the state on the bar examination.”

John Calamari’s services to his profession, school, university and
country have been many. But it is not only professional skills and
achievements that are the mark of a person. Traits of character and per-
sonality are the indelible impress of John Calamari. One notices his
courtly manner before his razor-sharp mind; his constant quest for learn-
ing before his encyclopedic knowledge of the law; his broad tolerance
before his deeply held convictions; and his good fellowship before his
inevitably sound advice.