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John D. Feerick: A Student's Perspective

Cover Page Footnote

Fordham School of Law, J.D. expected 2002; Editor-in-Chief, Fordham Moot Court Board.

JOHN D. FEERICK: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

*Sarah Copley**

This is what every student at Fordham Law School knows about Dean John D. Feerick: we know that he, too, started out as a student at Fordham, becoming Editor-in-Chief of the *Law Review* in his third year; we also know that he was recruited out of law school to work at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom soon after the firm's founding, and enjoyed a career that paralleled Skadden's development from a small New York firm into a global institution. Most students have also heard the rumors about the instrumental role he played in drafting the Twenty-fifth Amendment, or of his world-renowned labor negotiation skills, or of his widely-applauded tenure as President of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.

Most students also know that this brief recounting does not begin to do justice to Dean Feerick's contributions to the legal community and beyond, based on the stories passed on by Fordham alumni, judges, faculty and the other Fordham deans. But even if no student can fully appreciate the imprint left by Dean Feerick's career, we can at least say that he has taught us well by example.

Dean Feerick is frequently self-deprecating when he talks with students. For example, he will laughingly recall when, as a young associate, he was the unexpected recipient of a hail of papers, thrown at him in disgust by a certain Skadden partner. This is a comforting image for those of us heading off to become first-year associates; one that will provide solace if—or when—we find ourselves similarly situated.

Dean Feerick also recounts the first time he argued before the Second Circuit, appearing before none other than Judge Irving R. Kaufman, himself a Fordham alumnus and formidable jurist who served as Chief Judge of the Second Circuit for seven years. The Dean, as he tells the story, was intensely focused on the intricacies of his argument. He filtered out all distractions, including a light that started blinking before he had finished his argument. Soon thereafter Judge Kaufman started, distractingly, to snap his arm up and down. In the face of these disturbances, the Dean steadfastly maintained his

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focus and persevered. Several days later, Leslie Arps called the Dean into his office after receiving a phone call from Judge Kaufman. The judge had confided to Arps that when, or if, John Feerick intended to ever again argue before the Second Circuit, he would have to pay attention to the light signal indicating the conclusion of his allotted time. We are all grateful the Dean survived this frightening experience—that is, both the one before Judge Kaufman and the one before Mr. Arps.

Dean Feerick is extremely supportive of his students. I have witnessed the Dean's dedication first hand during my work on Fordham's Moot Court Board. Recently, before an evening round at the National Moot Court Competition, hosted by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, the Dean sat in the back of the room, jotting down ideas for a speech he would give later that night—in upstate New York. He wished the team good luck, watched them compete, congratulated them, and departed just in time to catch his train. I doubt anyone else in their right mind would attempt such a full schedule, and yet Dean Feerick gracefully pulls it off on a regular basis. More to the point, his support motivates students to be involved and to excel, whatever their activity or service.

Dean Feerick also makes personal connections with an extraordinary number of students at Fordham Law School, which is unexpected given his stature. It is not unusual to see him reassuring a cluster of anxious first years in the hallway that they will make it through the year or, upon learning a student has become engaged, to produce a congratulatory Fordham Law School baseball cap from his secret supply.

Some of the luckiest students are those who recently participated in Fordham's study abroad program in Ireland. They had the good fortune of becoming acquainted with the Dean in the relative calm of Dublin and, since, have frequently talked about the experience. One story in particular bears mentioning. Rumor has it that the Dean, in addition to his many other attributes, is quite a dancer. This may be old news among his friends and colleagues, but it is a delightful new perspective for the rest of us.

Joking aside, Dean Feerick sets an important example for the 450 or so students who venture into the legal community every year upon graduation; namely, that professional distinction can be achieved without sacrificing basic human kindness and respect for others. This is a particularly important lesson for students entering a profession often criticized for its competitive nature.

Dean Feerick says one of the reasons he is retiring is to spend more time with family, including his many grandchildren. Speaking on behalf of current Fordham law students, I would like to thank his grandchildren for sharing him with us these final years of his deanship. He could have retired as an icon many years ago. But, instead, Dean

Feerick stayed on, and allowed another generation of law students to share in the remarkable experience of having attended Fordham during his tenure.

Notes & Observations