



1993

In Memoriam: Professor Frank Flegal

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IN MEMORIAM:

PROFESSOR FRANK FLEGAL

JUDITH AREEN*

Frank Flegal was so central to the life of Georgetown Law Center that most of us are still unable to imagine the future without him. Fortunately, and precisely because he was so fundamental to the community that we have become, he will always be with us.

When I think of Frank I think first of Fast Frank, Frank the fabulous teacher—the one chosen to be the model for all of us and captured on film for our faculty retreat as far back as 1973. Even this fall, when his indomitable spirit kept him going despite the fatigue increasingly obvious around his eyes, Frank was, if not fast, still the most extraordinary teacher of our generation. When I met with his students earlier this fall to explain that he could not continue with the class, they were full of concern, rather than the complaints I feared, because they already cared so deeply. As one said to me that day, “but what will we do? He is the best teacher we have. He’s the one that brings it all together.” I was especially pleased to be able to relay those words to Frank for nothing (except Linda and Katie of course) meant more to him than his students.

It was always that way. I recently flew to a conference on the West Coast with a woman who is now a law professor at a nearby school. She went out of her way to tell me that for her class almost twenty years ago, Frank had also been the one—the teacher they will always remember. Thoreau once observed that “my life has been the poem I would have writ.” For Frank, his teaching was a poem that will live on in the thoughts and deeds of twenty-one years of students.

But Frank shaped the Law Center by much more than his masterful teaching. He served as an Associate Editor of *The Georgetown Law Journal* in his years as a student here. After joining the faculty in 1971, he was promoted to full professor in a record four years. He then spent four years as Associate Dean. Beginning in the late 1970s, Frank became Chair of what I believe is the longest running committee of its kind in our history, the New Building Committee. As Chair, Frank was the one who kept us headed in the right direction on the lengthy and often difficult path to the completion in 1989 of the Edward Bennett Williams Law Library.

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Many hands contributed to the effort, of course, but it was Frank whose determination, vision, fairness, and wisdom got us past the early days when there seemed no way to pay for it all, through the middle days when everyone was demanding more space than the budget would permit, and even beyond the final days of having to design around our inability to close G Street. It was extraordinary that one man possessed the many different skills that turned out to be crucial to the project. His passion for airline schedules became the bedrock for shaping the intricate details of cash flow and construction. His ability to relate to everyone in the Law Center mediated the conflicts that inevitably arose within the committee or between architects and those paying the bills.

It is appropriate, therefore, that one of the ways we will honor Frank is with a plaque in the Williams Library, so that future generations of faculty, students, and visitors will know about the extraordinary contribution he made to all of us.

Frank's institutional contributions went far beyond the library. Those who have only joined the Law Center since 1979 may not realize it, but every time you go to class at 10:05 a.m., 11:15 a.m., 12:20 p.m., and so on, you are moving on Frank's schedule. He put it all together more than fifteen years ago when he served as Associate Dean, and no one since has dared to tinker with such a successful balancing of ABA rules and Georgetown size. He was similarly the architect of our summer school, which has provided a much needed opportunity for our evening division and graduate students to spread some of their extraordinary burden into the summer months.

Many may not have known most of these things because Frank was so extraordinarily modest about his achievements. It was that inner strength, combined with his integrity and intelligence that made him so influential when any issues arose. Frank would always weigh a matter with great care, making up his own mind rather than bowing to political pressures. For this reason, when he spoke on a matter, his word carried enormous weight. It was an aspect of Frank's concern for all of us that he used his position of respect only rarely, and only when he believed he could contribute to a better outcome.

Frank was the first person in the history of the Law Center to marry a faculty colleague. We were all so delighted first by his marriage to Linda and later by the birth of Katie that we adjusted to losing Linda from our ranks with the consolation that she would still be part of our community. And Frank, well Frank just beamed with the happiness he had found as husband and then father. For the first time there was a serious rival to his students in Frank's eyes—and that was his beloved Katie. But she wasn't really a rival, of course, for in another sense Katie was his student—as

indeed we all were. He taught us not only about teaching, but about character, wisdom, and friendship. Norman Cousins once wrote that “if something comes to life in others because of you, then you have made an approach to immortality.” Well Frank has not just handfuls, but scores of former students as well as colleagues who know that he did bring something to life in us. If his poem was his teaching, we can be sure that his is a poem that will never end.

