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Tribute to Jim McGoldrick

Steven M. Schultz*

Jim McGoldrick will forever be a legendary figure at Pepperdine Caruso School of Law. For just shy of fifty years, Jim was at all times a student favorite. Amazingly, after almost five decades, he continued to approach each class with enthusiasm and students routinely commented that Jim consistently brought joy to the classroom. Jim had a true knack for connecting with all of his students and for making difficult constitutional law concepts easy to understand, relatable, and interesting. Additionally, as both a faculty member and administrator, Jim influenced the culture and trajectory of our law school. For example, as Associate Dean for Academics, Jim's accomplishments included establishing the law school's London Program, which has remained robust for over thirty years, and establishing a special summer session course taught by United States Supreme Court Justices and the Solicitor General.

It would be impossible to overstate the impact Jim had on his students over the past fifty years. He was their favorite, and for good reason. He was also my favorite colleague, in addition to being my friend and mentor. He possessed many positive qualities, as outlined below. Although I have had friends who possessed different combinations of some of those qualities, no one possessed all of them. Jim was unique.

Jim was the funniest person I have ever known personally. He could find humor in anything and his wit was quick, irreverent, creative, and, occasionally, biting. Moreover, his sense of humor was organic. By that, I mean that, in the moment, he could make virtually anything funny. It is very hard to convey someone's sense of humor—as the saying goes, “you had to be there” to fully appreciate it. However, the following excerpts from Jim's faculty profile provide a glimpse, through Jim's own words, into his sense of humor:

“Professor McGoldrick has received best teaching awards as voted by the students, but not as many as he thinks he deserves.”

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As Associate Dean, Professor McGoldrick “instituted Spring Break at the law school, for which students stand eternally grateful. (Contrary to popular rumor, he did not invent pie.)”

“While teaching in the law school’s London Program, he worked as an on-air legal analyst for London’s Sky News during the O.J. Simpson trial. Both the L.A. Times and the Entertainment Tonight television program referenced his ‘cult-like’ following in that capacity. Both were likely in error.”

Jim was deeply principled and he acted on his convictions. I have heard stories from many alumni about how Jim “went to bat” for them, even if it meant challenging the administration. Indeed, Jim was not shy about challenging authority on students’ behalf. Although I could never do justice to others’ stories, brief summaries of two anecdotes illustrate Jim’s commitment to fighting injustice.

In the 1980s, our law school and university had few African-American students. One day, one of our law school’s African-American students was stopped by campus security as the student, a recently admitted first-year student, was about to enter the law school building. Jim observed what was happening and confronted the security officers, essentially reading the officers “the riot act” for stopping the student for no apparent reason other than the color of his skin. Jim’s show of unconditional support for that former student continues to have a profound impact on that former student, who has said that Jim’s actions gave the student dignity and reinforced the student’s inherent worth as a member of our law school community.

For many years, our university would not recognize LGBTQ organizations, leaving LGBTQ students and their advocates feeling isolated. Jim befriended a group of LGBTQ law students and offered to serve as their adviser if they tried to form a new student group. With Jim’s guidance and support, the students were able to obtain official law school recognition for an OUTLaw student group, the first such officially recognized group at the university. I have listened to the first president of the OUTLaw group speak about Jim’s instrumental role in helping that group get established, affirming the dignity and inherent worth of our law school community’s LGBTQ students.

Jim was a consistently first-rate teacher for almost fifty years. Numerous awards reflect his success as a teacher. In addition to receiving numerous student-selected Professor of the Year awards, Jim received the

university's highest teaching award, the Howard A. White Award for Teaching Excellence. Although all of Jim's teaching awards were well earned, what has impressed me most about Jim's teaching is what students have said about their experiences in his classes and how they have said it. Indeed, students' eyes light up and they smile brightly when they are talking about Jim's classes, and they gush about his teaching and hilarious classroom antics. In fact, I have heard countless times that Jim has an amazing ability to intellectually challenge students while simultaneously entertaining them. Jim's influence on students has been so strong that I often invoke his name when one of my own classes is dragging. Indeed, whenever I see that student attention is waning, my "go to" measure is to raise a conversation, meal, or golf game I had with Jim. The mere mention of Jim's name always gets students' attention. I am profoundly sad that our future law students will not know Jim.

Jim had the rare gift of making whomever he was with in a given moment feel as though they were the most important person to him. Whether we were having lunch at our favorite dive restaurant, playing golf, or just visiting in his office, I always felt that I had Jim's full attention when I was with him. It was never sufficient to poke my head into Jim's office to say hello. Jim always invited me in for a chat, offering me a drink and a snack from his fully-stocked supplies. What particularly amazed me is that Jim would invite me in for a chat during the hour before he was scheduled to teach a class, freely interrupting his class preparation to visit with me. Except when he needed to provide me with stern advice (more on that below), Jim routinely referred to me as "Stevie Boy" and I took to calling him "Jimmy Man." Quite simply, Jim made me feel special, just as he did for countless others.

Jim was a great mentor. We often discussed approaches to teaching and the latest issues facing the faculty. I relished Jim's insights about how I could be a better classroom teacher, including his simple but sage advice that "it is better to teach less material very well than to teach more material poorly." Jim instilled in me the importance of being myself in the classroom, correctly observing that students relate well to authenticity. Further, Jim provided me with a lot of advice on how to draft better exams and his advice worked. In that regard, we would competitively compare the statistical reports we received about the multiple-choice section of our respective exams to determine who gave the "better" exam. Although Jim's advice helped me craft much better exam questions, the pupil (me) never

bettered the teacher (Jim). To me, Jim personified the ideal law professor and I have tried to emulate him as much as I can.

Jim was extremely generous. He invited me to many events over the years, including to his house for events that he and his wonderful wife, Jan, hosted for students. Jim also invited me to the many happy hours he hosted near campus for his students. Likewise, Jim organized and paid for several faculty social events. Particularly special to me was Jim and Jan's graciousness in inviting my wife, Lucy, and me to a celebratory dinner they hosted before they were married. Because the event was attended by family and friends of theirs who were unfamiliar to Lucy and me, Jim and Jan intentionally sat us directly across from them, making us feel like special invited guests. I am extremely sad that Lucy and I were unable to share many more years of happy occasions with Jim and Jan.

Jim was a true friend. He was always happy for me when something good happened for me and he genuinely cared about what was happening in my life. More importantly, though, Jim would tell me honestly when he felt I needed to do something better. In short, he was a true friend, someone who was honest when honesty was needed. Jim was unafraid to say exactly how he felt about something, routinely starting such comments with "Steven," a name only my mom ever called me (and only when I was in trouble). Thus, on occasion, I would hear comments from Jim like: "Steven, I fundamentally disagree with you"; "Steven, you could not be more wrong"; and, simply, "Steven, no." Although Jim's criticisms were bracing, they were always constructive and his honesty made our friendship stronger.

I would want to be friends with anyone who possessed a fraction of Jim's many great qualities. That I was friends with Jim is a gift I will always cherish. I miss his friendship each day and I always will. At the same time, I am comforted to know that his legacy at our law school will endure forever.