

TRIBUTE

DEAN W. EDWARD SELL—OUR DEDICATED *LAW REVIEW*
ADVISOR AND UNWAVERING SUPPORTER

Matthew E. Shames
Editor-in-Chief, Volume 66

Towards the end of my second year of law school, as I began to learn the ropes of my new position as Editor-in-Chief, I had several opportunities to sit down and talk with Dean Sell about the upcoming year. Although I never was a student of his in the classroom, I looked forward to working with the *Law Review*'s most senior faculty advisor. We discussed all sorts of ideas, large and small, for how to improve the *Law Review*. I looked on as he learned how to use a digital camera. I got to hear a few of his legendary stories. I began to get a feel for how we would work together. It felt particularly good when he leaned over and whispered to me, "I have a feeling we're going to get along very well."

Like many second-year law students, I began work as a summer associate shortly after final exams, and did not have the opportunity to see Dean Sell during the summer months. While I frequently found myself at the law school in the evenings, Dean Sell had long since left the building. A week before classes were to begin, I came in to the school to get things ready for the coming year, eagerly looking forward to meeting up with Dean Sell to continue our interrupted conversations from the spring. Shortly after I arrived that Monday morning, however, word arrived that Dean Sell had passed away over the weekend.

The truth is that I hardly knew Dean Sell, and that it is only now, after his unexpected departure, that I am becoming fully aware of his importance to both this *Law Review* and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. In particular, as I talked with former members of the *Law Review*, I was amazed at the influence he had on both the publication itself and the students who

worked diligently under his tutelage. It is with this in mind that I asked a handful of former *Law Review* members to share their thoughts on the pages that follow, to help paint a portrait of Dean Sell from the perspective of the *Law Review*. While the result is surely not a complete view of the man, I hope that it conveys some sense of Dean Sell's dedication and importance to the *Law Review*. Those of us who got to know him, even just a little bit, are richer for the experiences.

Theodore A. Schroeder
Editor-in-Chief, Volume 58

I never had a class with Dean Sell. Thinking back on it now, that seems strange and, in some ways, hard to believe. Not a single hour of lecture in three years of law school. Yet, Dean Sell taught me as much, if not more, than any professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. That's just the way he was. He was teaching all the time; whether or not he was in the classroom, whether or not he was consciously trying to do so. A truly great teacher. That is how I will always remember him.

I had met Dean Sell a few times over the first two years of law school, but I really came to know him during my time as Editor-in-Chief of the *Law Review*. With his office just down the hall from mine, Dean Sell spent many hours with me discussing the law school, the *Law Review* and the law in general. Dean Sell had a passion for each of these things; a passion he passed on to me and, I am certain, countless other students.

In 1996 and 1997, I am sure no one would have minded if Dean Sell had taken some well-deserved time off, reduced his schedule or allowed another professor to serve as adviser to the *Law Review*. That he chose not to do so is a wonderful tribute to his desire to continue mentoring students like me. Dean Sell was willing to discuss anything with me: the substance of the articles the *Review* was to publish, the minutia of the editing process, the history and direction of the law school, his personal interests and mine. Given his experience and accomplishments, there was no doubt he possessed the balance of wisdom and knowledge in our conversations. Notwithstanding this reality, Dean Sell was always interested in me and my point of view. I am sure this is no surprise to those who know him. Indeed, his respect and admiration for his students was much of what made him such a wonderful ambassador for the law school.

It seems to me that the nature of being a law professor has changed over time. The pressure of scholarship often distracts from the true mission of the institution: to educate. Make no mistake, Dean Sell was a scholar. He was an expert in corporate law and, in particular, the law of Pennsylvania on matters of corporate governance. But he never much talked about these things to me. His true love was for the law school and for teaching.

As someone who came along near the end of his incredible run at the law school, I was not present for many of Dean Sell's accomplishments. Fortunately, much of the legend was told to me. Not by Dean Sell himself—he was not one for self-promotion—but by others, like his good friend and my mentor, Professor Ed Symons. For all he accomplished for Pitt

Law School, I thank him. But mostly I will treasure and carry with me those many conversations in his office. As a student, I cherished that time. And after all his years at Pitt, I could tell that Dean Sell still did as well. A teacher to the end.

Ira S. Nathenson
Editor-in-Chief, Volume 59

I don't know whether it's true, the old adage that there's no more than six degrees of separation between any two people. But nobody can seriously dispute that for the past fifty years, the number of degrees separating nearly every University of Pittsburgh School of Law alumnus can be reduced to one—Dean Sell.

In many ways, my connection to Dean Sell is like the many Pitt grads preceding me. The classes we attended were a potpourri of hypotheticals, analysis, sparring, war stories, and jokes. In the end, they almost always tied together to make a broader point about the practice of law, or sometimes, about the practice of living. In *Agency & Partnership*, Dean Sell asked "How do you terminate an agency?" My classmate Jeffrey Waxman responded with mock sarcasm, "Sell, you're fired!" Dean Sell, of course, loved it, just as he loved telling jokes and stories, sometimes mildly off-color, and always with a wink that we should never repeat the tales. Like the rest of us, I never had any doubt that he required the same oath of secrecy from every other student he told the same story over the years, and we never got tired of hearing them.

Again, like many of us, I also had the privilege of working on the *Law Review* with Dean Sell, who eagerly served as a Faculty Advisor when I was Editor-in-Chief of Volume 59. Like anything else he ever did, Dean Sell was a zealous and pragmatic advocate for the *Law Review*, and time and time again, provided invaluable counsel. For him, there was never a matter too trivial to discuss.

My contact with Dean Sell, again like so many of us, continued after graduation. I tried to stop by to see him whenever I was in *The House That Ed Built*. I went to reunions and to Dean Sell's banquet. I felt sad for him when Mrs. Sell passed away and was happy to hear that he found love again. And even when the post-graduation years started to accumulate (and in the grand scheme compared to other Sell alumni, there haven't been that many years so far), I could never call him anything but "Dean Sell," even though he hadn't been Dean for years before our class graduated.

I most recently stopped by to see him only a few weeks before his passing. At that time, we talked for over an hour about my goal of entering academia and becoming a law professor. As always, Dean Sell's advice was encouraging and heartfelt, but also practical. Only a few weeks after our last visit, I got the most bittersweet call of my life when Professor Harry Flechtner called to tell me that Dean Sell had passed away and that somebody was needed this year to teach Sales, a course slated to start only days later. As a

result, I now sit here as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Law in *The House That Ed Built*, having finished teaching Sales, and starting to teach another Dean Sell course, the very Agency & Partnership course that Mr. Waxman and I took not so many years ago.

Many times, I still don't know how to feel. Even today, the excitement of my first teaching position remains tinged—and sometimes outweighed—by the sadness of how it arose. It is axiomatic to say that Dean Sell's shoes are too big to fill, and I am not foolish enough to believe that I can fill them. Like the rest of us, I don't know what the future may bring, but were he here, Dean Sell might say that how you behave on the journey is every bit as important as where you go. So I don't know where I'll ultimately end up teaching, but should I also be lucky enough to teach law fifty years or more, that sounds like a pretty darn good life to me.

Bradley J. Martineau
Editor-in-Chief, Volume 62

I had the honor of working closely with Dean Sell as the Editor-in-Chief of Volume 62 of the *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, and from that working relationship I was able to develop a close friendship with him.

No matter what the circumstances may have been at the time in his life, Dean Sell took great pride in giving 110 percent of himself to his students. He made sure to put his students first even before his family and himself. Although Dean Sell had been teaching over 50 years at the Law School, during the last few years of his teaching career he insisted on carrying a heavier course load than any other professor at the Law School. At the same time, he also devoted a substantial amount of his time to the *Law Review*.

Dean Sell took great pride in helping his students, and he made sure that he always maintained an open-door policy for his students. Dean Sell's unfettered devotion to his students, including myself, did not end with Law School. Instead, his mentorship carried through into practice as he always made sure to stay in touch and offer his help whenever he could.

When I think of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, I can't help but think of Dean Sell. Dean Sell is the one who made the Law School what it is today. Dean Sell's unselfish dedication of his time and career to the University of Pittsburgh School of Law has been invaluable to the faculty and students that had the privilege of knowing him, and ultimately will prove to be invaluable to the faculty and students in years to come.

Matthew H. Hawes
Senior Research Editor, Volume 64

I learned of Dean Sell's death (and to me, he will always be Dean Sell and not Ed or Professor Sell), as many did, by email upon arrival at work. Shocked and saddened, the next few days passed in a frantic attempt to learn the circumstances of his passing and the University's memorial service. All my efforts were for nothing. I learned of the memorial the day it was scheduled. Too late to pay my respects; too late to say my goodbye.

So when asked to draft a short tribute to Dean Sell's life, career and enduring legacy, I readily agreed—there was none at the University I held in higher esteem. It was not long before the realization emerged: I am not qualified tribute to Dean Sell's life and career. My arrival at the School of Law in 2000, only a few years before his passing, afforded exposure barely worth noting in his epic, five-decade career. But as a member of the *Law Review*, I did have the opportunity to spend time with Dean Sell in the capacity he loved most: with the students, out of the classroom. And though my time was brief, Dean Sell left an indelible mark—his legacy—as he did upon all who had the fortune to know him.

Notwithstanding his two years with U.S. Steel, for over half a century, Dean Sell was the School of Law. In a time where Americans average over a half-dozen jobs in a lifetime, how did Dean Sell manage to spend fifty-seven years at Pitt? It wasn't merely a love for the law that kept him returning to the institution that he had built—and let there be no doubt, were it not for his vision we might very well have spent another fifty years locked away in the Cathedral. It certainly wasn't the paycheck—to a sympathetic ear, Dean Sell shared that during his last years his pay was lower than any full-time professor on the staff. And it definitely wasn't the ease of the schedule—notwithstanding his retirement in 1994, Dean Sell was known to carry as great a course load as any full-time professor on the faculty. Rather, it was always first and foremost the students.

His love for the students was evident to even the casual observer. As a first-year law student studying at a fifth floor carrel in the library, I witnessed the near ceaseless flow of aspiring lawyers seeking guidance on jobs, course selections, and, I would imagine, help with his courses (for Dean Sell maintained, even in "retirement," a reputation as one of the most demanding professors at the law school). Only a professor who gives everything of himself earns such trust and loyalty outside the classroom from ever-cynical students.

Although I remained an observer for another year, our paths eventually crossed and as a member of *Law Review* I found entrée that I thought I needed to approach him. It was in his role as advisor to the *Law Review* that I came to know Dean Sell.

I believe that that it was *Law Review* that provided Dean Sell with the perfect interaction with the students. The relationship with *Law Review* members, unlike the classroom relationship, was not burdened by grades or authority. Instead, he was an advisor, a mentor, and a friend. I found myself making frequent trips to his office, like those I had watched all during my first year. And even though I often waited my turn along with other students, I looked for excuses to visit, and was never turned away.

With over fifty years of near continuous presence, we often took it for granted that Dean Sell would always be a part of our law school and our lives. Throughout this remarkable career, he taught our parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and, for some, even children. Generations of lawyers and generations of families, taught and inspired by Dean Sell, his love for the law and his commitment to service. What is Dean Sell's legacy? Each one of us is his legacy, a legacy that will endure.

Shanda N. Hastings
Editor-in-Chief, Volume 65
and
Michele Sherretta
Lead Executive Editor, Volume 65

We could fill pages talking about the wonderful traits that Dean Sell possessed that enriched the lives of all who knew him. He was an amazing scholar, a wonderful professor, an excellent mentor, and he had a sincere dedication to the student body that was evidenced in all that he did. However, it was his unwavering support for the *Law Review* and his sense of humor that touched us the deepest and made a lasting impression on our lives.

Dean Sell truly epitomized what it means to be a faculty advisor. He gave us the discretion we needed to run the *Law Review* with our own style, but at the same time, he let us know that his door was always open. He was always ready to give advice when we needed it and he stood behind all the decisions that we made. No matter how sticky the situation, we knew that Dean Sell would go to bat for us if we needed him.

He was even there to help us with the little things. After a couple of failed trips to Home Depot, we had given up hope of finding the special “S” hooks we needed to hang our bulletin boards. We finally gave up and decided that our bulletin boards were meant to stay propped against the wall. Dean Sell, sensing our frustration, asked us what the problem was. We explained our dilemma and he told us that we shouldn’t worry about it anymore. He was going to go to his local hardware store after his last class. Sure enough the next day he came in with two packages of hooks and his tool set and then proceeded to help us hang everything up.

Later during our tenure, when the school’s journals were jointly trying to plan the year-end banquet, Dean Sell offered to help us find a speaker at the last minute. He took a great deal of time out of his already packed schedule to make sure that the banquet, held for the school’s journal staff, staff alumni, and faculty, was one we would remember.

That was truly the essence of Dean Sell. He had accomplished so much and was so respected in the legal community, yet he was willing to go out of his way to help us not only with our big problems, but also with our little ones.

Although we will never forget Dean Sell’s support and guidance, our fondest memories are of his sense of humor. The *Law Review* offices were right next to Dean Sell’s office (which he referred to as Antarctica), so as he would pass by he would often stop and tell us a joke or a funny story. By the

end of the joke, we would all be laughing so hard, even Dean Sell would have tears in his eyes.

As any former student knows, Dean Sell was an early riser. He was in his office at the brink of dawn. We however, were night owls, so when we'd finally make it into the office at ten or eleven o'clock, Dean Sell loved to say, "Nice to see you decided to come in today" with a big grin on his face. Or if he saw us on the computer, he would stick his head in the door and say, "I see you are playing solitaire again, how do you ever get any work done?" and then laugh as he walked back to his office. He was constantly making us laugh and brightening our day.

Dean Sell was one-of-a-kind and the *Law Review* is never going to be the same without him. He dedicated his entire soul to everything he did. He wasn't just an advisor—he was the best advisor anyone could ever hope for. He wasn't just a professor—he was a confidant and a friend. His dedication inspired us and his sense of humor renewed our spirit. A piece of Dean Sell lives on in everyone who knew him. He will be deeply missed and impossible to replace.