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Carl M. Selinger, Teacher

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CARL M. SELINGER, TEACHER

*Charles R. DiSalvo**

It is easy to *say* you are a teacher.

It is another thing altogether to *be* a teacher.

All of us on the faculty knew about Carl's classes. They were works of art, the result of meticulous preparation, the result of a superior intellect at work. Students who enrolled in Professor Selinger's classes got their money's worth, for Carl was the consummate classroom teacher.

Now the class schedule said Carl was teaching torts and comparative law, but the students knew better. They knew they would learn more than the law.

Here is what one student wrote after learning of Carl's passing:

I will always remember him as a person of grace. . . . He had a great deal of which to be proud, but despite a considerable record of achievement. . . , I do not perceive him to have been at all egotistical. Rather [he] seemed to carry himself with a certain "matter-of-factness" and real humility. Professor Selinger was a man who embodied the best. . . . [a] life in learning, a life in service, a life in excellence.

That was the impression he made by working from behind a podium.

And that was some of Carl's best teaching.

This was not a man, however, who could be confined to a classroom. He taught on a larger stage than that.

Carl was dean for seven tough years. He gave it his all. He did an outstanding job. When he left the deanship to join the faculty, no one would have been surprised to see him take it slow. Many other people would have headed straight for the rocking chair. Not Carl. Whether he was fifty-four, or sixty or sixty-five — when most people retire completely — he kept right on going: the West Virginia Law Institute, the Inter-American Bar Association, improving his classes, involved in the faculty, supporting younger faculty, publishing, and always, always thinking how we might do things better. Carl retired from the deanship, yes, but he never took advantage of his status as a former dean to

coast. He never retired from responsibility. He *taught* the rest of us what it meant to serve — to *serve* — as a faculty member.

That was some of Carl's best teaching.

When Carl was diagnosed, he had yet another chance to take the easy road. He did not. Instead he displayed a wonderful sense of balance. On the one hand he recognized the inevitability of his impending death. On the other hand, he never stopped living. He resigned himself to death, but he never resigned from life. He did not retreat. He maintained his concern for others and for the future. He kept on doing the work in which he believed. He met with his first-year students right through the end of the spring semester.

But here is the best example. Some months before Carl's death, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals enacted a rule prohibiting persons who had committed felonies from applying for admission to the bar, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. This was a draconian rule, a rule which would deny the possibility of redemption, a rule which would keep out mature forty-five-year olds who were once immature sixteen-year olds. Carl knew, too, that the rule would keep out good people who had committed political offenses, such as draft resistance and the like. A proposal came before the court to change the rule. Carl composed a letter to the court protesting the rule and advocating change. It was an elegant and powerful letter. Where did Carl write it? He wrote it from his deathbed. He wrote it just a few days before his death. Here was a man who taught us courage and strength, optimism and hope. Here was a man who taught everyone around him how to live in the face of death.

That was some of Carl's best teaching.

It is easy to *say* you are a teacher.

It is another thing altogether to *be* a teacher.

Carl Selinger was a teacher. He was a teacher whose most important lesson to us was his life.

I, like many others, am grateful to Carl Selinger, for all of us are better for having been his students.