



TOURO UNIVERSITY
JACOB D. FUCHSBERG LAW CENTER
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Touro Law Review

Volume 34 | Number 2

Article 6

2018

A Tribute to Leon Lazer

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Recommended Citation

Seplowitz, Rena C. (2018) "A Tribute to Leon Lazer," *Touro Law Review*: Vol. 34: No. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/lawreview/vol34/iss2/6>

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A TRIBUTE TO LEON LAZER

*Rena C. Sepowitz**

Leon Lazer, my friend, colleague and suitemate for more than twenty-five years was one of the wisest people I knew. His perceptiveness, keen intelligence, acerbic wit and devotion to Touro as an institution made him one of the most respected figures on campus and in the legal community. Despite the prominence he attained as a judge and as chair of the Pattern Jury Instructions Committee, Leon was always available to listen to a student with questions or a colleague who needed advice.

Leon was ageless and the paradigmatic Renaissance man. His penetrating views on social, political and legal issues were molded by a rare historical perspective. Unlike others, however, he was not mired in the past; rather his experiences in World War II and on the Appellate Division fueled his commentary on contemporary events, ranging from deep political schisms, economic dislocations, intractable international disputes and military conflicts, and problematic judicial decisions. A prolific reader, an ardent opera lover and an enthusiast of theater and cinema, Leon constantly provided insightful and pithy views on the arts. Indeed, Leon's unquenchable interests also extended to virtually all aspects of popular culture, including technological innovations and music, in part, to be familiar with his students' icons.

Over the years, I treasured my lunches and dinners with Leon during which we dissected the most recent political and international disasters, lamented the questionable impulse to update such otherwise brilliant operas as *Salome* and *Tosca*, and scrutinized the latest law school controversies. Although a self-described pessimist, Leon generally suggested a productive resolution of even the most troublesome issues. Throughout these discussions, his empathy and devotion to his family and friends also emerged clearly. Energized by the conversations, I invariably was disappointed at their termination and eager to resume them. When I visited Leon shortly before he died

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we agreed on our topic for the following week -- a discussion we never had.

Leon was a pivotal member of the Touro community and a devoted mentor to members of the Law Review. His sage and frank comments at faculty and committee meetings helped to guide the law school, preventing unnecessary diversions and resolving divisions. His appreciation of the skills needed by our students to succeed as ethical and able lawyers influenced curricular and appointment decisions. Leon's public discourses, whether at colloquia, symposiums or programs honoring him, displayed a command of the subject matter and compelling analysis of the issues packaged in dynamic and entertaining presentations. His speaking skills and expertise were apparent in the classroom where Leon inspired the respect and love of his students and in his office where he advised students for many hours on their Law Review notes.

I was truly privileged to be Leon's colleague and friend. Although I miss his presence, his voice, sage advice and incisive commentary continue to guide and influence me.