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## Professor Bernie Segal: 33 Years of Inspiring Law Students

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# Professor Bernie Segal 33 Years of Inspiring Law Students

*By Lorri Ungaretti*

**P**rofessor Bernard (Bernie) Segal is recognized as an effective, dedicated teacher by his colleagues and remembered fondly by hundreds of former students. On December 6, 2004, Bernie was one of several people honored at the Golden Gate University alumni awards luncheon at San Francisco's Palace Hotel.

Professor Bernie Segal joined the Law School faculty in 1972 and soon expanded 1 elective course to a litigation program with more than 35 courses. Bernie has made tremendous contributions to the Law School, including coaching students for mock trial competitions, starting a certificate of specialization program in litigation, and creating a classroom assignment based on a fairy tale.

A fairy tale? Several years ago, "Little Red Riding Hood" became part of Bernie's Mock Trial class. Students play roles in the trial of Leonard Wolf, a canine accused of murdering Ida J. Riding ("Grandma") and violating the Interspecies Dalliance Act in the woods with Rhoda ("Red") Riding Hood. Bernie uses the fairy tale to help students realize the importance of telling a story well in court.

In his classes, Bernie encourages, cajoles, critiques, and inspires future lawyers. He is known for videotaping students and describing their strengths and weaknesses in class—not to criticize, he insists, but to provide a constructive evaluative process. He is a great storyteller. Former students remember his lessons because, as Scott Goering (JD 02) explains, "For every point he makes, he can probably tell five or six stories to illustrate it."

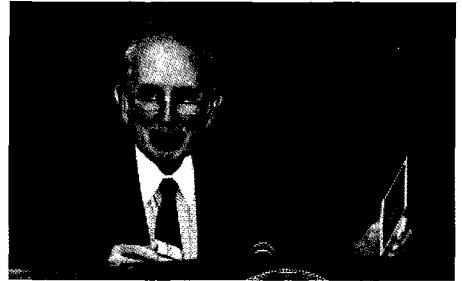
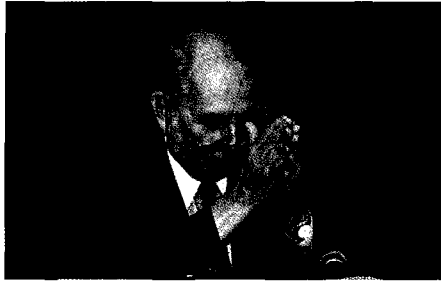
Bernie Segal earned his BS in journalism and political science from Temple University in 1952. He later went to the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned an MA in government administration in 1954 and a JD in 1959. Right after law school he began practicing criminal defense and taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania. He

**“Bernie Segal will always be remembered for his devotion to his students—and their devotion to him.**

knew then that he loved teaching and showing people how to practice law.

Perhaps Bernie’s most significant case as a practicing lawyer was that of Dr. Jeffrey R. MacDonald, whose story was the subject of the book and television movie, *Fatal Vision*. Bernie has represented MacDonald continuously since 1970. “I’ve been trying to free him from these unjust accusations for almost 35 years,” Bernie says. “I’ve thought about trying to get the *Guinness Book of World Records* to list me as the most stubborn lawyer in a criminal case,” he adds with his characteristic grin. He was interviewed recently by CBS for an installment on MacDonald for the television show *48 Hours*.

In 1970, Bernie met Lani Bader, then dean of Golden Gate University School of Law. They talked about Bernie relocating to San Francisco



*“I’d like to thank the Academy . . .” Bernie said as he began his acceptance speech.*

and becoming a full-time professor, but Bernie was not sure he wanted to make such a major move. For the next year, Bernie continued to practice full time and teach as an adjunct. At the end of that year, Dean Bader offered Bernie the position at GGU, and he accepted. “I’ve never looked back, and I’ve never been sorry,” he says.

Bernie’s finest recommendations and compliments come from his students and colleagues. Craig Singer

**He thanked the full-time faculty for “bringing Golden Gate from the unknown to the well known in litigation.”**



*Bernie Segal with family and colleagues.  
Back row, left to right: with Professor Janice Kosel and Patricia Dobashi; with Golden Gate University President Phil Friedman; with School of Law Dean Frederic White.  
Front row, left to right: with son-in-law Simon Kenney and daughter Amy Segal; with Hon. Lee Baxter (JD 74).*

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*Bernie Segal in his early teaching days.*

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(JD 89), deputy district attorney in Fresno, says, "Bernie Segal is with me every day that I walk into the courtroom. When I see how lawyers handle themselves with clients, judges, and colleagues, I realize how, as an alum of Bernie's program, I learned how to be a REAL lawyer."

At the alumni awards luncheon on December 6, 2004, Dean Frederic White introduced Bernie as the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award. Dean White told the story of a former student who once telephoned Bernie and said, "I was trying this case, and I could hear you yelling in my ear." Bernie's reaction? "I take it as a compliment that I'm a student's Jiminy Crickett." The dean ended his introduction with, "May Bernie stay our 'Jiminy Crickett' for many years to come."

In his typical fashion, Bernie accepted the award with humor and humility. He started by holding up a plastic figure saying, "I want to thank the members of the academy. . . ." When the laughter subsided, he

said, "I'd like to thank Dean White for that lovely eulogy. I was getting a little uncomfortable. I began to look at members of the alumni committee moving toward me and thought, 'Does she have a bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley in her hand? Is she going to point me to my casket?' And then I realized that they were going to let me stay a little bit longer."

Bernie went on to admit that this introduction was the second most interesting one he had ever received. "The most interesting introduction belongs to former Dean Tony Pagano," said Bernie. "Tony was



*Bernie Segal in the 1970s with student James Molesky (JD 79).*

about to introduce me after a Mock Trial victory. As dean, he was always worried that if he said too much about a faculty member, if he was a little too praiseworthy, the words might come back to haunt him in a salary negotiation. He began to say, 'Well, I have here a plaque to give to Professor Segal.' And then he stopped. He realized that he was getting awfully close to praise. He turned to me and said, 'Segal, how long have you been doing this?' I answered, 'Twenty-five years.' Then he said, 'It's about time you got it right!'"

Over the 33 years Bernie has worked with GGU students, the Law School has participated in 85 competitions. In 25 of them, GGU teams have won gold, silver, or bronze medals. At a recent National Mock Trial Competition in Sacramento, the GGU team made it to the final round and placed second in the regional tournament.

At the luncheon, Bernie credited other people with the success of GGU's litigation program. He thanked the full-time faculty, specifically Professors Allan Brotsky and Susan Rutberg, for "bringing Golden Gate



Above: In September 2001, as part of the celebration of the Law School's centennial, Bernie joined law students, law faculty, Hon. George Choppelas, and Noah Griffin in a fictitious mock trial of *Caruso vs. City of San Francisco* and General Frederick Funston. Bernie played the attorney for opera singer Enrico Caruso (portrayed by Griffin, seated), who was suing the city after the 1906 earthquake.



Left: Enacting a case based on "Little Red Riding Hood" is one assignment in Bernie's Mock Trial course.



Professor Segal has always met with students to make sure they understand the law. (Note the tie!)

from the unknown to the well known in litigation." He added, "We have a strong faculty, a great teaching faculty, a dedicated faculty. These people have made me want to stay at GGU over the past 33 years. It has meant a lot to see them, talk with them, share with them—just be in the same building with them. They've always been there, not just to talk but to give their strength and support."

Bernie also thanked adjunct faculty members who help prepare students for competition. "The only thing we can offer to adjuncts is that they will work Monday nights, Tuesday nights, Thursday nights, and all day Saturday, being with students," Bernie said. He extended special thanks to alumni Shahrud Milanfar (JD 98), Brian Soriano (JD 96), and Wendy Bemis (JD 01).

Bernie reserved special appreciation for Judge Lee Baxter (JD 74), "our alumna, our friend, our colleague, our member of the board of trustees," for establishing the Baxter Fellowship in Litigation, which is given each year to a graduating student who has a deep commitment to litigation.

"I'd like to say something that Otto Butz [former GGU president] would appreciate," Bernie added. "We do it on the cheap. Otto was always conscious of the budget. And we get more mileage out of our faculty than any other school in America. And we get it in part because of teaching assistants. Without our teaching assistants, we could never do all that we do."

However much Bernie admires his colleagues, his influence is strongest among the hundreds of budding lawyers whom he has taught and encouraged over the years. Susan Rutberg, one of Bernie's students in the 1970s and now a professor of law at GGU, says, "Bernie Segal will always be remembered for his devotion to his students—and their devotion to him. Generations of trial lawyers around the state—and probably around the country—remember Bernie whenever they stand up in court. They hope to come close to his silver-tongued presence." 📖

Lorri Ungaretti is the marketing and events director for Golden Gate University School of Law.

Color photos by Charlotte Fiorito.

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