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Where in the World Virginia Leary moves on to a new stage in a distinguished global career

Looking back over her career as a lawyer, a professor and an international human rights activist, you could say Virginia A. Leary just did the expected. Her father was dean of the University of Utah Law School; it was no great leap of imagination for her to become an attorney, was it?

Or you could take a more realistic look, and marvel at

how this UB Law professor — now retiring after 19 years at the school — carved out a niche for herself that didn't exist for women, or indeed for anyone with an interest in international issues.

Bernadine M. Butler '94, who worked with Professor Leary in the Graduate Group on Human Rights, tells a Leary story that illustrates the point.

"In trying to determine what career to choose," Butler says,

"she went for vocational testing. When she met with the counselor, he said she had strong skills in analytical thinking, and law might be a suitable profession. The counselor then suggested that she might consider becoming a legal secretary. Those of us who know her well can see the humor in that."

Leary — who leaves SUNY as a Distinguished

highest position in the State University of New York system, by the SUNY Board of Trustees in 1993. The appointment to that rank "is just one index of the enormous respect, admiration and confidence he has inspired in virtually every quarter of our academic community," UB President William R. Greiner said. He received the Jaeckle Award, the highest honor that the Law School and Alumni Association can bestow, in 1986.

In addition to his administrative duties, Headrick has continued to teach law and other graduate and undergraduate courses. He has written numerous books and journal articles, and delivered papers at professional meetings. His recent publications have dealt with various aspects of global capital markets.

Before coming to UB, he served as vice president for academic affairs at Lawrence University and assistant dean at the Stanford Law School.

Headrick received a bachelor's degree, magna cum laude, from Franklin and Marshall College; a bachelor's degree in politics from Oxford University, where he was a Fulbright scholar; a law degree from Yale University, and a doctorate in political science from Stanford.

UB Law Professor John Henry Schlegel says Headrick's favorite verb is "to do."

"What Tom is interested in is first getting people to see that they can do things and then getting them to do them. And that's what he provided for us — a sense that we could do things, as well as do them differently. Tom is exactly the kind of person we need at a time when the institution of higher education is under fire."

Reflecting on his career at the Law Review dinner, Headrick said: "It's been fun. That's the important thing to me.

"There have always been interesting problems to work on, interesting people to work with, challenges to deal with, and that's what keeps you going.

"It doesn't matter very much what they call you or what your status and title may be. It only matters that you're doing something that's important to you and important to the other people around you, and you try in some way to make a difference.

"Whether I have made a difference or haven't, I suppose other people will come to judge. But I feel I have been trying, and that's what drives me along." ■



Service Professor, the system's highest rank — has written and lectured extensively on the international protection of human rights; on labor issues and workers' rights; and on health and human rights. Among her many books are: *International Labor Conventions and National Law* (1982); *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights* (1991); and *An Introductory Guide to Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law* (1993). She has traveled to Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Pakistan and elsewhere on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International.

At UB, she directed the Law School's Geneva Internship program, which awards stipends for 10-week summer internships with international organizations in Geneva, Switzerland. She also co-directed the UB Human Rights Center, which sponsors interdisciplinary conferences and lectures on the protection and advancement of human rights around the world.

She remembers being fascinated as a child in Salt Lake City by stories about other countries, and when she arrived at the University of Chicago Law School, she lived in the school's International House. The school didn't offer an international law major, so Leary on her own started exploring international relations issues and the United Nations. After law school she signed on with an international women's organization — traveling to South America, the Middle East and Europe — and transferred to Brussels and then Geneva.

She also joined Amnesty International, the worldwide advocacy organization for human rights. "It's very difficult," she says now, "to be academically interested in human rights without wanting to do something about it."

That activist spirit has led Leary to lands most of us only read about in the headlines — places of civil war, class strife and human suffering. She tells of a visit to Sri Lanka in 1981, as the civil war in that Asian nation was just taking hold. She stayed for a couple of months, and says, "I came to the conclusion that the war was going to escalate. It did, in 1983.

"That taught me that you can see these things coming if you look early enough."

She returned to Sri Lanka about a year ago, traveling throughout the country with a group investigating the nation's stability. "While I was there," she notes, "the leading candidate for the presidency was blown up. Then the president was assassinated." The investigators talked to refugees and inspected homes that had been destroyed in the fighting. Leary discounts the personal danger involved: "One thing that could have happened was hitting a mine. But anything can happen to you anywhere."

Another fascinating trip, she said, came in 1987 when she joined a Swiss human rights group to inspect the labor situation on the pineapple plantations of the Philippines. They were up at 4 a.m. to watch workers picking and canning the fruit.

Along with this global work, of course, has come a distinguished career in teaching and scholarship, a subject on which Leary speaks with passion.

"When I was going to law school," she says, "everybody was afraid. But I have been convinced all along that fear is not an aid to learning — it inhibits learning. That is one reason I have been so comfortable at UB Law. From the beginning, there hasn't been much Socratic teaching here.

"When I was at university, one of the professors was a faculty sponsor of the international relations group on campus. He was not a very good professor, but in his off hours he spent time with us. He showed us that professors and students can mingle and learn a lot that way.

"To me, teaching is something other than just lecturing."

Her students are happy to expand on that philosophy. "She makes you feel like you are her favorite person, but I am sure if you talk to 500 other people, they would tell you the same thing," says Joseph C. Grasmick '79, now a Buffalo attorney practicing immigration law for Canadian businesses and professionals.

"She takes a personal interest in helping people. If you want to go to Geneva for experience in human rights work, she will try to find the money to get you there."

Says Bonnie Butler, a co-founder of the Women's Law Center in Buffalo, which provides legal services to low-income women and children: "Virginia has wide-ranging intellectual interests. She has the ability to look at both sides of an issue, and she encourages her students to do that. She also has a commitment to intellectual honesty. She tries to identify your biases and note how that impacts and distorts your thinking. For me, this made a considerable impact."

With the passage of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the North American Free Trade Agreement, more and more issues of workers' rights and international trade will arise, Leary says.

And what better place to study those issues than in Geneva, where Leary has spent so many summers shepherding UB students through internship programs in human rights, environmental law and health law? She's moving there for good now — though hardly to retire.

She is writing a book on the right to health in International Law. She expects to do more teaching and research work.

And she is continuing a two-year project, partially funded by the Ford Foundation, to set up an international policy institute on human rights. "There are a lot of people doing grass-roots work," Leary says, "but there is no place to stop and think about what is being done and how well it is being done."

Three homes are being considered for the institute, she says: London, The Hague — and Geneva.

There's no question which one Virginia Leary is pulling for. ■