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Professor Elizabeth B. Mensch '79



Hilary P. Bradford '53, left, and William A. Niese '61

Fond memories and practical advice

Inspiring words at the Law Review Dinner

A much-loved UB Law School professor and an alumnus successful in corporate practice took turns at the dais at the school's annual Law Review Dinner, accepting with grace and inspirational eloquence their separate honors.

Law Review Editor in Chief David R. Pfalzgraf Jr. '97 presided over the May 2 dinner, held at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in Buffalo. As always, the gathering was occasion to celebrate the accomplishments of another volume of the scholarly *Buffalo Law Review*, and the passing of another class of editors into the world of legal practice. But they also used the occasion to honor Professor Elizabeth B. Mensch '79, known for her teaching and her legal writing (often with her late husband, Professor Alan Freeman) on a wide variety of issues; and William A. Niese '61, a former editor in chief of the *Law Review* who is a senior vice president of the Los Angeles Times and chairs the Law School's Dean's Advisory Council.

Pfalzgraf presented Professor Mensch with a special edition of the *Law Review* that was published as a tribute to her late husband, along with the signatures of each contributor to that issue. In his remarks, Pfalzgraf recalled going to a review session in torts at Professor Mensch's house. "With six first-year law students, a dachshund, a fat cat, a bunny, a goldfish and Professor Mensch, our study group learned about cost-benefit analysis like never before. This is the kind of teacher that Professor Mensch is. She teaches with such patience and vigor."

Greeted by extended applause, Mensch turned reflective as she thanked the *Law Review* staff. "As I was thinking about tonight," she said, "it occurred to me how wonderfully gracious students have always seemed to be in showing

their appreciation. And in the contract that we've made, we on the faculty are pretty blase when it comes to expressing how much we really owe the students.

"I have never been more aware of this than when Alan was sick. No matter how weak or frail he felt, if there was a class to be taught I never hesitated to say, c'mon, up and at 'em, there are students out there. He never failed to come out with all the scrappiness of the Energizer bunny. And I thought, what is this great gift of life that our students give us? What is it that they do for us?"

"Partly, of course, it is intellectual engagement. Admittedly, students provide us a captive audience, even for our wild, crazy theories. Really, though, what students give us is something more valuable than a captive audience. It's a gift on their part of a process that is hard to describe. We watch as they get more and more sophisticated, more and more sure of themselves, more and more intellectually competent, and we watch with a kind of wonder as this happens. To hear the stories that filter back of graduates really engaged and effective in solving a problem in the workaday legal world — there's where the true reward of teaching lies."

Niese, the second honoree, is responsible for legal and human resources issues at the Los Angeles Times, where he is one of two senior vice presidents. He is a past recipient of the Law Alumni Association's Distinguished Alumnus Award.

Niese addressed himself to the graduating third-year students in the room, urging them to tackle the life-changing decisions ahead of them without trepidation.

"Many of these choices," he said, "will be individual and unique to each one of you. But two will be common to you all."

"The first, of course, is: What will you do? Each of you will make a calculated and deliberate choice. You will practice law, go into government service, go into business, large firm, small firm, litigation, transactional work. But what you will do is one thing, where you will do it is another. I am not urging anyone to leave Western New York. I am simply saying, make a choice. To choose to live in Western New York is one thing. To just let it happen is another.

"The point is, moving from one place to another is not always easy. But I have had the pleasure of working with some of the best law firms and legal departments around the country, not only in Los Angeles but in San Francisco, Denver, Dallas, Chicago, Washington, New York, you name it. And I can tell you that a Law School graduate from UB, and certainly one who has been a member of the *Law Review*, can compete with anybody.

"You can make your life wherever you want to make it. You will never be more free to make a choice than you are now. You are totally, for the most part, unencumbered, and need only to be concerned about yourself. Once you make that first choice, you begin to sink professional roots and personal roots. You build up equity in your firm. You develop clients. You may be married and have children. Having made that first choice, it will be much more difficult for you to make the second.

"So take these decisions one at a time, look them in the eye and deal with them. And most of all, deal with them consciously, not by default."

Niese then pointed to an aspect of career development often overlooked in the search for the perfect resume. "You will have two essential assets," he said. "First and foremost yourself, your own qualities, your own character. And, of course, you will have what you've accomplished at the University at Buffalo Law School.

"Now, anyone in this room who has recruited a lawyer will tell you that at the end of the day the issue really is human qualities - character. Because anyone who is being recruited obviously will have a good academic record. So what's the difference? The answer is, who you are. And that holds true here or anywhere else." ■



Brian Remy '00 and Carol Remy



Left to right: Kathryn B. Friedman '98, Jeffrey Friedman and J. Claire Razzolini '98