

# Of Life, Law, and Libraries:

## *An Interview*

## *with Dino D'Angelo*

**K**nown for his work as an attorney, a real estate developer, and an active preservationist who has successfully restored the character of such landmarks as 310 S. Michigan and the Civic Opera Building, Dino D'Angelo (J.D. '44) is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic collector of painting and sculpture and a strong supporter of the Lyric Opera. He is also a philanthropist. In May 1984, the Law School announced receipt of a gift of \$4 million from Mr. D'Angelo. The money will be used to construct a major addition to the Law Library that will provide space for 250,000 volumes as well as house additional faculty and administrative office space. The expanded facility will be called the D'Angelo Law Library. In a recent interview with the editor of the *Record*, Mr. D'Angelo talked about the reasons behind his gift and the issues he sees facing the Law School.

**RECORD:** *The University of Chicago Law School will soon have a library that will bear your family name. What influenced your decision to make this gift?*

**D'ANGELO:** First, of course, the money had to be available, and then my family—my wife and children—had to be willing to have it used this

way. Before I met with Dean Casper to make the final arrangements, I called my son in Rome and told him, "Louis, I'm just about to go in to see Gerhard Casper, and this meeting is going to cost you kids a lot of money." He said, "Dad, that's just fine with us." Dean Casper has a theory that in philanthropy, unlike modern architecture, less is not more, and that giving \$4 million will be infinitely better for my soul than my original pledge of \$1 million. Strangely enough my family seems to agree with him. Their enthusiasm has made the donation right and proper, and a great pleasure.

Once the money is there, then you have to consider what institutions you hold in esteem, which ones you are most beholden to personally and which you think will do the most good. With these criteria, the University of Chicago Law School was first on my list. We all have debts to pay, and each of us pays them in his own way. Debts to institutions that in some way shape our lives can never really be repaid (I couldn't possibly repay the happiness my profession has given me). The debtor can only hope to match the obligation.

This institution certainly helped shape my life. I've never forgotten that I'm an immigrant—I came here from Italy when I was six—and I've

always valued the heritage that made me uniquely myself. But the University of Chicago helped me to break through the barriers that might have stopped me from becoming all I wanted to be. It showed me new horizons that I could never have known about had I stayed in the safe waters of my ethnic neighborhood and my tight heritage.

This country is an adventure, and I often wonder if I would have known that if I hadn't gone to the University. The school is chock full of contradictions and conflicts, but it lives by the premise that you can reason to a conclusion. Faculty and students can exchange ideas with no holds barred (except the physical ones), and that is a wonderful, stimulating activity to take part in.

I came from my west-side neighborhood to the University, to Hutchins' "community of scholars," and I found myself in an intellectual environment second to none. I had access to the minds of such thinkers as Hutchins, Adler, and Mayer. I felt like a person who knew that beefsteak existed but had never actually tasted it, and suddenly it was beefsteak for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I was impressed as hell. But I was also stimulated to take advantage of all that was offered. I was lucky enough to know while they were going on that my years at the University and the Law School



were among the best of my life. When I recently met Hanna Gray, I told her that I knew I certainly hadn't been the brightest student the school ever had, but I was sure no one had ever gotten more out of it.

The school took me and molded me like a lump of clay, and I like to think that the man that resulted can in turn take another lump of a different kind of clay and make a building at the Law School that will carry his name.

*What do you think of the Law School architecturally, and what considerations do you feel are significant in the design of a new addition?*

I have always liked the entire Law School complex. It holds together; its proportions are correct. I've never believed form should follow function. I think a building's function should follow its form. The first thing you see as you walk along a street is the outline of the structure, and you see it with your eyes and not your intellect. You may walk inside and appreciate the

ingenuity with which the bathrooms are connected to the water supply, but that is not your initial perception of the building. When you walk in Rome or Paris, you notice that the buildings' scale is human and unified, and that the themes are relatively harmonious. The Law School has that.

The design that Cooper-Lecky, the architects, have come up with for the addition is an elegant solution to the problem of how to build on without wreaking havoc with the space or the surrounding buildings. It won't disrupt the whole world to permit construction or to permit integration of the facilities. And finally, when it's all done, you aren't going to see it because it will be part of the same building. What the architects have done is to take a well-balanced rectangle and turn it into an equally well-balanced square. The additional expansion is in the back where it won't be noticeable anyway.

I think the reason that Cooper-Lecky could design this addition when other architects couldn't was that they'd been involved in design-

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ing the original building and did not see its final form as fixed. Most people looked at the building as sacrosanct. They were afraid to touch it. But because these architects had known the original design in all its stages they could see its potential for change and they were able to incorporate the changes simply and elegantly.

*Shortly after you purchased the Civic Opera Building, you said you were uncomfortable being photographed there because you did not want that building to seem to stand for your whole life. What part of your life will the new Law School Library represent?*

I objected to being photographed in the opera building because, as much as I love music and as splendid as I find the structure, with its opera house and its theatre, it was just an acquisition. Any person with money enough could have bought it. It is an extension of my economic being—a

good investment. But the library is different. Not everyone could have been asked to fund a law library. That building will be an extension of my intellectual being, which is much more important. The opera building represents a way to invest my money while the library represents what I have chosen to *do* with my money. I would like very much to be photographed in front of the new Law Library.

*This is a time when the status and value of legal education is being widely questioned. Do you believe the Law School has a special role in the current situation?*

Yes, I think that the Law School should educate good lawyers. If we have anything that is important to ourselves in our profession it is being lawyers, and that identity should never be confused with the role of social activist, social critic,

or corporation man. I believe that a lawyer is a highly privileged professional. He is the one who is burdened with the responsibility for proper advocacy of a client's interests within the framework of social responsibility. I'm concerned because I do not see lawyers coming out of law school with the kind of sensitivity they should have to do this job responsibly. Perhaps the Law School can give them this sensitivity because it has a history of commitment to reason and to understanding the past.

I also hope the Law School can work to protect the future. When I was in law school, we did not have the atom bomb. We had Hitler, but compared to the bomb Hitler was nothing. I would like the Law School to be in the forefront of evolving a system of laws that would make the annihilation of mankind far less possible than it is today. In the letter I wrote to Gerhard Casper promising to fund the library, I said that I hoped that this gift by an Italian immigrant would not be finally reduced to mute dust by the onslaught of the fire started by another Italian immigrant on this very same campus while I was a student here forty years ago.

I will always remember a morning I was walking to the Law School terribly concerned about the war news I had read in the paper. (This was during the time that Hutchins had urged us all to stay in school so that the army could call us up in an orderly fashion.) I was walking behind two students as we passed Stagg Field, where Fermi was doing his experiments, and as I got closer to them I heard one say to the other, "You know, Descartes' *I think, therefore I am* only works with one definition of *I* and one definition of *think*." I felt a tremendous sense of reassurance that in the midst of the horror that was happening to the world there could still be places where people continued to think about ideas. It gave me hope then, and it still does today, that the Law School could be one of those places. ■