

**WHY I AM AN IMMIGRATION LAWYER:
REMARKS DELIVERED ON RECEIVING
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD FROM THE
INDIANA UNIVERSITY MAURER SCHOOL OF LAW**

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I am very deeply humbled by the award granted to me today of the Distinguished Service Award of the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. I have sought over the years to create a career in the legal profession that meets the standards instilled within me during the course of my legal education at this institution, so for me it is a considerable matter of pride and joy to be recognized in these endeavors by an institution that has had such a profound influence upon me.

Owing to the passage of time, I now serve as a repository and guardian of the legacy of my law school teachers who provided me with instruction both on the law and my responsibility to use my professional talents for the social good: Pat Baude, Val Nolan, Bill Popkin, Ed Sherman, Tom Schornhorst, Argyri Argiris, and Buzz Arnold. Collectively, these teachers inspired as well as humbled me. They challenged me to my greatest potential as a student and with equal frequency reduced me to speechless pulp. But individually and collectively, they created exacting standards of excellence and instilled within me not simply a determination to succeed, but a deeply abiding respect for the law itself.

But for me, the apotheosis of my legal experience is Professor Harry Pratter. Pedagogically, he was my north and south, my summer and my winter. He was my mentor, my model, my teacher, and my friend.

I think that through the prism of time, and in ways unbeknownst to me at the time, Harry taught me four important lessons about the law and the legal profession.

First, Harry painted for me a majestic portrait of the legal profession itself. He imbued within me a sonority of the spirit through his direct statements that as a lawyer, I would be participating in one of the three professional pillars of Western civilization: Medicine, Theology, and Jurisprudence. He gave me a vision of being able to touch deeply my clients and society itself, and to understand that I could contribute to the world's greatest social engineering project, that is the transformation and hopefully enhancement of society through the Rule of Law.

Second, Harry was a dedicated polymath. He was a ceaselessly inquisitive individual who would explore relentlessly vast areas of human knowledge. He instilled within me a belief that the law could embrace a wide range of personal and professional interests in a manner that would allow me to better fulfill my roles as a lawyer, a citizen, and a human being. I believe that Harry was a man immensely dedicated to knowledge for knowledge's sake, and he taught me the value of synthesizing the disparate threads of the human experience into the practice of law.

Third, Harry taught me the elegance of language and the preciseness of human thought. He had a massive vocabulary that enabled him to convey knowledge in an elegantly packaged, wonderfully illuminating manner. On a fundamental level, he was never far from a dictionary nor would he pass up any opportunity to expand and enlarge his lexicon. In his speech and his writing, he adhered to the formal structures and rhythms of the English language, mixed in with great humor and wit and above all, permeated with wisdom of both the law and ultimately of human nature.

Fourth and perhaps most importantly, Harry taught me to trust my own personal passion and to believe that the law could accept and embrace my personal interests. In my own life's experience, I had a driving

passion to live abroad in Russia following the conclusion of my legal education. While I had received a number of offers both to clerk and to enter law firm life, I felt strongly a call to experience a life abroad in another culture and in a far off land made even more impenetrable by the Iron Curtain. At that point in time, there was no official program or even recognition of a globalized approach to law, and it was only Harry who encouraged me to listen to my dreams, to pursue my passion, and to journey abroad, and I will be forever grateful for his encouragement of me to follow this particular dream.

But Harry could not and even if given the chance, would not define my professional goals for that choice is ultimately a deeply personal, internally probing decision. I wanted a professional life that would be painted on the canvas of the world and yet one that would intimately touch the lives of individuals; a career that would deal in large, raging public policy debates and yet be grounded in fundamental, sublime legal principles; a career that would be intellectually challenging, at times humbling, ever changing, fast-paced, relevant to my clients and to society, and a values-driven career that would elicit my passion and commitment.

For the past 25 years, I have practiced my profession as an immigration lawyer. I wish the students in this room the same sense of fulfillment and enjoyment from your professional choices as I have derived from mine. My clients each year are drawn from roughly 90 countries. They are biomedical scientists and physicians; computer systems programmers; university teachers; conductors of great orchestras; athletes; foreign cultural groups; museum curators; business managers and executives. They are also the poor and the dispossessed who continue to view America as the golden door that upon being opened, will lead to their happiness and, in some instances, their salvation. I listen to their stories and hopes, and then lead them on a journey through a jurisprudential labyrinth to their desired goals. In the course of these endeavors, I at times perpetuate a great national tradition of welcoming the stranger and another tradition of combating the prejudice and xenophobia that is an equally strong thread in the story of immigration in America.

Several years ago, I traveled from Minneapolis to San Antonio where I was invited to give a talk on immigration for healthcare professionals when a client who was totally unconnected with this conference, upon learning of my presence in town, asked me to dinner. Unbeknownst to me, he arranged a dinner for all 18 of my clients and their families who then lived in town. And at that dinner, each and every client at some point of the evening would approach me expressing the exact same sentiment with the only variant being the name of a child: "Mr. Aronson, this is my son, Miguel, and it is he you are working for," or "Mr. Aronson, this is my daughter, Isabel, and it is she you are working for."

And it is in such moments when whatever skills I have as a lawyer get delivered for the benefit of generations whom I will never meet that I hear the whispers of my own ancestors, who arrived in this country as refugees carrying only hope and courage, and it is in their words that I address the ages, history, and all of creation.