

REMARKS OF DEAN DAVID M. SCHIZER

February 4, 2011

I am very pleased to present Columbia Law School's Medal for Excellence to Max Berger, Class of 1971.

I suspect that everyone here knows that Max is an exceptionally talented lawyer. He is a founding partner of a great law firm, Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann. Max has obtained four of the largest securities fraud recoveries in history. He has enjoyed these successes for his clients while maintaining the highest ethical standards. Anyone who knows Max knows that he wouldn't have it any other way.

To be honest, knowing Max Berger is a somewhat humbling experience. For example, he is not only an incredibly gifted lawyer, but also quite a talented photographer. Max's work appears in several public and private collections, and has been exhibited at the Laumont Gallery in Manhattan. I know professional photographers who dream about that kind of recognition. And Max has done it—as a hobby—and he probably wouldn't even think to tell you about it, because he is so understated. And that is what makes Max such an inspiring person to be around: He is a high achiever who is also a thoroughly warm, caring, and generous person.

Max also loves the Law School. He finds the time to serve on our Dean's Council, and we are very fortunate to be able to count on him for advice. Max and his wife, Dale, have also founded the Dale and Max Berger Public Interest Law Fellowship, which supports Law School students pursuing public interest legal careers. In addition, Max's firm established a generous fellowship in public interest law to provide financial assistance for graduates doing anti-discrimination work, as well as a memorial scholarship named for founding partner Paul M. Bernstein of the Class of 1953.

For all these reasons, Max Berger exemplifies the highest ideals of our intellectual community. It is, therefore, a great pleasure for us to recognize Max with the Medal for Excellence, the Law School's highest honor. Please join me in congratulating Max W. Berger.

REMARKS OF MAX W. BERGER '71

February 4, 2011

Thank you, David, for those kind and generous words. Thank you Lord for this wonderful weather; and thank you to three of my four kids who must have felt like Job trying to get to New York ... but they made it. They should have never moved away with our grandchildren!!

Needless to say, I'm so honored to receive this award and to be surrounded by my family, friends, partners, fellow Columbia alums, students, faculty and members of the judiciary.

I'm also humbled to be in the company of the extraordinary prior recipients and to be sharing this award with Steve Case, who has done so much over so many years for both the Law School and the University.

When David called to tell me I had been selected for this award, I thought to myself, "surely the law school has made a mistake – I hardly fit the mold ... after all, I'm a plaintiff's lawyer!"

But, I've learned that's what a Columbia Law School education is all about ... training students so that each of us has the confidence to be our own person and not fit into any particular mold.

You know, all over the city there are award ceremonies taking place. Some are significant to the recipients and some not. As I thought about what I would say today, it all came down to one theme. I just wanted to share with all of you (ever so briefly) why this award (from the law school I love) is so profoundly meaningful to me.

I remember like yesterday sitting in the library during my senior year at CCNY downtown – then known as the Baruch School and now Baruch College – writing my law school applications. I was soon to be the first in my family to graduate college, let alone attend law school.

I knew two things at that time: attending Columbia Law School was my "impossible dream" because, even on the remote chance that I was accepted, I couldn't attend unless I received a scholarship. Well, to my utter astonishment, both happened, and little did I know this kid from Flushing was about to begin a journey that would be transformative.

Even on my first day of classes, I learned so much. First, I didn't need to be wearing the suit and tie I so painstakingly put on that morning. Next, I went to lunch with a classmate I just met from Iowa. During that lunch, I learned that roast beef was not just eaten on rye bread with mustard, pickle and a cherry Coke but, also, on white bread with mayo washed down by a glass of cold milk. I also began to learn to think like a lawyer in "Legal Method" and to experience the feeling of utter terror that Hans Smit would call on me in Civil Procedure and I'd give the wrong answer.

In short, I was exposed to classmates who were not only incredibly smart, but also diverse, and to our law professors who were, of course, among the best anywhere.

Three years later (and 40 years ago), when Dean Sovern handed me my diploma, while I was holding my beautiful one-year-old daughter Meredith (who is here today) in my arms, I surely didn't appreciate what the past three years had really meant to me and, I suspect, to my classmates.

I soon realized though, that we were being taught from the ground up to think like lawyers – not just any lawyers – but the very best ones. We were being taught to analyze problems rigorously; to see issues expansively; to be confident and forceful in expressing our views; to respect and defend the rule of law and all it stands for; and, most importantly, to emerge from this process as leaders, capable of accomplishing anything we set our minds to and to discharging our responsibilities with integrity and the highest level of professionalism.

So, it took a while but, after a time, I realized that the core values that motivate and define me in my professional career were, in large measure, formed at Columbia Law School where now, the children of poverty and privilege all have the same opportunity I was given 40 years ago.

How lucky I was.

I've been so blessed in my life in so many important ways and I try not to take things for granted. One of those blessings was the privilege to attend our great law school.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for this honor. I truly will treasure it always.

*Winter Luncheon
Waldorf-Astoria
February 4, 2011*