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Tribute to Professor Lackland H. Bloom, Jr.

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TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR LACKLAND H. BLOOM, JR.

*Jason Bloom**

Although I'm a 2004 graduate of Dedman School of Law, I am one of few SMU law students in the past half-century to have never taken a Professor Bloom class, attended a Bloom lecture, or obtained a copy of the coveted "Bloom Bible." In fact, I intentionally avoided taking any Bloom classes while at SMU—and for good reason—he is my father, and neither of us could have handled the awkwardness. I also think we were both reasonably confident that he might have failed me to prove he was not biased. But even though I never took his class, he has taught me a great deal about life, integrity, and the law, and I have had the pleasure of watching him accomplish a great deal throughout the course of his 45 year career as a law professor.

My dad began teaching at SMU in 1978, which happens to be the year I was born. Although he's been a law professor my entire life, his legal journey began a few years earlier. After graduating from SMU with a degree in English, my dad—himself the son of a lawyer and eventual judge—attended law school at the University of Michigan, where he graduated in the top two percent of his class. Although he knew at that time that he wanted to be a law professor, no law schools seemed to be hiring rookie lawyers. So, he moved down to Houston to clerk for Judge John Brown on the Fifth Circuit. After finishing his clerkship, he submitted his resume to Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering, LLP, which quickly hired him to work in the firm's Washington, D.C. office. It was there, a few years later, that he attended a job fair and applied to become an associate professor at SMU. SMU quickly hired him, and he moved his family, including me, in utero, to Dallas, where he has remained ever since.

Growing up a law professor's son, I learned that the law school faculty operated like a family, often attending social events, holiday parties, and baseball games together. It helped that my dad began his career with a class of several young professors his age, most of whom spent their entire careers at SMU, and all of whom have since retired. And he developed many relationships with his fellow professors over the years that I believe were part of the "glue" that kept him, and them, at SMU for so long.

I also learned that, despite the long summer and winter breaks, being a professor was a lot of work. I have many memories growing up of my

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dad coming home with boxes of blue books and holing up in his home office for days on end in order to get them graded on time. And when he wasn't grading or teaching, he was often writing. Throughout his career he published numerous articles on constitutional law and published two books¹—with a third on the way. His publications were not only great academic accomplishments, but great physical ones, as well, since he did most of his typing with his two index fingers. His favorite topics have always been the Supreme Court, the Constitution, free speech, and copyright law, and he spent most of his career teaching those subjects. He also lectured outside the classroom, including giving a TED Talk making a compelling case against criminalizing even the most vile and hateful forms of speech.²

Then there were the news interviews. As a local expert on the Supreme Court, my dad was often interviewed when important decisions were released. I was intrigued as a child when the news cameras would show up at our house to interview my dad on the couch. As a prank, during one interview when I was five years old, I walked behind the couch while the cameras were rolling and pretended to stab myself in the arm with a collapsible plastic toy knife, and then dramatically collapsed behind the couch. To the bewilderment of my dad, who was facing the other way, the interviewer and cameraman abandoned their duties and rushed behind the couch to find me curled up in a ball laughing. I think my dad even cracked a smile when he looked over the couch and saw what happened. Fortunately, it was not a live take, and they were able to start over after my mom escorted me out of the room.

I also recall the passion my dad had for the law when I was growing up. When not working, he would often tell me about legal principles in Supreme Court decisions in a way that made them truly interesting to a lay kid with no desire to go to law school. And, although he never pushed me toward law school, his excitement about the law and being a lawyer ultimately helped guide me in that direction.

My dad is not just passionate about the law itself. He truly enjoys being in the classroom and teaching. Growing up, when I would occasionally prod him about why he chose to be a professor when he could make significantly more money in private practice, he always had the same response—“because I love it.” That, itself, was a teaching moment.

His passion for the law and for teaching has had deep impact on the legal community. In addition to his scholarly contributions, he has taught thousands of lawyers over the course of career. It seems that few have graduated from SMU in the last half century without taking at least one Bloom class, and lawyers often sing his praises to me. On one recent occasion, I was in court arguing a First Amendment issue on behalf of a non-party media client when the judge, in the interest of full disclosure, announced

1. See LACKLAND H. BLOOM, JR., *METHODS OF INTERPRETATION: HOW THE SUPREME COURT READS THE CONSTITUTION* (2009); LACKLAND H. BLOOM, JR., *DO GREAT CASES MAKE BAD LAW?* (2014).

2. See Lackland H. Bloom, Jr., *Why We Should Protect Hurtful Speech*, YOUTUBE (Apr. 23, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sU5CJRaKP8 [perma.cc/KR4Y-HPP9].

to counsel for the parties that he had taken my dad's constitutional law class at SMU. The attorneys for both sides said that they had each taken my dad's constitutional law class as well. I don't doubt that many other courtrooms in Dallas and beyond are filled with lawyers and judges who had Bloom for Con Law.

I know that it is with a heavy heart that my dad is retiring from teaching after 45 years. If it were possible for him to continue teaching, he would do it. While I'm confident he will continue his legal scholarship for years to come, he will always miss the opportunity to teach and connect with students. But I also know that he will always look fondly on his long, successful, and storied career as an SMU law professor and his many achievements along the way, for which I sincerely congratulate him.