A TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR JOHN MURPHY
PASSION, INSPIRATION, LEADERSHIP

TWENTY years ago I was finishing up my first year in law school. I had not set out in life intending to be a lawyer, and in fact spent several years after graduating from college doing just about everything but pursue law. And when I finally decided to enroll in law school (that decision being a whole story unto itself), somehow I came to a determination that I was most interested in either environmental or international law. Today, I can’t even remember where either of these initial leanings originated, although I remember making the decision during first year to pursue a career in one of these two paths. As it turned out, I took the environmental law course first and discovered that RCRA and I really weren’t meant for each other. Being slightly better versed in my critical analysis skills and therefore (so I thought) my decision-making abilities, I concluded that my initial and obviously uninformed assessment of where my interests truly lay was probably ill-thought out. I tossed out the idea of both environmental and international law together, and instead filled my schedule with other courses that sounded interesting: privacy and law of higher education, for example. And that, as they say, really should have been the end of it.

Memories are funny things. While we obviously remember key events in our lives, often the tiny seeds that germinate into what has the most significant impact on our lives, or the most insightful self-revelations, get lost in the haziness of time. Somewhere, at some point, during my 2L year, I must have seen a poster or had a professor whom I respected (and there were more than just a few of those for me at Villanova Law School) who must have whispered in my ear about the Jessup Moot Court Competition. I must have signed up to try out for the team—and I obviously tried out and did well enough that, amazingly enough, the coach—none other than Professor Murphy—selected me not only to be on the team that year as a 2L, but to be the swing oralist.

PASSION. The Jessup problem that year was a mock-up of the Persian Gulf War. The drafters—as did I when I delved into the research to write the briefs—saw such a wealth of issues in the law of armed conflict, expropriation, and humanitarian law, that the presented hypothetical could have easily subsumed a lifetime of research and endless debate. And yet, it had to be distilled into 90 minutes or less of oral argument and—for me—the ability to literally argue out of both sides of my mouth with equal conviction, accuracy, and passion. I ate, slept, breathed, and practically devoured international law. Whole shelves of the International Law section in the library were stacked in my carrel and tabbed with hundreds of Post-It notes. Countless hours were spent discussing and debating the most esoteric points of international law with Professor Murphy, all of which sharpened both my arguments and my knowledge.
In that one moment lost in time, when I decided to try out for the Jessup team, I made a decision that would literally influence the trajectory of my career. I made a decision that crossed my path with Professor Murphy’s, whose mentorship, intellectual strength, and steady presence helped me win the Best Oralist award and lead our team to the International Rounds that year, and carried forward as a source of strength and friendship in the years that followed. That single decision ended up opening my eyes to what turned out to be much of what was best in me and what engenders passion in what I would find myself doing during the remainder of my time at law school and throughout in my legal career.

And so I discovered that while I had been mistaken about my interest in environmental law, I had unwittingly been spot on about my passion for international law. In my third year, I returned again as a member of the school’s Jessup team and also signed up for every single international law course Villanova offered—each of every one of which was taught by Professor Murphy, in whom I found a veritable endless fount of knowledge, experience, and intellectual strength.

**Inspiration.** Law school, of course, eventually does come to an end (although this no doubt seems wishful thinking for 1Ls during exam time). After I graduated, a series of unforeseen events found me practicing law in Washington, D.C. In those initial, lonely years as a lowly associate in a law firm practicing securities and antitrust complex litigation—particularly at 1 a.m. in the morning as I was working on a particularly tedious pleading—it was often difficult to remember why I had felt so energized, so invigorated in law school. I was doing well enough, and I enjoyed litigation greatly, but something was missing. I recall that in those early years, each time John came to D.C., he took great care to touch base with me to see how I was doing. He introduced me to his own D.C.-based colleagues and network. He shared freely his experiences working at the State Department and being inside the Beltway, listened to my doubts and questions, and provided guidance and support. And in one of those discussions, it dawned on me—none of my practice involved international law. Although I liked what I was doing, and was doing well at it, I wasn’t passionate about what I was doing. Something had to change.

I started by going back to school, earning an LL.M in International and Comparative Law at Georgetown Law Center. I met more of John’s friends, including fellow VLS alums like Jack McNeil, whose decades of public service culminated in his service as Principal Deputy General Counsel for the Department of Defense. With Jack, I had the pleasure of again being a student to an intellectual giant, as Jack was one of my teachers at Georgetown, raising my knowledge and literacy in international law to encompass national security law as well. Jack, like John, also became a mentor, staunch supporter, and friend.

As I was completing my LL.M, I changed jobs and went in-house, joining the International Telecommunications in Satellite Organization (IN-
TEL SAT), an international organization that owned and operated the world’s first satellite system. I had modified my career trajectory back to what I was passionate about, and the world to which John had opened the door for me: international law. Each successive career change that I have pursued ever since bears the same mark of passion for international and national security law, and the inspiration shown to me by John to have the will and courage to pursue that passion in my life and career relentlessly.

Inspired by John and Jack, many years and yet another job later (this time to the National Security Agency), I was given the opportunity to develop a national security law course focused on technology and terrorism at George Mason University Law School—a course that I have taught as an adjunct for over ten years, and in which I strive to inspire—as John inspired me—another generation of students to find and pursue their passion.

Leadership. So now here it is: over twenty years since I first walked through the doors of VLS. My career in that time span has included work in private practice, an international organization, the government, a U.S.-Russian joint venture selling launch services, the corporate headquarters of the largest U.S. defense contractor, and now as the General Counsel for an Italian-owned U.S. defense contractor that builds naval combat ships. It has been incredibly fulfilling and satisfying—an amazing fact for someone who had never intended to become a lawyer.

I could not have planned for any of this, nor could I have figured it out on my own. Acknowledgement and credit for how I found (and continue to find) my true path belongs to those individuals that modeled leadership to me at formative points in my life, and held true to the qualities that inspire others to be the best that they can be.

We live in uncertain and perilous times. We live in an age where there are fewer leaders than there need to be, fewer visionaries than there should be, and fewer individuals with an unwavering commitment to mentoring others and a firm belief in the importance of the rule of law in bettering the human condition than there ought to be. These are the qualities that John has carried throughout his own life, and which he has generously shared with others—such as me—to their benefit. His passion, compassion, and love of learning and teaching have been inspirational to many, and I am thankful to be among those who are lucky enough to be graced with his guidance, his intellect, his mentorship, and his friendship.

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