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# *In Memoriam*

## **Professor Rudolf B. Schlesinger**

By CHARLES D. CRAMTON\*

It is with a mixture of sadness and joy that I join you today in honoring Rudolf and Ruth Schlesinger. Sadness for the loss of fine colleagues and friends; joy for the celebration of their lives. On behalf of Dean Russell K. Osgood and the faculty of the Cornell Law School, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this memorial service for Rudi and Prutti. To Steve, Fay, Ron and the rest of the Schlesinger family, please accept our heartfelt condolences during this time of loss.

Today is a time of celebration for the lives of two dear friends and colleagues: Prutti and Rudi. Those of us gathered here today know well the history of Rudi and Prutti's lives. Today I will comment briefly on Rudi and Prutti's impact upon the Cornell Law School.

Rudi came to Cornell in 1948 with glowing recommendations from Columbia Law School (where he served as Editor in Chief of the Columbia Law Review), the Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, and attorneys in his Wall Street law firm. Rudi came with unique qualifications and perspectives: trained in Civil Law in pre-war Germany, and then in the Common Law in the United States. Beginning as an Associate Professor, Rudi quickly distinguished himself as a scholar and teacher. In due course he became a full professor of law and then the first William Nelson Cromwell Professor of International and Comparative Law (the only person deemed qualified by the law school to fill that chair until Professor John Barceló assumed the chair in July of 1996).

While the International Legal Studies Program at the Cornell Law School traces its history back to 1929 with the approval of its

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LL.M. program, it did not truly get off the ground until the arrival of Rudi and Prutti in Ithaca. Rudi's tireless desire to see comparative law integrated into the U.S. law school curriculum resulted in scores of Cornell graduates moving into their legal careers with a better understanding of global legal systems and the tools necessary to practice law in the post-war legal environment. His casebook on comparative law became the benchmark against which all subsequent texts have been judged.

Between 1948 and 1975, Rudi taught virtually every law student who walked through the doors of Myron Taylor Hall. In an interview in 1987, Rudi commented:

I taught the Class of '49 and my last Cornell class in 1974-75, which was the '77 graduating class. The majority of them have done extremely well, they are a matter of great pride and joy to me. In every one of the 27 classes I taught [at the Cornell Law School], there were some truly outstanding people who are still my close friends today. I regard that as the most wonderful harvest of my twenty-seven years [at Cornell].

The impression Rudi made upon students at Cornell is legendary. He instilled a love for and dedication to the law, and the proper use of the rules of law in our society and world. Their gratitude was exemplified in the endowment of the Rudolf Schlesinger Scholarship Fund at the Cornell Law School. The first recipient of the fellowship is a graduate student from Germany who is completing his LL.M. at Cornell this year.

As I meet with Cornell alumni around the world, without fail they recount their time in and out of the classroom with Rudi, and universally hail him as their favorite professor, and more importantly, as a friend. Following Rudi's death, I received numerous phone calls and letters from former students expressing their sorrow at Rudi and Prutti's passing, and expressing their admiration and appreciation for both of them. I attended the Cornell Law School following Rudi's retirement in 1975, and I consider it a disappointment that I never had the opportunity to study under his tutelage. I do, however, consider it an honor to have had the opportunity to get to know both Rudi and Prutti in recent years.

Many of my colleagues have commented on how inseparable Rudi and Prutti were, and that continued until their final moments. Prutti also distinguished herself at Cornell, serving as the curator of prints at the A.D. White Museum and then later working at the Herbert F. Johnson Art Museum. Prutti, among her many attributes, was

a gracious woman. Dean Osgood recently recounted to me the episode of the unveiling of a commissioned portrait of Rudi for the Law School. Neither Prutti nor Rudi had seen the portrait and Dean Osgood was tremendously nervous that they would not like it, particularly given Prutti's art expertise. The unveiling went without a hitch, and Prutti never expressed her professional opinion as to the quality of the portrait; she gracefully expressed her gratitude for honoring her beloved husband. I might add here that Rudi's portrait is the first and only faculty portrait to hang in the Cornell Law School Reading Room.

I would like to recount two other anecdotes about Rudi for you today. First, several colleagues recounted to me how Rudi had been requested to redraft the California Civil Code which had become too complicated. Rudi went right to work and within a matter of days reported that the project was completed. Amazed, the drafting committee asked to see it, to which Rudi replied that it had only two sections:

1. All proceedings involving legal matters must be fair; and
2. Only lawyers may interpret Section 1.

Second, Professor Faust Rossi, one of the most popular professors at the Cornell Law School in recent history, shared with me one of his first experiences with student evaluations. Several years after coming to Cornell, Professor Rossi was particularly pleased with how one of his large classes had gone during the semester, and he was eager to read the student evaluations to see if the students had shared his assessment. One of the first evaluations praised the class and his teaching, then concluded with the comment: "Don't give up, if you work very hard at your teaching, some day you *might* be *almost* as good as Professor Schlesinger."

