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## The Professional Professor

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# The Professional Professor

*Kent D. Syverud*  
*Dean and Garner Anthony Professor of Law*  
*at Vanderbilt University Law School*

Welcome to the Vanderbilt Law School and to this happy occasion in which we reflect on the life and career of Jonathan Charney. I say this is a “happy” occasion deliberately. There have been two months and a lot of tears since Jonathan died, and I know for many people here including me the loss is still deeply felt in expected and unexpected ways. But we *are* celebrating today, and we should be happy as we reflect on the extraordinary career and accomplishments and life of Jonathan Charney.

We have some special guests with us today. From Jonathan’s family, we have Sharon Charney, his beloved wife, and his children Noah, Tamar, and Adam. Rita Charney, Jonathan’s mother, is here, as are his brothers Richard and Robert Charney, his cousin Andy Shookhoff, and his cousins Peter Greenfield and Judith Starbuck.

Representing the *American Journal of International Law* and the American Society of International Law, we are happy to welcome three of our speakers today, Professor Richard Bilder from the University of Wisconsin Law School, Professor Louis Henkin of the Columbia University Law School, and Professor Michael Reisman of the Yale Law School. Also representing the *Journal* and the Society, we are grateful for the attendance of Professor Bernard Oxman of the University of Miami Law School.

I’d also like to acknowledge Judge Martha Daughtrey of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, a former colleague of Jonathan’s on the Vanderbilt faculty; Judge Aleta Trauger of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, a former student of Jonathan’s; my colleague William Smith, Dean of the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University; Dean Susan Karamanian of the George Washington University Law School; Professor Mary Ellen O’Connell of the Ohio State University Law School; and Dr. Craig Sussman of the Vanderbilt University Medical School, who was Jonathan’s doctor at Vanderbilt these past years.

Jonathan influenced the lives of many students, professors, judges, lawyers, and policymakers who could not be here today. I have received an outpouring of letters, tributes, and notes of anguish from people all over the world who learned of Jonathan’s passing and this event and could not attend. They include everyone from government ministers and U.N. officials to former students or readers

of his work. I cannot read them all today, although I will share them with the family and with the *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, which is honoring Jonathan by publishing the tributes from today's celebration. I would like to read one, though, because it captures for me one aspect of the essence of Jonathan Charney that I experienced in the last five years—it shows Jonathan to be the quintessential professional in everything he did.

This letter is from Professor Victor Prescott, of the University of Melbourne, in Australia. Professor Prescott worked with Jonathan on several projects, including throughout his illness, but only learned of Jonathan's illness and passing recently. Here is what he calls "The Letter I Wished I Had Sent to Jonathan Charney":

Dear Jonathan,

I regret that my last brief message to you concerned an unimportant matter. If I had been aware of the real circumstances my first thought would have been to thank you for being such a wonderful academic friend. To tell you how important your friendship has been to me. Involving me in your brilliant concept on International Maritime Boundaries is a debt that now can never be repaid.

Happily the first four volumes, and any others that follow, will stand as a fine monument to your eminence as a scholar in the law of the sea. You have set standards that will encourage others to improve.

We only met five times, on four continents, in seventeen years but your influences on my career and work have always been for the best. You opened doors that led to new understandings and opportunities.

My second thought would have been to tell you how much I will miss you and your friendship, wisdom and unfailing good nature. Two thousand years ago Pliny the Younger described someone very like you.

"He is yet a scholar, than which kind of man there is nothing so simple, so sincere, none better."

Sincerely,

Victor

Jonathan touched a lot of people in this way. No matter what the obstacle, no matter what the excuse for compromise, no matter whether the issue was grading a one-credit student paper or drafting an international treaty, Jonathan was insistently, curmudgeonly, patiently, and principally professional in the very best sense of that word. He was a professional professor. I have worked with very few others like him.

We are celebrating Jonathan's life and career today with five speakers, the first two of whom will mark Jonathan's contributions to the Vanderbilt Law School. They are Professor Jeffrey Schoenblum of the Vanderbilt Law School faculty, and James McHenry, who is both a law student and a doctoral candidate in political science. Professor Schoenblum will speak first. Professor Schoenblum joined the faculty

here in 1977 and is a renowned scholar and expert in international estate taxation and wealth transfers. He recently was selected to deliver the Norton Rose Lecture at Oxford University, the Paolo Fresco Lecture at the University of Genoa, and the Nottingham Lecture.

Mr. McHenry is a graduate of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and was a graduate student of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan at the Rackham School.

Our next three speakers worked closely with Jonathan Charney during a long career in international law.

Richard Bilder is the Foley & Larnder-Bascom Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin Law School, where he has been on the faculty since 1965. He taught Jonathan Charney as a student in Wisconsin. Professor Bilder has served on the Board of Editors of the *American Journal of International Law* since 1972 and has served as Vice President of the American Society of International Law. A graduate of Williams College and the Harvard Law School, Professor Bilder is the author of scores of books and articles on international law and has served many times as an international arbitrator, treaty drafter, consultant to governments and the United Nations, and editor.

Louis Henkin is University Professor Emeritus, Special Service Professor, and Chair of the University Center for the Study of Human Rights and of the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School. Before his appointment as University Professor he held chairs in Constitutional Law and, earlier, in International Law and Diplomacy. Educated at Yeshiva College and at the Harvard Law School, Professor Henkin served as law clerk to Judge Learned Hand and to Justice Felix Frankfurter, and was an officer of the United States Department of State before turning to academic life. Among various public and professional activities, he was the Chief Reporter of the Restatement of Foreign Relations Law of the United States (1979-87) and Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of International Law* (1978-84), from 1992-1994 he served as President of the American Society of International Law, and he has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights since 1979. Since 1999, he has been a member of the Human Rights Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

W. Michael Reisman is Myres S. McDougal Professor of International Law at the Yale Law School where he has been on the Faculty since 1965. He has been a visiting professor in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Berlin, Basel, Paris, and Geneva. He is a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science and a former member of its Executive Council. He is Chairman of the Arbitration Tribunal of the Bank for International Settlements, a member of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, a member of the Advisory Committee on International Law of the Department of State, co-Editor-in-Chief of

the *American Journal of International Law*, Vice-Chairman of the Policy Sciences Center, Inc., a member of the Board of The Foreign Policy Association, and has been elected to the Institut de Droit International. He has published widely in the area of international law and he has served as arbitrator and counsel in many international cases and was Vice-President and then President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States and Vice-President and Honorary Vice-President of the American Society of International Law.

We at the Vanderbilt Law School thought long about how we could appropriately mark Jonathan's contributions to the school in a permanent way in our building. Jonathan was not much for buildings. He told me early and often that there were many law schools with great buildings, and many fewer great law schools—and some of them had lousy buildings. He told me that it was not the building that mattered, but the faculty and students and scholarship going on inside it. That said, Jonathan had strong aesthetic sensibilities, and he was particularly proud of fine art, especially the work of his wife Sharon. He cycled different paintings by Sharon through his office, and he savored them.

We have purchased one of those paintings, *Rejuvenation*, which Sharon created in 1998. It has now been hung at the top of the stairs at the entrance to our faculty suite, along with a plaque that says this:

*Rejuvenation*, Sharon Charney, 1998. This painting placed in grateful memory of Jonathan Charney, Professor, Vanderbilt Law School, 1972-2002, Co-Editor in Chief of the *American Journal of International Law*; Lee S. and Charles A. Speir Chair in Law.