

A photograph of the USC Law School building at dusk. The building is a large, multi-story structure with a prominent central tower and a courtyard in front. The courtyard is filled with people seated at round tables, celebrating. The building's facade is illuminated with warm lights, and the sky is a deep twilight blue.

USC LAW

THE LAW SCHOOL ♦ UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Centennial Celebration

USC LAW

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FEATURED ARTICLES

- 4 **From the Dean**
by Dean Matthew L. Spitzer



PAGE 4

- 6 **100 Years of Legal Education at USC**



PAGE 6

- 16 **USC Centennial Celebration**
Gala Dinner
Founders for the Second Century
Faculty, Deans and Librarians Reunion



PAGE 18



NEWS FROM . . .

- 24 **The Law School**
- 29 **Our Centers**
- 31 **The Faculty**
- 43 **Continuing
Legal Education**
- 44 **The Students**
- 55 **The Graduates**



PAGE 31



PAGE 63

FUNDRAISING REPORT

- 90 **Donors 1999-2000**

FEATURED COLUMNS

- 27 **Update on Admissions**
by Associate Dean Robert M. Saltzman and
Assistant Dean William J. Hoye
- 28 **It's New, It's News**
- 40 **USC Law School in the News**
- 42 **Faculty and Olin Workshops**
- 56 **Life and the Law**
by Frederick M. Nicholas '52



PAGE 56

AND INTRODUCING NEW COLUMN

- 104 **Focus on Philanthropy**
by Shari Leinwand '76



PAGE 104



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LIFE AND THE LAW

PRO BONO: *The Action Behind the Words*

BY FREDERICK M. NICHOLAS '52

As a transfer student from the University of Chicago Law School, I came to USC Law School in 1950 with great trepidations. For one, I was leaving a top-rated intellectual law school, which was good but not great (at the time).

Much to my great surprise, I enjoyed my last two years at USC Law School, and as a bonus, because I served in World War II and was subject to recall for the Korean War, I was permitted to take the California State Bar Exam while I was in my senior year. I passed the Bar but barely survived the senior final exams.

My experiences at USC Law School were rich and varied. I made life-long friends and when I graduated I felt that the Law School had bestowed upon me magical powers: unlimited opportunities in an intellectual field, skill and discipline, direction and motivation. For the first time in my life, I felt that I had a power base. USC Law School gave me that.

Following my graduation in 1952, I started my legal career with Loeb and Loeb in Los Angeles, where I spent five years as a motion picture anti-trust litigator and a transactional lawyer. Upon leaving Loeb and Loeb, I formed my own firm in Beverly Hills, Swerdlow Glikbarg & Nicholas. I left the firm in 1962 and continued practicing law as a single practitioner, specializing in real estate law and real estate development.

I formed The Hapsmith Company, a real estate firm specializing in shopping center development, with a partner in 1958. I practiced law full time until 1980, and retired to develop real estate following the death of my partner.

Through the practice of law and my real estate efforts, I became involved in the growth and development of a myriad of civic projects, which brought me great satisfaction: The Museum of Contemporary Art; The Temporary Contemporary; The Walt

Disney Concert Hall; and Public Counsel.

My most rewarding experience in the law has been my association with Public Counsel, the largest pro bono law firm in the United States. In 1969, I attended a Beverly Hills Bar Association luncheon and heard Ralph Nader speak on the failure of lawyers to meet their responsibility to society. His remarks touched a tender spot in my psyche as I had long felt that lawyers, as a group, did not give back to the community. That year I was chair of the Beverly Hills Bar

Association Committee on the Future of the Bar, and proposed forming Public Counsel under the auspices of a foundation established by the Beverly Hills Bar Association, with the subsequent participation of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Public Counsel's beginnings were modest; I was the first president and we had one staff attorney, a paralegal, and a budget of \$5,000, plus a loan from me for \$20,000. By 1999, Public Counsel had 20 staff attorneys and more than 2,500 volunteer lawyers, paralegals, and law clerks. It has given more than \$30 million in free legal services to the community. Public Counsel is what is best about the legal profession, Los Angeles and ourselves, and I

am proud of my role in helping to create Public Counsel.

I am presently involved in the most interesting project of my career. I am the administrator of the estate of Sam Francis, an internationally known artist who left an estate of thousands of works of art, including works on canvas, oil on paper, lithographs, etchings and monotypes. I am in charge of liquidating this huge cache of fine art through art dealers in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Berne, Zurich, Amsterdam and Tokyo. My long involvement with the practice of law has helped me bring this great challenge close to a near conclusion.

I thank USC School of Law for preparing me to deal successfully with the unexpected.



Frederick Nicholas '52