



IN MEMORIAM

Wesley J. Liebeler
Professor of Law, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1931 — 2002

Jim Liebeler died suddenly on September 25, 2002. It is at once enormously sad and strangely comforting to think of Jim's life ending as he was engaged in one of his passions – flying over one of the legendary lakes of the northern New England he loved so much. Jim died as he lived, excited and exciting, audacious, filled with tremendous energy and love of life. He seemed young for his 71 years, and he leaves a significant record of making a difference.

Jim came to UCLA in 1965 as a new law teacher fresh from the role of assistant counsel to the Warren Commission. During his early years at UCLA Jim spoke frequently about the work of the commission. He also assisted Congressman Gerald Ford in an attempt to provide appropriately controlled access to some of the foundational documentary evidence of the assassination.

As he delved into the teaching of antitrust, Jim quickly became convinced that the subject deserved a wholly new approach. Just a decade after he began teaching, Liebeler had garnered such attention as an antitrust scholar that he was chosen director of the Office of Policy Planning and Evaluation at the Federal Trade Commission. He convinced the Commission to examine the role of professions and state laws in creating legal barriers to entry and to competition. He also brought the Commission to endorse the study of the consequences of past actions. In all this Jim truly was a courageous reformer.

After his return from Washington, Jim moved into a great productive burst of superb scholarship. His sheer brilliance combined with his passion for law reform and his knowledge of economics. A 1982 comprehensive review made it unmistakably clear that Jim was one of the major figures in anti-trust scholarship, a master in applying economic analysis to vertical integration. Some of the favorable comparisons drawn by outside appraisers might have made even Liebeler blush.

Jim's enthusiasms and talent permeated his classroom. While his irreverent humor and strongly held perspectives were not for everyone, Jim made a powerful impact on many of his students. His classroom was highly rigorous, challenging and fun. Liebeler relished his former students' successes, as law firm lawyers, government policymakers, judges and professors.

Jim's close connections to the UCLA Economics faculty led to important pioneering developments such as co-taught law and economics courses and an extremely challenging joint degree program. Of many stimulating encounters about Jim's work, Harold Demsetz remembers: "The discussions always opened my mind to an issue that was novel to me, and they also entertained me in ways that only Jim could think of. He was not afraid to tackle topics on which he had not been versed by his mentors, and, in the process of give and take on these topics, he brought novel perspectives to them."

In 1992 Jim found UC's early retirement incentive program irresistible. Recalled to teach, Jim was able to more fully divide his time between his farm in Newfane, Vermont and Malibu. During these years Jim's refusal to be bound by past interests exhibited itself as he turned to issues in constitutional law, bringing ideas from philosophy and economics to a new course and agenda he was evolving. Jim continued as a member of

the UCLA Law faculty for 34 years, until his former student and UCLA colleague Mark Grady recruited him to George Mason's law school.

Jim could be exasperating, sometimes downright maddening. But so many of us LIKED him. At times, we would shake our heads and say: "I don't know why I like this guy so much", but the fact was that we did. It wasn't just his sense of humor and his ability to poke fun at everything, including himself. It may have been that we found his own love of life so stimulating. And Jim's passionate approach ranged from scholarship and teaching, to his excitement about everything he did — flying and restoring buildings in Vermont included, to his sons Erik and Lars, his wife Susan and their daughter Jennifer — each one so vitally important to him. And Jim thoroughly enjoyed being the outrageous iconoclast. Quite simply, Jim was one of those human beings who made the rest of us feel more alive.

Years ago some of us were teasing Jim about what he would do since his economic tradition had become the mainstream. He laughed uproariously assuring us not to worry, he would figure something out! In 1980, writing to a law school trying to take Jim away from UCLA, Dean Bill Warren concluded: "Jim is an original." And he was, in so many ways.

Harold Demsetz
Mark F. Grady
Susan Prager