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Alan N. Polasky

*Memorial Resolution by The University of Michigan Law
Faculty Concerning Alan N. Polasky*

Alan Norman Polasky, Professor at The University of Michigan Law School, died suddenly on July 22, 1976, at age 52. Having come to Ann Arbor in 1957 after training in accounting and in law at Iowa and teaching experience at Northwestern and Yale, he had been a dynamic member of the Michigan faculty for nineteen years.

More than most, the life of Alan Polasky is hard to capture in words. The variety of his interests and skills and the many facets of his personality gave his life memorable impact on his school and on his profession.

Blessed with a quick mind, Alan brought to his work a concern for exactness and detail. Given this bent, it is not surprising that his service in World War II was that of a B-24 navigator, that his collegiate training and first professional experience should be that of an accountant, and that his specialties in the law included taxation, estate planning, and accounting. Highly skilled in all his fields, his principal eminence was in estate planning. As his colleagues, we all benefited by the distinction he brought to himself and to his school.

In the pursuit of his professional interests, Alan was a driven man. Few law teachers have been more diligent in the discharge of their academic duties. But his great activity extended beyond the law school environment. A nationally known lecturer, he addressed meetings and conferences from coast to coast. No group was too small, no location too remote for him to agree, gladly, to make a speech on pour-over wills or on some labyrinthine provision of the Internal Revenue Code. And if a moderator failed to keep a program on schedule, leaving Alan, the climactic speaker, with an abbreviated time, Alan simply used his rapid-fire delivery to present the hour-long speech in the fifteen minutes granted him. However work-burdened he was, he came alive on his speaking trips.

Alan had an enormously active and inventive sense of humor. Many among us, even after twenty years with him, were still uncertain as to whether a particular proposal or piece of news was offered seriously or in jest. A collector of anecdotes and inveterate punster, Alan created intricate spoofs that were classics, such as his proposal of and elaborate justification for a regressive tax system.

In keeping with the popular image of creative people, Alan kept a disorderly office. A collector of books, journals, reprints, and advance sheets that might—somehow, some day—be of some use in his work in evidence, or in estate planning, or in income taxation, or in accounting for lawyers, he created pile after mountainous pile of papers. As legendary as was the disorder, equally legendary was his ability to retrieve a desired item when a colleague asked for it.

An important measure of a man's life is the extent to which he has served others. In addition to Alan's training of thousands of students, he was active in professional organizations (for example, having served as Chairman of the American Bar Association's Section on Real Property, Probate and Trust Law), in the cause of law reform (he was consultant to the American Law Institute's estate and gift tax project which led to the major revisions of that area in the Tax Reform Act of 1976, and he testified before Congress on numerous statutory proposals), and in continuing legal education (he was a frequent faculty member of the National Trust School, Practising Law Institute, and Michigan's Institute of Continuing Legal Education, to name a few).

Alan gave of himself unstintedly. He cared about his students, whether they were undergraduate law students or experienced practitioners at a conference. After formal sessions, he liked to gather with small groups over coffee and continue a wide-ranging discussion.

Generous and good-hearted, he was also vulnerable. The student disaffection in the 1960s troubled him greatly. Indeed, the sense of rejection that he felt explained the frequency with which he refreshed himself with practitioners, whose language he spoke and whose problems he understood as well as any American law teacher.

This humane man, this brilliant man, this superbly professional man, this complex and useful man enriched our lives and served our school with high distinction. We are poorer without him. But we are rich in his memory and grateful for his life and his influence on us all.

December 10, 1976