

In Memoriam – Marcel André Desautels*

D A R C Y L . M A C P H E R S O N * *

The passing of Marcel A. Desautels, on January 31, 2023, at the age of 88, is a loss most acutely felt by his family, but it is a loss for others, too. Many of us at Robson Hall, the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law, are among this large group. Dr. Desautels was an alumnus of the Faculty twice over, and a generous benefactor to his alma mater.

About a decade ago, I was bringing a team of students to the Davies, Ward, Phillips & Vineberg LLP (now simply Davies LLP) Corporate/Securities Moot. Though I had heard the name of Dr. Desautels, I had yet to meet him. My co-coach had had more contact with Dr. Desautels, and we both believed that it would be a great idea to invite Dr. Desautels to a dinner to meet and interact with these students. We were unsure whether Dr. Desautels would take up the invitation. Nonetheless, we decided to take a chance.

It turned out that Dr. Desautels was not only willing to come for dinner but was enthusiastic to do so. He showed up and was immediately taken with what was interesting to these students. He wanted to know about them, their interests, their law-school experience, and how their training for this business-law-related moot had gone. Dr. Desautels was charming and engaging. He was interested in these young people both as students and future professionals, as well as in the activities that were taking place at his alma mater. He did not want or need flattery for his obvious contributions to either the Faculty of Music (that, of course, bears his name) or the Faculty of Law. With me, he bonded over his pride in being a Franco-Manitoban, as I was (and am) a fluent French speaker. He spoke passionately about his

* C.M., O.ONT., O.M. BA (LatPh)/55, LLB/59, LLM/65, LLD (Hon)/99

** Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba; Research Director, Marcel A. Desautels Centre for Private Enterprise and the Law; Acting Associate Dean (Research and Graduate Studies); Co-Editor-in-Chief, Manitoba Law Journal.

love for music, especially opera. He would practice his opera singing every day, despite the fact that he was approaching the age of 80 at this point.

I walked away from that dinner thinking of Dr. Desautels as a renaissance man. He had done very well as a lawyer, but then shifted his focus to the business world. He was a talented and passionate singer. Though he could not indulge all of these passions simultaneously (at least not as full-time occupations), none of them ever left him completely. He spoke with fondness of his days as a lawyer, and his time in business, and students who had an interest in both law and business could see, talk to, and ask questions of a man who had succeeded in both.

Of course, for many people, Dr. Desautels will be known, first and foremost, as a philanthropist. The economic gifts bestowed by Dr. Desautels on the University of Manitoba and elsewhere are certainly worthy of recognition and thanks. As the Research Director of the Marcel A. Desautels Centre for Private Enterprise & the Law, my role is directly attributable to his generosity and foresight to support the Faculty of Law long into the future. I and my colleagues at the Faculty of Law will never forget this.

My most powerful and lasting memories of Marcel Desautels, however, will not focus on finances. Instead, they will be centered around a man of many talents, who worked hard for his successes, was passionate about many different areas (law, music, business, and students were all among his passions). He loved Manitoba, and genuinely engaged with anyone he met. The very fact that I remember so vividly, years later, not only the events of that dinner, but perhaps more importantly, how Dr. Desautels made all the participants at the dinner feel that night, speaks to his influence, simply by being who he was.

I have heard it said that death is that state wherein we live only through the memories of others. If this is true, the death of Marcel Desautels means that it remains for those of us who were fortunate enough to interact with him to pass on the lessons of a highly capable, exceptionally passionate man to future generations. I will do my best to be up to the task. Thank you, Dr. Desautels, for all that you have done, and all that you are.