Lost and Found: Class Ring Weathers Hurricane

JUDGE RICHARD D. MILLS, BA ’54, JD ’59, got a surprise with some real class when he learned that his small jewelry box had survived the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. A couple who were rebuilding not far from Mills’ demolished home in Diamond Head, Mississippi, had discovered the box containing his Washington University class ring.

The couple then called Washington University in an effort to return the ring, which, in addition to his class year, also had the initials “R.D.M.”

“Out of the blue, I got a call from the Alumni and Development Office asking me if I had lived in the area devastated by Hurricane Katrina,” Mills recalls. “They told me my class ring had been found. I thought it was just wonderful that the couple had gone to such an effort to find me and return it. After the storm came through, we found almost nothing. I was so amazed and so pleased to get my ring back.”

Mills and his wife Irene’s home was among 244 houses obliterated in the Diamond Head area. The couple had evacuated with only some photos and a couple of suitcases of clothes. When they went back, they discovered very few items—their mailbox half a mile up the road, some plates, and an outdoor rocking chair.

In the aftermath of the storm, Mills had all but forgotten about the ring, which apparently had floated inside his partially destroyed nightstand to a marshy area behind the subdivision. On senior status as an administrative law judge for the U.S. Department of Labor, he had worked with others to get the judicial offices up and running and had purchased another home on higher ground. The ring brought back happy memories of Washington University, where he is making plans to attend his 50th reunion.

As difficult as it was to face the storm’s devastation, Mills says it gave him pause for reflection. “It makes you appreciate the important things—friends, family, and all the volunteers who came down to help us. That was just amazing.”

By Ann Nicholson

THE SHELDON ROODMAN
Summer Fellowship has been established by the Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF) of Metropolitan Chicago to honor Roodman, JD ’66, for his nearly 40 years of service to the nonprofit organization, including 30 years as executive director. Third-year law student Iliana Konidaris was the fellowship’s inaugural recipient.

Konidaris, who worked closely with five attorneys at LAF’s South Suburban Office during summer 2008, says the mentoring she received was invaluable: “The LAF attorneys devoted a significant part of each day striving to teach me everything they knew. They exhibited an admirable sense of humor when faced with challenging problems and incredible compassion when their best efforts did not always result in the necessary relief for their clients.”

Konidaris notes that her cases made a lasting impression: “While I remember the satisfaction of helping clients through enormous and desperate problems, I more profoundly remember the losses, which taught me that our system is far from perfect.

“I saw one of our clients become homeless in her last stages of life while waiting on an appeal—despite incredible work by the attorneys on her case,” Konidaris continues. “There is still so much work to be done, and it was an honor to serve, to see the intensity of the problems that we face as a society, and to learn from such excellent attorneys.”

Roodman began working for LAF in 1969, serving as acting executive director and then executive director from 1976 until his retirement in 2006. He previously taught as a Bigelow Fellow at the University of Chicago Law School and practiced law at Mayer Brown & Platt. Upon his retirement, he received a lifetime achievement award for his tireless efforts to provide civil legal services to hundreds of low-income and disadvantaged people and communities throughout metropolitan Chicago.

Now enjoying retirement, he remembers fondly his years at Washington University Law, including classes with Professors David Becker, Frank Miller, and Daniel Mandelker.

By Ann Nicholson