A MUSING FAREWELL
By Ronald Silverman

The editor-in-chief of this yearbook asked for it. He asked me to say a word or ten in farewell to the high-spirited class of 1990. Intending to persuade my immovable self, he asked me to “represent the faculty.” I quickly accepted for various reasons. First, it is great fun being an unrepresentative representative, even at the risk of giving my colleagues, who never selected me for this engagement, a case of collective heartburn. Second, the departure of the class of 1990 coincides with a number of personal “celebrations.” While I agree with Voltaire that “the secret of being a bore is to tell everything,” I have decided to disclose the following to the self-selected few who will read this. If the truth be known, I have just completed twenty years as a law teacher, almost thirty years as a somewhat serious student of the law, and fifty years on this earth. As a result, I simply cannot resist one final opportunity to sing my reflective song to the fast retreating ears of former students, soon to be professional colleagues of sorts.

There is, however, one problem. What song is best sung at this point of both separation and professional union? After considerable meditation, I have chosen two very serious topics for my final sermonizing: dreams and the real purposes of your formal legal education. The two topics, I hope, are related.

Of course, dreams or goals are important for us all. But which dreams? I used to agree with Herman Melville who supposedly had the following statement on the wall over his work table: “Be true to the dreams of thy youth.” I am now slightly more persuaded by another point of view succinctly expressed by two men of special though differing distinctions. Charles
Francis Adams, on learning that he had lost his party's nomination for the Presidency of the United States, spoke well and wisely about his changing dreamlife: "When I was young I challenged the world for prizes which I now would not cross the room to secure." Shakespeare seemed to agree, through the mouth of a very witty fellow named Benedict, that "a man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age."

While such differing perspectives may be ultimately much ado about nothing, it seems to me that very serious questions are posed if not answered by these quotations. How do we, in fact, successfully reach for our dreams? How well equipped are we for unpredicted dreams, for pursuing new goals, professional and otherwise? And what does legal education have to do with pursuing old dreams and forming new goals?

In a word, our legal education has much to do with our continuing and changing dream lives. What better way to search and succeed than through the application of a rigorously disciplined professional intelligence — a vigorous and powerful intelligence trained for multiple uses. Law study, in its humanistic ways, also teaches us to endure uncertainty with certain measures of patience if not grace. Who among us is entirely immune to confused goals or an absent dreamlife? What if our professional lives are uninspired, at least temporarily, by discernible and praiseworthy goals? At its deeper best, our legal education helps us to endure such a dispiriting condition. Your legal education, therefore, has a moral purpose, both for those of you who will practice your profession for an extended time, and for the many of you who will not.

Finally, your legal education prepares you very well for another instrumental and ultimate goal. You have been invited to participate in a lifetime of conversations. An Englishman by
the name of William Cory, who was a teacher but not a lawyer, speaks for me on this most important of subjects. How strange it is that a non-lawyer should so ably describe the core reasons for culminating our formal education with a legal education:

At school you are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism . . . A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed with average faculties acquire so as to retain; nor need you regret the hours you spend on much that is forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions. But you go to . . . school not so much for knowledge as for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice, a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, discrimination, for mental courage and mental sobriety. And above all you go to a . . . school for self-knowledge."

Amen, brother Cory. Amen!