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Memorial: Nicholas Triffin (1942-2000)

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Memorial: Nicholas Triffin (1942–2000)

¶11 Professor Nicholas Triffin, Director of the Pace University School of Law Library from 1984 until 1998, died on April 8, 2000, after a long and valiant battle against amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). During the eight years Nick fought this cruel disease, his body became increasingly frail, but his will to survive, his dedication to his students, and his love of the study of the law were undiminished. Nick continued to fulfill his personal and professional obligations with grace and dignity, and taught his last class just a few days before his death. It never occurred to him to give up.

¶12 Nick was raised by his parents, Robert and Lois Triffin, in France and New Haven. His father, who taught at Yale, was a well-known Belgian economist who assisted in the formation of the Common Market and championed a European central bank. He was an ardent internationalist who believed that expanded trade among nations would contribute to world peace.

¶13 Nick studied political science and economics at the Università di Roma and graduated cum laude from Yale University with majors in political science and philosophy. He went on to attend Yale Law School, where he specialized in international law. After graduation from law school, Nick practiced law at Willkie, Farr & Gallagher in New York and later worked as an administrator at Columbia University and Johnson State College in Vermont. Nick also worked at the Ford Foundation and practiced law in New Haven.

¶14 In 1978, Nick received his M.L.S. from Rutgers University and began his career in law librarianship. He joined the staff of the University of Connecticut School of Law as the Assistant Law Librarian and then moved to Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he served as the Director of the Law Library and Associate Professor of Law. Nick had very fond memories of his colleagues and friends at Connecticut and Hamline; one of the prized possessions he kept in his office was a stuffed gopher toy that had been given to him as a going-away present by his staff at Hamline.

¶15 Nick moved back to the East Coast in 1984 to become the Director of the Pace Law Library. Pace was a very young school when Nick arrived, and there was much that still needed to be done to develop the library's collection, services, and staff. Nick worked with energy and passion to build up the fine collection that is his legacy to the Pace community. He made sure that, even though we were a new library, we had all the resources required to support the curriculum as well as the research interests of the faculty. When Pace decided to establish its environmental law program, Nick took the lead in choosing the legal, scientific, and technical materials that would support this specialty; today, Pace has one of the richest

environmental law collections in the country. Nick was a visionary and understood the role that computers would eventually play in legal research. He worked toward the goal of integrating manual and online research by investing in technology at the Pace Law Library, and in the early 1980s wrote a series of articles on computer-assisted legal research to help spread his vision of the future.

¶16 In 1998 Nick stepped down as Director of the Pace Law Library and became a full-time Professor of International Law and Advanced Legal Research. In the fall of 1998, Nick spent a sabbatical semester at Yale Law School, where he revisited the study of international law in preparation for his new teaching assignment at Pace. He loved being back at Yale and often spoke warmly of the gracious hospitality shown him by the Yale community during his time there. As an instructor at Pace, Nick was extremely popular with his students, who valued his commitment to them. He produced pages of insightful comments on students' written work and was always accessible.

¶17 Nick's expertise in librarianship and his knowledge of international law were recognized when he was appointed the Director of the Pace Institute of International Commercial Law in 1995. The Pace Institute is probably best known for its highly regarded Web site devoted to the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods. Nick was responsible for both its elegant, user-friendly design and for its high editorial standards. While director of the institute, Nick visited the University of Beijing in 1997, lecturing on international commercial law.

¶18 Even after Nick retired as library director, he still defined himself with pride as a law librarian. He cherished the friendships he had made during his career and spoke fondly of those for whom he had been a mentor. Nick enjoyed the stimulation of the professional associations with which he was involved. While at the University of Connecticut, he served first as vice-president, then as president of the Law Librarians of New England. He was the vice-president/president-elect of the Minnesota Association of Law Libraries during his last year at Hamline. As library director at Pace, Nick was very active in WALDO (the Westchester Academic Library Directors Organization) and was instrumental in guiding this consortium during its early years. Nick served on or chaired a number of committees and special interest sections of the American Association of Law Libraries, and he organized a program on California legal history for the 1992 AALL Annual Meeting in San Francisco.¹ In 1998, he organized and moderated a program on Internet publishing for the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Law Schools.

1. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN EARLY CALIFORNIA LAW: LEGAL HISTORY AND COURT RECORDS, audiotape of program presented at 85th Annual Meeting, American Ass'n Law Libraries, San Francisco, July 21, 1992 (Valencia, Calif.: Mobiltape, 1992).

¶19 Nick's knowledge of legal publishing and bibliography was legendary. For many years, he edited *Law Books in Print*. He collected rare law books and had a particular weakness for legal dictionaries. At some point, he lost track of how many he owned! He also compiled the *Drafting History of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure*² with his wife, Madeleine Wilken, and wrote a number of bibliographies³ and book chapters on legal research. Nick was an extraordinarily talented writer. His prose was crisp, elegant, and seemed to flow effortlessly.

¶10 Until his illness, Nick had been an avid whitewater kayaker with a reputation as a fearless daredevil. He made remarkably potent wine in his kitchen and enjoyed having friends over to sample it. He was a chocoholic who created rich desserts that were works of art, as beautiful as they were delicious. He was a world traveler who made his last trip in February shortly before he died. Nick was a Quaker, an active member of the Wilton (Connecticut) Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, and deeply devoted to peace. He loved opera and music, and could discuss almost any subject with erudition, intelligence, and wit.

¶11 Knowing that his life would not be long, he lived it to the fullest and wasted no time on self-pity. In his last years, Nick became an advocate for the disabled, insisting, for instance, that the Pace Web sites be accessible to visually and hearing-impaired users. At the time of his death, he still had research and writing projects he would have undertaken had time permitted. Our community has lost not only a cherished friend, but also a scholar who was still actively engaged in his life's work.

¶12 No matter how dire Nick's own situation became, he always greeted his students and colleagues with twinkling blue eyes, a gentle smile, and words of encouragement. He displayed a courage that was all the more profound because he never sought to call attention to it. His death has left a tremendous void in the lives of those who knew him.

¶13 Nick loved his family dearly. He is survived by his wife, Madeleine Wilken, and his son, Rob Triffin, an undergraduate student at Yale University. It was a source of great pride to Nick that his son was carrying on the Triffin family connection with Yale University. His daughter, Amyk, a gifted artist, died in 1992; her stimulating artwork decorated his office and was the subject of many conversations. Nick is also survived by his mother and two brothers.—*Marie Stefanini Newman*⁴

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2. DRAFTING HISTORY OF THE FEDERAL RULES OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE (Madeleine J. Wilken & Nicholas Triffin eds., 1991).
 3. See, e.g., Nicholas Triffin, *Legalized Gambling: A Selective Annotated Bibliography from 1970-1980*, 12 CONN. L. REV. 920 (1980).
 4. Director of the Law Library and Associate Professor of Law, Pace University School of Law, White Plains, New York.