Lewis R. Katz†

Sidney Picker: King of the Manor

When Sidney Picker joined the Case faculty fifty-one years ago, Dean Toepfer said that Sidney, with his pedigree of Dartmouth, Stanford, Yale, the White House Trade mission, and a Fulbright in Australia, would never stay here more than a year. Fifty-one years later we celebrate Sidney's memory and honor him for his glorious thirty-three years at the law school despite Toepfer's prediction that he would choose opportunities and go elsewhere.

We honor Sidney for having invented International Law in our curriculum and for fathering the International Law Journal fifty years ago. Sidney hadn't been in Cleveland long when he looked up from his Shaker Heights home and realized that Canada lay just north of Lake Erie. As part of his international law fiefdom, Sidney founded the Canada-U.S. Law Institute, the first of its kind. Sidney reasoned that it was absurd to be in Cleveland and almost see Canada and not focus on the special relationship with our most important neighbor. He got the institute off the ground convincing both the Canadian Embassy and the U.S. State Department that the other was contributing $75,000 because it felt the endeavor so important. To save face, each contributed $75,000, so as not to be outdone by the other. Once the project began, Sidney spent a year shlepping a small committee of law school faculty and a law student visiting several Canadian institutions to select just the right one. By some undisclosed formula Sidney decided that the perfect partner school was Western Ontario Law School, and he was right. Sidney's design focused on student and faculty exchange which thrived for many years, as well as the Canada-U.S. Law Review which focused on comparative legal issues of importance. Sidney also began the CUSLI conference which drew some of the most important diplomats, business executives and scholars to discuss issues critical to the relationship between both countries. In 1980 Sidney snared U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart and Canadian Supreme Court Justice Brian Dixon to highlight the conference. (On the day of Potter Stewart's talk, Sidney, who focused on every detail of the conference down to hors d'oeuvres and the color of napkins, lost Potter Stewart between the Terminal Tower building, where he was staying in a railroad's cushy suite, and the law school where his talk was to be given. It was just such crise du jour which provided the flavor to the very meticulous Sidney's endeavors).

† John C. Hutchins Professor Emeritus of Law, Case Western Reserve University.

It was a similar revelation that prompted Sidney and wife, Professor Jane Picker of the Cleveland Marshall Law School, to greet the fall of the Soviet Union with the realization that someone had better instill in young Russian law students the essence of democracy if Russia was to become part of the democratic west. To that end they created the Russian-U.S. Legal Education Foundation, and taught summer school at St. Petersburg University Faculty of Law and began bringing law students for a year to our law school and Cleveland Marshall School of Law. As before, they managed to talk the two law schools into providing free tuition for the visiting law students and eventually talked eight American law schools to provide scholarships for Russian students. They begged and borrowed the remaining funds to support those students' living and travel expenses from friends, alumni and even the American law firms in St. Petersburg and Moscow who would be the ultimate beneficiaries of those students' education. They have personally interviewed and selected each of the students. And they chose well. The students we took invariably were the best or very close to the best LLM student of the year. Not only were they great students, they went home and became very successful lawyers. As this group of RUSLEF alumni grew, they truly welcomed Sidney and Jane as the Tsar and Tsarina on their annual visits to Russia. And the Russian legal community also took note of Sidney and Jane's accomplishments. They were each awarded Honorary Doctorate of Laws degrees, first by St. Petersburg University in 2002 (the year before the honorees were Russian President Vladimir Putin and the German Chancellor), and in 2013 they were honored by Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University. RUSLEF has created a generation of very successful Russian lawyers committed to democratic principles. The only mistakes Sidney made were that Russia has hardly developed into a democratic nation, nor is there a healthy family of western democratic nations left for it join.

If I stopped now I would not have conveyed the essence of Sidney Picker, the law professor. Sidney taught International Law and Future Interests (he taught the latter because of people like me who insisted that International Law was not law). His classes were informative and fun. His exams were a nightmare, page after page after page. He was always late and would spend the entire night before an exam alone in the law school. In the morning he presented a secretary and the registrar the Herculean task of copying the exam in time for the 9 am test.

Sidney, who loved spending time with students, had an odd sense of priorities. Whatever came along was the priority of the day. If a student had a problem that for some odd reason took five or six(!) hours of discussion to resolve, Sidney spent those five or six hours no matter what else was on his calendar that day. One of his peccadillos, though, was the student who did not show up for an appointment. Lateness Sidney could tolerate, but the student who did not show up and did not call was beyond his patience. When he retired after thirty-three

years there were lawyers in Australia, Canada, Russia and all over the United States who had spent hour after hour after hour with Sidney, interrupted only by Sidney's rushing to class, talking about the student's problems and plans. And amazingly, Sidney never hesitated to solve those problems and develop those plans and tell the student what to do. I've always hesitated to tell a student what to do; what if I was wrong? Somehow, Sidney always knew (or at least never thought he might be wrong), never hesitated, and all over Australia, Canada, Russia and throughout the United States are students who took Sidney's advice and have thrived. Sidney loved his students and knew best, and they loved him.

If a man or woman is lucky, he has one or two lifetime friends. I have been especially lucky because I have had six or seven special lifetime friends, and all have been professors or former students at this law school. Sidney was one of those special friends, and I would like to tell you a little bit about my special friend, Sidney Picker, the gadfly and meshugena.

Always impeccably dressed and well-groomed, Sidney I. Picker, Jr., was truly of the manor born. He was part of the twentieth century's other great American migration—the Jews in the movie business who made their way from New York to Hollywood. It was in Hollywood that Sidney enjoyed the good life and realized or decided that he was special and was entitled to be treated as such. Sidney's father made a great living making B movies at United Artists studios, owned by Sidney's uncle who bought it from Mary Pickford, John Barrymore and Charlie Chaplin. In those days, we went to the movies for a double feature—two movies. One got top billing, and the second was a B movie, made for far less money and starring lesser named actors. Sidney's father made a cowboy series starring a singing cowboy, Gene Autry. Autry's sidekick was a young Indian kid, played by child actor Bobby Blake, who went on to a long career and nefarious ending. Autry and Blake naturally had horses. During the making of the movies, whenever the director shouted "cut," Sidney walked over to Bobby Blake and grabbed his horse and rode it around the studio until they were ready to start shooting again. Growing up in Hollywood instilled in Sidney a certain sense of entitlement. Who wouldn't want to trick or treat when your neighbors were Lou Costello (of Abbott and Costello fame) or the luscious Susan Hayward (who gave out cameras to trick or treaters), for whom Sidney developed a lifelong crush and always cried when she, a convicted murderer, went to the gas chamber in the movie "I Want to Live."

When Sidney came to our law school in 1969, he brought with him a know-how in international trade negotiation, and most importantly his wife, Jane Moody Picker, who built her own career as a distinguished professor at Cleveland-Marshall law school: founder of the Women's Law Fund, and one of the first and distinguished litigators for women's legal rights, in Cleveland as well as in the United States

Supreme Court. Of course, we couldn't hire Jane as a full-time member of this faculty because our then dean did not think women belonged in the law school (as they hadn't belonged at the Harvard Law School from whence the dean came). My wife Jan keeps reminding me that this is not about me, but to me Sidney brought a sense of fun to the law school. It was amazing that you could have a law school training first-class lawyers and have fun doing it. We wrote ditties about all of our colleagues, students who broke the mold, and we began a musical comedy about that dean and his secretary.

Sidney and Jane were outstanding hosts, opening their home to people with titles to young law students everywhere. Dinner parties at the Pickers were always a gracious, eclectic mix of people responsible only for never allowing lulls in the conversation. Jane and Sidney seemed to entertain effortlessly, much as they strode through life together. The young girl from Elyria, Ohio, and the boy from Hollywood were soulmates, partners in life. They made, and lived, their own adventures.

I could focus all day about Sidney's hijinks. Sidney was a master complaint writer. He wrote outraged letters about every perceived insult or vendor's inadequacies. United Airlines' then president wrote him a letter apologizing for just serving peanuts on the delayed flight from Maine to Cleveland. He was so effective at these letters that I told him his tombstone would say, "A Man of Letters." Sidney always paid for the best and expected to be treated as such. When he was kept in the waiting room an inordinate amount of time waiting for his doctor, he sent the Cleveland Clinic a bill for his time. Amazingly, it worked. For as long as he was that doctor's patient, the doctor's office would call Sidney to come because he would be seen in the next fifteen minutes. When Sidney and Jane's house on Van Aken Boulevard was flooded while they were travelling, the insurance company fixed every bit of the house and refinished every piece of furniture except for the master bedroom, which had been spared and where Sidney and Jane lived for close to a year while the work was done. While Sidney's standards were high and demanding, a year to redo the house was excessive. The contractor who just couldn't finish the work to Sidney's standards would show up every morning with coffee and donuts for Sidney and Jane as a peace offering. They built their next home in Cleveland Heights, one of the first urban cluster homes in Cleveland. In the contract, Sidney arranged for a seven-foot fence around their small backyard. Since his became the only fence dividing the common area, it was not popular with the other residents, but Sidney insisted upon his contractual right. Sidney was so particular about every detail of that house, Jane realized she had to send Sidney abroad if the house was ever to be finished; thus, Sidney had his maiden trip to China.

There are multiple examples of Sidney the gadfly here at the law school. We used to have a police training institute at the law school, called the cop shop. Police cars were parked all over East Boulevard

and Ford Drive, most illegally. One morning, Sidney looked out of his office window and saw an officer park his department's car in a no parking zone blocking a pedestrian walkway. Sidney called the local television stations and registered a complaint. It must have been a slow news day because a TV truck pulled up to the law school and started filming the illegally parked police cars. It was quite a sight to see the officers running from their classroom to move their cars. There are multiple other examples but my favorite occurred not too long before Sidney retired. As a money-saving gesture, the university shut off the hot water in the restrooms one winter. It was especially cold washing one's hands in cold water. We all grumbled, but Sidney called OSHA and filed a health complaint. The hot water was turned back on the following week.

I hope I've given you a brief portrait of the many sides of my dear friend Sidney Picker. I miss him so very much.