Fine mind sharpened by a big heart

October 30, 2009

Jack Goldring, 1943-2009

Jack Goldring was one of Australia's finest lawyers, with a sharp and inquiring mind, a breadth of knowledge crossing many disciplines, a great wit and creativity. He was an inspiring teacher and scholar (and, critically, a scholar who cared very deeply about teaching) and a friend and mentor to many students and colleagues.

John Lester Goldring was born in Sydney on April 14, 1943, the son of Les Goldring, a jeweller, and his wife, Elsa. Jack's first public role was as one of the famous radio "Quiz Kids" of the 1950s. He was educated at North Sydney Boys High School and the University of Sydney (from which he graduated with a BA and an LLB), and in 1969 he earned an LLM (master of laws) from Columbia University as an Australian-American Educational Foundation Fellow.

Goldring's academic career was characterised by innovation, energy and accomplishment. He was one of the first staff members at the University of Papua New Guinea, where he served in the faculty of law from 1970 to 1972. Many of his students from that era went on to become important figures in law and government in PNG.

Back in Australia in the mid-1970s, he joined the law faculty at the Australian National University, where he supported the community legal services movement and was one of the founders of its principal academic organ, the *Legal Service Bulletin*. He was dean and professor of Macquarie University Law School from 1981 to 1987 and foundation dean of law at the University of Wollongong from 1990 to 1995. He made this new law school a critical part of the region.

Goldring's sense of social justice led to new programs and policies to support equal opportunity entry into law for indigenous students and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

He was always prepared to contribute to public policy and in 1983 and 1984 was the chairman of the Committee of Review of Private Overseas Student Policy. Its findings, published as the Goldring Report, rejected a market-based approach to the education of overseas students and said the introduction of fees for overseas students should be slower and more moderate than had been suggested, and that the plan should be supported by generous public scholarships.

Goldring was also a law reformer. He served as a commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission full-time from 1987 to 1990 (and then part-time until 1992) and as a commissioner of the NSW Law Reform Commission in 1997 and 1998.

In 1998 Goldring was appointed a judge of the District Court of NSW - a rare honour for a career academic. He sought out and soon excelled at handling criminal trials, with all their added pressures and the special need for evidentiary and procedural precision.

In 2007 Goldring was chosen as a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of Law and a member of the Council of the Judicial College of Australia, representing District and County Court judges across Australia.

His intellect was matched with a compassionate soul. Goldring not only made many friends, he kept them all his life. His sense of humour was enormous and infectious, and there was nothing he loved more than a good laugh. He loved making appalling puns and hearing his friends groan as an irrepressible chuckle bubbled out of him.
He also loved to eat good food, but, more importantly, loved to eat with and cook for his friends. All his enthusiasms, knowledge and ideas were shared. He loved to read and to shine his perceptive, curious and kindly mind on books of all kinds - histories, comedies, satires, thrillers. They all found a place on his shelves, beside the bed, over the coffee table and under the stairs, all lent in a moment to friends.

He also loved travel after a journey to India as a student stimulated his interest in other cultures. Many recent travels were organised with groups of friends, to the Kimberley, Italy, the south of France, Russia and back to India.

Late in 2008, Goldring heard that his lymphatic cancer had returned, just before a trip he had organised for 15 friends to Rajasthan. He shared it vicariously.

Jack Goldring was married twice, to Liz Dennis in 1967 and to Maree Keating in 1980. He is survived by his partner of 16 years, Sue Kirby, and his stepchildren Nicki, Harry, Sam and Syd.

Colleen Chesterman