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JAMES M. FORKINS SR. , 85

Revered law professor at Loyola

By Barbara Sherlock
Tribune staff reporter

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James M. Forkins Sr. had such a strong effect on his law students at Loyola University that decades later they can remember being in his classroom.

"He was a terribly impressive man because he was very, very bright and very much in command of his subjects and of his classroom," said Jim Faught, the law school's associate dean who was his student in 1979.

Mr. Forkins taught about contracts, a required class for first-year law students. He was, for many students, their introduction to law school, to law professors and to a lawyer.

"It's not too far a stretch that at first students--me included--were in awe of him," Faught said. "He taught a very serious and professional class and was so competent you didn't want to disappoint him.

"One of the things I will always remember is that he would come into the class impeccably dressed and was the only professor we ever saw that could lean against a dirty blackboard and walk away clean. He really was a wonderful image of a lawyer and professor for us."

Mr. Forkins, 85, retired professor of Loyola University Chicago School of Law and a founding fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, died of complications from a dissected aorta Thursday, April 15, in his Chicago home.

Mr. Forkins decided at the age of 12 to be a lawyer, influenced by his grandfather who had an interest in the law and his uncle who was an attorney, said his wife, Sandra.

He began his legal education at the University of Detroit, but then, after serving in the Army Air Forces during World War II, he finished earning his degree at the University of Michigan. He was admitted to the Michigan bar in 1947 and to Illinois' bar in 1949.

He became part of the Loyola faculty in 1947 on the advice of his best friend at the time who had joined the Jesuit order the same day Mr. Forkins was drafted into the Army Air Forces.

For the next 27 years, Mr. Forkins taught classes in contracts, remedies, matrimonial and family law, helping to create the curriculum for the latter two subjects in the 1960s. He was an acknowledged expert in the Socratic method of teaching, prodding his students to learn by answering sequential questions, instead of just delivering the information to

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them by lecture.

During the 1960s, he also was the university's general counsel and helped in the real estate transaction for its Rome Center.

He left Loyola in 1974 for private practice, working for a number of firms, including serving as the head of the matrimonial division as a partner in Schiff, Hardin and Waite. In 1981, he returned to Loyola and remained there until his retirement seven years later, when he became professor emeritus and opened a private practice with his best friend Owen Doss. He officially retired in 1993.

While in private practice, he met his wife, Sandra, and they married in 1976. He had been married and divorced earlier from his first wife, Mary Margaret Mollica.

A national authority in matrimonial and family law, he helped found the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in 1962, serving as its president from 1970 to 1973.

He enjoyed mystery novels, when he was finished reading his three newspapers a day and completed their crossword puzzles. He loved the opera and traveling.

Other survivors include his daughters, Patricia Callaghan, Theresa Janovsky and Elizabeth Harano; his sons, James "Marc" Jr. and Stephen; 14 grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren.

A funeral will be held 11 a.m. Tuesday in Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, 2455 N. Hamlin Ave., Chicago.

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