

Roy Reardon, a ‘Lawyer’s Lawyer’ and a ‘Lion’ of the Trial Bar, Dies at 92

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Roy Reardon, the legendary former head of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett’s litigation department who spent more than six decades with the firm, died on Friday, the firm and his family announced. He was 92.

Raised in Astoria, Queens, Reardon was the second of four children born to a father who was a printer by trade and who worked for a financial newspaper that went belly up when the Great Depression hit.

To put food on the family table, his father took jobs through the Works Progress Administration, where he did backbreaking labor such as digging ditches for what is now the Grand Central Parkway and working on the approach for the Triborough Bridge, now called the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge.

For a time, a storied legal career did not always seem like it would be Reardon’s destiny.

None of his relatives worked in the legal profession and his father encouraged him to focus on his athletic gifts—especially basketball, which got him a full-ride scholarship to St. Francis College in Brooklyn.

“He was a natural athlete, a fierce competitor and a champion of sportsmanship in all aspects of his life,” Reardon’s family wrote in his obituary.

At St. Francis, Reardon was co-captain of the varsity basketball team and broke the school’s scoring record. He was drafted into the NBA by the Syracuse Nationals, the franchise that is now the Philadelphia 76ers.

But ultimately Reardon was steered in a different direction.

One of his teammates from St. Francis invited Reardon to go watch criminal trials at Brooklyn’s Borough Hall, according to his oral history for the Historical Society for the New York Courts, for which he served as executive vice president.

“I decided I would, and I went with him and kept going with him whenever I could and came to the conclusion that being a lawyer sounded really interesting,” Reardon said in his oral history. “It was competitive just like sports. There was an interaction with people, so you had to have, generally, a sensible approach to life’s problems and how to deal with them, and you had the ability to help people if you could.”

Reardon continued nurturing the idea of becoming an attorney and



Roy Reardon, former litigation department head at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett.

Courtesy photo

decided to apply to St. John’s University School of Law.

Reardon’s life then came to a crossroads. He was accepted into St. John’s, but he was also set to go to training camp for the Nationals when the fall semester started that year. He couldn’t have it both ways.

Reardon tried to balance the grueling work of going to law school while playing for a second-tier professional basketball team that toured around for games in small cities in New York and Pennsylvania. When his grades began to suffer, he gave up his hoop dreams and devoted himself to his legal studies.

After his 1954 graduation, he was drafted into the Army, where he worked as a counterintelligence agent.

Reardon landed with Simpson Thacher in 1956, pulling down a starting associate's salary of \$4,500 a year—a figure that in more recent years he would pass along to new associates at the firm who were hired with promises of six-figure paychecks, he said in his oral history.

When Reardon joined the firm, Simpson Thacher had fewer than 100 lawyers on staff (a number that has grown almost ten-fold) and everyone was required to have hats, he recounted. By 1965, he was made partner.

In his long career with the firm, Reardon represented a veritable who's who of corporate clients.

Around the time that consumer advocate Ralph Nader's seminal work "Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile" hit the shelves and car manufacturers were faced with a rising tide of products liability litigation, Reardon worked on a team representing General Motors.

Other bold-faced clients that Reardon represented during his tenure were Seagrams, Ford and GTE. In the GTE libel case, in 1989 a Florida jury granted a \$100 million verdict against Home Shopping Network, which accused GTE of selling it a faulty telephone system.

Reardon also successfully represented professional golfer Casey Martin, who has a condition that impairs his ability to walk, in a landmark case before the United States Supreme Court establishing Martin's right to accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Roy was a legendary lawyer, a lion of the trial bar, and a renowned appellate advocate, arbitrator and mediator," Reardon's family said in his obituary.

In addition to his work for the firm, Reardon wrote a regular column for the Law Journal on the New York Court of Appeals; served as chair for the grievance committee in the Appellate Division, First Department; sat on the boards for the Fund for Modern Courts, the Office of the Appellate Defender and the Judges' and Lawyers' Breast Cancer Alert; and worked on the New York City Bar Association's executive committee.

Simpson Thacher leaders issued statements of tribute in the wake of Reardon's death and credited him with being the principal architect of the firm's global litigation practice.

"Roy was a legendary leader and he will be greatly missed—he set such an example for all of us, in particular through his deep commitment to pro bono work," said Bill Dougherty, Chair of Simpson Thacher's Executive Committee. "So many generations of lawyers benefitted from his expertise, insight and dedication, and I'm honored to have called him a colleague and friend."

Lynn Neuner, Global Co-Chair of Simpson Thacher's Litigation Department, added: "Roy was a revered member of the trial and appellate bar for good reason. He played a critical role in some of the nation's most-significant cases across so many disciplines—class actions and products liability, libel, antitrust, arbitrations. He was the consummate 'lawyer's lawyer' and will be deeply missed."

"Roy was extraordinary—as a litigator, colleague and a mentor," said Jon Youngwood, Global Co-Chair of the Litigation Department at Simpson Thacher. "Not only did he play a vital

role in the Firm's global development and the Litigation Department, but he was incredibly generous in providing counsel to his fellow partners and young lawyers. We are fortunate to have had him as a colleague."

The Historical Society issued a statement on Reardon's passing stating that the attorney provided "smart, no-nonsense guidance" for the organization.

"As the Society's executive vice president, Roy strongly supported our education initiatives, communicating to the public, and especially to students, the fundamental significance of courts in their lives and opportunities," the statement reads. "He developed our fundraising initiatives, including our annual gala, a fixture in the legal community."

Reardon was preceded in death by his first wife, Teresa Steele Reardon.

He is survived by his second wife, Patricia M. Hynes; his children, Abigail Reardon, Cordelia Reardon Laverack, Letitia Reardon Tregellas and Roy L. Reardon, Jr.; his brothers John and Alan Reardon, his sister Rita Reardon Spoto; 11 grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

Memorial services have not yet been planned.