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2021 Alumni Career Award: Hon. George Singal, 1967

Brian Naylor

George Z. Singal

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The College of Our Hearts Always

2021 Alumni Career Award Recipient—Judge George Singal, '67

June 21, 2021

<https://youtu.be/kn7axplpaw8>

Run Time : 00:09:48

Transcript is machine generated, unedited, in English.

The Hon. George Singal '67 was selected to receive the Alumni Career Award, the Alumni Association's highest honor. Singal has had a long, distinguished career in law.

Singal arrived in the U.S. as a young immigrant following World War II. He rose in his profession to become a United States District Court judge. In 2019, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts appointed Singal to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court along with his District Court duties. In that role, Singal reviews and acts on government requests for electronic surveillance, physical searches, and other matters related to foreign intelligence gathering.

00:01

the university of maine alumni

00:03

association

00:04

alumni career award i'm npr washington

00:08

correspondent brian naylor

00:12

george single's story begins in lublin

00:15

poland

00:16

his father and mother when the nazis

00:19

invaded poland

00:20

fought in the resistance his father did

00:24

not survive the war
00:26
his mother was pregnant with george
00:29
and after the war she
00:32
took her little daughter by her hand and
00:34
somehow
00:35
through courage and perseverance found
00:38
her way
00:39
a thousand miles through central europe
00:42
over the italian alps into a refugee
00:46
where she gave birth to george george's
00:48
mother
00:50
his sister and he as a baby
00:53
emigrated the united states they had
00:57
nothing
00:58
spoke little or no english came to
01:00
bangor maine
01:02
george learned early on the value of
01:05
education
01:07
the value of community
01:08
[Music]
01:10
and the value of hard work
01:13
he might have learned the value of luck
01:15

when meeting the love of his life
01:18
i met george at camp lounge in oakland
01:21
maine
01:22
i was in my cabin and i was attacked by
01:24
a bat this huge
01:26
huge thing came flying at me i ran
01:29
running out
01:30
and he said i'll get whatever it is
01:33
he comes in he finds a broom he goes
01:35
bang bang bang bang
01:36
he comes out holding this little thing
01:38
and i say that's not what i saw
01:42
single earned his bachelor of arts
01:44
degree from the university of maine in
01:46
1967
01:47
his juris doctor from harvard in 1970
01:51
and then began private practice in
01:53
bangor every case that george took on
01:56
no matter what it involved was
01:59
became a passion of george's not just
02:02
represent
02:03
the client but the knowledge base itself
02:07

single soon became a lawyer's lawyer
02:10
and the proof of that is that when
02:12
lawyers
02:13
got into legal trouble and they were
02:15
sued for malpractice
02:17
who did they go to they went to
02:19
georgetown
02:20
in 2000 president clinton nominated
02:23
single to fill the post left by the
02:24
passing of u.s district judge morton
02:27
brody he was a favorite selection
02:29
for the court supported by me and many
02:32
of his calling our calling
02:35
i think he had a quiet ambition
02:38
to be a judge and he did go out and seek
02:42
it actively
02:43
but he was delighted to have the
02:46
appointment
02:47
and it's certainly true that he has
02:49
served the court very well
02:52
when he goes on the bench to consider a
02:54
case
02:55

he's known among his colleagues to be
02:57
thoroughly prepared to know the ins and
02:59
outs of the case
03:01
to know the facts that gave rise to the
03:03
case
03:04
and to understand fully what the policy
03:07
ramifications are of his decisions
03:11
chief justice john roberts appointed
03:13
single to the united states foreign
03:14
intelligence surveillance court in 2019
03:18
for many of us concepts of
03:21
due process separation of powers
03:25
freedom of speech are theoretical
03:27
concepts
03:30
for george they are secular
03:33
commandments they are
03:37
concrete single would often share his
03:41
inspirational story
03:42
when naturalizing citizens i wish
03:46
everybody could observe judge single
03:49
preside over a naturalization ceremony
03:52
he shares with them in part some of his
03:56

personal history and he inspires each
03:59
and every one of those new citizens
04:02
to achieve whatever they want he does
04:05
not tire
04:06
of telling his story to new citizens to
04:09
prove
04:10
to them that in this country anybody can
04:14
be
04:14
anything that they would hope
04:17
george is a talented cook who can tell a
04:21
perfect
04:22
joke he can recite episodes of seinfeld
04:26
and the godfather perfectly
04:28
and he always gets to the airport at
04:31
least
04:32
an hour ahead of when he needs to be
04:35
punctual in getting to an appointment
04:38
and
04:38
sitting for a portrait one day i walked
04:41
into
04:42
judge singles chambers and he looked at
04:45
me
04:45

and he said what are you going to do

04:47

about your portrait

04:49

and i said i i don't know i'm not quite

04:52

ready for it he said

04:53

you've got to do it now do it before

04:56

your face

04:56

sags

04:57

[Music]

05:00

i called the artist that afternoon

05:04

george is more than george george is a

05:08

patriot

05:09

and he's somebody that it's a delight to

05:11

know george you're not a person who

05:14

seeks recognition who seeks

05:17

publicity by nature you are a quiet

05:21

reserved man

05:24

i am so happy for you and your family

05:27

george

05:28

on behalf of me and patty and our family

05:31

we want to congratulate you and tell you

05:34

how

05:35

very very proud we are of you my friend

05:38

my colleague my mentor the university of

05:42

maine

05:43

has recognized your sustained excellence

05:47

as a lawyer as a judge and as a human

05:51

being

05:51

on behalf of all of the law clerks

05:53

who've been lucky enough to work with

05:55

you during your more than 20 years on

05:56

the bench

05:57

we just want to thank you through your

05:59

example we've learned how to be students

06:01

of the law

06:02

while teaching others to appreciate the

06:04

rule of law congratulations grandpa jake

06:07

olivia zach and i are so proud of you

06:09

we're always here cheering you on and we

06:11

can't wait to see what you accomplish

06:12

next we love you

06:14

i've grown up with you i've raised our

06:16

family together with you

06:18

and now i'm growing older with you

06:21

i am so proud of you today and always

06:24

our entire
06:25
family congratulates you on having
06:28
received the 2021 university
06:31
alumni career award it's so well
06:33
deserved and especially so
06:35
since i know how much the university has
06:37
meant to you
06:38
judge george single the 2021
06:42
alumni career award honoree i want to
06:44
thank the alumni association
06:47
for the honor of being given the alumni
06:50
career award
06:52
when i view the prior awardees
06:55
i am humbled to be in their company
06:58
as i think back to my time in orono
07:02
i realized that this award is not really
07:05
about me i see it as recognition of the
07:08
programs
07:10
and professors at the university of
07:12
maine in rno who prepared me
07:14
for where i am today june is graduation
07:18
season
07:20

and graduates are routinely asked what

07:22

they learned in college

07:24

to be honest i remember fewer any of the

07:27

many facts i learned

07:30

but that is in my view

07:33

of no consequence

07:34

[Music]

07:36

albert einstein once said quote that the

07:39

purpose of a proper education

07:42

is not the learning of many facts

07:45

but rather the training of the mind to

07:48

think

07:49

unquote in other words

07:52

the purpose is to so train the student

07:56

that that education continues forever

08:00

at maine i was blessed with professors

08:03

like

08:04

whitney and thompson and schoenberger

08:09

all of whom considered teaching a

08:11

passion

08:12

and not simply a vocation

08:15

they were accessible and they cared

08:18

about the students

08:20

in fact it was professor thompson who

08:23

urged me to go to law school

08:25

even when i resisted the idea

08:29

the honors program exposed me to

08:31

multiple disciplines

08:33

history economics

08:37

science philosophy and languages

08:41

not just to learn the facts but to

08:43

develop the ability

08:45

to observe the connections among all of

08:47

these disciplines

08:49

in a word to think

08:52

being at the university was academically

08:55

not

08:55

easy professors challenged our answers

08:59

regularly

09:00

when a student took a position he or she

09:03

often had to defend it

09:05

before the other students was it worth

09:08

it

09:09

yes i've often stated that i worked

09:12

harder at the university of maine
09:14
than later at harvard law school the
09:17
common wisdom
09:18
is that law school teaches one to think
09:22
like a lawyer
09:23
i was one up on that i had already been
09:26
taught
09:27
to think like a black bear again
09:31
thank you for this honor
09:36
[Music]
09:47
you

The University of Maine in Orono is the flagship campus of the University of Maine System, where efforts toward racial equity are ongoing, as is the commitment to facing a complicated and not always just institutional history. The University recognizes that it is located on Marsh Island in the homeland of the Penobscot nation, where issues of water and its territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites, are ongoing. Penobscot homeland is connected to the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations — the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac — through kinship, alliances, and diplomacy. The university also recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are distinct, sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.