ALLAN F. SMITH —
Young all his life

Professor Kent Syverud
delivered this tribute to Allan
Smith, his former professor and
academic inspiration, at Smith's
Smith died Jan. 21 at the
age of 82.

I first met Allan Smith
in the summer of 1978, when
he was already 66 years old.
That summer, and into the
fall, he taught property law to
students. The course
began in early August, and we
were young all his life. His portrait at the Law
School captures that. Allan's
predecessors as dean —
Blythe Stason, Harry
Hutchins, Henry Bates and
others, have traditional
portraits, each seated, alone,
in a dark suit, staring clear-
eyed over the viewer’s head
into the infinite future. And
then comes Allan's portrait:
modern art (too modern for
some people), bright colors,
numerous panels showing
Allan smiling, moving, alive,
and actually with someone,
Alene, who shares in so much
of their joint achievements.

Allan did so many things
for this University: as director
of graduate studies in the law
school, as dean, as vice
president, as interim presi-
dent, and as a promoter of the
arts. But he was at his greatest
in the classroom, and I think
it is as a teacher he would
most want to be remembered.

Many of you surely remember
his teaching. The way, when
you answered wrong, he
would bellow “What?!” Before
that, I never knew it was
possible, in a single word, to
convey irritation, amusement,
and forgiveness at the same
time. Many of you surely also
remember how, after he
guided you through a
minefield of hypothetical
questions — how, after he
had needled you into thinking
aloud intelligently for the first
time in your life — he would
finally stop after one of your
answers and say to you “Yep,
that’s pretty good,” and then
move on to someone else. We
students came to live for those
“pretty goods” — we prized
them above all other praise.

Allan always loved the
theater. It has taken me years
to understand just how fine
an actor he really was. In the
classroom he was not an
obvious entertainer or a
comedian. He did, however,
dramatically infect us with his
passion for law. His wry
humor and occasional disgust
always were sincere, and yet
on reflection I see they were
also quite calculated —
calculated to lead us to the
problem or nuance or insight
Allan wanted us to struggle
with. Allan's acting was
invisible (like all great acting),
leaving us to focus on the
drama of the law itself.

Much of what we do in this
college town sometimes seems
driven by our desire to
triumph in some secular way
over death. Some of us seek
immortality through our
children — through giving
them the great values and
learning and culture and
opportunities that will enable
them to look back with pride.
Some of us seek immortality
through our research and
writing, hoping that it will be
studied and read long after we
are dust. Some of us seek it by
erecting enduring buildings or
by building immortal institu-
tions.

Allan, of course, did all
these things. His children and
grandchildren and great-
grandson would make anyone
proud; he wrote two books;
there is a hospital that he
helped get built and a beauti-
ful law library that bears his
name; and he surely helped
nurture this great institution,
this University of Michigan,
through very troubling times.
Yet there is not a soul in this
sanctuary who really believes
Allan did any of these things
so that he would be remem-
bered after his death.

Allan did them because, in
his understated, plain-spoken
way, he loved people and
wanted to teach them. Allan
Smith, that youngest of
teachers, will live on through
the people who learned from
him, inside and outside the
classroom, and there are an
awful lot of us. My colleague,
Ted St. Antoine, who is also
Allan's former student, has
said it far more eloquently
than I can: “Allan drew out
the best in everyone around
him. His memorial will be the
careers he fostered and the
lives he enriched.”

For all these reasons, we
have to say to you, Alene, and
to Stevie and Greg and the
family: We will miss Allan
terribly. But it is hard for us
to be sad for very long when we
think of Allan's life. We can
think of no life that was better
lived, or that is more worth
celebrating. And Allan,
wherever you are, please
know that, thirty years from
now in the year 2024, when I
am 66 years old and gawkily
presiding over yet another
class of 21-year-olds in
Hutchins Hall, your portrait
will hang before me, and your
memory will make me the
youngest person in the place.

— Professor Kent Syverud
Michigan Law School