Professor M. Michael Sharlot, Wright C. Morrow Professor Emeritus in Law and dean of the Law School from 1995 to 2000, passed away on June 22, 2013, while on a cruise in Alaska. He will be remembered for his razor-sharp intellect and matching wit, his expansive erudition, his selfless dedication to the Law School, his graciousness to his colleagues and friends, and, even, his sartorial splendor.

Mike was born in Brooklyn, New York, on October 7, 1935, to immigrant parents of modest means. He lived in Brooklyn and Philadelphia, but spent his formative years in the small Pennsylvania town of Delaware Water Gap. After graduating as valedictorian from Stroudsburg High School, he worked his way through Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he met his future wife, Susan (Seigel) Sharlot. They were married upon his graduation and set off together to Australia where Mike studied labor arbitration at the University of Melbourne on a Fulbright Scholarship. When they returned from Australia, Mike enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania Law School, taking his LL.B. in 1962. He began his legal career as an associate at Covington & Burling LLP, but left to join the office of legal counsel to the Peace Corps when that program was only six months old. He stayed with the Peace Corps for five years, eventually serving as its General Counsel.

Mike joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin School of Law in 1969. He soon became known as an expert in criminal law and evidence. He gave generously of his time in improving the administration of justice in a variety of ways. These included his service as one of the primary drafters of the original Texas Rules of Evidence, on the Texas Punishment Standards Commission, as a West Lake Hills municipal judge and zoning and planning commissioner, and on numerous other professional and governmental committees. He collaborated with colleagues to produce a leading casebook on criminal law (now in its sixth edition), a two-volume treatise on the Texas law of evidence (now in its third edition), and a best-selling Texas evidence handbook. It is said that Texas trial lawyers enter the courtroom without a copy of this handbook at their peril.

But Mike’s true passions were his teaching and his administrative service to the Law School. In the classroom, he was known for his exhaustive knowledge of the subject, his quick wit, and his mastery of the Socratic method. A recipient of the Texas Exes’ Teaching Excellence Award in 1986, Mike had legions of devoted current and former students. They all admired his incisive intellect and wit, which were obvious from the outset. Many of them, particularly those who faced personal hardships, also discovered that Mike was a man of enormous compassion and kindness, willing to spend hours talking with them and assisting in any way he could.

Mike’s talents as an administrator were extensive and his selfless dedication to the Law School was unequaled. He served as associate dean for academic affairs for ten years under Deans John Sutton and Mark Yudof. He was named interim dean in 1994 and dean of the Law School in 1995. He presided as dean at a turbulent time in the history of the Law School. Not long after his appointment, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decided Hopwood v. Texas, declaring that the Law School’s affirmative action program in admissions was
unconstitutional. One of his major contributions as dean was leading the Law School’s successful effort to maintain the diversity of its student body. Notwithstanding the disruption caused by Hopwood, Mike’s deanship was also marked by the significant expansion of the Law School faculty and comprehensive reform of the first-year curriculum. At the end of his deanship, Mike returned to full-time teaching and remained a valued colleague until his retirement in 2007.

Despite his brilliance and renown as a legal scholar and dean, Mike is perhaps best remembered for his personal qualities. He had a great heart for friendship and a complete generosity of mind and spirit. He balanced wit and compassion and rigor of thought with what amounted to perfect pitch. And Sue was his equal in these regards. As a result, a community naturally formed around the Sharlots that made room for everyone. Whether you were Ann Richards or Molly Ivins or a timid Law School newcomer who needed a welcome, you found a place set for you at their huge and well-used dining room table. Their summer pool parties were legendary for hospitality, frolicking children, and the best conversation you could have in a wet bathing suit. Mike formed many dear friendships during his forty-four years in Austin, and with these friends he had countless adventures traveling and exploring Texas and the world.

Mike did not take his accomplishments, his family, or his friendships for granted. Rather, he considered himself the most fortunate of men. He especially felt enormously lucky in his family and took great pleasure and pride in them all. To say that Mike will be missed by his family and friends does not do justice to the sentiment. He is survived by his wife of fifty-six years, Susan Siegel Sharlot; his sister and brother-in-law, Phyllis and Fred Zusman; his daughter, Sarah Sharlot Dietrich, and husband, Fred Dietrich; his son, Matthew Sharlot, and wife, Karen Keohane Sharlot; his nephew and niece and their spouses, Robert and Tia Zusman and Rosanne and Bob Jacobs; and his adored grandchildren, Sam, Max, and Julia Dietrich.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Guy Wellborn (chair), Lynn Blais, and John A. Robertson.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Law on December 5, 2013, and posted under “Memorials” at http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.