



JOHN HELD (L'64)

BY GREG LANGLOIS

John Held (L'64) freely admits he's not a "details" man. After earning a bachelor's degree in engineering from Purdue University, he ultimately decided against pursuing a doctorate in nuclear engineering or thermodynamics—two areas he was interested in—partly because he felt he "was just not going to be a very good detail-oriented engineer." Instead, he chose a career in patent law. He quickly learned that choice didn't exempt him from summoning a command for details, either—and neither would any other legal area.

"One of the things about patent law that always bothered me was the details," he says. "But looking around at my compatriots in other areas of practice in my first firm, which was a general law firm, I found out that they had to be just as detail-oriented as I did.... I remember walking into a real estate lawyer's office a couple of doors down from me, and there he was with a ruler trying to measure an area to find the square feet. I thought, 'Boy, I don't want to do that!'"

So Held stuck with patent, trademark, and copyright law. And despite his distaste for details, he's enjoyed a successful career that nicely combines his engineering background and love of the law. For that he's grateful. "I would say God was on my side," he says. "He made me make the right choice."

After working for nearly two decades for the same law firm, Held and six other attorneys launched their own Chicago-based firm in 1988. McAndrews, Held & Malloy, which specializes in intellectual property, now employs more than 80 attorneys, and Held continues to draw from his engineering background to represent his clients even more effectively.

"I basically use engineering as a translation tool," says Held, who was encouraged to pursue engineering by his father at a time when the Soviet Union was thought to be winning the "space race." "Whether I went kicking and screaming into engineering school or not, I came out as an engineer, and this work is a good opportunity to combine my engineering background with the law, which I love. It allows you to translate the technical subject matter that you're getting from the technical people without their having to go back to the basics. You have to translate it into a language that patent people use."

When patent, trademark, or copyright disputes lead to litigation, there's more at stake than designs, brand names, or ideas, Held says. "People think patent law is just about things and machines," he observes. "But a lot of people are surprised at the emotion that goes into those cases because you're talking about somebody's 'baby'—they identify with these inventions. So there is a dynamic that includes some very personal feelings. Before I got into it, I hadn't really realized that was going to happen."

Despite that surprise, he did have plenty of intellectual property training before launching his career. While attending Georgetown Law at night, Held first worked as a government patent examiner, then worked at a Washington, D.C., patent firm, and finally clerked for a federal judge on the former U.S. Court of Customs and Patent Appeals.

Balancing work and school—as well as a growing family (by graduation, two of the Helds' three daughters had been born)—was not easy, Held recalls. "It didn't leave a lot of room for fun. It meant long days," he says. But "everyone in the carpool...was in the night school doing the same thing, so you didn't feel sorry for yourself."

Held has given back to Georgetown in a number of ways, by serving, for example, on Georgetown University's Board of Regents, on which he served as chair of the Law Affairs Committee, and helping to lead the Third Century Campaign, for which he was the Law Campaign Committee's vice chair of the Chicago region. In recognition of his service to Georgetown, Held was awarded the Paul R. Dean Award in 1999.

The reason he has worked for and donated to his alma mater is a simple matter of applying the law's "but for" test, says Held, who grew up in a small town near Louisville, Kentucky, and was the first in his family to attend college.

"'But for' Georgetown, I wouldn't be where I am, and I wouldn't have enjoyed the life I have had," he says. "So a certain element of my motivation is payback. They took a Kentucky boy who went to school in Lafayette, Indiana—and there I was at Georgetown. I'm an attorney, and it's really made a difference in my economic life and my whole emotional life—everything—so you really need to give back something."

"The opportunity was there, they gave me a lot, and I've tried to give back some little part of it."