

# He's Lawyer, Heart & Soul

Leon Charney was at a neighborhood movie one June day three years ago when a woman suddenly screamed, "Help! Help my husband!"

The man was in the agony of a heart attack. Someone rushed to phone for an ambulance. Leon raced to the nearest apartment house, rang the bells of three doctors. All three said the same thing: "I don't want to get involved."

When the ambulance arrived 50 minutes later, the man was dead.

"That shook me up badly," Leon recalled. "Didn't the doctors realize the same frightening thing could happen to them? But they were re-



Leon Charney—a Good Samaritan

luctant to be good Samaritans because they were often sued for negligence."

For the next two years Leon fought a single-handed battle to get a "Good Samaritan Law" on New York State's books. In March, 1964, New York became the 14th state to provide that if a doctor helps an emergency victim he is not liable to a law suit unless he is grossly negligent.

"I hoped the law would compel doctors to aid anyone in an emergency," Leon said. "But they rejected that on the grounds that it goes beyond constitutional limits."

## Began Fight as Student

All this would be a considerable achievement for that rare breed—a seasoned lawyer who is also selfless. In Leon's case it was remarkable. He began his fight when he was a student in law school.

He is 26, won his law degree a year ago and is now with the staid Wall Street firm of Colton & Pinkham. He will not work or travel on his Sabbath or any holy day. A devout Orthodox Jew, he practices all tenets of his religion faithfully.

He and his wife, Rene, an assistant editor at Doubleday, live in Manhattan, but Leon serves as the permanent, full-time cantor of Congregation Beth Abraham in Bayonne, N. J., where he was born.

"Until I got into Brooklyn Law School my education was a religious one," he said.

In four years at Yeshiva University he took twice the number of courses of the average student because he was taking two degrees simultaneously, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Hebrew Literature.

## Quits Basketball Team

He had to quit the varsity basketball team after the first year. His father died. Leon made his own way by selling fabrics at night and over the phone between classes.

After he was graduated he taught school for one year, decided on the law and resumed his sales job after class. In seven years of school he never got more than five hours sleep a night.

"But I was very fortunate," Leon said. "My

best customer put \$2,000 in the bank for me. I never used it, but it was a great lift knowing it was there."

During summer vacations he was a pop singer in summer resorts. At one point he refused a recording contract.

"The law is a little more stimulating than rock 'n' roll," Leon said drily.

He had hardly settled in his law office when a song-writing friend came to him one day with this story:

## Friend Was Incensed

On a Sunday night the songwriter had parked his car in a legal zone in front of his house. On Monday morning he came down to find a fat yellow line painted on the curb in front of his car, marking a brand new bus stop. There was also a parking ticket tied to the windshield.

"My friend was properly incensed," Leon said. "He felt the Traffic Department should have left a note to the cop on the beat. He decided to fight it, no matter what it cost."

Leon dug into his law books and filed a demurrer with the court, meaning the charges as stated were true, but as a matter of law they were insufficient to constitute a crime or an offense. The charge was dismissed.

"As far as anyone knows," Leon said, "that's the first time that happened in court."

It's been said that the law is never dead though it often sleeps. Leon likes nothing better than to jolt it awake.