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Tribute

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I spent my third year of law school in 1995-1996 at Boston University as a visiting student from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Although personal reasons brought me to Boston that year, one reason brought me to B.U. -- Betsy Clark, a scholar whose work I had long admired and who had agreed to take me on as her student. I knew what a top-notch historian Betsy was, but I could not have known when I arrived at B.U. what a great teacher, generous mentor, and kind friend she would be.

Supervising my independent study that fall, Betsy was incredibly patient. I would run to her office with what I thought was a bright idea: "Isn't this legislation a response to that particular historical event?" I'd ask. "Hmm. Why do you think so?" Betsy would query if I was vaguely coherent. "Maybe you should read an article by so-and-so," she'd respond if I was particularly off track. Yet Betsy's questions never scared me; what I feared the most was her silence, her lack of comments on an idea or a paper. After I finally got up the courage to show the first draft of an article to Betsy (who was by far the best writer I knew), it was not the red ink on my paper which sent me back to the computer, but rather her lack of comments which told me I had rewriting to do. Silently, Betsy told me that she believed that my work could be better. Slowly, over the course of my year as her student, I began to believe that I could do better, too.

No idea too crazy for the intrepid Betsy Clark. She spent many afternoons in conversations with her students. On more than one occasion, I stayed too long at her office hours because she was so easy to talk to and just plain fun. One afternoon when we were discussing some research, Betsy interrupted me to say, "Bridget, that sounds great. It's really interesting, but let's go get some french fries." So off we went to the food court next to the law school, and we traded stories and shared a carton of fries. Betsy was an unparalleled thinker, but she also enjoyed a good fry and a good gab.

Please infer no disrespect from my deviation from the time-honored tradition of students calling their teachers "Professor" and the teacher calling the student by last name, prefaced by a curt "Mr." or "Ms." It's just that for me, and for most of her students, Betsy was just Betsy. In a wider legal academy characterized by some as aloof, Betsy had place for hierarchy. She earned the respect of her students because of her thinking, writing and teaching. She made accessibility a priority and even served up lasagna at her home to the entire Social History of Rights Seminar in the Spring of 1996.

Betsy led that seminar with grace and skill. Incidentally, she also assigned more reading and made me work harder than I ever worked in law school. In spite of the workload, though, or perhaps because of it, Betsy's Social History of Rights class was the best I have ever taken. She asked questions about the connection between voting rights, protective labor legislation and environmental law. Betsy urged us to turn and turn topics until the syllabus which had seemed hopelessly jumbled at the beginning of the semester gradually became coherent. Each right was related to another. It was all a part of a culture of "rights talk," and we were right in the middle of it.

Speaking of rights talk, we certainly did our share that semester. Betsy was gently solicitous of the quietest student and kind to the most loquacious. She always asked for justification of our positions and for a new way of looking at old materials. Betsy wasn't afraid to inject herself into the class, either. One of the most memorable moments of the semester came when discussing a piece of reproductive rights legislation which Betsy found particularly offensive. Betsy blurted out, "If I ever meet the senator who sponsored this legislation, I'll wrestle him to the ground." Her students all loved the idea. We knew Betsy would win that fight.

I know I speak for all of Betsy's students in saying how much we miss her, how much we admired her, and how much we appreciated her. Betsy made learning exciting; she opened up a whole new world of ideas and changed the way we see the law. For that we are better thinkers, better lawyers

and better people. As Betsy's students, we strive to bring her honor as we go into the world beyond these law school doors with just a fraction of her enthusiasm and her passion for learning.

Bridget J. Crawford

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