DEDICATION

LENDING LIGHT TO COUNTLESS LAMPS:
A TRIBUTE TO JUDGE NORMA LEVY SHAPIRO

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There is a sad but common misconception in our society that time and energy contributed to others is time and energy lost. Rare is the individual with the perspective to recognize that we may give without losing, and that it is often in giving that we gain.

Judge Norma Shapiro is such an individual. In a career that has spanned more than five remarkable decades, Judge Shapiro has demonstrated a sincere selflessness that is immeasurable in its impact. She has said that one of her favorite quotations is from the ancient Roman official Gaius, who poignantly noted that “[o]ne who helps the wandering traveler does, as it were, light another’s lamp by their own, and it gives no less light because it helped another.” And indeed, as we pay tribute to her extraordinary professional and personal accomplishments, we cannot help but recognize the countless lamps to which she has lent her light.

When she began law school in 1948, Judge Shapiro was one of only eight women in her class at the University of Pennsylvania. As one whose timing and experience was parallel, I can say with some confidence that this path sometimes was not easy. Nonetheless, Judge Shapiro thrived. She served as an editor of the Law Review and graduated at the top of her class. And in the years that followed, women who walked the same path into that predominantly male world knew that they could count on her to share her insights and advice and to lend a little of her courage and charisma to those whose lamps might otherwise have flickered.

As her career progressed, Judge Shapiro’s light continued to shine in dark corners where women never before had traveled. As one of the first women to become a partner at any major Philadelphia law

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firm, she lit the way for generations of women who would follow in her footsteps. She was the first woman on the Philadelphia Bar Association’s Board of Governors, and later, its first female chair. She was the first woman to be appointed to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and the first woman to sit on the federal bench in all of the Third Circuit. Yet Judge Shapiro humbly recognized that it simply is not enough for there to be a “first.” Ever willing to serve as a mentor, a resource, an example, and a friend, she tirelessly assisted others who became the “seconds,” and “thirds,” and so forth. She founded the Women’s Law Project, a coalition of women attorneys dedicated to education and public policy. In her religious and professional and political communities, she has given unceasingly of her time and talents. Her generous contributions of her own energy and experience, with equal vigor to the local elementary school as to the national bar association, stand as further testimony to her willingness to brighten others’ lamps with her own brilliant flame.

A final example of Judge Shapiro’s willingness to lend her light to others is a personal one. In the early 1980s, I was invited to attend an event in Philadelphia. President Ronald Reagan had recently appointed me as the first woman to sit on our nation’s Supreme Court. It was a daunting, at times overwhelming, responsibility, and as a “first” myself, I was somewhat short on mentors. It was during that trip to Philadelphia that I had the good fortune to meet Judge Shapiro. She was warm and thoughtful. She knew what it was like to be the only woman in the room. More significantly, she knew how important it would be to me to hear her gracious words of support and encouragement. I welcomed and appreciated her kindness.

The world for women is much changed. In less than a century, we have gone from a nation in which it was deemed unseemly to grant women the right to vote to one in which women outnumber men as eligible voters in national elections. In half that time, we have gone from a nation where women like Norma Shapiro and me graduated with excellent law-school grades, only to receive job offers as librarians and secretaries, to one in which women comprise nearly thirty percent of attorneys and more than fifty percent of law school students. Our nation has learned, and is continuing to learn, that jurisprudence and wisdom have no gender, and that the whole country benefits when the

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3 See Kristin Choo, Moving into the Driver’s Seat, A.B.A. J., June 2001, at 84.
privileges of lawyering and judging are open equally to all. More importantly, we are learning that real change—the sort that is reflected in individual spirits as much as it is reflected in national statistics—comes about because people like Judge Shapiro care enough to share their flames with those whose own lamps are dim. In giving of herself so thoroughly, Judge Shapiro truly has made a difference.