

TRIBUTE TO JUDGE NORMA L. SHAPIRO

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Learned Hand, speaking of Brandeis, once said that a person's life, "like a piece of tapestry, is made up of many strands which interwoven make a pattern;" to separate a single strand risks an injustice to the beauty of the whole.¹

So it is with this brief tribute, which can hardly do justice to the content of so full and rich a life as that of Judge Norma Shapiro. Indeed, the true tribute to Judge Shapiro stands written at large, memorialized in the annals of her court, highlighted in her creative contributions to bench, bar, and community, and perhaps preserved best in the minds and hearts of the scores of persons she has counseled, mentored, and helped to advance.

Yet, at the risk I mentioned a moment ago, I shall dwell on one rich thread among the rest and that is her contribution to the betterment of our system of justice through her commitment to judicial independence and equality for women.

For most judges, the bench becomes insular. And no wonder; to grapple with the daily needs of justice is consuming, draining, and unrelenting. But for Norma Shapiro, there was always service beyond the walnut paneling of her courtroom.

In the hearts of most lawyers worthy of the name burns the ambition to leave the law a better instrument of justice than he or she found it. To most, the opportunity is denied. But Norma Shapiro, presented with the opportunity, seized it with passionate intensity.

She took the arduous journey that is required to become head of the ABA Judicial Division. Here, more than ever before, she involved judges as well as lawyers in the ongoing tasks of judicial independence. Judicial independence is a house with many chambers: merit selection; fair compensation; freedom from fundraising; administrative leeway; adequate staffing; availability of technology, and more. Under her stewardship, the Judicial Division became a key player in

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¹ Judge Learned Hand, Address at the Meeting of the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States in Memory of Mr. Justice Brandeis (Dec. 21, 1942), *in* 317 U.S. ix.

addressing these issues, often prodding a bar that had slouched toward apathy.

And her reach went beyond that Division. She was a leader in the ABA's influential Section Officers Conference, chaired the Coordinating Council of the ABA Justice Center, chaired the ABA Conference of Trial Judges, and more. As a member of the Special Committee on Judicial Independence, which I established during my term as President of the ABA, with former FBI Director William Sessions at its head, Judge Shapiro has been a prominent force. Judicial independence, in too many parts of our nation, still has far to travel, but Judge Shapiro has helped close the gap between the ideal and the reality.

For Norma Shapiro, justice also means equality for women and she has focused fiercely on that goal. She herself has been a vital trailblazer. She was first in her law school class and the first woman to clerk for a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice. As the first woman partner in the prestigious Dechert firm, she pioneered a new standard for women struggling to balance their commitments to work and family. Demonstrating grace and professionalism in this challenging endeavor, she helped pave the way for future women partners in that firm and in others.

She was also the first woman to chair the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association and the first woman appointed to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Her trailblazing list is long and her honors many, including the ABA's treasured Margaret Brent Lawyers of Achievement Award, the Philadelphia Bar Association's Sandra Day O'Connor Award and the prestigious Meador-Rosenberg Award of the ABA's Standing Committee on Federal Judicial Improvement in recognition of her profound contributions to the administration of justice.

But being a model herself was not enough. Early on, Judge Shapiro chose mentoring as a means of furthering equality of women. True mentoring is not a casual exercise. It requires dedication, insight, rapport, and commitment; it is not a sport for the short-winded and one must be prepared for disappointment, both in selection and outcome.

Others in these pages have written about her mentoring, but the account bears repetition. Her judicial chambers are always open to young women needing advice, from the law school level to those seeking state and federal office. She has been a mentor to numerous women judges, particularly in Pennsylvania; to law clerks, even long after their departure from the chambers; and to a multitude of others

who readily pay homage to her guidance and who do not hesitate to draw repeatedly upon her wisdom. She has been unstinting in the personal time she has devoted to such counseling and mentoring.

Judge Shapiro has also cast her net beyond the legal realm, serving and leading a variety of community endeavors. Her Jewish roots are firm. As president of the Jewish Publication Society, the nation's oldest Jewish publisher, she initiated a commentary on the Old Testament hailed by scholars of all denominations.

And somehow while she was busy achieving all of these things, she and her husband, Dr. Bernard Shapiro, during their fifty years of marriage, happily have nurtured three children. One is a doctor, one a lawyer, and the third an engineer in solar energy. And now they also have the joy of six grandchildren.

This year Judge Shapiro was elected to the ABA's Board of Governors. ABA President Dennis Archer and President-Elect Robert Gray are fortunate to be able to draw on her counsel.

My experienced colleagues tell me that Judge Shapiro runs a vigorous, effective courtroom; she is always prepared, listens carefully, discourages sham and pretense, and rules clearly and fairly. I have missed that experience since Judge Shapiro will not sit in any case in which I appear, but I can attest to the warmth and depth of her friendship, her uncommon sensitivity, and her ready availability in times of need. I cherish that friendship.

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon lauds the woman of valor who girds herself with strength and performs her tasks with vigor. "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates."²

How fortunate we are to have this Woman of Valor in our midst.

² Proverbs 31:31 (Hebrew).

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