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Helene Simson
1929-1984

DEDICATION

Helene Simson, Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico since 1973, passed away on November 3, 1984. Professor Simson was a woman of exceptional charm, intelligence, and grace. The affection in which she was held by her students, colleagues, and friends is a testimonial to her success in life. We at the New Mexico Law Review are especially pained at her passing, as she was not only a contributor to our journal, but also a friend and a supporter.

This issue of the New Mexico Law Review is dedicated to Professor Helene Simson. In her honor, we publish the following tributes which were made at a memorial held for Professor Simson at the University of New Mexico School of Law.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF DEAN ROBERT J. DESIDERIO

We are here today to remember and to honor a special person. Helene touched all of our lives. We remember Helene as a person of compassion and concern who cared for us all. She was above all a teacher whose students remember her with fondness and respect. I would like to quote from a letter about Helene that I received just yesterday:

Good teachers and their influence on one's life stay with you always.
Helene was certainly one of these special ladies.

The law school has taken several steps to honor Helene. The faculty has renamed the Client Counseling Competition as the Helene Simson Client Counseling Competition. It is a fitting tribute as Helene had a strong interest in the Client Counseling Competition. She made it an exciting educational experience for her students, who participated in the program in large numbers. In addition, the New Mexico Law Review has dedicated its next issue to Helene. Finally, at the request of the Simson family, a memorial scholarship has been established in Helene's name.

Today, six of Helene's friends will read memorial statements in her honor. They are Professors Fred Hart, Ruth Kovnat, and Mike Norwood of the law school, Justice Mary Walters of the New Mexico Supreme Court, Phil Krehbiel, President of the Legal Aid Society of Albuquerque, and Toby Grossman, a close friend of Helene.

REMARKS OF DEAN FREDERICK M. HART

The good lawyer dreams of justice for all and recognizes that we deny the poor the legal representation that they need.

The good lawyer dreams of an efficient and humane means of resolving disputes and recognizes the limitations of our advocacy system.

The good teacher dreams of the accomplishments of her students and recognizes the deficiencies in the educational process.

Helene was a good lawyer. She worked for the poor. She studied and advocated mediation and conciliation as a substitute for litigation.

Helene was a good teacher. She demanded the same intensity of her students that she brought to the practice of law. She developed new methods of teaching law.

When Helene joined this faculty in 1973, there were few women lawyers, although women were beginning to come to law school in some numbers. Our profession was in the early stages of adjusting to a world in which women would have an equal opportunity in all lawyering jobs. There was still doubt as to whether a woman could go into the pit and survive, much less prevail. There was prejudice against women lawyers.

The most substantial change in legal education that occurred in this century was also beginning. Clinical legal education was new and untried. Whether it could contribute to the education of future lawyers was in doubt. At this school, major efforts to incorporate it as a significant part of the curriculum had resulted in turmoil, if not chaos.

Helene's appointment to this faculty was one of the most significant we ever made. I am sure that when she first considered a teaching career, she envisioned classroom teaching much in the manner of those who taught her. The law school, however, had different needs. We needed a woman who would demonstrate our belief that the woman's place in the profession should be no different from the man's. We needed someone with the heart and courage to represent us as a clinical teacher in the courts of Albuquerque. We needed someone who could be an example for the women at this law school.

It was hardly fair to ask Helene to undertake these roles. She had every right to object that we were asking too much and to demand that her job at the law school be no different from that of any other faculty member. By imposing on her our expectation that she would contribute more than the rest of us, we made the risk of her failure far greater.

I do not know whether Helene was aware of the hopes we had when she joined the faculty. I suspect that she was somewhat reluctant to teach in the clinical program because she wrote, in her characteristic good humor, a few years ago that:

I'm beginning to think that I really *did* want to join the clinical faculty. But this old dog is having to learn new tricks. Word processing is the hardest new trick—it has always sounded to me like something Campbell Soup Co. should be doing.

Helene did not fail. She demonstrated that good lawyering can be performed with grace and dignity. She helped develop a clinical program that is recognized nationally as the best offered by any law school. She inspired hundreds of students, as well as her colleagues.

It is fitting and proper that the Client Counseling Competition be named in her honor and that a scholarship program be established in her name. These memorials will remind us, and our successors, of her contributions to this school and this community.

More importantly, her contributions themselves will endure and be a lasting testament to her participation in the growth of this school and the profession. The law school is different today because she served as a member of this faculty. It will be different tomorrow and all of the days to come. Nothing can ever change the fact that she made it a better place, both while she was here, and for all time.

We who have benefitted from her good works are fortunate that Helene Simson was a good lawyer and a good teacher.

REMARKS OF PROFESSOR RUTH L. KOVNAT

We are here to celebrate Helene Simson's life and to share our grief at her death. How to capture the spirit of Helene? She had a life of graciousness and elegance, both in mind and body. She had a life of balance. Helene understood the importance of both work and love; she also understood that they were not mutually exclusive. She infused her work with love, and we, her colleagues, her friends, her students, her clients, all felt it.

As for infusing her love with work, let me share a story with you that her husband, George, recounted to me only recently. Helene really wanted to be a lawyer. She also had three school-aged children and she didn't want those children to think that anything competed with them in her mind. So she reached a solution, a solution that only a person as generous, as gracious, and as smart as Helene could have achieved. The solution was to go to law school, be a spectacular student, and become a spectacular lawyer, yet not let her children know that she was a law student. She went to law school every day and she read her cases. But she also was able to give her children everything that they needed without their even knowing that there were other demands that might be competing

for their attention. On graduation day, as George tells the story, he said to the children, "Get dressed up. We're going to a graduation." And they said, "Whose graduation?" George replied, "Your mother is graduating from law school." They attended the graduation and they cheered; and we should cheer for Helene.

I would like to conclude by reading to you excerpts from a memorial that was entered into the minutes of the Faculty Senate on November 13:

Helene Simson, a beloved member of the faculty of the School of Law since 1973, died on November 3, 1984. She is survived by her husband, George, her sons, Mitch and Jeff Simson, her daughter, Nina Dailey, and her granddaughter, Annie. She is also survived by her colleagues on the faculty, hundreds of students, and members of the bar. Her compassion, sense of justice, and high standards of professionalism were a profound influence on those privileged to work with her.

Helene was born in New York City. She received her first degree from Smith College and her Juris Doctor from our law school in 1965. For seven years thereafter, she was an attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Albuquerque, where she zealously advocated the causes of the poor. Her commitment to the Legal Aid Society lasted until the end of her life. She served as President of its Board of Directors from 1973 to 1976 and then continued to shape its policies skillfully and sensitively as a member of the Board until illness interfered.

In 1973, Helene joined our faculty. The Clinical Program was just beginning to take shape. The ambition was to build the program on a scale previously unimagined in legal education. The very best people were needed. Helene Simson was recruited.

At that time, there was discrimination against women in the legal profession. There was no one better able to dispel the belief that the role of women in the legal profession was a limited one than Helene Simson. She had courage and heart and was a tough-minded, good lawyer. She was a role model for women students and proved that women are as good at lawyering as are men. Her dedication to women's rights was constant. She chaired the New Mexico Bar Association Section on Women's Rights and Obligations since 1980.

In September, to honor her, to let her know that the Law School recognized that the Law School, the community, and the legal profession are better institutions because of her work, the faculty named a competition which she had sponsored for years [as] "The Helene Simson Client Counseling Competition." In accordance with her wishes, the Helene Simson Memorial Scholarship has been established. The Legal Aid Society has created a summer internship to honor her.

She has left us a great legacy and responsibility: To carry on her ideals of human dignity, her spirit of generosity, her personal gal-

lantry, her high ethical standards, and her vigorous advocacy of civil rights.

REMARKS OF PROFESSOR J. MICHAEL NORWOOD

Helene's greetings for the frequent visitors to her office were always warm and friendly. Her office, like her appearance, was remarkably neat, orderly, and attractive. Her beautifully organized office marked the dedication and energy she brought to her work as a lawyer and as a professor. Next to her desk she kept photographs of her family, whom she loved dearly. The collection of books on the shelves of her office reflected her favorite professional subjects, the lawyer as counselor and negotiator. If you knew her well enough, you knew that among the accumulated keepsakes of her career, which she kept but did not display, was a certificate of award presented to her by her students in 1975. The award, for "Best Role Model," expressed the respect and genuine affection Helene's students felt for her as a lawyer, a professor, and a person.

Helene loved to travel, to read, and to see the latest movies. In recent years, she went to Europe, China, and Africa (twice—once to Egypt, and once to Kenya on safari). She loved the adventure of new, fresh experiences. She did everything, including traveling, with class as well as good humor. With her cheerful wit she once explained to me how she was able to obtain a good soak even in the most rustic of hotels, where the bath water was frequently opaque. Her simple solution, with which she was completely satisfied, was to include a healthy quantity of bath powder in her luggage to disguise the water's aroma and appearance. Perhaps her love of new experiences and her ability to adapt to new environments contributed to her decision to become a lawyer. It certainly contributed to her successful career.

Helene's career was adventurous and pioneering. She entered law school and became a lawyer when it was rare for a woman to do so. She appeared regularly before trial courts when it was rare for a woman to do so. She dedicated her energy, talents, and resources to providing legal assistance to the poor when it was not popular, fashionable, or profitable. She undertook the training of lawyers using the clinical method when it was a new, unproved, and controversial teaching technique. She did all of this extraordinarily well, with grace, and without ever leaving behind her experience as a woman and a mother. Driven by moral commitment and courage, she took the risk of leading the way for others to follow. She opened paths to new ways of thinking and new ways of solving problems. Having pioneered the path, Helene did everything in her power to help others—whether man or woman, black, red, or white, rich or poor—enter the profession.

Helene's teaching in the clinic was admired by all. She instructed us

all in interviewing, counseling, and negotiation. She could invariably be found in her office with a student or colleague discussing a case, reviewing a video tape, or planning a class.

The books on Helene's shelves define the term "counseling" as giving guidance or advice, assisting another in making a decision, helping someone with a problem, or providing comfort. They speak of fulfilling the role of a knowledgeable and good friend. Helene provided us all with a living example of the meaning of the word "counselor." Her students and her colleagues, past and present, spent countless hours seeking her counsel, and she tirelessly gave of her time to give help and comfort.

The loss to the profession, to her students, to her colleagues, to her friends, and to her family is profound. The award given to her by the Class of 1975 speaks truly: Helene Simson's role model is our inspiration.

REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE MARY C. WALTERS

"This is a tender hour, but it is not a tragic hour."

Twelve days ago those words were spoken at the passing of one who taught his children and his listeners about the worth of every human, the rights to which every person is entitled, the concern for our fellow man that each of us must nurture for our friends, our neighbors, and even those who are not our friends, and the obligation we bear to attain justice in conformance with lawful procedure and orderly petition to our constituted government.

Is it strange to recall today the instruction of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., the teacher and father of one who was awarded the precious Nobel Peace Prize? Not at all.

Those of us who were favored to know Helene Simson knew her, too, as a teacher of cherished values: compassion, integrity, fairness, honesty, dedication. She urged negotiation and reconciliation before resort to litigation. She trained her clinical students to open their hearts and feelings to the needs of their clients and to make those needs and pains their own. She insisted that her students learn and understand the ethical demands of thorough analysis, conscientious evaluation, exhaustive preparation, and honest presentation—all the while within the bounds of courtesy and impeccable professional behavior and integrity. The rights of the unrepresented were to be sincerely championed; the needs of the oppressed to be fervently advanced; the justice of the cause to be argued with conviction of the rightness of the cause.

If we commemorate today the tragedy of losing Helene, it is the tragedy that no more will students know the gentleness of her persuasion, or the intensity of her convictions, or the fire of her devotion toward helping

to create men and women of good will, high standards, and virtuous personal honor.

But in the tenderness of this hour, we thank God for all those students, all those lawyers, and all those hundreds of friends—as well as the members of her family—who knew the joy and the impact of her influence and of her presence and who experienced her warm and loving nature for the years she gave to us. Those of us who will remember Helene will remember a lady in every sense that word has ever had and still enjoys, a lawyer who knew and exemplified the best that term implies, a teacher who possessed all the gifts of those to whom the passage of knowledge is given, and a friend whose warmth and concern and sincerity was never doubted.

“They are not lost to us who find the light of sun and stars and God.” Helene is not lost to any of us.

REMARKS OF PHIL M. KREHBIEL

Helene Simson devoted the entirety of her professional life to the cause of the Legal Aid Society of Albuquerque. In addition, she devoted more years to the work of the Society than any other individual in the history of the organization.

Helene joined the Legal Aid Society as a staff member immediately upon her graduation from the law school in 1965. During her dedicated and committed years as a member of the Legal Aid staff, she served as a staff attorney, as chief of the law reform unit, and as chief training attorney.

After returning to the law school as a member of its faculty, Helene maintained her contact with the Legal Aid Society as a member of its Board of Directors. She served as President of the Board for four years, and from her initial tenure on the Board until the time of her death, she served as a member of the important Executive Committee. Looking back at the history of the Society during Helene’s service on the Board, it is hard to find one major Board action—from the hiring of a new Executive Director to finding new offices for the program and the raising of additional funds to meet budgetary crises—that she was not in the center of, usually as chair of a special committee to meet the crisis of the moment.

Helene Simson was the heart and soul of the Legal Aid Society. She exemplified the highest ideals of dedication and service which were at the core of what the Society stands for; to the extent that the Society has been able to attain its goals, it is in large measure due to the leadership and dedication of Helene Simson. Through her dedication, she made the Board of Directors dedicated to two simple but essential principles: (1) the Society must provide the very highest quality of services to its clients;

and (2) Society lawyers must be entirely independent of outside influences so that they may exercise the full measure of independent judgment on behalf of their clients. During the political adversity which Legal Aid has faced in the last two decades, Helene Simson insisted on uncompromising adherence to these two principles. As a result, the Board, and the Society as a whole, followed suit and survived.

I learned today that Helene received a role model award for her work with the students at the law school. It made me conscious for the first time that, during her entire professional career, she served as a role model for us at the Legal Aid Society. She brought a polite and dignified commitment to her work as a lawyer, to her work training and assisting lawyers who followed in her path, and to her work as the inspirational leader of the Legal Aid Board. In doing so, she inspired us by providing a role model that we all have tried to follow.

To honor Helene, the Board has established the Helene Simson Summer Fellowship Program, which is designed to bring to the Society for the summer a law student who exemplifies Helene's commitment to high-quality, independent legal services to the poor of this community. Through the Helene Simson Fellowship, the Society will seek to attract new recruits who exemplify Helene's sense of professional duty and responsibility. Through that mechanism, we seek to ensure that the spirit of Helene Simson remains with us for a long time to come.

REMARKS OF TOBY GROSSMAN

For My Friend

Helene was my first role model. I had heard of her while I was still in law school, but we didn't meet until after I had graduated and begun working for the Legal Aid Society. I cannot say that we became great friends immediately, because true friendship takes time, effort, and shared memories to achieve. I can say, however, that I felt an immediate empathy between us. I was always a little bit in awe of her dignity and self-possession. As a colleague of ours said: "She was a classy lady." Eventually, we became close; our friendship became entwined with our professional lives; now I remember bits of both.

The year 1968 was exciting because of the times, because of the purpose we shared and believed we could achieve, and because of the people with whom we worked at Legal Aid. We were surrounded by bright young men, but most often, I found myself seeking Helene's advice because we shared similar backgrounds and were the only "lady" lawyers working for Legal Aid at that time. Even though we worked in different Legal Aid neighborhood offices, we managed to speak several times a week—

mainly because I would call her to seek her advice or just to cry on her shoulder.

Later, we moved to the main Legal Aid office in an elegant old house—now gone—behind the building at 1015 Tijeras NW. My office was in the former living room and Helene's was in the former dining room. Separating us were huge sliding doors, which I often frantically pushed open, more often than not so I could cry or complain or ask for Helene's help, but also so we could just talk about ideas and mutual problems. Sometimes we merely talked about the foibles of opposing counsel.

I was so pleased when Helene moved to the law school about a year after I had. Over the years, our talks about law and lawyers never stopped, nor did her valuable advice. I watched as she became involved in the Clinical Law Program and marveled at her ability to deal with hysterical judges, hysterical opposing counsel, and even more hysterical law students, all the while keeping her calm and, most importantly, her sense of humor. I envied her ability to laugh while fulfilling her duties so well. She helped me realize that a sense of humor is invaluable and that it can be maintained while doing an excellent job.

One of my most pleasant memories stems from my daughter's birth. Helene wanted to see Jennifer, but the hospital allowed only close relatives to visit. Helene snuck in when I told the nurse she was my aunt. Afterwards, Helene looked at me with a deadpan face and said, "Couldn't I have been your older sister?" Helene and George were at Jen's first birthday party and laughed with us at the baby's antics. Even the last time I spoke with her, Helene had to know what Jen was doing and about her problems. Helene let me know that the problems I magnified were small and would pass—an important lesson.

When Lynn, her daughter-in-law, called me in July to tell me the terrible news, I couldn't absorb the fact that Helene would not be there to talk to and to seek advice from whenever I needed her. I personalized her tragedy—a natural human reaction.

She's gone now. I have already had to remind myself several times since her death just a few weeks ago that she no longer is just a walk up the stairs. We all knew and loved her. Her contribution to the law school was immense but—forgive me for being selfish—to me, her loss is much more personal. My good friend who would listen, advise, gossip, and laugh with me is gone and I miss her.