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Eleonora V. Eckert

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TRIBUTES

ELEONORA V. ECKERT

*Kent D. Syverud**

In 1949, Dean E. Blythe Stason of the Michigan Law School interviewed candidates for the position of editorial assistant to the *Michigan Law Review*. It seems remarkable today that the dean of a major law school would not delegate such a responsibility to some other administrator, and that a group of student editors would not insist on controlling any decision itself. But the world, including its deans and its law reviews, was different then, and Stason hired Eleonora Eckert — after extracting a promise from her that she would stick with the job for “a couple of months or so.”

Forty-four years later, the *Michigan Law Review* can be very grateful that, at least in connection with this one decision, deans were once autocratic and law reviews were once far less independent. Eleonora Eckert now has finally completed her term. The *Michigan Law Review* could not have become the living institution it is without this woman serving tirelessly as its memory, conscience, and heart.

From 1964 to 1993, Ele was the business manager of the law review. That means she took care of the subscribers and the advertisers and, often, of the printer. For most of these people Ele was the *Michigan Law Review*, and her calm, intelligent, and efficient dealings with them assured everyone that the *Review* was a reliable and stable institution.

Of course, in many years nothing could have been further from the truth. Law reviews are tumultuous places, where the staff changes completely every year, at once, along with the editorial philosophy, the job descriptions, and the office arrangements. Far too often, the departing editors take with them their vast wisdom, accumulated over twelve months, about how to put out a magazine. Far too often, the number of student editors who are available in a crisis, or in the summer, or during exams and vacations is not enough to get the editorial work done.

At all those times, Eleonora Eckert was there to save the day calmly, quietly, and self-effacingly. She reminded editors of strategies

* Professor of Law, University of Michigan. Professor Syverud was an editor-in-chief of the *Michigan Law Review* during Ms. Eckert's tenure. — Ed.

for dealing with authors or students or faculty members that worked in the past. She proofread every word of more than thirty volumes of the magazine. She caught embarrassing intellectual mistakes in articles and notes, as well as spelling errors and bad grammar and style. She helped maintain the sanity of many a despairing student editor. She advised and she worked, and she always got the magazine out.

Outsiders measure institutions, including magazines, by what they accomplish. By that measure the *Michigan Law Review* has done well. Insiders, however, have to live with an institution as well as to observe its accomplishments. Insiders therefore tend to measure an institution by the character of the people it has attracted and held. The *Michigan Law Review* attracted and held Ele Eckert. And that is why many of us who worked on the *Review* still regard it with reverence.

ELEONORA V. ECKERT

*Gregory P. Magarian**

Writing this brings on minor pangs of guilt, because Ele Eckert dislikes recognition. That's the odd thing about an institution like the *Michigan Law Review* and Ele's role in it: the fact that she's been there twenty times longer than any student editor means that she tends to take herself for granted and can't understand why everyone fusses about her retirement.

But how could we on the staff fail to marvel at Ele? For most of us, our first day on the *Review* was one of the most daunting days of law school, topped only, later, by our first day on the editorial board. But on those days, as on every day, here came a woman, shuffling down the stairs to Sub-3, weighed down by the day's mail, who had graced the *Review* longer than any of us had been on the planet and who clearly was born with more clues about how the place worked than any of us would ever find. I will never forget the times I tried to figure out whether a certain issue format or page layout or typeface quirk was consistent with *Review* convention. Finally I'd ask Ele, and within minutes, which I think she took only to avoid showing off, she'd produce a list of past issues — from 1980, 1977, 1967 — that answered the question. That's how the place worked.

Ele would have been the jewel of the *Review*, though, even had she never computed a budget (without a computer — they haven't made the computer that can keep up with her) or caught a typo no one else would notice until the issue came out. Law reviews can be very unpleasant places. Student editors, high-strung creatures that we are, can tear each other apart over political squabbles, drown in our own pretensions, or just learn to hate each other. Our staff didn't, much, and I think Ele's presence was a major reason. How could we make too much of political differences when Ele was willing to make the moral leap of being as friendly to us liberal democrats on the staff as she was to her fellow dittoheads? How could we wallow in pretension when Ele, who has had the dubious pleasure as ace proofreader of being the only living soul to read every word of every issue since the Truman administration, was never shy about lambasting our latest

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epic on “The Comparative Hermeneutics of Such-and-Such Jurisprudence”? How could we hate each other when Ele liked us?

Ele loves plants more than anyone I’ve ever known. Her office brimmed with them. What is wonderful about this, aside from the fact that it makes her easy to shop for, is that it marks her as a person who loves life, and living things, and humanity. Such people are precious; lawyers-to-be may need to be around them more deeply than anyone else. For me, my colleagues, and scores of our predecessors, Ele has been such a person — the right person, in the right place, at the right time, for a long time. The *Review* can never replace her; it can only hope to hold her luster. May the road rise to meet her.

ELEONORA V. ECKERT

*Christina B. Whitman**

One day, relatively early in my term as Editor-in-Chief of the *Michigan Law Review*, Ele Eckert came to me with a draft of a student note that had been given to our secretary for typing. The secretary had turned to Ele in despair. Page after page of yellow legal paper had been filled with minuscule pencil scratches and then elaborately decorated with even more minuscule additions and emendations. Red lines and blue lines and green lines, overlapping each other and occasionally blurring together, wove in and out among the pencil scratches. I asked the editor who had produced this colorful, if illegible, masterpiece if *he* could read it. "Of course not," he replied, "but it's not my job to type up manuscripts."

Ele held one of the world's impossible jobs for over forty years. Every spring she had to adjust to an entirely new set of work relationships, and she was not faced with the most accommodating people. When Ele came to know us, we were newly selected law review editors, heady with achievement, jealous of our autonomy, and too often heedless of the talents of the people upon whom we were most dependent. She regarded us with amusement, patience, and even affection.

Ele came to the *Law Review* as a young college graduate, and over the years she became its memory. She was the only person who saw the whole picture, and she was completely aware of what was going on. Her main responsibility was for the business affairs of the *Review*. These she managed beautifully, educating us, with great tact, in what was necessary to preserve our financial foundation. But Ele had many other indispensable talents. One of the most useful was her ability to answer any question of grammar or usage that we could produce. She knew each staff member by name, observed our struggles with a reassuring irony, and could produce genuinely illuminating tales of the Great Editors of Yesteryear. For myself, I particularly enjoyed discussing books with Ele. We loved the same authors, and talking about them reminded me that there would be a time when my reading would not be made up entirely of notes on airport searches and real estate investment trusts.

The four decades through which Ele shepherded the *Law Review*

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were times of great social turmoil and change. It cannot have been easy for her, and I know she did not regard it all with approval. None of this, however, had any effect on Ele's attitude towards us or our mutual responsibilities. She was a complete professional, a model of what we were beginning to be. She taught us, temporary caretakers of an institution that was her life's work, to rise to her expectations of us.

ELEONORA V. ECKERT

*Rodney D. Martin**

Fourteen years ago we paid tribute to Ele Eckert as she completed thirty years as Business Manager of the *Michigan Law Review*. Ele wanted nothing to do with the dinner at which she was to be honored, although we finally coaxed her into attending. Ten years later, the *Law Review* once again fêted Ele at its annual banquet. Again, she participated only reluctantly. The notion of another tribute may be more than Ele can stand. But it has to be done.

For forty-four years, Ele Eckert served the *Michigan Law Review* and its student editors with a dedication and a sense of caring that is rare. Gracious and modest, intelligent and witty, Ele was the perfect person to brave the annual onslaught of new student editors. Her humility was an antidote to our hubris. She tolerated our quirks and helped us to overcome our mistakes.

To one who came to know and love Ele while working on the *Review*, her retirement hardly seems possible. Ele was a constant. Each time I have returned to campus, she has been there, my link to those heady days when the *Review* was entrusted to us and a reminder of how valuable a friend can be.

Ele saw to the details of running the magazine, freeing us to labor over articles and notes. She nurtured the soil so we could tend the flowers. All of us who toiled in the garden should be grateful.

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