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Carol Los Mansmann: A Remembrance

*Donetta W. Ambrose**

I first met Carol Los in the fall of 1963. She was twenty-one, beautiful, bright, very popular, and much-admired. None of those things changed at all in the nearly forty years that followed.

I was drawn to Carol by her extraordinary warmth. We shared a Polish heritage and spent many evenings regaling our friends with traditional Polish carols.

There's no telling, I suppose, when the seed of an idea takes hold. But, very near to that first day I met her, I knew that I wanted to be as much like Carol Los as I could be. Over the next four years, as I began and completed my college years, I had the privilege and opportunity to share Carol's experiences as she began and completed law school.

And, in her extraordinary generosity of time and concern, she pointed me in the direction of a profession which, quite frankly, would never have occurred to me had Carol Los not been headed for a career in the law.

Over the following years, we saw each other only occasionally but kept in touch through occasional notes and news articles. Even though Carol's triumphs were in the United States Supreme Court and mine were confined to the Court of Common Pleas of Westmoreland County, she acknowledged every success with the enthusiasm of a true and loyal friend.

When I was elected to the Court of Common Pleas of Westmoreland County, Carol was genuinely thrilled and, in fact, afforded me a great thrill in return when several months later, she invited me to sit with the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania when she was sworn in as the first woman to sit on that court. It was a great and momentous occasion for the Western District of Pennsylvania. All eyes and all attention were focused on this remarkable woman. She, however, while very proud of her own accomplishment, was, as usual, not so taken up with the moment to forget old friends.

One of the very best things about my move from Westmoreland County to the Western District was the opportunity to have closer

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and more frequent contact with Carol. At that time, the “girls” of the Western District—Magistrate Judge Ila Sensenich, Carol, and I—had some good times. I wish there had been more. I know that for Magistrate Judge Sensenich and me, Carol was truly a role model, not a celebrity, but a friend who gave us daily inspiration.

When Carol finally and courageously left us, my personal loss—indeed the loss of the entire Western District and Third Circuit—was profound. But I, personally, have so much to be grateful for. Indeed I am grateful beyond measure for what Carol left me both professionally and personally.

Professionally, Carol was and is my inspiration of what a good judge should be. The care with which she listened to arguments and the insights she added reflected her honesty, her integrity, her brilliance, and her determination to do justice.

Carol was also at the forefront in addressing those issues that ensured full and equal participation and advancement of women in the profession. She initiated flexible work schedules and job-sharing and made sure there were equal opportunities for clerkships in her chambers. To be part of a system of justice charged with keeping the promises of equal rights, of liberty, and of freedom is a blessing. To serve in that same system with Carol, who personified the fierce protection of these rights, was a joyful thing.

Personally, Carol was and is my inspiration for what a good woman, a good person should be. I always had the sense that Carol Los Mansmann could not only make her way in the world, but actually change it for the better. I was right about that. Carol knew that none of us had time to wait for the world to change and that we could not expend our energy being angry or frustrated. We had to get on with it now, as best as we could, in whatever way worked best. She never stopped getting on with it.

Carol was a person who took the time and made the effort to make friends and to be a friend, a genuine, authentic friend, a friend who celebrated the success of others, instead of competing at every opportunity.

Carol was a compassionate person who treated no one with disregard, but rather extended to strangers the same concern and respect as she did for family and friends.

Speaking of family, Carol was certainly a person who valued her family, immediate and extended, above all else.

Finally, Carol was a person of unflinching faith who knew that we are all accountable to someone greater than ourselves and that religious beliefs could provide a strong foundation when things around us appear to be uncertain.

So, I started off by stating that when I first met Carol, I knew that I wanted to be as much like her as I could be. I still feel that way today. And so I pray that I will always be inspired by Carol's life, that I will be faithful, as was she, to the values stated in our Constitution, and that I will be guided by the same inner moral compass, nurtured by family and valued by the community, that guided her life.

