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Tribute to Judy Lipton

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Ayesha Bell Hardaway[†]

TRIBUTE TO JUDY LIPTON

Many would be hard-pressed to find someone closely connected to clinical legal education who does not know, or at least know of, Judy Lipton. You see, Judy has worked on a wide variety of cases, attended too many conferences to keep track of, and taught hundreds of fortunate students during her more than thirty-year career as a legal clinician. I have had the great fortune of working with Judy in three separate capacities for the last seventeen years.

JUDY THE PROFESSOR

My first stroke of luck came as a third-year law student. By some miracle, my name was drawn through the lottery system used to determine Case Western Reserve Law Clinic's enrollment. At that time, enrollment throughout the law school was high and Clinic interest was teeming; placements there were at a premium. I did not quite know all of what took place behind the fancy glass door on the ground floor of our law school, but once I found out that it involved representing real clients, I knew I had to try to be a part of it. The Criminal Clinic was my first (and likely only) choice. And so I first met Judy and Carol Turowski¹ as a student enrolled in their year-long Criminal Justice Clinic.

Judy's pedagogical approach to teaching provided a healthy foundation for her students to understand the criminal legal issues that their clients were facing. Judy, as a professor, coupled that healthy foundation with what seemed like an innate and genuine style that empowered her students to hone their skills while believing that they had what it took to provide excellent representation to their clients. It was in the Clinic that I began to truly believe that I had what it took to be a strong advocate and litigator. Judy's students were able to leave law school knowing that their first-year clinic experience put them on par with many practicing attorneys.

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1. There are also many distinctly wonderful things to share about Carol and her teaching style, but this is a tribute to Judy. While I also owe a debt of gratitude to Carol, my focus on Judy is my best effort to reflect on the enormous impact she has had throughout my time as her student and eventual colleague at Case Western Reserve Law School.

JUDY THE COLLEAGUE

My second stroke of luck came when the Clinic faculty and staff welcomed me with open arms as a faculty member. Judy, the colleague, still exhibited all of the wonderful attributes I had first encountered when she was my professor. She was welcoming, warm, and deliberate about making sure that I felt valued and included. Her ability to empower while redirecting students' attention was, quite frankly, masterful. And although she made it look easy, I can imagine that redirecting me had to be a handful at times. Though our relationship technically transferred to a collegial one, I still found myself learning so much from Judy. On a daily basis, she exemplified the true art of what many legal clinicians aspire to: the ability to prioritize student-centered and client-centered experiential teaching.

The Clinic faculty, staff, and students benefitted from more than Judy's work in the classroom. Her service as the Clinic's Co-Director, and as the first Associate Dean of Experiential Education, showed how dedicated Judy has been to the success of not only clinical programs, but also to ensuring that our law school received national recognition as a leader in experiential learning. I think it is safe to say that we were all inspired when she was named the inaugural Honorable Blanche E. Krupansky and Frank W. Vargo, Jr. Clinical Professor in Criminal Law. Being able to celebrate the honor at a reception with her late mother, husband, children, and grandchildren created memories that I treasure. Having a front-row seat to Judy's trailblazing career has inspired me to dream bigger about what I want my career to be when I grow up.

In short, as I look back on my time with Judy, the colleague, I am reminded of something Carmen Naso and I would comically—yet oh, so seriously—ask ourselves when we got stumped by an issue: “W.W.J.D? What would Judy do?”

JUDY THE NEIGHBOR

My third stroke of luck may just be the greatest of all. It is this third connection that made Judy's retirement less grief-provoking. I could comfortably wish Judy well on her departure from the law school because I knew it was not “goodbye”; it was simply “see you later.” Indeed, it literally meant “see you later that day.” I should fess up and acknowledge that my perspective was not always so mature. In many ways, I am sure I came off like a delusional kid every time Judy's eventual retirement was mentioned during the last two years or so of her time working with us in the Clinic. Any passing comment about her retirement consistently resulted in my doing everything but putting my fingers in my ears, closing my eyes, and repeating “lalalalala” until the talking stopped. I was never above reminding our colleagues, and Judy herself, that they should change the subject quickly unless they

wanted to see me cry. And there were plenty of moments when I could not hold back the tears.

But as the months dwindled to days, it dawned on me that I still had a unique point of access to Judy because she is also my neighbor. Knowing that I could share a wave and comforting glance with her on my way to or from my home has made the transition more bearable. But Judy the Neighbor is just as phenomenal as both Judy the Professor and Judy the Colleague. She keeps an eye on my house when I am away too long; she stops on the sidewalk to chat about the most important or the most mundane things, depending on what the situation calls for; and she comes to the rescue allowing me to finish a meal in her oven when mine is on the fritz. This third stroke of luck is one that seems to never fail. In fact, the same morning I penned this tribute, I shared a wave and comforting smile when I passed her on our street.

I am a much better lawyer, mother, clinician, and advocate because of all that Judy Lipton has contributed to my career and my life. I am beyond grateful for the great fortune of getting to work so closely with her for so long.