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Tribute to Sharon Johnson

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TRIBUTE TO SHARON JOHNSON

Farewell and Thanks

The student-run law journal is a wondrous, if somewhat mysterious, thing.¹ No other profession or academic discipline publishes the vast bulk of its scholarship in journals that are edited by students.² I think it is a great training ground for future lawyers,³ and I respect the tradition. This is where law students hone their legal-research and writing skills.⁴ This is where many of them learn about complex production schedules, the importance of deadlines, and how to deal with challenging and difficult professional situations. It is also where they learn that administrative assistants are the ones in an office who are really in charge and that a great one is worth her weight in gold. At the *SMU Law Review*, student editors learned this latter lesson early and well because—make no mistake about it—Sharon Johnson has been a great administrative assistant.

As a faculty advisor to this journal, I meet with incoming editors during their transition month immediately following board elections. In recent years, none looked more panic-stricken than when they uttered the words, “Please tell me it’s not true that Sharon Johnson is retiring.” Most years, I have been able to soothe their worried brows and reassure them that Sharon will be staying on for another year. This year, alas, the rumor is true. We are saying farewell not only to the law review’s administrative assistant for the past fifteen years, but to a dear friend as well.

Sharon’s departure presents us with a challenge. Her retirement leaves a void that will be impossible to fill in the short run and extremely difficult to fill in the longer term. The student editors will have to work hard to make that happen. All of that comes later. For now, we should be happy for Sharon and grateful for our good fortune in having had such a wonderful colleague for as long as we have.

1. The unique nature of law reviews edited by students has been documented in detail and decried almost since the appearance of the first law reviews well over a century ago. One of the best surveys of both the history and the criticisms of law reviews is Bernard J. Hibbitts, *Last Writes? Reassessing the Law Review in the Age of Cyberspace*, 71 N.Y.U. L. REV. 615 (1996). For a stirring defense of student-edited law reviews and the law-review experience, see Cameron Stracher, *Reading, Writing, and Citing: In Praise of Law Reviews*, 52 N.Y.L. SCH. L. REV. 349 (2007-08).

2. This has not been universally regarded as a good thing. As far back as 1936, Yale law professor Fred Rodell famously wrote, “There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is its style. The other is its content.” Fred Rodell, *Goodbye to Law Reviews*, 23 VA. L. REV. 38, 38 (1936). Although not much has changed in the intervening seventy-four years, students can hardly be blamed for the writing style of their professors and the practicing bar.

3. See Stracher, *supra* note 1, at 370 (“I am convinced that participation on law review remains the best training for a wide variety of legal jobs that require precision, analytic rigor, excellent writing and editing skills, and a perfectionist’s work ethic.”).

4. *But see* Rodell, *supra* note 2.

Sharon's retirement is a good thing for two reasons. The first is that she will now have lots more time for her knitting projects and to spend with her beloved grandchildren.⁵ As a recent enrollee into the ranks of grandparenthood, I can appreciate Sharon's desire and rejoice in her new opportunities to spoil them rotten (or at least enjoy them for more hours each day).

The other benefit to be derived from Sharon's departure is the opportunity it provides us to honor her for her extraordinary service to the *SMU Law Review*. To hear Sharon tell it, she has enjoyed every hour of every day with every student she has worked with. Maybe so, but Sharon has paid a price to be the *de facto* office manager, den mother, and general factotum for the law review. Consider this one fact: In any given year, perhaps the only students to read every word in an entire volume of the journal are the editor-in-chief and the managing editor, but Sharon has read every word in every issue of every volume for the past decade and a half. If this doesn't entitle her to an honorary *Juris Doctor* degree, then she at least should have been able to collect hazardous-duty pay.

It is difficult to overstate Sharon's importance to the day-to-day functioning of the journal. When new student editors arrive after board elections in February, still wet behind the ears, they have an enormous job to learn. For many years, Sharon has been their teacher, quietly and patiently instructing, prodding, and moving them along to higher levels of performance. She has seen fifteen editorial boards come and go. Some boards have functioned more smoothly than others, but Sharon has loved them all as if they were her own kids. She remembers them fondly when they are gone and loves hearing from them when they return as alums. Law reviews have the reputation of being pretty heartless places, at least some of the time. Sharon's heart made the downstairs offices of the *SMU Law Review* a kinder and gentler place.

"The first kindness is competence,"⁶ however, and no thank-you for her years of service would be complete without recognizing that Sharon Johnson was first, last, and always a consummate professional. In a line of work that demands "precision . . . and a perfectionist's work ethic,"⁷ Sharon set an example for all who worked with her.

5. I will probably never have another chance to use this quotation, one of my favorites, in a law review article, so here goes: "The reason grandparents and grandchildren get along so well is that they have a common enemy." The quotation has been attributed to comedian Sam Levenson, *see, e.g.*, The Quotations Page, <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/582.html> (last visited July 8, 2010). However, the National Association of Independent Schools credits historian Arnold Toynbee with a very similar sentiment: "Grandparents and grandchildren are natural allies against a common enemy." Patrick F. Bassett, Nat'l Ass'n of Indep. Schs., *Cultivating Grandparents*, Apr. 22, 2002, <http://www.nais.org/about/article.cfm?ItemNumber=145399> (last visited July 8, 2010). The only thing that doesn't ring quite true is the idea that Sharon Johnson could have an enemy in the world.

6. I attribute these words to physician-poet David Schiedermayer, even though neither of us can remember the poem in which he used them. *See* Jennifer Bard, Thomas W. Mayo & Stacey A. Tovino, *Three Ways of Looking at a Health Law and Literature Class*, 1 DREXEL L. REV. 512, 537 n.141 (2009).

7. *See* Stracher, *supra* note 1, at 370.

Sharon's level of performance did not come about by accident. Rather, it was the result of a passion for the organization, its people, and the work itself. Sharon truly cares for the *SMU Law Review*. It is one of the reasons she didn't retire any sooner, as well as the reason she told me, as I was preparing this essay, that she is having second thoughts about retiring this year (even though, she confessed in a conspiratorial whisper, she really feels the time is right). Her commitment to the mission of the law review and to its student editors has always been an inspiration to the rest of us.

I have relied on Sharon's professionalism, commitment, and good judgment every day. It will probably surprise no one that she has been my eyes and ears in the office. It has been a source of great comfort to me to have Sharon as my work-partner. I have always known, as a generation of law-review editors have learned, that the *SMU Law Review* has been in capable and caring hands.

Sharon, we will miss you.

Thomas Wm. Mayo

Associate Professor, SMU Dedman School of Law; Advisor, SMU Law Review Association.

Sharon Johnson: SMU Law Review's Wonder Woman

I am honored to pay tribute to Sharon Johnson for her fifteen years of outstanding service to the SMU Law Review Association and its members. She has been vital to the success of this publication and will be sorely missed. Being part of an annually changing, student-run journal is scary. It is also rewarding and challenging, and it teaches you a lot about the Bluebook. But mostly it is just scary.

Every April, a new group of students is thrown into the deep end of the publication process, and for the past fifteen years, Sharon has been there to pull them to safety. I, of course, was no exception. I first met Sharon the day before I became managing editor. I was terrified by what I had gotten myself into. I already had a stack of articles to edit, exams were fast approaching, and despite hours of training, I felt like I had no idea what was going on. That day, as we walked to lunch, I remember seeing Sharon and my predecessor, Meghan, walking together, chatting and joking, and I began to feel better. I knew I would have an ally. And Sharon was just that to all of us—she was our ally, always in our corner and always there to make sure that everything turned out okay.

Every year, no matter how much training the incoming editorial board receives, there are always questions, and there are always disasters, or at least situations that feel like disasters to overly anxious law students. Fortunately, Sharon has always been there to pick up the pieces. She is the glue that holds the law review together, always ready with an answer to every off-the-wall law review question that we could dream up ("Now,

is there any way that we can publish the summer edition *before* the spring edition?") or with a story to make us feel better about any mistakes we may have made ("Oh, this is nothing! One year . . ."). Sharon laughs in the face of impossible deadlines and casually brushes aside the constant fretting of apprehensive law students. And after everything we put her through year after year, she still came back to us to start all over again.

I will not miss the endless hours spent editing articles in the law review office or the midnight runs to school to drop off last-minute revisions, but I *will* miss seeing Sharon every day. I will miss making law review jokes that no one else would find funny, complaining about deadlines, and breathing a sigh of relief when we sent out a journal. But mostly I will miss stopping by Sharon's office just to talk about anything and everything. After a year of working together, having her help sort through my debacles and jointly celebrating my victories, I can honestly say that Sharon is my friend first, and my colleague second.

Sharon Johnson truly has a servant's heart. Her knowledge, patience, and dedication have been a blessing to the SMU Law Review and its members. Thank you, Sharon, for fifteen wonderful years of dedicated service to this organization. We all wish you a fantastic retirement!

Kristen N. Brown
Managing Editor, *SMU Law Review*, 2009-10

Sharon Johnson

Some may wonder why the SMU Law Review Association chose to honor Sharon Johnson in this issue of the *SMU Law Review*. Her name never appeared on the masthead, and it cannot be found on the law review website. More than anyone, however, it is Sharon who deserves credit for passing on the institutional knowledge required to keep the law review functioning year after year. It is for this reason that we decided to recognize her fifteen years of service to the law review by dedicating this issue to her.

Sharon served as the administrative assistant to the law review for fifteen years, ensuring that turnover proceeded smoothly every year. Were it not for her, the difficult and stressful transition from staff member to managing editor would not have been as bearable. It was Sharon who taught me the essential aspects of the job and who kept me on schedule—as anyone who has held a law review position knows is an overwhelming feat. If anyone had a question about the publication procedure, how to structure a symposium, or how to communicate with an author, I always referred them to Sharon first.

Sharon proudly documented the successes of the current and former SMU Law Review Association members, and she still receives holiday cards from many people who spent many hours in the law review hall-

way—a place Sharon helped to make brighter. Her love and dedication to the law review and to SMU will be greatly missed.

Meghan Kreuziger

Managing Editor, SMU Law Review, 2008-09

Sharon Johnson Tribute

In the spring of 2009 I embarked on a harrowing journey—taking on the role of president for the SMU Law Review Association. It was not always an easy job, but I knew that when I hit rough water, Sharon would be there to help me find balance. Sharon played a much larger role in the SMU Law Review Association than any title can encompass. For us, Sharon was a resource, a collective memory, our history, our teacher, and our guide. Most importantly, Sharon was always there as a friend. I spent many afternoons sitting on the faded coral upholstery of a chair in her office, sharing with her my most recent trials and tribulations of law review and of life. And she would always respond with good humor and sound advice. Her strong character and spirituality make her one of the few people in the world who can stop me from worrying about every little thing.

Sharon's job is not an easy one. It is no small task to work with the sometimes-inflated egos and often over-urgent to-do lists of law review leaders. But Sharon has manned the basement of Storey Hall with the necessary style and grace to draw out the best in the students. Sharon has seen different student boards, different advisory boards, and different school administrations and administrators. In some years Sharon has been the only constant from one year to the next that a law review executive committee has had. In that unique position, Sharon has had the opportunity to greatly influence the culture and make-up of the SMU Law Review Association. Sharon never shirked that responsibility and always encouraged us to take on our roles wholeheartedly. She empowered us to take charge, to be strong when necessary, and to be humble when required. Sharon created a unique culture where student leaders could feel in control of their role and organization.

Sharon's departure will leave a void that will not easily be filled. The law review will miss her greatly. But I am confident that her strong relationships with the students, the advisors, and the administrators have created a system that will continue to produce increasingly valuable output. So much of the law review's accomplishments are due in no small part to her work, and I know that the foundation is in place for the continued and steady improvement that she would want. Personally, though, Sharon's departure and my graduation will leave me missing something. During my year as president, Sharon gave me the support necessary to do my job. Sharon served as my champion when I was unable to do so.

Without fail, she provided all of us with invaluable insight and encouragement.

Sharon, we would all be lost without you. We thank you so much for all that you have given us.

Rachel Feinberg Harrison

President, SMU Law Review Association, 2009-10

Sharon Johnson Tribute

For the last fifteen years Sharon has been a dedicated fixture in Room 5 of Storey Hall. You could often see her short grey hair peering above a stack of articles, as the sound of her fingers feverishly pounding in edits echoed in the hallway.

As president of the SMU Law Review Association, I often referred to myself as a cruise director, but we all really knew who was captain of the ship, and that was Sharon. She was quite at home among the hustle and bustle of the law review. Sharon was a gentle leader—always patient and calm under pressure as the deadlines grew close and tempers flared. She would never interject and only gave her opinion if asked. She let you make your own mistakes. I quickly learned to always ask Sharon for her advice.

Sharon took care of the law review as if it were her own child. Now instead of spending her days tracking down tardy authors, her time will be filled chasing after her six precious grandchildren. Her family is the light of her life and second only to her commitment to Christ.

I think of Sharon and smile every time I glance over at the frame she gave me for graduation which reads: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ Jeremiah 29:11.” Although the SMU community will certainly miss her, I know she has a wonderful future ahead of her.

Amanda B. (Peters) Childs

President, SMU Law Review Association, 2002-03

Thoughts on Sharon

I don't remember exactly when I realized that Sharon knew the answers to all of my questions about how to make the *SMU Law Review* a successful publication. She doesn't give unsolicited advice, but I learned that if I watched her eyebrows very carefully, I could tell when she had some pearl of wisdom to share with someone who was willing to listen. I

am still amazed by her tireless grace, humor, and patience, and I still miss working with her.

Eileen Youens

Editor-in-Chief, *SMU Law Review*, 2002-03

Ode to Sharon

The '03 Texas Survey issue was a bear
With thirty-three articles—each requiring care.
Sharon squinted over each round of edits,
Interpreting red arrows, symbols, and carets.
Patient with our mistakes, she filed them away
To keep future editors from going astray.
As guardian of the law review's memory,
Sharon's influence shaped its trajectory,
And she will always be part of its history.

Audra (Wassom) Bayes

Wendy (Gerwick) Couture

Texas Survey Co-Editors, 2002-03

