Remembering Rona

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I first met Rona Mears during the summer of 1979 in a course on Business Associations that I was teaching at the Southern Methodist University School of Law. In the third row of the classroom, among a group of some fifty students, almost all of whom were in their twenties, sat this forty-year old woman who would quickly distinguish herself in my eyes then and who remains in my memory still, three decades later. Her lively intelligence easily allowed her to dominate the intricacies of corporation and securities law. But more than that, she projected what I can only describe as a cheerful seriousness of intent—a quality that I soon learned was an essential element of her character. Her participation in class was insightful, to the point, and delivered with a maturity of judgment that few younger students possessed. She had an enthusiasm for the law and an energy for life that was palpable.

Rona had earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota in 1960. Later, she moved to Dallas with her husband, SMU professor John Mears, raised a family in the intervening two decades while active in a number of church and civic activities, and then in 1978 decided the time was right to undertake graduate study. Typical of Rona, who always seemed to me a human dynamo, she enrolled in not one but two graduate programs, studying both law and business at the same time in the dual degree program at SMU’s law and business schools, earning both degrees with honors in 1982.

In 1980, I became dean of SMU Law School. One of the obligations that I took with me to that job was a commitment to co-author with Professor William Streng a treatise on international business transactions to be published by Matthew Bender. If I was going to survive as a dean and still write that book, I would need a lot of help, so I immediately turned to Rona and asked her to be my research assistant. She readily agreed with that cheerful seriousness of intent that she brought to all her projects. For the next two years, while continuing her strong academic performance and serving as an editor of the law review, she worked—indeed, truly labored—to help me complete the first two volumes of what would become a six volume treatise. Each week, she would arrive in my office, arms loaded with books and documents, sit down on the other side of my desk, proceed to brief me succinctly and articulately on the topic she had been researching, and then hand over a

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superbly drafted memo discussing in detail the subject of her briefing. As I look back on our association of nearly thirty years ago, I readily acknowledge that without Rona’s help those first volumes of our treatise would have had to wait for the end of my deanship for their completion. I have had many excellent research assistants since that time, but none were better than Rona.

The qualities that I saw in her as a student and research assistant would impel her into a stellar career in law. Her intelligence, her energy, her capacity for hard work, and her enthusiasm enabled her to become a distinguished international lawyer, a partner in a prestigious Dallas law firm, and a leader of the organized bar. From time to time, over the years, we would meet at professional programs and meetings, and I was always delighted to learn of her latest plans and projects. One encounter that remains firmly in mind took place in Prague in the mid-1990s. On a tour of the Czech Republic, my wife Donna and I were walking down from the Prague Castle to the old town when we were surprised to spot Rona and her husband John climbing that steep hill towards us. In her cheerful fashion, she exchanged greetings and news with us and then, as she had done all of her life, continued her journey toward the summit.