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## Thanks to Ellen Solender: A Generous Teacher, Scholar, and Friend

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# THANKS TO ELLEN SOLENDER: A GENEROUS TEACHER, SCHOLAR, AND FRIEND

*C. Paul Rogers III\**

**A**LL of us learn in life that some people are takers and some people are givers. Unfortunately, we also learn that far more of the former than the latter exist.

Ellen Solender, who retired from our faculty last year, is a giver. In the broadest sense of the word, she has given to the SMU School of Law. She and her husband Bob have over the years continually opened their home to our community of scholars, teachers, and students. Saturday morning tennis at the Solenders, followed by juice and donuts, is literally part of our institutional history. Ellen and Bob have generously benefited the school financially. And scarcely a year went by when Ellen did not get willingly stuck with chairing some major university or law school committee. Most recently, as chair of our Minority Affairs Committee, she successfully undertook to implement a “World of Difference” program for our entire student body, faculty, and staff.

As a teacher and educator, Ellen also gave of herself. She treated her torts class as if they were her children, caring but demanding and with high expectations. She exuded warmth but exacted intellectual rigor, a combination not easily achieved.

Ellen is a trailblazer, also in the broadest sense. The mother of three growing but not yet grown children, she began law school (at SMU) 24 years after graduating from Oberlin College. At that time, few women and virtually no “mature” women with families attended law school. Shortly after graduating with honors she took over our legal writing program, performing superbly and quickly earning faculty status. Ellen continued to blaze trails, leaving legal writing for fulltime teaching and research and becoming our second woman to earn tenure and a full professorship.

As the number of women coming to law school rose dramatically, Ellen became an invaluable role model to scores of women students striving to make it in our male dominated profession. She undoubtedly helped shape a few male attitudes as well, with her grace-under-fire poise, uncommon good cheer, and unerring sense of perspective. (Example: In

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years of tennis at the Solenders I have never seen Ellen, unlike the rest of us, question a line call.)

Throughout it all, Ellen never compromised her independence of thought and action. (Recent example: She threw her own retirement party last spring.) She became an effective advocate for the diversification of the law school faculty and student body, far before it became politically correct to do so. As befitting a teacher of the First Amendment, she valued open lines of communication. As dean, I came to particularly value and appreciate her periodic visits to give me a "heads up" or some quick counsel, whether I thought I needed it or not. And I learned that I was far better off heeding Ellen's advice, solicited or not.

The SMU law school owes Ellen a large debt of gratitude, and so do I. When I joined the faculty in 1980, Ellen and Bob quickly befriended my wife Lynn and me. She chaired my tenure committee and led me through that onerous process. She helped me get through a seemingly endless AALS Recruitment Conference in Chicago when bronchitis laid me low. During my time as dean, she has given me words of encouragement when I needed them most.

So all of us in the SMU law school community are in Ellen's debt: faculty, students, and administrators. That is what happens with folks who give so much of themselves.

Now Ellen and Bob will have more time to travel, which makes them happy, and to be together, which makes them even happier, for they are a couple truly devoted to each other. Bob has always supported Ellen and taken great pride in her professional successes, but I know he is glad to get her back. His gain is certainly our loss, but we thank him for loaning Ellen to us these last twenty-five or so years. (Not that he had any real choice in the matter.)

Ellen leaves the law school a far different and, I believe, a far better place than she found it when she enrolled as a 1L in the fall of 1968. She has had much to do with making it different and with making it better. I cannot think of a higher tribute to give a giver such as Ellen. Simply put, she made a difference.

Although Ellen has certainly earned her time away from us, we will miss her daily presence and counsel. But I have high hopes that she won't stay away completely. I am often in need of advice, and it gives me no small comfort to know that Ellen will be only a phone call or a FAX away.