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Maureen Tribute

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MAUREEN TRIBUTE

*Michael Foreman**

I met Maureen when, via a dual career move, my wife and I relocated to Texas. My background included nearly two decades of legal practice spanning from private practice to state and local government. I had also done some adjunct teaching at northeastern law schools. Based upon this background, and a relentless campaign to be hired, I convinced Maureen to bring me on as clinical instructor, or some academic title comparable to this in SMU's clinical program—to be honest I can't keep all the academic titles straight. Having never been totally dedicated to teaching, my thoughts at that time were, "How hard can this be?" I know how to practice law, so it would be simply a matter of getting students to watch and learn. Luckily, Maureen recognized something in me that made her believe I had the potential to be a successful clinical instructor, and perhaps more importantly, she had the patience to work with me.

Anyone who has worked with Maureen knows she is a tenacious litigator; coming from my background, that is a trait I admire. But it was the way she approached the students, immersing them in all aspects of litigation—the tedious, glorious, ugly, happy, disappointing—that was my own education. In the clinics, Maureen was as demanding of the students as law school education requires, but she also provided students the space to find their own way. And I may add, as a fledgling clinical instructor back then, she also provided me that same space.

I remember that at that time one of the clinical reading assigned was *Subordination, Rhetorical Survival Skills, and Sunday Shoes: Notes on a Hearing of Mrs. G.* by Lucie E. White.¹ For established clinicians this was no doubt stock-in-trade material. Maureen urged rather strongly that I read it. Coming from a firm litigation practice, I found it interesting but initially questioned its practicality—surely the attorney knows best. But Maureen was patient, allowing me the opportunity to digest this approach to practice and apply it in our meetings with varied clients and our periodic clinic trips to the low-income housing agency. Ultimately, my thinking evolved about this approach and I found myself adapting it with my own twists, adding Denzel Washington's initial client interview in the

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1. See generally Lucie E. White, *Subordination, Rhetorical Survival Skills, and Sunday Shoes: Notes on the Hearing of Mrs. G.*, 38 BUFF. L. REV. 1 (1990).

movie *Philadelphia* and Richard Gere's interview of Edward Norton from the movie *Primal Fear*.² In watching Maureen interact with students, I realized that she also practiced student-centered learning, recognizing that all students learn in different ways. Maureen was wonderful at identifying for students the best path for them.

One of SMU's major cases at that time was that of an inmate who was paralyzed and had developed sepsis because the facility where he was being held refused to assist him to move and refused any accommodations because of his disability. I say it was the clinic's case, but it was in reality Maureen's case. It was filed before I arrived and the litigation spanned virtually the entire time I was there. Semesters of students came and left experiencing some aspect of the case. One semester's group drafted discovery, another semester the students answered discovery, another group responded to one of many summary judgment motions; the litigation crawled forward, but Maureen remained. Ultimately the case went to trial with the students trying the case under Maureen's watchful eye. I left SMU to return to the East Coast, but Maureen continued to steady the case through a victory in the Fifth Circuit. True to her focus on student-centered learning, the case was argued by a young female who did not want to do litigation but did a wonderful job in the appellate argument. Through it all Maureen was there anchoring the litigation, and beyond that, her commitment and the thoroughness of her attention to every aspect of the case served as a constant role model for the students working on the case. As a bonus throughout, she maintained her sense of humor.

But my focus on her clinical work here should not be mistaken for a lack of focus on scholarship and the academic aspect of law. While teaching the clinics and serving as an academic Dean she continued to do cutting-edge legal research and presentations. After I left SMU she expanded her commitment to advocacy, being instrumental in the creation of SMU's child advocacy clinic.

I returned to litigation, but carried with me the lessons from Maureen. She instilled in me a desire to pursue a career in clinical education and helped me to develop the skills to hopefully do it well. It sounds self-congratulatory, but I think she did it right! I started a civil rights clinic that has just celebrated its ten-year anniversary, and I am currently an Associate Dean of Clinical Education. Thank you, Maureen, for being an inspiration and a mentor. But more importantly, for the experience you have given to your students during your years in the SMU Clinics, and for demonstrating to them the meaning of true advocacy.

I know you have moved on from clinical education, but your passion for justice and the rule of law will lead you to explore the next challenges. There are other battles to fight and injustices to correct, and I know you will carry on. I wish you well. Congratulations.

2. Just as an aside, if you have not seen the movie it is a classic depiction of *non-client* centered lawyering, but I won't spoil the ending for you.