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# Professor Maureen Noble Armour: The Last Lawyer in Town

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## PROFESSOR MAUREEN NOBLE ARMOUR: THE LAST LAWYER IN TOWN

*Jake Torres\**

**D**URING law school I would attend any student organization's meeting if they offered free food. So when I received an email that the legal clinics were serving pizza at their information session, I headed straight to room 207 in Florence Hall. That is where I first met Professor Armour.

Representatives from each of the clinics took turns describing the type of legal work their clinics offered and the benefits of enrolling in their clinic. When Professor Armour spoke on behalf of the Civil Clinic, she was blunt. "We're the last lawyers in town. We take the cases that other lawyers won't take, or that the non-profits can't take." During my three semesters as her student in the Civil Clinic, I would often write down "Armourisms." Two—neither of which contain her favorite four-letter word—appear below.

"They're better off with you than with no lawyer."

In the fall of 2016, a landlord with over three hundred single-family rental properties sent a letter to each of his tenants informing them their month-to-month leases would not be renewed. Most of these tenants, clustered in West Dallas and South Dallas, could not afford lawyers and the local non-profits did not have the capacity to meet with the tenants to explain the meaning of the letter or their rights under the law.

Within days, Professor Armour organized a series of neighborhood clinics and staffed them with law students. Over one hundred families attended one of the clinics to ask questions and receive free legal advice. The clinics gave me the chance to see Professor Armour do what she does best—bring legal services to those who cannot afford them. She was everywhere. One minute I saw her gently explain the impact an eviction would have on an elderly woman. The next minute she firmly ordered reporters out of a church because the families were worried their faces would appear on television. But her greatest lawyerly skill—which she instilled in each of her students—she did without saying a word.

"Stop talking. Lawyers listen."

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\* Jake Torres is currently an Associate Attorney in Vinson & Elkins' Dallas office. His practice centers on representing financial institutions. Jake graduated *cum laude* from SMU Dedman School of Law, where he was involved in the Hispanic Law Students Association and the Civil Clinic.

Lawyers love to hear themselves talk. At the final neighborhood clinic, Professor Armour joined me to interview a young mother of two. I was in the middle of explaining the landlord's letter, head down in my notes, when Professor Armour stopped me. I had not realized the young mother wanted to ask me a question about a separate document.

Whether we were in court or in class, Professor Armour was always listening. She taught us to recognize the relevant information in a client interview and how to ask effective follow up questions. Professor Armour picked up nuances when a judge addressed us from the bench and when a student asked a question in class. Learning how to listen is not a skill commonly associated with law school, but it is one that all great lawyers have.

Professor Armour is the kind of lawyer we should all strive to be. She is a scholar in the classroom and a force in the courtroom. She is strong in front of opposing counsel and gentle with clients and students. Thank you Professor Armour for leaving a successful career in private practice to become the last lawyer in town—for accepting the cases that other lawyers could not or would not take.