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Tribute to Professor Linda Eads

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TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR LINDA EADS

*Paul McGreal**

TEACHER. Mentor. Colleague. Friend.

I have been fortunate to know a small handful of people who have filled two or three of these roles. In each case, it was a person whose connection transcended the personal and professional. I have known only one person, though, who has filled all four roles—Professor Linda Eads. And this is significant because, as baseball and civil rights pioneer Jackie Robinson wrote, “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.” I am honored to share my reflections on Linda’s special impact on a life that is better for having known her.

At the distance of almost thirty years from law school, I carry two lasting memories of Linda’s teaching. The first is oddly specific: I have a crystal-clear recollection and nuanced understanding of the hearsay rule. What makes this remarkable is that I have not used the hearsay rule for almost twenty-five years! And yet that knowledge—and more that I learned from her so well—stuck in a way that few else did. In her classes, I did not simply memorize, I learned.

The other is a continued confidence in my curiosity. I enrolled in her “Women and the Law” seminar in my third year, and the course was one of the few that consistently pushed students to dwell at the level of principle and theory, and then connect that thinking to concrete problems that affected people’s lives. As students pursued their hunches and intuitions, Linda firmly and respectfully pushed us to articulate our thoughts, probe each step of our reasoning, and confront our assumptions. Her underlying message was clear—your ideas are valuable, so take them seriously and test their metal. That course cultivated a confidence and joy in learning that has sustained my academic career.

After graduation, Linda became a trusted mentor. As I navigated a brief time in law practice at a large firm and then applied for academic positions, she was my go-to adviser. This was because I knew two things with certainty: she cared about my well-being, and she would tell me hard truths (always with respect) even at the risk that they would be met with an unpleasant reaction. And when that reaction occasionally came, she forgave, forgot, and moved forward.

A lasting piece of advice was something she shared that she had heard from a former colleague. Here is a rough paraphrase: professional fulfillment lies in aligning interest, aptitude, and opportunity. That is, a person has an opportunity to do work that they love and are good at. When I

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reflected on this wisdom, I knew that I wanted to teach law—it is what I love. And Linda was always there to help with the other two: finding an opportunity to pursue this passion and growing as a scholar, teacher, and servant.

We later worked as colleagues when she invited me to join the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct Committee of the State Bar of Texas, which drafted proposed rules to implement the American Bar Association's Ethics 2020 initiative. As a young academic, I was humbled to serve, and the experience was energizing and formative. Though Linda was busy chairing the committee, along with her full-time teaching, she always took time to share reflections on the process and feedback on my work. It might be something small, like nudging me back to awareness when I started to doze off during a marathon meeting, or something more significant, like counseling me on how to respectfully and candidly disagree with more senior (and experienced) committee members. And all the while I was witness to the confidence and finesse with which she shepherded a large group of strong personalities through the sensitive terrain of regulating our profession.

We have also worked as coauthors on a constitutional law book for law students. The multiple decisions and deadlines throughout the process could have been stress points or occasions for friction. Yet, three editions later, looking back on over a decade of writing collaboration (and adding a third coauthor), the experience was joyous. Whether the issue was dividing topics or royalties, I felt no tension. And we wrote without pride of authorship, interested only in making the whole as good as it could be.

Most importantly, through all of this, we became friends. I can still remember the moment when I thought this might happen. It was some time after graduation, and I wrote yet another email message to Linda. Despite her urging to the contrary since graduation, my message began, "Dear Professor Eads . . ." As best as I can recall, her reply was to the point: "Dear Paul, Please call me Linda, or I will not reply to your next message. Best, Linda." I laughed and smiled. It was just the kick in the seat of the pants that I needed to make the mental leap from professor to colleague and then to friend.

As I wrote this tribute, it occurred to me that we take for granted what we mean by "friend." And this may be more so today when technology tempts us to use that precious term in facile ways. As Muhammad Ali wrote, "Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything." So, let me be concrete about what I have learned: Linda has been a real, true friend. A "there when you need them," "tell you the hard truth even though you might blame them," "call when you need to," "stick with you at your worst," "reassure you that you're not crazy," "bring you back from the brink," "take joy in your successes," "trust with your difficult truths," "share your sense of humor" kind of friend. And for that, above all else, I will be forever grateful.