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VICKI PALACIOS—AN APPRECIATION

*C. Paul Rogers III**

AFTER almost thirty years of service to the SMU Dedman School of Law, Vicki Palacios is beginning another stage of life. Her retirement from the law faculty is a very real loss to us for a number of reasons, but foremost, is that we as an institution are losing an individual whose compassion and sense of fairness are unwavering. Indeed, when I think of Vicki, the first things that pop into my head are her empathy and compassion, whether it be for law students facing special challenges or for those wrongly incarcerated in our criminal justice system. She wants the world to be a kinder, more just, and compassionate place, and she spent her career trying to achieve just that.

When Vicki joined us in 1991 to teach our criminal law curriculum, she already had extensive experience in the criminal justice system, including a long stint as a board member and then as chair of the Utah State Board of Pardons. She was, in fact, a perfect fit for us; she not only taught Criminal Law and Constitutional Criminal Procedure but also developed new courses in the areas of criminal justice administration, juvenile justice, sentencing, and the death penalty. More recently, Vicki was instrumental in bringing an innocence clinic to the law school, which has already achieved success in freeing an individual wrongly convicted of murder.

Vicki brought knowledge sifted from experience as well as her own passion to each of those subjects. Her legacy, or at least one of her legacies, is that many of her former students serve in all aspects of the criminal justice system—including from the bench. And that is a very good thing because Vicki's compassion and sense of fairness have most certainly had an impact on each of them.

Vicki was the first Hispanic woman to join our faculty, although by then we had for many years attracted growing numbers of Hispanic law students. Needless to say, she has been a wonderful mentor and role model for scores of Hispanic students in the intervening years. But her character and integrity have had an impact on all the students that she has taught, regardless of the student's ethnic background or whether the student chose a career in criminal justice. She brought rigor, enthusiasm, depth of knowledge, and good humor to her teaching. Equally important, her students always knew that she cared about their well-being outside the classroom.

* Marilyn Jeanne Johnson Distinguished Faculty Fellow, Professor of Law, and former Dean, SMU Dedman School of Law.

In much the same way, Vicki was a supportive colleague during her years on the faculty. More than once I remember Vicki saying without a trace of envy, "He [she] is such a star" in reference to one of her colleagues' accomplishments. She has a way about her that shows that she cares and that we can count on her to pitch in and help in a pinch.

Vicki managed all of this while enduring significant personal hardships as the single parent and primary caregiver of an adult child with a debilitating illness. One can only imagine the toll this took, but Vicki never complained, and she soldiered on with her responsibilities at the law school and within the university. Her quiet courage in the face of such a difficult family hardship has truly been an inspiration to us.

It hardly seems necessary to reiterate that we will miss Vicki. We will miss her good cheer, her sense of humor, her good judgment, and of course, her compassion. She certainly leaves SMU a better place than she found it, and for that we are very grateful.