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## Tribute to Professor Beth Thornburg

Melinda Arbuckle  
*Shellist, Lazarz, Solbin LLP*

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## TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR BETH THORNBURG

*Melinda Arbuckle\**

IT'S such a challenge to write a tribute to one of my favorite people as her time as a professor at Southern Methodist University comes to a close. How do I express what she has meant to hundreds of students without writing an overly fawning, maudlin mess that she would not enjoy reading?

Maybe we break it down to the basics, to the process she taught us.

First, Professor Thornburg is a teacher, and I do believe that. There are law professors who are first writers or first academics or first lawyers, but I've never known a law professor more committed to the act and process of teaching than Beth (and what a labor to break the habit of calling her Professor Thornburg!). Her dedication to ensuring her students actually *learn* is evident in her work on the Civil Procedure Questions and An-

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\* SMU Dedman School of Law Class of 2011.

swers supplement (the real textbook!), the theory she reads, the techniques she implements (hello clickers!), and the time she spends with each student. Beth is a teacher to her students for life. I know so many of us still reach out to her with tricky problems or simple problems with answers we've forgotten because we're just not her. Sometimes the problems are legal, sometimes professional, and sometimes personal, but no one is more qualified to lead us toward finding the right answer. Whoever steps into her role must strive to continue this legacy of teaching.

Second, she's a feminist. The decisions of a few over the last couple of weeks and days have affected us all, and there's no moment more crucial to assert the simple truth that women belong everywhere. That women's rights are human rights. It is impossible to memorialize Beth's impact, especially right now, without reflecting on the example of feminism she sets. In grappling with the repercussions of the *Dobbs* opinion, and what it means for the continued legitimacy of our system of justice, Beth was the first person I reached out to for comfort and wisdom (and to share some not-so-mild swear words). I know that even in her retirement, she will continue to bolster important human rights objectives, as she has expressed her desire to do pro bono legal work to further the interests of those amongst us who are in the most precarious positions. It is some relief to know that even as we all must struggle to be the light we want to see in the world, one of our greatest beacons still burns.

Third, and ultimately, Beth is an example. I know others will write of her sharp intelligence and her body of work (I hope someone writes about *Lawtalk* because I love that book). But, in choosing role models, I search out qualities that are simultaneously more timeless and more ephemeral. Timeless because we all must recognize on a deep level that the core traits Beth embodies—responsibility, compassion, and honor—are, in fact, heroic. But also ephemeral because it seems like we don't build monuments to the people who tenaciously work for incremental change without the promise of glory, who always pick up the phone and offer help, who remain committed in their most important relationships. We really ought to examine our building of monuments, generally . . . . In any event, these values are defined by successive moments intimately experienced rather than grand dramatic gestures which have lent themselves to historical recollection (and they almost never seem to occur on horseback, which I think has traditionally been the main prerequisite for the making of a monument). But, for my marble and bronze, I would carve her.