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## VALEDICTION

### THE CHALLENGE

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I deeply thank the Board of Editors of the *Oklahoma City University Law Review* and the Board's advisor, Professor Karen Eby, for limiting the *Review's* coverage of my retirement to these three pages.

In first grade, my life revolved around two women. The first was my mother (now Mary Solon Lewis); the second was my teacher, Sister Mary Laura. Both were in their late twenties and far from home. Mom had been born on a dirt-poor ranch (*in* the ranch house) in the South Dakota Badlands, while Sister Mary Laura was from Detroit. Both were responsible for educating far too many children (six for Mom; about thirty for Sister Mary Laura). And neither had time or money that they could call their own. Raising six children on my father's salary meant Mom counted pennies, and Sister Laura had taken a vow of poverty.

Sister Laura never reached her full potential, dying of cancer when I was in third grade. But Mom put us through six undergraduate degrees (Amherst, Carleton, Princeton, St. John's of Santa Fe, and two from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln), graduate studies at Stanford, a Yale law degree, and a Ph.D. in non-linear physics from Cornell. Later, Mom earned her own degree while working full-time, then returned to her beloved Badlands, where she continues to astound us. Now in her mid-eighties, she walks several miles almost every day, and this summer, the University of Oklahoma Press will publish Philip S. Hall and Mary Solon Lewis, *From Wounded Knee to the Gallows: the Life and Trials of Lakota Chief Two Sticks* (2020).

When I was nine, Sister Laura found the following poem, copied it by hand, acquired a frame (despite her vow of poverty), and sent it to Mom. It hangs above the light switch in my office, so it's the last thing I see before I head to class, where I will find seventy-some students. Some are hungry to learn; some have spent hours working the assignment; some think anything we discuss is useless "theory." Some are distracted by worries of a sick child, an ailing elderly parent, a dissolving marriage, an abusive partner, or the source of next month's rent. Some bear centuries-deep scars of unspeakable sins committed against their ancestors (or themselves). Some believe that education is rote memory and unquestioned regurgitation. Some feel completely alone in a sea of faces; some struggle with anxiety, depression, dyslexia, autism, or even addiction. Some will do wonders when they graduate; some will do wonders by overcoming tremendous obstacles and graduating. But whatever they bring to class, our duties as teachers are to reach them, to listen to them, and to see in them more than they see in themselves.

*Poem for David, 8 & Open*  
By Jeanette Nicols<sup>1</sup>

He was 8  
and brought in an armful  
of hard tar

later, brought  
it in again  
cubed in a tub of water

Asked why  
he said “to see  
what it’s made of”

Tar is made  
of tar  
I nearly said

before I saw cubes of curiosity  
floating like rafts  
in that water.

before I saw the man  
walk out of the boy  
with an armful of tar

an armful  
of what  
everything’s made of.

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1. The *Law Review* was unable to find additional information for this source.