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NANCY INGRAM KENDERDINE: COLLEAGUE, MENTOR, AND FRIEND

Nancy Ingram Kenderdine dedicated twenty-eight years of service to Oklahoma City University School of Law. She became the first woman to serve as dean of an Oklahoma law school when she took on the role of Interim Dean in 1982. She taught more than 8,000 students during her tenure at OCU Law. She was the first recipient, and first repeat recipient, of the OCU Law Merit Scholars Teaching Excellence Award. She was a longtime fighter for women's equality, a lover of animals, and a beloved colleague and friend—her influence will always live on at OCU Law.

The following includes excerpts of a piece written by the late Vicki Lawrence MacDougall to honor Nancy Kenderdine upon her retirement from OCU Law.

Once upon a time there was a law school that strove for excellence and in its quest hired many new faculty, including Nancy Kenderdine, the heroine of our tale. Nancy awed students through the years with her teaching expertise and students describe Nancy as articulate, intelligent, opinionated, demanding, with a formidable presence in the classroom and, at times, a wicked sense of humor. After singing her praises, many students often add

the remark, “What a character.” Students always have the utmost respect for Professor Kenderdine as a professional and an equal respect for her legendary final exams. Many would probably be surprised to discover that the teaching guru of OCU metamorphosed from a woman cocooned in a traditional role. Indeed, it is a credit to Nancy that she is not a stagnant person; rather, Nancy constantly grows as a person and, to a large degree, Nancy will always be a work in progress.

Nancy Kenderdine was my mentor, and I really don't know if Nancy chose me as her student or I chose her as my mentor or whether the mentorship simply evolved. Regardless, I learned much of what I know about legal education from a master. Nancy taught me about faculty autonomy, academic quality, law school curriculum, developing courses, classroom techniques, techniques for dealing with students (including when to say “yes” and when to say “no”), and approaches to testing and grading. Hopefully, her teaching expertise is reflected to some degree by my performance in the classroom and her philosophy about legal education will survive her retirement by my continued presence on the faculty. Our relationship perhaps changed from mentor/student to one with more parity when I first discovered that Nancy was not always right.

Nancy and I have seen each other through the most difficult times of our lives and have shared in each other's happiness. Simply stated, life doesn't provide many friends like Nancy. My friendship with Nancy has also provided me with some unique insight into her personality. Never suggest to Nancy to do something unless you are willing to follow through with the suggestion. One year, I was trying to convince Nancy to attend the faculty grid-iron. We were both reluctant to attend the faculty roast hosted by the student bar association, but I was still trying to come up with various arguments to get her to make an appearance. Finally, Nancy said, “I'm not going. I have nothing to wear.” This was not a silly concern. Few professional women kept semi-formal gowns in their closets. I responded, “Fine, we can go rent costumes.” Nancy inquired what type of costumes and I said (without thinking, I might add), “gorilla suits.” Nancy eyes lit up and she said she had always wanted to wear a gorilla suit.

That is how a week later we found ourselves dressed in full gorilla suits in the parking lot of the Civic Center wondering how we were going to get to the grid-iron on the second floor when we had to go through a religious revival that was (unbeknownst to us when we made our plans) being hosted on the first floor. The answer is, you walk through the religious revival like you own the place with gorilla heads held proud. The two

gorillas did enjoy the grid-iron. However, some students were upset that Nancy was portrayed as a gorilla inasmuch as a gorilla stood up when Professor Kenderdine's name was called during the presentation of the faculty.

Another aspect of Nancy's personality is that she will accomplish whatever she sets as her goal and will rarely quit until that goal is reached. Nancy is a strong-willed person who will get the job done. For example, Nancy will continue to play the same game of "Roof Rats" or "Free Cell" over and over again until she wins the game. Nancy is a terribly self-confident person: it never occurs to Nancy that she won't succeed. When Nancy was Interim Dean she observed a man going up the stairs carrying a rifle. Remembering the "Texas Tower" incident, Nancy chased after the man who was rather surprised because he was a professor in the education department and was just going upstairs to show a friend his antique rifle. But, the point is that the thought never occurred to Nancy that she wouldn't be able to single-handedly bring down an armed gunman.

Nancy retire? I doubt it. Nancy will never retire; Nancy has simply conquered legal education and has decided to move on with her life, but she will undoubtedly set new goals for herself, although those goals may be currently unknown. Nancy will clearly have more time to spend with her two dogs and the highlight of her life, her grandson, Adam Lee Kenderdine. I am also sure that Nancy will occasionally miss the classroom experiences and that the law school will miss her presence. Oklahoma City University will suffer a big loss with Nancy's retirement and I will miss her as a colleague, but fortunately I will not have to miss her as a friend. I know Nancy as a very special person, a person for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration. Upon her retirement, I will attempt to assure that Nancy's knowledge of legal education will survive through my continued presence on the faculty and I will also attempt to assume Nancy's role as the occasionally necessary proverbial thorn in the faculty's side. However, unlike the rest of the OCU family, who will be saying goodbye to Nancy upon her retirement, I am very privileged to simply say, "See you around, Kenderdine."

The following includes excerpts of a piece written by the late Dennis W. Arrow to honor Nancy Kenderdine upon her retirement from OCU Law.

One should hesitate more than once before deploying a cliché in a tribute to a retiring friend. But in this instance, my friend is so much the

antithesis of a cliché, and so truly a woman for all seasons, that her character, her contributions to our university, and the value of her friendship will shine through any verbal infelicity on my part. Nancy Kenderdine is an American original, a woman of exceptional and varied talents, and a woman I have been privileged to call “colleague” and “friend” for twenty-seven years.

Following a period of distinguished instructional and administrative service at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, Nancy Kenderdine joined our faculty in 1977. At the time, both our law school and university were undergoing periods of transition, and I (at the well-seasoned age of twenty-eight) reflected on my two years of teaching experience and with the hubris of youth thought that I had quite a few of the answers. In short order, by her example (and without any awareness of her effect), Nancy disabused me of both notions and moved onto the short list of colleagues on whose opinion I could always rely. She soon assumed that status for the rest of our law faculty as well.

So much so that during the most difficult days our law school has ever faced (a financial crisis that peaked during Academic Year 1979-80), the school turned for leadership to Associate Professor Kenderdine, first as Associate Dean and a year later as Interim Dean. With Nancy’s capable leadership (and the unparalleled help of our friends), both the law school and Nancy pulled through splendidly, and Nancy returned to the faculty to provide superb instruction to the next generation of law students and rock-solid academic-quality-leadership to the next generation of our faculty. As any reader familiar with legal education will well understand, the set of faculty members about whom not a single colleague would have an uncomplimentary word approaches zero. But Nancy Kenderdine is one.

Though the word has now become unfashionable (at least at some trendy law schools), the style of Nancy’s leadership was principled. Nancy, no automaton, is quite human, and from time to time is as tempted by ad hoc, make-it-up “pragmatism” as any of us. What is extraordinary about her is the remarkable number of times she resisted such temptations, with an unshakable academic-quality-driven commitment as her lodestar. In those circumstances in which she applied incarnations of the rule of lenity, the applicant had always found a way to satisfy Nancy’s rigorous—and articulable—standard of desert. In those cases, despite my equivalent commitments to academic quality, to equal treatment, and to principle, I usually found myself in agreement. Any law school—any institution at

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all—would be fortunate to have a dozen or more like her for moral-compass-preservation purposes.

Nancy's personal odyssey is fascinating in its own right, and helps explain the person she has become today; that story, however, is best told by others. For myself, however, I can only express my everlasting appreciation for her friendship, her judgment, her strength, her courage, and her example. Thank you, Nancy.

The following is an excerpt written by Michael W. Thom.

I first became acquainted with Nancy through meetings at the Oklahoma Bar Association. She called me in 1999 to ask if I would teach a class as an adjunct professor, which I gladly agreed to do. She then asked that I teach additional classes, which I did, as well. She was always available to answer questions and provide suggestions. We had numerous discussions before and after my teaching stints regarding estate and trust issues. I often asked her about complex Oklahoma intestate succession questions arising in my practice, as she wrote the definitive treatise on the topic. She was always gracious with her time and her amazing knowledge. Even after she became ill, she told me not to hesitate to contact her with any questions I might have or just to discuss interesting legal issues. She was a dear friend and a true scholar and is greatly missed.