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TRIBUTE TO MARY FRANCES “RICKY” BLACKSTONE

Peter C. Maxfield

Reflecting on the lawyers and law professors I’ve known over the past thirty some years, I can only think of one whose significant accomplishments range as widely as those of my friend and law school colleague, Mary Frances Blackstone (Ricky). As a linguist, classics scholar, musician, law scholar, teacher, law librarian, and person, Ricky Blackstone is truly a renaissance person.

I learned the hard way to never even mention around the Law School, let alone brag about, my high school and college training in the Latin and Greek because on those usual occasions when my recollections were inadequate to explain a word or phrase, I knew and know where to go. Before her entry into the legal profession in 1969, she taught Latin at the University of Wyoming. I also know that Ricky is fluent, as a practical matter, in Spanish and French because a few summers ago Karen Maxfield, the woman to whom I’m married, had the good fortune to travel with her through Europe.

When Ricky retired from the University Symphony in 1985, she sat at the first stand of the second violin section, a position she occupied for a good number of some thirty years as a member of the orchestra. One of her many friends and orchestral colleagues describes her orchestral tenure as follows:

She attended all rehearsals, played all the concerts, toured with the orchestra, and outlasted four or five conductors! Ricky truly enjoyed playing, and the only time I remember her complaining about the music was when the orchestra gave a program consisting only of waltzes and Ricky and her second violin section had to spend the entire concert playing nothing but afterbeats!

Ricky has been active as a legal scholar her whole career in law teaching. Her publications include *NATURAL RESOURCES LAW ON AMERICAN INDIAN LANDS* (Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, 1977) as a co-author. This book was cited in *Merrion v. Jicarilla Apache Tribe*, 455 U.S. 130 (1982). Additionally, she authored “*The Fault Factor in No-Fault Divorce and Equitable Distribution: Some Suggestions for Change in Wyoming*,” 20 Land & Water L. Rev. 133 (1985). She’s testified before legislative committees commissioned by the Wyoming Supreme Court, particularly in the area of alternative dispute resolution. She’s regularly taught continuing legal education programs and spoken on many occasions to

campus and community groups primarily on family law, civil rights and employment law, and alternative dispute resolution.

Many in law schools who teach legal research and writing consider the course the price to pay for the opportunity to teach in law school. For several years while I was dean, I taught legal research and writing. If I had not fully understood it prior to that experience, I learned then that this course—perhaps the most important in a law school curriculum—is exceedingly difficult to teach well. Unlike many courses in law school, which in many respects are really self-taught and consequently beneficial to the student regardless of the quality of teaching, legal research and writing must be well taught to be beneficial. Over the years, Ricky's sections of legal research and writing were always well taught. Clearly her love of language and her unwavering insistence on precision of expression largely explain this. Also, though, she cared for her students not only as people but also as future lawyers for whose success she always bore more than her share of responsibility.

Though Ricky did an excellent job with her other courses including family law, employment discrimination law, and alternative dispute resolution, most of my professionally dealings with her centered around her work in the law library. The long and short is that her library work was distinguished by an unqualified commitment to the needs of the patron – student, lawyer, or faculty. On many occasions when I was struggling to find a source of information on some abstruse topic, either Ricky would know of a helpful resource or she would go to work and somehow find one. In either case my work and that of other faculty members was considerably enhanced because of Ricky's assistance in the library.

Though I still see Ricky regularly, unfortunately it's usually just in passing. I don't often get to stop by her office much to enjoy her terrific sense of humor, her warmth and generosity as a person and a friend, and her zesty opinions on an array of subjects. Thinking about our years of work together, I'm thinking maybe, Ricky, you and I ought to approach the Law School and see if we couldn't just start all over again. You should know that my career at the Law School has been profoundly gratifying in large measure because of you and my other colleagues.

TRIBUTE TO MARY FRANCES “RICKY” BLACKSTONE

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After 28 years of service, my friend and colleague Ricky Blackstone announced her retirement in 1997. We who follow in her footsteps owe her a debt of gratitude. She embodies the pioneer spirit in legal education, and should be an inspiration to us all.

Ricky received her law degree from the University of Wyoming in 1969. There were 29 graduates that year and she was the only woman. Ricky reports that one of her (male) professors had a “ladies’ day.” Since she was the only lady in the class, that meant she was called on for every question! How times have changed. Last year, the College of Law graduated 28 women in a class of 66.

When I joined the law faculty in 1982, Ricky Blackstone and Catherine Mealey, then the library director, were the only two other women law professors at the University of Wyoming. Ricky started out in the traditionally “female” categories, such as librarian, law school faculty secretary and legal writing instructor. Ultimately, she was promoted to full professor. Now the College of Law has many women in faculty positions across the curriculum, and the traditional female categories have been gender integrated. She really paved the way.

Ricky established an excellent reputation for her teaching in domestic relations/family law, and sex discrimination in employment. Many of our graduates currently practicing in these areas got their start under Professor Blackstone’s tutelage. She brought a sense of humor to these difficult subjects. Many of her students I am sure got a few chuckles (as I have) from the New Yorker cartoons relating to marriage and gender issues that paper her office door. In her teaching of legal writing and appellate advocacy, Ricky also had a reputation for being a stickler about spelling, grammar and good writing in general. This is a tradition that we should all seek to carry on.

Ricky’s other accomplishments and publications are detailed in the biographical statement, so I won’t repeat them here. But I will say that in the years I have known Ricky, she has always struck me as somewhat of a Renaissance woman. She has many interests outside of law. She has long had a passion for music, and played violin in the University orchestra for many years. She speaks several languages, can read Latin, and has traveled extensively around the world. She is an avid reader on many subjects. She is always the life of the party, and loves to meet new people. She raised

three children. With Ricky, there is no need to tell her to “get a life.” She has one!

Not to mention she is a great storyteller. She told me that when she married noted Wyoming geologist Don Blackstone, she decided to change her name again because she wouldn't want to deprive the law school of such a renowned name in legal history.* By the way, I'll never forget Ricky's wedding to Don, how there was a blizzard in Laramie on that day in May, etc. Oh, wait a minute, she married Don before I knew her! Well, that's how vivid Ricky's stories can be.

Thank you Ricky, for all you have given us. And by the way, don't stop now just because you've officially retired.

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Professor Emerita Mary Frances Blackstone (born Mary Frances Rickershauser, but called Ricky most of her life) graduated from UCLA in 1942, Phi Beta Kappa, with a B.A. in Latin and French. For many years she accompanied her Air Force husband on his assignments in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, Texas, the Panama Canal Zone, eventually ending up in Wyoming in 1958 with her newborn third child.

After graduation from UCLA, Ricky worked as an editor and advertising copywriter, medical secretary, patents librarian, and bookkeeper for the Air Force and for private business, and as a college administrator. She taught English, Latin, and other subjects at every level from junior high to the university level. When her youngest child entered kindergarten, she enrolled in the University of Wyoming College of Law, taking only classes offered while her children were at school.

After five years as a part-time law student, she was offered a faculty position if she agreed to go full-time the next year and graduate. Consequently, she graduated from the University of Wyoming College of Law in 1969, passed the bar, and was admitted to practice before all Wyoming state and federal courts. Professor Blackstone began work as Assistant and then Associate Law Librarian while teaching Legal Research and Writing and Appellate Advocacy. When she began working at the University of Wyoming Professor Blackstone was only the second woman on the law faculty, but still became the editor of the Law School News (now the Law School Alumni News Letter).

Later, Professor Blackstone began teaching Family Law. After students requested a class in women and the law, she taught a course called Sex Discrimination and the Law, which evolved into an employment law course. When mediation and arbitration began to gain favor nationwide, but not yet in Wyoming, she took specialized training and began to teach Alternative Dispute Resolution. When Wyoming's longtime local government expert, Dean E. George Rudolph, retired, she also began teaching Local Government Law. In 1977 she coached Wyoming's first Client Counseling team, which won the regional competition. Through special studies she became certified as a Westlaw Specialist and was awarded the Certificate of Competence in Law Librarianship from the American Association of Law Libraries. Since working halftime in the library while teaching these courses and performing her other duties was too much of an overload, she became a fulltime teacher and eventually became a full professor.

With Dean Frank J. Trelease and Professor (later Dean) Peter C. Maxfield, Ricky wrote Natural Resource Law on Indian Lands, published by the

Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation. She researched domestic relations law in other jurisdictions, worked with legislators on revising Title 20 of the Wyoming Statutes, and published a law review article on her ideas for the revision. Professor Blackstone studied rules for alternative dispute resolution in other states and worked with Wyoming Supreme Court Committees to formulate an appropriate statute and procedural rules for this new area of Wyoming law. In the early 90's she studied safety regulations in the commercial fishing industry and testified on needed legislation before three subcommittees of the House of Representatives Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, after meeting in Washington with Representatives of several states involved in the commercial fishing industry.

After twenty-eight years on the faculty, Professor Blackstone officially retired in 1997, but continued to teach one class each semester for the next two years and still works almost fulltime in her law school office. During her years in Laramie, and before, she has pursued two major interests—music and travel—by playing violin in the University Symphony Orchestra for thirty-two years and by traveling in more than thirty foreign countries. Professor Blackstone has established a scholarship for law students who are single mothers with child custody and a travel fund for the University Symphony. Professor Blackstone is active in two service clubs—Rotary and Zonta—and other civic organizations and says she understands why retired people always seem to feel busier than they ever have been. Professor Blackstone has stated that the thing she misses most, now that she is not teaching, is “a greater opportunity to know the law students better.”

The Editorial Board is pleased to dedicate this issue of *Land and Water Law Review* to Professor Blackstone in appreciation for her years of dedication to both the University of Wyoming College of Law, and the University of Wyoming as a whole.

Career Highlights

EDUCATION

J.D. 1969, University of Wyoming College of Law

A.B., 1942, University of California at Los Angeles, Phi Beta Kappa

EMPLOYMENT

Professor of Law, University of Wyoming College of Law, 1969 – 1999

Subjects taught: Family Law, Local Government Law, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Legal Research and Writing, Appellate Advocacy, Employment Discrimination, Women and the Law, Civil Rights, Juvenile Law, School Law

Assistant, Acting, and Associate Law Librarian, 1969 – 1975

Certificate of Competence in Law Librarianship

PUBLICATIONS

Natural Resources Law on Indian Land, with F.J. Trelease and P.C. Maxfield (Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, 1977), cited in *Merion v. Jicarilla Apache Tribe*, 455 U.S. 130 (1982).

The Fault Factor in No-fault Divorce and Equitable Distribution: Some Suggestions for Change in Wyoming, 20 LAND & WATER L. REV. 133 (1984).

Nichols, Financing Elections, 67 L. LIBR. J. 318 (1974), book review.

McCulloch and Bernstein, The National Labor Relations Board, 68 L. LIBR. J. 201 (1975), book review.

The Williams and Wilkins Case, 69 L. LIBR. J. 265 (1976), book review.

RESEARCH AND LAW REFORM SERVICE

Research and work with Albany County legislator and Joint Interim Committee on Title 20 (Domestic Relations) of Wyoming Statutes

Helped lead efforts to increase mediation and use of other alternative dispute resolution methods, including research and meetings with the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution and Permanent Rules Advisory Committee (Civil) of the Wyoming Supreme Court to formulate new rules of evidence and procedure for alternative dis-

pute resolution, as well as proposed statute on mediation confidentiality and immunity.

Research on safety regulation in the commercial fishing industry. Testified before three subcommittees of the House of Representatives Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL/SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

American Bar Association, Wyoming State Bar, Albany County Bar

Rotary International, Paul Harris Fellow

Zonta (Secretary)

University of Wyoming and State Retirees (Executive Committee, Secretary)

Phi Beta Kappa (Wyoming Alpha)

COMMITTEE SERVICE

University

Academic Standards Committee

Tenure and Promotions Committee (Chair)

Faculty Rights & Responsibilities Committee

Academic Planning Committee

Committee on Committees

Center for Teaching Excellence Advisory Council

College of Law

Faculty Appointments Committee (four years as Chair)

Admissions Committee

Secretary of Faculty

Editor, Law School News

Numerous Continuing Legal Education and other oral presentations

Faculty Advisor—Women's Law Forum