1995

Memorial for Chief Judge Anne Simonett

Martha M. Simonett

Follow this and additional works at: http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol21/iss2/2
Martha Simonett

Thank you for coming.
Thank you for the power of your prayers.

Thank you for the poetry, the music, the bouquets, the hundreds of cards and letters that Anne treasured and wanted so much to be able to respond to each one personally. Your love and support helped Anne more than you know and meant more to Hank, H.J., Claire and all of us than I could today express in words.

A special thank you to the Sheas' wonderful neighbors in St. Louis Park for everything that you have done.

To Governor Arne Carlson and Susan Carlson: thank you for the support and love that you gave Anne, the notes of encouragement, the phone calls, the flowers, the uncanny way you captured Anne's essence after knowing her for such a short time, the opening of your home to all of us; you were two bright stars in Anne's life these past two years, and you'll be two bright lights in the hearts of every member of my family in the years to come.

And to all of you wonderful lawyers out there: Anne, Mary, John, Paul, Luke and I grew up in a family whose father really believed that lawyers were just about the greatest group of people in the world, and you never let us down; in the good times—these past two years—Anne's appointment to the Hennepin County Bench, Dad's retirement parties at Camp Ripley and Duluth, Anne's appointment as Chief Judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, the parties on the courthouse lawn in Little Falls and Landmark Center and the Governor's mansion—we all drove home from those celebrations with hearts full of thanks.

And in the bad times these past eight months: as Dad says "ah, lawyers are great in the tough times; if they haven't been there, a client has and they know what to do and they know what to say"; and you did it all and you said it all.

So as we gather together today to celebrate Anne's remarkable life, from training me in as a waitress at the Pine Edge Inn;

† Sister of Anne Simonett.
to Lawrence University’s Conservatory of Music; to Vienna to play the piano; to Yale and a Masters Degree in music; to Harvard Law; to the rungs of power on the East Coast; to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals; to Cravath, Swain and Moore; to Covington and Burling; and then back home to William Mitchell and our own Faegre & Benson and the bench—it’s a celebration of you. It’s so wonderful to know that everything Anne gave she got it back from you tenfold.

Anne was a direct, disciplined, confident, proud person. Her friend and predecessor and now Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Paul Anderson put it well: “With Anne, what you saw was what you got.” Anne was always prepared. She left little to chance. She was sensible, as I would hear her doctors say; practical as mother always said; and as the oldest of six children, as Grandma Bogut used to say; “dear little Annie could be so bossy.”

She always had, as my brother Luke puts it, an awesome sense of duty. She was critical of idleness. I don’t think there was a day in Anne’s life that wasn’t planned, organized and full of resolve. It would never occur to my sister to leave work early, or to chat away a morning. If a case settled, if she finished laying the ceramic tile in the entryway, if she finished the final edits on that last opinion, or finished sewing the living room drapes or the pillow covers for Mom, she’d just neatly roll up her sleeves and get started on the next project.

When she was five years old, Mom recalls that Anne couldn’t wait until she was six so she could get her first library card. And when she was fifteen and still too young to get a summer job, she asked the sisters at St. Francis High School if she could take a summer class in American History. And I have such vivid memories of Anne on a blanket on the boulevard across the street with her friend Ruth Laseske, with stacks of books, all summer long reading and debating the fine points of American History.

Anne knew herself like few of us do. She rarely made a false move. As she told us all lately, “there’s nothing I would have done differently.”

Her total devotion to her family, to her children, and her devotion to work and public service never seemed to compete or conflict with each other as they do for so many of us. For
Anne, her work and her home life just naturally flowed together and complimented and strengthened each other.

All of us respected Anne for what my husband Gabriel has said over and over since he first met her five years ago: “Everything about Anita—as he called her—stands for excellence.” And all of us loved Anne, of course, each for our own private reasons. It’s a quality difficult to describe, but for me, it was a “purity of spirit,” a certain kind of innocence, but she’d object to that word; a goodness that was always shining luminous in her eyes; It was something that I’ve been aware of for years—for sure since we’ve been adults. But sometimes it would startle me when I’d catch her eyes from across a room and she’d be unaware of me. Her eyes mirrored a soul that was everything pure and good. It came out in her lack of cynicism. She had little interest in gossip or people’s foibles. It used to make me laugh to think that Anne would be the last person in the world to have the scoop at the office. She used to always say that Dad was the “soul of discretion,” and I don’t think she had any idea how close that acorn fell to the tree. It came out in her protectiveness towards anyone she felt wasn’t getting a fair shake. She had no tolerance for even an innocent joke told at someone else’s expense. She had an unshakeable belief in the power of people to do good; that no one was beyond redemption and a belief that any problem, no matter how seemingly insurmountable, could be solved if you just faced it, thought about it, read everything you could about it, and worked at it hard enough.

For us though, Anne’s most endearing quality was her ferocious loyalty as a sister, a daughter, a wife, and above all, a mother. Some might call it blind loyalty, but to Anne there was never any doubt that her sister was the best lawyer; her sister Mary should have been canonized years ago for her selflessness; her brother John, the world’s most sensitive poet; her brothers Luke and Paul, legendary for their gentle humor and quiet way of always being there. I don’t know how many discussions with my sister Anne ended with: “Of course I’m going, I’m your sister!,” or “he’s family,” or “she’s family,” or “they’re family.” And for Anne, that was it. End of discussion. Whether you were Simonett, Shea, Wegerson, Bogut, Schlichte, Luta, Hobday, Kemp, or Moudry, whatever you did, it was done by one of the best and the brightest. I think the greatest gift that Anne gave
to her brothers and sisters was by always taking more than her fair share of responsibility, she allowed all of us to live more selfishly.

But the two most important people in Anne Simonett’s life were H.J. Shea and Claire Shea. So congratulations to you, H.J., and congratulations to you, Claire, for making your mother so proud.

And finally, you can’t talk about Anne for the past fifteen years without talking about Hank. Each standing alone was a force, believe me, to be reckoned with, but together and inseparable as they always were, you didn’t stand a chance. Anne would always tell me how she couldn’t wait to get home to talk over everything with Hank because there was no one in the world that she loved more, trusted more, relied upon more, respected more or was more proud of. And in the last eight months, Anne and Hank taught the rest of us more about courage in the face of adversity, about strength, fortitude, hope, selflessness, acceptance and solitude than we ever wanted to know.

But I think mother, as she always does, sums it up best when she says: “Imagine what the world would be if every family had a Hank Shea.”