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Memorial for Chief Judge Anne Simonett

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When I first met Anne, she and I were standing outside the door to the William Mitchell Child Care Center, early on a crisp fall morning in 1986, each of us having just deposited a very small boy into the hands of someone else for the remainder of the day. We had an instant bond. It took just a few minutes of conversation for us to establish how grateful we both were for the presence of such a good day care center right on campus, how conflicted we nonetheless were about leaving our children, and how much preparation we both still had to do for Torts class that day. It was clear that there were many hours of conversation waiting to be had.

We became fast friends. And we did talk, a great deal, over the two years she was a visiting professor at Mitchell. We discussed our kids and compared ineffectual parenting techniques. We talked about our husbands and our siblings and our parents and our religion. We even talked about the law, and about lawyers and judges, and what it was like to try to teach the law to new students, and about the unrelenting process of constructing good hypotheticals for class. (As you can imagine, Anne's were impeccable.) And always, always, we laughed a lot. At the end of that first year we graded blue book exams at her house, with our kids napping upstairs. It was only a marginally successful venture, but we had a very good time.

Anne was a terrific teacher. She was so completely at ease in the classroom, it was as if she had been there for years. She was so bright and quick and consistently well prepared that her classes were always a challenge for her students, but her utter lack of pretense, her absolute guilelessness made her completely trustworthy. She had that rare ability to create a classroom atmosphere that crackled with energy, but was never intimidating. Little wonder that the students loved her. They responded to her warmth and humor as much as they marveled at her prodigious intellect. They knew she cared about what they learned, and she cared about them. She was incredibly accessi-

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ble for one so gifted. The last time we talked, she told me she had had cards and letters from students she hadn’t seen since 1986, and she was deeply touched, but with her characteristic humility, she was also genuinely surprised at what she had meant to those students. She had so many gifts, and she shared them so graciously, so effortlessly, with everyone, I am sure she really had no idea just how many people she had touched, and how many would miss her.

Anne was a wonderful friend. She was completely genuine, and when you were with her, she was totally present. With her generous nature, she made you feel that your views were important, your opinions valuable, and your own interests interesting. I will miss the bright spirit that she was, and the sheer pleasure of being in her company.

When our friends die, they invariably take a little of us with them, but most times they also leave us a little something that we didn’t have before. Of Anne’s many gifts, I will treasure most the one she left me with the last time I saw her. It was just after she had completed a grueling course of radiation, and she was starting to feel a little stronger. (With her sense of humor fully intact, she asked me how I liked her turbaned Gloria Swanson look.) We talked a long time that day, about a lot of things. We talked about how hard it was for her not to look into the future, but to stay focused on what was before her now. When we said goodbye, I knew that I had been in the presence of an extraordinary life that was truly being lived in the present tense. Painful and difficult as that was for Anne, she had shown me the grace that was in it, too. She had been learning not to plan, not to project, not to fear, but simply to be, so that nothing precious or sacred in the moment would escape her notice. She was, as she wanted to be, fully and gratefully present for every minute of every day that she had left with Hank, and H.J. and Claire.

Last Sunday, Hank told me about some words that have meant a great deal to Anne and to him, over many years. They are a kind of desiderata that speak to basic values the two of them shared. He asked if I would read them to you today. The words, written by S.H. Payer, seem to me to describe Anne perfectly. They are, I think, a kind of benediction from her, for us all:
Live each day to the fullest.
Get the most from each hour, each day and each age of your life.
Then you can look forward with confidence and back without regrets.

Be yourself—but be your best self.
Dare to be different and to follow your own star.
And don’t be afraid to be happy.

Enjoy what is beautiful.
Love with all your heart and soul.
Believe that those you love, love you.
Forget what you have done for your friends, and remember what they have done for you.

Disregard what the world owes you, and concentrate on what you owe the world. And above all, remember that God helps those who help themselves.
Act as if everything depended upon you, and pray as if everything depended upon God.