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TRIBUTE TO EILEEN SEARLS

SANDRA H. JOHNSON*

Smiling eyes. Lilted laugh. Soft voice. When you meet Eileen Searls, you meet an Irish colleen. Behind the Irish charm, however, is a fearless, tenacious, brilliant, and strong woman. This combination has made Professor Searls a delightful colleague at Saint Louis University for all of her forty-eight years here.

Eileen's accomplishments in building the Saint Louis University Law Library are apparent in the breadth of the Library's collection, the central space it occupies within the law buildings, and, most importantly, in one of the finest library faculty and staff in the country. The fact that she built the Library while the Law School was starved for resources is not so apparent. She had everything it took, except for money. She scavenged a collection from the Library of Congress giveaways. She built what she called her "cottage industries," in copying services and the most outstanding cataloging effort anywhere, and produced some additional revenue to support the Library. Eileen brought Saint Louis University law students into the computer age long before other law schools saw the need to do so. In 1975, when I took a summer course at the School of Law while working in St. Louis, I was surprised to see the number of computers and their availability to students. There were no comparable resources at the law school I was attending. Eileen knew "niche" before it became a common strategy for gaining a competitive edge. She instinctively focused on developing special areas where the Law Library could be distinctive. She saw the efficiencies in collaboration among institutions decades before the rest of the pack and developed several library consortia to coordinate acquisitions and resource development.

Obviously, Eileen's achievements in the Law Library and her leadership in law librarianship nationally are more than enough to justify us in lauding her successful career and in thanking her for all she has done for Saint Louis University and for the School of Law. For me personally, however, that is only part of the story of Professor Searls.

Eileen has been a pioneer. For a law librarian to be a full member of the faculty was unusual in 1952 when she joined the law faculty at Saint Louis University. She was the first woman at Saint Louis University School of Law

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to receive tenure and the first to be promoted to full professor. Some pioneers stake out and defend their territory against latecomers. Eileen welcomed “later-comers,” including me. Women alumni from the seventies still talk about Eileen’s soirees for the women law students when all of the women law students at the school could fit in her apartment for a meal. As the number of women law students exceeded the capacity of her home, the number of women faculty increased gradually from one (Eileen) to two more, and then three more and so on. When I first joined the law faculty in 1978, Eileen hosted dinners for the women law faculty—all three or four of us. All of my colleagues at the School of Law were extraordinarily welcoming and supportive; but Eileen’s “women only” events were special, as anyone who has been in a small minority would understand.

Before the terms “role model” and “mentor” became familiar to the point of cliché, Eileen just naturally assumed these functions because of her innate generosity and her keen insight into academic life. Eileen has mentored me for years. In fact, I would say she tutored me. Once I became Associate Dean of the School of Law in 1979, I was a marked woman. Eileen had me pegged as someone who would be involved in academic administration. Although I never saw administration as a career for me, she did; and she made sure that I understood libraries, the resources they need and how legal education fits into higher education. I often wondered why she kept feeding me those statistics about libraries.

I was most influenced, however, by Eileen’s example of what a good faculty member should be and how the individual and often isolated efforts of faculty members can build a great institution. Eileen’s vision of the role and obligations of faculty members is very clear.

Eileen was born into an academic family, of which she is so proud. In fact, anyone who knows her knows that she hails from the University of Wisconsin. As with many Wisconsin alumni, Eileen has remained “true to her school.” The spirit that she found within her family tradition and at Wisconsin influenced her sense of the proper relationship of a faculty member and the institution within which he or she teaches.

Eileen offered me a much richer vision of the relationship between a faculty member and the law school or university than was generally held in legal education, and I think it relates back to her loyalty to Wisconsin. In Eileen’s view of the world, as a faculty member “you owe something” to the institution. Her loyalty to her *alma mater* is matched only by her loyalty to and her investment in Saint Louis University School of Law. Faculty members, in Eileen’s view, are charged with building the institution, not only their personal careers. Eileen has a very refined sense of the necessary independence of faculty and of the special role of faculty in the governance of the law school. Still, what I saw in her relationship to Saint Louis University School of Law was that your obligation is to contribute, not just occupy.

Eileen consistently demonstrated her belief in a model of the community of scholars rather than in a more Darwinian world. Eileen was always the first to recognize and to congratulate a colleague on the publication of an article, a presentation at a national conference or the taking of an important office. She believes that “your success is my success.” For the Law School to succeed, individual achievement was not enough; it would take the combination of many individuals to do that. So, if the Law School’s reputation was enhanced through recognition of a colleague, it was good for us all. Healthy competition was fine, but petty jealousies and gain measured in terms of loss to another had no place among colleagues. Eileen understands deeply the “community” aspect of the academy.

Eileen has always believed that Saint Louis University faculty should be “players.” She understood the importance of participating at the top levels either locally or nationally. She always set the bar a little higher by identifying areas or organizations where Saint Louis University should have a presence. She was not the “back office” type. To test whether you were as good as you thought you were, you needed to get out of the office and into the arena. She nudged and pushed and prodded all of us.

If I were clever enough and the reader were patient enough, I probably could identify “48 lessons” to match Eileen’s 48 years at the School of Law. There is always more to Professor Eileen Searls. There is more than charm and humor, although she has those in abundance. There is more than just being the first, although she was the first in several categories. There is more than volume count and shelf space, although she built both. There is the fearless, tenacious, brilliant, strong professor and academic administrator. I am grateful for her tutelage.

