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TRIBUTE TO EILEEN SEARLS

ROGER GOLDMAN*

I decided to conduct a poll of the library staff by asking them what single word best describes Eileen. Tied for first with 12 votes each was “generous” and “cheap.”

Probing a little further since these choices seemed oxymoronic, I asked for examples, and it turns out that Eileen is generous with her own money and frugal with the law school’s. When the annual meeting of the Association of American Law Libraries is in New York City, Eileen invites current and former staff members to be her guests at lunch or dinner at Tavern on the Green, one of New York’s finest restaurants. But when a meal is on the library budget, it’s a different story: she used to pack hard boiled eggs for all her staff to eat when they attended meetings to stretch the budget a little further. Eileen does not drive a car, yet takes the time to buy books on her myriad trips and lug them back on public transportation. And she will go anywhere for a good buy: Once she flew to Mexico to go to a bookstore specializing in Mexican law only to find it was closed for Christmas. Often, she would get a van to go to the St. Louis book fair where she would pack boxes of quite inexpensive books for the library or fly to Washington, D.C. to get free duplicates from the Library of Congress and then get a local congressman to mail them back on his or her franking privileges. And it’s not just books she hates to throw out: rather than dispose of old pantyhose, she made braided rugs out of them.

Another common refrain about Eileen is that she knows the history of the law school better than anyone. In fact, a visit to her office is mandatory for geology students—her system of filing is to layer materials on top of each other on her desk and couch according to different decadal eras so the McDonough period at the bottom would have files from the Immel era on top of that followed by the Childress age and so on until the present day. Someone once described her office as an ever-expanding time capsule. And she can always put her hands on whatever it is she is looking for, eventually.

The Searls method of instruction usually involves an aphorism or story. Here’s one of her favorite sayings, usable on any occasion such as when a student might be feeling low after taking an Immel exam: “People as lucky as

* Professor of Law, Saint Louis University School of Law. This was a speech given at a dinner in honor of Professor Eileen Searls on April 14, 2000 at the Marriott Pavilion Hotel in St. Louis.

we are don't have to be smart." And Eileen feels that a story gives better results than a direct statement. For example, Eileen wanted some consultants to give an estimate on the cost of installing emergency lights at the head of the main stairs in the library. Instead of asking right out for an estimate after the tour of the area, she told them a vivid story about what the results of a fire might be without backup emergency lights: charred student bodies, hands outstretched in the dark, piled together at the head of the stairs. It was a gripping story and the consultants were clearly moved although they didn't understand the significance of the story and a few days later quoted an outrageously high price for the emergency lights. So it doesn't always work.

Eileen has a power over time. Most people try to get to the airport prior to the time the plane is to take off. With Eileen, she knows she will catch the plane regardless of the time—it will be delayed in landing or taking off and she always makes it.

In preparation for tonight, I contacted four current directors of law school libraries who worked under Eileen as staff members or students for their assessments. They are Jim Hoover, from Columbia University; Betsy McKenzie, Suffolk; Cam Riley, University of West Virginia; and Jim Milles, SUNY Buffalo.

When they think of Eileen, they think immediately of her total commitment to the law school and to the law library. As the librarian who built SLU Law Library over a period of almost 50 years, she has stamped her personal imprint on the collection, the design, and the values of the library. One of those values is an adherence to the long-term vision of the law school, reflected in the strengths of the collection and the services provided. At the same time, Eileen's commitment to the librarians and staff who have worked for her over the years has inspired them and been a source of strength over the years, and one of their primary models as library directors. Each has patterned their library policies after Eileen's, finding them workable and balanced. Each has strived to demonstrate the same fierce loyalty to their law school and staff that Eileen has shown throughout her career.

They all noted that throughout the law librarian profession, she is known for her longstanding leadership in interlibrary cooperation. She was one of the founders, if not the primary instigator, of several law library consortia, including the Mid-America Law School Library Consortium and the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. She recognized the importance of resource sharing long before many other librarians, faced with increasing budget constraints, jumped on the same bandwagon. She realized the importance of computer technology long before most other librarians and has never stopped growing in the job. She has always been concerned that students are well served, using the money from the copy machine to buy, in the old days, selectric typewriters and more recently, computers.

And finally, each valued Eileen as a colleague and a good friend: the kind of friend who would sometimes tell them things that they did not want to hear, but needed to think about. Each knows that Eileen is proud of their accomplishments and that Eileen knows she has set an example for them all.

Although they could not join Eileen tonight, they are all here in spirit and join me in congratulating Eileen on a wonderful career.

