A Woman for All Seasons: A Tribute to Nancy I. Kenderdine

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A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS: A TRIBUTE TO

NANCY I. KENDERDINE

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One should hesitate more than once before deploying a cliché in a tribute to a retiring friend. But in this instance, my friend is so much the antithesis of a cliché, and so truly a woman for all seasons, that her character, her contributions to our university, and the value of her friendship will shine through any verbal infelicity on my part. Nancy Kenderdine is an American original, a woman of exceptional and varied talents, and a woman I have been privileged to call "colleague" and "friend" for twenty-seven years.

Following a period of distinguished instructional and administrative service at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, Nancy Kenderdine joined our faculty in 1977. At the time, both our law school and university were undergoing periods of transition, and I (at the well-seasoned age of twenty-eight) reflected on my two years of teaching experience and with the hubris of youth thought that I had quite a few of the answers. In short order, by her example (and without any awareness of her effect), Nancy disabused me of both notions and moved onto the short list of colleagues on whose opinion I could always rely. She soon assumed that status for the rest of our law faculty as well.

So much so that during the most difficult days our law school has ever faced (a financial crisis that peaked during Academic Year 1979-80), the school turned for leadership to Associate Professor Kenderdine, first as Associate Dean and a year later as Interim Dean. With Nancy's capable leadership (and the unparalleled help of our friends), both the law school and Nancy pulled through splendidly, and Nancy returned to the faculty to provide superb instruction to the next generation of law students and rock-solid academic-quality-leadership to the next generation of our faculty. She returned to her former Associate Dean's post from 1997 to 1999, as things would have it, at the conclusion of a troubled, unlanmented, and mercifully brief deanship (not her own), to reunify the faculty, restore confidence in our dean's office, and provide

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the kind of quiet and effective leadership that is her stock-in-trade. As any reader familiar with legal education will well understand, the set of faculty members about whom not a single colleague would have an uncomplimentary word approaches zero. But Nancy Kenderdine is one, and the fact that our faculty has turned to her during both of the difficult periods that our law school has experienced during my thirty years here should inform the reader of her role far better than any superlatives I could conjure.

Though the word has now become unfashionable (at least at some trendy law schools), the style of Nancy's leadership was *principled*. Nancy, no automaton, is quite human, and from time to time is as tempted by ad hoc, make-it-up "pragmatism" as any of us. What is extraordinary about her is the remarkable number of times she resisted such temptations, with an unshakable academic-quality-driven commitment as her lodestar. In those circumstances in which she applied incarnations of the rule of lenity, the applicant had always found a way to satisfy Nancy's rigorous — and articulable — standard of desert. In those cases, despite my equivalent commitments to academic quality, to equal treatment, and to principle, I usually found myself in agreement. Any law school — any institution at all — would be fortunate to have a dozen or more like her for moral-compass-preservation purposes.

Nancy's personal odyssey is fascinating in its own right, and helps explain the person she has become today; that story, however, is best told by others.¹ For myself, however, I can only express my everlasting appreciation for her friendship, her judgment, her strength, her courage, and her example. Thank you, Nancy. May your future days be long, and may all of them be sunny.
