

1998

## In Memoriam: Memorial Tributes for Professor Elizabeth B. Clark

Thomas A. Green

*University of Michigan Law School, [tagreen@umich.edu](mailto:tagreen@umich.edu)*

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/articles/135>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/articles>

 Part of the [Legal Biography Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Green, Thomas A. "In Memoriam: Memorial Tributes for Professor Elizabeth B. Clark." *B. U. L. Rev.* 78, no. 2 (1998): 231-2.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

determination, her love of life and her love of us.

We cannot replace her. But we will not forget her.

---

THOMAS A. GREEN\*

The first time I met Betsy, now some twenty years ago, she simply appeared during office hours to ask about being a research assistant. She had finished her first semester of law school, she said, and—as she put it—“there must be something more to it than this.” So began Betsy’s career as a legal historian; to which she brought a classics background, a powerful mind, prodigious imagination, irony, whimsy, and, to put it mildly, a way with words.

Betsy was, of course, a superb student, as Charlie Donahue, Bruce Frier, and I immediately recognized, one from whom one learned as much as one taught. Her range of interests—from Roman law, to medieval Continental law, to the entire common-law tradition—was rare indeed. Betsy’s writing was economical yet colorful, affecting and often inspired. And perhaps the highest commendation: the quality of her papers always justified the length of the incomplete she had taken.

Betsy’s humor and her humanity were sources of delight and support. She and Victoria List, laboring on my office floor in a sea of file cards, conspired to undermine my occasional tendency to take things too seriously—“Get a life!,” or its then equivalent, was their well-intentioned advice. “Just keep working on those cards,” I would reply. How the name of our cat, Sappho, got into the page proofs of the Thorne festschrift index I never determined, but I have my suspicions.

Research assistant, student, friend and confidante: Betsy was all those things, and we remained close after she left Michigan. My wife, Ruth, and I saw her on the frequent trips first she, then she and David, made to Ann Arbor to visit her parents and brothers; and I saw her at A.S.L.H. conferences, where on the Friday night, Charlie and I, Betsy, Victoria, and others in the old Michigan group went out to dinner. Betsy was now a scholar in her own right, widely known and respected for her wonderful work. I had come to be one of her editors—Dirk Hartog and I were working with her toward completion of her book. And as it happened, she had come to play that role for me.

Betsy was, in fact, an exceptionally talented editor. Her most substantial task on my behalf was to rescue an article I had written during what I sometimes admit was a mid-life crisis, and which the article’s few readers

---

\* John Philip Dawson Collegiate Professor of Law and Professor of History, University of Michigan.

think is a mid-life crisis. Betsy helped me in many ways to get through those difficult years; our experience with the article might have strained, but in fact strengthened, our relationship. Betsy was supportive and, as always, generous; but of course, she had a way with words: "If you must write about Roscoe Pound, try not to sound like him." Betsy crossed through all the paragraphs that could—in her view, should—be deleted, and pencilled in bridging prose that both preserved what was worth preserving and made up for lost transitions. It was a spectacular performance. But if Betsy was a great editor, I was not a great editee. I shall never forget those long phone calls, by turns uproarious and sombre, filled with my anxieties and Betsy's reassurances, and ultimately descending into frenzied negotiation: "I'll cut this paragraph if I may keep that one"; "well you'd do better keeping this other one than that one"; "ok, if I may also keep the one that follows it; they sort of sound right together"; "it's a deal, but now you owe me another." And so on. Many calls, over many weeks. That was Spring 1995, and a large chunk of Betsy's last untroubled summer. It was not lost on either of us, through all of this, that I was supposed to be one of her editors. We had talked for hours over the years about her work, about themes, narrative, strategy of organization—macro stuff—but I had also line-edited the drafts she had sent me, making only modest suggestions compared with her thorough overhaul of the "Age of Pound." But our role-inversion was not an irony Betsy would indulge—not openly, at any rate. I was her teacher, her advisor, her editor: that—so it seemed—was that.

The last time I saw Betsy was Tuesday, December 23, three days before she passed away. Ruth and I spent a half-hour with her; it was painful in so many ways, that so obvious but unnamed leave-taking. The essential Betsy shone through, her frailty notwithstanding. Toward the end, and with some effort, she stood to hug us good-bye; Ruth found the words that I could not, to tell Betsy how important she had been to me; we helped her back down onto her sofa. Then I sat next to her and said—still engaging in euphemism—that if she did not feel strong enough to get back to the book, Dirk and I would see it through to publication. She was at first concerned that it would be too much work for us, that if we did it, we should be co-authors. It was her work, I assured her; we were her editors, and it had all been decided. Betsy was visibly deeply pleased that her book would see the light of day—and she said as much. Then her concerns about authorship returned. "We will have to dither about this," she said. "Don't you think we need to dither a bit?" Now "dither" is a very Betsy word, meaning in this case, I think, that we should engage in all the discussing, back-and-forthing, weighing of the matter, taking into account of real feelings—all of the very human aspects of scholarly life that Betsy loved to engage in, that we all loved her for. "We really must dither about this," she persisted as we left, and she was smiling at the very thought.

---