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A PIONEER AND ROLE MODEL

Michelle Zakarin

Although Ilene Barshay was not my legal writing professor when I attended Touro Law School in the mid-1990s, she received the highest acclaim among the students who were in her class. I looked at Ilene Barshay as a pioneer and role model. She was the first Touro alumnus who successfully found a career in teaching at Touro. She inspired me to reach for the same goal. When I joined the faculty approximately seven years later, her reputation remained as strong and wonderful as it had been then. Her charm was sincere and drew people in with ease. After getting to know her personally, I realized that she possessed a genuine warmth in her teaching style that basically drew students to her office like a magnet. Back on the Huntington campus, the “Legal Methods hallway” was adjacent to the cafeteria and the home of the treasured student mailboxes. It was a social area where one could always find students and professors engaging in small talk. I have vivid memories of students in and out of her office; many were the same students almost daily. Ilene explained that many of these students would go to her office for writing assistance and then stay indefinitely to discuss law school more generally and even personal relationships. They confided in her in a way that people would typically do only with a close friend. She established strong bonds with them and it is no wonder she remained connected to so many former students throughout her life.

Ilene’s door was always open for her colleagues as well. She was able to balance her serious devotion to teaching while remaining lighthearted and funny. She had a wonderful sense of humor and could joke and laugh easily. When walking into her office, one was met with beautiful photographs of her twin sons (both lawyers in top firms, she would proudly say) and her younger daughter (of whom she was also very proud) and, of course, her beloved grandchildren. The photos would spark conversations about how she loved babysitting for her grandchildren. I had young children at the time and my eyes must have

opened wide because she immediately explained that her babysitting was for her family only. Understandable, I guess.

She was an insightful mentor to me in my early teaching years. She could sense when I needed some assistance about how to present a topic in class or how to be sure my grading was accurate. She had a way of making me feel as though I already knew how to answer my own questions. I am confident she made students feel the same. Ilene was one of a kind and is greatly missed by all who knew her.