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PROFESSOR ROMBAUER AS FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

Richard Cosway*

Professor Marjorie Dick Rombauer has been associated with the University of Washington School of Law since her student days, when she earned recognition as the Honor Graduate in Law. She served as Casenote Survey Editor for this Law Review and was, of course, elected to the Order of the Coif. Her exceptional abilities and dedication to hard work were the bases for her becoming an instructor in legal research and writing beginning in September of 1960, her graduation year. Her newly acquired faculty colleagues welcomed her with great respect. Even so, her quiet dignity and unassuming demeanor may have caused those of us who know her best as colleague and friend to underestimate all she has done for the law school, for her students, and for the legal profession. Focusing for the moment on the teaching of legal research and writing, where she got her start and where her contributions are probably the greatest, observe this tribute:

Professor Rombauer was there in the beginning: innovating, supporting, and inspiring an entire generation of law school professors. In the late '60s, in a vast sea of traditional legal scholars, someone was doing things a bit differently. She wasn't teaching legal writing in some of its current embodiments, but then she wasn't teaching straight legal research, or "legal writing style" either. *Did anyone at the University of Washington understand what she was doing?* Probably not. Because if anyone had realized she was setting the stage for the most recent revolution in the way something called "Legal Writing" is taught in American law schools, she would have been lynched by a posse of pious pedants. After all, traditionalists knew what belonged in the first year curriculum. And they knew that teaching students to write briefs and memoranda has nothing to do with the mystical process of teaching the neophyte student to "think like a lawyer."¹

I cannot speak for my colleagues of that period, but I am guilty as charged. I knew her students really appreciated her, though her course in

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1. *A Tribute to Professor Marjorie Dick Rombauer*, Newsletter of the Association of American Law Schools Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research, May, 1988 at 7 (emphasis added).

legal research and writing entailed much more rigorous work than that to which they were accustomed and thus was not a favorite. I knew that she expended great effort to challenge her students with realistic, current, and difficult but manageable problems. I knew that the problems were drawn with exceptional care and were written clearly and concisely, without ambiguity. I also knew that before she submitted a problem to the students, she had done the same amount of work that they would need to do, and more. I knew that she worked with students in a personal way, criticizing their written work and demanding correction. She most likely was regarded as too demanding, for she demanded of the students almost as much as she demanded of herself. But that she was a pioneer in her contributions to the field was not brought home to me. I might have observed a footnote in a review of three legal writing and research books published in the early 1990s, which recognized the pioneering nature of her work by saying: "The inclusion of research skills in all three of the new texts may reflect the influence of another comprehensive course text, Marjorie Dick Rombauer's *Legal Problem Solving*, the first edition of which appeared in 1970."² However much we value Professor Rombauer as a colleague and friend, it may have been left to outsiders to express appropriate acclaim.

The Washington State Bar Association publicly recognized her exceptional service to the legal profession by naming her the 1987 recipient of its Award of Merit. Though she continues to write in the field of legal research and writing, her interests have expanded more recently to the fields of debtor-creditor relations, bankruptcy, and secured transactions under the Uniform Commercial Code. In these fields, too, the bar association has recognized her contributions as recently as the 1991 annual mid-year meeting of the Creditor-Debtor Section. Her students greatly appreciate and respect the quality of her teaching and the depth of her understanding in those highly technical fields. Even they may not know of her role in drafting pertinent Washington statutes, however.

One should recall that, "Between 1900, when the AALS was founded with a charter membership of thirty-two schools, and 1945, when World War II ended, exactly three women held tenure or tenure-track appointments in member schools."³ Professor Hill in the cited article details the very slow growth in the number of women law teachers,

2. Neal Feigenson, *Legal Writing Texts Today*, 41 J. Legal Educ. 503, 508 n.20 (1991) (essay review).

3. Herma Hill Kay, *The Future of Women Law Professors*, 77 Iowa L. Rev. 5, 6 (1991).

showing that Marjorie Rombauer was among the early entrants into law teaching. The obstacles facing women seeking entry into the legal profession were intimidating,⁴ and Professor Rombauer faced them without pause or complaint, and overcame them without fanfare.

When Professor Rombauer became acting dean of the University of Washington School of Law, she joined an even more elite group. Although a woman had first assumed the post of dean of an American law school in 1898, this was an aberration. That woman and two others had formed a law school in the District of Columbia catering solely to women aspirants to the legal profession, and helping them overcome the difficulties they faced.⁵ Selection of one of the founders as dean was natural, but it did not initiate a ground swell.

Another pioneering role is Professor Rombauer's work with lawyers from civil law (mostly Pacific Rim) countries in the University of Washington's Asian Law Program. She has contributed mightily to that program, as Chair of the Graduate Students Committee, Graduate Program Coordinator, and a teacher of one of the program's most important courses. Indeed, so successful has she been that in 1990, she was appointed Visiting Professor at National Taiwan University.

She loves the associations with Asian students so much that she is engaged in an intensive study of the Japanese language both here and in Japan. In part, at least, this study is an unselfish giving of her time toward improving her rapport with Japanese students. To her friends and colleagues, it is also another demonstration of her zeal and enthusiasm for teaching and for whatever else constitutes her life. We take for granted her generosity, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work. We are not even surprised that, though she is an accomplished pianist, she has more recently mastered the accordion and the synthesizer. When she plays these together, one could mistake the result for the entire Boston Symphony Orchestra accompanied by the organs in Radio City Music Hall. Who, knowing Marjorie Rombauer, would expect less?

4. Associate Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg have mentioned the difficulties they originally faced as women seeking employment with a law firm. Justice O'Connor revealed that on her graduation third in her class from Stanford in 1953, the only law firm position open to her was that of legal secretary. *Id.* at 11.

5. *Id.* at 5.