

SUSANAH M. MEAD TRIBUTE

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Philosopher Albert Schweitzer once said, “Example is leadership.” This quote personifies Susie Mead, who has led by example in the Indianapolis community and at the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law for more than thirty-five years.

Susie has deep roots in our community. Born and raised in Indianapolis, a distinguished graduate of the Tudor Hall Class of 1965, she became involved in our community in profound and myriad ways. Susie’s talents, work ethic, and intellect could have taken her anywhere—theatre, finance, business, publishing, social work, religious leadership, politics, landscape design, culinary arts, or architecture. We speak for many when we say we are so grateful that she took an interest in the legal profession!

In 1972, Susie matriculated at our law school, one of a handful of women in her class. In the words of her husband Jack Mead, “At that time, while she was a fabulous mother, she and other women of her generation began to seek out professional careers.”¹ Jerry Bepko, a former dean of our law school and long-time chancellor at IUPUI, described her as “part of that wave of outstanding women students who lifted our law school in a significant way in the 1970s. . . . They helped contribute to the growing sense that the [s]chool had a destiny of greatness that was within realistic reach.”²

After graduation, Susie applied for a clerkship with the Hon. Paul H. Buchanan, then the chief judge of the Indiana Court of Appeals. Legend has it that when she dropped off her resume at the courthouse, the judge immediately corralled her for an interview and offered her the job before she left the building. The clerkship was a wonderful way to kick-start her career. And after working two years with Judge Buchanan, Susie returned to the law school as a legal writing instructor. We’re not sure what Susie had in mind at that time. Certainly,

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1. Jack Mead, Undated Note to Authors (on file with authors).

2. Gerald Bepko, Remarks at the Introduction of Susanah Mead for the Distinguished Alumnae Honor, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law 1 (May 2007) (on file with authors). In his remarks honoring Susie as the law school’s Alumna of the Year in 2007, Chancellor Bepko also told a story that has become law school lore:

Saying Susie was well rounded as a first year law student might have applied literally since she was expecting their second child as she sat in my contracts class. In fact her doctor had predicted birth during the exam period. So I administered a special early exam for Susie and, sure enough, her second daughter was born on the very day of the contracts exam. The family rejected my suggestion that the baby be named Hadley, Baxendale, Taylor, Caldwell, Hawkins or McGee. Instead they chose the non-contractual name Edie.

she could not have imagined that before it was over, she would serve the institution in every imaginable capacity—as director of the legal writing program, a tenured professor, associate dean for academic affairs, and ultimately as dean, the first woman and first alumnus of the law school to do so.

Susie's leadership early in her academic career foreshadowed her ability to make this school a place to become a better lawyer, a better scholar, and a better colleague. For example, as a legal writing instructor at a time when that aspect of formal legal education was in its nascent stages, Susie helped found the Dean's Tutorial Society. The Society—an honorary student organization that provides academic support to other law students—was the first organized, volunteer, law student-to-law student tutoring effort in the nation. The Dean's Tutorial Society provided a model for similar tutorial efforts in law schools throughout America. Later, Susie made a transition from teaching legal writing to teaching and writing about tort law. A generation of students learned about the “reasonably prudent person” from someone who was eminently reasonable herself.

Most of us at the law school today, however, remember Susie best for her work in the deans' office, and it is in that role that we both came to know her as a colleague and friend. The move to administration came when Dean Norm Lefstein appointed her as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in 1997. Dean Lefstein made numerous outstanding decisions during his long tenure at the school, but appointing Susie as associate dean was one of his wisest. Susie obviously had the “technical skills” to do the job—she was (and is) smart, organized, and responsible. But no one could possibly have done the “people skills” part of the job better than Susie.

Soon, Susie's deanly work was augmented by her service on the Building Committee for the law school to be built at the corner of West and New York streets. In that role, Susie literally donned her hard hat and steel-toed boots to shepherd our school into the future. According to Dean Lefstein, “Susie played a significant and lasting leadership role as plans for Inlow Hall were developed. Her contributions were especially invaluable as we determined new furniture to purchase, the selection and location of class photos, and artwork throughout the building, all of which remains on display today.”³ Susie took special pleasure in the committee's efforts to relocate the Woodard Room⁴ from the old law school to the new building. In true Susie fashion, today's Woodard Room links alumni with a peaceful, welcoming workspace, graced with three magnificent pieces: a fireplace mantel, a bookshelf, and a table, all from the Maennerchor Building, which housed the law school from 1944 until 1970.

Susie was perhaps at her best when serving as a recruiter for new faculty and an ambassador for newcomers to our community, an enormously important role

3. E-mail from Norman Lefstein, Professor of Law and Dean Emeritus, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law, to Cynthia A. Baker, Clinical Professor of Law, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law (Mar. 14, 2012, 10:47 EDT) (on file with authors).

4. This room is set aside for alumni and dedicated to the late Hal Woodard. Mr. Woodard, a Harvard law graduate, was a longtime adjunct teacher at the law school and an important benefactor to our law school community.

for the good of the institution. She was a fixture on the faculty recruitment committee and the “go to” person when new members of the law school community were house-hunting, looking for the right school for their children, or just trying to learn more about life in Indianapolis. Chancellor Bepko said it very well when presenting Susie with the law school’s Alumna of the Year award in 2007:

She knows legal education well and can do a good job of selling the potential of our school. But there was much more. She took people to show them the city of Indianapolis. She talked to them about how their teaching packages could be best structured. She talked about family issues for those faculty members who had families. She also was a very compelling ambassador for the city. She was able to give them good[,] direct and candid advice along with a nurturing counsel that made them feel right at home.⁵

Susie’s enthusiasm for, and example of, balancing the demands of profession and family did not stop once a prospective faculty member joined our academic community. Both of us have experienced, many times over, the even-handed encouragement of Susie Mead as we raised our children. Susie never failed to laugh with us about our, sometimes comical, struggles as parents. And, with a lightness of experience and wisdom, was always able to provide excellent advice about the art of balancing families and careers. Beyond being a wise mentor herself, Susie encouraged new faculty to seek the best guidance and insight from other faculty members as well. Indeed, our school has a special culture—a sense of camaraderie and a family-like atmosphere, not always present on academic faculties. This exists today because we were fortunate to have Susie’s leadership for so long.

In 2004, Susie finished a seven-year run as the school’s Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. At the time, Susie thought that her days in administration were complete. We recall talking to her then, discussing how she was looking forward to spending more time with students in the classroom and returning to writing in the area of products liability, her academic specialty. But—as Susie herself might say—alas, it wasn’t to be. About a year later, the law school’s then-dean announced his resignation in a somewhat abrupt fashion, and the school needed someone to lead it through what was clearly going to be a tumultuous time. Not surprisingly, the law school community quickly rallied around the one very obvious choice—Susie Mead.

Susie did not relish a return to the deans’ suite. But once she took the reins, she displayed the characteristics that epitomize great leadership. Those of us who worked with Susie during that time saw someone who confronted the most difficult of situations with equanimity. We observed a person making difficult decisions promptly, but patiently. We also saw someone who was tolerant and slow to anger, but firm when necessary. In short, in Susie Mead, we saw that “example is leadership.” And *visa versa*.

5. Bepko, *supra* note 2, at 2.

With all that she devoted to our law school, one might think that our tribute would conclude here. But, as we tell our law students, there is so much more beyond the walls of this law school. And Susie again provides the model for leading a full and balanced life. Most importantly, she and Jack raised three beautiful daughters. In Jack's words, "As a result of her example, her counsel and her support[,] I think all three girls were destined to become career women as well. Each has obtained advanced degrees[,] two with masters and one with a Ph[.]D."⁶ After her daughters' athletic and extra-curricular obligations waned, Susie began to share her time and talents more broadly in our community. As just a few examples, Susie has served as trustee to the Pension Fund of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local No. 30, as an elected member of the Indianapolis Garden Club, as a great supporter of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and as an active member and leader of Christ Church Cathedral.

At times, Susie's legal background was as important as her leadership skills. Appointed as chancellor of Christ Church Cathedral then under the leadership of the Very Reverend Robert Giannini, she was effectively the legal advisor to her congregation for many years. Susie also served as an elected member of the Cathedral's vestry. In both capacities, she assisted the congregation with redrafting and updating its bylaws, canons and other foundational and policy documents, her work consistently contributing to the long-term well being of the Cathedral. She brought energy and insight to addressing issues of poverty, environmental degradation, and women's health in her role as a member of the Cathedral's Millennium Development Goals Committee. And, as she did for our law school community, she did this important work while retaining the ability to serve as the most gracious hostess one could imagine.⁷ In the words of the Very Reverend Carlsen of Christ Church Cathedral, her hospitality to Bishop Zache Duracin of Haiti was emblematic of her ability to so gracefully meld roles of hostess and leader. "Bishop Zache Duracin was one year removed from Haiti's devastating earthquake of 2010. He was struggling with unbelievable burdens of leadership and needs of his country, his congregation, and his people. In Indianapolis, Susie's gracious welcome to our community allowed the Bishop to rest, nourish his body and his soul, and realize that he had the support of many people around the world."⁸

In the Christian church season of Advent, a time of anticipation and penitence, one week is recognized with a pink candle on a wreath along with three purple candles. This pink candle, traditionally lit on Rose Sunday, represents a lightening of spirit, a sense of calm, and a way toward hope. As this short tribute sets forth, Susie has, time and time again, brought a lightness and

6. Mead, *supra* note 1.

7. Jack and Susie offered their home to many community and faculty celebrations, including events honoring guests like Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the United States Supreme Court, and on another occasion, the Episcopal Bishop Zache Duracin of Haiti.

8. Telephone Interview with the Very Reverend Stephen Carlsen, Christ Church Cathedral (Feb. 29, 2012).

hope to difficult times, a path to improvement, and a contribution to everyone she has touched. To us, it seems that Susie, in so many ways, is the equivalent of what the pink Advent candle means to many—an example of a way toward patience and wisdom and peace in our busy, complicated world. So, to Susie Mead, we offer our thanks and best wishes. We miss you and your leadership around the law school, but wish you the very best for a long, happy, and healthy retirement. Enjoy your time with friends and family. And always remember that you have a family at the law school as well.



MARY THERESE WOLF