PROFESSOR SUSAN MARTYN’S INFLUENCE AS 
EDUCATOR AND MENTOR

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PROFESSOR Susan Martyn has undoubtedly made exceptional contributions to scholars, lawyers, and the public through her prodigious and meaningful scholarship. I write to suggest that she has had a profound impact on the profession and the greater public in another way: through her roles as teacher and mentor. This piece seeks to illustrate, through the use of a few examples, the impact she has had and continues to have.

Many former students recall their early meetings with Professor Martyn. Christopher Bussert (’83) is a partner at Kilpatrick Townsend in Atlanta, Georgia. He was a student in Professor Martyn’s first Torts class as a faculty member at the University of Toledo College of Law. He remembers that he had just watched Paper Chase and was quite worried that she would be a female version of Professor Kingsfield. He found her to be “thoroughly knowledgeable, and passionate about the subject matter,” concluding, “We both survived.”¹

Matthew Mitten (’84), Professor of Law and Director of the National Sports Law Institute at Marquette University Law School, recounts that Professor Martyn was a very good and very demanding professor. He has a vivid memory of an event in her classroom. She spotted a student in the front row who had a study aid on his desk. After she pitched it in the wastebasket, Mitten reports Professor Martyn informed the student that he could not bring it to her class and that he had to do his own thinking.²

Marja Lasek-Martin (’89) practiced health care law at Radcliffe LeBrasseur and DLA Piper in London, U.K. She agrees that Professor Martyn could be a bit intimidating.³ In early meetings, Lasek-Martin found that Professor Martyn was “formal, professional, and intelligent,” noting that those qualities “made her a little scary.”⁴ Lasek-Martin notes, as do many of Professor Martyn’s former students, that she was extremely well prepared for class and, in turn, expected her students to be well prepared.

¹. Author’s Interview with Chris Bussert (July 13, 2015) [hereinafter Bussert Interview] (notes on file with author).
². Author’s Interview with Matthew Mitten (July 14, 2015) [hereinafter Mitten Interview] (notes on file with author).
⁴. Id.
Professor Martyn’s enthusiasm for her subject matter, as well as her desire to push students to give their best efforts, continued throughout her tenure at the College of Law. Jocelyn Cubbon DeMars (‘10) is currently an associate at Fields Howell in Atlanta, Georgia. She states: “In the classroom, she had an intensity, love of the law, and sense of humor that motivated students (like me) to work hard and to enjoy law school.”

Breanne Democko Rubin (‘13) is an associate at Eastman and Smith in Toledo, Ohio. She echoes DeMars’ sentiment, observing that Professor Martyn was tough and demanding and stating that her “thoughtful classroom questioning inevitably revealed the limits of our knowledge which, in turn, encouraged further review and study.” Rubin astutely recognizes the reason for Professor’s Martyn’s rigorous classroom presentation: “I grew to realize that Professor Martyn pushed her students so hard because she cared so much about each student personally.”

Rubin’s statement is one of many accounts of the personal interest Professor Martyn took in her students. Anita Lopez (‘97) currently serves as Lucas County Auditor in Toledo, Ohio. She recalls her early days as a student and the concern Professor Martyn showed for her:

I was recently hired by the University Law Library to be a clerk, working in between classes and in the evenings. One day in the middle of the semester, Professor Martyn recognized me working in the library. She knew I was a first year law student and approached Professor [Bruce] Kennedy, Law Library Director at the time, and demanded that I not work as a first year student because I received a grade she thought needed improvement. She believed first year law students should not be working. I was very upset and thought she should have minded her own business. She, of course, saw to it that she got her way; I received more funding from the University and my hours at the library were reduced. Looking back, I am not sure I would have done as well in my first year if Professor Martyn had not stepped in.

Lasek-Martin recalls the many hours she and Professor Martyn spent together discussing her interest in medical ethics issues; Professor Martyn provided extensive guidance regarding LL.M. programs in health law. Kelly Kszywienski (‘07), a partner at Snell & Wilmer in Phoenix, Arizona, reports that Professor Martyn showed similar concern about her career path. Noting that Professor Martyn was always honest and insightful, delivering her opinions without judgment or pressure, Kszywienski recalls:

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5. Email from Jocelyn DeMars to Lee Pizzimenti (Aug. 21, 2015, 9:22 AM) [hereinafter DeMars Email] (on file with author).
7. Id.
10. Email from Kelly Kszywienski to Lee Pizzimenti (July 26, 2015, 4:45 PM) [hereinafter Kszywienski Email] (on file with author).
The advice Professor Martyn gave me that I’m most grateful for is the advice that led me to my current firm. I put a ton of time and thought into my job search because, as a mother and older law student, I wanted to secure the best long-term option for me and my family. I was fortunate to have lucrative job offers from some internationally-recognized and prestigious firms that I was tempted (and being advised by others) to pursue, but Professor Martyn helped keep me grounded and focused on finding the firm that best fit my goals and personality. I am still with the firm Professor Martyn recommended and am truly proud of my legal career and the lawyer and person that my colleagues have helped me become. I don’t believe I could have made a better job decision.11

Professor Martyn’s interest in her students continued beyond their school years. Mitten recalls that he taught at the College of Law after spending a year teaching at South Texas Law School. He found her to be extraordinarily helpful, giving him class notes and past exams.12 He adds that their professional paths crossed again at Marquette Law School when she visited as a named professor—a “prestigious visit that recognized her overall contribution to legal education, and her scholarship.”13 Mitten was pleased to spend time with her during her year at Marquette, “completing the circle” as colleagues.14

Lindsay Navarre (’05), Assistant Lucas County Prosecutor, reports that Professor Martyn continued to serve as her mentor long after graduation.15 She adds:

When I became the president of the Toledo Women’s Bar Association, I dove into issues of gender equality in the law and Professor Martyn was one of my first sounding boards. At a WLSA function, we talked for over an hour about her experiences as a woman lawyer and a legal professor who had spent over 30 years busting through glass ceilings and breaking down barriers. Soon after our talk I formed the Women’s Advocacy committee and had her speak at the TWBA’s Fall Kick-Off event. She inspired a packed house with personal stories of antiquated maternity leave practices and sexual harassment. There were stark truths in her speech, but also hope in her journey.16

While many of Professor Martyn’s students refer to the seriousness with which she approached her teaching and her mentorship following graduation, they also remember Professor Martyn’s warmth, humor, and pleasant demeanor. Kszywienski recalls that Professor Martyn was always cheerful and that they spoke about “life, school, family, or anything else that came to mind.”17 Kszywienski adds that Professor Martyn was “so great with my six-year-old

11. Id.
12. Mitten Interview, supra note 2.
13. Id.
14. Id.
15. Email from Lindsay Navarre to Lee Pizzimenti (July 30, 2015, 11:13 AM) [hereinafter Navarre Email] (on file with author).
16. Id.
17. Kszywienski Email, supra note 10.
daughter that my daughter wouldn’t complain about coming into school with me if I told her we’d be visiting Professor Martyn.” 18 Rubin recalls that she and Professor Martyn spent a great deal of time together the summer Rubin was Professor Martyn’s research assistant, even attending a Zumba class together. 19

DeMars has similar fond memories of the personal relationship that Professor Martyn cultivated.

As much as I will never forg[e]t her lecturing on the Palsgraf case or facilitating discussion on tough ethical questions, I will always fondly remember sitting in her office talking about her new granddaughter and preparing for my summer clerkship, attending the UT Homecoming game with our families, and having lunch with her at the student union. 20

A natural question when considering Professor Martyn’s legacy is how the lessons she imparted have carried forward through her former students’ careers. Professor Martyn’s professionalism served as an inspiration to her students, who have attempted to apply what she taught them to their professional lives. Several former students admit that when faced with ethical issues, they ask themselves: “What would Professor Martyn do?” Lasek-Martin recalls asking that question numerous times, stating that Professor Martyn led by example. 21 Bussert recalls her hypothetical discussions—“it is not unusual even now: I will think what would Susan do under these circumstances? She had a profound effect upon my approach—do the right thing.” 22

In addition, Professor Martyn has influenced the general approach her students take as professionals. Mitten recalls: “When I was learning my teaching style I unconsciously incorporated her teaching methods. She was always questioning, demanding excellence.” 23 Rubin agrees that Professor Martyn’s approach is one worthy of incorporating into daily practice. She finds that Professor Martyn was never afraid to ask the tough questions and never accepted any fact at face value. “She always questioned the accuracy of every fact and the reasoning behind every action taken. I find myself trying to mimic her approach, and these learned skills have translated into my practice, and ultimately made me a better and more thorough attorney.” 24

Navarre reports that Professor Martyn’s influence goes beyond how to practice law. She notes:

For me, Professor Martyn was one of my first examples of “what I wanted to be when I grew up.” I was lucky enough to have had her as a role model long before I ever entered the doors of the UT College of Law. I first met the Martyn family when her husband became the pastor at our family’s church. Their daughter, Sarah,

18. Id.
20. DeMars Email, supra note 5.
22. Bussert Interview, supra note 1.
23. Mitten Interview, supra note 2.
and I were confirmed together and became fast friends. As a 15 year old girl, I looked at Susan Martyn and saw a loving mother, a devoted wife, an accomplished lawyer and a respected educator. She was mastering the “work-life-balance” long before it was a catch phrase.25

As the coordinator of this project, I exercise the author’s prerogative to get the last word regarding my recollections of time spent with Professor Martyn as a student in her Torts and Professional Responsibility courses at Wayne State University. My first impression of her was that she was the energizer bunny: constantly upbeat, engaged, and unstoppable. As others have said, she had high expectations, but her presentation was always joyful. She seemed to take such pleasure in teaching that I concluded I wanted to do what she was doing. Knowing of my interest, she graciously gave of her time to give me advice about law review, clerkships, and preparing for an academic career. As a new Professor, I had all of her ethics notes, her open ear concerning teaching issues, and guidance regarding my scholarship. That guidance continued throughout my career at the College of Law. Professor Martyn has been a wonderful mentor, colleague, and friend.

It is fitting to conclude this piece with congratulations and thanks from former students. Rubin states:

I had the pleasure of getting to know Professor Martyn … [a]s a law professor, advisor, mentor, fellow board member, and friend. Professor Martyn has given so much to the University of Toledo College of Law over the last 30+ years. She is truly a cornerstone to the institution, a renowned scholar in the field of legal ethics and professional responsibility, and a powerful advocate. She has challenged me to become a better attorney, better citizen, and a better person. I cannot thank her enough.26

Kszywienski adds that she is “so grateful to have learned from Professor Martyn and to have her in my life. Her retirement is a tremendous loss to law students, but a privilege for her family and a progression Professor Martyn has well deserved.”27 Bussert concludes:

The students, alums, and bar were extraordinarily lucky that Professor Martyn stayed at the College of Law throughout her career. The recognition of Professor Martyn as a preeminent, prolific scholar benefitted the College. But, beyond that, we were lucky to have had a person with her passion. Ethics for her was not just to prepare students to pass the exam. She expected us to take it forward in the practice of law, informing our relationships with clients, opponents, and the bench. For 33 years, I have done that. She was great for me; she has been great for generations of law students.28

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25. Navarre Email, supra note 15.
27. Kszywienski Email, supra note 10.
Lopez agrees:

While serving as Lucas County Auditor, I was finally able to thank her when I delivered a proclamation to her for receiving the YWCA Milestone Award in 2014. I continue to give thanks to Professor Martyn for being strong enough to look out for me and advocating for my success as a law student. She made a real difference in my life and I am sure many other students’ lives as well. She will surely be missed by many and I wish her all the best in her future endeavors. She is not only fully deserving of the YWCA Milestone Award but she will forever be deserving of my gratitude.  

Navarre echoes these sentiments:

At the risk of using a cliché, it is truly hard to imagine the law school without her there. When I think of my time at the UT College of Law, she is the first person I think of. [I recall] her torts class my first year, her ethics class my second year, her brilliance, her frankness, her courage, and her mentorship. There are some people who are truly irreplaceable. Thank you for everything, Professor Martyn. 

DeMars adds that Professor Martyn is an outstanding lawyer who has had a remarkable career. And “all the while—and all the more importantly—she is an outstanding person, member of the [University of Toledo] and national legal community, and friend. She perfectly embodies what every lawyer should aspire to be.”

Lasek-Martin tells a story that illustrates Professor Martyn’s fierce intelligence and intellectual curiosity:

I had the unique experience of traveling with Professor Martyn to London a few years ago. She was giving a CLE lecture on legal ethics to an international group of lawyers. We shared a ride into London from the airport. Having lived in London for many years, I arranged for Daniel, a private driver, to meet us at the airport. During our drive into town, Professor Martyn discussed the recent article she was researching. We dropped off Professor Martyn first at her hotel. Afterwards, Daniel tuned to me and said, “I have no idea what she was talking about but she seems scary smart.”

Professor Martyn has used her “scary smartness,” her devotion to teaching, her enthusiasm, and her practice of professionalism to touch the lives of students for over 30 years. Those students have had careers in government and academia, as well as in local, national, and international firm practice. They will continue to spread her legacy, and her influence will remain.

29. Lopez Letter, supra note 8.
30. Navarre Email, supra note 15.
31. DeMars Email, supra note 5.
32. Lasek-Martin Comments, supra note 3.