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Family Court Review Memorial for Ruth Stern

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FAMILY COURT REVIEW MEMORIAL FOR RUTH STERN

J. Herbie DiFonzo



It is impossible to write about Ruth Stern without thinking of baseball. When she and I were set up by a mutual friend eighteen years ago, we found instant common ground in our passion for the New York Mets. She later told me that I won her over right away by knowing that Dennis Ribant was the first Mets starter with a winning record. Ruth's pedigree with the Amazins' came from Opening Day in the old Polo Grounds in 1962. It would astonish no one who knew her to learn that we videotaped every Mets game all season long, a mark of sheer nuttiness for two professionals.

Ruth was a social worker when she decided that she could do more for children by becoming a lawyer. She joined the initial class of CUNY Law, an institution entirely devoted, as she was, to public interest lawyering. She went on to practice with the Juvenile Rights Division of New York City's Legal Aid Society for thirteen years. Her background in social work made her a particularly resourceful and effective advocate for the many abused and neglected children whom she represented. This experience served as the basis of all her subsequent work as both lawyer and scholar.

She twice rescued family law programs at Hofstra. In 2005, when Andy Schepard and I found ourselves suddenly without an administrator to coordinate the school's diverse family law programs, we turned to Ruth, who proved to be a wonderfully capable organizer and manager. Ten years later, Hofstra and AFCC implored Ruth to jump into the breach and serve as Managing Editor of *Family Court Review* during an unexpectedly troublesome transition. A glance at the issues included in the 2015–2016 year shows her golden touch as an editor. And reading her Editorial Notes reveals both her humor and grace with a pen. (A pen, literally—she always composed in longhand on legal pads, only afterwards recording her prose on a computer.) The opening lines of her November 2015 Editorial Note illustrate her gentle wit, remarking on Andy Schepard's pivot from editor to academic dean:

As a baseball fan of almost foolish consistency, Professor Andrew Schepard is well acquainted with the wisdom of Yogi Berra. He might therefore agree that his recent career change is the logical result of coming to a fork in the road, and taking it.

It came as no surprise to me that Ruth was a marvelous writer. What proved startling was that we were able to collaborate effectively. We coauthored eleven articles and one book, *Intimate Associations: The Law and Culture of American Families*. But our joint efforts almost crashed at the outset, when I committed the egregious sin of editing her prose without asking her. After she accepted my apology, we devised ground rules and managed the process quite smoothly thereafter.

Ruth loved to travel. We met as the result of a serendipitous voyage she took to India on which Ruth met a good friend of mine who suggested to her that she might join forces with another devoted Mets fan. Over the years, we had many hiking and walking adventures through Europe and the United States. We were about to go on an African safari when Ruth took ill.

I will miss her always.