

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR JANE LARSON

Professor of Law Jane Larson died on December 24, at the age of 53. She attended Macalester College, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1980 with a specialization in women's history. As an undergraduate, she won the Katherine Rock Hauser Award in Women's History. Professor Larson received her law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School, where she graduated with high honors in 1985. While there, she helped to found the journal *Law and Inequality* and served as an article editor for the publication. She was a judicial clerk for Justice Rosalie Wahl of the Minnesota Supreme Court and for Judge Theodore McMillan of the Eighth Circuit. Professor Larson is survived by her beloved son Simon Rosenblum-Larson; her sister, Jennifer Larson Knauth; her nephews; and other relatives and dear friends. She was preceded in death by her parents.

Professor Larson was Voss-Bascom Professor of Law; she joined the faculty of the Law School in 1996. Before she came to Wisconsin, she was on the faculty of Northwestern University Law School, where she was twice awarded the law school's highest teaching award, the Robert Childres Memorial Award for Teaching Excellence. Before beginning her teaching career, Professor Larson was an associate at the Washington, D.C. law firm of Powell, Goldstein, Frazer and Murphy. She was a member of the bars of the State of Minnesota, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

Larson was a nationally prominent scholar in the areas of feminist legal history, land reform and poverty law. In recognition of her contributions, she was awarded the University of Wisconsin's H.I. Romnes Faculty Fellowship, given to faculty members of proven scholarly potential at a dynamic period of career development. In 1998, she was a visiting fellow at the European University Institute Faculty of Law in Italy. An immensely popular teacher, she once explained that she taught doctrine as if teaching musical scales, i.e., as a necessary technical skill on which all else is based. But, she said, it is the social, political and philosophical context that brings meaning to doctrine and makes music out of the law.

In addition to her acknowledged excellence in teaching and scholarship, Jane Larson took a very active role in service to the Law School, the university, and especially to the disenfranchised people whose plight she analyzed in her scholarship. With law professors Sylvia Law and Clyde Spillenger, Larson was a co-author of the historians' briefs in two landmark cases involving women's reproductive rights: *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989) and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992). Larson worked actively on behalf of the university's Land Tenure Center. She also received national and international recognition for her work on the *colonias* settlements located along the southern border of Texas.

Larson's exemplary work on the *colonias* combined theory, legal doctrine, empirical research, social policy, community empowerment, and hands-on legal research. The project began with legal theory—debates over the role of law and over whether the free market or regulation yielded better results for all, including the poor as well as the rich. It ended up on the ground, examining a real-world example, and implementing legal changes to test the theory. As Larson explained, there were no zoning laws in the unincorporated areas of the Texas counties that border Mexico, no housing codes, no subdivision and infrastructure requirements, no government provision of basic public services, no planning mechanisms. Although the area bore out market advocates' predictions in that land and housing there were quite inexpensive, Larson noted that living conditions in these settlements were "deplorable." Drawing on both progressive and conservative research, Larson worked with other scholars and an NGO to establish a land titling program for residents of the *colonias*. The team proceeded to assess the effects of the legal change they had carried out through more empirical work. This work revealed that expected economic results had not been

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achieved, but that an unexpected benefit had followed from the land titling program: a heightened sense of political empowerment for those who had participated in the program.

Larson was also known for her work in feminist legal history. Her writing has been called “a model of how to integrate the history of doctrine with the surrounding social values.” Among her signature contributions to legal feminism were her research on the tort of seduction and her co-authored Oxford University Press book, *Hard Bargains: The Politics of Sex* (with Linda R. Hirschman, 1999). As one reviewer explained, “this is a wide-ranging, dense, and well-written book, blending political theory, historical detail, cultural critique, and sexology in discussing how our notions of sex have been formed and why we should acknowledge sex as thoroughly political—not just in the public realm, but in each individual sexual encounter. *Hard Bargains* provides an erudite and involving exploration of the classic feminist political adage: the personal *is* political.” Larson’s feminist perspective contributed to her work as an author of the Eighth Circuit Gender Fairness Task Force Report and to her devoted mentoring of many students and colleagues.

Jane Larson’s energy and unique spirit left their mark wherever she went. Her former Northwestern colleague Charlotte Crane describes this impact: “She was nothing short of magnificent. In the classroom, this magnificence meant students thronged to her classes not just to be instructed but to be educated. In a scholarly debate, it meant that her position would be presented lucidly but passionately. In daily interactions, it meant that one would easily be pulled into her concerns and suffer discomfort if unable to respond. She and the energy she brought with her simply could not be ignored.” Colleagues note her contributions to Latina/Latino scholars and studies, as signaled by the post remembering her on the blog *Nuestras Voces Latinas* by Guadalupe Luna grieving the loss of “nuestra amiga mia.” When news of Jane’s death became public, tributes poured in from across the country. Clyde Spillenger of UCLA wrote that Jane was “a great teacher, an engaging and supportive friend and a brilliant scholar” who could “reject the false necessity that the institutions we inhabit seem to demand, and envision what life where injustice was not taken for granted might entail.” Her colleague Stewart Macaulay remembers her as a fellow jazz aficionado who requested Coltrane in lieu of epidural during the birth of her son, Simon, and notes that he “loved listening to her puncture balloons and expose stupidity and greed in high places. Of course, she died far too young, and we cannot bring her back. But she left many good memories behind.”

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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