
Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison On the Death of Professor Emerita Marygold Shire Melli

Marygold Shire Melli helped break down barriers to women being lawyers. When she entered law school in 1947, she was one of the few women to attempt this career. It helped that she was very smart. Despite graduating from law school with honors, Melli could not find work with any law firm. Undeterred, for ten years she used her exceptional legal and negotiating skills to draft major legislative reforms to Wisconsin's criminal and juvenile codes. This led to changes in Wisconsin law that far exceeded what she could have accomplished representing private clients. In 1959, Margo became a professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School. She was the first woman to serve there and one of the first to be a law professor anywhere.

She also was a model of the ideal University of Wisconsin Law Professor. As new demands on the legal system appeared in American society, she helped the legal system cope with them. Traditionally, law schools emphasized business and economic problems. Melli said that she wanted to expand the subject of legal study to "the people handling parts of the law." She created courses that looked at marriage and divorce, children's rights, law and the elderly and juvenile justice. Her research informed her students, but also the courts and legal officials who have to cope with difficult social problems in these areas.

She was a role model for many women, a mentor, a fine classroom teacher, a researcher, a member of many committees charged with such tasks as running the law school, the university, various legal agencies, her community and causes such as the arts in her city, county, state and nation.

She did so many important things during her career that all we can do is offer a few examples. During the first years of her career, there were many major changes in family law. Professor Melli conducted research and wrote articles about such things as child custody after divorce, developing mathematical standards for child support, bargaining under no-fault divorce and exploring new family forms. She wrote "friend of the court" briefs that were submitted to appellate courts. She was active in many associations of professors, judges, court officials and lawyers who specialized in family law, and she started journals and wrote columns that focused on reported decisions by appellate courts dealing with family law issues.

The Wisconsin Law Foundation gave Melli the Belle Case LaFollette Award for outstanding service to the legal profession. The State Bar of Wisconsin recognized her lifelong contributions to the advancement of women in the legal profession. The Family Law Section the State Bar gave her an award for outstanding service to that section. Melli's scholarship in the field of family law also earned her recognition both nationally and internationally. She was appointed to leadership roles with the American Law Institute, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and the International Society of Family Law.

Melli was a good citizen and did more than her share of the committee work necessary to run the law school and the university. She was the Associate Dean of the Law School during the troubled time of protests against the war in Vietnam. She chaired the executive committee of the University Faculty. No tribute to Melli would be complete without acknowledging her tireless work to ensure the hiring of women faculty at the University of Wisconsin Law School and in steering countless numbers of her women students into important teaching positions throughout the country. Capitalizing on this work, she became the Chair of the Chancellor's Task Force on Gender Equity and Co-Chair of a Regents' Task Force on the Status of Women. The Regents also gave her an award for Outstanding Contributions to the Advancement of Women in Higher Education.

Submitted by
Professors Macaulay, Claus and Weisberger