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## In Memory of Julie Chek

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# IN MEMORY OF JULIE CHEK

*Professor Maritza I. Reyes\**

The Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) *Law Review* dedicates this volume of the Journal to the memory of one of its Staff Editors, the late Julie Chek. Julie helped to edit this volume before she died unexpectedly on June 5, 2015 in Tallahassee, Florida. This dedication is the Law Review's way of honoring Julie for her contributions to the Journal and to the FAMU College of Law.

Writing about the passing of one of my students is not something I had considered to be a possibility—then I learned of the news of Julie's sudden illness and passing. It was shocking news. She had young children and a husband. She also talked with me about her sister and her mother. She probably had more family members that we did not get to talk about. I searched for Julie's e-mails in my computer. I read them over and over again. I also re-read them before I began to write this heartfelt dedication. I do not know how to do justice to Julie's memory in a few paragraphs. Although I only knew her for a year, I saw so much goodness in her. She cared. She had the ability to empathize and feel compassion. She was honest, diligent, and dedicated. These are character traits that make for great lawyers. We lost one of the good ones.

Julie was a woman whose light and spirit touched many of us during her time at the law school. Many of her classmates wrote posts attesting to this on Facebook and in the "We Love Julie Chek" fund that one of her classmates, Cynthia E. Navarro, set up on GoFundMe.com.<sup>1</sup> I met Julie when she was starting her second year of law school. That semester, she took two of my classes—Evidence and Professional Responsibility. Every semester, when I walk into the classroom on the first day of class, I wonder what the semester will be like. Each group of students is a little different. I look forward to getting to know students individually and as a group as the semester progresses. I cannot remember every student I have taught; however, there are some students I will never forget. Julie was someone who will forever remain in my heart and mind. She was a positive, kind, and

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1. GoFundMe, *We Love Julie Chek*, <http://www.gofundme.com/vuh75d4> (last visited Aug. 23, 2015).

caring person. I still remember her warm smile as she came into class. She was eager to learn. She dreamed of becoming a lawyer.

My evidence course in Fall 2014 was a very large class. It was especially hard getting to know each student, including memorizing their names. I remember a time when Julie volunteered and I could not remember her name. She was gracious and understanding about my predicament. She immediately said “Ms. Chek” and proceeded to answer my question.<sup>2</sup> After that class ended, she approached the podium as I was gathering my materials and introduced herself. This one-on-one introduction helped me to begin to get to know her. My professional responsibility class was smaller, so here was where I came to know Julie more closely. She always had insightful responses and comments. Her broad professional and life experience permeated through her contributions as we discussed rules and applied them to the ethical and professional choices that lawyers make in life and in practice. Julie was always prepared for class. She was smart, inquisitive, thoughtful, cordial, respectful, and responsible—a model law student. I was not surprised to learn that she was a member of the Law Review; it was obvious that she was one of our best students.

I applied for tenure at the beginning of Fall 2014 and my application was still being reviewed in Spring 2015. Julie and many other students and alumni gave me encouragement and support during the tenure process. On March 4, 2015, Julie wrote a letter I shall always cherish.<sup>3</sup> In it, she stated:

In conclusion, I consider myself lucky to have been a student of Professor Reyes. She is an amazing teacher, and she is an asset to this school. I aspire to be like her. She is strict when she needs to be, and she truly cares about her students. This is law school, after all, and students need to be prepared for the tough reality of the real world. I feel like I am an even better student due to Professor Reyes.<sup>4</sup>

Julie also wrote that she aspired to be like me; I was touched by her compliment. She also visited me in my office and urged me to remain steadfast as I went through the tenure process.<sup>5</sup> She told me that my teaching made a difference in her life and in the lives of many other students. Julie was no longer in any of my classes at that point but she made time to let me know that she appreciated me as a teacher and as

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2. I address students formally during class.

3. Letter from Julie Chek, Law Student, to Maritza Reyes, Law Professor, FAMU College of Law (Mar. 4, 2015) (on file with author).

4. *Id.*

5. I deeply regret that I was not able to share the news of my tenure with Julie. The FAMU Board of Trustees approved all tenure applications that were submitted for approval by President Elmira Mangum, including mine, on June 10, 2015, five days after Julie passed away.

a person. Words cannot convey what her words meant to me then and how much more they mean to me now and for posterity.

Julie continued to visit me in Spring 2015 during office hours. Through our conversations, we got to know each other more personally. We had a lot in common. I learned that she was raising two young sons so I shared with her my own experience of raising two young sons while balancing law school when I was a student. We both majored in business before attending law school. We talked about the unequal treatment that we sometimes faced as professional women. We discussed her career goals. She wanted to become a law clerk and sought my advice. She asked me to serve as her reference when she applied to intern at the Supreme Court of Florida. I said yes without hesitation. When she obtained the internship, she was thrilled. She hoped that the experience would lead to a law clerk position once she graduated from law school.

Julie and I were in touch during Summer 2015 via e-mail and by phone. Julie was in Tallahassee for her internship. She was in awe of the Supreme Court of Florida and the justices. She planned to immerse herself in the experience. She was thankful for the professional opportunity. She was interning in Justice Peggy Quince's chambers, so I knew she would have a wonderful internship. I connected her with another of my mentees; he was serving as a law clerk in the court.

The last time Julie and I spoke was on May 20, 2015. We had a long phone conversation that evening after she left work. She was enjoying her internship. She had a lot on her mind, including considering career opportunities and trying to make the best choices for her and her family. Her children were her priority. We talked about how much we enjoyed being mothers. Julie loved her sons very much. She wanted to make them proud and provide better opportunities in life for them. Toward the end of our conversation, she thanked me for mentoring her. She told me that she looked forward to remaining in touch throughout our careers. I told her that I looked forward to cheering her on to future accomplishments. She was very talented. She was an all-around good human being. She came into our lives for a season and showed us that an individual can make a difference even in a short time. We shall always remember her. May she rest in peace.

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