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It is with deep gratitude that I write this tribute to Professor Willemien du Plessis, as she gracefully retires from a remarkable career. Professor du Plessis is a celebrated and renowned expert in her field, widely recognised for her expertise, accomplishments and leadership. Her research interests in legal history, legal pluralism, environmental law and land law are a testament to her vast knowledge and expertise. In the realm of legal scholarship she stands as a luminary, casting light on the intricate intersections of law, society and the environment.

There is much to say about Professor du Plessis, but this is not meant to be a biography, so I will confine myself to my personal experience of her as a student and mentee. As an educator, Professor du Plessis is devoted and passionate, dedicating her career to excellence in teaching and learning. Affectionately known as "Prof Willemien", she is a treasure to the academic community and even more so to her students. She is a master of her craft, imparting wisdom and guidance with the ease and finesse of a Jedi Master.

As a student I have had the distinct privilege of being taught and supervised by her at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. My first encounter with Prof Willemien was during my first year as a law student, when she taught the challenging and dreaded Historical Foundations of Law module (also known as Roman Law). Despite its complexity, she made it engaging and enjoyable by incorporating various re-enactments and activities to enliven the material. I was fortunate enough to facilitate her module the following year and regularly visited her office for guidance. She took a keen interest in my academic and personal development even amidst the demands of her busy schedule, which was heart-warming to experience. In my fourth year I took her elective in environmental law, a subject that was clearly close to her heart. Her passion for environmental justice was evident in

every lecture, as she challenged us to think critically about issues such as equity, accountability and fairness, as they relate to the environment. She encouraged us to use our knowledge to make a difference in the world and to be forces for positive change. It was also through Professor Willemien that I discovered the Masters programme in Environmental Law and Governance, and she taught the Environmental Law module at LLM level with the same energy and enthusiasm that she had shown for every other subject she taught. Her Friday night classes were always engaging, ensuring that we not only comprehended the material but also learned to critically interrogate and apply the concepts. However, it was when we all took a break and headed down to the cafeteria that the discussions would really take off. Prof Willemien would always make rounds to ensure that all her students had something to eat, and we would relish the opportunity to converse with her. It was always wonderful to hear her perspective on current events, and she would encourage us to bring environmental law into the context. But her teaching also had a very humane element to it; she took a genuine interest in our thoughts and aspirations. It is evident from the hundreds of students who have dedicated a paragraph to her in the acknowledgments in their dissertations and theses that she has touched, mentored and inspired countless lives.

Throughout my own academic journey Prof Willemien has been a valuable source of support and inspiration. She also directed me to my LLM supervisor, Professor Anél du Plessis. Under their expert co-supervision I have now also successfully completed my doctorate. It would be remiss not to mention what an excellent team they both made. Most of Prof Willemien's students have one or more stories to tell of her often-eccentric method of commenting on their research. She favoured providing written comments on our work, often embellishing them with doodles, sketches and humorous remarks. Her feedback, while in-depth and critical, was always truly kind, and reminded us to not take ourselves too seriously.

Throughout the ten years that I have known Professor du Plessis, she has demonstrated unwavering dedication to the advancement of her field of expertise. She is a remarkable soul whose devotion to the advancement of her field is matched only by her compassion and commitment to her students' academic and career development. She is also well-known for her generosity in sharing resources and opportunities; if she knows what your research is about you can always expect an email with relevant resources or new information. Her impact extends far beyond her numerous publications, research activities and scholarly engagement; her students have become accomplished professionals thanks to her

mentorship and guidance. She has a wealth of knowledge to impart, and all of us have been all the better for being on the receiving end, as well as for having had the opportunity to learn from her.

Prof Willemien, on behalf of the many whose lives you have touched, mentored, and inspired, we offer our heartfelt appreciation for your unwavering commitment to teaching and learning. Your impact on your students' lives will be felt for years to come, and we are grateful for the opportunity to have been mentored by you. May you continue to enjoy great health, satisfaction, and success in whatever lies ahead, and may happiness always be at your doorstep.

RM Steenkamp

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