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Josephine (Jo) R. Potuto*

Anna Williams Shavers—In Grateful Memory

Anna Williams Shavers was my dearest friend. When the phone call came that her death was imminent, my very first impulse was to phone Anna to cry with her about it. And that's the way it always was. No matter the issue—serious, funny, gossipy, informational—she was always the first person I would call. No matter the issue—serious, funny, gossipy, informational—I expected our reactions to be similar, and they almost always were.

Anna and I talked about important, grave, and serious things; about the Law College; about legal education; about current events; about the state of the country and the world. We also shared the little things, the funny things, about ourselves, our families and friends; about books we were reading, movies or television shows we had seen. We told each other things we were embarrassed to share with others because they were too petty or silly. Most of all we laughed together.

On the surface we could not have been more different—in race and ethnicity, religion, and where we grew up. Anna was a whiz with computers and the Cloud. I have a running feud with both. We differed in political views and in our view of the appropriate role of government in people's lives. In important ways, in fundamental ways, however, we could not have been more alike. We both came from families with no money. We both were the first in our extended families to attend college. We both believed in setting goals and working hard to achieve them. We both believed in family, in forging strong friendships, in loyalty, and in being there for others. We both cared deeply about the direction of the Law College. We both felt immeasurably fortunate and proud to be part of the Law College faculty, to be doing something we loved—and getting paid for it.

Anna and I liked free things, even if we had no use for them. We adored high-end treatment. Spa Days. Traveling first class. We liked dressing up (and no one could fail to see Anna's wonderful sense of clothes and style). We did High Tea in New York, Dublin, Cambridge, and many times in London.

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We loved Husker volleyball. Anna, the lovely, gracious, kind, forgiving, Anna, transmuted into a rabid fan at volleyball games, with even an occasional boo. I often wondered if this was my influence on her!

Anna and I went to the New York theater and saw countless movies together. Perhaps the only time our tastes differed was that Anna loved the Marvels Avenger Series, and I went only because she wanted to.

Anna and I sat together at professional meetings. We learned together, played together, went out to lunch and dinner together. We loved just walking together in a city and chatting about everything and anything.

We visited countless museums—MoMA, the British Museum, the Musée National du Moyen Age, the Museums of the Negro Leagues and American Jazz. Much was uplifting, some of it quite sobering. We visited the African American Museum in Detroit and were silenced by a to-scale reproduction of the hull of a slave ship in which enslaved people were transported to the U.S. At the D.C. Holocaust Museum, we listened to every one of the first person recorded accounts of survivors of the Concentration Camps. We toured the Symphony Hall in Vienna, and we shared an eerie sensation that an exhibit honoring the Vienna Symphony Orchestra during the pre-WWII and WWII era listed the names of musicians who stopped performing with the Orchestra, but nowhere mentioned that they were Jews excluded from performing.

Anna spent so much time at my New Jersey house that she designated my second bedroom as hers and sought an accounting of anyone else who stayed there. She always said that I (and New Jersey) introduced her to good bread.

We both loved to travel. We did the yin and yang of the Jersey Shore, went to fifteen Final Fours and numerous football and basketball championships. We made several trips to London, visited Sicily and other places in Italy, spent time in Cambridge, and in Austria.

We had a truly memorable weekend in Paris. On Anna's bucket list was riding the Chunnel. So we did—from London to Paris and then back.

It was extremely hot in Paris. We decided to forego the long line at the Louvre and, instead, do a bus tour. We listened to the head-set narrator describing D'Artagnan riding his horse down the Champs-Élysées. I thought it was odd, but kept listening. Anna, with higher standards and more curiosity, fiddled with the headset. It turned out we were listening to a child's tour narration. I continued to listen to it, for fear I'd lose all narration. Anna couldn't stand it. She put her headset on my head, quickly adjusted mine, and then used it.

Anna gave me a Christmas tree ornament one year. She said she liked the idea that when I put the ornament on the tree, I'd think of her and our friendship. The last time she and I spoke, she mentioned the ornament, and also spoke fondly of the Christmas that she and her family spent with me in New Jersey.

The last in-person time that Anna and I shared was at the 2019 ALI meeting. On the last night, we talked about dining out, but, typical us, opted instead for junk food in my hotel room so that we could watch the last episode of *Game of Thrones*. We had a great time (and agreed that the end of the series was terrible).

Anna was always helpful; always sensible; always ready with a quick line; or to laugh. She had style and grace. High standards and an unwillingness to settle. She was smart, savvy, a great listener, and passionate about racial and gender equity. She worked hard to assure that doors were open for all. She was giving of her time. She was exceptionally kind and thoughtful. She also was a clear-eyed realist.

The public Anna was always gracious, always supportive. That was the private Anna too, but in private she also could be wickedly sarcastic and funny, in a very understated way.

Anna led an extraordinary life. And she left an incredible legacy of achievement. With all of her accomplishments, I know she felt that her greatest ones were her long and loving marriage to Stanley, and her amazing and amazingly accomplished daughter Amber.

No one person could hope to capture all that Anna was. To include comments from all those whose lives Anna touched, and to fully capture her character and charm and accomplishments would take volumes. I include just a few comments here, to provide a fuller but by no means complete picture.

Harvey Perlman, Dean and colleague during Anna's time on the faculty wrote this about Anna:

Because Anna was so upbeat, I always left an interaction with her feeling better. She had an infectious laugh which often preceded her entry into a room. You had to pry to learn of her experiences as a young black child going to school in Arkansas shortly after *Brown v. Board of Education* or to surface the hurts and indignities she suffered because of her race. Yet she did not shrink from them. She was passionate about racial justice, and she carried that passion to the plights of immigrants, victims of sexual trafficking, and those suffering from poverty. One always understood that her commitment to making life better for others was not diminished by her general good humor, nor the firmness of her positions softened by her gentle nature. She was a good lawyer, an engaged teacher, a valued colleague. I am grateful I was able to play a small role, as Dean, in convincing her to join Nebraska Law. It is a better institution because of her service.

Jan Gradwohl, Law College graduate, Judge, great friend to the Law College and to both of us, wrote of Anna and of her experience as an alumna working with Anna:

Dean Shavers came to the College of Law in 1989 as its first Black law professor. In addition to her classroom teaching, Dean Shavers provided meaningful faculty involvement in student organizations, such as the Multicultural Legal Society and Black Law Student Association, whose activities extended beyond the study of the law to include easing the adjustments of students to the unfamiliar, and many times hostile, environment of Lincoln. As an alumna of the Law College, I worked with Dean Shavers on some of those student events and served on University Diversity and Inclusion committees with her. Dean Shavers—Anna—was a dear friend, respected colleague, and effective educator, whose humanity and effectiveness in addressing complex issues made a significant difference in the lives and careers of countless students, faculty, and colleagues.

Kristen Blankley, colleague and friend, described Anna's impact on her development as faculty member and leader:

Anna led in a way that was supportive and gentle, particularly in her work surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). For those of us willing to do the work in this area, she asked relevant and thoughtful questions, and she encouraged honesty, even when it was messy and ugly. Anna gave me the courage to use my skills in mediation and facilitation in the world of DEI, notably in facilitating discussions about race and writing about best practices for these conversations. Anna made me a better leader, and a more self-aware citizen. I've learned not only from her teaching but also from her example. She cared deeply about human dignity, and I am a better educator, mediator, and person because of her.

Sally Wise, friend and formerly the law librarian at the Law College, described her experiences with Anna:

I have many memories of traveling with Anna and friends, and we always seemed to get into situations that were both interesting and unusual. You never knew what was going to happen next! As you can imagine, eating, drinking, talking, and laughing with Anna in any venue was always a complete joy.

Anna was also a baker and one of my regrets is that I never asked her for her recipe for sweet potato pie. I and others have made sweet potato pies in Anna's honor. However, the pie I made was a disaster, and it did not meet Anna's pie standards. So, I am back in the kitchen trying different recipes and enjoying remembering Anna's smile, good humor, and perseverance.

I am a better person for having known Anna. But I can't help regretting all the things we will never get to do. Every day since her death underscores the loss. Anna, ever kind, would sympathize with me, but also laugh at me. And tell me, in very elegant phrasing, to get a grip. She'd tell me that the only way to never have to mourn a loss is never to have had strong and loving relationships. She'd be right, as she so often was. But mourning is mourning. I love grammar. Anna's death shows me that I like commas much, much more than periods.