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It is an immense honour to celebrate the career of a remarkable individual, Prof Willemien du Plessis. But where does one even begin?

I met Prof Willemien du Plessis in February 2015 in front of the Faculty of Law of the North-West University while she was heading to her office after making herself a fresh cup of coffee. I was just looking for a supervisor, and she politely invited me to her office. Little did I know that encounter would change the course of my career.

Throughout her career Professor Willemien has left a lasting impact on her students, her colleagues, and the wider academic community. Her commitment to excellence, her passion for environmental law, and her tireless efforts to help her students achieve their full potential have inspired countless individuals over the years. She used any resources at her disposal to help her students who were in need, not just in relation to academic matters but also in relation to their general well-being. She fought for her students, even when that would land her in hot water.

Professor Willemien displayed a profound knowledge of environmental law. Her knowledge of this field is evident from her great contribution through her ground-breaking research, countless publications, and numerous presentations at conferences around the world. Her contributions to the academic community will be felt for many years to come. Environmental law is constantly changing, and her ability to keep up to date with the changes and to share the same with her colleagues remains astounding.

I will remember her rigorous approach to teaching, her ability to bring complex ideas to life, and her unwavering support for her students. Her lectures were always engaging, and her willingness to go above and beyond to help her students

succeed was truly remarkable. Her supervision style was exceptional. Every time I engaged with her concerning my work, she made me feel that she was dealing with me as an individual, not just one of her many students.

But perhaps what will be most remembered about Professor Willemien is her kindness, her warmth, and her genuine care for those around her. She was always approachable, always willing to lend an ear or offer advice, and always had a smile on her face. Her humorous comments will be sorely missed. One comment that never escapes my mind is her writing on one of my scripts, "Don't mind the stain on the paper. I was sitting under the tree while marking, and the elephant started chasing me. I dropped your paper, and the elephant might have stepped on it." That is Professor Willemien for you.

It would be remiss of me not to talk about the motherly nature she effortlessly expressed to her students and younger colleagues. Her love for her students and colleagues transcended the confines of professional relationships. Well, in my case, not only did she help me get my degrees but she tried to help me find a girl to marry on a number of occasions. What manner of love is that?

As a black, Lesotho-born national, I always marvel at her ability to appreciate cultural diversity. Interestingly, at one point I learned the etiquette one must display before the Khosi from her.

So, as I say farewell to Professor Willemien in an academic capacity, I do so with a deep sense of gratitude for all she gave me. I thank her for her service to the academic community, her unwavering dedication to her students, and her countless contributions to the field of environmental law.

To our retiring Professor Du Plessis¹, I offer my heartfelt congratulations on a career well-lived. I wish you all the best in the next chapter of your life and I hope that your retirement is filled with joy, happiness, and all the rewards that come with a life fully lived. Thank you for everything you have done for us and for being such an important part of our lives.

TJ Rantlo

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