



# CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF Esther F. Lardent

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1946-2016  
Esther F. Lardent

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## **WELCOME**

Jim Sandman, President, Legal Services Corporation

## **REMEMBRANCES OF ESTHER**

Jim Jones, Chair, Pro Bono Institute

Cindy Cohen, Associate Justice, Massachusetts  
Appeals Court

Ken Frazier, Chairman and CEO, Merck & Co., Inc.

Bob Sheehan, Of Counsel, Skadden, Arps, Slate,  
Meagher & Flom

## **INVITATION TO SHARE MEMORIES**

Jim Sandman

## About Esther F. Lardent

Long active in legal services and the organized bar, Esther served in the ABA's House of Delegates and as chair or member of numerous ABA committees and task forces, including the Commission on Immigration, Consortium on Legal Services and the Public, Commission on Domestic Violence, Task Force on Terrorism, and various ABA committees on pro bono and legal services. She was a member of the ABA Board of Governors from 1996 to 1999. Esther also served as Co-Chair of DLA Piper (US) LLP's innovative global pro bono project, New Perimeter, as well as a member of the Global Advisory Committee for Ashoka's ASE program.



Before founding Pro Bono Institute in 1996, Esther served as an independent legal and policy consultant for the Ford Foundation, the American Bar Association, state and local bar associations, public interest and legal services programs, and other clients. From 1977 to 1985, she was the founder and first director of the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association, one of the nation's first organized pro bono programs, and, in conjunction with that position, administered a nationwide pro bono technical assistance effort from 1981 to 1985.

Esther received her undergraduate degree, magna cum laude, from Brown University, and her J.D. was awarded by the University of Chicago. Esther received a number of awards in recognition of her public service contributions, including the Exemplar Award from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, the Philadelphia Bar Association Founder Award, the William Reece Smith, Jr. Award from the National Association of Pro Bono Coordinators, the National Association for Public Interest Law's Public Service Award, and was named one of the 90 greatest lawyers in Washington, D.C. by the Legal Times. In 2013, Esther was named one of The American Lawyer's top 50 innovators. More recently, she received Merck & Co., Inc.'s Kenneth C. Frazier Equal Justice Award (2014); the Western Center on Law & Poverty's Earl Johnson Equal Justice Award (2015); and The American Lawyer's Lifetime Achievement Award (2015).

Esther was a guest on National Public Radio, CNN, Washington Watch, Nightline, and other network, cable, and local television and radio programs. She taught at a number of law schools and served as a panelist for numerous organizations

## About Esther F. Lardent

and conferences. She also contributed to and wrote a number of publications, law articles, and books.

On April 4, 2016, Esther passed away. Esther's passing was a tremendous loss for the legal profession and the fight for access to justice, but her legacy endures and the organization she founded remains committed to advancing her work through its mission to promote, support, and enhance pro bono efforts around the world. ❖



It is with profound sorrow that the Board of Directors of the Pro Bono Institute marks the passing of our beloved friend and founder Esther F. Lardent. Under Esther's inspired leadership since its founding 20 years ago, PBI has been a leading voice in the cause of equal access to justice and an important agent in the transformation of pro bono legal services. PBI's successes stand as a tribute to Esther's deep personal commitment to the constitutional principle of "equal justice for all" and form a part of her enduring legacy to the legal profession and to American society.

A daughter of Holocaust survivors, Esther's commitment to civil rights and serving the needs of the poor and underprivileged came early. After completing her undergraduate work at Brown University and receiving her J.D. from the University of Chicago, Esther took her first job in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. From there, she went to the Boston Bar Association and founded the Volunteer Lawyers Project, one of the nation's first organized pro bono programs. She subsequently served as an independent legal and policy consultant for the Ford Foundation, the American Bar Association, state and local bar associations, public interest and legal services programs, and other clients. As a consultant at the ABA's then Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities, Esther founded the Death Penalty Representation Project.



In 1993, as head of the Law Firm Pro Bono Project, Esther launched the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge®, an aspirational peer-to-peer effort to increase the amount of pro bono services to individuals of limited means and organizations serving them. In 1996, Esther established PBI as a nonprofit organization to administer the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge® and to provide supportive informational and consulting services to law firms interested in deepening and expanding their pro bono commitments. In 2000, PBI entered into

a partnership with the Association of Corporate Counsel to expand and encourage pro bono services in corporate law departments. This effort led, in 2006, to the launching of the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge® initiative, an effort to get major corporate law departments to embrace pro bono services and to strive to have more than half of all of their legal staff actively engaged in pro bono work every year.

It is no exaggeration to say that Esther's efforts and tireless energy led to a transformation in pro bono services in both law firms and corporate law departments. There are now 137 law firm signatories to the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge® and 145 law department signatories to the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge® initiative. Collectively, law firm signatories have provided more than 60 million hours of pro bono services in the 20 years since the launch of the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge® and corporate law departments have delivered many thousands of hours of pro bono services as well. These services have impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of persons who, but for the pro bono commitments of the lawyers involved, would have lacked the ability to access or navigate the legal system. It is hard to imagine a more fitting legacy for Esther and her passionate commitment to justice for all.

Esther once said of her position at PBI: "For me, it's the best job I can imagine." From our perspective, Esther was clearly the best person for the job that we could imagine. We were privileged to know and work with her for 20 years, and we take comfort from the fact that she has left an enduring legacy from her long life of service to others. ❖



For many years, I had felt this special kinship with Esther. Somehow we both felt this utter impatience with what I experienced as (and I think she did too) the needlessly slow pace of change in our field, and the unwillingness to move faster with the obvious. We would sit next to each other at meetings, at the same time both whipping up each others' frustration, and calming each other down. She was a great and needed comfort.

It was only in the last few years that I learned at least some of why there may have been this resonance. While both her parents were survivors of the Holocaust, and only one of mine was, and while my father was probably never formally under Nazi occupation, we both, I like to believe, absorbed a sense of urgency and obligation from that unique history.

She was able to take that history of pain and loss and use it to drive transformative institution building. It was never enough for her to be key in creating the pro bono movement and then rest on those laurels. On the contrary, she saw at once the inadequacies of what had been built, and created new and more ambitious possibilities.

This was the story of her life, and we are all, including millions who never met her but were helped or will be helped by the institutions she built, forever in her debt.



*Richard Zorza is an attorney, independent consultant, and author of the Access to Justice Blog.*



I have known few that have been more committed to the cause of equal justice than Esther. And even fewer loved her work and her many comrades more.

Many of you know that Esther spent time with the Civil Rights and Social Justice Section, working on the Death Penalty project, immigrant rights and on other issues. Esther spent a good part of her life steering the ABA in the direction of justice, as this Section is also committed to. I got to know her as a young legal service lawyer, looking for an opportunity to keep access to our legal system open in the wake of massive federal cutbacks. I worked for the ABA's pro bono and private bar involvement project, completely overwhelmed by a new world for me. Esther took me under her wing teaching me the complexities of the ABA and the world of organized bars. I became one of Esther's



People, an ever widening circle of men and women, of many ages, backgrounds, and professional positions – from indigent clients to judges and bar presidents – that she supported, taught, advised, nurtured (and danced with) – for life.

Most of her career was devoted to advancing pro bono – the work that all lawyers should be doing, for the public good and without pay. From her work with Boston's pro bono program, consulting with the ABA and Legal Services Corporation, to her founding and leading the Pro Bono Institute, her nickname, the Queen of Pro Bono was well earned. Clients who could not afford a lawyer everywhere, and beyond our country's borders as well, benefited from her work. She played a big part in moving pro bono from a desirable part of a lawyer's ethical commitment to a major part of our nation's promise of justice. The Institute will carry on her legacy. Of course, she knew everything there was to know about pro bono. But, more than that, she inspired so many and kept the rest of us charged up and happy to be a part of the effort.

Many of you know that she was born in a refugee camp after World War II. So beyond pro bono and the ABA, she connected with my dedication to diversity, to redress for Japanese Americans interned during WWII and to the rights of immigrants and refugees. To her friends, she always had your back, when you had professional, health or social challenges. I pity anyone who took a cheap shot at

an ally of hers. I remember a young legal services lawyer in some city in a more conservative part of the country criticized a private attorney whose pro bono work led him to support legal services funding. After Esther educated him I don't think he'll miss the importance of finding allies wherever you can.

A number of years ago, we were both in the hospital at the same time with health issues, and she somehow found me even though I wasn't fully conscious at the time and stood by me even though it wasn't allowed. Compassion came naturally to her.

So, I can say with some certainty, Esther would say, in her memory, make sure you can say that you have done – no, increased - your pro bono contributions – and enjoy being part of the fight for justice. ❖

*Paul M. Igasaki is the Chair & Chief Judge of the Administrative Review Board of the U.S. Department of Labor. Paul accepted on Esther's behalf a posthumous Civil Rights Hero Award given by the Civil Rights & Social Justice Section of the American Bar Association.*



## Association of Corporate Counsel

The Association of Corporate Counsel joins our members and colleagues throughout the legal community to mourn the loss of our longtime friend and hero, Esther Lardent, former CEO of the Pro Bono Institute (PBI), who will forever be affectionately remembered as the “Queen of Pro Bono.”

The founder of PBI, Esther’s dedication to justice and providing legal representation to underserved communities made a difference in the lives of thousands. Throughout her life, Esther devoted her time and countless resources



to expanding the reach of pro bono opportunities to law firms, legal departments and, most importantly, people in dire need of legal services.

Starting with her work as director of the American Bar Association’s Law Firm Pro Bono Project, to establishing PBI in 1996, to developing

Corporate Pro Bono (CPBO), a partnership with ACC, Esther was the driving force behind making pro bono an indispensable part of the legal culture.

Most importantly, Esther illustrated by example to the legal community that as lawyers, we are bound by the responsibility to use our skills and training to help fulfill a promise of equal justice under the law for all people.

We were constantly inspired by Esther’s passion to achieve what most may have viewed as unattainable. We have watched her dream of providing more pro bono opportunities come to fruition and we celebrate her legacy of service and extend our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends, colleagues, and all who knew her.



With deep sadness at her passing, and deep appreciation for her leadership, the Association of Pro Bono Counsel joins so many others in honoring the life of Esther Lardent. For over two decades, Esther was a singular and irresistible force in turning the legal profession towards its ethical duty to serve the poor, challenge social inequity, and bridge the justice gap. As the doyenne of *pro bono publico* — legal work done for free for the good of the public — Esther was without peer, and she will be deeply missed.

As the founder and leader of the Pro Bono Institute, established in 1996, Esther was seemingly everywhere, an indefatigable voice of the better angels of the legal profession. Her call resounded, and she succeeded wonderfully. Since PBI's founding, the number of hours of pro bono legal services contributed by large law firms, and more recently corporations, has soared, now averaging approximately 5 million hours of donated time and expertise annually, much of that on behalf of our most vulnerable persons.

Not a visionary only, Esther was highly practical. She loved the nuts and bolts of pro bono work as much as the ethical imperative and the social calculus that underlie the profession. She made the “business case” for pro bono work, repeatedly enumerating all the ways in which a healthy pro bono practice benefits not only our clients, but the lawyers, law firms and corporations that embrace the effort. She instituted a public “Pro Bono Challenge” to get firms and corporations to deliver more help to those in need. She insisted that “what gets measured, gets counted,” urging us all to assess and value pro bono hours alongside billable hours when weighing the overall performance of our institutions.

Esther seemed at times indispensable to the cause. Yet she would be the first to demur from that conclusion. She was modest in her accomplishments. She loved to laugh. She read widely and enjoyed the theater and films. And she loved to teach. Many of today's law firm pro bono leaders, including most if not all of the 179 members of APBCo, fondly recall learning essential lessons about the always-evolving craft of *pro bono publico* from Esther.

At APBCo, we are indebted to Esther. She passed the pro bono torch to so many of us. It is an obligation that we are honored to carry on. ♦

The Board and staff of the Australian Pro Bono Centre pay tribute to Esther Lardent, the legendary founder and president of the Pro Bono Institute.

Her contribution to the development of the pro bono movement globally was monumental.

Esther was an exceptional leader who provided inspiration, enthusiasm, support, advice, encouragement, guidance, and so much more, to so many. We will

remember her as an incredibly warm person who loved to laugh and who was remarkably generous with her time, knowledge and expertise. She will be sadly missed.

Esther had a great sense of strategy, an acute critical eye and a persistence to develop creative solutions to address the constraints and barriers to pro bono that she would so ably investigate.

One of her skills was a deep understanding of the organizational psychology of law firms and corporate legal teams. This, combined with a current knowledge of the unmet legal

need of the indigent and marginalized, and the business trends and prospects of the legal industry, was formidable.

Above all Esther was a leader with a determined vision to get every lawyer on the planet doing pro bono legal work.

Her influence in the development of the pro bono movement in Australia was, and remains, significant. Many of us met her through early friendships, for example with David Hillard and Fiona McLeay, then both at Clayton Utz, and now both leaders of the pro bono movement in Australia.

Many Australian lawyers have now made the pilgrimage to the PBI Annual Conference in Washington DC and despite the arduous journey we always come home with new ideas and inspiration.

Esther has also travelled to Australia on at least two occasions. In 2003, as a Fulbright Scholar she came to Sydney and gave a paper at the National Pro Bono



Conference on the pros and cons of defining and quantifying pro bono, a paper still very relevant today.

In 2010, she was a keynote speaker at the National Access to Justice and Pro Bono Conference in Brisbane 2010, where she was greeted warmly by fellow keynote speaker and friend, the United States Ambassador to Australia, Jeffrey L. Bleich. In her usual tireless way she also gave presentations and workshops in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, talking of how now was the time for pro bono to achieve BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals).

As a self-described “policy-wonk”, Esther’s way with words was eloquent and persuasive. Never a year seemed to go past when there wasn’t a new trademarked PBI pro bono project whether it was a Clinic in a Box™ or the Second Acts™ project for transitional and senior lawyers. Perhaps we will see the publication of her collected articles about pro bono in a book.

Esther also made the trip to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam in 2013 to present at the Second Asia Pro Bono Conference. She had a commitment that never seemed to waver. This included a fundamental commitment to improve access to justice. The growing gap between available legal assistance and the legal needs of the poor, indigent and disadvantaged was always her starting point.

For the Australian Pro Bono Centre which commenced in 2004, Esther’s influence is evident. Australia was influenced by the Pro Bono Institute’s Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge® when creating its National Pro Bono Aspirational Target. The Target has been a vital part of driving broader participation in pro bono by Australian lawyers.

As Esther said in an interview in 2011, “My goals for my work are three things. I want to make good things happen. I want to make the world a better place even if I’m doing it three steps back from the front lines. I really want to work with really smart, really good people who can teach me and who are a pleasure to work with.



And then the final thing is that I don't want to be bored."

(That was four things, Esther!)

Realizing that all of our time on this earth is relatively short she added, "If you're a nasty screamer, who is totally focused on what your draw is going to be this year – very unlikely that I'm going to have much interaction with you, which is great; I don't want to!"

We don't think there is much doubt that she achieved these aims and has certainly left behind her a legacy that presents an enormous challenge to all of us to honor and continue.

It has been an honor and privilege to have known Esther and to have received so much support from her.

We extend our condolences to all who knew her, particularly the board and staff at PBI.

Vale Esther! ❖





Our organization BABSEACLE, along with our Asia Pro Bono Consortium partners, are guided by the conviction enshrined in the Margaret Mead quote:

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

Esther led her life committed to this belief and principle, while also understanding that it was important to have many others, often from large groups, including law firms, corporations, civil society, governments and others join on to effectuate change.

Throughout her life she saw and recognized that there was an incredible amount of unmet legal needs, and lack of access to justice, being experienced by people worldwide. Rather than shying away from this reality she addressed this challenge head-on and devoted her life to ensure the pro bono movement would assist in righting this wrong.

Her efforts led to the creation of the Pro Bono Institute more than 20 years ago which has done monumental work, including helping to bring about law firms and lawyers providing 4.3 million hours of pro bono each year.

Esther was a visionary, a doer and importantly, she was a real mentor. This included her coming out to be with us in Asia in 2013 where she presented the Key Note speech at the 2nd Asia Pro Bono Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. We were so honored to have her with us as she inspired and provided guidance and how to further develop this existing and ever growing group of world changers.

Prior to her travelling across the globe to be with us Esther took much time out of her very busy schedule to prepare for her journey and presentation in order to ensure she would provide the greatest impact she was capable of. This period of time allowed us to learn much more about who Esther was and where she came from.



In 2012 we were in the earlier stages of organizing official pro bono related convenings in order to bring together individuals and groups of committed persons to help drive and fuel the pro bono efforts in Asia.

Esther very much related to what we were doing and how we were going about doing it. She compared our efforts to her own. Esther talked with us about her early years in working to organize the pro bono movement in the USA. She reflected on how these efforts included her and a few persons gathered together in solidarity, often in a single room to work well into the late night hours and running around doing everything. They were a group of people who took their responsibility

seriously and yet they celebrated life knowing they were a part of bringing positive change to so many others.

She told us that there was an immense amount of obligation and importance placed on their shoulders. When this felt like it was too much for them, the group would make sure to go out and dance well into the evening revitalizing themselves so they would be ready, productive and effective to address the issues and challenges of the next days,

weeks and months. She also told us how moved she was and how much she loved and was honored by the incredibly committed, exceptionally hard working, PBI team that continued to do immense things with often limited human and other resources.

Esther came to Vietnam where she worked and celebrated with us. She was, as we knew she would be, an inspiration and a treasure chest of knowledge and experience. Esther, being Esther, also greatly enjoyed being surrounded by the gathered group of persons committed to bringing greater access to justice to others. One of the many wonderful memories we have of her is her yelling “BINGO” with glee, and winning a prize, as she participated in one of the many interactive and informative sessions the conference had become known for organizing.

With Esther’s passing we find incredible solace in knowing that Esther’s legacy continues to grow and change the world. We have been inspired and mentored by her in so many ways it is almost impossible to express.



Our thoughts and deep condolences go out to all of her family, friends and colleagues who knew her and all who have been touched by her. This includes the deeply committed PBI team that will continue to carry on her legacy of ensuring pro bono and mentoring continues to grow and strengthen.

Esther, we promise to keep changing the world in ways you have taught us to do, and dance in celebration as this incredible impactful, transformational movement grows and grows. As we do so we know that you are there with us. ❖



After I finished speaking to her class at Georgetown Law School a dozen years ago, Esther Lardent, founder of the Pro Bono Institute, drove me back to my hotel. It was a chance to unwind and catch up. As we inched along in traffic, Esther began to keep time with a song on the radio.



“I bet you didn’t know this,” she said in her unmistakable scratchy voice, “but there was a time when I had seen every tour by the Rolling Stones in America.”

No, I confessed, I had no idea.

“Oh,” she sighed with a smile, “the ‘60s.” Then, without missing a beat, we went back to talking about the crisis in legal representation for the poor and what she was doing to address it.

That was Esther. A delightful character of many parts who had a single focus: changing the pro bono landscape in the United States. I thought of that encounter when I learned that after a long illness, Esther had died on April 4.

For me, Esther was a friend, a source and a collaborator. She came of age as part of the cohort of idealistic lawyers who created the legal services movement nearly a half-century ago. Though she spent much of her career prodding the barons of the corporate bar to live up to their better natures, she never lost her rock ‘n’ roll spirit. You can’t always get what you want, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards taught her, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need.

After finishing law school at the University of Chicago in 1971, she started the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association, helped create the American Bar Association’s Death Penalty Representation Project, and advised the Ford Foundation on a host of social justice issues, which ultimately led her to create the Pro Bono Institute in Washington in 1996.

It was a different time. While some cities and some large firms had robust pro bono traditions, many programs were small and disorganized. PBI provided technical support to firms that needed it and developed best practices for the field. And Esther and her board launched the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge.

Jim Jones was the managing partner at Arnold & Porter as PBI was getting started. “We needed something to jump-start pro bono activity,” he recalls. “Esther and a small group of us looked around for ideas. The Pepsi Challenge—the ad campaign of Pepsi versus Coke—was big then. Lawyers are highly competitive, and so we decided that we needed a challenge for them too.” The great John Pickering, a name partner at what was then Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, took pride in delivering his signed Challenge statement to Esther’s office personally. He wanted to be first.

The Challenge, still in place, required firms to commit 3 or 5 percent of their billable hours to pro bono. Twenty years later, Esther’s great legacy, according to Jones, who now chairs PBI’s board, is that she counted roughly 60 million hours of pro bono work performed by the 150 or so signatories to the Challenge. The American Lawyer’s A-List rankings are credited with prompting a second wave of big-firm pro bono activity, a development Esther adored. She also created a challenge for in-house lawyers.



Born in Europe to Holocaust survivors, Esther talked about the gratitude she felt to her adopted country. Her work, she felt, was a repayment for being welcomed and given room to thrive.

I last heard from Esther in November. She was recovering from a stroke but assured me that she was on the mend. We pledged to get together. To my regret, we did not. If someone asks what music ought to be played at her memorial, there really is only one choice. It’s another Rolling Stones anthem:

*Let’s drink to the hard working people  
Let’s think of the lowly of birth.  
Spare a thought for the rag taggy people  
Let’s drink to the salt of the earth.*

Thank you, Esther. Here’s to you. ❖

*Aric Press is the former editor of The American Lawyer.*

Many years ago, I heard a French cooking critic, in a movie I saw, most likely on an airplane, say that not everyone can be a great chef, but a great chef can come from anywhere. Esther must have come from special people and a special place. While I doubt that Esther's parents, who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, and came from Poland to this country to start a new life and a new family, knew the Yiddish words for *pro bono publico*, they, no doubt, knew the



meaning of struggle, the value of life, the importance of a high-quality education and imparted to their daughter, Esther, a desire to live life fully, to make a difference in the world, to use her intellect and talents wisely, and be the very best that she could be. Esther did all of that and more.

I knew Esther for more than 35 years. We met early in our careers. Esther had become the first director of the Volunteer Lawyers Program in Boston, one of the very first Bar Association

sponsored, well-staffed, pro bono programs in the country. It was funded as part of the Congressionally mandated Legal Services Corporation's Delivery System Study. Colorado Rural Legal Services, where I worked, had also been awarded a grant to experiment with and evaluate alternative delivery systems. I met and was struck by Esther at one of the very first National pro bono conferences. Even then Esther was way ahead of the field.

Esther built the model pro bono program for all to follow, and she worked with decades of American Bar Association and state and local Bar leadership to head off crises and strengthen Bar support for legal services and enhance access to justice.

Esther realized early on that it made great economic sense to ask lawyers to give, free of charge, of their time and talents to those in need. She built a career expanding justice by encouraging, cajoling, preaching, teaching, supporting, training, recognizing and rewarding the most talented lawyers who did the most to serve those who would otherwise go without legal advice and representation. Esther lived her belief that pro bono did not mean free or charitable, but meant fully "for the public good". She was a leading light for pro bono. She was the queen of pro bono. But she was far more than that – she was a leading light for justice, equality and fairness.

I recall that at one of the first pro bono conferences – that is what this event was called in those days – I heard a large law firm lawyer from Boston say, provocatively, that when a private attorney sees a legal aid lawyer, he or she sees a bad lawyer, and when a legal aid lawyer sees a private attorney, he or she sees a bad person. No one worked harder than Esther to dispel this grossly erroneous, unfair, unhelpful and inappropriately limiting perception. She worked diligently to connect the two communities and to energize and mobilize the very best in both.

I heard a Governor of Colorado, years ago, refer to an initiative as being caught between unloving critics and uncritical lovers. Esther Lardent served those of us in the legal services community as a most loving critic. She believed deeply that we can and should do more and do what we do better. Our clients simply deserve the best from legal services and from the entire Bar, and she insisted that we do our very best and she helped us create, think through and implement ways to do it.

Time and conversations with Esther were fun, joyous, almost musical, but they could also be damn uncomfortable, challenging us in legal services and the Bar to face up to our faults, imperfections, foibles, always with that special twinkle of hers, and to move us from the comfort of where we were and what we were doing, to the uncomfortable space of where we should be – the unfamiliar – the space that she saw, but we did not, at least not yet. But her vision – her dreams, through her efforts, were almost always realized.

Esther used her unquestioned intellect, and her unwavering clear values and her unsurpassed energy and passion to move us all forward.

I am – we all are – saddened by Esther's death and our loss, but we are energized by her life and her legacy. She called us all to make the world a better and more just place, calling upon us to do all that we can to further the cause of justice from starting pro bono programs to working with the ABA to secure the highest quality counsel for death row inmates, to encouraging corporate counsel and large and small firm lawyers to do more for those with less.

J. Paul Getty, when asked his secret of success, said simply it was to “rise early, work hard, strike oil”. We all struck oil when Esther dedicated her life to our community and to the cause of justice.

A writer said “Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain.” Esther spent her life dancing, singing and laughing in the

## Colorado Legal Services

rain, always striving to make the Bar, the legal profession, all that it should be, fully devoted to the public good and to ensuring fairness and justice.

The vast majority of you, whether you know it or not, just as the thousands and thousands of clients who did not know Esther – didn't even know her name – were touched profoundly by her work. All of you – all of us – have been impacted by her leadership, vision or guidance either directly or indirectly.

Many have done much to advance the cause of access to justice in the past 40 years. None did more than our most well respected colleague, teacher, mentor and good friend, Esther Lardent.

Esther's and my tradition teach us that we live on in the acts of goodness and kindness we have performed in our lives and in the hearts of those who cherish our memory. Esther will live on in all of us, in our continued struggles in the furtherance of her labors to ensure justice for all. Esther's life, her vigor and her dedication will continue to serve as a light – a beacon, summoning each of us, as she did so well, to be our best, to be thoughtful, creative and fully engaged in our efforts to make justice a reality. May her memory serve to challenge us all and may Esther's name always be for a blessing. ❖

*Jonathan D. Asher, Esq., Executive Director, Colorado Legal Services presented these remarks at the 2016 Equal Justice Conference at the request of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association and the American Bar Association.*





With scores of others around the world, we mourn the passing of Esther Lardent and celebrate her extraordinary life. Founder of the Pro Bono Institute (PBI) and former Co-Chair of New Perimeter, Esther was known throughout the legal world as the “Queen of Pro Bono” for her tireless and innovative work to promote pro bono. “The legal profession has lost one of its most inspirational leaders. We at DLA Piper were so fortunate to know and work with Esther, and she was a personal friend to many of us at the firm. Her legacy will continue to guide us and our pro bono efforts,” said Roger Meltzer, Global Co-Chairman and Co-Chairman Americas at DLA Piper.

Over the last 20 years, Esther and PBI have been an unwavering force in encouraging the legal profession to uphold its ethical duty to serve the poor, fight for justice and bridge the justice gap. Esther’s visionary spirit and drive inspired law firms and corporate legal departments to do pro bono, develop innovative and impactful pro bono projects and to expand society’s commitment to access to justice. Esther’s leadership



has touched countless people in the legal community as well as in the communities of under-served people she encouraged us to assist. At DLA Piper, she inspired us and contributed to our pro bono work and programs across the firm.

Esther was a trusted advisor and great friend to DLA Piper and New Perimeter. Esther was with New Perimeter from its very beginning when it was created in 2005. She served as New Perimeter’s Advisory Board Co-Chair, first with Judge Pat Wald and then with Mark Ellis, Executive Director of the International Bar Association, facilitating many of our meetings over the years. Esther’s thoughtful feedback and inclusive nature guided our efforts and helped our new venture – a one-of-a-kind pro bono organization – spread pro bono to some of the most under-served regions around the world.

Esther was also a wonderful and loyal friend and a special mentor to our pro bono leaders. We are forever grateful and honored to have known and worked with her. She had an incredibly generous spirit and all of us will sorely miss the twinkle in

her eyes, her wise guidance and her enthusiastic encouragement. We will continue to work hard to uphold Esther's legacy and keep her memory and vision close to our hearts.

As PBI noted, "Esther was a shining star in the legal world. Her light and enthusiasm paved the way for all of us who pursue increased access to justice. It is now up to us – all of us – to be those stars in her constellation and carry the torch on the path to justice. Let us carry on Esther's legacy and renew our commitment to help the countless people who need our assistance." ❖



The Board and staff of Justice Connect are saddened to note the death of Esther Lardent, founder, President and CEO of the U.S.-based Pro Bono Institute.

Esther, and the organization she founded and ran for 20 years, had an unparalleled influence on pro bono legal work, ensuring greater access to justice for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable. At the time of PBI's founding, the notion of a structured and intentional approach to doing pro bono work in law firms was novel and rare, and pro bono by in-house lawyers in corporate legal departments was virtually non-existent. Esther's vision and drive changed this decisively.

Esther combined her understanding of how lawyers work with a deep commitment to access to justice, and how best to link the two. She had a profound and sparkling intellect, uncommon drive and seemingly inexhaustible energy. She was inspirational, thought provoking, sometimes provocative and never content with the status quo. She was also funny and warm and a mentor and guide to many.

A true pioneer, Esther cleared the path for those of us who are committed to access to justice through pro bono work. Pro bono legal work is now truly a global phenomenon and Esther, affectionately known as 'the Queen of Pro Bono', is a major reason for this. Justice Connect (then PILCH Victoria) was very proud to bring Esther and her colleague Tammy Taylor to Australia in 2010. The visit inspired lawyers and policy makers to a deeper understanding of the potential of pro bono in responding to unmet legal need.

Esther will be keenly missed, but she is one of the few of whom it can be said that her legacy will live on and who helped make the world a better place. ❖



## Legal Aid of the District of Columbia

Legal Aid was saddened to learn of the passing of Pro Bono Institute founder Esther F. Lardent. Established by Esther in 1996, the Pro Bono Institute (PBI) is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization mandated to explore and identify new approaches to and resources for the provision of legal services to the poor, disadvantaged, and other individuals or groups unable to secure legal assistance to address critical problems.

Under Esther's visionary leadership, PBI emerged as a leading voice in the cause of equal access to justice and an important agent in the support and enhancement of pro bono legal services. Today, PBI works with hundreds of major law firms, in-house corporate legal departments, and public interest organizations in the U.S. and around the world to continually expand, improve, and enrich pro bono service.

Our thoughts are with Esther's family, friends, and the many colleagues she inspired through her extraordinary work on behalf of access to justice. ❖



Esther F. Lardent will be remembered as a tireless champion for equal access to justice, said Legal Services Corporation President James J. Sandman.

“Esther did more to increase pro bono work by big law firms and corporate legal departments than any other person in the history of American law,” Sandman stated. “She helped transform the pro bono sector and inspired countless lawyers and law firms to take an active role in expanding legal services to disadvantaged groups.”

Lardent founded the Pro Bono Institute (PBI) in 1996, leading the organization for 19 years until transitioning to a strategic advisory role last summer. Under her leadership, PBI became a powerful force for change, expanding and deepening the pro bono engagement of law firms and corporate legal departments. Lardent believed that leveraging the talents and resources of these organizations could have an enormous impact on improving access to justice for low-income Americans.



Lardent’s commitment to expanding access to justice was long standing.

She served as an independent legal and policy consultant for the Ford Foundation, the American Bar Association, state and local bar associations, and public interest and legal services programs. She was the founder and initial director of one of the nation’s first organized bar pro bono programs, the Boston Bar Association’s Volunteer Lawyers Project. During that time, she also administered a nationwide pro bono technical assistance effort. She received her B.A. from Brown University and her J.D. from the University of Chicago Law School.

Throughout her life, Lardent was a powerful advocate for the value of pro bono service. She was able to make attorneys understand the business case for engaging in pro bono work and spoke compellingly on its personal rewards. During her tenure at PBI, she helped convince 137 top-tier law firms and 145 corporate legal departments to increase their commitment to pro bono services. She also

expanded pro bono work internationally and was looked to around the world as a leading resource on effective pro bono programs.

Her leadership and achievements were widely recognized. In 2013, The American Lawyer named her one of its top 50 innovators. In 2015, she was honored with The American Lawyer's Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Esther galvanized the entire legal profession through her vision of a society in which everyone receives equal treatment under the law,” LSC Board Chair John G. Levi said. “She was a hero to us all, and such a powerful and persuasive advocate in making the case for why pro bono service matters. Her role in expanding access to justice cannot be overstated and her leadership and voice will be greatly missed. It is up to all of us to carry on her life's work.” ❖



NLADA and the entire equal justice community were deeply saddened by the passing of Esther Lardent, founder of the Pro Bono Institute, NLADA leader and nationally recognized innovator in increasing access to justice for low-income people. NLADA was honored to recognize Esther with its Champion of Justice Award in late 2015, but even this title was inadequate - as any words would be - to describe and acknowledge the many contributions during her visionary career.

In 1996, Esther founded the Pro Bono Institute. Her aim was nothing short of revolutionizing the very concept of pro bono legal services. The formal, institutionalized pro bono programs of the largest private firms and corporate legal departments in America that we see today directly mirror the transformation that Esther led over 20 years ago.

Her unique perspective, which led to the creation of the PBI, was undoubtedly shaped by a career dedicated to public service from the start. By 1977 she had already founded one of the nation's first organized pro bono programs: the Volunteer Lawyers Project in Boston, which today maintains a network of roughly 1,000 attorneys. She served as Executive Director until moving on to lead the

ABA Death Penalty Representation Project, corralling support and assistance from top partners at elite law firms. Together these helped to inform her exceptional clarity of vision around the potential power of pro bono. She established the Pro Bono Institute in 1996 to pursue these dreams in a more comprehensive way.

If her ideas were bold, her drive and talent to make them real were even more impressive. The three came together as she launched the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge®, and the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge® 10 years later, both revolutionary models at the time. For all her achievements in advancing justice for low-income or disadvantaged Americans, NLADA presented Esther with its 2002 Exemplar Award.

Esther received many additional awards recognizing her many public service contributions, including the Philadelphia Bar Association Founder Award, the William Reece Smith Jr. Award from the National Association of Pro Bono Coordinators, the National Association for Public Interest Law's Public Service



Award. She was named one of the 90 greatest lawyers in Washington, D.C., by the Legal Times. In 2013, she was named one of The American Lawyer's Top 50 innovators.

Esther's passing led to tributes from every corner of the equal justice community.

Jo-Ann Wallace, NLADA President and CEO, remarked: "Esther was a visionary whose leadership significantly expanded equal justice and pro bono. She was also a great friend to and leader of NLADA, always free with her support, vision and inspiration. We will miss her greatly, but never forget her friendship and her contributions to the cause of justice for all."

Jon Asher, executive director of Colorado Legal Services and Esther's longtime friend and colleague, accepted the Champion of Justice Award on her behalf. Quoting the famous refrain that tells us life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, but learning to dance in the rain, he said "Esther has spent her life dancing, singing, and laughing in the rain -- always striving to make the bar of the legal profession all that it should be, fully devoted to the public good, and ensuring fairness and justice."

The contribution Esther made to justice in America is immeasurable. Most of the many thousands of people in this country and abroad whose lives are improved by the pro bono assistance that she made possible will likely not know her name. But we who pursue the fight for justice do - and we continue our work in her honor and her memory. ❖





Esther's tireless efforts and unparalleled passion transformed the legal profession and reinforced the commitment of lawyers, law firms and corporations to equal access to justice for all in the U.S. Her inspiration and her organization serve as catalysts for the growth of legal pro bono worldwide. We are incredibly grateful for Esther's lifetime commitment to serving others, and we stand on her shoulders in our work developing global cultures of pro bono.

Our thoughts are with Esther's family, friends and the many colleagues she inspired through her work. ❖



As busy as we all are, there are a few things that should always make us stop and reflect. This time, it is the news of losing someone so important to our field: Esther Lardent.

Esther Lardent was an early board member and critical inspiration to us at the Taproot Foundation. What Esther did for legal pro bono service is what we and many others, both in the U.S. and through our network of global partners, are working so hard to achieve across all professions today. We are taking time to reflect on Esther's contribution, not just to Taproot as a partner and member of our board, but to the entire pro bono movement.



In 2009, Taproot convened a roundtable discussion of leaders in pro bono service to talk about advancing the pro bono movement by building champions of pro bono service inside corporations. We knew we weren't starting from scratch because of the precedent of the legal pro bono marketplace, so we knew we needed Esther there.

I remember being very moved and inspired – both by her presentation itself and also by the direct line to action that we were able to take from it: the deeply ingrained pro bono ethic we associate with lawyers wasn't just always there. Esther shared that it was only about 15 years earlier when 12 lawyers sat together around a table having a discussion not unlike ours asking, how can we make pro bono services more accessible? It took someone, thinking the same type of thoughts we were thinking, to figure out the ways to accelerate interest into action, and action into a movement. Esther was that pivotal figure, translating what had initially been a call to action by President John F. Kennedy in 1963 into a mutually reinforced 'norm' among the legal community decades later. It had been her idea to push to get pro bono included in the criteria ranking law firms in the major journal of the time, creating a natural accelerant driving firms to compete to increase their pro bono service. And then later she had the foresight to also shift to make it the norm for legal departments within companies, too.

Aaron Hurst, Taproot's Founder, shared, "Esther Lardent was a good friend and mentor. Her vision for pro bono service in the legal profession was the inspiration and became the playbook for all of Taproot's work to expand our impact beyond our Service Grant program. Because of Esther, we took steps to inspire the creation of the Billion+Change campaign, helped hundreds of companies build pro bono programs, and toured graduate schools calling on emerging professionals to adopt the pro bono ethic. She was largely responsible for the spread of the pro bono ethic in the United States and one of the greatest Americans of the past fifty years. She will be missed but her legacy will continue for centuries to come."

She wasn't just the "Queen of Pro Bono" as everyone in the field so admirably refers to her, she was really the mother of the movement in a lot of ways—a strong, creative, talented, inspiring, tireless, good-humored and determined source that a successful movement needs.

We remain inspired by you, Esther. ❖



## Volunteer Lawyers Project

Esther Lardent, created the Volunteer Lawyers Project at the Boston Bar Association in 1977 and was its first Executive Director.

Known as the “Queen of Pro Bono,” Esther devoted her career to finding innovative ways to meet the legal needs of people with limited means. VLP was one of the first organized pro bono efforts in the country. The Pro Bono Institute, which Esther founded in 1996 and led for 20 years, essentially transformed the pro bono culture in big law firms and corporate in-house departments.

The legal community, and the access to justice community in particular, has lost a giant. VLP has lost its founding mother. We find consolation knowing that thanks to our many dedicated volunteers, Esther’s spirit of innovation and service live on at VLP. You are part of her legacy. ❖





Let's work together to ensure that  
what your organizations have built is a  
beginning and not an end.

*Robert D. Ladd*





