

## Judge Antoinette L. Dupont<sup>1</sup>

Judge Antoinette L. Dupont, known to friends and family as "Billie," passed away on September 2, 2020, at the age of ninety-one, after serving the Connecticut judiciary for almost forty years. She was predeceased by her husband, Judge Albert J. Cretella, Jr. The daughter of Albert J. and Helen Utano Loiacono, she was survived by her two brothers, Vincent Loiacono and Anthony Loiacono; her children, Ellen Dupont, Antonia van der Meer, and William Dupont; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. Judge Dupont loved her children, her family and her many friends, referring to her children as her most significant achievement and a source of her love and admiration.

Judge Dupont graduated from Pembroke College in Brown University, where she majored in political science. She was a member of the second class of women to attend Harvard Law School, graduating in 1954. She began her legal career as a consultant to the Eisenhower Commission on the Application of Federal Law to the Virgin Islands before going into private practice in New London. In 1977, Governor Ella Grasso nominated Judge Dupont to the Court of Common Pleas and then, in 1978, to the Superior Court. Her love of the law, her passion for legal research, and her flair for administration made her a brilliant judge. In 1983, Governor William A. O'Neil nominated Judge Dupont to be one of the original judges to sit on the newly created Appellate Court. In 1984, Chief Justice Ellen A. Peters appointed Judge Dupont as Chief Judge of the Appellate Court, a position she held until 1997, when she took senior status. In 1999, Judge Dupont became a judge trial referee. She continued to hear Appellate Court cases in that capacity until her retirement in 2016.

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<sup>1</sup>Remembrance by Attorney Jill Begemann with assistance and input from Judge Dupont's family.

Judge Dupont was not just a mentor, a trailblazer and a role model, but, as a member of Zonta and the League of Women Voters, she was also a lifelong advocate of women's rights. She rose above gender discrimination and fought against it. As chair of the Task Force on Gender Bias in the Connecticut Courts, her groundbreaking work made the courts fairer to women, adding to the remarkable legacy she leaves behind.

Judge Dupont's sense of fairness and her ability to foster a collegial atmosphere endeared her to everyone at the Appellate Court. She once said that her favorite words were "I agree," but she was not afraid to disagree when she thought the legal reasoning was wrong. She was a true colleague whose collaborative skills were enhanced by her genuine collegiality. In 1984, shortly after her appointment as Chief Judge, Judge Dupont spoke about the fact that most Appellate Court decisions are unanimous. Explaining why, she stated: "It's because, I think, we all work very hard at collegiality, discussing among ourselves and trying to come to a common ground. We work very well together. We spend a lot of time talking to one another and finding cases for one another to read. It's not five people going off in different directions. It's five people trying to find common ground."

Judge Dupont's humility was not to be mistaken for timidity of any kind. During her tenure as Chief Judge, Judge Dupont successfully guided the court through its formative years. Her immeasurable influence on the Appellate Court continues. Under her leadership, the court accomplished its stated goal of reducing the backlog of pending appeals; in doing so, it issued well reasoned decisions, establishing a consistent and cohesive body of case law. The opinions authored by Judge Dupont reflect her strong intellect and her original and thoughtful writing style. She appreciated

the challenges faced by trial judges, and her opinions continue to provide clarity for both the bench and bar.

In *O'Neill v. O'Neill*, 13 Conn. App. 300 (1988), for example, a case holding that an equitable distribution of property should take into consideration the plaintiff wife's contributions to the marriage, including homemaking activities and primary caretaking responsibilities, Judge Dupont wrote that "[a] property division ought to accord value to those nonmonetary contributions of one spouse which enable the other spouse to devote substantial effort to paid employment which, in turn, enables the family to acquire tangible marital assets. The investment of human capital in homemaking has worth and should be evaluated in a property division incident to a dissolution of marriage."

In *State v. Thurman*, 10 Conn. App. 302 (1987), Judge Dupont addressed the importance of following judicial precedent, noting: "Our duty is to follow judicial precedent rather than to base a decision on our own view or the popular view of what the law ought to be. This decision directly affects only this defendant, but tomorrow's case, involving some other defendant, may depend upon the reasoning of this decision. Public confidence in the legislative will and in the precedent of the highest court of this state is least threatened when both are followed."

Judge Dupont led the court as it increased from its original five judges to six, and later to nine. She created many of the court's in-house traditions that continue to take place every year, including the swearing-in ceremony for new Appellate Court law clerks, the court's annual law clerk reunion dinner, the annual Supreme Court/Appellate Court softball game, and the court's year-end pizza party and name the poster contest.

As Chief Judge Alexandra D. DiPentima noted at the celebration marking the thirtieth anniversary of the Appellate Court, "these events keep us together year after year and provide new opportunities for the Appellate Court 'family' to continue the communication, support and understanding Judge Dupont wisely encouraged."

In 2007, Judge Dupont was interviewed as part of Women Trailblazers in the Law, a project of the American Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession. During that interview, she was asked how she would like to be remembered as Chief Judge of the Appellate Court. Judge Dupont replied: "As one who fostered collegiality and tried to have all the members of the court feel an important part of a common goal that is to deliver decisions. All of our decisions are published so that it would be one cohesive body of law for the lawyers in the state. It helps a lot if everybody gets along. One of the first things I asked was that everyone, when they came to court in the morning, kept their doors open and not closed, that we ate lunch together at least once a week, and that we saw each other as much as possible out of court as well as in. I would like to be remembered for that." She also indicated that she would like to be remembered for the passage of legislation that allowed former Supreme Court justices and Appellate Court judges to sit by designation on the Appellate Court to help with the backlog.

Speaking at Judge Dupont's memorial service, Chief Judge DiPentima said: "I remember Billie for championing women in leadership roles, including myself, for thoughtful, wise opinions, including the rare but right dissents, for her tenacious skill in preserving and enhancing the court through legislation that provided for judge trial referees to sit on Appellate Court cases, for increasing the number of Appellate Court

judges from five to nine, and for her ability to wear very high heels in very inclement weather—actually any weather.

"To the children and grandchildren whom Billie was so proud of, know that she continues to inspire and guide her other family—the Appellate Court."