

Remarks at Ann Nicholson Appreciation Event 10/31/13

Peter Lichtenberg

I first met and worked with Ann Nicholson in 2005, early into her term as the Chair of the Merrill Palmer Board of Visitors, when I co-chaired a committee on helping to determine future directions of the Merrill Palmer Institute. Because I was directing a similar type of research unit right next door, the Institute of Gerontology, I was asked to help lead this committee. Although Merrill Palmer officially became part of Wayne State University in 1981, for a variety of reasons it was never well integrated into the university. With the long-time Director's retirement in 1997 there were some years of turmoil for the Institute. Ann stepped right into that turmoil; joining the Merrill Palmer Board in 1998.

I have clear recollections of Ann's important work on the 2005 committee. She was insightful as to how Merrill Palmer would best integrate with Wayne State University. Ann understood all of the challenges for a research institute like Merrill Palmer to be integrated with the university as a whole, and she articulated several times that, despite the challenges, there was an important opportunity that existed to help young children, and families and the community surrounding Wayne State University. Her commitment to children was ever present and gave urgency to finding a path to improving the position of the Institute. Indeed that committee's work led to the resurgence of Merrill Palmer.

Fast forward to the early spring of 2008, and I was asked by Dr. Hilary Ratner, Vice President of Research, to become the interim director of what was now the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. Dr. Ratner had consulted with Ann who gave her support to my taking on the position. One of the first things I did was to have lunch with Ann who told me that she believed I knew my way around the university and that knowing how to integrate Merrill Palmer Skillman into the university was our greatest need.

Ann's support of our Institute and her leadership in the resurgence of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute was amazing. I found Ann to possess the traits of a great faculty member, and a great researcher. She is passionate about her subject, wants to know the details of how and why things did or did not work, wants to know what the impact of the work will be, and always has piercing, penetrating questions that improve the project. As we rebuilt Merrill Palmer Skillman, Ann was one of four members of the Board of Visitors who remained on the board; and she welcomed and mentored our new board members. Each and every faculty member and student who presented their research projects to the board has commented on how

affirming Ann was to them and to their work. I feel the exact same way. Ann has always been available to advise, to encourage, to enjoy the successes of what we have done, and to help us dust ourselves off after things did not go so well and get up and try again.

I hope that Ann is proud that from four faculty members in 2008, Merrill Palmer Skillman has now grown to 11. That this faculty is committed not only to research excellence, but to training the next generation of researchers, to reaching out to the community and translating ours and other's research, to providing an exceptional educational experience to young children in our Early Childhood Center, and then going farther to lead the way in enhancing the excellence of 17 preschool centers in the Woodward Consortium of Early Childhood Centers.

Ann . . . we thank you so very much, and we take such great pleasure in celebrating you and all you do for young children and their families. We look forward to your continued help as the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute aims to increase its impact on young children in the City of Detroit, the region, the State of Michigan, and the nation.