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Boston College Law School

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Judge Sheila McGovern, Class of 1960

11/20/02--Judge Sheila McGovern, Lynch School of Education and BC Law graduate, passed away on Tuesday, November 12. Judge McGovern, a much loved and respected First Justice of Middlesex Probate and Family Court in Cambridge, was known for her warmth and dedication shown to adopted children and families, and for her service to Boston College as Alumni Association President for the Law School, and later for the University.

"Sheila's death is a great loss to this community," said BC Law Dean John H. Garvey. "She was a wonderful person and tremendously talented judge. Her compassion and fairness for everyone who stood in her courtroom was inspiring to all who had the good fortune to have known her."

Born in Cambridge, Judge McGovern graduated from Boston College in 1957 and Boston College Law School in 1960, and was one of only three women in her graduating class. She was the first president of the BC Law Alumni Association in 1975, and served as the first female president of the Boston College Alumni Association from 1985-86. After graduating from BC Law, Judge McGovern served as a probate court clerk and assistant register of the court, before being appointed as a judge in 1974. She became first justice in 1980. Judge McGovern also served as president of the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers.

Judge McGovern was well known for her fair and reasonable considerations on every case that came before her court. She went to great lengths to make families feel at ease, using puppets to make children laugh and decorating her chambers with photos and drawings from the families she had helped during the adoption process.

For embracing the ideals of leadership, justice, and public service, Judge McGovern received the 1975 BC Alumni Association Award for Excellence in Public Service and the 1980 Judge of the Year Award from the Massachusetts Academy of Trial Attorneys. BC Law also honored her with the 1988 St. Thomas More Award. She had the additional distinction of being the third woman appointed to the probate court. Her portrait hangs in Stuart House on the Law School campus.

Judge McGovern leaves two brothers, Philip and Arthur; eleven nieces and nephews; and three grand nieces and nephews. A funeral mass was held on Saturday in St. Mary’s Church in Cambridge. Donations may be made in her memory to the McGovern Hurley Scholarship Fund, c/o BC High, 150 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester, MA 02125.