

During my first year of law school, I had a major personal crisis. I made an appointment to talk to Dean Wendy Archibald and waited on the bench outside of her office with tears streaming down my face. When she saw me, she silently hugged me and welcomed me into her office.

She listened to me grieve and took time to make sure I was able to express how I felt without reservation. We spent a lot of time talking about whether I should withdraw from classes to go home. She asked about my husband and even remembered details about my new puppy. That day in her office, I probably cried too loud, shed too many tears, and talked too much, but she made it easy to do so. She gave me permission to be weak, unorganized, and not one hundred percent me. Yet, she encouraged me and reiterated how much potential she saw in me. I remember walking out of her office feeling renewed and hopeful. She gave me the strength and courage that I needed to conquer the days ahead.

At her office door, I hugged her. In between my sobs, she said softly, "My heart is broken because your heart is." Those words stuck with me. That was compassion at its most needed and best. I skipped a class that day to talk to her, but that 90 minutes at her office was the best class I have attended. I still look back on that experience as a landmark moment for my life.

Dean Archibald reached out to me regularly to check in with me. In the last email she sent me, she asked if I was doing well and if she could do anything for me. I later found out she was already diagnosed with cancer when that last email was sent.

Dean Archibald's ferocious compassion has helped me to thrive. She lifted me up when I was in my darkest chapter. She inspired me to be vulnerable when I need to and to be resilient in face of challenges. She led without any need for recognition or reciprocation. Her warmth and generosity shone through every action and word, and I, along with other students, basked in it. She was a true leader. She inspired me to follow her example and be my best self. From her, I learned that I must actively seek to engage with others, find people to serve, and catch people in times that they need a lift. I have to look.

It only takes one true leader to change the direction of a person's life, and Dean Archibald was such a leader for me. She continues to be a source of light, energy, and love for me, and I hope to continue her legacy of leadership and hopeful healing.