It is very difficult to imagine NYU Law School without Jeannie. The Law School is a truly wonderful place and extraordinary people work here, but there’s nobody quite like Jeannie—and there never will be.

Jeannie joined the Law School in 1994, but I didn’t get to know her well until early 2002, when I was selected to be dean. At the Weinfeld Gala that year, I was amazed how Jeannie, then our Director of Alumni Relations, connected so wonderfully well with our alumni. A few weeks later—I had not formally become dean yet—I asked Jeannie to run our development office. I offered her a very significant promotion, but all she wanted to tell me was how she was unqualified for the position: she had never raised any money, she didn’t like to ask for money, she didn’t fit the profile of a successful fundraiser. Jeannie is usually very persuasive, but that was a rare instance when she wasn’t. Even so, all she agreed to do was to help me out for three months, making it clear that she might then say no. Thankfully, that didn’t happen and we worked extraordinarily closely for all 11 years of my deanship.

The beginning of our work together turned out to be perilous. Jeannie and I went to the ABA meeting for deans and development directors that takes place every two years, generally in Jackson Hole. On a hike in which we were planning how to launch our development strategy, we came face to face with a bear. Our strategy session was abruptly interrupted as we very quietly watched the bear eat some wild berries on the side of the trail and then walk away, obviously reluctant to interfere with NYU Law School’s ambitious development goals. Jeannie’s unflappable nature (and her Western upbringing) turned out to be very useful!

I learned so much from Jeannie. Early on, when I gave a talk about the Law School that I thought was pretty good, she told me that I sounded like an engineer, methodically making a technocratic case for why the Law School was worthy of support. She told me that people would support the Law School only if they established a deep connection with me personally.

Jeannie not only dispensed trenchant advice about human psychology but also did it in the most direct way possible, always making sure that a potentially painful message would come across clearly. She once told me that she would need to
humanize me. I asked her whether I had sounded inhuman. Her answer definitely wasn’t the resounding no I had hoped for!

Jeannie is the most out-of-the-box thinker with whom I’ve worked with closely. In 2010, after the end of the most successful law school campaign in history, which raised $415 million in seven-and-a-half years, Jeannie took over the supervision of all of our student-facing offices as Vice Dean. In her new role, she insisted that I not give the traditional dean’s orientation talk to our incoming students. Instead, she said, she and I would have a conversation. I think that it started with Jeannie asking me to tell the students about what I liked to cook for my kids. And then, she treated the incoming students and me to a screening of a toy car race, followed by her perceptive perspective comments on human nature. She definitely had humanized me, though I had the very distinct sense that Dean Vanderbilt was turning in his grave.

It is hard to imagine how anyone could accomplish as much as Jeannie. While she was running our extraordinarily successful development operation, she did something on the side: get a Ph.D. And while she was at it, she published a significant academic article based on her dissertation.

Jeannie’s fingerprints are all over the Law School: in the faculty members, programs, and buildings that were funded by the more than $550 million that were raised under her leadership; in our initiatives on emotional intelligence and the training we give students to succeed; in the experience of women; in the countless students, alumni, and faculty members who were changed in significant ways, as a result of their interactions with Jeannie.

In some ways, she leaves an enormous void. But, on the other hand, so many of us are better people and more effective professionals because we had the privilege of working with her. All that will persist. And NYU Law School is so much better as a result.

Jeannie, I will miss seeing you in the hallways. But I hope that we’ll continue to stay in close touch and that our friendship will continue to thrive. After all, I don’t have many friends who want to have ice cream before, not after, their pastrami sandwich.