

## Remembering Felicia Nekritz... 15 Years Overdue

Posted by Kati Byrne Spaniak, June 13, 2013 at 06:21 am

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Felicia Nekritz



The invention of the Internet and Facebook have shaped the way that we grieve for those that we have lost. But what about those who died before the days where we could share our thoughts and remembrances about them with the click of a button?

We grieved in silence and didn't know if other people remembered the person like we remembered them. We came upon birthdays and anniversaries of the person's death quietly and alone.

This is what it was like when one of my best friends succumbed to breast cancer in 1998. Felicia Beth Nekritz was a 26-year-old woman who grew up in Northbrook. She had her whole life ahead of her. She had just gotten married and had thrown herself into her [career](#) as an attorney.

When she died so suddenly, I was alone. For all of those that loved Felicia, our only way of communicating was by phone. And

if I didn't call them, or they didn't call me, we grieved alone.

**Now, 15 years later, we can finally grieve together.**

This week, we are honoring Felicia and her life with a fundraiser at Joy of the Game. The Felicia Beth Nekritz Foundation has raised over \$250,000 and supports organizations fighting breast cancer and promoting [juvenile justice](#). This fundraiser is being held in conjunction with the opening of the [Felicity School](#). This [school](#) was started by Felicia's brother, Mike Nekritz, and was named after Felicia. You can read more about the Felicity School [here](#).

**Please join us or contribute to this worthwhile fundraiser while enjoying a great time with hundreds of North Shore residents.**

After Felicia died, her mother, Sue Nekritz, forwarded me an article written by Northwestern Professor of Law, Steven Lubet about Felicia. I have posted it below... **while it didn't make the rounds on Facebook back then... I hope that it does now.**

### ***A Life Well Lived***

*Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics [Vol 13:575]  
by Steven Lubet*

*I learned everything I know about Felicia [Nekritz] Presser by reading her obituary which is [attached to this Patch article]. I distribute the obituary every year to the students in my Legal Ethics class, because it is the best lesson I can give them about... well, about themselves.*

*Though I seldom pay attention to [newspaper obituaries](#), on September 5, 1998, one particular notice caught my eye as I paged forward to the op-ed section. The headline was "Felicia Presser, Juvenile Defense Lawyer," and it was accompanied by a photograph of a very young woman. I forced myself to read it, knowing that it had to be a tragic story.*

*Felicia Nekritz Presser graduated from law school in the Spring of 1996, taking a job with the juvenile section of the Ohio Public Defender's office. In December of that year she married Jay Presser. She was diagnosed with breast cancer just a few weeks later, and in less than a year, she had passed away. Simply writing those facts still takes my breath away. When I read them to my students, virtually everyone gasps in horror and then the entire class falls silent.*

*The first lesson is that life is fleeting and fragile. No one can ever be completely safe from that one devastating test result or accident that can cut short all of your hopes and aspirations. No matter how secure and successful your life may seem, it can all end suddenly and without warning.*

*And in those awful situations when the good die young, family and friends are left to search for meaning and solace. That is the second lesson. Here is what Felicia Presser's loved ones said about her:*

*"She believed absolutely in [rehabilitation](#) as opposed to incarceration of criminals," said her husband. "She believed in the inherent goodness of all people, and it was that basic belief that drove her."*

*"It was her heart that just drove everything and drove everybody to her," said her mother.*

*Others added that she was passionate about defending the underdog. She worked on death penalty cases and she volunteered legal assistance to the homeless. The main thing that stood out was that "she really cared about [her] clients."*

*That is the third lesson. Faced with an almost unimaginable loss, Felicia [Nekritz] Presser's loved ones were able to find some measure of comfort in the fact that she had devoted her life to helping others. In what must have been the most sorrowful of times, they consoled each other by remembering the way that Felicia had lived, the good works she had done, the commitment that she valued.*

*As I explain each semester to my students, no one will ever look back upon the loss of wife or daughter and say, "What we remember most is that she billed 2200 hours every year." No one tempers the grief of a son's death by recalling that he always drove a new BMW, or that he wore a Rolex and went skiing in Aspen every year.*

*My point is not to embarrass my students about their materiality or to call them acquisitive. I have no standing to do that, considering my own comfortable life style. Anyhow, they would be justified in tuning me out if I ever tried to preach them out of their supposedly covetous ways. Rather, I hope to show the tremendous fulfillment, and ultimately the depth of meaning, that can come from using one's legal training to help others. It is not too hokey (or at least not way too hokey) to realize that when a career ends, as it does for everyone, the greatest satisfaction comes to those who have given the most. And this is true for legal careers that span the decades that we all hope for, or only a few short years.*

*There is astonishing pressure on contemporary law students to aspire to professional success in the most conventional terms: big firms, long hours, high salaries. None of those are bad in and of themselves, but conventional success can become self-defeating if it is allowed to crowd out the motivation to do good. Every attorney in every job can find some time for some sort of pro bono work, and it is that work that will stand out in the thoughts and memories of those who really care.*

*I commend to all of – lawyers, law students, and law teachers – Felicia [Nekritz] Presser's example of a life well lived.*

*Steven Lubet is the Williams Memorial Professor of Law. As Director of the Law School's award winning Bartlit Center on Trial Advocacy, he teaches courses on Legal Ethics, Trial Advocacy, and Narrative Structures. The author of fifteen books and over 100 articles on legal ethics, judicial ethics, and litigation, he has also published widely in the areas of legal history, international criminal law, dispute resolution, and legal education.*