

The Honorable Elizabeth L. Perris
2018 Recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the American College of
Bankruptcy

By Barbara J. Houser

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I am deeply honored to have been asked to present The American College of Bankruptcy's Distinguished Service Award to our fellow, The Honorable Elizabeth L. Perris, a distinguished retired bankruptcy judge from the District of Oregon. As many of you know, this award is presented annually for significant accomplishments in improving the administration of justice in the insolvency and bankruptcy field; for distinguished service consistently rendered; and to a recipient who has distinguished herself or himself in a manner consistent with the goals and purposes of the College. For those of you not as familiar with this award, consider it the equivalent of the College's "lifetime achievement award." Judge Perris' achievements over the course of her life are astonishing and she is richly deserving of this award. Tonight we honor her for her many and varied accomplishments.

I first met Judge Perris in December 1999 when attending what we federal judges affectionately refer to as "baby judge school." Liz was at my Phase 1 orientation program as a mentor judge; I was there as a judge-want-to-be. I didn't know Judge Perris from Adam, but it didn't take me long to realize that I "wanted

to be” just like her. When you are in the presence of greatness, you know it and you know that you should aspire to be half as good a judge as she.

Let’s talk about Liz “the judge” and why I aspired to be like her – both after first meeting her in 1999 and throughout our tenure together on the bankruptcy bench. During her 30-plus year tenure as a bankruptcy judge, Judge Perris:

presided over a number of significant cases, including one of the most contentious cases filed on account of clergy sexual abuse charges, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland chapter 11 case, along with the Society of Jesus, Oregon Province chapter 11 case;

served two non-consecutive terms on the Bankruptcy Appellate Panel for the Ninth Circuit, including serving as Chief Judge of the BAP from 2003-2005;

served as the only bankruptcy judge member of the board of directors of the Federal Judicial Center, following her appointment to the board by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;

served as Chief Bankruptcy Judge in the District of Oregon from 2005-2010;

served as a member of the Judicial Conference Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules from 2007-2013 following her appointment to the committee by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; and

served as faculty at countless educational programs around the country, including those sponsored by the Federal Judicial Center and including “baby judge school.”

Finally, if these accomplishments aren’t quite enough to make you believe she is one of the most distinguished jurists in the country, Judge Perris is an amazing mediator. As you know, judges can be asked to serve as mediators for their colleagues in their colleagues’ cases. Once again, Liz is the gold standard, as she:

mediated two chapter 11 cases filed on account of clergy sexual abuse charges, the cumulative effect of her experiences with these types of cases resulting in the development of a template for the resolution of other clergy sexual abuse bankruptcy cases around the United States;

mediated several complex financial and labor disputes in Chapter 9 cases including the City of Stockton, California, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, California; and, most recently,

mediated the City of Detroit chapter 9 case, where she helped bring about a resolution of complex financial disputes among the City of Detroit and its financial creditors.

Measured by distinguished tenure on the bench, measured by the cumulative importance of her judicial decisions, measured by her prominence in mediating the most complex and highly charged insolvency cases, and measured by the sheer force of her energy, intellect and good cheer over many decades, Elizabeth Perris is preeminent among United States Bankruptcy Judges of this generation.

Let's talk a little bit now about Liz, "the person." Liz was lucky enough to have had a long-time marriage to Beverly Schnabel, a wonderful woman that shared Liz's joy of family and friends. Sadly, Bev and Liz lost their battle with Bev's cancer last year, obviously a great loss for Liz and all those that knew and loved Bev. Liz, I know Bev is with us here tonight in our hearts, and that she is joyful about your receipt of this well-deserved award.

If you ask people to describe Liz, one of the things they will often say first is that she is

very humble, modest and self-effacing. People also describe her as incredibly decent, fair-minded and always wanting to do the right thing. The theme that occurs over and over in conversations about Liz is that she cares deeply about those with whom she works and comes into contact, and that she treats everyone with courtesy and respect. We can all hope that we are thought of in similar ways.

As I noted at the outset, I aspired to be like Judge Perris when I first met her; I still aspire to be like Judge Perris. You should too.

Ladies and gentlemen, with great joy and deep affection, I give you my friend and beloved colleague Elizabeth L. Perris, a wonderful human being and unquestionably one of the best bankruptcy judges in the history of our judicial system.