A mother’s bequest keeps her son’s name alive

When eminent Tasmanian lawyer John Kable QC died suddenly in 1995, his mother established a scholarship to honour his name and help others who wished to study the law.

Now the John Kable Memorial Tasmania University Scholarship in Law will continue in perpetuity, thanks to the generosity of Bess Kable, who passed away in May this year.

Ms Kable has dedicated her entire estate, approximately $600,000, to the University of Tasmania.

Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Mike Calford will accept the gift from the estate’s trustees in a ceremony today.

“The University of Tasmania is deeply grateful for this extraordinary act of generosity, which will continue to gift Tasmanians the opportunity to study a law degree, and extend the remarkable legacy of the Kable family into the future,” Professor Calford said.

Born in North-West Tasmania in 1923, Bess Kable came from a prominent farming family, marrying Lionel Kable and having a son, Herbert John Kable, born in 1953. Tragedy struck when she was widowed at a young age and she raised her son, John, alone.

John studied at Elizabeth High School and Elizabeth College before graduating from the University of Tasmania with a Bachelor of Laws in 1975. Following graduation, John became the associate to the Chief Justice of Tasmania, Sir Guy Green, and completed his articles with the Honourable Mr Justice Zeeman.

John practised as a barrister and solicitor in Launceston from 1977 until 1990 when he commenced practice as a barrister with chambers in both Hobart and Launceston.
He was involved in a number of important and successful criminal cases in the High Court and was held in high esteem by his peers and the courts, including the High Court of Australia.

In 1985 he served as a President of the Tasmanian Bar Association and later as a member of the Council of the Law Society.

Throughout his career as a lawyer, John maintained a very keen interest in the Faculty of Law at the University of Tasmania and generously sponsored his time to students and staff.

Referred to as ‘legendary’ by his peers, John acquired a truly national and international profile as a criminal lawyer, both in terms of practice and as a committed reformer, and was appointed Queen’s Counsel in 1994, before his sudden passing in 1995.

Despite her devastation, Ms Kable was determined to carry out his vision to establish a scholarship that would help young Tasmanians study law, dedicating his $200,000 estate towards its creation. For 15 years, Ms Kable served on the selection panel.

Since its inception the scholarship has helped 21 students study a Bachelor of Laws at the University.

It provides recipients with $4,000 per year for up to four years and is dedicated to supporting promising students educated within the state-school system (as John was), and provides preference to students from rural or regional areas.

Ms Kable was incredibly proud of the students that the scholarship supported, often attending their graduation ceremonies and keenly following their careers. Their friendship provided her with an ongoing source of joy.

One such student was 2017 recipient Kaitelin Campbell, who met Ms Kable earlier in the year at a scholarship presentation ceremony.

The scholarship enabled her to relocate to Hobart from Launceston to realise her dream of undertaking a law degree, which she will commence in 2018.

“I am very grateful to Bess for this incredible opportunity. To have a scholarship reduce your HECS debt is of huge benefit, and particularly to receive it in cash, which helped me with the costs associated with moving to Hobart.

“I’m very excited and looking forward to it – studying law was always my plan. My aspiration is to help disadvantaged women, especially women dealing with domestic violence who struggle to access the legal help they need.”

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