Professor Luz Estella Nagle, or Luchy as she is known to her friends, was born in Medellin, Colombia. After earning a law degree from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Luchy became a district judge in a hometown terrorized by drug lords. As a young judge, she frequently handled criminal drug trafficking cases. Locally, she was known as “La chicita, bonita, pero bravita,” which roughly translates into “pretty little woman who is brave and tough.”

As the drug lords’ influence grew, honest members of the Colombian judiciary either moved away, or risked physical harm. A judge who was one of Luchy’s friends was assassinated. The police offered Luchy protection. She declined because many police bodyguards were known to also work for drug kingpins. Instead, she accepted a police-issued gun. It wasn’t long before she was forced to use the weapon. In October 1985, a gunman entered her office. Instinctively, she dropped to the floor and fired her pistol, wounding her assailant. Only one month later, a motorcycle gunman pulled alongside her car and fired an automatic weapon. Fortunately, the young judge swerved her car, causing the assassin to miss his mark.

Concerned for her family’s safety, Luchy left Colombia and moved to California. Life in the “Golden State” was anything but golden. Unable to practice law, she supported herself by painting houses while earning a master’s degree at UCLA. She once quipped that all she had painted before were her fingernails. Her survival skills, honed in Colombia, would again be called into action in the United States. An automobile accident almost killed her. Discrimination and ridicule followed when she was learning English. She persevered, earning a J.D. degree from The College of William and Mary and clerking for the Virginia Supreme Court. Work as an attorney for the Microsoft Corporation followed.

In 1998, Luchy accepted a teaching position at Stetson University College of Law, focusing on international courses. In 2000, she received the Dean’s Award for service to Stetson. I am proud to say that the following year Luchy received Stetson’s Homer and Dolly Hand Award for Excellence in Faculty Scholarship. Luchy has won numerous writing awards and is frequently called upon by the national press for her perspective on international affairs.

Eighteen years after the two assassination attempts, Luchy testified as a defense witness in the trial of Colombian drug lord Fabio

“La chicita, bonita, pero bravita”
Ochoa. What can you say about a woman who faced bullets rather than compromise her integrity, and then offered to defend a drug kingpin who might have been among those who tried to kill her? UCLA School of Law Professor Michael Asimov once called her “spunky and tough.” That characterization is true, but does not go far enough. I would define my friend and colleague as “spunky and a tough lawyer’s lawyer.”

In the same spirit that American president and revolutionary hero John Adams defended the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre, Luchy testified for Ochoa because she believed he was entitled to a defense. She believed the American government’s actions in the Ochoa case violated not only a specific agreement, but also her sense of justice and fair play.

This award-winning professor speaks and writes English with profound proficiency and has authored numerous articles on the law. She has an equal command of Spanish and Portuguese. Luchy uses the same integrity, determination and “spunk” to teach Stetson law students that she has used to overcome personal obstacles. I am honored to call Professor “Luchy” Nagle a colleague and a friend.

A member of the Stetson faculty since 1985, John Cooper is professor of law and the interim director of graduate and international programs. He is the co-author of several books, including State Constitutional Law in a Nutshell, Florida Constitutional Law: Cases and Materials, and International Tax Guide: U.S. Income Taxation.