

REFLECTIONS ON JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINSBURG

I had the honor of meeting Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on two occasions- once in Washington D. C. and once in Chicago- at functions sponsored by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ). We were both members of NAWJ, which is an organization promoting gender equality in the courts, and at one time I was a board member. At a small reception in Chicago I was able to speak with Justice Ginsburg who was there with her granddaughter who is now a lawyer. When you see this diminutive in stature, woman it is such a visual contrast with the knowledge of her powerful intellect and immense contribution to the law. Justice Ginsburg wore gloves as she was shaking hands with attendees. Her voice was very soft, but she was always smiling. She expressed an interest in our courts and how the young women lawyers were faring. She had a dry wit and was the consummate gentle lady.

I was a generation behind Justice Ginsburg as I entered The University of Iowa College of Law in 1972 when women were just starting to enter law schools in larger numbers. My class was about 20 percent female whereas Justice Ginsburg's class in 1956 was only 2 percent female. At the law school, they did not know what to do with us. They had hastily converted a male restroom for the females but left the urinals. We insisted that we were there to stay, and the urinals needed to go. Law School was conducted using the Socratic Method where professors ask questions of students regarding the case studies. In our class, the women were singled out for embarrassment and particularly called on when a case dealt with sexual assault. I can only imagine the issues faced by Justice Ginsburg.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Justice Ginsburg was already a rock star to women lawyers. She was arguing cases before the U.S. Supreme Court which was rare for women. She was pursuing a strategy of carefully selected cases to promote gender equality. The strategy was working! In cases such as *Frontiero v. Richardson*, she prevailed in her argument that it was an unconstitutional denial of equal protection to deny a housing allowance to a female in the Air Force because of her sex. In *Weinberger v. Weisenfeld*, she carefully selected a male plaintiff who was denied social security benefits after the death of his wife. Case by case, she educated the all male Supreme Court about gender discrimination.

Justice Ginsburg had difficulty finding a job after she graduated from law school despite her stellar resume. I too had that same experience in 1975. Only two women were in private practice in Cedar Rapids, Iowa when I was looking for work. Reasons for not hiring me included: "Our partner's daughter will be graduating from law school in a few years and we will need to hire her" and "Our attorneys need to travel and their wives would not like them traveling with a female lawyer."

Justice Ginsburg was a role model for our personal lives as well. She managed a happy marriage and children. She cared for her young daughter while in law school in addition to caring for her husband during his cancer treatments.

When Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed in 1981 as the first woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court we were thrilled. Women were encouraged by her appointment to apply to be judges. I was inspired to give it a try. In 1992, I was appointed to serve as the first women District Court Judge in Polk County, Iowa and in the 15 counties of the Fifth Judicial District. This position was very tough at times as some members of the judiciary, some lawyers and litigants did not want women in the judiciary. When Justice Ginsburg was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993 it was such a victory

as we knew she would be another strong voice for gender equity. We were no longer a token of just one, but we had two women on the highest court. Over the years, Justice Ginsburg's majority opinions and her dissents were infused with integrity and hope for what our laws and our country should be for all. Her decisions on DACA, health insurance, racial discrimination, same sex marriage, women's reproductive rights, equal pay and more have impacted every facet of our lives. She embraced her well-deserved rock star status as," The Notorious R.B.G. "

It is hard to put into words how grateful I am for Justice Ginsburg. She remained focused and worked tirelessly for her belief in justice for all. Along the way there were many personal sacrifices she made to excel in her legal work. During her career she was collegial and able to communicate with Justices who did not share her views on the law as evidenced by her friendship with Justice Antonin Scalia.

We have come a long way over the last 50-some years, but we have much more work to do. Thank you, Justice Ginsburg. You have inspired many other lawyers and judges who will continue to champion your work to tirelessly promote not only gender equity but equal justice for all.

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September 19, 2020