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Ruth Bader Ginsburg

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Ruth Bader Ginsberg, 2016

IN MEMORIAM: RUTH BADER GINSBERG

By Morgan Proffitt

Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Even the name itself is powerful.

Though her stature was small (barely 5 feet tall), the “notorious RBG” (as she was called by her fans) had a presence that was anything but. She was born in 1933.

As a young Jewish woman from Brooklyn, Justice Ginsburg excelled in her studies with the help and support from her mother, an incredibly strong influence in her life. The day before her high school graduation however, Ginsburg’s mother passed away, marking one of the first of many adversities Ginsburg would be asked to overcome in the course of her long life. After graduating at the top of her class at Cornell University in 1954, Ginsburg married the man who would be her lifelong partner, Martin, and started a family. Both she and Martin enrolled at Harvard Law School in 1956, where Ginsburg was one of nine women in a class of 500 people.

During this first year of law school, her husband was diagnosed with cancer, and Ginsburg took on the task of maintaining her own studies plus her husband Martin’s. Despite overt discrimination from the administration at Harvard Law, Ginsburg excelled, eventually serving as the first female member of the Harvard Law Review. With Martin’s recovery came his graduation and a job in New York City, where Ginsburg transferred to and graduated from Columbia Law (tied for top of her class, of course) in 1959.

Despite this academic success, Ginsburg struggled to find a job due to gender based discrimination in the legal world. Eventually, after being unable to secure a job with equal pay to her male counterparts, Ginsburg pursued research in civil procedure before accepting a professorship, first at Rutgers University (1963-1972) and then later at

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Columbia University (1972-1980). In 1972, Ginsburg founded the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, a project that "through litigation, community outreach, advocacy and public education... empowers poor women, women of color and immigrant women who have been subject to gender bias and who face pervasive barriers to equality."¹ Ginsburg went on to argue numerous cases devoted to ending gender discrimination, including 6 before the US Supreme Court (*Duren v. Missouri*, *Califano v. Goldfarb*, *Edwards v. Healy*, *Weinberger v. Weisenfeld*, *Kahn v. Shevin*, and *Frontiero v. Richardson*).²

In 1980, Jimmy Carter nominated her to the District of Columbia's US Court of Appeals, which she served on until her nomination in 1993 to the US Supreme Court by Bill Clinton. Ginsburg's style on the bench was one of slow, steady, calculated advocacy - she believed the power to change laws and society remained with Congress, with the courts as a guiding voice. However, this does not mean that Ginsburg was shy in expressing her opinion - known in her later years primarily for her dissenting opinions, Ginsburg was, in my opinion, the example of how to remain a part of a fellowship even if you often disagreed with it.

As a woman entering into the world of theology and ministry, I too often find myself on the outside of discussions, no chair left for me at the table. Ruth Bader Ginsburg serves as an example to me for her

¹ "FAQs: The ACLU Women's Rights Project and Women's History Month." *American Civil Liberties Union*. Accessed February 26, 2021. <https://www.aclu.org/other/faqs-aclu-womens-rights-project-and-womens-history-month>.

² Christensen, Andrew. "Washington and Lee University LibGuides: Ruth Bader Ginsburg: A Reading List: Arguments before the Supreme Court." Accessed February 26, 2021. <https://libguides.wlu.edu/law/RBG/arguments>.

In Memoriam

perseverance in the midst of rejection, for her passion no matter the cold shower thrown on her, and her vision of the future that she never forgot.

When asked how she would like to be remembered, Ginsburg replied, “Someone who used whatever talent she had to do her work to the very best of her ability. And to help repair tears in her society, to make things a little better through the use of whatever ability she has. To do something... outside myself.” In the aftermath of her death in September 2020, women around the world grieved the loss of a life so well lived that it changed the course for millions after her. While her seat on the bench is now filled, the legacy she left behind is not one of medals or honors, but of a culture that is better because she was in it.