

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg
March 15, 1933-September 18, 2020

The Southwest Women's Law Center would like to recognize the passing of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, on September 18, 2020 at the age of 87. Justice Ginsburg was a tireless crusader for gender-based equal rights and a reproductive rights supporter, often through powerful dissents.

A staunch supporter and warrior for gender-based equal rights while working on both sides of the bench, Justice Ginsburg herself faced numerous instances of gender-based discrimination throughout her life, which through perseverance and tenacity she turned to triumphs and firsts. No matter what obstacle was placed before her, she overcame it, whether professional or personal. A lesson for us all, especially during these troubling times.

During her first year at Harvard Law School, she was grilled by the dean about why she thought she had the right to take a place away from a male student. She refused to allow that attitude to deter her from success, becoming the first woman to make the Harvard Law Review. After finishing her second year at Harvard, she transferred to Columbia University Law School to complete her final year (her husband, Marty, had taken a position with a law firm in New York) where she also made law review *and* graduated at the top of her class.

After graduation, she experienced significant obstacles in finding fulfilling work, from fewer options and lower pay than her would be male colleagues, to outright discrimination based on her gender, her status as a mother and being Jewish. Her early career included clerking for a U.S. District Court judge for two years, then working on a project studying international civil procedure (specifically Swedish civil procedure) and then teaching, first at Rutgers University Law School and then at Columbia Law School, where she became the first woman faculty member to earn tenure. During her time teaching at Columbia, she became the director of the Women's Rights Project for the American Civil Liberties Union, where she argued several important sex discrimination cases in front of the Supreme Court of the United States. She was appointed to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia by President Jimmy Carter in 1980 and then onto the Supreme Court in 1993 by President Bill Clinton, where she served until her death on September 18, 2020.

In addition to the obstacles she experienced professionally, Justice Ginsburg had experienced her share of personal struggles, particularly with her health. Justice Ginsburg suffered numerous bouts of cancer throughout her life, all of which she overcame, until losing her final bout with pancreatic cancer. Notwithstanding these numerous health issues, she rarely let them interfere with her work on the Court. In January of 2019, she missed oral arguments for the very first time since taking the bench in 1993 and this because she was recovering from surgery to treat lung cancer. She was still able to participate and vote in the matter as she was able to read the transcript of the oral argument.

In the last decades of her life, she became a cultural icon of sorts, having been given the moniker "Notorious RBG", a riff on rapper "Notorious B.I.G". She seemed to enjoy this new notoriety,

although appeared somewhat perplexed by it as well. There are any number of t-shirt designs and knick knacks featuring Justice Ginsburg, documentaries made about her life, her name is featured in hundreds of songs and children dress up in her likeness for Halloween. Her public appearances were an event, with people waiting in line to see her speak.

Perhaps it was her small stature, her righteous dissents, the fact that she tried so hard to keep going until it was safe to let go, or the simple fact that she had personally experienced many of the scenarios which had come before her as a jurist, which is typically not the case with the predominantly white male jurists that populate the courts of this nation. She is undoubtedly the only Supreme Court justice who can be identified by a majority of Americans and the rent left in the fabric of society by her passing cannot be mended.

One last thing. In the days since Justice Ginsburg's death, which fell on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, there has been telling of a Jewish tradition where one who dies on Rosh Hashanah is a Tzadik (also spelled Tzaddik), a person of great righteousness. How perfect. We cannot let her down. We must keep moving forward in her honor.

The Southwest Women's Law Center sends its deepest condolences to the family of Justice Ginsburg, her Court family, friends, and all those across the United States who loved her.