

PUBLICATION

Perseverance: Justice Ginsburg's Journey Through Adversity

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The name evokes a myriad of feelings in just about everyone, but especially in girls and women, spanning the generations from the very young to those in their twilight years. For me, Justice Ginsburg's name will forever be synonymous with focus, resilience, grit, defiance, selflessness, and, of course, steadfast perseverance.

Reflecting on Justice Ginsburg's life and legacy, I immediately envision her journey *through* adversity as a pioneer with a quiet strength coupled with the determination of a wrecking ball and as a meticulous architect with vision and patience.

I visualize her as the high school senior suffering the devastating loss of her mother to cancer the day before her high school graduation and yet still matriculating to Cornell later in the fall where her undergraduate performance over the next four years was nothing short of sterling. I think of her joining her husband, Martin Ginsburg, at Harvard Law School in 1956 and about how she must have felt as one of only nine women in a class of 500 students. The sex discrimination that she endured was overt and pervasive, shaping her sensibilities, but she excelled academically earning her place as an editor on the *Harvard Law Review*, even while caring for her baby daughter and ultimately for a sick husband when he was diagnosed with testicular cancer. After transferring to Columbia Law School and graduating at the top of her class in 1959, she continued, despite her proven record, to experience sex discrimination in her search for employment.

In the 1970s, Justice Ginsburg led the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Women's Rights Project from the year of its inception in 1972 until she was appointed to the federal bench eight years later. Justice Ginsburg led the ACLU in groundbreaking legal battles – a number of them playing out before the United States Supreme Court – that became foundational bricks for current legal bans on sex discrimination. She was determined that neither men nor women should be limited by gender stereotypes. While her own experiences of discrimination no doubt guided her path, she has said that she chose the ACLU because she "wanted to be a part of a general human rights agenda...Civil liberties are an essential part of the overall human rights concern – the equality of all people to be free."

Justice Ginsburg's perseverance is a reminder that with strength of mind and strength of purpose, all is possible. Justice Ginsburg is a reminder that our lives are not for us alone, but at our best, we can have broad impact for humanity and for coming generations.

I also think of Justice Ginsburg's perspective on daily life and the usual rigors of each day. Of her early balance between academic work and motherhood, for example, she said, "Jane was 14 months old when I started law school. There was a break in my day, so I worked very hard until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, then I came home, and it was Jane's time. So, I would play with this little child and then by the time Jane went to bed, earlier than most children, then I was happy to go back to work...Each part of my life was a respite from the other."

When we are tired, and that is often, we think of Justice Ginsburg. She is our inspiration to persevere and to embrace each part of our lives.