

A Life in Human Rights

Patricia Gatling lives a life of service, whether in her New York City human rights position or her international training.

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

This year's recipient of the UMLaw Benjamin Cardin Public Service Award has already received a slate of awards, settled into her dream job, and met the three people in the world who have influenced her most. "I became a lawyer because of Barbara Jordan; Thurgood Marshall swore me in to be licensed to appear before the U.S. Supreme Court; and I met Bishop Desmond Tutu at the home of the mayor. The three most influential people in my life, and I have met them all," says Patricia L. Gatling ('82). "How cool is that?"

Public service is a way of life for this accomplished human-rights lawyer. As commissioner and chair of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, Gatling works for Mayor Bloomberg and the community at large, enforcing human-rights laws and combating discrimination in New York City (even serving on the commission to rewrite the city charter). She cites as her main charge to "balance the rights of immigrants and religious groups versus the post-9/11 mentality of people directly affected by acts of terrorism."

Gatling is also a senior trainer with the State Department's John Jay College of

into the diplomatic corps. Her father was in the military, so the family traveled and lived overseas when she was growing up. She learned German as a teenager when the family lived in that country. She spent her sophomore year of college (her Johns Hopkins BA was in International Studies) in Paris studying "French, Italian, a little Chinese, even Arabic," and living with students from all around the world. "You never know why you're exposed to some things that become clear later in life."

Deciding she could do more for other people through the law, Gatling went on to earn her JD from UMLaw before joining the Kings County (NY) District Attorney's Office. She rose to the position of First Assistant District Attorney in charge of the Major Narcotics Investigations Bureau, the Community Relations Bureau, legal hiring, inter-agency training, and governmental affairs. Gatling also implemented and directed a groundbreaking initiative, "Com-Alert," which brought together the DA's office, probation, and parole, as well as other agencies, to assist those returning from prison; it has become a national model. As president of the National Black Prosecutors Association, Gatling advocated



Maryland even more. It was one of the few schools at the time with [community] law clinics, and there were so many people of color there. The professors had so many different interests. There was a sense one could become a real community lawyer."

Receiving the public-service award means a great deal to Gatling. "I'm tremendously honored, and my parents are just delighted," she says. "I've always respected and admired Ben Cardin. He has dedicated his life to public service and to a good and inclusive government." She has followed his example by dedicating much of her professional life to making a "level playing field" with opportunity for everyone.

Gatling's commitment to public service also comes from her roots, having lived through the civil rights movement and seeing firsthand how an individual can make a difference for entire communities. "As human beings, we are inextricably bound together," she says. "As Elie Wiesel said, Our lives are not just for us. What better way to live than to serve?"

Freelance writer Ruth Thaler-Carter spent thirteen years in Baltimore; she now lives in upstate New York.

"The great thing about Maryland was that it was a very open environment."

Criminal Justice, teaching "Human Dignity and the Law" in newly emerging democratic countries, such as Botswana and Thailand. She also trains law-enforcement officers around the world on human rights and democratic policing. No stranger to the media (she's appeared on "Oprah" and in numerous documentaries), Gatling speaks frequently to the public about civil rights, the "formerly incarcerated," and expanding job opportunities and other social services.

Gatling's original plan had been to go

on behalf of her African-American colleagues to overcome the daily prejudices they faced.

Gatling has great affection and respect for her UMLaw education. "The great thing about Maryland was that it was a very open environment," she says. "I was accepted at about ten law schools, and I chose Maryland partly because it was affordable."

Also, she adds, "I could take the perspective of thinking out of the box that I developed at Hopkins, and apply it at