

Tribute to Jana B. Singer

Karen H. Rothenberg

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TRIBUTE TO JANA B. SINGER

KAREN H. ROTHENBERG*

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my personal thoughts about one of my best friends and colleagues, Jana Singer. Bear with me for memories do fade over all the years but some stay with you forever.

I first met Jana when she was being recruited to join our faculty in late 1984. I was so excited to have another woman join the faculty. It was a lonely place for young women on our faculty back then—when I joined the faculty on July 1, 1983, you could count us on one hand. From the beginning, I could tell Jana and I would be soulmates, and I was anxious to get to know her better, even before she arrived at our law school on July 1, 1985. After she was hired, we loved to meet and chat about her upcoming wedding to Vince Prada and her preparation for her first semester of teaching. That spring she joined my family at our Passover seder and, for many years, we shared seders and so many happy occasions together with our growing families—baby namings, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, and baby showers.

Jana and I also supported each other as we commuted to and from Bethesda together many nights each week—often calling our husbands to tell them we were in bad traffic or we had to stop for gas (sometimes true) and would be home late (my husband Jeff and Jana’s husband Vince were never late for anything)! During these long drives we had time to compare notes on childrearing and the challenges of work-family balance. We both were not very good at the balancing act.

But just as importantly, the long drives gave us the time to develop professionally. Often, we would debate complex issues at the intersection of family and health care law: How should we determine the right balance between parental rights and the best interests of the child? What impact would genetic testing have on the privacy of familial blood relatives? What duties did family members have to share test results? What role should the courts have in forcing blood transfusions or cancer treatments on children over the objections of parents? The issues discussed and debated went on and on as we witnessed so much change in the composition of the family and societal attitudes.

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* Marjorie Cook Professor of Law & Former Dean, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

We also were brainstorming together on new teaching techniques to improve our teaching. We both tried with enthusiasm to integrate the use of narratives, films, and plays to bring the class alive and to put legal rules in the context of society. And personally and professionally, we were questioning the impact of gender on our scholarship, teaching, and roles on the faculty. In the early years, it was hard to know when to speak up when, for example, I overheard jokes about female students or sexist comments in the faculty lounge. As more women faculty were hired, the environment began to change, and we found our voices. I have no doubt that my teaching and scholarship were so much better because I was able to benefit from Jana's brilliance and wisdom. I was forced to defend my positions. Jana is such a kind person, but she has a keen intellect and can push her ideas in convincing ways. She can kill you with kindness, and this technique did not only work in scholarly debate but also as a top administrator.

I am so grateful I inherited Jana and Diane Hoffmann, another great friend and colleague, as Associate Deans when I was asked to act as interim Dean in the summer of 1999. They had been on the job just a few weeks when I joined them. This was the first time in the law school's history that women served as both Associate Deans and Dean. We worked so hard to earn the respect of the faculty, staff, and students. This was a true test of our friendships! I was appointed Dean the following year and after another year, Jana decided that she wanted to return to her teaching and scholarship full time. I was sad to lose her, but I was happy that she would be able to devote all her talent to students and the academic and legal communities.

A few years later, Jana and I shared some very sad times as well. When Vince died suddenly in an auto accident, Jana called me to meet with the rabbi at her home and to be with her and her children, Michael and Josh. The outpouring of love and expressions of sympathy meant the world to her, and we joined together as a law school community at the funeral, at her home that week, and for many months after.

And then many years later, we came together to rejoice with Jana and her new love Larry—who, among so many other loving gestures, inspired Jana to learn how to play golf! It was so much fun going with Jana to pick her wedding gown—a great shade of rose—Jana was glowing. These are such happy memories.

Jana starts a new chapter in life—filled with grandchildren, golf, and good deeds. I have no doubt she will continue her strong bonds of collegiality with us. Thank you, Jana, for our continuing deep friendship and for everything that you have done to make our law school community and our society a better place!