

## A JUSTICE AND A FRIEND

*Stephen G. Breyer\**

Shortly after I learned of Ruth’s passing, I thought: *A great Justice, a woman of valor, a rock of righteousness, and my good, good friend.*

Ruth will be remembered as a brilliant judge, and a great jurist who did much for women (indeed for everyone) both before and after she became a Justice. Ruth was intelligent, logical, and hardworking. Her opinions reflect her principles. When I wanted to know what she was thinking—and I always wanted to know what she was thinking—I would read her memos and her drafts. Her analysis of a case would be clear, true to the record, and true to the parties’ arguments. She would explain the law succinctly, but without omitting necessary detail. As a Justice, her opinions reflected her basic decency. She understood the basic indecency of discrimination and unfair treatment. She correctly assumed that the law seeks to help people live better lives.

Ruth was a woman who made the world a better place for us to live in, in ways both big and small. She paid attention to all the details. That included her clothes. She dressed well. She loved the ruffs she wore with her robes on the bench. She paid attention to the details of human relations. A few weeks before she died, she sent my newly born grandchild a t-shirt with the words, “Future RBG Law Clerk.” Her note said: “This is too large for you. It’s going to have to be for Ryan” (his older half-brother) “until you get big enough to fill it.” She was a thoughtful person.

Ruth understood that not every silence needs to be filled. She would think before she spoke, even on social occasions. But she did have a good sense of humor. Over the years, I might go into her office to tell her something I had found funny, and say, “Ruth, what do you think of this?” And she would find it funny. We would chat about it—as long as I did not stay too long. If I stayed too long, she would stand up from behind her desk. I knew exactly what that meant: She wanted to get back to work, and that’s what she did.

Ruth was a rock. When I came back to D.C. for her service and went into my office, I found a card she had sent on my birthday a few weeks prior. The card had a picture of her, and it said, “I order you to have a happy birthday. To my *younger* colleague, stay cool and well.” And she underlined younger, which she always thought was terribly funny—and I liked it too! She wrote, “We’ll get together when this epidemic is over, and see an opera, and life will go on.” Even now, thinking about that cheers me up.

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\* Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Portions of this tribute first appeared in Stephen Breyer, M. Margaret McKeown & Robert Katzmann, In Memoriam: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, *Judicature*, Fall/Winter 2020–2021, at 84, 85.

What was it like to work with Ruth? Interesting. Challenging. Educational. The longer you knew her the more you liked her. And I did know her many years. And I did like her very much.

I shall miss Ruth very much indeed.