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Tribute to Barbara Salken

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Tributes

Remarks of Michael B. Mushlin, Presiding at the Memorial Service Celebrating the Life of Professor Barbara C. Salken

November 21, 1996

Today in the presence of her family this community gathers to celebrate the life of Professor Barbara Salken. For thirteen years she graced these halls with high intelligence, beauty, boundless energy, infectious laughter, common sense, generosity, unadulterated honesty, . . . and for the last months of her life with profound bravery and fortitude. She did this with absolute dedication to us and with a love for us which is startling in its sincerity and its simplicity. In the process she transformed countless lives. Many of those persons are here today; many of you are involved in the administration of justice, a cause for which Professor Salken worked passionately. You perform that arduous critical task far better and with more skill and compassion because of the influence of Professor Salken. You are the legacy of her life.

Barbara was a master teacher and a superb scholar. She was my friend and my colleague. From my first day here, barely a year after she first arrived, until this October 17th my career here was shaped and strengthened by Barbara. We both came from a background in public interest law. (Indeed, we had worked for the Legal Aid Society in the same building some twenty years ago, albeit in different offices.) We both faced the prospect of learning how to become competent teachers and scholars; we both thought it would be nice to achieve tenure here. We reviewed what each other wrote. We learned evidence law together and team taught it once in name. In truth, I

will always in a sense teach the class with her because her influence on me is so intense. There wasn't a day that I didn't speak to Barbara often to argue points of law with her to the point of fatigue.

Typical of Barbara was the following exchange which happened in more or less this fashion more times than I can count. It would begin with a simple inquiry about a point of evidence law that troubled her: say the Former Testimony Exception to the Hearsay Rule. "I'm having trouble understanding it," she would say. I would invariably respond, "That's easy, I figured that out a long time ago. Here's how it works." She would sit down at my desk taking the stance of an eager student at the foot of her favorite professor. We would then chat. By the time our chat got very far it was apparent to me, from her questions and my responses, that I had no idea what I was talking about and that the topic was a lot more complex and nuanced than I had imagined. (Although she didn't suggest anything of the sort.) In time, the talk would end, I would have come to a new understanding of the law, and Barbara would leave never once indicating that she had taught me so much. Instead, with a characteristic turn of her head she would nod and thank me for my terrific help.

Every day we walked together to lunch. She was, and remains, a part of my life. I know what I say is true for me is equally true for many others who looked to her for support and for strength, and who benefitted from exposure to her brilliant mind. I have never known anyone who had as many people who considered her their best friend as she. What she gave me she gave to many others. My gratitude to her for her friendship is more than I can ever truly express. The irony is that she saw it exactly the other way. I learned this most fully when, in my last conversation with her, she looked at me from her hospital bed and said with a smile and a tone of satisfaction: "I have such good friends here."

Today we will hear from a representative group drawn from alumni, students, faculty and friends who will speak to us about their relationship with Barbara. Many, many more could have spoken and would have wished to. But to keep the event from lasting too long we have shortened the list drastically. The words each speaks are, of course, each person's own. But in

speaking to us they will also speak for us, and through their personal recollections give meaning to the collective emotions that draw us to this place today.

Eleanor Roosevelt said that to find true universal rights, start in the small places where people live and work. In this small place, in this brief time, we had in our midst a person who exemplifies what Eleanor Roosevelt meant. We are fortunate that Barbara Salken chose this place. Here she gave freely of herself, here she reached her prime, here we were the beneficiaries of her enormous talent. With this richness bestowed—even if for too brief a time—how can we not celebrate the life of Barbara Salken?