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## Reminiscence

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## Reminiscence

### Patty Rauch

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It's hard to believe that twenty-five years have gone by. Brandon, my nephew, was only three years old then. I was in law school and he didn't see me often enough to be sure that I was his Aunt Patty. Now, here he is graduating, crossing the stage and receiving his law diploma. His father and mother never would have predicted that Brandon would have entered law school. And I could never have predicted what radical yet overdue changes would occur between our two stints in law school.

Was it really that long ago that I crossed the dais joined by two women classmates holding newborn babies in their arms? To see them filled me with happiness and pride for all the women who for three years were women, mothers, wives and students. It also saddened and angered me. As these two women reached for their diplomas, the President of the University greeted them with a warm and seemingly understanding smile. But neither he nor most of the other men present that day really understood what it had been like for women to work their way through the still largely male-like institution during pregnancy and the first two years of the lives of their babies. So few people really understood. Certainly none of the young fathers had babies in their arms.

Brandon is walking off the stage now. There are lots of babies in the audience and not just with their mothers. I can see at least a handful of babies playing with the robes of their new lawyer-fathers. It's hard to believe that so much has changed since 1985. I began to think about it last evening as the family gathered to celebrate with Brandon.

I remember the initial reactions to my announcement of plans to study law. One good friend appeared delighted, though he immediately and candidly replied that he'd divorce his wife should she return to school. They had children just as we, but he couldn't imagine who would care for them if his wife were at school. I heard this same story

all too frequently. Women were at law school, but a wife was there only with her husband's grudging acceptance and expectation that she would plan her school schedule to fit with the needs of "her" family. There was Jackie who spent every free moment in the law library because her husband insisted that she not study at home at all. She would leave campus quickly after her last class, pick up her son, return home, and become "mom" and "wife". Once in a while Jackie's husband would pick up their son, if it weren't "inconvenient" for him. It made me angry that she so willingly accommodated her husband's demands as the price for pursuing an important goal in her life. This entire picture was such a contrast to the stories my husband told about his law school days. He was single and, though he worked hard at school, he and his male friends who had children made time for law review, lunch-time basketball and afternoon frisbee games. Jackie couldn't. I couldn't. We had children to be concerned with.

Child care arrangements were to be the woman's exclusive responsibility, too. She would have to take the long hours necessary to find a suitable day care center or babysitter. Our university day care center was better than many, especially because we had the good fortune to get a slot for our two kids and because the teachers were wonderful. But it only accommodated twenty pre-school age children, if toilet trained, was only open during the day, and enjoyed little financial or moral support from the University administration. It was hardly adequate for a University population numbering over ten thousand, including many single parents and many who attended or taught classes at night.

I discovered the center by talking with other students. The law school catalogue didn't bother to mention it. And only Rachel could attend at first because Stephanie wasn't yet toilet trained. So I had to look elsewhere. The best I could find was a nearby day care factory. It was clean. It was safe. It was licensed. But that wasn't enough. For the mothers knew, from the times we put down our law books to glance at books on child care and child development, that children needed not only safe but also special places with lots of love and attention and caring adults. Yet Stephanie, age two, often stood forlornly alone in a huge play yard, overwhelmed by the noise and commotion of fifty children she had never seen before. And after play time she would follow the other troops inside where twenty-year-old girls, not mothers themselves, would insist that the kids simply sit at a table to draw or complete a worksheet morning after morning. And every other month there were new teachers. Salaries were low. Benefits were meager or non-

existent.

Those images haunted me at law school. I didn't want simply to drop Stephanie somewhere. I and other mothers with me wanted for our children the love and attention and caring that we could give them only part of the time if we were also to pursue other goals. So I pressured Stephanie to learn to use the toilet. With some exaggeration about her success I got her into the university day care center with her sister, but I squirmed for six months wondering and worrying each day about her having too many "accidents" to be able to stay. I was lucky that she really learned how to use the toilet just as the teachers' patience was nearing an end.

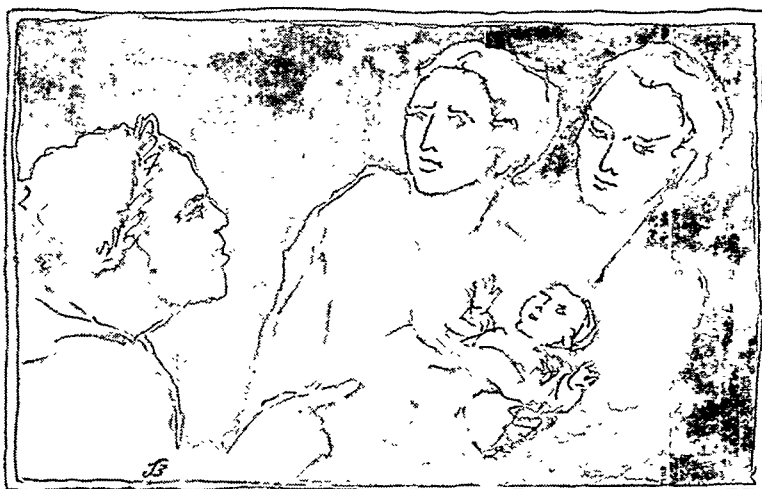
I was lucky, too, that it was a good day care center and reasonably affordable. Most of us paid \$200 to \$300 a month per child for our day care. With tuition for part-time students running over \$4,000 a year, it was also a strain to meet the day care costs. At least we had one full-time income. Some of my friends were divorced and had little income, if any. Their resources, primarily from student loans, were often stretched beyond limits by their day care expenses. All too often mothers were forced to choose between studying and keeping their child home for a day in order to save a few dollars. Few people sympathized with the anguish of that choice, yet most students sympathized with those who needed to sacrifice study time to a "real job," a job in a law firm, to make ends meet.

Many times I thought about how much easier it would have been had both my daughters been school-aged. Then I could simply take day classes, pick them up at 3:00 P.M., and study evenings. I soon discovered that mothers with school-aged children had problems, too. Often times important classes and meetings occurred in the late afternoon when the children's school was "out". And what arrangements could be made when there was a school holiday for the child but none for mom? And a sick child automatically meant that mother would miss classes because dad "had" to be at his office while mother was only a student. She could afford to alter her daily schedule. He couldn't.

There were other battles for us to face, too. Many of the young men in class thought "mommies" strange entities. One young man constantly teased me about how I carried my books. "You look like you're carrying a baby. Having kids sure has given you lots of experience lugging things around. One problem, though. You take all those cases we read much too seriously. Guess it's that maternal desire to protect the poor plaintiff or defendant." Such comments often hurt and confused me. I believed that being an intelligent woman and a mother allowed

me to bring some very special qualities to the classroom. I soon discovered that motherhood made me something less, not something more.

Others couldn't believe that the moms in class could be so prepared, even have ideas to contribute. "Don't you have to spend your time changing diapers and reading fairy tales?" was the popular and insensitive refrain. The guilt this aroused robbed me of some of the pleasure of doing well. It aroused anger, too. These students assumed that, once home, it was my role to minister to my children. I pitied the young women who would marry these young men and find themselves expected to be "only a mother." It just didn't occur to these young men that my husband desired and enjoyed bathing and feeding and reading to our girls while I read Contracts. Even on those evenings when neither of us felt like handling these child-chores, my husband didn't look to me as the sole caretaker. We both felt that these girls were *our* daughters, and sometimes we simply negotiated who was to care for them.



Difficulties for student/parents

I had known for many years that being a woman didn't limit my abilities or my desire to achieve. In fact, being a mother broadened my world view and enhanced my potential contribution to law. Motherhood — caring for little people — gave me a new sensitivity to the needs of all people. When I read a case I could appreciate that it was about people and conflict, not just about legal theory. But once pregnant and a mother, I was often relegated by some men to the position of a fragile, even child-like person who neither wanted nor was able to do more

than warm baby food or chauffeur little ones to kindergym classes. Motherhood supposedly dulled my senses and desires to pursue what non-mothers and all fathers clearly could.

While many of my classmates were dubious or scornful, the administration and most of the faculty were largely indifferent. They might have cared had they thought about it. But most of the faculty were either unmarried and childless or older males whose wives had been the primary caretaker of their children. They knew little or nothing of my children. The application for law school certainly didn't inquire. The faculty rarely spent time discussing the nature of the student population, what demands were made of student time, and how those demands affected their lives. They knew of course about the young children of some of their newer faculty, but expected no less productivity from them as a condition for continuation, promotion or tenure. Having children was their choice and therefore their problem. How then could they appreciate the struggle of mothers who were law students!

There go the caps tossed into the air. As I look at the sea of faces I realize that law schools are no longer populated primarily with twenty-two year olds. So much seems to have changed.

The seeds of change were sown before I went to law school, in the golden era of law schools. Thousands wanted to go to law school in the late 1960s and through much of the 1970s and, thanks largely to expanded consciousness, many more of the applicants were women. The percentage of women entering law schools rose dramatically. There was some plumbing to do; new bathrooms had to be added. And the male club would never be the same again.

Applications started dropping dramatically by the early 1980s. All but the elite law schools were now more concerned about their survival and were delighted to admit older women and men who were returning to school five, ten, or even twenty years after graduating from college. Oh, yes. Remember George and Martha. He was 65, retired president of a truck line. She was 62. In their last year of law school they crossed paths. The last time I saw them they were walking hand-in-hand in the parking lot. Claims for recognition and understanding of student needs now also came from those with more life experience and maturity. Maybe that made the changes inevitable. I certainly didn't feel the inevitability then.

Or maybe it was just a lucky break. One of the women on the faculty was awarded tenure after struggling eight years, sometimes teaching part-time to reach that goal while at the same time raising her

two children from birth. Her husband was a lawyer in a large commercial firm and much of the responsibility for the children rested on her. No longer burdened with the fear that offense to other faculty might jeopardize her chances for tenure, she persuaded the faculty to set up a committee to consider how the law school might better accommodate the needs of students, faculty and staff who were also responsible for raising children.

The committee began to find out about "the other life" of its student parents. Its reports helped to dispel the fantasy that students had only to eat, sleep, play intra-mural sports, secure student loans and study law. The faculty began to systematically gather information from its applicants, its admittees, and its alumni about the number and ages of their children, the responsibilities of "the other parent," and ways in which the law school could help students attend meaningfully both to their children and to their legal education. And from that information came lots of good ideas which the school began to implement over the years.

The law school catalogue was amended to invite parents and prospective parents to consider the law school's part-time program, which would allow students to stretch out their studies and take classes both during day and evening. An additional assistant dean, a young parent, was hired to work part-time and assigned the responsibility of counseling these students, helping them to work out a balanced and satisfying schedule which wouldn't leave them torn, exhausted or burdened with guilt. She worked hard, too, on getting an Order of the Coif chapter for the law school. I heard that they didn't think too highly of law schools with part-time programs. I wonder if she succeeded. I'll have to ask Brandon.

Faculty began to invite law student parents to bring their children to class. The older children would come in with their crayons and coloring books. The younger ones might sleep, or coo. If one started to disrupt the class, someone would take the child outside for feeding, diaper changing, playing or comforting, and others in the class would later pitch in to help the caretaker pick up the material covered in class.

An alumnus endowed a fund for a child care staff person to work in the law library and donated funds to the library building campaign on the condition they be earmarked for construction of two sound-proof study rooms, equipped with cribs and toys, where parents could bring their children to study in the library.

Faculty began posting times when they would be off campus and their offices could be used by students. Space and privacy for student

activities, once at a premium, became abundant almost overnight without a dime spent on construction. Students used the offices for study groups and organizational meetings, and one or two of these offices also had a crib and a cache full of toys.

The law school and others convinced the university to build a new family center located near the university's three graduate schools. The center offered both day and evening child care for pre-school age children and facilities for families to gather for dinner and some evening entertainment. And the university contracted with a neighboring high school to offer afternoon enrichment programs to the school age children of its faculty, staff and students. These came after years of struggle. The priests who ran the university talked about the importance of family but they weren't really conscious of or sympathetic to the concerns of parent students. It took a lot of time and effort to educate the "fathers" about what it meant to be a parent.

The word about this newly "family conscious" law school and university spread quickly and it became a mecca for some of the brightest student and faculty parents in the nation. That talent started to attract recruiting by some of the most prestigious law firms in the country who pledged with the placement office that they would set aside some attorney positions for job sharing by parents whom they hired. Some even began to set aside space in the office for child care. That began to enrich and humanize those law firms, and their practice, and their clients and . . .

"Come on, Aunt Patty, let's go grab some champagne and celebrate. Are you dreaming or something?"

"Oh. Hi, Brandon. No. Well, yes, just a little bit. Champagne sounds great. Congratulations. Let's celebrate."

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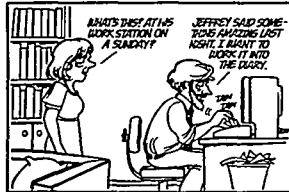
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