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IN MEMORY OF JOAN FITZPATRICK: A FORMER STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Elizabeth J. Kane*

When I first met Joan Fitzpatrick, it was immediately apparent that she possessed a seemingly limitless understanding of law, politics, and history. She combined this knowledge with a passion for teaching and promoting global human rights. As a scholar, Joan was brilliant; as a person, she was compassionate, dignified, and honest. Throughout the five years that I was lucky enough to have known her, her dedication to students, education, and above all action, was in my eyes heroic.

In 1998, as an undergraduate research assistant at the University of Washington School of Law, Joan allowed me to take her graduate level seminar in international human rights law. Although I was initially reticent to participate in an advanced course full of law students taught by a world-renowned expert, I was reassured by Joan's practice of treating everyone with a high degree of respect and consideration. In class, Joan applied her comprehensive knowledge of the field with an informed and precise analysis. Among the students, she was able to spread a feeling of inspired confidence that made even the most dismal human rights crisis seem surmountable. Like other students who met Joan, I left her class feeling informed, and motivated to make a change in the world.

Human rights law attracts many students and scholars who aspire to positively impact the world, however pursuing this field can be disillusioning on many levels. For practitioners, it can be an arduous struggle with extremely high stakes and an emotional drain. For students, it can be a seemingly unattainable career goal that promises mainly, perhaps only, altruistic rewards. Despite these negative aspects, Joan encouraged many students to persevere in the field. One way that she did so was to tell students that when she graduated law school in 1975, the field of human rights law scarcely existed—Joan was left to her own initiative and determination to help legitimate human rights law as a legal specialization.

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Joan's personal success story and her willingness to help moved many students to dedicate themselves to human rights work. For example, at the University of Washington, many students have been able to find jobs with immigration and human rights organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and participate in projects such as brief writing, research, symposia, and human rights fact-finding delegations. Most, if not all, of these projects would not have been possible if not for the support of Joan. She knew or had contacts with every significant organization promoting human rights; and equally, everyone knew Joan. Although always busy, she consistently and selflessly made time to get students involved in her work. Joan was an excellent resource for students.

Joan's devotion to individual students was matched by her dedication to educating the public about human rights issues. Immediately after September 11, 2001, I worked with Joan to organize a panel to discuss the impact of terrorism on law and human rights.¹ When the day of the event arrived, the room overflowed with concerned people, even on a sunny Friday afternoon the first week of classes. At the same time that she was preparing for the panel discussion, Joan swiftly digested hundreds of pages of legislative materials concerning the Patriot Act and other legal documents being generated. It was always important to her to use her exceptional skills and information to educate the community, and this calling must have been as important as ever in the period of drastic change and international conflict following the attacks on the World Trade Center. Through speaking and educating, Joan instilled in others a sense of duty to get involved and to think critically about the impact of world events on human lives and freedom.

Joan was not a simple academic locked in an ivory tower of unrealistic dreams. She strived to make a real world impact on human rights every day. For example, when her recent book, *Human Rights Protection for Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, and Internally Displaced Persons*,² was published, she donated copies to nonprofit agencies that could use it in their everyday work. She once told me that she did not want her work to sit on a shelf somewhere gathering dust; she wanted to

1. Videotape: America's Response to Terrorism: International & Domestic Legal Implications (Panel: Daniel Bodansky, Joan Fitzpatrick, and Stewart Jay 2001) (on file with the University of Washington Law Library).

2. HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION FOR REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS: A GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES (Joan Fitzpatrick ed., 2002).

get her books directly into the hands of human rights workers who could benefit from them. To me, this was perhaps the most moving aspect of her character: Joan was not content to study merely a situation. She had the talent and courage necessary to tackle the problem, and thereby change the world.

Joan's combination of scholarly integrity and drive to make an impact on a complex and evolving body of international human rights law made her an outstanding asset to the legal and academic community. We simply will never be able to understand how her loss has changed the realm of law and academics. In this world, where there are so very few true heroes of human rights, Joan will be sorely missed—she was the real thing. However, it is unquestionable that her legacy and knowledge will survive in the minds and hearts of the many students, scholars, and professionals who she taught and inspired.

