

Patti Rose Scheimer Bednarik

Memorial Resolution Dauphin County Bar Association Harrisburg, PA

March 19, 2014

It is not length of life, but depth of life.
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introduction

Greetings to the Judges of the Court, to Patti's beloved husband and fellow attorney Joseph Bednarik, to family members including her brothers Alan, Craig and Gary Scheimer, to friends and coworkers, and to her colleagues at the Bar.

We come together today to mark the transit of Patti Bednarik through our ranks. She stood among us, and then she was gone -- far too soon, on October 26, 2013, at the age of 56 -- after courageous fights with a major heart attack, kidney disease, and finally cancer.

She will be remembered. Her legacy will be perpetuated by those whom she inspired, and also through the work she accomplished.

From Plato and the Pythagoreans, through many religions, and into our common thought today, there is the notion that *all good things come in threes*. Today, as her professional peers, we think about Patti as a wonderful combination of *three distinct qualities and roles*, in one person.

This is not to disregard her roles as a spouse, a sister, an aunt, or a friend. But today, we celebrate her role as an attorney.

Patti was an unusual combination of:

- an *administrator* demanding accountability,
- an *advocate* seeking change, and
- an *adventurer* indulging in exploration.

She demonstrated that one person can enforce legal standards and rules as an *administrator* while prosecuting cases, and then pioneer change in a new area – Animal Law - with passion as an *advocate*, and yet still enjoy living with excitement and wonder as an *adventurer*. Think of these three roles as we tell her story.

Early Life, Education, and Travels

Patti was born on May 21, 1957, in Mount Lebanon, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Milton and Beatrice Scheimer, known to all as "Buzzy" and "Skippy". Her parents were sweethearts in high school, where Buzzy was the class president (with a great sense of humor), and Skippy was homecoming queen.

The Scheimers had three sons – Alan, Craig and Gary -- before Patti, their only girl. Justice Max Baer, one of Patti's cousins, remembers the joy that the announcement "It's a *girl*" brought to their family.

Her father affectionately called her "Rosie"; others called her "Patti Roses." Always, a loving family molded Patti's life. She eventually became an amazing aunt to eleven nieces and nephews, including her godson Benjamin Baer, who is now an attorney.

Patti was always an *adventurer*. At age 7, she went on a bike ride before learning how to use the brakes. She went over a cliff and hit a tree. This serious accident likely taught her something about consequences.

However, the memory of it did not keep her from relearning how to ride a bike during law school. Then, in 2012, she rode a bike 18 miles down a mountain in a Jamaican rainforest. We assume the length of the ride was due to her intentions, not to any lingering confusion about the brakes.

Patti was known from an early age as brilliant. However, she was also absent-minded. Can any of you relate to this?

Patti kept losing her house keys! To help, her father installed in their home what may have been the first keyless entry system in Pennsylvania, proving that obstacles can be overcome.

On August 23, 1972, a 15-year-old Patti decided to reserve that random day of the year, each year, for "celebration, introspection and reflection," and for trying something new. She did this for the next forty years, resulting in escapades, new skills, and service to others.

Patti finished high school early so she could spend a year in Israel. Against all expectations, she returned home with a boyfriend who was not Jewish, but a Bedouin Muslim. Luckily for Joe, that relationship did not last, but it did provide Patti with experiences like riding a donkey sidesaddle to family gatherings.

Patti chose not to join the family appliance business with her father and two of her brothers. Instead, she started college at Pennsylvania State University, transferred to George Washington University for one semester, left college and worked for a year for the United States Senate Budget Committee, then returned to Penn State.

There she settled into a major -- Social Welfare. She excelled and became a College Marshal -- a student with near-perfect grades and many honors and activities -- who was chosen by faculty to lead her thousands of College classmates into graduation ceremonies in 1981.

During that one college semester in Washington, D.C., in 1977, she met her future husband, Joe Bednarik. He was finishing law school. She signed up on a "ride board" to share a ride to their mutual hometown, Pittsburgh. They would date for seventeen years before marrying in April 1994.

After college, Patti returned to Israel for a year to work for the United Nations, studying the elderly population there. She became fluent in Hebrew, which she later taught at her temple.

Upon her return from Israel, she first earned a master's degree in social work from the University of Maryland, and then a law degree from UCLA School of Law, in Los Angeles, California. Characteristically, immediately after graduation from law school, she went on a whirlwind tour of fifteen countries in seventeen days, before she began work at a California law firm as a litigation associate.

Joe accompanied Patti to California for her legal education and her early years of practice. He stayed there when Patti returned to Pittsburgh to care for her ailing mother. After her mother's death, Patti got a new job – in Las Vegas, Nevada! So Joe who loved the desert was in Venice Beach, California; and Patti, who loved the beach, was in Las Vegas. But not for long.

Both decided to return to Pittsburgh – neither the beach, nor desert, but home -- in 1989. As an *advocate*, Patti worked as an Assistant District Attorney in the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office, while Joe got a job in Harrisburg. Patti proposed to Joe in November 1993, with dramatic flair – she used the scoreboard at a Penguins hockey game at the Civic Arena in Pittsburgh before thousands of fans.

Work and Life in Harrisburg

In 1996, Patti began work at the Supreme Court Disciplinary Board in Harrisburg, when many of us came to know her.

Now begins our formal recitation of Patti's accomplishments, both as an *administrator* and also as an *advocate*, while she was among us in Harrisburg:

- Counsel for District III, Office of Disciplinary Counsel, of the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania (1996-2010)
- Member, Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania (2007-2010)
- Founder and first Chair of the Animal Law Committee of the Pennsylvania Bar Association
- Course Planner for the first Animal Law Conference presented by the Pennsylvania Bar Institute in 2004, and the planner thereafter
- Member (appointed by Governor Edward G. Rendell in 2006) of the Dog Law Advisory Board, where she helped pass a stricter law for commercial breeding kennels a/k/a puppy mills.
- Adjunct Professor of Law, first at Widener University School of Law (Harrisburg Campus) teaching Professional Responsibility, and then at Penn State (Dickinson) School of Law (Carlisle Campus), teaching its first Animal Law course.

- Director of Character and Fitness for the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners (2010-2013), where she determined the suitability of candidates for admission to the Pennsylvania Bar.

That is an impressive record.

How she acted, while doing all that, is better described by others who knew her:

- "Patti was honest, unaffected, and authentic. She said what she thought and didn't try to color it. And she was completely truthful, not because she wanted to be, but because she didn't know how to be anything else. She had a keen mind, an impressive intellect, and a wit to match."
- "In her teaching, Patti was as she was in all things -- incredibly patient, dedicated, and thoughtful. Patti had an enviable ability to 'connect' with people and share her passions. One testament to her teaching ability was that every year she taught, her enrollment grew."
- "Patti called me all excited to tell me about the seminar that she had finally managed to convince PBI to present on Animal Law and listed the topics that would be covered. I replied 'But Patti, you haven't included anything about service animals.' Patti didn't miss a beat. 'You're absolutely right', she replied. 'Will you present on that?' Patti's enthusiasm was always so contagious. She had her topic and presenter."
- "Patti was not just a dreamer; she was a doer. Her aspirations rose high, while her work remained grounded. For those of us who watched her do it, we instinctively felt her passion, attention, and energy."

Patti loved animals and especially dogs -- perhaps the most devoted of pets. On weekends, Patti and Joe transported homeless dogs in legs of journeys to shelters, foster homes, and adoptive families. Patti continued this volunteer work until she could no longer drive.

After Hurricane Katrina struck, Patti and Joe traveled to Louisiana to work with the Humane Society, helping to rescue dogs abandoned in New Orleans. There they found and adopted their beloved Chow Chow, Trina, who became a star guest at the PBI Animal Law Conferences.

"Patti's Battle"

Patti learned several years before her death that she had polycystic kidney disease and would eventually need a transplant. That time came in November 2012, when Patti was returning from a bus trip, helping victims of Hurricane Sandy. She had already survived a major heart attack in 2011. She celebrated her recovery in 2012 with a "Happy to be Alive" party attended by over 100 guests. Now she was engaged in a new battle for survival.

At least ten people immediately began testing to donate a kidney for Patti. One was Dr. Deborah Toder, a friend of Patti's since age two; one was attorney Nadia Adawi, Past Chair of the PBA Animal Law Committee – neither was a match. Attorney Laurie Besden was a match and had committed to donate her kidney. Instead, Patti ended up receiving a transplant from a dying donor at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

But one week after the successful transplant, she learned from her physicians that she had Stage 3 cancer. After initial treatments, she and Joe returned to their mutual home, Pittsburgh, again. They bought a furnished house with a view of the home where Patti grew up.

So, after all her adventures -- parachuting from an airplane, paragliding over glaciers in Alaska, swimming with wild Hector Dolphins off the shore of New Zealand, riding the scariest roller coasters, studying tap dance, and engaging in meditation -- she returned to her roots: a familiar place, and her family.

Her sister-in-law, Deborah Scheimer, sent email updates about Patti's condition under the heading "Patti's Battle." Patti contributed her own positive and grateful commentary when she could. On Saturday morning, October 26, 2013, Deb sadly wrote: "Our dear Patti's battle is over. She slipped away peacefully as she slept last night. May Her Memory Be a Blessing."

Patti's Legacy

Numerous stories and obituaries about Patti appeared, including those in the Harrisburg Patriot-News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Philadelphia Inquirer. These accounts highlighted the loss of a very special person, who bravely fought her last battle.

In the November 2013 Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Disciplinary Board, the esteem held for Patti by her professional peers was stated clearly:

Patti's enthusiasm and positive outlook were an inspiration to all who knew her.

She was a skillful lawyer, a passionate teacher and advocate, a generous, adventurous spirit, and a treasured friend.

We will miss her deeply.

Well said, and known as true by us, her Memorial Committee, about our dear friend and professional peer, Patti Bednarik, Esquire.

Conclusion:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that, in the passing of Patti Rose Scheimer Bednarik, the Bar, the Court, and the community have lost a friend, a mentor, a professional colleague and a valued citizen. We tender our sympathy and condolences to her husband and to her family and many friends.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we reaffirm for ourselves that the life example she gave us, of generosity of spirit, service to others and joyfulness, is one which we would do well to emulate.

AND RESOLVED FURTHER that copies of this Memorial Resolution be spread upon the records of the Dauphin County Courts and the Dauphin County Bar Association, that the original and a copy be filed with the Office of the Prothonotary, and copies transmitted to her family members.

Respectfully submitted, this 19th day of March, 2014, by this Resolution Committee:

Jessie L. Smith
Jessie L. Smith, Chair

Gicine P. Brignola
Gicine P. Brignola, Esquire

Edwin W. Frese, Jr.
Edwin W. Frese, Jr., Esquire

Neil E. Hendershot
Neil E. Hendershot, Esquire

Teresa Lazo
Teresa Lazo, Esquire

Elizabeth G. Simcox
Elizabeth G. Simcox, Esquire

