



Esther Berezofsky 2014 – 2015

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Esther Berezofsky: I am Esther Berezofsky. I'm with the law firm of Motley Rice which is a national plaintiff's law firm. I'm the managing partner of the New Jersey office and we do a host of different plaintiffs' work, ranging from consumer litigation, environmental litigation, medical device, and pharmaceutical. My area is primarily environmental litigation, as well as mass torts involving pharmaceutical products and medical devices.

I've been involved in the organization for just about close to 20 years. My work has always been about advocacy. It's always been more about causes and leveling the playing field, holding people or companies that harm individuals and communities accountable and so becoming part of a community of people who share the values and the commitment to the same kinds of issues and justice was like finding an ideological home -- like-minded people, shared ideology, less about a particular issue, just joining a community of like-minded people.

As a child of Holocaust survivors, whose mother was a partisan and a resistance fighter, the warrior gene in the service of justice is deeply embedded in me. And so I really resonated with the organization and its goals and its visions and mission.

I do recall a case that had a profound impact on me. It was a federal pre-emption case that Leslie Brueckner, who was a staff attorney with Public Justice, argued in the United States Supreme Court -- and it was awe-inspiring. The combination of her grace under pressure, her knowledge of the law, of the facts in that courtroom was just very powerful. The power of her argument, in which she ultimately persuaded nine justices who decided unanimously in her favor, in Public Justice's favor, was of a great moment to me. It reinforced the concept of impact litigation and Public Justice's commitment to that.

It was 2014 and '15 that I was president. My tenure on the board spanned several decades during which there were many changes. The organization has lived through many growing pains.

There was a need for change -- but change doesn't come easily. We began an 18-month journey. I say "18" because it began shortly before my presidency and went on after and I remained involved in it, an 18-month journey of longterm strategic planning.

The common thread -- and what I believe ultimately got us through that period -- was the commitment and the love and devotion to the organization that all of the board members had. A real testament of that is the fact that most of those people, notwithstanding that tumultuous time and struggle, are still with the organization.

We grew and expanded but it was a challenge. It took a long time. It did not happen overnight and the changes took time. And I think it's fair to say -- regaining the equilibrium of the organization took a while, as well. In some ways, we're now realizing some of the fruits of the labor that went into that time.

For the couple of years before I became president, I thought a lot about what I wanted to do during that year. I think everybody who is moving into that position thinks about that -- what do they want to do and how they want to contribute to the growth of the organization.

Well, when it actually happened, there was no question about what my challenge would be and I embraced it. And I feel it was a really significant part of my life and I continue to feel very committed to moving things forward.

It was a reorganization of the structure that allowed us to grow: changes in leadership; changes in the way staff were organized; a commitment to diversity; a greater commitment to more of an egalitarian approach within the organization, the staff, the attorneys. I think it was a very fundamental change in the structure of the organization and it's continued to evolve since then.

I'm very proud to still be an active participant and work with an incredible staff and board to help continue to shape the vision and realize the potential that Public Justice has for impact litigation and has had over the years.

One of the things I'm extremely proud of is all of the Supreme Court cases that the organization has argued and prevailed upon. Having been involved for a long tenure and having lived through the times and the changes, even the name change was incredibly contentious. Yet, we struggle, move forward and the organization, I believe, is better and stronger for it.

After the 2016 [presidential] election, the devastating impact of that we all felt. We're in a period now, with the changes in the Supreme Court, the challenges are huge. I think one of the things that we have to do is to continue to struggle on the issues that we're committed to, whether it's environmental issues, civil rights, voting rights.

I think it is an extremely challenging time, given the Supreme Court that we have and many of the judges that were appointed in the last four years [2016-2020]. I think we have to address those and continue to struggle and to move forward. And even in the last couple of years, there's been some important decisions in favor of people and human rights and we just have to continue to do that.

I can't say that I'm an eternal optimist because I don't think anyone who knows me well would necessarily characterize me that way. But I am a fighter. I think that, in the face of the challenges that we have, you have to press forward and maintain a commitment, live your values - that's for me, personally. As an organization, work to achieve the vision and the values that we all fight for. We just have to -- even if it's in slow increments and in small ways, we have to move forward and continue the struggle.

When I spoke about a like-minded or ideological home or like-minded community, that's exactly what I'm talking about. That's what I found -- people like me -- and those people have become close, close friends, like family, and integral and meaningful in my life. I think we've become meaningful in each other's lives in many ways. It's nice to know that you have allies.