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REVIEW ESSAY

Law & Society REVIEW

A tribute to Lauren Edelman

We have lost a great one. Laurie Edelman was a gentle, generous, ingenious, and generative giant in socio-legal studies. Her passing is devastating for me, for many others, and generally for our field of intellectual inquiry.

I was not a close personal friend with Laurie in the way that many were, especially those who worked and lived in close geographic proximity to her. But I interacted and collaborated often with Laurie for most of the last 30 years, especially since she took a faculty position at Berkeley in 1996. We were roughly the same age and our treks through academic life were parallel in many ways. From our earliest encounters, she was for me a constant source of inspiration, a role model, a catalyst, a teacher, and more. These engagements were more than enough for me to witness her ironic sense of humor, her gracious support of others, her love of intellectual exchange, and her profound commitments as a scholar, teacher, public intellectual, and professional colleague. I will not try here to summarize her many, many activities and accomplishments, although I urge people to spend some time reading her lengthy CV, various profiles, and testaments from others to appreciate all that she did and how she mattered. Instead, I will focus my reflections on the various points of direct interaction with Laurie that mattered most to me and qualify me for commentary.

The obvious place to begin is with Laurie's significant contributions as a **scholar**. Laurie and I shared substantive intellectual interests in workplace civil rights, antidiscrimination law, and struggles for worker justice. We differed, though, in the approaches that we developed and the forms of research and publication. My work on anti-discrimination law focused on bottom-up rights struggles by social movements and unions or workers' associations; I published several monographs, an edited book, and a wide array of diverse essays on related topics in this general area, although my research also took me in many other directions (tort reform, popular culture, etc.) as well. Laurie, by contrast, was more disciplined, restrained, and concentrated in her overall research agenda. Her focus was on law and organizations, especially private corporations. Her research showed how corporate organizations contested demands from workers for equal treatment and rights in various legal settings, with the former usually "coming out ahead," in the process reshaping official law in ways that advanced and protected their organizational interests in the long run. As Marc Galanter (1974) had previously reasoned, business organizations to a large extent insulate themselves from challenge by substantially shaping the official law over time to which they were accountable while making symbolic shows of legal compliance. Laurie constructed much of her career advancing this basic agenda in various creative ways, thus exemplifying the advice that she gave to graduate students: establish a coherent research identity and then build relationships with others around related agendas.

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Laurie's multifaceted work on "legal endogeneity" became widely known through her many journal articles and the eventual blockbuster, award winning book, *Working Law: Courts, Corporations, and Symbolic Civil Rights* (2016). I regularly taught several of Laurie's articles – most notably "To Reply or Not to Reply – That Isn't the Question: How Organizations Construct the Meaning of Compliance" (with Shauhin Talesh, 2011) and the award-winning collaborative essay "When Organizations Rule: Judicial Deference to Institutionalized Employment Structures" (2011) – before assigning her book in recent years. I not only insisted that graduate students took her work seriously, but I summarized Laurie's argument to cap off my own recent book about struggles by Filipino labor activists for basic workplace rights over a century of experiencing sustained, racist, classist anti-immigrant legal violence (*Union by Law*, 2020). More than a few times, in her writings and talks she at least indirectly or implicitly critiqued my bottom-up focus on worker activism and rights claiming as too narrow or one dimensional. While much of my work did give due attention to corporate opposition and cooptation, even backlash and capitalist hegemony, I could not disagree that I did not study up close and at length the tactics of employers. That said, we usually agreed that both approaches are valuable and, together, very complementary.

The legacy of Laurie's research publications on corporate cooptation of law to a large extent provided the basis for choosing her as the winner of the LSA Harry J. Kalven, Jr. Award in 2018 and the American Bar Foundation Fellows Outstanding Scholar Award in 2020, both among the most prestigious awards by these important socio-legal organizations. She earlier, in 2000, won a very prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, for many a gold standard of recognition. She also was invited to join the *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* editorial board from 2003 to 2008, a gig that convinced me to accept an invitation as editorial board member (now Associate Editor) more than a decade later, illustrating again that Laurie routinely was far of ahead of me in most regards. In these and other ways, she distinguished herself as a scholar at the very top of her field.

Laurie's huge impact as a scholar was matched by her influence as a **professional and institutional leader** in the Law and Society Association and field of Sociology as well as within her university. Again, I could list a great number of achievements in this category, but I stick to those that I knew directly through my personal experience. Laurie was well known for her election as President of the Law & Society Association in 2002. She won the election over me, the other nominee, and then graciously proposed that we share the role. Even though unrealistic, I was moved by her kind, collaborative gesture. It mattered to me because the experience did not mark us as rivals but, rather, drew us closer together as professional colleagues, supporters, and friends. Among her achievements as president was overseeing the development campaign for the Association's 40th Anniversary. I learned a great deal about and from her work on that campaign when I became president a nearly a decade later and was responsible for initiating a similar effort for the upcoming 50th Anniversary celebration. I also learned much about her important role as leader, mentor, advisory committee member, and selection committee member for the joint LSA/ABF Diversity Fellowship, a fabulous institutional innovation in which I played a far smaller administrative role during my term. During my term as LSA president, Laurie proved a constant source of sage advice and good humor, which was very much appreciated.

Laurie accomplished far more as a leader of LSA, but I was most familiar with and appreciative of her less well-known contributions as a founding and continuing leader of what came to be known as the West Coast Law and Society Consortium Retreat. This biennial conference grew out of many conversations between us and others in the early 2000s, and kicked off in 2005, with Laurie, me, Rosann Greenspan, and Lawrence Friedmann as the organizers. The initial event was in Berkeley, followed up by regular events at other West Coast university sites – Hawaii in 2007; Stanford in 2009; Southwestern Law in 2011; University of Washington in 2013; and UC Irvine in 2016. I stayed on as organizer among a changing cast of others, while Laurie, on being appointed as Dean for JSP, dropped out as a lead organizer after Berkeley. But she continued to participate and, most important, was a critical force in the original conception that continued to inform efforts for the next decade.

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The animating ideas on which Laurie and I fully agreed from the start were that retreat panels: (1) should be organized around general research "problems" or themes rather than individual research presentations, discussion-based, and catalyzed by designated "provocateurs"; (2) mix scholars of different rank and career stage, highlighting in particular graduate students and younger scholars; (3) mix methodological or theoretical approaches to a common issue so as to connect scholars who often did not otherwise engage one another; (4) focus on problems or themes of greatest interest to younger scholars and relevance to West Coast sites of the meetings (e.g., Hawai'i). I heard at the time that other regular regional meetings were organized in the Midwest and Northeast, but in my memory we never inquired much about or consulted them when we initiated what we thought were quite unique undertakings. This was a time when Laurie served as Director at the UCB Center for the Study of Law and Society and I was early in developing and directing the new Law, Societies, & Justice program at UW. Planning the West Coast Consortium events provided much time for us to share our visions, experiences, and challenges of leading our respective university programs, she in a long established, high profile unit and me in an entirely new, still inchoate campus unit. It was a period of enormous and exciting learning for me. This also was the period when I interacted with Laurie most regularly and intensively, nurturing my deeper understanding and appreciation of her intellect, personal charm, and institutional commitments. And, it was often fun. I will forever remember the second retreat meeting, in Honolulu, when we (Laurie, I, and Rosann Greenspan) drove a rented car for hours around a big chunk of the island of O'ahu, sharing thoughts and laughing a lot. It was a glorious day, and it cemented my bond to Laurie as friend as well as professional colleague.

The previous comments point to yet another reason for appreciation of Laurie's commitments and values. In short, she was by all counts a fabulous **teacher and mentor** to graduate students and younger scholars. Her profound commitment to mentoring was matched by her compassion and patience in the practice of mentoring. At Berkeley, she was instrumental in developing a robust pipeline into professional academic careers for scores of undergraduate and graduate students. I knew many of her mentees, not least because many of them chose to enroll in JSP rather than our University of Washington programs where they also had applied. I must admit that I watched with some envy as students I actively recruited chose to work with Laurie, and later interacted with them at conferences, but the primary effect was to deepen my respect and appreciation for Laurie as a mentor. Again, she was an important catalyst to, and role model, for me in my own graduate and undergraduate mentoring activity. We often talked in particular about the obligation that we assumed as mentors in generating financial support for our students, and especially in encouraging and guiding them through grant (National Science Foundation, etc.) application processes. One of the most gratifying professional moments for me was when we were chosen as co-winners of the LSA Stanton Wheeler Mentorship Award in 2018. I could not imagine being in better company for that honor.

Beyond our parallel and intersecting professional activities, we shared a passion for playing **music**. I gleaned from numerous conversations that Laurie played fiddle in a variety of mostly-folk based styles, while I played six string guitars, from electric blues and jazz to acoustic folk and Indie styles. I never heard her play, but more than a few times we wistfully committed ourselves to playing together some time.

I did not see or talk to Laurie much in recent years, largely due to COVID-imposed remoteness. We did exchange by email a number of times, though. In 2019, we shared thoughts with others in the Law and Social Movements CRN about the wisdom and legality of including social movement activists on LSA panels and perhaps waiving their registration fees; Laurie and I initially disagreed a bit, as she adopted a characteristically cautious position, but we quickly found happy agreement on a more nuanced compromise position. This past fall (2022) she wrote to congratulate me on the announcement of my retirement, saying that she was "not far behind," likely retiring within a year. I responded that this was the first time I was ahead of her in anything! We also discussed our parallel painful, debilitating maladies with forearms (she long suffered from tendinitis, I from CTS) and

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pledged to finally get together and play folk music, after I recovered from wrist surgery and we both were retired. I was always aware that she had endured substantial health challenges and was inspired by her capacity to push forward despite them.

In that last email, Laurie told me that she would be traveling to Camano Island, north of Seattle, later in the fall, so I urged her to look me up. In very late December 2022, KT Albiston, her JSP colleague and dear friend, emailed to tell me that Laurie had entered Skagit Valley hospital with an unknown but seemingly serious malady. I texted Laurie the next day to wish her well and ask if I could do anything to help her out; she texted back right away to thank me and say that she would be fine. We exchanged again, and I assumed all was well, then left the country for several weeks on a long-planned vacation trip. Having heard nothing more and failing to follow up, I was utterly shocked to receive an email just 6 weeks later announcing her death. It hurts me greatly to know that I did not reach out more at what became the end of her life as well as before.

I will forever be inspired by Lauren Edelman's animating commitment to serious scholarship, professional leadership, compassionate mentoring, collegial generosity, good humor, and playing music … even though I am saddened that our expressed hopes to play stringed instruments together will never be realized.

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