

**The Peggy Browning Fund Honors Judith P. Vladeck**  
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**By Allison Beck, Esq.**

When I talked to Judith some months ago about being tonight's honoree, she said no, not me, and then she proceeded to tell me exactly who should be honored and how to go about doing it.

I persisted -- or as we say, I kept hocking her -- and she relented.

Of course, there were conditions -- we wouldn't make this a big deal and I would make sure that we kept this part of the program short.

But as I learned many years ago - from Judith, actually - even good girls don't always do what they're told!

The simple fact is that Judith's life and life's work are the *essence* of what the Peggy Browning Fund is all about -- mentoring law students to become passionate advocates for working people.

No one has pursued justice for working people with more intelligence, skill, and devotion than Judith Vladeck and no one has given more generously of her time and energy to mentoring young lawyers.

Judith's work on behalf of those who are being treated unfairly is legendary.

My union was just one of many that believed that Judy and her late husband, Steve walked on water, which for Jews was no small feat.

And, then, there was her second career as one of the foremost plaintiff's discrimination lawyers in this country, litigating complex sex discrimination cases and righting some pretty hideous workplace wrongs.

Especially now, that I am of a "certain age" I am more in awe than ever that Judith began this intensely demanding new work at a time in her life when others might be happy to coast. Not Judith.

Now to the mentoring part - the very thing that makes the Peggy Browning Fund work and the gift that Judith has given so graciously and tirelessly throughout her career.

I know because I was one of those young lawyers who was blessed to have Judith in my life as a role model, a mentor, and a trusted advisor.

I cannot begin to tell you how much it meant to me -- as a young lawyer, one of handful of professional women and the first woman lawyer at the Machinists Union back in 1980 -- to have someone of Judith's stature and accomplishment take an interest in me.

Actually, I think she took one look at me and thought -- oy, she's going to need help! Boy, was she right and I was just one of many equally needy young lawyers.

But that didn't seem to matter to Judith. She let me know that I could always call on her and when I was in her presence - whether it was a quick hug at an LCC conference or a cherished long lunch while in New York - she made me feel special, smart and capable.

Judith also understood the balancing act that so many of us were attempting - working long hours, raising young children, and trying to maintain our marriages. She had done it spectacularly well and somehow she made us believe that we could do it, too.

In 26 years, there has only been one piece of advice that I got from Judy that turned out to be wrong. Early on she said, "Honey, I'm hearing great things about you, but don't get your hopes up - you are *never* going to be General Counsel of that union!"

That most certainly would have been true had she not taken the time to guide me, encourage me, and show me how to do it.

One final word that needs saying.

There are a lot of really smart lawyers in the labor movement (thank God because we need them), and there are a lot of lawyers who are tireless and tenacious in the cause of worker rights.

But with the possible exception of Peggy Browning -- there is no one who has so effortlessly combined brilliance and toughness with such beauty, elegance and charm. It is this truly rare combination that has inspired me and so many others -- and we are all so very grateful.