



A TRIBUTE TO PEGGY BROWNING

A Beacon for Workers' Rights

BY RICHARD G. FREEMAN

Peggy Browning was, by all accounts, an exceptional person whose life and qualities left their mark upon the legal community on the national as well as local scenes. Born in Tennessee, smart and glamorous, educated at Swarthmore and Penn Law School, she was an award-winning ice dancer as well as a creative, dynamic attorney.

While her name could have graced the masthead of any mega-firm, Browning chose to devote her energies to workers' rights. When she died of cancer in 1997 at age 46—by then a Member of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)—Chief Judge Edward R. Becker of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit celebrated her as “one of that rare breed of great appellate lawyers.” In a personal note of condolence to her husband, Philadelphia lawyer Joseph Lurie, President Clinton recalled Browning's dedication “to justice and to fair labor practices throughout the nation.”

In her defense of workers' interests through her work at the law firm of Spear, Wilderman, she never lost a case in the Third Circuit. She was tirelessly focused on issues such as union representation and fair and equal pay and decent working conditions—the foundations of a worker's daily life. Her achievements strongly justified President Clinton's nomination of her as the first union-side lawyer in history to be appointed to the NLRB, hitherto dominated by academics and management. At the NLRB the screen saver on her computer bore the words from the preamble to the National Labor Relations Act “...by encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining.” She thrived as an idealist in a high government post.

Peggy Browning's impact in life had been so profound that when she died the people closest to her sought to fill the social, personal and civic emptiness her loss created. Peggy's life, they thought, was the kind of exemplary life Plutarch writes about—so exemplary it has in some way to be attempted to be duplicated by another person. Her husband, Joe Lurie, a partner at the Philadelphia law firm of Galfand Berger, brought together law professors and labor lawyers and created a fund in Peggy's name that would support the education of law students in the rights and needs of workers. Galfand Berger has been the prime financial support of the fund.

Joe Lurie remembers Peggy as “the person who wanted to be the William Brennan of the NLRB, the person who brought people together on the issue of workers' rights and compelled all to work for the common good regardless of special interest.” Personally mindful of her “gentle nature” and “Southern

charm,” Joe sought to expose the labor-side world to the dedication of the finest law students who would embody Peggy's professional qualities—some of which Judge Becker noted in his encomium: “a keen intellect,” “mastery of the record,” “the ability...to inspire confidence”—in other words, the best law students.

By the end of 1997 Joe Lurie had raised close to \$100,000 and the work of The Peggy Browning Fund was under way. Lurie serves as president of The Fund, which places exemplary law students—“Peggy Browning Fellows”—in summer positions with labor unions, federal workers' rights agencies and social welfare groups whose work benefits working people. Leon Pasker, now 41 and a trial attorney with the Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor, treasures his summer with the Philadelphia Unemployment Project. One of the first Peggy Browning fellows, Pasker as a law student represented claimants in unemployment compensation hearings.

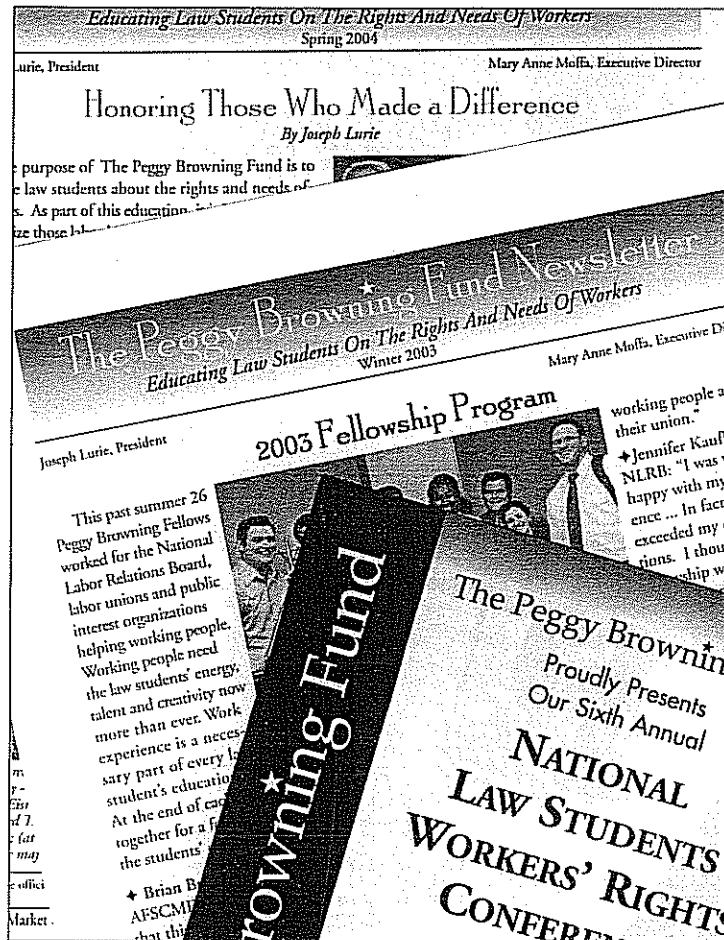
“I was lucky,” said Pasker, “I had litigation to do right in the middle of my law school education. I presented evidence, cross-

examined witnesses and directed the claimant and also helped with housing and mortgage assistance. The best part about it, in addition to the litigation experience, was to get out there and just dive in on behalf of someone who needed unemployment compensation or who needed some money just to survive and I was the only help they could get.”

The Fund draws its twenty-seven fellows from applications that come from ninety-plus law schools. This year, the Fund received 350 applications for the fellowships, which pay \$4,000 each.

Dennis Walsh, who succeeded Peggy Browning as an NLRB Member, took on three Peggy Browning fellows at the Board. These post-second-year law students worked on litigation seeking enforcement of NLRB orders, doing legal research for the general counsel, working on the Member's staff and clerking for administrative law judges.

“Peggy was a mentor,” says Walsh, who served as her chief counsel when she was a Member and before that worked as an associate at Spear, Wilderman, “and mentoring young attor-



neys was important to her, particularly women attorneys in the labor movement."

Friends of Farmworkers is a small, understaffed, highly lauded nonprofit organization that has fought for years to protect and enforce the rights of migrant farm workers. According to the group's director, Karen Detamore, the Peggy Browning fellows have provided extra muscle for one of its major endeavors, defending the rights of Chester County mushroom workers. "We've had a great selection [of fellows]," said Detamore, "students with a high level of legal skills as well as a commitment to workers' rights and social justice."

Peggy Browning fellows also work directly for unions. Typical is the experience of Lance Geren. A native of Limington, Maine, Geren always wanted to be a union-side labor lawyer. Today, 30-year-old Geren works at Freedman & Lorry, a major Philadelphia labor firm. As a Peggy

Browning fellow he wrote briefs and helped design litigation strategy for the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine & Furniture Workers AFL-CIO (or IUE for short).

While a union with 50,000 members, the IUE has a small legal staff—four lawyers. So Geren was put to work immediately doing substantive legal work. Unlike, say, the legendary summer internship at the white-shoe law firm, he never entertained clients at the

Four Seasons or lounged on the company yacht. A disciple of Professor Roger Hartley of Catholic University's Columbus School of Law, Geren "jumped right in" and spent a busy summer in Washington, a summer that fine-tuned him for the work he does now on behalf of several large unions.

"The Peggy Browning Fund really worked as a catapult sending me in the right direction," said Geren. "It shored up



Summer 2004 Peggy Browning Fellows (FROM LEFT) Brian Noonan, LaTonya Joyner, Alan Boal, Annette Labiano-Abello, Jasmine Blackmeir, Tracy Bortnick, Christopher Gant and Lilah Rosenblum meet on June 16, 2004 for an introductory dinner in Washington, D.C.

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For a complete list of participating law schools, visit www.peggybrowningfund.org/law_schools.html



Joseph Lurie

what I already knew and what I hoped was true about unions, and the intervention of the Fund made it clear that would be the continued direction of my career. It is also a great networking tool."

Networking, indeed. The Fund doesn't thrive merely in the summer like a day lily. Throughout the year it sponsors meetings and workshops where former fellows can trade experiences and share wisdom with a variety of players in the labor field. In January the Fund honored Marvin Miller, the founder and first executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association. The Fund also sponsors an annual dinner dance and a National Law Students Workers' Rights Conference.

Joe Lurie welcomes the participation of Marvin Miller and other notable union leaders in furthering Peggy Browning's legacy. "The road to economic and social justice is long and hard," he says. "The Peggy Browning Fund hopes these inspiring honorees will help us pass the baton of desire to the next generation of those who will practice public interest labor law."

As a popular vehicle for interim legal training, the Fund has become an institution in legal education. It has attracted contributions from big and small givers. And the work of the interns has benefited more than a few working people along the way. Within a decade of her death, The Peggy Browning Fund is fulfilling its eponymous goal to perpetuate the memory of Peggy Browning by multiplying her good works. ■

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To learn more about The Peggy Browning Fund or to make a donation, visit www.peggybrowningfund.org or call 215-665-6815.