

## Remembrance

The first time I encountered Cynthia was at a meeting of the Guttmacher Institute Board of Directors, in New York City almost a decade ago. Highly regarded by members of our Washington policy staff, which I direct, as an able and influential aide to Senator Olympia Snowe working on women's issues, her invitation to address our board had been made at their suggestion. My personal interaction with Cynthia that day consisted of little more than a smile and a handshake, but it's fair to say that I was duly impressed—and completely charmed—by her presentation. And I mean presentation in both senses of the word: not only her talk itself, which was, of course, substantively superb, but also her self-assurance, and the elegance of her delivery—a perfect fusion of dispassion and passion. I think I know a star when I see one, and I know that I saw one on October 16, 1997.

Shortly after we met, Cynthia left Senator Snowe's office to take a prestigious position with the White House, again concentrating on women's issues. Word on the street, however, was that she may not have regarded it as a perfect fit, and armed with that gossip, key members of my staff and I decided to embark on a charm offensive of our own. Eventually, Cynthia succumbed to our nonprofit version of wining and dining—a few lunches in moderately priced restaurants to get to know each other better—and in the fall of 1998, she accepted my offer to join the Institute as a senior policy associate.

Over the eight years that I had the privilege to work closely with Cynthia—half of those with her sitting in the now-painfully-empty office next to mine—she demonstrated again and again that she was, in the vernacular, the full package: a disciplined, rigorous analyst; a genuinely thoughtful thinker; a serious writer and a compelling communicator. Above all, though, she was a powerful, determined advocate, bent on moving a positive sexual and reproductive health agenda forward, even in the most difficult political environment. Cynthia argued both the political wisdom, and the moral imperative, of our movement's focusing on what could be termed bread and-butter issues for women. Her early, instrumental work in developing federal legislation whose very introduction largely galvanized a national movement to secure insurance coverage of contraception, illustrates that ethic. So, too, does her most recent work in promoting and brokering the introduction of federal legislation to greatly expand low-income women's access to contraceptive services under Medicaid.

Today, a majority of states have enacted insurance coverage mandates modeled on the bill Cynthia championed, and a Guttmacher study has determined that it is now the norm, for women who are lucky enough to be insured, to be insured for contraception. I feel certain that someday soon, the Medicaid bill to which Cynthia devoted so much energy in her final weeks and months will become law—and millions of low-income women now ineligible for subsidized contraceptive services henceforth will be able to receive them.

Cynthia may have been devoted to bread and butter, but she also relished controversy. She advocated strongly for the legal right of adolescents to obtain sexual and reproductive health care on their consent, and thus protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and disease. And she spoke out forcefully against federal abstinence-only sex education policies—authoritatively documenting their increasing extremism over time, and the extent to which they are out of step with what parents, teachers and young people themselves say they want—not to mention, with what young people, actually do.

But over and above her extraordinary skill-set, what made Cynthia so special to those of us who worked with her were her personal qualities. Driven as she was to be recognized for her own achievements, she epitomized collegiality—both externally, working in sometimes tough, highly competitive coalitions, and inside her own organization, where it matters most. Cynthia knew how to play well in the sandbox. And she also just plain knew how to play. True, she was a revered and sought-after mentor to junior staff. But while the mentoring might be about how to do a legal analysis, it could just as easily be about how to wear a purse with panache. And speaking of purses, Cynthia was famous for flying into the office after a busy lunch hour—her painfully fashionable, pointy-toed boots click-clacking down the hall as she jauntily showed off her latest new hairdo, or her impossibly skimpy purchases from the zero-to-two sale at the Betsy Fisher boutique across the street. No all-work-and-no-play gal she, Cynthia was the office recommender-in-chief for all things having to do with the good life: book and movie suggestions, reviews of the latest new restaurants, even the perfect 16<sup>th</sup>-birthday present for a cherished niece. And she could get quite down and dirty when the situation called for it,

too. I will always remember the two sets of song lyrics she wrote to send off departing staff members—hilarious, and suitable strictly for satellite radio.

There is so much I will always remember about this vibrant young woman in her personal and professional prime, who was respected and admired to be sure, but who also was loved, and loved most by those who worked with her most closely. That is why my colleagues and I rail against the fundamental injustice of her leaving us. We know that in the grand scheme of things, we have no right to consider ourselves among the ranks of those most aggrieved by her death, but we are aggrieved nonetheless. As Emily Dickinson put it, our own lives ‘closed’ a little with her death, which remains for us ‘huge,’ and ‘hopeless to conceive.’ And so, yes, we pay tribute to Cynthia today. We’re proud to honor her, and we gladly celebrate her life. But, certainly, we miss her more.

Cory Richards

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