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My Friend, Ilene Barshay

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MY FRIEND, ILENE BARSHAY

Heather Melniker

I did not want to have to write this tribute to my friend, Ilene Barshay. Not only does it mean she is no longer here, but it is also impossible to do her justice in just a few short paragraphs. She was a force in life, and she will be forever loved and forever missed.

Ilene attended Touro after having raised her two older children and while her daughter was still in public school. On the outside, she may have seemed like a typical suburban mom, but she was oh so much more. She was intellectually curious and gifted, and she was so excited to begin this new chapter in her life. She embraced the challenge, thrived in the academic environment, and of course, graduated with many honors.

Luckily for me, Ilene decided to come back to Touro to teach after she had been in practice for a few years. I was excited to meet my new colleague and hoped we would develop a warm working relationship. We did, but little did I know I was meeting someone who would also become a lifelong friend. From her very first semester teaching at Touro, it became clear that Ilene was a superstar. She excelled at teaching and she loved nurturing her students so that they would reach their full potential. She saw each student as an individual with a unique story, and she was determined to help each one in any way she could. In return, her students adored her, both while in her class and long after they had left it. Her office was constantly filled with current and former students who asked questions about legal issues, sought guidance about careers, and chatted about their lives. I was astonished that every year on her birthday in February, a group of former students surprised her with balloons and a cake, singing happy birthday loudly in our office suite. That genuine and incredibly thoughtful act spoke volumes about the affection, respect, and high regard students had for their beloved Professor Barshay.

Outside of Touro, Ilene never really understood that there were only twenty-four hours in a day. Like a balloon that keeps getting

larger, she was somehow able to expand her day to accommodate everyone and everything. Her compassion for others was all-consuming and inspiring. She volunteered endless hours to help victims of domestic violence, provide legal advice for her synagogue, serve as her synagogue's first woman president, and provide immediate guidance, comfort, and support to the many, many people who sought her help. She had names and numbers of various doctors she personally knew and thought nothing of calling them on behalf of someone who needed help. In fact, she once called me from Europe while she was on vacation because I had left a voicemail at her home asking for her opinion about a doctor. That's simply just who she was—always willing to help, and more importantly, always wanting to help.

I got a small glimpse of how she was able to accomplish so much when we frequently carpooled to work events or had lunch together outside of work. In between our discussing family, current events, and work issues, Ilene constantly checked her telephone messages. She literally checked every few minutes, and in that short time, there were always new messages. She called everyone back and I could hear how much people relied on her. She was available to everyone and she managed to give her full attention to each request, each issue, and each person.

Above all, Ilene was utterly devoted to her loving husband and children, and as the years passed, her daughters-in-law and son-in-law. And when the grandchildren started arriving, it moved everything to a completely new level. She frequently showed me her “brag” book each time it was updated—a book of pictures of her grandchildren she would whip out and proudly show anyone and everyone. Through Ilene's stories, I followed her grandchildren's milestones and watched her joy as she regaled me with stories. Her family meant everything to her.

Ilene Barshay was one of those rare people one can only hope to meet in life—generous, loving, compassionate, and kind—I was blessed to call her my friend.