

WOMEN'S BAR ASSOCIATION/WBAF
ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

+ + + +

PASSAGE TO POWER:
HONORING WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

+ + + +

PRESENTATION BY
THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL

+ + + +

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 1996

+ + + +

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S
(9:48 p.m.)

MS. RENO: Alexis, thank you so very much.

It's a little over three years ago that I stood in this room and spoke with you. I asked you then if you remember how people had touched your lives during those weeks before that.

I remember how my first grade teacher, how my baby-sitter, how so many people, including the dean of my law school, had touched my life and what a difference they had made.

I can now tell you after three and a half years in office that people touching our lives are so incredibly important. I still remember walking into the Oval Office for the first time to meet one of the brightest, warmest, kindest people I have ever met. And he's still that way.

I still remember Alexis looking at me as Newsweek talked about mid-level White House people sniping at me. And she gave me a hug. I still remember going to Austin to a ladies' night out at the mansion and having dinner with the governor and Molly Ivins and some wonderful ladies in Austin and sleeping in Sam Houston's bed.

(Laughter.)

MS. RENO: I still remember going up to talk to Nancy Kassebaum about children and about prevention and about what works and then going to Kansas and walking into a wonderful Kansas setting and greeting her family and then greeting my old friends and then greeting a college classmate of my mother's. And I understood better than ever what America was all about.

These two ladies have touched my life, but you have touched my life. So many times since that first time in the Spring of 1993 people have stopped me on the sidewalk or at meetings

and said, "I met you here" or "I met you there" and "I thank you."

Marcia Greenberger has just been absolutely wonderful to me every step of the way, as have your leaders and all the people who represent this nation and represent lawyers in this community.

I am so proud of those who work in the Department of Justice, those who work at the U.S. Attorney's Office. You have touched my lives. You have been a torchbearer.

And those who are immediately around me, there's Lois Schiffer. There are so many wonderful lawyers. But there's one special person, a person I talked about when I was here before, a person who cries very easily, a person who is reputedly hard-nosed, but a person who is a great Deputy Attorney General, Jamie Goret.

All of you are torchbearers. And it is important for us to carry the torch forward together to let people know how important public service.

I thought I knew about public service. And I think I do. After 15 years as a state attorney in Dade County, people said, "How can you survive Washington?"

I said, "I think I'll be able to." If you've been through 15 years in Miami, you can do it.

(Laughter.)

MS. RENO: But now I can tell you after three and a half years, after editorials, after congressional hearings from both Democrats and Republicans, that there are no dollars that I could ever make in private practice that would ever be the substitute for what public service has meant to me.

And I encourage the young lawyers in this room tonight never ever to forget public service, that if you're not interested in service in the government, always remember community service.

I was in a classroom in Sacramento, California at 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon watching a police officer who was off duty tutor a child, watching a young Catholic high school student participate in community service in a public elementary school, watching a parent who cared.

All of us can make a difference if we reach out and become a torchbearer for children in this city and across the land. We can be torchbearers if we talk about domestic violence and do something about it. We can be torchbearers if we talk about child support enforcement and make it as important to collect child support as it is to collect income tax. We can do so much if we look at the real issues of the world and put people, all of the people, of America first.

But when I was here before, I spoke to you about family. I spoke to you about that mother that built that house that only wrestled little alligators, the mother that told me I shouldn't be a lawyer because ladies didn't become lawyers. And when I called her to tell her that I had been accepted at law school, she whooped with joy and said she guessed she'd always wanted to do it herself.

For that lady that built the house that wanted my sister and I to be disco dancers, --

(Laughter.)

MS. RENO: -- she's the one that deserves the award. She was the torchbearer.

(Whereupon, the foregoing presentation was concluded at 10:03 p.m.)