

7-05-00
Diane Blair Memorial

Draft : Not for distribution

DIANE BLAIR MEMORIAL SERVICE
DRAFT OUTLINE OF EVENT
JULY 25, 2000

Invocation Rabbi Laura Lieber

I. HRC Welcome

- About a year ago, Diane wrote me a letter, saying, "I had the most bizarre dream last night in which you and I entered the New York City open tennis tournament, as a team. I think we would have done much better had we not insisted on wearing identical, tailored pink pant-suits. What does it mean? Something about pink panthers." Now, I never did figure out the meaning of the pink pant suits, but I do know that, on the court and off, there was no one any of us would rather have on our team.

[ie: my first impressions of her, what she has meant since then to me, my family, and all of us.]

- And so late last night, as I was thinking about how I could possibly do justice to this extraordinary friend and colleague, mother and wife, sister and scholar, teacher, and public servant...I realized that it was Diane who I would normally go to for advice at tough times like this one. It was Diane who I so often giggled and cried with, Diane who would scold me if I didn't show enough affection for birds or moose. It was Diane who was the best girlfriend I could ever ask for, and, in so many ways, the sister I never had. So, I thought about some of the items she would have suggested that we bring with us today:

- PROPS: [you can choose from these...they will be up on stage]

Diane's glasses (she always had a way of making us all see things more clearly).

Needlepoint – always managed to do at least two things at once.

Books.

Tennis Racket.

Apron (great cooking/recipes)

Binoculars (for Bird Watching).

Moose (family token)

Penguins

Wrap (her mother always said, as did she, “Don’t forget your wrap.”)

- As I went through old pictures and letters last night, I found a note Diane once left me explaining that she had to go home right away because her good friend and housekeeper Hazel had passed away. She wrote: “Thank God, I spent the afternoon before I left home with her – holding her, telling her all she’s meant to me.”

- In the last few months, so many of us wrote and called to tell Diane how much she meant to us -- how she inspired us to reach further, or get more involved, or love and live better. All of us come here with great Diane stories, some of which we can even tell in public!

- There are people here who knew Diane during her years at Cornell and in Washington, D.C. People who were part of her morning exercise group or walked the all-seasons trail with her, or hiked with her in Yosemite and Australia. There are people who have traveled from all over Arkansas, America and the world to be here today.

Asking people to stand: [Do you want to ask them all to stand in the same place? Or divide up and ask to stand, as appropriate, during the program – ie, students under Diane as educator?]

Could all of Diane's former students please stand?

Could her colleagues from the University of Arkansas stand?

How about everyone who has ever worked on a campaign with Diane, including the famous box boys?

What about those who worked with her at the Arkansas Educational Television Network, or the Corporation for Public Broadcasting?

How about her colleagues at the Commission on the Status of Women or the Commission on Public Employees Rights?

Could you please stand if you are part of the Single Parent Scholarship Fund?

Could everyone who is a member of her beloved Modern Lit Club, which has been meeting since the 1920s, please stand?

And could everyone who has ever received a thank-you note, or any other kind letter of appreciation from Diane, please stand?

- Twenty years ago, Diane said, "It may not be possible to be a serious scholar, a dedicated teacher, a perfect parent and a political activist at the same time, but I'm trying." Now, I don't know anyone who tried harder or succeeded more at the art of living. Somehow Diane squeezed more life and fulfillment out of her too brief time here on earth than most of us could have done in 300 or 400 years.

II. Introduce Video.

III. Celebrating Diane as an Educator.

- Early on in our friendship, Diane and I were both working at the University of Arkansas. And we would grab frozen yogurt and walk through campus together, talking about our students, our lives, and the world around us. [Now, there weren't a lot of women professors back then. In fact, when Diane told the chairman of the political science department that she wanted to become a candidate for a master's degree in political science, his first question wasn't about her credentials, or GRE scores. It was, "Do you have your husband's permission?"]
- I know how very proud she was of the honorary degree she received recently from the University she loved so much. Proud not just because of what it said about her many contributions to academia. But, most of all, because of what it said about her teaching. Three times she was voted Outstanding Faculty Member by students. And when anyone asked Diane what she wanted her legacy to be, she always pointed to her students.
- In 30 years, she never lost her passion for the classroom. When you talk to her former students, their faces always light up as they recount the colorful way she told stories – or the times she dressed up like President Nixon for Halloween – or her ability to make politics come alive for everyone. [She was even voted by the Alumni Magazine as one of the 100 reasons that make the University great – which, as one friend jokingly pointed out in a letter, was only slightly higher than 'making out in the pit']
- In her last few months, so many of the letters she received from former students began with, "You probably don't remember me..." And, most of them went on to recount how she changed their lives.

Quotes from recent student letters:

“When I started back at school as a 33 year old adult, I was very apprehensive that I could make it. You not only taught me so much but inspired me to have confidence in my ability.”

“You inspired me and made me think. Much of my success is due to you. I appreciate the attention you gave me. I only wish every college student in America could have the luxury of having you teach them.”

“I recall...the time you were returning graded tests to some of us only to qualify that those whose papers weren't being returned may have been victims of your children's air sickness on a plane trip from Little Rock. Teaching is a gift. Thank you for sharing your gift with me and others.”

Introduce Education Speakers: [Ask all of them to come up]

Daniel Ferritor, Former Chancellor, U of A

Lou Green, Former student

Penny Miller, Political Scientist, University of Kentucky
(and close personal friend)

IV. Celebrating Diane as a Public Servant

- When Diane accepted that honorary degree, she asked the graduates to be not only good workers and family members, but also good citizens. It was a message she gave to every single one of us lucky enough to cross her path, and a philosophy by which she lived her entire life.

- There are many people in this room – my husband and I included – who, for decades, have looked to Diane for her wise counsel on policy and politics. And many of the victories we've celebrated, including the presidential races in 92 and 96 are hard to imagine without her. But, no work was above or beneath her. She was just as willing to get down in the trenches and go door to door, read through mounds of research, or retype huge parts of a speech after a computer crashed as she was to analyze complicated policies.
- During the 92 race, Diane even rented this little apartment in Little Rock, where, for almost a year, she lived like a teenager, eating cold baked beans out of a can for dinner. And, during that time, when I called and asked her what I could do for her, she once said, "I'll tell you what you can do. You can come down and sleep on this little rental fold-out bed and toss and turn all night, and eat this food!"
- I remember having Jim and Diane come down to stay with us before the first inaugural. They would tell the guards they were going to the Blair House, and the guards would say, what are your names, and they would say, "Jim and Diane Blair." Which the guards thought was their idea of a joke!
- To Diane, politics was not a dirty word. It was the bread and butter of our democracy -- the way we leave the world a little better. And she did it every day, from Washington County to Washington, D.C. When I was watching that video, I kept thinking of all the ways she's served. None of us will ever forget her going head to head with Phyllis Schlafly on Valentine's Day, 1975.

- We remember her standing up on the Commission for the Status of Women. For the Single Parent Scholarship Fund. For public broadcasting. For the Democratic Party. For candidates up and down the ticket in Arkansas. We remember how she showed, by example, why politics matters, why we all must get involved, and why, as she said recently, "it is impossible to be a good person and not be a good citizen."

Introduce Speakers on Diane as a Public Servant [ask them up]

Frank Cruz, Chairman of the Board, Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Senator Dale Bumpers

Senator David Pryor

V. Celebrating Diane as a Friend.

- As we were going through the people speaking today about Diane in all her many roles, it seemed that all of them could come up here and talk about her as a friend. There were many tough times, both professional and personal, that I, for one, cannot imagine having faced without Diane. Somehow she always knew when to make us laugh, when to reach out a hand, or drop us a note.
- When I opened letters from her, I never quite knew what I'd find. It might have been a recipe for pepper soup, or book and movie recommendations, or a picture of her with a grandchild, which she described as "Diane in Heaven." She'd send me vitamins to keep me healthy, or cartoons to keep me laughing, or even shoes, which she included with a note saying, "I've decided that happiness begins with happy feet."

- A few years back, Diane wrote a letter to us in which she recounted a recent Razorbacks basketball game. She wrote: “Two 8 year-old boys sat behind us and after the Hogs went over 100, one said to the other, ‘Maybe now we can make 200 points.’ To which the other solemnly replied, ‘That would be the awesomest’

- Diane, my friend, you are the awesomest. You taught us all what it means to have real courage, and what it means to be a real friend. And none of us are done with you yet. The truth is, you will never be far, because your life and lessons will live on in the hearts of everyone who had the privilege of knowing you and loving you.

Introduce Friends. [You can join this group on stage if you wish or sit down].

Martha Sutherland (representing the Modern Lit Club)
Rita Davis (close personal friend)
The President

VI. Celebrating Diane as a Family Member.

- I remember in the first few months after we moved to D.C., we were still adjusting to this new life. Diane was a visiting scholar at Brookings. So, she was thankfully nearby. And at times when my schedule was uncertain, I knew I could count on Diane to take Chelsea somewhere, such as the doctor's. It wasn't that there weren't Secret Service members and others who could escort her. But, if God forbid we couldn't go, we wanted family there. And Diane and Jim were always family.

- Most of our conversations over the years inevitably focused on what was happening in the lives of our children and families. Because for all the fancy titles and awards that followed her name, Diane was probably most proud of her success as a wife and mother and grandmother.
- She wrote to me recently, “There is really nothing more gratifying than watching one’s own child mature into a loving, accomplished adult. I can’t even begin to describe how blessed I feel these past two days surrounded by our wonderful children, each of whom has found ways to let me know how much my mothering efforts over the years are appreciated.”
- Ask the entire family to stand.
- Ask family members speaking [tbd] to come to the stage. [Bill Kincaid will speak last and introduce Dr. Ed Matthews.

Benediction Dr. Ed Matthews