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Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

**University of Buffalo
Honorary Degree Remarks
August 26, 2019**

This occasion is both a joy and a sorrow for me. A joy because a bright and caring young man in the class below mine at Cornell University, Wayne Wisbaum, was both a strong supporter of the University of Buffalo and its Law School, and a prominent member of Western New York's legal community. A sorrow, because Wayne did not live to be with us today. In July 2018, Wayne wrote to me that his health disabled him from playing a

lead role in the arrangements for my visit, but he still hoped to attend all the events. He asked me to confirm that I would come to Buffalo in August 2019 in any event. I did so immediately, and did not withdraw when my own health presented challenges.

Wayne was the very best of lawyers, the least self-regarding, the most dedicated to the well-being of the people, organizations, and communities he served.

Although he is no longer in our midst, we remember

Wayne with affection and esteem for all the good he has done.

It was beyond my wildest imagination that I would one day become the Notorious RBG. I am now 86, yet people of all ages want to take their picture with me. Amazing!

If I am notorious, it is because I had the good fortune to be alive and a lawyer in the late 1960s. Then, and continuing through the 1970s, for the first time in history, it became possible to urge before courts, successfully, that equal justice under law required all arms of government to regard women as persons equal in stature to men.

In my college years, 1950-1954, it was widely thought that women were not suited for many of life's occupations — lawyering and bartending, military service, foreign service, driving trucks, piloting planes, policing, serving on juries, to take just a few of many examples that now seem senseless.

It was exhilarating to help bring down the barriers that, in Justice Brennan's words, put women less "on a pedestal," than "in a cage." So much has changed for the better since then. True, we have not reached Nirvana, but the progress I have seen in my lifetime makes me

optimistic for the future. Our communities, nation, and world will be increasingly improved as women achieve their rightful place in all fields of human endeavor.

At a reception some years ago, a college student asked if I could help her with an assignment. She had one question and hoped to compose a paper by asking diverse people to respond. What, she asked, did I think was the largest problem for the 21st century. My mind raced passed privacy concerns in the electronic age, terrorist threats, deadly weapons, fierce partisan divisions in our legislatures and polity. I thought of

Thurgood Marshall's praise of the evolution of our Constitution's opening words, "We, the people," to embrace once excluded, ignored, or undervalued people — people held in human bondage, Native Americans, women, even men who owned no real property. I thought next of our nation's motto: E Pluribus Unum, of many, one. The challenge is to make or keep our communities places where we can tolerate, even celebrate, our differences, while pulling together for the common good. "Of many, one" is the main aspiration, I believe; it is my hope for our country and world.

**With appreciation for the degree just awarded me, I
am proud to be affiliated with the University of Buffalo
and its Law School.**