

# RESILIENCE is my SECRET!



“Flaming Feminist!”  
“Notorioust!”



“I dissent (not  
‘respectfully’)!”



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## ***I AM ... the “notorious RBG”!!!***



*Notorious B.I.G. and RBG “out rappin’ together” (per Photoshop) back in their shared Brooklyn neighborhood in 2015. Source: <https://www.salon.com/2015/07/30/>*

### **“The Notorious RBG”. A contemporary American icon.**

Why “notorious”? Because RBG—Ruth Bader Ginsburg—became a most unlikely American “rock icon” in her eighties! There are several outrageous reasons you may not have known about until now because early on she was nothing if not shy and studious, the picture of obedient perfection.

So how did “Miss Goodie Two Shoes” turn into the “Notorious RBG”, you ask? Although an opera buff, just *maybe* she could have gotten plugged into that black Brooklyn rapper named “the Notorious B.I.G.”, Biggie Smalls. Her later biographers said they purposely used this sobriquet for her. But there was more ...

According to the hip DJ Rob (Vandenberg) on his “pop, rock, hip-hop and R&B music blog for serious fans”, in a feature article on the rockin’ Justice Ginsberg, he wrote, *“her steely resolve on the court led to her ‘winning the Internet’ in her eighties, making her the most celebrated high court justice since, well, **EVER**. Her unending quest for gender equality and civil rights for the underrepresented gave her a fierceness and a following that few others have attained in modern times. She was the subject of unforgettable memes, SNL skits and other tributes (including an opera featuring her and Justice Scalia) that no other Supreme Court Justice has experienced before or likely will again soon.”*

*Source: [djrobblog.com/archives/11708](http://djrobblog.com/archives/11708)*

Still, on the serious side, Ruth also became “notorious” because of her unyielding, outspoken spirit of defiance against injustice, her remarkable physical resilience in the face of recurring cancer, not to mention her growing sense of humor and, beyond that, her strength to fully “follow her dream”. Because of all these, it is said that this petite, resilient dynamo all but “single-handedly re-defined the American justice system”!

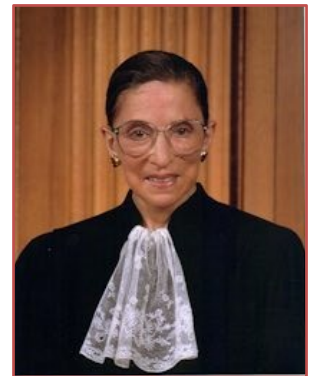
### 1. Inauspicious Emergings

Looking back, how did Ruth Bader Ginsburg (known affectionately to today’s Americans as “RBG”), the shy and studious little Jewish girl, manage to catapult herself from her humble working-class milieu in Brooklyn (NY) to today’s legal world fame? And with “rock star” status at that?!!!

#### Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Born 1933 in Brooklyn, New York; studied law at Harvard and Columbia Universities, after which she taught law (with a focus on women's rights) at Rutgers and Columbia Universities. During the 1970's, she launched the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) women's rights project and became the "focus" for women's equality. 1980 Appointed by President Carter as judge of the American Circuit Court of Appeals for Washington, D.C.; then appointed by President Clinton in 1993 as only the second female judge to the US Supreme Court. Also named one of America's "Women of the Year" in 1993; Named one of the 100 “Most Powerful Women Alive” by Forbes Magazine in 2009; 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award; 2015 Time Magazine Icon; 2016 selected by Fortune Magazine as one of the "World's Leading People."

*Source: Autobiography blurb, “My Own Words”, Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York*



What character traits defined her? Were essential? And unique for RBG?? Which role models, mentors, partnerships were significant, even indispensable? How did the "defying power of her spirit" come to the fore? Were there life-changing “spiritual turning points”? What creative values, what experiential values and what "tragic triad" (suffering, guilt, death) lent their power to her significant achievements? How did the dynamic work between her inner resilience ('bouncing back' after losses) and the outer calling that drew her on?

Resilience \_\_\_\_\_ Calling

"Bounce back" \_\_\_\_\_ Pull forward

### **Resilience Factor #1: Brains, diligence and perseverance**

Just a small, nondescript girl born into a working-class family that was close but without money or higher education, Ruth wasn't born with the proverbial "silver spoon" nor did she have an easy start. She lost her older sister to meningitis when she was two years old and her dearly beloved mother to cancer when she was only seventeen and two days before graduating from high school.

Despite this—or perhaps *because* of it—she developed **resilience**. Always extremely diligent (also persistent) at school, she compensated for her losses with all the more intensive personal achievements. People who knew Ruth—nicknamed "Kiki"—from those early years agreed that she had a 'warm vibe' all her own that only grew stronger as she matured.

Ruth began to draw attention to herself at the age of thirteen. Her very first editorial (1946 for her school newspaper) dealt not with superficial "teenage" things but with global, universal principles—from the Biblical Ten Commandments, through the English 'Magna Carta', to the American 'Bill of Rights' and Declaration of Independence, to the then brand new Charter of the United Nations!

Lighthouse illustration here and throughout the text wherever "beacon" appears

**Beacon.** Throughout Ruth's childhood, **Eleanor Roosevelt** was her role model *par excellence*. As a woman (and wife of the incumbent US President) committed to the idealistic dawn of the post-war period, she led the successful effort that culminated in the 1948 adoption of the "**United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights**" described by Eleanor as "the international Magna Carta for all mankind." What a heady era!

### **Resilience Factor #2: Mind-opening mentors**

**Beacon.** Ruth's first and finest role model was her mother, Celia. Although she had had to give up higher education in favor of her brother, Celia was her aspiring daughter's first and perhaps most pivotal role model. Ruth herself confirmed: "*My mother kept inculcating two things in my mind: 'Be a lady' and 'Be independent.'*" Although Celia was diagnosed with cancer at a very early age and died just two days before Ruth's high school graduation, she had obviously penetrated very deeply into her daughter's soul.

Maybe Ruth experienced her first "spiritual turning point" here. She had to go on alone but with the pronounced blessing of her beloved mom. Here there would also have been a resemblance to Viktor Frankl, who received his mother's blessing when arriving together at the concentration camp, but only finding out at the end of the war that she had died shortly after. Mothers, parents, mentors—ALL can remain beacons, even after they die.



Now Ruth went resolutely on, especially with a hint of intellectual defiance. With a full scholarship, she began her studies at Cornell University; threw herself into them and was strongly influenced by two professors in particular with regard to her later career:

- **Beacon.** Vladimir Nabokov's European Literature Seminar contributed immensely to Ruth's developing her own writing style: just the right word, just the right order, and convincingly to the point.
- **Beacon.** Prof. Robert E. Cushman's course in American Constitutional Law (including his confrontation with McCarthyism's restrictive 1950s laws) drew her to her post-graduate law studies.

It came then as no surprise—rather as a matter of course—that Ruth emerged from her studies at the top of her Cornell 1954 class (valedictorian).

### **Resilience Factor #3: Heart-opening relationship with Ruth and Marty**

**Beacon** of a Lifelong Love. Ruth met Marty Ginsburg as a freshman at Cornell University. *"He was the first boy to appreciate that I had a brain,"* she said years later. At first they 'only' met on a mental level but soon realized how much "opposites attract"! She was the serious, rather shy student; he the sociable extrovert with a great sense of humor! He even made the ever-serious Ruth smile. It didn't take long for their relationship to spark a deep and lasting love.



Although both were "lightning smart" and intellectually/financially independent, they never clung to each other, but complemented each other in exemplary fashion. Luckily, there were almost no conflicts of values: they shared their Brooklyn roots and Jewish religion and fully embraced each other as life partners from an early age. Ruth married at age 21 in June 1954, right after graduating from Cornell.

### **Resilience Factor #4: Eye-opening experience of Swedish society**

In 1967, Ruth had an experience that opened her "legal eyes." As part of a new project at Columbia University Law School (New York), she spent some months in Sweden where gender equality was a given. An equal opportunity for women (in part because the state fully supported childcare, etc.), it offered a smooth combination of work and family. "Women don't have 'dual roles'. Just like men, both have only one role, being human." This is also how she lived the mutually enriching relationship with her husband. Both were WAY ahead of their time in this regard.

### **Resilience Factor #5: "In sickness and in health":**

The first trials soon followed: Marty's military service at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; their first child, Jane; acceptance of both parents at Harvard Law School.

But then—out of the blue in his final year of law school—Marty was struck down with a rare form of testicular cancer. Extremely aggressive radio-therapy. Uncertain chances of survival.

**Resilience to self-transcendence.** Ruth didn't hesitate for a moment, but immediately put her heart and soul into it. In addition to helping her husband and caring for her three-year-old daughter, she attended not only her own HLS lectures, but also Marty's final courses, notes, and thesis. How much sleep did she get during this time of crisis? Two hours/night max.



But she *did* it: accomplished this superhuman feat in which *she transcended herself* out of love for her husband, her family and, ultimately, herself. Marty was indeed healed and their life in the academic and business world went on... but deep down they were both *transformed* by it. This initial experience anchored and refined their relationship.

This challenge was followed by the blessing of a second child, James, and relocation to New York, where Marty then successfully worked as a tax attorney. Life there was very diverse and enriching. The family valued education, culture, and (increasingly with Ruth) humor. As was reported many years later by daughter Jane: "*I grew up in a family where responsibilities were shared equally: Dad cooked; Mom thought.*"

Dad as "Chef Supreme" ..... Mom as "Thinker Supreme"



That didn't bother Marty in the least. On the contrary, he was later even recognized as the “Chef Supreme” in her circle of friends (a pun when Ruth later became a justice on the American “Supreme Court”—SCOTUS)!



They complemented each other in other ways, too, and were always willing to relocate as an intact family—from Boston to New York and New York to D.C.—if one or the other landed a good job (say, Supreme Court Justice!). Incidentally, it was Marty and his extensive business network that were instrumental in Ruth's becoming known as a groundbreaking lawyer/judge.

As a “lobbyist” for his wife, he was unbeatable! For both of them as in-fact equal partners, they'd been through thick and thin together for 56 years “until death do you part” in 2010. But they were still a long way from that.



### **Resilience Factor #6: Discrimination at law school and then at work**

Harvard Law School: “Bastion of Male Supremacy”. In 1959 Ruth's HLS class numbered 552 students; only nine (2%) of these were female. A decidedly hostile environment. They

were constantly “overlooked” or ridiculed, even accused by the 100% male faculty of depriving men of those coveted HLS slots. When Ruth graduated from Columbia Law School (again as co-valedictorian), she didn't even have a single job offer!

**Resilience.** Ruth always had to reckon with the possibility that her husband's cancer would come back; so she needed a permanent position. But there, even in avant-garde New York, the worst discrimination (“on the basis of sex”) still stood in her way. In her legal profession, this steamroller just rolled ON. No aspired position as a lawyer, let alone as a judge. Finally, in 1963, Ruth accepted a position as a law professor, first at Rutgers, then at Columbia University. At that time there were only eighteen tenured female law professors in all of America!!



Ruth became arguably the first professor to offer a law course on gender and discrimination (Rutgers) and later the first female (tenured) tenured professor at Columbia University... but at first, despite her outstanding achievements, she had to hang on “by a thread” professionally for a few more years. Just because she was a woman.



The phenomenon of "sex stereotyping" was ubiquitous. Gloria Steinem, the media darling of the 1980s and 1990s, summed up the American dichotomy when she remarked, "Not the women, but the society, was crazy." But the time was ripe for a change.

### **Resilience Factor #7: Breakthrough USA Gender Equality**

Ruth humbly said later that she was just "at the right place at the right time". This coincidence may be; but that wasn't all. In addition, she was 1) well prepared; 2) sharply focused; and 3) fully supported by her husband Marty.

Pioneering at this point in America was Ruth's idea that the law should be "**gender-blind.**" When she became director of the women's rights project for the American Civil Liberties Union in 1974, she campaigned publicly, defending six landmark cases before the Supreme Court.

The critical turning point in Ruth's career came in 1980 when she was appointed by President Jimmy Carter as a judge on the Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals. Thirteen years later the time had finally come: in 1993 (at the age of 60) she was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Bill Clinton and confirmed by a 93:3 majority by the Senate Judiciary Committee!

"I see myself as a flaming feminist."

*Caption. Ginsburg is considered in many circles to be the most outstanding women's lawyer of the 20th century.*

### **Factor #8: SCOTUS and RBG's "spiritual defiance": "I DISSENT."**

RBG was guided and “pulled” by her human rights conscience. Although she was initially viewed at the Supreme Court (SCOTUS) as more of a moderate-liberal—i.e. a strong voice for equality in general (supportive of all minorities and disadvantaged persons), as well as the separation of church and state—

and reticent, the U.S. political landscape was increasingly changing around her. But she remained true to her principles, as captured in these lines by the American poet Robert Frost and was able to say—

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."*

It has often been claimed that this type of decision was "a clarion call to venture off the beaten track and blaze a new trail". However, such decisions usually only take on clarity in retrospect.

That's how it was with RBG. For the Court, the turning point was the disputed Bush vs. Gore presidential election in 2000 that steered America in a radically different political direction. Exceptionally in this case, even the Supreme Court became involved! The SCOTUS majority came out for Bush; RBG disagreed. This would—and indeed *did*—change the course of America's standing on the world stage. She saw it coming and thus concluded her dissent without the traditional word, "I *respectfully* dissent," writing just, "I DISSENT"—I do NOT agree—while wearing a black "jabot" in protest to emphasize her dissent. This then became part of her new ritual.

### **Resilience Factor #9: Realizing her calling to create a new legal landscape for America**

RBG lived in New York City very close to the famous Statue of Liberty. A bronze plaque with the sonnet by Emma Lazarus has been inside the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty since 1903. It speaks of the millions of immigrants who came to the United States of America (many of them via Ellis Island in New York Harbor) and the identity of America as a professed immigrant nation. Here is the core of the inscription: (plus image)

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
your huddled masses,  
yearning to breathe free!  
The wretched refuse  
of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless  
tempest-tossed to me:  
I lift my lamp  
beside the golden door."*

In her book, "*Grit*", about beyond (just) resilience, Harvard-trained Asian neurobiologist, Angela Duckworth, writes about the two main factors—

passion and persistence—that pull us forward. “Grit”—stamina?? It’s that; but MORE. Rather a vocation, a “calling from a higher place”.

### **Resilience Factor #10: Life Balance. Bask in hard-won praise.**

Viktor Frankl spoke of “the tragic triad”—sorrow, guilt, death. But wouldn't it also be appropriate to honor “the cheerful triad”—“Joy, Gratitude, Humor” as suggested by psychologist Otto Zsok? Especially nearing life’s end, in RBG’s case, she was deeply grateful, having done her utmost to improve the lives of millions, American women in particular.

This was her **calling**: to revive that spiritual self-transcendence in America, a country that had seemingly forgotten its former ideals. But RBG understood them inherently, these goals, these shining spiritual signposts of America’s past founders. And she defended them stalwartly with her knowledge, resilience ... and far beyond. She was a beacon in dark times.

In 2019, at 86, RBG celebrated her 25th anniversary on the US Supreme Court. Despite her age, she continued to travel and speak publicly, widely acclaimed everywhere, especially by progressive women around the world.

### **Workout photo**

She also kept incredibly physically fit! One video documented her daily “work-out” and she set herself the goal to continue serving on the Supreme Court through 2023 when she would turn 90 (and outlasted the Trump presidency). As “RBG” filmmakers Betsy West and Julie Cohen reported, RBG’s “ambition and stamina surpasses anything we’ve ever seen from anyone.”

No wonder, since she was also fighting cancer with all her might (now for the fifth time). But the real meaning of her life was higher: a fight for justice and equality. Thus, Nietzsche’s sentence: “He who has a why to live can endure almost any how” applied to her fully.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg said 2018: *“I LOVE my work.”*

*This is the best and hardest work I’ve ever had in my life ... It kept me going despite four cancer diagnoses.*

*Instead of succumbing to the pain, I just knew that I had these Supreme Court documents that had to be reviewed.”*



16 RBG ALL FINAL 10SEPT23

Ruth Bader Ginsburg finally did lose her long battle with cancer, dying in 2022 at 89, but she will be remembered long beyond her long life's end. A beacon for the rest of us who may aspire to follow in her footsteps.

Amen, dear "notorious RBG". What a great job!!!!

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## Readers' Interactive Workbook

Whatever your age or current stage of life, interacting with these historic or contemporary profiles can spice up your own life, calling up comparisons with the figures featured here. Taking a vivid “walk down Memory Lane” and recall challenges that you faced—whether you overcame them or just barely survived with bruisingly useful “lessons learned”. This can help you rev up your right-now resilience Have a go at it with the “notorious RBG”!!

1. Ruth was once a shy 13-year-old Brooklyn girl nicknamed “Kiki” who wrote an essay for her school paper. **If YOU were thirteen again, what might you have written about? Who were your role models back then?**
2. Ruth’s much-beloved mom died just days before her daughter’s high school graduation. But she found the resilience to go on to Cornell that same fall. **Where might YOU find the strength at age 17 to forge ahead *positively* after grave personal loss?**
3. Ruth met Marty, the “love of her life”, her freshman year at college. Do you think YOU might (or already have?) met the “love of your own life” She gave a special reason why she fell in love: “He was the first boy who appreciated that I had a brain!” **What might YOUR reason be to fall in love? Then or now?**
4. As one of only nine females amongst the 552 students in the Harvard Law School class of 1959—even though she graduated as Co-Valedictorian from Columbia Law, she was subject to discrimination both at university and later in her professional life. **Have YOU ever been discriminated against? For what reason and how did you react? Could you turn it into a personal victory?**
5. Later in life, as a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Ruth became known as the “Notorious RBG”. WHY was that? What might YOU become “notorious” for?
6. Ruth battled valiantly against cancer. How did she “bounce back” more than once? She chalked it up to the honor and challenge of serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, saying “*I LOVE my work. This is best and hardest work I’ve ever had in my life...it’s kept me going through four cancer diagnoses. But, instead of succumbing to pain, I just know that I need to review these current Supreme Court documents.*” **Have you had any grave health issues? How have you handled them to date? Can RBG serve as a personal role model?**

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