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Barbara Salken: A Remembrance

I knew Barbara for all of her thirteen years at Pace, first as a colleague, later as a friend. Barbara was the best colleague and friend one could have, and the most infuriating, for the same reasons: her unflinching intellectual and emotional honesty, her immediate recognition of hypocrisy, and her absolute refusal to allow anyone to get away with sloppy thinking. Barbara did not understand the concept of compromising one's principles. I don't believe she ever said or did anything because it was safe or expedient. She didn't have much interest in "just trying to get along" with people. In matters of law school governance, she always wanted to reach the right result, whatever the issue, and wanted to work with people to achieve that result. She was amused by the law school politics, she understood the quirks and foibles of all her colleagues, but never played to their vanities. She always argued the merits.

I especially recall a situation when I was Acting Dean. I was feeling considerable pressure to reach a particular decision and had persuaded myself that it was the correct one. When she came into my office to argue against it, I knew I was in trouble, but I set forth (cogently I thought) the ground for my decision. When I was finished, Barbara looked at me and simply said: "Do you believe that?" She knew, of course, that I didn't, and she wasn't going to let me get away with thinking that I had persuaded her or myself.

Barbara was a fierce fighter. Sometimes she went too far: threatening to run over the security guard with her car because he wouldn't allow her to park; disrupting a faculty meeting because she was impatient with the level of discussion. Later, though, she would acknowledge her mistakes and apologize if she thought she caused someone pain. This combination of action and reflection was a trait practically unique to Barbara.

Barbara also had a refreshing lack of pretension about herself. I recall a friendly debate between Barbara and Willem Vis, a senior professor of great charm and distinctly European culture. When Willem remarked that he didn't understand something Barbara said, she gently pointed out the difference

between them. She asked him to imagine what kind of earrings he would wear if he were a woman, and he replied immediately that he would wear small pearl ones. “Willem,” said Barbara, “you are arguing with a woman who is wearing gorillas in her ears!”

Everyone who knew Barbara can tell stories like these, but they only sketch the barest outline of who she was. I feel at a loss for words, incapable of portraying the multifaceted, complex and extraordinary person that was Barbara. I know that, as I remember Barbara, I strive to live up to the demanding standards she set for herself. This was one of her many legacies to us, her colleagues and friends.

—*Professor Barbara Black*