

Amber

BY SHELLI FEDULLO

I met Amber Racine for the first time about eight years ago at either a Philadelphia Bar Association or a Barristers' Association event. We were introduced by a mutual friend. I am not quite sure which one made the introduction, but it was Regina Foley or Kevin Mincey or Bernie Smalley. Although I do not remember a lot of details, I very clearly remember that I liked Amber immediately. She was friendly, high-energy, and radiant. She struck me as being lit from within, but not in a "look at me" way.

Our shared involvement in professional activities often brought Amber and me to the same events, and because we shared many mutual friends, we would always have a "stop and chat" with a few of them. It didn't take very long for our greetings to include a hug, or very long for my fondness of Amber to grow. I already knew from reputation that Amber was a leader, but it was in 2014 when she served as president of the Barristers' that I learned the depth of her talent. I learned how her commitment to the professional community was matched by her service to the Philadelphia community. I learned that she knew how to get things done. I learned that she was unafraid of speaking the truth. I learned how she inspired and motivated others.

As our friendship grew, our 29-year age difference made



absolutely no difference. Over the years, we worked together around important, serious, sometimes difficult issues, especially last year when she was chair of the Board of Governors and I was Chancellor. Amber was my touchstone, my trusted advisor. We also laughed together over silly things. As good friends do, we could look at each other and read the other's mind. And of course, there were the texts (many of you know what I mean). I knew that Amber would always be a part of my life. She promised that when she came to visit in my old age, she would make sure I was wearing lipstick. As I told her, many times, I had claimed her as my adopted "Bar Association daughter" who I loved and cherished.

It was "please wake-me-up from this terrible dream" and unfathomable to have become part of a bereaved community, joined together in heartbreak, bereft over Amber's sudden passing on November 11. Our Amber, this brilliant, vibrant, generous, compassionate, honest, funny, talented, luminous, loving woman. This person

of grace, kindness, integrity, strength, and wisdom. This accomplished lawyer, this "let's make this happen" leader, this respected role-model, this unselfish mentor. Amber, a woman lit from within and a source of light for all of us. Our beautiful, beloved, precious, once-in-a-lifetime, Amber, always a blessing, and now of blessed memory.

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Grief and loss. Yes, we begin to move on as well as we can. Time helps, but grief is not linear. Sometimes we feel the loss as if it was new. But what we learn is that love is forever, immutable, and that our memories are blessings.

Over the last few years I find myself thinking about how we handle loss and grief. Our religious and cultural rituals and customs bring solace. Good and caring people envelope us with kindness and sympathy, they offer charity to honor our loved one. They comfort us and share our tears. And then, within a few weeks, even those whose loss is the most profound -- close family and dearest of friends -- are expected at least to try to start to do whatever it is we normally do, to begin to "move on." And in our different ways and at different paces, we each do -- what else can we do?

And the rest of us, those in the wider circle of loss, we grieve too. In the weeks since Amber's passing, friends who loved her -- those who, like me, are in this wider circle of loss -- have ourselves felt lost. We talk to each other. We cry. We ask each other how can we manage without Amber, what do we do? We all want to call Amber to ask her.

The truth is that we already know. We know exactly what Amber would want us to do, expect us to do. In being blessed by her memory, we owe it to Amber to keep her light alive, each in our own way. To be generous of time and spirit. To be a mentor. To help without being asked. To bravely speak the truth. Yes, maybe no one aside from Amber would don a turkey headband and turkey glasses while at the podium at a meeting of the Board of Governors to ask for donations to the Barristers' Turkey Drive. Maybe only a few people aside from Amber would happily ride around in a truck to hand out turkeys and food to families in need. Maybe only Amber would ask the women she mentors to stand next to her when she accepted a mentoring award. Maybe Amber is one of the few people who always intuitively knew when her help was needed and helped without

being asked. Still, having lived in Amber's light, we each know what to do.

Amber meant so many things to so many, but above all, she was an adoring and adored daughter. To dearest Juliana, thank you for the precious gift of your Amber. My sorrow for your loss is as deep as my love for Amber. I hope knowing what she meant to all of us brings some comfort to you and to your family.

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So Amber, my sweet friend Amber, while you won't be able to make sure I am wearing lipstick when I am old, I will know you for always. ■

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