

I recently had a mountain-top experience I'd like to share with you. Last year I was nominated by longtime friend Anne Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association, to join the International Women's Forum, a global organization of preeminent women

of significant and diverse achievement. I was thrilled to be accepted into this prestigious organization, which brings women together across international boundaries to share knowledge, enrich each other's lives, and exert influence in their communities and globally. Recently, two of its most accomplished members invited the DC Women's Forum to lunch.

This was no ordinary gathering: The invitation came from Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg. We gathered in a regal room at the Supreme Court, and as we talked and admired the grandeur, Justice O'Connor joined us. After she welcomed her guests, I spoke to her about my recent visit to the Heard Museum in Phoenix, which houses a gallery named in her honor. As an Arizonian, she said how proud she is of her state and the museum and shared that she, too, was in Phoenix then and had hurt her leg on a bed frame, requiring medical attention. We talked about the little annoyances of life and the tremendously hot Arizona weather.

At lunchtime the two justices joined the buffet line like the rest of us, not asking for special treatment. I sat at a table and soon was joined by other guests, including Justice Ginsberg. She spoke casually during lunch, mentioning her husband's excellent golf game. Afterward, the two leaders told fascinating stories about the chief justices whose portraits surrounded us, graciously thanked us for joining them, and departed.

Walking back to the office, I reflected on how these two outstanding people acted like ordinary folks who just happened to achieve extraordinary accomplishments in their lives. No pretenses or fanfare — just honest, straightforward conversation.

This is the same impression I've received throughout the past eight seasons of The Nation's Capital Distinguished Speakers Series. We bring our audience face to face with the most

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Accomplishments

celebrated people in the world. For 32 unforgettable evenings, we have heard from leaders who have moved the world and shaped our lives.

All of the speakers say they are "ordinary" people who work hard, have strong passion, and continue to care greatly about their contributions to society. Backstage, I am struck by how clearly they resemble you and me. They have the same hopes, dreams, and anxieties, and they are committed to succeeding as they walk out on stage.

After their speeches, they often ask me how they did. I'm used to that question now but was taken aback by it at first. Imagine being asked that question by the likes of Margaret Thatcher, President George H.W. Bush, Stephen Hawking, or Archbishop Desmond Tutu. As with the justices, I marvel at the down-to-earth personae of our guests and how they reach out to our audience.

The Speaker Series provides our community the chance to learn from these "ordinary" people with extraordinary lives. We hear firsthand how they achieved greatness and how they developed such incredible leadership abilities: all lessons important to us as leaders in our profession.

Our ninth season begins November 19 at the Kennedy Center with a patriotic theme, "American Heroes, American Stories." In this pivotal moment in history, the Speaker Series will spotlight the American spirit — what it is now and how it has changed — according to the people who most embody it. Scheduled are former President and the newest Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter;

award-winning television newscaster Peter Jennings, with Michael Beschloss, Gwen Ifill, and two surprise panelists; former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani; and international musical icon

Quincy Jones. For more information, visit www.gwsae.org/speakerseries.

Also, please notice the many Speaker Series sponsors who will provide us with the opportunity to touch greatness four times this year. I hope to see you, your staffs, and your guests during these intimate evenings.

