



Address at the Becky Salokar Celebration of Life

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on January 23, 2017**



This speech was presented to the attendees of the Celebration of Life for FIU's former Associate Professor of Politics and International Relations, Becky Salokar, on January 23, 2017.

Good afternoon – thank you for being here. Let me begin with this question: What is it about the passing of a dear friend that clears the mind and reminds us of all that is important? This is a question that I asked when we lost Debi Gallay. I ask it again this afternoon. What is it about the passing of a dear friend that clears the mind and reminds us of all that is important?

During the solitude, quiet and tranquility of this past December holiday, I could not stop thinking about Becky and what she and Judy had been through... What I knew about her. What I did not. Why I had not gotten to know her better – as the friend that she always was, as the colleague who gave me unconditional backing maybe at times when I did not deserve it, as the person who was always there for FIU. Conscientious. Responsive and responsible. Frank. Candid. Authentic.

Although it is not reflected in the institutional memory, Becky served as my associate Dean in the new but short-lived College of Urban and Public Affairs here at FIU in the 1990s. I will never forget having breakfast with Becky that fresh and bright Spring morning and asking her to serve as my associate Dean. She was thoroughly surprised. Did not quite see herself in that role. But because I asked, and our wise Provost Mau was persuasive, she took the job on.

We set about to reorganize the four programs in the then college – as Luis Salas aptly described it – “to rearrange the chairs.” But at that point in her career, Becky needed more professionally than the position provided.

The end came shortly. We had just completed an assembly of faculty. There I had announced a new faculty assignment strategy that removed flexibility in faculty work effort.

Shortly after the unhappy gathering, one of our colleagues from Social Work assaulted Becky as she was standing on a balcony in AC1. He was so angry about the announcement that he sought her out, told her we were wrong about this, and then angrily pushed her so hard that Becky nearly fell over the two story balcony unto the brick patio below. That professor was suspended from the university and then resigned, but Becky had had it – she wanted back to University Park and to her Political Science colleagues.

Earlier, I mentioned that Becky was conscientious, responsive and responsible, frank, candid, and authentic. Let me pivot around the quality that for me stands out!

The quality that most stands out for me about Becky professionally was her authenticity as a human being – both in and out of the job. In this selfie and big me era, Becky had a unique inner compass and persona that gave her an authenticity that most of us – including me – might strive for but will rarely achieve.

Knowing Becky for over three decades, I can assure you that this authenticity was not contrived or affected. It was natural. It was Organic.

Listen to Charles Taylor (from David Brooks in *The Road to Character*, p. 249): “There is a certain way of being that is my way. I am called to live my life in this way and not in imitation of anyone else’s...If I am not, I miss the point of my life. I miss what being human is for me.”

Becky’s unique original self (Brooks, p. 249) is the glue that holds this assembly together this afternoon, and will be the foundation of all the memories that you and I cherish about our Becky.

If this university has a moral ecology, Becky is surely one of its pillars because of her unique original self. This authenticity challenges us as the legacy that Becky leaves us with, as we contemplate how her memory can make us stronger and better human beings....

No, no, no! It’s not possible to believe that someone so large and vibrant is gone. But, no one or nothing can rob us of the sustaining impact of her authenticity as a human being, friend, coach, mentor, and colleague.

We are better for having spent these decades with our Becky, and we will miss her dearly.

Judy we are grateful for all that you did to sustain Becky over these years. We wish that we could do more to sustain you in these difficult moments.