



IN MEMORIAM

Norma Wikler
Professor of Sociology, Emerita
Santa Cruz
1942 — 2002

Norma Wikler, professor emerita of sociology, died in Costa Rica on May 28, 2002, at the age of 60. During her twenty years at UCSC, from 1971 to 1991, Professor Wikler was an outstanding teacher who inspired generations of students with her passionate investigation of social inequalities and strategies for social change in a broad range of institutions: the courts and legal system, health care, the military, among others.

As a teacher at UCSC, and elsewhere, she was well known for her brilliant wit and sense of humor, her astounding energy, intellectual breadth, dramatic flair, and her often- zany sense of the absurd. Her research and teaching combined her passions for political activism and social justice. She was prescient in detecting and analyzing important social issues and problems. Her work was always on the cutting edge or ahead of its time.

As a child, she lived in Lexington, Kentucky, on the grounds of a prison directed by her father, a psychiatrist and leading expert in substance abuse. Her first degree, from the University of Michigan, was in nursing, which she hated. She ended that brief career by tossing her uniform and nursing apparatus into a ceremonial bonfire, early on displaying her life- long courage to leave behind what was safe or expected in order to take on new challenges. She left behind her first career to study sociology at UC Berkeley during the 60s, where she was involved in the anti- war movement, and wrote her doctoral thesis on the political consciousness of Vietnam veterans. I recall she often spoke of the deep emotional scars suffered by her subjects, long before there was any widespread appreciation of the prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder following combat in Vietnam.

In 1979 Professor Wikler published *Up Against The Clock: Career Women Speak on the Choice to Have Children*. It was one of the first works to explore the new choices and conflicts of women of her generation. According to Betty Friedan, it was a pathbreaking book, “delineating the problems and conflicts of young women living with the options the Women’s Movement fought for.”

In 1989, Professor Wikler turned her intellectual and organizing talents to her greatest and most influential work. She took a leave from UCSC from 1989 to 1991 to become the founding director of the National Judicial Education Program to Promote Equality for Women and Men in the Courts, sponsored by the NOW Legal and Education Fund and the National Association of Women Judges.

Professor Wikler’s founding work generated more than 50 gender- bias task forces in the state and federal courts, a movement that forced judges to examine how gender stereotypes permeated the legal system and produced serious inequalities. This work remained a passionate concern of Norma’s for the next twenty years and she pursued it not only at UCSC, but also as a Bunting Fellow at Harvard University and at the Institute for the Study of Social Change at UC Berkeley. As several friends and colleagues have observed, Norma’s spirit and work are alive every day in our courtrooms, whenever a battered woman is granted protection instead of being ignored. In addition to her work on gender bias in our judicial system, Professor Wikler co-authored important articles with her brother, Dan Wikler, about emerging ethical issues in the new medical technologies.

In 1992, Norma found the courage, once again, to give up the safety and security of a tenured academic position in order to move to Costa Rica, where she became involved in creating and building an organic pineapple industry. The ten years she spent in Costa Rica allowed her to combine her interests in ecology, labor reform, community organizing, and child welfare. She organized numerous projects for improving the lives of workers and children in her community, and co-authored a booklet for children on organic agriculture that is used by schools throughout Costa Rica.

Norma was also passionate about the arts, especially dancing, and she was a talented dancer. At Norma's memorial service in New York, her brother Dan recalled one of Norma's boldest and most joyful schemes: pretending to be a member of the New York Police Department so she could dance in a special performance of "Kids and Cops" at Lincoln Center. The performance was choreographed and directed by George Balanchine, her artistic hero. Norma thrived not only on intellectual, artistic, and political adventures, but also physical ones - hiking and traveling - that required great physical stamina, dexterity, and grace.

A memorial bench in Professor Wikler's honor now overlooks the beautiful lake in Central Park, a place she loved. It bears the epitaph, "Outraged and Outrageous." Paul Levy, a friend of Norma's since childhood, concluded his tribute for her memorial website with this remark: "How Norma would have relished the ditsy incongruity of having an epitaph derived from an old, banal Readers' Digest theme: but she really was The Most Unforgettable Person I've Ever Met."

Those of us who were fortunate to be her friend or colleague will never forget her. She brightened our world, and deeply enriched our lives, and no one could take her place. In addition to her brother Dan Wikler, her sisters Marjorie Senechal and Jeanne Wikler, her mother Ada Wikler, and several adored and adoring nieces and nephews survive Professor Wikler.

Marcia Millman