David Hinkley

THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN

More Stories of Solidarity and Struggle in the Human Rights Movement

Activism and Social Movement Studies

Collection Editor
R. ANNA HAYWARD

LIVED PLACES PUBLISHING

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I dedicate this work to all the women profiled in these pages. In particular, I want to acknowledge Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan, whose leadership brought me onto a path I have traveled for over half a century, and Rose Styron, whose first-hand investigations to document human rights violations have been conducted with courage matched only by her grace.

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Abstract

From my first days of involvement in the human rights movement, women in its leadership have mentored me and inspired me with their vision, commitment, and tenacity. Here are stories of their irreplaceable contributions to the struggle for prisoners of conscience, survivors of war crimes and torture, refugees, people living in extreme poverty, and women seeking equal rights in law and practice. In addition to their acts of solidarity and shared struggle, here too are stories of women standing up for themselves from El Salvador to Yemen, from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Zenaida Velásquez Rodriguez. Welcome!

Key words

activism, Amnesty International, asylum, conscience, movement, prisoners, refugees, solidarity, struggle

Contents

Introduction

This collection of stories is intended as an invitation to human rights activism. Students and teachers of history, international relations, women's studies, medicine, and law can find in these seven tributes to the leadership of women in the human rights movement avenues for the engagement of a new generation in this historic struggle. The invitation has become especially urgent in light of the critical challenges the movement must confront today, when refugees and migrants are under siege in the United States and many parts of the world, when legal rights women have enjoyed for decades have been rescinded, and long sought goals are in danger of slipping away. The women featured in these pages have pioneered new frontiers of struggle, improved the lives, and lifted the hopes of oppressed people, some through acts of solidarity, others by standing up for themselves and for history. Protecting the human rights of every person depends on vigilance and activism, now more than ever in our lifetime. The movement needs your hands, your voice, your vision, and talents. Here, you will find ways, championed and led by these remarkable women, to make a difference for human beings suffering injustice and for a better future for all.

Learning objectives

Identify and assess the implications of current US refugee policy on human rights and the principle of equal rights under the law.

Identify the factors arising from current US immigration and refugee policy that may lead to a Constitutional crisis, and consider appropriate responses of legal activists and civil society to defiance of a court order by the executive branch.

Evaluate the relevance to your life and community of these challenges within the worldwide human rights struggle, for women's rights, refugee and migrant rights, and for an end to extreme poverty and inequality.

Warning

This book contains explicit references to and descriptions of situations which may cause distress. This includes references to and descriptions of:

- Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners
- Sexual violence and domestic abuse
- Violent assault and rape, including of children
- Forced disappearances and political killings

Please be aware that references to potentially distressing topics occur frequently and throughout the book.

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The mentor, the music and the muse: Ginetta Sagan, Joan Baez, and Rose Styron

To prisoners of conscience huddling in dark prison cells anywhere on earth, we say, "Coraggio. Lavoriamo per te." (Courage. I am working for you.)—Ginetta Sagan in a speech to the Polish Senate in 1997

> Action is the antidote to despair.
>
> Joan Baez

> Miracle of midsummer, the trust of dark
> sails us beyond this harbor.
>
> From *Goodnight, Great Summer Sky* by Rose Styron

Figure 1: Ginetta Moroni Sagan. Photo credit: Wikipedia, public domain.

The mentor and the music: A human rights journey begins

My human rights journey began in 1973, when Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan recruited me as a volunteer for Amnesty International. Listening to a radio interview with Joan about her work with Amnesty led me to call the contact number she provided. It was Ginetta's phone. Joan answered and gave the phone to Ginetta, who invited me to come to her Atherton, California, home at once. From the moment we met, Ginetta's vision, energy, and passion were an inspiration to me. She became my mentor, sharing lessons from her long experience in organizing and campaigning for human rights, which began before I was born.

At 19 years old in 1945, Ginetta had already risked her life for two years as a courier for the anti-Fascist resistance in Italy, helping

over 300 Jews escape to Switzerland. Her parents were arrested by Mussolini's Black Brigades for their own activities in the resistance. Her father was shot in a staged "escape" and her mother, who was Jewish, was murdered in Auschwitz.

Once I was in Ginetta's confidence after working closely together for many months, in quiet moments she sometimes shared memories of her days in the resistance. I remember the first time she asked me to sit a while at her kitchen table after the other volunteers had left for the evening. Her eyes were alight while remembering her colleagues in the resistance, but she winced at the memory of her capture by the Black Brigades. I listened in silence to her account of being subjected to brutal torture for forty-five days. Of all forms of ill-treatment she suffered, she told me the most devastating were mock executions, each staged immediately after she was forced to witness the execution of a fellow prisoner. She related how the torture and rapes she endured had traumatized her, haunting her sleep with nightmares and her soul with unbearable memories. But she remembered, too, the precious glimmer of hope that came in the form of a loaf of bread thrown into her cell by a jailer that contained a matchbox with the word *coraggio* (courage). However, soon after, a date was set for her execution. And then, at the last possible moment, she was rescued.

On April 23, the day of her scheduled execution, she was being beaten by guards in a villa in Sondrio, Italy, when a pair of German officers forced her Italian captors to release her into their custody. She later recalled watching the stars from the window of their car and thinking, "I will never see another dawn." But the Germans revealed themselves to be Nazi defectors collaborating

with her resistance comrades, and they delivered her to safety. Ginetta told me that her rescue had illuminated what acts of solidarity can achieve; indeed, her experience had intensified her determination to persevere in the struggle against oppression, unjust imprisonment, and torture. "I was not forgotten," she said with a brave little smile, adding, as I often heard her remind her audiences, "We must never forget the prisoners."

At first, only a handful of us were volunteering at Ginetta's home. Until we had recruited enough volunteers to distribute the work, we few did everything from writing letters on prisoner cases to organizing new groups. But soon, staffing the first Amnesty sign-up tables at Joan's concerts provided us with invaluable opportunities to introduce this new organization to thousands

Figure 2: Ginetta Sagan calling for the release of Tibetan activist nun Phuntsog Nyidron in 1990. Photo credit: Alchetron Free Encyclopedia, public domain.

of potential activists. So, by the winter of 1973, Ginetta's house was perpetually humming with activity. One evening, just before Christmas, noticing that I was still sorting dossiers and stuffing envelopes at 9 pm, Ginetta said, "Enough. Any of our smart new volunteers can perform these tasks as well as you. I want you to do what only you can do."

Learning the work

During those years, I had many opportunities to observe Ginetta's method of cultivating volunteers. She would talk at length with each one as soon as she recognized in her or him the necessary energy and commitment to go far with the work. These conversations always included taking a kind of inventory: talents and interests, professional training, networks and associations, and any experience of activism. She would then tailor assignments to take advantage of each volunteer's assets and interests. She applied the same approach to working with donors. I was teaching junior high school then, which interested Ginetta. She asked me to consider what teachers could do in their professional capacity to advance the cause. Since I had past experience as an editor of *The Owl*, the century old literary quarterly of Santa Clara University, Ginetta asked me to develop and edit a newsprint magazine for use as an organizing tool. Eventually named *Matchbox* in honor of that message of hope, it was the first Amnesty newsletter published in the United States. Because I was a teacher, accustomed to presenting ideas to students, she appointed me to lead discussions at regional gatherings and to act as a spokesperson at demonstrations and in media interviews.

One of the vital lessons I learned from Ginetta during that first year was the importance and power of networking. She stressed that the human rights struggle requires the application of many different skills and perspectives. Yet, it wasn't just her words that struck home; Ginetta always taught most of all by example, and that fall, she showed me a good example of how networking is done. In the face of widespread violations of medical ethics, including psychiatric detention of dissidents in the Soviet Union, and the participation of medical professionals in torture and executions in many countries, including in the application of the death penalty in the United States, Ginetta called on her husband Leonard, a physician and medical researcher, for leadership. They hosted a dinner party to discuss these issues with some of Leonard's colleagues at Stanford University and in private practice. Because Ginetta had noticed that I have a facility for remembering what I hear, she asked me to attend as a fellow Amnesty activist and also as an observer. I knew Ginetta would want me to take mental notes she could debrief me about after the party.

At that memorable dinner, I learned something completely unexpected about Ginetta: she was a superb cook. The dinner she served was sumptuous and elegant, the first of many I would enjoy in the coming years. I didn't know then, but eventually learned that after the war, Ginetta had emigrated from France, where she had been living with her godfather and studying at the Sorbonne. She came to the United States and met Leonard Sagan while both were studying at the University of Chicago. After their marriage, when Leonard's work took him to Washington, DC, Ginetta went with him and worked part-time teaching cooking classes to the wives of US Congressmen.

After they moved west, her culinary talents quickly became well known in California. By the 1970s, she numbered among her friends renowned chefs, including Masa Kobayashi of Paris and San Francisco and owner and chef Pierre Dupar of the Dar Maghreb Restaurant in Los Angeles, who had been imprisoned by the Nazis in France. Hotelier Bill Kimpton, a friend and frequent dinner guest, commissioned a book of Ginetta's menus and recipes with stories from her life woven in, on the fortieth anniversary of her liberation. A perfect tribute since, as with all her gifts, Ginetta used her cooking talent to advance the cause of human rights, as I witnessed for the first time at the dinner party for doctors.

Ginetta and Leonard kept the conversation with his colleagues that evening light until it was time for dessert and coffee. Leonard then briefly but eloquently articulated Amnesty's concerns. He invited his colleagues to join him in speaking out and organizing against psychiatric detention in the Soviet Union within their professional networks and associations. Most present responded with appreciation if not assent, and a few committed to help. Ginetta spoke with tears in her eyes about her mentor in the resistance, a courageous Italian physician whose execution she had been forced to witness. Those who stayed to discuss what they could do to help got to enjoy Leonard's homemade Zinfandel. Seeing their delight at his handiwork put a radiant smile on his face. Because I stayed to be debriefed by Ginetta, I was the last guest to leave their home that night. At the door, I offered a verbal swoon about Ginetta's cooking. She waved it away. "We are asking a lot," she said. "At least they should enjoy the occasion." That was her way, to meet people where they are,

give them something to remember, something to make them want to hear from her again, and to give something of themselves in return.

The music

Together with Ginetta's leadership and passion, it was Joan's music that had most to do with the growth of Amnesty in the western region of the United States in those formative years of the 1970s. At her concerts, in addition to advocating for peace and nonviolence and denouncing the illegal and immoral US war in Vietnam, Joan would talk about human rights and her work with Amnesty International. She didn't mention the same issues at every concert. At some, she would touch on the human costs of Fascist rule in Greece or on the role of the School of the Americas in propagating the use of torture by the militaries of US allies. She would often end her messages by calling attention to the intrinsically urgent need to abolish torture worldwide. She sang songs of protest, including a ballad about Sacco and Vanzetti, who were executed after a politically charged prosecution in the United States in the 1920s, and a haunting tribute to dissident Natalya Gorbanevskaya, imprisoned without trial in the Soviet Union.

During a pause, one of us would rise to ask, "What can we do?" Joan would invite her audience to stop at a table near the exit when the concert ended and sign up to become a member or start a local chapter of Amnesty International. Hundreds responded. Many would then attend gatherings of local chapter leaders and members, where Joan would sing and play her guitar, creating a unifying esprit de corps.

Figure 3: Mimi Fariña and Joan Baez. Photo credit: markymarko, CC 2.0

Sometimes, Mimi Fariña would sing with her sister Joan or solo. Their mother, Joan Bridge, was among the most active and effective Amnesty volunteers. Ginetta would invite former prisoners of conscience who had been released following Amnesty intercessions to speak about what it meant to them to learn that ordinary people from around the world had worked for their freedom. These presentations, including the inspiring music, had a profound impact on volunteers, including me.

New chapters sprouted up. Our numbers at demonstrations in front of consulates in San Francisco swelled. A few articles appeared in Bay Area newspapers, usually featuring Joan and Ginetta. The Nobel Peace Prize that Amnesty would receive was still four years in the future, but the music had begun to make people notice.

At the end of that first Amnesty summer, in August 1973 the Fascist regime in Greece yielded to international pressure by granting a general amnesty to all political prisoners. I remember the quiet celebration Ginetta and Joan shared with our growing group of volunteers. Joan brought out her guitar and sang a song she and exiled Greek actress and chanteuse Melina Mercouri had performed together at a concert in Europe to raise consciousness about the torture of prisoners under the Papadopolous dictatorship. We clinked our glasses of Leonard's wine in a toast to freedom. After all the worry and feverish activity to confront the crisis in Greece, Ginetta seemed to breathe easier at last. The "regime of the colonels" would take almost another year to collapse, but the cessation of torture with the release of all the prisoners of conscience whose cases we had worked on felt to all of us like a powerful victory.

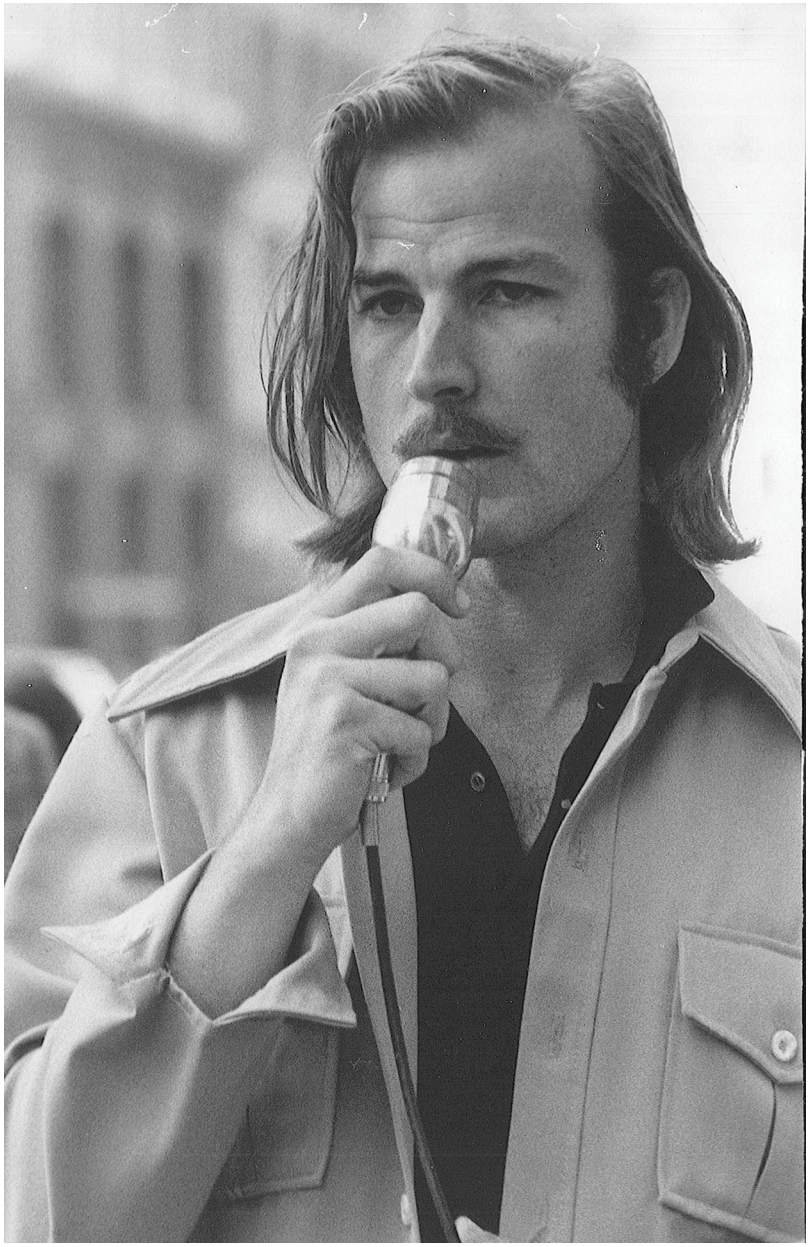

Figure 4: Me speaking at a demonstration outside the Indonesian Consulate in San Francisco, April 15, 1975. Photographer unknown, photo owned by me.

Figure 5: Melina Mercouri in exile. Photo credit: Wikimedia, public domain.

Before I left her home that warm summer evening, Ginetta and I spent a few moments together at her kitchen table. She quietly reflected on the specter of brutal oppression that had haunted her life. "Fascism didn't end with Nazi Germany, of course," she said. "It won't end with Greece either." She was right. A few weeks later, it came to Chile.

The muse: Rose Styron and the conflagration in Chile

On September 11, 1973, with the complicity of Henry Kissinger, the Nixon administration, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), General Augusto Pinochet took power in Chile in a violent

military coup that took the lives of at least 3,000 Chileans, including democratically elected President Salvador Allende. Amnesty International condemned the killings and disappearances and the torture of tens of thousands of prisoners that ensued.

At her concerts, Joan sang songs by Chilean folksingers Violeta Parra and Victor Jara and urged her audience to write letters and telegrams to Chilean officials and members of Congress calling for the release of Chilean prisoners of conscience, including Allende's Minister of Justice, Orlando Letelier.

After the death of her husband, First Lady Hortensia Allende went into exile in Mexico. In 1974, we learned from Amnesty in London that the United Nations had invited her to speak about the conflagration in her country on February 4. Ginetta immediately reached out to Rose, whom she had gotten to know two years earlier at an international conference on the abolition of torture convened by Amnesty International in Paris. On Amnesty's behalf, Ginetta asked Rose, an accomplished poet and journalist and the wife of author William Styron, to go to Chile to collect information about human rights conditions there. Her findings would substantiate and bring up to date Hortensia Allende's report to the UN. In particular, Rose was asked to seek the whereabouts of artists and American students who had been arrested and held with thousands of others in the Estadio Nacional de Chile, a soccer stadium in Santiago.

Knowing it would be Rose's first experience of clandestine research, Ginetta flew to New York and met Rose at the airport to go over what to do and especially, what not to do. Rose had agreed to go, but wondered why she was chosen. In her

luminous memoir *Beyond This Harbor: Adventurous Tales of the Heart*, Rose speculates that she was selected because she could conduct herself so as to be seen by Chilean authorities as just another American tourist. To help her play the part, Rose brought along her eldest daughter, Susanna, then 17. But Susanna was not along only as cover. She had a greater facility with Spanish than did Rose, having spent several months in Spain, and she was studying Latin American history as a freshman at Yale. For the benefit of the security police watching them, Rose and Susanna took in popular tourist spots in Santiago between discreet visits with clergy and other contacts provided in New York by Rev William Wipfler, head of the Latin America division of the World Council of Churches. At that time, a coalition of clergy members from many faiths, *La Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Vicariate of Solidarity), represented the most vocal and organized opposition to the regime, pursuing every legal means to find the disappeared, obtain their release, and pressure Pinochet to stop the brutality.

Ginetta had warned Rose that their hotel room would be bugged, so Rose played loud music or TV news to cover sensitive conversations. The driver assigned by the hotel was transparently a spy; so Rose, never letting on that she knew they were being surveilled, would have him drop her and Susanna at a big department store. They would immediately leave by another door, take a taxi to their meetings, and afterwards return by cab to the store to meet the driver.

Rose and Susanna traveled to Valparaiso, a beautiful resort city on the coast often visited by tourists. There, their contact identified two ships in the harbor that were being used to hold large

Figure 6: Rose Styron with her daughter Alexandra in 1968. Photo credit: Toni Frissell. Library of Congress, public domain, used with the permission of Rose Styron.

numbers of political prisoners. The prison ships were flanked by US Navy vessels, evidence that the United States was protecting its investment in the junta. At the instigation of Richard Nixon's national security advisor Henry Kissinger, the United States had played a major role in bringing Pinochet's dictatorship to power. Tactics included financing a nationwide trucker's strike and leading an international boycott of Chilean goods to cripple its economy, setting the stage for a coup the CIA helped orchestrate.

The peril Rose and Susanna faced throughout their time in Chile became most acute as they prepared to smuggle documents they had collected out of the country. Rose stashed some in the false bottom of a bag one of her contacts provided, sewed some into the lining of her skirt, and hid others by padding her bosom.

As they checked out, to Rose's dismay, the receptionist informed her that her ticket had been changed from Braniff to LanChile. "Much quicker," he said. Rose quickly gave a bellhop money to run to a phone and change it back, while she explained to the receptionist that she had to meet a friend at the Braniff lounge. "He's not in Santiago," the receptionist replied, without saying how he knew this. "He's coming in just to see us off," Rose insisted.

Rose knew government agents were watching her. It was the moment of her greatest anxiety that she and Susanna would be arrested before leaving Chile. But at the airport, they managed to board the Braniff flight. Preparing to board, Rose saw to her amazement and delight that their plane had been painted by Alexander Calder, a family friend. "Sandy has come to save us!" she told Susanna. On board, Rose saw that a man she was sure was a Chilean security agent chose a seat near them, which meant to Rose that they were not yet out of danger. The flight included a layover in Lima, Peru, where, to escape further surveillance, Rose and Susanna locked themselves in a bathroom for two hours until they were sure their connecting flight to New York had gone without them. They emerged to find the terminal nearly empty, and took a late flight to Dallas. From there, Rose contacted Ted Kennedy, a longtime friend, who arranged for an aide to meet her flight in New York and bring her to Washington, DC. Senator Kennedy promised to meet her at an event he was attending that day. To her shock, Rose learned when she arrived that the event was a formal party honoring Henry Kissinger. Guests lined up to be photographed shaking Kissinger's hand. Ted Kennedy escorted Rose through the line, where she refused to shake hands with the man who had helped bring torture, political