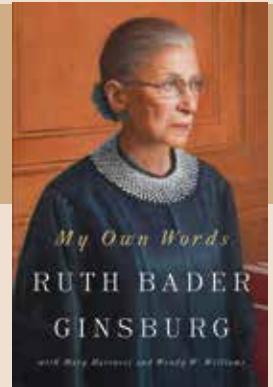


My Own Words

By Ruth Bader Ginsburg with Mary Hartnett and Wendy W. Williams, published by Simon & Schuster (2016), hardcover, 370 pages, \$30
<http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/My-Own-Words/Ruth-Bader-Ginsburg>



Reviewed by Amanda A. Page

Vägmärken is a Swedish word that when translated to English means waymark, pathmarker, or waypaver, and it is a central theme in Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's autobiography *My Own Words* (p 63). This term has become Ginsburg's personal philosophy that flows throughout her career, her writings, and her judicial opinions. Early in her career, Ginsburg was hired by the Columbia Law School Project on International Law to coauthor a book on civil procedure in Sweden and became immersed in Swedish law and culture.¹ This is just one of many little nuggets that add up to a totality of a woman who has paved her own way while leaving a path for others to follow.

My Own Words gives a glimpse behind the workings of the United States Supreme Court. Ginsburg reverts to her roots as a professor of civil procedure in her tutorial of the Court's workday operations and daily procedures. She details how the Court selects the cases it hears, how oral arguments are structured, how the justices determine their decisions, and how their opinions are drafted and released.

This weighty material is preceded by a lighthearted chapter detailing Ginsburg's lifelong love of the opera that she shared with her husband, Marty, as well as her fellow justice, the late Antonin Scalia. She has often dreamed of being an opera diva, and if granted one wish, it would be the talent to have a "glorious voice." This dream was unfortunately crushed at an early age as she tells a self-deprecating story of a grade-school teacher who instructed her

to mouth the words and not sing in school performances.

However, her love of the opera was fulfilled in the most unique way when Derick Wang, a young composer and law student, approached Scalia and Ginsburg with the request to make them the stars of an opera. *Scalia/Ginsburg* is based on their different perspectives of constitutional interpretations. "We are Different, We Are One" plays on the theme of their reverences for the Constitution, the U.S. judiciary, and the Court.² There is an excerpt with an impressive footnote collection detailing all the references in the opera to United States Supreme Court cases.³ It could be considered a review of constitutional law class from the first year of law school.

As most readers are aware, Scalia and Ginsburg had a special relationship that is evident in her deference to him and her many stories about their time together on the Court. In a 2007 interview, Scalia told the authors, "We are two people who are quite different in their core beliefs, but who respect each other's character and ability. There is nobody else I spend every New Year's Eve with." (p 38) Scalia tells of the tears he saw

on Ginsburg's face at seeing the Taj Mahal on their trip to India. Along that same vein, there is an unexpected photo of the two justices on an elephant in India. The insider tales that are shared with readers give us a perspective of these powerful individuals that make them enduring, charming, and personal.

My Own Words would not be a complete collection of Ginsburg's life without including speeches, anecdotes, and biographical tales about Martin "Marty" Ginsburg, whom the justice calls her "life partner." Ruth Bader met Marty Ginsburg during the first semester at Cornell University. Theirs was a marriage based on mutual respect, admiration, and appreciation. She said in an interview that Marty "always made me feel I was better than I thought I was, that I could accomplish whatever I sought. He had enormous confidence in my ability, more than I had in myself." (p 25)

This book was initially intended to be a supplement to Justice Ginsburg's official biography. However, her authorized biographers, Georgetown Law professors Mary Hartnett and Wendy W. Williams, felt a biography would be more fitting after the justice's service on the Supreme Court concluded.

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The compilation of speeches, writings, and opinions on their own are an amazing homage to a woman who has dedicated her life to making this world a better place. To sweeten the pot, Hartnett and Williams have included introductions to each chapter that provide insight into this very private justice's life. They tell of a seemingly normal childhood that was bookended with tragedies. When Ginsburg was only 14 months old, her six-year-old sister died of meningitis, and when she was 17, just two days before her high school graduation, her mother died of cancer.

Ginsburg was able to overcome such striking adversity because of the foundation laid by her ever-encouraging mother. She stated in an interview:

My mother was very strong about my doing well in school and living up to my potential. Two things were important to her and she repeated them endlessly. One was to “be a lady” and that meant conduct yourself civilly, don’t let emotions like anger or envy get in your way. And the other was to be independent, which was an unusual message for mothers of that time to be giving their daughters. (p 5)

The vastness of *My Own Words* starts with Ginsburg's first published article in her elementary school paper—an editorial discussing such high-level scholarly issues as the Ten Commandments, Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence. The article gives the reader a glance into the prolific Vågmarcken she will become as a professor, lawyer, and Supreme Court justice.

My Own Words continues with several speeches regarding gender equality, a cause that has been at the core of her essence and her contributions to better this world. The justice's speeches start with a tribute to the women who are an inspiration to her and champions for the cause of gender equality. The speeches then proceed to tell of the women who have influenced past Supreme Court justices' lives in a chapter entitled “Remembering Great Ladies: Supreme Court Wives' Stories.”

The book also includes a comprehensive historical education on landmark United

States Supreme Court cases pertaining to gender and race equality. Ginsburg had a hand in history as an attorney submitting an amicus brief on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union for *Frontiero v Richardson*, which held in 1973 that the U.S. military cannot give out benefits to the family of service members differently because of sex.⁴ The book also contains a speech relating to the justice's role in the 1996 case of *United States v Virginia*, a.k.a. the VMI case, in which she wrote the decision for the majority that held the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was violated when the Virginia Military Institute excluded women from admission.⁵ The authors also include her speeches pertaining to equal justice regarding race in her discussion of the landmark Supreme Court decisions in *Brown v Board of Education* and *Loving v Virginia*.⁶

My Own Words offers a great behind-the-scenes look at Ginsburg, who can appear so guarded and measured, by sharing numerous anecdotes that create a personalized image not often seen in public. Readers will take away an understanding of the humanity, humor, and gumption the justice possesses.

Though Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg appears slight and soft spoken, diving into

her speeches and writings gives readers insight into the resilient trailblazer who is an inspiration to anyone striving to be a true Vågmarcken in this world. ■

Amanda A. Page, Esq. is the owner of Page Law, PLLC, located in Southfield. Her practice is dedicated to consumer bankruptcy law. She is a member of the SBM Michigan Bar Journal Committee and vice chair of the Oakland County Bar Association's Debtor/Creditor Committee.

ENDNOTES

- Oyez, *Body Politic: Ruth Bader Ginsburg* <https://www.oyez.org/justices/ruth_bader_ginsburg?page=3&order=title&sort=asc&iframe=true&width=80%25&height=80%25> (accessed February 8, 2018).
- Wang, Preface to *Scalia/Ginsburg: A [Gentle] Parody of Operatic Proportions*, 38 Colum J L & Arts 237 (2015).
- Wang, *Libretto, Scalia/Ginsburg: A [Gentle] Parody of Operatic Proportions* (2014) <[http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53540427e4b086059ff999ce/t/53cec579e4b0dd883c98cbc4/1406059897369/Scalia-Ginsburg+Libretto+-+2014-05-09+\(F\).pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53540427e4b086059ff999ce/t/53cec579e4b0dd883c98cbc4/1406059897369/Scalia-Ginsburg+Libretto+-+2014-05-09+(F).pdf)> (accessed February 8, 2018).
- Frontiero v Richardson*, 411 US 677; 93 S Ct 1764; 36 L Ed 2d 583 (1973).
- United States v Virginia*, 518 US 515; 116 S Ct 2264; 135 L Ed 2d 735 (1996).
- Brown v Board of Education*, 347 US 483; 74 S Ct 686; 98 L Ed 873 (1954) and *Loving v Virginia*, 388 US 1; 87 S Ct 1817; 18 L Ed 2d 1010 (1967).



MONEY JUDGMENT INTEREST RATE

MCL 600.6013 governs how to calculate the interest on a money judgment in a Michigan state court. Interest is calculated at six-month intervals in January and July of each year, from when the complaint was filed, and is compounded annually.

For a complaint filed after December 31, 1986, the rate as of January 1, 2018 is 2.984 percent. This rate includes the statutory 1 percent.

But a different rule applies for a complaint filed after June 30, 2002 that is based on a written instrument with its own specified interest rate. The rate is the lesser of:

- 13 percent a year, compounded annually; or
- the specified rate, if it is fixed—or if it is variable, the variable rate when the complaint was filed if that rate was legal.

For past rates, see <http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/Resources/Documents/other/interest.pdf>.

As the application of MCL 600.6013 varies depending on the circumstances, you should review the statute carefully.