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EULOGY FOR TORA KAY BIKSON

Michael Rich

February 22, 2013

We are here today to celebrate the extraordinary life and career of an unforgettable friend and colleague; an important intellectual leader, teacher, mentor, and researcher; and a wonderful mother. Tora Kay Bikson. Tora meant a lot to many, many people, but she also meant a lot to this institution, so I am especially grateful to her family for choosing RAND as the site of this tribute and also for asking me to share some of my memories and thoughts today.

Thanks specifically to Dr. Karra Bikson, whom you will hear from a little later, and thanks as well to Fred Ruf and Tom Bikson.

Tora Bikson's RAND career stretched nearly four decades. She came to RAND in 1974 with four advanced degrees. She had graduated from college with a degree in philosophy and minors in French literature and English literature. She then earned a master's degree and a Ph.D. in philosophy, with a concentration in formal logic and the philosophy of science, and a minor in contemporary epistemology, the study of knowledge. She then earned another master's degree and another Ph.D., this time in psychology, with a concentration in psycholinguistics. I have to say that I am very proud to be president of an organization that could attract someone like that! And, of course, I am very grateful that we had the good sense to hire her.

Tora was a stellar researcher with an enormous body of published work and a dazzling array of collaborators. She specialized in identifying and understanding the factors that explain successful organizational change and innovation, and she helped pioneer and shape the study of how modern communications technologies could, would, should, and ultimately did change the behavior and performance of organizations and individuals. Her leadership in these fields resulted from her combination of brilliance, prescience, and experience examining a very wide array of settings and organizations, from the FBI to the national university in Qatar. The vast majority of research at RAND is commissioned by clients and grantors, and Tora's list is as long and varied as that of almost anyone I have encountered: It includes the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, the United Nations, the Markle Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the OECD, and the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, among many others.

Her very first RAND publication, written with Jackie Goodchilds, was called *Old and Alone*. It examined the common assumption that being old and alone is a severely negative condition. The paper then demolished the assumption by pointing out that it was based almost entirely on data about older men, usually older men who were in institutionalized settings. Tora and Jackie used a sample of men *and* women and developed an alternative hypothesis that differentiated between men and women; their hypothesis steadily and surely replaced what had been conventional wisdom. This was only the first of Tora's many, many fresh and distinctive analyses.

I could go on about Tora's research, and I am tempted to, but you are going to hear from some of her most illustrious research collaborators today. I *will* say that if all she had done at RAND was

perform and lead research, we'd be saluting Tora today for a tremendously productive and influential career. But, her contributions to RAND—and her importance to the nation—go well beyond even the dozens of clients she helped and the dozens of papers, articles, and reports she placed in the public domain.

For more than a quarter-century, Tora chaired RAND's Human Subjects Protection Committee, which we call the HSPC. This is the institutional review board that evaluates research protocols to ensure that research at RAND that involves human subjects complies with the body of general regulations that have come to be known as the "Common Rule." This entails applying principles of beneficence, respect for persons, and justice, and it often requires the resolution of difficult issues related to consent, risk, deception, mandatory reporting obligations, and confidentiality, among others, and often with respect to vulnerable populations, which makes adjudication of those issues especially delicate and complex.

Protecting human subjects is important at RAND not just or even primarily because it is required by regulations. It is a part of the ethos of our institution. Tora understood that. It is why it has long been RAND policy to apply the ethical standards outlined in the Common Rule to all of our research, no matter what the source of funding. While human subjects protection has a fairly long history in biomedical research, to my knowledge, RAND's HSPC was the first such committee at an institution performing social and behavioral research. It was established in 1969, well before the idea of institutional review boards was introduced in the first revision of the Helsinki Declaration, well before the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was convened, and well before the commission's report, known widely as the Belmont Report, was published. So, this is something that we have been very serious about for a very long time.

At most places, the institutional review board acts like a soccer goalie, blocking or rejecting projects that don't contain adequate safeguards, in order to protect the institution from liability. That's not surprising. Violating the rights of human subjects can trigger an immediate and total suspension of all federal research funding to an organization. So, there's a lot at stake.

But, as usual, Tora didn't see things in the conventional way. She respected the important problems our researchers were addressing, and she admired the innovative approaches they devised to solve those problems. As she saw it, her job and that of the HSPC was to help our researchers have it both ways—to be able to tackle important policy problems using novel methods and to protect their human subjects at the very same time. She saw her job not as blocking or rejecting, but as enabling and facilitating, so she became an expert at balancing the value of evidence-based research to address important societal challenges, on the one hand, with the responsibility to protect human subjects, on the other.

This approach, combined with her expertise and skill in leading the committee, enabled RAND to do trailblazing studies involving such vulnerable populations as children, the homeless, victims of crimes, the financially disadvantaged, prostitutes, prisoners, drug dealers, and even terrorists, and on such intimate and sensitive issues as abuse, marriage, illicit substance use, criminal violence,

depression, financial decisionmaking, and sexual behavior. Every time we undertook one of those studies, Tora helped make it possible.

In the days since Tora passed away, many researchers and HSPC members have sent me memories about Tora in this role. And, frankly, I cannot top Sandy Berry's description of what made Tora so effective and special. Sandy is senior director of our Survey Research Group and a longtime member of the HSPC. She gave me the green light to share what she wrote to me:

It was always fun to see Tora run an HSPC full committee meeting. Tora guided the committee meetings with a light touch. She let members have their say and then looked for solutions that would address concerns without threatening the feasibility and approach of the project. The discussion was wide-ranging and seemed at times to get completely off-track, but Tora was actually in firm control. She invited different perspectives and tolerated viewpoints that sometimes seemed downright wacky, but when the discussion ended she summed up the result with succinct clarity. Tora was so smart and such a kind and positive person that she transcended what can be a narrow regulatory process and made it both intellectual and heartfelt. Those of us who were on the committee or just had projects that required review were well aware how lucky we were to have Tora. She kept us on a clear ethical track, and we will miss her a lot.

Tora became one of the nation's foremost experts on ethical issues associated with designing innovative social and behavioral research projects. In 1999, with Tora's encouragement, I commissioned an outside review of our entire system for protecting human subjects. A major academic medical center had just made a horrendous mistake, and we thought it was prudent to have an outside expert take a close look at our safeguards. I hired Arthur Caplan, then director of the University of Pennsylvania Center for Bioethics, and now at NYU Langone Medical Center, to do the review. At the time, he was arguably already the nation's leading bioethicist. He and his team did an extensive site visit and delivered a detailed written report. But on the way out, he told me that if his university—Penn—were ever to commission an external review of its own human subjects protection system, he would recommend that it hire Tora and RAND for the job.

It is no wonder, then, that Tora was a fixture at every important national meeting on research ethics. She won numerous awards for her presentations and service. One 2003 conference paper on the principle of justice in social and behavioral research was selected for inclusion in an anthology of the most influential papers on research ethics over the previous 30 years. Her Pardee RAND Graduate School course on research ethics, which she co-taught with Carl Builder, was a model for others around the world.

But, she did more than simply apply and teach the principles of the Belmont Report. When the regulatory guidance wasn't sufficient, she took the initiative to develop new guidance.

Here is just one example: About ten years ago, Tora realized that the regulations were not adequate for helping our researchers and the HSPC with the special circumstances they were encountering in the growing body of research that RAND was conducting on the antecedents, processes, and

consequences of terrorism. For instance, there was guidance about when deception and concealment were acceptable in research, but the guidance didn't take account of some special circumstances present in certain kinds of research we needed to do on terrorism. There was guidance on balancing the benefits and the risks to participants in research, but it didn't seem as helpful for a situation in which one group bore the risks and another group reaped the benefits. And there was the whole area of researchers' obligations to ensure confidentiality, where we needed to know whether assurances of confidentiality could still be given in an era of new law enforcement statutes and new intelligence techniques, both in the United States and abroad, where we conduct much of this research. We concluded that there simply did not exist a coherent and accepted set of guidelines, a framework, for resolving any of these three sets of ethical issues.

I recall Tora explaining that there were two potential bad outcomes in a situation like that. First, it was possible that RAND and others might decline to do research that is vitally important, simply because we couldn't figure out, with confidence, how to address the protection of human subjects. Clearly, avoiding vital research is not a good outcome. Second, and potentially just as bad, RAND and others might press ahead with research that is well intentioned, only to inadvertently commit important ethical mistakes that could harm the human subjects who participate in the research, and ultimately harm our organizations.

Tora, Patrick Gunn, and I spent a week in Washington visiting every U.S. government agency we could think of in search of some signal that the authorities were thinking about these dilemmas. We came up empty-handed. So Tora launched and led an international discussion to develop the conceptual framework and the principles for resolving these questions so that research in this very important domain could proceed in an ethical manner.

I hope you see why I believe that both RAND and the nation have lost a treasure.

Tora was a wonderful colleague—both supportive and totally unflappable. She made each of us better and didn't seem to care about personal recognition or monetary reward.

Seven or eight years ago, RAND introduced its first RAND-wide bonus program. It took us a while because there was a long-held view that RAND employees weren't really interested in money, that we were motivated by a higher calling. Some of our economists, of course, said that was total nonsense and that everyone was motivated by money, even RAND staff. In the end, that view prevailed. So, with uncharacteristic fanfare and publicity, we launched the program—the first formal cash bonus program in RAND's history. Candidates had to be formally nominated, and then a committee of staff members picked the winners. Fifteen people were awarded a Bronze Award, ten a Silver Award, and eight people won Gold Awards. The RAND president then picked two of the Gold Award winners for the largest cash award of all, the two President's Choice Awards. These were all handed out at a big awards dinner.

The process permits the front office to nominate a candidate, and in that first year I nominated Tora. It was then up to the staff committee. Happily for me, the staff committee named her as one of the eight Gold Award winners, thereby qualifying her for one of the two President's Choice awards.

That was up to my predecessor, Jim Thomson. Lo and behold, Jim did indeed select Tora for one of the two top awards. I suppose it is possible that I might have done a little extra lobbying at this stage, but I'm not saying. This was a big deal because it came with a sizable cash prize, one that was huge for a nonprofit like RAND, especially that first year.

Tora was delighted to hear that she was selected for an award, and at the dinner she gave a wonderful acceptance speech in which she deflected most of the credit onto the rest of the HSPC and talked about what an honor it was to be associated with the other big winner that year, Shan Cretin. At the end of the evening, Jim reminded all the winners to pick up their envelopes at a table on the way out. The envelopes contained certificates and, of course, they contained the actual checks.

Tora went home without picking up her envelope. Someone in the HR department brought it back to RAND and locked it up. What followed was a five- or six-week effort to remind Tora to stop by HR to get her envelope. She never did. One day, Allison Elder, our vice president of Human Resources, bumped into Tora in the hallway. Allison told her to stand still while she retrieved the envelope and brought it to her. That was that, or so we thought.

About two months later, I got an excited phone call from a very grateful Tora. She told me that she took the envelope home and set it aside without opening it. Then, two months later, she was about to throw it away, but she said that she couldn't remember what it was, so she finally opened it up and discovered the check. She told me she had absolutely no idea that any of the awards came with a cash prize, and I am not sure she ever really cared.

When I told Jim the story, he just smiled and said, "Apparently our economists have never met Tora Bikson."

Each researcher at RAND writes a self-evaluation every year or two. I still get a kick out of the one that Tora wrote in 2001. The first question on the form at the time was "Do you have any questions about what's expected of you on the job? What areas are unclear to you?" Tora's answer was two sentences long. It's her second sentence that reveals, to me at least, a lot about what made her so special here at RAND. Here's what she wrote: "Perhaps it's paradoxical to open this review by noting that although I've been at RAND for over 25 years now, I'm not exactly clear about what's expected of me on the job. Maybe that's why I like it."

Tora was truly one-of-a-kind. Her degrees, her research interests, her intellectual and moral strength, her absolutely unique style, the blond hair, the platform shoes, and on and on. One of a kind. Like many of you, I know I've lost a terrific colleague and a wonderful friend. RAND has lost one of its most valuable contributors, and the research world has lost one of its most forward-looking ethicists. It's daunting to think about going on without her, but I know that she taught us well.

Tora, thank you for enriching our lives and the lives of so many others. None of us will ever know anyone else quite like you. You have blessed us with many wonderful memories; you will never be forgotten.