

# CHANGE AGENTS



JON W. DAVIDSON

**IN THEIR BRIEF LIVES, PAULA ETTLEBRICK MADE ONE HELL OF A DIFFERENCE, AND ANTHONY COLÍN STOOD UP TO HELP CREATE A BETTER WORLD.**

**THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO LIVE** their lives embracing James Baldwin's quote, "The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in." Paula Ettelbrick was the epitome of such a person, someone determined to change the world for the better. Paula—who became Lambda Legal's first staff attorney in 1986 and went on to become the organization's legal director from 1988 to 1993—left the world on October 7, 2011, having made it a more just and sweet one than when she came in.

Paula's life was one of service. After Lambda Legal, Paula became the policy director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, legislative counsel of the Empire State Pride Agenda, director of family policy at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and executive director of the Stonewall Community Foundation. Paula also taught at the University of Michigan Law School, NYU School of Law, Columbia Law School, Wayne State University and Barnard College. In her brief 56 years in the world, she made one hell of a difference.

Paula fought to make sure that the LGBT organizations in which she was involved stay true to the teachings of lesbian feminism, that they seek justice for the full diversity that makes up our movement, and that we all understand that we are part of a global community. In a famous nationwide tour with the late Tom Stoddard, who was then Lambda Legal's executive director and her boss, she was a model of how leaders in our community can respectfully differ, as she and Tom publicly debated each other about the wisdom and consequences of pursuing the freedom to marry. And, in the life she built, she modeled that loving families come in many configurations: Paula and her partner Marianne Haggerty often vacationed with Paula's former partner, Suzanne Goldberg and her partner Mary Lou Kelley, together with Paula's and Suzanne's children Adam and Julia.

For those LGBT people whose health is protected by domestic partner benefits, who have retained child custody and visitation that previously would have been denied, who are living safer lives abroad, who are served by stronger and more inclusive public interest organizations, and who have learned how the law shapes and is shaped by society, Paula helped craft your world.

Another agent of change who was important to Lambda Legal recently passed away as well. On November 22, 2011, the world lost Anthony Colín at the tender age of 27. In 1999, when Anthony was only 15, he fought against his high school's refusal to allow him and his friends to form a gay-straight alliance. The decision that bears his name, *Colín v. Orange Unified School District*, established a precedent that has helped hundreds of GSAs overcome school administration opposition. That ruling made clear not only that schools cannot prohibit GSAs when they allow other non-curricular clubs to meet or force them to change their names to avoid the word "gay"; it also recognized, in the decision's words, that GSAs "may involve the protection of life itself" because of how they help contribute to the health and well-being of LGBT youth.

That decision happened because Anthony stood up to help create a better world than the one he entered. I remember so clearly hearing Anthony on the witness stand explaining why he opposed the school's effort to have the GSA renamed the Tolerance Club. "I don't want to be tolerated," he emphasized. "I want gay people to be *accepted*, just like anyone else."

Paula and Anthony, I profoundly miss you both. Thank you for the changed world you have left us.

*Jon W. Davidson*