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Tribute to Philip B. Blank

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Philip B. Blank

A belief in community, a passion for the profession, a concern for others.

Prof. James Fishman†

When Phil Blank came to school it was like a freight train pulling into a station. You could hear him from far, far away, saluting his colleagues, staff, students, and anyone else who happened to be along his path. Law schools tend to be caste-like institutions, but for Phil, Pace was — as it should be — a community. All were greeted with the same good cheer, concern, and bonhomie.

One day I saw Phil alight from his car in the parking lot, walk over to one of our maintenance people, throw a hammer lock on him, and begin shouting in Spanish, in which he was fluent. This encounter ended with a modified high five. At first I thought my dear friend had become unhinged, but Phil was just greeting another colleague.

My office was a few yards from Phil's. We spoke to each other every day, usually not about law school, but of our families. Mondays would often begin with: "Do you know what Gregory did this weekend?"* We tend to compartmentalize our personal and professional lives. Phil and I, though, spent an inordinate amount of time bragging about our children or just talking about life. Phil was a deeply religious man, and carried his belief in everything he did. Ethics and moral responsibility were part of his everyday life and conversation.

Phil was devoted to and so proud of his family. After all these years he was like a honeymooner with his beloved Mary. They telephoned each other constantly. Usually once during the week they lunched together. In good weather they would picnic.

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* One could substitute Philip or Artie, but never Trisha, who was too good to do anything wrong.

Phil got such a kick out of the dirty looks that attorneys would give him who knew he was married but did not realize that he was lunching with his Mary.

When Phil joined Pace ten years ago, I welcomed him with open arms. He relieved me of what was then the rookie assignment, teaching Legal Method. He attacked the subject with the diligence, intelligence, enthusiasm, and integrity with which he did everything. For the first time Legal Method was taught with the seriousness and importance it deserved. Phil was first and foremost a teacher. For him, teaching was more than the transmission of information. He was introducing his students into a profession that he loved and respected. In every subject Phil tried to instill into his students a sense of ethical responsibility and a concern for the moral implications of the attorney's conduct.

Phil had a great respect for the law. He really did think it was majestic, and he strove to communicate the dignity of the legal profession. To students and everyone, he was caring, kind, and incredibly concerned with their welfare. He spent so many hours counselling students, attempting to find them jobs, offering extra assistance, and giving them support when they needed it.

Phil was totally loyal to Pace. He worked harder for the law school than anyone else on the faculty. Though teaching was his great love, he agreed to take on the job of Associate Dean for External Affairs. He disliked the fundraising, and the constant meetings which took him out of the classroom, but he threw himself into it with his usual gusto. As with everything else, he was quite successful. His concern for community was such that he always tried to mediate disputes among the faculty. He would meet my skepticism of his efforts with optimism and a belief that he could make a difference. He nearly always did.

Phil had an unusual quality for a lawyer and an almost unique one for a law professor: he truly was a modest man. Not until he left us did I realize what an expert and how esteemed he was in the field of trusts and estates. He genuinely respected others' accomplishments and expertise. He had a rare quality today, that of deference. He believed that someone who held a certain title, be it Professor, Dean, President, or Chancellor deserved respect. Though he might disagree with an individual or a

policy, he was always loyal and worked for the greater good. His kindness, integrity, and concern for others are examples for all of us. I speak for all my colleagues when I say that I have benefited from knowing him. I only wish these words had been written when he was with us.

