

Pace Law Review

Volume 30
Issue 4 Summer 2010
Showcasing Pace Law School Scholarship

Article 1

June 2010

A Tribute to William F. Harrington

Jay C. Carlisle II
Pace University School of Law, jcarlisle@law.pace.edu

Richard L. Ottinger
Pace University School of Law, rottinger@law.pace.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/plr>



Part of the [Legal Profession Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jay C. Carlisle II and Richard L. Ottinger, *A Tribute to William F. Harrington*, 30 Pace L. Rev. 1140 (2010)

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/plr/vol30/iss4/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at DigitalCommons@Pace. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pace Law Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Pace. For more information, please contact dheller2@law.pace.edu.

A Tribute to William F. Harrington

Jay C. Carlisle II* & Richard L. Ottinger⁺

On January 23, 2010, our beloved friend and founding member of the Pace Law School Board of Visitors, William F. Harrington, affectionately known as BJ, passed away at the age of 78. On Wednesday January 27, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan celebrated BJ's funeral mass, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan. Edward Cardinal Egan also celebrated, along with thirty other priests of the Diocese, and more than one thousand mourners, including leaders of the New York bench and bar, were present to pay their respects to one of Westchester's most prominent lawyers and philanthropists. BJ's son William P. Harrington delivered the eulogy. Archbishop Dolan hailed Mr. Harrington for his "wise counsel" and generous support for the Catholic Archdiocese of New York. We dedicate this special edition of the Pace Law Review to William F. "BJ" Harrington.

BJ was born on December 3, 1931 in Yonkers, New York, to Jane and William Patrick Harrington, a firefighter who died at an early age. BJ delivered newspapers, worked in the post office and did other jobs to cover his school and related expenses. He received guidance and invaluable help from his mentor, a Capuchin priest, Father Finian Sullivan, O.F.M. BJ attended St. Joseph's Grammar School and Charles F. Gorton High School in Yonkers, New York. He is fondly remembered as "the kid with only one suit," which he wore to all functions and on all occasions. BJ then attended Manhattan College, where he participated in the School's accounting and St. Thomas More societies. Upon graduation, he became a teacher of accounting and business law at the Sacred Heart High School, in Yonkers, New York, and also worked part-time in an accounting position. Thanks to the encouragement of Father Finian, he was admitted to Fordham Law

* Jay C. Carlisle is one of the founding professors at Pace University School of Law. He is a Commissioner for the New York State Law Revision Commission, an elected Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation, and a Referee for the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct. Special thanks to Michael Bauscher for all of his assistance.

⁺ Professor, Pace Law School, 1985- ; Dean, Pace Law School, 1989-94; Dean Emeritus, 1995- ; Former Member of Congress, 1965-70, 1975-85.

School and continued working as a teacher during the day and attended law school in the evening. He married Audrey Kazimir in 1955 and began raising a family, with three children at home by the time he graduated from Fordham Law in 1959. He then joined the law firm of Bleakley Platt Schmidt Hart & Fritz, now Bleakley Platt & Schmidt, where he practiced law for 50 years and served as the firm's Chairman and Managing Partner for 35 years. BJ began his legal career at the Bleakley firm working with the late Federal Judge Charles L. Brieant, Jr., who was then a Bleakley partner. The two remained life-long friends.

BJ was an accomplished attorney in trust and estate litigation and oversaw the growth of Bleakley Platt into one of the premier law firms in New York. He served as Legislative Counsel to Lt. Governor Malcolm Wilson between 1964 and 1973, Town Attorney for the Town of Pound Ridge from 1980 to 1985, and Town Justice from 1985 to 1991. A devout and dedicated Roman Catholic, BJ served his church and the Archdiocese of New York throughout his life. He was a Trustee of St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers and St. Patrick's Cathedral, and a key member of the Cardinal's Committee of the Laity, which provides financial support for the Archdiocese's Inner City Scholarship Fund. He served as Chairman of St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains, New York, and as Vice Chairman of St. Joseph's Medical Center's Health Fund in Yonkers, New York. He was a proud member of The Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in the County of Westchester, serving as the Chairman of the Society's Board of Stewards for over 25 years. Under BJ's leadership as Chairman, that organization provided financial assistance to both individuals and groups, benefitting the poor and disadvantaged of Westchester, particularly the inner city schools of Yonkers, New Rochelle and Mount Vernon. As a longtime member and Vice-Chair of St. Joseph's Medical Center Board of Trustees, he helped establish three separate nursing home facilities and co-chaired fund-raising campaigns that successfully raised millions of dollars. In addition, BJ provided indispensable support and guidance at the Pregnancy Care Center, in New Rochelle, New York. BJ was a close friend and confidante of the late John Cardinal O'Connor, and worked tirelessly to carry on Cardinal O'Connor's many initiatives, including the Inner-City Scholarship Fund.

BJ was a Knight of Malta, as well as a Knight of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, and humbly accepted various awards throughout his life including The Fordham Law Alumni Medal of Achievement, Fordham Law School's Dean's Medal of Recognition, the Pace Law

Leadership Award, the Charles Carroll Award from the Guild of Catholic Lawyers, the St. Thomas More Award from the Cardinal's Committee of the Laity, the Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice Medal and the Humanitarian Award for Life. In addition, BJ proudly served as Grand Marshall for the Yonkers St. Patrick's Day Parade.

BJ devoted an enormous amount of his time and contributed generously to various academic and teaching institutions. At the School of the Holy Child in Rye, New York, BJ helped to eliminate a major debt and to build an endowment so that the school could continue to thrive as a recognized Catholic school for young women. He was equally supportive of the Carmelite Sisters in Beacon, New York, and was an active Trustee at Iona Prep where he made significant contributions. At Fordham Law School, he has been one of the pre-eminent leaders, defining the highest aspirations of the School. He was a close confidant and advisor to former Dean John D. Feerick, who recently reminded Fordham alums that "BJ was never too busy to take calls, to meet frequently with us, to offer advice, to sit on school committees, to support the alumni association, and to act as a mentor to hundreds of Fordham students and graduates." He served for many years on the Board of the Fordham Law Alumni Association, and led numerous successful Fordham Law fund-raising drives.

BJ was a founding member of the Pace Law School Board of Visitors and was appointed by Dean Richard L. Ottinger as his first board chairman, a position he held for eleven years. Dean Ottinger recalls that BJ graciously accepted the appointment, despite having served as Chair of a campaign for U.S. Congress by one of the Bleakley Platt partners against Dean Ottinger. BJ was instrumental in starting the law school's Annual Leadership Dinner and worked tirelessly with Ottinger, and successive Deans David S. Cohen and Stephen J. Friedman to provide support and guidance to the Law School. Dean Cohen recalls turning to BJ frequently for advice and successfully asking him once to solve a major law school problem by speaking with an important political figure. Dean Cohen said, "Who wouldn't do what BJ asked to be done?" When BJ retired from the Board in 2005, Dean Friedman, currently president of Pace University, stated, "Pace Law School deeply values your contributions to the school over the years as well as our continued association with you." BJ later served as a member of the Board of Governors for Ave Maria School of Law. He also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Sacred Heart High School.

Professor Jay C. Carlisle recalls meeting BJ shortly after arriving at Pace Law School in late 1977 to serve as Assistant Dean to Dean Robert

B. Fleming. He became aware that not only was BJ a trusted advisor and friend to Dean Fleming but that his firm provided many professional services to the law school, to the University and to the University's then President, Dr. Edward J. Mortola. These services included navigating the financial contributions made by Bessie Gerber Glass and her family toward the construction of the Law School and its Library. When Dean Fleming retired from the law school's deanship, he became "Of Counsel" to the Bleakley firm. During BJ's 35 years as Bleakley's Managing Partner, the firm hired many Pace Law School students for part-time work and, upon graduation, many as associates. Today, the firm is proud of its distinguished partners and associates who are Pace Law graduates. The late Appellate Division Justice James D. Hopkins, a former partner of the firm, was the Acting Dean of the Law School from 1982 to 1983. Many members of the Pace Law School community remember the kindness and leadership demonstrated by BJ, and the School's current Dean, Michelle Simon, is one of his many faculty admirers. Janet Johnson, who served as the Dean of the Law School from 1983 to 1989 and was a professor at Pace until 2008, also has fond memories of BJ. She recalls, "I served for nearly a decade on the Magistrate's Selection Committee for the Southern District. BJ was an active part of that body through its latest activities in 2008. His wise counsel was always apparent, as was his generosity of spirit." Professor Michael B. Mushlin, who for seven years served as Associate Dean under two deans, remembers BJ Harrington's forceful presence and firm commitment to Pace Law School even though it was not his Alma Mater. Pointing especially to BJ's service as Chair of the Board of Visitors, Professor Mushlin said, "This was an immeasurable contribution which signified that this important person believed in us and our potential to do great things."

BJ is survived by his loving wife of 55 years, Audrey, of Pound Ridge, New York; his sons William P. Harrington of Pound Ridge, New York, Brian F. Harrington of Pound Ridge, New York, and Peter F. Harrington of Waccabuc, New York, and their wives, Carolyn, Elizabeth, and Danielle, respectively; his daughters Mary Pat McCarthy and Mary Beth Harrington of Pound Ridge, New York; and nine grandchildren Caitlyn, Megan, Emily, Luke, William Finian, Caroline, Hanna, P.J. and Jill. He is also survived by his two loving sisters, Mary Harrington and Jane Devlin. BJ was a devoted family man and was frequently heard to say, "I could not believe it when Audrey said she would marry me." He loved spending time with his grandchildren and was known by friends, colleagues and family never to complain. Every day for him was a new

one, full of joy and challenge. Dean Feerick recalls one of BJ's five children saying to him, "No matter what you might say about my father in any other area, his best attribute is and has been as a devoted husband to my mother, Audrey, as a father to me and, to my brothers and sisters and as a grandfather to our children. I speak on behalf of all of us when I say he has been the kindest, most compassionate, most generous and most understanding person we have ever known; we love him dearly and we thank him for always being there for us in every moment of our lives."

In his celebrated biography of Lord Carson, Marjoribanks wrote: "A great lawyer's fame is always written in sand, and he leaves behind him no permanent memorial. . . ." BJ Harrington is an exception. He has left a legacy as one who many believe was one of New York's most outstanding trust and estate lawyers. His legacy is the respect and affection he earned from the bench and bar for his extraordinary accomplishments and for his dedication to every task, no matter how mundane. While all his philanthropic achievements are too numerous to describe, Archbishop Dolan aptly referred to BJ at his funeral Mass as one of the most visible Catholic benefactors in New York over the past few decades. The Archbishop said, "He was a regular presence at the most important Catholic gatherings, especially when money and support needed to be raised." The Archbishop continued by observing that he quickly learned about BJ during his first meetings after coming to New York last year. "In the course of those discussions, one name was mentioned over and over again," Dolan said. "'You should talk to BJ Harrington about that, he'll know what to do,' someone would say, and many heads would nod in agreement. Or, I would be told 'BJ Harrington has been working on that . . . ' and I would be assured that the matter was well in hand." At the Mass, Dolan said he came to know BJ as a gentleman. "I am fortunate to have gotten to know him, and the Archdiocese of New York is immeasurably better for the many years of wise counsel and dedicated service he provided," Dolan said.

In April 2008, BJ was honored to meet Pope Benedict XVI at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers. He was humbled by the television coverage which featured him with the Holy Father. Professor Carlisle remembers his last conversation with BJ was about his visit with Pope Benedict XVI. BJ, who would seldom "toot," let alone "blow," his horn was very gratified to have met and spoken with the Holy Father.

At the time of his death, BJ was the moving force behind the construction of the new Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center in Yonkers, New York, serving as the Chairman of the Center's Capital Campaign.

BJ worked tirelessly to establish in southern Westchester the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center as a state-of-the-art \$125 million residential nursing facility for severely disabled children, most of whom cannot walk, eat or breathe on their own. The Center has been in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood since its founding in 1987 by the Sisters of Charity, a Roman Catholic religious order. The Chelsea lease was about to expire and the Center needed a new location. They contacted BJ several years ago to help find a building spot and he brought together the Center and City officials in Yonkers. Then BJ was appointed Chairman of the Capital Campaign for the new facility and the 6.5 acre site at South Westchester Executive Park in Yonkers was purchased. Construction has begun and when completed in 2011 the campus will serve children from low-income families in New York City and Westchester and Putnam Counties. Some of the project will be funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, but BJ set out to raise \$20 to \$25 million to meet the project's official price tag. "This is a tough time to raise funds from individuals," BJ told *The New York Times* on August 29, 2009, "but for the last year and a half I've been asking people from Westchester, prominent people, to come down and visit the center. Every one of them, they come away shaking their heads after they see what's being done for the kids. We're going to be all right."

We will remember BJ for his many accomplishments and generosity but above all for his personal characteristics of fair play and leadership. He was always outraged when others were treated unfairly and he worked diligently to correct the injustice. He strived mightily to help the poor and downtrodden. He believed ardently in education and giving others the opportunity to enjoy the rewards of learning. BJ was an activist who fought for what he believed but afterwards could laugh and love with the best. As Dean Feerick said in 2002, when Edward Cardinal Egan conferred the St. Thomas More Medal upon BJ on behalf of the Cardinal's Committee of the Laity, "To all his endeavors, he brought commitment, passion, unquestioned integrity and a basic decency and humanity that have placed him in a class by himself." BJ's unique sense of what it meant to be a lawyer and a humanitarian was complemented by a wonderful sense of humor, a combination that the students, faculty, deans and alumni of Pace Law School deeply respect. BJ had all the gifts of the Irish, unfailing loyalty to family, faith and friends, a quick wit, and a discerning intelligence. He was a complete gentleman whose exemplary behavior will serve as an inspiration to those fortunate to have known him. BJ Harrington, we salute you and we will miss you.