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Tribute to Dean Philip B. Blank

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This issue of the Pace Law Review is dedicated to the memory of Dean Philip B. Blank.

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Tribute

Tribute to Philip B. Blank

Dr. Mortola†

The decision to dedicate an edition of the Pace Law Review to Dean Philip Blank is an act based upon respect, admiration and deep affection. How well Phil Blank demonstrated that working relationships can become the foundations for true and revered friendships.

I first knew Phil as a dedicated member of the Mount Pleasant Zoning Board of Appeals who, while scrupulously observing his professional responsibilities in that office, guided Pace through much of its development and expansion in Pleasantville and Briarcliff. His hand was involved in much that was done to create our beautiful Pleasantville campus.

The day he joined the faculty of the School of Law was truly a memorable one for the University. Wherever he could be of service, Phil was there. He displayed an intense love for teaching and for Pace. He was known to so many of us as friend. On scheduled or impromptu visits he came to help, to offer counsel — always to offer sincerity, caring, integrity. Ethical considerations were foremost with him, but one could always

† Chancellor, Pace University.

count on gentleness and humor with incisive penetration of the issues and clear identification of the high road to what was just and responsive to the special nature of a School of Law.

In so many ways he demonstrated a devotion to detail in his personal relationships with friends and associates. On the occasion of my retirement in 1987 he and several of his White Plains colleagues prepared a simply wonderful tongue-in-cheek indictment that generously spelled out achievements that occurred while we worked together at Pace. A minor typographical error slipped in. Several weeks after the presentation he came to retrieve it and had it corrected. No effort, no detail went unattended in his teaching and in his relationships with those whom he admired. Above all, his family was his central love. How often he spoke of his wife, Mary, and his children, Arthur, Philip Jr., Gregory and Patricia. They know how precious is the consuming love of a good husband and father. He was always present, always supportive, always caring.

An irreplaceable loss, yet a lasting influence. A totally generous and unselfish man, yet a towering force in bringing humanity and integrity to our School of Law.

Never out of mind. Always remembered with love and the utmost respect, we stand in awe of Philip Blank, who in so short a time positively affected the lives of so many. We shall be eternally indebted to him.

Eulogy to Philip B. Blank

John W. Keegan†

*To everything there is a season
And a time to every purpose under heaven
A time to be born
And a time to die
A time to weep
And a time to laugh
A time to mourn
And a time to dance
To everything there is a season*

We cannot capture Phil's life here this morning but we can name and give thanks to a few of the things which he gave to our lives.

He was a Man for All Seasons.
Like St. Thomas More, he was a brilliant lawyer, a deeply religious man.
He was a lawyer and a teacher but he was more than that.

As a lawyer he was this County's leading expert in Trusts and Estates law.
But he was more than that. He donated his skill, training and time to his community unselfishly.

He was a teacher and devoted all his spare time to helping students at Pace Law School. He was persuasive. Whether you needed it or not, you had a Pace Law student working in your office.
He probably placed more Pace graduates in Westchester County law firms than any other

† Attorney, White Plains, New York. Delivered at the Memorial Service for Philip Blank, Holy Name of Jesus, R.C. Church, Valhalla, New York, February 8, 1989.

single individual. He often complained to me that he did not have enough time to help the students when he was made Associate Dean. His door was always open to them.

His benchmark was dedication in everything he did.

He was creative.

Several years ago he included in his Professional Responsibility class an hour on alcoholism. Because of his vision, that protocol will soon be adopted by every law school in this country.

He was a loving brother to all his brothers and sisters. He spoke of you in glowing terms and I always got the impression that he had a wonderful time growing up with you.

He was a father — more to Tricia, Arthur, Philip and Gregory. No father could ask for more than he received from you.

You put that gleam in his eye when he spoke of you. No father could ask for more love than he received from you. That love will not die — and only grow stronger as the pain subsides and the fond memories of your father become filled with sunlight.

And for Mary, Phil was a husband and more. I enjoy a special place in their lives - I introduced them. I worked in an office with Mary, and Phil worked in my old office. When Phil called, he would get Mary on the phone; Phil began to ask about Mary; I told him about Mary; Mary began to ask about Phil; I told her about Phil. The rest is history. All I ever heard from Phil was gratitude for my role.

Mary, you stood by Phil and never gave up hope.

Your love was inspirational. No one could have asked for more than you gave to your best friend.

As time passes we will hold each other a little longer and we will hug each other a little closer. We will be enormously grateful — not because we are suddenly aware that we might lose someone some day, but rather because you have made us aware of what a blessing it is to love someone today — and to have someone love us.

I cannot think of Phil without thinking of his family. I cannot think of what he made of his life without thinking of the people who helped make it possible.

And so I think it shall always be.

They are bound together and no power on earth, not even death, can break the circle of love.

And so Phil, let us again recall the words of Paul-

*The time of your departure has come
You have fought the good fight
You have finished the race
You have kept the faith
Henceforth there is laid up for you the crown of heaven*

Until we meet again, Phil, thank you for being here and thank you for being part of our lives.

Tribute to Philip B. Blank

Dean Janet Johnson†

Phil Blank wore his loyalties and commitments “on his sleeve,” as the old saying goes. Everyone who met Phil certainly knew that he cared passionately about his community, his church, his profession, his law school, his students, and his family. It was his commitment to Pace Law School and its students that I most intimately knew as his colleague. The growing reputation of the law school and the professional acceptance of our graduates were largely attributable to Phil’s efforts, both as a dedicated teacher and as a tireless advocate in the legal community on behalf of our students.

Yet for all of Phil’s outstanding qualities that were widely known, there were others which one could only discover by chance — the student in academic difficulty whom he tutored privately, the financially distressed student for whom he offered to pay summer school tuition, the “average” student who he knew would blossom if placed with a practitioner who would instill professional confidence in the student.

Also generally unknown was Phil’s pioneering role in exposing students to the strong link between alcohol and drug abuse and attorney misconduct. He was a man of visionary zeal in this regard. He wanted his students to know about the pressures of the legal profession and the kinds of problems lawyers face every day. The American Bar Association only recently moved to urge law schools to include discussion of alcohol and drug problems in their curricula. Phil had done it for years.

Westchester attorney William V. Cuddy recently expressed most eloquently the essence of Phil Blank: “It is probably accurate, and by no means a criticism of others, to say that I know few persons who cared as much as Phil did about the success of the School of Law, its students, and its graduates; it is certain that no one cared more.”

Thank you, Phil. You cannot be replaced.

† Dean, Pace University School of Law.

Tribute to Philip Blank

Evans V. Brewster†

Phil Blank was a friend. A person remembered for the impact that he had upon so many people: young, old, and young at heart. He was an inspiration and a role model. A man dedicated to his family, his profession, and to high principles.

I first met Phil Blank when he was a practitioner of the law in the office of former White Plains City Court Judge Stewart Rowe with whom he practiced law for almost six years.

Later, after Surrogate Otto C. Jaeger invited him to become a member of the Legal Staff of the Westchester County Surrogate's Court, I learned about his intellectual integrity, his devotion to the law, his ability, and his loyalty from Judge Jaeger.

But it was when we worked together in the Surrogate's Court that I was able to personally observe the high standards he set for himself and his pride in his work. He was fair and honest in his personal life and in the Court. I quickly shared Surrogate Jaeger's respect, admiration, and high regard for Phil, his ability and his contribution to the Surrogate's Court.

Attorneys seeking his advice were treated with courtesy and left with a better understanding of the law and respect for Phil.

Phil was active in the Westchester County Bar Association as a Director and Chairman of the Trusts and Estates Section. He believed in continuing education for lawyers and participated in many legal education seminars on Surrogate Court practice.

Perhaps it was this activity that developed his interest in teaching. He first taught part-time in the evening while working as a legal assistant in the Surrogate's Court during the day. Phil soon recognized that teaching law as a full-time Professor would be a challenge, an opportunity, and was what he would enjoy doing.

Phil was uniquely qualified to teach. He was challenged by

† Surrogate, Westchester County

the law, the changes that take place, the new legislation, and the court decisions. As a former practitioner he was aware of the law from the views of a practicing attorney. As a former Law Assistant in the Court, he was aware of the requirements of the Court and the perspective of the Court. As a Professor of Law, he was knowledgeable about the theory of the law.

Phil was able to combine theory with practice in his teaching. When he told his students how an attorney addresses a case — this is what the court requires — this is how the law is applied — they knew that he was speaking from experience.

Many Pace Law School graduates who practice in the Surrogate's Court were taught by Phil. They are good lawyers, well grounded in the law. He taught them well. Phil never lost his love for the Surrogate's Court and often brought his class to the court to observe court activities. He proposed and supported a successful Student Intern Program with the Westchester Surrogate's Court. Phil believed that his students would be entering a stimulating profession. He encouraged them to respect and be proud of their profession.

Several years ago, Phil lectured at a conference of the National College of Probate Judges held in Saddlebrook, Florida. His lecture was favorably received. He told me that he enjoyed the participation in the conference but that the happiest times at the conference were shared with his wife, Mary, who went with him. I believed him because I still remember them dancing until the orchestra packed up their instruments and left.

Attorney Philip B. Blank, Professor Philip B. Blank, Dean Philip B. Blank — but always Phil to his friends. Memories are a gift from God. Phil shared so much with so many people. Each has memories that will be recalled with a smile or warm feeling. He touched many lives and each gained. Phil's life made a difference.

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.

† Professor of Law, Pace University School of Law.

* 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.

Tribute to Philip Blank

Terrence J. Dwyer†

I first met Phil Blank when I was appointed to the Mount Pleasant Zoning Board of Appeals. At that time Phil had been the Board chairperson for quite a few years and prior to that had been a member of the Board.

On first impression he appeared to be a hard, tough disciplinarian, but as I came to know and understand him, I saw his gentle and caring side. He guarded the integrity of his Zoning Board with the enthusiasm of a young athlete, but never failed to exercise compassion in doing so.

He rigorously scrutinized all possible conflicts of interest. The slightest suggestion of a potential conflict caused him deep concern for fear that even a hint of impropriety might reflect adversely upon the Zoning Board or Mount Pleasant.

Whenever it was possible to exercise compassion toward another human being to help ease his problems, Phil Blank would draw upon every bit of his legal knowledge and experience to bring the matter to a just and equitable conclusion. He fervently hoped that all parties would leave our hearing with a feeling that the good of the community had been served.

As a teacher, his lessons extended far beyond the classroom by the example he set in his everyday life toward his family, church, and civic duties. His life was a model for both his colleagues and friends. The enduring benefit his colleagues and friends have received from his knowledge, wisdom, and help will be remembered and sadly missed.

Philip Blank constantly manifested his love for Pace University School of Law and his pride in his students. Although he has left us physically, Philip Blank will always be with us in our hearts.

† Attorney at Law, Bronxville, New York.

All Thy Sum of Good

Josephine Y. King†

*For nobility above pettiness and ambition,
For purity of mind and deed,
For sensitivity to the needs of others,
For placing community above self,
For tutoring, counseling and comforting students and colleagues
-all without thought of plaudit or recognition,
For impatience with half efforts and intolerance of half truths,
For dedication to the law and learning,
For love of God, of family, of friends and of country,*

Dear Colleague:

*Never believe, though in my nature reign'd
All frailties that besedge all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good.
- Shakespeare, Sonnet CIX*

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