In Memoriam: Christopher Lawler

Joseph W. Bellacosa
IN MEMORIAM: CHRISTOPHER LAWLER

DEAN JOSEPH W. BELLACOSA†

Those who read and research through the pages of this issue of the St. John’s Law Review should feel the spiritual presence of Christopher Lawler, a second-year law student. Christopher had lost his dear friend, Charlie Heeran, a Cantor Fitzgerald bond trader who worked in the World Trade Center, on September 11, 2001. Then in a blind twist of fate, Christopher perished on November 12, 2001 when American Airlines Flight 587 crashed into his home in Belle Harbor, Rockaway, Queens, New York.

Each human tragedy from the horrible events of fall 2001 is unique and poignant. Yet, Christopher’s fate warrants special commemoration so that his time among his St. John’s colleagues is recorded for posterity in the annals of the Law Review. The editors of this issue are to be commended for the inspiration of including a remembrance of Christopher Lawler here.

As Dean, I can personally certify that Christopher was a superior young man with an optimistic outlook on life. He was also a fine law student working his way, like so many others, toward the goal and ambition of being a well-trained lawyer,

† Joseph W. Bellacosa returned to his Alma Mater in August of 2000 to assume the Deanship of the School of Law, after having completed a distinguished fourteen-year term as Associate Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals. A double alumnus of St. John’s, Dean Bellacosa earned a B.A. from St. John’s College and an LL.B. (J.D.) from the School of Law, where he served as Associate Editor of the St. John’s Law Review. He served as a faculty member and Assistant Dean at the Law School from 1970–1975 and continued as an adjunct faculty member while on the New York Court of Appeals.
educated to serve people in need. He even joked about taking his Uncle Andrew Lawler's successful law practice "off his hands" sometime in the future. A dreadful destiny tragically ended Christopher's quest.

When Christopher lost his friend Charlie in the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, he struggled through a grieving period. On Monday, November 12, Christopher stayed home instead of coming to school and class. That fateful morning, the Lawler home became another "Ground Zero" when American Airlines Flight 587 plummeted into its residential community shortly after takeoff from JFK Airport. Christopher and his mom, Kathie, were killed along with hundreds of others.

For me, as Dean, the jolting loss extended beyond the singular importance of Christopher being one of our law students. I also had gotten to know him through his uncle, Andrew Lawler, an excellent lawyer and longtime friend of mine (despite his Fordham allegiance). Christopher's uncle called our law school on that terrible November 12th morning in the hope we would search for and find Christopher in his seat in class. Alas, it was not to be. When I passed along that sad news, I prayed because we all knew that Christopher was lost. In addition to the profound loss suffered by Christopher's uncle and family, the entire law school community felt a blow to its spirit from the terrible news that one of its own professional family members had perished suddenly and randomly in the catastrophe.

The Mass of Christian Burial for Christopher and his mom in their parish church at the end of that awful November week revived our spirits somewhat. So, too, did the Memorial Mass celebrated in the Mattone Family Atrium here at the Law School after Thanksgiving, with Christopher's family present and joined by an overflow crowd of students and faculty. During that immediate period, an unsolicited H.W. Wilson Foundation gift of $100,000 also came in to the Law School to honor the memory of Christopher. It was dedicated as a student scholarship fund.

In sum, the St. John's Law School community sought and found consolation in the spiritual dimension, but it will always ache from the empty space left by Christopher's sudden and untimely departure from this earthly existence. He was struck down in his youth before his dreams of helping others as a
lawyer could find fulfillment. We are saddened by this harsh reality, but we must go on to our service and work as a tribute to his memory.

May Christopher rest in God’s peace, and may the St. John’s Law School community recall him fondly and not forget his lost promise. The remembrance should be with prayers for him, his family, his schoolmates, and all those he might have helped.