

In Memoriam: Dean John J. Murphy

St. Thomas More Institute for Legal Research

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In Memorium: Dean John J. Murphy

The late Dean John J. Murphy was a consummate educator and an enduring source of support and guidance to the St. Thomas More Institute for Legal Research, the publisher of the St. John's Law Review. His untimely death in 1980 brought to a close a decade of earnest, often inspired, leadership.

Dean Murphy, himself a consultant to the Institute, was a man of considered and deeply felt beliefs. In many ways he contradicted his age. Though existentialism and sister philosophies permeated the academic community, he remained decidedly Thomistic. While the regalia of materialism was unfurled, he answered with spiritualism. Throughout his life Dean Murphy maintained a commitment to living the Christian message and, by example, teaching it to others.

In class, the Dean comported himself with quiet dignity and self-restraint. Whether forgiving the indiscretions of a first-year law student or skillfully negotiating a difficult case, Dean Murphy conducted the class in any easy, assured manner. Rarely did he bellow and more rarely yet did he lose his temper. His style was not to lord over the student, intimidating him or her with some infamous manipulation of the student's recitation. Rather, the Dean waltzed with the novitiate, and with each calculated swirl more closely approached the desired answer.

Dean Murphy often said that law school should be the most challenging and intensive intellectual experience of the student's education. To his credit and our discomfit, this goal was largely realized. A singular ambition for excellence was infused in all projects the Dean undertook. The fruit of these many labors is perhaps best reflected in the enhanced reputation enjoyed by the Law School among members of the Bar and the legal community. The relationship was symbiotic. Dean Murphy's energy and imagination transformed many of his ambitions for the School into reality. These successes, in turn, inspired even greater ambitions. His only limitation was time.

In August of 1979, Dean Murphy contracted lung cancer. He then began a long and agonizing battle which, perhaps, even he knew could not be won. Although the cancer was debilitating, the Dean insisted on working whenever the disease allowed him a brief respite. He found something curative and relaxing about work. To be restricted to bed for days at a time was anathema, a contradic-

tion to his whole life. Despite all efforts, the cancer recurred and spread. At junctures, the combination of the disease and the chemotherapy combatting it worked to deprive the Dean of his voice. Worse, with almost malicious precision, a similar paralysis found its way into his writing hand. With his abilities to communicate held hostage, work became more difficult, more frustrating. Nonetheless, he remained optimistic. His body was decimated, but his life was still filled with purpose. He courageously endured.

On September 26, 1980 Dean Murphy died. His death marked the end of a career punctuated by many successes. While the life of any one man is only a moment in astronomic time, some men spite this brief tenure. They live on, recalled to our minds for having touched us in a special way. For many—both students and colleagues—Dean Murphy was such a man. Our consolation will be the memory of this talented lawyer, this practiced, almost intuitive teacher and most poignantly, this compassionate, truly spiritual human being.

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