

April 2021

A Memorial Tribute to Professor John J. Murphy

Donna M. Nagy
Indiana University Maurer School of Law, dnagy@indiana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/uclr>

Recommended Citation

Donna M. Nagy, *A Memorial Tribute to Professor John J. Murphy*, 89 U. Cin. L. Rev. 810 (2021)
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/uclr/vol89/iss3/10>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by University of Cincinnati College of Law Scholarship and Publications. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Cincinnati Law Review by an authorized editor of University of Cincinnati College of Law Scholarship and Publications. For more information, please contact ronald.jones@uc.edu.

A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR JOHN J. MURPHY

Donna M. Nagy, C. Ben Dutton Professor of Business Law, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Professor John J. Murphy was my very first connection to the University of Cincinnati College of Law—and to the legal academy more generally. What began with an hour-long conversation in August 1993 led to a wonderful twelve years as faculty colleagues and a dear friendship that continued for the fourteen years after I joined the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. John was legendary for his energetic and inspirational classroom teaching. But as my colleague and friend, John taught me through his constant examples what it means to be a supportive mentor, a beloved professor, and a devoted spouse and parent.

Our first conversation is one of my most precious memories. I was a fourth-year associate at a law firm in Washington, DC with aspirations to become a law professor, and John was the chair of UC Law's faculty appointments committee. The unusual aspect of this initial telephone screening interview was that it occurred at the start of my two-week vacation, while I was visiting relatives in County Kildare, Ireland. Hearing that John was eager to speak with me, my obliging secretary offered to "patch him through" to the phone in my cousin's living room. The interview then proceeded with John questioning me about "my mother's people," and with me learning about John's "people" in neighboring counties. We also spoke about John's wife Eileen, a nurse-midwife who was born and raised in Scotland, their three children (one in law school at the time), and John's sisters in Boston, as well as my parents in upstate NY and six siblings scattered throughout the U.S. Only in the final quarter of our time together did John ask me about my interest in teaching and the scholarly projects I had hoped to pursue as a law professor (fortunately for me, prior publications were not then a prerequisite for a new law teacher). Later, when I questioned John about why so much of that initial conversation centered on our families, he reminded me that all the details about my education, legal experience, and teaching aspirations were in the resume and cover letter he reviewed prior to the phone call. John set out to get to know me as a person, and I'll always be honored that he deemed that phone call a mission accomplished.

I joined the UC law faculty the following year, and I had the great fortune of occupying the office adjacent to John's. I also had the privilege of launching my teaching career alongside of John's two other hand-picked, entry-level recruits: Graeme Dinwoodie (now at Chicago-Kent College of Law) and Michael Van Alstine (University of Maryland

School of Law). John was confident that the three of us (four, actually, with Michael's wife Lisa) would become the best of friends, and that we did. John and Eileen looked after us all, though Graeme and I, without our partners in Cincinnati, had much more time to experience the Murphys' warm hospitality. Like Eileen, Graeme hails from Scotland with a delightful brogue. That first year, before my then-fiance and now-husband Brian joined me in Cincinnati, Graeme and I reveled in many long, laughter-filled evenings at John and Eileen's lovely home on Clifton Hills Terrace, often beginning with the treat of her excellent cooking or his skill on the outdoor grill. Both were naturally gifted storytellers. Graeme, Michael, and I likewise enjoyed regular happy-hours with John and Dean Joseph Tomain at Uncle Woody's pub across the street from the law school. From both John and Joe (themselves the best of friends), I learned the importance of not simply mentoring junior colleagues but truly welcoming them into one's inner circle.

John's reputation as a master teacher was well known and much deserved. Although he taught Contracts Law and Labor Law for nearly thirty-five years, methodical class preparation was his hallmark. I can recall inviting John out for an impromptu coffee with a Boston friend in town for the day, who had managed to break free from a long day of law-firm depositions. John had been wanting to meet this friend because of their mutual connections. But John demurred—he was preparing for his class later that afternoon. When I suggested that his decades of experience might allow him to “wing it a bit” on this one occasion, John was aghast. He told me in no uncertain terms that his students deserved better. Whenever I'm tempted on teaching days to shuffle around priorities, I think back to that colloquy.

John's devotion to Eileen and all the members of his family was always there for all to see. His retirement from the UC Law faculty in 1999 enabled him to spend more time with Eileen, who was challenged with multiple sclerosis. He continued his legal work as an arbitrator for another decade, but his commitment to Eileen's care ultimately comprised his full attention. Eileen's passing in 2015 left an enormous hole in his heart, but the time with his children and grandchildren continued to bring him great joy. In the law school classroom, John had for decades entertained students with charming anecdotes about Johnnie, Janie, and Deidre's capers through their years at grade school, college, and beyond. His wonderful sense of humor and self-deprecating wit blended splendidly with his tough socratic-questioning and razor-sharp intelligence. It was a brilliant strategy for successful teaching, but it was also quintessentially John.

It is impossible to encapsulate John's profound influence on his students, colleagues, and friends, nor is it possible for me to express

adequately my gratitude for the start he gave to my teaching career, his mentoring as my senior faculty colleague, and the twenty-six years of friendship we shared. It warms my heart to know that he is now reunited with Eileen and that his twinkling Irish eyes are smiling down upon all of us who loved him.