

1986

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Recommended Citation

Andrew P. O'Rourke, *The Legacy of Joe Crowley*, 54 Fordham L. Rev. 466 (1986).

Available at: <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol54/iss4/6>

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THE LEGACY OF JOE CROWLEY

*Andrew P. O'Rourke **

I REMEMBER the smooth and mellifluous voice. That was my first impression of Professor Joe Crowley. I sat in a night law school class on Damages and heard him say that he would call on us *in seriatim*. A hurried and whispered conference in the back rows concluded that this meant in alphabetical order, and we breathed a collective sigh of relief. Here was a real gent.

That original impression of a dignified professor of law who treated us, not as equals to be sure, but worthy of respect, lingered and grew through my law school career, as I encountered Joe Crowley in several of my courses. He was, in fact, one of my favorite teachers. This was not only attributable to the fact that he gave me one of the few "A's" I ever got at 302 Broadway, but because he was patient, always willing to listen, and you could tell that he loved the law. To him it was a many-sided jewel, which he held up before us, letting the light hit on its facets, explaining to us the uses, always pressing us to regard it reverently.

After Fordham, our paths parted and except for a jot here and there in the alumni news, I didn't follow Joe's career. My own life took me into local government, and when I ran for City Council for the very first time, I inadvertently rang Joe Crowley's doorbell and asked him to vote for me. It turned out that he was not only of the opposite party but was the City Democratic Leader of Yonkers, where I was seeking office as councilman. Notwithstanding this wide gulf between us, he was kind and patient and wished me good luck in my adventure into public life.

Joe didn't stay long as party chieftain. I will not speculate on why he left the rarified and smoke-filled caucus rooms of power, but it was his party's loss.

As the years passed I began to see more of Joe Crowley. He was involved in so many church-related and civic concerns that it was impossible not to run into him and be impressed by his serious and dedicated concern for his community.

He ran once for Supreme Court Judge. It was a foregone conclusion that he couldn't win in the ninth judicial district, where Republicans outnumbered Democrats by two to one. He was like Robert E. Lee, cantering his horse onto the field in the service of his conscience, aware that whatever his efforts, only defeat awaited. I'm proud to admit in public that this was one of the few times I pulled the lever for a Democrat.

Joe was a great conversationalist. He enjoyed people and had the Irish gift of being a good storyteller. He loved Fordham and was always filled with plans for advancing the Law School in scholarship, size and importance. When the time came for my own daughters, Alice and Aileen, to

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attend the Law School, I told them to seek out courses taught by Professor Crowley so that they could see an example of the great lawyers Fordham has proudly produced. They were not disappointed.

The years moved inexorably along. Civic affairs, the alumni world and being members in the same parish brought us together many times. I was always the student, Joe, the Mr. Chips. We laughed together and joked about politics. He always made me proud to have gone to Fordham and learned from men such as he.

There is a place for great teachers, for those who see the law as the humanizing and regulating force of civilization. A special place for those who find dignity in all others, who prize the law like a gleaming and flawless jewel. But the highest place must go to a man like Joe Crowley, who managed so much in his life, a wonderful family, a full career, the respect of his peers. He was so like the many faceted jewel of the law, which he loved so dearly.

I learned of his death by a telephone call from the press asking my comments. As the reporter spoke, I remembered the voice, now stilled, and the dignity and devotion to the law which he passed on to legions of students. While I've learned and often used the platitudes of funereal remarks, I eventually added with all the sincerity within me, "I've lost a friend."