

American University Law Review

Volume 50 | Issue 3

Article 5

2001

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Recommended Citation

Milstein, Elliott S. "In Memory of Peter Cicchino." American University Law Review 50, no.3 (2001): 581-582.

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In Memory of Peter Cicchino

IN MEMORY OF PETER CICCHINO

ELLIOTT S. MILSTEIN*

We are here to profess our profound sadness to each other and to express to his family the sorrow of the Washington College of Law Community over the loss of our colleague, friend, mentor, and teacher, Peter Cicchino. We welcome his parents Peter and Mary Jane Cicchino, his husband, Jonathan Springer, his brothers and sisters, Sally Rooney, Jane Goretski, Bill Cicchino and Jill Cicchino and his sisters-in-law Elizabeth Cicchino and Mychal Springer. We welcome them back to this place to be among Peter's extended family at the Washington College of Law.

With us it was love at first sight. The consensus that developed immediately after his faculty interview was that Peter was someone quite special and we very much wanted him to join us. We were devastated to learn, first as rumor and then as fact, about his disease. And so, unlike his family and his friends from before, we came to love him with the knowledge that we would soon lose him.

As each of us contemplates the mystery of life's meaning, a question that sometimes occupies our imaginations and that we discuss with our friends is, What would I do if I knew I only had a short time left to live? Travel? Spend all my money? Shout my complaints from the highest mountain top? Peter, who knew that each day was precious, enobled us by his choice to spend his days as a professor at the Washington College of Law. Peter's answer to this question—to work with us, to teach, to learn, to write, and to serve—to do the work that those of us who are privileged to be here aspire to do every day, to do this work with exultation, without complaint, with enormous energy, devotion, commitment and joy—endows our lives with significance beyond what we *ever* had hoped.

Were it possible for a law school to canonize someone as a Saint,

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there would be a holiday named for Peter. I believe that he walked among us, ministered to us, and talked to us, to teach us by example and by word, to be better people, to embrace each other, to work harder for justice, and to fight for the poor and the oppressed. He was deeply religious, and his illness did not dim his faith, either in God or in justice. He believed in the promise of the Constitution, that our society would be just, and believed in the work entrusted to lawyers as having the possibility of fulfilling that promise. He imbued us with his understanding that we should withhold complaining on behalf of ourselves and use our power only to fight injustice.

Those of us who speak today were asked by Peter to do so and he asked us to implore those of you on the faculty to work to inspire our students to champion the oppressed, to give our students the tools to fight arbitrary authority, to transmit to them the values that draw upon their loftiest aspirations, and to never let them forget that the cause of justice is entrusted to them. He asked me to say that teaching legal theory divorced from practice is empty talk and that teaching practice unsupported by theory cannot accomplish our purposes. Peter wanted us to say to our students that he believes in you and hopes you will carry on his struggle to uplift and to bring dignity to the marginalized. Peter's life demonstrates that you can say no to authority and still prevail, oppose unjust laws and get them rewritten, and challenge unfair processes and change the results. You, our students, the future warriors of the bar, have the power to change the world. On Peter's behalf, we hope that you do.