In Tribute

A Lawyer And A True Gentleman

Joe Lynch was a mentor, a raconteur and a cruise director

By JOHN D. MOORE

The world is a less generous place. Less witty, too. It longs for the last of a dying breed, the gentleman lawyer. All because of the passing of Joseph G. Lynch of Halloran & Sage in Hartford on Sept. 10, at the age of 88.

"Money," Joe was fond of saying, "has no other purpose than to make other people happy." That's what he believed and how he lived. If you met Joe long enough to have him press one of his humorous business cards ("Hot Air Balloon Pilot!") into your palm, you knew Joe well enough to be invited to one of his all-comers breakfasts in Portland every Sunday morning. Wesleyan professors would mingle with legal adversaries, native Portlanders and University Club colleagues and belly up to Joe's commercial-sized island. The host would take each order and whip up whatever your heart desired: waffles, pancakes, omelettes, sausages or toast.

Joe didn't practice generosity solely on the Sabbath, however. Every summer, he would arrange a whimsical cruise of the Connecticut River from Portland to Hamburg Cove for all of the firm's associates and summer associates. Everyone who sailed on one of these voyages got to know each other as well as the beauty of the lower Connecticut River Valley. That, of course, was Joe's purpose.

Several couples at the firm became engaged one year in the late 1980s. Joe decided that this serendipity deserved a celebration and treated us all to a four-course dinner at Cavey's restaurant in Manchester. Ten years later, he threw a repeat dinner for all of the same couples, even though many of us had left the firm.

Joe was a raconteur with tremendous comedic timing. He featured a ready supply of ever-fresh jokes. Joe's litigation war stories always had a comic twist while simultaneously teaching important lessons to the legal newcomer. Short in stature but long on charm, Joe was a ray of sunshine beaming energetically atop a freshly-pressed shirt, tweed sports jacket or suit and the omnipresent bow tie. Joe constantly carried with him packages of small press-on Wesleyan Cardinal stickers that he would bestow on the lapels of friends and acquaintances alike to spread the gospel of his beloved alma mater.

Favorite Maxim

"Nobody loses a settled case." Young lawyers, girded for battle, may have chafed when they first heard Joe invoke his favorite maxim. The saying, however, reflected not a man reluctant to fight, but a man who understood that there was more to be gained by seeking to explore common ground in a civil way. He certainly knew how to fight if need be. Years of trial work yielded a motherlode of pithy experience. "Trial work is not a game of draw poker," Joe would intone, reminding listeners that the facts were the most important part of the case. While the legal arguments to be drawn from the facts might change, the facts themselves were immutable.

"Small cross-examination, small closing, small verdict," Joe would instruct, hoping to inoculate his colleagues from the epidemic of attorney grandiosity. But after investigating the facts, informing his claims adjuster of the positives and negatives of the case and eliciting settlement authority, Joe would approach his opponent to discover whether what he or she wanted matched what Joe had to offer. If the case were to settle, as most did, no one indeed lost, and, in fact, mutual respect was always won.

As mentioned above, Joe was a gentleman, and not just a lawyer. His love for and fidelity to Halloran & Sage and its people were unmatched. From the most senior partners to the secretaries and mailroom personnel, Joe loved each person equally. His democratic affection to the firm's employees was the stuff of legend. Joe cared deeply about everyone and took an interest in their lives, both in and out of work. He was instructive and never critical; he inspired and trusted those who worked for him. Joe will be sorely missed throughout the Greater Hartford legal world.