

In Memory of John W. Keegan (1930-2006)

(As delivered February 11, 2006  
by Barry Roark Strutt, his law  
partner at Keegan, Keegan & Strutt, LLP.)

This group is so large, and we are all assembled here as one large group for one reason: to bear witness that Jack was the living and true embodiment of the realization of the idea of the extended family— the successful and loving extended family. And make no mistake, Jack was at its head.

First, The blood Keegans are in evidence everywhere— as it should be in every prolific, Irish family: his loving wife, his childhood sweetheart, Audrey; his younger brother, Ray; his steadfast sons, John, Greg, and Kevin (and we can count among his sons— Michael Murphy— whom he loved as a son); his devoted daughter, Laurie, (and we must include Michael Murphy’s sisters— Eileen Rossi and Maureen Fargo— whom Jack and Audrey loved and raised as their daughters).

And of course, there are his sixteen glorious grandchildren! So many of them you wondered how there could be any room in his heart for all those Keegan grandkids. But there was room. There always was plenty of room—because Grandpa Jack made room. That’s how big his heart was. And that’s where we come in— the rest of us. Because Jack made room for all of us assembled here: his neighbors, friends, colleagues, past clients, associates, and even casual

acquaintances.

But it was hard to remain a casual acquaintance of Jack Keegan. Jack was a walking fellowship. If you walked down the street with him, it was hard to get to where you were going— people would come out of the woodwork to shake his hand. And Jack found fellowship wherever he went— whether it be at a meeting; or at exercise class, or at a class reunion.

We were all drawn to him. He made us feel a part of his life. He made us all feel special— a part of that great extended family. We feel proud and honored to have known Jack and to be a part of that family, and we acknowledge and return that honor with our presence here today.

In the 15 years I practiced law with Jack, I shared not only physical space, I shared the endless intellectual and emotional energy that made up Jack Keegan. And now I am honored and grateful to the Keegan family to be asked to say a few words to honor Jack's memory. When I first showed up at the Keegan's doorstep

~~here in White Plains back in 1980. Tom and Ray were practicing law together~~

they practiced law. Because their offices were always back to back, they had developed the first wireless, hand's-free intercom system. "HEY JACK!" "What Raymond? And so it went. Back and Forth. Brother to brother.

And even today, John and I still prefer that system we learned from our mentors, Ray and Jack, over the advanced technology that sits on our desks. Jack's idea of the immediate family extended far beyond blood lines. For Jack, the extended family was as boundless as his love. And if at first I confused the names of his daughters , and how many daughters he had, that was because I hadn't yet grasped that idea.

Tragedy in the Murphy family was more than Jack could bear, and he opened his heart and his home to Eileen and Maureen to fill their void. To Jack's way of thinking, Eileen and Maureen were also his daughters; they were also Keegans. From my later perspective as Jack's partner– taken on for life he said– as an insider and an outsider– I would come to learn by Jack's words and his deeds that he loved them all equally– without reservation– and without qualification– as only Jack could do.

Although Jack was a superb counselor at law, his children advised me in preparing this eulogy that he was an even better counselor in the affairs of life. Laurie told me that Jack had taught her that: "She must be of use in the world as

God's plan unfolds for her—One day at a time."

And Greg remembers Jack counseling him that "You should make everyone you meet in life a teacher. They will teach you how you should be, AND they will teach you how you should not be. They will do this in their words, and in their actions." Is that ever good counsel!

And it was true for all of us that you went to Jack for advice. Isn't that so? And if you were wise, you took it. (With the possible exception of business investments— there's Kenny Rodgers, and a certain mountain in Bedford— but no matter—those were material concerns.)

Jack was a great father confessor—a great listener. You could tell Jack anything— I mean a-n-y-thing! And most people did. Because Jack not only knew how to listen, he knew how to keep a confidence! And if you couldn't trust Jack Keegan, who in this world could you trust?

And although we knew Jack was always there for us— it was a mystery how he could completely disappear on the other end of a telephone! Sometimes you'd just get a grunt— and usually just a lot of dead air. Ah— but we laughed about it and we loved him for it! Because it was Jack.

Jack had amazing powers of concentration! When he was lost in thought— preparing for trial— you could set off a bomb beside him— and he wouldn't blink.

As a kid growing up, you might think you were intentionally being ignored.

But John and I do it to each other now. It's a hazard of the profession.

Jack loved to work. And with Jack it wasn't just a virtue, it was an art form— and he applied it to everything he did: a meticulous, careful, perfectionism that Jack never let ~~waver~~.

Now Eileen told me that Jack's intense focus on family reminded her of a country song about a father's love for his children. The song is called "That's My Job". The refrain reminds her of Jack's outlook on fatherhood. It goes: "That's my job – that's what I do – everything I do is because of you; to keep you safe with me. That's my job you see . . ."

You see, that's the kind of father Jack was. Everything he did was for his kids, his wife, his family. It was a job he loved— and never ran from.

And Maureen wanted me to remember Jack for the care, love, concern, and good counsel he always gave to every member of her family.

But as much as each of the Keegans loved their father, I'll bet that from time to time they let his birthday slip by unnoticed— it's human nature; it happens. But not with Kevin Keegan. I'm willing to wager that from the time he was a small boy, he never once, not once, let his Dad's birthday slip by him unnoticed! (Okay, so maybe it helped that they shared the very same birthday, June fourth.) And now

Kevin has that special and important, shared remembrance of his father.

Ah those 16 grand children— How he loved his grandchildren! He never tired of talking about them. And he never tired of doing for them. There was the steady stream of birthday cards; trips to the beach—the mob scenes at the Pizza Hut. And then there was the renting of THE BIG YELLOW BUS! I don't know who loved the bus ride to the Big Apple Circus and to Radio City Music Hall more—the kids or Jack. (I think Jack— he loved the giving, the joy he felt in making others feel good.)

And finally, we can't forget the Hess Trucks! Every Christmas Jack would keep filling up at those Hess Stations until he had enough model trucks for all of his grandchildren. Once he came into my office, beaming. He was so excited I thought we'd won a case— or better yet— settled one. Both arms were filled with boxes. He was so excited because he had paid for his limit of Hess Trucks. They wouldn't sell him anymore, but then had talked the guy behind him into selling him his trucks— so he could have enough for all of his grandchildren. What a wheeler-dealer, huh? That's the kind of Grandfather Jack was!

Now Audrey asked me to remember her Jack with these words: “Jack was my heart. He was my protector. I loved – and was loved. I have known Jack since I was 16. I think God matches some of us early.”

I think you're right, Audrey. And sometimes it is a perfect match. And I know Jack always sought shelter in your warm and caring embrace.

How do I know that? Because I know about date night. Date night?

What was date night? It was, of course, Thursday night— movie night. Date night. You take your childhood sweetheart and you double date with your best friend and his wife from the neighborhood— from the time you were teens— and you go to the movies every Thursday night. And because it's Jack— he means every Thursday night. And you do it without fail— decade, after decade, after decade. It came from the heart. That was Jack.

Audrey once said to me that "Jack was my teacher, you know." Well, Audrey, Jack was a teacher to all of us— every one of us. Jack was a great teacher because he taught by example. Ah— to hold oneself as Jack did. Always upright and straight as an arrow. He had a calmness about him. A quiet strength and an almost intimidating dignity. And that penetrating, almost hypnotic gaze that seemed to come from somewhere deep within.

He had a commanding presence and dignity that, I think, came from constantly struggling for self-truth and then living the truth however humbling and difficult it might be to accept. And Jack was a great teacher because he did the hard work of finding out who he really was. It was a life-long process for

Jack– as it should be for all of us.

There was so much to admire in Jack. The inner strength of character, the stability– and he was above all else– a paragon of responsibility! I swear in all the time I knew him, he never missed a meeting–of any kind. Not once. Oh, and Jack was a perfectionist and punctual– to a fault. One of Jack’s great pleasures was rooting for the Yankees. Thanks to Mike Cerussi , Jack got to see virtually every Tuesday home game and many weekend games year after year. He’d take his cronies and often, John and I.

Now Jack couldn’t be late. It was constitutionally impossible for him. Even though we had tickets and a pre-paid parking pass, we would often arrive so early that we’d have to wake up the grounds crew to open the turnstiles. We couldn’t get anything to eat– they hadn’t opened the concession stand. Once, we were so early– even though we brought our own food along– there was no place to sit. They hadn’t unlocked the picnic bench area outside the stadium!

Jack loved his Yankees. I once tested his unflinching sense of fairness against his undying loyalty to the Yankees at a time when they were crushing everybody. I said, “Come on Jack– Do you really think this is fair? What do you want?– Do you want the Yankees to have All the money, so that they can buy All the good players–so that they will win All of their games?–And Jack just looked at

me as if I were from another planet– as only Jack could do– and shot back–“Why NOT?” (You can take the boy out of the Bronx, but you can’t take the Bronx out of the boy.)

And how about the way Jack dressed, huh? Let’s dress Jack. The shined shoes. Spit-shined. The smartly tailored Brooks Brother’s suits. (Had to be. ) And the perfectly folded handkerchief in his left breast pocket. The white shirts– with the ivy league, button-down collars– it had to be white– (He knew what suited him. Nothing trendy or phony about Jack!)

And the thing about the cuffs– there had to be exactly an inch and a half of white showing. And then we put on the navy- blue, Burberry top coat– topped off with the Kangool cap– (three colors: blue, black, and grey).

On the weekends Jack would dress down– which was dressing up for a lot of people. That meant the natty blue blazer and now, perhaps, a blue shirt. He could have been a clothes model, if he had loved anything but the law.

And he was a strikingly handsome man– that silver mane of hair, and every hair always perfectly in place– (I think it might have had something to do with his almost weekly trips to Mike the Barber– and that can of hairspray that used to rattle around in the bottom drawer of his desk!) .

And fully dressed he looked and acted more like a senator than any real

senator ever did– or could. And he could have played the part of a senator better than anyone– (With the possible exception of Gregory Peck–another Irishman).

But Gregory Peck was no Jack Keegan, was he Audrey?

For all his talents, and good looks, Jack was really a humble man, with a great sense of humor–and an infectious laugh–he loved to tell a good joke or a good story– and he was good at it. And there was nothing pretentious or fancy about Jack. He was basically a meat and potatoes man, a BLT guy– a diner guy. And generous? Just ask Rose, his dedicated and loyal secretary for some fifty years–about the reams of checks that went out to Covenant House, Catholic Charities, the Indian Missions, and on and on.

No one lives a perfect life. And Jack would be the first to second that. But Jack learned long ago to confront his demons and change– change or die– it was as simple as that: Jack was all about redemption and transformation. And Laurie, John, Greg, and Kevin know all about that truth!

Was Jack successful in that transformation? Laurie reminded me that “a man’s success is measured by the lives he touched, and left them better from knowing him.” Jack Keegan was that man! There is absolutely no doubt about that. So many friends. So many good friends. So many best friends. And if you weren’t his best friend – you wished you could be– it was something to aspire to.

So was Jack a success by that measure? Well, as many people who came up to Jack's children over the years and stopped them on the street to say: "You know, I love your Dad, he saved my life"-- you would have thought he had been a world famous heart surgeon. But Jack had a different mission in life he was famous for. A different way of saving people. Perhaps an even more important one. And he did save lives. He did change hearts.

Yet Greg reminds me that Jack would say-- "I didn't save their lives, son; they saved mine!" But wait-- we have to tell the complete truth here-- Jack was not good at everything he tried.

Because Jack tried-- and he tried-- his hand at golf-- and I heard the story many times about how Jack was playing a round of 18 holes-- with three other guys. It's a foursome-- you're supposed to start out and finish that way-- but after seeing parts of the course that they had never seen before-- parts that they never knew even existed, they came to the ninth hole and Jack said: "That's it for me-- I'm quitting" . . . . And no one asked him to stay and play on.

Sooooo. Jack thought that he'd try his hand at boating. Can't get into too much trouble there. Now at that time the Keegans lived right here in White Plains. And Jack went out and got a used sixteen foot boat with a windshield and an outboard motor. And they had it tied to the back of their car, and they were on

their way to a gas station— Jimmy House's over on Lake Street—to have Jimmy put a safety chain on it. But before they got there— they were traveling down Cloverdale Ave. (John checked the Road Atlas for historical accuracy).

And the kids glance out their side window  
and they see a boat—  
one with a windshield—  
and it's their boat—  
and it's gaining on them—  
and then it's passing them—  
and it's clipping telephone poles—  
and then its' trespassing—  
it's running up onto someone's lawn  
where it smashes into a tree—  
it's place of final rest—

Ah, that wasn't a good day for Jack.

But it wasn't over. The following week or so the mail arrived at work. And there was just one or two at first,— before they started coming in like missiles. They were summonses and complaints— And Jack was the named defendant. Something about a runaway boat— dozens of different pedestrians— when they're

hadn't been any pedestrians— each claiming to have been injured by the same runaway boat on Cloverdale Ave.

Ah, Jack could take a joke. And that laugh— that infectious, full-bodied guffaw. We'll miss that laugh.

Let's talk a little about Jack Keegan, counselor at law. How do you eulogize a legend? Jack was pure class. He tried cases the way they were meant to be tried. He was civil and courtly— but you had better not try to push him around.

He was a man of details. So much so, he used to joke that he should have been a detective. He thought through everything ahead of time. He knew what could hurt him— and what to avoid. I think the lessons he learned from his life in the courtroom he applied to his larger life outside— and the other way around too.

Now Jack was a calm and measured person, but he loved the combat of the courtroom. He made no apologies for speaking on the behalf of those who were wronged or injured— (as he liked to say). And speak he did! His oratory was elegant and smooth— but never slick— elegant and smooth but at the same time down to earth. So eloquent and smart. He stayed within himself and spoke in a way that complemented his courtly manner. And that deep, resonant baritone didn't hurt either. But that polished elegance could cut like glass. And if you were on the other side— you wouldn't even know you were hurt until it was too late.

Jack's eloquence could be that lethal.

Jack never thought of himself as a judge—he was far too humble for that. But the Bench would have been better for it if he had. We all know that.

And ethical considerations were not something shelved away in a lifeless code. Ethical considerations were to be lived and practiced! As for the client—the client always came first! That was his first commandment! Jack was the consummate lawyer, a lawyer's lawyer.

They'd ring the bell when Jack Keegan was summing up, so people could come to watch. That's how good he was at his craft!

A Bronx guy with a big heart, he could get into a squabble when his views were challenged. One day he came in a little miffed because a pal had called him a “limousine liberal.” I shot back: “Hey Jack, at least you made it!” He laughed hard at that—harder than I had expected, and I quickly realized why.

Jack and Ray were Bronx kids. No silver spoons in their mouths. These were hard-working self-made men—who wanted more than anything to be lawyers. Ray reminds us that Jack had wanted Bronx Science, not just any school. It had to be The Bronx High School of Science--that was Jack. He had his standards—he set the bar high for himself. And he always got there. In recent years he loved going to their reunions—revisiting those years and renewing

friendships. He loved it.

After Bronx Science it was on to Fordham and Fordham Law School. All the awards and accolades, too many to mention— and Jack wouldn’t have wanted that anyhow. But what we sometimes forget, or maybe what we didn’t know or didn’t realize, was how much Jack truly loved being a trial lawyer.

And when at an awards dinner he told us all with a quaking voice: “This was the best job I ever had!” – I think we all realize now that those tears were there not because Jack had given up on being a lawyer—that he was tired of it. No, Jack didn’t want to retire! He would have gladly kept going if there had been any chance he could. It wasn’t his spirit, but his body that was failing him.

And let’s face it: We are all in awe of Jack’s courage— not just his emotional and spiritual courage, but his physical courage too! His heart had been battered black and blue by those past surgeries! He had to be in pain, but he never let on that he was. Jack didn’t complain or quit when lesser men would have. He pressed on. To the end, there was not an ounce of quit in Jack Keegan.

Jack was an avid reader. And a real current events guy. I always tried to make sure I had read his favorite columnists before I came in to the office— So I could keep up. We would trade books back and forth— and I still have a few— half-read on my nightstand— unfinished— I’ll get to them Jack.

We're never really ready when God takes the ones we love. But we all know where Jack is! The way he lived his life— he was always just One Step away from those gates.

The little guy was never little in Jack's eye. He knew all the people who served him by their first name— and they knew his. But usually it came back as "Mr. Keegan". Just Jack's presence commanded respect— and he always got it.

Jack always saw the big picture. He treated everyone with dignity and respect. The golden rule was Jack's rule. And it was the gold standard— backed by the full faith and credit of Jack's good and caring soul. Jack was wise enough to recognize and hold fast to the truly important things.

We all know some people who profess to be religious without being truly spiritual— And others who seem to be truly spiritual— without being that religious. It always seemed to me that Jack and the way Jack lived, had rather easily solved this apparent paradox: just by being a giving, caring person, by serving the needs of others— without selfish calculation.

He was constantly in the process of transforming himself— for the better. He was constantly becoming a more spiritual person. And if the source of his inspiration for that continuing work was the cinema, or scripture, or fiction— or a meeting in a room with kindred spirits where the truth is spoken— So be it! It

didn't matter to Jack!

He was never hung-up as Jean Anoulih's fictional Becket was— pondering whether he might be engaging in some doctrinal treason by doing the right deed for the wrong reason. No, Jack always seemed to be doing the right deed, for just the right reason. And he seemed to always do it effortlessly. He didn't have to think about it. He didn't have to second guess— because he had learned to embrace the hard work of redemption and endless self-transformation as something you just did— something you just had to do— like taking a breath— if you wanted to live, truly live right. You just declared that you would do it! No excuses— you just did it! One day at a time!

How do you eulogize a legend? How do you sum up a life of tireless service? – A life so-well lived. So many friends. So many close friends. So many best friends.

Being Jack's partner taught me a lot about the art of persuasion— And about how important the art of summation is— Because when you get to the last part of the trial, the defendant presents his arguments first, then the plaintiff gets his turn. And Jack was a plaintiff's lawyer. Now sometimes a defendant's lawyer, or perhaps even a judge, might pick away at the weaknesses in your case. (It could happen in conference, in chambers, or even out in the hall.) And

whenever this happened, Jack's trump card would always be: "I still get to speak last, don't I?"

Yes Jack, You do get to speak last. Because you are in each of us. You are in our hearts, in our minds, and in our souls. And now that you are gone— you will continue to speak through us— in the stories we tell about you. And more important, as we remember, and cherish, and pass on to others, the lessons of life you taught us.

So yes, you still get to speak last, Jack.

We love you Jack.

Husband, Father, Grandpa,

Brother, Uncle, Friend, Colleague,

Counselor of troubled souls,

Champion of Justice,

Partner to us all—

You were the best at everything you did.

We miss you madly already.

We will miss you always.