

Professor Emeritus Robert Heller was honored to present the following eulogy in memory of his colleague and friend, James Conway. The service was held on July 7, 2007, at the Newman Center on UB's North Campus.

We are here today to pay honor to Dr. James A. Conway: scholar, educator, author, researcher, leader, military veteran, humorist, magician, artist, wood carver, colleague, husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather, and dear friend—a true renaissance man. As I was dressing for today I wished that I had saved a bow tie. As you may all recall, Jim was Mr. Bowtie personified!

Jim's interests, skills, and knowledge were vast. Intellectually he had few peers—his mind was quick and sharp. He grasped thoughts and concepts quickly. He possessed that rare ability to deal with both the abstract and practical with ease.

Jim was quick to challenge you to defend your ideas. He was not prone to accepting things at face value and frequently pushed you to the point of frustration if you were unable to clearly articulate your position. I always admired Jim's ability to conceptualize abstract concepts and offer a variety of new perspectives for you to explore. He pushed students and colleagues hard and would not let you off the hook until you were able to stand firm in your beliefs. If you waffled, he could be tough but after you struggled for a bit he provided you with alternative ways to strengthen your ideas or position. Again, Jim had that unique ability, that so few possess, to tell you what you needed to hear, not necessarily what you wanted to hear—a characteristic of a truly exceptional leader.

His Irish temper could flair up quickly. Both Jim and I had fairly aggressive and competitive personalities and while we clashed occasionally, we had equally strong respect and admiration for one another. I vividly recall one encounter Jim and I had many years ago when he was chairperson of the Department of Educational Leadership. He was on my case for a variety of reasons, most deservedly so. But at last I had had it and burst into his office shouting, "Conway, you are a pain in the butt." Well, that is a close approximation as to how it came out. Before Jim could respond I turned around slamming his office door as I exited. Sitting in my office, a few doors down the hall from his, I was thinking, "Why did I say that to my dear friend with such anger?" A few minutes later there was a knock at the door and Jim entered saying, "Heller, you are right, I am a pain in the you know what." We looked at each other for a few seconds and then both broke out in laughter giving each other a firm handshake and slap on the back. It was truly the only time in our friendship spanning three plus decades that we ever faced one another at this level of aggression.

For those of you who attended Jim's retirement from the university, you may recall my story about Linda and Jim's three boys growing up knowing me but not knowing my real first name until the retirement dinner when I was introduced as "Bob" Heller, the master of ceremonies. You see, Jim would come home from the university each day and at the dinner table Linda would inquire, "How was your day dear?" Jim's reply usually began with "That Damn Heller." The Conway boys always thought that my first name was "Damn."

The truth is Jim and I were very close. For years and years from early spring to late fall, we began our days rising before sun-up to play nine holes of golf at the Audubon Golf Course before showering, having breakfast, and going to the office. We did this four to six days a

week. Jim, Dick Stevic, Stan Cramer, and myself constituted the foursome. We paired up and the losing team bought coffee. When Dick Stevic retired from the university and moved to Arizona, Frank Calzi joined the foursome until retirement broke the group up.

For many years, Jim, Dick, Stan, and Bob, as professors, had the good fortune of free time between semesters and began our New Year with a week of bachelor golf at Jim and Linda's condo on Siesta Key, Florida. We had so much fun together. In the spring the four of us traveled to Williamstown, MA to Stan and Roz's condo for more bachelor golf and either during the spring or summer season often made a trip to Wellesley Island in the 1000 Island region of the St. Lawrence River for even more golf at Judy's and my summer cottage. The guys did not like the golf courses in the 1000 Islands so we made fewer trips there. The courses were not as well kept and rougher there.

Jim was also a member of the infamous "Great Debate Society," comprised of our colleagues at the university, which enjoyed a 34 year run. Now most likely when I make reference to the "Great Debate Society" the image in your mind was that of a group of serious scholars sitting around debating the great issues of the day. Truth is, it was a group of cronies having an evening out each month to tell tall stories, enjoy much laughter, and then some serious poker. We sent notices of the meeting through university channels and did not want to mention anything about playing poker. Hopefully our deans over the years thought that we were engaging in scholarly dialogue.

Oh, I could go on endlessly with wonderful stories and accounts involving Jim Conway.

Jim had a great sense of humor. He enjoyed a good laugh and was a master story teller—usually with a hint of Irish wit in them.

He was a proud and loving husband, father, father-in-law, and grandfather. His family was the excelsior of his life. Jim and Linda did a marvelous job as parents raising their three sons Jimmy, Matt, and Chris. They are a model family that would serve today's society well. Family portraits of the Conways always left me in awe. My wife Judy and I would view them and both share a common reaction, "What a beautiful family."

The shared head of that family, of course, was Jim. With Jim and Linda's support, encouragement, and love, each of the sons has achieved great success in their personal and professional life.

How fortunate all of us have been to have shared our lives with this wonderful man. While today is a day of sadness for us all, in reality we should be basking in the glory of our good fortune and thank God for allowing Jim's touch to have enriched our lives. He will live forever in our hearts and minds.

I love you, dear friend Jim, and leave you now in the hands of God until we meet again in the life hereafter.

—Robert Heller
Professor 1964–1998