

Notre Dame Law School

## NDLScholarship

---

Journal Articles

Publications

---

2022

### Bon Voyage, My Friend

Amy Coney Barrett

*Notre Dame Law School*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law\\_faculty\\_scholarship](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship)



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Amy C. Barrett, *Bon Voyage, My Friend*, 97 Notre Dame L. Rev. Reflection 5 (2022)..

Available at: [https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law\\_faculty\\_scholarship/1478](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/1478)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Publications at NDLScholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal Articles by an authorized administrator of NDLScholarship. For more information, please contact [lawdr@nd.edu](mailto:lawdr@nd.edu).

## BON VOYAGE, MY FRIEND

*Amy Coney Barrett\**

I met John in the fall of 2000, when he traveled to Washington to recruit new faculty at the annual hiring conference. Although I was not then on the teaching market, John heard that I intended to enter it in a year or two. He invited me to have coffee to discuss my plans, and so began a friendship that spanned nearly twenty years.

John wore many hats in the course of our relationship: mentor, colleague, co-author, and treasured friend. When I wrote a law review article, he invariably devoted time to reading and commenting on the first draft. When I first taught a seminar in Statutory Interpretation, he offered advice on the syllabus. And he became so interested in an article I was writing about constitutional interpretation in Congress that we ended up as co-authors.

Even though John liked to think and write about statutory and constitutional interpretation, neither was his primary interest. That distinction belonged to environmental law. John wrote prolifically in this area, securing the John N. Matthews chair at Notre Dame and later publishing his book, *Law's Environment*.<sup>1</sup> I will leave it to those inside the field to describe John's impact on it. As an outsider, what strikes me is that his interest was not just scholarly. Instead, John fused his commitment to environmental law with other passions: faith, photography, and travel.

As a serious Christian, John believed that humans have a moral obligation to care for the environment. More than that, he saw stewardship of the earth as part of the human vocation. This gave him a distinct lens through which to view the persistent problems of environmental law—for example, how to balance economic development in poverty-stricken regions with the preservation of natural resources. To be sure, Christianity did not offer John a simple

---

© 2022 Amy Coney Barrett. Individuals and nonprofit institutions may reproduce and distribute copies of this Essay in any format at or below cost, for educational purposes, so long as each copy identifies the author, provides a citation to the *Notre Dame Law Review Reflection*, and includes this provision in the copyright notice.

\* Associate Justice, United States Supreme Court.

1 JOHN COPELAND NAGLE, *LAW'S ENVIRONMENT: HOW THE LAW SHAPES THE PLACES WE LIVE* (2010).

solution to such dilemmas. I have a fond memory of gathering with colleagues around John's dining room table for a day-long discussion of his draft manuscript on Christianity and environmental law. We had lively debates about nearly every chapter because there were conflicting views on nearly every question. While John's death interrupted the completion of the book, it reflected the project that meant the most to him: bringing his faith to bear on even the nittiest and grittiest matters of environmental policy.

John did not pay tribute to the environment with only his pen—he used his camera too. He was an excellent amateur photographer. The walls of the Nagle home displayed his handiwork, and album after album documented the wildlife that John encountered on his travels. My children were particularly taken with John's Alaskan bears. Not only were they beautiful, but John had photographed them at *very* close range.

John was not in Alaska solely for the bears. He had traveled there in conjunction with a book he was writing on national parks—a project that he almost certainly undertook because of the field research it required. In fact, that project was quintessential John: he managed to make it part of his job to visit the most beautiful sites in America. Not, of course, that John confined himself to domestic travel. He loved nothing more than a stamp in his passport. To satisfy his travel bug, he took teaching posts all over the world, including Beijing, Hong Kong, and London. When Notre Dame needed a lecturer on an alumni cruise to Antarctica, John eagerly volunteered. That trip makes it no exaggeration to say that John took his expertise in environmental law to the ends of the earth.

Notwithstanding his many travels, John did not cultivate a taste for even minimally comfortable hotels. On the contrary, he liked to entertain his friends with pictures of the run-down motels he frequented on his trips to national parks. And while John traveled the world, his favorite restaurant was neither international nor sophisticated. It was The Cheesecake Factory, which, sadly for John, has no South Bend location. When his daughter Laura was short of the practice hours needed to get her driver's license, John had her take him on a 200-mile round trip from South Bend to Chicago for lunch at his favorite restaurant. Never one to pass up the chance to do something nice, John dropped off some cheesecake for my family on the way home.

That cheesecake was one of many treats that John regularly delivered to the Barretts. At Christmastime, he made us sugar cookie pizzas, decorated with gumdrops by his daughters Laura and Julia. When he heard that my sons John Peter and Liam were interested in now-extinct passenger pigeons, he stopped by with a book containing

the last known photograph of the species. He brought my daughter Juliet a stuffed panda from his beloved China and showered Benjamin, who has developmental delays, with affection, gifts, and prayer. John spared no effort for his friends. When I joined the Seventh Circuit, he flew home from London to be present at my investiture. As a gift, he produced a copy of the out-of-print Webster's Second International Dictionary, knowing that Justice Scalia, for whom I clerked, was among the many writers who regard the current edition as inferior.

I could go on with more stories about the gifts, both tangible and intangible, that John gave to those around him. But for now, it suffices to say that rather than putting his resources into himself, John put them into his family, friends, church, and work. And in each of those contexts, he was fully himself and entirely unselfconscious about who he was. That made him approachable to a wide variety of people. He was as at home with fellow academics as he was with students, with adults as with kids, and with suburban congregations as with the inner-city congregation that he and Lisa attended. John embodied humility. And though he never made himself the center of attention, he became central to our lives anyway. John has now departed on his greatest journey, and those of us left behind miss him deeply.

