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A TRIBUTE TO WALTER
BARTON: "HE DID HIS BEST"

HON. FRANK J. GUARINI

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 25, 1980

Mr. GUARINI. Mr. Speaker, in the June 19 edition of the *Beacon*, the official organ of the Paterson Diocese in New Jersey, there appeared a touching article regarding a former Jersey City resident. Because of the special problems Walter Barton had, I believe the following is worthy of the attention of all of us who have received a better share of God's mental and physical gifts.

Gerald Costello is the executive editor of the *Beacon*, and Victor Winkler, a former Jersey City resident, is its managing editor. The article is as follows:

EULOGY FOR WALTER

FINNEGAN HOUSE RESIDENT MADE LIFE
MEANINGFUL

(By Maura Rossi)

OAK RIDGE.—Somewhere today, there's a seven-year-old girl who owes her life to Walter. If God had made Walter just for that, his life would have been worthwhile.

This was the eulogy of Father Richard Oliveri, associate director of the diocesan special education department, for the frail 69-year-old Walter Barton who died June 8.

For the past seven years Walter was cared for in the department's Finnegan House here. For two years before that he was in Murray House, Paterson. Both are diocesan residences for retarded adults.

"All of us want our lives to be of value, and pray that we might be in the right place at the right time, when our response just at that one great moment, will make our lives meaningful," Father Oliveri said at the funeral Mass offered in St. Thomas the Apostle Church here Thursday.

"Walter had that moment," he said. He

recalled the winter of 1973, when Walter was the only one at Finnegan House who made a daily trek to the roadside mailbox.

"We didn't get much mail back then, and usually mostly bills, so we'd only check every few days," Father Oliveri said.

One day Walter found a tiny baby girl, less than 12 hours old, in the box. He cradled her in his arms and carried her into the house, saving her, "according to Father Oliveri," from almost sure death from suffocation or exposure. He was retarded, but his reaction was the right one, "Father Oliveri said.

"Some of us may never get that moment," Father Oliveri said. "But there is a different way to look at Walter's life. He built no bridges. He amassed no fortune, he was not a great public servant, but he brought much to the lives of everyone he met, just by being Walter."

"It's funny how we never realize till they are gone how much the people we love give to us, how much of what we are comes from their just being what they are," he said.

"Speaking directly and personally to the mourners in the church who remembered Walter's strength and fierce independence—not always easy to cope with—he referred briefly to the 60 years Walter had lived with his mother in Jersey City, and how "he knew everybody and everybody knew him." It was after his mother's death that Walter found a home with the diocese.

"We lived with him and shared with him, and helped him to be happy," the priest said. "But it was not one sided. Walter brought joy, life, spontaneity to our lives."

Concelebrating the Mass were Father John B. Wehrlen, department director, and Father Patrick Scott, pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Pompton Plains, who recalled later that Walter and some of the other Finnegan House residents and Father Oliveri had kept him company at what would otherwise have been a lonely Christmas dinner in his rectory last Christmas.

The mourners for Walter included some Finnegan House residents and staff, as well as those from Marathon House in Wayne, residents' relatives, neighbors and Lillian Gallagher, the department's other associate director.

Walter had become her personal charge in recent months as he declined in health and ability to care for himself. It was at her summer home in Bricktown that he died, literally in her arms. These were all the family Walter had, and they were all there.

"He's gone to bring spice to the Kingdom of Heaven," Father Oliveri said. "I hope they're ready for him."

It has been said "To live in the hearts of those you love is not to die."

Walter Barton will live forever in the memories of all those in the Diocese of Paterson, led by Bishop Frank J. Rodimer, who were enriched by him. He certainly did his best and will receive a just and proper reward.

I would like to express my special feelings to Father John Wehrlen who is doing such magnificent work with retarded adults. A graduate of St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, recognition of his work goes well beyond the State of New Jersey.

Of special significance is the effort that Father Wehrlen made assuring that Walter Barton would receive such treatment which many times seems to be reserved for those with more of our worldly goods.

I believe the poem below written many years ago by Oliver Wendell Holmes excellently sums up this tribute to our friend Walter, who saved the life of a little girl he never got to know.

THE VOICELESS

We count the broken lyres that rest
Where the sweet wailing singers slumber,
But o'er their silent sister's breast
The wild flowers who will stoop to
number?

A few can touch the magic string,
And noisy Fame is proud to win them:—
Alas for those that never sing,
But die with all their music in them!
O hearts that break and give no sign
Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
Till Death pours out his longed-for wine
Slow-dropped from Misery's crushing
presses—

If singing breath or echoing chord
To every hidden pang were given,
What endless melodies were poured,
As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven!

Walter's life proves "Those who know the path to God, can find it in the dark."