

### Dennis Patrick Cantwell, M.D., 1939–1997



**D**ennis Cantwell, M.D., was a “natural” as a child psychiatrist. He combined high intellectual achievements with humility and empathy, qualities that made him particularly well endowed to work with young, handicapped children.

Dr. Cantwell was a fine listener, both with his patients and with his friends. He knew intuitively how to let both “little people” and adults tell their own stories. Even during his residency at Washington University, his fellow students would come to him for advice. Dr. Cantwell’s sensitivity to the needs of others may have been partly shaped by his own experience with an eating disorder manifested by a craving for meat. As a Roman Catholic, he did not eat meat on Fridays and in fact fasted throughout the day. Pacing the halls, he would declare “I am hungry, but I cannot eat now. I hate fish. I have to wait until midnight to eat.” Then at 11:00 p.m. he would disappear, explaining that at the stroke of midnight he would be in a restaurant with a big steak.

His spirituality and his love for his family ran deep, but he also approached life with a sense of humor. For example, al-

though he loved and honored his eldest daughter, who was an attorney, he also would joke, “Every Sunday I go to kneel in mass and ask God’s forgiveness for making another lawyer.”

His innate humility prevented him from discussing his many honors with his colleagues. He was a “whiz kid” as a child, graduated with highest honors from Notre Dame University, and went on to earn many other awards: The Ittleson Award from APA, the Lifetime Achievement Award from Washington University in St. Louis, and the Elaine Schlosser Lewis Award from the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. After completing a residency at Washington University, he became the Joseph P. Campbell Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles. His contributions to psychiatry were many: extensive research in disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and fields such as genetics, as well as service on the original DSM-III task force.

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