

In Memoriam, Kelly Beth Cosby
Admission Ceremony for Attorneys
September 12, 2016

Before we begin today's ceremony, I want to give a special recognition to a young lawyer who is not with us today, but perhaps in spirit. As you notice, there is an empty seat in the first row of chairs in the court room. The young lawyer who would have occupied that seat did not absent herself voluntarily. Rather, her heroic efforts to complete law school and then to pass the bar exam, then to start work in a well-respected law firm, while severely ill with cancer and undergoing medical treatments, succumbed in the end to this dreadful disease. Yet, because she satisfied every obligation demanded of an applicant to the Bar, under extraordinarily demanding personal circumstances, and because she performed with such exemplary dedication, discipline, and unwavering good spirit, we have reserved that seat for Kelly Beth Cosby.

Today, we are posthumously admitting Kelly to the Bar of the State of New York. This application has been supported by many people, including the law firm Duane Morris where she was getting her start as a New York attorney. While this is an unusual procedure, we the First Department Appellate Division deem it appropriate to posthumously enter the name Kelly Beth Cosby to the official roll of attorneys in this State.

Kelly was raised in the Midwestern part of the United States, a region renowned for solid values, unpretentious diligence, and an ethos of personal responsibility, traits which traveled with her when she came east to attend NYU Law School. She had been active in academic and public policy activities, especially those involving human rights, as a student at the University of Kansas. While at NYU Law School, she was an International and Human Rights Fellow at its Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, a senior executive editor for the Journal of International Law and Politics, and for a summer, an intern with the Global Justice Center where she did research and writing on issues such as violence against women in armed conflict and how international law should be applied to protect victims of violence.

However, while these private efforts were undeniably worthy and obviously reflected Kelly's idealism, she, ironically, actually attained public recognition for an achievement that was notably whimsical and which I recall reading about in an article in the New York Law Journal: she co-wrote and recorded a rap music video parody that went viral on YouTube and which paid tribute to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth

Bader Ginsburg, titled “Notorious RBG.” And to further underscore that she wasn’t just an overly serious and dry academic, Kelly was a producer, choreographer, vocal director, vocal arranger and lead cast member in NYU’s satirical 2015 “Law Revue.”

However, here is where her story takes a dramatic turn that is both sad and inspiring. Kelly had been diagnosed with melanoma in 2012, followed by surgery at Sloan Kettering. The idealism that is reflected in her law school career undoubtedly took on special meaning for a survivor of a particularly lethal form of cancer. Someone else might have gone to ground; Kelly took flight. Yet, the melanoma returned as she completed her studies in May 2015 and prepared for the bar exam. Again, someone else might put everything on hold to undergo the physically taxing treatments and handle the emotional turmoil that the cancer necessitated. Kelly, instead, navigated between chemo and the physically and emotionally taxing bar exam studies. She passed the July 2015 bar exam, and started her law career in the law firm last September. However, having succeeded in all of her challenges, she ultimately suffered her first failure, that of mortality.

Kelly Beth Cosby died on November 15, 2015, a 25 year old who exemplified idealism and lawyerly accomplishments, yet whose greatest accomplishment may be the example she has set for others: whatever the challenges, whatever the impediments, whatever the pain and turmoil, persevere with grace and dignity. That, in a nutshell, is, I think, the best advice that one can give to aspiring lawyers, and Kelly Beth Cosby did so by example.

Although today we have reserved an empty seat for Kelly, we honor the full life she lived as she traveled along a path that reached its end far too soon. Kelly was gifted in many ways, but she did not have the gift of time. This court will give Kelly an extension of time so that she may fulfill her life long aspiration of becoming an attorney in this jurisdiction. The Appellate Division, First Department, herewith admits Kelly Beth Cosby to the roll of attorneys of the State of New York.

We should give a round of applause to Kelly Beth Cosby.

I also wish to acknowledge the family members of Kelly who flew all the way from Kansas to attend today’s ceremony. We have with us Kelly’s parents, Jimmie and Mark Cosby, and her brother Clay Cosby.

We also have with us the Dean of New York University Law School—Trevor Morrison and Associate Dean of NYU Law, Office of Career Services, Irene Dorzback. Also in attendance are three partners from the Law Firm Duane Morris: Thomas Newman, William C. Heuer and Michael Grohman. We also have with us law associates and friends of Kelly: Elaine Simeon, Stephanie Chery and Natalie Balistreri.