

### ***A Note to the Applicant***

The student for whom this award is named strode STA's halls in a garish tie, carrying minimal textbooks with his hefty recreational reading. He was a championship debater and All-State trumpeter who played on the baseball, track, ski, and football teams, and was active in student government. In his valedictory speech, he urged us to be grateful if only for the gift of not having been born a frog. Bound to succeed in whatever path he chose, he pursued service over fame or fortune.

Throughout his life, he was a study in contrasts with a puckish sense of humor. After receiving the Naval Academy's award for outstanding achievement in navigation, he joined The Flat Earth Society. After sporting a *Nuke the Whales* bumper sticker for a decade, he bought an environmentally-friendly Tesla. He was a world traveler, opera devotee, and lover of esoteric literature. As his wife, Anne, put it, "Kevin lived a hundred-year life in sixty-one years."

He so valued his STA education that he was inducted into the Hall of Honor in 2016 for his sustained support. Accordingly, it was at a Catholic high school, Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois, that he brought his academic life full circle. Any university would have welcomed him, but he wanted to help younger students. As he put it, "I want to catch kids before they turn off to math and science. I want them to see that it is fun, and they can do it." One former pupil, heart-broken at the loss of his best teacher, mentor, and friend, recounts how Kevin not only attended his hockey games but included a question on the final exam around the physics of his championship-winning goal.

To truly understand Kevin Warnke, you need to watch him in action, as filmed teaching a class at home in January 2021 during the pandemic at <https://www.wenbanfh.com/obituaries/Kevin-Christopher-Warnke?obId=19962096> . (Go to the **Tribute Wall** tab and click the window showing a picture of Kevin next to some white roses.) Then consider this essay question (500 words max): **If you had a year of financial security in which to do anything you wanted with your talents and interests, what one thing would you attempt and why?**

Hello Ms. Warnke,

You do not know who I am, but my name is Justin Fiore, and I am one of your husband's former students. I am currently a Junior in college and graduated from Loyola in 2020 where I had Mr. Warnke as my AP Physics teacher.

Recently, I took some time to reflect about my current path and place in life as not only a student studying mechanical engineering, but also as a catholic and man of God. During my reflection, I kept on coming back to the many memories and lessons I had been given by your husband. I began my college career studying Engineering, Physics predominantly due to Mr. Warnke's love of science and energy he instilled in all his teachings. He was the reason I decided to study Physics in the first place and instead make the switch to not take a pre-med route like I was originally planning as my college major. I now have switched into Mechanical Engineering because I feel it is more in line with what I want to do in the future, but I am still motivated by the lessons I learned in my senior year of high school. In fact, I often find myself reminiscing on how Mr. Warnke taught a particular lesson if my college lecturers are also instructing me on that topic area.

As a man of faith and philosophy, I struggled a lot in high school with finding the parallels between how both God and science work together in our world. Mr. Warnke played a key role in me finding how they both function in my life based on his own image of God. In fact, I still have a letter he wrote me when I was leading Kairos which is a catholic retreat at Loyola. In it, he explained to me how leadership comes from within and often it is important to understand what foundation your inner beliefs are made on. He went on to say that to be a successful leader, it is important to know when to lead by logic and the understanding you can derive, but also know when to lead by emotion and the beliefs that you have faith and trust in. I still hold this piece of advice close to my heart especially when I try to rationalize decisions based on how numbers work out or what direction I believe God is looking for me to take as communicated by my emotions.

With Mr. Warnke's sudden passing and me being located down in Champaign, Illinois, I never got the chance to explain to him how much of an impact he had on me. I truly do accredit my passion and love for engineering to your husband. He has inspired me not only to do engineering because I like the math and science behind it, but to study the field in order to give back and be a man for others. I have many friends who take the same classes as me who are studying various engineering fields because of the salary and personal benefits they can achieve from it. This has never been the motivation for me. The idea of doing good for humanity through my own ideas and being the first person to make a breakthrough that could change the life of someone else is the reason why I am so driven in my work. I also accredit this belief to your husband.

I have not made many promises or goals for my life ahead of me yet, only as many that I think are necessary, however, one of the ones I have made is to teach. Mr. Warnke choosing to give back all the knowledge he had gained through his lifetime to students like myself before he fully retired has inspired me to do the same. This act of educating the next generation made me realize how important it is to use my studies for the betterment of mankind and made me decide that I want to do the same thing for someone else one day. I want to be incredibly excited to talk about how my Tesla's motor works and create a project around EVs, I want to be willing to give up part of my lunch to answer my students' STEM oriented questions even if they had nothing to do with the chapter we were learning,

and I want to be inspiring my students to think deeper about the problems the world gives to them just as Mr. Warnke did for me.

Your husband has been one of the biggest role models I have had in my life to this date, and I wish I could tell him just how much of an impact he has had on me personally. I wanted to let you know this because I remember how much he would talk about you in class-always with a smile on his face. Your husband touched my heart and mind for the better in just the one class I had with him, and I cannot imagine the countless other students and colleagues who had the same experience. If I could say one thing to him, it would be "Thank You, for inspiring me to go forth and use my thoughts, words, and actions to bring about the greater glory of God" (This is adapted from a prayer he would have us say each day together before we started class).

I hope that my sharing of my experience with Mr. Warnke comes across in good faith. I really just wanted to let you know just one more story of the good your husband put forth into the world. I hope you are doing well and would love to stay in contact if you would like to. My email address is [justin.m.fiore9@gmail.com](mailto:justin.m.fiore9@gmail.com). Please take care and have a good upcoming holiday season.

Regards,

Justin Fiore