

OBA – MEMORIAL PROGRAM
Remarks by Thomas A. Grennan
May 19, 2017

Family and friends of our recently deceased lawyers, distinguished judiciary, and fellow members of the Omaha Bar Association:

Forty years ago, one of my mentors, Gene Welch, stopped in my office and said “you should join us at the OBA Memorial Service” – which I did. I was a junior in law school. I really did not know what to expect. As I sat and listened, I was impressed by the fact that, although the practice of law is frequently adversarial, there was, nevertheless, a sincere tone of comradery and mutual respect shown at that first Memorial Service that I attended. Since then, I have attended many Omaha Bar Association Memorial Services and that same comradery and mutual respect has been reflected at each of the memorial services.

Unfortunately, lawyer bashing has been with us for centuries; however, it appears to have been on the rise in more recent times. What people fail to realize is simply this: lawyers are, by nature, problem solvers and, ultimately, peace makers. Without lawyers and without the judiciary, we would have anarchy in this country. It is the legal profession that is the oil that keeps the machinery of this great nation moving.

There is something special and unique about practicing law in Omaha. Even though there are some lawyers who are more difficult than others, the vast majority of the lawyers whom I have encountered in this legal community are impeccably honest and straightforward. Of course, we all have our respective jobs to do;

nevertheless, there remains a level of cooperation and civility that is remarkably unique to the Omaha Bar Association.

I have had discussions with other Omaha lawyers about this phenomenon. Candidly, I attribute this ongoing level of civility and mutual respect to the mentoring that took place when I was a young lawyer and the mentoring that has continued through the present. Learning how to be an effective lawyer is not necessarily something you learn in law school. Rather, it is something you learn by watching experienced lawyers in action. It is something you pick up virtually by osmosis. Most of us have been fortunate to have had great role models and mentors.

The men and women we honor this year come from diverse careers. It was my privilege to know many of the deceased lawyers we honor today. I was impressed by the breadth of legal experience reflected in the list. I would be remiss if I didn't comment briefly on each of these individuals:

- **Pat Matthews** graduated from Creighton Law School and practiced tax law in Milwaukee for many years. Pat was the son of one of the past OBA presidents, Frank Matthews.
- **Dave McCann** was a well-respected, candid and shrewd lawyer. Dave represented his clients well. He enjoyed the respect of his fellow litigators.
- **Paul Hill** had a distinguished career as a reference librarian at the Creighton Law School. He helped hundreds of young (and old) lawyers learn how to research the law and otherwise serve their respective clients.

- For most of his career, **Ken Legg** worked for State Farm. He was, by nature, a peacemaker and conciliator. He had an uncanny ability to resolve contentious cases to the satisfaction of everyone involved. Whenever you talked to Ken, everything was “tip top”. He enjoyed a “tip top” life, indeed.
- **Kate Shugrue Schaffner** had the blessing of being mentored by her own father, Professor Richard Shugrue, of the Creighton Law School. Kate had a private law practice for many years in Nebraska and Arizona helping victims of abuse and neglect; in addition, she helped make adoptions possible for many families.
- **Mary Beth Weber** was an exceptional lawyer who was married to Mark Weber, our current state counsel on discipline. Mary Beth was the heart of their great family. She will be dearly missed.
- **Robert Marcotte, Sr.**, also known as R.D. Marcotte, was a leader in the insurance industry. He had an excellent business sense.
- **John Sodoro** was a classmate of mine and a very close friend. I knew John since we started as Creighton undergrads in the early 1970’s. John was well liked by clients as well as other lawyers. John was all about family, faith, friends and his firm.
- **Franklin Norris** served as a navigator in a B24 bombing crew during World War II. Later, he earned his law degree at Northwestern Law School. He practiced law in Omaha for many years.

- **Sam Jensen** distinguished himself in the arena of labor and employment law. Sam was affiliated with various Omaha law firms. He was active in the Omaha Bar Association.
- **John Liakos** was a very astute lawyer with many loyal and appreciative clients. John was a leader in the Greek community in Omaha.
- **Robert Q. Kelly, Sr.** was the law librarian at Creighton for many years. In addition, he was a dedicated law professor at Creighton. He was a gentle man who wanted to share his working knowledge of the law with the students.
- Although I did not know **Charles M. Caldwell**, it is my understanding that he was a fine man and a fine lawyer.
- **Joseph Barmettler** was a larger than life lawyer, who enjoyed a great reputation. Joe Barmettler was a partner in the Fitzgerald Schorr Barmettler and Brennan law firm for decades.
- **Judge Maurice S. Redmond** was a well-respected lawyer in northeast Nebraska. He served as a District Judge in South Sioux City, Nebraska, for many years.
- **Jack Higgins** was one of the most effective trial lawyers in Omaha. If you were his client, you were in good hands.
- **Gary Wence** was affiliated with various law firms in Omaha. At the time of his death, he was living in Scottsdale, Arizona.

- **Rosemarie B. Lee** was a dedicated and congenial public servant. She served for many years in the County Attorney's office. Rosemarie was well liked and respected. She was always known as being a very positive and supportive person.
- **Joseph Beninato, Jr.** obtained an MBA from the University of San Francisco and a law degree from Creighton University. Joe was a well-respected CPA in Omaha. He leaves behind many family members and close friends.
- **Judge Dick Spethman** was one of the best district judges that we have ever had. He would keep cases moving, deal with matters promptly and otherwise accommodate lawyers and litigants. Judge Spethman had a good sense of humor and also had an innate sense of what was right.
- **Bill Stockdale** was another of my law classmates. Bill was a well-respected lawyer who understood business matters, tax and estate planning. Bill was a wonderful family man.
- **Bonnie Durham Dawson** was a Sociologist, Vocational Counselor and Juvenile and Adult Probation Officer. She was the first woman prosecutor in the state of Nebraska.

I should note that there are two attorneys who were not listed in the program, but who will be honored next year.

- **Judge James Murphy** was a kind and compassionate district judge. He was a good listener and a very fair-minded jurist. He left many legacies, the most notable

being the founding and implementation of the Drug Court.

- **Dick Valentine** was a co-founder of the Valentine O'Toole law firm. He was an excellent trial lawyer. Dick was a formidable opponent, but totally fair.

All of the lawyers whom we honor today were a credit to their profession and, more importantly, to their respective families. All of these fine lawyers, in their own way, helped mentor other lawyers. Unquestionably, they left this world a better place than they found it.

The memory of these lawyers will not fade.

Thank you.

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