

## 2012 OBA Memorial Program

Twenty-four years ago, my mother was invited to attend the Omaha Bar Association's memorial program, and she wasn't sure she wanted to come. Unlike my father, she was not a church-going person, and she abhorred sentimentality in any form. But she came, and she received her red rose. Afterward, she said she was glad she came, because the OBA program reassured her that when my father was at his office working six days a week, when he was in court, when he was at Northrup Jones negotiating settlements or acting as a mentor to young lawyers, when he was at the Omaha Club over the noon hour playing pitch with other members of the bar, he was with another kind of *family*. It was a family that cared about him, valued him, and, now that he was gone, it *missed* him.

This year, the Omaha Bar Association family lost 28 lawyers, and Ron Henningsen, the publisher of the Daily Record and a beloved member of Omaha's legal community. Many of you are here because, this year, you lost a lawyer you loved. Thank you for sharing your lawyer with us. And thank you for the sacrifices you made because you loved someone who chose a career of service.

When I read about the lives of the lawyers we lost this year, and when I think about those whom I knew well, certain words ring out again and again, like notes from a carillon, playing a simple but beautiful tune: Integrity, generosity, intellect, insight. Teacher, counselor, mentor, leader. Commitment to family, community, country and faith.

I will not attempt to tell you about the lawyer you loved. You know the measure of your loss. I do hope to reassure you of two things—first that your lawyer chose a career that helped make the world a little more fair, a little more peaceful. And second, that your lawyer was valued by fellow lawyers, judges, and the broader legal community. Each red rose represents someone who is deeply missed.

When I hear people refer to lawyers as members of the second oldest profession, I tell them they are right. *Judges* are members of the oldest

profession. In Exodus, Chapter 18, Moses created the judiciary. Once there were judges available to apply the law and resolve disputes, it soon became apparent that people who went to the judges seeking justice were not on an equal footing. Some were rich, powerful, popular, clever, and eloquent. Some were poor, simple, disliked, frightened or shy. So, advocates were needed to speak for the poor, the friendless, the outcast, the very young, and the very old. Advocates who would help expose lies and fraud. Counselors who would teach the law, help the people abide by it, and, through good example, *inspire* others to be fair, honest, and respectful. So, the second oldest profession was born—the practice of law.

It was not until chapter 28 of the Book of Exodus that the priesthood was established. Hippocrates, the founder of the medical profession, didn't come along for another thousand years.

The member of the second oldest profession that *you* loved may have prosecuted criminals or defended the accused; counseled corporate giants, or represented victims of child abuse. The lawyer you loved may have been a teacher, a mediator, or an estate planner. Perhaps a gift of eloquence, a love of reading, an analytical mind, or a passion for justice led your lawyer to the law. Or, maybe your lawyer just didn't like bullies. There is no better way to put a bully in his place than to learn the law.

Because the lawyer you loved spent years studying the law, and long hours at work, someone's voice was heard. Someone's property was restored. A child was made safe. A business prospered. A city grew. The creativity of inventors and artists was nurtured. And people who might have been enemies because of their differences lived in peace, knowing that the law was their shield and sword.

As a judge, I have the great privilege of seeing lawyers wield those shields and swords in the courtroom. As advocates and adversaries, they give their all to present their clients' cases. Then, when they come back to chambers for a cup of coffee, their respect and even affection for each other is evident. It makes me proud to be a part of the legal profession, and especially proud and grateful to be working in Omaha, Nebraska.

The Omaha Bar is gracious to visiting lawyers, welcoming to new members of the bar, compassionate to lawyers who are in crisis, and kinder to judges than we sometimes deserve. The members of the Omaha Bar are in constant good fellowship with each other, thanks to the OBA.

The loss of one member of this community is felt deeply. This memorial program helps the members of the bar deal with their grief, as much as it honors the loss that the lawyers' wives, husbands, children, and parents have suffered.

So, thank you for sharing with us the lawyer you loved, and please accept my assurance that your lawyer made a wise career choice, is dearly missed, and will never be forgotten.