

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

Memorial Session

for

JUDGE ROBERT VAN PELT

September 26, 1988
2:03 p.m.

Speakers:

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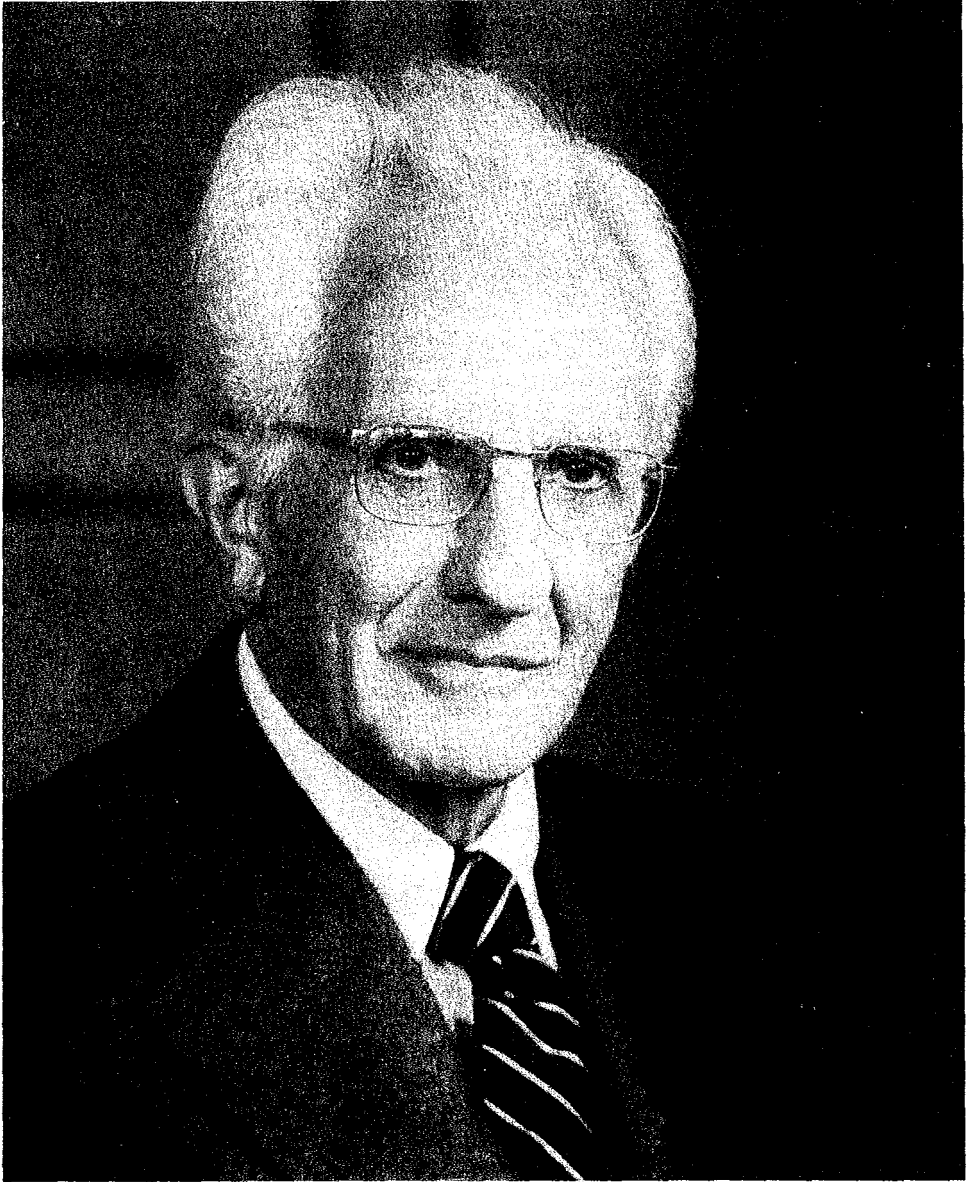
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Proceedings

JUDGE STROM: On behalf of the judges of the federal courts I want to welcome the family and friends of Robert Van Pelt to this ceremonial session convened in his memory. And at this time the Court would recognize the Reverend Otis Young, Minister of the First Plymouth Congregational Church, to give the invocation. Reverend Young.

DR. YOUNG: Let us pray. God of all people, our creator and supreme judge, we give you thanks for implanting in our world and within us human beings a sense of justice which makes democracy possible. We are thankful also for our government of laws and for those among us who are called to interpret the law and judge between us. Continue to keep alive among us the standard of your truth and continue to raise up judges who will judge us righteously.

We are especially thankful today for the witness and the justice which the man in whose memory we gather has given among us. We are thankful for his life, for his work among us on behalf of justice. Help us all to learn from his example. Amen.

JUDGE STROM: Of all those present on the bench, my opportunity of getting to know Judge Van Pelt as a fellow jurist has been, of course, the briefest. Nothing I say can enhance or detract from the man he was. He was the consummate gentleman. He always was concerned about his friends and associates.

Many times during the short two and a half years after my appointment and prior to his death he would inquire as to how things were going. And he always asked me to feel free to contact him if I had any problems of any kind.

On several occasions he even wrote and complimented me on a particular opinion I had written. To a new judge such words of praise were not only welcome but bolstered my confidence that I may be on the right course to becoming a good judge.

At his installation in August of 1957 Judge Van Pelt reminded us of his personal philosophy which was encompassed in the words taken from the Book of Micah. What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? I think that Judge Van Pelt's life has been an ample demonstration of those words.

I had the privilege of presenting a memorial resolution written by Judge Urbom at this year's Eighth Circuit Judicial Conference

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and I would like to close my remarks by quoting a short passage from that resolution.

“What is a judge? He is man. Yes, after all, and no matter what, and beyond all procedures and investitures, a judge is nothing more nor less than a man—one man having his one-man path, his one-man circle and orbit among other men, each of whom is one man.

“We remember, then, Robert Van Pelt—a rara avis, a rare bird, a white blackbird, a snowwhite crow; one man with a one-man path; one man whose style attracted us, whose philosophy inspired us, whose equanimity reassured us.

“He was what the rest of us would like to be.”

At this time I would like to recognize Mr. Richard Knudsen, who's been the chairman and who has put together today's program, to serve as master of ceremonies the rest of this proceeding.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Judge Strom. Judge Strom and members of the judiciary, Judge Van Pelt's family and friends, fellow lawyers, it's an honor to be present here to honor a man such as Judge Van Pelt.

I appreciate the efforts of everyone to be here today, members of the family, and I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to some of the people that are here. First of all, Judge Van Pelt's family, Midge Irvin and Eames Irvin and their daughter, Judge Van Pelt's granddaughter, Susan Evnen, here in the front row. And over here in the jury box the magistrates, at the far end Richard Peck, and next to him Senator Roman Hruska, Magistrate Richard Kopf, Magistrate David Piester, our two bankruptcy judges, Judge John Minahan, first and Judge Timothy Mahoney next to him.

I will be introducing other members of the program here shortly.

I also want to comment just briefly that this proceeding will be taken down by our court reporter Gary Latimer, and at the conclusion the transcript will be prepared and a copy presented to the family. In addition it will be published in the federal case reporter services of West Publishing Company.

Also present here is our U.S. Marshal, Tom O'Hara, and people from the clerk's office, Bill Olson, deputy clerk Barbara Campbell and Judge Strom's secretary, Jean Roeder.

One of the persons present here served with Judge Van Pelt as the federal judge in Omaha for almost the entire, I guess the entire career of 30 years of Judge Van Pelt. Got to know him, obviously, very well. A very dear friend, and I'd like to call upon him first, Judge Robinson, to say a few words.

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JUDGE ROBINSON: Mr. Knudsen, members of the Court, Judge Van Pelt's family and friends, as has been indicated, today we are gathered in a memorial tribute to our friend and former colleague, Judge Robert Van Pelt, whose passing, of course, saddened us, saddens us all still.

His countless accomplishments have been chronicled and recorded. But the bare paper record does not, and indeed cannot, properly recreate the vibrant, spirituous life which Judge Van Pelt embodied. Only we, who have loved him, lived with him, laughed with him or cried with him can resurrect the deep-seated affection, tenderness and awe that he inspired in all of us. Having touched Judge Van Pelt we inescapably were inspired and touched by him. Our friendships were molded, our mettle tempered by the privilege of having known him.

Judge Van Pelt and I were appointed to the bench closely in succession over 30 years ago. Then and after that for some time, being the only two district judges in the district, we served together many times on three judge district courts comprised of two district judges and one circuit court of appeals judge. Now, though we disagreed sometimes on the proper result in a case I can say without hesitation that disagreement was always without disharmony.

Judge Van Pelt was a true friend. I think sometimes as he approached his work and his decisions, I think he always relied upon the prayer, "grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things that I can and wisdom to know the difference." He certainly followed that rule.

Judge Van Pelt was a true friend. He was integrity, honor and duty all firmly present, but without any ostentation. To paraphrase a known quote, "we have lost more than a friend, we have lost an inspiration." He would rather light candles than curse the darkness. And his glow warmed the world. We, Judge Van Pelt's family and all of his friends, shall always walk in his radiant warmth. Thank you.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thanks, Judge. In our federal system the office that Judge Van Pelt held as the district judge in the state of Nebraska in Lincoln was part of the Eighth Circuit and the Court of Appeals sitting in both St. Paul and St. Louis. We have two of the United States Judges from the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals with us today. And the first one I'd like to call on is one who has served with Judge Van Pelt many years in the federal judiciary and now in senior status, and this is Judge Donald Ross. Judge Ross.

JUDGE ROSS: Mr. Chairman, family and friends of Robert Van Pelt, Robert Van Pelt was a judge's judge. He was recognized by

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all of the judges of the Eighth Circuit, including the district judges and the Court of Appeals judges as our expert on evidence and judicial ethics. And he was a friend with whom we could consult on legal as well as personal matters.

In his capacity as a member of the Judicial Ethics Committee of the United States Judicial Conference he was always available to counsel his fellow judges on the very complex and often technical Code of Judicial Ethics. Because of his own very strict personal and judicial ethics no judge was ever better suited to serve on this committee.

I knew Bob for more than 35 years as a lawyer, as a fellow judge, as a friend, and more importantly as a fellow Frontier County alumnus.

My father had a grocery store in Curtis and Bob's mother earlier had run a restaurant in Stockville, the county seat. And the restaurant catered to lawyers and judges who would come to Stockville to attend court. It was there that he was first exposed to the law. And it had a great influence on him. He later served as Frontier County deputy treasurer.

Now, Curtis is a town with a population of over a thousand, and Stockville is a town of less than 25. The old frame courthouse was built before Bob was born. And has been propped up two or three times to keep it from falling over.

Frontier County voters will not vote to build a new courthouse in Stockville but neither will they permit the county seat to be moved to Curtis. The only argument Bob and I ever had was a recurring one. He felt that Stockville should remain the county seat and I felt it should be moved to Curtis.

We had a great time kidding each other and arguing with each other about that important subject.

Bob was also active in the Republican Party. He was a close friend and a confidant of Senator Hugh Butler and was a delegate to the Republican National Conventions of 1940, 1944 and 1948. He was also a close friend of Senators Curtis and Hruska. Now as judges we could not be active in either political party. But as friends we often talked about politics and candidates and enjoyed the conversation completely.

Judge Van Pelt was a real positive influence on me and I think most of the people in this room. And he will be sorely missed by every one of us. Thank you.

MR. KNUDSEN: Judge Ross. Our other judge from the United States Court of Appeals is our most recent judge and who assumed that position upon the retirement of Judge Ross. This is

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the former district judge in Omaha, Judge Arlen Beam. And before that a practicing lawyer in Lincoln. Like to call upon Judge Arlen Beam of the United States Court of Appeals. Judge Beam.

JUDGE BEAM: Mr. Chairman, Midge, Eames, Susan, my associates of the bench and bar and ladies and gentlemen, I have so much respect for the memory of Judge Robert Van Pelt that this is a bit of a difficult time emotionally.

Judge Ross and I spent this past week in St. Louis for hearings before the Court of Appeals. And the judges of the Eighth Circuit, both active and senior, who became aware that I would have the honor of appearing here today asked that I convey along with my own remarks their great respect and admiration for Judge Van Pelt and their desire to participate in this memorialization.

Some time back I had occasion to read a tribute to Mr. Justice Stanley Reed presented by Chief Justice Warren Burger. Mr. Burger said of Mr. Reed, there was nothing in him of the prima donna nor did he seek to offer good copy to the press. Others might try to make the front pages, others might hector their colleagues, but Reed, serious, modest, retiring, and always courtly, went about his job kindly and warm. He could not help but be popular with his colleagues for his unfailing courtesy, even temper and dry sense of humor. He was a moderate in all things and exemplified the virtues of a true gentleman, the epitome of civility.

This, in my view, almost perfectly describes my perception of Judge Robert Van Pelt. Although much done by Judge Van Pelt was good copy for the press and did make the front page, I'm certain that you will hear today of his many contributions to the law, to legal education, the rules of evidence and judicial ethics to name a very few. However, something that we may tend to overlook because he was such an outstanding jurist is that he was, as the commentators described Sir Thomas More, a man for all seasons. His knowledge of and contributions to the entire fabric of this state and nation beyond his activities as a judge and lawyer inspired us all.

Betty and I had dinner with the judge at the judicial conference in Colorado Springs a little over a year ago. And he talked about his bird watching activities with Mrs. Van Pelt. And laughed about what must have been one of his few examples of bad judgment. He drove down a dirt road in rural Lancaster County too soon after a rain and became hopelessly stuck in the mud. The Van Pelts, as I recall the story, had to be extricated from the mud through the good graces of a local farmer and his tractor. And I noted that this farmer was one of a class of one of his favorite group of people. He remarked that he had been such a long time supporter of all

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weather farm to market roads that this exercise was truly out of character for him.

Midge, Eames, Susan, we who have been privileged to have known him are richer for his varied interests, his shining integrity, the strength of his wisdom and the depth of his knowledge. And because of the Judge's Frontier County roots that Judge Ross has mentioned, I believe that a short verse written for another great jurist might be appropriate today. "He will go back to the quiet lanes where the city's hum shall cease, to walk again the gentle ways, the paths of rest and peace." Thank you.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Judge Beam. Our senior judge of the United States Court of Appeals, Donald Lay, was intending to be here and not able to be here at the last minute. But Judge Strom, do you have a statement from him?

JUDGE STROM: Judge Lay has asked me to present on his behalf the following remarks.

"It is with the deepest regret that I cannot be present today to honor our departed friend, the Honorable Robert Van Pelt. Unfortunately a conflict developed at the last moment that has prevented my attendance. It is for that reason I have asked Chief Judge Strom to read this statement.

"I am fully aware that the spoken word is more meaningful than those written, but I am confident Judge Van Pelt's family and the multitude of friends know that I write this message with the deepest sincerity.

"First, let me say that Bob Van Pelt has been my friend for the last 35 years. Although I knew him briefly as a lawyer, my first substantial contact with Judge Van Pelt was in the courtroom after he was appointed a federal judge.

"I had the privilege of trying several cases in front of him. Later as a judicial colleague I developed a close personal relationship with him. He had a deep and pervasive influence upon my life.

"In March of 1970 when Judge Van Pelt took senior status I wrote a short tribute to him in the Nebraska Law Review. Rather than to attempt a restatement I would like to simply repeat those words.

"One lesson in life is that excellence of one man oftentimes inspires others to reach out for a similar achievement. Lawyers when called to trial before Judge Van Pelt immediately became aware that a greater effort, a better brief, a more thorough preparation and an exacting performance were now required. Not only did one sense this as an unwritten command but additionally

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there was always some indefinable extra drive for excellence that was instilled within the lawyer appearing before him.

"I perceived him to be a judge who strived to perform his office with the greatest of dignity, dedication and excellence and as a lawyer appearing before him I found within me a reciprocal need to attempt to do the same.

"While it is difficult to explain, in effect there was developed within my early legal genes the need to do the very best that I could possibly do because I knew Judge Van Pelt expected as much of me.

"This judicial charisma affected others as well. In the late 1960's I was attending a church breakfast. At the time of the benediction the minister called upon each of us to name a person who had most influenced our life in the past year. As we went around the group one of the church members stated a familiar name, Judge Robert Van Pelt.

"After the meeting I asked this person, who was not a lawyer, how he knew my friend, Judge Van Pelt. He stated that he really did not know him personally, but he had recently served on a jury in federal court on a case over which Judge Van Pelt had presided.

"He stated that he was so impressed by Judge Van Pelt's fairness and candor in the trial and the profound respect and courtesy Judge Van Pelt used in dealing with the lawyers, the jurors and the witnesses. He stated that he came away with a greater sense of responsibility as a citizen and a desire to become a better person in his overall relationship with others.

"I now leave it to others to record the details about this unusual man whom we all considered a privilege to have known."

Donald P. Lay, Chief Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Judge. I'll now move from the bench behind me over to the jury box. Although I confess I find a certain uneasiness when I look at the makeup of the jury today. I do want to call upon first, we're very honored and pleased to have the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court with us, Honorable William Hastings.

We were a little concerned about Judge Hastings up until a few minutes ago because we had a call saying that he had automobile trouble at the rest stop at Greenwood and there was a problem. One of the benefits of being the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court enabled him to come in here very quickly with the Highway Patrol. So we thank Judge Hastings for being here and we thank the Highway Patrol. Judge Hastings.

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JUDGE HASTINGS: May it please the Court, I don't want anyone to think that I do that all the time. That's the first time I've ever had occasion to do that. But I didn't know what to do. I was out there 40 minutes from Lincoln and no car and I'd changed billfolds, I didn't have any credit card, either state credit card or personal credit card, and I had to keep charging to my home number and my wife had to be called each time to verify. These probably shouldn't be part of my remarks.

Much of what I am about to say I had the privilege of saying directly to Judge Van Pelt this last winter. That was when he was honored as the recipient of the Rotary Club's Nebraskan of the Year award.

Included within the Ten Commandments for the new judge as compiled many years ago by then Chief Judge of the United States District Court, Edward J. Devitt, were the following:

"Be kind. Be patient. Be dignified. Remember there are no unimportant cases. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't forget your common sense. Pray for divine guidance."

Judge Robert Van Pelt was the personification of those commandments throughout his 31 years of service on the bench of the United States District Court.

I first became acquainted with Judge Van Pelt during my senior year in law school some 40 years ago. He taught a course in examination of real estate titles and, believe it or not, he made abstract reading an exciting experience.

For the next 17 years I had the pleasure of trying cases with, against and before Robert Van Pelt. Since 1965 I have been proud to call him a fellow judge. He was always the consummate gentleman.

For some time before his death I would see him a couple times a week when he would meet for lunch every Thursday with his granddaughter and every Friday with two of his oldest friends. He never failed to come over to our table to inquire of me as to the health and well being of the Supreme Court. He attended both of my installation ceremonies, when I first went on the court, and just a year ago when I was appointed chief justice.

I know this last time required great physical effort on his part because of his health. I was flattered and honored to have him present.

But then he was like that. A common man who enjoyed people, and an uncommonly excellent judge who never ceased the quest for justice for all.

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In my remarks at the opening of the May session of the Nebraska Supreme Court, which was the day of his funeral, I called him a jurist without peer. His legal knowledge and ability, his concern for others, his awareness of social problems, his judicial temperament, his dry wit, his courtesy and friendliness and, I suppose as much as anything, his kindness earned him that title.

Robert Van Pelt left a legacy which we will enjoy and from which we will derive benefits for years to come. I will miss his cheery greeting and the farewell that was his trademark. "Always good to see you." Thank you.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Judge Hastings. Although Judge Van Pelt was a judge for 30 years in Lincoln, he maintained a close relationship to the lawyers and the practicing lawyers in informal settings as well as in the courtroom. And as a part of that he particularly enjoyed bar association meetings, Lincoln bar and state bar meetings. And we're pleased to have with us today the president of the Nebraska State Bar Association to say a few words, Harold Rock. Harold.

MR. ROCK: Thank you, Mr Chairman. May it please the Court, the members of the Nebraska State Bar Association have lost a cherished brother and we miss Judge Van Pelt very much. We miss his patience with us and with our juries. We miss his scholarly updates on the rules of evidence. We miss his warmth.

Judge Van Pelt carried with him true moral authority. Moral authority is the authority of the true professional. Moral authority is derived from knowledge of one's duties and obligations and a knowledge of one's profession. It requires instinctive moral values. It must be exercised unselfishly, not in a self-serving way, not on behalf of a particular client or a particular cause but in the service of society. It must be exercised for greater civil order. Judge Van Pelt's career was directed toward the achievement and exercise of professional moral authority.

Judge Van Pelt was past the age of 90 at the time of his death. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes on his own 90th birthday wrote: "I have always thought that not place nor power nor popularity makes the success that one desires but the trembling hope that one has come near to an ideal."

If Judge Van Pelt did not achieve his own ideal it was only because he continued to establish a higher standard for himself throughout his life.

The members of the Nebraska state bar will sincerely miss their colleague, Judge Robert Van Pelt.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Harold. During the course of 30 years of being a federal judge Judge Van Pelt would have had and

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did have many law clerks. Those law clerks, for those of you not in the legal profession, are young men and women just out of law school, new lawyers, top honors, top students, selected by the federal judge to work with him for a year or two and assist him in the research and the preparation and the trial of lawsuits. Judge Van Pelt had many of these law clerks. As a matter of fact, I'm sure that many of them are here today. Could we just see the hands of those who are former law clerks of Judge Van Pelt? Many of those people have gone on to successful law practices. Some of them may by this time be judges themselves.

But here to speak to us today on behalf of all of the law clerks of Judge Van Pelt is his first law clerk and now a practicing attorney, former bankruptcy judge in Nebraska, Jerry Strasheim. Jerry.

MR. STRASHEIM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May it please the Court and family of Judge Van Pelt and friends of Judge Van Pelt.

I think, although the count is not exact, Judge Van Pelt had 24 law clerks in the 30 years that he served as United States District Judge. And he started those 30 years when he was 60 years old and finished when he was 90.

What we have heard today from members of the court who are in a far better position to say than I was that Judge Van Pelt was truly unique as a judge. And I think that we law clerks can certainly underscore that. It would be very difficult for us to think of a judge who would be a trial judge who would ever be better than Judge Van Pelt. There are many, many fine judges, but we certainly learned that while we were there and had it just reproved time and time again over the years.

He was truly a unique person. We were privileged to be his law clerks, were privileged to sit and learn from Judge Van Pelt. And we can say that almost to a man, the 24. I know of no exceptions. We have always felt that way throughout all these years. And, frankly, some of us are getting quite well along in years at this time.

I think the reason he was unique as a judge was that he was unique as a man. Really I think he would have been outstanding at whatever he did. He simply had an amazing capacity. We have heard speaker after speaker today so far, all of these judges, refer to Judge Van Pelt as a friend. A true friend. A friend who they would turn to. That is what Judge Van Pelt was to every one of the 24 law clerks, a friend.

He was interested and concerned in every one of his law clerks throughout all of the years from the very first, which I started, through the 30 years until the end.

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Each year he would have all of his law clerks, he would request all of his law clerks to meet, in the beginning it was a luncheon once a year, in the end it was a dinner, and we would all get together and talk with Judge Van Pelt. And there would just be an enormous feeling of satisfaction from the judge, who was happy to see us, but we came out far the better for that meeting.

Just to give you some examples, some of the things that Judge Van Pelt did for the law clerks personally, my wife and I were married by Judge Van Pelt. And at one, I think it was the last dinner, somebody happened to mention that they were married by Judge Van Pelt and hands started going up around the room. There were several couples of law clerks that happened to have been married by Judge Van Pelt.

People always talked to Judge Van Pelt about career changes as they were going along in their legal careers, even personal problems.

Judge Van Pelt had requested some years ago, and it turned out that way, that the law clerks would be his honorary pall bearers at his funeral. Something which we were all very, very proud to have been able to do.

So I would say that Judge Van Pelt truly was unique. The law clerks were clearly privileged, very privileged to have been associated with the person.

As for me, I don't think I'll ever meet a better judge. And I think that's probably because I really don't think I'll ever meet a better man. I think Judge Van Pelt for me personally is probably the most memorable person I will ever meet.

The last sentence, or one of the last sentences of what Judge Strom read from the Eighth Circuit memorial was that Judge Van Pelt was, taking up the quote, what the rest of us would like to be.

I think the rest of us will fall short of the mark because I don't think the rest of us can be what Judge Van Pelt was. Thank you.

MR. KNUDSEN: Thank you, Jerry. Last I'd like to call upon a long time family friend and a past president of the Nebraska State Bar Association and at the present time a member of the American Bar Association standing committee on the federal judiciary. A man who's known Judge Van Pelt, worked with him for many years, Jim Hewitt from Lincoln. Jim.

MR. HEWITT: Thank you, Mr. Knudsen. May it please the court, Midge, Eames, Susie, I'm really very happy to have the chance to be here this afternoon and say a few words about Judge Van Pelt.

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I consider this a solemn occasion, but not really a sad one. Anybody who lived as long and did as much as Judge Van Pelt certainly would not feel that sadness was appropriate under these circumstances and I don't think so either.

I'd like to tell you not about his career as a judge, because there are other lawyers and judges much more capable than I today who have talked about that. But I would like to tell about some of the things that brought home to me throughout all the years that I knew Judge Van Pelt what a wonderful man he really was.

Like Judge Hastings, I first met Judge Van Pelt when I was a senior in law school. He taught us conveyancing. I can't remember much about the course in which conveyancing was taught, I think it was in practice lab as a matter of fact. But I certainly remember the expertise that Judge Van Pelt displayed. And the thing I remember most about it was that he came down to me after class one day. I had no idea who he was other than that he was a distinguished lawyer in Lincoln. And he said, are you Roscoe Hewitt's son? And I said, yes, I am. And he said to me that he had known my father, who was a practicing lawyer in Hastings, and that he had been a good friend of his. And he spent some time talking to me about it, something that made an impression on me that's lasted all my life.

When I graduated from law school I went in the Air Force and I came back to Lincoln to practice law with Jack Stuart. I walked in the front door of the office, this is absolutely a true story, I walked in the front door of the office and the secretary said, Mr. Hewitt, we're so happy to have you with us. Here is a message from Judge Van Pelt. He has appointed you to represent a criminal in federal district court. I didn't even know where federal district court was.

The interesting thing was the guy whom I was appointed to represent was a young man who had burglarized a refrigerated car full of beer in Hastings.

Now, I guarantee you even though I was a young lawyer I probably knew more about how to obtain beer illegally in Hastings than anybody in the State of Nebraska. But how Judge Van Pelt knew that I knew that I will never figure out.

But in any event, after that I had many occasions to appear before him, and it was always wonderful. Because I think the one thing that I would like to say about his ability as a judge was that it didn't make any difference what kind of case it was or who the people were, the lawyers or litigants, he had the most unique ability to divorce himself from any preconceptions that he had. And I think Judge Van Pelt was a man of strong conviction and there were a number of things that he held very strongly and firmly.

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But he could set those aside and view each case as though it was a brand new matter that he had not heard before. A wonderful faculty on the part of anyone and certainly on his part as a judge.

I can remember an occasion when Sam retired from the state district bench and the Lincoln bar had a function at which we lampooned him a little bit. I was the master of ceremonies, and I suppose a few of the slings and arrows may have been outrageous, as a matter of fact, but Judge Van Pelt was sitting right in front of me. And I could see him wince from time to time as we said a few things about Sam that perhaps might have been inappropriate. And he never said a thing to me about it, he never, he never said a word that any of it was not proper or inappropriate or that it bothered him in the least. And I am confident that a couple of the things may have wounded him a bit.

One other thing I would like to tell you about. When I was president of the state bar I became embroiled in a public controversy with a business leader here in Omaha who had taken occasion in the press to refer to a decision of the Supreme Court which ran counter to his, the best interests of the corporation which he headed. It became sort of a cause celebre for a few days. Judge Van Pelt sought me out, came to see me, as a matter of fact, and said, I just want you to know that I think you did the right thing. He said, the court must be upheld. He said, you did what you should have done, and he said, I want you to know that I appreciate it.

I can't tell you how much that meant to me because I was catching a lot of flak from the World-Herald and other sources as well.

I belonged to a discussion club with Judge Van Pelt. Otis belongs. It's called the Round Table. It's a wonderful club. We meet monthly. I always made an effort to sit next to him. Because of all of the little pearls that you could pick up from him in just day to day conversation.

Judge Ross referred to the fact that Judge Van Pelt was active in Republican Party politics, and he was. And he retained, I thought, a strong interest in Republican Party politics even though he was a sitting judge. He always knew who had done what to whom and why. And I suppose that's the most important thing.

I can just tell you personal, personal reminiscences, personal recollection, of a man whom I thought was a good and great and really fine man.

I get a little choked up when I talk about him because he meant a great deal to me. He was a fine church man.

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We both shared an interest in the small liberal arts colleges here in Nebraska. Judge Van Pelt had gone to Doane. I spent some time at Hastings College. We talked a lot about small colleges. We talked a lot about a variety of things. And he was always inspirational and interesting and great fun to be with, even when he was 90 years old. He had the interests and the mind of someone decades younger than that. Time never passed Judge Van Pelt by.

Nobody quotes Longfellow any more. It's passe to talk about things that. But I guess, really, if I could think of anything to sum up Judge Van Pelt I would say that he truly left his footprints on the sands of time. Thank you very much.

MR. KNUDSEN: Jim, thank you. I'm sure that each person in this room could stand up here and relate a personal experience that he or she had with Judge Van Pelt. It may have been concerning his wisdom, it may be concerning his dignity, or his humor. But the theme that would run through all of these stories would be the same, and that is the great influence that he had on the life or lives of each person that he was associated with.

We've seen this by just the comments made here today. For 30 years Judge Van Pelt really personified the United States law in the State of Nebraska. And this country and this state and each of us are the better for it.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few thank yous, particularly to those people that helped me: Jerry Strasheim and Gary Dolan, Jerry Laughlin and also some of the ladies, Sally Knudsen, Marianne Strasheim, Ruth Kauffman. They are going to be hostesses in a reception that follows this ceremony in the jury lounge, which is to the left in the hallway outside the courtroom and then to your right. And there will be some coffee, cider and cookies and all of you in attendance are invited to visit with, meet Judge Van Pelt's family and some of the other personalities here today.

Judge Strom, I'll return the program to you.

JUDGE STROM: Thank you very much, Dick. As the speakers were reminiscing about some of the experiences they had with Judge Van Pelt I recall that during the time that my appointment was before the Justice Department and before the President and then finally before Congress that one of the comments that frequently was made, well, he's 60 years old. As if that should have been a detriment. But Judge Van Pelt made a very special point of coming up to me and said, you tell them that I was 60 years old and I wasn't too old to be a judge and neither are you. And I've always remembered that.

Dick, on behalf of the courts I want to thank you and the others who worked on the committee in formulating this program. And I

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expressly want to extend our appreciation to Mrs. Knud Mrs. Strasheim and Mrs. Kauffman for their efforts in putting together the reception which follows. We appreciate the work that you've done and the efforts that you've made to make this a successful day.

I want to express appreciation to the members of Judge Van Pelt's family who are here today and to the other friends of Judge Van Pelt. We appreciate your attendance.

At this time, then, I would recognize again Reverend Otis Young to give us the benediction.

DR. YOUNG: Loving God, we are thankful for the memories this day has brought to us again. Let these memories be a guide to us as we go on to live in this world that we may carry out the good works of Judge Robert Van Pelt. Amen.

JUDGE STROM: At this time I would ask the United States Marshal to adjourn court.

(2:53 p.m., adjourned.)

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