

A GREAT AMERICAN

*Kari Sutherland**

As I sit here writing this tribute, the man in question smiles at me from across my desk. He is, of course, impeccably dressed in his white suit, dark tie, and cuff links. He also is sporting round eye-glasses and that infectious grin. Thankfully, the spectacles do nothing to obscure his kind and mischievous eyes. I've seen photographs of him from earlier years and I am quite sure that he has always looked the same and always will. His dear visage that I've described is captured in my clerk picture that hangs on the wall in my office, likewise memorializing the images of the 1997 version of myself and my two co-clerks, Kristofer Hess and Ed Neveril.

Judge E. Grady Jolly. Even his name is fun to say. Looking back on my year with him, I wish that I had known beforehand what an impact that he would have on my life. I wish that I had better known to savor that precious time. And as I re-read what I've written so far, I almost hear a voice eerily similar to his telling me that this piece is starting to sound like a eulogy and to cut it out!

While I am not quite sure if the judge did it on purpose, he managed to hire 3 very different clerks my year. I was the lucky local Mississippi hire; Kristof and Ed were the outsiders. Somehow we melded together – some days better than others – to cohesively form his chambers. While we had different belief systems that provided good fodder for lively discussions of daily life and legal issues, one thing continuously brought us back together: our esteem and affection for our boss. That the judge thought enough of each of us to hire us meant that our value was

* Butler Snow LLP, Oxford, Mississippi; law clerk for Judge E. Grady Jolly, 1997-98.

unquestionable. But I think we all secretly believed that we were his favorite. I know I did.

Judge Jolly shared his life with us. We all met and came to know his wife, Bettye, and their dog, Annabelle. More importantly, they came to know us. They had us over for dinners and parties. We house- and dog-sat for them. I particularly loved this job perk as they allowed parties at their house in their absence. Can you believe that? We got to be a part of their world – and they ours. When my then-roommate and I hosted an annual Christmas party for our friends and neighbors (most folks typically were in their 20s and 30s at the time), Judge Jolly and Bettye strolled through the festivities without batting an eye – as if there was nothing unusual about a sitting Fifth Circuit judge attending a soiree put on by baby lawyers still cutting their teeth.

While Judge Jolly certainly honed our legal thinking and our writing skills, he taught – and continues to teach – so much more than that. He taught us how to defend our position in a gentlemanly (or ladylike) fashion. And how to respond to questions during oral argument. More importantly, how *not* to respond. And that “winging it” is never wise. He also exposed us to different things. Like wonderful New Orleans food from Galatoire’s. Or like opera, which you were going to listen to on the drive to New Orleans because you were mistaken if you thought you didn’t like it. And, sure enough, while “like” might still be a somewhat strong adjective, I do somewhat appreciate it now.

In short, Judge Jolly made a difference in our lives that year. He made a difference in my life, and continues to do so. Not everyone you meet in life will have such an impact. Treasure the ones that do. Judge Jolly, I hold you in high affection and admiration. As you are wont to say, you’re a great American.