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Tribute to Justice Charles H. Reynolds

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Kentucky Supreme Court

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In gaining a legal education, nothing is more treasured than a mentor relationship. A mentor teaches the new practitioner the strategies in preparing a case, the idiosyncrasies of local judges, and the pitfalls of trial practice. A mentor molds the naive mind into an armed intellect, prepared for whatever fact scenario may come. Justice Reynolds exemplified every aspect of this definition.

As evidenced by the countless number of attorneys which he trained, Justice Reynolds cherished the role of mentor, instructing each of us on the importance of ethics, courtesy, and Kentucky art. We learned from his polite demeanor in the courtroom and his tolerance outside of it. He won many an argument by simply “nicing them to death.” He instructed us to guard against rushed judgments and to thoroughly research each issue of law. He motivated his pupils through jest or vague comments leaving the person to speculate as to its meaning. But to say Justice Reynolds was a hard taskmaster would be a mischaracterization, for he treated his employees with respect and was sensitive to their needs and desires. It was important to him that his employees put family and church before work.

Both in practice and while on the bench, Justice Reynolds treated his fellow attorneys with respect and honor. Often referred to as “a lawyer’s judge,” Justice Reynolds never dominated proceedings, but allowed attorneys to present the issues in the manner which they perceived to be most beneficial. His rulings were always made fairly and efficiently, never allowing cases to backlog. Throughout his career, many sought his advice. Rarely giving his opinion of the idea, he would, through questioning, assist the inquirer in finding what he or she ultimately believed to be the solution. This temperament helped build credibility, for

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* Justice Reynolds served on the Kentucky Supreme Court from 1990 to 1996 and on the Kentucky Court of Appeals from 1976 to 1990.

** Law clerk of the Kentucky Supreme Court to Justice Charles Reynolds prior to his death.
during his tenure on the Kentucky Supreme Court, many gave great
credence to his vote and looked for his guidance when differences arose.
A jocular remark or a historical quote was a tool he effectively used to
break the tension of a heated discussion.

Justice Reynolds surrounded himself with humility, never wanting to
bring attention to himself or to receive credit for work he did. Many
times, when talking with his clerk, he would remark about an opinion that
he himself had written as "that opinion of yours," fully knowing that the
clerk had had little if anything to do with its drafting. His son stated
during the funeral’s homily that if he knew that everyone there had taken
off work just to come to pay tribute to him, he would be mad at them all.
How true that is. Justice Reynolds was a leader through his humbleness.

It is said that a mentor leaves a little bit of his soul in those he
teaches. If this is true, then Justice Reynolds’ spirit will live on for many
years to come through those he molded, and the citizens of Kentucky will
be better served as a result.
Justice Charles H. Reynolds.