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Stanley Forman Reed

Potter Stewart

Supreme Court of the United States

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STANLEY FORMAN REED

Stanley Forman Reed came to Washington in the waning days of the Herbert Hoover Administration, expecting to stay six months. He was there the rest of his working life. First as General Counsel of the Federal Farm Board, then as General Counsel of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and finally as Solicitor General of the United States, he served with conscientious diligence and skill as a lawyer in the Executive Branch of our government.

In 1938 Stanley Reed became a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. His 19 years as a Member of the Court spanned one of the most controversial and fast-moving periods of the Court’s and the Country’s history. But whether in agreement or dissent in cases of great importance during those years, Justice Reed always retained the genuine affection and respect of all who knew him. I never heard anyone speak a malicious word about him, nor him a malicious word about anyone.

One tiny event involving Justice Reed will always remain in my memory, because I think it so perfectly epitomizes his goodness, his modesty and his wisdom. Soon after I came to Washington, and only a few years after his retirement, he and another Justice and I were conversing at lunch, and something moved the other Justice to ask what he thought was a rhetorical question: “Golly, have you ever thought what you would do if you had your life to live over again?” Justice Reed’s response was immediate. “I wouldn’t want to live my life over again,” he said. “It couldn’t possibly be so good the second time.” These simple words from a man in his twilight years were truly inspirational to a young newcomer to the Court, and I shall never forget them.

In April of 1980 I journeyed to Maysville for Stanley Reed’s funeral. There I came to understand his pride in the community he loved, the community to which he had returned for so many summers. There too I came to understand the love and pride that Maysville felt for Stanley Reed, as, with every flag in town at half-mast, his earthly remains were laid to rest beside those of his father and mother.
So now at last Justice Reed has come home to his beloved Kentucky. There he finally rests at the end of a long, honorable and rewarding life in the service of our nation—a life that he was so modest as to think could not have been the same if he had lived it over again.

Stanley Forman Reed was a good and wise American. His wife Winifred and their two sons, Stanley and John, will remember him as a devoted husband and father. A few will remember him as a colleague, and many, as a friend. Kentucky will remember him as he always remembered Kentucky—with pride, with gratitude and with love.

Potter Stewart