

EULOGY OF

* 1ST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

CHARLES LEWIS MAYER

* CADDO PARISH, LOUISIANA

MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT:

Charles Lewis Mayer was born November 8, 1908. He was the sixth and youngest child of August and Mattie Mayer.

On October 26, 1938, he married Lettie Bird. Charlie built a garage apartment for them to live in on Shreve Island. The house is on River Road, across the bayou from the Duck Pond. Over the years, as they needed additional space, Charlie and Lettie would add another room. I don't know how many bedrooms and bathrooms there are in that little garage apartment today, but I'd be willing to bet any one of you that it is the only garage apartment in Shreveport with an indoor swimming pool. Charlie died in that house on Christmas Eve, in his sleep, at the age of 90 years and 46 days. In between those two book ends, November 8, 1908 and December 24, 1998, Charlie Mayer led a wonderful life.

On July 7, 1942, Charles Lewis Mayer, II was born. Lewis and his wife, Judy provided Charlie and Lettie, with two granddaughters, Julia and Judith Anne. Judith Anne was born on Charlie's birthday.

After Charlie's death, I spent some time in his office, just kind of looking around. I was reminded of some things about Charlie that I already knew. The two most important things in Charlie's life were his family and his work. Directly across the office from his desk, where he could see them everyday, were pictures of his mother, his wife, his child and his grandchildren. On the wall, by his desk was a framed quotation that read, "One of the greatest mysteries in the world is the success that lies in conscientious work."

Another thing I did, was to walk around the office, and to ask the people who knew him best to describe for me, in one or two words, the traits which best described Charlie. Here is what they

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said: "Always a gentleman, always courteous, wonderful mentor, gentlemen's gentleman, straight shooter, always nice, charming, fair, friendly, interesting and interested in people, funny, witty, a joy to be around." His granddaughter Judy, when I asked her the same question, told me "He loved people."

Charlie was all of those things and more: husband, father, grandfather, lawyer, friend and companion.

Charlie was, without a doubt, one of the very best trial lawyers I have ever known.

Charlie was certainly smart and well educated. He attended Centenary College, was graduated from Columbia University, and the Tulane Law School. He read the law every day. But that is not what made Charlie such a good lawyer. Charlie understood the role of a lawyer. Charlie knew that the role of a lawyer was to be of service, not only of service to his clients, but also to his profession and his community.

It was that attitude, his character, and his work ethic that put him over the top. Charlie had the ability to relate to almost anyone--from truck drivers and surgeons, who were accused of negligence--to the judges and juries who tried them. Charlie's character traits, his competence, and his preparation enabled him to convince most juries, most of the time, of the truth of his client's case. Most of the time, when Charlie tried a case, it was not really a fair fight.

In 1932, Charlie joined Joe Jackson and Alex F. Smith in the practice of law. In 1939, at the age of 31, his peers elected him president of this Association. In 1955, Charlie was invited to become a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers. During his career, Charlie handled cases from the lowest magistrate's court to the United States Supreme Court.

Charlie served his profession not only as President of the local bar, but by service on the Committee on Professional Responsibility, the Committee on the Unauthorized Practice of Law, the Law Reform Committee, as a Commissioner to investigate complaints of violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct against his fellow practitioners, and on the Louisiana State Law Institute.

Charlie served his community on the Caddo Parish School Board, of which he was President, and as Chairman of the Community Chest, the precursor to today's United Fund.

Charlie loved baseball and kids. As a young man, Charlie played in the local softball league for the Bar Association team. It is hard to believe now, but when the World Series was played, when it was supposed to be, in the daytime and in the early fall, our office sort of went on half-time. Charlie would get a T.V. set, put it in the conference room, and during the game, unless there were an emergency, we watched the series.

When Little League came along, Charlie's love of baseball and kids merged. At one time, he sponsored three little league teams. He invested countless hours, and no telling how much money, in that pursuit. I do not know if that was community service, or just plain fun. But Charlie touched a lot of kids. Two of his players, Hank Gowan and Heni Dehan, became lawyers. Heni told me Charlie's home and yard looked like a minor league training camp.

Charlie enjoyed life to the fullest. He used to tell me stories about the depression. Until I met Charlie, I had never heard a good story about the depression. But Charlie had great stories to tell. I learned, from him, about bathtub gin and moonshine. If one wanted gin, one drank the moonshine, clear, as it was purchased. But, if one wanted bourbon, he put it in a wooden cask, put the cask in the trunk of his car and drove it around for a week or so. When it had acquired the right color from the cask, it was bourbon and one had the principal ingredient of a "bourbon sandwich."

Charlie also told me stories about going to football games. He said that he, Lettie, Mr. Alex F. Smith, Sr. and Mrs. Smith used to leave Shreveport on Saturday, drive to New Orleans, watch the Tulane game, drive back to Baton Rouge, catch the L.S.U. game at night and drive back to Shreveport, all in the same day, all on gravel roads and making four ferry crossings in the process. He made it sound as if they did that every weekend.

When Charlie would make his rounds of the office and pass someone in the hallway, he usually greeted them with the question: "How's your corporosity?" None of us knew what the word

“corporosity” meant; but we thought he was inquiring about our health, so the reply would be “Fine, how’re you doing?” To which he always replied, “Fair, to middling.” None of us could find the word in the dictionary. We thought he made it up. After his death, I finally figured out how to spell the word, and I found it in a great, big unabridged Websters dictionary that must have been published before WWI. Literally, the word means “bodily bulk.”

This past summer I was wearing a seersucker suit and someone accused me of wearing an “Andy Griffith” suit. When Andy Griffith was asked why he wore seersucker suits in his “Matlock” series, he replied that it was because, in his experience, that’s the way southern lawyers dressed and he was trying to look like one. Well, Charlie was a southern lawyer, and, in warm weather, he wore seersucker suits. What I had on was not an “Andy Griffith” suit, it was, if anything, a “Charlie Mayer” suit. That’s the way I’ll always remember him, seersucker suit, gold rim glasses, white socks, brown shoes, standing in front of a jury, trying to persuade it of the truth, the way he saw it.

I met Charlie Mayer in 1963. It was my privilege to get to know him well over the following 35 years. Charlie was not a father figure to me. He was more like a wonderful uncle, who was a role model, mentor and friend. In the movie, “A Wonderful Life,” the wingless angel, Clarence, after reviewing Jimmy Stewart’s life with him, says, and I’m paraphrasing, “You led a wonderful life, you touched a lot of people, it would be a shame to waste it.” Charlie led a wonderful life, he touched a lot of people, me, among others, and he didn’t waste a minute of it.

Respectfully submitted,

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By


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