

In Memoriam **John Silber Stephens**

I was going to start this talk by saying "Top of the Morning," because anyone who knew John Stephens knew to expect that upon meeting him any morning. They also knew that if asked how he was doing, he would always respond, "Top Shape."

But since this is afternoon and not morning, I guess I will open it like this:

JOHN SILVER STEPHENS was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on September 29, 1931, and died in Shreveport on October 20, 2014. In between those times he lived a long and colorful life, devoted to his family and to the practice of law.

John attended the Wentworth Military Academy and graduated from Coushatta High School. He went on to earn a degree in Animal Husbandry from LSU, and obtained his LLB (later converted to a J.D) in 1958. He was a Kappa Alpha and stayed an active alumnus throughout his life.

After law school, John began practice in Many, Louisiana, but longed to return to his hometown of Coushatta, where his parents owned the general store. An older lawyer of his acquaintance suggested that it would be good for him to work for an insurance company as an adjuster for a little while before starting his practice, and learn how insurance companies operated; so he worked for State Farm for a year - a fact that he did not advertise later in life.

John hung out his shingle in Coushatta and became an assistant district attorney. He was also the lawyer for the local Ford dealership. So, he had a steady income and a new car, and he and his wife Ginger started raising a family. They had two daughters, Virginia Ellen and Melanie. He loved his family. But he also loved a good time. And many of those good times were of the well lubricated variety.

John was elected to the bench of the 39th Judicial District in 1979. However, he was not able to serve in that capacity for very long before those well lubricated good times caught up with him. Thus began his "dark night of the soul."

I met John in a round-about way. I knew his daughter, Ginger, when she served as the secretary of our church. Later I met John Lynn, Ginger's husband, in an entirely different setting, and it was months before I knew that the two were married. John and

Ginger and my wife Nancye and I became fast friends.

Somewhere in there I met John Stephens, but it was months before I knew that he was Ginger's father. The more I was around him the more I liked him, and the more I knew of his story the more I admired him.

John loved the law. If there was anything he loved more than the law, it was his two daughters; later in life, he found Judy Rausch, and they were together for more than twenty years.

The dark night of John's soul involved his forfeiting his judgeship, and eventually losing his license to practice. But, I'm sure that he would tell you if he were here today that it was also one of the best things that ever happened to him. It caused him to examine his life and to take inventory. He found a God of his understanding and set out to repair the wrongs he had done. And I guess it was partly that experience that was the cause of John's great love of the practice of law. He considered law to be a noble profession and he considered it a lawyer's duty to help those who were less fortunate.

He was devoted to three things - his clients, his family, and helping others who found themselves at the bottom of that same pit John had climbed out of. He regained his license to practice, and began again here in Shreveport.

John and Judy joined my church, St. Luke's United Methodist, where he was a faithful member for the rest of his life and the long-time teacher of the Fellowship Sunday School Class.

He used to say about his practice in Coushatta that the Bethards got all the paying clients and he got the rest. His daughters told me about receiving all sorts of things as barter for legal services, from vegetables, fish, fresh game, and chickens to motorcycles and even a coat. It rarely mattered to him whether a client could pay him, his only concern was whether he could help that client. Ginger worked for him for several years and she will tell you that the only times she ever got mad at him was over taking so many non-paying clients. He used to joke that he was that famous Italian lawyer, "Pro Bono." He enjoyed an interesting case and would take it regardless of the possibility of payment of a fee.

John and I had similar practices and we often consulted each other about handling different aspects of our cases. But he took cases that I never would have. If asked him why he would usually just tell me that the client needed him.

A couple of other things about John that probably most people don't know - he was a great dancer (until he broke his hip) and he loved the opera. He and Judy loved to take weekend trips to catch an opera performance or to go dancing - to Memphis, New Orleans, Houston, or Dallas and sometimes much farther.

He was one of the last of a dying breed - the true country lawyer. He believed in his clients and would stick with them through thick and thin. One story that needs to be told is of a client that John represented for years. This client had substance abuse problems and the usual legal problems associated with them. John tried to help him with his drug problem as well as with legal matters, including criminal prosecution.

But, despite all John's efforts, the client eventually went to prison. During this time my office was near John's and we visited often. He told me one day that he was going to see a client in prison. I was curious and asked him if he was working on an appeal, and he said no. My curiosity got the best of me and I kept asking until he told me that he just went to visit this client because he had been abandoned by his family and that no one else visited him. But John visited him at least once a month for as long as he was in prison, just because no one else would.

But the story doesn't end there. One day John got a call from the west coast. This former client had gotten out of prison and had inherited a considerable sum of money. He moved out west where the laws were more tolerant of his habits. He told John that he had an airplane ticket for him and that he wanted him to fly out to the coast and that he had a present for him. When John got there. This former client presented him with a Maserati - when John was well into his seventies. The former client made John promise to keep it and drive it for at least a year and to have fun with it. And John did just that. I am sure lots of people were surprised to pull up to that sleek Maserati at a stop light and look over and see that shock of white hair.

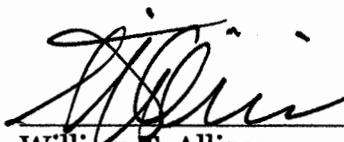
His office was probably John's favorite place. He was never too tired or too sick to go to work. In the last few months of his life, his family tried to talk him out of going to

the office, but that was to no avail. When he could hardly breath, just a few days before the end, he insisted on tending to business - he had some "loose ends" that needed tending to for a client.

In all the time I knew John, I never heard him say a bad word about anyone. Never! Lawyers know that this is a difficult profession and one that is inherently adversarial. I know it is sometimes difficult not to say something negative about a brother at the bar - but not John. He was the consummate gentleman, country lawyer, and a friend to all. Properly educated and extremely well read, he respected everyone, and treated everyone with dignity and kindness. Regardless of one's station in life; pauper or prince, all were treated as equals. And, he had a great sense of humor. I admit that sometimes his wit escaped me, and on some of those occasions, I might get it and start laughing hours later, or even the next day.

I learned a lot about practicing law, loving my neighbor, tolerance of others, forgiveness, and being a true gentleman from John, and I will join many in missing him.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Allison", written over a horizontal line.

William T. Allison
Attorney at Law