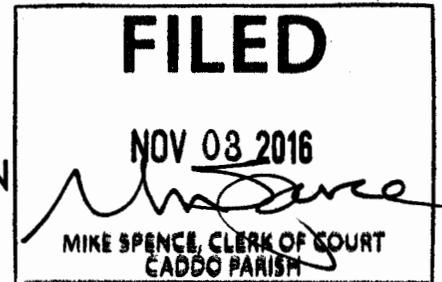


MEMORIAL FOR
WILLIAM NORRIS III
PRESENTED AT THE MEMORIAL AND RECOGNITION CEREMONY
HELD IN THE FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

NOVEMBER 3, 2016
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
SHREVEPORT BAR ASSOCIATION
by Judge Jim Norris



My father loved nicknames. He had one for his wife, kids, grandkids, coworkers, just about everybody. My law firm staff actually gave him one. The “living legend.” They said everywhere they went with him, not only did people know him, but you could tell they loved him. They said it was like being around a celebrity. A retired Supreme Court justice referred to him as a “judicial giant.”

As I prepared for today, I thought about what defined his legal career. What made him a legend? The first thing that came to mind was his school board service. As a young lawyer and member of the Ouachita Parish School Board, he guided the school system through integration. He actually wrote the plan that was approved by the federal government. His leadership during this difficult time cost him both professionally and personally. He lost friendships over his role in the process and our family received 24-hour police protection for several weeks after he was threatened. But, he refused to back down from what he believed was right. Forty years later, he returned to the same board and helped lead the school system out from under federal control. He did so while donating his entire school board salary to the schools he served.

I thought about his service to the City of West Monroe, first as a City Attorney and later as a City Court Judge. I remember his tenure on the Fourth Judicial Court, and how he loved being in the courtroom. I would sometimes watch him in court and each time was impressed with his knowledge, his handling of cases, and how respectful he was to the attorneys and the litigants who came before him. I know the impact he has had on the current members of the 4th JDC. He played a significant role in the decisions of several of them to seek that office and spoke at their inductions.

I recall traveling around the entire Second Circuit territory when he was running for the Court of Appeal. If my memory serves me correctly, the Second Circuit Court used to be housed in this building. My father's office was across the street in the Slattery Building. In his 21 years of service there, he set the bar for legal scholarship, fairness, collegiality and an attention to fine detail that left an indelible mark on that court. As I was preparing these remarks, I heard words of praise from many people, including interim District Attorney Steve Tew, who finished law school in 1985 and asked my dad to help him find a job. My dad recommended him to Judge Jasper Jones, and the two of them became leaders and mentors for Steve. "Judge Norris took time each day to give me advice about the practice of law," Steve told me. "I admired him, and I hope he saw his impact on me as a lawyer and as a person."

After almost 40 years of service to the public, the West Monroe-West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce and the Monroe Lion's Club recognized him for his community service. The *Ouachita Citizen* said this about my father:

Norris hailed from a different generation of Americans.

Like many men of his age group, Norris entered public service because he felt he could make a difference in people's lives. He didn't do it to enrich himself personally, and he didn't see his position as a jurist as a means to issue rulings from the bench to benefit one litigant over another.

Just think this incredible career was almost grounded by, of all things, a torts exam. I think it was one of the last exams he took his first semester at Tulane. After he took the test, he convinced himself that he had flunked it. He went back to his apartment and told my mother, "We need to pack. I'm not going to make it." Although my mother tried to get him to wait until he received his grades, my father was steadfast in his belief that he had flunked out. She called my grandmother to come pick them up and began to pack their belongings. Meanwhile, my father went back to the law school to retrieve some of his personal items. He happened to run into, of all people, his torts professor, who noticed something was not quite right with my father. The professor asked what was wrong and my father said, "I can't cut it, I'm going home." Fortunately, the professor told my father to come with him to his office, where they looked up his grade. It was one of the highest scores in the class. The professor encouraged my father to stay in school and check his other test scores before making a decision to leave. My father waited and when he received his grades, they were some of the best in his class. He graduated from Tulane with honors and was the president of his class. He later obtained a Master of Laws from the University of Virginia Law School, on May 18, 1986. I remember that day because my father attended a law school ceremony but it wasn't his. It was mine.

One of the reasons for my father's success was his tremendous work ethic. Without question, he learned that trait from his father. My father was the oldest of four children and everybody worked in the Norris family. Even the Mayor had to work, not as much or as hard, but he had to work, too. When my father became old enough to drive, he asked if he could get a car. His father replied, "Sure, if you buy it and pay for the gas." He was old-school. He handwrote every pleading he ever drafted and then dictated it to his secretary. No forms, no templates, no shortcuts. He agonized over small and large cases alike, always trying to find the right answer. No one outworked him.

He also loved helping people. In the eighth grade, I wrote an essay about why I wanted to become a judge. It was because of the stories so many people had shared with me over the years about how my father had helped them. I read Teddy Allen's article in *The News Star* and *Shreveport Times* about the impression my father made upon him when he was a 15-year-old student visiting my father's courtroom one day. As a lawyer, he was interested in your case, not just the fee he could charge. He would try to help you if he had known you five years or five minutes. Now I'll admit we had some disagreements over his fee arrangements. He taught me to look at the client's ability to pay, not solely the value of the work we performed. It took me a while, but I finally got to the point where I could smile when there were cakes, pies or homemade bread in the kitchen because I knew we had just gotten paid.

How did a young man who grew up making syrup enter the political arena? Maybe it started when he met James A. Noe while working as a cameraman and disc jockey. Mr. Noe introduced him

to Earl K. Long and my father drove “Uncle Earl” around the state when he ran for governor. Maybe it began when he was the campaign manager when Lemmie Hightower was running for student body president at Northeast. Lemmie was in a tight race until my father came up with the slogan “Gimmie Lemmie.” The catchy phrase caught fire and Lemmie dominated the race.

Whatever the reason, I know my father tried to make a difference in people’s lives in every position that he held. My father didn’t really like the nickname “living legend,” and I don’t think he considered himself a judicial giant. He reminded me many times that true greatness lies in one’s unselfish service to others. I think that was the greatness my father strived to achieve. He treated others like he wanted to be treated and humbly served others. I don’t know how many lives he impacted throughout his legal career, but he certainly made a difference in mine.