

SHREVEPORT BAR ASSOCIATION  
SAMUEL V. PRUNTY, JR. MEMORIAL  
OCTOBER 30, 2012

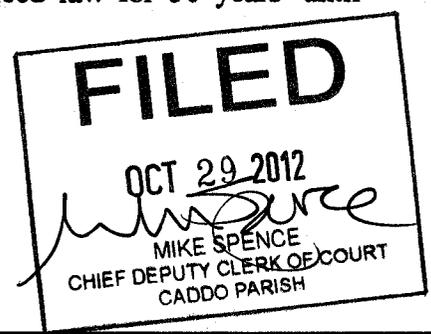
Judges, new lawyers, old lawyers, and guests,

He never argued a landmark case. He never became wealthy or powerful. Yet, Samuel Vincent Prunty, Jr. , was the epitome of what it means to be a lawyer. Well before Legal Aid, the Indigent Defender Office or Pro Bono projects, Sam would provide legal work for anyone who needed representation, regardless of their ability to pay. He was a true General Practitioner—from simple wills to complex civil litigation and from speeding tickets to murder cases, Sam did it all! He tried hundreds of cases in his career and argued many more at the appellate level.

Today, my son, Ben, joins our ranks as one of the newly admitted attorneys. For Ben, and others who are too young to have known him, I'd like to tell you about Sam. For those who knew Sam, I'd like you to reminisce.

Sam was born in 1918, in Shreveport. After serving in the army in WW II, Sam returned and married Louise. She would be his wife for 65 years until her death in 2010. Sam worked for Kansas City Southern and then got a job as a machinist. But he'd always had an interest in law, because he was passionate about helping others—especially the poor and working people. In the old days you didn't have to attend law school to be awarded your law license. So, Sam enrolled in night school at Centenary College, and after four years of classes and being mentored by an older attorney, he passed the Bar exam. Sam maintained a solo practice throughout his career.

Sam was very proud to be an attorney. He loved the law—it was not just an occupation to him. He had a common-sense approach to solving problems. He was professional, without being condescending. When Sam saw or heard about something he thought was wrong, he'd tell you his opinion. And if you disagreed with him, he liked it even better! Sam loved to argue! He had one of those voices that sounded cranky, but you could always detect a smile or a chuckle as he said it! In all the time I'd known him, which is since 1977, I never heard him say anything bad about another attorney or judge. Sam actively practiced law for 50 years--until



2006, when, at the age of 88, he and Louise moved to South Carolina to live with their son, John, and his family.

Sam had a lot of stories-- one time, long ago, when he was a young lawyer, he returned to court to resume a trial after a lunch recess. The judge in the case apparently had one cocktail too many and told the parties he wouldn't be seated at the bench--he was going to lie down in the adjacent room, and leave the door open so he could hear all the testimony. I don't know if Sam made an appeal to the Judge's sober judgment, but he won the case!

Another time, Sam told about a client he'd represented numerous times over the years on drug charges. Eventually, the client wound up having to serve time in jail. This client was an excellent artist who had a talent for drawing birds--not jailbirds--but real birds!!--all kinds of birds!!--and he'd send those illustrations to Sam.

Later, after the man had been released from jail and was consulting with Sam on a new charge, Sam thanked him for the pictures. Sam told him, "It's a great thing that you can recognize all those birds--It's just too bad you can't recognize a Narc."

I never heard anyone call Sam "MR. Prunty"-----from judges to fellow attorneys-- from clients to secretaries--he was "Sam" to everyone. He had a great love of people and they reciprocated.

Sam enjoyed having a beer after work at the Thomas House, where he would talk LSU sports with his friends and the owner, who was the mother of the assistant basketball coach under Dale Brown.

It was also at The Thomas House where Sam met ZZ Top--the little band from Texas. ZZ Top came to Shreveport one year to rehearse for a world tour and discovered The Thomas House. You might think an old attorney and three rock 'n' roll musicians would have nothing in common, but Sam touched a "chord" with them. Billy and Dusty--the two guys with the long beards--and their clean-shaven drummer, who, ironically, is named **Frank Beard**.

While they were in town, ZZ Top also discovered Cobb's BBQ, in Bossier City. Sam would get calls from one of the band members saying, "Sam, we're going to Cobb's for lunch. You wanna join us?" And he did! How cool is that?!

Sam and Louise had two sons, John and Roy. Tragically, Roy was murdered in 1993. His killer has never been found. I can't imagine going through something like that—but Sam didn't let that tragedy transform him—he never became bitter. He had incredible faith and inner strength and continued to see the **best** in people and be trusting of them.

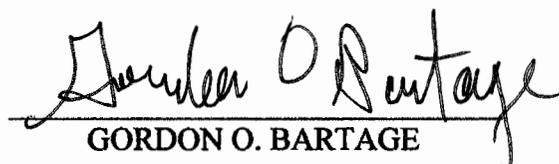
Sam loved LSU!!! His sons both attended LSU—and that led to a passion for the Tigers. Sam and Louise would join Hunter Huff, Mike Spence and the courthouse crowd on their “Tiger Express” bus pilgrimages to all the home football games. Sam continued to closely follow LSU even after he and Louise moved to South Carolina.

Sam loved working word puzzles—he did the Word Jumble as well as the New York Times crossword puzzle every day— in ink! Those word puzzles kept his mind sharp and may be the reason Sam never had a “cross word” for any one.

Sam was active in Holy Trinity Catholic Church, where he served for years as lector. He also enjoyed his memberships with the American Legion and the Knights of Columbus.

Sam Prunty, Jr. was a compassionate person and a passionate advocate. As attorneys, we often ask what we can do to improve our image with the public-- Sam has given us a blueprint—treat everyone with respect—never carry a grudge—be honest with your clients, your opponents and the court.

So, to Ben, and your contemporaries—congratulations on your admission to the Bar—and may your legal careers each be as long, and as honorable, as that of Samuel Vincent Prunty, Jr.—You have big shoes to fill.

  
GORDON O. BARTAGE