

October 28, 1991

FILED

remarks by United States District Judge Tom Stagg

OCT 28 1991

GEORGE J. DESPOT

DEPUTY CLERK

THE COMMITTEE REQUESTS ME TO EULOGIZE MY FRIEND, GEORGE DESPOT, WHO DIED, UNEXPECTEDLY ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 14. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO DO JUSTICE TO THIS ASSIGNMENT -- BUT I WILL DO MY BEST WITH THE CONSTRAINTS OF TIME AND SENTIMENT.

THERE ARE PROBABLY FEW HERE TODAY WHO REMEMBER GEORGE AS A PRACTICING LAWYER. AS I LOOK DOWN THE LIST OF THOSE WE HONOR TODAY, I BELIEVE HE PRACTICED LAW FOR LESS TIME THAN ANY OF THEM, BUT HE PRACTICED LIFE FAR IN EXCESS OF THOSE WHO WERE HIS CONTEMPORARIES AT THE BAR.

AFTER HIS SERVICE IN EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II, GEORGE WAS GRADUATED FROM NOTRE DAME, AND THEN HE WENT TO GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY TO LAW SCHOOL. ON GOOD ADVICE, HE TRANSFERRED TO LSU LAW SCHOOL, WHERE HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE CLASS OF 1950 (STUART LUNN, DONALD ZADECK, LEROY SCOTT, IRVING GREENBERG, WINSTON LINAM, GORMAN TAYLOR, MONTY WYCHE, NEIL DIXON, HERSCHEL DOWNS AND SIDNEY COOK, WILTON WILLIAMS AND BEN EGAN). HE SAID THAT WHEN HE CAME TO LSU IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE HE EVER WENT TO SCHOOL WITH GIRLS!

HIS LAW PRACTICE BEGAN IN THE RICOU-BREWSTER BUILDING, SHARING SPACE WITH LEROY SCOTT. THEY LATER TEAMED UP WITH

PHILLIP MECOM SO THAT THEY COULD QUALIFY TO WRITE TITLE INSURANCE AND TO CLOSE LOANS. IN THE BEGINNING HE HAD A GREAT SOURCE OF CLIENTS BECAUSE HIS FATHER AND UNCLE OWNED THE COLUMBIA RESTAURANT AND VARIOUS OTHER SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS ENTERPRISES. I CAN RECALL SOME OF GEORGE'S HILARIOUS TALES OF THE VARIETY OF TROUBLES SOME OF THE COOKS AND WAITERS BROUGHT TO HIS LAW OFFICE AND HOW HE SOLVED THEM, WITHOUT A FEE, MOSTLY. AND HE HAD SOME CLIENTS FROM THE OIL AND GAS COMMUNITY AND FROM GOLF COURSE AND GIN RUMMY GAMES, AS WELL!

ON HALLOWEEN IN 1953, GEORGE MARRIED PEARLA TINSLEY -- AND, IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS, FIRST SUSAN AND THEN REBECCA PUT IN THEIR APPEARANCE TO BRIGHTEN HIS LIFE.

AND DURING THIS TIME, GEORGE MOVED MORE AND MORE AWAY FROM LAW AND HIS WORK BEGAN TO CENTER ON THE DESPOT FAMILY ENTERPRISES. EVENTUALLY HE BECAME INVOLVED ALMOST ENTIRELY IN THE OIL AND GAS PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT BUSINESS. HE AND HIS BROTHERS, CAMILLE AND GREG, WORKED TOGETHER AS A TEAM IN MAKING AND MANAGING VARIOUS INVESTMENTS.

I SAID ALMOST ENTIRELY, BECAUSE IN ABOUT 1960 THE POLITICAL BUG BIT HIM AND FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS HE PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE POLITICAL LEADERS IN OUR STATE AND ON THE NATIONAL SCENE. MY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH GEORGE BEGAN WHEN WE WERE PART OF A GROUP SEEKING TO FURTHER THE PROSPECTS OF

HE POSSESSED A DROLL WIT AND SHARP MIND. AND HE LOVED TO DEBATE -- ON ANY SUBJECT, BUT MOSTLY ABOUT POLITICS. HIS SENSE OF HUMOR AND GREGARIOUS NATURE WILL BE SORELY MISSED.

GEORGE WAS AN EXCELLENT JUDGE OF CHARACTER. HE COULD SEE GOOD IN A PERSON WHERE OTHERS COULD NOT -- OR WOULD NOT -- SEE.

HE HAD A HIGH DEGREE OF TOLERANCE FOR OPINIONS HE DID NOT SHARE.

HE KNEW WELL HOW TO LISTEN -- EVEN TO DISRUPTING AND IMPOLITE VOICES -- AND TO RESPOND LOGICALLY -- WITHOUT RANCOR.

THE QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP, WITH WHICH HE WAS WELL ENDOWED, ARE KNOWN TO POLITICAL PEOPLE IN EVERY CORNER OF THIS STATE. AND I BELIEVE IT TO BE TRUE THAT THOSE WHO DIFFERED WITH HIM DID NOT LACK RESPECT FOR HIM OR HIS VIEWS.

THE ABILITY TO ATTRACT PEOPLE AND TO EARN THEIR FRIENDSHIP WAS HIS IN ABUNDANCE. AND THIS WAS ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM WITHOUT REGARD TO CLASS OR COLOR OR SEX OR AGE. HE HAD FRIENDS IN EVERY WALK OF LIFE, FROM THE HIGHEST TO THE LOWEST. CHILDREN WERE ON INSTANT TURN-ON FOR GEORGE. ALL AGES, SHAPES AND SIZES. MY GRANDDAUGHTER, SARAH, WHOSE LOVE HE CAPTURED WHEN SHE WAS QUITE SMALL, IS JUST ONE SUCH EXAMPLE. WHEN SHE WAS A BABY, AND NOW, TO HER HIS NAME WAS ONE WORD: "FUNNY-GEORGE."

EVEN THOUGH HIS BUSINESS AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITIES GREW LARGER AND LARGER, GEORGE COULD ALWAYS FIND TIME FOR CALLS FROM ALL MANNER OF PEOPLE. WHETHER THE CALL CAME FROM THE WHITE HOUSE OR FROM "NINETY-BUCKS," SOMEHOW HE MANAGED TO BE AVAILABLE WHEN HE WAS NEEDED.

PEARLA, SUSAN AND REBECCA PUT UP WITH LESS OF A HUSBAND AND FATHER FOR SEVERAL YEARS -- BUT THE SUM OF THE TIME THEY LOST IS MORE THAN EQUALLED BY THE RESULTS OF HIS EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE LARGER WORLD HE SOUGHT TO INFLUENCE.

HARDLY A DAY PASSES WITHOUT SOME THOUGHT THAT OCCURS OR REFERENCE TO GEORGE IS MADE. EVEN THE FAR-OFF REFERENCES LATELY OF THE DAMAGE TO THE ANCIENT CITY OF DUBROVNIK BRING TO MIND THE TRIP TO VISIT HIS "ROOTS" WE PLANNED "SOME DAY." AND SO IT IS THAT HIS MEMORY WILL STAY ALIVE.

MEMORIALS ARE NOT MADE SOLELY FROM MARBLE OR STONE. THEY CAN BE AS EPHEMERAL AS A PASSING THOUGHT THAT ENRICHES THE MOMENT, BRINGING A SMILE TO YOUR HEART OR TO YOUR LIPS AND JOY TO YOUR SOUL.

IN THAT FAMOUS QUOTATION USED BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY IN "FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS," JOHN DONNE PENNED MY SENTIMENTS IN THESE WORDS:

...ANY MAN'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME, BECAUSE I AM INVOLVED
IN MANKIND.

BECAUSE SO MUCH LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP EXISTED, THE PASSING OF A MAN SUCH AS GEORGE DESPOT CAUSES ALL OF US TO BE ESPECIALLY DIMINISHED. FOR MYSELF, I OWN THAT IT IS PAINFUL TO HAVE TO VIEW THE FUTURE WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SHARE IT WITH MY FRIEND GEORGE.

YOUR HONOR, I MOVE THAT THIS MEMORIAL FOR GEORGE J. DESPOT BE MADE A PART OF THE PERMANENT RECORD OF THE FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT.

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DONNE—

Devotions. XII

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.