

FILED

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IN MEMORIAM

N. GRAVES THOMAS

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To the Honorable Judges of the First Judicial District Court, Members of the Bar, Members of the Family of N. Graves Thomas, Ladies and Gentlemen:

At a time when the public perception of lawyers is perhaps less than ideal, Graves Thomas has enabled us to stand a little taller. At a time when the pace of our lives demands a less personal relationship between lawyer and client, Graves demonstrated the art of caring. He both enhanced the stature of our profession and made a real and lasting difference in the lives of the people he represented.

Perhaps the best that can be said of anyone is that he made a difference. And Graves did make a difference. Our part of the world is a little different - and our profession is a little different - because of the role Graves played in both of them. If you believe that we who knew him are charged with the task of filling in the void that he left, we have no small challenge before us.

To borrow a line from a well-known song, "Graves did it his way." He was unique. His uniqueness was derived from a combination of qualities, a few of which I would like to mention briefly.

First, Graves brought a sense of humor to our profession. A telephone call from Graves was different from any other. There was just enough authenticity in the voice to cause my secretary to pause for a split second and ponder whether Henry Kissinger or Warren Burger might actually be calling! No matter whose life he held in his hands, resting on his ability as a lawyer, Graves had the capacity never to take himself too seriously.

Next, Graves was a competitor. In a profession that is built around competition, he was among the best. This trait was early in evidence as he served as captain of his Baton Rouge High football team, which won the state championship, and was elected president of the Student Council as well. We in

North Louisiana became aware of Graves during his first position as a lawyer with the Louisiana Attorney General's office when he was sent up here to prosecute the Jack Favor case. While I remain critical of the Attorney General for sending a first year lawyer out on a mission of this magnitude, it is perhaps appropriate that Graves should begin his legal career trying one of the most difficult cases that the state had to offer. It set the stage for what was to come.

Graves knew the meaning of commitment. As a prosecutor, his tenacity was unparalleled. Both as a member of the Attorney General's staff and as an Assistant United States Attorney, he took on major investigations and lived them twenty-four hours a day. I can speak from experience in saying that in defending a client that Graves is investigating - and hoping that maybe this is one that might slip through the cracks - it was disconcerting to go into Graves' office and find the evidence against your client tacked up on the walls of his office! Not much slipped by him.

Then when Graves moved to the other side of the courtroom as a defense lawyer, his clients changed, but his commitment did not. Just as he had been committed as a prosecutor to putting all the guilty where they belonged, as a defense attorney he was equally committed to preserving the rights of those accused of crime. He spared no effort. I can recall more than one time, before Graves had completed his own library, leaving him working on a brief in our firm's law library. There was no reason to leave a key with him at night with which to lock up because he would still be there working the next morning! He didn't use a clock when it came to representing his clients.

Graves never allowed his own personal interests to intrude upon what was the best interest of his clients. He never considered himself at all. He is the only lawyer I know who had such a concern for his client that he argued incompetence of counsel - what he claimed to be his own incompetence (which certainly wasn't true) - as a basis for appeal. When a person

in trouble went to Graves for help, he retained not only a lawyer with superior technical competence but also a lawyer who would defend his cause with passionate zeal.


The circle of those who enjoyed and benefitted from Graves' concern extends far beyond his list of clients. Although he had no children, he was a neighborhood father. He constantly kidded with the children in his neighborhood and went out of his way to find little odd jobs for them to do as an excuse to give them much-appreciated spending money. On a larger scale, you may recall a very elaborate and expensive gingerbread house that was donated one Christmas to Sister Margaret for her use in brightening the Christmas of children who otherwise would have little to enjoy in that holiday season. It was not until after Graves' death, I am told, that Sister Margaret learned that Graves had purchased this gift at substantial expense and donated it anonymously for the enjoyment of these children. Similarly, there have been countless other gifts of Graves' money, his time and his concern for the benefit of those in need. Giving was part of his nature; giving without recognition was his personality.

Graves' concern for the needy stood alongside his support of our community's artistic interests. Many are unaware of the active role he played on the board of the Shreveport Regional Arts Council and in other groups devoted to the recognition and preservation of artistic development. He was also a leader in the Historic Preservation of Shreveport with his old Victorian-style house, the product of more than a decade of renovation, standing as one of the landmarks of this organization.

Graves lived 40 years. We are tempted to say that history should have allotted him at least that many years again. But perhaps he sensed something that we haven't - because he seems to have packed a very complete life into that 40 year span.

Graves did make a difference. And he will continue to
make a difference.

Respectfully submitted,


L. Edwin Greer
for the Memorial Committee