

MEMORIALIZING ROBERT M. SPIRE, ATTORNEY AT LAW

EUGENE CRUMPT†

It is with privilege, humility, and respect that I will attempt to convey the warmth and love that Robert Spire had for the law and the people he served.

Bob Spire was born September 20, 1925. He was a graduate of the Omaha school system and attended the Julliard School of Music of New York City and was a graduate of the Harvard University and the Harvard University Law School. He was the husband and companion of Elaine Phillips and they together were the proud parents of Ruth, Louise and Jessie, three gracious and devoted children.

Bob and Elaine were the in-laws to Leif and Jim and were the doting grandparents to Amy, Laura, Jessie, and Ella.

Bob left us at a point in his career and life when he was reducing his work load and preparing to devote more and more of his time to his family and friends. Bob had completed an interim directorship of the Nebraska State Bar Association which followed a lengthy career of public service working with Nebraska Senator Robert Kerrey in Washington, D.C. and serving the people of Nebraska as their Attorney General, graciously and with dignity. Bob felt that laws were enacted to encourage and permit us to do the right thing rather than tell us what we can't do. He said the laws belong to the people and we should cherish and use them with vigor.

Bob's commitment to public service included teaching at the University of Nebraska College of Medicine, being a Regent and President of the University of Nebraska, Omaha Board of Regents, serving on the Board of Trustees of Ball State University, and serving on the Boards of various civic, philanthropic, charitable, and profit and non-profit organizations. Bob was also President of our Nebraska State Bar Association, holding many positions and offices of leadership and counsel.

Bob's list of accomplishments and awards in the area of civil rights, legal rights for the poor and disadvantaged, and civil liberties are many and too numerous to mention. His heart and his office wall were filled with symbols and mementoes of those he touched and those touched by him. To make a long story short, the Nebraska State Bar

† Director and General Counsel, Central States Compact. Adapted from a speech given to the Third Judicial District on May 27, 1994.

Association's highest award for pro bono legal services is awarded annually in Bob's name to a lawyer who continues in Bob's path to provide legal assistance to the poor. Bob was proud of his association with the Legal Aid Society of Omaha and its efforts on behalf of the poor.

I can recall meeting the silver haired gentlemen early in my legal career as a young lawyer. We were both members of the House of Delegates. Bob's strong personal tutelage, guidance, and encouragement to me on the duty, obligation and responsibility of being an effective lawyer still move me today. He was dedicated to the belief that the law, lawyers and judges were to be respected as important parts of a system that guarantees due process of law and equal protection to all that seek justice and resolution of disputes. But I was not unique in this relationship, although I felt so; Bob's friendship with lawyers and non-lawyers alike made him a man of the people.

Bob was an eclectic reader of all kinds of books, novels, biographies, fiction and non-fiction, various local and national newspapers, periodicals, and journals. One of his most favorite magazines was the *New Yorker*. He loved to read the essays and the cartoons with equally satisfying results. One cartoon comes to mind that he enjoyed:

Two priests upon returning a record to a record store remark to the sales person, "this Thelonius Monk album . . . it's jazz!"

There was rarely a public speaking opportunity that he refused or turned down. He enjoyed talking to the Urban League, the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, and even the school children of Nebraska. He enjoyed delivering his presentation, and after his speech, he enjoyed his conversation with the audience. He would speak on important issues of the day or question whether we as lawyers were doing a good job as members of the Bar for our client or the profession. He was quoted as saying his personal motto was to "get up early and work hard, to listen to the people and accept criticism, to correct my mistakes and try to do what is right." He would often remark to me at how much he had learned from his speaking experience after being invited to the engagement and listening.

Bob Spire is one of the few men I know, if not the only one, who had the ability to effectively and intelligently make reference with compassion to Martin Luther King Jr., the Platte River, and Beethoven in the same sentence and have us all feel prouder of ourselves for having heard and briefly shared his thoughts. He loved and revered all three dearly. He challenged himself and others to maintain a deep reverence for individual freedom, develop an appreciation for the beauty of nature, and cultivate a desire for the arts, music and literature.

Bob's favorite philosopher, Yogi Berra, continued to inspire Bob with thoughts such as: "When you come to the fork in the road, take it"; and "I have a good memory but sometimes it's short."

In his activities, Bob relished the opportunity to indeed approach the fork in the road and make the right choice. He chose to lead by example, inspire by his work ethic, and achieve by the art of inclusion. Witness his involvement and participation with others in the University of Nebraska-Omaha-University of Nebraska-Lincoln merger issue, the jailing of parents in the Christian school dilemma, the Omaha school system desegregation, the leadership of the Nebraska Department of Justice, and the stewardship of our own State Bar Association, to name just some of his opportunities.

Bob took his responsibilities and obligations with a great degree of seriousness, reserving to himself a sense of wit, humor and self-deprecating.

Bob's love of music was more than just striking alternately the white keys and the black keys on his piano. He understood the balance between melody and harmony, the mellowness of the flats and the sharps, the tension between fortissimo and pianissimo and the beauty in both ragtime and chamber music. Bob knew what it took to make sweet music. For him, it took inspiration, dedication, perspiration, and a good sense of timing. Bob used this same formula for music to succeed in his law practice. Bob was a card carrying member of the legal profession. He was also a certified public accountant. Of all of his professional memberships, he was most proud to be a card carrying member of the Local Omaha Musicians Union where he and Shorty Vest, a longtime friend and fellow musician, would play duets at the drop of a hat. He also relished his professional and personal relationship with Al Ellick, his partner in the law firm of Ellick, Spire and Jones.

Bob was never a soloist, with his family in Omaha, with Elaine and their children at home, and with lawyers of the State. Instead, Bob played sweet collaborative music. Sometimes, we weren't all singing from the same hymnal, but Bob nevertheless challenged us all to *sing*. Sing loudly, sing with spirit, sing with enthusiasm, sing with passion. He challenged us all to sing!

Our collective memories of Bob and the other lawyers we remember and honor today should all be good and they should be long. It should be good for all they did and tried to do in service to their Bar and profession. It should be good for all they accomplished with the help of their loved ones and those that shared their dreams. But, more important, our memories should be long for having had Bob and his colleagues cross our paths and touch our lives.

