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Judge Barefoot Sanders

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JUDGE BAREFOOT SANDERS

Ramsey Clark

EVEN before we met, Barefoot Sanders made an indelible impression on me and, though less indelible, on many flat surfaces on and around the campus of the University of Texas in Austin. One morning, as a freshman, I was running late as usual for an eight o'clock class and encountered big barefeet painted on the sidewalks, crossing streets, ascending walls. In comparison Big Foot Wallace would wear a size 5. They were part of Barefoot's successful campaign for Student Body President and remain the most appealing political ad I've ever seen.

We both spent the 1950s in Dallas starting our families, law practices and, for Barefoot, vital service in the Texas legislature and presidential campaigns of Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy. I gave Barefoot the first political contribution I ever made, \$25.00, out of fewer than a dozen in my lifetime since I believe campaign contributions corrupt politics.

We served together in the U.S. Department of Justice throughout most of the sixties. Barefoot began initially in Dallas as U.S. Attorney, then in Washington as Assistant Deputy Attorney General where he played a major role for the executive branch in passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and major crime control legislation. He was promoted to Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Division, supervising all general civil litigation in which the United States was a party, where he provided inspiring leadership and a high standard of professional excellence for U.S. civil litigation throughout the country. We lived several doors apart in suburban Virginia and usually drove to the Department and back home together, which was the best opportunity either of us had to think out loud about what we hoped to accomplish.

But then President Johnson, who knew the Congress as no other President has, persuaded Barefoot to become his legislative counsel at the White House. There, Barefoot was the principal executive branch official responsible for seeking legislative authorization and appropriations for ambitious Great Society programs to end poverty, control crime, provide excellence in public education, health care, employment and social security for all. During these years Barefoot made a major and lasting contribution to our country and its future.

When Barefoot was appointed to the District Court, my mother, sister and I all agreed that my father, Tom Clark, would want Barefoot to have his Supreme Court robe, unused since Dad's death in 1977. We knew the robe would serve a heart and mind devoted to justice in our own home town.

I never saw Barefoot on the bench or visited his courtroom or chambers, though we visited socially whenever I was in Dallas and kept in touch. Yet I know that Barefoot brought a passion for justice, a reverence for law, practical procedural pressure to move cases to judgment, and a human spirit that was always kind and true and has left his indelible imprint on the quality of justice.

One of the great joys of my life was my long association with Barefoot Sanders and his amazing family.

March 2, 2009