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JOHN HOWIE - TRIAL LAWYER: A GOOD MAN

AL ELLIS

“I’M NOT SURE a grown man should cry, but I just can’t help it.” These were the words e-mailed to me following John’s death by one of the finest defense lawyers in the State against whom John had tried several cases. In this short, concise statement he captured the respect and love that all of us, friend and foe, had for John Howie - Trial Lawyer.

Having been named Trial Lawyer of the Year by the Dallas Bar Association in 2002, having been selected for membership in the elite International Academy of Trial Lawyers, and having recently been selected for membership in the American College of Trial Lawyers, John’s skills as an advocate for his clients and as one of the best aviation lawyers in the nation would be disputed by none. One of his favorite quotes came from President Theodore Roosevelt giving credit “to the man in the arena. . .whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who errs and comes short again. . .who spends himself in a worthy cause. . .who, at the worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.” John Howie was a fighter and a trial lawyer and proud to be a part of this segment of our profession. John Howie was also a good man.

John’s skills as a trial lawyer were not all that defined this good man. The first word that comes to most minds when remembering John is integrity. As John Martin, another frequent opponent, commented, “His word was his bond. Confirming agreements in writing simply wasn’t necessary.” Another lawyer tells the story of a difficult client who terminated his services and eventually became represented by John, who settled the case and paid a referral fee to that lawyer without even discussing the circumstances of the dismissal. Following John’s death he wrote:

In our opinion, we both felt that the case was resolved very favorably to the client. But as sometimes happens, the client is not

satisfied with the results. She decided that somehow I was to blame for the fact that she did not receive as much money as she felt she should have for her claim. She protested the payment of the referral fee to me, but John honored his commitment. The client then filed a grievance against me, and it is my recollection that John was supportive of me as far as the quality of work that I rendered during the time I represented her.

Stories like this from other lawyers are legion. John Howie was a good man.

John Howie had one of the biggest, most compassionate hearts of any person I've known. Many stories of his generosity within the profession and the community are known, but there are probably stories out there none of us, even those closest to him, will ever know. John and I were once doing interviews at a pro bono legal services clinic. He became aware there was no copying machine in the church basement where we were located, and the clients had to go to a nearby grocery store if they wanted to make copies of their important documents. The next day John had a new portable copier delivered to the pro bono clinic.

A few years back, Dallas was experiencing a major heat wave with numerous consecutive days of 100 degree plus temperatures. The Dallas Morning News reported on several elderly folks who lived in homes without air conditioning. Within a day, John had purchased at least 15 window units and had them installed in the homes. I could go on and on with stories about John's financial support of MADD, Camp John Marc, Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program, Habitat for Humanity, and many other worthy causes. Suffice it to say, John never hesitated to put his money and his time where his mouth was. John Howie cared. He was a good man.

John's love of life, his dedication to his family, his profession, and his community are best illustrated by the following anonymous quote he had printed on some of his note cards:

It is easy to sit in the sunshine and talk to the man in the shade.
It is easy to sit in a well-made boat and tell others just where to wade.
It's easy to tell the toiler how best to carry his pack. But you'll never know the weight of the load, until the pack is on your back.

A friend and I were discussing accomplishments several years ago, our own and those of friends and people we knew. I continued thinking about it long after the conversation ended. I finally decided that, in the end, if someone in remembering me

could say, "You know, he was a good man. A really good man," I'd call that a win. John Howie was a good man, a really good man.

