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A TRIBUTE TO ROBERT H. DEDMAN, SR. (1926-2002)

Robert Dedman, Jr.

IN the words of our great American forefather, Thomas Jefferson, “At the end of our lives, the only thing we will have left are our relationships and our experiences. Make them extraordinary.” My father, Robert H. Dedman, was extraordinary. This tribute is written in celebration of his life.

The greatest compliment I could give my father is to say that he had a servant’s heart. He truly became selfless over his lifetime. In fact, I believe that his heart finally gave out on August 20, 2002, because he had given so much of it to others throughout his life. He was extremely proud when Southern Methodist University renamed its law school in honor of our family in February 2001. Robert said many times that “the more you learn, the more you earn.” But more importantly, he would advise, “the more you learn, the more you live.” In describing his philosophy of giving, Robert summed it up in one phrase: “They don’t put luggage racks on hearses.” He believed we make a living by what we receive, and that we make a life by what we give.

Robert loved the law and was fortunate to work as an attorney for one of his mentors, H.L. Hunt. This provided him the opportunity to observe the business world and it instilled in him the entrepreneurial spirit that led to the founding of his first club, Brookhaven Country Club, forty-six years ago. Robert was a unique person because he had a rare combination of ambition, vision, and the ability to make things happen. He was also the eternal optimist—the fact that he initially used the plural in naming his company Country Clubs, Inc., demonstrates that, from the beginning, he had a greater vision for the future. The vision that he saw so early on has grown and evolved into what is now ClubCorp, the world leader in providing golf, private club, and resort experiences.

Having grown up poor in Arkansas, Robert liked to say that he “was too poor to paint and too proud to whitewash.” He believed that the combination of poverty and pride taught him that the best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your own arm. Robert learned early in life that it is better to be a victor of choice than a victim of chance. His humble origins taught him humor as well. To the end, he carried jokes in his wallet. Following his death, *The Dallas Morning News* wrote that “He was at the age when he could tell jokes, tell risqué jokes, and nobody

would be offended.” One of his favorite jokes was: “Life is like a roll of toilet paper. It goes so much faster toward the end.”

Throughout his life, Robert was a consummate coach and teacher. His mother used to say that he actually began teaching his own teachers as early as the fifth grade. Later in life, he reduced some of the principles he felt were most important to a speech about a four-legged chair—each leg of this chair represented by the letters *P-L-A-N* (planning, learning, attitude, and, of course, my mother, Nancy). He was a coach on the golf course. He insisted upon giving lessons to everybody (willing or not) regarding their golf grip. I now tell golfers that I have proof that there is golf in Heaven because Robert once told me that he wasn’t going otherwise.

Robert often coached through poetry. He loved poetry, calling it the collective wisdom of the ages, or the language of the heart. He especially admired Rudyard Kipling’s poem, *If*. The last verse of the poem describes the essence of Robert. It says, “If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch.” Robert knew U.S. presidents, celebrities, the rich, and the famous, but he was down to earth with everyone. He inherently knew the wisdom of the Italian proverb: “At the end of the game, they put the king and the pawn back into the same box.” His determination to live every day to its fullest was truly the Aristotelian philosophy of life—the fulfillment of one’s potential. He was the living embodiment of the Latin phrase, *carpe diem*, or “seize the day.” Robert often referred to the fact that life is not a dress rehearsal, and he crammed a lot of life into seventy-six years.

Robert had many titles throughout the years. He was a student. He was a partner. He was an entrepreneur, a founder, a lawyer, a business leader, a coach, a community leader, and a philanthropist. But the references he loved the most were husband, father, and granddaddy. There’s no question Robert was a great success in life, but he also realized how important it is to make a lasting contribution and to create something that’s significant. The fact that the SMU School of Law now bears his name is significant. I am proud to know that, through the law school, his legacy will endure. Longfellow’s poem, *A Psalm of Life*, reads in part: “Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime, and, departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time.” Robert Dedman’s footprints can never be filled, but they can be followed.