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Remembering Johnny Johnson

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REMEMBERING JOHNNY JOHNSON

*C. Paul Rogers III**

IT is uncommon for a law review to publish a memorial issue honoring one of its graduates. Normally, such posthumous distinctions are reserved for long time, revered faculty members or perhaps U.S. Supreme Court Justices. But John R. Johnson was no ordinary graduate. He was a lawyer of uncommon ability and intellect and a man of exceptional vision and vitality. His all too early passing is a very real loss to his city, his university, and his profession.

Johnny was, to begin, an exceptional student, editor-in-chief of this journal in its former incarnation as the *Southwestern Law Journal* and one of the literally handful of summa cum laude graduates in the law school's almost 70 year history. Indeed, genius is not too strong a word to describe Johnny. He was not only book smart, but street smart. He was a tough guy, demanding to work for and with, but a perfectionist with a heart. He cared deeply for his city and for SMU and put his considerable energies into making an impact on both. Needless to say, he was hugely successful on both fronts.

Johnny was, as are most great lawyers, a wonderful problem solver. His mind was exceedingly quick to grasp even the most complex issues and to derive a solution that would likely elude everyone else in the room. And Johnny was at bottom a pragmatist. When a football scandal rocked SMU once again in 1986, his advice, as a University Trustee, was simple: get rid of football. While the university did not on that occasion heed his advice, Johnny played a major role in reconstructing the University's athletic programs.

He was willing to serve where needed, as long as the need was real and not pomp and circumstance. My first two years as dean were aided immeasurably by Johnny, who served as chair of the law school's Executive Board. He succeeded in providing focus and meaning to that group. When the university asked the law school to consider reopening its part-time evening program, emotions ran high on both sides of the issue. Johnny, not one to shy away from controversy, made sure that the board's voice was heard loud and clear, even if it did disagree with the law school faculty.

Johnny packed a lot of living into his all too short stay on earth. His list of accomplishments is all the more impressive considering he was only with us for 51 years. He was intense and demanded excellence from those around him. To say that he did not suffer fools lightly is an understatement. Nonetheless Johnny was inspirational; his drive and commitment were absolutely

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infectious. Johnny was one of those rare people who raised the level of discussion whenever he walked into a room. He brought out the best in those around him. You had to earn his respect and, if you did, you felt the better for it.

Johnny Johnson was a legend in his own time. He has left a void that cannot be filled, but we are grateful for the time he had with us.