

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY LAW REVIEW

VOLUME 49

FALL 2024

NUMBER 1

TRIBUTE

THE LEGACY OF JUDGE GARY PURCELL

The Honorable Robert E. Bacharach

Judge Gary Purcell was a proud graduate of Oklahoma City University School of Law and used his excellent legal education there to serve the public as a judge for roughly 44 years.

His commitment to public service ran deep. He firmly believed in the rule of law and recognized the impact of every legal ruling on individual lives. Through his service, Judge Purcell left an imprint not only on each and every one of us, but on the lives and legacies of generations of people who had entrusted the most important matters of their lives to the court. He embraced that responsibility with the seriousness of the trust that came with it. As Judge Purcell said: “If you use your brain and use your heart, whatever you do will be the right thing.”

He generously shared his experience and wisdom with me. I began my tenure as Judge Purcell’s student when I joined him as a colleague roughly 25 years ago. As a new judge, I had many more questions than answers. And I knew that my transition would be far smoother with the benefit of Judge Purcell’s experience. He was both gracious and supportive as he answered my questions and encouraged me to trust my own judgment. Judge Purcell was an exceptional mentor.

The rule of law underlay everything in Judge Purcell’s world as a judge. He approached every case, every legal issue, with utmost

seriousness, with dedication to the role he had been assigned in administering justice.

Judge Purcell was an extraordinary judge. He viewed himself as ordinary, but he was anything but. He was a judge and person of exceptional intellect, ability, and determination.

His determination had deep roots. Judge Purcell contracted polio when he was a boy, and its impact continued throughout his life. Even as a grown man, he could not move his right hand. But that didn't slow Judge Purcell down. He adapted, and his athletic prowess proved legendary. He was an outstanding baseball player and scratch golfer. Polio was no match for Judge Purcell's determination.

I saw that determination in his long battle with cancer. It was obvious that Judge Purcell was suffering. More than I can even imagine. But he never once lost his determination to beat cancer. He was going to be there for his family and to return to the courthouse to work. And even when he couldn't go to the courthouse, he continued to do his job from home. Even as he experienced the dreadful cycle of sickness that came from dose after dose of chemotherapy. Polio hadn't defeated his determination, and neither would cancer.

Our world is a better place because of Judge Purcell's lifelong judicial service. He represented the rule of law at its finest.