

The Soul of Our Court

Recollections and Reminiscences



A Tribute to the Honorable

William Benson Bryant

September 18, 1911 – November 14, 2005

THE WILLIAM B. BRYANT AMERICAN INN *of* COURT

The Soul of Our Court

Recollections and Reminiscences

A Tribute to the Honorable

William Benson Bryant

September 18, 1911 – November 14, 2005



THE WILLIAM B. BRYANT AMERICAN INN *of* COURT

Edited by Kristen Grim Hughes

Published for the private use of Members and friends of The William B. Bryant American Inn of Court. Permission for quotation or reproduction must be obtained directly from the original authors or copyright holders. May 9, 2006.

I was Blessed to have had this Prince of a Man as a Friend

I met Attorney William Benson Bryant in 1959 while I was a member of the Metropolitan Police Department (Morals Division). I had arrested a client of his for violating the Federal Narcotic Laws. After the preliminary hearing, his client was held for the action of the Grand Jury. During the course of the cross examination, I could tell by the way he phrased his questions that he was not the typical lawyer (5th Streeter). Later, outside the hearing room, he approached me to say he appreciated how I handled myself as a witness. We shook hands and went our separate ways. Sometime later we ran into one another in the Courthouse and the subject of his client came up. I don't recall who brought up the subject, but, at this point, I gave him the same information that was written in my report, as well as in the affidavit, and the information that would be used in testimony at the trial. This was "Pre-Jencks." At that juncture, however, I did not know the current status of the case.

At a banquet in 1964 attended by U.S. Marshal Luke Moore, Attorney Bryant, myself and our wives, Attorney Bryant complained to Luke Moore about the failure of the U.S. Marshal's office to serve subpoenas on three vital witnesses in a criminal case where he (Bryant) was counsel. Luke told him to reissue the subpoenas and he would make sure they were served. Attorney Bryant replied: "I have copies outside in my car." Luke told him: "Go and get them and give them to Kirk." And so, after the banquet, I went and served all three subpoenas. Later, I learned all of these witnesses were reluctant witnesses. I am sure none of these three expected to see a Deputy U.S. Marshal show up at their front door after midnight in a tuxedo. And the result?

Attorney Bryant's client was acquitted. This was one of the stories that lingered with all of us.

Attorney Bryant was easy-going and easy to talk to. The atmosphere at the Courthouse among the U. S. Attorney's office, the Metropolitan Police Department, and the Defense Bar was very congenial at that time. In 1965, when William Bryant was appointed United States District Court Judge for the District of Columbia, I was assigned as his Deputy U.S. Marshal. This cemented our long and enduring friendship.

From 1965 to 2000, Luke Moore, Julian Dugus, George Windsor, and William Bryant were team teaching at Howard University School of Law as adjunct professors in the trial advocacy course of study. During this period I worked on the team with them as a professional witness, spending many hours developing strategies to prepare the next generation of lawyers. I saw the same technique Judge Bryant used with students demonstrated and practiced in the courtroom: he was a caring, compassionate, and instructive jurist. The classes at Howard gave me yet another opportunity to appreciate his intellect, his knowledge, and his love of the law.

During our private moments, we often greeted each other with a joke and would talk about life, politics, sports, the general news of the day, and, of course, the law. As a non-lawyer, I was privileged to listen to the dialogue between him and his law clerks as they dissected a case. He would simplify the most complex and complicated case so that even I could understand. He was the consummate teacher.

The last eight or nine years of his life, we found ourselves spending more and more

time together. He often reminisced about his childhood in the District of Columbia, his experiences at Howard University as an undergraduate, his golden opportunity as a research assistant to Dr. Ralph Bunche, and on race relations in the United States. He often reflected on the research and investigation of the Jack Robinson story while Robinson was in the military and stationed in Texas. As our friendship and admiration grew over the years, he privately became my Uncle Bill.

Uncle Bill had such quick wit. At times when I would call to check on him and ask: "How are you doing today," or sometimes: "What's up Uncle Bill?" one response that remains vivid is: "Oh, I am just sitting here drinking Jack Daniel's and listening to Ray

Charles." Because he was a non-drinker, I thought that was a riot and we always laughed.

During this year's Masters' Golf Tournament, I could not help but think about how much he enjoyed playing golf, as well as being a spectator. He truly loved the game and often talked about the time he met and played a round of golf with Lee Elder. He often compared the game of golf with life: it is preparation, tenacity, concentration, talent, seizing the opportunities, and being prepared for the unknown.

I was blessed to have had this prince of a man as a friend, confidant, moral conscience, my advisor, and my teacher of life ...
MY UNCLE BILL.

Kirk Bowden
Deputy United States Marshall
Washington, D.C.