

Profile:

William Joslin

Recipient of 1992 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award

WCBA member William Joslin has been selected by the Bar's Professionalism Committee as the recipient of the 1992 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award. The award is presented annually to the practicing lawyer in Wake County who "best exhibits the qualities-of professionalism." To the committee and the Bar, the choice of Joslin was clear, but to Bill, it came as a surprise. "I myself had nominated someone who I thought was very deserving and who embodied professionalism in my mind." Joslin said. "The nominee I suggested is the kind of lawyer who calls them as he sees them." By all accounts, that straight-forward honesty which Bill admires in his nominee is reflected in himself as well.

Bill believes that professionalism results from a combination of honesty, directness, and dedication to clients. A balance is important because, Bill observes, dedication to clients can be carried to an excess where honesty can be compromised. The best approach is to let the "chips fall where they may, even where the client may not hear exactly what the client wants to hear."

The professionalism that Bill exhibits today is the product of an honorable legacy of mentors in Bill's career. While in law school, Bill studied under Columbia law professor Walter Gellhorn who, Bill recalls, impressed him as a great scholar and a man of great integrity and forthrightness. Bill served as editor of the law review and, after graduation, entered a clerkship with Justice Hugo Black at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Justice Black was a man of great compassion for the underdog in society, Bill recalls. "His opinion in *Florida v. Chambers*, a coerced confession death penalty case, will about make you cry, and we cited that case on a number of occasions. He recalls the Justice as a hard worker who read a great deal in many disciplines, such as history and philosophy, and had the ability to skim through text and pick out the substance of an argument with phenomenal ease. Not only did Bill's tenure with the Supreme Court expose him to great professionals, such as a fellow clerk John Paul Stephens, but it also cast him in a historic time of the Court. Bill recalls the chilled relations between Justice Jackson and Justice Black arising from the "Blast from Nuremberg" where Justice Jackson, who was serving on the bench in the Nuremberg trials, publicly castigated Justice Black for interfering with Jackson's bid for the chief justice position. While Bill says he was friendly with Justice Jackson's clerk, he never set foot into Jackson's office.

After Bill's clerkship, he started his own office in Raleigh. Bill was a familiar face in downtown Raleigh already; his mother, who had been widowed when Bill was seven, had operated a tea room on the corner of Hargett and Fayetteville streets called the Tally-Ho Inn. The tea room was a meeting place for many of Raleigh's downtown professionals. The atmosphere, Bill recalls, was similar to that found today at the "Upstairs Restaurant" on Wilmington Street, where today patrons will be greeted by Bill's sister who is the hostess.

Bill's practice developed into a general practice, where he engaged in issues of general business law, real property, estates, and litigation. Robert McMillan, Sr., a man much-admired by Bill, was a mentor to Bill during that time and, from time to time, would nudge clients Bill's way. Later, Bill formed a partnership

with Charles Manning, Sr., which split in 1953, and in 1962, the partnership of Purrington, Joslin, Culbertson and Sedberry was formed. Presently Bill continues to practice with Charles Sedberry

Consistent with Bill's tradition of professionalism, Bill has served the people of North Carolina with distinction. From 1962 to 1965, Bill was chairman of the North Carolina Board of Elections. He recalls a particularly interesting summer when he conducted a number of hearings in Madison County in connection with an election involving Zeno Ponder. There, he says, in Ponder's home county in the deep mountains of the state, witnesses would arrive wearing pistols. The SBJ was on site, ostensibly to keep order, but Bill says their primary role was to protect him and his board members.

Bill reflects upon the development of the legal profession with mixed feelings. While he believes that the increasingly complex society has spawned more lawyers and the need for specialization, Bill believes the atmosphere in the early days of his practice contributed to professionalism. Unlike when I first started to practice in the '40s and '50s, where you knew everyone's name and who you could trust, today's profession cannot foster that same intimate knowledge of one another." However, once lawyers know one another, "civility is as high as it ever has been." The Bar Association, Bill observes, plays a most important role in promoting professionalism merely by bringing lawyers together in social and professional settings.

Bill has been married for 46 years to Mary Coker Joslin of Hartsville, South Carolina. Bill and Mary met on the stairs of Riverside Church in New York while Mary was a student at Vassar College. Together they have six children and now proudly boast of 12 grandchildren. One daughter discovered she had inherited Bill's legal aptitude and, as a second career, is now in her third year of law school, where she is the articles editor of the law review and at the top of her class.

Even though Bill was surprised when named the recipient of the WCBA's Professionalism Award, the honor is no surprise to his peers. The qualities which Bill has come to admire in his mentors, such as Justice Black, Professor Gellhorn and Robert McMillan, Sr. are reflected in Bill's practice and profession. Without knowing it, Bill describes himself best when describing those whom he has admired. These very qualities—honesty, dedication to clients, and a straightforward sense of square dealing and fair play—are the qualities which the WCBA honors in Bill Joslin by naming him the recipient of the 1992 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award.