Manford Rainwater Was Lawyer for Downtrodden.(Obituary)


Byline: Paul Logan Journal Staff Writer

Country lawyer Manford Rainwater was once described as having the folksy voice of a Sam Ervin and a physical resemblance to Clarence Darrow.

A Tucumcari attorney for 54 years, Rainwater was known for his love of the law and defending "the downtrodden and the underdog," said former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Stanley F. Frost.

Though a nonsmoker, Rainwater died Nov. 20 of lung cancer. He was 84.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on Dec. 5 in Tucumcari at a place to be determined.

"Manford had a unique personality," said Frost, who was a District Court judge for many of Rainwater's cases. "The law was his life. He really enjoyed coming to court. He had a great social conscience."

In a 1987 Albuquerque Journal story, Rainwater said his dad, a railroader of German descent, wanted him to be an undertaker and his mom, a teacher, wanted him to be a preacher, "so I compromised."

He graduated from the University of New Mexico and earned a law degree at the University of Oklahoma.

In the late 1940s, Rainwater ran for district attorney and then for district judge, losing both elections. He won three terms in the state House of Representatives in the mid-1950s.

Rainwater's great-nephew, UNM law professor Kip Bobroff, said many people have spoken to him about how his great-uncle wasn't concerned about money or the color of a client's skin.

"If you needed a lawyer, he was willing to represent you," Bobroff said. "He would fight like a bulldog to the point where a lot of attorneys didn't like to be up against him.

"I can remember him driving over from Tucumcari and giving my family a carload of toilet paper because one of his clients paid him that way."

Rainwater once said he didn't chase down a due bill because he would "rather win than make money. I'm a poor loser."

Bobroff credited his great-uncle for helping inspire him to become a lawyer.

"He was somebody who always cared a lot about justice," Bobroff said. "And he showed me being a lawyer is all about doing justice."

Survivors also include his sisters, Helen Narges, of Tucumcari, and Dorothy Durrett, of Farmington.

PHOTO: b/w

RAINWATER: Tucumcari attorney for 54 years

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