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## Sid McMath

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## Sid McMath

### Cover Page Footnote

The UALR William H. Bowen School of Law and the UALR Law Review would like to bestow a special debt of gratitude on Governor Sidney S. McMath for his distinguished service to our nation and the State of Arkansas as a military officer, governor, attorney, and icon in the legal community. The essay that follows is one of six in this issue that pays tribute to Governor McMath's accomplished life and illustrates the impact of his legacy. He will be forever remembered in the hearts and minds of those whose lives he touched.

## SID MCMATH

*Sam Laser\**

Sid McMath was a trial lawyer—a *real* trial lawyer. He was the best plaintiff's lawyer against whom I ever tried a case. It was during his years as a lawyer that I knew him.

Sid was seven years older than I. I did not know him as a student in law school, a United States Marine Corp officer, a county prosecutor or Governor. Later I learned that we were both on active duty at the same time during World War II and both served in the South Pacific. He in the Marines, and I in the Navy.

I started my law practice in 1947, and for a few years heard much about Sid's political accomplishments, but we did not become personally acquainted and good friends until approximately 1955. I was never involved in politics. Therefore, I really didn't know Sid well until I had been in practice about eight years. Sid and his partner, the late Henry Woods, always represented the plaintiffs, and I the defendants. I tried many cases against Sid, sometimes against him alone, sometimes with his partner, Henry, and later on with Sid and one of his sons, Sandy, Phillip or Bruce. In addition to some thirty-five to forty cases that went to trial, there were probably 150 other cases that we settled.

I never encountered a lawyer who could make jurors cry, especially women, like Sid could. He could wring every bit of sympathy out of a jury for the benefit of his grieving client. I remember his closing arguments in trials in which he had the jurors sobbing, the Judge wiping his eyes, the bailiff, court clerk and reporter crying, as were all the spectators. I had the only dry eyes in the courtroom, and I wanted to cry! He was a master speaker and orator. He did not talk from notes, but from his heart.

In his law practice, Sid never broke a promise, and always kept his word. It was never necessary for us to put any agreement in writing. He never reneged on one, nor did I. He fought for his clients just as hard as he had fought for his country.

Neither Sid, nor I, worried too much about the law of the case. We concentrated on the facts to try to persuade the jurors to hold for our respective clients. You cannot mention the name Sid McMath without thinking about Henry Woods, who had worked with Sid in his political career and then as his law partner until about 1980, when Henry Woods was appointed as federal judge. Henry was a great legal scholar who researched and pre-

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\* Sam Laser is a senior partner in the Laser Law Firm. He is a member of the Federation of Insurance Counsel and Defense Research Institute, is included in THE BEST LAWYERS IN AMERICA- PERSONAL INJURY LITIGATION (DEFENDANTS) 1983-2004, and has received the 2004 Outstanding Lawyer Award by the Arkansas Bar Foundation.

pared the law of the case, so that Sid was free to concentrate on the story created by the facts.

Sid and I never had a cross word in or out of the courtroom, nor ever suggested to any judge or anyone else that the other one was guilty of any impropriety. We had mutual trust, respect and affection for each other. In the courtroom we asked no quarter from the other. Outside the courtroom, we were very good friends for about the last 48 years.

Sid felt strongly that there was no higher calling or profession than that of being a lawyer. He believed in and practiced the idea that a lawyer had a duty to work hard, to be capable, and most important to be honest, not only in the best interest of his clients, but in the best interest of mankind.

Freedom, liberty, and justice are just words without lawyers, judges, soldiers, sailors, and marines to obtain and preserve them. They were more than just words to Sid. He personified them in his actions. I believe strongly that a man has no right more precious than his freedom. Sid fought for that right on the battlefield, as prosecutor, as Governor, and as a vigorous advocate in the courtroom.

Sid was vitally interested in the law, and was concerned that lawyers and judges practice their profession with a view toward justice for all. In recent years when integrity, ethics and civility seemed to become more scarce, it was gratifying to be associated with a man who possessed those vital elements of character. He was known and respected for his faithful adherence to ethical standards and professional reliability and diligence. Sid was extremely able, conscientious, and efficient in his performance of his duties. He consistently demonstrated the highest degree of professional ability and integrity. He was unswerving in his devotion to his clients, their causes, and his responsibilities. In recognition of his many accomplishments, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law named the street in front of the school McMath Avenue.

His sons Sandy, Phillip, and Bruce are fine lawyers. Their father was a great mentor for them, and they wisely took advantage of that opportunity and learned well.

When Sid's son Phillip, who is a neighbor of mine, informed me that Sid was now totally blind, I, of course, was saddened, and Phillip was devastated. I hastened to say to Phillip, "Son, if there is any man alive who can handle that condition, it is your dad," and he did.

The late John W. Davis, one of the greatest lawyers of our country, once said, "In the heart of every lawyer, worthy of the name, there burns a deep ambition so to bear himself that the profession may be stronger by reason of his passage through its ranks, and that he may leave the law itself a better instrument of human justice than he found it." Sid McMath did just that.

On a personal note, in April of this year when my son Samuel York Laser came home from a ten-month deployment on the aircraft carrier USS

Abraham Lincoln in the Persian Gulf and the war with Iraq, there was a surprise "Welcome Home" celebration for him at the airport. Sid McMath, despite being blind, needing to finish his book, fulfill his speaking engagements, and meet many other demands upon his time, came to the airport, welcomed my son home, shook his hand, and thanked him for his service to his country. This time I did cry.

