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James H. O'Keefe

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QUITE A RIDE

HONORABLE JAMES H. O'KEEFE*

I suppose at a time like this, as in an obituary, one is to say all things nice. Yet, one must be true to one's self. So a confession: My feelings about Rodney have not always been benevolent. Well, how would you like it if you had a job for two years, which you worked to get and won, and some upstart lawyer filed against you? I did not like it either. Modesty prevents me telling you the result.

Rodney and I had a lot in common. We both served as state's attorney of Walsh County and municipal judge in Grafton. We both did trial work across the table from the other. The latter was not necessarily a pleasant experience as Rodney had this habit of too often winning. Laymen (and sometimes lawyers) have difficulty understanding how two people, who seemingly hate each other in a litigation milieu, can be seen together later in good cheer.

I became a judge while Rodney was still in practice and I am pleased to note he never filed an affidavit of prejudice, though he did tell me once that my decision "stunk"—a judgment never rendered on him. His favorite expression of outrage was and is "I am shocked." He was easily shocked.

Rodney and Betty had many wonderful years in Grafton. He was a partner with Elton Ringsak, the most decorated soldier of World War II. My memories tend to the humorous, too many and too detailed to disclose here. I was honored to speak at his investiture in Fargo. I think I said he was a man of integrity and common sense, with a fine grasp of the law and a fire to do his best. I was not wrong.

As he nears the end of his judicial road, he can look back with joy on his charmed small-town childhood in Cavalier, his years as a student and athlete at the University of North Dakota, and his marvelous family. It has been quite a ride.

* North Dakota Supreme Court Surrogate Judge; formerly presiding Judge of the Northeast Judicial District of North Dakota.
