

JUDGE ALBERT W. COFFRIN

Philip H. Hoff*

I was privileged to practice law with Judge Coffrin for almost ten years. My personal experience, coupled with conversations with his closest friends and associates, confirm my belief that the qualities which made Judge Coffrin such a remarkable trial judge were in place long before he ascended to the bench.

Of critical importance was Judge Coffrin's view of himself. He was secure in himself, knew who he was, and recognized his limits. This manifested itself in an air of quiet assurance and a total lack of pretense.

His view of himself was reflected in his view of others. He was extraordinarily non-judgmental, and even among his closest friends he was almost never critical of other people.

While Judge Coffrin had a superior mind and was always a good student, his success as a student and his success as a lawyer probably were equally due to his diligence, persistence, and determination. He had an extraordinary ability to concentrate for long periods of time without interruption and his work product in a given period of time was materially higher than that of his peers.

Given his work habits, one would think that Judge Coffrin would resent being interrupted by a colleague or client who sought advice or direction. Just the opposite was true. He had an amazing capacity to accept the interruption with equanimity and to give his undivided attention to that colleague or client and his problem, following which he immediately refocused totally on his work.

Judge Coffrin served as President of the "famous" 1937 class at Burlington High School, a position he held until his death. The style of leadership demonstrated there was based upon a personal warmth and concern and upon a willingness to listen to his classmates and their points of view. After carefully evaluating what was presented to him, he would then embark on a course of action. This pattern of leadership was repeated throughout his life and career.

Al Coffrin was fun to be with. He enjoyed a good time, had a ready laugh, and possessed a subtle and understated sense of humor. He was an astute observer of human nature and he delighted in pricking someone's balloon without ever being mean or sarcastic.

* Partner, Hoff, Agel, Curtis, Pacht & Cassidy; Governor, State of Vermont, 1962-69.

His relations with his friends, clients, and colleagues were marked by kindness, openness, patience, and tolerance, but always with a distinct reserve. Familiarity was not a characteristic of Judge Coffrin, and even with his best friends there was always a point where his openness stopped. Clearly there were parts of himself and his family that were off limits.

Al Coffrin gave extensively of himself not only to the cause of justice but to his family, to his friends, to his colleagues, and to his community and this country. In so doing, he enriched all who came in contact with him. He was a tremendous asset to his society.