

## **Memorial**

### **Jack D. Levin**

#### **Iowa Judges Association – June 21, 2006**

No kinder soul 'twas robed in black,  
Our bow-tied friend, our gentle Jack.

Jack D. Levin was born on April 28, 1938, in Newton, Iowa, the son of Margaret and Jacob Levin. He grew up in Oelwein. As a boy he was afflicted with a heart condition that followed him throughout his life. Those who knew him well and those who knew him only a little realized he simply used his heart too much. Jack died on January 13, 2006.

In 1961 Jack received a Bachelor's Degree from the College of Business at Drake University. The following year he completed his legal training at Drake and began a law practice in Newton and Monroe. In 1975 he was given the Award of Merit from the Young Lawyers Section of the Iowa Bar Association.

After twenty years of confusing clients, attorneys and judges alike about how such a gracious man could be a lawyer, Governor Robert Ray appointed him to the bench. He began his judicial duties in sub-district 5A. Then for some mysterious reason, after several years, he became a Polk County Judge. Unsubstantiated rumor has it that the Iowa Supreme Court hoped his gentlemanly manners might rub off on the rest of us. Perhaps it did.

Through his efforts, Polk County adopted a mandatory mediation process for resolution of domestic relation disputes. Some of us were skeptical of the program's success. But Jack's placid demeanor masked a truly remarkable tenacity when reaching for a goal. After the statistics proved Jack's faith in the process he was so excited he was heard to exclaim, "Goodness gracious." He had a very salty tongue that way.

Jack was nominated to fill a vacancy on the Iowa Supreme Court in 1987. Although deserving, he did not receive the appointment; but that might have been a blessing in disguise. Given his nature he certainly would have gotten writer's cramp penning all those notes of apology to the trial judges he was compelled to reverse.

He gave us quite a scare in 1989 too when, at age 51, he actually considered returning to private practice because of low judicial salaries. Fortunately, friends persuaded him to stay on the bench. A host of citizens, practitioners and fellow jurists are richer for it.

Jack's gentleness permeated his work – was the bedrock of his judicial philosophy. It led him to chair the Iowa Judges Association Ethics Committee. It drew his attention to children's welfare and his dedication was recognized when he was made an Honorary Life Member of the Central States Judicial Council.

He was a member of the American Mock Trial Association Judges Hall of Fame and a Lifetime Trustee of the Iowa State Bar Association Foundation. Even after 18 years of service on the bench, he volunteered as a Circuit Court Mediator certified by the Florida Supreme Court and for the North Iowa Dispute Settlement Center.

His membership in the Lee and Collier County Bar Associations in Florida, the Polk County and Iowa Bar Association and Iowa Judges Association enriched the organizations and their members.

Jack, more than any jurist I have known, agonized over his decisions. This was not due to a want of decisiveness. Like Lincoln, Jack could "feel the lash upon another man's back." Though required to rule, he seemed incapable of doing so without feeling the pain of the losing party. I believe this made judging harder for him but more just for the litigants. He paid for their justice. There was nothing wrong with Jack's heart – he just worked it too hard.

Beyond the profession, organizations and public duty, Jack rested his true happiness on his family. He and Myrt, his wife, were a team. Anyone who saw them knew how well they supported and complimented each other. There is little doubt that Jack's motivation for judicial treatment of children and families was his love of his own, including son Jack and wife Annette and daughters Stacy and husband Matt and Ann and husband Scott – and, of course, the crop of seven grandchildren.

Giving Jack. Gentleman Jack. Gentle Jack.

No powers used to press a grudge,  
No not by him, our gentle judge.

Mr. President, I move that this memorial be spread across the pages of this association and a copy be sent to Judge Levin's wife and family.