

**Memorial for Judge James P. Rielly
Before the Iowa Judges Association**

November 4, 2011

Presented by Annette J. Scieszinski, for the 8th Judicial District

“What a Difference a Single Life Makes”

Judge James P. Rielly of Oskaloosa was one of my judicial colleagues-- actually the first to call me and welcome me to the 8th District Bench, phoning just minutes after the Governor. That was Jim Rielly's sensitive manner; I tried many cases before him in the years I was “growing up” as a lawyer, and I appreciated his humanity. He was a warm human being, and a collegial judge. It was his “brand” in a justice system stereotyped as stern, somber, steely. Jim Rielly's collegiality set the tone in Mahaska County where he practiced law and later served on the bench. The organized bar there nurtures its professionalism with traditions of weekly lunches and periodic memorials for the members who pass on. Case-in-point: the County Bar sponsored a poignant memorial for Jim Rielly to an overflow courtroom crowd the morning of his funeral, just one month ago.

Today, I share a poem penned by Mahaska County Attorney Rose Anne Mefford, and read by her at that Memorial. This piece captures the impact Jim Rielly had on the legal community who knew him best.

Justice, as an abstract concept, is often depicted as a lady.

Flowing robe, sword in hand, scales lifted high, she is rife with symbolic imagery and lofty idealism.

But, like most abstract concepts, Lady Justice, formed concretely and visibly in the real world can bear little resemblance.

Justice, I can tell you, is a gentleman. A gentle man. Kind and good. Strong and tall, with a back that carries responsibility easily.

Justice is sturdy and steadfast. Solid. Concrete. Justice shows up; does what it says it will do. You can count on Justice; you can set your clock by it; you can take it to the bank.

Justice is wise. Justice listens more than it speaks. When Justice speaks we all are wise who choose to listen.

Justice has no need to fill its right hand with a sword. Justice needs its hands free: to shake your hand, to pat your back, to lift you up with its support.

Justice, in real life, has no use for blindfolds. Justice looks you in the eye and assesses who you are—deeply, compassionately—because Justice cares who you really are.

Justice sees; has eagle eyes, (or maybe HAWK-eyes!) Justice does not turn a blind eye; it captures, observes the little things, the smaller gestures where the truth sometimes abides.

Justice serves. Justice gives and gives and never takes. Justice never condescends or patronizes.

Justice has a heart that is larger than life. Justice is constant and consistent. Justice is beloved, revered and respected.

Cherished in the community where it flourishes, Justice is as iconic as the red bricks and mortar that surround this building [the Mahaska County Courthouse].

Justice has existed here, day after day, year after year after year after year.

I have known Justice in its real and concrete human form.

His name was Jim. He was adored.

[--by Rose Anne Mefford]

James P. Rielly, the son of Patrick and Catherine Higgins Rielly, was born November 23, 1931 at Rock Valley, Iowa. A 1950 graduate of the Rock Valley High School, Jim earned his B.A. from Westmar College in 1953, and then served in the United States Army until 1955. Upon military discharge he entered the University of Iowa's College of Law and earned his J.D. degree with the Class of '58—renowned for its numerous judges and other leaders in the legal community.

On August 31, 1957 Jim married Mary E. McGinty at Rockwell City. They moved to Oskaloosa in the fall of 1958 when Jim began a practice of law with the firm of Fleck and Jones. Several years later in 1964, he joined attorney Bob Spayde in forming the Spayde and Rielly Law Firm.

Jim regarded public service as a privilege and a priority. President Lyndon Johnson tabbed him in 1967 to serve as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Iowa, a position he held until 1969 when he resumed his county-seat practice. Jim was also the Oskaloosa City Attorney for a total of 11 years. Governor Robert D. Ray appointed him to the 8th District Bench in 1980, where he served with distinction. Jim retired in 2001 but continued serving the local bench as a Senior Judge—coming to his office in the Mahaska County Courthouse virtually every day for most of the last 10 years. Jim died on September 28, 2011 at the age of 79.

Jim was a spiritual person, a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church and at one time active in the Knights of Columbus. He was a proud man, and especially treasured his Irish heritage. Jim was a community man, a member of the American Legion, and the Elks. And, he worked toward improvements in the legal and justice systems, through his membership in the Iowa State Bar Association and the Iowa Judges Association.

Jim loved people, and enjoyed time socializing and golfing at the historic Elmhurst Country Club. He was an avid reader—often carrying his latest book with him on the judicial circuit for a noon-hour read. He fished, and he spent quite a bit of time at the Elks "roundtable". On fall Saturdays you found Jim tailgating and attending Iowa Hawkeye football games.

Family was always very important to Jim; and Sunday dinner with the crew was an event! Jim's survivors include his five children: Mary Pat Johnson and her husband Bill of Rockport, Massachusetts; Ann Baker and her husband Nathan of Loomis, California; Michael Rielly of Minocqua, Wisconsin; John Rielly of West Palm Beach, Florida, and State Senator Tom Rielly and his wife Mary of Oskaloosa. He also leaves a legacy of six cherished grandchildren: Ben, Sam, Amanda, and James Baker, and Katie and Shawn Rielly. Jim was survived, as well, by a brother, two sisters-in-law, and a brother-in-law. In addition to his wife, Mary, Jim was preceded in death by his parents and three sisters.

In tribute to Jim's love of reading, memorials may be made to the Oskaloosa Public Library Book Fund.

Mr. President, on behalf of the 8th Judicial District, I ask that this Memorial for our colleague Judge James P. Rielly be spread upon the official records of the Iowa Judges Association, with a copy to be mailed to the Rielly family.