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Dallas J. Laird

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## JUSTICE JOSEPH CARDINE — A TRIBUTE

*Dallas J. Laird\**

It is easy for me to write a tribute to someone I respect, admire and appreciate. When you have known Justice Joseph Cardine (I call him Joe) for 25 years, the stories, the anecdotes, the truth is already in place.

Joe, as he most likes to be called, is a mentor, a father-figure, lawyer, teacher, professor, judge and friend to those who know him. He has been all to me.

I first met Justice Cardine when I was a law student and he was the Natrona County Attorney. In those days, the County Attorney was the state prosecutor and civil lawyer for the county. It was a part-time job which paid about \$12,000.00 per year. Joe also maintained a busy private practice. We had a lay Justice of the Peace then, so putting it all in perspective, the county job was a labor of love for Joe.

During those times (late 1960's), Casper had motorcycle gangs, gambling, prostitution, along with all the rest. Joe, the prosecutor, was better than any career prosecutor I had ever seen. He knew the criminal statutes backward and forward. He knew the criminal rules as well. It is really very interesting. He could eloquently argue criminal law and then switch his mind to civil law with relative ease. He did it all the time, every day, in those days.

*Do you see a great judge in the making?*

I'll tell you more. During his service as County Attorney, he brought in some young lawyers, Joe Vlastos and Hugh Duncan, to name a couple. Joe had a lot to do with their early training. They are both excellent lawyers. Joe brought Vlastos, Wes Reeves and Nick Murdock into his private practice. He gave them his guidance and training, and they are great lawyers today.

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*Do you see a very fine law professor in the making?*

I'll continue. Joe won a lot of cases, big and small. He lost some too, but not many. He was always totally and completely prepared. He was fair and he wanted to see that justice was done. He wanted the truth to come out. To him, justice was and is the truth.

I remember when he ran for President of the Wyoming State Bar. I went to Jackson and campaigned for him. When I started my discussions with the lawyers of Wyoming, they would generally say, "Oh, save your time, I'm already going to vote for Joe." It was an easy campaign. Joe won handily.

I had a terribly difficult criminal case in the early 1980's, and Joe was representing one of the target defendants in the same matter. It was a high-publicity case. I was scared of my own inadequacies.

Joe came by my office one day and asked if I wanted to help him investigate and prepare the case. I jumped at the chance. He taught me how to prepare, he taught me how to really care for my client. I think that is when I started to become a "real" lawyer. That is when I saw the friend in Joe Cardine.

When Joe went down to Laramie to be a law professor, I felt a loss to the bar association. Several years later, when I would meet some of Joe's law students, I could see the gain to our profession and the respect those students had for him. I know what he taught me and I could see in their faces how valuable he was to them.

I went to Joe's Supreme Court retirement dinner in 1994. He had turned 70. There was a lot of respect for him at that dinner. The Judges, his friends, Gerry Spence, all said nice things about him.

I was impressed when they presented him with a book, a volume that contained all the opinions he authored when he was a Justice and Chief Justice of the Wyoming Supreme Court. There was his work as a Justice, all of it. He had done a lot for the people of Wyoming.

Joe got a lot of justice and gave a lot of justice over his years as a lawyer and judge. Guess what? He isn't done yet.