

Memorial Resolution

THE HONORABLE JOHN EVERETT WILLIAMS

OCTOBER 17, 2023

Judge John Everett Williams, a devoted father and grandfather, a wise and caring judge, and a faithful friend, passed away suddenly on September 2, 2022. He was a true renaissance man who lived his short sixty-eight years to the fullest.

John Everett was born on November 11, 1953, to Betty Everett Williams and John L. Williams. His father was an attorney, and John Everett began attending trials at a young age. He graduated from Huntingdon High School in 1971 and from the University of Tennessee at Martin with a degree in criminal justice in 1977. In 2015, he became the first person to receive the Outstanding Alumnus

Award from the criminal justice program. He received his Doctorate of Jurisprudence in 1981 from Cumberland School of Law at Samford University of Birmingham, Alabama. While in law school, he was co-chairman of the Cordell Hull's Speakers Forum, which was selected by the American Bar Association as the Most Outstanding Student Bar Association Project in the nation that year.

Although John Everett received offers from multiple law firms, he chose to return to his hometown of Huntingdon and open up his own law office. He tried numerous cases against his father, who was the district attorney general. John Everett later enjoyed recalling the trials against his father, which he described as "brutal" because each knew the other's tactics, and he quipped that he was not invited over to his parents' home for dinner on those nights. He fondly recalled "accidentally" dropping photographs that his father handed to him in an effort to break up his father's questioning of a witness, and his father's distracting jurors from John Everett's closing argument by straightening a portrait on the courtroom wall that was perfectly straight before he touched it. John Everett later practiced

law with his father at Williams and Williams, Attorneys at Law, in the same office that he eventually maintained as a judge until his death. Throughout his practice, he served his community by representing an array of pro bono clients, including adoptive parents and families of crime victims.

In November 1998, John Everett was appointed by Governor Don Sundquist to serve on the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals. He repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to assist his colleagues whenever called to do so. He went out of his way to welcome new judges to the Court and to guide them in their new roles. In 2018, he was elected by his colleagues to serve as presiding judge for Court, a position he held until his death. As presiding judge, he successfully guided the Court through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During his tenure on the Court, John Everett served as a mentor to numerous law clerks. His love of the legal profession reflected in the stories and advice that he shared. He would engage his law clerks in lively debates, challenging the clerks to defend their positions by taking the opposing side. He set an example for his law clerks by treating colleagues, staff members, and attorneys with kindness and respect. At the completion of their clerkships, his clerks left his office as both better attorneys and better people.

John Everett's caring nature led to his involvement with the Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP). He was a strong advocate for the organization and served as its chairman for a period. He traveled through the state and the country, promoting the organization and its services. He also never hesitated to personally call someone who he learned was in need of TLAP's services.

John Everett was a masterful storyteller, and his delivery of the story was as compelling as the story itself. His love of storytelling and captivating audiences led to his portrayals of Mark Twain. He was actively involved with The Dixie Carter Performing Arts and Academic Enrichment Center in Huntingdon, performing there a few weeks prior to his death. He also was a talented magician and a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. He performed numerous magic shows over the years at conferences and parties. The children in Huntingdon referred to him as the “Magic Man,” and he performed at the local school each year as part of the kindergarteners’ study of the letter “M.”

John Everett loved Huntingdon and Carroll County. He often spent time with his local friends at “The Coffee Shop” or whittling wood at the local lawnmower shop where they told stories, discussed politics, and tried to solve the world’s problems. He was involved in too many local organizations to name, and he was awarded Huntingdon’s Outstanding Citizen of the Year in 2018.

John Everett was an avid outdoorsman and fisherman and enjoyed spending time with friends in a duck blind or on the Tennessee River. His love of the outdoors led him to purchase a lake house on Kentucky Lake, where he often sat outside on his deck in the mornings and enjoyed a cup of coffee while reading opinions.

John Everett made friends wherever he went. The best example involved his annual pilgrimage to Burning Man, which he began in 2016. There, John Everett, or “the Colonel” as he was known due to his likeness to Colonel Sanders, became friends with people from all over the United States and from different walks of life. He embraced them in his circle of friends and, like all of his friends, he would call them out of the blue to check on them and to chat. Consistent with John Everett’s caring nature, he volunteered with the Temple Guardians at Burning Man to help those who were dealing with the loss of a loved one, and he was part of

Anonymous Village, a clean and sober camp. In recent years, John Everett's brother, Bob, joined him on the cross-country trip in John Everett's RV.

Most of all, John Everett loved his family, his son, John Everett Williams, II ("J"); his daughter-in-law, Devon; and his granddaughters, Emory and Everly. John Everett, or "Granny" as he was called by his granddaughters, spent as much time with them as possible, including cheering on Emory at softball games, gathering seashells with Everly at the beach, tubing with them at the river, camping out with them in his RV, and sharing ice cream sandwiches.

It is impossible to describe John Everett in a few short pages. He was truly one of a kind, and his contributions to his family, the legal profession, and his community are immeasurable. We mourn his passing, but we celebrate his life and count ourselves blessed to have known him as both a colleague and a friend.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Tennessee Judicial Conference that the foregoing Memorial Resolution in honor of our dearly departed colleague, John Everett Williams, that a copy be furnished to West Publishing Company for publication in Tennessee Decisions, and that copies of this tribute and resolution be furnished to his family.

Respectfully submitted this 17th day of October, 2023.

Camille R. McMullen, Presiding Judge

Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals