



William H. Murphy

April 20, 1917 - May 22, 2003

William H. Murphy, Sr. Fearless Advocate William Hughes Murphy was acutely conscious of his duty to serve the public, to contribute to city of Baltimore and to the legacy of African American people. William Murphy's life was a testament to heroic achievement. He had an unswerving commitment to justice and fairness, to racial and economic equality and to his family. His powerful work ethic combined with unflappable self-confidence propelled him to overcome enormous obstacles that set a lasting example for friends, family members and foes. Judge Murphy was especially determined to mentor and embolden young lawyers, stockbrokers and entrepreneurs by encouraging them to create an optimistic picture of their future, by reinforcing his faith in them and their belief in their own potential. He had little tolerance for whiners and slackers. Whether he was talking to young people he mentored or was presiding over a packed courtroom, Judge Murphy could be both philosophical and pragmatic, both irreverent and distinguished, but always encouraging and enlightening. William H. Murphy was a loving husband and a proud and dedicated father who, along with his wife of 62 years, Madeline Wheeler Murphy, instilled a sense of social responsibility, public service and a commitment excellence in his five children: William H. "Billy" Murphy, Jr. 60 of Baltimore, Madeline Murphy Rabb of Chicago, IL; 58, Arthur Wheeler Murphy, 52 of Baltimore; Houston W. Murphy, 50 of Alexandria, VA; and Laura W. Murphy, 47, of Washington, DC. He was proud of Billy's legal career, Madeline's artistic and entrepreneurial career, Arthur's political and consulting

career, Houston's technology career and Laura's leadership in civil liberties advocacy. He was also very proud of his ten grandchildren because of their education attainment and career paths. He adored his wife and they were partners in all sense of the word. They supported each other's parental decisions, political careers and moral and principled judgments. William Hughes Murphy was born on April 20, 1917, the seventh and last child of George Benjamin Murphy and Grace Hughes Murphy. He grew up in the segregated but relatively affluent neighborhood of Druid Hill Avenue where almost everyone knew his parents and relatives. By the age of ten he had a profitable paper route selling his family's newspaper the Afro American. William "Bill" Murphy was first to admit that his mother, Grace Hughes Murphy, had a profound influence on the choices he made in life. It was she who decided that he would go into law school rather than chose a career working for the Afro, where his father George B. Murphy – a high school principal -- was also treasurer, and where many of his siblings worked. After graduating from racially segregated Douglas High School, his mother convinced him that he could earn a better living by attending Oberlin College and then going to law school. There were significant obstacles to William Murphy's path to a career in law. Flagrant segregation and Jim Crow laws were manifold in Ohio where he attended Oberlin, and were rigidly enforced in Baltimore especially by the University of Maryland Law School. Murphy was only the third black to attend the law school since Reconstruction, but that was only possible because Thurgood Marshall and others filed a lawsuit to gain admission for African Americans. Murphy's completion of law school was interrupted as a result of being drafted into the Army. As a Second Lieutenant he served stateside during most of his military intelligence career, but also served briefly in North Africa. Notwithstanding his service to his country, Murphy returned home to suffer the indignities of lawful racial segregation by not being allowed to eat in restaurants, stay in hotels and being forced to ride the segregated train while traveling home to his family in Baltimore. He was also told, upon his completion of law school in 1946, that he could not join the

Maryland Bar Association, eat lunch or rent prime office space like the white lawyers who practiced law in the city. Thus, in addition to practicing law on Pleasant Street near the downtown area, Murphy had a law office in the basement of his home in Cherry Hill. It was there that he became intimately engaged in seeking justice for the workers who resided in nearby public housing who faced injury and discrimination in the leading industries of Baltimore: ship building, construction, steel fabrication and the like. His client base honed his ability to champion of the needs of the common man. Because William Murphy was self-employed and because he came from maverick and independent lineage, he was more inclined than many African American men of his generation to be outspoken. He had a clear vision of what needed to be done to uplift members of his community and his regal bearing instilled confidence in others. Notwithstanding his diminutive stature, he was not at all easily intimidated. When he confronted racist or bullying behavior, he did not mince words, but rather utilized his mastery of the English language to frequently render speechless the targets of his wrath. This leadership ability combined with an effortless charm and inspiring manner made him an ideal candidate for public office. As a result of his enormous client base and his popularity, William Murphy was able to defeat a sitting judge and get elected to the Maryland District court in 1970. Because of his capacity to see the justice system through the eyes of the downtrodden, Judge Murphy added a much-needed voice to the Maryland judiciary. His colleagues, the lawyers who tried cases before him, the employees of the court system and those who were perpetrator and victim alike marveled at his control of the courtroom. He levied his harshest punishment against wife beaters and drug dealers, and he recognized the problem of racial profiling by the police long before the phrase entered the public lexicon. Judge William H. Murphy, Sr. served on the District Court of Maryland from 1970 until his death on May 22, 2003. During his 32-year tenure -- one of the longest terms ever served by a District Court judge in Maryland history -- Judge Murphy was renowned for his fairness, judicial

temperament, wisdom and compassion. Judge Murphy was one of the few judges to sit in every District Court in the state of Maryland. Because of his demeanor and judgment, the Chief Administrative Judge regularly assigned to him the most sensitive and controversial cases. As soon as the workday was over, you could count on William H. Murphy to head straight home to his beloved wife Madeline and the five children. In fact, you could set your watch by the appointed dinner hour: 6 PM. This was the time at home when the kids learned of the daily war stories of Dad and Mom's life. Whether it was the most recent trial, the sagas as President of the PTA of P.S. 159 elementary school, struggles to establish the Cherry Hill Presbyterian Church, the ups and downs as Chairman of the Board of Provident Hospital, meeting the needs of other black lawyers gleaned from being the President of the Monumental City Bar Association, the financial feats as President of Ideal Savings and Loan or providing the latest news as Treasurer of the Judicial Conference of the National Bar Association -- it was all instructive and sometimes entertaining. Home was where important life lessons were instilled in the children and where oral participation was required, not just tolerated. However, the mood around the dinner table could shift from lighthearted knock-knock jokes to stern lectures depending on the progress the children made toward carefully crafted goals. After 18 each child was required to pay rent, go to college or move out. He believed that parents only had their children for a short period of time and it was the duty of parents to prepare them for independent living. William Murphy imparted his love of classical music, his love of beautiful countryside scenery, his trees and garden and rocks and stones to anyone who would listen. He could wax eloquent about the number of pine trees he planted in his back yard or how long it took him to rebuild the stone wall around the Murphy's Cherry Hill home of 55 years. He leaves behind his wife and children, mentioned above, his sister, Sister Constance of the Order of St. John the Divine in Toronto, Canada, innumerable daughters and sons-in law, 10 grandchildren and their spouses, cousins and five great-grandchildren. This versatile man will be greatly missed by hundreds of people who had the

privilege of knowing him throughout his 86 years in our midst. May he rest in everlasting peace.

Tribute Wall



“ *William H. Murphy*

March 25, 2023 at 10:25 AM



“ *William H. Murphy*

October 13, 2022 at 08:33 AM



“ *I was saddened to hear of Judge Murphy's passing. It was an honor to have met him through the Division of Correction as a Sgt. at the Mitchell Court House. A great man Judge Murphy was, and will be sorely missed. Thank you for this opportunity.##imported-begin##Alvin L. Anthony##imported-end##*

July 02, 2010 at 02:21 PM



“ *"The Judge" made me laugh, and I feel so blessed, to be left with such happy thoughts about him and the things he'd say...##imported-begin##Harriette Lane Matthews##imported-end##*

July 02, 2010 at 02:21 PM



“ *Judge Murphy, Thank you for all you have done for my family over the years. You will be greatly missed.##imported-begin##Gina Lane##imported-end##*

July 02, 2010 at 02:21 PM