

SERVING WITH CHIEF JUSTICE C. EDWIN MOORE

*David Harris**

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch*

Rudyard Kipling

His long shadow is cast across decades of Iowa's judicial history. He presided for lawyers who had practiced during the 19th century—and for those who will practice during the 21st. His long years of public service equipped him well to lead the state's judicial branch of government, and he did so with elegance and a personal flair. Chief Justice Moore was widely heralded for his leadership and was immensely popular. His achievements are legend.

Most memorable, however, for those of us who were privileged to serve with him, was his colorful and powerful personality. He fairly sparkled. Good cheer was his hallmark, as was his genius for making people like and admire him. His was a dominating presence but it was restrained by a kind and friendly manner. His uncanny ability to recall names and details of other persons' affairs disarmed even the most casual visitor.

And visitors came in droves to his statehouse office. Elected state officials, lawyers, disgruntled litigants, judges, school children, high school classmates: none were turned away; all found ready access to his chambers. He seemed delighted to see them because he truly was.

Once a somber, nervous man appeared at the statehouse in work clothes when the chief happened to be in the court's reception room. The visitor's face lit up and 50 years seemed to fall away when he was greeted:

"Hi, Charlie! I haven't seen you since we left East High."

"Hi, Eddie," he greeted the chief. His face grew somber again.

"Oh—I suppose I shouldn't be calling you Eddie anymore. I should say 'chief justice.'"

The chief's arm fell on his shoulder. "Charlie," he said, "if people weren't comfortable calling me 'Eddie,' no one would be calling me 'chief justice.'"

Although obviously a man of strong—even iron—will, the chief was even more noted for his gentle thoughtfulness. He was decisive and lightning fast in the decision making process. Working with and near him was always a special pleasure because his forceful nature was coupled with a highly cultivated sense of humor. The "Moore" court took its heavy respon-

* Associate Justice, Iowa Supreme Court.

sibilities in dead earnest, but we had a rollicking good time doing so.

Few persons of weak will are appointed to an appellate court. Our own group, like most appellate courts, was made up of persons with strong feelings about their efforts. "We are all *prima donnas*, Dave," he told me once, "me included." Shepherding such a group called for extreme patience, infinite tact, and great talent. I have always thought the chief's efforts and abilities in this regard were his most impressive.

A chief is also an associate justice. Chief Justice Moore shared a regular rotation in opinion assignments and voted as a regular court member on the opinions authored by others. During the opinion conference he filled a dual role, presiding as our impartial chief and participating in often heated debate as a regular court member. We marveled at his ability to separate these two conflicting roles. Guided by some sixth sense, he never intruded as chief while participating in debate. Indeed he was often the peace maker, soothing ruffled feathers, mending hurts, and constantly but discreetly urging the agenda forward.

So doing, he took full advantage of his straightforward, self-made demeanor. He often dropped references to his boyhood, spent in a working class family in Des Moines. Writing his own biography, when authoring an update of the supreme court's book on its justices, he was careful to mention that he was the second Des Moines resident appointed to the court. He was particularly proud of the fact that he continued to live in *east* Des Moines and would emphasize the *east* whenever, as he often did, he mentioned it. He exhibited the same fierce pride whenever he mentioned his much loved Drake Law School.

The chief was very much in touch with his roots and displayed them effectively, also with a smiling pride. The technique was to suggest, without saying so, that he was a guileless boy who had worked, rather than dazzled, his way into his position and would therefore need a careful explanation. His comments tended less to sophistication than to common sense. The inexperienced might be tempted to take him by the hand and lead him. Then the trap was sprung. The result could be devastating and was almost inevitably to his advantage.

During his tenure as chief our court developed a tradition of social activity during the evening following the monthly opinion conference day. Spouses attended and participated and the battles of the day faded into a proper perspective. The chief relished these gatherings and participated with zeal and his usual flair. He was much cherished by the extended court family. During these gatherings he persisted with his *east* Des Moines connection, endearing himself and his people to an ever increasing circle.

During his long career he became acquainted with most of Iowa's prominent lawyers and judges. Many were his close friends. He brought our history alive by spinning anecdotes about the judges and lawyers he had known. Because of his own profound impact on Iowa courts and Iowa law, it was apparent to us that his own name would one day be added to the list of

those who will be mentioned among our past giants. If he sensed this high place in our future he never showed it, though he did seem to enjoy court traditions and protocol. I always believed this enjoyment did not stem from personal aggrandizement, but from a genuine love for and pride in our court as an institution.

Future students of Iowa legal history will find much evidence of C. Edwin Moore. They may come to inquire into the nature of his great personality. To them and to all let it be known that he was indeed a great man. He was great because he was so human, so strong, so at peace with himself and his mission in life. He taxed his considerable abilities to their limits and left an enduring monument to himself and, thereby, to the people from whom he was so proud to have sprung. To have been his associate and friend was one of my life's greatest treasures.

