

## Judge Thomas G. West<sup>1</sup>

Judge Thomas G. West of Danbury passed away on Friday, July 26, 2019. He was the husband of Mary Alves West. Judge West was a native of Danbury and the son of the late George and Elizabeth Roah West. He came from two old Connecticut families. The Wests were from Danbury. On his mother's side, he was descended from an old New London family that harkened back to New London when it was a whaling port. He is survived by his three sons, Joseph, Thomas, Jr., and Michael, their spouses and seven grandchildren, Johnell, Zane, Michaela, Jordan, Zachary, Elijah and Ava.

Judge West attended Danbury public schools, graduated from Western Connecticut State College, and earned his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Connecticut School of Law. A common thread throughout his educational achievements was hard work, both academically and in the workplace, where his labor financed the cost. In the days before Pell grants, college loans, and tuition assistance, Tom West paid his way, and, in the process of doing that, became an excellent carpenter and machinist, before his admission to the Connecticut Bar.

He was nominated to the Superior Court in 1984 by Governor William A. O'Neill and to the Appellate Court in 2002 by Governor John G. Rowland. Both governors left a common legacy of appointments to our courts of men and women who were part of their communities and blessed with wide experience, and Judge West is a part of that legacy.

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Judge West worked as a legal aid lawyer for the Norwalk, Stamford, and Danbury regional legal services. He entered private

---

<sup>1</sup>Remembrance by former Chief Judge Joseph P. Flynn

practice in Danbury and became a partner in the law firm of Ventura, Ventura & West, P.C. He served as an assistant corporation counsel for his city, Danbury.

Judge West was involved with his community. He served on the board of the Northern Fairfield County United Way and on a committee of Danbury Hospital's board of directors. He served on the boards of the Camp Fire Girls, Inc., and the Danbury branch of the NAACP. He was honored with an achievement award from the NAACP and as alumnus of the year by Western Connecticut State University. The city of Danbury named one of its parks the Tom West Park.

As a judge, Tom West dealt daily with what John Greenleaf Whittier once described as the doubtful balance of rights and wrongs, serving in the courts of Fairfield County and Waterbury, as well as at the Appellate Court in Hartford. He brought insight, common sense, and fairness to the cases on which he sat.

We remember his human qualities, his ready wit, the piano player, the juggler, the smile that lit up life around him, and the good friend.

Judge West served honorably in the United States Army. Several years ago, while sitting on an appellate panel hearing cases "on the road" at Ansonia High School, he recalled his army service while addressing the students. He was one of a handful of soldiers in the United States who had excelled on an examination and was sent to a special school in the South with military transportation. He was the only person of color among the soldiers heading to the school. When the soldiers would stop at mealtimes on their way, restaurants refused to serve him. He described going to the kitchen door to get something to take away to eat. One cannot forget such indignities. However, Judge West made the point that, although they should not be forgotten, they should not

be permitted to overwhelm a man. He encouraged those students in attendance to avoid bitterness and to arm themselves with education and skills because there were great opportunities awaiting them in this country.

South African President Nelson Mandela and our own Judge John T. Downey suffered the injustice of long imprisonment, and both had memorized William Ernest Henley's poem, "Invictus," which took them through long days. Judge West was one of those unconquerable souls in Henley's verse, and he is best remembered in the quatrain:

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.