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One in a series of
 Legends of the KBA

ROBERT W. RITCHIE, ESQ.

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When I was asked to write an article about Bob Ritchie for the KBA's "Legend" series, I was excited about the opportunity to share my thoughts about this remarkable individual, but also somewhat apprehensive, because many of us think of a legend as a story that's mostly myth – King Arthur, Robin Hood, etc. But the word "legend" has many definitions. So in writing about Bob as a "legend of the KBA," I selected the dictionary definition of "someone who many people know about and admire for a skill or talent." Bob's skills undoubtedly met that part of the definition. Having had the unenviable task of trying several cases against him when I was a prosecutor, and then the privilege of trying several with him when we were partners, I can attest to his tireless preparation, technical perfection, and superb trial advocacy. By all accounts, Bob Ritchie qualified as "someone admired for a skill," a skill few could ever achieve. Another true legend, Bobby Lee Cook, said that in his fifty years of practice, he had never known a finer lawyer than Bob.

But it's the "talent" part of Bob's legend status that we not only can admire, but also can and should strive to achieve. Bob's great *talent* was equally, if not more important, to him than his extraordinary *skill*. This talent was his seemingly limitless ability to love. He loved the law and he loved to fight the good fight, but more importantly he loved being a lawyer for all the right reasons. He loved the opportunity to rebuild broken lives. He believed his clients, regardless of the seriousness of the charges against them, were human beings entitled to compassion, understanding, and his best efforts.

His love of people didn't stop with family and friends. Walking down the street, Bob would greet strangers as well as acquaintances. Out of town, he would carry on conversations with hotel clerks, bellmen, taxi drivers, court security officers, and anyone else he ran into. This was

especially true at restaurants. No matter what restaurant (including of course every *Cracker Barrel* in a twelve state area), no matter the meal or time of day, Bob would introduce the waiter or waitress to everyone sitting at the table with him and carry on a conversation like they were old friends. This was not an affectation – Bob really cared. Once I was in St. Louis with him for a hearing. Bob had tried a couple of lengthy cases there several years before, but had not been back since. When he and I went to lunch at a downtown restaurant, one of the waitresses spied Bob and came rushing over to say, "Why hello, Mr. Ritchie, it's so good to see you again – how have you been?"

Bob's love of people also didn't disappear when he stepped into the courtroom. In fact, that's where it shined. In spite of being a fearless and aggressive trial lawyer, he was nevertheless a gentleman. He firmly believed, and preached to those in the practice, that civility and professionalism were the hallmarks of a good lawyer. As his friend and oft-time adversary District Attorney Randy Nichols said, "Bob has lectured on civility among lawyers and leads by example in his courtroom conduct. His work has made this a better bar and a wonderful place to practice our profession."

Bob received the Sixth Circuit Professionalism Award shortly before his death. In his letter supporting the nomination, Tennessee Supreme Court Justice William Koch noted three things that illustrated Bob's commitment to excellence, civility, and professionalism: "First, Bob is known as one of the "go to" criminal defense lawyers in Tennessee, and he has earned that reputation not by flashy or gaudy antics, but rather by solid work and attention to detail. Second, Bob is widely respected by his peers, so much so that the highest service award offered by the Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers was named in his honor. Third, notwithstanding his busy schedule, Bob always found time to **teach and mentor other lawyers as a law school teacher, legal educator, and writer.** In 1999, his article entitled *Civility in the Practice of Law: Must We Be 'Rambos' to be Effective?* was selected as the best article that appeared in the Tennessee Bar Journal in 1998."

Bob Ritchie would want us to promote and employ the highest ideals of the legal profession. In so doing, we will preserve his legend. This sentiment was echoed by veteran prosecutor and former U.S. Attorney Russ Dedrick: "I think a fitting tribute to Bob's life and career would be a commitment by all of us at the Bar to dedicate ourselves to the finest traditions of practice with our adversaries before the Bar. Even in the straits of a knockdown trial or during the most tense and aggravated of situations, we should always remember that Bob would have cared to call us by our full formal name, shake our hands, and inquire about our well-being. If we do that, I am sure Robert W. Ritchie will be our friend for life as we demonstrate our commitment to civility with each other. This is the Bob I knew and will forever remember as a friend."

Well said, Russ – that's what this "Legend of the KBA" was all about.

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