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In Memoriam

Monroe L. Inker: 1925–2006

SANFORD N. KATZ*

When Monroe Inker died suddenly on April 15, 2006, not only did Massachusetts lose its most distinguished family-law practitioner, but the nation lost a major trial lawyer. Called “the father of Massachusetts family law,” Monroe was responsible for convincing the state’s legislators to bring the state’s divorce laws in conformity with the basic principles of the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act. Through his practice, he witnessed first-hand the inequities that the old divorce law had imposed on women and he tried to right the balance. Because of his concern for providing divorcing women with a fair shake, he became known as a “woman’s lawyer.” Although the label had some merit, it tended to cloud the fact that he was truly interested in protecting the rights of all participants in a divorce. He had a special affection for children. To him, children of divorce were more vulnerable than women and needed special protection.

Monroe’s concern for the vulnerable in the divorce process was an outgrowth of his concern for the downtrodden in society. For years before he became famous as a divorce lawyer, Monroe represented defendants in criminal cases (by court appointment), who could not afford to pay private attorneys. Because of his reputation as a first-rate trial lawyer, he was sought after by more affluent clients who could pay and the fees he secured from those defendants helped to support his pro bono work. It was during the years that he handled criminal cases that he sharpened his litigation skills and became a master of the rules of evidence. Few lawyers could match Monroe’s skill during a cross-examination, and it was for

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that reason that he was called upon to teach classes on cross-examination both locally and nationally.

Monroe loved the law and he loved being in court. He trusted the adversary system. He was always searching for a new argument, often challenging traditional doctrine. He studied literature, read novels and poetry, not only for his own pleasure, but also for finding a passage, a phrase, or a line from a poem that he might quote in an opening or closing statement. Often he would say that he wanted to try a case before a knowledgeable judge and face a lawyer who knew the rules of procedure and evidence. Otherwise, he felt that the adversary system couldn't work, and justice for the litigants was in jeopardy. Because of his concern for raising the level of family law practice, he often helped young lawyers by being available to answer practical questions (such as how one got a certain matter into evidence) often in the corridors of the courthouse. He gave of his time to continuing legal education programs both in Massachusetts and in various American Bar Association programs throughout the country. For the past quarter of a century, Monroe was active in the American Bar Association Section of Family Law, serving on a number of committees and as a member of the Board of Editors of this *Quarterly*.

Monroe's love for teaching was realized when he taught at Harvard Law School, Boston College Law School, Boston University Law School, and Suffolk University Law School. He taught conflict of laws, equity, evidence, trial practice, and special seminars on child custody. More than a decade ago, he designed a special course on evidence and trial practice at Boston College Law School that is still taught today.

Monroe was not only generous with his time to young lawyers, in terms of teaching trial tactics, but he was generous in his support for young lawyers whatever their gender or color. His law firm was the first Boston firm of its size to hire African American lawyers such as now Federal District Court Judge David Nelson and former Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Rudolph Pierce. Monroe had the uncanny ability to discover real talent. A number of lawyers who now sit or have sat on various Massachusetts courts—juvenile court, district court, superior court, appeals court, and the supreme judicial court—owe their careers to Monroe Inker.

Monroe was born on July 5, 1925, in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were hard working, and Monroe and his sister grew up knowing the difficulty of living from one paycheck to another. Yet, Monroe was blessed with extraordinary intelligence, which earned him a place in the famous Townsend-Harris High School, which was one of New York's public high schools for gifted boys. He went on to study first at City College and then at Brooklyn College where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1948.

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He then attended Harvard Law School, where he earned his LL.B. in 1951. He returned to Harvard Law School as a Teaching Fellow and received his LL.M. in 1954.

Like so many talented Jewish graduates of Ivy League law schools, Monroe had a hard time securing a job with a law firm. But the rejections he received prompted him to begin his own practice, which flourished and quickly gained a reputation for doing excellent work. The law firm's name changed from Crane, Inker & Oteri to White, Inker & Aronson as the partnership roster changed. In September 2005, White, Inker & Aronson closed its doors and Monroe, at age 80, began a new association with another Boston law firm. But death took Monroe only eight months later.

Monroe Inker was an extraordinary person who had many gifts that made him a superb lawyer. I learned a great deal about the practice of family law from him. I can think of no one who was more loyal, more generous, more thoughtful, and more supportive than he was to me. He was the definition of a true friend.