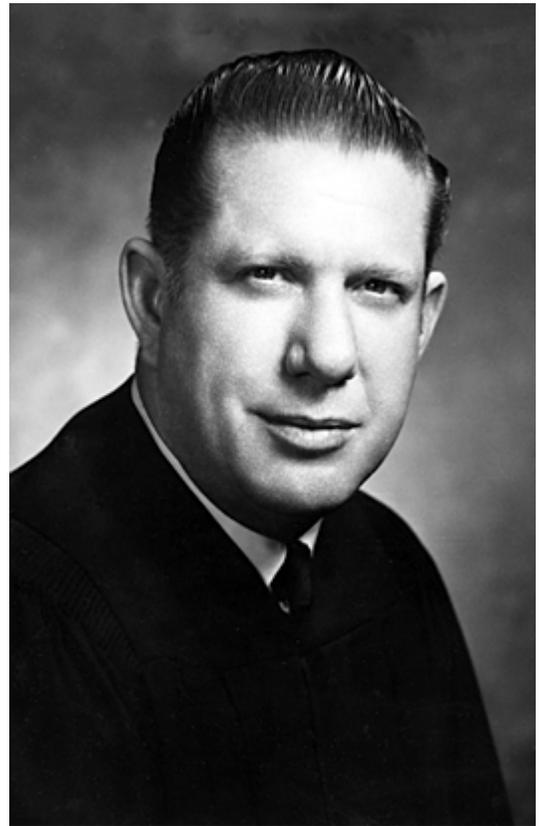


WOODIE ANDREW LILES
(1922-1983)

ONWARD AND UPWARD AFTER TURKEY
CREEK TO GENUINE LEADERSHIP
IN LAW AND IN LIFE

This is a story of eternal truths and verities (to borrow a phrase famously created by William Faulkner) about a remarkable personality, a not-so-common man.

The life story of Woodie Andrew Liles (he ordinarily used only his middle initial) would make a fine, warmhearted motion picture. It contains many of the elements of *"It's a Wonderful Life"* released in 1946. It featured inimitable Jimmy Stewart and was directed by the great Frank Capra. It combined a hero who worked hard all his life, endured exposure to danger and devoted his life to real public service helping others directly or indirectly.



There was never a question in the minds of Woodie Liles' family and close friends that he was destined to succeed wherever his desire and ambition took him. As his life unfolded, it turned out that he was preeminently a winner not only in law when he became an appeals court judge but also in politics and government when, during his service as a state legislator from 1958 to 1965, he was voted one of the ten outstanding legislators.

It is not likely that anyone reading about the former judge, Woodie Liles, will know the answer to the question, "*Who in the world was Walter Bagehot (1826-1877)?*" This scribe certainly had never heard of him. He was an economist/critic famed for his lucid, highly readable works on political economy, history and literature. His 1867 work entitled *The English Constitution* is considered a classic in its field. For the benefit of his contemporaries and also for history, he defined a constitutional statesman as a man of common opinions and uncommon abilities. Like a well-tailored suit of clothes, that definition seems to be a comfortable fit for Judge Liles.

He was born on March 19, 1922 either in Andalusia or Red Level, Alabama, depending upon which account of his birth is being relied upon. The press release announcing his candidacy for a vacancy on the Florida Supreme Court in 1968 to succeed Chief Justice Millard Caldwell inaccurately reported that he was a native of Plant City.

We might never have seen nor heard of Woodie Liles had his father, a sharecropper farmer, not migrated to Hopewell, Florida, with his family, where he leased an 80-acre strawberry farm. That move led Woodie to spend the rest of his abbreviated

lifetime in Florida pursuing his combined careers of politics, government and law with zest and due diligence.

He was interviewed following his appointment to the 2nd District Court of Appeals in 1965. He noted that his father had lost everything of tangible value that he owned during the depression years and that he was introduced at an early age to a hard-scrabble life on the farm. He was obliged to work hard even though he admittedly did not care much for farming. *“When I was real little,”* he says, *“I became interested in becoming a lawyer.”* Woodie had to miss some early schoolwork in order to help during the berry harvest. Because the farmers market was across the street from the Plant City branch of the County Courthouse, he was often seen observing lawyers at work.

His early education took place at Hopewell Elementary and Turkey Creek High. All the while, he was obliged to do chores on the farm and engage in other odd jobs to help the family financially. Nothing could deter him from pursuit of his early ambition to attend college and follow a legal career.

He received his elementary education at Hopewell Elementary and graduated from Turkey Creek High School. Higher education was put on hold when he was inducted in the U.S. Army during the height of the Second World War. His life was dramatically changed when he received a devastating injury to his right leg during combat while he was serving in Europe. As he later described it:

“I was an infantry sergeant in the Fourth Division and we were in Germany approaching the Rhine River. Early one morning I took a patrol out to reconnoiter the area ahead. Just at daylight, the Germans opened up with mortars and two of us got hit. I was wounded in the right leg. I never did know what happened to the other fellow. I tried to take the patrol back but our position was overrun. I put a white flag on my rifle and didn’t move.”

His right leg was permanently impaired. He was transported to an aid station, the closest thing to a hospital in the area, and after 19 operations the doctors managed to salvage his shattered leg. We are told that he was bedridden for 31 months. During that time, he kept busy by reading, taking correspondence courses and charting his future. He remained determined that his injury would not prevent him from moving on with his education and his life.

The circumstance of Woodie’s meeting for the first time with his future wife, Helen, happened in real life, but the facts would make a good soap opera script. Helen Ann Pasquarelli was a member of the WAC Medical Corps having enlisted in February, 1945. She was trained at Fort Oglethorpe, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She was a medical and surgical tech whose duties took her first to Daniel Field Hospital and then to Oliver General, both in Augusta, Georgia. She met her future husband at the latter facility. She relates: *“He was one of 35 patients in the ward. He had spent time in hospitals in France and England before being shipped back to the states. Although he and I never talked about how he was injured, and about all I learned about it was that it occurred during*

the Battle of the Bulge in Hertigan Forest in Germany. At the time of his severe wounds from mortar shrapnel, Woodie was a Tech Sgt. assigned to company F 22nd Infantry, U.S. Army. His decorations included a Purple Heart, Bronze Service Start and Combat Infantry Badge.” At the time of his discharge from the U.S. Army, he was a Master Sergeant. That was in August, 1947.

Helen continues: *“We married at Oliver General Hospital on June 23, 1946. He was a patient there until August 1947. He spent over 3 years in hospitals while still in service and numerous times as a civilian as a direct result of his wound.”* Helen tended to make light of her own awards but she received an American Service Medal, WWII Victory Medal and also a Good Conduct Medal.

After Winston Churchill’s premature birth in 1874, his ambitions developed early in life. As a result, he was described in newspapers of the day as a *“young man in a hurry.”* In many respects, Judge Liles’ post-war life emulated that of Britain’s remarkable Prime Minister. In one of his interviews given early in his political life, Liles put it this way: *“College was always my goal. I had made up my mind when I was still little that somehow I would go to college and become a lawyer. I never listened to anyone who didn’t share my ambition and it never occurred to me that it couldn’t be done.”*

Anyone having any familiarity with the limited financial resources of the Liles family might well ask the question: How could Woodie have afforded to attend a college and pay all the costs and expenses associated with it? The answer was the G.I. Bill, beneficial legislation that enabled WWII veterans like this scribe, his contemporary, to acquire education consistent with their hopes and dreams. Woodie’s wife, Helen, also entered college and majored in education. Woodie and Helen took up residence in FlaVet Village, a facility in Gainesville for veterans and families.

At the time of his discharge from the U.S. Army, he was a Master Sergeant. That was in August, 1947. At Gainesville, Liles compiled an impressive record as a campus leader. Along with other G.I. families, the Liles couple became actively involved in college life and ultimately, the ex-farm boy, ex-clerk, ex-welder and ex-soldier was elected student body vice-president. After he became a senior classman he was chosen President of the Student Body, member of the Florida Blue Key Leadership Fraternity and member of the University Hall of Fame. Other significant activities included: Membership in Phi Delta Phi scholastic legal fraternity, debating team, Chairman of various political organizations and Kappa Alpha Social Fraternity.

Upon receiving his law degree in early 1953, essentially the first major step taken by him to reach his longtime goal of becoming a lawyer, he was admitted to practice in Florida. This writer graduated from the same law school as Liles but five years earlier. At the later time, admission to the Florida Bar was not dependent upon successful completion of the Bar examination; those of us of that era had only to meet the good moral character requirement. It was called the *“diploma privilege.”*

During his tenure at the University of Florida, Woodie formed a solid friendship, despite the fact that they were politically on opposing sides, with Leon Handley of Orlando. Although not going at full speed, Handley still has an office with a firm and is still practicing law.

Handley tells us something of interest about his nexus with Woodie Liles:

“I met Woodie Liles at the University of Florida. He was in the opposing political party and a very active campus politician.

C.J. Hardee, of Tampa, John Crews (later circuit court judge in Gainesville), Paul Rogers (later member of Congress), Mallory Horne (later Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Florida Senate) were on my side. All of us were friends of Woodie’s, though he was a leader of the opposition. (All but Rogers and Mallory are now deceased.

Throughout his life, his injured leg was a continuing problem. It must have been extremely bothersome but I never heard him complain—not once.

Woodie practiced law for a while here in Orlando with the firm of Sanders, McEwen. Turkey Creek, or Hopewell, or Plant City, or Hillsborough County had too great a pull for him to stay away for very long. Back he went and into politics in a big way. While in the Florida House, Richard Kelly, then a circuit judge in Pasco County, came before the House in an impeachment matter. The charge was, as I remember, essentially, abuse of lawyers who came before him. The House voted narrowly not to impeach. After the vote, Woodie was walking down the hall only to hear Judge Kelly tell the press that the lawyers who complained had seen nothing yet, but wait till he got back! Woodie went into the House, moved to reconsider, and the judge was impeached. (That is my recall, but many great stories are ruined by eyewitnesses.) Judge Kelly later became known for saying ‘does it show’ referring to cash money.

Woodie was truly humble, not modest, not shy, not meek—just truly humble. He genuinely liked people and was basically kind and thoughtful. Many men I have known with disability seemed to feel the rules did not apply to them because of their disability. I never saw the slightest bit of a feeling in Woodie that he was entitled to any advantage because of his leg.

I liked him—he liked me. I used to feel I had a special place with Woodie but eventually I felt that Woodie liked everybody. Everyone had a special place in his life. He truly was a public servant.”

After Woodie returned to the friendly confines of East Hillsborough County, he became associated with two-well-respected lawyers, also Gators, and a few years his junior. They were Bob Edwards and Larry Goodrich but later opened a satellite office in Tampa. The triumvirate evidently did well during the decade of its existence, to-wit: 1955-1965.

Only a few years out of law school and with the drive and ambition of youth, Liles first ventured seriously into state politics in 1958 when he announced his candidacy for state representative, Group 1, in Hillsborough County. He was opposed by a popular lawyer, Paul S. Buchanan of Plant City, now deceased. While not relevant to the purpose of this account of Judge Liles' career, it happened that Buchanan was in the graduating class at University of Florida College of Law in 1948 with this scribe. Liles defeated Buchanan by a comfortable vote margin of 30,376 to 18,464. It was the start of a prolific career in government for Woodie Liles. His former law partner relates that Liles was a master at the art of meeting people generally and readily making friends with them. Woodie was what is commonly known as a people-person, sort of an equal opportunity outgoing personality. As someone else who knew him has said: "*Woodie never met a stranger.*"

By his hard work and public persona, Liles made a name for himself during his several terms in the House. He chaired the Legislative Interim Committee on Mental Health and Retardation. The work of that important committee provided the foundation for allowing Florida to have one of the most advanced programs in the United States. He was a member of the Legislative Council and continuous member of the House Appropriations Committee. In addition to his frenetic work in the legislature, he served as President of Florida Young Democrats. He was also in many civic, fraternal and veterans organizations in his community and state; Member of the Hillsborough County and American Bar Associations.

In 1962, Woodie was unopposed and reelected to the House in his district. In 1964, he had two non-lawyer opponents but neither was a match for his appeal to the voters and he retained his seat handily.

During a Tuesday lunch gathering of retired judges in Tampa recently, the subject of lawyers as legislators came up for some reason. Senior Judge Ralph Steinberg, a sincere and hardworking jurist who still serves to conduct trials in Hillsborough County as well as other neighboring counties, noted that in bygone years lawyers were in profuse number in both the upper and lower chambers of the Florida legislature, but now that number is clearly diminishing.

It was during the truncated administration of Governor Haydon Burns of Jacksonville (1965-97) that Woodie's personal and political fortunes significantly improved. A vacancy on the 2nd District Court of Appeals occurred in 1965 when Judge Jack F. White, an honored member of such court, died. Liles was offered the appointment and no doubt accepted with alacrity. He served with distinction and in early 1967 was chosen Chief Judge, evidently at 43 the youngest judge ever chosen to preside over the Lakeland tribunal. He resigned from the Court in 1973 and served as Hillsborough County Attorney and later with the Public Service Commission.

He might have remained on the 2nd District court indefinitely had not a vacancy been created on the Supreme Court of Florida in 1968 when Chief Justice Millard Caldwell took retirement. Also attracted by the opportunity for service on the highest

rung of the judicial ladder was Circuit Judge James C. Adkins Jr. of Gainesville. It was a close contest. Many people like Tampa lawyer, A. Dallas Albritton, Jr. thought he was well known throughout the state, had appellate court credentials and could win the seat. The *Tampa Times* newspaper endorsed him (Liles) stating that Liles experience in writing appellate decisions and his proved ability entitled him to its endorsement. Despite the positives regarding Liles' candidacy, he was defeated by Adkins, who like Liles is now deceased. The loss at the polls aforesaid is believed to be the only blemish on Judge Liles' otherwise untarnished record of success at the polls.

This reporter would be inexcusably remiss to not include in this account of Judge Liles career reference to those who have been outspoken in their praise of Woodie Liles' capacity for hard work, diligence and commitment to the highest standards of justice and fairness in both his personal and professional life. Former Supreme Court Justice Fred Karl tells about his long friendship with Woodie Liles:

"I held Woodie in high esteem and counted him among my good friends.

First about our relationship: We met in Tallahassee when we were both young men and while we were serving in the Florida House of Representatives. I believe it was 1958 or 1959. We liked one another and soon discovered we had a lot in common. We were veterans of World War II and we fought in Europe—at times we were very close geographically although neither of us knew we would someday meet. Both of us were wounded around the same time and ultimately treated after the war at Oliver General Hospital in Augusta, Georgia. We spent some interesting time together pondering the similarity of our experience.

The same continued until his death. Both attended Law School under the G.I. Bill of Rights. We served in the House together and our voting records were very much alike. We each served as County Attorney of Hillsborough County and as you know, we were both judges, he on the 2nd District and I on the Supreme Court. I was Florida's first Public Counsel and I persuaded him to take my place when I was ready to leave the position. Finally, we both moved to Tallahassee and practiced law there in close proximity. His death ended that pattern and it was a terrible blow.

We spent many hours together talking about the past, as I mentioned, but we also spent some quality time pondering the future. He was one of my strongest supporters when I ran for governor in 1964 and I helped him in every way I could in his various endeavors. We dreamed together about better government in Florida. We tried to make those dreams come true.

On a personal note, I found him to be trustworthy, loyal and empathetic. He cared about his fellow man and was willing to sacrifice his own opportunities for peaceful relaxation to work for worthy causes of folks in need. He was strong and determined. I sensed his war wounds caused him much pain, but he seldom complained. He was brave and courageous. While serving as Chief Judge he had to discipline one of his colleagues who

was also a friend. It took courage to do it. He would take a stand on any subject he cared about with regard to the adverse consequences. He was a decent human being.

One more experience we both had which helped determine what our political lives would be was the way our respective law firms treated us. At critical times, our political lives were altered by law partners who wanted us out of politics. Since neither of us made personal wealth a priority, we were vulnerable to their determination. In my case it prevented me from being Senate President. I never knew the consequences of Woodie's firm's actions but it was serious, because I saw the personal grief it caused."

T. Terrell Sessums, Esq. was for years a commanding figure in the halls of the legislature in Tallahassee. He was also a friend and admirer of Woodie Liles. He tells us a lot about under what circumstances he knew him:

"In the Spring of 1959, I took a leave of absence to serve as Legislative Assistant for a new state Senator, Sam Gibbons, and once again had an opportunity to know and work with Woodie Liles who, together with the late Robert T. Mann and the late Tom Whittaker, were the three (3) House members from Hillsborough County. I served in the same capacity again at the 1961 Session, when the legislature met every other year, and although I worked for Sam, I enjoyed the opportunity to observe and occasionally assist the members of the Hillsborough County House delegation.

Then, when the first wave of Legislative reapportionment added three (3) additional Florida House seats to Hillsborough County in the spring of 1963, I ran for and was elected as a State Representative from Hillsborough County just in time for the 1963 Legislative Session where I joined Woodie, Bob Mann, Louis De La Parte, Ray Knopke and Rene A. Zacchini. Sam Gibbons had been elected to Congress in 1962 and Tom Whittaker had succeeded him as our State Senator. Bob Mann had been an unsuccessful candidate for the Congressional seat Sam won, so Bob ran for the Florida House again in the same 1963 Special Election and was reelected to the house in the same election as Ray Knopke and me.

As one of six members of the Hillsborough County House delegation in the Legislature, I worked closely with Woodie and other members of the delegation. When offices were first provided to members of the House in an adjacent office building, Woodie and I shared a small office that had two small desks, two desk chairs and room for only one seat. Woodie, as an experienced legislator, always managed to slip out of House Sessions for a few minutes before adjournment and get to our office to start dictating to his secretary or meeting with someone before I could get there. Consequently, I was relegated to using my desk on the House floor and did not enjoy the luxury of a private office until more adequate provisions were subsequently provided for Legislative offices.

In observing the members of our delegation, Bob Mann was the member most often involved in floor debates usually calling the House's attention to bad bills or Amendments, which he could frequently cause to be defeated. Woodie was more laid back and a calm, astute observer of the House and its members. Consequently, I found Woodie

and former state Representative, Ralph Turlington, from Alachua County who sat nearby, to be the best source of political information and advice concerning the House and its members. Woodie was adept at building consensus and developing coalitions to secure the passage of legislation, including that of particular interest to Hillsborough County, although Woodie seldom rose to speak.

If we had been members of a football team, Woodie Liles would have been the quarterback of the offensive team and Bob Mann the captain of the defensive team. Between the two of them, those of us who were newer members of the Legislature were able to pick our way to serve the public.

In short, I always found Woodie to be an able and honorable person, who was open and accessible, a keen observer of his fellow legislators and the legislative process and helpful to others in a variety of worthy causes. Woodie was a doer and enjoyed the respect and friendship of his colleagues.”

Judge Liles was fortunate to have a few unusually distinguished attorneys as Research Aides (formerly called Law Clerks) during his tenure on the District Court. One of them is now retired Circuit Judge Stephen L. Dakan of Sarasota, whose most pleasant recollection about Woodie was the latter’s capacity to relate entertaining stories about Liles’ experiences in the legislature. He also recalls that the grim story about his serious combat wounds in Europe. Judge Dakan has a vivid memory of Woodie Liles saying that he hoped no one would have to go to war again.

Current District Court of Appeal Judge David A. Monaco (5th Dist) provided the following comments about his period of service with Judge Liles.

“When I graduated from the University of Florida College of Law in March of 1966, I went to work for Judge Liles at the Second District Court of Appeal as a research assistant. I was in a bit of a pickle at the time because I was going to enter the Judge Advocate General Corps of the United States Navy in October of 1966, and I needed a job during the interim to support my wife, who at the time was expecting our first child. Prof. Mandy Glicksburg, who taught at the University of Florida, knew that Judge Liles had just lost a law clerk and was in sharp need of an interim person. He recommended that Judge Liles contact me, he did, and I soon went to work for him in Lakeland. My tenure ended six months later in October when I entered the Navy.

It was a wonderful time in my life. Judge Liles was a bright and engaging person, and easy to get along with. Mr. Patterson is correct: Judge Liles did not enjoy research. He did, however, have an extraordinary sense of right and wrong. It was perhaps his strongest judicial asset. He taught me, and I am sure the rest of his clerks, that doing what was right was always the most important thing. I guess this is a long way of saying that he enjoyed a large measure of horse sense.

I did clerk for Judge Liles during the consideration of the Coppolino case, although it was published a month or so after I left the court. As you can imagine, it drew a great

deal of media attention. I recall it being argued by F. Lee Bailey on one side and George Georgieff, Assistant Attorney General, on the other. Frankly, Mr. Georgieff did a far superior job, and his views eventually prevailed.

I remember, as well, that Margaret Goss was his judicial assistant. She was a remarkably kind and gentle person and went out of her way to assure that everyone felt at ease. I was saddened to learn from Mr. Patterson of her death.

Something not mentioned in Mr. Patterson's letter, was the fact that Judge Liles had run for a seat on the Florida Supreme Court. Under the old constitution, I believe that the seat was elective. He ran a year or so before I first met him. The main thing I remember about that episode was that he had a running battle with American Express over some credit card charges that he was disputing. I think I can safely say that he had no great affection for that organization. The only time I ever saw him angry, in fact, was when he was fuming about those charges. I don't know how the issue was resolved but I can tell you he was not about to back down.

You have compelled me to take a pleasant walk through my memories of an exceptional judge. I count it a great privilege to have worked for him."

John Patterson, partner in a busy Sarasota firm, writes about his experience with Judge Liles. Some editing was necessary due to the length of his response:

"I was recommended to Judge Liles as a research aide by Prof. Mandall Glicksburg at the University of Florida Law School. I met with Judge Liles in the Spring of 1969 for an interview and we got along well from the beginning. I accepted the offer and took the position in June of 1969.

The court was relatively small then. There were five judges: judge Robert T. Mann; Judge Liles; Judge Joseph P. McNulty; and Judge T. Frank Hobson Jr. Research Assistants or aides, as we were called then, include David Mulock (Judge Mann), and Bill Haddad and Wally Pope (Judge McNulty). David became a partner in Carlton, Fields until his retirement. Wally started with the Trenam firm and was one of the founders of Johnson, Pope, Bokor, Ruppel & Burns, LLP in Clearwater. Bill became the clerk of the Second District and served for many years. We all are friends to this day.

As I recall, John was Judge Lile's aide when one of F. Lee Bailey's more famous cases involving a doctor who allegedly poisoned his wife made its way to the Second District Court of Appeal. The case is Coppolino V. State, 223 So. 2d 68 (2d DCA Fla. 1968). This may well have been the most widely publicized case in which Judge Liles authored the opinion of the court. I remember boxes of documents on the case residing in John's office when I first came aboard. The case was the subject of a book by noted Sarasota author John D. MacDonald titled "No Deadly Drug." David A. Monaco, who is now a judge on the Fifth District Court of Appeal, was also a research assistant for Judge Liles before me and I think before John McDermott. He may have also worked on the Coppolino case.

As I worked at the court and got to know Judge Liles better, I learned something of his background. Margaret Goss, who was his secretary and invaluable assistant on the court and elsewhere, grew up with Judge Liles. Margaret was a fabulous person and sadly is no longer alive.

Judge Liles took his position on the court seriously. He was always prepared and enjoyed discussing and debating issues before the court. He was very accessible to his aides and other judges. He did not particularly enjoy the time-consuming research involved in complex issues and relied on his assistants to prepare summaries and direct him to key issues and key authority. He had excellent judgment and knew many of the leading figures of the time in law, business and politics. He did not make decisions in a vacuum and looked towards the practical result both on the litigants and the precedent a case would establish.

There was some discussion at the court during 1970 that Judge Liles was on one of the lists of political enemies of the Nixon administration. I never tried to confirm this. Judge Liles' politics were progressive, but hardly radical. If he was on such a list, it was a sign of the paranoia of the Nixon administration.

I do not recall how the request originated, but Judge Liles was asked to submit an article to The University of Florida Law Review on prosecutorial disclosure of exculpatory or potentially exculpatory evidence. The issue had been raised by the United States Supreme Court's decision in Brady v. Maryland. He asked that I co-author the article with him and I gladly accepted. It was an interesting and challenging project. I did the bulk of the research and drafting, and we would review, discuss, and revise the drafts together. The article was submitted to and published by The University of Florida Law Review in 1970 or 1971.

I enlisted in the Florida National Guard while in law school and was assigned to a company in Clearwater. Normally, one goes for basic training soon after enlistment. Judge Liles called in his friend Earl Faircloth, who was the Attorney General and asked if he could do something about deferring my active duty. Judge Liles' knee was bothering him considerably and he did not want to bring on a new assistant for the five or so months I would be absent. The Attorney General called General MacMillan, the head of the National Guard, who arranged for the deferment until November. When the order came down to my company commander along with a call from General MacMillan, I was given undue credit for having 'connections.' I must say that I did nothing to disabuse this impression.

Judge Liles remained active in community affairs while on the court. I recall asking him at one time how many nights a week he would be at some event. I vividly recall his answer: three or four. I recall wondering at the time how this could occur. I came to find out in my own career that it is not very difficult to let this happen.

Judge Liles liked Sarasota and told me that if he were to start over again, Sarasota is where he would go. He was good friends with Woody Cullis and Tom Icard at the Icard,

Merrill firm in Sarasota and suggested that I apply for a position. My wife and I were interested in larger cities but visited Sarasota for an interview with the firm. I became an associate with the firm in the summer of 1970 and remained there for the next six years.

Judge Liles likes new challenges. While he enjoyed being on the court, he did not care for the drive from Tampa. After leaving the court, he became, as I recall, the Hillsborough County Attorney. We stayed in touch. He visited our home in Sarasota several times when in the area. He enjoyed fishing and we did that a few times also. He was a good friend of Judge Lynn Silvertooth (Judge Silvertooth was the trial judge in the Coppolino case). He kept in touch with Judge Silvertooth and fished with him on occasion with more success than I could produce. I recall Judge Liles recounting a trip with Judge Silvertooth that produced a 'boat load' of fat mangrove snapper. Judge Silvertooth still resides in Sarasota and our judicial center bears his name.

Judge Liles moved to Tallahassee some time in the 1970s. He had a position with the Florida Public Service Commission. He was active there until his untimely death."

William L. Hyde Esq. of Tallahassee spoke some memorable words regarding his work and friendship with Judge Liles at a memorial service for Liles after his death, in the First District Court at Tallahassee. His remarks, essentially intact, are as follows:

"I shall not speak to you of what a fine friend Woodie Liles was. Your presence here alone testifies more eloquently to that than I could ever express. I shall confine remarks to Woodie Liles as a Judge, employer and as a friend, personally.

I knew prior to my association with Judge Liles, of his fine reputation as a trial judge, an appellate judge, Public Counsel to the Public Service Commission, state legislator and trial judge. That he had excelled in all these fields, I was sure could only make him a fine employer. Indeed he exceeded all my expectations.

I had the distinct pleasure of working with him for approximately sixteen months, which were some of the greatest learning experiences a young lawyer could ever hope to have. Our discussions ranged around from the minutiae of practice and procedure in which he was very well versed to the substantive issues of great import, and everything in between. On all these matters, he was informative, well versed and an engaging speaker.

Judge Liles liked to tell stories, particularly to illustrate a great point. In fact he once noted that stories were good metaphors for legal principles, an observation that would not be lost on most biblical scholars.

But these stories were not mere metaphors. They were also analytical means by which he could root out the justice of a given issue. To me, the most illustrative observation of this approach to the law was his notion that, and I am paraphrasing it, that deciding a case for a judge was rather like peeling an onion, an observation fostered no doubt, by his love of gardening. The various layers of an onion, he felt, represented our preconceived notions, prejudices, simple expediency, outworn precedents, obsessive devotion to

technicality, et cetera. At the end of this process, he hoped, was just a result, one true to established legal principles but reflective of our ever-evolving concepts of fair play. He was particularly sensitive to the last principle. I can only commend that approach to any lawyer or any judge, for that matter, any person.

In summation, I can only say that Judge Liles made quite an impression on me, personally, professionally and intellectually. He was unfailingly cordial, witty, humorous, kind concerned. Every time I am confronted with a thorny legal issue from now on, I shall ask myself what would Judge Liles have thought and done. I do not imply slavish devotion to his views. He would be the first to condemn that.”

Woodie Liles and Robert T. Mann must have had a royal contretemps at some point in their careers, which traveled somewhat parallel paths over the years. This scribe is unacquainted with the details, but one man knows a great deal about them. He is Mallory Horne of Tallahassee, also a product of the University of Florida College of Law. Horne served in years past not only as Speaker of the House of Representatives but also as President of the Florida Senate. His contribution to the not-so-pleasant chapter in the history of two important individuals in the history of the Sunshine State reads:

“His war with Bob Mann became a deep wound and led his resignation from the court. It began in front of my very eyes during a tumultuous time. Liles and Mann were State Representatives from Tampa and I was Speaker. We had served the last 95 member House and were seated in the only 125 member House ever (all within a year). Out of the political combat for power and recognition (a weakness in most political people) these two very savvy and smart men started as competitors and became enemies-mortal later. It was hurtful to me personally, for it was my job to maintain an even keel. Bob was a provocateur and few liked him in the House for a number of reasons. This festered with each one attempting to kill bills of the other and with each becoming more vituperative in debate.

As you know, destiny moved them both to the District Court. There the infighting became so vicious that the JQC sent emissaries first and worse later. The end of that story is a meeting in Askew’s office out of which my friend Woodie resigned his Judgeship. In his waning years, Woodie and the editor of our paper spent hours and hours together. May he rest in peace.”

Woodie Liles was a robust, over 6 foot tall man. He liked to light up his pipe and enjoy it like that master detective, Sherlock Holmes, created by the genius of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Except for his crippled right leg, he was in apparent good health at 60. On February 5, 1983, he and wife Helen were at a Tallahassee movie theater. The judge’s friend, Bill Hyde, currently a partner in the Tallahassee firm, Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart had queued up further down the line from Liles. There was a sudden commotion ahead of Hyde and the latter learned that his old friend and mentor had suddenly collapsed from a massive heart attack and died at the scene.

Judge Liles was survived by his wife his and adult children, Cheryl and Jay, all of Tallahassee.

To sum up the essence of this extraordinary man, it suffices to say that he was a man truly bent of life.

Morison Buck

AFTERWORD:

Hurried and worried until we're buried
And there's no curtain call
Life's a very funny proposition after all.
George M. Cohan