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Arthur G. Scotland

*California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District*

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## **Epitome of Excellence: The Legacy of Robert K. Puglia**

Arthur G. Scotland\*

When Korean War veteran Bob Puglia left his beloved state of Ohio in 1954 to study law at the University of California, Boalt Hall, he came with little more than his immense intellect, work ethic, and motivation. Upon his untimely death from cancer in 2005, Bob left behind a legal legacy in his contributions to the rule of law in the Golden State and, even more importantly, in the influence that he had on innumerable members of the legal profession.

Bob's profound influence on the legal profession was broad, from the courtroom to the classroom, where Bob taught for many years as an Adjunct Professor of Law at the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law. As his former students and colleagues can attest, Bob brought to every task his keen mind, his sound character, and his passion to instill in all an appreciation of, and respect for, the rule of law.

The stories of his skills as a trial attorney are legendary. For example, whenever then Sacramento County Chief Deputy District Attorney Bob Puglia prosecuted a jury trial, all of the lawyers in the office who could do so would sit in the courtroom to watch the master in action (leading someone to scrawl "Hero Worship" on the office in-out board). Bob set a standard of excellence in trial that led to his gubernatorial appointment to serve as a Superior Court judge.

Bob's reputation as a trial judge was as glowing as was the distinction he earned as a trial attorney. Recently, a person who tried hundreds of jury trials in courts throughout California and Oregon remarked that the finest trial judge before whom he appeared was Bob Puglia. With his encyclopedic knowledge of the law, his firm yet velvet control of the courtroom, his respect for the law, and his decisiveness, Bob was a tour de force as a trial judge. He even was a valuable source for his colleagues on the bench, who often called Bob for his guidance on legal issues.

But it was Bob's work for almost a quarter of a century as Presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, that made his brilliance known to an audience far beyond Sacramento's legal community. As expressed on the impressive bronze plaque that dedicates the Robert K. Puglia Law Library of the Court of Appeal in Sacramento, a tribute bestowed upon his retirement in December 1998, Bob's appellate opinions "are marked by scholarship, common sense, clarity and eloquence, reflecting his philosophy of judicial restraint and his understanding of the proper role of the courts in a democratic society."

Indeed, Bob's appellate opinions could serve as a textbook for judicial decision-making. They reflect his respect for the rule of law, his dedication to reach the legally correct result, and his adherence to the conviction that judges

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\* Presiding Justice, California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District. Memorial Service for Presiding Justice Robert K. Puglia, Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, Monday, March 21, 2005.

must not abuse their limited powers in our tripartite system of government. And Bob's opinions entertain, so to speak, as well as inform. A showcase for his prodigious vocabulary, his judicious use of humor, and his flare for turning a phrase to make a point, they stand apart from the often pedestrian legal writings of many jurists. Other appellate justices have been heard to say they strive to emulate Bob's work. And even those justices, lawyers, and academics who from time to time have disagreed with Bob marvel at the persuasiveness and eloquence of his appellate opinions.

While Bob's appellate opinions have had great influence on the rule of law, those who received the greatest benefit of his influence are those who had the good fortune to work directly with him as lawyers, trial judges, or appellate justices. Bob's day-to-day interaction with colleagues revealed not only his brilliance, but also his charm, wit, and coolness under the most challenging circumstances. He was a true leader and innovative administrator who always looked for productive ways to improve court administration, who inspired others to strive for excellence, and who created the collegial atmosphere that is now embedded in every pore of the Third Appellate District.

His day-to-day interaction with others also revealed the personal side of Bob, who had a soft spot in his heart not only for his wife, Ingrid; children, Susan, Peter, Dave, and Tom; and their families, including grandchildren, Ben, Nick, and Hailey; but also for his many friends. Bob's concern for others did not stop with his family, friends, and colleagues. Years ago, on a vacation trip to the Far East, a bus boy in a hotel restaurant in Laos asked to practice his English with Bob. In doing so, he spoke of his aspiration to better himself and his family by going to business school. Impressed with the young man's motivation, Bob offered to pay his school tuition to help him achieve his goal.

When I think about Bob, as I often do, I feel very lucky that he was a mentor and friend. My hero in the law, Bob Puglia is the most remarkable judge, perhaps the most remarkable man I have personally known. His positive influence on the law and on those around him is indelible.