



## Mr. Virgil L. Upchurch

February 14, 1930 - October 23, 2011

VIRGIL L. UPCHURCH Virgil L. Upchurch, 81, of Norman, Oklahoma, passed away on Sunday, October 23, 2011, at Norman Regional Hospital. Upchurch was born on February 14, 1930, in Anadarko, to Arbulee Upchurch and Rebecca Jane Dabney Upchurch, who for many years owned and operated Upchurch Groceries. While working there as a youth, he developed a strong work ethic and a passion for people that would serve him well all his life. He attended Anadarko public schools, participating in athletics, including football and track and field squad. He was a member of coach Smitty Williams' conference championship team that made the AHS football program's first-ever state playoff appearance in 1945. He was an excellent student who excelled in history. Upon graduating from AHS in 1948, Upchurch attended Cameron Junior College in Lawton, Oklahoma, for one year before transferring to Central State College in Edmond in 1950. After one semester there, the Korean War broke out and he joined the U.S. Air Force, proudly serving three years with the 59th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and reaching the rank of staff sergeant. His military career included navigational training and featured stops in San Antonio, Cape Cod, Houston and Goose Bay, Labrador, among others. During his final year of service, he developed an interest in law and decided to pursue a law degree upon his return to civilian life. In January 1955, he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma and set out on a course that would last more than five decades and include countless courtroom victories. He married his first wife, Jo Ellen West, in October of

1956 and of that union were born two sons, Jay Craig in 1959 and Gary Neal in 1961. He earned his bachelors degree in history in 1957 and two years later, his law degree. That same year (1959), he returned to his hometown of Anadarko, where he landed his first job as an attorney for W.H. Cooper's firm. A year later, he ran for Caddo County Attorney and was elected by an overwhelming majority, eventually serving three terms. As County Attorney, he lost just two trial cases, forging a reputation as an effective prosecutor. Although politically active over the course of his career, Upchurch, a self-professed Yellow Dog Democrat, never sought office again after serving as county attorney. He did, however, remain active in the cause of fighting for social justice issues. While his law practice often involved extended hours, he always made time for his sons, coaching their Little League teams and attending games faithfully. The trio -- later to become a foursome with his stepson Mark -- made countless trips together to watch professional and University of Oklahoma-related sporting events and built a lifetime of memories that included a deep-seeded passion for the Sooners. He returned to private practice in 1965 with veteran attorney Haskell Pugh, during which time he developed a strong reputation as a successful defense attorney. He and Pugh remained associates for 13 years until Pugh's retirement in 1978, which opened the door for a partnership with Upchurch's longtime friend John Paul Buzbee. The firm of Buzbee and Upchurch enjoyed a successful 30-year run and is still located at 203 W. Broadway in Anadarko, despite the recent retirement of the two principals. In 1982, Upchurch married his second wife, Sallie Buzbee, with whom he spent the last 30 years of his life. During that time, the couple raised two sons -- Mark and Rodney -- and enjoyed traveling and exploring the world together, taking trips to Greece and Canada and many points in between. They spent many happy moments at their cabin in Colorado. Another of Upchurch's favorite pastimes was doting on his four grandchildren -- Brittany, Breleigh, Mahlia and Jacob, whom he loved dearly. In 2009, Upchurch celebrated 50 years of practicing law in Anadarko, a half-century that saw him become a beacon of the community who touched

countless lives. He was a member of the Anadarko Rotary Club and previously served as a trustee of the Oklahoma Bar Foundation. He also served as president for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity and was a proud member of the University of Oklahoma Alumni Association and the Sooner Club. A longtime member of the First Christian Church of Anadarko, he had a special way with people, no matter who they were or where they came from, that made them feel important and respected. He was preceded in death by his parents, a sister, Genevieve Blakley, two brothers, Max Upchurch and Donald Upchurch, and his first wife, Jo Ellen Upchurch. Survivors include his wife, Sallie, of the home, sons Jay Upchurch of Norman, Mark Stack of Oklahoma City, Rodney Stack, and Gary and wife Christie of Norman. Services will be held under the direction of Smith Funeral Home at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, October 26, at the First Baptist Church in Anadarko, Oklahoma, with the Rev. Tom Buzbee officiating.

# Tribute Wall

TF

“ We express our deepest sympathy for the loss of your father.

**The Law Family** - August 29, 2016 at 12:00 AM

KY

“ So sorry to hear of Virgil's passing. I always appreciated his humor and his willingness to help in legal matters. I know he will be greatly missed. Haskell Pugh was my great Uncle and the law firm he and Virgil founded served the Younkin family admirably. Again please accept my sincere condolences for your family's loss. God Bless.

*Ken and Sharon Younkin, Norman, OK*

**Kenneth Younkin** - August 29, 2016 at 12:00 AM

DO

“ My grandma was willy hale upchurch. I never got to meet Virgil but igrew up around his dad and his reputation for excelling in school was something I always remember ed. His uncle roy and his fafather helped me grow up because my father died when I was 4 they both took time out of their busy lives for me it must be a trait handed down from the first u pchurch god bless virgil Will see you later.

**Donald** - August 29, 2016 at 12:00 AM

BW

“ Jay and Gary you are truly in my prayer and the Lord will give you the Peace that passes all understanding. Mr. Upchurch was such a awesome, awesome man.

**Beverly Willhoite** - August 29, 2016 at 12:00 AM



“ *I loved Uncle Virgil very much and he will be missed very my thoughts and prayers are with all of you.* ”

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**Vicki Upchurch Wheeler** - August 29, 2016 at 12:00 AM