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Jack Garris had 'soft touch' for underdog



Jack Garris as he appeared in his younger days. Well known in the county, he died Feb. 21 at 85.

BY FRANK WEIR
Legal News

A worthy opponent in the courtroom, a special friend, and a caring person is how Jack J. Garris is remembered by his many friends and clients.

He had a zest for life and was a fighter in the courtroom but had a soft touch for the underdog.

Garris, a long-time Ann Arbor attorney whose imprint on the legal profession lives on with his three attorney-children, died Feb. 21 at 85 years old, from a stroke.

Although he had battled Parkinson's disease over the past few years, it did not keep him from staying active in the family law firm he started.

"He would come into the office on occasion to check on how things were going and what cases we were working on", said daughter Jacalen.

His son Michael added that he never lost his zeal for his

law practice.

Garris was born into a Greek immigrant family of little wealth. He overcame financial adversity totally on his own and attained his dream of becoming a successful attorney.

His son Steven felt his dad's early struggle helped shape Garris' dedication to the plight of individuals of modest means and to helping new attorneys.

"He never talked down to people or felt that he was better than others," Michael said. "A client's background didn't matter to him, be they poor or well to do, and clients loved and respected him for that.

"He represented individuals primarily and, as a career philosophy, he believed it was important to represent everyone equally, regardless of race, position, or financial status.

"As a firm, all three of us still maintain that approach, that philosophy. That's how he raised

us," Steven said.

Steven added that his father headed the local legal aid society for a number of years and never ceased doing pro bono work.

Jacalen added that "He did pro bono work all the time. If he knew a client couldn't afford his bill, he would conveniently forget to send it," she said.

After Garris' death, the family received a number of cards from attorneys remembering how the elder Garris helped them get a start. He was a father figure and mentor to many young people, in and out of the legal profession.

Garris' wife Helen also is very much involved in the family law practice and met Garris at the University of Michigan.

"He sat in front of me in my abnormal psychology class," she laughed. "He just loved trial work from the very beginning. He was very gregarious and had

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... in which the two defendants, who were tried in a joint jury trial, appeal from their convictions for first-degree murder.

During jury selection, the prosecutor excluded various blacks from the jury on the basis of peremptory challenges.

When defense counsel objected, the trial court called on the prosecution to explain the challenges, but was not satisfied with the prosecutor's stated reasons for challenging two of the jurors.

After a deputy was unable to locate the two jurors and bring them back to the courtroom, the

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