

James Hayward Roussel (1939 - 2018)

Obituary



James Hayward Roussel, a prominent local maritime defense attorney, died Thursday February 1st from complications of pneumonia. He was 78. Jimmy, also known as Roach, was a lifelong New Orleanian. He attended Holy Name of Jesus for grammar school, and graduated from De La Salle in 1957. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1961 with a major in History, and went on to graduate from Tulane Law School in 1964 Phi Delta Phi.

He had a long and storied career as a maritime attorney working for both Phelps Dunbar from 1964-2005, and Baker Donelson from 2005-2018. During the course of his career, Jimmy represented the London Insurance Market and was involved in numerous large-scale litigations including the M/V BRIGHT FIELD allision with the New Orleans Riverwalk in December 1996, and the BP Oil Spill class action and as lead counsel for the dredging interests in the Hurricane Katrina litigation.

His honors and awards included Best Lawyers' 2003 New Orleans Admiralty & Maritime Law "Lawyer of the Year, " Best Lawyers' 2016 New Orleans Mass Tort Litigation/Class Actions - Defendants "Lawyer of the Year," and he was named among the top 10 and top 50 attorneys in Louisiana by Louisiana Super Lawyers for several years.

Jimmy has learned, forgotten, and made more law in his nearly five decades of practice than probably any other admiralty lawyer in New Orleans. His legal acumen was legendary, and was exceeded only by his skills as a raconteur and local historian/genealogist of all things and people maritime and New Orleanian. Any visit to his office would result in at least one war story from Roach's astoundingly diverse and novel-worthy career. Jimmy has been a mentor to literally generations of his fellow lawyers. But beyond all this, Jimmy's most respected and beloved attribute, unerringly

mentioned by his colleagues as well as by the counsel he has practiced against and judges he has appeared before over the years, is his profound humility and respect for every person he encounters.

Jimmy was a type-1 diabetic and dealt with the complications of diabetes his entire life. He was a former President of the Louisiana Chapter of the Juvenile Diabetes Association. He was a member of numerous Carnival organizations as well as several other clubs and groups. He was a Dixie Beer Drinker and lifelong New Orleans Saints fan, supporting both in good times and bad.

Survivors include his wife of 53 years, Louise "Puddin" Roussel, three sons, James H. Roussel, Jr. (Joy), John Ranson Roussel (Christiana) of Birmingham, AL and Christophe Numa Roussel (Steve) of Atlanta, GA, a sister, Sedley Roussel Alpaugh, and seven grandchildren, James H. Roussel III, Sawyer Booth Roussel, Margot Marie Roussel of New Orleans, Amanda Hayward Roussel and John Ranson Roussel, Jr. of Birmingham, AL, and Abigail Elizabeth Barnes and Ashleigh Sarah Barnes of Atlanta, GA.

Relatives and friends are invited to attend a celebration of his life at St. Francis of Assisi Church at 631 State Street on February 17th at 12:00 noon. A visitation will be held at the church at 10 AM. In lieu of flowers, a memorial donation can be made in his name to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation at <http://www.jdrf.org/>.

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Subsequent to the original posting, Tom Conger received the following tribute:

A good portrait of his post-Hanover life was submitted by Mr. Wayne Meehan, who met him professionally, and not through Dartmouth:

"Most of you on this distribution list don't know who I am, but I had the good fortune to work with Jimmy...so I thought I would share a few thoughts:

In the scheme of things, Jimmy and I spent a short amount of time together, but I always felt close to Jimmy (I don't have to tell you that he had a way of making people feel welcome). We spent many long days working together, a few long nights, many dinners with Puddin, 2 memorable trips to Hong Kong, and always kept in touch. I

remember that after I came back to New York after the first round of Bright Field hearings, someone in New York asked me what Jimmy was like. My response was: "imagine if you could live your life such that you could say anything which popped into your head – and get away with it." This occurred to me because of something which happened during the Bright Field hearings. We were approaching Christmas, and the woman heading the NTSB investigation canvassed the group about whether we should work through Christmas week or take a break. Jimmy stood up said something along the following lines: " Ms. _____, you're a married woman – you've been down here for weeks now and I know you need to get back to New York to see that husband of yours." She paused, (and I sat there terrified about how she might react) but then she smiled and said, "Yes, I do need to get back to New York." Pretty sure I would not have gotten away with that, but Jimmy had a way about him.

As you know, Jimmy had a nickname for everyone. Mine was "crow." The genesis was a long night out after the first round of Bright Field hearings where we were both "over-served." Jimmy said my legs were wobbling like the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz, so I became "crow". My story was that I was fine and stable, but Jimmy's vision was distorted. I think we were both right.

I spoke with Jimmy around his [late December] birthday. I knew he was having a few problems, but if he knew the end was near, he didn't let on. He seemed in good spirits. He even told me that Puddin said she found me a house – my family and I almost moved to New Orleans after my time down there on the Bright Field. As always, he asked about my wife and my daughter Sammy (whom he always referred to as "the Bright Field baby" since she was born a few months before the accident and spent some time crying in Jimmy's office when my family came down to visit me). As people do, we both agreed to make an effort to see each other this year.

I certainly didn't know Jimmy as well as some of you, but I am better for knowing him and he definitely left a lasting impression. Just last week, I got an extension on something which was due and I told one of my partners that a very wise lawyer in New Orleans once told me that an extension was the next best thing to a win – I think you know who that was. Through the time I spent with Jimmy, I learned something about what it takes to be a good lawyer, but more importantly, I learned something about

perspective, the value of humility and the values we should all strive for. He was one of a kind and, as I have said many times, Jimmy was the "real deal."

I know Jimmy was a great lawyer but that's not what I will remember – I will remember that he was a great guy. I will remember when he picked me up for hearings in his beat up mustang with the top down when it was snowing – the top was broken so we drove to the hearings with umbrellas. I will remember that everywhere we went in New Orleans, everyone knew him and was happy to see him. I will remember that Jimmy and Puddin always made time for me when I was in New Orleans. I will remember how his lower jaw would protrude slightly when he was laughing at his own jokes, and I will remember those little hands wrapped around a cold Dixie."