

## A Celebration of Life

By Francis G. Murphy

Justice William F. Batchelder ("Batch") died on May 7~~th~~ at the age of 92. His family chose September 26 for his memorial celebration, giving them time to present to us a fitting occasion to reminisce about a long life, well lived. They chose "The Barn on the Pemi" in Plymouth as the apt venue.

The Barn's post and beam frame was built of local hemlock that was likely rough sawn in a water-powered mill. There is not a nail used in its mortise and tenon joinery. None of the surfaces are lacquered shiny. Marks from carpenters' chisels remain visible. A 19th century New England barn is held together by pegs and gravity keeping its joints fast. But there is left play in those joints that allows the structure to sway a tad in rough weather.

Justice David Souter served with Batch on the Superior and Supreme Courts. He told us of his noticing a huge trailer full of large logs on the way up to Plymouth, which reminded him of a remark made by Batch: "Those loggers make money by somehow getting 11 acres worth of logs from the purchase of logging rights to 10 acres." The afternoon was punctuated by the recounting of many such witticisms.

Later, a speaker told us how Batch had approached a neighbour~~r~~, when Batch realized after the fact that he had felled a tree on the neighbour's land. His admonition to new lawyers was recalled by several speakers: "Never lie. Never steal."

Throughout the afternoon, we were treated with a slideshow, allowing us to watch the man mature through all his seasons, beside a beautiful, growing family. Batch and Betty, his wife of 6~~3~~3 years, have 13 grandchildren and ~~nine~~9 great-grandchildren. We saw Batch at age 18 in his naval uniform and his eldest son, Stephen, in his.

Many photos showed Batch in front of a woodpile or woodstove. One fetching one showed a seasoned Batch high fiving a toddler in front a lit stove. The program's back page has a photograph of the family celebrating his 75th birthday, surrounded by autumn colours while overlooking Squam Lake.

Betty was in the midst of family and friends at the event. Anne Batchelder Dow later told me that her mom now is the family's "rock." Many speakers spoke admiringly of Betty and her years with her husband on their farm.

Anne read to us from her father's prose poem, "Autumn Leaves." It was written while coming to terms with the death in 1987 of Stephen, who died while on board a reconnaissance plane that had failed to land at night on the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz. He wrote in part:

"A dampness in the air has caused my thoughts to leave this contemplative reverie and is quickened by thoughts of the woodstove and whether it's fire has gone out and how much wood is in the box. As I walked back through the fields and up the open hillside to my house, I am at peace, knowing I have been refreshed once again by the eternal verities, of the reconciliation of life and death, death and life and the prospect of renewal; always renewal!"

The Barn had originally been constructed in Canterbury in 1855. It received its rebirth in 2018 in Plymouth.

The afternoon included a bag – piped rendition of "Anchors Away." We all stood to sing "God Bless America" and a Eucharistic hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth."

Clara, Batch's granddaughter, ~~holding her baby~~, recited Psalm 121. Its first lines befit a man inspired by the landscape: "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help."

Members of the Bench recounted stories of Batch as a trial lawyer, ~~c~~County ~~a~~Attorney, and judge. Judge Howard, a former law clerk for Batch, recalled the decision

written by Batch that enforced a statute disallowing "construction work in progress" in the rate base for electrical charges. That unanimous decision led to the bankruptcy of PSNH after the huge expenditures for Seabrook I and II. (I could almost hear Batch saying, who needs risky, expensive, nuclear power when you have a woodstove?)

I recall Batch participating in the Court's ruling that declined to adopt in the 1980's the equivalent of the federal rules to replace our old, idiosyncratic Rules of Civil Procedure. Batch remarked to me then that our rules "had more play in the joints." In other words, justice may not be served by a rigid adherence to procedural dictates. Fairness was always his first criterion for justice.

Emily Dickinson wrote: "I see – New Englandly." Batch lived and thought New Englandly. Perhaps, that is why Justice Souter remarked wistfully that, when talking to Batch years back, he could hear a bygone New Hampshire.

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