

Philip H. Corboy, Sr. "Dean of 'Corboy College' turns 80, Still Teaching"

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As far as Philip H. Corboy is concerned, it's too early to worry about his legacy.

"We're having ourselves a time," he said of his fellow octogenarians, whose rank he joined Thursday. "We're not ducking a thing."

But looking back on his career, Corboy said he is proud to have taken part in what he calls "the torts revolution."

For many of his protegés, colleagues and adversaries, Corboy remains the central figure of their careers.

"I was in awe of him. He was larger than life," said Robert A. Clifford, founder of Clifford Law Offices, who worked for Corboy as an associate and was for a brief time one of Corboy's partners.

Cook County Circuit Judge William D. Maddux, the presiding judge of the Law Division, said Corboy is "by far the best I've ever seen."

"He beat my pants off every time I got halfway near him," Maddux said.

Born in poverty on the West Side, Corboy grew up in West Rogers Park. Among Corboy's schoolmates at St. Margaret Mary School was Henry J. Hyde, who later would serve in the U.S. House of Representatives as an Illinois Republican. He characterizes Corboy not only as a friend but as "an excellent basketball player."

"He made up for his lack of size with an abundance of energy," Hyde said.

That would be a recurring theme in Corboy's life.

Attorneys

- Philip H. Corboy

"He's got a very dynamic personality. And it's a personality that's not to be denied when you're in a courtroom. He has a spark about him that can both intimidate and inspire," said Neil K. Quinn of Pretzel & Stouffer Chtd., who opposed Corboy in court for decades.

After graduating from St. George High School, Corboy enrolled in St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa. His studies were interrupted by two years in the Army. He was assigned to the 99th Infantry Division but was stricken with asthma when the division was shipped out to Europe.

While in the Army, he bounced around several colleges, but never obtained a bachelor's degree.

A year after leaving the Army, he enrolled in Loyola University Chicago School of Law, which, having been shuttered through the war, had just reopened its doors.

Corboy finished first in his class in a record two years and has since become one of Loyola's biggest benefactors.

Despite his impeccable grades, Corboy said he could not get a job with any of the city's firms. He accepted a job at the City of Chicago Corporation Counsel, at a salary of \$4,200 a year. There he met the first of two mentors to whom he gives credit for his later success.

Joseph F. Grossman, Corboy recalls, "treated me like a son. He loved to argue. He taught me how to organize the law and I was nurtured by him."

Corboy worked for the city until 1950, when James A. Dooley, one of the top plaintiff attorneys in Chicago, asked the young attorney "if he knew anyone who would be interested in working for him."

Dooley was to become the second major influence in Corboy's career.

"He just worked and worked and worked. And all Mr. Dooley could do was win lawsuits. I learned from him that to never be wrong, you had always to be prepared," Corboy said.

In his first trial, a jury found for Corboy, but the trial judge entered judgment notwithstanding the verdict and was later upheld on appeal. Corboy had tried to obtain life insurance proceeds for the widows of two friends who had drunkenly shot one another to death. *Espinoza v. Equitable Life Assurance Society*, 103 NE.2d 149 (Ill. App. 1950).

Although he lost, Corboy said he knew what he wanted to do with the rest of his life.

"I knew there were people who needed me," he wrote in a 1996 magazine article.

After almost two years with Dooley, Corboy set off on his own. With \$2,500 borrowed from court reporter Pat Sullivan, he hung out his shingle at 1 North LaSalle St. over Easter weekend in 1952.

From the start, he began recruiting ambitious young trial lawyers to his firm. Like Dooley, he expected his associates to learn "by osmosis" and then venture out on their own.

The training regime was so successful that, by the 1960s, judges and lawyers were referring to "Corboy College."

Although "alumni" of the college remember Corboy as an avuncular figure, they said he was deadly serious about the business of trial law.

"It was hard work, long hours. You needed a good work ethic to prosper there," said Nicholas J. Motherway of Motherway & Napleton, who worked for Philip H. Corboy & Associates three decades ago.

But Corboy had a sense of humor about himself, as well, another alumnus recalled.

"Having offered me the job, he said, 'Well, how much are you going to be pay me now?'" said Todd A. Smith, a name partner in Power, Rogers & Smith P.C. and current president of the Association of Trial Lawyers in America.

Corboy said he is proud of the fact that, to this day, the partners at Corboy & Demetrio P.C. continue to hold evening sessions where young associates can get direct mentoring.

Thomas A. Demetrio, the first of Corboy's associates to move up to partner, said Corboy's greatest contribution to the bar was his work on the Illinois Pattern Jury Instruction Committee in 1957.

"Those guys were pioneers. They had nothing to work from. They created the jury instructions that are still being used today", Demetrio said.

Corboy acknowledges his work on the committee as "the proudest" of his career.

Pressed on the topic of legacy again, Corboy voices his preference.

"My entire life has been dedicated to using my skills to helping people who are in need at the destitute time in their lives," he said. "When I'm gone, I hope people will say two words: 'He cared.'"* Article Reprinted with the Permission of the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.