

River Karma



River karma is the belief that you do not want to tempt the river gods as ill fortune will quickly follow. Whitewater paddlers are uniformly careful about what they say on trips because they don't want to fall victim to bad "river karma." Yet we know that there are going to be times on a journey when bad things happen no matter what. Today, I am experiencing bad river karma – something sad has occurred.

One of the most pleasant things about being Bar President is going to local and county bar associations to give reports or "state of the bar" speeches. In those speeches I usually get on my soapbox a little in an attempt to remind our colleagues about how fortunate we are to be part of the most honorable profession in civilized societies. I also preach to our membership the fact that attorneys are, as a rule, good citizens and good people.

We recently lost one of those good people – one of those honorable friends.

I write this article on a beautiful Christmas Eve afternoon. This is a time when one should be celebrating the holidays with family and friends – a time of spiritual and seasonal happiness. This day took a detour from the norm as I have just returned from the funeral of Sam Heuer, a Batesville born, Little Rock lawyer. Sam died way too young. The chapel was overflowing; even the standing room was crowded. Our profession was well represented: state judges, federal judges, prominent attorneys and friends of a fallen comrade were there to honor him.

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I sat with Phil Kaplan, one of ten people on a pew built for eight. Phil was quick to assure me that Jewish funerals are mercifully short. Sam would have enjoyed that comment. Little Rock lawyer Jack Lassiter delivered a eulogy for his friend. He spoke of hunting trips and how one of the most pleasurable parts of the outing was the car trip to and from the hunt. Often the conversation between the two friends was the highlight.

Sam Heuer and I were friends as well. Not social friends, but "elevator" and professional friends. We often referred cases to each other. Jack spoke not only of Sam the friend but of Sam the lawyer. He spoke knowingly of Sam's passion for his cases, his clients, for life and the practice of law. The rabbi spoke of Sam's magnetism for weird

cases – "the weirder the better as far as Sam was concerned." He would immerse himself in such projects.

The service caused me to reflect and focus on what I have been trying to convey to members of the Bar across the state...that ours is a noble profession. Arkansas lawyers are leaders in almost all community, church and charitable organizations. We should always remember that. We should always be proud of that. We should always defend our chosen profession when it comes under attack.

In those same speeches, I often refer to a quote taken from a speech given by a successful University of Virginia Law School alumnus in a commencement speech at his alma mater. In defining the role of the American lawyer he said we are: "the advocates for any just cause, no matter how unpopular."

Sam Heuer was such a person and his approach to the practice of law was an example of what is good about our business.

On a beautiful Christmas Eve, I was able to be part of the celebration of the life of a fellow attorney and friend. It inspired me to redouble my efforts to promote our industry whenever I am given the opportunity to do so. I encourage each of you to do the same.

The loss of a good man and a good lawyer darkened this day. However, his example and the celebration of his life made it brighter for those of us who continue on the journey. ■