

Charles Edward Baker



COLUMBIA - Charles Edward Baker of Columbia died peacefully Tuesday afternoon in Providence Hospital.

Charlie, as he was known by all, was a brilliant lawyer and accomplished singer.

Charlie was born in Charleston, November 5, 1935, to the late John Ancrum Baker and Madame Gertrude Tremblay Baker. Charlie was raised in Columbia where he graduated from Dreher High School in the class of 1953. Members of that class meet once a month for lunch and Charlie's great wit will be missed.

Charlie was graduated cum laude from the University of South Carolina in 1956 with a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration, and graduated magna cum laude from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1959.

Charlie's entry into the practice of law was delayed when his South Carolina Air National Guard unit was deployed to Europe in one of the more heated moments of the Cold War. Following admission to the practice of law, Charlie joined the Columbia law firm then known as Belser & Belser. Over the years the firm has changed membership and names with the one constant being the name of Baker. At the time of his death the firm was Baker, Ravenel & Bender.

During his years in practice, Charlie was associated with many outstanding attorneys and public officials, including Heyward Belser, a former chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Alex Sanders, former Chief Judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals and later president of the College of Charleston, and Jean Hoefler Toal, Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Each of these lawyers, and countless others both within and without his firm, relied on Charlie's intellect, experience and probing questions to sharpen their arguments and polish their presentations. All of Charlie's partners and associates acknowledge that they were better lawyers because of Charlie's presence, whether the case involved an interpretation of a contract or a novel constitutional question.

Charlie was a legal scholar in addition to being a highly regarded practitioner, having been associate editor of the South Carolina Law Quarterly and a member of the law school honor organization Order of the Wig and Robe. Charlie contributed a chapter to the South Carolina legal encyclopedia South Carolina Jurisprudence, and was admitted to practice before the Supreme Courts of the United States and South Carolina as well as the United States District Court for South Carolina and the United States Courts of Appeals for the Fourth and Fifth Circuits.

Proving that one can have a life in addition to the law, Charlie appeared on stage regularly in Town Theatre productions and sang in the Columbia Choral Society. Charlie was on the Board

of Governors for the Columbia Stage Society, the Board of Directors of the Columbia Music Festival Association, president of the Columbia Choral Society, president of the Evening Music Club, a life member of the Columbia Drama Club, a member of the Carolina Jazz Society, and a Centurion of the University of South Carolina.

Charlie was a member of the Catholic Church of St. Joseph and a member of the choir there for more than 50 years.

Charlie is survived by his wife, Anita Heckle Baker, his daughters, Carol M. and Anita T. Baker, a sister-in-law, Betsy P. Baker, and seven nieces and nephews. Charlie was predeceased by his parents, his brother, John Ancrum Baker, and a nephew, Rusty Baker.

A Rosary will be celebrated at 6:00 p.m. with visitation following until 8:00 p.m. Friday at Dunbar Funeral Home on Devine St. A funeral mass will be celebrated at St. Joseph's at 11:00 a.m. Saturday with burial to follow in Elmwood Cemetery.

Pallbearers will be a nephew, Brad Baker, and former law partners, Cravens Ravenel, Jay Bender, Markey Stubbs, Bill Davis, Kirby Shealy and Warren Powell.

Chief Justice Toal noted that Chaucer penned the perfect description of Charlie in the prologue to Canterbury Tales, writing in old English, 'He was a veray parfit gentil knight' which translates in modern English as, 'He was a true and perfect gentle knight.'

Family members and friends gathered in the hospital waiting room remarked that Charlie's passing signaled that God needed a good lawyer or a wonderful voice in the Heavenly Choir.

Charlie's family requests that, in lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Columbia's Town Theatre at 1012 Sumter St., Columbia, SC 29201 or St. Joseph's Catholic Church, 3512 Devine St., Columbia, SC 29205.

Published in The State on December 16, 2010