

Reflections on a Memorial Service for Robert Kelly Pace

On November 11, 2018, I went to a memorial service for Robert Kelly Pace, an outstanding lawyer who loved and supported the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. The gathering was here in Tyler and there were some 200 of us in attendance. If I counted correctly, there were 13 individuals who had known Kelly at different times and places and in different ways who told “Kelly Stories.”

Not surprisingly, there was a common theme: Kelly cared. He cared about his family, his law partners, his clients, his friends, TCDLA and the legal profession. Although there was, of course, some humor in these stories, there was a quiet dignity about the service.

Earlier in his life, Kelly had encountered some demons, but he had won the battle against them. For lawyers or judges with alcohol or drug issues, Kelly was a wonderful resource person who was always available to visit with them. When I was serving as president of the State Bar of Texas, I had the opportunity to appoint Kelly to a leadership position in the Texas Lawyers Assistance Program. The State Bar owes Kelly a debt of gratitude for the work that he did on behalf of TLAP.

As I have reflected on the memorial service and upon the life of Robert Kelly Pace, I only have one sadness – that Kelly didn’t have the opportunity to hear his friends and family talking about the impact that he had on their lives. And there is a lesson in this. We have all had those who have been there for us when we needed them. We shouldn’t wait until it is too late for us to express our gratitude to them for what they have done for us. A simple “thank you” the next time that you see such an individual would certainly be appropriate.