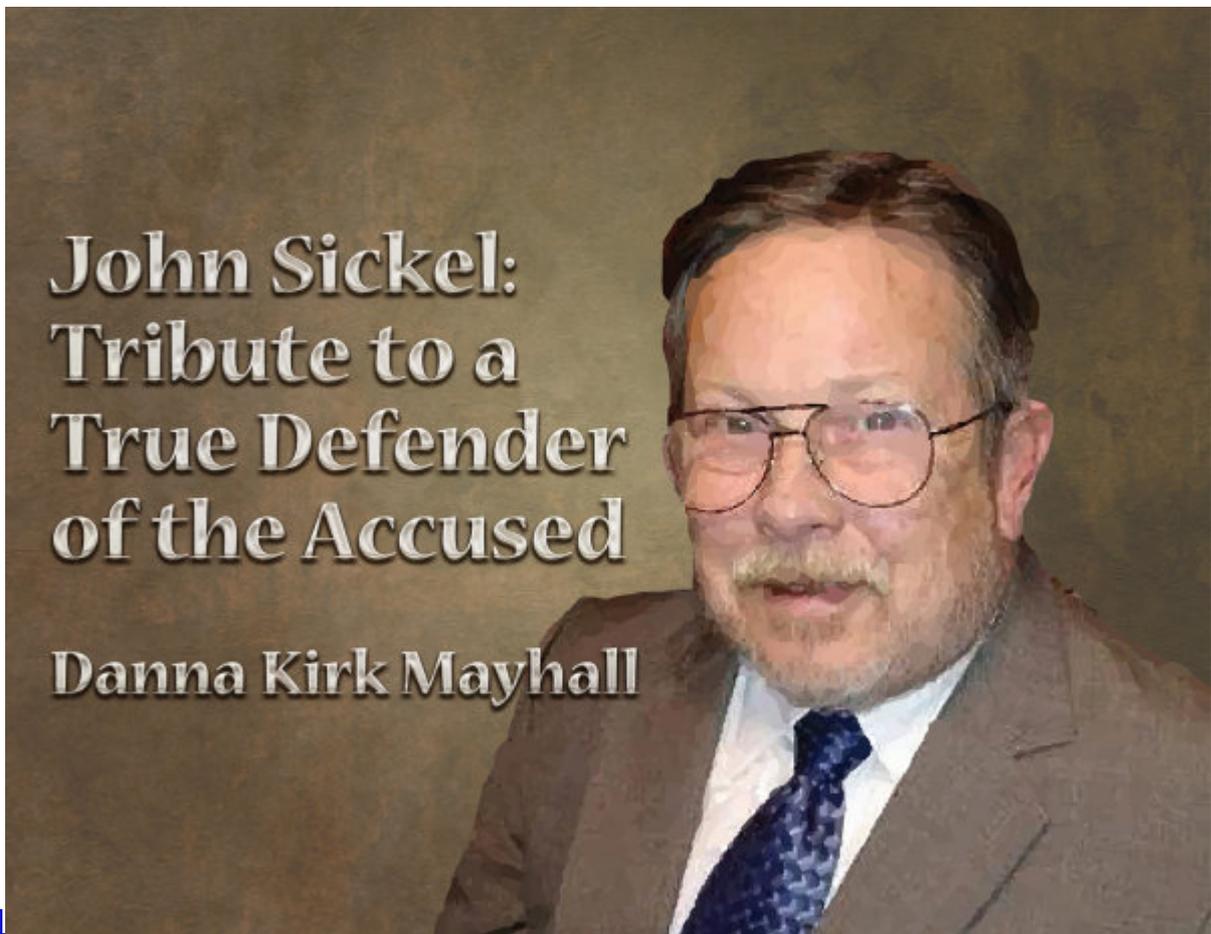


John Sickel: Tribute to a True Defender of the Accused

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John Sickel Jr. was a friend of mine. He was not just my friend, of course; he was the friend of many, a father, husband, grandfather, and an inspiration to us all.

It wasn't too long after I began my practice in Athens, Texas, that I became acquainted with John. When I met him, he had just recently left office as the District Attorney of Van Zandt County. I learned that he was the kind of lawyer who was never too busy to mentor a young, inexperienced lawyer like I was back then. I can't tell you how many times I leaned on his experience in the years since then. Many times, I called him for advice and counsel, and he never failed to give me the answer I needed at the time.

Another lawyer told me he would often go over to his office in Gun Barrel City just to ask a question and would end up spending an hour there. He said he always learned something from John. He said he felt like he had been to a CLE. He was generous with his time?not just to me, but also to other colleagues as well.

A friend of mine said that she first met John in the courtroom because he was representing her ex-husband in a divorce. She said that he saw her a few years later and apologized to her for representing her ex. I?m not surprised at all. John was like that. He saw things as they truly were, and most of all he cared about people.

I learned at his memorial service that John had wanted to join the military when he was young, because his father and his ancestors had been in the military, a lineage traced back to the Revolutionary War! However, he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as a boy and was unable to serve because of that. In 2009, he was allowed to enlist in the Texas National Guard as a JAG officer, and he was so proud to serve in that capacity. At his memorial service, several of those with whom he served were there to pay tribute to his service in the Guard.

John truly believed in the Constitution and the rights of the accused. He diligently fought for his clients and would take the case to trial if he believed that it would serve the ends of justice to do so. One court reporter commented that she could almost hear ?The Star Spangled Banner? playing in the background as he delivered his closing argument. He was a classical liberal, believing in the presumption of innocence and the right to be free from unreasonable governmental intrusion.

John loved his family and cared for them until the very end of his life. Many tragedies came his way, but he never let those tragedies define him. He held his family even closer during those times.

John and I didn?t see eye to eye on politics, but we respected each other?s beliefs, and our conversations about the subject were never contentious. In fact, he mentioned that fact the last time I saw him. I know that John loved this country, and he not only respected my right to disagree with him, but would defend my right to do so as well.

John can never be replaced and will long be remembered by his family, friends, and colleagues. I aspire to be like him in so many ways. I especially want to treat my young colleagues the way he treated me. I want to never be too busy to consult with those who seek my advice about a difficult case, just like my friend, John Sickel, who helped me so many times.

Rest in Peace, my friend.

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