

Memorial to be Held for Superior Court Judge Robert M. Olson



A "Remembrance Gathering" will be held on Saturday, Nov. 21st for Judge Robert M. Olson, who passed away at the age of eighty-five on September 4, 2009. Born in Alhambra on July 20, 1924, Olson lived in Pasadena while growing up, attending Pasadena High School. Olson served in the U.S. Army Air corps for two years during World War II and was a member of a B-29 crew flying on 35 missions over Japan.

When he returned from the service, he married his junior high school sweetheart, the former Lila Murphy, in 1946. Robert (known as Bob) and Lila met at Wilson Jr. High and became junior high and high school sweethearts. Bob caught Lila's eye with his flowered shirts and she would call him "petunia" which drove him crazy and he finally spoke to her and the rest was history. The couple moved to Sierra Madre in 1954.

He began his college career at UC Berkeley in 1947, then transferred to the University of Southern California where he received his Bachelor's Degree in 1949 and his Juris Doctorate in 1951. While at USC, he was a member of the Law Review. His wife worked to support the couple while he attended college. "I felt so guilty that my wife was working that I went to school every summer," he said in an interview for an article published in the Los Angeles Daily Journal in 1989. "I took the maximum (course) load. I graduated in June and was sworn into the bar in July. My wife quit work, right there and then."

Olson's first job in the legal profession was with the firm of Burr & Smith in Los Angeles, working on real property, business law, probate and other civil cases. In 1957, he left Burr & Smith to become trust officer and corporate secretary for one of the firm's clients, Security Title Insurance Co. Shortly thereafter, he became general counsel and secretary of Southern Counties Gas Co. and Pacific Lighting Service Co. He later joined the law firm of Kalmbach, DeMarco, Knapp & Chillingworth. In 1972, then Governor Ronald Reagan appointed Robert to the bench of the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles. He began serving on the bench at the Pasadena Court House in 1973, and spent most of the rest of his career there.

In the 1989 Daily Journal article, John Peck, who represented probate cases before Olson, called the judge "the most outstanding" of the probate judges. "He's an old-school gentleman-lawyer of the highest order, the way lawyers were before law became a cutthroat proposition," Peck said. An example of this involved a case that became legendary in Pasadena, in which Olson ordered an estate to provide training for a pet dog that had been left behind when its owner died. Because the dog was old and somewhat aggressive, the estate's executor recommended that it be put to death. Olson ordered the estate to provide training and a trust fund to pay for the care of the dog, which eventually was adopted by a retired police officer. According to the Daily Journal article, the estate's attorney, Marilyn Freytag stated that "This shows Olson's basic compassion. He showed his heart and feelings for what the old lady would have wanted . . . That man has an awful lot of heart, a wonderful temperament, a good sense of humor. He stands alone in my book."



Olson is survived by his wife of 63 years, Lila, two daughters, Sarah J. Olson, and Ann Olson Ayres and one son, Robert M. Olson, M.D., son-in-law, Geoff Ayres and one grandchild, Dylan Fleck Ayres.

The Remembrance Gathering will be held on Nov. 21 from 1-5 pm at the Ayres' home. Email annolson99@yahoo.com for details.