March 3, 2015

*Orlando Sentinel*

By Jessica Inman, Orlando Sentinel Staff Writer

*Late judge, John Alton Reed, kept copy of Constitution*

When he died, John Alton Reed Jr. was reading a copy of "Huckleberry Finn." This just after he reread another book from his youth: "Tom Sawyer."

These choices, said his wife, Louisa, were unusual for him. Not one to venture into fiction on a frequent basis, Reed preferred biographies for the hour he spent reading in bed each night. The passage he returned to most fell into neither category.

"Still on our bedside table is a copy of the Constitution that he read quite often," said Louisa Reed.

Former Florida judge and lawyer John Alton Reed devoted his life to the simple pursuit of right over wrong. He died Feb. 19 of cancer. He was 83.

He had been a judge for Florida's Court of Appeals in the Fourth District in West Palm Beach for about five years when he was appointed by Richard Nixon to the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida in 1973, said former colleague and longtime friend John Lowndes.

"As a judge in the courtroom, John had a very evenhanded demeanor, and in the courtroom, he [was] probably nicer to people, more evenhanded than he should have been," said John Lowndes. Reed remained on the bench until 1984.

Mr. Prepared, as he was known in early years by colleagues because of a meticulous thought for detail, was one of the few judges of the time who wrote his own opinions, instead of handing the task off to a clerk.

"[He was a] judicious worker," Lowndes said. "There was an awful lot of pressure on judges to spend a lot of time and effort working."

At 5-feet-9 with broad shoulders and an upright posture, Reed kept an unruffled persona as he tended what he knew best:

"[He was the] kind of person who saw things [as] being either right or wrong," said Lowndes of what he described as his partner's "matter-of-fact approach to things."

Years later, when Reed became a partner at Lowndes, Drosdick, Doster, Kantor & Reed after leaving the bench in 1984, he litigated commercial lawsuits for the
Orlando firm. His courtroom presence remained the same.

"[He] treated everyone with respect," Lowndes said. "[He was] not over the top about things."

Even after office dress became more casual, Reed continued to wear a coat and tie. His office was unremarkable other than a photo of his wife and children. He arrived at 8 a.m., left at 6 p.m.

"[Reed's] passion [was] not so much for law itself, but [his] passion [was] for doing a good job at whatever he did," said Lowndes.

The attitude also translated to his time on the tennis courts: first on weekends, and then, when he retired, multiple times a week.

Though he and his wife moved from Winter Park to Sapphire, N.C., upon his retirement, he would continue to visit the office he spent more than 20 years in.

"Of all [the] people I've ever known, I would think that John had the most sensitivity of what was right and what was wrong," Lowndes said. "He honestly was a person of the highest ethical standards that you could ever have, and he never ever would have done anything that could detract from that."

In addition to his wife, John Alton Reed Jr. is survived by daughters Donna Reed of Portland, Ore., Joanne Reed of Iowa and Deborah Martin of Naples; six grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Moore Funeral Home of Brevard, N.C., handled arrangements.