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a controlled life

Legacies Of Hope and Faith

By Paul David Westgate

E. J. (Pepper) Meacham, Jr. brought to Clinton, Custer County, and the State of Oklahoma an example of strength, faith, and courage. Through his life, he experienced exhilaration and depression, and he faced each with the determination to be better personally and create a better community environment.

"Pepper" Meacham, named for Pepper Martin, famous pitcher during the 1931 World Series, tasted his first victory--birth--in October, 1931. After serving his country in a time of war, he earned his Doctorate of Jurisprudence from the OU College of Law.

In 1919, E. J. Meacham, Sr. and George Meacham founded Meacham and Meacham, Attorneys at Law. In 1958, Pepper joined the family firm and started developing his reputation as a tough defense attorney.

Before becoming Mayor of Clinton in 1972, Pepper was involved in community events, such as the annual PTA Negro Minstrel. Playing the part of an "end man" gave him an outlet for his wit and humor. During his administration as Mayor, he was instrumental in establishing Clinton Regional Hospital. The community needed a medical facility after Oklahoma closed the state hospital that had been strong in the area. Clinton Regional Hospital continues to be one of the strongest community hospitals outside the metropolitan areas. Pepper's first desire was the growth of Clinton; he wasn't a spotlight seeker.

Early drinking habits led to problems. In 1975, Pepper admitted he was an alcoholic by joining the local chapter of Alcoholics

Anonymous, founded by Dr. Bill Tisdal in 1945. With the help of AA and his own determination, Pepper remained sober to his death.



He touched hundreds of lives through AA. A brother in AA once said, "I love him not for what he is but for what I become when he is with me." He worked with people daily as those with problems came by his office or his house during the evening hours. His heart and home were always open to people who wanted help. Dr. George Miller described him the best: "He was filled with a passion for his Creator that couldn't be put into words; it could only be lived. He was a gentle, compassionate, and loving friend who was loyal to a fault."

Distance never deterred Pepper from traveling throughout the state working with AA programs and individuals. He spoke to groups

of all ages explaining the dangers of alcohol. He was very active throughout Custer County with the simple message that when help is wanted help is available. He devoted his life to giving to others time, energy, and the greatest gift of all--genuine caring.

Once Pepper had control of his life, he returned to the vital position of community and professional leader. He served as Vice President of the Oklahoma Bar Association, proving the respect and admiration his fellow attorneys felt. In the county and community, his leadership role continued as he chaired the community for renewal of the county courthouse. The new legal library in the courthouse was dedicated to E. J. (Pepper) Meacham, Jr.

From top to bottom and back again, Pepper and family survived many crises. In 1978, Pepper fought through open-heart surgery. In the early 1980's, Pepper's health began to fail, and each onset was faced bravely. In October 1984, he suffered a heart attack which ended his life in December 1984.

Pepper Meacham left Clinton and the state the greatest legacy, hope and faith. Through his life, he proved that when a problem is met honestly and help is sought, a solution can be found. His desire for each of us would be to look at people for who they are and share our love with all we meet. ■

PAUL DAVID WESTGATE, 14, plays French horn in band, received best-of-show award for his Science Fair project, and is a member of the scholastic team. His parents are David Westgate of Kingfisher and Karen Westgate of Clinton.