



Senator William Ezra Jenner

Foreword

By William Edward Jenner, Esq.

Why do I feel compelled to write about my father? Perhaps because as I grow older, I feel my own mortality and want to express these thoughts so that my own sons will have them. My father was, if nothing else, a loving father who always placed my welfare first and did everything to help me achieve my goals. I could always rely on his promises and knew that if he said that he would help me, he would do everything in his power to do so. I never had to doubt his motives, intentions, or love. If I have had any success as a father to four sons, it is because I tried to follow his example in my relationships with them.

A friend, who had grown up with a very dysfunctional father, once told me that when he had children he resolved most of all to be a good father. He, however, failed in that because he later realized he really didn't know how, because he had no role model. I feel blessed that I did.

My father was a generous and humorous man. He was friendly and loyal to his friends as they were, for the most part, to him. In politics, they were known as the "Jenner Gang." They stayed together even though they didn't control a great deal of patronage because of Dad's charisma and the fact that they could always count on his word. He always told me that in politics, more than any profession, "...your word is your bond." If you lie in a contract or business deal, you can be sued. There is no legal action for breach of promise in politics.

He not only made good friends in politics, he had many good social friends, business associates, and loyal secretaries. I think because he was fun to be around, essentially warm and kind, profane but never in a sexual or irreligious sense, people gravitated to him. Even many of the United States Senators who disagreed with him politically, and on policy and legislation, liked him as a person.

In his fifty-year marriage to my mother, he was also kind, loving and generous. The marriage worked, however, because of the kind of person she was. She did not interfere in, nor was she particularly interested in, his politics. When he got home from work, she would listen as he got things off his chest. Home was a place of refuge where little was demanded of him. She took care of me, their only child, kept a neat house, and had the meals prepared. She never sought the limelight even though she was attractive and had theatrical talent, which she left dormant throughout their marriage until his retirement from politics and return to her hometown of Bedford in 1958.

He was, in my view, more of a populist in internal affairs. His background was that of the common man. He was fair to labor and pro civil-rights. I do not remember him ever saying a derogatory thing about the African-American race or any other minority. His invective was saved for communists, fellow travelers, big spenders, and one worlders.

On news of his death, a college classmate and old friend of mine sent the clipping of the New York Times obituary and wrote that, “[he] was such a vital, interesting, and kind man. I have always felt it a distinct privilege to have known him and spent time with him. Mr. Jenner was also one of the best fathers and husbands I have known...his distinguished and outstanding public career only served to add an extra dimension to his personal stature.” I believe all my friends felt this way about my dad – and so did I.

A Brief Biography of William Ezra Jenner

By Jaleh Fazelian and Douglas Denné

William E. Jenner was born in Marengo, Indiana, to L. Lenwood (Woody) and Jane Jenner on July 21, 1908. Jenner attended Indiana University and graduated with his Bachelor of Arts in 1930. Soon after, he began to study law and graduated with his law degree from Indiana University in 1932.

William Jenner married Janet Cuthill on June 30, 1933, and they had one son, William Jenner. In 1933, he also began his law practice in Paoli and Shoals, Indiana. In 1934, he ran for a seat in the State Senate and won. In 1937 and 1939, he was minority leader in the State Senate. In 1941, he became the President Pro Tempore.

Jenner resigned from the State Senate in June 1942 to join in the World War II effort. He served in the Army Air Corps in Europe. He was discharged as a Captain in October 1944.

Soon after his return from the World War II, Jenner was elected to fill the seat of deceased Senator Frederick Van Nuys. In 1946, he ran again and was elected to the U.S. Senate, beating former Indiana Governor M. Clifford Townsend.

Jenner served as a United States Senator from January 3, 1947 to January 3, 1959. During his service in the Senate, Jenner was deemed a conservative and held many isolationist views in the area of foreign affairs. He voted against the Taft-Hartley Bill and the Marshall Plan. He also voted against the North Atlantic Security Pact.

Jenner opposed President Truman in many respects and called for the impeachment of Truman after the firing of Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected, Jenner gained prominence as the chair of the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary. During the mid 1950s, Jenner spent the vast majority of his time investigating Communist infiltration of the teaching profession.

Jenner was also a friend of Senator Joseph McCarthy. When McCarthy was censured by the Senate, Jenner voted against the censure and gave speeches condemning those who agreed to censure McCarthy. Jenner also gave a eulogy at McCarthy's funeral.

Jenner was a strong supporter of the civil rights movement from African-Americans. Jenner attempted to amend the Railway Labor Act of 1950, an act that allowed for racial and religious discrimination by unions. Additionally, Jenner laid out a plan for the Republican Party of 1945 calling for the inclusion of all races. His fight for civil rights endured until the end of his Senatorial career.

After retiring from the Senate, Jenner returned to Bedford, Indiana, to practice law. Jenner passed away on March 9, 1985.

Information taken from the following sources:

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000093>

Jenner, William Ezra from Gale Biography Resource Center.