

A Justice Of the People and For the People

By John C. Danforth

Let me tell you about Clarence Thomas, whom I have known for 17 years.

Clarence Thomas will bring to the Supreme Court compassion, courage, and independence instilled by a life the President has described as a model for all Americans.

As he has acquired the education, knowledge, and skills required to be a Justice of the Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas never lost sight of his origins.

He was born in very humble circumstances in the rural South in 1948, near the Georgia seacoast. He is black, so Clarence Thomas, his family, and his neighbors and friends lived under a segregated system and knew what it was to be treated as second-class citizens.

Here is what the laws and customs said to Clarence Thomas and all his people: "The race is over for you before it begins. In the land of freedom, your hopes and dreams, the mind and heart given to you by the Creator, the content of your character -- all these count for nothing. You stand at the starting line with a millstone around your neck."

His father left the family when Clarence was a toddler: When a house fire forced their mother, Leola, to split up the family, Clarence and his brother Myers went to live with their mother's parents, Myers and Christine Anderson. The great hero in Clarence's life was his grandfather, Myers Anderson. Mr. Anderson was illiterate, but operated a small delivery business and farmed on

Danforth, a Republican, is Missouri's senior U.S. Senator

family land. Among Mr. Anderson's rules was that his grandsons believe in themselves and always -- always -- do the work that needed to be done. When Clarence or Myers said they couldn't do something, he would say, "Old Man Can't is dead. I helped bury him."

Mr. and Mrs. Anderson sent the boys to Catholic school in Savannah because they believed it was the best education available for them. The Andersons taught Clarence and Myers to believe in God, to work hard, and to get an education.

The world was beginning to change for black Americans. For Clarence's generation, people who had gone before had begun to make a difference. The people who opened doors for Clarence and his generation included civil rights lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall, the man Clarence would succeed on the Supreme Court; the Justices who struck down "separate but equal" status for blacks; Presidents who opened schools, colleges, and universities; judges, legislators, and citizens across the land; and family members and teachers who did everything they could for children like Clarence and Myers Thomas.

* * *

Clarence graduated from Holy Cross College, with honors, and Yale Law School. As the Attorney General of Missouri, I wanted to hire the best lawyers I could with the budget provided by the legislature. I hired him from law school in 1974. One of his conditions was my assurance that he would be judged on his abilities as a lawyer; that he would be working in a colorblind office. From his early days in that office, he was a



Judge Clarence Thomas

bright, hard-working and able attorney.

I was elected to the Senate in 1976. In 1977, Clarence went to work for the Monsanto Company in St. Louis in its legal department, and stayed until 1979. I then asked him if he would leave Monsanto to work for me as a legislative assistant. He did so, and worked for me in Washington from 1979 until 1981. His principal responsibilities were energy, environment, and public works.

In 1981, he was nominated by the President to be Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights and was confirmed by the Senate. He was nominated a year later to head the Equal Employ-

ment Opportunity Commission, the agency that enforces federal laws against job discrimination. This position also required confirmation by the Senate. When nominated to a second term as EEOC Chairman in 1986, I asked why he wanted this job again. It was not a job that could advance his career. His answer was, "I have unfinished work that I have to do." His leadership at EEOC was distinguished by vigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination laws to protect individual workers, by impressive results for cases brought and relief for victims, and by thorough modernization at an agency that had what were regarded as serious problems in administration, record-

keeping, and morale.

In 1989, Clarence Thomas was nominated to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which is regarded as the second highest court in the land. A fourth time, he was confirmed by the Senate to a position of trust and honor. On July 1, this distinguished and honorable American stood beside the President, as the person to succeed Justice Marshall.

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Clarence Thomas is one of the most independent people I have ever known. He calls them as he sees them and will make his own decisions on the Court. His guiding principle will be one of judicial restraint. He shares the President's

'Old Man Can't is dead' said Thomas' hero, his grandfather

belief, which is my own, that judges are not legislators, and should not impose their own beliefs and ideas through contorted or wishful readings of the law. Clarence Thomas will take the facts of the case and do his very best to apply the law and precedents of the Court. He will not manipulate something into what it is not.

Unlike most who have served as Justices, he will bring to his deliberations knowledge of the life of the humblest people. His natural sympathies are for "the little guy." People who worked with him in my offices in Jefferson City and Washington feel very, very strongly about Clarence Thomas, and I believe that is notable. One reason they feel strongly, I believe, is because we saw how he makes friends with people in a building,

guards, mail clerks, messengers and others. We heard his booming laugh. And we all saw his determination that justice be done, a strong and independent mind, and his capacity for hard work.

Lives are not stories in books, people aren't saints and Supreme Court Justices aren't marble statues. When he makes a mistake, he owns up to it. He tries to be better than he is. He knows that no one is completely "self-made." He knows where he came from and what those who went before have helped to make possible for him. The key point is that he wants to be the best he can be, in part as an

obligation to people who made a difference for him. Clarence Thomas also feels an obligation to reach back and help

to lift people up. By his principles, and his life itself, he is very deeply committed to the words carved above the entrance to the Supreme Court: Equal justice under law.

There is a message in this life for children in Pinpoint, Georgia, and other Pinpoints around the U.S. The message is: You can do it. There also is a message for the nation. The message is: America is in truth the country where dreams can come true, a light to the world. How proud every American should be that good values, education, and sustained effort remain more than a match for Old Man Can't.

More than any other Supreme Court nominee that I could name, Clarence Thomas would be the People's Justice. With the people he stands. For the people, he must be confirmed.



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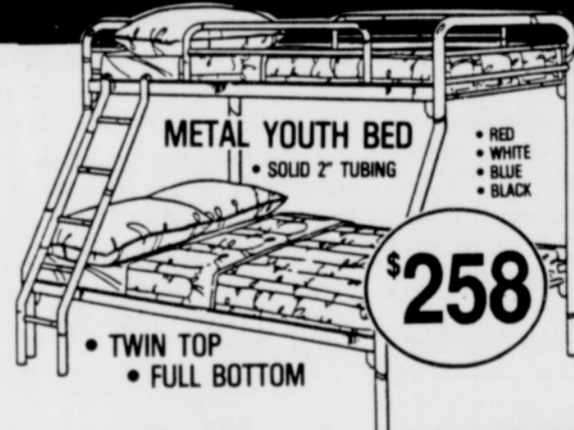
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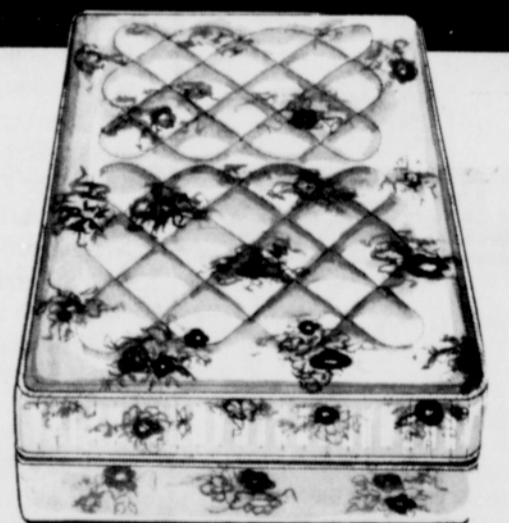
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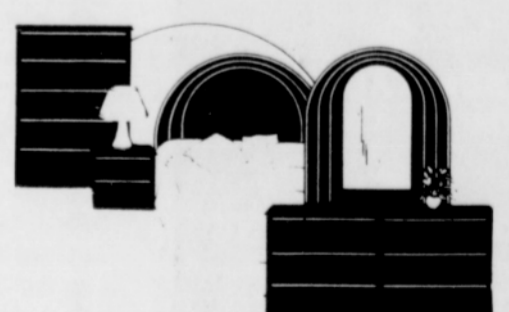
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