



C. Thomas Cates

July 24, 1941 - December 23, 2020

C. Thomas Cates passed away peacefully on December 23, 2020, of cancer. Tom Cates was born on July 24, 1941 in Memphis, Tennessee, to parents Charles and Mary Evelyn Cates. His father owned a country grocery store, and for a time, Tom and his sister Marilyn lived with their family in the back of Cates Grocery in Milan, Tennessee. He excelled at Milan High School as the co-captain of the football team, the Senior Class President, and was named “Mr. Milan High” for the class of 1959. He graduated from Memphis State University in 1963 and Vanderbilt Law School in 1965, where he was on the Law Review and the Order of the Coif. He served in the Army Reserves and was honorably discharged.

While in law school, he met Elaine Taylor. After a whirlwind romance, he married her in 1965. Together, they created a wonderful life for their four children, Cindy, Charlie, Taylor, and Andy. Tom was so proud of his children and modeled for them the values of hard work, humility, and service. He has been blessed with seven grandchildren who loved to call him “Papa.”

For more than forty years, he practiced law with Burch Porter & Johnson, in Memphis. Resisting the trend to focus on one specialty, he was a “lawyer’s lawyer,” able to help his clients with complicated transactions as well as litigation matters and any other problem that arose. He was an exacting and effective mentor, passing along to young lawyers who worked with him the benefit of his wisdom and experience. Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing through his retirement in 2013, he served as the City Attorney for Germantown and Collierville, Tennessee, providing steady leadership through a period of tremendous growth for both communities. Among his many accomplishments in this role was the negotiation to secure the land use rights necessary for the development of Wolf River Boulevard. He also spearheaded the litigation on behalf of several municipalities which led to the creation of the municipal school districts in Shelby County.

Tom was instrumental in assisting the City of Germantown in establishing its own library. He was an active reader and appreciated the value of a strong library to a community. For

many years, he served as the Chairman of the Board of the Germantown Library Foundation. In gratitude for his years of service, the Germantown Library recently named its primary collection the “C. Thomas Cates Collection.”

Since moving to Germantown in 1979, Tom and Elaine have been active and devoted members of Germantown Presbyterian Church. Tom taught Sunday school for youth and adults and furthered the church’s mission projects. His work with the church led him to serve as a board member, and ultimately Chairman of the Board, of NaCoMe, a Presbyterian camp and retreat center in Pleasantville, Tennessee.

As much as Tom was known for his legal and professional skills, he was also renowned for his skill as a gardener and outdoorsman. He was eager to share the bounty of vegetables he grew and to advise others of the secrets of his gardening success. Many friends, church members, neighbors, work colleagues, and even strangers enjoyed vegetables that he grew, especially his tomatoes. Every year, workers at MIFA would look forward to when he would deliver to the office a truck full of watermelon and sweet corn. He also enjoyed to fish and to hunt ducks and quail. He loved to host “fishing rodeos” at his home. He helped many children over the years catch their first fish.

He is survived by his wife Elaine; his sister Marilyn McCormick (David Spell); his children Cindy Cates Moore, Charles Cates, Jr., Taylor Cates (Carolyn), Andy Cates (Mary Allison); and his grandchildren Isabelle Moore, Lucy Moore, Amelia Cates, Thomas Cates, Campbell Cates, McCool Cates, and Wren Cates.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the family will wait and hold a memorial service on February 16, 2021, at Germantown Presbyterian Church, which will be live-streamed. Memorials may be made to the Germantown Community Library, 1925 Exeter Road, Germantown, TN 38138; Germantown Presbyterian Church, 2363 S. Germantown Rd., Germantown, TN 38138; or NaCoMe Camp and Retreat Center, 3232 Sulphur Creek Rd., Pleasantville, TN 37033.

Comments



“ We are so saddened by the passing of our dear friend like family, Mr. Tom Cates. We think by God’s design, he came into our life through a church youth group outing at his home and from there a lifelong friendship was formed. He became like a second grandparent to our son. They shared together their love of fishing, hunting and the great outdoors. He was a mentor, role model and friend to our son who loved to visit and spend time with him. We were so crushed that my son missed seeing him before he passed as our son is schooling abroad. Our son visited Mr. Cates over the Christmas holidays the morning after his passing, a day too late. We were all shocked and heartbroken as we didn’t realize his health had declined so suddenly. He left a loving imprint on our hearts, especially our son’s heart and for that we will forever be grateful. We hope you are flying high Mr. Cates, fishing, hunting and growing a glorious garden in Heaven! Until we meet again dear friend. We so miss and love you! Thank you Mrs. Cates for sharing him with us..... We hope to help you in any way we can. Praying for you.....
With love, thankfulness and sympathy,
Dr. Ashley and Stacey Park and son, Ashley II

Stacey and Ashley Park and son Ashley II - January 09 at 03:01 PM



“ I remember Tom Cates as a witty, loving father. He and Elaine were very involved with their children’s activities at SGIS. On a trip to Land Between the Lakes with the fourth grade,
I remember his announcement that we were approaching the birthplace of a really great guy... and the great guy was Tom.
In our Savior’s grace,
Betty Martin

Betty Martin - January 03 at 11:31 PM



“ I was also a classmate of Tom at Vanderbilt Law School (Carol was one of two women in our class!) and his partner at Burch Porter & Johnson for about 20 years. Tom was an excellent lawyer - well respected by his peers and by mayors of Germantown and Collierville which he served as city attorney for many years. Tom will be missed by many of us.

Allen Malone - December 31, 2020 at 10:56 AM



“ Tom and I were classmates at Vanderbilt Law School and worked together at Burch, Porter, and Johnson. Our children played together. He was a fine lawyer and a fine friend. I will miss him.

Carol Daugherty Rasnic

Carol Daugherty Rasnic - December 30, 2020 at 02:02 PM



“ Tom was always someone I looked to for legal advice as Mayor of Germantown. He met challenges with compassion for people first, but stood his ground on the letter of the law . I will miss his friendship, quick wit and humor. My thoughts and prayers are with Elaine and the family.

Charles Salvaggio

Charles Salvaggio - December 28, 2020 at 04:25 PM



“ Tom was the first lawyer I ever hired for my brand new securities firm. All I knew was he was a young lawyer who got his law degree from Vanderbilt. The year was 1971. We fought many legal battles together. He was a great lawyer. The only time my firm was ever sued in Chancery Court Tom was my attorney. He put on a brilliant defense, and asked the judge for a summary judgement. The judge granted the motion. The case was dismissed without going to the Jury. Tom was also one of the most decent men I have ever known. I will miss those occasional calls from him to meet at the Picadilly for lunch.

I loved Tom Cates!!

Bill Carty

Bill R. Carty - December 28, 2020 at 04:49 PM



“ I am sorry to learn of Tom Cates passing. He was an excellent attorney and a fine person.

Tommy Farnsworth - December 28, 2020 at 10:08 AM