

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BRISTOL

The Law Courts
Small Street
Bristol
BS1 1DA

BEFORE:

THE RECORDER OF BRISTOL HIS HONOUR JUDGE BLAIR QC

Parties Present and their status

His Honour Judge Patrick
Mr Tully, for the local Bar
Mr Nick Clough, for Solicitors

Hearing in the Memory of the Late Rodney King

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A **His Honour Judge Blair QC:** I have summonsed us all together this morning to say a few words about Rodney King. There's much to celebrate publicly about Rodney King. I imagine he will be rather embarrassed that we are talking about him here today, but at the same time quietly proud to hear how much he was loved whilst with us on this mortal

B coil. I'm going to invite His Honour Judge Patrick in a few moments to say a few words about him, who also knew Rodney in a different context. A representative of the Bar will speak and has kindly agreed to speak on behalf of the Bar, and I think Mr Clough on behalf of the solicitors' profession.

C I knew Rodney King as an instructing solicitor when he briefed me over the years to represent a number of his clients who had got into trouble with the police. I remember him listening patiently to me on those occasions when I rather over excitedly came up with some clever legal argument which might possibly undermine the Prosecution's case,

D but I quickly sensed his scepticism on those occasions about trying to be clever. He would respond by giving one of his broad grins and, without more ado, gently turn the conversation back to the practicalities in hand that needed to be arranged about bail, witnesses, clients, character witnesses.

E Rodney was not a man for airs and graces, he was practical, he was pragmatic, he had no wish to project himself as a sophisticated man about town, instead he was a straightforward and genuine Bristolian. Motivated by serving fellow human beings who

F faced worrying legal problems and needed the help he could provide. I hope I don't tread on the toes of anyone who is yet to speak in a moment, but this was an extraordinary man, the adjective that comes to my mind to describe our dear friend is compassionate.

G I remember a particular occasion a few years ago, when personally I was under a lot of stress and feeling rather isolated, but, to my extraordinary surprise, found Rodney taking the trouble to track me down and offer his support and sympathy. No other solicitor ever did that, that I can remember. He followed it up by writing to me and thereafter we had

H a number of very open conversations about some of life's deepest issues. It's a pity that he had such a short time in retirement before leaving us, but I rather suspect he will have been allocated heaven's equivalent of a luxury apartment with a balcony view, as a reward for his servant heart. Judge Patrick.

A **His Honour Judge Patrick:** It was only on very rare occasions when Mr Tully, Mrs Vigars, or Miss Collins were busy that Rodney ever instructed me. But then again, he always did have an eye for the real talent. But I think I knew him best from a rather different perspective because for the 11 years that I was an assistant priest at All Saints Clifton, Rodney was a member of my congregation, Although I always felt that he saw it

B the other way around, and that I was a part of his. Modest, unassuming, politically correct, always quietly at the edge of things, none of those concepts describe Rodney. He was larger than life and always had something to say, which was usually either kind or, more often than not, simply outrageous.

C All the time that I was at All Saints he would accompany his mother, Mama Joyce as he called her, to Mass. They lived next door to each other until, in her last years, it was necessary for her to move. He was incredibly close to all his family and it is especially

D good that his younger sister, Alison, is here this morning or Our Kid, as he called her. He was always talking of his family and when he was with them, treating them in the same comic way that he would treat the rest of us.

E I remember being invited to lunch by some friends and as I walked into their sitting room I found Rodney and his mother there. He looked at her and said in a stage whisper, now take that silver out of your bag and put it back in the cupboard where you found it. She loved it. He maintained his humour right to the end. Alison tells the story that a week ago today, when he was weakened by his illness, a nurse came to his bedside armed with

F a syringe and he warned her, gently, he said, I've got the claim forms in my bag. There was always laughter when Rodney was around and he could raise an eyebrow in a way that made Frankie Howerd look like an amateur.

G He was though, a committed Christian. It's an understatement to say that his faith was important to him. He went to Mass, not only on Sundays but through the week as well. He served on committees and would take part in discussion groups during the season of Lent. If there was a concert or some fun to be had, he was there. He supported the congregation, sorting out their conveyancing, writing their wills, they all turned to him.

H His faith didn't stop at the church door. It's clear that his Christian faith influenced his life and his work.

A In many ways, he was more an old fashioned country solicitor than he was the city
version. By that I mean that there are untold examples of his kindness and generosity in
terms of his time and talents: people helped, listened to, supported, fee notes left unspent,
extra work done and never billed. It's no accident, I think, that many of his clients seem
B to be far more demanding than the clients of other firms. Money wasn't important to
Rodney, helping those in need was. He lived his faith and it was a comfort to him that he
died supported by it.

C And Rodney also loved a party. I was fortunate enough to be invited to what I think now
must have been his 60th birthday along, of course, with several hundred of his closest
friends. It was a lavish affair because he was a generous host. The instructions were
extensive, where it was, when we were to arrive, what we were to wear, what we could
and what we could not bring. We were to be gathered at the front of the building at a
particular time and of course we all did as we were told but our host was nowhere to be
D seen until suddenly, Rodney appeared on a balcony above us.

E Now, my memory might be faulty but I seem to remember a fanfare of trumpets. I can't
remember what his outfit was, partly because it was one of three costume changes that
afternoon. Again, I seem to remember it was a circus ringmaster, if it wasn't, it should
have been because he was like the ringmaster, at the centre of things, but so that the show
was the best it could be.

F Sad though we are today, especially for his family, we should give thanks for all that
Rodney did, seen and unseen and above all, for laughter, joy and fun.

His Honour Judge Blair QC: Mr Tully.

G **Mr Tully:** My Lord, if I may just say a few words on behalf of the local Bar. Any of us
who were fortunate enough to be briefed by Rodney King on behalf of one of his clients
always felt incredibly fortunate. He was a true gent and a consummate professional,
unfailingly courteous, conscientious, caring and kind, but, as has already just been said,
H humour was never very far from the surface. There was always a twinkle in his eye and
there was never a smile that was very far from his lips. The one thing he never really
stood for was pomposity. He could puncture artifice very easily. He was always down
to earth.

A One small, short anecdote, if I may, to illustrate that. I had the good fortune to be instructed by him to represent an alleged rapist. The trial was to take place in London. We traipsed up to London on a number of occasions for pre trial hearings and I implored the Crown to see the error of their way and to drop what I suggested was a weak case. I was unsuccessful in my imploring. So, we turned up for trial and on day one I was then

B told by my opponent that he belatedly shared my views of the Crown's case. We didn't get on until the afternoon, so he asked for some time to consider the matter overnight and we were adjourned. That had the net effect of meaning that Rodney and I were footloose and fancy free in London for the evening. What might we do? Well, I had a brainwave.

C Perhaps drawing upon my long experience of keeping company with Ian Glen, Queen's Counsel, I decided to dazzle and impress Rodney with my ability to show him a good time in the capital that evening. The top show in town at that stage was a revival of a

D Samuel Beckett play called Endgame which had had rave reviews in the press and was hotly tipped for all of the awards. I landed two late returns for us. How fortunate we were.

E My Lord, I don't know how familiar you are with that particular play but the synopsis, drawn from Wikipedia, tells us it's Samuel Beckett's one act play which is commonly considered to be one of his most important works. There are four characters, one called Hamm, who is described as being unable to stand and blind. Clov, Hamm's servant, unable to sit, taken in by Hamm as a child. Nagg, Hamm's father, no legs, lives in a

F dustbin. Nell, Hamm's mother, has no legs and lives in a dustbin next to Nagg. Well it was existential claptrap and as we left you can imagine what Rodney had made of our evening. He turned to me and very audibly was heard to say, much to the amusement of everybody leaving the theatre, I wish we'd gone to see Mamma Mia!.

G Well, that was Rodney, our Rodney. Unlike that other famous Rodney, Rodney Trotter, he could never be considered to be a plonker. He was named, well named, King. Brendon Moorhouse was to tell me, as I was coming into Court this morning, a story of what Rodney relayed to him as how he came to be called Rodney. Apparently, he was named

H Rodney because HMS Rodney happened to be moored up close to where he was born at the time. He said his parents took one look at him and one look at the boat and decided that the boat had a small behind but it had a big gun upfront apparently, and therefore he

was to be named Rodney. Well, we're all the poorer for his passing, we're all the richer for having known him. We'll miss him in these Courts and in this city.

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His Honour Judge Blair QC: Thank you Mr Tully, yes, Mr Clough.

Mr Clough: If it pleases My Lord, I've been asked to say a few words on behalf of the solicitors of Bristol, many of whom knew Rodney, and I first met him many, many years ago when we were both on a committee called the National Committee for Law Students in the early 1970s and when I came to Bristol, he was a very effective chairman of that committee, and when I came to Bristol I was surprised that he had not changed at all.

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He still looked at life through the lens of humour and he was, as has been said, larger than life, a man who was universally known, and universally liked, a man of great warmth and generosity, hardly a bad word to say for anybody, only in very rare circumstances, and I don't know anybody who's really had a bad word to say for Rodney.

D

He was a committed Christian, he was committed to his family and later in my career I found myself employed by him, and I found him to be an employer as he had been a friend. He never raised his voice, he was very magnanimous, he was kind to everyone he met. He suffered, as most people know, for some years from diabetes and that he bore with great fortitude. His retirement unfortunately was sadly cut short and he will be sadly missed.

E

May I tell a story that he was to tell, and this is a story he told me in the early '70s and it's the unembellished version, because Rodney was very good at embellishing stories. Over the years it became grander and grander but this is the, this is the original and this is what he said happened.

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It was when he was in articles, he was articled to a gentleman called Paul *Dimambro*, whose career unfortunately didn't go as he hoped it would but, be that as it may, one summer evening Paul said to him, Rodney my eldest daughter is due to take her driving test in two weeks' time, perhaps you would take her out for a driving lesson, and he agreed to do so, and shortly before they got back to the house Rodney said to the young lady, I'm afraid I've been caught short, I wonder if I could use your facilities? And she said yes, it's at the top of the stairs, as soon as you get in through the front door, straight up

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the stairs, the door facing you, and he went bounding up the stairs two at a time and sank, as he said, onto the toilet seat with a sweaty sigh and evacuated himself, to find a polite cough to his right, and he turned to see Mr *Dimambro* brushing his back with, with a loofah. He said there was no way to extricate himself from that situation.

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He will be, he will be sadly missed, he was one of the real characters of the Bristol legal circuit and the law doesn't throw up characters like him very often. He will be, as I say, very sadly missed, we are all the better for having known him and we are diminished greatly by his loss.

C

His Honour Judge Blair QC: Thank you very much. I shall order a transcript of today's proceedings and I know for certain that Bristol Law Society would like to put something in their next publication, which may reflect some of the very warm thoughts that have been expressed this morning, but thank you very much for gathering this morning in his memory.

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