

CHARLES BARROW

*'An outstanding judge
and an outstanding man'*

by Tommy Denton

A dreary December drizzle cast a gray mist across the living room window. On the hearth next to a slowly burning heap of logs in the fireplace lay the sports section of the Austin Sunday paper. The headline bore the black message: Missouri 70, Baylor 51. For Charles W. Barrow, shelling pecans as a sort of primal therapy, the damp, overcast skies were a suitable setting.

"I look in the paper in the morning," Barrow said, "and if I see Baylor won something, I feel good all day. If they lose, I feel down, and it affects the rest of my day."

For an eminent member of the Texas Supreme Court, that admission might seem incongruous. But to those who know Charley Barrow, it isn't at all.

"I went to Baylor largely by chance, but Mother said it was the answer to her prayer," Barrow said, recalling the quirk of destiny that led him to Waco and Baylor.

He said that after he graduated from high school in Jourdanston, he felt no allure to follow in his father's footsteps as a lawyer.

"I was going to be an engineer. The only man who had any money in Jourdanston was a civil engineer with the Highway Department, and he had a new car every year," Barrow said, reflecting on the more material motivations driving his adolescent mind. "We drove up to SMU. It seemed like Jourdanston could fit in that quadrangle there, it looked so big to me."

"I hadn't given a thought in the world to Baylor, but we stopped by on the way back home. A most imposing man with a cluster of silver hair came out into the foyer of the administration building. It was President Pat Neff. He took us into his office, and within fif-



Charles Barrow—justice of the Texas Supreme Court

Tommy Denton

teen minutes I had a job mowing the grass for the summer to pay off my tuition. I think I figured it at two bits an hour."

At the first opportunity, Barrow tried out for the tennis team. "Mowing that grass in that heat made me a lot better tennis player," he said. "My freshman year I made the team, and as a result I got a job teaching two P.E. classes in tennis." This ended his career as a lawn mower. He went on to win varsity letters in 1940, 1941 and 1942. And he earned a law degree in 1943.

In World War II, Barrow served as a Naval line officer on a ship that received seven battle stars. "I'm no hero," he says. "I was on a ship, I went where it went, and I just tried to hang on." He was recalled to duty in the Korean war, a tour that altered his view of life.

"You know, in the Navy in Korea, there wasn't a whole lot to do," he said. "I remember in the evenings just after supper, I would sit on the eye of the ship, smoke a cigar and just think. One of the things I realized there was the unimportance of money. I had three \$100 bills in my pocket, and there was nothing I could do with them.

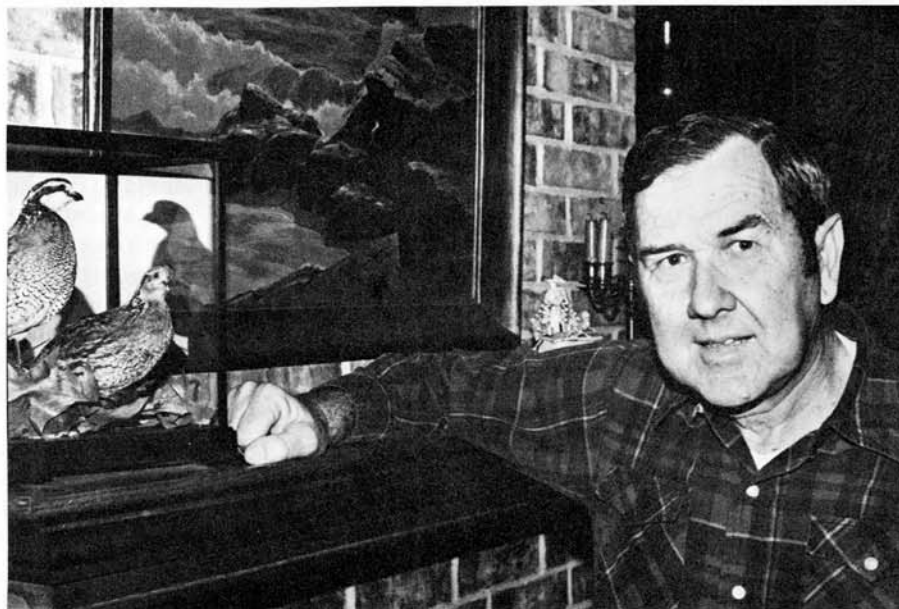
"My main goal in life had been to make money. I promised myself then that if I ever got back, I would try to put a little more in my life."

He did return safely to his wife, the former Sugie Williams, whom he had met at Baylor and married in 1943, and his two sons, Wally and John. (David and James came along after the Korean war.) One of his first acts was to request that his name be added to those of his firm's other partners, and the San Antonio firm became Moursund, Ball, Bergstrom, and Barrow.

During his judicial career, Charley Barrow has written more than 600 legal opinions, not a paltry achievement. But through the years of rendering difficult constructions of law, he has chosen not to clutter his personal life with the complexities that must be woven into his legal opinions. He declines to postulate complicated philosophies of life, and those who know him well say he hasn't a pretentious bone in his being.

"He is highly qualified as a lawyer, he is an upstanding citizen, he is an outstanding family man," said Jack Dillard, executive director of the Texas Center for the Judiciary in Austin. "In addition to his ability, he is a very personable individual and has a tremendous sense of humor. He's just ol' Charley Barrow."

Waco attorney Lyndon Olson, Sr., also speaks in glowing terms of his fellow Baylor graduate. "He is an outstanding judge and an outstanding



Tommy Denton

man," Olson said. "I've been impressed with him as long as I've known him and read his opinions through the years. I have observed him as a fellow Baylor graduate and jurist through the years from a distance; I'm proud to see a Baylor graduate achieve the position in the profession he has. It certainly reflects well on Baylor and the Baylor Law School."

"What everybody looks for is peace of mind," he said, trying to skirt an effort to make him wax eloquent. "The ultimate thing that gives you peace of mind is a belief that this world and these people are run by God. I never tried to adopt a philosophy or plan of life other than to do the job wide open. I'd like for my kids to find the belief that there is a Supreme Being. I believe everybody needs something they can hang on to in life. I've tried to teach the boys the value of hard work.

"I've never tried to work it out. I've seen things I've thought I got on top of pretty quick, and I've seen it turn 180 degrees. What started out as one of the happiest days of my life turned out to be the day my father and mother were killed in a car wreck. You've got to have something to hold on to."

When his father died, Charles Barrow ran in and won the election to fill his seat on the Fourth Court of Civil Appeals in San Antonio as an associate justice. He rose to chief justice in 1977, and he was appointed to the state's highest civil tribunal in 1977. "My goal as a judge has always been to earn the respect of my peers, associates, the public, to have them say that I was a good judge. I'm just a commonsense judge. If the law doesn't make common sense, I want to know why."

A slate of his credentials fairly

bulges with achievements: Chairman of Texas Judges, 1971-72; Baylor Lawyer of the Year, 1972; Distinguished Jurist Gavel Award, St. Mary's School of Law, 1978; Greenhill Judicial Award, 1979; Charter member, Judicial Qualifications Committee; Co-editor, Benchbook for Texas Trial Judges; Co-editor, Texas Pattern Jury Charges; and numerous articles in bar journals. He is an active Methodist layman, serving on the board of Stewards of Manchaca United Methodist Church in Austin. He is a 33rd-degree Scottish Rite Mason and has held numerous offices in that organization. He is a past president of the San Antonio Baylor Alumni Club, past director of the Baylor University Alumni Association, and now is a director of the Baylor Bear Club.

M.A. "Catfish" Smith, executive director of the Baylor Bear Club and former Baylor football coach, testifies to Barrow's dedication to Baylor athletics. "Charley Barrow has been giving to the athletic program since I've been here . . . I know for twenty-two years. He's got that ol' green and gold in him. Lordy, he's been awfully good to us!"

And Barrow himself says it: "You never saw anybody who's a stronger Baylor man than I am. I met my wife there. I made a lifetime of friends. We learned a concern for each other. You can't do anything on your own. We need each other.

"And you know, I've had the same seats in Baylor Stadium for twenty-five years. You can look around you, see who's there, and see who's died. . . ."

Not exactly random thoughts on a rainy afternoon in December, with a glowing fire crackling, punctuated by the rhythmic crunch of pecan shells.