

## Memorial: Oscar E. (Skeets) Strothers (1921–2005)

### Elegance, Style, and Grace\*

¶1 Oscar “Skeets” Strothers, former chief law librarian at the U.S. Department of Energy, died of heart disease on Saturday, November 19, 2005, at Providence Hospital in Washington, D.C.

¶2 He was the son of Oscar Strothers and Mary Wilkins Strothers, and a native of Atlanta, Georgia. Oscar and his sister, Doris Strothers Borum, were raised by their maternal grandmother, Cherry Brown Wilkins. Mrs. Wilkins, their grandmother, was a suffragette and a colleague of both W.E.B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass. This was a distinct complement to Oscar’s upbringing.

¶3 Oscar was educated in the private and public schools of Atlanta, including Oglethorpe Academy Preparatory School, Booker T. Washington High School, and Morehouse College. He served in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

¶4 After his discharge as sergeant, Oscar furthered his education at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School and the Catholic University of America where he studied library science. He became a professional law librarian and spent his entire career with the federal government, working at the Department of Commerce, the Civil Aeronautics Board, the Department of Transportation, and, finally, the Energy Department. He retired in 1995.

¶5 He was one of the founders of the Law Librarians’ Society of Washington, D.C., and served as its president from 1973 to 1975. He was also an active member of the Tuskegee Airmen and the D.C. chapter of the Morehouse College Alumni Association. Those who knew Oscar have wonderful memories of a man who was a mentor to many. He had all of the skills and attributes of the top professionals and the willingness to share his knowledge with others.

¶6 For many of us, we will remember Oscar as a person for whom style was an intimate and inseparable fact of his personality. He was one of those people with an acutely strong sense of who he was and how he wished to live. He realized that being a “gentleman” would distinguish his life from others and allow him to become a model for the undecided. He dressed for success before it became a popular concept, and he had remarkable impacts on the people he met professionally or socially.

¶7 Oscar also loved to entertain and, especially, to laugh—he had a distinctive one that could bring a smile to anyone within hearing distance. He had a deep interest in fine foods and aged liquors and was received by name in many of the renowned Washington restaurants. Oscar really enjoyed an excellent meal, and to share dinner with him at the Annual Meeting was a treat not to be missed. He had

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a *joie de vivre* that transcended and brightened any social circle he was in. And he could cut a mean step on the dance floor.

¶8 Oscar was preceded in death by his parents, Oscar Strothers and Mary Wilkins Strothers; grandmother, Cherry Brown Wilkins; sister, Doris Strothers Borum; and other relatives. He leaves to cherish his memory, Helen Davis Strothers, his wife of fifty-two years; two daughters, Leslie Strothers Fletcher and husband Brian, and Martina Strothers Leonard and husband Stephen; one grandson, Christopher Stephen Leonard; numerous nieces and nephews; a host of family and friends; and many law librarian colleagues whom he taught how to value a career and place it within the proper context of one's life: Be exceptionally good at what you do, but do not do it at the expense of living one's life to the fullest . . . and do that with elegance, style, and grace.—*Marvin Anderson*<sup>1</sup>

### Tuesday, November 22, 2005\*

¶9 I received sad news this morning. My friend Marvin Anderson called to inform me that Oscar Strothers, one of our dearest friends and a retired member of AALL had passed away. It is difficult to settle down enough to think back over years of friendship. These thoughts come to mind.

¶10 I began work at the law library of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Little did I know that it would turn into one of the most interesting careers a person could ever have. Those were the days when our library budget was sufficient to offer great opportunities for travel, continuing scholarship, and professional growth. Best of all, Director Lance E. Dickson encouraged those opportunities. What fortune to attend my first AALL Annual Meeting in Toronto, in 1977, and to begin meeting colleagues and dear friends.

¶11 Registration was about \$40 (no, I did not leave out a zero!). As advised by my director, I attended CONELL, the Conference for Newer Law Librarians, held at the Inns of Court. There I met Marvin Anderson, who was changing careers—"serving hard time" as he put it—by completing a library school graduate program. After CONELL, Marvin and I continued to find our way as more members of AALL began to arrive. As we met others, the question asked at every turn was, "Have you met Oscar?"

¶12 That first "Oscar" meeting was captured so well by Marvin in an earlier piece for *Law Library Journal*<sup>2</sup> which I heartily recommend. The best way I can

1. Minnesota State Law Librarian, Retired, Saint Paul, Minnesota. The author acknowledges the contributions of Helen Davis Strothers, Leslie Strothers Fletcher, and Martina Strothers Leonard, widow and daughters of Oscar Strothers; and the additions and contributions to obituary information by Rita M. Parham.

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2. Marvin Anderson, *Three Plus One for the Road*, 91 LAW LIBR. J. 183, 184–85 (1999) (describing first meeting with Oscar Strothers, one of his mentors).

describe my first meeting with Oscar is to say that I became an instant groupie. Oscar was the *gold standard of law librarian mentors*. He took us under his wing and was our leader.

¶13 When Oscar was serving as president of the Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C., he would attend luncheons for chapter presidents and the chapter's meetings during the Annual Meeting. He would bid us a "see you later," and disappear behind the door of the meeting room. It was hard being left on the other side of the door to figure out what to do until he reappeared, at least until someone would say, "Let's go to the exhibits" or "Maybe we should have lunch."

¶14 Marvin and I treasure our last conversation with Oscar. It was a pleasure to hear his voice, to talk with Helen, his wonderful wife, and get an update on "the girls." There was even a hint of some consideration to attend the St. Louis meeting. Then came the call on Tuesday, November 22, 2005.

¶15 I will miss so many things about Oscar Strothers: his distinctive laugh, most often an indication of mischief; his enthusiasm for the profession of law librarianship; his contagious love of life and desire to help and mentor his colleagues; and his love for family, friends, and community. It is comforting to be counted as a member of the host of family and friends who mourn his passing, along with the AALL membership.—*Rita M. Parham*<sup>3</sup>

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3. Law Library, Paul M. Hebert Law Center, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.