

## WILLIAM PALMER '89: MCGEORGE'S "LONE JEDI"



What do a first-edition book autographed by Rosa Parks and a thank you letter penned by Benjamin Netanyahu have in common? They were both given to attorney William Palmer '89 in recognition of his contributions to the protection of human and civil rights.

So, who is William "Bill" Palmer?

"I guess I would like to think of myself as a lone Jedi - from the original Star Wars, not the more recent remakes." Much like the monastic heroes who guard peace and justice in the galaxy, Palmer has dedicated his career to righting wrongs and giving a voice to the voiceless.

But before he was defending Carol McNeal, an African-American bookstore owner in Sacramento, against a hate crime, or penning Holocaust insurance reparations laws, or writing model laws from a military compound in Iraq, the powerhouse attorney hailed from ordinary beginnings.

Palmer is a native of Sacramento and has fond memories of growing up near University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law campus. During law school, he lived in his grandmother's house in the Land Park neighborhood and rode his bike to class. "I remember digging for quarters

in my backpack to buy coffee at the coffee shop on campus," said Palmer.

He knew in high school that he wanted to pursue law as a career. "I felt that I would never stop learning and that I would be able to make changes in society." After high school, he attended UCLA where he majored in history and was an active member of the Theta Chi fraternity and men's crew team. When it was time to apply to law school, McGeorge was the natural choice.

"I was lucky to go to law school. I took out student loans, and I put myself through. I couldn't afford to fail," said Palmer. And he didn't.

After graduating from McGeorge in 1989, he was hired by Diepenbrock Wulff Plant & Hannegan, Sacramento's oldest law firm at the time. The experience was life-altering. "I learned so much working alongside such hardworking lawyers. We worked really hard." The experience launched his career and in 1999, Palmer struck out on his own and founded the Palmer Law Group.

Throughout his career he has written several laws and treaties in the areas of insurance regulation and served as the General Counsel on insurance and Chief of Staff for the California Department of Insurance. He is also widely recognized for his work in a series of federal cases that challenged the constitutionality of California's unclaimed property law. His efforts resulted in a federal injunction that closed the state's Unclaimed Property Division and forced the rewrite of the law.

"As a young lawyer, I considered myself lucky if I had just one published decision," said Palmer. "I never imagined that I would brief five cases to the United States Supreme Court with two written opinions - one with Harvard Constitutional Law Professor Laurence Tribe, and the other with Harvard Federal

Procedure Professor David Shapiro as co-counsel, respectively."

But Palmer is most proud of his pro bono and civil rights work, which includes challenging the acting U.S. Secretary of State on behalf of families who lost sons in Iraq to kidnappers. The case led to the overturning of the United States Hostage Policy, announced by President Obama before he left office.

He's currently finishing a project for the United Nations writing model laws and regulations in the Solomon Islands. While on Guadalcanal, he helped cut through legal snarls to install a new national park commemorating the 75th anniversary of the WWII Marine Corps victory with a one-ton granite monument atop the famous Bloody Ridge. While there, Palmer catalogued the names of Theta Chi brothers known to have participated in the Guadalcanal campaign and helped deliver sand from the battle site to the family of a Marine whose remains were never recovered.

With such an illustrious career, it's easy to overlook Palmer's most crowning achievement - raising three children as a single father. "I did the endless loads of laundry, braided my little girl's hair, shopped for prom dresses...I wasn't hard-wired for that work, but I would never fail my children," said Palmer. "I call them my three "Magic Buttons," and they are my proudest achievement."

While his career has earned him a collection of published cases too numerous to count, Palmer hasn't lost sight of where he started.

"It seems I have traveled millions of miles and lived five lives since walking out the front door of McGeorge in 1989. Yet, the tools my professors handed me have stayed with me always, and I continue to use them to straighten the Arc of Justice."