

ROBERT DOUGLAS DALTON, 1929 — 2022

Criminal defense lawyer represented famous and infamous

By Douglas Saunders*Daily Journal Staff Writer*

Doug Dalton, who represented the famous and infamous – including Roman Polanski and John D. Ehrlichman – during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, has died. He was 92.

Robert Douglas Dalton grew up in Long Beach and dreamed of becoming a lawyer, his son, Bart Dalton of Brozynski & Dalton PC in Plano, Texas, said.

“He would tell us stories when he was a kid in Long Beach that he would take the trolley up to Los Angeles just so he could watch trials at the courthouse,” Bart Dalton said. “That was something he just did, but he never

thought he would be able to go to law school.”

The GI Bill helped Dalton obtain his dream. After graduating from UCLA, he enlisted in the Navy and served between 1951 and 1953. Once honorably discharged, he attended law school at the University of Southern California and then went to work as a prosecutor in the Long Beach City Attorney’s Office.

Dalton left public service in 1960 to work in private practice for Joseph Ball of Ball, Hunt, Hart, Brown & Baerwitz. There, he sharpened his legal skills, representing clients in civil actions before growing a criminal defense practice. One client was the widow of famed Los Angeles Times reporter Ruben Salazar.

Salazar was assigned to cover an Aug. 29, 1970 protest in East Los Angeles billed the National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War. The protest was sparked by the large number of Latino-American servicemen dying in Southeast Asia. The protest drew 30,000 people that day. According to reports, the protesters were peaceful until the police showed up. Then things got chaotic.

Salazar, one of the most prominent Latino journalists of his day, was among the three people who died. He was sitting at a bar sipping a beer when he was struck in the head by a 10 inch torpedo shaped tear gas projectile fired by a deputy sheriff.

Bart Dalton said his father secured a \$700,000 settlement in a civil lawsuit

brought by Salazar’s family. The deputy was never charged with a crime.

“I believe at the time it was one of the most significant payouts in the county by a municipality,” Bart Dalton said.

Soon Ehrlichman, the aide to President Richard Nixon, hired Dalton to defend him. Ehrlichman and co-defendants G. Gordon Liddy and David R. Young Jr. were accused of conspiracy and burglary in connection with the break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s former psychiatrist following Ellsberg’s leak of the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times.

Ehrlichman and the others wanted Nixon to testify that they were acting as law enforcement officers. Dalton tried to subpoena Nixon but White

House counsel James St. Clair rejected the request.

Ehrlichman was found guilty of three counts of perjury and one of conspiracy. He was sentenced on July 31, 1974, to 20 months in prison.

That was the case that made Doug Dalton a go-to lawyer for celebrities who got into legal scrapes, Bart Dalton said.

“He became known as a kind of celebrity lawyer in town. He represented John Lennon, Jim Brown, Burt Reynolds and the one they all talk a lot about, Roman Polanski,” Bart Dalton said.

Bart Dalton said his father was a giant in the profession.

“I remember I had some court hearing in Pomona and dad had a friend in

the DA’s office in Pomona so he came out with me and he was waiting in the back and the judge was in the middle of something,” the son said. “The judge stopped and said, ‘Mr. Dalton, do you need something?’ It was like the whole world had frozen because my father was there – he was that well respected.”

“It was always very impressive when he walked into a room. I am honored to be his son,” Bart Dalton said.

Doug Dalton passed away Aug. 20, 11 days before his 93rd birthday. He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Shirley, and their five children, Juila, John, Douglas, Matthew and Bartholomew.

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