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DAILY DATEBOOK

THE IN CROWD

Defending Douglas  
Leah Garchik

The reputation of the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, maligned in "Wild Bill," Bruce Murphy's biography published earlier this year, was defended last week in Uncle Sam's ceremonial courtroom in San Francisco, at an event hosted by the Federal Bar Association and the U.S. District Court Historical Society. Ninth Circuit Judge William Alsup, who'd clerked for Douglas in 1971 and 1972, had been upset by Murphy's claims that Douglas had lied about his military service (Murphy writes Douglas never served) and childhood bout with polio (Murphy says Douglas never had polio). These charges have been repeated in various book reviews, most notably by U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Richard Posner in a New Republic piece that also called Douglas "rude, ice-cold, hot-tempered, ungrateful, foul-mouthed, self-absorbed and devoured by ambition."

This isn't the view of 30 admiring clerks -- including former Secretary of State Warren Christopher -- Douglas' second wife, Mercedes Eicholtz, and his widow, Kathy Douglas Stone, who were among those at the hour-and-a-half presentation. The purpose was proving Douglas had served in the military, and that while exact documentation is unavailable, it's entirely possible he had polio.

Alsup emphasizes he's not accusing Murphy of lying but of faulty scholarship. "I don't think that people should try to promote themselves at the expense of public servants who cannot defend themselves," Alsup told TIC. "I felt that some of us owed it to his memory to set the record straight."

P.S. Christopher, a guest at the Luncheon Project earlier that day (at One Market), said he clerked for Douglas in 1949, and he's the late justice's oldest surviving clerk.

P.P.S. All this legal action has to do with the American Bar Association convention, which has had a few jolly moments. Two hundred merry lawyers attended a prebanquet roast of civil rights lawyer Dale Minami at Ozumo on Thursday night, along with actress Tamlyn Tomita, who appeared in a comic video about the honoree's social life. Minami, one of People magazine's "50 Most Eligible Bachelors" two years ago, apparently includes having a good time among his personal civil rights.

SURPRISE?: Patti Austin, looking suspiciously glammed up but proclaiming

herself totally astonished, was guest of honor at a surprise party Sunday night at Shanghai 1930. Q Production, which does management work for her, had lured Mayor Willie Brown, Wilkes Bashford, Stanlee Gatti and a gaggle of musical pals, including whiz kid-singer 16-year-old Ryan Huston, Dick Bright on the violin, Carter Collins on the congas, and Frank Martin on the piano. Their "Everyday People" didn't sound everyday at all.

Brown had been on "Face the Nation" early in the day singing the Democratic song -- Gray Davis will withstand the attack -- but he and Gatti couldn't resist chortling about Larry Flynt, who's paralyzed from the neck down, saying the governor's "paralyzed from the neck up."

MEANWHILE: Outside a Williams-Sonoma store, Public Eavesdropper Keira Williams heard a woman ask, "How come everyone named Fred is so jovial?"

GLIMPSES: Backstreet Boy and musical star Kevin Richardson, who's appearing in "Chicago," took some after-work refreshment at the Clift Hotel's Redwood Room Thursday night, where he was surrounded by gaga fans, reports a TIC spy, and had such a good time that he stayed until closing time. On Sunday, Richardson and the "Chicago" cast went to Asia SF, where the "girls" performed a "Cell Block Tango" to honor their guests.

And Kristi Yamaguchi, Emerald Yeh, execs from Visa and Macy's and, former Police Chief Fred Lau were at Roy's that night, at a dinner for Emme Tomimbang, host of "Emme's Island Moments" on Hawaiian TV, which is about to show a segment on restaurateur Roy Yamaguchi.

FINALLY: Topping the excitement of Tammy Faye Bakker, last year's featured guest at Bob Pritikin's annual Labor Day party for 600 nearest and dearest, is this year's guest: Mickey Rooney. Pritikin won't say how much he's paying for Rooney, who uses considerably less mascara than Bakker.

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The downside of fame

"Sometimes you see your pot belly in the paper. That's annoying."

-- Chris Martin on the attention he's been getting as Gwyneth Paltrow's boyfriend, in Us Weekly.

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PHOTO (3); Caption: (1) William O. Douglas: Help from his friends, (2) Kevin Richardson: Downtime

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