

Anselmo was judge, mental health advocate



Arthur Anselmo recognized himself in Rudyard Kipling's poem "If."

"If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster/And treat those two impostors just the same/ ... Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it" was often quoted by Anselmo. By the time he died in April at age 89 in Duluth, he had known both.

He became a municipal judge at age 26 and a state court judge in Minnesota's Sixth District at age 34, served 20 years as assistant Minnesota attorney general, had drinks with Ernest Hemingway, dated Ginger Rogers and gleefully chaired Gov. Rudy Perpich's State Commission on Bocce Ball.

Anselmo, who had bipolar disorder, also frittered away nearly \$1 million on sports cars, women and bad investments, spent nine months in a psychiatric hospital, became jobless and homeless, and married and divorced four times.

"He definitely experienced more heights and challenges than the average person," said his son Dario Anselmo of Edina. "Getting married and buying sports cars were two of his favorite things to do."

Former Minnesota Attorney General Warren Spannaus appointed Anselmo as his assistant attorney general working out of Duluth.

"I never would've won the election without Art," Spannaus said. "People in the Iron Range wrote me off as a gun control nut, but he'd introduce me and say, 'He's not trying to take your guns away.' I would never go to the Iron Range without him."

Anselmo graduated from Hibbing High School, served in World War II and earned an undergraduate degree from University of St. Thomas and a law degree from Marquette University in Milwaukee.

He served 20 years as assistant attorney general, and capped his years of public service as the official chairman of the Minnesota Commission on Bocce Ball in 1985 when asked by Perpich. In a Star Tribune interview at the time, Anselmo said, "Someday I figure bocce will be so big, there will be a bocce queen. I will want to reign with her." Criticized at the time of his appointment for not knowing the difference between a bocce ball and a beach ball, Anselmo said: "I always knew that there were usually beautiful girls behind beach balls and men with big cigars behind bocce balls."

Dario said his dad was good with a quip, but just as likely to make himself the butt of a joke in his storytelling. When Anselmo and his first wife, Barbara, ran into Robert Kennedy on the ski slopes in Aspen, Anselmo captivated Kennedy with stories about politics in Minnesota and about Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale. Or so he thought. "When

Dad quit talking, Bobby said, 'Could you get off my skis, please?' and left," Dario said.

Former Vice President Mondale described Anselmo as a natural politician. "He had a big smile, he liked people, and he was part of the rising Italian-American generation," he said.

Mondale believes bipolar disorder kept Anselmo from greater achievements. Many expected him to be on a path to the U.S. Senate or a Minnesota Supreme Court appointment. In 1969, he was the first patient at St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth to receive lithium, which changed his life. "He used to say that going off the medication was his medication. It was a temporary high, [but] he'd eventually get psychotic and delusional," Dario said.

In retirement, Anselmo became a mental health advocate who frequently shared his experiences, even making a brief appearance on Oprah Winfrey's show.

He died of renal failure April 26. In addition to his son Dario, he is survived by another son, Greg, of Miami, and three grandchildren. Services have been held.

John Ewoldt • 612-673-7633