

OCT 13 2023

US DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF NC

**RESOLUTION AND MEMORIAL
FOR
CHESLIE CORRINNE KRYST
October 13, 2023**

Your Honors, it is my distinct privilege and high honor to represent the Mecklenburg County Bar; my firm Poyner Spruill LLP; and Cheslie Kryst's family, friends and many supporters in presenting to the Court this Resolution and Memorial honoring the life and memory of Cheslie Corrinne Kryst. With the Courts' permission, I would like to address the audience and Court simultaneously. I will begin by recognizing the members of Cheslie's family who are present in Court.

To know Cheslie is to be inspired by her. Her many professional and personal accomplishments are well-documented, but she was so much more than that. We can honor Cheslie by honoring the principles that guided her life: justice, equity and love. She's been described as "walking sunshine" and that's true. Her memory remains a light in our lives.

Cheslie had a unique ability to challenge societal conventions. She excelled whether her stage was a courtroom, beauty pageant or a personal conversation. She was as comfortable in a pair of high heels as she was in spikes as a Division 1 track and field athlete. And it didn't matter if you were a client on death row or one of millions watching the entertainment news show where she worked as a correspondent, Cheslie made you feel special.

Cheslie was born on April 28, 1991, in Jackson, Mich., to Rodney Kryst and April Simpkins. Cheslie spent much of her childhood in Charlotte. After graduating from Fort Mill High School, Cheslie earned a business degree from the Honors College at the University of South Carolina, where she graduated cum laude. Additionally, she was an accomplished athlete, primarily participating in the long jump and triple jump, but as was her nature, she also competed in relays, hurdles and anything else her team needed. From the University of South Carolina she went to Wake Forest University where in 2017 Cheslie earned both a J.D. and M.B.A. She then successfully passed the bar in both North Carolina and South Carolina.

While attending law school she spent her summers in what she referred to as her "professional" law clerk position with Poyner Spruill. Then, in 2017, we were beyond thrilled when she chose to join our firm as a litigation associate. She was beloved by colleagues, clients and those in the wider legal community. Cheslie was a successful and enthusiastic attorney. In addition to her work for our firm, Cheslie pursued her passion as a pro-bono advocate for clients with excessive sentences, particularly people of color. She also started a blog for women that provided advice and inspiration concerning affordable and fashionable business attire.

Cheslie was an ardent advocate for meaningful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, especially in the legal industry. She helped draft the firm's DE&I plan and returned to the firm part time as our first Diversity Advisor after she began her television career. When Cheslie had the idea for a firm-sponsored panel discussion involving diverse voices in the legal community for Black History Month, she made it a reality. She always challenged the status quo and was vocal in sharing her passion for the cause. Her legacy lives on with Poyner Spruill and her shared brilliance continues to make us a better, more inclusive law firm.

DE&I was not her only cause. She became an Impact Ambassador for Dress for Success, combining her love for fashion and philanthropy. She also supported Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America and was named to their national board. These were just some of her many commitments to change, and she embraced all of them with enthusiasm.

As Cheslie was fully committed to her career as a full-time legal associate, her colleagues were surprised to learn in 2019 that she had won Miss North Carolina USA. For years, she had worked toward this achievement with unmatched discipline. Her mother was the former Mrs. North Carolina US. Cheslie won Miss Freshman at Northwestern High School in Rock Hill, S.C. and Miss Fort Mill High School in Fort Mill, S.C. Cheslie was a talented pianist, fashion designer and entrepreneur. Many people have vision but no one could bring that vision to life and communicate it to the world the way Cheslie could.

We all enthusiastically cheered when Cheslie was crowned Miss USA in 2019, and when she notably became part of the historic 'trifecta' of Black pageant winners along with Miss Teen USA, Kaliegh Garris, and Cheslie's dear friend Miss America, Nia Franklin. In fact, I recall a client texting me the night Cheslie won, excited to be able to tell all her friends and colleagues that her lawyer was Miss USA.

Cheslie proudly wore the Miss USA crown for 557 days as the longest-reigning titleholder in Miss USA history. The Miss USA title along with Cheslie's brilliance, quick wit and empathy opened doors for Cheslie to become a twice daytime Emmy-nominated correspondent for the TV program "Extra" and a national celebrity.

Despite her quick rise to stardom, Cheslie remained Cheslie. She stayed connected to our firm, the legal community and people she knew before she became a star. This included sending my daughter multiple ideas for her eighth-grade graduation dress.

Cheslie valued family. They grounded her and inspired her. She is survived by her parents – Rodney Kryst, April Simpkins, and David Simpkins; her sister – Page Kryst; her brothers - Asa Kryst, Chandler Kryst, Brooklyn Simpkins, and Jet Simpkins; her niece – Raegan Kryst; her grandparents – Joyce Reece-Thomas, Virginia Kryst, and Gary and Tessa Simpkins, and a host of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

At 30 years old, Cheslie tragically died by suicide on January 30, 2022, after a long battle with high-functioning depression. The fact that her struggles were unknown to so many sparked a nationwide movement to focus on mental health and come together as a community. That discussion continues to this day and will continue for a long time to come.

Everyone who worked with or knew Cheslie remembers her sense of humor, which could be a bit wicked and typically was accompanied by her contagious laugh. She could find humor in most everything. Her laugh also contained something undeniably sweet. Most anything would do, but Insomnia cookies in the afternoon will forever remind her co-workers of Cheslie. All who knew and loved her will also remember her smile when we think of her amazing spirit that she shared freely with so many.

Cheslie's legacy and impact will live on with the work that is being done in her name and in honor of her memory. Her passion for the law and for all being treated equitably and fairly is what should be taken from her legal career. Please join me, my law firm and the whole legal community in honoring Cheslie Kryst.

So, Your Honors, with a deep sense of friendship, admiration and gratitude for Cheslie's life, we, the undersigned, respectfully move that:

1. The United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina and the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, shall adjourn this day in memory and honor of Cheslie Corrinne Kryst; and

2. This Resolution and Memorial shall be stamped filed and inscribed in the minutes of these Courts, with a copy kept in the Memorials of Deceased Attorneys in the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court of Mecklenburg County and copies made available to the family.

Respectfully submitted this the 13th day of October, 2023.



Thomas L. Ogburn III
Presenter
N.C. State Bar No. 23415

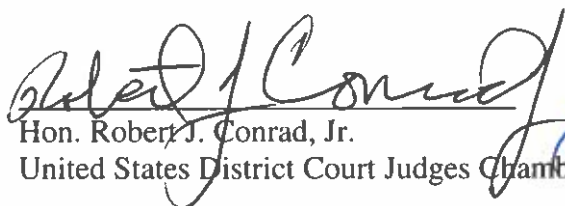


Courtney L. Ballard
President-Elect, Mecklenburg County Bar
N.C. State Bar No. 49064

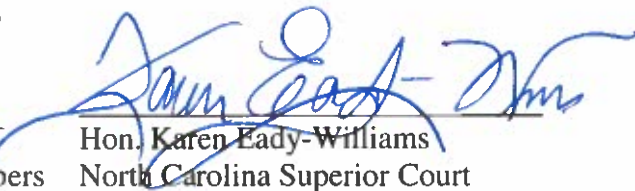


Hon. Samantha C. Mobley
Member, Committee on Memorials
N.C. State Bar No. 51140

So ordered this 13th day of October, 2023



Hon. Robert J. Conrad, Jr.
United States District Court Judges Chambers



Hon. Karen Eady-Williams
North Carolina Superior Court