Epilogue

William Murray, in whose name the Murray case was brought, faced a string of difficult personal problems in the years after the litigation. Finally, he renounced atheism and embraced God, writing a letter published in the Baltimore Sun in 1980 in which he sought “to apologize to the people of the City of Baltimore for whatever part I played in the removal of Bible reading and praying from the public schools of that city.” He publicly forgave “those who assaulted me and destroyed my property during those years that Murray v. Curlett moved through the courts.” Murray organized a faith ministry and even picketed some of his mother’s atheist meetings.¹

Madalyn Murray married Richard O’Hair in 1965 and adopted his last name. Throughout her life, she remained the nation’s most prominent spokesperson for atheism, headed several atheist organizations, and wrote books about her beliefs on atheism and the separation of church and state. In 1995, Madalyn, her son Jon Garth Murray, and her granddaughter Robin Murray-O’Hair mysteriously disappeared from their home in Texas. Extensive searches failed to turn up their whereabouts. In January of 2001, Madalyn’s former office manager, David Waters, led police to a spot in Camp Wood, Texas, where they found the charred bones of the three Murrays. Positive identification of Madalyn came from a metal hip whose serial number was identical to one given to her.³
Ellery Schempp earned his doctorate in physics from Brown University. He taught physics at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Geneva. Later, at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, a U.S. Department of Energy facility in Berkeley, California, he worked on a research team trying to better understand salt domes and other geological formations important in nuclear waste disposal. He went on from there to General Electric, where he helped develop magnetic imaging technology for biomedical research. He is now semiretired and lives in the Boston area.

At the age of sixteen, Ellery’s challenge to Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer at Abington Senior High School caused great upheaval and bitter feelings in his own community. Ellery says that his own principal wrote to a college admissions officer recommending that the school turn down his application for admission. But the bitterness would not last forever.

In 2002, Ellery Frank Schempp, PhD, class of 1958, received Abington Senior High School’s highest honor bestowed on its alumni. He was inducted into the school’s hall of fame for his achievements in science. Among Ellery’s major accomplishments, the school noted the following: “Initiated school prayer suit against Abington which was eventually decided by U.S. Supreme Court in 1963.” Although the controversy over religion in the public schools continues to roil national politics, in Abington at least, people have made their peace with Ellery’s protest.