



Judicial Profile-Virginia Gay Broome

By: Thomas Hoadley

November 1991

All you sophisticates who thought the Civil War was over are wrong. We had a slight skirmish right here in Palm Beach County...and the South won! But first, the background.

A black dirt area called the Delta extends 200 miles north and south along the Mississippi River south of Memphis. It is 85 miles wide and produces more cotton than anywhere in the world. It is home to magnolia blossoms, Spanish moss, Jefferson Davis, Yazoo City, and William Faulkner. It is also the birthplace of southern gentility, honor and duty. Quite naturally, this area was quite disturbed at that radical Lincoln, and the events of the day. They seceded in 1861, and furnished 80,000 troops to the Confederacy. They were the guardians of the river until Vicksburg fell. They were conquered; but their spirit or gentility was never conquered. They were graciously readmitted to the Union in 1870. The capitol of this area was and is, Jackson, Mississippi.

Judge Broome was born, raised and went to school in Jackson. As befitting a Southern belle, she was president of the Literary Club and the History Club. She also was on the swim team at Mississippi State College for Women. You see, the future Judge wanted to be a teacher. So, after graduation in 1962, she went by bus (in white gloves and a correct Southern "picture hat") to Melbourne, Florida.

The school board had recruited her: but the bus company had lost her suitcase. she taught English and creative writing in Melbourne for 14 years (except for a year in 1971 to get a master's degree at Mississippi State).

Judge Broome became interested in teacher issues and techniques and joined the Teachers Union in Brevard County. She became the vice president and the editor of the Union newsletter, "Solidarity." She became so interested in labor matters, she decided to become a labor lawyer in 1977; so on to the University of Florida for two straight years, graduating in 1979. She heard David Blutworth give a talk to the law school on one of his trips and she was impressed; so she switched from labor law to being a prosecutor. On April 1, 1980, she started trying misdemeanors in County Court, then on to DUIs, and finally felonies.

In ten years, she had prosecuted 200 felony trials and worked on the Mark Herman case. (She thinks he is guilty). And, lo and behold, she became Chief of the Felony Division. This job of "chief" was more than den mother to 30 lawyers trying felony cases for the state of Florida. This job entailed distribution of cases, approval of bargained pleas, reviewing all files coming form "intake" for fairness and uniformity and , in general, "putting out fires" for that former college partner, David Blutworth.

In 1990, yet another goal to conquer, a judgeship. But this was complicated. It was a three-way race that narrowed to two in a run-off. It was clearly a gracious social activist from the heart of the old Confederacy, a school teacher and prosecutor, versus the good-ol'-boy network formerly from the North. Who would win? Judge Broome relates that early in the campaign it got back to her that the good-ol'-boys were saying she

Broome 2

couldn't win. Then she got the endorsement from two newspapers. Finally, she rolled out her secret weapon: her mother. From July to November, she took a leave of absence and went to two or three meetings a day. Her 71-year-old mother went along with a badge which said: "Vote for my Daughter!" It was a close race against a well-qualified candidate...and she won.

After being sworn in, she was assigned to the Family Division, and she loves it. She feels more in control and less pressure than in trying a murder case. It also fits into her interests down through the years which centered on children, schools and crime. For example, she had served on the Governor's Commission on Drug-Free Schools.

So what is the conclusion of this article? Two things come to mind. First, coming of age are the leaders of the 'new south,' replete with a social consciousness that would put the ward-healers of the "old north" to shame. Second, I came away from my interview wondering what would have been the conclusion of the war if Judge Broome had been in charge rather than Jefferson Davis?