



Judicial Profile-Richard Burk

By: Thomas Hoadley

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With his quick wit and outstanding personality, all of Dick Burk's friends knew he was slated for community leadership at an early age. He was a star debater and actor in the Players Group at Ponce de Leon High School in Coral Gables, (an opposing 300-lb. tackle ended his football career). Dick started his political career by campaigning for and winning, the State Presidency of DeMolay (a high school Masonic Order). After graduation in 1949, he headed for the University of Florida to obtain a political science degree. He hit that pattern of excellence, which leads only a chosen few to become a BMOC (Big Man on Campus). Secretary of Blue Key, Director of the Gator Growl, Head of the Military Ball, President of the Phi Gam Fraternity, and so on and so forth.

There were only two girls in his industrial management class. He sat behind Carol. He must have concentrated more on Carol than the class work. They started to date, fell in love, and were married in June, 1954. After graduation, being an ROTC graduate, he went into the Army as an infantry training officer at Fort Benning.

Richard had decided in high school that as a debater, actor, and politician that he might have a natural bent as a lawyer. After his discharge from the Army, he, Carol, and their son, Richard, born in 1955, went back to Gainesville to law school. Cathleen was born during final exam week in 1959.

As he was getting ready to graduate, he interviewed several law firms, and decided to go with Jim Nemeck, that well known Stetson benefactor. He worked on personal injury cases with Jim for a year and a half on the 11th Floor of the Harvey Building. Bob Scott talked him into going into a partnership in the Florida Capital Building (now Bank of Boston in Palm Beach). Dick then concentrated on commercial and construction cases. He represented the Associate General Contractors of America, Home Builders Association, and Palm Beach Junior College. In 1981, his firm was Scott, Burk, Royce & Harris. (Ernie Simon had moved to Delray). He applied for a Judgeship in 1981; that was the year that Jack Cook got the appointment. When Judge Hugh MacMillan's seat became vacant, he reapplied. Four were nominated. In December, 1981, his friend (and fellow Blue Keyer) Bob Graham called, and told him that he had the appointment. He took the Bench on January 15, 1982.

His assignment was to the Civil Division where he had expected to go. He had not realized that this entailed fifty percent domestic. Then, Chief Judge Lewis Kapner transferred him to the Criminal Division. He had to study at night to catch up. There for four or five years, he liked it. Chief Judge Emery Newell transferred him back to Civil for four or five years.

No attorney in Palm Beach County will every forget Judge Burk's wonderful 8:45 hearings. His incisive rulings, his unabashedly humorous remarks, and "off the wall" comments, continued the Jimmy Knott tradition, and then some. Chief Judge Jack Cook transferred him to Juvenile in May of 1995, where he has been since. He shares the case load (one third each) with Judges Karen Martin and Ron Alvarez. He is the "Coordinator" of the Juvenile Division. This job means that he is currently active on

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several Boards including the Childrens' Services Council, Criminal Justice Commission, Foster Care, Guardian Ad Litem, and on and on and on. Let's just say that there are many groups and organizations that take a very active interest in the welfare of our children. Always a joiner, he is a past president of the Downtown Kiwanis Club (with a 36-year perfect attendance record), and past president of the Forum Club.

He describes his job as a Judge as "sedentary." he not only has a very active mind, he has a very active physical regime. Richard and Carol take a long walk after dinner. He goes to bed at 9:00 p.m., but is up at 4:30 a.m., and rides his stationary bicycle and swims until 6:30 a.m. On good days you will find him riding his Harley to work. He spends weekends rollerblading and bike riding. He makes pancakes on Sunday morning for Richard (a CPA), Cathleen (former Assistant State Attorney) and Heidi (a homemaker), and five grandchildren. Judge Burk has always been known as a devoted family man. First was a fishing boat, and weekend trups to Peck's Lake, south of the St. Lucie Inlet. Later the fishing boat was traded for a Winnebago motor home, and the entire family went camping on weekends.

He stated that he has no plans to retire. Carol has informed him in no uncertain terms that she does not want him hanging around the house.