

December 2006



Circuit Court Judge Martin Colin

*“This is where lawyers do the most public good”*

submitted by Irwin Gilbert on behalf of the Judicial Relations Committee

Born in Newark New Jersey, Judge Colin wanted to be lawyer since he was a child watching episodes of Perry Mason on television on Sunday nights. He was the middle child in a middle class family living in a melting pot neighborhood. There was never hesitation or doubt in his mind as to his career choice. After graduating American University in 1971, he attended Rutgers Law School, obtaining a J.D. in 1974. He clerked at Arnold & Porter and for the U.S. Attorney before moving to Florida in 1974 when he joined the Palm Beach County Public Defender’s Office. He worked there with attorneys Lois Frankel, now Mayor of West Palm Beach, and Richard Lubin. He became Chief of the Felony Division before leaving for private practice in 1977. While in private practice, Peter Blanc was one of his associates until 1990. In 1992 he became a solo practitioner.

There are events in our lives that can defeat us or empower us, moments that can define us or take our lives in an entirely new direction.

For more than thirty years Martin Colin was a successful lawyer practicing both family and criminal law. More than that, he was a husband to Ellen and the father of their two sons, Matthew and Michael. The “plan of his life” was built around his family and the practice of law. He was part of a community of lawyers in Palm Beach County he considered part of his extended family, “the glue that holds us together”.

For an instant time simply froze when his wife Ellen was diagnosed with Leukemia and then the fight was on. The Palm Beach County legal community responded overwhelmingly and supported her five year long struggle, including countless donations of blood for transfusions. But this battle could not be won.

His sons grown and out of the house, Martin Colin reexamined the plan of his life and realized that his personal pain drove his compassion for others. Now he would turn to public service. He believes the public interest is best served by having Judges that can bring knowledge and experience to bear. Thirty one years of experience as a trial lawyer provided those skills. He was elected to the Circuit Court Bench in 2004.

Judge Colin believes that service on the bench is where lawyers do the most public good. There is an extraordinary ability to affect people’s lives. He gives no thought to the sacrifices a lawyer with a successful practice must make to assume the bench. With Matthew and Michael established in their own careers (both are school teachers and basketball coaches) it was the right time for public service.

He finds a great camaraderie among the Judges in this Circuit and considers Judge LaBarga to be his mentor. He feels that his fellow Judges really care about doing the right thing. In listening to him speak and observing his manner, one finds Judge Colin to be a humble and grounded man, simultaneously altruistic and practical. Currently assigned to the Family Division, his goal is to have Court orders complied with. Some national studies have shown that seventy five percent of family division orders are not complied with. Judge Colin takes time to explain his rulings and orders so that parties will understand their obligations and believe that the Judge has the will to enforce those orders. This practice seems to be effective as he sees fewer post judgment enforcement motions since he began in the division. He also emphasizes that the public must perceive that the Courthouse is open to hear their grievances.

The Judge states plainly that he could not do his job without the valuable assistance of Judicial Assistant Sherrie Norton and Courtroom Deputy Phil Sherman. Ms. Norton provides organization and manages communications, allowing the Judge to concentrate on substance. Working in the Courthouse does not insulate you from the violence and anger of the outside world. If anything, serving on the bench can make you a focal point of threats. Keeping Judges safe is essential to keeping them independent.

Away from the bench, Judge Colin is an avid tennis player and bicyclist. He can be found on the court playing against girlfriend Betsy Savitt. She also helped to elect him to the bench, working tirelessly on his campaign.. He is an active supporter of the American Leukemia Society and competes in the Lake Tahoe "TNT 100" a 100 mile bike race around the Lake. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training<sup>®</sup> ("TNT") is the world's largest endurance sports training program. The program provides training to run or walk a whole or half marathon or participate in a triathlon or century (100-mile) bike ride. It has also helped to raise millions of dollars for medical research. Fair warning, Judge Colin also trains for kick boxing.

Being a Judge is different than he imagined...it is far better and more satisfying than he expected. His goal is to continue to serve until he just can't anymore. He cannot see beyond that day yet. Neither can the community of lawyers that has known him for more than thirty years.