



Judicial Profile-Robert M. Gross

By: Thomas Hoadley

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Judge Gross was born in Washington, D.C., in 1951. His father was a businessman; his mother was the administrative assistant to Chairman Landis of the CAB. Eugene McCarthy lived in his neighborhood, as did J. Edgar Hoover. He was an only child, and an avid reader. Washington in the 60's was the center of historical events. It was the time of Kennedy's Inaugural Address in the snow, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. Riots, fires, anti-war marches on the Capitol. It was the time of great social upheaval and turmoil.

After graduation from high school, Bob decided on Williams College; a small school of 1,200 students in the Connecticut Valley. As he had been the Editor of his high school paper, he wanted to be a journalist. He studied hard in college, was Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude.

At some point at Williams, he decided not to be a journalist, but to go to law school. To him, law had become an intellectual endeavor, creating societal changes; a combined career in writing and action. He chose Cornell Law School (near the New York Finger Lakes); he wanted to go to school in New England. One of the great law professors of this generation has been Irving Younger. Younger has frequently lectured trial lawyers in the United States on evidence. He has been a great influence on Cornell law students. Bob Gross decided to become a trial lawyer. After graduation, he became an Assistant in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. This had been the office of Tom Dewey and Frank Hogan. From August 1976 to November 1977, Bob assisted in the prosecution of major criminal trials, took pleas, and wrote appeals. He decided the lifestyle in Manhattan was not satisfactory. If you wanted to raise your family in a normal environment, you had to live outside the city, and commute two hours.

Florida seemed to be an easier place. He had been a summer intern in David Bludworth's office while at Cornell. Assistant State Attorney Hurley had obtained a federal grant for law student interns to try felony cases. Other State Attorney interns that summer of 1975 were John Phillips, Phil Houston, and Paul Moyle. Bob worked in the State Attorney's Office from 1977 to 1981 as a felony prosecutor. Deciding he needed civil trial experience, he worked for Moyle, Jones & Flanigan, involved in civil litigation, from 1981 to 1984.

Bob ran for County Court Judge (against Richard Henry) in 1984, and was elected with 62% of the vote. He enjoyed the County Court position as he felt he was close to people, and the Judges took an active role in deciding cases.

Nevertheless, he applied for a Circuit Court Judgeship six times. In 1991 Bob Gross was the first Circuit Judge appointed by governor Chiles. During Judge Gross' tenure as a County and Circuit Court Judge, he was rated first, second or third in every

Bar poll since 1985. The Palm Beach Post, on October 30, 1994, described the Courthouse consensus: “Gross is in nearly every lawyers lost of top five Judges. He is scholarly, straight forward, and compassionate, and he knows the law. He reads, researches, and writes thoughtful opinions. He treats lawyers with respect. He works hard.” Bob Gross may have had a goal to sit on the District Court of Appeal. He applied three times for this position. On the third try, Governor Chiles appointed him to take the place of George Hersey who died in July. He states that he has found a home on the Court of Appeal.

Judge Gross has been on the Florida Judicial College faculty since 1989. He teaches evidence to newly elected Judges in March, and teaches “Judging” in January. In 1993, Judge Gross was appointed by Governor Chiles to the legislatively created Task Force on Criminal Justice and Corrections.

Bob dated Karen in 1971 at Williams College. Then they had other marriages and divorces. In 1989, Bob met Karen at a seminar at Harvard. Karen was a journalist, and hadn’t changed since they had dated 18 years before. It was love at second sight. To Karen’s three daughters have been added two young boys from this marriage, ages 3 and 5. The boys are at the age for Power Rangers and wrestling, and are about ready for sports.

Karen’s mother lives in the oldest house in Northhampton in the Berkshires. (Cal Coolidge used to be the Mayor). Bob and Karen do a lot of traveling between Florida and Massachusetts. This is the area of Tanglewood, summer stock theater, old-fashioned villages, and Oliver W. Holmes from Pittsfield. Bob is currently reading The Common Law by Holmes. We have read and been surprised at the clarity of his well-reasoned written opinions on routine discovery matters. Our Bar is proud that he can now exercise his talents on a much broader scale.