

Judicial Profile on Judge Larry Klein September 1993

Judge Klein's forbearers came to the United States from Hungary around the turn of the century. The Judge's father was a traveling salesman, who purchased a business in Springfield, Ohio, 20 miles west of Columbus. The Judge was an only child. He went to school in this small, midwestern town and graduated from Springfield High in 1957.

Not wanting to go to college too close to home, he chose the University of Michigan. When asked about his grades in college, he said he was an excellent pool player. His college was interrupted by serving in the Army for six months. He met Lynn Blitcher when he was a sophomore, and married her about the time he graduated from Michigan in January 1962. Lynn was from West Palm Beach, the daughter of a dentist, who had gone north to Michigan to college. After graduation, he and Lynn then drove to Gainesville and he enrolled in law school in February, 1962. He was in the upper quarter of his class, and was on the Law Review. He said he settled down, learned to study, and went straight through law school in two years. Lynn supported him as a dental hygienist in Gainesville.

After law school, job openings were fairly tight. He got a job as a research clerk with the Second District Court of Appeal in Lakeland. One of the judges was Sherman Smith, from Vero, who knew Al Cone, Bill Owen, Ward Wagner, and Chuck Nugent. Judge Smith recommended to them that Larry be hired to do their appeals. Larry came to West Palm Beach in 1965 to work in the windowless, hurricane-proof building on South Olive designed by Al Cone. He joined ten other lawyers. At this time, this was the only local firm specializing in plaintiff's work. He left this prestigious plaintiff's firm in 1975. It had grown to 18 lawyers. He left because the appeal work was slacking off, and he was being asked to do trial work.

After he went out on his own, he still worked on his old law firm's appeals. He also appealed cases for lawyers from Broward to Vero and beyond. He had partners from time to time, including former Judge John Beranek, who married a girl from Tallahassee and moved there. Jane K. Walsh came with him in 1980, and now carries on the work of their firm.

Larry and Lynn had their first baby in Lakeland. Two more were added later. All three of these children graduated from Michigan. His only son, Marc, is a Northwestern Law School, and a daughter is an English teacher.

For outside activities, the Judge plays tennis three times a week. "I have played with the same guys for 20 years." He loves to read fiction, and work in his yard in North Palm Beach.

Twenty-five years ago he bought a three-bedroom "cabin" near Franklin, North Carolina, where he can sit on the porch and listen to "bubbling" brook. He loves to ski in

Snowmass every year, and sometimes in the White Mountains. He and Lynn will go to New York once in a while for the theatre, and he has vacationed in Europe.

Judge Klein has been very active in our Bar Association. Judge Gavin Letts asked him to run in the Junior Bar in 1966. He worked his way up through the chairs and became Bar President in 1975. He was also the President of Legal Aid for several years. When he came, it was only one lawyer and one secretary doing uncontested divorces. There was some resistance to an expansion of this group by the “old guard” and always a lack of money. He also served on the Fifteenth Judicial and Fourth District Nominating Committees for four years. He has lectured extensively on appeals and written chapters on appellate procedures for books.

When he heard that Judge Downey was going to retire in 1993, he hoped to become an appellate judge, and put in his name. He had an interview with Governor Chiles. It was his opinion that Governor Chiles has attempted to bring in well-qualified lawyers to fill judicial vacancies, rather than elevate existing judges. He was sworn in on March 12, 1993.

I asked him what he did at home. He described himself as loving his family and wife. He leads a relatively quiet existence at home.

He seems to have settled in at the Fourth District. He is 53. Since mandatory retirement is 70, he has said that he would be very happy to remain on the Court for another 13 years.

How would you describe Judge Klein? Two words come to mind. Brevity and integrity. He is a friendly person, but not one to over power you with words. His appellate briefs were notoriously short and incisive. This is the advice brief writers give us, but few of us follow. But, if he is short on words, it is well known that he is long on integrity. The Governor certainly could not have appointed a more qualified candidate, and we wish him a long and successful 13-year tenure.