

Judicial Profile on Judge Kathleen J. Kroll  
By Thomas Hoadley  
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Kathleen Kroll was born in Chicago. Her family was typically midwestern. Her father went to college on the G.I. Bill after World War II. He studied air conditioning and refrigeration at ITT, and ended his career as Regional manager for York. Being a corporate family, Kathleen and her two older sisters moved around the country. Her mother instilled in her three daughters to achieve, to learn to trade, and not to be dependent on anyone. Her father taught her midwestern values, and with hard work, you can reach your goals. In high school, Kathleen was conscientious; a student leader, made good grades, and was voted “most likely to succeed.”

She loved the intellectual excitement in the Boston area. She picked Tufts, a small school, and graduated magna cum laude, a head of the Student Council. Her goal had always been the same. To be a lawyer. Her teacher, Mr. Brown, had told her in the fifth grade she should be a lawyer. After graduation from Tufts, Kathleen and several of her Harvard friends headed south to law school in Washington, D.C. Antioch was a famous school in its day. It is no longer in existence. Prior to starting school, students lived with a family of a different race and social status. Instead of lecture halls, law was taught and practiced in various working clinics for the indigent. Law students were interns in the U.S. Department of Justice, D.C. Board of Education, U.S. Attorney’s Office, Lawyers Committee For Civil Rights, and the Urban Law Institute. It was toward the end of the Vietnam War. It was an exciting civil rights time.

Kathleen stated that although she previously had been highly motivated, she had also led a protective life until Antioch. The law school experience caused a deep awakening of her social conscience. She wanted to become a trial lawyer. Toward the end of her last year, another graduate of Antioch, Jim Greene, recruited her. He was then working for our Public Defender’s Office. As an Assistant Public Defender, she ended up defending capital crimes. After four year in the Public Defenders Office and eighteen months defending alleged murders, she suffered a “burn-out”. She thought it was time to get out. At this point, she applied for a Judgeship. She was not selected, and was told she needed civil experience to become a Judge.

Working with Baskin & Sears in Boca Raton, she did commercial litigation, and defended a few criminal cases. After three years, she unexpectedly was offered a chance to go to the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. In one year, she would receive a Masters in Public Administration. She studied government regulations, court re-organization, mediation, and many other aspects of courts and government. When asked why she interrupted her career to go to Cambridge, she said it was a “mid-career” decision. She went for the sheer enjoyment of learning.

Up north, she decided to run for Judge. She worked all summer and through the fall on the campaign trail. She ended up the winner in a County Court Judge race.

Judge Kroll was a County Court Judge for nine years. She admits that this job did not fully tap her intellectual capabilities. Always a teacher and student, she lectured in the paralegal program at PBCC for six years and taught adult education for the Palm Beach County School Board. She was also a faculty member of the Florida Judicial College, and became the Associate Dean. Judge Kroll has been instrumental in our local Traffic Magistrate Program in County Court. She also taught “gender bias” at the Judicial College. She made this interesting comment in 1984 after her election as County Judge: “Women are adding a new perspective of femininity to society, rather than merely fitting a male mold. There is nothing wrong with being feminine and having a career; being a mother and having a job.”

She is one of the founding members of the Palm Beach Chapter of the Florida Association of Women Lawyers.

She then applied for a Circuit Judgeship. She told the Judicial Nominating Commission that she was a root bound potted plant. “I was wilting, and I wanted to move on to something more challenging.” Governor Chiles had no problem selecting her as our newest Circuit Judge.

Judge Kroll has not neglected her own family life. Several years ago, a friend fixed her up with Jonathan Low, visiting from New York City. Jon was with an investment firm in Boston, a graduate of Dartmouth and Yale. He is currently living in Washington working as Senior Policy Analyst in the Labor Department, a Clinton appointee. Kathleen and Jon commute back and forth every other weekend to be with each other. Additionally, there is Travis, a second grader.

Judge Kroll is soon to be rotated out of the civil division into domestic relations. This may be a “hard landing” for her. During her lifetime, she was always questioning, seeking answers, and attempting solutions. In domestic relations, finding satisfactory answers may not be that possible.

We certainly wish her the best.