

Judge Gavin Letts
By: Thomas Hoadley
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Judge Letts; father was a civil servant attorney in Edinburgh who was articulate, spoke five languages, and was brilliant. His father and mother were avid tennis players. The Judge went to grammar school and then to the University of Edinburgh where he started to study medicine and graduated in 1952. He then started to work for a corporation in Scotland.

In the meantime, his wife to be Dorothy "Dotsy" Wood, was born and raised in West Palm Beach where her father headed a successful law firm, Wood and Cobb. After high school, Dotsy ended up at Sweetbriar College. After graduation, her father decided to send her on the Grand Tour of Europe. She and two friends took a steamer to Naples and slowly worked up the continent through Italy, the Alps, Germany, Paris, and finally to England. Dotsy traveled alone to Edinburgh to look up a mutual friend of the local Walton family. While in Scotland, she caught the measles and ended up in the Edinburgh Fever Hospital. The friend came to visit, and brought Gavin Letts. There must have been some type of magic because Dotsy stayed in Edinburgh from June until after Christmas. Dotsy rented a room, they dated constantly, and they fell deeply in love.

Dotsy came back to the United States, but her heart remained in Edinburgh. She went back in August with her parents. They met Gavin in London where he immediately proposed sitting outside the British Museum. They were married two weeks later and went to the Highlands for their honeymoon.

After their marriage, they decided to stay in Scotland and remained there for about a year and a half. Dotsy and her father then talked Gavin into coming to the United States to go to law school, and he agreed. He enrolled in Washington and Lee in February, 1955, and graduated in 1957. Dotsy worked in the college library. Gavin was a good student and was on the Law Review. He passed the Florida Bar but had to become a U.S. citizen before he could be admitted. He then went to work in the family law firm. After several years, he left Wood and Cobb to become an attorney on his own having helped found the Worth Avenue Bank. During the time he practiced law in Palm Beach, he also served as town judge from 1972 to 1976.

He had always wanted to be a judge; and in those days, you had to run for election. He filed for a vacancy on the Fourth District Court of Appeal; no one filed against him, and he was elected. He wrote many opinions while a member of the Court and was Chief Judge two times. He is known for his brief and "to the point" decisions. He had a very high sense of morality. His wife said that he usually got to work by 7:30 A.M. and came home at 7:00 P.M.

Gavin Letts happens to have been one of my neighbors. Although Gavin did not like to garden, Dotsy did. She turned a charming English cottage into a Scottish garden paradise. Flowers bloom continually in the front yard. As you sit in the study and look into the back yard down the brick walkway, all you see are flowers, bushes, and trees in a real garden setting. Gavin had a wonderful library of all the important books of English literature one would expect from a graduate of a British university. He loved to read historical novels and the classics, and he loved art and music. He was very athletic by nature; and his passion for tennis had recently turned to golf. Many weekends were spent watching tennis, golf, football, and soccer matches on television.

Gavin was very proud of his two daughters. Sophia has an MBA and currently works at the States Attorney Office. His foster daughter, Debbie, came to babysit when she was 12, and was

more or less unofficially adopted by the family. Debbie is a Ph.D. psychologist now working in Gainesville.

What is Gavin doing now? I see him Heaven having discussions in Gaelic with that Irish tribe of Celts (called the Scots) who migrated to Scotland in the Fifth Century, and conquered the Vikings and Picts. Oh yes, and he and that moralist, John Calvin, are discussing the severe doctrines and harsh discipline of Scottish Presbyterianism. Those Calvinistic Rules of Conduct that “put steel in the backbone of Scotland.” I am sure he is also dreaming of Dotsy and Dotsy’s Scottish garden.