



Judicial Profile of James R. Stewart  
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Judge Stewart grew up in Indianapolis. A turning point in his life was in high school. He successfully passes a national examination for a full 4-year Naval ROTC college scholarship. He picked the school of his choice, his family school, the University of Illinois. This was born a full-fledged Marine infantry platoon officer.

While in college, he met Jane at church. She was a fine Georgian girl. She had come north to study occupational therapy. Like Annapolis graduates, Jim had to wait until he was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. before he could marry Jane. He did this in 1954 on a Wednesday following his graduation. Why the death-defying choice as a infantry officer in the Marine Corps? He could have chosen to be a more sedate naval officer. He describes himself at that time as “gung ho”.

Over the next 3 years, Lt. Stewart and Jane moved 13 times. Quantico, various military schools, and naval bases. He was assigned to a combat cargo ship, out of San Diego, providing landing and support equipment for amphibious landings. The Korean War was just ending. In Jim’s tour of duty, there was no Naval or Marine JAG Corps. (This would come later). Line and staff officers served as Trial and Defense Counsel. Lt. Stewart was asked to try 6 to 8 Court Martial cases, and like the challenge. But 13 location moves in 3 years of Jim and Jane (and their small child) was too much. A decision was made to leave the Marine Corps, and go to law school.

Jim enrolled in Miami Law School. Jim’s father lived in Miami. From 1957 to 1960, Jim went to law school, was on the Law Review, and clerked for a large defense law firm. After a short stint with the law firm, he and Jane (and now 2 children) visited a friend with Wood & Cobb. He like the area, come to West Palm Beach, and worked for this firm from 1961 to 1967. In this civil practice, there was, of course, the usual mix of real estate and mortgage closings for First Federal. He started to try cases for the firm, and loved the trial work.

In 1967, he and Jane (and now 3 children) lived west of town, when Jog Road was dirt. This transplanted Hoosier became a Republican Precinct Captain, and Claude Kirk worker. After Kirk was elected, the Governor selected Jim as our second Probate Judge. Paul Douglas did most of the probate, and Jim did most of the mental health. Almost immediately Jim had to run in an election to keep his seat. Both Paul Douglas (Democrat) and Jim Stewart (Republican) kept their probate Judgeship that year. Judge Stewart was to be a Judge for 28 years.

He expected a lot from attorneys. He got us thinking maybe we wouldn’t get that continuance! You ask why? Judge Stewart had always been interested in education. He became a 16-year jury trial instructor at the yearly National Judges’ Conference in Reno, Nevada. (This also allowed the family to go on a 2-week backpacking trip through the nearby mountains.) The theme at the Reno Conferences had always been “Judges should not grant continuances.” Should he not practice what he preached? Jim also was one of the Deans of the Florida Judicial College in Tallahassee; he taught evidence.

In his mid-40’s Judge Stewart started to run, usually from the “Y” at noon. Twenty-thirty miles a week, sixty in training. Then, marathon running. That developed into bicycling 45 miles every Saturday, up and down AIA. Then the yearly bike trips across Georgia. And a recent 350-mile trek through the

Italian Lake District. His next bike trip? A 6-week group ride from the Atlantic to the Pacific...(after he retires).

The question is to what Jim will do after November 30<sup>th</sup> is still open. He is not a “sit at home” type. There is the coast-to-coast bike trip, and visiting his 3 children in Tennessee, Georgia and Tallahassee, computers, and books. He is also tracing his roots, and exploring his family history. With the name Stewart, he should not have a look much past Scotland. One of his favorite photographs is outside and Edinburgh Pub called the “Jolly Judge.”

Perhaps that he practiced law with Gavin Letts was not accidental. They both exhibited that Calvinistic high moral sense of duty...that recognition of right versus wrong, which has been so self-evident to us all.

Jim lives alone now. Jane died in December 1993 after a valiant 16-year struggle with leukemia. If there is a heaven, Jane is looking down on Jim, and her 3 children. How proud she must be to be part of this family, as we are.