



Judicial Profile-Harry Lee Anstead

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The family was “down and out” because of the Great Depression. Millions of family providers had no work. This large Catholic family moved from Toledo to Jacksonville looking for work. The father disappeared from time to time. A local benefactor, Harry Lee, had befriended the family, giving them food and shelter when they needed it. The sixth child was born, and out of gratitude, the child was named “Harry Lee” Anstead.

After Harry Lee was born, the father disappeared for good. Loretta was a good mother. She was a gentile lady. She could paint and play the piano. It was up to Loretta to keep her family together.

The family moved into the Brentwood Housing Project. A New Deal answer to housing for the poor. His mother was a clerk for an insurance company, and made bandages for the Red Cross. Six children were expected to help support the family. Paper routes, and selling newspapers on street corners. Harry Lee made his contribution at age eleven by delivering groceries and mowing lawns. Later, he worked in ship yards, and electrician’s helper, a roofer, and a mover. Loretta was able to hold the family together with the help of her children.

Harry Lee was the only child to attend college. His mother cashed a \$400.00 insurance policy. She had been paying 50 cents per week on this policy. This put Harry through the first semester of Junior College. The next three years in Gainesville were paid by Harry lee working odd jobs.

After graduation in 1960, he was recruited by the National Security Agency in Washington.

In January, 1961, he stood in the snow. He watched Justice Warren swear in President Kennedy. Eisenhower was there. Robert Frost read a poem. It was a moving experience. In 1961, he decided to work his way through law school in Gainesville.

He met Susan during a “Big Shuffle”. Before women started going to law school, when a co-ed would walk into the law school library, the male students would shuffle their feet. Susan Fischer was “shuffled”, started to cry, and ran out of the building. But Harry Lee had seen her and had fallen in love. They were married August, 1963. Susan had only completed her second year. She moved to West Palm Beach with Harry. She graduated in the first class at FAU in 1963.

Harry Lee decided he wanted to be a trial lawyer. Joe Farrish was recruiting trial lawyers. Harry signed on. He was with Jow for a couple of years, moved over with Kirk Sullivan, then was with Jim Simpson for ten years.

After thirteen years in private practice, he decided he wanted to go on the Bench. He applied for the District Court. He had done some appellate practice and enjoyed the academic atmosphere. He had a family of four children, and wanted to have his life more organized.

Susan taught school, and was on the Community College Board for nine years. Harry Lee became active on the Board of Nova Law School. Susan decided to go to law school, commuted over a three year period, and graduated in 1991. She became a Deputy Public Defender, and is now working for Legal Aid.

Justice Anstead was nominated to the Supreme Court in 1985, 1986, 1990 and 1994. He had been a good friend of Rosemary Barkett. When she went to the Eleventh Circuit, he would be the natural person to succeed her.

Susan remains in West Palm Beach this year while Michael graduates from high school. Harry has an apartment in Tallahassee, and admits to being "homesick." But, since he was from Northern Florida, he likes the changing seasons. His present position is "exhausting work" even though he has two clerks. He feels the responsibility. Every month, the Court hears twenty one to twenty six cases, including five to six death sentence appeals.

At the swearing in ceremony on October 11, 1994, Former Chief Justice, Raymond Ehrlich, himself from Jacksonville, said it all: "Life was not easy, but the door to opportunity is open to those who are ready to make the effort to break through the barriers."

Justice Anstead's remarks went back to Harry Lee. From the day I learned about Harry Lee, "from that time forward I have been Harry Lee. I struggle mightily every day to live up to my namesake."

Loretta died. But if there is a heaven, she is thanking Harry Lee. Not only for food and shelter when times were rough, but for instilling in her son that will to help the less fortunate.