



Judge Richard I Wennet
By: Eric Santo - 1983

Monuments, traditions and social vales are much alike. The durability of each depends on their respective fabric and foundations. Each tends to erode slowly, but perceptibly through time. Lasting monuments stand solid and steadfast upon pillars, which tower above the rubble and ruins long-forgotten neighbors. Lasting tradition and enduring social values are sustained by men of firm character. Men like Richard I. Wennet.

Mr. Wennet is basically a small town person who was raised in New City, New York a town in which his parents still reside. Mrs. Wennet is a former professional opera singer who performed at Carnegie Hall. Her son claims to have none of her artistic talent.

The young Wennet was more inclined to emulate his father, a ship captain, a graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy. In 1971 Richard Wennet graduated from the academy with a Bachelor of Science degree in marine engineering, and he currently holds an engineering license. Following graduation Mr. Wennet elected to continue to contribute to the defense of his country by remaining with the United States Naval Reserves. Presently, he is a Lieutenant Commander and is attached to a first rate, combat ready U.S. Marine Corps unit known as ANGLICO. Words need not be spoken to demonstrate the Lieutenant Commander's intense pride in his highly motivated and highly rated unit. Photographs of actual military parachute jumps made by the unit are displayed in the Commissioner's office. He has personally made 57 military jumps.

Mr. Wennet's civilian life is not a far jump from the military. His pride, intensity, and love for living remain unchanged. Only the target differs. After serving as a policeman for nine months in upstate New York, Richard I. Wennet set his sights on the University of Miami Law School. The industrious Wennet not only paid his way through law school by an assistantship with the university and substitute teaching, but he was still able to intern with the State Attorney's office in Dade County and to play semi-pro football with the Miami Buccaneers. Mr. Wennet graduated in 1974 and remained as an assistant state attorney.

Preferring a small town atmosphere, the Commissioner moved from Miami to Palm Beach County in 1976. Until he succeeded the Honorable Mary E. Lupo as Democratic Relations Commissioner in 1976, he was engaged in private practice for two and one half years.

The leadership that Mr. Wennet demonstrates in the military carries over to his professional and personal life. He is the President of the Young Lawyers Section of the Palm Beach County Bar Association, the secretary of the Association of Retarded Citizens of Palm Beach County, and a director of both organizations. The ever active Wennet spends his leisure time at the beach, exercising at a local gym, and by playing softball for a legal secretary's team in a county league.

Clearly, the Domestic Relations Commissioner has offered a great deal to his country and to his community. He now offers the following viewpoints:

The Interview: "I hesitate to do this interview. There are so many prominent judges who are far more worthy than I to have an article published in Bar Bulletin. Each deserves a great deal of respect and admiration from the bar and community for their role as jurists."

Philosophy: “I am a firm believer in retaining traditional values. Ladies should be treated as ladies and gentlemen. Lawyers must act as strong and forceful advocates, but they should not forget how to treat each other with dignity and courtesy.”

The Role as DRC: “Patience, compassion, and common sense are the chief requirements. Many people have asked me how I tolerate the job. The performance of my duties gives me a great deal of personal and professional satisfaction. The opportunity to correct an injustice or to do the right thing in a world where so many insolvable problems exist makes the job a privilege rather than a task. Of course, the job can be frustrating when the parties create a problem, that neither really want to correct or the court does not have the authority to remedy the problem.”

Impact: “My experience as DRC has not made me cynical, but I am a realist. I know both the heights of virtue to which people can climb and the depths of dishonesty and deceit to which they can sink. Truth and honesty must remain unchanged. Basic good basic evil never change. One’s standard of professional conduct should not change as a reaction to or an accommodation of whatever mores that members of the public have adopted for expediency.

I do not consider myself as a philosopher and have not really formed beliefs about people. Each day is faced anew, with a view toward enjoying living and everything I do. I generally feel outstanding and fortunate. There is a lot for which to be thankful for.”

Aspirations: “ I would like to continue to progress forward in the judicial field.”

Hobbies: “Physical fitness is important to me. My scores in Marine physical fitness test are usually high. Competing against younger troopers can be exhilarating, especially when I outscore them. To keep in shape, I attend a local gymnasium and have weights at home. There is even a chin-in bar in my office.”

Social Duty: “My participation in the Association for Retarded Citizens of Palm Beach County is fulfilling. I feel a strong commitment to help the handicapped, especially because it has struck close to home. Cerebral Palsy afflicted my brother, Kenneth. Those who are blessed with the physical and mental ability to help themselves have a moral obligation to help those who are less fortunate.”

Suggestions: “I recognize that a number of lawyers who appear before me do not receive adequate compensation for their time. Generally there is insufficient income on both sides, but preparation is essential. Know the elements to be proved in post judgement proceedings. Some attorneys do not prove the amount of arrearages. Others criminal contempt and civil contempt. Be prepared to demand specific relief with which the opposing party can realistically comply. I would suggest reading the Florida Bar CLE Manual entitled Support, Custody and Property Rights in Florida. Also, make the financial affidavits realistic and have your clients prepared to explain inconsistencies.”

Common Mistakes: “Talk with your client and know what her or she will say. On occasion attorneys will find themselves explaining away apparent misrepresentations when their client’s testimony conflicts with their opening statement.”

Pet Peeve: “I become annoyed when parents use their children as pawns or tools. It breaks my heart to see children suffer because of their parent’s actions. Often there is little a court can do to correct this type of situation. Children are the greatest responsibility that an individual can undertake.”