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Tribute to Judge Sanders

Dawn Davenport

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TRIBUTE TO JUDGE SANDERS

*Dawn Davenport,
J.D. Southern Methodist University,
Clerked: 8/10/87 – 6/28/88*

IN the spring of 1988, potential jurors had been called for several trials. Jury selection was going slowly and the potential jurors were told to report back first thing Tuesday morning. On Tuesday mid-morning, the Judge was notified that one juror had not returned. When the Clerk called his house, his roommate, an honest (or more likely clueless) fellow, said the would-be juror had gone fishing. Upon hearing of his whereabouts, the Judge “asked” him to be in his courtroom at 3:00 that afternoon. Apparently this message and the tone in which it was delivered made its way to our hapless juror because at 3:00 sharp, a 21-year-old North Texas University student showed up in chambers in cut off blue jean shorts and a ratty t-shirt. His choice of clothing was undoubtedly not one of his better decisions that day, ranking in stupidity right up there with the decision to go fishing instead of report for jury duty. When Phyllis told the Judge of the juror’s arrival, she helpfully mentioned his dress and general demeanor. I’m not sure if that information influenced the Judge’s decision, but the Judge decided to “meet” with the juror in the courtroom. Not one to miss a teachable moment, the Judge dressed in full robe and called for the marshal to announce his entrance.

I had noticed the scraggly arrival and the Judge’s response and decided that my legal education would be furthered by witnessing the proceedings. Not wanting to be selfish, my co-clerk and I called all the other Judges’ clerks in the building. As if the poor fellow’s luck hadn’t been bad enough, an Associated Press reporter happened to be walking by at the same time the clerk herd was running into the courtroom, and seeing the excitement decided to join us to see what was up. We made quite an audience.

As you might imagine, the Judge read the kid the riot act, complete with a full recitation of civic duties. He then ordered him to hand copy the Constitution and Bill of Rights and return it to him by Friday. The juror seemed a bit shell-shocked and when asked if he had any comments, he stammered that he just didn’t want his father to find out “because he was a real conservative Republican.” Needless to say, we thought this was hilarious, and even more so when the juror called the chambers later that day and asked if he was suppose to copy the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. It must have been a slow news day because this story made several newspapers throughout the US.

On Friday the juror showed up in a new-looking three-piece suit with his father in tow to dutifully turn in his copy. The whole thing didn't seem quite so funny when the Judge told me that since I was obviously so interested in this case, I would be the one to check his handwritten submission for accuracy.

There is a semi-funny follow up to this story. A few months later my husband, Peter, was called for state court jury duty. On the day he was to report, I had a trial with the Judge, so I had left the house very early. Our three-year-old daughter awoke with a fever. Peter immediately called Phyllis to ask what he was suppose to do about jury duty since he definitely didn't want to copy the Constitution. Phyllis played around with him a little before assuring him that a sick child was a good enough excuse and giving him the number to call.