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Reflections from Jennifer Drobac

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REFLECTIONS FROM JENNIFER DROBAC

*Jennifer Drobac**

MY most embarrassing moment with the Judge: When Ellen from the clerk's office suggested that a group of us take the other Sanders clerk, Jennifer C., to see the Chipendales (male dancers) for her birthday, I hesitated. What would the Judge say, if he ever found out? I was twenty-seven years old but still valued the good opinions of certain father-figures, specifically my dad and the Judge. I had never ventured to anything so risqué and I doubted that Jennifer C. had either. However, with a spirit of adventure and knowing that the Judge was a believer in civil rights, I agreed and contributed for myself and my co-clerk. Ellen purchased the tickets and then left a message that we could pick them up from her office.

I discovered later that the Judge had intercepted the message, and had "graciously" retrieved our tickets for us, when he stood in my office doorway, waiving the tickets. That day at lunch, with a barely veiled smile, Judge "quizzed" us regarding our outing. Eating his usual can of tuna and Tabasco with his bag of Frito's corn chips, he queried, "Jennifer, does your father know that you will be attending this event?" "Do you need someone to escort you to this venue—I mean is it in a safe place?" "I feel as if I should wait for you two in the lobby!" Jennifer C. and I squirmed in our complete embarrassment, as we also stifled mortified laughter. Two grown, highly educated women—off to see a show of male strippers—with our Judge looking out for us in the lobby?! We did not see Judge Sanders in the lobby that night—

But we checked—just to make sure!

I am personally most grateful to the Judge for being a great boss:

Judge Sanders was the best boss that I have ever had. He gave positive feedback whenever credit was due. Certainly, he was demanding and crabby about work product. He insisted that we keep a current docket and never tolerated less than a 110% effort. However, when we performed well for the court, Judge Sanders let us know that he was proud of our work and appreciated our contributions. He was generous with praise and consideration. No boss before or since has been that generous with his attention and verbal rewards.

Judge also took care of his chambers staff. I once asked Judge if I could keep a small desk-top fish tank for a couple of gold fish. I even wrote a "Motion to Stay" by my would-be scaly office-mates. Judge said

* Sanders Clerk 1988-89.

that he would take the motion under advisement. His main concern? That our custodian would not be burdened by the new office addition. If I could ensure that the scales of justice would be the only thing needing dusting, I could keep my scaly friends.

After a short time working for Judge, I came to understand that he also respected Miss Phyllis, his secretary, with an unusual loyalty and consideration. Unbeknownst to the judicial clerk candidates, Miss Phyllis conducted the first interview with any applicant in the waiting area of chambers. She asked us about our experiences and desires to work for Judge Sanders. She deftly drew us out to see whether we'd work well together and with Judge. If you did not impress Miss Phyllis, you would not get the job. Judge relied on her for much more than administrative assistance and his trust was well placed. The two of them created a rich workplace for public service.

Finally, when I became pregnant unexpectedly, Judge handled the matter with professional concern and assistance. I was the second in a string of three clerks to become pregnant during the clerkship. Expressing best wishes and good humor, Judge replaced us each when required to do so and never made us feel uncomfortable for inconveniencing the court. Later he laughed at the clerks' movie spoof of the office that led to the pregnancies!

Something unusual that I admired about Judge Sanders was his faith in juries:

Judge once told me that in his years on the bench, he had come to respect the jury. He said juries rarely made mistakes. Jurors were thoughtful, caring people who tried very hard to make correct decisions. One could trust a jury. In this day of criticism about juries and their verdicts and awards, I think of Judge and his faith in the jury system. I believe that Judge was correct.