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## Sanders Court Family

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# SANDERS COURT FAMILY

*K. Michele Walters (with assistance from Nancy Kiefer)*

I am writing to acknowledge what I believe is the universal experience of Sanders clerks. While clerking for Judge Sanders was eye-opening and rewarding in myriad ways, its most treasured aspect was that it conferred membership in the Sanders court family.

I feel well-positioned to address this topic because part of the Sanders court family became my real family. My predecessor clerk, Scott McElhaney, married my sister, Allison Walters, after they met during a clerk outing to the Texas State Fair, under the shadow of Big Tex.

Membership in the family could cause some initial confusion. My friend Nancy Kiefer, who clerked the year before me, recalls receiving an invitation to the “Sanders family reunion” during her third year at law school. Her response, based on her belief that the event involved the Judge’s relatives, rather than his clerks and their families, probably gave the Judge a good laugh.

The confusion was understandable. Not many judges reunite with their clerks each year and call them family. Judge Sanders took the long view of his relationship with his clerks. He made each of us feel valued, not only for the things we could contribute in a year’s time, but for the ways in which we could enrich the unique community he created. His interest was not just in our professional development. Although he was an excellent mentor, most of all he wanted us to have fulfilled lives, however that came about in individual cases. One never felt shy about calling the Judge to tell him any kind of news, whether it was a promotion at work, a decision to quit work and travel or to stay home with the kids.

The Judge’s affection and loyalty extended beyond chambers to those working in the courthouse and were wholeheartedly returned. Not only clerks, but several courthouse staffers, asked Judge Sanders to preside over their weddings.

The Judge’s secretary, Phyllis Macon, deserves much credit for fostering the family feeling. During the clerkship year, Phyllis showed the new recruits the ropes, shared courthouse lore, and provided invaluable tips on how to settle into a productive routine with the Judge. Phyllis contributed perspective and fearsome recall to the lunchtime conversation in chambers, along with the baked treats that her oven produced in quantity. Phyllis sent the clerks out of the nest at the end of their terms with handmade afghans and invited them back to reunions, year after year. She still updates and distributes an annual court family directory and re-

members every child of every clerk with a birthday card. Phyllis maintains that her obituary should list all the clerks as her surviving children.

The members of Judge Sanders' real family have been, and continue to be, wonderfully supportive of the extended Sanders court family. Jan's efforts and gracious presence were integral to the inclusive spirit of every reunion and holiday party. Whether you were one of the earliest clerks, or one of the newest, or were only there because you had married a clerk, Jan welcomed you with warmth and genuine interest.

The Sanders court family remains an enduring community, sustained by the many life-long relationships that grew from our clerkship days. Nancy and I met when one inherited the other's docket and spent a week of overlap absorbing clerk wisdom. The bond we shared as Sanders clerks became the foundation for a lasting friendship. The many interconnected members of the Sanders court family have similar stories to tell. We all have the same people to thank.