



## Hon. M. Margaret McKeown

### Circuit Judge, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

The refrigerator in her chambers is covered with souvenir magnets from exotic locales: A caravan of camels walk across a sand dune in Oman next to a miniature carving of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Although Judge M. Margaret McKeown—or M3, to her clerks—loves traveling around the globe (She’s been to Palau! Twice!), it’s not something she shows off. She didn’t bring back all those magnets; rather, continuing the tradition she started, over the years her clerks have thought of the judge fondly on their travels and sent back mementos to her chambers in San Diego. So, just like the judge, the magnets are eclectic, exhibit a healthy mix of seriousness (a magnet from South Africa’s Apartheid Museum quotes Nelson Mandela: “To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”) and humor (“I <heart> Girl Scout Cookies” and “Eat More Pie”), and have seen many adventures.

Judge McKeown was born in Casper, Wyoming. Her parents instilled in the family the importance of education—her mother was an avid reader and a frequent patron of the local public library—and Judge McKeown’s was the first generation in her family to attend college.

Judge McKeown received a certificate of Hispanic Studies from the University of Madrid and a B.A. in International Affairs and Spanish from the University of Wyoming. She often lectures in Spanish, tries her hand at Japanese, and is still seasoning her French. During



college, she sought out a position with Wyoming’s U.S. Sen. Clifford Hansen, whom she first met during a high-school field trip to Washington, D.C. This experience cultivated her love of the law and commitment to public service—Judge McKeown has served in all three branches of the federal government.

After college, Judge McKeown graduated from Georgetown University Law Center. The connection to her alma mater runs deep—she later received an hon-

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orary doctorate from Georgetown, served as a visiting faculty member, and has sat on the Board of Visitors for more than 10 years.

Upon graduating from law school, Judge McKeown headed west for mountains and adventure and joined Perkins Coie LLP in Seattle. Perhaps unsurprising to those who have appeared before her, Judge McKeown excelled as a trial and appellate lawyer. She litigated intellectual property, antitrust, and constitutional law issues, and represented high-profile clients, including Boeing, Amazon.com, and Nintendo of America. Adept at anticipating changes in the legal landscape, she staked out a practice on the leading edge of tech law. (Still a technophile, the judge was an early adopter of using an “e-benchbook” during oral argument, allowing ready access to records, briefs, and cases on her iPad.) Always conscious of the importance of public service, Judge McKeown took on significant pro bono civil rights litigation and argued before the U.S. Supreme Court.

No one must have told M3 about the “glass ceiling.” During her career at Perkins Coie, she became a mother, the firm’s first female partner, the first woman on the executive committee, and a managing director. She

started the firm’s intellectual property practice, created the firm’s formal part-time lawyer program, and co-founded the firm’s Washington, D.C., office.

The legal community took notice of Judge McKeown’s many achievements. She was selected as one of the Fifty Most Influential Women Lawyers by the *National Law Journal*, and one of Washington’s Winningest Trial Lawyers and an Outstanding Lawyer by the Seattle-King County Bar Association. She founded and was the first co-president of the statewide Washington Women Lawyers and was the first woman to serve as both the president of the Federal Bar Association of the Western District of Washington and Washington’s delegation to the American Bar Association House of Delegates. Her accolades weren’t limited to the legal field; Judge McKeown served as a Japan Society Leadership Fellow and received the Big Sisters Outstanding Mentor Award.

Throughout her time in private practice, Judge McKeown maintained her strong commitment to public service. She served as a White House Fellow and was appointed as a special assistant to the Secretary of the Interior and a special assistant in the White House. (She later served on the board of directors, and as chair, of the White House Fellows Foundation.)

In 1998, Judge McKeown was confirmed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She is known as

a brilliant, fair, and superbly prepared jurist, and she is well-respected by members of the bar and bench alike. (She was previously mentioned as a possible nominee for the Supreme Court.) Judge McKeown loves her job, especially her clerks (she had to tell me that!), and her colleagues. The feeling is mutual.

“Margaret is simply one of the most remarkable people I’ve ever met,” says her colleague and boss, Chief Judge Sidney Thomas. “She is a world-class jurist and recognized as a national leader in judicial administration. More importantly, she is deeply trusted and valued by her colleagues, who constantly seek her advice and counsel. I am honored to call her one of my dearest friends.”

“Judge McKeown is incredibly hard-working, brilliant, courteous to the lawyers who appear before her, and devoted to teaching her clerks about the law,” says Judge Tracie Brown of the San Francisco Superior Court, who clerked for Judge McKeown during her first year on the bench. “As a young lawyer lucky enough to be one of her clerks, I was able to learn firsthand what it means to be a great judge. She is an inspiring role model, and I think of her often as I sit in my own (shabbier, poorly decorated) chambers deciding the issues that come before me.”

Being an active federal judge is, of course, a full-time job, but this hasn’t stopped Judge McKeown from being a leading voice in judiciary-related endeavors. As president of the Federal Judges Association (FJA)—a voluntary association of more than 1,000 Article III judges—Judge McKeown has overseen the successful class-action pay-restoration litigation brought by the FJA and has worked to enhance the FJA as a voice for judicial independence. Just last year, Judge McKeown conducted an engaging interview of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts during the FJA’s quadrennial meeting in Washington, D.C.

Judge McKeown is a frequent speaker and commentator on judicial ethics, having served on the Judicial Conference of the U.S. Codes of Conduct Committee—the ethics committee for the federal judiciary—for more than a decade, including as the committee’s chair. She also served on the ABA Commission to Revise the Model Judicial Code.

Judge McKeown is keenly focused on improving access to justice in her local community and around the country. Seeing a need for high-quality pro bono legal services in immigration proceedings, she was the “mother” behind the ABA’s Immigration Justice Project of San Diego, which promotes access to justice. She received the Founder’s Award from the same organization. Judge McKeown was also instrumental in the creation of the ABA’s Media Alerts on the Federal Circuit Courts Project to provide reporters, lawyers, educators, and the public with accurate, unbiased analysis of significant federal appellate decisions.

An avid traveler, Judge McKeown’s passion is working with judges around the world on rule-of-law initia-

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tives, including those in countries as diverse as Bahrain, China, Mexico, and Peru. She has also assisted the judiciaries of several countries in drafting their judicial codes of ethics. As Mexico and Ecuador transition to a system of oral advocacy, Judge McKeown participates as a trainer on topics ranging from ethics to cross examination. In El Salvador, she has advised on a forensics project related to processing evidence from mass graves, and, following the Arab Spring, she had the opportunity to work with judges in Tunisia on judicial independence issues. Judge McKeown chairs the ABA Latin America and Caribbean Rule of Law Council. In addition to lecturing and teaching overseas, she also teaches closer to home, serving as an adjunct professor and jurist-in-residence at the University of San Diego School of Law.

Judge McKeown's commitment to service extends beyond the law and judiciary; her community involvement has ranged from arts organizations to working with children, as well as service on the boards of the La Jolla Music Society, the Volunteers of America, and the Girl Scouts of the USA. She also volunteers at a camp in Colorado for children with cancer.

Judge McKeown has been recognized for her outstanding work. She received the ABA's Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, the Girl Scouts' Cool Women Award, and the FBA's Community Service Award.

With this shining resume, don't assume that law is her only passion. She is an incredibly well-rounded person with dedication to her family and real interests and hobbies. For instance, she was the only female member of the first American mountain-climbing expedition to Mount Shishapangma in Tibet, where she survived an avalanche. An enthusiastic chef and foodie, Judge McKeown recently penned an article about applying statutory interpretation skills to the art of reading menus.<sup>1</sup> She loves to play tennis, hike, and kayak with her many friends and clerks. When swearing her clerks into the bar, she advises following "the three E's"—excise (get rid of unnecessary words and write in plain English); embrace (spend time with your family and friends); and exhale (take time to enjoy life and the law). Judge McKeown lives this wisdom, plus—and this is my personal (though biased) favorite—she often bakes a cake for clerks' birthdays. And they're really good. ©

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Hon. M. Margaret McKeown, *Culinary Ambiguity: A Canonical Approach to Deciphering Menus*, 51 HARV. J. ON LEGIS. 227 (2014).

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