

## Judicial Profile

JOYCE KITCHENS

# Hon. Orinda D. Evans U.S. District Court, Northern District of Georgia

JUDGE ORINDA D. EVANS is a woman of “firsts.” She was the first woman appointed to the U.S. District Court, Northern District of Georgia. She is the first female chief judge of that same court. According to Judge Charles A. Pannell Jr., when she was the sole female judge, the court was like the “beauty and the beasts.” She has gained her accomplishments by hard work, a formidable intellect, and an even disposition.

“She is just such a sweet person — truly a pleasure to work with,” said former Chief Judge G. Ernest Tidwell, who has now taken senior status. “She is always so bright and cheerful,” he continued. “I wish I could say the same thing about myself.”

Judge Evans loves the intellectual challenge of being a judge. Prior to her appointment by President Jimmy Carter in 1979, she was a partner at Alston, Miller & Gaines (now Alston & Bird).

She decided to go to law school after graduating from Duke University with a major in Spanish. Her employment prospects were dim, and she had loved an introduction to law course she had taken during her undergraduate studies. She had studied cases imposing liability on good Samaritans and served as

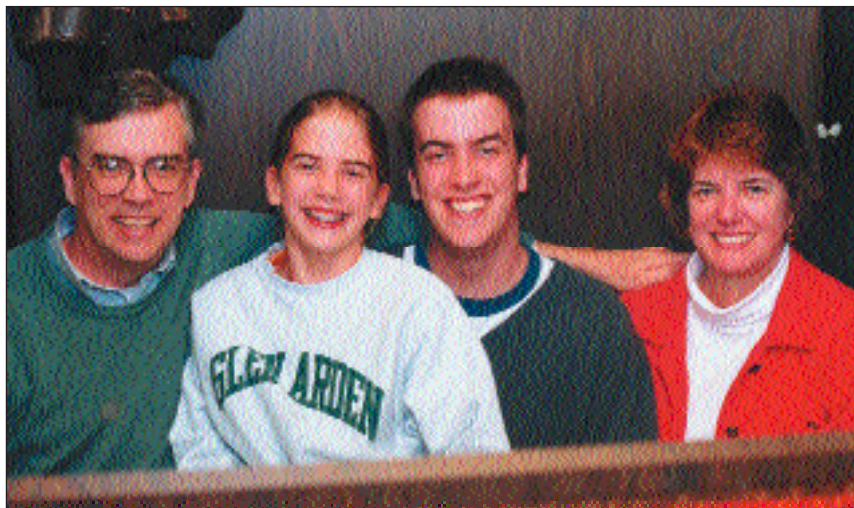
a witness in a mock trial. When she received a scholarship from Emory University School of Law, her fate was sealed. The judge loved law school, enjoying the intellectual challenge. She graduated with distinction.

After graduation from law school, she was looking for jobs at a time when many Atlanta firms were not interviewing women. Few employment opportunities existed, even for those women at the top of the class. She was initially hired by Fisher & Phillips, a labor law firm, and subsequently moved to the Alston firm to engage in general litigation.

Judge Evans grew up in Avondale Estates, Ga., part of the metro Atlanta area. While a college student, she worked as a waitress during summers at the family-owned restaurants, Evans Fine Foods. She comes from a long line of hardworking folk — the judge’s father and his two brothers ran the restaurants while her mother remained a stay-at-home mom until the judge’s youngest sister was in the first grade. Then Mrs. Evans completed her degree at Georgia State University, graduating near the top of her class. She became a teacher and officially retired when she was in her mid-60s. However, she is now 83 and still teaches two days per week.

The judge’s father retired because of health problems after her mother started teaching. After his retirement, he played piano, enjoyed gardening, and cooked for the family while her mom worked. Thanks to his early retirement, he lived to be 82.

Judge Evans is married to Roberts O. Bennett, a former lawyer who decided to give back to the community by serving as a social studies teacher at Stephenson High School in DeKalb County. Judge Evans met Rob Bennett after law school, on an occasion when her roommate’s brother came to visit, and Rob then came to visit him. Two weeks later, Rob invited her to lunch; subsequently, they were married. Judge Evans and her husband have two children — Wells Bennett, a recent honors graduate of Georgetown University, and Elizabeth Bennett, a ninth grader at Woodward Academy. Wells’ love is Russian studies and his rock band; Liz excels in athletics and is a “happy-go-lucky kid.” She is an honor-roll student. When not judging, the judge loves home decorating and gardening. She enjoys watch-



Judge Evans (far right) with her family: Roberts O. Bennett, Elizabeth Bennett, and Wells Bennett.

ing Liz's soccer and basketball games and loves to snow ski.

In her profession, the rewards for Judge Evans have been making a difference in small ways. She recounts a letter she received from a plaintiff alleging discrimination against a federal agency. "Apparently, I ruled in his favor," she said, "because he thanked me for recognizing his abilities and allowing him to show what he could do. After his trial, he stated that his whole career changed; he received promotions, he was doing well, and had a satisfying job. I was very touched." She also appreciates the letters she gets from former criminals, telling her how they have turned their lives around.

What it is like to be chief judge? "A lot of responsibility comes with being chief judge. It's a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of rewards. The most important part of the job is to be the person on the court with the responsibility to look ahead and see where we need to go and make sure we have the resources we need. It is creative in that sense; I have enjoyed it a lot."

As to Judge Evans' performance, Judge Tidwell comments, "Anytime I've had an issue, she's always been so gracious and patient. She's one of the nicest and hardest working people with whom I have had the pleasure of dealing." Judge Julie E. Carnes observes, "She has always been an effective leader on this court and in the Eleventh Circuit, even prior to her elevation to chief judge. She is a good consensus builder, whose concise communication style is quite persuasive. Ten words from Judge Evans are often as powerful as 10 paragraphs might be from someone else."

Judge Evans perceives the court for the Northern District as "a big court which is becoming bigger. One of the challenges is to accommodate those changes in a good way." She believes that maintaining contacts with the bar and getting input from members of the bar is part of the mission of the chief judge. She tries to foster personal connections through meetings, with the judges getting together once every other month. In addition, the cafeteria has a specified area for judges so they can visit during lunch. Judge Evans feels it is important for the chief judge to foster interactions between judges as

the court grows.

Judge Evans is a hard worker. She serves on the Eleventh Circuit Judicial Council, a body created to deal with disciplinary matters, which also evaluates new courthouse projects, space allocations, and recommendations for needs concerning new magistrates or judges. Judge Evans also serves on the Eleventh Circuit Judicial Council's Executive Committee, which addresses matters that Chief Judge Lanier Anderson feels do not merit a meeting of the whole council or when the matter is time-sensitive.

She serves on the Security and Facilities Committee for the Judicial Conference of the United States and is a member of the Eleventh Circuit District Judges Association. She is on the Executive Committee for the Atlanta Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and was instrumental in helping with that chapter's "bench-bar lunch and learn" program. She was formerly an adjunct professor at Emory University School of Law and is affiliated with St. Luke's Episcopal Church and Ansley Park Civic Association.

Judge Richard W. Story comments, "Chief Judge Evans is providing excellent leadership to the court, working diligently on matters that affect the entire court. It takes an enormous amount of time to deal with those issues in addition to her own caseload. She handles all of these responsibilities wonderfully."

Judge Evans' pioneering efforts have greatly contributed to a new climate — there are now three female magistrate judges and two other female district court judges for the Northern District of Georgia. Judge Charles A. Pannell observes, "She is like an older sister. She puts up with all these men, all these years, and gets them to do what she wants without even raising her voice." In her work, her goals, her attitude, and her relationships, Judge Evans has served her profession well. TFL

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*Joyce E. Kitchens is a sole practitioner specializing in employment discrimination and is national treasurer of the FBA. She and her husband Jerry Barnes live in Hiawassee, Ga., and spend their leisure time exploring the North Georgia mountains.*