



Hon. James S. Moody, Jr. U.S. District Judge, Middle District of Florida

Attorneys who litigate in Judge James Moody's courtroom promptly discover that he is a modest and thoughtful jurist. Incredibly patient and considerate, Judge Moody developed his judicial personality through his experiences growing up in the rural landscape of Plant City, Fla. Learning about Judge Moody's childhood evokes images of a Norman Rockwell painting, as he recounts tales of water skiing, fishing, and hunting for quail, doves, and turkey.

Judge Moody lived an idyllic life, steeped in tradition and surrounded by countless extended family members who made the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas into fun gatherings with at least 90 attendees. Plant City is the type of small town where everybody knows each other's families and, accordingly, any individual's attempts at misbehavior were swiftly renounced and corrected. Parental expectations were exceedingly high, which created young men and women with strong constitutions. These types of experiences gave Judge Moody a sense of belonging and caring for the larger community.

Judge Moody grew up with a brother and sister, who both went on to engage in successful careers as well. However, it was their childhood that drove them to become active members of the community. At the age of 12, Judge Moody and his brother received matching shotguns so their father could teach them how to hunt birds. Judge Moody's father stressed the importance of gun safety when hunting and to always watch out for one's fellow hunter. The speed and varied directions of quails and doves can create risky circumstances for fellow hunters, and procedural compliance was essential to ensure everyone's safety. Judge Moody describes how the family's hunting dog was particularly effective at locating groups of birds in the grass and, once the



birds were flushed out, they would fly in many different directions. If a hunter was not careful, this could create a potentially precarious situation. Additionally, turkey hunting required a great deal of waiting until a fast-running turkey, with excellent eyesight, went scurrying by. Patience, diligence, and respect for others was taught as paramount, and those lessons have remained with Judge Moody throughout his life.

Plucking and cleaning birds—as well as managing the cows and bulls on his family's property—also provided a



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great deal of experience in building respect for the earth and in valuing physical labor. Often, Judge Moody had to mend fences and retrieve cows at inconvenient times, such as in the middle of the night or during his beloved Florida Gator football games. Additionally, his appetite demonstrates a palate refined by country living. He has a preference for fresh dairy milk and fried doves served in mushroom sauce. Judge Moody amusingly recounts how he and his brother were the only members of their college fraternity, Sigma Chi, who were willing to eat the mystery

meat that sometimes found its way onto the dining table.

When Judge Moody was 10 years old, his father was appointed as a Circuit Court Judge for the State of Florida by Gov. Leroy Collins (D). Previously, Judge Moody's father had been elected as a representative to the state legislature. While Judge Moody grew up with an accomplished father, he greatly cherishes memories of their time together fishing, hunting, and cow wrangling and following his father's directions as his Little League

baseball coach.

Judge Moody always knew that he wanted to be a lawyer and majored in accounting at the University of Florida with the expectation of attending law school there as well. While in Gainesville, Judge Moody received his bachelor's degree with high honors, his business graduate school degree, and his Juris Doctor degree with honors. Additionally, his activities on campus led to his induction into the University of Florida Hall of Fame and the Florida Blue Key. Judge Moody was the editor of the university's yearbook—which was titled, at that time, *The Seminole*. (This is ironic, given that the University of Florida's greatest athletic and educational competitor has always been the Florida State University Seminoles.) Additionally, his accomplishments included recognition by, and/or induction into, Omicron Delta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Beta Gamma Sigma, and Order of the Coif, as well as "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges." Upon graduation, Judge Moody purchased season football tickets, and has held the same seats for more than 40 years.

After graduating from law school, he began working as a trial attorney for a law firm in Plant City. His very first trial proved how his strongly held view of people—as decent and honest—ran counter to the occasionally dishonest witness in the courtroom. After the trial concluded, Judge Moody returned to his law firm with an expression of bewilderment. When his assistant inquired as to what had caused his curious expression, the judge told her that he was shocked that multiple witnesses

had lied during their testimony. He was perplexed that people could be dishonest and, more importantly, lie when testifying under oath. Judge Moody recounts that his assistant laughed so hard at his innocent expectation that she nearly fell out of her chair.

He went on to practice as an attorney for 22 years and became a board-certified civil trial lawyer, a certified public accountant, director of the Sun Bank of Tampa, and chair of the Florida Bar's Jurisprudence Committee and Attorney's Fees Committee. After his varied experiences in the courtroom, Judge Moody felt that he could make a greater contribution to the local community by campaigning for elective office as a Circuit Court Judge. He won that election and loved presiding over cases from his very first moment on the bench. Five years later, Judge Moody submitted his application for a position as a U.S. District Judge for the Middle District of Florida.

Judge Moody found the process of appointment to the federal bench to be another adventure in his legal experience. Sens. Bob Graham (D-FL) and Connie Mack (R-FL) had only enough time in their schedules to interview the judicial candidates in a private room at the Orlando International Airport on a Saturday morning. Subsequently, after being vetted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the American Bar Association, and the Department of Justice, Judge Moody was appointed to the federal bench in 2000. In March 2014, Judge Moody will assume senior status.

Judge Moody has always actively presented educational programming for attorneys and law students. A few of his legal presentations have included "Environmental Damages," "Managing Trials Effectively," "Misconduct in the Courtroom," "The Economic Loss Doctrine," and "Civil Fundamentals: Post Trial Motions and Appeals." He has also acted in a judicial capacity for mock trials and moot courts for various law schools and been involved in the local community in a nonlegal capacity. He has chaired or been appointed to Success by Six (a school readiness effort), Hillsborough Tomorrow, the Children and Families Workgroup, the University of South Florida Economic Development Board, the University of Florida Law Center Association Board of Trustees, the United Way of Tampa Bay, and the Plant City Lions Club, of which he served as president.

Judge Moody has four children: Ashley, James III, Patricia, and Ryan. It was important to the judge to raise his children to have the same work ethic that he was required to develop as a child. He felt that it was also important to instill the value of hard work and diligence in his children by requiring a commitment to the family abode. Every weekend, the Moody children were required to labor in the garden by mowing, pulling weeds, edging, and landscaping. This yard work needed to be done, with excellent results, prior to any leisure activities. While this may not have been a child's idea of fun, particularly when other families hired professional landscapers for these tasks, the Moody children now realize the important lesson it provided. This is especially evident in the very

successful careers that they now enjoy.

Ashley, Judge Moody's firstborn, followed in her father's footsteps by attending the University of Florida for her bachelor's, master's, and J.D. degrees. Much like her siblings, she was raised on the weekends attending the University of Florida Gator football games. It was during the summer after her freshman year that Ashley returned to assist her father in his successful campaign for a seat on the Florida Circuit Court. Ashley felt it was important to do so not only because she believed he was a perfect person for the position, but also because she knew he possessed "the requisite characteristics of a good judge—[he is] honest, selfless, and hard working." Further, Judge Moody's high principles and morality have been a guiding light to Ashley and her siblings as they continue to strive to emulate their father's goal—to do the very best job possible at any task assigned. Ashley's experience campaigning for her father, and her subsequent experiences as an attorney, made it a natural fit for her to join the judiciary as well. In 2006, Ashley campaigned for, and won—like her father before her—a seat on the Florida Circuit Court.

Judge Moody finds it extremely important to hold his family close and, almost every weekend, he gathers his children and grandchildren together for an engaging and entertaining family meal. One of the many benefits of this experience, according to his children, is that Judge Moody happens to grill the best steak dinner in town.

Judge Moody has developed an outstanding reputation as a deliberate and thoughtful jurist in the Tampa Bay legal community. His first law clerk, Lara J. Tibbals of the Hill Ward Henderson firm, has many fond memories of her time working with him. She initially learned about Judge Moody's unpretentious nature on his very first day on the bench. Lara recounts a charming tale of Judge

Moody's attempt to arrive early to the federal courthouse so he could be certain to immediately begin working on his newly assigned cases. Unfortunately, Judge Moody was forced to wait outside by the U.S. Marshal's Service, who did not yet know the judge. Rather than indicating some sense of entitlement, Judge Moody patiently and quietly remained outside the doors of the courthouse until the appointed hour of entry. Lara notes it is Judge Moody's quiet resolve to be decent and thorough in every single case that makes him an exceptional judge. She adds: "Judge Moody is an extremely bright and hardworking jurist. He has never been one to shy away from complex and high-profile cases. It is through the most challenging issues he has faced as a judge that his intellect and wisdom have shone the brightest."

Judge Moody has held firmly to the values that he developed long ago, which dictate that hard work and decency should always be paramount in a lawyer's personal and professional life. Accordingly, he is certainly a role model for this and future generations. ☺



Judge Moody and his family