

Judicial Profile

LYN ENTZEROTH

Hon. Bana Roberts U.S. Magistrate Judge, Western District of Oklahoma

WARMTH, COMPASSION, INTELLIGENCE, and a truly captivating laugh—these qualities of Judge Bana Roberts touch one immediately upon meeting her and remain with one long after leaving her company. Growing up in Woodward, Okla., Judge Roberts’s family and her Oklahoma roots play an important role in her life. Judge Roberts is the daughter of Bill Burkett, an accomplished lawyer who served as U.S. attorney and a state judge,

and Phoebe Burkett, a homemaker. Judge Roberts is the oldest of two brothers and one sister, and she remains actively involved in the lives of her siblings and their families. As a girl in western Oklahoma, Judge Roberts would help out in her father’s law office in the summer, but it did not occur to her that she one day would follow in her father’s footsteps into the practice of law and, eventually, onto the bench.

After graduating from high school in Woodward, Judge Roberts attended the University of Oklahoma, where she developed a number of close, long-lasting friendships, including her close relationship with Robin Cauthron, chief U.S. district judge for the Western District of Oklahoma. The paths of Judge Cauthron and Judge Roberts crossed again in law school, in practice as lawyers, and on the bench. Judge Roberts’ life is marked by many such true and long-lasting friendships. Her friends treasure Judge Roberts’ incredible sense of humor and her loyalty, and they describe her as a “true friend.” These attributes form a strong and essential part of Judge Roberts’ approach to life.

Judge Roberts had not planned to become a lawyer. After graduating from the University of Oklahoma with a B.A. in English, Judge Roberts taught seventh-grade English in the public schools in Norman, Okla. However, she quickly realized that teaching classes of 30 to 40 seventh graders was not what she wanted to do with her life. It was the early 1970s and, unsure what she wanted to do, Judge Roberts accepted a position as a secretary with Crowe and Dunlevy, an Oklahoma City law firm, eventually becoming a paralegal with the firm. Her experience with the law firm made it clear that the work and life of a lawyer, which her father so admirably exemplified, was the

path for her.

Initially, Judge Roberts attended law school part-time at Oklahoma City University while working full-time as a paralegal with a law firm. Juggling full-time work with the demands of law school is a daunting task, but as Judge Roberts has demonstrated throughout her life and career, she ably handled these demands. Eventually, she transferred to the University of Oklahoma College of Law to finish her final year of law school and to graduate. Her son, Todd Blasdell, was born during spring break of her last year of law school. Judge Roberts, nevertheless, finished the term, graduating in spring 1977 and passing the Oklahoma Bar exam that summer.

After graduating from law school, Judge Roberts joined the law firm of Foliart, Mills and Neimeyer and assisted in defending hospitals in medical malpractice cases. She later joined the law firm of Fenton, Fenton, Smith, Reneau, and Moon, where she practiced general defense in insurance cases. In describing her experience with these firms, Judge Roberts gratefully acknowledges the lawyers who helped her when she was a young lawyer, and she remembers that there is nothing more exciting than winning a case heard before a jury.

In the mid-1980s, Judge Roberts served as assistant general counsel to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, primarily representing University Hospital and Children’s Hospital. About this time, she was encouraged to toss her hat into the state judicial nominating process for an opening as a judge in the Oklahoma District Court. In 1988, Governor Henry Bellmon appointed Judge Roberts to serve as a district judge in Oklahoma County, where she presided over criminal and civil trials. The Oklahoma Trial Lawyers’ Association recognized her judicial talent, naming her Outstanding State Trial Judge in 1989.

In 1991, Judge Roberts was appointed to serve as a U.S. magistrate judge for the Western District of Oklahoma, a position she has held for the past 15 years. As magistrate judge, Judge Roberts handles a variety of cases, ranging from civil rights cases to general civil cases to habeas petitions and criminal matters. Judge Roberts’s intelligence, warmth, and compassion are evident in her dealings with all who come before her. From jurors to lawyers to litigants to witnesses to schoolchildren visiting the courtroom, Judge Roberts graces all with her warm smile and makes sure that

they are all are treated with respect and dignity.

Judge Roberts also gives meticulous attention to all the orders, opinions, reports, and recommendations she issues. Perhaps it is the seventh-grade English teacher in her, but she makes sure that no grammatical errors appear in her orders. She even has been known to correct grammatical mistakes in applications for search warrants, and attorneys would do well to proofread any paper they present for her signature. That said, Judge Roberts is known to wade patiently and painstakingly through pro se pleadings and applications in order to assure that a litigant's claim will be heard even if it has been inartfully pleaded.

Judge Roberts' commitment to the law extends well beyond the courtroom. She is a past president and former member of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Bar Association. She is also the past president and emeritus member of the William J. Holloway, Jr. American Inn of Court. She has served on numerous Oklahoma Bar Association committees, including committees focused on alternative dispute resolution, law-related education, and law schools, and she served on the steering committee for the first Women in the Law Conference. In well-deserved recognition of her career, in 1999, Judge Roberts received the Mona Lambird Spotlight Award, which is given annually to women who have not only distinguished themselves in their legal careers but also have lit the way for other women pursuing legal careers.

In addition to her many professional responsibilities, Judge Roberts places a high priority on her family and personal life. In 1996, she married Wilson Roberts, and, for several years, Judge Roberts made the arduous commute from Ardmore, Okla., where her husband was the president of a bank, to the courthouse in Oklahoma City. Now living in Oklahoma City, Judge Roberts is very busy with her family and active in her church and her community—currently serving on the Executive Board of the Oklahoma Special Olympics Committee. Judge Roberts also is tremendously proud of, and committed to, her home state of Oklahoma. Judge Roberts comes from a long line of graduates of the University of Oklahoma College of Law, including her father, brother, and son Todd. And she has been a ferocious University of Oklahoma sports fan for many years. However, when her nephew became the star quarterback for the University of Nebraska's football team, she cheered for Nebraska, at least temporarily. Most recently, Judge Roberts, her husband Wilson, her parents, and her brothers and sister gathered in Kansas City for the Big 12 championship game between Nebraska and Oklahoma. Her heart belonged to her nephew Zack that day, and she and her family had a warm and happy family gathering for Zack after the game.

Clearly, Judge Roberts has had a wonderful career on the bench and a full, engaged life off the bench.



From l to r: Law Clerk Linda Birch, Law Clerk Ann Threlkeld, Courtroom Deputy Brandi Currin, Judge Bana Roberts, and Judicial Assistant Marcia Davis.

For those who work with Judge Roberts, it is her infectious laugh, her sense of humor, and her enthusiasm for life that stand out. As a former clerk to Judge Roberts, I have so many memories tied to laughing and sharing stories and ideas. Whether it was having lunch with her court staff or sharing the trials and tribulations of raising children, Judge Roberts' wonderful sense of humor and incredibly sharp mind and wit were evident. One of her colleagues stated that thinking of Judge Roberts brings a smile to her face. Speaking for myself, and as one of those women for whom Judge Roberts has "lit the way," she has been a true friend. **TFL**

Lyn Entzeroth is an associate professor of law at the University of Tulsa College of Law in Oklahoma. Professor Entzeroth clerked for Magistrate Judge Roberts from 1999 to 2002.

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