

## Judicial Profile

PATRICK J. MCLAIN

### Hon. William F. Sanderson Jr. U.S. Magistrate Judge, Northern District of Texas

“Judge Sanderson has served as a magistrate judge of our court for over 30 years. His record of national leadership as a magistrate judge and of service to our court is a testament to his steadfast commitment to the judiciary, the bar, and the public. We will miss him on the court, but we wish him the very best during his well-deserved retirement.” —*Hon. Sidney Fitzwater, chief U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Texas*

“Judge Sanderson is our resident scholar and gentleman. He is also a true unsung hero of the U.S. magistrate judges across the country for his work in advancing the stature of these vital judicial officers. He’s been a friend and mentor to me for 20 years. I will really miss him.” —*Hon. Jane Boyle, U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Texas*



In March 2010, as he entered retirement after 40-plus years of federal service, U.S. Magistrate Judge William F. Sanderson Jr. concluded more than 31 years as a federal magistrate judge. Judge Sanderson has been one of the longest serving magistrate judges in contemporary times; he is the second longest serving federal magistrate in the Fifth Circuit. His long legal career has been marked by devotion to his family, quiet scholarly leadership, and honor amongst his peers.

On the same day in 1943 that Sir Michael Philip Jagger (that is, Mick Jagger of Rolling Stones fame) came into the world in Kent, England, the son of William Sanderson Sr. was born in Battle Creek, Mich. The younger William Sanderson attended elementary school in Little Rock, Ark., but, after his family moved to Texas, he attended high school in Highland Park, a suburb of Dallas.

William F. Sanderson Jr. demonstrated his scholarship and abilities as a youth. As a result, he was

admitted to Vanderbilt University and spent four years in Nashville, Tenn., where his father was raised. Judge Sanderson graduated with a degree in English (minoring in history) in 1965 and headed to the University of Texas School of Law in Austin.

Sanderson had no lawyers in his family, but as a child he had watched “Perry Mason” on television, from which his calling was conceived. At the University of Texas School of Law, Judge Sanderson served as both a class officer and as vice president of the Student Bar Association.

Before earning his law degree in 1968, Sanderson married Sandra Gregg of San Angelo, Texas. Their marriage, now in its 43rd year, produced two children—William F. Sanderson III and Virginia Kathleen Sanderson Freeman. Judge Sanderson has four grandchildren: Fletcher, Lily, and Malcolm Sanderson and Rachel Freeman.

Sanderson started his legal career in 1968 as an assistant city attorney for Dallas. He did not serve there

long before he was selected to be an assistant U.S. attorney. He was a federal prosecutor in Dallas for the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Texas, where, for the next seven years, he represented the U.S. government and federal agencies in civil litigation, argued appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and also prosecuted criminal cases in federal court.

In 1977, when the oil industry was booming, Judge Sanderson accepted a position as an associate with the law firm of Stubbeman & McCrae in Midland, Texas. As a civil litigator, he tried his last federal case in Abilene before the legendary U.S. District Judge Leo Brewster, who had traveled from his bench in Fort Worth to hear this contentious local case. The controversy made the front page of the newspaper in Abilene, and, even though the tone of the articles was definitely against Judge Sanderson's client, he prevailed at trial nonetheless.

Perhaps it was because of his reputation for honor, courage, and success that Judge Sanderson was called to return to public service before he completed three years in the private sector. He was nominated to be a federal magistrate judge in Dallas, where he has now served for 31 years.

As readers of *The Federal Lawyer* know, federal magistrate judges handle a broad range of civil and criminal cases. Upon taking the bench, Judge Sanderson had a great deal of work on which he needed to get up to speed. About 33 percent of a magistrate judge's docket in the Northern District of Texas consists of habeas corpus petitions from prisoners, including those on death row. Judge Sanderson says that he and his fellow federal magistrate judges refer to the habeas corpus cases as their "surreptitious docket"—not because it is hidden but because it rarely gets media attention, which arises only when the writs are granted. Judge Sanderson explains that these life-and-death matters always receive his utmost care and attention.

After Judge Sanderson had served almost 12 years on the bench, his peers recognized his leadership and abilities by electing him president of the Federal Magistrate Judge's Association for the 1991–1992 term. Chief Justice William Rehnquist also honored Judge Sanderson by appointing him to a six-year term on the committee representing the Judicial Conference of the United States. With the assistance of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, Judge Sanderson was involved in a great deal of legislative work pertaining to the federal judiciary.

Judge Sanderson remembers these honors with gratitude, but he becomes most animated when he recalls some of the more unusual matters that he has been asked to tackle as a magistrate judge. Cases involving the transfer of prisoners provided Judge Sanderson some interesting venues as well as challenging issues. American citizens serving time in a foreign country can, under treaty, petition to come back to the United States to serve their sentences, and foreign



Judge Sanderson at a 2004 reception in honor of his 25 years on the bench.

citizens in U.S. prisons may seek to serve their sentences back in their home countries. Judge Sanderson often flew out to Monterrey, Mexico, to assist in handling prisoner transfer requests.

In his travels to hear the petitions of U.S. citizens confined abroad, Judge Sanderson once held a hearing at Her Majesty's Prison Wandsworth, the largest confinement facility in London, located in an imposing castle-like structure built in Victorian times. Judge Sanderson also remembers vividly the fascinating cultural experience of his trip to Panama during Holy Week to conduct a hearing for two American women who were seeking to be returned to the United States to serve the remainder of the sentences that the Panamanian courts had handed down.

Back at home, Judge Sanderson has worked on a wide variety of federal matters. Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Saldana has appeared before Judge Sanderson for a broad spectrum of those cases. "The judge was fully prepared and consummately professional," she recalls, adding that, for more than 25 years, Judge Sanderson "always gave me a fair audience ... whether I had 'won' or 'lost.'... [T]hose of us here at the courthouse will miss him."

Judge Sanderson particularly enjoyed presiding at naturalization ceremonies, and he has held some at the Old City Park in Dallas on the Fourth of July. He typically swears in 80 to 100 new citizens who have immigrated from 23 to 50 countries. Judge Sanderson has also sworn in new citizens in groups consisting of up to 930 people at the massive Dallas Convention Center. Judge Sanderson considers it a great honor to naturalize such productive new citizens, and he notes that these ceremonies may be the only time that a judge can speak and everyone can be happy with what he has to say.

William Sanderson has also been active as a private citizen. He is past chairman of the Administrative

Board at the First United Methodist Church of Richardson, Texas. He has also served on the board of the Greater Dallas Community of Churches and now is an elder at Northpark Presbyterian Church in Dallas. He and his wife Sandra once shared the presidency of the Dallas Opera Guild. In addition, he is an active member of the Rotary Club of Dallas.

Judge Sanderson has given a lot of his time to the legal community. He frequently gives lectures at national law institutes and to local bar associations, especially the Dallas Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. He also finds time to serve as a Master with the William B. "Mac" Taylor Inn of Court and was awarded the honor of Serjeant at Law. Martha Hardwick Hofmeister, past president of the Mac Taylor Inn of Court and an officer in the Foundation of the Federal Bar Association, recalls Judge Sanderson's unflagging willingness to give back to the legal community and his particular desire to ensure that young lawyers are mentored by more senior attorneys. Her husband, Kent Hofmeister, past president of the FBA, notes that "Judge Sanderson has always been a true friend and supporter of the Federal Bar Association, both at the local level and in our nationally sponsored events and activities. His collegiality and willingness to work with young lawyers, especially in Dallas, have been invaluable to this community, and we will miss him both personally and professionally."

Judge Sanderson retains a passion for history, especially the Civil War. As he enters retirement, Karen Mitchell, clerk of court for the Northern District of Texas, remembers "Judge Sanderson's institutional knowledge and vivid stories of court history. He should be congratulated for his lifetime of service to the United States as a magistrate judge."

In retirement, Judge Sanderson and his wife may have time to pursue their passions for traveling and

opera. They snorkel in places like the Caribbean, and they have traveled to spots as far away as Okinawa, Japan, where their son-in-law, an Army officer, was stationed for a time. Judge Sanderson's love of the ocean extends to lighthouse art and memorabilia, and he is also devoted to the maintenance of his 2002 Ford Thunderbird, which is painted in "Thunderbird blue."

Not too long ago, Judge Sanderson reflected that he had served on the bench long enough to have seen a generation of lawyers appear before him. As a judge, he loved the opportunity to be a student of human nature and, as a subject of such study by those who have come before him in court, Judge Sanderson has been a model of gentlemanly conduct—thoughtful and respectful of all who have brought their cases and controversies before his court. For those of us who remain on active duty in the federal courts, he will be recalled as the kind of person that we hope that the magistrate judges in our federal courts will always be. **TFL**

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*Patrick J. McLain has a solo practice as a judge advocate and attorney specializing in federal criminal defense and military law. He served as president of the Dallas Chapter of the FBA for the 2008–2009 term.*