

The Honorable Charles R. Simpson III

By
Jo E. Lawless

If given the opportunity to craft a federal district judge to preside over the cases you practice, what would you include? Perhaps you might look for qualities such as honesty, commitment to fairness, intelligence, dedication to the law, common sense, and a good sense of humor. If so, you need look no further than the chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky, the Honorable Charles R. Simpson III.

Born July 8, 1945, the son of Charles Ralph and Anne Markel Simpson, Judge Simpson spent his early childhood years in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. The Simpson family moved to Louisville, Ky. There, Judge Simpson graduated from Waggener High School in 1963, having been named a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist and finalist.

In the fall of 1963, he enrolled in the University of Louisville. In addition to diligently pursuing his studies, he also immersed himself in campus activities — particularly in areas of student leadership and journalism. Judge Simpson served as the editor in chief of the university's newspaper. He was a member of the Student Council, University Student Senate, and Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. He was tapped for membership in Pi Delta Epsilon, a national journalism honorary fraternity, and Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership honorary fraternity, and was listed in Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities. He obtained a bachelor of arts degree, with a major in economics, in 1967.

The following fall, he entered the University of Louisville School of Law. He served on the staff of *The Louisville Lawyer* and was a member of Phi Alpha Delta law fraternity. He received his juris doctor degree in June 1970. Following graduation from law school, he traveled in Europe, studying gothic and renaissance architecture and painting.

Judge Simpson returned to Louisville, Ky., and began the practice of law as an associate with the firm of Rubin, Trautwein & Hays in 1971. In 1975, he left to establish and become a partner in the firm of Levin, Yussman, McConnell & Simpson. He withdrew from that firm in 1977, and established himself as a sole practitioner. During his career in private practice, Judge Simpson engaged primarily in civil litigation and spent a great deal of time in the courtroom. He also served as a member of the standing panel of bankruptcy trustees of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Kentucky between 1977 and 1986.

U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell recommended Judge Simpson for a federal district judgeship in 1986. Senator McConnell recalls his utmost confidence that Judge Simpson

would make a "first class judge." While acknowledging that the two have been friends for many years, Senator McConnell quickly points out that he had a unique perspective on Judge Simpson's legal abilities for one simple reason — he had been Judge Simpson's client. Judge Simpson served as principal legal counsel to Senator McConnell during McConnell's tenure as county judge executive for Jefferson County, Ky. The senator recalls Judge Simpson's superb handling of complicated legal matters and negotiations. "I was his client and I know that he was a fine lawyer."

On June 6, 1986, President Reagan nominated Judge Simpson to be a judge of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky. The Senate confirmed his nomination on Aug. 2, 1986, and he was appointed to the position by President Reagan on Aug. 4 of the same year. He became chief judge of the court in 1994.

Judge Simpson has proven to be a particularly progressive and pro-active chief judge. Under his leadership, the court has undertaken several projects intended to improve the quality of litigation in the Western District of Kentucky for judges, litigants, jurors, and counsel alike. Major renovations for all of the courthouses in the district have been initiated and some have reached completion. Additionally, the court continues to make significant advancements and to set national trends in areas such as automation and financial reform.

Louisville attorney Marvin Coan offered remarks on behalf of the bar during the judge's investiture service in 1986. Coan remembers being called upon to offer those remarks many years ago, and states his belief that his hopes and predictions regarding Judge Simpson's tenure on the federal bench have proven to be true. Coan comments, "Having had the privilege of knowing Judge Simpson for many years when he was practicing as a lawyer, I knew upon his selection as a district judge that he had all of the outstanding qualities to be a member of the federal judiciary. Looking back on his first 10 years as a judge, I believe that Judge Simpson has shown through his keen intelligence, unwavering commitment to fairness to all parties who come before him, and hard work that his selection for this high honor and privilege was well deserved."

Indeed, Judge Simpson receives praise from members of the bar, transcending lines of practice and interest. Joseph M. Whittle, former U.S. attorney for the Western District of Kentucky, describes Judge Simpson as "intellectually honest" and a "model judge." Whittle says that Judge Simpson never engages in "pre"-judging a case (*i.e.*, determining the outcome he desires and then searching the law to support his decision). Rather, "Judge Simpson analyzes the law, applies the law to the facts of the case before him, and then reaches a decision. He is the type of judge we all learned about in civics class, history class, and law school."

A prominent criminal defense lawyer in the Louisville area, R. Kent Westberry, also gives Judge Simpson especially

high marks. Recalling numerous experiences practicing before Judge Simpson in particularly complex criminal proceedings, Westberry characterizes Judge Simpson as an exceptionally good judge. "Judge Simpson is very intelligent. He comprehends issues very quickly. Perhaps what I appreciate most, however, is the courtesy he always extends — even when it is obvious that he disagrees with you." Westberry points out that he is not alone in his assessment of Judge Simpson's skill and temperament; in polls conducted by the Louisville Bar Association assessing the federal judges who preside in the Western District, Judge Simpson "consistently receives ratings in the high '90s."

Perhaps Judge Simpson's high praise is directly related to his enthusiasm and enjoyment of his judicial position. "It is a joy to be a federal judge in the Western District of Kentucky," he says. While quick to note that he meant no disrespect to either the Courts of Appeals or the Supreme Court, Judge Simpson states, "I have the best job that there is in the judiciary. Being a trial judge is definitely the most fun." He attributes the high "quality" of his professional life to his fellow judges, commenting that he works in a very collegial court. Judge Simpson also points out that what he does requires a team effort. He credits great law clerks, support staff, and the high caliber of attorneys who appear before him for his successes as a judicial officer.

Whether serving as an elbow clerk, managing his docket or practicing a case before him, working with Judge Simpson is a never-ending educational experience. His insatiable appetite for facts and curiosity of the law are contagious. He is a mentor in the truest sense. When asked about his proudest accomplishment, Judge Simpson described his participation in the Louis D. Brandeis American Inns of Court. He is a master of the local chapter, indicating a lifetime membership. Members of the organization include law students, seasoned practitioners, young lawyers and judges. The purpose is to bring together a wide variety of individuals to share ideas, experiences, and knowledge. "All of the members learn from each other. I believe that it helps judges, such as myself, do a better job. It keeps us in touch with what it is like to be a young lawyer — what it is like to conduct a law practice in the community."

Judge Simpson consistently demonstrates his long-term commitment to bar-related activities and improvement of the law. He currently serves on the Judicial Conference Bankruptcy Committee. He is a member of the Louisville Bar Association and served on the organization's board of direc-



tors in 1981, 1992 and 1993. Judge Simpson also holds membership in the Kentucky Bar Association, Federal Bar Association and the Federal Judges Association.

Judge Simpson is very supportive of Kentucky's Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, having been a guest speaker for the group on several occasions. The Kentucky Chapter spans both federal judicial districts in the state and highlights the cooperative spirit encouraged by both courts. Noting that the Kentucky Chapter continues to grow, Judge Simpson also comments that the organization appears to be in a "dynamic era." He compliments the service provided by many members of the Federal Bar Association to the Western District through committee membership and hard work, particularly noting the efforts of the national organization's president-elect, Louisville attorney Adrienne A. Berry. Judge Simpson's interest

in and views concerning the Kentucky Chapter's important role in the Western District exemplify his commitment to improving the law through the combined efforts of the court and bar.

A lifetime student of the law and vigorous supporter of law-related activities, Judge Simpson clearly demonstrates strong judicial characteristics. He is, nevertheless, in many respects, unassuming and rather low key. He does not seek out attention for himself and yet is quick to praise others. He goes about the business of meting out justice with a quiet deliberation.

Upon entering his personal chambers, one would most likely see Judge Simpson sitting behind his desk reviewing files and working at the computer. On the credenza, within arms' reach, one will not find honors, awards, or mementos evidencing professional accomplishments or deeds. Rather, one will glimpse that upon which he places highest value — his family. Judge Simpson is a devoted and loving husband and father. He and his wife, Clare, have three school-age children.

The people of the Western District of Kentucky are most fortunate to have this principled and grounded man as a jurist for their important legal matters. He expects much from the lawyers who appear before him and certainly offers much in return. ■

Jo E. Lawless is a staff attorney for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky. She is a former elbow law clerk to Chief Judge Simpson.