



Judge William Matthewman

United States Magistrate Judge

By Lauren Johnson



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United States Magistrate Judge William Matthewman Judicial Profile

You would be hard-pressed to find someone more committed to justice than United States Magistrate Judge William Matthewman. Throughout his career, Judge Matthewman has become intimately familiar with the justice system and its principles from three different perspectives: first as a police officer, then as an attorney, and currently as a judge. This wealth of experience has allowed Judge Matthewman to come up with a remarkably simple explanation: “If everyone does their part in a case, the end result is justice.” In other words, if the parties’ counsel acts zealously, effectively and fairly, if the jury is properly selected and fair, and if the judge is fair and even-handed, then justice will prevail.

Judge Matthewman was born and raised in the Miami, Florida area. Because the law had always interested him, Judge Matthewman started his career as a police officer on patrol for the Miami Police Department and was quickly promoted to sergeant. He worked on the SWAT team handling special incidents and in the K-9 unit, where his K-9 partner “Fuzz” went home with him every day and lived up to the phrase “a man’s best friend.” During his time as a police officer and his frequent appearances in court as a witness, Judge Matthewman’s devotion to the criminal justice system grew, and he felt like he could be doing more for it. He saw first-hand that it had imperfections and problems, especially in dealing with minorities and the poor. And so he began attending law school at the University of Florida’s Levin College of Law.

After serving as a Research Editor for the University of Florida Law Review, Judge Matthewman graduated from UF Law with honors. He started his legal career as a young associate at a prestigious international law firm, learning quickly—to his surprise—that a young, novice lawyer could make a higher salary than a police sergeant. He started practicing in a number of different areas, handling civil and criminal cases. In fact, early in his career, Judge Matthewman wrote a law review article entitled “Title VII and Genetic Testing: Can Your Genes Screen You Out of a Job,” which was published in the *Howard Law Journal*, evidencing



his interest in employment law and discrimination law.¹ But criminal cases stood out to him most, so he started to narrow his focus.

From that point, Judge Matthewman quickly gained invaluable experience trying many criminal cases in federal and state courts, and he became a Florida board-certified criminal trial attorney. He enjoyed having a wide range of cases—from representing civilians and police officers charged with various state and federal crimes, to representing accused murderers facing the death penalty. While a defense attorney, Judge Matthewman was one of the few attorneys in the country who was qualified as a “learned counsel” in federal death penalty cases. In fact, Judge Matthewman was a lead attorney on the first “modern” federal death penalty cases tried in Florida and Puerto Rico. He proudly recalls one federal death penalty case that he tried in the District of Puerto Rico, where he obtained a complete acquittal on all charges against his client, a rare accomplishment in federal capital trials. This work, however, also raised concerns with Judge Matthewman about the problems of race in the application of the death penalty, which inspired him to write an article discussing this disparity that was published in *The Washington Post*.²

Among the vast array of trials he participated in,

Judge Matthewman said he probably takes the most pride in the final case he tried as an attorney, which ended just a few days before he was appointed to the federal bench in 2012. In that case, Judge Matthewman successfully defended Adam Kaufman—an Aventura, Florida real estate broker, who was accused of murdering his wife Eleonora “Lina” Kaufman. The case and trial were the subject of heavy media coverage, including by *Court TV*, *Dateline*, *48 Hours*, and *Tamron Hall*. The lengthy jury trial in Miami-Dade County Circuit Court was carried live on In-Session Court TV. This case was referred to colloquially by many as “the spray tan murder case,” because prior to trial, a defense forensic medical examiner expert testified in a bond hearing that Lina may have died from an allergic reaction to her first full body spray tan. After further investigation, however, the defense team discovered that Lina had actually died as a result of an undiagnosed heart condition, myocarditis, which evidence they presented at trial through forensic and expert testimony. The jury found Adam Kaufman not guilty, but the moment Judge Matthewman is most proud of was when the jury foreman—in an interview after conclusion of the trial—stated that the jury not only found Adam Kaufman “not guilty,” but they also found him to be innocent.

After a certain amount of time practicing law, when Judge Matthewman considered his future, he felt that becoming a judge was a natural transition. Judge Matthewman believed that serving in a judicial role would bring all his previous experiences with the justice system together. He did not want to be an adversary anymore; he wanted to be a neutral and fair decision maker. Thus, in July 2012, he accepted his appointment to the federal bench.

In his current role as a United States Magistrate Judge, he enjoys working on cases with cutting-edge issues, but he also notes that any matter with good lawyers on each side makes for an interesting and challenging case. He emphasizes the importance of cooperation and professionalism between opposing counsel in the discovery process, lamenting the tendency of lawyers to get bogged down in discovery gamesmanship and fishing expeditions instead of addressing the core issues. In Judge Matthewman’s view, the best lawyers are *not* the loudest in the room, but rather the ones who are polite, professional, and zealous.

Judge Matthewman is considered by many to be an expert in the area of e-discovery and electronically stored information (a.k.a. ESI). He believes the 2015 amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure are especially instructive on how discovery in federal court is shifting “towards a new paradigm.”²³ His 2019 law review article on that topic has garnered significant attention and been cited multiple times for its e-discovery principles, and he is often asked to speak to legal groups, bar associations, and law schools on these subjects. Consistent with the 2015 Rule amendments, Judge Matthewman requires each side in every case to “size and shape their discovery requests to the requisites of a case.”²⁴ He



believes that “scorched earth” discovery tactics have no place in modern civil litigation. In fact, in his standing discovery order that Judge Matthewman issues in every case, he directs the parties and their counsel to read Chief Justice Roberts’ 2015 Year-End Report on the Federal Judiciary, which he directly quotes:

“I cannot believe that many members of the bar went to law school because of a burning desire to spend their professional life wearing down opponents with creatively burdensome discovery requests or evading legitimate requests through dilatory tactics.”²⁵

Judge Matthewman’s experience with fishing expeditions, however, is not all bad—at least when it reaches beyond the confines of the courtroom, as he enjoys an active lifestyle that includes fishing, hiking, and kayaking. In fact, he spends most of his free time outside and can often be found picking up trash and plastic left on the beach near where he lives. Judge Matthewman also loves to run and has completed numerous marathons, half-marathons, and other races over the years, although he acknowledges getting slower as he gets older. He has four children, has been happily married for over 36 years to his spouse, Diane Matthewman, and takes joy in spending time with his growing family.

Through each part of his career, Judge Matthewman has learned how the justice system looks from different perspectives—as a police officer, as a witness in court, as an attorney, and as a judge—which has helped him develop a holistic view for which he is eternally grateful. To this day, on his birthday or Father’s Day or other days of moment, he often receives text messages, emails, and phone calls from former clients and former law clerks



Top: Judge Matthewman hiking with his wife, Diane, in California earlier this year. Above: Matthewman during his time in the K-9 unit of the Miami Police Department.

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One of Judge Matthewman's many fishing expeditions.

wishing him well; a true testament to the dedication and heart that Judge Matthewman puts into his work.

When asked to give any advice or insight he has for newer lawyers, Judge Matthewman stresses the importance of one's reputation, in many respects, because your reputation will follow you throughout your career. Reputation for punctuality, believing that early is on time and that on time is late. Reputation for honesty, being forthright with the Court and opposing counsel. Reputation for being prepared, noting that lawyers should know their case and the issues inside and out. And reputation for professional appearance, as he considers the way a lawyer presents themselves and treats all involved in a courtroom (regardless of their title) to be of the utmost importance.

Throughout his life, people have often remarked on Judge Matthewman's resemblance to former President John F. Kennedy—who happens to be one of Judge Matthewman's heroes—which is why it seemed apropos to end on this quote of President Kennedy: "Life is never easy. There is work to be done and obligations to be met—obligations to truth, to justice, and to liberty." Judge Matthewman lives by these words every day through his continued service to advancing the legal profession and his lifetime commitment to justice. ☺

Endnotes

¹William D. Matthewman, *Title VII and Genetic Testing: Can Your Genes Screen You Out of a Job*, 27 HOWARD L.J. 1185 (1984).

²William D. Matthewman, *The Racial Disparity on Federal Death Row*, THE WASHINGTON POST (March 15, 1996),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1996/03/15/the-racial-disparity-on-federal-death-row/9fdedf6b-1fac-415d-bec4-79542beb2399/>.

³See William D. Matthewman, *Towards a New Paradigm for E-Discovery in Civil Litigation: A Judicial Perspective*, 71 FLA. L. REV. 1261 (2019), <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/flr/vol71/iss5/4>.

⁴See John G. Roberts, *2015 Year-End Report on the Federal Judiciary*, (2015), <https://www.supremecourt.gov/publicinfo/year-end/2015year-endreport.pdf> [hereinafter 2015 Report]. See also Order Setting Discovery Procedure, <https://www.flsd.uscourts.gov/sites/flsd/files/2022-SampleOrderSettingDiscoveryProcedure.pdf> (last visited August 15, 2023).

⁵See *id.* at 2 (quoting 2015 Report at 11).