



SPOTLIGHT ON JUDGE
PATRICIA H. MUISE
GWINNETT COUNTY RECORDER'S COURT
By: Judge Patricia Muise
Margaret Gettle Washburn, Sr. Ed.

Judge Patricia Muise was born and raised in Rhode Island, mostly on the shores of Narragansett Bay, and is the eldest of 6 girls. Coincidentally, her father's twin brother also had 6 children - 5 of them boys. She attended an all-girls Catholic high school where she was active in the theater group, the drill and dance team. Both were conducted with a nearby all boys school. The theater group put on musicals: "Music Man," "My Fair Lady" and "Camelot." Judge Muise states that: "...since I can't carry a tune in a bucket, my roles were minor." The drill and dance team marched with the marching band from the boys school and performed half time shows at their football games and marched in parades. Judge Muise and her drill team marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade in New York City, and she recalls stepping over "a pair of drunks fighting in the street." They also marched in the Cherry Blossom Festival in D.C., however, there were no drunks at that parade, at least, not in the street. (maybe just politicians?)

Now, interestingly, Patti's father thought that higher education for females was a waste because he left school after 8th grade. However, that just spurred Judge Muise on and she graduated from Brown University with a degree in Biology at the age of 20! While attending Brown, Patti continued to help out with her high school productions and also served as the drill instructor and choreographer for her church's drum and bugle corps.

Judge Muise's first job was as a telephone operator; like the "old movies with women sitting at a row of stations, running thick cords over the panel in front them". After graduating Brown, she worked in engineering support roles for General Dynamics' Electric Boat Division (building submarines) and later at Data General (building early computers and peripherals).

Judge Muise married after graduation and was a "stay at home mom" for a few years. However, when she became a single parent, she re-entered the workforce, again in engineering support positions. Happily, Judge Muise remarried, acquiring 2 stepsons who affectionately refer to her as their "wicked stepmother." Obviously, they adore their step-mother and, as there is less than 3 years age difference between Patti's oldest stepson and her youngest child, they were quite the perfect blended family.

The family moved to Atlanta in 1987, with Patti's husband's new job, and settled into Peachtree Corners. As the children were getting older, the Judge decided that she, too, wanted to make a decision about: "What I would do "when I grew up." Her first choice was medical school,

but she still had “kids in tow”, and decided upon law school. This turned out to be a great decision and she has never regretted entering into the practice of law. She chose Georgia State College of Law, 14 years after graduating Brown, and was almost 35. Having made that decision, she attended law school full time, mostly during the day while the kids were in school. Wife Patti, Mom Patti and Law Student Patti volunteered at the kids’ schools, hauled children to their activities and worked part time for a neighbor’s nonprofit organization, worked part time doing title research for a real estate firm. When she looks back over those years, she’s stunned at what she accomplished; “I was never without my law books at my children’s’ practices”.

After graduating law school in 1992, Patti worked for a real estate closing firm in Sandy Springs, then in Plaintiff’s employment law. She was active in her community and served as President of her HOA, and was one of the founders of the United Peachtree Corners Civic Association, serving as its first President. She was elected to the Gwinnett Board of Commissioners in 1994, representing District 2, defeating 3 opponents, including the incumbent in the primary, and then the opposition party candidate in the general election. As her political career heated up, trial practice was time consuming, and she returned to real estate. She ran for re-election in 1998, and her opponent failed to qualify and proceeded to run as a write-in candidate. There were allegedly flaws in the opponent’s petitions; there was litigation between the opponent and the Board of Elections. Patti intervened when the case went before the Georgia Supreme Court and she was represented there by Walt Britt. Judge Muise won her bid for re-election.

Judge Muise resigned from the Board of Commissioners when she was appointed to the Recorder’s Court, in 2002. She presides over the traffic cases one expects to have in Recorder’s Court, but also over the Environmental Calendar which consists of County ordinance violations. Judge Muise states: “These range from your normal animal cases, to fire code violations, to leaking septic tanks to abandoned or poorly maintained properties. My experience with all of these kinds of issues while on the Board of Commissioners makes it much easier for me to deal with them from the bench without a steep learning curve.”

“As far as I am concerned, I have the best job in the world and have no desire to be elsewhere. The cases I hear are interesting and give me a never-ending supply of funny stories to share (such as the day that the defendant in an animal control case barked on the witness stand). I can make a difference in our community and in the lives of those in my Court. And the cases I hear don’t cause me to agonize or stress over them, other than the rare “doggie death penalty” case.” Judge Muise has been married for 31 years and has 7 grandchildren: 2 in Rhode Island, 2 in rural Pennsylvania and 3 in northern Virginia. We are grateful to Judge Muise for her 24 years of dedication to the Gwinnett community and to the bench.