



### SAO PROFILE IN PASSION – ED GRIFFITH

*There are some people who are truly unique and fascinating, and our Profile in Passion this month is the epitome of that. He doesn't fit into any mold, he breaks them. With his unparalleled ability to view situations and his signature laugh, Ed Griffith is an SAO legend.*

Edward Michael Griffith's journey to becoming the Senior Public Information Officer at the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office is interesting enough to be a best-selling book. It all began many years ago when his Irish mother moved to London where she met and married his American father who was deployed there. They welcomed their first child, Ed, and three years later moved to the United States. "We ended up in Philadelphia and my sister, who is seven years younger than me, was born there," says Ed, better known as Griff to his childhood friends.

Unlike most kids, Ed didn't really have a dream of becoming an athlete, or fireman or anything specific for that matter. "I never really thought about it. I lived in the moment," he chuckles before continuing. "I wanted to be a catalyst for change."

Ed, who was always a good student and enjoyed reading, attended St. John the Baptist Catholic School in his Roxborough, Philadelphia neighborhood which was an immigrant area. "We had Italians, Poles, Germans and Irish. Even though we were all Catholic, each group had its own church and school."

It was Ed's beloved mother who insisted that he attend LaSalle College High School which was an excellent prep school. "That was a defining moment in my life and set my direction. It was academically demanding and turned out to be actually harder than college. In high school, I learned how to learn."

“I went to Villanova for college but was only there for a year and a half. I was a psychology major but honestly, the 3 years of psych classes I took in high school were *way* more advanced, so I got bored and dropped out.”

Coming from a hard-working family, Ed immediately found employment in an exciting and sometimes dangerous field. “I read gas meters for a year. It was wild! I went to people’s houses to read the gas meter, go down to the basement, and you never knew what you would find.” He was chased by dogs, walked into flea-infested homes, and came into contact with a broad range of people with different experiences and situations.

After a year, Ed went back to school but this time he attended Penn State. “I was a history major, and I also took some education classes because I thought that I would end up teaching.”

“History gives you a perspective and an understanding. It shows you how the present is built and developed from the past. Past always gives you perspective on the present,” he explains.

The past also came into play in his personal life. One day at the university he ran into a girl from his childhood neighborhood. Though they hadn’t been friends, they had friends in common. That chance meeting changed their lives forever. Years after riding bikes around the same blocks, they fell in love and went on to have three children and four grandchildren.

They both graduated college in 1977 during the hard economic times and during a recession. “The job situation wasn’t great, so I went to work in the restaurant industry. This time I became a line cook. I had worked in restaurants in high school and my family had worked in restaurants as servers, so it was something familiar.”

Ed’s future wife moved to Pompano Beach with her mother and started working in retail. She told him that there were job opportunities in Florida, so he moved down in 1978.

“That’s when I went to the mental hospital,” he says slyly before clarifying, “I got a job as a Social Worker at the South Florida State Mental Hospital. They had a hard time filling positions, especially ones that dealt with forensic patients.”

For someone who constantly refers to the great thinkers and the fathers of modern psychology even during the most ordinary conversations, dealing with people with complicated psychological issues was like conducting his doctoral thesis.

One of the patients he encountered was Humberto Mesa who was at the mental facility because he had murdered his girlfriend and was found Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity. He decapitated her, walked down the street naked while holding her severed head, and then threw it at a police officer who was trying to place him in custody.

“It was a fascinating place where you got to see people who were mentally ill and others who were trying to fake being mentally ill. I enjoyed my four years there.”

“I had a variety of jobs at the hospital, and eventually I was working in the legal department as a paralegal. We never had enough beds at the hospital, so they had me come down to the courthouse and supply the mental health evaluations regarding patients’ competency.”

Ed was the first Mental Health Liaison for the then Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS, now DCF) and the courts.

It was then that another twist of fate provided yet another opportunity to journey even further into the criminal justice system. “A prosecutor I knew indicated that there were paralegal position openings at the SAO. Since the mental hospital was closing, I decided to apply.”

Fortune shown upon Ed as once again his path would cross with a woman that would change his life and give him purpose. “The new head of the Economic Crimes Unit (ECU) interviewed me to be her paralegal. Her name was Katherine Fernandez Rundle, and the rest is history,” he smiles with a gleam in his eye.

“Little did I know that in that moment I would hire not only a paralegal but a trusted advisor and friend,” said State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. “I can always count on Ed. He isn’t afraid to share his opinions, concerns, ideas... whether they are popular or not. He is beholden to no one except the vision and the mission of the office.”

“One of the projects I worked on in ECU with Kathy was filing civil lawsuits against slumlords. I would go with housing inspectors to various locations throughout County. I would spend days walking all over Liberty City, Overtown, West Perrine, Florida City, and we would check out all the public housing projects to get information and evidence of the deplorable conditions that the residents in public housing were living in. It turned out that at the time, one of biggest slumlords in the County, was the County. So, we sued the County.”

When State Attorney Fernandez Rundle was Chief Assistant to Janet Reno, she was responsible for the Grand Jury and Ed was by her side. “It was fascinating to help in the

Grand Jury process where they have addressed such important topics and issues that are of great importance to our community and its safety.”

“As times changed and the office began receiving overwhelming amounts of media inquiries, Kathy (who had become the State Attorney), saw that the SAO needed a focused approach to deal with the numerous requests from the media and also to better inform the public of what we do and how we can help them.”

“Since I had knowledge of the office in general and how each department worked, it was easy for me to appropriately pass this on to reporters who mostly didn’t understand the actual role of a prosecutor, or how criminal justice system worked.”

“Since we had worked so closely together, I was gifted with a good sense of who Kathy was, her perspective and her intentions. I had a good understanding of the issues and concerns and how she wanted to address them. And what I didn’t know, I made sure that she told me.”

Though Ed had no formal media training, he learned along the way and grew into a position he created as the first Public Information Officer (PIO) for the SAO. Over the years, he has endeared himself into the hearts of his fellow PIOs, even serving as a mentor to those just coming into their position. He has an established reputation with journalists and reporters who never grow tired of his response to them when asking how he is doing, “you know, I’m just here saving the world.”

Even though the Media team has grown, Ed Griffith is the Original, he is the Godfather, the Oracle, and is consulted by many as a living I-Ching. He is also the only person in the office who can take a conversation about a present-day situation and relate it to a historic event like the Visigoth invasions.

Even after 40 years at the SAO, Ed still comes into work with pep in his step and the energy to take on the world. What keeps him around? “I enjoy the work because it’s always different and I get to use my psychology background. There are so many nuances of the human experiences in the uniqueness of this job. It’s fascinating, and you learn something new every day.”

“This office is the university of the mind and human experience. It is intellectual alchemy. We turn intangible ideas into tangible solutions to community problems.”

**“One of the greatest subtle gifts are the interactions and conversations that we have here at the SAO. Some of the smartest people you will ever meet are in this office. It is all due to the environment that the State Attorney fosters.”**

**When he is not reading warrants, articles on foreign policy or Vikings, or putting together the talking points and visuals elements for press conferences, Ed is either talking about fishing or on his boat fishing. Those select few who are invited to join him on one of his fishing reconnaissance outings are part of an exclusive club. There is always coffee, snacks and every so often, they actually catch a fish.**