

Mutual Respect

Based on an interview of Judge Frank A. Hoss, Jr. by Alissa N. Hudson in February 2001.

Born in Tennessee, Frank A. Hoss, Jr., moved to Manassas with his family in 1944. His father was a vocational instructor, teaching electronics at a time when “tube” technology was at the forefront, and television was just becoming a fixture in the average American home. Hoss remembers a store front in Old Towne Manassas that featured a television for the viewing pleasure of the general public. He attended Osbourn High School, and commented that Friday night football games were the mainstay of weekend entertainment. The area was largely agricultural at that time, and the occasional horse and buggy could still be seen in town.

Hoss attended Washington and Lee University on a full athletic scholarship, (one of the last four students to be afforded this honor, he played basketball all four years), receiving his undergraduate degree in Geology in 1958. He went on to W & L Law School, graduating in 1961, and returning to Manassas to begin his legal career. Having known Selwyn Smith before heading off to W & L made it easy for Hoss to move into a business relationship with Smith, one that lasted for 17 years. Hoss went to work for Smith, both as a part time Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney, (earning \$3,500 per year), and as Smith’s associate. Other well-known Manassas attorneys and judges have also come through business affiliations with Judges Smith and Hoss, namely Judges Murphy and Whisenant, and attorneys Bill Stevens, and Dick Boatwright.

A typical day early in his legal career would find Hoss prosecuting in GDC in the mornings with Jim Davenport before Judge May, and returning to his office in the afternoons to work on real estate transactions, title searches, etc. Real estate was booming business in the 1960’s “and lawyers did it all.” There were no title companies, though title insurance was available. It was a simpler time to practice law, “...contracts were less complicated, property settlement agreements didn’t exist, and the Virginia Code only had two or three volumes.” An attorney could know all the law, unlike now, where attorneys tend to “specialize” to the extent possible, (out of necessity), just to allow them the opportunity to keep up with the panoply of new legislation promulgated each year. Hoss added that “he appreciates the difficulty of the practice of law these days, the paperwork required,” and the need to constantly be aware that your client may sue you, (something that just didn’t happen much when he was practicing law).

Hoss remembers serving as secretary for the PWC Bar association, the “honor” always being conferred upon the newest member of the Bar. The Bar had 10-12 members at the time, dues were \$15.00 per year, and were most likely to be collected in connection with judicial balloting events. Hoss also served at the State Bar level as the local bar council representative, and on the ethics committee. He remembers a time when minimum fee schedules were in effect, (the minimums being set by the local Bar), and when there was a ban on any type of legal advertising. He also remembers a significant amount of discussion regarding the need for continuing legal education for attorneys, and was present at a conference for prosecutors when the Miranda decision was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court. He has experienced some of the most significant changes to impact the legal profession, all fraught with concern as they occurred, all assimilated in due time. Those experiences add balance to one’s life, and in the case of Judge Hoss, that balance prepared him for later Judicial Appointments.

Judge Hoss was appointed to the General District Court Bench in 1978, (for a mere \$38,000 a year!), where he served with now retired Judge Murphy. Hoss was appointed to the Circuit Court bench in 1986, to fill a newly created position, where he served with Retired Judges Smith and Thornton, and Judge Whisenant. (The fifth judicial seat was added in 1995.) He announced his retirement, effective in 2001, after 23 years on the bench, and intends to serve as a substitute judge when called upon, adding that it will keep him active and leave him time to play a little more golf. Hoss is described by those who routinely practiced before him as one who was dedicated to his job and who took his responsibilities seriously. He is said to have always given his full, undivided attention to the case before him, regardless of its size, and could be counted on to provide soundly reasoned decisions. It is no small wonder that those whom Judge Hoss respects, for the difficulties they face each day as attorneys, also respect him for his diligence as a Judge. He will be missed.