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Mar. 2014 E-newsletter Alumni Spotlight: Alumni Spotlight: Jennifer D. Bailey (J.D.'83)

Office of Communications and Public Relations
University of Georgia School of Law, lawcomm@uga.edu

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Alumni Spotlight: Jennifer D. Bailey (J.D.'83)

News @ Georgia Law February 2014 Alumni Profile



Name: Jennifer Drechsel Bailey
Title: Circuit Court Judge, Miami-Dade Circuit Civil Division
Employer Name: Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida
Location: Miami, Fla.
Georgia Law graduation year: 1983
Other degree(s)/institution(s): A.B.J. / University of Georgia / 1980

1. Why did you choose to attend Georgia Law?

Law school was a last-minute, senior year decision for me after I took a business law class and found it fascinating. At the very last minute, I applied and was admitted.

2. What is your most memorable experience from your time at Georgia Law?

Professor Julian McDonnell was illustrating some contract issue with u-pick farms and described them as "the sort of liberal arts exercise that the Volvo crowd is fond of." The classroom rolled with laughter, and the line still makes me smile.

3. Who was your favorite law professor? Why?

Professor Ron Ellington taught me Civil Procedure and how to use the rules. As a young lawyer, my understanding of those rules gave me a real advantage over other attorneys. To this day, the first advice I give young lawyers is to read the rules. And keep reading them until you know them.

4. What was your favorite thing about living in Athens?

The combination of the elegance and earthiness of the South with the funky and quirky character of Athens. I was there during the B-52 era and when the 40-Watt Club really only had one light bulb and a cooler.

5. Where was your favorite place to study during law school?

My porch.

6. What advice would you give to current Georgia Law students?

Be open-minded about career options. There are great ways to use your law degree to make a difference in the world beyond what you see on "Law and Order."

7. Please give a brief description of your responsibilities as administrative judge for the Miami-Dade Circuit Civil Division.

Ours is the fourth largest court system in the country, right behind NY, LA and Chicago. I am responsible for 26 judges assigned to our 1926-era downtown courthouse. Keeping the court's systems running smoothly, supporting my colleagues in their work, dealing with the media, and making sure that competent justice is delivered in a timely and effective manner are my responsibilities.

8. What do you enjoy most about your job? What is the most rewarding aspect?

I like solving problems. The most rewarding aspect is moving a case from resolution to solution. It's not so hard to resolve a matter by picking a winner, but if you can come up with a judgment that the parties believe is just, then you've solved the problem. When litigants come up to you years after their case was heard, shake your hand, and thank you for doing a great job for them - that's meaningful.

9. What is one of the greatest challenges facing your field right now?

Florida is a judicial foreclosure state, and Miami was ground zero in the foreclosure crisis. We went from caseloads of 2,000 pending cases per judge in 2007 to over 6,000 per judge in 2008-2012. Handling the cases was complicated by disarray within the lender/servicer industry. We are digging our way out with successful case management and have reduced the caseload, guided by the principle that it is more important to do things right than to do them fast. Our economy demands we move these cases, but never at the expense of the integrity of the judicial process.

10. What has the experience of being a judge taught you?

There are few absolute truths in the world. And you cannot judge if you don't listen.

11. What advice would you give to someone wanting to become a judge?

Acquire the skill of withholding judgment until you have all the information needed to make a good determination. It is a real skill to not judge ahead of the facts, especially in this world of instant information that we live in today. Listen. To everyone. Everyone deserves to be heard in court, and you need to have that skill from the day you start.

12. What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What are your hobbies/interests?

Most of my spare time is devoted to my husband and two great daughters. I also create mosaic artwork - my work has been in juried exhibitions. I explore the outdoors at every opportunity. And I am surrounded by books.

13. How do you stay up to date on legal issues and trends?

Read everything everywhere I can. Understanding the world helps you understand justice.

14. What book/resource do you find yourself referencing the most?

The Civil Procedure Rule Book. Professor Ellington was right.

15. What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment in life?

I have been a Circuit Court judge for twenty-one years, and during that time I have managed to juggle life, family and work well enough that I am still married to the same great guy and have two great kids and a solid professional reputation. I don't know if I "leaned in," but whatever I was doing, I focused on doing the best job I could.

16. If you could share an afternoon with anyone, with whom would you choose to spend it?

My family. I like them the best.

17. When you look out your office window, what do you see?

A city that encompasses all that is good and bad about America in the 21st Century, but that almost always has great weather - so lots of blue sky and sunshine.



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The University of Georgia School of Law 225 Herty Drive Athens, GA 30602-6012 (706) 542-5191
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