

Graciousness and Gentility in the Practice of Law

Based on an interview of Bruce Gross by Alissa N. Hudson in January 2016

Bruce Gross was born in Indiana, PA. His father was a pastor, serving three congregations at the time, and was ultimately assigned to a church in Cheektowaga, NY, a suburb of Buffalo, which is where Bruce spent his high schools days. In 1967, he graduated from Houghton College in NY with degrees in history and political science. Not sure what his next step should be, he took the GRE, the LSAT and the Foreign Service Exam. Inspired by the TV series, Perry Mason, he headed to law school at American University in the fall of 1967. He had completed three semesters when he was “drafted into the Army and went to Fort Bragg for basic training. Near the end of basic training they went through the company and asked who could type. I raised my hand and found myself working as a legal clerk/court reporter in the office of the Judge Advocate General for Fort Bragg and spent the rest of my Army days there. I learned more about the reality of the practice of law and the courtroom in those days in the Army than I ever did in law school.”

Gross returned to American to finish law school at night while working during the day for the Federal Power Commission and then clerking for a DC Superior Court Judge. He graduated in 1972, worked for a congressman for a while and entered private practice in 1975 as a solo practitioner in Arlington. He eventually moved his family to Prince William County and “fell in love with the area”, so transitioned his practice here, ultimately going into practice with Bob Klima for a time and then on his own again around 1989. His early mentors were Tom Underwood, Pete Steketee and Greg Porter, and he refers to the “graciousness with which the Bar back in those days worked together” describing it as “absolutely incredible.” He also admired the “gentility that we experienced with Judge Thornton and Judge Sinclair and to a great extent with Judge Smith. They were teaching all of us how to be an advocate, how to be a counselor and how to live your life in the public eye.” He also recalls a heartfelt conversation with Judge Becker who credited, “values outside of the profession; a spiritual foundation and a family foundation” with helping him maintain the “grace and thoroughness” he exuded while on the bench.

In the early days of his career, Gross handled wills, trusts and estate work, and real estate transactions. He also served as a GAL where he “loved being in the courtroom, participating in the investigations, being the eyes and ears for the judges from a neutral perspective.” He also enjoyed representing churches and working with not for profits, among them, Didlake. From 2005 to 2010, he was spending “almost half of my time working for Didlake”, so it was a natural progression for him to become their general counsel in 2010.

Grose remarked, “I love what I do for Didlake.” (Side note: Didlake strives to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities by providing rehabilitative services and life-enriching opportunities.) “General Counsel in an organization isn’t just practicing law. You really are having an opportunity to manage and run a business by making recommendations, by asking the organization to look at things in advance. You are doing, not just the classic kind of damage control that is the norm of the litigation process. You are trying to shape events and shape people before the fact.”

When he retires from Didlake, he hopes to be able to continue working with non-profits because he truly enjoys applying his expertise to benefit others. He also expressed an interest in working with the PWC Bar to support inter-relational and inter-generational programs to provide opportunities to pass along the gracious, welcoming nature of the Bar to its newest members.