

Learning by Living in a Judicial Family – Ohio Judicial Family Network

By the family of Judge William Klatt, 10th District Court of Appeals

A year and a half ago, when my spouse was appointed to the 10th District Court of Appeals by Governor Bob Taft, I was so happy that he was finally able to fulfill his dream of serving as a judge because, as his highly objective spouse observes, this is the best use of his personal and professional talent. I was so thankful for the interest of the Governor, the Attorney General and the many other political and legal professionals that were so supportive of his appointment and subsequent race to keep the seat.

Becoming a judge, though, does not involve just the family member holding the position. In states where judges are elected, the entire family has to "buy in" to the concept of running a successful campaign in order for the campaign to enrich, rather than take away from, family life. This is challenging if one's spouse and children are socially shy and/or teenagers. The latter factor makes life especially challenging for the entire family!

This is why I (as their demanding mother) asked our children to reflect upon how living in a judicial family has affected their lives. I was hoping that this would open their eyes to some of the unspoken positives that have come out of such a state. Our 16-year-old son, Will, reflects on the ideological differences he has with his dad but ends up affirming that Bill has encouraged his political activism. Our 14-year-old daughter, Anna, ends up viewing political campaigning as a form of community service, and she emphasizes that our family always comes first in the heart of her dad. Joseph, our 11-year-old, adds humor and youthful optimism to the daily struggles accompanying any political campaign.

Following are three independent perceptions of learning and living in a judicial family:

Living in a Judicial Family
Will Klatt, 16

I never really expected that living in a family with a judge for a dad would be easy, and trust me, sometimes it is not. Nor was the campaign road an easy one for me. Passing out "Bill Klatt for Judge" pamphlets on a Saturday morning is not what your typical 16-year-old would call fun. Sometimes I had to do things I did not feel comfortable doing. For example, riding in parades and wearing a shirt with my last name on it is about the last thing I wanted to do.

Don't get me wrong, there are lots of positives as well to being the son of judge. People treat you a little more seriously if someone in your family works in an elected position. You get to meet many big-name politicians in your community, and you learn about our political system.

Dinner time, strangely enough, is the time when my dad and I talk about what is going on in the news, what politicians are running for what office and so on. These conversations usually lead toward conversations about political concepts and ideology. My father and I are very different in this area. My father is a Republican, where I am a very active liberal. We hold very different opinions about the war on Iraq and other national issues; yet, he has not held me back from working with progressive groups and the antiwar movement. He has always allowed me to fight for what I believe in, and he even let me travel to Washington to protest the war on Martin Luther King Day.

My dad also showed me that the only way to win at something is to work hard to get it. He worked very hard to win his last election, learning from past experiences and winning in the end. Sometimes it was very hard to help my dad during the election because I was also asked to help pass out pamphlets for other Republican candidates. In some instances, I supported their opposing candidate. The distribution effort was hard for me to do, but in the end, I decided I had to compromise in order to help my dad.

Another thing I had a hard time dealing with was the possibility that it might make no difference how good a person was at doing their job or how qualified a person was when elections came around. It seems to me that it often has to do with how much money a candidate spends on television ads or how many parades a person was in. Not only are these things not fair to the candidate, but I question if this is fair to the voter who only voted for a candidate because they saw her/him on television?

Over all, I'd have to say living in a judicial family is a great experience. The only negative is that the campaigning can be difficult, and the time might be better spent with friends and family or helping out in the community.

Life as a Judge's Daughter **Anna Klatt, 14**

Being the daughter of a judge has exposed me to many things that I would not have otherwise had the chance to experience. In the political world, I am constantly exposed to all different types of people in parades, festivals and even in my own home. During campaigning, I had the chance to serve others at the Greek Festival downtown. Although busing tables and washing trays was not the most enjoyable task, I learned what it means to work as a team and to serve the community.

Spending a good deal of the summer being in parades and handing out pamphlets has taught me more about our political system and the importance of voting. One vote can change someone's life. Fortunately, people must have read my dad's pamphlets and voted for him!

Throughout my dad's career as a judge, I continue to learn from him as he challenges my brothers and me with cases and hard situations that he is faced with every day. From our many discussions at dinner, I have realized that it takes someone with a truly honest heart and unbiased opinion to do the job that my dad returns from every night. His wisdom has benefited me in many ways and has helped me form my own opinions on moral issues and on our system of government.

The summer before elections is a crucial time for political candidates and being a part of the campaigning taught me to be open to all different types of people. Traveling to many different communities exposed me to different parts of Columbus and those who live there. People from various backgrounds, ethnic groups and social status came together at parades to share in the celebration of our country. Meeting such diverse groups of people enabled me to strengthen my people skills and build more confidence.

Learning about the judicial system from my dad has also helped me in school. While studying government, I was able to apply some of the knowledge that I learned to my schoolwork. The combination of school and my dad's knowledge has helped me develop ideas about what I would like to do, as I grow older and experience more of our world.

Even though my dad is a judge, his responsibilities to be a good father are, and always will be, his top priority. I learn from him every day, and he will always be there to support me. His gift of loving nature has touched the hearts of my family and has made him into a truly honorable person. The dedication Bill Klatt shows towards his work and those closest to him, sets an example for me to strive toward. Without him, I would not be the person I am today, and for that I am forever grateful.

Life as a Son of a Judge
Joseph Klatt, 11

Being a son of a judge is very interesting. Sometimes, at dinner, my dad tells us about his cases (without the true names) and asks what our opinion is. These cases make us think very hard and use our brains. Not many kids get to experience this.

When my dad is running everyone in my family helps in the campaign. We wear the T-shirts that say Retain Judge Klatt to public events and go to parades. I like giving out stickers and candy at the parades. I eat the kind I like first. I am proud to be the son of a judge but even better is just being my dad's son.

Judicial Spouse Grows Up
Maryanna D. Klatt, Ph.D., age unknown

Our kids are not the only ones who have learned lessons during the political process. At my initial meeting of the Ohio Judicial Family Network, I was introduced to a respected jurist's wife. It was the first opportunity I had to chat with others who had already been through the challenges of campaign life. I began to voice concerns about how embarrassing it is to participate in fundraising events for your spouse when she asked me, "Do you think your husband would be a good judge?" My response was, "Yes, a great judge."

With much dignity, warmth, and conviction, she reminded me that in a democracy, if we want good government, we need to work to get good people elected. And part of that work is to support the fundraising efforts necessary to run a political campaign. In a gentle way she was telling me that if I wanted good people in government, then I needed to act to make that happen.

She helped me more than she will ever know that day. Our conversation changed my view about the campaign process and what could be learned from living a judicial family life.

The Ohio Judicial Family Network *works!*