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A TRIBUTE TO JUDGE PHYLLIS A. KRAVITCH

Thomas A. Clark[†]

It is a privilege for me to write a few paragraphs about Judge Phyllis Kravitch. Much can be said about this fine Judge who has contributed greatly to the development of the law of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. I wish to comment about her courage—a quality much needed by a judicial officer. All of us seek approval of others—it makes us feel good. But there are times in life when the crowd may be moving in an errant direction and one must be courageous enough to take a stand against the majority.

Phyllis Kravitch has always been courageous. She went to law school in the early 1940s when few women were attending. I am a contemporary of Judge Kravitch and can say from personal knowledge that during the early decades of our lifetime, there were many discriminatory feelings and actions against persons because of their race, religion, sex, and origin.

Judge Kravitch has been a person of courage in thoughts, actions, and expression. Having worked closely with her on the Court of Appeals for over seventeen years, I have observed her express her studied thoughts and opinions, listen carefully to the opinions of others, and reach decisions that she believes to be just. At times she has been a minority of one. In every instance she has abided by what she thought was right. She has never “gone along to get along.”

On the other side of the coin, even though Judge Kravitch never hesitates to voice her dissenting opinion, she is always a gracious lady with Southern charm. An example of this would be when Judge Kravitch was in New Orleans shortly after she had been appointed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Kravitch and her law clerk were leaving the hotel for court one morning during a heavy downpour. Guests were lined up to wait for taxicabs. Just as Judge Kravitch and her law clerk were about to step forward to take their turn for a taxi, two well-dressed men with briefcases came rushing out of the hotel and entered the cab, saying that they were running late. The law

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clerk started to say something about them waiting their turn, but Judge Kravitch told her it did not matter—the men could have the taxi and another surely would be pulling up shortly. You can imagine the look on those two lawyers' faces that morning when Judge Kravitch entered the courtroom in her judicial robe. She said something like, "Well, gentlemen, I'm glad to see that you made it to court on time today." The embarrassed attorneys could only stutter an apology to this petite judge who had deferred to them rather than cause conflict.

For Judge Kravitch the law has been a jealous suitor. The workload of our court has left Judge Kravitch little time for anything but the law. Although she has spent time with her family and her extended family of law clerks, the law consumes most of her day-to-day activities. There is little opportunity in the judicial experience to do what I call "looking out the window."

In closing, I wish to say that Judge Kravitch brings joy to those who know her. She is a very thoughtful person. The illness or events in the lives of friends always bring cards, calls, or some similar words of congratulations, condolences, or encouragement. One is lucky to be among her friends and associates.