



We Call Her “Kitty Ann”

By John Wayne Jewell

*I*t doesn't sound like a name one would call the Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, or any judge for that matter. But that's what my family and most of her close friends have called the Honorable Catherine Dick Kimball for the 50-odd years we've known her. The name does not lessen the respect which we have for her but, instead, reflects the personality of this wonderful woman.

Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine D. Kimball bringing order to a meeting. Photo by Ross Foote.





Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine D. Kimball with family and friends on a ski trip. Photo provided by Kimball family.

While others will write about the Chief Justice's many accomplishments, I set my hand to this in an attempt to reveal something of her early career and, more importantly, her personal side, and to thank her for her family's friendship with mine.

I grew up with Clyde Kimball in our small town of New Roads and was his fraternity brother at LSU. Neither of us knew Kitty Ann Dick prior to 1963. She was growing up in the "big city" of Alexandria where she was born in 1945 to the late William H. Dick and Jane Kelley Dick. She was the oldest of five, with four younger brothers. After graduating in 1963 from Bolton High School, she came to LSU that year, and we have had the privilege of knowing her since. She entered LSU Law School in 1966, and she and Clyde married the following year.

After graduating in 1970, and bearing two children (Kevin and Catherine) along the way, she and Clyde lived in Alexandria where she clerked for U.S. District Judge Nauman Scott and later served successively as special counsel to the Louisiana Attorney General's Office and general counsel to the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice. A few years after their third child (Lyria) was born, the Kimballs moved to New Roads, where she later began the solo practice of law in 1975 — the same year Clyde ran for and won a seat in the Louisiana House of Representatives, a seat he held for 16 years until he decided not to seek re-election. She practiced law and served as assistant district attorney until 1982.

That year, Clyde's uncle, Dan Kimball, a longtime district judge for the 18th Judicial District (Iberville, West Baton Rouge

and Pointe Coupee parishes), died. Kitty Ann was persuaded to run for his seat and she won. She served on the district bench until 1992 when the Supreme Court seat she now holds became open. Until that year, this seat had been occupied by men from Baton Rouge — the most populous of the 12 parishes it served at the time. Aware of the challenge, she accepted it head on. Against great odds, she and Clyde campaigned tirelessly from St. Landry



Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine D. Kimball and family. Photo provided by Kimball family.



Parish on the west to Washington and St. Tammany parishes on the east. She carried every parish in the general election.

As a colleague in the practice of law, Kitty Ann added much to our local bar — and not just because she was the first woman to have an office in New Roads, although that probably helped. Who would think of being un-professional to this lady?

As a district judge, her intellect and knowledge of law and procedure was apparent from the beginning. Never was a judge more hardworking and, at the same time, so accessible to the bar. Her office was always open.

As an associate justice and Chief Justice of our state's highest court, I need say no more. It has been a continuation of the same high standards.

But with all of that said, it is the personal side of this special woman that has impressed me the most. While there are many women in our profession today, it was not so in the 1970s and 1980s. Maybe it was growing up with four little brothers that prepared her so well for her future roles in life. I have had the privilege of observing firsthand the way she maneuvered her role as a wife and mother side by side with her professional duties. When church, school or community asked, Kitty Ann did her part and never used her career as an excuse not to respond. The jobs she accepted were numerous: president of her church council, president of the local Mothers Club, member of the local parochial school board, president of the Legislative Wives Auxiliary, to name a few.

She has always been unpretentious to a fault. Outside court, one would never know her occupation, other than that of a wife, mother, sister or friend. Even on the mountains of Colorado, she looked and acted like a sweet, ordinary wife (well . . . maybe not quite so much . . . after all, she was in pain) while being transported by the ski patrol down the mountain after a bad fall while trying to keep up with Clyde (another of the challenges she refused to turn down).

When my son had the honor of clerking for her at the Supreme



Clyde Kimball and Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine D. Kimball. *Photo provided by Kimball family.*

Court, he had difficulty remembering to call her “Justice Kimball,” instead referring to her as “Miss Kitty Ann.” She finally told him to give up and that it was OK to use the name he had grown up using.

When she joined the Supreme Court on Jan. 12, 1993, I was given the privilege of introducing the new justice, and the following is some of what I had to say:

“Yes, Kitty Kimball is a good judge, but it has been said that no one is a good judge who is not first a good man or woman; that one may have learned intellect and have exhaustive knowledge of written laws and jurisprudence, but if one does not have a moral quality summed up in love of neighbor, that learned intellect will produce technically competent but invalid work.

“Kitty Kimball is a good woman. Everyone in this Courtroom who knows her has been touched by this goodness, by her generosity, by her desire to serve her community, by her sympathy and her understanding, her patience and, most of all, by her love for family and friends, and for her God.”

The same words hold true today.

Soon our Chief Justice will enjoy her well-deserved retirement with Clyde, her three children and their families, including six grandchildren.

Yes, we've always called her “Kitty Ann” and always will. Thankfully, we will now have the chance to do so much more often. On behalf of all of New Roads and Pointe Coupee Parish, thanks for being our friend, and welcome home, Kitty Ann. ♦



Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine D. Kimball at a Red Mass. *Photo provided by Kimball family.*

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