



# *Farewell*

## **Thanks for the Memories**

**By: Hon. Karen S. Jennemann**

Over 28 years ago, on November 3, 1993, Eleventh Circuit Judge Gerald Tjoflat swore me in as the first woman bankruptcy judge in Florida. Thirteen years later, in 2006, Laurel Isicoff joined me as a female colleague in the Southern District of Florida. On February 2, 2022, I will retire with an expected six women serving as bankruptcy judges in just the Middle District of Florida, and countless more throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit and the United States. This is just one change I lived.

The first time I held court in Orlando, I had to sit on a telephone book to see the litigants. The chairs were too short for me to see over the bench! We were in a commercial building where I rode the same elevator as the disgruntled parties that I would soon make very happy or very sad. We used typewriters and had paper files. Staff had to paperclip relevant pleadings to put on multiple carts holding the many files needed to prepare for a hearing. I signed every single order, including thousands of discharges. We got a lot of exercise, but we got it done.

In 2003, we thankfully converted to electronic filing, and the paper and carts disappeared, as did many of the staff who retired as we became more efficient. When the Bankruptcy Code was revised in 2005, we were ready for the influx in filings, serving cookies to the many people waiting in line to file their case before the new restrictions were implemented.

After the real estate crash and recession of 2008, we were busier than ever trying to help folks survive and keep their homes. In 2009, one of our creditor lawyers

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suggested we start a formal program to encourage debtors and their lenders to consensually modify their mortgages. And the Mortgage Modification Mediation program was born. Today, it is the national model used in numerous courts across the country. The program has helped thousands of families stay in and, more importantly, pay for their homes.

In 2011, I was honored and selected as Chief Judge for our district. During those years, I got the privilege of meeting and learning the jobs of our court family district wide. I also learned how important the bankruptcy bar associations are to our mission and saw the depth of professionalism, devotion, and talent of our attorneys. We collectively worked hard to unify our procedures and work together. As Judge Williamson coined the term, we are now “One Court, One Team.”

I presided over thousands of cases, saved numerous families from foreclosures, discharged untold millions in debts individuals could not pay, and kept businesses open for their employees. But more than that, the job brought challenges, joys, and meaning to my life for over 28 years.

As I leave, I want to thank every one of you who have enriched my life and upheld the integrity and importance of the work of the bankruptcy court. Special thanks go to:

- Every law clerk who worked in chambers as an intern, a term clerk, or a career clerk. I could not have issued our thousands of opinions without your help. I loved watching your careers and lives blossom.
- To the bankruptcy court staff, many of whom stayed with the court family for decades, doing whatever needed doing. A special thanks goes to Maggie Moyet, who supervised the Orlando office, and my personal chambers’ staff, including Kathy Deetz (in many roles), my trusted courtroom deputies, most recently Gena Whitsett (who figured out how to switch to remote hearings *virtually* overnight), and my long-time judicial assistant, Cindy Courtney.
- To my judicial colleagues, from those who I was invested with in 1994, Jerry Funk and Bill Glenn, to those who I serve with today under Chief Judge Delano’s leadership, including one of my former law clerks, Lori Vaughan, who will now preside over the Orlando Division. I leave the Court in very good hands.
- To all the attorneys who practice in this court and who make our bankruptcy court excel, whether it is by volunteering for a *pro bono* case, working with a bankruptcy bar association, especially the wonderful Central Florida

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Bankruptcy Law Association, or mentoring a new lawyer. You are the best of the best.

- And, finally, I want to thank Arthur Briskman, who taught me the ropes of judging, mentored me for years, and will remain a true and dear friend. We always agreed to rule similarly and never once in 28 years on the bench together ever disagreed. It was a joy to serve with him.

So, as I start a new adventure, whatever that may be, I will close with the lyrics Bob Hope made famous:

*Awfully glad I met you*  
*Cheerio and toodle-oo*  
*Thank you*  
*Thank you so much*  
*For the memories.*