

*Judge Rudolph T. Randa Memorial  
Seventh Circuit Conference, May 2, 2017  
Diane S. Sykes, Circuit Judge*

On September 5, 2016, we lost a beloved member of our legal community in Milwaukee. Judge Rudolph T. Randa died at the age of 76 after a courageous eight-month battle with cancer. Judge Randa dedicated his entire adult life to public service, and what an extraordinary public servant he was. He brought to his work on the bench a lively intellect, a deep reservoir of respect for the dignity of all persons, and a passion for the preservation of freedom, justice for all, and the highest aspirations of the American system of self-government. He was a man of strong faith and was deeply devoted to his family, to his country, and to the rule of law.

Judge Randa's roots were in Milwaukee's working class. He was born in the City of Milwaukee on July 25, 1940, the son of a sheet-metal worker. He attended Milwaukee public schools and graduated from Riverside High School, along with his friend and later colleague on the state and federal bench, the late Judge Terence Evans. Judge Randa was an honors student, a star shot-putter on the track team, a chess champion, and the class president. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and a law degree, in 1966, from the University of Wisconsin. He then entered in the U.S. Army and served in the Vietnam War, rising to the rank of Captain and Company Commander. He distinguished himself as a leader in combat and was a much decorated soldier. For his service in Vietnam, he was awarded the Bronze Star, the Vietnam Service Medal with 5 campaign stars, and many other medals. Following his discharge from the Army in 1969, he served a brief stint in the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and then returned to Milwaukee for a job in the City Attorney's Office.

In 1975 he waged and won his first race for an elected judicial position, shocking the local political world by beating an incumbent Milwaukee municipal judge whose patron was none other than Milwaukee's powerful Mayor Henry Maier. This political feat did not escape notice, and before long he was elected to the Milwaukee County Circuit Court bench. He served there with distinction in the 1980s until his elevation to District I of the Wisconsin Court of Appeals, which serves Milwaukee County. In 1992 President George H. W. Bush nominated Judge Randa to serve on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin. He was unanimously confirmed by the Senate. From 2002 to 2009, he served as the court's Chief Judge.

On the bench Judge Randa was known for his diligence, his fundamental fairness, his patience and practical wisdom, and his humane approach to the administration of justice in his courtroom. He deeply felt the profound responsibility of his office, and he exercised his judicial authority as a true servant of the law and the public trust. He insisted on observing the formalities, traditions, and decorum of the courtroom not to puff himself up or emphasize his own authority—he well understood that it was not about him—but to reinforce the seriousness of the daily business of our courts and to recognize the equal dignity of each person before the court, no matter their station, and the importance of each case before the court, no matter how large or small.

Judge Randa was an affable man with a wonderful sense of humor and a talent for storytelling. Lawyers loved to appear before him. He excelled at the practical and human aspects of the work of a trial judge in a busy urban jurisdiction—the constant personal interaction with the lawyers and litigants, the jurors, the law-enforcement and probation officers, and, yes, criminal defendants. Judge Randa was famously a law-and-order judge, and the serious criminal cases that routinely came before him often required him to impose long prison sentences. Yet he was genuinely concerned about the offenders who came before him for sentencing, speaking to them directly and quite

personally and treating them with honesty and dignity. Not well known is the fact that he regularly received letters from offenders he had sentenced to prison thanking him for his personal interest in their cases and his sage advice about how to improve their lives.

Judge Randa was a great patriot. He deeply loved this country. One of his favorite judicial duties was the naturalization ceremony. He took great pride and joy in welcoming new American citizens and administering the oath of citizenship to them. It gave him an opportunity to expound on the greatness of this country and the gifts and responsibilities of citizenship.

Like most judges, Rudy Randa was very proud of his former law clerks, many of whom are now superstars in our bar. He personally mentored them, and they remained close to the judge and his wife, Melinda. He had a profound influence on his clerks and on many others in our legal community who admired him professionally and personally.

Perhaps most important of all, Judge Randa was a man of great faith and boundless love for his family. He attended daily Mass—not at the grand St. John’s Cathedral, just two blocks from the federal courthouse, but at Old St. Mary’s, a lovely and intimate small church a few blocks further away. He loved music (especially opera) and also politics and the Green Bay Packers. He was utterly devoted to his wife, Melinda, and their two sons, Rudy and Daniel. His Catholic faith and his family were his greatest joys and deepest sources of strength. He had many friends as well, and I count myself among those who were fortunate to learn from his example and to benefit from his friendship and support. He leaves a tremendous and lasting legacy in our legal community and in the life of our city and state. He will long be remembered and is greatly missed.