

# The Washington Post

## First Person Singular: Lee F. Satterfield, 53, Washington, chief judge, D.C. Superior Court



*Jonathan Newton/THE WASHINGTON POST - "Most of us choose this profession because we want to help people," says Lee F. Satterfield, chief judge of the D.C. Superior Court. "If you're in it just to judge, that wears off, and people find out that you're just as human as they are."*

**By Carla Broyles, Thursday, June 14, 9:30 AM**The Washington Post

My father always wanted to be a judge and had gotten far along in the process, but withdrew his name because I had been sick as a teenager with bone cancer. I had my leg amputated and other surgeries because it had spread to my lungs. He felt it wasn't the right time and that he needed

the stability and flexibility to help the family through the medical crisis. Fifteen years later, when there was another opening, he got the application and gave it to me.

He died in 2006 and didn't live to see me become [chief judge](#). He always told me to deal with people as I would want them to deal with me. He was very calm, and I think I've developed that characteristic. You're making important decisions that impact people's lives. Most of us choose this profession because we want to help people. If you're in it just to judge, that wears off, and people find out that you're just as human as they are.



*(Jonathan Newton/THE WASHINGTON POST)  
- "When I go home, I'm raising teenagers, so I have to be a parent, I have to do some judging," Satterfield says.*

Every now and then, you run into somebody on the street who says you sentenced them. One guy told me that it was the best thing I did for him. This young man said that it helped him straighten out. That's rare that we have people telling us that. My time presiding in the family court division has been particularly rewarding. A kid, a teenager [who was neglected], she still corresponds with me and my staff, letting us know how she's doing. When I became chief judge, she wrote me a nice letter telling me that she understands some of the things that I was trying to do for her now that she has children of her own. That just makes your day.

When I go home, I'm raising teenagers, so I have to be a parent, I have to do some judging. [My kids] would probably tell you that I judge

all the time. If I'm very cautious about them going out somewhere, [they'll say] "Well, you wouldn't be that way if you weren't a judge." I tend not to try to make a lot of decisions when I'm off the job, because I have to make so many during the day. It can be stressful. One thing I haven't done as well as my father did is develop an outlet. His was golf. And we went to football games together. Big fans of the local football team, suffering fans. I try to get the kids interested, but they're like, "Dad we're not interested in watching [the Redskins] with you, because we've never seen them win." So when I talk about the old times and why I'm so hooked on them, they look at me like, "We haven't seen it." So that's not my outlet anymore. And I haven't played golf since my father died. I only played to hang around with him.