



Come with me to Manassas, Virginia.

It is the place where Americans first fought each other in this country's Civil War.

The creek which gave this battlefield a northern name - Bull Run - still flows, but the fields of Manassas are mostly gone now.

This town is a suburb of Washington, D.C.

In place of the open fields we now see houses. In one of the homes the father of three young children is packing his suitcase.

It is 1996, or thereabouts. The father, a trial lawyer, has been packing his suitcase a lot these days. Mostly he is traveling between Washington and Grand Rapids.

One of his traveling destinations, in Grand Rapids, is this courthouse. He is spending time in a courtroom downstairs.

At home, the lawyer's young son is begging his father not to leave. The two are very close, and the child wants his father to stay home.

When he loses the argument, the boy - whose name is Andrew - goes to his bedroom. He finds his most-valued treasure ... a dinosaur ... and decides to do something unusual with it.

Since he can't convince his father to stay home, and since he can't travel with his Dad to wherever he's going, Andrew decides the next best thing is to let his Dad borrow his dinosaur.

He packs his treasure into the suitcase, along with all the other important stuff his Dad needs on the trip, and gives him a hug.

His plan is to make sure that his dad isn't lonely while he's away from home. After all, if the dinosaur is good for Andrew, it will surely be good for his dad.

These days Andrew's Dad spends a lot of time in this courthouse. He's our new magistrate Judge, Phil Green.

If you know anything about Judge Green, you know he's a good man. From where I sit, that's way beyond significant.

He's also a family man. His biggest topic of conversation is - and always has been - Ann Marie, Elizabeth, Andrew, Claire Marie, Mary and Grace.

There's a reason why today's five ushers are Judge Green's five children.

These days Judge Green wears a black robe when he does his job. But these days aren't the first days that he wore a robe.

Earlier in his life - before Ann Marie and the children - Judge Green wore a different kind of robe and lived a different kind of life. It was an essential part of who he became as a man.

I checked out today's reflection at the Trappist's official website. It's amazingly fitting for today's events. Here it is:

An old monk said: "The reason we do not make progress is because we do not know our own capacities and do not have patient endurance for the work we have undertaken. We want to acquire virtue painlessly."

The work Judge Green has now undertaken requires patience. It requires endurance. It requires virtue.

One does not come to such attributes easily or quickly. Character-shaping takes years.

Judge Green has the character to be a very good judge just as he is a very good man.

He has the years of experience to preside over civil cases and criminal cases.

I know him more from the civil side of things. I saw him work tirelessly when I was appointed Special Attorney to the United States Attorney General in the mid-90s.

Then I knew him as Phil. I saw him as someone who took his work unbelievably seriously.

I knew him then, and know him now, as a scrupulously honest man. Someone who is fair. Someone who listens. Someone who is patient. Someone who can make a hard call, and get it right.

He will join the other judges in this room as someone of whom we all can be proud.

We are blessed, in this District, to have the bench we have. Judge Green will take his place among this group of jurists and will live up to their standards.

Something happened this week which caused me to completely change my remarks for today. That event made me more reflective. More serious. More introspective. Less humorous.

My beloved Mother died this week. We laid her to rest the other day. My father is utterly bereft. Totally heartbroken.

After 67 years of total togetherness, he is alone. He doesn't know what to do. It's hard for him to comprehend the loss. He keeps asking where she is.

Thinking about my Mother's departure made me recall the dinosaur story.

Thinking about the dinosaur story made me reflect on my own actions this year.

I've packed my suitcase a lot because of a case pending in this court.

I've been gone more than I've been home because of that case.

My Mother understood the nature of my work. She was always patient when I had to be elsewhere. She forgave when my place at her bedside was empty.

There comes a time, though, when all of the work and all of the deadlines must take second place to other responsibilities in life. Before we became judges and lawyers we were sons and daughters, fathers and mothers.

Our work in the law is important. Our obligations as human beings are equally important.

We must never sacrifice one for the other.

Setting aside case work, to be at the side of a dying loved one who needs us, is as important as doing our jobs well in this courthouse.

In fact, it HELPS us to do our jobs well in this courthouse.

Knowing how, and when, to do that is part of what makes us human.

And so, because of my Mother's death, my remarks celebrating Judge Green's investiture today are far different from what I had originally planned.

You all know that he will follow the rule of law which is very important to him.

You all know that he will be fair and impartial.

You all know that he is as experienced in the civil law as he is in the criminal law.

Our judges, who selected Judge Green on our behalf, believe in him and so do we.

But people who wear judicial robes are also people who touch lives in ways that most of the rest of us will never do, effective though we may be.

And it is that fact which I want to stress today for our newest Judge.

- Remember who you are as a person ... let that guide you during your time on the bench.
- Remember who you are as a man ... let that envelop you when you are faced with hard decisions.
- Remember who you are as a student of the law ... let that remind you sometimes the issues are far from black and white.
- Remember who you are as a child of God ... let that lead you to wisdom.

Credits:

Investiture speech for the Honorable Philip J. Green, U.S. Federal Magistrate Judge. Presented at the Gerald R. Ford Courthouse in Grand Rapids, Michigan on September 12, 2014.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Becoming-a-Judge>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Becoming-a-Judge>