

Judge Recounts Courtroom Foibles and Shenanigans

by Dawn Chase

WHY JUDGES WEAR ROBES, by Judge J. Samuel Johnston. Warwick House Publishers, Lynchburg, Virginia. \$20 plus postage and tax. Copies can be ordered at Jural Jollity LLC, 1514 Arrow Street, Lynchburg, Virginia 24503.

Defendants, to paraphrase Art Linkletter, do the darndest things.

So apparently do plaintiffs, witnesses, lawyers, jurors, law enforcement officers, drunks, uneducated people, shrewish women, feuding couples, and the judge's secretary. And even, sometimes, the judge.

A courtroom through some eyes is a theater where stories amusing and bemusing, silly and poignant, humorously disconcerting and heartwrenching, unfold on a regular basis.

Retired circuit judge J. Samuel Johnston, who sat on the bench in

Campbell County near Lynchburg for more than thirty years, has collected his favorite courtroom stories in *Why Judges Wear Robes* (Warwick House Publishers, Lynchburg, Virginia 2009).

Many in Virginia legal circles know Johnston through his research on juries and his speaking engagements before bar groups, including the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, which gave him its distinguished service award in 2007, just before his retirement.

On the cover of his book is a painting of Dixie, his yellow Labrador retriever, decked out in judicial vestments and holding a gavel. The picture

sets a tone for the stories, which might have been told to hunting buddies over campfires, as well as clusters of lawyers at conferences, over the years.

Warning: do not send this book to anyone, particularly your grandmother, without reading it first. There is profanity in it. Many of the stories would not pass a test for political correctness.

But if you're one of Judge Johnston's many fans, or if you want a winking glimpse into one rural courtroom at the turn of the twenty-first century, you might enjoy *Why Judges Wear Robes*.