

## Judge John W. Scott Brought Diversity to Fredericksburg— Twice

At the celebration of Oliver White Hill's one hundredth birthday in May 2007, Judge John W. "Scottie" Scott and his wife, Alda L. White, shared the Virginia State Bar dinner table.

White leaned toward her husband and named the many leaders of Virginia's government and legal community who milled around them and occasionally approached to shake Judge Scott's hand. White was her husband's eyes— his vision had been impaired since birth. Together they greeted members of the network that had brought John Scott to the law, to the bench, and to the table that night.

There were Richmond Sen. Henry L. Marsh III and numerous other legislators from the General Assembly and Congress, many of Judge Scott's professional "siblings" in breaking barriers, and, at the head table, Oliver Hill — the lawyer who had extended the invitation to many of them to join the justice system.

Judge Scott's civil rights story began in 1963 when he and five others sued to be allowed to attend the all-white James Monroe High School in Fredericksburg. Their victory was "a major turning point for integration in Fredericksburg," according to the *Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star*.

His attorney for that battle was Samuel W. Tucker of the Richmond civil rights firm Hill, Tucker & Marsh.

That's when the young Scott realized the power a judge has and decided to go to law school, White said. "He used to say just with the stroke of a pen his life changed."

He went to Wesleyan University, then the University of Virginia School of Law. He worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund. His work impressed Hill, Tucker & Marsh, and the firm invited him to join it. Mr. Scott said he wanted to return to his hometown. So HT&M established a satellite office in Fredericksburg, just for him.

That's when Alda White entered his life. After beginning her legal career as a legal aid lawyer in Emporia, she had accepted a job as assistant county attorney for Stafford County. "When I started, there weren't a lot of black people there," she said. "I'd never been anywhere where the janitors were white, but there, the janitors were white."

Everywhere she went, people asked her if she knew John Scott. "It didn't take rocket science for me to figure out that he must be black." So one day she did something completely out of character — she picked up the phone,

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called him, and said, “I’m Alda White, I’m the assistant county attorney in Stafford, and I’m black.”

“He thought that was the funniest thing he’d heard,” she said. “I guess people thought all black people know each other.”

Their friendship grew into marriage. They had three sons.

In 1989, John Scott became Stafford County’s first African American judge. Seven years later he moved from general district to circuit court.

On April 17, at age 59, Judge Scott died after eye surgery. The stunned community bestowed accolades on him in newspaper editorials and Web logs. They praised him for his careful attention to each litigant and each case, and for his big heart. *The Free Lance-Star* noted that he was a model train collector.

“He encountered, personally and through clients and complainants, his share of ugly discrimination,” the paper eulogized. “But he knew that on the line to greatness, bitterness was a siding and vengeance a broken track.”

Alda White remembers when their youngest son, Jeffrey—now a college graduate—came home from elementary school and said, “Did you know there was a time when white people and black people couldn’t go to school together?”

His parents marveled at Jeffrey’s astonishment. “He thought it was something in ancient times,” White said.