

What I've Learned: Hon. Freddie Pitcher, Jr. (Ret.)

Vital Statistics

Position: Senior Partner at Phelps Dunbar, LLP and
Mediator with Mediation Arbitration Professional Systems (MAPS)

Born and raised: Baton Rouge, LA

Parents: Mother was a beautician; Father worked at Exxon for over 43 yrs.

Siblings: Floyd (deceased), Larry, Juanita, and Glynn

High School: McKinley Senior High School

College: Southern University and A&M College

Military: United States Army, 1967 – 1969 Honorably Discharged, Sgt E-5

Law School: Southern University Law Center (1973)

Spouse: Wife, Dr. Harriet Anderson Pitcher

Children: Dr. Kyla Dean Pitcher, Assoc. Vice President for Student Affairs at Alabama A&M University and Hillary Comeaux, General Contractor

Summary of Legal Career:

Chancellor & Professor of Law – Southern University Law Center, 2003 – 2016.

Partner - Phelps Dunbar, LLP, 1997 – 2002

Judge, Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal, 1992 – 1997

Judge, Baton Rouge City Court, 1983 – 1987, Judge, 19th Judicial District Court, 1987 – 1993

Law Offices of Pitcher, Tyson, Avery & Cunningham

Assistant District Attorney – 19th Judicial District, Parish of East Baton Rouge

Special Counsel, Louisiana Department of Justice – Office of the Attorney General

TBRL: Growing up, I always knew that I wanted to be ...

JFP: A lawyer and follow in the footsteps of my cousin, Alex Pitcher, who was a civil rights attorney in Baton Rouge.

TBRL: The best advice I ever got was ...

JFP: You should always treat people the way you want to be treated.

TBRL: The best advice I ever gave was ...

JFP: To my law school students. I told them that there is a direct correlation between preparation and success when it comes to law school and the practice of law.

TBRL: The best lesson I ever learned was ...

JFP: As a young lawyer, I learned that there is no substitute for preparation. Trying to “wing it” always brings about a less-than-desirable outcome.

TBRL: I was always taught to ...

JFP: Treat people with dignity and respect and the same would be extended to me.

TBRL: Being both a lawyer and law school chancellor ...

JFP: Has afforded me the opportunity to travel all over the world and meet so many wonderful and interesting people. Never in my wildest imagination, as a youngster growing up in Baton Rouge, did I ever see myself serving in the capacities that I have served nor being such a global citizen, simply because of my law degree. It's been quite a privilege—from lecturing and being recognized as an Honorary African Chief in Idioko Ijesia, Nigeria; to receiving an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Siirt University in Siirt, Turkey, for my support of international higher education collaborations; to teaching international criminal law in London, England. It's been an amazing journey!

TBRL: One of my first jobs I got as a kid was ...

JFP: Shining shoes at a barber shop off the corner of Perkins Road and College Drive. And then, as a teenager, I spent some time caddying at Webb Park golf course.

TBRL: There have been a number of pivotal points in my life ...

JFP: One of the first was when I was selected as one of 75 students from all over the country to participate in a six-week summer work-study program at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. This happened between my junior and senior year at Southern University, and it was my first experience in an integrated educational environment. It convinced me that I could compete on any stage. Other

turning points were: marrying my beautiful wife, the birth of our daughter, being hired as a law clerk my senior year of law school in the Criminal Division of the Office of the Attorney General, and then being hired as Special Counsel upon graduation. Another milestone was being hired as an Assistant District Attorney and prosecuting the first bifurcated capital murder trial in Baton Rouge. It was the second one of its kind in the state, after the Supreme Court decision in *Furman v. Georgia*. Even more turning points include being the first African American elected to the Baton Rouge City Court, 19th Judicial District Court, and the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal; being the first African American partner in the Baton Rouge Office of Phelps Dunbar, LLP; and being named as the sixth Dean/Chancellor of the Southern University Law Center.

TBRL: In reflective times like the present, I can't help but think about . . .

JFP: My friend Judge Ralph E. Tyson. Ralph and I met the summer of 1972. He was the resident black law student at Louisiana State University Law School, and I was the visiting black student, bringing LSU's diversity population up to two. We didn't know at that time that our lives would be inextricably tied together for years to come. After that summer we reconnected when we were both hired at the Attorney General's Office and made our maiden court appearance together in St. Francisville before Judge William Bennett, who threatened to jail us when we first entered his courtroom. Before the deputies could corral us, John Sinquefield, who was also with the Attorney General's Office, yelled out to the judge that we were Assistant Attorneys General. What we didn't know was that the judge was holding a closed hearing and everyone was sequestered. Our ethnicity and being with the AG's office had the judge flustered for the rest of the day. Ralph and I went on to start a law practice together that became known as the Law Firm of Pitcher, Tyson, Avery, and Cunningham.

TBRL: The best lawyers I ever tried cases against were . . .

JFP: Charles "Chick" Moore and Dennis Whalen.

TBRL: The best judges were . . .

JFP: The Hons. Melvin Shortess, John Covington, Frank Foil, Lewis Doherty and Alcide Gray of the 14th JDC.

TBRL: If I were in charge . . .

JFP: If I were in charge of the justice system, I would ensure that all public-defender programs were adequately funded. Too often we have seen the ends of justice not being reached because overworked public defenders lacked the resources and ability to offer their clients effective legal representation. Having been both a prosecutor and defense lawyer, I've witnessed the unlevel playing field from which a Public Defender's Office has had to play.

TBRL: I would like to have dinner with . . .

JFP: Former President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama. I would really enjoy talking to them about their experiences in

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the White House and the burdens of being a first.

TBRL: What gets you mad?

JFP: People who manipulate circumstances when things aren't going their way. For instance, once, when I was on the trial bench, we had a lawyer feign a heart attack when I denied his motion for a continuance in a second-degree murder case. Dr. Louis James, the Deputy Coroner at that time, came up to check him out after he was taken into my office and placed on my couch. Dr. James examined him and couldn't find a thing wrong. Then, Dr. James looked over at me and saw how upset I was and said, "It looks like I need to put YOU on that couch before you have a real heart attack." We had jury pool members waiting, so yes, I was definitely angry!

TBRL: The older I get . . .

JFP: The more passionate I become about imparting life lessons and acquired wisdom to younger generations. I once spoke to a high school graduating class about the "zigs" and "zags" of life. I explained to them that you shouldn't be discouraged if you don't reach your intended goal straight away. Then I told of my personal "zig" towards a career as a college professor. I applied for and received an assistantship in the School of Government at LSU. I couldn't accept the assistantship right away because I was drafted into the Army. After about 15 months had passed, and while serving in Germany, I wrote to LSU, inquiring about the assistantship and learned that it was being held until I returned from active duty. I came home and started graduate school in the Spring of 1969, but halfway through the semester, I realized that graduate school was NOT what I really wanted. So, I "zagged" back towards my dream of becoming a lawyer after only one semester of grad school. If the law school bug had not bitten me so potently and stirred up my boyhood dreams, I probably would have stayed on the college professor track. Ultimately, I ended up exactly where I was supposed to be.

TBRL: I have the most fun when . . .

JFP: After back surgery and a hip replacement, I am now having the most fun when I am out on the golf course. It doesn't matter if I shoot in the mid to low 80s or if I am approaching 100, it's great to be out on the green. I also enjoy spending quality time with family and friends. Creating special moments with family and friends is one of life's greatest blessings.

Both Ed Walters and Chick Moore were stalwarts in my campaign for my city and district court judgeships. Ed and I started a routine where we would go jogging on Saturday mornings. We both were about 40 pounds lighter then. Our route would start at Ed's house, then we would run over to Perkins Road, up Perkins to Valley Street. Then

we would run up Valley to Bawell, turn right and head to College Drive. Our route would then take us back to Perkins and on to Ed's house. Invariably, Ed would fall behind while I kept my steady pace. It never failed, however, that when we made the turn into Valley Park, my old neighborhood, Ed really upped his pace and went stride for stride with me until we got to College Drive. At College, Ed would shift gears and fall back into his glide pattern again. I believe Ed didn't share my confidence that it was safe to jog in my old neighborhood. For him it had to be a run. ■



INTERVIEW BY EDWARD J. WALTERS, JR.

GAIL'S GRAMMAR

This column is about a small topic—the word *minuscule*. The word, which means "very small," comes from the Latin *minus*, meaning "less." It is pronounced with an *uh* sound in the middle. *Minuscule* is often misspelled "*miniscule*" and mispronounced with a long "e" sound in the middle. Some dictionaries list *miniscule* as a variant and MSWord's spellchecker won't catch the mistake, but the guides that most lawyers use, such as the *Chicago Manual of Style* and Garner's *The Redbook*, list *minuscule* as the only acceptable spelling.

Send suggestions for future Gail's Grammar columns to Gail Stephenson at GStephenson@sulc.edu, or call Gail at 225.771-4900 x 216.

