

**WILLIAM H. NORRIS****1936 - 1995**

During his lifetime, Bill Norris pursued several careers, but it was his office as Judicial Commissioner that gave him the greatest pleasure.

Commissioner Norris was born in Wilson County, Tennessee, on July 25, 1936. At an early age, his parents moved to Davidson County where he attended public schools. He graduated from Central High School in 1954 and from Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro in 1958 where he majored in mathematics and chemistry.

Bill was first employed by the Tennessee State Highway Department in the materials and testing division where he remained for 17 years. During his tenure with the State, he attended the YMCA Night Law School, graduating and passing the bar in the mid-1970s. He continued his employment with the State as an assistant district attorney in East Tennessee but decided to return to Nashville a few years later to associate with William Castleman in the practice of law where his major focus was in real property and, in particular, real estate closings. He was also active in the community and in many civic organizations.

Bill Norris was first appointed as a General Sessions Court Judicial Commissioner in 1976 where he remained until failing health forced him to retire in 1992. He administered his duties with dignity and common sense, yet firmly, justly, and equally.

Commissioner Norris was perhaps the most well-loved jurist to ever sit in Night Court. The many Night Court watchers who squeezed into the tiny courtroom on weekends could count on Bill to explain things, and he often answered questions from the crowd. He had compassion for the disadvantaged of the community, and this made him a favorite with the "regular" spectators. Church youth groups and Boy Scouts were frequent visitors to Night Court and preferred to plan their trips "downtown" whenever Bill Norris was sitting as commissioner. Groups from as far away as Kentucky would call to find out his schedule so they would know when to plan their trip to Nashville's Night Court.

Commissioner Norris was plain-talking, and the folks listened to what he had to say. He had an excellent perception of the law along with a good sense of humor. Bill worked the midnight shift so that he could spend time at his law practice during the day.

One of his most memorable moments occurred outside the old police station in what is now the Ben West Municipal Building. A woman wearing a nun's habit asked if he was a commissioner. When he said yes, the woman pulled a brick from a paper bag and threw it at him. She missed and was immediately arrested. She never explained why she threw the brick.

As a Night Court Commissioner, Bill became very learned in the law of probable cause. During his 15 years on the bench in Night Court, he tirelessly extended himself to the "new" commissioners. They could always rely on him for advice and solutions to problems regardless of whether they asked him for advice at midday or midnight.

His compassion, dignity, and patience for and towards those who came to Night Court will be missed.

Before his retirement, he said "I'll miss the people - reporters, people visiting Night Court. I *won't* miss the stress and long hours."

Bill Norris died on March 17, 1995, at the age of 58 from complications of diabetes. He is survived by his wife, Betty.

  
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Michael F. Mondelli

  
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Howard M. Taradash

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