



New Judge Profile

Andrew Ellis

*Ada County Magistrate Judge
Fourth Judicial District*

February 28, 2014

Ever wonder if art, or in this case a particular film, imitates life? Or if life imitates art or film? If so, one might want to get to know Judge Andrew Ellis a new Magistrate in Ada County in Idaho's Fourth Judicial District. His passion for the art of film, combined with a family steeped in the law, gives him a unique background no other judge may claim.

Born in San Jose, California and living in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains until he was nine, Judge Ellis' father was elected Municipal Court Judge of Groveland, California. He says he lived on a "gentleman's farm" of 80 acres. It was during that process that the family decided to move to Idaho to operate a 430 acre dairy farm. His father split time between California and Idaho as he retained a part-time assignment in the San Fernando Valley similar to Idaho's Plan B senior status. Judge Ellis graduated from Cambridge High and proceeded to the College of Idaho.

Graduating with a B.A. in English, Theatre, Art, and Secondary Education in 1994, Judge Ellis spent the next three years as a teacher and Head of the Theatre Department at Broad Run High School in Ashburn, Virginia. Returning to Idaho, he graduated from the University of Idaho, College of Law in 2001. After a clerkship with the Idaho Court of Appeals, he joined the Ada County Prosecuting Attorney's Office where he practiced for eleven years before being named Magistrate Judge in October, 2013.

During his legal career Judge Ellis continued to pursue his passion of filmmaking. Although he did a lot of theatre in his undergraduate days, he says it "morphed" into filmmaking because it was easier to schedule into his life of a day job and a busy family. He is a Founder and Managing Director of the Idaho Forty-Eight Hour Film Competition and Fest. He has also served as a Board Member for the True West Cinema Festival and the Idaho Film Foundation. He also admits to developing a "later in life" passion for ice hockey. He jokes that he has the "non-skills" of someone who learned later in life, but says it is "terribly addictive."

Needless to say, with this background Judge Ellis admits to being a movie person rather than a book person. Which he then clarifies as "which is to say in this day and age, I'm a TV person." He gets most excited by a long-form series on HBO and Netflix. He claims "The Wire" is the best TV ever made. That's when he has time for it. Married to another lawyer, with two very active children his life off the bench is as booked as his daily calendar at work.

Although he may get listened to more at work, where he finds the transition and challenges new and exciting. The biggest challenge during the transition Judge Ellis states has been, “Plunging into and learning a new area of the law, specifically Domestic Relations and Child Support Establishment and Enforcement.” He also notes the challenge of “appreciating how far he must go in learning the art of walking the fine line of allowing parties and counsel their opportunity to fully and fairly present their case, while simultaneously curtailing the natural litigious drift toward lengthy and time-consuming discourses on irrelevant topics.” In non-movie, judge talk, seasoned mentors call that taking control.

There are two things Judge Ellis states he likes most about being on the bench so far. First, Judge Ellis finds it rewarding to try and create a courtroom where win, lose, or draw the parties, counsel and witnesses feel heard and respected. Second is the revelation, “obvious as it sounds,” that he gets to make the decisions that he determines are right according to the facts and the law. He notes after years of trying to convince the judge and/or jury to do what he felt was correct, it is “liberating” to realize that he actually gets to make the decision and people listen to him. He admits, however, that “Its taking some getting used to.”

But remember, Judge Ellis comes from a home where his father spent the bulk of his career as a Municipal Court Judge for the State of California. He cites his parents as his “consistent heroes” and most admired persons in his life. After them, he notes every teacher he has ever had and can think of no profession that more profoundly shapes the individuals it touches than educators. If not a lawyer and judge, Judge Ellis admits he would be teaching theatre or English and pursuing the production side of the film industry.

Does life imitate film or does film imitate life? We may never agree on an answer. But we can agree that the State Judiciary along with the people of Ada County and the Fourth Judicial District are proud to welcome Judge Andrew Ellis to the Magistrate Bench. Welcome, Judge Ellis!