

Judge Ronald Gould ('73) says he's like many judges. He reviews a case. Knows he has to stay impartial. Hopes his rulings were correct.

Still, this judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit doesn't give much thought to another aspect of his day—dealing with multiple sclerosis.

But many others have. And, you may be surprised about when he was even diagnosed.

Early Days

When Gould lined up a clerkship with Judge Wade H. McCree, Jr. and then clerked at the Supreme Court with Associate Justice Potter Stewart, he didn't set out to be in commercial litigation. He just tried to set out for Seattle.

“I received a couple of letters from former classmates who were in Seattle and very positive about it—one was working for a law firm, another for a federal judge,” he says. I got a job with one of the larger law firms there and I was with what's known as Perkins, Coie, Stone, Olsen & Williams.

Commercial litigation became his specialty because, frankly, that was their need.

“In those days that's how a firm assigned you when you were starting out,” he says. “They thought I was a fit with my business training from the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce.” Many of his intriguing cases involved anti-trust, maybe the most fascinating involving, of all things, potatoes. “I represented Peter J. Taggares, one of the biggest potato farmers in the State of Washington—he had a dispute on a venture with Jack Simplot, one of the biggest potato farmers in Idaho. Colorful characters to the say the least and I learned a lot about joint venture law on that one!”

If that was among his most interesting moments, 1990 may have provided his most challenging—his MS diagnosis. Some may have thought this would have come after he already attained judgeship, but Judge Gould was a role model before he ever was appointed a robe.

Whether losing the use of a hand or eventually needing a wheelchair, he pressed on—for himself and his clients. “You just find ways to deal with it,” he says. “I was right-handed but then sometime in the late 1990s it reduced my ability to use that hand to write. I just taught myself to use my left for that and other things...Or you end up in a wheelchair so that's where a personal assistant can help.”

Finding solutions.

Maybe the most important part of being a judge.

Maybe why he received a fateful call in the middle of an anti-trust case which had brought him to Alaska. “I remember I didn’t want to take any calls and interrupt my work,” he says. “But then it changed when they told me, ‘It’s the White House.’”

Confirmed in 1999, Gould found being an appellate judge in the federal system a dream job for a lawyer. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to be able to try to study up on each case and use your talents to help the people involved by bringing it to a resolution,” he says. “I like writing opinions cases so it fits me.”

But what fits his future? “I will continue being a judge as long as I can do it with a high level of skill,” he says. “I might even try writing if I ever reduce my case load. I’ve tried over the years to do some legal writing for a journal or giving speeches but I just didn’t like it as much as buckling down and preparing for an appeal!”

Max Hensley, his law clerk since August, learned Gould’s attitude isn’t the mark of a brave face but a determined legal mind. “MS impacts his daily life but not in his work,” Hensley says. “Yes, we do participate in oral arguments through video rather than traveling but, other than that, it’s doing the same work as any other judge.”

Gould also taught him the value of organization. “He has to be more focused and can’t waste time but the end product is in the same place,” Hensley says. “It’s a good lesson for all of us—keep your eye on the goal and you’ll be surprised by what you can get done.”