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Alumni Profile

Beth Rogers Thompson

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Ruling with respect

Just when Judge Sandra Thompson '68 thinks she's heard it all, a defendant insists she had to steal a scarf to wear to church. The judge is unmoved.

Thompson knows what it's like to lack money to buy what you want – or to pay your court fine. "I give people a year to pay their fine, and I'll make special arrangements if they don't have the money, including community service. But I expect them to fulfill their obligations," she said.

In the 1960s Thompson chose Linfield from colleges the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students matched her with, based on her SAT scores and personal information. But after three years, the financial aid

ended and she couldn't afford to stay. Thompson withdrew from Linfield and went home to Santa Monica, Calif.

Family friends provided a private scholarship, enabling her to receive her B.A. in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1969.

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"Each time I have encountered some obstacle in my life, there has been some blessing to help me get over it."

– Judge Sandra Thompson '68

been some blessing to help me get over it," she says.

Her Linfield days were not over; she now serves on the college's Board of Trustees and chairs the committee on student affairs.

Thompson, who earned her law degree from the University of Michigan in 1972, was appointed to the South Bay, Calif., Municipal Court in 1984 by then-Gov. George Deukmejian and was elevated to Los Angeles Superior Court when the courts were unified in 2000.

Her many honors include the Thurgood Marshall

Scholarship Foundation Award of Excellence in 2006 and the Joan Dempsey Klein Distinguished Jurist Award from the California Women Lawyers in 2005. The California Association of Black Lawyers named her the Bernard S. Jefferson Judge of the Year in 1999.

She also served as president of the National Association of Women Judges in 2005.

Thompson, who hears misdemeanor criminal cases, didn't always want to be a judge. "I wanted to be an actress or a singer, but I felt I was not good enough to make people stop eating their dinner and listen," she said. As a Linfield student, she appeared in the play *No Strings*.

She describes herself as "an inveterate theater-goer." One of her favorite plays, which she saw again recently, is *Twelve Angry Men*, about a jury.

The seeds of her judicial career were planted in high school. She presided over student court hearings on infractions such as smoking and wearing open-toed shoes without nylons. The adviser encouraged her to consider becoming a judge. Thompson had no idea at the time that she would have to become a lawyer first.

She worked as an Inglewood city attorney and a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney before her judicial appointment.

Prosecutor Joan Jenkins says it's a pleasure to try a case before Thompson. "She's always prepared. She's fair to both sides and goes out of her way to make the jury feel respected and important. She's so respectful of everyone. ... And she knows the law like a son-of-a-gun."

– Beth Rogers Thompson



Judge Sandra Thompson '68