

# A view from the bench... and from the home

## Judge Kenneth Langdon maintains a sense of humor

By LISA RUTLEDGE  
The Herald

Just an hour before he was to hear the testimony of a man accused of sexually assaulting foster sisters, District Court Judge Kenneth Langdon sat in a Georgetown restaurant eating bacon and eggs.

As friendly chatter buzzed about the Georgetown restaurant, Mr. Langdon teased a local handyman how odd it was that he was wearing a suit asking what charges had been laid against him.

As his wife lovingly wiped his cheek with a napkin, he complained of an abscessed tooth. "How would you like to be tried by a judge with an abscessed tooth?" he joked, as he buttered his toast.

The couple eats breakfast at the restaurant so often the staff has their meal prepared as they arrive. However, the jokes and comfortable coffee house chatter never changed once the crowd found out Mr. Langdon was a judge.

His wife, a court reporter, says his kind and gentle persona make him an approachable person and eliminates the mystery and intimidation factors which can often interfere in a judge's personal life.

Reference guidelines from A Book For Judges stipulates judges must conduct themselves in a manner higher than that of an ordinary citizen. Conduct must be free from impropriety or even the suggestion of impropriety.

According to the manual, traffic offences may be minor but in the career of a judge it will be a

serious matter because the public expects those who administer the law to obey the law. It advises judges to always act in appropriate manner because the ordinary man's opinion and respect for the law are based on a judge's actions, both in court and in private life.

But Mr. Langdon will be the first to admit these rules expect more of a man than humanly possible. "If people expect me to be perfect, they're sadly mistaken," he said, shaking his smiling face. He said the only person who even comes close to perfection is his wife, but he admits his judgement could be biased.

What these conduct rules mean to the long-time Georgetown resident is that he must refrain from association with, or socialize with lawyers who go before him in

court. And of course, keeping to 10-km over the speed limit, he teased.

The conduct code has not put excessive pressure on him to be perfect in public, said his wife. "He's not afraid to show his affection in public and I love that," she said. "He's not afraid to touch or hold hands over the table."

Mrs. Langdon said although he may not admit it, Mr. Langdon can become lonely at times. She said there are some individuals, such as lawyers, whom he would like to socialize with but he must always be aware he could be accused of giving preferential treatment.

She said they have to be cautious to avoid potential embarrassing situations as well. For example, they had to declare bottles of wine after returning to Toronto and pay triple in duty fees. "It wouldn't have been worth the embarrassment," she said.

Unwritten codes for judges make many rights afforded to ordinary citizens unavailable to judges, Mr. Langdon explained. He said if a judge receives a traffic ticket, that judge is expected to pay the fine and not fight the ticket in court. It's a no-win situation because the judge will be obligated to uphold the fine to prove independence, he said.

He has been stopped by the police on occasion, however, if the officer doesn't know his position,

Mr. Langdon won't provide the information. But since his licence plate reveals he is a judge, he jokes "Then again I may never get one in the first place."

After several coffee refills, Mr. Langdon headed off to the District Court in Brampton, arriving to see his furniture huddled in the centre of his office. As he was only sworn into the District Court from Peel Provincial Court several months ago, his office is just being painted.

After settling down behind his desk with a cup of tea brought by his court sheriff, Mr. Langdon offered to help a young female painter move three floor-to-ceiling wooden bookcases from his office into the hallway. He joked with passerby that he was getting a crash course in furniture moving.

Mrs. Langdon says his sense of humor is the healing medicine that prevents him from catching judge's disease. She explained that this disease can develop in judges who listen continuously to the evils committed in society. "Whenever he sees an appropriate opportunity to send out a few one-liners, he will," she said.

There is an appropriate time and place for humor, said Mr. Langdon. For example, he insisted there was no place for humor in the sexual assault case he was hearing during the week of June 20. However, in a case in which a man bought a "rust-bucket" automobile, Mr. Langdon saw an opportunity to recite his judgement in prose. The prose involved a man named Tutty whose car would only go putty. No one gets hurt in this type of situation, he said, adding that the lawyers came back after lunch with their own proses. "If you don't keep a sense of humor you'll go crazy," Mr. Langdon said.

Just recently he had a good laugh after a man, while giving testimony, refused to believe Mr. Langdon was a qualified judge and made a citizen's arrest on the spot. Shortly after politely inviting the man to his office to view proof of his qualifications, Judge Langdon recommended a psychological assessment.

When the frustration sets in after listening to unprepared and even unwise lawyers, it is sometimes difficult to remain patient, Judge Langdon says. He said many judges have come to know a lawyer nicknamed "The Keys to Kingston". This particular lawyer never realized the art of good cross-examining sometimes means knowing when not to ask questions, he said. Judge Langdon listened intently while this lawyer further incriminated his own client by summoning answers proving this own client was driving under the influence of alcohol.

Judge Langdon admitted if the lawyer had refrained from further questioning, the client would not have been proven guilty of drunk driving.

What horrifies some people comes under the daily routine for judges, said Mr. Langdon. To remain distant from cases, sexual offenders are often referred to as "diddlers," he said. Sexual assault cases come before judges so often that it is difficult to be shocked, he added.

Keeping distant while listening to cases involving sexual offences has not always been easy for Judge Langdon, however. Early in his 5-year judicial career, Mr. Langdon spent days of sentencing hearing listening to the evidence involving a clean cut man accused of molesting the children his wife babysat. All the children and their parents gave evidence during the hearing.

With a week left scheduled for the hearing, Judge Langdon told his senior advisor he couldn't sit in on the hearing any longer because he would have handed down an excessive sentence. He picked up his daughter and went sailing for a week just to restore faith in relationships. It's necessary once in a while to reestablish trust in relationships between adults and children, he says. Just to know an

adult can have fun without "diddling" a child, he said.

It takes about an hour discussing a case to help Judge Langdon wind down, Mrs. Langdon said. When he sat in Provincial Court, he was extremely tense because of the inefficiencies of having so many cases to be heard in a short period of time, she said.

Judge Langdon described another incident which still bothers him today. He received a late phone call from a man who killed another driver while driving under the influence of alcohol. Without hesitation, Mr. Langdon, who was still a lawyer at the time, told the man to refuse any attempts to take samples which could prove his intoxication. The man was not convicted but Mr. Langdon never forgot the man was responsible for taking another individual's life.

Such examples do not undermine Judge Langdon's faith in the justice system. On the contrary, it reaffirms his trust in the system that an innocent man will never be found guilty. The right man is almost always charged but he can only be guilty if the evidence presented proves his guilt, Judge Langdon maintains.

He likes to say he fell in to the law profession by accident. Teaching languages was his first love but he chose to study law after he discovered literature instruction was his only option. Many of his relatives are also lawyers and in judicial positions.

**If people expect me to be perfect, they're sadly mistaken!**

— Judge Langdon

Judge Langdon and his father were one of the few father and sons sitting on the bench in the same time period.

"He's very suited to what he does because he listens well and has a knack for giving equitable verdicts," said Mrs. Langdon. "I've sat in front of nearly every judge and Ken is tops."

He doesn't just hand out sentences according to the book, she said, adding that he will tailor punishment to the needs of the individual. "Most judges don't really think of the people who are before them," she said. For example, in a shoplifting hearing, Judge Langdon might look beyond the simple facts and include counselling in the sentencing, Mrs. Langdon explained. He will add more to the sentencing to help if it appears a shoplifter acted out of character, she added.

Mrs. Langdon accredits her husband's even temper to the relaxed nature of their homelives. She takes full responsibility for redeveloping his interests in golf, which he now plays at every free opportunity. "I forced him out a few times and it just clicked and he's become really enthusiastic about the game now," she said.

In the four years they have been married, Mr. Langdon and his wife have become inseparable. They take separate cars to the Georgetown restaurant for breakfast, follow each other to work and then, if possible, organize their routines so they can follow each other home again.

Mrs. Langdon admits they like to live leisurely, hating to cook and do housework. But at least once a week Judge Langdon will cook a roast, with potatoes, vegetables and Yorkshire pudding. "I've got him trained well," she teased. "I use plan A. I say 'I just can't do anything' and he'll do the majority of the cooking and I clean up."

Mrs. Langdon never loses sight of her husband's authoritative position. But he never lets her forget he is, as she says, "a country boy who doesn't like the big smoke of the city."



District Court Judge Kenneth Langdon