

Justice started out as police officer

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Body

Ohio Supreme Court Justice Sharon Kennedy first wanted to be a police officer when she grew up.

Her high school teacher told her she had the ability to be a lawyer instead, even a judge.

She laughed in disbelief, Kennedy recalled as she spoke to Findlay Flag City Morning Rotary on Wednesday.

Nobody in her family had gone to college.

Years later, as a police officer for the city of Hamilton, she became frustrated with an attorney's poor cross-examination of a witness. "If that guy could make it through law school ..." she recalled, the rest of her comment drowned by audience laughter.

She went to University of Cincinnati College of Law and found another mentor, who, like her high school teacher, encouraged her to push on even further. On her last day as a law clerk, the mentor asked what her career plans were. By that time, Kennedy had a dream. She started to answer him with a hedge.

"I'm going to hang out a shingle. I'm going to try some cases. I'm going to have a lot of fun trying cases," Kennedy recalled saying. Then came the real disclosure: "I think sometime, I'd like to be ... I'd like to be a judge."

The mentor said she could dream even bigger if she was willing to work at it.

"Kid, you can do whatever you want. Just work hard and you'll get there. Kid, you're so young, you could even make it to the Ohio Supreme Court," Kennedy recalls being told.

Kennedy said she laughed again, just like she did years earlier when encouraged by her high school teacher.

That was in 1991. For the next seven years, she was in private law practice. During some of those years she was a special counsel for the State Attorney General's Office, a warrant and compliance officer for Butler County Juvenile Court, and magistrate and warrant officer for Butler County Area Courts.

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From 1999 to 2012, Kennedy was a Butler County Common Pleas Court judge. In 2012, she ran for state Supreme Court justice.

That time there were naysayers.

"Everybody told me I was crazy. I could never do it. I was blah-, blah-blah, blah-blah," she said. "Noise in the background."

"That's the path, that road not taken," Kennedy said, citing Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken."

Despite the naysayers, Kennedy won in 2012, filling an unexpired term on the high court. She was elected to a full six-year term in 2014.

"It's been a great and wonderful journey," she said.

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