

Top Judges Also Need to Unwind

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When their black robes are hanging in the closet, Justice Byron R. White likes a fast basketball game, Harry A. Blackmun strolls across the street for chamber music and Chief Justice Warren E. Burger keeps his hair silvery by washing it in beer.

Supreme Court justices are very private persons. So are their clerks, the top-ranking young law school graduates who do not like to betray the justices' trust.

Yet former clerks, secretaries and other employees at the court delight in telling tales about the nine justices they have seen in unguarded moments.

Justice William O. Douglas, who has served longer than any other member in history (35 years last April 17), is well known as an outspoken liberal, a tireless mountain climber, fisher-

man and hiker and a thrice-divorced man of 75 who raised eyebrows when he took a 23-year-old student as his fourth wife a few years ago.

"Douglas is a very quiet man," said a former clerk. "He doesn't establish relationships easily. We got along better after my clerkship was over, and during the year I was there it was almost like a fraternity pledge or going through boot camp."

White, 56, a former professional football player, regularly bests his law clerks at basketball and paddle ball in the Supreme Court gym.

A former clerk recalls that when White was once troubled over the issues in a case, he went off to the gym for basketball. When his clerks climbed the steps to join him, White was in mid-court, "bouncing the ball, but staring into space,

clearly lost in thought. Then he threw the ball at us — hard — and shouted, 'What if ...?' and that presented the key that unlocked the case."

While he is a dedicated conservative, Rehnquist "often said that he didn't care about a clerk's political philosophy, but wanted people he could get along with," Robert W. Wild of Rochester recalled. He said Rehnquist tends to distrust people recommended as "good conservatives."

Burger is known as a strong decision-maker, and takes pride in doing most of his own work, including drafting opinions and writing speeches. He takes a fatherly interest in his clerks. At home, he enjoys painting, sculpture, gardening and cooking and is reported to be a connoisseur of wines. His barber says Burger care-

fully maintains his silver hair's sleek appearance by washing it in beer and special conditioners.

Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr., reported to be the wealthiest man on the court, is patient and sensitive to the needs of those who work with him. "His hobbies are work, photography and tennis, in that order," a secretary said.

Blackmun is a quiet, hard-working justice who insists on doing his own work with minimal help from his clerks, to the point his office has become a court bottleneck.

He takes lunch at his desk every day. He frequently takes walks from his apartment, and tries to indulge his fondness for chamber music by strolling across the street from the court to the Library of Congress for its weekly concerts.