

Arnason Keeps Cool

Angela's Judge Thrives on

By Don West

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SAN JOSE — Superior Judge Richard Earle Arnason, the 50 year old jurist presiding over the Angela Davis trial, is a relaxed and studiously patient man who enjoys his work.

Not even pressures from a kidnap - murder trial attracting worldwide attention have ruffled his cool demeanor.

"I sometime do my best work under pressure," he told reporters in an easy going session a few days ago. Opening statements were scheduled to officially begin the trial today.

The sixth judge to be involved in a volatile case some critics see as a test of U.S. jurisprudence, Judge Arnason was extremely circumspect in fielding questions about the trial itself.

Proper Forum

"I will say that after this case is over, I think it will have proven to be a proper forum to present the issues in an adversary setting and manner all will find satisfying," he said.

His governing philosophy in handling his court is to avoid anticipating problems and create unnecessary pressures. Make a decision at the proper time and go on to the next move, he contends, is the best policy.

Judge Arnason keeps a strict barrier between his work on the bench and his home life in Contra Costa County. Trial activities here have not intruded at all, he said.

"I do have one serious vice," he admitted. "I like good food and I like to explore different restaurants."

Many Magazines

A voracious reading habit consumes four daily newspapers and a variety of magazines. Arriving regularly are Time, Uewsweek, Readers Digest, Harpers, New Yorker, Esquire, Playboy, Sports Illustrated, National Geographic, Harpers Bazaar and Vogue.

He keeps his 5 foot, 10 inch, 152-pound physique in condition with regular pre-breakfast workouts. But the daily 70 minute drive to San Jose, required when the Davis trial was transferred here last December from Marin County, has eliminated his brisk early morning walks.

Judge Arnason's North Dakota armboy background still lingers on in one of his favorite pastimes, working among his trees, roses and camellias.

He cannot remember a time when he did not want to be a lawyer, an ambition partially influenced by an uncle, Svenbjorn Johnson, who was a justice on the North Dakota Supreme Court.

Raised on Farm

His family — he is the eldest of nine children — lived on a farm outside Grand Forks, N.D., until he was in the eighth grade.

"I can best sum up my childhood by saying that I have triplet sisters and on the day they were born I had to milk all 12 of our cows," he recalled.

He worked summers on the farm until his third year in college because "In those days that was the only place

Pressure

there was any money."

After graduating from Boalt Hall School of Law in Berkeley, he returned home briefly to marry his wife, the former Joyce Locklin, before coming back to the Bay Area to practice law.

His legal work, eventually as a partner with Rep. Jerome Walie (D-Antioch), cov-

ered nearly all areas of civil and criminal practice until his appointment to the Contra Costa Superior Court by Gov. Edmund G. Brown in 1963.

School Board

While never active politically, he served nine years on the Antioch School District Board.

His preference as a judge is handling criminal matters because of their deeper involvement with people and issues. About 60 percent of his court work has been in this field he estimates.

Three of the criminal defendants who appeared before him were sent to Death Row, but Judge Arnason

would not comment on the recent State Supreme Court decision invalidating the death penalty.

Obviously respected by both defense and prosecution in the Davis case, Judge Arnason speaks highly of the legal talents on both sides, adding that the defendant has lived up to her promise

to him to conduct herself professionally.

"I enjoy my work a lot more than when I was an attorney because here there are no clients to answer. The final kernel is myself. I make my decision, not always pleasing both sides or either side, but once it is made I forget it," he said.



JUDGE ARNASON
"A proper forum"