

Merri Rudd

Enjoys Reward as Probate Judge

Merri Rudd has always found delight in diversity. Good-heartedness and a sense of ethics are her cornerstones.

Part of her work week is spent as Bernalillo County Probate Judge, helping citizens settle uncontested estates. Part of the time she operates Abogada Press from her Albuquerque home, where she publishes books on legal topics. On weekends, she might be digging in her garden, practicing the skills she learned as a master gardener, or swirling around the floor at a contra dance, sometimes calling the dance steps from a wooden stage.

She also writes a regular column in the Albuquerque Journal and gives talks around the community.

“I’ve always been happiest when I’m juggling a lot,” she says.

Although Rudd attributes her initial sense of outrage and injustice to growing up in Memphis in the 1950s and 1960s, witnessing segregation and race riots firsthand, she planned to be an environmental activist after graduation from Vanderbilt University with a degree in English. The influence of two men, a banker 20 years her senior, and a former boss, shaped her early independence. “They encouraged me to accomplish anything I wanted and convinced me that my greatest strength was my ability to think unconventionally,” she says.

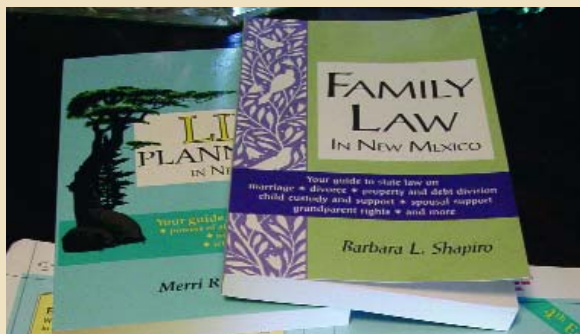
She worked as an administrative assistant with the Tennessee Environment Council and National Public Radio in Washington, D.C., but a job as legal secretary with Covington & Burling in Washington, D.C. inspired the first shift in her career. As part of its pro bono program, the law firm donated six employees to a legal aid office for six months. Rudd so enjoyed helping people she applied to law school.

“I figured there were two ways to fight battles, through the courts and the press,” she says. “I had writing skills, but I needed legal skills.”

Remembering the month she had spent backpacking in New Mexico after college graduation, she chose the UNM School of Law, planning to concentrate on environmental law. She had fallen in love with the vistas and vast space of the West. But in her second year, an externship with the Senior Citizen’s Law Office turned her head.

“I was hooked,” she says. “I love seniors, their wisdom and vibrancy.”

Her attraction to the emerging field of elder law also was tied to her affection for her grandmother.



For more information and to order books, go to: <http://members.aol.com/abogada>



Merri Rudd receives the 4th edition of *Life Planning in New Mexico* at her home warehouse.

While still a law student, Rudd co-authored the New Mexico Senior Citizens Handbook, which covered laws and programs affecting the state’s senior citizens.

Following graduation in 1986, she clerked for William Bivins on the New Mexico Court of Appeals. Two years later, she clerked for U.S. Magistrate Robert McCoy. In between, she worked for the Senior Citizen’s Law Office and remained involved with them even after setting up her own elder law practice in 1988.

For the next nine years, Rudd represented clients, often going to their homes to help prepare wills and trusts. She served on the Uniform Health Care Decisions Act task force, and in 1993 she was instrumental in drafting and lobbying a law that helps to ensure an individual’s right to cremation.

In 1992, she published her first book: *Life Planning in New Mexico*, a lay person’s guide to elder law issues. In May 2004, the fourth edition came off the press. Like her initial influence into elder law, the book was inspired by her grandmother, who died in 1991 after enduring undo frustrations later in life.

“Knowledge is power and I hoped the book would help others avoid what my grandmother went through,” she says.

Family Law in New Mexico, by Barbara Shapiro followed. So far, Abogada Press has published 14,000 books.

Rudd continued her practice, but gradually the emotional nature of the field took its toll. “I liked the humanity of elder law, but there was no relief from losing clients,” she says.

To offset the sadness of her practice, she overcame an overwhelming shyness and turned to teaching, at TVI and as an adjunct at the UNM law school. Her favorite students were the ones who didn’t want to be there, but needed it to fulfill a requirement.

“By the end of the semester, most of them were into it,” she says.

In 2001, she was appointed Probate Judge, then elected to a full term in 2002. She considers her position a dream job.

“I get to be a judge without an adversarial setting,” she says. “And it’s a great opportunity to teach people about the law.”