



# Gail S. Tusan

By Nicole Girard

**T**he Honorable Gail S. Tusan was gearing up for reelection when she received some welcomed news.

“Every four years, we stand for reelection and this is my year for that,” she said. “There’s a qualifying week where you determine if you draw opposition. I was fortunate to not have done so.”

Tusan—who currently serves as chief judge of the Family Division—has racked up a full 28 successful years on the bench. She will begin her fifth term with the Superior Court of Fulton County in January. She is also a National Judicial College faculty member and presently serves as an adjunct Emory Law School faculty member team teaching a Civil Trial Practice – Family Law course.

In 2009, the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys (“GABWA”) presented Tusan with the Leah Ward Sears Distinction in Profession Legacy Award. She is also a past recipient of the MLK Center for Nonviolent Social Change’s Peace and Justice Award, a member of the YWCA of Greater Atlanta’s Academy of Women Achievers and a charter inductee into her alma mater, John Muir High School’s Hall of Fame.

“It’s very gratifying to know your public service is recognized as being worthwhile,” she said. “It’s a tremendous relief not to have to divert time from judging to conduct a contested campaign this summer.”

The Family Division has been a part of the court for 14 years now. In her capacities as Chief Judge, Tusan is overseeing some significant changes in the way they do business.

“We’ve put a good bit of energy into making sure there are better ways to be available to the parties we serve and to make sure the judges employ the best practices in tackling their caseloads,” she said. “I’ve worked administratively to look at the bigger picture, to make sure the court is user friendly.”

She said she would like to see the courts become more accommodating and accessible via telecommunications



technology such as Skype.

“Sometimes we can resolve things through conference calls as opposed to having people come to the courthouse,” she said. “We do a lot of mediation to help parties reach resolutions sooner than later. We’re looking at the overall process and making a concerted effort to achieve uniformity in how we do things.”

When not presiding over the bench, Tusan is writing about it. She is currently working on the sequel to her 2007 fiction novel, “Misjudged.”

The story, which was met with positive reviews upon its release, is about a judge named Suzanne Vincent. In the story,

Vincent discovers that the son she gave up for adoption has spent his childhood languishing in foster care. She struggles to give up the degree of control she is accustomed to exercising over her professional life as she attempts to reconnect with her estranged son. At the same time, she faces a ruthless political opponent who threatens to destroy her career.

Due to perceived similarities between the some of the book's characters and the Atlanta courthouse where she works, Tusan had to convince colleagues and friends that while art does tend to imitate life, her creation was pure fiction.

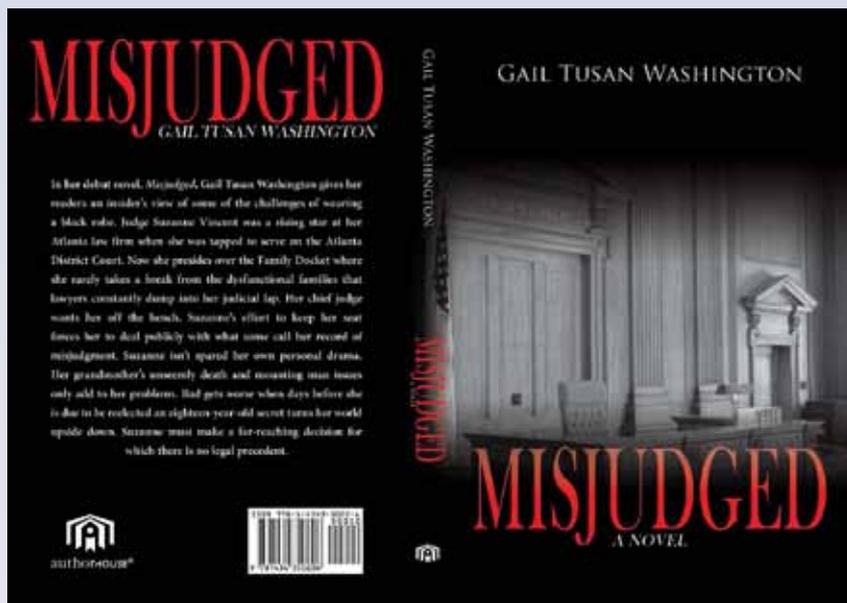
"I think the cases I preside over speak volumes about life and the lessons to be learned," she said. "If different decisions were made, the outcomes would be different. But as a judge I'm not able to change the facts, so I found it to be very fun and a way to escape from the rigors and stress of everyday cases."

As an avid reader, Tusan said she was forced to shelve her life-long ambition of becoming a fiction writer once she became entrenched in her career, young family, and extensive list of community and volunteer activities.

"Presently, I would say a large part of my community service is court related," she said. "I think there is a need for judges to step off the bench and interact within the community. It gives us a better sense of the individuals that come before you."

Presently, Tusan serves as vice president of Buckhead/Cascade City Chapter of Links, Incorporated. Links is an international organization of professional and business women who come together to focus on community service aimed at improving the quality of life through educational and cultural programming.

She has served as chair of the Judicial Sections of the Gate City Bar Association and Atlanta Bar Association, president of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, "GABWA," Camp Fire, USA, Georgia Council, vice president of the Legal Clinic for the Homeless, and chair of the Georgia Supreme Court's Commission on Continuing Lawyer Competency, among others.



"Atlanta is a city where there are a lot of volunteer opportunities," she said. "I grew up with the family value that giving back to one's community is a personal responsibility to be taken seriously."

She feels that working with children is exceedingly worthwhile.

"Certainly working with young people is extremely important to encourage them to continue their education so they can become self sufficient, productive members of society and not end up before the court for making bad decisions," she said.

Tusan's own childhood was spent in Southern California where her backyard overlooked the San Gabriel mountain range. She said that while it took some time to get adjusted to the Georgia landscape, she is, by now, completely won over.

Now that her four children are grown and quite successful in their own right—a recent law graduate, one entering law school, one entering business school and the youngest entering medical school—Tusan and her husband, respected dermatologist, Dr. Carl V. Washington, Jr. with Dermatology Associates of Georgia and current president of the Atlanta Association for Dermatology and Determatologic Surgery, cherish their weekend getaways in the picturesque Golden Isles.

"If you're active and interested in life," she said, "you're always busy."