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the property on Mathis Road

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with his studies. When he graduated high school in 1953, he enrolled at Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical, and Normal College (which later became the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff). He played for the basketball team and showed a lot of potential. In 1954, he enlisted in the air force and spent most of his tour in Europe. While there, he continued to play basketball for air force teams and was considered one of the best players in the service. He soon married and had twin daughters. Once he left the air force in 1958, he wanted to build a life for his family.

He enrolled at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, at age 23, and was soon part of the basketball team again. He led the team in scoring for each of the three years he played. In 1961, he was the NCAA scoring leader with an average of 32 points per game. When he graduated in 1961, he was the university's all-time scoring leader with 2,196 points. Several records he set with Gonzaga still stand decades later. Now age 26, he was drafted by the Los Angeles Lakers in 1961. Instead, in the age before multi-million dollar NBA contracts, he chose to go to Hawaii to play with the new Hawaii Chiefs, part of the American Basketball League. The ABL, however, collapsed by 1962.

Burgess returned to Washington and decided to go to law school. Because the ABL did not pay players very well, he did not have a lot of money. To support his family and pay for law school, he worked the night shift with Washington Water Power Co. In spite of all the demands on him, he graduated near the top of his class. In 1966, he became a legal intern with the United States Atomic Energy Commission. After six months, he was hired as assistant city attorney for the City of Tacoma. After two years, he entered into private practice with Jack Edward Tanner, who would become a federal judge in 1978.

His legal career took off in the 1970s. He soon began serving as a municipal judge before becoming a county district judge. In 1980, he became a regional counsel for the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, acting as a legal advisor for HUD. In 1981, he was appointed as a magistrate judge for the U. S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. In this position, he served as the first judge seen in federal criminal proceedings and oversaw arraignments of suspects and set bail.

Burgess received a great deal of respect in the legal community for his wisdom and good humor. In November 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed him as a district judge for the Western District of Washington, succeeding his retiring former law partner, Jack Edward Tanner. He would be overseeing full court proceedings at the federal level with this new position. In 2005, on his 70th birthday, he assumed senior status, a semi-retired position for federal judges.

However, his health started to decline but still presided over cases. In 2010, he died of cancer at age 75. In honor of his basketball career and his years of public service later, Gonzaga University would retire his jersey number, number 44. He was widely mourned in the legal community in Washington state, called by colleagues "a legend on two courts."

Week of July 10, 2023

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