King County Superior Court Visit Observations and Opinions

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Court House Attended: King County Superior Court – Seattle

Date Attended: February 24, 2016

Judge’s Name: Theresa B. Doyle

Type of Proceeding: Civil

Subject of the Case: Tort Motor Vehicle

Stage of the Proceeding: Direct and Cross Examination

Abstract

This paper depicts my observations and opinions on what I observed during my recent visit at the King County Superior Court in Seattle in the James v. Washington State case. From what I understood, James is suing Washington State for damages because he underwent a collision due to icy road conditions and he claims he had no prior warning that the road was icy. There are four main points I made in this paper: 1. I identified the case type and stage of the proceeding I watched as direct and cross examination of witnesses, 2. I noticed differences in attorneys and formed opinions based on their performance, 3. I was able to observe an active jury in action, and 4. I was able to identify both similarities and differences between what I saw in the courtroom and what I see on television.

As I walked into the Superior Court I was extremely excited, since I had never been there before. Not knowing my way around, I got lost multiple times but I finally made my way up to the clerk’s office. Hoping the clerk would come to my rescue, I was somewhat disappointed since she was only able to explain the schedule to me but said she couldn’t give any recommendation on which case would be the best for me. Finally understanding the schedule, I wandered around the court looking for a good case to sit through when finally the man at the information desk came to my rescue and helped me find a case. I observed the James v. Washington State case in which James is suing Washington State for damages because he underwent a collision due to icy road conditions and he claims he had no prior warning that the road was icy. This case was a good case to sit through since it was easy to follow, which allowed me to observe many things about court procedures which include: 1. I was able to identify that I was sitting through both the direct and cross examination of the witnesses, 2. I noticed differences in attorneys and formed opinions based on their performance, 3. I was able to observe a jury in action, and 4. I was able to notice both differences and similarities between what I saw in the court room and what I see on television.

As soon as I walked into the courtroom I saw a witness at the front of the courtroom and heard a lawyer questioning him. At that point I knew I was going to be listening to either a cross examination of a direct examination. As I attempted to catch up to what they were talking about I noticed that the lawyer was asking the witness open ended questions and by then I knew that is was a direct examination proceeding. During this direct examination the lawyer attempted to demonstrate the appellee’s side of the story. He continued to ask about weather conditions, road conditions, and the actions taken to improve road conditions on the day of the collision. During this process, the lawyer didn’t attempt to contradict what the witness was saying so this also helped me establish that it was the appellee’s witness and that questions were being asked to help describe and enforce the appellant’s argument. After the appellee was done asking questions he said, “I have no further questions for this witness your honor.” Then, the appellant’s lawyer got up and started asking the witness questions. This time the lawyer asked leading questions that resulted in a yes or no answer from the witness. I realized that the appellant was attempting to build a case against what the witness answered to the appellees questions, therefore this was a cross examination. After both sides were done questioning the witness, the judge asked the jury if they had any questions if so to write them down on their paper. After the juries questions were answered, the next witness was questioned and they went through this same process except this time with the appellant’s witness.

During my visit in the courtroom I paid particular attention to the case attorney’s for each side and noticed quite a few differences between them. First of all, the appellant’s attorney seemed more prepared than the appellee’s attorney. At one point, the appellee’s attorney was not able to defend an objection that was made against something he said. The judge asked him a question to help clarify what he had previously said, but he became confused and flustered and was not able to answer the judge’s question. As a result, the court went into recess, the jury left the room and they attempted to resolve the issue. The appellees lawyer acknowledged that he was aware that his question was right to be objected, but that he had a point to the question he asked. Even though, they were able to resolve the issue, it gave me the impression that the appellee’s lawyer was not as prepared as the appellant’s lawyer. Something I noticed was the same between both lawyers is that they both made objections a lot. The word objection came up various times from both sides which helped me realize that the lawyers listen very carefully to what is being said and they attempt to stump the opposing side’s argument as much as possible. This is true especially in front of a jury because they attempt to make the opposing side lose credibility amongst the jury which brings me to my next point.

This experience allowed me to notice the importance of the jury and their duties in action. After the cross examination and direct examination of each witness, the judge would ask if the jury had any questions. In this case, the jury had quite a few questions after the first witness’s direct examination even judge Doyle said, “Seems like you have a very interested jury.” As I watched the jury during the proceedings I noticed that all of them were taking notes, which demonstrated their complete interest in the case. The juries duties in action are not always portrayed in films and television shows, which is why I was surprised when the jury asked questions.

Furthermore, I realized that there is both similarities and differences between court sessions depicted in movies/ television shows and what actually takes place in a real court session. First of all, the jury doesn’t play a major role throughout the session only at the end when they give their verdict. However, this was not true for the case I observed because the jury was actively participating either by taking notes or asking questions when given the opportunity. Also, Movies portray court sessions as extremely dramatic and hostile, but that is not really the case, at least not for the civil case I observed. The only way movies/ television shows and real court sessions are the same is the layout of the court and the objections posed by the lawyers. The courtroom I was in was not as big as the ones portrayed on television, but it did have the same layout. Also, in television shows I have watched the lawyers constantly attempt to object to the opposing side’s arguments and this is indeed what happened in the session I observed.

All in all, my experience at the King County Superior Court in Seattle was both interesting and entertaining. What I have learned in B CUSP 202 B really helped in understanding the case and the proceedings I watched. I also really enjoyed listening to how both sides of the case presented and defended their arguments. This experience sparked my interest in jury duty since I was able to see an active jury in action. Even though the James v. Washington State case didn’t have that dramatic effect like in the movies, I was still able to enjoy the case. If only parking wasn’t so expensive, I would definitely consider visiting the Seattle King County Superior Court more often.