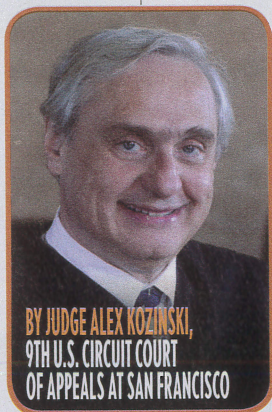


JUDGE CHAMBERLAIN HALLER

My Cousin Vinny (1992)



I have long had a warm spot in my heart for the cantankerous Judge Chamberlain Haller in the movie *My Cousin Vinny*. In many ways, he's an anomaly: a Yale Law School graduate who winds up on the bench in a small town in Alabama; a strict enforcer of the rules of procedure who nonetheless gives Vinny quite a bit of leeway. Prone to take himself a bit too seriously, he sees the dignity of the court—indeed of the entire state of Alabama—as depending on his strict enforcement of procedural rules in his courtroom. For all of that, he is not lacking in humanity



BY JUDGE ALEX KOZINSKI,
9TH U.S. CIRCUIT COURT
OF APPEALS AT SAN FRANCISCO

and gets some of the best lines (other than Vinny).

When he's frustrated with Vinny's inability to enter a plea for his client, he sounds a bit like that other great Southern figure of authority, Captain in *Cool Hand Luke*. "Once again, the communication process has broken down between us. It appears to me that you want to skip the arraignment process, go directly to trial, skip that and get a dismissal. Well, I'm not about to revamp the entire judicial process just because you find your-

self in the unique position of defending clients who say they didn't do it."

Even then, he is not without a sense of humor:

Vinny: "Your honor, may I have permission to treat Ms. Vito as a hostile witness?"

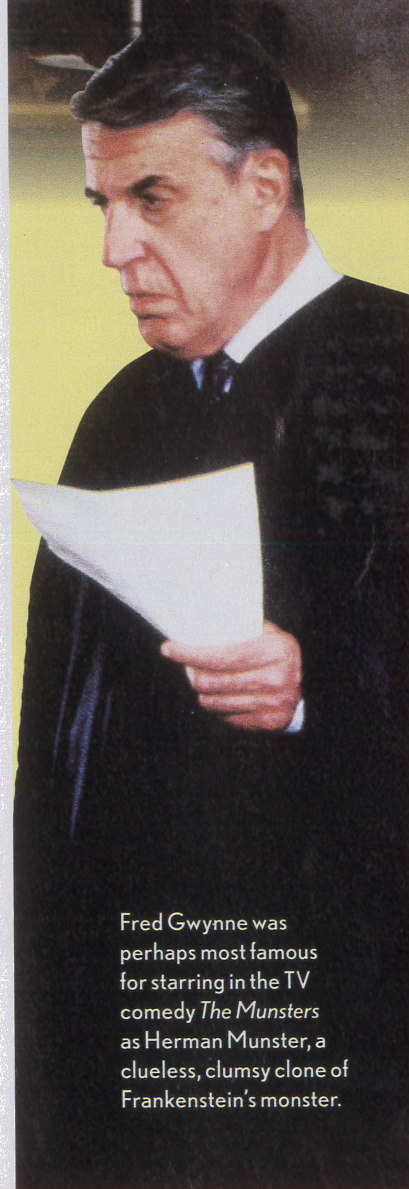
Mona Lisa Vito: "You think I'm hostile now, wait 'til you see me tonight."

Judge Haller: "Do you two know each other?"

Vinny: "Yeah, she's my fiancée."

Judge Haller: "Well, that would certainly explain the hostility."

Brought to life by the incomparable Fred Gwynne, Judge Haller stands as a reminder that dignity and a bit of stuffiness are not inconsistent with doing justice in the courtroom.



Fred Gwynne was perhaps most famous for starring in the TV comedy *The Munsters* as Herman Munster, a clueless, clumsy clone of Frankenstein's monster.

