here are some distances that can’t be measured in miles.

When Catherine Matteau Stone ’76 came to Assumption College, she quickly realized that she was a world away from the small town in Maine where she grew up. Stone’s goal was to be the first person in her family to graduate from college. She also wanted to work for the State Department, have a career in foreign affairs and earn a doctorate. Then her plans changed.

Four decades later, Judge Stone is still the only person in her family to have earned a college degree and lives about 2,300 miles from her hometown – but in Texas, not Tehran – and she holds a Juris Doctor rather than a Ph.D. Today she is chief justice of the Fourth District Court of Appeals in San Antonio, where she and her husband of 36 years, Thomas Stone, Ph.D. G’77, reared their three sons.

“I wanted to go to a Catholic college out of state, but not too far from home, and I was attracted by Assumption’s French program,” Stone said. “I applied early decision because if you committed to Assumption, the school made a commitment to meet your financial needs, and I had many because I’d been living on my own since I was 16. Assumption took care of me.”
The day Stone arrived to start classes was her first time on campus. “My experience at Assumption was an eye-opener for me,” she said. “I met kids from all over New England, New York and elsewhere. It was truly a liberal arts school. In our classes, we were taught to seek the common good – to see the body politic, not just what’s good for me.”

“ASSUMPTION TAUGHT THAT, AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE ARE OUR BROTHERS’ KEEPERS.”

Stone embraced the College’s strong message of social justice and began to consider a law career. “All of my plans were changing,” Stone said. “I met my husband, Tom, during the fall of my senior year. Tom earned a master’s in psychology at Assumption in 1977. We were married on campus that fall. We left the next day for Beaumont, Texas, where he did work related to his degree program.”

Stone was hired as an investigator in the district attorney’s office in Beaumont. Back then, the court system in Texas was not as welcoming to a woman with a college degree who hailed from New England as it is today, Stone found.

“It was a man’s world,” she said. “My husband finished his degree, so it was time for me to go back to school. Rather than go on for a Ph.D. in political philosophy, I decided to go to law school. I thought that was the practical choice.”

The Stones moved to San Antonio, where Catherine attended St. Mary’s University School of Law. She graduated in 1982 and was admitted to the Texas Bar that same year.

“I started law school pregnant, which was not part of the plan,” Stone said. “My son was due in January, so I planned to go for fall semester, then sit out the second semester. I learned that I couldn’t make up the classes I needed in the summer. The dean suggested that I sit out a whole year, but would not guarantee my admission for the next year. Today, they would not have handled it that way. I went for the full year to save my place in the law school.”

After graduation, Stone was offered a one-year judicial clerkship at the court of appeals where, in 1994, she was named to a judgeship. In 2009, she was elevated to chief justice.

“The clerkship was a great opportunity,” she said. “I discovered that I really liked the appellate work because it was a nice blend of the practical and intellectual – both research and writing. Later, I was hired by a law firm, where I did litigation and appeals. I was able to establish a practice fairly easily because it was somewhat novel then in Texas to have a lawyer who specialized in appeals. A lot has changed in 30 years.”

What has not changed is Stone’s commitment to justice, truth and the care of others. Her keen legal mind and sense of fairness have brought her wide recognition. Honors include the 2009 Henry B. Gonzalez Award from the St. Mary’s University Hispanic Alumni, the 2009 La Prensa Foundation Women in Action Award, two Barbara Jordan Public Service Awards and the 2004 Archdiocese of San Antonio Leadership Award, among others.

Away from the bench, Stone is an avid reader, a year-round tennis player and a devoted first-time grandmother. In addition to her extensive community and parish volunteerism, she and Tom enjoy time with family and meet monthly with their prayer community, which has included the same eight couples for 28 years.

“I really enjoyed my time at Assumption and still keep up with the friends I made,” Stone said. “Assumption set the course for me. In addition to the academics, the College taught us that, at the end of the day, we are our brothers’ keepers.”

AC Connections

“One of my Assumption friends, Richard Garcia ’74, who’s Cuban, came to the College by way of Miami,” said Judge Stone. “I lost track of Richard about a year after graduation. When I started my first semester at St. Mary’s University Law School, I was five months pregnant. A guy came up to me, patted me on the belly and gave me a kiss on the check. He said, ‘Well Cathy, I sure hope you got married.’ It was my Assumption friend, Richard Garcia. He’s an associate judge in San Antonio, Texas, now. Judge Garcia is a walking saint who always has a smile on his face. He hears child abuse and neglect cases every day. I know that he gives those cases all the appropriate attention.”

Judge Garcia, who presides over the Bexar County Children’s Court, has been recognized for his tremendous efforts on behalf of children and families. (He was named one of the nation’s 150 Angels in Adoption by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) in 2011 for his efforts in placing orphaned and neglected children in new homes.)

Since 2004, Judge Garcia has spent his days hearing cases of child abuse and neglect, as well aschild support, visitation and adoption. In 2011, U.S. Congressman Charles Gonzalez from Texas selected him as an Angel in Adoption. Angels in Adoption is a public awareness program of CCAI. It recognizes the outstanding achievements of those who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans in the U.S. and abroad. The Bexar County Children’s Court, with assistance from several other local aid agencies, is leading the State in the number of children adopted over the past five years, averaging more than 1,000 adoptions each year.”