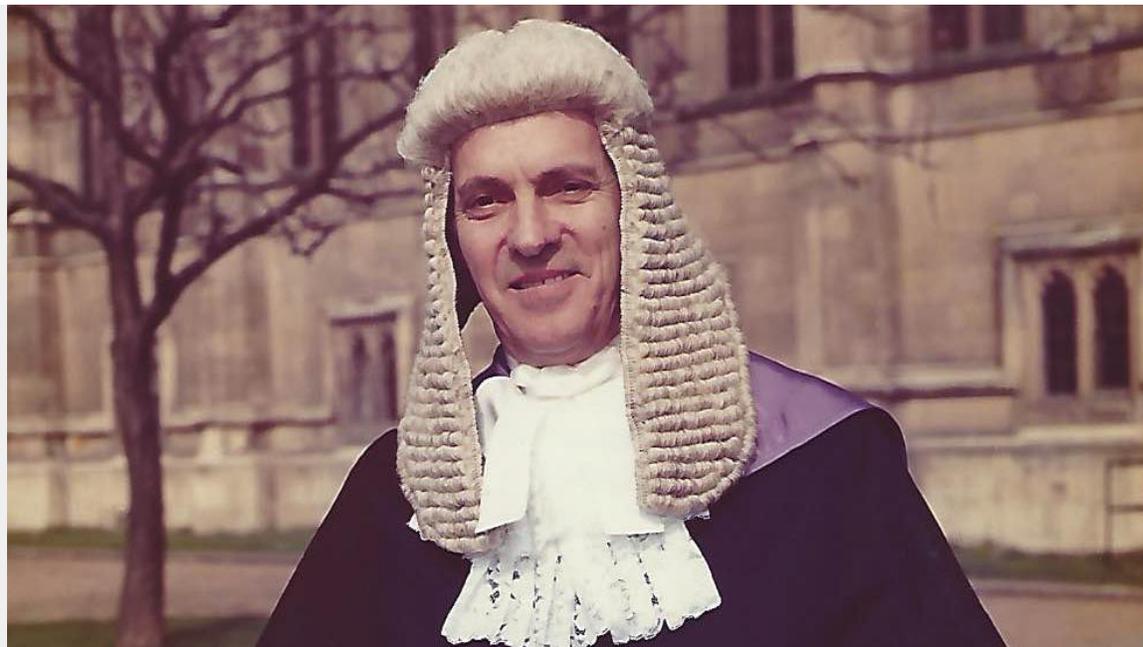


OBITUARY

# Leonard Krikler

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Innovative and unconventional judge known as ‘Quickie Krikie’ because of the speed with which he cut to the heart of a case



Leonard Krikler made headlines because of his innovative approach to justice

When Leonard Krikler was a newly qualified barrister in the mid-1950s it was not easy to obtain briefs without connections, but Krikler’s ability in court did not go unnoticed, and soon his clients included the comedians Peter Cook and Norman Wisdom — who, he quickly discovered, was unable to resist clowning around, even in conference. Krikler also represented Stirling Moss, who was found guilty of dangerous driving and had his licence suspended for 12 months in 1960, after a police officer really did ask the racing driver: “Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?”

For much of the next decade Krikler worked on courts martial in West Germany — often with the Highland Light Infantry, gaining the honorary rank of Colonel — and represented the Crown in cases involving British troops. These included the unsuccessful 1969 appeal by Leslie Grantham (later of *EastEnders* fame) against his conviction for the murder of a taxi driver in Osnabrück.

Later, as a judge, Krikler was highly regarded for his work ethic. Advocates affectionately dubbed him “Quickie Krikie” for his “ability to cut through the froth and get to the heart of a

case with alacrity” — and Krikler often made headlines thanks to his innovative approach to justice.

One defendant who had pleaded guilty to stealing hospital food was given a lenient sentence, because “anyone [who does so] deserves help, not punishment”. At Wood Green Crown Court in 1987 an ageing shoplifter who had spent his life in and out of jail was startled to hear the judge say: “I have been handing out sentences for 12 years, but you have been receiving them for 32. You have more experience than I have, so what do you think I should do?” The defendant opted for a suspended sentence — and never offended again.

Leonard Gideon Krikler was born in Shabani, Southern Rhodesia, in 1929, the youngest child of Major James Harold Krikler OBE and his wife, Tilly. His parents had emigrated from Lithuania in 1909 and his father ran a shop.

At the age of six the young Leonard was sent to *Milton School in Bulawayo*, 100 miles away, writing in one of his early letters home: “Dear Mummy and Daddy, please send tuck. Lenny.” He and three of his friends soon ran away. After they were tracked down the school’s headmaster held an assembly. “These boys not only escaped from school,” he said, “but they even took young Krikler with them, who’s only two bricks and a tickie high!” Lenny, the ringleader of the operation, kept quiet.

Unlike his older brother, Bernard (Bunny), who was head boy at **Milton** and the captain of rugby, Krikler was not a star pupil and left having acquired little more than a love of art and a healthy disregard for authority. He saw this as no setback, however, and in later life would tell his children that “there’s no such thing as a failure that can’t be turned into a partial success”.

Krikler’s route to a career as a barrister and a judge was far from conventional, especially in 1950s England. After dropping out of boarding school in Southern Rhodesia at the age of 16 without sitting his exams, his parents wearily dispatched him to London to live with his older sister, Fiona, and “grow up”. The plan worked and within six years of his arrival he had scraped passes in his matriculation and law exams. Along the way Krikler paid for his rent and food by taking on a series of jobs such as railway porter while attending night school. Any wages left over were saved up for art classes in Paris, where he spent his holidays at L’Académie de la Grande Chaumière.

After being called to the Bar in 1953, Krikler served his pupillage under George Avgherinos at Goldsmith’s Buildings. Head of chambers was Stanislaus Seuffert, who remained there after its merger with Lamb Building until he retired. Krikler then took over as the head of what was then the largest chambers in the country, until his appointment as a circuit judge. He also sat as a High Court judge (Family Division).

In family cases — for which Krikler had a passion — he wanted to ensure that any children involved were looked after properly. He was instrumental in setting up a children’s room at court

with books and comfortable chairs to put them at ease. Here he would introduce himself to them, drawing cartoons and letting them try on his judicial wig. When a colleague asked, “What about nits?” he dryly replied, “The children will just have to take their chances.”

Back in 1955 Krikler had met Thilla Hermann, a medical student, at a party and told her that he was an undertaker’s assistant. Within two days he had proposed marriage and, despite his apparently modest prospects, Thilla accepted. Her father was against the marriage because he wanted her to complete her studies, but he relented in the face of Krikler’s charm on condition that they did not start a family until his daughter had qualified as a doctor.

They were married within five months and had their first child, Stephen, the next year. He is now an orthopaedic surgeon. After a nine-year gap they had three more sons: Douglas, a banking executive with Investec; Alexander, a criminal barrister; and James, an architect.

Thilla died of cancer in 1973. With four boys aged between 2 and 17 to look after, Krikler admitted there were times when he struggled after Thilla’s death, but managed to “hang in there”. Then in 1975 he took three of the boys on holiday to Israel, where Thilla’s sister, Eva, introduced him to Lily Shub, who was bringing up her three children alone.

With characteristic decisiveness Krikler proposed marriage within a few days and after a month had returned to London having acquired a wife and three more children: Susan, who is a barrister with the Crown Prosecution Service; Tracy, who is a bodywork therapist, which involves using manipulation to improve the function of the body and mind; and Colin, an optician. Their youngest child, David, was born in 1977. He runs his own PR company.

Krikler, who took on the role of the chairman of the New London Synagogue between 1989 and 1992, always made sure that his family life was lively and full of warmth. One wall at home was covered with an assortment of hunting horns, bugles and tubas, and he would summon the children to meals with an enthusiastic rendition of *Come to the Cookhouse Door, Boys*. At other times he would treat them to his own adapted versions of music-hall songs.

In 2000 Krikler and Lily held a party at the Royal Courts of Justice to mark his 70th birthday and Lily’s 60th, as well as their silver wedding anniversary, a celebration that Krikler, with typical wit, called the Lillenum. After retiring in 2004 he continued painting and drawing — and writing to *The Times*. He was also a keen gardener.

Diagnosed with lung cancer in 2016, Krikler spent much of the next year in hospital, but remained content with his life. “I’ve had two marvellous marriages, two great wives, eight marvellous children and 22 superb grandchildren. I can’t ask for a better life and ain’t nobody on earth who ain’t born to die.”

**Leonard Krikler, circuit judge, was born on May 23, 1929. He died of lung cancer on January 18, 2018, aged 88.**