



ORAL HISTORY OF MIRIAM WOLFF

FIRST INTERVIEW

January 3, 2007

Today is January 3, 2007 and it's 10:00am and I am sitting at Judge Wolff's house in Los Attos Hills. My name is Ladoris Cordell and I am the person who is interviewing Judge Wolff for her oral history. Judge Wolff, thank you so much for making yourself available to do this and I thought what we would do is start at the beginning. If you would tell me first of all where you were born and raised.

Judge Wolff: I was born in Portland, Oregon, ninety and half years ago. It's kind of too bad that we didn't start this a few years ago because I find I have absolutely no memory for names anymore. You lose something with each year you add, but I think I remember events pretty well.

Ms. Cordell: Well that's good. What month were you born?

Judge Wolff: I was born July 24, 1916. My father was an MD, he had left New York in order I think to escape from a family that adored him. He found it kind of necessary to get away and the furthest he could get was Portland, Oregon.

Ms. Cordell: So you mean he was being smothered in a sense?

Judge Wolff: Yes, by an adoring mother.

Ms. Cordell: Was he an only child?

Judge Wolff: No, he was one of seven, but he was her favorite. He had gone away to Med school, and I think she looked forward to his coming home. His father had died when he was a freshman in college at Georgetown. They were a well-to-do family and very close knit. My mother was also from New York. They

had fallen in love and had decided to marry. My grandmother's other children never really moved very far from her, most of them stayed right with her in a big multi-story house. She was a beautiful imperious woman, apparently very charming and she just kept her kids very close to her and to one another.

Ms. Cordell: What is your father's name?

Judge Wolff: Leon Wolff. No middle name.

Ms. Cordell: And your mother?

Judge Wolff: My mother was Rose Hochberg. She was very beautiful. Before you leave I will show you a picture. She had a brother living in Portland and I guess that might have been part of what triggered their move. But anyway they became engaged, they actually married in Portland, Oregon and nine months and ten minutes later I was born. I have a hunch my mother was in her early thirties, she was very secretive about her age. I think she might have been either my father's age or maybe a year older, I am not sure.

Ms. Cordell: Was she a college graduate as well?

Judge Wolff: No, but she was a productive woman. She was working before they married. She was the oldest daughter of five children. She had been born in Connecticut and then the family had moved to New York, lived in what became Harlem. But Harlem was not a...

Ms. Cordell: It wasn't black?

Judge Wolff: Was not black, but it was then and still is I think a very interesting part of New York. Yes, yes. My father took the Oregon examination because like

lawyers, doctors went through in the examination process and he was admitted about the time I was born. He started his practice voluntarily in a part of Portland that was regarded as a poor section. Lots of Italian immigrants whom both my mother and father admired. My father liked his patients and they loved him. We left that house when I was three and half and I know the time precisely because that's when my brother was born. But I remember the house very well. I remember the rooms. We were on the second floor, a grocery store was on the first floor. I remember that we used to be able to walk, probably through a window, to go outside onto a kind of balcony. We could go out on the balcony porch and pick grapes. I of course couldn't pick them; I couldn't reach them, but the rest of the family could. My father loved that kind of thing, he thought he was really, really in the country. And in fact he really liked doing it. When my brother was born they moved to a much more fashionable section of Portland.

Ms. Cordell: What is your brother's name?

Judge Wolff: Lippman

Ms. Cordell: First name?

Judge Wolff: Yes, Lippman Wolff. That was my grandfather's name. And one thing Jewish people do, of which I really highly approve, is they name children after a deceased relative. Lippman Wolff was my father's father and Lippman was the first male grandchild in the family. I was named after my mother's grandmother, Miriam, and after my father's grandmother, Evelyn. So I am Miriam Evelyn.

Ms. Cordell: So you are three and a half, he moved, your brother comes into the world and you step up, you move to another neighborhood?

Judge Wolff: We moved to a new neighborhood not for status but because I am soon to be going to school. There was no such thing as preschool as far as I know and I don't think there really was, but my father would not let me go to kindergarten because he thought I was not well enough and strong enough. They were always trying to have me put on weight.

Ms. Cordell: So you were a tiny thing?

Judge Wolff: I wasn't, I was normal height, but I was just skinny.

Ms. Cordell: Did you not eat or was it just....?

Judge Wolff: I thought I ate, I don't know. I mean some kids just don't put on weight.

Ms. Cordell: So your father thought you were a little too frail for kindergarten?

Judge Wolff: And too likely to get colds. Actually I remember the first grade and you might be interested. It was a portable school. The first grade classroom was heated by a potbelly stove. I loved the first grade teacher and she loved me. She arranged the kids according to how smart they were. I had learned to read before I went to school which is probably true of practically everybody.

Ms. Cordell: So you are five years old maybe at this time, first grade six years old?

Judge Wolff: Oh yes, it had to be six.

Ms. Cordell: By any chance you remember your first grade teacher's name, but you do remember her.

Judge Wolff: Oh, I remember her. I thought she was kind of big, but I loved her dearly. She was also the principal of the school. My father was very concerned about

the school, and he didn't like the idea of a potbelly stove and he didn't like the drafts and he worried about my catching cold and developing some kind of a lung disease I assume. So he went before the school board to argue for, and was always credited by the principal with having done a great deal to get them a permanent building. However that was beside the point for me, because we had left that area by the time the school was built.

Ms. Cordell: So she seated you according how smart you were?

Judge Wolff: How smart you were.

Ms. Cordell: So where were you?

Judge Wolff: Theoretically I should have been in the first seat, I was the best reader and that's all you have to be, but it was not the closest to the stove. She had been convinced that I was a "sickly" child and indeed I was born with some kind of a heart problem, and so they were probably legitimately concerned. I can still remember my being very distressed about this and her saying to me "Miriam, you are in the third row over but that is seat No. 1." I also remember that when I got very bored in school, which I did frequently because listening to other kids read is horrible, I would lie down on the bench and look at everybody upside down. I found this very entertaining.

Ms. Cordell: And she allowed you to do this.

Judge Wolff: Oh yes. I didn't bother anybody.

Ms. Cordell: Were you a talkative child?

Judge Wolff: I can't really answer that, I assume I was.

Ms. Cordell: Precocious ?

Judge Wolff: I do remember when I first walked.

Ms. Cordell: Wait a minute, how old would you have been?

Judge Wolff: Well, probably about one year plus. I remember my mother said she thought I was never going to walk.

Ms. Cordell: Maybe a year or two? Okay, and so go ahead.

Judge Wolff: You want to hear this story.

Ms. Cordell: Absolutely.

Judge Wolff: There were a group of women sitting around with my mother, and why they thought to spell in front of a two year old, I can't imagine because I can't imagine that they thought I understood them and I am sure I didn't. The telephone rang. We of course had a telephone. They were talking to my Aunt Cele. I got up and I walked for the very first time across the room because I wanted to talk on the telephone, took the telephone and said, "Aunt Cele, did you know that Aunt Millie is "p-r-e-g."

Ms. Cordell: That's great.

Judge Wolff: They must have been shocked and of course I had no idea what it was, but the fact they were all spelling proved it had to be something really ....

Ms. Cordell: I love it, that's precocious.

Judge Wolff: Somewhere between two or three, because that's the house we left when Lipp was born.

Judge Wolff: But I might tell you because it came to my attention the other day, somebody had said to my mother, "How old was Miriam when she talked" and my mother thought about it and said "I cannot remember a time when Miriam

could not communicate.” And that probably was correct. Yes, infants do communicate.

Ms. Cordell: By the way the story about the phone ringing -- I think it should stay in, it's lovely. So you are in school....

Judge Wolff: Then we, my father wanted to go back to New York and do some graduate work and by that time Lippman was born. He wanted I think partly to show off the first grandson. My mother had gone to New York while I was an infant to show me off. Before my father went East, he moved us to another part of Portland that was a little more convenient for my mother. He took Lipp with him and then did his graduate work.

Ms. Cordell: This is in New York?

Judge Wolff: In New York.

Ms. Cordell: So did the whole family go?

Judge Wolff: No, mother and I remained in Portland and Lipp and dad went to New York. His family really wanted him to transfer his practice, he agreed to look into it while he was there. His mother really pestered him for a long time to return to New York.

Ms. Cordell: So his family raised your brother, kind of? So how did father go to school and raise a little boy.

Judge Wolff: Oh, well yes he stayed with my grandmother, and the family.

Ms. Cordell: And for how long was that?

Judge Wolff: Well how long does a graduate course take, about three months.

Ms. Cordell: So it wasn't a full year?

Judge Wolff: No. I would think it was about three months. But anyway, meanwhile my mother had developed what was called “hay fever” and I assume it is allergies. I can remember going down to the allergist with her while they made enumerable cuts in her arm and put various pollens in and she turned out of course to be allergic to practically everything including things that she had never ever seen. In due course they decided that the better thing was to get to a climate that was more suitable for her. My father had gone through Los Angeles on his way to New York, liked Los Angeles and decided to move us all down there.

Ms. Cordell: You were in what grade?

Judge Wolff: By the time we moved I was in the fifth grade, when I went to Los Angeles. I had already skipped a grade. When I entered school in Los Angeles I found that I was repeating a lot of work. The schools in Oregon was really better than the schools in California.

Ms. Cordell: And these were public schools in Oregon?

Judge Wolff: Oh yes, always public schools. I am sure my family wouldn't even have thought about a private school.

Ms. Cordell: So when you go to LA had you already skipped a grade?

Judge Wolff: Yes, and then I skipped, I skipped a year eventually and over great opposition by this school, I still remember, teachers saying “you will never learn this because you are skipping it,” but it isn't true. Bright kids learn what they have to learn. So when I was going into junior high school I thought about “what do I really want to do with the rest of my life.”

Ms. Cordell: You are thinking about this in sixth grade?

Judge Wolff: Yes. My mother was kind of agitating for the idea of my being a school teacher, because she liked the idea that there were three months you were free in the summer and one could travel.

Ms. Cordell: That's good.

Judge Wolff: And I didn't like the idea of teaching, and I didn't want to be a doctor.

Ms. Cordell: Because?

Judge Wolff: I don't know, I really just didn't think that that was for me. I decided I wanted to be a lawyer. It wasn't too bad a decision, really.

Ms. Cordell: Not at all. How did you decide, did you tell someone, or did you just thought about it?

Judge Wolff: I don't know if I had told anybody.

Ms. Cordell: But you knew, six grade this is what you decided?

Judge Wolff: I decided.

Ms. Cordell: So let me ask you, was your brother as precocious as you, as bright as you?

Judge Wolff: He had a different mentality. He was much more artistic. He can work with his hands, he can make jewelry, he can paint, you know, he pretty much knew what he wanted to do and he was a bright kid. He fit into the family well. But it's a different mentality. He wasn't as verbal, and he was much more popular.

Ms. Cordell: Why do you say that?

Judge Wolff: He really was -- you know all the kids liked him. Our personalities are quite different.

Ms. Cordell: So sixth grade, you \_\_\_\_\_?

Judge Wolff: Sixth grade. So then I went through junior high knowing that I wanted to be a lawyer. Our neighbor was in the District Attorney's office in Los Angeles, and handled a lot of high profile criminal cases. I loved going down the court listening to him whenever I got a chance. My father encouraged that, by then everybody knew, everybody in the family knew I intended to be a lawyer

Ms. Cordell: Had you seen women lawyers? Did this inspire you in any way? So these were all these men, lawyers, and judges.

Judge Wolff: I met a couple of judges who were family friends and who were very nice to me. I probably was in high school by then. My father too was very encouraging. The point of my story which I thought might interest you is I had to decide where to go to college. I had heard a lot about Yale and Harvard. Well, Yale and Harvard did not take women, and their law schools did not take women. I knew nothing about the University of Chicago, I mean it just wasn't on my radar. And maybe it did take women. I know it had a law school, but it did not occur to me. Of course I knew about USC and that it had a law school. By the time I was in high school I had a professor in debating. Now I was a good debater, and the professor implied that he could probably get me a scholarship to USC if I wanted to join the debate team. But I had heard that Stanford was the best law school on the West Coast, so I decided that really what I wanted to do was to go to Stanford. That's how I became an undergraduate at Stanford. I entered Stanford wanting to go to law school.

Ms. Cordell: What year are you talking about?

Judge Wolff: It was nineteen thirty three. I am the class of thirty-seven.

Ms. Cordell: Class of thirty-seven, undergrad?

Judge Wolff: Undergraduate. By the time I graduated I had already had a year in law school.

Ms. Cordell: How did you do that?

Judge Wolff: Well, law school had a four year plan but you got your AB at the end of your first year and you finish the first year of law classes with the rest of the first year. All you had to do to get in the law school was to pass the LSAT high and I assume have an A or B three year average.

Ms. Cordell: And you did?

Judge Wolff: Yes, I know, I had heard that I was either the highest or the second highest in the class.

Ms. Cordell: So let me go back a little bit, so in high school you are a straight A student, and was it really hard at all, nothing in particular just straight A's.

Judge Wolff: We had a few special courses for just bright kids.

Ms. Cordell: For the gifted program, something like that?

Judge Wolff: But they never called it that. You know our Junior high was a new and rather strange school. But it had one novel approach. It divided each year into groups, and actually it wasn't until I got to high school that I realized we had been divided into groups by our IQs. I thought, and all the rest of the kids thought, we were divided into groups by our age because the kids with the high IQs were also the youngest. But we kept winning all the awards in Los

Angeles. LA had uniform junior high school testing; tests for math for example. Our whole group, I our class, always came out number one in the City. We were the only junior high in Los Angeles that was divided according to IQs.

Ms. Cordell: Do you remember the school?

Judge Wolff: The school was Mount Vernon.

Ms. Cordell: Mount Vernon Junior, that's a junior high.

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: What about your high school.

Judge Wolff: Los Angeles High School.

Ms. Cordell: Did you read a lot when you were a kid?

Judge Wolff: Oh yes, oh constantly. Everything. Our branch library was two blocks away, if I had any time I went there, and we had a big library...

Ms. Cordell: In your home?

Judge Wolff: Yes, I read all the time.

Ms. Cordell: Did you write a lot as well. Were you a writer?

Judge Wolff: Yes, actually I wrote a lot, I never was on the school paper. I wasn't really particularly interested in that, but I did write a lot of speeches. I did a lot of speeches.

Ms. Cordell: You gave speeches?

Judge Wolff: I gave speeches and I did a lot, gave speeches all over. Speeches for fundraising for charity, debates, speech contest. I started to tell you about the

special group in high school in our English class. Almost everybody in that class became a judge.

Ms. Cordell: Really. So we are talking males.

Judge Wolff: Mostly male. There weren't very many women in the class.

Ms. Cordell: And they became judges.

Judge Wolff: Yes, many became judges. Almost all became lawyers, which is kind of interesting. We were in a group, this is high school and we didn't all go to Stanford. In fact, I guess most of them went to Cal or UCLA or Harvard, which was always very popular. I think what happened was that it was fashionable at that period for bright kids to go into law. By the time I was in law school it was really fashionable for bright kids at Stanford to go into physics.

Ms. Cordell: That wasn't your thing, physics?

Judge Wolff: Physics was definitely not my thing. Although I took a course in physics at Stanford.

Ms. Cordell: And how did you do?

Judge Wolff: I damn near flunked it. But I got through, Ladoris I was the only woman in the class, I did not have enough basic mathematics. I did not have enough advanced mathematics to get through it, but I squeaked by mechanics and I did not have trouble with electricity or heat and light. Fortunately those grades were combined.

Ms. Cordell: So did your parents come to your graduation from college from Stanford? Was that a big deal?

Judge Wolff: No, but I went through the graduation ceremony.

Ms. Cordell: And do you remember why?

Judge Wolff: Because it was the end of my first year in law school and it really didn't mean anything to me. I had none of the senior activities at Stanford. It's still very hard for me to relate to my class now, because I related completely to the law school.

Ms. Cordell: So when you finished law school that would have been...

Judge Wolff: I had finished law school in September of '39, because I wanted to get out early.

Ms. Cordell: Why?

Judge Wolff: This was the depression, and I wanted to start paying back my student loan.

Ms. Cordell: So let's talk about that a little bit? Student loans? What are we talking about?

Ms. Cordell: I mean how much money you owed?

Judge Wolff: Whatever tuition was.

Ms. Cordell: Have you any recollection of what we are talking about? I mean tuition at Stanford, if you cap tuition, room and board it thirty thousand...

Judge Wolff: Oh, you can't talk about today. We paid, you know we were still paying a hundred and fifteen dollars a quarter and, but bread was eight cents a loaf and I paid fifteen dollars a month for rent. There were no dormitory facilities for women graduates at Stanford.

Ms. Cordell: So only the men, only the men had places to live?

Judge Wolff: I am not really able to answer that. There was nothing for women. You could not, unless you were a Proctor, stay in a dormitory and I can't say that I wanted to, ...

Ms. Cordell: So where did you live?

Judge Wolff: In Palo Alto.

Ms. Cordell: In an apartment.

Judge Wolff: Yes, a little apartment over a garage. You know, it was fine, that part was fine.

Ms. Cordell: Fifteen dollars a month?

Judge Wolff: Yes, and you could earn... I took some time between while I was in law school. I went to school one summer so I could take six months off later and work. I got eighteen dollars a week and that was about three dollars a week better than most of my peers.

Ms. Cordell: So what kind of job was that?

Judge Wolff: It was in a special office created by the District Attorney, the City Attorney and special counsel to sue some contractors from San Francisco (this is in Los Angeles), who had destroyed the underpinning for the St. Francis dam by failing to excavate in the manner prescribed and in dynamiting instead. That is still part of the flood problems of Los Angeles. That special office recovered the biggest judgment the county of Los Angeles had ever recovered. They created a special office and I worked for them just as a clerk putting the exhibits together and underlining the appropriate language and

working very seriously expecting at the end of each week that I would be fired...

Ms. Cordell: Because?

Judge Wolff: Well because you know they said "well we don't really want, necessarily want somebody, we don't know when the funds will run out." I don't remember exactly what they said, but the man who interviewed me left his options open.

Ms. Cordell: Were you the only woman?

Judge Wolff: In the office? Well, no, that was an office, it was secretarial, clerical work and all of the secretaries and clerks were women.

Ms. Cordell: Of course.

Judge Wolff: And of course I wasn't doing legal work. I mean I was assisting the lawyers and listening to them and being very impressed by them. Actually it was terrific. It really was an interesting thing.

Ms. Cordell: Going back to law school, so how did you find the experience?

Judge Wolff: You have to start -- we are really running out of time, but you have to start at the beginning. Stanford at that point was taking in a lot of student applicants for law school, but they were taking them in and they were going through this litany -- they thought it was funny -- of saying "shake hands with the man to your right, shake hands with the man to the left because only one of you will be here next year." We started out with a class of eight-six, we ended up graduating twenty-six, and it was done deliberately.

Ms. Cordell: What was the point?

Judge Wolff: That was the way it was done at Harvard. Yale was doing the opposite, it was screening the students who came in and graduating virtually all of them. Stanford was screening those of us who went in on the four year program, because I guess it would be pretty embarrassing if they were flunking these kids their senior year, but they weren't doing a lot of screening otherwise. They were simply flunking them out or telling them it might be a good idea to plan to transfer.

Ms. Cordell: Were you the only woman in the class?

Judge Wolff: No, no. Either six or eight of us started out. I was the only woman who took the bar when I took the bar.

Ms. Cordell: You were the only woman of your senior class who took the bar when you took it?

Judge Wolff: When I took it, but two of the women took the bar later. One, because she was a four year student as I was. I also should have taken it a year later. And one, because she was ill, and both of those women passed the bar.

Ms. Cordell: Do you remember who they are?

Judge Wolff: Yes, one was a gal named Beth Doyle. Beth and I again ran into one another in Sacramento. She was a bright woman, good lawyer and she became head of social security for the western states. The second was Marian Leachman who was not very well during the time we were in law school and married I think right after. She, as far as I know by the time she took the bar, was in a wheelchair. She did take and pass the bar, but I don't know if she ever practiced.

Ms. Cordell: Were there any people of color in your class, any blacks, any Latinos, Asians?

Judge Wolff: There were no Asians or Latinos, no. But there were practically no blacks at Stanford.

Ms. Cordell: What about the Jewish population, was it...?

Judge Wolff: There was a Jewish population.

Ms. Cordell: There was no cult or anything that you knew of?

Judge Wolff: No, well nothing that I knew of and I don't think there was. If there was it escaped me. I don't think Stanford went for that.

Ms. Cordell: So back to law school, your favorite classes, what were they, subjects?

Judge Wolff: Contracts.

Ms. Cordell: Why?

Judge Wolff: I thought it was basic, most challenging, most interesting and...

Ms. Cordell: Where did you sit in class?

Judge Wolff: At the back?

Ms. Cordell: Why?

Judge Wolff: I did not want to be called on.

Ms. Cordell: When people were called on, I mean this is the way it goes and it wasn't about raising your hands, you just called on?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: And so does sitting in the back really protect you?

Judge Wolff: Well pretty much.

Ms. Cordell: Alright.

Judge Wolff: I can't remember who sat beside me for contracts, but when we thought that the professor was getting toward the back row, he and I began to tremble.

Ms. Cordell: So this is the fact that you are such a debater, \_\_\_\_\_.....

Judge Wolff: But I did not want to be called on in class.

Ms. Cordell: Do you remember being called on in class, not just contracts?

Judge Wolff: Oh yes.

Ms. Cordell: And do you remember any particular experience?

Judge Wolff: By George Osborne.

Ms. Cordell: What class was that?

Judge Wolff: That was "remedies" and it was one of his favorite questions. It was something about the rights of a mortgagee. I can't remember what it was about. I am sure you have heard of George Osborne. Everybody was scared to death of him and he was probably one of the nicest professors at Stanford. He had this big bellowing voice "You could stay outside in the Quad and take notes. He called on me for one of his favorite problems. I came up with an answer and said, "the plaintiff prevailed" or whatever. Then he would lead you on with a series of similar questions until you were convinced that your first answer was incorrect. I remember sticking to my guns and I don't know why I was so positive I was right and finally he said "Why Miss Wolff, why do you conclude that," and I said in effect I really don't know, I don't know.

Ms. Cordell: \_\_\_\_\_ words.

Judge Wolff: And he said "Oh, I see, feminine intuition." Then he said, "Well you are correct."

Ms. Cordell: And you were right?

Judge Wolff: And I was right.

Ms. Cordell: So your feminine intuition. Oh my goodness.

Judge Wolff: Actually George was very good to me, it turned out. What happened is I wanted to take the bar early. Kirkwood was the dean. Some student who was Coif, had flunked the bar the year before and Dean Kirkwood was a very austere man. He called me into his office and said "To graduate, you are taking courses until September, the bar is October, you will not have any time to study for the bar and I just can't permit that." And I said, "but I need to start earning a living and I will have graduated by the time of the Bar" and in effect I did not have the right to apply for the bar until graduation. And he said: "if you apply for the bar without my permission, I will cancel your registration at Stanford." And so I said "oh," left his office and sort of staggered to the water fountain. I don't know whether George Osborne or Prof. Turanteen got there first, but one of them said to me "Miss Wolff, you look upset" and I said, "well, yes I am" and told him what happened and by then the two of them were there, George Osborne and Turanteen. And George said: "the Dean can't make that decision, that has to be made by the faculty." And so apparently the two of them called a faculty meeting and the Dean called me back in the office a few days later and said "I have been overruled by the faculty and you will be allowed to register and apply for the bar, but I think you are making a mistake."

Ms. Cordell: And you said?

Judge Wolff: Thank you very much.

Ms. Cordell: So you took the bar?

Judge Wolff: So I took the bar, and I think I passed very well because for years I graded the bar and although I don't know how I did on the bar I must have done alright, but it was an eerie experience.

Ms. Cordell: So you are only, when that happened you were in your early twenties, if that?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: And so here you have these men telling you, I mean it must have been devastating?

Judge Wolff: Yes, and then you have got a lot of stuff. Ladoris, I mean you heard from people who said you are taking a place of a man. You know that isn't true.

Ms. Cordell: Hold on now, so you are saying you heard this, how did you hear it? Did people actually say these things to you. Are these fellow students, are these faculty?

Judge Wolff: No, no faculty.

Ms. Cordell: Faculty would actually say to you....

Judge Wolff: You are taking the place of a man.

Ms. Cordell: And what was the point in their telling you this if you are there.

Judge Wolff: They assume that you're going to get married and not practice or you are going to quit or whatever. You know the logic escapes me. I have never been able to figure it out. I was adamant; I mean I wanted to practice law.

Ms. Cordell: What I am saying is that you are in law school, this is a fact and the obligation is to teach you and they are also making these comments?

Judge Wolff: Yes, but not all of them.

Ms. Cordell: I understand. Even one is too many.

Judge Wolff: In fact actually I liked Chester Vernier, the man who taught bills and notes, sales and criminal law. I thought he was fine. Also his wife was a very nice woman, she had me over a couple of times for thanksgiving dinner; I knew her son and I never could go home for thanksgiving. Stanford always had just one day off for Thanksgiving. I couldn't afford to go home. I might tell you this. I entered Stanford thinking we were poor. It was until I got to Stanford that I realized, or got out of Stanford that I realized we were not poor.

Ms. Cordell: And how so, what was it that convinced you otherwise?

Judge Wolff: What convinced me that .....

Ms. Cordell: You were not poor, yes, what did you see at Stanford?

Judge Wolff: Well, the percentage of people in income groups. I knew what my father's income was pretty much and I learned what the population percentage was; I realized his income placed us in a fairly high category. But we never, neither my brother nor I were ever raised with the idea that we could afford a lot of stuff, we had to earn whatever we got, and I don't know whether Lipp felt that way but I thought we were really financially poor. Of course we knew we were not entitled to scholarships, because my family's income was higher than that.

Ms. Cordell: What did you wear to class in law school. What did you wear pants...

Judge Wolff: No, no, women did not wear pants.

Ms. Cordell: You mean there was rule.

Judge Wolff: No, but nobody did. I never saw a woman in pants.

Ms. Cordell: So you never saw a woman in pants, and there was a sort of no, no kind of understood, so you wore dresses.

Judge Wolff: Yes, stockings. The men did not wear ties and all that.

Ms. Cordell: So they could be more casual?

Judge Wolff: So they could be casual.

Ms. Cordell: But not the women?

Judge Wolff: Well, we wore casual clothes but not....

Ms. Cordell: I mean not evening gowns or anything, but your stockings and ....

Judge Wolff: Yes, and high heels if you could walk in them.

Ms. Cordell: Did you do that?

Judge Wolff: Yes I did. I remember we had a woman doctor at Stanford who said you know "Miriam, you want to continue to wear high heels, you don't want to look like...." She was, I don't remember the words, but the idea was...

Ms. Cordell: It's feminine image? You were very \_\_\_\_\_?

Judge Wolff: A business-like feminine image?

Ms. Cordell: Got you. So when for example the thing happened with the dean saying you know I don't want you to take the bar exam or when a faculty member says you know you are taking the place of a man, were these instances when you were calling your parents and say you'll never believe this.

Judge Wolff: No, you never called your parents.

Ms. Cordell: No, what's that mean, what do you mean you never called your parents?

Judge Wolff: Well, you wouldn't spend money on a telephone call. I mean that's not what you did.

Ms. Cordell: So who did you talk to when this stuff happened, I mean it's pretty traumatic?

Judge Wolff: You know other friends in the dormitory, or other friends but you didn't, I can't remember ever calling home.

Ms. Cordell: So your parents really never knew, learned about the dean?

Judge Wolff: Well maybe after the fact, but not particularly.

Ms. Cordell: Any female professors?

Judge Wolff: The only female professor is one I did not have: Marge Bailey in the English department.

Ms. Cordell: And that's in undergrad? How about law school?

Judge Wolff: No one in law school. And I think there was one woman student in the med school, and she must have had a really hard time. I can't say. I had one really bad incident at Stanford with a man.

Ms. Cordell: Is this law school?

Judge Wolff: In law school. It was before an examination the first year. I was sitting relaxing with a cigarette, everybody smoked, and I was sitting on the law school steps and a man whose name I can't remember -- I'm sure I've erased it -- came up and was saying and I really didn't know him very well, he was in my class, not a friend of mine particularly and he said something about "what was I doing" and I said I was studying for whatever it was, and he said "well you know everyone in the class hopes you will flunk." He said, "we don't feel that way about the other women in the class." Then he went on and

on and I went back to the dormitory, so it must have been at the end of my first year, and I really, really hit the books.

Ms. Cordell: Did you cry?

Judge Wolff: Oh, no I don't think so. That would not be my reaction. And I ended up getting either the highest or trying for the highest grade in the class.

Ms. Cordell: And why you, why the other women were okay but not you?

Judge Wolff: I don't know. I still don't know. He flunked out later on. Well he transferred to Duke, which we thought was equivalent to flunking out. But I confided in a group of my men friends with whom I studied, after the fact, and they said they were very supportive, and they said "Miriam, people don't feel like that and pay no attention to him; he is a pain," but he had done his work because I really worked for that exam.

Ms. Cordell: That's great.

Judge Wolff: I mean, it was a real challenge.

Ms. Cordell: He was your motivator?

Judge Wolff: Yes, and I guess I had been pretty motivated anyway but that finished it. But I did find that a devastating experience, and it was the only time that anybody was that candid. Then there must have been a lot of people that felt that way.

Ms. Cordell: So graduation, your parents came, your brother?

Judge Wolff: I don't know, Lipp must have been working. He was in UCLA or at SC. We all felt work was imminent. He must have still been an undergraduate at UCLA and I don't think time would have permitted him to come, but my folks came. For them, you know, it was a very pleasant experience. I

suppose the ceremony itself didn't mean all that to me because it just meant I was moving into the second year in law school.

Ms. Cordell: But how could you graduate September and be ready to take the bar exam the next month? I don't understand?

Judge Wolff: Well you can't.

Ms. Cordell: But you did?

Judge Wolff: But I did?

Ms. Cordell: But how could you do that?

Judge Wolff: I was reviewing, theoretically I was reviewing my notes. Now I cannot remember people's names, etc. At that time I could read a page and hear everything the professor said. I mean, I could hear his voice. I guess, you knew basically the courses you took. The only problem I had was the courses I hadn't taken. I had taken almost a year in the graduate school of business, while in law school. What Stanford wanted with this four year plan was that you take work in another discipline. But the only school that we had that kind of rapport with was the Graduate School of Business. Nobody thought to take a year in biology, etc. And we didn't have computer science.

Ms. Cordell: No computers?

Judge Wolff: Not then.

Ms. Cordell: And so there were courses that you didn't take, but that were on the bar exam?

Judge Wolff: That's true, and I tried to work those up. One of them was Domestic Relations, divorce, etc. and I must say I am sure that I did very badly, because

I didn't and I don't know whether it helped to have had a bar review course.  
But I did go through all my notes.

Ms. Cordell: Back then how many days, was it one day for the bar exam?

Judge Wolff: No, it's two days.

Ms. Cordell: Two days and you are writing essays. Is that basically what it is?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: Amazing, truly amazing.

Judge Wolff: Yes. One of my friends found a hotel near the examination which was at the Masonic Auditorium on Van Ness -- a small hotel -- and the number of the guys agreed that it would be a good place to stay. We met on the stairs after the first day of the Bar -- most of us couldn't sleep. I don't think I slept for three days, and I literally died when the bar was over. I thought I was going to go out and celebrate with friends, but I could barely keep my eyes open.  
We took the Bar on sheer adrenaline.

Ms. Cordell: And then the bar results came out when? So you took it....

Judge Wolff: The bar results did not come out till December.

Ms. Cordell: And how did you find out?

Judge Wolff: I guess you get a telephone call.

Ms. Cordell: Is that right, there wasn't anything in the mail?

Judge Wolff: Maybe it was in the mail, yes, it was in the mail. Let me back up a little. I took the bar and I intended to interview for a firm in San Francisco. I think it was a good firm, and I think that they would have probably employed a woman because they did subsequently. One of the senior partners had come

to Stanford and given a course in labor law, and I liked it and got a very high grade, and I thought that was the field I would like to go into. Then I called home to say that I had finished the bar and my mother said, “Miriam we did not want to tell you while you were studying for the bar, but your father has cancer and we didn’t want to bother you with this, we didn’t want you to know but I would like for you to come home right away.” So I did. I never went up for an interview, and I left the next day for Los Angeles. Of course this changed everything. So between the time that I took the bar and the time of the results, I had approximately three months, and I thought I would start looking around for a job and we ought to leave this for the next session, about what it was like to look for a job.

Ms. Cordell: That’s perfect. So you want to stop here.

Judge Wolff: Yes, I think it’s only fair to you.

Ms. Cordell: Oh, I am kind of loving this, you have no idea, I am just loving. This is fabulous, this is fabulous. So would you like to stop now. We have a few more minutes. I have been looking at your watch. Yes, we have about ten more minutes left.