

ABA Commission on Women in the Profession

Women Trailblazers in the Law

ORAL HISTORY

of

MIRIAM WOLFF

Interviewer: LaDoris Cordell

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ORAL HISTORY OF MIRIAM WOLFF

FIFTH INTERVIEW

January 31, 2007

Ms. Cordell: We're going to talk about, I guess, a lot of different things. We're getting [inaudible] to the judgeship. But there are some things Judge Wolff mentioned to me before I started recording that I would like to go over. We can go over it in any order you want. So, there are things such as the U.S. Naval War College, the Board of Visitors, Title 7 and WWII. So, you can pick, start anywhere you want.

Judge Wolff: I thought it might be interesting to start with what women in my category were doing during the War. Those of us who didn't go into armed services. The first thing I did; I was in Los Angeles anyway because of my father's health. I thought all women were probably going to be drafted in some form or other, and I really thought, like many of us did, that the United States was going to get into the war with Germany a lot earlier than we did. And, so, I thought, well, they may or may not want lawyers, but I ought to do something that would be useful. So I took the course at USC in personnel evaluation and I took that in 1941. Los Angeles was suffering blackouts. I was working, so I took it at night. I think it was fairly common for women to look for some kind of job like that that might be useful.

Ms. Cordell: Why that course? What was that going to do?

Judge Wolff: It was going to let me go into a program like Douglas Aircraft and work with staffing and/or shipbuilders. Anyway, as you can see, I was fresh out of law school.

Ms. Cordell: Would you say, I mean, was this common for professional woman to do, decide to help the war effort and ...

Judge Wolff: I don't know.

Ms. Cordell: So what gave you the idea? Did someone talk to you or?

Judge Wolff: I don't have a very clear recollection of that. I just thought, well, I should look around for some college course other than law that had to do with running businesses and that was one; personnel evaluation. It was offered through U.S.C.

Ms. Cordell: Were you the only woman in the class or is this filled with women?

Judge Wolff: No. There were very few women. It was filled with men.

Ms. Cordell: So you had finished law school and...

Judge Wolff: And I graduated from law school and I think I started the class before I was admitted to the bar.

Ms. Cordell: And so did you learn anything or ...?

Judge Wolff: Yes. You learned how to do time and motion studies and statistics and keeping records. It was not a particularly challenging class.

Ms. Cordell: This met every week or what are talking about?

Judge Wolff: Oh, I think it was probably. I got a certificate. No, I think it was something like three or four nights a week.

Ms. Cordell: For a year?

Judge Wolff: For about a year.

Ms. Cordell: Did you get an “A”?

Judge Wolff: I don’t remember how they evaluated it. I know I got a certificate. It was a certificated program.

Ms. Cordell: Do you still have it?

Judge Wolff: I don’t have any idea where it is. Anyway, let me talk to you about what I actually did during the war. As you know, we went into the war in December of ’41 and not long after that, about a year later, I went up to Sacramento and then came back to San Francisco. The first house I was living in was in Menlo Park. Dibble Hospital, which now has become SRI, was on Middlefield Road and Santa Cruz Avenue. I think what I did was probably fairly typical of what women lawyers were doing. I became a Grey Lady, which was a volunteer for the Red Cross. I don’t remember whether I worked at Dibble one night a week or two nights a week. I probably worked more than one night a week, but I worked regularly one night a week. So I would come home from the Court, change, bicycle from the station to my house, change into a Grey Lady uniform...

Ms. Cordell: Which I need you to describe at some point.

Judge Wolff: It’s a seersucker uniform with white collars and cuffs.

Ms. Cordell: A dress?

Judge Wolff: Yes. Dress. Women always wore dresses.

Ms. Cordell: And the uniform itself was what color? Was it grey?

Judge Wolff: Grey.

Ms. Cordell: It was grey? Seersucker?

Judge Wolff: Seersucker and if I remember correctly, buttoned down the front. And, then I bicycled down to Dibble. Dibble was a blind and plastic surgery center and it was the first hospital that the wounded from the Pacific hit after they left the field hospital itself. As far as I can remember, all patients were male. Very few people were blinded during the war who did not also suffer multiple other injuries. And so they would have lost a nose, an ear, part of a jaw and there would be extensive plastic surgery. The one thing you could assure people of was that they were going to improve. They weren't necessarily going to learn to walk if they'd lost legs and arms, but plastic surgery was definitely going to improve their physical disfigurement. And they were badly disfigured. I don't know how they do plastic surgery now, but at that time, all of the grafts were made by taking an arm or a leg or another body part, putting it in juxtaposition to the wounded area and letting it grow because if you could rehabilitate a face with the skin from an arm, as an example, there was less rejection. And during the period the graft is growing, it's a very disfiguring process. So I would bicycle down to Dibble and do whatever was necessary. Read to people. Take patients to movies. Those who couldn't see. I loved describing movies.

Ms. Cordell: What do you mean describing movies? I mean, do you....

Judge Wolff: Well, they're talking pictures but you are saying to the blind people that you're taking to the movie, she is just coming, the heroine is just coming

through blah, blah, whoever she is, is just coming through the door and she is about to greet whoever...

Ms. Cordell: And you're saying this in the movie theatre?

Judge Wolff: And I'm saying it in the movie theatre.

Ms. Cordell: So you're whispering it to the.....

Judge Wolff: Well. At night, you know. The other men in the theater understood you were bringing in two or three people who were blind. And the other thing that's very interesting is, men are very tolerant of one another. Particularly people in hospitals. I think men are nicer to one another than the average woman would be to one another. Anyway, I never had people objecting. We're talking, you know, we're trying to be inconspicuous, but we're talking to a small group, two or three people who can't see the screen. So you took people to movies. You wrote letters. One of the amazing things to me was how many of the wounded had no idea, had lost track of their families long before they went into service. Had no idea where their relatives were. And I also trained other Grey Ladies. Then when I moved from that house in Menlo Park, because I was subletting it from friends and they got out of the war and came back a little early. And I moved into Palo Alto. And Dibble was too far away to bicycle.

Ms. Cordell: And you were about 25 years old then?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: This was '41 so you were 25 or 26.

Judge Wolff: Yes. And then I started working at the hospital, the veterans hospital, in Palo Alto, which handled the mentally ill. People who had breakdowns. I also was a Grey Lady there and I also trained other Grey Ladies.

Ms. Cordell: What did you do for them, the mentally ill?

Judge Wolff: Mostly we worked in open wards. That is, people who had ground privileges. You distributed cigarettes, for example. Conversation. These are people who are going to get out and kind of need a liaison. For some of the people, we put on a monthly or weekly dance. But generally we would just converse. Of course, patients were in all stages of illness. Some of them were talkative. Some were very disturbed. But the interesting thing to me was that during the time that I worked at veterans hospital the treatment of the mentally ill underwent a radical change. When I started the guards were all male, very big, they used a lot of physical force and some of it was excessive. Then the armed services put in a different General I assume, who started a different kind of treatment of the mentally ill and it was interesting to see how the guards changed. They became much more conversational. Smaller in stature. Their treatment of the patients was much more respectful and all of this was before "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." So it was a very interesting development. I worked there quite a few years.

Ms. Cordell: How many hours were you putting in? How many days a week?

Judge Wolff: Probably about two and a half hours a week, I would say. If I did a training session of other women, I did it on Saturday. All of the Grey Ladies were women.

Ms. Cordell: Do you know of any other women lawyers who were Grey Ladies [inaudible]?

Judge Wolff: I can't name any. But, we did a variety of jobs, but I would guess that almost all of the women were doing something similar. Now, if you want to skip to ...

Ms. Cordell: Did we cover the Navel War College, then? Was that your taking that...
[inaudible]

Judge Wolff: The Naval War College was interesting.

Ms. Cordell: Tell me about that [inaudible]

Judge Wolff: One other woman and I were at the Navel War College. It's a one week session and it was a session on "global strategy" and it was all male. I was port director then. This was 1972.

Ms. Cordell: '72. Okay.

Judge Wolff: The other woman, I think was Margaret Smith who was a Senator from Maine. We didn't really become well acquainted because there was no real opportunity. We went into a session...a large session in the morning where we had lectures. And then in the afternoon we broke off, had lunch and broke off into smaller sections. And...it was at Newport.

Ms. Cordell: Why were you there?

Judge Wolff: I was invited.

Ms. Cordell: So you were invited for a session. This was in Newport, RI?

Judge Wolff: Newport, RI. And I have said many times. The most interesting thing I did during the time I was port director was spend one week at the United States Naval War College. But it was. It was really very interesting. It also was

interesting to go into the sessions because I would listen to all the discussions and I was later proved right and they were wrong. They would say almost plaintively, do you really believe that? And I'd say, yes.

Ms. Cordell: So you were very outspoken?

Judge Wolff: I was ... not until I was called on. I'd listen to all these people either in Congress or high in the Armed Services. Included in all the sessions are people high in the ranks of the Armed Services. There was a tendency, I should say, to believe that since oil was so important we were going to, we, the United States, were going to have to cut its ties to Israel and increase its ties to the Arabs. And, you know, some of us who had been out in the world more just knew that that wasn't going to happen.

Ms. Cordell: And you spoke out about this?

Judge Wolff: Yes. But I must say, they never rejected what I said. I think basically they knew that was the way it was going to be.

Ms. Cordell: Are we talking hundreds of people or just....

Judge Wolff: No. Its...I would say they maybe invite 75; 60, 70 people. It was great fun. I'd never been to Newport and it was very stimulating. And Rhode Island is interesting anyway. They'd talk about our late President, George Washington.

Ms. Cordell: Interesting.

Judge Wolff: Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Ms. Cordell: What about Title 7? Your work on Title 7? You mentioned that last time.

Judge Wolff: We had one session of ... that was put on by the American Bar Association. I'd like to tell you a little bit about... going back to the American Bar

Association. I'm skipping around. One of the first things I did when I got out of Stanford...

Ms. Cordell: This is law school.

Judge Wolff: Stanford Law School. One of the first things I did after I was admitted to the bar was I joined the American Bar Association and I joined the Los Angeles Bar Association because I was there. And you might be interested to know that the Los Angeles Bar Association did not take any African Americans and every year that would come up and the rest of the bar associations would threaten to oust the Los Angeles Bar Association but didn't happen. I don't know when they started taking women. But anyway, I did join. But the American Bar Association at some point passed a resolution to impeach Earl Warren when he was Chief Justice. I wrote a letter of protest. I'd love to have a copy of it but I don't have it, to the American Bar Association for this resolution, withdrawing my membership. I ceased to be a member of the ABA for many years.

Ms. Cordell: So this would have been when? And why, what was Earl Warren doing to upset them so much? We're talking Brown vs. the Board of Education? 1954 or right about then. And you sent a letter of protest about that time and said I'm through with you all?

Judge Wolff: Yes, and I withdrew. I did not rejoin until Individual Rights and Responsibilities became a Section of ABA, at which point I rejoined. It did not upset the ABA that I withdrew but I did. Now they put my date of admission to the ABA to the second date but I actually did join as soon as I

graduated and was admitted. I never had a face-to-face meeting with Chief Justice Warren, but I did have an interesting telephone-to-telephone encounter, I remember fondly. Workman's Compensation had what it regarded as its own funds to build a building to house itself and its activities in San Francisco and proposed to hire its own architect. The State Architect protested on the ground that he alone was to be the architect for all State Buildings. The request for the opinion landed on my desk and it was clear that under the law the State Architect would prevail, but it seemed unseemly to me to have two State Agencies publicize this kind of difference. I talked to the head of the office, and he agreed that I could telephone then Governor Warren, tell him about the requested opinion and suggest that he might want to have the two agencies come to his office and arbitrate their differences so that Workmen's Comp could employ its architect and the final supervisor would be the State Architect. The Governor understood there was no legal authority for this solution; but we did discuss it, and he thanked me for calling him. In a few days the request for the opinion was withdrawn. As a corollary: Some years later the Port built a new fire-boat. They wanted an experienced designer and builder and a ship yard in Maine was selected. I was then Port Counsel. To avoid any problem with the State Architect we provided that his office would supervise the building for us and we periodically paid his expenses to Maine and back. The other thing we were going to mention was I did chair the Board of Visitors of the Stanford Law School and I was very

pleased with that. I was the first woman who chaired it. And during that time...

Ms. Cordell: Now, that's 1973 to '74 when you first, when you chaired?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: And that made you the first woman chair, ever?

Judge Wolff: Ever. And during that time we built the law school -- the new law school.

Ms. Cordell: Let's see, my last, I graduated in 1974. I was the last class to be in the old law school, so the new one opened in '75. So you would have presided over all of that. Just say, what is the board of visitors? What's the...

Judge Wolff: Well, it's a ... I don't know what it is today, but on the two times that I served on it, it's a group that has no real authority, but it was supportive and interested in what was going on in the law school. It's a group of people certainly interested in what's happening in the law school. We were a rather strong voice as to what the size of the law school should be. We made a lot of suggestions. Some of them were good. Some of them may be not too good. I say that because during one period when I served on the board of visitors, Stanford was undergoing some of the riots as all the schools were. There was a strong feeling ... strongly divided feeling on what ought to be done. Part of us felt that Stanford was doing a pretty good job of not overreacting.

Ms. Cordell: This was during the Vietnam War protests, and Nixon. This was Watergate and Nixon. '73 and '74, is that the time we're talking about?

Judge Wolff: I'm talking about before that.

Ms. Cordell: Before that? So the protests at Stanford, was it pretty much the Vietnam War protests?

Judge Wolff: Pretty much, yes.

Ms. Cordell: Okay.

Judge Wolff: And. Let me go off record.

Ms. Cordell: Sure, and I'll just stop it.

Judge Wolff: The dates are 1973, '74. And one member of the board felt very strongly. We had an executive board as well as a board and I chaired, of course, the executive committee as well. That attorney, a prominent attorney, from Santa Barbara got up and protested to the dean that Stanford was not doing enough with these radicals who were there and that they should all be kicked out. Anyone who ...

Ms. Cordell: That would be me, you know? That would me. I was there in law school yelling and powering, with the big afro ...

Judge Wolff: Yes. You all ought to be thrown out of law school. And the rest of the executive committee ... I'm trying to remember, but I would say the executive committee, consisted of maybe 20 of the members of the board, were having dinner. This is Francis Price. And Francis got up, walked out. Tried to slam the door but it didn't slam. And we never saw him again. He left.

Ms. Cordell: And he was upset because....?

Judge Wolff: Because the dean and the rest of the group did not agree that the protestors ought to be thrown out of school.

Ms. Cordell: Glad he left, because that would have been me, being thrown out of school.

Judge Wolff: He was definitely in the minority. It was too bad but people on both sides had strong feelings.

Ms. Cordell: I'm sure.

Judge Wolff: Most of us felt Stanford was handling the situation very well. People had a right to protest and we weren't that bothered by it.

Ms. Cordell: So, and I've raised this a couple of times. I'm just not sure if we talked about it and that's your work on Title 7?

Judge Wolff: All I did on Title 7 for the ABA meeting was chair the discussion. Individual Rights and Responsibilities sponsored the resolution.

Ms. Cordell: This is the ABA?

Judge Wolff: Yes, the ABA

Ms. Cordell: And the resolution was to endorse Title 7?

Judge Wolff: To endorse Title 7.

Ms. Cordell: This is the Civil Rights Act? All that, right?

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: Okay. And you did what now? You chaired...

Judge Wolff: I chaired the discussion.

Ms. Cordell: And what kind of discussion was it? Was it all everybody said yes this is great or was there a dissention?

Judge Wolff: There, again, can we turn the machine off?

Ms. Cordell: Absolutely.

Judge Wolff: Phyllis Shaffley was supposed to appear before the ABA taking the negative side. Actually she didn't appear. She sent her husband.

Ms. Cordell: How did he do?

Judge Wolff: He did badly. He was in a very hostile environment. It swept through, the endorsement resolution went through very easily. It was no big thing. After it went through it was strongly endorsed by the ABA. Then there was an undercurrent of people who wanted it rescinded and that kept coming up at ABA meetings.

Ms. Cordell: What job did you have at the time? What were you doing?

Judge Wolff: I was at the port.

Ms. Cordell: You were at the port.

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: So this was again the 70s obviously.

Judge Wolff: Yes.

Ms. Cordell: So it kept coming up but the ABA did not change its position?

Judge Wolff: No, the ABA did not change its position. And that endorsement was, you know, I thought it was pretty important.

Ms. Cordell: Absolutely. So you want to take up your transition now from the port to the court? Or do you have some other things. I know you have ... I don't want to miss anything. I want to talk about everything you were doing this time. And I can stop it if you want to. Let me stop. Okay.

Judge Wolff: We'd been talking about: ... When I took the job of port director, I had assured everybody that if I did what had to be done for the port to make it viable financially, acceptable socially, doing its job, there was no way that my job could last more than five years. And that became very clear. And one of

the things that might interest you is that one of the things that was happening was a tug of war. By now the port had been transferred to the City and County of San Francisco, and there was a tug of war about what that transfer really meant to the people of Fisherman's Wharf, for example. It meant that they expected to have autonomy. I had them ... as did my predecessor, on a lease terminable on 30 days' notice. However it was terminable for cause and many of them were second generation operators. And we should back up a little bit to point out that the Fisherman's Wharf area was then and probably still is the most financially successful eating row in the world.

Ms. Cordell: In the world.

Judge Wolff: The rents were based on percentage. It was very fair to the lessor and very fair to the lessee. It was a base rent, vis-à-vis a percentage. But basically it was a percentage and most of our leases for port property were based on that. We maintained the property and they were required also to maintain their own structures. But when the transfer was made there was this burning desire on the part of the Fisherman Wharf merchants who felt now they were in control of the property and they and I were at swords points. And you might be interested to know, too, that I called a meeting and I guess that this really triggered a really adverse response, which I expected and didn't care about, on racial discrimination. So I had all of the lease holders at Fisherman's Wharf in for a conference. I told them that it had come to my attention that there was racial discrimination against Blacks [inaudible].

Ms. Cordell: It [inaudible] hiring Blacks, is that what ...

Judge Wolff: No. No. Not, serving.

Ms. Cordell: Okay.

Judge Wolff: And that in their lease they were prevented from discriminating and that they were going to have to uphold that, or their leases would be cancelled. I had it documented, of course. And finally one of the members, one of the leaseholders got up, literally with tears running down his cheeks and he said, "Ms. Wolff we don't discriminate against Blacks." He said, in fact, I have instructed my staff if there is a Black person waiting to take them out of turn and take them up stairs, which are actually the best views, but of course also the least conspicuous eaters, and serve them immediately because I want them out of there. We have so many southerners. And I said using his first name, "that is discrimination." They were aghast. I always thought it was a pretty interesting story. I said you've got to treat African Americans, people of color, exactly the same way as you treat everybody else.

Ms. Cordell: So did your message get through during your tenure?

Judge Wolff: Probably. Well that was very near the end of my tenure. To some extent. But probably not appreciably. Although I would guess today that it's no longer a problem. I think what happened, you know, it was a slow realization. But it was, you know, a right hard for people to grasp.

Ms. Cordell: How did it come to your attention that this discrimination was going on?

Judge Wolff: From people who had had a problem.

Ms. Cordell: And they would come to you or to your office or was it...

Judge Wolff: Do you remember Franklin Williams?

Ms. Cordell: No. Who was Franklin Williams?

Judge Wolff: He was the first African American. He was Johnson's appointment/our representative to the United Nations.

I don't know exactly how it came to my attention. But things like that were reported to the rental section and came to me. Quickly came to me, actually.

Ms. Cordell: This was a huge issue.

Judge Wolff: Yes, it is an issue. But it was ... part of it was people who did not understand the requirement. And we let people get away with discrimination. Let me back up just a little bit. The port had the only Chinese American police officer in San Francisco. That was when we were a state-owned port. San Francisco has a large Chinese population. San Francisco police not only had no African Americans; they had no Chinese. And of course the railroad had no African American switchmen; no Chinese. During the time that Pat Brown was attorney general and I was still in the attorney general's office, I was called in because an African American had passed the switchman's examination no. 1, and the head of the railroad said what are we going to do. I said: "You're going to offer him the job." And he said, "Miriam, if we do that the railroad will strike." And I said, "well he's still number one, and under your regulations and in the union contract you offer the job to the person who passes number one. I'll tell Pat Brown about it because he's Attorney General." And I went back to my office, told Pat Brown and I said there'll probably be a big brouhaha and that's it. And he said "go for it." What happened I assume, I'm guessing what happened. They did tell him

they would offer him the job. I'm sure they complied with what I told them they had to do. But I think the person who passed simply didn't want to go through all that and withdrew. It was too bad but it was a little soon in the hierarchy of things. Anyway we faced a lot of that. After the transfer to the City, we had the Fisherman's Wharf people feeling that they were now going to run the port. And I must say I thought the leases on the port property were very fair. We recognized, I recognized, anyway, that the function of the port was to ship cargo. The function of the other property was to help support that endeavor, we had the Embarcadero, for example, we did our own parking regulations. I didn't want trucks driving up and down. I wanted them parked, double parked so that they could go into the docks, unload their cargo, and waste as little gasoline and time as possible. We had our own parking set up. We had secured from the legislature the right to pass traffic regulations on our property. And we did. We functioned with this in mind. The leases were terminable by the port so that in the event we needed the property for port purposes it could be obtained, but they were also fair and the system that I used was that if improvements were being erected that would have a 25 year life for tax purposes, I would provide that within the 25 years if we were forced to terminate for other than a good cause, we would reimburse the owner of the lease for the balance of his costs. I would make the lease firm for five years and thereafter at the end of each year use a fair formula to raise the rents. So that the port was always protected. And by the way I urged Stanford to do the same thing for the shopping center and I don't think they

ever did but I think for public or trust property, it's a very good system. There were loads of people who would have loved to have unadjustable rents etc. That began coming to the fore and it was very very plain. And then what actually triggered my leaving was the financial statements of course passed over my desk, and Pacific Far East Lines became our biggest debtor and I was appalled when I saw it and Pacific Far East Lines by then had been acquired by John Alioto who is the son of the then mayor of San Francisco. San Francisco is a very small town and everybody knew that the mayor had underwritten the whole transfer between the original owner and John Alioto. I felt that I really I did not want to approach it an open public meeting but I called each of the commissioners. The commissioners were still state appointments I think all of them - maybe some had terms that expired and had been appointed by Mayor Alioto and advised them of what the situation was. I told them at some point very soon they were going to have to take some drastic action, and that they were between a rock and a hard place and I did not want any of them accused of improper action, and so I thought that they should decide what they wanted to do. About the time that I left Cyril also left.

Ms. Cordell: Why did you leave?

Judge Wolff: Well it seemed to me a clear conflict of interest.

Ms. Cordell: How so?

Judge Wolff: You either had to levy on the ships, throw them into bankruptcy, or decide, the Board had to decide what it was going to do. It was our biggest debtor at that point and the debt was running up every month.

Ms. Cordell: Right. So did you feel that you couldn't do what you wanted to do because they weren't either the commissioners were not behind you on it?

Judge Wolff: I thought it was up to them to - well yes they'd have to authorize it.

Ms. Cordell: And that wasn't coming forth?

Judge Wolff: Well it was up to what they wanted, how they wanted to handle it.

Ms. Cordell: So I'm still just not clear on why you left though. I mean so you go to them. You say look this is a situation. It's going to call for drastic action and then, so still what prompted you to leave - did you just say I just don't want to deal with this now - I'd rather do something else?

Judge Wolff: Well it was very clear that they were not happy with taking action against Pacific Far East Lines plus it was getting very difficult to handle the port. The Mayor was certainly not very happy with the idea that the port was making sounds like it was going to take some action, and although I really don't want to speak for what the Mayor thought and I actually don't know how they finally handled it. I don't know whether they threw PFE into bankruptcy or whether they gave up.

Ms. Cordell: But at some point you were the director going on 5 years - or 4 years. So how did this next move come about?

Judge Wolff: I had a vacation scheduled. I hadn't taken a vacation for a while. The ABA was meeting in Hawaii and I was going to the ABA meeting and then the

ABA was meeting with Australian and New Zealand bars. I thought it was probably time for me to get ready to terminate my time with the port and think of other options, plus the fact that the same friend who had been very interested in protecting me.

Ms. Cordell: Does this friend have a name?

Judge Wolff: I'm not going to name him. He's been long dead.

Ms. Cordell: Okay. He was looking out for you.

Judge Wolff: Yes. He was looking out for me generally. And his mantra had been for a long time that one should retire from the state system at 55 and seek another job. We regarded state retirement as deferred compensation, and I think that's proper. I think it's appropriate. But if you want to live comfortably and remain in public employment you need two retirement systems. If you retire at 55, which is the state magic number, you then can put in another 10 or 15 years on another system. I assumed that the other system would be federal. It never occurred to me that there was another state system that would qualify as separate. Well I didn't make it at 55 because I still was interested in running the port, but I made it about 59, so it wasn't too far out of line. I had not made any secret of the fact that I did not expect to hold the port job really much beyond the point of 55, so I thought the ABA trip was a wonderful opportunity to kind of get back into the law field and just see what was out there. Anyway, I went to the ABA meeting and had a great vacation - first trip to Australia, New Zealand. Stopped in Fiji on the way back and great swimming in Fiji by the way. And then came home having announced before

I left that I was leaving the port, saying goodbye to everybody when I came home. And by the way there are no secrets around the waterfront -- everybody knew everything that was going on and they knew it much better than I remember it today. But in any event, interesting to me was that after I got back and I had only been home a couple of days. On one day, I had two telephone calls from men friends, saying why don't you become a judge and for each of them I said, "Well if you know the governor, be my guest." I guess they did.

Ms. Cordell: Who was the governor then?

Judge Wolff: Reagan.

Ms. Cordell: And you were registered?

Judge Wolff: I am a registered Republican and have been all my life, but I have almost always worked for Democrats and I have worked very loyally for Democrats.

Ms. Cordell: Why are you a Republican then?

Judge Wolff: Well you know the Republican party has changed, but I have always regarded it as a party that believed in free trade, as the party that believed in limited government. I was a great supporter of Roosevelt because at that point drastic action had to be taken, but I thought of Republicans as people who interfered the least.

Ms. Cordell: My parents are both Republicans. They registered because that was the party that - exactly. They never voted Republican as you - they worked for Democrats but they decided not to change their affiliation they've never voted Republican but they are registered.

Judge Wolff: Well I can't say that I've never voted for a Republican because . . .

Ms. Cordell: Well I'll forgive you for that.

Judge Wolff: But in the attorney general's office almost all of the attorney generals were Democrats, and they had my complete loyal support but they in turn were working for Republican governors and I think each of them did his best to serve the Governor.

Ms. Cordell: Right.

Judge Wolff: So they did. I mean it's that simple.

Ms. Cordell: So they make a call or contact someone in the governor's office and then what happens.

Judge Wolff: And then I had a call from the governor's office.

Ms. Cordell: Well wait. Did you have to put in an application and submit.

Judge Wolff: I had a call in fact actually I had a call I think it was from the governor's office or maybe from one of these two men saying oh by the way you live in San Mateo County don't you - and I said no I live in Santa Clara County. I mean it was great. I submitted the application.

Ms. Cordell: And how long await do you think it was before you knew?

Judge Wolff: I knew almost immediately.

Ms. Cordell: So and who told you - how did you find out?

Judge Wolff: Somebody from governor's office.

Ms. Cordell: And were you at home - were you still at the port?

Judge Wolff: No I was home.

Ms. Cordell: You were at home.

Judge Wolff: I was back from vacation. The governor was appointing Marilyn Zecker and myself the same day as it worked out.

Ms. Cordell: Well this is by the way this transcript it's coming back to you to be completely edited and it can just draw lines through anything you don't want. You have final say on everything.

Judge Wolff: Well anyway I was told; but the final offer did not come through until December.

Ms. Cordell: What does that mean -- the final?

Judge Wolff: Well the actual papers.

Ms. Cordell: I see, so you get the phone call saying the governor is going to appoint you. And then that happened in the summer, is that what you are saying?

Judge Wolff: Well I got back from vacation in the fall. It was probably around late October/early November.

Ms. Cordell: Okay and then December.

Judge Wolff: Yes in December I really find out officially.

Ms. Cordell: It's official. And at this time your Dad is no longer alive?

Judge Wolff: No neither of my parents are alive.

Ms. Cordell: So your Mom - when did she die?

Judge Wolff: She died before I became a judge. I was still at the port when she died.

Ms. Cordell: So you became a judge in 1975?

Judge Wolff: That's right.

Ms. Cordell: And by that meaning was it December of '75 when you were first appointed or are we talking.

Judge Wolff: Yes. And the actual swearing in I think was January 2nd.

Ms. Cordell: And where?

Judge Wolff: Judge Allan swore us in.

Ms. Cordell: Bruce Allan.

Judge Wolff: Bruce Allan.

Ms. Cordell: And where was that?

Judge Wolff: In San Jose and then the ceremony was later on.

Ms. Cordell: Did your brother come to the big ceremony or the small one?

Judge Wolff: I think a cousin came when I was sworn in by Judge Allan. It was not what I would call a big ceremony. Then Mark Thomas and I were sitting in the same courthouse. Mark was sworn in at the same time. We were sitting in Sunnyvale and later on we were, I think, the first to plan a swearing in ceremony where we had a cocktail reception, and then invited a group of friends for dinner.

Ms. Cordell: So tell me about this whole judging. So you're looking for something else to do. Port director job is done. And you get a couple of phone calls. And you think about judging. And you say well I'll go ahead. But had you really thought about it? You know this is a big thing.

Judge Wolff: You know at one time I had come back from a vacation. Before I became port director, and there was a call from somebody in Pat Brown's office, when he was governor saying Miriam would you like to be a judge, and I said I don't know let me think about it. You don't make that kind of response if you want to be a judge.

Ms. Cordell: So you clearly weren't ready then.

Judge Wolff: But I did call back a couple of days later and said yes I think I'd like that.

Well nothing came of that. But the funny part was that Pat always thought he had appointed me as judge and he always introduced me as being one of his appointees.

Ms. Cordell: And would you correct him?

Judge Wolff: Never.