INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE BECK

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INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE BECK

INT: This is Doris Guttentag and I’m making a recording on May 5, 1997. Judge Phyllis Beck, why don’t you start from the beginning, where you were born and when.

JUDGE BECK: All right. I was born October 7, 1927 in Brooklyn, New York.

INT: Where in Brooklyn?

JUDGE BECK: I don’t remember. I left there when I was a month old.

INT: Okay. And where did you go from there?

JUDGE BECK: My family moved to the Bronx.

INT: To the Bronx. And how long did you live there?

JUDGE BECK: Until I went away to college.

INT: Well, that’s interesting, since that’s practically the story of my life. Tell me about your parents, who were they?

JUDGE BECK: My parents are from Poland. They came here in 1920 and ’21 and they were married abroad. They were married in Poland. I had an older sister. I have a brother and myself, and we were all born in this country. I’m the youngest of three.

INT: And what did your father do?

JUDGE BECK: My father was in business. He was in the millinery business. He was a jobber of the raw felt from which hats were made, and my mother worked in the business with him.

INT: Doing what?

JUDGE BECK: Whatever needed to be done.

INT: She worked too.

JUDGE BECK: Yes, she was always-my mother was a career woman. My mother always worked.

INT: And you had two older siblings?
JUDGE BECK: Right.

INT: Do you want to tell us, brother, sister?

JUDGE BECK: I have—my sister, who died five years ago, had a Ph.D. in social work and she
had many academic positions, but the last few years of her career she was a full time
psychotherapist. My brother is, as we jokingly say, he’s a tycoon on Wall Street, which he really
is. He’s an investment banker and runs some mutual funds and does things like that.

INT: And what was your parents’ attitudes about education? What were their values?

JUDGE BECK: You know, there was just no question that we would all have—we would all go
to college and beyond. That was just a given.

INT: That was a given.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: For the girls as well as for the boys?

JUDGE BECK: The girls, as well as the boys, my father was-believed in total equality and my
father always admired women who were powerful, as he would say, or had careers.

INT: And your mother?

JUDGE BECK: My mother certainly valued education very highly. She didn’t value stardom
quite as highly as my father did. Her values were more towards humanism.

INT: Towards humanism.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. So for my father we all got this—cause I say this motor inside of us to
achieve, and from my mother we got a very lovely kind of humanism.

INT: What language did you speak at home?

JUDGE BECK: English.

INT: So your parents spoke English?

JUDGE BECK: My parents occasionally spoke Yiddish. My mother knew five languages and
spoke them all fluently, but we basically spoke English at home.

INT: Was your mother an educated woman?
JUDGE BECK: No. Neither my mother nor father were formally had formal education.

INT: But she did know the five languages.

JUDGE BECK: She did. Yes, she did. And I remember one time I brought a college friend home, Ralph Kolodny, and he knew how to speak Russian and he came away from talking Russian with my mother and said— he told me what a classy Russian my mother spoke.

INT: She spoke a good Russian?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. Elegant Russian.

INT: So where did they come from in Poland? Did they live in shtetels?

JUDGE BECK: Let’s see. My father came from a small town called Lipner. My mother came from a resort town called Choco Chinik, but they lived in Warsaw and their level—they were very sophisticated people. My father was extremely well read and they had the sophistication of the people who had lived in Warsaw. I mean there was never a day that my father didn’t read the New York Times.

INT: And how about grandparents? Did you know them?

JUDGE BECK: I only knew my grandparents on my father’s side. My mother came from a family of ten children and six of those children and their children were all wiped out in the Holocaust, but three of her siblings did not remain. I had one uncle in England and I still have a lot of first cousins in England. My father brought one of my mother’s sisters to this country from Germany, and my mother had another sister who lived in Canada.

INT: So you knew your father’s parents.

JUDGE BECK: I knew my father’s parents. My father came from a family of six boys. My grandparents came over here in the 1920’s, also-

INT: At the same time as your father?

JUDGE BECK: A little, little later, I think. A little later. And my grandparents, courtesy of an uncle of mine who was extremely wealthy, lived in Westchester, and as I remember from my childhood in an enormous three story house where we used to go for Friday night.

INT: This is your father’s brother?

JUDGE BECK: Yes, who placed his parents in a rather grand house in Westchester.
INT: In Westchester.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Where in Westchester?

JUDGE BECK: At that time it was very nice. It was Mount Vernon.

INT: In Mount Vernon. Did you have close contacts with your aunts and uncles?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. On both sides.

INT: This was a tight family grouping?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: So aunts and uncles and cousins?

JUDGE BECK: All the time.

INT: And tell me about the neighborhood you lived in?

JUDGE BECK: I lived in a very interesting neighborhood. I guess it was typical. There were three ethnic groups in the neighborhood. There were the Jewish kids, the Italian kids and the Irish kids. The Irish kids went to parochial school so we didn't have much to do with them. The Italian kids went to the public schools as did the Jewish kids, and it was the kind of an extraordinary neighborhood. There were a number of Jewish kids who went to the public schools and then went on to Harvard and Yale and have done really very well for themselves.

INT: And was there tension in the neighborhood?

JUDGE BECK: No. Everybody was kind of-everybody was detached and distant, but respectful.

INT: So there was no mixing?

JUDGE BECK: Not a great deal of mixing, no.

INT: It was the Jewish kids-

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: What part of the Bronx was that?
JUDGE BECK: It was in the tip of the West Bronx, near Moshulu and Van Cortland Parks.

INT: Which high school did you go to?

JUDGE BECK: Now I left the Bronx when I went to high school. I went to Hunter College High School, which was a high school for so-called gifted children. My sister had gone there. My cousins and gone there, then I went there.

INT: So you followed in their footsteps.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: What was the family like about Jewish connections? Did you belong to a synagogue?

JUDGE BECK: No, we did not belong to a synagogue. My father came from—my father’s parents were orthodox and very religious. My father was a political Zionist and therefore he really abandoned and denigrated formal religion, and so I was never in a synagogue when I was a kid.

INT: And the holidays?

JUDGE BECK: No.

INT: You didn’t observe the holidays?

JUDGE BECK: Well, you see, you kind of stayed home.

INT: You stayed home.

JUDGE BECK: Out of respect for them, but we certainly didn’t observe them, no.

INT: So there was no Passover services.

JUDGE BECK: You know, when it came to family kind of things we did.

INT: You got together.

JUDGE BECK: Yes, but we didn’t do—we didn’t observe anything at the Temple or in relation to the Temple. If anything, the family was more Folkschul. You know, they were cultural Jews but not religious Jews.

INT: Did they send you to a Folkschul?
INT: Did you have to take any sort of lessons, music lessons?

JUDGE BECK: I did take piano lessons, yes, and I'm sorry now that I didn't learn more.

INT: Those are always the regrets.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: So you went to Hunter High School and after there, where did you go?

JUDGE BECK: I went to what was then Pembroke but is now Brown.

INT: Right. Women's College of Brown.

JUDGE BECK: Pembroke College of Brown, right.

INT: And after you graduated from Pembroke, did you go to graduate school there?

JUDGE BECK: No. I worked for Time Magazine. I worked for Time Incorporated as a researcher and then I got married and moved to Massachusetts, to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and I worked for a newspaper, the Berkshire Eagle.

INT: Doing what?

JUDGE BECK: I was one of the Great Barrington reporters for the Berkshire Eagle.

INT: And how long did you stay there?

JUDGE BECK: We stayed there about a little less than two years and then we moved-then my husband went in the army and we came to Pennsylvania.

INT: So this is before the Second World War?

JUDGE BECK: No, this was Korean War.

INT: Korean.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Okay. So it's before the Korean War. Let me get back to life in the Bronx when you were young. Did you have a circle of best friends?
JUDGE BECK: Yes. I’ve always had it. To this day I have it.

INT: You still maintain this?

JUDGE BECK: Not the same friends, although I still—yes, I always have—

INT: A circle.

JUDGE BECK: Of girlfriends, yes. Always did, ever since I was a kid and I still do.

INT: And so when you were a kid you had a group of girlfriends that you hung around with.

JUDGE BECK: Hung around with. We played sports together and we hung around together, yeah.

INT: What kind of sports?

JUDGE BECK: We played basketball.

INT: Is that right?

JUDGE BECK: Yeah. Played basketball at summer camp and I played basketball at school.

INT: So you went to a summer camp?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: So your parents obviously had been doing well.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. We did not suffer.

INT: Didn’t suffer. You went to an independent college.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. My father always did very nicely.

INT: And did you belong to any clubs or any organizations?

JUDGE BECK: Well, the girls.

INT: The girls.

JUDGE BECK: The girls, yes.
JUDGE BECK: No, but the girls had a club.

INT: Is there a memorable event when you were a kid?

JUDGE BECK: I think going to Hunter College High School was a memorable event. I'm still close to my two best friends in high school. We E-mail now to one another. It opened up a world of the intellectual-opened of a world of intellectual excellence to me. It certainly broadened my cultural horizons. We spent a lot of time going to museums and concerts. I would say more than any other schooling or anything, my high school years were defining for me.

INT: Was it that you’ve met girls from other areas outside of the Bronx?

JUDGE BECK: No, not necessarily.

INT: Is it that it was an all girls’ school?

JUDGE BECK: There was an intellectual rigor about it that I think is unusual.

INT: What were you aspirations when you were in high school? Do you remember that? I mean when you and your girlfriends would get together, did you talk about-

JUDGE BECK: Well, it was during World War II, so one really never had long term aspirations. You know, you just hoped the war would be over and you’d get on with your life.

INT: But you didn’t see yourself as being a judge or a lawyer at that time?

JUDGE BECK: No. I did see myself always as having some kind of career.

INT: That was always in the books for you.

JUDGE BECK: Always, yes. Always in the books for me. I mean, you know, in terms of a yearning. Had I not done it, I think I would have-it would have been an unfulfilled yearning, but having done it, it was a fulfilled yearning for me.

INT: But you saw your life choices as being career. Was marriage part of that?


INT: Is that the way your sister saw herself also?

JUDGE BECK: I don’t know.
INT: You never discussed it.

JUDGE BECK: I don’t know.

INT: How many years difference was there?

JUDGE BECK: Five. But she certainly had a family. We were very close. We were best friends, yes. We were very close. But she certainly had a very interesting fruitful career, and even a family too.

INT: Right. So you hadn’t discussed with her.

JUDGE BECK: No. Just coming from my family it was just the thing that you did. My mother had always worked and-

INT: When your mother worked, who took on the responsibilities of the house?

JUDGE BECK: We had a housekeeper.

INT: You had a housekeeper.

JUDGE BECK: We had a sleep-in housekeeper. In those days, at least from the circle I came from, you had sleep-in housekeepers who were young women from Pennsylvania and our housekeeper for about ten years was a woman named Stella Gossler from Allentown, Pennsylvania, and a few years ago she saw my name in the paper and she wrote to me and I wrote back to her.

INT: That’s sort of interesting. A voice from the past. Were you living in an apartment?

JUDGE BECK: In an apartment, yes.

INT: Okay. Well, let’s talk a little bit about your work. How did you happen to choose law?

JUDGE BECK: Oh, well that’s an interesting story. I was home for-when we moved to Pennsylvania I had-I was pregnant and then had a child and then I had three more, so I have four children in all, and the years I was at home I was active in party politics. I was active in the Democratic Party. I was active in the League of Women Voters and I was active in the kids’ school, whatever school they were in, and this was 19-Let’s see. Alice was born in ’59 so this was about 1961. I still had a yearning for a career and I also realized that unless I got a professional degree I would spend my life pasting stamps on envelopes for the Democratic Party, and that’s the last thing I wanted to do, so I decided that I really should look into some professional opportunities, and the first thing I did was I went for one year to Bryn Mawr College in their graduate department and I took some psychology courses and some child development
courses and they were-I just-I could do them intellectually but there it just was not fit for me.

INT: What year was this?

JUDGE BECK: This was 1961. Yeah, 1961. And it just was not-it just didn’t fit me, and I really-I complained a lot to my friends and other people about Bryn Mawr and one of my friends, a girl by the name of Sheila Humphrey from the League of Women Voters asked me a very good question. She said to me-we were at a dinner party one night and she said to me, “What would you have done if you were a man?” And I had absolutely no answer but the question haunted me for a few days and, you know, this is a little dialogue going on in my head and in trying to answer the question, because I thought it was a wonderful question, I asked myself, “What did the boys who had performed as well as I had performed in college do?” and I realized that a number of them had gone to Harvard Law School. I want you to know when I graduated from Brown, Harvard Law School did not take women yet. Two years later they took women. But I realized that, and that was the first time I had even thought about law, so then I thought, well, maybe I would try the law because just trying to match my mental talents with the guys I knew, so I went down to Penn Law School, but I could only go part time because I had four kids. I went down to Penn Law School but they would not have me because they would not have any part time students, so I then went over to Temple and Temple was very glad to have me and I’ve always been very grateful to Temple Law School for that. It’s interesting. I started at night. I started in a program that normally takes eight years, but I remember my first night there I was taking contracts. I took the class and I just was in love and I’ve had that kind of excitement and love affair with the law ever since.

INT: So you had the fit-

JUDGE BECK: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

INT: And you did it in eight years?

JUDGE BECK: No, in five.

INT: In five.

JUDGE BECK: The only reason I did it in five was I realized I couldn’t drag it out for eight. I just wouldn’t finish, because that was too burdensome, so I then went summers. I went nights. I mean I graduated in the night school but I went anytime-I had a housekeeper then three days a week day or night so as long as I could get credit for a course I took it. You know, I was very goal-oriented, and after five years I got my degree.

INT: When did you graduate?

INT: In '67. And then what did you do?

JUDGE BECK: Then I worked for a law firm which no longer exists and I basically worked with one lawyer whose name is Ragan Henry, and he’s a black lawyer and we represented a lot of black businessmen and businesswomen in the Delaware Valley.

INT: He was a political figure, wasn’t he?

JUDGE BECK: He was a little bit in the Republican Party. He did some stuff for them but what happened to him was he ultimately bought radio stations and TV stations, basically radio stations and he really left the law and ran his empire. I frequently think if I didn’t become a judge I would be part of that, which would have been okay.

INT: Right. So you stayed with him and you worked with him.

JUDGE BECK: I worked with him for four years, then I went with-then I left him and I went to work for another firm, Duane, Morris and Hecksher, and I worked with them for four years. The last two years that I worked for Duane-Morris, I also was teaching at law school, at Temple, and then the dean, who had been my professor at Temple, asked me to come over full time and I did.

INT: And how long did you stay there?

JUDGE BECK: I worked part time for two years and full time for two years, and then I was invited over to the University of Pennsylvania Law School to be vice-dean and to teach over there.

INT: When was that?

JUDGE BECK: That was 1976-'81.

INT: And did you do anything about part time-

JUDGE BECK: By then they were taking people occasionally part time.

INT: So let’s go on from there. So you were at Penn as a vice-dean?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: And then what?

JUDGE BECK: And then the legislature-the Superior Court was formed in 1895 and it had been, from its formation, a seven person court. In 1980, the court was expanded to fifteen people and I decided to see if I could get one of those seats, because under Governor Thornberg who
was the governor then, and under the legislation which created the extra seats, he had to appoint four Democrats and four Republicans, so I attempted to get one.

INT: So you had maintained your Party connections?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. I had run for office twice in Lower Merion. I had run for school director.

INT: Did you get elected?

JUDGE BECK: No. Not in Lower Merion. This was in the Sixties, and Democrats didn’t get elected to anything then, although it’s a little different now. I was defeated both times but I had run and I had been somewhat active in the Party here. Then I went through the paces. I had an interview with his dutiful selection committee. Ultimately I was one of the eight people he appointed to the court. Then in 1983, I ran for the job and won a ten year term, and I won it in the primary because at that time you could cross-file, and I won not only the Democratic primary, I also won the Republican primary, so for all intents and purposes, in May of 1983 I was elected, although I went through-you go through the formality of the election in November, but I had been elected in May.

INT: And that’s a ten year term.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. And then I ran for retention in ’93 and was retained.

INT: So you’re there until-

JUDGE BECK: For a while.

INT: 2003

JUDGE BECK: For a while.

INT: Yeah. Okay. Since this is an interview pointed towards Jewish life, did you run across anti-Semitism in your work career or have you run across anti-Semitism?

JUDGE BECK: I can’t really say that I have.

INT: Get it on the record.

JUDGE BECK: Well, I can’t really say, you know, overtly I have really run across anti-Semitism. I’ve run across discrimination, but that’s been as a woman.

INT: As a woman rather than as a Jew.
JUDGE BECK: Yes. Yes. I’ve never-I haven’t, you know, I think-not I think, I know it’s rife out there and I know many other people have. I’m just-the way my career steered, it did not run into it.

INT: Did you have any mentors when you went to law school?

JUDGE BECK: When I went to law school no, but afterward, I would say, I did. Certainly Ragan Henry was one of them. Then the dean, now Federal Judge, Louis Pollack. He was dean of Penn Law School. He certainly was a mentor of mine. I’d say both of those men were mentors.

INT: No women?

JUDGE BECK: There weren’t any. When I was graduated from law school, I either knew or knew of every single-there was so few women. I knew of-

INT: That was when?

JUDGE BECK: ’67.

INT: ’67, right.

JUDGE BECK: Thirty years ago, and I knew every women or knew of every women who was a lawyer.

INT: You must be astounded by the change.

JUDGE BECK: Yes, it’s very gratifying. It’s very different.

INT: Were there any stresses for you in maintaining an actively legal career and family?

JUDGE BECK: Constant. I mean there wasn’t a minute when there wasn’t some kind of-wasn’t some kind of stress or pull. I mean that’s constant. It’s like you have a radio that plays static, and if you don’t get a new radio you get used to the static and so you get used to the very, very torn feelings you have constantly.

INT: Let’s talk a little bit about your marriage. You were married after you graduated from college.

JUDGE BECK: Right.

INT: How long after?

JUDGE BECK: About a year. A little over a year.
INT: You graduated when?

JUDGE BECK: In '49.

INT: And you were married in '50?

JUDGE BECK: In '50, right.

INT: For the record, let's establish who your husband is and who your children are.

JUDGE BECK: All right. My husband is Aaron T. Beck and he is a research psychiatrist. My four children are—you want me to just give their names and what they do or just their names.

INT: Who they are.

JUDGE BECK: Dr. Roy Beck. He was born in 1952 and he is a neuro-opthomologist and an epidemiologist and lives in Tampa, Florida. The next one is Judith Beck Busis and she's a doctor. She's got a Ph.D. in psychology and is a very prominent cognitive therapist and runs the Beck Institute. Then there's Daniel Beck, and Dan lives in Boston. He has a Masters in social work and he is a psychotherapist at Harvard School of Public Health. And then there is Alice Beck Dubow who is a lawyer. She's a Penn Law School graduate and she's a tax lawyer with a private firm. Roy has three children, Judy has three children and Alice has two. And Dan is not married yet.

INT: I can hear the expectation.

JUDGE BECK: The expectation, yes.

INT: And where do you and your husband live right now?

JUDGE BECK: We live in Wynnewood, in the same house where the kids grew up.

INT: So you stayed out there.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: And how have your children responded to your working?

JUDGE BECK: I remember—see, I went back to law school when Alice was two.

INT: Alice is the youngest?

JUDGE BECK: Youngest. She was born in '59. She was just a little over two, cause I started
law school in-(end of tape 1, side 1-rest of side 1 is blank. Side 2 starts about a third of the way through.) I was in law school when Alice was two and a half. You know, I think she indicated at times that she didn’t mind my being away, but she was somewhat socially embarrassed when kids would come to our house and I wasn’t home and other mothers were, so it seemed to be a social embarrassment rather than deprivation for them, and they learned to get on. They’re very, all four of them, are very independent kids and they learned to be independent and self-reliant, and we had a work chart at home and they were expected to do a lot of household tasks, and in a way it was easier having four children because they pressured one another to do the tasks, which they did, and so you have to ask them if they were deprived.

INT: I’m interested in your point of view.

JUDGE BECK: From my point of view, I may have been deprived, you know, not spending as much time with them as I would have liked to but I think that’s where the deprivation was for me.

INT: How does your husband feel-

JUDGE BECK: We had a traditional household. No, he didn’t mind my going to law school as long as I got everything done that was expected of me. We had a very traditional household.

INT: What do you mean by traditional household?

JUDGE BECK: I managed the household. We had, as I said before, we had a housekeeper three days a week, whom we still see. Bea Waples was her name. And I was the C.E.O. of the household. My mother was wonderful. She would come. My mother was a good cook. I’m not a cook. I could live in a house without a kitchen, but my mother would come weekends and my father had died by this time and she loved to cook, so she would cook and freeze and the days the housekeeper wasn’t there we would defrost.

INT: How about were you involved in, when you went back to school and back to your career, were you involved in other activities?

JUDGE BECK: No. I did run for office twice. That was the one thing I did, and I guess I was active at the Ardmore Junior High for a while, but basically just going to school and being the C.E.O. of the household and the mother of four children consumed me.

INT: Right. But you indicated that you always had close friends.

JUDGE BECK: Always.

INT: And that went on-
JUDGE BECK: No. I gotta tell you that if I have to say one of the things that I didn’t, for the five years that I was in law school...I still am. I talk a lot on the telephone. I still do with my friends. But for five years I didn’t. I was very disciplined in terms of, you know, you asked me what I gave up. I gave up talking on the telephone, which was a sacrifice because I like to talk on the telephone.

INT: And did your friends follow you or join you in having careers?

JUDGE BECK: No, not necessarily.

INT: Do you find that there’s a relationship now between your social life and your career?

JUDGE BECK: No. That’s separate.

INT: Well, let’s talk a little bit about your clubs and organizations that you belong to now.

JUDGE BECK: Now. Oh, okay.

INT: Where are you now?

JUDGE BECK: Now I’m very active in the community. I’m chair of the Independence Foundation, which is—well, we used to have a hundred million dollars. We have more now because of the stock market, and we give away about five million dollars locally in the Delaware Valley and we give that in three areas. We support a number of community health centers run by nurse-practitioners. We support a number of legal services organizations and we also support cultural organizations. We support community cultural organizations as well as the major cultural organizations, so I spend a lot of time on that. I’m also—do you want to know what other things I do?

INT: Sure.

JUDGE BECK: That’s my major. I’m chairman of the Independence Foundation. I’m a trustee of the Free Library and I spend a considerable amount of time on that. I’m president of the Foundation for Cognitive Therapy and Research. If you turn it off I’ll get my list because I have a list someplace. (Tape shuts-end of tape 1, side 2)

INT: August 11, 1998. My name is Sally Benson Alsher and I’m here with Judge Phyllis W. Beck, who is the judge of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania. Judge Beck, tell me when you were born and where.

JUDGE BECK: I was born October 7, 1927, in New York.

INT: Where in New York?
JUDGE BECK: I was born in Brooklyn, but my family left Brooklyn when I was about a month old so I have no recollection.

INT: Where did they move to?

JUDGE BECK: My family moved to the Bronx where I was raised.

INT: Tell me a little bit about your grandparents, starting with your maternal grandparents.

JUDGE BECK: My maternal grandparents never came to the United States. I did not know them. My paternal grandparents did live here, in Mt. Vernon, New York, and I knew them. Let me start with my mother’s family. My mother was one of ten children brought up in a resort town in Poland called Choco Chinik. Her father, as far as I remember, was the manager of a forest for somebody else who owned the forest. Including my mother, four siblings left Europe and went to different places. Three generations of six siblings died in the Holocaust, with one exception to that. My mother and father were married in Poland and came here in the early Twenties—I think it was 1920, before the change in the Immigration Act. My mother had a brother who lived in London and I had four first cousins in the English branch of the family. Another of my mother’s sisters lived in Canada, so I had three first cousins there. A sister of my mother’s came to the United States from Berlin, where she had moved, and I have one first cousin on that side. I have one cousin in Israel because one of my mother’s nephews went from Poland to Israel. Otherwise, everybody else, was killed.

INT: What stories, if any, did your mother tell about her mother? Did she ever tell you anything about her?

JUDGE BECK: Not really. I don’t have any stories or recollections. All my mother’s folks though, those that I knew, coming down to this generation, just were enormously decent, sweet, lovely people, as was my mother. But in terms of specific stories—I heard stories about how she got out of Poland, but I never heard stories...she didn’t really talk about her parents or her siblings who didn’t survive.

INT: How did she get out of Poland?

JUDGE BECK: My father came from a family of six boys. They all left Poland. My father was from a small town called Lipner. They all left. She married my father in Poland and when my father came to America, she also came.

INT: When was that?

JUDGE BECK: My father came twice. My father came to America in about 1916 or 17, went back to Poland, married my mother and they came in 1920.
JUDGE BECK: My father came from a family of six sons. I had some cousins who had come to
New York City, probably in the late nineteenth century. I would see those cousins at weddings,
and they, to me, were grand because a lot of them were policemen, so they would come to these
weddings and functions in their police uniforms. Also, one of my father’s uncles was here. He
was extremely successful. And my father’s older brother, his brother Sam came, and was also
extremely successful, so I have no...I don’t have the experience that other New York Jews have.
When my grandparents came to the United States they lived in Westchester County in a three
story house, and that’s where I went to dinner on Shabbos, on Friday night. So I have no
connection or experience, which most Jews do, with the working class people, because none of
my father’s family were working class people, nor with the Lower East Side experience. It was a
very different kind of experience.

My father’s mother and father were very religious. My father and his brothers were totally
irreligious. They were...in those days, and it seems so strange now, you were either religious or
you were a Zionist. You could not be both. My grandfather was religious, my father was a very
strong, powerful, political Jew, and was a Zionist. So I never went to temple, but did have a
cultural...He was very strongly identified with being a Jew, had a very strong cultural Jewish
upbringing in terms of Jewish literature, Jewish music. My brothers and sisters...I didn’t go. I
was the youngest of three. They went to a Yiddish speaking camp, Camp Boiberik, and so we
had a very strong allegiance and ties to cultural Judaism, but not to religious Judaism.

INT: What languages did your grandparents speak?

JUDGE BECK: My grandparents spoke Yiddish. My mother and father at home spoke English.
When they didn’t want us to know what they were talking about, they spoke in Yiddish, so of
course I know Yiddish. My mother was self-educated and she spoke five languages. My mother
spoke Russian, Polish, German, English and Yiddish. But in those days, you were brought up to
be “an American,” so much to my regret, English is my really only language, although I perhaps
could pick up German if I was schooled in it, because when I was six my mother’s sister came
from Germany and my mother and her sister spoke in German, and when you’re a kid and you
hang around, you pick up a language. So when I go to a German movie I can understand.

INT: So your grandparents went to synagogue and they belonged to a synagogue here?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. My grandfather did.

INT: Tell me about family dinners, if you can remember, at their house?

JUDGE BECK: I can. They were terrible.

INT: Why?
JUDGE BECK: On one hand, my mother's family were extremely generous and loving people. I don't think my father's family was, and so I don't have happy memories. Very strict. I don't have happy memories of dinner on Friday nights at my grandparents' house in Mt. Vernon, except the fact that two of the six brothers were unmarried and they lived on the third floor of this very large house in Mt. Vernon, and all of us kids used to love to go up there because they had the current magazines and the current books. They were I guess what we would call swingers nowadays. They were very loving and they were fun.

INT: What did he do, your grandfather?

JUDGE BECK: Nothing. His sons supported him. He studied. The movie “Avalon” always gets to me because I start to cry from the beginning to the end. What did the grandfather do in that movie? Nothing. My grandfather did nothing. I shouldn't say nothing because that's too pejorative, but did my grandfather earn a living? No. Did he find it was necessary for him to earn a living? No. His sons.

INT: What about your grandmother? Did she cook?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Did she make all the traditional meals?

JUDGE BECK: Maybe she did. What I remember about my home is there was this surge and this urge to be American, so I was not really exposed to Jewish food at home. My mother always worked so we always had help in the house, but food-wise, it was certainly not traditional.

INT: Was it making brisket and-

JUDGE BECK: No. Nothing like that.

INT: Tell me about your father. What is your earliest memory maybe about him?

JUDGE BECK: My father was a businessman, a fairly successful businessman, so the other experience that I did not have...fortunately, we were fairly well off, so I did not have the Depression and the deprivation that a lot of Jews had. My father was really, in terms of me and my siblings, the intellectual force in the family. I really was very lucky to have both that intellectual force and this enormously humanitarian force from my mother, so I really...the good part of making progress or coming up in the world is the motor inside of you, what generates you, and that really came from my father. Humanity, which I hope I have, came from my mother. For both of them, education was extremely important. Although, as I say, my family was fairly well off, we were a totally non-materialistic family. Education, books, things like that, were what was important. In terms of being a father, my father was extremely loving. He was a great raconteur and a real charmer. When I went off to college-I went to what was then Penbrooke
which is now Brown, and I lived in dormitories where these New England maiden ladies were housemothers, and they used to love when my father came to visit, because my father would just charm the pants off them. As I said, he was a very great raconteur.

INT: What was his education?

JUDGE BECK: Neither my mother nor my father had very much formal education. It was what the Jews were permitted in a small Polish town, which I gather had a school set up by the Jewish community and established by the Jewish community. My father was a great reader.

INT: What did he like to read?

JUDGE BECK: The New York Times was in our house every single day. He sort of read current fiction and non-fiction.

INT: What did they do with their leisure time, if any?

JUDGE BECK: Leisure was not something that sat well with my parents, and it doesn’t with me to this day. I don’t take to leisure very well.

INT: Vacations or holidays?

JUDGE BECK: No. This was not part of...

INT: No seashores at the beach?

JUDGE BECK: No. People get great satisfaction from working. I’m like that too. They got great satisfaction from the learning and from working. As I say, leisure was not a value.

INT: Tell me about your mother. What kind of person was she?

JUDGE BECK: My mother worked. My father was in business and my mother worked with my father. As I said, we always had help at home. My mother was one of the great human beings of all times. She was a very close friend of mine and she just had a very caring soul.

INT: What did she do with your father? What kind of work?

JUDGE BECK: They were in the millinery business. That’s an interesting story too. My Uncle Sam, who came first to this country and who set up his parents very well, was in the millinery business. I guess it’s a typical Jewish story. You settle where your relatives settle and you go into some kind of business that your family was in. My father was the middleman who sold the felt bodies that went into making ladies’ hats.
INT: And your mother didn’t have to work but she just wanted to?

JUDGE BECK: No. Here, my father had six brothers. All my aunts worked. Everybody worked. Nobody sat down and thought, “Should I work, shouldn’t I work?” Everybody worked.

INT: Do you remember any stories about your mother that you might want to tell? Was she a religious person?

JUDGE BECK: No. Neither of my parents were religious. My mother was helping everybody, especially people who came over...the greener, from the old country. She was always the source of, I’m sure, great solace, to some of the people, and what was important both to my mother and my father, what was apparently important, was their family, their immediate family, and for my mother much more so than my father, an extended family. So she was very close. Those things were very important. She was not intellectual. She was very intelligent but my father had a real intellectual yearning, which I don’t think she did.

INT: How did she learn those languages?

JUDGE BECK: I guess she was just a natural. In Poland she spoke Polish and she spoke Russian. I just don’t know but I remember at college I took a year of Russian, and just recently a friend of mine who lives in Boston said he used to love to come to my house...he took Russian with me. We took Russian together. But he’s fluent in Russian and I’m certainly...I can say [Russian word] and that’s about it. He said, “I loved to come to your house because your mother spoke such a high-class Russian.” I have no idea how she learned it.

INT: Do you remember her speaking?

JUDGE BECK: Oh yes. I can remember her going from one language to another without missing a beat.

INT: What about holidays in your family? Did you always go to your father’s parents?

JUDGE BECK: No, holidays were awful in my family. You had to kind of...we didn’t go to synagogue, but on the other hand, you couldn’t live the day normally because it was a shonda for the goyim. So holidays were terrible. We got to stay home from school maybe. I don’t take leisure well so I completely...

INT: What about your siblings? Tell me about them.

JUDGE BECK: Very upwardly mobile family. I was the youngest of three. My older sister, who died in 1992, was very well-educated. She had a Ph.D. She started out as a social worker and had a number of high academic positions, and then the last phase in her career she was a psychotherapist. My brother, who I just spoke to this morning, is a Wall Street tycoon.
INT: Baby brother?

JUDGE BECK: No, I’m the baby.

INT: And they have children and they have families?

JUDGE BECK: They have children and families, yes. It’s just wonderful because not only were the three of us very close, but the next generation, the cousins, are all very close.

INT: What do you remember about your childhood with your siblings?

JUDGE BECK: I came from a very nice, very baalebatish house. It was focused. My father always had his way. It was his job to go make a living, and it was our job to go to school and learn. There was a minimum of nonsense in that kind of a household. I must say I think I raised my children the same way. It was just expected that we would behave and by and large, I think we did. I went to P.S. 80, which is a public school in New York in an upwardly mobile neighborhood. Some of the boys went to Harvard, to Yale. Others went to City College. My kind of defining experience was my high school days. I went to a high school in New York City which was also a public high school but it was for gifted girls. It was Hunter College High School. That was a school in which my cultural horizons were so enormously broadened. It was a school that was in Manhattan. Most of the girls came from more posh backgrounds than I did. As a matter of fact, one of my best friends is from high school and we E-mail each other all the time, and when Frank Sinatra died we E-mailed one another, and I commented to her that in high school, Frank Sinatra was the line in the sand. If you liked him you weren’t really intellectual. You had to like Leonard Bernstein and deny Frank Sinatra his due. Our E-mails revealed we both grew and were now broad enough to think they were both terrific. But in high school I didn’t think so.

INT: Tell me what your neighborhood, your community was like?

JUDGE BECK: Growing up, it was this upwardly, this unbelievably upwardly mobile community. I’m really now just talking about the Jewish kids.

INT: Were there non-Jews in your neighborhood?

JUDGE BECK: Yes, there were three types of people, categories of people in the neighborhood. There were the Irish-Catholics, the Italians-one block from where I lived was a neighborhood called Little Italy-and there were the Jews. The Irish went to parochial school. The Italians and the Jews went to the public school. Everybody kind of accepted everybody else. Everybody had his or her own turf. When I was in grade school, I don’t think I was in anybody’s house who was not Jewish. Once I went to high school that was different. I had two best friends, one of whom was not Jewish and I was at her house all the time and she was at my house. That too was part of my broadening experience. I thought everybody who was not Jewish was Catholic, growing up in my neighborhood, and my whole horizon really just broadened tremendously at high school.
INT: But in grade school in your neighborhood, you don’t recall any-

JUDGE BECK: No, there were no turf wars. Everybody stuck to-

INT: No anti-Semitism or any kind of-

JUDGE BECK: No. If there was, it didn’t affect...I think people were fairly respectful of one another and kept to their own territory, although in Little Italy it was a very colorful place to grow up because on the Saints Days there were bands in the street and there was effigies of the Saints. You got exposed to all of that, but strictly as an outsider.

INT: How would your parents react to something like that if they were cultural Jews?

JUDGE BECK: The Italians did their thing and the Jews did their thing.

INT: So it would just be something different and not-

JUDGE BECK: Right. There was a Catholic church in the neighborhood. My father especially did not react well to that, because of visions from the old country, but there was no overt animosity.

INT: How did his Zionism display itself?

JUDGE BECK: My father belonged to various Zionist organizations. I guess organizationally he was a Zionist. A lot of people-this was in the Thirties-that my parents knew, were leftists, and my father was not. My father was an American. My father was a capitalist. He would have no part, and I can remember political discussions and arguments at home. My father thought, from the get-go, that capitalism was the way to go and a lot of people with whom they socialized did not think that.

INT: Was he a Democrat or a Republican?

JUDGE BECK: Always a Democrat. It was the day of Franklin Roosevelt. But he was a capitalist and made a good living and it provided him with an opportunity and his children with the opportunity, so he did not favor a leftist point of view.

INT: So your childhood sounded very happy.

JUDGE BECK: It was fine.

INT: What did your room look like? Tell me what your house looked like?

JUDGE BECK: It was on the third floor of a very nice apartment house on the Grand Concourse
in the Bronx. You walked in to a fairly commodious center hall. You would go to the living room—there were two steps down. And then my sister and I shared a room. It was the first room to the left. My brother had a room in the back and then my parents had a room. There were two bathrooms in the apartment. It had an adequate kitchen and dining area.

INT: What about the housekeepers? Did they come and go?

JUDGE BECK: No. We had one for about ten years. As a matter of fact, she wrote to me recently. Stella Gossler. Most of the housekeepers in those days were from Pennsylvania. They were from the Allentown area. The housekeepers lived with us.

INT: Where they young?

JUDGE BECK: Young, yes. I think there was just a few years difference between my sister, who's five years older than I, and the housekeepers.

INT: What was that like?

JUDGE BECK: I don't know.

INT: You didn't know any different so-

JUDGE BECK: I didn't know any different. My mother and father set the tone of the house. It was in no way were the housekeepers relegated to supply us with values.

INT: So they were like maintenance basically.

JUDGE BECK: No, they were part of the family. Much more than maintenance. They were part of the family.

INT: And then they went on to eventually-

JUDGE BECK: Stella came back to Allentown and ultimately married. About two years ago she saw my name in the Allentown paper and dropped me a note, and I responded.

INT: What about friends? Do you remember friends from your childhood? This is pre-high school. Tell me about some of your friends.

JUDGE BECK: As I said, the Jewish girls hung together. We had a club called The Amicas and we played ball. We played basketball and we had meetings which I think we thought were very important. I've always had close friends and it really goes back to those days. (End of tape 2, side 1) My brother studied privately and then the bar mitzvah ceremony was at home.
INT: So he was bar mitzvahed. There was that.

JUDGE BECK: Yes, my brother was.

INT: So even though they weren’t religious they still-

JUDGE BECK: Yes, that was a symbolic...

INT: So they were willing to do that with him. Were there any other memorable events besides high school, because we’re not up to that yet, that you can remember as a child? Doing something as a family or going any somewhere special?

JUDGE BECK: I have a cousin who’s a year older than I. She was really kind of a fourth sibling. Her father, my Uncle Sam, was much more of a dandy than my father was, and he used to take us strolling on Fifth Avenue and they had a summer house at Lake Mahopac and we used to go there. My Uncle Sam’s family was a very close part of my extended family. He was in the millinery business too, but the manufacturing end, and he used to go to Europe twice a year. Then, when I got to stay home from school I loved it, because we used to go, my cousin Harriet and I, would go see him off on the Normandy or the Queen Elizabeth. We got all dressed up and went to the stateroom and that was very exciting.

INT: What were any of the other activities that you had? You said you had a club?

JUDGE BECK: Oh, as a girl? We had a club. We played ball. I went to summer camp where I also played ball. The girls hung out together. It was interesting. I haven’t thought about this in a long time. Girls hung out together and the boys hung out separately, but I think we were kind of, by the seventh or eighth grade, looking each other over.

INT: But you didn’t have a boyfriend then?

JUDGE BECK: I did. I did have a boyfriend, I guess in about the seventh grade. We went to the same camp.

INT: What was that like? What was camp like?

JUDGE BECK: It was Camp Towanda in Honesdale, Pennsylvania.

INT: Overnight?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Eight weeks?
JUDGE BECK: Yes. My boyfriend, whose name I still remember and he still remembers me because I keep getting regards—he ended up Dean or Associate Dean of Harvard Medical School. His name is Danny Federman. I have not seen him in a hundred years.

INT: There was some religion though at camp, you said earlier. They just did Shabbat maybe?

JUDGE BECK: I seem to remember them doing Shabbat. It was all very...it was the camp the Jewish kids went to and everybody in camp was Jewish but it was totally non-religious.

INT: What were some of your aspirations or goals growing up that you can remember, professionally or personally?

JUDGE BECK: I probably had a vague notion that I would like to have some kind of career. I certainly wanted to learn absolutely everything there was to know. I had an aspiration that I wanted to be engaged broadly in life. I think even as a very little kid I had that aspiration, which my father certainly encouraged. My father liked what he called powerful women, and he would refer frequently to people like Eleanor Roosevelt or Anna Rosenberg, who was in the Roosevelt administration, with great admiration, and that set in my head that I would like to play-

INT: There was a lot going on then.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. I would like to be part of the broader scheme.

INT: Who were some of your role models or mentors? Who did you look up to when you were a child? Eleanor Roosevelt obviously.

JUDGE BECK: When I was a child? My mother. I'm trying to think of...no, I guess basically my mother.

INT: Let's talk a little bit about school. You talked a little bit about high school. Tell me a little bit more. You got to high school and it put you into the city.

JUDGE BECK: It put me in the city, in Manhattan. It also put me with...There's a book my Muriel Sparks called "The Prime of Miss Jean Brody." I loved it. My high school was much like that. In the book, the teacher kept referring to "my girls," who were la-creme-de-la-creme. That's the way our teachers referred to us. At least that's what I got from it. I still am not sure everybody felt that way but I certainly felt that way going to that high school. My sister went to that high school, as did my cousin Harriet, who was a close part of my extended family.

INT: How did you get there every day?

JUDGE BECK: On the subway, an hour each way. I learned a lot of Latin verbs that way.
JUDGE BECK: Yes. It was a defining experience, number one, not so much physically, because we still lived in the Bronx, but I left the Bronx mentally at that point, and I saw a very broad world and I liked it.

INT: Tell me what things happened there that were inspirational and that inspired you in other ways.

JUDGE BECK: Academically, I did alright in grade school, but when I went to high school I really began to shine and blossom intellectually. To this day, two of my closest friends are from high school.

INT: What was your favorite subject?

JUDGE BECK: I kind of liked everything. It was such an intellectual feast for me.

INT: What were your favorite books?

JUDGE BECK: One was...one of my friends gave it to me as a wedding present. It was “Tom Jones,” by Fielding. I must have loved that book because she gave me a first edition as a wedding present. It was a very classical education.

INT: And rounded.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. At home I had been introduced to a lot of current literature and political books. In high school I really think I had a very classical education. Four years of Latin and Shakespeare, physics. I kind of liked everything.

INT: Tell me about the social setting there. That must have been really fun.

JUDGE BECK: Okay. When I went to high school, it was an all girls’ school. There was no male even around. All of the teachers were women. Some of the teachers still wore their skirts to the floor, covering the ankle. Like in my home, there was an expectation you behaved. I guess some of the women from what I hear didn’t, but I certainly did.

INT: But it also must have broadened you socially, to take a train to come in, to have friends there. Did you stay in the city? Did you ever get to stay late and do things?

JUDGE BECK: Sure, all the time. I had these two best friends and one lived at 95th and Park, and her family was my family and my friend Virginia lived up near City College, in an old brownstone. Yes, I was always at their houses and they were at my house. There was a constant interchange, and as I say, an enormous broadening.
INT: Who was your favorite teacher?

JUDGE BECK: I guess she was my biology teacher, Mrs. Lillienthal. People said, “How did I get to Penbrooke or Brown?” She was a major influence.

INT: In what way?

JUDGE BECK: My sister had gone to Hunter High School and then went to Hunter College. My sister thought it was a major mistake for me to go to college in the city, so she had my parents primed that I should go out of the city, and then there was the question of where I should go. My parents talked to Mrs. Lillienthal and we kind of just hit upon Brown which is where I ended up going.

INT: Tell me about that. When did you go? What were the dates?

JUDGE BECK: From ’45 to ’49. It was a very exciting time to be in college because the boys were just coming back from World War II. Except for gym, all of the classes were coed. Classroom activity itself was very interesting and for only one reason, because of the experience that the men coming back had. I found college absolutely easy after high school. It was a no-sweat experience for me. I loved social life. I loved fun.

INT: You went to high school though during the war years. Was that any-

JUDGE BECK: That was very different. I think we started class at 6:30 in the morning. We got up practically in the middle of the night because we started class at something like six-thirty or seven because the Navy used the building in the afternoon. A number of us did things like we rolled bandages at the Metropolitan Museum. I remember sitting there rolling bandages in the afternoons. You wrote a lot of letters to the fellows, all of whom were overseas.

INT: Who in your family were overseas?

JUDGE BECK: My brother was in the Navy. It was all of his friends who were all part of my social life before they went into the service.

INT: It must have been hard for your father, for your mother, to have your brother in war.

JUDGE BECK: Well, everybody was...it was different then. Everybody was doing it. My brother enlisted when he was seventeen. There was nobody who was not in the service.

INT: So you were at Pembroke with other women, some of which were still your friends from high school or nobody went?

JUDGE BECK: No. Just one girl from my high school went to Pembroke/Brown with me, so it
was a very different crowd from high school. It was essentially, in those days, upper class. A large percentage of the girls came from upper class, private schools.

**INT:** So you were received well?

**JUDGE BECK:** Yes. There were no sororities. There was no social demarcations.

**INT:** What inspired you to go to law school?

**JUDGE BECK:** That's an interesting question. After I was graduated from Brown I worked for Time Magazine. I worked for Time, Inc. for a while. Then I got married and we moved to Western Massachusetts, where I worked for the Berkshire Eagle, which is the newspaper up there.

**INT:** Did you write? You were writing?

**JUDGE BECK:** Yes. From Great Barrington. The Berkshire Eagle is out of Pittsfield and I worked out of Great Barrington. Then I moved to the Philadelphia area. Then I had four kids and I stayed home for eleven years. While I stayed home, I was active in politics in the Democratic party and also League of Women Voters and the kids' schools. By the late Fifties-I had had my fourth child in '59, I realized that I would be relegated to pasting stamps on envelopes for the rest of my life unless I had a career. Since I was kind of crazy about the kids, I didn't want to just introduce myself to the world and say, "Here I am, whatever you want me to do I'll do,"...so I decided what I really needed was a niche career, and so I went to Bryn Mawr and studied psychology, because my husband was a psychiatrist and I figured, "Well, I could always get an interesting job in that field because I know a lot of people in that field." I was a political science major in college.

I spent a year studying psychology. I could do it intellectually but I was really attempting to fit a square peg in a round hole. It just was not me. I have four kids and it never occurred to me to go to law school, and one time I was at dinner with some friends—it was a dinner party at somebody's house, and I was complaining about Bryn Mawr—how I hated it. And this woman whose name was Sheila Humphrey said to me "What would you have done if you were a man?" I said, "Sheila, that's such a wonderful question. I can't answer that question. I don't know what I would have done." But I said, "I'm going to think about it," and I thought about the question for a long time and thought that what did the boys from Brown who did as well as I did—what did they do? And I realized that many of them went to Harvard Law School, and that was the first time it occurred to me that maybe I should go to law school. On the other hand, I wasn't liberated to the point where I'd thought I could just go to school and leave these children. And so I initially went down to Penn, because my husband was on the faculty and money was very tight then, and I realized that I could go to Penn for free, and I went to see the Vice Dean. I later became the Vice Dean at Penn Law School. He was incensed at me because I came to ask him if I could go to law school part time, and he said no and he was insulted and he said would I try to go to medical...
school part time? And I said, “Certainly. If I wanted to be a doctor that’s what I would do,” but he would have no part of me. I then went to Temple, to which I am eternally grateful, and they had a night school which would be part time. And so that was how I got through law school. I never knew a lawyer in my life. I knew nothing about the practice of law, but after I read my first case—when I opened the book—it was for me and it’s been for me for thirty years.

INT: So when you were in college, you got a degree but you didn’t necessarily think you were going to do anything with it?

JUDGE BECK: I got a terrific job.

INT: That’s true.

JUDGE BECK: Around the country, I think the Time, Incorporated chose five women to work there. But I got married, so that’s why...no, I would have stayed. I was happy there. I would have stayed there.

INT: Because you could have made a career through that.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: How were you received as a woman? Well, this was in ’67 so-

JUDGE BECK: No. I went to law school in ’62 and was graduated in ’67. Temple is a marvelous place. If you could do the work they don’t care if you’re a woman, if you’re a man, if you’re black, if you’re white, if you’re Hispanic. They don’t care. All they care about is the way you can do the work. It’s still like that. It’s a wonderful place.

INT: I just want to digress a minute because I have a question. When you were-

JUDGE BECK: My motivation in going to law school wasn’t only that I would be relegated to pasting stamps. I was really a total misfit in my expected social role. I wasn’t the least a misfit as a mother or as a family person—that I was always crazy about—but in my expected role I was a total misfit.

INT: What do you mean?

JUDGE BECK: I had no commonality with women who were doctor’s wives. None. I didn’t care about clothes. I didn’t care about food. I didn’t care about decorating my house. I didn’t care about any of the things that were on their screens. None of their interests were on my screen. I felt peculiar, like an oddball.

INT: What were some of your other friends doing, who weren’t necessarily living with you but
the friends that you had gone to Penbrooke with? Did they go on to do other things?

**JUDGE BECK:** Not at that point. No. Not at that point. People got married and had children in those days. People, especially women, are really controlled by their environment.

**INT:** Was there anything when you were in college—anything that you can remember about that period, because that was like the Fifties.

**JUDGE BECK:** That was the late Forties. I had a wonderful time. I just blossomed socially. Continued to grow intellectually, but socially I really blossomed. I was head of the Zionist Organization of America, the Brown chapter.

**INT:** What was that like?

**JUDGE BECK:** I was active in Jewish affairs. I was very active in Hillel.

**INT:** What motivated you to do that?

**JUDGE BECK:** I’ve always had a very strong Jewish identity. So I was head of the Zionist organization and I was active at Hillel, as well as being active in the Brown community.

**INT:** That must have been very interesting. That was also the McCarthy era, in the Fifties—

**JUDGE BECK:** No, it was pre. That started...it was pre. But I went out with some Jewish boys. I went out with a lot of non-Jewish boys. Mainly non-Jewish. But there again, when I think back on it today, where the bars are certainly lowered, but in my day, when it came to making a final marriage decision, you would not marry out of your religion.

**INT:** What were some of the stresses and strains that you experienced going back to school?

**JUDGE BECK:** I loved it. Still I had a very traditional household. My husband was supportive of my going to law school as long as I did everything a woman was supposed to do. But going to school was my joy. We talked about leisure earlier. That was my pleasure.

**INT:** So you just walked around with a book all the time?

**JUDGE BECK:** No, not really, but—

**INT:** When did you study? When did you have time?

**JUDGE BECK:** I studied very hard for exams. I didn’t have a great legal education because I didn’t do all the work I should have done. Hopefully I’ve made up for it, but I didn’t do all the things I should have done, but I managed to get by.
INT: Your youngest child was how old?

JUDGE BECK: Two. And the interesting part of that story is the amount of social...this is now 1962. Betty Friedan wrote and published “The Feminine Mystique” in ’63 so this is prior to any thought of the Women’s Movement. The amount of social disapproval I got, to me was extraordinary. You just asked me what happened in law school and in law school everything was fine, but the amount of social disapproval-

INT: Because you were leaving the children?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. From both men and women. When I think back on it now, it was outrageous.

INT: But you were still there for them. It was night school.

JUDGE BECK: People cared. I don’t know why anybody else should have cared what I was doing, but people cared. I think people were threatened by it. I was the first one to do it. People were threatened by it. I didn’t ask anybody’s opinion but I would go to a party and get people’s opinions.

INT: So you were an outcast before and you’re an outcast now.

JUDGE BECK: But I don’t care. But I did care when I was home. I really felt like a social outcast.

INT: Tell me some of the ways—the women wouldn’t speak to you or they would be-

JUDGE BECK: When I went to law school? Oh, I would hear things like, “Oh, you’re doing a terrible thing. Your children are going to end up in the gutter.” Those kinds of comments. “How could you do this to your children and your husband?” But those things I could just walk away from. I didn’t feel bad about that for long.

INT: What has been your involvement in the Jewish community? You spoke about Zionist organizations, Hillel when you were in college. Did that continue?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. My husband...but things shifted once I married because my husband came from a synagogue family. We haven’t even talked about him. My husband came from a family which always had belonged to a synagogue. He had a traditional Hebrew education, and all my children have. I’m very grateful. Because of him, all of my children were either bar mitzvahed or bat mitzvahed and they all know some Hebrew, so I’m very grateful for that, and they’re all highly observant Jews, much more than I am.

INT: What were some of the values and ideas you had when you began this journey, this process
of law school?

JUDGE BECK: I just wanted a little job, a little part-time job, that would be of interest to me. That’s it. Period. I had no great aspirations.

INT: How were you able, do you think, to advance over the years?

JUDGE BECK: That’s a hard question. I think it’s a combination. I talked to you before about the motor inside one that generates one to do things. I think it had to do with a lot of...a combination of ambition, brains and luck. I’d be hard put to proportion them, but I think it was all three things. I’ve always been open to opportunity. I can remember—I’ve spoken to a lot of women’s groups, been on a lot of panels. In the early Eighties I would be on panels with women who all had their five-year-plans, and I never had a plan in my life like that. But my antennae were always up. (End of tape 2, side 2) In terms of outward manner, I don’t appear to be tough. But I’m strong and I’ve had adversity which I won’t talk about, but which I triumphed over.

INT: Where do you think that comes from?

JUDGE BECK: Family. Maybe it’s genetic. When I look at my brother and my late sister, we’re all tough. I don’t mean tough in a pejorative sense. I mean tough in a strong sense.

INT: Persistent?

JUDGE BECK: Persistence and being able to...I have to think about what I really mean by that. It’s not toughness in...I don’t think I’ve ever yelled at anybody, but I don’t bleed too easily for people.

INT: You don’t take a lot of guff, no nonsense.

JUDGE BECK: No. I think everybody that knows me and works with me would say that.

INT: What shape does your spirituality take today? How do you express your spirituality at this point in your life?

JUDGE BECK: By being as decent as I can to as many people as I can. I would say that’s how.

INT: What other interests can you tell me about that you’ve had that are special to you, or did we cover-

JUDGE BECK: I think most of them are covered. I read a lot. I play tennis. I go to a lot of cultural events. I have an awful lot of fun. For the last ten years, my New Year’s resolution is always the same, “Have more fun,” which I’ve done.
INT: You talked about some adversity. What other things have you had to overcome that you feel were important?

JUDGE BECK: When things happen in life, you can... I guess some people take self-defeating paths in response to adversity. I’ve either been lucky or smart, and have never taken a self-defeating path. When I ran for office-first I had to get my nomination approved by the Pennsylvania Senate. It was a challenge that I had to figure out how to do it. I guess in that way I’m trying to say I do have that toughness. I know instinctively what path to go down, and I go down it, almost with a force fully of its own. Do what I have to do, and I don’t get distracted.

INT: What would you have done differently?


INT: Not law school earlier?

JUDGE BECK: No. I think women of my generation were lucky because we had our children when we were young and now I’m having a great time with them.

INT: What does it mean to be Jewish and female in the twentieth century, from your perspective?

JUDGE BECK: I think being Jewish and being female feeds into the same end. It’s a sense of having responsibility to the community, having a responsibility beyond yourself. The fact of the Holocaust has overwhelmed my adult life. My response to the Holocaust is that it’s always made me very sympathetic to people who have been through real trouble. I can tell real trouble from fake trouble and I’m super-responsive to people who have real trouble.

INT: You feel more affected now than you did maybe when you were younger?

JUDGE BECK: No. I’ve always been overwhelmed by the Holocaust.

INT: Was your family... did they feel the same way?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Your dad, your mom?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. Overwhelmed by it.

INT: Because your mom lost family there.

JUDGE BECK: This wasn’t even personal. It was personal as a Jew. It wasn’t personal in terms
of did I lose anybody I knew and loved. The answer to that is no, but the enormous affront. The enormous barbarity and cruelty of it.

INT: What about being a woman in the twentieth century, going into the twenty-first century actually?

JUDGE BECK: As I told you before, I think it’s been to my great advantage in certain ways. In those where situations I did feel discrimination, I got out of those situations. On the community level, I do whatever I can to support women. I’ve very supportive, both organizationally and personally, of women.

INT: Do you feel a mentor to other people?

JUDGE BECK: A lot of people tell me I am.

INT: As a role model?

JUDGE BECK: Yes. I think probably to my daughters I am.

INT: Were your sons bar mitzvahed?

JUDGE BECK: Yes, and my daughters were bat mitzvahed.

INT: What was that like, to not have done that yourself and to have-

JUDGE BECK: It was the right thing to do and they were going to Hebrew school. They all complained about Hebrew school and I’ve always said that Hebrew school is something you’re not supposed to like. That’s what I am where I’m tough. They didn’t like Hebrew school-so what? My response to them is, “You’re not supposed to like it-just go.”

INT: You were conservative that way.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. The entire religious piece comes from my husband, not from me.

INT: Did his family keep kosher?

JUDGE BECK: In part. I think they didn’t eat pork. My family did. We ate pork. We ate lobster. But they didn’t. And so it didn’t matter to me. I certainly modeled my household to-

INT: And the one daughter is very involved in the synagogue.

JUDGE BECK: Yes.
JUDGE BECK: My children are also closely tied to Judaism. Except for my son Dan, who is not married, they're all married to Jewish people. And they all belong to synagogues and all of their kids-

INT: Do you still belong to the synagogue?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: And go on High Holidays?

JUDGE BECK: Yes.

INT: Which synagogue?

JUDGE BECK: Beth Hillel.

INT: Both as women's role have evolved and continued to be identified and changed, what is your hope for the future of women's involvement in the Jewish community?

JUDGE BECK: Well, I have a worry there, but it's broader than the Jewish community. As women have become more and more career oriented, those communities that depend on women volunteers may not flourish. Women have always been the purveyors and the conveyers of culture and values. As women are very involved with their careers, I worry that the religious and philanthropic communities will not fare well.

INT: I agree. I agree with that. Where do you see yourself in the picture, in the Jewish community at this point. You said you're becoming more involved with that. For any particular reason?

JUDGE BECK: Because somebody asked me.

INT: Anybody can ask you?

JUDGE BECK: Absolutely. I can say yes or no.

INT: What advice or warning would you offer to your children, grandchildren or successors as they become involved with the Jewish community?

JUDGE BECK: Here again, I can't confine my answers to the Jewish community.

INT: Well, to the community then.
JUDGE BECK: I think family is most important. I think we each live a very long time and I think it’s very important to keep things in perspective, and certainly when the kids are young that the focus of everyone-man or woman-is on the family.

INT: Is there any message that you would like to kind of end with? Anything that you’d like to say that we haven’t talked about or you want to add?

JUDGE BECK: I am particularly sensitive to woman. Unfortunately, the media picks on women and is always sending them messages, and women indiscriminately buy the message. Now the message is that unless a woman has a career, there is something wrong with her or she is missing something. Well, you can’t prevent the media from sending out these messages, but any woman that listens to the message uncritically is lacking. It may be that for you having a career is not right, and so you really have to search and do what’s right for yourself. I don’t think the media sends messages to men that are quite that directed, but they do to women. The message I got in the Fifties and the message which took me a long time and a lot of pain to overcome was “You had to have children, stay home, make mayonnaise and bread,” and if you weren’t happy doing that there was something wrong with you. Now, it took me a long time to say, “That’s a message but it’s not a message I’m going to buy.” But I think women are notoriously bad in buying whatever message is sent, and when I think of the Fifties’ message it was very different from the Nineties message, but the whole idea that women buy whatever message is sent uncritically.

INT: What about the idea that women maybe need to work more today, in the Nineties, their lifestyle and everything, and maybe have to.

JUDGE BECK: You got to put that into your whole life as part of figuring out how you could lead a successful life. But following anybody else’s messages isn’t going to get you to leading a fulfilled life.

INT: What friends were really supportive then of you? Your old friends seem to have been supportive of you and what you did in your life.

JUDGE BECK: Yes. I’ve always been blessed. Ever since I was at P.S. 80, I’ve always had close girlfriends, and I use the world girl. I have close girlfriends now, and I include my two daughters and my daughter-in-law in that. That’s been a mainstay for me.

INT: Is there anything else that you think we haven’t talked about or that you want to add?

JUDGE BECK: I don’t know. Turn it off for a minute and let me think. (Tape shuts) ...and in the community, I am very careful to be identified as right.

INT: We didn’t really talk about the political side of your career. Tell me a little bit about that.

JUDGE BECK: As I said to you earlier, I started in the Fifties in Delaware County, where I was
a Committeewoman. Then in the Sixties I ran for political office twice. I live in Lower Merion. I ran for the school board twice and was defeated twice because it’s a highly Republican area. Now, once I got on the bench, I gave up politics. As I said, I was appointed in 1981 by Governor Thomberg and then stood for election statewide in 1983. I tell women’s groups all the time that you never get a job unless you apply for it and work for it, and that includes the President of the United States. He’s looking for your vote. When there were openings on the bench, the statewide bench, in 1980, I applied for the job. Applying for the job was not sitting back and saying, “Gee, aren’t I smart, aren’t I terrific, wouldn’t I be valuable?” That’s nonsense. I had been a lawyer for a long time. I had a lot of political contacts. It wasn’t accidental that Governor Thomberg appointed me. I was lucky, because I don’t think he would have appointed me unless I was a woman, but I had to get all the political ducks in order to do that. You have to know how to do that. And then I ran statewide in ’83. I had to raise money. My committee asked people for money. I ran in all sixty-seven counties in Pennsylvania, and I really had a very good time.

INT: It’s must have been a lot of work.

JUDGE BECK: It is.

INT: Traveling and the constant-

JUDGE BECK: I started in 1980, I was elected in November, ’83, so it was close to four years that I worked. I worked very hard politically. That was one of the more interesting parts of my career. As a judge, you can’t be political except...there’s one exception. You can lobby for the improvement of the judiciary, and I’ve been very active in a group called Pennsylvania’s Modern Courts, so I’m frequently in Harrisburg lobbying for judicial reform. My work in judicial reform stemmed from 1987. Governor Casey appointed me chair of the Judicial Reform Commission. I’ll show you a copy of what we put out—a report which is about 190 pages, and from that report a statewide movement developed called Pennsylvania for Modern Courts. I limit my political activities to judicial reform, but I’m still very involved in Harrisburg, with the legislature and the government, but limited to judicial reform.

INT: What did you like the most about the political scene?

JUDGE BECK: I really am a great admirer of politicians. A lot of people I know sit around and talk. It’s the politicians, it’s the committee people, that really oil the wheels that make the democracy work. I have always been very respectful of politicians, and truly admire them and like them as a group.

INT: Can you say your favorite politician that you’ve known and worked with?

JUDGE BECK: There was a woman who died two years ago named Genevieve Blatt, who ran for the U.S. Senate, who ran for a lot of state offices. I was the third women in the state elected to statewide office. It’s shocking. This was 1983, and there had only been two other women,
Genevieve Blatt and Grace Slome, who was the treasurer. Is that not shocking? 1983 and I’m the third women to gain statewide office?

INT: It is, but I think it has to do with some of the-

JUDGE BECK: Times have improved. Improved enormously.

INT: You have to have the drive, I think, too.

JUDGE BECK: The drive and the know-how.

INT: And the determination to do that. So what other kind of advice or warning-I don’t mean advice but things that you have to tell to your successors, for example.

JUDGE BECK: For women to get ahead, on the one hand you have to be focused but on the other hand, you have to have...there again I talk about the antennae up. You have to be a risk-taker.

INT: Do you see things changing for the twenty-first century?

JUDGE BECK: Sure.

INT: There will be more women-

JUDGE BECK: Oh yes. This is no question. I graduated from Temple night school, I was the only woman in my class. I think the day class had three women, three or four. Now over 50% of the law school class are women. You see more women in the legislature. As far as I can see, there’s almost no deliberative body that does not have a woman.

INT: Who are some of the women today that you admire?

JUDGE BECK: Politically?

INT: Yes.

JUDGE BECK: I like Hillary Clinton.

INT: Why?

JUDGE BECK: I don’t always agree with her. But she’s out in the world, confident that there is a place for an intelligent voice in the world, whether that voice is a man’s or a woman’s. Certainly Golda Meir was a very important woman. I guess I like women who are players.
JUDGE BECK: I like women who play on the broad canvas.

INT: Is there anybody else out there that you admire?

JUDGE BECK: There's a whole slew of terrific women in this area, many of whom I'm really friendly with, and who are supportive of other women.

INT: Is there anything else that you want to add or did we-

JUDGE BECK: I think you've covered everything?

INT: Are you sure? I'll have to come back if not. Nothing else that we haven't talked about?

JUDGE BECK: I don't think so.

INT: Thank you very much.

JUDGE BECK: Thank you. (End of interview)