UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LAW SCHOOL

ALUMNI ORAL LEGAL HISTORY PROJECT

NARRATOR: JUDGE ARLIN M. ADAMS

INTERVIEWER: PROFESSOR SARAH GORDON

PLACE: SCHNADER, HARRISON, SEGAL and LEWIS

DATE: JULY 1, 1999

TIME: TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

:31 Introduction

1:01 Birth Date and Place

Philadelphia, 1921

2:52 Parent Occupation

Father was an artist before going into the hat industry. Mother was a homemaker and then worked in department stores because of the depression.

3:11 High School

Olney High School. The school won 22 of the 24 city scholarships. I did not get one.

6:26 College

Always wanted to go to college. Decision to go to Temple based on its proximity to where I lived and worked.

6:41 Law School Decision

Always wanted to be a lawyer. Penn gave a full scholarship.
Between College and Law School

Volunteered to serve in the Navy because I was very impressed with the Pearl Harbor events. Saw action in the North Pacific.

Law Review

Editor-in-Chief. Learned a lot about writing and research. Activities during Law School. Earned my Master’s degree during this time awarded by both Penn and Temple.

Size of Class

During the War the Law School had very few students. Classes had about 10 kids, many women; the guys were drafted or took defense jobs.

Fondest Memory of Law School

I loved the Law School. The greatest intellectual experience that I had ever had.

Influential Law School Professors

Dean Keedy, Herbert Goodrich, Fry, and Chadburn.

Clerkship

Chief Justice Horace Stern of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. He called the Dean of the Law School to choose a clerk.

Career Options

I was offered a teaching fellowship to Harvard Law and I interviewed with the law firm of Schnader, Harrison, Segal and Lewis. Dean Earl Harrison recommended that I do both, practice and teach at Penn. Starting salary at the firm was $3000.

Initial Types of Work

 Mostly brief writing for Schnader. Very close relationship with Schnader who’d had no children himself.
On Being Appointed Secretary of Public Welfare

Started the Head Start Program. Introduced music and art programs for the retarded. Made birth control available to people on welfare.

Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association

Was given permission by the law firm, (Schnader) to become Chancellor. Had a wonderful executive director but didn’t have the hierarchy that they have today so the Chancellor had to do a great deal of the work. It took up two-thirds of my time.

Richard Nixon

Friendly with the then Vice-President Nixon who asked me to come to NY and be a part of his team. Upon advice from Schnader who thought he would become the next president, I agreed.

Being Appointed to the Third Circuit

Richard Nixon wanted to appoint me to the Third Circuit. Was told by the Attorney General not to take too long to think about it, it was an important position. I agreed, there was no confirmation process.

Most Demanding Aspects as a Federal Judge

Had only one female law clerk. Enjoyed all aspects, the briefs, the oral arguments, the conferences and the opinions.

Philosophy as a Judge

Thinks precedent is extremely important and was very open to new ideas, but was kind of conservative in my thinking. I was reluctant to disturb legislative judgments. Received more and more civil rights cases.

Law Clerks

Because of a feeling that I was going to be appointed to the Supreme Court, faculty advised students to apply as clerks. I wanted people who worked very hard, didn’t mind long hours and were very careful in their thinking and research.
Teaching at Penn

Shortly after becoming a judge, Dean Bernie Wolfman called to ask me to teach constitutional law and I unwisely agreed to teach three days a week which was eventually changed to a seminar on the First Amendment.

Approach on Religion Clauses

Had some doubts about Justice Brennan’s position on prayer in the school and Christmas decorations and conducted my own research. That’s what whetted my appetite for the subject.

Resigning from the Bench

After several traumatic serious considerations to the Supreme Court and investigations on my Mother in a nursing home, I didn’t want to expose my family to that any longer.

Returning to the Law Firm

Was disconcerted that the emphasis changed to money. There was a lack of interest in younger lawyers. I thought I could do something to change it, but it is a forlorn hope. But someday the profession will come back to where it was, but not for a long time.

Public Service

I devote a great deal of time to mediation and arbitration, an important development in the law. You will see a great deal more alternative dispute resolution because the cost to litigate is so expensive.

Health Field

Sick people in HMO’s are not getting the attention or medication they are entitled to. Sick people can’t wait two years for problems to be aired. There has to be a mechanism to resolve that.
Independent Counsel for the Investigation of HUD

Was there from 1990 until 1995. There was one case to be completed against the Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, which took a long time because of a few other cases on appeal. But the bulk of the work was done in five years. Although not in existence any longer an independence counsel should’ve been restricted to investigation of a person in a high position, and limited to a year term.

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts

The principal position has been trying to promote merit selection of judges. Appellate Judges, should be appointed and not elected.

Board of Overseers

Law school was going down in reputation and in its ability to recruit students and faculty. Physical plant left a lot to be desired. The Law School wasn’t getting enough money from central administration. The University began saying that the Advisory Board needed to get alumni to contribute more.

American Philosophical Society

The oldest learned society in the U.S., fashioned after the Royal Society of Great Britain. It’s dedicated to promoting “useful knowledge.” It has 550 American members and 100 foreign members.

Public Speaking

I get called on three or four times a year and I enjoy talking about the profession and about religion.

Degrees and Awards

The Honorary degrees from Penn and Villanova meant a great deal, but the Philadelphia Award has great history and many wonderful people who received it.

Advice to Law Students

Law School is a great experience even if you don’t want to practice law. It is a wonderful preparation for business, publishing and writing. Take it seriously and work hard.
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