

Mercedes Diez

SR 1256, Oral History, by Linda Brody

1981 February 5-27



DEIZ: Mercedes Diez

LB: Linda Brody

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Tape 1, Side 1

1981 February 5

LB: Judge Deiz, can you tell me where you and your family came from?

DEIZ: You are referring to my family, or my family that I have as a result of being married to Carl Deiz?

LB: Your family — where you came from.

DEIZ: Before I got married?

LB: Yes.

DEIZ: I was born in New York City, first generation American, I guess. I don't guess, I know it's true. My father was born in Cuba, and my mother was born in what is now called Czechoslovakia, but it was Bohemia when she was born. I was raised in New York City.

LB: Why did your family stay in New York City?

DEIZ: [Laughs] I'm laughing because New Yorkers never seem to leave their native city. Essentially New Yorkers — and I think they still are — a provincial sort of people. When you're born there, you don't go anywhere else. Manhattan, and all the other boroughs of New York City, is inundated with people from all over the United States as well as from all over the world, but those who are born in New York invariably stay there.

You asked me why did my folks stay? First of all, my father — I'll have to think, because you are doing some digging. My mother I know came to the United States with her parents when she was seven years old. She learned English very quickly, so as a very little girl, I understand, she became the interpreter for all of these Czechoslovak people in the lower East Side of New York, and went on — I'm really very proud of her — to become a secretary. She was the first class to graduate from the first high school that taught commercial trades, in other words, to be a stenographer and a typist. Because I know Mom was telling us about a three-row typewriter which you see in museums nowadays and I can't imagine anybody typing on just three rows.

Then her father — her mother was a midwife — was a carpenter; that seems to stick in my mind. He became a farmer in upstate New York, and the family went to live with him in upstate New York someplace. At which time apparently when my mother became 16 or 17 or 18, he decided to (her father) engage her to some other old farmer who was as old as he was. So, my mother told me a long time ago that she just ran away from home, in order to escape from this kind of a marriage, which was alien to everything that she understood because she was an American since she'd gone to all the schools here. Then she ended up in a doctor's office as his secretary, in which building, I think — in fact I know — my father was working as an elevator operator. They fell in love, which must have been fantastically unreal in those days, and they married.

My father was really a very handsome man, very dark, literally very dark skin, very good looking guy who, while he literally was born in Cuba, was the child of West Indians, and — I don't understand this part — because he was raised in Cuba, he spoke Spanish as well as English. When he came to the United States I don't know. He was an entertainer, and he danced and sang and he was extremely, we thought as children, fantastic. In those

days, this is before I was born, just prior to our getting to the First World War, he did a lot of entertaining on the vaudeville stage but always pretended, when he was in any community, especially in the South, that he could not speak English, and he wore a turban wrapped around his head. He used to boast about this.

He was always able to go into any hotel anywhere, because no matter how dark he was, this country's such a nutty country, that they never said, "We cater only to white people," and Francisco Herberto Lopez — that's how he'd always say his name when he was showing off, but his name was Frank Herbert Lopez — would pretend that he could not speak English, and could only speak Spanish, so he was housed anywhere he wished to be in a hotel! He used to boast about that sort of thing, so it gave all us children a kind of wild desire to understand what are the intricacies of America, because we had two good parents.

Before you turned on the machine, you knew that I am the oldest of 10 children, because my parents were Roman Catholic and they simply didn't believe in any kind of birth control. I suppose I shouldn't say that: I suppose they wanted 10 children because it's nice to have a lot of kids, too, but not when you're terribly, terribly poor. We were not terribly poor until the beginning of the Depression, which was about 1931. Then it really was pretty bad for many, many people in New York City. That's about my parents.

LB: Was your mother employed when you were growing up?

DEIZ: No, never. She always was home, raising the children. She gave up of herself completely, at all times. My mother believed in everybody reading anything and everything. She never permitted any of us to speak English ungrammatically; we were never permitted to use any slang whatsoever. I know that children say "ain't" these days so easily; that was simply a word that was never used in our household. When I say she gave of herself literally, she did. People always thought each one of the Lopez children was an only child. I don't know how she was able to do that, because each of us was made to feel extremely important. By having so many kids, however, which I don't believe in, personally, because

she lost her teeth, much of her beautiful hair, all that stuff goes out of your body — Now what am I telling you all that stuff for? I think I'm trying to say things to my own mother, who's been dead a long time. You said that happens.

LB: Yes, it does. I read that your family — That you had grown up in Harlem. What kind of an education did you receive when you lived there?

DEIZ: Actually I did not grow up in Harlem. I was born in Harlem Hospital, I went to public school, as we called it, to about the 3rd grade in Harlem, I believe. At that time there was my sister Carmen and my brother Paul, and I think my brother Pedro was born then, too. Then we moved to the East Side of New York which was considered the Lower East Side. Not all the way downtown, but on the East Side where there were very few black people. Lots of Germans, lots of Jewish people, lots of Italians, lots of — a few Puerto Ricans, very few. A polyglot neighborhood. Everybody was a foreigner, everybody, except the children. The children were all born in the United States. We heard languages all the time; we enjoyed foods from all cultures; and everybody just lived with each other, poor and happy, and cussin' and fighting and carrying on.

LB: What kinds of family activities did you have?

DEIZ: Almost every two years there would be another child in the family, so that our activities were such that they were full of imagination. We always put-on make-believe plays at home. A few neighbor kids would come in, but there were enough of the Lopez's to have a good time by ourselves, and play lots of records and dance and sing and carry on. My brothers learned quickly to teach themselves to play guitar. I, to get away from all of these children, and to get away from the penury of our circumstances, lived in the museums, because they were free. I'd go with perhaps my sister Carmen, and every Saturday I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the American Museum of History. It was a long walk, but kids can walk. We lived in the libraries. In those days, you could go to

the movies for a nickel, but it's kind of hard to find a nickel when there's a whole lot of kids to give nickels to. What did we do for entertainment? We picnicked in the park. There's lots of free things to do in New York.

LB: You mentioned earlier that your father was an elevator operator. Did he continue that job?

DEIZ: No. All the years — I've never known him as an elevator operator. To me my father was a valet in hotels, not a gentleman's gentleman, which I'm sure he could have done, too. He also spoke beautiful English. All of the hotels had, in those days, tailor shops. It never occurred to me until you asked me how unusual that must be, because nowadays when you and I go to a hotel we know we can send the laundry somewhere — which I've never done — but people, I guess, who stayed in hotels, would send their suits and dresses and things out to be cleaned on the premises where my father worked, and I don't know what else he did. I've gone to those very prestigious hotels, that I've visited with him, and I saw the big Hoffman machines that they press with, inside of the hotel. Interesting. I hadn't thought of that. Because he worked in hotels, despite our not having any money, we always had fancy foods. Perhaps, not enough milk and other things, but there'd be caviar, special crackers. I guess he brought those things home. I don't know if he ripped them off or what, but we'd have special salmons and cans of this and that. Until the depth of the Depression, then all the jobs ended.

LB: How did that affect your family?

DEIZ: It was pretty bad. That's not answering you. You asked me, are there any things I'd rather not talk about? I suppose my children never want to hear about old history, so I've never even said it out loud. My husband here, Carl, indicated to me that there was no feeling about the Depression in Portland, Oregon, the way I attempted to tell him when we first got married. The winters were extremely cold, and the only way to keep warm was to

find wood, and everybody — the children, including myself, were always out there scavenging trying to find wood to put in the stove you had in the apartment, the tenements. We always lived on the top floor, purposely, in order to have more sunshine and more light. The houses were terrible, and sadly, there are still some of those buildings standing in 1981 in New York City, that were horrendously bad in the 1930s. Isn't that awful? We ate, I guess. We all didn't die, but it was a very bad time. Then I lucked up on work.

LB: Had you graduated from high school by that time?

DEIZ: Yes. I did very well at school, because I got out of grade school at the age of 12, so I got out of high school when I was 16. I could not afford to go to college in any kind of way, even though I had the grades to get into Hunter — which would not take any kind of tuition money, but you have to buy books, and you have to buy supplies, and get back and forth, and have something to eat. My very first job when I got out of high school was at a very prestigious ladies' shop, which still exists, I think, on 5th Avenue, called The Tailored Woman. I don't remember — I think I got that job through the high school.

LB: What did you do there?

DEIZ: I got paid a dollar a day — they ought to be ashamed of themselves, I don't care how terrible the Depression was — I was hired to be the maid. The maid was supposed to take the carpet sweeper and clean up the dressing rooms from all the pins and the lint that came out of the clothing, and keep the place straight. I was very happy to have a job. The problem was it was very frustrating because it was dumb; there was just no challenge to it. There was a crew of white girls working in a part of The Tailored Woman shop, whose job it was to — what do they call those people? I can't remember; they weren't salesgirls, anyhow — to take the price tags off which indicated the wholesale price, and just automatically double the price in order to make it retail. They were doing it very badly, and they hadn't even graduated from high school, and they'd say, "Hey Merce, how do you add

these things?" So, I would go in and keep doing it and fixing it and getting it over with quickly, because really it was not difficult. I was pretty frustrated because they wouldn't give me the job.

I didn't know anything about racism. It would never occur to me that anybody was not giving me something because I happened to be black. In those days you said Negro. In those days, I guess I didn't particularly know what the heck I was because we didn't give it any kind of thought. We had a mother and a father, and nobody pointed at you when I was being raised, in that area which was literally people from all over the world, with emphasis on most of the nationalities that I indicated. Nobody said you're one thing or another. Everybody was wanting their children to get an education. We went freely to each other's homes. So, it never occurred to me, that perhaps, that was the reason that I couldn't get this other job. Anyhow, the job ended because I was fired after I'd been there about four or five months, I think. Because a woman up-chucked in the restroom.

And they said "Mercedes, go clean it up."

And I said "I can't do that."

They said "What do you mean you can't do that, you're the maid."

I said "I can't do that because if I do it, I'm going to vomit, [Laughs] and I can't do that."

So, they said "Well, you can stay till the end of the week."

So, I got fired. Thank god! [Laughs] I mean, some people really don't think do they. I was really a little kid then.

Then some miracle happened, and somebody told me there was going to be a W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration] Federal Theater. I went to the Urban League, the first time I had been to the Urban League, and I was at that time 17 years of age, and this was then in Harlem, where I went. They sent me to the Lafayette Theater, where a lot of people were being considered for all kinds of jobs. I didn't have enough sense to know how to sell myself, so I said, "Could you please hire me as an usher?" So, they hired me as an usher. I could have been hired as a leading lady! [Laughs] Not really, but I mean I could

have made up any old thing, not that top, but something. To me, theater meant an usher. What else do they have in theaters? I didn't know any other thing.

This was the Lafayette Theater, which is, to this day, really quite famous, because the Lafayette Theater had been the place for the black renaissance theater prior to the Depression. The building had kind of gone into a lot of misuse, and it was fixed up. We were extremely fortunate because those who were hired were under the tutelage of John Houseman, who everybody sees these days, as well as Orson Welles. Orson Welles was the director, and John Houseman was the producer at the Lafayette Theater, which did a lot of work in putting on black theater. For an impressionable 17-year-old, I had, for the next four years, the best exposure in my life, literally, of all kinds of wonderful things that opened my horizons.

LB: Did you become acquainted with John Houseman and Orson Welles?

DEIZ: Yeah. Everybody knew everybody. It was a together family. I didn't realize — They didn't know what was going to happen to them either, but even I knew that a man named Orson Welles was simply a genius. He was pudgy then, about 21 or 22 years old. He's really not much older than I am. Had this manner of evoking from the people on the stage — because I watched all the time — anything he wanted. I liked Shakespeare very much when I was at school, in high school, and when I saw it being done on stage and understood the nuances of what Houseman and Welles were doing in bringing it out of people, I couldn't have put it into words what I'm saying to you now, but it made such a difference. Macbeth is a play that I will know all the time, many of the parts, because I was an usher for maybe a month.

Then somebody asked me, I don't know who — Yes, I do, too. Dr. Unthank, who's now deceased, was a very famous doctor in this town, his brother — I didn't know any Dr. Unthank out here — but his brother was the business manager around there, and he moved me from being an usher to being a switchboard operator in the front of the theater. Where the box office is, we had a switchboard, and I quickly learned to operate a board,

which hooked up to the theater all over the place. Switchboard operators are just like Tomlin, that actress. You know everybody's business. I really loved that work. I was able to switch my hours finally. By 1936 I knew I had to get back to college. All the fellas who worked at that theater said I was a nice little girl, and I was everybody's sister. Very frustrating: I never had a boyfriend; I've never been out anywhere, and here I have this job with all these milling people around everywhere, all wacky wonderful theater people -

LB: You were 19 at that point?

DEIZ: Eighteen. I wasn't 19 yet. I only worked as an usher one month; then I went on to the switchboard. There were a couple of fellas who were going to law school someplace, and talked to me about law school. I said, "How do you get to be a lawyer? What a fantastic thing to do." I was very pleased, and they said, first you're going to have to get your college; you know that. So, I contacted Hunter and found out, which I knew anyhow, that I had had four years of Spanish but I needed a second language before I could get in. I had not had two languages. I went to night high school, and worked in the daytime, and took two years of French in one year, and then I was able to get into Hunter in 1938.

LB: What happened to your family at that point? Were you the first one to leave home?

DEIZ: I was still living home, I was still home. People do a lot of things in a few months, don't they? I hadn't thought of that. I got this background out of the way, and already was (inaudible) from high school, so that's all I needed, except I needed this other language. I went to Hunter in the daytime, and I worked the switchboard at night.

Then I got married, stupidly, but I did in 1937. He was a good guy, unfortunately, Billy Owens was, and I didn't know it because, again, I had never gone out with anybody, and all those fellas were saying, "Mercedes, you're a nice person. Just go to school and go to work." Everybody else seemed to be having a good time and I didn't see why I shouldn't get married. I guess that's how you have a good time. Sounds very, very naive. I

can't believe it. His mother wanted us to marry. My husband then was unfortunately an alcoholic, and I just didn't understand what alcoholism was, and I was a good Roman Catholic so our oldest boy was born, and WPA ended, and I went to work in a union.

When I say, "our oldest boy" that doesn't make any sense. My son Bill Deiz was born William R. Owens, okay? This is a thing he knows so there's nothing to hide in that except that I don't want it to be blabbed around the world. It's just that I don't mind it being on your tape.

LB: How long were you and Mr. Owens married?

DEIZ: That's what I'm trying to remember. From 1937 to 1948 when I came out here. How long is that? Eleven years? I got my divorce in 1949 — Incidentally, when you opened the tape you said February 5, 1981, and I grinned, because February 5, 1948, my Bill and I — I told him that this morning, because he drove me to work — stepped off the train in Portland, Oregon, and I thought I would be in the deep depths of snow like in Alaska. So when the porter on the train wakened us up at The Dalles — I didn't know anything about the West — and said, "You're approaching Portland," I put some galoshes on Bill and I put some galoshes on me and I got us all wrapped up real tight, and we stepped off the train in 1948 on February 5, 33 years ago. My brother Paul, who lived here said, "Where do you think you are, Ellis Island?" [Laughs] It was a sunny gorgeous day — you know how Portland can be in February, like it was this morning, and the grass was green — and I felt like an ass. [Laughs]

LB: So this is a historic day.

DEIZ: Yeah, it is. I'd forgotten, 33 years ago. I shall remember you, Linda Brody.

LB: Let's go back to your marriage with Mr. Owens. What did you do when you were married to Mr. Owens? Did you work, or were you a housewife?

DEIZ: I always worked. He would get jobs off and on, because he was drinking too much, and I was getting tired of supporting that guy.

LB: Could we maybe return to your days at Hunter, and discuss what you studied there?

DEIZ: You know how long this will take if we go into all of that stuff? Who wants to hear all of that?

LB: I think it might be interesting. What were you studying at that point?

DEIZ: It sounds as though I always wanted to be different. I guess the truth is that that's true. I was trying to figure out what kind of a major could I have that would be different from what everybody else had. All the gals I knew who were going to school were always going to be a teacher or a nurse or a social worker. I said, "I don't want to be any of those things, everybody else is that." That sounds like I'm showing off, but I did say that. I figured, what had I never heard of, and somebody I read somewhere wrote something about a dietician, and I said that would be a good idea. There'd be food. I guess we were always hungry. I took physiology as a major, and what was my minor? What do you call that course where things slide down hills?

LB: Physics.

DEIZ: Physics, which I should never have done. You said you don't like science too much. Neither do I. Things slide down the hill — Isn't that ridiculous? I can see the classes at Hunter where they were always having balls going down things and up things, and we were supposed to understand exactly what the teacher was talking about. The teachers were terrible.

LB: How long did you attend Hunter?

DEIZ: A little more than three years. I don't have that many more credits in order to get my degree in something. I went from 1936 to 1939, so I went for three years.

LB: You attended school while you were married?

DEIZ: Oh, yes. Had I not been married I definitely would have finished school. It was a question of trying to support myself and my husband, who had jobs sometimes and a lot of times didn't have jobs. He would be terribly frustrated because literally, for him, the racism in America affected him very badly.

He was born in New York City also, and should have been a playwright. He was very talented. I met him at the theater, because he worked in the box office at the same Lafayette Theater. He always drank too much, and in those days, at least, nobody understood what alcoholism was, that it was a disease and hopefully could have been treated had there been the means to find the way to do it. He would — The reason I left, finally, despite my religion -

Because for years I simply did not believe in such a word as divorce; I had to leave New York to do that because you can't get a divorce in New York except for infidelity, adultery. I don't sound very much like a judge, but we haven't used that word in so long I couldn't remember what it was.

LB: It's a rather archaic law.

DEIZ: True. That's why we got rid of it. I came west specifically to stay with my brother for a while and start a new life.

LB: Did you actually know you were going to stay in Oregon, or was it just a temporary thing?

DEIZ: I didn't. I had assumed that I would stay here for a while and get the divorce, if I hadn't really made up my mind to do that, and then go on back. I became enamored of a fantastic place to live after being here a year, so...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

Tape 1, Side 2
1981 February 5-12

LB: What kind of work were you prepared to do when you came to Portland?

DEIZ: The federal theater ended about 1939, 1940, and I fortunately got a job for about four years working in a union, the Hotel and Club Employees Union, where I learned much more about office procedures and literally honed my own skills in office work. Then, when Bill got born in 1943, I went back for a while and the war ended. Hallelujah! That's the other thing. You say this is an autobiography, and you were also indicating when you were turning the tape that you didn't exactly know what you wanted to do with yourself: I never really knew what I wanted to do either. I knew I was never going to be the things I've just told you about — that was just a means to an end.

During the war I knew that I had all of this college credit, which many gals don't have, and so — this was before Billy was born — I said, “I'm going to join the WAVES.” [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] I liked the name WAVES, and I'm going to leave my husband and he can join whatever he wants to join. This was a terribly important war to me because I've left out all this political thing that I believe so strongly in over all these years, that we've reached. We've gone from my beginnings until about 1942. Up until that time I had become quite active in civil rights and stuff like that. I knew by that time that most likely they were going to say, “We're not going to let you be an officer in the WAVES because you are colored,” and I was going to fight this thing all the way down the line.

First of all, anything that we can do to in order to fight the Nazis and everything that Hitler stood for, which was the most abominable thing in the whole world, plus the fact that I could become an officer — that would be really neat. So I got all the necessary papers and nobody acted as though they were terribly amazed that this “colored girl” came to get the papers, and I got them all filled out to hopefully to become an officer in the WAVES, and then I was feeling awfully morning sick-ish and I found out I was pregnant, so there was no way to get it which was just as well. I'm not a military sort of person.

I have no idea how that would have worked. We all seek things to do.

After Bill was born, and I didn't want to stay at the union anymore, I'd been doing that long enough, some friend suggested seeing someone who worked in a fashion advertising agency in the Empire State Building. That was my last job before I came to Oregon. I worked for two years at a fashion advertising agency where I was the coordinator for the art department in hiring all the freelance paste-up work artists. No, the paste-up work artists worked there, on the premises, but all the artists would bring in all the original kind of gorgeous art work and the copy and all that — I coordinated it. I've had some interesting jobs, now that you remind me. They were interesting.

When I came to Oregon, I was looking for work in advertising because I knew that that was a fascinating field, the kind that was something like theater because I really did like theater. It can give you ulcers and can also be a dog-eat-dog business which I really didn't like, but I figured there's a way to move ahead in that field. When I got to Oregon, and I did check on getting work, some outfit here which helped newcomers in those days, they helped men and women who came to Portland, particularly minorities, sent me to what was then called the Iron Fireman, which is now one of the biggest corporations we have.

LB: An advertising agency?

DEIZ: No. The advertising agency was Gerber Advertising. Gerber suggested that I go over to Iron Fireman because they had their own advertising department. They were willing to hire me to write copy about furnaces, and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. I said, "What do I know about furnaces?" and I turned them down. When people learned about that stuff they said, "You must have been crazy." There are no women in advertising, hardly, and certainly not a Negro woman in advertising. "Why did you turn that down?" I said, "Fashion advertising in clothing, and furnaces -" I've always been very fortunate when it comes to job hunting. I've always gotten a job, always.

LB: I want to ask you one more question and then we'll finish up for today. You mentioned that you were active in civil rights in New York. Were there any other issues that you were active in besides the issue of being an officer in the WAVES?

DEIZ: People in theater, at least in New York, are very articulate in letting the world know how important it is to be concerned about human rights, about the horrors of fascism, about how people get along with each other.

All of that exposure I had, as I told you, by being so lucky to be in the federal theater. Not only did I work — I was paid to work in the federal theater which was in Harlem, but the WPA Federal Theater in those days also had what was called the Living Newspaper. I would attend those productions regularly, and learned — so much that was absolutely current in terms of the whole world, from that which was being shown on the state. From a kid who had just lived at home and going to school and being in museums, I was abruptly learning many, many things during the many formative years that youngsters go through until the age of 21. A number of big stars that are big movie stars now — I knew them as people. I was a very quiet person, not noisy and talkative like I am now, just sitting there quietly absorbing whatever anybody's talking about.

Then I became active when I was working for the trade union; I became the shop steward to organize all the women who worked in this trade union. What do I find out, but even though we're working in a union which was for the Hotel and Club Employees, throughout New York — they didn't want us to be unionized, [Laughs] So we had a picket in order to get decent hours and decent working conditions and a decent salary, which was incredible. That's when you start getting more sophisticated — always there are problems, and it isn't all that simple.

I picketed some stores, I remember, down on 14th Street, and that's when I learned about police brutality, because while I wasn't hit, the cops on horses because they ride horses in New York — were hitting the women who were picketing the department store down on 14th Street with their billys across their breasts so again you'd get alerted to the fact that there is a lot of evil and badness in the world.

My first husband and I used to put on parties to raise funds for such things as the Scottsboro Boys. I didn't know who they were, but I just knew there were some terrible things going on down South. I learned about the dichotomy of this country — that's what I mean. When you try to telescope years, it seems that I'm talking too much, but when I think about it in terms of month by month — There's a myriad of things that all of us have done during those various times. How we enjoyed life. I danced and played and had a good time too.

[Tape Stops]

LB: Judge Deiz, when we last spoke we talked about your arrival in Oregon on February 5, 1948. I was wondering what kind of impressions did you have of Portland, and specifically the black community, when you arrived here?

DEIZ: The impressions after I had literally been in Portland? Not something I anticipated, but something I saw?

LB: I suppose so, yes.

DEIZ: I saw a verdant, green, balmy day such as we have today on February 12, but it was much more sunny. I had arrived at Union Station with my son. My brother, who picked us up at the train station, took me right across what I now know is the Broadway Bridge across the Willamette River, which of course I promptly told him he should pronounce Will-a-MET [Laughs] in my proverbial way of telling people how to pronounce words, and I was 1,000,000% wrong. He lived in what I now recognize — and for years know — as Albina, in an area that now — It was on Benton Street, on which presently sits the new warehouse building for Portland Public Schools. That whole area, to my amazement, was full of black citizens. I really was amazed about that because I had not realized that there were that many black people in Portland, Oregon.

At that time, in the area of Broadway and Williams Avenue, was a fascinating assemblage — No, not assemblage, a fascinating community of people. Even though I missed, and was quite homesick for, New York City, it wasn't really — I had much more social life I think here than I had ever anticipated, because in that same area that I'm talking about there were several churches that had a lot of activity that I was invited to, and there were clubs — nightclubs.

In those days they had what you call bottle clubs, and they didn't sell any liquor except if you belonged to these clubs. That was new to me, but I didn't drink anyhow so it didn't really matter. The musical bands that came through Portland invariably played at these clubs. I was much younger than I am now and I had a wonderful time. At night I'd get invited out and go dancing. You want the names of some of these clubs, because I can't exactly remember -

There was a place called Sandy's — Gosh, my husband's going to get annoyed that I can't remember these names right off the top of my head.

LB: Were they just for black people?

DEIZ: No. The membership was supposed to be black, I guess. I think it was a circuitous sort of a thing for people to be able to buy booze when they were out having a nice time. You brought your bottle and you paid ostensibly for the club soda and the ginger ale, but you still were paying just about as much for that stuff as you would be if you were buying booze. There were always a lot of white people in these clubs. I never saw a segregated club. What surprised me, coming from the streets of New York without trees except where the parks are, was that everybody had lawns, the majority of the homes were very well, tended and very well kept up, and there were also homes in that area that looked disheveled and bad, but the overwhelming majority had very nice homes. Then my brother took me one time I remember to a place called Vanport, and I was amazed to find a city that looked geographically as large as half of Portland, Oregon, and when I learned the

population of that place, which I can't recall now, it was obvious that it was the second-largest city in Oregon.

The other impression I have of 1948 is that it's the only time in my life that I literally was discriminated against by a sign. I remember it because it's the only time that it's ever happened — an overt discrimination. I was with a friend. We drove up in a car — this was another thing we didn't have in New York either — they had these drive-up restaurants, drive-in restaurants. I never saw such a thing until I came west. The waitress came out to — this place was on Interstate Avenue going north toward Killingsworth; it doesn't exist any longer — and the waitress came out and my friend rolled down the window of the car and ordered a couple of hamburgers and two cokes and she said, “I'm sorry, I can't serve you.” I was wondering what was wrong with her, and she said — my friend said, “What do you mean you can't serve us?” because he was a very militant guy — and she said, “Because I can't serve colored.” I said, “You're not serious. First of all, we're not even going in to your stupid joint. We just want you to bring out a couple of hamburgers and cokes.” She said, “I'm terribly sorry.”

That got me started, literally, in Oregon, to get very active with the Urban League and the N.A.A.C.P. [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and go down to the legislature and start lobbying with lots of other people. By 1949 we did in fact get the — The ability of every person to be accommodated in any place of public accommodation became the law of this state. I can't remember exactly the title for that kind of legislation — it went into effect by 1949 — I'm not saying that Mercedes — it was still Owens at that time — that I was instrumental in having that done, but I was certainly very much a part of this kind of a fight to work together with many progressive minded people throughout Oregon, who thank God, changed the laws in this state.

LB: Who were some of the people who worked? Do you recall?

DEIZ: There was a nice lady named [Marie Williams?], Oliver E. Smith — I'm talking about black people at the present time — my brother Paul Lopez, and his wife, Odillia, both are

dead now, the [Rutherfords?], certainly Dr. Unthank and his wife, Thelma. Many of those who are in executive positions in the Urban League and whoever at that time was the head of the N.A.A.C.P. I can't recall, but [Shelly Hill?] of the Urban League...

LB: Did you say that you were surprised at that sort of discrimination then?

DEIZ: I wasn't surprised; I was shocked. I couldn't believe it. We had just finished the Second World War. The idealism and the altruism that I had literally assumed was going to spread its beneficence all over the world was still very much a part of me and everybody else that I knew. I certainly was very well aware of the fact that during the Second World War black troops were segregated, and that we had all gotten there fighting for democracy. I also found to my amazement how much the Japanese were discriminated against on the West coast, because we didn't know anything really about that on the East coast. Our newspaper simply didn't carry the emphasis on the fact that the Japanese were placed literally in concentration camps on the West coast. All of that I learned about when I came here, and this pristine fantastic Northwest I thought was the frontier for great democracy was in one sense that, and in another sense full of a lot of damn racist attitudes and hatreds. It surprised me very much.

I learned, subsequently, that because so many people had come to Oregon to work in the shipyards during the war that all kinds of — they claim — new attitudes were brought to this state, and that because the minority population had expanded tremendously because of the war that all of these new restrictions — which I call abominable and illegal, became a part of the culture of the Portland, Oregon area. Blacks made it clear to me back in those days that you never would go to a place like Klamath Falls or Bend, Oregon or Hood River, because, “Niggers better get out of town by sunset.” I never experienced anything like that.

I've just told you, Linda, one specific overt act of discrimination that I had against myself, which didn't mean that I wasn't aware that all these things were always going on.

LB: You said when you were

DEIZ: I should include the name of Bill Berry, who was very active as the executive director of the Urban League of Portland at that time, who had a great influence on the peoples of this part of our state.

LB: You mentioned that you never had any trouble obtaining employment, and when you first worked here you went to work in an advertising firm?

DEIZ: No, you misunderstood, or I didn't make myself clear. Because I had some experience in advertising, I thought I would go back into that same field when I got here, and I turned the job down, which I think was very stupid on my part now that I think back on it because of the fact that they didn't have women in that industry or very, very few, and there were no blacks in it, okay? But I didn't take the job because I wasn't interested — I thought — in writing any copy about furnaces. I didn't know anything about it anyhow, but I could have learned.

For a bit of time I had some trouble finding work that would support me and my child. For example, Bill Berry, who I mentioned just a moment ago, of the Urban League, insisted that I go to work in a laundry, because they were trying so hard to integrate the force of people who were working at a laundry. I told Bill Berry there was no way in the world I was going to work in anybody's laundry. He got pretty annoyed with me because he said my duty to help in this matter of race relations involved going to work in a place where — well, I just wasn't going to go, period. And I didn't.

I finally got a job part-time with the Internal Revenue Service, because an old friend of mine — you don't need all of that. A New Yorker was here, Leonard De Paur, with the De Paur Infantry Chorus, who was putting on a fantastic concert as he always did at our Civic Auditorium. I went backstage, and Leonard wanted to know what in the world was I doing in Portland, and anyhow, he introduced me to a couple of lawyers who he — no, that's not right. Michael Loring was a cantor and I also knew Michael Loring as being a

great actor — I thought — matinee idol in New York. He lived here, in Portland, Oregon, at that time, and Michael, who I had run into somehow in Portland, took me backstage, and that's where I saw Leonard and the two of them together told the lawyer that I had to get a job. This attorney, who no longer is in Portland, recommended calling somebody at the I.R.S. That's what I tell you — I always get jobs some kind of way. I got this ear-rending job of banging away on a graphotype machine making metal plates of taxpayers. I have to say it was ear-wrenching because the machines were all located at the customs house, which is up there on Broadway, and the whole first floor was covered with these big machines. Did you ever see those machines? You sit there — it's like a typewriter, the keyboard — but you're making metal plates. Nobody does that stuff anymore, thank God. Very, very loud, and very noisy, and what a clatter! But I was so delighted to have a job that was great. It wasn't too far from where I lived at that time on Benton, so that I could walk back across the Broadway Bridge while trying to save some money when the weather was good, anyhow.

There is where I really met Carl Deiz, because he had just graduated from the University of Portland, and he was a tax collector. Which I thought was — My goodness, who ever hear of a black person being a tax collector? What kind of a job is that? [Laughs] It was alright for me to work at I.R.S. as a clerk but -

Carl was kind enough at times to say, "May I give you a ride?" when it was raining, and he drove me to the nursery where my child was and we started sparking each other. I might indicate since you're making this interesting tape, that I met Carl, I think, that first week I had arrived here in 1948, at the Urban League, because somebody introduced me to him as a fellow who was a Republican and was campaigning very strongly for Tom Dewey — who was the governor of my state — to become president of the United States. That turned me off Carl Deiz emphatically, and I wouldn't think of speaking to him. I despised Tom Dewey — I think every working mother despised Tom Dewey — I really don't mind it being on the record.

The man is deceased, I guess — I don't know whether he is or not — but he was very strongly averse to having day-care centers for us working women during the Second

World War. The only time I ever went to the capital of my state, Albany, was to — We went up there with baby carriages, carrying our kids, and took this long train ride to go there to convince him to consider the plight of us, in that we needed someplace to leave our children while we helped earn a living, and also help the war effort. Well, he wouldn't even open the gates to his mansion.

I can remember this to this day, Linda, the children were so thirsty, so was I because it was July, I think, and they wouldn't give us any water. They had snarling dogs at the gates. Everybody was treated as though you were dirt. When I found Carl Deiz was campaigning for this person, I wouldn't speak to him until I found him almost a year later when we were both working at I.R.S.

LB: How did you handle working and caring for Bill? You said he was in a daycare center.

DEIZ: Yes. Blessed Martin day-care nursery was one of the — on Williams Avenue at that time. I think it still exists, but has a different name. Black and white children were in that school. It was run by Catholic sisters; it was an extremely good day-care center, and I really mean that, because my child, Bill, had been in nurseries even since he was two months old. I was always looking for a place that would not be just a day-care center, but would literally be teaching him something and helping him to mature, while working together with children, helping him to be more balanced and all that business. I got him in there, and fortunately the charges were based on your income, so I was able to manage until such time as he went to first grade.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

Tape 2, Side 1
1981 February 12

LB: Tell me, how did your personal life and your employment progress at that point?

DEIZ: The job I had with Internal Revenue Service was a temporary job. I had not taken any Civil Service exams in order to get it, and I knew it would end with the ending of the tax period. Then I got a new job temporarily working for the Oregon Methodist Association as a lady's — Pearl Sherlock, bless her heart — as her secretary. Methodists, at least that Methodist, didn't believe in smoking, and I used to have to sneak around smoking cigarettes.

Carl would come — before I got the job with the Oregon Methodist Association, he started visiting me at my brother's house and we'd go to the movies every now and then. What is very interesting about my husband way back then and to this day, which is 32 or 33 years later, he doesn't drink and he doesn't smoke and he doesn't really cuss — I don't mean really, he doesn't, he doesn't even say “damn” — he loves red pop and popcorn. When we'd go to the theaters downtown to see a movie, 'cause they didn't have these kind of shows we have nowadays (four and five in a building) he always bought popcorn and red pop and I thought that was so funny, because I'm supposed to be “Miss Sophisticated” from New York. [Laughs] You know, he never said, let's go to these clubs that I was telling you about, 'cause he doesn't like to dance, which is very frustrating.

He had so many of the qualities that I think any woman would be very fortunate to have in a husband, and he had an automobile. That sounds like I'm horribly materialistic but it was great. I never knew anyone who owned a car, and Carl had a good job and he was a college graduate, and he was a Portlander, and he was very attentive and kind and considerate — nothing bad about him at all, where I had been used to a lot of — not bad people, but — more [Laughs] “nutty” people, yeah that's a better word. He's a very calming influence on my life. If you think I'm speaking fast now, I understand that I used to go a mile a minute like Neil Goldschmidt. I've slowed down tremendously.

I had applied for work through the Urban League again, with the help of the Urban League, to work at Bonneville Power Administration. I must have taken the Civil Service exam for that, in fact I did, and I got hired to work as an assistant in the law library. I got that job on October 3rd, 1949, which meant that it was a regular Civil Service job, and I was delighted, because at last I had some stability for work, and I would know what my hours were.

The problem was you had to be at work at eight in the morning and I really had to figure out what to do about Bill. By that time, I knew my husband's mother and grandmother and his father, and I knew that Carl and I were in love and we had to get married because you don't live with someone that you're not married to.

Oh, I had forgotten. I had gotten a divorce, okay, I got the divorce in the spring of 1949 – So, Carl's grandmother insisted that we get married on a Friday or a Wednesday – I can't remember what day it was. She just said some day of the week was very important.

I had gotten the job on October 3rd and we got married on October 5, 1949, which really annoyed the people at Bonneville Power Administration because you fill out yards of paper when you start on a new job, and so all these yards of paper had to be redone and refiled under the name of Deiz. They said, “Couldn't you have gotten married before you started the new job?”

Carl's grandmother said, “You must own land.” I had never thought of such a thing. Whoever owned anything? I had always rented. She gave Carl and me – maybe his mother did too, I can't recall, but I think it was Grandma Foster – \$500, with which we bought a lot. Can you imagine buying a lot for \$500? On North Portsmouth we built a home, or had a home built. It was while we were waiting for the home to be finished, we lived in university homes, which were war – homes that had been built during the Second World War which were only temporary housing. We lived there until the house got built and then we moved into our really lovely little house on Portsmouth, where we lived until we moved to this present house in 1963 – that capsulizes Carl and me.

He applied to Bonneville also, and he was – he left Internal Revenue Service and came to work at B.P.A. [Bonneville Power Administration] a few weeks after I did, I think.

He worked as a budget analyst in one way or another, but usually in the Chief Engineer's office. It made our life easy, to be able to go to work together.

Bill was the problem in that — based upon the kind of work I do these days, Linda, I suppose I would be severely criticized. But we went off to work to be at work at 8:00 in the morning, left this child home, because Boise School — while our house was being built, before we ever moved to university homes, Bill went to Boise School for about four or five months in the first grade — the little house I lived in very temporarily was right next door to Boise School, and we had a phone, and the minute I got to work and called home and said, “Bill, are you eating your breakfast?”

Because before we left, we had gotten him dressed and ready to go to school. So, I talked with him all the time on the phone. And he was eating his breakfast. And I said “Now close the door”

“Yeah.”

“Got your Key?”

“Yes.”

And off he'd go to school.

Now this kid was only six, and so nowadays when parents come in fighting over custody and they tell me they left a child alone — I keep wondering where would I be if somebody had said I was a neglectful parent? I know that I was not a neglectful parent, but there was no way to do it any other way. The moment 3:00 arrived, I always was on the phone from work to call home and say, “You're in the house?”

“Yes.”

“Get out of that cookie jar.”

“How did you know I was in the cookie jar?”

I said, “That bird came over here.” My kids were so funny. They always believed me about some bird that flew in and saw what they were doing. You do that with your kids too, Linda? Aren't children funny? They really believe you.

He never was in any trouble, and he waited until we got home and then we did things as a family, always, together, the three of us. I never left him at night in any kind of

way. He got himself off to school and he got himself home from school by the time the house was built on Portsmouth — that would be 1950 — and Karen wasn't born until 1952. Again, I had no babysitter for Bill Deiz, who by that time was adopted by my husband, because my first husband did not object to the adoption. Bill has always been raised by Carl Deiz, and that's his Dad. I wouldn't have married any man who wouldn't have adopted my kid. That just didn't make any sense to me.

LB: I'd like to come back to your husband in a moment or so, but first, what happened to you — the stage is sort of set, I assume. You're working in a law library. What happened from there?

DEIZ: It still had nothing to do with my being a lawyer, if that's what you mean. I liked it very much; I was able to do a lot of reading in relation to technical things about dams and electricity. I don't want to you think I was all that intrigued by it, but I have to read, and while doing my work, you read whatever you — I do — what you put your hands on, and I got to know a whole lot about the power marketing industry and I also met a lot of people just because I worked at Bonneville who'd done a lot in this state in terms of —.

Norman Stoll, for example, was the general counsel at Bonneville then, and in subsequent years was one of my teachers at law school. His son (perhaps you know), young Robert Stoll, is very interested in developing one of the large areas over by Yamhill and 2nd and 3rd. There's a fella named Goldsmith, who has just died recently, who's had quite an impact on the Northwest in terms of the uses of conservation and how else to utilize the Columbia River. How could I have known the Neuberger's from Bonneville? Seems like it.

One of the good things in this state, too, in this area anyhow, was the togetherness of people who were interested in learning about things. We had a World Affairs Council that Carl and I used to attend regularly every week out at Reed College. This is all during these years that we're talking about now. That's where I met Herb Schwabe, who was an

attorney at that time, and I met his wife, Barbara. We were all learning all kinds of things about world affairs. I think that's where I met the Neuberger's. No, it isn't — no.

A very good friend of my husband's, before I met Carl, and who has always been my best friend, is Carmen Walker, and Wilson Walker. They lived in Vanport before the flood in 1948, and subsequent to that they've both been very active as teachers and in community affairs. Carmen introduced me to a club called — Oh dear, the name will come to me a little later.

There's a gal named [Lenore Robinson?], who's white, whose husband was in the Second World War and wasn't home, like many husbands were not home. Lenore realized then that we were fighting in a war for democracy, and she didn't know any people of other minorities. She got together with several women that she knew — she was very active with the A.A.U.W. [American Associations of University Women] and some sorority or other, I don't know.

And I think, she and Mary Rieke, started this thing, a Fellowship. That's what they called it. So, [Carmen Walker?] invited me to the Fellowship, and that's where I met, for the first time, women in Portland, Oregon, who were active in doing all the kinds of things that I think you and I believe in doing today in the 1980s. That again, was a strong influence on my life, because we met weekly in different people's homes, so that white women, who had never been in black people's homes, or Asiatic women's homes, got to talk with each other and find that we had so many things in common, and a number of things that were different about our cultures. It was a thing, I wish to goodness, that I wish we had going today.

LB: Would you compare it to what we have now, what we call a “network” kind of thing?

DEIZ: It was a network, but not for jobs. It was a network for understanding each other. I think perhaps there are lots of similar groups going today, but if only the network, as you say it, would spread so that the groups that are going today would not be disparate, but would literally be working together, perhaps we'd find that this attitude thing that worries

me all the time — not being able to change attitudes of people — could be changed more effectively. We still, I think, continue to work too separately too much. I've only known you for a week, and I know that I could easily know you all my life. You're just that kind of a neat lady. I mean it. I meet people like that all the time, and it would be so lovely if I knew that we could see each other as a group sometimes, and keep touching the lives of other people so it would grow, this business of stop assuming that people are better than somebody else just because their skin is a little different, you know? That's my soap box speech.

LB: How long were you employed with the Bonneville Power Administration?

DEIZ: Until about three weeks before Gilbert was born, then I quit.

LB: That was...

DEIZ: He was born in December of 1953, so I quit sometime in November of 1953.

LB: Were you in law school at that time?

DEIZ: No

LB: What happened?

DEIZ: Gee, I was really out of work longer than I thought. I that I was — that after Gilbert was 9 months old I wen Bonneville because he was born in 1953, no, that's true, I didn't tell a fib. That's right. By the time Gilbert was nine months, Yeah, that's right, September or October of 1954 is when I went to work for Graham Walker.

Did we talk about that before?

LB: Graham Walker?

DEIZ: Graham, yeah. This is a story that has been told in interviews every time, because I owe him — much. He is my dear friend. You're not printing this anyhow so even though I'm repeating this, it's a fact. [Belton Hamilton?], who is an administrative law judge at this time, and who is the fellow who introduced me — he and I were going out somewhere and he introduced me to Carl Deiz way back when, separate and apart from the time that I had met him with the Dewey thing. Anyhow, [Belton?] had graduated from law school at Stanford, I think, and I was very proud of the fact that he was coming back here to be an attorney, and I let him know that I really needed to get back to work. I had cabin fever. It's a cliché, but it was true.

I cannot stand staying home. That was the only time in my life I'd ever been home for nine whole months. Which was alright, because I still had a little girl and a little baby and it was the right thing for me to do, but I still didn't like it that much. I like the kids, don't misunderstand me, but I just don't like staying in the house.

[Belton?] said, "There's a fella that I know named Graham Walker who's looking for a secretary because he's going to open up his office on the east side, leaving his downtown office." Would I be interested in being a legal secretary?

So, I said, "I'll get in touch with Mr. Walker."

So, I called Graham, and he said, "Yes, I'm looking for a legal secretary."

I said, "To be perfectly candid, I'm not a legal secretary. I know I'm a good secretary, but I don't know a thing about being a legal secretary. I don't even know what that means."

He said, "I'd like to interview you, and I understand you have a couple of small children, so I'll come and see you at your home so you don't have to pay for a babysitter." That impressed me tremendously, and it does to this day. I never heard of an employer saying a thing like that! Did you ever hear of anybody?

He came out to our home on Portsmouth and I was hired. That was approximately September or October of 1954, and he taught me what you had to do as a legal secretary. I was also working for another guy named [Morgan Pritchett?], but he's no longer an

attorney and I don't care. The two of them were associates. They put an office on Holladay and Union Avenue in an old home. It was a really nice kind of place to have an office, right on the street level, and lots of clients came in. He brought his clients and so did [Pritchett?] bring his clients.

I found myself being very comfortable with the kind of work I was expected to do, I certainly wasn't giving any legal advice, but when these guys would goof off and go somewhere I had to smooth the feathers of their clients who might be unhappy because they didn't show, and I was talking to them about whatever you need to talk to people about.

Graham said, "You know, Mercedes, you really have a propensity for the law. Why don't you go to law school?" I agreed that I loved it and that I had, as I think I told you a long time ago when we first started talking, the height of my — of any achievement that I could possibly attain would be to be a lawyer.

I told Graham, "It's out of the question. I simply can't afford to go to law school."

He said, "Well, we have a night law school in this city."

I said, "Yes, I learned that recently."

He said, "If your husband agrees, I'll pay your first semester to see how you do."

Carl said he had no objection, even though it meant he would have to be taking on a tremendous additional burden or working and taking care of the kids at night while I went to school, if it would teach his wife to be more logical. I expected him to say that. I don't know whether he was supposed to be funny or not, but I resented that very much. My husband is very mathematically-minded. I happily accepted Mr. Walker's offer and went to Northwestern College of Law starting in September 1955.

LB: And, you were working during the day, then?

DEIZ: Yes. I did very well that first semester. I think I got almost all A's — maybe one class was a B, I can't recall. Since I had done so well, and I really liked it; it was a different world. I had been out of school a long time; I'd never been to school with men; all the schools I'd

attended before were with women and girls. It's funny, it never even occurred to me that that was strange. Grade school, high school and college — it was all women.

Anyhow, there was another gal in that freshman class, but she flunked out, so I was the only woman. The class started out with 130 something, and by the time I graduated four years later there were only 28 or 29 of us. I was the female who was with the group all along, and the only gal who graduated in 1959.

I stopped working with Graham Walker and went to work downtown in the American Bank Building with [Wes Franklin?]. The name of the firm was Anderson, Franklin & Jones. Shortly after I was hired to work with one attorney who then left, [Cliff Olson?] came from John Day, Oregon, and I became his secretary. What is interesting about this, and the reason I'm saying all of these names, is that [Cliff Olson's?] courtroom is right next to mine, so he was my boss. Robert E. Jones is a judge on the 5th floor, and [Laughs] “Little old” Mercedes Deiz, who was the secretary in that firm — every now and then they tease me about how did your secretary get to be in the same building as a circuit court judge. Three out of one firm is really something, and several of those attorneys who are still there pro tem frequently here.

It was extremely good training for me, extremely good training, because they are plaintiff's lawyers, and when you're a legal secretary in a firm that is essentially trial lawyers, you understand what it is like to prepare pleadings, get to the courthouse, and get a file. I knew all that kind of stuff before I ever graduated from law school.

While I typed up all these papers, and would sit in on interviews with clients when the attorney is talking to them so that I became familiar with the kinds of questions that attorneys would ask. I also made the trips to the courthouse, so I got to be very familiar with the clerks on the second floor. That's very important whenever you're going into work, when you're going to do something new, to know the people who you work with and the routine. And to treat the clerks very nicely in a courthouse, which young lawyers don't always do. They act very officious and so they don't get very much assistance. Since I've been a worker all my life, I expect somebody to treat me nicely, so you treat other people

nicely. Therefore, I've had tremendous background and experience in being a practical attorney, which does not mean —.

I don't know if you're familiar with Northwestern College of Law. Any of the people you've interviewed talked about that? Now it's at Lewis and Clark. At the time that I went it was on 9th and Oak in a building with Venetian blinds that were always broken, [Laughs] The reason I mention that is because when a class graduates it always wants to leave some kind of gift to the school, and I said, "Listen, fellas," to my graduating group, "We ought to at least buy some new Venetian blinds for this school." I was voted down, and they left the proverbial large photograph of everybody, which is just as well, because the building's been torn down, so we still have the photograph somewhere, right? Otherwise, the Venetian blinds would have been gone. I was very practical. I did all right. I graduated fourth in my class.

LB: Did you at that time have the ambition to become a judge?

DEIZ: Oh, no. I wasn't thinking of any such thing. No, never, never. Judge! No. To my dismay, Linda, however — and again, my wonderful husband all these years has been doing all the fantastic things of being the primary nurturing parent. I mean I was great. I was a good mother, never did anything that negated the best interests of my children, but the person who was always on call was Carl. He was fantastic, and he always washed the dishes. When I'd leave work at five, he'd pick me up and I'd rush home and cook — I don't know how you can do these things.

I guess when you're younger you can do it, and you're doing it right now. I could cook dinner, get it on the table, have everybody fed, and be in that car to drive myself to school by 20 to seven, and I'd be sitting in my class at seven. I had several speeding tickets, too. [Laughs]

You better ask me a question because I'm wondering again.

LB: When you finally did graduate, what kind of opportunities were available to you as an attorney?

DEIZ: What I wanted to say, because you're making a true story, is that to my dismay, I did not pass the bar, and nobody believed it..

LB: Oh, I'm Sorry.

DEIZ: Including me! The reason I threw in Carl at that point was because I didn't know how much he was worried about me because he doesn't show concern, and he called me at work because he had called Salem and nobody even knew who passed or didn't pass and he wanted to be the first on hand to let me know. I just didn't believe it. It didn't seem possible, this smart lady who did very well at school. How could I flunk? Well, I did, and so: one more hurdle. I just kept on working in that same firm for another year and took the bar exam and passed easily the second time.

I know why I flunked the first time. I had an attorney, [Phil Levin?], who's now dead, a very dear lawyer, good, good man, went and checked my papers and he said, "You know, Merce, had you been a lawyer, arguing these cases in court, you would have won your cases hands down because you answered your questions 50% right."

I said, "What do you mean by that?"

He said, "You never gave the other side." I handled my questions as though I were the attorney for the plaintiff, and when you answer a bar exam, you're supposed to be able to show the examiner that you can come at the question either for the defendant or for the plaintiff, okay? So, (I found out) thank God.

They never said those words in exactly that way to me at law school. I must remember to tell that to my law clerk. It made a big difference, because it meant — these couple of words, I'll stick it on there. If I gave you a gift, and it's yours right now, that's a gift inter-vivos, but if I give you this spoon and I say, you may use this spoon, and when I'm dead it's yours, that's a gift cause amortize, that you receive in case of death. Most likely,

after I read the examination question, I made a decision which way – what kind of gift it was, and I went into all the legal ramifications of only one aspect of the thing, so I flunked, which was a terrible blow. But by 1960 I became a lawyer, and three days after I was notified that I passed the bar, I tried my first case. That was scary.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

Tape 2, Side 2
1981 February 27

LB: When we last met, Judge Deiz, you were speaking of obtaining your license to practice law and that you had your first trial a few days later. What happened after that point in your life?

DEIZ: Even though time is short I want to tell you about that first trial. Reuben Lenske was an attorney that I knew briefly in Portland, Oregon, and he called me knowing that I had just passed the bar and he wanted me to try a case because he would be testifying as a lawyer in that case and therefore, he couldn't try it. I was honored to be asked, and so I wasn't scared to death. I was full of trepidation because normally a brand-new lawyer doesn't go right away into trial practice.

The reason I want to discuss it very briefly is because it was a case where I would be defending two defendants in a civil case. The landlord wanted them out of the premises because they had not paid rent for a long time, and I was hopefully to convince the judge that there was a defense to the claim of the landlord.

It so happened that an attorney [Sam Sewall?], was representing the plaintiff's landlord and Lyle Wolfe, was the judge from Baker, Oregon, who was sitting in Multnomah County — at that time Lyle Wolfe was a rotund, chubby — more than chubby judge — and when his Honor Judge Wolf said, “Are the parties ready?”

The opposing counsel stood up and said, “Ready for the plaintiff, your Honor,” and I stood up and said, “Ready for the defendants, your Honor.”

And [Sewall?] said, “Judge Wolfe, I don't know who that woman is over there standing up saying ready for the defendants.”

I'll never get over it; I can remember it to this day. Judge Lyle Wolfe reared up and stood up at the bench, and looked to me like a big Santa Claus with a black robe on, and he said, “[Mr. Sewall?],” in a thundering voice, “I don't know how people practice law west of the mountains, but we in Eastern Oregon accord full respect to women at all times. If

this young lady, Mrs. Deiz, says she is ready for the defendants, then she is ready for the defendants. Do you understand, sir, that if you do not treat this woman with respect, who must be an attorney if she stands up to say she's ready, you will be found in willful contempt of court?"

I was — I shriveled, you know? That was my introduction to the law, and I've been very fond of Lyle Wolfe ever since.

LB: Why did he do that, do you think?

DEIZ: I'm not going to get into that. I'm not going to denigrate some man. Leave it alone. These two fellows that I was defending, who I didn't know, never paid me a red cent — to this day! They've never paid any kind of attorney fee. I researched the law during the lunch hour. We tried that case clear through to 11:00 PM that night because Judge Wolfe said he was going to finish it that day, and he had to get back to his own bench in Eastern Oregon. He sat on that case for a whole year. That was from October when I was arguing to October of the next year. He finally came out with a decision in favor of the landlord, so these characters (men), who were really pretty much of characters, lived rent-free for a whole year based upon the fantastic efforts of Mercedes Deiz.

I did do a very good memorandum at law but they had not a leg to stand on. I was just pulling all the — everything I ever learned at law school about waiver — all kinds of legal ramifications. I really wanted that on the record because I was so delighted with Judge Wolfe. Attorneys have always said they're so afraid of him and he's so strict. Well, he absolutely believes in being a gentleman, so in a matter of speaking, the feminist movement would say, "Where's he coming from?" because he was really giving me a different treatment than he would a man, okay? But I loved it.

You wanted to know what happened after that. From then on, I think I mentioned that I was in private practice and you asked me about — workman's compensation.

LB: Workmans compensation, yes.

DEIZ: I had been trying cases in court and building up a fairly good-sized clientele but I was certainly not getting rich as a lawyer. I had enough money to pay my secretary adequately, to have a very nice law office, and shared expenses with my associates, who were men lawyers.

LB: What type of law were you practicing?

DEIZ: General practice. The emphasis was on personal injury cases. I had — I was kind of an expert, in a manner of speaking, in getting and trying personal injury cases. Just about 1967, when I applied for work with the State of Oregon Workman's Compensation Board, my children were reaching the age where they would be going to college and I needed some kind of regular steady income to supplement my husband's income in order to help the kids.

So, I applied for the position where again no woman had ever worked as — in those days they called them hearing officers who had the same role as a judge. I was hired, and I worked there for two years, evaluating the claims of injured workers, as to the amount of — whether their claims should be accepted or not, or increasing the amount of permanent partial disability that had been awarded by the State Accident Insurance Fund. The workers appealed their cases, and all of those — the hearing officers serve exactly the same as a judge — the same rules of evidence apply — but again, there's no jury.

LB: Were you doing that fulltime?

DEIZ: I did that fulltime. I had to give up all of my practice and give up all the cases. You agree to give up your practice when you do that. Some of the will work I had done, and estate work of people who subsequently died — I had assumed that I would be probating their estates. I couldn't do any of that. From the time I went to work with Workman's

Compensation until today I have been a regular employee of the state of Oregon. Okay. I've not been back in practice since 1967...

LB: So you actually did just practice private law a very short time.

DEIZ: About seven and one half years.

LB: What did you find interesting about your work on the Workman's Compensation Board? Anything in particular? Any kinds of experiences that you could have taken into your next step?

DEIZ: Even as of today, I can always ask questions in the courtroom when — for example, I had a case this morning where a man was indicating he could not pay child support because he had been on workman's compensation for the past six months, and the attorney representing Support Enforcement Unit of the state was letting it go at that. Because of my experience and my knowledge in the area I did not let it go. The man is receiving a good-sized amount of money as an injured worker, tax free, and there's no earthly reason why he should not be paying some of that money to help support his children. That's a practical answer to your question. There were some interesting cases but it's more than 13 or 14 years ago. I can't remember some of the interesting cases that I did have. Some of them are fascinating.

LB: What happened to you after you served on the Compensation Board?

DEIZ: In our other two interviews, Linda, did I ever get to talking about being a district court judge?

LB: No. That's what I was referring to at this point.

DEIZ: It seems like I'm always having dramatic — but things do happen to me dramatically. When you work for the State of Oregon as a hearing officer — and in any other capacity — your work day starts at eight. I recall being at the KEX Building, where our office was located, down there on 4th or something — nice looking modern building. That's where our offices were for the Portland workman's compensation hearings. I was dictating an order that I had — the orders that you make in workman's comp — the cases are pretty lengthy — as to why you find the way you find and you make certain conclusions of law based thereon. I was dictating that sort of thing into the machine so the typist could get around to typing it, when the phone rang.

I was distracted by the phone ringing and I just picked up the phone and I said, “Yes?”

And a man's voice that was very harsh sounding, hoarse sounding, said, “Mercedes, this is Tom.”

I said, “Yes, Tom who?”

He said, “This is Tom McCall, and I'm calling from my sickbed.” Well of course, my abruptness vanished forthwith and I almost curtsied [Laughs] over the telephone. He said, “There are some reporters in the room with me right now, and I'm gonna have to make an appointment to the District Court. I want to know if you would accept. Forgive my hoarseness, but I have the flu or something and I can't speak very clearly.”

I have no idea, Linda, exactly what I said. I was flabbergasted; I had never expected to be a judge. I knew — after I left Workman's Compensation, I assumed that I would go back into the private practice of law. I told the honorable Tom McCall, who'd been a friend of mine and my family's for quite a long time, way before he ever went into politics, I know I was greatly honored and of course I accepted.

Then he also said, “But Merce, I want you to understand that you and I are going to feel pretty badly if we learn when you run for office in April, because he called me the end of November — in four months you'll have to run for that position, and I want you to realize that there's a possibility that maybe the citizens of Multnomah County are really very prejudiced and will not vote for you as a black person or as a woman.”

I said, “Honorable Tom, Sir, that doesn't worry me in the least bit. Setbacks are normal for anybody, and it's up to me to convince the voters to vote. Besides which, I don't believe that's going to be true.”

He said, “I don't think so either, but I hope that you're not going to be hurt in that way.”

I accepted and I had a lot of beautiful publicity from the press because of this — for him — unique appointment. First of all, he's a Republican and I've always been a Democrat, and I think I'd mentioned before that Judge Lewis was the only other woman judge other than the one you told me about that I didn't know. That's a million years ago. I was the only black woman attorney, number one, in the state of Oregon, so now I become the only black woman judge. Just the second judge, literally.

Don Willner, who had been a state Senator, came to me early in January when I had been sworn in as a district court judge and he said, “You know, Merce, you're gonna have to carry on a campaign, and I doubt if you know anything about that.”

I said, “You're a thousand times right. I don't know a thing about it.”

He said, “I volunteer to serve as your chairman, as long as you do everything, I tell you.”

Well, that's alien to my nature, and I said, “What do you mean?”

He said, “What I mean by that is that you cannot, as you know, collect any money.”

I said, “Yes, I know. A judge can't solicit a red cent from anybody for anything.”

He said, “I'll take care of the campaign part, the money-raising part. But when I say you're gonna have to do what I tell you that means whenever I say you will show up at such and such a place you will show up, and you'll convince people that they should vote for you.” He was pretty much of a — sounded like a good-looking Svengali.

I said, “Don, thank you a million times.” He did put together a committee, and he found many coffees for me to attend, and churches, and schools, and every time I got off the bench it was -

First, we had assumed that there would be no competitor, but a man — an attorney — did file against me, so therefore the campaign had to get into gear. I beat this man easily

during the primary so there was no campaign for the district court position in the general election, and I thought that was the end of it. It would have been but for the fact that the legislature the following year passed a law indicating that Multnomah County was to have eighteen circuit court judges instead of the seventeen it had always had, and the position could not be filled by appointment, but had to be filled by election.

During 1970 and all of 1971, I was a district court judge, which position, to this day, I loved. It was great work. I like it, because that's the true people's court. Everybody goes to district court, for traffic; for small claims; for all the kinds of myriad of problems that people have and they hope can be straightened out in the courts, is done in the district court. That was to be my future, I thought.

When this new position opened up, I didn't pay any attention to the fact that there was a new position, except that Jean Lewis, a couple of other judges, and several attorneys said, "Judge Deiz, we really would like you to run for that position." I demurred for quite a while, because I just didn't feel like going through a campaign, and I also liked what I was doing, and the job was domestic relations and juvenile court. They said the reason they were urging me to do it was that they felt that I had the proclivity and the sensitivity and all that stuff to do this kind of work, and they were concerned about some of the people who might be filing for the job. My husband agreed with their perspective, and I filed, and for a while I thought there won't be too much problem.

To my dismay, seven men ran for the same position! That campaign was really a great deal of work, from January of 1972 — from the end of 1971 to the time the primaries started — I campaigned literally very vigorously, which was one of the highlights of my life, I think. I met, Linda, so many people all over Multnomah County, which is an extremely large county. Not geographically, but it never occurred to me how far away Cascade Locks is, for example, from Troutdale. You're going everywhere. Going out toward east county — there are more people living out there. The nice thing that happened to me in the campaigning is that so many Republican women's organizations asked me to come and address them, as well as Democratic women's organizations. Judgeship is non-partisan, but you still have to hope to reach everybody as much as possible.

LB: What kind of issues were the people interested in?

DEIZ: That's the other thing. There's no issue that any judge can discuss as such if it is an issue. The people who are running for this job who are not judges can talk about all kinds of thing with impunity. Because I was already a judge, I'm circumvented by the canons of judicial ethics to be careful not to talk about anything that is political. This is a very difficult thing to do, okay? For example, I believe in the canons 1000%, but I also believe in judges being activist as far as we can without being political. You're always on a tightrope. I refuse to not to be a member of the N.A.A.C.P. I think that would be about the only one. Being a member of the Urban League would present no problems, but the N.A.A.C.P. does in fact bring litigation to the courts on issues that are of extreme importance to many people, from my point of view. Especially in the area of civil rights. I will not stop being a member of that organization. It's no longer, thank God, true but if there were such a thing as saying I'm strongly in favor of anti-lynching law, despite my being a judge, I'm going to say that out loud and clear.

I couldn't campaign on any issue which involves things that could come into the court. I was candid with people if they'd say to me, "Mrs. Deiz, or Judge Deiz, are you in favor of the death penalty?" And I'll say, "No, I'm not." It made for — I'd explain why I'm not, and I'd say, that's my own philosophy. I want you to understand, however, since I'm answering you candidly, that in the event I had a murder trial — luckily I didn't have to address that as much in 1972 as I would have had to in 1978 — if I had a murder trial assigned to me, and it appeared that the death penalty would be involved, I would ask my presiding judge to relieve me of hearing that case. If my presiding judge refused to relieve me of hearing the case, then I'd have to face my conscience and perhaps give up being a judge. Fortunately for me, I've not been put in that position, because I know what I literally believe in, and I do not believe in taking people's lives. I abhor and detest that. Horrendous things that wicked men and women have been doing in killing others, but I just don't believe that killing them resolves anything. What other kind of issue would I have avoided?

You never take sides in politics, or endorse anybody running on any kind of a Republican or Democratic ticket. I don't endorse people, either, running non-partisan. My family's in the same kind of position, so we can't put up lawn signs.

LB: You mentioned that you were the first black woman attorney, or first black attorney in the state of Oregon?

DEIZ: No, I wasn't the first black attorney. There'd been several men attorneys. However, I had always thought that I was the first black woman attorney in the state, until 1980, when Kay Bogle, who I think I suggested you might want to talk to, did a series on a woman named [Beatrice] Cannady, who was a lawyer, I guess, in this state in the 1920s, which I find to be wonderful. Maybe the Oregon Historical Society has some information on that woman. She moved, I understand, from Oregon to California, and I don't know how long she was here as a lawyer. I had assumed, until I read these articles by Kay Bogle, that I was the first, but obviously I wasn't, if she in fact was an attorney, and it appears that she was.

LB: How did it feel to achieve — to gain these wonderful achievements — the rather unique kind of positions that you've attained? How did that feel?

DEIZ: At the time I had on “seven league boots.” Almost like the time I passed the bar. When I passed the bar, I just pushed aside my typewriter — I was in Wes Franklin's firm at that time — and I said, “I passed.” And I ran out of the office. I said, “I'll be back, “ and I walked up and down Broadway, I can remember, as if the whole world could look at me and say, “Look, she did it!” It was a lot of work to pass the bar. You want to know how does it feel? I don't know. My kids say, “Hi, Ma,” my husband says, “Hi, Merce.” It's wonderful, but I don't really feel any differently.

Let me put something on your record because I scribbled this. I knew you'd ask me something about achievement, and I don't mind being quoted that achievement in my book is the knowledge that you have studied, and worked hard, and done the best that is in you.

People always talk about success, whereas the distinction with achievement and success is that in success you're being praised by others and that's nice, but it's certainly not as important, or as satisfying, as achievement. What I tell kids is that they really ought to aim for achievement and forget all about success. It's nice to give platitudes, but that's what I really believe.

LB: Do you have any insights into why Tom McCall may have chosen you for the position of district court judge?

DEIZ: You asked before we started eating (lunch) whether there was any discrimination, and since this is an oral history, and I have reached the age where I don't have to keep everything so private or something, I think I'll mention this.

Yes, now that you — I had submitted my name to the Judicial Selection Committee, so I didn't tell the exact truth — now it came back to me. I didn't tell you a fib purposely, but it's returning now. In 1969, there were more than two positions opening up because judges were retiring or moving up to the Circuit Court. I had submitted my name to the Judicial Selection Committee of the Multnomah bar, to be considered sometime for a judgeship.

Clay Myers also has always been a friend of our family — we knew him from church. We were Episcopalians, and he was Tom McCall's Secretary of State at that time. Clay let me know that my name never came to the Governor, despite being submitted by myself and others, by the selection committee. Clay said, "Merce, I really don't know." And a couple of attorneys had told me the same thing. And I was surprised, because the names of the men who were being submitted to the Governor had no more qualifications for the job, I didn't think, than I did. A few of the men's names who had been submitted had obviously worked a few more years as trial lawyers than I, but some had worked even less. I met the qualifications, so I didn't understand why they didn't at least submit my name.

Subsequently I was informed by Clay Myers what the Judicial Selection Committee continues to do is always submit three names to the governor, which in their judgement are the top people. What Governor Tom McCall has told them to do this time around, since

they had circumvented his selections a couple of times, was to say you will send to me the names of every person who has submitted his or her name for consideration. I thought that was a gorgeous thing for the governor to do.

I still didn't expect anything to happen. In fact, I didn't even know about this until after I was selected, okay? I learned it subsequently. That's how I learned that obviously there was some kind of discrimination against me, whether for being a woman, or whether for being black, I don't know which one. I'll never know which one because they're never going to tell you.

In this same area about discrimination, to my pleasure, I never experienced any type of discrimination in clients coming to me when I was a lawyer. My offices were always on the ninth or the tenth floor on various buildings, which means I didn't have any sign outside the door saying come on it, where they could have walked in off the street. They had to find me. In those days there was no kind of advertising the way lawyers can do today, and it was always by word of mouth that you could — some other client must have said come and see Deiz. I always had clients. I had many, many men clients; I didn't have as many women at all. I had a lot of men clients, and white people. I had many more white clients than black. I had them from various parts of the state, not just in Multnomah County. Especially in the area of estates and drawing wills. That never presented problems.

I may have mentioned when I worked with Nels Peterson for about a year that I came to court every day — Did I talk about that? I guess not. In 1965, for a full year, I was working with Nels Peterson and his firm right across the street Don Londer was there, who is also a judge now. Because of the recognition in the bar of the prestige of Nels Peterson and the kinds of work he does in personal injury, some of that must have obviously rubbed off on me, because of his recognition by defense attorneys as being a good plaintiff's lawyer. That building is right down there, 1000 SW 3rd, which is a block away from here. All I had to do every day was walk from that building over to this building, and I was in the courthouse every day during 1965 arguing many motions and demurs and trying cases both here and in the federal court.

It gave me much more standing with the lawyers all over this county, and lawyers from other parts of the state. I tried cases in other counties, too. That was a big help. I didn't experience the kind of discrimination that women were getting up through the 1970s from the law firms.

[End of Tape 2, Side 2]

Tape 3, Side 1
1981 February 27

LB: Judge Deiz, have you ever experienced any discrimination since you have become a judge?

DEIZ: Not that I know of. Nothing overt.

LB: Since you've explained that you had such a positive experience as an attorney and I was wondering...

DEIZ: I don't want you or your listeners or readers, to get the wrong impression. Multnomah County and the State of Oregon is no better than other places in the United States. The discrimination which is here, and the ways people try to denigrate and segregate others continues. It's just that it's — you always know that it exists, and I fortunately have never had — I don't think — any kind of chip on my shoulder so that I'm not looking for problems.

I don't understand an article that the *Oregonian* wrote about me last November, when I've always had a good press before. It hurt, that article, because Whitney, who's a reporter for the *Oregonian*, wrote this story about more affidavits of prejudice filed against Judge Deiz than against other judges. The reason it hurts so much is because I know, I suppose everybody says this, but I know that I'm a very fair individual, and I'm not prejudiced against anybody, and the headline said that I had more affidavits of prejudice, therefore lay people assume that I'm prejudiced, and those affidavits have nothing to do with prejudice; it's just that attorneys file them when they are judge-shopping, which means that they are —.

If I've ruled, for example, that children will stay with the mother and the father wants to challenge and get custody, and I've left the kids with the mother, then the father, if he's got any sense, naturally would say, I don't want that judge when we have the regular

hearing on the dissolution because I'm still fighting for custody; I really want another judge. That is his right, and that is what an attorney ought to do. So, they file an affidavit to make sure that it goes to another judge, who hopefully will see it a little differently or a whole lot differently and place the kids with the father, and vice versa. So, that these affidavits are merely a mechanism that the statutes provide for, in effect giving an attorney a chance to go to another judge without literally just saying I don't want you or you. They can move around, but they have to file these things. I don't know why the *Oregonian* wrote the story, because despite the headline it went into depth saying I'm sensitive and fair and a whole bunch of other things.

To this day, I have not gone down to the presiding judge to see who files affidavits and what are they all about. I think it would bother me more just to know about it. By my not knowing who filed it, and the same people, they tell me, come into my court anyhow — my court's always very busy — it makes my impartiality, I think, that much better because I don't know who filed them.

A number of people have suggested, especially minority people — my friends who are black, men and women, and lawyers — the only reason that story was run against you by the *Oregonian* was because there's enough damn discrimination in this city that they're going after you for being both a woman and being a black. I suppose that I sound Pollyanna-ish when I tell you that I don't want to believe that. I just don't want to believe that. I've reached the age where I'm sure I've gotten where I've gotten on my own merit, and I can't understand why someone would be picking on me now because I am of a certain color or a certain sex. I don't know the reason and to this day I cannot figure out the motive. Somehow, we all find out about motive in time.

LB: I want to ask you about your career as a jurist. What are some of the important decisions that you feel have contributed to our state laws?

DEIZ: That I was involved with?

LB: Yes.

DEIZ: I think you mentioned when you started talking with me that Betty Roberts could answer that question in depth obviously much more than I can because an appellate judge she and the other judges on the appellate bench do indeed make case law that affects all of us because we have to follow it. Trial judges have to follow it and the population has to follow whatever the appellate courts do.

I've had some very interesting cases. You caught me short; I'm trying to remember exactly what.

This morning, since it just happened — it's really not that important, it won't be that important for your Oregon history project — both I and Judge Kathleen Nachtigal, believe when a man is charged with being a putative father of a child that that man is entitled to court appointed counsel when he is impecunious and cannot afford his own attorney. He is not being charged with a crime, and we continue, she and I, the female judges on this bench, to appoint lawyers for those men, because in my estimation, and I guess in hers, requiring someone to be responsible for a child or children from now and for the rest of their lives, in effect, or at least until the age of 21 if the kid goes on to school, is as important as if a person is charged with a shoplift. In my book it's much more important than many of the crimes that people are charged with committing. That's the sort of thing I do, and neither she nor I have been appealed in that regard yet. I don't mind it being on your tape.

Again, in this area of affiliation, this morning I ruled that since a man is again facing a jury trial on whether or not he's the father and he's denying it, then even though the law requires him to speak out at a deposition, because the State of Oregon wants to get discovery from him as to all of his background, his attorney came into court and said, "Your Honor, the Constitution of the United States precludes that because his rights are being affected. Why should he have to in effect disclose anything about himself when he's denying that he's the father?" I ruled in this man's favor, and again, that is contrary to the statutes of this state.

One case I was very much involved with was a year ago when I ruled based on the statutes, rather than the Constitution of the State of Oregon, that the juvenile court hearings continue to be closed to the press and to the public, except -

That's what I ruled. Ever since I've been a judge and having anything to do with juvenile court, my position has always been that anybody can come out to that court — the press, magazines, you, people, just come out any time you want — just give me your word of honor that you'll never disclose the identity of the child. Whenever I've said that to the press, they haven't bothered to come. When the Michelle Gates case broke, and I don't mind saying her name out loud because it's been in the papers ever since the horrendous murder happened. When a little four year old was killed by Michelle Gates, because that is the ruling that happened in that case, finally by another judge, the Oregonian brought suit before me in order to have the courts opened and I refused based upon the statutes which said juvenile court hearings shall be confidential.

However, I did know that the Constitution of the State of Oregon says that no trial shall be held in private, and I tried to play with words, by saying, “No, you *Oregonian*; you may not come in.” But I frankly do not see the distinction between the word private and confidential; but I used it as a gimmick because the problem is that if we literally believe in the rehabilitation of kids within the juvenile court system, and I believe in it, I don't see how exposing them to anything that the newspapers write, including their names and their families, and where they live, is ever going to be of any help to the child. I said, “You cannot come in,” and then the Oregonian brought a writ of mandamus against me, and the Supreme Court of Oregon ruled exactly the way I expected it to, which is that the Constitution of Oregon supersedes any statutes in the Oregon Revised Statutes, and therefore as of May 1980, I think it was, all courts in the State of Oregon are open to everybody. So far, from what I've been reading in the papers, I think they have been very careful not to give too much exposure to youngsters, but it's a thing we're going to have to live with. We're one of the few states — I don't think you can count them on your hand — where the juvenile court hearings are open to everybody. They are still very confidential

in the rest of the United States. Since kids are very important to you and to me, I just hope we're doing the right thing. It comes to me quickly off the top of my head.

LB: That's an important decision. Is there anything else you would like to add to this permanent record that we have not talked about?

DEIZ: About me and my family? That's right — this is sort of a history of Deiz.

LB: What about your memberships and associations, Judge Deiz?

DEIZ: There are two organizations with which I am most active at the present time. That is the National Center for State Courts which does a great deal of research and development in all areas to help to improve the administration, and the efficiency, and the training of the judicial system.

[Knock at door] Come in.

[Tape stops]

What was I saying?

LB: You were talking about the National Center for State Courts and your involvement with them.

DEIZ: I've been a director for the past three years, and we have just revamped the method of who serves on the aboard. I think there'll be more chief justices of the Supreme Courts of the states, as well as some enlargement with more court administrators as well as trial judges. Hopefully, I will be re-elected for another three-year term.

As I was just telling Ed McConnell on the telephone, who is our national director, the nominations to be on the National Center have to come from other national

organizations, and I know that the National Association for Women Judges wishes to nominate me to be reelected.

We were discussing that, and I'm not asking to serve because I'm immodest; it's just that for three years I've become literally much more knowledgeable about all of the things that the courts ought to be doing, separate and apart from what I do as a judge in my specific court. When you get a certain amount of training, I think it ought to be utilized rather than continually having new people start from scratch and learning all over again. Hopefully, I will serve another three years. I'm serving my second year as a director of the National Association for Women Judges at the present time.

LB: Is that a new organization?

DEIZ: That organization was formed a little bit more than a year ago in California because of the herculean efforts of two women -literally herculean: Joan Dempsey Kline, who's a justice on the Court of Appeals in California, as well as Vaino Spencer, who at that time was a trial judge in California. A black woman who is a very handsome lady. I met her when I first became a judge. She now is on the appellate bench also because Governor Brown appointed her to the higher court in the interests of accolades. I ought to indicate that I've never seen so many women judges in my whole life as when I went to the first meeting because the Honorable Governor Brown certainly believes in appointing women to the bench, and they were all over the place! There were so many young women judges. A couple of them were wearing jeans and I thought they were, if not high school kids, at least in college, and here they were judges! It was interesting. These two women contacted judges all over the United States, and we formed an organization in September 1979. Last year, in October 1980, we had the first annual meeting of this association in Washington, D.C.

LB: That's very appropriate.

DEIZ: It was appropriate because first of all, President Carter, similar to Governor Brown, went out of his way to make sure that women and minorities went on the federal benches throughout the United States. He changed the complexion of the federal bench more than any other president has ever done. If there's one thing that Carter will go down in history for it's his appointments to the federal courts that were exceedingly good appointments. By using the nominating commission system, he got input from citizens and everybody so that our Federal courts are in 100% better position, from my point of view, than they ever were before, and I do indeed give President Jimmy Carter great credit for that.

I don't know if you're interested in any kinds of statistics, but back in 1971 there were approximately 2900 blacks who were in the legal profession, with only 189 of that number who were judges. By 1977, these figures had grown to 6000 attorneys with less than one third of that number being black women, as of today, there are 400 judges who are black, including women, throughout the United States.

Looking through my notes I thought I would just indicate — it has nothing to do with my notes -I have two heroes. One is Eleanor Roosevelt, and I think I talked about her when you and I first got started because I think she's the epitome of everything that women ought to do and be, and Frederick Douglass was always my hero as a man who fought with great sensitivity for the rights of the slaves in time for all people, and I believe in that sort of thing. Not on a soap box, but I thought it would be nice to end your recording with a couple of heroes.

LB: Yes, I usually do ask my interviewees, “Who might be your heroes, who you particularly admired or who influenced you?” So, I'm glad to add that information.

DEIZ: I think both of those people did influence me. I didn't know Frederick Douglass, but I read as much of his works as I could find when I was younger. You are such a nice lady, and I want this on the record. I have made a new friend in Linda Brody.

LB: Thank you, Judge Deiz. It has been a great pleasure to talk with you.

[End of Tape 3, Side 1]
[End of Interview]