

Basic Detail Report

Title Interview with Sandra P. Gersten

Date 2007 September 5

Description Oral history interview with Sandra P. Gersten who was interviewed

by Debra C. Ruel on September 5, 2007 for the Connecticut Bar Foundation's

History of Connecticut Women in the Legal Profession Project. Topics Discussed:

- Background : Sandra P. Gersten was born on June 21, 1936, in Hartford,

Connecticut. Her father was a Russian immigrant who, after arriving in the U.S.

at age eighteen, started the first Jewish delicatessen in Hartford and later went

into the real estate business. Her mother was a housewife who later worked for

the State of Connecticut. - Sisters' Legal Education: Sandra Gersten had two

sisters who were also lawyers: Annette Gold (deceased) and Roslyn Motlick, who

is retired. Both sisters practiced law in New Haven for many years. They

attended the University of Connecticut School of Law. - Sandra Gersten's

Educational Journey: Sandra Gersten graduated from Hartford's Weaver High

School in 1953. She then attended Vassar College from 1953 to 1957, majoring in

Sociology. During her college years, she spent her junior year abroad in Paris

and at the University of Geneva High International Studies. She also participated

in the Junior City Council and Junior Achievement in Hartford. - Law School:

Sandra Gersten went directly to the University of Connecticut School of Law

after college. She recalls that female students were very scarce; her class started

with five women, but only two, including herself and Katherine Yeoman

Hutchinson, graduated. She was the Treasurer of the Student Bar Association,

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which primarily managed the bookstore. - Bar Exam and Early Career: Sandra

Gersten took the Bar Exam in New Haven, a two-day, seven-hour-a-day exam.

She passed and then sought employment. Firms were hesitant to hire her

because she was married, questioning her commitment. As a result, she decided

to open her own practice. Years later, she moved her practice to West Hartford

Center. - Family and Law Practice: Sandra Gersten has always practiced

independently but was loosely affiliated with her husband's firm when her

children were young. For the last twenty years, she has been affiliated with her

son, Peter Gersten, who also practices law. Her daughter, Karen Gersten,

practices with her husband. - Practicing Law as a Woman: Sandra Gersten found

that her colleagues and adversaries were generally courteous, partly because

many knew her husband, Aaron. She had no issues dealing with judges as a

female attorney, emphasizing that respect was earned through preparation. -

Law School Application Process and Social Norms: Law school applications in

her era involved personal interviews. She interviewed with Thomas Archibald

from UConn. She did not wear her engagement ring to the interview to avoid

being seen as not serious about her studies and future practice.

Dimensions Duration: 1 Hour, 17 Minutes