

NEW MEXICO BAR ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEW – MEL ROBINS

AUGUST 27, 2007

INTERVIEWER: TERRENCE REVO

MEL ROBINS INTERVIEW – SIDE ONE; TAPE ONE

TR: This interview is part of the Oral History Project, sponsored by the State Bar of New Mexico and its Senior Lawyers' Division. I am Terrence Revo, a member of the Senior Lawyers' Division of the State Bar. Today is June 27, 2007, and I am interviewing Mel Robins in my office in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Mel, I want to thank you for coming today. And I want to ask you a little bit about what your life was like in your family and in your community as you were growing up.

MR: Fine.

TR: So, what part of Albuquerque were you raised in?

MR: I was raised in Ohio.

TR: In Ohio?

MR: Yes. Columbus, Ohio.

TR: When did you move to Albuquerque?

MR: 1951.

TR: And who were your parents?

MR: My father was Harry Robins; my mother was Fannie Robins. Later on, my parents were divorced. Her name - she married a fellow named Goldstein after that.

TR: Did your father tell you why he moved from Ohio to Albuquerque?

MR: Yes. He had tuberculosis. And at the time he came here, which, I think, was 1942, the thinking in the East was that the tuberculors needed a high dry climate. And this was suggested as being that. And he came here and got over the worst effects of the tuberculosis.

TR: Was your dad a lawyer by the time he got to Albuquerque?

MR: Oh yes. He became a lawyer, I think, in the mid '20's.

TR: Now he was a local magistrate judge, was he not?

TR – Terrence Revo (Interviewer)
MR – Mel Robins

MR: Yes.

TR: How long did he serve on the Bench?

MR: It was probably six-seven years.

TR: And how old were you during the period of time when he was on the Bench?

MR: Let's see . . . probably in the '50's – early '60's.

TR: When did you become a lawyer, Mel?

MR: In 1944 in Dayton, Ohio.

TR: Oh. So you were a lawyer also before you came out here?

MR: Yes.

TR: Do you still maintain your Ohio membership?

MR: It's forever, as I understand it.

TR: And when did you start practicing here in Albuquerque?

MR: 1952.

TR: What was your practice like?

MR: Here?

TR: Yes. And back when you started.

MR: In Ohio?

TR: No. Here in Albuquerque.

MR: Here. Originally, it was . . . I was in my father's office. He, at that time, was in private practice. And I think I was there about a year; a year and a half. And then, Eisenhower was the elected President. And the U.S. Attorney became a Republican. And probably with some help from my father, I went into the U.S. Attorney's Office as an assistant.

TR: Who were some of the other assistants at that time?

MR: Jim Borehood. The U.S. Attorney was Paul Larrazolo. Jim Borehood and . . . who was it . . . the fellow later became a Judge . . .

TR: Morey Sanchez?

MR: No. He was the one that departed when he was replaced by Larrazolo. From Silver City . . . oh well, I can't remember.

TR: So how long were you in the U.S. Attorney's Office?

MR: I was there three or four years.

TR: How did you like that part of the practice?

MR: Oh, I enjoyed it. It was the most enjoyable part of the practice in all the time that I practiced law. Although, there are other times, too. But it was a real experience. We had a great judge. It was Carl Hatch. And it was a pleasure with him. And it was good work. I learned how to try cases there.

TR: What kinds of cases did you handle as an Assistant U.S. Attorney?

MR: Bank theft; bank robberies; man-act; that's transporting a women across the lines for sexual purposes; auto theft; some immigration work that wasn't like it is now. But there was some of that.

TR: So you were basically a criminal prosecutor as a U.S. Attorney?

MR: Yes.

TR: Going back to what I touched on before, what was life like in Albuquerque during the early 1950's?

MR: It was very pleasant. I think the population was around 90,000 people when we came here. And all the lawyers knew each other. And the town was, I think, very vibrant at the time.

TR: Was it a growing community during those years?

MR: Oh yes. Yes. The bases was, I think, Sandia Base, which was a stead employment thing. And the government was a big factor in the economy, too.

TR: Was your dad a judge during that period of time?

MR: No. He became a judge later. He was active in politics. He was the Republican State Chairman, National Committee man. And so he did a lot of traveling around during that kind of work. Also doing a little bit of law practice. And that was essentially what he did during that time.

TR: So as a lawyer, I would assume that you didn't appear in front of your dad?

MR: Yes, that's true.

TR: But you must have seen him in the courtroom?

MR: I did.

TR: And did you have any favorite stories about your dad that you'd like to share with us?

MR: At times, I would compare notes with Mike Sutton, whose father was a judge. And we would count the number of times we hid under the table when our fathers were on the Bench. They did unorthodox things. But they were each very much admired by many people. And they were also reviled by many people.

TR: Well, in their unorthodoxy, did you see them as being fair administrators of Justice?

MR: Oh yes. They were. I think my father introduced the idea that the police are not always right; that there are sometimes when they make mistakes, too. And that some of their arrests were unauthorized, and all of that. In fact, the police department, during his tenure in office, got a petition to remove him from the Bench, which did not succeed.

TR: Any other stories regarding your dad that you'd like to share with us?

MR: I didn't go in there very much. A lot of people tell me stories of their experiences with him. But when I was present, it wasn't too frequent or too enjoyable sometimes.

TR: What was it about your either childhood or your adolescent experiences that made you decide to become a lawyer?

MR: When I finished undergraduate school – this was during the war of 19 . . . second World War – I was not in service, and I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I thought, 'well, I've enjoyed reading about politics; I've enjoyed reading about lawyers, etcetera. And my dad has been a lawyer. So why don't I do it.'

TR: Where did you go to law school?

MR: Ohio State University.

TR: While you were in school, were there any professors or other role models who inspired you to continue on in the practice of law?

MR: We had some, I thought, excellent professors. Mr. Hallen Strong – they were good teachers. Of course, we had a very small law school because most of the people were

drafted. I was, forever, had some problem with my ear. They kept telling me you come down each six months for an examination, and we'll take you the next time. But each time they looked at my ear and say, 'no, not this time.'

TR: So you had the opportunity to go to law school while World War II was going on?

MR: That's right, yes.

TR: When you entered law school, did you have any idea what kind of lawyer you would become?

MR: No. No.

TR: So let me jump ahead to the time period after you left the U.S. Attorney's Office. What did you do then?

MR: I joined the Lorenzo Chavez and Art Ortega in their firm, and practiced with them. And they did mostly personal injury work.

TR: So you started as a personal injury lawyer in the late '50's probably?

MR: I think it was '56, yes.

TR: And how long did you work with those two gentlemen?

MR: Art

(END SIDE ONE – BEGIN SIDE TWO)

MR: . . . and with Bill Snead. I practiced with Lorenzo Chavez until 1973, I believe.

TR: How was the personal injury practice different back then than it is today?

MR: I'm not sure what's happening today. But at that time, it was, I think, more of the cases went to trial than today. I believe today, there is a lot of mediation, and that didn't exist as far as I knew back at that time. And it didn't cost a huge amount of money to go to trial then. And now, it's very expensive when you go to trial. So I believe there were much more trials going on in these cases than now.

TR: I've been told that back in those times that the trials were usually much shorter with fewer witnesses than they are today.

MR: I believe that is true. And the files were this thick. And now you can fill a room with all of the discovery and the pleadings and everything else.

TR: So, as a plaintiff's attorney during that period from the late '50's into the '70's, how often would you get to try a case?

MR: I would say on an average of once a month.

TR: And as you . . . let me back up a little bit. What were the verdicts like back then compared to when you stop practicing?

MR: A verdict of \$10,000 was considered respectable back in the late '50's, I think. Occasionally, you'd hit on a bigger verdict. But they were not real large. It sort of changed over time, and it depended on the kind of case. When malpractice became part of the practice of personal injury lawyers, I think, the verdicts there were much larger.

TR: Medical malpractice, you mean?

MR: Yes.

TR: You had indicated that you practiced with Lorenzo Chavez until the early '70's?

MR: Right.

TR: And after that, what did you do?

MR: I practiced for another year with Avelino Gutierrez. And then I started on my . . . I associated with Leo Strand after I started on my own. But we had no formal relationship then.

TR: So you and Leoff were basically . . .

MR: We were sharing space, right.

TR: How were trials different during the era of contributory negligence as opposed to comparative negligence.

MR: Well, Mary Walters made a great contribution to the practice.

TR: She certainly did.

MR: When she came out with that opinion that espousing comparative negligence. You didn't worry about the negligence of your client so much with comparative negligence. But even in the days when contributory was supposed to be a bar to recovery, generally you could work with that and try to diminish the plaintiff's negligence, if any. And it just made it simpler to prepare and try.

TR: How did the juries back in the days of contributory negligence, how did they work their way around the contributory negligence issue to come up with a favorable verdict?

MR: I think they wanted to see a certain result, I think. They could overcome the actions that might have constituted a contributory negligence. It was an emotional thing, too.

TR: Was it like the give-and-take in the jury room to reach what they thought was a fair decision?

MR: I suppose you've sat outside jury rooms at times, as I did, and I gave it up after a while because of the things that I thought were important in the trial. I would overhear from the other side of the door of the jury room. And they were considering something else completely. They reached what they felt was fair, I believe.

TR: How did you feel about the jury verdicts back then? Did you feel they were fair; did you feel they were biased one way or the other?

MR: No, I thought they were fair. I think the juries were one of the best institutions that we've had in the practice of law. And for the most part; and there were times when I thought they went haywire. But most of the time, I thought they did a reasonable job.

TR: What kinds of memories do you have of the judges that you tried cases in front of?

MR: I was trying to think . . . Judge Tackett was in there. He was a . . . he prompted settlements as much as he could. Judge McMannis was present. He would take a case and sit on it for a while. Then on one day, he would decide about ten or twelve of them that he had been sitting on, and make his decision. Reedy – he was quite decisive. Slope(?) was indecisive, but he was a good judge (inaudible). McPherson was okay. I'm trying to think of some of the others there. Off hand, that's what I can think of.

TR: Most of the cases that you actually tried, were they in State court or Federal court also?

MR: Most of them originally were in State court. Then later, they began to – they would be removed to Federal court. And we tried them in Federal court. And sometimes, we filed in Federal court; not often.

TR: In those earlier days, was it typically the plaintiff or the defendant who asked for a jury?

MR: Plaintiff.

TR: Things are very different in today's world.

MR: Is that so?

TR: Well, the defense almost always asks for a jury trial in today's world.

MR: Yes?

TR: So maybe the jury trials have become different.

MR: Probably so, yes. I didn't know that.

TR: Is there one or two people that you could point to who were particularly influential in your career?

MR: Well, let's start with Paul Arrezolo, who was a U.S. Attorney. He was a very fair, unprejudiced man. And he was a good guide on how to be a prosecutor. He was very fair. Later on, I became friendly with Charlie Driscoll. And then Charlie, as you know, was a rather controversial person.

TR: At times.

MR: Yes. And he gave a lot of good ideas about what we should be as lawyers. It didn't mean that he or I would always follow those. But he had some good ideas. And he was a brilliant lawyer. But on some occasions, he could do a wonderful job.

TR: Did you ever go to his meetings down at Jack's Bar on Central?

MR: That's right, yes. On . . . what was the day? . . . I forget. It was . . . not Flag Day. But anyway, there was always . . .

TR: Law Day.

MR: Law Day, that's right.

TR: He would have an un-Law Day party down on Central at Jack's.

MR: Yes.

TR: Anybody else that you can think of that was influential in your career?

MR: Well, Lorenzo and Art. Art taught me how to try a personal injury case. I had good trial experience when I was in the U.S. Attorney's Office. But when you get down to the field of personal injury, there are a lot of new techniques that you use. And Art helped me a lot on that. And so did Lorenzo. And Lorenzo thought pretty well. He thought well, and he could come up with a lot of new ideas about what to do in these cases.

TR: Speaking of cases, what cases that you handled over the years stand out in your mind?

MR: One of them is a case, I believe the style is *Miller v. State*, in which I worked with Charlie Driscoll. And we, I say, we brought the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights to the State of New Mexico courts. Because until then, there was a silver plate doctrine where the Federals would gather the case, and there was a lot of inadmissible evidence in the Federal court. But they'd give it to the State prosecutors, and they would get convictions because there were no protections that we had instituted in this *Miller* case. And this was an important thing. From then on, the Bill of Rights, under the Federal Constitution, were applied in New Mexico. And I don't know how long ago that was.

TR: So would it be fair to say that the Federal Rules of Evidence were far stricter or more restrictive than any rules of evidence that the State of New Mexico had?

MR: No, not in the matter of civil rights. They were much . . . yes, they were. They were stricter than the New Mexico rule. That's right. And so the same standards were then applied in the State court.

TR: Any other cases of yours that stand out in your mind that you think were either important or cases that you particular enjoyed?

MR: I had a case where a little child was mauled by a dog out in the canyon. And the child had severe injuries from the mauling, and eventually filed suit on it. And it had a lot of publicity at the time because it was a severe attack, and it was a dog that had been let to run loose from some lumber yard there. And the child lived nearby. And the dog attacked him. The child was taken into the hospital for surgery. And there was a nurse in surgery who was a dog lover. And she felt very protective about dogs. And she started a rumor that the child was not mauled by a dog, but by his parents. And this spread through the entire community. I remember everybody knew that it was the parents who did it. And finally, we got a dentist who was a forensic witness. He had testified in some case in Florida where there was a well-known sex offender who was on trial. And he was one of the witnesses there. And he saw the pictures of this boy, and called me and said, "You don't have to worry anymore. Those marks on the boy's face are identical to the configuration of the dog's teeth." And so it calmed down then. And eventually, it went on to settlement. But it was interesting while it was going on.

TR: Did you try cases with other lawyers? Or did you do most of your trial work yourself?

MR: After I left Lorenzo, I tried most of them by myself, yes. And sometimes with others.

TR: Who were the other attorneys that you associated with?

MR: Leoff Strand would help me on some of the cases. I don't remember any others in particular. Most of those, I believe, I tried alone. We had a big malpractice case in Gallup where Leoff worked with me. And we got a good verdict on that one.

TR: Did you ever try a case with your dad?

MR: No.

TR: How about with your daughter?

MR: No.

TR: Tell us about your daughter, Jackie, and why she decided to become an attorney.

MR: She . . . she, I don't think, had any predetermination that she wanted to be a lawyer. But something came up involving her, and I remember as soon as it happened, there was a possibility that someone who she knew at the time, might be prosecuted. And if that person was prosecuted, it might have involved her. And I went in to see Victor Ortega, who was the U.S. Attorney at the time, and discussed this with him. And he had some suggestion as to how to handle it. And everything blew away. I think Jackie was quite impressed with the fact that there are ways of resolving what could be serious problems. And I think that's when she sort of decided she'd like to be a lawyer. And she has been, and enjoys it very much now.

TR: And she is still doing criminal defense, I take it?

MR: Yes. That's all she does.

TR: Wasn't she the public defender for the State for a while?

MR: Yes.

TR: So she started out on the other side of the courtroom from where you started?

MR: The *prim nova*, yes, that's right.

TR: What type of professional associations were you involved in during the time that you practice law?

MR: I was a member of the New Mexico Trial Lawyers. I was on the board of the . . . what is it known as now? . . . The civil part of rendering aide to the people who need help.

TR: Legal Aid?

MR: Legal Aid, yes. I was on the board of that. I was on the Supreme Court's Disciplinary Board. That was about it, I think. I belonged to the American Bar Association.

TR: Were you one of the lawyers that helped create the Trial Lawyers?

MR: No. There was a loose sort of an organization originally started by Joe Smith and Lorenzo Chavez, and I think, Henry Kiker and Art Ortega; developed that type of activity. I think they got it started by the time I got to the practice with them. It was a fairly strong organization.

TR: So you're talking about the Trial Lawyers Organization being strong by the mid '50's?

MR: Yes. I think so. Yes.

TR: Did you hold any offices in the Trial Lawyers Organization?

MR: No.

TR: When you sat on the State Disciplinary Board, what were some of the more interesting issues – not naming names – but interesting issues that you had to address?

MR: I don't think there were that many interesting issues, really. The usual things that come up in a practice.

TR: It sounded like when you were talking about the story with Victor Ortega that you went to see him, that in some respects, the law and the administration of Justice was more personal back then, than it is today?

MR: Oh yes. As I mentioned, I think, people knew each other – most of the people knew each other. And you could talk to each other without taking notes. So that's the way it was, I believe.

TR: Would it be fair to say that the judges were more accessible to the attorneys and to the public back in those days?

MR: I believe so. I don't know how they are now, but they were . . . you could work with them.

TR: When did you decide to retire?

MR: I think it was '91 – maybe the end of '91.

TR: And how come you decided to retire?

MR: The honest answer is that I had participated in a trial shortly before this time, and when the instructions were being done, I failed to ask for an instruction that I was entitled to. And I don't know that that contributed to the loss of the case. But it was a defense verdict, and I felt that I had missed something, and that I might be missing some other things from time to time. And it was a good time to get out of practice.

TR: I certainly can understand that.

MR: And the reason I used . . . and it was true, too, with both my mother, who had recently moved here, and my wife were ill at the time. And they needed attention, too. So, I thought this was a good time to stop working, and doing something else.

TR: So you became the caregiver for your mom and your wife?

MR: Somewhat, yes.

TR: Now your wife as since passed on?

MR: Yes.

TR: In the 15 or 16 years, since your retirement, what kinds of things have you been doing to occupy your time?

MR: I don't have much time anymore. I'm not doing a thing, really. I read the papers in the morning; I listen to some operatic background while I'm reading. The mornings pass. At noon, I go to lunch with some former judges and lawyers. We meet everyday. And in the afternoons, I juggle around somehow, and get through each day. Not any structured activity.

TR: If it isn't too personal, may I ask who the people are that you still have contact with – the lawyers and the judges?

MR: Yes. Paul Matussi, Phil Ashby, Dick Traub, sometimes the Carr(?) brothers come down. And I have a friend who calls himself 'a lawyer hang-on.' He likes to be around lawyers and judges. He's not a lawyer, but he likes to listen, even though we don't discuss law much at all anymore.

TR: Going back through your career in law that expanded almost 50 years, what kinds of stories or anecdotes do you remember that you think are either funny or poignant?

MR: I can't really come up with anything in particularly right now. There are a lot of very interesting cases that I worked on. Nothing particular that I can assign to that.

TR: So the personal injury practice that you had, I take it was mostly automobile, some malpractice, and then maybe slip and falls – those type of things?

MR: Toward the last nine or ten years that I practiced, I believe I concentrated more on medical malpractice, which I thought was very interesting, and it was more lucrative. I would handle other cases, too. But it's odd. In 1972, I had a malpractice case referred to me from Detroit. And as of that time, malpractice was sort of looked down on by the Bar, as claiming another professional did something that didn't meet the standard of care,

and it really isn't right to go after another professional, and all that business. Well, this was a case involving some doctors at the Air Force Base here. And so there wasn't that personal relationship that seemed to stop people in the past. And that case was eventually settled for a good sum of money. I remember talking to some of the other fellows in the plaintiff's practice and saying, "look, we've been trying these cases with automobiles bumping into each other, and slip and fall type of things. This kind of work is more interesting, and it is more enumerative." And I don't know that there wasn't any practice in that sort of thing before, but then, the fellows that I talked to started accepting cases and went around looking for witnesses who would be able to testify to help the case. That was a big problem then. I think it's changed somewhat now, but it was very difficult to get expert witnesses then.

TR: Well, it still is somewhat difficult. You typically have to go outside of your community.

MR: Yes. Go to California.

TR: Did you have to do that in the later years?

MR: I still had to do it, yes. But some of them were very obvious cases of negligence, and didn't have to go to all those lengths.

TR: You had indicated earlier in our discussion that there were a lot more trials and jury trials in the earlier days than there were in the later days. What do you think the reason for that is?

MR: Part of the reason, I believe, is that the insurance companies thought they could win. And the plaintiff's counsel thought they had a good case, and they went to trial. Now, I don't know when that changed. Well, there were so many cases filed that you got into this practice of mediation, where some of the lawyers would start doing mediating – usually retired judges. And got many of the cases settled that ordinarily might have gone through to trial. I think they did a good job of assessing the merits of the cases in making their views known to the lawyers on both sides.

TR: You had talked about the dog bite case, and that case that you tried with Charlie Driscoll. What do you think was your more either controversial or difficult case?

MR: A civil rights case that I tried against Los Alamos Nuclear Lab. I always thought civil rights is easy – it's right there. They put up very strong defenses, and they've always, I thought, was very restrictive at the time. One of them came out well; one of them didn't. But I thought those were very difficult cases.

TR: You've talked a lot about cases that you've tried and judges that you've known. Based upon your experience, what makes for a good jury trial?

MR: I believe you need a client that is likable. And you need some facts to help the case along, yes.

TR: How about the lawyers. What have you seen in terms of how lawyers make for good trials?

MR: Well, generally, the insurance company lawyers, they were in the large firms. I think they were well prepared. They had good investigations, and had a lot of practice. And they, when you had to go to trial, you had a lot of work to do to prevail. And, on the plaintiff's side, it was the same thing; if you're going to go, you have to be prepared and all that.

TR: So it's the old adage of 'hard work and preparation is 98 percent'?

MR: Yes. I remember I would, whenever I went to trial, I would always look up a case that was on the decisive issue of the trial, and had it ready. And some judges, you know, when you got to that issue, they would appreciate being furnished with the case that was controlling. So . . .

TR: And other judges?

MR: Well, they had their approach to it.

TR: In the years that you've been trying cases, what perceptions have you developed regarding our jury system and the concept of trial by a jury of your peers?

MR: I think it is a great institution. It makes people more human, I believe, including the lawyers, to work with the jury on these cases. And one of its purposes, I think, is that the fact that there will be a jury on a case, causes each side to settle more often than if its going to be tried to a judge alone. Because juries are somewhat unpredictable, and as strong as you believe your case is, it doesn't mean that the jury will see it that way.

TR: Lawyers have a habit of say, "I think a Bernalillo County jury is going to do this," or "I think a Bernalillo County jury is going to do that with this case." Have you seen that there are very many lawyers who had the ability to predict what a jury is going to do?

MR: I don't think so. I don't think so. They have the feeling about it, I know. There are certain counties I enjoyed trying cases in – McKinley County, Valencia County; at one time, Santa Fe County. But there were facts to be dealt with.

TR: Do you think that the juries – not the jury system – but the juries themselves have changed over the years that you've been trying cases?

MR: The composition of the juries?

TR: The composition or the way the jurors look at the lawyers; the parties; the facts.

MR: I think, when I first started doing civil trial work, the juries were probably more sympathetic to the plaintiffs. And the defense bar and the insurance companies came along and started infiltrating the news and the insurance companies would circulate articles and other things about excessive verdicts. And they would play up the odd cases where there was a verdict. And I think that has made the juries, as a whole, more conservative in their approach to the cases.

TR: How has the practice or the legal community changed during the course of your career?

MR: During the time that I was practicing, . . . what was your question again?

TR: Sure. How has the practice of law or the legal community changed during the course of your career?

MR: During that time at the beginning of it, and most of the way through until I stopped working, we were familiar with each other. And generally, we took each other's words at their face value. You say you're going to do this, and the other side would say 'ok, that's all right.' Or you reach some understanding on something. And rarely, as far as I can tell, was there anyone writing it down, as these words were said. And you took each other's word on matters. I think that was changing toward then. You're getting many more lawyers, and you're getting many people who you don't know. And there is a matter of 'put it in writing,' which is a change from the way it was.

TR: You talked about a number of the famous plaintiff's attorneys that we've all heard their names over the years. You haven't mentioned any of the defense lawyers who defended the cases that you've tried. Who, in that category is of memory to you?

MR: Jim Valentez from Judge Johnson's office; The Rodey lawyers; I'm trying to think now . . . there is Jim Taluse; Ray Rodey; Chuck . . . I forget his name now. Jim Richey; Joe Rael; . . .

TR: Did you ever try a case against Richard Civerolo?

MR: Oh yes, many times, yes.

TR: What was he like to try a case against?

MR: He was very severe in his trial techniques and practices. I was trying a case against him in Gallup once. And he had put his witness on the stand. And I was walking toward the podium to do cross-examination. And I heard him whispering to Wayne Wolfe, "He's going to ask for his statement." He was referring to his witness's statement. And frankly, that hadn't occurred to me, but I got up to the podium and asked the witness, "Have you given a statement in this case?" And Dick screamed and jumped out of his

chair, and said, “I object; I object.” But he was very aggressive in his trial techniques. And outside of court, he was easy to get along with.

TR: Did you find that with most of the lawyers that you tried cases against – that they were one way in the courtroom and another way outside the courtroom?

MR: Yes, there were some. Yes, I believe so. They did their work in the courtroom, and sometimes you could get along with them afterward.

TR: Okay. We’re going to go off the record for just a moment here.
(pause)

TR: We’re now back on the record. We needed to go off the record to change the tape. Mel, next thing I want to ask you about is: what do you think your most significant contribution to the practice of law or to your clients was during your career?

MR: I’d say, the idea of doing a good job and thorough job. I’m not sure I was always real thorough, but I was trying to be thorough. And trying to show integrity in the practice. It is important, I think generally, to convey that impression.

TR: Now you’re saying that in terms of – in regard to your clients, as well as the other attorneys and judges that you dealt with?

MR: Yes, I think so.

TR: What do you think of the legal advertising that you see in today’s world?

MR: Well, I’ve adopted the feeling of the U.S. Supreme Court that to make the services available to the public is important, and advertising is one way of doing it. I’m sure that many people would not have obtained legal services unless there was this advertising to make some lawyers available to them. And from that standpoint, I think it was necessary. I don’t particularly like, because I started practicing at a time when advertising was supposedly not permitted. And some of the things I see or hear today, I think they are excessive and self-promoting too much. But generally, I guess it’s okay so the people will know that there are ways of getting to court, and getting what they’re entitled to.

TR: You said back when you became a lawyer, advertising was not considered to be a good thing, or that it was unprofessional for a lawyer to do that. When you left the U.S. Attorney’s Office, for example, how did you develop a practice?

MR: Well, I went into an established practice with Lorenzo Chavez and Art Ortega. They had a good practice.

TR: And then, in the ‘70’s, when you went out on your own, how did you maintain a good healthy client base?

TR – Terrence Revo (Interviewer)
MR – Mel Robins

MR: At times I wondered if I would have a client, but mostly by referrals from other lawyers, I believe. That was probably where most of the work came from. And then some people would come back, or a relative of someone I had represented would come in.

TR: Do you have any words of wisdom to the younger lawyers starting to practice in today's legal world?

MR: Yes. Be prepared and work hard and be prepared and be on top of the case. Because from what I hear, there are a lot of people who are just walking into something and not having prepared themselves, and they take a beating on these things.

TR: Anything else that you'd like to share with us before we conclude today?

MR: I think you've covered a lot of ground.

TR: All right. Well, I thank you very much for taking your time to come in and talk with me today. And we're going to conclude the interview. And we'll keep this interview in a database or in a library. And it will be accessible to you or your family anytime you'd like.

MR: That's good. Thank you.

TR: Thank you. We're going to turn off the tape now.

END OF MEL ROBINS INTERVIEW