Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Bobbe Bridge

SUMMARY

Bobbe Bridge is a former Associate Justice of the Washington Supreme Court, and a dedicated volunteer and philanthropist who has been honored with numerous awards for her civic involvement and service to children and youth. Justice Bridge was appointed to the Washington State Supreme Court in 1999 after serving ten years as a King County Superior Court Judge. In 2006, she retired from her judgeship to assume the role of Founding President and CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), a private nonprofit organization that does work with child welfare and the juvenile justice systems in Washington State.

Jeff Schwager: We're off to the races. So welcome, Justice Bridge. It's a real pleasure to meet you and to have you here. Thank you. Um, so I wanted to begin by asking about your background and where you were born and grew up and all that stuff.

Bobbe Bridge : Uh, born and raised in Seattle. Um, yeah. Not many of us anymore, but that's true.

Jeff Schwager: And how did your family end up here?

Bobbe Bridge : Well. Let's see. My father was originally from new Jersey, and he was here during the war and met my mother, who was also born and raised here. Wow. She's now 90. Well, she'll be 94 years old in June, but she's 93 now. My father's passed a long time ago, but, um. Yeah, he was originally from new Jersey.

Jeff Schwager: Um hum. And your ancestors before that, do you know?

Bobbe Bridge : Uh, primarily. Well, primarily, um, the hard way. Um, I guess not the hardest way, though, if you catch my meaning. Yeah. Um, I would say, uh, primarily Czechoslovakia of what was kind of scrunched together as Czechoslovakia and, um, some from Ireland, actually, to.

Jeff Schwager: Uh huh. And was that do you know when that was.

Bobbe Bridge : The mutt side of me? Uh, it would have been the turn of the 20th century, early 1900s.

Jeff Schwager: Uh huh. Okay. And, um, do you come from an observant family?

Bobbe Bridge : I would say, uh, no. Um, reformed spiritually. Um, and, um, I would say observant culturally.

Jeff Schwager: Um, and we're Jewish values. Uh, things you talked about in your house. Uh, were they important to you?

Bobbe Bridge : Certainly. Values of social justice, tikkun olam, um, fairness, hard work, family, all of those kinds of Jewish values. Absolutely.

Jeff Schwager: Does. Uh, was your family, Were your parents educated? Did they go to college? Were.

Bobbe Bridge : You know, I was the first in my family to go to college.

Jeff Schwager: And, um, how did you end up choosing law as your profession?

Bobbe Bridge : Well, uh, that's kind of an interesting story, I think. Um, but, um, I was, as I said, the first in my family to go to college really intended. Um, I liked being a student. So students like to be teachers. I guess that's the, you know, your opportunity to learn and still make money. Um, but for me, I frankly didn't feel called to K-12. I think you have to be really talented and almost a performer, a performance artist, in order to be a really good teacher. Um, certainly. Now, um, but but even in the days when I was growing up and then ultimately trying to decide on a career and so college teaching was what I thought, which, again, absolute wonderful opportunity to read, to do research, to write, think and talk with other people, your students, other faculty members. So that's where I was headed. And I graduated at the University of Washington with a degree in political science, went to the University of Michigan for graduate degree, was on track to complete a complete a doctorate in political science, emphasis on American government, subspecialty judicial politics. And I had a wonderful contemporary problems is what we called it civics, that sort of thing. Uh, teacher in my high school at Lincoln High School in Wallingford. And, um, she had really gotten me or I'd gotten the bug from her about politics and the like and, um, really about the judiciary. And, I don't know, I was just always fascinated by by law and the kind, but didn't know any lawyers and didn't really, um, as I said, I was really headed for graduate school, and it was a time in the in the development of political science where, um, there were a fair number of political science professors, particularly if they were in American government and looking at the judicial branch as opposed to the other two. Um, uh, they were lawyers or had some kind of a law background, even though they had never practiced law. So, you know, it was intriguing, but, you know, not something that I thought I could leap to or afford to do. But, um, there I was in Ann Arbor, um, completed a master's, uh, was on track, uh, had a grant to do work in, um, uh, for my dissertation, which was, um, which was to be on juvenile justice. And, um, there was a great deal of change being brought to the world of juvenile courts in the late 60s, early 70s, which is the time that we are talking about. And, um, lots of different, um, cases were being decided by the United States Supreme Court, the thrust of which was to introduce many of the so-called adult criminal rights due process rights into juvenile court, which didn't look at all like most courts did in those days. Um, it had always been a very private court, not a court of record, as we would say. No lawyers, uh, a judge, but a judge frequently who didn't wear a robe. Uh, the proceedings were in chambers, uh, in other words, office as opposed to being out in a courtroom. No juries. Uh, as I said, no lawyers. Uh, typically it would be the young person, maybe his or her parents, uh, together with a probation officer in the state of Washington. We call them probation counselors. And this judge who would, um, presume that the child had done the crime of which he or she was being Accused and proceeded accordingly to fix the child. It's a social work model, and one which the founders of the early juvenile courts in the beginning of the 20th century held dear, and the idea was that children shouldn't be treated like adults because they were different. Of course, now the science, you know, fast forward, the science tells us that's exactly true. But their, their, um, solution for that was to take them out of the adult system because the adult system was pretty harsh at the beginning of the 20th century. Um, the adults didn't have many due process rights even, um, that, of course, began to change over the by the by the time by 1970 ish. But um, and then people began to worry about, well, were children being treated fairly. What is this presumption? Not of innocence, but of guilt? What is this? Um, nothing on the record. No appeal. What is this? Not having someone to speak on behalf of the child, i.e. a child's lawyer. So all of these various rights were being introduced and so there was a lot of turmoil. I thought this would be a very interesting thing to study. And so I got a three year grant to do that which and to study juvenile courts in Walla Walla County and in King County here. And um, with uh, because Walla Walla was still, in those days, pretty much run like the old days, it had not introduced lawyers, it had not introduced, um, due process rights in general. Um, there was the opportunity for the child to have a lawyer, but it really wasn't taken too seriously, if you catch my drift. And, um, then. But King County, being King County had, um, you know, embraced all of these opinions and had, um, a prosecutor that was assigned to juvenile court, um, kids were assigned public defenders, uh, entered all of their the rights that the Supreme Court promised them. The proceedings were on the record. The judge had a robe. It was in a courtroom, albeit a smaller one. No jury boxes necessary. Uh, and, um. And so it would it was an interesting way to study, and the way I studied them was, um, to, um, interview, observe, of course, the proceedings to interview all of the what we would now call stakeholders, uh, the judges and lawyers, etc., the grown ups in the room, um, and then the kids themselves also as to how they felt about the proceeding and, um, with, with my objective being to find, um, to, to discern whether or not the introduction of these rights not being introduced to Walla Walla. That's the comparison. Whether the introduction of these rights had any difference on a kid's attitude about how they were being treated. Did they feel a part of their community? Did they feel like someone cared about them? Did they feel like they were getting help? Did they feel like they were being treated fairly? I guess is the is really the crux of it all. Um, and trying to compare in that way. And so I was introduced to lawyers, lots of them. And um, got a lot of encouragement, particularly from one judge, um, who was in juvenile court a lot because he liked going up to juvenile court. We call it up because it literally is up from the main courthouse. Um, it's on Capitol Hill. And, um, he took me aside and became a mentor of mine, uh, for me and encouraged me to get out of the back of the courtroom and observing and instead go to law school and be a lawyer. So I did, and, um, fast forward, I had intended that I would be a, I would be a lawyer that represented kids, and I really didn't care whether that was as a prosecutor or as a public defender. I thought prosecutors had the ability to make a lot of change and to make sure that the process was fair, there was a lot of power there. So even if that was the route, I would love to do that. And juvenile, um, or of course, being a public defender and

actually representing the kids themselves. So, um, but that didn't happen. I ended up at, at Garvey, Schubert and Becker, um, after a summer internship, and I just stayed for 14 years. But, um, the, um, the end of this little story is that, um, the judge who was my mentor was Charles Smith, who was the first African-American judge in the state of Washington, certainly in King County. And, um, he became a great mentor to me then and carrying through my years as a practicing lawyer. And I ended up spending my first two years on the Washington state Supreme Court with him as my colleague.

Jeff Schwager: That's great.

Bobbe Bridge : I know, it was pretty amazing.

Jeff Schwager: Wow.

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah.

Jeff Schwager: Um, I, uh, for this project, I interviewed Judge Barbara Rothstein, and she talked a bit about her experiences as a woman in law school and the fact that she couldn't really find a job when she finished law school. I'm curious if you had, uh, a difficult time as a woman in those circumstances, or if I think you're a decade probably later than probably.

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah. At least.

Jeff Schwager: Old enough.

Bobbe Bridge : Um, yes. They had, um, were all things equal? No. Are they still. No. But, um, no, I think because of people like Barbara Rothstein, I think I did have have an easier path. I also had a wonderful law firm. Um, it was small to begin with. Um, well, to begin with, my beginnings with it, um, there were two of us who came in at the same time, so I was either number 12 or number 13, depending upon who got the who got the seniority. If we were if we had been organized that way, which we weren't. Um, so we were very small. It had a great sense of pride in giving back to the community. There was a culture of. Of belief that being a lawyer was a privilege. We were presented with a lot of power that, um, an ordinary profession or an ordinary citizen was not imbued with, such as the ability to subpoena people. Um, sometimes hold life and death matters in your hands, literally, if you're a judge. But but even more even even so, as a lawyer. Um, and so it was a privilege, and we, um, we had the obligation to pay back to our community. So there was a kind of tikkun olam spirit, if you will, in that firm. And it was Dan Barer who hired me, another sort of, um, Kevin Bacon moment, if you will take my relationship with Justice Smith as a Kevin Kevin Bacon moment. Um, but Stan Bear, I had first met, um, in probably 1963. It would have been, um, when I was a sophomore at the University of Washington. Yeah, I was still a sophomore beginning of my sophomore year, and, um, he was working for Brock Adams, who was a congressman, and I was taking a political science course which required us to volunteer for some political campaign. And so I chose Brock Adams. He was our representative and, um, uh, met Stan, and he could not have been kinder to me. He, um, basically brought me into the inner sanctum. I will never forget having, uh, dinner. There was a table probably no bigger than the one we're seated at for people, one of whom was Congressman Adams, who I had held in the highest degree of esteem. And, um, Stan and one other person from the campaign. And it was just an awestruck, kind of star struck sort of experience for me. And I remembered that all those years lost track of of Stan as he was in law school at the time when I was, um, beginning undergrad. And then here I was, um, the summer of 75. It's a Barry Manilow album title. Um, the summer of 75. I am applying to be a law clerk, not thinking that I was wanted to go with a private firm, but I had interviewed at the prosecutor's office, I had interviewed at a public defense agency, and I had friends who had counseled me to. You should really interview someplace that you don't think you're going to like, and then maybe you'll get you'll get an offer and you can have the experience for the summer and just, you know, see what private practice is like. And I said, well, that sounds like a very good idea. So anyway, I got a lawyer, a lawyer, I got an offer from them, and it was Stan Baer who interviewed me. Um, amazing coincidence. And, um, I just had the time of my life. It was a great. I was the first woman who had ever been a law clerk at Garvey. And, um, I ended up being the first woman associate and the first woman partner. Wow. So it was a great experience. Um, and Stan is still one of my closest friends, um, and a great mentor.

Jeff Schwager: And so you were.

Bobbe Bridge : So it was much easier, let's put it that way. Yeah.

Jeff Schwager: And you were there for 14 years.

Bobbe Bridge : I was there for 14 years.

Jeff Schwager: And you went from there to the bench.

Bobbe Bridge : To the King County Superior Court. Yes.

Jeff Schwager: And how did that happen?

Bobbe Bridge : Um, well, I think that was probably the most intentional of any of the things that I so far described. Um, I knew that I was ready to do something else. And, um, I indicated earlier that, um, there was a culture at Garvey Schubert about being active in your community, giving back, um, even more, um, which was unusual, um, for any place, um, I think I think now, um, there is a high degree of commitment, um, in the legal community here in the state of Washington, in particular in King County, um, that law firms, large and small, um, do give back to their community and do have very vibrant pro bono programs and things like that. But it wasn't so much true in the early 80s, which is the time frame I'm now at. And so they, um, they gave us credit on billable hours, which was very unusual for a time that we spent in the community. And it need not be, um, the culture being so strong, it need not be, um, with legal representation, the classic pro bono Activity. It could be serving on a nonprofit board. It could be working in it, volunteering in a soup kitchen. Um, a variety of aspects. Just so long as you were engaging in your community. So, um, I had a lot of experience doing that, and it was great. Lots of board work and some of which, um, re-engaged me in the juvenile and juvenile court issues, juvenile delinquency issues, and some of which did not. Um, as you will see from that bio that I've given you. But, um, but I kind of got the itch to do this full time and to do some kind of public service full time. And, um, we had a sabbatical program at Garvey Schubert. They still do a sabbatical program. And, um, I was entitled to three months off at this particular. It would have been I think it was 1987. I think that's right. Now, I should remember, um, and I decided I was going to run for the King County Council, which I did, and I took on an incumbent, a woman, um, and named Lois North, uh, which was my district and I lost, uh, but I realized that, um, you know, it was it was what I wanted to do. Not necessarily the legislative process, but it was something I wanted to do and enter another great mentor for me, my mother in law, Shirley Bridge, um, who, you know, counseled me. Don't give up for one thing. And she said, this may turn out to be a blessing. And of course, she was exactly right about that. I would have probably hated being on the King County Council, but, um, she, um, she said, stop thinking about you think you want to do public service? Stop thinking about the job. You know, what about this? What about that? Just think you know what you what you're interested in and what you would like to accomplish or areas to explore that you would want to have an impact on. What issues are of concern to you, things of that nature. And she was so right. Because I'm not a spider. Being a lawyer and kind of obsessive compulsive about a lot of things, I'm not necessarily a person who plans everything. I certainly didn't plan my career as you, as you can tell. I kind of, you know, landed in these places. Um, and it was true here, too. Um, you know, we kind of I literally, literally wrote down a list of things, and she looked at it and she says, you should be a judge. And I said, a judge. And I thought, I said, that's no, I mean, I you know, I'm an activist, you know, I want to do active things. I want to advocate for things. And she said, no, no, no, no, no, I think you should be a judge. You'd be great judge, blah, blah, blah. And so that, you know, over a couple of year period, I was back at the law firm, of course, and over a couple of year period, you know, got to think more and more about that. Talked to a lot of people, um, um, friends of mine who were judges, women. Um, did they like it? How did it differ from from private practice or, you know, the practice of law, private or not. And, um, decided that. Yeah, this was this was worth a shot. And, um, it also kind of circled back to my graduate school days of studying judiciary and, um, that interest. And, um, so I made application and, um, then governor Booth Gardner selected me for a vacancy, um, a retired judge retired mid midstream. And, um, actually, um, John, um, the judge, um, resigned, um, retired, however, you want to put it because he basically said, I have presided over too many trials where guns have been, have killed people, or have otherwise ruined the lives of everybody in the courtroom, defendant as well as the victim, as well as the families involved. And I can no longer sit silent. And I need to be an advocate. And I cannot do that and be objective as a judge. And so he quit and, um, John Riley, and that's what he spent, um, a lot of his final years doing. So it's kind of, you know, interesting in the context of what's going what's happening in our, in our communities today. Um, but that was the, um, so I took his seat and, um, loved every minute of my work as a trial court judge and felt very blessed to have had that opportunity. And I was not lonely, and I was not, um. I was I was able to be an advocate for things that, that I cared about, in the sense that I wanted to improve the legal process. And I was able to be able to do that as a judge.

Jeff Schwager: And did you get to focus on juvenile issues?

Bobbe Bridge : I did, I spent um, I spent approximately half my time about four and a half years in juvenile, very, very challenging time. Mid 90s. Lots of not so different in some ways as to what's happening now. Um, although we have, you know, very, very low juvenile crime rates now, but, um, we, um, there were juvenile crime rates were high. The feeling, the mood of the body politic was to get tough on these kids. Um, do the crime, do the time. Regardless, age doesn't matter. Um, kids are super predators. Those were the words, actually, the the the terminology used by some social scientists who were writing on this group of kids. Um, and, um, so there was a lot of harsh sentencing, um, statutes, legislation being passed, um, discretion of juvenile court judges, which used to be quite broad to tailor the, um, you know, the introduction of due process rights, of course, because all of that did, in fact happen, um, through the years. But when it came to sentencing, for example, um, the juvenile court judge typically had, uh, in the spirit of the old juvenile court about we need to look at the child. We need to rehabilitate, rehabilitate the

child. We need to have individualized justice, was the phrase, so that, um, not just a standard sentencing range, because then you couldn't really deliver the right kind of package that would hopefully help this young person on their way to off the off the track of, of crime and onto, uh, on the way to a successful adulthood, whatever that meant, treatment or what have you. Maybe it maybe a degree of incarceration, but, um, anyway, some package that would be tailored to the youth and a lot of that discretion was taken away from judges with the idea that judges were too soft. And that's why this was running amok. And so something had to be done, and it needed to be reined in. So judges were politicized, I think in that period. A small P and our code of ethics, our code of conduct, does allow us to speak on issues pertaining to the administration of justice. And this certainly did. And so, in a generic way, we couldn't talk about, you know, this specific crime shouldn't have this kind of sentence, but but about the general concepts of should we have individual more individualized justice should. Should judges have more discretion or hold on to the discretion that they had? Or should we, um, place that authority elsewhere? And um, so the the Sphere Court Judges Association of Washington, um, created for the first time a legislative committee, and I chaired it. Um, and we spent a lot of time on juvenile issues during those, those mid 90s and much of it, as much of it, as I said, had to do with juvenile. Juvenile justice. Some of it had to do with some some issues pertaining to family law. Um, some of it had to do with, um, child welfare, the so-called foster care system. And, and we were at the table, um, speaking from our experience, um, obviously some not always being able to take a position one way or another, but at least, um, advising the legislators that this is, you know, you can take this into your. Please take this into account. This is what we're seeing and what we think is best. So I had a great opportunity to do all of that. Um, and to do it from a statewide perspective, perspective through the association of which I became president in the latter part of the 90s, right before I went up to the Supreme Court. Um, it was a great experience.

Jeff Schwager: And how did you end up going up to the Supreme Court?

Bobbe Bridge : Well, um. That was one of those opportunities where, um. Where I, I really, um, didn't think that it was the right move. Um, I wasn't done. I didn't feel done at all. Unlike when I was, um, um, contemplating the move from private practice, I really was determined that it was going to be in a public service setting, and I was ready. I mean, I had certainly not learned everything I needed to know about the practice of law, but I had I had had the great opportunity at Garvey Schubert to do a variety of areas of law. Liked some, didn't like others, but it was good. It was a great experience, and I learned a lot about myself and other people and the law. Um, and so I felt ready. Um, but this I wasn't ready for. I mean, I thought I had a lot left to do at the Superior Court level, and I and I loved it. I enjoyed my work immensely, whether I was up at juvie or which I certainly enjoyed, sort of fulfilling that promise to myself that I made in graduate school, that I was going to do some work in juvenile court. I just didn't think it was going to be at that level. Um, but Barbara Durham, um, became ill. Turned out that the diagnosis was early onset Alzheimer's. And, um, so she was she retired and, um, there left a vacancy on the court. The then governor, Gary Locke, um, you know, was accepting applications of letters of interest, that kind of thing. And I was encouraged by a number of people to go for the vacancy. Um, I said to them what I said to you, um, this would be a great honor, there's no question. And it's a great opportunity, but I don't think it's me. You know, I really like the trial court, and I love the administrative responsibilities. As I said, I was already I was by that time the presiding judge of the Superior Court, having having gone from chief judge up at juvie to the broader court. And I liked that, too. Um, and so but, um, you know, things happen. And I thought about it and said, okay. And, uh, and Governor Locke agreed. So, um, it was again, it was a fabulous opportunity serving with Charles E Smith. Um, um, it was a great bench, uh, and I learned a lot. The opportunity to kind of get back to an more, an more of an academic kind of posture, although it's judging, but it's it's also learning and researching and writing, uh, along with skilled law clerks. And, um, so it's a very different, very different role than the judging that you do in the superior court level. I thought I was, you know, but I was, um, very blessed as well as I said, to have good colleagues and and that opportunity.

Jeff Schwager: You mentioned some of your mentors, uh, earlier. Uh, I know that judges play an important mentorship role with their clerks. Um, is that something that you enjoyed?

Bobbe Bridge : I do indeed, indeed. Yeah. And I do it. Um, I'm a part of a group. Um, it's a formalized program at the University of Washington Law School and have been since, well, since I was at Garvey Schubert, um, where, um, they put together, um, you, um, practicing lawyers, wherever they are. Uh, some judges do it as well. And I did it when I was a judge, uh, including on the Supreme Court, uh, to mentor first year law students. And, um, I've done that for years, and I. I love it every annually during the holidays in December, I have a lunch and bring them together, whoever's around, And it's really particularly neat for the, um, for the newest one, the one who really is a first year law student to kind of see what has happened, um, with the others. You know, there is life after law school. You know, people really do survive this. And oh, and look at all the interesting things they do. Some of them are still practicing law. Some of them are now stay at home moms. They're all women, by the way, except for one man who came to work with me at KCI and he's now at the prosecutor's office. Um, but all the rest of them have been women, so they they just see the variety that's open. And it really is a good experience for them too. So yeah. So I keep I keep hold of them and, um, and the same with my law clerks. They were great people.

Jeff Schwager: Um that's wonderful. That must, um, create a great network for them.

Bobbe Bridge : I hope so. Yeah, I hope so. Yeah. You know, help them to to explore job opportunities and be in positions for internships as well as full time jobs, and it makes me feel really good.

Jeff Schwager: And have you been able to give a lot of opportunities to women coming out of law school as your clerks? Is that has that been something that you've prioritized for women?

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah.

Jeff Schwager: Are you allowed to prioritize that sort of thing?

Bobbe Bridge : No. But you certainly I think, um, you know, all things being equal, I think you would say, well, you know, I'll give this person maybe the break, but I had both men and women as my law clerks, mostly women, but I had both.

Jeff Schwager: Um hum. Okay, so tell me about the center for Children and Youth Justice.

Bobbe Bridge : The center for Children and Youth Justice is a 501 three nonprofit whose mission is to improve the outcomes for kids and youth who are in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Um, and we do that by improving those systems and trying to make them be more research based and data driven with respect to their interventions and relationships with these kids, so that we are focused on the kids themselves. Child centric, I guess, is a way to look at it. And, um, we we accomplished that by, um, by more of a project orientation, I would say. We sort of we look at areas where the results are dismal subpopulations, for example, of juvenile justice and child welfare, where, um, those populations don't seem to be doing well, um, after they have been touched by these systems. In a matter of fact, the systems tend to be a negative experience for them. Um, kids of color, um, LGBTQ kids, girls, um, but that sort of thing. And, um, you know, where can we add value with what we do best? And what I think we do best is bringing people together to learn together how they might change a particular practice or policy and or a process. Since it is a legal process, they might change any of those things and change them in the way they do business with each other. That would improve those outcomes for kids. Now, sometimes that hypothesis that it would, that changing the policy practice process is going to really make things better for kids comes from research. Sometimes somebody else's, sometimes ours, mostly somebody else's or somebody else's experience. Maybe it's a replication of something that happened somewhere else and it, you know, succeeded. Their their numbers showed great, great outcomes for kids. So we all learned together, see whether this could work in this particular environment. And somewhere in the state of Washington, which is is our, our Our territory. And, um, then we help them through, you know, whatever, um, memoranda of understanding, whatever kind of documents they need to come up with to formalize their, their new relationship, their the new thing, they're going to practice. And, um, sometimes that's, you know, writing the policy itself. Sometimes it's not a policy. It's just, you know, how we're going to do business sort of thing. Uh, we then, um, help them. We either come with a grant to do this ourselves, come with funding, or we help to raise the funding, um, altogether. Uh, in order to accomplish this, we then manage them through a pilot, um, either manage or manage an evaluation or do an evaluation. So it's all as, again, data driven. And if we come out with good metrics, whatever those metrics we've decided may be, um, and we have, um, and we've got success. Help them to sustain it. You know, it's not sequential. I mean, this is all kind of happening simultaneously along the way, as I'm sure you appreciate. But, um, then, you know, once that's all buttoned up and it becomes part of the system and the new way of doing business, we look at another aspect, some other population who seems to be underserved or ignored or worse case, um, further traumatized by these experiences, by the experiences in those systems and then, um, and move on to something else. Um, we have one part of our organization, our body of work that is an exception to that rule. And that is, um, a project started out a project, um, now it's a home. It's a home. So at Garvey, at CC, so I assume we would call the program, um, and it's called Lawyers Fostering Independence started with a very small kind of illustrates what we do, but it started with a very small grant from the American Bar Association. Our. Our mandate from that grant was to try to find ways to engage lawyers in something that would help young people who were aging out of the foster care system to not have the rotten outcomes that that they were experiencing. For example, um, compared to their non foster age group, they were more, more likely to be homeless by some four times, more likely not to be employed, more likely not to be in school, more likely to have unaddressed mental health issues. The beat goes on. More likely to be parents with no support. Um, all of these really bad outcomes that, you know, just set their life on a path which is not successful. And, um, so that was our mandate. Find something that lawyers could do that would help turn those bad statistics around. And so we brought stakeholders together. Also talked to and one of another part of our M.O. at KCI is we bring the voices of the youth themselves, usually veteran youth. I mean, the young adults talk to us about their experience and offer up recommendations for what could have made their life different. So we bring youth to the table. How might this change? Etc. and we came up with the idea of a pro bono legal service where we would recruit and train, um, and hopefully, um, do whatever we needed to do to retain, um, a group of lawyers who would agree to do volunteer legal services, civil legal services, not criminal civil legal services for young people who were aging out, um, young people between we decided 17 and 25. Um, that was before all the brain science told us. That was exactly what what that that those

key those key years are Ah. And, um, so that's what we did. And, um, we tested it out for a period of a year, and we, we, you know, we we were successful because we were we resolved housing issues. We were able to get a nice group of referrals. We were, um, um, we educated social workers and social service agencies around the area. This was limited to King County at the time. And um, our test group, if you will. And um, so we had a good group. We had reason to believe that there were there were a lot more out there that we weren't serving. So the need was great. We were we were filling a need and um, and, uh, we were, we were seeing successes. So, um, we then decided, all right, great. Now our model says you now go around to the system and plug it in. Right. Sustain it in the system somewhere. Well, that wouldn't mean you'd go to the Department of Social and Health Services. In this instance, you would go to other civil legal aid agencies who do that solely for for a business and see, you know, here here's the model that we have. You want to take it. Nobody wanted to take it unless we were going to raise the money to do it. And so I said to myself, well, if I have to raise money to sustain this program, I might as well keep it here. And, um, and we also learned and this was the, you know, sort of the more positive side of that, um, as, as opposed to the entrepreneurial. But, um, and that was our lawyers really liked the idea that they were engaged with, with a group, to wit, CCJ that was doing other things, um, in the area of child welfare and juvenile justice and wasn't just a lawyers organization that we really were looking at reform of legal of two legal systems for sure, but that we were in doing it, um, with staff. That was not all lawyers. We were doing it on not just the purely, purely the court system, but but other aspects of these systems. And so they thought that was cool to be a part of that kind of an endeavor rather than to go with, you know, um, Volunteer Legal Services Inc. and, um, and so we have it's been remarkably successful. I think we are now, I should know this by heart, but I don't I think we are about year 8 or 9 and we are we are now, um, expanded to Snohomish County probably later this year will be in Pierce County. Um, and we know that we need to go to the east side because the, the east side, meaning the east side of the mountains, um, because there is need there as well. I mean, obviously the largest population chunk is here, and so we still have that, but we have we served over 200 young people. Last year was a was a record year. And we do legal clinics. We've added that as part of the part of the picture, in addition to just referrals, we've added many more social service agency partners who whose staff are trained by us, you know, and to how to identify something that might be a legal issue, um, which is really important in that kind of work because, you know, it's the hammer and nail sort of thing. Um, um, a social worker hears of a kid or hears a kid explain to them that they're about to get evicted from their apartment. Their first impulse is to find them another apartment or find them a stable place to live. Our first impulse is to keep them in the apartment and say, why is he being evicted? You know, does the does the landlord have real grounds? Um, you know, etc.. And so, you know, maybe the legal fix is a more permanent one than, than having the poor social worker have to keep finding new places for this young person to live. And while he's he or she is unstable, he housed for, you know, very long periods of time, thus stopping everything dead, you know, can't go to school, can't keep a job because he's not stably housed. So, um, anyway, it's been a it's been a great, um, great success. And, um, but it's but it's the, um, the exception to the rule. Other things, um, like supporting early connections, which is a model. And I won't spare the details here, but, um, the a model, a new way of handling cases in the child welfare system, which involve little kids from zero plus one day to ages to age three. And, um, in a more therapeutic kind of a, like a drug court environment as opposed to an adversarial environment. And, um, where where there's a decision making team, even though the judge may be at the head of that team, um, you still have, um, people that are that are giving input from the various disciplines, from the various agencies, in addition to the lawyers, etc. and, um, that is now embedded in, in King County and um, um, is successful. We have not yet moved at any place else in the state, but, you know, we sure would like to, but, um, yeah, that's kind of that's our M.O., as I said, that we once we, um, prove something up, we'll put it in and try to put it into the system and be adopted that way.

Jeff Schwager: How big is the organization?

Bobbe Bridge : We have, um, we have approximately 19 people on staff, but, um, that includes, at any given time, about 3 or 4 interns. Summertime, even maybe 4 or 5 interns. But, um, and so 15 ish full time staff, myself included. That's great. Yeah. It is.

Jeff Schwager: It seems like you've really gone full circle to where you've gotten back to an almost academic setting where you can really study things as you had intended to do.

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah, it's it's a bit of that. I mean, it's a nice blending. I mean, for me personally, it's a nice blending of that academic side and more activism because. Yeah.

Jeff Schwager: How did you sort of how did you make the decision to move from the bench into doing this?

Bobbe Bridge : Well, that was, I think, more intentional on my part. I seem to have finally gotten the picture that I should really sort of think these things through. Um, I had decided that I was not going to run for re-election in 2008. This was about the summer of 2005 ish, I think, and which would have meant I would have been running in 2007. And, um, I think I've got that. Yeah, that I do have that right. And, um, I, um, and I'd thought about, you know, weaving together these experiences Variances of, um, you know, kind of with a political system, political systems change kind of hat on the network that I had developed over the state, um, from both my Superior Court Judges Association roles, in addition to my role as on the Supreme Court and, um, and

really and then returning to my roots, if you will, in juvenile and juvenile court and thinking, how could I do that? And I thought about a variety of ways in which I, you know, figured I had one more gig in me that, um, what might that what might that be? And it could be, you know, a, an agency such as Casey Family Programs, which does a lot of great work and, you know, or some other place like that that would allow me to do a consultancy kind of role, something like that. Then I thought, well, maybe not, maybe I ought to just do something on my own and, um, and do the same weaving. Um, I had long, many years earlier to this, when I was contemplating this, um, learned that these kids, um, shared so many of the same needs and experiences, whether they came in on the juvenile justice side or whether they came in through the door of child abuse and neglect in child welfare, they really were the same kids. And yet these systems didn't talk to one another. They didn't share resources. Um, they weren't learning from one another. And, um, so how could I, you know, bring that to a business, as it were? And, um, looked at a couple of models across the country, um, one of which was probably the the closest to what we, we ended up doing at the Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia, run by a wonderful man named Bob Schwartz, who had been doing it for many years. Started out not unusually for these kinds of agencies, um, starting out as a public defense agency, but as becoming more ever more frustrated about one child at a time and trying to, you know, based upon their experience and seeing systemic issues that they could really resolve better from a systemic level. And so, you know, that's kind of how how it was put together, focused originally on juvenile justice and then later adding some elements of child welfare and just really well run and impactful, um, doing things that I thought were intriguing. Um, you know, there's there are things that are different about CCJ. So, I mean, that was a model. There's a couple of other places, one in Denver and one in Los Angeles as well that are that are really children's law centers, kind of usually their name is. And so, um, you know, I really thought that we, we had the opportunity or I could have an opportunity to do something like that. And my husband and I were, you know, were prepared to invest in it to kick it off. And so that's kind of where I was in the summer of 2005 when, um, the MacArthur Foundation came, had been in the state, um, trying to determine whether Washington state was going to be part of an initiative that they had started, um, called models for change, which was a. Huge investment. I mean, it was well over $100 million by the time it was over with, um, in what they thought was going to be up to seven states. Um, in looking at models of change that would improve the practice for juvenile courts or juvenile justice system in general. But, um, the focus would be juvenile courts. And, um, so and I had been part of the teams that of people that they had been meeting with, um, about and this was from my perch on the Supreme Court, of course. And, um, we were selected we were selected in September ish, October ish of 2005. This was great. Um, the next step was to for them to find what they called a lead entity. Capital L. Capital E, in other words, an organization that would manage these grants because the foundation would actually make the grants that were that were um, um, permitting the change that were, were, uh, resourcing the, the change efforts around the state. And the partners. But but there would be a manager on site and that would be this entity. So November of that year, which was 2005, um, some people came to me and said, um, hey, uh, we think that you ought to do this. And I said, I have a day job. and, um, I like it well enough, but frankly, I mean, I've been thinking about doing, you know, such a thing, but, you know, that would be after I, after I, um, my, my term is complete and one thing led to another. And by December, we were I brought some folks together at my house that I had worked with over the years and said, what do you think about this? You know, I mean, I went back to my kind of original model that was in my head that this would be an agency that would deal with both child welfare and juvenile justice. But the opportunity on juvenile justice side is right before us now, you know, what do you think everybody said it's a great idea. There's nobody in Washington that's like that. Um, you know, this could be it. So we made inquiries at the foundation as to whether or not they would entertain a proposal to be the lead entity from an organization that didn't quite exist yet, but could be could be in existence in a few months. And they said, um, yeah, you know, no promises, but we would, because we know some of the people that are involved in this and and yeah, we think that has that has some promise. So um, from that time basically after the holidays, so starting for real in January of 2006 and um, we put together from my Garvey Schubert, we, uh, did the articles of incorporation work with a former partner of mine at Garvey Schubert, who was who was not there any longer. She was in-house at a at another at a company. Um, she helped us work the the 501 C3 application had that by May, um, had hired a former colleague of mine who had been a policy analyst at the administrative office of the courts in Olympia and was now, um, a a policy analyst with a specialty in juvenile, um, policy analyst in King County Superior Court. He was ready to retire and had one more gig. And so I said, would you like to be the managing director? And he said, yeah, that'd be great. So we worked up this proposal and took it in June, flew to Chicago, presented it to the foundation and were awarded the position. And, you know, grant money. And so we for the next five and a half. Well, actually more like six and a half. It was supposed to be five years, $10 million, um, which didn't come to us, I have to say. I mean, it came to the the entities, the counties, the, the wazoo and UW who did research, um, the state agencies that we worked with, the Office of Public Defense, the Washington State Center for research and others.

Jeff Schwager: Passed.

Bobbe Bridge : Through. And we were the pass through. Well, and of course, we were getting paid for it. So, I mean, it did it did justify our existence. Um, and, uh, for the next about six and a half years, almost like I said, in upwards of $12 million when all was Toll said, and told it was a pretty wonderful, wonderful opportunity. And so, um, we started and, um, in the latter part of 2006 and by 2000 and I went, um, in as chair of the board, and my husband too, was on the board. And we, um, by the spring of 2007, we had developed a work plan, which was our first deliverable. But along the way, the board, um, had decided, rightly in my opinion,

that we needed as soon as possible to to find a project in the child welfare realm so that folks would know that we were really serious about merging the two and really talking in an integrated way about these two systems and being, um, competent, um, in both of them. And so we did about March, April of 2007, And we started working on this. What became supporting early connection this birth to three child welfare model of doing business. And then meanwhile we were developing also we were developing this work plan for models for change. And um, so it was in May of 2007 that, um, we were actually it was at the point in time when we announced the work plan, we announced the counties that had been selected to be our partners in models for change. And I announced that I was at the end of the year, going to leave the Supreme Court and go to work full time at CCJ. So that's how it all came together.

Jeff Schwager: Wonderful.

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah.

Jeff Schwager: Um, I think that covers everything. I wanted to ask you.

Bobbe Bridge : Good.

Jeff Schwager: So that was great. Thank you very much.

Bobbe Bridge : Yeah. Talk too much, right?

Jeff Schwager: No. You talk.