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## Portraits & Perspectives

### Marian Mayer Berkett

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PORTRAITS &  
PERSPECTIVES:  
A LOOK AT US

# Marian Mayer Berkett

A LIFE AND LAW CAREER OF 'FIRSTS' FOR THIS PEOPLE'S LEAGUE CO-FOUNDER

Interviewed by Edward J. Walters, Jr.

Full-page photo by Joe Bergeron

*M*arian Mayer Berkett has been practicing law for 61 years and is still active. Her accomplishments in the law were recognized as recently as November 1998 when the New Orleans Bar Association presented her with its Award of Special Distinction. It was noted that she had written the first treatise, or the "bible," on workers' compensation law in Louisiana while still in law school. Although she prefers to be known as a lawyer and not as a female lawyer, she has been singled out as a pioneer among women lawyers and for her role in contributing by example to the acceptance of women in the practice of law in this state. Among other firsts, she was the first woman to be accepted into an established Louisiana legal firm. She was interviewed for this article shortly after receiving the New Orleans Bar Association award.

**JOURNAL:** I understand you're from Baton Rouge. Tell me a little bit about your family.

**BERKETT:** Well, I was born in the shadow of the Old State Capitol on St. Ferdinand St. There were only about 30,000 people in Baton Rouge at that time. My father was Maurice Mayer. He and his family came to Baton Rouge in the 1880s from Harrisonburg, La. My mother was from New Orleans. She graduated from Newcomb in 1906. I had three siblings.

**JOURNAL:** After you graduated from Baton Rouge High School in 1929, you went to Louisiana State University, right?

**BERKETT:** Yes. I majored in journalism and, since I was so absolutely intrigued by political science, I minored in that. After I graduated, I got a scholarship to the Geneva School of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. While I was there, I met Manly Hudson who is gen-



Marian Mayer Berkett began her law career with the firm of Deutsch & Kerrigan.



erally considered the father of international legislation. He was teaching at Harvard and he suggested that, while I couldn't come to Harvard because they didn't allow women, that I take classes at Radcliffe and he would get me a scholarship there and I could then audit his courses. It sounded wonderful. Now this is 1933. Hitler had just come to power. I'm Jewish. I came home and applied to Radcliffe and they said that, in order to qualify, I had to have a reading knowledge of German. I had never taken German and the last language I wanted to learn at that point was German. So I decided not to go to Radcliffe.

I came back to LSU and got my master's in political science. My master's thesis was on workmen's compensation. The thesis was eventually published as *Workman's Compensation Law in Louisiana*.

**JOURNAL:** Then you went to law school. Why law? Was it because of your experience in writing that book?

**BERKETT:** I wrote the book the summer after my first year of law school. I went to law school because I was interested in the law. What started my interest was international law and, of course, political science.

**JOURNAL:** How many ladies did they have at LSU Law School when you started?

**BERKETT:** I can't remember any others, but there may have been. I don't think there was anybody else in my class.

**JOURNAL:** I've been told that Huey Long ran you out of the LSU Law School. What was that all about?

**BERKETT:** Well, this was in the era of the Longs and the anti-Longs. It seems that I was the only vocal anti-Long person in the whole of the law school. One day the dean of the law school called me into the office and said, "Somebody's got to shoot that man. He's just a tyrant." That's the dean of the law school talking to a freshman student.

**JOURNAL:** That's more information than you needed.

**BERKETT:** I understood where he was



In 1937, Marian Mayer, a Tulane law graduate, signed the register as a full-fledged lawyer. Standing from left, attorney Bernard Mintz; Tulane law graduate Alva S. Weatherford; Loyola law graduate Margaret Dwyer; and LSU graduate John Overton, Jr., son of the United States senator. Photo reprinted from the New Orleans States-Item (July 1, 1937).



Marian Mayer Berkett has spent her 61-year law career with the firm of Deutsch, Kerrigan & Stiles. Photo by Joe Bergeron



coming from. My phone was tapped. I was followed.

**JOURNAL:** And when they say you were vocal, what does that mean?

**BERKETT:** Well, I went around making speeches. And I expressed myself at the law school. I had to go out of East Baton Rouge for a while. Martial law was declared in Baton Rouge. No more than two people could stop to talk to one another on the street. That lasted a short time.

**JOURNAL:** I never heard about that.

**BERKETT:** Well, you see, a lot of people never heard of it because, when T. Harry Williams wrote the book on Huey Long, he only talked with the Longs. He did

not talk to anyone else. He never got the whole story.

**JOURNAL:** So what would you go speak about?

**BERKETT:** About Huey Long and what a tyrant he was. He was beating people up. He was doing all kinds of things. He had absolute power.

**JOURNAL:** Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

**BERKETT:** Absolutely. Look what happened to *The Reveille*, the LSU student newspaper. Every one of those people had to resign and go off somewhere else. I'm a journalism student, remember? At that time, I had graduated in journalism

and, although I was not on *The Reveille's* staff, I could put myself in their position. Huey Long wanted to tell them what they could write.

Well, that was the worst thing that could happen to someone with training in journalism. They all just went to the University of Missouri that had a good journalism school. Huey Long had a gestapo long before Hitler understood how to do one.

**JOURNAL:** I understand you had your phone tapped and you were followed, is that right?

**BERKETT:** Well, I think so. Anyway, I came down to Tulane as a result of all that.



In 1939, members of the Special Committee of the People's League (with league co-founder Marian Mayer, seated) publicly inspected 1,062 names of the Orleans Parish grand jury venire. Photo reprinted from the New Orleans States-Item (Aug. 9, 1939).



**JOURNAL:** Tell me how you made the decision to leave LSU.

**BERKETT:** That was easy. I just felt so uncomfortable, so isolated.

**JOURNAL:** What about the rest of the students at the law school? Were they Longs and you were the only anti-Long?

**BERKETT:** It was hard to get them to reveal themselves. In Louisiana, everybody has cousins and so forth and, if one of them spoke up against Long, the whole family got the axe. There were economic reprisals and so forth. So I decided to come down to Tulane and that was the smartest thing I ever did.

**JOURNAL:** When you were in Tulane Law School, were you still vocal about the Longs?

**BERKETT:** Oh, yeah, and even afterwards. When we graduated in '37, things were still pretty bad in Louisiana.

**JOURNAL:** Tell me about the organization which you co-founded, the People's League.

**BERKETT:** A bunch of us who graduated in the Tulane class of '37 got together and decided we can do something about

this. It's youth and enthusiasm and optimism and we did do something about it. We organized the People's League. When we started the group, we all agreed that anyone who joined the group must agree he was not going to run for any public office. That was not the purpose of that organization. All agreed, except Hale Boggs. Hale said he couldn't agree with that. He said he wanted to go into politics.

We thought about it and decided that, look, here's the kind of guy that we'd like to see in public office, so we made an exception for him. We had a small group. We didn't have any money, but we had some access to the press and we sounded big.

We had a committee for everything you could think of and it was plastered all over the paper, giving the impression that we were thousands, although we were only a few dozen. When we met, each person could put in 10 cents — that's how we tried to finance all this. That's all we could afford. When we got out of law school, I was the highest paid. I got \$125 a month. Some of my fellow students worked for nothing just to get training.

**JOURNAL:** I hear your organization targeted the district attorney of Orleans Parish.

**BERKETT:** The story of how we got rid of him is a spectacular story.

We decided that the reason nobody was doing anything about all this corruption was because there was something wrong at the criminal court. We didn't know whether it was with jury selection or the district attorney. One of the photographs accompanying this interview depicts our surveillance of the jury selection. We all gathered around where they had this big fishbowl. We had a professional investigation of each person picked to see who he was and whether he would be a desirable grand jury member. Then we were officious enough to suggest to the court who should be chosen out of the 144 for the grand jury. We gave the judge all the information we had assembled and told him whom he should choose. Well, the judge did not berate us for being officious but he didn't exactly follow our advice. It turns out that the people he did select were people we welcomed because they revolted against the district attorney. The district attorney refused to bring indictments this grand

## Highlighting Louisiana Women Attorneys

# The First 99<sup>+2</sup> Through 1999

Elig. (Eligible) • Dec. (Deceased) • Ina (Inactive)

Admitted	Name	City	Status
7/3/25	Edwina Breckwoldt Chasez	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/2/26	Mary H. Connolly	Metairie, La.	Dec.
6/1/28	Irma M. Kenny	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/13/28	Golda S. Landauer	Metairie, La.	Elig.
3/2/34	Fannie E. Burch	Amite, La.	Dec.
7/1/34	Frances Leggio Landry	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.
1/1/35	Mildred B. Riseman	Opelousas, La.	Dec.

Admitted	Name	City	Status
7/1/35	Juanita Tansey Parker	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/12/35	Adelaide Baudier	Metairie, La.	Dec.
7/1/37	Marian Mayer Berkett	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/1/38	Laurie G. Campbell	Shreveport, La.	Dec.
8/8/39	Marjorie Smith Zengel	New Orleans, La.	Ina.
7/30/40	Jean Craighead Shaw	Homer, La.	Elig.
12/10/40	Beverly Jewel Hess	New Orleans, La.	Dec.
7/28/41	Miriam Cooney Abbott	New Orleans, La.	Dec.
7/27/42	Elizabeth Ridnour Haak	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/27/42	Margaret T. Lane	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.
7/27/42	Kathlyn M. Roome	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
10/6/42	Courtney Schiro Faust	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/8/43	Aline Nobile Thompson	Harahan, La.	Elig.
7/26/44	Marjorie L. Jackson	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
8/1/45	Katherine L. Brash Jeter	Shreveport, La.	Elig.



jury thought he should and we'd get wind of it.

**JOURNAL:** Oh, I see. The grand jury would tell the district attorney, "We want you to indict this person," and he would decline to follow its recommendation.

**BERKETT:** We heard that the grand jury was going to file its own report complaining of the district attorney. We alerted the press to be there in court for the presentation. The foreman of the grand jury told the judge, "The members of the Grand Jury have prepared their own report." The judge said, "You cannot do that," and the judge directed the sergeant-at-arms to take the report away from the juror. With that, the grand juror who had the report threw it to the press and its content was published in all the papers. That started the whole thing. We called a meeting on the steps of the criminal court, calling for the recall of the DA. Hale Boggs was our spokesman. That was Hale's entrance to the public arena. A lot of litigation followed about whether the jury was in contempt, whether we of the People's League had crossed the line or the jury crossed the line, whether the DA was acting

properly. All of this went up to the Supreme Court and we prevailed. The DA resigned. Then we went on to other things.

During the administration of New Orleans' Mayor Maestri, we picketed city hall criticizing the alleged corruption, and the mayor got some goons out to beat up our pickets. We had to get an injunction from the federal court to stop it. These were some of our activities.

**JOURNAL:** That must have been really exciting.

**BERKETT:** Oh, it was. Now there are very few of us left of that original group. Moise Steeg and I decided last year that we ought to get together the press notices and compose a scrapbook. We presented it to the Tulane law library and that's where it resides.

**JOURNAL:** What happened to the group?

**BERKETT:** Well, the war came and the fellows who had been involved left for the service. When they finally came back from war, they had to reconstruct their lives and their youthful enthusiasm had been somewhat dulled by the stark brutality of a war.

**JOURNAL:** So now, to go back, here you were — a brand new lawyer. You said you got the grand sum of \$125 a month when you started, and you were working for Deutsch & Kerrigan. This was not the first place that you applied for a job?

**BERKETT:** No, I had one other place. I went to see a well-known lawyer whose family I knew and whose family knew my family, and I asked for a job. I just got on the streetcar and came downtown. I didn't have an appointment. I just went on in and he was very paternalistic and told me that, as a woman, I had two choices. I was either going to have to clerk for a judge or I would have to go into government. He also said, "I want to give you one other piece of advice — when you go looking for a job, make an appointment."

**JOURNAL:** That was probably good advice.

**BERKETT:** I left his office and walked across the street and went to see Eberhard Deutsch. I had never met Eberhard Deutsch either, but I did know his wife who had been a guest at our home in Baton Rouge. I didn't have an appoint-

Admitted	Name	City	Status	Admitted	Name	City	Status
8/1/45	Dorothy D. Wolbrette	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	6/11/53	Ruth Gentry Talley	Bogalusa, La.	Ina.
3/27/46	Carol Byrns			7/29/53	Margie Gray		
	Fleddermann	Pensacola, Fla.	Ina.		McMahon	Shreveport, La.	Elig.
7/31/46	Anna Andollina	Metairie, La.	Dec.	7/29/53	Mary Mosley		
3/24/47	Marian Lloyd Nash	Gretna, La.	Elig.		Robinson	Baton Rouge, La.	Dec.
11/20/47	Martha C. Innes	Maurepas, La.	Elig.	12/22/53	Charlotte A. Herman	Ada, Okla.	Elig.
3/30/48	Ollive T. Reed	Baton Rouge, La.	Dec.	6/11/54	Louise Schramm		
3/31/49	Miriam T. Attaya	Gonzales, La.	Dec.		Korns	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
7/27/49	Virginia M.			6/11/54	Helen Wimmer Pierce	Lecompte, La.	Dec.
	Carmouche	Lake Charles, La.	Ina.	2/24/55	June B. Cahn	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
3/29/50	Rosemary T. Pillow	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.	6/10/55	Miriam M. Miller	Arlington, Va.	Ina.
8/1/51	Carmen M. Moore	Rancho Palos		6/10/55	Helene McGee		
		Verdes, Calif.	Elig.		Walker	New Orleans, La.	Dec.
3/31/53	Mary G. Armstrong	Dallas, Texas	Dec.	6/10/55	Geraldine Bullock		
3/31/53	Theresa B. Cosner	Hammond, La.	Elig.		Weaver	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.
3/31/53	Lynn Piazza Jackson	New Orleans, La.	Ina.	6/12/56	Adelaide W.		
3/31/53	Janet Mary Riley	New Orleans, La.	Elig.		Benjamin	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/11/53	Martha Jo B. Chandler	Lafayette, La.	Elig.	6/12/56	Joan A. Danner	Metairie, La.	Elig.
6/11/53	Nadia St. Paul Moise	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	6/12/56	Sylvia Roberts	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.



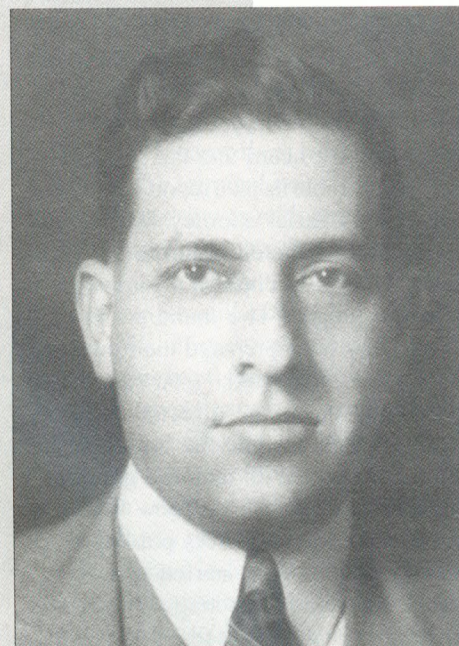
ment. He met me anyway and we discussed the book I had written. I knew that Eberhard Deutsch valued the ability to write. He hired me.

**JOURNAL:** How many lady lawyers were there in New Orleans at the time?

**BERKETT:** Well, I never counted them but, what lady lawyers there were, were women who practiced individually or with their husbands. I guess the most important and the most prominent one was Anna Judge Vettters Levy who later became a judge — first woman judge. She was quite potent. When she died, her husband became a judge. They were both capable lawyers. In Baton Rouge, of course, there was Harriet Daggett who was my friend and mentor. Her contribution was enormous. Also in Baton Rouge, there was Frances Landry who also practiced with her husband and, in Monroe, there was Mary Louise Snellings who practiced with her husband. They were highly capable women. I guess I was the first woman hired by a large firm. Considering that Ruth Ginsberg couldn't get into a firm 20 years later, I was extremely fortunate.

**JOURNAL:** When you started practicing with Mr. Deutsch, what kind of work did you do?

**BERKETT:** Well, obviously I did a lot of workers' compensation work but I did all kinds of things. I ran the gamut. At that time, the only specialization was a choice between civil law or criminal law. So I did everything — collections, bankruptcy, labor law, tax cases, income and estate. I was involved in a large number of succession cases that have established much of the case law in that area. As time went on, I did a lot of work in construction law and contracts and served for six



**Eberhard Deutsch**

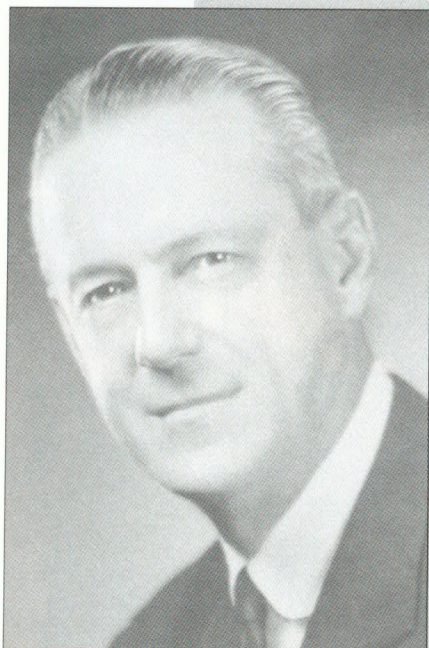
## Highlighting Louisiana Women Attorneys The First 99<sup>+</sup> Through 1999

Elig. (Eligible) • Dec. (Deceased) • Ina (Inactive)

Admitted	Name	City	Status
6/12/56	Anne Lennan Simon Judge, 16th JDC	New Iberia, La.	Elig.
4/4/57	Ruth Loyd Miller	Jennings, La.	Elig.
6/12/57	Jane F. Asher	Paris, Ill.	Ina.
6/12/57	Caryl H. Vesey	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
2/14/58	Patsy Jo McDowell	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.
6/11/58	Carole A. Breithoff	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/11/58	Audrey Daste LeBlanc	Baton Rouge, La.	Dec.
6/11/58	Margot L. Mazeau	Arlington, Va.	Elig.
7/11/58	Gwendolyn B. Crockett	College Park, Md.	Elig.
2/17/59	Elsie B. Halford	Metairie, La.	Elig.

Admitted	Name	City	Status
2/17/59	Sue C. Watson	Lake Charles, La.	Elig.
6/8/59	Joan Elaine Chauvin	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/8/59	Lillian M. Cohen	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/8/59	Dorothy R. Cowen	New Orleans, La.	Ina.
2/16/60	Elizabeth Spink Karmazin	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/14/60	Penn Cuney	New Orleans, La.	Ina.
6/14/61	Angela Roddey Holder	New Haven, Conn.	Elig.
6/14/61	Gloria Irvine	Harahan, La.	Dec.
6/14/61	Barbara B. Rutledge	Metairie, La.	Elig.
6/13/62	Janet Smith Freund	Newark, Del.	Ina.
6/13/62	Mildred L. Krieger	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
6/13/62	Marian M. Livaudais	Mandeville, La.	Elig.
6/13/62	Yolanda M. Palmer	Brownsville, Texas	Elig.
6/13/62	Margaret Cleve Spedale	River Ridge, La.	Ina.
6/18/63	Jacqueline McPherson	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
8/28/63	Edna S. Killian	Metairie, La.	Elig.
8/28/63	Jamie F. Veverica	Diamondhead, Miss.	Ina.





Emmett Kerrigan

years on the Governing Committee of the ABA Forum for the Construction Industry. I also had a wide practice in surety and fidelity law and, for a time, in air law.

**JOURNAL:** You did family work, too?

**BERKETT:** I did some family work.

**JOURNAL:** What did you like? Did you like to work with workers' compensation cases?

**BERKETT:** No. I didn't. In fact, I'm glad that early on I got out of that. I had to do it in the beginning because that was a good deal of the practice and that was what I was supposed to be an expert in. Anyway, I got into a lot of construction and contract work. A lot of fidelity work. Somewhere along the way, we had several airlines as clients and I did all kinds of opinions in air law and later handled *Chicago and Southern v. Wateman Steamship Co.* That involved Delta's first international route. The case went to the Supreme Court and made some law on the power of the executive branch.

**JOURNAL:** Let me ask you some questions about being a lady lawyer. What was it like in the early days of being one of the very few lady lawyers in town?

**BERKETT:** In law school, I can't remember that I was treated differently from the male students. I had complete equality. When I got into practice, of course, I did run up against some unpleasantness both from the bench as well as the bar, but I think after I established myself a lot of that simmered down. My impression was that most of the problems came from lawyers who weren't very good lawyers, who used their misogyny — real or feigned — as their weapon rather than the law. I'm sure there

Admitted	Name	City	Status	Admitted	Name	City	Status
6/17/64	Mary Ann Vial			8/25/65	Katherine Connell		
	Lemmon	New Orleans, La.	Elig.		Thouez	Hallandale, Fla.	Elig.
	Judge, U.S. District Court			9/21/65	Elizabeth Ann Weaver	Traverse City, Mich.	Ina.
8/1/64	Brenda Gail				Michigan Supreme Ct.		
	McDonough	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	4/28/66	Doris Falkenhainer	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.
8/26/64	Joy S. Miller	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	4/28/66	Judith A. Nichols	Missouri City,	
8/26/64	Shirley Basile				Texas		Ina.
	Singreen	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	8/31/66	Catherine L. Barter	The Woodlands,	
8/26/64	Evangeline M.				Texas		Ina.
	Vavrick	New Orleans, La.	Elig.	8/31/66	Mary Coon Biggs	Franklin, La.	Elig.
4/27/65	Mildred Byrd	Birmingham, Ala.	Elig.	8/31/66	Margaret A.O.		
4/27/65	Ann L. Kerr	Clearwater, Fla.	Elig.		Correro	New Orleans, La.	Elig.
4/27/65	Leila C. Schroeder	Baton Rouge, La.	Elig.	8/31/66	Iva Macdonald		
4/27/65	Peggy Patterson				Futrell	Arlington, Va.	Elig.
	Wiley	Livingston, Texas	Ina.	8/31/66	Ana V. Hernandez	Coral Cables, Fla.	Ina.
6/11/65	Lois Jett	Conroe, Texas	Ina.	8/31/66	Katherine M. Schwab	Ponchatoula, La.	Ina.
8/25/65	Nancy Amato			8/31/66	Phyllis M. Taylor	Houston, Texas	Elig.
	Konrad	Harvey, La.	Elig.	8/31/66	Veronica D. Wicker	New Orleans, La.	Dec.
	Judge, Juvenile Court						



are things that, if I had not been a woman, I could have aspired to that I didn't, but I'm not even sure that I would have aspired to them.

**JOURNAL:** Why don't you talk to me a little bit about who were the best lawyers that you practiced against.

**BERKETT:** I thought Charlie Rivet was an excellent lawyer. I liked him very much. Mose Scharff was excellent. I can think of others but not their names at the moment. If we are going to talk about great trial lawyers, I must mention my partner Emmett Kerrigan who was a superb trial lawyer and Eberhard Deutsch was the finest lawyer I have known. His accomplishments are legendary.

**JOURNAL:** If you had a nemesis, who would your nemesis be?

**BERKETT:** I really don't think I had a nemesis. I've been engaged in highly contentious litigation, sometimes with excellent lawyers as opponents and sometimes with persons I did not admire and whose tactics were offensive. But, a nemesis, no.

**JOURNAL:** Have you ever had an experience where you were really glad you were a woman instead of a man?

**BERKETT:** (Laughter) You mean in the practice of law?

**JOURNAL:** Yeah, let's restrict it to the practice of law, where it may have worked to your advantage to be a woman.

**BERKETT:** I really can't recall. I can think of a lot of times when I wished I hadn't been a woman such as when an opposing lawyer tore my documents from my hands to tear them up. If I'd been a man, he would never have done that. Some of the judges had kind of a crazy notion that, when you walked into their offices and you were a lady, they had to kiss you. I don't subscribe to that idea. I do recall that the first day I practiced law, they sent me a female client who was having intestinal problems and the only way I could interview her was to take her to the ladies room. I thought to myself they sure need a woman lawyer for instances like these.



Marian Mayer Berkett, the videographer, blends into the crowd during Mardi Gras.

**JOURNAL:** Obvious question. You've been practicing law for 61 years. Why are you still doing this?

**BERKETT:** Oh, I like it. I could think of other things I could do but I think I can do this better than I can do anything else.

**JOURNAL:** Let's talk a little bit about your interests apart from the practice of law. I understand that you were quite an athlete and still are.

**BERKETT:** I don't know about "still are." I played a good game of tennis in my youth.

**JOURNAL:** When was the last time you played tennis?

**BERKETT:** (A few months back.) But I didn't play tennis, I just went out to hit the ball because I hadn't played in so long

I wanted to see if I could still do it. I have just had my cataracts removed and I'm having a little problem about whether I'm going to continue to play. I have a problem finding people to play with now. So many of the people with whom I used to play have stopped playing.

**JOURNAL:** I understand you are a pretty good golfer, too.

**BERKETT:** No, I never was a good golfer.

**JOURNAL:** I see two "hole-in-one" trophies sitting on your shelf.

**BERKETT:** Yeah, but those were accidental. I really was never a good golfer and I didn't even like golf. I played golf because my husband didn't play tennis and wasted 30 years playing golf when I



should have been playing tennis and then, suddenly when he was about 60 years old, he decided to play tennis and I took it up again and I loved it.

**JOURNAL:** Tell me about your vacations. I understand I'm talking to the only person I've ever heard of who went to the Falkland Islands.

**BERKETT:** Oh, yeah, I went right after the war down there. I was in the first boat in. We were on the way to Antarctica.

**JOURNAL:** How was that?

**BERKETT:** Cold. In the Falklands, the Argentine soldiers had left clothes and material all over. We were restricted somewhat because of land mines. In Antarctica, there was a constant exhibition of floating ice sculpture on a scale larger than Henry Moore's.

**JOURNAL:** Where else have you been?

**BERKETT:** We've gone a lot of places. We like Asia particularly. When we first started off, we went to Europe and then, about 1959, we started going to Asia and kept going back. Nepal, India, Chitral, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Hunga Valley, Laos, Thailand, Iran, New Guinea, Egypt, Mongolia, Russia, Bhutan, Ladakh. We've been to China about five times. In 1980, we got to Tibet, a place I'd never dreamed I'd see. We've had some wonderful adventures. We saw Kathmandu in '59. Traveled the Silk Road, north and south routes.

**JOURNAL:** Give us your perspective on where we are as lawyers today.

**BERKETT:** I don't think we have a good reputation and I don't know what it's going to take to clean it up. Lawyers have always been the subject of criticism. The nature of our profession exposes us to disapproval. Our professional obligation is to represent as best we can the interests of our client as if he were speaking for himself. The interest of our clients is not always praiseworthy. Sometimes our clients take positions that are grasping, aggressive and unappealing. We must expect to be criticized, for example, when we defend a criminal, but the criminal is entitled to a defense and we are obliged

to afford it and obliged to expect a public distaste because of it. I suspect, however, that our reputation today has sunk below the traditional level. The profession seems to be overstocked and perhaps the competition has lowered the standards of practice. This is something the bar itself must clean up. I understand the need for specialization but it worries me that the compartmentalization that comes with it is eroding the law and its practice. I guess I see it from my own perspective. As I mentioned, I ran the gamut. I find that gives me a broader view than those who know a lot more about a particular portion of the law than I do, but they are looking so narrowly that they miss the wider issues that may be there. Law should be an integrated whole series of rules designed to accomplish an ultimate social goal. There seems to be a growing disconnect. In Louisiana, we had the civil law that was rationally integrated and now we are losing that by superimposing common law junk for the sake of conformity with a system we have never embraced. I understand the possible need in commercial matters but find it hard to understand why conformity is needed in social and family and succession matters.

**JOURNAL:** Some sage advice for young lawyers?

**BERKETT:** Well, for one thing, I think that computers are great but they are not a complete research instrument. The overdependence on them is not producing a very scholarly result. First of all, the database only goes back 20 years or so. There is a lot of very valuable stuff that goes back 100 years, especially in civil law. It's sort of like history — if you don't have the whole thing, you haven't got much. Here at Deutsch, Kerrigan, we have a tremendous library and still can't accommodate all the books that I think ought to be there. I think that a paper library still has a very definite purpose and should be the primary source.

**JOURNAL:** Who was your mentor?

**BERKETT:** Eberhard Deutsch and Emmett Kerrigan were undoubtedly a great in-

fluence. Eberhard Deutsch was a tyrannical teacher, but absolutely superb. He was a perfectionist. If you'd left out a period, he'd put a red slash there and then you had to do the whole thing over, no computers then. You'd have to have it typed over. I came to this firm as Marian Mayer and then got married and so, instead of signing "MM," I'd sign off "MMB." Every time I sent a memorandum to Eberhard that had "MMB" on it, he took a red pencil and marked out the "B." I was just as unrelenting. I continued to sign MMB. Finally one day I walked into his office and I had on a blouse with a large monogram MMB. I marched up to his desk, expanded my chest and said, "Where is your red pencil?" And I had no more trouble after that.

**JOURNAL:** What is your passion now outside of the law?

**BERKETT:** I guess it's my husband. I have a lot of things that interest me. Right now, I'm sort of hooked on learning how to use the computer and video. I'm not trying to get true professional results, but I'm fascinated by what is going on in the video field. I had done some video in my travels. I recently did a video history of Deutsch, Kerrigan & Stiles and that's how I really got interested in real video production. I learned then all about what you have to do and how to do it and I got hooked and, so now, I'm trying to go over all my old stuff and trying to create some new material.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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