

Inside the Court: Eyewitness Accounts

Justice Stephen Breyer

Breyer Clerks Panel

Panel presented at University of Virginia Law School, Charlottesville, VA – 2022

Rachel Harmon (1997): "He always stayed good humored and optimistic, he was really and is a joy to be around. He was incredibly devoted to his wife, to his children, now to his grandchildren. He had valued friendships that have lasted for decades. He was excited by new plays, and movies, and books, and museum exhibits, and ideas. And he constantly wanted to learned something new so while I was clerking he was listening to audiotapes all the time trying to learn Spanish"

Dan Ortiz: (Clerked for US Court of Appeals) "He was in government legislature, he worked for the Senate, he worked for DOJ at various times, and the Sentencing Commission, he was a judge, and then a justice, he's been everywhere. And one of the things that most animated him as Rachel indicated is his all consuming interest and enthusiasm for learning new things, having new experiences, and bringing other people along with them."

Rachel Harmon: "So I don't know if this is an anecdote exactly but when I was clerking, I was a little distracted, maybe I was less focused than my peers, it was the year of Monica Lewinsky's blue dress and Hillary Clinton's attorney client privilege assertion but my father had advanced lung cancer. And I was sometimes maybe not as attentive as some of my peers, I think that would be fair. And Justice Breyer could not have been more understanding. And when my father was able to travel towards the end of the clerkship, he hosted my father in chambers for more than his usual tea."

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Vince Chhabria (2001): "He seemed distracted, he kind of seemed like he was thinking about something else, wanted to get off the phone, and the conversation wasn't that helpful. And so Mike hangs up and he thinks, well, OK I'm not clerking for him anymore, maybe he is no longer interested in what I'm going to do. And then the next day Justice Breyer calls back and says, Mike, I'm really sorry I was distracted yesterday when we were talking. Can we please have the conversation over again? And that is him in a nutshell although he sometimes is distracted. He really, really cares about the people in his life and he's paying more attention than you think he is."

SOURCE : <https://www.law.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/transcripts/Breyer%20Clerks%20Panel.pdf>