

# renaissance woman

FAITH HOCHBERG OF LAKEVILLE, CT

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Faith Hochberg has lived in a lodge house on Lake Wononscopomuc (better known to the area as “Lakeville Lake”) for more than twenty years. In 1999, she was nominated by President Bill Clinton to serve as a Federal Judge on the District Court for New Jersey, where she commutes weekly. Meanwhile on weekends and after-hours, Faith has developed a second career as a painter and jewelry maker, with pieces on view at [www.berkshireartist.com](http://www.berkshireartist.com). Wearing dark jean shorts and a light denim shirt, curling up on a deep stuffed couch, Faith was relaxed and animated throughout our conversation. When the low clouds dropped into thunder and the lake turned to static, we sat for a few minutes in reverence, savoring the endless beauty and surprise this part of the country provides.

**You’ve had a fascinating career as a judge and an artist. I was trying to imagine you as a child.**

I loved playing with paper dolls. I had no interest in animating them to do anything; I just liked creating outfits for them. I had paper dolls that had probably 100 different outfits – fancy things, things that wouldn’t have been in my life.

My mother bought our clothes out of the Sears-Roebuck catalog, which I grew to detest. But I didn’t care as much about my clothes as the dolls’. When I was seven or eight, I began going to private art lessons with a serious artist. By nine or ten, I was taking the bus by myself for seven cents from the little town I lived in in New Jersey to Newark to take Saturday morning classes at the Newark Museum. Off I went. Newark in those days had some wonderful stores for window shopping. My favorite was a button store on Halsey Street.

**How did you get from the Newark Art Museum to the law?**

There were very few women lawyers – I didn’t know any growing up. My mother was an incred-



Above: Faith Hochberg in her Lakeville, CT home and studio working on one of her jewelry art pieces. Below left: One of Faith’s paintings of New York City.

ibly brilliant mathematician who had a graduate degree in engineering and in post-War America she was trying to be a housewife with four kids – and she really did try, hand-smocking dresses for us. At eighth grade graduation, I got a prize for being the top female student and my friend got the prize for being the top male student. We both opened our envelopes and his prize was twice as much as mine was. I was infuriated!

I said, “Alright, that’s it. I’m going to be a lawyer. This is not right.” Then I started saying it for shock value.

The watershed year was 1970 or ‘71 when all the Ivy League Universities started accepting women. I went to Jackson, the girls’ school at Tufts, and studied Economics. I came back and worked as a research assistant for a woman, a dean of the school. I asked her for advice and she said “You should apply everywhere. Don’t be ridiculous, you should apply to Harvard!” She wrote a letter.

**Did you make any art in Law School?**

I squished it, I squashed it, I buried it. It was a time when, if you weren’t really good, people thought of you as a joke. I didn’t start creating again until we were in New Jersey. In our house was an old cavernous greenhouse room, a 1930-esque solarium. I painted a Masonite floor. Then I went to the children’s toy store where they were clearing out of

kids’ oil paints. A Park Seed catalog arrived in the mail. I decided to throw it in the air and whatever page it opened to, I would paint that. Every week I would do one little detail on the floor, just a tiny period of time on Sunday afternoon.

**What was the first thing you created that you felt might actually be good? That you wanted to share with someone?**

You know, it’s hard to ever share your work with someone. In a way it’s a lot easier to stand up in a court of law and argue a proposition with someone opposing me than saying “I painted this painting. What do you think of it?” You’re very exposed when people look at your artistic work.

The art is a relief from the very structured principles of law. I keep offering to give my law clerks watercolor lessons at lunchtime and they’re like, “No, thanks.”

**Why Lakeville?**

We had moved from the Boston area to New Jersey and knew we wanted to have a foot in New England. The only thing we knew was Tanglewood – Mark [Hochberg’s husband] took out a map and

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said I want to be 45 minutes south of there. He called the nearest Realtor he could find and said “I want to be at the place with those two blue dots.”

I’m inspired by Lakeville – I love this place, it’s a paradise for painting. The only downside is it can look almost trite because no one will believe how bucolic some of the scenes are. There is no angst in any of these paintings. I’m always looking for a good foreground in the lake – sometimes sailboats, the ducks coming. I’m intrigued now with loose representation – watercolors and experimenting with abstraction. Reginald Marsh did better tugboats than anyone I’ve ever seen, and fabulous women. The women have such a zest to them. They have so much motion.

**I’ve been thinking of motion as it relates to your jewelry – some is so structured and some, like the lariats, are made to move with the body.**

Even with the sculpted pieces, I often have a few pieces that move and pick up light. Each is a composition – I’m juxtaposing colors, matte to sheen. The idea is that women have to look gorgeous. If they don’t, I’m not interested.

**How did you start making jewelry?**

The jewelry I started in 2004 as a way of painting longer. I made them so I could paint all day long and change for dinner in 15 minutes. I wear a uniform: black jeans, any neutral color top, my hair back in a ponytail. But I put on one of my necklaces and it looks like I’ve dressed for dinner. When I travel, it helps me bring far fewer clothes.

I wouldn’t know the people I know if I didn’t do this. “Oh my god, where did you get that necklace?!” And oftentimes people will approach me, saying “I have this necklace of my mothers. It’s a bit dowdy looking, but could you enhance it to make it a memory for me?”

Sometimes there’s a fabulous pendant hanging on a cheap velvet cord. I have an ability to take the object by the artist and think about what he would have done, what colors he would have used. It’s like communing with an artisan of the 1950s.

**What was your first thought when you learned you’d been appointed to the federal court?**

Senator Bill Bradley from New Jersey reached out



Above, three of Faith’s paintings. Clock-wise: An old Ford pick-up, horses running, and a landscape. All images are cropped. Below left: One of Faith’s artistic jewelry creations.

to me and asked me to be the U.S. attorney in New Jersey which is the highest-ranking prosecutor in that judicial district. I was thrilled to do that – it’s every litigator’s dream. After I had done that for a while, he asked me to serve on the bench.

Going through confirmation is no picnic. It’s just one of those things that you think about long and hard before you agree to plunge in.

But it’s the best judiciary, I think, in the world. It’s something you can’t do too early because it really is a significant pay cut for almost everybody. Now it’s even more difficult because there’s sequestration. It’s got its issues but it’s still as interesting a law job as you’re going to get.

**What is your typical day on the bench like?**

Some judges are constantly on trial. I’m not. My happiest moment is when we can arrive at a settlement that everyone feels is fair, when people have dodged an incredibly gut-wrenching experience. The hardest is criminal sentencing. You’re depriving someone of their liberty, and they’ve usually done something pretty terrible. Some of them you feel nothing you can do will unhardened that person, that going to jail is just part of their life. Some of them are truly remorseful and the circumstances that got them into crime will never be repeated. I’m always interested in understanding the “whys.” I like days when I can teach the law clerks.

The saddest ones are the ones that are older, the men who know they don’t have a lot of years left. You have to do it, it’s part of the job – and they get

what they deserve, but there’s no sense of satisfaction after that kind of day.

There are days of despair when you see the same pattern repeated over and over again. One day, I couldn’t do a sentencing because I was told the wrong prisoner had been produced. Two of the prisoners had the exact same name; it turned out they were father and son, both in the same jail, same kind of crime, but not together. Or how do you deal with somebody who has done a very bad act, but was abused as a child and it’s documented? And scientifically we know that one who was abused is infinitely more likely to become an abuser. Those are hard days.

**What’s your perfect Lakeville day?**

Getting up, putting on flip flops and jeans, Mark making coffee, and just being able to do whatever I feel like – from the garden, painting, playing golf, seeing friends, going to good restaurants. In the wintertime, I have the opera blaring on my Wave radio in my studio. I put homemade soup on a slow cooker so I can be up there.

**You’re a true Renaissance woman. Is there anything you can’t do?**

I’m woefully inadequate at computer technical skills. I’m always getting frustrated. I don’t exercise as much as I should. I can’t sing worth a damn. Oh, there’s more. ●