Jean Beetz was born in Montreal, Quebec, on March 27, 1927. He was the son of Jean Beetz and Jeanne Cousineau. He began his university education at the University of Montreal, earning a B.A. in 1947 and an LL.L. in 1950. Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, he went to Oxford University, where he completed a further B.A. in 1953. He was called to the bar before he left for England, and upon his return in 1953 became an assistant professor at the University of Montreal. One of the first full-time law professors at the university, he taught there for 20 years and from 1968 to 1970 was dean of the faculty. During that period, he also acted as a legal adviser to the federal government and served as special counsel on constitutional affairs to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, then prime minister of Canada. He was appointed to the Quebec Court of Appeal in 1973 and elevated to the Supreme Court of Canada on January 1, 1974. He served on the Supreme Court for 14 years and retired on November 10, 1988. He is appointed to the Order of Canada in 1989 for his contribution to Canadian federalism, administrative, public, and civil law. Justice Beetz died on September 30, 1991, at the age of 64.