

ILOHI Interview with John J. Becker

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Transcribed by Mary Kelley

MP3 file Sony

John J. Becker=JB

Michella Marino=MM

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(MM setting up recorder)

[0:00:01]

MM: Ok, so we're good to go... um... I would just start with a lead in by saying that I am Michella Marino and I am here interviewing John J. Becker. Is that right?

JB: John J. Becker.

MM: What's the J. stand for?

JB: Joseph.

MM: Joseph, ok. And today's date is Tuesday, February 26, is that right?

JB: Right.

MM: 2019. Um so we'll go ahead and get started. And I probably should have said before I turned that on too if at any point uh there's a question you don't want to answer uh you know just tell me or tell me time out and I can hit pause on the recorders as well and I happy to do that.

JB: Ok.

MM: So we'll get started just sort of easing into your childhood and in go chronologically that way. So when and where were you born?

JB: Born right here in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

MM: OK. What's your birthdate?

JB: March 26, 1933. [0:01:02]

MM: Ok, what were your parents' names?

JB: My father was August Becker and my mother was Josephine Wehrle Becker

MM: That W O R L E Y? or how do you spell?

JB: No, W E H R L E.

MM: Oh, really ok.

JB: Good German name (chuckles).

MM: Oh, of course of course (laughs).

JB: My grandfather came from Germany.

MM: Oh wow. When when did he come over?

JB: He came over as a 18 or 19 year old boy.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: His whole family moved over...

MM: Wow.

JB: and uh, so he's you know (chuckles) the name and (chuckles) the Becker name I don't know much in the Becker lineup other than who my grandparents were because they were both deceased when I was born.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh so [inaudible] there're no Becker's in the surrounding area that we were related to.

MM: Huh.

JB: Although there are other Becker's in the area but none of them were technically related closely that anybody knew each other.

MM: Sure, well you just sort of answered my next question of where your family's from.
[0:02:00] So your mother's side came from Germany right?

JB: Germany.

MM: But you don't have any sense of where the Becker's are from?

JB: Well, I know they came from Germany but two generations earlier.

MM: Ok.

JB: So.

MM: Um, well, what were your parent's occupations?

JB: My father was a plasterer.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh he plastered many of the buildings in Fort Wayne and elsewhere (chuckles).

MM: OK. Did he work for a company or...

JB: Yeah.

MM: ...was he self-employed?

JB: He worked for many companies. He was the president of plasterors union here in Fort Wayne.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And he he did the artistic work. You've been to the Embassy Theatre?

MM: I haven't.

JB: Oh, ok well up around the main, you know, floor area that's all his artistic work and they called the pieces and put 'em on the wall and he also did the Fort Wayne National Bank building downtown and many others but he even did our house (laughs).

MM: Wow (laughs). So wide range of work there.

JB: Yeah. [0:03:00]

MM: Um, did your mother work outside the home or what did she do?

JB: Uh, she did up until her (pause) got married and had family.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: She was the head of the business department of General Electric here in Fort Wayne. And she was one of the highest rated women in the company at that time.

MM: Wow, ok.

JB: I inherited from her (laughs).

MM: (laughs) Of course. Um, so did you have any siblings then?

JB: I had five sisters and two brothers, one older and one younger. The older brother died uh less than a year old. He got pneumonia and those days they didn't have all those medicines and things so uh I grew up in the middle of a family (chuckles) so yeah.

MM: Yeah, so you you fell smack dab in the middle of the...

JB: Well, as middle as you can be [0:04:00] for eight (laughs).

MM: Yeah sure, sure fair enough. Uh, it, what was the age range of your oldest to the youngest? (quiet undertone) I'm [inaudible] check on this.

JB: Uh, let's see, my parents were married in 1925. My first sister was born in '26, I was born in '33 and my youngest sister was born in uh '41.

MM: Ok. Um, well how would you describe your childhood?

JB: Well protected (chuckles).

MM: What do you mean by that?

JB: Well, (chuckles) I couldn't do anything without getting in trouble (laughs).

MM: (laughs) Oh you've got a lot of eyes on you.

JB: Yeah, too many eyes on me, yeah.

MM: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

MM: Ok. Where did you grow up in Fort Wayne?

JB: South uh Fort Wayne. Directly South at by Harrison Hill Elementary School and St. John the Baptist where went to kindergarten at uh Harrison Hill transferred over to St. Johns then and went to the Catholic Grade School. [0:05:00]

MM: Ok. Was your family Catholic then? I presume.

JB: Yeah.

MM: Ok. Who would you say were the most influential people in your childhood?

JB: Uuuh, most influential? Probably my parents and uh neighbors who kept an eye on me and you know just generally growing up in that era.

MM: Um huh.

JB: Of course, you know I grew up during uh World War II and uh so it you know.

MM: Well, that uh, I was gonna ask you a little bit about that. You were probably about eight or so when the war started?

JB: Uh yes, I was eight...

MM: Yeah

JB: ...when it started.

MM: Do you remember anything about that or what, how did the war affect your childhood?

JB: Yeah, the war itself didn't, you know, have any basic effect on me other than I had uh uncles who were drafted and went off to the service. I had uh friends, not really my age group but friends [0:06:00] who went to the service.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh [inaudible] I finished grade school in 47 and the war had been over for two years and so you know I'm just a little kid (chuckling).

MM: Do you remember rationing or anything like that?

JB: Yeah I even have a ration book stamp (chuckling).

MM: Do you? How neat, uh huh.

JB: It's a, yeah (chuckling).

MM: So it didn't drastically affect your immediate family in any way?

JB: No, other than, other than slice meat was so thin you could see both sides of it (chuckles).

MM: (chuckles) Yeah, yeah, that's funny. Um, well what understanding, if any, did you have about your family's politics or your family's political beliefs as a young child?

JB: My mother and father never got [0:07:00] involved in any of that. Um, my grandfather owned a tavern. And he was involved in in both parties because you had to keep (chuckles) harmony with the police and all that (chuckles).

MM: Uh huh. So, did you have any sense that they were one political party or the other or?

JB: Uh, back then all Catholics were Democrats, basically and I was a democrat. And til I got involved in politics and uh, with my wife and all and because of the people that were involved

here in the Democratic Party they pushed us to the Republican Party because we were prolife and uh, equal rights and all those kinds of things and so it uh.

MM: You were equal rights or not equal rights?

JB: For equal rights.

MM: For equal rights. Ok right.

JB: Right.

MM: Um, well as a child growing up in Indiana or Fort Wayne in particular what were your views about the State of Indiana or being a Hoosier? [0:08:00] Did you think about that at all?

JB: Not really (chuckles). My mind was just on having fun and playing with the neighbors (chuckles), you know, until I got into high school and then, you know, I started getting more involved with things and so on.

MM: Sure. Um, so you mentioned that you went to elementary at St. John the Baptist. Is that right?

JB: Um hmm. Right.

MM: Ok, which was a parochial school.

JB: Right.

MM: Where did you go to middle school or junior high and then high school?

RB: Well in those days it's just eight grades of elementary and then four years of high school.

MM: OK.

JB: And um.

MM: So, what High School then did you attend?

JB: Central Catholic High School downtown.

MM: OK. Um, when, I'm sorry go ahead.

JB: I was going to say it's torn down now (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, yeah. What year did you graduate?

JB: 1951.

MM: 1951. OK. How would you describe your experiences in school?

JB: I remember walking into the school for the first time and a sister who was the principal [0:09:00] came up to me and she said I know you John, you had two sisters that went through here and they were good students and we expect a lot out of you (chuckles).

MM: What'd you make of that? (chuckles)

JB: (laughs) I knew I was in trouble.

MM: (laughs) Yeah.

JB: (laughs) You know I was just an average student.

MM: Mm hmm.

JB: We had a class that, uh, we had 400 freshmen you know 8th grade, well by the time we graduated we had 282 graduates out of that. But 40 or 50 of them went across the street to Central High School for vocational classes that we didn't have and so on. So, it wasn't like they all dropped out of school it was just that uh...

MM: They moved around a bit?

JB: They moved around.

MM: Sure.

JB: And, um. [0:10:00]

MM: Did you have a favorite subject in school or involved in extra curriculars?

JB: Well, I was involved in athletics and extra-curricular. As uh favorite subjects were math and sciences.

MM: That makes sense.

JB: Yeah, that's why I became a math and science teacher (chuckles).

MM: Sure. When did you start playing football?

JB: Freshman year.

MM: Freshman year.

JB: Well actually I started in sixth grade.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: With elementary teams.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: We played the other schools in town.

MM: Uh huh. Did you get involved with other sports or was football sort of your main one?

JB: Well I played basketball also.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: My freshman year I went out for the basketball team. And the coach cut me after two practices and says John, you're too short (laughs).

MM: (laughs)

JB: And at that time, I was just barely over five foot six. (chuckles)

MM: Yeah, yeah,

JB: And then in the next year and a half I grew six inches and I was six foot tall [0:11:00] (chuckles).

MM: I bet he reconsidered that probably.

JB: Yeah.

MM: So, um, so where did you go after high school? When you graduated.

JB: Well, fortunately our high school football teams were state champions in football. Of course, that was no they didn't have playoffs. They just had the sports writers voted us in. But we opened the season against uh South Bend Washington. Which was the state champion the year before and we beat them. And immediately all eyes were on us because we had beaten the state champion. And we went ten games undefeated.

MM: Wow.

JB: So we were elected as the state champ as the state champions.

MM: Oh

JB: And I uh got an athletic scholarship to Notre Dame. And I went there one year. And I saw that Notre Dame was not my social life that I'd grown up in. My roommate came to the school

... his chauffer brought him, his chauffer carried his suitcases up for him ... and, you know, that just wasn't me (chuckles).

MM: Yeah.

JB: So I uh transferred to [0:12:00] Xavier of Ohio for one semester and uh they didn't want to give me uh athletic scholarship so I said well then I can't come. So I came home and worked for two years and during that time I was a construction worker. And from my dad's experience and all and friends that parents owned construction companies ... so I got into that. And uh then I got drafted 1953.

MM: Ok

JB: Um the group from Fort Wayne ended the Korean War because they knew we were comin' (chuckles).

MM: Good for you guys (laughs).

JB: (chuckles) Well we were in basic training. The final week of basic training we had orders to go to San Francisco to get on boats [0:13:00] to go to Korea. Well while we were out there in our last week they had the cease fire. So immediately, you know, stopped we don't need more people over here (coughs) Excuse me. Hmm. So um, excuse me a minute while I go get a drink. (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, go ahead.

JB: Phlem just cut loose (chuckles).

MM: (chuckles)

JB: (cough) (cough) If you want anything to drink or anything just stop us and we'll get it.

MM: Ok, sure thing. I've got some water right here. I should (inaudible).

JB: Ok. Well, so uh when I was in basic, they uh said uh you've had experience in engineering. So we're going to put you in the artillery and let you teach the surveying and fire control and so I that's what I did [0:14:00] for the remainder of my two years is is acted like a sergeant but I was only a private.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And, uh but that's what got me interested in teaching that.

MM: That's interesting.

JB: So when I came home I went to Purdue. Started here in Fort Wayne when it was downtown. And uh, that's when we I got married. And uh, moved down to Purdue then my second year and went out for the football team and got two years of scholarship. So, I could afford to go there.

MM: So, did did you play the full last two seasons at Purdue?

JB: Well I I was on the team (chuckles).

MM: (chuckles) I understand.

JB: (chuckles) That uh.

MM: So, um well a couple things in there if we could jump around just a little bit. Um, were you expecting to get drafted or was did you anticipate that happening or? [0:15:00]

JB: I I assisted in it happening because I went down and said I can't get a good job. I can't do anything. So, will you get me on the list and send me in. So that's how I got drafted.

MM: Ok.

JB: Yeah.

MM: And then, so for the remainder of the time when you were teaching in the army were you in San Francisco the whole time or did you get shipped elsewhere?

JB: Well uh I was uh at Camp Fort Lewis Warshington the army base there.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh I was there, you know, for almost a year and a half...

MM: Ok.

JB: and that's all I did there.

MM: Sure. So, were then discharged in 1954 or...?

JB: Fifty... well I went up there in uh November of '53 and got out in '55. I went in on April the 28th of '53 and got out on April the 27th of '55. Two years to the day. (chuckles)

MM: Yeah. (chuckles) Wow. Ok, um now, I feel like I'm probably jumping ahead [0:16:00] of myself here but you mentioned getting married sort of in that time period too so when and where did you meet your wife or future wife?

JB: She was uh Central Catholic student. I recognized her in my freshman year.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: In fact, I asked who she was. Our Senior year we shared a locker (chuckles). We didn't have enough lockers for everybody so uh we shared lockers.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh want to really hear something funny?

MM: I do.

JB: In the Junior year, uh at the one of the football games uh she was inviting people over to her house for her birthday party.

MM: Um huh.

JB: And I heard it. So, we I and two friends went over to her house for the birthday party. Knocked on the door. She opens the door and she says I didn't invite you and closed the door.

MM: Ahh (laughs).

JB: So, two weeks later I asked her for a date. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) Did she yes to that one?

JB: Oh yeah. (laughs)

MM: That's funny.

JB: So, through the end through the Junior [0:17:00] and Senior year we dated.

MM: Ok. Um, and and her name was Jean?

JB: Pardon?

MM: Jean was her name?

JB: Jean. J E A N.

MM: And what was her maiden name?

JB: Bobay. B O B A Y.

MM: Ok. Is her family from Fort Wayne then presumably?

JB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There were two Bobay brothers that came to Fort Wayne in 18... no nine...1840. And all the Bobays in Allen County are descendants of those two boys.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh so you know.

MM: And, I'm sorry I missed the date on that but when did you all get married?

JB: 1955, May 14th.

MM: May 14th, 1955. Ok.

JB: Yeah.

MM: So, you were just getting out of the army then.

JB: Yeah, in fact she made all the wedding plans and everything.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And of course, we wrote daily.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: 6 cents for a postage stamp (chuckles).

MM: At least she...

JB: At least five of them a week at a right now

MM: wow.

JB: And she wrote me and we kept in contact.

MM: Um hmm. And what was she doing? Was she still here in Fort Wayne...

JB: Uh huh.

MM: ...while you were serving? Ok.

JB: Yeah, yeah. She worked uh as a secretary in an office.

MM: Uh huh, great. [0:18:00]

JB: And uh...she enjoyed that (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, yeah. So, uh, again I'm jumping around I apologize but...

JB: No, that's good.

MM: Back to playing at Purdue. Um what was it like playing uh football at Purdue? Who was the coach at the time?

JB: Jack Mullenkof

MM: Jack Mullenkof, ok.

JB: And uh he said why didn't you come here in '51 out of high school? (laughs). He was the coach then there and I went up to Notre Dame under Frank Layhee.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh, so you know. (chuckles)

MM: Yeah. That's the way it works out.

JB: Yeah.

MM: Uh. So then... what was your major when you were in college?

JB: Well I started out in engineering.

MM: OK.

JB: And then I switched over to education, math and chemistry. And uh, so I could become a coach. [0:19:00]

MM: Um hmm

JB: So, I coached for 25 years. Football.

MM: Uh huh. Ok. Um, well even through college, in the army in particular... in what ways did your awareness of politics evolve? Did anything change for you at the time?

JB: No. It just a gradual change. And as I said my wife was twisted my arm to be the political person.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: Because her physical condition she couldn't uh put up with the problems and the stress and all...

MM: Uh huh,

JB: But she could do all the planning and everything.

MM: Uh huh, so together, like a team really?

JB: Right, right.

MM: Ok. Um, so you had decided after the army then that you did want to teach and coach...

JB: Uh hmm.

MM: Um, where did you get your first job? And after you were certified to teach?

JB: Uh, At Northside High School here in Fort Wayne.

MM: Ok.

JB: I taught there for nine years...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...as the assistant football coach and uh it was the [0:20:00]...we'd switching over to the junior high school system where it was 8 4 4 or 8 yeah 8 4 4, and uh we uh you know I was coached football and uh, that's when I took up refereeing basketball. For a little extra money, you know, and be involved and all. But uh.

MM: Uh huh. Ok. (pause) I...let me jump around here...did you have...I know you did you showed me a picture but um...when were your children born?

JB: Uhhh, Tim was born...we were married in '55, Tim was born in July the 5th 1956...

MM: Ok. [0:21:00]

JB: My daughter Julia was born October the 5th 1957...

MM: Ok.

JB: and uh, so ...

MM: Close order

JB: ...they went through Purdue with me (chuckles).

MM: Did they? (laughs). So, did you live on campus?

JB: Yes, yeah.

MM: Ok.

JB: Married student apartment.

MM: Uh huh. Well how did your family then sort of influence your education or your career? I mean I'm assuming you didn't have a sort of typical college experience if you're taking care of kids at the same time.

JB: Yeah, well, uh, I had two older sisters who uh both went to college...um...both up in Minnesota and uh I you know wanted to be a college student so I came back and did all the things I had to do to keep up and uh make things available and of course in those days college wasn't that expensive that you could, you know, [0:22:00] could afford it.

MM: Yeah, yeah. Um I think I read somewhere that you later went back and got a masters' degree. Was that for your teaching masters or what was that about?

JB: Yeah well Indiana teaching license said you had to have five years' experience and a masters' degree to get your life license.

MM: Ok

JB: And uh, so I went back to Ball State to get my masters license because it was much easier to just go 60 miles down to Muncie than it was to go 120 miles over to Lafayette.

MM: Sure.

JB: So I took night classes during the year and I took one uh of the quarters system that they had at that time uh down there and then come come home and coach football in August or otherwise I'd still be in classes.

MM: Um hmm. Sure. [0:23:00]

JB Yeah.

MM: Ok. Um well how then did you become more seriously involved in politics? When did that start happening?

JB: Well I became a precinct committeeman for the Republican Party and uh did all the leg work of getting people out to vote, voting and getting all that kind of thing.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh my wife well pushed me to do it because she was involved with the Eagle Forum Organization and they're politically involved and so that's how we really got going.

MM: So, had her or where did Jean's interest come from? Is that something her family had been involved in or did she just get into it herself?

JB: She just got into it herself. (chuckles) Her her her parents were very don't bother us with all that political stuff (laughs).

MM: (laughs) Yeah that's funny. So, she wasn't following anyone's footsteps?

JB: Well my parents were the same way you know. They didn't think at all about politics.

MM: Uh huh. And so, had she...it had she gravitated towards the Republican Party earlier than you or ...

JB Um hmm.

MM: ... is that something you came into together? [0:24:00]

JB: Um well I guess I guess I tagged along with her but she's the one that guided us and started us and uh.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: So that's where we got going.

MM: Ok. Um I feel like the answer to this question may just simply be your wife but what shaped your political outlook?

JB: I guess our religious views.

MM: Ok.

JB Uh, particularly being pro-life...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and uh she had two miscarriages and and that of course made us more aware of the you know the child and all and uh, so it was the common...

MM: Uh huh. Was Jean Catholic as well?

JB: Yes.

MM: Yeah, ok, well I guess you both were at the Catholic High School. So, ok. Um, well as you initially became involved in politics even if that's precinct committeeman or what have you were there [0:25:00] specific issues or legislation that you were championing or fighting against even before you got into the legislature?

JB: Umm. Nothing particularly I could point out. It's it's just the overall view of the Republican Party and and the Re...the Democrats in Fort Wayne who pushed some things to the extreme that you know we we can't do that you know.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: It's against our faith and against all we believe in.

MM: Ok, well what are some examples of that? You know I mean you've said a couple of times that Democrats were going sort of in a hard direction at least locally here.

JB: Right.

MM: Where did you see them going?

JB: Umm. (pause) I don't know if I can point out one [0:26:00] or two but you know just the overall stand of the Democratic party here and and uh Republican Party.

MM: Did you see that that was changing from the past or were just your ideas changing, too?

JB: Well I guess it'd be both but mainly the... our ideas were changing and we just could not set... get in line with the Democratic Party again.

MM: Ok. And again, just cause you've said this a couple time like specifically in Fort Wayne were you paying attention to national politics or were you more just focused on what the Democrats were doing locally?

JB: Uhhh national projects.

MM: Ok.

JB Rather than, you know, cause so many of my friends who were Democrats were having thoughts too about what their party was doing nationally and, you know, so we joined together (chuckles).

MM: OK, so a disconnect between national politics and local politics...

JB: Right.

MM: ...was making you and others question what's going on? Ok. Umm (pause) so at this [0:27:00] time then uh who were your national political heroes, if any?

JB: Well, I was a John Kennedy supporter.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh I always liked his quotation "Ask not what your country can do but what you can do for your country." And this is where I think, you know, the Democrats on national level also got split up and caused the break away and uh so it's just a combination.

MM: Um hmm. Ok. Again, is your sort of getting involved in local politics er about when did you become a precinct committeeman?

JB: Oh that would have been probably in the late 70s early 80s.

MM: Ok. Did you have any, um state or local [0:28:00] politicians that you were campaigning for or that you advocated for or looked up to in the 70s and 80s?

JB: Not particularly you know.

MM: Ok. Um, well what then made you finally decide to run for state government? Or did you have other levels before you went from precinct committeeman to the legislature?

JB: Uh I ran for uh, Allen County Council one time.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh, of course it's a big wide area and my name wasn't that well known on in politics...

MM: Um hmm

JB: ...and uh so I ran twice for two different [inaudible] once for the district seat and once for general at large seat and uh just then the combination of people that we got involved with and got more and more involved with...I agreed [0:29:00] to take over the the area to be the precinct committeeman and so on ... and get the workers for the party and all that ... so just so you start slow and just get going (chuckles).

MM: Uh huh. Ok. Uh, within ... what made you decide to finally run for the general assembly?

JB: Umm (chuckles) Ben Giaquinna was the Repub uh Democrat and uh I'm the only one that beat one of the Dem uh a Giaquinna in an election...I beat his dad...you know, I lost to him one time I won the second time and I lost the third time.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: Because it was a strictly democratic district as it was laid out...its all central Fort Wayne and southeast Fort Wayne and uh, but because I was teaching at the southeast school and I grew up in

the south part of Fort Wayne a lot of people knew me and so my name became invol open and involved and so I got really involved in it. [0:30:01]

MM: Ok. So, you beat his father once?

JB: Yeah.

MM: For?

JB: Well he's he's the father of of Mark and uh Phil.

MM: Ok.

JB: And Phil's down in the legislature now.

MM: Now, yeah ... and his father was the...

JB: Right.

MM: right, right ok. Ok. So, um what did your...ya know, you showed me some of your campaign materials but what did you emphasize? Why did you want people to vote for you?

JB: Um, one of the big things at that time was they were putting a uh dump in southeast Fort Wayne, a gar garbage dump. And that was just lowering all the values of that area. And I uh this is gotta ...you can't do that. You gotta take that out to an area where it's not going [0:31:00] to tear down the value of all the houses and everything around it.

MM: Sure.

JB: And so that was the biggest thing.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And it was less than a half a mile away from the high school which was a brand-new high school.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And uh it just yep from then on the area just went down hill and...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: So, its...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...a hard thing to see but you you gotta stand up and fight for something, I guess and I did.

MM: Sure, sure. Ok. Um, wou...did you have a particular for that aah what probably would have been ninety four when you uh ran.

JB: Um hmm.

MM: Um, did you have a particular campaign strategy in terms of getting elected for the house?

JB: Get more votes (laughs).

MM: (laughs) That's the basic goal, yep. [0:32:00]

JB: Well I, I think I knocked on two thirds of the doors in the district.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And I started, you know, just knocking on doors every weekend.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And uh spent time doing that and. [clock chimes]

MM: Did your wife organize some of that? I mean you said she was very heavily involved in this.

JB: Oh yeah, she's she always helped us with...get ready. Uh, I suppose I was a rebel rouser because uh when I was teaching in Fort Wayne at Northside I was uh coaching and the coaches salary at that time was nickels and dimes. For coaching, uh, twelve weeks of football I got \$200. You know that didn't even pay for my coffee (laughs).

MM: No, no way.

JB: So, I, along with the other coaches, said hey we've gotta do something. This is ridiculous. I know that teachers' salaries are not the highest...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...but there no sense in, you know, giving up all your time to do these things if you don't get some [0:33:00] award for it.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: So, I worked with the coaches and we got a got to be represented by the Fort Wayne Teachers Association...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and they took our proposal to the school board and we got a \$300 raise.

MM: Wow. Yeah.

JB: More than double our pay and uh than uh, the following year the president of the Association came down to me and said would you serve on our salary committee? So, I served on the salary committee for two years.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And the second year we went on teachers strike...

MM: Wow.

JB: ...to get the same kind of situation for the teachers' salary that we'd gotten for the coaches.

MM: Uh huh. Uh huh.

JB: And uh so I was the Salary Committee chairman the year the Fort Wayne teachers went on strike.

MM: Ok.

JB: And that was 1967.

MM: Wow. So, you're getting some involvement that way as well. Organizing.

JB: Yeah, so that's how I got my [0:34:00] feet wet...

MM: Sure, um hmm.

JB: ...in the political area. Cause it was political.

MM: Yeah, absolutely.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

MM: So you'd also said that you'd taught at North Northside right?

JB: Northside, yeah.

MM: For nine years. Where did you go after that?

JB: Heritage opened.

MM: Ok.

JB: They combined Monroeville and Holden schools.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh so I coached and taught out there for five years.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And then Harding opened...

MM: Ok.

JB: ... and I got the head football coaching job at Harding...

MM: Ok.

JB: ...and so I was involved there for seven years.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh, whenever you get your head in the noose than they hang ya (chuckles). You also have to watch your backside and uh. They didn't fire me from Northside but they took away all my extra-curricular things that's the reason I went to Heritage. And when I got to out to east down the superintendent called me in and [0:35:00] we had a nice conversation. I said eh (chuckles) I don't look for trouble but I'm not gonna stand around and things are goin'...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...badly to let it keep goin'.

MM: And do you mean with teaching or with football?

JB: With football.

MM: Yeah. Um hmm.

JB: I mean with teaching you know you're in the classroom ...

MM: Sure.

JB: ...and nobody even knows what you're doing in the classroom.

MM: Yeah, yeah.

JB: It uh, yeah, it's a different field uh but uh I enjoyed it and so the superintendent gave me the head football job over at Harding when it was open...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...and uh, so I did that then for seven years.

MM: Ok.

JB: And uh, my principal came to me one time and said last year you won seven ball games and this year you won none. [0:36:00] Do you think you can't do that? And I said Coa, uh, Sir, we have one public junior high feeding Harding High School. All the Fort Wayne schools have three junior highs feeding the high school. We just don't have the numbers and the talent.

MM: Yeah.

JB: Ya know? So, you do, you know, I said well, you know, you can fire me now (chuckles) or wait and fire me later...

MM: Yeah. (chuckles).

JB: ...won't make me any difference.

MM: Sure.

JB: I'll say I can win three games next year if we're lucky.

MM: Yeah.

JB: We won four. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) That's an improvement.

JB: (Chuckles) But they fired me anyway.

MM: (Laughs) So was that your last teaching and coaching at Harding or did you go elsewhere after that?

JB: I stayed at Harding.

MM: To teach but you didn't coach anymore?

JB: Right, right.

MM: Ok, and so when did you retire from teaching? [0:37:00]

JB: The year after I got elected.

MM: Ok.

JB: 1995.

MM: Ok, ok. Ok. Um Well I know that you defeated, narrowly defeated Vin Giaquinta. Was there a lot of Republicans that were running against each other first?

JB: Oh well there were just two of us in the primary.

MM: Ok. Who was the other person? Do you remember? It's been a while I know.

JB: Yeah. I can't think of his name right now but anyway yeah there were just the two of us and he had never done anything before and he really didn't have a name.

MM: Yeah.

JB And uh so I I won the primary without a problem.

MM: Sure, ok. And and I know I could look this up too but at that point how long had Giaquinta been serving?

JB: Uh, Ben had been in for four years.

MM: OK, ok.

JB: And uh so uh he and I didn't see eye to eye (chuckles). A funny thing is that when I first met Ben Giaquinna his name was Quinn. Hickson Quinn Real Estate Company. [0:38:00] (chuckles) Giaquinna was too long a name and too, you know, controversial...

MM: Um hmm.

JB...and uh so, you know, I razzed him about it. Hey, Ben, I knew you when you were Quinn. (chuckles).

MM: (laughs)

JB: (Laughingly) When did you change your name?

MM: Yeah. Uh, what made you decide to run for a house seat as opposed to the Senate?

JB: Uh, the smaller districts...so you, uh that are easier to get acquainted...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and you really have to have a known name in the Senate because you only...the Senate seat, you know, is takes up usually two or three full house areas.

MM: Sure.

JB: So, you know you really have a chore to do.

MM: Um hmm. Yeah, so you felt it was more manageable to start with the House?

JB: Right.

MM: OK.

JB: And who I would have had to run against to defeat to get up into that.

MM: Sure, sure. Ok. Um, well what was most important to you as a candidate when you were [0:39:00] starting your campaign to run for the house seat?

JB: Who or what was that?

MM: What what was most important to you? Was there I mean you mentioned the dump... is that kind of what you ran your platform on or?

JB: Yeah, right. The dump was one of the main issues that I ran on.

MM: Ok. Well how did you get that message out to the public? You mentioned going door to door but did you have other campaign materials or?

JB: Well, uh (pause) the mayor of Fort Wayne didn't like the dump either, so I got him, and he was a democrat. And so, the two of us would talk about it together, you know. And so, its how a lot of it was done.

MM: Ok, ok. What was election day like for you?

JB: Well, as I did all the work myself puttin' the signs out and all that kind of stuff, you know, and then going from poll to poll [0:40:00] and shaking hands with people to be sure and vote for me and so on. And then uh my campaign manager who was a house member the year before but wasn't running again, uh he advised my wife and I what to do and everything. And when I closed the polls on election day and started picking up all my signs, uh I could feel it was a very tight race. And when they started giving the results, uh, through the evening, he was always ahead of me. And uh, so uh, I was out picking up the polling signs and and uh my, Mitch my friend, uh called and said, hey I got word from the election board that you're beatin' Ben. [0:41:00] And so I started going around finishing my job (chuckles) and the next day it was still undecided.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And you know, and uh so when it finally came out that uh I won by six votes he immediately challenged and wanted a recount.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: So we had a recount and he won by six or seven votes. And so, the Republican Party pushed me to go all the way to the State for a recount and I won on the third recount (chuckles).

MM: Wow. Did you anticipate it being such a close race?

JB: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

MM: So, you kind of knew.

JB: Even old friends from where I grew up in the south end of town said we'd like to go out to vote for ya but you're a republican and we're democrats. And that's... (chuckles).

MM: Yeah. Um, (pause) so, [0:42:00] I guess like, normally you would know by the end of the day...

JB: Oh yeah.

MM: ...that you'd won. So, did you anticipate it dragging out or did you think well tomorrow morning it'll be settled?

JB: Well yeah, I thought, you know, when we'd heard the first results...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...but when there's only a six count difference you...(chuckle) to me it [inaudible] advises recount. And the funniest thing is that my own precinct they recounted it they'd made an error in the tally and I got uh six votes out of that revote tally (chuckles) in my own precinct.

MM: Yeah, wow, that's funny. Uh, so how long did that drag out then?

JB: Until December.

MM: Wow. [0:43:00]

JB: And uh, so I was, ya know, pins and needles, am I gonna go back to teaching after Christmas or am I gonna go down the (chuckles)...

MM: Yeah, and how did you work that out with your school? Were you going to take a semester off?...

JB: I just take uh, take, you know, or uh ...I don't know what they call it...not sick leave but...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...for political purpose, you know, you get approved to do that...

MM: Yeah, um humm.

JB: And uh, in fact I had things all laid out for my substitute teachers...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...on how to finish the semester. And of course, that's in late January.

MM: Right.

JB: And so, you know, I'd come back to work with the substitutes on weekends.

MM: Wow. Um (pause) so when you finally got the official word that you had won, I think I read somewhere had you already been sworn in as that was still ongoing or not?

JB: No, no, we didn't get sworn in until well...

MM: 'Cause usually that's a day in November.

JB: They they had an organization meeting in November but I I wasn't officially a member then. [0:44:01] I attended but I wasn't sworn in.

MM: So you did go but it wasn't official. Ok.

JB: Yeah.

MM: And then to jump back you had said that there was a former member of the house giving advice to you and your wife. Who was who was that?

JB: (chuckles) Mitch Harper.

MM: Ok. Mitch Harper, ok. Uh, so you go to organization day. You finally find out in December that you won the seat...

JB: Right, uh huh.

MM: ...by a hand full of votes. What did you find or what were you thinking as you actually walked into the Statehouse that first day in January?

JB: Y'know I was just, you know, flabbergasted by what was going on because I was just a little pin in the whole thing (chuckles) and uh, but in fact on the first day of organ...of being down there I was uh put on the education committee as vice chair.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: And the chairman [0:45:00] came up to me and he said John I have a bill and I have to hand over the gavel to you to run the meeting. And so I said oh ok and so we get into the meeting and he called it to order and said the first bill is mine and I'm turning the gavel over to John Becker the vice chairman and so he handed it to me and I proceeded to follow the rules and regulations as we went through it and then that afternoon we had a party meeting ...

MM: Um hmmm.

JB: ...and we were told now, you know, be ready to to do these jobs and we're going to have a meeting for all you int... new freshmen on how to conduct business meeting. [0:46:00] I says, it's a little late (laughs).

MM: Yeah. (laughs)

JB: (laughingly) And everybody laughed.

MM: Yeah, that's funny. Well how did you get the vice vice chair position right as you were coming in? Because you had been a teacher or...?

JB: Yeah, basically.

MM: Yeah, ok.

JB: Because the chairman was not a teacher.

MM: Ok.

JB: Ok. And uh there's only one other teacher I think on the committee.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And uh so you know, it's just a matter of here you are, you're hooked (chuckles).

MM: Yeah. Getting your feet wet right away. So, um well how then did you learn the ins and outs of state politics?

JB: Well, it's a lot of it is just being willing to listen and and uh move forward with whatever, you know, the party's line is that we're trying to to build up. Because at that time, you know it's just a matter Republicans vs Democrats. You want to do it this way, but we want to do it this [0:47:00] way. And uh so you have to do all the bargaining to get things done.

MM: Uh huh. Uh huh. Ok. Uh did you have any political mentors as you sort of settled in to the General Assembly?

JB: Not really. No.

MM: Ok, ok. Well obviously, at this point you're sort of firm Republican; you ran on the Republican ticket. What did the Republican Party stand for in your opinion during that time, the mid-nineties?

JB: (pause) Um (pause) I don't know if I can put, you know, voice my thoughts on that very well. Without giving it some long thought but...

MM: That's ok.

JB: It's, you know, it's, the party is, you know, uh has basic ideas of how we should tax people...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...how, who you should tax and how much and so on. Uh, so that's one [0:48:00] of the big things. You don't want to over tax but you don't want to not be able to do things.

MM: Right.

JB: You have to have some taxes.

MM: Sure.

JB: And uh so that I think that was the biggest issue we fought over.

MM: Ok. Ok. Um, how did you know the needs and wants of your constituents then?

JB: Well, I held a couple of meetings, you know.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: Down, you know, at various locations in the area. The high school, you know, there we got the room and got the people to come in and uh, we uh met at other places, uh churches or wherever in the area. And announced that we were gonna be there, [0:49:01] and what we wanted to talk about and if you have any questions bring 'em to us and we will, you know, help take uh care of the things you need to have done.

MM: Um hmm. Ok. Uh, did people write you letters or call you about issues or...?

JB: Oh yeah...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...all the time. I'd get uh letters and so on and I give them to my secretary (laughs).

MM: (laughs) Uh, that was funny. You had mentioned earlier too that you and your wife went down to Indianapolis. Did you or where did you stay or how did that work?

JB: Uh, there's an apartment complex just uh one block north and uh west of the Capital building...

MM: Ok.

JB: ...and we got a room in there. There were probably half a dozen legislators in there. It was ideal for uh couples to be there because some of the guys [0:50:00] you know would get a hotel room and their parents uh wife and family didn't come down so they could stay in the room but we you know wanted to be relaxed and uh have it there..

MM: Uh huh. So obviously with the diary you showed me your wife kept really good track of what was going on. How did she mingle with other people? What was it like for her?

JB: She enjoyed it. (laughs)

MM: Did she? Uh huh.

JB: She really enjoyed it. And uh she worked with the...you know, like I said she was a member of Eagle Forum and the state uh president of the year before we went down. And she gave it up in order to have more time and not be in criss crossing with all the things...

MM: Sure.

JB: ...and uh so you know we she even held meetings in our apartment (laughs). [0:51:00]

MM: (laughs) Wow. She was busy certainly.

JB: Oh yeah, yeah.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: You read through that and you'll see, she was very involved.

MM: I think that I had read at some point there uh a legislator's wives club or something like that. Was that still around when you were in there?

JB: Ummm. I don't know that there was a legislator's wives club, but the wives of legislators got together for luncheon and did things you know together...

MM: Um hmm. So, there was interaction there with other spouses. Ok.

JB: Yes, there was interaction with...um hmm.

MM: Um so you were just talking a little bit about how you knew the needs and wants of your constituents they would call or send letters that...

JB: Um hmm.

MM: ...you would then give to your secretary (amused voice) and uh other things. Um but how did you communicate and interact with them? Like when the session was over would you you held some meetings but were there other ways that you communicated [0:52:00] with them?

JB: Ummm not that I could say that I did specifically to do it.

MM: yes.

JB: No.

MM: Ok. Well do you remember the first bill you sponsored?

JB: Uh, actually I did not sponsor a bill of my own.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: Uh I got a senate bill and uh the sponsor of it asked me to carry it in the house and I did.

MM: Ok ok

JB: That was a senate bill from John Sinks

MM: Ok ok

JB: And uh...

MM: Was that the one that went through then?

JB: Yeah.

MM: In what issue was the around? What was that law about?

JB: (laughs) I have to get it [in audible] memory.

MM: I can look at that later.

JB: I mean that's twenty-five years ago. (laughs).

MM: Yes, yes certainly. Well I know that (pause) I think maybe both in the first and the second session at least but you were involved in educational testing issues? Um like trying to get rid of ISTEP or change uh... [0:53:03]

JB: We were just putting ISTEP in.

MM: Ok.

JB: Yeah. Making requirement that the schools uh you know test to make sure the students knew the level of all subjects.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: You know, I uh mathematics you can do level of math at different things. When you got social studies, history...where do you take one's year, you know, well you been in our schools ...the junior year you have US history...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ... and the senior year you have government and sociology classes what they consider the equivalent and but freshman and sophomore year you could have any century of history...

MM: Right.

JB: ... and it's hard to test that.

MM: Uh huh.

JB: But, you know, you can with math two plus two equals four no matter what level you're at (chuckles).

MM: Right, right. I'm assuming you got involved in those issues because of your background as a teacher. Um, I'm sorry back up.

JB: Go ahead.

MM: No, ok. And um, [0:54:00] it seems like, and I know that was twenty five years ago so if you don't remember please please just let me know but um it sounded like there was another test called IPASS maybe that people were trying to put in. Do you remember anything about that?

JB: Well they just gave it a different names because of the broadness of it and so on but it's all been the basic mathematics and basic history and uh the basic other things that were thrown in and it's just a matter of who prod... who organized the test and so on. It was just another name for the same thing.

MM: Ok. So, you were more involved in just trying to figure out what would be appropriate testing or what you thought we should do?

JB: Right.

MM: Throughout the state.

JB: Yeah, particularly in the social studies we would say we are just doing [0:55:00] a generalization of the US history and uh, but uh with math you know you could say this is level uh general math algebra...

MM: um hmm.

JB: ...and uh because most students in high school take at least general math and one semester of algebra at that time.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And uh so you know you could do that easier.

MM: Yeah. Ok. Um, also from my research I understood that you were involved somehow in a lawsuit that was suing the department of education um related to some of this testing. Do you remember what that was about?

JB: Ummm. No, I don't remember a lawsuit...

MM: Ok. [0:56:00]

JB: ... related to it. It was just discussion going back and forth but uh...

MM: Ok.

JB: ... no lawsuits.

MM: No, ok. Um well can you tell me a little bit more about the regular interaction amongst assembly members? Both formal or informal. How did you get to know your colleagues?

JB: Well, uh one nice thing is three out of five days a week they have luncheons. (chuckles) Some organizations paid for it so you'd go with 'em and you eat and you talk and there's general conversation about the bills or what we're working on and so on and it's uh you know you bump elbows so much that you you constantly involved with them yeah.

MM: So, you felt like you're talking about issues probably when you're on the floor and having sort of formal committee meetings but that also transpires outside of the chambers?

JB: Yeah. You you know um when I was there we had like twenty freshmen and so you know you were all [0:57:00] sharing things with each other and talking constantly about the bills that they're working on or the committee meeting they were in and what that involves, let us know what you think we should do vote for because there is no way you can know all the bills and all the information although I quote read every bill that went through the education committee...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ... and I read all the bills that I could, but I couldn't do them all or you'd be (chuckles) you never get any sleep. (chuckles).

MM: Right, right. OK. Um, what were interactions like between the majority and the minority parties? Between the Republicans and the Democrats?

JB: Uh, (pause) it wasn't that big a difference between them and so you had to go in and discuss things with them to know what their view was on [0:58:00] a particular issue. Particularly if one of the democrats on a committee with me I'd ask them now what is it you really want out of this bill and can you explain it to me in detail so that I don't have to read and reread the bill and once I go through it then I'd have their viewpoint...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and uh you know they all shared their information with you you know all the time.

MM: Sure. So, did you feel you were kind of forced to work together a little bit?

JB: Oh yeah.

MM: Yeah.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

MM: OK. Um, what differences if any were there between the members of the House and the Senate?

JB: Um, I didn't know that many of the Senators.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: I knew the ones from Allen County and...

MM: Sure.

JB: ...the surrounding area. But the rest of them I really didn't get to know very well unless they were on a committee with me but uh [0:59:00] we were you know we didn't have intermixing of

House and Senate so much as we just have putting together a group for the House in order to have committees.

MM: Um hmm. So even when you're going socializing or going to the luncheons it was still pretty parcelled out between house members together and senate senators together.

JB: Right. Yeah, yeah.

MM: OK. Um, do you remember what your relationship was like with your seat mate?

JB: What was that again?

MM: Your relationship like with your seat mate. Who you sat next to?

JB: Oh. Oh, well the two directly to my right were two Allen County republicans (laughs), Phyllis Pond and Gloria Gigline. They were my mothers' (laughs).

MM: (laughs) So they took care of you,

JB: They took care of me (chuckles).

MM: That's funny. So, you had some familiarity with them.

JB: Yeah, right.

MM: Ok.

JB: Of course, all the house members were divided with republicans on one side and democrats on the other, so we were right among all the republicans being that close to those two and talking [1:00:00] all constantly you know. Phyllis Pond was a teacher, elementary school teacher in East Allen where I was a high school teacher. So, we had a lot of things to really talk about.

MM: Sure, sure. Ok.

JB: (chuckles).

MM: Uh can you tell me a little bit about the process of generating a bill? How did, how did that transpire if you wanted to put forth legislation or sponsor a bill or...?

JB: Well (pause) most bills are written by organizations. Like the Chamber of Commerce or somebody, you know, they want something for the whole state but they gotta have a bill to pass.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: So, they get the [1:01:00] information and then they share it with you and say would you be a sponsor on this bill.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And then one bill that I agreed to help sponsor I sat down with the group and their attorney and and discussed what it should be and then they sent it to the legislative uh committee of or the... what is it the lit...its its where who writes the actual bill...

MM: The Legislative Services Agency?

JB: Yeah. Right, yeah. And so you know you talk to 'em about what you think it should have and the people that were pushing you set with you and tell you their view points so it comes out once it's corrected and so you can take the bill to the floor.

MM: Ok. [1:02:00] How was legislative business conducted outside of formal votes or committee meetings? Did you have to say once you had a bill in place how did you get people to support it or to get the word out about what it was about?

JB: Um, I don't recall any particular thing other than you know you have your bill written and then you talk to the people on your committee about the bill and then you share that information with others uh house republicans and house democrats to try and convince them that this is the way the bill should be...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...handled and what it should do. And so.

MM: Um hmm. So, did you have to sort of go around explaining that to people or would it just be like you would present it formally in front of the caucus or...?

JB: Just present it at the caucus...

MM: OK.

JB: ... or discuss it at the caucus...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...and like I say I only [1:03:00] got involved with the one bill that was my own bill and then it was John Sinks' bill that came over and ...

MM: Right.

JB: I I did arm twisting (chuckles). Look you know, this is what we got through the Senate and this is the House bill and we need to get it done this way so you know...(chuckling) and the one guy I swear he he just tried to antagonize ya (laughs).

MM: There's always one of them [in audible].

JB: Yeah, well.

MM: So, did you have to really work hard to get people on your side or did you feel like once you explained it people would be like you know kind of go with the flow?

JB: Most of them went with the flow after you got to that point.

MM: Yeah.

JB: Yeah. But I remember, you know, on my own bill when I was presenting it to the caucus I said now this is what the people tell me they need to have in order to conduct business [1:04:00] and so on. And this one guy you know he always had just a little tidbit about: (squeaky voice) Are you sure that's what they really wanted? (chuckles).

MM: Uh huh. That's funny. Do you recall what bill that was? To or...

JB: Not right off hand. (chuckles)

MM: No, ok. I can look that stuff up. Did you end up being able to advocate for not having the dump once you got into the legislator legislature?

JB: Well, that wasn't a state problem that was a local problem.

MM: Ok.

JB: But um but you know we we can't write a bill that covers all the state's you know...

MM: Right.

JB: ...that's a local problem.

MM: Um hmm. So, did that help you get into the legislature sort of campaigning on that issue or was that just something that just spurred you into getting involved?

JB: That spurred me into it and then got it going.

MM: Ok. Gotcha. Did you have a sense of how people [1:05:00] would vote um on a bill prior to the voting actually having taken place?

JB: You you knew you know let's say 90% of the people were gonna vote how they would vote, but, then there's always a few that you know...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...don't agree with ya even if you say its chocolate and they wanna say I don't know it's just brown stuff. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) So was there a lot of even particularly when you were in either committee meetings or maybe even in the caucus like internal disagreements that you all would have to hash out?

JB: Oh yeah in the caucus we we did. We had good debates a lot of times on various things.

MM: So, what would that look like? What was the atmosphere like when you would go to caucus?

JB: Um, it was you know very friendly usually but then like I say [1:06:00] there's some people who just did not agree with ya and uh but uh while while you have (laughing voice) that many people you only need one more than half. (chuckles).

MM: Right. So then when you were having those debates is the ultimate goal to get everybody on the same side so then you could present a unified front against democrats or...?

JB: Well, you know, that's when you in your um discussion party discussion you get everything ironed out the best you can and then you try to go from there.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And then, you know, I remember one time on my bill the person came to me and said I'm gonna present a change in the bill. Here's copy of what I'm gonna present.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And I looked it over and I said you know that's gonna ruin the bill if you do that.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And he says well that's what the that people I'm working with think needs to be done. And I says well [1:07:00] we'll have to see then (chuckling) how the rest of the party agrees with you or me on that.

MM: Yeah, yeah. And so you have to hash that out amongst each other.

JB: Right, yeah.

MM: Did any of those, for the most part, it seems like it was good hearted debate, but did any of that conflict ever spill out of there? I mean did people get heated and then hold grudges or...?

JB: I never felt any of that. No.

MM: Ok.

JB: No.

MM: Alright. Um, during your tenure what roles did party leadership play?

JB: Well, they put people on committees.

MM: Um hmm.

JB To push a particular issue they are for or they won't bring the bill up. You know there's all kinds of things, I mean, there's 500 bills (chuckling) that come up ...

MM: Yeah.

JB...they don't all get a hearing; they don't get out of committee. And of course, the [1:08:00] the head of the party tells the committee head, you know, we don't wanna hear your bill because we think it's just gonna cause trouble and now you get it worked out before hand, you know with a new version or something we'll consider but we were not considering as it stands now.

MM: So, the party leadership has influence in the committees to say kill this bill or modify it and maybe we'll send it through...

JB: Right, yeah.

MM: ...so that's kind of how it goes. And I think you know when you were in session that was the first time in eight years or so that republicans had full control...

JB: Right

MM: ...so I mean obviously you weren't in there before but did that was that a sort of unique opportunity for you all to sort of push forth your agenda or you know certain things that you all wanted to get through that hadn't [1:09:00] or had been stalled out for a while?

JB: Um (pause) I think everything moved along pretty evenly without big fights. And some bills would cause nothing but a fight and those would get put aside...

MM: Yeah.

JB: ...but uh others, you know you can't get all 500 bills through in a short session (chuckles).

MM: Right. It's a lot of bills. (laughs).

JB: Um yeah.

MM: Um, what would you say the public, the general public here in Indiana, what do we not know about the Indiana General Assembly or how it operates?

JB: Um, (pause) I don't know that I can give an example, but uh, you know, it's uh, like uh we didn't have gambling before that.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And there were groups [1:10:00] that wanted gambling you know and myself I don't think I'd bought three gambling tickets (chuckling) even to this day.

MM: Um huh.

JB: And I don't think that's how the state should get its money.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: Although because the poor people who buy tickets are the poor people that don't have the money to buy tickets you know. And being a math person, probability (chuckling) I know the possibility of you winning is very slim and yeah somebody's gonna win but you know there's millions of people buying tickets and only one person's gonna be a big winner.

MM: Sure. So with that example do you feel like there's just lots of issues that are sort of hashed out [1:11:00] that people don't know the history behind or...?

JB: Well, I think a lot of people who don't follow the politics going on constantly don't really understand why they do it this way or that way you know...it's just a matter...we have we have quote laws that should be taken off of the books because we're no longer a horse and buggy (laughs) you know...(laughs)

MM: Sure, yeah, great. Things just left there for a while. Well how did your legislative service affect your family?

JB: Well, um (pause) my children uh graduated in the 1980s, 70s to 80. And I didn't go on until '94. So, you know, they were...I had grandchildren...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...(chuckling) who who come down to see grandpa you know and thought it was a thrill.

MM: Oh, I bet. [1:12:00] I bet.

JB: Yeah.

MM: So, they were generally out of the house and had families of their own. So.

JB: Yeah, it didn't affect them at all.

MM: What about your wife?

JB: Well she ate it up. (laughs) She really enjoyed it you know.

MM: Good, good, ok. Um, do you recall or what would you say were the most controversial legislative issues during your time in office?

JB: I can't pick any one big one out. You know, a lot of it is just smoothing things out...it's not new mountains that we're climbing all the time...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...it's just little hills and things that we're changing we're not...

MM: Um hmm, ok. Um, do you recall if there was you know whether it was the bill you put forth or other things that you sponsored is there a particular piece of legislation that you worked hardest on or were most difficult for you?

JB: No, because I didn't have any agenda particularly [1:13:00] that I was trying to push to get through...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...just uh, you know, join in when where I could, smooth out the best I could.

MM: Yeah, ok. What was your proudest moment as a legislator?

JB: (pause) Hmm. (pause) I guess when I got the John Sinks bill through the house...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and the gang all signed my copy of the bill (laughs).

MM: Uh huh, uh huh, sounds like you had accomplished something there, uh huh?

JB: Yeah, yeah.

MM: Ok.

JB: And then I also enjoyed when I had the several people come down to be recognized by the legislature...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and you just get to introduce them and so on. That was nice.

MM: Um hmm. Yeah. [1:14:00] What was committee work like? I mean you shared the story of being jumped you know dumped into that from the get-go but I know you were on education and then I think I saw um natural resources, aged and aging and maybe families children and human affairs?

JB: Yeah. Uh, aged and aging we really didn't...I think we had two committee meetings...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...you know, there wasn't any big bills or anything to do.

MM: Ok.

JB: Um, natural resources, was, of course taking care of our state parks and so on. And that was more formal just to get things up to grade.

MM: Ok.

JB: Um, but the, uh, education committee we had several grr debatable bills...what we should do and particularly since we were talking about the predecessor to ISTEP and uh how I stood on how I stood on it and uh you know being a teacher for those years and um...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...uh, you know I tried to voice my opinion without upsetting everybody [1:15:01] (chuckles).

MM: Yeah. Um, did you feel most comfortable on the education committee and to sort of be a leader of that because of your background?

JB: I think so.

MM: Yeah.

JB: Yeah definitely.

MM: OK, um, and I know that lead...party leadership appoints you to committee work. Is that right?

JB: Right, yeah.

MM: So obviously education is a good fit. Did you have any sense of why you were placed on any of the others or was this...?

JB: No (laughingly) I think they went down and said here's a committee you [inaudible with laughter].

MM: (laughs) Gotcha.

JB: Yeah.

MM: Were there any major hurdles you had to overcome during your time as a house member?

JB: Umm, not that I...if I stayed on longer maybe (laughs).

MM: Yeah, sure, sure. Well what, in your opinion, was the most important work of the Indiana General Assembly? What's the most important thing they do? [1:16:00]

JB: (pause) Um. (pause) That all bills treat people equally and uh, you know, you can't have special rules for one group and a different set of rules for another. Y'all have to have the same set of rules and they have to be general in such a way that it affects the whole state that way...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and uh, so, you know, you gotta evaluate each one as to what it says and who it pertains to.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And it's...

MM: Um hmm. So, you see that as the goal of the General Assembly to try to make sure that that's the intent [1:17:00] of legislation?

JB: Um hmm. Yeah.

MM: Yeah? Ok. Well, uh, tell me a little bit then about the 1996 election. Cause Giaquinta runs again against you right?

JB: Right.

MM: Ok. So, um, what was your campaign strategy like to get re-elected or did you do the same things or...?

JB: Well, I basically did the same thing (chuckles) it was mainly getting recognition of me and the people that uh we were trying to help...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and what we were trying to accomplish and all. And uh so it's...you know.

MM: Did you do the same – go door-to-door or did you feel like you were better well known this time?

JB: No, I went door-to-door...

MM: Uh huh.

JB: ...and I would spend you know three to five hours every Saturday and Sunday out knocking on doors.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: Um, attending neighborhood association meetings...

MM: Um hmm. [1:18:00]

JB: ...and uh just keeping my name and interests out in front of the people and let them know who I was and so on.

MM: Sure. Ok. Wha, what was the outcome of that election then?

JB: Oh, he beat me by a couple hundred votes.

MM: Yeah, still close.

JB: I didn't challenge him (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, that uh huh. What...how did you feel about that? I mean had you wanted to continue for a long time? Or was this ok let's move on or...?

JB: Well I wanted to, you know, feel like I could do a good job for the people and wanted to be involved.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: Uh, I didn't set down and cry because you know it wasn't (chuckling) my goal all along to become a representative.

MM: Yeah.

JB: It's just something that gradually built...

MM: Sure.

JB: ...and got involved with it and did all the things that that uh were necessary to do it.

MM: Uh huh. How did, um, how did your wife respond?

JB: Oh, she took it [1:19:00] very seriously and she, you know, thought we were doing a good job for the people.

MM: Um hmm.

JB: And, uh she's sorry that we didn't win and go back again but, you know, you do what you can do when you can do it.

MM: Sure, sure. Ok. Well, how would you summari..., maybe you just did this, how would you summarize your time as a state legislator?

JB: (pause) Uh, (pause) it's just the daily routine of doing things, you know, and uh you weren't uh building new barriers or you weren't tearing down old barriers you were just trying to do the best you could to move the bills through and work with the people. And uh...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...fun and but, uh, you know, [1:20:00] it wasn't my life to, gonna go away (chuckling) because I didn't get re-elected.

MM: Right, right. You were able to move forward.

JB: Right, yeah.

MM: Do you have a favorite story or anecdote during your time in the General Assembly?

JB: Umm, not that I could think of right now. But, uh, I'd have to make some things up. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) Sure. Were there any lessons you learned about government or humanity or anything?

JB: (chuckles) Well when I was in the legislature, I got a call from St. Francis College saying they had a course they were teaching...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and it was in local government – would I be willing to teach the course? (chuckling) And I said yeah, I'd do that. Tell me what all I'm going to cover, and they told me, and I taught one semester of local government (laughs).

MM: That's fun. So, drawing mostly on your experiences of that work?

JB: Yeah.

MM: Well that's neat.

JB: You know we talked about the the city council, the townie council, school boards and the state elections but we ditched did the other three as our primary part of the class. And uh...

MM: Sure. That's neat.

JB: So, I made everybody go attend one of each of those meetings and write a report. One-page report on what you did there and what went on. (chuckles)

MM: Yeah, yeah. Do you feel like well, that's interesting, do you feel like either when you were serving or even today that most people know how those thing work?

JB: Not really how they work. No.

MM: Uh huh. Uh huh.

JB: No. Only what they see on TV (laughs).

MM: Um [1:22:00] Well after your defeat then for what would have been the 1996 election...

JB: Um hmm.

MM: ...did you have any interest in trying to run again in the future?

JB: No.

MM: No? Ok. Um, I I do know when we talked about this briefly, too, that you campaigned for other politicians.

JB: Oh yeah.

MM: How did you get involved in campaign work?

JB: Well, I had a friend who was running for state representative and I sat down with him and told him what to expect if he got elected...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and what he needed to do to get elected...

MM: Um hmm.

JB ...and uh we had a good discussion several times with several meet...with cof.. over coffee and so on...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and he appreciated my time that I spent with him...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...and I, you know, just enjoyed doing that but I said now, you know, I'll help ya (chuckling) but I'm not gonna run your campaign and do all the work...

MM: Sure, sure. So, you still kind of still stayed somewhat in the fringes of ...

JB: Right.

MM: ...other people's campaigns and things like that. Ok. [1:23:00] Well given that you've lived in Fort Wayne for most of your life, born and raised here, but also around the state, how would you say the state has changed over the course of your lifetime? Or do you think it has changed?

JB: I'm not sure I can point to anything that changed over the state...

MM: Um hmm.

JB: ...other than the fact that uh because the nature of the communities change...

MM: Um hmm.

JB...you know, the industries and everything else that affect the uh, but it's a gradual change that affects everybody and I don't think it's any drastic changes.

MM: Ok. I don't know how closely you've stay involved or followed up [1:24:00] with the Indiana General Assembly but do you think the General Assembly has changed since you served in the mid-90's?

JB: I've only visited down there a few times. You know, went down to several meetings and so on but uh I don't think it's changed that much.

MM: Yeah, ok.

JB: Yeah.

MM: What, if, any, enduring qualities do Hoosiers have or hold dear? Is there anything that makes Hoosiers unique?

JB: I have a sister who lives up in Michigan. I have a sister who lives out in California and I don't see any difference in it (chuckles)...

MM: Ok.

JB: ...them out there or me here.

MM: Ok. Well I think that really takes us through the majority of my questions here, um, is there anything I haven't asked that you would want to talk about or any experiences that we haven't covered? [1:25:00]

JB: No, I think we cover pretty good.

MM: Ha ha ha. Pretty thorough there not a lot of questions.

JB: Yeah.

MM: So. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me and share your experiences and you have amazing resources that both you and your wife collected so. Um, you know I said I don't think I have any other questions but if you're comfortable with signing the consent form if there anything you want me to cut or take off the record...

JB: No, no.

MM: ...I'm happy to do that then.

JB: I don't think I'll get hung for anything I've said. (laughs)

MM: I don't think so either. I think you're pretty clean here. But, well alright, I'll go ahead and stop the recorder then.

JB: Ok.

MM: Ok, we'll stop this one here.

END

[1:25:44]