

ILOHI Interview with Virginia Blankenbaker

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Indianapolis, Indiana

Interview by Michella Marino

Transcribed by Katie Turner

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Virginia Blankenbaker=VB

Michella Marino=MM

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[0:00:00]

MM: Alright, well, I will just state for the record, then, that my name is Michella Marino, and I'm here interviewing Virginia Blankenbaker, and today is Wednesday, October 17, 2018, and we are at your home in Indianapolis.

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: So, um, I think we've got all the paperwork signed, so we're good there—

VB: Alright—

MM: Um, so, I'll just start with some easy questions to begin with—

VB: Mmhmm—

MM: When and where were you born?

VB: I was born right here—Methodist Hospital... um, March 29, 1933.

MM: OK. Wow, so a longtime (VB interjects: "Yeah") Indianapolis resident—

VB: So, not only that—my mother had seven children, each about two years apart—they were all born at Methodist Hospital.

MM: Wow.

VB: Isn't that amazing? (Chuckles)

MM: Yeah where di—where did you fall in the lineup of siblings?

VB: Right smack in the middle.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And it was evenly—two girls, a boy, then me, then a boy and two girls. (MM chuckles) So, I was really like an only child.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: You got—(laughs) doesn't that sound sad?

MM: (Laughs) Um, what were your parents' names?

VB: Um, Charles Joseph—[0:01:00] everyone called him Pat. He was a popular, um, personality—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, in the neighborhood, and also in Indianapolis—uh, he was a member of rotary and on the bowling team—ev—just seemed like everyone knew Dad, and everyone who's, who's, who later said he used to be their 4H leader at one point.

MM: (Laughs) Uh-huh.

VB: And then Mother was a music major from Butler University when she met Dad and quite a good pianist and really brilliant in Latin. So, all—any of her kids that took Latin excelled in it (chuckles).

MM: Wow.

VB: But, Mother was a homemaker all those years—she went from being a city girl, here in Indianapolis... (voice quiets) to a farmer's wife.

MM: That's a big change.

VB: Yep (chuckles).

MM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

VB: And her name was Hessler—so Frances June Hessler.

MM: OK. And, now, did you grow up on a farm in—is it Camby? (Stammers)

VB: Well, that's ri (MM interjects: "OK")—it's very close, [0:02:00] yes—

MM: OK—

VB: You know, it's kind of i—a farm in M-Marion—right here—and now, our address was Indianapolis, Indiana, always, Decatur Township, and our—we were at the s—farthest, southwest corner of Marion County.

MM: OK.

VB: Very southwest of the airport.

MM: Where that would be today; gotcha—

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: Where is your family from originally?

VB: Well, always right here—uh, Dad was from Kentland, Indiana, was a, um, very good student—math and science—but also a, an all-state football player—

MM: Wow—

VB: Back in the '20s, so 19—'cause he was born in 1900—so, if you think about that (MM makes incredulous “whooshing” sound), 1900—he wanted to live a hundred years and he died on the farm, gardening, in 1998.

MM: Oh, wow!

VB: (Chuckles) But, but he, then, went to Purdue on a full scholarship, um, and was a—what they call it? A running tackle, then. And after Purdue, um, he joined the—what was the—something called the Decatur Steelies [0:03:01], which was the, before the... uh, what is it, Chicago, um—what's the Chicago team now?

MM: The football?

VB: Yeah, (MM interjects: “Um”) football team, it's [unintelligible]—

MM: Bears.

VB: Bears. (MM laughs) So, that is the f—the, the Bears were eventually moved to Chicago, but it was the Decatur Steelies became the Chicago Bears. So, he played there two years—they only got paid for the games that they played, so then he said, “What do you do after the season's over?”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And he was too—he was offered a job and he, um, began teaching school.

MM: OK.

VB: And Westfield is where my parents met.

MM: OK. So (stammers), I mean, obviously, you have long ties to Indianapolis, but how did your family get to (VB interjects: “Oh! From—interesting”) Indiana originally?

VB: Y-you know, they ran a—this much I know: They ran a—what's it called? A grist mill or—

MM (Makes encouraging sound)

VB: In, um, West Virginia—that's how Dad came here. [0:04:00] I don't know how Mom got here—

MM: Yeah—

VB: I wish I'd asked her—you know (MM interjects: “Yeah”), now, you wanna ask all those things.

MM: (Chuckles) Sure.

VB: And I haven't gone on to find the—

MM: Yeah—

VB: You know, the background—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: I know some people have. But, but Dad's family came, um, when Indiana was opened up—you know, I think as a s-state.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um (MM interjects: "That's interesting"), but let's see, his, his, you know, great—his great-great (MM interjects: "Yeah")-grandfather—the Irish, they came from Ireland there, and so, he—it was—they came from... and I'm not sure, in Ireland not—I think it's south—but it's far—during—they were farmers, and during the Potato Famine—

MM: Oh, OK—

VB: That's what took them on that awful boat ride to West Virginia, where they (stammers) ran a farm.

MM: Wow.

VB: Yeah. And then Mother's always was a professional—uh, her mom and dad were, uh, both a beautician and a barber—

MM: (Laughs)

VB: In a little town—and it was Covington, Indiana—

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: They came to Indianapolis and started the Indiana Beauty College, [0:05:01] which I don't know if it's (chuckles) still in existence (MM laughs), but she thought, "Well, there are little towns everywhere who wanted to have people who were professionally—know how to do hands—" they learned cosmetology, they learned electro-something or other, where you would remove (laughs)—

MM: Uh-huh (laughs).

VB: But anyway, every time Grandmother would come to visit... (laughs) we all wanted a permanent. And if you could—I had really white blonde hair—and she'd leave—I had this little, pretty straight hair pinned over at the side—she'd leave and I'd have this frizzy stuff (both laugh) all around it, but we thought that was big time, that (MM interjects: "Yeah") she'd give us a permanent.

MM: Yeah, I bet.

VB: With, with one of these machines that sat over top of your head.

MM: Uh-huh, that's fun. Now, I-I—maybe you said this—your maiden name was Murphy, is that right?

VB: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MM: So, that was your father's name. OK.

VB: Yeah.

MM: Um, so you just said you had siblings (VB interjects: "Mmhmm"), and about all two years apart there?

VB: Yeah. Yes.

MM: OK. How would you describe your childhood?

VB: Oh my gosh, I think about that a lot, [0:06:00] because, um... I really was—I t—kinda tagged along with the boys—my oldest sister and two oldest were always helping Mom—I always think about summertime. In the winter, school bus pulled up, Mother had seven—you know, when we were all in school from—didn't have Kindergarten—it was first through twelfth—so when all of us were going, we'd have a first grader and we'd have someone that maybe is in tenth grade, and we all had to carry school lunches—u-uh, it'd be too expensive to buy them. Mother'd be making these (laughs) sandwiches and, of course, making sure we all had our sho—socks (MM laughs) ready, and did we wash enough of 'em? And—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Oh it was—I thought—and I thought, later, we were always well-clothed—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Warm, well-fed—oh my gosh, 'cause they had the most beautiful garden in the world and that was their—Mom and Dad's—hobby. And, I remember, winter, we'd be studying the seed catalogs, and we could always pick out maybe a flower or two to plant—

MM: Aww, uh-huh—

VB: And, so, Dad was very [0:07:00] project-oriented, to—and then, he'd go off to work in downtown Indianapolis.

MM: So, he had a farm and worked (VB interjects: "Yes, and—") in Indianapolis?

VB: He worked in Indianapolis as a cou—then, when he stopped teaching, um, he was offered this county agriculture job here in Indianapolis. Um, um... Someone named Mr. Abbott was there as a county agent and Dad was appointed as the [unintelligible] agent and also kind of a horticulturalist and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He did ev-everything, I think, but—an educator. And, um, and I—

MM: So, did he get into education after he quit football?

VB: Yes. Oh, yes—he was actually an education graduate from Purdue, you know—

MM: OK—

VB: I mean, it was, it was math and science.

MM: OK.

VB: And especially was good at math, oh my gosh. Um, I just think back about, uh, Mom and Dad's pr—scr—their handwriting was so beautiful, and how, you know, writing was such an important thing way back then and now people don't even know how to write and I think about (laughs)—

MM: I don't even think they teach cursive in school anymore— [sound of dinging from computer or cell phone in background]

VB: And I'm [0:08:00] having trouble—like, if they'll say, "What is your phone number?" And I'm thinking, "Wait a minute—what is my phone number? (MM interjects: "Yeah;" chuckles) I never call myself."

MM: Yeah, right.

VB: But, but how things have changed—and some of the letters that my oldest daughter, especially, has written, and then Betsy's written some really nice letters, um, and—and how precious they are, and, and very telling—but I was talking to my oldest daughter, I said, "We're not writing letters anymore."

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, you know, they are beautiful—when you pick one up and read—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, um, maybe thoughts about what's just going on, and—

MM: Right, right.

VB: But, but, Mom and Dad were... Mom made sure we had music lessons and piano lessons.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um... I always was in 4H, and my oldest sister was kinda the junior leader, so she was kind of bo—would boss me around about helping, you know, what would I do in the summertime?

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: What do I need to do, and—that's why I could show you his historic picture that's (laughs) on the Indianapolis newspaper in, [0:09:00] uh, 1945—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, and my daughter brought that up (MM interjects: "Oh"), she said, "Why do you have this in the [unintelligible] (both laugh). But, anyway, it says, "The Yanks," um, um, "Defeat the Japs." And they used "Japs." (Laughs in disbelief) And then, everything was (stammers)—

people dying, and over here, on the other side was a column about some of the people—some of our soldiers were so desperate they were drinking their own blood—

MM: (Makes sad sound) Oh my gosh—

VB: And I'm reading that, but in the middle of that, I had won... blue ribbon at the Indiana State Fair on my, uh—it was a pint jar of red raspber—or, no, purple raspberry, regular raspberries.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And it—so, here it was—I thought, “That’s the only go—(laughs) good thing on that”—
(MM laughs) everything else was war news—but—

MM: Yeah—

VB: It was the—and so, when I entered the Legislature, one of the reporters had just gone through some old, historic things, and he said, “We’re—they reprinted this. Did you ever see it?” And I hadn’t, and so, he [0:10:00] brought that article in—

MM: Oh, wow—

VB: Um, and the way he knew that that Murphy was me was my father was my first page.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: At the (laughs)—the young—the oldest and the first page—there were always little kids
(MM interjects: “Uh-huh) or high school kids, and I said, “Well c—” My dad said, “What do I get now that you’ve been elected?”

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And he said, “I contributed \$15. What do I get?”

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And he said, “Aren’t you all crooks?” (Both laugh) I’m laughing, and I’m saying, “Well, let’s see.” So, I talked to Bob Garton, I said, “Is there a chance my dad (laughs) could be my page?”

MM: Oh, that’s neat—

VB: So, so, this reporter knew of Dad because the newspapers interviewed him a yo—lot about
(MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) gardening and he was kinda the, the “Mr. Dirt” back then—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, anyway, that was fun.

MM: (Laughs) That is fun!

VB: And I have it now hanging right around the corner (MM interjects: “Yeah”) here, mmhmm.

MM: We'll have to go look at that in a minute. Um, so, how did World War II affect your childhood?

VB: [0:11:00] Really, like I hardly knew, because we had—didn't have TV. And we had ra—one radio, and it was always in the kitchen, and, um, I got to listen to it on Sunday—Spike Jones and the All-American Band—and then, then, some symphony music.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, um, but didn't really know much about the war going on except I know that mother—they had to put—had these blackout—they said we were near the airport and there could be a chance, so we should have these blackout shades that pulled down.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, but didn't know—didn't really—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: We had rationing—I'll tell you how it affected us, in a way, um, the rationing—a lot of people who lived in the city couldn't get some of the things they would like to have—butter, as an example—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And eggs and sometimes really fresh meat, uh—and I don't understand that was rationed. And, uh, where Dad worked was in the Federal [0:12:00] Building, and it was, like, the third floor of the Federal Building downtown (MM interjects: "Mmhmm")—still there, um, I think where Sarah Ba—Barker Evan just—Evans [KT: Blankenbaker is referring to Sarah Evans Barker] just res—you know—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Is no longer the federal judge, but, um, he was in that building, and on Sa—when he would have to do the half day for the office, on Saturdays, um, Mother—one time, some of the workers there, cleaning staff, would say, "Mr. Murphy"—'cause he's always said, "You know about—do you have a farm?" and "Is there any chance you ever have butter or eggs?" And he said, "Oh my gosh, yes, we do!" Or maybe he took them in some, I think—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But they would order, and on Saturday mornings, Mother would (exhales), um, we'd have four shopping bags and eggs that were just ready to go, just—they'd been gathered within (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") a couple days—we had a big hen house—and then, uh, you know, it's amazing—ch-churned butter the old-fashioned (laughs) way and (stammers; MM chuckles) take turns doing [0:13:00] that as kids, and she made the best butter, and, uh, and formed it into pounds, and she'd wear it on a—she'd weigh it on a baby scale—

MM: (Chuckles)

VB: And then, um, and then they bought her fryers, which was interesting. So, um, um, she dressed chickens—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I think, boy, she worked, worked, worked. But we'd go up on Saturday—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And these—about ten o'clock, they would come in the restroom—ladies' restroom—(laughs) they'd be illegal, they'd probably now—um, and we—Mother with whatever kid needed shoes was the one that was with her that day (both laugh), but we'd be there and all these dark-skinned people came in—that's the first time I really s-saw people who were skins darker than mine (MM interjects: "Uh-huh"), which is—and they were so kind!

MM: Yeah—

VB: And then they bought us shoes (laughs)—

MM: Wow—

VB: Which is really good.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Yeah, bought 'em and then we w-went to, uh, uh, there was a s-shoe store, and I thought—
[0:14:00] I just can't say the name right now—

MM: Yeah—

VB: I was about to say it, but (MM interjects: "Yeah") it was really—Stout's, Stout's Shoe Store, and I think some of the Stout family still lives—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Here. And, uh, we go to L.S. Ayres to fa—get our 4H fabric.

MM: Oh, OK.

VB: And, uh, d—if you went down in the basement was less expensive—

MM: Uh-huh. W—

VB: So, anyway, all, all good, did that for years—

MM: Yeah—

VB: That's what I know about World War II.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: People couldn't get some of the fresh food—we didn't have markets, just a—if we wanted anything out of a supermarket, like flour, sugar—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, the nearest was probably ten miles from our house.

MM: Yeah, wow.

VB: Yeah.

MM: When your siblings—your older siblings—weren't old enough to be drafted or anything like that?

VB: No—

MM: They were still—

VB: They fell—too, too young.

MM: Yeah.

VB: Too young. Um (clicks tongue), tryin' to think, when Patty was, like, at Purdue, about the time—she was the oldest—and, um, I entered in '51 (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and she was, like, seven years older than me, so.

MM: Yeah. OK.

VB: [0:15:00] I-if that makes sense, yeah—

MM: Yeah—

VB: I guess she was seven.

MM: What—who would you say were the most influential people in your childhood?

VB: Well, it's certainly my parents were—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: I know that—and then my piano teacher, but, you know, most of all, the band teacher. Um, when I was, uh, in fourth grade, the school had—you could try out instruments, and I knew I wanted the saxophone—my sister had a saxophone—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And I played the piano, and I continued those lessons, but I s—picked up the saxophone; Dad found one, to—bought it for me (both chuckle), and, uh, or maybe a rotary gave him one, I don't know (laughs) (MM interjects: "Yeah"), but anyway, I started with the saxophone and my band teacher was really, um, I think my good health, you know, to... This is the only—I've always been healthy, I've never met (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") sickness until this crazy cancer (MM interjects: "Yeah")—I suppose people who live long enough will have something like that (MM chuckles)—treatable, not curable yet—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh, but the interesting thing is that, uh, [0:16:00] we would—every day that the weather was nice—even if it was cold—we would be out marching.

MM: Wow.

VB: First thing in the morning. Nine o'clock—(stammers) you know, the bus would get there early, and then we could go on the stage and dance (a voice whispers “Excuse me”), and kids—there was a jukebox there, but, other than that, um, um... [some sounds in the background] I think, I tried to think, how Mother kept us so busy, and Dad, too. Dad always said in the summer, “What are your pro—what projects are you going to do today?” Uh, “What’s your plan?” (Both laugh) Which is kind of interesting. And Mother, of course, she just wanted us out of the house. (Laughs)

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: ‘Cause, because there was enough washing and other things going on.

MM: I bet—

VB: And Patty’s job was kind of... to be the second mother, and Dorothy was always reading, and she was an intellect—I-I think she was a very good saxophone player, and—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Didn’t like it when I challenged her for first chair in the band, which I was still in grade school—she did—she got really upset (MM chuckles), but [low rumbling sound in background]—

MM: [0:17:00] And what are the names of your siblings, then?

VB: Um—

MM: I don’t think I asked that—

VB: Oldest is Patty (MM interjects: “OK”), and she’s passed away; and Dorothy, who’s passed away; Joe, who lives out in Avon on a farm—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, um, is a veterinarian; and then me; and then Bob is out in Avon, too, um, worked for my brother’s company; and then Rosemary, who lives up in, uh, Wawasee; and then Nancy, who passed away of Lou Gehrig’s disease (MM exhales, makes empathetic sound), of all things, who was a pharmacist, and just... smartest, too—a reader early on (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and always reading books.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, so—

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um, Mother was always a reader—always had—we’d go to the State Library, and on Saturdays, that’s wh—another thing we did after we got our cash—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: (Laughs) [unintelligible] shoes (MM laughs), fabric for 4H, to sew—and I sewed all the time, uh, that was a fun thing to do. So, I think part of it is, uh, I know, [0:18:00] as I got older and had kids—older (laughs)—when I was married (MM interjects: “Yeah”) and had children, um, and I’d see kids at the swim meets, and they’re running around doing nothing, and they see a mom sitting over there needlepointing or doing something, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I said, “Well, I’ll tell you what: We’ll start a 4H club.” So, I would start 4—I started a 4H club here in the city—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And when I taught at day adult—I’m sk-skipping, I know, but—

MM: (Chuckles) That’s OK—

VB: When I taught at day adult high school, adults who had dropped out of high school or, or even before, because of juvenile delinquency or pregnancy—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, back in the ‘70s, you couldn’t go to high school if you were pregnant. If they knew you were pregnant—out, out. And so, this day adult was funded by Eli Lilly Company, um, just amazing, the good things that that company does for this city that is, is never known—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But they, they did—funded that for, I wanna say ten years, and then the funding ran out and IPS didn’t pick it up, but [0:19:00] kids, kids would go then to the day adult school on, and I would work with that group of people (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) as a—when my kids got bigger—

MM: Wow—I didn’t realize that that’s what that was—

VB: Yeah, mmhmm—

MM: I knew you had taught there, but. Wow, that’s interesting.

VB: Yeah.

MM: Well, jumping back to your childhood real quick, what understanding did you have, if any, about your family’s politics or political beliefs when you were growing up?

VB: Not, not much at all.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Um, really interesting—um, Dad, I know, was asked to run for township trustee once (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and, and, um, I think he—they, they always voted, but I didn’t pay attention to why they voted.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I know that—I remember Dad did not like New Deal pro-programs, so I figured out he’s a Republican (MM interjects: “Mmhmm;” both laugh). Um, uh, and yet, he was for women... [sound of chime in background; possibly a smartphone notification] to have rights.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, and there’s a story attached to that, too, which Mother just... laughed at. [0:20:00] When, when, again, it dealt with... children and consent, uh, when it’s been raped by a family member—uh, we d—in the Legislature, we—that doesn’t ever happen, you know, I said, I said, “My husband, who’s about as conservative as they get, knows of four people in the Marion County Jail—he was Public Safety Director then—he knows of four people who are there because of, of... harming—raping a child that lives in that house.” And, uh, and I said, “And we have laws that nothing can be done—that child now becomes part of the juvenile system,” and the system, the judge, had strong feelings one way, and, uh, y—“What you do, the school system, is that they bring that child (chuckles) into the day adult program, and people like me work with them, because you’re not allowed to talk about [0:21:00] any other option.” And... (stammers) Anyway, Dad asked me on so-something, “How are you gonna vote?” And I said, “Well, h-how would you have me vote?” (Laughs) This was, like, he was 96 years old, and it was to kill some... it was some really bad legislation that was bad for women (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), I felt—for me, and I said, “It’s not bad for women—it’s taking away a woman’s... Who are w—who am I? I can be the most pro-life person in the world, and I am, but who am I to make a decision that all those people in this roo—” and I—so, I said to Dad, “OK, here’s what (stammers) I would vote. Who am I to make a decision for people, ‘cause I don’t know what they’re dealing with? They have to make that decision with their minister, their healthcare provider, their... whoever. (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) Or, if they’re smart enough, the, you know, their—understand. But that’s not up to us.” And, [0:22:00] uh, and... so, I said, “How would you have me vote?” And he said, “Well...” And he was getting shorter (laughs) as he got older—he stood at the dining room table out on the farm, and he stood up and we’re all sitting around there, and my kids, too, and... and he said, “Just take your time,” and he said, “Look at, look around the room.” And he said, “Now, how many men are in the state Senate?” And I said, “Forty-two.” “How m—so there’s 8 women.” And I said, “Yes.” He said, “So take your time, look around,” and he said, “Well, y—just say this: ‘I see 42 of you that wouldn’t even know w—what a person would go through to even have to consider this.’” ‘Cause it was outruling all abortions. And... he said, “‘There’s 42 of you that wouldn’t (laughs) know that—what a person would go through to have to even consider this.’” And Mother couldn’t believe it, ‘cause she (laughs) hadn’t have heard Dad ever talk about abortion, ever, ever, ever, and, uh, anyway, [0:23:00] that’s exactly what I did.

MM: Wow.

VB: And, anyway, um, the bill... um, passed—still passed the Senate, got to the House, and they added some other language, even worse, so it came back to be voted on that amendment, and I—and this would maybe, w—I don't know if Larry (stammers) what Larry [unintelligible] (stammers) said, but they came back, and that amendment was thrown down, making it even worse, and, and, uh, I'm looking at that, and I called the legislative s—helpers, the lawyers (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and I said, "Can we get a quick amendment?" I said, "I wanna know, if this passes, how much would it cost the state if it was—the state's now responsible, because this—they're saying that this many people—babies—are killed every year [0:24:00] from ab—" so I said, "So, so, if this—11,000 babies are born, and the state's insisting they be born," and I said, "This isn't even pleasant for me to p—talk to, because I have elev—five kids, you know, I don't even like to talk about this," but I (laughs) said that, "Who are we, you know—so, who's gonna pay for this?" So I said, "The state's—that's, the state owns this. So, the state requires th—this to happen? Of you, you, you? Then, we're responsible for the cost." And I said, "I wanna—how much would it cost if we have to educate these kids—and healthcare—up till they enter public school?" And they came back with that, and Larry Borst, who was the budget—was a finance chair—and Morrie [Mills], who was the budget chair, well—they look at that, and they're talking to each other, and they turn around, and they said, "Virginia, that's brilliant." (Laughs) They, they said, "You just killed the bill." (Laughs, then whispers) They were supporting it, too. (MM interjects: "Yeah") [0:25:00] (Voice goes back to normal level) They were supporting me on that. And, but they said, "That's the—" They said, "Of course the state should be in—" I said, "This would kill the budget. Look at this, what it adds." I don't know why we don't continue to, uh, talk that way, but we tend to so, uh, where we can't put ourself [sic] in the other person's position (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), so. And I know—I-I'm religious, and I know that, for me, how I feel, but.

MM: Mmhmm. It's hard to legislate someone else's life—

VB: No, how do you do that? You don't—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Well, and don't we have enough problems with chuckholes? (MM chuckles) And hi—funding? If you need finance that we're gonna generate, it better be for road work, bridge work, places that get, you know, where the (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") bridges fall and kill thousands, so.

MM: Yeah. Wow.

VB: So, anyway, that's—

MM: Well, that's interesting, about your father's (VB interjects: "Yeah") stance, that late in life—

VB: Yeah [unintelligible] in '96, mmhmm, (MM exhales in wonder) so, two years later when I...

MM: Wow—

VB: I was running for—talked into running for Congress, and—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: He had gone.

MM: Yeah. [0:26:00] Wow. OK. Well, so, you grew up, then, on the farm—what schools—were you in Decatur...?

VB: Decatur Township—

MM: Decatur Township—

VB: And there was one school from first grade through twelfth.

MM: Oh, that's right. (VB interjects: "Mmhmm") Morrie [Mills] had told me that, too (both laugh).

VB: It was—and so, band was the big—that was (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") a big thing, (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") or choir.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And, um... S-I just love the band—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: It just really made you feel—to be outside and marching and that—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Health of the body movement (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and then the good physical education class—I liked that a lot, just again, for—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, it kept your body healthy.

MM: Yeah, yeah. OK. Um, as a child, what were your views about the state of Indiana or being a Hoosier? Is that something you thought about?

VB: I didn't really, no—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But I, I know a fourth-grade teacher took us to—our class—to the Statehouse.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I really liked that. You know, we toured the downstairs—uh, kind of a museum was at the bottom of it then, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Dark, dank area, and [0:27:00] uh, and then, up, but we didn't get to see them in session or anything, but we kinda got to see what the feeling was, and that's when I learned that these are

[sound of chime in background; possibly a smartphone notification] the people who make laws for you, for you and your family, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I paid attention to that. And that was fourth grade, and I'll be darned, I was elected class president—this is (laughs) true, [unintelligible] they do this. Uh, and then, she gave me this book, and I think I still have it—it—*So You Were Elected*—and she, she talked to me about this: “This is really serious: If you're elected a leader, then you need to care.”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And th—I thought, “Boy, what a great lady” she was.

MM: Uh-huh. That's interesting—

VB: [Unintelligible] You have to care for the people.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Yeah.

MM: So, teaching that at even a young age—

VB: Yeah, so, you're—10?

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Maybe.

MM: Wow, that's neat. Um, now, you said you then followed your father's footsteps to Purdue, and your sister—

VB: I did, he—all of us could go to, you know, the fact that he worked for Purdue, we could go tuition-free (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), which took some money off—you had to pay for your [0:28:00] room and board—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But it really did help—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, um, so we had projects that helped... that's the way dad put away—Dad and Mom put away money for us for college, um, um, I know that they bought some kind of insurance policy for each kid through Indianapolis Life Insurance, uh, that would pay something at 18, and at 18, it just came due at 18—it's called—then, I don't think they even have that—but it'd be something similar to the college funds now—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Except—and they weren't taxable, then, I don't believe.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: But... all 3 years, yeah.

MM: Wow.

VB: Um.

MM: What type of things were you involved in at Purdue?

VB: Oh, my goodness. Well—so, I was in the band—i-in high school—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And really liked, and class... president—

MM: Or maybe I should ask—when did you graduate high school?

VB: So—in 195...1.

MM: Fifty-one. OK—

VB: And, and so, I was a cheerleader, but I also liked the marching band, [0:29:00] so this was a little silly, but I did it, and—

MM: At college?

VB: At high school, I'm gonna—

MM: Oh, high school, OK—

VB: This, this is getting close to college, but—

MM: OK—

VB: This is a little bit silly, because I would've—just about 12 minutes before halftime show, on the Decatur Central gym floor (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), or outside of the marching and football game, I'd run into the restroom, change into my band uniform, and come out with my baritone sax.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And then do that, and then, the minute the band—I raced to the restroom and throw the cheerleading back—and go back out here—

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And I thought, "That is... Why didn't everyone hate me in school?"

MM: (Laughs)

VB: But, but anyway, I think they thought it was funny.

MM: Yeah.

VB: At least, later I thought, “That was not—that was ba—” But it, you know what? It just filled something. I liked doing it.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: I liked, I liked the exercise of both things, so at Purdue, I thought, “I’ll take the baritone sax—well, the school didn’t have the baritone sax, so I’ll be back to the one I own, the alto,” and—but Purdue didn’t have girls in the band—it was ROTC band.

MM: Oh—

VB: Then, in ’51. [0:30:00] And so, I tried out for cheerleading, and I’ll be darned, got elected—there was—they chose one cheerleader that year off of the—they had 4 c—returning cheerleaders, and I got to be a cheerleader, yeah.

MM: Wow—

VB: So they had 5 girls and 5 boys, and, um, and I did that each year, and then my senior year, I was doing student teaching, and it got really heavy duty, um, and I said that—was ready for basketball season, I said, “You know, I’m 21 [sound of chime; possibly smartphone notification],” you know (laughs), “I’m gonna be ma—” getting close to being married when I graduated—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and [stammers] the alternate come [sic] on, and that person was so happy, you know, so that’s like, that’s when you learn if you pass it on—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: To someone, and so, I did the student teaching really big time, and (sucks teeth) loved Purdue—I ran for office my freshman year, and it was treasurer, and was elected—

MM: Wow.

VB: Um, and again, it was just... [0:31:00] You know, it was—what was kind of a “other people doing something clever—”

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: One of my, um, door people in Duhme Hall was really good about writing music, and she used to say, “Look. We’re gonna put someone up, OK—Virginia, you said you’ll do it? OK.” So, she’s gonna write a ditty, and she wrote a ditty of (sings in rhythm) “Vote, vote, vote Virginnny Murphy (MM laughs), the girl with lots of personality,” and we went around to all the housing units with this little group of girls singing this—

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And I was supposed to si-smile there—

MM: (Laughs)

VB: It was kind of like a—kind of like one of these TV ads.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Um, and I got—but anyway, I got elected, and, um, and treasurer does nothing. They meet with the Dean of Men, then—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Um, and then, I got elected again the next year, ‘cause (laughs) who else would run?

MM: (Laughs) Yeah—

VB: You know? Do—but, but anyway, I was a cheerleader and doing that.

MM: Wow.

VB: And, um, the—but I worked on my grades, because [0:32:00] I said, “I don’t wanna be known as a cheerlea—” so I really worked on my grades and had the biggest grade improvement from my freshman to my sophomore year.

MM: Wow.

VB: Pledged a sorority, and they had a great study table, you know (MM interjects: “Yeah”), they made it like—

MM: What sorority were you in?

VB: It was called Pi Beta Phi.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, and probably the reason I pledged them was that 4 of the cheerlea— (laughs) cheerleaders were Pi Phis!

MM: Yeah.

VB: Little political—

MM: Yeah—

VB: So, see, there’s poli-politics in everything.

MM: (Laughs) There sure is. Um, so you were an education major, then?

VB: Yeah, an education—yes, and—

MM: What did you wanna teach?

VB: Well, home economics is what my home ec. teacher said, you know (laughs), especially, she said, “You know, you love all the 4H projects, and—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “If you’re here in Indiana—” you know, they head that up at their schools, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, but I also like math and science, like my dad, and those were—and then, I got an, uh, ec—uh, an elective in econ—economics—and I loved that; I didn’t even understand what it was, never had that in high school—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And, uh, really [sound of chime in background; possibly smartphone notification] [0:33:00] thought, “Wow, so how do you...” A-and so, I took another, uh, economics class, with a (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), a person—(stammers) it’s all good, from another country, I think it was from Saudi Arabia, who was teaching it and—

MM: Wow—

VB: Said, “You know, if you buy anything right now, I’d say—if you had, if you had \$100, put it in Shell...” st—uh, “Shell Oil Company—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I found later, when I was asked to be a stockbroker, or see (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) if I could pass the test to be one, and study for that, uh, um, that company became another company and it was like, that \$100 [sound of chime in background; possibly smartphone notification] would have been multi—(laughs)

MM: Yeah (laughs), wow—

VB: I thought, “He gave good advice!”

MM: Yeah.

VB: Taught us about good cheeses, and—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, anyway, it was a good class.

MM: Yeah, that’s interesting. Um... (sucks teeth) I-I think I read an article at one point that (stammers) you really respected—w-was there a wo—a female [0:34:00] Dean who—

VB: There was—well, you know, the Dean of Women, which was quite interesting, and then, this Dean—the Assistant Dean, uh, um, was... Cecelia Zissis, was her name. And she was really... pro—both of ‘em were—D-Dean Sleeman, head of the women’s students, had served in the—World War II—was not married, and looked like some—everyone’s grandmother, and she loved—for some reason, she really gave me attention (chuckles)—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And she, uh, talked about, you know, goals—like I as pres—oh, so I ran for—I was, then, Secretary of the Women’s Students, then President of the Women’s Students my senior year. And, with that, we got into more... I hate to use—it’s supposed to be a bad word—“progressive” is supposed to be a bad word; I thought it was a good word (laughs). You know, when you’re looking at—what can you correct? What (MM interjects: “Yeah”) would make life better?

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: [0:35:00] And, uh, I know one of the things that we worked on was hours for women that, um, men—the men could come and go whenever they wanted to, but women students, they might be married (laughs), they might be, you know, if you’re—but, or engaged, they might be—and they go home for the weekend, they come back, and if they are one minute late, you are “campused,” it’s called, where you are—can’t go out, and you have to sit there, and (laughs)—and I thought, “This is so silly.” And, so, got busy with that (stammers), hours, and (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) then, also, uh, wives of students, um... who could enter—if their husband is enrolled in Purdue, I mean, they’re in married housing—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Instead of the mom—and they don’t have children—she could go to cla—she could go to classes, too. And, uh, so they had that, if, uh, family is paying for the tuition (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) that, uh, that person—so, on that, that’s outside of kind of the immediate [0:36:00] student, but Celia Zissis really worked on those things with me, and, and both were very influential in my life—political life—from then on. And contributed—when I ran for office, here comes a check from Lafayette, from Celia Zissis.

MM: (Gasps)

VB: Both of them came to my wedding (MM gasps again)—I didn’t send out invitations—wedding was in Lafayette—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, and they both were there with gifts, and—

MM: Uh-huh, yeah—

VB: You know what, it’s so—yeah, nice. Nice.

MM: That sounds like you were busy at Purdue! (Laughs)

VB: I was busy (MM interjects: “Uh-huh”), yeah. And then, people say, “Well...” Like, nasty article—(MM interjects: “Yeah”) [sound of rustling, possibly paper; unintelligible] says “scatterbrained”—oh, and then someone said, you know, “Is she d—” You know, the woman that—“ditzy” was the word, but you know what, you can tell a story, and—as I do—and I’ll get back here, I’ll tell the story, and I’ll say a little sidebar and back to it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Is that ditzy? If it is, I'm guilty. (Both laugh)

MM: Oh, goodness, no. (VB interjects: "Mm") Um, [0:37:00] well, as you're getting involved in running for various, you know, offices, and (VB interjects: "Mmhmm") college, and even as you're sort of maturing, in what ways did your awareness of outside politics evolve?

VB: Not at all. Which is also interesting, because I don't think the sorority house even had a newspaper in it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: If you took the campus—you know, paper was there, and, um... Didn't think much about, you know, just paid a little bit of attention to the one—maybe someone would get *The Indianapolis Star* (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") sent to them (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and then you'd read (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") what was going on, um, but not a whole lot.

MM: So, it was more about—

VB: You knew, you knew about the wars going on, the Korean War, but not a lot about that (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") and why, and (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), um, Dad and Mom (stammers) would get very, uh, they would get a bit, get—in conversations back home, now, a little more, because we weren't little kids anymore, we would hear (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), hear 'em talk about—

MM: So, did you have a better sense of kind of what they (VB interjects: "Yeah") believed and what party—

VB: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, I did, [0:38:00] very definitely.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I know that Dad—Dad is very much an educator for, um, environment. They did a lot of m-mulching, you know, they (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), they didn't—potato peelings, when we peeled our potatoes, um, they always went out to the mulch, they didn't go, you know—

MM: Yeah, like composting, or things like that, mmhmm—

VB: Yeah, composting, yeah, for the garden. And, so, they di—you know, they did that, and, uh, um, I... I know that Dad was really concerned when they started, um, and, and, what did he call them, Kennedy's Fields (laughs), because, because he was paying farmers to take down the fence rows, and then you'd get more dollars per acre for your crops.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And Dad said yes, but you—I mean, this is true, what he said became true—no more bluebirds in Indiana. Bluebirds housed in the fence rows, and the brown thrush—another beautiful [0:39:00] bird—fla—uh, housed—they always were, they, they were low-level birds that loved—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: The fences.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, so he felt—and the rabbits, you know, all these things disappeared because (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), uh, um, you were—took down the fence, and you planted right to the road now—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And then, the, the next thing that came, and this is where, you know, he, we disagreed with Morrie [Mills]’s, Morrie’s family—they were really big dairy farmers—but the disagreement, you know, was [unidentified voice in background], um, they tiled all through their farms, and there’s a natural topography of farmland, and, and we had a creek running through ours that had little fish in it, and, um, it wasn’t—some places deeper than other places, but it was a great little spot. And, uh, and, you know, it gets to you—the right to your farm, everyone’s tiled, and then there’s a problem, ‘cause now the water, [0:40:00] you know, is no longer into—you know, is not in your (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) creek as they’re tiling—attaching it to wherever existing fi—so, you get kind of exempted from that for a while.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But, but then, eventually, when the city wants to take over your land, and they, uh, tile it, and, you know, make it so that it’s, like, flat like the airport (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, wow.

VB: Yeah, that’s, that’s—so, it’s kind of, you know, it’s—you lose the beauty of the land, I guess is what I’m saying—

MM: Yeah, yeah (whispers) [unintelligible].

VB: And while fields are beautiful, green, and the corn and all that (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), but now, it’s just leveled.

MM: Yeah (VB interjects: “Yeah”), [unintelligible] have the rolling hills and—

VB: And, and you’re no longer, uh, taking care of the nature that’s there.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So, that’s what—they were very much about taking care of... Dad said, “You leave it always better than you found it.” And that was one of our mo—family mottos (laughs; MM interjects: “Uh-huh”). “Leave it better than you found it.”

MM: Yeah, wow.

VB: Nine of us using one bathroom (MM laughs)—OK, guys. (Laughs)

MM: Probably (stammers) a family lesson you had to follow [0:41:00] there. Um, so, what happened after you graduated from Purdue?

VB: Well, then, graduation—so, I'd fallen in love my (stammers)—well, early senior year, I, I got a diamond from—he was one of the candidates for treasurer the freshman year (both laugh), but, but we met our junior year, and, uh, and then I, and then I go into that, and that's kind of in the book, that two of our very best friends went on to be—she—went on to become the Dean of School of Graduation—the s—Dean of School of Education at Harvard—Pat Graham, she's retired recently. And Loren, um, who was a—then went on to a naval career, like my husband, John (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), um, I'll be darned, he then left, after he got out of the 3 years in the Navy (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), uh, destroyer, he, he got a doctorate in the history of Russian education—

MM: Wow—

VB: Which is what, uh, Pat's father taught at Purdue. And, uh, [0:42:00] he became one of our nation's top Russia science people, and with a joint professorship at MIT and Harvard.

MM: (Chuckles) Whoa.

VB: So, Loren and Pat, I just visited in May this year there—

MM: Wow—

VB: It was great to see them—

MM: [VB unintelligible] What was the last name?

VB: Well, she was Graham (MM interjects: "Graham")—G-R-A—or, Lor—she was Albjerg then, A-L-B-J-E-R-G (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and he was Graham, G-R-A-H-A-M.

MM: Oh, OK.

VB: She was—she was a Pi Phi, uh, in name only (laughs)—she was a town girl—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And so, I lived with her my senior year (MM interjects: "Uh-huh") to save money.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, her mother was also an Assi—Dean of Women's Office, and she said, "Why don't you invite Virginia (stammers), help her save money for her wedding," and (MM chuckles), and, uh, I made all the dresses—my dress and the 5 bridesmaids' dresses—

MM: Whoa—

VB: And did my student teaching at Manual High School (both laugh), which was... Got it all done! (Laughs)

MM: Wow. So, were you engaged, then, your senior year, or?

VB: Um, my senior year, about [0:43:00] in November.

MM: OK.

VB: Um—

MM: A-and what was his name?

VB: John Bauerle, B-A-U-E-R-L-E, from Fort Wayne.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he was a Na—going into the Navy pilot program (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and we ended up, um, um, graduation—ba—at graduation, um, he graduated in the morning, I think, and I in the afternoon—we were married at 5 o’clock, w-with his dad ended up coming down from Chicago to play at our wedding (gasps), and—at the Lutheran church there—

MM: That was all in one day?

VB: All in one day.

MM: Oh, my goodness! (Laughs)

VB: But we got it done, and then, because he had to report to Pensacola [sound of hammering in background] in 2 weeks—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um, or less than that, I think, it was—and, and, in the meantime, the Home Economics School, um, the Dean there, she said, “You won’t believe this, but we do have a job, we did find a job in Pensacola—it’s the only home economics job they have. It’s at Brentwood Junior High School. And—but they want you to also teach [0:44:00] math and science.” I said, “Is this amazing that you have minors in both of them?” And, um, so, Purd—I said, “I, I am a big cheerleader for Purdue!” They, uh, you know—sh—they went the extra mile. I didn’t ask them, uh, you know, I didn’t say, “Can you—you know anything about Pensacola, Florida?” to them. But they knew I had—they knew what their—they knew their students graduating.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, so, that was great. So—

MM: Wow—

VB: We did a quick honeymoon to, um, one of the state parks, and then got in his car and drove to Pensacola, Florida.

MM: (Laughs) Wow!

VB: So. And then, um, got the—I taught the year, and he, um, did his flight training, and then, advanced training in Texas. And then, Susan—daughter, oldest daughter—was born (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) in Texas, at Corpus Christi, Texas, and then—

MM: And what year was that?

VB: And that was in 1956.

MM: OK.

VB: So, '55, June, graduated. Taught the year. In May, uh, [0:45:00] th-the—and here's the other lucky thing, especially, uh, the principal, where I taught—I come back from Christmas vacation, ba—we came home to visit (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) the family—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I thought I'd had the flu—I threw up (laughs) all the way back to Fl—(laughs). And, so, I'm back at school, and, uh, finally I, you know, the teachers' lounge, I'm finally, you know, there, because I feel awful, and I'm going to the eyes, ears, nose, and throat doctor, and later on, she told me: “We all knew you were probably pregnant!” (Both laugh) And then, we—everyone's laughing: “When you said ‘eyes, ears, nose, and throat doc—” (Both laugh) And, uh, anyway, so then, the teacher—the principal said, “You know, normally fourth—we're supposed to teach—we don't let teachers if they start to show,” but she said, “You're so little, and you're not showing,” and she said, “You just stay right until he finishes his training.” And so, I finished the year. She's born September the 4th, [0:46:00] and he was then—finished his—we had had, uh, Navy housing there—and finished his duty, and got his first choice, which was Coronado Beach, California. We bought a home, and settled in, and six months later, he was killed in a [unintelligible].

MM: Oh, man.

VB: Yeah. [Sound of hammering continues in background]

MM: That's tough (sighs deeply).

VB: Yeah, it was tough.

MM: Yeah. So—

VB: No poli—you know, and I wasn't—I was just, then, just taking care of a child.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Uh.

MM: So, did you stay in California for a while, or did you come home with family?

VB: Oh, my parents came out and brought me back.

MM: Mmhmm. Oh, man.

VB: (Tearfully) And, you know, it's still, to this day, it's, it's—and, especially, I was rea—re-reading last night, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, it made it wrong, and, uh—

MM: Yeah. I bet.

VB: And yet, how good people were—I was offered several jobs when I came back here for—the teacher I did the student teaching under.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Lafayette offered me something. I was offered, and almost (sniffles) [0:47:01] wanted to do it, but I couldn't figure out what—they said Susan could e—be in the childcare there at the Purdue—

MM: Wow—

VB: Purdue had a childcare center.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: [Sound of rustling in background; possibly paper] They o-offered me a fellowship and I did it, I was—I loved chemistry, too, and the ama—uh, one of the nutrition, uh, she wrote the—one of the (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) books that all colleges were using, and, uh, she wanted—there were fellowships in study of amino acids, so (laughs) it was, it was a protein, and, um, and offered me a fellowship. And so, I had that, and I had the t—and then, I w—had worked at Ayres in high school—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And college, and, and they said, “Come back and talk to us about... that area.” But, you know, this was where my farm background was so... full. Because of all the pro-projects (both laugh). Um, and then, I was, um—Stokely Van Camp's home economist was a friend of my teacher, uh, lead [0:48:00] teacher at Manual High School, and um, she told me of a company buying out another supermarket chain here and they wanted to hire a—kind of public relations person.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And she said, “And, you know, I think they... I wouldn't—I think it's not like a 40-hour week.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And she said, “You should talk to this person—she's from Atlanta, Georgia, and she's the home economist with them.” And I said, “Well, that's alright,” and so, I'm—like, in April, I'm back, you know—he died in March—back in April in Indiana, in May, and, and interviewing, and sad, and—(laughs)

MM: Yeah—

VB: And this woman says, um (stammers), that interviewed, she said, “We’re giving you flexible hours with a salary, benefits”—you know, they don’t even have benefi—I thought, “Benefits?”—Is called Colonial Stores (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), out of Atlanta, Georgia (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and they were... [sounds of machinery in background; possibly lawnmower] part of a huge, s-southern chain—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [0:49:00] They’re buying these 8 Stop & Shop stores here. And, um, listened to what she said, and I thought, “That does sound good,” and they said, “If you can do—you have a baby, new, flexible hours—”

MM: Wow—

VB: Um, “Talk to women’s groups—if they want you, or schools, or”—so, that’s several speeches I’ve prepared for it, to have some television interviews, and—

MM: Wow—

VB: I could do that and talk and not get emotional and—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: It was good.

MM: Wow. That sounds kind of like a dream job to fall into with where you were in your life, yeah—

VB: Well, w—flexible hours in 1956—whoever—it was ’57, then (MM gasps)—whoever would think of that?

MM: Yeah—

VB: And then, that’s where I met Richard (laughs). He was, uh, one of the supervisors that came in—just the youngest o-of them, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and he... so quiet, and, uh, and I was grieving (tearfully), you know, I think they all knew that—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Um, and, but anyway (laughs), officially, um, he asked me to go to lunch, and, um, and then, he [0:50:00] asked—then, he saw my mother and I shopping in one of the stores, and he asked about Susan, and so, he—of course, he’d already known, ‘cause I think that—the gossip at the—that office, everyone knew what was going on—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, eventually, we went to lunch, and then, he drove over one Sunday and took Susan and I to get ice cream, and (laughs) you know, it was—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And so, our, uh, little romance started, then.

MM: Uh-huh. Wow—

VB: And, uh, and then, in—actually, January 2, 1959—I think we had to buy the marriage license, like, December 31st because of s—of the—being closed—but anyway, we were married at the Presbyterian church [sound of chiming in background; possibly smartphone notification], with my sister Dorothy and her husband witnessing, and—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, um, and then, I quit work after that, ‘cause I wanted to just be a stay-at-home mom.

MM: Mmhmm. Um, so, where, where did you live, then, after you got married?

VB: And then, and then at, uh, the Meadows, the Meadows, [0:51:00] which were really where young people lived—(MM interjects: “Uh-huh”) the Meadows Shopping Center was just (MM interjects: “OK”) 38th and rou-roughly Rural, or—

MM: OK, yeah. Mmhmm.

VB: And I don’t know what it’s like there now, but I know it’s pretty—I think it’s pretty—lotta sh—you know, shootings and [unintelligible]—

MM: Yeah.

VB: I think we haven’t done a good job of taking care of making it better than we found it, as my dad s-said—

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

VB: Um, yeah. That’s too bad—

MM: That’s interesting, yeah—

VB: But we were there, and then, then we (stammers) looked for a home when—then, I was pregnant—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I thought, “Well, he’s like, 29 years old—he probably can’t have children.” Um, he had been married for a short time back in his, like, 19, 20.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I thought, “Probably can’t have children,” my guess (laughs). No, wrong! (Both laugh) So, it di—so, married Dec—January 2nd; Sharon was born December 14th.

MM: (Chuckles)

VB: Second child. So, that—yeah. That was the right thing to do.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: Is, I think, [0:52:00] not go back to Purdue.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And, uh—

MM: And then you had 4 kids together—

VB: Uh, yeah—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Then, then, just every year and a half.

MM: (Chuckles in awe)

VB: Yeah, so there are, like, 4 little ones, and then Susan, a little bit—just kind of like 3 and a half years older—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: But I'm thinking (makes whooshing sound)—you know, and that's—they keep saying, "How did you do it? (MM laughs) With no help?" I said, "By—well... Good for our living, I guess."

MM: (Laughs) Yeah, I guess so!

VB: And then, you know, it's when we lived in Devonshire [unintelligible] in a home there on 6337 Brokenhurst Road, um, a precinct committeeman came along, and I signed up to be a Republican there, to vote Republican, which was interesting, 'cause I thought that's what my parents were (laughs). And, uh, and—you know, it was ki—it was really interesting. Um, we lived there (stammers) and had 4 children, and then (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") we knew we had to get a bigger house, or, you know, 3 little bedrooms (laughs).

MM: Yeah.

VB: And, [0:53:00] um (sucks teeth), with that, we moved what we were gonna build, and we looked at building way out, you know, like, in Noblesville or some (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") place like that, Westfield, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, someone, a friend—the same friend that wrote the little ditty when I (laughs) was at Purdue, lived, uh, on Washington Boulevard in Meridian Kessler, and she said, "You know what? Look at some of these old houses—they are selling really cheap. No one wants to buy them. They're afraid, you know, the changing neighborhood," and, uh, I said, "You've gotta be

kidding.” She said, “Well, just come and look.” And so, she said, “You know, there’s several in the paper,” she said, “I’m cutting them out for you to take a look.” So, I talked Richard into it, and the one was on Meridian Street, uh, 5019 Meridian Street, and the 5 kids (laughs) toddled up and did, up the stairs—they each were picking a bedroom (MM laughs) ‘cause there were, like, 6 bedrooms in that house, and, uh, and marking ‘em (MM laughs) and, and Richard said, “We’re not ready to [0:54:00] buy yet, kids (both laugh)—we can’t do that!” And, um, and then, the neighbor came out, and he said B—his name was Bernie Morgan and he was a car dealer at the BMW, and, uh (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), I think all the foreign cars he was in charge of— (MM laughs) you want more coffee?

MM: No, I’m still good, thank you—

VB: Anyway, he, um, said to Richard, “I put in an offer. They have it listed at, like, \$42,000, put—put a ridiculous”—just, uh, and he said, “Just say something like \$36,000.” [Sound of scribbling in background; possibly pencil on paper or rustling of paper] And Richard wasn’t sure, but then, the realtor came over, and, and s-Richard said that to him, he said, “Well, we could take it, ‘cause the, the family wants to really—he’s been transferred to Ohio, he really wants to get, get out of it before (MM interjects: “Mm”) winter, and I could s-see why,” you know—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But that’s what happened. We ended up in Meridian Kessler, and when you live in Meridian Kessler, then you really get involved in what’s happening in your neighborhoods, it’s a richer neighbor—I mean, more culturally rich—[0:55:00] it was just, um, the, the school was great, um—it was all good. The kids could walk to school (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), walk home for lunch, and, um, I thought it was all good.

MM: Wow—

VB: And, and, you know, all my friends that lived in that area? Well, the—Jean and her husband, the one from Purdue, they were transferred someplace else, and—but my very best friends, who’s another precinct committeeman who’d come to call on me (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and get me up in church—we got involved in the ch—Methodist church (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and, um, they have all moved out—they were all moved, then, to Washington Township.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, and I just felt kind of sad, you know, that, uh, people were moving out, and they wouldn’t say—you know, that—for a bigger house? ‘Cause you’re in a pretty big house, and—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Well, that’s just—they wanted just a new house, brand new house. Build it themselves, and, um, and so, we put our—you know, put our roots down there, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Then, I did the PTA— [0:56:00] PTO thing—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And, um, again became president and he—first head of some of the activities there, and just things that—where your kids are; if your kids are going there, you go there with them.

MM: Right, right. [VB speaks in background; unintelligible] So, still very active in community—

VB: Yeah—

MM: Things. I know, I know Richard later got involved in politics, but was he continuing in his same job at that point—

VB: He, he was a—we had Rich—so, what happened—those stores were all bought by that Colonial Foods store—

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And then, there was—what was going on was a bigger merger with a food chain from the east.

MM: Hmm.

VB: And, um, they—that chain—bought... the Colonial ch—‘cause they (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) were—owned a lot of c—they—what they did was what, kinda, Trump does: You buy something that has a lot of cash in it—property that’s—and then, you borrow the money against it. (Voice farther from microphone) What was that?

MM: I think there’s some people working down on the deck down there—or dock—

VB: Oh, that’s right—oh, my son [0:57:00] said they were gonna come down here—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Good. Good, good, good. (MM snuffles) Oh, great. [Unintelligible]

MM: (Laughs)

VB: He went to see his girlfriend in Columbus, Ohio, so—but, anyway, um, um...

MM: So, you were talking about the mergers of the groceries—

VB: Yeah, the groceries, yeah, so, so, they closed those 8 stores—or se—then, it was—got up to 8. And Richard said, “You know, I should buy... gotta figure out how to buy some.” And I had some money—little bit of money—and I loaned him, and my dad gave him some money. [Sounds of hammering in background]

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And he bought assets from the first one, which was 52nd and Keystone. And now, now it's a—it's a—you can see what—it's kind of like an AP type of store. Or more like, well, like—I'm trying to remember—it was more... Anyway, it was a smaller, but full, big supermarket, a lot of everything you wanted in it, uh, plus a butcher, and, um, [0:58:00] um... Then, he bought another one, and then ended up with 5, I think, altogether.

MM: Wow.

VB: And about then, uh, Bill Hudnut was running for... mayor, and he tried to get Richard to—he met Richard's research federation, so Richard was involved with a PTO—he'd never been—he had not gone to college. He started working in supermarkets when he was twelve years old. In high school, transferred to Indianapolis—his parents were divorced, his mom was—had some kind of mysterious weakness disease, and, um w—and her doctor sent her to IU—research—and (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") it turned out to be something called myasthenia gravis, where you lose your muscle (MM interjects: "Wow") control, and, uh, but he brought her up here, you know, like a-at 18 years old—no, younger than that: he was in high school, 16 years old. And he enrolled in night school at... [sounds of hammering in background continue] [0:59:01] uh, Tech. And Joe Amelia, uh, worked for Stop & Shop—like, he d—then he—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Hired Richard, and then he and Joe Amelia were always very good friends and—a-another supermarket owner. And, uh, um, but he, uh, never was involved in—thought politics was a (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") dirty, dirty thing—just always had—he thought you could pay off judges here—he said, "I know you pay off judges"—that was way back.

MM: Yeah.

VB: And, you know, if you had so much tickets or something, you could—

MM: Yeah.

VB: Get—and I said, "You've gotta be kidding." (MM abruptly chuckles) So, he did not feel good about politics, and I said, "Well, I'm doing this fundraiser for Dick Lugar, and I think—" that was way back (MM interjects: "Mmhmm")—"And I think you would like... to meet him." (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") And so, and s-sure enough, Richard, he did like him—he said, "Well, he's a good one." (Both laugh) And then, then, uh, um, he, through his church work—the Methodist church—he was a lay leader of the church, and then he, he [1:00:00] learned to be a leader, you know, he'd never done that. He'd never had any of that—g-got his (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") high school degree fro—out of Tech, at, at night, continued working as a manager at a store—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, just always did it the hard way. But then, he got this volunteer work, and that was just something really—he was enjoying—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, after I was elected to the Legislature, Bill Hudnut called and said, “I’ve asked him to be the Public Safety Director, and he s—he just laughed at me.” And, uh, he said, “What can I say to get him to do it?” And I said (laughs), “The o—” the— “If you said... ‘public service,’ he’ll do it—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And so, he asked Richard in a different way about it, it’s really needed, because there was a lot of conflict—we had a good reputation in the black community, and, um, they needed to get someone who could calm down the (MM interjects: “Mm”) community. And it’d be a great public service if (laughs) he said yes! (Both laugh) [VB speaks in background; unintelligible]

MM: Trick him into it, right?

VB: [1:01:00] Yeah, yeah—

MM: That’s funny.

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: OK, so... [sound of something possibly turning or hitting against something else]

VB: Well...

MM: Before... You’ve talked a—well, OK. So, it sounds like you were involved in a lot of volunteer organizations (VB interjects: “Yeah”) and charities and things like that. How, then, did you become more seriously involved in politics?

VB: And I mentioned that in that little book, too—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, the first was... the first was when you challenge someone who’s speaking at your little neighborhood meeting—I went to a Republican neighbor—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Neighborhood in Meridian Kessler with a neighbor. And she was a Republican. She said, “Well, go with me.” And guess who was speaking? Was the current state senator. And that person was speaking to this group of about 12 people in someone’s living room, so it was kind of a small enough occasion (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), but was saying some things that were absolutely... not the truth. And [1:02:00] I said to Sue Townsend, sitting next to me, “Sue, that’s not true. You know, I’m—you know, you’re at School 70, I’m at School 70—this is not happening, and she’s saying this is fact, that this is happening right there in our own neighborhood.” And Sue, Sue says, “Well, say something,” and I said, “(Makes whooshing sound)” and then, I said—next, she said, “And the kids are carrying—and some of these kids that are coming in from being bussed in—” which they weren’t—uh, “They had these, f—these cones that have forks on them that they stab kids with.” I said, “Not true.” I just—and then I— “Who are you?” [Sound of chime in background; possibly smartphone notification] is what the person said to me—I think that’s when I got involved in [another chiming sound in background;

possibly smartphone notification] politics (both laugh). And I said, “I’m very active. I have several children at School 70—we do not have any kind of violence there.” I said, “I’m really active there.” And Sue said, “President of the PTO.” (Laughs) “Four kids there.” (Laughs) She s— [1:03:00] and I said, “You know what... Don’t say things like that if it’s not true.” She said, “(Knocking sound) Right here. It’s in my notes (knocking sound repeats). I’ve had reports.” And that’s how she, you know, how she treated it. And it was not like, “Oh, I’m sorry. What could, you know...” But, but anyway, that’s what happened. And I thought, “That is not—” That was ’72. Well, then, like in ’7... [sound of rustling in background; possibly paper] 5 or 6, I decided to get a master’s degree—so I had a teaching degree, then you had to get a master’s degree; they gi—gave you a permanent teacher’s license.

MM: And was that at Butler?

VB: That was at Butler.

MM: OK.

VB: And, um, and in, again, um... as I am... working on that, um, someone had... h-how did this happen? Uh, someone who was pregnant, teaching at the day adult school, said, [1:04:00] “You know, would you, could you, substitute for me there?” Um, and I started doing that, and, li-liked it, and that’s when I learned about the pregnant teenagers being kicked out of the school, and I asked my kids about it—they said—I said, “So, at Shortridge, they said that these kids are getting pregnant. This S-Senator Gubbins said the girls are getting—they’re tea—they’re teaching this in high school. She said, ‘They are teaching (tapping sounds made for emphasis) this sex education in high schools.’” And so, I said to my two daughters, “How much sex education do you get at Shortridge?” They said, “...There’s nothing.” (Chuckles) They said, “If you take, maybe, Family Living—maybe, maybe someone might, I don’t know.” But, she said, “It’s not in the health c-book. We all have to take health once as a credit.” She said, “It’s from the bellybutton up. Yeah, they talk about the heart, the lungs, and then the head, but they—nothing else.” And, uh, so, I thought, “I’m going to take that—” so, it’s time to do the thesis—I took that... All those pregnant teenagers [1:05:00] ‘cause of all the sex education. And, um, so I went to the IPS superintendent, and I said, “This is what I wanna find out: statistics.” [Sound of hammering in background continues] (Laughs) And again, he laughed—kinda laughed at me—Karl, Karl Kalp, who later volunteered in my campaign when I was challenged in 1988—handed out in his neighborhood (both laugh), and stood at the—voting, where you go (MM interjects: “Uh-huh) in to vote, he stood out there as far as they made me stand, and had, had—which was quite good—but he s-said, “Here are the statistics,” and he said, “But here’s a person you would talk to.” (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) Then, I went to the Statehouse—big move—and talked to the person who was head of—it’s called the Department of Public Instruction, Title 9—and her name was Miriam... Her n—she had been a Sister, Sister Miriam. I—(chuckles) and Sister Miriam was now not wearing a Catholic garment (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) anymore, but she’s going out and doing her [1:06:00] service and she’s quite a smart educator. (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) She gave me the statistics. Again, she said, “Here’s the, here’s the approved book.” And she says, “You know who approves the healthcare book?” She said she heads the textbook commission, sacked it, and there’s no sex education in the health books. Um, so, this was—

MM: Wait, let me just understand it. So, Senator Gubbins is basically making the claim—

VB: That—

MM: That people are getting pregnant because they're being offered sex education—

VB: They're, they're offering this, and it tells you how to—(laughs) what I said, go to, go to your—now, they go to their phone, sorry—

MM: (Laughter apparent in voice) Yeah—

VB: Um, and you're 8. (Both laugh) [VB unintelligible] But anyway, uh, um, so—that's [sic] was—so, the stati—then you do have to analyze the statistics to do a statistical analysis, which I did—

MM: Sure—

VB: And s—I will be darned... in '79, I get a call from—at my home, [1:07:00] and she said, “This is Miriam.” Um, I just ca—I—'79 now, that was, like, well, that's when I finished up the—my—'78 or '79 is when I finished that degree. She said, “Here's what I think you should do: The election next year, you should run against.” And I said, “...You know what, it's too soon—I have—still have 1 in grade school, a sixth grader, and 2 or 3 in high school, 1 in college,” and explained it was too soon, and, uh, but I said, “I just think it's too soon.” And she said (laughs), “No, you could run—I think you could win!” And, uh, so she's encouraged me. Well, then—then, um, I get a call from someone else, and they said—1980 now—and they said, “You know, we're trying to find someone to run Republican. I'm trying to find someone to run against her.” [1:08:00] And, uh, Tom Binford—who was president of the Indiana National Bank and the pre—Speedway, who also headed up a committee, Nonpartisans for Better Schools, which was getting a group to reflect the IPS schools, boards (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and had supported me to run for that in the early '70s—called out of the blue and said, “I've heard your name come up and I think you'll get a lot of support.” He said, “I would support you if you'd run.” And then... I said, “I need to talk to Richard.” (Laughs) And I—so, I asked Richard, “Would you ever consider running?” And he said, “Never, I would never run for po—in politics.” And then I said, “Well, what about me? 'Cause we gotta find someone good.” He said, “Well, that's not my idea!” (Both laugh) Of who he thinks would [sound of chiming in background; possibly smartphone notification] be good. And then, he said, “Oh, you're serious.” S—but anyway, then he said, “We need to find out about it,” and by the time I—we—called John Sweazey, Richard helped raise money for the Republican party, and, and he asked [1:09:00] John if he would meet with his wife, Virginia, and John s—“Of course”—and so, we both went, husband and wife (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and, uh, he said, “Oh, I wish you'd come in sooner.” He said, “We've already slated.” And that was before Christmas in 19... so it was still '79, not even 1980 yet, I guess it was—right before Christmas. (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) And he said, “We chose at this election” and, you know, she couldn't even win, you know, so, that's it. And then I, I got to thinking about it, and I told the Sister, um, Miriam, about it, and, and then, I got other calls from people—my precinct committeeman called and said she—she said, “If you ran [sic], I will support you, and I will resign from my position.” And, um, then, the ward

chairman, Alice Ross, called, and she said the s-same thing—she was an older woman, very much pro-woman, and, and getting women in, in government (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and she said, “I’ll support you.” And—but, you know, women who [1:10:01] could sit down and talk to you and not tell you but talk to you and listen. (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) And, uh, so that’s what, um—and then, so, I said, “Richard, people keep calling,” and he said, “Well, let’s get our—” we take, always took a little vacation away from the kids (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) in February (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) for a week. He said, “Let’s go over to Ft. Lauderdale and do that and just relax (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and forget about it.” And, and I talked to my—one of my ministers at North Church (stammers)—a woman minister—um, gosh, see her face and can’t think of her (MM chuckles) name this minute, but sh—so I—she said, um, I said, “So, what—how would I make that decision? ‘Cause I tink [sic]—think I wanna do it—”

MM: Yeah.

VB: “And Richard’s not sure.” And she said, “Well, when you go away, get it out of your mind totally.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: “And then, when you come back, you’ll know for sure, because you won’t be able to get it out of your mind!” (Both laugh; MM responds: “Yeah!”) And, and that’s exactly what happened.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, [1:11:00] so then I told the others, I said, “Yeah, I, I’m kinda thinking about it, but I’m still scared.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Next thing I knew... I shouldn’t say this. (Laughs) Um, Nancy Papas of the Indiana State Teachers Association (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) called, and she lived in my district, and she said, “I’m a Democrat,” but she said, “I know you’re a teacher, and I know—I know—I’ve asked a whole lot about you,” she said, “You know what? You’ve got a lot of teachers’ support.” And that’s... And then, um, Alice Ross called, um... John Swea—well, Margie Neal, who was the precinct (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), uh, chairman, uh, who said, “I’ll run your campaign” and she was an organizer. [Sound of machinery, possibly lawnmower, gradually becomes louder in background] And, um, she... that was at—come—came out, and John Sweazey called her and fired her from Republican politics if she supported me. And Alice Ross called him and says, “I’ve resigned.” [1:12:00] (Both laugh) So, it got that right away. (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) And then, all the sudden, people all over, precinct committeemen, were quitting their jobs to support me. Which was really interesting.

MM: Wow—

VB: So, still, you didn’t know if I’d win or not (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), because it’s a very, very Republican—you have (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) to be a Republican to win (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) in this district back then—

MM: Right—

VB: And didn't know if I'd win or not, but there's—in that book, there's an article from the newspaper. They knew I had won when I had received, in my own precinct—which was two-thirds Democrats and one-third Republican—that I had received two-thirds of the votes. And, and her precinct, which was two-thirds Republican and a smaller number of Democrats—I'd won two-thirds of the votes. And, this is something the newspaper had said— “We knew that, early on, that probably she would have [1:13:00] won.”

MM: Wow.

VB: So that's, that's the politics. And then (MM interjects: “Yeah”), you know, it kind of followed you, because, uh... um, in '88, it happened again.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, then, in '91, you get... I think [unintelligible] with that big (laughs) family and married in Decatur Township—

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Uh... Where you learn how to s-stand up for yourself.

MM: Yeah.

VB: It's good.

MM: Yeah. Wow. So—and that was for the state Senate seat, right—

VB: Yeah, state Senate—

MM: Make sure—mmhmm—

VB: State Senate, yeah—

MM: Now, di—

VB: And I never thought of anything else other than that.

MM: Mmhmm. Mmhmm. S... So, maybe this is a pointed question (VB interjects: “Alright”) that you don't have to answer—

VB: OK—

MM: But w... (exhales) Was it, in part, that you really wanted... Gubbins out of office, or was it more “I think I can serve in this particular way”?

VB: Oh, that's a good one. Wow. Um... [sound of machinery, possibly lawnmower, continues in background] (Stammers) [1:14:02] Y-you know, I—it kind of—you know, I'd served as... leaders in the women's, uh, you know, o-of the women at Purdue, and I served as, you know, little high school in leadership, and, um, I just felt that (stammers) you know, at least I, I knew enough about government—I know that you're supposed to be a, a government that re-represents

all the people once you're elected, and I felt like we don't have to be so mean. We could be nicer. And so, did I think I could do a better job, um—I felt I'd be more representative of the people.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: For sure. And no one else came forward (laughs), you know?

MM: Yeah.

VB: And, and, and I want to just say this: Um, after 3 terms, and kind of a battle for the tw—the first and the third were a real battle, um, [1:15:00] second was eas-easier, um, and then, I'm now—Richard had died after (stammers) right—after that election. I mean, it really was tough on him, plus some other things that were going on in his life, it—um, was tou—that was a tough one.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, so, when it came time to run again—in '92... um, I have to stop and think of this—'91? So, I think (stammers) was the mayor's thing—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I had a lot of encouragement to run for that, even though I didn't even announce until, uh, like, February the 14th.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I did that just thinking it would be different—it'd be a smaller scale than the Legislature [unintelligible].

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But not really.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh, 'cause I focused legislature—I focused on issues (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), um, but I kind of knew Marion County really well from having lived here all my life.

MM: Right.

VB: And, um, [1:16:00] I just thought the challenge of it would be—would've been really, really good—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: So, so, then, in ni—when—first of all, Teresa Lubbers, who helped me, and her husband—he was in the administration of Bob Orr—who I think has been our best governor [unintelligible] that I've known (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"). Um, um, he... I'll get in trouble for that, probably (both laugh). But, but, um... (Stammers) You know, I ju—I do think that, um, I, I believe in a

citizen legislature process and I believe that we should have a cross-section of a lot of kinds of people there, and I think that, the older we get, we know where we are, and how do we change on the issues if we didn't get in and fight and work for what we believed in then? [Sounds of hammering in background continue]

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, so to—so, my son, youngest, 5 yea—of 5, said, “Mom, [1:17:01] why are you even thinking about ‘It’s time to run again’?” I said, “Well, Teresa called, and said she wants to get started on my campaign, you know, to get—help me. And, um, and she’s in the neighborhood, and she (stammers) worked on my other campaigns,” and, and, and I said, “And...” He said, “And?” Um, “Didn’t you always say, ‘You get in, you work hard, and you get out’? And didn’t you also say, when you campaigned against Gubbins, ‘Twelve years is enough in the citiz-citizen legislature’?” So (both laugh), it’s true when your youngest comes home to haunt you! And, um, and so, Teresa wanted to meet me at Patachou to talk about the campaign and we get—and what we needed to start organizing and just thinking about, and she had 2 young children, and she gets there—and Jim had just given me that talk—my young son—and, um, and she says, “So, so, [1:18:00] let’s talk about next year,” and then I said, “I think that’s a good idea.” And she said, “And would you use the same kinda committee as you [unintelligible]?” I said, “Well, what do you think?” And I said, “Because, what I think is I’m not (laughs) gonna run again, and I think you—it’s your turn. At least put yourself out there.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And she said, “...No.” (Laughs) She said, “I have, like, a 4-year-old and a 6-year-old—no way!” And I said, “Teresa, you live 15 minutes from downtown, you know that. And you know, if they go into night session, you’d come home and fix Mark’s dinner and you’d be back, or you’d have some really good sitters right there in the neighborhood.” And, uh [sound of rustling in background; possibly from paper], and she just said, “Well, that’s not even an option.” Well, um, I said, “Just think about it, because I’m not going to run.” And I’ll be darned [sound of clinking; possibly from coffee cup and saucer], she [1:19:00] thought about it, thou—talked to some other people, and she said she would do it. And you won’t believe—she had almost the same thing that I had: party didn’t support her; she’s been a Republican all of her life, grew up in Wayne—Warren Township. Um, worked for Dick Lugar in Washington, D.C.! And she had one—she has one of the most analytical brains. And is she exactly like I am on all the issues? No, you know, she, she has her ideas, and so, sh—but, but they can go up or down, uh, but what I do know is she’s straightforward and honest and she worked really hard. And, uh (laughs), I’ll be darned, she beat the slated candidate. (MM chuckles) And, uh, and then served (MM interjects: “Wow”) a few more times and now still serving in the State—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Board of Education (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”). So, she’s, she’s a great person—

MM: Wow, that’s—

VB: And Mark, too, her husband.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh, a lot of dedication.

MM: [1:20:00] Mmhmm. OK, so... As you were initially getting into politics, um—and it may be even in that first campaign or during your first term—what were key issues or legislation that you championed [VB interjects; unintelligible] or fought against?

VB: It was education and it was earlier—(stammers) especially early childhood that dealt with—if it's—you're talking about kindergarten, first, second grade—have smaller numbers. I had—some of my child—Betsy had 45 in her kindergarten and first grade at School 70. It was just overcrowded—we had, you know, just a lotta people moving in, but people (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), you know—it was just—happened to be bigger families, maybe, but—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But there's still funding at that, just—they fund—one teacher, uh, and, and so, I really championed and I ran on smaller class size, and the idea was, um, if you can't [1:21:00] get it down to, you know—I said, start out at maybe 19 per class, um, even if it's kindergarten—smaller—um, then you, then if, because you're constrained by building—number of rooms—uh, then, hire a second teacher, and dollar—the state would pay for that second teacher—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Could we do that?” And I'll be darned, Governor Orr jumped on the same thing—used it in his campaign. He said he, he supported my (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) view on that.

MM: Wow.

VB: He su—he, um... [sound of knocking in background] And that was one of the first things that passed—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Was that reduced class size. Raise the... Raise a penny on tax, and that was the fund [unintelligible]—uh, I wanted to do it more grade school, but it—they could raise enough for K through fourth grade—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I think—I don't know what the number [sound of rustling in background; possibly from paper shifting]—I think they've changed that now—I think they've—[1:22:00] and a lot of it, we don't have a surplus (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), even with that. Don't have a surplus during, uh, um, Governor Orr's administration.

MM: Wow.

VB: And then, they use that surplus later, I think, to kind of, um... pay for that program (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and oth—and then use other pro—you know (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), do other things with it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, I know the Budget Committee after... [sound of rustling in background; possibly from paper shifting] (Exhales) You know, I get frustrated, 'cause I didn't ever get to serve on the Budget Committee.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I chaired Health and Human Service—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Which all the issues came, came out of my volunteer work, you know, when I was—once, someone asked me, “[unintelligible] at home?” Well, what I meant was my, what I do is volunteer a lot—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, uh, I did that before the... [sound of knocking in background continues] before the, um... (stammers) I was elec-elected—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Continued on some of it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But—and it's really funny—son, Jim, again, was—when I was moving out of the Meridian Street house—he was packing up, [1:23:00] and he said, “Mom! How—and this says you were Crossroads” —which is a rehabilitation center— “Volunteer of the Year.” And I said, “Oh, yeah,” and he said, “But it was 1964.” He said, “You know what happened in '64?” And I said, “What?” He said, “Well, I was born!” (Both laugh) I said, “Yes, but that was November!” (Laughs) He's—so, anyway, he, he brings—makes honesty out of me all the time! (Both laugh)

MM: So, um, so, education was obviously very important to you—

VB: Yeah, th-those were the—those were especially (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), uh—but then, um, I got into—because of working with prenatal care for I s-say that I did all until, I think, it was '83—

MM: OK—

VB: And I found that it was getting a heavy, um, bill load—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: A lot of the social services brought the bills with me, 'cause I would then go look for a Democrat to (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) co-sponsor and kinda line up the votes (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) there and I could line 'em up on my [1:24:00] side, and, uh, but, but prenatal care was always a good one—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, anyone should have access to prenatal care. And then, how do you get it?

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And without it al-always falling on the Indianapolis taxpayers—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Because that's what would happen. Uh, I was for removing the trustee system, you know, from—since we had welfare and Medicaid, um, you know, we had the—a [unintelligible] fair system within, and we also had the Medicaid, which is a federal s-system (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), uh, for people with limited income. And, uh, some of those ar—were really hard because a lot of legislators don't even know the difference between Medicaid and Medicare—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, trustees' office, you know, does a lot of—this was like a cash cow, to be a—to pay at the trustees' department (laughs)—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Tax money goes in there—like a mill or something of our tax dollar, but that's a nice budget.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: No one has to ask [1:25:00] for—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um, you know, I-I've—peop—I, I want people to use the system honestly.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, try—I remember the kid, um—I guess, you know, I always put myself in someone else's place, and the, the kid that had AIDS, out of—far north—

MM: Ryan White—

VB: What was it—

MM: Cicero and—

VB: Yeah and—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And, and then, not permitted to go to school, and, and (scoffs) I was trying to... you know, bring awareness here—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I was trying to learn more about it, and, um, this is blood transfusions—were not—you know, but, but some of them refused to even consider, um, you know, didn't "want my kids near them," uh, anyone, and, um, and that's when I learned more about the gay community, and uh, um, uh, I was going to have a... uh, I was try—[1:26:00] o-of that whole issue, because they became very involved in it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, you know, meeting at the Statehouse— (laughs in disbelief) people didn't want that to happen! You know, f— (laughs) they're worried about germs and—

MM: (Scoffs in disbelief)

VB: I said, "Well, that's fine. Then, our Healthcare Committee will meet out at their, um, Association (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and where it was, 15th and something, and, and it— well (laughs) [unintelligible] just not very nice.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh, there's a whole lot of things—uh, your neighbors are Republicans and Democrats. Your Republican—your—you know, they have kids who are... all sorts. So, come on! Um, empathize with what the individual could be going through, and then as—then, I always try to say, "Is there a way government can help?" Or should help.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And those are hard issues, and sometimes easier to not be brought to the forefront, but I think Republicans really lost [1:27:00] a whole lot of, um, support when we try to put people in a box. Um, uh, I, you know, really fear that, um, the people—Republicans who really (stammers) were originally the equal rights party (chuckles), you know, has gone so far the other way that, uh, we're really the minority party now. Should not have been—again, uh—

MM: What do you mean by that, exactly?

VB: Well, we're the minority voting party. I think peop—fewer people are registered Republicans than prob-probably, um, Democrats—at least, people that I know have been voting all their lives Republican because of family situ—other things, have changed (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") their mind. And a lot of it is, um, I, you know, I think of, um... [1:28:00] Our county chair used to say, "All the schoolteachers are liberals and they're all Democrats." And, and, and he would always say "liberals," and I'd say, "John, what is a liberal? You know, why is that a bad word? And, I mean, is 'conservative' a bad word?" I said, "You know, most of your schoolteachers, who you say are liberal, most of them are daughters of Republicans. And (laughs), and I said, "I, I just think back and people I know, they're daughters of Republicans. And so, you're calling them now liberal, so you're kinda saying, 'We don't want you anymore.'"

MM: Mm—

VB: "And that—is that what we wanna do? Or do we want the teachers to be our friends? (MM interjects: "Yeah") A-as a party?"

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Um, so I ha—I was trying to get him to quit saying “liberals” or—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know. Well, he always said “liberals.” (MM gasps) As a bad word.

MM: So, what... Especially when you were in the legislature—I mean, it sound, it sounds like at times, you were at odds with certain parts [1:29:00] of Republican philosophy, but, but at the same time, you said you had a very conservative voting record—what, what did the Republican party mean to you, or what were the Republican party philosophies during the time?

VB: When, when you—you know, it’s really interesting, um... I didn’t pay so much attention to—I guess I... Being a part of who writes this into your platform and all that—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, probably should’ve paid more attention to it. What I knew, practically, is if you’re going to win—and then, it was Senate district 30, you most likely would be a Republican. And I knew I grew up in a Republican family, and I felt like I was always a Republican.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I felt, as one—my daughter—my sister, Dorothy, stated in here, in the—this recount when, um, Senator Gub-Gubbins is in, was in the same bridge group with her in [1:30:00] Wickham, where they lived—and, and when she said, “I hear your little sister is running—she’s such a liberal, she could never be elected,” and Dorothy sa—my Dorothy, who was not politically astute—very smart, though—she said, “Liberal?” She said, “She’s so conservative, she’s boring.” And she (laughs), she goes ahead—this gets reported to me by another person I knew who was there at the (stammers) bridge—they said, “She said, ‘They don’t have alcohol in their house. She’s never smoked. They go to church, and they go to the church dinner, and they go home.’” (Laughs) And you know, and she said, “That’s what they do.” She said, “Oh, no, she’s, she’s liberal—she’s running against me, she’s liberal.” So be it. You know, it was just—Dorothy just couldn’t—she said, “I, I can’t believe that I got in an argument with (laughs) with my [1:31:00] neighbor (both laugh), who...” ‘scuse me, was a chain-smoker, I wanna say. (Laughs)

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I would see her in committee meetings, smoking—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And knitting.

MM: So, for you, it sounds like it was more about issues and more about—

VB: Well, lives better—you know, people, um, like my secretary—I said, “You know, I know that lobbyists wanna come and talk to me.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But there's also sometimes a mother of a—and, and this happened with, right off of Down's syndrome, wanting to talk about, when their children are older, what's going—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I said, “So, I always want the individual to be—come in to talk when I, when we're open, you know, when we're in our office—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [Machinery sound in background; possibly electric saw or weed whacker] “I want an individual before a lobbyist.” And, uh, that was kinda my philosophy (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and you know, I don't know, that's just the way I grew up.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, [1:32:00] I, I think about my mom—it seems like, she kinda gave up her social life when they—she moved to the farm, 'cause she was always very active in little so—in, in the West Newton or Cam—what, what was it called? Valley Mills. And then, as she got more [unintelligible], they moved to the farm when they—Dad bought that in 1937, and, um, um, yeah, th—her life changed, but Dad always, always, always, he took—you know, if we had extra tomatoes, he'd give—make sure someone who needed them had them.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Or we had—whatever we would have, he didn't throw, he throw [sic] things away—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: For someone who needs it. And so, he, yeah—he was a very—they taught that openness of helping people, and because he was a 4H leader (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”)—and that's what you do with 4H (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), you help other people, you become—and they taught—if you, if you're a member of 4H, you're taught to be a leader.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: OK...

VB: You know, my [1:33:00] first elected—I just thought, when I first was elected something, that was... not at school, and it was sod leader of my 4H club (both laugh). They tried to have one job for everyone.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: It was my first year of 4H and... I got to be sod leader. (MM laughs) They were elected, duly elected.

MM: An important position! (Both laugh) Well, you've talked a lot about some local and then state, uh, political leaders, Governor Orr and others (VB interjects: "Mmhmm"), but as you're getting into the larger political realm, were there any national political leaders that you respected or followed?

VB: Well, there were... Sue Collins was one of 'em (chuckles), who supported me when I ran for Congress. There was a group called the Tuesday Morning Group, and, um, and they were... I—she was one of them. [1:34:00] Um, and so, you know, that's where I refused to badmouth anyone's decisions, uh, because I do know she's a very thorough... very thorough Senator. Um, and of course, Sandra Day O'Connor, you know, when she was, uh, nominated to the Supreme Court, she—they—everyone said, "Oh, she's so conservative!" And you know what? It's too bad, because she turned out to be one of the best Su-Supreme Court people we've ever had—in Indiana, now I know some of, like, the Democrats are going after judges, and yet, it was just the most wonderful thing—one of my volunteer groups, um, just in their newspaper, noted that, um, Jim Sweeney is the new federal judge, replacing Sarah Evan[s] Barker. Jim Sweeney I knew as a little kid who played at my [1:35:00] house, whose mother and dad were very much (stammers) contributors to—in their church and what they did—or—they were—kids were on the swim team with my son, and, um, and he has been a St. Teresa-lover's type of individual, where he has been a good human being and he's now, like, maybe forty, and... Maybe he's older than that (laughs). He probably is older than that, yeah, come to think of it, he is, about ten years older. Anyway, that's an honor, that he is, and well, would he always support exactly what I support? I wouldn't expect a, a Supreme Court judge to—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But I do think he will do what he does think is very best for the biggest number of—based on, based on the law.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So, I, I just salute him. Now, he's... he's been nominated by someone, and it happens to be, I hope (chuckles).

MM: Yeah.

VB: [1:36:00] Um, I think we're all gonna be proud of Jim Sweeney.

MM: Mmhmm. Wow. So... When you started campaigning for the Senate [sound of chime; possibly smartphone notification], what—how did you, um, campaign? What did your campaign look like?

VB: Just a lot of walking. And what's interesting—all the organizations that I had been involved in—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, like Pi Phi, have you campaigning (MM chuckles), and yet, I was president of the Alum Club here—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, they called it the Junior Alum Club, and people who had never even—maybe some of them—voted (MM interjects: “Yeah”), uh, were walking in their neighborhood.

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: So, it was a neighborhood campaign (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and it was friends going out (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and talk-talking to their neighbors about me.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And that was the best—that was a really good idea.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, there was the budget set of—you know, it was not very much, you know, compared to [unintelligible] today. [1:37:00] Um, it seemed like it was \$300,000, would’ve been. And I thought if you’d have—my, my mathematics was I’d rather have, uh, a thousand people giving \$1500—\$15 than fifteen give \$1,000.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And people think, “Oh, yeah, but you get your—get to where you wanna be if you get these \$1,000 donors!” No, \$15, that person’s gonna vote for you. And that’s what happened. I had notes from—some of ‘em were teachers from all over the state.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: One of ‘em sent a letter from Lafayette—I probably still have it some place—and said, “I don’t even have—I can’t even afford this, but I am making—hoping you’ll get in,” um, because, he said, “Teaching I love, and I want it to be affordable.” And there was a check for \$15 (chuckles).

MM: Wow—

VB: But I got a whole lotta \$15 contributions. And it was really fun, because, uh, um, trying to remember—[1:38:00] Steve Stoughton, who had served in the House of Representatives, who volunteered, I think, for the ’88 campaign when I wasn’t slated again—now I’m in leadership in the Senate and I’m not slated by the Marion County organization and Bob Garton couldn’t believe it, uh, Morrie [Mills] couldn’t believe it, Morris couldn’t believe it, and so, they said, “We’re gonna go on your letterhead (laughs), and you’re—don’t worry about raising money (laughs), uh, ‘cause you’ll get it raised.” But, but by doing that, uh, we started out—I think it was with—when Teresa was helping. We went down the letterhead with people whose—their names went on it, then, across the bottom and (laughs) up, so, you know, the—my little letter—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Became just all supporters’ names.

MM: Wow.

VB: And so, it was a door-to-door campaign.

MM: Uh-huh. Why didn't the party slate you in '88, then? Or—

VB: That, that's where that voting—they said I was too liberal. That's what came out in the paper, and that's what one of the articles [1:39:00] said, too liberal, and so, someone pulled up my voting record, then laughed (laughs), they said, "Show them—" You know, I think Morrie [Mills] said, "Show this to them." So, um, yeah. And showed that... And as Nancy Sealy, uh, Nancy, I'm sorry—that's another friend—Nancy Papas, uh, was back because I'd offered the Martin Luther King bill for the holiday, and, um, um, I was in the restroom at the Statehouse maybe five years ago when they were having some kind of, uh, recognition. So, I'm in the restroom, out waiting for someone who's inside—or maybe I'm (laughs)—whatever, and, um, and someone's washing their hands, and—a family member—and saying something to me, and I said something back, and then, I heard someone say, "Is that Senator Blankenbaker?" And then, I opened the door, and it was Nancy Papas, who headed—I don't know if she's still at ISTA, but she, she said, [1:40:00] she nev—something about, to my grandkids, "Just love her even though she didn't support us 100%." (Laughs) But, but that's—you know, to be, to—even though you didn't support something that they—which would be, maybe, um, I, I am really strong about review of teachers, and if you really get a—you know, if you are... al-alcohol, you should, you know, if you're alcoholic, you should not be in that classroom until you get straightened out, things like that. And I knew of cases where that had happened with my own family, with kids (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") who were in... and that was said to them, "That's just what we do, we pass them from school to school until they retire." (MM interjects: "Mm") Um, but anyway, there's certain things that I just believed in, and, um, but you don't have to be enemies with the people who are on the other side of it (MM interjects: "Mmhmm")—that's the other thing (MM interjects: "Mmhmm").

MM: Well, tell me about the Martin Luther King holiday bill—(stammers) you authored that, or [1:41:00] what was your role with that—

VB: Well, uh, for many years—and this came from Senator Lugar, who off-off—authored that at the U.S. Senate. So, he sent—when it passed as a ho—national holiday in the, in the U.S. government, um, he passed it to me and said, "Now, Indiana needs to get on board."

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "I want you to sponsor this." And—

MM: And was Katie Hall involved with that, too—

VB: Yeah, she went on as a co-sponsor. Well, then, um, really interesting, because not—who was one of the—Charlie Brown. You know that name?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Charlie Brown was honored the same day. He's up receiving for the Martin Luther King, and I'm in the audience with being supposedly in recognition of—as the author. So, he's emceeding the program, and he's saying I—he introduced this, and he introduced this—well, I had two, you know, in the Senate. And, uh, but he's—here's the history—he writes it one way, [1:42:00] and, uh, but then, he said, and then, finally, after he had introduced us, he said all these days—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: It finally does get passed, and “I wanna say thank you, Senator Blakenbaker, you know, for this...” But anyway, he got some kinda big trophy, from (trails off, laughs).

MM: And you'd been involved in it from the beginning, too?

VB: Yeah, f-from the beginning. And, and [John] Bushemi [unintelligible]—is he still alive? I noticed he's on that list as, as, uh—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he may've been the first one to say to me, “You know, let's do this—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: 'Cause [sic] sponsored some things together.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But, um, yeah. Kate and—Kate Hall—I would... I just can't remember doing a... Julia [Carson] would always come up to me and say, “Do you have any good bills I could go on?”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, I would find—

MM: Julia, you mean Carson—

VB: Carson, yeah—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um... So, yeah. It's—

MM: Well, I think Katie Hall may have been more involved when she was then in the U.S.

VB: U-U.S.—

MM: House, I think—

VB: That would be it—maybe, maybe she was with [1:43:00] Dick Lugar, maybe—

MM: Yeah. Maybe so.

VB: But, you know, it, it really—if you have a majority that probably takes, um, you know, when the House here (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), at the Statehouse, could’ve been introduced—some would say I, I introduced it there—(MM interjects: “Mmhm”) Charlie Brown, or—and I introduced it in the Senate it would sh—it would show, but—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, I can remember... Uh, Bob Garton saying to me, when I said I won’t, I won’t be running again, and he said, “And guess what I’ve saved for you?” He said (laughs), he, he saved Senate Bill 1 for me so I could finally, again, introduce this. Which was the Martin Luther King holiday (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), which did pass both House and Senate.

MM: Wow.

VB: Yeah.

MM: Wow. That’s amazing.

VB: But, but I was mo—I was very involved in a lotta the... Um, with the senators here, with the, um, uh, it goes back to our kids in high school—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [1:44:00] Grade school and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and some of the community centers that were for just African-Americans.

MM: I think I saw that you were on the board of the Flanner House, is that—

VB: I was, uh-huh—

MM: Yeah, with some of the others, too—

VB: For several years.

MM: Yeah. Wow, OK.

VB: But you know what’s gonna happen? It’s gonna (stammers), this... I fear my Republican party (laughs), um, all the sudden, they’re gonna wake up, and they’re gonna see how changed... and wonderful this country is. [Sound of something possibly dropped on the floor] Um, and it is. You know, I just think, uh—and that’s one of the things from the same fourth grade teacher I think about—taught us to have pen pals from other countries. And pick countries that you would not have anything in common with—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And mine was Italy, (laughs) and that’s kind of almost at the World War II, and I had a pen pal—it was a boy in Italy.

MM: [1:45:00] Wow.

VB: Yeah, and so, you, you know, I think when we get so hunkered down and angry, we're only hurting our own health.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I think that's what—I'm afraid that's what my party is doing. (Whispers, unintelligible; MM laughs)

MM: Yeah, there's lots of things going on right now.

VB: (Laughs, MM joins)

MM: We'll leave it at that, for the moment. Um, d—well, do we need a break or anything? Are you OK, or?

VB: Uh, I think I, I think I'm OK.

MM: OK.

VB: Maybe I'll eat a grape.

MM: Yeah (chuckles), OK. Um, well, what—so you win the election—

VB: Yeah—

MM: Well, first of all, you defeat [Joan] Gubbins in the primary—

VB: Yeah—

MM: And then you go on to win the general.

VB: Uh-huh.

MM: Right?

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: So, what did you find, or what were you thinking, as you walked into the Statehouse that first day?

VB: Oh, it was excitement—it really was nice. And, you know, the people who helped me—the one that—I know I had—we had some pre-training, or “Here's what the legislature's like—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “And this is what—you know, your s-salary's \$9500.” And, uh, but sounded pretty [1:46:00] darn good. It's from January to March one year—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And the next year, it's from, you know, the (stammers, unintelligible)—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Is different, um, but anyway, and then, you get what's more pay when you go to the committee meetings (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") that are not on in the summertime—(MM interjects: "Mmhmm") I mean, they were in the summertime.

MM: Right.

VB: And so, so that—I thought that was pre—I thought it was a volunteer job. I hadn't checked into paid!

MM: (Laughs)

VB: So those were, those were fun, but, but, um, the... (stammers) You know, it was exciting. Um, of course, I knew Morrie Mills, a very nice person—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, probably knew some o-others that were in Washington Township—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um w—

MM: Did you have any political mentors, or was it Morrie [Mills] or others who kinda helped you learn the ropes as you got in?

VB: Um, try to think about that... You know, I think the legislative—I think that legislative, [1:47:00] um... I think the educational meetings that we went to—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, were very helpful. And probably... Just got—I didn't really have anyone—I don't think I had anyone that really, kind of, took me under a wing, so to speak—

MM: Uh-huh. Well, you've been involved in a lot of things—I'm not sure that you necessarily needed that, but—

VB: Yeah, yeah, well, and so, you, you really just want to... you know, do as well—Morrie [Mills] was always good, because, you know, he was good—he was like, you know, you knew someone who [sound of rustling; possibly paper], uh, was your sister's age and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Played the trombone in the band (MM laughs), sat behind you! (Laughs)

MM: Yeah. Um... What, what were the regular interactions like amongst, um, members in the Senate?

VB: In the Senate?

MM: Yeah, how did—

VB: I thought good.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I really thought, um, I, I thought really good.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: I thought—you know, I didn't tend to go to lunch with people or [1:48:00] do—you know, I, I was probably reading bills at my desk and eating a sandwich there—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, I just didn't... social—I guess I didn't socialize, and maybe that was bad—I never did anything after hours, um, because [sound of hammering resumes in background] home was fifteen minutes away.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um... Um, but, after working with the others, you know, I thought, “All good.”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I, I ju—I, I thought people were pretty good. Your, your political people are political people—you know, Pat Miller's always gonna be very—like [unintelligible] whatever John Sweazey wanted, she was, you know, involved with him, and as a political person—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, but a really good human being. Um, very im... You know, just very much believing what she believed.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, friendly and good. So, I thought—that, and Sue Lansky was a—probably the closest one [1:49:00] I was to, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I liked, um, there were some bills I worked on really hard, um, when I chaired the Health and Human Service—Health and Human Service Committee—there, there was so much legislation I was carrying and involved in—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I would sometimes hand off something that I really cared about, which was vocational education, um, to, like, Sue Lansky, and said, “Can you carry this and author it?”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Here it is, ready to go—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Um, I have too much” —many, many other issues then—

MM: Right—

VB: There was this—I became kind of... Uh, it's like Mother used to say when I was a little kid, uh, "You don't wanna be a jack of all trade [sic], a master of none!" (Laughs) You know? (MM chuckles) But, uh, but I really worked on something called CHOICE Home Healthcare. And I think Dick Hunt was also the person who was a Democrat that was very much involved in that, and I believe very much of older people being able to stay in their homes, which, which they have an investment in—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [1:50:00] Than going into what was called the nursing homes then (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and I'd done some volunteer work in nursing homes and thought that's not always good for older people if they have family nearby and others—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: So, that home healthcare became a really, really big one, and probably one of the most, uh, emotional, uh, issues that I—worked on that, chaired the committee, worked on it several years, and, um, and Dick Hunt was very much—we had the votes to get that through, and, um, um, i-it was... it—there was—I don't know if politics probably was beginning to play a part against me, but, um, it went from them—I to—sent it to the House, and the House added mental health also, which broke, which broke the budget—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [1:51:00] With that piece, uh, if you do this first thing on home healthcare, which is what we concentrated on—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Mental health is a whole different—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Part, and whole, huge funding [unintelligible]—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: We could pay for the home healthcare. When it got to the House, someone loaded in mental health, it comes back to the Senate, and, um, since you can't call it down, because it's gonna—just like that, my idea of that abortion bill—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: That, you know, "OK, if this is what the state believes, you're gonna fund it!"

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Come back with mental health in it, and that has no place in the budget, and we're in the final days of it, and I had to pass. [Rattle-like sound in background] The ethical thing was there

was no money, 'cause now, it's the final vote in the Senate, and there's no money in it. And, uh... And that was—it was some dirty Republican politics involved in that (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and it wasn't on my side of the aisle.

MM: Yeah.

VB: [1:52:00] I don't mean it in some—not on, not on the Senate's side, it was—happened in the House—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, and it was not very nice.

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um, but then... The House comes back, puts it in a different bill, and then someone else, of course—there was no bill, which was the Senate bill—gets, now, uh, you're voting for it, because yes, now it's OK.

MM: Hmm.

VB: Without the mental health in it. But it's in a different bill number, so it just not a very ni—you know, it was kind of a mean thing, and some people, um, I learned about that [unintelligible] (laughs)—it was kind of a... I think there—sometimes with the politics—I didn't vote for our budget one year, and it was... Man, good thing I'm never gonna run for office again! (Both laugh) [1:53:01] Um, I guess it was in 19...86, if that was a budget re—year. Um... I couldn't support the state budget—it was down to the final vote. And, and I said in our caucus I couldn't support it, um—we had, like, 100 and... I don't know, let's say 59 teachers pink-slipped in IPS, because once they know they're—what the funding is coming from the state, and they cut funding from the state because many kids were being bussed out, then, to the township schools, and townships were getting those dollars (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), but IPS schools still have to run... a building, and they can't pay—so they cut out so many teachers to be able to keep the b-buildings open at that (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) time, and whether it's their right or not, they pink-slipped 159 teachers. The budget comes through, [1:54:00] um, and there's... There is a, you know, I thought 3 million in it for a party house at the governor's residence. Uh, governor's residence wanted to build a separate venue there, so if they had big groups coming, they could just do it here and keep it out of the residence, and, and I said, I finally said, “I have to explain why” (chuckles)—my vote, and my, my conscience was, um... Back then, we were expanding d-downtown a lot, with new hotels, new big ballrooms, big—and I said, “There's lots of party places in downtown Indianapolis. Don't have to build—we don't have to fund them as tax dollars.” And I said, “I have 159—here it is—documented teachers that are—have received pink slips in my district. And I can't support the bill that supports a party house we've never even discussed. [1:55:00] I've never heard about it till it shows up.” And so, I vote no. Well, all “H” breaks loose. Next morning, I get a call at 6:30 in the morning, and my husband and I always had coffee up in the bedroom (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) before he left for work [unintelligible] either of us, and, and the phone rings, and I said, “Oh, it's probably Josie [Orr]; she's probably mad a—mad about her party house.” It was Josie! (Laughs) And she says,

“Virginia, can’t we get together on this? Can’t you get your teachers in and we’ll get the party house, too?” And I said, “Well, you know, the, the thing is, part of it is they never discussed this—uh, it was never brought into the budget; it was just slipped in there.” Now, see, Morrie [Mills]—that’s (laughs) part of what he—so that’s, that’s where (laughs; MM interjects: “Yeah”) poor Morrie [Mills] probably gave him a lot of heartache. [1:56:00] Anyway, um... Um, she said, “Bob [Orr]... Bob’ll talk to you at 9. OK?” Well, of course he’s not going to—he’s gonna be straight down at the par—he goes straight down there and he takes the party house out of the budget. And announces it. And... ‘88—so, now this next year is when you straight campaigning (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) again or get ready to run—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And that’s when they put up one of the attorney aides over on the other side of the aisle (laughs)—Toby McClamroch—against me, saying that I’m too liberal, I’m not a party—I’m not a—you know, I didn’t, didn’t support what they wanted. And so, I guess when I’m elected—was elected, I’m working for the district is what I thought. [Sound of hammering continues in background]

MM: Yeah.

VB: That’s so—the way it was.

MM: Wow, yeah. [1:57:00] Politics behind the politics—

VB: And—but—and I have to say this: I think Governor Orr w-was the best governor I ever knew.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, and I d—and I knew Evan Bayh and Susan—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Nice, nice people, I like them both, but I was—served under Governor Orr a lot longer than anyone else (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and he is just, I thought was outstanding. And, and then I want to say Josie and Orr, when I moved to The Overlook, they were neighbors of mine.

MM: Mm.

VB: And became very good friends.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And she needed a friend just to talk to sometimes.

MM: Mmhmm. Wow. So.

VB: Very smart woman, strong woman—she should’ve had a life of her own. She should’ve—she could’ve run anything.

MM: Yeah. So. Wow... Well, when you did have a bill that you wanted to, to—

VB: Back, back to that part— “Oh, yeah, what about the bills?!” (Laughs)

MM: [1:58:00] No, no, no, that’s OK—these are, these are the types of stories we want to hear. Um, w—let me back up here. What differences, if any, were there between members of the House and the Senate? (VB interjects: “Mmhmm”) What was the relationships [sic] like between the two hous—or, the two chambers?

VB: Really interesting, because, um, you know, I knew some a whole lot better than others (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”)—May Kay Budak, um, good friend, I’d say probably one of—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: My best friends there. And Sue Lansky was on the Senate side.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, of course, Bev Gard (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), real br—smart woman (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and nice. Um (clicks tongue in thought), I’m probably forgetting someone. But back in the House, um, I had several friends that I’m just not [unintelligible] now (both laugh)—I hadn’t thought about that—

MM: But you had relationships between the two—

VB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, really good, you know (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), we—as far as getting the bills worked on, they were really effective. Vi—uh, not—the one from Evansville, um, try to re—I should look up those names again [sound of rustling; possibly paper]. [1:59:01] If I had that, I could—

MM: Oh, I probably have that, um—when you served? [Sound of rustling, possibly paper, continues in background]

VB: Um, those are... because one, one lady from... Oh, you know what? I have all kinds of things here we could look at. Go back here [unintelligible; sound of rustling, possibly paper, continues]. Ju—really in—really interesting. It was—you know, and some of the... some of the—

MM: Milan Parent?

VB: Yeah, she was—

MM: Or, uh—

VB: She was, she was, uh, (stammers) I think, in there for a couple times, but members of the Sen—

MM: And that was in the Senate—

VB: And that was—I moved over to the—

MM: I’m not sure—

VB: I know there was a—

MM: I don't know if I had the House one in there [VB unintelligible in background]—

VB: OK, maybe not.

MM: That might be the problem. Yeah, I'd have to look, too. I—

VB: [Unintelligible] and HRs. That'd be the—no, that's me sponsoring them. [Sound of rustling, possibly paper, continues in background] [2:00:01] OK, yeah.

MM: I can look it up, back when I get to the office, too. From Evansville in the House.

VB: Yeah, there were several of the House members (MM interjects: "Yeah") that I was very good friends with.

MM: Yeah.

VB: But, you know, I didn't tend to do a whole lot of, you know—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: The after things, uh—

MM: Mmhmm. Now—

VB: I'm not really good with great big crowds, you know, 'cause you're short, anyway (both laugh), and you get lost (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), um, I, I used to say to—when someone would say, "Well, I'm just a housewife," I'd say, "Don't say that." I said, "You know, for years, I'd be at receptions with Richard, and everyone wants to talk to him, and then I was elected senator, and guess what? I became someone." And I said, "I was someone before—"

MM: Mmhmm!

VB: When you, you say, "You know, I'm home, taking care of my kids," that's the hardest job of all! It is.

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um.

MM: And w—and how old were your kids by the time that you ran?

VB: By the time I ran, Jim was, like, sixth grade (MM interjects: "OK"), I think, uh—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: You know, say that he was seventh grade, and, um, [2:01:00] he was the one that was (stammers) more on his own—he learned how to cook when he was (MM interjects: "Yeah"; laughs)—early on, and he laughs, we—(MM interjects: "Mmhmm") you know, he laughs a lot about that—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Um. Yeah, he—and sometimes, I know, I was in a caucus meeting when he has, uh, suffered a head injury in a football game, and, uh, you know, I didn't learn about it till I got home—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know, because we were caucusing through the dinner hour, uh...

MM: Yeah.

VB: So, so, the—but then, the others—wonderful thing is Richard would always, uh, bring the kids who were in college—Sharon was at SMU and Susan was then working in Washington, D.C. for a congressman from Ohio—

MM: Wow—

VB: Um, I think after she graduated from, um, Miami of Ohio, and—but he would bring them home for campaigns (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and people really liked that—these kids showing up at the doors to support their mom.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And they were good! (Laughs) You know (stammers), [2:02:01] they knew the issues—

MM: Uh-huh. So, they were involved, too?

VB: But—yeah, they were involved, very involved.

MM: Uh-huh. Well, you just—you told me a little bit about this before I turned the recorder on, and then, you've mentioned it again (stammers)... How did your colleagues—and then, also the media (VB interjects: “Mmhmm”)—or, let me rephrase that. How... (smacks lips in thought) How do I wanna rephrase this? Did you ever feel your colleagues or the media treated you differently as a female politician?

VB: Um, well, some of the articles [unintelligible], but that was when I was running for mayor—they were really treating me differently. Um, how does a... guy that's been a lawyer in an office and then a prosecutor have a lot more experience being a mayor than a person who's chaired a whole lot of (chuckles), you know, big organizations, uh, and worked on all kinds of local issues in the Meridian Kessler area when I was, you know, [2:03:00] vice president of something there—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know, you're working on the roads—the, um, curbing, the walking, lighting, whole lot. But anyway, that decides itself. Um (stammers), I did—you know what, I did get a lot of press articles—maybe everyone else did, too—but, um, people would ask me about legislation, and I would just say what I thought.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, um... I know that—this is interesting—um, in 1986, it dealt with the vote on the budget, um, overheard at an A.G. Edwards finance committee—uh, this is a company—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, investment company—where the two managers—happened a son-in-law was being honored because he was from Terre Haute and was being, um, uh—[2:04:00] for his production or something (MM interjects: “Mm”)—he was being honored at a regional meeting. So, these two managers—his office and the Indianapolis office—were talking, and, and I know the one in Indianapolis was a real staunch Republican. I learned that later—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But they were talking about—they needed more women to be financial advisors, and, um, and the one from Terre Haute said, “You know, we need someone like Virginia Blankenbaker.” She said, “She gets more press here in Terre Haute than her own senator does.” (Laughs) So that was repeated by someone else, too, and then that person told me that, that, said, “Oh, you’ve got to be kidding.” (MM gasps) [2:05:00] Um, and, and then, this manager in T—he said, he was looking at hiring women for the Indianapolis office, because he says, “Women are, uh—older women have money, they’re widows or they’ve gone through a divorce and they don’t know what to do if they do have some money, and, uh, they need someone they can trust.” And I had just spoken out about that budget, and he said, like me, he was [unintelligible]. So this son-in-law overheard this, and I asked him how he—at the same time, one time, I asked him, how did he get to be an investment advisor, and he said, “Oh, I have a master’s degree from IU and it’s all about math and investing—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “And economics.” I said, “Oh my gosh, those were always my favorite subjects (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), but I never knew that you could make it into that kind (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) of career (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and, uh, he said, “You should go in and talk to that Indianapolis manager. I bet you could pass a lot of the tests.” ‘Cause they were (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”)—there’s about four or five tests you have to take, and, and I go in to talk to him, and said, “You know what, I’ve heard this, that you might be interested.” Um, he said, “Yeah, I would be, and I’d hire you in a minute if you pass those tests.” And he said, “We can get these books.” (Laughs) There’s, like, a—and I said, “That’s nothing. That’s like the Statehouse books—”

MM: Yeah [2:06:00] (laughs)—

VB: You know, that you— “And, and I chaired the, um, Sunset Committee of the Health and Human Services and Education, um, Committees—that we wrote the laws,” and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He said, um, “Pass that; we’ll hire you.” And he says, “Maybe after the next session, you’ll have the summer off (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”),” and so, in ’87, I worked like crazy on our vacation—studying, studying while Richard was fishing, and, um, came back and saw they could

test in Indianapolis on August 17th. Uh, I took the test, and A.G. Edwards got word that I passed that part and I could still do the juror's test the next month (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), but they hired me for \$15,000 a year.

MM: Wow.

VB: And knowing that I was still doing those three or four months in the Legislature—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh... [Sound of rustling; possibly paper] And A.G. Edwards, they—[2:07:00] corporate office—do not like any political people (chuckles) to be involved in—they do not. They're very much, uh, hands off—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: So, um, I had a philosophy—if—when a reporter would call me at A.G. Edwards' office, I'd say, "I can't talk here—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "But I—when I get to the Statehouse, I can talk, or when I get home—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "But I can't talk here—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, same thing—I said, "'Cause I don't do A.G. Edwards business at the Statehouse. I don't do any—"

MM: Yeah—

VB: "Business with anyone in the Statehouse or this." And, and that's the way—but I loved that work—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: I absolutely loved it.

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, uh, lucky.

MM: Yeah. Well, how long did you do that?

VB: And, and I did that until... Which I told the manager I would not get back into politics, but this was, um, um... I'm still doing that, ran for mayor, still doing it, and my clients were my mom, my brother (both laugh), my brother-in-law—it was a lot of relatives (MM interjects: "Mmhmm")—and, um, [2:08:00] and some small businesspeople. And many women (MM

interjects: “Mmhmm”), lotta women, who we did, kind of like (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), one-to-one. And, um, and I knew exactly, you know, it was like, t-teaching a class—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: To them. And finding out comfort levels—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Safety levels and —

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But, but, um, in 19... um... 95 (stammers), I’m trying to remember this now, so I was just—’80—oh, so, ’87, and the very next year?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Richard died.

MM: (Sighs in sadness)

VB: Yeah, I had that horrible, uh, campaign—’88—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Richard died, um, suddenly, of, of a stroke—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: An aneurysm in his brain—

MM: Mm (sighs in sadness)—

VB: Um... And it’s like I needed all that... ever—all that acumen that I learned—everything I learned that—at A.G. Edwards was helpful in [2:09:00] trying to figure out finances for (stammers, chuckles) me for the rest of my life, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, but, but I worked at—there—from, so, ’87 to... ’96, and I said, “I told you I wouldn’t run again.” After the mayor’s thing (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and I said—or, to the Legislature—and I said, “State Republican party called and said that the national [unintelligible]—” to—they knew I could win the Democrat seat, which was Andy Jacobs’ seat—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Showing, of all the people, I would run highest on the Republican side and Democrat side—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Put everyone in. And I said, um, and I've had calls, and I'm kinda wanting to do it. And so, I—he said, “Bring someone in,” and, um, son, Jim, did the—he had graduated from IU—

MM: Mm—

VB: He had helped with our business, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Then, he took the tests, and then he took over my accounts.

MM: [2:10:00] Oh!

VB: And I could leave.

MM: Yeah—

VB: So, I, I write up through—they try to do it ten years, that I was there ten years—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um (sucks teeth), I don't know if it went to the end of '96 or the end of '95 (MM interjects: “Mm”), but whatever, uh, you know, I still was able to put aside money—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Save money.

MM: Wow—

VB: And that was very helpful.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um.

MM: So, let, let me just get this—

VB: And that's when I ran for Congress, then—

MM: OK. So, let me get the timeline straight here and make sure I understand. So, you were up for reelection in '88—

VB: '88, yes—

MM: But Richard had just died in '87—

VB: No, he died in '88—

MM: Oh, he died in '88—

VB: Which is really interesting, all this conversation about—with the son-in-law, about A.G. Edwards, was in '86. And it was '87, that on vacation, that I took all those books—

MM: Uh-uh—

VB: And I was hired September, uh (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), to be an investment advisor in September—he died suddenly of a stroke, um, in—a year later, [2:11:01] November, like, 18th.

MM: Wow.

VB: He was in a city-county meeting—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He was really exhausted when I, you know, talked to him—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, he’d had a root canal that—after that was—had a terrible headache.

MM: Hmm.

VB: Uh, don’t know if that was a [sic] aggravator. He’d been in a motor home accident in ’67 and had a blood clot and (stammers) blod clot get—I mean, I don’t know what, but he was really exhausted.

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And, uh, he was in meetings on, um, salaries for the police and fire departments—

MM: Mm—

VB: And renegotiating at the City-County Building. At 9 A.M., after he’d been to the dentist, and, uh, his left leg—he said to Joe Slice, “My leg isn’t bending,” uh, “Can’t get it to bend down.” He recognized—Joe recognized that as a—one of the signs of a stroke, and called—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And they got him to... [2:12:01] He was president of the trustees of Methodist Hospital at the time—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he asked—it’d be more convenient if the ambulance took him to his doctor’s—Winono—hospital that’s now Ezekiel or something else (laughs).

MM: Yeah—

VB: But anyway, um, he, he went there, ‘cause he thought his doctor could see him quicker—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Than going over to—he should’ve gone to Me—the emergency at Methodist—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Where they would’ve done the full-blown test right then—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But he delayed it for about four hours—

MM: Oof (Exhales in sadness)—

VB: Um, and it started progressing.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And then, they thought it stopped—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: His doctor then did check him and thought he was OK, and thought he'd be home the next morning—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And... Mm-mm.

MM: Mm.

VB: That's tough. That was a tough one.

MM: Yeah, I bet. So, then—

VB: A-and that was '88—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: So that was—we had that awful—the election, '88, where I was [2:13:00] challenged by... you know, saying I'm too liberal.

MM: (Chuckles)

VB: (Laughs) So is my voting record.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: Sounds like I'm a real right-winger. Anyway, um, that was really interesting that someone was sharp enough to pull up the voting record and—

MM: (Laughs) Yeah—

VB: Give it to this man—

MM: Right.

VB: And then shared it back with (MM chuckles)—any—s-so anyway, we, um (sucks teeth), see, '88—there was a whole lot of things that happened in '88 which I (stammers) documented in the book—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Our home was... Do you want to go through all this?

MM: (Chuckles) Yeah—

VB: Part of it—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Well, in '8—19—the home that we lived in on Meridian Street—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: That we bought for, like, \$36,000 (laughs), which—and then, of course, things—inflation—then it—

MM: Right—

VB: Got back towards being worth more—

MM: Oh, I'm sure (chuckles)—

VB: People no longer worried about taking care of big, old homes—

MM: [2:14:00] Uh-huh—

VB: And great two acres of yard to play in—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And a good spot behind the garage left to garden, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, um, then, it was—a decorator show house, and I didn't know this, in '62, and the people came back and said, "We'd like to have a 25th anniversary and do your house."

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Again.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: "So, here's what it was bef—" 'cause it was pretty much like it was (stammers)—

MM: Yeah—

VB: In '62, so they— (deeply inhales) which was kinda a hard thing, with our busy lives, saying to Richard, um, "What do you think? Can we do this?" and, and, um, and I said, "They will put us in, like, an apartment, they—a furnished apartment—and they come in, and, and you can't say what they're decorating, but if you don't like it, you can ask them to redo it afterwards."

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And that's what happened. Um, so, that was '86. And then, '87, uh, went to work for [2:15:00] A.G. Edwards and, and this, this challenging, um, maybe that's when I—that's about the time... of the not voting for the budget—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And the—'88 was [unintelligible] of that, people knew, and then, I had all kinds of Republicans coming to support, and Richard really saying, "You're gonna win this. You're gonna win it the biggest ever"—you know, they— "That's really wrong." Um, he, he just really campaigned harder than he ever had. And, uh, and in July, that same year, he came home, uh, and said, "I'm exhausted. I can't deal with someone stealing from our store," saying we're—the people he had hired—

MM: Mm—

VB: To be the supervisor... Um, the police report showed him, and then the count showed him—was habitually stealing money out of the safes in the stores, different stores—five of them—
[2:16:00] and then, putting IOUs in, that he's gonna reimburse it, and he was a gambler—

MM: Oh... (sighs in sadness)

VB: Um, anyway, uh, disappointing. (Stammers) And, uh, he came home on [sic] July and said, "I can't deal with the stores anymore. Can you take them over?" Me, who hadn't been involved, except doing payroll early on—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And some public relations-type things—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Which didn't get me on the list for free, you know—

MM: Right—

VB: But that—to take over them, he can't deal with it, and he said, "I'm gonna take the dog and the motor home and go up to this cabin" that was on land that my son-in-law—another son-in-law—owned. And, and he said, "I'll just go up and work on the cabin and get away." So, it's July. He gets halfway up there, to the upper peninsula, and he gets a call that his mother died at the nursing home—she's in assisted living.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Turns around after a ten-hour drive—

MM: (Sighs in sadness)

VB: He turns around, and [2:17:00] he's driving all the way back. Now, that's August. September, he and Bill Hudnut, Lou Hensley, and some other friends went to (inhales deeply)—f-fishing in Canada. In October—eh, no, later in September—he and I went to Hershey, Pennsylvania to an antique auto show that we loved to go to and a great flea market—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, we did that. And he comes back and he's doing the public safety things in his time there [unintelligible] again, uh, and has this stroke in, uh, November. So, it went from one thing to another to another—

MM: (Sighs in sadness) Mmhmm—

VB: To another.

MM: That's a lot going on. Ugh (sighs). All right in a row there.

VB: Yeah, I know it. It was hard.

MM: I bet.

VB: Yeah.

MM: I bet. So, did you—

VB: Oh, and, and right after the election, in '88?

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: I get a call and that's, uh, from an IRS agent saying, [2:18:00] "I know you've been going through a—" she said, "This is," like, "Regina White. I'm assigned to do a complete audit of the Blankenbakers. You and all your legislative—any money anyone's paid you to speak, anything you've ever gotten from the state—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "Whether your home, uh, whether they left anything and you gained financially that you didn't report from the decorator show house."

MM: (Gasps)

VB: So, she says, "This is political." This woman got—she said, "This is really—" And she said, "And, and they wanna do all of Richard's Market Basket." We've never been audited in our life. "And we wanna do your personal audit." And she said, "And we'll make it—I'll do it at your ti—convenience. When can we meet?" And I said, "Well, my rec—the rec—house records, I do, and they're in a shoebox. The store records, I'll..." but I just told Richard I'd handle that.

MM: Mmhmm. So, do you think someone had called you in for that?

VB: Oh, oh, yes—she [2:19:00] said, "This is political." She said, "They called during the campaign. I knew you were going through all this..."

MM: (Exhales)

VB: This is amazing: She also got in trouble, because, actually, I had declared, um, if L.S. Ayres left drapes. Because they took down our old ones, they left—a-and I, I declared that as income.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I couldn't declare paint, you know—

MM: Yeah—

VB: The walls were in good shape. Um, the cabinets—they took out my good cabinets that I had just bought, solid oak—and put in nicer—they said they were gonna be nicer, but I put in the difference between the two, I had—(stammers) she said, when she got finished, she said, “OK, I'm probably going to be fired, but we owe you money.” The IRS owed me money. Owed the Blankenbakers money. She said, “You,” um, “You had the one [2:20:00] college you didn't take... deduction for her, um, healthcare. There was an expense—she had a big expense.” And, um, anyway, it was amazing—and she said, “And you,” um, she said, “You didn't—the drapes, you didn't have to—they took 'em—they—you had drapes up there before. So, are they gonna put your old drapes back up?” Then—but otherwise, you know (stammers), she—so, we got, like, 2,000-some hundred, but anyway, she said, “I'll probably be fired.” She said that to me on the phone.

MM: (Gasps)

VB: (Scoffs) She said, “Because they want me to find something in this.” But she said, “I could see this as political—” (stammers) she lived in Shelbyville herself. And that's amazing. And I shouldn't have said her name— (MM interjects: “Yeah”) she probably—if she still (laughs, MM joins) worked there, she's probably in trouble!

MM: Wow. So, someone was just out—

VB: Yeah—

MM: To get you all.

VB: Yeah.

MM: Ugh!

VB: Well, that was political.

MM: Yeah.

VB: [2:21:00] It was political. And, um, I got a call from a, uh, Republican leader in Wayne Township. And he said, “Virginia,” um, “Y-you know, they ch-check your taxes.” He said, “You live in the oldest house on Meridian.” It was built—part of it was built in the 1800s, but the rest of it was upgraded in 1917.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: He said, “You're paying more than either of your neighbors in property taxes,” and he says, “It's just been bumped up this year.” He said, “Something's not smelling right.” He was the Assessor in Wayne Township, but he also detected a little nasty politics going on. So, the home was bumped up, and I called, or I'd have to go down with all of the—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And they said, “Oh. Don’t know how this could’ve happened.” This is Washington Township Assessor. Very much a party person, and...

MM: (Scoffs)

VB: Um, [2:22:00] so, [unintelligible] exhausting (chuckles).

MM: Yeah, I bet. Sounds like a rough few years there. Um... So, then you decide you don’t wanna run again, right? So, that would’ve been the—

VB: Well, it would’ve been—that’s—

MM: So, you were—

VB: Yeah. Ninety-one was when I then, you know, said to Teresa that I wouldn’t run ag—you know, “I’m—”

MM: Yeah—

VB: “Not going to do this.”

MM: OK.

VB: “And I want you to consider doing it.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I don’t know if it was two—you know, she would’ve had to run in... ’92—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Yeah, so— ‘cause ’92 was my last year.

MM: OK. OK. [VB in background, unintelligible] So, but wasn’t it about that time you decided you did want to try for mayor?

VB: Well, that was before that, actually—

MM: Oh, OK—

VB: Because, because Bill Hudnut was leaving in—

MM: Oh, that’s right, OK—

VB: ’93, that’s ’93, and, um, yeah, aft—isn’t that something?

MM: Yeah, you were still sitting—

VB: I’m still in the Senate when I—

MM: Yeah, OK—

VB: I’m still in the Senate because I’m, I announced February 14th, [2:23:01] uh, after talking to Bill Hudnut.

MM: OK.

VB: Um, um, who was—he was more into the community, and he said, “We really need to do more within all the—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Communities—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, uh, protect—and the road work and, and curbing and health—the—we had—In-Indianapolis used to have a lot of healthcare neighborhood centers—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: That totally got wiped out when, um, the Trustee’s Office became more powerful and Medicaid became more powerful, um—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, you know, people went to the hospitals for emergency—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Instead of the little local—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Center, healthcare center. But Indiana had a pretty decent... [sounds in background; possibly furniture shifting] healthcare center.

MM: Wow—

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: So... (Scoffs) I, I have to admit that I saw this fantastic—

VB: Mmhmm—

MM: Um, mayoral ad you ran on TV where you were playing basketball— (both laugh)

VB: Written, written by Betsy and her husband, Tom [2:24:00] Griswold—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Who was—he still has on a show here in—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Indianapolis.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And, uh, they felt that, you know, the ads need to be, um, um, mo—show more of the f-fun side of me—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: (Laughs) And, and came up with this, and they produced it.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And, uh, they had to sell the idea to Teresa— “We need to, you know, get her ads” —

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, and what’s really funny is Diane Simon, who I had met through my daughter—they had homes on, uh, Sanibel, near each other—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Captiva—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: That were next door, and got to know Diane when they had little children and I had grandchildren and just [sounds of construction in background; possibly sawing or drilling] had the best time and good people, really, really neat people back in the ‘90s and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: She said, “I’ll loan you the money to do the ads.” So, she put, like, \$15,000 into the campaign—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Which I [2:25:00] paid her after (laughs) the campaign was over!

MM: Yeah.

VB: She said that, you know, “When they say we’re gonna give this as a loan—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Polit—then it’s all gone when it’s over,” you know—

MM: Yeah—

VB: You don’t have any money left—

MM: Yeah—

VB: I said, “Well, I did have money left,” so (laughs) I gave—

MM: [Unintelligible]

VB: And she said, “This has never happened before!” (Laughs)

MM: Yeah! (Laughs)

VB: She said, “Thank you.” But, but they are just, um... [Sounds of construction in background continue] They liked different type [sic] of politics.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I also talked about downtown establishing—there, there were still lots of workers downtown in ’90 and ’91 or 2, and they were developing that—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Circle Cent—kind of the (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) downtown mall area—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And I said that, “Have childcare incorporated in there so parents who work there—” I said, “It’s not all men that work now; sometimes men are the caregivers, but—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “The child can be, if they’re not in preschool or—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Uh, kindergarten, can be left there,” and I said, “Maybe adult daycare, too, ‘cause we have also moms (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”)— [2:26:00] people taking care of their moms.” They really liked that idea.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: They liked it. And I said, “With that, if the idea—get it incorporated into the thinking of our leaders, uh, then tax credits can be given to businesses that established—establish onsite or near-site daycare.”

MM: Mmhmm. Wow.

VB: Yeah. And, um, they really liked that idea—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And they supported me 100% from the mayor’s—

MM: Wow. So, it sounded like that was a close campaign.

VB: I-it was close—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: It was very close. And then there’s articles about Louis [Mahern] wanting to see if we could get together—well, they (stammers) most, most places, c—most states—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Many states, or cities I would say—the top two candidates then run. Uh, and, and we don't do that.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Here, the top two candidates were on the Republican side. Louis [Mahern] got 19% of the votes—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and not a [2:27:00] whole lot of people—it wasn't a big turnout—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But 40%, 40—you know, 40.9, and—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Like, 19 I think was what I had been given—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Um, and, and they knew that I would get the— 'cause I had such a strong—i-in the center part—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Because of public education.

MM: Right. So, what happened, then, when you got out of the state Senate up until you decided to run for U.S. Congress?

VB: Yeah—I worked really hard at A.G. Edwards and loved it.

MM: Mmhmm. Yeah.

VB: Did some volun—little bit of volunteer work—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And Steve Stoughton wanted to start this women's fund in Indianapolis (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") and he named several people to help with that, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He, he had seen—Steve Stoughton had been a—House Budget Committee, years earlier, and then he is the one that called and said, "I'll chair your—" he was no longer in the House—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He had young children and didn't want to do that anymore, and he said, "I will chair your campaign if you run—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know, “Against the slated candidate in ’88.” He said, [2:28:00] “That’s ridiculous that—that—”

MM: Yeah—

VB: “You were—couldn’t—” and I had a lot of people like him.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh—but anyway, Steve [Stoughton] then, um, helped start a fund in—and I think it was out in, uh, uh, Colorado. But he got involved in starting the women’s fund. He got a group together and we worked on that—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Too, and then, I was getting—still involved with A.G. Edwards—that I told him, right up until they named the official women’s fund (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), and now it’s part of the Indianapolis Foundation, um, uh, but anyway, that was a, kind of a thing I worked on—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Right up until they—I said I needed—take—just concentrate—

MM: Yeah—

VB: On one thing—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Which I did.

MM: OK.

VB: And then, I got the call from the state Republican Vice-Chair, who, um, told me about the polls—three different—two national and one IU poll that [2:29:00] showed I would win the Congressional race if I would enter it, and they were encouraging me to enter it.

MM: And that was in ’96.

VB: ’96, yeah.

MM: OK.

VB: And, uh, and I was doing really well, [unintelligible] all good—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: My campaign manager, uh, um, we argued a lot, didn’t get—he, uh, he was very dogmatic. He didn’t want me to ever talk to the press; it would always be through him. Um, he wanted to run a real harsh campaign, like, um, they came up with one of the a—and I thought, “Oh, my gosh, you’re gonna see the numbers just... plummet.”

MM: Yeah.

VB: Uh, if it shows I'm way he—up here—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And then, you put something in about showing, uh, uh, steel doors at the high school that I was—(chuckles) really liked the tea—the principal there, at Arlington—it looked like they were going through a—security—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [2:30:00] At the, at the airport. And so, th-the ads were horrible, um, they had featured people that worked from Indianapolis in it, you know, saying that, you know, it's like a m—um—

MM: Like, on—for your campaign?

VB: For my campaign. It wasn't like Betsy and Tom [Griswold], you know—

MM: Yeah—

VB: They'd done that, that little bit of good one—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But it was very, at—it was like... And it was raising a lot of money.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Uh, the national party said, "Whatever you do, do not let Newt Gingrich come in—you're running in a Democrat district, it shows that you got a lot of support—you get all the support of Independents—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "So, don't let him come in." And that was a given. Um, we were doing a rally in... on southside, a pa—Garfield Park—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And... Jim says—Jim Knoop, says, "Oh, guess what? Newt is going to stop by. He's in Louisville and he's gonna go to, to, uh, Fort Wayne—he's gonna [2:31:00] stop in Indianapolis just to greet people." And I said, "You know, national said don't do that, because, uh, he's a—" um, what is it when you—there's just people who don't like his personality, or—

MM: Yeah—he's a polarizing figure, certainly—

VB: Yes, yes, and so, um, but he was, and that—my numbers went way down, and that's when, uh, Julia [Carson] pumped hers up by bringing in Hillary [Clinton] and d—the Gores and the President [Bill Clinton]. And even, uh, Cassius Clay out of Chicago—came in even though he was, you know, having trouble now—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He came in and parked his plane at the a—and, and people just swarmed out to wave to him, and he stood there and waved, and then drove away, and it just got—it said, “Get out the vote—”

MM: Mmhmm. Well, how was it also running against Julia Carson, which, um—you probably worked with her for a long time—

VB: Yeah, I did, yeah, we were friends, and she—and you know what? Nice, nice lady.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: [2:32:00] Yeah. You know, and let’s, let’s say, um, sh-she wrote me one of the nicest, um, notes when my dad died—

MM: Mm—

VB: In 1998.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, you know, she, she did not have a great life herself, and, you know, at her—you know, she won, and then had a heart attack immediately, didn’t get there for four months, and then was sick most of the time. Um, so, it wasn’t easy for her, but—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But cam—you know, I don’t think it was a dirty—you know, we didn’t demonize each other. I don’t remember that, for sure! (Laughs) But I do sure remember saying that the schools weren’t safe and, uh, supporting me, that—you know, and just sounding like th—what I wasn’t. And, uh, and I saw where, uh, like, *Newsweek* would—I saw on Jim [Knoop]’s desk, when I came back from a, a trip to Washington—I saw on his desk were, like, 3 [2:33:00] memos, and it’s like, *Newsweek* and, um, *Time* *Maga*—they said wanted to interview me. And I said, “Why did I not get these?” And he said, he said, “Because I didn’t want to give them to you.”

MM: That seems strange to me—

VB: Yeah—

MM: Not knowing as much about politics—

VB: Yeah—

MM: That there w—there—(stammers) you were at—

VB: It was about control—he was a control freak.

MM: So, had you not worked with him before? What had happened with that—

VB: Well, I knew, knew—well, the people who were helping me—and it was kind of a different group—thing is, the national campaign, um, uh, the people that were helping me, didn’t know who else to get—they thought he would be good—he worked—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: For Governor Orr. Uh, I knew him from then—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But I, you know, didn't know him mu—much about him—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Didn't know—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I didn't know much about him.

MM: Yeah. Did you have—(scoffs). I feel like maybe this is—OK—

VB: One thing: I don't drink, and I didn't ever want alcohol at my events—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um, and one of the things that just really—[2:34:00] I realized at the end, um, they thought I was winning, and he had lined up a big party at a suite down at one of the hotels, and, um, and when—election night, now it's coming in, but I'm losing—and, uh, they said, "You wanna go over and greet the people at the—" whatever the hotel was— "down there?"

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: "And it's in the presidential suite and..." I said, "You've got to be kidding. Who's paying for that?" "Well, the campaign." I said, "Who authorized it?" "Well, Jim [Knoop]." Then, I find out that he had all kinds of booze at it (laughs)—you know, I thought, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't me, and that was—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Just really—so, I don't know what it wa—I don't know what happened there.

MM: Yeah.

VB: It was a—

MM: Do you have any—

VB: You know, you need to have a person that kind of fits with you, and I know the, the, the Republican who was supposed to be working with us from national, was named Don Nelson—I think was the name—and, uh, [2:35:00] he called afterwards and said, "You did not lose the election; your campaign manager lost your election for you." And he was really strong about it—he said, "I—we—he did everything we told him not to do. Don't get it—"

MM: Yeah—

VB: He thought I was winning—

MM: Yeah—

VB: He thought I was winning. Jim [Knoop] saw that he would probably be in Washington, helping.

MM: Yeah. Oh, that's rough—

VB: [Presumably looking outside] Oh, they're tearing that up.

MM: They really are, yeah! (Laughs)

VB: I like that... Wow. My son handles these things.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: Good for him!

MM: Yeah. Um... Let me jump back, here, for a couple minutes—back into your time in the General Assembly, if that's OK.

VB: Coffee?

MM: Oh, sure! Yeah. Well, you know what, can we take a quick break? I'm gonna run to the restroom—

VB: Yeah—

MM: If that's OK. I'll pause these.

VB: Let's do that!

MM: (Chuckles) Yeah. (Sniffles) OK, I think both those are started back up. Um, well I was w—we'll jump in a little bit more [2:36:00] to some committee work in a second—

VB: Mmhmm—

MM: But I'm curious about—what does the public not know about how the General Assembly operates? Are there, sort of, behind the scenes workings just about—the general public just doesn't understand about how it works?

VB: You know, I don't think so—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: You know, if they've gone through basic education—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and Indiana did publish—I don't know if they still do—but it's "Know Your Government"—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And that book really goes through committee meetings (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") and the legislative process and it's a really good, really good s—book—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: And I know that, in my district, schools came down all the time. One time, I was working after I left, so this would be more like ‘9...7, ‘98, ‘99—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, with someone named Ruthie Blankenbaker—no immediate relative that I know of, but Ruthie was a teacher at Park Tudor. She later became a—well, she was a strong [2:37:00] proponent of, um, what was it called, inter... Um, distance learning.

MM: Oh, mmhmm.

VB: And so, it was AT&T, a lawsuit that they had to give money back to the state, and the 20 million or whatever it was, or 4 mil—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I don’t know how much it was—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But she established this distant learning, and I got really involved with that, and, uh, knowing the tea—the principal at Arlington High School, and I was trying to remember how we got Noblesville High School to be the one, but [unintelligible] one was very much an outside—rural, but not rural—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And inner c—you know, now, Arlington was just a great school (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) and always was, and Jackie Greenwood tried to make it a great school. Um, ended up, um, doing distance—I said—so the project, got it set up, got really [2:38:00] involved in this. Um, talked to... government teachers at both places—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I said, “So, we’re gonna select kids that would be really interested, and you’re gonna study the same thing, but you’re gonna do this distance learning. And then, you’re going to take a problem and try to solve it together.” And, uh, it just turned out to be the most fun thing—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And that was early on, before we ever saw any interactive—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Things going on. So, she had started that early on, using AT&T money that was—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Given back to the state for some kind of lawsuit (chuckles; MM interjects: “Yeah”) they failed.

MM: Wow—

VB: And, and that was—the kid that got elected to be the leader, of the two of ‘em, was from Arlington. It was someone who probably had a gifted mind but had never liked school, did not like the, you know—it was very much... just not into it.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And took—and then I brought them to the Statehouse. And because of being an ex-[2:39:00] senator, I could do this, and I said, “OK, so you’re—we’re gonna—now that you’re in leadership, you’re gonna see what it’s like when you’re in the Senate.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And then, get them all seated in there, and I say, “How many of you think you could be a senator?” You know, some of them held up their (MM interjects: “Yeah”) hands. I said, “Well, now, just feel these seats. Don’t you think it looks good?”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, um, so—I can’t remember the kid’s—who was gonna be the leader—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “He’s gonna present the bill that you came up, which is you wanted to keep that—” what’s the Monon—they wanted to really keep it so it would have fast transit (MM interjects: “Mm”)—they were studying some kind of fast transit between—

MM: OK—

VB: The two—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Areas. And, uh, there wasn’t a bus service—it would be a monorail or something. And so, “You’re gonna present it.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So, “You know what you’re gonna do.” And it was really neat! They spent the morning at the Statehouse—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then saying, “I have—” Dorothy said, “I have stood out at the bus stop. I have never been in this building before.” [2:40:00] They lived not even 4 miles from downtown—

MM: Yeah—

VB: They’d never been—they’ve taken the bus down, they’ve seen the bus stops are outside the Statehouse—they’ve never been in there before.

MM: Wow—

VB: They sa—I said, “So, how do you run?” And then, pulled out the book—we talked again (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) about that. Um, OK, so he says, “I can’t raise money.” “So, how are you gonna learn about it? So, who do you know? Who’s your, who’s your state senator or your house—who is it? Or, who is your—who’s in the council that you know in your—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “OK, find out who they are. And just say you’re available to help them.”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “And it doesn’t matter if they’re Republican or Democrat—just say, ‘I’m here to help you.’ And just see what it’s like there. And then... You know, you just have to get involved very locally—I didn’t do that, I was involved just in the community. And [2:41:00] someone said to me (laughs), because I was trying to get smarter on, in education, uh, when [Sister] Miriam said—called me, I said, ‘OK.’ (Laughs) Your turn.”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um, I said, “Someone’s gonna say that someday, ‘cause you’ve worked now at helping that person—you might’ve worked on—maybe you wanna work on the other campaign—”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: “Uh, if a Democrat’s there, you may wanna work on—but find out what it’s like—”

MM: Yeah—

VB: “And then, uh, sign up to [sound of clinking in background; possibly coffee cup on saucer], sign up to be, uh, you know, an intern. You’re in high school, so, just say that ‘I want to intern for you next year.’ You know, you’re—and, and, you’ll do that. You can do it for a week or longer or whatever (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”).” So, anyway, just telling ‘em: “It only takes two feet.” And the one thing I tried to work with them was that—and I would teach this with my family living classes— “You know what you have [2:42:00] and I have that are exactly alike? And the President—” whoever the—(laughs) was the President— “Have? What do they have that you have? Money? No. What about hours? We have 24 hours of the day, and how do you spend your 24 hours? And, and that makes a difference.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: “And you could say, you’re gonna put yourself—and you’re gonna say, ‘This is how I spend my 24 hours.’ And if you say that you don’t wanna be a senator, you don’t wanna be in the House—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Uh, you can say, ‘I think I wanna be a lawyer.’” And I said, “OK, how long does it take you to be that?” Well, you know, that got to—you know, it’s really—and this is work, working on just getting the Noblesville kids and the others to talk to each other—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, they would talk to each other about goals and—and I don’t know what ever happened to that after I moved away in 2000.

MM: Yeah. That’s interesting—

VB: But it was a distance learning—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: [2:43:00] And it was really one of the most satisfying things I’ve done, too, with these kids—

MM: I bet. Oh, it sounds interesting, like a neat program.

VB: Yeah.

MM: So, um... (sucks teeth) We’ve probably hit on this a little bit, but what would you say is the most controversial legislative issues [sic] overall that were—

VB: Mmhmm—

MM: Uh, going on or discussed during your time in the Senate?

VB: Well, you know, I hate to say it, but I think the—controlling women is the most controversial. Because—and then, then it even starts with what do you call it? You know, I don’t like the word “pro-choice”—that’s probably where I am, bec—but I, I don’t [unintelligible] what I am.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, so that we have—why do we have to label people? (Chuckles)

MM: Yeah, I-I think you just hit it right on the head: It’s about... these ideas we have attached to labels.

VB: Yes. And, and so, that was— [2:44:00] that came up every year, and it still does, and now, it’s even worse. Um, ‘course, we know a lot more, it’s totally amazing, um, and it causes maybe some of us to alternate, but still, it isn’t up to me, as a senator, to make a law that limits you—you, you, you—to—what is going on in your life?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: You don’t know. I don’t know. And who am I—I’m not God. So, that’s the thing—I always think that the Legislature somehow gotten over into these emotional things, ‘cause that kind of gets people crazy—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And instead of, you know, go back to the boring things—education doesn't have to be boring; we just concentrate on how we fund it (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and, uh, and, and also, give the best that we can to the least.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: [2:45:00] Um.

MM: Was that always a guiding principle for you?

VB: I-I'd say that's probably...

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Kind of the Quaker background (both laugh) [unintelligible], Morrie Mills was also (laughs; MM interjects: "Uh-huh") big in the Quaker church.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I remember in high school, he said, "You should go to, you should go to Earlham."
(Laughs)

MM: Yeah, I know that they had big family ties there.

VB: They really do, yeah.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And the Quakers are—don't use the word "progressive," but they are very socially—

MM: Conscious?

VB: Conscious, yes.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And Larry Borst is the same thing, very, you know, um... open. You know, uh, smart, uh... Yeah, that's—

MM: Yeah.

VB: They were both, they were both, they were both good. Good people.

MM: You, you've indicated this a couple of different moments throughout the interview... about the changes in the [2:46:00] Republican Party. And I think this was when you ran for, um, U.S. Congress seat (VB interjects: "Mmhmm"), but you were endorsed by a group called WISH—

VB: Yeah, yes—

MM: And I think it was Women in the Senate and House—

VB: Who are pro-choice.

MM: Yeah. So—

VB: And, and that was—Susan Collins was one of the—really big in that, and I ca—trying to remember some of the others. Um, quite interesting. I remember that... I—and this is from my son—now, kinda feels different, I guess the economy, the way it's affected him as to maybe me, but—or others, and, uh, but... um, what was his name? Um, he was a senator—Bill, and he's married to, gosh, he was married to an heiress, to, uh, um, it'll pop up, [2:47:00] maybe—

MM: I-in Indiana, or national—

VB: No, no, this is nationally.

MM: Oh—

VB: She did a fundraiser for me in Chicago. Um, what, what, uh, big company, uh, retail—it's not Pillsbury, not—excuse me—

MM: I feel like I should be able to think of this, too (VB interjects: “Yeah”), I just can't (laughs)—

VB: I know it, and probably come out—it's probably—I shouldn't have read that book—

MM: No—

VB: I read it for the first time last night.

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: They're a few—she, she—the woman typed that after listening to the tapes.

MM: Oh, mmhmm—

VB: She taped me on that history—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um... [sound of rattling in background] and, and she, um—few things (MM interjects: “Yeah”) [unintelligible] and it was there—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Or a few things I, I—

MM: Yeah—

VB: I said Westfield is where my parents were married, or—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Or where they were, were married, too—

MM: Yeah—

VB: But met.

MM: (Exhales) I'm sure we'll come back to the names here in a minute, but, um, wh—[2:48:00] it seems like the Republican Party has [unintelligible] in that lately, but, um... I-I guess, how did you get—how did you find out about that group, how did they come to you, or what was that?

VB: Hmm. The national party put me in touch with them.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Or them in touch with me—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Like when I went to Washington?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And met with the Tuesday Morning Group, which is a group of senators, maybe—and House members—that were—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: What they call moderates. You know, I'll just say it like it is.

MM: Yeah.

VB: And... I wish I journaled more then—I j-journal more now (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") than I did—I never did then. (Inhales) Um, afterwards, I would, maybe on trips—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Journal. But I, I wish—that's what—if I—anyone that's running or in the legislature now, I-I think they should, every day (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), journal a little bit about [2:49:00] interactions. Uh, when I knew... you know, what I do that I did, did—(chuckles) excuse me—

MM: You're OK.

VB: Take a drink of water. (MM laughs) This coffee's good—

MM: It is good—

VB: Even though it's preheated! Yeah—

MM: It is good.

VB: And so awful, because this refrigerator being down (MM chuckles), and then my son went out and bought one of these little... models that's in the laundry room—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: I'm missing that a lot. (MM chuckles) Anyway, when, um... Now I have to stop and think w-what it was that I was getting emotional about.

MM: I think you were talking about when you—you said, “When [you] knew.” But you were talking about running—

VB: Oh—that I, that I wa—oh, about running again, I knew—

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm—

VB: Um, um, I’m not good at, at, uh, negotiating.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So to speak. And one of—a lobbyist—this young man that I really like as an individual, [2:50:00] knew him from the community—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he came—I had a legislation again, kind of, like, thinking about young parents, um, who have limited number of income to bills being paid, and the credit card companies, how they were really ripping them off with \$15, uh, didn’t get the payment on time, \$20 for, uh, not paying the interest on time, and, you know, and, and I said, “That is—it’s illegal. You know, we don’t let people hijack people and we’re, we’re permitting that.” And I asked that—I put a bill in that would say, um, credit cards—I, being a legislator, I knew a little bit about making money—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I said, prime—they say what the prime is of the—and so, you go 1% over prime, they’re gonna make a lot of money. Um, so the prime is announced by the [2:51:00] federal government (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), what the prime is, um, and that means you would not end up with \$20—you might end up with, with a \$3 overcharge. Maybe a \$4 on top (chuckles), but that’d be [unintelligible] bill—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Um, I had... Someone I really respected, who supported me many times, who was president of a bank, call and say, “You know, I’m a banker. We make—we do make money on our credit cards. And, of course, I would oppose it. But I’m not gonna tell you what to do.” And, “But I just want—but I do know that you’re—you know, it’s—would be OK to tell you—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “That I don’t like (laughs), I don’t like this bill, and you probably assume that.” I had a lobbyist, though, come to me, and look me in the eyes right before we went on the floor, and he said, “Senator, what would it take for you to pull the bill?” And me—that just crushed [2:52:00] me.

MM: Mmhmm. Sort of indicated that you could be bought.

VB: That’s what it implicated to me.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Now, um, he—you know, I think years later [sound of clinking in background, possibly coffee cup], maybe he meant, “I can work hard on this other bill, you know, for Marital Property Act (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), that you really would like,” which makes—explains the marital law to people who could go to the library, read it, and understand it—the average person. Instead of being shocked that the husband is old English law in Indiana, then, and the old English law, the husband can, you know, controls the money. And, um, so, anyway, I took it as crushing.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: (Inhales, cries quietly) And I thought, “That’s it. I’m done.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, but I think that’s, that’s what the game is.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, you have to (voice shakes)—and prob-probably I would say, “Well, work hard on the marit—you know, [2:53:00] the Uniform Marital Property Act, and I’ll hold the bill—” but I thought that that was really a good one.

MM: Yeah.

VB: And I introduced it for a reason, uh, because I heard from some of my middle income people who lived in my district, and, uh, and I have to say president of the bank was nice enough to say, “What would it take to get you to do this,” instead of saying—just voicing, like the constituents (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), “I don’t like the bill, but you understand why I’m gonna—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I thought, “That’s high class.”

MM: Yeah—

VB: But the person who’s a paid lobbyist—someone I respected a lot, I like a lot—probably still there—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, and, “What would it take you for you pull the bill?” But guess what? I had the votes on Friday to get it through. I had peo—I could count the votes—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And we get right up to—and it’s starting to snow that day—and about before noon, they usually called, call it—they would go in morning session on Fridays [2:54:00] and (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) they’d call it by noon. Well, earlier they called it, saying, “Well, the storm, they say, is getting really bad at the door (laughs),” so, [Bob] Garton called it early. And then, I come back on Monday, and Senator Justice said, “I can’t support the bill. You know, I

used to be on my bank's board, and they've asked me not to support it." (MM sighs) And then I've had—I could see the votes wither away. Someone got to them over the weekend, just saying, "Look, you've been my friend (MM interjects: "Uh-huh") for years, my neighbor. I work at the bank," or "You're on the bank board." Um, so, it lost.

MM: (Sighs) Mm.

VB: And you look at those credit cards now—it really makes me mad when, uh, you see interest and late fee and something else—there's, like, thr—it's, it's, it's criminal.

MM: Mmhmm. And it's probably targeting those that are struggling, too—

VB: A-and that's what it is—of course it is. (MM sighs) [2:55:00] And you know what, or someone who has had an emergency in their family, and they, you know, things are due today, um, and, "Oh, my gosh, did you get that in the mail?" Or the mail went early and (MM interjects: "Mmhmm")... and tried to call, and then say, "Hey, you put a \$25 late charge on here—interest plus late." (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") And, uh, so, it's just, it's wrong.

MM: Yeah.

VB: And... But that's when I knew that, uh, "OK (laughs), Teresa, it's your turn!" (Chuckles)

MM: Yeah.

VB: Or "If you could get in and—"

MM: So, kind of the ch-changing game, or the, the pressure of it just—

VB: Yeah—

MM: Made you not want to—

VB: Well, I-I just—it was who it was.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And that was hard.

MM: Yeah. Yeah, the personal connection there. Yeah. Hmm.

VB: Yeah. And you know what? And maybe, maybe it was my mind that was wrong—maybe it didn't mean that at all. So, but that's, that's [2:56:00] where I thought—and then, and then my son, Jim, who is so—he doesn't forget anything, it's really a—he sees things very black and white, and, um, and he said, "I didn't do something," he didn't do it. (Laughs) You know, he's—and, uh, and when he said, "Look, you did say this." And I said, "Whoa, whoa, I sure did." (MM laughs) He said, "You campaigned on it." "Yeah, I did."

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm. And so, he reminded you of that, right—

VB: (Laughs) "Thanks a lot, Jim!"

MM: (Laughs) Well, I know you were involved—you've mentioned the Health and Human Services Committee or Welfare Committee—um, and, and lots of other things, too. What legislation did you work the hardest on?

VB: A lot of time was spent on that Uniform Marital Property Act. Some understood it, some didn't—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, um, I... A lot of the lawyers liked it.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And a lot of the probate lawyers liked it, and some of the very high profile—including the head of the school of— [2:57:00] the, the law school came and testified for the bill. And he said it's, it's something like 10% of the people, then, had wills.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: He said, "So, there's 90% that don't have." And he said, "To be able to go to the library and [sound of clattering in background] look up and know you can read the law and know if there's a divorce, this is the way it's divided, or if you knew that there's a death of your husband, and you don't—" Some people who testified found out their husband had transferred everything else into a trust in his name, without the wife's signature—so, it was just saying that, um... What do you believe, you know, if your hus—your spouse died—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And you're the wife, or if there's a divorce, [2:58:01] what do you own? And, and people can agree on that—they can agree before the fact.

MM: Right.

VB: And, um, and so, where some lawyers don't—didn't like it, because they s-saw it cut into their fee structure, they said, "Well, it doesn't really affect you," but they felt the divorce, maybe, maybe affects 'em, uh, I said, "Well, some women did testify, you know that—came in and testified about their husband divorced them, they found out that they're the ones that came to the marriage with inheritance, and—but the husband managed the money, and now it's all been—he's, he's the one who was in charge. So, Indiana law was based on English law. Can't we base it on more of the Spanish, which is (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") equally owned?"

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: "Or, if you owned it before the marriage, and you—they never mixed it with your marriage, you never said, 'You're in control of this—'"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "You didn't write anything to say it. What you entered the marriage with is yours."

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: “In title, [2:59:00] even though someone sneakily retitled it.” It helps everyone—it’s just saying, “What’s fair game here?”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Because when you’re in love, no one pays attention to that (both laugh).

MM: Right, no one’s thinking finances—

VB: But, but that was a big one, and, and what’s really interesting—Susan Bayh testified for that for a couple years, and then her husband ran for governor—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And she said, “I can’t do it anymore.” (Laughs) Because when you understand—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Just the publicity, and we—there went a picture of her testifying before our—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Bill, be-before our, before that—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: But, you know, I tried to look at having sons and daughters, I want—I said, “OK, look at it this way: Wouldn’t you want to be fair for your son as well as your daughter?”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: What’s fair? And then write a—if, if we have to have laws that back it, why are we going back to laws that came over from [sound of rustling; possibly paper] when this country was formed from England?

MM: Yeah—

VB: Where the man was o—

MM: Over sim coeur, was over—covered women—

VB: And so, so, worked [3:00:00] hard always in the Senate and we get it through, and the House, um—oh, gosh, from Lafayette, she would carry it—um, she’s still in the legislature, maybe, from West Lafayette or Lafayette, um—

MM: Hmm—

VB: Let me just—let me think of her—I need to get that list—

MM: Yeah [sound of rustling; possibly paper], I have the list here—

VB: OK—

MM: Move it over here, too—

VB: [Sound of rustling continues in background] Not in the Senate; she's in the House—

MM: Oh... yeah—

VB: But it'd go to her, and... she'd negotiate. She was a negotiator more than I was—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um—

MM: Here, do you want that [unintelligible; sound of rustling increases in volume] over—

VB: I-I'm trying to—I have it some place, too, probably, around here— [sound of scraping; possibly an object being moved over the floor; sound of rustling continues] I don't know. Oh, it might be in this—

MM: In that green folder?

VB: What's this? (Chuckles) Gosh. I—there may be some things we don't need in there that's [sic] loose, I don't know.

MM: I'll get that out of the way for you.

VB: Oh, that's—this is my oldest daughter Susan's family. She has (chuckles)— [3:01:00] so, she p—went on to be a lawyer and, and, um, then—

MM: (Chuckles) Wow—

VB: He married her, um, when she, then, was hired by Sidley Austin in Chi-Chicago.

MM: Oh—

VB: And he's running up to see her and getting ti—speeding tickets (both laugh)—said, “We gotta propose!” So, this is all my, oh, family members and his family members, including my sister, and I think there's, uh—when I w—married for the third time to (chuckles) John Williams after being widowed for sixteen years—

MM: Oh, goodness. That's a good lookin' family!

VB: Yeah, thank you. A lot of fun. So, these are... It's funny, I can't replace these, two of these cheerleaders [sound of rustling in background]—oh, this is my mom and dad when he retired as county agent—

MM: Oh!

VB: At 65.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And Mom would be, like, 65—probably 59 there.

MM: (Chuckles)

VB: And then, [3:02:00] my oldest sister is—had a baby back in Colorado, I think, and then, the next one is Dorothy, this one. And then, Joe. Then, me. Then, Bob.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And then, Rosemary? No, that's Nancy—Rosemary and Nancy.

MM: Wow.

VB: Yeah, that's, that's a bunch of 'em.

MM: (Chuckles) That's a neat picture, too!

VB: Yeah, that was kinda nice—

MM: Oh, here, you dropped one—

VB: OK. So, but there are lots of pictures in here that would kind of—but the one thing that I don't—have no idea—in fact, actually... This, she—this woman went through some of my records, but there's something I signed here, supposedly, on... guns, and I don't know where it is. But—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: I bet you that was from when I ran for Congress and probably Jim [Knoop] did the—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He probably wrote (chuckles) those things down, because I thought, "Wait a minute! I'm not sure I agreed with the federal—" But maybe back, the federal laws were not so—

MM: Yeah—

VB: They were really loose. They're really strict now.

MM: Yeah.

VB: As f—allowing— [3:03:00] or, or, or loose, I guess on the—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Um, I don't know what it used to be, but—

MM: Yeah, I don't know, either—

VB: But it s-said I agreed with that position—I thought, "Where'd that come from?"

MM: Yeah.

VB: That's in there—

MM: Hmm—

VB: In the book. I should put it next to it—

MM: Yeah! (Laughs) [Unintelligible]—

VB: ‘Cause I did—I, I really am a proponent of—and, before I got the cancer, um, I talked to, um... um, gosh, the governor’s wife—isn’t this awful? Um—

MM: Current governor or before—

VB: Governor after Bayh was, um—

MM: Uh...

VB: He was in the Senate. Isn’t this—

MM: After Bayh, um—

VB: Oh, my gosh—the governor after Bayh who just—didn’t he—died?

MM: O’Bannon?

VB: O’Bannon.

MM: OK—

VB: So, I talked to her—she goes to my church—um, Judy—

MM: And Judy—

VB: Yeah, I ta-talked to her—this was about three years, four years ago—and... you know, like Char Lugar—I had about three women whose people recognized—and I wanted to [3:04:00] start a “Grandmas Mad as ‘H’ About Gun Laws.”

MM: (Laughs)

VB: And I said, “The way we change it is just, we get grandmothers who are really fed up and find a whole bunch of ‘em, and th—and we go to the opening day of the Legislature,” and I said, “You know, they’re gonna listen to their grand—their, their moms, or (both laugh) their grandmothers show up!” Um, it’s a—it’s really a different story, because grandmas are really angry. Uh, they’ve had grandchildren, maybe, affected, some of ‘em, and there’ll be a lot of ‘em that’s in our city that would show up. And I was really getting that organized and I wanted a national movement—thought of every—but we have to do it in the statehouses first to get changes (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”)—and, um—

MM: Then you got sick—

VB: Then I got, then I got cancer. (MM interjects: “Mm”) And I was in this treatment center (both laugh), and I thought, “OK, that slowed me down.”

MM: Yeah. That’s a great idea, though.

VB: And I think so—maybe someone will get that going again.

MM: Yeah. Yeah—

VB: Uh, Dick Hamilton was all for it—(laughs) he thought that was great.

MM: Mmhmm. (Chuckles) That's really great!

VB: He's my minister, yeah.

MM: [3:05:01] Uh-huh. Do you still go to the same Methodist church?

VB: Mmhmm, yeah—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Sometimes, I got to St. Luke's, because it's a quicker drive.

MM: Mmhmm, yeah. Um... What was your philosophy in chairing the Health and Human Services Committee?

VB: I don't know there was any philosophy—it was just, um, you know, dea-dealing with the laws that were on the books—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And should they have been changed or what would you have to do to make them more helpful where they were needed?

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And usually, it was a result of people coming with a problem... Um—

MM: And I'm assuming that, uh, Bob Garton appointed you to the chair—

VB: He did, yes, he did.

MM: So, how did that come about?

VB: Um, the fellow who was the chair before, who ran a big string of Merry Maneral—Merry Miller—Merry Matter—whatever it is—nursing homes— [Note: VB referring to Miller's Merry Manor: Senior Rehabilitation and Healthcare facilities – KT]

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: No conflict of interest at all—but (chuckles), [3:06:01] but anyway, he r—he didn't run again, and then, I was placed in that. Apparently, I never did get the education chair, because John Sinks was a teacher, I think—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: At Fort Wayne—I don't know if he's alive?

MM: I'm not sure I, I recognize that name, but—

VB: But John Sinks was the—and I was ranking member—and then, I was appointed to this, um, Health and Human Service, and then, also, that Sunset Committee, which is a two-year, big-time commitment of reviewing the laws.

MM: Tell me a little bit more about that one, too.

VB: Well, that is—it's a—it's made up of equal numbers of Re-Republicans and Democrats.

MM: OK.

VB: Um, on, on the committee structure.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Except, I think, the chair is a Republican is the difference. And, uh, we study all the laws that are on the Indiana Code Book that deal with health, education, welfare, and juvenile justice.

MM: Oh—

VB: And juvenile justice, instead of being in the [3:07:00] prison system, wanted it in the education system, uh, and books, so that if you—then you see what—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: What—it, it—anyway, we tried to get it together to make sense.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: [Sound of rustling in background; possibly paper] And that was a real lot of time spent on that.

MM: Yeah, I bet.

VB: Um, philosophy wasn't... you know, necessarily any "Gotta go and change that, make sure it's this way—"

MM: Yeah—

VB: "'Cause that's my view!" – it was just, "How's the current law figure in today's world?"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, and easy reading for the individual going in. Um, if—and then, usually, a majority would say, you know, "That needs to be redone—"

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, mental health was a big part of that, and we looked at the—some of the mental health facilities. We tou-toured all of them in the state, and realized there were some that were big buildings, and they'd have only a couple people in, in the facility—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: [3:08:00] Um, and I wanted to show them—one was—example was a-an individual [unidentified voices in background] who could never function, uh, there wa—part of their organs were born outside of their body—

MM: Mm, mmhmm—

VB: They never could walk, they never could do—and, and eventually, the family can't take care anymore, and so, they go to the mental health assist, and they're put into this mental health facility—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: That requires someone to be there 24 hours a day with them and at least turn them over [sound of rustling in background; possibly paper], and, and, and I took them in to one to see in Muncie, and I—it's been a while since I've wri—reviewed this, but, uh, really weird that there could be someone that was, like, 18 years old, and they've spent 18 years in that bed—

MM: Mm—

VB: With someone just moving them—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know? And they'll eventually die, but, uh, normally, that, that individual would not have survived birth, but, uh, today we have heroic efforts—

MM: [3:09:00] Mmhmm—

VB: [Unintelligible] birth.

MM: Mmhmm. Wow. (Inhales)

VB: So, mental health was a big one, and, uh, and now, that's even more huge, and drug abuse is huge, and I think about how the views are changing there, because back in my time, it was like, marijuana was a big, bad thing, and you know, anyone with it should be locked up, and you know, I'm thinking, "I didn't know anything about, about it (laughs)," but, um, they said, "Oh, you've [sic] probably have smelled it," and I said, "I don't think I ever have," and (MM laughs)—probably had! (Both laugh) So, so, uh, um, th-the point is, now, people—on cancer—are saying, "It's the only s-surviving situation I can have" or—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You know, it's really interesting—

MM: Yeah—

VB: Uh, the pain is so bad, that's the only thing that's helped, uh, so—b-but we were saying, "Lock up kids who are found with it" and we have a lot in jails today that are—had, had maybe a drug arrest.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Two—twice. So, they're [3:10:00] in for a long time.

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um, so the mental health is—continues to evolve.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Probably, that'd be an area if I was—you know, if I was a young legislator, I'd be working on.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Mmhmm.

MM: Well, and also, like in Indiana, like with the o-opioid crisis and everything, too—

VB: Here—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And yet, and yet, we talk about—s—no, won't say it.

MM: (Laughs) Love that sip! Um...

VB: How can we be so moral, and yet, have these crises?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And I-I'd say, you put that and you put the guns together [loud sound in background] and you're, you're having murder rates in the city that are ridiculous.

MM: Mmhmm. Yeah. There's some big problems to tackle, still. (Both laugh)

VB: Lock your doors!

MM: Oh. Um, what, [3:11:00] in your opinion, is the most important work of the Indiana General Assembly?

VB: What is the most important work of them?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Today or then?

MM: Well, let's start with then.

VB: (Chuckles) I think decent funding of public education—really big. Um, but also, uh, do we have a good repair of, of our infrastructure going on? (Coughs) Not just building more roads, but keeping what we have. (Coughs) And also—excuse me—

MM: Yeah—

VB: And I, I worry about Indiana becoming—we look so—like the buildings are all just getting to be concrete blocks.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And (coughs) I think that we should always find some way in the budget that we include a little bit of arts and new construction. And why I say that— [3:12:01] it doesn't deal, deal at all with way-out craziness, it deals with we soon become just, uh, where—what can we see that's pretty? The trees are being cut down at a horrendous rate (MM interjects: "Mmhmm"), and you know, bridges can be—there's a bridge over Meridian Street about... uh, right north of Kessler Boulevard, you go out a little farther, and then you start—and (coughs) when they first put that in—I don't know if they've changed it—but it went from a spindle, pretty bridge—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: You could see the water [3:13:00] down below it, flowing, and then, when they built it, it was just concrete blocks. And I asked the Legislature, "So, why did they not put the—the bridge back like it was?"

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, uh, I said, "It was a good design." And they said, "Well, we have a 'one size fits all.' That's it. That's the bridge pattern for the state. They're concrete blocks."

MM: Yeah—

VB: And that's the way—and [untelligible] they tear down a covered bridge (blows nose), is [difficult to discern what is being said] what bridge—is kind of a—building a wall. [Speech becomes clearer again] Just lots of little walls.

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um, so, I've—I did add that to a budget, that, that 1 percent of a bridge—however many million dollars it would be—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: One percent isn't a whole lot, but then, um, but would go for architectural design.

MM: Mmhmm—to, like, keep the character of things—

VB: Yes—keep—yes—and, um, they don't all have to look alike—

MM: Yes—

VB: But make it so it fits in aesthetically, and I, I said, "It has nothing to do with being—if we wanna, like, put words to it—it has nothing to do with 'liberal' or 'conservative'; it has to be [sic] with—pleasing for the eye."

MM: Yeah.

VB: “And do we want everything to just look like a blank wall?”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Which is the way currently, I guess. (Both chuckle)

MM: Um... [3:14:04] If we could talk just a little bit about, um... You’ve mentioned the Republican caucus a few times. (VB interjects: “Mmhmm”) Can you tell me a little bit about how that operated during your time?

VB: Mmhmm. Uh, usually, there was an issue that’d take us in there, and it might be budget—questions about it, and talk—discuss it—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, or a bill that was controversial, like the gun legislation—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um... Or to get someone to (laughs) consider, um, voting for something (MM interjects: “Uh-huh”)—they want, they want to try to convince the rest of us—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Uh, why it would be important, and they felt like they wanted that vote of confidence before they take it to the floor, um, and I want to say... I think the caucus chair—I tried to remember—at that time—that probably changed over some of the time, but [3:15:00] Joe Harrison? Maybe it was—is he alive?

MM: I’m not positive—I can’t remember—

VB: He was about my age, um—but Bob Garton’s—Bob Garton always ran a pretty good ship, I felt. Um, just, um, he was a listener, cared a lot about the same issues and—thanks to his wife, um, who was very, very talented also, uh, she just was delightful, but he... you know, he had to follow, I think, Chip Edwards, who had a very bad reputation—was put in jail—and, and Bob just really did, did the right things—but I know that there’s several times that he came to bat for me, and I thought, “Wow. That was really big” – and the one was 1988, where he really, um—and, and he said, “There’s two—” he said, “And Senator Borst [3:16:00] and Senator Mills will do the same.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: “And don’t worry about raising money.” (Both laugh) Now that’s amazing!

MM: Yeah.

VB: Uh, when—and, and that’s going against the Marion County organization, and Pat Miller, you know, was a friend of mine, but she was very much—had to support John Sweazey, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Always did, of course.

MM: Mmhmm... (Inhales) [Sound of rustling, possibly paper, followed by sound of clinking, possibly glass]

VB: Oh, this'll—it's gonna be interesting to see how many of 'em go to check these tapes out!

MM: Yeah! (Both laugh)

VB: [Unintelligible] Oh, holy grail! (Laughs)

MM: I think it'll probably be fine. It'll be a while before they're out, but, um, how would you summarize your time as a state legislator—

VB: Mmhmm—

MM: Overall.

VB: Enjoyable, mmhmm. Um, loved it when little kids came in and wanted to learn about it, you know, they'd wanna—and some of them are adults now (MM interjects: "Uh-huh") – (laughs) you know, one was a guy that runs the irrigation system, and he said, "Oh, yes! I remember when we came to see [3:17:00] you. (MM laughs) You talked to us." And so, the pleasure was—you know, I thought it was all good.

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

VB: I think growing up in the big family really helped, um, being the middle child, and I liked to fight with the older brother, um—I didn't like to fight with him, but he was a bully. And so, I had that early. (MM laughs) He's still alive, so. (MM laughs again) But he did like to hit my arm and bully me, and so (laughs), so I was prepared.

MM: Mmhmm. You knew how to take it—

VB: And you know what—well, yeah—you know what? It was, it was OK.

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm. Um, [sound of rustling; possibly paper] let's see here. What is your favorite story (VB interjects: "Oh, my gosh") or anecdote during your time?

VB: Oh, my gosh.

MM: Can you even limit it? (Chuckles)

VB: Yeah, that's a good question. That might take some thinking.

MM: Yeah, you think about that—

VB: 'Cause I'd have to go through twelve years.

MM: Yeah. (Laughs) It is a long time.

VB: [3:18:01] Mmhmm—

MM: Are there any lessons that stick out for you?

VB: Mm. Yeah, you know, I-I don't tend to say, "I should've done that differently."

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: There's probably some things others would say, "She should've (both laugh) done that differently!" And, uh (stammers), probably, a lesson would be I was really liking it there, and you know, it's the type of [unintelligible] where people stay on and on, and the—they earn a deep, really good income now—it's not like it's 9, \$9500 anymore, and all of that. But, but that aside, um, it goes back—it is a citizen legislature, and I don't think we're meant to go—stay there for thirty years. And a lot of the people who were with me there in 1980, 2, and 3, and 4, and on, are still there or have just retired—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Just—and I'm thinking, um, I know we're supposed to be really bright and all this, but you, you [3:19:00] have, within that timeframe, things you're passionate about—mine was education, mainly, and adult education and I really liked vocational education—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, so that's a pa—all those are passions—and then just people who have the least, I think, is part of my... Probably that good old Quaker church (MM interjects: "Yeah") upgr—bringing that, you know, you appreciate ev—every day, and Da—my dad, who always was the one that did more talking to us, and it was, like, um, leaving what you're doing better than you found it, so he'd give each one of us a plot of garden— "Leave it more than you found it." I'm—I hopefully left the Senate district, you know, I—hopefully better than I found it. (Chuckles)

MM: Uh-huh, uh-huh. (Sniffles) [Sound of rustling; possibly paper] How has the state of Indiana changed over the course of your lifetime?

VB: Wow, that's... (Sucks teeth in thought) [3:20:00] I think the, the housing patterns while they—I saw—lived with them—the patterns in Meridian Kessler while we stabilized with new people moving in, and the enrichment of our kids' lives, um, was great. Um, I don't like that we tend to keep people in clusters. (Stammers) There's still a lot of that old, old, old prejudice going on, and that's some of the older people and that just blows my mind.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um (sucks teeth in thought again), the gun violence. (Stammers) Laws don't help there, 'cause they're taken off the book—once you're passionately for something, you're no longer there, and, you know, others were busy with their issues, and they just didn't pick up on it—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But yeah, the (exhales)—

MM: I read—

VB: Those are the main things—

MM: Oh, I'm sorry—

VB: Well, I think that, [3:21:00] I think that and the drug epidemic, using... the opo—opioids?

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Bad.

MM: Yeah. I read somewhere, um, in a newspaper article, that—a-and you highlighted this—a lot of your friends, when you first moved onto Meridian, you know, they were, they were leaving, they were going to other places—

VB: They were leaving, yeah, mmhmm—

MM: But I read that you wanted your kids to a-attend Shortridge—

VB: Yeah—

MM: Because it was diverse, and it was local, and—

VB: All of that, well, all of that. And also, the real world, when they—if you keep in your little group throughout your life, um, wherever you work, you know, and, and I thought, “Well, my kids, who are probably gonna,” you know, “work in the city” – probably not farmland anymore, so you, you wanna be with people that you learn to trust early on. We had some really interesting things. Uh, one of the longest, oldest family [sic] in Indianapolis was someone—the Stuart Funeral Home people. [3:22:00] And their daughter, uh (mumbles under breath)—I'm having trouble—I think it was probably the time, but I'm having trouble remembering her name and (MM interjects: “Uh-huh”)—Tanya, Tanya Stuart—

MM: OK—

VB: Was my daughter Sharon's best friend at Shortridge. And Tanya, um, the Stuart's family lived here since, like, the 1800s, and she has African-American in her blood, and, uh, she—so, she's considered on her, you know, black.

MM: Mmhmm, mmhmm—

VB: Uh... We had an exchange student—we always had an exchange students [sic] at our home—and one of 'em was from Brazil. And her father, apparently, I learned later, was really high in government there. And she was the darkest skinned person I'd ever seen—this cute, cute 16-year-old girl. And we all had chores at our house, and she said, “I've never s—used a broom before!” (MM chuckles) [3:23:00] She said, “We have lots of help at home.”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I said, “You got to be kidding. You don't have to sweep.” She said, “No, I like it! I like it!” (MM laughs) But anyway, Sharon—so, Riviera Club—do you know where it is? (MM

interjects: “I don’t”) Riviera’s like—Illinois and White River, where the ca—where the canal goes through Illinois, and there’s a little—56th and Illinois, there’s a little shopping area there—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: But there’s, the White River goes through there—

MM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know where that is—

VB: OK. So, um, Riviera is—you go north just about a block, and to the left is a swimming club and it was always just a private swimming club. I didn’t think anything more ab—it’s pri—but that’s where kids swam (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), so if you lived in the neighborhood, that’s where you joined Riviera and you swam—kids who were on the swim team. Well, Sharon, who wasn’t on the swim team, um—and Gladys is her exchange student from Brazil and as dark as my refrigerator—and Riviera, um, gave her [3:24:00] a membership, ‘cause she’s living with our family.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: While she’s there that s—that year at (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) our house. And Sharon thought, “Swell!” So, the next day—we get that [unintelligible]—the next day—her best friend was Tanya Stuart—after school, she said, “Let’s go straight, straight to Riv—we’re gonna,” you know, “We’ll get a snack (MM interjects: “Yeah”), and if you wanna swim, you can, or otherwise, you could snack and we’ll visit a while (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), then you go home.” But they go, and they said, “Well, she doesn’t have a pass.” And they—Sharon takes her up to get a pass. And, “Do you live with the—our family?” “No, um, I live at—” like, I’m trying to think, she said, maybe, “46th or 45th and Illinois—”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And, and they just said, “Sorry.” Uh, “Can’t give you a guest pass.” But, but if she’d been white, she coulda had a guest pass. But they didn’t [3:25:00] say that. So, Sharon and she left and came straight to our home, and they’re giggling. And they said, “You won’t believe it! They wouldn’t let—they wouldn’t let Tanya in,” and Sharon and she are just laughing. They said, “Isn’t that interesting? Gladys can go, Tanya can’t.” And they’re giggling like cute little girls, but... I got it. So, Steve West was the Councilman from there. So, a group of us petitioned Riviera, and we became bad people (laughs) [sound of clinking; possibly glass] for doing that. But if we’re—neighborhood kids are invited to swim there, and you had to pay \$50 a year—\$60, \$70, whatever it was—anyone who applied, who lives in the neighborhood—you didn’t do any pedigree or anything—um, should be able to do it. So, a lot—it got really— [3:26:00] that’s part of being liberal (laughs), I guess.

MM: (Laughs)

VB: Or is it called fair?

MM: Yeah.

VB: But anyway, Tanya, to this day, I think she lives in Noblesville now—she was a lawyer, sharp gal (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), um—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Incredible person. And family has—I said, “We have lived in—Tanya has lived in Indianapolis. Her family has lived here longer than my family.”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: We always lived out in the farmland. And I said, “I don’t get it.”

MM: Yeah—

VB: And I got kind of... Not very good to do (both laugh). Things were ended at Rivi [sic]. (Chuckles)

MM: Yeah, wow.

VB: Yes, so—but, you know, that’s—change comes slow and Indiana—I don’t know why we drag our feet, you know, um, it seems... Oh, we wanna do—I don’t know. Maybe it’s better than I think—I haven’t really been back for... [3:27:00] 3 years.

MM: Mmhmm. And did you live in Illinois for a time—

VB: I lived for about 17 years there—

MM: Oh, OK—

VB: Mmhmm. And had remarried in 2004—

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: With a widower that friends thought we would be (laughs; MM interjects: “Uh-huh”), get along well, and turned out—

MM: And what, what was his name?

VB: His name was John Williams.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: And he was a partner at Sidley Austin law firm. His wife had died, pretty suddenly, of pancreatic cancer maybe 6 or 7 years before.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he was about to go into a retirement center, and people knew him and said, “He’s just a dear person and he’s really (chuckles) smart and—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “Fun,” and, uh, so, when he called to go out to dinner, so (laughs) real man calling [unintelligible] (MM interjects: “Yeah”) a woman, and, um, and he said, “But I don’t drive, ‘cause I’ve—” he was legally blind, and he (MM interjects: “Mm”) had polio come back as an adult (MM interjects: “Ach”) so he had, uh, braces on his legs (MM interjects: “Mhmm”), didn’t dr—anyway, didn’t drive. I said, “Well, I’ll drive!” (Both laugh) And it worked out [3:28:00] well.

MM: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

VB: But, um.

MM: And then, did you get married—

VB: Yeah, we got married in ’04—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: First date was ’02.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: I said—so, 16 years—that was a long time.

MM: Yeah.

VB: And, uh, just fun, smart, uh, laughed a lot—he sa—he was in the church choir—

MM: Mhmm—

VB: Uh, had a great voice—he was a Yale—

MM: Oh—

VB: Law graduate—

MM: Wow—

VB: Brilliant mind—is kind of a who’s who—and yet, very meek, quiet—

MM: Mhmm—

VB: As far as never boisterous—

MM: Mhmm—

VB: Not meek, but he was (MM interjects: “Uh-huh”) never (stammers)—but someone would come up, and he’s, he’s saying, “That’s something-something Macy IV.” He said, he said, “You just caught a little of the conversation—you know, I did their, their, uh, planning.” So, he was quite a notable probate lawyer.

MM: Wow—

VB: And also, uh, represented the Illinois Bar Association to the Statehouse in Illinois.

MM: [3:29:00] (Gasps)

VB: So, [unintelligible], and, uh, he was a Repub—a, a Democrat changed from being a Republican back in the ‘70s, and became a Democrat, which was quite interesting.

MM: Hmm. And so, was he from Illinois, then—

VB: He was from Illinois, yeah, sh—from, uh, Winnetka.

MM: OK. So (VB interjects: “Mmhmm”), uh, when did you, then, move back to Indiana? How did you come back here—

VB: Well, he died in 2012—

MM: Oh, OK—

VB: In Florida, so I was there for a while, and that’s where I own prop—and I own property—I said, I said, “You’re a good lawyer, because (MM chuckles) you sold your place (MM chuckles again), moved into my place—” He said, “Well, you had a better view!” (Both laugh) And, and then, my parents’ farm sold, southwest, and I got—we got lots of money for that—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And, um, um, I bought a little place, small place, in Naples, Florida.

MM: OK—

VB: So, that’s what I owned. And the place in Wilmette, my daughter and her husband bought for me to live in—it was an apartment near them.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Which, which [3:30:00] I—all the time those kids were growing up, I had them every day.

MM: Aww, uh-huh.

VB: They wrote the best letters when I lost to Congress, and they wrote me letters—how sorry they were, and then several put down at the bottom—they all wrote them and didn’t see each other’s letters—but one 8-year-old said, “But not very.” (Both laugh) He said, “Really sorry.” Then, he said, “But not very.” (MM laughs) And then—and Skatie, who’s now a designer in—clothing designer in LA, says, “Why do you wanna go to Congress? You’ll never see us anymore!” (MM chuckles) She said, “You will b—” I said, “Sure I will.” She said, “No! When you come home, you have to go to Indianapolis. You’ll never be up here!”

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So, she said, “Why are you doing this to me?” (Both laugh) She was—I was her escape from her parents’ house.

MM: Yeah. Oh. That’s sweet—

VB: So, anyway, it’s all good.

MM: Mmhmm. Um, I—(stammers) you’ve been away for a while, so maybe you haven’t kept up as much, but has the Indiana General Assembly changed since your time?

VB: And that I haven’t kept [3:31:00] up with.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: You know, I really, really have not, ‘cause I’m back down in Florida in the winter.

MM: Right.

VB: And, um, but what brings me here is the fact we have one of the world’s renowned researchers in this multiple myeloma—cancer.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And when Indiana—uh, if I was involved in government—I’d say, “We, we should be, uh, talking about economic development of these researchers that are world renowned.” This man, Dr. [Rafat] Abonour, travels all over the world from Thursday to Monday giving seminars on what he’s doing with his cancer research.

MM: Wow.

VB: Every treatment is just for the individual. And, uh—

MM: And he lives in Indianapolis—

VB: Lives in Indianapolis.

MM: Wow.

VB: And IU’s done a good job—he has a full professorship at IU.

MM: Wow.

VB: Yeah. A fairly young guy, and he’s recently bought—his mother—he’s from Syria—his mother’s here, and she’s just absolutely the sweetest lady—has become a good friend.

MM: [3:32:00] Oh! Uh-huh.

VB: (Chuckles)

MM: That’s nice.

VB: And she’s shy, and, you know (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”), just a lovely person (MM interjects: “Yeah”). But he, he knows how to—um, when you have a doctor that absolutely knows... patient to patient to patient, and his patients—the people—you go to the IU infusion center, and my kids feel sorry for me, they’re dreading it, and I said, “I love it!” (Laughs) I said, “First of all, they’re really nice. The snacks are great—”

MM: (Laughs)

VB: “And all the nurses are RNs.” And I said, “Dr. [Rafat] Abonour makes you feel like you’re the most important person in the world—”

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: “When he’s, uh, doing his check-up on you.”

MM: Mmhmm. And that’s what you want.

VB: Yeah. It’s amazing.

MM: Wow. That’s good—

VB: So, Indiana, you know, he’s what brought me here.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: I wouldn’t be here otherwise.

MM: Yeah. That’s nice that you already had the connection (VB laughs) and were able to do that, so. Well, what, if any, enduring qualities do Hoosiers still have or hold dear?

VB: Hmm. Good point. [3:33:00] ‘Cause I think we’ve done a good job of wrecking our little villages and towns that we (MM chuckles)—which were so charming (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”). You know, we’ve put so many roads through that, um, we cut off at, like, Kentland—I’ve never been back there.

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And I think it’s just highways around it. Um, farmland is being gobbled up or (MM interjects: “Mmhmm”) redirected, and—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Um, but Hoosiers? I don’t know that anything unusual—

MM: Uh-huh—

VB: Uh, in fact, the fact that we’re one of the drug capitals of the world doesn’t make me feel good, and the fact we’re so—Chicago’s much bigger than we are, and we’re having more murders per night or as many as they are—something’s weird.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And that doesn’t make me feel very good.

MM: So, you think we’ve actually lost some of what we used to have—

VB: I think we have lost something.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And... [Sound of clinking; possibly a glass] And politics is part of it—I think everyone wants a picture op—I think they, they want to be smiling, digging holes, and they want to be smiling, um, [3:34:00] meeting with the not-for-profits—those are wonderful.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: But, um, I sure would like to see someone out front saying, “We need to stop it now. We need to get these gun laws... in order—there should be no hunting of any sort in the city, so why does anyone have to have a long rifle in the city? And if you go some place else to hunt, fine, you have it locked up in some kind of safe, but you don’t... carry a handgun when you’re going into a Pacer game—or maybe you can’t do it; I don’t know—

MM: Right—

VB: But, but some people had a handgun in the Statehouse back when I was there.

MM: (Exhales) Whew... I feel like—

VB: So, I don’t know, I’m not—

MM: Yeah.

VB: Um, but it’s the number—I don’t know that our popu—it hasn’t grown, but we have this violence. And you can’t blame it on... Well, I’m sorry—I, I th-think it’s prejudiced to say we blame it on [3:35:00] im-immigration—we’re gonna blame everything on immigration (laughs), and I’m saying, “Wait a minute! The very best thing that we’ve had, I think...” And, and this is why I have such hope, uh—I have two great-grandchildren of which one of them, the dad’s Cuban, the mom’s, the mom’s blon—very blonde-haired and blue-eyed.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: And this little—and she is so darn smart—she—Scarlett is dark, curly hair, and she, um, has the brownest eyes, and ivory skin, and her dad is very Cuban—I mean, he’s lighter than she is, but—

MM: Mm—

VB: She wants to play school—starting about 3, wanted to play school with me—and the first question she asked, when I’m the student (MM chuckles), was “Are you bilingual?” OK, and I thought, “We have hope. (Laughs) We have hope for this!”

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: But, but [3:36:00] that’s what I’m saying, “What’s wrong with us?” Which i—so, that’s the thing, do I think we’ve gotten better? I’m not, I’m not sure.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Um, and I think some of it is our leaders are divisive and they shouldn’t be. Uh, I... [Sound of hammering in background] I don’t like, I don’t like divisiveness.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: So, an-another great-grandchild and his—kept his—I can't even spell the name, it's this long, but it's Spiro is the first name, and the Greek name is about this long—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And he's 2. (Laughs) And I'm thinking, "Oh, dear. Now, should he have been, should he have been called Spiro? (Both laugh) I don't know why his mother did that." But he does look like—he looks like (laughs)—he looks like a little Greek!

MM: Awww!

VB: And he's cute as can be.

MM: Uh-huh.

VB: Yeah.

MM: Mmhmm. That's, that's great. Well, we have covered a lot of material here today! (Both laugh)

VB: And you know what? If you decide to—you wanna talk some more—

MM: [3:37:00] OK—

VB: Then I should say, "Well, by the way, we should delete the first three pages!" (Both laugh)

MM: Well, yeah, I mean—I, I—

VB: You know, but I say, you know, Morrie Mills always gave me some good hints.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: One was running for Congress—I will just say this, because when I was gonna run, he said, "No, wait and run in two years. Don't run when you're running—when the president's running."

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: "Run in the off year." And that was back—thinking I sh-should've done that in (MM interjects: "Mmhmm") '94—I think, kind of, wondered why I ran—a lot of 'em probably wondered why I ran for mayor, uh, but that was kind of ta—after talking to Bill Hudnut, you know, he—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: He was not a fr—he had to see we're not Friends, even though toward the end they became, you know, Friendlikes.

MM: Mmhmm.

VB: Yeah, it's interesting.

MM: Yeah. Well, um, yeah—is there anything that, that I haven’t asked about (VB interjects: “I don’t think so”) or that you wanna talk about that we haven’t [3:38:00] gone through yet?

VB: I-I can’t think of anything—if you wanna take that and look—just look through it, I know that I, I was reading it until (stammers; MM chuckles) I didn’t realize there was so much, but there’s a lot of, I realized, typos—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: And some things I should’ve marked—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Differently.

MM: Yeah, I’d love to take a look at it, and then—

VB: But there’s a space and there’s more of the back half is the legislative stuff.

MM: OK—

VB: The early is more of my parents, they were do—there’s a little bit of a... family tree—

MM: Mmhmm—

VB: Started in there, but I haven’t paid much attention to that.

MM: Yeah. Well, how about I take that, and I’ll look through it and see if there’s anything we missed or anything I’d like to ask about, and then you (VB interjects: “OK”) can kinda reflect—

VB: I’ll try to look through these—I didn’t really get a chance to look at these—

MM: Sure, sure, and then maybe, um, on Monday or Tuesday of next (VB interjects: “Mmhmm”) week—I’m pretty wide open—

VB: Alright—

MM: We could meet up and...

VB: Yeah, and that’s—

MM: We’ll see then.

[Interview ends]