

ILOHI Interview with Van Smith

January 30, 2020

Indianapolis, Indiana

Interview by Ben Baumann

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and Ben Baumann

MP3 File, Sony

Van Smith =VS

Ben Baumann=BB

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BB: [0:00] So, before we start, I'll just state for the record that my name is Ben Baumann and I'm here in Muncie, Indiana at the home of Mr. Van Smith. Who I'll be interviewing today, and today's date is January 30, 2020. All right, so to get started, if you could just tell me about when and where you were born.

VS: Ben, I was born in Oneida in New York, right, the exact geographic center of the state of New York.

BB: Interesting. And what were your parents' names?

VS: My parents were Paul Smith and his wife, Reta Smith.

BB: Okay. And was your...were your parents originally from New York as well or?

VS: My father was from Binghamton, New York and gone to Syracuse University graduated came to Oneida to a run the [1:00] shoe store, he had joined a shoe manufacturing company, and was sent to Oneida to manage the shoe store. And my mother went to high school in Oneida and then went to work for the Oneida community, the big employer in town. She was a minister had an administrative job, met the shoe store manager, and that was that was the merge.

BB: Okay. Wow, interesting.

VS: They quite soon after that, I was, I was born soon after they married, or so after they're married, and my dad died. Just before I was two years old. So, [2:00] the household became my grandmother, who worked in the casket factory in Oneida, sewing linings, became the homemaker. My mother continued her job. And I was the kid at home for both of them to take care of. So, we grew up in that sense.

BB: Sure. Okay. Very interesting. And where did your family hail from before New York?

VS: They were all really New York. My dad's parents came from Watertown, New York. And my dad's father, my dad was an only child. His father and mother lived in Watertown [3:00] or his dad ran a glove manufacturing company. They had just the one child, my dad. And the fortunate thing, in all misfortunes of early deaths. My grandfather and grandmother passed away and own their own home. Which, when everything was settled, left about \$10,000 in trust for

their one grandchild me. And my mother had dated earlier in life had dated a lawyer in Oneida. So, that later became my trustee. And that was that time \$10,000 became and the vehicle for me [4:00] later, to go to Colgate University, which is just down the road from Oneida and costs about total cost in those days was about \$10,000. So, my 4 years at Colgate came from my grandmother's house.

BB: Interesting. Okay. Yeah, very cool. And how did you get to Indiana?

VS: My mother remarried later in life, to a gentleman who I had known for many, many years, and had been one of those great guys I would go to, he and his wife were are always sort of semi part of the family. And he would write the applications for me and he encouraged me to go to Colgate [5:00] So I'm not a college guy himself, but he played golf with the trustee at Colgate. And that's how I happened to go there. He lost his wife and in 1948 in the middle of the examination week at the end of my sophomore year in Colgate, they weren't married, and they came to Colgate. And they got (unintelligible) came and had their reception there in the middle of exam week, I remember. And were all close friends. And it was a great occasion for me to pick up a stepfather, that stepfather [6:00] became shortly after that, the President of the Wallace Solar Company making flatware in Connecticut, and as time went on why he attempted to purchase that company from the family that owned it and never could come to any conclusions of about it. But he did. He was well known in that flatware business, knife, fork, spoon, business. And there was a company in Muncie, Indiana called Ontario's Silver. And he did make some offers to buy that from the owner. My stepfather [7:00] made an offer for this Ontario company in Muncie in while he offered a purchase didn't work, they offered him a chance to come out. They needed somebody to run it. And they wanted him to come out and run that told him if you run that spend half your time there, we'll split whatever you can make it that business with you. So, he came out here half time, the other half time he lived in Connecticut where he had been the head of the Wallace Company and so they were out here. I my experience took me from Colgate. And I should probably follow that up for I match my stepfather. I graduated from Colgate [8:00] June 10, 1950. And I had two job offers each with a bank from Philadelphia. And I had the I held big because I could make a choice to which one of those that was going to take now was scheduled before the end of May...of June excuse me to make that decision. And then on the 25th day of June 1950. Truman started the Korean War. And I knew I was 1 A to be drafted. And I pictured myself digging trenches and holes and hard stuff. I had decided I outa to do something, so I enlisted [9:00] in the Air Force. And went away to Lackland Air Force bases all good people going to the Air Force. And I went through training in Lachlan. And all this time my father and mother were coming out and spending halftime in Muncie, Indiana and a half time in Wallingford, Connecticut and he was running this little plant called Ontario's over on Muncie, Indiana. I got out and had an interesting time in the Air Force spent the first year or so going through basic and earned a finally earned one stripe [10:00] and got called down to the orderly room one day and the master sergeant who was running the orderly room said, when I walked up to his desk, he stood up and said, "Sir, I have orders. They're promoting you to second lieutenant." So, I said, "Thank you." I got a commission, tore my one stripe off that shirt per bar, I bought a bar and put it on it. And that was the training I had and I became a second lieutenant.

And then traveled around for two or three years got out. When I got out of the service. I got out when the Korean War started. I was doing personnel work. And I noticed new records were coming. I said "People will look forward to your commitment, [11:00] which I had. Since they wanted to downgrade the size of the Air Force. You could petition to get out after three years, which I did. So, I got out. Surprisingly, a year earlier. As a first lieutenant and decided I wanted to go to law school. Well, I got out in it was a late spring. That would have been 53'. So, I went to Yale talk to people and they said," Oh, that's great. Nice transcript why don't you come next year, because we already have our class." And I was getting that story, whenever and so one of the places I stopped was in Washington DC at Georgetown Law School. I was sitting in a room in the administrative area [12:00] of the law school. And this Jesuit priest came walking by and said, "Hi" and I said "Hi." And he said, "Well, what are you doing here?" And I said "I just got out of the service and I'm trying to get into law school. He said, "Come in sit down." He happened to be the Dean of the Law School, was just great to me. And said, "We can get you in the law school, I think" And after he looked at the transcript. So, I said, "Great." And I began law school in the fall of 54'. It would have been, and being a veteran, I could go to night, school and day school. So, in two years, I finished the three years of law school by going to the day and the night school. [13:00] Without ever diminishing my real desire to make Budweiser the most profitable company in America. I bought sufficiently beer during that period not work too hard. But worked hard enough to finish the three years in two years here. And in DC. If you're a veteran, you could take the bar before you graduated from law school and your last semester if you're a veteran, so I took the bar, pass the bar, and then 24 months, I had my law degree and was a member of the bar. And so that is, then I went back to what I wanted to do is go out and visit my stepfather and mother who are living in Muncie, Indiana. So, I came out [14:00] here to visit thought that I maybe take three weeks or something I really wanted to, I had never become that acquainted with my stepfather and I really liked him and he's a good buddy. So much older now is so I came out and he said, "I've got a guy downtown I want you to meet who have lunch with I find, whose a lawyer, so I went downtown had lunch with him in Muncie, Indiana. A stranger to the town with a guy named Ray Clark, who was a lawyer in Muncie. And we talked a little bit about general stuff. And at the end he said, "I want to show you our office." And I said "Fine." So, we went to the office and he had one vacant room there and he [15:00] said "I'll tell you what, I'll put some furniture in your new income." And he said, "You can get acquainted." He and my stepfather were good friends. He said, "Come on out and get acquainted with your folks. You never had a chance to get acquainted with them." And I said, "Oh, no." And I had told him my plan was to go to Connecticut or New York to practice. And he said, "I'm gonna tell you something. Young guys, right out of law school. Don't know they're tuchus from all around. So why don't you just stay here one year, and then you can go to New York, Connecticut, and when you sit down to do an interview, you can say, 'Oh, I, you know, I already have.' I've done a case or two and I don't know well, and been to trial." So, he said, "You'd be way ahead of those kids coming right out of school." [16:00] And it sounded interesting to me. So, I sat down. Went to work practicing law in Muncie, Indiana, living with my new, my stepfather and my mom.

BB: Okay, wow. Interesting yeah.

VS: Got interested in the Muncie community. And from, from the standpoint of the legislature or politics I immediately became interested in the politics. My grandmother was such a great part of my life was very much a New York, Irish, Democrat woman. And in her casket factory, I could just in my mind, picture her as that woman on top of the machine [17:00] in her Irish leadership role, getting all the rest of the employees to join the union telling them they didn't know anything about who they're putting down here around this plant. So I really came to know her, we became good friends.

BB: So, she had a lot of influence then on your political development.

VS: Yeah, I can. I can remember my father and mother, sitting at a kitchen table with her and bringing a banker and the banker was, and we're all having a libation. And the banker finally got they got serious talking politics, and he really got more serious than any of us wanted him to. And he said to my grandmother, Agnes, he said, "Aggie, I don't think you'd vote for [18:00] Jesus Christ if he ran on the Republican ticket. And she slammed her glass on and she said, "Jesus Christ would never run as a Republican. But she was a very ardent Democrat.

BB: I bet. Wow. That's very interesting.

VS: So, I did get interested in politics and in Muncie, Indiana.

BB: Okay, very interesting. And remind me, where'd you go to law school?

VS: Georgetown, Georgetown, DC.

BB: Okay, got it. Very interesting. Let's see. What did your mother do at the time when you're growing up?

VS: She was working as an administrative employee, I lived in Oneida and a big [19:00] Oneida employer was Oneida community that made knives, forks, and spoons. Cheap work there.

BB: Okay. And I guess you didn't have any siblings? Correct?

VS: No siblings,

BB: And so how would you describe your childhood overall then?

VS: I was because of the loss of my dad. My element, my grandmother's element in her family was limited in number so I was and I had lost my dad. So, I was the interest of my grandmother was one of 10 or 11. And they were all in around at night and they all had kids and grandkids. So, the family the good Irish family. [20:00] All it interested in me is their kid who was his dad and was Aggie's grandkid. (Unintelligible) And so, it was big in the small town of Oneida. We were had a big family, but not in our building.

BB: Right. That sounds good.

VS: Knew everybody and went to high school there.

BB: Sure. Okay. That's great. And let's see what schools did you attend growing up?

VS: I went to high school in Oneida. And went to Colgate. And then went into the service and then went to Georgetown. So, I had a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Colgate. And then [21:00] I went on to stay active in academics, I have the Doctorate in Law from Georgetown and then five other honor (Unintelligible). So, I got half a dozen doctorates. And from Indiana, because that, that while I had my own alma mater, Colgate, I was asked to join the board of trustees. And then because they didn't have anybody else that would take it. I was Chairman of the Board of Trustees at my alma mater Colgate, for a decade. And then I was asked to join the board of Catholic University and I serve there as Vice Chairman [22:00] for many years and chairman was always somebody in red. They asked him. In Indiana, the legislative experience, introduced me to some wonderful Indiana leaders and Governor Whitcomb appointed me to the Higher Education Commission when it was originally formed. Mike Carmichael from South Bend was the chairman. And he died playing tennis first year or two. I really became interested in what the commission for our education was doing [23:00] and became its chairman for many years, but I was on 22 years I served on the commission for higher educational under four or five governors both parties. So, I got acquainted and that's why I ended up with honors from Indiana State and Ball State and Vincennes. And then got an honorary for my alma mater. But the smaller colleges had a feeling that I sort of on the commission for higher education to always tried to make sure they didn't get overrun by the big boys.

BB: Sure, naturally. Yeah. Interesting. Okay. And so, before you went to college, [24:00] did you have any favorite subjects in school or?

VS: Politics. I can recall. For a short time, we lived in New Haven, Connecticut, all my mother worked there. My grandmother lived there. And we came back. I can remember when the, at the Democrat National Convention for Roosevelt's fourth term. The big activity in the convention, was one of the real conventions of our American history, was great. Because everyone knew that Roosevelt wasn't gonna live. So, the contest became [25:00] nominating the vice president for Roosevelt's fourth term. And there were many candidates, and many well-known Democrats. And that went on for many ballots. And calling in a real old convention style. And I was a kid in the then seventh or eighth grades. And I can remember sitting up, my mother grandmother gone to bed, sitting up at night with the radio, and all my papers going through those ballots, "the great state of North Dakota casts its three votes for. And it went on all night long. And I can remember how great that was. Truman, obviously was the final surprising nominee. [26:00] After all, it's there were seven or eight very distinguished Democrats.

BB: Yeah. That's interesting. Very cool.

VS: And at the time, though I knew nothing about Indiana. I can remember being impressed that there were a couple of Indiana people that played a big part in that Democratic Convention. But I've always been sort of really interested political life.

BB: Let's see. Were you part of any clubs or organizations in college or in high school or?

VS: Yeah. In high school. I, again, because of interest in politics. [27:00] The guy when I was a senior in high school, I said to myself and to my, to a couple of wonderful teachers who supported me. We're not teaching anything about government. What we ought to do is we have political parties. And we only have people run in this junior class. You know just come on along. So, my neighbor was a guy named Dave Beekman. And he was a junior. And another great guy in a class was a guy named Bill Pryor and he was son of the superintendent of schools. They were both good guys. So, I convinced our faculty through poor the people in government. Convinced those two guys to run. [28:00] We had two political parties. And I convinced Leo Che, who was an alderman took me to the mayor, they convinced the mayor to get the voting machines out. As I said, "You oughta teach high school kids how to use these voting machines. So, in high school, we put we had two political parties, and we put the voting machines out and they had rallies. We had conventions, had a great time and they ran the election and my neighbor won and beat the superintendent's kid, who superintendent's kid went on to Princeton. Dave Beekman went on to Colgate. But it was interesting. [29:00] Again, just to hit I think for my grandmother and her sister who are always very close, her sister's husband was Mayor of Oneida. They were all Democrats.

BB: That's that is very interesting.

VS: I've always had a great respect for the Democrat Party as well as my Republican Party. In fact. Democrats are a lot more fun. And in Indiana, in Indiana politics, I met many very, very close and admired Democrat friends. When John Hillenbrand ran against Bob Orr [30:00]. John, his wife and Margaret and I have traveled around John bought a company out in New Mexico. That for one of his kids was going to operate. You know, the Hillenbrand's are big and Batesville. But we flew out together done that plan. He wanted me to walk around. We thought we were always in fact, I think I got president of the manufacturers or something while we're both candidates, and there's a picture somewhere we've got of me sitting between the two of them, but I chaired [31:00] the Republican Finance Committee for Bob Orr. Who was a great friend of John's. We just have always had good friends. Frank O'Bannon, and Frank is very was a very good friend and his dad. Frank, we're going to talk about the 51' session. His dad, Frank was Chairman of the Finance Committee in the Senate in the 51' session. So, anything I had in the House he'd take care of. When we were there. But it was O'Bannon's just been wonderful. And close friends and the first couple that Evan Bayh had for dinner in the governor's house. I think we're my wife and myself. So, his dad Birch and I were [32:00] good friends. While I've been active in the Republican Party and this bitterness sits around, just turns my stomach.

BB: I'm sure it must be, feels so strange.

VS: I'm inclined to have differences politically. But to really be able to have a lemonade afterwards. As good friends. Well, in Muncie, Indiana, became interested. And there was a big Jaycees club here. Jaycees were vague. And it's over 300 Jaycees in Muncie. And today, I don't think it's even active. [33:00] But it was a very active organization with political, but we had some great national speakers. We were, thought we were pretty snoozy. And we did elect a Hoosier as president of the National Jaycees. Big campaign and big convention, loved it. For the first time, put a radio in our trunk and the car. Great campaign up in Minneapolis. I think it was. But at any rate. We've been active in Jaycee politics. And so, a group of friends...why don't you run [34:00] for the state house. And so, I did. We won a primary together. There are two seats from here. And they've always been Democrat. But we ran in there that John Kennedy and Nixon were running. And good Indiana people wouldn't vote for a Catholic. So, the Republicans did pretty well. And we took the two seats, which had always been Democrat. And I went down as a surprising. frankly. [35:00] And as I said, we're married on the 19th of November and went down for the organizational meeting in December. And as we went to the organization meeting, the hold overs, which were only 14 of them I noticed, we're going to have a meeting for an hour and a half before they're gonna invite the rest of us in and we had 72, we had, so we had by far the biggest, so we go woah, wait a minute. So, they were going to organize the House. We had through friends, I had four or five friends and a batch of new people that were down there. Keith Bulen was went on to be [36:00] right...who was very active in that session, very much a leader. And I had known in the law business, a guy who ended up as a speaker, who had been not in not a holdover, but had served one term before that. So came back and all the young bucks are for him for speaker. And so, we, we organized in and we didn't take all of the spots, but we sat down in about four or five of us. So, we're sort of leaders of a new bunch, sat down with the old bunch. And we negotiated the chairmanships, we took about half of them [37:00] away from old lawyers, but we did ask Johnny Coppice who had served before, and was a hold over, and had been on the Ways and Means since we had nobody that had been on, which means Johnny Coppice took that. And I got appointed to that and sort of handled the education parts that I was interested in. And the post-secondary education, not the high school, not the public schools. And well, you could be downs through the chairman, various Chairman's, I didn't we split em up. We had some wonderful, wonderful people. [38:00] The chairman of the Labor Committee, Fisher, George Fisher was rather a high school coach here that I knew well. And George was a guy everybody wanted as chairman of the Labor Committee because he was a big guy. And very persuasive, looking and acting and handled the Labor Committee. Without any there wasn't any question about who was boss when you sat down at the table. But there are a lot of memories like that. I can recall Merrill Moore's wanted, then took and was the Chairman of Judiciary and [39:00] in the Senate. Well, I should first talk about as you know, better than I the unique organization of the 50. Of the 61' session. A tie in the Senate 25-25. And a big majority 74 in the in the House, big group Republican majority, with a Democrat Governor and a Republican Lieutenant Governor back when they used to run separately. [40:00] So Matt Welch was our wonderful guy. Just a super guy. Big man at Vincennes was the Governor and Dick Versteen also, a guy had become a good friend was the lieutenant governor. So, you got a Democratic

Governor, a Republican Lieutenant Governor and a House that was a whole bunch of new young guys in the Republican Party. And a Senate that was tied 25-25. What a political environment. And that was a year after the census. So, what are you going to do? And I was Chairman of the Reapportionment Committee, which we're sure we're doing versus session [41:00], but we might have done something in the second session. But for a guy who loves to eat wheat at the political troth it was just made for fun.

BB: I bet. That is very interesting.

VS: Frank O'Bannon the father of later Governor Frank O'Bannon, the Governor Frank O'Bannon had a brother Bob O'Bannon, who was a big lobbyist. And Bob O'Bannon, at the time, was present in the Muncie chamber. And we roomed together at hotel during the session [42:00] even down here, he was a Democrat, again, and I was the Republican from Muncie, but we were together and he was very well known in the lobbyists bunch, so I ended up being having a lot of fun with the lobbyists. Knew them well. And with the 72, folks, the Indianapolis newspaper, picked me out as the outstanding freshman legislator. In that session, I'm trying to think of the guy's name who always graded the legislators, and he wrote for the Indianapolis newspapers. [43:00] Well known political writer. I think I'm getting old.

BB: Well, it's hard to remember all those details. A lot of stuff.

VS: 91, maybe. I had a call this week, interesting has been speaking of age. Now, I had a call from a guy who was a young man on a budget agency. Because in that session, the four of us are named to the Legislative Advisory Commission, which is now called a budget agency that works between the sessions. And I was one of the appointees to that. And we worked with the budget agency, and the young guy who worked with us just out of the blue after all these years, called about two weeks ago and said [44:00] "I heard you are alive." and he said, "I called you to ask." He said, "Do you think you're the last one alive from that session?" I said, "It never dawned on me to think of it that way, but thanks for the call. I'm glad you're interested." There were a lot of there was a state senator in that session, a Democrat. He was chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the State Senate. He later became a federal judge in Marion County in Indianapolis Southern District. [45:00] Oh, I should remember his name and I don't you could immediately do it by looking at the Senate. I don't have a list of the senators, but oh, I'm sorry, I can't remember a very distinguished guy and made a great name for himself. So, but Muriel Moores was Chairman of our Judiciary Committee. And I can recall on the last 80 hours of the session, we'd sit down on the House and say, this is the next bill, we want to get through the Senate. So, Merle take that over to the Chairman of the Finance Committee over in the Senate and say, "Well, here's the next one." And he'd say, "Well, here's our next one, and (Unintelligible) and run it back. Then we get through that, and then we'd say, "Okay, now what's [46:00] our next level?"

BB: Yep, part of the process.

VS: But we had a great time doing that as a bunch of, frankly, younger guys who had never, never been there before.

BB: Absolutely. So, when did you when did you become affiliated with the Republican Party

VS: Affiliated. Well, I had interests in both parties. I had interest in politics, and politics and government was the interest. It wasn't the party was the main interests. It was government. And people expressing themselves in groups. That was most interesting. Now it happens that there's a Republican and a Democrat party [47:00]. That may change in historically it was different. And it may be different for future, but I must admit my because of my Irish Catholic Democrat, New York background, that was all Democrat. And my affiliation was a Democrat and sort of like my grandmother, Jesus Christ would never be a Republican. As I matured, I found myself as an economics major in college. I found myself more in touch with principles that were may be aligned more with the Republican Party. And then, aside from the political life [48:00]. I got into a fight with the US Chamber. I came back when I was running for the legislature. I hit left the law practice in Muncie and join my stepfather. And we bought that company and Ontario company where he was running, and we bought that company. And after a couple of years of law practice, I joined this company. So, when we were in the legislature, and thereafter I was in the company with him. He's behind you there. Looking at you. [49:00]. And he, he died. And so, I got stuck with that job. And so, in would have been in... This was 61'. In 63' he died and I became president. So, I was out of running right for office. And I had a job running Ontario Corporation, but stayed very active politically, and that's where I became more interested in the Republican Party. And I was sitting at the desk and Ontario, which was a pretty small company at the time. [50:00]. And the, you know, it wasn't that he left me any big deal because the company was \$800,000 negative net worth, when I stepped into it. But at any rate, I was sitting there one day and took a phone call, as I often did, nothing else was going on. And it was a guy from the United States Chamber of Commerce. And he called and said, "Our dues were becoming at the end of the year." And we he wanted me to renew our dues. And I said, "I don't think I'm going to." And this was maybe a couple of years after that I'd been in a job for two or three years. And he said, "You're not." And I said, "No, no, [51:00]. I'm saying I'm on another board here locally, and we've talked about it. And I think I'm gonna be pressing them to not pay there." And I said, "I'm getting sick of a bunch of guys with watch fobs hanging over their big bellies. Sitting in the Pittsburgh Business Club deciding everything." Little guys getting crapped on I wouldn't go for that. And he said, "Well, I'm sorry to hear that. We'll miss you." So, about two weeks later, I had another call was guy said "I'm Vice President, chamber for the Chicago region. I'm just going to happen to be in Muncie, Indiana next week. And I wondered if I could stop." And I said, "Well, [52:00] what day are you going to be here?" And he said, "Well what day are you going to be free?" Anyway, he came down. And we had a nice chat, and of all about that. And he said, "While we're starting a small business console and it's going to meet four times a year." And we wondered if maybe you want to join that. It's gonna be about 40 people gonna meet in Washington. And US Chamber wants to have the input from small and medium sized companies. So, I said, "Sure, I'll go, Mitch you called my bluff." So, I went to DC. [53:00]. And we met in the basement of the Hay Adams hotel. And I don't know if you're familiar with

Washington, but there's a White House and then the park, and in that chamber building right across and the other half of that block is a Hay Adams. We're in the basement of the Hay Adams.

BB: Okay.

VS: So we're 40 people meeting down there. And we met wants input on this bill on input and that bill, I said, "Isn't that the Chamber building next door?" And I said, "You're really wanna get the small companies invited." I said, "I walked in the lobby that big building one time and I saw the big room for the chamber board mates. And here we are in the basement of the hotel [54:00] if you don't have a meeting room over the chamber building?" "Well, next week, being in that chamber room." Next thing I knew I was president of this group of small people. The next thing I know, I went on the chamber board. And then I became chairman of the United States Chamber and traveled around the country for that, but politics again, but not Republican or Democrat. But speaking up to get your voice heard. So, a lot of this kind of stuff comes from them. And it's, it's been fun, but the legislature sticks out in my mind [55:00] as one of the real things because it got me into Indiana politics. And I was chairman of the Republican. You're getting a finance committee for a decade. But I don't like people hiding money. And they don't do it anymore. Oh, when I was chairman, we had everybody printed. And if you gave money where's the money in the top, you know we got 1,000, 10,000, 20. We printed their names put them up there. And give that to everybody.

BB: Very smart. Yeah.

VS: Very much for open. [56:00]

BB: Yeah, that's good. Yeah, definitely.

VS: So we had a series of staying pretty active. Ran both of Dan Coates Senate campaigns as chair. And then when Dick Luger ran for president. I was his national chairman. Mitch was his chairman. I was the finance chairman, nationally, and we've, Dan. Dick and Dan have both been very close. Bob Orr was governor while I was the finance chairman. Doc Bowen was chairman [57:00] of the Mutz deal and then became HHS chairman and took over the Mutz campaign, ran that. And then I always been very active in this congressional district. And when Dave McIntosh was the congressman from this district, and this we had a dinner in his home one night, a bunch of us and he said he was giving consideration to running for governor. And if he wanted to run for...wanted our advice about this, group of us. And as we left, he punched my arm and he said, "Come on over for breakfast." He lived here in Muncie. So, I went over [58:00] for breakfast. He and Ruthie. He said, "We are going to run for governor." So, I went back to the office two Republican elections back. A young Republican, ran against a Democrat incumbent of many years. And his name was Mike Pence. Ran a terrible campaign. And got trounced. And wrote a book about running a campaign and never do that again, then got a radio show. And it was very popular with a radio show. So, when Macintosh said, I'm going to [59:00] (unintelligible) over and had breakfast in the morning. He, Ruthie, and I had breakfast together. And he said, "I'm

going to have a press conference at noon. And I'm going to run for governor.” So, I said good luck, be all for you. Then I went back to the office and I called a young guy that we've met in the new press both Margaret and me. Named Mike Pence. And I said, “Mike we were impressed with you and your last one, didn't win and why don't you announce for Congress? About one o'clock because he's gonna announce for Governor at about 11, so we're gonna get right in there, right.” And he said, “Oh, my wife would just kill me. She remembers that episode. So do I. We wrote a book about.” And then he called back [1:00:00] in a half hour. He said, “We'd been thinking about that.” He said, “We do that if you'd be our chairman.” So, I said, “Well, I oughta talk with Margaret.” And then we, I said, “But I know she'd say, yes. So that's a deal. You want to run? I'd be happy to.” So, he ran for Congress. And got elected. And I chaired his campaign for 10 years. And then twice for governor.

BB: Interesting.

VS: He's a good guy.

BB: That's fascinating.

VS: Good friend. So, we've stayed interested in politics. The question was politics and we stayed interested. The other channel. Really. [1:01:00] I've had the good lord has been good enough to put us in a time when under change we've had some fun because we've been able to make some changes. That was sure true in the chamber when it became a new chamber for a while. The, the Reagan-Bush years were very good years. And we were very much a part of the Reagan and Bush, administration years. And that was good. So that chamber was good. And then the Catholic University got us in touch with all of the Cardinals were all on board [1:02:00] of Catholic U and we had a good relationship with those who are making decisions in the church. And then I had a call one day in Muncie asking if I would have lunch in Indianapolis the next time I was there with three or four guys. And I did and they were represented Muncie at the Indiana AAA. I had always been a member, but I never really went to what was going on. And they asked me if I join that board. And I did. And we got a little bit interested in the politics of AAA, which is the largest membership organization in America. Second only to the Catholic Church. [1:03:00] Now, but there are today 52 million AAA members paying an average of almost \$100 For memberships around the nation. There are 54 million members. And so Indiana went to the National things and I got a little bit acquainted there and so I ended up going on the board of the National AAA, which has of the 10 largest casualty insurance companies I think they have full ownership of three and part ownership of another couple and for instance AAA now insures 36% of the cars in California. Indiana's not that high some states are [1:04:00] but it's any billions of dollars. Bigger than I ever thought. But I went on the board and became chairman of the National AAA which was very interesting, because we changed the structure of AAA if they were trying to amalgamate and all I get one group annoyed, finally broken all that up. Kept it regional and but it was politics again. And so, whether it's chamber with the Reagan and Bush administration or whether it's been AAA or whatever was on the floor the night of the

convention [1:05:00] to pick Harry Truman run with Roosevelt. You know, it's all since high school. It's all politics. And but healthy, its relationship people governing themselves and

BB: Yeah, that's really, really neat. Yeah. Very cool. So yeah, we've covered a lot so far. So did you ever think that you would get involved in the state legislature when you first got out of law school? Was that something that you ever imagined?

VS: I went to law school because of my interest in people expressing your opinions. And, and you get interested in these things. I do. [1:06:00] Because I want to change policies. You know, if you've said AAA or said the chamber. The reason I got interested in the politics was to make changes. And so, if you're living in Muncie, Indiana. I went to the legislature. And as a result, Muncie, Indiana, was the first city in Indiana to get rid of the political control of fire and police departments. You know, we would pass a bill, that set up merit commissions. So that the guy on the back of a fire truck when would become the next chief and the chief would go back to the back end [1:07:00] of the firetruck, depending upon the politics of America. And we got rid of that. And we pass that in the legislature in this session. Despite the fact little was done, because there was so much division of public political parties. With the help of some Democrats from I got that bill passed, both the House and Senate and the Governor signed it. And I ended up as the first President of the Merit Commission for Police and Fire Department. But we did that, in that, you know, so you join the legislature. So, you can, do some of those things. Or you get interested in those political things. So, it isn't hiding money. It's, there's a big steak dinner. [1:08:00] You don't do that today. And I'm a great believer if I put my name on it, everybody. That was everybody at that came to the steak party.

BB: Right. That's, that's really neat.

VS: And we raised lots of money.

BB: Yeah, true. That's great. Wow.

VS: They don't do it today. Yeah.

BB: So I guess, talking about your family a little bit. When did you get married?

VS: The first chance I had but the scale.

BB: And what year was that?

VS: I was married in 1960 in November. Same month. I was elected. My wife. [1:09:00] I used to fly a lot, rent airplanes out of Muncie. And then ruining the airplanes. The pilot I used to a lot of Muncie aviation. I always would say because I didn't know what to get back. You know, walked today and maybe be late he always said "Tip the wing down here where my fiancée lives and she'll know I'm 20 minutes from...said "Fine." Said "Someday we're gonna meet her who

you know, we gotta have a double date or something.” I said “I loved to.” Well, he was engaged to this gal and I finally met her and that's my wife now. But I don't fly with him anymore.

BB: I can imagine that would be awkward. Yeah.

VS: We did start an airline. I was on a bunch of boards.

BB: Yeah. Sounds like it.

VS: There was a bank in Muncie [1:10:00] Dave Sirsa and I, Dave Sirsa was the chairman his family was the predominant shareholder. But I got to where I owned a pretty big chunk of that bank. And he and I were partners in starting an airline. Those are the...Both of those planes we owned. So, for instance, when I was chairman of the chamber, I could get from my home in Muncie, Indiana to my office in DC. In about an hour and 40 minutes. I go out and fly down from here to DC, so many, many weeks, I'd spend two days in the office in DC, and fly in and out when you wanted to.

BB: Yeah, very convenient.

VS: [1:11:00] The one closest to me here was a jet that we had, we had more hours, and that model of airplane than any other in that model airplane with one exception. The one exception was a guy that just took bank clearings every night so that was the only that had more hours than ours.

BB: Wow. Interesting. And see, do you have any children?

VS: We have. Yes. Five, so far.

BB: So far. Yeah (laughs). And what are their names?

VS: Their names are Lynn. Mark. Paul. Susan, Victor.

BB: Okay. Interesting.

VS: We had five in seven years. We have a daughter [1:12:00] who had five in seven years.

BB: Wow. Nice. Okay. And how did your family influence your career?

VS: My family. Oh, my grandmother?

BB: Or like your children and your wife?

VS: My wife is tremendous. You just have a most wonderful partner in the world. There is no way that we could have had I could have had anywhere near the fun I've had without Margaret. And she is revered among many people who would tell me you go to hell, but love her. She is much more popular and much more respected than I have always [1:13:00] circles by the room, everybody who say oh, where's Margaret?

BB: Yeah. That's amazing.

VS: She's a wonderful gal. Good lemonade too. (While drinking lemonade)

BB: It is very good lemonade. That's right. Let's see. So, when you first got involved in politics as a legislator, what were the key issues that you focused on or fought for?

VS: I probably had I was interested in cities and towns served as ranking member in that committee and got my bill through for because I was from Muncie, Indiana, and there were things in Muncie, Indiana I wanted to change and one of them was the whole police and fire thing. [1:14:00] So political you know. People becoming Chief without any sense at all. I was interested in I always said that because all of the political power in the construction business was from south of 40. That there was only one patch of Southern Indiana that wasn't paved. To Haute the rest of that was all concrete and tarmac down there. We didn't have any paving to this part of the state. So, I was a bit of an [1:15:00] overreaction to my desire to see Muncie get connected. Two or three issues that we were pursuing in the stage at the time was the planning was being done for our I 69. And we did get I 69 moved over this way. It was originally it was plotted for way over there, the side of Anderson, but we got it moved over. So at least it came between Muncie and Anderson. Another one was the medical school. The IU medical school was the biggest medical school by far in the country. And we wanted to get that done. [1:16:00] And that was a little bit later than this session, but was part of by desire, and I think found out in this session that we pursued. The chairman of the IU Med School who later became President of Purdue, and I shared the plan to put eight, the original plan to put eight schools of medicine really began with residencies in these places. And then we got to fourth year of med school in these places. And now on to three of them. We've had four full years of med school as we do here in Muncie now. It's part of IU med school. [1:17:00] But we have all four years as well, as a good residency program.

BB: Yeah. That's great. Yeah.

VS: Just a series of those. So, it seemed.

BB: Yeah, that makes sense.

VS: It was fortunate for me that we really got whipped in a ring for reelection. The whole state went the other way big. And it was fortunate for me because my stepfather died. And I got that the company that we had and there were four of us as directors. The other three were older and

more experienced in their business than I was, but [1:18:00] when he died, the we were indebted to a large supplier for about 800,000 bucks, and they thought that I would be the best guy to work that out. So, I got the job. With their support. Fortunately, did get that worked out. But prevented, even if I had interest for any actual office holding. But sure, staying interested in raising money and in supporting candidates.

BB: So, when you were, when you first started running for the General Assembly, did you have a particular campaign strategy at all or?

VS: Yeah, the campaign was, you know, to make the state debt [1:19:00] more fiscally responsible. Everything that people wanted and when you have run from Muncie, we want to make sure, in those days Ball State University was a building that the Ball family gave to Muncie who was one building, with some classrooms and it was called a normal school, which meant a teachers school and that was an offspring of Indiana State University and the board, Indiana State brand us. And then it became a board that ran both of you called The State Teachers College Board and ran both of them. [1:20:00] Then we got the split. And so, this was separate from that. And so, in this session and in the three or four sessions of the early 60s It became Ball State University it became first it became very independent from the teachers board then it changed the name from a teacher's college to Ball State University. And it had its own board. And then I think in, maybe the session might have been two sessions on it. Became Ball State University instead of Ball State Teachers College [1:21:00] started getting its own, but it originally was part of it. It was part of the board that this gift became part of what was Indiana State University and or Indiana... Yeah, Indiana State University.

BB: Okay. Interesting.

VS: So, each sessions we've been politically pushing for that. Now, Ball State could run rings around frankly, gotta degree from both of them. They've had better leadership. Politically, the leadership, particularly (Unintelligible) Morrison, and the leadership of a Ball State, contributed greatly to its [1:22:00] growth, strength and independence. By its position between Indiana University and Purdue, I suppose. There are people who might object to this, but from my observation of years of watching the academic institutions, when Purdue took the president, the chairman of the IU med school as its president, there was contention on the board, several board members resigned. There was there was not the close affiliation between IU and Purdue that had happened when Herman Wells and Fred Upday were running the system. [1:23:00] In the session that we're talking to talking about my serving, I can remember the Ways and Means Committee that the four presidents came into the hearing, Herman Wells, Fred Upday, John Evans, and the distinguished white haired guy from Terre Haute all came in, and we had just two lines in the whole state budget for higher education. One was the academic and one was the county agents you had to deal with at the same time because Herman Wells controlled the budget for the college and Purdue controlled colleges or the budget for the county agents, because Purdue's political base was every county in Indiana has a county agent [1:24:00] for farming. And that was their political base, as every county agent is strong in a politics of their own county. So, they

walk in four strong and then they walk out and go to another room and Herman wells would tell the people at Terre Haute and Muncie what they're going to get. That was the extent and as I watched in the Higher Education Commission for 20 years that's get much...became much more of an astute group of workers and observers to hone down where that money went.

BB: When you were running your campaign, who was your main opponent?

VS: [1:25:00] I don't know that there were candidates, Democrat candidates, there were Republican candidates for the legislature. But the opponent was John F. Kennedy. There's no question about that election was not an election between me and a Republican or Democrat running for the legislature. The whole federal election turned on the fact that a Catholic was running for. And, and they elected a Catholic. I suppose a Republican and Catholic had never been elected.

BB: Interesting. Who were your national [1:26:00] political heroes or state heroes at the time?

VS: Well, I was a close friend of Dick Versteen. Dick Versteen was the Lieutenant Governor. Matt Welch is a good friend. My neighbor here in Muncie was a candidate for United States Senate in the Democrat party against Vance Hartke when he was first running, and Matt was for my neighbor. I got to know Matt pretty well. And so, at well, at his funeral, Matt and I sat together. [1:27:00] so Matt was the (Unintelligible) and we were good friends, Dick Versteen was at that time was close, close friend. He and his wife and Margaret and I spent time together and he got beaten the next time around and fortunate for me because I took the job my father died and so on, but Dick Versteen called me and I was on the Employment Security Board some you got behind the board of Meridian insurance and I've had a lot of corporate boards [1:28:00] that was obviously because of personal the I should put it this way. The blessing I have had in hanging around the political arena has meant so much in opportunities that people have called and offered.

BB: Yeah. Yeah, sounds like it really is amazing.

VS: One example Christine called and got me on Meridian Insurance Board which I've enjoyed very much there are two insurance companies. [1:29:00] Doc Bowen when he went to HHS I took his spot on the casting company in Warsaw big company just enjoyed that trust because association with Doc. The one Marble Hill the power plant that Indiana that was being built here in Indiana. Under the Orr-Mutz administration. That power plant was scheduled to be built for \$2,800,000,000 and when it got to \$4 billion. [1:30:00] And because it was still being constructed, and there was an occurrence in Pennsylvania, if you remember, where a power plant blew up. When that happened, our Marble Hill plant was then subject to all of the new regulations that came after the explosion and Benzene in Pennsylvania. So, it looked like it was going to cost another 3 or \$4 billion. And Governor Orr and Governor, Lieutenant Governor Mutz, said, "Stop it." [1:31:00] And put two or three of us on the board of the Indianapolis or Indiana public service company IP. And so, we've ran that company and had the real difficult to

me challenge there of taking the chairman who I respected so much, and I had known so on taking him to lunch and telling him that his services we not going to be needed anymore. Just just bothered me terribly. But that's all because of political. Not, not because of politics because of friendships and respected associations that have been made. So, your called upon to run that. And then [1:32:00] later, I had to chair the committee to clean up Marble Hill. Somewhat cleaned up.

BB: Yeah. So, what did it feel like the first election day? How did you feel?

VS: Feel wonderful.

VS: When you look at those precincts coming in one by one. You've got all your notes, has a history of how those precincts have been in the past? And you see how it's going down and you think wonderful. And then there are other days when if you live in the political world, that you read how they're going, and then you see uh oh.

BB: Yeah. So, [1:33:00] what were you thinking when you walked into the state house the first day?

VS: The thing I remember about the first exposure is, we went down to the organization meeting. And had been telling the night before because of the organization meeting was going to be in the morning and Margaret and I went down. We had a room in the old Claypool hotel. And I would stay over and go to the meeting the next morning, and there and Margaret was a teacher. And there in the lobby, was the president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, who I'd heard of, but I didn't know anybody and he [1:34:00] came over and said, "Van, how are you?" As if he had known me for 14 years. And he said, "And Margaret, we were talking with the principal at your school today about what a wonderful job have you been doing with the school. And we thought we didn't know if you had something tonight or not. But we have a suite upstairs in the hotel and we're having dinner delivered up there. And we were hoping you be able to join us for dinner up there. That was my first night in the big city. Boy, I've been elected and look at this. It was the Indiana State Teachers Association. Who probably were not as happy with me as the years went by.

BB: So, what were your expectations for the legislative process? Was it more or less complicated and you thought? [1:35:00]

VS: I suppose that maybe more than the some I was aware of the degree to which personalities and relationships have in politics than most. I would suspect that just because I really admired, watched, studied political processes. So, but I think even with the [1:36:00] even with that I was I became more impressed with how personalities freely are controlled, Birch Bayh was a Democrat or in the House before we were there ran the Democrats while we're there, ran the House again after we hit there. Matt Welch was the Governor. But I think anybody that have been around the block a few times knew where to go [1:37:00] for answers.

BB: Makes sense. So how did you learn the ins and outs of state politics?

VS: I got to my...it's a process you get by touring blisters into calluses. So, it's, you'll learn that the blisters finally heal and you've got good strong skin. You probably get those boosters on the way.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. Makes sense. So how did you know the needs and wants of your constituents? And how would you interact with them on a regular basis?

VS: I don't know that you ever [1:38:00] know that. I think that candidates can take polls and take surveys. But good candidates have two buckets. One bucket is what you perceive to be the issues of the moment among your constituents. And you talk about those at coffees or dinners or luncheons. The other is the real nuts and bolts issue that you have with the president of the biggest employer downtown, the road construction company, that's not been paid [1:39:00] or the location of the next highway that's going through your county. Those things that are that issues people want to hear when you're talking in public. And then you get the third set those issues that aren't public, but their big the big dudes in your area have in the president of the biggest company in your district has got a real problem though with the some form of government or you've got a big hog farm and they're having trouble with the creek that runs [1:40:00] through there and is dumping something in next three farms and it's those issues that are key to an individual or a group but quiet, quiet issues. So, they're big public ones and group things and then kind of quietish at least in my observation.

BB: What was the first bill that you sponsored?

VS: The local one and one down there that got a lot of attention was a Muncie having getting first merit commission for police and fireman. And we got it passed. And we got it implemented. Got the governor to sign it, then the police unions [1:41:00] and fire unions are all against it.

BB: Yeah. Could you describe for me what the regular interactions were like, between people and the General Assembly, formal and informal?

VS: In those days, more than today, I understand. The formal session, but be there, I remember a very prominent Democrat saying to me, "Smith, you've never been in the legislature in the minority. So, you got to get over there." But he said, "Those of us in the minority come lately, leave early and spend a lot of time with the lobbyists. [1:42:00] So that's the informal, but the formal part of it is you I mean, you have to be there and you had bills that you have to walk through. And if you've got a bill, you got three readings to go through, and you're gonna move it three readings in one house and then take it to the other house and get a sponsor and get it through and then the then that's, they want, they wanted to change it this way. So, if you get the change, and you gotta bring it back together, and you gotta have a concurrence committee to work out the differences, and then you gotta have both people approve it after you take the

occurrence committee. And you got to thinkin, well, I'll take it on the governor and see if I can get him to sign it. So, you got a lot of [1:43:00] a lot of work to do. Frankly, some people, some legislators like to do that. And some don't do it. And that's why you get some people that are not legislators, but are interested in a bill and they follow that all the way through.

BB: What were the interactions like between members of the House and Senate and were there differences between the House and Senate?

VS: Yes. Oh, yeah. The, the Senate always has a personal image of being three flights above the House. And pictures, the House has a bunch of disorganized kids [1:44:00] who aren't very responsible. And the Senate can handle this. That really isn't the case. The Senate is probably more politic than the House. But in a more sophisticated way. I don't know that I'd say mature way. But I'd say sophisticated. And half of that sophistication is only because they believe it. (Both laugh)

BB: Fair enough. Could you walk me through the process that you had to go through for generating a bill?

VS: Oh, yeah. Well, in my experience you want to make sure [1:45:00] that your bill is written correctly. So, you use the talents of the legislative agencies that are available to make sure that you've got a bill that the lawyers and agency don't see anything wrong with it. You start that bill, through, you introduce the bill. And the Speaker, if you introduce it in the House like I did, the speaker can send it to Oshkosh. And you'll never see it again. Or it can send it to if, if you want to ask him to do that, you can send him to the cities and towns committee, where you are the ranking member, [1:46:00] cause you want to carry it through that committee, and you want to make sure before you bring it up in the committee that you get enough votes to get it and so on. So, or so you got to work with the Speaker to see where your bill is going. He could put it in his pocket and leave there and never see it again. That's the end of your bill. Or he could give it to a committee and that committees have to work it out to bring it to the floor. So, it's really committee and bring it to the floor. So, I had my bill went to the speaker, asked him to give it to the committee where I was serving to head ranking member. Take it, got everybody's concurrence before we even brought it up and brought it up. Took two minutes. And then comes back and he got first reading and you're gonna second reading, [1:47:00] you got to go through all the steps to get it through the House. And then wow. Now you got half the legislature's gone by that time you got that you made, you gotta get it through early because if you don't it through early, then you're out of luck. So, then you can get it over to the... You got to find somebody and, and I, I sure knew the you know, the Senate fit 25-25. So, I wanted somebody on both. So, I had Dick Versteen who ran the Senate and Frank O'Bannon, who was a Democrat, elder statesman. And you want them to make sure [1:48:00] they're are smiling when you come over with your bill. You gotta get it to the to a committee where you can make sure you get it out. You get it in, get your vote and bring it back. You're then feeling pretty good. Now, if what happened in the Senate. Somebody changes it as they did. And they usually do. And then you got the one from the House and no one from the Senate. And you gotta work up to the changes in a way that the

other boys. Then you gotta get it down. You gotta a final vote. Then you got to go to the governor's office and you're gonna get the governor to pass. It is not easily done.

BB: Sure. [1:49:00] Yeah, it's complex process.

VS: Yeah, it is. Complex process properly so. You don't want a bunch of mishmash.

BB: Right of course. You don't want to cause other problems.

VS: It isn't complicated. In a clumsy way. It is. It's complicated to assure it's safe.

BB: Right. And when people were voting on legislation, did you have an idea of how people were going to vote before they voted?

VS: Well, you'd like to, you wanna have. And if you, [1:50:00] If you're down to bringing up a bill in a committee or in one of the Houses, and you don't know what the vote is, you're not a very good legislator.

BB: Yeah. How important would you say it was in the general assembly to work with the other party?

VS: Well, in my view essential. In some people's views idiotic. But I'm, I'm very, very much you know, if you can avoid outright conflict [1:51:00] by a major group that are going to affect your outcome. I mean, logic tells you gotta do that. But frankly, I just enjoy that more.

BB: Would you say that the interactions between Democrats or Republicans, generally speaking, we're pretty good and friendly?

VS: Oh, they're fine. Sure. I hung around with Democrats socially after. Bob Roch who became Democrat Governor later, Bob and I were good friends. From Anderson. We were you know, the O'Bannon's [1:52:00] It was just, yeah.

BB: Yeah, that's great. What would you say the public does not know about the general assembly and how it operates?

VS: People would, I find that difficult to answer because I think there are very different perceptions. By different people, I think it would be tough to judge this is a perception. There are people that don't understand it that would say something like, oh, you got a bunch of hacks out there. You know, they're completely don't understand the process. But I think most people who [1:53:00] really seriously are familiar with the process of government you know confined disappointments, here and there. But the process is tough to replace. Yeah. I can't think of a better solution for our company, our country, excuse me, better country. I can't think of a better solution than the federal government and the state governments we have. I'm hesitant for

instance, I hear people talking about we had to give up the electoral college. But I always say remember, historically, we are the United States [1:54:00] of America, the United States, we have a group of states who decided to do this together. And so, those states are important. They're different. But we have an amalgamation of 50 different states together and somebody wants to take over all states and be like mine. No, so California wants all 50 states to be like California or I heard someone saying this morning. Ah, all lot of people are moving from California to Texas, and they're gonna turn Texas blue. That isn't right, people are moving from California to Texas because they don't like California and they aren't blue voters [1:55:00] they're gonna be red voters in Texas. Boy I am glad to get out of that. States are different. Wyoming is a heck of a lot different than Vermont.

BB: Yeah, that's a fair analysis.

VS: And that's all part of this governing and I have great respect for what we've developed and the way it operates.

BB: Yeah. So, do you think that there should be more people that are more aware of government and how it works?

VS: Absolutely. Their life depends upon it.

BB: Let's see. [1:56:00] What would you say was the most controversial issue during your time in the General Assembly?

VS: Well, I can tell you, the one that got the most letters. Was Johnson grass. Out of control Johnson grass. Because the number one issue for letters to the House of Representatives. I think I recall the control of Johnson grass.

BB: That is interesting.

VS: The you know, you'd be surprised if you judge the mail as you get and so on often surprising.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. What piece of legislation was hardest that you were involved in?

VS: Hardest? I don't know that [1:57:00] I know what that means.

BB: I guess, which was like the most complex piece of legislation required the most work on it to get it the way you wanted, perhaps or.

VS: The most innocuous can be hard. It can be difficult. Maybe difficult isn't the word. Every piece of legislation is difficult. Gotta be planned right as we were talking. I think the maybe the most emotional ones. Are the, are the ones that get you. Back in the days that I was there.

[1:58:00] I think probably the most emotional issues were getting to be school finance, I think was very emotional. It is not understood well. It involves so many people with students. So many teachers, it's got a well-organized lobby, both for and against. It's a major part of the budget. It has to do with state tax, and that has a lot to do with local tax. It has pride from academic scholarships to basketball teams. [1:59:00] So, I would suspect that I would giving it enough time, I probably think the most emotional deals that the legislature has one of them is school financing.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. What was your proudest moment as a legislator?

VS: To get elected.

BB: Yeah. Yep. Makes sense. Good answer. What about the biggest hurdle you had to overcome during your time as legislator?

VS: Personal or?

BB: Sure.

VS: Personal it was getting married on the 19th of November and then starting the session. Right away. [2:00:00] that the first few weeks of first two or three months of marriage. It was with my wife teaching in Muncie and my being in the legislature.

BB: Well, what in your opinion is the most important work of the Indiana General Assembly?

VS: Well, the General Assembly has the responsibility and authority to give the support and the tools to state government, state government in Indiana [2:01:00] has control over so many functions. If you has a functionary responsibility of staying out of the way, in some areas, religion, of being a welcome partner, if indeed there's a vigorous private school environment, whether it's higher education or post-secondary or secondary or grammar. It sets the tone I think, for relationships. [2:02:00] The difference between I'm proud to be a Hoosier and Indiana is more manufacturing per citizen than any state name. And Indiana sells more ducks than any state in the union. And all those you know many facts. Hoosiers play basketball well. And there so many things that you can have a sense of pride and if you if you make Indiana, more than a basketball team, but make it a real sense of pride, and pride that you want to make you want to make it work well. [2:03:00] Like a like a child or an ancestor. You want to you want to be proud of it. You want to talk up the points where it's great. And maybe you overlook the warts and be happy of being a Hoosier. And if you're happy about it, we'll find a way to work out the problems and it might take a legislature, it might take a Super Bowl or it might take other things, but we can be happy as Hoosiers, you don't have to write you know be sad, upset.

BB: So how would you summarize your time as a legislator?

VS: Summarize my time [2:04:00] I had I was a neophyte. Had good friends. It was a tumultuous environment compared to other years when you consider the Republican House tied and Senate and Democrat governor, Republican lieutenant governor. It was it was a world that wasn't steady. It was unsteady. So, in that environment perhaps it was more exciting than it might have been in a sleepy session today.

BB: Yeah. [2:05:00] What is your favorite story or anecdote from your time as a legislator?

VS: I think the biggest I think if I were starting to describe that someone who knew legislators from another state, I'd say it started out with a big smile when the holdovers from the last session, said the freshmen coming in this year. "We're going to have an hour and a half meeting of the holdovers to organize the House." And we said [2:06:00] "To bad those old guys can't come."

BB: Yeah. That's funny. Oh, my goodness.

VS: But that, began that began one of...

BB: Yeah, yep. What lessons, if any, did you learn as a legislator?

VS: Oh, I learned something every day. And I think that there is lots of structure and lots of history, and lots of theory about government and so on. [2:07:00] But the big thing you can't forget every minute, is that it's people. And that's its people. You know, first thing is, people pretty much have often said, and I've been more of a businessman. But I've always said, you get the challenge, no matter what business you're in. The challenges run people, customers, technology, facilities, and money in that order. And then the drive to work every day, if you just think I've got two or three unique things I ought be doing in each of those areas. And I ought to be ahead of the stream in each of those areas. You'll be a leader. Yeah.

BB: Did you have any regrets as a legislator? [2:08:00]

VS: Oh yeah. I did not get every bill I voted for.

BB: Yeah.

VS: That's one. My general reaction to having served is not one. Where I would remember regrets. It's one where I sincerely felt blessed to have the opportunity. Really, I gleaned so much from that, [2:10:00] that I hardly could have any regrets.

BB: Yeah. That's fantastic. What advice would you give to future legislators or even current legislators?

VS: Win. You can't win, you don't have to worry about voting.

BB: Yeah. Fair enough. Let's see. Down to the last few questions here. How has the state changed over the course of your lifetime?

VS: Indiana has taken a much more of a leadership profile in the country. The typical New York California flyover [2:10:00] Most people in New York would fly to California and not recognize there's anything in between. And I think the Midwest is more highly appreciated and recognized than it used to be, and I think Indiana has done a better job than any of the near Midwest. Maybe Ohio, Indiana and Ohio, I think have just increased in sophistication in stature, compared to all the [2:11:00] other states, Illinois has you know theirs, Chicago, but the city of Chicago image and the state of Illinois have just not been able to keep the image up. I think Chicago has that image of a great place for young kids or something but it's losing that as the state becomes so idiotically built on bad judgments by the legislature. Just terrible. It's an indication of how important the legislature is. [2:12:00] If you look at Indiana and Ohio, they've done good things. We were tagged some what about the difference between Lake County and Indianapolis, Southern in Indiana, but I think those differences are moderating and not becoming greater. I think they're lessening. Northern Indiana has become a part of Indiana they don't want to be a part of Chicago you know, they're proud to be part of Northern Indiana and we're proud to have them. For a while they were sort of [2:13:00] floating out to be part of Chicago. The southern part of the state has grown in sophistication. I think I'm very proud of Indiana and we have as time goes we have increased our position relative to other states.

BB: Now that's great. How has the Indiana General Assembly changed over time?

VS: The operation of the General Assembly is much more complicated. [2:14:00] The sophistication of legislation, not every bill but many of them with the conflict between modes of information and government. The complication in financial transactions. The sophistication of the higher education world, have all led to I think, in many ways the legislature runs fast and has tongue out trying [2:15:00] to keep up with several of those fast moving major elements of life. But I have great faith that the process is good.

BB: Good. Okay. Do you think that politics has changed much in Indiana?

VS: Yes. There's not deep bipartisan political respect that there once was. I don't know that I would have as much enjoyment today in the legislature, as I had before. I don't know that I would have as much fun [2:16:00] running for public office, as I had before. There is this tendency to really build extreme vitriol positions against personalities, rather than have a good discussion of issues.

BB: Yeah. Why do you think that has developed?

VS: It's all because of the damn Democrats. No. No. (Both laugh) I don't know. But it saddens me. It saddens me because [2:17:00] it's a magnification in both parties. It's a magnification of

the bitterness of the attractiveness of being bitter and trying to accomplish something by exercising bitter, and I'm a staunch Christian. And it just ain't good.

BB: Yeah. Interesting.

VS: Certainly, has not been Benedictine.

BB: Yeah, no, definitely not. What if any enduring qualities do Hoosiers still have or hold dear?

VS: [2:18:00] I think there's a healthy pride. That we all share as Hoosiers. I think there's a higher degree of patriotism in Indiana than there is in New York or California. I'm just proud to be a Hoosier.

BB: Yeah, that's great. That's great. Last question. What do you want Hoosiers to know about their role in relation to the function of the Indiana General Assembly?

VS: I think it is healthy [2:19:00] when Hoosiers know what's going on in the General Assembly. What are the issues. I think high school seniors know a lot less today about government in general. That may be because there are more of them. More kids in high school are prevalent more kids graduating from high school today, higher percentage than 20 years ago, but they're certainly not as well prepared. [2:20:00] That's sad, because I don't know of any educator that wants it that way. And the problem is, it ain't good for them.

BB: Right. Yeah. Sure.

VS: Personally, just is not. It's not good to have kids unaware, right? I feel so sorry for them. I really do. I wish there was some way I could pray them into ambition and excitement. We can sure grow hogs and grow corn and grow soybeans. I'd [2:21:00] love to find out some way to grow ambition.

BB: Well, is there anything that we haven't covered or talked about that you would like to say or?

VS: Yeah, I'd liked to say that I'm impressed by the state historian.

BB: Oh, very kind of you. Thank All right. Well,

VS: I'm glad he came from Kansas to Indiana and I hope he stays.

BB: Thank you. Well, I'm really glad to be here. And thank you so much for being a part of this. This has been great. I can turn off the recording here and.