

**LOWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT II**

INFORMANT: JOHN DURKIN, JR.

INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

DATE: 12/20/2001

J=JOHN

A=ALI

Tape I, side A

A: So this is interview with John J. Durkin, Jr., December 20th, 2001. And first, where and when were you born?

J: In Lowell, December the 26th, 1936.

A: Happy Birthday coming up.

J: Coming up. I'm 66.

A: All right. You can retire the week after right?

J: Yes, I would love to do that, but that's not going to be the case.

A: Now where did you go to school at?

J: I went to Riverside Grammar School, which is a little grammar school over in South Lowell, Wigginville section of Lowell, and Lowell High School. And graduated from Lowell High School in 1954, and went to Lowell Tech for aeronautical engineering for a short time, and switched to Merrimack College where I graduated as a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.

A: Okay. And what church did your family attend?

J: Sacred Heart Church over in what was then called the Grove.

A: Okay. And you lived in what neighborhood, in the Grove?

J: No, we lived in Wigginville, (A: Wigginville) which was on Rockingham Street, which is still there. (A: Yah) And it's a little village just beside South Lowell. At that

time composed of largely English people and some Irish, few Ports, but typical of, it was a suburban neighborhood, which was an early one at that time. I was born on Washington Street in Lowell, in a three-apartment tenement, where my father rented. And he bought this house at the beginning of World War II when he joined the Navy. And I spent, we moved there when I was one year old, all of my, both my brothers were born out of that house, and we lived there until my mother died and a year or two later my father remarried.

A: Oh okay. Now that neighborhood on the other side was a lot of French people?

J: In South Lowell, yes. Yah, predominantly French population in South Lowell.

A: And how would you describe the boundaries between Wigginville and South Lowell?

J: Well the main drag through Wigginville and leading to South Lowell is Lawrence Street, (A: Yup) and that was pretty much the divide. At Wigginville Center there was a fork, you bore right to South Lowell, Woburn Street as I recall. I'm sure of that. Riverside Grammar School was on that street. And Riverside Grammar School was kind of a dividing point between South Lowell and Wigginville.

A: Okay.

J: Yah, it was right, a few hundred yards down Woburn Street from that intersection.

A: Now you said your mother was Portuguese, (J: Yup) and your father Irish. How did that mean for your own cultural development, or awareness?

J: Well when I was very young I really never gave, there was no cultural strengths in my family. My mother came from a big Portuguese family, had eight brothers and three sisters and some of which had died before I was old enough to know that. And they were very prominent in the automobile repair business, the boys, in Lowell. Spinney's Garage was a big operation on Central Street, which my second oldest uncle ran, Tony.

A: And so their maiden, your mother's maiden name was Spinney?

J: Spinney, correct, yah. And the Portuguese name was Espinola, but her father changed it to Spinney when he came here. (A: Oh okay) He was a bit of a revolutionary (A: Yah) and was literally thrown out of Portugal because he was at war with both the state and government, and the national government, and the Catholic church. And I'm told he was a General in the Portuguese Army. I don't know if that's true or not. He certainly was an officer, and had a college education, which was very unusual for that year and that time. (A: Wow) But he was a cantankerous, mean spirited, annoying fellow, and he managed to you know, communicate that clearly to a mess of people. And he found himself no happier over here, although he opened a book store and was an intellectual of sorts, (A: Really) and earned his living doing that until he left his wife, my grandmother who actually died shortly after [unclear]. She died when I was three or four years old.

And went to New Bedford where he started a Portuguese language newspaper. (A: Really) And the first one I understand, and this is the second largest Portuguese community in Massachusetts, and ended up hanging himself in New Bedford. (A: Really) Yup, and became despondent with his inability to convince the world that he was right I would assume, because everything I know about him, I remember him, but I really don't, but everything I remember about him, he was real thick and real opinionated you know, old country male that expected everybody, especially you know, sib, younger members of the family to just accept everything he said as fact. And he failed to recognize that in this country people form their own opinion based on their experiences and their own intellectual abilities, and as a result you know, my father who was a very direct guy and my uncles who were, well never had formal educations were, were not you know, ready to accept anything [phone rings] of which was unreasonable. So he failed to generate support even within his own family. So his life I would gather was a bit of a failure. Excuse me. [Tape is turned off to answer phone, then turned on again]

A: And what was his name?

J: I believe he was Antonio J. Spinney.

A: Okay. Now what did your parents do for work?

J: My father came, was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. (A: Okay) And came here for Hood Milk to open new accounts. (A: Oh really) Yah, Lowell was a booming industrial city loaded with tenements and people, and their technique for opening new accounts, or getting new accounts was to send somebody around to offer a quart of milk, or whatever it was, to each new potential customer. He got, they got a free quart of milk, he got .50. And if they bought from the milkman who delivered to that route, the next quart my father got another .50. Then after that the account was the milkman's. And he built his route that way. My father's job was to go around constantly finding new customers. And after a while he, you know, they had, he and a buddy of his who came from Rhode Island, a Frenchman, Camden, Cam Brousseau, Leo Brousseau, had a daily quota. They knocked on so many doors and they sold so many accounts. And it was a hundred doors, or something like that every day. Of course you realize what Lowell was like in those days. There were tenements all over the place. You know, Back Central Street, Merrimack Street, all of those areas were filled with triple and quadruple deckers, and a lot of people lived in them. And he was looking for something to sell that he could keep the customer. (A: Yah) And he decided to get into the chemical business, which is the manufacturing of bleach and bluing, because the immigrant population were fastidious about cleaning, you know, which bleach (A: Right) because it killed germs. I mean the tenement stairs rising all the way up to the third and fourth floor used to be white they were cleaned so often, they were bleached right out. And so he got into the business of manufacturing bleaching water, which was a very simple process of mixing chlorine and water. It was 90% water and 10% chlorine more or less. I've forgotten exactly, and I worked there for a number of years. In a big vat, and he'd bottle it into one-gallon containers and sold it to people in their homes initially, and built a pretty good size business eventually.

A: Where did he work out of?

J: He eventually had a little shop over on, over on Bridge Street in Centralville, and later on Back Central Street. And then he developed a wholesale route selling it to supermarkets like DeMoulas and places like that. At that time it was family owned little super markets. (A: Yah. Yah) And doubled his business by selling it at a wholesale price. And he was a guy about my size, more broad than I am across the shoulders, and very active athlete when he was young, a ballplayer. And he could carry ten five-gallons in each hand. And you know, a gallon of water weighs eight pounds a gallon. It's a lot of weight, you know what I mean?. And he'd strip those out of a box of four gallons like nothing at all, and walk into a store, get them on the shelves, come back out and get more in it. He'd be back in the truck and on the way to the next one. I worked with him for a number of years when I was quite young, and not assisting him as much as just being with him. And he built a pretty good size business, and he sold it to a guy and joined the Navy when World War II started. He joined the Navy in 1941 right after Pearl Harbor. And this guy was supposed to literally baby sit the business and take the earnings for himself for running the business, and my dad was to return to the business right after the war. And he ended up stationed out in San Francisco where he got a mail, San Diego rather, California, where he got a slot in the mail, main western military mail Post Office, and was going to be there semi-permanently in those days, a year or more was semi-permanently. And he was entitled to bring his family out. So we got train fare to California. And my mother, myself, and my middle brother Roger traveled to the West Coast on a train and landed out in San Francisco, when we were supposed to land in San Diego, in San Diego which was like 500 miles south. My father had to borrow a car from the base and drive up through San Francisco to get us. Anyhow we lived there for two and a half years, and when the war ended drove back home. And the business was not here anymore. And my father kind of rebuilt it, but right after that an uncle of mine married to my mother's sister had gone to work for a company called Elliott's in Lowell which sold all kind of dry goods, but among them, floor coverings. And he developed an interest and some confidence in the floor covering area, and talked my father into going into business with him, and opened up what is now and still in Lowell, Puritan Floor Covering Company.

A: Oh, okay.

J: And he and my uncle ran that business, I don't know, I got out of college in Merrimack in '59, and I was going to work for a company and my dad wanted me to go into business with him, the floor covering business and he was going to leave Puritan. I finally answered yes to it. It wasn't something I really wanted to do, but you know, it didn't matter to me that much because I was willing to do anything. And I had worked in the business since 1952 with my father and uncle, I was a sophomore in high school.

A: At Puritan?

J: At Puritan part-time and then full-time in the summer, originally as a stock boy, and later as a salesman. And I wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do, but I certainly new the business, you know. At that point I had been in it for eight or nine years. And so we agreed to do it with one [unclear], my father controlled all the stock because I felt at this age, you know, if it didn't work out I could walk and find something else to do and he was not going to be able to. Anyhow that's how we started off. Now we opened a small store in one of Ned Flood's properties over on Andover Street, the corner of Andover going up the hill on Andover Street there, the first intersection before the Commonwealth House.

A: High Street?

J: Yah, yah High Street, High and Andover, right at the corner. And we opened a store there called Durkin's Incorporated.

A: Okay. That's still a rug place you know.

J: What?

A: That location.

J: Oh is it really? I didn't know that. I rarely go up there, just, my brother Tommy lives up there off Andover Street. I go up to his house, but I usually come in from 495 (A: The other way, yah) and go in that way. I've ridden up that hill for years. Anyhow, we did that. The operation was very successful. My father, I, and this same Cam Brousseau, who started with the bleach, it was called the bleaching water business, and we bought the former Stop and Shop building, which is where we're located now. At that time Stop and Shop was building a new store over in, over near the bridge, the Aiken Street Bridge, this side, the Lowell side of the bridge, but near Lowell Tech. (A: Okay) They kind of cleared that area, and one of the first buildings that was built was Stop and Shop. This building that we bought was the first building that Stop and Shop ever built as a supermarket.

A: Oh really?

J: They built it like a God damn bomb shelter. I mean it was extremely well built. Of course at the time it was built it was surrounded by other buildings. The Lowell Depot hill was behind it, all of which got moved when they made that overpass out there. As a matter of fact my grandfather's bookshop was right on that hill. (A: Oh really) Yah, the railroad station was a very active area in terms of investment. Any case we bought that building and moved the operation there in 1962, 63, and opened it as Durkin's Home Decorating Center, (A: Okay) which was a relatively new idea at that point. Nobody called themselves that before. But we were offering you know, to help the consumer marry whatever they were looking for into the entire household interior.

A: So you're talking flooring and draperies, and?

J: We eventually got into draperies, gift items, carpeting, that type of work. We did handle carpeting as well as what's called [resetting] floor covering, linoleum and things like that. (A: Yah, yah) But we eventually got into carpeting, and big carpet, some area rugs and larger world of carpet specialists. Those were products that in those years were really only handled by furniture stores. There were no floor covering specialty stores. We were among the first of them. We weren't the only ones, there were others, but the first that just dealt with floor covering and eventually drapes, upholstery, custom made details, custom rugs, custom drapes, and all types of window treatments, blinds, shades, all of those things.

A: Now how did your family find out about Stop and Shop and that location?

J: A friend of my father's in the floor covering business in Boston was friendly with the owners of Stop and Shop. His name was [Rapid, R A P D?], the family that owned the largest part of Stop and Shop, and was aware that they were going to be selling this building. And as a matter of fact, they produced a rather odd set of circumstances that my father and I went over and looked at the building, and Jesus Christ what a wonder set-up this is [going to be]. And at that point the overpass was being built. (A: Oh okay) It wasn't done, but it was getting there, and the building was totally exposed to the whole overpass. So it was a hell of a location in addition to the space, and the building was extremely well built. And we got an enormous forty-five, fifty-car parking lot with it. He called this friend and said, "What's your friend's name who runs Stop and Shop?" He gave him the name of Rapid person that he knew. My father called this guy and introduced himself as a friend of, his name was Charlie, but I can't remember his last name. And, "What do you want for it?" He said what he wanted, and my father says, "That's agreeable, I can make financing arrangements for that. When are you going to vacate it?" They worked out the details. The whole deal was made over the phone. (A: Wow) Nothing signed. There was not a dollar that exchanged hands, and we got called from two or three people over the course of the next few months wanting to know whether we were interested in selling the building. That they understood from Stop and Shop and the Rapid family that we had bought it. There was nothing going on any further than I just told you. (A: Wow) And we eventually, we put together a deal where we sold the last third of the parking lot furthest away from the building to I think it was Mobile Oil at that time, for a gas station.

A: Oh okay. So.

J: And we got, I think we paid \$125 for the building, and we sold the land to Mobile for \$45,000. So we were able out of what we were financing, the part we were financing to generate enough money to remodel the building into the facility that was suitable for us. And we've been there ever since.

A: Yah, great. Now how would you describe the social and economic condition of Lowell in the late 50's, 1960's?

J: Oh it was certainly a booming city. I didn't realize it when I was a kid, but you know, it was probably one of the most interesting cities in the world at that time, primarily because of all the various immigrant groups that were there. When I was a kid in high school in the early 50's we had the largest Greek population in the world outside of Athens, Greece. And [that was the seed of the] Greek Orthodox Church, (A: Yah) the, whatever they call the Bishop who is the Head of the Greek Orthodox Church, came here regularly. I mean it was his second home, because of you know, everybody was there. But that wasn't all. I mean the population of Lowell when I was a kid was predominantly Yankee. French-Canadian followed them because they came down to work in the mills and largely settled here. They were followed by the Irish who dug their way up from Boston, the canals, and all the laborer type things that they did. And after that was a whole mess of immigrant groups, probably at that time Greeks were the next largest group followed by everything you can imagine. Germans, Italians, Polish, they were all here, all in various locations in town where they clustered as they did because of the languages, and worked. I mean when I was a kid the ethic of success was work. Learn to work and do something well, and you will be rewarded. That simple. And you know, my father and all the people that I knew from that, from that era had no [sustenance] of education, formal education, but they knew how to do that, and they did, and did it well. And I mean all of my friends and the families that I knew from various, enormously mixed ethnic background succeeded because they were imbued with that characteristic. Honesty, hard work, couldn't miss. There were all kinds of opportunities in the city, and there were. (A: Yah) And there were. And I think of many, many people who I knew when I was young who have been enormously successful, and if you talk to them they'll tell you the same thing. That's why. Whatever direction that they took. And it also gave you an enormously very set of experiences in things like Greek food, Greek traditions, and the Greek Church. A lot of my friends were married in the Greek Church [phone rings] with the unusual little ceremony. And the Polish picnics, which used to be held you know, every weekend, (A: Really) and they were great social events. I mean as kids we didn't drink much, but I mean that's where you met the girls. They had all kinds of ethnic foods that the ladies all prepared. So it was fabulous food. The Portuguese had it too. The Germans had it too. Not as often, but the Polish had a picnic every weekend in the summer, and all of us guys used to go there. There were dozens of girls to dance with. And eventually the girls all went there too. And the churches were very active. The CYO, the Christian Youth Association it was called, in the Catholic Church where we were members, had dances every Saturday night you know, for teenagers, and they were a lot of fun. So there were a lot of social activities, and a lot of unsophisticated social activities that was easily controlled. You know, the guys didn't drink. The girls didn't get into trouble, and I mean you know, because I mean you got a girl in trouble, or you did something foolish like drinking and acting stupid, your father broke your head you know. It was as simple as that! It didn't matter whether the cops caught you, it was your father or your mother that was going to take you apart. [Both laughing] And again, that's a very simple thing, but it's the thing that the absence of which causes so many problems for the current generation, and less so in your generation as in my kids' generation. None of my kids, except for one I would say, got into any serious problems with the law, and they got into it with drugs. And it was a [unclear] of that generation if you got in with that kind of a crowd. And I always regarded myself as lucky that one out

of six is all that go into that. The others I'm sure all tried it, but you know, knew better than to get involved in it. Whereas their kids, they're having great problems with them. (A: Really?) Oh yah. Great, much more difficult to be a parent today than it ever was. (A: Wow) One of my daughters has four kids, aging from fourteen now down to four years old. And my oldest daughter has two, her thirteen and seven. And my son has my oldest granddaughter who's seventeen, and a boy who's thirteen. They're no trouble, but certain of them you know, the social life of these kids is totally different than it was when we were young. It's more structured, and you think that is good, but it's so structured that they don't get to do the things that they want to do, and so they go off and try some of these things that really get them into big trouble.

A: Now how did you get interested in politics?

J: That's an interesting question, but I think probably the guy responsible for that is a guy by the name of Walter Costello, from Lowell, Dracut. Walter lived up on Wentworth Avenue in Belvidere. Walter and I met as freshman at Merrimack College. He was a vet. He was about four years older than I am. (A: Okay) And my class was composed of maybe a third were vets, guys who were four years out of high school, and guys like myself who were just out of high school. And he and I became fast friends. He taught me about Irish heritage I guess. (A: Really, yah) Yah, my father well was first generation Irish, and his father was born in Ireland. (A: Oh okay) Never played that ethnic aspect at all at our home. And my mother's Portuguese background was limited to the certain types of food that she cooked that we all liked, but there was no, you know, I did speak fluent Portuguese I'm told when I was a baby, before I spoke English, but I don't speak it anymore and nor that I have further experience with it. But Walter, Walter as I say, and I became fast friends, and he was from a family that was very ethnic Irish, (A: Umhm) strong Irish Catholic family, and politics were their way of getting anything done. My father's family from Pawtucket, Rhode Island which of course was Irish, when my grandfather came over here from Ireland, and he also by the way was thrown out of Ireland, smuggled over here, IRA type something or another. My grandfather was a very quiet man and I never really learned what he did, but he did something in the revolution.

A: Was he like part of the [East?] Rebellion, or something like that?

J: It might have been because it was during that period of time, 1916, and but he got in enough trouble with the authorities being with the IRA to have to get smuggled over to England where he worked for a short period of time and emigrated to America. Anyhow, when he settled in Pawtucket, which was a smaller version of a town similar to Lowell, only not made up of as many ethnic groups, largely French and Irish and Yankee. The Yankee controlled it, and the others worked, but the political rules were that if you didn't own land you couldn't vote. (A: Really) Yah, and they existed generally throughout New England. That was the rule. And of course they prevented the immigrants from buying land. Now if you know anything about immigrant groups from my generation, their first priority was to buy land, they new the intrinsic value. And the unique aspect of America was "you bought it, you owned it." Not the King owned it, not the, you know, the Prince, whoever was in charge of it. You owned it. And they thought that was just

you know, the cat's ass. And it was intrinsic again in their nature. And I don't give a damn what nationality group you're talking about, they all had that common thread, that you saved your money and you got a house, or you got land. And then when you got enough you bought some more, and you either farmed it, or you rented it, or you built on it, and you made it more valuable than it was before. And because they couldn't do that, they couldn't vote. So they could gain no political power. (A: Wow) And my Irish grandfather had an uncle, a brother, my uncle, granduncle Phil who was very active in Democratic politics in Rhode Island. And the purpose of his activity, or how he was drawn into it, was to get some power for the immigrant groups. And they eventually overthrew the Republican strong hold. (A: Really) And I swear from what I knew about it that they taught Massachusetts' politicians how to do what they do better than anybody else in the world. I mean if you got, if there's a graduate school of politics in America, it has to be in Massachusetts. (A: Right) Chicago has nothing on us. Anyhow, they eventually got control of politics in Rhode Island and I mean, every job was filled. The requirement was that you had to have an ethnic name to get the job. I didn't matter what it was, as long as you weren't Yankee. And they took over the state, and they cleaned it out.

A: How about Lowell? What was the political system in Lowell?

J: Yah, Lowell was largely the same way, except that the, I have no recollection of the inability to vote as a result of not owning land. That probably existed at some point, but it was well before my time. The Democrats control Lowell as a working-man city, and the Democratic philosophy as you know historically attracted the working man who needed support. And the standard Democratic principle of operation was "Elect me and I'll get you a job." And that's how it worked. And pretty soon you know, like New York half the cops were Irish, half of them were Greek, the other third were French. And the DPW is the same mix like that. And whoever, what the ethnic groups would do was to try to find a candidate that they could get elected. And the city was divided up. Originally the councilors were elected at large, all of them. (A: Okay) The city was divided up into districts, and each district had a candidate, [had an office held]. And the districts were, were not what I would call gerrymandered, but they were very close. They were no resemblance to equal size, okay. They looked to isolate the French population so that they could get a representative, the same thing with other ethnic groups. And as a result each group got somebody elected, and had a voice on the city council. And eventually that became strong enough so that there were citywide candidates of any national group who were able to run and be elected. And we ended up with a council that was at one time, roughly half the council was elected by districts, and half the council was elected at large. (A: Right) And usually the largest vote getter was elected by the council as Mayor. (A: Okay) And at that time it was not a paid position. (A: Yah) And Walt Costello as I referred to a little while ago asked me to give him a hand to help a friend of his who was going to run for city council. (A: Uh huh) That was John Desmond. (A: Okay) And um, and I did. And I learned about the politics of running a campaign and tracking it. I'm kind of a mathematical guy, I'm a statistician, and so I developed a technique for what today is probably exit interviewing. So that you could get a very early sense of where the vote was going when the polls closed, by having a

number of people all over the various precincts to check this and get these results back to you. And I'd be running an adding machine with that computer for half an hour after the polls closed to tabulate you know, samples of twenty-five, or fifty of the responses, and then totally that and then interpolated it against the total votes cast in that particular precinct and projecting what the vote was going to be thereby. It wasn't entirely accurate, but it was very close. It used to be within one or two percent. (A: Wow) And the first time Jack ran he lost by a squeaking. (A: Really) Yah, and the next time he ran he was elected.

A: Okay. So he ran in 1957 for the first time, or the one in '59? That was the first year.

J: I, I say that's true. I'm not sure of those years, but the first time he ran he missed being elected by a squeaking, meaning it was a handful of votes. (A: Wow) And the next time he was elected easily. (A: Yah) [Phone rings] Then the city decided to go to city manager system I remember. Jack Desmond's uncle Cornelius was a state rep, and sort of a senior one. I mean he'd been there for years. And he wanted the job. And Jack's local political influence, and to some degree his I'm sure, got him the job. And so Jack was, Jack was the city manager, city councilor for I'm guessing six years before he ran for state rep? (A: Yah) And Walt and I ran the campaign when he ran for state rep, and that was a tough campaign, a lot of difficulty. And he was lucky. In between that we ran a couple of school committee races with different people. [I don't remember who they are.]

A: Any successes?

J: I don't recall any losses, so maybe they were successes. And the school committee was not that important at that time, but it was nevertheless something some people wanted, and it was nice to have a few people who were interested in education. Both Walt and I had very strong feelings about people who knew what they were doing getting in there, (A: Right, right) school committee or council. Jack was a, Jack was a great guy.

A: Now what did he do for work?

J: He worked for the telephone company (A: Okay) as almost the entire family did.

A: Oh really? Yah.

J: Yah. His brother Bill worked for the phone company. His brother Connie, his younger brother Connie, who became a very good friend of mine, worked for the telephone company. Cornelius at one time worked for the telephone company. Jack's father worked for the telephone company.

A: Okay. And what was his father's name?

J: Beside Mr. Desmond?

A: Would it be John as well?

J: No, it was William.

A: William?

J: Yah. Jack's brother Bill was the older brother, (A: Okay) and he was named after his father, and that was William. And all of them, the father, except Jack, Bill and Connie retired from the phone company. (A: Okay) Connie just two years ago. So they all worked there. (A: Yah) Connie Desmond, former state representative, who was city manager, he's the guy who appointed me to the Lowell Housing Authority.

A: I think it was the Lowell Redevelopment Authority.

J: Yes, that's right. That's what it was called then. And it was formed to form the basis for the, what was the Development Authority, the Housing Authority. The government subsidized various things that were available to us as a city, but we had no, because we had no organization to deal with that we had no access to it. (A: Okay) And I don't remember everybody who was on the Redevelopment Authority, but the chairman was a Monsignor Twist, who was then the pastor of the church up on Gorham Street.

A: Saint Peter's?

J: The one that was closed now. Is that called St. Peter's?

A: Yah, they just ripped it down a few years ago.

J: Did they? Did they actually rip it down? Again, I haven't been by there in a few years, because they had it all propped up the last time I was by there. That was pathetic, because that was a beautiful church. He was the pastor of that church, and he was chairman of the Redevelopment Authority. And a guy named Mello, who was a union business agent, (A: Yah) what was his first name?

A: Joe.

J: Joe, that's right, yah, also important, was on it, because I guess you needed to have a union guy. There were a couple of women, a couple of more guys, which I can't particularly remember. A fellow who was a young attorney, relatively young attorney, but well known in Lowell handled the temporary directorship of the Authority and acting as our one employee who did all the communicating, and got everything out and directed, kept the minutes you know, set up the meetings and all that sort of thing.

A: And who was that?

J: Um, I can't think of [unclear].

A: It wasn't Dick Flood, was it?

J: Yes, it was one of the Floods. I'm not sure, I don't think it was Dick. It could have been. Who was the Senior Flood? Wasn't that Dick that owned all the real estate?

A: Yah, I think Ned and Jim Flood was one of the brothers. They all died pretty young.

J: Yes they did.

A: They all died maybe in their 40's or 50's.

J: I remember Dick Flood, because being the landlord of the first store my dad and I opened. And Ned Flood I knew. I don't think it was either of them. So maybe it was Jim. I don't remember this guys' first name.

A: They owned a lot of property around town?

J: Oh yah, yah. Dick Flood, and Ned did too. Individual properties you know, like that block on Andover Street that we rented out. Dick particularly had a lot of big property like that, office space, small stores.

A: I think their father, or their uncle was city treasurer at one time.

J: It could have been. Well they're certainly a well-established family in Lowell.

A: Now I wanted to talk to you a little about the campaign before we go on to the Redevelopment Authority. Do you remember some of the issues that were happening during that time when Jack Desmond was running?

J: The first time he ran there was a hullabaloo over the fact that the city hired the device called the [grate-all]. At that time the device, these figures aren't accurate, probably cost \$10,000. It's a machine that has got all kinds of articulation that's used for grating and developing roadwork. (A: Umhm) And they were hiring this from some friend of the city manager's, or somebody he was associated with, (A: Okay) for some ridiculous fee a day, like a \$1,000 a day. (A: Wow) Most of which time it spent standing idly by the road waiting for other developments of the road before it could be used. And I remember going out, taking a picture. I didn't know what the hell a [grate-all] was. Take a picture of this thing and it became a focal point of Jack's campaign against the then, whatever he was, the chairman of the city council. Maybe he was city manager, or either an uncle became city manager.

A: Would it be Frank Barrett?

J: Well when was Frank Barrett city manager?

A: Right before Connie Desmond.

J: It could be. (A: Yah) Yah, although Jack lost that campaign, (A: Okay) which was probably 50's, the one you referred to in '57. (A: Okay) Very close, but he did lose. Yah, Frank Barrett, it could well be. And they were defending it you know, in many ways that politicians do. But I mean the bottom line was, it was political payback you know.

A: Yah. Yah. Do you remember the person that owned the grate-all?

J: Um, well-known excavating landfill paving company in Lowell.

A: Okay.

J: Church comes to me, but I'm not, I don't think it was Church, but it was somebody else. Just a family name. (A: Yah) And you know, we could have bought the machine for what we paid for I don't know, ten, twelve weeks we were renting it by them. And of course the longer it sat up there the more money the guy made. The machine wasn't even being used. In any case that was a big bone of contention and I imagine some focal point in that campaign, and there was a lot of hammering on it I remember. I wrote a brochure. I wrote a number of speeches for Jack. He would be on the radio. (A: Wow) And they all related to interplay of this incident, because Jack was a nobody I mean in terms [unclear] uncle was a state rep, but I mean he wasn't known politically.

A: Right. He was very young at the time, right?

J: Oh yah. You know, I, what was that, '59?

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

A: Yah.

J: But he certainly wasn't known as a political entity, but his name was known. That was another part of the political (A: Strategy?) strategy if you will, was that you used names that were well known. Unfortunately after a while everybody's name was well known because there was somebody in the family that was in politics. (A: Really?) Oh yah, Donahues, the you know, well you go back over all the names, French and Irish particularly, which seem to be the guys who went after politics. Johnny Janas as the one Pollock that I remember was an exception. (A: Yah) And we had a few, more than a few colorful Greeks that were in. And that George, Epicure Restaurant on the corner of Market and little Central Street there, was the political hotbed in town.

A: Was it?

J: Ah yah, it was the Georges brothers ran that. (A: Yah) And there were five of them. (A: Wow) And they ran it, very compatibly, which is extraordinary I always thought. A great bunch of guys. (A: Yah) And everybody met there to discuss politics, do secret things and decide who was going to be the next candidate, (A: Really) and who was going to support them. The Greeks were particularly adept at [McVillian] politics.

A: Really?

J: I mean they were, oh Jesus they loved it. They just absolutely loved it.

A: What were some of the stories you recall from those days?

J: Well they would, they would get together and they would discuss who was going to be a candidate, Greek or otherwise, it didn't make a difference. Who was going to be successful, and decide whether they wanted to back him, and if they were going to back them, decide who they were going to destroy in the process. (A: Really) The word might be competition. And they would sort out, I mean you can't believe the military precision that they used with this thing, and floating out who else was going to be a candidate. And whenever I wanted to know anything about the political scene as an update on something I had not been able to keep up with in anything, council, or statewide, or countywide for that manner, I'd go in to see Bill Georges. (A: Really) Yah, and get filled in. (A: Really) I mean oh yah, this guy's going to go for it, and he's going to get it. These two guys are going to go against him, and they're going to get wiped. And right on the money, because they had planned it months ahead of time. And they did as much work against this guy's enemies as they did for you. (A: Really) In the meantime you know, that was as far as I recall, the hottest spot in Lowell for lunch everyday. You know, all the lawyers were around the corner, and the cops were around the corner, and the Lowell Sun was around the corner. (A: Right) They all, they all accumulated there and that was a transmission of information there unlike any other place in downtown Lowell.

A: Did you know the guy John Georges?

J: Yah.

A: What was he like?

J: He was a gentleman. He had a lot of property, a lot of land. He was another guy who bought a lot of land. He bought land out on 495 long before it was ever a [division]. (A: Oh really) The family kept saying, "Hey, let go of that piece of shit. You can't farm it, you can't do anything with it." I bought it right. It's going to be good someday. And sure as hell they got a fantastic amount of money for it..

A: Where was it located exactly?

J: When you go out Andover Street, (A: Yah) and continue out there. Is that 113?

A: Ah, 133?

J: 133. You know when you get out where the, I don't know if it's still there, Stop and Shop, or a supermarket of some sort, a good size supermarket, almost up to the Andover line. (A: Okay) And the high-tension wires are near there somewhere. All that land, it was in the neighborhood of 150 acres of land from both sides of the road, and 495 goes right across [unclear] just beyond or before that restaurant.

A: Okay.

J: But he was involved in quite a few other pieces of property. Was John the one who had the Blue Moon?

A: Yah.

J: Yes. That was, that was one of the most famous business properties in Lowell. Because when John ran it, it was enormously successful, and John sold it almost every year and took back the paper. (A: Really) And people who would run it would never fail not to run it well. As a result he'd win it back six months, a year, two years later he'd win it back you know, the meantime he'd been paid for whatever he had, he won it back on paper. Took it back over, would build it right back up again into a successful operation, and again sell it. He sold that piece of property a dozen times and always made money on it. But he was a great guy.

A: Was he active politics?

J: On the outside. I didn't know an intelligent Greek in Lowell who wasn't active in politics you know, on the periphery, or behind the scene. [phone rings] Excuse me.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

A: Other issues around, around that time. Remember when the city moved from well water over to the river?

J: No, that occurred after me. (A: Okay) When did that (--)

A: I think it happened right around 1960, 61 when John was first on the council. They got rid of the Cook Well System.

J: Yah, but I don't recall that as being an issue. It may have been something that was going on at that time, but it doesn't (--)

A: In 1960 they voted to suspend the city manager, and then the next council meeting they voted to put him back in. Do you remember that?

J: Vaguely. Was that Desmond?

A: That was, John was on that first, first (--)

J: Yah, was it Connie Desmond?

A: No, this was Frank Barrett.

J: So Frank Barrett was the manager after Connie Desmond and before him?

A: No, right before.

J: Right before?

A: Yes.

J: So who was the city manager who was fired and then rehired?

A: Frank Barrett. He was fired and then two weeks later rehired, and then next year they got rid of him for good.

J: What were the circumstances?

A: I don't know exactly. That's why I was wondering if you remembered.

J: No, I do not. I remember the incident now when you mention it, but I don't recall any of the details.

A: Okay. How about the Industrial Park out on Chelmsford Street, any issues out there?

J: When did the Lowell Redevelopment Authority first form?

A: 1961.

J: Okay. Well that's when I served on the board. And was Connie Desmond city manager then?

A: Actually it was formed in '61, and then you went on probably in '62 because Connie Desmond started in '62.

J: Sayers, John Sayers was the lawyer who was the liaison for the Lowell Redevelopment Authority. (A: Okay) It wasn't Flood. It was Sayers. His name just came to me. I only served, we were involved with that as a consideration. It was one of the many projects that were possibly going to be considered by the authority to get government financing for, (A: Okay) or partial government financing. But I only served on the Redevelopment Authority for what amounted to nine, less than a year. (A: Okay)

And the reason for that was what happened. Our primary responsibility on that first Redevelopment Authority was to hire a director, (A: Okay) a professional, full-time director. As I recall the figure that we had for a starting salary was \$10,000 a year. We soon learned that that was nowhere near enough to attract what was then a confident, experienced Redevelopment Authority director. We had found this guy in New York who was very interested in moving out of New York more than anything else, nothing but praise for this guy. Had him up here and interviewed him a couple of times, but we were going to need, I forgot the figure, closer to \$15,000 to hire this guy. And we pulled as a group, pulled every string that we had in the city council to get this salary up so that we could hire a first rate guy to run this thing, because none of us including anyone in the city knew anything about redevelopment, and particularly you needed somebody who had the experience to weave his way through the entanglements of government relationships to get this stuff done.

A: So urban renewal was kind of a new field at that time?

J: That was, that was an aspect of this. These were all, I remember there being like a wide focus photograph of all the possible projects the redevelopment authority could finger as things the city was interested in doing to further growth and employment, tax base on all of the things that were the objective of these programs, many of which were really just forming in the federal government level too. So they didn't even exist in their full operational [set]. So I mean this thing had just enormous potential for the city as old as Lowell was, who had lost its textile base at one point, and we were flagellates in the electronics business at that point. (A: Okay) Wang was in Tewksbury. There was really nothing else in Lowell. There was a few fabrication plants. Crax was still big at that time, but getting smaller. You know, there was nothing with any real growth potential industrially to employ all of the people that had once worked here. (A: Wow) And to use, the other aspect of it was to use all of our empty mill space. We have miles of it, miles of it. Anyhow, as a group I felt that we were, I had served on a board at the Y, and then served on the board of a couple of companies, this was my first experience with a put together politically connected group of people to deal with a municipal type problem. And I thought that we had a group that were very thoughtful, provided a lot of good insight to information we needed to see, and really put the shoulders behind getting this budget up to the point where we could hire a professional so we could have a first rate operation that would do the city a lot of good. (A: Yah) That's it. Then we have to go into the political aspect of it, okay. If I recall correctly, and you can check this, there were five or seven people on that board.

A: I think there was probably five.

J: Okay. And there was Joe Mello, myself and Monsignor Twiss, there were a couple of women, and there was at least another guy. (A: Okay) And I don't remember who they were. (A: Okay) But we finally got the budget up, and we were meeting the following week to appoint this guy the first Redevelopment Authority director.

A: From New York?

J: From New York. The meeting was convened by Monsignor Twiss in the office where we met at town, at city hall. A motion was made by Joe Mello to nominate the kid who was a reporter for the Lowell Sun.

A: Bill Kiely?

J: Bill Kiely. I didn't think much of Bill Kiely then, and I certainly thought a lot less of him after this event took place. Monsignor Twiss said, "I thought we were meeting to affirm the nomination of our candidate, Charlie Brown, whatever his name was." And Joe says, "I think this man might be more qualified and he's local." He says, "What does he do?" He says, "He works for the Lowell Sun." "What does he do for the Lowell Sun?" "He's a reporter." You know, and I mean Monsignor Twiss was as astounded as I was. The motion was seconded by one of the other people at the meeting. There were one, two, three, four votes for it, and Monsignor Twiss and I. (A: Really) Yah. And this guy was elected. What was his name again?

A: Bill Kiely.

J: Bill Kiely, right, as the first director of the Lowell Redevelopment at \$15,000 a year. At that time he was making about \$8, or \$9,000 a year as a reporter for the Lowell Sun, and had absolutely no experience in this area at all, except he probably knew every political face in town without a doubt. I resigned.

A: Did you?

J: Yah.

A: Immediately after.

J: Immediately after. I wrote a letter to the city manager, and I thanked him for appointing me, but that there was no way you were ever going to get anything done this way. John called me, Jack Desmond called me, Walt Costello called me and wanted me to retract it because you know, you have to work with these people. And Joe Mello was not a friend of John's but he was certainly a political ally of John, as he was of Walt Costello. (A: Okay) But I only knew him from his serving on the board. I might have met him before that, but I certainly didn't know the guy. And this is how things were done, you know. I didn't recognize that. I didn't like it. And I, you know, quit and I was absolutely firm of my position. I didn't want to have any part of it. And so that's why all the things that took place in the early 60's on the Redevelopment, oh I'm sure I was reading about them and aware of them at that time, but you know, I was offended that they were taking place and not really paying a lot of attention to it.

A: Now why did you, why do you think they hired somebody like Bill Kiely?

J: Because it's done all the time. (A: Yah) It's done all the time. Why did they hire the former president of the Senate as the president of Merrimack, at Mass, U Mass? Because he's got the votes, right? And he wants the job. He wants some cush job that's going to pay him forever. So we got a school system at the medium and upper level that's filled with directors who have little or no experience in education. All kinds of experience in politics.

A: Let me ask you about some personalities that you might, or might not remember surrounding the Redevelopment Authority. The original board which only served a short while, Peter Riley?

J: I know him. He owned a printing company. A family business.

A: And if you have any stories associated with these guys, or any dealings.

J: No, my relationship with him was very cordial. He was a gentleman.

A: Okay. How about Albert Notini?

J: Yah, I knew him. I knew him, Mr. Notini. Gentleman, ran that business. Was he the one who was a music director at the high school, or was he the one who ran that wholesale tobacco shop?

A: I think he ran the store there.

J: Yah, okay. I remember him, but I, I knew him, but not real well.

A: Okay. Leo Clermont?

J: Yah, ran the meat market?

A: Yup.

J: Yah I knew him. I knew his brother, his brother Joe. (A: Maybe, yah) Yah. Yah. I knew him better, and again you know, hard worker, rambunctious sort of a guy, but got things done.

A: Okay. John Egan?

J: From the bank? (A: Yes) Yah. A staid banker type, you know, very close vested. I don't think he trusted too many people.

A: Really? Why?

J: It's how he acted. He was a banker. People always want things from banks, or bankers. Just a close vested guy. He might have been a very nice guy, but I mean I

certainly was in his company, and met him quite a number of times, because the Union National handled our financial affairs for the company.

A: Oh they did? Yah.

J: So my dad and I were in there a number of times. And I remember one of the times we were in there for something where we wanted to borrow some money to do something or another, and we were not rejected because we've been there for a long time and had a lot of money [unclear], but they were giving us a hard time. And we had this meeting in John Egan's office, and somebody else come in and out, he was a more junior banker, and I mean you know, it was an interrogation. And you know, we weren't going anywhere. We'd been in this town for all of these years, and all of us kids were born and brought up here. I found it you know, irritating and insulting. At that point I was probably in my mid 20's or so, and even then I felt as though I was a little too young to you know, backhand anybody at that age. But I told my dad when we left that building, I remember walking about away through the lobby, the main lobby of the Merrimack Street branch, the main branch of the Union National Bank, saying "I don't ever want to go through that again." They have no right to that information, and you know, the sum of money you want to borrow is a fraction of what we have in his bank, and there's no reason to be handled that way. And I, when we got out, when my dad retired and my brother and I took over the business, one of the first things I did was move the money out of that bank.

A: Oh really? What were they, what were they looking for, for information?

J: Yah, they were badgering us with question like they might ask you as an historian about a business matter. You know, about how this was going to be done? What you anticipated from this? Why you felt that was going to be successful? And many of the questions were oblique. They were not being asked for the purpose of answer to that question. They were being asked to reveal other information.

A: Really?

J: Yah, I thought so. I was really teed off at him. I couldn't, except for the sense of it describe it any more accurately than that to you.

A: Now was Homer Bourgeois there?

J: Yah, Homer was the president of the bank.

A: Yah, and he was in this meeting.

J: Oh no, no. He had very little to do with day to day business, not long after he became president. He was a day to day working executive at the Union National Bank [of the Yankee manner], and he was among the first of the ethnic groups to achieve you know, a

high level of power by being elected, appointed and elected president of the Union National Bank by the Yankee board that controlled it and owned it.

A: What was his role with the Yankee community?

J: Well his role with the Yankee community was the ethnic liaison to the non-Yankee community, which represented obviously in it's mix, the vast majority of the population of Lowell, (A: Okay) particularly the French, which were, which were second only to the Yankees in terms of a number of them. I've forgotten the numbers. In those days we had a 100 odd thousand people in the city. And they were 25, or 30,000 Frenchmen and only a few more percentage were Yankee names, whether they were or not, and various other ethnic groups followed that. The Irish were behind the French, but again not by much. (A: Okay) But the French were almost the largest population group in the city, (A: Okay) and certainly among the most vocal. (A: Really) Well from the viewpoint of emotional excitement. If they got excited about an issue, for Christ sake they were all over the place. And Homer was a member of the French Club over on, what's that street called?

A: Over by the common, the North Common?

J: Yes.

A: The Lafayette Club?

J: Lafayette Club. Lafayette Club. Cam Brousseau, whose name I mentioned to you before, the fellow who came from Pawtucket with my Dad and started the bleach business, or who worked, still works with my father in the floor covering business, and worked with us when we opened it, and he was a member of the Lafayette Club and regarded himself as a friend of Homer Bourgeois' as every Frenchman who ever met him did, because he was a [gregacious] guy and well spoken, and really you know, looked after the community. The guy had a big heart. And they picked the right guy, because they picked the guy who everyone got along with who knew him. Once you met him you were pleased to know him. And he was cordial and gracious, and he was a man of means at that point, because he was given, paid a lot of stock for his position as president of the company, and eventually controlled the bank.

A: He did? He controlled the bank?

J: Yes.

A: In stock?

J: If he didn't control it, he was very close to controlling it. (A: Hm) He was president of the Union National Bank for quite a few years, (A: Okay) almost all of my business years in Lowell. (A: Okay) In any case he would represent the community, the French community, particularly the French business community. Clermont you mentioned (A:

Okay) was one of them I know that got along very well with the Union National Bank. Eventually I think he was a director, and that was through Homer and the Lafayette Club.

A: Okay.

J: Homer was at the Lafayette Club with regularity, like Cam Brousseau, and Cam went there two or three times a week.

A: Oh really.

J: Have lunch, it was a very [unclear] little place, and it served good food, and good drink. And you know, it was popular with the French population. And it was their intermixing point for those that were successful. Very similar to the, I don't know if it's still there, the Greek Democratic Club. (A: Okay) Does that still exist in Lowell?

A: No it doesn't.

J: Okay. Well that was a mucky muck political club that was largely populated by Greeks. And if you were a non-Greek and you were invited there you got to know all the Greek boys and if you were acceptable, and the same was true at the Lafayette Club, or any of the others, the Polski Club is the same way, you had an entrance to their inner circle. (A: I see) And that was one of the other links like the Olympics that interlocked, that formed the political connections and drove the power in Lowell. (A: Hm) From those groups came candidates they agreed upon support, and they in turn interlocked with other ethnic groups, which they had no formal, superficial relationship, but the same kind of a relationship I'm describing that I might have had with the Greek Democratic Club, because I was brought in by a Greek, he introduced me to his friends. Introduced me to his friends. (A: Yah) So therefore I became a friend of theirs. And that didn't mean they'd murder for me, but it did mean that if I called them they'd answer the phone and speak to me, and help me whine my way through the Democratic power scene of the Greek community. (A: Okay) And you know, in Ireland and in England there's the tradition of the Pubs, which are the local gathering places for men particularly of the community, and all the interchanging of gossip and news takes place at those. The same things exist in Europe and all of the various ethnic groups in Europe. I'm sure certainly in your family's tradition of the Turkish side of it, there's all that business of smoking and the black coffee (A: Right), where they met and they talked. It was a social event for the guys, the exchange of information. And everybody likes to know what's going on. And they certainly like to know just as much as women do about what's going on in the inside. And the lifeblood of political activity is knowledge of that information. And there's not, that doesn't exist anymore. (A: Okay) I mean it exists only in another form, a looser form, a more arms length form. It doesn't have the warmth that it had. When I was brought in to the Greek Democratic Club by what the hell was his name?

A: Was it Louie Kolofolios?

J: No, no. No, no. That was [unclear]. He was a brilliant Greek politician who was never elected into office. (A: Really) Yah. And he knew everybody. And he knew where all the bodies were buried and what the connections were.

A: And what did he do for work?

J: He ran a catering business and bartended.

A: Was it Ernie Cagnas?

J: No, he worked for Sam Samaras.

A: Okay.

J: Sam was once a cop, eventually owned a package store with his brother.

A: Okay.

J: And Sam also owned a couple of bars, and he worked from [Xagoras, Xagoras] spelled with an X.

A: That's the guy?

J: Yes.

A: That's the guy that was the political guy?

J: Yes, brought me into the Greek Club. And what the hell was his first name?

A: Was he an older guy?

J: Not, well no, older than me, but not an older guy. He was Walt Costello's age, maybe about four or five years older. (A: Okay) [Gogi Zagoras. Gogi Zagoris]. (A: Okay) A political operative of the first degree.

A: Really. Now was Homer Bourgeois involved in politics?

J: On the outside all the time. (A: Really) Never in front. (A: Yah, yah) Way back. He fingered, he shoved, he pulled and he was a powerhouse.

A: Really. Who were some of the people he supported around town, do you remember?

J: Oh, I'd have to think back who the French candidates were back in them, back at that time. One guy he didn't support, a Frenchman in the 1972 Congressional race that my brother was involved in was the Frenchman there, the Monsignor who was, who ran for Congress as a Republican.

A: Spike Morrissette?

J: Spike Morrissette, right.

A: He didn't support him?

J: He didn't support him.

A: How come?

J: Because he thought he was stupid. (A: Really?) Yah. And he was right. (A: Yah) Yah.

A: And so who did, who did Homer support?

J: Oh in that particular race I don't know. He gave us money.

A: He did, really.

J: Yah.

A: Paul Cronin maybe?

J: I doubt it. (A: Okay) Paul Cronin was supported by the entrenched Republican stronghold of Brad Morse, and Homer was still I think you know, a Democrat, although he might have been registered otherwise. He was certainly not an aristocrat as Republicans regarded him. (A: Yah, yah) The Republican Party belonged to the Yankees, and only a very few ethnic groups were in their. Italians and a few Irish, but you know, as Churchill once said, "If you're not liberal when you're young you don't have a heart, and if you're not conservative when you're old you don't have a brain." So he found a few ethnic types who were successful at what they did, whatever it might have been, and felt they belonged in that crowd. (A: Okay) And a dye hard Democratic friend of mine from Connecticut who was a former state rep there, who insist that those Irish that are Republicans don't know, they think they're rich, and they foolishly [end up broke.]

A: Um, let me try some other names on you for the Redevelopment Authority. John Mullin, he was the union rep? I think Joe Mello might have replaced him.

J: Yah, it rings a bell. No, on that board I'm referring to Joe Mello was the original appointee. Mullin might have replaced him. The name rings a bell, but I don't know the man.

A: Okay. How about George Hudson?

J: No.

A: Edgar Vigeant?

J: Vigeant.

A: They used to call him Ricco, Ricco Vigeant.

J: I remember the name. It was a very popular name around Lowell. A lot originated from Lowell. No, I don't recall anyone with that name.

A: Okay. And how about George O'Meara?

J: Yah.

A: He later became a councilor. He worked for the Telephone Company.

J: Yah, he was a friend of Jack Desmond. Um, and I knew him. I don't have any particular good or bad experiences with him. (A: Okay) I think I knew him mostly when he worked for Jack Desmond.

A: Okay. And tell us about the Monsignor. What do you know about him?

J: Arrogant. Aristocrat. Regarded himself as a Prince of the church. No, which always offended me. I, the churches in Lowell, the Catholic churches in Lowell, which are mostly, absolutely beautiful architectural pieces were built with the nickels and dimes of the working poor people. (A: Right) And this guy lived up in the rectory in absolute luxury. (A: Really) Oh yah, the best of everything. He used to call me to replace oriental rugs over there that he was tired of looking at and were worth thousands of dollars. You know, just not a compassionate man. Not the kind of a man that ever should have become, in my opinion, a Monsignor. We had another Monsignor in Lowell named [Heida], (A: Yah) a German. Did you know him, [unclear]?

A: He was up at Saint Margaret's I think?

J: That's right, yah. He was a very close friend of my father's and I knew him very, very well. I got to know that man very well. Extraordinary guy. Just an extraordinary guy. He was like Homer Bourgeois was to the banking world, he was into everything, but you never saw him in anything. (A: Okay) I mean he would help out more people, and more entities, and get more things done by just making phone calls and plugging things together, and a great guy. Just, a guy like him, if he hadn't gotten sick in his later years, and eventually died from that illness, he probably would have been a Bishop, or a Cardinal of the church. He was a brilliant guy, brilliant organizer.

A: Tell us about the pick six election. That was the 1961 election, and the group of people got together, including Jack Desmond, and ran kind of as a slate.

J: Who else was on that slate? I remember that phrase.

A: Ellen Sampson, Bart Callery, Ray Lord, Joe Downes.

J: Ray Lord was the big French candidate of Bourgeois.

A: He was.

J: [Unclear]. Who else was there?

A: Joe Downes and John F. Carney.

J: Oh yah, John F. Carney, the character.

A: Do you remember his radio speeches?

J: Oh yes, I remember it well. For a short period of time after the war my father was in the carnival business sort of. (A: He was?) Yah, he ran a concession and he went around, and that's what John Carney's father did. (A: Right) And John Carney took it over. It was Carney's Entertainment Company, or something like that, and he ran these little carnivals that you see in churches now. And John Carney, as that business died, went to work for WCAP as an advertisement salesman. And we advertised on CAP and Puritan at that point you know, we were running the store, my father and my uncle. So he would see me regularly to get ads and set up ads, and he was a guy who loved to talk. Funny I still talk about him, because he was a very deep thinker. He was a guy who never smoked in his life. (A: Really) Never had a drink in his life. (A: Really) I mean worked out at the Y three, four days a week, stayed in shape, and he died very young, a raging cancer. I just always thought that was so incongruous to a guy who lived a type of life he lived. And he was a very devout catholic. I mean he went to church all the time. I don't think Jack ever married. He might have, but I'm not sure. I seem to recall he didn't. Anyhow, he was a very thoughtful man, and in his thick conservative way could be extremely lucid and gather support from nowhere, you know. I mean when he first ran that show on CAP you know, the switchboard would light up after he was done, and 90% of the calls were supporting him. (A: Really) And you know, you get, because John would say some things you know, on the radio that would raise some fireworks. Yes, I remember that effort being made, and it was being made as I recall to the elimination of somebody who wasn't on that list. Do you know who else ran during that period?

A: Sam Pollard was kind of John Carney's nemesis, and visa versa.

J: Yes, that's right. Oh yah, he did a job on Sam Pollard. (A: Yah) Who else?

A: Um, let me think here. I know people that fell off were Arthur Gendreau.

J: Yah, I remember his name.

A: But I think Frank Barrett was the guy they were really hot on.

J: So Frank Barrett was supported by Sam Pollard, (A: Right) and this guy Gendreau, was it Gendreau, (A: Gendreau) and others that you mentioned that were defeated. (A: Right) (A: Okay) Then maybe that's what I'm thinking of. That was the purpose of it, was to elect a city council that was going to say to the public before they were elected, they'll can him, and they did.

A: Yah, they wanted to get rid of Frank Barrett, number one. Now do you remember some of the speeches that Carney gave [phone rings] on the radio?

J: Um, not in detail right now, but I can feel the tone of them and the direction of them, yes.

A: Do you remember his famous football team?

J: Yah, that does ring a bell.

A: And Frank Lawlor from the Lowell Sun as one, you know, the quarterback or something, and Clemie Costello, and Homer Bourgeois, and other people, James Cooney. [Phone rings]

J: Excuse me. [Answers the phone-tape is turned off]

Side B ends

Tape II, side A begins

J: I've got to get going soon.

A: Okay. Yah, I just have a few more questions. On that pick six election, did the candidates ever meet? Did you ever coordinate a meeting between the candidates on this slate?

J: As I recall there was a lot of conversations between the candidates, telephone conversations. And a few of them who were close did meet, but not as a group. At least I never participated in anything as a group. (A: Okay. All right) And at that time, yah at that time I was still active in the Desmond's campaign. But at that time, and when Jack ran for state rep, and when my brother ran in '72, what I did for Jack in doing those campaigns, a lot of campaigns were primarily speech writing and putting ads together, and I acted as the track, statistician on election night, and nomination night, election night. Other than that I wasn't doing the day to day strategy, but if I heard something you know, I'd call Walter and give him what I heard and he'd act on it.

A: Yah. Okay. Now why did Jack Carney decide to run for council?

J: Because he felt he could do something. (A: Yah) Yah, he was in the vernacular you know, a thick nick, but he had a good mind. But the thicknickness was stronger than the mind was in some cases, and I laugh about that now, but it was a serious problem then, because you know, these guys were very committed people. Jack Carney was not a fool either intellectually, or politically, he did what he did because he believe that that's what needed to be done to fix something. And he was willing to sacrifice himself and his reputation to do that. So it didn't bother him one iota to come off as an ass as times on the radio, because he sought to get that point made. He was a very honest guy.

A: Yah.

J: I always admired that.

A: Now why do you think he was so opposed to guys like Homer Bourgeois?

J: Power. You know, I mean you got to understand that the Homer Bourgeois era, Homer Bourgeois could pick up the phone and kill a guy, or make him, I mean literally.

A: In the political field?

J: In any field, socially, economically, politically, honest to God. I mean you had a few power brokers in that city like you did everywhere who had those kinds of connections. If Homer said you are no good and not to have anything to do with you, you couldn't believe how isolated you'd become. (A: Really) Yah. And he didn't do that lightly. He was a vindictive type of a guy. (A: Right) But if he did that because you were a bad guy, or had bad motivation, you were dead. And there were a few Greek boys who had that experience. (A: Really) I don't now whether they had them particularly with Homer, but they, they tried to bully their way into the king makers lap. And you know, he recognized them for what they were. They had a reputation and they were blackballed. (A: Really) And as a result of that they could get no support anywhere.

A: Really, wow! Who were some of the guys that he was opposed to?

J: There was a guy, a Greek who ran for Congress out of the Acre. He had run for every office in the city.

A: George Macheras?

J: Yes. George Macheras, (A: Okay) he was one that happened to. (A: Really) When he got, he was first, I think he was elected wasn't he, to the city council, or school committee?

A: No. When Sam Sampson, Ellen Sampson's husband died on the council floor with the proportional representation Macheras had come in way at the bottom with the popular

vote, but because of PR and the number one votes, he got all the number two votes for Sam Sampson, and he was actually put into the council.

J: Ah huh. Okay. Yah.

A: Never, I don't think he ever won an election after that.

J: He never won at all. It's like Paul Tsongas. Paul, who as a close friend of my brother Roger, they went to high school together, and Paul's uncle and father were friends of my father. We took our cleaning there. I never knew Paul that well, and so I never developed a relationship with him. I was older than him. But I remember when Paul came back from the Peace Corps, and was marching down Merrimack Street with a Vietnam Kong flag, you know, leading an anti, peace march of sorts, which was alien to us at that time. And he ran for city council. And the guy he ran against dropped dead, and he was elected. He was a new comer, out of the blue. Most people couldn't even pronounce his name, never mind spell it. And he was city councilor, he was school committee a couple of terms, and then he ran for city council. And some other quirk happened there too, and he got elected.

A: Then he was on County Commission.

J: Then he was a County Commissioner, and the Lowell Sun was all set to support him against cleaning out, you know, for cleaning out the guy who was a thief that was in there, Michael something or other. And when, to the total surprise of Paul Tsongas, Brad Morse decides not to run and take the UN job. You know, and he was already boxed in with the Lowell Sun.

A: Who was already boxed in?

J: Paul Tsongas (A: Okay) with the, to run for the County Commission. (A: Yah) And he couldn't extricate himself. And he regretted that, he'd tell you so any day. I remember having a conversation with him when he lived down here in the Cape in the summer.

A: So this was 1972 election?

J: Right. Well no, no. Yes, '72. Yes '72 is when he was running for (A: Commissioner), backed by the Lowell Sun, running for Commissioner against this guy Mike something or other, who was a corrupt Commissioner. And the Lowell Sun was backing him all the way, when Brad Morse as a complete surprise to the Lowell Sun who supposedly knew all such things, decided to take the UN job. Brad Morse had had it. He was, he was never a guy who was much interested in work. He was real good at Edith Nourse's AA, but I mean he was never a real you know, gangbusters go get him type Congressman. (A: Yah) But he held on to the job because the Yankees elected him, just, he took care of everybody else too, so, that he could. Anyhow, that was a complete political surprise (A: Okay) to everyone in the city of Lowell. And Paul would have

liked to have run. That was where he wanted to go for the County Commissioner's job, but lucky for him that he was married to that commitment to the Lowell Sun to run, that he didn't get involved in the devil cal that, the war that took place with national publicity. There was more money spent on the Fifth Congressional District in Lowell for Congress than there was for any Congressional race in the country, number one. Number two, we had more candidates on both sides. I think there were nine republicans and there were twelve democrats. Everybody who was anybody was running. And Walt Costello was working for Paul Sheehy who was running, was a state rep, and he was because Paul Sheehy was a friend of his. And Paul got him his job at Lowell Tech as Financial Officer, Financial Aid Officer. (A: Okay) And I was working for my brother Roger who ended up running as an independent only because he had gone in to vote the previous year and switched his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat in order to nominate somebody on a Democratic ticket. And then you'd have the automatic switch back, and had forgotten to switch back. (A: Okay) And when he went in to get nomination papers for the Republican party, he was registered as a Democrat.

A: Who was he nominating the year before?

J: Who was he voting for? I don't know, but whoever it was, he'd move it in. Then you could make the switch on your party allegiance and get him a ballot. And you had to go to city hall to switch back. And he failed to do that anyways. That's why he was an independent. He was basically a conservative Republican. Anyhow that turned out to be a major mess.

A: That was a real huge election right?

J: Oh it was, I mean it involved Lawrence and their hometown boys, and our hometown boys.

A: John Kerry.

J: John, and John Kerry who, the carpetbagger from Dunstable who was a Vietnam Vet. And I mean of Jesus, some of the intrigue in that race was unbelievable.

A: Tell us some stories.

J: We had, we had a political operative in Washington who worked for Nixon, working for us. (A: Really) Yah, his name was Finkelstein, he was rather well-known. (A: Okay) And one of his men was a guy named, two brothers from Connecticut, the kid you want to talk to is my middle brother Roger. (A: Okay) He's an historian. (A: Is he?) Oh yah. He regards himself as an amateur historian. His actual job is as an appraisal and personal property [unclear]. I can't think of this kid's name now, but this kid worked for Bill Buckley, the columnist, writer who was, at that time was the voice of conservatism in America. And between Bill and Finkelstein they had all kinds of political connections. They had both worked for Nixon. And he was having his people dig into Kerry's past (A: Oh really) to find out you know, where there was, was it Nixon who invented the

term “dirty tricks”? Maybe publicly, but it was not him who invented it. Anyhow you know, they came up with this thing. When a ship is in trouble it needs help. The signal for it was to fly the flag upside down. (A: Okay) That’s tradition. (A: Right) However men don’t go around parades carrying flags upside down without it being insulting to the country. And he did this in Washington. (A: Okay) Very much like Paul carrying the Viet Kong Flag down the street. (A: Yah) And he had written a book, Kerry. (A: He did?) Yah, before 1972. He was a big admirer of John F. Kennedy, and he was John F. Kerry. And he liked, loved the firm, the term JFK. And you know, he was modeling himself after Kennedy in terms of he was a war hero, and he was writing a book. He wrote a book and he published a book, yet in the Congressional race in 1972, one of the things Bill Buckley came to [unclear], “If I wrote a book I’d want everybody to know about it, and I’d sell a hundred copies if I sold that many or more during the election,” right? (A: Right) So why doesn’t he want anybody to know about this book? So he found the book. He located the book. And on the cover of the book was John Kerry in a parade of veterans carrying the American flag upside down. I get on the phone and call whoever published the book. I can’t think of who it was. It wasn’t Prentiss Hall, but it was someone like that, and I had to speak to their authorization’s department. And they faxed me permission to reproduce the cover of one of their author’s books, specifically John Kerry’s. I got it in writing, and boy did that girl regret that. The next day we ran a full-page ad in the Lowell Sun, John Kerry carrying the American flag upside down, in his book that he refuses to release to the population of Lowell. Why does John Kerry not want you to read his book that he wrote and published?” Holy shit! I want to tell you, World War II broke out, because Clem Costello and his brother John supported [Roger?]. (A: They did, yah) They didn’t object to Cronin, they thought he was a milk toast, and the thought the same of Brad Morse. And that was largely true. They were guys who absorbed the job. They weren’t good at it, and but Clem and John were both realist. It was better to be a friend of the Congressman than to be an enemy. So in that basis they got along. But their support was always preferably with hometown guys who had the heads to do the job, and would not cooperate with them so much. They had all the power and money in the world. They didn’t need anything. But bring to Lowell political strength. And you know, they had picked the right guy in Paul Tsongas, and for the job that he got. And to finish that story with Paul Tsongas, Paul was easily elected County Commissioner, and avoided the war in Lowell that year. And Cronin ended up getting disgraced in office for claiming too many credits on the money that supposedly came to Lowell, (A: Oh really) and ran as an underdog, and two years later for the re-election, and Paul beat him easily, and he would have probably anyhow, but beat him easily and quite a turnaround.

A: And everybody else that had ran in ’72 had you know, spent their money and (--) Oh, they were, they were wounded, scattered and dis-[unclear] and they were all over the place, and most of them politically in ruin. Yah, there were many of them financially in ruin. It was unbelievable. This book could be written just about that, and all the candidates, and what happened to them all. But then two, or three terms later Paul wanted to run for Senate, (A: Right) and ran against Ed Brooks. Powerful, black, liberal Republican Senator from Massachusetts. A whole incongruous list of titles. And he gets attacked by his wife, and his daughters for non-support, and rousing, and carousing in the

islands. (A: Wow) And goes into the shit! I mean literally from king of the hill to in the pot. And Paul walks in, you know. I mean a relatively unknown three-term congressman from Lowell, and he walks in to the United States Senate. And he was a tremendous success in the United States Senate. And I don't personally agree with Paul's politics, but I always thought a great deal of him as a person, and a very compassionate man.

A: Now your brother ran, and did he pull out in one of the elections?

J: My brother ran as an independent, and we withdrew from the race (A: Okay) a few days before the election because our polls showed that we were going to go head to head with Cronin, and it was very unlikely we would win, because the Republicans would stick with a Republican, and that would be the difference. Our pollster who was the same guy Finkelstein took out of Washington, felt that the wisest thing for us to do would be to throw in our support with Cronin, and gain some political leverage from that, and we'd elect Cronin. I'm not sure that Finkelstein's motivation was Roger's best interest. I think it might have been a Republican party's best interest, but I couldn't disagree with the logic of it, because I had the same sense that the race was so close, the Democratic guy was out of it. The race was so close the Democratic guy was out. Kerry, we had weakened him so much, we had, not Cronin. That's the other thing. You know, White Knight Cronin stood apart from this savage war. (A: Oh really?) The battlefield was littered with blood and he was white as white knight. But he was politically smart enough to welcome us with open arms. And I did the talking at that meeting. (A: Really) He agreed that the race was very close, and that if we jumped in the bed with him that he would win it. And if we didn't we may both lose it, but certainly he would lose it. And so, which I personally think that Finkelstein, the guy in Washington, the political operative, probably had access to the information on Cronin's on internal polls, because he was a powerhouse in the Republican Party. (A: Right) And because of his position, Roger would want to know where Cronin was. And this probably gave him more accurate information than somebody else might have had, because Cronin, as with all professional politicians, spend much more money on polls and political management that people like us did. I remember that campaign was the first time I ever saw a fax machine.

A: Oh really? They had them back then?

J: Yah. We had to rent one from the phone company. It was about \$200.00 a month. God damn machine had to be this high and that wide. It took two guys to carry it in.

A: It was about two feet tall and three feet long?

J: Yah. No, it was about eighteen inches tall, and easily two feet wide, and it was deeper than a shelf. It was as wide as a desk. And because of Finkelstein in Washington, I mean he'd fly down here ever week or ten days, but he was communicating stuff back and forth all the time on the fax machine. Something came out in the paper and he'd want to read it, fax it to him, and [snaps finger]. But today for Christ sake we get 200 in a day in this little office.

A: That's right. Now did Bourgeois, did he support Paul Tsongas?

J: I would guess that he did. I don't know that, but I would guess that he did. He was his kind of man.

A: Yah. And how about the guy Eldred Field, did you ever meet him?

J: Yup, many times.

A: What was he like?

J: Stayed, Yankee gentleman. Gentleman first, but you know, he took care of his own.

A: Okay. Active politically?

J: Always behind the scenes. (A: Yah) Yah, always behind. I think, did Eldred run for one thing, for the School Committee, or something like that?

A: Ran for School Committee during the war.

A: Ran for School Committee during the war and won, but then got drafted shortly after.

J: Yah, and so never served.

A: Yah.

J: He was a powerhouse in Lowell, not of the magnitude of Homer Bourgeois, or the Costellos, but certainly among the varmints, he was, he was one of the top boys.

A: And what was the relationship between Homer and the Costellos?

J: Like all power brokers, I think they were allies when they felt it was to their advantage, but more often than not they weren't.

A: Okay.

J: The Costellos were not really Republican, but they were conservative, and as John Desmond was. John Desmond was, was a misnomer at that time, though a conservative Democrat. The Costellos were really conservatives first, and party was not that important to them, but they did get more involved in the Republicans eventually, because it was the nature of the politics.

A: Right. Right.

J: That never came to be involving conservative Democratic set-up if you will.

A: Yah, yah.

J: Um, so, but there was no place for those people who felt that way. Any case I think Homer, Homer more than any of the political powers in Lowell, had the pulse of any of the groups as to what they were doing and who they were fronting, and who they were backing. And he joined those groups when it involved someone that you know, that he thought would be a good leader. (A: Okay) And certainly [unclear] but he didn't. But every once in a while we had a candidate like Paul Tsongas who was absolutely, and certainly not elected by the Greeks, or by himself, that is he had broad support, and got broader every year and he was elected because he, and he did, this is another thing I always liked about the guy. He did it without being a political, political. That is, he didn't frequent the bars. He didn't frequent the political locations. You could always find Paul at home at night. He went to certain types of social events that had political undertones, or overtones to them, where his presence was needed to support them, and always with his wife on his arm. He was never scadalading around town with every female that was available, as was political you know, [unclear]. And the guys who were in the campaign in '72, which were mostly experienced state reps, city councilors, god knows, all the political, the [unclear] of them, whatever you call it were there. They were all people who had operated in that political arena, which required that type of a set-up. If you wanted to meet all of the guys who were running around all of the bars, ten bars in a night, and get home and have all you can do to you know, flop into bed. And I remember in the early Desmond campaigns you know, we did that too. (A: Really) That's how you, I mean you know, the local pub was the local hangout for all the guys in their groups. Whether it was, the Lafayette Club was a step above that. The Yorick Club was the same way in downtown Lowell, but all the others were neighborhood bar places, with the exception of the Epicure Restaurant, which had a lounge in the back, and a restaurant in the front. And that was a political gathering spot.

A: Citywide?

J: Citywide, (A: Okay) yes, and all ethnic groups. (A: Okay) And down the street was the Greek restaurant, Olympus?

A: Olympus, yah.

J: Olympus, yah, and that's where the Greeks went. (A: Okay) And DeMoulas' first supermarket was around the corner, and then a little shop right beside it.

A: Oh Tatsios.

J: Tatsios right, Tatsios. [Unclear]. He was a real political operative. (A: Really) Oh yah. He, I used to call him a gun-slinger. I mean you know, if you wanted to go out and assassinate somebody, I mean not physically, but politically and mentally and otherwise, Tatsios was the guy. You know he'd get so excited. A barber shop, was it a barber shop?

A: No, it was a little lunch cart diner or something. (J: Okay) A little hole in the wall.

J: And Sam Samaras was another one. Jesus Christ, I said, "Sam, I cannot imagine you ever being a cop." I didn't know him when he was a cop. He worked for John Desmond too.

A: He did? (J: Yah) So what was his role in the campaigns, to get the Greek vote out?

J: Yah, just to get the Greek vote out. That was at the stage where the ethnic groups were more melding. They were no longer a powerhouse within themselves. (A: Right) The last of them probably were the Greeks. (A: Really?) Oh yah, because you know, very few Greeks marry non-Greeks. (A: Okay) Unlike all the other ethnic groups who, you know, just melded into one another and as a basic group except for the older population, they trump all the time. The Greeks maintained the integrity of that community for quite a while, as did the French before them. You know, the French had schools, churches that were entirely in French. The fellow I mentioned to you, Cam Brousseau, who was my father's closest friend in business compatriot, he had three sons also as my father did. And the oldest one was about my age, and the next was about my brother Roger's age, and the next was about Tom's (A: Tom's age) age. And the kid who was my age spoke broken English. (A: Oh really. Yah. Yah) Yah, and it was a product of his education, you know. (A: Yah. Yah) Both Cam and his wife spoke fluent French, spoke English certainly, but this kid, who was not effective in any way mentally, but he grew up in the catholic French schools and they talked French. So he had difficulty you know, making the transition.

A: Okay. Second to last question because I know you need to get back to your business. Um, at one point Homer Bourgeois was not so much a powerbroker anymore, correct?

J: Yah, I think that it dissipated over a period of time.

A: And what would you attribute that loss of power to?

J: Well through most of the friends that he had in positions in different groups passing away. (A: Okay) The age just caught up with him. (A: Yah) Homer was fairly old when he died as I recall, but he was the last of, as my father was, the last of the people of his age group. I mean all of his friends were dead. My dad died two years ago at 89.

A: Oh he just died.

J: And he lived a long life. (A: Yah, yah) You know, when that happens with a guy like Homer, and Homer didn't live to that age, but at that time I'd say late 70's.

A: Yah, I think he was 77 when he died.

J: Yah, something like that, they were all gone. [Unclear] all gone, because his generation went back. Homer Bourgeois was working Union National Bank for Christ sake in the 40's.

A: No before that. He started in the 20's actually.

J: Oh did he?

A: He started as a runner, and (--)

J: I remember him saying he was a teller, and he was this and he was that, and he just picked up as a guy who could get things done by the owners of that bank. They picked the right guy.

A: Yah. Yah. Yah. Any ah, oh, one last question. Did, Paul Tsongas, did that represent the new political grouping that was coming to the front during the late 60's and 70's?

J: No, I don't think new, but he was an absolutely abnormality, because of the Peace Corps, and the Peacenik title that was a fringe group politically, not a core group of any of the political parties, but anything it was frowned upon rather than supported, you know. I mean people had sympathy with it. They certainly wanted peace, and didn't want war, but they didn't think that was the way to go about it, (A: Right) I guess would be the answer to that. And I think maybe he did in fact represent a transition into a new era of politicians, but I don't think it was recognized as that then. I think when Paul was diagnosed, what is now about six or seven years ago, and he resigned the Senate seat, that, there were a lot of article, national article about him that had that aura to them. And so I don't doubt that that was the case, but I don't think it was recognized. Paul was elected because he was intrinsically a good guy, and clean. (A: Yah) Much to the chagrin of a lot of political diehards who felt they had much more political connections than he had. Certainly they did, but they were going out of vogue. That, I say that quickly, but I, because I know it isn't true. There are political spider webs all over Lowell that still exist, (A: Right) and some of them are much older than you or I are. But a lot of them don't have the overall power that they had at one time. And there's still a lot of that at the federal level, and certainly at the state level, but I don't think there's as much of it. At least if there is it's very sophisticated today. It's not as noticeable as it was. So maybe I was in the middle of it then, and I was more aware of it. (A: Yah. Yah) But I really got to get going, but I'll, one of the things I'll do is give you my brother Roger's name (A: Okay). And he'll be down my house for Christmas and I'll mention it.

A: Okay, thanks very much.

J: Because (--)

End of interview

