Oral History Interview of Paul Cavanagh by Raymond Boryczka
Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs
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Boryczka: Mr. Cavanagh, to begin, could you tell me a bit about yourself--date and place of birth, something about your family background?

Cavanagh: Yes, I was born on May 20, 1921 in Detroit, at Calumet and Twelfth Street, in Detroit. It was the same day as the Tiger pitcher Hal Newhouser was born and I always claim I was born only a few blocks away from him.

Boryczka: Is that right?

Cavanagh: Yes. And I attended Hancock Kindergarten, St. Leo Grade School, the first half year of grade school. When we moved out northwest, we sort of upped our status a little bit by moving into the Livernois-Grand River area, where I was enrolled for the second half of first grade at St. Cecilia Grade School, and continued on there through grade school and high school, graduating in 1939. I went to work at Ford Motor Company in September 1939. Worked there for two years and then went to work for Chrysler, in their office as a, what I call, "slide-rule engineer". I learned to use the slide rule there. It was in the maintenance department.

Boryczka: Which plant was that?

Cavanagh: This was Highland Park.

Boryczka: Which Ford plant were you at?

Cavanagh: Well, I was at two or three, but I was in what they call B-Building at one time. My first job was on the line putting trays in coupes, you know the tray that goes from the back seat to the rear window. As a matter of fact, I would crawl in the trunk and hold the tray while another worker with a--what do you call that type of screwdriver?

Boryczka: The punch type?

Cavanagh: Yes; would fasten the tray in.

Boryczka: This is at the Rouge plant?

Cavanagh: At the Rouge plant, yes. And then I worked in the, I think they called the Rubber plant, was where I spent most of the time? I was working as a tire builder. That's when Ford made their own tires: truck, tractor and passenger car, which was very interesting.

Boryczka: You were also there then, at the time the UAW was attempting to ...

Cavanagh: Oh yes, yes, that was April of 1941. I was riding the bus out to work. The

bus stopped, oh, several blocks from the plant, on Miller Road, and someone stuck his head in the door and said, "All UAW men out!" Several guys got out; the rest of us sat there and said, "Well, we might as well get out too", and we did and then we discovered the plant was struck.

Boryczka: Were you involved with the UAW at all?

Cavanagh: I joined it that day, and did one shift. We were all supposed to divvy up some picket time. I did one small little shift over on Shaefer Road. This was all Local 600. And, then from the tire plant, yes, that was my last job at Ford. From there I, as I mentioned, went to work for Chrysler back in late '41. And that's the Rubber Plant, or Tire Plant, that Ford dismantled and sent to Russia during the war. I worked at Chrysler until the spring of '42, when I enlisted in the Marine Corps. That was in May of '42. Went through boot camp in San Diego, and various assignments, and then overseas in March of '43, and came back to the States in October of '44. Our ship sailed under the Golden Gate on October 18, 1944. A very happy moment for all of us. I had enlisted for four years, figuring I was smart. I'd be a regular, and maybe promotions would be faster, and so on, and of course none of that was true. So what I'm getting at is that when the war was over, my friends, the guys I'd been overseas with, my buddies, were all being discharged in October and November, and I still had to go until May of '46, which I did. I was discharged in San Diego. I got married, by the way, in California in 1945, January. My wife in the meantime had come back to Detroit. When I was discharged, I came back to Detroit and (I'm trying to recall), I enrolled at U of D. My first job back after the service was as a residential policeman, with the Flannery Residential Police, and my job was trying the doors of clients' houses. I'd make three rounds a night. I'd start at eight o'clock and finish about five in the morning; something like that. Over in that area of Boston Boulevard, Chicago, bounded by John R all the way down to Twelfth Street. Other streets were Atkinson, Edison, in fact I had the late Harry Heilman's house at one time. In fact, his dog bit me one time, when I was walking up the driveway.

Boryczka: (laughing) Why doesn't that surprise me?

Cavanagh: Yes. But it was an interesting job, although, you know, not very spectacular. There was no excitement that I remember on it.

Boryczka: Was this a means of working your way through school?

Cavanagh: Yes. Yes, it was.

Boryczka: What was your course of study at U of D?

Cavanagh: Well, I started out with, to my regret, accounting. I was in the school of what they call commerce and finance. And, of course some of the basic courses a freshman would take, which were English and I think there was a basic philosophy course, and others. I dropped out of there in early '47, still working for Flannery Residential Police. Then went to work for Detroit Steel Products, in their Credit Department, where I worked for the next couple of years and in, I believe it was, yes, '49, I went back to school. And again for Flannery. And this time I had job as a night watchman at Woodlawn Cemetery. Actually it wasn't that bad. I went in about five o'clock, and at dark I would close the gates, although I would in the meantime have made a couple of rounds of the cemetery on foot. And then at nine I would lock up again and leave. But I had the office of the cemetery to do my homework, and term papers and whatever I had, and that was a rather successful year, all the way around, although not much money or anything else. But I left there again, or left Flannery, in the spring of '50. And went to work again for Detroit Steel Products Company. I knew the Credit Manager, and he had asked me to come back to work, and I did with the intention of going to night school, which I did, for the next couple of years. I continued to work for Detroit Steel Products. They made windows, steel doors, and what was called hollow-rib. It was a metal roofing and paneling type of material. And I didn't continue night school, so I have had roughly two and a half years, I guess, of college. From there I went on to staying in credit work; I worked for Reynolds Metals in Detroit, what's called our Great Lakes region. I went to work for the Friend of the Court in Wayne County, and I was with them for roughly two years. And then to work for the Crippled Children Commission, which was at that time a small commission, one of a hundred and twenty state agencies, in Detroit.

Boryczka: About what time period are we talking?

Cavanagh: This would have been 1960. Worked there in our Detroit office as business manager until 1964, when I was transferred to Lansing. Shortly after that, it was a year or two later, under the new constitution and reorganization, our Crippled Children Commission was put into the State Health Department; and we became a division of the State Health Department, where I continued until I retired four and a half years ago.

Boryczka: Which explains how you got to Lansing, from Detroit. If we could back up

just a bit, and go back to your childhood, you were born in 1929...

Cavanagh: 1921.

Boryczka: OK. Good. Could you describe for me some of the family life when you were growing up? You mentioned, for example, that there was the move to the Livernois-Grand River area, which I assume was for the family a move upward, into a better neighborhood, a better area. You came from a basically blue-collar background, working class background? Tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in that period.

Cavanagh: OK. Well, my memories go back to Vermont Street, which was in St. Leo's parish, not far from Grand River, and what would have been, well, Canfield was one way down the street, Warren was another way down the street, and lived there for approximately six years. I mentioned I was born at Twelfth and Calumet, and very shortly we moved to Vermont. I recall we always seemed to have some relatives living with us, which, back in those days... Of course, both my parents came from Canada. In fact they came to Detroit the same day they were married: July 29, 1919.

Boryczka: They knew each other from Canada?

Cavanagh: Oh yes. They lived about ten miles apart, and from, what might be called, neighboring parishes; but nevertheless, they were close enough that they would have met socially, and so on.

Boryczka: What brought them to the United States?

Cavanagh: Well, my dad had an older brother here. And I think my late Uncle Mike was already working for the Post Office. And Detroit, I don't know why, it became a mecca for a lot of Canadians, and a lot of my dad's relatives. My mother's as well. And my mother's youngest brother, Patrick, came to Detroit and lived with us, and he finished high school, as a matter of fact, at St. Leo's. I think it was 1927 when he graduated from there.

Boryczka: So it was a sizable Cavanagh clan in the area. Could you give me a ballpark idea of how many? I know there are Cavanaghs who are not necessarily related to one another, but in terms of your immediate family. How many people are we talking about?

Cavanagh: The immediate family... now, I'm trying to think. Of course, we've expanded over the years, naturally.

Boryczka: But at this time, when you were growing up.

Cavanagh: Well, when I was growing up, yes, the Detroit connection, I'll put it this way, of Cavanaghs, and my dad's nieces, who were McKennas, his sister's daughters, came to live with us also. My mother's brothers... there were... And my Uncle Mike, who lived in Highland Park. There were probably twenty to twenty-five in the Detroit area, at that time.

Boryczka: What did your dad do for a living?

Cavanagh: My dad worked at Ford's. He ultimately became, I like to call him, a steam engineer, or a steam fitter; but he worked in the power house at Ford almost from the very start of his employment there. I think he may have started on the line and then gone into the boiler maintenance business, because I know he used to talk about going into a shut down boiler and cleaning it out.

Boryczka: Was he a skilled tradesman?

Cavanagh: Well, he became one. He was not at the start, but he became one.

Boryczka: Through training he received at Ford's?

Cavanagh: Yes, yes.

Boryczka: Do you recall him saying much about his feelings about working at Ford?

Cavanagh: From time to time, yes. Not a great deal. He did not very often talk about it. He may have had, or may have been better off, than most of the Ford workers, or factory workers in general at that time, which was the early and mid and late twenties, well before the unions came in. But he would mention sometimes about a man being fired right out of hand for what seemed like no reason whatsoever. Ford servicemen going through the parking lot and jotting down numbers, or license plate numbers of cars that were not Fords.

Boryczka: That's not just legend, that was fact?

Cavanagh: Yes, it's fact. And, oh a few other things like this. But by and large he did not talk a great deal about conditions at the plant.

Boryczka: When you were growing up, did you have a sense of being working class, or blue collar? What I'm getting at is, in terms of your home environment, did you grow up with any sense of class consciousness from your parents?

Cavanagh: I don't really think so, Ray, because... I guess I never thought much about it. My mother was a school teacher; she had taught school in Canada. And she was after us all the time to read; education; manners at the table. I would say my mother was the... well, the

intellectual side of the family, I'll put it that way; as my dad probably had no more formal education than the sixth or seventh grade in Canada. My mother had gone to, what we would call, Teacher's Normal College in Canada. Had a certificate. And taught school in Canada.

Boryczka: But did not teach in Detroit?

Cavanagh: She did later during the Depression, yes. But as far as being class conscious, I don't recall having that feeling, or anything like it. I suppose I always considered myself, and the family, sort of middle class, whatever that was at that time.

Boryczka: You were born in '21, and that's a relatively prosperous period for Detroiters, especially in the auto industry at that time. So, probably your early recollections before the Depression, was that things were fairly comfortable?

Cavanagh: Oh, Yes. Sure.

Boryczka: OK. The family made the move up to the Livernois-Grand River area, and what year was that?

Cavanagh: This would have been 1927.

Boryczka: That would have been about a year before Jerry was born. This was a move upward? Bigger house? Do you remember anything about that? Your reaction? At that point you're a kid about seven years old, new house, new friends, new kids, new neighborhood.

Cavanagh: I think I felt perhaps a spirit of adventure. The house we moved into was a two-family flat. We move in downstairs, on Tuxedo, near Dexter. I don't recall the house being anything more special than Vermont was. But, there were more companions my age, I felt. I should add, at this time, that neighborhood was predominantly Jewish, and I spent the next almost twelve years there, growing up in that area. My companions were Jewish. I guess, well, I like to tell this to my Jewish friends that I became what is known as a *Shabat goy*, a Sabbath goy. Many, many orthodox Jews in that neighborhood. I would go in on Sabbath, turn on or off lights, light stove, pay the paper boy, and these were all the services they'd ask me to do because here I was a Gentile. There were probably only three or four other Gentile families on the block, and my good companions or pals, as it were, were Jewish, most of them. I was the only one on the block that went to St. Cecilia's grade school; all the rest of them went up to (what was up on Linwood?), Roosevelt Grade School, Durfee Intermediate Grade School, and then Central High.

Boryczka: This is an era when Detroit by and large was a very ethnically diverse city, but yet a city generally divided into ethnic neighborhoods. Your parents made the decision to move into a non-Irish neighborhood. This was done consciously and purposely? Does it indicate anything?

Cavanagh: I really don't think so. I don't think my parents were that concerned about, then, their ethnic background, or staying with an ethnic group, as such. They were looking for, I suppose, like many families, onward and upward as much as they could, and for the children and themselves. So, moving into this neighborhood, to them was... it wasn't severing any bonds, really, from an ethnic group, because we lived on Vermont it was not an Irish enclave, by any means. Very mixed, very polyglot, as I remember. So there was no tearing away when we moved up, northwest, to Tuxedo.

Boryczka: OK. In 1928 Jerry is born. What number was he, among the kids?

Cavanagh: Jerry was number four.

Boryczka: Number four out of... will you refresh my memory?

Cavanagh: Out of six.

Boryczka: Four out of six. So he comes right in the middle. Any memory of any reaction?

Cavanagh: I don't recall any reaction particularly. Of course, you know, in those days, when a baby was due, or born, if you had relatives, the kids were sent away to the relatives. I'm pretty sure I was sent over to my Uncle Mike's, along with my sisters, or maybe one sister went with my Aunt Mary, I don't recall that. But he was, of course, a bit of a novelty, as any baby is to us, and I was seven. Maybe I was more blasé than my sisters. But after a while we got used to him. (laughter) My memories of those early years, of course I was old enough, or older than Jerry enough, to sort of ignore him when he was a year, two, three, four years old, and I had my own agenda to take care of, as I was growing up. Then when I went into high school, I guess I began to notice Jerry, because at that time he was my only brother. I also had another sister by that time, a year younger than Jerry. So I had three sisters and Jerry and I. You might say Jerry and I against the world, at that time. Into high school, and I used to take him over to what later became McCabe Field. It was, at one time a practice driving range. But St. Theresa High School played its home football games there. Our own school had dropped

football, for a year or two. So, when I was probably thirteen or fourteen, and Jerry, seven years younger, I used to take him over. I recall not only there, but on our living room rug, to my mother's dismay, I would try to teach him blocking and tackling. We'd get down in a three point stance, and I would charge at him, and throw him into the couch. (laughter) And we'd do this at the St. Theresa games, whoever they were playing. We'd do it, oh, half time or if there was no action on the field, I'd say, "Jerry, let's try this". He was always willing, and, as I say, drove my mother to distraction, this business in the living room. But then, through high school, I naturally had my own interests, in growing up and going to high school. As I became a little bit older, fifteen, sixteen, maybe taking out an occasional girl, and playing football myself. Jerry did later for St. Cecilia's. So, then, when war came along, or when I left, of course, I sort of lost touch with Jerry. But by this time he was entering high school. My one regret was that I never got a chance to see him play football, because his last season would have been 1945, and I was in California, still in the service. He graduated in 1946.

Boryczka: Before we start moving into that period, what impact do you remember the outbreak of the Depression having on the family?

Cavanagh: It had a profound impact, because my dad was laid off. I remember walking home from school. We were living on Tuxedo, walking home from school. My two sisters, the ones next to me, Eleanor and Ann, were sitting on a step leading to the porch, and one of them said, "Daddy got laid off". I knew enough then, I was probably — this would have been 1930 or '31 — I might have been ten years old, something like that. I knew enough about what I had heard, and that getting laid off then was really, really bad stuff. My dad was laid off for quite a while from Ford's. There were severe economies instituted at the house. My mother made do... It was just amazing what, the things, or how she scraped and kept us together.

Boryczka: What did the family do to support itself? What did your dad do when he was laid off?

Cavanagh: They had a little bit of money laid by, and I know they used that up. They were buying us a single — Oh, by the way, we had moved from the flat to a single home next door. My parents were buying it. As I looked back later, I realized it was probably on a land contract. But they lost it; they weren't able to keep up the payments, and the owner let them ride for quite a while, and then they began paying rent. So we lived there for a good while after they

had lost it. But it was during the Depression, just before the Depression, they had contracted to buy this place, and then during the Depression they lost it. Some savings. My dad did some odd jobs, and you know something, that I can't say I ever really appreciated, until later years, the things that my dad did to keep us going, as it were. Like, he was no salesman whatsoever. He was essentially a somewhat shy man. Well-meant, very polite and all that, but hardly the type that would push himself on anybody. And certainly not what I would call the salesman type. But he went, during those times, from door to door, with biscuits that my mother had baked, to sell. I'm thinking of what an impression that made on me later. Didn't realize it at the time, of course. Anyway, that's one of the things. And then cardboard in the shoes. We weren't the only ones. I recall a time at school: one of the nuns was asking for a dime for Chinese babies or something, and one of the guys stood up and said, "Well I don't have it; my dad's out of work". And she said, "Oh, oh, why Bernard, I thought your father would be retired". I don't know why she thought that. (laughter) That was sort of the never-never-land that some of them lived in. Yes, and Bernard maybe was eleven or twelve years old, you know, my age, at the time

Boryczka: Do you remember roughly how long your dad was out of work? Was it a couple of years?

Cavanagh: I think it was more like sixteen or eighteen months. It wasn't, compared to others, it was not that long. He kept, somehow, going out there; where he got bus fare, I don't know.

Boryczka: Do you know whether he tried any of the other auto plants?

Cavanagh: That I don't know, I don't know. But he felt that his best prospect was to get back at Ford's and in the power house, which he did. Of course, with that, things began slowly to pick up. It was still far from good flush times.

Boryczka: It took a while to recover?

Cavanagh: It took quite a while.

Boryczka: Do you remember any of your family's reaction to Roosevelt's election in '32?

Cavanagh: My dad was an ardent supporter. My dad was always interested in politics. He was an ardent supporter of Roosevelt. I can recall some conversations around the dinner table just either during that election year or just prior to it, when my other uncle, who is married to my mother's sister, Charlie O'Rourke, and dad, maybe my Uncle Mike, talking about Hoover.

And how Hoover, Uncle Charlie might say, ""Hoover doesn't give a damn about us"". Dad would kid him and say, "Oh, Charlie, if Hoover walked in here you'd say, 'Yes, sir, Mr. President'".

Boryczka: (laughter) Was your dad ever active in politics in a formal sense? Did he ever formally join the Democratic party, campaign for candidates, anything like that?

Cavanagh: He campaigned, yes. The Flannery I mentioned, that I had worked for, way back... We knew the family long before I went to work for the Residential Police. I am not sure how my parents met them. But Pat Flannery ran for sheriff on the Democratic ticket. I forget what year that was, middle thirties, maybe or late thirties. And dad worked on his campaign for him, with him. And then dad, believe it or not, got (how shall I put it?) seduced by a Ford worker who was a political worker, or did something; he didn't work in the shop, or factory. He seemed to be flitting about all the time. And he conned my dad into running for delegate in the Republican party in our precinct. By this time we had moved from Tuxedo. September, 1938 we moved to Yosemite, closer to Livernois. It was between Elmhurst and Burlingame.

Boryczka: It was still the same parish though, right?

Cavanagh: Still the same. And dad ran for delegate and won, and he did it by just going to every door. This Ford connection provided him with little cards to hand out. I don't know why he went for that. Oh, I know. He had this deep antipathy toward John Dingell, the father of the current congressman, whom he called a do-nothing, a rubber stamp, and so on. And I think this was partly what influenced him, because Dingell lived in the fifteenth district then and Dingell was the congressman. I have often remarked how different father from son was, among the two Dingells, and then how different... do you remember the Lesinskis?

Boryczka: Oh Yes, oh yes. Big John?

Cavanagh: Big John, who I thought was head and shoulders above his son, who succeeded him. But it's funny, how that went. But anyway, I think that may have been part of why dad ran. And I think it was just that one time, he ran for precinct delegate, and he won. That was about his only active involvement in politics, until Jerry ran, and then dad went to a voting booth on election day and handed out some cards.

Boryczka: Was this something that he stressed to the kids when you were growing up? Something that both he, perhaps, and your mother stressed when you were growing up? Having

been born in Canada, they became naturalized citizens. Oftentimes with immigrant parents, they stress to their kids that you have to be good citizens, get involved. Was this something you grew up with?

Cavanagh: Yes, it was.

Boryczka: It was stressed?

Cavanagh: It was stressed, that we, you might say, owed an obligation to this country.

Boryczka: Would you say, then, that your parents, in the formative years of Jerry's life, had a significant impact on Jerry, molding his future direction in politics?

Cavanagh: I'm sure they did, yes. Not only my dad, who had an intense interest in politics, and would talk about it at the drop of a hat. Well, not with us youngsters, but with his brother, or brothers-in-law, or whoever came to the house; friends that might have come over. I'm sure some of that rubbed off on Jerry. Plus the fact my mother was vitally interested in it. She didn't express herself about politics like my dad did. But my mother was insistent that, first of all, education, and then this obligation, and the idea of using our abilities to the very best, or the very limit. I think, through this, Jerry picked this up considerably. I have always thought that Jerry's temperament was ideal for politics. He had a fabulous memory, he could meet people easily and well.

Boryczka: Even when he was young?

Cavanagh: Even when he was young. And, he had the facility of seemingly putting people at their ease. Through high school and college he was this way. And so I always felt he was a natural.

Boryczka: A number of people made that observation to me, that that was a unique characteristic of his, this personableness.

Cavanagh: Yes. He could meet someone, and sometime later meet them, and show some genuine regard for them. You know, it wasn't phony, at least I never thought it was. "How are you, Jack? And how's the family?" We've all seen movies, we've read books about old-time politicians who go around the ward, or the precinct, or wherever, shaking hands. They know everybody by sight. Well, that's fine in a small area, a politician can do it, and it's necessary for him. But Jerry had this ability to do it almost anywhere and with anybody, really, and it always amazed me. I always prided myself on a good memory, but Jerry's was by far the better.

Boryczka: Amazing. You mentioned that as you were growing up during the Depression era, that you recall a number of family members coming in and out of the house. Does that mean that at times other family members would come and live with you for awhile?

Cavanagh: Yes.

Boryczka: Was this as a family gesture? Would they come in as boarders to supplement the family income?

Cavanagh: Well, I think there was one coming together of the O'Rourkes. This was my mother's sister, and Charlie, whom I have mentioned. They had, at the time, four children. We had this house, I remember, my parents were buying, on Tuxedo. A big, big upstairs — well, it wasn't finished. It was more like a tremendous attic, but yet we had beds up there. And the O'Rourkes moved in with us. It seemed to me Charlie was working, not much, but for this tool-and-die company, sort of off-and-on, or three days a week, or something. So there was some income. So for the sake of economy, or economics, the two families lived together in this place; I would say for about a year, before the O'Rourkes moved out and found their own place. Probably by that time dad had gone back to work.

Boryczka: Once he goes back to work, which would have been, what, about '33, '34?

Cavanagh: Well, maybe '32 or '33.

Boryczka: OK. Did he work continually from that point until the war?

Cavanagh: Yes. Yes, he did.

Boryczka: There weren't any more layoffs or anything like that?

Cavanagh: No. No, he was never involved in any more layoffs.

Boryczka: Your dad wasn't involved in UAW organizing at Ford or anything like that?

Cavanagh: He joined the UAW, Local 600, and he went to meetings.

Boryczka: Is this before or after the '41 contract?

Cavanagh: This was after. In fact, he and some of his friends on that bus that morning, or wherever they were, went immediately onto Wyoming and joined up.

Boryczka: Why? Why do you think he did that?

Cavanagh: I think he had sympathy for the union movement. And I think he knew it was inevitable. He had this sympathy for it anyway. And now, he felt, it was out in the open; you can join. Your name is down there, OK. That's all right. Where, before that, there could have

been reprisals. And would have been.

Boryczka: Which obviously was the way that most Ford workers thought?

Cavanagh: Sure.

Boryczka: Do you think your dad was surprised, that almost out of the blue, Harry Bennett and Henry Ford the First agreed to not only give the UAW what they were demanding, but even more than they were demanding?

Cavanagh: Yes. I don't know if dad was surprised. He was considerably pleased, of course, with the whole thing, the way it turned out. He never expressed any mention of that: that he was surprised at the capitulation of Ford.

Boryczka: He just thought it was inevitable? Did he get active in Local 600 after he joined, or was he just a member?

Cavanagh: He was a member, and he was active to some extent. [He was] never an officer. As I mentioned, he attended some of their meetings, and took part in, I guess, some of their social affairs, a picnic or whatever it may have been. But was not, to my knowledge, my memory, was never on a committee or anything like that.

Boryczka: Through the forties and into the first years of Walter Reuther's presidency of the union, there was a fairly strong Communist element in Local 600. Did your father ever have any observations on that? Any comments that you recall?

Cavanagh: I don't recall him talking about that at all, or mentioning it. He may have to some of his friends, or like a brother-in-law (Charlie O'Rourke), or brother Mike, or whomever. But I don't recall any...

Boryczka: We focused a lot here on the kind of impact that your dad had on the family, in terms of his experiences, and his thoughts, and his values. What sorts of impacts, what sorts of values, do you think that your mother made on the kids as they were growing up? On yourself, and on Jerry? Would you say that your family was a patriarchal family, a matriarchal family, or do you think your parents were equals, in the modern sense?

Cavanagh: You know, that's hard to say, Ray. In some respects, it was matriarchal, in the sense that when we were growing up, a lot of the decisions came from mother, as they related to school or who we played with, or who we went with. Dad was still the boss, but yet not the patriarch in the sense that we know the term. Probably, most of the day-to-day influence

on us was mother; her emphasis on reading and education. Both of them, however, with this strong sense of honesty and obligation. And something else I remember about my dad was his lack of prejudice. I don't recall him ever talking down about any race or color. Although he sided with Father Coughlin, dad always liked to make the distinction: he was not against the Jews; it was the international Jew, as Father Coughlin defined him. That may have been dancing on a fine point, I don't know. Of course, Coughlin was branded anti-Semitic, and there may have been overtones of that. But dad was, like so many Catholic middle-class people in those days, an ardent follower of Father Coughlin.

Boryczka: Listened to his radio program?

Cavanagh: Oh yes, without fail.

Boryczka: Ever go out to the Shrine of the Little Flower when you were a kid?

Cavanagh: I never went out there, no. The folks did, of course, but I don't recall ever going out there. I sold the newspaper, Social Justice, on the street corners.

Boryczka: Did your dad ask you to do it?

Cavanagh: Yes. It was... Dad said, well, maybe not these exact words, but we're going to take some of these papers and sell them, and...

Boryczka: Do you think that was an indication that your dad was active in Father Coughlin's movement?

Cavanagh: Well, I don't know how active you would say he was. He was an ardent supporter. We took the paper, and I sold some of the papers; I sold the paper, went out on street corners to sell them. And one time I think I even had a regular route of people who would buy it regularly. Dad probably attended a few rallies or whatever that Father Coughlin may have had at that time, or attended some of his radio broadcasts. Or, if Coughlin was making a special appearance, both parents would probably have gone to that. You're probably too young to remember, but Father Coughlin formed his own party back in 1936, and he ran for President a man named William Lemke, a congressman from North Dakota. Well, it was a political party, apparently it was registered and everything else, and I know my dad voted for Lemke. Lemke, of course, was swamped, I think; I forget how many votes he got in the popular vote.

Boryczka: Then he abandoned Roosevelt?

Cavanagh: Oh, yes, my dad? Yes, he had by then.

Boryczka: That's interesting.

Cavanagh: And I think it was because Father Coughlin claimed that Roosevelt had betrayed us. He had betrayed the Democratic Party, and so on, and so on. Dad, I'm sure, never really left the party as such, because, as one son likes to say, the Democrats, for all their warts, have these people who remember how it was. Dad was one of those.

Boryczka: It does seem rather curious, though, in all honesty. You were living, as you indicated earlier, in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, which would seem to indicate that there isn't anti-Semitism involved, if you're going to live in a Jewish neighborhood, and your neighbors, and the kids your kids will play with are Jewish. Father Coughlin, however, did enunciate considerable anti-Semitism, which got him into considerable trouble, as we know. What do you suppose the attraction was for your dad, to Father Coughlin? Was it just that he was a prominent Catholic?

Cavanagh: Well, that and the fact that Coughlin seemed to preach a type of social justice that was appealing to people like my dad, who had grubbed for a living. Where Coughlin didn't advocate Townsend's idea particularly, like soak the rich and distribute to the poor, and so on, but there were some facets apparently of Coughlin's program that appealed to dad and so many people like him. During this time I was, oh, high school, getting older, growing up, getting more ideas of my own. Dad was never what I would call an anti-Semite, but he did subscribe to Coughlin's theory. I think I mentioned this before: the International Jew, as Coughlin called him, who was the banker, the Morgenthaus and the Rothschilds and so on. Sometimes I thought, even then, myself, that the distinction was a little bit, you know, shaky. But Coughlin kept insisting it was the international Jew, not the ordinary man-in-the-street or the Rabbi across the way, or anything like that.

Boryczka: Essentially, many of Coughlin's arguments were the same kinds of arguments that Henry Ford the First was advocating at that time. With your dad being a Ford employee, was there any connection, do you think?

Cavanagh: Well, I wonder if there wasn't some influence there, about working for Ford as long as he did, and some of Ford's pronouncements. Yes, you're right, some of Coughlin's stuff sounded like old Henry back in the twenties.

Boryczka: I also wanted to ask you about your recollections regarding race relations as

you were growing up, because obviously that became a very, very significant factor in Jerry's political career later on. Was this an exclusively white neighborhood you were living in?

Cavanagh: Oh, yes. Yes, it was.

Boryczka: Did you have any contact with blacks when you were growing up?

Cavanagh: No, there was extremely little contact with blacks. When we lived on Vermont I vaguely remember, and maybe my mother supplemented my memory, there was a black woman who would come in once a week to help her out. I vaguely recall her. But she'd come in for the day and then she was gone. So, our contact with blacks was minimal. But yet I never heard a word against them either, in anger, ridicule, or any other way, when I was growing up in my house from either parent.

Boryczka: By the same token, was racial equality, or the issue of civil rights ever the sort of thing your parents stressed to you kids in the same way that they may have stressed the value of education, or telling the truth?

Cavanagh: Yes, we got some of that; yes, we got that. Not as specifically as some of the other things. But, we were given to understand that we were not to treat anybody any less than we wanted to be treated ourselves. I think that stuck with us, pretty much.

Boryczka: Do you remember anything about race relations in Detroit, in your neighborhood, in the larger Detroit area as you were growing up? Was there anything in particular when you were growing up about race relations that pops to mind, that was significant in formulating your values?

Cavanagh: Nothing that I can recollect. You know, the only thing about, what I'd call, early race relations in Detroit, which would have been when I was growing up, or what I may have read in a book about Detroit, was that pretty much the blacks were isolated.

Boryczka: Did you ever go to Black Bottom?

Cavanagh: Never did, no. Never did.

Boryczka: What did you think of Joe Louis?

Cavanagh: I admired him.

Boryczka: And the fact that he was the first black champion, do you think it was irrelevant to most white Detroiters at that time?

Cavanagh: I wonder about that. I think they were proud of the fact that he was a

Detroiter, and heavyweight champion of the world. There was also, I'm sure, among many of the people of Detroit, who were not sports fans, that, well, that's all right, tolerable I guess. That's probably the way they felt. The way they felt. Sports fans, I think, for the most part, didn't look at his color at all. Not at all.

Boryczka: That's interesting for those days.

Cavanagh: Yes, it is. It is. That's the way I felt about it.

Boryczka: So, race was almost a non-issue when you were growing up?

Cavanagh: I would say so, yes.

Boryczka: And you weren't in Detroit in the '43 riots, so that wouldn't have had any effect on you at all. Do you recall whether Jerry was here during the '43 riots?

Cavanagh: Yes.

Boryczka: Do you recall him ever saying anything about it?

Cavanagh: No, I don't, I don't. I remember my sisters talking about it. They were both working, I think on the east side at the time. And being frightened of what was going on, and at one point having a police escort on the bus or streetcar going over to, I think one of them worked at, Gar Wood Industries, which is way over there on the east side. But other than that, I don't recall. And I don't recall Jerry saying anything about it.

Boryczka: OK. There's one major element to the growing up of the Cavanagh clan in the thirties and the forties, that we haven't touched on directly as yet. That's the religious influence. You went to St. Cecilia's; both yourself and Jerry attended the University of Detroit. Perhaps you could make some observations on the impact that the religious side of your growing-up experience had on you and Jerry during this period, positive and negative.

Cavanagh: Well, I'd like to think that the positive part was giving us a grounding in the simple faith that both parents had, mother and father. With my mother particularly it was, no matter what is bad now, things will even out. Although somebody once told me that's an old Irish expression, that things always even up. If not in this life, then in the next. And so, from the good standpoint they grounded us thoroughly in religion. It had its negative aspects too, as we know. Going back to being taught by nuns in grade school. Although, what I've read in recent years about how so many kids came out of high schools where the nuns repressed them; I never felt that way about it. I thought in many instances some of the nuns were goofy, and

I just let it slide. I admired their devotion, I'll say that. The fact that they had literally given up their lives to teaching, even if some of them were power-mad, you know, or goofy. But I never felt that they oppressed me. Some of the doctrine they taught, and I think it was their view of church doctrine, about going to hell in a hand basket at the drop of a hat, which we now know is entirely wrong. So many of the strictures that they applied seemed just terrible now. Maybe it was my temperament, I don't know, but that just kind of slid off me. I would say, "Sure, I believe that," and I did, at the time. But I don't think it affected me adversely, nor did it Jerry, particularly Jerry. I think he sort of let that stuff slide, the negative aspect. But the positive aspect of the faith, and what we were taught at home and in school, stuck with him, and me, and all of us.

Boryczka: Was Jerry a very active Catholic when he was growing up? I mean, was he an altar boy?

Cavanagh: Yes, yes he was an altar boy, yes. Even after high school he maintained his Catholic obligations. That's usually around the time when young people start to let them slide.

Boryczka: Being active in the Catholic church oftentimes means becoming involved in various Catholic social welfare activities, spending time at missions and that sort of thing. Was Jerry ever involved in any of that sort of thing?

Cavanagh: Jerry... I'm trying to think what year; it was right after the war. Before the war I had belonged to the St. Cecilia conference of the St. Vincent de Paul. I was one of the younger members, and one of the members who had proposed my name stood up and said, "By golly, Fred Ozanam was only twenty years old when he..." (chuckles). Well, OK. So in '46, or late that summer, Jerry just out of high school, joined the conference of St. Vincent de Paul. By this time I had, well, I was married, and we moved... Yes, we were out the parish, just over the line when we moved, so I was not in the conference at the same time Jerry was. But he was; he joined, and he was quite active, and enjoyed it. Of course, you know what the St. Vincent de Paul society...

Boryczka: For the record, you might want to describe it.

Cavanagh: Well, sure. It's a group of Catholic laymen, and a conference is usually parish-based. And they are given names by the pastor, or other people of the parish of people in need, whether it's food, utilities and the like. And to the limit, or to the extent I should say,

of the conference's own treasury, they will help out. They write food orders; they will write clothing orders, and so on. Each conference is self-supporting through contributions made in the poor-box in church on Sunday. Occasionally the pastor of a parish where I lived in Westland, the pastor always donated the Thanksgiving collection to the St. Vincent de Paul. In fact he did it at St. Cecilia too. So whatever came in was put in the treasury and used.

Boryczka: So, the Cavanagh kids are growing up with something of a sense of social consciousness. Let me ask you a rather blunt question here. There are an awful lot of kids growing up in Detroit at the same time that you are, who don't end up with this sense of social consciousness at the end, when they go off into the world to start their own careers. Why the Cavanagh kids? Why did they, when so many other kids didn't?

Cavanagh: Well, I would like to credit... I think our home life, the influence of our parents, and living through the Depression, I think, had a profound influence on how we felt about the poor and the homeless, and other disadvantaged people. We weren't out on the street. We had food to eat. It was not fancy, and rarely was it much different than the day before; very, very staple type things. But we knew, at least we had an idea, an inkling of what many, many people had to go through. I think this had a profound influence on all of us, and our thinking.

Boryczka: Who were some of Jerry's close friends when he was growing up, outside the family? Or, first of all, who was he closest to in the family?

Cavanagh: Well, I think for a while he looked up to me. And then, of course we were seven years apart, and it was rather difficult to be real close, as I think I mentioned earlier. When he was quite small, six or seven years old, I could take him in hand. As he got older, he had his own ideas, and he and I were not what you'd call real close as brothers. I think the age difference made a big difference.

Boryczka: Would you say that he was closer to one of the sisters who was closer to his age?

Cavanagh: I think, believe it or not, my sister Joan, who he used to put upon sometimes awful. She was a year younger than Jerry.

Boryczka: What do you mean by 'put upon'?

Cavanagh: Well, I mean, she was so often the fall guy in some of his schemes. If she had any money, Jerry would con her out of it. (Laughter) It's true.

Boryczka: (Laughing) Then he was a politician!

Cavanagh: Oh, yes, yes way back then. When they were in high school, if he got a bit of money, he'd pay her back. But Joan was sort of an easy mark, more so than his older sisters, who were, you know, "Get away from me; don't bother me, kid," and things like that.

Boryczka: Do you think he was closer to your mom, or your dad, or...?

Cavanagh: Closer to my mother. Yes. He and my dad, I've often felt, had very similar personalities. When Jerry was growing up, when he was high school age and older, they would clash something awful. Dad would find something... Well, Jerry sometimes gave him cause for raising hell, you know. But, they were so much alike in so many respects, and I thought that's why they seem to have the opposite effect. Although in later years, they got closer, as I think a lot of boys, or young men, maybe do with their fathers after they've lived a few years, into their twenties or even thirties. They finally come to realize that, well, Dad was tough, but he was right in that respect, right this, you know.

Boryczka: When you say they were alike in many ways, how do you mean that specifically?

Cavanagh: Well, I mean they could be stubborn as hell. My dad was, and Jerry was, and could be. He didn't seem to bend very easily in spite of the fact he was well-met, easy to get along with. But if he took a stand on something, you just didn't move him. He was like my dad in that respect.

Boryczka: What would they disagree about?

Cavanagh: Well, sometimes maybe Jerry's hours. My dad, of course he used to raise hell with me about hours too, as he did with all of us. But, Jerry, in high school, if he stayed out beyond the time my dad thought he should be in, that was just one thing. Jerry, in college, when he was a freshman, sophomore, was active in the Young Democrats, and the young Dems were trying to unseat the so-called entrenched UAW Democrats, I mean locally. These young guys from U of D, Jerry being their president, got thrown out of a meeting hall one night (laughing). I forget who was running the meeting, but they were UAW people, actually, Soapy Williams' group, you might say, which included UAW...

Boryczka: This would have been the early 1950s?

Cavanagh: Early fifties, yes. Dad was sort of an admirer of Williams, and of course he

was a UAW man. Now they didn't actually clash over political philosophy, or anything like this, but my dad could be awful sarcastic at times. If something happened to Jerry, "Well, what do you think of that?", you know. And Jerry would snap back at him, and of course this went on until, as I say, later years they got much closer.

Boryczka: You say that the relationship with your mother was much more affable?

Cavanagh: Yes. Well, (laughing) I always felt he could con mother more. We all tried to do it, and I think the boys did it more than the girls. But Jerry could; he had a way about him. My mother, she had a will of iron, but she was also easy-going. She was kind of a paradox, because... Now my mother, I will say to her credit, I'd never heard her speak an ill word about anybody. I always admired her patience, and the way she acted in that respect. If I was talking about somebody, "Why that no-good...", she'd say, "Oh, now, that's all right". I'd get mad at her, and say, "For crying out loud...". I could never understand this. When I came to realize that she had this facility of patience, and, what's the other word I want to use...

Boryczka: Understanding?

Cavanagh: Yes, yes.

Boryczka: Tell me a funny story that comes to mind about Jerry Cavanagh, when he was a boy during the 1930s.

Cavanagh: Well, I'm trying to think of something during the thirties. I can tell you a funny one that happened... It was either during the forties... Maybe right after the war, because I happened to be over at the house, and this led to a confrontation between Jerry and my dad. Jerry was in the upstairs bathroom (we were living on Yosemite), and had taken to washing his feet, I guess, in the basin, and it broke off the wall. (Laughter) There was all hell to pay! (Laughter) As Jerry had no excuse for it, except that the thing was so weak, and my dad... he was just livid. I can hear him, you know, saying, "Oh, for God's sake, what can you expect," and on and on. Ordinarily, if you put your foot up on the basin, it shouldn't break off the wall. But anyway, we just thought it was hilarious. We didn't laugh in front of my dad, of course, and we kidded Jerry about it. He was kind of shame-faced for a while. (Laughter) I remember that so well. I really do. But earlier than that, I can't really recall any...

Boryczka: Do you recall any of Jerry's early associates, when he was a kid? Buddies, friends, anyone who perhaps would be a lifelong associate or friend, out of the neighborhood?

Cavanagh: I don't recall anybody from the neighborhood. He had them, his own age. I more easily recall some that he had in high school, that he was close to, and stayed fairly close to. I think of, what was his name, Kane. Was it Bill Kane? Oh boy, I have a hard time thinking of... There were a couple of others in high school, and now their names escape me.

Boryczka: They stayed friends for a lot of years?

Cavanagh: Yes, for a lot of years, after high school. And then, of course, the friends he made at college and law school, they're still extant, you know, still around, many of whom either worked on his campaign, some served his administration, but all... Jerry sort of kept in touch with.

Boryczka: Why did Jerry go to the University of Detroit, rather than any other college?

Cavanagh: Well, I think because it was closer, he could live at home. His tuition was probably cheaper than anyplace else you could think of. I don't think there was a particular ideological reason why he went there, but that just seemed the natural place to go, where he could live at home. Take the bus right up Livernois, and bingo, there you were.

Boryczka: So it was convenient as much as anything, and still get a good education?

Cavanagh: Yes, yes, right.

Boryczka: Did he ever voice any sort of disappointment, bit of brotherly jealousy, that he didn't have an opportunity to serve in the war?

Cavanagh: No.

Boryczka: No. Never any urge that way?

Cavanagh: No, never did. When I came back, he would ask me about service life once in a while, but not often. My nephews are much more interested in what I did and where I went and what I saw, you know, all of this stuff. And of course, it's another generation, of course. Mark, particularly, is interested.

Boryczka: But at that time he didn't express...?

Cavanagh: No, he didn't.

Boryczka: That's interesting. There is a story that Judge Joe B. Sullivan told me about Jerry when he was in law school. At that point I believe you would have been back; you were back from the service about that time. It has to do with a law fraternity that both of them were members of, Judge Sullivan and Jerry. And there was a black student who applied for admission

to the fraternity, and in fact Judge Sullivan tells me that this was when your brother first really came to his notice. Jerry pushed for membership for this black individual, for membership in the previously all-white fraternity, very strenuously. Judge Sullivan took notice of him at that point, and their relationship grew. If I recall correctly, Judge Sullivan said that Jerry was not able to get the black student into the fraternity the first time; perhaps later. Do you recall that particular incident?

Cavanagh: No, I don't, now.

Boryczka: This is, as near as I've been able to tell, the first public demonstration of Jerry Cavanagh's public belief in civil rights and racial equality. He's publicly taking a stand, in law school. How do you react to him doing that? Does it surprise you, in any way, that he would have done that?

Cavanagh: No.

Boryczka: Why doesn't it surprise you?

Cavanagh: Because, I think, it was a natural thing for Jerry to do, the way he was raised, I'm convinced of that. So, that doesn't surprise me at all.

Boryczka: OK. This is an era when, as you say, as you were growing up, there wasn't a lot of contact between whites and blacks. Race hadn't been a major issue in this city. We're talking about the early fifties, mid-fifties, when the Civil Rights movement has not become very prominent yet. I just want to make sure that I'm understanding the point you're making. Given the values that had been inculcated in him as a youth, it doesn't surprise you?

Cavanagh: That's right.

Boryczka: But it certainly does seem to put him in the vanguard fairly early on.

Cavanagh: Yes. You know, speaking to that, in that first campaign for mayor, I, well I was working for the Crippled Children Commission, and most of the office personnel there in Detroit were black. These were young women, stenographers, typists, secretaries. And one of them asked me, it was during the campaign, she said, "Does your brother mean that, Mr. Cavanagh?" I said, "Yes, he does". "Oh, OK." (Chuckles) I remember her asking me that, "Does he mean that...?"; what he's saying about equality and racial justice. I said, "Yes, he does". Another thing, this maybe isn't even apropos to what we're talking about, but I recall when I worked for the Friend of the Court, a Mexican fellow, who was an attorney, and was

an investigator, along with me, he said to me one day, "Paul," he says, "you know what I admire about the Irish?" I said, "What's that?" He says, "Your love of justice". I said "Well, thanks Hector. Yes, that's true, although there are many, many Irish who..."

Boryczka: It's interesting how many people of Irish extraction went into law in the Detroit area. Once again, Judge Sullivan explaining to me, in great detail, all of the Irish clans and families from, not just the Cavanaghs, but the Brennans, and the Sullivans. And then explaining to me how all of the Sullivans are not necessarily related to one another; they're from two or three different Sullivan clans. It gets very complicated. Murphy, and others. The Irish are very prominent in the Detroit legal community. Were you at all surprised that Jerry went into law?

Cavanagh: No, I wasn't.

Boryczka: Why do think he chose law above any other field he could have gone into?

Cavanagh: I could give you an easy answer and say his love of justice, but no, that... It would seem to me that Jerry probably felt this is the way he could best express himself, and maybe his ideals, in law. And of course, our whole family, there are ten attorneys among the younger generation. My mother and father had thirty-two grandchildren; ten are attorneys, and two more are coming up.

Boryczka: That's amazing.

Cavanagh: It is, out of thirty-two.

Boryczka: There must be something in the blood lines.

Cavanagh: There must (laughs).

Boryczka: That is amazing. Did you have any inclination that way?

Cavanagh: I thought I did, once, but then I thought I wanted to be a journalist, and I abandoned that. In more recent years, when I was already over the hill, so to speak, I thought of being a history professor.

Boryczka: Is that right?

Cavanagh: Yes, because I do love history.

Boryczka: Do you think that he went into law with an eye toward politics?

Cavanagh: I think he might have, yes.

Boryczka: I mean, they seem to go hand-in-glove.

Cavanagh: Yes, yes. I think he may have had that in the back of his mind, yes.

Boryczka: There are a lot of old sayings in political circles, but one of them is that if you're going to become a politician you had better have a huge, huge ego, because you're going to be taking a lot of knocks. How does that apply to Jerry? Do you think he was a man of immense ego?

Cavanagh: I don't know that he had an immense ego. He was a perfectionist in so many ways, in the matter of dress. And he got that from my mother's side of the family, I know, and particularly my maiden aunt, who lived with us for so many years. She was the arbiter of manners, and just about everything: dress codes and everything else. Jerry, I'm sure, picked up an awful lot of that from her. How you didn't go to church on Sunday unless you were properly dressed. There was a dress, suit or shirt or whatever for all occasions. Well, that's just one little thing about Jerry. He was very particular about that, because he felt, I guess, that appearance meant something, not just to satisfy your ego, but the fact that people got their impression from looking at you the first time. I suppose that's so important to a politician, I'm sure it is. Whether he was thinking about that, or not, in his early years, I don't know; I doubt. But I'm sure he had an ego of sorts, but how massive it was I don't know. He could take a joke on himself, and what used to delight me sometimes, if he was caught up in something, and how abashed he could look. Just, you know, like this. He at times could laugh at himself.

Boryczka: So, you're not surprised that he went into politics?

Cavanagh: No. No, I'm not.

Boryczka: Many, many people were surprised, though, when he declared his candidacy for mayor of Detroit. At that point he was essentially a political unknown.

Cavanagh: Absolutely.

Boryczka: Were you surprised that he decided to go straight for the mayor's slot?

Cavanagh: I confess I was. I confess I was, because he was just a struggling attorney downtown. He must have had (I'm sure he did) a sense of timing, that the time was right, and obviously it was, because he won against an entrenched mayor. Took advantage of every mistake that the previous administration had made, waged a very successful fighting campaign. Against odds, and it wasn't until late in the campaign that, I recall, things began to look up; people began to notice. I guess that's what I was trying to say.

Boryczka: Did he seek the advice of anybody before he decided to run? Did he talk to you or other members of the family?

Cavanagh: No, he didn't talk to me and I don't know of any family member, but I know he talked to some of his law partners. Well, he was, I guess, a junior partner. The late Leo Sullivan, and it's hard to say what Leo might have advised him. Maybe he told him, "Forget it, Jerry. But if you decide to go, I'm with you". And that was, I'm sure, the way many of them felt. Another friend of mine said, "Ah, why doesn't he run for sheriff? Why is he taking on the mayor?" I said, "Well, I don't know". Advice? I'm sure he talked to Joe B. about it, I'm sure of that. But Joe was very instrumental in his campaign. And then somebody put Jerry next to the late Tommy McIntyre, who had been a police reporter for the Detroit Times. Did you know McIntyre at all?

Boryczka: No. No, I didn't.

Cavanagh: Well, he was a feisty little guy with just one of the most bitter tongues I've ever heard. He could rip the hide off anybody.

Boryczka: Curmudgeon, eh?

Cavanagh: Yes, really. And Jerry enlisted him, and he was instrumental. Now I don't think McIntyre had advice to Jerry about yes or no, run for it. But once Jerry had decided to go for it, and he took on McIntyre, that's when McIntyre went to work, got advice, and publicity, and so on.

Boryczka: Did you get involved in the campaign?

Cavanagh: Yes, I did. I lived in Westland at the time, but I got involved as much as I could. I would take days off from work, and so on. I made a few campaign stops for Jerry. I remember a group of blacks over on Longfellow and Fourteenth, I think, was the street, and it was at the behest of a black minister. Boy oh boy, he was quite popular, and now I can't recall his name. I saw it pop up in the paper. I think he's still active in the black community; I can't remember his name. But Jerry couldn't go, and it was a Saturday, and asked me would I go. There was a whole bunch of people there. And I'll tell you who else attended, making his pitch, was Mel Ravitz. So we each had our turn to talk, and I spoke of what Jerry intended for Detroit, and they were quite specific about racial issues. And I assured them that Jerry was color-blind, and that he intended, if elected, to see that blacks got their fair shake in the city of Detroit. I

thought it went fairly well. Then I made a couple of other appearances... Well, then a few times I rode with him. Once to a lieutenants and sergeants meeting, where both Miriani and Jerry were. Miriani spoke and took off. Jerry had no chance to needle him or anything else.

Boryczka: Why do you think Jerry won?

Cavanagh: I think it was a combination of factors. I think the people were ready for a change in the administration. Miriani had given the people of the city the impression that he was willing to just ride along with, you know, the same old way, the same old stuff. The city was in somewhat financial trouble; it was. The black element, and the police force cracking down on them; that certainly helped Jerry.

Boryczka: Sure,

And blacks were looking for somebody who would help them out of this business. And the fact that Jerry was young and energetic. And I think all of those combined, plus the fact that people, as I said earlier, they felt a change in administration was coming. Somebody told me that a cab driver was telling a fare, "Well, I don't think... I'm going to vote for him, but I don't think he'll win". You know. "But I'm going to vote for him anyway". And there were enough of those people to put him over.

Boryczka: Joe B. Sullivan tells me that cab drivers were always his political touchstone. He always felt that he would get honest opinions from cab drivers. When he wanted to poll the citizenry before the era of mass polling that they have today, he'd go out and take cab rides. (Laughs) I don't know whether that was true or not.

Cavanagh: Well, I suppose he felt that cab drivers really saw, or talked to a cross section of people. I suppose they would.

Boryczka: How did your folks react, when he got elected?

Cavanagh: Jerry?

Boryczka: Yes.

Cavanagh: My dad had a severe cold that election day, and stayed home. He'd been out in the rain, handing out cards, you know, and he stayed home. My mother came downtown, where they were...

Boryczka: Were they retired by that point?

Cavanagh: Yes. And the room or suite was at the old Fort-Shelby Hotel. My mother

came downtown, and we were up there, I guess it was about eleven o'clock, and somebody brought up a Free Press. The headline said, "It's Mayor Cavanagh!" And I thought my mother would go crazy! She jumped up in the air: "Whoa!" And of course everybody cut loose then. But by that time, earlier, WJR I guess it was, had the so-called key precincts. They said Cavanagh's going to win. Before my wife and I left Westland to head for the Fort-Shelby, had the radio on, and I guess it was live from Miriani's headquarters. Miriani said, "I'm suspicious". He should have said, "I'm apprehensive", or something like that. He says, "I'm suspicious". And Gordon, of course, was riding the fence, saying "It looks like there may be an upset, but well..." But the prognosticators on WJR were saying, "The key precincts are in. Cavanagh has won".

Boryczka: Were you surprised? You'd been involved in the campaign.

Cavanagh: Yes and no. I'd been involved in it... Yes and no. I thought it was an uphill fight from the start. But, I was encouraged that day by the fact the public schools always have a vote, you know. And if I'm not mistaken it seems to me the high school kids went for Miriani, and the grade school kids for Jerry, and I thought, the grade school kids are reflecting their parents. I think; (laughs) I don't know. And, that's about the way it went, although that was a very straw that I held onto as I left Jerry's headquarters and headed back out to Westland. I say 'yes and no surprise'... I think, more yes, to be honest, yes. Because the whole campaign was run on a shoestring, literally.

Boryczka: Sure, In fact there was a name for it that the campaign managers called it. I can't recall right now. Something to do with shoestring budget that they ran it on. It was an upset, there's no doubt about that.

Cavanagh: Oh, yes.

Boryczka: Everyone was very, very surprised. At that point, Jerry Cavanagh becomes a national luminary.

Cavanagh: Yes, instantly.

Boryczka: You were telling me the stories... start at the beginning. This is during the primary campaign, the first election.

Cavanagh: In this little dinky office up there on Cadillac Square and somebody came up to the late Ollie Nelson, who was an attorney in with Jerry, and was also the finance manager,

as it were. Somebody said to Ollie, "We need some more signs, or posters, and need some money". Ollie (this won't come across on the tape), but Ollie went — (both laugh) — 'there you are'...

Boryczka: It's like he's picking grapes off a tree...

Cavanagh: Yes, off the vine. That's the way the campaign was run. If ten or fifteen dollars came in today, well, it went for this. Of course, there were bills, but ultimately they got paid. I'm not sure that they were paid before the general election, but certainly after the general election, and Jerry won, everybody wants to get into the act, you know.

Boryczka: Just as the media focused in a fair amount on Jack Kennedy's family life, with Jackie and John-John, and Caroline, and so on, there was a fair amount of focus on Mayor Cavanagh's family life as well. What kind of effect did that have on the family life? The kids, for example, and yourself. Is there a transformation that takes place, among family members, to have a member of the family suddenly in the national spotlight?

Cavanagh: I think so, yes. Yes. I think there's no escaping it. In Jerry's case, it isn't that we were, or felt, farther away from him. But realizing that he was in a different orbit now, as it were, not as available to us. That you had to go through people. That his bodyguards were here. I personally never had any problem, and I don't think any member of the family did, as far as that goes. But yet we knew, almost by instinct, that he was set apart, he was a little different now. He's not Jerry, with his shirtsleeves rolled up, that we're going to see in the backyard today. Although he did that too, after he was mayor. And I think this transition had some effect on his children; I'm sure it did, it was bound to, because they were looked after like never before. They were taken to Lions games, Tiger ball games. There were always policemen around, who would take them wherever they wanted to go, as far as that goes. And so it was a different lifestyle for them. This was 1961, which was thirty years ago, and Mark was just, what, about eight years old (Judge Cavanagh). And of course, being the oldest, then the others were down the line that much younger.

Boryczka: So, it does cause some changes?

Cavanagh: Oh, sure, yes.

Boryczka: Let me ask you a frank question. Sometimes it's difficult to get past some of the media hype, which all politicians engage in. One of the images that the media portrayed very

strongly was this very strong insistence on maintaining close ties with his family while he was in office, particularly with his kids. I've come across articles in Life magazine and in the New York Times which hardly mentioned his public policies on various issues, but talked about how he insisted on Sunday barbecues with the family in the backyard, and insisted on spending a lot of time with his kids, and that sort of thing. There's always part truth and part fiction in those kinds of media descriptions. How accurate do you think they were?

Cavanagh: I think that's reasonably accurate. He did want, he couldn't/wasn't always able to, but he tried, and did succeed quite often in setting aside time for the family. You know, there's an incident when Jerry was mayor. It was his second term, when I was quite pleased, quite thrilled, my second oldest son, Dan (we're living in Lansing then), was graduating (this is June, 1967) from O'Rafferty High. And I had asked Jerry to come and make the commencement address, and he agreed to it. And of course, the Christian brothers out there were just delighted, particularly one of them, who had sort of been a frustrated politician, I think. The ceremonies were held at the Sexton High School, and Jerry made this talk, and then we had this little reception here. He came over, and neighbors were coming out and looking. But I thought it was so good of him to do this, for Dan, and for me, you know. We had a great time that day, great time. Oh, yes, Attorney General Frank Kelley's young son, Frank Jr., was in Dan's class.

Boryczka: Oh, is that right?

Cavanagh: Yes, he was up there too.

Boryczka: Would you care to make any observations about Mr. Cavanagh's first wife?

Cavanagh: Well, let my say that I liked her, still like her; I haven't seen her in a long time. I think it may have been Mark's swearing in, as appeals court judge; it was up here in Lansing. She was here, and we were cordial. I was never, you know, after she and Jerry were divorced, I was never bitter about it, or at her. I felt no animosity. As I say, always liked her. I remember when they were first married, and we had a family bridge club. And Jerry, Mary Helen, my youngest sister Joan and her husband, and my sister Ann and her husband Chuck. Ann and Chuck were the bridge experts, and they were going to teach us and we'd rotate around. We always had a great time. Then, of course when Jerry became mayor, that ended the bridge club. We'd often see Mary Helen, socialize with her, until after the divorce. And then,

I'm not sure when she moved to Milford, but when she did, of course, that... I just never saw her again, until, as I mentioned, this occasion when Mark was sworn in. Or one other time: her daughter Angela graduated from Michigan State, and I saw her, and we were friendly, and so on. Then afterwards, I'm sure... Yes, it was at Mark's swearing in. So that's been my only contact with her over all these years.

Boryczka: She ever remarry, do you know?

Cavanagh: No, not to my knowledge.

Boryczka: Why do you think the mayor decided to run for the Senate? What spurred that?

Cavanagh: Good question. I think he felt it was time. I'm trying to remember now if that... No, the Senate spot wasn't open, really was it? Or was it? Griffin won it; he beat Soapy in the...

Boryczka: It was in the primary where he took on Soapy Williams.

Cavanagh: He took on Soapy and lost.

Boryczka: Yes, in the primary.

Cavanagh: I'm trying to think of... Well, the office wouldn't have been vacated, because the Governor would have appointed somebody. I can't figure out... There was no incumbent running, to my knowledge. Was Griffin a temporary appointment of Milliken?

Boryczka: Yes.

Cavanagh: Then that's it, yes. Apparently, those circumstances led Jerry to feel that it was time to make this run.

Boryczka: A lot of people thought that he was committing political suicide.

Cavanagh: Yes. And as it turned out, he took an awful beating. Well, he... I attended a meeting of the UAW here with him during that campaign. They're up on the stage; I think it was one of the local high schools. Jerry lit into them for endorsing Soapy in the primary; it was unheard of. I recall Emil Mazey sitting up there smiling, you know, like "What are you going to do about it?" It was a hopeless battle.

Boryczka: The UAW was very powerful in Michigan politics at that time.

Cavanagh: Yes. So, he was cooked right from the start.

Boryczka: It's kind of interesting that the Mayor in the most populous county of the state, by all accounts he had a fairly amicable relationship with the UAW, and with organized labor,

at the time. Do you have any reason, or do you know why he couldn't get labor support in that primary?

Cavanagh: Yes. I think labor felt they owed it to Soapy. In fact, somebody made the remark, what was it? To me, or whom? Did I overhear it? "We owe it to Soapy" for his years as Governor; for what he did, well in helping the UAW, and in using them, actually, to reorganize, you might say, the Democratic party, putting it together so that there was a succession of terms. "We owe it to Soapy". I think that was the overriding factor, that the UAW not only endorsed him in the primary, but went all out to work for him and support him.

Boryczka: Let me ask you about one other major point. We've discussed, ourselves, off the record, the recent book by Professor Fine on the Detroit riots, and I think that most of the facts of those riots are part of the record. They have been analyzed by experts. But perhaps what's missing from the record are some observations on the personal impact that this must have had on the Mayor, considering his interest in the Civil Rights movement from an early stage in his career. The support the black community had given him politically to get him elected, the first time and the second time. Aside from the politics, as a person, what are your recollections of the impacts of that riot on him, as a person?

Cavanagh: It had a profound impact on Jerry, as I recall it. Complete, utter disappointment that this would happen in the city which, up to that time, had been considered a model of racial justice. The devastation of the city, how it went on, and everything, just... and the politics that were played while the riot was on, if you're familiar with that. Johnson wanted Romney to write him a letter, and Romney was reluctant to. When Jerry called for the state police and the National Guard, and Romney was reluctant, and then Johnson played them both, as it were. But anyway, that, plus the fact itself of the riot, and that the black community, or so much of it, had erupted, had a terrible disheartening effect on Jerry. I know it did. I think, I'm sure, that it hastened his decision, that this was the end of seeking public office. I doubt if he... Well, yes, now did he make a stab at the Governorship? Yes, he did. So that this was enough to make him at least not seek another term as Mayor, and it left him sort of in limbo, really, the way he felt for the next few years, before he suddenly... His political ideas reawakened, and he went after the governorship.

Boryczka: You mentioned that he was very disappointed. Let's try to narrow that a little

bit more. What was he, or who was he disappointed in?

Cavanagh: I think he may have been disappointed in the general fact that this explosion was so close to the surface, and had been obviously bubbling there for some time. Either he, or the police department, were not aware of it. Just the year before, the police department had handled, in a very salutary manner, what could have been a big conflagration out on the East Side. It started out quickly; it was doused, and nobody was hurt. It was just all over and forgotten, and I think Jerry, from that incident, came to believe that anything like that, that cropped up again, could be handled. I think he was disappointed in the fact that his policies hadn't stopped this just-below-the-surface bubbling that had been going on for so long.

Boryczka: Had it changed his views any on the ability of government to resolve deep-seated socio-economic problems facing the cities at that time?

Cavanagh: I really don't know if it changed his opinion of that. He never expressed that to me one way or the other. After he left the Mayor's office, and lived in Ann Arbor practicing law, I think I saw him more often then than, oh, for a long time in between. We'd talk, not so much about the, uh, his Mayoralty years, or the administration, but about government in general, and how the country was doing, and so on. Or maybe some observations on this officeholder, or that one, or whatever. I don't think he ever completely lost the idea that government could and should do considerably for... Whether government can ever completely solve it, I myself doubt; I don't subscribe to that theory *in toto*.

Boryczka: As one who has been involved himself for his entire career?

Cavanagh: Yes.

Boryczka: This is totally hypothetical, but as my final question, as the person who is one of those closest to Mayor Cavanagh, if it were possible today, what do you think that Mayor Cavanagh would have to say about the current state of the city of Detroit?

Cavanagh: Well, let's see. I put myself in Jerry's shoes, if possible. I'm thinking, Ray, that I am going to reflect pretty much my own idea on this.

Boryczka: OK.

Cavanagh: Maybe thinking or feeling that Jerry would somehow go along with much of what I say.

Boryczka: Fair enough.

Cavanagh: I'm disappointed in the administration's apparent lack of caring for neighborhoods, for one thing. The Mayor seems to rule by fiat and there is secrecy, obviously Council doesn't know what the hell is going on, and so on. So many things that are going wrong, and it's the people of Detroit, who are living there, who are hurting over this. So many things have gone wrong in the last eight to ten or twelve years, with businesses moving out, downtown closing up... I know it would take probably a superman to do something, or would have, say eight or ten years ago, to turn things around. But maybe back then is when it could have and should have been done, somehow or other. I don't know; I think Jerry would be greatly disappointed. Whether he'd have a solution or not, I don't know. I certainly don't.

Boryczka: No one else has come up with anything.

Cavanagh: No. It's too bad, because we do see examples. Reading about one the other day: Cleveland is making a comeback. And it can be done, apparently. Whether Detroit has gone too far, I don't know, I don't know. But I think there are still some people of good spirit in Detroit, who, if given half a chance, would try, at least, to do it. Even some of the money people, who don't live in Detroit, they've got some investments in Detroit. But I think they might be willing, if they saw a concrete, decent plan that was going to help Detroit out. I think they might even be willing to invest.

Boryczka: Like Tiger Stadium?

Cavanagh: Tiger Stadium. I'd almost reached a point where I don't care if they play in Coldwater, you know? (both laugh)

Boryczka: I wouldn't mind seeing another pennant again.

Cavanagh: Oh, yes, yes.

Boryczka: Is there anything I've forgotten? Anything else that you think should get on the record?

Cavanagh: I don't think so, Ray. I'm only sorry I didn't have more information about Jerry from the time he was about, oh, let's say seven, or eight years old, on up into high school. As I think I mentioned, those were years that I was probably too busy with my own growing up.

Boryczka: Oh, sure. Well, you've given us a very good flavor, a sense of when he was growing up.

Cavanagh: Well good, good. I'm glad of that.