Bob Allesee Part 1

Q: This is Mike Smith interviewing Bob Allesee at the Walter Reuther Library on March 31, 2005. Bob, we're here to do an Oral History with you and we have to start at the beginning. Begin at the beginning as they say – I know you were born on September 20, 1932.

A: I was very young at the time.

Q: [laughter] In Laporte – is it La-port or La por-tay?

A: A Hoosier! So, the first things we'd like to get a little bit of knowledge of is the environment you grew up on. If you could just tell us a bit about your parents, their occupations and their heritage.

A: Well, September 20, 1932, I was very young at the time, so I can't tell you too much about that day. It wasn't really a normal – I started to say normal little town – but it really wasn't because Laporte is a rather unique town, especially in Indiana, but I would say anywhere, mainly because it was an amalgamation of three different kinds of towns. It was first of all, an agricultural center for the county and Indiana had harvested land up in that area. This is south of Chicago – Laporte is about halfway between Gary and South Bend and it's a very rich agricultural area. Laporte was the county seat. So we were agriculturally

oriented. Two, we were an industrial town. There were several major plants that were there – Allis – Chalmers had a plant there. And probably, I would guess, at least half the town was connected to Allis – Chalmers due to somebody in the family working there. Because they had 2,500 people working at the plant; one of their top plants. And in a town of 15,000, that's a lot of folks. But then, we had many other companies of various sizes, major companies and small companies. It was really quite a business town of all sizes and shapes, Allis – Chalmers, of course, with tractors and that kind of thing, but I worked at a radiator plant -- Modine, manufacturing. They made radiators for the automobile industry and for others, and then we had boiler factories and water heater factories. It was really quite an industrial town. But then, the third part of LaPorte was it was a recreational town. It was quite a vacation place. We had five lakes in the city, and in a town of 15,000, we had in that town of 15,000 millionaires. And I think we had the highest per capita income in the country. And these people were very generous; particularly, one family that owned the big hotel downtown, the only hotel. But it was a very nice one, a major hotel. And they gave things like a beautiful park that was around one of the lakes. This was a big chunk of land, and it was

a great park. They had a zoo, they had a baseball field, they had a gazebo where orchestras could play outdoor music. And then they gave the golf course to the city. And this golf course, back in 1930 or '31, when it opened, was in the top 50 golf courses in the United States -- that kind of quality. So people would come from the Chicago area, or from Michigan. Come down to Laporte, spend a summer, or at least a few weeks. And it was quite a town to grow up in. We also had one -- I always like to say it had the best -- but it certainly had one of the best educational systems in the state. Now, some will say that's not saying much. (laughter)

Q: Somebody from Michigan?

A: Indiana does take a lot of hits that way, but it was a marvelous place to grow up. I had just a very wonderful childhood. And my parents were kind of typical parents. I was raised up in the Baptist Church in LaPorte. But my father was, when I was young in the '30s, he was the athletic director at the YMCA. So he was known by everybody. Because in the '30s, the only place you could go was the YMCA. That was the least expensive place to do something and it was kind of the focal, social center of the town. So everybody knew my dad. He taught most of the people in town how to play volleyball or basketball or

swim, or whatever. And my mother was involved in everything. She was in the Eastern Star and church programs of all sorts and other organizations. So they were very active people. So I grew up in a town where, although we didn't have any money, we had a certain amount of status, which is always nice. But it was interesting growing up at that time because, of course, you didn't think about money so much back then, because nobody else had any either. Except a few very wealthy people in town and nobody paid any attention to that. We were all trying to be in the same boat. And then the war [World War II] came along, and the town changed considerably. Much like what happened to Detroit during the automobile era, when it went from being a rather smallish town, to suddenly becoming the motor city or the car capital, when it changed with the influx of labor from all over the country, when Henry Ford offered the $5 day. Particularly from the South. We had the same thing during the war because just outside of LaPorte we'd built an ordinance plant, the Kingsbury Ordinance Plant. They were manufacturing materials for the war, and this was around 1940. People who think that perhaps the war came as a surprise sometimes don't know that our country was preparing for that war long before Pearl Harbor. And my dad, as a matter of fact, was

hired to run the athletic program for this ordinance plant. It brought in all kinds of people, particularly from the south, very much like Detroit. And that did change the nature of the town. It was kind of a clannish city. It was that sort of thing where, if you'd lived there for 50 years, you suddenly were now one of the boys and girls and you were accepted. But if you hadn't been there more than 10 or 15 years, you were a newcomer. It was that sort of small-town thing. And when all these people came in, suddenly there were just a lot of strangers and they had very different mores than did the local people. We were in Northern Indiana. Now, Southern Indiana is very different. You go down to Southern Indiana and you might just as well have been in Kentucky or Tennessee, or any of the southern states, because they had a southern drawl and a very different style of life. But we were influenced by Chicago, to be quite honest. We were about 70 miles from Chicago; that was the big town. And much like the people around here, who come from outside of Southeastern Michigan, Detroit's the big town. And they're influenced by what goes on here. Well, we were influenced by media -- radio, they didn't have television back then -- but radio, and my goal was to be a radio actor.

Q: When did you decide on that goal? How old were you?

A: Oh, I was in grade school. In the '30s and '40s when you were listening to Hermit's Cave and the Lone Ranger, which came out of here, incidentally, those programs originated from Detroit. But the drama shows -- there were all kinds of them. And I wanted to be a radio actor. I didn't like being on the stage as an actor because I didn't move quite that well. I was not happy with the way I looked on the stage.

Q: I take it you tried it on the stage and --

A: Well, I had been on the stage to do little skits and things in grade school and all, and I was always uncomfortable on the stage. This is like television -- I've always said I never really cared for television, working in it. Although I was very successful at it. But I didn't like it because I'd rather be heard than seen. It's that simple. Radio is a wonderful thing. You sit in an empty room and talk to yourself and everybody thinks you're fantastic -- it's great. And I've always liked radio, except when I graduated high school in 1950 -- you know, that was my 18th year. And I graduated in the spring of 1950 and went to work in a radio station in LaPorte. And...

Q: Before we finish, if you don't mind -- growing up in a small town, and of course, you become a media celebrity in, during most of your career, one of the top ten cities, if

not the fifth or sixth largest city --

A: It was fifth when I came here. It was the fifth largest when I came here.

Q: Were there any kind of -- and I know you spend a bit of time in L.A. in the big city before you came to Detroit -- are there any lessons or certain influences from your upbringing that you think helped or hindered your career?

A: Well, knowing what it's like to be raised in Detroit or Los Angeles or Chicago -- that's very different from visiting. We visited Chicago on a fairly regular basis, not that often because we didn't have that much money and it was a long drive. There were not freeways, transportation was very different then -- two-lane roads to get any place. Going to Chicago was about a two to three hour trip, to go that 70 miles, and we didn't do it that often. And I also studied music in Chicago for a while when I got out of high school. I was studying guitar up there. Piano was my major instrument, but guitar was my secondary instrument, and I had a wonderful teacher. And I used to go up there every Saturday, but I was already an adult by that time. But my point is that growing up in a big city like Detroit, I would know certain things. And I have to surmise at my growth patterns would be very different. But living here, which I have done -- I've lived both in the city and in the

suburbs. I've been here 44 years now; I came here in January of 1961 and the city was on the downswing at that time. It started on the downhill, as I understand it, around 1950 or '55, when the big swing to go out into the suburbs began and people wanted to own their own homes and get away from the "city."

Q: And Packard and Hudson and other companies folded.

A: Yeah, that's right. I don't remember exactly -- well, Hudson hadn't folded. Oh you're talking about Hudson Motor Cars --

Q: I'm sorry, I was thinking two major employers, two historic car companies.

A: Yeah, Packard and Hudson built cars. And I love the story about the old man Hudson -- designed the car so that he could get into the front seat and have his top-hat on and not knock it off, or have to take it off to get into the car. So if you remember those old Hudsons, they had this very high roof and they were homely as all get out. When the other cars got more slick and modern-looking in the '30s, I think of the Chrysler Airflow as a car. In '36, was it?

Q: '34 I believe, the first one.

A: OK, I wanted to put it as '36. I'm not a car buff. Strangely enough, I never had any interest in automobiles

in particular. They were something to get into and turn the key and you went from here to there, but I never got all excited. But my buddies, when I was a kid growing up, oh, they were hysterical about cars and particularly about the Indianapolis 500, which struck me as a bunch of people driving around in a circle, waiting for somebody to have a wreck. And that didn't interest me -- it's like watching a tennis game, you know, you get tired of the ball going back and forth. And cars running around in a circle like that did not... but that is not to say that they weren't very popular -- they were and still are. And I have that problem -- I've always had it in Detroit -- it's that I'm not a car guy, although I appreciate the influence of the car in Detroit. They say it was much the same thing that happened in LaPorte when the influx of "outsiders" came into this little town. Well, it wasn't that little. You know, in Indiana, there were only about three or four... there were four major cities. Indianapolis was the capital and the major city. And Gsry was the big steel mill town, and that was a big town. And Evansville, down on the Ohio River in the south part of the state. And then right next to Michigan over on the east part of the state, you had Fort Wayne. And those towns weren't all that big, but in Indiana they were. And Indiana was just cluttered with

little, almost what you'd call villages. They would have sometimes only a few hundred people. My daddy used to describe small towns as two taverns and a hardware store, which I always liked -- I thought that was... that got at the sociological core of the issue. (laughter) Two taverns and a hardware store. But, of course, he never mentioned the church -- there was always a church. At any rate, LaPorte was 15,000 people. Now that doesn't sound like very much, I know. But it was a major city, we had major facilities. So I was blessed to grow up in what was a fairly good-sized town in my surroundings. And it had all the amenities of a large town. For example, because of where we were located in Northern Indiana, major symphony orchestras and singers or pianists or whatever -- you know, performers or actors, plays, whatever -- would be coming, let's say, from New York or Cleveland or Detroit, coming to Chicago to perform or, vice-versa, going the other way. And LaPorte was right on the path and the New York Central went through town, so they'd get off the train and do a show. And we had this huge civic auditorium, which was donated to the city by one of those millionaires, where we had the facility to put on a full opera. We had a stage that could handle a full opera and the place sat about 3,000 people, you know, that could see a performance. It

didn't have the greatest acoustics, mind you, because mostly it was used for basketball. (laughter) Well, we had things like that, which allowed me as a youngster to grow up listening to very first-class entertainment. There were very few cities that had that. So, it was a good place to grow up. I look back with great love on my hometown. I don't have anything bad to say about it, even though there were a lot of bad things I could say, but I don't want to. I enjoyed it too much, I had a very good childhood. But Detroit's my home now.

Q: Before we discuss your career years, we sort of left off when you graduated from high school, but I'm interested in hearing about during this early period is: you've got sort of a shadow career as a musician. So, what influenced you to work on your music?

A: Well, I will tell you. When I was about six years old, my parents went out for dinner someplace one night and we had a babysitter. And I had two brothers that were a little bit rambunctious, one older and one younger. I think my oldest brother, who was about 10 years older than I, was himself on a date or something and wasn't there. And so he couldn't watch us, and we had the babysitter come in and we were... to keep us occupied, especially me, we sat down at the piano. I had never played the piano. My brother,

who's just a couple years older than I, was taking lessons at the time. And we were doing this thing that you do on the black keys -- "dah-bah dah-bah dah bah-bah, dah-ba dah-ba dah-bah bah" -- you know, she [the babysitter] would play the lower and I would play the upper. Then, she taught me to play the lower thing and she would play the upper. And she let me stay up until almost 10 o'clock or something like that when my folks came home. And I performed. My mother was very impressed -- well, my dad was too. I played this thing very well. It was very simple, but I was a little guy and they said: "Would you like to take lessons?" And I said, "Yeah, but I've got a proviso." And, they said, "What's that?" And I said, "I don't want to play scales, I don't want to play exercises, I just want to play music. Now if you can find a teacher that will do that, fine and dandy, I will study piano." They found a teacher. I studied with her for about a year or so, and I just played music. I never went through the basic training of a pianist. So as a result I had no foundation. Then, she sent me off to her teacher and I studied with her for about five more years, or six more years, or whatever it was, until I got into junior high school. I must have been about 12 or 13 years old, someplace in there. I never learned how to sight-read

music, but I could play well. I had this phenomenal memory, so I could remember everything. My teacher would play a half a page of music and I'd see where her fingers went on the keyboard, and then I would play. But, she thought I was reading the music and she never knew, really, that I wasn't a very good reader. I knew one note from the next, I still do, but I don't read music. If you put piano score in front of me right now, I wouldn't be able to play it. I'd have to sit there and figure it out one note at a time. And I can read a lead sheet. Now the strange thing is, that in singing -- and I was a very strong vocal musician as well in high school and grade school, as I was in choral work and quartets and things like that. I could sight sing vocal music -- you could spill ink on the page and I could sing it, because I just knew what the notes were going to sound like in my head. I was always in perfect pitch because I have almost perfect pitch. So I was in tune and I had a musical ability, but as a pianist I finally got tired -- you know, as kids do when they get to be about 12 or 13 or 14 years old. I got out of it when I was starting to get interested in young ladies and I didn't want to play piano anymore, until I was in high school. And I think I must have been about a junior in high school -- sophomore, junior in high school -- and one of my

friends in the choir, the school choir where I sang, he played piano by ear. And he played sort of two-beat stride piano, like a beer hall sort of thing. But I was fascinated, I said: "How do you do that?" He said, "Well, I hear the melody and then I can hear all the chords underneath it -- the other notes that make up the chord -- and I just play that and out it comes." I said, "Can I do that?" And that was the next thing -- we sat down and he showed me four chord changes and started singing a song to me and said, "Well, play one of those chords with it." And I would play the chords and he says, "You've got a great ear." And so that started it, and I taught myself from there how to play piano. And because I'd had some fundamental training in piano music, it wasn't all that hard. I never thought much about it, really, but I taught myself how to play modern chord changes and how to become extemporaneous, and I became a jazz musician. Because it was the following year, I think, I must have been going to my senior year, and I got into this little group that was beginning to play. They were all about a year younger than I. But, they needed a piano player and I started playing piano with them and the next thing you know, you're working at the YMCA for the dances and after school football games -- you're playing for the dances and things like that. And

I began to learn the songs and, as a matter of fact, in a small town like that, you didn't have what you'd call a plethora of piano players. And so, even though I was young, and not too experienced, I was able to play -- especially when I got out of high school -- I was able to play with experienced musicians and learned a lot from them. When I went off to college, I played with some very good people and began honing my skills. And then, I went in the Army. At that point, I was in an army band, playing Glockenspiel. When they asked me could I play Glockenspiel, I said, "I thought that was a German beer." (laughter) I won't bore you with that story, but there, for the first time in my life, I really was a full-time musician. In the Army, it was not like being a musician in L.A. for example, but it was being around musicians, many of whom were my age and, like me, drafted during the Korean War.

Q: When was this, that you were drafted?

A: This was the Korean War. It was '54 to '56 that I was in the army because, first of all, I'd gone to college and I had a deferment for about two or three years, and I really wasn't happy with college. I was not too happy with the professors and the way the school was run.

Q: Did you go into the Army immediately after your graduation

in 1950, or did you start college?

A: No, I worked for a year.

Q: What did you do for that year?

A: Well, I worked at Modine Manufacturing Corporation in LaPorte, making radiator cores. I was a core assembler, which was a very highly skilled job. Normally you're supposed to take, oh, a year to be able to make piece-rate. You know, full piece-rate. I was there maybe a month and I was hitting the piece-rate. Now that was not my first experience, it was my second experience, with being in a union. And being here at the Reuther Library, that's always important. My first experience was when I started playing in this little band. The dance jobs at the YMCA or at the schools and other places -- at the local Elks Club, or Moose or whatever -- we had to join the union. LaPorte had a union local and I joined the AFM -- the American Federation of Musicians. At that time, Jimmy Petrillo was the president of the international [union] and, based in Chicago, he was the president of the Chicago local. Then, when I started working at Modine making these radiator cores, I belonged to the CIO. That was my first industrial union. And that was interesting because my family was a management-oriented family. Not that we had anything against the working man, certainly not. My dad was one

with the working man. But we were management people. For some reason or another, that's the way we thought and the way we did. We were good, solid conservative Republicans and we were a management-type people. And when I went out there to work at this plant, the other guys who were working there full-time, and this was going to be their life, they didn't like to see somebody come in and work as hard as I did. Because when the whistle blew, I was at my jig making radiators. And when it blew, I would go take a break or go to lunch, and the whistle would blow, I'd be back and they would all wander around because they had the job timed. The time and motion study work let them have probably at least two hours a day that they didn't have to work. And that's pretty good, really. I mean, I have nothing against this because people shouldn't be sitting around, from start to finish, hard at work. But I figured, well, Mr. Modine, or whoever was running the company, was paying my salary and he deserves to get a bang for his buck and so I had some problems with the union guys, my first experience with that. But we got along and that was one of the nice things. I learned how to get along. I learned a lot about unions in that situation because I had to. I also learned how to play Euchre. (laughter) That was another thing we did. In other words, I got along rather

well with everybody. But at one point I had a problem with -- you know, you would fill out a card showing how many pieces you'd made and then you would turn in your money for how much you'd earned. Well, you would come in on a particular night and the material was not up to snuff and you couldn't build as many radiators as you could on a normal night. You'd have a pink card for that kind of a night. And you got your average earnings, your AE, for that night. Which would have been maximum, you'd make the maximum. And back then I think maybe I was making $2.05 an hour, which in 1951 was a heck of a piece of change. In fact, I think I made more than my dad. But I was getting money to go to school, so I was happy. Except that I turned this card in -- and I'd only been there a couple of months. Of course, the usual thing is that nobody can learn that job like an experienced guy. So they returned the card back to me, the foreman did. And he came back and said, “you can't make this much money, you couldn't make all these radiators.” They just said I wasn't skilled enough. And I went to the foreman and talked to him. First, I went to the union representative and talked to him and he said, "Well, you haven't been here long enough." I said, "I don't want to talk to you anymore. You be careful or I won't pay dues." I walk into the foreman, I gave him

the same routine. He's telling me I can't do this and I said, "I can." And I said, "Are you going to stand out there and watch me make radiators? I can make them as fast as anybody on this floor." I walked up to the management office, the manager's office and I said, "I want to see the manager." And I'm in work clothes. They let me in and he said, "What's the problem?" I put this card down and I said, "You're calling me a liar." He said, "I beg your pardon?" I said, "I turned that card in and that's the best I could make and I worked every minute that this place was open while I was working." I said, "I didn't sit down once." And I said, "The material was awful." And I said, "I deserve to be paid my average hourly earning." And I said, "You're calling me a liar and I don't like that because I'm not." And this guy liked that. He thought that was good. He signed the card, he said, "Don't worry. You'll get the money." And I got back and went to work and finished my day. The next day I get this call to come up to the manager's office and I said, "Oh-oh, something's going to happen now." I walked up and they said, "How would you like to work for management?" So I took a job as a quality control inspector. (laughter) The problem was -- and this is something that union guys will understand and laugh at -- I had this wonderful job where I walked in and

I had a coat and tie on and a white shirt and all that stuff. And I was out in the plant, watching the quality of the work as it came off the line in various and sundry places and graphing it so that you could determine where problems were and get them corrected. Well, for a young kid -- I was just out of high school -- that was a little bit difficult, out on the line with these older guys. But they all accepted that. The thing is, after about three months I said, "I love the job, it's great. And I like everything about it except for one thing." And they said, "What's that?" And I said, "I'm not making enough money -- I'm only making about half of what I made out on the floor making radiators." And I said, "I'm trying to get money to go to school, so if you don't mind you can have your quality control job because nobody's paying any attention to it anyway." You've got to put yourself into perspective, here. This is in 1951 -- or 1950, pardon me. 1950 to '51. And at that time the war had ended only three or four years earlier. Industrial things, the car business was going bananas as anybody here in Detroit would know. And these were fin and tube type radiators, which they used at General Motors and at other companies. Ford, I think, used honeycomb radiators but we were fin and tube type radiators. We were running three shifts -- you know, 24

hours a day this plant was running. 600 people worked there. And they were always behind in their orders. So they didn't care anything about the quality of their product -- get it out the back door. And I couldn't get anywhere with the management people or the workers, either one, to make better quality radiators. And the management people wouldn't back me up, either, because they'd say we've got to get the --

Q: Product out.

A: -- the product out. And so I got frustrated with this and I said, "Let me go back on the floor. I'll make better radiators for you and I'll be happier and I'll make more money." Everybody's got to come out ahead. And that's what I did. I worked there about a year -- several months from when I got out of high school until when I went to college the following fall. And, years later this came back to help me. You were asking about L.A. Well, I went to college and I was a philosophy/humanities major -- I didn't study broadcasting or anything like that.

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: Indiana University, and the reason for that was I had a scholarship there. I couldn't get a scholarship to where I wanted to go, which was... my first choice would have been St. John's out in New York because they taught the Great

Books. They were about the only school in the country that taught the Great Books and I've always had this immense interest in philosophy and theology. You know, that kind of bookish, sit in a corner with a book in your hand... I was that kind of a kid. But, in Indiana, you play basketball.

Q: Of course.

A: At any rate, I wasn't happy there because they didn't have a very good humanities/philosophy department at that time. They're a much better school now. Indiana's one of the better schools in the country, but back in 1950, '51, in the early '50s, they were not much to holler about. I couldn't get into St. John's because all the classes were filled with the veterans coming back [from WWII] on the G.I. Bill, so they weren't giving much money away. And I wanted to go to Northwestern because they had good teachers they also had a good broadcast department and I thought, well, that would be one reason -- if I wanted to go into a broadcast department, I'd go to Northwestern for two reasons. One, they had a good department, but more than that, they were in Chicago. And a lot of those people would make contacts and then go into Chicago broadcasting out of school. And I thought, well that might be a good way to go. But Northwestern... I came very close to

getting scholarships at both places, but I just missed them because there were just not enough scholarships around back then.

Q: Now during this time period, you're still thinking you want to be on the radio?

A: Yeah, yeah. I was always going to be a broadcaster and I wanted to be on radio. Television had just come in. I really did not care for television -- it was the same feeling I had about being on the stage, I'd rather be heard than seen.

Q: But, during your college years, you're taking humanities courses, but you were still thinking about being in radio? Did you take any communications classes, or... ?

A: No, I didn't because I didn't feel I had to. I actually had a job in Bloomington at the commercial radio station. Why would I want to work at the college station when I could work and make money and be in a professional, commercial situation? So I worked at the station in town and I had a very good job. I worked about eight hours a day there.

Q: Do you remember the call number?

A: That was WTTS in Bloomington. It was owned by Sarkis Tarjian, who was in the manufacturing field. He made electronic equipment. And he was a hugely successful and

wealthy guy. But they didn't pay very much money. Every time you wanted a raise, his wife would come out and cry. And he had this huge mansion with... it seems to me that it was about 40 rooms, and what used to get us, he had four or five bathrooms. Now, growing up in a little town without much money in the Depression, anybody that had four bathrooms was, you know, wow! Anyway, it was an interesting time to work there and I learned a lot. That's how you learn in broadcasting. I don't really believe that you can teach somebody to be a broadcaster. I think you have the talent and you can do it. With the things that you can learn... there are things to be learned in class. There are many things that you can be taught, particularly on the technical side, and you can be critiqued by someone who is experienced as a teacher. But you really have to go out and learn in the cauldron of fire. You go out on the line and you make your mistakes and... I'll give you an example. My first day in work as a broadcaster -- well that's an interesting story, let me back up a little bit. I walked into this radio station -- the radio station call letters in LaPorte were WLOI, which stood for "we're low on income." (laughter) That's where I learned about sales and how important that was to the broadcasting biz. At any rate, I walked into his office and I said, "I'd like a

job."

Q: Now, is this in LaPorte?

A: Yeah, in LaPorte. And I'm just out of high school. I mean, I had just graduated and I walked into his office and I said, "I'd like a job, please." And he said, "Well, what experience have you had?" And I said, "Well, really, I haven't had any." And he said, "What the hell are you bothering me for? You come in here and ask for a job and you've got no experience. Why the heck should I hire you?" And I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "Because I'm better than anybody you have on the air." And that got him. His eyes opened up and he said, "Oh. I want to hear this." So we went off to his studio and he handed me some commercials and some news to read and said, "Do this." And I read it -- I was a good reader. That was one of my skills, probably my biggest skill. Like being able to sight-read words and make sense out of them. I was just a good reader -- of course, I'd always been a reader. And he said, "Come on back to the office." So we walked back in the office and he's shaking his head and trying to... and he looked at me and says, "You know, you're right. You're better than anybody I got on the air." And he says, "You're hired." And that was the way I started.

Q: So this was your first job in --

A: My very first job, yeah.

Q: -- in communications. And this would have been in...

A: 1950.

Q: 1950, summer?

A: Yeah, I've been going 55 years now.

Q: So what did you do on your first job?

A: Well, you'll love this -- this is what I was going to start to say. Now, I had been around a radio station. I mean, a little bit, hanging around as kids do. And as a matter of fact, we had a high school show that we did. Now, I sat in the studio with a friend of mine and we did this show that was oriented towards high school students; I think it was on a Saturday. And it was about an hour and we talked about what was going on at the school, and we played a couple of records -- pop stuff -- and told jokes. Just a bunch of stuff. At any rate, I wasn't in the control room, so I didn't know anything about that. Well, now that you're going to be the staff announcer, you're the guy that's sitting in the control room and no matter what else is going on, whether it's a record show or not, you have to pull your own records out of the library; you have to read the commercials and fill out the log; and do all those little things that are just standard things in a small station. The guy that was on duty... my first day was, I

think, a Saturday, if I'm not mistaken. And I was to work from noon until six o'clock.

Q: Wow, that's a long stretch.

A: Yeah, well, that wasn't unusual either. I think he had worked from six in the morning until noon. And small stations are that way -- they don't have that many employees. So I walked in at about 11 or 11:30. He was busy and he was on the phone, talking. And he was supposed to indoctrinate me and show me everything. Now, it's about five minutes until 12, and I'm supposed to go on and do the news or something, or run the equipment. And he said, "This is turntable one over here." And he said, "That pot there and that switch, that's for that turntable. This is turntable two and turntable three and these knobs and switches are for that one. This is your microphone switch, this switch is for your microphone out in the studio, there's your log, that's with all the commercials in it." The book rather, the book had all the commercials. "There's your log, tells you what's going to happen. I'll see you." And out he goes. And I am now all alone. I didn't know what was going to happen. And when I got out of that thing at six o'clock, I had never made a mistake. Thank god everything went as it was scheduled and I came out of there feeling like I'd been run over by a semi-

trailer truck and it had backed up and gone over me again. That's what I call trial-by-fire. That's really being tossed into the pit. But it was great, in the sense that I learned instantly. I didn't have to hang around studying this stuff. That's why when I went to college the following year... I had been working there and then when I was in school, I would come home for the summer and I would work either at that station or at a station in Michigan City, which was about 10 miles away. And I worked at both of those stations, and the second year I as in school I got a job at the local radio station and I worked there. And then, I don't know, I was in the middle of my third year and I really decided, why don't I just get out of here and let myself get drafted? Then, I can come back on the G.I. Bill and go to a school that I really wanted to go to. So that was the way that I analyzed it. I left school, and worked for the radio station at LaPorte at that time. And I got drafted.

Q: What year would this be?

A: I was drafted in the spring of '54 and I think I went into the Army in May of '54. And I was drafted a couple of months prior to that. In the meantime, I had applied for a job in Chicago. This is one of those tragic little stories that I've always wondered, what if? What would have

happened? I had a friend of mine that I had worked with a couple of years earlier in one of these stations. And he had gone on -- he was very talented -- had gone on to work in a station in Chicago. And, they were playing a lot of jazz music, which I liked, and I listened to it. I went up there one day, I had some time. And I went over to the station and talked to him, and we were just going over old times and he said, "We're looking for an announcer. Why don't you audition?" And I said, "Mike, I can't do that. You know as well as I do." There was a rule in Chicago stations: you had to have five years of experience before they would even let you fill out an application at a Chicago station. It was a big city, you know. I had only been in the business about three and a half years at that time. This would have been about toward the end of '53, or very early '54. Yeah, it would have been probably early '54 because I didn't start until June of '50 so that is what it was. And he said, "Well, look. Let me go talk to the program director." I'm sitting there and he comes back and he said, "Come on, you can audition." And I went in and auditioned and I guess I did pretty well because they called me and asked me to come back. They had hundreds of people auditioning for this job and I got called back. They had it whittled down to about 10 of us. The worst

part of it is that, when I was sitting in the waiting room of the radio station in the lobby, I'm looking at these people around the room and I knew many of them as being some of the top broadcasters in the Chicago business. And this wasn't the major radio station -- it was a very old station, as a matter of fact it was the oldest station in Chicago -- but it was not a major [station], it was a second-level station. And I'm thinking: "What kind of a business is this, where these people that have been network announcers or major station performers are now looking for a job in this place?" That was my first awakening to the difficulties of being in the creative arts. Well, think about it this way, because these people -- not just me -- but these people need this job. You know I'm already working down in Indiana; I don't need this job. I'm here because my buddy has put in a word for me and you've allowed the rules to be moved a little bit and I appreciate that, but... I got a call a week later and they said, "You got the job." I had won the job. And that same day was the letter in the mail saying, "Greetings. Greetings. You're going to go out and save the country." And back then, they had the rules then that, if you got drafted, they had to hire you back. And this was a little bit of an ethical dilemma for a moment, saying, well should I tell

them, or should I go and start the job and after I'd been there for two or three weeks tell them: "Oh my god, I just got my draft notice and I'm going to have to join the Army." Well, I called the guy up and I said, "I want you to know something. I've just got my draft notice." I gave him the day that I was to report, which was going to be about two months away, and I said: "Now, I'd love to come up and work for a couple of months, but you're going to have to take the next guy on the list. What do you think?" And first of all, he couldn't believe that I would call him and tell him that. He said, "I just don't believe this." I said, "Look. There's either ethical or honesty, or there's not. It doesn't come in shades of gray. You either do it right or you don't do it at all." And I said, "This would not be right for me to come up there and make you have to go through all of the hiring process again to get somebody and then you'd have to hire me back anyway." I said, "I'd rather have you have the options of what you want to do." And he said, "Well, I think we'll hire somebody else, but when you get out in a couple of years, please come back, because we want you to work for us." When I got out of the Army, I went back to Chicago --

Q: This would have been 195--

A: This would have been in the May of 1956. I went up there

and there was no work. That was a recession at that moment and they just didn't have a job. And so, I didn't want to go back and work in the small stations. I had had enough of that. Because, even when I was in the Army, I was working for a radio station. I was stationed in Arizona, Southern Arizona. That was a fun thing -- I could talk for hours about that, but I won't. The thing is, I worked for a radio station in Bisbee, Arizona.

Q: Is that an Army radio station?

A: No, no, this was a commercial station.

Q: While you were in the Army?

A: Yeah, I was in the band at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Interesting place, but I'll tell you, it was so far out of everywhere -- I mean, this place was 40 miles from Bisbee -- and 60 miles from Douglas. It was about 60 miles from the Mexican border. But that was the reason for being there -- it was between the two mountain ranges, the Huachucas and the Chiricahuas. And it commanded the plain leading down to Mexico, and it was founded as a cavalry post back in the middle-1800s, when we were having all the problems with Mexico. Therefore, the cavalry could control the border. When I went there, it had been converted. It really had been closed for a while and they just had reopened it in 1954 and made it an Army Electronics Proving

Ground. And I went there, and was a clerk typist -- I was trained to be a clerk typist, but when I got there I decided I didn't really want to type on the typewriter. I wanted to either do broadcast or entertainment or be in the band, and I got myself into the band; because they needed a piano player to play the dance job. But the band wasn't big enough to qualify to have a piano player and I didn't play any other band instrument. And that's when they said to me, "Can you play the Glockenspiel?" And I said, "Well, I thought it was a German beer." But of course the Glockenspiel has a piano keyboard. It's the little bells and you hit it with the hammer and it's like a piano keyboard. I said, "Sure, I can play that." And of course I could because I knew exactly where the notes were and what they would sound like, and you know... So I got into the band and then at night, at five o'clock, we would play -- where they take the flag down... gosh, I can't remember now what they call it. Anyway, at five o'clock our day was done and I had a place down in Bisbee and I was married at that time and I would go home and have dinner with my wife. And I would change clothes and go to work at the radio station, from 7:00 to 11:00. And I would go home, and that would be the first time my wife and I would get a chance to really sit and talk and find out what's been going on

during the day. She must have had a long day. And then I'd get to bed, maybe 12 or 1 o'clock, and be up by 5:30 or so to get dressed and go and play soldier in the Army. Because I had to be in there by seven o'clock in the morning, and it was 40 miles away. So it was an interesting time, but like I say -- you know, when I was in Los Angeles, I finally wound up for a while working in Bakersfield. I was playing a musical job at one of the clubs in Bakersfield and I just went over to the radio station to say hello and try to remember what it was like. And next thing you know, I was working there part-time. But when I left -- when my music job ended -- I left there and went back down to L.A. But when I was up in Chicago, this job was not available.

Q: This is after you've been discharged?

A: Yeah, I did not want to go back into smaller stations, so I said to my wife -- we didn't have any children -- I said, "Look. I do not want to grow old and look back and say, 'I wonder what if,' because I'm not that kind of a person. If I can do something, I want to do it, then I'll know 'what if' -- I don't have to think about it. I'm going to go to L.A. and play piano." And everybody in LaPorte thought I was nuts. "You're a broadcaster." I said, "Yeah, I know that. I can always do that." But I said, "What I don't

know is whether I can make a living playing the piano." And after this year and a half or so that I'd had in the Army being in the band, I was thinking that perhaps the life of the musician, because many of these guys had been full-time musicians before they got drafted. They may have been young but they were very talented people. This one fellah was a bass player in the Army. And he lived in Los Angeles. When he got out of the Army -- as a matter of fact, he was from Detroit, come to think of it. He was born and raised here -- but when he got out of the Army, instead of coming back here, he went to L.A. And I knew that he was out there and I called him and I said, "Can I stay with you for a while, while I get myself settled?" And he said, "Well I only have a small bed and it's a small apartment." And I said, "Well, I can sleep on the floor." And he said, "Great." And I did. I got in my car and I drove to L.A.

Q: When was this?

A: This would have been July the 4th, it was that weekend of July the 4th in 1956. I was out there for a little over a year and I did make it. I played, you know. I was a member of Local 47, of the wonderful musicians' union in Los Angeles. I played in places like Las Vegas and Reno and Tahoe and that kind of thing. I played with different

groups -- heck, I would play anywhere. I'd play in a bowling alley or a bar mitzvah or a wedding -- anything. Wherever you need it; if you had a piano there, I was going to play. And although I was a jazz piano player, I could play with small groups and most of those groups did not have organized music. You played ad-lib. Whether they were reading jazz or not was not the point. They didn't really play good music, as much as they just played. And that's the way I played, so I was able to get along very nicely. And, of course, when I played with jazz groups, then I was in my own field and I had a lot of fun. That was what I really wanted to do, but that's a very tough life. Any musician in a big city will tell you it's a great extra job, a side job, to work one or two nights a week, or something like that. But it isn't a full-time job. There's never full-time work for most people. Now, there are many successful people who can say, "I make a lot of money as a musician," but for the journeyman musician, it's very difficult to make a living. I happened to be one of them out there -- I probably made two or three hundred dollars a week, which wasn't bad. Of course, you had to pay expenses. And my wife and I got along very nicely out there. It was in Hollywood, California.

Q: I take it you brought the wife along later after you --

A: Yeah, I said --

Q: Sort of like immigrants in a way. Come to this country first, check it out, and bring the family.

A: Exactly what it was. I said, "If I don't make it, I'll be back. And besides, you've got a place to stay with your folks here. No problem." But I said, "If I make it, I will send for you and we'll have a life out here." And so it was about two or three months later and she came out. As a matter of fact, when I mentioned earlier that Modine had something to do with my experience in Los Angeles... that first couple of months was really an eye-opener. That was like the feeling that I had when I looked at these announcers auditioning for a job. Because I had days when I was down to five cents in my pocket, wondering where I could go to buy a cup of coffee, where I might run into somebody who was looking for a piano player or a group to play. Now, I always had the bass player -- he and I were living together. So I had the bass player and that was an advantage. He knew a lot of musicians by that time and was pretty well established as a bass player. He would bring me in to play piano, but again, it was sporadic; it was nothing steady. And I had bills to pay. For example, my car. I had bought a car when I was in the Army in Bisbee, Arizona. The bank gave me this loan because I was a

broadcaster in the radio station and in the Army out there at Fort Huachucha. And, the bank was a sponsor on one of the shows that I did. And so they were very kind to me, gave me very good credit. I remember calling them when I was out there and I said, "I want you to know that I haven't forgotten," because I hadn't sent a payment in for a couple of months. I said, "I'm out in L.A. and I'm trying to be a piano player. I'm not going to stiff you. I will pay you, don't worry about it." Because I said, "That's important to me, to pay you. Because I owe you money." But I said, "I'm trying to do this and I don't have any right now." And this guy said, "You're wonderful, thank you very much. Can you send the interest on? If you can do that, you got a deal." And he told me it was only a few bucks because interest rates were very low back then. I managed to send the interest every month and it wasn't until I got settled that I could make the payment comfortably from my salary, from my income. But at that point, I was thinking: "Out in Whittier, California, which is where President Nixon was born -- it's a suburb of L.A. -- Whittier, about 20 miles out of town, had a Modine plant. They had a manufacturing plant in Whittier. And I knew that if I had picked up the phone and called the employment people at Modine and said, "I'm a core

assembler, would you happen to have a job?" I would [have a job] right away -- because they always needed core assemblers; that was just the one thing that was hard to train in that company -- if I told them that I was an experienced core assembler from LaPorte, I could have a job. And I would sit and look at the phone and fantasize about having money in my pocket again, but I didn't want to screw up my fingers because that job really cut your fingers up and it was terrible. Especially when you're playing guitar -- if you've got little cuts on the ends of your fingers, it's awful. I finally couldn't stand it. One day I broke down and I picked up the phone. I called Modine and talked to the guy out there. I told him who I was and I said, "I used to work at Modine in LaPorte. I wonder if you would have work for me here. I was a core assembler." He said, "Can you be here tomorrow?" (laughter) So help me, I was broke. And I didn't know how I was going to get enough gas for my car to get to the job and I had met this gal... at this time, my wife is not there, I'm alone. And there was a restaurant where musicians and a lot of people used to go and it was one of our favorite places and I got to know everybody there. The short order chef became a good friend and, as a matter of fact, he wanted to be a singer. Everybody in Hollywood

wants to be an actor or a singer or a musician or something. They're all out there to be famous. He wanted to be a singer, so whenever he would go out and audition for a job, I would go along as his accompanist and play piano for him. He and I would tell jokes and laughs and the waitresses were the same way. We were very well-acquainted. This one waitress was very interesting because she was probably one of my soul mates. I don't know whether you were ever into that kind of thing, but she knew me inside and out, and I knew her too. She was an interesting gal and this restaurant... I remember days when I had no money and I'd walk in there and I'd order a cup of coffee because I had five cents. And I remember Nick, the chef, the guy who I played piano for just so he could sing... we would talk for a while and the waitress or he would say, "Don't you want something to eat?" You know, I said, "No, no, no, I've eaten already. I just want a cup of coffee. I just came in to talk." And the next thing you know he says, "OK, your steak sandwich is ready." The waitresses would look at him and say, "I didn't order a -- " He said, "Which one of you broads ordered a steak sandwich?" And everybody would look at him and say, "I didn't do that." And he'd come over and say, "I don't know how they can screw up like this. Somebody ordered. Here,

I don't want to throw it away -- why don't you eat it?" And he put it down in front of me. He did this two or three times for me. I knew what he was doing; he knew I knew; but we didn't talk about it. It was one of those things... wherever you are in life, there's always somebody who shows up to help you, to get you through tough times. And this waitress was one of them. That evening, I was sitting in a booth having something to eat and coffee and we were talking. She was off and we were talking and I told her about my going off to do this job and she said, "I know you don't want to do that." And I said, "No, but I have to. I've got to pay the bills. I've got a problem, though: I don't have enough money to get to work." And I said, "Could you lend me maybe five bucks and I'll pay you? I get my first check next week and I can pay you back." And she put a couple of bills into my pocket, into my coat pocket, and I said, "Thank you very much." And I got back to the apartment and I pulled them out of my pocket and it was two $20 bills. $40.

Q: Which was huge, so much then.

A: Oh, not only that, but... I didn't know it, but I'll finish the story and then you'll know what I'm saying. I worked through the week and came in the following week to pay her $40 back. And I looked around and I said, "Where's Craig?"

And they said, "I don't know, she hasn't been here. She quit. She just didn't show up, she left." I said, "You're kidding!" She was gone. Nobody knew where she'd gone, nobody still knows where she's gone, and I don't know either. Except that I still owe her $40. (laughter) And with the interest, she's going to make a lot of money. I have this firm belief that there are people who come into your life just for the purpose of helping you. And some people call them angels. I don't know. I call them soul mates. But angels, or whatever you want to call them. There have been too many times in my life that somebody has been there to help me when I needed help and I, you know... she was one of them. And I'm still looking for her. (laughter)

Q: That's a great story.

A: Anyway, I started work and I worked there for a couple months, and at this point, I had made enough money to send for my wife. I got my own apartment and I'm still playing piano along with working at Modine's. And at that point my wife came out and now we had a life together, and she got a job working. That was very unusual back then because women didn't work and I was raised that way, and I didn't want my wife to work. Because I was out a lot. You know, she was working days at a bank and I'm working nights, and we would

see each other for a little while in the mornings or in the middle of the night. Well, we did see each other enough that we had our first boy come along. And that was the reason she got pregnant with my oldest boy, who's now doing my radio show with me.

Q: OK, at this juncture, tell us your wife's name, and where she's from and...

A: Well, this was my first wife. OK, this was Marilyn Lindsay Jo, Marilyn Jo, and I always called her Jo. Jo Lindsay, and she was a minister's daughter.

Q: From LaPorte?

A: No, she was from Michigan City. And we were rivals, LaPorte and Michigan City. But all the guys dated girls in Michigan City, and all the guys in Michigan City dated girls in LaPorte. Don't ask me why, it's the way they did it. I met her... that was just before I got drafted, when I met her. I went into basic training and when I got out of the first two months of basic training, I came back for a 10-day break and then you go back for your second two months... and we got married. Everybody in the church thought she was pregnant. (laughter) Because it was a quick, hush-hush marriage. Now, three years later, we had a boy. They were disappointed. At any rate, it wasn't that at all -- I just knew that, that's who I wanted to

marry, and I knew that from the moment I met her. I mean, this is one of those things where you meet people and some people call it deja vu, when you have something happen that you know that you've been there before, or "I've known this person before" -- that kind of thing. And I knew her and she was a soul mate, and so we got married. That's the one I left home to go back out to L.A. And then, she came back out there. When she was with child, I was going to go on the road for an extended period and I didn't want to leave her in L.A. by herself. So I sent her back home to go to Indiana with her parents, and then I was going to stop. When the baby came I would come in and take the two of them and we'd go off and finish this road trip. I was singing with a very excellent vocal group and I was getting out of piano playing, going into vocal work, which was much more secure in Hollywood. There's quite a bit of work for professional singers in group work, choral work. All the background singers that you hear in recordings? There is about 20 or 25 people in Hollywood that do all of those jobs. It doesn't make any difference whether they're going "ooh-ah, ooh-ah" in the back of a rock and roll recording, or whether they are the Norman Lubach Choir. There is no Norman Lubach Choir or any of these other groups, they're just a group of professional singers. And I had gotten

myself acquainted with them, and fortunately, they liked what I did. I could sight-sing -- you know, like I said, you could spill ink on the page and I could sing it -- and I was in tune, and I was musical. Well, what more do you need? So I was becoming one of these people and it was through them that I met this vocal group that was on the verge of becoming one of the major vocal groups in the country. They had just recorded an LP that had been very well-received, and they were a very modern group and wonderful to sing with. And they were going on the road.

Q: What were they called?

A: It was called the Jones Boys. And this would have been in '57, toward the end of '57. And to make this long story very short... the group folded and I had sent my wife back to Indiana and I never got to work with them. We had rehearsed, but I never got to work with them, and the group folded and I got a job playing piano in L.A. for about two months. And then the baby is due, and I said, "Hey, I'm not going to be here in Hollywood when I got a baby due in Indiana. I'm going to be there." And that is an experience. I left downtown Hollywood at 10 o'clock on a Sunday evening, and at midnight on Tuesday I pulled into Indiana. I got there a couple of days before the baby was born. I've always told my oldest boy, "You're the reason

I'm not a musician, you know." (laughter) Anyway, I went back into the broadcasting business. About three years later, I worked at a couple stations in Indiana. As a matter of fact, I worked in LaPorte again for about a year and then I went over to Michigan City and worked there for a year, and then the station in South Bend that was owned by the University of Notre Dame. They had a commercial radio and television station, and they called and asked me if I would be interested in coming to work. They had heard me on the Michigan City station and they said, "We'd like to have you come to work here." And although they didn't pay a lot of money, I would be able to get some television experience there. So I went to work and I worked there for one year and, like I said, the money wasn't that much. And there had been an ad for this job up at WWJ. I didn't know anything about Detroit, didn't know anything about the world's first radio station or anything like that. But I saw this ad and I just sent a resume -- I was actually applying for a job in Canada. There had been an ad in Broadcasting Magazine for a job in Canada and I thought, you know, they were about 10 or 20 years behind us in broadcasting. They weren't into all that noisy rock and roll. And as a musician, I just couldn't work at a station like that. I mean, I wasn't going to play that kind of

music -- I wanted to play what I played, what I like. And there wasn't much of a call for that, to tell you the truth. But up in Canada, yeah, there was. And I thought, well, that will be more fun. So I had applied to this job, and in that, same magazine was this ad for WWJ. And I thought, well as long as I'm sending in the resume and the tape to one, I just made a copy of the tape and a copy of the resume and sent it to Detroit. And lo and behold, this is where I came to work in January of '61. I didn't expect to stay here, except for maybe two or three years at the most. I really came to stay at least one year, minimum. Because I felt I owed WWJ that much, to stay for at least one year, so they don't have to go through hiring somebody again. Because again, there were hundreds of people auditioning for that job. And I didn't want to stay more than two or three years. It had been a couple of years and I was now starting to look around -- I was getting a little antsy, wanting to move on, and at this point Bob Jr., my oldest boy, who does the radio show with me, is now going into school. And having grown up in LaPorte, Indiana, where you have very stable relationships... in my high school graduating class there must have been at least 80% of the kids that were in my kindergarten class that graduated high school with me. I never went back and

actually counted them up, but I would bet at least 80%, maybe more -- And that kind of stability, I thought, was very important. So I looked at his mother, to Jo, and I said, "Hey, you know, I don't have to go and get another job and prove to everybody that I know how to be a broadcaster. I'm good enough." But I said, "I don't want to drag the kids" -- we had two boys at that time -- "I don't want to drag the kids around, would you like to stay here?" I said, "I kind of like Detroit." And she said, "So do I." And that was it. We had been renting a place out in St. Clair Shores and when I decided to stay, I came into the city, which is what I always wanted to do anyway. We bought a place over in the Palmer Park area and we bought a home --

Q: What year would this be?

A: This would have been 1965.

Q: After you had four years here.

A: Yeah, I'd had four years here, you're right. Well, of course, I made the decision, then it took a while to find a place that we wanted. That took a while and then there I was. So we moved in, in the Fall of '65.

Q: I'm going to step back slightly, though. So OK, you come to Detroit in '61. I assume that your tape and your resume you submitted impressed WWJ, or you had an audition?

A: No, I sent the tape, and then they called me in to do an audition and to talk with them. Actually, it was on a Saturday and I was working at WNDU in South Bend for the University of Notre Dame. I worked Monday through Friday, and so Saturday was the only day I could come up here and they said, "Well, we'll be in. Come up and we want to talk to you. You know, we can't tell you that you're hired, but we can't tell you that you won't get the job." Because the two people that were going to talk to me were the Radio Station Manager and the Program Director, but the guy that had to make the definitive judgment was the General Manager of the station and he wasn't going to be there. So they said, "We can tell you 'no,' but we can't tell you 'yes' -- Ed Wheeler has to pass on you." I said, "Well, OK. I'll start the process." So I flew in here and met them at the old Fort Shelby Hotel. Now you see, WWJ was right across the street back then. And Detroit News was on the south side of Lafayette, and on the north side, there was the radio station studios which had been built back in the '30s. They were the premier radio facilities in the '30s. When they built those studios, they were the cream of the crop, back then. They're a little sagging at the corners by this time, but then, they were still wonderful facilities. And next door to them was where Channel 4 was.

Channel 4 is still in that block, but the radio station has moved and gone to the suburbs. And the Fort Shelby has not had anybody in it for a number of years. I went into their coffee shop and we're having lunch and I'm just talking to these guys, you know. They had already heard my work and they liked the work.

Q: Do you remember the names?

A: Of the people who --

Q: The people that were interviewing you?

A: Yeah, the manager of the station was Don De Groot, good Dutchman. Don De Groot was the Manager and Bob Heneberry was the Program Director. So we're talking and having lunch, and I'm telling him my ideas about the business and what I wanted to do. I said, "I don't want to be an announcer forever. I'd like to go into management. And so, you know, look out for your job, keep an eye behind you, because I'll be looking for a management job down the road." And they thought that was cute, but that was of interest to them too, you know. And then, all of a sudden, in walks Ed Wheeler. He is the General Manager of radio and television -- he ran everything. And he was a super guy, Ed was. He was a straight shooter, but he'd hardly ever talk. He'd just listen, and it was wonderful to have somebody that could listen to you; particularly, in our

business because in our business everybody talks. (laughter) An aside: I'm standing on the tee one day -- we had a golf group with the radio and television station. Once a month we got together and played in a golf league -- And we're standing on the first tee and there were two other announcers and salespersons from WWJ along with me, standing on the first tee, ready to tee off. And another guy walks up and he's looking at us and he said, "I got one question." And we looked and said, "Yeah, what?" He says, "Who's going to listen? Three broadcasters and a salesperson." (laughter) And we all broke up, we laughed. I never forgot that, it was a great line. At any rate, he [Wheeler] was the reverse. He was taciturn and he listened. It was January and they were doing budgets, and so he was in working on his budget for the year and he came over to grab a sandwich. He wolfed that down like, you know, I couldn't imagine anybody eating that fast, but he did. And he was listening to me talk to Don and Bob. And he said, "Well, nice to meet you. Good luck to you. I'll probably see you soon." He walked out and the next thing I know, we finished our lunch and walked back over to the manager's office, and now we're talking about money and hours and what I would be doing on the air. And I said, "What's happening?" And they said, "You're hired." And I

said, "Well I thought you -- " And they said, "Well, Ed nodded. (laughter) And that's all it takes, you know." And as it turned out, I was the last person that Ed Wheeler hired in the broadcast department because about two months later, he was moved back to the Detroit News to run that operation because that's where he had been before and they lost their General Manager a few years earlier, and they sent him [Wheeler] from his job running the newspaper over to run the broadcast division. Then they brought him back because the news was having some problems and he was a marvelous administrator; mainly, because he knew how to listen. Unfortunately, he's gone. He passed away a number of years ago, but because I was the last guy that ever was hired by him, I was sort of special in his mind. I was there for 17 years. (laughter) A long time to be at a place where you had all kinds of aggravations and problems! I was very active in the broadcasters' union. I was on the board of directors of the union and, you know, when you talk about unions and being here at Reuther, I belonged to a lot of unions through the years -- for a management guy, it's kind of wild. But at different times, I have belonged to five different musicians' unions: I belonged to the one in LaPorte; I belonged to one in Michigan City; I belonged to one in Bloomington Indiana, which was the Indianapolis

local that covered Bloomington, so I belonged to the Indianapolis local; I belonged to the Los Angeles local; and here in Detroit, I belong to two locals, the local 5 which is Detroit; and the other local which is out in Oakland county. And I still belong to those two. As a matter of fact I'm a gold card life member of local 5 and I would never drop my card, to put it bluntly. I'm proud to be a musician... who knows, I may wind up someday going back to work for a living, I never know. It's highly unlikely, but at any rate I keep my card and I'm in those unions and I'm still an AFTRA member, which is the American Federation of Television and Radio Announcers, and I'm also a member of the Screen Actors Guild, SAG. And I belong to those two because to freelance -- you know, do freelance work as an announcer -- you had to be in both of those because that would cover television and radio. I don't do much of that work, mainly because I made a pretty good living as a performer at J [WWJ]. And, I didn't want to take bread out of my brethren's mouths because, if a guy with a big name will go in and work for scale -- and a lot of the guys in this market did that, name people would work for scale -- and do voiceovers and things like that, that was the kind of work that the freelance guys should be doing, and I knew that they didn't have that much work to

do and it didn't seem right to literally take bread out of their mouths. So, I didn't do that much... if somebody asked for me I would go do the job, and many times it was sponsors of my radio show or television that wanted me to do their freelance commercials. And they would ask for me and they would have to pay me over scale, because I would always make that very clear. "You've got to pay me over scale and if you quit being an advertiser for me, I won't do the commercials anymore." I made that kind of a rule. So I didn't do a whole lot of that sort of work, but I still belong to those two unions. Do I belong to any others? (laughter) I've been a pretty good union guy. Through the years I have belonged to a lot of unions and I belonged to the CIO. I never belonged to the AF of L because the musicians' union was part of AF of L, so I guess I was affiliated as a musician, but I was never in the AF of L-CIO, but I know an awful lot of people because through the years I've been very close to people in the labor field.

Q: So, before we start speaking about the details of your career in Detroit. You in Detroit, you are hired... what was your impression coming to Detroit in 1961? I mean, of the city and the area?

A: Well, like I said, it was starting to -- you could see the

deterioration. Stores were beginning to close, people were moving to the suburbs, and I didn't like suburbs particularly. I liked the city and the mix of people, but the interesting thing to me was the historical background, the history of Detroit. Most people really don't know that much about their own town, even those who have grown up here. And this is a city that's rich with history; every corner you stand on there's something that happened there. And it's one of the oldest cities in the country. This city was founded over 300 years ago. For goodness sake, that's a lot of time for a country that's only been a country for 200 years. So, you know, I was impressed by that. And I'll tell you what it was -- I liked the people. I could walk through town -- when I first came here and I was working on the radio at J and was fairly well known -- and I could walk, let's say from the downtown YMCA over to the WWJ studios, which is about a mile. And I would walk right through the downtown area. And block after block, store owners would be out sweeping the sidewalk or something like that. It was like being back in LaPorte, Indiana. And these guys would look at me and say, "Hi, Bob," and I'd say, "Hi, Fred, how's business?" It was just like being home in LaPorte, except it was bigger. It had that small-town feel and intimacy, which I like. I grew up

with it and I like it. But it had the big-town advantages of historical museums and theaters and music and art... and, you know, this is a great city for that. We've got great facilities, especially back then -- they'd been allowed, because of budgetary problems through the years, to deteriorate a little bit. You can see right here in your Wayne State area, the resurgence that is just alive here. And we're very active with Wayne State, my wife and I. She got a Masters degree here. She got interested in gerontology and she got a Masters degree in gerontology here. We're big contributors to the School of Dance here. We haven't said anything about that; you've referred to me as Allison, which is fine because that's the way most people know me. That is not really my name. My name is Allesee -- it's the only one in the whole country and I had used it on the air for a dozen years before I came here. And that's one of the things that was interesting. In that initial consultation, we're talking about coming to work here and one of the questions they ask me -- they said, "Well, would you mind if we changed your name?" And I said, "Change my name? What's wrong with Allesee?" Because to me, that's a Danish name -- well it's not, really, it's an Anglicized version of a Danish name. My father's family came from Denmark; his father was an

immigrant. And so my father was a first generation American and they wouldn't speak Danish in the house. He couldn't speak Danish. They spoke it between themselves, but not when the kids were around. He knew very little about Denmark. As a matter of fact, the first time I went over there -- unfortunately it was after he passed away and I could have told him things that he wouldn't have believe. I found out things about my family that were incredibly interesting but he never knew. He just knew a few words and that was it. But it was a Danish name, and when my grandfather came over, they didn't have an "ø", and the name in Denmark is Allesøe. And when my grandfather came in, he was only about 16 -- this was not many years after the Civil War. He came over as a 16 year old and they said, "What's your name?" He says, "Peter Allesøe." They said, "How do you spell that?" He says, "A-L-L-E-S-Ø-E," and they said, "What's an 'ø'?" He says, "That's the 'o' with a slash through it." And they said, "We don't have an 'ø.'" He said, "What can we do?" And they made an "e" in it, so it became A-L-L-E-S-E-E, and it's the only one in the whole world. If you ever see that name spelled that way, say hello for Bob because that's a relative of mine. (laughter). I'd made a commitment to myself that I'd stay at least a year, but probably no more than two years.

Because I really wasn't planning to come to Detroit. It was kind of an odd thing that I was coming to Detroit. And I'll tell you why. I was working for the University of Notre Dame. They have commercial radio and television stations there. And I was working for both. Which was interesting to me because, although I had done some television shows, I had not literally worked around a television station for any length of time. And part of my duties there were to do a radio shift and do the normal things that I knew in radio. And then also work over in television doing the evening news announcing. And I was the announcer for the late news. And did the commercials in that. And that got me around the television thing, which I needed to know, because I realized that probably down the road I might have to do a lot of television if I was to be successful in the broadcasting business. Although as it turned out, as a matter of fact it turned out that radio in a way is doing better than television, really. It's not going anywhere. In spite of Sirius and XL and all the rest of these things that people moan about, radio seems to be a part of people's lives, and so, I'm not worried about it going anywhere. But when I came here I had thought, well, I'll probably go on a couple of years and then go someplace else. But when I was at Notre Dame,

I was not making a whole lot of money, and I was working a lot of hours, and it was a very hard time in my life for that reason. And so I was ready to move. And I saw an ad in Broadcasting magazine for a station up in Canada. And I thought, now, there is a good move. Because the Canadian broadcasting stations -- at least this is now going back 45, 50 years ago -- were at least 10-15 years behind what was happening in the States. And I didn't like what was happening in the States on radio. The record shows were all very restricted. The announcers weren't performers at all. They were robots. They were time, temperature and name the song. And somebody picked the song for you and you tell them what it is and shut up. Well, that isn't what a performer does. And I was a performer. No question about that. I don't want to be an automaton. I wanted to be a broadcaster. So I thought, well, that'll be a good thing to do. And I was going to go to that station and I made up a resume and a tape and everything. And in that same issue of Broadcasting magazine, here's this little block ad for WWJ, of which I had never heard. And Detroit. Well, that's the Motor City, but I don't want to go into a factory town. And a lot of people thought that. And they still do. Which of course is exceedingly wrong. There's nothing wrong with factory towns. There's nothing wrong

with being a motor city. But it wasn't exactly my idea of a liberal arts place. How wrong I was. And I have found that out through the 45 years I've been here. But at any rate, I just dubbed the tape off, copied the resume, sent it off to WWJ. I never heard from the station in Canada. I guess they wanted to hire somebody who was a Canadian citizen, more than likely. And I never got a letter back from them at all. But I got a call from WWJ saying: would you come up? They had gone through all these tapes and they had me down in the final sorting out and I went up and interviewed and that was that story about how I finally got the job when Ed Wheeler winked at the manager and the program director, and there I was. So then I came here. That was when they wanted to call me Bob Allison instead of my real name of Allesee, which I'm very proud of. I make no bones about that. And I think I told that story, did I not?

Q: Yes, yes, you did.

A: OK, sometimes you don't remember from one tape to the next what you've talked about. At any rate, the interesting thing there was that I came here, and my assignment was to be the air personality from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., right through the noon hour, with a record show broadcasting from Eastland Shopping Center. And then the remainder of the

day or early in the morning -- it was different every day. I had a schedule every day that revolved around those two hours when I was on the air, but about four or five hours of the day I would be what they called a staff announcer. I would do station breaks and read commercials in the newscasts. Whatever was required. And keeping the log and all those things that a broadcaster does, I had to do as a staff announcer. And I wasn't called a staff announcer. We did have staff announcers, two or three of them at that time. And they did staff work, but they didn't have a show of their own. But the people like myself who had a show of their own plus staff [duties], were called special staff announcers. It was a category. And we had our own pay rate and all that kind of thing.

Q: You've been described in this first job as the hip young disc jockey.

A: That came as a result of -- I'll tell you when I used that term. I don't know the date that I was a hip young disc jockey because I don't know -- I don't think that the management at that time knew what the word hip meant to tell you the truth. I think they were still calling it hep.

Q: Hep cats, right.

A: Yeah, they were hep cats, not hip. And I used to say when

I was a piano player in Los Angeles I had a guy that used to -- he was a little older than I -- and he used to say I'm hep. And I would look right at him and I'd say I'm hip, you're hep. That would break up the guys and we would all laugh. Anyway, I came and they put me into the two-hour show from 11:00 to 1:00 from Eastland Center, sitting in that little glass box out there. And this went along and I was arguing with them practically daily about the awful music and we had a meeting once a week where you'd go into the general manager's office, and the program director would be there and the music librarian, who handled all the -- he was the music coordinator for the station and he picked all the music with the help of the management. And he was on management staff. And we would all sit down, and the guys that were on the air, there were about four, five of us that did shows during the day, we would all sit there and they would play a record and we would vote on it to see whether or not we wanted to put it into the mix. And, of course, if the general manager sort of nodded his head while the record was playing, everybody said yes, that's great we'll put that in. And if he sort of shook his head a little bit, everybody said no, I don't think that'll work. And it was that kind of a -- except for me. Because I only said yes if I thought it was to be a record I wanted

on my show or on the station. And if I didn't think it should be there, I said no. And that was it. And I was usually the only voice of dissent. They didn't much care for that. But I told them, I said look, if you don't want my opinion, let me stay home. I don't want to come in here and spend two hours of my time in here doing this. And so they said, oh no, we need your opinion, oh we know, but they didn't want it, they knew what they wanted to do and so we were -- there was a lot of tension in that first year or so that I was here because of things like that. And I'm not that hard to get along with, but it was an uncomfortable place for me to work because I was not allowed to -- although I did, I talked between records, I talked about things, and they would always tell me shut up and just put the records on. I said fine, then I'd go out and do it my own way anyway. And the only thing that saved me was the ratings. I'll get to that in a minute. But, we had been so arguing during this period of the first couple of months, or maybe it was three months, but we had really been at each other's throats. And one day -- we fired people on Friday, that was always when they fired people -- and one Friday it was about 1:00. I'm getting through with my air shift, and the phone rings, and it's the program director saying, "Bob can you come down to the station." I

was through for the day at that particular day, I was through and I was going to go home; I had a lot of things to do. And he said: "can you come down, we want to talk to you." Well, I said to the engineer, I said: "Brock, I may not see you Monday." I said: "I think they're finally come to the parting of the ways and on I go to wherever that will take me." And I drove down from Eastland Shopping Center all the way down there [Downtown] thinking well, where do I go? Who do I call? I've got to find another job, yeah. Well, that wouldn't bother me, but I'd never been fired. I've always been able to say when I want to quit and where I'm going. I go out and get another job, and then I give notice and tell the management I'm moving on. And I've never been fired. So I'm driving down, thinking all these things, wondering what I would do now that I'm going to get fired. And I went in and they said, well, we're going to make a change and I said: "oh yeah, what's the change?" They said -- John Lynker was his name, another special staff guy like myself, and John did the drive time show from 4:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon. That's the prime time. And it was called the Bumper to Bumper Club, and I'll explain that in a minute. But they said to me -- we want you to do the Bumper to Bumper Club and John Lynker's going to move up and do the 11:00 to 1:00 shift.

Which is like telling him we probably should have fired you but we're going to let you do the 11:00 to 1:00 shift and little Bobby's going to come down here and do this show. And I knew I'd hurt his feelings. And I went to him and told him I'm sorry about this. It's not a way for management to handle people, it's not very discreet. But I said at least you've got a job. And he laughed. He said: "yeah." He said: "and, maybe I better start looking." We laughed about it. But I know how it must have made him feel, but at least we never clashed. John and I were able to stay friends through that because I realized what was happening. And now I got a promotion. They were going to give me more money and I'm now battling the number one guy in the market, J.P. McCarthy, who was on from -- I think he was on from 3:00 to 6:00, over at WJR. And here I am sitting in there from 4:00 to 6:00. And years earlier the show had been done by a fellow named Jim Deland, and Jimmy Deland was a local piano player, played in the clubs all around town, and was very well known. He was a slightly obese wonderful jolly guy that had a nice voice. He never had really thought much about being a broadcaster, I don't think, but somehow or other he wound up doing this Bumper to Bumper Club, as they called it. It was one of those things that sounded like it came right out of the 1940s or

'50s, and he was doing the records, and in between the records, he would have little modulations, live on the piano, which was in that studio out there. That piano, that little baby grand, was still in that studio when I was doing the record shows. As a matter of fact, during the records, because they were so awful, the music was so bad, I used to walk over [to the piano] just to keep my sanity. I said turn that thing off, and they'd cut the speakers, and I'd sit there and play for about a minute and a half, or two minutes. And do some -- engineers and I, we used to laugh about playing their favorite songs, because they didn't like the music either. And here I am now doing this show. And then, they said to me, well, you play piano don't you, and I said yeah, I play piano. And they said, well, why don't you put the piano back into the thing. So I had to figure out how to -- I would -- in other words a record would end and I would pick up on the piano from the same key where the music ended and play a few bars, just noodling, and then I would -- if I was going to give the time I would sort of do a little ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, with an octave, you know, and say it's the time. And that was what Jimmy Deland used to do, although I had never met Jim, he was dead before -- he had passed on before I came here, and John Lynker was his replacement.

And that's the way it was when I came here. So I don't know anything about Jim Deland except that, I'd heard people in other parts of the country do this kind of thing. And so I had a rough idea of what he did, and that's what I tried to do, transition, and so when I'm going into the next song, while the music was playing, I would tell the engineer to play me the first few bars of the next song, so I'd know what key that's going into. So then I would be noodling along, sometimes under commercials. I would put a little music bed under the commercials. And it sounded, I guess, very nice. I don't know, I'm not the judge of that, except that I wound up being the number one afternoon drive time host.

Q: I think in today's words we'd have called that multitasking, wouldn't we?

A: Yes, I guess it would be. At any rate, the bottom line of this is that, I went along and I was building a very nice audience. Like I said, I was number one from 4:00 to 6:00 in the market and --

Q: Against J.P. McCarthy, which was in those days --

A: Against Joe, and incidentally Joe and I were always good friends. And just a little side note -- because I always thought that Joe was a very, very good performer, although he was one of the -- he was one of the most insecure people

you would ever meet. And I don't mean this maliciously or anything, but Joe was always sort of scared to death. As a matter of fact, his first wife, Sally, his first wife and Joe were good friends of my first wife and myself. We used to go out to dinner together, and we would see each other at functions, and we became -- and Sally and Jo became good -- my Jo, Marilyn Jo, they became good friends and did things together during the day. And we were very well-acquainted. And so it wasn't like anything competitive, but Sally used to tell me that when Joe first started broadcasting, he had to take tranquilizer pills to sit-down behind the mike. And I said you're kidding! Anyway, the problem was that he sort of blossomed late in my estimation. Probably I'm not one to judge other people. I shouldn't do it, but when I came here, I heard Joe on the air and he was very good, but he was sort of like an automaton. He was sort of a singsongy kind of guy. And he was able to take a job out in San Francisco, and he was out there a year. It did not work out there, and he came back here. When he came back here, in the meantime, the station had changed hands and Hal Youngblood was here as a producer and director. And they started a show at the noon hour, Oh, what was the name of it, oh, dear. Don't get old. Was it Focus? It was from noon to 1:00 --

Q: I should know this, too.

A: Noon to 1:00, and they interviewed people, it was a talk show.

Q: Yeah, it was on for years. Jeez, I should know --

A: A number of years, and it started with a gal, didn't work out too well, and they put Joe in there. J.P. I shouldn't use that, because people know who I'm talking about now. And they put J.P. in there, and Hal Youngblood, God love him, took Joe -- J.P. -- and really bludgeoned him about how to talk, how to handle. He turned him into a first class performer. And I always used to kid him about it because I'd say; "you must have hated Hal Youngblood from time to time." He said, "oh yeah." I said: "But Joe, thank him. Because he made you into the number one name in this market. I guess I'm fairly well-known, but Joe was better known than I was. And he'd been in the market longer, but that's neither here nor there. Joe was a first rate performer, and earned every bit of his accolades. I don't want to take a thing away from him. That's what I'm saying.

Q: No, no, sure. He made the morning show on WJR, which had --

A: But he blossomed.

Q: -- this huge broadcast range.

A: Huge audience.

Q: You can hear WJR down in Florida on a good night.

A: At night especially. But even during the day, they went out 150, 200 miles. Well, they were the -- did I talk about how WJR got that 50,000-watt clear channel?

Q: No, no, please.

A: Didn't I? Oh, well, we're rambling again. I'm starting to tell you about my first assignments here, and now I'm talking about history.

Q: We can stand a tangent or two.

A: Well, getting back to Joe, he did that. He came in and did the noon show, the noontime show, and that along with his morning and afternoon drive time show was just too much. He was on the air too much and they finally took him off of the afternoon shift. In the meantime, I'm over there doing the Bumper to Bumper Club and that went on. The following year, that would have been about the second year I was here, in February of '62, I get called in, and now they said to me, we want to start a talk show to replace My True Story, because the network had decided to drop My True Story, and they were going to use Ask Your Neighbor and that's how I started doing Ask Your Neighbor. I didn't want to do it, I said --

Q: My True Story a soap opera?

A: A soap opera. One of the longest running soap operas of all time on NBC. We were an NBC station back then, not CBS. JR was CBS. WJR was CBS. WWJ was NBC. And WXYZ was ABC. And then, of course, things changed. ABC wound up owning WJR, which they do now. At any rate, the interesting thing was I was doing -- now I started doing Ask Your Neighbor. And the same thing happened with me. I was doing Ask Your Neighbor and the Bumper to Bumper Club. And they moved Ask Your Neighbor -- originally it was on from 1:00 to 2:00 -- I can remember when they called me in to ask me -- they were not asking me but telling me -- that I was going to do this, and the first thing they said, well, we're losing My True Story and I said, "oh really", and they said NBC is dropping it. We've got this hour and we've got to fill it. I said what are you going to do? And they said we're going to put a talk show in there. And, of course, I immediately think, oh, got to be one of these hard-hitting talk shows where people call up and you don't argue that hard but you're talking about serious stuff, good topics -- and they wanted me to do it. I said wonderful, great. I said what's the format, and they said household hints and recipes. And I said huh? I said what? They said yeah, it's a question and answer show, Ask Your Neighbor, household hints and recipes. And I said, guys, I

am not the poor man's Aunt Fanny. I said I probably am the only hip guy you've got around here. And you're going to make me go in there and do household hints and recipes? And they said yeah. I said well no thanks. I don't want to do that. Somebody else would probably be better for that than me. And the next thing they said, well if you don't want to do it that's fine, but you're out on Lafayette Boulevard, good luck. And I said oh. Well, in that case when does it start? It started February the 5th of 1962 and I went in there really grudgingly, thinking that, that show, under that format, which did not strike me as a very bright way to do things, would probably last maybe a year, maybe two years, but that'd be it. And now, this is 43 years later as we speak. And it'll probably be on 43 years from now if my son can keep it going and live long enough. At any rate, I'm getting to the point now where probably in the next eight or ten years, I'll drop out of it or maybe just go in and do it periodically. Because one, I want to do other things. And two, I'm getting older. But I would like to carry it for 50 years. That's kind of a mark for me, and we've been 43 years last February. And so seven more years I still want to do it, God willing, and the creek don't rise and my voice -- we'll get rid of all of this laryngitis I've got and the frogs

jumping around in it, which you can hear from time to time. At any rate, when we went up in the morning the first thing that happened -- I mean it was from 1:00 to 2:00 in the afternoon, and we carried the day games of the Detroit Tigers. For years we had carried the day [games] -- we used to carry all the games. But then, WJR had the big signal at night, and so the Ball Club and the advertisers wanted to be over there. So because we had had the long history of having the first -- excuse me, the first broadcast of baseball in this market, matter of fact, it might have been the first broadcast of baseball in any market, -- because we were the world's first radio station, first station that had regular programming. And they had the night games at JR and the day games were at J. And they were the afternoon games. And so what would happen in the summertime was -- remember, I started in February -- by the time we got to the baseball season in, the full season in let's say June, we had an audience that just started to draw everybody. This show just came off the floor like you couldn't believe, and it suddenly was the number one daytime show in the market. And as a matter of fact, they were -- again they were going to fire me because I wouldn't listen to their pleas that I should shut up and let the neighbors talk. And I said, look, I understand what you're

getting at. And if the neighbor has something to say that's wonderful, I let them talk. You may not notice this because what you want me to do is go, uh huh, thank you, and do a commercial. And I said, I am not that kind of performer, nor will I work like that. You'll have to get somebody else if you want a robot out there. I don't do that. And so I just kept talking, and I said I'm a professional talker, the people who call in are amateur talkers, and let's keep that in mind. And I didn't mean this to be egotistical or anything like that, but that was my approach to it. I was going to work that way or else I didn't want to work.

Q: Plus, your growing audience is backing you up.

A: Well, they were just ready to fire me when the first ratings came in and all of a sudden they were number one in the market in the middle of the day, which hadn't happened in years, and here I was, number one from 1:00 to 2:00, and I was number one from 4:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon. I was their number one man. And so they didn't really feel like they should fire me. Besides Ed Wheeler would never have let them fire me. I was the last guy he hired into radio before they moved him back across the street to run the Detroit News. And so up in the -- when this grew so much and it was being interrupted by baseball, every time a

baseball game would come on, Ask Your Neighbor was off. And the phones would light up at the switchboard. For the entire hour complaining: I don't want to hear baseball, I want to hear Ask Your Neighbor. Well, what they did was move Ask Your Neighbor up into the morning, and they increased it an hour, which I thought was the height of folly. But I just didn't think the show could stand that. It didn't seem that interesting to me. Little did I know. That shows you how stupid people in the performing arts can be sometimes. They don't understand the public very well. At any rate, they put me up there from 10:00 until 12:00, two hours. And as a result, even though I was number one, it would have been too long a day, and they knew that. So they took me off of the Bumper to Bumper Club, and they took me off of all staff work. I now became a performer. And, every couple of years or so we'd negotiate -- usually it was when I walked in and said I quit and then they would give me a raise, and that was about the only way that I ever got a raise down there, because I had to walk in and say I'm sorry, I can't get along with this, I need a raise, and I think I earned one, because I made them a lot of money on Ask Your Neighbor. And they knew that. But it was the last thing they wanted to do, they were going to make the bottom line as nice as they could. And they

didn't have anything else that was number one. Not the morning show or the afternoon shows or anything. Everybody got whupped except Ask Your Neighbor. But I would say I'm going to quit, and they'd say OK, stay, and that went on for -- well, let me say, by this time I'd been here about three years or four years, and I was doing very well here, but bear in mind I came here to stay one year minimum, and two to three years maximum, because I did not want to be in Detroit. Now, by this time, I'd been here three or four years; I'm getting to know the city very well; I'm involved in a lot of things; I was doing a lot of public service work with charitable organizations and people who were into running the city. I was working with people at City Council, helping in every way I could to promote good things for the city. And, I was about to leave. I said now this is it. I've had enough of this, time to move on. I wanted to be either in Los Angeles or New York. Los Angeles would have been my first choice because I liked LA having been out there to play piano. I wanted to go back and live out my days there because it was a good broadcast town and I loved the weather. Or secondly, New York, because it is the number one market in the world, and I thought, well, OK, that'd be my second choice. Or third choice, the town that was always the big town to me because

I grew up in the shadow of Chicago, and I would have wanted to go there. So those were my choices, to go to those, and I started to look around. And at this point, my oldest boy, Rob, who does the radio show with me now for the last six or seven years. He has been my co-host on Ask Your Neighbor; he's also the producer and he runs the board, and takes care of the answering the phones, but he's on the air with me in great measure. So it's not like he's just pushing dials and answering the phone. And he was about to enter school. And that gave me pause to look back at my own life, growing up in wonderful little La Porte, Indiana. I graduated high school with at least 75 or 80% of the kids that were in my kindergarten class. They graduated high school with me. That's great stability. That's the kind of thing that I think every kid and every parent should value highly. Whether the kids know it or not, it's really a very stabilizing thing to have friends through the entire 12 years of your schooling. Or 13, if you count kindergarten. And I was great for rest time, I can tell you that, I was -- roll out your rugs, kids, and you'd lie down and take a little rest. At any rate, Rob was going into school and I did not want to drag him around. Especially if I'd had to go to Chicago and then New York or LA, disrupting his school. Because I had seen kids who had

parents that moved around, and they had had to move. And that was something, and I felt very sorry about for them as I was growing up. So I said to his mother, my first wife, I said, what do you think? I said I don't want to drag these two kids -- I had two boys then -- and I said I don't want to drag them around while I try to prove to everybody how great I am, how good I am. Because I said I happen to know how good I am, and it makes no difference to anybody else, and it certainly doesn't make any difference to me, I don't have to prove myself. And I said, frankly, I like Detroit. It's a wonderful city once you get to know it. From the surface it looks like Motown, gray town, car town, factory town, smoke town, call it what you want. I happen to have gotten underneath that cover far enough in those three or four years that I realized the town has a marvelous history. It is a great city in many many ways, and I wanted to be here. And so I said to my wife, because that was a decision the two of us have to make, not just me. And she said, I kind of like it too. I said done, and we bought a house. And we moved into it in '65. We bought it in the summer of '65 and moved in in the fall. There's a couple of stories there but I don't want to get too far away from -- it's a personal thing.

Q: I want to get back to something here. This may be a simple

question but it may be a complex one. So what made you so popular? What made Ask Your Neighbor so popular?

A: This is hard to answer --

Q: And if I could say -- I'm sorry, kind of a two-part question: what philosophy did you take into your career? How you were going to shape it?

A: Well, I look at all talk shows the same way. I don't care what you're doing. You don't hassle people. A lot of these talk shows are fundamentally -- they are ego trips for the people who are doing the shows and it's me, me, me, me, me all the time. And they are saying -- if they can belittle the caller somehow they think that makes them look smarter or bigger. Neither of those are true. It makes them look dumber, just like they are when they do that kind of thing. You don't belittle somebody who calls you on a talk show. I don't care what the format is. To me, if I ask somebody to call on the air and talk on my radio show -- I don't care what the format is, whether it's political, antagonism, right, left or whatever, or whether it's an Ask Your Neighbor, which is a household show you have invited them into your home. And this studio is my home. You are my guest and I want to treat you the same way that I would treat an invited guest in my home. Which is to be civil. If you have a discussion, not an argument but a discussion,

you don't bludgeon people with that. You argue intelligently and cogently, and they can make their points as well as you make your points and let the audience decide who's right. And then, you politely say thank you for being here, goodbye, and they're off and now you go on to somebody else. Well, that being my premise, that probably was one of the reasons why I've been successful. There are several reasons why I have been successful, and it's very hard for me to talk about these things because some of it sounds egotistical, and I don't think that I am, and the reason I say that is, I don't care if anybody knows who I am or not. That is of no interest to me. I went into the broadcasting business because essentially I am a performer. Yes, I like applause. But no, I don't have an ego problem, nor do I need anybody to stroke it and to tell me how great I am because I don't care. I know how good I am. This is what I mean, that sounds egotistical on the surface of it --

Q: It's all right.

A: But let me say this, and I've said this to young kids going into the business, I've talked to classes and to individuals, and I have said, look, if you don't believe that you are the best performer then you have no reason to walk on a stage, to be in front of a microphone, to sing in

front of a band, to be in front of a movie camera or a television camera -- if you don't think you're the best person that ever walked the face of the earth. I can sit here and tell you right now I am the best broadcaster that ever lived. I absolutely believe that. That gives me the confidence to make mistakes, to go out and learn, because you only learn from your mistakes, you do not learn from your successes. I have the great joy to sit here and tell you I have never been anything but successful in my life. 55 years in the broadcasting business and it was true in the music business too. I was successful. And the point is that, when I fail, I don't -- you never fail until you stop trying. And when a person stops trying, that's failing. And I have never done that. When you fail you learn. This is when you learn. You do not learn when you succeed. Because once you've succeeded at something, whatever it is -- you take Edison. He had how many, 100, 150, failures from which he learned before he could put a little band of wire inside of a glass bulb and have the bulb light. All those failures was how he got to that success. And when he got to that success, did he fiddle around with light bulbs anymore? No, he went on to gramophones or voice over the air. Thank goodness, otherwise, I wouldn't be sitting here talking about it.

And that's what I mean. When I fail it's temporary. I learn from that and go on, and eventually, I succeed at what I'm doing. Now, as a broadcaster I have made a lot of mistakes. I have done some funny things through the years. But I've learned from those, and as a result, after a few years in the business, probably before I came here, I was pretty much considered a successful broadcaster. And one of the reasons for that is as simple as my voice. I cannot take any credit for that. It was God-given. I have three brothers and a father, none of whom have that voice. And the voice is very singular, it's very recognizable. People hear it, they know who I am. And thank God, it's pleasant. It doesn't have an edge to it like some voices. It doesn't have a negative connotation. It's a very positive -- but thank God, because, I didn't devise this voice. It was given to me. My only thing is that I have to do something with it. That's my problem. What are you going to do with that voice, kiddo, and I've been trying for 55 years to do something with it that will make the world a better place than it was when I came into it. Bear in mind that, when I was in school, in college, and all through my upbringing through grade, before I ever went to school, I started reading in philosophical works and theology and that kind of highfalutin stuff. My parents really wondered where I

was coming from, but when you believe in reincarnation, I could tell them I was here before, doing some very strange things. I must have been a guru or something. I probably had a hermit's cave on top of a mountain somewhere. And I thought funny thoughts. And I still think funny thoughts. And people wonder when they talk to me. At any rate, I really want to do well with my life because that's what I'm here for. I'm here to do something, and that's been given to me by a greater power. I don't want to start talking about what God is or anything like that. I think I know, but I don't want to get into that because that arouses a lot of negative things. People have their own way to think and I say that's good, think your own way, I'll think my way. Let's not worry about that. But if you wanted to argue about it or discuss it, may I say, because I use the word argue in the classical philosophical sense, which is like debating. They're arguing in a debate thing. And that kind of organized arguing is very different from people hollering at each other. That's not what I mean when I use the word argue in its best sense, when you are arguing points and counterpoints and you are picking away at your opponent's weaknesses and accentuating your own strength, and defending your weak spots. That's what arguing is. And that's what I do. Now, when I'm on the

air, I still do that. I think that way. So I can't change the way I think. I like to talk, yes, I am a talker, which is why I'm in the business I'm in. That's why they couldn't make me stop talking at WWJ, and for the last over a quarter century I've worked for myself, and so I don't have that problem anymore. Thank goodness. I can just go do what I want to do. But people liked what they heard. They had an interest. I didn't talk down to people. That's another thing about talk shows and performers. I have every right in some ways to talk down to an audience because I have a much larger vocabulary than most people. That's because I love words, I've been -- I read the dictionary for fun when I was a kid, and I read into all kinds of funny books and things that had words that nobody ever uses except people who are thinking funny things in the middle of the night. And what happens is, if I use big words, I sometimes apologize for it, but not very often because my attitude is, if I hear a word that I don't know, two things: one, I'm going to ask you what that word means and admit to you that I do not know what you meant by that word. I'd say I'm sorry I don't know that word. What did you mean? And, if somebody were to call on the air and say you just used this word, what is it, I am thrilled because I think that's how you learn. There again, when you don't

know, ask a question. And I would assume that if anybody really wants to know, they ought to call and ask me what I meant. Or -- and this is the other result of a word that you don't know, you go to the dictionary and look it up. And sometimes, once in a while, somebody would say, you know you use some kind of big words. And I said, yes, because they're part of my vocabulary, and that's what I -- I think that way, I talk that way. And I'm not going to apologize for this and I'm not going to change the way I am. But I will ask you that, if I use a word that you don't understand, call and ask me what I meant, or even better, go to the dictionary and get in the habit of looking up words that you don't know. People read for example. Now, most newspapers and most magazines are written to about anywhere from a third to sixth grade level. So you don't run into all that many words that you don't know. But any time you're reading and you don't know a word, you should go look it up. At any rate, that's what I told people to do, and evidently that's what they do. So I can be myself. I don't have to be somebody I don't want to be. And this comes through. I don't care how it strikes people, whether they think I'm egotistical or not, that doesn't bother me. You can think that if you want, I know that I'm not and that's all I'm concerned with, and

what they get out of this is that this guy is himself. And this reality is a very good thing in performing. Any time a performer sings, plays an instrument, plays a part in a play, acts a role, or reads a commercial on the air -- that's one of the reasons that I was always the top paid person at WWJ and the number one guy was because I did the commercials so well. And the reason that I did them so well was because, first of all, I spoke to people. I didn't read to people. I spoke with them, I made them sound like I was saying these words. And two, I made them think I believed these words. Now I can do that as an actor or -- and that was when I worked for WWJ, I had to be an actor, because sometimes they had advertisers that I didn't like. But then, I had to be the actor and read the words the way that they would sound best even though I didn't believe them. But, when I talk about my own advertisers now, whom I have screened and talked to and been out with and used their products and all that stuff, I can give them the old good magazine seal of approval, the Good Housekeeping seal of approval. And that's what Ask Your Neighbor is. We give a seal of approval and so people will go out and buy the things that I'm talking about. And for a radio station or a television station, or my own program that I own, this is good because then the sponsors

get results, selling advertising becomes easy, and you have a very nice business. Because we are a business. And you don't ever want to forget that. A lot of performers don't realize that radio is a business and performing is secondary to that business end. Because without the business you don't have a place to talk. That simple.

Q: When we finished Side 1, Bob, we were talking about your philosophy of broadcasting, of performing, and we were also talking about what made Ask Your Neighbor successful. There's ample evidence that it was successful, when you're the number one show, and of course, it's been running for so long, so --

A: It's not number one anymore, Mike, let's be very clear about that. That was back in the '60s and '70s when I was at a major station. And there were only at that time – really, AM was the big radio thing. Now FM is the big thing, and I'm sure if I were to go onto one of the better known F.M. stations or to WJR, as an AM station, that we would again be number one in the market, because I think the show has that kind of an attraction to a lot of people. It just needs the stage to be on, and we're not on that. I'm not disparaging my radio station, but most people have never heard of WNZK. It's an ethnic station, and the owner, Sima Barakh, was perspicacious enough to -- see

that's what I do --

Q: Yes, I see, there's one of those words.

A: Well, it's a nice word. I like it. Got a nice ring to it.

Q: Sure does.

A: He was knowledgeable and cogent and -- there's another one, you don't hear that word that often. But don't sound pedantic -- if you want another word -- because pedants, I don't like pedants. I don't like pedantry. On the other hand, I don't think of it as pedantry because I've been talking this way all my life. I wasn't kidding. I used to read the dictionary for fun. I just loved turning pages and reading, and I had a photographic memory and I remembered every word I ever looked at. And I had a vocabulary of two or three hundred thousand words. Now, some of those words have not been used all that much, and probably, they don't come out that fluently. But they're there somewhere if I could find them. At any rate, the point is that I really liked words and this is natural to me. And so if I'm going to be myself, I use the words. But what I started to say was that Sima, who owns the radio station [WNZU], he owns about ten radio stations in other parts of the country, and he had this ethnic format, 24 hours a day. And a very good signal. It reaches all around southeastern Michigan. I'm able to be heard all

over the place now. Plus, we're also online. My son had set up the website for me a number of years ago, and we have audio streaming so that we can be picked up anywhere in the world, and we have people listening all over the place. But what he did was take the four hours in the morning from 8:00 until noon and opened them up to regular programming. And two of those hours he sold to me, from 9:00 to 11:00, and the hour following me he sold to Monty Korn, who is a very well known financial/legal guy, who has been broadcasting longer than I have. Of course, he's a lot older than I am. You know, Monty's in his 80s. And I think he's 83 or 82. He's nine or ten years older than I. And he has been well-known in broadcast, and in newspapers and others through the years. And so he is on from 11:00 till 12:00. And from 8:00 to 9:00, before our show, there are two or three other people who do various and sundry things, but in that four hours from 8:00 till noon, it's modern talk radio and then at 12:00 noon, it's an Arabic programming that goes for about six or seven hours, which is very interesting -- we [Detroit] have a very large Arabic community now. And people should not overlook that. This is the largest Arabic community in the world outside the Middle East. And it's very important to our community as a whole. I'm talking about metropolitan [Detroit]. And

you look down in the Dearborn area, for example, that's the most highly impacted Middle Eastern community. Now they're very diverse. It's not just one Middle Eastern group -- that's all kinds of people. And people forget there are Middle Eastern Christians as well as Muslims. And people don't follow this too well. As a matter of fact, when we first came on the air -- I'll tell this little side story. We came on the air, first day. All of a sudden without any promo or anything like that -- we had run some promos, but nobody paid any attention to them -- and so when I first came on, and here it no longer is the Arabic programming that had been on the air at that time. Suddenly this talk show, Ask Your Neighbor, and this funny-sounding guy, Bob Allesee, who's that? For all these Middle Easterners who were the big audience, the phones were ringing wild, everybody saying: Well where is my Arabic programming? They said stay tuned, it'll be on at noon. And everybody was complaining through the first week. Then, all of a sudden, after about the first or second week, I started to get some people with Middle Eastern accents calling in. And the next thing I know, people would call in and say, you know, this is a wonderful show, thank you. And I said you're very welcome, thank you. I said I'm glad we didn't ruffle your feathers, because I understand that when we

first came on everybody thought: what's going on here? But, I'm glad you like it. This is regular radio, it's not like -- but the ethnic stuff is all there. Your Arabic shows that cater to your particular tastes run from noon now till 7:00. So you've still got plenty of that, and now you have us too. And it turned out that one of the biggest segments of my show in terms of demographics is the Middle Eastern Arabic community, of which I'm very proud because that's not an easy nut to crack. Mainly because -- well, think about it. Right now, the problems in Iraq, the problems in Afghanistan that we had, the problems we're having with Iran, and on and on and on you go. And these are things that fester under the surface of listenership in broadcast, and especially, on an ethnic station that was catering primarily to the Middle East. To have an American show come on, apple pie, which is what Ask Your Neighbor is, I'm very happy and I'm very proud of that. I know pride goeth before the fall, and I don't want to fall but I'm very pleased that we were able to communicate. Because that's what I do. And there, going back to what we were talking about in terms of success, if you are able to communicate in the medium of radio or television or acting or music, or any of the performing arts, if you are able to communicate one on one, me to you. And remember, I'm not

talking to this huge audience. I am talking to a lot of individuals, and I talk to them alone. And, in their ears, I hope that everybody who listens to me as a broadcaster thinks, feels that I am speaking to them alone. And then you add all those people together and you have a number one show. And so that is again one of the basic premises out of which I work. Now with all that said, let me for a minute digress. When I decided to stay here, I made a simple statement: I bought a home. And we stayed. That's a very oversimplification of what actually happened. Because I had found a home, and I think this might be of interest to some people. We had been looking and wanted to be in the Palmer Woods area, either Sherwood Forest or Palmer Woods. We wanted one of those homes because I like older homes. And we were looking in there and couldn't find anything that was either right, or that was in my money range too, because those were expensive homes 40 years ago, 45 years ago. And this was at the very beginnings -- the very beginnings of the real exodus of the wealthier upper class white community moving to the suburbs. It had been going on for 15 years, started around 1950, the exodus of the white population from the city of Detroit. But there were a great many people who had stayed in nice areas like the Palmer Woods area or Rosedale Park

area, and we had looked in there too. But I had not been able to find exactly what I wanted when I started looking for a home, which was in the spring, or even before that, in the late winter of 1964. And I'd made this decision. And one of the salespeople at WWJ, his wife was a realtor, sold real estate. And he said to me, my wife has a home that she thinks you'd like. Well, it was south of Seven Mile Road in the University District Association, which was the one mile square, just north of U of D [University of Detroit]. So this is the University District that people called it back then. Matter of fact, if you remember the days when you had names for your prefixes for phone numbers, it was University 544 whatever. That was our telephone number. University was the prefix: UN. Then they went to digits, which I really -- I loved that, I miss those[prefixes] -- because it told you a lot about the area to which you're calling. Anyway, that'll never come back now. That's gone forever. At any rate, they wanted to show me a home that was -- it was actually at the corner, the southwest corner of Parkside and Margarita. The address was on Parkside, but it was on the corner and I said: "no, no, I want to look in Sherwood Forest and Palmer Woods. That's really where I want to look." They hammered me, and this was my friend, who's a salesman down there,

and I didn't want to insult him, so I said look, we'll take a look. We drove up there, this day that we were going to see the house, and it had this big turret entrance. It looked like an old castle with a turret on the front facing out to the angle as you're looking at the corner of Parkside and Margarita. I'm standing there, and here's this turret with the wall coming right out to that corner. And that was very pretty. And I liked that and I walked up and the house was wonderful brick home, three stories, opened the front door, and I'm standing in this turret, this round space, which was where you hung your coats and you wiped your feet before you went. And I looked down this hallway, and there's this wonderful hallway, and I looked all the way through the house to the breakfast room, which was just off the kitchen. I walked a couple of steps into that hallway and I could see on my left the main living room space, and this was this huge 40 by 20 foot living room, which seemed huge to me because I'd been living in rental houses that were much smaller. And I looked to my right and there through a stained glass door was the library, a beautiful little room that I loved, I looked at just that much of a house. Two steps into the house. And I felt reverberations in my soul and I said to the lady that was selling the house, the owner, who had

been raised in that house, her parents owned -- her parents built that house in 1935 and she was raised in that home. And her parents had passed and she was the owner, and she and her husband were now building a house out by Belleville, and they were going to sell it [the old house] and she didn't want to sell it. She really wanted to stay because that was her house. And I said to her, I'll buy it, how much do you want? Because I hadn't been told how much she wanted, no one had told me, and I just looked her in the eye and I said I'll buy it, how much do you want? She was taken aback, and she said, oh well, don't you want to see the house? I said no. I know the house. This is my house. I want this house. I will be happy here. And she just beamed and her shoulders showed that she was -- she said I hated to sell the house and she said now I feel OK because I know that somebody like myself who relates to this house is going to buy it. And I said I understand what you're saying and I feel the same way. And I do want to see the house, but how much do you want? And she wanted $28,500. And I looked at her -- now bear in mind this is the beginnings in that neighborhood of the change, people are beginning to sell, so there was a glut on the market, nice homes that were selling nowhere near what they should have been worth. If that house had been in the suburbs at

that moment, it would have been worth about $80 or $100,000. And it would be $1 million now. But back then, in 1965, it would have been worth $80 or $90,000 or $100,000 in the suburbs. But, here it was, in this area in Palmer Woods and I said that's not enough, is there something wrong? I thought maybe it's going to be the new furnace, the roof is going to fall off. And she said, oh no, no, she said, but there's just a lot of homes on the market and that's all it'll bring. I said, well, I said I feel like Jesse James. I said, this house looks gorgeous. And the more I saw, the more I said, this is what I want, I can't believe you only want $28,500. I said, best deal I ever made in my life. So we worked it out and we started to sign the papers and things like that. Then I got a call from her saying, we've had some trouble with the builders out there building our home in Belleville. There's a big strike going on with the carpenters' union and stuff like that, which maybe some people remember because it was a big story back in '65. And she said, would it be all right [to stay a little longer]. I was living in a rental home over on the East Side on East Outer Drive. and that was a wonderful neighborhood, too, but it was changing. And that didn't bother me. Because I don't care where you're from, I don't care what color you are, I don't care what ethnic

background you have -- that means absolutely nothing to me except you're more interesting than a lot of the people in the suburbs where everybody is alike. That I hated, I did not like that and, as a matter of fact, when I decided to buy this place, one of my friends who is a banker said, are you sure you want to buy that? He said, you'd be much better off to buy a nice house, out in Farmington, or Farmington Hills, because at that time, that was one of the hot spots in the area of Metro Detroit, you see. And he was thinking like a banker. If you're going to make an investment in a home, it should be something that grows. And I said to him, this is where I want to be. I am in an urban area, I am in a big city. It's a polyglot. It's full of all kinds of people. Different colors, different religions, different backgrounds. And that's what I want. As long as you have to put up with all the urban mess, which is to say traffic jams and congestion of all kinds and that sort of thing, at least I want to have the joy of cross-pollination, which is the real way that civilization began anyway. And, there again, now I'm showing off some of my reading from my childhood. Because I had read about how civilization evolved. And it was in places like Damascus, for example, the oldest city on the face of the Earth, it's where civilization began -- because it was a

crossroads. People from the Far East, European people, from Africa, were all crossing paths. It was the trading center and that whole area in the Middle East is marvelously interesting for that reason. It's where we developed civilization as we know it now. And I wanted to be in the cross-currents of all kinds of life. It didn't bother me who lived next door. As a matter of fact, when I moved into that house I had a wonderful Jewish doctor who lived in that house. We became great friends and it's where I really began to appreciate Judaism. Because I had never had -- growing up in a small town in Indiana -- I'd never had that much connection to Judaism, for example. That's what I mean -- now, my next door neighbor is different from me, which I love. And as a matter of fact, when he moved out, which he did a few years later, when he moved a wonderful black fellow came in there and he and I became great friends. And again, you learn from people who are different, not from people who are alike. You don't learn to think from the people who think like you do. You learn from people who think differently who have other opinions, who have other backgrounds, and can teach you about their perspective which is different from yours. I wanted that, and she asked, could we stay in the house for a few more months while this gets settled and then we can

get our house built and you can move in. I said, stay as long as you want. It's your house. I know how you feel. And I said, I have told the person from whom we are renting that I was going to buy a house. I gave him notice so that he could start to advertise and look for someone to rent the house and not be vacant, because I knew how that would be. He was very surprised because he said, I've never had a tenant who ever told me they were leaving. They walk in and they say, we're out. And he said, and that leaves me sometimes weeks, maybe even a couple of months -- three months -- while I'm trying to find somebody to take his place. And I said, well, I realize that. I'm sort of a business man and, I said, I understand that. I said, that's why I told you. And I said, but I don't know when I can move into my house because the people from whom I'm buying it are going to stay there for a while while their new house is being built, so if you don't mind, I'll give you a couple of weeks notice or a month. As soon as I know, I'll let you know. He said, wonderful, don't worry about a thing. Famous last words. Because we had decided with the owner that they were going to be out of there in three months, come what may, so that I could put my kids into school in the Fall. Because now we were coming up to June, and at the end of the Summer, the kids were going to

be going to a different school, and we wanted them there. Now, I get the wonderful thing from the guy that I rented from. He said, guess what? One of the people who came to look at the place wants to buy my house. And he said, they want to move in in two weeks. He said, you'll have to be out. And I said, oh, really? And now I was hard-pressed. Did you ever try to find a place that you could rent for three months?

Q: No.

A: And I had -- by this time I had my youngest boy born -- I now had three boys, a wife and a dog. And I was going to try to find a place to stay for three months. It so happened that in the Seville Hotel, near the Forbidden City Restaurant, which was very well-known on the first floor of that hotel. That was one of the great Chinese restaurants in the area -- the Wong family I think owned that. Or maybe it was the Yee family -- I'm not sure now, but it was a very well-known Chinese. A lot of people...it would ring a bell with them, the Forbidden City Restaurant. And I had a very dear friend of mine, who was a financial guy. He had retired, but he had been a musician, a songwriter, and back in the '30s. One of the song he had written was a classic in the jazz genre. It was done by Billie Holiday. He had written the music and the lyrics, and in order to

get Billie Holiday to sing it, they had to give her the credit for the lyrics. And so the song was by... Herzog... why can't I think of his first name? But it was Herzog and Billie Holiday who wrote that song. I want to say Walter Herzog, but it doesn't sound right. Somehow that doesn't sound right, and he's been gone for years and years and years. But he was livin' on the third floor -- he had an apartment up there, a three-room apartment for himself and his wife. It was more than adequate, and many times we would go up there. He had a nice piano, and we would have little parties, dinner parties -- he had elegant dinner parties. I went to him and -- I think it was Walter -- and I said, Walter, do you have any idea where we could stay? He says, there's an apartment just like this on the other end of this hall, on this floor. I took it. And the hotel was happy to rent it to me and they knew that I was only going to stay there three months, but here I am on the third floor of the Seville Hotel, and in case anybody doesn't know where that is, it was at the corner of Cass and Charlotte. It was over just north of the Masonic Temple, and the Cass Corridor which is famous... (laughter)

Q: Nowadays.

A: Or, at that time, it was infamous is what it was, because it was the place where drug addicts, alcoholics,

prostitutes -- you name it -- wandered up and down Cass Avenue. And that was what you had out there and it was really fascinating because at midnight I would take our dog out for a walk... (laughter) it was an experience. But the kids couldn't go out and play; they had to play up there in the room. That was a time -- three months there -- but we got through it. And it came to the Fall when it was time to go to school and we still couldn't move into our home. We didn't move into the home until just before Halloween. So it was in October that we moved into the house. At any rate, at least as an experience -- I don't ever want to go through it again -- but it was interesting, I'll say that. I learned a lot from that one. Because we became Mario's best customers, because at night my wife would be very tired from having the kids all day long wrapping around her. She had to drive them to school when it got to September, so for a month or six weeks, she was driving them out there to our new neighborhood and then driving out to pick them up in the afternoon to bring them home. And they were going to school there -- she had quite a day's work ahead of her every day. I would come home in the afternoon and then we'd take the kids and go someplace or do something, but at night, many times, we would take the whole family and go about five or six blocks north of us on

Second Avenue. Pardon me, I said Cass -- Cass was behind us, it was Second Avenue. Seville Hotel was on Second and Charlotte. Cass Avenue was the block east of us. That was here now at Wayne State, right where we are, we're on Cass Avenue. This was on Second Street. And up on Second Street at Willis, about six blocks north of where we were by the Masonic Temple, is Mario's. And Mario is a wonderful guy. A great restaurant. To my mind perhaps -- well, not perhaps -- in my mind, that was the best restaurant in this city, ever, bar none. And what was wonderful about it -- and I could speak a lot of Latin words and therefore I knew a lot of Italian, just because I knew a lot of Latin words -- he would come out on the floor and every waiter that worked for him -- there were no waitresses, they were all waiters -- they were all in tuxedos. It was a very first-class restaurant. And he had a marvelous Italian chef in kitchen who used to take my kids back there and show them stuff and let them mix things. It was really like a second home. He would stand out on the floor and swear at his waiters if they weren't doing things exactly the way he wanted. He was a real drill sergeant, you know. And I loved the place, I loved the food. And I got acquainted with it a couple years earlier because they came on Ask Your Neighbor to

advertise. This is an interesting story. In the broadcast business, I used to go out with the sales people and talk with the new clients, or to somebody who was coming on the air so that I could meet them and know something about their business. And it sort of solidified everything and it's the way I've done broadcasts all my life, from the very first job I had. I may have mentioned that earlier -- the first job I had was at a station called WLOI, which stood for We're Low On Income. And I learned very quickly about the relationship of commercials to performing and the business of radio. The first job I had, I learned how important it was to sell commercials and to run a business. Because, otherwise, I didn't have a job and I didn't have a check. And I used to go out with the salesmen there, at that station, and out of that they made me a salesman. So I was, actually, in the first radio station I ever worked, I was a salesman-announcer. Because I could sell. In this particular case -- as a matter of fact, the salesman whose wife put me into my home that I love so much, it was that salesman. Bob Campbell was his name. My goodness I have trouble remembering these things sometimes, but we were eating at Mario's and they were doing something very avant-garde. This is brand new back around 1963 or 4, I'd been on the air a couple of years, I think, of Ask Your

Neighbor, and we had this massive daytime audience that was mostly housewives. Perfect audience for frozen food. And he, now, was coming out with frozen dinners -- and there really was nothing quite like what Mario was coming out with. He was going to have the ravioli, the gnocchi, the dishes that were famous at his restaurant. And no one had ever done that. If you got a frozen dinner, there were a couple of companies -- I think Bird's Eye had some and some other companies had dinners, and you were eating sawdust or something. They were frozen and they had no flavor. He was coming out [with frozen dinners] and his chef had worked on this and they had taste-tested them. As a matter of fact, for fun, they actually took a frozen dinner and heated it -- I watched them -- they heated it and he served it – mastaciolli I think it was or something, someone had ordered mastaciolli off the menu. They took a frozen box, opened it, heated it up and the customer said, boy, best I ever had. Thank you -- he was raving to Mario and the waiter about how good it was and I'm just standing off a little bit listening to this. I knew how good this product was; it was wonderful. But nobody wanted to buy that stuff back then. It didn't last. It went along for about six months or a year, and it wasn't making any money, even though we had this huge audience and people believed me,

they still didn't want to buy frozen food. Everybody cooked back then. And the interesting thing is, I thought, the salesman says, we're going to have Mario's Restaurant on the air. And I said, well, I've heard the name but I've never been there -- well, how about lunch? We went in for lunch at Mario's and I sat down at a nice table and we had a waiter, we had a bus boy, we had Mario, the owner, and we had Guido. Mario's half-brother was the sommelier, and Guido was the head waiter. So we had Mario and his half-brother Nello, and Guido, and a waiter and a bus boy, all taking care of this table. And I felt like King Tut. They served Veal Olympic, is what I ordered from the menu. And they prepared it tableside because that was one of those things that they did tableside, where they'd pour a little liqueur on things and flambé it at the table. And they served bananas Foster for dessert. I was in there for lunch for four hours. I think it was three-and-a-half or four hours. I was there and they hovered around me for three-and-a-half or four hours. We talked, we had the advertising agency guy, our salesman and myself were having lunch. And I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I had never tasted food so beautifully prepared, so well-served, so attentive we had different wines with each course. It was a real feast. And, of course, Mario paid for it. So,

you know, when I went on the air to talk about Mario's Frozen Foods, I was telling everybody how wonderful his frozen foods were, but nobody would buy them. But what happened was, all of the people who by this time in the '60s had been moving away to the suburbs and they thought Mario's had long gone under, they realized -- because I talked about Mario's and the food and how wonderful it was, to relate it to the frozen foods -- people started coming back in and going back to Mario's. And his restaurant business -- the frozen food was dying -- but the restaurant business picked up 20% that first year, which in the restaurant business is a big turnaround. And he thought I was god. And I was in the restaurant for two years before I realized they had a menu. Because that first day, they didn't give us a menu -- they suggested things that we could eat. That Veal Olympic sounded really very good so we had it. And it was that way -- I'd come in there and they'd say, ah, Signor Allison, what would you like? And I'd say, well, maybe tonight it will be fish. And they would walk away and food would start coming because they had all kinds of -- the appetizer tray would come out and that was a whole meal in itself, and then they would have an antipasto, then a pasta, and then about that time you would get to your main dish and then there would be some

dessert. They'd skip the soup, there was a soup course but they would skip it because that's more food than almost anyone could eat. I remember going one night and they said: what will you have Signor Allison? I said, you know, I'm not really very hungry. I'd kind of like to have a grilled cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee. I was being cute and they said, oh... we don't... we don't... well maybe we can make you a grilled cheese... I said, no, no, I'm using that as a little aphorism or something, a little metaphor -- I don't want very much. And they were baffled as to what to serve me that wasn't very much because they loved me and my wife and my kids, or when I came in with guests. And I never picked up a check. In all the years I went there, during the time that they were on the air with me, they were so beautiful, and they would not let me pick up a check. And I said, guys, I have to report this. You know, you're not allowed to have gratuities like this. And they said, your money is no good here. You are part of our family. And I told the radio station about it because we were required to do that. And I told them, you know, that many times they would give me special wines and things like that and I couldn't pay them. Now, of course, Mario is retired and it's owned by a different family. I go in there and I get to pay now. But it will never be like what

it was then -- it was just something special for our family and our kids still talk about it. And I remember the great joy -- there was one of the things about radio, the power of radio, again. Talking about something from a personal standpoint, because of my experience, people came in [to Mario's] from everywhere. And radio has that kind of power. Then, after we had lived in this third-floor apartment for three months with three kids and a dog, we finally got into the new house. Well, it was a wonderful neighborhood that I dearly loved. At that time, it was about half-Catholic and half-Jewish. And it was beginning to change, but when I moved in, it was about half-Catholic, half-Jewish. I was about the only Protestant in...I was an elder at Fort Street Presbyterian Church. I wanted the kids to come up in a church and my first wife had been a Presbyterian minister's daughter. And so I had joined the Presbyterian church out of deference to my father-in-law and his congregation when we got married. And so, when we came up here, I looked around and I really couldn't find a church that I liked. One time we were at a meeting of the Greater Detroit Council of Churches or something -- I was a member of that. I was in a lot of things as a broadcaster. I just felt like that's what a good broadcaster should do. You should never turn your back on your city because you're

nobody unless your city says you're somebody. You get your celebrity, if that's the word, from the people who listen, who are members of this community, so you've got to give back to that community. If you don't do that, shame on you, period. Same way for sports people. I don't care what performing art you're in -- and sports is a performing art, that's all it is. It's a money business, they are performers, they are entertaining people. And when you're in the entertainment business, whether it's gambling or sports or broadcasting or arts or music -- and of course I'm very active with the symphony and the opera house, we're very deep into those -- the music hall. As Sandy Duncan likes to call me, the house pianist at the music hall. Because I'll play for functions they have down there; I do that as a little favor for Sandy. And I like to do things like that. And you get into organizations like the Rotary Club. I belong to a lot of different things and I don't want to get into all of that, but this is what a performer can do. And by performing arts I mean all performing arts. They should be aware that they owe something to the audiences that make them what they are, whether they're symphony musicians or whether they're sports stars or broadcasters. So I'm involved in all this stuff, and in that community, I was the only Protestant in

there. Well, I started to say that I was in a community. One time at the Council of Churches and -- Ed Willingham was his name and he was the leader of that group, he was the front man for it and was a paid staff person for Council of Churches activity -- I think it was Ed, said, you know "you're looking around for a Presbyterian Church" he says "why don't you go downtown to Fort Street which is -- Fort and Third -- the second Presbyterian Church in this area. And when it was built -- this is a cute line -- "when it was built" -- our first Presbyterian Church is out on Woodward Avenue, many people will know that and Fort street was the second Presbyterian Church that was built, back in 1848, and everybody said 'why are you building it so far out on the west side? The corner of Fort and Third? Nobody will come to you!'" And this beautiful sanctuary, I walked in there and I was sold, that was my church -- it was just like walking into my home. When I walked into that church, and this was about 1961 or two, I'd only been here a short time, but I was already involved in the city and doing things, and I went in and I met the pastor of the church and said "I want to be a member" and he was overjoyed to take a young family in, I was only about 28 or 29 when I came here. He was delighted and I got very active in the church and started to be in things that they

were doing and the next thing I know I'm elected an elder of the Presbyterian Church. And even though I am no longer active in the Presbyterian Church, I guess I'm still an elder, and one of the things that people don't know, it's one of the rather obscure things in Presbyterianism, as an elder you can take confession. You have anything you want to confess to me, Mike? (laughter) I can listen.

Q: (laughter)

A: Matter of fact, one of the ministers there a couple of years later used to come out to my home there at Parkside and Margarita, and I was his confessor. He would come out and unload on me and tell me all the problems he was having and I would tell him how to handle it and help him through the session because I was an elder and I can do things like that. And it was a lot of fun. He would come out and unwind, and have a drink, a cup of coffee, and talk with me. We would discuss religion and lots of things. It was a wonderful time. My kids grew up in that church and they still love it, but they've gone over to other things now that they're older and they're in different parts of the area, so they have their own things that they're involved in. Which is fine with me, you know. I never told anybody how to believe or what to believe. They just grew up in that church at Fort Street. I dearly love it. It's a

wonderful church and they do a lot of great things in the city downtown in an urban setting. And it's so needed. Churches are really the last frontier in this town right now, and if it weren't for them, I don't know where we'd be. Because, I'm talking about all churches in the community that are still in the city, they are the backbone of what's Detroit and hopefully -- we are on an upswing now, we're turned around here in Detroit and I'm very interested in that because you can see what's happening down at the Campus martius in the center of the city, and that's always been a hub. And out from that are going to come a lot of things. I hope I'm around to enjoy it, and see it, and be a part of it because I worked very hard with a lot of groups through the years to keep the city solvent and it's going through some terrible times right now. But those things change, you know. Mayors come, mayors go, and if you just wait long enough, things will come around. And I'm a very big optimist. Didn't I ever tell you my definition for optimist? Oh, you'll love this. An optimist is the guy that thinks his wife has given up cigarettes when he finds cigar butts in the ashtrays.

(laughter)

Q: (laughter)

A: That's me. I am an optimist. And I don't look at life

through red, rosy glasses or anything like that. I'm a realist. I understand right and wrong and realism and what has to be done, the dirty work that has to go on, but all together, if you look at 10,000 years of recorded history, man has come a long way. And even though we're still fighting wars and arguing, little by little we are moving toward what (Pierre De Chardonne?) the great Jesuit Priest used to call the Omega point, becoming one with God. We're moving that way. And here in this urban setting, you are with the Reuther Library, you're part of that, this is really where things are moving and it's a joy to see it, and I'm glad to be a part of it. Now that's straying a long way from -- I'm used to doing that, I stray a lot -- but getting back to the broadcast business and Detroit. Gosh, when you talk about -- back in my old neighborhood there in the University District Community Association, I was the president of that association and very active during the riots. I had a wonderful time. That was my year during the riots in '67, so you can see I got into that rather quickly. I move into the house in '65, of course, immediately joined the community association because I wanted to be in that, and it wasn't but a couple of years later that I was the president of that association and working during that rioting time. That was an

interesting time, driving downtown as I did everyday to go to work at our station downtown right through where that riot had started over there by Claremont and Twelfth. And you'd drive underneath the overpasses and you'd look up because you never knew whether there was going to be somebody standing up there with a gun in their hand during that whole four or five days 'till things cooled down. And, then we got back. Detroit, as they have gotten through everything else through the years, they got through that too. We have a wonderful history in this town, people ought to come over here not only to this library, but just up the street is the main public library and get into the Burton Papers and the other areas of that library and find out about this marvelous town Detroit. Detroit (pronounced in the French way). This is a French community, and people wonder why you have those spokes coming out of downtown, because that's the way French people made towns back in the 1700's; Paris, the perfect example. You've got the hub in the center of Paris, and it's a wheel, and the spokes go out, the main streets of Paris go out, and that's the way you get around. Well, this was the way we were -- a half a wheel, and they formed that and that's what we have. Then the British took over when they won the French and British Wars, the early British who ran America at that time, it

was an English colony, and they put the square on here, the grid, on top of the wheel (laughter) and that's why you have such weird street configurations, especially downtown. And I couldn't figure that out when I first moved here. I couldn't believe how streets would bend around and you were going north and south one minute, and the next minute you're going east and west. Well that's because of the grid over the wheel, and that got me interested in the history of Detroit.