Q: And I'll just talk normally and say good morning, Eleanor. How are you today?

A: I'm fine. How about you?

Q: I can't complain.

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Q: Good morning. This is Bill LeFevre with an interview with Eleanor Josaitis of Focus: HOPE. The date is June 26, 2007, and we are on the campus of Focus: HOPE in Detroit, Michigan. Good morning, Eleanor.

A: Good morning, Bill. How are you today?

Q: Well, I just simply cannot complain.

A: That's good.

Q: We talked in our last meeting about how to start these oral history interviews, and I want to go back to that. What I'd like you to do before we do anything else is give the mission statement of Focus: HOPE.

A: It was written March 8, 1968, and it reads, "Recognizing the dignity and the beauty of every person, we pledge intelligent and practical action to overcome racism, poverty, and injustice, and to build a metropolitan community where all people may live in freedom, harmony, trust, and affection. Black and white, yellow, brown, and

red, from Detroit and its suburbs, of every economic status, national origin, and religious persuasion, we join in this covenant."

Q: Thank you, Eleanor. I'd like you to describe your upbringing and your early family life.

A: Well, I was born and raised in Detroit, went to Saint Theresa High School, and as a teenager was always involved in volunteer activities in school. I loved it. I was the first girl cheerleader at Saint Theresa's High School, and I taught all the boys how to dance because they taught me how to drive a car. So that was kind of fun. But I grew up in a very caring family, and I had three siblings, two sisters and a brother. My father worked at Wayne State University. He was in charge of all the maintenance at Wayne, so when it was vacation time, one of the very first things that we would do when he would get off work -- we would meet him at the bus stop and we would all be in the car, ready to go on vacation. So we spent all of our summers -- we would go camping. One of the things that I always remember -- and I tell my kids this, too -- when I would get bored, my father would say, well, I'll give you 50 cents if you can go catch a squirrel. So I would spend hours trying to catch a squirrel. It kept me occupied. He taught me how to love nature and how to respect nature.

That is something that is still ingrained in me. As I graduated from school, I wanted to be a nurse, but they told me that my personality was such that I would not be a good nurse, so I was denied the opportunity. So I went to work for Michigan Bell Telephone Company. In fact, my entire career was right down the street at the [Yellow Page?] Building that Focus: HOPE now owns. I have had three jobs in my life. The first one was right down the street here, where I worked for an accounting firm. The second one was across the street at the [Yellow Pages, owned by Michigan Bell] Building. The third one was when we started Focus: HOPE. So you never know where your life's journey is going to take you. But I have seen a lot of things. Growing up, I watched my father, who developed Parkinson's Disease. That was very traumatic, just watching him deteriorate. (pause) Lots of lessons. Then, when I got married, my husband and I bought a home in Taylor because he could get a GI loan for no money down. So we moved to Taylor and just became very busy raising five children. Then the only other thing I would do when I would get bored -- he would tell me, well, you had better find something else to do, so I would go and teach catechism St. Alfred's School. I don't know what you are looking for, Bill.

Q: I'm going to ask you another question. I asked this a couple of weeks ago when we met, and you had a rather poignant story. It was, what from your early life predisposed you to become what you became, basically a Civil Rights crusader?

A: Well, I can tell you the exact moment when my life changed, the exact moment -- watching television and watching a program on the Nuremburg Trials. I was appalled at what I was seeing, but the program --

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A: -- was interrupted and they showed the march on Mississippi. I saw policemen riding through giving electric shocks with cattle prodders, turning fire hoses on the marchers, setting dogs loose on them... I mean, I sat there and cried my eyes out. But what I kept asking myself -- what would I have done if I would have lived in Nazi Germany during that time? Would I have become involved? Would I pretend I didn't see anything? And what am I doing about what is going on in my country? It changed me dramatically. I became a very strong supporter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and very passionate about Civil Rights and what was going on, just seeing how people were jkbeing treated so disrespectfully. Now, you know, Father

Cunningham was an English Professor at Sacred Heart Seminary, and he was the weekend pastor at our parish. My husband and I would always attend his services, and then he would come over to the house afterwards, and we would have dinner. We became very, very good friends. Father had a little retreat that he wanted to put together for married couples, and he invited my husband and I to attend, which we did. I made the mistake afterwards of saying, great retreat, Father, but did you ever think about doing A, B, C, D? And he said, will you come and run my retreats for me? So I would organize all of his retreats, and we just did that for a few years. When the riots hit in Detroit, immediately we said we have got to do something more than what we are doing. One of the very first things that we did, we handpicked 50 priests who were known for their ability to speak. We took them away on a three-day retreat, and we brought in the Black Panthers. We brought in the Ku Klux Klan. We brought in every hate group that you could think of and every different opinion that people were having, and we inundated them with all this information. Then they went out for three weeks in a row and circled around and spoke at all of the parishes. Then, what we would do -- we would organize ahead of time, when they were going out -- for example, when they were going

out to my parish, then there would be black people from the city who would come afterwards into my home, and I would invite my white neighbors, and folks from my church, to have a dialog. We did this for three weeks in a row, all over the metropolitan area. As a result of that, people were saying, hey, you know, this sounds like a good idea. What do you want to do next? Well, we held a big event at the University of Detroit Mercy Auditorium and again, invited -- went to all the parishes and said, you know, everybody is welcome to come. Father spoke, and he laid out a plan that he had of how we all had to get together and work together, and it was just from there. People just kept saying, what do you want? What do you want? Where do you want us to go next? What can we do next? It was a very challenging time. As you know, that's when I told my husband I wasn't going to ask anybody to do anything I wasn't willing to do. We sold our home and moved back into the heart of the city, which is six minutes out the back door of Focus: HOPE. But it was challenging because, you know, my mother hired an attorney to take my five children away from me. My father-in-law disowned me. My brother-in-law, who was an engineer, asked me to use my maiden name so I wouldn't embarrass anyone. And it wasn't lack of love. It was, they thought I had absolutely lost it. My

youngest was three. My oldest was 11. And it was challenging. We lost a lot of friends. So did Father. I mean, I watched Father get tossed out of two churches when he went to give a sermon. You know, we were bound and determined we were going to bring people together. Now, I have to tell you, my mother changed, and she became a strong supporter. Last year, 39 years later, my brother-in-law apologized to me for causing me so much pain. But, you know, once people kept saying, what do you want us to do? What do you want us to do? How can we get together? -- we got a carnival ride owner to bring carnival rides to downtown Detroit, and we closed off Woodward Avenue, from Jefferson down to the Kern Block.

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A: -- we brought in carnival rides, and we had huge, great big signs up that said, "Let's Get Together." We had volunteers from everywhere that were coming. We had off-duty policemen that came and volunteered all their services because we were catching all kinds of -- everybody in the Mayor's Office said, if there is another riot, you are going to be held accountable.

Q: So this was Focus: Summer HOPE '68?

A: Yes, Focus: Summer HOPE 1968. That's what our first thing was, to bring the folks together. We had all kinds of entertainers that would come. Bob Seeger came and sang for us. Aretha Franklin was there one time. I mean, they would just come. We did that for five years in a row, and people asked what do you want us to do next, Focus: HOPE? What do you want us to do next? We listened to what the people in this city were talking about when they said we were being ripped off in the supermarkets. That's when we got the volunteers in the city and suburbs and did a very sophisticated survey. We went into the chain stores, the mom and pops, the independent stores -- nobody knew we were coming. We would just go in and take down all the prices. We found out that the folks in the city were paying 30 to 40% more for their groceries, and they were dumping the old meat and the old produce from the suburbs into the city. Our data went on national television, and managers were fired for ripping off the folks. Then people kept saying, what do you want us to do next, Focus: HOPE? It just kept evolving. The next thing, Wayne State University wrote prescriptions for us. I would go in the drugstore and buy a prescription. My black counterpart would come exactly 15 minutes behind me and pay 30% more for it. What do you want us to do next, Focus: HOPE?

Q: I do want to back up a little bit and ask you about life in the Detroit metropolitan area during the 1960s and how things did and did not change under Cavanaugh's administration. There was a perception when he was elected that he had the then-called black vote and that he was going to change race relations. And yet, what happened under his mayoralty was the worst urban crisis in the history of Detroit.

A: You know, I think at that time, I was very comfortable in the city, very comfortable. I used to have a lot of friends. It was in the late '50s when they started to build the freeways that started to divide the cities up. And it went right down the heart of the black community, and they had to spread out all over when they were putting I-75 together, and the Jeffries --

Q: Paradise Valley?

A: Paradise Valley. You saw a lot of people moving and changing, you know. And then because the developers wanted large tracts of land, they were moving out into the suburbs and building a lot of homes. Well, then I found that a lot of folks didn't want to stay in the city. They wanted to go out and get a new home, out in the suburbs somewhere, where they had a bigger back yard and all the rest of it. Cavanaugh, in my judgment, was trying very hard to do the

right thing. He was a good leader, but I think that it just blew up, and he couldn't see it coming. You know, the thing that I hear most of all from my black colleagues, my black friends -- very few black police officers, very few black firemen, still the isolation and not a real warm and welcoming community, still pockets of isolation. But you know, I hear a lot of people say, riot, and then I hear other people say, civil unrest. I'm inclined to think civil unrest, when you can just --

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A: -- You can only take so much and be pushed back and not treated with dignity and respect for just so long, and then you are going to explode. And I think that's what happened.

Q: So there was an underlying rage on one side and a complacency on the other?

A: Correct. That's exactly what I would say. (pause) And you know, that's still the problem today. We don't want to talk about it.

Q: No, no. We certainly don't (laughter). So where were you during the riot of '67?

A: Living in Taylor. I walked the streets the day after the riots with Father Cunningham because that Sunday, Don and I

were down at Sacred Heart Seminary with Father. We were having dinner with him that day, and then we went home that night and, you know, 2:00 in the morning is when everything broke. Father and I went down there and just -- oh, my God -- tanks going up and down the boulevard, airplanes flying over, helicopters flying, buildings on fire. It was something that I had never, ever experienced in my life.

Q: Talk a little bit about how you got from those set of days during the riots, when things must have looked so bleak, to March 8, 1968, when you formulated a plan -- or began to formulate a plan -- for how you were going to attached your perceived ills in the city.

A: All we wanted to do was bring people together. That's all we had in our mind. How can we bring people together? How can we bring people together to talk to one another, to learn from one another, to understand one another? In Taylor, I was being asked to take pistol practice lessons. I was being asked to stock my basement with food because everybody thought there was going to be another riot. Our goal was to bring people together so in 1968, another riot wouldn't take place. That was our goal. That's why we enlisted help from all the priests. That's why we kept bringing people and saying, talk to one another. Let's talk. Let's see what is going on. People asked what do

you want us to do next, Focus: HOPE? Come on. Let's get together. We had walks. We would invite people from the suburbs and from the city, and we would walk together, and then we would meet at the State Fairgrounds and have a music festival at the State Fairgrounds -- anything to bring people together. That was our purpose and our goal. It's still our goal today.

Q: Back to the mission statement -- 40 years later, it is still so simple and elegant, a clear set of goals. Talk about how you came up with that.

A: Well, it was when we were doing the festival downtown that we wrote the mission statement. Father Cunningham, Charlie Grenville who was a friend and a writer, and I, wrote all the words (pause). We put it up on big boards, and we called it the brotherhood pledge. When people would come down to the festival, we would show them the great big posters, and then they would sign the brotherhood pledge. We called it the brotherhood pledge for about three years and then changed it to the brother/sisterhood pledge. People were still signing it. Then we changed it to the mission statement, but it is exactly the same words and exactly the same purpose -- intelligent and practical action. That's what we're all about. It's got to be

intelligent, and it's got to be practical action, but it has got to be action.

Q: Has there ever been any serious attempt to change the mission statement, or is that held as sacrosanct?

A: People have told us, yes, why do you still use the black and white, and yellow, brown, and red, from Detroit and its suburbs? Why do you still have that? Well, come on. I mean, we could change it to Arab American, Chaldean American, you know, black American, but it's all the same -- black and white, yellow, brown, and red. So, no, that's our mission --

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A: -- statement, and anybody who would attempt to change that mission statement would have their hands full.

Q: Run up against a brick wall. As you were talking about black and white, yellow and red, my mind flashed on one of the most identifiable symbols in Detroit, and that is the Focus: HOPE symbol. Talk a little bit about the background for that and what it means to you and has meant to the organization.

A: Again, we were looking for a brand of some sort. I'm trying to remember the gentleman's name. He worked at Wayne State University. He was a professor there, and his

last name starts with F. I'm going to have to look it up -- Finch, I think it was. But anyway, we went to his house because he was known for being creative in things like that. We were sitting there saying we wanted, you know, something -- we had to do something. Father put his hand on the table while they were talking, and he reached over and put his other hand on the table and went just like that -- black and white, working together, coming together. It wasn't clasped because we were a long way from reaching it, but we were reaching towards one another. You're right. I mean, I can be anywhere, and people will recognize the… I can't tell you how many waiters, and bartenders, and all the rest of them, always ask me, can I have that button? And you say, sure. I'd be glad to. It's a brand.

Q: It is, indeed. Focus: Summer HOPE, summer of '68, you have this celebration. I'm sure there's a feeling among your colleagues and among the citizenry of Detroit before you have the celebration. Can you talk a little bit about how that changed feelings in Detroit during the summer, when once again there were fears of riot?

A: Well, I think it was -- when people came together and were having a good time, it just kind of broke down a little bit of barrier. It was just a matter that they could see maybe that there was a little more coming together of people.

You know, that was the same year the Tigers won the game, and everybody was hooting, and hollering, and running up and down the street because the Tigers won. And I think that people began to see, OK, we have got to make some changes here, but we have to do it in a different way. We can't do it in a violent way. And I think that the black community, in my understanding, could see more and more opportunities being given by the white community -- more police, more firemen, more people in power. It just began to lift things up and change.

Q: So there was a collective sense that we have seen the abyss?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: After the riot of '67, was there a shift in Cavanaugh's administration that you saw? There is in some cases a sense that that city administration was forever shattered.

A: Well, I think they were probably shattered, but Judge Joe B. Sullivan has been just a very good friend. He was the Chief of Staff for Cavanaugh, and he would tell us stories about how things changed but how they really did not expect that to happen. But I can't go into a lot of depth in it, Bill, because I really don't know. I wasn't involved so much in the politics at that time.

Q: I do want to go on to the series of events that you did -- the summer events. Before that, I want to ask about some of the early people that were with you and Father Cunningham that kind of brought out Focus: Summer HOPE, that maybe we have not heard about in the past.

A: There is a gentleman by the name of Harry Stark, who is a lawyer. When we started, we were in the church basement down the street. I was going through my purse, and Father was going through his wallet. Harry came into the Rectory, and he said, what are you two doing? We said, we want to put out a newsletter. And he said, well, what are you doing? We said, well, we were trying to get enough money. You know, we had one little machine down in the basement, and we were printing out the newsletter, but we wanted to mail it out. And he said --

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A: -- well, let me see if I can't get you some help. He brought us a check for $25,000. Honestly, we thought we had died and gone to heaven. He did something else for us. He introduced us to a whole new level of people. Then, when we bought this building -- the Federal Building down here -- one of the banks owned it. We wanted to start our food program and put it in that building down there. The

president of the bank at the time is the one that said, we will donate the building to you. He also introduced us to another level of people. Then-Senator Don Riegle was involved right from the very beginning. Senator Carl Levin was on City Council -- very, very supportive of us. There were just so many people that really cared about what we were doing. People from Ford Motor Company, from General Motors -- they just all came forth and said, you know, we will give you a little hand here. What is it you need? And Father was extremely articulate, a very, very charismatic person, and a person who was extremely articulate. I mean, he could sell you the Brooklyn Bridge, and that's what he did to a lot of the executives. I can go back into my file and pull out a whole lot of records of people that came forward. Joe B. Sullivan was wonderful. A gentleman by the name of Peter Tealy, who really helped us, Senator Phil Hart, Senator Bob Griffin -- I mean, you know, just these people that have stayed with us for so long… Governor Jim Blanchard, and Governor John Engler and Jennifer Granholm have been very supportive. And, you know, one of the things that I'm very grateful for is that we have the support of both the Democrats and the Republicans. I don't care who you are. If you are Democrat, Republican, Independent, we work with all of

them. It has taken us a long time, but we have built that trust, and that's important. It takes a while to build trust.

Q: You talked a bit about how articulate Father Cunningham was. That leads me to, really, my next question, which is, what was it about the relationship between the two of you that made it such a useful and productive relationship?

A: Father was a master communicator, and I was an organizer. He could articulate it, he could sell it to anybody, but then I could make it happen. That was the chemistry between the two of us. When we were fighting for all of our programs, and so forth, Father could articulate what it was that we needed to do. Charlie Grenville, who was our writer and head of development, could translate it and put it all on paper, and then I could get all the doors open, and we could go in and just do it. But I can't tell you how many times I would get a call back from Washington -- we had just met with the Senators, and so forth -- and they would say to me, OK, Eleanor, translate what Father just said to me (laughter) because he was just so dynamic in his ability. I can tell you when things changed is when he came to me one day and said, Eleanor, I am going to be the good cop, and you are going to be the bad cop, which was exactly the opposite of my personality, exactly the

opposite. When my colleagues didn't invite me out to lunch or out to their parties anymore, I came to him. My heart was broken. He stuck out his hand, and he said, congratulations. You finally made it. So I was the one that had to stand by the clock and say, you were supposed to be here at 6:30. Where were you? Or, why are you wearing the baggy pants? Come on. You know, whatever it was -- just the bad cop. But it was good chemistry between the two of us, and the chemistry went right up through the very end.

Q: You may have already answered this, but it brings up a question in my mind. Is there a specific date or event at which it dawned on the two of you that you were a professional team, basically for life, and that you were most effect --

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Q: -- tive together, working?

A: (pause) I think fighting for five years to get the -- no, I'm going to go back to the very beginning -- when we were doing the festivals, and all of the rest of it, there was a gentleman by the name of Dario Bonucchi who was an architect, and he knew all the musicians, and he brought all the musicians to join us. He is the one that got Bob

Seeger and all the rest of them to come on down to the festivals. Dario, and Father, and myself, we would be talking about it and getting all of the people and the volunteers -- Dario could organize it, Father could articulate it, but nobody could remember anybody's names. So I was the person that could remember everybody's names. It started from there, and you just saw the little different nooks and crannies that we both had. I think we knew right from the very beginning that we were doing the right thing. The lawsuit was a challenging time for us. There was a total of 13 years that we spend suing a major corporation -- very, very lonely time. Everybody that loved us left us, said we don't want any part of you, Focus: HOPE. You know, it really builds relationships. When we were fighting so hard for the food program, for mothers and children, fighting hard for the programs for seniors -- yes, we are doing the right thing. But Father and I would fight constantly. We would argue about everything. We would close the door. We would argue about something, and, by God, you had better have a passion, you know, if you are just coming in here to be a wimp about it, forget it. So it would be argue, and fight, and we would go out, and shake hands, and go on our way. He would win some, and I would win some. But there was never a moment

when we didn't respect one another. It was that maybe you wanted the green floor, Father, and I wanted the other floor -- you know, just simple little things like that -- or how to approach something.

Q: I want you to talk a little bit about how you went from the summer programs to the survey, and then talk a little bit about the survey itself -- pricing, product quality, and service -- and what came out of that.

A: We did it because the folks in the city were telling us that they were being ripped off in the city, and we could see it ourselves. We would go around and check out the things, and we said, we have got to do a very sophisticated survey. And it was sophisticated. This wasn't just a mom and pop thing. We got professional people to help us design this survey and what we needed to do. Then, when we got the volunteers, we trained them so that when they went into the stores, everybody was singing off the same page. We weren't going up and down. I think that was a very good thing that we did because the people in the city said, Focus: HOPE, they are really about some serious business here. People in the suburbs were saying, we didn't know this was happening, and then they said, come on. What can we help you with?

Q: So there was one thing to put together a celebration every summer, and a different thing to put out [a product?].

A: Right, to put out the product, and the first product was, what are the folks in the city saying? You know, why is there so much anger? Well, if you were paying 30 to 40% more for your groceries, and you knew it, wouldn't you be a little ticked off? And if you were seeing that the old meat and the old produce was coming from the suburbs and being dumped in your backyard, wouldn't you be a little uptight about it? So, that was the first thing that we took on. We had to build the trust of the community, and they saw us as being about serious business. From there, it just kept evolving.

Q: You must have had perceptions going in and then been faced by the truth when the survey came out. Was there something that really surprised you about the survey?

A: The different --

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A: -- yes, what really surprised me, was the difference in the amount of money people in the city were paying for the same product. Here is one -- there was one store that I went into. There wasn't a price marked anywhere, but a lot of seniors living on Social Security shopped there. The man

said to the woman who was trying to figure out her bill, 'Honey, don't worry about it. Bring me your check at the end of the month.' She went in there on December 17. When she got her bill, the first item was $12.17. She went back two days later, bought a quart of milk -- $12.19, just taking the date and folding it right in. You know, I am thinking, what are we doing to seniors and poor people? This is not acceptable. We still have got a problem in the city right now. You see all the stores are closing up, and Farmer Jack is bailing out, and there are no more Farmer Jacks anywhere in the city. There are no big grocery stores.

Q: Which leads to another interesting question, and that is, when the survey came out, who most opposed what had been found, and which corporations actually embraced what you had brought to the light?

A: There was a grocery store chain, Chatham's Grocery Store. I'm sorry, I have to go back in the records and get some of the names, but the Chaldean community was very uptight with us for publishing this. Ed Deeb, Michael George came over and challenged us. And at that time, Farmer Jack's -- the owner -- also challenged us. But there were more stores around then than there are now. But then when we showed them the data and showed them what our experience was and

just laid it on the table -- this is it, folks - -they changed. They understood. They backed off and became strong supporters. Ed Deeb and Mike George are two of our best buddies right now. They understood what we were trying to do, and it wasn't that we were doing it to be disrespectful to someone. We were doing it because it was a problem that needed to be solved, and they understood that.

Q: So you have done this pricing survey. You have brought out the results. There has been some community backlash, and there has also been some community praise. Where did you go from there?

A: Well, we went to the prescriptions, and then from the prescriptions, everybody was saying that hunger was a reality, and malnutrition was a reality. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had a surplus food program, where they would give you the surplus food, and you could give it out. But they were bringing it in on railroad trains, out into the suburbs, and nobody in the city wanted to take advantage of it. They asked the Salvation Army if they wanted to do it, and they didn't want to be bothered with it, and we said, why don't we do it? So we went down to City Council and asked if we couldn't be the people that would oversee that program for the surplus commodities.

And finally they voted and said, yes, you can. So we had a little building over on the East Side, and we would move all the food in there. But it was all surplus food. And what we wanted -- we kept saying, let's design the program. Let's design it for a pregnant woman, a mother up to one year after she gave birth, all children up to age six because if the family is still in need, the little one could get the school lunch or the school breakfast program. Now, our goal was that we wanted to change the regulations, and we wanted to have a nutritionist help us put the food package together so that it wasn't just always surplus food. We wanted the nutritionist to say you need A, B, C, D in the food program. We fought a long time for that, but we finally got the regulations changed. It was called the Commodities Supplemental Food Program, Mothers/Children. And then a senior citizen that told me off -- then we fought for five years to get seniors onto our food program and get the legislation --

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A: -- the legislation changed again. And we did that. But it took us five years, and I met a lot of good people along that fight, I'll tell you. I'll forever be grateful to Senator Philip Hart, and (pause) Peter Tealy and the Don

Riegle's of the world, and so many who said, how can we help you with this?

Q: You have made a leap now from the survey to trying to provide food for people within the City of Detroit and its environs.

A: Right.

Q: That's a big leap for an organization, and a lot of organizations, when they make leaps like that -- or the leap to start MTI, for example, later on -- they often fail as a result. What is one of the reasons, or a couple of the reasons, that Focus: HOPE was able to make those leaps, not once or twice, but time and time again?

A: (pause) Well, I think the motivation that pushed us along was faith, number one, and it just seemed to be intelligent. It seemed practical. I mean, when we sued the company that was moving out of town, we lost all of our friends -- came to us and said, you are making a serious mistake by filing a lawsuit against a corporation. We said, the reason for moving is racially motivated. We were there a year, and the judge said, no, that women are experiencing sexism as well as racism. You are going to have to have two suits. We had two federal judges, two sets of attorneys, two costly lawsuits, and everybody -- the foundations that loved us, left us. The individuals,

people -- because they were all saying, 'Focus: HOPE, you are going down the wrong path.' But for us, the path was intelligent and practical because, yes, hunger is a reality, but how do you see that we build a world where everybody has opportunities in their life? We proved that we were right, and we stayed in federal court a long time. Judge Feikens was a wonderful, wonderful person, and I sat in that courtroom for months and months (laughter). I would always take a box of doughnuts with us, and we would be sitting in the courtroom, and when everybody would break -- both sides -- I would go out, and I would get the big box of doughnuts. So they would come from that side and this side and eat the doughnuts with me. But, you know, we did it. Afterwards, everybody could see that we were serious, very serious about action, and everybody was back shaking our hands -- way to go. Congratulations. The company is one of our strongest supporters today. They bring hundreds of volunteers through here on a regular basis.

Q: This brings yet another angle to Focus: HOPE too because --

A: Yes, but let me tell about one of the difficult times right then. The building that you are sitting in right now was firebombed during the heart of that lawsuit. We had no money. We sat for months and months with plastic garbage

bags above our head, and every time it would rain, the telephones would go out, and the computers would go out, but we did it. So, you know, I mean, you talk about some of life's challenges, but if you have got that fire in your belly and you know that you are doing the right thing, you just keep hanging onto it. I'm sorry I interrupted.

Q: No (laughter). It's important to hear your voice today. You go from the survey to the food program. You end up in a landmark lawsuit. At some point in time, Focus: HOPE becomes something else as well, and that is a political reality in the city, and in the state, and ultimately nationally. Can you talk a little bit about Focus: HOPE in the political arena early on, and what you learned as you went along?

A: (pause) I think when we were fighting for the legislative change in the food program -- the Department of Agriculture -- it was Senator Hart and Senator Griffin that we went to. We went to Senator Hart first -- first of all, the Democrats. I didn't know squat about politics --

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A: And it was Joe B. Sullivan, who lived across the street from me, who was Cavanaugh's Chief of Staff, who really let me ask all the questions I would want to. I would go over

there at night and tell him what we were doing, and he would say, you are on the right path, El. You are doing it. He was the one that said, you have got to get Senator Griffin. So we called Senator Griffin, and Griffin sent out his chief person to help him understand what we were doing. We were still in the basement of the Rectory. He said, well, what are you trying to do? I mean, what do you folks know about running a food program, for crying out loud? And we said, we don't know anything about it, but it needs to be done, and we want to do it. Well, he was a little reluctant to help us, and then all of a sudden he could see our passions, so he said, I'm with you. He went on to be George Bush's Press Secretary. And next, he went to be the Ambassador to Canada. But here's my point about Peter and what he taught. I could call him any time I wanted to, and I would say, Peter, you know, I am thinking about doing this, or this, or whatever I am doing, and he would always say, yes. Yes, yes. Or, he would say, oh, no. And when I got the oh, no, it was really -- Jesus, no. But when I got it, he would say, no, El, and then he would tell me why. But he never made me feel like I was an idiot. He was the one that coached me all the way along, and it was the same with Senator Phil Hart. I'll never forget a telephone call that I got down in my little room

at the basement, 6:00 at night. Eleanor, it's Phil. I just want to know how it went today. Did you get a hold of blah, blah, blah? I mean, they understood what we were doing, and they just wanted to help us. They would say, you need to go see so-and-so, and we would go and do that. Good. Here, try this person over here. It's trust.

Q: I have a personal observation from being -- I didn't grow up in Detroit, but it seems to me Detroit is not so much a city as a very large village, and that the access in Detroit, if you want it, tends to be relatively easy. Would you agree or disagree with that? And talk about politics in Detroit a bit.

A: (pause) I think that it can be very difficult. I think City Council can be very difficult at times. To get through some of the bureaucracy can just drive you crazy, but I do think there's a lot of people of good will that are trying very hard to change the city. I have certainly seen a lot of changes in the Mayor since the last election. (pause) I just want to be politically correct (laughter) about the city because it's not always easy to deal with, and there are just some folks that are negative. But, you know, in a way it is a small town, and you have always got a friend or two that knows a friend or two, or knows somebody. So I don't want to offend anybody. I just want

to work with everybody. So you tell me what you need for me to do in order for me to win what I'm going after, and I will do it. I have just had a lot of very good friends along the way that have helped.

Q: We have been going for about an hour now, so I don't know if you have tired yourself out yet.

A: Why, you have got one more?

Q: I have got one more hour? (laughter)

A: No.

Q: I have got one more question?

A: Yes.

Q: I do want to go back, then, to your early days because you told me a story last time we talked that was about the riots of '43, and it was a very poignant story about an early event that really affected you.

A: Really affected me. My grandmother lived just a few blocks away from Oakman Boulevard here, over off of Hamilton. I would visit her all the time, and we would go over to Belle Isle regularly.

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A: And we were over on Belle Isle the day that they had the disruption on Belle Isle, and the rioting, and everything broke loose -- blacks and whites fighting. We came back to

my grandma's house, and the neighbors were just all flocking over and talking about it. But what I heard -- I kept hearing the word Nigger, which I had never heard before. The Niggers are coming to get us. The Niggers are going to set Detroit on fire, and the Niggers this. And I mean, it just -- I never heard it. It was not part of my growing up experience, and that's the first time, and it really stuck in my mind. This is not acceptable. I mean, I'm a little kid listening to this. But it was a defining moment in my life, very defining.

Q: Well, thank you for that. I think we'll stop for today, and we have got another meeting -- I don't know if it's next week or the week after, but we are going to go a little forward with Focus: HOPE and the history of Focus: HOPE and yourself at that time. So, once again, thank you, Eleanor.

A: (laughter) You're welcome.

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