

Josaitis OH 2

Q: OK. We'll just do a normal check of the recording level and see how everything is.

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Q: So we'll start. It is Tuesday, July 10, 2007. We are on the campus of Focus: HOPE, and this is an interview with Eleanor Josaitis. Good morning, Eleanor.

A: Good morning.

Q: How are you this morning?

A: I'm just great. How about you, Bill?

Q: Well, I can't complain. I never was able to.

A: Nobody wants to hear it, anyway.

(laughter)

Q: First of all, let's back up a bit. We talked last time about the '60s and the start of the food program, and we talked a little bit about the Triple A case. We can always edit that out -- the name of the company -- at the end. We're going to kind of continue along in the 1970s today, but I have a first question for you today. What I'd like you to do is talk a bit about some of the people that have kind of formed Focus: HOPE and pushed Focus: HOPE along over the years, some of the colleagues here, some of the

candidates that you remember most, and the particular reasons that you remember them.

A: You know, Father and I were very blessed to have a group of people that were at Focus: HOPE right from the beginning that really understood what we were about. Charles Grenville was just a remarkable writer. He was a former priest who left the priesthood. He called me one day and said, El, I have got to do something meaningful with my life. Father and I invited him to come on down. He was just brilliant. He could take Father's vision, and Father could articulate it all, and Charlie could transcribe, and he would write it all down and get those proposals out there. He was just masterful. Thom Armstead was a young man who worked at Chrysler Corporation that, when Father Cunningham started the Church of the Madonna down the street, he wanted to start a program for youth, like basketball, and things like that. He got Thom Armstead to come on down and start the program, and then as the programs around here just kept going, Thom joined us, and he was with us through the food programs. He was the one that started the Machinist Training Institute with us -- just a fine, fine gentleman, and a person that you will enjoy talking with because he has got a history in his mind like you wouldn't... I mean, he can just rattle it off.

Thom is legally blind and has retired from Focus: HOPE, I think it was maybe three years now, but is still -- just comes regularly. Ken Kudek -- Ken was a young graduate. He was in school. In fact, he was studying to get his Ph.D. When Chrysler Plant bought the plant and started to remove people from the neighborhood, and everybody was afraid that they weren't going to get a fair price, Ken took that responsibility on, and he handled all of that to make sure that all the people were provided with adequate income, and the rest of it. And then he joined us. Ken's brain works 100 miles an hour, and he is an anthropologist, so he has to go back to the beginning of time every time he talks to you, and tell you all the history of it. He is just brilliant, and he had done a remarkable job for Focus: HOPE. Edna Jackson -- Edna has been with us for many, many years now, and she ran our food program for a long time. She was the head of the volunteer department. She is a social worker. She is still with us, just a woman of faith and strong beliefs who wants to make a difference in this world. Linda Hanks -- Linda Hanks came to us when we had one computer, and Linda Hanks will tell you she was on our food program. She wanted to make a difference. She came to us, and she has just got tremendous skills, went --

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A: -- all the way, started our program, and started the information technology training program, and is running that, and works with Wayne State University on our new programs. We're very blessed to have her. She is really a remarkable person. But you know, I look back on all of those people, and then I look back on -- I had something happen the other day. When we were fighting so hard for all of our programs, and we would always go to Washington, we just formed a lot of relationships. Darryl Gorman, who is the Chief Corporate Counsel for the Mayor of Washington, helped us write the language for a food program and change it from a surplus to a supplemental program. He still is in contact with us every day. I mean, he follows what we are doing. No matter when we call him, he is right there to help us. He went to work at the National Science Foundation, so he helped us develop the Center for Advanced Technologies. Chuck Cutola worked for Senator Carl Levin when we were developing the Center for Advanced Technology, and he has just remained... He has left Carl Levin. He now is a professor at a university in New York, but he constantly says what can I do to help you? How are you? In fact, he just sent me a very significant check the other day, saying, thinking about you and all the good work that

Focus: HOPE is doing. I mean, those are the things that you just hold in your heart. The entire Michigan Delegation has been so supportive of us, and I can't even begin to say. Carl Levin, and Sandy Levin... Don Riegle was very helpful, and all of these people understood what it was we were trying to put together and really wanted to help us, and we are very grateful for that. And, you know, I'm grateful that Wayne State wanted to archive -- or the Walter Reuther Library -- wanted to archive some of our history. There is a very rich history, and I can tell you, I am blessed with the people that are here every day that come because they really appreciate what the organization is about, and share their talents. They come all the time and share their talents, but they wouldn't be here if they didn't believe in what we were doing.

Q: What about some of the graduates of the programs over the years? Are there some that stand out particularly to you?

A: Well, there is one woman that came to us from a bitter divorce. Denice is her name. She was on our food program, and more than anything she wanted off the food program. She learned about our programs, and she put her little one down at the Children's Center, or our childcare center, and went through our Machinist Training Program and went through the engineering program. She is now managing a

plant with 119 people in it. She comes back and talks about what her salary is, and everybody's eyes just hit the floor. She talks about buying a new house, and buying a new car, and she encourages all those that are behind her to say, you know, you can do it, too, so hang in there. Donald Hutchinson -- same thing -- went to Japan. He was at General Motors, and they sent him over to Japan. He was there for two years -- just brilliant. What I like about them is, they come back, and they tell stories, and they say how much they appreciate what the organization has done for them. And I get that every single day. That just warms your heart. So there are a lot of good stories about the graduates.

Q: I did want to go back to something you mentioned a couple of minutes ago and explore it a bit further. Could you talk about the relationship between Madonna and Focus: HOPE over the years, and some of the high points, and maybe some of the low points as well?

A: Well, I don't think that there were any high or low points with Madonna Church. Father took that, and the parishioners -- they were going to close the parish -- the Archdiocese was -- and Father just --

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A: -- he was not going to let that happen. He was so adamant about that, and so outspoken. He renovated the church, and he would do anything to pull all the people in the community together. The parishioners just kept growing, and growing, and growing. I have been a member of that parish for 38 years, so I can certainly attest to how it has grown through the years. They understood -- he had a nun, Sister Cecilia, who worked for him. She really understood what Father was trying to do with Focus: HOPE, so she handled all of the details of Madonna, and I would handle all the details of Focus: HOPE. Father was going back and forth, but there was never any contention. We never got any money from Madonna. We never got any money from the Archdiocese because we were just an independent organization that was developing, but we certainly had a lot of volunteers that came and appreciated what it was we were doing. So there was no animosity. Sister Cecilia, she kept that boat afloat, and I kept this one afloat. Father was magnificent. He was just a remarkable character.

Q: How was the relationship with the Archdiocese over the years?

A: It grew. At first, they were very distant. They didn't want any part of what we were doing. In fact, they were

really upset with Father when he hand-selected 50 priests and took them away for a weekend, but he did it. After that, the Diocese could see how Focus: HOPE was growing, and all of a sudden they became kind of proud of this Father Cunningham. I can remember when the first Archbishop came to one of our walks. That was history in the making. And then I can also tell you that one of the first times, when the Cardinal was invited to give a talk at the DAC, or DEC -- Detroit Economic Club -- Father and I attended it. The Cardinal mentioned Focus: HOPE in his speech, and the first time he also included my name. Father just looked at me and said, I guess we've made it, [El]. We finally made it. But up until that point, it was nothing, just by the side. We never have gotten a nickel from the Archdiocese, although many of the parishes support us on a regular basis, individual priests and their churches do. But the Archdiocese -- no.

Q: Somewhat Providential, and I use that term in a calculated way because I look back at, once again, the history of Focus: HOPE, and it seems that it has been very Providential over time, the relationships that the organization has had with individuals that seem to come up -- like a Linda Hanks. Just when you need to plug in or find some expertise, it shows itself. Could you talk a

little bit about that and how -- some of the luck of Focus: HOPE over the years?

A: Well, you want to call it luck. I call it faith, and I see that people... I'm a firm believer that (pause) the Good Lord has got a sense of humor, and when you need Him, He is going to come for us. I have just seen so many people come forth just at a time that we need them desperately. I have seen it over and over through the years. Other people would call it many different things. To me, it's just a faith and a belief.

Q: Could you expand on a couple of those times when the right person came at the right time?

A: Peter Tealey, Vice-President George Bush's Press Secretary, came to us early, early on when we were struggling with some things in Washington. Peter said, I will help you. Tell me, what do you need? Peter just was a remarkable man that helped us get all the way through all the Washington thing --

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A: He taught us how to manipulate the system. Manipulate is probably a wrong word -- how to work with the system. He has just become a remarkable man and was extremely helpful to us. He became the Ambassador to Canada and still

remained. He now has got a big firm in Washington, DC, but he is just somebody that really appreciated it. And I'll tell you, the other one is Senator Philip Hart, who was a remarkable person and cared very much about what we were doing. He certainly taught me a lot about (pause) -- taught me how to work with both the Democrats and the Republicans and Independents. I can tell you when we started, I didn't know anything about politics, but he nurtured me and guided me. Joe B. Sullivan, who has since passed -- Judge Joe B. Sullivan and Mary Sullivan... Mary Sullivan was the person that started our childcare center for us. She had a vision, and when we bought the building, the vision was on a napkin between Mary Sullivan and her son-in-law, Tom Lewand, and Father Cunningham. They sat there and drew their plans and what they wanted. Mary was just a remarkable woman, very, very caring and a tremendous asset to Focus: HOPE. I still see her on a regular basis. She might be somebody you want to interview, too. A good person.

Q: I think I found a new job for myself.

A: Yes, with all these good people?

Q: Interviewing all the people that you mention. When we last talked, we had gone through the food supplement program, and we talked about the lawsuit. We are coming up to a

junction here. Focus: HOPE makes a very big leap around 1981 in starting the Machinist Training Institute. Could you talk a bit about how you decided that you needed to move into that? And then we're going to talk about the Training Institute itself.

A: (pause) Excello Corporation announced that they were going to close their building, and we went over there to look at it because we thought maybe we were going to expand our food program. We had a food program over on the East Side. We were warehousing the food, and we were getting truckloads of food in, and we needed more space. So we went over there to look at it for that purpose. Then, as Father was going through the building, he was saying, you know, maybe we ought to be doing some training. So that's when he took the attorneys from the lawsuit, and he said, tell us what the demands of the 21st century are because our passion has always been to get people off of the food program and into the financial mainstream. That was the bottom line. The attorneys -- they did their homework well. We really researched everything and found that there was going to be a skill shortage. Father said, well, why don't we train people if there is a skill shortage? I mean, what do we know? But let's try it. That was his mindset constantly. His mindset was, he could

see it, he could envision it, and he was a risk taker. When people would call him, they would say he is a futurist, or you can see this. He said, no, I can't see around a curve, and I don't know what's coming, but I always say you are never afraid to take a risk. Now, remember that Father grew up in a family that was -- they were economic developers. His father was a realtor who built homes and everything, so Father grew up knowing and understanding about buildings and that kind of thing. So that was not a problem for him to look at that Excello Corporation. He could -- well, we can fix this. Where a lot of people would walk in and just be panic-stricken, he was just exactly the opposite. With the help of a lot of people --

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A: -- In 1982, Focus: HOPE took ownership of the 10 acre complex formerly known as the Excello Machine Tool Division. We acquired the property through a donation from the Excello Foundation. There were several structures on the property, and we had to figure out how we were going to pay for the light bill, so it was decided that we needed to get some tenants in to rent some space, and to help share some of the expenses, and also to bring some much needed jobs into this community. James McDonald, the former president of General Motors, and

Lloyd Reuss, who was then the General Manager of GM's Buick Div. was instrumental in helping us to bring manufacturing contracts and jobs to what is known now as the Focus: HOPE Industrial Mall. Our first tenant was a company called Cycle-Tec a subsidiary of the F. Joseph Lamb Co. They were awarded a contract to remanufacture General Motors' 350 Transmissions, this partnership brought over 200 new jobs. Shortly after the transmission project began, Focus: HOPE announced the opening of the Machinist Training Program. Thomas Armstead, manager of the Focus:HOPE Food Program was selected to head up the new project. He was joined by Bill Fitzpatrick, a former machine shop owner, and some retired machinists from the Excello Corporation. Many people were skeptical, after all, we were known as a feeding program, and many people asked the question, "What do you know about training skilled machinist?" Prior to the development of the program, we interviewed hundreds of machine tool companies and we asked them, "What qualities are you looking for in an entry level employee?" And the response was: a strong work ethic, basic machine tool skills, good math aptitude, and drug-free. During our interviews, we noticed they were all concerned about some of the same issues. Many of them never hired a minority or a woman. Also during that period, there was a huge shortage of machinists and employers were reluctant to train because they

invested a lot of money in training, and a competitor would come along and offer them 50 cents more an hour and they were out the door. So we knew we had a guaranteed market, and that's what we were looking for. We were confident that they would hire our graduates because they sat at the table and told us what they were looking for... It has been a tremendous journey.

Alternate ending (depending on how script is used): This year, Focus: Hope's Machinist Training Institute celebrated its 25th anniversary. It is a national model and has become one of the most successful programs of its kind in the country.

Q: How did you attract people to teach in the Institute, and could you talk about some of the early machinists who came out and taught for you?

A: I will tell you, one name was Wilfred Little. Wilfred Little was Malcolm X's brother, and Wilfred Little was an executive at -- at that time it was -- Michigan Bell. Wilfred and I were at a meeting one day, and we were talking, and I mentioned that we were starting this new program. He said, Eleanor, I would love to come and help you. He said, I always wanted to be a machinist, but because I was black I never could get into any of the programs. He said, I want to come. He left Michigan Bell

and came and worked here at Focus: HOPE. He was remarkable, and he brought other people with him.

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A: -- most of them were African-American and believed in what we were doing and wanted to make a difference, and they were grateful that we were doing it. I will never forget Wilford. We used to talk regularly, and we would always talk about race, and how things are going, and are we headed in the right direction, and so forth. When the students, you know, would get kind of -- oh, this is a lot of hard work, or something, he would just sit them down, and he would say, let me tell you what hard work is. He would take them through some of the history, and he would take them through -- you know, he said, I always wanted to do this. How would you like it if you never could do this because you were black? And, you know, he just made a significant difference on their journey, if you will. Just good people. One of the other things that we did when we have had graduations is, we would invite all of the students to bring their parents, and so forth, and their partners. You could just see a sense of pride that this young person was graduating, and had a skill, and was going out the door with a job. We would invite all of the

different business owners to come, too, so it was a big event. One of the things that I remember is that so many of the young people that were graduating had never owned a suit, and it was just something, the way they grew up. Poverty was real. We would always ask the business people to donate suits, and we would get them all the time. We formed a little boutique over there, and the sense of pride, watching those young people go out the door knowing that they were somebody... I can tell you a story about -- you know, they all wear uniforms. Something that has always been extremely important to us is to wear a uniform because it is a sense of pride. When I drive or go home -- I don't live that far from here -- I saw a young man standing on the bus stop with his uniform on. I pulled over, and I said, hey, can I give you a ride? Yeah, Miss J, I would really love it. He got in the car, and I said, now, you are standing at the bus stop with your uniform on. How come? And he said, you know, I used to go into the bank, and I was nothing but a [black hood] He said, now when I go in there they will say, oh, you are studying to be a machinist? You are going to be an engineer? He said, it changes immediately, but it's because they had the uniform with the Focus: HOPE logo on it. People were

beginning to recognize that our programs were very sincere and that we were making a difference.

Q: How wonderful. I have a favorite photo from when we did the exhibit for Focus: HOPE in 2001, and it is of Thom moving equipment into the empty Excello Building.

A: Exactly.

Q: Could you talk a bit about that, and how it felt to take control of the building and to move some of the equipment in?

A: To move it in -- and, you know, we had to go get it. We went to the Defense Department to get the equipment. We went and got all the surplus equipment that we possibly could get. To have the trucks pull up in front and watch Thom and the rest of them pushing that equipment in there -- I mean, it was like the dream is coming true, and let's just keep pushing ahead. But Armstead, he was a trooper. Believe me, he was a trooper. That is a great picture. I hope you are going to interview Tom because he has got a lot to tell you.

Q: Now, at the same time, you start the Machinist Training Institute, and there is a decision to start manufacturing on the campus, as well. How did you come about that?

A: Well, just before we started the manufacturing, we made a serious mistake with the Machinist Training Institute, and

it was the number of young men and women who could not pass tenth grade math. But we lowered the standards one time, and, oh, my God, did we blow it and did we learn a lesson. Don't ever, ever, lower the standards. When we started the program, we went to all of the people who were going to hire them and said, how --

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A: -- do you want people trained, and what do you want? And they all said, a work ethic, work skills, drug free. Now, we took a lot of criticism because we did drug testing, and people said, you are a nonprofit organization. Why are you so hard on people? Well, because we wanted to see that they would get a job when they got out of there, so we didn't want to pat anybody on the shoulder. But when we lowered the standards, we found out that they couldn't make it then, so we started another program. We started Fast Track. Its purpose was to upgrade the math skills, and it has been very successful. We can raise the math level two years in six weeks time. You know what we did? (pause) We hired a former Command Sergeant Major -- his name was Thomas Murphy -- because you couldn't run a game on Murphy. That was our whole purpose, was to see that you could -- what good did it do us if we would pat somebody on the

shoulder and say, I understand the bus didn't come, the dog bit the cat -- whatever the excuse was, and nobody wants to hire them? So we wanted to change, and had to change, the whole mentality of people. Fast Track has been very successful. So we got Fast Track up and running, and then here comes the time when all welfare reform is coming into play. People have to get a job, and they have got four weeks on welfare, and then out the door they go. We were finding so many people that were coming in, trying to get into our program, who couldn't pass eighth grade math, eighth grade reading, so we started another program called First Step, where we could raise the level even higher and get them in there. And it worked. I could tell you a story about one woman. She was graduating from our Information Technology Program. We established that much later. She said, can I tell you my story? She was trying to get her composure. She said, I had come in here with my high school diploma, and she said, I have been out of the workforce for five years. She said, Eleanor, I tested at fourth grade reading, and she said, I was absolutely devastated. The recruiter said, no, you have got to try harder. She said, I had my family, my neighbors, my church group helping me. I came back -- five points off. No, you have got to try harder. She said, I finally did. I went

through First Step, Fast Track, all the way through the programs. She started to cry. She said, I just want to thank you because you didn't lower the standards. You gave me an opportunity, you gave me encouragement, and now when I am going out the door, I know I am the one that did it. That's what we wanted more than anything. Here is the opportunity. Grab hold if it. We will give you all the encouragement we possibly can, but you have got to want to do it. And it has been successful. Now, that's all up and running. And then the Ford Industrial Engine Plant announces its closing, and it was right down the street. We thought, OK. Let's go take a look at it. Father and I walked through it. Honest to God, it was the ugliest building you ever saw. We carried umbrellas because the pigeons were flying, and the roof was leaking, and everything else -- just an ugly, ugly building. But we went off, and we had an off-site. Thom Armstead was one of them. Ken Kudek was one, plus Father and myself. We said, why don't we go even further into the future and create a renaissance engineer? Why don't we create somebody that industry doesn't expect and will exceed industry's expectation? And we had many, many long conversations about it. We bought the building. We paid -- I think it was -- \$750,000 for it. But then we started on the journey

of convincing people that we really might know what we wanted to do, and we brought universities together. We brought the five universities to begin with, which is University of Michigan, Wayne State, U of D Mercy, Lawrence Technological University, and Lehigh. Father would explain to them what his vision was for the future. You know, at first everybody was just -- I think you are flying off the wall, but then they began to see that he was very serious.

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A: So we started to try to get a memorandum of understanding signed by the Secretaries of Education, Labor, Commerce, and Defense, all saying, you know, Focus: HOPE, you are on target. It took us -- oh, I guess it was about -- eight years before we got the memorandum signed. It took us that long to redevelop all the buildings and get the money. But the Defense Department, again, helped us with equipment coming in there. The National Science Foundation became a partner, and we got a lot of money to start the education component from the Science Foundation, and that was very good. So it's been a journey, but one very worthwhile.

Q: Let's go back to that leap again, to the Machinist Training Institute. You have already got a program in place -- your food supplement program -- and sometimes organizations that

make giant shifts like that lose sight of their original mission. Could you talk about what happened when Focus: HOPE did that shift? What happened to the food program, how Focus: HOPE may have succeeded but also might have struggled with its change in mission?

A: No, we didn't struggle with it because our mission statement is something that is extremely important to us, and we have never, ever lost sight of what our mission statement is. The food program is as important to us as the engineering program. How are you going to eliminate racism? How are you going to treat people with dignity and respect? How do you eliminate poverty? You have to be intelligent, you have to be practical, and we saw that what we were doing was very intelligent and very practical. It was practical to see that people had food, for God's sake. I mean, that's reality. And it's practical to see that people have opportunities. If you are going to break a racial barrier, come on. Try something different, but don't lose sight of what your mission is. You know -- March 8, 1968, and it's still our mission today. It hangs on all the walls. You can turn around and look at it right there. That's why we have never... Money? Sure, money has always been a challenge, and a lot of people thought we were flying off the wall most of the time, but, again,

Father had that ability to communicate. Charlie Grenville had that ability to transcribe and write what Father was talking about, and then I could get the doors open. So it was a good event. But, you know, people would doubt first of all. Then, when they would come, and they would see it, they would say, you know, you are on target. But I can remember my husband saying one time to a group of people, I hope to heck one of you knows what to do because I guarantee that Eleanor doesn't know anything about (laughter) machining or manufacturing (laughter). But that's all right.

Q: The food supplement program is really what you have been at for in some ways the longest, alleviating poverty and hunger in the City of Detroit for so many years now. Can you talk a bit about the changes you have seen in hunger in Detroit in all those years, and also how you keep the faith?

A: (pause) You know, the changes I see as far as hunger is concerned -- the program that we started was for pregnant women, and children up to age six because if the family was still in need, the little one could get the school lunch or the school breakfast program. And then it was that senior citizen that really nailed me to the wall. I'll be grateful to her forever because when she called, she asked

about the program, and I just went bragging and bragging about the program. That is when she screamed at me and said, I am 72-years-old, and you want me to get pregnant before you will help me. The thing that I have seen through the years is that there are more and more seniors that are coming on the food program. They are living on less than \$500 a month. I am seeing more seniors that were the maids, the cooks, the housekeepers --

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A: -- so they were always paid under the table. Nobody ever paid Social Security for them. I am seeing more seniors that their husbands have passed away, and they may be living on half of his Social Security. So the changes that I have seen in the program is, then when they have -- they developed a program called WIC, and they designed it for women, infants, and children. The WIC Program gives you coupons, and you go to the store and buy your food. Well, there is a report that has come out recently that 82% of the stores in the City of Detroit, where people take their food stamps or their WIC coupons, are either gas stations, convenience stores, party stores -- 82%. So what am I seeing? I am seeing a lot of people that live in neighborhoods right now that, if you drive through the

neighborhoods, you would say, well, where do they go to grocery shop? Or, there is a burned-out building next door to them, or the whole neighborhood is gone. That's what I am seeing more and more in the city. I am seeing that there definitely are pockets of new development, and I am very encouraged by that, but I am seeing more and more people who need it. And you know, the interesting thing is, I always tell everybody two things. Number one, don't judge your brothers and sisters who might be on a food program because you never know when you might need it yourself. And the second thing is, don't assume Grandma and Grandpa are taken care of, or your Mom and Dad are taken care of you because you don't know. And unless you go open up the cupboards and look in there, you are not going to find out because Mom or Dad are too proud, and they don't want to be a burden. I have seen that over and over and over again. I had the head of the Civil Rights Commission for the State of Michigan a few years ago who came and gave a talk on Martin Luther King Day. When her talk was over, she raised her hand. She said, Focus: HOPE, I want to thank you. My husband and I moved here from Washington, and he was unemployed, and we were on your food program. I get that all the time. I can be at the fanciest affair you ever thought of, and somebody will come

up and grab hold of my hand and say, I got my Ph.D. now, and I was on your food program. You know, you just don't know. If the food program is going to help move somebody along, that's the greatest gift we can give anybody. And I also saw another thing that was very troublesome. It was the number of seniors that were taken into their children's homes. Here, Mom, you can have the back room there. Just give me your Social Security check and stay in the room. Many of those people called and said, could I get on the food program, too, because maybe if I had something that I could contribute, they would treat me differently. So we are dealing with the human conditions.

Q: Often a messy affair. I want to talk about three different men who have had, I think, a pretty significant impact on your life. One you have mentioned recently, and that is your father -- right, your father. Your husband.

(laughter) Talk a bit about him, and --

A: My father did, too.

Q: Oh, I'm sure he did (laughter).

A: My husband? Great guy. We have been married many years.

(pause) He owned hobby shops, Joe's Hobby Centers. He is a businessman, a very sophisticated businessman, a person who understood my passion to do something and always supported me. When we first started -- just remember, he was working

from 8:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, and I was raising all the kids. I can tell you one story that --

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A: He came home one night, and I just said, you know, I need some help. I am going bonkers here with all the kids running around. He said, Eleanor, we will always have a roof over our head. We will always have food, but you have got to find something that is your passion. I had a big bag of garbage, and I kicked it down the basement stairs, (laughter) and I went down there, and I said, OK. I am going to change. I am going to find something. He was so supportive the whole time. He was not happy with me the day that we walked the streets after the riots. He thought I was a little too assertive. But he was always very, very supportive of what Father Cunningham and I were doing. Father Cunningham and my husband were the best of friends, absolutely the best of friends. They could be with one another and talk, and they never talked about Focus: HOPE. They never talked about the hobby business. They talked about everything else under the sun. When we started, and we would do things, every year my husband would take us on a trip somewhere. I remember the first time he came home, and he had four tickets to Spain, and he was shaking them

in Father's face, and he said, I am going to take you, Father, and I'm going to take your Dad, and Eleanor and I, but you two can't mention Focus: HOPE one time. Well, obviously we talked in code, but, I mean, that was his gift to us. We did that 19 different times. We would go to different countries where we never knew the language. We went to one place where we stayed in a grass hut. I mean, it was his gift to us that was so meaningful. He is a wonderful father, very, very good with his kids, taught all of our kids all about cars, and I give him credit for my youngest daughter who races Mustang cars on the weekend. It scares the socks off of you (laughter). But just a remarkable person. You would like him very much -- very personable. Everybody loves him, and he is a great grandpa, a great husband, and a great father.

Q: You have mentioned something that I'd like to explore just a little bit further, the trips that you took abroad. What did you see abroad and bring back to Focus: HOPE?

A: Different countries, the way people treated one another. There was one little place -- we went to an island. We had to take a small plane into it, and there were grass huts, and just one little restaurant there. At the end of the island, there were a lot of houses up on stilts, and there were freighters coming in and dumping garbage and tires

underneath houses. I was just appalled at what I was seeing. I said, God, how can you treat people like this? You know, I just wanted to start the revolution. But when I went back and asked the people in the restaurant, they said, oh, my God, if we didn't have that, all of these houses would be out to sea because it comes in. And I thought, oh, now, you come in here, and you think you know everything about this place, and you are going to change it -- entirely different. Great because what I brought back is that, yes, we are different, and we can all learn something different from one another, but I can't pretend that I can go and solve all the world's problems in South Africa, for God's sake. I don't know enough about that. So you have to learn, and that is what it taught. It taught me to listen. It taught me how to be more observant of what I was seeing, and then to bring it back and say, let's think this through. It really gets the cobwebs out of your head. It was remarkable.

Q: I do want to talk about a couple of other gentlemen that you have dealt with a lot during your professional life. One is the person who was the Mayor of the City of Detroit for a great many years, and that is Coleman Young.

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A: We always had a good relationship with Coleman Young. We had to earn our way with Coleman. He, like everybody else, was a little, you know -- what is this priest and this woman? What are they trying to do? I remember when we opened the childcare center, he came down for the cutting of the ribbon. He was very, very complimentary of what we were doing. You know, we could always go to him, and he would help us. But I remember at the very end, he was kind of distant when we were putting in the Center for Advanced Technology. One person said, you know why Coleman is backing off, don't you? He thinks Father Cunningham is going to run for Mayor (laughter), which -- no way on earth was Father ever going to run for Mayor. As soon as that was eliminated, we had good... I respected Coleman. He, too, was a visionary. He was gutsy as the dickens. He told you the truth, and, you know, you could either take it or leave it. But I respected the man, and he learned that Focus: HOPE was about serious business, too. I would say that we had a very good relationship with him.

Q: Just off the record, he ended up -- first of all, (laughter) the last day of his tenure, I got a phone call from Dave Adamany and spent -- what was it, New Year's Eve? -- at Manoogian Mansion and at the City County Building, collecting all of his records for the Reuther because he,

of course, had given his campaign war chest to the College of Urban Labor and Metropolitan Affairs. Then he joined our faculty, and had an office in our building until he died, and taught. It was interesting to see him. He just had a presence, which I'm sure you could talk about further.

A: Yes, he definitely had a presence. What I liked about him is, I found him to be very genuine. He was a man that believed in things and was not afraid to stand up [to it?]. That's what I liked about him. He made a difference.

Q: Another person, and that would be Lloyd.

A: Ah, Mr. Reuss. (pause) He is the epitome of class. Mr. Reuss is a gentleman who is a man of very, very strong faith, who believes that the Good Lord has asked him to do something, and he is more than willing to take on any assignment. He is always dressed to absolute perfection. You can set your clock by him. I mean, if he tells you he is going to do something, he is there right on time. He always wears his white shirt with his French cuffs and just is always dressed impeccably. But (pause) he takes on -- what I liked about him most is, when he was removed from his position of President at General Motors, he and his wife made up their mind that they were going to stay here and do something else and make a contribution. Now, he

could have easily gone off to Naples -- or wherever he wanted to in the world -- and lived happily every after, but he wanted to get involved in the community. He is involved with so many different things in the community -- the opera house, and just so many different things. But when he tells you he is going to contribute, or he is going to do something, you know it. You can trust him, and you know that he is just not giving you fluff. He is here because he really means it. He took on the responsibility -- when we started the Center for Advanced Technology -- of becoming the Executive Director of the Center for Advanced Technology, and he was the one that interfaced between --

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A: -- all the universities and all of our business partners. He brought so much respect and knowledge. But you know, one funny story to tell about Lloyd -- we would have some really contentious moments, when we were trying to build stuff, you know, and, blech, everything was falling apart. He would say afterwards, El, I think we need to go and have lunch, and I would say, OK. He would say, I will pick you up. So he would go get the car. I would get in the car. We would talk about what just happened, all the way down to the restaurant. We would get in the restaurant. We would

talk small talk for exactly -- exactly -- six minutes, and then it was right down to business. I am telling you, you could set your watch. I still laugh at him today, when we will go out and have lunch. I will say, OK, I bet you -- six minutes and down to business we go. And it was, let's get business done and that's the way it is. But that's the way Lloyd is -- down to business, and let's get it done. I have the utmost respect for the man. You know, you said put a label like you were going to put on Coleman. I would say, the epitome of a class act. He has been extremely helpful to me. He was very, very helpful to me when the Board of Directors asked me to give up the day-to-day and take on the capital campaign. He was extremely helpful to me, so it's nice to have friends that really care. We can pray together, we can laugh together, but we work well together.

Q: Because I inadvertently mentioned him previously, I think I would like to add your father to the list of people that have influenced you. Talk a bit about your relationship with him.

A: I'm going to tell you one story about my Dad. My father was head of maintenance for Wayne State University. When it was vacation time, he had built the family a trailer. We would go down and meet him at the bus stop. We would

get in the trailer, and we would be off camping for three weeks. He taught me how to love nature. He taught me how to respect nature. He would tell me, when I would get bored, that he would give me 50 cents if I could catch a squirrel. I mean, it was nature, and he loved it, and he taught me. But my father had Parkinson's Disease, and in his final days I mean, I was so angry with God because I couldn't understand what my father's purpose was. We would go to the house, and my father would say, don't sit on the cat, which we never owned. Pick up your feet -- the train is coming through. I mean, it was just -- you know, he couldn't stand up because he would fall. It was before they knew how to do anything with Parkinson's. I remember when my father passed away, I saw more compassion and more understanding in my family, and in his grandchildren, because people didn't judge him. They said, that's Grandpa, you know? You want to have an answer for everything. You want to know, how come, God? Why did you do that? You know, what was his purpose in life? Well, maybe his purpose in life was to teach people to be compassionate about one another, that might have an illness. You don't know. I have great respect for my father. He taught me a lot, and I take my grandkids out, too, and tell them I'll give them 50 cents if they can

catch a squirrel. (laughter) He taught me how to love nature, and I am teaching them how to love nature.

Q: All right. Well, we have been at it for a little bit over an hour, and I think this is probably a good time to stop for transcription purposes. Next time, what --

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