

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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**Arkansas Memories Project**

W. Jennings B. Osborne Jr.  
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford  
November 19, 2009  
Little Rock, Arkansas

## Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center website at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

## Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

### **Citation Information**

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Jennings Osborne on November 19, 2009, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. Today's date is November 19, 2009.  
I'm Scott Lunsford, and sitting across from me is Jennings Osborne. Jennings, do you have a middle name?

Jennings Osborne: Bryan. William Jennings Bryan Osborne Jr.

SL: William Jennings Bryan . . .

JO: Bryan.

SL: . . . Osborne Jr.

JO: Think I was in the fifth grade before I could spell it all.

SL: [*Laughs*] We are at your—uh—uh—farm out here in—in Little Rock, Arkansas. And, Jennings, I'm gonna ask you if it's okay that the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History is here recording this interview, both audio and visual, and that we're going to archive it and make it available for researchers and documentarians and students and teachers. We'll archive it in the Special Collections Department at the University of Arkansas. Is all that okay with you?

JO: I'm honored. Yes.

[00:01:01] SL: Thank you very much. Well, I can tell you we're

honored to—and I think I've got the greatest job in the world. I—unfortunately for you, the worst part of this is that you're gonna be lookin' at me for a long time today. So I—I hope you can suffer through that, and—and we'll—we'll just have to work through that.

JO: Good.

[00:01:20] SL: Jennings—uh—where and when were you born?

JO: September the twenty-first, 1943, in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

SL: Fort Smith. And who—who were your parents?

JO: My dad—named after him—was from the old school. He was born in 1897. And—uh—he grew up Heavener, Oklahoma. Moved to Mena when—Arkansas—when he was real young. His father worked for the Kansas City Southern Railroad.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And they moved around when the division would move around. Um—my mom—um—born in Arkansas. She was twenty years—uh—younger—uh—than my dad, I think. Uh—old school, both of 'em. Dad was one of five in his family. When he was in the third grade, his father died.

SL: Hmm.

[00:02:27] JO: And in those days, the oldest just had to go to work.

And Dad went through the third grade. Went to work for the

Kansas City Southern. He would ride a horse at night up in the mountains to wake up the conductors and engineers. And I've always thought—you know, I was probably in the fifth grade [*laughs*—I thought there were wolves under my bed, you know. [*SL laughs*] Here, this little kid was goin' up in the mountains. Really old school. Dad had a—Dad had a hard life—uh—growin' up. One thing he never told me about, ?just? fascinating to me, he had smallpox when he was, like, twelve years old.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: They moved him away from the family about a mile out in the woods, and he lived out there a year by himself. Just lived off what he could catch and eating wild berries. Just . . .

SL: When he was twelve years old?

JO: Yeah. He never ever told me that story.

SL: So they—they basically—uh . . .

JO: Quarantined him.

SL: . . . quarantined him . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . out in the wild.


JO: Yeah. He had no contact with his family or anything. And he never ever discussed that with me.

[00:03:45] SL: Were there—were there—was he affected by

smallpox? Did it paralyze him?

JO: I never knew that. My sister told me about it a few years ago.  
Never even knew that it happened.

SL: Wow.

JO: Never ever discussed it. And I worked with him for twenty years  
ten feet away from him. You know, I'd've probably used it a  
thousand times, especially when I didn't want to go mow the  
grass or something, if he would tell me what he had to do when  
 he was twelve. But—um—he went to work for the railroad,  
learnt Morse code on his own . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . and worked hisself up to be brakeman. But at the time, he  
knew electricity was gonna really be something, so he took a  
correspondence course. Learned a lot about electricity. Had him  
a little company that—uh—worked on—um—automotive—um—  
generators, alternators, and starters. He even designed the  
machinery that he couldn't get durin' the war and stuff. He  
designed it, made it himself. Um . . .

SL: So he—they manufactured—uh—alternators and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . did the windings . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for the . . .

JO: Did it all himself. It was a one-man operation.

SL: And he did that out of Fort Smith.

JO: Yeah.

[00:05:03] SL: Do you remember the name of the company that . . .

JO: Osborne Electric Company.

SL: Osborne Electric Company.

JO: Yeah. I went to work there when I was five years old, and there was a window that had "Osborne Electric Company" on it. And I stared out that window my whole life, you know, contemplating my future—everything. And my father died in [19]68, and we sold the—the building and all of that. Maybe ten years ago, my sister had that preserved—that window—and gave it to me. Had it framed. And it didn't really look right 'cause it said "Osborne Electric Company." Then I happened to think, "I looked at it the other way."

SL: The other way, so it would reverse.

JO: So I turned it around. It's—I have it in my office. But . . .

SL: That's a great story.

JO: Yeah.

[00:05:59] SL: What about your—your mom? Now, what was her maiden name? Do you . . .



JO: O'Bryan.

SL: O'Bryan?

JO: Yeah. She was one of five. Her parents died, I think, when she was around twelve.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And the four girls and one brother all lived together and somehow made it. Mother dropped outta school in the eighth grade. Uh—no clothes. No shoes. Just hard, hard times, you know.

SL: So your—your mom made it through eighth grade; your dad made it through third grade.

JO: Third grade. My dad did his income taxes every year. Taught himself to read and write . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . on his own. Was never audited by the IRS. I think I've been audited twenty times. [*Laughter*] You know, had the best accountants in the world.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: So . . .

SL: Simpler times . . .

JO: Yeah.

[00:07:05] SL: . . . too. So did you get to know—it sounds like your

grandfathers on both side of your family passed early and you never . . .

JO: Never—never . . .

SL: . . . got to know them.

JO: . . . never knew 'em.

SL: What—what about . . .

JO: My dad's mother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: . . . she lived with us till the eighth grade. Um—she—uh—just part of the family. We called her Ma.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Uh—she did everything we did. She—uh—sat in the middle in the backseat of the car, and I was on the left side, and my sister was on the right. Funny what you remember. But I remember she was a large lady. If we had chicken dinner for Sunday, she always had two chickens by herself and one chicken for the family. [*Laughter*] A large lady.

SL: Wow.

JO: Yeah. And old school.

SL: Um—so do you remember—um—uh—did you ever visit her at her house growin' up? You . . .

JO: No. She was always with us.

SL: Always with you.

JO: Yeah. We never got to go to Grandma's house. We were always there.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: And my grandfathers—I—I—I never knew 'em. Um—my dad's father worked for the railroad, and my mother's father—um—worked at an ice plant.

[00:08:30] SL: Uh-huh. And did you ever know your—your—uh—mother's grandmother?

JO: No. No, she died . . .

SL: She had passed, too?

JO: . . . fairly early, you know—um—um—with breast cancer. I remember—I—I think my mother was twelve when she died. The—her parents both died, I think, within a year of each other.

SL: Hmm. Boy, that's hard.

JO: And in those days, you know, they would send all the siblings to a—a farm to work or something. And somehow they all stayed together. I have no—no idea how. Uh—I don't ever remember a guardian around or anything. They just made it work. Mother said it was so hot, sometimes they'd sleep under the bed. It was cooler.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Really old school.

[00:09:20] SL: Mh-hmm. Um—do you remember having any—uh—  
did your grandmother—uh—ever tell you any stories about . . .

JO: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . her livin'?

JO: You know, a few. You know, my sister listened to everything. I  
guess I was preoccupied with *Sky King* or *Superman* or  
something.

SL: Sure.

JO: Lash LaRue. Um—they had a hard, hard life growing up. Um—  
she—um—she had the five children, and you know, I—I'm sure  
they didn't—they didn't—I remember my dad talkin' about  
drawing water. Uh—I remember my mother talkin' about they  
would draw water in the morning, leave it in a tub outside so the  
heat would warm it up, you know. And . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: . . . everybody took a bath in one tub of water. It's just things  
you can't even comprehend nowadays. Yeah.

SL: Um—well, let's talk about—uh—um—your—um—well, let—let's  
talk about your dad some more. I—it seems like you spent  
some time with him if you were workin' down in their shop when  
you were five years old.



JO: I remember the first day of kindergarten. My dad told me I was a big boy now, and I was gonna start workin' for him every day and—um—I was gonna take piano lessons. You know [*laughs*], unfortunately, he's—he wasted a lotta money on piano lessons. But he taught me work. I had—I was outta school at three ten. I had to be work at three thirty. I never could dillydally after school—never play sports—nothin'. I went to work every day. Saturdays we worked all day long, so I never got to sleep in or— or anything. Growin' up, I remember when I would get outta bed, go to the bathroom [*laughs*], shower and stuff—come back. My bed was made, and you didn't go near it. You would never come in after school and get to jump in bed and take a quick nap or somethin' like that. Beds were made to sleep in. Lotta rules.

[00:11:38] SL: So—uh—did you make your own bed, or . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . was that somethin' . . .

JO: My—my . . .

SL: . . . your mom . . .

JO: . . . my mother made it.

SL: . . . made your bed . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . while you were takin' your shower.

JO: Yeah, she had my breakfast ready. But you know, there—there were a lotta rules, especially working, you know. I helped my dad every day, ever spring vacation, you know, all durin' the summer. There—ever—everything was work.

[00:11:59] SL: What kinda stuff did he have you do at the shop?

JO: You know, I did everything. You know, he taught me how to wind armatures—you know, repair generators—just everything, you know, from the bottom up. I remember when I first started, I would sweep . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: . . . the floor and stuff like that. But Dad taught me everything, and I helped him. I was his—his only help.

SL: Is that right?

JO: And you know, we got to know each other, you know, really well. Uh—so . . .

SL: So . . .

JO: . . . you know, the work ethic is—my mother was strong about, you know, working, too. You know, she helped my dad, too, so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: . . . it was all work and sorta no play.

[00:12:37] SL: So your father didn't have any other employees?

JO: None.

SL: It was just the family?

JO: Yeah. Mother worked a couple of days a week for him.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Then she did his books at night.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Dad'd work at night, too, you know, watchin' TV and—you know, I'm so old. You know, we'd all look at the radio till the fourth grade we got a TV. But I remember prior to that we'd just all get in a room and stare at a radio on the floor. I don't know why it was on the floor. [*Laughs*]

SL: Um—so do you remember some of those radio programs?

JO: Yeah, *Ozzie & Harriet* and *Lum and Abner*.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Wow. Pickin' my brain now. Good to go back. Um—yeah, the whole world came outta that voice box.

SL: So—um—I—I would—I would guess newscasts—you—that had—they listened to the news on the radio.

JO: You know, I—I can remember on TV. I just cannot remember on the radio.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

JO: You know, a friend of mine, Jimmy Carter, told me one time—he

said, "You know, I can remember the winters were cold, but I can't remember the summers." And I'm thinkin', "Are you crazy?" [*Laughter*] You know, I—I realize now I can't remember things.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Uh—you know, I don't—I—I have no knowledge of news comin' over the radio.

[00:14:06] SL: What about boxing? Um . . .

JO: Oh yeah, wrestling was big back then. That's the only sporting event my dad ever took me to. We went to see Gorgeous George. And he—he never went to sports or anything, but somehow we ended up watching Gorgeous George. I think he probably—maybe wrestled for maybe one round or something. He had a—quite a show—preshow.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: That was a big deal. My dad loved wrestling. And I would—I would—he would get so intense. I can see him tryin' to help out. I'm the same way now if I watch Jermain Taylor or something box or somethin', I find myself tryin' to help him. Yeah.

SL: Dodgin' and . . .

JO: Yeah, just crazy.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]



JO: I used to think my dad was nuts doin' that, but I'm in the same boat.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, you come by it honest.

JO: Yeah.

[00:14:56] SL: Yeah. Well—um—so [*clears throat*] the—uh—the house that you grew up in, you mentioned piano lessons. Did y'all have a piano in the house?

JO: Had a piano and organ. My sister still plays. She did recitals in high school by herself. And I remember when she would do a recital by herself, I would always have to play a duet with her, and I would have to have my music. I couldn't even memorize one piece, and she had probably done twenty. Yeah, it—it worked great for her. I just had no musical talent. My dad just—you know, he—he—he had played some instruments. He just wanted to give me something he never had.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And—uh—instead of sports, I got piano.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Probably the worst thing that ever happened to me. [*Laughter*] I hated to practice.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: I hated to play. I just never—it—it was not easy for me. I took

all through grade school and half of high school, and probably the happiest day of my life was when I didn't have to take it again, and I have never touched a piano since. And I am sorry, Mother and Dad, but [*SL laughs*] it was just never my thing.

[00:16:09] SL: Well—um—uh—you mentioned that you had an organ in the house. That's . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that's unusual. I haven't . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . talked with anybody—was it a pump organ, or was it an electric organ?

JO: It was electric. It was electric.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Yeah. Uh—you know, Dad and Mom tried to supply us with everything they didn't have.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And you know, since my sister was so gifted playing and everything and—it—it just worked out great for her. I played the organ a little bit. I ended up havin' to do Mass at five thirty in the morning in high school for the nuns, and that's probably the worst thing in the world you could do to a teenager is have to be in church at five thirty in the morning. You gotta get up at

four, you know [*laughs*], and it'd last for twenty minutes. But I did that. I played mass for a while.

[00:16:54] SL: So—uh—your household was Catholic?

JO: Ah—Baptist.

SL: Baptist?

JO: Baptist. We went to a Catholic school. My parents thought since they didn't get to go to school, they thought the Catholic education was the best.

SL: Well . . .

JO: And . . .

SL: . . . it's . . .

JO: . . . a lotta discipline involved.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Uh—you know, I—I remember somebody got beat to death every day in the Catholic school growin' up. So they . . .

SL: You mean . . .

JO: . . . they taught your manners.

SL: You mean we're talkin' corporal punishment . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . uh—in—uh . . .

JO: Yes.

[00:17:28] SL: I remember several people have—have talked to me

about the—the nature of—uh—how the strict the nuns could be  
and—and—uh—quick to dish out . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . some kind of a . . .

JO: You know, I see plays and stuff now on TV. Kids are chewin'  
gum or something like that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: You would be put to death if you were even caught with a gum  
wrapper. [*Laughter*] You know, that's—that's how severe it  
was.

SL: Um—what was the name of the school—the Catholic school you  
went to?

JO: Grade school was Immaculate Conception. I think I probably  
graduated and never even knew what the name stood for. Went  
to St. Anne's coed high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Um . . .

SL: So you—it was Catholic education for you all the way.

JO: All the way.

SL: All the way through.

JO: All the way. Had thirteen years from kindergarten through the  
twelfth.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Um—high school, when I did my practicing for my piano, which I hated, during religion, but in grade school, you know, I used to sit there and listen to everything.

[00:18:32] SL: So you—you were at Catholic school because your folks felt like that was the better education. But did religion play a role in your—in your home—in your household?

JO: My parents—my mother—very devout Baptist. We went to every dogfight there was at church. Um—we—we went to church seemed like two nights a week and all day Sunday. Um—my sister and her family still continue to be very religious. I have sorta strayed . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . off the righteous road, but—uh—you know, I—they—uh—they gave me every opportunity in the world to—to—uh—learn everything I needed to learn. Uh—my wife is Catholic. Um—so . . .

SL: Um—so were there—um—did you have Bible study at home? Were—were you expected to—to study the Bible at home, or did . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . all that take place at the church?

JO: Church. Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Now, I remember Mother would read the Bible some.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:19:48] JO: Uh—I don't remember my father—uh—Daddy was always studyin' something, you know. It was just amazing that somebody who only got to go to the third grade . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . uh—always reading, you know, technical books and stuff like that when he would design and—and make his machinery. I have all of his plans and everything. Um . . .

SL: Wow.

JO: . . . all of his layouts. It was amazing how he was able to do all of that on a third-grade, you know, education.

SL: Yeah. Sure.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:23] JO: He had a beautiful handwriting. I have some of his writings when he was in high school, and you could tell he went to the third grade. Then in his twenties, you know, it was all normal. It's old school. Lotta determination.

SL: Yeah. Sure.

JO: Yeah.

[00:20:46] SL: Well, did—let's get back—whenever y'all had—it sounds like, you know, you're in the shower. Your bed is made when you come outta the shower. Breakfast is on the table first thing in the morning. Was the same true with dinner at night? Were you expected to be in place . . .

JO: We never missed. You couldn't miss a dinner. And TV was always turned off. We had lunch at twelve o'clock—seemed like on the dot, like, on Saturdays and Sundays and—well, after church. Dinner at night was always at six o'clock. I didn't realize, but we could have whatever we wanted, which was—the menu—it sure wasn't vast, but whatever my sister and I wanted, my mother would cook it for us. Lunch was always



predetermined. That reminds me. I had a—we had a monkey growin' up, and the monkey was always at the table, too.

SL: Now wait a minute. Okay. So when did you have a monkey growin' up? How old . . .

JO: Oh golly.

SL: . . . were you?

JO: It was in high school. His name was Buddy. Buddy lived ten or twelve years. I bought this monkey for my dad, and somehow, you know, it just became part of the family, and it would do anything my dad asked it to do. But it would eat with us. It ate

the same thing we ate. He had his own plate, so [*laughter*] . . .

[00:22:23] SL: That's great. Well, did he take him to the shop?

What . . .

JO: No, no.

SL: No? Just stayed at the hou . . .

JO: We had a big cage for him. But they're very clean. When they're through, they clean up, and they throw everything on the floor. I remember we had always paper down. I don't even think there was plastic back then. Yeah. Just reminded me of eating. You know, everybody had their own little place like everybody does growin' up.

SL: Yeah. And he had his place to eat.

JO: He was between me and my dad. Yeah.

SL: [*Laughter*] That's great. Well . . .

JO: They just eat like a human.

SL: So he had to be a hit in the neighborhood. I mean, did all the kids just . . .

JO: You know, we didn't—I had one friend growin' up, a guy named Bill Carroll—lived across the street from me, and we were very close. Went to grade school and high school together. Probably the only guy I ever had that lived in the neighborhood. We lived in a old neighborhood, and you know, the kids were all gone. It



was like in the Quapaw area here in Little Rock. It was just big old houses. And growin' up, I didn't—our house was huge. I didn't know that, you know, you could have it all air-conditioned or all heated. We had certain rooms that were air-conditioned, and some were heated in the winter, you know. It just varied where you went.


SL: Right.

JO: The climate, you know, determined what part of the house you stayed in.

[00:23:44] SL: That's neat. So you grew up in an old [*JO sniffs*], kind of historic . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . neighborhood, and the house was one of those—it was an antebellum . . .

JO: Yeah, I don't know a whole lot about the history of it. But yeah, I remember my mother used to do sausage. I would actually go out on a screened porch during the winter and get sausage that wasn't even refrigerated, you know. Everybody lived. We just—  
 Mother would can it. Gotta remember, old school. Mother canned, you know, vegetables and all that kinda stuff. We never had a garden, but—and my dad—I remember he would buy, like, a hog at a time or a cow at a time, and we would have it all cut

up.

SL: The . . .

JO: So . . .

SL: . . . butcher would do that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for you.

JO: Yeah, we'd have it frozen. We'd go to a community locker where we kept our stuff.

SL: The . . .

JO: My parents always planned for the rainy day. Yeah.

[00:24:45] SL: Well, they had lived through the Depression, so . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Did you ever—did they ever talk about the Depression?

JO: They did. They talked about it. Dad . . .

SL: Well, let's . . .

JO: . . . never talked about livin' in the woods, but the Depression—yeah, they did.

SL: What'd they have to say about it? Do you remember?

JO: Mother used to talk about it. They would have—if they could have a onion sandwich once a day, they were happy. Dad—Mom worked for a dollar a week, and she was glad to get it. Seemed like Dad made two dollars a week. Times were really, really

tough. You couldn't buy anything. Nothin' was for sale, and you didn't have any money to buy it, you know, even if you had the money. Yeah, I think the Depression musta really been something. My dad worked every day. You know, he was glad to do anything. He did a lot of odd jobs.

[00:25:38] SL: The house that you grew up in—was that one that was in your dad's family or . . .



JO: No, Dad—when Dad was a young man—I actually have a picture of him with his automobile—he bought a Dixie Flyer. I think he was twenty-one years old. He bought it on credit. Missed the last payment. Lost his car. [*SL gasps*] So Dad never ever bought anything on credit. Even the house that my mom and dad lived in when I was born, they paid cash for it. Now it could've been five thousand dollars, but Dad paid cash. And the house that we moved to after—maybe I was four or five years old—and they lived there—that was through college—Dad paid for that. They never—Dad never had a credit card in his life. Never charged anything. He got burned that one time.

[00:26:42] SL: Yeah, I remember my parents were—I don't remember them ever using a credit card. And I think that Depression era put an indelible mark on the folks that made it through that. They were very, very conservative . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . with their money and very cautious about investments . . .

JO: Extremely.

SL: . . . or—you know, they just didn't trust much of . . .

JO: They didn't even trust banks, really.

SL: Right.

JO: You know, my dad was tellin' me how people, you know, that really wouldn't put their money in the bank because they had lost it all. They just went to the bank one day, and they said, "No, there's no money."

SL: Yeah, it was before the insurance.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Federal deposit insurance. So let's get back to dinner.

JO: Kay.

SL: What a great image. It's you and your sister, your mom and your dad, and Buddy the monkey . . .

JO: Yeah, and . . .

SL: . . . at the . . .

JO: . . . Corky the dog.

SL: And Corky the dog.

JO: He was a Pekingese.

SL: Pekingese dog. [*Laughs*]

[00:27:46] JO: You think back, you know. Corky would sit in a chair. Everybody had a chair. You know, Corky was on the other side, and I can't remember—I'm like Jimmy Carter—I can't remember the summers. Seemed like Corky had a plate, too, but we mighta put it in the chair. But everybody had to sit down. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, and he . . .

SL: And they—and both the animals knew this. They . . .

JO: Oh yeah. Yeah, they just grew up together, and there was no problem. Everybody had their own serving. And you know, we—it was really family time. We all visited and talked about everything. I remember that. It was a talkative time. I remember I had some friends that I went to school with. They had to speak in French, and they had to pick a topic every night. Ours was not that complicated. We had a monkey and a dog and [*SL laughs*] probably a homemade pizza we were chewin' on. Yeah.

[00:28:47] SL: Was—did your mom and dad, or did you and your sister—did anyone ever say grace at the table?

JO: Yeah, I think we did. I think my sister and I took turns doin' that. Then I think it sorta went to my sister. My sister was very, very intelligent. She had the ability to visualize numbers in her palm of her hand, and she could add, subtract, divide

everything by just doin' this. [Points to palm of hand] I tried it forever, you know. I couldn't make it work. I can remember my sister growin' up—if she couldn't understand something for a test, she would memorize the page, and she could recall it. Needless to say, I couldn't do any of that, but she had the ability to do that. So . . .

SL: Like a photographic memory.

JO: Oh yeah. She can still do it to this day. You know, she works crossword puzzles every day just to tax her mind. Yeah, I . . .

SL: Well now, is she—was she your older sister or . . .

JO: She was my only sis—she was older.

SL: Older?

JO: She's two years older. She always, you know, took care of me. I needed somebody in charge.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well now, it sounds like your dad was pretty good about being in charge and . . .

JO: Yeah.

[00:30:10] SL: . . . determining what you were going to do with your time. Did—what about the school homework? What—did your mother make sure that you . . .

JO: Mother was . . .

SL: . . . did that?

JO: . . . Mother was involved with that. Yeah. After—homework was always after—you know, get out from school, go to work. We closed at six o'clock. I had—it was a greasy job, and you know, I—to this day, I will not look under the hood of a car. I had to—when I was five years old, I had to use Brillo Pads to clean my hands with. I never wanted anybody to know my hands were dirty, and I just—but you know, eat at six o'clock, and after that we did homework. Mother was in charge of homework. Yeah, I don't—I can't ever remember Dad being involved with us with homework. But Mother taught me all of that.

SL: You know, we kinda dropped the ball a little bit here on the Depression stories. Do you remember any—oh, you know, I guess—did their—your parents ever talk about the soup lines or the—any of the work programs? Were they involved with any of the CCC stuff or gover . . .

JO: I remember they talked about some of their relatives goin' to California because my dad always said, "Everybody has a relative in California," [*clears throat*] 'cause they all went to California to work on the ships and all the government programs out there. I remember a lot of our relatives went out there to earn a living. There just wasn't anything in Arkansas at the time.

[00:32:11] SL: Well, do you remember any of your aunts or uncles being around?

JO: Yes, yes.

SL: Were they . . .

JO: My mother's side—I remember all my aunts and their husbands. I have an uncle now that's I think ninety-four. He's in Fayetteville. Lived there his whole life. Worked for Shipley Bakery.

SL: Curtis Shipley.

JO: And his [*laughs*] father worked for Shipley Bakery. I don't even know if they're in business now or anymore.

SL: So is—was that the Osborne side?

JO: No. No, that's my mom's side.

SL: O'Bryan side.

JO: Yeah. They all—everybody worked. Everybody had a job. Some were nurses on my mom's side. On my dad's side, one of his sisters was a nurse in California. She moved out there. He had a brother that he was in business with for maybe a month, and [*laughs*] he moved out West. And he was in refrigeration forever. Moved to Yuma, Arizona, which was a good place for refrigeration. He had a sister that stayed in Heavener, Oklahoma. That's where my dad sorta grew up. And she lived



to be in her nineties. She—I remember her husband played professional baseball for the Kansas City Athletics. And I always wanted Uncle Bert to hit me a ball, and I finally talked him in one day to take my bat, and he hit me a ball and he broke my bat. *[SL laughs]* And you know, you only got a bat once in a lifetime. So it was the end of my baseball career. *[SL laughs]* You know, you tried to patch it. You tried to nail it.

SL: No.



[00:34:10] JO: You just don't—you know, we didn't get to—you know, now you get different levels of bats and all that kinda stuff. But I saved my money once, and I wanted to get a Louisville Slugger.

SL: Sure.

JO: And I went to this sporting goods store, and the guy wouldn't sell it to me because he said I wasn't old enough to have a Louisville Slugger. Crushed.

SL: Oh!

[00:34:33] JO: So maybe that's why, *[laughs]* you know, played with bullwhips and threw knives all my life. I always had a bullwhip. I thought I was gonna be in a—like, a carnival. I had this fifty-gallon barrel that I could actually walk on forward and back, and I had a trick rope and a bullwhip. And I could throw

knives. And I thought this act was gonna, you know, take me . . .

SL: Places.

JO: . . . through the future. Yeah.

SL: So is that kind of a cowboy thing? Were you . . .

JO: I don't—you know, you go to the show Saturday night. I remember it was twelve cents. We got twenty cents. Twelve to get in and eight for a Coke or a candy bar. And my sister and I—we would get a—I would get the Coke. She would get the candy bar, and we'd split it.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. All worked.

SL: So is that—you're talkin' movie theater or . . .

JO: Yeah, movie theater. Yeah. You know, if I saw *Superman*, I was Superman for a week. If I saw Roy Rogers, my greatest hero in the world, he would—I was always a big Roy Rogers fan. On my fiftieth birthday—somebody knew I was a huge fan of Roy's—he sent me a personalized letter, personalized card, and FedExed it to me and paid for. What a guy.

SL: From Roy Rogers?

JO: Yeah. He, you know, lived in California. So that was a big deal. But I was always, you know, the character of the week.

Whatever I saw—easily impressed—wanted to be like, you know, Tarzan—swing from a rope in the backyard with a tree.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*] Well, this barrel and . . .

JO: Trick rope and . . .

SL: . . . trick rope—now, when you say trick rope, is it—you—we're talkin' a lasso?

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: And . . .

JO: I actually figured out how to do that. And I could jump through it and do the—make the big hoop and all that stuff, you know.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Just trial and error till I finally figured how you do it. It—there is a trick to it.

[00:36:50] SL: So [*JO clears throat*] what did your mom and dad think about this show that you put together?

JO: Gee, no idea. I don't know. You know, I could throw knives pretty good. Mother always said I was gonna hurt myself. I know I can't ever remember my dad commenting about it.

SL: One way or the other.

JO: No.

SL: Did . . .

JO: Bullwhips. I still collect bullwhips. I still crack bullwhips.

They're fascinating to me.

[00:37:18] SL: So what would you do with the bullwhip? I

mean . . .

JO: Just make it pop.

SL: Just make it pop.

JO: Yeah.

SL: You didn't put out candles with it or . . .

JO: No. Nah.

SL: . . . any of that kinda stuff?

JO: Nah, I never had any—a good friend that would actually hold one for me. [*Laughter*] Yeah, I remember growin' up I tied my sister up one time. I almost got killed. I don't know why—I tied her up to a tree and just left her, you know. I'm still in trouble over that.

SL: [*Laughs*] My brother and sister did that to one of my older brothers.

JO: Really?

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And in their case, there was actually a fire that started on the . . .

JO: Oh my goodness.

SL: . . . hillside, and they had to come back and get him.

JO: Oh my goodness. [*SL laughs*] Wow.

SL: Yeah. That's—I don't think he's ever forgiven 'em for that either. [00:38:11] So let me see now. I'm gonna—I'm tryin' to—what about—did your mom always do the dishes, or did the kids take turns doin' the dishes?

JO: I washed. My sister dried.

SL: Always.

JO: Always. Yeah. But I don't know why I hated to dry. I didn't mind washin' at all. So we did 'em. We did 'em after every meal. I don't remember cleanin' the table. I think my sister set the table. My sister had her little jobs that she did 'cause I was at work.

SL: I see.

JO: But it all worked out. She did a lotta helping with my mom. But I think she always set the table every night, and I think she helped cook. Everybody sorta worked, you know. They had it figured out.

[00:39:00] SL: You talked about the—your mom makin'—make—did she make the sausage or . . .

JO: Oh yeah. Yeah. Everything was done by hand. With the old grinder. It's a—you know, we used to help her—it's a wonder,

you know, there weren't more accidents or anything like that.

But yeah, Mother had a grinder that she used.

SL: And no refrigeration? I mean, you had an icebox with a block of ice and . . .

JO: We had an icebox. Growing up in the summertime, I don't know if it was—he just couldn't keep up with the demand or what, but we would have a gentleman to bring us a block of ice. And he would put it in our refrigerator. I've often wondered what that costs—probably a nickel.

SL: Yeah.

JO: It just couldn't've been much. And he was—he had one arm.

SL: Wow.

JO: And he had a piece of leather, and he had those hooks that he would—yeah, he did everything with one hand as he had been in an accident. You know, he did all work. I can remember him comin' to the house and doin' that. So . . .

[00:40:10] SL: Wow. What about heat in the house? How was the house heated?

JO: We had gas. We had a fake fireplace growin' up. But I remember in the mornings, it was cold. We didn't get carpeting until the eighth grade—funny how you remember that—and TV in the fourth. Carpet in the eighth. But to this day, there's no

hardwood floors in my life, excluding the kitchen in there. We have carpet everywhere 'cause we never had carpet till the eighth grade. It was cold. It was cold in the winter. I remember Dad would get up. And he was the first one up in the mornings, and he would light the stoves, and we had a little stove in the bathroom—gas. No central heat or anything like that. We had one air-conditioner growin' up. It was in the living room, but it also functioned as our bedroom at night. We would have cots, and Mom and Dad had a rollaway—hideaway bed.

SL: There in the living room.

JO: Yeah. All worked. You know, it was just normal. [*Laughter*]  
You know, the dog slept with us. The monkey was happy being in the heat. Buddy never slept with us.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. He was susceptible to colds.

SL: Huh. Well, but in the winter, he'd . . .

JO: He was inside.

SL: . . . the cage'd be in the house.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[00:41:37] SL: Yeah. So [*laughs*] I just love that you guys had a

monkey. That's just so unusual. I—I've never talked with anyone that had that kind of pet. I . . .

JO: I remember it cost twenty dollars, which was a lotta money then. Yeah, it was probably—you know, coulda been equivalent to two thousand. It seem like it was an awful lotta money. Little squirrel monkey, and he just turned out to be part of the family. Think he lived eleven or twelve years. A long time.

SL: So did he—did y'all teach him tricks, or was he . . .

JO: He would sit on my dad's shoulder, and they would talk, and you know, they were—he was always fidgeting with somethin' [gestures with hands], playin' with something, you know. I would mess with him occasionally, you know, but he was—it was my dad's pet. But he was a part of the family. If we'd go somewhere, we had to take him with us, you know. [SL laughs] He'd just sit in the back. We had a little portable cage. He'd sit in the back seat and swing, or he'd sleep just like a human, you know.

[00:42:51] SL: Uh-huh. Did he ever have him down at the shop?

JO: I don't ever remember that.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Nah, he stayed at the house. Yeah. Ol' Buddy. We buried him in the backyard. We buried everything in the backyard.



SL: Yeah. Sure.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Let's see now. We've talked about the air-conditioning and the refrigeration and the heat—radio and TV. Now this was a black-and-white TV, and you got this when you were in the fourth grade.

JO: Fourth grade.

SL: So that would be what? That'd be in the [19]50s.

JO: [Nineteen] fifties.

SL: Mid-[19]50s, I guess.

JO: It was the old vacuum tube, and I remember my dad was always switchin' out tubes. They wouldn't last very long. And you got so many lines. Our TV station in Fort Smith would come on at eleven o'clock and go off, I think, at ten thirty, and it was one channel. It was Channel 5, [*laughs*] and they had all three networks.

SL: Yeah.

JO: They'd get the best of all three. We would try to pick up Tulsa. You had to do it by the rotary antenna. Yeah, it was always a nightmare, but you know, it was space-age then.

SL: Yeah, you bet.

JO: Yeah.

SL: You bet.

JO: It was—like, we . . .

SL: Black and white.

JO: . . . we had to—had gotten one of the first Betamax machines—Mitzi and I did. Thirty-minute tape was the maximum. I think we taped *Gone with the Wind*. I have no [SL laughs] idea why. It took, like, ten tapes, you know.

SL: Right, right.

JO: Never looked at any of 'em.

[00:44:27] SL: [Laughs] Well, you know, it sounds like to me, Jennings, that your parents come from—came from hardscrabble families, worked really hard, had a belief in education. Even though they didn't go very far with their education, they instilled in their kids that education was important, and it sounds like you did fine. Your sister may have been a step ahead of you on that end of the stick.

JO: Two steps.

SL: It also sounds like to—I mean, you had a piano, you had an organ. You had a . . .

JO: We had a lotta things growin' up, you know, looking back that—you know, they really provided us with a lotta things.

Christmases were always big. I remember in the ninth grade—I



got a new car every year—ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and the first three years of college. A brand new car every year. You know, when I worked for my dad, I never got a paycheck. He never gave me a paycheck, and you know, my friends were paperboys and worked at the grocery store, and you know, they always had a piece of paper on Fridays where they could get some money. Dad ne—always gave me what I needed, but he never gave me a paycheck. Looking back, it was sorta strange.

SL: So did you—were you given an allowance . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . or your sister an allowance?

JO: Just whatever I needed. You know, they would come up with it. But the—I never—part of work was just like part of breathing. It's just somethin' you gotta do, and there was just no—ever a mention about "You're gonna make four cents an hour" or something. When I got outta school and Mitzi and I got married, I remember I was makin' eighty-one cents an hour in Fort Smith at the hospital. Moved to Little Rock, and I was makin' ninety-one cents an hour. [*Laughs*] And I remember I went to lab school, and this—the monthly salary was four hundred dollars a month, and I told Mitzi—I said, "I don't know how anybody could spend four hundred dollars a month."

[00:46:59] SL: Yeah. Yeah, I understand that.

JO: Things have really changed.

SL: Really changed. Yeah.

JO: Yeah, but Mom and Dad did everything in the world to make our life—you know, that they didn't have the opportunity. And I blew a million opportunities that they gave me, but they gave us every chance in the world. That was just the theme back in those days. You just have to do better for your children. They made a lotta sacrifices, like, I took piano twice a week, and I think it was, like, three dollars a lesson. That was six dollars a week, and that was a lotta money back then.

[00:47:42] SL: Sounds like your dad was visionary in that electrical market and that he provided a service that ended up providing well for his family. I mean . . .

JO: Yeah, he—Dad did well. You know, Dad had this theory—if you were to bring—he didn't take anything off of the car or put it on—if you brought it to him, he would repair it. He would repair it while you stood there. You didn't have to come back the next day. You didn't have to come back two hours later. You just waited on it. He could fix it in ten minutes or fifteen or something like that. It was a—really selling point, if you think about it . . .

SL: Sure.

JO: . . . because . . .

SL: Unheard of.

JO: . . . there was just no—and you know, if it required Dad to work till nine o'clock at night, you just did it to work out the customers. Then you started again the next day. So that—you know, that went a long ways with me. I've implemented a ton of that stuff in my business just for his work ethic. Nothing's impossible. You know, you just do it. Work through it. Make it happen.

[00:48:53] SL: So let's talk about your schoolin' for a little bit as a child growing up. You talked about—you've mentioned the corporal punishment and how strict the discipline was at the Catholic schools. Was there a subject that you were particularly—that you kind of grabbed hold of and enjoyed?

JO: Nah, unfortunately, I say no. Nah, it was just like something you had to do. I remember in the first grade my teacher told my mother she was gonna call me Sonny because my name was so heavy for a little kid. [SL laughs] [Clears throat] Nothing ever jumped out at me. I always thought that I could be doing something else instead of stayin' in school. I always felt like, you know, "Just give me a chance, and I'll run the marathon. I

can do it." You know, "I just don't need this," and I did need it. But it was a struggle. Grade school—you know, I had to work every day. And high school was fun for me. I sorta—I remember my sophomore year I was secretary, junior year I was vice president, and senior year I was president of my class. And I really enjoyed high school. It was fun. But no favorite subjects. Had no idea what I wanted to do.

SL: Even in high school?

JO: Even in high school. I had no idea what I wanted to do. You know how crazy people vote you to do different things? I was voted to be a US senator. You know how far I [*laughter*] got with that. But I never knew—to this day, I don't know what I wanna do. [*SL laughs*] You know, I'm still out there lookin' around.

SL: Well, you know, it's kind of . . .

Bruce Perry: Hold it.

SL: Oh.

BP: Somebody's at the front door.

SL: Front door? Okay.

Joy Endicott: Stop?

[Tape stopped]

[00:50:55] SL: All right. We're on tape two now, Jennings. We just

had a great lunch that he had brought in for us. There's enough food in there for us to eat for about three more days.

JO: All right.

SL: It's great. Thank you . . .

JO: You're welcome.

SL: . . . so much for that. We've been talkin' about your growin'-up days in Fort Smith. And it occurred to me that I think the only other Fort Smith resident that we've sat down with has been Curtis Shipley. So maybe we oughta talk about the town of Fort Smith a little bit now and what you remember about Fort Smith and your neighborhood when you were growing up. What can you . . .

JO: M'kay.

SL: . . . say about . . .

[00:51:34] JO: We lived three blocks from Main Street, Garrison Avenue. So I remember if we went to town, we always walked. And we would go to town on Thursday nights. Apparently the stores were open late, and we would all dress up and walk three blocks, and you were downtown. We had Kress's and wal—it wasn't Walgreens—can't think of the name of it—three five-and-dime stores. But we always went to town Thursday night. Back in the days where you could get ten hot dogs for a dollar or ten

hamburgers for a dollar. I remember my dad would walk downtown and go to Coney Island and get ten hot dogs, bring 'em home, and the sack never tore, it was so much grease on it. [SL laughs] Unusual things which you remember. We always thought the town was, you know, very progressive. And we go back now—it's been forty-five years—nah, close to fifty years since I lived there—and it just looks like a neutron bomb went off. Everybody left. It's extremely devastating. It was always a factory town. Everybody worked at the factory, and they had a lot of furniture manufacturers there. It's still a factory town. But we rarely go back. My parents are buried there. We go back at Christmastime and take Breezy back and sorta reminisce the way it was. It was all normal, growin' up. Great town to grow up in. Sidewalks.

[00:53:34] SL: Well, did Fort Smith have a square?

JO: No, it was . . .

SL: It just had that main Garrison Avenue drag.

JO: Main—Garrison Avenue.

SL: And did that—was there a bridge that . . .

JO: Went to Oklahoma.

SL: . . . went to Oklahoma? And was that Garrison Avenue that . . .

JO: Yeah.



SL: . . . went . . .

JO: When you got on the other side, you were in Moffett, Oklahoma. I think that's the only town that was off limits to army personnel. I don't know if it still is or not. It wasn't . . .

SL: I wonder why.

JO: . . . it wasn't a [*unclear word*]*—*had a lot of 'em drinking. I remember gambling, and they actually had slot machines. I remember in my college days, I went to a place over there, and they were actually gambling. Slots, craps, all that. Just shocked.

[00:54:16] SL: Was it Indian reservation territory?

JO: No, no, no, no, no. [*Laughs*]

SL: It was just the state of Oklahoma.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It was wide open.

[00:54:23] JO: Some entrepreneur tryin' to see how long he could get away with it. Yeah. At the end of Garrison Avenue was Immaculate Conception Church. That's—on one side was my high school, and the other side was my grade school. But we always walked downtown. The whole world was walkin' downtown and, you know, always contemplating the future.

SL: So when you said on Thursday nights you'd get dressed up, was

this a family outing every . . .

JO: Yes. Yeah. Everybody got . . .

SL: You and your sister . . .

JO: . . . dressed up and we . . .

SL: . . . and your mom and dad would . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . walk on down.

JO: My sister and I would always hold hands. And I think we got a dollar. Don't ever remember my sister spending her money. I probably spent a dollar and a dime. [*SL laughs*] You know, borrowed some money from her. I always spent mine. I always had to have a toy or somethin'. But my sister would hang on to hers. Yeah.

SL: Those were good days.

JO: They really were. They were so simple, you know. We just had no worries in the world. Guess that—you know, the—later in the [19]50s, we had the Cold War to worry about, but you know, normally, you know, you're just carefree. Everything is free to you. Your parents have all the responsibility. Good times.

[00:55:47] SL: Do you remember anything about the crisis at Central High in [19]57 and what the talk around town was in Fort Smith?

JO: You know, I remember my dad—I remember people comin' in and talkin' to my dad about it. We just thought it was horrible. But we would go to St. Louis in the summertime. My dad would do a business trip to look at the latest machine or something like that. There was a place up there. I remember my dad was embarrassed to say he was from Arkansas when we checked in at the hotel. It was so embarrassing for him. Yeah.

SL: That affected—it affected a lotta people like that.

JO: Really.

SL: And it's still a stigma that the state carries with it . . .

JO: Oh . . .

SL: . . . to this day.

[00:56:30] JO: . . . oh yeah. You know, I can remember—I've told many a people openly, you know, that, you know, I—there were two drinking fountains in every public store, you know, and it was "white" and "colored." And I remember, you know, nobody would ever go to the "colored." You know, I did it one time, and nothin' happened, and I continued to do it because there's always a line at the "white." You know, the doctors' offices had separate waiting rooms—restaurants, you know. I can remember the bus goin' by my house, and there would be twenty people in the back of the bus, and there would be nobody

in the front. But you know, you couldn't—you—they couldn't ride in the front. It was crazy. My dad always talked about it. You know, how it wasn't fair. And you know, he would point it out to me. I can't remember my mom one way or the other. But we never had any racial problems with anybody. It just never came up.

JE: Scott?

SL: Yes.

JE: I need you guys to turn your cell phones off. We're gettin' digital updates.

[Tape stopped]

[00:57:44] SL: Okay.

JO: When I went to school from kindergarten through high school, there was never a black person that went to our school. No rhyme or reason. It was a private school, but nobody ever attended. And I don't ever remember [19]61 to [19]65—the first two or three years at Fayetteville—that there were any blacks. I just—it doesn't ring a bell at all. There were people from Nigeria and stuff like that at the university, but I never had a problem. But apparently Little Rock, you know, left a black eye for a lotta people.

SL: Yeah. Do you remember any of the black community in Fort

Smith? I mean . . .

JO: Yes, very—it was fairly close. It was four blocks away from our neighborhood, and they had public housing there. They had their own high school, grade school, there. I don't ever remember any racial problems in Fort Smith. It was all concentrated in Little Rock. My—I think it's still that way. There's two parts of Arkansas—you know, northwest and central. My dad never had any use for Little Rock. I have no particular reason why. We'd come to Little Rock to buy our school clothes and stuff like that, but you know, it's—it was just—it split the state as to what was goin' on in Little Rock. My father always, you know, would talk about it, how disrespectful it was and everything.

[00:59:26] SL: Well, I'm tryin' to think, you know—I know that Fayetteville High School was integrated pretty early. I think they pride themselves in being the first. Do you remember—course, you were in private school even through high school, right? So I guess the public schools—you weren't really aware of what was goin' on with the public schools, were you?

JO: Yeah, I don't remember any problems in Fort Smith durin' that [19]57 era 'cause that would've put me in the eighth grade, ninth grade. I just don't remember anything like—any problems.

It was so concentrated in Little Rock.

SL: You do remember the "white" and "colored" fountains—those being . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . labeled.

JO: No restaurant—since Mitzi and I have been married—since [19]65, we would drive the old Highway 10 before the freeway from Fort Smith to Little Rock. There were restaurants that said, "No blacks allowed."

SL: Wow.

JO: That's just frightening that it was so public. That hasn't been [*laughs*] too long ago, you know. Forty-four years, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . it seems like yesterday.

[01:00:51] SL: When you would go to the movie theater . . .

JO: Third floor. And I remember the lady that took your money always faced the white crowd, and when she took care of the white crowd, she would turn around to take care of the black area. And they always went to the third floor.

SL: Balcony.

JO: Yeah. Yeah, and not the first or second. Yeah. Gosh, [*laughs*] it's just hard to believe that was in my lifetime. Yeah.

SL: Well, let's see now. What else about Fort Smith that made you feel like it was a progressive, good place to grow up in?

JO: Yeah, it all seemed normal to us at the time till we moved away. Yeah, it seemed like the crime rate was always low. There's nothin' like your hometown—especially, you know, my parents were both alive and lived in Fort Smith their whole life, so always happy memories of Fort Smith. I went back later in life and decorated, you know, a park there with all my Christmas lights, and it was sorta neat comin' home. And there were, like, ten thousand people showed up.

SL: Yeah?

JO: It was a big deal. Your hometown. Good times. Simple times. That's where I had all my big Christmases, and you know, like I said, you know, high school was fun for me. It was—I probably enjoyed every year, but I remember high school was fun.

[01:02:38] SL: Well now, at one point you were tellin' me that your father—you always had a new car every year starting in high school, was it?

JO: Starting in the ninth grade.

SL: In the ninth grade, you were drivin' a car?

JO: I got a—yes, my sister—she always had to be in the car with me, but I got to drive to school in the ninth grade back and forth,

which was good. I remember in the eighth grade I got a motorcycle. Always wanted a motorcycle. Elvis was big then, you know, and Elvis had a Harley. I got a motorcycle in the eighth and ninth grade, and then I got a car in the ninth grade and one in the tenth, eleventh, twelfth—first three years of college. It was a—I enjoyed Christmas day. [SL laughs] My dad never told me I was gonna get one. It would just appear. Always had a red ribbon on it. And we've sorta done the same tradition with Breezy. Sometimes we get Breezy a car or something. We always put a big red ribbon on it. Just a little tradition.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[01:03:41] SL: Tell me about your motorcycle. You were in seventh or eighth grade when that . . .

JO: Eighth grade. Got me a Simplex Automatic. It was just a simple little motorcycle, but I was so excited. Then in the ninth grade I got a Harley, and that was one of the happiest times in my life. I really enjoyed, you know, riding a motorcycle. Didn't get to ride it everywhere. It was very restricted where I could ride 'cause my parents always thought I was gonna have an accident.

SL: Sure.



JO: So I got to drive it to school and back. Friday afternoons after work, I could drive it down the street for about twenty minutes. It was a big deal.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But it was very restricted. I never got to go out and just ride just because I was riding. There always had to be a purpose what I was gonna do. My parents were, you know, good as gold to me, but there wasn't any nonsense. They—sorta like the work ethic they've given me. When I go to work in the morning, as soon as I get to work, I'm ready to work. I go to work. And I—it just drives me crazy when people aren't ready to go to work because it was just no nonsense around my house. And I was probably the loosest one of everybody. [*SL laughs*] You know, my sister was straight as an arrow. I'm the one that deviated—always pushed the envelope.

[01:05:05] SL: Well, let's talk a little about deviation and pushing the envelope. So did you ever get in any kind of trouble at all growin' up?

JO: No, but you know, I would do things that people really wouldn't think about doin'. Remember in the eighth grade, the last day of school, I rode my motorcycle through the halls, and I even went on the second floor. I [*laughs*] don't know why. Just because I

could do it, I guess. Nothing major, but yeah, I . . .

SL: This was your first motorcycle that you got?

JO: Yes. Yeah, just being a little different and [*SL laughs*] just positively no fear. Sorta like today. I don't fear a lotta things. You know, I . . .

SL: Well, so you figured you could get away with that 'cause it was your last day in that school?

JO: Yeah, last day in school, and I just—don't ask me why it possessed me to do it, but a motorcycle in a hallway is pretty loud.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And I'm sure the nuns had a heart attack, but when I went on second floor, that—I don't know why I did that—'cause I could. It's a wonder if I didn't get hurt. I don't—I guess I told my parents. I don't remember. [*Laughs*] You know, and it took me years to figure out—Mother would pick me up every day after school. She said, "You get in trouble?" And I'd say, "Yes." Got a automatic beating when I got home. I don't know when I decided, you know, you just don't say—you know, maybe I deviated durin' the day. Mom would always take us to school and pick us up till the eighth grade. I guess the seventh grade, I started riding my bicycle, and then I got my motorcycle in the

eighth. Then the ninth, I got a motorcycle. Then I got the car. And my sister's so good she would let me drive it, you know. I guess it was intended to be her car, but I always got to drive it. Then I remember the next year I got another car and she got a car.

SL: Boy, that's really quite remarkable.

JO: Yeah.

[01:07:09] SL: Your dad's business must've really been good and . . .

JO: You know, he just—yeah, you know, he just wanted us to have what he didn't have. And it wasn't a—you know, we weren't extravagant by no means. [*Laughs*] I remember we'd go to grocery—go grocery shopping on Wednesday nights. I guess that was coupon day. I don't know. If you didn't get the paper early, there were a million holes in it 'cause my mom did use coupons. But we could never eat anything on the way home—my sister and I. You know, it was a candy bar, a banana—it was just no eating until you get home. And then my dad would take the sales slip, and my mother would call off an item, and Dad would check it off. And I don't think they ever found a mistake. That is old school.

SL: That is. That is.

JO: It's—yeah.

SL: That's great.

[01:07:59] JO: So you had to wait forever to get whatever your item was.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh, you couldn't touch anything until the . . .

JO: Till it was checked off.

SL: . . . the receipt had been gone over.

JO: Yeah. And in cereal—you know, there were—in my era there were always some kind of a gift.

SL: Sure.

JO: Yeah, I [*laughs*] remember—I swear Mother used to take that gift and put it all the way in the bottom because I had to eat the cereal before I could get the gift. And it never would come out [*SL laughs*] till at the very end. Then if it was an airplane or something, I'd—I would throw it in the air and, you know, on the roof, and that was the end of it. But there were a lotta neat prizes back in there. There were decoder rings. All kinda things you could get and . . .

SL: Sure. Cracker . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . Jacks, too.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. Those toys were good.

SL: Yeah, they were great.

JO: They probably cost .0001 percent, maybe.

SL: Right. Right.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I remember those, too.

[01:08:52] JO: I hadn't thought about Cracker Jacks in a long time.

[*SL laughs*] Tells you what ?end the toy? was in.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I loved that stuff, too.

JO: Yeah.

[01:09:05] SL: Well, let's see now. So you—I'd say riding a motorcycle up into your school and up on the second floor and gettin' out without gettin' hurt, and you didn't really get any trouble for that?

JO: No. I . . .

SL: Your parents couldn't have known about it, or I would've . . .

JO: I just don't remember. [*Laughter*] Like Jimmy Carter can't remember the summers. I don't remember—I'm sure my parents knew about it, but I don't remember getting in trouble for it or—who knows?

SL: Now when you say Jimmy Carter, are you talkin' about President

Carter?

[01:09:38] JO: Yeah. He was tellin' me one time that the winters were really cold, and his mother was always faith healing. His father was the largest mule dealer in Georgia, so he was always travelin' Georgia sellin' mules. Jimmy grew up next door to a— with a black family that took care of the property. And they had three or four children, and they still have the exact house, and Jimmy would lay next to the fire with all the little black kids. This woman that taught him how to read and write and everything—she lived long enough for him to take her to the Georgia mansion and to the White House. A neat little story.

SL: Yeah, I kinda remember that.

JO: Yeah. But Jimmy said he can't remember the summers—you know, if they were hot or what. And I'm thinkin', "How could you say that?" And I can't remember stuff now. [*SL laughs*] That's—I remember ridin' my mike [Mitzi Osbourne edit: bike (motorcycle)] through the school but nothin' after that. I was a good guy. I didn't—but I've always—you know, I could take the step, you know, and not think twice about it.

[01:10:50] SL: Well, you've mentioned earlier that it was kind of—you weren't really thrilled to be at school and goin' to the classes. You felt like you could be doing something else, and so

that . . .

JO: I always thought, "Just give me a shot, and I can do it." Yeah. You just have to work through the process. College was probably the hardest, you know. High school was fine, but I just never had that urge for knowledge. Always felt like I could do it.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Just give me a shot at it, and I—'cause I can do it with endurance, you know. That's, I think, the God-gift quality I have. I can work twenty-four hours a day and be enthusiastic that twenty-fifth.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And it just—it's the work ethic my parents gave me.

[01:11:46] SL: You've mentioned—so did you go to church on Wednesday nights, being Baptist?

JO: Wednesday night, Sunday morning—Sunday school, church, back again that night for Royal Ambassadors.

SL: That's a youth organization?

JO: Yeah. Yeah, and then evening service. My father would join us Sunday nights, but yeah, we were—family was very religious. I don't remember 'em—like I said, Mother readin' the Bible or anything, you know. None of that, but we certainly participated in church. But . . .

SL: Royal Ambassadors. Now were you active in that group?

JO: Yeah. Yeah, [*laughs*] I believe it was a youth organization.  
Yeah.

SL: 'Cause you mentioned earlier that you—sounded like your senior year you were class president at the high school, so I just have this feeling that you may have gotten invo—did they do civic things? The—what did the Royal Ambassadors do?

JO: You know, it was just a youth organization, you know, to try to keep guys—you know, give 'em ideas for the future—that type of thing—and just keep you off the street. Yeah.

SL: Keep 'em busy.

JO: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[01:13:12] SL: But you enjoyed that.

JO: Yeah, yeah—not that I—I'm really not a people person, but yeah, you know, for me that was really pushin' it.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah, I'm more of a loner, I think.

SL: Yeah, but [*JO clears throat*] still, if you're class president in high school, you had to have some people skills to . . .

JO: Yeah, yeah.



SL: . . . pull that off. I mean, the kids had to like you . . .

JO: Sure.

SL: . . . and know who you were and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and have enough respect for you to vote for you. I mean, that's determined by the student body, right?

JO: Yeah.

SL: So there's some skill there somewhere.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Being the loner that you are, still . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . you were able to make connections somehow.



[01:13:56] JO: And I figured out a long time ago, you gotta be nice to the little person. You know, there's more little people than big people out there.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And to this day, if we go to a function, I always remember to go into the kitchen and thank the people, you know, that prepared the food—that type of thing. I—it just all makes sense to me to do somethin' like that.

SL: Well, it means something to those folks . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . to the folks—to anybody that you pay respect to, it means something whether they're big people or little people.

JO: Yeah, yeah.

SL: We're all human.

JO: I know.

SL: And they all have feelings.

JO: And you know, y'all like that face time with somebody—one of your heroes, you know.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You just gotta remember, you gotta take everybody—I try to take everybody along on my fantasy ride. I'm on a fantasy ride. I know that. And I enjoy it. I like to take people with me. You know, it's—I've gotten to do some incredible things, and it's fun to include everybody around you and . . .

SL: Well, we're gonna get to some of this ride that you've been on here in a little bit. I'm not quite done with your youth.

JO: I gotta get outta high school.

[01:15:11] SL: I know. One thing we haven't talked about is girls. When did girls start to get your attention or start to play havoc in your life—however you want to look at it?

JO: You know, my first girlfriend was a next-door neighbor that actually made a model. And I saw some pictures of her the

other day, and they were phenomenal. We were five years old. I think she had a tonsillectomy, I think, and my dad let me send her a dozen roses. She was my first girlfriend.

SL: How long did that last?

JO: Ah, I think she moved to California maybe in the third grade.

[*Laughter*] Somethin' like that. Not long.

SL: But you fell head over heels early.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: So . . .

JO: Oh yeah. Her name was Martha Dietrich. Funny how names sound funny nowadays. At the time, it was very normal. I fell in love again, I guess, in the eighth grade. Fell in love in the ninth grade. Fell in love in the [*laughs*] tenth grade. Dated a little girl for two or three years. Yeah. Mitzi and I went together—I mean, we knew each other in the ninth grade, but we never dated in high school.

[01:16:28] SL: Uh-huh. Well, what were the rules for dating when you were growing up? What . . .

JO: Oh, your parents would—yeah, my mother would drive us to some little function—well monitored. [*Laughs*] You know, we'd go to a Girl Scout dance or something—a school function at the school, you know. It was—but you couldn't deviate at all in a

situation like that. It was extremely straitlaced. We used to go to little school dances and—I remember in the eighth grade—in the ninth grade. All the little social functions.

SL: Always chaperoned.

JO: Always. Always. Then if I could go out one night a week, it was probably Friday night. Had to be home at ten o'clock. Never had a key to our house. Never. Later in life, when I bought my mom a beautiful home, I still did not have the key. [*Laughter*] She always opened the door so, you know, there was no alcohol involved. Nothing like that. You always had to present yourself properly 'cause Mother opened the door. She was in charge. Even when—probably three months before she died, in a walker and extremely sick and ninety years old, still opened the door for me. I never had a key.

[01:18:05] SL: Well, you know, that's very, very interesting. When I was growin' up in Fayetteville, we didn't ever really lock our doors or, you know, the—even the keys were left in cars. I mean, there just wasn't—you know, the neighborhood was just kind of everybody's home. You know, kids came and left, you know . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . unabated, and it was just kind of expected that the

neighbor's kid might be comin' in lookin' in your fridge or whatever. It wasn't . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . it wasn't that unusual. So when you were growin' up, did y'all always have the doors locked and . . .

JO: Always. Yeah.

SL: You were really close to Main Street.

JO: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . it was a little bit different . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for you.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: We always locked the door. And, like, I had—only had Martha Lynn that lived next door for three years, I guess, and I had my friend, Bill Carroll, that lived there maybe five years. And those are the only two neighborhood kids we ever had. You know, it was just my sister and me. We played this game called "In the Years." I have no idea who named it or why, but you know, she was a movie star, I was a cowboy. We played that game all the

time—I guess till I tied her up and left her. [*Laughter*] That was the end of that.

SL: She was done with you by then, huh?

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:19:32] SL: Well, it sounds like she kinda—you mentioned earlier that she kinda looked after you . . .

JO: She did.

SL: . . . growin' up, and that—that's a good thing.

JO: Yeah. She was a nervous kid, goin' to school. She'd never been away from home. I hadn't either, but it didn't bother me to go to school—leave home. Really bothered her, and I think that's why I went to kindergarten, which—to be there for her sole support. But it turned around, you know, that she turned around and took care of me. But—still does.

[01:20:09] SL: Now have we heard your sister's name? I'm not sure we've named her.

JO: Carolyn.

SL: Carolyn.

JO: Yeah, Carolyn Ruth.

SL: Carolyn Ruth.

JO: I call her Carrie.

SL: Uh-huh. And . . .

JO: Yeah, she's the historian for the family. She has three children. One's a cardiologist, one's an engineer, and her daughter's a CPA.

SL: So they—that—all those educational genes—smart genes . . .

JO: Went that way.

SL: . . . passed on. Yeah.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. They got 'em all. Yeah. She's been married I guess close to fifty years. She lived in Fort Smith till my mom died. Then she moved to Alabama. That's where her son, the cardiologist, lives, in Birmingham. So I guess he gets to pick the nursing home. [*Laughter*] Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: But she's healthy and doing well?

JO: She's good. Good. She's a cancer survivor I guess probably more than five years.

SL: That's great.

[01:21:11] JO: But she taught the first grade for thirty-some-odd years. I asked her why you would take the first grade. She said, "If I can get 'em started on the right track"—apparently, I probably didn't get started on the right track, but she tried to get everybody started on the—and she was so nervous when she

went to school that, you know, the nuns just ignored her, which was the thing to do. And she says the first six weeks, she usually has four kids in her lap, you know, until they get adjusted. I asked her one time—I said, "What's the greatest innovation that's happened to you in thirty-five years of teachin'?" She said, "Velcro," 'cause she's had to tie so many little shoes.

SL: Oh. Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That's interesting. You know, and it sounds like she has a great passion . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for that work.

JO: She does. She's a good person. I remember when my dad got sick. He was sick for nine months with lung cancer. The minute she found out that he was sick—she lived in Greenville, Mississippi—had a home, husband, good job, and everything—she left and never returned to be there for my dad. Husband had to sell the house, get a new job in Fort Smith. She can make the ultimate, you know, sacrifice. I would go home on Wednesdays and Saturdays to see my dad durin' that time, but you know, I didn't alter my life the way she did. When my mom



got sick, she immediately moved in with her and took care of her. Years later, I got RNs around the clock and all that kinda stuff, and I'd go home and see my mom all the time, but you know, she made the ultimate sac—she will alter her life.

[01:23:00] SL: I wonder if—was it your mom's mother that lived with y'all?

JO: Yeah.

SL: I wonder if . . .

JO: My dad's mom.

SL: Your dad's mother.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I wonder if the care that was given to her while y'all were young—if that impressed upon her to . . .

JO: She . . .

SL: . . . step up—that the children step up.

JO: Yeah. She always does what's right. Always. Yeah. Not that I don't, but you know, I might deviate sometime.

SL: Well . . .

JO: She would never deviate. It would never enter her mind. Yeah. She can go to *A* to *B* faster than I can. You know, we were just taught that, you know, to do it as quick as possible and as efficient as possible. She has really maintained that.

SL: Yeah. Some people . . .

JO: So, you see, it's all from our parents.

SL: Yeah, I'm . . .

JO: Yeah.

[01:24:00] SL: . . . I was gonna say your parents passed on that do-right rule.

JO: Yeah. Just no deviation. Yeah. There was even a time when the monkey had to go back in the cage. [*SL laughs*] Lotta rules.

SL: You know, I keep thinking that there's gotta be some more stories about Buddy.

JO: [*Unclear words*].

SL: Yeah, are there any good stories about Buddy you can—even—are there any bad stories about . . .

JO: Oh, you know, everything's good to me. If you buy a monkey—probably best to buy a female. We had a—Buddy was a male. I remember the first time that Mitzi came over to meet my parents. We only had two bathrooms, and it was a big deal, you know, to have two bathrooms. We put Buddy in the small bathroom in the cage. We just wasn't ready to introduce Buddy to the world—to Mitzi. You know, I remember somehow Mitzi ended up goin' to the small bathroom, and she got an indoctrination of the real world with Buddy. He was playful.

SL: Yes.

JO: So [*laughs*]*—*I don't even know if I even told her I had a monkey. I don't remember. Too many years ago. [*SL laughs*]  
But he was entertaining for her. But . . .

SL: Well, was that the first time that she had been to your house?

JO: Yes. Yeah.

SL: Oh, and what a great impression, huh?

JO: I know. Yeah, he . . .

[01:25:34] SL: How old were*—*was she then, or when was that?

JO: We got married when we were twenty-two . . .

SL: Oh, so . . .

JO: . . . I think, so . . .

SL: . . . this was after you were . . .

JO: This is prior to marriage.

SL: Oh.

[01:25:46] JO: First time she'd ever met my parents. So I think we dated less than a year. And so I was twenty-one. But she had a rude awakening to the Osborne family. But it was all normal for us. Yeah, but we [*laughs*] had been entertained many times by ol' Bud. Yeah, those are good times to think back. And it seemed so normal to me to have a monkey eating at the table. Just part of life. Good times.

SL: Well, it's good it didn't scare her off.

JO: Nah. She's probably had a lotta regrets since then, but . . .

SL: Oh, [*laughs*] come on.

JO: . . . she held tough then.

SL: Well, okay. Is there anything else you can tell me about your life growin' up in Fort Smith that we haven't kinda touched on? 'Cause I'm bout to—what happened graduation—at graduation from high school in Fort Smith? What was your immediate task? What was your next *B*? If graduation was *A*, what was *B*?

JO: Go to college. Just the thing to do. My rude awakening to the world. Like, you know, I always had to be in at—I could pick one night to go out. Had to be in by ten o'clock. Never got to really go till about eight o'clock, so [*laughs*] you know, it was a quick evening. Goin' to college was—there was not a key to our fraternity house. The doors were never locked. So that was a shocker. And just bein' away for the first time . . .

[01:27:32] SL: So you graduate in the spring. That summer you continued to work in Fort Smith with your dad.

JO: Always helped my dad. Yeah.

SL: And then you drove up to Fayetteville and pledged a fraternity right off . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . your freshman year.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Which fraternity?

JO: Phi Delt.

SL: Phi Delt. Mh-hmm.

JO: That was—we had been to Fayetteville so many times. Always knew I wanted to go to Fayetteville. We had a aunt and uncle that lived—still have an uncle that lives there in Fayetteville, so we were very familiar with the campus, the town, and everything.

[01:28:12] SL: What brought you to Fayetteville so often?

JO: My aunt and uncle. They live right off of College on Prospect.

SL: Okay.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: *[Laughs]* Small world. I think my uncle's ninety-four. They lived there his whole life. So we were always goin' to Fayetteville at least once a month our whole childhood, you know. Sundays was our day of travel. We would go see my dad's sister in Oklahoma, or we'd go see my mom's sister in Fayetteville. Sunday afternoon was travel time. I remember we had a [19]36 Chevrolet, and then we bought a new car in the



[19]50s—in 1950. But I can remember my dad makin' sure everything's in the car we needed, and he was always gonna have a flat. Can you imagine [*laughs*] goin' on an adventure, and you knew you were gonna have a flat? And my dad would have to change that tire. I remember there were hot patches and cold patches.

SL: Yeah.

JO: My goodness. Then we got our new car in 1950. I don't ever remember my dad changin' a flat after that.

[01:29:29] SL: So you think that had as much to do with the tires as it did the kind of roads that Arkansas had before the [19]50s?

JO: You know, that could've been a factor, but I just cannot imagine. [*Laughs*] I would've passed the trip up if I knew I was gonna have to stop and change a tire.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: And take the inner tube out and do that patch on it and hand-pump it back up. My goodness, those were hard times.

SL: So let's see. What year are you in Fayetteville, now?

JO: [Nineteen] sixty-one.

SL: [Nineteen] sixty-one. Okay. So let's see. Is that—that's still—that's Faubus, isn't it?

JO: Yes.

SL: Governor then.

JO: Yes.

SL: Were you very much aware of state politics?

JO: A little bit. A little bit. I got to know Faubus years later. I can tell you some stories about him, but . . .

SL: He's smart guy.

[01:30:30] JO: Yeah, a heck of a guy. We really got to be friends—close friends. But there was a guy, Sam Boyce, from Newport that I helped campaign for my freshman year. Yeah, I was dabblin' just a little bit in politics, you know. I sorta liked that. But I can remember in [19]60 whe—probably [19]60 I met Faubus in Fort Smith. And I can remember in high school I was president of the Arkansas Democrats Club [*laughs*] of Fort Smith. That was a long—I just thought of that—a long time ago. We had monthly meetings Tuesdays at the courthouse. Simple times.

[01:31:24] SL: What did y'all do?

JO: I [*laughs*—you know, I—apparently, you know, we talked about future candidates and present candidates and, you know, campaigning. But I sorta had the bug there a little bit, you know. And then the high school politics, you know. I sorta had the little bug. I remember went off to college. There was a guy

named Freddy Favor from our fraternity that ran for president of student government. I remember I was really active in that with Freddy, but somehow it all got diluted.

SL: So the Democratic youth organization in Fort Smith—did y'all, like, hand out bumper stickers or put out yard signs, or did they give you any of the kinda the retail politics of . . .

JO: We did.

SL: . . . the campaign?

JO: I don't ever remember—you know, I'm sure there were bumper stickers then. [*Laughs*] I just don't remember.

SL: Well, maybe not.

JO: You know, I just don't remember.

SL: Maybe not yet in [19]60.

[01:32:31] JO: But I remember signs. Remember we would nail signs up—actually nail 'em. And get permission to put 'em in people's yards. But I was a little active in that . . .

SL: So you . . .

JO: . . . in that era.

SL: . . . you carried some of that with you to the university when you first helped the . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . Favor guy run for . . .



JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . student body—did he win?

JO: Yeah, he did. He did.

SL: There you go.

JO: Yeah. Yeah, I remember his little tagline was "Do yourself a Favor and vote for Fred." Yeah.

SL: That's a good one.

JO: I haven't thought of that in fifty years. Yeah. He ended up being a lobbyist in DC, and I haven't seen him since college. But I've sorta kept up with him. He's retired on the West Coast now.

SL: Uh-huh. West Coast.

JO: Yeah.

[01:33:24] SL: So let's see. You get to Fayetteville, you join a fraternity. The doors are never locked. All of a sudden, there's not really a curfew for Jennings. Is that what I'm hearin'?

JO: You're hearin' it. I—not that I went wild, but I certainly had freedom that I'd never had before, and I got caught up in all the freshman stuff, you know. The Shamrock, Mhoon 71 Club, Rockaway—gosh . . .

SL: Rockwood Club?

JO: Rockwood Club. Who was the guy that always played?

SL: Ronnie Hawkins . . .

JO: Ronnie Hawkins.

SL: . . . and the Hawks.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: My brother used to bounce for him.

JO: My goodness. You know, you couldn't get near that. Was it Rockaway? Was that it? Rock . . .

SL: Rockwood.

JO: Rockwood.

SL: The Rockwood Club.

JO: You couldn't get near it. It's probably so small. I don't even know if it's still there or not, but it was probably so small, but that was such a big deal to go there, and Ronnie Hawkins playin'. I mean, it didn't get any better than that.

[01:34:28] SL: Can you remember Ronnie's performances?

JO: Oh yeah. Yeah.

SL: He was quite the athlete.

JO: Yeah. Yeah, I don't remember anything . . .

SL: I think he could do backflips.

JO: Really?

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: I musta been lookin' the other way or . . .

SL: And the . . .

JO: . . . [*laughs*] [*unclear words*].

SL: He did something called the camel walk, which looks a lot like Michael Jackson's moonwalk.

JO: Wow.

SL: I mean, he was—yeah, he's quite a Fayetteville legend. I—actually, we've done two interviews with Ronnie.

JO: Oh my goodness.

SL: And actually recorded one of his shows . . .

JO: Awesome.

[01:35:03] SL: . . . at a party. Yeah, he's—I actually did an album for Ronnie Hawkins in my studio.

JO: Wow.

SL: And so I'm pretty familiar with Ronnie. He—and he knew my family growing up and . . .

JO: That's awesome.

SL: . . . was terrified of my father and [*laughs*] had the greatest respect for him. But—well, tell me a little bit about the Rockwood Club. Do you . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . do you remember much about it?

JO: You know, I just remember it—native stone structure. Walk inside—you couldn't see three feet, the smoke was so thick. I

don't ever remember any tables. I'm sure there were. Just seemed like people standing, and it was so loud. And I remember the Shamrock.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Friday afternoon, you were lucky to—there were tables there. I remember that. But you know, it was just so jammed on Friday afternoon. And that was a big deal for me, just to be in an atmosphere like that. [*Laughs*] Sorta something crazy I'm recalling about that club. The urinal was like a trough. Don't know if you remember that or not.

SL: Yeah.

[01:36:14] JO: And it was tilted like this [tilts arm diagonally]. It—you know, a lotta people on the left side waiting in line. [*SL laughs*] But it—they always put all the cans and the beers out back. I don't know who picked 'em up—the empty ones. But yeah, that was a big deal to go to the Shamrock Club or see Ronnie Hawkins. And you know, John Tolleson was a big hit up there. John Tolleson. And you know, I remember Wayland Holyfield. Johnny Roberts. They—it was the Rockets or something.

SL: Yeah.

JO: I can't remember.

SL: Yes, that's right.

JO: Yeah.

SL: You got it.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Your memory's not too bad.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Especially when it comes to rock and roll.

JO: [*Laughs*] Yeah. So those were . . .

SL: There was also . . .

JO: . . . those were . . .

[01:36:58] SL: Let's see now—course, John Tolleson—I know John

pretty well. And he married Gail Cooper, who lived across the

street from us, so I knew John pretty well. In fact, I kinda

blame John for some of my history—my rock-and-roll history and

my recording history. He . . .

JO: He was awesome. I mean, he played at our prom, and I think it

cost forty dollars—our senior prom. And he must've played for

two hours, just bangin' that . . .

SL: Piano.

JO: . . . that piano and singin' the whole time. So talented. Yeah.

SL: "Tennessee Stud."

JO: Yeah, yeah, that . . .

SL: Remember that was one of his signature pieces.

JO: You know, for people that missed that era, they missed a lot.

SL: They did.

[01:37:46] JO: Just that little era right there, you know, of my college days. Just like Ronnie Hawkins, you know, that was a chance of a lifetime, and that was normal. He lived in Fayetteville. I guess he did. He was always playin' there. I don't know when he moved to Canada or any of that, but he was always out there playin'.

SL: He . . .

[01:38:05] JO: You know, Dickson Street stopped at George's. There was a UARK Bowl, Underwood Jewelers. That was the end of Dickson Street.

SL: Well now, there was Jug's.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Jug Wheeler's.

JO: Yeah, that's right. It went by . . .

SL: Up the street a little bit.

JO: Can you imagine backing into that? You know, you had to be in college to be able to do that. You had to back into Jug's. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, it was what—seventy-five feet?

SL: Yeah.

JO: It was—it's exactly right. Then you could order Jug's—'cause people sent me just a hot dog [*laughs*—I guess they'd take an order from anybody. And you know, I'd—"Order for Osborne." I'd go down and get it. It'd be a hot dog, you know. "Thank you so much." But . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, you could order beer, and Jug's would deliver the beer to the campus back then.

JO: Wow! Now see, I can't remember that. We had a no-drink policy in the fraternity house, and they really adhered to that, but . . .

SL: Well, that's good.

JO: But I—that's interesting. I had forgotten that. I had forgotten about Jug's. Yeah. Well, there's another place . . .

SL: Well, the D-Lux. The . . .

JO: Wow.

SL: . . there was a restaurant called the D-Lux. It's the 36 Club now, but there was the D-Lux.

JO: Yeah.

SL: There was—well, course, Collier's.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: The old Collier's actually had a soda fountain in it. And let me see now . . .

[01:39:22] JO: There was a—you know, getting back up there by Underwood . . .

SL: The Library Club, and then there was—of course, there was Rogers Rec, the pool hall.

JO: Yeah.

SL: You pro . . .

JO: Was that thing on Dickson?

SL: Yes. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. I have not thought of that.

SL: It was still on Dickson until just—it just recently changed. They've still got the pool tables out in the back, but you know . . .

JO: I have thought—yeah, you've jogged my memory on that one. Wow. And Jug's, backing in. Could you imagine trying to back in there now? [*Laughter*] You would be so nervous. There wasn't any room in there.

SL: I know, I know.

JO: [*Unclear words*].

SL: But it was the place.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: It was the place.

JO: Yeah.



[01:40:04] SL: And there was also the Scott Hotel was right across from the Library Club. City Lumber had a front there on Dickson Street.

JO: What was the name of that hotel—Mountain Air?

SL: The Mountain Inn.

JO: Mountain Inn.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Do you remember the Mountain Inn?

JO: Well, you're takin' me too far back. Yeah, he had a swimming pool that . . .

SL: That's correct.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It was pretty modern.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: It was very modern then. Yeah.

[01:40:34] JO: I remember we checked in early one time at the fraternity house. We couldn't get in some reason or other. I don't know what was goin' on. And—some school thing, so we had to spend the night. We spent the night there, and that was like being in Vegas at the Wynn. Yeah. That was a big time for a Fort Smith boy.

SL: Mountain Inn had a place called the Town Club run by Billie Snyder, and she was kinda the—on her tombstone, it's "Billie Snyder, yellow dog Democrat." It was kinda the political hangout back then.

JO: Yeah.

SL: So let's see. Where—I gotta get back now to Jennings now, and you're experiencing no curfew. You've got [*laughs*] Ronnie Hawkins, who eventually became kinda the Elvis of Canada.

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: The Shamrock Club, Jug Wheeler's, Dickson Street.

JO: Jug Wheeler's.

SL: Tryin' to think. There was the Huddle Club. Don't know if you remember the Huddle Club. [*JO sighs*] That was one of those places.

JO: Yeah. I remember it, but I don't have any memories. I—you know, I just—not like I do at Mhoon's 71 or the . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: Rockway. I'm gonna get it right in a minute.

SL: Rockwood.

[01:42:05] JO: Rockwood.

SL: Yeah, the Rockwood Club.

JO: Where am I tryin' to get Rockaway? Rockwood. Yeah. No cover

charge. Just a—I wonder what a beer cost then.

SL: Well, it was probably a dime, I bet, or a quarter. And maybe a quarter a draw, you know.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Maybe a buck fifty . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . buck and a quarter for a pitcher, maybe.

JO: Yeah, I was just thinkin' maybe George's may be a buck, buck and a half.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[01:42:33] SL: Now I'll tell you who was the—there was a doorman at the Rockwood Club. I don't know if you remember. It was Don Tyson.

JO: Oh my goodness. Wow. Isn't that somethin'.

SL: [*Laughter*] It is.

JO: No.

SL: Even Fay Jones has a history with the Rockwood Club. He helped lay some of that out and . . .

JO: You know, if you think of it, that was his architecture.

SL: And . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . Ronnie had him come out every Saturday night at ten thirty because he knew that he'd have some money, and he—it took two years to pay Fay.

JO: Isn't that somethin'?

SL: Mh-hmm. And it would be, like, twenty dollars or somethin', and it was enough money to go up to Mary Maestri's.

JO: Wow.

SL: That's what he and Gus ate on every Sunday night for twenty— or two years.

[01:43:27] JO: Wonder how thick that steak was at Mary Maestri's.

SL: [*Laughter*] I don't know. It was . . .

JO: It covered the—it would hang over the plate.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But it had to be—been microns.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, the—oh, the Venesian Inn's the same way.

JO: The . . .

SL: Number nine, rare. It's bout that thin. But the . . .

JO: That was a huge piece of meat. Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] It was. It was.

JO: I haven't thought of Maestri's. Mary Maestri or any of that.

[01:43:55] SL: Well, it seems like—it sounds like to me you—all of a sudden you were out in the—almost like going to the wild Wild West. I mean . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . all of a sudden . . .

JO: You know, I had a date at—was it Monte Ne?

SL: Monte Ne. Yes.

JO: Monte Ne. You know, we had a fraternity function. Wow. Here's a kid from Fort Smith with a date at Monte Ne. Where am I? You know, I could've been on the moon.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: That was a—it was a different era.

[01:44:25] SL: Well, okay. So what about the school itself—the university itself? I mean, you made your classes despite not . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . havin' a curfew and . . .

JO: Oh yeah. You know, we had a good scholarship chairman in our fraternity, and they really laid the laws down. They really helped all the freshmen get off to a good start. You know, if you weren't in class, you were at the library. I remember the—we

called it the 1.5 bench. The old library had the benches.  
?Remember the? old benches out front in the foyer? If you sat on that, you'd probably make a 1.5. But I was there when somebody came in and said Faubus had been assassinated, but it was [*laughs*] really JFK.

SL: Oh!

JO: Yeah. Yeah, I—my messenger always wrong. I remember a guy rushed into my office and said, "Elvis just died in a fiery car wreck." It's always wrong, but it sounds right at the time.

And . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: So I gotta shoot all my messengers first. [*SL laughs*] Wait for the second one. Yeah, you know, I thought college was hard. It was a lotta responsibility. And again, I just wanted to—if I could get out there, whatever I could do, I could do it. I knew I could, no matter what it was. I had no idea what I wanted to do. You know, I thought about bein' a lawyer once, you know, and a little politics, you know. But whatever it was gonna be—I thought about a radio station, and I thought about a TV station. But I just really wanted out of school. I enjoyed school. College was fine. I found it difficult. There were—I remember Monday nights was fraternity meetings. Tuesday night, probably intramurals.

Wednesday [*telephone rings*] night was exchange dinner. I think you had Thursday night to study, and then you got the weekend. Friday, [*laughs*] Saturday, and Sunday, and it started all over again. Yeah, there just wasn't a lot of time. I just—I don't know. I thought it was trying times, but it was fun. I don't have any regrets.

[01:46:41] SL: Well, did you not get indoctrinated into the whole Razorback thing until you came to Fayetteville?



JO: I can remember in high school our coach would hand out free tickets for the Razorbacks just to fill up the stadium. But you know, I never went to any—in high school, I went to the high school football games—that kinda stuff—basketball games. But I never went to a Razorback game. The only thing my dad ever took me to was Gorgeous George wrestling—the only sporting event. So Razorbacks was unique to me at Fayetteville. I remember, you know, we all—starting off in the fraternity, we always had to have a date, and you know, you wore a coat and tie to all the Razorback games. You bought your date a white mum with the A on it. Big deal.

SL: Big deal.

JO: Big deal. Yeah, it's really changed. But yeah . . .

BP: Hey, I need to stop.

[Tape stopped]

[01:47:43] SL: Jennings, we're on tape three. We're . . .

JO: Hope that's good.

SL: Oh, it's great! Are you kiddin' me? It's great. I will say that it was fun—I probably talked too much about the clubs and the bands and stuff, but that was something about Fayetteville—especially back in those days. There was some magic in the air about the music and the entertainment scene and all the—you know, Coach Broyles was in play then. The football team was gaining respect. We're [*laughs*] about to be national champions.

[01:48:21] JO: Right. I can remember goin' to—I guess it was a one o'clock class, and Frank will be walking up the trail up behind the Phi Delt house comin' up from Wilson Sharp, and we would sorta walk together. And at that point in time in his life, he was extremely friendly. Very informative durin' that era. I've asked him a hundred times if he remembers it, and he says, "Oh, of course," but just a little kid walkin' to class. Yeah. I'm in Fayetteville away from my parents for the first time. I think I have a seven o'clock, third-floor Old Main English three [*laughs*] days a week. Lord have mercy. You've gotta be eighteen years old to do things like that. And probably out the night before. I don't know when the first class was—seven twenty, seven ten.



But you know, you couldn't use the elevator at Old Main. It didn't work in my era. I guess it works now. But it didn't then. You just climbed the steps. It was a . . .

SL: Hardwood floors creakin' and . . .

JO: Oh yeah, it was so old. Yeah.

SL: . . . radiator heat.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. It's good times.

SL: Do you remember the homecoming parades?

[01:49:40] JO: Oh yeah, yeah. I remember, you know, all the fraternities and sororities would either do a float. They always did the house, but they'd do a float, too. Yeah, stuffin' Kleenex into chicken wire. Yeah, it was big time. There was some—it could've been Civitans—somebody a block off of College always had half of chickens they would barbecue.

SL: I was one of those kids that took those half-chickens in the tin-foil bags to the cars and sold 'em to the—that was the Exchange Club.

JO: Was that what it was?

SL: And actually, that was my father's barbecue . . .

JO: Wow.

SL: . . . sauce that—and I still cook chickens like that.

JO: What did that chicken cost?

SL: Oh, it was seventy-five cents for a half.

JO: It seemed like they had a thousand . . .

SL: A dollar and a quarter or somethin' for a full . . .

JO: That was the biggest grill. They had—looked like two hundred out there . . .

SL: Well . . .

JO: . . . at one time. Yeah.

SL: . . . yeah, I helped Dad make those.

JO: Isn't that somethin'?

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, that was us . . .

JO: That was a . . .

SL: . . . out there.

JO: . . . that was a big deal. Just like the mums with the A. That was a big deal for the Razorbacks. Yeah, you're right. We'd—like reminiscing back in high school—I never got to play ball, but my high—during—in high school, ninth through the twelfth, our team never lost a game in four years. Then we, you know, moved into Fayetteville, and I remember I went to see my high school play Springdale, I think, and we lost my freshman year in college. I hadn't thought of that in fifty years. [*Clears throat*]

[01:51:27] SL: Was that Northside?

JO: No.

SL: Or was that before Northside? It was just Fort Smith?

JO: It was—my high school was St. Anne's.

SL: Oh, okay.

JO: The Catholic school.

SL: Okay, St. Anne's.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I've played St. Anne's.

JO: Did you really?

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Sure.

JO: Yeah. Coach [George] Loss. Coach Bock—Coach Loss's still alive. Coach Bock died a few years ago. Good people. Yeah. But yeah, Razorback games were big—sorta like a Texas game, you know, you were just so nervous the whole week. It was like a fever. We were almost sick. Yeah, that was—I never thought of that. That is when the Razorbacks were really catchin' on with Frank Broyles.

SL: That's right.

JO: Then the crescendo in the [19]64 deal. Yeah.

[01:52:11] SL: Donna Axum . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . becomes Miss America.

JO: Yeah, Tri Delt. Had a class with her. That was big time. Yeah, who would've thought that she would be Miss America. Hmm.

SL: Lots of stuff kinda colliding in Fayetteville, Arkansas . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . at that time.

JO: There was a girl named—was her name Karen Carlson? She was in the drama department. She went on to make an actress.

SL: I think that's right.

JO: And she married one of [*laughs*] the guys that played *Starsky and Hutch*, I think. One or the other she married. I don't know why I thought of that. But yeah, Karen Carlson was a—I remember walkin' through the Fine Arts Building at Fayetteville goin' back to the fraternity house, and on the right was sculpturing. I was thinkin', "There's no way my dad would ever pay me to go to school to sculpture. And that class was full. I remember there was hay on the ground. They had a nice library to study in at the Fine Arts Building. So I'm sure it's gone now.

SL: Yeah, actually, the sculptor back then was Howard Whitlatch. He was pretty good at what he did. Pretty familiar with . . .

JO: That class was full.

SL: Yeah.

JO: When I'd walk through, I mean, you know, everybody was attentive. You know, like—talkin' bout entertainment stuff—you know, like Fayetteville—first concerts, I'm sure, like Peter, Paul and Mary—all of that. You know, first time ever exposed to big-time entertainment in the men's gym.

SL: That's right.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That's right. I had a front-row seat for that. They came and had dinner at our house.

JO: Wow.

SL: It was quite something.

JO: Yeah. Seems like that was [19]61 or [19]62.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

JO: Somewhere in there. Yeah.

[01:54:02] SL: Those were magic days.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: You hit Fayetteville at the exact right time. Probably didn't—had no idea at the time that it was . . .

JO: Gaebale was a big deal.

SL: Absolutely.

JO: Those old races—those little . . .

SL: Soap Box Derbies.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And they always brought the big entertainment ?during? there, and it was huge. I think now, what is it, the Red and White game or somethin'? You know, I don't even remember. But Gaebale was a big weekend. It was huge.

[01:54:33] SL: And then there was always the Washington County Fair.

JO: Oh yeah. [*Laughs*] Yeah, there was always a bunch of guys come back beat up or somethin' that [*SL laughs*]—yeah. And you walked to that. Yeah . . .

SL: Yeah, it was on Razorback Road.

JO: Yeah. You know, we just walked to it. It was no big deal. Now, you know, I'd need a fleet of ambulances to get me there and back, but yeah, you just walked—goin' to county fair. I hadn't thought of county fair since—yeah, it was big.

SL: Well, it was Ronnie Hawkins's biggest competitor 'cause all the guys took the girls to the fair instead of goin' out to the Rockwood Club that weekend.

JO: Did he own that?

SL: He did.

JO: Yeah.

SL: He—yeah, he owned it.

JO: 'Cause he was always playin' there, and I . . .

SL: And he had a partnership in the Shamrock Club.

JO: Oh, wow.

SL: Ronnie was shrewd.

JO: Yeah.

SL: He was shrewd.

JO: He got both ends.

[01:55:22] SL: Dayton Stratton. I don't know if you remember Dayton. He was a little guy, but he managed Ronnie for a while and kinda took over Ronnie's club when he moved to Canada. Big fighter. He could—he wasn't afraid of anybody.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Billy Ray Smith—I don't know if you've heard . . .

JO: Yeah. Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah. He could handle Billy Ray. [*Laughs*]

JO: Yeah, speakin' of fights, there were always a fight at one of those places.

SL: Well, you know, let's talk about fighting just for a second. Back in those days, people liked to fight.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: And even if you got in a fight with someone, it didn't really mean you weren't friends. They just liked to mix it up.

JO: Yeah.

SL: There was somethin' about that.

JO: I know. I never did understand it, but it—I had some good friends that even in high school that would fight after a party or something. And yeah, it didn't last long, but yeah, there was injury. Yeah. But there was always a fight at Fayetteville or something, seems like—all due to alcohol. At ten cents a bottle, no wonder. But that's a lotta money, you know. We didn't—I don't remember anybody picking up tabs for anybody back in those days. You were lucky to get in and get out.

SL: Right.

JO: Yeah.

[01:56:52] SL: Okay, so you spend four years at Fayetteville. Now what did you—do you remember what you ended up majoring in?

JO: You know, business and a little biology. Yeah, I was leanin' toward science a little bit. Then I—when I left Fayetteville, I thought about—always had visions of something big. I thought about workin' in a hospital, but not really working—owning a



hospital. That was always I thought about. So I went to lab school at St. Vincent's after we got married—moved to Little Rock, and I started workin' at the hospital. Vietnam was raging at that time, you know. [SL sighs] And not that I didn't wanna go and serve my country but always wanted to hit the ground, you know. And I had visions of, you know, still tryin' to own a TV/radio station or get into the medical field somewhere. And my introduction into the laboratory and all that kinda stuff, you know, put me in the medical field. Just—it's always gonna be around. You're always gonna need medical help. So I got steered that way.

[01:58:17] SL: Okay, now wait a minute. You just mentioned a couple of things we haven't talked about at all. First of all, getting married and moving to Little Rock. So you spend four years in Fayetteville. You pick up a B.A. . . .

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . in business—minor in biology, maybe, and you come back home? Do you come back to Fort Smith?

JO: In the summertime.

SL: And I wanna know how you and Mitzi hooked up. How . . .

JO: Okay.

SL: . . . how did that come about?

JO: We worked at the hospital together.

SL: Here in . . .

JO: In . . .

SL: . . . in Fort Smith?

JO: . . . in Fort Smith.

[01:58:50] SL: And what hospital was that?

JO: St. Edward's.

SL: Okay.

JO: At the end of Garrison. My whole life [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Was on Garrison.

JO: . . . it rotated within a mile, you know. I'm like a deer. I never leave, you know, the area of a mile. We worked together there, and Mitzi was an X-ray technician, and I was workin' as an orderly. Back in those days, doctors would let you suture people up. You could do everything. It was sort of a heyday for me, workin' in the summertime. And Mitzi and I got to be good friends and . . .

SL: But now had y'all known each other before?

JO: In the ninth grade we went to school together. Really didn't know her that well. She dated my best friend. She's—she still talks about him being the biggest pervert in the world. Sorry, Bill. [*SL laughs*] But we didn't really know each other in the

ninth grade. Mitzi went to a coed school [MO edit: St. Scholastica All-Girls High School] after that. I stayed at St. Anne's. And after school—we met in the summertime. First date we had, we went to the cemetery where my parents are buried now, and we flew a kite. And three dates later we got engaged, and we got married within a year.

SL: That's pretty quick.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Three dates later, you're engaged.

[02:00:22] JO: Yeah. It just all seemed to work. She believed in me, and I believed in her, and we were compatible. And we—you were sayin' the first time we met—our mothers shared a room in the hospital at St. Edward's. We're three days apart. Small world. We lived thirteen blocks from each other, but I really didn't know her. And I remember my mother was in the hospital a week, and she went home in an ambulance. That is old school.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. But apparently we met at an early age. [*Laughter*] And then we, you know, worked the summer together, and my life is still in semesters. I don't know if yours is or not, but I still think of first semester and second semester. My whole life is divided

that way. So we worked together first semester we were outta school, and we moved to Little Rock. Got married in November. Moved to Little Rock, and we had our anniversary the other day. Forty-four years.

SL: Congratulations.

[02:01:30] JO: But we moved to Little Rock. I think we had two hundred dollars. I had two hundred dollars. I think Mitzi had five hundred. And we moved in, found an apartment, furnished. We carried all of our worldly possessions with her. You know, everybody has the classic brick 2X4, you know, bookcase, and all these books we never read. But we brought everything down in a trailer. And I found a job the next day at the hospital, and Mitzi eventually found a job workin' for some doctors and . . .

SL: So why did you choose to move to Little Rock?

JO: Just wanted outta Fort Smith.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You know, after comin' back from Fayetteville, and it just—we just felt like, you know, that Fort Smith was, you know, the opportunity place. We always liked . . .

SL: You mean Little Rock.

JO: Little Rock. We always talked about Dallas and talked about Memphis, but Little Rock was the easiest and simplest. Yeah, we

had been to Little—I had been to Little Rock. I had a lot of fraternity brothers from Little Rock and visited Little Rock, and it just seemed like the land of opportunity for us. Big city. We were also—I was makin' eighty-one cents an hour. We could get a dime raise in Little Rock. Ninety-one cents an hour or so. Opportunity was there.

[02:03:00] SL: Did y'all know anybody other than your fraternity brothers . . .

JO: ?No?.

SL: . . . that . . .

JO: ?Yeah. Yeah?, we just—I think we probably got a newspaper and found our apartment. We drove down one Saturday afternoon a couple weeks before we got married and got the apartment. And then I moved in. I didn't even have a job, but I had a couple of contacts—physician contacts that I'd talked to, and they set me up at St. Vincent's. And the first—that was in [19]66—we got married in [19]65 in November and moved to Little Rock in [19]66. [Nineteen] sixty-six, [19]67, and [19]68, I worked at St. Vincent's and Baptist, and my personal claim to fame for me—I worked three years with one day off a year, and most of the time I took seven nights of call, and I worked sixteen hours a day.

[02:04:07] SL: Now, okay. Now let's . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: Let me break this down.

JO: Okay.

SL: You—I'm hearing you worked at two different hospitals.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And both of these jobs were full time.



JO: Yeah. I worked at Baptist from seven to three, and I went to St. Vincent's from three to eleven, and then I took call at St. Vincent's seven days a week. And that's before the days of pagers or anything. But you know, I told you I knew I could do it if I could hit—just—I gotta get outta school. I gotta get rid of all this. I know I can work. And I made it all come together. So I did that three years, takin' Christmas off—the only day I took off. Then in [19]68, I started my business. I still kept my call, and I still kept my day job at Baptist the first year I had my business. You know, you weren't—I wasn't sure I could really make a go of it. And then I started goin' to the prison and doin' work, so I'd go to Pine Bluff—Grady, Arkansas, every night. I wouldn't—I had to be back by twelve 'cause I went on call at the hospital. That's before pagers and cell phones. You just had to call in.

[02:05:29] SL: Okay. So for three years, you had two jobs and seven hours of—or seven days of call.

JO: Yeah, and I . . .

SL: And then . . .

JO: . . . worked the weekends sixteen hours a day, too—worked every day sixteen hours—even the weekends.

SL: And . . .

JO: I could pick up forty hours on the weekend from Friday afternoon, a double Saturday, and a double Sunday—it gave me another forty hours.

SL: So we're talkin' then a hundred-and-twenty-hour week. Is that right?

JO: Yeah, sixteen times seven, then my seven nights of call. I never got tired. I never complained 'cause that's . . .

SL: Well now, what about [*laughs*] Mitzi?

JO: . . . that's what I wanted to do.

SL: What's Mitzi doing? She's . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . workin' for some doctors.

JO: Mitzi's workin' some doctors. She'd come into the hospital at night. We had a little dog, a little Chihuahua, and she'd sneak the Chihuahua in to see me. [*SL laughs*] And—but I was the

happiest. I finally got to do what I wanted to do, and I . . .

[02:06:28] SL: And she was okay with you workin' that hard?

JO: She was okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I probably talked to her ten times a day, and at night, you know, she'd come up. Then, you know, call sometimes—you know, I always got called. I don't think I ever went a night without getting called, but I might not get called till three in the morning. So you know, I had some time at home. *[Laughs]* And then, you know, get up in the middle of the night. It never . . .

SL: Jennings, that . . .

JO: . . . never bothered me.

SL: . . . you know, that sounds like someone that's really on fire about gettin'—doin' work, but it seems like there'd be some health consequences that—when did you ever sleep?

JO: Yeah, I'm payin' for it now.

SL: Yeah.

[02:07:10] JO: But then I never had any problems then. Never. I could remember at the hospitals I would run up and down the fire escape 'cause I didn't wanna wait on the elevator. I'm really—I've gotten a lot better, but I'm very impatient. I hate to wait on people, and I hate for people to wait on me. That's just a no-no. But I got to do—what I always wanted to was work.



And you know, you could work your tail off, and you know, you'd even make a lotta money at ninety-one cents an hour. But I had the three jobs goin', and you know, it all worked. I have no regrets. [SL sighs] And then I got my own business . . .

SL: Okay, now. I . . .

JO: . . . and then I could work twenty-four hours a day. Go ahead.

SL: All right. Now let's talk about your own business. That . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: What kinda business are we talkin' about?

JO: Medical research.

SL: And what—how did that happen? How did . . .



JO: I was head of the microbiology department at Baptist.

SL: Okay. Now wait a minute.

JO: Okay.

SL: How do you get to be head of the microbiology department with a B.A. in business and a minor . . .

JO: Yeah, I went to lab school.

SL: You went to lab school.

JO: Went to lab school at St. Vincent's.

SL: In Little Rock.

JO: In Little Rock. And so I went to work in the clinical lab at

Baptist, and I was just there at the right time. Right place at the

right time. And everybody knew, you know, my work ethic. I'm gonna work till it's finished. So there was an opportunity, and I got to be head of the lab at the microbiology department at Baptist.

SL: Okay.

[02:08:42] JO: And so I—there's a little test you do. The reason the doctor puts you on a medicine after he does a culture is that he knows the medicine will work 'cause you do this little simple test. It's called sensitivity disk. I had a doctor approach me and said, "Can you drop this certain disk on my patients that are—have pathogenics?" And I said, "Sure." So I'm workin' all day long probably for twenty dollars, and he's gonna give me twenty dollars for this thing that I do five hundred times a day for twenty dollars a day. So it got my attention. It was for a national drug company. So I met the people from the drug company that asked this doctor to get me to perform this test. So I just saw an opportunity. There seems to be a lot of money in this field. So I got to know this guy. He introduced me to another M.D. out of Dallas, and I was sort of their package man. They asked me if I could find a doctor to do something, and I said, "Sure." I did it for nothin'. They were happy. Within six months, I had really gotten to know these two M.D.s, and I just

saw an opportunity, and I said, "You know, I think I can make a livin' doin' this." So I just put it together on my own. I . . .

[02:10:21] SL: So where did you—where was your business physically?

JO: Starting off, it was nowhere. [*Laughs*] It was in a kitchen of a doctor's office, and then I actually moved to the basement. I was really getting uptown. But I would have these different studies' tests performed in doctors' offices, sorta like a mediator or a broker. And then I said, "You know, why am I giving all this business away? You know, here I'm the one that wanted to own a hospital. Why don't I just create a hospital?" So you know, it evolved over a couple of years, and I bought me a building and we—I rented one for—I didn't buy it—I rented one for ten years, and I eventually bought my building. But I was in business thirty-five years testing new compounds first time through man. First pass.

SL: Okay. So let me get this straight. You kind of fell into this by doing lab tests on something called a disk. And is this a—like a blood sample that you drop into a . . .

JO: You take the actual pathogens. Say you have a strep infection.

SL: Okay.

[02:11:41] JO: You actually take the organism and put it on some

culture media, and then you put the—a disk that's impregnated with the actual antibiotic—simple thing—and you mix it. And if it gives you—if it—you can look at it, and if it kills the organism, that's the drug of choice. Simple little test. And that's what got me goin' 'cause I got to know the drug companies, and I just—you know, one thing led to another. They were talkin' about me finding patients with, you know, osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis, high blood pressure. I said, "You know, I can make all this work." And then I started givin' it to doctors' offices to do, and then I said, "You know, why am I givin' all this away? I can do this." So I just hired me a doctor and built me a facility, and it just all worked out.

SL: So . . .

[02:12:39] JO: But I had the opportunity. You know, when I was at the hospital, a lot of people were upset because I was workin' so much, and I was always takin' flak from different employees, you know, because you know, they didn't realize I was workin' the night shift, I was workin' the weekends. You know, everybody's jealous of everybody, so it was always a problem for me. So now I finally had my own business. I can work twenty-six hours a day if I want to. Nobody's gonna gripe at me. So at last I hit my home run.

[02:13:11] SL: So in your business that you started, you would still take whatever organisms that they were tryin' to find a solution for . . .

JO: Totally different.

SL: Totally different?

JO: Totally different.

SL: Okay, what happened?

JO: We have the medicine now . . .

SL: Okay.

JO: . . . but we don't know if it works, so we give it to a patient to see if it works. So I did that for a couple of a years—efficacy—and I really didn't like that part of the research because you can be biased. You can always be—criticize—"Well, you said it worked." Well, I found out phase one—first time from animal to man, you just give it to see if you live. That's what I wanted. The risks are big, or you gotta deviate a little bit—take the chance—and that's where the money is, and that's what I wanted to do. I wanted the highest risk, but it paid the most. So I got into phase one. They've got this compound that looks good in the dog, rat, primate. [*Laughs*] Let's give it to a human, and I'm your man. So I never—we still did lab work, and I still drew blood. I drew blood five thousand times a

month. I drew all the blood—the majority of it—but we didn't—I got away from all the microbiology and all that.

[02:14:36] SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. So is this part of the—is this part of an FDA regimen?

JO: Yeah, yeah.

SL: So after so many successful cases, then the drug is approved?

JO: Yeah. Long or short of it. Phase one, you give it to the person just to see if they live. It's all—you don't care if it works or not. So you do tons of—you know, from ophthalmology, you know, EKGs, lab work—everything—to monitor this person to make sure the person leaves the way the person came in after you dose 'em. That's what I did. Second phase is after you know it's safe, then you give it to a person with the—havin' a problem—try to find the dose—see if it works. Efficacy. I don't like that 'cause I don't wanna be biased, I don't wanna be criticized, you know. [*Laughs*] There's a lotta problems with people doin' research 'cause, you know, they all want it to work.

SL: That's right.

JO: You know, I [*laughs*] never wanted it to work 'cause that meant they had to go back to the drawing board and start over again.

SL: Right.

[02:15:47] JO: But we had—in all my years of doin' it, we had

Claritin and Motrin—probably two of our biggest drugs that we took all the way through. But I had thousands of losers that never went anywhere. I was never uncomfortable dosing somebody. Phase three, you're just tryin' for efficacy. Phase four is postmarketing. But I stayed in the phase one department, and . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . that's the easiest one. Yeah, you're constantly monitored by the FDA and all of that.



SL: Okay, I'm gonna step back just a little bit. You had a call, or a doctor approached you about doing some stuff at the prison? Now . . .

JO: He wanted me to do some of his patients in the hospital, so that's how they got started. But I had another doctor [*laughs*] from a drug company that asked me if I could do different studies, and I couldn't find anybody would give me hospital space. I tried to—I even tried to buy a hospital once. Nobody would sell me beds. Nobody would—so I found out that I could go to the prison and get the same thing done. So [19]68, [19]69—little bit of [19]70, I did all my work at the Arkansas state prison at Grady.

SL: What's the name of that?

JO: Arkansas State Correction.

SL: Arkansas State . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

JO: Yeah. It's at Grady, Arkansas. You can always tell if somebody's been to prison. [*Laughs*] They don't refer to it as Pine Bluff; it's Grady . . .

SL: Grady. Okay.

[02:17:25] JO: . . . or Cummins. Yeah. [*SL sips from a cup*] So I did that, and there was a Supreme Court ruling in the early [19]70s that you couldn't use prisoners 'cause you were coercin' 'em—'cause you were payin' 'em. So I was suddenly outta business. But then I had the foresight to, you know, just build me a facility and put beds in it and call it a hospital, so it all worked. Very innovative back in those late [19]60s. People didn't even advertise. It was sort of against the law to advertise. I was advertising for drug studies—all this kind of stuff—volunteers. Like, lawyers never advertised back then.

SL: Right.

JO: It was just the unwritten law. Little deviation. You gotta push the envelope. So it all worked for me.

SL: So instead of workin' a hundred and twenty-plus hours a week



for other people, all of a sudden—or not all of a sudden—but you got to a place where you were workin' for yourself.

JO: I got to work for myself.

SL: And what—did Mitzi fit into the . . .

JO: Mitzi helped me for years. Yeah. She spent the night—same times I did, you know, workin' there all the time. I drew blood durin' the night. When Breezy came along, Mitzi sorta did things at home. She had—somebody had to raise Breezy.

SL: Right.

[02:19:00] JO: I worked at the facility from Friday—from Sunday night to Friday afternoon. I was there twenty-four hours a day. It was my business, and nobody could tell me to go home.

SL: So you said something about hiring a doctor. You hired a doctor to . . .

JO: I just—you just—you have to have a . . .

SL: So he was kinda your resident . . .

JO: . . . principal investigator. Yeah.

SL: . . . doctor.

JO: Yeah. You have to have a principal investigator.

SL: And then did you have any other staff?

JO: Yeah, I had about—probably at my peak, I had fourteen people. I always run a lean machine. After I sold my business, I think

they're up to fifty people . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . and about a tenth of the work. [*Laughter*] But I just—I always—my philosophy is to hire people that wanna work. "We're all on the same cruise, and if you're willin' to work, I'll pay you well." And all of my people—they'd been with me, you know, twenty, twenty-five years. I never had a turnover. I had a fantastic staff.

SL: That speaks very well of the business.

JO: Yeah.

[02:20:08] SL: So you must've liked the work as well. I mean, I know that you really wanted to get started, but . . .

JO: Yeah. You know, but I can be happy runnin' a fillin' station. You know, I just wanted to work. I just happened to fall into—you know, I pursued the medical field like that. But I just felt like I could've done anything I wanted to do. Like, I could be happy changin' a tire. Wouldn't want to, you know, but I enjoyed the rewards of working hard. It was very rewarding to me. And again, I didn't have anybody tellin' me I couldn't work.

[02:20:51] SL: Well, and you got in—you found a niche that actually paid pretty well.

JO: Yeah. Yeah, I am the first to admit that. Yeah. That's why I

never quibble with people when they give me a price for a hot water tank or something, you know. "I got my way. I will help you get you get your way." [*SL laughs*] Yeah, I never ask anybody for a favor. I—it's just not my nature 'cause I never expected a drug company to—you know, I told 'em if they wanted, you know, cheap medicine, you know, I'm not the Walmart—I'm sorry—and I love Walmart. But yeah, everybody has to make a livin', and I just found a little niche that—now there's probably a thousand places like mine. Durin' my era, there were very few.

SL: Do you think you kind of helped write the book on those kinds of facilities?

JO: Yeah, you know, I'm the old grandfather they talk about. Yeah. I had never been to another site. I just developed it myself, what I thought would work. Never went to a trade show. It was all word of mouth. I was really blessed with the amount of work that I got over the years. But I had never been—and I went to one drug company once—bought lunch for everybody [*laughs*] and went home, and if they could—"I don't need this. I can do this at Little Rock." So that I was my only time at a drug company.

[02:22:20] SL: Well, you and I were talkin' earlier about how critical

it is to have—to satisfy the client or to pay attention to the client or to accommodate a client. So somehow or another you had some people skills in this, too, that you aren't quick to admit to. But you developed relationships.

JO: Right, right. You know, I made everybody family from all the drug companies. I would pick 'em up at the airport and pick 'em up in a limousine—they're all middle management. Good as gold. Bring 'em to the office. I remember I always had a snack or something for 'em. Every lunchtime they got to pick whatever they wanted. If I had three drug companies in a week, and all three picked Chinese, so be it. I can live with it as long as they're happy. And I remember I always took 'em out at dinner at night. My time—I'd always bring Mitzi and Breezy—you know, get through at eleven o'clock at night—take 'em back to the hotel, talk to 'em for an hour. Then, you know, I gotta get up at five the next morning. But I enjoyed what I did, and the rewards were, you know, very rewarding for me, you know, financially and, you know, mentally. 'Cause, again, I got to do what I wanted to do. I think Lorrie Morgan's father said, "You better like your signature song 'cause you're gonna sing it forever." Well, I've always remembered that, and you know, you need to like what you do 'cause you're gonna be doin' it

forever. You know, I never dreaded goin' to work. It was always a high to me to get to work, and I treated every study like it was my last study. You know, I'm very fortunate. I just eat and breathe it the whole time. Wear you out.

[02:24:25] SL: Okay, so now I'm back in Fort Smith now, and you're gettin' outta school, and you were kinda antsy to get outta school. You really didn't have a whole lot of patience with it. You went to your dad's electric shop every day after school. Did you look forward . . .

JO: Hated it.

SL: You hated it?

JO: Hated it.

SL: So . . .

JO: The worst thing in the world you can do is ask a kid, when everybody else is out playing cowboys and Indians or ridin' bikes or playin' tennis—playin' sports—I gotta go to work. And it's a dirty job. [*SL laughs*] It is grease. My hands were so black on a little kid. I got—I just had to, you know, use Brillo Pads. Five years old. No regrets, but I hated it. I hated goin' to work.

[02:25:16] SL: I'm just tryin' to figure out where you got this drive to get started.

JO: My mom and dad. You know, you gotta go to *A to B*, period, you

know. And it's just always instilled in me. But school was out at three ten—I'm at work at three thirty. There is no deviation. I'm at work at three thirty.

SL: I know, but . . .

JO: I have to be there. I don't know what would happen if I wasn't there, but I was never late. And I didn't get off till six or later, but we worked till six o'clock. It was just like somebody flips a switch at six, and we're through for the day. Yeah.

SL: It's just that you have the—you had this voracious appetite to get to work once you got outta school, and I mean . . .

JO: Well, I knew I could do it.

SL: . . . essentially, three jobs at once . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . seven days a week. And then you start your own company, and you're pretty much there twenty-four hours a day, five or six days a week. So you had this enormous appetite to be working. I'm just—and you say it's from your parents gettin' from *A* to *B*, but it seems like there's a lot in that *A* to . . .

[02:26:27] JO: Well, yeah, I was a dreamer. I always wanted to dream. You know, like, I don't know how many cars I have—automobiles I have now. I've never counted 'em. I don't wanna know. But you know, I've had the pleasure of gettin' 'em, and

that's fulfilling to me. You know, I just knew I could do good if I ever got the chance—no matter what it was—changin' tires, you know. Could've been a TV evangelist. I don't know. [*Laughter*]  
But . . .

SL: Well . . .

JO: . . . I knew whatever I could do, I could do it. I just wanted the opportunity. It was just killin' me to get out there and get goin'. Yeah, yeah. I was—you know, I remember in the summertime the summer I met Breezy—Mitzi—I don't think I was on the payroll till maybe the last couple weeks. I just donated my time, and you know, I asked 'em for a job, and they said, "You're not qualified. You can't do this." And I said, "Well, can I just work free?" And they said, "Sure." So, you know . . .

SL: As an orderly?

JO: Yeah. So I was workin', like, sixteen hours a day, you know, gettin' to know all the doctors—suturin' people up, you know. It was [*laughs*] fun. I enjoyed it. You know, I'd sit around, and I'd say, "Golly, I hope we have a big car wreck tonight." [*Laughter*]  
And you know, the doctors would go crazy if they'd hear me say that, but you know, I was ready to do somethin'. So it was . . .

[02:27:49] SL: And really, it was those relationships that you built that led you to some contacts in Little Rock. Is that . . .

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . how that worked?

JO: Yeah, I had known all the doctors in Fort Smith, and when I moved to Little Rock, I asked a couple about a job, you know. He said, "Well, I know a guy." They—so I went to a physician the day we moved here, and he said, "Sure." He called the hospital. I had a job the next day. Yeah, I remember when I interviewed for the job. I said, "You know, I wanna work as many hours as I can. I'll work weekends. I'll work nights. I'll—I just want work." And they—we had a great relationship. And this lady that gave me the opportunity, I just found out she died, like, a year ago. I never knew she was still alive, or I'd [*laughs*] gone to worship her almost. She was so good to me—Hilda Adams. She gave me the huge opportunity, you know, in Little Rock.

[02:28:48] SL: This was at Baptist?

JO: St. Vincent's.

SL: It's at St. Vincent's.

JO: Yeah. You know, she just fell in love with me 'cause I said, "I'll work nights, weekends—you tell me—all holidays. I'll work 'em."  
So . . .

SL: And you did.



JO: I did. I loved it. I loved when there was a Razorback game in town. Everybody wanted off. You know, I wanted to work, so it just all worked. No regrets.

SL: It's—you know, it's so—what's remarkable about this—I would say 99 percent of the people would feel like they had missed life—that they had missed a lot by working—by committing so much of their time to their—to the labor of life and—but you seemed to be—you loved it so much, it's like you kind of found your life in the work—in the process of working.

[02:29:47] JO: Yeah. Yeah. I enjoyed gettin' up and goin' to work. I enjoyed workin' those sixteen hours. I remember when I was goin' from Baptist to St. Vincent's in the old days, people were all goin' home, and I'm goin' to the second job. I—you know, I wondered, you know, "What's it like to go home in the middle of the afternoon?" You know, I left in the morning when it was dark, and I got home at night when it was dark. And I had that call. Also, during those three years—well, it really lasted for five—remember I worked in microbiology. This is a service that doctors' offices didn't have back then, so I had thirteen doctors' offices that I would go to at night and do their microbiology for 'em. And how many times did I lose the keys to thirteen doctors' offices? Twice. [*Laughs*] Yeah, it—really a mess. But

that—remember, that's in the days before pagers or cell phones. So in every doctor's office I'm at, I gotta call the hospital and say, "I'm at Doctor So-and-So. Here's my number." And then when I leave, I go to another doctor's office. I remember one night I had to go up six floors in this building. Dark. And I had a master key, and I had to go down this hall that was dark and go in the side door to this doctor's office to get to his lab stuff he had left me. And I opened the door, and there was a guy there robbin' it.

SL: Oh!

[02:31:18] JO: Oh, just petrified. Said, "Buddy, I won't [*laughs*] say anything. You don't say anything. We'll just go our merry way." And he did. He didn't do anything to me. He was robbin' all the drugs and everything. And the next morning I got a call about eight o'clock wantin' to know if I knew anything that happened in the night, but I said, "Yes, I do, but I made this guy a deal that I wouldn't call the police or anything, and I didn't." But goin' down that dark hall to get into the elevator, that was scary. I guess I was twenty-two years old, twenty-three. Scary.

[02:31:54] SL: That's right. You're awfully young doing—during this three-to-five-year period. So . . .

JO: Yeah, I . . .

SL: . . . you start your own business when you're twenty-seven?

JO: Ah . . .

SL: Twenty . . .

JO: Twenty-two or twenty-one? Twenty-six.

SL: Twenty-six.

JO: I remember one night, I got a call in this doctor's office—you know, it's three o'clock in the morning, I guess, and the lights are on. My car is outside. Police called [*laughs*] and said, "This is the police department. You need to go outside." And I said, "Well, how do I know you're the police?" And he said, "Well, don't go outside." And, "Okay, makes sense to me." So I open the door, and I expected to see a policeman there saying, you know, "Hi, I'm Officer So-and-So. What are you doing in this building?" When I open the door, there was a gentleman kneeling down and one standing up with two shotguns, you know. Couldn't've missed me. Wow! [*Laughs*] "I'm making a livin', buddy. Work with me." But yeah.

[02:32:57] SL: So these were another set of robbers that were . . .

JO: No, it was the police department.

SL: It was the police.

JO: Yeah. They just saw the lights on in the doctor's office. But yeah, that adds to the eleven-to-seven mystique, but I was very

excited. I had thirteen doctors' offices that were payin' me a set amount every month, you know. That was . . .

SL: So you guys were savin' your money.

JO: I've always spent it. I wish I could say that.

SL: Oh, I was gonna ask you about that.

JO: Wish I could say that.

SL: You said earlier . . .

JO: I . . .

SL: . . . make a dollar, spend a dollar ten.

JO: Oh yeah. You know, I—it provided a lotta jealousy for me at the hospital, you know. I was drivin' a new Mercedes. I had an airplane. We had a home with a pool, you know. But I had a lotta things goin'. But it just—it's always created, you know, problems. People either like me or dislike me. There's no *[laughs]* in between. So I've had a lot of problems through the years 'cause, you know, I've been very, very lucky.

[02:34:00] SL: Well, you worked *[laughs]* very, very hard.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I mean, it's hard to imagine anybody would hold that against you and . . .

JO: Yeah, you know, there's people out there. Yeah.

SL: I wonder if they understand how much work you put in or . . .

JO: No idea.

SL: . . . or your—the effort that you—that it took . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . to have that kind of style—that lifestyle. That's interesting.

JO: Yeah. Worked hard, played hard.

SL: Uh-huh. Well, so you had this business—well, let's see. We probably ought to talk about Breezy a little bit. Breezy came into your life. How old were y'all when you had Breezy?

JO: Breezy—it'd be thirty [MO edit: thirty-six]. We always enjoyed goin' to Vegas. Never gamble. Just liked the atmosphere. Loved the food. Loved the people. Loved to shop. And Mitzi is always late. I am always early. And we went to Vegas one time, and our luggage didn't make it, so we stayed at the—oh, I cannot remember it—Mitzi would kill me. I cannot think of the name of it. It's still there—hotel. Our luggage didn't arrive for a couple of days later, so we went to Vegas and brought Breezy back. [SL laughs] So that's our Breezy story. She was born in [19]80. Easy to calculate how old she is. But good kid. She had everything in the world she ever wanted, and you'd never know it. She's a really down-to-earth-type person. Yeah. She has her own little business in Little Rock. She teaches yoga. She graduated from UCA, and she's happy. She's twenty-nine.

She's our whole life. Yeah. She's the "Beezer."

SL: The Beezer.

JO: Yeah.

[02:36:24] SL: So I guess when she came along that changed some of the dynamics of your work relationship with Mitzi. She now . . .

JO: Mitzi's now home.

SL: . . . stayed home.

JO: She's gotta—somebody's gotta raise Breezy. And you know, I made all of her little parties. I would have the film crew there. We always [*laughs*]*—*we filmed everything—always gave every kid a VCR of ever event. We did all the major holiday parties and everything with Breezy. Yeah, we still look at her videotapes of different little functions she did.

SL: Well, sure you do.

JO: But yeah, that was fun.

SL: I mean . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . everybody loves to see their kids growing up.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, I did sort of the same thing with my kids, but that's 'cause I've been in this kind of business for a long time. But . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . I understand that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and how valuable that is.

[02:37:26] JO: You know, I wasn't—I admit I wasn't there every day, but you know, I wouldn't—Breezy would—Mitzi would bring her down to the office, and you know, we still—I still maintained, you know, tryin' to be the good father. But I admit—you know, I'm the first to admit that, you know, I did do a lotta time away from the house, you know. ?Thinkin'? . . .

SL: That's not unusual for the fathers. I will say that many say they wish they had spent more time with 'em growin' up, but you know, you're puttin' a roof over their heads and clothing on their back and food in the belly. I mean, there's responsibilities and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: And usually people enjoy their work, and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . they're contributing something to the community in real ways. So there's a drive there, and there's a balance that you try to achieve. It sounds like you did . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . fine with it. It sounds . . .



[02:38:28] JO: We—I—yeah, I tried. We—I remember we were leavin' the office one night right around Christmastime, and I was lockin' the door, and Mitzi had Breezy. She was—I don't know—I'm not sure if she was a year old yet—lot of leaves around the car and everything. I heard some people talkin'. I thought Mitzi was laughin' with 'em, but they were tryin' to kidnap Breezy.

SL: Whoa!

JO: And you know, they had guns. You know, they put guns in Breezy's mouth—my head—all this kind of stuff. You know, Mitzi wouldn't, you know, dare give Breezy up. It was a big tug-of-war-type thing. Mass confusion. And I figured these guys were probably associated, you know, through my business some way, you know. Volunteers or something. So I just had to say, "Hey, wait. Wait a minute. Wait a minute," you know. "What do you want? Let's take care of this," you know. And it was getting out of control. But after that, you know, our wall went up. [*Sighs*] We had security guards, you know, for Breezy 'cause I was never home, you know. We had a—we got a dog that came from the pound that was brilliant. And we had every—all of my animals are named Buddy. We had Buddy trained. Buddy



stayed with Breezy for ten or twelve years, and that protected her. I always thought somethin' would happen. So yeah. Good times, bad times. But—so we always had that fear that [*SL sighs*] somethin' was gonna happen.

[02:40:12] SL: So you think these guys—it was all about your wealth, that they were after . . .

JO: I . . .

SL: . . . dollars? Is . . .

JO: . . . I think so. You know, it was a hectic probably four minutes. You know, it seemed like an eternity. We had just cashed a check for Christmas, too. Thank you very much. [*Laughs*] And some guy from a drug company had given me the billfold, so you know, they're takin' my billfold. I said, "Wait—wait—wait—wait a minute. You don't need the billfold. Just take what's in it. It was a gift. I only had it maybe a day." But—so we've had our ups and downs.

[02:40:51] SL: So did the authorities ever catch those guys?

JO: No. We figured out probably who they were. I think one got killed—shootout or something—and one's in prison. I can't tell you what happened to the other one. It's been too many years ago.

SL: Boy!

JO: We lost track of it.

SL: That's a big wake-up call, isn't it?

JO: Yeah, we were always insecure after that, you know.

SL: And for good reason. I mean . . .

JO: But one—this same dog we had—it reminds me of an event. I was actually home. I don't know, it musta been on a weekend or something. My dog wanted to go to the bathroom, so I let him out. And a guy walks by with a clipboard—says, "Security." Well, you know, I was petrified. I couldn't even talk. My dog didn't understand any of that, so he sent him to the hospital. This was this dog that we had trained to take care of Breezy.

SL: Uh-huh. And the guy was just some guy that had . . .

JO: He had broken in, and we didn't . . .

SL: He had broken in.

JO: Yeah. We didn't even know it. But we—since then we've been, you know, pretty lucky.

[02:41:58] SL: There is something blessed about your life, isn't there?

JO: I—you know, I'm the luckiest person in the world. Gotten to meet so many people, and so many nice things happened to me along the way. Yeah. For a little boy that stared out that window, that I actually have—yeah, you know, I'm gonna put it

back up in my new office. But I went by it every day and—just the way I saw it—the whole world. Oh, I've been blessed ten million ways.

SL: Did your parents—were they ever aware of the success that you . . .

JO: My mom.

SL: Your mom.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: That's right. You—your mom actually lived with you for a while. Is that right? No, that was your grandmother . . .

JO: Grandmother.

SL: . . . that lived . . .

JO: Mom lived in Fort Smith. She lived to 2000. So she got to—she told me that she—I think it was in her obituary that I took her to meet and see the Rolling Stones [*SL laughs*] and the—she said that's what did her in, she thinks. That was a long time ago.

[02:43:17] SL: Let's see, 2000. What was that, Voodoo Lounge or Steel Wheels? That's probably Voodoo Lounge.

JO: Voodoo Lounge. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, the big inflatables on the stage.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

JO: Yeah. War Memorial.

SL: Yeah, I was there.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughter*] Somethin'.

SL: It was a great show.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: That was—you know, Butch Stone the whole night was right here wantin' me to finance the next one.

SL: Oh!

JO: "Oh man, let me enjoy it, Butch, please."

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[02:43:42] JO: You just gotta work it when you can. Yeah, Dad always told me—Dad said, "You better find a job where you can sit down," which I did. [*SL laughs*] I actually found a job 'cause he always said I had a buncha lead in me, you know. He was always, you know, pushin'. You know, I knew what he was doin'. It—like I said, the worst thing in the world is to have to work every day after school and the weekends. You know, I never slept in. And Sunday morning was, you know, up for church.

SL: Right.

JO: So you know, I didn't sleep in till I went to college. I didn't realize that you could go back to bed, or you could sleep in. That all happened in college. Never. You couldn't ever go back to bed at the house. Never. 'Cause you're always workin' or somethin'.

SL: Well, the bed was made . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . when you got outta the shower. It—you're done with that . . .

JO: You're through.

SL: . . . until [*laughter*] the evening, right?

JO: You're through. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. So college is a—really a rude awakening for me. Lotta freedom attached to college.

[02:44:51] SL: I was gonna say, though, the discipline that you got at home probably served you well in college.

JO: Oh, it did. You know, I knew when I was doin' wrong. Yeah. Oh yeah. To this day, you know, I—when I get into my car—my dad always said, "Lock your car." To this day, when I get outta the car, I got Dad sayin', "Lock your car." Still there. Yeah, I

just can't get it out of my head. Yeah. So [*SL sighs*] no regrets.

SL: Well, okay. So you have your business for thirty-five years, and then didn't—you sold this business, didn't you?

JO: I sold it.

SL: And—but now you're kinda—you're gonna get back into it. Is that . . .

JO: Right. I had a five-year no-compete. And my five years was up in July.

SL: So you're gonna open up shop again.

JO: Tickled to death.

SL: And are you gonna work it as hard as you've . . .

JO: You bet.

SL: You can't wait.

JO: Yeah, I go every day.

SL: We're talkin' back to *A* to *B*, aren't we?

JO: Yeah.

SL: And you're . . .

[02:46:05] JO: First thing I did was identify my bathroom and my bedroom. That's half my battle. Then I identified my office and everything I need in there?. Yeah, I'm ready to hit it. I got possession of the building maybe three weeks ago. I've been there every day. We're doin' some remodeling and everything.

SL: And have you got staff picked out . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that you're gonna hire?

JO: Yeah.

SL: Or some of your old . . .

JO: The old crew.

SL: The old crew.

JO: Yeah.

SL: So it's like a homecomin'.

JO: It is. Everybody's excited. I'm excited. Ready to hit it. Yeah.

Yeah, I still had that urge. I will admit, though, for the last five years I have not set an alarm. Very few times. Every day of my life, I've always set two alarms. I just can't take a chance on being late.

BP: Outta tape.

SL: Outta tape? All right. Joy, let's stop recording.

[Tape stopped]


[02:47:04] SL: Let's—first of all, what was the name of your company?

JO: Arkansas Research Medical Testing Center. We call it Arkansas Research for short.

SL: Uh-huh. Arkansas Research Medical Testing Center. Okay,

great. Thanks.

JO: Now it's Osborne Research Center.

SL: Good. Good. Well, before we go back over the span of your career and your other involvements that came along as well, let's talk about this last five years. I mean, I know when David Pryor lost the Senate race and before he became governor, he always said he was like a fish outta water. All of a sudden,  [*laughs*] you're not doin' this business. You have a non-compete clause for five years. And what do you do for five years?

[02:47:57] JO: Well, I had this no-compete clause, but I had this consulting arrangement. And for the first three years I went to work every day. They never once asked me one thing. I was in my office every day because I told 'em I would be there. So durin' the day I'm just lookin' for somethin' to do. Some days I would leave early and mow grass, and I—you know, I finally found that when I mow grass—I've got the property on Cantrell that I have to mow, I got the property at Hot Springs, and I got the property at the farm, so that's sort of a full-time job mowing grass. And I could solve almost every problem in the world by mowin' grass. It was so gratifying—just instant gratification. So I rode a lawnmower for, you know, three years, I guess, and [*SL laughs*] got to travel some. You know, we'd never traveled.



We'd never been to Europe. We'd never been anywhere—to Vegas once in a while—'cause we're always workin'. And so Mitzi and I traveled some, and everybody needs to see Europe once, and I'm fine and glad to be back home. But always dreamin'. I'm a dreamer. I was always dreamin', "What if," you know. And I'm still tryin' to figuring out what I'm gonna do—where I'm goin' or what I'm gonna end up being. But I enjoyed not setting an alarm clock. I set two alarms my whole life 'cause I knew I only had maybe two hours to sleep, and it's gonna take you two alarms to wake up. Once I wake up, I'm fine. It's just gettin' up—the initial phase. But I have enjoyed the five years I was off. I missed working. I miss making money. I enjoy doin' that. That gives me a lotta satisfaction.

SL: Well, so . . .

JO: I work hard and play hard, you know.

[02:50:20] SL: But you're really lookin' forward to getting back into the work.

JO: Yeah. You know, it's a challenge. Worst economic times in my lifetime. And here I'm doin' a start-up business. But if it's endurance, I'll win. That's the key. Or I tell my good friend, "I could have a stroke and [*laughs*] gracefully bow out if it doesn't work." But I'll give it a shot. I'm excited. Yeah.

SL: Well, it is a start-up business, but it's a—it's really kinda getting back to the business, isn't it?

JO: I hope so.

SL: I mean, you've got—you still have some . . .

JO: I still have contacts.

SL: You still have contacts, and you have a—you still have a record of getting the job done.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Kinda like your father, getting the job done right—no waiting.

[02:51:18] JO: You know, the—when the drug companies would give me a study, if I accepted it, they knew they could go home and go on vacation 'cause I would get it done. So . . .

SL: Well, there you go.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I'm quite certain you'll do fine. Get it going.

JO: Hopefully, or I'll count on that stroke to [*SL laughs*] gracefully get me out of it. "Well, he tried."

SL: Well, and you're gettin' your—some of your old crew back.

JO: Yeah.

SL: So that's gonna help.

JO: Yeah.

SL: There's folks there you can trust—know that they'll do the work

and help you get it done and support you and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . love workin' for you.

JO: Yeah, I know.

SL: So . . .

[02:51:58] JO: One of my closest friends that will not be comin' to work for me said that she just couldn't work sixty hours a week again. So . . .

SL: Well, you oughta . . .

JO: They all know what they're getting into.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: But the rewards are there, so . . .

SL: Good.

JO: I always hopefully took care of everybody that worked for me. When I had a good month, they had a good month. I would share. Yeah.

SL: Well, that—that's good. You know, that kinda reminds me of Coach Broyles in a way. Whenever he'd get a raise, he'd just divide it up among his coaches.

JO: That's neat. It pays.

SL: Yeah.

JO: It works, yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: That loyalty is everything.

[02:52:42] SL: Okay, so some—one thing we haven't really talked about are your civic involvements over the years. And I can think of three areas that you're kind of known for. Your—certainly, your lights—your lighting your Christmas lights; your fireworks; and I have to say I've personally experienced your barbecue. So how did that come about? How did those things come about?

JO: It probably all started with the Christmas lights.

SL: Okay.

JO: Breezy, I think, was six and asked me to put up some Christmas lights. So we, I think, outlined the wall on the house, maybe, and I don't even know if the house was involved the first year. And then I—my banker always said I cannot do anything in moderation, so he—it just started growing, and I said, "You know, this is sort of a neat thing I can do." So I—it evolved over the years where, you know, I just had a full-time crew all year long, makin' everything for me. And then they'd start in September putting it up, and we ended up with millions of lights, you know, on the house.

SL: And this is on—the residence on Cantrell.

JO: On Cantrell.

SL: This became kind of a famous spot.

[02:54:05] JO: [*Laughs*] And you know, it created the famous lawsuit that went all the way to Supreme Court, and I never won a motion. Al Copeland that owned Popeye's—he's now deceased—but Al Copeland had the same problem in New Orleans, and he had taken it to the Supreme Court and lost all the way. And I don't know why I thought I could go there and beat it, but I couldn't. But . . .

SL: So the argument was that you had created such a magnificent show that . . .

JO: It was a nuisance.

SL: . . . it had become a nuisance.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That the crowds were so massive. Everyone [*laughs*—it was one of those things that everyone loved, but they didn't like everybody loving it.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Is that . . .

[02:54:53] JO: It just created a tremendous traffic jam in front of our house. And everybody would slow down. You know, they'd been in line for hours, and so everybody wanted the thirty

seconds. So traffic moved slow. But it was a big deal for us. We enjoyed doin' it, and it opened up a million doors for me. I don't know why I got international attention or what, but it just created "the guy with the Christmas lights," and I look past over the years, you know, that we've gotten to know all the presidents on a personal basis. Bush Sr., Bush Jr. We've had dinner with 'em a thousand times—met 'em a thousand times. Jimmy Carter was even at my daughter's wedding. Jimmy Carter and I have vacationed together numerous times, and we're the best of friends. And it just opened a whole new world. We took the Christmas lights—gave 'em to Disney in Florida, and they've had 'em for almost fifteen years. So we have a huge connection with Mickey and all of our friends at Disney. And it also opened up a new era that—I gave forty-two cities Christmas lights, and we actually put 'em up a couple of times for all the cities. But I always wanted to decorate Graceland. Elvis, being a huge fan of mine, you know, everybody my age. And we actually accomplished that. And probably one of the greatest nights of my life was when my limousine pulled up to Graceland, the gate automatically opened, I go up to Graceland, Lisa Marie and Priscilla open the door and greet me, and we had dinner. You just can't beat that. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, that was big time.

And we've gotten to . . .

[02:56:52] SL: So you loved Elvis as a . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: You were a big fan of his.

JO: You know, Elvis was . . .

SL: The king.

JO: You know, Elvis had everything everybody—every kid wanted, you know. He had the looks, he had the airplanes, he had the cars, he had the mansion. You know, he had it all.

SL: Had the moves.

JO: Yeah, yeah. You know, that was the greatest hero of all was Elvis. And for me to know, you know, Lisa Marie the way we do and Priscilla and all of that—all over a Christmas light.

[02:57:26] SL: Now let's talk a little bit—detail about the lights.

This isn't just a house that's outlined with strings of lights.

You—how many lights were involved at Cantrell?

JO: I think it was, like, two or three million. I think it was three million. I think . . .

SL: Three million lights.

JO: You know . . .

SL: And so all those lights went to Disney World in Florida.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. And then we did forty-two different cities in

Arkansas of lights. You know, we had lights everywhere. You know, some of the places, you know, are—no longer have 'em. But you know, one time we got to light up Arkansas, which was sorta neat.

SL: So you would just donate lights, and then . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . those different cities would . . .

JO: We actually put 'em up different cities.

SL: You actually did the install on some of 'em.

JO: From everywhere, you know, from—I even created a tomato man for Warren that we decorated. You know, just—Monticello, Hot Springs—everwhere. Yeah, that was really fun to do 'cause—tryin' to create good memories. You know, I've had tremendous memories, and it's that fantasy trip—gotta take everybody with me.

[02:58:44] SL: You gotta grin when you consider how many kids have been in front of the lights that you've provided.

JO: You know, everybody's got a factoid. You know, "You let me in to see the lights." "You gave me a picture of the lights." You know, we would do, like, twenty thousand Christmas cards with the lights every year that we'd hand out. People still have 'em on their refrigerator. Candy canes. I know I have bought two



million candy canes in my lifetime. But we still do candy canes at all events. Still give away the big candy cane. That—you know, I enjoyed doin' that. That was fun. Had my mom down. Mom would help hand 'em out and my sister. It was a family affair. Little Breezy—it was all normal to her [*laughter*], you know, to have the state of Arkansas outside your house. It was normal.

SL: Well, you say that—and we've still got some more areas to go to, but I don't wanna leave this yet. You say that these lights—the whole lights thing kind of opened up many doors for you. You got to meet many people, and you mentioned both the Bushes and Jimmy Carter. And you talked—you've mentioned Jimmy Carter several times today, and so I think we oughta talk a little bit about Jimmy Carter and how you guys got together and how that relationship has continued.

[03:00:20] JO: Yeah, you know, I started all these relationships—even with Ronald Reagan—you know, just wrote 'em a letter and said, "Thanks for what you did." And we just started corresponding, and then one thing led to the next, and you know, we become the greatest of friends. Jimmy Carter—great friend. In fact, he asked me one time if I would consider givin' him some angels—Christmas lights—and puttin' 'em at his

house. Well, you know me. *[SL laughs]* I decorated the whole town, you know. It's only a block long. But we've been to Disneyland—or Disney World—maybe three or four times to celebrate New Year's Eve together. We just did it last year. But they've become great friends, you know. They've come to visit. They've been in this room. They've come to visit us, and we visit them. Interesting story. One weekend—Friday night—we had dinner with the Bush Seniors. Just a different scale of entertainment. We had stuffed quail eggs with the Bushes and some good barbecue. Friday night, same weekend—Sunday afternoon—we had dinner with the Carters. And the menu at the Carters' was—some people will kill me for sayin' this—chicken breasts that he had bought a week ago at the Methodist church fund-raiser. *[SL laughs]* They have one restaurant in Plains, and he got the leftovers from the Sunday meal, and we had light bread. Everybody had a slice of bread. And when we all got through eating, Jimmy didn't eat his bread, so he put it back on the stack. Just two different personalities altogether. Yeah.

SL: That is interesting.

JO: Yeah.

[03:02:30] SL: I always thought that President Carter was one of the smartest guys I'd ever heard.

JO: ?You know?, his presidency just was a stepping stone to getting where he is now. You know, he takes on world problems that nobody else will tackle. Interesting concept. His health's really good. He can outwalk me—definitely outtalk me. But a good guy. We're just fortunate to meet people like that.

SL: And Rosalynn . . .

[03:03:05] JO: Salt of the earth. She is from Americus, which is the next town to Plains. They grew up together. And their bed—Jimmy made it years ago. He's a woodworking guy. And he makes a lotta stuff. Yeah. They're traveling constantly. They've really had good health, but they're getting old, and they're getting ?frail?. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah. I—you can see that.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Well, what about Bush Sr.? What . . .

JO: Good guy. Easy to talk to. We met him maybe fifteen years ago and got to know him over the years, and we've been—you know, they've been very gracious with us. We see 'em once or twice a year. They're good people. And George W.—good guy—had a fantastic first term.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughter*]

JO: Yeah.

SL: And . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . we don't need to say [*laughs*] much more after that. Well, what about any of—I mean, I know that—you know Barbara and David—and by the way, I spoke with David earlier, and he said be sure to tell you hi.

JO: Nicest guy in the world.

SL: He is a good guy, isn't he?

JO: He is. You know, he does everything right, and he has time for you, and he's a teacher. He'll teach you something when you're around him. If you're around him very long, he's gonna teach you something. Yeah. So he's a interesting guy.

[03:04:45] SL: You know, he's one of those do-right guys.

JO: Always. Always there if you need him. He always has time for you. He's like Clinton. You know, Clinton will always make time for you. I remember years ago when Clinton was governor, people would come up to his table at a restaurant, and he'd always stand up, shake their hand, and listen to 'em. Nobody's better than Clinton. He listens. David Pryor listens. Yeah, you can't always say that about everybody, but yeah, they've got that unusual trait.

SL: I always thought Clinton's attention was kinda riveting. It was

like you really felt like you were the only person in the room . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . when you were in front of him and that he would remember everything.

JO: Somebody once said—and there's so much truth to this—if you're in a room with Clinton, he's the smartest one. [*Laughs*] It's a good little . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . good little thought. We got to know his stepfather really well, Dick Kelley. And we let Dick travel everywhere with us. Dick was a great guy—you know, married Virginia.

SL: Yeah.

[03:05:59] JO: And I asked him one time—I said, "Where did you meet Virginia?" He said, "I wish I could tell you I met her in church, but I met her at the racetrack." [*Laughter*] He was a good guy.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: He was a—I think we were the last people to talk to him . . .

SL: Really?

JO: . . . before he died. Yeah. He was a good guy. But we enjoyed his company. Great guy.

SL: [*Sighs*] Are there any other figures that are kind of exemplary

good guys to you that you have admired and proud to know?

Just on—I mean, I don't want you to . . .

JO: Oh, I don't . . .

SL: . . . think you have to list everybody, but . . .

JO: No, no, no, no.

SL: . . . or put you in a position . . .

JO: Let's see, greatest hero overall would be Roy Rogers.

SL: Yeah.

[03:06:53] JO: Yeah, I put my dad above anybody, but—Roy

Rogers. Never got to meet the guy. You know, when a lotta people—they get elevated in life, you know, are sometimes a pain. [*Laughter*] You know, you encounter a lotta those.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But there's some really good guys out there. Yeah, politicians. You know, one of my best friends is Mike Huckabee. Good guy. Good fisherman. We fish together. Before he got healthy, we ate a lot together.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You know. Everbody would ask me if I ever asked him for something. I said, "Yeah, you know, 'Pass the catfish and don't eat it all.'" You know, he could clean a table off pretty quick.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah, he's back on his diet now. I never thought he could ever run a marathon. It'd be like me running a marathon. But . . .

SL: He lost a lotta weight.

JO: Yeah, you know, typical guy, and they have that drive—the hidden drive. You know, Mike can do anything he wants to do. But it just infuriates me to death, [*SL laughs*] you know. I cannot—I can set my sights, but you know, he will accomplish 'em. Yeah, I'll hit and miss at 'em, but—it's just interesting how people are.

[03:08:16] SL: You know, folks with—this is a pretty big pendulum of influence here that—just in the names you've mentioned. You've got the Bushes and Huckabee, and then you swing over here to Carter and Pryor and Clinton.

JO: Reagan.

SL: Reagan.

JO: Reagan. [*Laughs*]

SL: You know, you're covering the whole political spectrum here, and to have these relationships that are genuine relationships . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . this says something about Jennings Osborne, I think. I mean, these folks are all good folks, and they all respect each other, but in order—it's kind of unusual that you could be friends

with all of 'em at the same time. There—the political differences are so vast in some instances.

JO: I know.

SL: What is the common . . .

JO: I don't know. The common denominator? I have no idea. I—my only story on President Obama—when he started getting his name out there, I happen to remember that I thought somebody sent me a book autographed—personalized to me that I couldn't pronounce his name, and I put it on my credenza. It fell off my credenza. When I started lookin' for it, it was under my credenza. And I—there's a book—couldn't pronounce his name—and I looked, and it said, "To Jennings," and it had this little deal in there—you know, personalized—thinkin', "Wow. Small world." So he was doin' his homework, you know.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: For a long time. Yeah. I admire the drives behind all the presidents. They're all unique, and they had that drive—that focus that, you know, everybody—I like. I derive energy from it.

SL: Well . . .

[03:10:24] JO: I don't know what the common denominator is.

Just—I'm just lucky. [*Laughter*] Just—what are my chances of havin' Lisa Marie and Priscilla open the doors to Graceland for



me? 'Cause I never met Elvis, but you know, you saw a million times his limousine go in the gates—shut and go up to the door. You've seen it a thousand times—and actually get to do that. And had dinner, and his—the lady that cooked it cooked for him. I remember the first time I met her, she hugged me, and she said, "Hoo, you're as big as Elvis!" [SL laughs] "Thanks." And they had, like, Lisa Marie saying, "You sit where Daddy would sit." I said, "Oh, I can't do that." You know, it's just—that's big stuff for me. Maybe I'm too materialistic, but . . .

SL: Oh, I don't think so.

JO: . . . it's a chance of a lifetime . . .

SL: I mean . . .

JO: . . . to sorta get close to your heroes.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah, that's . . .

[03:11:27] SL: Well, and I bet it was a lovely meal. I mean, I bet y'all had great conversa . . .

JO: It was. It was fried chicken.

SL: Yeah.

JO: It was great. Yeah, and I had . . .

SL: I was gonna say, probably fried chicken.

JO: Yeah, and I had two chicken breasts. [Laughter] And I've

always told Lisa Marie, "I wish I'd've taken a picture of my chicken bones." [*SL laughs*] But I didn't. Yeah.

SL: That's good. That's good. Okay, so the light thing opened doors for you. But there's also fireworks and barbecue in here, too. So how did that come around?

[03:11:58] JO: You know, we started doin' fireworks, I think, after our barbecue events, and then we started incorporating fireworks. And people asked to do different areas, so fireworks are—we even did 'em after the Razorback games in Little Rock. Fireworks—yeah, Riverfest—it just became a real big deal. Creates good memories. We were after somethin' that would create a memory. Our Christmas lights created a good memory. You were in a car for thirty minutes or an hour and thirty minutes tryin' to—you know, there you have family time. Good memories, hopefully. Candy canes. Good memories. Fireworks—everybody's happy when they see fireworks, and we just lucked onto it. And barbecues—I started barbecues fifteen years ago, probably, or more, and I did the media league's softball team. Somebody asked me if I would barbecue. Well, I couldn't barbecue, so I did hot dogs. It all worked. They were happy. I was happy. Then I just started piddling at Hot Springs on the weekend, barbecuin'. And then I just—I got this rib that



nobody ever uses 'cause it's just so crazy expensive, and that became our signature dish. And we found that we brought so many good memories to people with the barbecues, and we've done this—in Arkadelphia, we did five thousand people. I've always made sure we have enough food. That's the closest we've ever been to runnin' out. But if we do an event for fifteen hundred people, I usually have twenty-five hundred just to make sure. I never wanna not have enough. And then, you know, the ol' moderation thing. I just started sayin', "Well, why don't we give 'em a whole chicken? Why don't we give 'em a big turkey leg?" And it just kept—and "Why don't we give 'em a three-pound sandwich?" [*SL laughs*] And it just kept gettin' bigger and bigger and bigger, and you know, it ends up twelve pounds or something. And how many of 'em been dropped? Probably five hundred. [*Laughter*] You know, it just happens.

[03:14:15] SL: It is an enormous pile of food on a tray. I can personally attest . . .

JO: But you know, it's—they're locked in. They see it. They never forget it.

SL: That's right.

JO: And that's what I'm after. It's like when I have somebody from the drug company come down and I feed 'em lunch, they will

never forget it. And that's what I want. I gotta make that locked-in impression.

SL: There's somethin' about people—folks puttin' their feet under a table and havin' a meal and bein' a part of that. There's just somethin' about that. It's almost holy.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It's sustenance . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . in every sense of the word.

[03:15:01] JO: Yeah. Yeah, I—it's—I guess it all starts when you're a little kid. You gotta show up for dinner. We always called it lunch and supper—dinner and supper.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Went off to college—it became lunch and dinner. Okay. Whatever. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

JO: I can adapt, you know.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

JO: It's my awakening, goin' to college—leavin' Fort Smith—'cause I—you know, I met people with multiple cars, airplanes—these are college students, and their fathers were farmers of towns I'd never heard of before. Lepanto. It didn't exist in Fort Smith.

But barbecues have been great for us. We've probably done two or three hundred events over the years. Met a lotta people doin' that. Hopefully helped a lotta people. A lot of people were just there 'cause they're hungry. I love to go into the Delta and do those barbecues 'cause I know these people are probably gonna go hungry without this food, and that was very satisfying, knowin' that they're gonna eat two or three days off this food.

SL: Yeah.

[03:16:17] JO: And they got their candy cane they're happy about, and they hadn't seen a candy cane. [*Laughs*] You know, it's so funny—it reminds me of somethin'—you were talkin' about the ?nine member people before the band?—candy canes break sometime. They'll always bring it back to you [*SL laughs*] and tell you it's broken. And you give 'em a new one—you watch 'em—they'll go three feet and break it to eat it. You know, just inside deal.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Well, those are all very, very generous things—activities—that you've done to thrill people, really—to give them something that they won't forget. That's really . . .

JO: Thanks. We . . .

SL: . . . that's really remarkable think that y'all have done.

JO: We just really enjoy it. You know, we cook our own food, and you know, we serve it.

SL: You guys serve it. You're the [*laughs*]*—*the three of you serve the stuff.

JO: Yeah. You know, it—I don't know why it's either very hot—the temperature—or very cold. I donated a barbecue to some charity. David Pryor bought it, and we did it downtown at the, I guess, Arkansas territorial place. And it was freezing that night. I just remembered that. It's always cold or hot. [*Laughter*] You can't ever get it perfect. Lotta fun. Hopefully, like I said, it creates a lotta memories, and we really enjoy doin' it. And Breezy was always there to help us. She does the bun, Mitzi makes the sandwich, and I do the rib.

SL: There you go.

JO: And the rest is history. Lotta people help us do stuff like that.

SL: So Breezy has the spirit . . .

JO: She does.

SL: . . . on that stuff.

JO: She's a very good kid.

[03:18:24] SL: I'm really—that's exciting that she's doin' the yoga thing. My wife is a huge advocate of yoga and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . goes to two or three classes a week and works out in between. It's really—she . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . loves it. So I . . .

JO: Breezy does, too. I've never seen her do anything. I've never seen her do it, but she's very dedicated and very passionate about it.

SL: It's a big workout.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It . . .

[03:18:52] JO: And she loves goin' to work. It's sorta like Lorrie Morgan's father, "You better like your signature song 'cause you're gonna be singin' it for the rest of your life." She's found a business she loves to do. That helps, you know, 'cause nobody likes to go to work. I certainly didn't [*SL laughs*] like it growing up. But it . . .

SL: But once you got grown up, you found somethin' you really loved.

JO: You know, yeah, and my dad just taught me everything. That was the greatest lesson in the world. Yeah, I was very fortunate to have the work ethic instilled in me. At the time, it was—it did

not make any sense to me, and it was very difficult. But it makes you work through things. I waited till six o'clock. I was excited. You know how you get that second wind?

SL: Yeah.

JO: I can remember in school at three o'clock, I'm dyin'; three ten, I'm wide awake. Yeah. Yeah.

[03:19:48] SL: Yeah, I've experienced that, too. I know what you mean. Well, what other civic stuff have you done? Is there any charities that you're particularly fond of or any causes that you are really quick to advocate?

JO: You know, we've never ever singled out one charity, but we've been involved with, you know, nearly everything from, you know, the dog pound to the, you know, heart association—just, you know, we've never had one favorite that we had a cause with. We just included everything. Everybody needs help. And now . . .

SL: If it's a good cause, you guys are in.

JO: Yeah, you know, we'll do you a barbecue or write you a check [*laughter*—one or the other, you know. Whatever it takes, you know. We've painted a lot of houses, and yeah, life's been good to us, you know. But it's a tremendous trade-off that we've had with life, you know. We've had our ups and downs. Everybody



does. But overall, you know, no regrets. Not sure I'd do it exactly the way I did it, but I probably wouldn't vary that much, you know.

SL: Well, the results have been pretty remarkable.

JO: For a little guy from Fort Smith—hmm.

[03:21:30] SL: I gotta ask you about your pin on your lapel.

JO: Oh, okay. Yeah.

SL: What's the story on that pin?



JO: You know, Mickey's a big part of my life.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And I wore Mickey today—I just wanted to. You know, I usually have the American flag ever since 9/11.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But Mickey opened a million doors, you know, for us with the Christmas lights. So I just had that Mickey pin made, and he's special. He's a—that's just an incredible connection. You know, a little factoid nobody probably knows about—there's only two people with their names on merchandise at Disney for sale is Walt Disney and the Osborne family. We don't get a dime out of it, but the only two people with their names at Disney—when we go down for Christmas to see the lights every year, I bring my whole family down. We did this before we had the light

connection. There is about, I don't know, thirty of us and my sister's family and their family. We used to take my mom down. Before my light connection, I used to say, "I can do somethin' down here," you know, being a dreamer—never thinkin' I'd get the chance. When I had my different displays at Cantrell, I had Mickey in a train, and he was waving, and smoke was comin' out and—you know, and it was very simple mechanical stuff. I got a call from Disney, but I didn't know it. My attorney got it. He ignored it because he was thinkin' probably, you know, that Disney was going to complain about Mickey on my wall, you know. The next year he got another call. He ignored it. But the guy that called him—that's when I was havin' all the trouble with the lights and everything. [03:23:38] And I had received offers to decorate the Empire State Building, a mountain in Montana—every crazy thing you could think of. This guy from Disney that I didn't know—he just said he was from Orlando—had this Residential Street that he wanted decorated and would I be interested. And I always said, you know, "Put it in writing, send it to me, and I'll certainly entertain it." And it came on Disney stationery. [*SL laughs*] Not knowing what Residential Street was. That was a street at MGM, so that's my tremendous, you know, Disney connection. It's—you know, when Michael Eisner

was there, you know, he always made it a point to see us every year, and we usually go down for a couple weeks at Disney time—Christmastime—and enjoy the lights, and they're very, very nice to us. But that's been a big deal for us at Disney, just to know our lights are there, and they're seen by millions of people. And they have all the room in the world. You know, the Disney in Florida has forty square miles they can decorate, so they got a long ways to go. So Mickey's important. He's opened up all the doors for me. When we got the word that, you know, we had to shut our lights down, that was very devastating 'cause, you know, I was just doin' it to make people happy and my daughter happy.

SL: Yeah.

[03:25:09] JO: And you know, everybody took it the wrong way in the neighborhood, and so it really worked out. It was a blessing. Besides, I've gotten to meet a lotta people, like kind of a Christmas light. And we still go every year. We've been goin' maybe twenty years . . .

SL: Wow.

JO: . . . at Christmastime to Disney. Our lights have been there, I think, fifteen.

SL: Wow. It doesn't seem like it's been that long ago.

JO: Oh, no. I . . .

SL: It goes fast, doesn't it?

[03:25:41] JO: I talked to the guy that's in charge of it at Disney two days ago, and he was just tellin' me all of the new things they added and everything. And now they're—it's all LED now. It's all electronic. We did everything on one computer, and they probably have twenty now. Yeah, they have music timed to it. It's a big deal.

SL: Yeah, I—you know, I've never been to the one in Orlando, but even the shows out in California—that one out in California—are quite remarkable, and they're all beautifully orchestrated, and I'm sure the one in Orlando is over the top.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: It's a big deal. We'll have to go. I know Mickey . . .

SL: Well, I'd love to go. [*Laughter*] I'd like to see that. I . . .

JO: Mickey's a good friend.

SL: Well, good.

JO: I think there's, like, fifty Mickeys. Sorry.

SL: Well . . .

JO: It's almost like Santa Claus.

SL: . . . I know I certainly grew up watchin' him on TV, and I

know . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: *The Mickey Mouse Club.*

JO: That's right.

SL: My gosh.

JO: Yeah, that reminded me of *Howdy Doody*.

SL: Absolutely.

[03:26:47] JO: It also remind—I should've brought it today—I didn't think of it—I collect ventriloquist dolls, and I finally after many years had one made like me. And when I got it, I looked at it, and I said, "My goodness, that's old!" I mean, it looks exactly like me, but you'd never picture yourself, you know, as getting old. Can . . .

SL: That would've been great.

JO: Can you believe I didn't bring . . .

SL: He could've sat on your knee.

JO: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] He would've said hi to you. [*Laughter*] He looks identical.

SL: Well, we may have to do this again.

JO: Oh, it's a . . .

SL: We'll . . .

JO: I forgot all about that.

SL: We'll interview the dummy.

JO: He'll make more sense. But I—but *Howdy Doody*. How simple was that?

SL: Oh!

JO: *Winky Dink*.

SL: Yep.

JO: Yeah, you gotta help Winky Dink get over the canyon.

[*Laughter*] I remember my father walked in one day—he didn't know what in the world was on his TV with a grease pencil, you know. *Winky Dink*. [*Sniffs*] Hmm.

[03:27:48] SL: Yeah, I also got to—I grew up with *Captain Kangaroo* as well. That was probably a little bit later . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for you, but that was a big deal for me.

JO: Oh, you know, I just—I was never on drugs, but I always felt like I had to be on drugs to appreciate Captain Kangaroo and Mr. Green Jeans. Oh, it was just so far-fetched. My life was so simple, you know, with a Bozo ?me too? or something. Or *Howdy Doody*. How simple could that be . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: . . . you know. Things really got complicated. Captain Kangaroo was always busy.

SL: Yeah.

JO: He had a lot goin' on. I never could understand that concept.

SL: Well, it was the ring toss that [*laughter*—his keys. You know how he'd always hit the hook.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That was a big thrill, makin' sure he hit that hook every day.

JO: Yeah, it was.

[03:28:37] SL: Well, okay, where else do we need to talk about here? We've kind of—we've gotten you . . .

JO: We got outta high school.

SL: We got outta high school. [*JO laughs*] We got you through college without a whole lot of damage.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Without admitting to too much.

JO: Yeah, I only bought one door at the fraternity house. My elbow accidentally hit it. But that was a—and then there was a guy that went around doing caricatures at the different fraternity houses.

SL: Uh-huh. I remember those guys.

JO: Yeah, I still have my caricature. I think it was ten dollars. It probably took him five minutes to do . . .

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JO: . . . it, but it shows me . . .

SL: But he was good.

JO: Yeah, he was good.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Showed me knockin' down a door with my elbow.

[03:29:21] SL: What's the story on that?

JO: I just—I guess I came back from the Mhoon 71 and thought I was Superman. I don't know. Maybe somebody had the door shut or something. Who knows? I remember [*laughs*] the phone company said, "If you destroy one more phone in the fraternity house, we're not replacin' 'em." You know, you couldn't go to Walmart and buy 'em. I remember when we got ready to make a phone call, you had to look for parts because there were only four lines goin' into Fulbright. Don't know if you remember that or not.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And you know, there's six thousand people tryin' to call Fulbright—four lines. And I mean, our phone system were parts for parts, and it was just a mess—the guys had been upset. Don't know why I thought of that.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, it was a real—it was somethin' you had to deal with.



JO: Yeah.

SL: At least every weekend.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. And if you're tryin' to get a date or tryin' to organize somethin', it's a challenge.

[03:30:21] JO: It's just hard to believe that, you know, we were—we had one line. We had two phones and one line and a pay phone. Fulbright had four. I guess the sorority houses probably had two lines or maybe just one. I don't know. You know, there were no parking spaces in Fayetteville on campus then, and there's none now. [*Laughter*] Yeah, that parking was really a problem.

SL: Yeah.

JO: I had a convertible my freshman year, and my housemother asked for a ride downtown, so I'm driving, my housemother is sitting in the middle—I got the top down—and I drop somebody off in front of Old Main. Well, when we drove past Old Main and let this person out, the housemother didn't move. She's sixty-five years old—here, I'm in a convertible [*telephone rings*] crossing Old Main. I don't even know if you can drive in front of Old Main now or not. Can you?

SL: No. Well, no. They have a gate to get to the back of it.

JE: [*Unclear words*] hear that?

JO: Yeah, you used to be able to drive right in front of it.

SL: Yeah. No, you can't do that anymore.

JO: Yeah.

[03:31:28] SL: Hm-mm. I do remember the cars being parked up on the lawns and over the curbs and all of that.

JO: Yeah, there was just no places. I rented a place one semester by the Kappa Sig house. I think it was five dollars a month. Isn't that amazing?

SL: It is. Yeah.

JO: Close to the UARK Bowl.

SL: Still there.

JO: What was the theater downtown called on College?

SL: Ozark. You had the Ozark on College. You had the Palace up on the square.

JO: It's familiar. I can't place it, though.

SL: Yeah, it was the Palace. It—that was a good one. And then the UARK, you know. UARK had the full rake. It didn't have a balcony. It was all one level, but it would . . .

JO: Wonder how many people you could put in there—eighty?

SL: No, there was more than that in the UARK.

JO: Was there?

SL: Yeah, I would say maybe a hundred and fifty [*telephone rings*]

or maybe two hundred. It was . . .

JO: It seemed so small.

SL: It was pretty steep. I mean, it went back.

JO: Yeah, it was.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Those were the days.

[03:32:35] JO: Is Underwood's still there, or they move, too?

SL: Underwood's is still there, and now there's a huge condominium building behind Underwood's. It's the tallest structure on Dickson Street now. It's the last tall structure on Dickson Street. They've since put an ordinance in that keeps it to six stories. I think that one's maybe ten—twelve, maybe. It's pretty big.

JO: What was that drugstore, like, across the street from . . .

SL: It's Palace.

JO: Palace.

SL: Palace Drug Store. Yep.

JO: Exactly. Palace and Collier's. They would all cash a check.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Wonder how many hot ones they had. [*Laughter*] Everybody would . . .

SL: I don't know.

JO: . . . take a check from you.

[03:33:15] SL: Let's see. What else was there? Piggly Wiggly . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . was around the corner.

JO: Exactly.

SL: I can remember when Ronnie Hawkins's bands used to steal from Piggy Wiggly. [*Laughter*] And the girls let 'em. The checkout girls knew what they were doin'. Those were . . .

JO: How old was he then—his twenties?

SL: Ronnie? Yeah. He left Fayetteville—said he was not gonna come back till he was a star—went to Memphis and had a heck of a time tryin' to put it together. I mean, he recruited Levon Helm when Levon was fourteen years old. His parents made him finish high school before he could go on the road with Ronnie.

JO: Wow.

SL: But yeah, he must've been early twenties.

JO: I know Tolleson was. John Tolleson was very young.

[03:34:16] SL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, John's a great guy. I'm not sure—he may still be workin' for the university. He was in development for a long time. He may still be there. I'm not sure. I've got all of his songs on my computer. He and I have

done a couple of gigs together. He's performed at a couple of my shows, and I've recorded him singin' some stuff at his home. He's a good guy.

JO: He was hot.

SL: He was hot. [*Laughs*]

JO: He could do it. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, he was hot.

JO: I don't remember anybody—?like, it was? forty dollars for prom—I don't remember anybody with him. I think it was just him and a piano—an upright.

SL: He did have a band, but when I saw him it was just him and an upright piano.

JO: That's what I remember.

SL: Microphone.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, it was . . .

JO: Worked his tail off . . .

SL: . . . it was powerful.

JO: . . . forty bucks.

SL: Yeah.

JO: That was a lotta money to come up with. That took a lotta car washes and . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . bake sales. [*Laughter*] But everybody wanted Johnny Tolleson. Hmm.

[03:35:19] SL: Yeah, they were—he and Ronnie were kinda rivals at the time. They were probably each other's only competition, bandwise.

JO: You know, I cannot remember—I'm like Jimmy Carter—I can't remember a band [*sighs*] at Mhoon 71. I know there was, but I can't remember. I just can't remember a live band there. You know, there certainly wasn't any records. I guess it—but you know, they had that jam session Friday afternoons, so I'm sure there was somethin' there.

SL: Yeah. Well, there's—I'm tryin' to think—Jerry Yount played with the McClelland brothers. MC5, I think, were playin' around then.

[03:36:12] JO: I remember our big deal was Johnny Roberts, Wayland—we had, like, three—the drummer—I think it was John Tyler. He was a fraternity brother. Wayland was, and we had a—there was a guy named Griffin that did something. He might've played the piano or something. I don't know. But you know, Johnny was a Sigma Nu, and the other ones were all Phi Delts. Yeah. They were really popular.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, I've met Johnny Roberts years ago. I haven't seen

him since, but I did get a chance to spend an evening with him  
on . . .

JO: I saw him on an airplane. Go ahead.

SL: He—ad agency? Did he end up . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . with an ad agency?

JO: Exactly.

SL: Yeah, I think that's right.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: We were flyin' somewhere, and Johnny was three or four seats  
ahead of us, and we said hi—well, we said hi to each other. I  
remember Johnny got up once we took off, and he got a book  
outta the overhead storage—sat down, and I said, "Golly, I wish  
I liked to read, you know." Had a bookmark in it—opened it  
up—fell asleep an hour later and closed it and put it back.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah. Well, he was tired. And that was probably the  
quickest way to get to sleep.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Okay, I can read that. [*SL laughs*] Yeah. It's amazing when  
you see those people—Chris Polychron and all these guys I went

to school with—they actually got old. I still feel the same.

SL: Well, I know what you mean. I'm startin' to feel it myself.

JO: You got a long ways to go.

[03:37:51] SL: So is there anything else you wanna say about Mitzi?

Is there—I feel like she—first of all, you worked so many hours and were on all the time. It takes a special person to accommodate that in a relationship.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I mean, you guys must've had some kinda shared vision, or maybe it wasn't that complicated. Maybe it was just what you-all decided to do, and you just got on with it.

[03:38:26] JO: You know, before we got married, you know, I was volunteering, you know, sixteen hours a day, and I used to pick up some private-duty nursing. If somebody had cataracts or something—in the old days the person couldn't move, or if an alcoholic would come into the hospital, you had to have somebody to stay with him.

SL: Sure.

JO: And I picked up a lotta that, so you know, we had a lotta that goin' on. And then I used to give shots. I worked for a clinic. I used to do house calls giving shots—pain medicine to a lotta cancer patients. So you know, Mitzi and I would be in the



middle of a—thought we were gonna have a date, and I would get a call sayin'—you know, they'd call my mother saying, "You need to go do a house call," and I—and it was always interrupted. So I guess she was orientated from day one. I don't know. She's put up with a lotta BS.

SL: Well, I mean, she came from, you know, the X-ray field and was kind of indoctrinated into the medical profession, so she understood that you had to take care of things when they happen.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It's not the kind of thing—it's not like mowin' the yard.

JO: Yeah. Yeah, you can always stop.

SL: Yeah.

[03:39:47] JO: I remember we moved to Little Rock. You know, I got my big break from Hilda Adams—thank you very much, Hilda. They let me work as much as I wanted to, and I certainly took advantage of that. And I can remember comin' up to the hospital—sneaking in our little dog—little Chihuahua—Fuddy, which eventually became Buddy.

SL: Buddy.

JO: Everybody turns out to be Buddy. [*SL laughs*] I think Buddy lived twenty years, maybe twenty-one. You know, that was our

baby till Breezy came along. The little dog lived a lifetime, but Mitzi always, you know, put up with it, and then, you know, just—I don't know—it somehow all worked out. She did a great job with Breezy 'cause, you know, I don't take any credit for that. Breezy was—Mitzi took care of—I don't think—I don't ever remember discipline Breezy at all. I never spanked her. She just never gave us any trouble. So Mitzi had a lot to do with that. Good kid. Mitzi's always been there for me—good times, bad times. You know, we've had our ups and downs. She's always right. I always let her win.

SL: [*Laughs*] It's simple that way, isn't it?

JO: It—you know, I won't argue. I hate to argue. I will walk a mile around something not to argue. I get no pleasure out of arguin'. It's just wastin' time. But Mitzi's very opinionated. I'm an opportunist. You know, I'll—I have some strong beliefs, but they're all adaptable. Mitzi is very set forth—straightforward—very opinionated. A lotta things don't bother me. A lotta things bother Mitzi.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

JO: I'm probably the biggest one, but she gets involved with things.

SL: Yeah. Well, that's good, though.

JO: Yeah, it all works. It makes it all work.

[03:42:15] SL: I was—who was it I was talking with? Morris Arnold.

He—he's married. He has a wife and says the way they worked it out—he just lets her do whatever she wants to do.

JO: Yeah.

SL: "Whatever you want to do, it's fine with me."

JO: That's the way I am. If Mitzi's happy, I'm happy.

SL: Yeah.

JO: So you know, whatever it takes. She's been good. We've had a good life—forty-four years.

SL: That's a congratulations there.

JO: [*Unclear words*].

SL: That's for sure.

JO: You know, hopefully we'll make it to fifty, you know, unless [*laughs*] I have my graceful stroke and bow out, you know.

SL: I don't think that's gonna happen. I think you've got this regeneration of your business that's gonna keep you engaged and keep you busy, and that's what . . .

JO: I get that feeling.

SL: . . . gives longevity. If you—if you're workin' and you've got something to do and you keep after it . . .

[03:43:15] JO: My dad never talked about retirement. He had to quit nine months before he died. He died when he was seventy-

two. But he went to work every day. And there's somethin' to that . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . you know. Bush Sr. always tells me that. He said, "You know, don't go retire. Always do somethin'." You know, I'm not sure I wanna jump out of an airplane when I'm ninety, but he [*laughter*] keeps busy. And like I said, I enjoy workin', and I derive energy from it. So it's a new era in our life. We'll give it a shot.

SL: Yeah, I just have this feeling your work is not done yet. I think you've still got some more stuff to do. And I'm not talkin' about your business necessarily.

JO: Oh, I know.

SL: I think you've got some stuff ahead of you yet.

[03:44:09] JO: [*Clears throat*] You know, for somebody that thinks they know what life's gonna bring, you know, I—you just—you don't know what the future, you know, holds. If it's endurance, I got it made.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

JO: Unless I have my stroke that gracefully eliminates me, but—you know, there were—you know, the—tryin' to get the early worm, you know, that's a no-brainer for me. That's probably been my

best philosophy of life is to get up before anybody else and go to bed after everybody else. So . . .

SL: Well, from all indications, that's exactly what you've practiced, and it's worked, and it's simple.

JO: Oh . . .

SL: That's a simple thing to . . .

JO: My whole life is simple.

SL: Yeah.

JO: From droppin' that disk. You know, whoever thought of that, you know. It makes a lotta sense. Pretty simple to do. Yeah. I always think brain surgery is fascinating. And a neurologist once told me—he said, "It's pretty simple." [*Laughter*] So I have to take his word for it.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But everything seems complicated till you actually do it.

[03:45:28] SL: Well, I guess even brain surgery is getting from *A* to *B*.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Break it down that way. [*Sighs*] So let's see, now . . .

JO: I got outta high school.

SL: Yeah, got you outta high school. I got you outta the nuns.

JO: Gosh.

SL: Boy, that sounded so brutal.

JO: You know, I saw a couple of my nuns that I went to school—that taught me—somewhere around the Christmas light era, they were at Mount St. Mary's, and I guess I met 'em at Breezy's school. That was such a treat. In Fort Smith, they—the Catholic cemetery on Lexington—if you ever go there, if you go right to the back where the dumpster is, you'll see about fifty little crosses, and they're all my nuns that taught me.

SL: Wow.

JO: The back of the ?bus? by the dumpster. God, you know, surely there's a heaven 'cause they certainly paid their price. Just rips your heart out when you think about it. They were good people—disciplined—fear was everything—pain and fear. That was their philosophy, and it worked, you know. Nobody would ever even think about smoking a cigarette or even havin' one on your possession. Yeah, it was a mortal sin. Yeah, you'd be killed. It all worked. They had a neat philosophy. Breezy went to a Catholic school twelve years. There was one nun for the whole Catholic system in Little Rock. So it's just a end of an era.

SL: Yeah.

[03:47:27] JO: I never had a lay teacher in my life through grade school and high school. Hmm. And you . . .

SL: It is an end of an era, isn't it?

JO: Yeah.

BP: Tape.

JO: And it just . . .

BP: Tape.

SL: Tape? Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[03:47:40] SL: So this is tape . . .

BP: Five.

SL: . . . five. Talkin' about Fort Smith and the ghost town. And towns in general these days—when I was talkin' with Doyle Rogers, there was a time at Batesville where they wanted to built a new jail, and they had—the city council had decided on some property that was outside of town. And Doyle Rogers was against that, and he said—they said, "Well, we can't find any property." Well, he found 'em some property in town. They built the jail in town. And his philosophy was you gotta keep the services in the downtown, otherwise it will die if you—because of the mall phenomenon and all the fast food and all the drive-through stuff and theaters and all that stuff—if you don't have the core government services downtown, then the down—the town goes away.

JO: Fort Smith is a perfect example of that. You know, the downtown—the main street died, and I remember Towson and Midland—part of the downtown area—just gone, and you know, it just all stopped. Gosh, I can remember, you know, when— young—growin' up, you know, you go downtown, and there's, like, at Christmastime—like Little Rock. You know, Main Street was just bustling, but you know, it's all gone away. You know, the concept you mentioned about malls and stuff—you know, now it's all open area. You know, in the next twenty-five years, they're gonna say, "You know, we need to enclose this so we can do the climate control and the security and all of that." Just the—everything just be—same thing evolving. Yeah. But you're right. You know, the malls took everything away from the downtown area. There wasn't any parking places. But you know, in the old days we always walked to town. But you know, if we did drive, you could always find a parking place.

[03:50:07] SL: Well, there's—part of that is cultural, and you know, the American ideal of being mobile at any moment and going anywhere you wanna go whenever you wanna go, and so there's—there are—the automobile certainly changed a lotta things. But the evolution of it is that so many folks now have cars—or two or three or four cars that—yeah, they wanna go



where it's easiest to take the car.

JO: Yeah.

SL: There is, you know, that walkability for the downtown area is—there's some places that that's kinda coming back—that they see the value. And of course, me—I think in terms of history and all the history that evolved in the downtowns and all the activity that—and decisions and things that were established early on. You know, there was a drive to have a downtown—to establish a place, and you lose that if you don't provide some kind of viability to those downtown areas. And I wish there was a way to bring that all back all across the country, but I just don't—it's gotta be a special community . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that recognizes that kinda stuff . . .

JO: Yeah, it's a long ways . . .

SL: . . . and promotes it and provides for it.

JO: . . . before that'll evolve back. And now, you know, you can communicate with people on the Internet. You don't even have to see 'em. There's no structure to anything anymore. You were mentioning fast foods a while ago. You know, we never had fast foods growin' up. Jug's. Jug Wheeler. Wonder if that was the guy's name.

SL: It was—I think it—well, the—Jug was his nickname, but it was Wheeler. Yeah, I forget what his real name was.

[03:52:06] JO: I bet you couldn't put fifty cars in there.

SL: No.

JO: And it was always busy.

SL: Probably—maybe twenty.

JO: And it handled the whole university.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Plus, he delivered to the . . .

SL: He delivered.

JO: . . . to the university. And it all came outta that one kitchen, I guess, there in the middle.

SL: Yeah.

JO: I don't know. Hey, I got my hot dog a couple of times from somebody.

SL: Well, sure.

JO: Thank you very much.

SL: Sure, sure.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I can remember Jug Wheeler's. Yeah.

[03:52:38] JO: But fast food's changed the whole dynamics. I don't ever—we would go out to dinner once in a while, but you know,

in the [19]50s, you know, Mother cooked.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You cooked a meal every night. Just part of it. And dinner was important. Yeah, rehash the whole day, which doesn't happen now. You got TV on.

SL: You know, that—it—that was a great part of your story that you mentioned, growin' up in the house, is that y'all communicated at dinnertime or suppertime—what—you know, that it was a gathering—a formal—it was really a formal gathering, sitting down and reassessing the day and probably talking about the next day or the . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . rest of the week.

JO: You were never exempt, but you really didn't wanna be. It was just part of the family tradition. But I don't ever remember missin' dinner. Never.

SL: It was fun.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It was strengthening in many ways.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Those days are over.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. Breezy with her TV dinner in the den watchin' TV, eating. I'm at work. Mitzi's in the kitchen, I guess. It's just—those days are hard to come back.

[03:54:03] SL: I wonder what the glue is now. Is it the cell phone that keeps people in touch with each other? I mean, what is it that . . .

JO: Well, you . . .

SL: Is there anything that's holding any of us together anymore? I don't know.

JO: You know, you're probably like me. You just wonder what's on your iPod [*SL laughs*] or your iPhone or your Blackberry, you know. Everybody is so in touch now, but they're really not. But communication's a big deal. I don't know what the next step's gonna be. I'm not a visionary. Maybe Doyle would know.

SL: Yeah.

JO: There's got . . .

SL: I guess it's a virtual family, maybe. I don't know.

JO: Yeah. Probably worldwide Internet—wireless. But it's interesting how everybody's in touch, but they're really not. Everything's so impersonal now with the Internet. But it's normal to everybody else. I've never played a video game in my

life, and you know, jillions of people—they grow up on video games. Just a different era.

SL: Yeah, and lots of contributing factors. Television is totally different now. There's no—it's not—networks are really just another channel now—another . . .

JO: Yeah, you have four hundred channels, and some nights you say, "Well, I can't find anything."

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

[03:55:37] JO: I remember growin' up, Channel 5—they told you what you were gonna watch on the three networks, and everybody was happy. Sunday night was that *Walt Disney World of*—something—whatever it was.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah, six o'clock or somethin' like that.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You never missed it.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That was great. I remember that.

JO: *Kit Carson* was on Monday nights, and *I Love Lucy*. What a . . .

SL: Oh my gosh.

JO: . . . simple life.

SL: *I Love Lucy*.

JO: Yeah, Lucy once said that she couldn't raise all of her grandkids without *I Love Lucy* reruns.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Entertained a lotta people. So simple. It's, what, shot in two rooms?

SL: Basically, yeah. Well, let's see. Every once in a while, you'd see the club. You'd see the show.

[03:56:25] JO: True. Do you remember the Western—I don't know which Western it was, but they used the same house for everything. It was, like—I don't know how to explain it, but it was some Western, and they shot the same scene every time in this . . .

SL: *Bonanza*?

JO: . . . this house. I think it was earlier than that. Maybe it was *Cisco Kid* or something. But it was all shot—I remember growin' up I didn't know where those rocks were—you know, that every—that was in every—you know, Arizona and California.

SL: Right.

JO: I never knew where those were. I looked for 'em my whole life. You know, everybody would hide behind or shoot . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . behind or . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: I couldn't find any rocks like that.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

JO: Funny what you think about years later. Where are those rocks? And think of all the times that Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, you know, got off of their horse and pulled somebody else. I just wonder if they used doubles or they actually fell off—pulled somebody off of a horse and rolled down a hill.

Remember all those scenes?

SL: Yeah.

JO: They were all identical.

SL: Yeah.

JO: And the runaway buckboard.

SL: Yep.

JO: How dangerous is that?

SL: Very.

JO: Yeah.

[03:57:37] SL: I think a lot of that was real.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I think a lot of that early on was pretty real.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I mean, even in the silent films those stunts were happening.

JO: Were real.

SL: Yeah, the house falling, and the guy's standing, and it falls around him, and he's—'cause he's standing where the doorway was.

JO: Boy, you know, that . . .

SL: That was real.

JO: . . . timing had to be right on that.

SL: Whoa!

JO: Well . . .

SL: There's some engineering.

JO: Mh-hmm. It's interesting . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . how simple things were. Like *M\*A\*S\*H*. I never knew *M\*A\*S\*H* was shot in an indoor—the residential street that—at MGM. They used four—gah, I can't think of that movie. You know, they shot it once, and you saw it for the rest of your life. I can't think of the name of the movie. But things were simple. Seem to be very complicated now.

[03:58:52] SL: Well, let's figure out something else to finish this thing up with. I think we've covered the highlights—high points. Is there anything that—is there anything you wanna say to



Breezy and maybe your future grandchildren or any advice?

Was there any advice that your mom or your dad gave you that stuck with you that you think might be worth continuing?



JO: [*Clears throat*] To me, it's all perception and endurance. I—and nothing's really impossible. You can just—I guess I got that from my parents. From where my dad, you know, came from and my mom and what they ended up with, you know, was unbelievable. You know, everything hasn't been rosy for me, but through endurance you can make it work, you know. I—I've had an incredible life. I have gotten to do so many things that people just dream of, I've actually gotten to do. Very thankful. Breezy and Mitzi have been very supportive 'cause, you know, I've had my deviations. I have veered from *A* to *B* on crazy things. They've always been supportive, and that helps. We haven't always—I haven't always hit a home run, but I had some good strikes. Extremely thankful.

[04:01:04] SL: Well, you gotta swing to hit the ball.

JO: That's right. [*SL laughs*] Gotta show up.

SL: You gotta show up. You know, my dad would tell me, "Americans never give up." Or "No hill for a stepper." That . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that kinda stuff.

JO: You know, before Tom Brokaw wrote that book about the greatest generation, I thought my dad missed everything, you know. He—the moon walk was [19]69. My dad died in [19]68, so you know, I just thought he'd missed the whole world, and that generation did everything.

SL: Yep.

JO: They saw it all happen. You know, just—you know, from no electricity to electricity. What an accomplishment. Electricity had to change the world . . .

SL: Well, yeah.

JO: . . . you know. I just can't imagine it before. You think of Abraham Lincoln reading a book with a candle. Yeah, if our power goes out, you know, life's over.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

[04:02:10] JO: But it was huge. Yeah, my dad had the foresight to see that—you know, electricity was everything. It's like Doyle Rogers—you know, visionary. You know, he had all these visions and most of it he made come true. Yeah. I've always had trouble seeing in the future, but you know, some people are just gifted. I remember Doyle was tellin' me about this guy that asked him to build some buildings for him and—big Sam. I have a Sam Walton story. Miss Walton told me this. She said at

Christmastime many years ago, Sam went to buy some Christmas lights, and he went to the store, and they were out. He didn't think anything about it. Figured he just had a good day. So he went to Rogers, went to Fayetteville, and they were out. He was in a panic. "What happened to the Christmas lights?" And he checked with his manager in Fayetteville, and said, "Some guy named Osborne bought 'em all." [*SL laughs*] And Sam just couldn't believe that I had bought him out of Christmas lights, and I actually remember sendin' a guy up there to northwest Arkansas to buy all of the lights. So Miss Walton said that Sam was just shocked that he didn't have any lights. And she told me later, when they got lights, she put 'em up and she left 'em up all year. That's my Sam Walton story.

SL: That's a good one.

[04:03:49] JO: Doyle's is better. [*Laughs*]

SL: Doyle has some great stories.

JO: Yeah.

SL: He's a great storyteller.

JO: Yeah.

SL: He's seen a lot of . . .

JO: He really has. He was a part of it.

SL: He was. Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And in some ways still is.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, he's . . .

JO: It's amazing.

SL: He is an amazing story. He's another guy that knew about work and showin' up and doin' a good job, and he did have the ability to see an opportunity. And you say you're not visionary, but you saw an opportunity. You got it. And he could latch on to those things, too.

JO: Yeah.

[04:04:36] SL: You know, there's a—there is a [*sighs*]*—I will say—*and nearly everybody that I interview—there is this work ethic, and there is this belief that you can—that things can happen—that you can make things happen. And there's that gumption to do it that is instilled early on. And I . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . I think you're as good a example of that as anybody I've talked with. There's some real value here for folks to experience. I really appreciate the time that you've given us today. I hate to cut us off, but I don't know if there's anything else that we can say . . .

JO: I got outta high school. That was a blessing. [*SL laughs*] Yeah.

SL: Now, you didn't—you enjoyed . . .

JO: I know. I know.

SL: . . . you enjoyed . . .

JO: I did.

SL: . . . reliving that stuff . . .

JO: I did.

SL: . . . didn't you?

JO: It was good.

SL: Yeah.

[04:05:27] JO: It was good. I was a possible US senator, somebody wrote down. They were wrong.

SL: Well, you kinda look like a US senator. You could be a US senator.

JO: I could be in the fast food business, too. [*Laughter*] Yeah.

SL: Well . . .

JO: Good life.

SL: . . . it . . .

JO: I've enjoyed it. Ups and downs, but overall there've been a lotta ups. Oh, we were thinkin' of my mom and dad, but I can't think of anything else.

SL: Well, your sister helped you, too.

JO: Oh yeah. She still does. She's the historian for the family. She has all the pictures. She sent 'em to me, and I'm havin' 'em put on a CD for you.

SL: Okay.

JO: But she's a—she knows everything about the family. I was goin' over some things with her this morning. We talk a couple of times a day. We always have. Yeah, good kid.

[04:06:36] SL: And she's in . . .

JO: Birmingham.

SL: . . . Birmingham now.

JO: She retired after Mom died in 2000. I think she retired, and she moved to Birmingham, and she's a couple years older than me. But I think she retired then. [*Unclear word*] very active in the church and missionary work and that kind of stuff. She's doin' her part for me.

SL: Well, I've got a brother that's like that—preacher and does a lot of mission work and . . .

JO: He's workin' for you.

SL: Yeah, he is.

JO: He's the balance.

SL: He's a good guy, and he took care of me. He's an older brother, and he also took care of me, so I understand that.

JO: Are your parents still alive?

SL: No.

JO: Yeah.

SL: No, I've lost—I've—they've both passed. I've had two brothers that have passed.

JO: Oh my goodness.

SL: So I've got Gary and Barbara . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . left and grateful to have that. They're both beautiful people.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Very good to me.

[04:07:38] JO: That's probably a—it was a shock when my dad died. Mother was sick for so long. You know, you prepare yourself for it. That's gotta be the worst thing in the world is to lose a parent.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: It is hard. Mom had cancer, so that was—you know, it was kind of a—we felt like it was kind of a blessing when she passed 'cause there was so much pain. Dad was harder. Dad lived into his seventies, and you know, you start losin' your mind a little bit, and they kinda—he kinda changed a little bit. So his was

hard, too, in a different way.

JO: Hmm.

SL: Yeah, parents . . .

JO: Special.

SL: That's tough. Brothers are tough, too.

JO: I can't imagine . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . losin' a brother or a sister like that.

SL: But you know . . .

JO: Time heals all.

SL: Yeah, and I think you and I are both pretty blessed. We're still here.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: We're still havin' a good time.

JO: I haven't had my graceful stroke yet . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] No.

JO: . . . to bow out. That's . . .

SL: You gotta quit talkin' about that graceful stroke.

JO: That's still the [*unclear word*].

[04:08:56] SL: I don't think—I think you're gonna be denied that. I don't think you're gonna get that. I think there's more work ahead of you yet. I think you're still hungry for it.



JO: Yeah, I do hope—I'm gonna work hard at my business. I still have that old philosophy that, you know, if you work hard enough, you can do it. So if it's endurance, I'm in. But life's been good.

SL: Well, okay. I'm gonna thank you for givin' us all this time today and . . .

JO: Thank you. It's an honor.

SL: . . . we will—well, it's certainly an honor to be here. We will be sending you stuff as we get to it. It'll take us a while. The crew that you see here is our crew.

JO: It's a good little crew.

[04:09:46] SL: If we're not doin' the postproduction work, we're out doing this, so it's not like this stuff is happening all the time. We—you know, it's one or the other for us. The Pryor Center's dark right now 'cause we're all out gettin' interviews, so . . .

JO: Who's your next interview?

SL: Tomorrow is Phyllis Brandon.

JO: Brandon. Yeah.

SL: And I understand that she is a remarkable story as well. She was the first reporter assigned to the Central High crisis.

JO: Exactly.

SL: Which was very unusual to have a female lead reporter.

JO: I just can't believe Phyllis did that in [19]57. You know, I think I'm in the eighth grade or ninth, and she was covering that.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And I don't know anyone that doesn't have the greatest respect for her. So again, I have a great job. I mean . . .

JO: Oh, you do.

SL: . . . I'm gonna be—I'm—I'll be blessed again tomorrow to . . .

JO: [*Unclear words*].

SL: . . . to sit across from somebody that's made a difference in . . .

JO: That's amazing.

SL: It is. It's great. It's a great thing that we get to do, so—you've been very patient with it, and I know patience is not one of your virtues. [*JO laughs*] But we've had several times here today where you had to wait for us, and I appreciate your patience.

JO: Listen, I'm glad you were here.

SL: Well, we're very particular. We want this to be good, and we want it to be right, so we take a few extra moments to make it so.

[04:11:19] JO: Yeah. Hope somebody looks at it someday and says, "Golly" . . .

SL: Oh yeah.

JO: . . . "I can do that."

SL: That's the deal. That's . . .

JO: "He did it. I can do it."

SL: That's exactly—that's exactly . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . what we hope. Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And we think that'll happen.

JO: If I can do it, anybody can do it. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well . . .

JO: I got through high school. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah. I think you'll see some of this activity. I think they'll get it. These are inspirational stories, you know. They're Arkansas people telling their own stories instead of someone else tellin' 'em for us. So you're in a good group of folks. You're in a good group.

JO: Long ways from Fort Smith.

SL: It is, but in some ways it's not. Fort Smith gave us Jennings Osborne. So you know, it's an honor to be talking with someone from Fort Smith. That's—it's a good thing.

JO: Very kind.

SL: Okay.

JO: Thanks, buddy.

SL: Thank you.

[04:12:23 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]