

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Vic Snyder
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
August 23, 2012
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 Web site at <https://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.
- Double underscores indicate two people talking at the same time.
- 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 Vic Snyder on August 23, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: It's a great honor to be sitting across from you—uh—Vic.

I—I can't thank you for—enough—for carving out some time for us. I hope that we can—uh—I hope you have a great time doing this. Um—I have to identify ourselves. I'm Scott Lunsford. I'm here with the Pryor Center, and you are Vic Snyder, Congressman Vic Snyder. Uh—we are at yours and Betsy's residence here in Little Rock, Arkansas. Today's date is August 23, 2012. And—um—I wanna give you just a little bit—a preview of what's about to happen. We're gonna talk about your life and—and—uh—try to get your life story the way you want it told. Uh—we will give you all the raw footage—uh—for you to look at. You'll get a transcript for you to read. We'll ask that you look at both of those items, and if there's anything that you say or happens during this interview that you don't want to share with the rest of the world, we delete it, and we take it back. Uh—we don't—we're not here to get you or embarrass anybody. We just want to make sure that you get to tell your story the way you want it told. [00:01:10] Once you're happy with the footage and the transcript, we will post this stuff on the Pryor Center website along with the scans that Bruce will be scanning—um—of your family photo albums, of your career, and—uh—we will post the entire transcript of the interview, the entire audio of the interview, but we'll only post highlights, what we call highlights.

And they're just compelling segments of the interview or segments we feel are representative of—of your life that—that you would like to share. And those are the things that people will actually [*camera clicks*] watch video-wise. So if you're okay with all of that—uh—and we will—and by the way, we will encourage people to look at this stuff and to use it. We're partners with—uh—uh—a group that's working on the Arkansas History Lesson Plan that will be taught in the public schools. [00:02:06] And they're using footage from our interviews as part of their lesson plan. We'll encourage students doing—uh—research or thesis work, undergraduate, graduate. We'll encourage—uh—documentarians to visit our website and—and use this material to help tell the stories of Arkansas. Having said that, if—if you're okay with that—uh . . .

Vic Snyder: Sure.

SL: . . . then—then we'll keep going.

VS: Sure.

[00:02:32] SL: That's great. Thank you very much. Um—now, Vic—is Vic Snyder your entire name? What—what is your given name?

VS: It's Victor Frederick Snyder.

SL: Frederick.

VS: Yeah.

SL: And—uh . . .

VS: After two grandfathers.

SL: Two grandfathers. So are you a—a second or a third? Just . . .

VS: No.

SL: Just after your grandfathers.

VS: No. Yeah.

[00:02:53] SL: Um—and—uh—I know you weren't—uh—born in Arkansas.

You were born in Oregon. Is that—that correct?

VS: Right, in Med—in Medford, Oregon. Yeah.

SL: Medford, Oregon. And the year was . . .

VS: Nineteen forty-seven. In fact, the—uh—place where I was born, the actual maternity ward, is now a congressional office for Congressman Greg Walden, who is the Republican member representing that area. He's actually—his—his district office is in the maternity ward where I was born. [*Laughter*] And I've gone up there to visit his staff and say hello. Yeah, so . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] So . . .

VS: We thought it was a big hospital in 1947, and now it looks just like a very meager three-story—little three-story office building with probably fairly low rent, I would think.

[00:03:34] SL: Well, now—uh—what were your—uh—mother and father's names?

VS: My mother's—uh—name was Marjorie Snyder, and—uh—my dad's name was Donald—Don Snyder.

SL: And—uh—your mother's maiden name?

VS: Bloomingcamp.

SL: Bloomingcamp.

VS: Bloomingcamp. Yeah, it was a—uh—it's an unusual name. You don't—if you—if—because it was a—one of those—uh—I think, immigrant angli—you know, when it was—uh—modernized, they—people came into the country. It was originally Blumenkamp, I think. A German . . .

SL: German name.

VS: . . . *B-L-U-M-E-N-K-A-M-P* or something like that, and then it changed to Bloomingcamp. So there's not very many Bloomingcamps. They're related to us somehow, so.

[00:04:17] SL: Did you—um—know your sets of grandparents on both sides, or was it just your mom's side that you got to . . .

VS: No, I knew—I knew—uh—my—uh—grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side, and I knew my grandmother on my father's side. But my—uh—paternal grandfather was—uh—during the Depression he was traveling around tryin' to find work—uh—was—had something fall on him and ended up as a paraplegic in a wheelchair and—uh—managed to burn himself up in a house fire—uh . . .

SL: Oh!

VS: . . . uh—when—uh—before I was ever born. Before—I don't think my mother ever knew him, either.

[00:04:56] SL: Uh—so that was on your father's side?

VS: Father's side, yeah.

SL: Father's side. And—um—but you did get to know—uh—one grandmother and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and a set . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . on your mother's side of grandparents.

[00:05:07] VS: Yeah, she was very—a very big part of our lives. She—my—my—uh—mother and father divorced when I was, I th—I think two or three. But my—I think my mother was still pregnant with my sister when—my only sibling—when they separated. And—uh—even as a little—when my sister was just a little baby—uh—I—I can remember being over at my grandmother's house—we—uh—my dad's mother. My—my mom and—um—my dad's mom became very close friends, and we spent a lot of time to—with her watching us. And m—my dad actually left Oregon and went to Southern California, and we saw very, very little of him for a lot of years.

[00:05:50] SL: Mh-hmm. What—what was your—uh—uh—father's mother's name? What—what . . .

VS: Father's mother's name—she—they were—both my grandmothers were named Minnie. She was known as Meemee.

SL: Meemee. [*Laughs*]

VS: Was what she went by. Yeah.

[00:06:02] SL: Uh-huh. And—uh—so you never got to know—uh—your dad's dad because . . .

VS: No, he was dead.

SL: . . . he passed . . .

VS: Yeah, he was dead.

SL: . . . before you were born.

VS: He was actually Victor Snyder, also.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: He was where the Victor came from.

[00:06:14] SL: Um—so—and—and then let's talk about your—your mom's parents. Um—what were their names?

VS: Um—he went by Fred Bloomingcamp . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: . . . was my grandfather, and she was—uh—Minnie Bloomingcamp.

SL: That was . . .

VS: They were on a—they were on a ranch—uh—down in Northern California—town of Hornbrook.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: Uh—probably about 100 and—I guess it was 110 acres close to the house, and then they had some other pasture land up on the hills. But it's the—my grandfather had a butcher shop, and so they would—uh—so they had a source of cash comin' in the family through the butcher shop. But then they would raise a lot of their own—and we—even growin' up, we—I remember sheep and dairy cattle and beef cattle and pigs and—uh—two or three chicken houses. And so they raised a lot of—uh—the meat that they—both for their own consumption, but also to sell in the butcher shop.

SL: Lot of protein goin' on there.

VS: Lot of protein, yeah. [*Laughter*] Yeah, yeah.

[00:07:14] SL: Well, so did you get to visit them often . . .

VS: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

SL: . . . growin' up?

VS: Yeah, growing up, we—as little kids we would go down there probably once a month and spend the weekend. And in the summer, probably a couple weeks in the summertime. Uh—at Christmas, you know, big holidays, we'd go down there also.

SL: Uh-huh. Um . . .

VS: Kind of the—this—the big—the big—uh—the Christmas Eve adventure was—'cause my mom was always working. She wouldn't get off until, you know, five thirty on Christmas Eve. My Uncle Charles would come over the mountain—who lived—uh—his entire life with—uh—his mother—he would drive over the mountain about an hour away, the Siskiyou Mountains, which were sometimes pretty ice and snowy, and pick us up and take us back over the mountain. And so it was always a big adventure whether we'd have to get chained up or not to get over the mountains to get to Grandma's house, you know, for—for Christmas.

[00:07:59] SL: Put the chain on the tires.

VS: Put the chains on the tires.

SL: The tires, yeah. I remember having to do that. Um—so—um—what was their—ah—hundred and ten acres—uh—a ranch. I'm assuming they had electricity and—uh—did they have running water? Was . . .

VS: Yeah, they had running water but—uh—I mean, even—uh—and they had plumbing. But even as a kid, they still had the outhouse. And I member for years my Uncle Charles preferred to use the outhouse rather than [*laughs*] the indoor bathroom setup. So—so yeah, they had—you know, like most farmhouses—uh—uh—they had gotten hooked up to electricity and water, and they had well water and—uh—and—uh—plumbing.

SL: Do you member—uh . . .

VS: All—all my—all my—my mother and her three siblings were all born in that farmhouse.

SL: In the farmhouse.

VS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:08:54] SL: Did—uh—so I—I bet you were kind of close to your grandfather, then.

VS: No, I—I wasn't because he died of cancer—I don't know—I think maybe in [19]56, so I was only nine.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: I became very close to both my grandmother, but also my Uncle Charles. He—Uncle Charles never married. He was a lifelong bachelor, but he was really good with kids. And—uh—both—when I was young, but then literally decades later, after he'd moved to southern Oregon—uh—after he retired, he'd be—he was always really good at working with kids, the neighborhood kids. So—uh—uh—the typical weekend for me as—as a kid, really, for probably twelve or

fifteen years—if we—when we went down to Hornbrook to the ranch, I would basically be a puppy dog to my Uncle Charles for the whole time. If he was on the tractor, I was sittin' on the tractor. If he was feedin' pigs, I was feedin' pigs. If he was drivin' his pickup to go hunt deer or something, I would be following him around. [00:09:52] But he was all—he was very hardworking. He was a carpenter that worked in a mill town nearby, so in the morning and night and weekends he was working on his farm, planting alfalfa, harvesting alfalfa, baling hay—you know, all those kinds of things.

SL: So did he have his own farm as well or . . .

VS: That was part of that . . .

SL: Part of the . . .

VS: . . . the acreage . . .

SL: . . . the family . . .

VS: They would raise the—raise the alfalfa—uh—some barley—uh—for feeding the livestock.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: And they would always have to buy some, I think, but they would—they'd—they raised quite a bit of—of hay and—uh—to feed their—the—to feed the livestock.

[00:10:25] SL: Did you mention hogs? Did they raise hogs, too?

VS: Yeah, he would—uh—they would get them when they were, oh, you know, about this big [indicates seven inches], and then they'd raise 'em up to where they could be slaughtered.

SL: Did . . .

VS: Fact, I wa—I wa—I'm old enough that—uh—when I was a little boy, they still used a team of horses for some of the work. My grandfather was very good at raking hay with a team of horses. I—and he would have these high school kids that would help. And I can remember one day in the summertime, I was down there—I was probably seven or eight, and one of these kids said—I think he was a kid, I don't know—he said, "Here, hold"—it was the end of the day—he said, "Here, hold the horses." So I'm standing there holding the—the reins on—the bridle on these two big work horses. And I'm—they're towering over me [*SL laughs*], and I'm thinkin', "What am I gonna do if they decide they really do want to go get a drink of water right now?" But they—but they—they stood there for a long—fairly long—what seemed like a long period of time to me. But—so anyway, I was—you know, I'm old enough they were still using—uh—still using horses for some of the—some of the work.

[00:11:22] SL: What about—uh—did you ever get to see a hog day, where they—uh—they—uh—dressed out the hogs and they . . .

VS: I—I don't remember being there when they slaughtered hogs. I was there certainly when they—I—I saw 'em do—when they would—uh—slaughter a—some beef, or I remember they actually did shear the wool off sheep for a while there, but then they kind of got out of the mutton and lamb business, I think. But business was always—these were always small numbers. Chickens was always—slaughtering

chickens was always part of it. I don't ever remember him doing hogs.

[00:11:55] SL: Now, was your Uncle Charles your mother's brother?

VS: Yeah, his only brother or her . . .

SL: So . . .

VS: . . . only brother.

SL: So he—uh—um—early on, he was kind of a—a father figure for you.

VS: He was. Yeah. No, he—he really was. And I think it was probably particularly for me, since I did not really have a father in the household much at all. From the time I was two on, I just . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: . . . didn't see him very much. Uh—but he was a very important figure to—uh—to his other nieces and nephews also and—and even as he—after he moved from the ranch, to neighborhood kids. I mean, he really—he became a big part of the lives of—uh—of—uh—of kids 'cause he was just—I think it was probably 'cause they liked to do what he liked to do. He liked to be outside. He liked the garden. He liked to hunt. He liked to go places and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:12:42] VS: But he was just very good with—with children. He—he died—uh—just a couple months ago, and it was interesting at the funeral because it was like there were two sides to him. One, there were those of us who really knew him as—when we were kids in the—in the [19]50s and [19]60s. But then after he moved to Ashland, Oregon, he befriended these—this family across the street. Again,

another single mom with three kids, and that was in the mid-[19]70s. And so for the next thirty years or thirty-five years, he became a big part of their family. And—uh—I mean, they—they were just as heartbroken as anyone was—they—about—uh—because he was essentially the grandfather in this family that now has grandkids and great-grandkids, I think. I mean—uh—so he was a—he was a very soft-spoken, kind of a shy, bachelor type, but he was very—physically very strong, and—and—and I never saw him afraid of anything. But he was always very—very helpful and very kindhearted to children.

[00:13:47] SL: So were he and—and your mother kind of—did they have the same sort of personalities with children? Were they just—um—sensitive to what . . .

VS: I don't—I would say that they were very—um—they were very close.

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: Uh—they—he was very good about—with sometimes taking us on trips with him—um—and he would do things with my mom. Uh—my mom never remarried after the divorce and so—but he was always very good about watching out. I think part was watching out for her, part of it was just being a good brother, part of was he liked the company, too, I think.

SL: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm.

VS: The family was pretty close. We had a—we had—the aunts and uncles were—I mean, like, we would never think of not having a holiday or a birthday that somehow your aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews weren't

involved somehow.

SL: Uh-huh. Um . . .

VS: In terms of personality, I—I think they were probably—I mean, they—we certainly saw the Bloomingcamp influence in terms of eating habits and [*laughs*] things like that. But I—but I think they were probably—they all had their own individual personalities.

[00:14:52] SL: Well, let's talk about those eating habits. You—that kind of tickled you. What—were they just . . .

VS: Oh, it's a . . .

SL: . . . ferocious eaters?

VS: My wife and I have this ongoing discussion now. You know, we have a six-year-old and three three-year-old boys—all boys—and she thinks that there's—she said, "You're not supposed to have dessert every night." Well, you would never tell that to a Bloomingcamp. [*SL laughs*] No, you have dessert every night. [*Laughter*] In fact, you would have dessert at both lunch and dinner, you know.

SL: Sure.

[00:15:18] VS: That's what you'd—there was just—that was it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: That's the way you did it. There was always pies and cakes and cookies and ice cream. And—and then I can always remember my grandmother and my Uncle Charles—uh—they would always have a late-night bowl of ice cream before going to bed. But you know, they had a very calor—calorically—a big, high-caloric requirement just for

farm work. I mean, my grandmother was always . . .

SL: Lot of energy.

VS: . . . moving and—and as was my Uncle Charles. So there's reasons why people eat a lot and don't ever get heavy 'cause they're always workin', you know.

[00:15:49] SL: When—uh—when you would visit your grandparents—um—um—what was the—what were the dinners like? Were you—what—were you expected to be seated at a table at a certain time, and did that carry over into your—into your own family household—your mom—when your mom's house? Did—I mean—uh—like, dinner at six, lunch at noon . . .

VS: I . . .

SL: . . . and you were expected to be there?

VS: Yeah, I mean, there—there—it was a—it was a—you know, both my grandparents and my mother and all her siblings—it was three meals a day. You're expected to sit down as a family. I mean it was never even—you'd never even think of not doing that.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: There was always an abundance of—of food at my grandmother's because of, I think, again, the calar—the core—the caloric requirement. But they had—they had gardens, and so they would have—you know, there was always an abundance of corn on the cob and mashed potatoes and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: . . . everybody have—would have bread and butter. I mean, that was just kind of the na—nature of it, so there was always big spreads. Big—big—it was big, country-cooking kinds of things. I think it was probably simpler cooking than what I think of as Southern cooking. I think we probably—and we didn't have much fried fish. I don't remember that at all.

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: But—but—uh—more roasts and chickens and potatoes and bean and corn. More of—more of a—kind of a German influence kind of cooking. And that—and then that certainly continued into my—the way I was raised by my mother, too.

[00:17:13] SL: Did—um—was grace always said at the table at the meals?

VS: It was—ah—it was not. It was not.

SL: Um—so . . .

VS: I'm tryin'—I'm tryin' to think about that. My—my—um—my grandmother was very active in her church, and in fact, that piano stool that you have your equipment sitting on and that piano—I don't know if it's in the shot or not—were—my grandmother bought in 1904 . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

VS: . . . out of San Francisco so she could teach piano lessons. But she was also very active in the church and the Sunday school that—you know, church piano and—and that kind of thing. So church was very important to her. It was not so important to her husband or her son.

[Laughs] So while my mom and her sisters were pretty active in the church, but I think the men called the day when it came to grace. I don't remember a lot of grace at—uh—at—uh . . .

[00:18:10] SL: So . . .

VS: . . . at—uh . . .

SL: . . . you were exposed . . .

VS: . . . those meals.

SL: . . . to music early, though. Uh—uh—there was a piano in the—in your grandmother's house.

VS: My grandma's house. Yeah, my Aunt Bee was a—she—uh—my Aunt Bea was probably the real musician amongst the siblings. She was—uh—she—uh—she's still living. She's in her nineties now, but she still tells stories about age sixteen—she was doing this honky-tonk-band style that she—her—her mother—my grandmother—told her that she could do this band thing on Saturday nights at some Grange hall, I think. She did it for quite a while 'cause she liked the money—as long as she got up for church. Well, they would not get home because of the drive till like three in the morning, and then she'd have to get up. And so it was a very short nights and—but it was a—but she learned a lot of songs, and she still has this—still plays. You can tell this kind of honky-tonk style of playing with her church music. It's—that's actually very appealing.

SL: So she . . .

VS: My mother played the piano, but not at all as much as my—my aunt

did.

[00:19:12] SL: Um—so when you say "a Grange—uh—meeting," is that a cattlemen's . . .

VS: No, that's—I think that's a western thing more than a . . .

SL: Western thing.

VS: . . . Southern or Midwest thing. The old—the Grange halls. They—they were—uh—not just cattlemen, but it was—in agricultural communities—the Grange . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: . . . halls were like community centers and—uh—in agricultural communities. And I can remember going and seeing movies put on, broadcast on sheets hanging on walls, and that kind of thing.

SL: Kind of a—just a community center.

VS: Community center. Yeah.

[00:19:44] SL: Yeah. Um—and then—and then she'd have to show up—would she play at the church? Would she have to play or . . .

VS: I don't remember.

SL: . . . just attend?

VS: I think she did some. Yeah, I think she did. Yeah . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . that was my aunt.

SL: Uh-huh.

VS: Yeah.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:19:59] SL: You mentioned that your uncle also hunted. Is that right?

VS: Yeah.

SL: Or—and did he teach you to hunt?

VS: No, I never did as a . . .

SL: Never did?

VS: I went out with him some, but I never—I—it was just not anything that I ever picked up. It's probably one of those things that comes from not having a father in the household because there's a lot of hunting and fishing in Oregon. And particularly maybe in southern Oregon. I just never did pick it up. I—and he—my uncle wasn't much of a fisherman. I did do a fair amount of fishing in probably junior high and early high school because one of the kids—kid across the alley from us—his—he and his dad went fishing a lot, and they would take me. So we'd go trout fishing. Mostly it was trout fishing on the Rogue River in southern Oregon that we would do. But it was not—I didn't fly fish. I usually bait fished in the Rogue River. But so that's what I did quite a bit of growin' up.

[00:20:55] SL: Did they ever teach you to clean a fish or . . .

VS: Oh yeah, yeah, sure.

SL: Yeah, yeah. That's good. I like to fish.

VS: Yeah, that's good.

SL: And I fly fish, and trout's a big deal for me, but . . .

VS: My wife, Betsy, is . . .

SL: And Oregon's supposed to be a great place to trout fish.

VS: Yeah, there's a—yeah, although—you know, the trout that have been planted here, I mean, are much bigger than the trout that we had in Oregon. I think it's 'cause of weather, temperature, and volume of—I mean, water temperature and the volume of food that there—the record set for weight and size for the kinds of native fish we had in Oregon are set here in Arkansas.

[00:21:31] SL: Yeah, yeah. Okay now, you just mentioned an alley. So we know a little bit—we know that your grandparents and your uncle were—had a farm in . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . Northern California, and you were living—you grew up in—was it Med . . .

VS: Medford was the . . .

SL: Med . . .

VS: . . . town in southern Oregon—and probably still is—when people want to escape from the rural life, they would go to Medford. And so the—my mom and her two sisters—at some point, they all migrated to Medford for jobs. My mother was born in 1921, so around the time that she was kind of coming of age—nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two—then we had World War II, and there was a military base at Camp White. I think it was a basic-training base, so there was a lot of—you know, boys and girls and Saturday-night dances and that kind of thing. My mom loved to dance but the—so that's what—it was jobs for women that led them to move over to Medford. And that's where

they end up raising family.

[00:22:45] SL: So what—did your mom and dad meet at—was he in the military? Was he at the camp or . . .

VS: I actually don't know how they met.

SL: You don't know?

VS: He was raised in ore—in Medford and I don't think he was—I think they actually met after the war. I think that's the—yeah, I think that's right. They met—after the war.

[00:23:03] SL: Well, let's talk a little bit about your house in Medford. What was it like? What did it look like and . . .

VS: Well, we had several houses because after—I don't remember where we lived very well. I think we lived in a duplex at the time my mom and dad were still a couple, and then after they separated and divorced, my mom had had a second baby as a single mom with two little ones. She ended up renting places from—for—I don't know—the first—till I was in the eighth grade. And at some point then, she was able—I think my Uncle Charles had loaned her some money, and she made a down payment on a house in Medford. It was the house that she was living in at the time she died in 2000. But I mean they were—you know, the neighborhood I lived in was probably pretty typical American neighborhood. Kind of post-World War II neighborhood where almost every house had people with kids in it about our age. You know, kind of the part of the post-war baby boom. And so you know, it was a very vibrant neighborhood and a lot going

on and very nice kids and, you know, nice people in the neighborhood who would watch out for each other's kids.

[00:24:20] SL: Was it downtown, or was it just outside of town? Was it more . . .

VS: It was in the city limits of Medford, which at the time I was raised it was probably about a town of seventeen thousand. So it was like—it was certainly the biggest town in southern Oregon, but.

SL: I guess I'm trying to imagine—is it—was it kind of ranch-style homes, or were they . . .

VS: No, they were very modest homes.

SL: Very modest.

VS: Yeah, very modest homes. Small square footage. Pretty small lots and they—boom, boom, boom, boom—down the street.

SL: Right.

VS: Yeah.

SL: But there was . . .

VS: And it was a—probably the more—you'd have to say probably the more—I don't know—modest side of town till you can get in parts of Medford where there were more sprawling ranch styles and more acreage and more money and—but that's not where we lived.

[00:25:12] SL: But it wasn't, like, two stories and . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . townhouse or something . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . like that.

VS: No, no, no, no, no.

SL: Just a regular home.

VS: Yeah.

SL: But there were lots of kids in the neighborhood . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . so you now had friends that you would play with after school . . .

VS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . and . . .

VS: Oh, sure. Yeah. It was kind of the *Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver* era where, you know, kids were goin' in and out of each other's homes and that kind of 1950s kind of style of being raised.

SL: Yeah, nobody ever locked their doors. Nobody . . .

VS: Yeah, you know, and you think about—I think about that now with the kids. I mean, we would—I mean, there were times when you would just leave and your pare—your mother wouldn't know where you were for several hours. I guess she didn't worry about us. We certainly didn't think there was anything to worry about it. Nowadays, I'm not sure parents let their kids out of sight for ten minutes without wondering where they're at and probably for good reason, but . . .

SL: Absolutely.

VS: And it—certainly, a lot of kids got in—did some things that they shouldn't have done, I think, during those times. But like I say, they're—you know, the neighborhood was very good about watching

out for each other.

[00:26:22] SL: There was a—there is something about "it takes a village" attitude. I—lots of folks that I've interviewed—you know, if you—whatever you were doing—maybe you were blocks or neighborhoods away from your home, but every—all the parents knew each other and if—you know, they would call if you'd done something wrong. Maybe even a neighbor who had would discipline you or say, "You know better than doing that," and . . .

VS: Yeah, I probably saw more on the positive side, though. I mean, I—and maybe that's just because most of the folks in our neighborhood that they did have two parents. But for the most part, I saw people's generosity, you know. They're—they were, you know, inviting us to go places with them or, you know, those kinds of things.

[00:27:11] SL: Well, did you—let's talk a little bit about school. Let's get you in school. Did you go to public schools or . . .

VS: Yeah, they—the—at that time the Medford school system was a really strong public school system. And so we just assumed—I mean, we just took it for granted that they were really good teachers and good schools for the time. And I think that got even better as you got into junior high and high school because they offered—like the junior high I went to had three full bands and a string orchestra.

SL: Wow.

VS: You know, they had the "A" band, "B" band, and "C" band, and they had so many kids interested in music. And we just assumed that's the

way it was everywhere. I don't think it was that way everywhere. If the school district decided, the school board decided they needed a millage, I think it always passed. I mean, there was—they were always looking for—there was a lot of commitment to the schools. The only private school was the Catholic school there, which, you know, people understood why there was always folks that wanted to be in a Catholic school. But people were very supportive of the public schools.

[00:28:25] Dale Bumpers has always talked about how he benefitted from the—I forget how he phrased it—how he benefitted from the greatest systemic sex discrimination in the history of the country, which means there were a whole lot of women that now they would be CEOs of companies and, you know, doctors and lawyers and all. But they didn't have those opportunities. That was a much more difficult route fifty and sixty and seventy years ago. And so that kind of talent—a lot of 'em ended up in public education. And you could tell it. I mean, they're just really smart teachers that were from first grade on up, you know.

[00:29:02] SL: Did you have a favorite teacher every year or was there . . .

VS: Oh, I don't know about—I don't know if I did or not. I had some folks that stood out. I—just like every kid does. I had mentioned before we started, my teacher, Mr. Merriman—my sixth grade teacher was a minister who—on Sundays then he taught school. He was a very nice man. Very positive with kids. Very generous guy. But a couple days after sixth grade he was killed when a tree fell on him. He was felling

some timber in Oregon, and it was a summer job and was—he was killed by a tree. And that had a big impact on the kids in his class 'cause they—and probably for a lot of us, our first real experience with death and going to see a body. And they had a visitation for his class and all. But there were a lot of good teachers. A few years ago—well, not—maybe two or three years ago—wasn't that long ago—I forget what the occasion was, but somehow I was making—there was some resolution about schoolteachers or something and I—so I did a little floor speech, [*unclear word*] floor speech, and mentioned some of my teachers by name. I think that's what happened. I've kind of forgotten. I think I did. I think I made a floor speech, and then I think I sent the text to this reporter I knew in Medford at the *Medford Mail Tribune*, and I think he did a little article about it. But I actually heard from one of my former teachers and then from a friend of mine, a family friend of mine who is also a teacher. And they—you know, they—the teachers—yeah, the teachers really appreciated that we still remembered what—you know, the quality of the education we had as kids in Medford, Oregon. [00:30:48] I remember I had this eighth-grade civics teacher. I don't remember his name, but he worked this—he had this paperback book on the US Constitution. It was one of those books—it was very thorough. There's nothing left out. But it was designed for junior high kids, and it had cartoons, but it was—all the language was there and the amendments and all that. And we—I think that we did it for, like, two nine-weeks periods. I think it was

half a year, we studied the US Constitution. And I think it had a big influence on why I was—got interested in government and in American government and interdemocracy. And it—I don't—maybe ten years ago I decided I'd try to find out what that book was, so I had one of my staff members contact the Medford School District, you know, about this era, and it was kind of one of those things with great kind of—almost embarrassment. "Not only do we not know what the name of the book is [*laughs*], we have no even record of what that teacher may have been. You need to understand, you—it was decades ago you were here." [*Laughs*] You know, so I thought—"Well, I give up on tryin' to find that book."

[00:31:47] SL: Well, you know, also, that would've been in the [19]50s, right?

VS: Right. Yeah.

SL: And so you—I guess we were—America was kind of a hero—war heroes for—and during World War II they were—there was an American spirit . . .

VS: There was.

SL: . . . back then.

VS: And most of the men there had participated in the military in some way or had had some reason for not doing that. Yeah, so that was a big part of people's influences.

[00:32:23] SL: And so there probably was a great—I don't remember ever having a—any classes or any study on specifically the Constitution

here.

VS: I don't know if that's still done or not.

SL: I don't . . .

VS: I—it . . .

SL: . . . remember that.

VS: . . . you know, because I have wondered about that because I thought, "Well, how did we do it?" We had eighth—it was eighth-grade civics.

SL: Yeah.

VS: And I don't know if kids have a civics class. I know we have a focus on history and Arkansas history, which I think is good. But for whatever reason, we did, and for me it was a, I think, a very positive and probably influential course for a junior-high kid.

[00:33:00] SL: Yeah, I just don't remember a textbook that was primarily about the Constitution and studying . . .

VS: Well, you and the people at the Medford School District [*laughter*] don't remember it.

SL: I mean, I remember civics, but it was more—it was . . .

VS: Kind of government and . . .

SL: Government and . . .

VS: Yeah, broader than that.

SL: Yeah, but it wasn't really . . .

VS: And this was a—very focused on the US cons—I remember it was a brown paperback book. It—yeah.

[00:33:24] SL: That'd be interesting to hunt down. So how were you at math and science and . . .

VS: I was a good student.

SL: Were you?

VS: Yeah, I was a good student. I was probably better at math than I was other things, but I think I caught up on that. I think—you know, there—well, I don't know how much we need to go into that, but there was—you know, Medford's like a lot of towns. You had kids—kind of working-class families, you know. Wage-earning families. And then you had the kids in a town that size that were—kind of like the doctor/lawyer kids and the successful business kids. They probably had more opportunities or more exposure to things than we did through the family vacations and trips and the, you know, the . . .

SL: Yep.

VS: . . . goin' to historical places. And so as we got—as we all kind of merged together as we got into the high school 'cause there were two junior highs, a westside one and a eastside one. But when we all come together in high school, then you start appreciating—I mean, I did—that, well, those kids seemed to be more—like maybe it's sophistication. More sophisticated. They had more a sense of—"Well, you know, I want to go to Yale. I want to go to Harvard. I want to go to Princeton." And they did. You know, to Stanford—and they did, but they had—were goals that they had instilled in them from their families. And their family had resources to help them do that. And I—

those were really just names to me. I mean, I really didn't know what that was and—although academically, I did as well if not better than most of those kids, but you just—it's just kind of what you're . . .

SL: You're exposed to.

VS: . . . have—what you're exposed to.

SL: They—they'd been exposed . . .

VS: What you're exposed to.

SL: . . . to other . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . things. Other worldly things.

VS: Yeah.

[00:35:18] SL: So did you need much prodding from your mother to do your homework, or were there rules—you had to do your homework before you could do this or . . .

VS: No, she never had to prod me, but there—she—my mother was a—she graduated from high school, and she did some corres—she never went to college, although she probably would've wanted to if she—if that had been seen as a possibility for her, I think. But she did correspondence courses on shorthand and some office accounting kinds of things. She was always a—pretty much was a bookkeeper in, like, a small business. She did the payroll and all that kind of stuff. But so education was important to her, but I don't ever remember if she had to prod me. We just kind of assumed that . . .

SL: You liked it.

VS: Yeah, we liked it, and we'd—what you'd want to succeed. And I don't ever remember having to—either me or my sister—having to say, "Oh, I got a call from the teacher. You didn't do well, or you got your homework."

SL: Right.

VS: So—fact, it was probably the other way 'cause I was—I'd get up, set the alarm for, like, four thirty or five in the morning and try to finish a paper or something, and it kind of would sometimes disrupt her sleep that I was up roamin' around the house 'cause she was a bit fearful of—as living—being the only adult in the household, about what the noises were, and she'd wake—would wake up at every creak and crack, you know.

[00:36:30] SL: Did you—were you assigned chores or duties at the house or did . . .

VS: Some. Yeah.

SL: Some?

VS: Yeah, some.

SL: I mean, did you, like, make your own bed always?

VS: Yeah, I mean, I kind of—I actually kind of forget that. I mean, we had a dog we helped feed. I mowed the lawn. But I don't remember that we had a list of "this is yours and those are yours." But . . .

[00:36:53] SL: Would you help with the dishes after a meal or . . .

VS: We did some, although my mom was pretty—I just can't—I don't remember. I—she was always—she'd get in and get it done. That

might've been homework time, too, growin' up. I member Saturday mornings it was always a bit of a challenge for me and my sister to get the chores—the Saturday morning stuff done. I don't know if it was just the nature of Saturday morning or not, but . . .

[00:37:17] SL: I remember helping my mom take clothes off the line outside, growing up to . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: I'm assuming the laundry was hung outside on a line and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . dried there and . . .

VS: But as we got older, we always had a yard, and we always had some kind of a vegetable garden, and I would always do that. And we had a fireplace that my mom liked, and so there was always wood-chopping kinds of things.

SL: Fireplace.

VS: Small, little fireplace. Yeah.

[00:37:48] SL: So did ya'll have a radio growing up?

VS: Yeah.

SL: Do you remember much about how that . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . played a role?

VS: Actually, I do, quite a bit because, you know, television when I was—didn't really come out till the [19]50s, and we were a little slower than most. I don't think we had a television till I was in the fourth grade.

But I can remember the radio shows, you know, just 'cause I'm of that vintage. And you know, like Saturday morning—I think it was *Big Jon and Sparkie* and—you know, but one of the ones my—I really liked listening to Bob Hope's radio show.

SL: Sure.

[00:38:23] VS: And I'm—I've always been suspicious that maybe I learned to value humor and [*laughs*] humor in public speaking and all because of spending too much time listening to Bob Hope's radio show. But I recall that my mother even in, like, first and second grade would let me have the radio under the covers to listen to Bob Hope or something. But so you know, *Our Miss Brooks* and *The Great Gildersleeve* and just kind of the—all the classical radio shows that we would listen to.

SL: Well, the . . .

VS: *Flash Gordon*.

[00:38:54] SL: Of course. Did the three of you, you know, gather around? Was there a family . . .

VS: We did some. Yeah, I can remember, like, on I think Sunday evenings, maybe, was when *Our Miss Brooks* was on. There would be some of that. Maybe laying on the floor coloring or something, we'd listen to the radio.

[00:39:07] SL: What about music? Did—was there . . .

VS: No, it wasn't—other than what you'd hear on the radio.

SL: Well, that's what I'm sayin'.

VS: Yeah, yeah, we . . .

SL: Did you . . .

VS: She—there was a—that was a—but we didn't, like, have—my mom didn't have a big record collection or anything like that.

[00:39:24] SL: So the—do you remember the call numbers of the radio station that you listened to?

VS: Well, I mean, you know, KMED was a big one growin' up. KBRY—KBOY was—which I thought was pretty good 'cause who'd get KBOY. That would be a pretty good one to get for—there must've been a lot of competition to get KBOY. I member when that—when I was in Vietnam and one day we were listenin' to—back—it was probably—it was 1968, and we were kind of standing around at noon hour listening to Armed Forces Radio. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

VS: And this guy I'd known for several months said—he just kind of was—there was about six or eight of us, and he just said, "Well, I sure wish that was good old KMED radio," and I—that was the first time I knew he was from southern Oregon. [*Laughs*] So—and I've actually seen him since then, a few times as the decades have gone by.

[00:40:18] SL: So TV didn't hit until a few . . .

VS: We didn't get a TV until I was in the—I think, about the fourth grade. And other kids had it before that, I think. But—and at that time, you know, there was, again, because of the age I am, there was maybe one TV station initially, and there would just be—their schedule had a

lot of TBA on it, to be announced and . . .

SL: Absolutely.

VS: . . . a lot of downtime and . . .

SL: Right. Test pattern on the . . .

VS: Test patterns and . . .

SL: . . . screen.

VS: You know, and that kind of thing. But . . .

SL: Black and white.

VS: Black and white. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Yeah.

[00:40:52] SL: Well, let's talk a little bit about neighborhood activity. I

mean, first of all, was the neighborhood diverse? Were there different ethnic groups . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . represented? It was all Caucasian.

VS: Yeah, it was all Caucasian. Yeah.

[00:41:06] SL: Did you—were there—was there—were there any African

Americans or . . .

VS: There really . . .

SL: . . . Asian or . . .

VS: There really weren't. In fact, a few years ago, maybe ten years ago, a book came out—I think it—there's somehow—where the title is the title on sundown towns. And Medford was one of those that was

considered a sundown town. The basic idea that if you were an African American in a town like that, you'd better be out of town by sundown or . . .

SL: Yes.

VS: . . . bad things could happen.

SL: Yep.

VS: And it was—sadly, it was true. There were certainly were sundown towns in Arkansas.

SL: Absolutely.

VS: I member reading in the same book. And so I remember in high school the weather service had transferred in—just because they were national—you know, US government outfit, they had transferred in a— an African American weatherman. And it—and somebody had a, like, a small wooden cross, you know, old KKK type of symbol, that they had burned on his—stuck in his lawn. And the reason I remember that is because it made the papers, but I also remember the woman that picked us from—after school drove us by the house, and I actually saw them.

[00:42:24] SL: Did he last? Did he ever . . .

VS: No, I think that he . . .

SL: He had to move?

VS: Yeah, I think he was moving on. And there was a—but I didn't hear from many people what I thought was overt racism. I did from some. But I didn't much within our family, and I didn't much from people.

And in fact, as I remember going by there, I think it was more kind of a sense of, "Well, how stupid is that?"

SL: Yeah.

VS: "You know, to burn a cross at—for—and a weather man? I mean, what's the point of that?" A meteorologist. I don't mean weatherman like a TV weatherman. I mean a meteorologist that was actually trying to figure out what it was—weather—that was more the spirit of—I remember the carload of us that went by and saw that.

[00:43:05] SL: Gosh, I guess I just always assumed that all those sundown towns were in the South. I never even thought that it might be out on the West Coast as well.

VS: No, there is—in fact, if you go back and look at the history of the Ku Klux Klan, there was—in the—and I will let you talk to UA historians about this, so what I'm about to say is probably factually not very accurate. But I think it was in the post-Reconstruction period that there were a lot of Southerners that left the South—and had different periods, either for economic reasons or whatever—but they went to find other places to live. And a fair number of people ended up in the Northwest. And so you can find pictures down—I forget what the name of that street is that goes right between Willamette University where I went to college and across the street they'd—the Oregon state capital of robed Klansmen marching. I mean, it—there was a period in Oregon history when the Klan had big influence over politics in Oregon. But I think a lot of that was—had migrated from the South.

[00:44:09] SL: That's interesting. I know there was quite a bit of—I guess the void of any African American community out there kind of isolated—insulated—the—you and your upbringing as to—I mean, you didn't have any experiences with that.

VS: No, you didn't. And that's a—I think is a—I think that's a potential hazard for kids that they don't get exposed to diversity like that. Now again, you're a kid, and you [*laughs*] end up where you're at. And diversity . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . takes a lot of forms. But I think that is a disadvantage—I think there are disadvantages to children being raised in homogenous communities. Now there are also disadvantages to being raised in communities that have diversity in which there clearly is great ethnic, religious, or racial tensions.

SL: Right.

VS: I mean—because I—you can also—and you and I would know some of people who were raised in areas with diversity. And to this day, even as adults, they still harbor feelings that they shouldn't have . . .

SL: That's correct.

VS: . . . that are not productive or not helpful. Not the way, you know, we were intended to be as human beings. So I think for sometimes when kids are raised in environments where they don't have exposure to diversity, I think that's a problem. But it also, I think, can be fertile ground for when you do as an adult or college student or whatever—

you don't necessarily take with you any bad feelings, either. You know, it's just a lack of exposure.

SL: Right.

VS: And so I think you can see that also, that just because you were not raised in a diverse environment doesn't mean you're—come out of it a racist.

[00:46:22] SL: What a—did you join any organizations, any civic or, you know, like Boy Scouts or Cub Scouts or . . .

VS: I was a Cub Scout and a Boy Scout, and that's about the only one I really remember. I was active in our church youth groups growin' up as a kid. And then, you know, I was in the school band, and that was—we were—Medford had a big football program, so with the band—I didn't play football, but I was in the band, in the marching band. And so that was, you know, that—there goes that Friday night and, you know, those kinds of things. But . . .

[00:46:57] SL: What instrument did you play?

VS: I played a clarinet from the—I guess I started in the fifth grade.

SL: Did you ever pick up or listen to any Benny Goodman or . . .

VS: Yeah, some.

SL: Some? Yeah.

VS: Yeah, some.

SL: Yeah.

VS: But it was also very clear there's a big difference between playing in a marching band in high school and what those guys could do.

SL: Yes. [*Laughs*]

VS: And there weren't many high school kids, I don't think, that could play at that level of clarinet. Now I could see cornet players that seemed to me that could play at a—like a level of a Dixieland band. I didn't see many clarinet players in high school play at that level, but . . .

[00:47:35] SL: So you got to travel . . .

VS: Some.

SL: . . . for football games?

VS: Some, yeah.

SL: Get on the bus . . .

VS: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . and do the band . . .

VS: Yeah, some.

SL: . . . trip.

VS: Some, yeah.

SL: State competitions. Did you . . .

VS: Yeah, there was . . .

SL: . . . try to get chairs?

VS: There was a—well, there was a big competition amongst the bands. I mean, again, it goes back to good public education and the bands. I don't know what our band was—a hundred piece or something.

SL: Wow.

VS: They would have the big—the towns—the cities in Arkansas—or in Oregon would have this competition, annual competition, for who was

the best concert band. And they were—and it was very—you know, it was real high-quality stuff.

SL: So did you play both in the concert band and marching band, too?

VS: Yeah, they were the same.

SL: They were the same.

VS: They were the same, yeah.

[00:48:19] SL: Kay. What about movies? I'm assuming Medford had at least one movie house, probably two.

VS: Yeah, it had two—the Craterian and the Holly. And movies were a big part of being a kid, growin' up. It was, like, twenty cents on the—for the Saturday matinee, and you know, it was—I remember goin' one time—I only had nineteen cents and [*SL laughs*] the nice woman let me in anyway. I also remember coming out one Saturday and turning the wrong way to walk home and ended up lost and so—some—I was crying on a street corner. Some kid found me and said, "Well, that's the police station across the street," so they gave me a ride home. But . . .

SL: Those were good days.

VS: But you know, movies were a big part of that because you didn't have computer stuff. You didn't have much television at that time, so movies were just this whole dream world, you know. But . . .

[00:49:11] SL: You member the first movie you saw?

VS: No.

SL: Did you have a favorite, early on?

VS: I don't remember. I remember when I was, you know, in the pre-vaccination era, when I was sick with either red measles or chicken pox or something—was this movie about—a Roy Rogers movie that was a big, prominent, color movie about Trigger, and I didn't—I was—my mother would not let me go. [*SL laughs*] And I was heartbroken, and it was just in the last—a few months ago I think I actually saw that movie on TV 'cause I never did see it. I saw—I think—I thought, "I think that's the movie that I was heartbroken over," but I don't remember. But . . .

SL: Roy Rogers.

VS: Yeah, but . . .

SL: Dale Evans.

VS: Yeah.

[00:49:51] SL: Well, I'm trying to get an image of the culture that you grew up in there. So you were a band guy. You made good grades.

VS: Yeah.

SL: You enjoyed school.

VS: It was very rigorous—I mean, I think it was pretty rigorous academic expectations in the schools.

[00:50:16] SL: Is there—did they have—like here, I grew up in grade school—we even had square-dancing time. Did . . .

VS: I don't remember that.

SL: You don't remember any of that?

VS: Yeah, I don't remember that.

SL: Were there any organized . . .

VS: We had a—I mean, I think it was part of a PE class that we had. I think they taught us to square dance, but I don't remember a square-dance club or anything like that.

[00:50:38] SL: Right. Let's see—did you have any—did you know any relatives that served in the war, World War II or . . .

VS: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . the Korean War?

VS: Sure, sure. Most of 'em did. And my Uncle Charles did not. My Uncle Charles had terrible asthma. He tried. I think he tried more than once, but he was . . .

SL: Got a 4-F.

VS: He—yeah, whatever he had they—he didn't—they didn't take him. But my dad was in one of Patton's outfits and my—I had a uncle who was in the navy on a ship that was hit by kamikaze pilots. And I had another uncle who was—helped liberate or was around the camps, one of the death camps in Europe. I had another uncle who was actually in the navy before the war started. He was a kind of a drinkin', fightin', cussin', banty-rooster type. But because of that banty-rooster size, when he was in the navy he was—ended up on a submarine. [*SL laughs*] So he served on a submarine throughout World War II.

SL: Boy, that's tough.

VS: Yeah, so they—but that was that nature of that generation. Most of the men did something war related and, you know, they did.

[00:52:05] SL: Yeah, back then people wanted to serve. They—you know, it wasn't—some folks . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I've interviewed—some folks that wanted to get in there before they were of age, and they were . . .

VS: Yeah, and I don't know how many of these guys enlisted. I don't know if my dad enlisted or was drafted, but they all—the expectation for all of them was that they would all end up, and they pretty much did.

[00:52:31] SL: So did y'all have—did your mom have a car when y'all were growin' up?

VS: Yeah. It was always a pretty [*laughs*—sometimes questionable whether—how long it was going to . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . go or not, but yeah, we did.

[00:52:51] SL: So what was it like—did you—when you were in high school, did you ever get to take the car out on a date or . . .

VS: No, I did not get my driver's license until I was eighteen and was out of high school. And I—that may just be because it was so easy to walk most places and to school . . .

SL: Medford.

VS: . . . in Medford and all. I think I was a little—I think probably it was part of the nature of being in a family of more modest means. We had one car. My mother worked. She took the car, and so I don't remember, you know, really having much of a drive to get a driver's

license before I was eighteen.

[00:53:35] SL: You know, I just thought—I don't think we got your sister's name. What is it?

VS: Karen.

SL: Karen.

VS: Yeah, she's three years younger.

SL: And she's still with us or . . .

VS: Yep. Yep.

SL: And does she live in Oregon now or . . .

VS: She does. She lives in the—in North Bend on the Oregon coast.

[00:53:57] SL: Well, what was your—did you have any really close friends, growing up that—any stories? I'd like to hear some—did you ever get in any kind of trouble? Did—were you mischievous? Were . . .

VS: I don't think I was mischievous. I—in fact, my mother talked about that I wasn't, and I don't know—you know, I don't know why some—I'm tryin' to figure out now with my boys, why are some seem to be more mischievous than others or [*laughs*], you know, have a chip—born with a chip on their shoulder. On the other hand, my six-year old doesn't seem to do much of that. He seems to be always—you know, be curious about the world and wantin' to do what his teacher says 'cause he thinks that's interesting and all. But I don't think I got in much trouble. We tried to do—I was very active in the church youth group, which was pretty active. You know, it was—it would be a fair amount of activities and all. The Boy Scouts had quite a bit of activity.

The friends I had—we—you know, Medford's a great place for just pallin' around your neighborhood, and you know, I played tennis in junior high and—but I'm sorry I don't have any tale of larceny or [*SL laughs*] grand-theft auto for you.

[00:55:07] SL: You didn't paper any girlfriend houses or . . .

VS: No, not that I recall.

SL: . . . no Halloween shenanigans.

VS: Not that I recall. I was pretty active even in high school—even then I got interested in political things. You asked about organizations earlier. We actually in high school had a—we had, like, a campaign committee, and I was in this little group called—it was a Teen Age Republican group back then. And so we had—I was the chairman of the campaign committee and we—I'd get calls from candidates that would want me to get 'em volunteers. They'd have—you know, if they were goin' door to door or something.

SL: Right.

[00:55:49] VS: And I'd call back and say, "Well, I have, you know, two or three or four there," and they were ecstatic about it. Now I know why, 'cause if you could call some high school kid who'd show up with three or four people, that was a huge deal in a campaign.

SL: That's a lot of yard signs.

VS: Yeah, that's a lot of . . .

SL: That's a lot of doors.

VS: Yeah, goin' door to door and parking. We'd park cars. [00:56:03]

Nelson Rockefeller came to southern Oregon when he was running for president, and he brought along his wife, Happy, who subsequently died of cancer. But we parked cars for that event and then all got to go up and meet him and get his—shake his hand and get his autograph. And so we—I did a lot—did those kinds of activities. A lot of door-to-door stuff. In fact, that's why I think—that's why I ended up winning my first political races. I just assumed that how you won political races was goin' door to door, and so I went to thousands of homes in my first election in 1990. But it was because of what I learned in high school, you know.

[00:56:42] SL: I was gonna ask you about—oh, the church group. What church did y'all belong to?

VS: It was a Presbyterian church in Medford was the one that I spent most of the time with.

SL: And what . . .

VS: My grandma—I had a grandmother—my grandmother was a Nazarene. I participated in that one some, but then as I got older, I kind of gravitated toward this youth group connected with the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Medford.

[00:57:04] SL: And what did you do? What was your—you were a Cub Scout and then a Boy Scout?

VS: I was a Cub Scout and then a Boy Scout.

SL: And the Boy Scout—was the troop—was it affiliated with the Presbyterian Church?

VS: It was not. I think it was the . . .

SL: It was just a . . .

VS: . . . Knights of Pythias or something and, yeah, I think the scoutmaster lived, like, three doors down from us.

[00:57:26] SL: So you got to go camping.

VS: Yeah, we got to go camping. Fact, the scoutmaster's son—while I was in Congress—now lives out somewhere in Virginia or something. He came up to my—came—made arrangements to come to my office, and the scoutmaster's been dead for quite a few years. But he brought some scouts to [*laughs*] my office, I recall, in Washington. Was it scouts, or was it his family? I can't remember. But anyway, he came by to say hello.

JE: Now might be a good time to break. Lunch is here.

SL: Okay.

TM: [*Unclear words*].

SL: All right. Well, we've got our first hour . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:58:01] SL: So, Vic, we're on our second tape. You've survived your first hour . . .

VS: And we . . .

SL: . . . with the Pryor Center.

VS: We've had lunch.

SL: We've had lunch. We had Arkansas burgers.

VS: Arkansas Burger Company.

SL: Arkansas Burger Company. They were fine. I got chocolate shake all over my shirt.

VS: [*Laughs*] That's a good sign.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's a good sign.

VS: Shows enthusiasm.

[00:58:22] SL: So you know, we've been talkin' about your upbringing in Oregon. We've covered a little bit about your mom and your grandparents that you knew growing up. We talked a little bit about the school and that you had good teachers. Good, strong public-school community that Medford was.

VS: Yeah.

SL: You were in the band—marching band and the concert band. One and the same. But we—you really haven't told us any anecdotes about your childhood as far as things that actually happened to you or that you experienced.

VS: You mean, like broken arms and . . .

SL: Broken arms, mud balls . . .

VS: Mud balls and . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Anything.

VS: . . . and adventure. You know, I think I had a pretty tame childhood.

[00:59:21] The—I will tell you about the broken arm because it was one of those things where I—we were jumping from a fence into a catalpa tree, and I've never felt the same way about catalpa trees since 'cause it had this limb that curved down, and if you jumped—

got—climbed up the fence, stood on the top rail, and jumped, you could grab that limb and swing out, which works real well unless you lose your grip. I lost my grip and landed on my elbow and shattered my humerus. And this was, like, a few days after getting out of school in, like, the fifth or sixth grade. So for six weeks I had plaster from here all around here, all over my chest and body with a bar going from here . . .

SL: Oh!

VS: . . . down to here. And so you know, tryin' to play baseball with one hand or something like that in the neighborhood. So that—I remember that summer very—that six weeks of that summer very well.

SL: Did it heal up okay? Any . . .

VS: It healed up very well.

SL: . . . consequences after?

VS: And then I was at—years later, when I was doin' my residency in family practice, I had a orthopedic rotation at Children's Hospital. And I saw a guy with a similar break, and we talked to the orthopedist, and he said, "No, we don't do that anymore. We just put 'em in a sling." [Laughs] So I'm thinkin', "For six weeks I was like this [holds arm up and away from body] in the hot of the sun and everything like that when I could've just been in a sling like that the full time."

SL: You'd think it just could not possibly heal as well just in a sling, though—that . . .

VS: Well, it's just—I think it did. Yeah.

[01:00:52] SL: That's somethin' else. Well, you were—you mentioned somethin' about riding a tractor one day.

VS: Oh yeah, we were talkin' about my Uncle Charles, and I had told you about when I was a little kid we would—I would follow him everywhere. But if he was plowin', I'd sit on the tractor with him. And I member one day when—I couldn't have been very old. I don't know, probably six or seven or something—sitting on the—kind of between his legs on this big tractor seat. And somehow I managed to fall off right in front of the big wheel, and my Uncle Charles was very quick and athletic. And of course he stopped it before I got run over by the big wheel. [*Laughs*] But I still remember sitting there in the dirt wondering, "What am I doing down here in front of this tractor wheel?" And my Uncle Charles, I think, was wondering the same thing, you know.

SL: Yeah, I bet it gave his heart a skip.

VS: Yeah, yeah.

SL: Yeah, that would not have been a good thing to have happened.

VS: No, no.

SL: To come back home and say . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . "Sorry." [*Laughs*]

VS: Yeah, "Lost one."

[01:01:51] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, so high-school-wise, you had a great high-

school experience.

VS: Yeah, it was a—yeah, I thought so. I mean, I was—physically, I didn't really grow until—I think really I was out of high school. I mean, I was younger, a little bit younger, than most kids in high school, so I never was a—you know, I never participated in athletics much just bec—partly 'cause of the size thing; probably partly cause of motivation. But I—you know, it was pretty challenging academically. I mean, it was a pretty rigorous high school, and there was a lot of advanced-placement classes, and I would take those. There were small numbers of kids and it really—and they really did challenge you, you know. And so that's—you know, you spend a lot of time. I would get up a lot of mornings to finish papers and so on at five in the morning before headin' off to school.

SL: AP or—that's advanced-placement . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . studies and so if you—did you have—were the advanced-placement students separate from the rest of the classroom?

VS: Yeah, they were . . .

SL: . . . or were they in . . .

VS: . . . advanced-placement classes.

SL: So you had a smaller classroom size, I would assume.

VS: We did. I think since then—this was back in the early [19]60s—I think since then the numbers of advanced-placement students has expanded, which I think is a good thing. But it was not very—it had

just really gotten goin', I think, in a year or two or three before that. So this was kind of a first thing for this school, and so the numbers started out pretty small. A US history class probably with ten or twelve people in it and—you know, so that the class sizes were smaller and the kids were, you know, very well read and motivated and bright kids.

[01:03:45] SL: That opens a—I think that opens up doors when you get that kind of close-knit instruction and there's . . .

VS: Yeah, I think it does.

SL: . . . fewer students and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . the student-to-teacher ratio is much more conducive to being excited about what you're learning about.

VS: I think it does. I also, though—I guess I'm reflecting more policy now—I think if you had to choose between, you know, two mediocre teachers and class size of fifteen versus one really good teacher and class size of thirty.

SL: You'd take the thirty.

VS: I'd go with the class size thirty every time because a really smart, gifted teacher—hardworking—really can thrive in an environment with more students. I think that's—to me, that's the most important thing.

[01:04:37] SL: So I assume you graduate pretty well high up in the class.

VS: I did. I think I was second in my class, and I remember—the reason I remember it is 'cause my best friend was first, and it's irritated me

ever [*laughs*] since.

[01:04:51] SL: Now, who was your best friend?

VS: We didn't—I don't know if we thought about that stuff a whole lot. I—it just—it didn't—I don't know. His name is John Casterline. He—if you Google him you will find him. He's a—he was a really smart guy, and he is a—became, I think, a population studies—he does a lot of epidemiologics and population studies, and so you'll see his name on stuff involving, like—what was it, populations and disease and things like that.

SL: Do . . .

VS: I think he's an epidemiologist or—from the statistical analysis side. He graduated from Yale.

[01:05:27] SL: There was something I was gonna ask you about. Gosh, what was it? Well, it'll come back to me. Did you—so . . .

VS: We were talkin' about academics.

SL: We were talking about academics, and I was gonna segue into college life, but there was one more item about graduating . . .

VS: I'll say another thing while you're gettin' your thoughts together there.

SL: Kay.

VS: And again, it's I guess applauding the teaching of that time. But the science labs and the—you know, the resources for science and the sophistication, I think, of the science teachers. I—we had high school physics and high school chemistry, and you know, they were just were kind of, in a way, showmen, you know. In addition to being really

smart people, they were showmen in terms of, you know, blowin' stuff up to make a point and . . .

SL: Sure, sure.

VS: . . . you know, that kind of thing. And . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: Which I think is—I mean, I'm not saying that there are not teachers like that now 'cause I know there are. I just was fortunate that's what—was what I had, and not every kid is blessed to have that.

[01:06:36] SL: I remember what it was. Did you take any speech and debate or . . .

VS: I did.

SL: . . . theater or . . .

VS: I did.

SL: . . . anything like that?

VS: Yeah, I did. I did—I—not theater. I never saw myself as doin' that. But debate—I started that in junior high, I think in ninth grade, and took it all three years in high school and really liked it and, again, had a really good teacher. The teacher was a guy named DeVere Taylor. *D-E-V-E-R-E*. And he was a World War II veteran, and I was very good friends with his daughter, who was in my class—daughter, Cindy. And—but I think it's a—he's an example of kind of the—a very mature veteran, smart, curious guy. He's—but we're in a very small town in ore—southern ore—rural southern Oregon, but he's very much aware of what was goin' on in the world, and I learned a lot from him as a, I

think, as a personality in addition just to the experience that came with actually having to stand up in front of people and make speeches and do—there was—Oregon had a pretty vigorous debate competitions.

SL: Sure.

VS: So speech and debate competitions and—you know, and those were both eye opening just from the perspective of competing in—being—going through that anxiety about standing up in front of people. But also just for kids goin' off on bus trips and—together and, you know, all the adventure and misadventure that comes from that.

[01:08:09] SL: Yeah, as I remember, there would be, like, a national question that all the . . .

VS: "Resolve that higher education should be a guaranteed right for every student," or something like that.

SL: Yeah.

VS: That kind of thing. And then—and you know what, I remember that sometimes and I—that has occurred to me in the last few days, and I won't say for what issues because it doesn't matter. But you know, when you're in a junior-high or a high-school debate, you look for points. Now you may know in your heart, "Well, that's a pretty weak point," but it's the best one you got, so you're gonna use it because it's a competition.

SL: Sure.

[01:08:44] VS: Well, sometimes when you hear political debates—you know,

I find myself—fact, I said to my wife the other night, "Some—you know, these guys—some of these guys think this is like junior-high debate, and it's not." There actually are some arguments that are better than others, and if you got a weak argument, at some point you may just be better off by saying, "I don't really have a very good argument. [*Laughs*] You know, you may be right on this one." But everything in life does not have to be conducted like a junior-high or high-school debate in which you're assigned a side and you vigorously go after it. Well, no, part of it is your judgment, not just your ability to debate, but your ability at some point to say, "I think he does have the better argument." And then make that decision and go on.

[01:09:23] SL: In competition, though, you had to be well versed on both sides of an issue, right?

VS: Yeah, 'cause you would flip back and forth.

SL: You'd flip back and forth.

VS: Yeah, yeah.

SL: And so what that teaches students, and you probably latched onto it, was that you see both sides of an argument. You're not . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: You have to be able to defend . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . both sides.

VS: I—yeah, I think that's right. So you see both sides. On the other hand, I've always felt like—we're talking about both sides of an

argument. I think there's probably, you know, twenty-seven sides to an argument.

SL: And there's that.

VS: And at some point you—whether—you know, if you're a—the job of a President Obama or a Governor Beebe is somebody makes those twenty-seven arguments or two arguments, and you make the decision and—based on those arguments. I mean, there is—I don't know if I want to say truth, but there is an argument that will carry the day. Now history may prove it to be wrong, but you know, arguments can at some point carry the day. and sometimes it's pretty clear what the better argument is. But I mean—so those—you know, so—you know, so I had my eighth-grade civics class on the Constitution, and we had the debate stuff. [01:10:28] The other thing this teacher did, this Mr. Taylor did, is once a week he would assign—we'd sit in his class and do nothing but read the news magazines. He passed around *U.S. News* and *Newsweek* and *Time*.

SL: *Time*.

VS: *Time*.

SL: Of course.

VS: And I can't remember if we had a—I don't think we had a test on 'em. I think we talked about 'em. I can't remember, but we all kind of devoured the—you know, devoured those things. And that—he thought that was an important thing and, well, that was pretty easy duty for us. So—you know, but it's not a bad thing for kids at that age

to get exposed to current events.

[01:11:00] SL: It seems like the—journalism in those days was also—I don't—for some reason I feel like it was at a higher motivation. They—it wasn't so partisan or so—you know, it was—there was real reporting going on and real—written well. I . . .

VS: I think there is—and I'm not a journalism historian—but I think there's two sides to that argument, too.

SL: Yeah.

VS: And so as somebody who, you know, thought that it was the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of Walter Cronkite—you know, that that's . . .

SL: Yes.

VS: If Walter Cronkite said that was it, then that's what had indeed happened.

SL: Yeah.

VS: But there's also the view that says, "Well, no, Walter Cronkite made his—he had his own views. He made a decision about what was news and what was not news."

SL: Yes.

VS: And the people who didn't make the news cut that day, they might've been sitting around thinkin', "Now, why'd you cover that story on the new kind of cherry pie at the state fair, and you didn't cover the fact that we're doing a protest on whatever," or whether it's—doesn't matter if it's left wing or right wing. And so there are people who, you know, will discuss the Walter Cronkite era as being one in which we

really homogenized, and it was kind of like there was a very narrow view of what was acceptable news. And you saw the news magazines, I think, often reflected that. They would often cover the same thing. It wasn't uncommon for them to have the same story on the cover.

SL: Yep.

[01:12:33] VS: Sometime even very similar pictures. And so now you think, "Okay, what do we have now? We have this huge noise of voices on the internet, but also on the broadcast media and the print media." And sometimes you and I, Scott, go back—"Well, what would Walter think? I mean, where is Walter? Just tell me, Walter. [*SL laughs*] I just want to know—what's the truth in this, Walter? Where's the truth, you know, 'cause I" . . .

SL: "What do we do?"

VS: And I go, "What do we do? I can't [*SL laughs*] sort it out." And it puts more of a burden on—it puts more of a burden, I think, on people to sort things out. But it also gives you a lot more tools to sort things out because you've got resources. You know, every—anyone can go to the Pryor Center website and learn stuff or—you know. [01:13:21] Now if you choose, however, just to surround yourself with one view and don't want to venture out, well, you can pretty soon be as reassured as we were in the halcyon days of Walter Cronkite that there is just this kind of one view there if you choose not to go out there. But if you choose that, you do that at your own peril, I think, given that the resources that are out there now.

SL: I'm probably—lean toward more guilty [*laughter*] as charged. I—yeah, there's just some stuff that I just don't watch. I . . .

VS: Yeah, I know. Yeah, no, that's right.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Yeah, you—or you do a little bit, and you think, "Okay, I'm not gonna do this anymore."

SL: Yeah, I mean it's a—I don't know. But again . . .

VS: But there was a . . .

SL: . . . I think you're right, that the burden is on us to do that filtering now.

VS: Yeah.

SL: That it's all so . . .

VS: But there was—I mean, you had the—that was part of that time when I grew up. You had Huntley-Brinkley, and you had Walter Cronkite and very well-respected journalists. And while they were in competition, their news was essentially the same, and they worked—and they had a pretty good block of time. I remember when Douglas Edwards, I think, went from fifteen minutes to thirty minutes, and you know, they started—but the quality was good and people prided themselves on the quality of their journalism. But I don't think we thought very much in those days about, "Well, they may have their own biases, too." We didn't rethink that . . .

SL: We didn't.

VS: . . . because it seemed like they were trying very hard to do the best

job they could and they—I mean, they certainly covered—I think, covered fairly the civil rights movement and what was going on with the Vietnam War, which were the big issues of growing up at that time.

[01:15:01] SL: Did you ever have to do interpretive events—you know, part of a—in . . .

VS: What do you mean?

SL: When I was growin' up, speech and debate—you also did extemporaneous speaking and . . .

VS: I can—we had what we called—I think the events that I—impromptu and extemporaneous were, I recall, the two.

SL: Yep.

VS: I think impromptu you had, like, one minute to prepare and extemporaneous you had, like, thirty minutes or something or . . .

SL: Right, right.

VS: Yeah, those are the—those were actually the two events that I competed in alongside of the debate. And then I think they had oratory, but that was not for me. *[Laughs]*

SL: Right. But all that stuff taught you to think on your feet in front of a crowd.

VS: Well, it's—yeah or at least contribute—I think it contributed to more confidence in front of an audience and—because you for—I think any elected official—I don't care how shy you are at the beginning of a political career—and there are people who go into running for office

that really have not stood up in front of an audience before at all. And you can tell that.

SL: Sure.

[01:16:04] VS: Hattie Caraway when she ran for the Senate for that first full time, when Huey Long came up . . .

SL: Yep.

VS: . . . she acknowledged and the people who followed that—for that time he was up here, that ten days, her speaking dramatically improved the longer—I mean, they—she—they did, like, forty-some events or thirty-eight or something . . .

SL: In ten days.

VS: . . . by her watching him and learning from him. And her confidence went up, and she started getting fire, too, and—but it's a—it's something you learn. Well, if you've had high school debate and did some speaking and—you know, it helps you the first time you decide to stand up at a press conference and announce that you're running for office if you actually had done that a little bit, you know.

[01:16:46] SL: Right, right. So is there anything else you want to talk about high school and pre-high school, growin' up in Oregon? You know, we didn't really talk a whole lot about your mom. We talked a little bit about her, but . . .

VS: Yeah, I'll tell you about my mom a few—for a minute or two. She—my mom was—she—I mean, she had a lot of challenges in her life. I mean, nowadays you can't walk down the street without running into

somebody that's divorced or a kid that's had parents that are split up and we . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: You know, that's the—kind of the way America's gone and—but when—she—you know, my mom was not interested in being a single mom with two kids. She just happened to marry a guy who—you know, I think that's part of coming—you know, my dad was one of Patton's guys and came back. And I think he just probably got married sooner than he should have for the wild oats side of his life and . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: So she's there with two kids, and she was a bit on the timid side, and I think she had a lot of anxieties about life. But she had a great, incredible work ethic and incredible honesty about her. And that's why she did so well in her work because people would trust her with—I mean, they figured out right away Marge Snyder was not gonna steal anything. She would agonize if she couldn't find a dime, you know, when she balanced books at the end of the day at a—what was the—oh, Leonard Electric where she worked in an appliance store and that kind of thing. But it was a hard life, so it was very common when we were growing up, you member—so we didn't—you know, health insurance was hard to come by. Never had any child support, just always totally depended on the money she got and the wages that a single woman in those days could get. [01:18:33] But it was quite

common that—at the—as she would get near the end of a two-week pay period, that she'd be short on money. And she gave us whatever allowance. The allowance wasn't much, and at some point I had, you know, some jobs. I had a newspaper route and, you know, worked jobs in the summer and that. Well, I had my own meager amount of money. She would come to me and ask permission if she could borrow, like, two dollars out of my little savings account or, you know, if it was a really bad week, you know, five dollars—could she borrow that?

SL: Yeah.

[01:19:05] VS: Well, you think a—you know, I think about that and it—course, we would always say yes. But I think sometimes we would say, "What? Why do you need five dollars?" You know, that kind of thing. But it wasn't so much—I suspect she didn't like the idea of having to ask her kid to borrow money, but I think about the fact that she did 'cause I never would have known, you know, if she would've gone and drawn two dollars out of my savings account or—I mean, I wouldn't have known. But that she would come and actually ask permission to do that, I think was commendable, you know. Kind of part of her honesty, maybe part of her respect for other people's possessions. But as I look back on that now, you know, I think there's a whole lot of families in America—if two or three dollars every two weeks would get you by, that's pretty good livin', you know. I mean, she wasn't comin' by to say, "Gee, we're short two hundred, and we're

gonna have to—the lights are gonna go off." I mean, those kinds of things happen to American families now and happened then. So we—I never felt like we were terribly short on money. I mean, I was aware that the other kids in the neighborhood had more things and more family vacations and—you know. But it never seemed like something that was a big burden to my sister and I.

[01:20:26] SL: How—we really didn't talk at all about you and your sister growing up together, what that was like. I guess—were there duties kind of segregated according to gender? I mean, were there things that . . .

VS: I actually don't . . .

SL: . . . the son always did that . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . the daughter did not or . . .

VS: Well, I don't remember my sister mowing the lawn. I mean—yeah, now I wouldn't have expected her to—I was three years older than her. But I don't remember much about that. I think my sister and I always got along pretty well and still do. In fact, I think we would say as we got older, we get along very—really well. And I don't know when we went from being kind of sparring, competitive brother and sisters to really being . . .

SL: Supportive brother.

VS: . . . pretty close friends, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[01:21:13] VS: But it was somewhere, you know, in high school or after I'd gone off to college and come back. It was some period there because we still are very, I think, very supportive and all. I mean, I can remember—I think I mentioned to you—told you the story of when I had the cast. Well, at one point in that period, my sister figured out if I was laying down on the floor and she sat on me and started hittin' me with a pillow, I really could not get up, you know. [*Laughter*] For the first time, her brother who was three years older—she—you know, she had the best, and she took great delight in that. So I do remember that. She was probably in the fourth grade then or something.

[01:21:55] SL: Well, let's move on. And if you think of somethin' that you want to say about this time period that we—that we've been covering, just jump back to it. There's no real rule here and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and there's no real wrong way to go about doing this. I do try to keep us relatively in chronological order.

VS: Yeah.

[01:22:14] SL: But—so you graduate pretty high in your class, and you've—coming from a community that's very public-education oriented and supportive. And you had great teachers. So what was your next step? You go to the university.

VS: Well, you know, it—that's interesting because I was kind of contrasting me with some of the other kids, and when I say me, it was like,

probably, most of the town was more like me than it was like some of these other kids. But—so my friends were talking about, well, one wanted to go to Princeton, and one was gonna go to Yale, and a couple went to Harvard, and they all did. Another one went to Stanford. They were all very—they were bright, successful ki—they're successful today. I didn't have any—anyone in my family that had been to college, and I was the oldest of all the—well, I guess I was almost the oldest of all the nephews and nieces. So I remember goin' to see a high-school counselor to talk about it, and I didn't really know what to ask. You know, what do you ask when you're talking about, "Where do you go to college?" I mean, if you don't really know what college is or hadn't ever been on a campus. I guess that's not fair. I went to the debate conferences there, but I didn't really know—it's not like I had an older brother or a dad or a mom that talked to us about what college is like and "This is what I thought was really good and gee, goin'—that one was too big. We want you to think about a smaller"—I didn't—we never had any of those discussions.

SL: Right.

[01:23:44] VS: And so—I mean, this guy just suggested—he said, "I think you need to go to Willamette." But I didn't know what that was. I mean, I had not heard of it. But it's a small school, comparable to Hendrix. It's a Methodist-affiliated school in Oregon. Mark Hatfield, the former US senator, was the student-body president, and then I think the library's named for him now. So, okay. And, I mean, that

was as far as—I never did think about, "Well, should I go to a small liberal-arts, private school versus a big state university?" He just suggested, "I think Willamette'd be a good place for you." And so that was just off and running. It wasn't really much of a decision on my part, but it probably shows the value of, you know, counselors and a good counselor who has—I think that turned out to be a good fit for me.

[01:24:28] SL: Well, did they encourage you to apply for scholarships . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . at a number of universities and . . .

VS: No, I . . .

SL: Just that one.

VS: . . . applied for—I think that's the only college I applied to.

SL: And did you land a scholarship there or . . .

VS: Yeah. I mean, I think I ended up with several, you know . . .

SL: Grants and stipends.

VS: Yeah, piecemeal it together. I don't remember—I don't think those first two years of college were much of a financial burden for us. My mom may have a different view, but I don't think it was. I don't remember that we borrowed any money. I had saved some money from—I worked in lumber mills and some things like that through it all. But . . .

SL: Now . . .

[01:25:05] VS: So I went up to—so I ended up goin' to Willamette for a

couple years in Salem, Oregon.

SL: Is that very far from Medford?

VS: Couple hundred miles.

SL: That's a pretty good distance.

VS: Yeah. No, yeah, once you went up there it was . . .

SL: You were there.

VS: . . . not like comin' home on weekends.

SL: Right.

VS: You know, I didn't—I went off to college, and I didn't see—I think the first time I saw her was—I don't know, Christmas or something.

[01:25:24] SL: You know, before we go on any further, you mentioned your—I guess those were summer jobs or . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . did you have jobs during the school year as well that . . .

VS: Not so much. I had—I think in junior high during the football games, me and another guy sold—got I think something like three dollars for sellin' popcorn at the high-school football game halftime, and . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . I had a Sunday morning paper route for the *Oregonian* for a couple three years, just a—I didn't have to do it during the week—just on Sunday mornings. And then during the summers in junior high I started—that's when I started doing fruit work, thinning peaches, picking peaches, thinning pears, picking—yeah, picking pears.

Irrigation and that kind of thing. See, Medford is the land of Harry &

David. You know Harry and David?

SL: Oh yeah, sure.

VS: That's where Harry & David . . .

SL: Great stuff.

VS: . . . came out of. They're just a short distance . . .

SL: Yeah, shippin' the crates.

VS: . . . from my high school.

SL: Yeah.

VS: But Harry and David had came out of Medford, Oregon, and so it's—for a while—you can go back and find, like, sixty, seventy years ago—people would estimate—like, of the world supply of, like, certain species of pears came out of southern Oregon. So that's a—that was something I did. I had another Saturday morning job of sweepin' up a store on Saturday mornings.

[01:26:41] SL: Were there any migrant workers . . .

VS: There were.

SL: . . . that would come through?

VS: Yeah, there were quite a few.

SL: And . . .

VS: And they were—as a kid, I remember 'em because they were, like, crews and they were—I think they were very isolated from . . .

SL: The rest of the community.

VS: . . . rest of the community because they spoke no English. I mean, they really did come up from Mexico, work the fruit, and go back. And

then as I got older, I worked in at least one orchard that I remember where I was talking with—had some communication with folks with very poor English, and my Spanish was worse.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, I—and just seems like wherever there's harvests . .

VS: Yeah. No, there was . . .

SL: . . . going on . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . that there's a labor force that follows whatever . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . harvest is in season.

VS: Yeah.

[01:27:29] SL: And I was not aware of the quality of fruit that you guys grew around that area.

VS: Yeah, it was a . . .

SL: That was good.

VS: It was a big deal. Sixteen-foot ladders, as I recall, to pick pears.

[01:27:40] SL: Wow. Okay, so you end up—and the name of the school again?

VS: Willamette.

SL: And that's . . .

VS: See, some people say Willamette, but it's Willamette, damn it.

SL: Willamette. And it was a private Methodist school.

VS: Yeah.

SL: And probably highly regarded in the state.

VS: It was. Still is. It has a law school. It has, I think, a master's-degree program in economics in addition to its undergraduate. It was a very solid—you know, it's like Hendrix—a very solid academic school.

SL: Small student population.

VS: Yeah, small liberal arts. Yeah, yeah.

SL: Old school—was it an old school?

VS: Yeah, it was founded in 1842 by Jason Lee and the early Methodist pioneers. I think that's what it says on the [*SL laughs*] stone out in front. Something like that. I think it was 1842 . . .

SL: That's good that you can remember that.

VS: Jason Lee and the early Methodist pioneers, I think.

SL: So . . .

VS: Which, by the way, is one year older than Mount Holly Cemetery, to put it in context.

[01:28:39] SL: Wow. What did you do there? What did you like? What was the best thing about that place?

VS: Well, I think at Willamette was—those first two years from 1965 to [19]67—it's—for me, it was kind of like catch-up time in terms of growing up. I was more immature than other kids in my high school class. I was a bit—I was always on the young side 'cause of the way my birthday fell. I was always—physically, stature was smaller. But both my—I think my maturity and physically I kind of caught up through that time. So my first year or so I really spent almost all my time on academics. I was afraid—I didn't know how I was gonna

compete.

SL: Right.

VS: Because I had taken those AP classes, I skipped a couple of freshman-level classes, and so I was put into—instead of having to take, like, the history of literature or something, I was put into, I don't know, a Shakespeare class or something and so I—most of the kids in the class then were sophomores. And the same thing happened in history. I—they put me in a history of England class. So I was really focused on academics. And so I think probably most people would say that was a pretty boring year, and it probably was, although it was a pretty safe incubator for a kid who was—you know, first time away from home and was probably on the immature side and really needed to do well academically to stay in school. [01:30:00] And then in the—in my sophomore year—when I came back home, I think I worked in a lumber—in a plywood mill that summer—a veneer mill that summer. But I went back to school the following year. I was kind of more older and more mature and started, I think, being more inquisitive about what I was doin' and where I was goin' in life. Took some courses that were kind of eye opening kind of—you know, they were kind of personally challenging—a philosophy course and a religion class.

[01:30:28] SL: What—which—what was the religion class?

VS: It was a seminar in Paul Tillich.

SL: I don't know that.

VS: Yeah, he was a theologian who was—he had a very—it was kind of a

very—this is my—for all the theologians who actually watch this, I apologize for this. [SL laughs] But he had a very complex way of looking at theology and so I—in my view—and so I think that it would've been the kind of theology that wouldn't have spoken to a—kind of a mainstream—you'd really have to spend a lot of time, I think, and try to understand what was goin' with that. I can't remember anything about it now, as you can tell. Then I took a philosophy class from a real good guy who used philosophy also to challenge you personally about what you were doing in life. [01:31:11] So at the end—so Willamette required you at the end of your sophomore year to declare a major. So I declared economics. Went home, bought some economic books. Middle of July I realized I had not opened one of those books. Hadn't looked at anything. And somewhere, a week or two or three after that, I went down to the Marine Corps recruiter and just assumed that they only had, like, a four-year enlistment. And they said, "No, as a matter of fact, we've got a quota in of two-year enlistments." 'Cause if I had dropped out of school, just didn't want to go back, you—then you're—be subject to the draft in those days.

SL: Right.

[01:31:45] VS: Nineteen sixty-seven. So I ended up enlisting in the Marine Corps for two year—for a two-year enlistment and did not go back to college. And it was like—then it became a—six years later, it was, before I went back to college.

SL: So your motivation there was because you didn't feel you were

prepared for your . . .

VS: I think it was a . . .

SL: . . . next semester?

VS: I think it was a combination of things, Scott. I think—no, it wasn't about preparation. It was, "Okay, if I thought this was such a great thing, why wasn't I even lookin' at it?" Why wasn't I even interested in readin' about it?

SL: Right.

VS: I think that I was aware that there was a whole world out there. The problem with that whole world being out there was if you went off to wander around, you would get drafted. And so—and then I also had the family background. You know, the men in the military . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . from World War II. And so—and the oppression of the war in the summer of 1967 was dramatically different, say, than in summer of [19]69 or—you know, there was a whole shift in attitude about what was goin' on with the war.

SL: You bet.

VS: And so I think there was just kind of, in a nineteen-year-old kid, there was kind of a lot of curiosity about the Marine Corps, about the military, about war, about foreign countries. And so I'm not sure if I understand all the reasons I decided to do that, but I think—I consider it my first adult decision. And I think it has been—I think the Marine Corps was a very good thing for me. I have a lot of respect for the

Marine Corps.

[01:33:11] SL: So I bet your mom didn't take it very well, though.

VS: Particularly since I didn't tell her until after I had signed the papers.

SL: That was not uncommon.

VS: No, I guess not. I think it surprised her. And of course, you know, she came out of a generation of women who had gone through World War II, and so I knew the people that lived. She knew the people who died.

SL: Right.

VS: And so there was that issue, too. But she never—I mean, it was—you know, I remember expressing some concern and maybe dissatisfaction with it. But she also—and I never remember—I mean, that went away pretty quickly. I think there was also a side of her that understood it. And in fact, when I finished Marine Corps boot camp sometime in—I don't know—November or October of [19]67, her first plane ride—she and my Uncle Charles flew down to San Diego, and she came down to see the graduation. And for her to get on a plane was a huge sacrifice.

[01:34:09] SL: So Camp Pendleton.

VS: No, Marine Corps Recruit Depot was where you had a boot camp, MCRD in San Diego. And then after that, then you go to—I went to Camp Pendleton for what was called ITR. Infantry training regiment was the—kind of the—kind of like your internship. All Marines went through it, and then from there they would go on to whatever they

were gonna do in the Marine Corps. I was not a grunt in Vietnam or a combat guy. I was—worked in the adjutant's office for the First Marine Division north of Da Nang. We could actually see like, ten, twelve miles away—see the Da Nang airstrip, particularly it would get hit. Saw a fuel depot go up one night but, I mean, we got hit some. I don't know, twelve, fifteen, twenty times or something at the places I was at. Some kind of incoming rounds or mortars or recoilless rifle rounds or something like that—rockets. But I was not an infantry guy.

[01:35:13] SL: You're probably lucky. So you enlist in the Marines. You go to the boot camp and you get shipped out to Vietnam. Were you—you couldn't have been comfortable in Vietnam, were you? I mean, there was so much . . .

VS: Well, there was . . .

SL: . . . going on that . . .

VS: There was—you say comfortable. No, I don't know if anybody was comfortable there. There was a—because of me working at that division headquarters, there was flat-out some boredom, you know. Now—and I recognize that there were a whole lot of guys in the country that would've loved to have that kind of boredom, so I—but you know, it was—then at some point I got moved—I was able to get to another area that was more—you know, I would hitchhike a lot of rides in helicopters, which I thought was pretty entertaining, although I was scared of—I was afraid of heights. Once I got up in the helicopter it was okay 'cause I could see things. But I—it really

started becoming a problem riding in helicopters. But I rode in all kinds of different helicopters. I was carrying mail, so I was hitchhiking on helicopters. And so you know, you could see quite a bit from there. I did that for about three months.

[01:36:35] SL: You ever get any fire when you were up in the air?

VS: Not that I was aware of. Yeah, not that I was aware of. I could see some. I mean, I member seein' things goin' on on the ground, but I— not that anybody was firing at us.

[01:36:59] SL: So what about just the country itself, Vietnam itself. What was it—were the—were you in a situation where it was friendly?

VS: Yeah.

SL: They were friendly to the Americans?

VS: Yeah, I mean it's—yeah, although we were really confined to a Marine base and—but no, there were Vietnamese civilians who came in, and they would work—you know, they worked the club, and they would work the—you could hire 'em to do your laundry, and so you'd have some contact that way. And then I was able to work it out a few times where I could go out, and I went out with these teams that would go into villages and, you know, do lice treatments for kids and that kind of thing. I did that a little bit just to get out of that Marine environment a bit. And I actually got isolated out there one day and was spot—realized I was walking back, which was not the smartest thing to be doin'. But I was—so some guy—a guy on a—an American on a road grader stopped and picked me up. It's kind of like being on

the tractor with Uncle Charles. And I said . . .

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

VS: . . . "Yeah, this is—I'll take this ride just to get" . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: So I rode on a road grader all the way back.

[01:38:04] SL: [*Laughs*] Hitchhiking in Vietnam.

VS: Hitchhiking in Vietnam. Yeah.

SL: Wow.

VS: But it was—and I think, though—even though it was in—you know, for the most part you were in a—in Marine bases and around Marines.

You were always aware you were in a foreign country, and that was the first foreign country I had been in.

[01:38:25] SL: Had you ever seen rice fields before?

VS: No. No, not bein' from Oregon.

SL: Right, that's what I was thinking. I'm just tryin' to come up with a list of things that make Vietnam Vietnam.

VS: Oh, water buffalo and, you know, the—just the people squatting in the rice fields and poopin' and—you know, just—it was just a different way of living. The poverty, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[01:38:50] VS: But then the—but then there was a—I mean, I think it was part of my interest in working overseas as a doctor later on was . . .

SL: Was the morale good while you were there, or did you watch it start to decline or . . .

VS: What—you know, I don't think I ran into anybody that was really exuberant about being over there. But I didn't run into many people that—I mean, everybody counted the days, but I didn't feel a whole lot of I think what developed later. I think there were two things that happened as—and I'm just one person that was like nineteen or—I turned twenty-one in Vietnam, so my views are probably skewed by immaturity. But I think that the further the war got along, the more that there was that kind of—the ferment that was going on back home was startin' to percolate though the troops. [01:39:44] And then you also had the issue of race.

SL: I was just gonna say . . .

VS: And so I saw a little bit of that while I—not much, but a hint of it. But then it—really things kind of became pretty stressful in the military and in America at large, you know, for a period of time. And so there—I mean, there was a—Vietnam was not good for the American military. And so after the war ended, there was a lot of concern about "How do we get the military back to be the kind of the fighting force and professional force that we want it to be?"

[01:40:25] SL: Did you ever see any napalm drop?

VS: Yeah. I mean, from a distance, I mean, but I . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . saw it. Yeah. I would not want to be on the receiving end of it.

SL: You would not, and probably not want to even be close to being . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . on the receiving end . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . of it. It's . . .

VS: Yeah.

[01:40:46] SL: What was the—there was a famous—Robin Williams was in a film about the radio guy. Did you ever get to hear that guy . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . when you were over there?

VS: I assume I probably did. Wasn't it—it was based on . . .

SL: Good morning . . .

VS: . . . based on Sajak, wasn't it? Yeah. *Good Morning, Vietnam*. I—this is a—well, I'll just repeat what I heard, since it was on the—on—live on the radio, it must be not crude and in poor taste. [*SL laughs*] But I remember—you know, so you got Armed Forces Radio.

SL: Yes.

VS: It's commercial-free radio, right?

SL: Right.

VS: So you would think you could have music twenty-four hours a day without interruption, but no, you didn't. You would get commercials, but it would be on things like, you know, "Don't forget to take your malaria pills," and that kind of . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . stuff. Well, anyway . . .

SL: Public-service announcements.

VS: Yeah. So anyway, one of 'em one day was on the importance of preventive maintenance on your vehicles, particularly your Jeep.

SL: Okay.

VS: And so this guy goes through about why you need to do all the servicing and, you know, check the grease and check the oil pressure and all that. And then the last line was, "After all, you wouldn't dip your stick into something that wasn't well-oiled, would you?"

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh, my gosh!

VS: See—well, that was the Armed Forces [*unclear words*].

SL: Yeah, Armed Forces humor.

VS: So I apologize for the crudity, but that was your United States tax dollars at work in Vietnam. But that was—that may well have been that kind of spirited guy [*laughs*] like . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . like Sajak and . . .

[01:42:03] SL: Well, it was indicative of the time, too.

VS: Indicative of the time.

SL: You certainly couldn't get away with that now.

VS: No, no. Well, I don't—Armed Forces Radio? I don't know, you might be able to.

SL: I don't know, maybe not.

VS: Well, I'm—are you listening to 'em over there?

SL: No, I'm not.

VS: I'm not either.

SL: I'm not, but . . .

VS: No, I'm not either.

SL: . . . they seem to be a little bit more sensitive.

VS: But that was—you know, that was a guy who was live.

SL: Yeah.

VS: You know.

SL: And there.

VS: And there. And what are they gonna do, fire him . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . you know. So . . .

SL: Popular guy.

[01:42:30] VS: Yeah. I'll tell you one story that happened while I was there—was—I was at this place called An Hoa for about three months. It was back when I was catchin' rides on these helicopters, and it was a fairly small-fire base. And—well, I mean, it was pretty good size, but anyway, it had—at one point—so we get word—had a one—it was led by a one-star general, a Marine general. But at some point we get word that they need an honor guard. And we got special guests coming in. So I was somehow recruited, as I was, like, a E4 corporal or something to be this honor guard. And so this whole flock of helicopters come in and land.

SL: Yeah.

[01:43:19] VS: And it turned out it was the admiral who was in charge of the entire—all the forces in the Pacific.

SL: Wow.

VS: It was John McCain's dad.

SL: Oh! [*Laughs*]

VS: And I didn't know it at the time. It was Admiral McCain. And so I'll tell you one story that was from then and one story from now. But—so I'm standing there being the honor guard, and down comes Admiral McCain. And I remember him as not being very tall. I've seen pictures since, and he seemed taller, but at that time he looked to me like he wasn't very tall. Maybe he was stooped over a little bit. I don't know, but he didn't seem very tall. But we would never see that many stars, you know, in that kind of an area. Then he was followed by a bunch of three-star gen—lieutenant generals, which was just unheard of, I mean, as a E4. If—you know, you would get upset if you saw a one-star general. So they—and then so they're all following along behind him, and he gets right in front of me and looks at me and says, "Son, where's the pisser?" [*Laughter*] I said, "It's right down there, Admiral." So he went down there and used the generals' little bathroom, and all these other generals were standin' around waiting for him and kind of talkin' to me. And then he came back, and they went in and got their briefing. [01:44:27] Well, that was in—I think it was December of [19]68, and it was only when John McCain ran for president—and there was a whole lot of bio stuff that came out and . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . I mean, this is not a new story I'm about to tell you, but it was a—that I was more cognizant of what was goin' on, but at that time when Admiral McCain came to our place, John McCain was a POW and was in North Vietnam. And Admiral McCain, around Christmas, would always arrange a trip to Vietnam, and he would get as far north as he could where he could actually stand and look north. It was his way of reaching out to his son. But that trip was part of that time of year for him to—that's my recollection of what that was goin' on.

[01:45:25] SL: So you don't think you took on any damage, any personal damage, from Vietnam? I mean, is there . . .

VS: I don't think so.

SL: Nothing—no trauma, no . . .

VS: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean, I don't—not compared to what—no, never. There wasn't—I don't think there was any real . . .

[01:45:43] SL: So you're back in [19]69?

VS: I would've just been whining to say there was something there. It was terrible for me, but it was a—was not a grunt and I didn't get shot and . . .

SL: So you come back in [19]69? Is that . . .

VS: That's right.

SL: . . . about right?

VS: Yeah.

SL: What happens then?

VS: Well, I came back, and I had a two-year enlistment, and I wanted to get an early release to go to school 'cause I was ready to move on from the Marine Corps and . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . I actually knew exactly what to do, so when I got on my leave to—after I came back from Vietnam, I went to the school in Ashland, Oregon, in southern Oregon. Southern Oregon College, at that time—walked into this administrator's office, and Carol Longen, who was in my grade school class, was sitting there, and she was the person—I said, "I need this letter," and she looked at me and said, "I know exactly the words that you need." And she did. 'Cause I—knew what the words I needed to get me an early release to go to summer school. So I . . .

SL: Right.

[01:46:41] VS: . . . went out to Cherry Point, North Carolina, and spent a few weeks there and got released two and a half months early from the Marine Corps and on a two-year enlistment 'cause they didn't have any place—you know, two year—the point of a two-year enlistment was to come in and get trained, go to Vietnam, come back, and get out.

SL: Right.

VS: And so that's what they did with me. [01:46:52] So I went to summer school there, and then kind of wandered off for a while. I ended up kind of hitchhiking and getting some jobs, and I worked at a

school, a residence school, for kids with emotional problems in Colorado. I had a gas station in Silverton, Colorado. I leased a Phillips 66 station. I worked in Santa Fe as a special deliveryman for the post office for a while. I helped put some money into a—started a little restaurant down there and then came back to Oregon to Salem to work supervising VISTA volunteers at a community action program in Salem, Oregon. And at some point I got interested in—one of my VISTA volunteers got me interested in—I took an EMT class at a rural ambulance up outside of Salem at the one—well, in Mill City. And that got me interested in medicine, and that led to me gettin' a job as a orderly in a hospital, and that led to becoming a nurse's aide in a nursing home. And then I got interested—I thought, "Well, maybe I should go become a physician's assistant." And I applied, and the program at Johns Hopkins said, "We're really interested in you, but you need these courses." It was, like, physics and chemistry or something.

SL: Right.

VS: College level. So I went back to Willamette 'cause that's where I was—it was real easy to go back and took those courses and did well enough—I got A's, I think—and I thought, "Well, maybe I'll just go one more year and try for medical school," and that's what got me. So it took me ten years to go. I graduated from high school in [19]65 and college in [19]75.

SL: Two of those years in Vietnam.

VS: Two years in Vietnam and two kind of on the road in Colorado, New Mexico. And then two working in Salem for the community action program there.

[01:48:33] SL: So on the road meant—what did you do while you were on the road?

VS: Oh, I mean, I—when I say I was on the road, I worked—I mentioned those jobs that I had. I had some day jobs, too. I worked for a tree surgeon for a couple days. I was in Phoenix, Arizona. I think I spent three or four weeks working for a—as a dishwasher in a restaurant. I sold fried fish at a state fair. Got to see the—Karl Wallenda perform.

SL: Wow.

[01:49:03] VS: I was a—in fact, that—but the—so you'll appreciate—this is a Arkansas connection—so the Wallendas—I go to see the Wallendas perform 'cause I'd always been in interested in Karl Wallenda. Well, pre—the first act was Jerry Van Dyke. You know, who's an Arkansas connection.

SL: Yeah.

VS: So Jerry Van Dyke is doing his comedy routine with—I think he had his banjo and performing and everything. Well, one of the Wallenda guys comes out in, like, a coat and tie or something, and the equipment wasn't right. So while Jerry's singing and dancing, this guy's goin' back and forth in his coat and tie, moving the chair from here over there and [*SL laughs*] puttin' the pole back over here. And finally he gets done. Jerry Van Dyke finished. And then the same guy comes

out wearing tights and sequins and everything. [Laughter] Didn't make a big deal, but he just did the same stuff, goin' back and forth on a tightrope. Yeah.

[01:49:47] SL: [Laughs] That's funny. So . . .

VS: So then I finished—so I . . .

SL: You know, that—you know, back then that was not an uncommon thing that kids wanted to do.

VS: What, take some time out of school?

SL: They did a lot of hitchhiking, and they did . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . they did just kind of set out and go for the adventure of it.

VS: Yeah.

SL: There was that kind of spirit going on.

VS: There was. It was probably some dead ends. I remember running into one guy in Silverton, Colorado, and I said, "What are you doin'?" Somehow we got to talkin'. He said, "Well, I'm, you know, hitchhiking around, and I'm writing in my journal. I've been s—looking about life, da-da-da-da-da, and doing all these things." And I said, "Well, yeah, how long've you been doin' that?" "Well, it's my eighth day."

[Laughter] A long, dusty road, you know. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah, no kidding.

[01:50:36] VS: But there was. I mean, I think kids now still like to do that.

I mean, we—but I think on the good side, kids now are given much more opportunity in college to go overseas . . .

SL: Yeah, study abroad.

VS: . . . much more than I ever had. I mean, these study abroad programs, I think, are great. And on the other side of it . . .

SL: All my children did that.

VS: Yeah, I think those are great. On the other side of that, you know, one of the things that we get concerned about as policy folks and parents and legislators is why does it take kids so long to graduate from college? And so—I mean, I've been involved in these discussions about, "Boy, if we could just get kids, you know, to do it in six years or at least in"—I mean, in four years, or at least in six years. And course, nobody asked me. Well, it took me ten years . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . you know. And I don't feel like I wasted that time but, you know, some people would say, "Well, you would—might have been better off if you had, you know, handled things a little differently." So there's—but I think the difference is—I'll overstate this. There is a difference between a kid who takes ten years because he wants to try different things, versus a kid who takes ten years because they can't afford it 'cause they—if they lose their part-time job, they have to quit 'cause they can't afford the tuition. And that's . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . a lot of what we have goin' on now. Just the cost of it is prohibitive to a lot of kids, and that's why it gets stretched out, and that's not good. I think there's a lot of kids if you'd—if you say, "I'll

give you a full ride if you'll finish in two years." Done.

[01:52:10] SL: Yeah. Hmm. So after your two-year road trip, you . . .

VS: My road trip. [*Laughs*]

SL: You . . .

VS: Back to—back—so I'm back in school.

SL: And you're . . .

VS: Majored in chemistry.

SL: Yeah.

VS: And—but I didn't have much involvement with the campus. I mean, I was livin' off, and I was older, and I like Willamette a lot, and it would prepare me well. But I applied for medical school, and a couple years later after graduating went off to—graduated in chemistry and went off to medical school in Portland at the—I think it was called at that time the Oregon—University of Oregon Health Sciences Center, I think is what it was called then.

SL: Yeah.

VS: It's got a different name now. Spent four years there going to medical school and then came to Arkansas and—to do my residency in family practice is how I got here.

[01:53:02] SL: How does that residency work? I mean, how do you get a residency in Little Rock, Arkansas, if you got your degree in Oregon?

VS: Well, they have a—I think it works differently now, and I think it's going through some changes, but it's kind of like a lottery. Let's see, what would it be comparable to? I don't know, maybe timeshare or

something, when you would turn in your first three choices . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . for dates and try to line up—so I actually—I did not want to be in Oregon. I was interested in seein' more of the world. So I figured that farm states would have good family practice program. So I interviewed at, like, I don't know, seventeen places in, like, Texas and Nebraska and Tucson, I think, was the one closest to Oregon. One here in Little Rock. And then you rank out my first choice, second choice, third choice, fourth choice, and then the programs ranked their choice of students that they have interviewed.

SL: Right.

[01:53:53] VS: And then it's called match. The com—some kind of, you know, primitive computer puts that all together and says, "Here's where you go." And what you always end up with is some programs that don't get enough students and some students that didn't get a program that they wanted. And so there's—I think that's one of the things that's going on now differently in a way that's more productive. That there is a better way to sort out that second step of things for kids that don't match up the first go-round.

[01:54:22] SL: So what did you think when you saw Arkansas on your residency acceptance?

VS: Oh, I was—yeah, no I thought it was fine. I was—I had just come through and spent a day or two here, but I liked Little Rock. I like—I thought Arkansas was really beautiful to drive through. It was kind of

funny—the—there was a guy here—he's a—one of the residents—he's passed away now—Gary Woods. But he kind of took a liking to me, and he was tryin', you know, do the hard sell. So he was tryin' to impress me with Little Rock, so he took me that evening—took me to Slick Willy's.

SL: [*Laughs*] I remember Slick . . .

VS: Remember that?

SL: . . . the old . . .

VS: That pool place down at . . .

SL: . . . train station.

VS: . . . the old train station. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah, yeah.

VS: [*Laughs*] So I—and I thought, "Well, okay, that was"—I mean, it's kind of a nice place. I'm not sure if it's, you know, if that's the number-one selling point of Little Rock, but it was all right. But what I liked about it was the faculty and the—and I can say this as somebody who was raised out of state that there really is a friendliness about Arkansas that I think a lot of Arkansans don't appreciate. There's a genuine generosity and friendliness and a willingness to help people you don't know very well that isn't present everywhere. And I—you know, I still hear that from people who come in from out of state. "The people are so nice here." They are. They don't know it, but they are.

[01:55:42] SL: So is that—let's see, that would've been . . .

VS: Nineteen seventy-nine.

SL: [Nineteen] seventy-nine.

VS: July of [19]79, yeah. Shortly after Slick Willie's opened.

[01:55:57] SL: David Pryor—was he governor in [19]79? I can't . . .

VS: No, it was Bill Clinton's . . .

SL: Bill . . .

VS: . . . first term.

SL: That's right.

VS: Yeah.

SL: That's right.

VS: And then he was the boy wonder and was written up in *Time* magazine, then he lost in 1980 to Frank White.

SL: That's right.

VS: So . . .

SL: That's right.

[01:56:19] VS: Fact, one of my favorite stories comes out of that. Ed Fry, who was my chief of staff in Washington for, I think, twelve ye—eleven, twelve years, and died of cancer this past year. But during that period when Bill Clinton was out of office, and it was the dark days for Democrats, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . in Arkansas 'cause we had a Republican governor. And so Ed—and this was back—and Ed would acknowledge me saying this, but that was back in Ed's drinkin' days. He's—was a recovered alcoholic

and was dry for years, but at that time he was drinkin'. So he doesn't . . .

SL: Ed . . .

VS: Ed Fry.

SL: Fry. Okay, Fry.

[01:57:00] VS: Ed, my chief of staff. My friend. So Ed and another guy were going down to Cajun's Wharf, which had been newly opened and it—you know how Little Rock is. Someplace opens up new, and it's hot, and everybody goes to it. And . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: . . . so Ed didn't like to walk much, and he was tryin' to find a parking place without havin' to walk very far. And he sees this car pulling out. Now, there's another car that's waiting there, but he realizes just the way—this guy's gonna blo—back up and block that car while it pulls away. And realized that if he pulled up as that car backed out, he could zip in and cut off the other car. That's what you do when you've had too much to drink.

SL: Yeah.

[01:57:34] VS: So he does that. [*SL laughs*] Pulls in there. Gets out of the car, and the couple in the car that were waiting and had been waiting were just mad. You could just see her just madder—and he looks over there, and it's Bill and Hillary Clinton. [*SL laughs*] No longer governor. Can't even get a parking place because they're no longer governor. And he stops, and he turns to his friend and says, "Yeah,

what could they do to us now?" and walks on into Cajun's Wharf.

[Laughs]

SL: Yeah, he was feelin' good, wasn't he? [Laughs]

VS: Not—yeah, not knowing he was gonna be the next president, you know? So . . .

SL: Right, right, right.

TM: Scott, we should change tapes.

SL: Okay. This is—we—you si—survived another hour.

[Tape stopped]

[01:58:11] SL: Okay, we're starting our third tape. You're holdin' up better than I am.

VS: There you go.

SL: You're lookin' at me and sayin', "Scott" . . .

VS: "Wake up."

SL: . . . "you're gettin' sleepy." [Laughter] So we're gettin' all caffeined up here with Diet Coke. So we'd gotten you to Arkansas. Again, before we really start goin' down this path of—from here forward, we just kind of—you just kind of—we just said—you just said, "Well, I went to med school." And we didn't really talk about med school.

VS: No, no.

SL: And you did that in Portland is . . .

VS: Right. Yeah.

SL: That's right?

VS: Yeah, yeah.

[01:58:45] SL: And so for—I guess—what made you decide to go to med school? What was—was there an influence that said . . .

VS: Probably watching *Dr. Kildare* TV show [*SL laughs*], you know, years ago. But I think that really was part of it. I mean, I did not have doctors in the family. I didn't have really any medical people in the family. But I mean, I think there was a little bit of exposure on those TV shows. I suppose . . .

SL: Absolutely.

VS: . . . nowadays kids watch reality shows and want to be a turtle catcher, you know, like Wildman or something like . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . that. But—and then also the—I remember reading books in high school. There was one called *Intern*, and there was another called *Doctor X*, and they were, like, non-fiction books written by people who had been through those experiences with a lot of names changed for patient confidentiality reasons.

SL: Yeah.

VS: And then—I mean, little things, like the movie, *Dr. Zhivago*, you know, the . . .

SL: Gosh, yeah.

VS: . . . guy who wants to be—but I also had always had an interest in—at some point formed along the line of working overseas, and I always thought that being a doctor might help that. My friend I mentioned earlier, John Casterline—his dad was a doctor and I—and so I had

some awareness and a little bit of what—you know, he was a nice guy and all. But I really kind of grew into it, you know, because I—as I mentioned, the EMT class—that led to getting a job as a nurse's aide and a orderly in a hospital. The hospital I worked at had the busiest emergency room, I think, in the Northwest for a while just because it was the only hospital emergency room within quite a few miles of Salem. There were two hospitals there, but one did the obstetrics and not ER, and the other one did the ER and not obstetrics. So what—there was a lot of trauma and things that came in. So that really piqued my interest in me being—you know, there's—you kind of—a bit of an adrenaline junkie to want to want to work in the ER an'd do that, but I was doing that as an orderly. So that got me interested in medical—medicine-related stuff from the physician assistant, then goin' on to medical school.

[02:00:45] SL: Did you start building relationships with doctors and nurses then or . . .

VS: Just—well, just from being . . .

SL: Just working . . .

VS: Knowing them there. Yeah. And I got—you know, I learned a lot from—got to be friends with—I wouldn't say social friends, but some. But really, just the—you know, kind of the intensity of the—working on—of a—like a job relationship and a fairly intense environment at times.

SL: Yeah, an ER is teamwork, basically.

VS: Yeah. No, it is. Yeah, it is. Yeah.

[02:01:12] SL: Yeah. Okay. And so why Portland? It's close?

VS: Well, it was—I think only applied to two medical schools, and it was a state school. At that time, medical school was very competitive. And I thought I had my best shot at getting into that school. And just the practicality of what tuition would be at a, say, a private school.

SL: Right.

VS: And so the other one I applied to down in California, I got on their waiting list or something. But I—as soon as I got this—the notice of acceptance at Oregon, I called 'em up, and they still had me there and couldn't tell me when they—I might be moved off, so I just accepted the one to Oregon, which was fine 'cause I like Portland and liked Oregon.

[02:01:58] SL: Yeah. So your time in Portland was . . .

VS: It was good. Portland is an interesting town. It was then, and it is now. Portland is—you know, it's on the Willamette River with a—in—where the Willamette runs into the Columbia and a lot of towns around the Willamette River part of it. And you know, what was it—fifteen years ago when a big delegation from Little Rock, City of Little Rock, went to Portland to learn how to use your waterfront area and all. And so a lot of things we see now downtown are ideas that came from . . .

SL: Portland.

VS: . . . Portland. Yeah, and they—I think two or three years ago went back and, "Okay, what else can we learn?" But Portland is a very

pleasant place. The medical school was very good. I mean, it was a state school but I—maybe that's true of all schools. I don't know. But I thought—I just thought they were very good faculty, very sound, very committed group of people. In my medical school class they were—well, a group of very smart folks.

[02:03:01] SL: Do you still keep up with any of those folks?

VS: Not very much. I do a little bit. I—being in Congress helped some. One of my anatomy partners has—came—just coincidentally we'd been—we had four people workin' on a cadaver, you know. So [*SL laughs*] she came to Washington a few times just for conferences or something, and I would see her. I—it was kind of a sad thing. There was a period of fourteen years, the fourteen years, I think, that brought about this interview today, when I had several of my medical school classmates—they would only hear from me every two years when I was calling for a political donation. [*SL laughs*] So you know, they were glad that . . .

SL: Oh, go on now.

VS: . . . those days—no, that's the truth. [*Laughs*]

SL: The . . .

[02:03:46] VS: But the—but then—and then the—and I think medical school is a—medical school is challenging. You know, medical school is—first year, it really is labor intense. You've—lot of class time, but then your classes have a lot of lab time connected with them. And it's challenging, and so you end up with a lot of homework time, you

know, and if you get behind in that stuff, you can—you know, that—you can pay a price for it. And then as you gradually—then in your second and third year, primarily, start moving onto the wards. Then I think for most people it could—pretty anxiety-provoking. I remember one of the guys or faculty members—kind of the grand old man tam—grand-old-man type. He wore, like, an Australian bush hat, and you know, he's just kind of, in a way, kind of full of himself, but a very elegant man. But he—one of the things he said one day was, "Get used to being anxious." And you know, I did being—you know, these are people's bodies and lives you're talkin' about.

SL: You bet.

VS: And if you think that every decision you make, you're gonna be 100 percent sure it's the right decision, you're in the wrong line of work.

SL: Right.

VS: So he said, "Get used to being anxious." And it's a—that can be a challenge. I think that's one reason why some people kind of narrow their practice down some. The more you can learn about one area, then you're . . .

SL: More confidence you . . .

VS: . . . a little more comfortable and confident. Course, the more you narrow yourself down in one area, it can often mean, then, that people start sending you the most difficult patients in that area. So it can kind of backfire on you, but there's . . .

SL: Right.

VS: There is a satisfaction that comes from—you know, you may not know all the answers, but the confidence comes. But probably gonna get as good as it's—my judgment anywhere in the world. I'm not saying that was me, but I think from people who really know an area of medicine that—but I'm sure they have anxiety, you know. Even the really great ones.

[02:05:36] SL: Well, did you end up being a GP or did you . . .

VS: I did my—I came here to do my residency in family practice, and that was really what I was always interested in. I never really looked at specializing. I just thought that that would serve me, I guess, best if I wanted to go overseas or just—I don't know. Maybe it's kind the mystique about primary care.

[02:05:58] SL: Back in your childhood, do you remember any doctor experiences?

VS: I broke several bones and—not much. I—what—you know, we didn't have the kind of health insurance that families ought to have now and that my family is blessed to have now. I remember when I would—if I had a bad cold, my mother thought it was really bad, we had a friend who was a nurse. And more than once when I was a little boy, my mom would throw me in the car and take me over and—on—it was right on Peach Street there in Medford. And this nurse friend of ours would come up with a syringe full of penicillin and shoot me in the butt with it in the car. [*SL laughs*] And that was the health care. Now, that's what you do when you don't have health insurance. [02:06:43]

So, I mean, when they have these big debates about no health insurance, I know what it's like when your parents don't have health insurance and they're . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: . . . worried about you. You do whatever you can, and getting a shot of penicillin in the butt from somebody who's not even examined you is not very good health care. But that's what—you know, my nurse friend, who was a dear family friend, she was doin' the best she could. And my mom was doin' the best she could, but that's what you do when you don't have much money.

[02:07:09] SL: I can remember our family doctor actually making house calls, actually coming to the house . . .

VS: Huh.

SL: . . . to look at us.

VS: I don't remember that. I remember one time having—I remember getting the red measles really—the hard measles really bad. And I remember getting chicken pox really bad. And the reason I remember that is 'cause my sister caught 'em, but not very bad at all. But then a public health nurse came by the house. It was, like, when I was in first or second grade. And I—what I remember about it is she looked in the—came in the kitchen, stood in the door. I was on the other side of the room, and she refused to come closer. That's when I thought, "I must be pretty sick." [*Laughs*]

SL: Wow.

VS: She stayed away.

SL: Okay, so . . .

[02:07:50] VS: I don't know what else to say about medical school, Scott.

I—it was a, I mean, a fairly straightforward experience. I did one summer take a fellowship in alcohol—I don't remember what it was called, but when we had exposure to different ways of treating alcoholism. Me and another student had some kind of a fellowship, which was an interesting experience, to visit the different kind of recovery places in Portland and what they do and how their different approaches, and that was a interesting time.

[02:08:27] SL: Let's see, so now how old are you now when you're in Portland?

VS: I started medical school when I was twenty-seven, and I think I graduated when I was thirty-one.

SL: I'm tryin' to think what's goin' on with the country at that time.

VS: Well, you know, it's one of the things that as—I mean, there's always a lot going on in any block of time. But I—you know, I realize when you—now as I look back, when you're in medical school, it pretty much sucks you up. I mean, it really does eat you up, and so I don't remember a whole lot about current events or—you know, I remember going to a political rally in 1976 for Jimmy Carter and got about this close to him and—which was—you know . . .

SL: Phenomenal.

VS: . . . I wasn't one of those people that just had to have a handshake

but . . .

SL: Right.

VS: So I member, "Okay, I guess I found time to go to see a Jimmy Carter rally." [02:09:29] The Portland Trailblazers one year won the NBA championship back in—when Bill Walton was playing. And somehow I would find time to go stand in line for tickets, for playoff tickets, and went to six playoff games, which was pretty good, you know, one in . . .

SL: That's great.

VS: . . . each of the series, and I think, "How'd I do that? Well, you were a medical student" and some—for whatever reason, that particular year—it may have been my fourth year, I don't know. It's a lighter kind of . . .

SL: Everything lined up.

VS: . . . a year than your first years.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Yeah, that—you know, one of my roommates. And so it was not all grindstone stuff. But you know, it was a challenging four years.

[02:10:05] SL: Okay, so the matching matrix, residency matching matrix, puts you in Little Rock, Arkansas.

VS: Yeah.

SL: And you actually were looking forward to that. I mean, did you . . .

VS: Oh yeah.

SL: What did you know about Arkansas?

VS: Really not much at all. Not much [*SL laughs*] at all. I—other than I knew it was a rural state, and I thought it would have pretty solid family practice. And Little Rock seemed very inviting to me. It was—you know, Portland was a pretty good-size town, and Little Rock was smaller. But Little Rock still seemed to have—you know, just seemed to be—looked like it would be a pleasant place to live.

SL: No . . .

VS: And I liked the people that I'd met in the residency program.

SL: No . . .

VS: Some of whom were still there.

SL: No preconceptions?

VS: No, not really.

[02:10:50] SL: The—that's good. So you get to Little Rock, and are you—you're—are you gonna be livin' by yourself . . .

VS: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . or did you have roommates?

VS: Yeah. No, I lived by myself. I got a place in downtown Little Rock in an old home that was—it was a—one of these three-story, old, elegant homes down at 21st and Scott that had—one side was one family, and the other side was divided up in two apartments. But the home had actually been built that way. It was up a—I think the guy who had originally built it or lived in it was having some financial issues, so it's not like an old home that had been subdivided.

SL: Yeah.

[02:11:31] VS: It was kind of built that way, so it was very . . .

SL: It was good.

VS: Very elegant, even though it was—they were apartments. They were very elegant places. And so I liked livin' downtown, and I, you know, I liked residency. Kind of goin' back to doing, you know, doing new things, like so I joined the Marine Corps 'cause they had a two-year enlistment 'cause I wasn't prepared to get a four-year block of time, but a two-year. And then leasing a gas station and workin' at a home for kids with emotional problems. And goin' back to the community action program and then, okay, I'm gonna maybe see about being a physician's assistant. And I always had this sense of—maybe it's still going on—of trying different things. Well, family-practice residency was like that. You know, for—I think my first rotation was the newborn nursery at UAMS.

SL: 'Kay.

[02:12:21] VS: Which, by the way, was the same nursery that my little boys were in in the—when they were being fed over there after they got out of NICU. And then so you—after we started to learn something after a few weeks about taking care of newborns, and then, boom, you're on the medicine wards at the VA, and you're back to being a dummy 'cause you're starting off new, and you know, and so you do that for two months and, "Oh, I've got the handle of this now, at least enough to get by and with the help of the residents." And boom, then you're in obstetrics for two months and so you—it really was anxiety

provoking, but for somebody like me that liked learning new things—I mean, once you get through it—I mean, I found it very satisfying.

[02:13:03] The residency at that time, family-practice residencies, required a rural-health elective. And what they envisioned—they were tryin' to get more doctors out in the rural areas as—you know, that you go out to a rural area and spend time with a country doctor. Well, I was able to get approval to do—for my rural-health elective to go to the refugee-relief effort in Thailand. And so I spent three months during—in 1981 during my residency, working as part of Cambodian refugee-relief effort. I lived on the border with—between Thailand and Cambodia, and that counted. They actually had—it actually had to be cool—I mean, one of the high-ranking officers in the American Academy of Family Practice had to approve it, but he said, "Okay, the border of Thailand's probably rural." [*Laughs*] So he signed off on it.

[02:13:47] SL: That's a—that's interesting because you would think that they would've, you know, like, clamped down on that, and you had to be within Arkansas, serving Arkansas . . .

VS: Well . . .

SL: . . . 'cause you're at an Arkansas school that . . .

VS: I think that it was—I mean, I don't know. They probably just looked at it. They probably didn't think about it a lot, other than—well, it's not like the guy, you know, is goin' off to—I don't know—something—demeaning something. It was—he's goin' to something he's interested in. Academic time is the time to go explore. You know, should I

actually end up working overseas the rest of my life, that's not a terrible thing. If he doesn't, he'll probably come back with some experiences that he wouldn't get otherwise and he —and probably nobody can accuse him of underworking in that kind of an environment. So . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . you know, I appreciated 'em doing that.

[02:14:39] SL: So does this tie in with your—you mentioned earlier in your life, you were thinking you'd like to do stuff overseas. Is that . . .

VS: Yeah, that was part of that. Yeah. And so that was, like, the first opportunity to take advantage of that. And a friend of mine in town who's now passed away, she was very interested in doing that, so we kind of pursued together—'cause I didn't ha—we had no connections with any of the organizations that worked in these areas. And so we would kind of reinforce each other. But she and—I think she may have ended up goin' first. I can't remember. But we went with different organizations, and I found one. And then once you're in that situation, when you work overseas in a place that's a really kind of pretty catastrophic, there's all kinds of NGOs. You start learning the names of 'em, what they do, you know, Catholic Relief, American Refugee Committee, International Rescue Committee. I mean, there's all these—Concerned America. I mean, there's all these different organizations. So then that puts you in the position of—when you decide you want to go somewhere, you have a better sense of, "Okay,

how do I make those contacts, and who do I—what organizations should I pursue and" . . .

SL: One leads to the other.

VS: One can lead to another, like in most professional thing. [02:15:51]

And then toward the end of that year, in Christmas of that year, is when we were having terrible problems in Central America with a civil war in El Salvador and refugees comin' over into Honduras and the whole area of the c—time of the Contras and all that. Well, I can't remember how I stumbled into this, but I ended up going down with a couple of medical school classmate—I'm sorry—medical students who were friends of mine. We went down kind of as medical observers to these refugee camps around Christmastime. They were trying to encourage international observers in the camps 'cause there were some concerns that things were happening to refugees that shouldn't be happening, and if there were more third-party eyes on there, that that might not happen so much. So we went down and I—we really went down there to be tourists in the healthy sense of just being in these camps and . . .

SL: Right.

[02:16:45] VS: But while we were there, a French woman doctor in one of the small camps away from us developed some kind of eye infection and refused to leave until she was relieved. And so they came to me as—even though I was, you know, only a second-year resident, said, "If you'll fly in—if we can fly into that camp, we can get her butt out of

there." *[Laughs]*

SL: Right.

VS: "Yeah, that's fine with me." So I flew in, and she literally flew out on the same plane. Fact, that was kind of an interesting time. I didn't like flying in small planes, so I'm sittin' in the back of the plane. My two medical students were sittin' up front in a single-engine plane. We land on this hillsi—this mountaintop had been kind of scraped clean, and it was one of those things—as—after we finished landing, the pilots started having a discussion. "They said this runway was that long. It can't have been that long." I mean, it was like *[laughs]*—it was kind of—nroooooom—just *[laughs]* before you go off the edge. But I mean, it was not anything dangerous, but they did—it's not like you had this long buffer of coasting time. But that was kind of entertaining. [02:17:45] But you know, that was a situation where it—when you start learning that doctors in refugee camps don't have nearly as much impact as good sanitation, clean water, and a reasonable supply of protein- and vitamin-containing food. That's what really makes an impact in refugees' lives. Now, can doctors save lives and do good things? Yeah, you can, but if you've got fecal contamination and dirty water, you're just really goin' upstream. So. [02:18:14] SL: So I was gonna ask you what the similarities were. And you think it's really just that basic stuff. I mean, did you encounter the same sort of thing in Cambodia and Thailand? Is . . .

VS: Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, there's a lot of similarities there. In Thailand I

worked some of the refugee camps, but there developed a little bit of animosity between the Thais and the Cambodian relief effort because at some point there was so much—you know, this was back in the days of *We Are the World* and—no, I guess that—no, that was Ethiopia. But this is back in the days when there was a lot of focus on what was going on there. And the Thais started realizin' the folks in the refugee camps who are foreigners to us are getting better health care and better nutrition than our villagers right outside the wire, and that's not fair, and everybody knew it wasn't fair. So they started a Thai village program, so we had medical teams going into the Thai villages, and that was my job, essentially, and I would go some in the refugee camps—the—on call and some things like that. But I enjoyed that 'cause I got to drive around, and we'd go in these villages and kind of like a circuit-riding thing weekly or once every two weeks in rural Thailand. It was a kind of a romantic period of my life to be out there on the border there. [02:19:24] We did a clinic one day—this is the only kind of thing that you'd like when you're young. But you may recall that the Vietnamese had come into Cambodia 'cause they didn't like the Khmer Rouge. Khmer Rouge was causin' too much trouble, so the Khmer Rouge and the—Vietnamese basically really pushed the Khmer Rouge back. Well, the Thai—the Vietnamese really made the Thais nervous 'cause the Vietnamese had very strong, sophisticated armory left over from the American war. But there would be these border skirmishes. And so we were going out to a clinic one day, and

there were these artillery pieces out there, and they said, "Well, there was something going on on the border, and so we drove past it," and so we've got a bunch of villagers out, you know, some distance down the road, and we're doing a clinic outside. Anyway, artillery [*laughs*]—they start firing at something they saw across the border. But I mean, it wasn't—there wasn't any danger, but it just kind of—well, only—you know, when you're twenty or something would you think this is entertaining.

SL: Right.

VS: Of course, it was easy for us to go there than the villagers. They had to live there all the time, you know.

[02:20:30] SL: Right. So did you ever—was it difficult to keep healthy when you were working with refugees? I mean . . .

VS: Depending on where you were at. I'm a lightweight when it comes to being overseas. I mean, I have friends who will essentially eat anything and never get sick.

SL: Right.

VS: You know, I'm somebody, you know, if I look at a film, a movie, of you know, a cholera epidemic, I'll start feeling queasy that night, you know.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

VS: And so I worked very hard at doin' the things you're supposed to do, drinking bottled water, and make sure the food is cooked well, and all those kinds of things. But if you're seeing sick patients, you're at risk.

SL: Risk. Sure.

VS: And so I felt for the most part that I would do reasonably well, but I think anybody who works overseas like that, you'll get something. The worst thing that ever happened to me was when I was in Sudan workin' in the Ethiopian relief effort, which was the *We are the World* days, and in fact I think I showed you the pictures of when Harry Belafonte . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . came to our . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . our refugee camp to visit with his wife. [02:21:47] But we had two things goin' on that were really bad, in addition to all the normal stuff of, you know, malnutrition and all that. One of 'em was cholera came. We heard it was coming. It was up at the border, and we had a—I was working in a refugee camp of over a hundred thousand people and . . .

SL: Gosh, a camp that . . .

VS: . . . and my section was the—and I remember calling in these doctors that—from another country and very nice guys but they—I think they didn't want to think that there was cholera there because that means you have to change how you do things. And I had this family that had come in, and they were having watery diarrhea, and there was—and I told 'em about it, and they said, "Well, no"—I said, "Well, what else is it? I mean, what am I lookin' for, then?" And of course, the test came

back that it was cholera, and it wasn't just a few days to a week later that we had to set up a whole tent. And we had to really go into a battle against cholera in that camp. We set up a whole separate cholera tent so they could be isolated. We sent out people—the worst thing is people get cholera so bad that they just die in their own stool in the tent. So we would have rounds where we had groups of people that I think twice a day would go into every tent in that entire camp and just check. "Is anybody here sick?" So there's nobody sittin' there either because they're too weak or because of a kind of a family that didn't understand what was going on. And I've got a great picture somewhere of a old man being found sick. He was just poopin' his little life away, and they threw him on a donkey and literally brought him into my clinic, which was a dirt-floor clinic anyway, but—so the donkey felt at home—and unloaded him onto the stretcher from the back of the donkey. So that was one thing we had. [02:23:23] But the other thing we had was hepatitis. And when I came back, I was scheduled to go to law school, to start law school. While I was over there I was accepted to law school here at UALR. And before classes ever started, I got really sick. And it turned out I developed hepatitis, but it's the kind of hepatitis that is almost for sure called hepatitis E. It's a water-borne kind of hepatitis similar to our A. It's more deadly than hepatitis A for pregnant women.

SL: Right.

VS: So they think it's something to do with the immune system of a

pregnant woman. But I was really, really sick, but then as sick as I got—rapidly as I got sick, I quite rapidly got unsick and was able to stay in law school. So in answer, that's a long way of saying, "Yeah, you can try real hard, but sometimes you're, particularly if you're in healthcare, you're at risk of getting things."

[02:24:20] SL: So you said—did I hear you say that the camp that you were in—population was a hundred thousand?

VS: Yeah, I think that was the area—I think that was the section that I was taking care of had a hundred thousand people in it as a doctor. But I'll go back to what I said is—what makes the most difference in that situation. It's not the doctor that's there. I mean, you're not gonna be doin' heart surgery and putting in stents or something. The most important thing is do they have food? Do they have, you know, basic childhood immunizations? Do they have clean water? And can you prepare all that such a way that kids don't get diarrhea? I mean, that's—and if you can—and sanitation. And so if you have a refugee camp that's supervised by the UN and the—they will pay attention to, you know, sanitation . . .

SL: Most basic things.

VS: . . . and cold chains for vaccines and outhouses, and you know, the cleanliness that you can stay on top of that better than if they—people were just allowed to come in and there was no organization and no teams. But—so part of your job as a doctor is just to get out of the way and recognize the other stuff is more important, I think. But you

have your role too, you know, 'cause there's some simple things
somet—like in cholera. If you can pop an IV in somebody—don't have
to be a doctor to do it—but if you can pop an IV in somebody and just
stabilize 'em for twenty-four hours, they're probably gonna be okay.

[02:25:40] SL: I just can't imagine that community. It's really—I can't—I
mean, I guess it's a camp because there's no permanent structures
there? Is that what makes a camp or . . .

VS: Yes.

SL: . . . is that just where they—it's a town where they decide to . . .

VS: Well . . .

SL: . . . stay or—I mean . . .

VS: Well, what happened . . .

SL: . . . that's more people than—that's as many people as, what, North
Little Rock . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . or . . .

VS: Yeah, half of . . .

SL: . . . more people.

VS: . . . half of Little Rock. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[02:26:10] VS: Well, I think what happens—and once again, my apologies to
the people at the University of Arkansas who are experts in population
movements—but you have two things going on. One of 'em is most of
the time you have one group of people crossing a border. So that

creates the problem. So they're leaving—at that time, people were tryin' to get away from the famine and from the civil war that was going on against Mengistu, who was a Communist dictator in Ethiopia. And you had provinces of Tigray and Eritrea that were fighting against Mengistu, and there was great famine, and so people were tryin' to get away from that. So they're coming into Sudan. So how do they end up where there's no city? 'Cause the host nation really didn't want 'em comin' in their cities. They've got—they may have their own poverty problems, their own unemployment problems. There may be spies. There may—they can be destabilizing. So there's always this effort. "Okay, where are we gonna put 'em?" "Well, if you want to have 'em out in the desert, that's okay, but Mr. UN, you've gotta feed 'em, and you gotta water 'em. And by the way, we may want something for the inconvenience and the stress to us." And so that's how you can end up in these—along these border situations in some really . . .

SL: Large.

VS: . . . weird places. [02:27:21] In—when I was in Thailand, one of the camps that—or the group I worked with was also responsible for what was called non—I think it was called Nong Samet. I don't remember how you spell that—like probably *N-O-N-G S-A-M-E-T* or something like that. But there was a tank ditch that was designed by the Thai military so that the Vietnamese that were bringing tank force across, they would at least have to stop and put some bridges or something could bear the weight of a tank, you know, so they wouldn't have this

massive tank thing. But the tank ditch was actually probably inside from where the border was and the border—you know, the border and the tank ditch weren't necessarily in the same place. So things can get a little murky along these lines exactly. Were we actually in Cambodia, or we were in Thailand? And I don't know, but this is where the camp is, and everybody's accepted that it's okay to go treat them there, you know. Nobody's gonna ask for your passport, depending—just if you go there.

[02:28:16] SL: So we've mentioned Cambodia, Thailand, Honduras.

VS: Honduras. Yeah.

SL: And now Ethiopia? You did some work . . .

VS: Yeah, I was . . .

SL: . . . in Ethiopia?

VS: . . . in the Sudan. Yeah, yeah, I spent—and then the—so I was—while I was a resident, I spent the three months in Thailand working with Cambodian refugee-relief effort. Then we spent that just like couple of weeks as a medical tourist in Honduras with El Salvadoran refugees. Then I spent six months with a group called Concern out of America, Santa Ana, I think, and a Catholic mission hospital in Sierra Leone. And—which was not a refugee situation. That was a fairly sophisticated hospital in a very rural, poor, poor area of Africa.

SL: Right.

[02:29:02] VS: And then in 1985, the summer of [19]85, I was in the "We Are the World" Cambodia—oh, I'm sorry, Ethiopia.

SL: Ethiopia.

VS: In Sudan. It was interesting—the—in Sierra Leone when I went there, it was very poor. There was a very ever-present level of corruption, but it was very low level. Like, if you wanted your mail. Okay, give 'em, you know, twenty cents or something in addition to the—you know. That kind of level of corruption. There was always something going on. But it felt very safe, and I would do a lot of walking, and I was halfway dating a woman at the time. I had a motorcycle, and we'd ride all over the country and felt very, very safe. But then as you probably know, then we've had this—you know, incredibly, probably Charles Taylor-inspired, brutal civil war in Sierra Leone.

SL: Exactly.

[02:29:58] VS: And when I went back as a member of Congress and visited—in fact, I went with the ambassador, and he took me back to my hospital grounds, and it had been burned and all. But I ran into some nuns in—I guess I was stayin' in Guinea, and we were talkin' about having worked at Sierra Leone, and one of the nuns said to me, "Did you ever imagine that the people of Sierra Leone could be that brutal toward each other?" And we couldn't. We just—the only way that could've happened was by inspiration [*laughs*], I think, of people from the outside with drugs and weapons and the promise of money that somehow would so disrupt the social mores. [02:30:36] I mean, the only violence I ever saw in my six months of Sierra Leone—that I was in Sierra Leone was outside some little bar which is, like, about

this big, which somebody had a generator refrigerator and sold beer for twenty cents or something. Two guys kind of got arguing. One slapped the other one, he started crying, and the fight was over. I mean, that was the level of brutality that I'd seen there. And then this horrendous stuff of chopping off children's hands and babies hands and, I mean, just incredible brutality. It was just hard to imagine.

[02:31:09] SL: So you were doing all this work except for the study abroad—or the rural effort in Thailand while you—after you had finished your residency and you established . . .

VS: Right, yeah.

SL: . . . a practice here in Little Rock.

VS: What I did after I finished my residency was I started working emergency room work. So I finished my residency—when did I finish my residency? In [19]82 . . .

SL: Kay.

VS: . . . I think. Yeah, sometime in [19]82. And there's a lot of hospitals in Arkansas that have emergency rooms that don't—at that time did not have full-time ER docs. And they were looking for part-timers, you know, and fillin' hours. And there's companies that contract with 'em, and so I was just filling a schedule with as much work as I wanted to work in emergency rooms. I spent a lot of time working at White County Medical Center in Searcy and some—you know, a few places around like that. But I was just—worked by the hour, so I didn't really have a medical practice. And then I—in 1984 I worked in the Mondale,

you know, the doomed Mondale campaign, but I was working nights in the ER and then, you know, depending on if I had an easy night I'd get some sleep. And if—come in and was working as a full-time volunteer in the Mondale campaign and—while I was working emergency room work. [02:32:44] And then—I guess when I came back from Sierra Leone after six months, too, I got interested in prison medicine and worked in the Arkansas prison system for a while.

SL: Is that anything like a refugee camp?

VS: Well, it's, I mean, it's—I guess it goes back to trying to—you know doing different things, and it's just a different kind of medicine. And I had done educational work in prisons before in Oregon. I did GED teaching and some things like that, and I just kind of liked it. I liked dealing with inmates, I think. And so I mean, I liked—I think there were some issues with the contract, the health care, and there were some issues like that. But in terms of the actual job of working with inmates, I liked it. And then at—but then at some point—I think it was after I went to law school—I started getting part-time work and then stumbled into—that's when I really did—started doing more [*unclear word*] primary care. Jim Weber, who was the president of the American Academy of Family Practice had a practice in Jacksonville, he asked me to cover his practice for him for those couple years when he was spending so much time out of Arkansas because of his national leadership position, so I spent a lot of time in Jacksonville. And then Columbia/HCA bought his clinic and bought saint—bought the clinic

at—the family clinic at University and Asher, and so then I started doing some work with them. And then ended up spendin' more time with them. Then I went to law school and that—so that's when I started doing much more traditional family medicine. I think I've kind of messed up my time period there but . . .

[02:34:25] SL: Well, what I'm getting, though, is this incredibly long list and incredible amount of commitment of time doing this volunteer stuff. I mean . . .

VS: Well, it's—it actually is a—it's not a long block of time. It was—I think I—I think the total amount of time in my life I have lived overseas has been, like, two years and couple weeks or something. I mean, a year—thirteen months in Vietnam or twelve months and twenty days, and ten days in Okinawa, six months in Sierra Leone, three months in Thailand, three months in Ethiopia, and two weeks in Honduras. Now that's, you know, that's probably more than a fair number of Americans, but it's nothin' like being, you know, a Catholic priest who spends thirty-five years. And the nuns, by the way, always say, well, they spend forty-five 'cause the priests can't handle the heat. [*SL laughs*] But the nuns outlive them. But I mean, to me it was—I liked the work a lot, and I found it very stimulating and a bit of an adventure, and you know, it's kind of a romantic period of your life to do those kinds of things. But I never was—saw myself as being the kind of person that would say, "Well, maybe I'll go home ten years from now." I was always, you know, wantin' to get back to, you know,

American culture and music and whatever the next stage of life would be. But I was always—I always very much liked what I was doing at the time I was doing it. But they were—by design, people were looking for a doctor for three months. Okay. If they'd said, "I want one for three years," I probably would've . . .

SL: Passed.

VS: . . . been—not—I would've probably passed at that time in my life.

[02:35:58] SL: But still, even at two years and some change, that—that's really—I just wonder how that relates to the rest of American volunteerism. I would think that most Americans—most people don't spend even that amount of time in their lifetime volunteering for causes . . .

VS: No.

SL: . . . you know. It's a . . .

VS: The Mormon's kids spend two years, and they don't even see their families for two years, so.

SL: Yeah, that's true.

VS: But it's . . .

SL: But still, that's a small . . .

[02:36:26] VS: But I think—but I—I mean, I think people do what they want. I did it because I liked it.

SL: I know.

VS: You know, and I did it because I learned from it. And I think those things, those experiences, contribute to your life and can contribute to

your life in unexpected ways. And so when we started getting into foreign policy issues when I was on the Armed Services Committee—I mean, like, yesterday the Prime Minister Meles in Ethiopia passed away at age fifty-seven. Well, I met with him when I went to Ethiopia as a member of Congress. They—both he and the President Isaias of Eritrea were pretty bitter rivals. Now they had great respect for the refugee-relief movement in the Sudan, and it was very clear that was part of the reason that they met with me and part of the reason that they trusted me. President Isaias actually let me go to the border when they were—and into the trenches there when they were having this war with Eritrea on their side. I visited both sides, and each party knew I visited both sides. But he wouldn't let anybody from the diplomatic community, including the American ambassador, to go. No one—but he said, "For you, because of the work you've done"—so I went with my military Marine attaché from Washington. But it was because of what happened, because of the work that I had done there. And they just had such respect for the international community outpouring of helping support them during a very difficult time of that Mengistu war. There was more to it than just health care. There probably was—that was probably a way of funneling funds into these [laughs] . . .

SL: Oh, I see. Yeah.

VS: . . . movements. I mean, I think there was some—a lot of—I don't know everything that happened there. But my point is you look—

okay, so I'm a doctor in Sierra Leone, and what happens? Charles Taylor motivates this incredible civil war, brutal civil war, in Sierra Leone at the time I'm on the House Armed Services Committee. Meles in Ethiopia becomes one of the leading voices and forces in Africa fighting terrorism and al-Qaeda and going into Somalia and dealing with that. I mean, it's—so it's just—you know, sometimes you go to these places that are volatile. They stay volatile for some period of time.

[02:38:47] SL: Okay. I'm also hearing you've—you're practicing medicine, and you decide to go to law school. I mean, what's up with that? Why . . .

VS: You know, that—this is kind of embarrassing [*SL laughs*] because I actually don't remember deciding to go to law school. [*SL laughs*] You know, I really don't.

SL: You just ended up there?

VS: I'm really glad I did it. I member goin' through the process. But it was clearly not a decision that was, "Gee, I'm really dissatisfied with medicine, and I want to change careers." I really didn't go to law school with the idea I'm gonna practice law. I think that it—I wouldn't have been shocked if I had done that, but that really wasn't what motivated me. I think it was just that I was always intrigued by law school, by what they learn, by my lawyer friends who seem to be smarter than me and [*SL laughs*] how they approach things.

[02:39:41] And so—and they had this program at UALR, and I

thought, "Well, this could be an interesting thing to do." And so aside from that little hepatitis thing at the beginning—I mean, I got started in it, and I don't want to overstate this, but I mean, I liked law school. If I hadn't liked it, I would have quit. I mean, at times it was, like, too much of a good thing. I mean, how much—another test and, I mean, the pressures of it and all. But I found it interesting. I liked the people. I liked the professors. UALR Law School is very, very good. And it really did help me think about how our country works and how—about policy, and I think it was a very good foundation for—not for solving things, but for asking questions, you know, on congressional things or about policies. It's a real good background for asking questions.

[02:40:36] SL: So you really never really deployed your law degree in any way.

VS: I finished law school, did the Bar review, took the Bar, passed the Bar. But the day after the Bar exam I went back to doin' medicine. That was in February of [19]89. And then at some point I got interested in the—running for the . . .

SL: State.

VS: . . . state legislature, and that was in early 1990. So I think it's pretty clear that I'm a job hopper.

[02:41:09] SL: Well, I don't know that I would call it job hopping. I—you know, I kind of get the feeling that you just have this itch to keep learning and to keep doing.

VS: I like tryin' new things. Yeah. One of the things about Congress, you know—so I was there fourteen years. That's the longest, you know, time I spent. It's not fair to really say it was because I practiced medicine for fifteen-plus years or something. I don't remember doin'—making my living as a doctor. You know, while I was at different places, it was never like I was bouncing from place to place. There'd be people, you know, "I've completed these commitments and all." But even within Congress, I mean, I think if you look at a lot of members of Congress, well, they'll be on this committee, and then at some point, well, they switch to this committee. And you'll—so it's an opportunity to pursue different . . .

SL: Things.

VS: . . . interests, even though . . .

SL: Yeah.

[02:42:08] VS: Like a lot of jobs. I mean, you know, you've been at the UA for a period of time, but you've changed your focus and have freshened things up. And then when I had—I mentioned I traveled to Africa and did some international travel related to the Armed Services Committee. But then when Betsy and I started having babies by the batch I . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Babies by the batch.

VS: . . . I really curtailed my international travel 'cause it was—she'd had health problems, and we had all these babies. But I'd started carving out a niche for myself working with the diplomatic—with the

ambassadors and it—well, my staff did the travel for me, and I really carved out a niche for myself, but it was—my point is—yeah, you—I had the same job for fourteen years, but it—my subcommittees changed, and you know, you pursue different interests, and topics change what—you know, the big—the thrust of the Clinton Administration is not the same as the thrust of the Bush Administration, so you—it's kind of like you reinvent yourself. It's something different. Kind of like family practice.

[02:43:12] SL: Well, before we get to the congressional stuff, let's talk about your state representative run. You only served one term there. Is that right?

VS: No. I ran in 1990 and—against a very nice man [*ice rattling*], Senator Doug Brandon . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . who passed away from cancer not long after—my recollection is not very long after the election. I can't remember exactly the date. But he had a lovely family. But I got in that race—you know, anyway—for whatever reasons I just was interested in it and thought I could do the job. And I wasn't given much of a chance. And Senate terms are four terms, but this was in 1990. And the census is done in 1990.

SL: Right.

[02:44:09] VS: And so between 1990 and the next election cycle, 1992, re-districting occurs in the senate districts. So I won the race. No

Republican opponent. I served one term in the Senate. Well, in the Senate because you have staggered terms—four years—eighteen are elected one cycle and seventeen . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . in the next cycle, so you get the four-year terms, you draw. Well, I drew a two-year term. So I was on the ballot in 1990.

SL: Yeah.

[02:44:34] VS: Then in 1992 I was on the—let's see, I was on the ballot 'cause I drew the two-year term, and then I ran for Congress in 1996. I think that's how that worked out 'cause I—yeah. No, I'm missing—yes, let's see, I'm forgettin' the intricacy here, because 1990 I ran against Senator Brandon. In 1992 I had no opponent, but then in 1994 Jeff Sharp ran against me in the Democratic primary for the State Senate. So for some reason, because of the census and the draws, I ended—Senate four terms, but I had an election in [19]90, unopposed in [19]92, and then had a challenged primary in [19]94. So it was a bit perplexing to say I had a four-year term when I had to run every two years. So I've been on a ballot every . . .

SL: Every two years . . .

VS: . . . every two years for twenty years.

SL: . . . for the—for twenty years.

VS: Yeah.

[02:45:27] SL: And I just gotta say—I mean, isn't there a sense that you're pretty much running all the time when you're on a ballot every two

years? I mean, you have to . . .

VS: Well, yeah. But I did a—I would do it—well, first of all, I mean, I was unopposed in 1992, so you know, that was—didn't seem much like it that year. But I would do it differently when I was in Congress, and we may want to talk about this in some detail sometime. But I did not fund-raise in the off year, and I would shut my campaign down, and I think that's becoming—I was an anachro—I think I was an anachronism when I started that. But I think it worked really well for me. I think my constituents liked it.

SL: Obviously.

[02:46:13] VS: But so what I would do is I'd ramp up in January of election year. If I had a challenging race, I mean, I could raise a million dollars—I mean, and it's really hard work, but I have to do that in, like, nine months, you know, or eight or eleven months, ten months. But I'm really vigorous at it. But then when the campaign ends, I pay my bills, debt, everything, and then shut it down and lay off staff. And the only thing I do is I have to file a report—you know, a financial report.

SL: Right.

VS: But if you sent me a check, I'd mark it void and send it back. I wouldn't raise money. And then I would have usually a year or even a little longer. I might have fourteen months with no fund-raising, no accepting of donations, and there was a sense of peace about that that my colleagues didn't have. [02:47:01] *[Laughs]* And my—I'm

laughing because one of my favorite stories is there's a guy [*SL laughs*] from Massachusetts who—we were down on the House floor a few years ago, and he said, "Hey, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." I said, "Are you still doin' that thing where you don't raise money in the off year?" And I said, "Yeah." Said, "Well, can I make a comment?" I said, "Sure." He said, "I think that's really stupid." [*SL laughs*] I said, "Well, can I ask you a question?" He said, "Sure." I said, "If everybody did it like I did, would this be a better place?" And he said, "Oh, yeah." [*Laughter*] So—well, there you go. So . . .

[02:47:40] SL: Well, I just hear . . .

VS: So in answer to your question—yeah, if you're—if it's a full-time—not a full-time job—if it's an intense activity of yours year round, year after year after year after year, I think it eats—I think it—I don't think it's very healthy for the system and for democracy. I don't think it's very healthy for an individual—at the same time you're voting on important stuff, you realize, "I got this fund raiser coming up and, gee" . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . "how am I gonna time that call to this banker or this union lobbyist when I've got these bills coming up ahead of time?" And it just makes it kind of weird, I think.

SL: Well, and . . .

VS: But on the other hand . . .

SL: . . . you run . . .

VS: . . . you know, it takes money to do these campaigns.

SL: Yeah. But I guess—had you done what I believe most do, there's always that possible conflict. I mean, you're working on legislation, and there's this entity over here that wants—that are—that likes that you're working on that legislation and—but it has the appearance that you're . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . working for them . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know.

[02:48:48] VS: I think that—I think sometimes you will see that and—in something in the paper that said, "Well, this person"—I clearly think there's times when somebody does something and a short time later, they get a donation. And I think . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . think it's pretty unseemly. But I also think, just because of the frequency of fund raisers, that you know, well somebody cast this vote on such-and-such a date or had this vote coming up, and there's this fund-raiser. Well, the reality is the fund-raiser had probably been scheduled for months.

SL: Months. Yeah.

[02:49:16] VS: They had probably sent out twenty faxes to 'em, probably three phone calls. They'd been working it for months, and almost no members of Congress have control over when that vote was gonna occur.

SL: Right.

VS: And it—you know, and for whatever reasons, bad luck or good luck, you know, depending on your perspective, that's the way the voting worked out. And . . .

SL: Right.

VS: And it can work the other way, too. I mean, I've had people who—friends of mine who say, "Yeah, I had this event all scheduled, and one of my cohosts was this group, and we'd been workin' on it for months, and a vote came up, and they didn't realize I was gonna vote a certain way, and they pulled all their support." Well, that's kind of tacky, too. You know, that's . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: You were supporting a person, we thought, and it turns out you just thought you were buyin' a vote, you know, and it didn't work [*laughs*] out that way, so . . .

[02:49:57] SL: It's a slippery slope.

VS: Yeah, it's—but anyway, everybody struggles with it, I think, and people do different things, and you know, I did some things that other people would not do, like I had no problem accepting PAC money because it's identified. I mean, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . where it came from. It's if it's the—you know, whatever—the Comcast cable PAC, well, it came from Comcast. There's not any surprises there—where it came from. But I can understand why those

who don't take that didn't—I mean—and I—just like I think they probably understood why I didn't do things in the off-season, although everybody kind of struggles with what works best. Oh, I have to say the pressure is more and more—you gotta keep raisin' and raisin' and raisin' because your vulnerability is—all this huge outside money coming in.

[02:50:45] SL: I was looking at your election results, congressional election results, and it looks like to me that your very first congressional race was your closest.

VS: Right. Yeah, that's right. Against Bud Cummins. It was 52–48, I think.

SL: Yeah, which is still pretty good win. I mean . . .

VS: Yeah, it was close. CNN, by the way and—had the check marks that I'd lost. [*Laughs*] It was a interesting from the—you know, once the polls close, my work's done. So I mean—so I didn't—and whatever happened, happened. But it was interesting, once that occurred, man, you talk about a victory party. It just kind of emptied out. [*Laughter*] Which—"Yeah, so these are my friends, you know." [*Laughter*] And so—and then I got a call from Rich Moellers I think is his name—Moellers—I think I'm pronouncing that right—from KVOM—K—Voice of Morrilton in Morrilton who—I don't know if Rich is still there or not, but for years he really ran a really good radio station. So about the time that CNN announced I was losing and everybody had left the victory party or [*SL laughs*] not everybody, but a fair number—I get a call

from Rich—said, "Carmen," said, "We just done all the calculations, and the only county we don't have in is a few precincts in Yell County. But even if we give all those votes to your opponent, you're gonna win the race, we think, about 52–48, and can we go on the air?" I said, "Rich, I'm glad to go on the air with you, but you need to understand that CNN has announced that I've lost." [SL laughs] He said—he got kind of abrupt, and he said, "Look, we're—we've had guys out at the courthouse doors. We're very sure of our numbers. Now, can I put you on the air or not?" You know, so I went on the air, and it was, like, three hours later CNN came back and [SL laughs] realized that they were wrong. So . . .

[02:52:21] SL: That wasn't a Wolf Blitzer call, was it?

VS: No, no. [SL laughs] No, no, it was a—most of those, at that level, they have a service that they . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . buy, and there was—I used to remember what the details were, but there was something that had happened and why that's—and something had occurred. Fact, I've had probably—I've had several elections where there was, you know, strange stuff had happened. I mean, my—I forget some of the details. My first election in 1990, there was something [ice rattling] that had happened with—down at the—at—with the voting machines in Pulaski County. And I was practicin' medicine. I was goin' to work the next morning at, like—you had to be at clinic at eight o'clock. I went to bed. I finally went to

bed, like, eleven, not knowing if had won or lost. I mean, I had to practice medicine the next day for eight or nine hours. And I get this call at one fifteen in the morning. I heard a lot of screaming in the background. My friends were down at the election commission saying, "You won by, you know, 516 votes or somethin'." Said, "Thank you," and [*laughter*]*—so that was that victory party.*

SL: I don't know, I could've—I don't know if I could've slept.

[02:53:29] VS: Then four years later in this election against Jeff Sharp, the first count comes out, and I had lost, like, overwhelmingly lost. Well, when I first heard that, I was very confident I had won. I mean, I—you sometimes feel things out.

SL: Was he an independent?

VS: He wa—he ran in the Democratic primary.

SL: Okay.

VS: But he—you know, in my view, you know, he wasn't very popular and he—a lot of times as people heard him speak, they would kind of tend to vote the other way.

SL: Right.

[02:54:04] VS: But what saved me, my peace of mind, was I knew that there were paper ballots out there somewhere that had been checked. While the computer read—it was checked. So if had to pay for a recount, I could do that. Well, it was—I don't remember how, but it didn't take very long, an hour or two or something. And what had happened was it was using these voting machines, and before you

count a race, you have to clear the preceding race. And in the preceding race somebody had beaten somebody like, you know, 7,000 to 117. And so they started adding in my race, but my opponent right off the bat had, you know, several thousand advantage, and so the . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . total comes out. And first thing I thought is, "Well, this isn't what we had thought was gonna happen." And then somebody noticed, "Well, actually, you know, the total vote total there was more than voted in the election." [*Laughter*] So they figured that one out. But—so that—but there has been several times that—then they had the thing in [19]96 with CNN goin' one way, and then I had an election with the voting screens, and I had people from my campaign who went in to early vote and would hit my box, and my opponent would get the X. And it would . . .

SL: That's spooky.

VS: They called it drift. As the day went on, it's like—okay, here's this and they're lined up like this, and as the day goes on, it kind of drifts. And so . . .

SL: Oh!

VS: . . . if you hit this box here, it actually electronically records there. And we got calls from more than a few people that said, "Vic, I finally had to leave, leaving that vote uncast because it kept poppin' up your opponent's name." So it was just . . .

SL: That by—that . . .

[02:55:42] VS: That adds to your anxiety. I don't . . .

SL: Yeah, it does.

VS: . . . know why I'm ramblin' on like that, Scott, but it was—they were kind of interesting little . . .

SL: No, no, this is the kind of stuff . . .

VS: . . . anecdotes about . . .

SL: That's the kind of stuff that's priceless. You know . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . the—I'm still—you know, when they ask me, "Electronic or paper," I always take paper. [*Laughs*]

VS: Well, you . . .

SL: I still—I just know how vulnerable . . .

VS: Yeah, I started . . .

SL: . . . these systems are.

VS: . . . electronic banking, so I probably better go for . . .

SL: Well, I do . . .

VS: . . . electronic voting.

SL: . . . electronic banking, but . . .

VS: At least there's supposed to be a paper receipt, but it's a—anyway, but it was—it's been interesting. There's several—I was tryin' to think if there was any more.

[02:56:15] SL: Well, there was one election cycle where you got 92 percent of the vote.

VS: That must've been whenever I had a Green Party candidate.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Yeah, I think so.

SL: It was. I don't think I've ever seen that.

VS: Oh yeah. Well, it was a—I met the lady. She was a very nice person, but she didn't really—I didn't have an opponent, and she didn't have a—I didn't have a Republican opponent, and she really didn't have much of a campaign, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: But she knew that. But she—I saw her at some event. She wanted her picture made with me, so we took our picture and . . .

SL: Yeah. Well, you know, I guess this is as good a time as any to talk about maybe some [*unclear words*] . . .

TM: Hey, Scott, let's go ahead and change tapes.

SL: Oh, okay. Hour three.

[Tape stopped]

[02:56:57] SL: Okay, so this is our fourth tape?

TM: Yes.

VS: Looks like you're takin' a picture of his elbow.

TM: Well, I got a profile here. [*Laughs*]

VS: You know you won't—he's not even lookin' at me anymore. [*Laughter*]

SL: Anyway, yeah, I've bumped in—I've crossed the camera lens many times. [*VS laughs*] I get kind of excited and animated but—okay, so Vic, we were—we're kind of in your congressional career now, and I

know that we have kind of skimmed over everything else to get to here. And I just want to make this pledge to you that if we don't finish up today, or if you don't feel like we've finished up today, we'll come back and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . we'll do some more because I think you have one of the most interesting and broadly based perspectives as far as career goes of anyone that I've sat across from. I mean, you've really done [*laughs*] a lot of neat things and done things well. So I'm perfectly comfortable with spending more time with you if we run out of . . .

VS: Okay.

SL: . . . time today. [02:58:04] But as far as your political career goes, I was about to say—and Joy brought up some stuff that we'll talk about, too, but I was about to say that you really seem to kind of hold to your guns about the things that you believe. And I didn't ever feel like the political winds really—that you would stand where you felt like you needed to stand despite what was blowing on around you. Some of your votes put you in a pretty small minority on some things, but they seemed to be a higher ground in my read. And so there's something that makes people admire a person that cuts through all the stuff, sticks to their guns, and looks like they're exercising the right thing, trying to do the right thing, rather than the expedient thing. And it seemed to have served you well. [02:59:08] I mean, you kept getting elected. I mean, you—I would say that you were probably

more liberal, voting-record-wise and progressive, more populous than what the conservative bent has been in this state, anyway, for the past decade or more. But you've held your ground, and you did well. So how does that happen? How is that you continued to get reelected and reelected with pretty comfortable margins . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . at a time when the conservative winds were blowing and people were wanting to go to war and there was all this stuff . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . blowin' around you?

VS: Well—and I could say several things. I think—oh, some of 'em are kind of anecdotal, I guess, but you need to think about, "Okay, what is it that people want?" I mean, people really don't—I mean, I think very few people think that they have as much awareness of what the specific issues that we're voting on as the person who's up there. Otherwise, what's the point of having classified briefings and classified hearings and hearings and meeting with constituents and all—you know, if there's actually learning that comes from the legislative process of committee meetings, then if you're a constituent, and I'm a constituent now, I can understand sometimes why Mark Pryor might vote differently than me 'cause he's probably hearing a whole lot of things that I don't—you know, I'll read a newspaper—I'll read a story on something for one minute and think, "Well, why did they vote that way?" Well, he may have spent months on that issue. And so I think

there is respect, you know, for people who kind of labor, and I think some people have—a lot of people have an awareness of that.

[03:00:58] I think the other thing, too, is if—you develop a reputation of trying to learn from people, even those people that you disagree with, because the reality is if somebody that you disagree with, you disagree with them on an issue. You don't disagree with them on everything. And so if you can sit down with people who may be vehemently opposed to you on something, there's still things you can learn from them about. [03:01:22] I think an example is probably—I mean, it was very clear to representatives of groups like Right to Life. They were very concerned about the health care bill. Well, they had every right to be concerned about the health care bill if it was actually gonna do what they were led to believe that it was going to do. And they still may think that, but I mean, there was reasons to go back. It helped me shape questions. Say, "This group of people—what can I tell them about, you know, this bill?" And then I think there's a—there is something about—"Okay, what do you actually—what do you really conclude?" I won't say so much as a belief as a conclusion, a policy conclusion. 'Cause belief sounds like, "Oh, it's just my own personal view on something, and that's what I'm gonna do." No, it's your conclusion that on this specific vote, on this policy issue, that this is the best way—that that's the best way to go. [03:02:18] I member senator—state Senator Wayne Dowd, *D-O-W-D*, from south Arkansas. He said that—oh, he did it on the floor of the Senate. He said, "You

know, it's a whole lot easier to go back home and explain something—explain a vote—if you actually believe it." [Laughs] I think that's pretty good advice, you know. If you start voting in a way contrary to what you really think is the right thing or the best—I don't mean right by your own personal maybe values, but right in terms of, you know, just a judgment on what's the best plan for this agency or the plan for the country or the plan for the military. If you start voting contrary to that for political reasons, it is really hard to go before a civic club and explain it and explain it to your wife and explain it to your brother and—you know, so that's kind of a long, rambling way, but I think it's more than just—"Well, I believe this, so I'm gonna stick by it." No, it is a process of learning and the respect for people that you meet with. And I—you know, there are things that I clearly made up my mind with, but on votes that I was—were up in the air, I would meet with people from a lot of different views, trying to gather it in. And then when you cast your vote, if you can explain it to folks, even the ones that disagreed with you—I mean, I have Republican friends that'd come to me and say, "Vic, why'd you vote that way 'cause I think you always have a good explanation." So I'd explain it to 'em, and they still may not agree with me, but they'd understand it. Now there's clearly people out there that, you know, don't agree with me and didn't like me. [03:03:45] I don't—my wife said she ran into somebody the other day that had a friend who did not want to live in River Ridge because it was too close to Vic Snyder, which I thought

was pretty cute. [*Laughter*] So I hope they watch this. But you know, I'm rambling on too much, but I think it's part of a representative democracy, which is people hire somebody to try to sort out all this stuff. And if you sort it out in a way that respects people who disagree with you, I think folks appreciate that and appreciate you explaining why you voted a certain way.

[03:04:19] SL: I know that you decided not to—I know you decided to leave Congress, and I know a lot—I sense a lot of it was family related. You just had . . .

VS: Yeah, it was all family related.

SL: All family related. But was it really all family related, or is there a level of animosity and division up there that just makes it not the same as it was when you first came in? I mean, it seems . . .

VS: Hey, I went . . .

SL: . . . like to me . . .

VS: . . . in when Newt Gingrich was speaker. I know about animosity.

[*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

[03:04:54] VS: One of the first votes we did was the, you know, reprimand and the ethics stuff that Newt Gingrich did. I mean, there was—there's always—there was always been some harshness. My reason for not running for reelection was 100 percent family and because of these kids. And I have a six-year-old now and three three-year-olds, and at the time I decided not to run, they were much younger. As you

may recall, my wife had some—went into congestive heart failure at the time of the delivery, and we, you know, we're dealing with that. So it was all kid related. Now there's a whole lot of people that say, "Well, aren't you glad to be out of there?" Well, if I could've made it work, I would love to be up there. Now does that mean you get frustrated? Sure, you get frustrated. But I always had good relationships with Republicans. I mean, we'd fight about things and all, but I really liked the job, and I would've liked to have been able to make it work, but it was clear to me it wasn't working. And probably one of the things that really brought that home to me—I think this may have been actually after I had decided—I can't remember when this was, but there was one time I was sitting in the Little Rock Airport waiting for the plane to take off or waiting for to load—board the plane—and I realized that I was already missing the boys, and I hadn't left Little Rock yet. Well, if that's not a warning sign, you know.

[03:06:20] So no, I'm—I think the democratic process—and this may go back to my eighth-grade civics class we talked it a couple hours ago. The democratic process was set up to deal with issues when they are intense. If there's no great division in the country, well, who cares if you have a king or a democracy? If—'cause everybody agrees on the stuff. When the democratic processes are most effective are when they resolve issues of great intensity, and by effective, I mean however it comes out, people accept the results. Even if they lose, they will say, "Well, we played in a democratic system, lost, but we

lost fair and square. You know, that's just the way it is." That keeps us from shootin' each other [*SL laughs*] like how things have been decided through the eons of time. [03:07:12] And if I can divert for a minute, that's one of the reasons I'm very concerned about the role of money in our elections, by all this stuff we're seeing right now about voter suppression. But it's very clear from the statements that there are people trying to pass laws to suppress votes. Well, that may work in the short term, but if you have a country—let's say—talk about something other than the United States. If you have a country where wealth gets increasingly concentrated in a smaller number of people, and that's happening in this country right now, and those more people, because of changes in the law, are more and more able to use that money to control the election processes, and at the same time, you have laws being passed that take more and more of these people and, for a variety of reasons, keep them from voting, at some point people will lose confidence in the democratic process. And I think that would be very ominous if people will not accept the results of election, they'll say, "They bought it, and they suppressed vote", or will not accept a difficult policy decision on—whether that's trade or goin' to war or not goin' to war—say, "That is illegitimate because one guy with several billion dollars bought the election at the same time legislators that were financed by this small group of people suppressed votes." And that's a nonpartisan thing. That kind of stuff can work . . .

SL: Both ways.

VS: . . . regardless of party. [03:08:39] The risk for the United States is if the American people start losing confidence in the processes that lead to these votes at times of great division. And every once in a while, America has times of great division. We had it during the Civil Rights days. We had during the Vietnam War. We had it after World War I. I mean, times of great, great division—and democracy proves its mettle then. It doesn't prove its mettle when we're all one happy family and say, "Oh, isn't it great? We all get along." Well no, who wants to participate in that? Why not go up there when things are of great intensity 'cause it means you're deciding great things, great challenges, at a time of great division. So I would've been glad—I would've preferred to be in the majority to be up there. It's a lot more fun bein' the majority than minority. But I did the minority for ten years. I did the majority for four years. I like both of it. I would've been fine to have gone up there and—you know, if I had been able to get past the election with Tim Griffin. He was, of course, very motivated. But it was pretty clear to me I was havin' troubles with this some time before. My wife and I went through that after we had our first baby. And I was havin' problems with it then. I mean, I actually went and saw a very nice woman Methodist minister in DC, and I just said, "I want to sit down and try to figure out—I'm havin' trouble dealin' with the fact that I've got this baby back home."

SL: Right.

[03:10:03] VS: Well, by the time—I went and made an appointment to see

her. By the time I went to see her, I said, "I've got it figured out. There isn't anything you can say to make this better. There's nothin' you can say that will help my little boy understand why his daddy's not around. There's nothin' that anybody can say." And so then at some point we—Betsy and I, we started looking for a—well, maybe if she—if we moved our family to DC and she got a church there, then I would come back home on these weekends, maybe not every weekend, but fairly frequently. And I—and just work from dawn to after dark, when my staff would wear 'em out 'cause I—with my family would be in DC. Most people—members of Congress—find you can spend, you know, more family time that way.

SL: Right.

[03:10:38] VS: Well, then that's about the time we decided to have another baby, and then we found out we were gonna have three, and that ended all that discussion. But that's a long way of saying it was all kids. It had nothing to do at all with the atmosphere up there. I would've—I get along well with my Republican colleagues and even the—and would've been proud and honored to have continued if it would've worked for our family, but it didn't. It was probably more fair to say it wasn't working for me. I see kids like Jeremy Hutchinson and Mark Pryor, and they seem to thrive, even though their fathers were away a lot. So I'm not—I don't want to discredit their relationships with—their father-kid relationship. It wasn't working for me.

SL: It's unique for everybody.

VS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it was—may have been just fine for my kids and just fine for my wife, but I didn't like it. Maybe that's partly because I'm old and I'm . . .

SL: Well . . .

[03:11:43] VS: I'll fill in one more thing. There are people that say, "Well, it was—you know, gonna be a difficult election year, and Congressman Griffin was running. He's a very formidable guy," and he really is. And where that—if a factor is a factor at all, which is I know to do the job right even when you're in the district. Just being back in Arkansas doesn't mean you're spending all your time with your kids. To do the job right, which is the way I did it until my—we had the triplets, and we have all the issue of my wife's health at the same we're having the babies. And you need to be out in the district all the time. And so it was pretty clear to me that just to go to a fish fry in, you know, White County, if that meant I go to a—leave at five o'clock to go to a six o'clock fish fry and get home after the babies are in bed and maybe my wife's to bed, well, what kind of a—I might as well be in DC all the time, you see?

SL: Right.

VS: And so that's the impact. That's where the role of—you start thinking about an election year and then—well, it's gonna be worse in election year. And so the—but the whole process had begun before there was ever clear there was gonna be a health care bill or a 2010 wave or

anything like that.

[03:12:49] SL: Well, you just mentioned health care. You know, Joy was saying, you know, we've interviewed Joycelyn Elders and Harry Ward and . . .

VS: Dr. Elders was one of my attendings when I was a resident.

SL: Is that right?

VS: Yeah, she was on the pediatric ward. She was a very gifted endocrinologist, as I recall.

SL: Well, she's a—she was a wonderful person to sit across from. She was very, very generous and very open and has a remarkable life story.

VS: Yeah, she does. Doctor—I was a big fan of Dr. Ward's, too.

SL: I don't know anybody that wasn't.

VS: Yeah.

SL: I . . .

VS: He did a lot. I think he—didn't he start in 1980? I think it was . . .

SL: I . . .

VS: He and I came to UAMS about the same time. He as the top dog, and me as the low dog. And—but I got to know him well and always just really enjoyed interacting with him and his wife.

[03:13:44] SL: Well, we were very, very lucky to get . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . to sit across from him. I think during his interview he had about 17 percent capacity in his lungs.

VS: Oh.

SL: You know, but . . .

VS: See . .

SL: . . . he . . .

VS: . . . with Harry—what happened with me was I would—we would never socialize, but I would see him at events. And we would catch up, and I always enjoyed him and all. And—well, then I stopped seeing him at events and—'cause he just had to curtail his . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . activities.

[03:14:13] SL: Right. So you know, they had very definite opinions about health care in America, and of course, basically it's just too expensive, and it's not set up right. So I don't know. What do you think? Where do you think we're headed as far as the health care in America goes?

VS: Well, check with me after the November elections, and I'll give you a better—I'll have a better idea. I—my own belief right now, sitting here in August of 2012, is that if the election results turn out in such a way that the health care reform law can really get implemented, that as time goes by, more and more Americans are appreciate what it does for them in a way that doesn't bust the budget. Now does that mean we're gonna have some challenges? We absolutely will.

SL: Yeah.

[03:15:15] VS: But I'd rather have those challenges going ahead than I would the ones that we have when we don't do anything. 'Cause I've seen those. I know what those are like. I'm the guy whose mom

would take him over to get the penicillin in my butt 'cause we couldn't afford to go the doctor. So I think we have several things that we have to work on. There is too much unnecessary care being done. Too much care being done. People in good faith—maybe sometimes not in such good faith—you know, maybe they own the MRI machine or somethin'. You know, too much unnecessary care being done. There's too much necessary care not being done, like "Have you had your screening colonoscopy?" You know, have—do you ask that to all the people you interview—all the retirees—us old folks.

SL: No, I haven't, but maybe I should.

VS: Do you say, "Have you had your screening colonoscopy yet?" I mean, we're not doing all the preventive stuff we have to. We're not managing people with diabetes. We're not taking care of exercise, and we're—too many of us are smoking. We—but we—like I work with Arkansas Blue Cross, and they want doctors to spend more money on preventive stuff. I mean, they're trying to do things to encourage more primary care to do more things that they'll get reimbursed for [laughs] from Arkansas Blue Cross because we ultimately think that saves everybody money, and it ultimately saves insurers money. Course, one of the things could be they could move to a different insurance company, so we'd spend it on the screening stuff. But I mean that's—those are the reality issues, and somebody else benefits. But—so too much stuff that's being done shouldn't be being done. Too much stuff that ought to be being done that's not being done. If

doctors would do it, they'd get paid more. Too much inefficiency in how we do things. I will give you an example. [03:17:00] I got this on the American Hospital Association's convention I went to a few months ago, and they all—I snuck in the meeting for the hospital board members from throughout the country. And the guy gave an example of the hospital—he was on the board or worked with the board members. They did efficiency studies on nurses. I think these are the numbers—that the nurses were spending 35 percent of their time at the bedside and taking fifty-eight hundred steps a shift. They put little pedometers on 'em and measured—actually measured the time at the bedside. So they interviewed nurses—"Why are you walkin'? Why aren't you at bedside more? Why are you walkin' all over?" They said, "Well, we gotta go get stuff, you know." Hunting—what do they call it? Hunting and gathering. "We gotta go get stuff."

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

[03:17:39] VS: "Well, so you gotta get sheets. Where are the sheets?"

"Well, they're at the closet at the end of the hall." "We gotta get a catheter." "Where are they?" "Well, they're in the closet at the other end of the hall." I mean—so they changed everything around and then after they made their changes, they re-did the study. Their nurses now spend 90-plus percent time at the bedside, and they're walking, I think, was eight hundred steps a day. Now what does that mean? It means you have a whole lot more actual work with patients being done without having to hire more people. In fact, you may

actually be able to not lay off somebody—might replace somebody—'cause you can—maybe you only needed that much time at that bedside, but now that nurse can cover three patients instead of just one. And with a whole lot less work. [03:18:22] So my point is we are very inefficient in health care. We have to do a much, much better job at hand offs. That means when you get out of the hospital and you're told to go to your doctor, your doctor doesn't even know you were in the hospital. And if you actually get an appointment and remember to go, your doctor may have no record of you or what happened with you when you were in the hospital or what medicine changes were made. So there's all kinds of things that we can do out there. There is no one magic thing. The health care law, in my opinion, is a giant step in the right direction and for peace of mind for American families on how to get health insurance. But it didn't have a whole lot to do with how do you get hospital board members to start putting pedometers on nurses' legs and all that kind of—I mean, each hospital's gonna have to struggle with that, and each clinic insurers are struggling with it. But does that help at all?

SL: Yeah, yeah. My wife's a nurse.

VS: Well, there you go.

SL: Recovery room. Runs the recovery room, so . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I'm aware of these things.

VS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[03:19:27] VS: But there was—and there was so many things in the health care debate that became really frustrating because it was like we were debating something that didn't exist, you know. First it was death panels. *[Laughs]* Well, there wasn't any death panels. I mean, it wasn't—I mean, you still hear people talking about that and so—you know, so how do we come out with this way of requiring everybody to have health insurance? Part of it was 'cause it was working for Governor Romney in Massachusetts. We do it with car insurance. And another way to go would be just to say, "Everybody's in Medicare." But there wasn't an interest in doing that. This was a more moderate, mainstream-market-based system saying, "No, we're not gonna get rid of the private insurance market, but you are gonna have to figure out a way to get health care—I mean, health insurance either through your work or if you're a veteran goin' to the VA or you're a military retiree—whatever it is, but everybody's gonna have to have skin in the game 'cause you all go to the hospital when you get sick. But let's set up a way for you to buy private insurance if you don't have any on this exchange where you can—you know, take advantage of size and the marketplace and all—but not have a one-payer system." [03:20:39] And so it's really interesting to me—by stepping back, everybody acknowledges, "Yeah, we could've required everybody to be in Medicare, and that would've been fine and constitutional, but when we step back and say *[laughs]* 'Let's try to use the marketplace,' that

somehow that was a terrible thing." I think once people try this exchange, I think—I hope that we'll get more and more confidence in it 'cause otherwise if it just goes away, we're right back to where we were with millions of Americans not doing well in our health care system, having really second-rate care with poor quality and inefficiency.

[03:21:11] SL: Well, what about the physicians? I mean, I hear conflicting things. Sometimes I hear physicians are . . .

VS: Well, a physi . . .

SL: . . . totally behind this, and then I hear that we're gonna lose a bunch of physicians 'cause they don't want to mess with the . . .

VS: Physician . . .

SL: They can't make a living.

VS: Physicians are a lot like people. You know, they have disagreements. [Laughs] I can say that . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . 'cause I am one. No, I think that's right. There were clearly some people were just strongly behind this and think we didn't go far enough. There are physicians out there that think we should go to a one-payer system and be done with it. That'll be the most efficient. There are others that just think this will be a terrible thing and all. I—my own view is I just don't understand how it can be bad for a physician to have more patients coming in that actually have health insurance can pay for their services. But that's my own view.

[03:22:01] I have one little story to you about the passage of the bill, if you'd like to hear it.

SL: Absolutely.

VS: We—as you may recall—I mean, the whole debate for the health care bill went on for a long time, and we had town hall meetings back here and lots of meetings and everything. But one of the issues was—and I touched on it a while ago—was there was concerns about in the—people who—in the right-to-life community—very concerned that this law was going to somehow allow government dollars to be buying coverage for abortion, elective abortions. And there was—I guarantee you, there was no interest by the great majority of the members of Congress who supported the law, nor the president, to somehow change the law with regard to federal dollars. You know, that's the Hyde language. There was no interest in changing that language at all. But recognizing we were doing some changes, so I—how can you finesse things so those people will have confidence that we're not changing anything, yet still accomplish what we wanted. Well, this became not just a vote—not just an issue for, like, members of Congress dealing with their constituents, it also became an issue within the Democrat caucus because we have—there's a substantial number of Democrats—Democratic elected officials that are pro-life and—which is part of the broad base of the Democratic Party. So there was discussions—"How can we make them comfortable with what was going on in the bill and understanding it?" [03:23:39] So

this was fairly towards the end of this thing. You may recall that Ted Kennedy—you know, Bart Stupack got his language in the House bill that was helpful to the pro-life community. They liked that language, so it goes over to the Senate. Then Ted Kennedy passes away after the Senate had passed their version. So big chunks of the bill could not go to conference because there was no longer sixty votes. There was only fifty-nine votes 'cause Ted Kennedy had passed away. So then partly—I think mostly through Nancy Pelosi's leadership, there was a way worked out that—"Well, no, if we vote the Senate bill parts of it—other parts of it can be done—some aspects of it through the budget reconciliation process, but we'll have to accept a lot of language in the Senate bill. It won't get changed." So then there became—I know this is a lot of inside the park stuff, but . . .

SL: No, it's good.

[03:24:28] VS: But there then became a big issue. The pro-life community really liked Bart Stupak's language. A lot of the Democratic pro-life House members liked Bart Stupak's language, but that was gonna go away if we voted on the Senate bill. So I was trying to understand the differences, and so I called—I had my staff call—Katie Hargis, I guess, called the Congressional Research Service. It's our—they're our folks—and said, "Send a lawyer over here to explain this to me 'cause I don't understand it." And so I—we sat down with one of these lawyers, and I started getting the feel of, okay, the difference between the House bill and the Senate bill and what's it doin' and all." And I

started feeling more comfortable that the Senate bill was actually going to be as good as Stupak's language and that the pro-life community didn't have any reason to—shouldn't have any reason to fear it, although I understood why they did, because it's hard stuff to understand. [03:25:21] And so then I, at some point, made an announcement to the caucus that—"You know, this may be worthwhile—that I'm gonna have this guy come back and meet with a few more people and this lawyer and everything and—but we'd like it if you could come join us." Well, some did, so I had another meeting in my office. This one was bigger now. I had several members of Congress that—for whom the pro-life position was important to them, including Bart Stupak. And I had my staff there, and there were some members who'd sent staff members, so this poor little lawyer who's used to sitting in an office by himself writing briefs for members of Congress who probably don't read 'em much has like—it's like he's holding a trial. Well, there's probably about thirty people in my office. [03:25:59] So we're discussing about this stuff and going back and forth and, you know, not really resolving anything much. And the folks that were supportive of the Stupak language were very sure that that was the best way to segregate funds and keep government funds from buying abortion coverage and all this kind of stuff. And at one point, one of my young staffers—she was, like, twenty-two—well, I'll tell you her name—Melissa Tuttle. She's in law school now. So toward the end of the thing, she raises her hand, and she said, "May I say

something? May I ask you a question?" "Okay." She said to the lawyer—she said, "Isn't it true that when somebody gets the government money subsidy under the House bill, that that check comes to the person, and then they pay the premiums?" He said, "Yes." "And isn't it true under the Senate bill that if a person qualifies for the subsidy money, the government money that is the money we're concerned about—that that doesn't go to the individual, it goes directly to the insurance company?" And he said, "Yes." She said, "Well, doesn't that mean, then, that under the Senate language that the government money is clearly more segregated than it could ever be under the House bill? Because if somebody got the subsidy in their checking account, they could immediately write it out for an abortion policy?" And we looked at all each other and said, "Yep, that's exactly what that means, that under the Senate language the money is clearly segregated and the government money can never go to buy this abortion rider policy because it will only go for—directly from the government to the insurance company for those policies that qualified on the exchange." [03:27:35] And we had that guy write that up and this James Oberstar and I, who's another—he's another pro-life Democrat—we distributed it to the entire caucus. Bart Stupak was sitting there, and I think it resonated with him and some of the others. But it was an example of, number one, a smart, young staffer who's probably gonna be a gifted attorney someday, but also the value of trying just to thrash out—what we were talking about before—try to

learn things and try to understand 'cause this is—you know, Moses did not put on gold tablets the right way to do these things. [03:28:12] But I think that gave a whole lot of comfort to pro-life Democrats on the substance of the bill. May not help them in trying to explain [laughs] why something that was so important to 'em in the House bill now is okay with 'em on the Senate side. But from the actual—for their gut and their own personal value system, it really did reassure them. No, you know, that—my young staffer was right—that that—those funds are more segregated under the Senate bill. And that's one of the, in my opinion, one of the big reasons why we had the votes to pass the Senate bill without the Stupak language 'cause once you realize "Oh, those funds are never mixed in with an individual's checking account. They go directly without the opportunity to ever buy an abortion rider policy." So that was my anecdote on the history of the health care bill.

SL: That's a great scene.

VS: Well, I may . . .

SL: You painted a great scene.

VS: . . . be wrong. I mean, there may be other reasons, but I think that was a factor in why there was some more votes there than people had anticipated.

[03:29:10] SL: I love that—all those folks together and the young un in the crowd.

VS: Intimidating that poor lawyer. [Laughter] No, he was a very nice guy.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Forget his name, but he was a very nice guy.

SL: Well, I mean—there was probably intense silence when she took the floor, I would guess, because if she hadn't spoken up and . . .

VS: Well, I think we would've missed that.

SL: Yeah.

VS: I think we would've missed that. [03:29:37] And it—there's probably time to comment a little bit on staffers. I mean, you know, House members don't have many staffers. Senators probably don't, either, given that the cover entire states, but . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . you know, we were limited, I think to, like, seventeen or something full-time staff members. And so you got to have an office back here, so that's, you know, four to eight or four to six. And so that gives you ten or eleven in DC. And you think, "Well, that's a lot." Well, yeah, you gotta have one to answer the phone. You gotta have somebody just to be kind of chief of staff to stay on top of administrative stuff and everything. And when you start thinking about all the challenges facing the country and the bills coming up—you've got a cadre of maybe six or eight people that are supposed to understand every legislative issue that comes before the Congress, deal with every constituent that comes in, prepare me for all kinds of things and speeches and everything. And you know, it really helps to have smart, energetic people willing to work long hours, and I was

blessed with a great group of people.

[03:30:37] SL: There is something about the role of staff in how successful an elected official is.

VS: Oh yeah, for sure.

SL: If you got bad staff or not effective staff or staff that's not paying attention . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . it can really bite. I mean, it can really hurt . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . the representation . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . that the people were expecting to get.

[03:31:01] VS: One of the things I pride myself on is—in terms of, I guess, life decisions in the workplace is I really—I have gained confidence through the years in my ability to find good people. And I think that has served me well. And by good people, I don't mean just subject-matter smart. I think that's part of it. But people who have a generosity of spirit about them in terms of being a team player who will be supportive of Arkansans when they come walkin' in the door or supportive of anyone that comes walkin' in the door who's confused about where they're at or whatever, will know how to deal with difficult people. But I have made a few mistakes along the way, but for the most part, I really think I did well and really helped myself by hiring good folks. I was very much involved in the hiring. Some members

don't. Some members say, "You're my chief of staff."

SL: "Put it together."

VS: "Get somebody out there for me." Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

VS: "And if it's not—if I don't like 'em, you're in trouble." But I mean, I can't operate that way. I've gotta have people that I'm comfortable with.

SL: You know . . .

[03:32:11] VS: The one lesson I learned, by the way, was for every position, require a writing sample. And by writing sample, I don't mean, "Oh, you brought in that. Let me look at that. Is this your brother-in-law's work down here in the right, the lower right?"

SL: Right.

VS: I mean, where I sit 'em down at a typewriter and—typewriter—at a computer and say, you know, "Give me a one-page letter on, you know, why the Congressman's not able to travel to Nova Scotia for the annual fishing convention of the cod fishermen this year." [*SL laughs*] And you'll be amazed in, you know, five or six sentences of somebody that has a college degree and a master's degree, and you were just about ready to hire him, and you think, "Hmm, doesn't even know how to use spell check or [*laughter*]"—you know." [03:32:53] You know, I just really—and I don't want to mock them because it is a problem if people are getting through college and even a master's degree and their writing skills are not to where we consider just kind of good,

professional writing, I mean, that's the fault of the—I don't think that's their fault. Nobody's ever told 'em. That's the fault of the institutions they came out of that somebody along the line didn't take 'em aside and say, "You may think life is nothin' but short emails, but people are gonna judge you by grammatical errors in your emails. We'll tolerate the occasional misspelling in email, but we won't tolerate terrible grammar in email and in a business letter. It's got to be professional." And I—that was one of the—once I make the decision, smart, substantive, generosity of spirit, hopefully some Arkansas connections, do my writing sample. And unfortunately that's [*laughs*] disqualified a few people.

[03:33:49] SL: That's smart, though, to do that. I always look for a thread of humanity . . .

VS: Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah.

SL: . . . in the language. I always look for the language first, and you know, I think spell check's important, but that's . . .

VS: Yeah. No, that—I agree with you. I agree . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . with that. Right. Yeah, I agree.

[03:34:11] SL: You know—where are we on the tape, Trey?

TM: Oh, probably about twenty, twenty-seven.

SL: Okay. We're kind of at a point where we're gonna have to cut you loose because you've got a birthday thing to do here pretty soon. And we've covered a lot of stuff—skimmed over a lot of stuff. One thing

that we have not talked about and we ought to talk about is your wife.

I think that . . .

VS: We . . .

SL: . . . it would be . . .

VS: Is it possible for us to do a one-minute break?

SL: Yes.

TM: Yes.

VS: Because speaking of my wife, I think I've heard my phone go off, and I better make sure that we . . .

SL: Okay.

VS: . . . don't have some issue there.

SL: Okay.

TM: Stopping tape.

[Tape stopped]

[03:35:56] SL: All right, we may have a child or two show up here at the . . .

VS: We'll see. Two fell . . .

SL: . . . in these last . . .

VS: . . . asleep here. Yeah.

SL: . . . few minutes, which would be a beautiful thing to have happen, so.

VS: There you go.

[03:35:08] SL: You know, I was going to say we haven't really talked a whole lot about your family. We've mentioned Betsy in passing from time to time. And your children, that you have four children. Do you

want to—first of all, I think we should name your children and . . .

VS: They already have names. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well . . .

VS: I got one . . .

SL: . . . for the record—on the record . . .

VS: I gotta tell you this. I gotta tell you this. Okay, I'll—here's—here are their names. Charles Pennington Snyder, our six-year-old. We call him Penn. Wyatt Singleton Snyder, Aubrey Thomas Snyder, and who'd I leave out? Oh, Sullivan Bloomingcamp Snyder. So poor Sullivan got stuck with the Bloomingcamp name, but he'll go by . . .

SL: Sully?

VS: . . . you know, Sully B. or Sullivan B. Snyder or something but . . .

SL: Okay.

[03:35:59] VS: But the story I was gonna tell you about the naming of the babies—so we go in—Betsy starts developing preeclampsia and go in the hospital to have these babies. And she—they put her in the bed and give the steroids so we can sit there for, I think, a couple of days or something and schedule for the C-section. And so the neonatologist comes in and—sayin' hello and goodbye before the surgery. Well, I've got the names on three pieces of paper, and I said, "Here's what we want to do." Betsy was there—I said, "We need to give you these papers. Once those babies come out and they're all in their little things, would you just go down and lay a name by those babies? 'Cause we're not gonna get into a discussion about, 'Well, this one

looks more like a Wyatt. And this one [*SL laughs*—no, this one really looks like an Aubrey'" and—you know, I mean—said, "We're not gonna do that." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah, just go—just put 'em down there, and that'll be it." So I can't remember if it was that afternoon or that evening and he came to use to talk to us a minute, and he said, "Now, I gotta tell you somethin' about, you know, about what happened." I said, "Well, what happened?" He said, "I did what you told me to." He said, "I went down there and told the nurses what I was doin' and laid 'em down—they got into a discussion. Said, 'No, this one looks more like a Wyatt,' and so they start" [*laughter*]—so they moved 'em all around and named the babies. So they're . . .

SL: Well—but . . .

VS: So that's how they got their names.

SL: . . . the effect was it spared you all the . . .

VS: Oh, we . . .

SL: . . . discussion.

VS: I mean, how you just make a discussion—decision about "This one looks like a Wyatt."

SL: [*Laughs*] That's funny.

VS: So their names are Wyatt, Aubrey, Sullivan, and our oldest one is Penn. And they're all family names, which is why we ended up—I've got my Aunt Bee Wyatt, my Aunt Lois Sullivan, and Aubrey is from a family—it's a family name of Betsy's side of the family of the—fact, it was a nineteen-year-old kid in the early part of the century who died

of tuberculosis before he ever had children. His last name was Pennington, which is where Penn's name . . .

SL: That's a beautiful name.

VS: . . . came from. So yeah, yeah, it's a . . .

SL: Yeah, I really believe in doing that, too—taking names from the families.

VS: It really cuts down on the universe. You know, if you just say, "Well, these are it." You know, so [*laughter*] . . .

[03:37:57] SL: It does. It does. Well, tell me how you and Betsy met.

What were the circumstances?

VS: Well, I—this is kind of peculiar because I actually—you know, when you see somebody like a TV personality, like you happen to be in an airport and you run into 'em. It's kind of like, "Oh, hey, you're my friend. You member [*unclear words*]," then you realize, well, no, that was a TV thing. Betsy was at Pulaski Heights for years as an associate pastor, and they had a Sunday morning TV ministry. So I would sometimes see her on TV and watch her some. I mean, I wouldn't sit there and watch her whole sermons or whatever, but I would see her. And so I saw her someplace. I think it was the time that Tipper Gore came to Little Rock during that campaign and saw her someplace and said hello to her, but it was kind of like in the spirit of like I'd always known her. And I realized later, "Well, that was really not fair," 'cause I think the only time I'd met her was when I was watching her on TV. But that was probably the first time we actually said hello. [03:38:55]

But then Vino's tavern—Vino's pizza and microbrewery used to have this tribute to Louis Jordan. Are you familiar with Louis Jordan?

SL: Yes.

VS: African American out of Brinkley, Arkansas.

SL: Yes.

VS: "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't (My Baby)?"

SL: Yes.

VS: "Choo Choo Ch' Boogie." I mean, some . . .

SL: Yes.

VS: . . . songs like that. Just had an incredible musical talent, song-writing talent, acting talent who was—who had great success, but would've had phenomenal success it hadn't been for racism, you know. But . . .

SL: Right.

VS: Anyway, so they did this tribute to Louis Jordan, which was a lot of fun. And . . .

SL: At Vino's.

VS: At Vino's. Yeah, they did.

SL: Okay.

VS: And anyway, Betsy was there, and she was single at that time, and I was, and so we started talking, and I think that was a Saturday. And that following Sunday, the next morning, I went to her church service, which was at Quapaw Quarter United Methodist, and that was her second Sunday since being assigned there and—which was nice because I caught her at the very beginning of this new church that

went through phenomenal growth while she was there. And so I really got to see—is there a little boy over there?

TM: He popped in, and he popped out. He's around the corner. Hey, buddy.

VS: Hey, Sully, you can come here if you want. Come and sit on Daddy's lap.

TM: Yeah, come on in here.

[03:40:08] VS: So anyway, I got to see this phenomenal growth go on while she was there. And when we got married, we actually got married during a Sunday service, which I highly recommend for cutting down on the expenses of a wedding. But [*SL laughs*—you know, you d . . .

SL: Well, you got an automatic audience.

VS: Well, you—but you know [*laughs*] you do baptisms during a service and . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . you know—and all. So she—anyway, so we got married during the service. But that's—that was how we met.

[03:40:34] SL: Now, the first church that—where you saw her on TV—was that Vic Nixon's . . .

VS: Yes.

SL: . . . church?

VS: Yeah, she was Vic's associate. Yeah, at Pulaski Heights.

SL: Now, see Vic was my associate pastor and MYF leader in Fayetteville.

VS: Oh, is that right? Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I know Vic and Freddie well.

VS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So . . .

VS: She—and she's now at—but then we had the—and she was at Quapaw when we got pregnant with the triplets and realized—I forget how things were happening, but that it wasn't gonna work to have a si—at that time, a three-year-old and three new babies and be workin' on. But that was before we found out that she developed post-partum cardiomyopathy, and she went into congestive heart failure. After the delivery of the babies, we came home and—anyway, had to go back and was admitted to coronary care, and her heart function really went down. And there was—it can be very ominous sometimes for . . .

SL: Sure.

[03:41:33] VS: I mean, a third of the time they don't do well at all. Well—but she's—over the next couple years she gradually has gotten better and better, and her exercise tolerance is real good. She was on disability for two years and—but she, for about a year and two or three months now, she's been the full-time senior pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church at Mississippi and Evergreen. And that's a great group of people and good for the kids and all. And her heart's doin'—I think her heart's doing well. Now we just grapple the great American battle, which is with families with kids and two working parents, you know. How do you do all the events and all the things with kids and—you know, and right now we've got three that we just put 'em in

lockstep, but sooner or later they're all gonna go this one this way, this way, this way.

SL: That's right.

VS: We're gonna have—one of 'em will want soccer, one'll want stamp collecting, and you know, one won't be sleeping at night. I mean, so we'll have to address that. But [*snaps*] anyway, it's going well right now.

SL: They'll probably all three want soccer and all three want baseball and all three . . .

VS: No.

SL: No?

[03:42:36] VS: No. No, see, so here's what's going on, see. [*SL laughs*] Penn, from—I don't know—this—he's only six years old. This is his fourth year, maybe coming up on his fifth year, to start in dance.

SL: Cool.

VS: So Penn is big for his age. He's—I think he's—could be a good athlete. He's a great swimmer. His swim teacher is tryin' to get him to quit dance and start getting into swimming. But he loves ballet. And I say, "Penn, you like ballet?" "I love ballet." And so I got a six year old that loves ballet. Well, the other three are not gonna love ballet, so that means we got dance school, and so you know, so I'm not at all convinced that they're all gonna end up at the same place at the same time.

SL: I think you're gonna be busy for about the next ten years . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . with this.

VS: Yeah.

SL: Yep.

VS: I think . . .

SL: And you're gonna . . .

VS: . . . the next twenty.

[03:43:23] SL: You'll love all of it. [*Laughter*] Well, twenty. Yeah, that too.

Well, okay, that's good. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about your family?

VS: No, I think we . . .

SL: Before . . .

VS: . . . think we're covered on that.

SL: Okay. Okay. Well, what about your current job with Blue Cross?

How'd—how did that come about? What happened there?

VS: It was just—you know, when you make a decision not to run for election, then you realize you're gonna be unemployed, and you have young kids and—I mean, I had saved some money so it wasn't a panic, but you start thinking, "Okay"—I mean, I really wanted to stay in Little Rock. I mean, I've got family here, and I mean, Betsy's got these wonderful siblings that are—her—she has four—three brothers and a sister that average—they're between fourteen and twenty-two years older than she is. She was like the afterthought in the family.

So it's like having four sets of grandparents [*SL laughs*] for our babies,

you know? Even though . . .

SL: That's excellent.

VS: . . . you know, her mother's passed away. We don't—we're—I'm too old to have grandparents that are—my mother's gone. So they are a tremendous support, and they have other family members here, too. So we couldn't even think about, "Oh, there's a great job offer in" . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . "Nova Scotia," you know. We wanted to stay here. And so you know, it just—it turned out that, you know, Blue Cross approached me, and you know, I had looked at—was looking at some other things, too, and had some other pursuits I could have gone after, but I thought this was the best fit. And it's been—it's a very nice group of people. You know, they're a nonprofit insurance company. They really work hard at, I think, tryin' to make health care work for Arkansas. You know, what I mentioned before about somehow people think insurance companies want—figure out ways to keep from spending money. No, Blue Cross would really like it a lot if they could figure out ways to get doctors to spend more money, but spend it on the right stuff, to spend it on preventive care because ultimately they think that'll cut down on the big stuff down the line, like hospital . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . admissions and all. But they are very forward looking. I mean, they recognize that what's going on now is not sustainable as we're sitting here, August 2012, that we cannot keep solving it by adding

more money to health care, that no system has yet figured out to curtail the growth. But that we've got a—our quality's not as good. Our efficiency's not as good. Our access for Americans is not as good. We're not nearly as healthy as other parts of the world—that they want to be part of preparing for a healthier Arkansas and a healthier America. So it's a—I mean, it's a very complex enterprise, health care is, but Arkansas Blue Cross is in a time of great complexity in health care, so it's pretty interesting to be a part of it and very, very nice people.

[03:46:25] SL: Well, I'm so glad that you were able to give us this whole afternoon.

VS: Sure.

SL: I was worried that we might've been crossing your responsibilities that might—I don't know.

VS: Oh, we're good. We're good. Where did Sullivan go? Did he disappear?

TM: Yeah, he went back in.

VS: He got intimidated.

TM: Yep.

SL: Well, I think—it sounds like—well, number one, there's no question I believe you made the right decision. I can tell you that . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . how you feel—it looks like it feels really good for you to be here right now and . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . be with your family, and I don't know if your stress level has gone down some. I can't imagine that it wouldn't have, but . . .

VS: It's just the—yeah, I think in a lot of ways it has—just being on the road. I mean, like a few—a couple months ago Penn—I was here, and Penn rode his bicycle for the first time. You know, all of a sudden he just took off. And I was—rode with him and took him to school the next morning. I said, "Now you know, Penn, if I'd had that other job, I would—you would've just had to tell me about it on the phone. I wouldn't have seen it," you know. And it—you—those are the kind of things that—I mean, all parents miss things, but it—you can try to control that some.

[03:47:43] SL: Well, we may be at a good place to stop for today. I mean, I don't want to cut you off in the middle of anything or—where are we, at about ten minutes left on tape?

TM: Thirteen.

SL: Thirteen minutes? Well, we can talk for another thirteen minutes.

VS: Yeah, I don't know if you—there's a—there was a couple of things I was gonna mention. I don't know if it's—it's kind of backtracking. I don't know if you . . .

SL: Backtrack.

VS: It's fine?

SL: Do it.

VS: Yeah, I—you know, we kind of passed over the state legislative . . .

SL: Yes.

VS: . . . stuff pretty—well, we passed over everything pretty quickly. But I was gonna mention in terms—just in terms of the legislative work. You know, people sometimes say, "Well, what did you—what are you most proud of in your legislative career?" And I actually go back to my time with the state Senate, when I got involved in drunk-driving legislation. Stacy Sells, I think, had a lot to do with that. I don't—her first husband was killed by a drunk driver, Tim Brewer. But also as somebody who worked emergency room and saw a lot of bad stuff from . . .

SL: Sure.

VS: . . . drunk driving and all. [03:48:46] But so, like, ar—in my first session Arkansas's underage drinking, you know, the no-tolerance bill. That was my bill that passed and became law. And then it took a couple sessions, but the administrative license revocation bill that now makes it much more difficult for people accused of drunk driving to keep postponing their trial date and keep their license. It's getting more drunk drivers off the road. And then I played a role in this—it was not my—I was not the lead sponsor, but I carried on the Senate side that had to do with authorizing interlock devices so that people who've had previous arrest records—I think it's still a law in Arkansas—they have to blow into something to actually prove that they're—there's different ways—one that you blow in and it does it quick.

SL: And that blood . . .

VS: Blood or the . . .

SL: Or not blood, but . . .

VS: When you have to poke in a code . . .

SL: Yeah.

VS: . . . and if you can't—if you're—you have trouble doing that if you've reached a certain level. But I mean, I think it's those kinds of things of—you know, I think there are people now roaming around that are just celebrating life today that have no idea that they might have been killed by a drunk driver if we hadn't passed, you know, those kinds of laws. So I think that's a—that's, I think, the good side of public policy. You can sometimes be part of something—of a team of people and interest groups that probably were motivated by very tragic events in their life to try to get good legislation passed to cut down on the carnage on the highways. [03:50:10] But—and then I wanted to mention at the congressional level—I don't—and I mentioned it briefly, but I thought I'd talk about it a little bit more. We got—I got my staff and I involved in some international issues that were kind of like the—I call 'em, like, the con—the real complex, ongoing conflicts that—kind of the world is kind of, for the most part, doesn't think much about. And we—in a very systematic way kind of started poking at 'em some just to learn more and to be helpful if we could to try to resolve 'em. [03:51:07] One of 'em was this ongoing issue between Eritrea and Ethiopia. They had the terrible—the worst trench warfare since World

War I, and I mentioned having gone up there. But they still have not resolved those issues. They've gone back to war again, and I won't go into detail about that but—in my involvement in some of that stuff. But you know, we made a very aggressive effort to stay in touch with both the Eritrean-Ethiopian ambassador and just try to keep learning about what is going on so they felt like he had a conduit for this—the congress—the same issues came along that were important to them. [03:51:28] Another issue was the—in a very—fairly remote way, but at least some way with the issue in Cypress. I had one staff member who took two different trips to Cypress. One sponsored by the Greeks Cypriots and one by the Turkish Cypriots. And they kind of went to the same places, but heard dramatically different stories of what had occurred, you know. Because you—it's one of those areas of the world that it's still in conflict and great division. And most of the world goes on without thinking much—surely much—most of the American Congress goes along without thinking much about it, and I don't fault them. There's a whole lot of things that I don't think about that other members are thinking about. [03:52:07] We also looked at the ongoing issues with the government of Morocco and a remnant of a movement that's free now—pretty much based on the border with Algeria that's been a remnant there—been there for decades, and there's refugee camps there that I've had one of my staffers go—more than once have her go into those camps and also visit on the Moroccan side. And we've had representatives of both sides come and talk to

us, and we try to learn about it and try to be helpful to whatever international efforts or American efforts there are to try to resolve those. [03:52:45] But that was—it was something that my staff really liked and those—I think those diplomats that represented those areas appreciated having somebody taking an interest in a way that really try to learn about it. So it was at a time when I wasn't traveling because of the kids, but I could have my staff do traveling, and I felt like—you know, nothing got solved, but that it was a productive way to—you know, at least try to learn more and have a . . .

SL: Continue the discussion.

VS: . . . place in common with a continued discussion and be a way of helping inform the Congress about some of the things that was going on. And so to—and that's something you asked—relates a little bit to your question before about—well, all the animosity in Washington. Yeah, but I think every member of Congress has certain things they do that don't relate at all to that animosity. They may have a project that they can work on a bipartisan way, you know. [03:53:45] I mean—for example, they're both Republicans and Democrats that feel very strongly about the need for additional funding for research, you know, regardless of what they think about all the other issues. Well, this was a niche that I have carved out for myself that I've enjoyed and that would have continued and could have continued regardless of what was going on with minority or majority control.

[03:54:09] SL: Could ask you about the debt and how the . . .

VS: You know, I meant to say that. I meant to talk—to touch on that when we were talkin' about the health care bill.

SL: Yeah.

VS: Because I mentioned to you the things that we heard that we were debating that I just thought weren't true at all, like . . .

SL: Right.

VS: . . . death panels and all. I think it is completely valid for people to be skeptical about, "What is this gonna look like fiscally down the line?" And you know, all I can say is we have looked at this stuff and look at CBO's scoring. We looked at what happened in [19]97—one of the reasons in 1997 that we ended up having such budget surpluses the last three years of the Clinton Administration, we were paying down national debt so fast. Alan Greenspan testified he thought we were paying it down too fast and it might have ramifications for the economy 'cause we were pulling so much money out of the economy, which is—seems like a dream now. But one of the reasons that happened is because some changes were made in health care that dramatically saved money—much more dramatically. So things don't always have to work, you know, worse than you expect. Sometimes they can work better . . .

SL: Better.

VS: . . . than you expect. I mean, you can't bet on that. But the reality is whatever happens will not be exactly what people predict. It'll either be better or worse. And so I fully appreciate peoples' concern about,

"Well, how much is it gonna cost?" My only rebuttal is, "What we're doing right now is costing too much. If we do nothing, it will not get better. We've got to do something, and part of that is to get the people to have skin in the game to go into ER and go into—you know, UAMS, I think the last I checked had 16, 17 percent of their patient care not being paid for because of they're getting so many people without any insurance. [03:55:54] But I think people who raise, "How are we gonna pay for that?—I think that's completely a hundred percent valid because health care is such a big part of the economy, and we just have to—but we have to make it work. We all want health care. We want really good quality health care. Right now we haven't figured how to pay for it, we have nowhere near the quality we—that we ought to have. We are no longer—we are nowhere living the way we ought to in terms of our eating habits and exercise habits and smoking and seatbelt—I mean, all those things we all know we ought to do. So we have a lot of work to do in health care, and if we do all these things, we have to do it in such a way that it's fiscally sound. And so I appreciate people thinking that's an important issue. My own view is we did as much as we could to get us goin' in that direction on this bill, but if it seems to be not going that way, then we gotta do things to make it . . .

SL: Make it work.

VS: . . . to make it be fiscally sound. And if we ultimately do that, if it's successful, then it has other ramifications, too, which is if the health

care law will work like I hope it will, American business will do better in their ability to compete internationally because most of our international competitors do not have the health care expenses. So you know, the best example is always—that we use is cars. US car manufacturer going against a foreign manufacturer—they're at a \$1,600 or so per car deficit right out of the blocks because of health care costs for current employees' families and retirees. We've got to figure out a way to get that more level, and that's by improving quality, getting more efficient, and at least kind of leveling it so it doesn't keep going up and up and up 'cause for the American businessperson, the most unpredictable part of their budget is their health care costs. If they want to keep providing health care insurance for their employees. What's that gonna be next year? It's very unpredictable.

[03:57:46] SL: Yeah, as an employee, I get those notices . . .

VS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know. So I can see that—how that affects everyone. Well, good, we got that in.

VS: Are we done?

SL: Well, I think . . .

VS: We're about out of time.

SL: . . . we're at a place where we oughta honor your request to . . .

VS: All right.

SL: . . . get you to the birthday party.

VS: Yeah.

SL: And I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed this.

VS: Well, good.

SL: I hope you've had a good time with it.

VS: Yeah.

[03:58:12] SL: I hope that we get back together, and you can finish up with whatever we didn't get to.

VS: Yeah, if you want to think about that and look at what we have, and we probably . . .

SL: Okay.

VS: . . . have things that . . .

SL: Okay.

VS: If you want to do that.

SL: You can come visit the Pryor Center.

VS: Yeah, I need to do that anyway. Yeah.

SL: Yeah. We're tryin' to get into a building on the square.

TM: Want to stop tape?

SL: Yeah, let's stop tape.

TM: Stop tape.

[End of interview 03:58:37]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]