

## Interview with James Frazier

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: How did you get involved with the Obama campaign?

Frazier: Okay. I met Barack Obama when he was a state senator through Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn. So, I had met him. We were in Springfield a couple of different times, he did some beneficial veteran's legislation, I think, so we met. We both smoked cigarettes. And he never had any. (Mark laughs) So, more than once I ended up in the parking lot with him, while he bummed cigarettes and we chatted. I found him to be tremendously engaging and probably one of the most intelligent, smart man I ever talked to. The guy is scary smart and can put concept together quite well. Then he got—I wasn't involved in his senatorial campaign at all. He got elected and I saw him a couple of times. Talked to him a couple of times. Went to Washington a couple of times and made some recommendations about legislation for a particular—ah survivors.

DePue: You told me over lunch that you and Carol Ann had a chance to go to his office, one time.

Frazier: Oh, actually, that was Joyce and I. That was before I got divorced and went to his office, yeah, took her, yeah.

DePue: And he found time to talk to you?

Frazier: Oh, yeah, yeah. I told you, one of the things about being a Gold Star Dad is people usually answer you. People usually are very accommodating. I dropped in on him one time in Washington. He came out and sat with us for twenty

minutes. My ex-wife kept saying, we shouldn't be here. I said, no, he works for us! We can be here. (both laugh) But, Barack is a very nice guy. He's very charming, personable guy. But, I suggested some legislation, some issues about hiring, putting Gold Star Parents—getting the same points that veterans get. Also, the G.I. Bill issues. Jake was killed but he had the right to an education and when you don't have a dependent, poof, it's gone. So, I think siblings ought to have the opportunity to get it instead of restricting only to dependents. But, that's for another conversation. And then what happened, I don't know. I would do some public speaking and stuff and I did Memorial Day in Chicago and I think that's where they saw me. The Democratic National Committee contacted me. I did an opening for them at the Hyatt in Chicago. I got a call and was asked to do the opening down at Springfield when they announced Joe Biden as his running mate. Myself, and the mayor of—you want to hear a bad back story? The mayor down there at the time was also a stone-cold alcoholic and ended up committing suicide a year later.

DePue: Tim Davlin.

Frazier: Yeah, you know him. Yeah.

DePue: I remember hearing the news on the radio when I was on my way to Champaign.

Frazier: Yeah. Nice guy.

DePue: He'd gotten himself in trouble...

Frazier: Money

DePue: Extorting money from the Catholic Church, I believe.

Frazier: Yeah, ninety thousand bucks. So, I did the introduction for Joe Biden and Barack and I guess they liked it. I did another speech or two. Then I got a call and was asked to be at Grant Park on election night. By this time, now, I'm with Carol Ann. Carol Ann and I went down there. It was just insane. I mean, I'd never seen anything like it. A hundred TV cameras and three hundred thousand people or however many people there were there. And that big stage with all the flags. So, we're sitting there waiting, myself, the reverend and the singer. I think the reverend went out first or maybe the singer did, I don't remember. They did their thing. I went out and did a short little opening speech and then led everybody in the Pledge of Allegiance. Then, I said you know, waiting for our President-elect Barack Obama, crowd goes crazy. We went back stage, and in a few minutes later he and kids and everybody and Michelle showed up and went out. That was huge. The walk from the back of that stage out to the podium, if you can picture that? That had to be sixty feet. That was the longest walk I have ever—oh, my God. I'm walking out there and I'm looking; and all the camera lights were over here. There are people over here and over here, it was...I'm like oh, man. When I got to the podium, you'll love this; I left my regular glasses in my coat pocket and I was wearing my reading glasses, which turned out to be a benefit because most everything was a blur, except for people right in front of me. I'm looking down at Brad Pitt, Stedman, Oprah, I can't...Oh, yeah, Jesse Jackson and Junior and I can't remember who else. I'm like they're like right there in front! That was interesting.

DePue: You can't help but realize you're part of history in that moment.

Frazier: Oh, yeah! Yeah! Yeah, I got this great—Rob Johnson on Channel 2's a friend and Rob had a nice DVD made for me of it. It was really cool. Yeah, that was fun. We got done doing that and at Christmas time I'm with the family and Carol Ann and we announce to them we're flying to Vegas the day after Christmas to get married and couple of minutes later my phone rings and it's one of Obama's guys in Washington I know and he said, he wants you at the inauguration. You're coming. Okay. I went back inside and told my family I said, by the way, we're going to honeymoon in Washington at the end of January. (Jim laughs) We're going to the inauguration. Telling her right then and there. They're all like, come on, seriously, what are you talking about. I said, no, seriously, that was just Obama's people called. We had a wonderful time there. Went to all the balls, Commander in Chief Ball was my favorite.

DePue: Did Carol Ann have to get a brand-new dress for all of that?

Frazier: Oh, my God, yes. (both laugh) Oh, yeah. We get there—this is—I hate to even say this, we had a handler. (both laugh) I hate to even say that. You had a guide. We got there on Saturday. Sunday, we went to the big concert and he's like okay, you're going through this entrance here's your credentials and stuff. We had seats for that. For the concert and oh, my God.

DePue: Was this an outdoor concert?

Frazier: Oh, yeah, it's phenomenal! Oh, the entertainers, you'll never see them all together again. It was unbelievable. If ever look at a video tape of that, it was just fantastic. I mean, this guy took care of everything for us. That day, though, he says, by the way, you're going to RFK Stadium tomorrow because Michelle

is doing a tribute for the troops packing boxes and stuff like that. And by the way, you're going to open for her. I'm like...

DePue: Open, as in give the introduction?

Frazier: Yeah, do the opening speech. I'm like you were going to tell me this when?  
(both laugh) That night in the hotel, I'm sitting there trying to write something out. Carol Ann was great. She would go, how many times have you written a speech? I mean, a whole speech. I said, never. Once in a while I'll use 3 x 5 cards with just ideas. She goes why are you trying to do it now? She's going to screw it up or throw it away tomorrow. I said, okay, fine and I gave up. Well, I did the opening for Michelle and it was fine. Nobody threw anything at me, so, and I did okay. And then I do one or two other openings for them after that.