

# Interview with Bernie Schoenburg

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, March 9, 2009. My name is Mark DePue; I'm a volunteer with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, working on a project on Governor Jim Edgar. Bernie, you're my second interview. I interviewed Mike Lawrence, one of your colleagues in journalism, just this last week, and thoroughly enjoyed that and expect just the same in talking to you today. So good morning.

Schoenburg: Good morning.

DePue: We always start with the basics: when were you born; where were you born?

Schoenburg: June 26, 1954 in Chicago, Edgewater Hospital, which I think closed a couple years ago. Hillary Clinton was born there, too. I lived in Evanston. My parents had recently moved to Evanston, to a home in which my father still lives. He's always had the same telephone number for fifty-four years. DePue: Well, that's convenient.

Schoenburg: It is.

DePue: What did your father do?

Schoenburg: My father, William, was in the wholesale produce business with a family business, Louis Schoenburg & Sons—L-o-u-i-s—on, I think, the South Side of Chicago. He was one of eleven children, nine brothers. I think they all at some point or another worked at that business. He ended up leaving that business when there was only he and one other brother still in it, when he was about forty. Then he became an insurance agent, got a try-out and made it for Prudential, and made a good career out of that for thirty years. He retired when he was seventy two, and he's now ninety.

DePue: When did he go into the insurance business? What year?

Schoenburg: Well, 1940, so that would be...let's see. Something like...something like near fifty years ago. Wow.

DePue: So then you were growing up while he was an insurance agent...

Schoenburg: I was growing up. I was six or eight. No, I was probably about six, that's right, so probably about 1960. Yeah.

DePue: I know you'd like to tell us a little bit about your mother, and I certainly want to hear that story, so...

Schoenburg: Well, my mother—

DePue: Her maiden name.

Schoenburg: Was Youngman.

DePue: Her first name?

Schoenburg: Edith Youngman. Y-o-u-n-g-m-a—I think she used one N, although her parents, I think, used two, or someone in the family did. But they were from Austria. She grew up in a small town not far from Vienna and was an only child.

DePue: When was she born?

Schoenburg: She was born in, I'm thinking '26. Let's see, she died in October of '08. She was eighty-two, so...yes. They had pretty much an idyllic life there, that she sometimes stayed with her grandparents; they had a store, and her father, I think, drove a truck some. He had various jobs. They were Jewish in a town that had almost no Jews, but when the Nazis came, they were evicted—basically told to leave their home within a day or two—went to live with relatives in Vienna, ended up...

DePue: That would've been about 1938, '39? Because the Nazis took over Austria in 1938, so...

Schoenburg: Yes, I think it was '38. They ended up getting some money to do things like buy visas and try to bribe people who would move refugees around; I think that came over a period of years. But they were refugees. They lived in Brussels for a while. My mom worked in somebody's home, didn't have a lot of food, I think taught some children a little bit, just during the day as part of taking care of them. Learned French because she was very nimble—she was a teenager. They ended up...

DePue: The whole family was there?

Schoenburg: The whole family was there, and I think that her parents got employed in various ways. My daughter is named after my grandmother Elly, although her name was Gabriella from the old country. We decided on Elyse, but to name her after her so they could both be called Elly. My grandmother was always very good with making clothes. She was also a hard worker, talked about the fifty-pound or -kilo sacks that she would carry of—maybe it was 100, I don't know—heavy things. She was a strong woman, very hard worker. But she was always a seamstress. She could make dresses. She made most of my mother's clothes when I was growing up. But she would work. I'm not... probably some kind of physical labor that my grandfather found there. They were in Brussels for a while. I think they sold off some of the family jewelry or used it as bribery. They were also getting some money from one of her uncles, who was already in America, because he had come in the early thirties and got a good job; he became a buyer for a department store in Chicago. He would send money, which helped them book passage to America eventually. But they were smuggled across Germany one night and shot at going over a wall, and lived in the hills of France for a while.

DePue: Was that after the Germans had invaded Belgium and France, then?

Schoenburg: They were in Belgium when the Germans invaded Belgium. My mom remembers seeing what looked like a bunch of birds or something. She said the sky was full—it was apparently the airplanes coming that started bombing. So they took a train ride out of Belgium. It's interesting, because I didn't know I was going to go into all of this. (chuckles) I had interviewed her some, doing what you do, over a number of years, just a couple of times—but I had put some things together, and I had written a column in 1984, when Reagan went to Bitburg. Then I wrote a column again upon her death, which was kind of an update of that, with some information from a subsequent interview that I had done with her, and also an interview I had done with her mother back in the eighties. So I'm not exactly sure of the timeline, although I think I had it there pretty well. But yeah, they had to leave Belgium when the Nazis came there. That might have been when they were smuggled and were taken in by people in the hills of the Pyrenees, I think, in France.

DePue: So way in the south of France.

Schoenburg: Yeah. As she tells it, she believed that the people weren't particularly happy to be taking on these refugees but thought they were told to do so. She ended up staying, I think in a stable—possibly like a crawl space underneath a barn. They were in some building that had animals in it, which may have even been the farmhouse itself, but it wasn't a great situation. While they were there, they were separated from her father, who somehow had been taken away and put in a camp.

DePue: Well, if I can, you mentioned in the article that you wrote at the time of your mother's death that soldiers came to the house and asked for your father. And I assumed that the soldiers—

Schoenburg: My grandfather, her father.

DePue: Your grandfather. Yeah, I'm sorry. But these would have been Belgian soldiers.

Schoenburg: I had always assumed they were German soldiers, but I'm not sure at that time...because I'm not sure I asked that question, so... You know, we're a few years out from when it occurred.

DePue: Sorry to put you on the spot, Bernie.

Schoenburg: No, that's okay.

DePue: What happened to them after they were in southern France?

Schoenburg: Let me recall. My mother befriended, somewhere near where they were living, a teacher, who ended up working with them to write letters to try to find out where her father was. They ended up locating him in some kind of detention camp, and I believe my mother and my grandmother went to visit him. I know he was ill or injured. He had an infected leg, I think, that she has talked about. From then on, I think they were able to visit him from time to time as they were staying in another camp. I know they were in—she called them detention camps, because they weren't like death camps in Poland or Germany, but they were places that Jewish refugees were being put and being fed very little. Clearly the security was not as bad as some places because she talks about leaving in the middle of the night sometimes with another girl to go either beg for or pay something for bread from the truck drivers, from the bread trucks, so she could bring it back and share it with the family.

DePue: These camps sound like they would have been run by the Vichy French government, then.

Schoenburg: That was probably the case. I know the names of those two cities. Agde, A-g-d-e, and Rivesaltes—I don't know how to pronounce that, exactly—R-i-v-e-s-

a-l-t-e-s—which I believe are both places that have become tourist locations—you know, beautiful and not in war. But she talks about having just a bowl of soup and a piece of bread or something in a day, and very bad nutrition. They ended up—I think because of money that continued to come from Uncle Karl Youngmann, who was in America—being able to book passage on a ship which left out of Morocco. Now, at some point, they were in Marseilles as well and lived there for a while, because I know she and her mother had enough money—and I don't think it was much—to see operas there. So there was some kind of European life going on in the middle of this, but I'm not sure exactly of the sequence.

But they were able, once reunited, to book passage on this ship which left out of Morocco. She believes that when they left Marseilles, that everybody else who was left—they stayed in kind of a holding hotel for a while, where people were waiting to book passage, and when it came through, they left. She believed that she was about the last group of people allowed to leave and that others who were left behind, they had them sent back to death camps. I mean, that's at least what she believes.

DePue: Bernie, this gives a whole personal meaning to the movie *Casablanca*.

Schoenburg: (laughs) Well, there you go. You know, I'm not a great student of history as you. It's interesting, my mother was not shy about talking about this, but she made no big deal about it, because they did book passage. [In]1942, [they] arrived in Baltimore on a ship called the *Nyassa*, N-y-a-s-s-a, which is interesting, because when I put that in an article after her death, a friend of a friend who is a lawyer, writing about a refugee that he knows who had discovered a brother years later, had come to America on the very same passage on the very same ship and was intrigued but saddened that he hadn't been able to talk to my mom about that for a book he was working on. But yeah, it was quite a history. My mother, once in America, was still a teenager, had a goiter when she arrived, from malnutrition.

DePue: She was living in Chicago at the time?

Schoenburg: After they arrived in Baltimore they moved immediately to Chicago where her uncle lived, and they moved in with him and his wife. They stayed there I think for a couple weeks or months and then got an apartment of their own because they all went to work, including her. It was decided by her and/or her family that she would help pay back the money that had been sent to them—which they did pay back. But she never ended up going to high school, other than night school to learn English, and she went to a lot of movies to learn English. My friends when I was growing up didn't even know she was foreign because she spoke perfect English. So.

DePue: What was it like, then, having parents who had lived during the Second World War? Your mother had seen the ugliest side of humanity, if you will. How did that affect your childhood growing up?

Schoenburg: I was born in 1954. America was building a lot of highways and doing fine. We had our little 1,000-square-foot house; it was walking distance from a very good school in the suburb of Evanston. I lived three blocks from the city of Chicago. So I just thought it was kind of a perfect family and everything was fine. It didn't affect much other than I knew the heritage. I went to the temple and the Hebrew school in the neighborhood, in one building, so I was aware of that heritage. My mom would talk about it just a little. She didn't dwell on her past, because we were all about just being outside and playing with the kids in the neighborhood and going to school. So it was just kind of normal.

DePue: Ozzie and Harriet type of normal?

Schoenburg: Well, I thought so. You know, I look back, and I would have changed a thing or two. But it was a pretty stable childhood.

DePue: I don't know how to phrase this, but do you recall that your parents, your mother especially, did they have particular views about the United States because of where she had come from and where she had landed?

Schoenburg: I think it was her who said that they always used to be told when kids that the streets were paved with gold here, and then they were somewhat surprised that you couldn't just look down and get a chisel and become rich. But I think they had a pretty good attitude about it. We did not have a particularly easy time when I was growing up, which I do think helped form where I'm at, because when my dad was working in the produce market, I know there were good times and bad times, at least to some extent. We did have a lot of boxes of fruit that would come home with him. I'm the only kid I know who used to eat pomegranates from time to time. (DePue chuckles) I think my mom was in charge of the bills, and I do think the amount that my dad at some point was making was about forty dollars a week. So we were not affluent. We would go to a restaurant, maybe once a month, and it was always a place that served chicken and french fries—Chicken in the Rough—that was about the fanciest restaurant I was at until I was eight. I never went on a vacation until I was, I think, six or eight, and it was to Lake Geneva [Wisconsin]. We stayed in a rooming house that I think cost something like ten dollars a night, maybe it was eight, and we went to the grocery store to buy bologna (M – he pronounced it baloney) and bread to have for dinner.

So when he got into the insurance business, things got somewhat better. There was actually a transitional period of, I had thought it was a year and a half, but it might have been eleven months, where he worked three hours a day at McDonalds during the lunch rush, where he would serve customers at the

window. A lot of people thought he was the boss because he had gray hair—he was kind of an early gray—and distinguished-looking. Then he would work at night at the Evanston Bus Company, which was before the CTA took over Evanston, cleaning buses and running them between things. So we did not have any kind of lavish upbringing. I remember going into stores all the time and wondering, Who buys all this stuff, because we certainly can't.

When he got in the insurance business, though, that started the process where he sold enough—he became a good salesman, although he's not a big talker—he's kind of a man of the fifties—but he believed in the product he was selling, and he could sell it. I used to listen to his sales training records at home, and my brother and myself and I think my mother, too, sometimes, would all sit on the living room floor and mail out 500 letters a week to try to help him get leads. But he always made the conventions, so those became our family vacations.

DePue: What was your brother's name?

Schoenburg: Louie—Louis—named after my grandfather.

DePue: So your brother is Louie, and Bernard turned into Bernie?

Schoenburg: Yeah.

DePue: Did you have [a] religious background growing up?

Schoenburg: Yeah. I mean, my father is originally from Chicago. His parents were from, we think, Lithuania. I'm pretty sure of that. Vilnius, I actually think. Because it was such a big family, there were some people who did histories. He was the tenth of eleven children, so I think his mother was around forty when he was born, and he was still not very old—certainly not beyond teenager—when his parents moved to Florida and he lived in Chicago with another brother and worked a lot. But they, I think, kept kosher in the home, and he learned Hebrew, did those things. My mother, despite the fact she was thrown out of a continent because of her religion, was very unreligious. Although culturally Jewish and happy to be, she never had any training in it, and in fact, sang in a church choir in her little town when she was a kid, because they might have been the only Jews in their small town—I think it was Brand—B-r-a-n-d.

But we did live in a neighborhood that was about three blocks from the temple, and my mother was very strong on us, and I think my dad, too. They wanted us to get the Jewish education. So we went to Sunday School and then Hebrew school, which at times involved three nights a week of class, plus Sunday, in addition to regular school. I was bar mitzvahed at age thirteen, and then I kept going for one more year to graduate from the Hebrew school program they had at that temple.

DePue: You have to help me out here. “Temple” would suggest you were Reform, then?

Schoenburg: Actually not. I think they’re all called temples or synagogues, but there are three main branches, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. This was a Conservative one, so there was a fair amount of Hebrew that I had to learn. The services on Saturday morning often went two and a half or three hours. I did a lot, especially around the time I was twelve and thirteen. Up to my thirteenth-birthday bar mitzvah, there was a time I was at that temple, which was Conservative, like seven days a week, because I would meet with the rabbi or the principal on Mondays for just my bar mitzvah training; I had class Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; I went to services Friday and Saturday; and men’s club on Sunday, which was also turned into—you’d have breakfast, and then a lot of the kids would hang around and play ping-pong. So it was intense for a while. When I went to high school, I kind of shifted into sports and took a hiatus from that kind of intensity.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about your high school years, then. Was this a public school?

Schoenburg: A great public school, Evanston Township High School. When I was in eighth grade, I think it was *TIME* magazine that called it maybe the best high school in the country. I’m not sure. Obviously the things shift and move. But it had 5,200 students when I was there. It was kind of built in an H shape, so there was a center hall and then four wings, and they had built an extra building onto each wing. They had a lot of construction, or had had, so part of the facility was very old and traditional and beautiful, and part of it was very new, and all the new labs and kitchen equipment, whatever you need. So it was a great school. There were, I think, twelve boys’ sports. There was just a lot of choice there: a big field out back, stadium across the street, swimming pool. They built the wrestling room when I was there. I was in wrestling in high school. So I took advantage of it, and I enjoyed it.

DePue: When you were in high school, what were you thinking in terms of life beyond high school, in terms of a career, college, things like that?

Schoenburg: I wasn’t thinking much. (both laugh) I was just doing. I was a pretty good student. I used to even think I was a very good student, and then when I look at one of my report cards, there were a couple of Bs on there, so I guess I wasn’t as perfect as I had remembered. It was in the age of the moon shot. I was in high school, I think, when that happened in ’69. So everybody was kind of concentrating on science. I was taking math and science. There was a great program at the school called Chem-Phys , where starting sophomore year, you’d have chemistry and physics with two teachers, but in the same class, that they would coordinate. I did that for two years. Some people took trig senior math as a senior, but I didn’t because I guess I didn’t want to work

that hard. So I took biology—Advanced Placement Biology was a course—and I think I had a math course, too.

It's interesting because now that I have children, one of whom is in college and one of whom is a junior in high school thinking of going to college soon, there's so much intensity on where you're going and how you have to get certain grades and take certain courses.

My father went to college for two weeks and then decided he didn't like it, partly because they almost paddled him in the frat [fraternity] that his brother dropped him off at with two dollars in his pocket. He went back home to the family business, which at that time looked like a good career. And my mother, of course, never had the opportunity to go to college and never actually even got a high school diploma, despite the fact she was one of the smartest people I've known. So the whole ethic was, You're going to college. It was not a question I was going to college, but I didn't know where, and I didn't really know the differences between schools.

DePue: But there was no ethic in terms of what your profession was supposed to be?

Schoenburg: Not really. It was open. I thought it was probably going to be something scientific, but I thought about it some. I knew I was always squeamish, so I knew I didn't want to be a doctor or anything like that. The law looked interesting, but I didn't give it a lot of thought because I was just living in the moment. I played soccer for four years in high school, and many years beyond, including college. I wrestled in high school and put a whole lot of energy to that because I would lose weight to get a lower weight class to have a competitive edge, and could think of nothing else. I was just going along, doing what I thought I should do at my age.

DePue: Well, you and I happen to be the same age. The other thing that was going on when you were in high school—you mentioned 1969 was the moon landing and all—but that's in the height of the Vietnam era. Any kid our age had to be thinking—young men—OK, what's going to happen to me after I graduate? Am I going to get drafted? Now, obviously, you went to college. Where'd you end up in college?

Schoenburg: Well, I ended up at the University of Illinois in Champaign. I will say that clearly the war was a part of things. I was not very political. We didn't have a lot of political discussion at home that I recall. My mother was very smart, read the *Tribune* cover-to-cover every day, once they started getting it, I think, probably about the time I was in grade school. She helped us with our homework a whole lot. But I don't recall any serious discussions of where the world is going, on a regular basis.

DePue: Did you have a sense of your parents' political leanings, what lever they would have pulled going into the...?

Schoenburg: I think because they were from Chicago, they were both Democrats. I mean, everything in the media was Democratic. My dad came from the north side of Chicago, so that's my impression. And my mom—I think that people thought the New Deal and FDR had kind of been a savior to people who finally came over. I'm not sure how historically accurate that all is, but I think that was where they would vote.

DePue: Did your parents at all, around the dinner table, talk about what was going on in Vietnam, or...?

Schoenburg: See, we almost never had that experience, because my brother and I would eat in the den, watching cartoons or other TV shows. My dad had his own schedule, because he often was out at night, seeing families, selling insurance. So Sunday mornings, sometimes we ate together, but almost never other than that.

DePue: Well, tell us a little bit more then about getting to college and what you found out about yourself and life once you got to college.

Schoenburg: Well, I will say that I just applied to three schools. Northern [Illinois University], where my brother had gone. My brother, by the way, had ended up going into the National Guard right [out] of high school. He's three years older than me, so the whole Vietnam-era thing was something that we dealt with in our family, and he dealt with it by getting in the National Guard, which at that time was a ticket not to—

DePue: It was not easy to get into the National Guard.

Schoenburg: It was not. I think my dad knew someone who he sold insurance with who was leaving a Guard spot who somehow, maybe there was a string pulled to get my brother to take that spot. But my brother got in, did basic training, got really sick there for a while, but got through it, because they didn't let you sleep much at Fort Leonard Wood, and ended up doing six years in the Guard. So [it] kept him out of Vietnam. When I graduated high school is right about the time Melvin Laird, the secretary of defense, I think, said, "The draft is over, but we're going to have one more lottery, just in case." My lottery number was very low, so I might have gone to Vietnam a year earlier, or gotten in the military, but I did not, and so that was the end of that, because the draft ended right at my year, when I turned draft age.

So I applied to [University of Illinois, Northern, and Illinois State University, which I had driven by with my soccer coach once; we had given a speech or a demonstration at Bradley and Peoria about how to have a soccer program, because we had a good soccer program and a lot of schools didn't. We drove back through Jacksonville and Normal because he wanted to show us a couple of other towns and colleges. Illinois State looked nice, and then I—

DePue: From the bus as you drove by?

Schoenburg: From the car. Yeah, there were like four of us in a car. Not a sophisticated college search. I'd never been to Champaign, but a lot of people were applying there, so I applied there, too. There was a lady down the block, Mrs. Rosenbaum, who was a lawyer by trade, who said, "[University of] Illinois is a better school; you should go there." So I did. That was pretty much my decision-making process. I got accepted to all three, and I went to one. When I went there, it was large. I think I lost my key for a while my first week, and I called my mom all upset because that was the first time I was ever away from home for any significant amount of time. She calmed me down, and I fell into things and started taking classes and figuring out the social life of a large campus.

DePue: You were majoring in what at the time?

Schoenburg: I was just in LAS, Liberal Arts and Sciences, general, because I had no idea what I wanted to do. It didn't bother me; I just had no idea.

DePue: I want to take one quick step back and ask you, who would you say was your most important influence in your life growing up, back in Evanston?

Schoenburg: Well, I would have to say my mother, just because [she was a] good person, always there. I never got into serious trouble as a kid because I told my mom everything, and she would know everything, what I was doing and where I was, and so...and we got along, almost always.

DePue: What was social life like, then, once you got to college?

Schoenburg: Well, part of the mother-watching in Evanston was I didn't even get invited to parties where people were doing things that weren't supposed to happen, so—

DePue: We're talking about 1972, '73, where there's...

Schoenburg: A lot of stuff going on. Yeah, I mean, I think I never even saw drugs in high school. I think they were there; I think I knew people who were involved, but I wasn't at those parties. I was student council president as a senior, when it had somehow become out of favor to do that kind of thing.

DePue: Out of a class of how many?

Schoenburg: Well, Evanston Township actually had four student councils. They had four principals all within the same building, but in the different wings. So I was the student council president of one of them, so it would have been about 300 kids.

DePue: That's still a sizeable class, though.

Schoenburg: Yes. Well, 300—actually, more than that. Yeah, it would have been like 1,200, including the four levels. Because I was my freshman class president; I lost sophomore year by three votes; and then I took a year off; and then I got back into it. Actually, there was an anti-government, anti-administration feeling growing because of the whole rebelliousness of the time. Actually, the principal asked me to run for student council president when I was a senior, late in my junior year, and I did. I was unopposed then, so you can tell that it wasn't kind of the active student thing; it was more like I was just a good kid.

DePue: You were the safe candidate.

Schoenburg: I think I was. Nobody else even wanted it. So I was fine, but I don't think I broke any great barriers of policy while I was in that office.

DePue: All of that suggests that again, once you get away from home and away from those influences and you're in a big college environment, that you're exposed to a lot of different things.

Schoenburg: I am. Because I tested well in things, I was exposed to five mornings a week of a very advanced calculus class; because I got into like—it was either honors or advanced. That was very hard. It took me about three weeks to find the bars. It was legal, somehow, in Champaign at that time, if you were eighteen and a college student with a college ID, to get into bars, so I did discover that life. Then I liked it a lot. The combination of that plus the very difficult calculus class with the teacher who spoke too fast in a British accent didn't hark very well for me. I ended up not catching as much as I should have of what was going on in that class or not keeping up with it enough. I tried, but it was very hard. I ended up getting a B, but I think it was because the curve was low.

DePue: Which suggests you weren't the only one who was struggling with—

Schoenburg: Yeah, I think a lot of people were struggling. It was a very, very rigorous course. U of I does have a lot of engineering students, and there's a lot of competition. I was not in the engineering program, but I know that a lot of people were told in certain classes, you know, Look around. Half of the people here will be gone soon, kind of thing. So it was rigorous. I was not used to not being a good student. I was a pretty good student in everything, but that class was particularly difficult, so I ended up transferring second semester into basically a lower level of calculus to finish up a year of calculus but going over some of the same stuff I had learned. That was all the calculus I ended up taking. So I do blame calculus in part for me being in journalism.

DePue: Blame or credit?

Schoenburg: Well, credit. You know, the way things worked out. I am somewhat of an impatient person, just as far as sitting in one place all day is difficult. Reporting has ended up being something where you can get up and move

around a lot, sometimes leave the building, most of the time. So I kept trying to envision myself doing an experiment that would take a year or two to get a result, and that seemed difficult, because watching all those TV shows as a kid, I was more into immediate gratification.

DePue: So all of these things are the things that were pushing you away from being a scientist or an engineer.

Schoenburg: Yes.

DePue: What were the things that were pulling you in a quite different direction?

Schoenburg: Well, I was caught up, not overtly, I don't think, but somewhat toward the movement toward freedom, social justice, in a different way, breaking out of the bonds of conformity, I guess. But again, I didn't join any big movements. I've always been strongly pulled toward justice as I see it. I need to go back to this, but to be wrongly accused of something, for example, it just drives me crazy, and I can't imagine how bad a situation it is for people wrongly accused of crimes. Because when I took auto mechanics in high school, one time Mr. Brown's chair—the teacher—was taken apart and put upside down in front of the class. He came into class and said, "I want everybody in this class..." I had taken auto mechanics because I needed a one-credit thing, and this was, you know, not a lot of honors kids in the class. He had shown my workbook once as the way to do it—"everybody should do it like Schoenburg"—and so I probably—

DePue: Which isn't necessarily a good thing.

Schoenburg: I probably didn't engender a lot of good feeling in the class that way. I'd used colored pencils, I think. He wanted to know who broke his chair and asked people to write it and then pass the pieces of paper up. Somebody said I did, and I didn't. He never believed I didn't. To this day, that's a killer. I don't know if Mr. Brown's still around—I don't think so. So I understood the need for justice strongly.

Well, (pause, sigh) it's very odd. I've always liked black music and thought that race relations was the major problem in this country. I had been working towards that feeling through high school. There was a lot of back-and-forth in Evanston—it was very interesting—because it's a very mixed community, so my high school was like 20 percent black, 20 percent Jewish.

DePue: But you weren't likewise motivated against the war?

Schoenburg: I think I was probably at that point, certainly not radicalized to the point that "our leaders are lying to us" or anything; I just didn't pay that much attention. No. Race relations, I could understand because I could see it, and I had actually had to work through it in my eighth grade, when I was the student council president there, and running a dance. The African-American kids at

school rose up because the music wasn't right; we brought on a black member of our committee with the music, and then pretty much all the music was black, and everybody was happy. I worked this out. Actually, it was my favorite music anyway, so it didn't matter. I had just been more of a personal witness to that issue, somehow.

DePue: How about personal prejudice against you as a Jew?

Schoenburg: There was a little, but not very much. There were a couple of guys in junior high who said a couple of things that led to a couple of incidents. Like one guy, in a very accusing manner in shop class, once called me "You Jew" or something, and I think I slapped him. We took judo together, so we kind of knew each other. That was a bad one. Then there was a guy with a German name who had said something. It was a little incident between us by the lockers once, and I don't remember what it was, but it was a little unpretty. So I felt it a little, but generally—like I said, it was 20 percent Jewish. My neighborhood was like 70 percent Jewish when I was in grade school and walking to school, just before busing started in Evanston. On Jewish holidays, out of twenty-two kids in my class, I think seven were there on Jewish holidays because everybody else was off. So it was a very odd...

DePue: You described in college, though, that you were drawn to the issues of civil rights. Were you active in any of those?

Schoenburg: No. Never motivated. I never took on more than just trying to be a good student and do the right thing. But I think you're asking maybe how I got into journalism, for example.

DePue: That's what this is leading to.

Schoenburg: Yeah, I know. Because as a sophomore at U of I, there was a situation. It was easy to go to the football and basketball games, because it would cost like twenty-two or twenty-four dollars a year for the activity pass. I did that because it was part of the campus life, and I enjoy sports. Football's another story, because I played soccer. They got all the money, and soccer got nothing at U of I, because it's still just a club for men. But at a basketball game... There had been a falling-out between the coach—I think his name was Harv Schmidt—and all the black players, and they had all quit, possibly the year before. We were playing another Big Ten school—it might have been Michigan—and there were some black players. I was sitting in the Assembly Hall, and people were basically shouting—if it wasn't racial epithets, it was making fun of the race of the other players. I ended up writing a letter to the editor, to the *Daily Illini*, about how bad that is. Just because our coach doesn't get along with black players doesn't mean we should be racist towards members of other schools' teams. It took me I think maybe an hour or two to write the letter. It was only about three inches long. It was the first time my name was ever published in a paper with my writing associated with it.

DePue: And the paper again was...?

Schoenburg: The *Daily Illini*, which was the—

DePue: The student...

Schoenburg: —the school paper, which had like 10,000 copies a day. I think it was free. It was either free or a dime. It might have been a dime. So that was my first writing, and it was on that issue.

DePue: What was your feeling when you saw your name in print?

Schoenburg: Well, I thought it was kind of cool. I guess there's some power in getting your thoughts out to a larger audience. I remember I used to listen mostly to the popular radio stations when I was a kid: the Chicago [stations] WLS, WCFL. I'd hear news reporters talking about something, and I thought, Wow, it impressed me that you could speak to a large audience.

DePue: Your major at that time? Was it still in the sciences?

Schoenburg: It was still in liberal arts. I had not moved along, I think. Basketball might have been first or second semester. I had a lot of extra credit hours or Advanced Placement hours or whatever. When I went to college, I had like twenty-two hours, so I basically had an extra semester under my belt before I got there. Most of it in Spanish because I had taken Spanish from sixth grade on and had done well in it and had enjoyed it. So I needed to declare a major by the time I was a junior, but I was a junior in the middle of my second year. So in going through the questions about what I want to do, this is where I ended up just kind of looking around. I don't even remember if I talked to a counselor. I wasn't very smart about this, and I didn't get a lot of guidance from home because my folks just weren't that familiar with the college scene. Very supportive, but I don't think they knew any more than I did about where you go for those decisions to be made. But I looked around, and I remember just reading something or seeing on a list and then looked up a book on public relations.

I, at that point, had decided, through my having been student council president of actually all three schools I'd been to from grade school on—grade school, junior high, high school—I had decided that I wasn't good at that because I wasn't really moving. I was actually too happy. I thought my family was perfect, and I thought school was nice and the administrators were fine people, despite the fact that I had run into a few promises where we got promises unkept; it hadn't quite dawned on me how much you have to advocate for things to make change. And I didn't really seek a lot of change because I was pretty happy. So when they wanted me to get into student government in college, I had decided against it. They wanted me to because I wanted a ping-pong table for our dorm, and I got our dorm council to get it so that we could have a ping-pong tournament, which I wanted to participate in,

which I did. So they thought I was a mover and a shaker, but really, I just liked ping-pong. (DePue chuckles) And I took second. So I stayed out of that.

But I wanted to move into some kind of a field that would allow me to deal more with people, because I wanted to develop that side. I just felt like, in studying the chemistry and then studying the calculus, I wasn't dealing with people, and I wanted to maybe learn how to be a better conversationalist or something. So public relations sounded good. So that was in the college of communications. It was in the advertising part of it; journalism was another part of it.

I just did it. I went into public relations, not even knowing what it really was. Then when I took the course in advertising and public relations and I was told, Well, if you're working for a company and something bad happens, here's what you don't say. I did have this feeling of justice, and not telling all the truth in a bad situation didn't seem right to me. But what did catch my fancy was a course that I took as part of getting into that field, which was news-writing for non-majors. I had a teacher named Lynn Slavonsky—L-y-n-n S-l-o-v-o-n-s-k-y, I think—who only was an instructor, I think, for six years, because he didn't want to do the writing and the research stuff; he just loved newspapers. He had ink in his veins, and taught a news-writing for non-majors course. He had come as a copy editor on the old *Daily News* in Chicago, which still existed, I think. I think he had newspaper files at his home. It was a lab course where, for example, he would stand up and say, "I'm the police chief. I'm giving you a report. Take notes; write a story." He'd give you the facts of a case, and you'd sit there and type on our manual typewriters.

One day, we came into class, he said, "All right, everybody go out, find somebody, interview them, come back, write a story, [and] turn it in by the end of class. The class, I think, was an hour [and] forty [minutes]. I interviewed a guy who was fixing a railing on the quad, and I pushed myself forward to talk to somebody. This is what I ended up [doing] for the rest of my life, imposing myself on other people and asking them questions, but it was very odd. But I got something out of it, and at the end of that class, I asked him if he thought I could make it on the *Daily Illini*, and he said he thought I could. So the next year—my third year in college—in new student week<sup>1</sup> I went to the *Daily Illini* and asked if I could do a story. Luckily, they said, yes, you could do this one story. They would just pay you by the inch per story, and you didn't have to get hired, because I clearly did not have the skills at that point to have been a full-time staffer. But I was given the opportunity to do one story on—well, it was a difficult economic time, and people were shifting majors into business, away from—

DePue: About '74, '75, then?

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<sup>1</sup> New student week is an orientation week before classes start.

Schoenburg: Seventy-four, I think—after my summer in Mexico, which is another thing. I did the story. I talked to the dean of engineering. That was a big deal for me. That was like the highest official I had ever spoken to. One of my roommates always made fun of me: “Hello, Drucker? Schoenburg, DI,” because he heard me make the call. I wrote the story, and then they liked it and assigned me basically to cover one meeting a week.

DePue: When you first talked about that experience of going out and imposing yourself on somebody, I got the sense that that was a little bit different or difficult for you. Is that not the case?

Schoenburg: It’s still difficult for me sometimes. I like to live and let live. I have a lot of respect for other people’s space, and when you’re a reporter, you are, in a sense, invading that space. I think the fact that I’ve fallen into, in the last twenty years, political reporting is better, because politicians want you to cover them. They expect it. So when they get your call, even if it’s an imposition, and I sometimes think it is, certainly at odd times, or in difficult times for them, it’s hard to make that call. But it’s a lot harder to go up to the person whose house is burning and ask them what they think of that.

DePue: Then that particular side of you doesn’t fit the stereotype of the reporter.

Schoenburg: You know, I’ve turned into someone who I think—and I judge this just when I’m around a bunch of colleagues at a press conference—I end up asking a lot of questions. I have good questions, and it’s based on what I’ve known over time. I don’t always think of the right ones; I love press conferences because other people ask good questions, and then you benefit from that. I’m often very thankful after the fact that I have talked to somebody as part of any kind of a story, political or not, because to get to know them is interesting. But I’ve never been the kind to just go up to a celebrity and start talking, so being a reporter has actually pushed me into interesting experiences I would not have otherwise had. I’ve always been thankful for that. It’s still hard, but I have the excuse of my job to make conversation with people I would normally not have the audacity to start a conversation with.

DePue: Did that experience, then, of writing in the *Daily Illini* and getting in that one course, cause you to shift to become a journalism major?

Schoenburg: It did. Yeah. It was kind of a bunch of events that would move forward, because the meeting a week that I covered was the Assembly Hall Advisory Committee; I think it was graduate and undergraduate students. The Assembly Hall, of course, is the basketball arena. It had been recently built. It was being paid for by student fees, so there were bonds, and the student fees were paying off the bonds. I had no idea what any of this meant because I had like no financial education at that point. But I would go to these meetings. It was a big deal on campus as to what was happening in that building because of the entertainment; people on campus were often upset because they would get

entertainment like Farfel the Wonder Dog, or the Lipizzaner Stallions, who were really playing to the larger audience in the Champaign-Urbana community or central Illinois. So, Why can't we get great concerts? That's what the radical element on campus wanted. I didn't know much about any of it. I had never been to a concert until I went to college—part of going to a store and never knowing what I could buy.

But because I had that one meeting a week to cover, when a call came into the *Daily Illini* office saying that there was this fraternity that had bought a block of tickets to a concert coming up and was scalping them, I was the one basically that the story came to. It was actually a Jewish fraternity, which was odd, because it turned out that the president of it at the time—I think he was the president, or at least the guy selling these tickets—was the boyfriend of someone who I grew up with about a block and a half away from me. But I didn't know exactly who was there at the time; I just knew it was this fraternity, and we got a report they were scalping tickets to a Jethro Tull concert.

So with the agreement of the newspaper editors and the publisher, who was an adult who ran the thing, they ended up giving me forty dollars to go buy tickets undercover. I don't know if journalists do that much these days, but undercover was still quite in vogue. I enlisted one of my roommates with big shoulders; I used his name, and he used mine; we went over to the fraternity and bought two six-dollar tickets for twenty dollars each, then called them back and said who we were and what we had done and put it in the newspaper. It was the front-page story the next day.

I had another reporter who was actually a year younger than me but much more experienced in journalism say, "You need help with this?" I said, "I don't know." I guess I did, so she—Pat Wingert—and I ended up having a double-byline. She did some writing, and I know we contacted the State's Attorney. The headline, I think, was *Tull Tickets Scalped for Twenty Dollars Each*, which was, of course, three times the price plus two dollars, so that was kind of a big deal.

What ended up happening with that, in addition to me making a few enemies at the fraternity—where I didn't live anyway—was there were no charges filed against anybody, but the Assembly Hall ended up changing the way it sold tickets to a lottery system so that no longer could fraternities send their pledges to buy hundreds of tickets for use of the fraternity and for scalping purposes. Other people could have access to these tickets. They would no longer have long lines at night, because they had a lottery system. You got your number, and then you came at a certain time to buy your tickets. So that's almost as much change as any story I've ever written has created.

DePue: Was that the point in time where you were hooked on journalism?

- Schoenburg: That pretty much got me, yeah. That was the promise of what the media can do to make change. That seemed to show it. So I enjoyed that. In addition to covering that meeting I became kind of a regular at the *Daily Illini* after that.
- DePue: Well, let's talk a little bit about your political leanings at the time, or how that factored into being a career journalist, because politics would be your beat.
- Schoenburg: Yeah. I had no idea at that time. I just was interested in whatever. It was just the news. I didn't differentiate much between political and other stories; I didn't have any particular strong knowledge of politics.
- DePue: Weren't [you] taking a minor in political science or in history or in sociology or...?
- Schoenburg: I just wanted to get the degree. Even my sophomore year, my second year, when I transferred into College of Communications, I had taken a very rigorous course, Biology 110, which, despite the fact I'm somewhat squeamish, intrigued me. I think that was the course where I had to dissect a fetal pig or something, to the dismay of my roommates, because it was in the refrigerator for a while.
- DePue: Next to the beers. (laughter)
- Schoenburg: This was still in the dorms, so I'm not sure what was—I don't think so. Actually, I only had one roommate in the dorm that year.
- DePue: Stale pizza, maybe.
- Schoenburg: Yes, whatever it was. But I didn't want to give it up. I was thinking to myself, Maybe I can do public relations for a scientific company or a medical company, because the next course was Bio 111. I had gotten a B in Bio 110. It was about the hardest I'd ever worked, and I learned a tremendous amount, I thought. I didn't want to stop, so I took the next one just because I wasn't out of it yet. And I did okay in that; I think I got a B in that, as well—which was pretty good, considering all these pre-meds were killing themselves to get As and beat everybody else so that they could be the ones to get into medical school.

In journalism, they wanted you to have a well-rounded background; they wanted you to have six hours, like two courses, in history and political science and philosophy, and so I just did what was required. I thought, "I already know who Abraham Lincoln is; I'll study something else." So my two history courses were the one on South America and one on South and Western Africa, because I wanted to find out about something I didn't know. I sit here taping this interview in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and realize that thousands of books have been written about Lincoln, but I had no sophisticated knowledge of what history was at that time, that what I had

learned in the sixth-grade book wasn't enough to tell me who these people were.

DePue: Maybe even more important than that, though, in terms of what your future career would be, would be rigorous political science courses.

Schoenburg: I had no training in it, I had no knowledge of it, and I didn't think I needed it. So my political science courses, I don't even remember what they were, if I even... I'm thinking political science was one of them. I know I took statistics at some point, and I knew that that would help with surveys and such. I know I took sociology. But I didn't know how much I didn't know.

DePue: But by the time you're a senior in college and you realize, Okay, I'm going to graduate; I want to be a journalist; but I'm going to have to find a job. What did you think your beat was going to be?

Schoenburg: My whole view then was, Yes, I really like this newspaper thing. I like the rush you get out of getting your story in the paper and seeing it. You write it and then it's there a few hours later. It's still amazing, truly. Of course, now with the Internet, it's like immediate. I did go to a seminar on how to find a job in journalism at school. The model was probably to find a smaller paper and start, and get your experience, and move up. And I just thought that...

DePue: Just take whatever assignments they give you?

Schoenburg: Yeah. Yeah, anything was good. I had no specialty in mind.

DePue: Well, let's get to the point where you move on after college. Where did you end up?

Schoenburg: After three months of kind of a difficult coexistence with my parents at home, (both laugh) because my hours were no longer their hours—which was the basic problem, because my dad had a hard time getting to sleep if I wasn't home, and I wasn't home a lot. I worked in a factory that summer, an extension of what I'd done the summer before. But I sent out resumes to a lot of places.

One of the people who had come to that seminar at college when I was a senior was Gene Smedley—S-m-e-d-l-e-y—Gene like Eugene, I think, G-e-n-e. He was the managing editor of the *Bloomington Pantagraph*. He had said things including, If you want to get a job at a place, you should go even when they have no openings and ask for an interview because then when they do have openings, they'll know you. So I did, at the *Bloomington Pantagraph*, in addition to sending resumes a lot of other places. I got a lot of rejection letters from very small places. But I traveled to Bloomington, and I interviewed. I don't think I did very well. I was quite nervous. I wore a very tight suit because it was the only one I had. (DePue chuckles) I don't think it fit very well. And then went home, and I don't recall hearing anything for a while. I

got a call from them, and I think it was around late August or early September, to come and interview again because they had an opening. So I drove down to Bloomington—very nervous—and met with the city editor then, Dick Streckfuss—as well as Mr. Smedley—who did become quite a mentor of mine, and someone I think about a lot even now. It turns out they had had at least one other good applicant appear that day, a young lady—I don't know who it was—because Streckfuss was clearly undecided by that day, but told me to come back in a couple hours, and they'd let me know. So I took a walk and came back. I know the one line that I said that I think worked was, "I hustle."

He took a chance on me, even though I think my writing wasn't as good as hers and my experience probably wasn't either. I had never had an internship, because I had spent a summer in Mexico studying Spanish. So I started—I think mid-September, I think it was the thirteenth or fourteenth—of '76 at the *Bloomington Pantagraph*, which was at that time a morning and afternoon paper. My hours started 8:00 in the morning to 4:30, and I was there for a full five years, 8:00 in the morning to 4:30, which is very odd for a new reporter. They never made me work nights regularly.

I covered Illinois State University campus issues, but mostly just the Normal and Illinois State police departments—because the campus had its own police department, plus the town of Normal did. So I would drive around in the morning, go to the police stations, ask these guys in uniforms that I was scared to talk to what had happened and look at their reports, come up and write a few things, usually about a burglary at such-and-such address. I had no idea how to write a feature, no idea how to look into a trend and make a bigger story out of it, but I learned as I went.

DePue: Who was mentoring you during that time?

Schoenburg: Well, Dick Streckfuss was a mentor. You know, there were flashes of things that happened that moved me forward. When the president of Illinois State University resigned to take a bigger job, Streckfuss wanted me to go interview him to say what his tenure had been like and how he had changed the university. Well, I asked some very basic questions of that man—I think it was Gene Budig, B-u-d-i-g—and came back and tried to write something. It clearly just did not have the scope that Streckfuss wanted, and he said, "I'm taking you off of this. I'm giving it to someone else," or "We're not even going to do it." I was upset and asked why and what can I do, and he said, "Nothing." You know what? Looking back, he was right, because I just did not have the global view that you need to do a certain kind of story, because I guess the lack of training that I had, the lack of knowledge about what makes a story, had me thinking too narrowly about what a story is.

DePue: But wouldn't you have learned all those things in journalism?

Schoenburg: I should have, but the real life experience is different. There was another story while he was there. They were decommissioning the name U.S. 66, so Veterans Parkway, which it became in Bloomington, used to be U.S. 66; they were no longer going to call U.S. 66 an active highway because it had been replaced by the interstate system. Of course, I didn't know this other than having remembered the television show *Route 66*. But this was a major American trend, and if Streckfuss was anything, it was someone who saw trends and fun in everything. He owned a parade, but that's another thing. (laughter) He owned parade pieces that he would rent out to cities and organizations that put on parades; all of us ended up working on some parades, which I did.

But he had assigned me to do a story about what Route 66 had meant to Bloomington-Normal. I remember I went to like one business and asked a diner what they thought and maybe talked to one other person, came back, and wrote a little story. He said, "I'm taking you off this story, too. It's just not yours." Again, I'm like, "What can I do?" and he's like, "Don't worry about it." He ended up putting a very good feature writer on it, James Keeran—I think he's retired now—and an intern that they had, and they ended up basically doing a two-page double truck—the paper was bigger, broadsheet, in that day—of all the businesses that had been developed along Route 66 over the years, what years they started, interviews with various... I mean, it was a great story; I just had no idea how to start to think about something like that.

Then there was one other particular time. So I look back, and I could do those stories now, even though they might drive me crazy, because I'm better at something I can handle in smaller bites, but I understand what a big story is and what it needs. There was an accident one day. We used to carry cameras; we've come full circle now, because we carry cameras now for the Web and everything else. A truck had had a little bit of a crash on I-55, and the cab of the truck was hanging over an overpass; the guys had climbed out of the truck, the driver and his assistant, and they were fine. So I went out to the accident, and I, with my camera, went down the embankment. I got this great picture of this truck hanging over a bridge. Then I talked to the driver, and I got his name and what company he was with, and I went back on deadline for the afternoon paper—because this was about 11:30 in the morning—and wrote the story. And Streckfuss said to me, "How did they get out?" I said, "I don't know. I didn't ask them." He was flabbergasted, because that's the story. "You missed the entire story. What happened to the people? What did you think, hanging over the edge of an embankment and getting out of the truck? That's what you need." And I was so mortified that I had missed... I ended up taking the orange *Pantagraph* car and driving around for about an hour, trying to find these people. Couldn't, of course. There were no cell phones. When I think of what I look for in a story now, that day, and the pain of that day, of doing it wrong, is often what I think of.

DePue: So sometimes your mentor doesn't necessarily groom you in ways that are gentle?

Schoenburg: Well, you—

DePue: We talked earlier about the stereotype of the journalist. Streckfuss sounds like the old-school newspaper editor.

Schoenburg: Well, it's interesting because he actually was a really gentle soul and a feature-y guy, but he knew those things. He liked a good feature; he liked human interest. And he taught me, because I couldn't do it. He only lasted there my first eight months, because he sent someone on a story—a woman in the newsroom; they wanted to do an undercover story about car repair and rip-offs or something. They just took one spark plug cord off the spark plug so the engine was going rough and sent her to four different shops. One of them fixed it for like ten dollars by just reattaching the spark plug thing, and everybody else charged her 300 or 400 dollars for an overhaul and this or that.

He wanted to print the story including the names of the shops, and the business office decided he couldn't do that. He thought it was because they were advertisers; they thought it because it wasn't fair, apparently. I, of course, was sure it was because they were advertisers. So he went over to the U of I and talked to some professors and got backup that the story would not be libelous and would be fair to do. He said, "Print it or I quit." And he quit.

There was a big meeting called at the Lucca Grill in Bloomington where all of us met. I was just a minor player in this; I was new. People were demanding him to come back and demanding that they rehire him, and called in the managing editor, who had just had an operation, (laughs) and he came down anyway. Streckfuss was like, No, I want to move on. So he ended up leaving the paper. The next editor was actually more hard-nosed in some ways, and I almost didn't make it in the business. But I got through some of that, too.

Streckfuss lived in Hudson, which was about ten miles north of Bloomington—and I ended up becoming great friends with him. In these tough times with the next editor who took over, from assistant city editor to become city editor, I would often go out and have a few beers and talk to Streckfuss into the night about what I was doing and why it was wrong and what could be changed. So we did a lot of that.

DePue: So he definitely was your mentor during those years.

Schoenburg: He was.

DePue: I would assume that that incident where he quit was as much your education in the ethics of journalism as anything.

Schoenburg: Well, I respected him for it. I was sorry he was gone. I'm not sure how fair that story was to the businesses. You know, because a lot of things can be wrong with an engine. I don't know. But I certainly appreciated his tenacity and trying to stick by his principles.

DePue: How long did you stay at the *Pantagraph*?

Schoenburg: Well, in total, ten years. See, shortly after Streckfuss left, there was a guy named Dave Haake—H-a-a-k-e, I think—an older reporter who smoked a pipe a lot. He used to go to Springfield for the *Pantagraph* just on days of a legislative session to cover issues of local interest; he didn't want to do it anymore because his youngest child was going away to college, and he didn't want to leave his wife alone at home. So I was a young, single guy. Despite the fact that if you asked me, I had pretty severe shortcomings. In the summer of '77, the last week of the session, the next editor sent me down to be with Dave, stay in a hotel that week, learn the ropes, and then I would take over covering days of the legislative session. So I came down. It was one of the hardest or most disorienting weeks of my life.

DePue: What year would this have been?

Schoenburg: Seventy-seven. I had just started in September of '76, and this was like in June of '77.

DePue: What was so disorienting about it?

Schoenburg: Well, if you walk around the state house, there were at the time 177 members of the house, all of whom were new and different. I was at this point still scared to talk to a policeman in uniform; still didn't really understand what a good story was, probably; had never covered a city council meeting except once in the city of Champaign for a class at the U of I—not for publication, just for class. I had only covered I think, one candidate ever for anything, because the *Daily Illini* had me interview the two candidates for coroner of Champaign County. It was very weird, because one of the coroner candidates recorded *me*, because he didn't trust any student reporters.

It was the last week of the session, where they're passing all the legislation, so you're walking through the halls—I don't know where I'm going, mostly, other than where Dave was showing me. He was very busy, so he tried, but he was also trying to do about six stories a day. They kept saying, "Have all voted who wish. Have all voted who wish," which is the final action through the loudspeakers as they're taking votes on bills on the House side, and then on the Senate side. There were conference committees meeting in little room. I was just completely overwhelmed. I had no idea what to do. The first byline story that I got that week, Dave sent me to a conference committee where they were discussing an appropriation to pay the widow of the sculptor of the Everett Dirksen statue on the lawn of the capitol—which is a pretty

interesting statue because it has a little donkey and an elephant down by his legs, and they're both crossing their fingers behind their backs, because Dirksen was known to play both sides. The sculptor had actually apparently cast two statues, and one of them was in storage in New York state. She hadn't been paid for the second one, and so they were trying to get money for that. The only reason we cared was because Pekin was at the edge of the *Pantagraph* territory, and Dirksen was from Pekin. So I ended up doing a story about that and went out and looked at the statue.

But just what was happening in the committee—it all happened so fast—I didn't know who to ask what. I think I interviewed the wife. But I did a story, and it was okay; it was my first real story—byline—out of Springfield, I think about Thursday of that week. But other than that, I was running around trying to figure out what to do and going a little crazy. Then we came home. Oh, they were also very long days. We had really bad chili at midnight at some little bar that is no longer there, along the strip that became the home for low-income housing and disabled housing that was built along Jefferson. We were staying at the St. Nicholas Hotel. The first night we got back to the St. Nicholas Hotel—I think it was the last week it was open as a hotel—doors were locked when we got there. The guy who came from behind the desk had a gun in his hand and said, “They robbed me last night, but they're not going to get me anymore.” (both laugh) This is midnight; I'm exhausted; I have no idea what we've just done. I went to my room and the key wouldn't work in the room or something. The carpeting was all ripped up in the corridors. I think we paid like ten dollars a night.

DePue: Welcome to the state capital, right?

Schoenburg: Welcome to the state capital. So I had to change rooms in the middle of the night. This was my welcome to Springfield. (laughter) But that got me started. By that fall, it was mine. I came down the days of the session to cover the legislature, the veto session. Then the next summer I spent usually three days a week, three nights a week, in hotels in Springfield—often the Governor Hotel because I could walk, or later, Red Roof Inn or whatever—cheap places—and would cover mostly local issues.

But for a couple of years, it did vary then because the first year, it was pretty intense; I came almost all the time, days of the session. The second year, it dropped off a lot; it was sporadic. Every time I would head out of Bloomington, I would be scared. I wouldn't want to come here, and when I'd see the dome, I'd get a queasy feeling in my stomach because I knew I was going into a place I had no idea what was going on. So it was very hard.

DePue: Well, somewhere along the process, though, you mastered all of those things.

Schoenburg: Well, mastered enough. I don't think one ever masters. But what really happened was I got conversant with the process to some extent, got to know

our legislators. Jerry Bradley, in particular, was a Democrat, somehow seemed nicer to me. Maybe it was my leanings at the time. I worked with him, and he's (unintelligible, mic noise) help with some bills, or like what was happening and where it was happening. I was the kind of guy who would sit through an entire committee hearing, not knowing if the bill I was interested in would come up because I was too shy to ask the sponsor if they were going to call it that day and didn't even know to ask. So I spent a lot of time in committees. Learned a lot about a lot of issues that way.

What really turned the tide after then—a lot of this coverage falling off, and one year, almost not coming down at all—was the paper was sold to the *San Francisco Chronicle* from the [Adlai] Stevenson family. We had tried to form a union, but that didn't work, and then they sold the paper. Apparently the sale was contingent on it not being union. The new bosses were the owners of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the new editor was a young man in that family named Theriot—T-h-e-r-i-o-t, I think. They were spending some money then. They sent me to Japan in 1980 to cover our sister city, because they could see that I could take pictures when I had gone to Israel on a trip and came back and did a picture page. So that was a good thing. Then they sent me to cover Mount St. Helens' aftermath because I was at a wedding out at Portland. By then, I was showing that I could—I hustled, I guess.

Mr. Theriot said, "We're only sixty-five or sixty miles away from the state capital; we should either have a bureau there or not." So the *Pantagraph* decided that instead of just having a desk in the pool room of the state house press room, we should establish a full-time presence, and I was chosen to go. Once I started in January of 1982 to be here full time in Springfield at the capitol, it's really the off-days of the legislature that you learn what's going on. Somebody will have a press conference, or you have long conversations with people, or you do interviews, and you actually find out what's going on. That's when I finally felt grounded in knowing what's going on enough to say it. After a year and a half full-time, I ended up doing a Sunday column. That started me being a columnist and reporter, which has continued for most of the rest of the time.

So it was being there, being in the press room, and then knowing the characters, and actually having an officemate there who helped a lot, despite his interesting background, Channel 20, Kelly Smith. He knew everybody in town. He reported on local things and state things. He was, in the true reporter style, somewhat obnoxious: he'd ask the same question six or eight times to a governor, trying to get him angry. It didn't always work, but sometimes it did. But everybody came by the office to see Kelly and tell him what was going on—lobbyists and legislators—and I was the beneficiary of that. Kelly was helpful to me; as I was thinking through column ideas, we'd talk. So I became knowledgeable of the system and felt good about it because I was here full-time.

DePue: Were you living here at the time?

Schoenburg: I moved here in January of '82, in an apartment.

DePue: I know somewhere along this timeframe, when you're with the *Bloomington Pantagraph*, you also got married.

Schoenburg: Yes.

DePue: Tell us just briefly about that.

Schoenburg: Briefly. There was a very long day in 1984 where I went to cover Walter Mondale speaking in Peoria. I went to Bloomington to write the story and practice with my soccer team at the Central Illinois Soccer League in Bloomington. I took a shower at somebody's house, I came back to Springfield, and then I met my wife. (laughter) I saw her at Baur's Opera House,<sup>2</sup> which was a popular place. Then I went over to Boone's Saloon; she and her girlfriend walked into Boone's Saloon. And ended up, after about twenty minutes, talking to her, got a phone number and went out the next night. She was a Springfield person. Kim.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Schoenburg: Yaffe. Y-a-f-f-e.

DePue: Y-a-f-f-e?

Schoenburg: Uh-huh. Her father is a doctor—still is—a doctor in town. He's eighty-one now; he still runs twenty-five miles a week. She had finished her first year of medical school at SIU, which is in Carbondale, but the SIU med school's last three years are in Springfield. She was a few days from starting her second year of medical school, so that's when I met her. Then I had to compete with medical school, but it worked out.

DePue: I know you left the *Pantagraph* in 1986. What caused that move?

Schoenburg: We were married at the end of '85. Kim wanted to do her residency outside of Springfield, because I guess it's kind of like the idea, you don't want to inbreed your profession where you went to school, or your professional training. So I needed to get another job. Otherwise, I'd probably still live at the *Pantagraph*. I was dedicated and happy, and it was my thing. So I needed a job in a bigger city. I ended up taking the Associated Press test here, to show that I could do that work, and got a job with the Associated Press in Chicago. So we moved to Chicago in October of '86.

DePue: At that time, did you think that would just be a short-term experience?

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<sup>2</sup> Baur's was a popular restaurant; if there was any singing, it was not of operatic quality.

Schoenburg: I really didn't know for sure. Kim was actually taking some externships, they call them—kind of like internships—but a month here and a month there at different hospitals before her actual residency in Oak Park. So I didn't know. It was just the next step in a career.

DePue: What did the AP have you doing?

Schoenburg: (laughter) Everything. By then, I was confident that I knew what I was doing, but if you saw the way some of my stories were marked up by the editor there, T. Lee Hughes, the state editor, you just wouldn't believe how bad I was, really—organizationally. When I look back, I had not yet mastered the correct organization of a news story to make it easy to read, and certainly easy to cut, because at AP, they want you to learn how to write every story [so] that if only four paragraphs are run in some papers, it will still make sense. The full story is told, and details come later. So there was something called the nutgraph, and I just didn't have that concept down.

DePue: Duck draft?

Schoenburg: Nutgraph, like paragraph. The nut of the story, the meat of it, to say what it's about. The idea that I learned was, Never write anything that you have to read farther to explain it. Explain it as you go. The nutgraph, within the first four paragraphs, should tell you: This story is about this, He was accused of this on such-and-such a date, This is where it is, and This is where it's going.

DePue: Were you writing on the criminal beat—

Schoenburg: No.

DePue: —or were you writing politics?

Schoenburg: In Chicago, it was everything. I had learned, certainly, how to write more fancifully. I had a better idea by then, of course, of how to write feature stories. Everybody had to write a feature a week, but it was really kind of a news factory. The feature a week might be something that you saw, an idea in one of the local papers in Chicago and expanded on it and made some phone calls. A lot of it was from the office; some of it was out and about.

You learned how to do everything for them. I started working, I think it was 9:00–5:30 for like two weeks, but then I was at 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. for weeks. Then I was weekends. You had to learn how to write sports, take sports scores. I had never even read a box score in my life. I just hadn't been interested in that direction. I had to learn how to take box scores. There was some kind of intra-office e-mail at the time, which I don't think we called e-mail—messaging—but there was no e-mail from other people. We didn't have a fax machine when I started. Everything was over the phone by dictation. So you'd have to take box scores by dictation and game scores. On Saturdays, when I worked, every college football game was given a story. I had a

computer with eight screens, and I'd fill each of them up and have these stories in the works.

We learned how to, certainly, if there was breaking news like any kind of a—I did cover a school shooting once, where I went out to a school where somebody was shot. When Mike Ditka had a heart attack, they called me at home, and I went to Halas Hall, the team headquarters, to report from there. I got the byline, even though I wrote nothing, because I called in: "The doctor just said he had a heart attack." They said, "We know. We're watching it on Channel Nine." They were writing it from there, but at AP, whoever's on site gets the byline, and everybody else helping just helps.

DePue: Well, you called this a news factory; did you say that in a disparaging way, or...?

Schoenburg: Well, I appreciate when you're at a newspaper or on a beat and you have time to think and walk around and meet your sources, it's good. When you're at AP in Chicago, you'd be shocked to know that despite the fact that there are twenty stories that might come out of the bureau in a day, there are sometimes like three people working as reporters that day, and a supervisor and some other editing people. But you'd come in, and they'd say, "Okay, you have a half-hour to read in," which is one way I really learned, whatever, over time, the big lesson has always been "read more," which is why I spend a lot of time reading papers in the morning now, because otherwise, you don't know what's going on. But you'd read in to see what was on the AP wire already. At that time, they were on a pretty solid two-cycle day for morning papers and afternoon papers. Well, you'd get about six assignments when you'd walk in. They'd say, "Take your half-hour, but then all these stories that were for the afternoon papers, we need them turned for the morning papers," meaning, Find a new lead, call somebody, see if there's a development, or take a different element out of the story and change it. Or go to a place and cover a story and come back if there's a press conference or a feature that needs to be done.

Again, we all had to find a feature a week on something and turn it in. There was a feature in the *Tribune* about women who had a motorcycle club in the suburbs. I ended up calling one of them or two of them and doing a story over the phone, because they only wanted 400–500 words, because that's an AP kind of a thing.

So I learned to write fast. I learned to do a lot. They wanted us to learn everything at AP, so I also had training on the radio desk, for the broadcast desk, where we'd often take information from stringers. In other words, small stations or reporters in Galesburg or other places would call and say, Here's what's happening, and I'd take notes and put out a story. Every print story had to be converted into a broadcast story. I had never written broadcast, and I remember, again T. Lee Hughes pulled me aside and said—he saw it printing

off the machine what I had written on the broadcast wire—and he said, “Read this out loud.” I had a lot of “according to” and very print journalism formal stuff, and he’s like, “This does not flow.” I had a bunch of dashes in it. He said, “Just read this and think about it.” I ended up learning to write through that more conversationally, which ended up helping a lot once I became a columnist later, after moving back to Springfield, because I just had never understood that you didn’t have to be so formal. I just didn’t have enough experience to lighten up.

DePue: This experience sounds like you were doing news an inch deep versus your experiences before where you were doing more in-depth coverage. Would that be a fair assessment?

Schoenburg: Not necessarily, because they would also give you project days where you were off everything and working on that. I was part of the team that prepared for the 1988 Democratic National Convention.

DePue: In Chicago.

Schoenburg: No, in Atlanta.

DePue: In Atlanta, okay.

Schoenburg: For example, it had been, I think, twenty-five years, or—it wasn’t exactly twenty-five—but Jesse Jackson was going as a candidate for president. Paul Simon was also running for president that year, from Illinois. There was a great contrast that even I knew about, from ’72, when Jesse Jackson and a group of outsiders in the Democratic Party unseated the first Mayor Daley of Chicago from the Democratic Convention in Miami, Florida. So I ended up calling Jesse Jackson and calling other people who were part of the delegation in ’72 and doing a very, not long, but broad story, and deep, really, about the difference from being the radicals taking over the party to going to this convention with somebody who’s not going to be a winner, but a presidential candidate, and an accepted part of the party. So there were good things like that.

I interviewed Mayor Daley about his hiring practices. The Chicago papers followed me on that because they had very few African-Americans in the top echelons of city government. I caused them some trouble. Actually, I think my initial draft of the story didn’t have that edge on it, but one of my editors thought that I should pull that element higher and made it higher, and then the other papers did pick up on it. So I got some good experiences, in addition to working very odd hours. For three months, I was the overnight guy, so I was midnight to 8:00 in the morning, and it was just very hard.

DePue: Maybe this is the right time to ask you a little bit more about your own personal political views, your own philosophy, and how you balanced those with being a journalist.

Schoenburg: Well, that's interesting, because everybody in Springfield's been asking me this question for years. I haven't voted in primaries in years—certainly not in Springfield, because in Springfield, everybody checks, and if you're a political writer, people wonder who you are, so they check. Just like if you won a state job, over the years people would check to see how you voted. But I haven't voted in primaries in some years. I did vote, I think, in Democratic primaries in the past, like when I was in Oak Park, and I think I voted in the Republican ones in Bloomington because the only candidates where there were interesting races were Republican.

Again, I grew up in a neighborhood and in a family where I think it was assumed everybody was a Democrat, so leanings probably in that direction. But I do have to say that certainly on the state and local level I have voted both ways, and I have done it on the basis of who I think is honest, because it seems that the ideology doesn't matter as much as who's going to give you a straight story about what they're doing, especially if it's managing things. So particularly on the state and local level, I do switch it around.

DePue: How much were you able to pay attention during those years up in Chicago to what was going on in Springfield, your old beat?

Schoenburg: Well, it was interesting. Actually, a fair amount. As part of my being there, I was sent down for the last week of the legislative session to help the bureau in Springfield, so I kept in touch. I think I came down at least one of those years for the Gridiron Show, which the press used to put on to lampoon the legislators. I actually wrote a song for one of those shows about Mayor Eugene Sawyer of Chicago—not that I'm very creative, but I just thought of something and did it. Even in '86, one of my first assignments was to stay up all night and to just keep compiling and revising the list of who won all of the legislative races in Illinois. So my knowledge was helpful in that. I had always kind of kept up with city of Chicago politics. I wrote the story, for example, when Mayor Daley was inaugurated. That was actually one of my better leads for me, because I think he did it in Orchestra Hall. I said that he talked about trying to create harmony in the city in the speech in Orchestra Hall, or some kind of metaphor like that, which was pretty good for me. AP likes that kind of catchy thing anyway.

So other than when I first went to AP, and when one other editor came in who didn't seem impressed with anyone who hadn't been with AP for a while and they were talking about how to handle a certain race, I would try to pipe in, and it was as if I was not there. But at the end of my three and a half years, I was the day supervisor for a while. My knowledge did come through and help me do things, including getting the assignment to cover the '88 convention in Atlanta, which I did, covering Illinois and Alaska delegations. Alaska only had eleven people in their delegation. I had to do a story a day for them because a regional reporter had not been sent from Alaska.

DePue: Well, from what you've mentioned before, you came back to the Springfield area in 1990. What led to that move?

Schoenburg: I had tried to get hired, in particular by the *Tribune*, and it didn't seem to be happening, for whatever reason. They didn't have a lot of openings; I think they were seeking more diversity on their staff, and I don't look diverse. But no great hard feelings about that because Kim's dream actually always was working with her father. They have a wonderful relationship; he's a family practice doctor, and she is one because of him.

AP was not a good long-range plan for me, because when I say "news factory"—it was a high burnout rate there, so the people who had been there for years were generally very good writers but very tired. (laughs) The other kind of people who were at AP were the up-and-comers who would spend a few years in Chicago and then go to New York and try to get on the national desk or go overseas. The Associated Press is one of the few organizations that will still send people overseas, or to great, fancy bureaus.

So coming back was a good thing for her, and a better job opportunity, really. I came down to Springfield to look around, and at that time—it was just an odd, wonderful situation—there were five openings at the *State Journal-Register*. I went over there, I interviewed, and I actually was hired with the opportunity to wait a couple months until I was ready to move down, and they would hold it. That's what happened.

DePue: We should say that was the *Springfield State Journal*. [*State Journal-Register* merged in 1974].

Schoenburg: The Springfield—right.

DePue: When did you start working there?

Schoenburg: July of 1990.

DePue: What was your initial assignment there?

Schoenburg: The plan was, I would be a special projects person, which also probably would have driven me crazy because again, I still have a hard time putting together longer-range things.

DePue: It sounds like a feature writer.

Schoenburg: Yes, it does. I thought of one good story, which was the twentieth anniversary of Paul Powell's death, which I ended up doing, because he had died in 1970. I traveled to Vienna to do that, which was a fun and interesting trip. But as it turned out, just about the time I started at the SJ-R, the guy who had been covering Springfield City Hall, who had actually been an intern of mine at the state house—Mike Matulis—had just announced he was leaving, I think to go

to work for one of the universities or colleges in town for a while; he came back to the paper later. He had been covering City Hall, so with my level of experience, they assigned me to Springfield City Council. So I ended up doing that for two, which was very intense. We had an eleven-month-old child when we moved back. I was at work the first time he walked, because I ended up covering like three night meetings a week, including the Council's committees. It taught me a tremendous amount about the city of Springfield, because all the factions are involved in the City Council. It was still a pretty new situation with having ten aldermen, because that's the new form of government here, which had come in the late eighties. People really cared about the stuff I wrote about. It was very different from writing about the state house for Bloomington, because I could do that and be completely anonymous, whereas I'd write about potholes or if you could burn leaves or not, in particular, in the city of Springfield or where to build a new—

DePue: It's a big issue.

Schoenburg: —where to build a new road. A lot of people cared—certainly the people I was dealing with at work. As the only daily newspaper guy covering city hall, it was very different from the statehouse, where you've got thirty reporters, and everybody's trying to get bits and pieces of the puzzle. I'd walk into city hall, and I was the newspaper guy, so all of the employees who were disgruntled would come and tell me stuff. So I was breaking stories all the time. I had never had any situation like that. It was probably the best beat I've ever had in that newspaper regard. I was in control of that beat.

DePue: Who was mayor at the time?

Schoenburg: Ossie Langfelder, who looked somewhat like my grandfather and was also from Austria. Nice man—I have great respect for him—but he didn't believe in news conferences. I do believe that because of that, the spin was always negative. I very often would come to a story by employees telling me something's going wrong, and then I'd go to Ossie for a response. I always put his response in the story; he never had a problem with it—most of the time. Never—yeah. I mean, he respected what I did because I always gave him his opportunity to speak, but he was not doing any public relations because he didn't think it was right to brag.

It is interesting, because some reporters have nothing but disdain for the PR people for politicians. They serve a good purpose if they do it right; he just wasn't doing that. He had one press conference in the two years I covered him, and it was to name a fire chief. But that turned into a fiasco because the guy he named tried to fire all the top people that afternoon. It ended up being a six-month battle; he was not confirmed, and he ended up leaving the department. So you can see why Ossie didn't like having press conferences.

DePue: I know that eventually you moved on to pick up the statehouse beat again and also become a columnist. How did that end up coming back.?

Schoenburg: Well, what ended up happening was, a city editor who had come in, Dana Heupel, H-e-u-p-e-l, who is now the publisher of *Illinois Issues* magazine, kind of realized that our paper had a hole in it because it was a long tradition to have a political columnist; when I started there, Pete Ellertson was the political columnist. I had actually interviewed for that job some years before but didn't take it because I had just met Kim and was moving to Chicago. But Pete somehow got taken off that job and then left the paper. The column was empty for a total of a year and a half. Then Dana said to the bosses, "We really ought to have a political columnist in Springfield and reestablish this." Even though he was new to the paper, he saw that as a flaw. I had had some conversations with him, just telling him about Neil Hartigan, what he was like in the past. I kind of still remembered my *Pantagraph* days and my knowledge of things from that. Anyway, they reestablished the column, I applied for it, I interviewed with the top bosses, and I got the job in the summer of '92. I was a little scared, because I didn't know how I would fill this in non-election times, but I thought if I got the job I would see how it would go.

DePue: And the rest is history, as they say.

Schoenburg: Well, they actually have always kept me stationed in the Ninth Street main building of the newspaper. I have a desk at the Capitol, but I don't position myself there, because some of them expressed the idea they don't want me to talk just about under-the-dome stuff; they wanted me to keep the perspective. I've always written about county and city and other candidates around, too.

DePue: Well, I'm going to ask you one other question here in terms of being a columnist as well as still being a reporter and how you balance those things. Then we're going to make a major shift and get to the subject of this project, which is Jim Edgar. So how do you balance between reporter and columnist?

Schoenburg: My column is very different, I think, from a lot of columns, because it's not just my opinion. I don't just take a fact and go off into what's right or wrong about that. There are some columnists, also, who get really personal and attack the subjects of their articles—I'm thinking of a certain guy right now in the *Chicago Tribune* (laughs), you know, who will attack someone as a liar, and everything that comes out of their mouth is dirt and worms. I don't go that direction. My column is more fact-based. When I'm writing, with very rare exception, where like everything is on the record about what somebody thinks about something—like, say, former governor Blagojevich—there were times that maybe I would write something that I didn't call [about], but I almost always even called his people for a response, to let them know what I was doing. Whenever I do anything in print that makes somebody look bad or set them in a negative light in any way, I try to call them or their spokesperson to

at least let them know it's happening, to see if they want to respond. And very often, response does come and changes the column or the story.

So my column is still fact-based. It's supposed to be analytical. I'm not supposed to tell people how to vote; that was the only rule they set for me: don't tell people how to vote. That was fine with me, because from my high school days, I know I'm not the most decisive person, and that's fine. So I analyze politically what's good or bad. I view it as a major thing I do in the column, in particular of matching rhetoric of a campaign or a candidate to what they're actually doing, which is what kept me really busy during the Blagojevich years. I think I do it fairly, because I try to get both sides, even in a column. There are other places where there are columnists and reporters—David Broder comes to mind, in the *Washington Post*—somewhat of a role model for me. I've just met him a little bit, a time or two, and said hello. He actually started on the *Pantagraph*.

DePue: Really?

Schoenburg: For a year and a half before he went to—I think it was *Roll Call*, or *Congressional Quarterly* in Washington. I think there was a time he suspended his columns as he was writing, or suspended stories—one or the other—during a campaign that got intense. I've tried to balance, knowing that it is imperfect. At the *Tribune*, Tom Hardy for awhile was the political writer who also wrote a column. He ended up getting very severe about Carol Moseley Braun for awhile in his columns; that, I think, probably raised questions about his stories. I've been pretty severe on Governor Blagojevich but also did stories. I try to follow the journalistic ethic that I have learned and [the] style that I have learned, to make a story fair, to get both sides, and it has worked well enough for me. I know it's not perfect, but it works.

DePue: Well, it's time to change gears and talk about Jim Edgar. I certainly appreciate your comments here in terms about balancing reporter versus a columnist and keeping your own views out of the reporting side of the business, especially, and from what you've said, largely in the columns that you write as well. But, we want you to share your views about Jim Edgar and some other politicians here. Let's start by saying, what's your first encounter with him, your first experience with Edgar?

Schoenburg: I remember seeing him on the floor of the house, and I think it was as a state rep, so I was probably in the press box. I was probably looking out at this sea of 177 legislators and wondering how to figure out who all these people are and being shocked over time that I would recognize the voices when they came over the squawk box. You get to a point when you cover them to even understand what they might say. But I kind of remember him as a young guy on the floor.

DePue: That would have been in the late seventies. He had just that one term, basically. He would describe himself as a back-bencher.

Schoenburg: I don't remember a lot about him. I think I remember—you would probably know when—when Thompson named him legislative liaison or top legislative guy.

DePue: That was April '79.

Schoenburg: Okay, so it would have been in a time—and I can't remember if that was a year I was on or off. I might have still been coming down a lot. But I remember that it was interesting there was such a young guy who was leaving the legislature to go do this. But that was all. I don't think I knew him at all; I don't think he knew me.

DePue: Do you remember any specific incidents, occasions, when he was Secretary of State? Because he was Secretary of State for a long time.

Schoenburg: Yes. Secretary of State. I dealt with him quite a bit, and that was because one of the issues that he was pushing, in addition to trying to get the blood alcohol limit for drunk driving lowered—which I don't think he did, because I think George Ryan did, but maybe I'm wrong—about the .08.

DePue: I believe that was Ryan.

Schoenburg: Yeah, because I believe he had tried. But what he also wanted to do was mandatory auto insurance. At that time in Illinois, it was not legally required that you have auto insurance. A main industry in Bloomington, if not **the** main industry, is State Farm Insurance, who sells a lot of car insurance. It's funny because State Farm and the big insurance companies generally didn't want mandatory auto insurance. Everybody who had car insurance had an uninsured driver portion of it that they were paying anyway that would cover losses if they had encounters with uninsured drivers; they didn't want to have to insure the bad drivers because the risks were high and it would be more costly, probably for the company as well as for the people being insured. But Edgar saw it as, I assume, a matter of fairness—certainly a good political issue because it's one of those things where nobody—it's kind of like the bank bailout now. You don't want to pay for the guys who were irresponsible. All the uninsured drivers sure were irresponsible—they're getting in an accident with you, and they don't have insurance. People think that's not fair. So it's funny. I covered a lot of the hearings where he tried to get that through committees and then floor debate. So that was one of my staple stories for a while, where Bloomington cared. It was one of those where I didn't have any trepidation about knowing this is my story because it was a Bloomington story.

So I would deal with Jim Edgar a lot. It was funny because the lobbyists—I remember one guy, John Bernstein from Bloomington—where they would

give me all the arguments as to why it was a bad idea, and Edgar would say it was a good idea. The legislature didn't pass it for a while, but he stuck with it and finally got it done.

DePue: Just from that experience itself and hearing both sides coming from Bloomington, an insurance town if ever there is one, what's your impression that you got from Jim Edgar—the kind of person he was, the kind of politician he was?

Schoenburg: He didn't overplay it. He just seemed smart. There's something about him. He carries himself well. He always has a real nice suit. (laughs) He stands very straight. People made fun of his hair sometimes because it was so perfect, but nothing like the governor that would come seven years later. (laughter) We had a cartoonist at the *Journal-Register*, Mike Thompson, for a while, who every time he would do a drawing of Edgar, it would come with a little price tag on it, coming off the hair, as if it were this perfectly store-bought thing. He was gone by the time Blagojevich<sup>3</sup> came, so who knows what he would have done with him. But Edgar, I don't think he demagogued it; I think he just presented it forcefully and regularly, and he seemed to believe what he was saying.

DePue: Was it him personally who was coming to the legislature?

Schoenburg: Oh, he was. Yeah, he would come and testify as Secretary of State.

DePue: Was that typical?

Schoenburg: For major issues that any of the constitutional officers present, it is typical for them to make the case themselves in the appropriate forum. Certainly for a signature issue like mandatory auto insurance, this was the kind of thing where I think his press people would let it be known he would be there, and then he would testify and talk to reporters afterwards. The whole thing served his purpose of moving the legislation, and helped build up his name.

DePue: At that time, what did you think his aspirations were?

Schoenburg: Didn't know. I think I think more of those things now and over the years as I've become much more the political guy. At that time, I was a columnist once a week, but I was still with the *Pantagraph*. I think I felt some level of confidence then in what I was doing, but I was just there to watch and record what was going on. I think if you'd asked me back then, Would he be governor? it was a maybe, but it didn't strike me in any particular way. Kind of like Obama. (both chuckle)

DePue: When you observed him.

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<sup>3</sup> Blagojevich, the governor who succeeded Edgar, had a big mop of hair worn forward. It was the usual gag about him in all the comic strips, especially when he was impeached, tried and imprisoned for selling influence.

Schoenburg: When I observed him [Obama] as a state senator. I don't know anybody who thought particularly he would be president; he was just a good state senator who could talk. It's funny, too, most of the people in Illinois live in the Chicago region, and Edgar has a couple of his eastern-central Illinois mispronunciations of things. He says "Warshington," with an R. I think he often leaves Ss off some words that should have Ss. So not that you have to speak perfectly to be a top politician in Illinois, as both Mayors Daley have shown...

DePue: (laughs) They've mastered that.

Schoenburg: He was a little bit of a down-stater.

DePue: When you say he was a little bit of a down-stater,<sup>4</sup> does that mean that maybe not intentionally, but they tended to, Okay, we'll he's probably not going to go anywhere because he's not from the power base of Illinois politics?

Schoenburg: Possibly that. I mean, you can't preclude people. Paul Simon was already prominent, and he was from far-southern Illinois, in Makanda, near Carbondale. So it didn't necessarily preclude someone. We still had some Republican strength; that was really when the state was more cut up into three slices than it is now, because I think things are melding. You know, Democratic Chicago, Republican suburbs, and kind of mixed downstate with Democratic and Republican areas. But certainly where I was writing for, Bloomington, to the shock to my system, was staunchly Republican, and a lot of other places were, too. I guess I didn't think it put him out of it, but I didn't think much about it, that I recall.

DePue: You already said that you watched him quite a bit in hearings, et cetera, pushing for mandatory auto insurance. Would you get a sense he was doing that because he thought that was the right thing to do, or because he thought that was a politically astute thing, and he was an ambitious guy? At that time.

Schoenburg: I think I thought both. I think he believed it was the right thing to do, but it was clearly something that struck a chord with a lot of people and would be seen as something to advance a career.

DePue: So you would have described him as ambitious in that respect.

Schoenburg: I think so.

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<sup>4</sup> Illinois is 600 miles north to south, with Chicago in the northern fifth of the state. In Chicago, anyone south of Kankakee is called a down-stater. In Springfield, right in the center, everyone south is considered a down-stater. The real down-staters are generally considered to be from the lower triangle of the state, south of the St. Louis latitude where there is a distinct difference in dialect.

DePue: But you've already said you were surprised; it wouldn't have been your guess that he'd be governor someday.

Schoenburg: And part of that is—

DePue: This is only twenty years ago.

Schoenburg: I know. It's a long time ago. Maybe I was thinking more of it in those days, I think, because now I tend to put people in those boxes right away. Maybe I was thinking in those ways, and when I read some of my older stuff, I am surprised that I had some subtle political thought. I think I was more in the mode of making sure I covered my beat and didn't get in trouble.

DePue: Well, tell us about your views of Jim Thompson—Big Jim.

Schoenburg: Big Jim, he was one—truly, in my job, I was always anxious for him to move on to something else because he intimidated me some, partly because it was like we would never get rid of him—and that's not in a bad way. But I started coming down in '77. He was [the] new governor in January of '77, so he was still pretty new. He would end up being there fourteen years, winning four terms including a two-year.<sup>5</sup> He was very smart and knowledgeable on all subjects that would come his way, and very confident.

It was funny, because in the news conference room that we called the Blue Room because of the curtains, up by the capitol, he would sometimes stand up there for an hour and have press conferences. By the end of them, because the lights in those days were very hot, he'd be sweating like crazy. But he seemed to enjoy the back-and-forth and handle it very well. I remember a couple of times, once at a budget briefing, he finally called on me for something and I froze (laughter) a little bit. I couldn't kind of remember. It's funny, because over the years, I've done a lot of television and radio, and every once in a while, something like that will happen, where I'll have a thought and it won't come when I'm in the spotlight, and that was odd.

One time, I remember I was sitting near the back of the room, and he called on me for something, and I said, "How much does" something. Everybody laughed, and I didn't know why. I think it was something like Johnny Carson used to do on the *Tonight Show*: "Well how—how much..." (laughter) "How big do you think...?" And apparently it sounded like a Johnny Carson kind of question—

DePue: Waiting for Ed McMahon to chime in.

Schoenburg: —that I didn't intend to ask, and I was like completely caught off guard as to why that happened. I respected him, but because he was so smart, he was very

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<sup>5</sup> During the Thompson administration the voting was changed so that the state elections fell between the national elections. This produced one term of two years.

intimidating, especially when I was so new that I didn't know what I was talking about.

DePue: Well, he's intimidating just because he's big, as well.

Schoenburg: He's also, yeah, six-six or whatever. And yeah, everything about him was in control. When you think part of your job might be to find the chink in the armor or whatever, it was tough to find, sometimes, with Thompson.

DePue: From what you describe and others have described, he enjoyed the combat of the relationship between—

Schoenburg: He was confident. He was a good trial lawyer. I've seen others do this. Edgar ended up being, by the way, quite good with us. It was in the Thompson years that I really learned that being governor means everything you think can be news, which was a shock to me.

DePue: Say that again?

Schoenburg: When you're governor, everything you think can be news. This is one of the many things that I did not learn in journalism school; I assume they do a better job of it now. I'm not getting down on the journalism school I came out of, which I think was quite good, plus the *Daily Illini* experience. But in addition to not really understanding what a good feature story was because of my lack of experience, I really didn't know that at a certain level, like if a Jim Thompson or a Jim Edgar were to say, "I'm thinking that maybe in the future we might need a tax increase," that's a front-page headline, whereas if most other people say that, it's not. The other thing, just from a work angle, when you have a press conference with a governor and you talk to them for however long, twenty minutes or sometimes longer, you might get four or five stories out of that, because everything they think on every subject can be news, just because they have such control of the process. If the governor says we need more kids to be insured, that's a story. If the governor says we need mandatory insurance, or I don't want the death penalty anymore, that's obviously a giant story. So it was just interesting for me, and it was during the Jim Thompson time that I learned this, that I would see this happen I would see other people asking the questions; I was somewhat in awe and fear of, My gosh, how many stories can come out of this? (laughs) Which sometimes I had to write, but obviously we had help through the Associated Press and such.

DePue: What were the big stories or the big story during the last portion of the Thompson years?

Schoenburg: What were those?

DePue: He came in after Walker, so he had to restore some credibility with the notion of government as well as a relationship with the legislature; Walker did not have that.

Schoenburg: Well, he [Thompson] did have that. He got along with people. A couple of times, he ran races against Adlai Stevenson, and some of the issues there were—well, there were good and bad. I think he brought in Class X felonies;<sup>6</sup> I remember seeing some of the debates on that. The prosecutor side of him said, We're going to get tougher. They started the process of building a lot of jails so that there was a lot of competition among cities for who would get the next jail, which said something bad about the economy, because he was there in '82, when there was a recession. So you had people seeking jobs for their constituents to be prison guards, which is probably one of the worst jobs there is. But it says something about the economy and the criminal justice system and the way it was going.

He did, I think, promise no tax increase at one point and then came in and did some tax-raising, so...

DePue: We had that temporary surcharge at the end of his administration—

Schoenburg: That's right.

DePue: —which is going to factor in big to Edgar's first election campaign.

Schoenburg: Right. This is interestingly at the time when I was not concentrating specifically on state government because I was in Chicago. I do remember the debate between Edgar and [Neil] Hartigan, which I'm sure we'll talk about, when Hartigan said, "We can cut; we don't need it. Two percent. Me and Marge can sit at the kitchen table and cut 2 percent of our budget; state government can do the same." Edgar was the one who campaigned saying, We need to keep that surcharge in. So yeah, there were budget problems. During the Thompson years, I remember some years they had layoffs—I think it was 1,300 one year—in the state budget. I remember the poster at the budget briefing for reporters: "There will be pain," because the *State Journal-Register* ran a picture of that poster. There were some people upset in the governor's office because they thought that broke the embargo on the information we were getting in the briefing before the budget speech.

DePue: Now, you lost me there. The embargo on information before the budget speech?

Schoenburg: The tradition at the State House, at least during the Thompson years and beyond, had for many years been that the day before the budget address, there would be a briefing with reporters to explain what was in it, but the information would be embargoed until noon on the day of the speech, when the governor started speaking. So that you weren't supposed to write stories for that next morning's paper to say what's in the speech, or put it on

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<sup>6</sup> Class X felony is, Short of first degree murder, a Class X is the most serious felony in Illinois. The court *cannot* sentence probation for a defendant found guilty; there is a mandatory minimum sentence of 6-30 years in the Department of Corrections.

television or radio. But they wanted to give you an explanation of the numbers.

DePue: That sounds very much like something that Thompson learned from mistakes that Dan Walker had made, where he had—

Schoenburg: It might be; I can't speak to that. What I can speak to is that in some recent years—and I'm not sure who started it, because I think it might have been the AP one year and the *Tribune* another—some reporters have not gone to the briefing, have found budget books other people were given, and have therefore not felt bound by any embargo, so they put the news out earlier. So there's been kind of an evolution. That may be in the past now, but there's still some sort of briefing that has been given each year. Unfortunately, in the Blagojevich years, it was really heavy on spin. I guess it always is. But they want reporters to understand what the numbers are because it's such an overwhelming document.

DePue: When Edgar first ran for governorship, he'd already run for Secretary of State and won that two times outright. Maybe start with that. Are either of those campaigns that you remember much from?

Schoenburg: I remember in Chicago in 1990—well, that was the governorship, right?

DePue: Yeah.

Schoenburg: I was mostly in the office at that time at AP, but I do know, for example, that Neil Hartigan, who was the Democratic candidate and had been Attorney General, had a Sunday press conference once where he was I think talking about how they didn't need the money of that surcharge, and he was going to be the one lighter on taxes—which was kind of an odd turnabout, because the Republican Edgar wanted to keep the tax increase there, and the Democratic Hartigan wanted to...

DePue: Well, let's put some specificity to it. It had been raised in '89 from 2.5 to 3 percent for personal taxes, and for corporate taxes, from 4 to 4.8 percent. So that was the nature of the discussion; what you're saying is, they were arguing whether to keep that.

Schoenburg: Right, and I think—yeah, half of that increase, the half percentage point, was for local governments, and the other half was for schools. I think Edgar wanted to keep it all, maybe for both of those purposes, or for schools. I just remember: it's actually our current governor, Pat Quinn, long ago made somewhat of a style decision to have press conferences on Sundays in Chicago, because a Sunday press conference often would bring out reporters not regularly on the beat, so they might be interns or young; there's not other news on Sundays, so you're almost assured a better chance at a headline on a Monday. So I remember Neil Hartigan had a Sunday press conference, I think, where he was arguing for the tax cut. I remember that I thought his logic was

flawed, and I was asking some tougher questions based on my experience, but it was a Sunday press conference where he was pushing this, Well, we can cut 2 percent of state government. It was interesting that Edgar as the Republican was the one wanting to keep the tax on, which seemed at the time like he was trying to sell people on a fiscally responsible thing to do, which is hard when the populist idea would be, Cut the taxes back to where they were. Hartigan seemed like he was pushing the populism without necessarily adequate backup for that position. The voters ended up believing Edgar, which just says something about him.

DePue: That they thought Edgar was more credible in what he was saying.

Schoenburg: They did. I think he sold it well. Because it's a tough sell, to say, The taxes just went up, and we should keep them, because that's what we need to operate state government well.

DePue: Do you recall what else Edgar was saying about taxes?

Schoenburg: You might know. (laughter)

DePue: Yeah, I do.

Schoenburg: Again, I was only tangentially involved in that campaign because I was at AP in Chicago.

DePue: Well, as I understand, the second part of the promise was, But we're not going to raise any more taxes. We'll keep this surcharge, and we won't raise any other taxes.

Schoenburg: That sounds right, but I'm...

DePue: Do you recall what Hartigan was saying? We don't want to keep the surcharge. Was he making any pledges beyond that about further taxes?

Schoenburg: I don't remember if he was. I just remember him saying, We don't need this money, because we can cut 2 percent just like you and your family can.

DePue: Well, this is very unfair of me asking, when you're not on that beat necessarily.

Schoenburg: It's okay.

DePue: Well, that brings us back to Springfield. When did you legitimately start picking up the State House beat again? You said that already, but is it 1992?

Schoenburg: Yeah, in the middle of 1992. I think my first column was sometime in mid-July, maybe even the nineteenth, of '92. Again, it was the political beat, so I was still based where I still am, at the newspaper's main office at Ninth Street,

but I then had a desk with the bureau at the State House and have had one since, which is kind of nice.

DePue: Okay. Well, we've been at this a little over two hours. Maybe this is a good time to take a break, before we get into the meat of the Edgar administration itself. So if that sounds okay to you, we'll pick this up a little bit later.

Schoenburg: That sounds fine.

DePue: Okay. Thank you, Bernie.

(end of interview #1 - #2 continues)

## Interview with Bernie Schoenburg

# ISG-A-L-2009-006.02

Interview # 2: March 16, 2009

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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### **A Note to the Reader**

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DePue: Today is Monday, March 16, 2009. My name is Mark DePue; I'm the oral historian with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. We're with Bernie

Schoenburg today. This is part two of an interview with Bernie. Good morning, Bernie.

Schoenburg: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: Always like to have busy reporters spend a big chunk of time with us. I know you have other things you probably should be doing, so I appreciate you spending the time. As you know, Bernie, but just to remind the listening audience here, this is part of the Jim Edgar oral history project. It's an important piece because it provides that perspective of a journalist. We know what the role of journalism is: to keep politicians honest, if you will, to be the watchdogs for the public. Bernie, you mentioned you thought it might be good to start with a story from your childhood again, to provide a little bit more perspective and understanding of where you came from.

Schoenburg: Just so as not to leave the wrong impression, because we did go into how I got to do this job and how I got to this profession. I wanted to mention that through my high school years, when I was living at Evanston and really went to a great high school with a lot of people, I said something about how idyllic my family life was. In many ways, we were kind of the Ozzie and Harriet family, but in some ways, there were some tensions, too. I just wanted to reflect that because in particular, I believe it was my junior year in high school—it was a year that I think I was out of student council because I had lost the race the year before, and it was a year before I was president of my quarter of that giant school.

But I was trying to organize a 100-hour basketball game, night and day, twenty-four hours, because when my brother was a senior, the senior class had done that. He's three years older than me. I thought it was really cool. I thought it was kind of just a good spirit thing. So the administration told me that I would have to round up teachers to be there at all hours. I did that almost single-handedly by taking my free time in between periods. I ended up getting help, I think it was with the scheduling part of this, from a guy. His nickname was Peewee, and I don't remember his real name.

I remember that after a long morning of work one day, I think on a week-end, I invited him to my house. He came to my house, we had lunch, and he was black. I didn't know until this time in my life some of the stronger feelings of my father, who had grown up in Chicago in various neighborhoods, some of which had, as they say in Chicago, "changed," which meant turned basically from white to black. Chicago, I know through study later, is one of the more segregated cities in America.

My dad ended up staying in the den and not coming out to say hello, as I recall. Then later I got the message that I shouldn't bring a black person home again. This was rather shocking to me. I'm saying this now—my father is a good person, a great provider, was an insurance agent for all these years,

from the time he was forty, after working a couple jobs, and always wants to give you money—he's very generous with what little he had. But this was something where I didn't see his viewpoint at all. I tried to talk to him, but he was, as I like to say, a man of the fifties. He didn't talk much in kind of conversational terms. You didn't have a heart-to-heart with my dad—at least I never have. He was pretty immovable on this at that point.

So this led me to some feeling of rebellion. I didn't do much about it, but there was, in my sense, injustice in my own home. That helped probably make me understand even more race relations being a big problem, because I think I earlier identified it as what I consider the continuing biggest problem in America.

As it turns out, my dad in many ways, mellowed over the years. Our neighborhood got a little more diverse—not much, but some—so that where it used to be mostly Jewish and a few houses with Christmas lights, now there are some—there were always an Asian family or two—and there became black families, Hispanic families, all on the same block, and my dad was fine with it. He changed with the times some. But this would have been about 1974 or '5, and he hadn't made that transition yet. It had a long-time effect on me. We get along. We've not discussed anything like this seriously, ever, and he's ninety as we speak. But it was something that obviously had an impact on me because it set certain boundaries that let me know it was very hard to change people's minds about some very serious things.

DePue: Even people you would chalk up as being good people.

Schoenburg: He's a good person; he's not exactly a subtle philosopher. But he was always good to the family as far as being a good provider, which is what I think he considered his main role. You know, hard worker. But I would consider this a flaw, and it was one of those formative things where I think I have actively tried to be different from him.

DePue: What was it about his life growing up in Chicago, maybe his formative years, that led him to that very different view of things, do you think?

Schoenburg: I think it's a very nuts-and-bolts view of a lot of people in the city of Chicago, where I learned about panic peddling, where if one black family would move onto a block that had been traditionally white in Chicago, then certain unscrupulous real estate dealers would come in and try to go house-to-house, saying, "The neighborhood is changing; you've got to sell your house now for nothing, or for a low price, and move." Because areas of the west side, which, I know traditionally had been I guess Jewish in the early part of the twentieth century and then turned almost entirely black—in Chicago, partly because of, I think, an institutionalized racism, neighborhoods would either be white or black, or Hispanic, as time went on. There was not a lot of mixing. There was a lot of what they called white flight, which is a lot of white folks would think,

Well, if black people are moving into the neighborhood, property values will go down, and we better move to the suburbs now. And that happened—

DePue: And your family moved in '56, right?

Schoenburg: My family moved in '54 from the north side of Chicago, which was actually not a changing neighborhood. This was something that showed, I think, good foresight on my father's part. He wanted to move to Evanston because they had good schools. We ended up living walking distance from a grade school. They ended up building a junior high that was bicycling distance, too. Then the high school was one central high school for the city, which was a couple miles from us, which was bus distance or carpool. But he moved to a good neighborhood. I don't think the neighborhood he moved out of at that point on the north side of Chicago was changing colors. But he had lived, I think, in other places in the city that might have changed. Certainly, his business was a south side business—the family business—and I think the neighborhoods around it had quote-unquote “changed”—when they had the produce business.

So he had what he considered street smarts, which was, I think—the little discussion that we had about this situation was, If you let this guy come to your house, he will tell his family it's a nice neighborhood, and when they're looking for a house, they might buy one here, and that would be bad for the neighborhood. And I thought this was horrendous. (laughs) I was just appalled at the logic, but my father was not the kind who would argue with you; he would just be quiet, and that was it.

DePue: So there was no screaming between the two of you over this?

Schoenburg: I think I tried to make an impassioned argument—not screaming that I recall—and he was like talking to a rock. There was just nothing, no movement.

DePue: How about your mother?

Schoenburg: My mother was a wonderful and intelligent person who, I think because of— This was not the only situation in which my father was immovable; I think in matters emotional and marital, he was also pretty immovable. She was a survivor—a brilliant survivor—and she basically got through things and let him win. I don't think she took him on much, although there were times later when he was fighting me about something else once, that I know she was upset, actually cried and basically was taking my side. I don't know if he came around at all, but he would at least subside.

DePue: That was not the case in this incident?

Schoenburg: In this incident, I think she just said, “You have to understand your father.” Something like that; I don't remember exactly. She didn't try to fight him because I think she knew the battle could not be won either. I think she

philosophically was probably on my side, but there was no great forming of lines in the family.

DePue: Well, it does speak a lot about the nature of racial divisions in the United States. I mean, ultimately, part of the discussion is, it gets down to economics.

Schoenburg: It does. It's home values and neighborhood. Well, it's safety and economics, at least that was the perception. As I ended up working at the Associated Press in Chicago, it was interesting, because I know there was a professor in town at that time, who I think went on to Harvard, who would put out the occasional study saying that Chicago was the most racially segregated city, either in the country or in the north. I believed that because of the things that I had seen firsthand.

DePue: Growing up in Chicago, did you also—in Evanston, next door to Chicago—did you also have the sense that Chicago was a machine city?

Schoenburg: I remember at some point picking up on the Mike Royko—Daley machine thing you know, Mike Royko being the great writer for the *Daily News* sometimes, and then *Tribune* until his death in, I think, 1997 [1932-1997]. But I know it was around journalism school time that I became particularly attuned to that and got more interested in what was going on in Chicago. I was not very politically astute as a high school kid, as I said with the Vietnam War. I wasn't exactly on par with other friends of mine who paid more attention to international news.

DePue: Let's jump way ahead, then, Bernie.

Schoenburg: Jim Edgar.

DePue: Jim Edgar, yeah. When we last met, we finished off by talking about the 1990 campaign between Edgar and Hartigan. I wanted to pick it up from here. Hopefully I've structured it in such a way that there's some sense to the organization that we've got here, basically try to keep a chronology, but also picking up some of the major themes. I'd like to start off with any memories you might have about his inauguration. For example, do you remember his inaugural speech at all?

Schoenburg: Well, let's see. This would have been January of 1990, and I was living in Chicago.

DePue: Oh, in '91.

Schoenburg: Ninety-one. So I was living here but covering city council, so they would not have sent me. I know that the state was in a fiscal bind, but beyond that, I don't have a strong recollection because it wasn't my job at that moment. (laughs)

DePue: When did it become your job to follow the State House side?

Schoenburg: It was in the summer of '92 that they took me off the city council beat to become the columnist. They went about a year and a half at the newspaper where there was no columnist. There had been a guy named Pete Ellertson who had it for something like five years; it might have been a little more than that. He was taken off that beat; then he left the paper. From about the time I was at the paper for six months, which would have been—I started in the middle of 1990—so from about the beginning of '91 until the middle of '92, there was no political columnist, locally. Then Dana Heupel—H-e-u-p-e-l—who had come in as metro editor, kind of pushed to reestablish the columnist role, and I applied for it—we might have discussed that—then I got it. So really, I think it was between the Republican and Democratic conventions in '92 that I remember—we had not planned as a newspaper to go to either, but I remember calling some people at the second convention—I think it was a Herndon,<sup>7</sup> actually, who was a descendant of Lincoln's law partner and biographer, at one of the conventions—I think it was Democratic—saying, What's going on there as a delegate or as an alternate? So that was when I really began paying attention, again, directly to State House matters.

DePue: Well, The beginning of anybody's administration, you put together your team. In his [Edgar's] case, the team chief of staff was Kirk Dillard for the first couple of years. What can you tell me about Kirk Dillard?

Schoenburg: Kirk has always been the kind of guy who is friendly, confident in his surroundings, smart. He has gone on to become a state senator. He was reasonably young, because still, as a state senator, I think he's in his forties now. I know there've been some discussions as to if he would run for statewide office, which is still a possibility. The last go-round, which might have been the 2006 cycle, I remember talking to him about it, and he said that he had young children, so he still has, I think, grade-school children. So I think it spoke well to have a young, energetic person running things who was smart. I think it was similar to Edgar himself, that, you know, he brought somebody on who was not necessarily entrenched and probably had some fresh ideas, even though they had some difficult economic times.

DePue: Well, chief of staff is oftentimes the person that precludes access to the boss and tries to manage the boss's schedule so it's somewhat rational. What kind of person was Kirk Dillard when it came to access to Edgar?

Schoenburg: In Edgar's years, when I became a columnist, I ended up interviewing him just about every year at Christmas or New Year's time. So they provided access, and I think that's a reflection of a governor who feels confident of himself. He also had fairly regular news availabilities or news conferences. He would come to the Blue Room, which is the press conference room at the

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<sup>7</sup> It was Bill Herndon, Jr., a Paul Tsongas delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

State House, and talk. A lot of times, he ended up having either bill signings or availabilities when he would just say, If you guys want to talk about something—maybe there's a topic—then [he would] open it up to other questions. There's the main office on the second floor of the capitol and an office to the side that has usually been kind of a public press conference place for various governors in my time here. So he would open it up in there. Again, just like in my Jim Thompson experience, you could get three or four stories out of a situation like that. He would sometimes lecture the press on, I wish I was your boss, and I wish you would do things this way, and Don't spin it out of control. He made fun like that a lot, but he was clearly confident enough to know what he was saying, not say the wrong thing, keep it in control, and face us without running out the door as, you know, some other politicians have done in my time, particularly Blagojevich.

DePue: Would you describe him as a policy wonk in that respect?

Schoenburg: He was good on policy. I didn't know this until at some point, and I could just kind of jump into it. He was good at politics, which I didn't necessarily realize until later, because I spent a day with him, a full, long day starting in Chicago at 8:00 in the morning in 1994 [during the] campaign, when he was running for reelection. We met at a breakfast in Chicago. I think Stuart Levine was there, (laughs) but I'm not sure. I met him at the elevator, who later became known as someone who did dirty dealings on the Teachers' Retirement System and the Health Facilities Planning Board, but he was a big contributor. We were in downtown Chicago at a breakfast, and Henry Kissinger spoke. We went to Meigs Field for a helicopter flight to the suburbs and something in DuPage County. Then we flew to southern Illinois and ended up at the Johnson County annual gospel sing, which is a big Republican event that he appeared at, and then flew back to Springfield like at 10:30 at night.

But what was surprising to me in that flight was, as we were flying over various parts of Illinois, he'd point down and he'd say what the county was; he'd tell you who the county chairman was; and he'd tell you the Republican strength. He knew everything about the politics of the state, which surprised me, even having covered him for a few years at that time, because I guess this is what it takes to be governor and to become the legislative liaison for a governor as he had done for Jim Thompson at a young age. He knew who people were and what they cared about in different parts of the state. When I was just looking over, in recent days, some old articles, that reminds me that he did due diligence to the politics of being where he's at.

There was a guy named Sam Panayotovich—P-a-n-a-y-o-t-o-v-i-c-h, I believe—he was a state rep, Democrat. He ended up switching parties, along with Eddie Vrdolyak in Chicago, to become a Republican. He then got beat because in Chicago, when you become a Republican, your base doesn't know what to do with you. In his case, I think he ran again and lost. But anyway, he was then out of the legislature. He then opened a bar or took over a bar that

was across from the capitol, which is no longer a bar but was one for many years that legislators went to—Edgar never included—because he doesn't drink and didn't do that scene at all that I'm aware of. It had been *Mr. B's* and *Sorry Charly's*, but it became *Play it Again, Sam's*; it was in a little office building just north of the Stratton Building and near the capitol. Well, Edgar ended up naming Sam Panayotovich to the Liquor Control Board, which was a pretty high-paying job, but that just shows—you know, it's a bar owner, it's a guy who switched parties, but it's a former legislator a lot of people liked, so he was getting one of these nice appointments from Jim Edgar.

DePue: Did you see his in-depth knowledge of Illinois politics, grassroots politics, as a positive, as an admirable thing?

Schoenburg: I saw it as surprising that beyond the policy, he knew so much about this stuff. I guess a little bit negative. It's somewhere in the middle. Somewhere in the middle, truly. I was impressed, but it was like, Oh, he's one of those guys, too. He understands the system, and he knows how to work the system. A lot of people have said in the later times that George Ryan got in trouble for helping friends, or even Rod Blagojevich, but there's really no comparison there—although Rod had contributors and gave them things and gave ex-legislators various jobs if they were friendly to him. Oh, and even Blagojevich, because of the George Ryan scandal that would follow, didn't take money directly from his own employees. Well, George Ryan did until the very end of his one term as governor, when it was clear that he was getting in trouble for that. But Jim Edgar was in the time when, yeah, people did give.

One of the stories I skipped over—I recall, I think it was at either the convention center or the fairgrounds—I think the Prairie Capital Convention Center—he had a fundraiser. I think it was fifty dollars a person. They were expecting to raise 400- 500,000 dollars. And you know who would line up for that—it was all the state employees who were working for him. All of that, some years later, as corruption scandals would mushroom once again, as they bubble up in Illinois from time to time, would say that's a terrible thing, that your employees are buying these tickets and showing up at the event so they can shake your hand. But you know, Jim Edgar did it, but he did it in a nice way. (laughs) But it was some of the same stuff.

DePue: It wasn't illegal by any means.

Schoenburg: It was not illegal. In fact, it's still, I think, not illegal, although all of the various movements to tighten up ethics laws have said you shouldn't take money from your own employees. Most of the constitutional officers either ban it or don't encourage it. Like Jesse White, the secretary of state now, says, "I don't send invitations, but if they want to come, that's okay." (laughs) And that still happens.

DePue: Well, the need for money hasn't dried up, has it?

Schoenburg: You've got to have money to advertise, and I know Jim Edgar raised a lot. People would get sometimes tens of thousands of dollars from either individuals or companies or PACs—political action committees—along the way. He certainly was among those who did that and used it well, because looking at the '94 campaign, he advertised long and hard against Dawn Clark Netsch on television—that's the expensive part—and without money, you can't do that.

DePue: Well, let's go back to the relationship with the press. This is probably a good time to bring in Mike Lawrence, who some would say was his closest advisor and certainly was his press secretary for most of his administration. Your opinions about working with Mike?

Schoenburg: Well, this is not a fair question because Mike and I have become great friends. I have talked to Mike about how he handled things, so I know more about some of the inner workings of that than I would normally know from just a professional relationship as press secretary. When I say "great friends," I mean, it's also kind of professional, but we enjoy each other's company a lot. Now since he's been teaching at Southern Illinois University these several years, as assistant and then director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, he's had me down as much as once a semester to speak to classes. We usually have a meal together; I have stayed overnight at his home and his lovely wife Marianne is there, and it's just a nice thing. But Mike has told me that as a press secretary, he wanted to be in the room, he wanted to be part of the decision-making process, and that Edgar did listen to him in some situations where Edgar might want to hire a consultant and Lawrence would say, "No, bad guy; don't do it."

DePue: Is that the normal model for what a press secretary does?

Schoenburg: I think it should be. I don't think it always is. I don't have a great body of knowledge to draw from, because there was Jim Thompson, and he had Dave Gilbert, who had come off the *[Chicago] Tribune*. My impression was Dave Gilbert was like that, that he was a close friend of Governor Thompson. Then David Fields took over, and my impression was, he was close enough. With Rod Blagojevich, for example, my impression was that nobody dealing with the press was that close, which is why we never got a real view of the guy. Cheryle Jackson, who was his first main spokesperson and has gone on to head the Chicago Urban League now as its president, was spokesperson for five years. But you really thought the chief of staff was running things; I'm not sure if Cheryle was in the room or not. I'm sure they're there for some of the discussions of how to roll out the ideas and the strategy sessions, but my guess is the real hardball was not discussed in front of her.

DePue: Would you say that Mike Lawrence then was Edgar's closest advisor?

Schoenburg: My guess is he's right up there, partly because he was with him for, as you said, starting with the secretary of state time. I know even when Mike was a reporter at the State House before that, he and Edgar used to have lunch because Mike is a big guy on going to lunch with people and talking. So he got to know Edgar, I think, in the legislature and then as Secretary of State and then joined his staff. My impression has always been, both seeing them in places together and hearing each talk about the other, that there was a great mutual respect. So my guess is he would be up near the top. There was a, I think, chief of staff or a campaign manager named Andy Foster who, interestingly, was like twenty-seven years old when he was running the campaign for Edgar on the second go-round. Very young. He was smart, probably a good tactician. You've got to think that Lawrence was someone, because of his vast knowledge of state government, having watched it for, at that point, probably twenty years as a journalist, and the fact that it seemed like there was a mutual respect, that Edgar would have gone to him as a sounding board on lots of initiatives.

DePue: Anybody else on the staff who really sticks out in your mind? Let me ask it this way: Joan Walters.

Schoenburg: Joan Walters. Yes, thank you for the prompt—which is interesting, because Joan is back in Springfield now, having moved out of state for some years. Joan was his budget director, I think when he was Secretary of State and then as governor. Budget was one of the more difficult things that Edgar had to deal with, because, even though in light of the fiscal state of the state today, in 2009 it was really bad and while they may be in the hole as many as eleven billion now, back then, they were in the hole I think a billion or more.

DePue: When he walked in, practically within the first couple of days, he says, "We've got a 300-million-dollar hole to fill," and then it quickly, when he started looking around and taking assessment of things, it was right at a billion dollars.

Schoenburg: Wow.

DePue: Which I'm sure in Edgar's mind was serious money.

Schoenburg: Very serious, and it still would be serious money. It's just that things have gone so crazily far. For him to put Joan in the situation he did shows that he respected her greatly; I know he respected her counsel greatly. I didn't know her very well, other than the annual budget briefings that the state administration would give to reporters the day before the budget would come out. Serious person. I didn't know her well. It was clearly a good relationship that they had. In later years since I've come to know her, she's very active now in something called the Citizens Club of Springfield. You can see that even—and I think she's retired—even in retirement, she's trying to do good

things for folks. So I think her motivation was good. I think that's generally the kind of people that Edgar had around him.

I'm trying to think at the moment if there were your typical political goofballs hanging around; I don't remember any offhand, although as you bring up names, maybe we'll get there. But there are some politicians who surround themselves with the kind of the guys who dig dirt and the guys who schmooze with everybody and drink a lot to get things done at night, to move the dime. I don't think Edgar surrounded himself with that [those] kinds of folks. They were more the goody-goody.

DePue: But that wasn't the kind of folk he was, was it?

Schoenburg: Well, the main—

DePue: How would you describe Edgar? Let's put it that way.

Schoenburg: Well, what's interesting is, despite doing the serious politics that we've talked about—and part of that is having—I'll just mention his patronage chief, the person in charge of hiring, basically, was Janis Cellini—J-a-n-i-s—who is Bill Cellini's sister and a very nice and smart person. Not one who has been public with the press; only in recent years has she talked to me, (laughs) because she was the kind who would be smart enough or whatever not to return phone calls. But Bill Cellini has been known as the political powerhouse of Springfield and of Illinois for a long time and now sits indicted and claiming his innocence in the scandal involving Blagojevich and all. He raised money for Edgar, and his sister was in charge of patronage for Jim Edgar, so he was *smooth*.

DePue: Was that her title?

Schoenburg: I think it was probably director of personnel or director of intergovernmental affairs or something like that. I'm not exactly positive. But everybody knew her as the patronage chief. I would only get hints of this, but we were coming out of the Thompson era, and I think it was 1990 that the RUTAN<sup>8</sup> decision came down; you couldn't overtly hire and fire people based on politics if they were below the management level. But Edgar did the political due diligence, and that's one example.

DePue: How would you describe the way in which patronage at that time worked? You mentioned the RUTAN decision, so it was at least on the surface, you're

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<sup>8</sup> *Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois*, 497 U.S. 62 (1990). The practice of hiring and promoting low level employees based on their political affiliation was denied as an infringement of employees' First Amendment right of free speech. A government's interest in securing loyal employees who will implement its policies can be met by hiring high level employees on the basis of their political views. <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?navby=case&court=us&vol=497&page=62> (accessed November 4, 2011).

not supposed to be using your political clout to hire people when it should be by merit. I mean, a very rough explanation of it.

Schoenburg: I do remember there was a series of stories, mostly done by, I think, Doug Finke—F-i-n-k-e—one of my colleagues, who has covered kind of the personnel side of things and still does a lot, where, I think maybe under court order or just under the RUTAN ruling itself from the Supreme Court, there had to be a list made of RUTAN-exempt positions, those who were considered to be policy-makers or close to policy-makers so that they could be hired as an advocate for the boss as opposed to just doing the work of the people who are coming to the state facilities. I think that list ended up being about 3,500 people out of a state workforce at that time of like 60,000. So they would clearly be able to hire their Republican friends for that, then you weren't supposed to be doing that for the other jobs.

DePue: So Julie Cellini—or not Julie...

Schoenburg: Janis Cellini.

DePue: Janis Cellini would have been perfectly in her rights, and Edgar as well, for filling those positions based on political connections back to these county chairman and things like that?

Schoenburg: Yes. There was a time when county chairmen—under this RUTAN ruling—the decision was they couldn't even write a letter for somebody. I know Irv Smith of Sangamon County, who was the county chairman for many years and just retired from that years ago—

DePue: Republican County Chairman.

Schoenburg: Republican County Chairman—was very upset about this. He was also a long-time alderman in the city of Springfield. He actually served twenty years, which is more than the twelve years now allowed under term limits. A lot of Republican county chairmen thought it was unfair that you could not even make a recommendation. That ended up getting changed. I think there was a ruling somewhere along the way that said they, like anybody else, should be able to make a recommendation, so that's what happened.

My impression is that even in the Edgar years, state employees were scared to vote in primaries unless they were voting in Republican primaries. That is still the case today in Springfield. RUTAN or not, people know that with our closed primary system, which means you have to declare which party you are when you vote, you assume that somebody in the hiring process or who works with you is going to check those records and find out if you're a team player or not. My impression is that in the Edgar years, that was still going on, but quietly and nicely in comparison to some more overt times.

DePue: Quietly and nicely. Describe "nicely."

Schoenburg: Maybe the boss wasn't yelling at you for... (laughs) I've heard that people were being sold [campaign fundraiser] tickets when they were in the Secretary of State's office, just like George Ryan did. You know, Here's some tickets; you should sell them or buy them. I don't have direct evidence, so others would have to be more severe on that. That's for fundraisers for the boss, which is kind of traditional politics.

DePue: You mentioned that you were surprised to find out that Edgar was as thoroughly knowledgeable about politics, especially Republican party politics I'm sure, in the state as he was. Did you have a sense that he was okay with the RUTAN decision and the new patronage rules that **he** suddenly had to deal with when his boss, Thompson, had never had to deal with that before.

Schoenburg: Well, he reacted to that in kind of the similar tone of dealing with the press, like, I wish I was your boss. This is the law; we're going to work with it; we're going to follow the law. So he didn't overtly say, This is a terrible thing.

DePue: Did you think he was sincere when he said that?

Schoenburg: I think he was frustrated in having to do it but would try to do it. That's the way it seemed to me— or at least try to put on the show that he was doing it.

DePue: What other words would you use to describe his personality and his leadership style?

Schoenburg: Well, I diverted into the Janis Cellini thing from your earlier question about style. It is interesting—to this day, he presents himself very well, just by simple things as dressing nicely and wearing the tie and standing very straight. He is the kind of person who walks into a room, and there's a presence there, which is, I think, one of those intangibles that winning politicians have to have. Some very smart people that I have covered, who I thought were going to be good candidates, didn't have it, because nobody cared when they walked into a room. So Edgar, he's got the—I think we've discussed this—he's got the nice hair. Not as wild as Blagojevich, but... Presents himself well. The one thing that did surprise me was he was proud but not overbearing about his religion, that he belonged to Central Baptist Church, which was right across the street from the mansion, and would sometimes go there with the family on a Sunday, I think. While Jim Thompson had been known for having lots of parties at the mansion and spending a lot of money on alcohol—which actually turned into a big story once, by Bill Lambrecht of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and how much they spent on like shrimp and liquor. Thompson was just livid about this; I remember seeing some of the reaction to it. Edgar decided, The mansion is my home, and we will not serve alcohol there.

DePue: He didn't drink, period.

Schoenburg: He did not drink; he does not drink, so he was obviously never known as the kind of legislator who gives them all a bad name. I don't even think he was

out late much at all. Never recall seeing him. When I was a younger reporter, there was no family to get home to (laughs); I would go out some and meet legislators and actually found that to my business extremely useful—which I've tried to explain to my wife. (laughter) But when I used to go to *Play It Again Sam's*, or its predecessor, places right across from the Capitol, when a day's work was done, I ended up meeting legislators at that time who became kind of my best sources or people who would trust you just because they know you outside of work for years, for decades, really. But Edgar did not work that circuit that I'm aware of. Certainly, there were the political events, which I think he did well. I think people respected him for his straightness in the way he carried on his life. Certainly that image served him well with the public.

DePue: In my understanding, he also has a reputation for **never** cursing.

Schoenburg: I'm not positive about that, but I've never seen it. Of course, we've never had any FBI tapes on him as there were on Blagojevich with all the potty-mouthed stuff. So my guess is he's probably stuck pretty close to that.

DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question, but in the parlance of politicians, some could draw the conclusion that because of the personality—he had the Boy Scout reputation, from what you're describing—he didn't have the political clout, that people wouldn't fear him in a political sense—wouldn't respect him, perhaps, is the better word.

Schoenburg: I'm glad you brought that up because that was the point that I was just trying to remember. I think, and I actually wrote, that it hurt him to not give on like his view at alcohol at the mansion. I say that because there was a negative reaction to it. Jim Thompson—one of his traditions was at the end of the session every year—you could usually tell when it was coming, and sometimes they'd have the party anyway if there was going to be a little carryover—would have a party at the mansion and invite all the legislators and the press, if we were done with our stories or past deadline. I remember going some. The mansion would be packed. There would be bars set up in it. They usually poured very heavily there—probably told to do so. In other words, strong drinks. People seemed to have a good time, and this was a tradition. Well, I remember in Edgar's first term or two, there was a party at the mansion at or near the end of the session. In those days—I would probably seek to be seen this way less now—but I was a reporter who enjoyed drinking some, back then more so, and that was more the image that you wanted to have as a reporter, I guess, or at least it fit.

DePue: The **hard core** reporter.

Schoenburg: Yes. We've all mellowed over time. But I remember seeing a waiter there carrying around what looked like glasses of beer, and I'm like, Aha, Edgar's let down. Well, it turned out to be apple juice, (laughter) because I got one.

You know what? People left quickly, and within two years, I think—I'm not sure if Skip Saviano, a Republican legislator from Elmwood Park was in office yet—but he started having parties at his house, and Gary LaPaille, I think, had a party at his house once that might have been end-of-the-session. He was state senator for a while and chairman of the Democratic party. But nobody ended up, within a year or two, going to the mansion, and then Edgar just stopped doing it. In that year, and I think it was '92, '93, '94—I can't remember. No, it was after that, maybe even '95. It was after the election with Dawn Clark Netsch, and that's when Edgar had switched—he said it wasn't a switch, but it was kind of a switch—from being against the tax swap with a lowering-of-property-taxes promise for an increase in the income tax to fund education. Tried to get something like that through the legislature, and it was stopped for a time, in particular because Pate Philip, the Republican president in the Senate, didn't like it, and either didn't call it for a vote or didn't put enough votes on it. I wrote a column saying that, if Jim Edgar would just lighten up and pal around more with the legislators, he might get stuff done like Jim Thompson did. If he would have them over to the mansion and serve them alcohol, maybe they would feel more at one with him.

This was the one time that I remember Mike Lawrence was perturbed with me more than any other time in our relationship, because he called me on the phone, and the way I like to put it—and it isn't necessarily this—but kind of yelled at me for twenty minutes: It's really Pate Philip; it's not what you say. Yet, I was arguing that I had seen the congenial kind of politician work, or the congeniality method work, and that Edgar was not doing that. He was not being the after-hours guy, when, my experience is you make these good relationships because you're chatting with people and learning more about them in a non-work situation. But I just remember that Mike Lawrence was quite perturbed at that and wanted to let me know that, which was fine, and I took it nicely, and we remember that fondly.

DePue: There are a couple governors in Illinois with reputations for having an absolutely **horrendous** relationship with the legislature. What was the nature of Jim Edgar's relationship with the legislature?

Schoenburg: Well, I think that, because he came out of the legislature and then was a legislative liaison for a governor, it was very clear to the players that he understood the process. Maybe Jim Thompson's years started it, but Edgar clearly continued it for his eight. As budget negotiations got serious, you would meet with the leadership, the members of each caucus or the leaders of each of the four caucuses of the General Assembly, and try to deal, try to work out something, try to compromise.

DePue: So roll-up-the-sleeves kind of work?

Schoenburg: Roll up the sleeves, let the press in for just a minute to take pictures of you all meeting, maybe, and then get serious in the closed session and try to work out

how things could go. There were some tough choices to make, as when Edgar decided to cut, I guess, welfare payments to single adults, which I think cut 100,000 people off the rolls; that was seen as difficult, but something that had to be done in one of his early budget years. But obviously, when you talk about a bad relationship, Rod Blagojevich was the worst that I've seen in my more than thirty years of doing this.

DePue: Dan Walker was the other one I was thinking about.

Schoenburg: Dan Walker was just before I came on the scene, because Jim Thompson was new when I showed up in the summer of '77 for my first little touch of Springfield. But yeah. Well, Dan Walker, I think, was viewed as a serious person, a knowledgeable person, but the problem he had was that he got to office by fighting Mayor Daley—the first—in Chicago, Richard J. Daley. Mayor Richard J. Daley had a big faction of people who were in the legislature, so they weren't going to work with Walker no matter what. He, as I understand it and have since learned through occasional stories, studies, and talking to him, he would try to continually take them on and show his independence from the Chicago machine. So you had kind of a built-in structural reluctance of part of the legislature to work with him, and he wasn't going to work with them, so there was a lot of tension. I think there were some other things, too, that I'm sure Taylor Pensoneau will tell you about. (laughs)

George Ryan could also work the budget magic by calling people in. Despite the fact that he got in trouble with the law for giving his friends tips about what state government was doing, or sending political money to his family from Phil Gramm, who was running for president—various silly things which were helping his friends—that did not really detract much from his long tenure in the legislature himself when he was speaker of the House, later lieutenant governor and secretary of state, and then governor. He knew the process, and his word was good with the people in the legislature. So they could go to him, make a deal, shake hands, and the deal was done. I think particularly of Jeff Schoenberg, who was a state senator from Evanston. He's a b-e-r-g as opposed to my b-u-r-g, and we are not related that we know of and never met until we were in the legislature, but call each other "cousin" just for the heck of it. (laughter) Nice guy. He was seeking money, I think it was for a renovation or expansion of a children's museum in his district; I remember him talking about it, saying, I went in to George, and I could have asked for a million dollars for renovation, but I thought what the heck—and this was during George's big—it wasn't—

DePue: Build Illinois?

Schoenburg: Well, Build Illinois was Thompson, and this was—George's had another name, I believe *Illinois First*. But as part of a lot of money coming for projects, he said, I'll ask for five million for a new building. He got it, even though he's a Democrat, and the money came through, and I think there's a

new children's museum somewhere on the North Shore because of it. So there was a trust within the process of George.

Now, Rod Blagojevich came in and would have the same kind of meetings with leaders, but it became clear over time that Rod Blagojevich wasn't actually negotiating. He was giving little lectures; he would tell jokes about the Cubs for fifteen minutes and then not get down to business, because his views were so odd and the things he wanted to do were so out of the mainstream and may not be able to be paid for, like expanding health care when there was no money to do so, and he wanted to do it anyway. He was not listening. Frank Watson—who recently retired as Senate Republican leader—I remember him using the word “bizarre.” He's in these meetings, and it's **bizarre**, because he'll say this weird stuff, and it's off the beaten path a little bit. But Rod Blagojevich, even with the press one time, he started talking about how he could visualize up to forty-two words backwards and forwards and started talking gibberish—I've written about this—saying, “Any sentence, I can memorize it and say it backwards.” And we're like, What are you doing? (laughter) So Rod Blagojevich was not like a real person. My impression was that Jim Edgar always was a real person. He was of the legislature in the past. He was now the executive—he took that very seriously—so he wasn't going to get bowled over, but he also was going to understand the need for compromise and the need to work with folks. I think he had the respect of people for that even if they didn't like what he was doing at times.

DePue: Well, you mentioned for George Ryan, you make a deal, you shake your hand, and people could trust him. Was that the case for Jim Edgar?

Schoenburg: I believe it is. I'm trying to think if there's anything I've heard that differs with that, but clearly the overwhelming impression of Edgar is the strait-laced way he dealt with his personal life was also the way he dealt with other people, in that he would tell you something, and he would at least be intending to tell you the truth and carry through with it.

DePue: Let me throw a couple other terms at you, and see if these make sense for you in terms of Edgar's reputation. A born administrator?

Schoenburg: I wonder what one of those is. I know it's not me, (laughter) which is why I'm here, watching these people for all these years. He seemed clearly to enjoy being in charge and would say so. I read over something where he talked about maybe being in the U.S. Senate or something, and I think at one point, he said he didn't want to be one of 100 people or whatever; he wanted to be in charge.

DePue: Maybe put it this way: was he a good organizer? Did he prefer organization and structure?

Schoenburg: It certainly seemed that way. I know that there was some reorganization of government under him, including bringing a couple of departments in to the Department of Human Services, and I think Rehabilitation Services was one of them. That's just technically bringing more structure to things. But it seemed—

DePue: DNR was another example, a very important example, for him—Department of Natural Resources.

Schoenburg: Yes. And I'm trying to remember what went into that. He looks structured, (laughs) just because he's always so neat and clean. He had, as I recall, unlike some of us, a very sparse desk, and did seem to enjoy managing things neatly. That's at least the impression. I think he had regular cabinet meetings, which, like under Blagojevich almost never happened because he was just apparently conniving with whoever was his chief of staff at the time.

DePue: Would you describe him as principled?

Schoenburg: I believe that Edgar is principled. Yet, it's interesting, because for all of the religiosity, he was very strong on not imposing those views. He has been very emphatic and repetitive in his view over time that to be a Republican and to win in Illinois, you can't have real hard-line conservative views on things. He is, for example, pro-choice on abortion, as was Jim Thompson. He believes that because of the demographics of Illinois, with significant Democratic strength, that you have to be open to both sides on even some social issues. And yet, I don't think that that is to say he's unprincipled, but some Republicans have been unhappy because he's too moderate for them. But yes, I think just in the fact that the impression is, he gives his word and his word is good—that kind of principle. He'll stick with things. I must say, there were some kind of dippy-doodle moves, and in particular, this thing about the tax increase. It was—

DePue: Nineteen ninety-four election campaign and then—

Schoenburg: Right, 1994 election campaign in which Dawn Clark Netsch, long-time state senator at the time and then state comptroller—first woman comptroller of the state—if I recall—yeah, because Loleta Didrickson came after her. But she ran a campaign in which she clearly said, we're not funding our schools evenly and fairly, so we should raise the state income tax and lower property taxes. Her proposal was seen as very honest (laughs) by the whatever, state watchers. But it also involved what would be like a 41- or 42-percent increase in the state income tax. That was the summer, then, that Jim Edgar ended up having bypass surgery. Then right about the time he was getting well, he started running ads very early for those days against Dawn Clark Netsch, saying, "She wants to raise your taxes 42 percent." He just pummeled her with ads like that through the campaign season. I think he won 101 out of 102 counties. Within the next year or two, he ended up going for a reform of

school funding, claiming that things had changed and the field had shifted because they had made some other changes, but he basically was for a very similar plan, which some could see as a reversal, but he never really admitted that.

DePue: Well, let's put some context, if you will, to this. This is a crucial discussion and has been for twenty or thirty years in Illinois politics. What is the nature of this controversy about income taxes versus property taxes as it relates to education?

Schoenburg: The basic thing is that our state constitution says that the state should have predominant responsibility for the payment of school funds; however, it has ranged from like 38 percent to 32 percent actually comes from the state to pay for public schools, and the rest is made up from property taxes. What that means is, if you're from a place that either has middle- or upper-income people or a lot of industry or, in particular, a nuclear power plant or something that pays a tremendous amount of taxes, you can have very good schools because there's adequate funding to do so. If you live in a poor community without a factory and with low-income housing, you might have a very low tax base. There's a great disparity in school districts in Illinois, and there are—gosh, there's still nearly 1,000 school districts. There used to be more than 1,000. There have been some consolidations of the tiny ones, even though those usually come with great heartbreak in the local communities who don't want to lose their football mascot.

But the unfairness of the system is that the quality of your education depends on geography, where you live. Reformers for the forty years I've been doing this have always said that's a bad thing and there should be some way to fix that. The problem is trying to get it fixed politically, because it's very hard to do. The people in the rich areas, particularly the northern suburbs of Chicago, and some of the western suburbs, don't want to lose what they've got. They fund their schools almost entirely themselves because the state help gets less when you put in more yourself. They say, Leave us alone; we're doing fine. We'll take more state funding, but we don't want any system that would make us give less.

DePue: They wanted to have caps on the property tax increases? That was also part of the debate, was it not?

Schoenburg: Well, yeah, the rising cost of property tax. There's always reaction against taxes, regardless. Actually, like in my suburb in Evanston—it's funny. When I was growing up, I remember there were various school referenda to increase funding, and they always passed. When I was working at The Associated Press in the late eighties, I think it was statewide news that the city of Evanston rejected a tax increase for schools. So there comes a point where people say enough is enough, and so yes, there was certainly that there.

DePue: I've always wondered if that's a factor of demographics. Well, the baby boomers are now educated. All those baby boomer parents aren't as inclined to vote for a tax increase.

Schoenburg: That's partly it. Clearly, if you have kids in the school, the argument is easier to accept, that I want to improve the schools, and if not, you don't see the direct benefit to your life, even though I think public policy folks would all say the quality of education defines a whole lot about the quality of the society today and in the future. So that's what the problem is. The solution to it has just been very elusive, because Edgar did work at this over time and was able to get some taxes and fees increased, but not the income tax. Well, actually, the income tax raise to 3 percent that just preceded him ended up becoming permanent and helping schools.

DePue: Which was a fight right before you took over the reins of being columnist and being in the State House, as I recall.

Schoenburg: Right.

DePue: Well, right after he got the start of his second administration, he appointed Stanley Ikenberry [President, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign] to this blue-ribbon commission to do exactly what we've been talking about. Would you see that as a way to give himself some cover on the central issue in Illinois politics: Do you raise income taxes or keep funding it with property taxes?

Schoenburg: Yeah. This, of course, was a commission to determine how to best fund the schools. I think you always appoint a blue-ribbon commission of some sort before you want to raise taxes, or at least almost. Because you want to be able to say that there's evidence that what I'm doing is not just something I thought of on a whim. Ikenberry was either the president of the U of I or just retired from it.

DePue: He was president emeritus at that time.

Schoenburg: Okay, just retired. So respected, obviously, in the education field, and yes, they were going to look for a way to craft some legislative solution to the problem that we've just been talking about. I know what they came up with was, at least in part, a base number for how much should go to fund each student in Illinois, as a baseline. You could fund them with more or less. Even today, I think some of the schools in the North Shore spend in the neighborhood of 20,000 dollars per student.

DePue: But the base number coming from the state, versus what others would have preferred as a percentage that the state would bear?

Schoenburg: These were real dollars. Well, the 50 percent—and we can talk about Jim Edgar's vote on that, too, because there was a constitutional amendment

proposed, I think it was 1992, to change the constitution to say that the state would have to provide at least 50 percent. We can look up the language of that. Instead of saying that the state has the predominant responsibility for school funding, it would actually set it to pay half. Edgar, interestingly, was governor, and I think it was at Springfield City Hall he discussed this, and might have even voted there. I think by then, I was on the beat and went to see him do this. He came out and said that he voted against it; he voted absentee because he was going to be out of town and it was several days before that vote. They needed, I think 60 percent approval, and it's in the state constitution, so you can check me. An extraordinary majority was needed to pass this as an amendment, and it was widely thought that the news and the announcement by Edgar that he voted against it killed it, or at least helped kill it, because it came close, but it didn't pass. That was kind of a surprise because what his "no" vote did is, it didn't put him as governor in a bind to find that money, to meet that requirement that the new constitutional amendment would have done. So while he was for the schools, this was something that a lot of school advocates really wanted, and he did vote against it.

DePue: You say it wouldn't put him in a bind to find the money?

Schoenburg: No, it would have put him in a bind to find the money, and he voted against—

DePue: And in 1992, this is in the midst of some very serious budget challenges that Edgar's facing.

Schoenburg: As there almost always are. Yeah, he didn't come out on the side of the reformers on that one.

DePue: But his first two years, he was cutting; he was making those declarations that, okay—I can't remember the percentage—but 2 percent or 5 percent of each one of the agencies, they have to find someplace in their budget to cut 5 percent.

Schoenburg: Yes. Again, I was covering city council during most of that time. But he did come in with the deficit, as we discussed earlier. He famously said to us many times, "You got to be able to say **no** in this job." He didn't want to increase programs too much, and he wanted to cut back on some things. So it was a difficult time.

DePue: Well, he had the nickname Governor No.

Schoenburg: Well, he probably likes that because it shows tough decision-making, necessity. But he wasn't known as being too flashy. Rod Blagojevich tried to be flashy and got some programs through and ended up with a lot of lawsuits that stopped other things he tried to do, either lawsuits or legal actions or just the law, like bringing in cheaper prescription drugs from overseas, which Blagojevich tried and couldn't do because it was not legal—or flu vaccine

from overseas, which also he couldn't do because he never got approval. Edgar wasn't generally trying things like that. He was trying to manage the state and was seen as somewhat boring. But a lot of people look back and say it was a good time to be boring, to get the state budget under control.

DePue: Would you describe him as tenacious, especially in terms of his agenda that he had as governor?

Schoenburg: I think that he was. I don't think that you get to the position of governor without a tenacity to you. I think there was one budget summer overtime legislative session that went something like seventeen days, didn't it? I think.

DePue: Mm-hmm, early in the administration where he was fighting to balance the budget and make those cuts.

Schoenburg: It's not an easy thing to do. You can compromise and try to live with what you've got and maybe hope that more revenue comes in, but he didn't do that. He had his fights with Pate Philip, interestingly, on some of the tax stuff, who was the leader of the Senate, but of his own party. He would battle with Mike Madigan, the speaker of the house. There's probably more of a mutual respect between him and Mike Madigan than there was with Pate Philip because Pate Philip was more of the—well, I don't know if I'd say rowdy—I think he'd be the kind of guy who was a former Marine, and probably kind of a pat-them-on-the-back kind of tough guy who would think Edgar was a little bit of a namby-pamby for not drinking—I'm guessing.

DePue: Where would they differ and where would they agree on political agenda? Because Philip was at least the same party affiliation.

Schoenburg: He was the same party, and they would agree on basic smaller government, smaller regulation, and generally lower-taxes stuff, so it was only when Edgar would then turn around and say, I want higher taxes—I think at one point, he got Philip to—I'm trying to think whether this was Thompson or Edgar. At one point, Philip ended up being the sponsor of a tax increase, which he didn't really want to do. But I know he was the one who blocked the major education reform, which included the funding that Edgar wanted. So probably on some fiscal matters, when Edgar got a little more liberal at what he wanted to do, that Philip was just pretty hard-core conservative, even though he was also known as a big patronage guy in DuPage county. I think if you worked in the Tollway booths, you probably had to go through Pate Philip's organization in the suburbs. (laughter) So state—

DePue: In Illinois politics...

Schoenburg: The state's about jobs, which is one of the things that shocked me, but I think Edgar understood.

- DePue: You mentioned Mike Madigan. Flesh out a little bit more about Mike Madigan's personality and the relationship he had with Edgar.
- Schoenburg: Mike Madigan—
- DePue: We're talking the speaker of the house.
- Schoenburg: The speaker of the Illinois House and a Democrat who's a lawyer, been in the legislature it seems like forever now, but I think it—
- DePue: Pretty much.
- Schoenburg: —might be from the late seventies.
- DePue: Late seventies. How did he get to the legislature in the first place?
- Schoenburg: Well, he was a delegate to the Con-Con, the Constitutional Convention, and I think—
- DePue: In 1970.
- Schoenburg: Nineteen-seventy. I think they started meeting in '69 or something because it was the constitution of '70. I think that's what brought him into the process, and certainly Chicago, Democratic politics.
- DePue: Does that mean he was a Daley guy?
- Schoenburg: I believe he was a Daley guy. He's very smart and deliberate in things he says. He reminds me of Edgar in his demeanor and his dress. He always looks crisp; he always stands straight. The thing about Madigan is, he ended up being I think majority or minority leader for a while in the House. But certainly in recent years, since he's been speaker, he actually talks, like on the floor of the General Assembly or in press conferences, very little. For a while, he didn't have press conferences after his daughter—who was actually an adopted daughter after he married Shirley, his wife of many years now. But I think Lisa Madigan was something like ten when they got married, and then he ended up adopting her later. They do call each other father and daughter very clearly and prefer it that way without the "step-" or "adopted" involved.

Well, Lisa Madigan had a tough race for a while, and then Mike Madigan quit talking to the press for about a year, (laughter) just because he thought she was dealt with unfairly, or at least that's what it seemed to be. But even without that, he is careful in his choice of words. He's one of the few people who, when they speak on the floor of the House, everyone shuts up and listens. He's a good lawyer; he's a smart legislator; he's a great tactician; and he could be very tough, but also very direct. He just says what he means and gets the message across. Sometimes it can portend interesting new policies, like I think when he was renamed speaker this year, and maybe even the last

one, he said, “We’re going to have make some difficult choices,” which everybody thought meant, We got to do a tax increase. But I think that a guy like that would respect a guy like Edgar because they both know where they’re going and have their philosophy and know that compromise is part of the process as well.

DePue: Well, you’ve gotten into some fascinating territory when it comes to Illinois politics. Explain to us why the Four Tops, if you will, in Illinois politics, seem to have such an incredible amount of power.

Schoenburg: Part of that comes from—

DePue: The Four Tops being...?

Schoenburg: Being the Senate president and minority leader and the speaker of the House and minority leader, so the heads of the Democrats and Republicans in the House and the Senate. They meet with the governor to hash out—at least it has become the tradition in the last twenty years that they meet with the governor—to hash out serious issues, in particular, the budget, towards the end of the session, to come to a compromise that then can be shared by each of them with their caucuses, who can then, often in a structured roll call find the votes to do it. Which would mean, Some of my members can’t vote for a tax increase, so I’m going to let them not do that so they can run for reelection and say, I voted against it, but I have enough safe members in districts that are so Democratic or so Republican that they’re going to get reelected anyway. We can put them on the bill, and we’ll get enough votes that way to get it passed. Then if it’s a **really** close situation, maybe some people will have to put themselves at risk to vote for this. I don’t know if that’s going to happen anymore today, by the way, because the Republicans may dislike the Democrats so much that none of them will vote for a tax increase; then we’ll have to see if the Democrats can take the risk necessary to take that action for the fiscal goodness of the state. But whatever.

But the Four Tops, part of it is, actually, the current governor, Pat Quinn, was a leader of the movement when he was just in the quote-unquote “Coalition for Political Honesty.” How many years ago is that?

DePue: Nineteen seventy-eight—1980 was the election—

Schoenburg: Yeah, so it’s thirty—

DePue: —for the Cutback Amendment.

Schoenburg: The Cutback Amendment. He led the petition drive which allowed Illinois voters to decide if the membership in the Illinois House could be reduced from 177 to 118 members. At that time, Illinois had a very odd system of fifty-nine districts, each with one senator and three members of the House. When voting for the House—they call it a bullet vote—you could vote for just

one person, and they would get three votes, or you could vote for two, and they'd each get one and a half, or you could vote for three, and they'd each get one. Through the primary process, there were no more than two members from one party on the ballot in each House, so what that meant was, basically, unless there were independents involved, you'd always get two of one party and one of the other representing each House district, which was the same as a Senate district. Which meant that if you're a Democrat living in McLean County in Bloomington, you could go to the state rep, Gerald Bradley, who was the Democrat, and who might represent your interests more than Gil Deavers, then the Republican in the House. But partly because they raised their pay in '78 in a way that made everybody mad, kind of in a one-day sweep. It was a lame-duck session in '78, which meant it was after the election. Some people were not going to be coming back. Some were probably promised jobs if they voted for the pay increase; I don't know that. But they voted during the day for a 40 percent increase. It seems like a pittance now, but it seemed like a lot then. Base pay for legislators went from 20,000 a year to 28,000. Governor Thompson was out of state but used his autopen to veto the bill; then that night it was overridden. So in one day, Thompson could say he was against it by vetoing it, but—

DePue: He'd just run for reelection based on that, based on not raising legislators' pay.

Schoenburg: Okay, well, that's a tidbit that I had forgotten, but that would be... So by him vetoing it, he could say that, but then the legislature overrode it immediately in what clearly had been a deal. Everybody went crazy, in particular, Pat Quinn, and helped push forward his Coalition for Political Honesty, which was him and a brother and a few other folks, as far as I know. They ended up asking people, as in the Boston Tea Party, to send teabags to Governor Thompson's office; I think hundreds of thousands were sent, or at least many thousands. And there was a petition drive. Our 1970 constitution does not allow, like California, for initiative votes. In other words, you can't say, I'm going to get a bunch of people, thousands of people, to sign a petition, then we can vote on an issue. You can't do that about like criminal law or civil law, but you can do it about the structure of the legislature, because the framers of that constitution, Mike Madigan probably involved, thought that the legislature would never change its structure itself, so that's one place where the people should be able to do it.

So using that opening, Pat Quinn had a petition drive to change the size of the Illinois House, or at least to put on the ballot a question to do so. He was successful in gathering probably a quarter of a million signatures to do that because people were so mad about the pay raise. It was put on the ballot, and it was passed. Jim Thompson, by the way, at his next inauguration, I have read something where he apologized profusely, during his inaugural address, for having done that deal. He thought it was a mistake. He spent an inordinate amount of time, I thought, reading back over it, saying, I was wrong to do

that, but I did it. Okay, fine, but the legislators got their pay raise. But what that meant was, there are now only 118 members in the House, so every Senate district is divided into two, and then each of those sub-districts has only one legislator, Democrat or Republican, usually—or independent, but that doesn't happen much in Illinois, if at all. Once in a while.

What that seemed to do, however—without limits on campaign contributions, you have all these people running in races. Now, many of them are safe districts, so you don't have to spend a lot of money, because if you're, again, in McLean County, or even in—well, not necessarily Sangamon County, because Springfield has significant Democratic strength even though the whole county is Republican. But if you're not in a safe district, you might get into one of these races, which, now—shift forward to 2008—you can spend like a million dollars per person to try to get a member of the House elected for what is now a salary of something close to 70,000 a year. Things have moved up.

There are no limits on campaign contributions in Illinois, yet, although that might be changing because of the Blagojevich scandal. Labor unions and businesses can give, individuals can give, unlimited amounts, as can those businesses or labor unions which, by the way, at the federal level, in federal elections, they're not allowed to give unless it's through political action committees. But we also have political action committees, and they can give unlimited amounts. So what ends up happening is a lot of the lobbying groups will give just to the leadership, or maybe a little bit to the legislators, but then mostly to the leaders, because the leaders are the ones who, through their caucus political organizations, will decide which legislators are targets, meaning, which are in those races where it's competitive. They will throw lots of their money at those races to help their candidates stay in so they can keep their majorities, or try to climb out of a minority, or not get into a worse minority.

But what that does is, when those legislators get elected, the feeling is, they are probably beholden to those leaders. So the leaders have a lot of power, because if you cross the leader on either a vote, not just for them but for what they want in legislation, the bills that are important to them, that might mean you're not going to get money for your election next time if you're challenged seriously, or maybe they'll even put up somebody against you, which can happen at times.

So the leaders, through this whole process of reform to cut the size of the legislature, have seemed to get even stronger because there is only one member of the House per district now. If they have a tough race, it's pretty much their leader that very often is going to be the one who provides them the most money of anybody. So the lobby groups have to go to the leaders to try to curry favor with them and give them the money, because they know the leaders are where the power resides. The individual members know that too

because they often have to go there. I just heard the other day, there was a state senator in a press conference where they were talking about reforming this system, saying, “I remember calling for” he lives in an impoverished district in a Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago— “I called people, and I was told, I’m sorry, I only give to leaders. That’s terrible.” But that’s the situation they’re trying to change through some legislation. That’s a perfect example of this kind of thing. So the leaders are powerful and often set the agenda.

DePue: Well, we got seriously away from Jim Edgar there, but that always fascinates me, that whole discussion, so that’s my fault for making that diversion. Can you tell us a little bit about your understanding of the relations that the Edgar administration had with Daley—in this case, Richard M. Daley?

Schoenburg: Yeah, who is the son of Daley One. I think they got along reasonably well. I know that one of the things that Daley wanted early on, was to close Meigs Field. Jim Edgar liked the state plane and helicopter to be able to use Meigs Field, which was the small airport that juts out right into Lake Michigan along the Chicago skyline. There was a deal reached to keep it open, at least for a few years, when Jim Edgar was there. He could work with Daley, and Daley could work with him. It does seem over time that mayors of Chicago, which is overwhelmingly Democratic, and they’re all Democrats, sometimes would work even better with Republican governors because they at least know that they’re on opposing teams, and they’ll come to some compromise. The Republican governors know that the city of Chicago has a significant number of people—the city has like three million people, so it’s about a third or a little less than a third of all of the people in the state. So I think they had a respect for each other. They would have known each other from legislative times, I think, because Daley the younger was in the state Senate [1972-1980].

DePue: And about the same timeframe, was in the legislature when Edgar would have been there.

Schoenburg: Yeah, either when Edgar was in the legislature [House 1976-1979] or when Edgar went over to Thompson [1979], I’m not exactly sure. But they would have known each other from those days. Yeah, I think there was a healthy relationship.

DePue: Well, there was some friction right at the beginning. Again, maybe this is at the time you weren’t paying a lot of attention, but Daley was hoping for some funding help on mass transit issues in Chicago. Of course, Edgar, looking at his budget deficit that he was, wasn’t inclined to support what Daley wanted. Does any of that ring a bell?

Schoenburg: It rings a bell somewhat, and I do, as you say it, remember some clashes. I don’t remember a lot of specifics, but I remember Daley being—maybe part of what I’m saying is when he was happy George Ryan was there later,

because George Ryan made a deal and got Soldier Field redone. I think there might have been some attempts to do that earlier, under Edgar.

DePue: There were. There were. Sports stadiums—

Schoenburg: And Edgar—

DePue: —was an issue as well.

Schoenburg: Yeah. Edgar was probably tighter than Daley wanted him to be on stuff.

DePue: Well, one of the things that was very significant, especially for the city of Chicago, and it goes back to this whole education issue: giving Daley some more power to really control what was going on in his school district. That would have been in the 1995 timeframe. Tell me the specifics there.

Schoenburg: All I remember is that at some point not too many years earlier, the Chicago public schools were called the worst in the nation, and I think—

DePue: Exactly.

Schoenburg: —that was by William Bennett, who was education secretary and still a conservative commentator.

DePue: They had a school board and they had a superintendent who was kind of outside the purview of control of Mayor Richard M. Daley at the time.

Schoenburg: Interestingly, '94 was the Republican sweep year, so when Newt Gingrich and the Contract with America were able to basically take over a majority of the U.S. House for the first time in like forty years, it was to the detriment of Bob Michel from Peoria, who had been minority leader for like twenty years. Michel then retired so that Ray LaHood, his successor, would be a Republican in the majority for the first time they've ever had in decades. But the Illinois legislature was taken over by the Republicans as well, and they were able to pass through reforms to affect the city of Chicago that many thought, I think, the Democrats would have not done because of the strength of the teachers' unions. I don't remember specifics because it was not the story for my central Illinois papers that I was covering day-to-day. So I remember as an observer, and my impression is that the Republicans more easily could take on the Chicago Teachers Union, which is a very powerful political force in Chicago, in making reforms and giving control then to the mayor. So that's probably how that happened. I do remember that Republicans have been very proud—Lee Daniels was speaker in that year—of reforming Chicago schools that year. I'm not sure if this is what brought in Paul Vallas, but it might have been.

DePue: Yeah, it was. It was.

Schoenburg: Yeah, as Daley's guy to run the schools in Chicago.

DePue: I happen to know, because I was in the National Guard up there, and he was actually in my unit for a short time. But once he got to that position, instead of the superintendent of the schools, I think in '95, when all of this came to pass, he became the executive director of the Chicago School System and worked directly for—

Schoenburg: Mayor Daley.

DePue: —Mayor Daley.

Schoenburg: Who was happy with him as long as test scores went up significantly every year, and then they had a bit of a falling out something like six years later. Yeah.

DePue: But for a long time, Paul Vallas was one of the most popular people up in Chicago because of the nature of the reforms, if I recall correctly.

Schoenburg: That sounds right, which is one of the reasons that he seemed a viable candidate for governor (laughs) in 2002, when he was in the Democratic primary and interestingly had done well, but as a Democrat that year, lost to Rod Blagojevich because Rod Blagojevich got so many votes downstate. Roland Burris was another candidate from Chicago who took a lot of votes in the African-American community that otherwise might have gone to Vallas for his help to the schools.

DePue: It was still a pretty close race. It was much closer than the general election.

Schoenburg: Vallas ended up losing in a statewide primary to Blagojevich by about 20,000 votes in 2002. That was really close. What was interesting, too, was Vallas had lived in Springfield and had been on legislative staff and had actually headed I think what at the time was called the Economic and Fiscal Commission of the Legislature, the financial reporting arm of the General Assembly. So he really understood state finances well, as clearly Rod Blagojevich did not.

DePue: So how did Blagojevich end up winning downstate over Paul Vallas, who had better credentials downstate at least?

Schoenburg: Blagojevich had a great stump speech about his father from Europe and his mother, who collected nickels and dimes in a ticket booth for the CTA, [Chicago Transit Authority] and he talked about working people, and he looked young and vigorous. He also did the due diligence politically through the tutelage, really, of his father-in-law, Dick Mell, who was an alderman in Chicago. Rod Blagojevich talked about this: "My father-in-law said, Get a lot of money to scare everybody else out of the race, and then get political support."

What they ended up doing, he talked a really good game about creating jobs downstate. I never really believed that his numbers were good, but he talked about having a privately-funded venture capital plan for downstate, and to create 50,000 jobs. I think he might have—obviously they had some way of having these numbers, but probably pulled them out of a hat. He talked about economic development in parts of Illinois long forgotten.

Through an introduction with Congressman, I think, Lane Evans, over in the Quad Cities at that time, Blagojevich met John Gianulis, who at the time was longtime Democratic county chairman of Rock Island County but also headed the Democratic County Chairmen's Association of Illinois, which I think officially includes them all, but at least the ninety-six downstate counties were very active in this group. Gianulis became a great advocate for Blagojevich and convinced the rest of the downstate chairmen's group to give its endorsement to Blagojevich. That really helped pull out the stops. There's a lot of strong political leaders who can generate a lot of votes in downstate areas—Madison County, Rock Island County. Some of these places went like four- or five-to-one for Blagojevich in that primary because of his promise of newness and help for downstate, which he soon thereafter forgot once elected.

Vallas didn't like to fly, so he didn't come downstate much because it would take too much time to be busing or taking the car or train. Some people thought he should be downstate more, but he wasn't, and a combination of those factors helped Blagojevich win big. Vallas actually won the suburbs, Burriss won the city, and Blagojevich overwhelmingly won downstate, and that's what did it for him—to the chagrin of many downstate afterwards.

DePue: Well, getting back to Edgar... Clearly one of the major advances that Edgar made in education—the fight was always centered on money and the budget—property taxes versus income taxes and trying to establish that floor, as you mentioned, which he finally was able to do late in his administration for I think it's 4,800 or 4,700 dollars a year for each student that the state will contribute.

Schoenburg: Right, and it's now up in the 6,000s because it has periodically been increased.

DePue: That was crucial, but the other big scalp on his belt educationally, if you will, is this issue of restoring some discipline and structure to the Chicago school system and what we've been talking about here. Another huge agenda item for Edgar getting into his administration was doing something for children. Can you address any of the issues that were revolving around that?

Schoenburg: Again, these would be statewide issues, and I was somewhat more localized in my coverage. I do remember there was a project that he started in order to get—

DePue: Project Success?

Schoenburg: Project Success, which was, I think, put into various schools to try to consolidate social services so that you wouldn't have to go to five different state offices to get—I'm not exactly sure what it was—but unemployment and various kinds of welfare payments and health care that, maybe if you go one place, one-stop shopping kind of a thing. So I know he stressed it. That was some part of the consolidation of state services.

DePue: Did you think it was successful? Do you recall?

Schoenburg: Again, I didn't do any in-depth work on that. I know he talked about it a lot. My impression was that at least in the pilot phase, it was a good thing. And I don't have anything to say otherwise.

DePue: How about welfare reform, because Edgar, to a great extent, was kind of ahead of the power curve in welfare reform?

Schoenburg: Well, this is what I was discussing earlier when they had big budget problems, and he had to figure out how to cut some government programs. There was a certain kind of relief—there was a name for it—and it was—

DePue: Earnfare was one of the early initiatives. I don't know if...

Schoenburg: Okay. Yeah. I was actually talking about what they cut, the 100,000 people who were cut off the rolls, who were single—it might have been just men—but it was single individuals on some kind of care. I believe it was called General Assistance. But certain people were cut from the welfare rolls of the state, which—and I will try to think of it as well. But—

DePue: Fresh Start in 1993 implemented the marriage penalty, that stated that if one parent in a two-parent family home on public aid and who worked more than 100 hours, that the family no longer would be eligible for assistance. That was Fresh Start in 1993.

Schoenburg: Yeah. I'm thinking of just the kind of monthly assistance check to single people.

DePue: Well, he did have an expectation early on—and I'm sorry to put you on the spot here—

Schoenburg: No, that's okay.

DePue: —expectation early on that if you could work, you should work.

Schoenburg: You should work. Yeah, which is interesting, because I think Bill Clinton ended up doing something—

DePue: It was very similar to what the—

Schoenburg: —nationally—

DePue: At the national level.

Schoenburg: —right about then. I remember that—

DePue: But that was two or three years after Edgar had already started doing this.

Schoenburg: All I can say is a general feeling in the time, I know that a lot of Democrats thought it was heartless in a sense to do this, and a lot of Republicans probably thought that it was fiscally wise and also morally smart to get people working, as you say, if you earn something, then you can get more. I think that's what it was.

DePue: Did you have a sense of which of those two would have motivated Edgar more? Was it the fiscal rationale or the moral?

Schoenburg: I don't have a strong remembrance of this stuff. I'm guessing it was about half and half, because he really needed the money, and he also, I think, believed in the moral underpinnings of... I mean, he clearly had a good work ethic himself, and I think he believed that if you had one, you'd be better off. I'm speculating some, but that's what I would think. I'm reminded that Paul Simon thought that Bill Clinton a couple years later was doing a horrible thing by setting like a five-year limit on welfare benefits. And yet, over a period of the next fifteen years or so, it was seen as one of the better programs to come out of Washington because people actually did go to work when they might not have otherwise. So things certainly change over time and perspective.

DePue: One of the really high-profile things when it came to child issues was the Baby Richard Case. Can you talk about that one a little bit?

Schoenburg: All I can talk about is, I believe it was Judge Heiple, and I'm not sure if he was the—

DePue: He was on the Illinois State Supreme Court.

Schoenburg: On the Illinois Supreme Court. I'm not sure if he was chief justice at that time.

DePue: I don't believe he was.

Schoenburg: Okay. But wrote the case that basically said that this child who had been, I think, adopted, or in some kind of foster care for like four years—he was like a four- or a five-year-old child—and the case had taken a long time to go through court, but the court decided that the child should go back to his natural parents, who had been suing to get custody, if I recall correctly.

DePue: His father.

Schoenburg: His father. Okay.

DePue: Who hadn't seen him in four years or so.

Schoenburg: There you go. I remember the newspaper stories because they always referred to his adoptive parents as the only parents he had ever known because he was an infant, I guess, when he went to them. Bob Green was a columnist on the *Chicago Tribune* at the time. He somewhat fell from grace after that through some Catholic schoolgirl thing. But sorry, Bob.

DePue: That sounds like an interesting story.

Schoenburg: Yeah, that's another thing. But he had a habit of getting on a story and staying with it for long periods of time. He wrote many articles, many columns, about Baby Richard, as I recall. And I do recall that after the decision came out, and it was a matter of some fervor in the news, there was, I think, a State of the State address that Governor Edgar gave in which he used something near the end of the speech to say he disagreed with the court and thought that this kid should be able to stay with the parents he knew.

DePue: With the adoptive parents.

Schoenburg: With the adoptive parents. And it was a bad thing. I think he was going for legislation to do so. I think I interviewed a Supreme Court justice on the floor who had been sitting right in front of him at that speech, because it was usual for one or more members of our Supreme Court to be in the chamber for our State of the State address. I was surprised. That was one of the stronger emotional things I ever saw him do, and it was almost out of character. But it struck a nerve with him; you could just tell.

DePue: Well, that goes back to a couple of my questions about whether or not he was principled, and his initial agenda, because he clearly laid out the territory of improving life for Illinois children right at the beginning of his administration. Maybe this is a good time to bring up your impressions of Brenda.

Schoenburg: Oh, well, gosh. I don't want to say anything negative about the lady who just left a few months ago as first lady, who was Patti Blagojevich, but she did not smile much when in Springfield and wasn't in Springfield much anyway, so it's a bad thing. But I've often lamented in recent years that we don't have a classy first lady like Brenda Edgar, and truly, like Lura Lynn Ryan as well, who, despite the troubles of her husband, handled herself very well.

Brenda Edgar did not want to be in the spotlight, but was just seemingly a supportive and very nice person to be around. I think she handled herself with class, so that was appreciated by the public. I don't think she had a great public persona because she didn't want one, but she—

DePue: You mean “great” in terms of a big—

Schoenburg: In terms of a policy agenda. I think she did the occasional... There are some things the first ladies of Illinois do, and I think she would have done those, like talk to a classroom from over near Decatur every year, a little press conference with, I think they’re fifth- or sixth-graders. I might be reminded by you, but I don’t remember any particular initiatives that she put her name to.

DePue: They were in the area of childcare.

Schoenburg: So that makes some sense. But she wasn’t the kind of person who liked to give speeches. The more interesting event that we had—if we see each other now—we saw each other within the last couple months when President Obama was visiting Springfield on Lincoln’s birthday—it’s a very friendly greeting, and I ask how the kids are. I’m still on the Edgar’s birthday card list from years ago, and now it’s down to showing all the grandkids; the family has grown up in Colorado. But there was one funny incident, because for a time, Jim Edgar would vote on either primary or election day at the downtown Springfield YMCA, because that was the precinct voting place for the Mansion. He and Mrs. Edgar would go and vote. I would usually go because they would announce in advance when he would be there, his press people, and it was always a good time to talk to the governor about any number of issues in the election that day or whatever else was going on. That turned out to be very useful for me as a reporter because that was the perfect kind of situation where you can ask him: What’s going to happen in the Senate race and why? What’s going to happen in the governor’s race and why? Congress? whatever, and get his opinions on things, because that’s the quotable stuff that makes good fodder for your story, for your analysis of what happened in the election, for the next day. So I would always try to be there and get that done.

Well, one day, Brenda Edgar showed up, and you know, she did not banter with us. I mean, she was just friendly, said hello, that’s it. She was wearing a sweater someone had given her, and it had a Republican elephant stitched into it as part of the stitch. Well, there was a picture in the paper of her voting with the elephant on the sweater. Somebody called me and said, You’re not supposed to do that; that’s electioneering at the polls. It’s like wearing a political button. So I, as a columnist, called probably [Mike] Lawrence or somebody in the administration and posed this question and found out—I think somebody said technically yes, and whatever. She had no idea, whatever. She was kind of scared of me for three or four years after that because of the sweater. We would joke about the sweater, but she really—“I’m not wearing the sweater, Bernie.” That was just one of those situations where I think I perturbed both of them. It would be seen as an attack on the... if this is the only attack on the first lady, sorry. But not a big deal.

DePue: I expect the reaction was, You got to be kidding me.

Schoenburg: Yeah, stuff like that. I thought it was a legitimate column item, but it created a little tension there for a while, which over time has become good-natured. But she handled herself well and basically was in the very traditional role of supporting her spouse in the governorship.

DePue: We're already in this one and three-quarter hours here. What I'd like to do now is to move to some of the more controversial aspects of his administration and ask you to reflect on those. I know you have some things you'd like to bring out as well; at least, I suspect you do. Do you know much about the Tollway scandal? That was something that was more focused on Chicago.

Schoenburg: I would have to be reminded of more. I mean, it sounds...

DePue: Well, I know that Robert Hickman ended up resigning in 1994 because of that.

Schoenburg: Yeah. He was, I guess, Tollway executive director, and I think he was using the helicopter. I think he was one of Edgar's businessman fundraiser friends from Charleston, if I recall. That would just speak to who was in this big state position, and that would speak to the kind of raw politics that even the fancy Jim Edgar, the polished Jim Edgar, was using. Because maybe your friend shouldn't have been in charge of this massive enterprise if they ended up not using it well. That's all I know. I don't recall ever meeting Robert Hickman.

DePue: Well, the one that seemed to get most of the ink, certainly in central Illinois, was the MSI scandal, the Management Services of Illinois.

Schoenburg: That was a company where the principal lived, I think in Petersburg, but somewhere close to Springfield. In the Medicaid process, they created some kind of a computer system where they would go over somebody's file, and if they saved a certain amount of money, they would be paid, I think, a percentage. They ended up having their billing go from like a million dollars one year to like twelve million the next. I guess one of these guys had personally installed Edgar's computer at the mansion, so there was some connection. He should have known them, but he claimed he didn't know them well. They ended up being charged by the federal government with rigging the bid or—

DePue: "They" being...?

Schoenburg: They being MSI, Management Services of Illinois. I think there was somebody at the Department of Public Aid, one or two—and you can probably tell me—

DePue: Ron Lowder, Mike Martin.

Schoenburg: Mike Martin owned the company.

DePue: Robert Wright, perhaps, was an insider.

Schoenburg: Robert?

DePue: Wright. And Mike Belletire.

Schoenburg: Well, Belletire was—

DePue: I don't know that he was ever charged for it.

Schoenburg: I don't think he was. He was certainly mentioned. He was in the Edgar administration. Was he even chief of staff for a while? I think he might have been. He was kind of a political guy.

DePue: He was deputy chief of staff.

Schoenburg: Deputy chief of staff. He had, I think, been in charge of one of the agencies before, The Department of Mental Health director in the 1980's. So the allegation was that they basically conspired to allow this company to make a lot of money just through using their computer system and figuring out, I think it was Medicaid payments.

DePue: And again, "they" being the people in company?

Schoenburg: The people in the company, but I think Lowder worked for the state, so I think there were some in the company and some at the Department—if it was still called the Department of Public Aid at the time. I think that was it.

DePue: Was this an issue that you were writing about?

Schoenburg: I wrote some about that, yes, so I should know more, although our people full-time State House were probably doing a bit more.

DePue: Well, here's a fairer question for you, perhaps. What did you think of the way the Edgar administration dealt with this scandal, the allegations?

Schoenburg: My view of that is certainly colored by what Mike Lawrence has told me because it was their both public and private line that there was a letter that explained this problem that went to the governor's office. Mike Lawrence saw the letter, and the governor saw the letter; they decided to turn it over to—it was either the inspector general or prosecutors, who then went forward with it. So they say they blew the whistle on themselves, which showed that they were aboveboard. I don't have a quarrel with that. I don't know any better. It was interesting.

What made the biggest news about this was that Jim Edgar was called to testify in this trial. I remember being outside the federal courthouse when everybody was there talking to him, I think it was just afterwards, at what is

now the Paul Findley building, which houses the federal court in downtown Springfield. I remember there was a pretty good gaggle of press around and the governor answering questions and getting in the car. I know that he maintains that, "We blew the whistle, and we didn't know of anything wrong, and I didn't remember these guys very well."

Mike Martin, by the way, I think his—it's either his wife or significant other—was the secretary of the Senate at the time—or no, the top legal person for Senate Republicans, not the secretary. But he testified, and I think he objected to the press making it seem as if just because he was called to testify, he was guilty of something. He obviously was never charged or found guilty of anything. Mike Martin did go to prison for a while, as I recall, and there might have been some other prison time, but there were other convictions in that. Then there was somebody in the administration, Jim Burger, who I think was charged with something related and was acquitted, I think the Edgar administration made a point to say, The guy closest did not get convicted of anything in that.

It made for a lot of bad headlines. There are some people who have speculated in later years that he didn't run for higher office because the MSI would come out again. I came out of it feeling that some people were squirrely with numbers, but I didn't feel that Edgar was dealing with these guys to make them a lot of money or anything. I didn't get that impression.

DePue: So, on the spectrum of major scandals in Illinois politics...?

Schoenburg: It was his major scandal because it brought him to court, but I never saw the evidence, as I recalled, that made Edgar look particularly bad, other than there were some people trying to game the system from within.

DePue: Do you have anything else that you would like to talk about in terms of his years as governor?

Schoenburg: I wrote down the name Andy Foster, who was, I guess, executive director, I think of his office, or of his campaign, and became assistant to the governor at some point. And it was just interesting because I—

DePue: His '94 campaign.

Schoenburg: I think so, because Andy was like twenty-seven years old then, and Andy was kind of a bright Republican, conservative, I think, but clearly good with management skills. I just thought it was interesting Edgar entrusted such an important enterprise to someone of that tender age. It probably showed a forward-thinkingness and an openness because it wasn't just one of his old buddies or something that was running things.

I also wrote down the name Rudolph Shoultz, who was named to the Human Rights Commission. He was an African-American reverend, I think

from another country, because he had somewhat of an accent, in Springfield [Union Baptist Church]. He was well-respected, and he was named by Edgar at one point to the Human Rights Commission. I do know that Shoultz was often viewed as independent, and I think that's because he—I think he tried to raise money for Edgar, but I'm not sure of that—but I do know that he tried to get people hired by the state a lot. So he was, I think, not alone among black preachers in Illinois who worked with Edgar. I don't have direct knowledge, but I remember knowing that Edgar's campaign worked with some black churches in Chicago, where they might have provided certain help to the churches, and those folks ended up coming on board the Edgar campaign, even though he was a Republican, because that's kind of the retail politics of Illinois. I think Edgar was tapped into that to some extent.

DePue: Well, I know that the campaign was proud of how they had done in both the African-American and Hispanic community.

Schoenburg: Yeah. I don't know exactly what the political negotiations are, and I'm not sure it's all perfectly pure, based on philosophy, or not, but certainly governors in Illinois have learned to give grants to certain community agencies, and some of them are church-run. I think there was some of that, although I don't have direct recollection.

DePue: Well, I know one of the appointees that the administration was especially proud of was another African-American, Howard Peters, who started his time with Edgar at the Department of Corrections. Do you recall him?

Schoenburg: Oh, I do. Still lives in Springfield. I think he's now the top lobbyist, if not, maybe even the president of the Illinois Hospital Association [Executive Vice President, Policy & Advocacy], because he moved down to the Department of Human Services. He's a very smart guy, so it just showed Edgar knows he's smart. But he's a very smart guy, and his wife Beverly is a community activist. They're a strong policy kind of couple. I believe he does some preaching in a church as well. But yeah, I think that was just finding a quality person for some top jobs, which is not a bad thing.

DePue: As I understand, the story was he was fairly prominent in the Department of Corrections but otherwise would have been obscure to most of the people in the state when he was elevated to that position.

Schoenburg: Yeah, certainly not a known entity—but I don't think a lot of department directors often are. He was brought up with Edgar and I think was able to spread his wings. Maybe he was ready to go before, but Edgar certainly recognized that he had talent in various fields.

DePue: Anybody else that you'd like, or any other issues you'd like to think about?

Schoenburg: Oh, I'm just noticing that you mentioned the Tollway Authority. Well, I just noticed one story, that Edgar reappointed Arthur Philip in the Tollway

Authority. Well, that was Pate Philip's brother. That was the kind of thing that the pristine Jim Edgar over here was also playing the politics to make sure that the brother of the president of the Senate, even though he didn't get along with him all the time, was in this very clearly patronage spot. That's the kind of thing that reminds you that he did the politics necessary to have the position that he had.

DePue: So you're not holding that against him, *per se*?

Schoenburg: You know, you've got to do what you've got to do. It's funny, because when I started railing against Blagojevich early in his administration in some of my columns, one of his top aides, Bradley Tusk, from actually New York City, responded when I said something Blagojevich had done was goofy, that well, I'm just an insider in Springfield. Well, I think I understand the process as I have seen it here. Some of it is distasteful.

There was another guy I would put in the very same category that Jim Edgar named to, I think it was the gambling—let's see—no, it was the Liquor Control Board, also—Don 'Doc' Adams of Springfield, who is a former executive director of the Republican party and a longtime member of the Republican State Central Committee. This was a paying board that didn't used to do much that I'm aware of. You're giving a guy thirty or forty or fifty thousand a year to be on this board and have occasional meetings.

I think these things were distasteful to me when I saw them; I understood why they were done. I don't know if Edgar liked doing them or not, but he did them. I don't think I respect it much, but I think it's part of the price of doing the job, or has been, and I'm not sure how you'd get away from all of that. It's the kind of thing that people look to me as, I hope, through the column over all these years, somebody [from whom] they can find some truth they wouldn't find other places. Well, if I would find that an Edgar was naming an Arthur Philip or a Doc Adams—he's called "Doc"; he's not a doctor—to boards and commissions that pay money, I would put that in the column. That would get it said, and I would let it speak for itself.

DePue: Well, let me put it this way. This might be a strange kind of construction for a question, but if you were to take a look at the governors of Illinois that you have some memory of—and does that start with Ogilvie, perhaps, or maybe about that time?

Schoenburg: Ogilvie, Kerner.

DePue: Kerner and Ogilvie, all the way up to the one who just stepped down, which is Blagojevich—he didn't step down; he got pushed out—

Schoenburg: Yeah, he got booted.

DePue: —and put them on an ethical spectrum of one to ten, with ten being most ethical and one being least, where would Edgar fit on the scale?

Schoenburg: As opposed to the other governors?

DePue: Yes.

Schoenburg: Now there's a good question. As you know, I don't opinionize very much. Let's try to think. Well, including Pat Quinn, too. Pat's somewhat of a—I actually used the word and I hate to do it again in public (laughs)—I think I said “some call him a demagogue,” when he was going around always having many press conferences. But Pat Quinn over time has proved he's not in it for the money. I would have to put Edgar at kind of a one or two, and I put Quinn with him at this point, because Quinn is clearly not in it for the money.

DePue: Well, one or two was at the least ethical side.

Schoenburg: No, most, most. Thompson brought in pinstriped patronage. Edgar raised money from his employees and appointed some of these goofballs to things who may not have deserved it on merit. And yet, I think he, through necessary compromise, did what he thought was the right thing to do most of the time, almost all of the time, I think. So yeah, I view him positively. You know, he's an interesting mix of things. He's interested in horse racing, which we didn't even get into here. It's kind of odd. Everybody has a vice, and I think gambling or the horse racing industry might be his. He just likes that.

I know he's become a member of many corporate boards since leaving the governorship, and he works at the University of Illinois, which is a pretty good gig. I mean, it's fun, because he does really bring a lot to the forums and the classrooms that he talks to, but I know he even talked about getting this job before, and they pay him a fair amount—I think it's more than 100,000 a year. But he always said even to us, I don't want to grade papers; I don't want to write tests; I just want to talk about stuff. (laughter) That's a pretty good gig, and he's got it.

DePue: He gets to talk about politics, and you already said that he knows—

Schoenburg: He knows that stuff. That's right. And he brings his perspective. And yeah, he still advertises for candidates once in a while and does some things and has been sought by the party to run for office, which I think he finally gave up on because he and Brenda decided it's not in their best interest financially, because he'd have to give up the corporate boards, and health-wise, because he had those health problems during his governorship.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about the point in time where he announces that he won't be running again for governor. I know that there was quite a debate within the administration, within his inner circle, if you will, about what his political future would be. I mean, there's three options as I understand it: another run

for governor, popular at the time; a possible run for U.S. Senate seat; or retire. When he came out and announced—and I assume you weren't involved or overheard any of the discussions about that?

Schoenburg: No, although I did hear a rumor about who had been asked to come down the night before. Somebody called me and said, Some of his really old long-ago aides have been told to come to Springfield to see the announcement, so it looks like he's going to retire. I actually wrote a story saying that, that it looked like he was going to retire; that was in the morning paper. Then he did announce that he was going to retire, so that made me look pretty smart to the bosses that day.

DePue: Did it surprise you?

Schoenburg: Just because politicians almost never say, "I'm done," that it surprised me. The day he announced it, I was glad I was right in the story, (DePue laughs) at least with the speculation in that direction. It's always somewhat of a surprise, because it just opens up such an open field. The party's probably not happy because they want the safety of an incumbent. What was interesting then, too, is—I think right away or very soon thereafter—he said he wanted George Ryan to be his successor, and said nice things about George and how much he knows about the process.

DePue: Just like Jim Thompson had thrown the bone to him...

Schoenburg: Yeah, yeah. And maybe, looking back, he would have changed that decision, seeing what happened to George over the years.

DePue: How about the decision in 2006? An awful lot of speculation, maybe dreaming, within the Republican party at the time that Jim Edgar might be willing to run again, against somebody who was increasingly unpopular, certainly in Republican circles.

Schoenburg: Well, again—

DePue: When the cupboard was otherwise pretty bare.

Schoenburg: It was intriguing, but his life had changed. I think Brenda was probably a part of this. You know, they like visiting the kids, they like having their financial resources to travel between Illinois and Colorado. It would have been great for the Republican Party, but probably not so great for the Edgar family. The fact that he had had heart problems at a young age I think continues to scare Mrs. Edgar and probably Jim Edgar as well. It's one whole different ballgame to be on the outside making commentary about things and being on the inside running it again. Interestingly, the right wing of the party was kind of always against him, the 30 percent who didn't think he was pure enough in his Republican politics and too moderate. So they weren't going to like him anyway, but I think there was a hope among the party faithful that he would

go for it because he would have instant credibility and he still had approval ratings that might have been around 70 percent, at least from the time he had left office. That was the last one on record.

I remember that he toyed with it, and I remember that he got emotional at a press conference up in Chicago that I just saw a video of. That was it. He'd have to give up probably a lot of income to do that, plus raising money again. It's a rat race, and I think it was just a personal decision that it was time to move on and not take that one for the party because it would have been a really big bite.

DePue: Do you think he ever had national aspirations?

Schoenburg: Oh, I think most folks in this field do, but I never got the strong view that Jim Edgar was going to be president. I think we talked about this possibly last time. He has some colloquialisms in his speech that speak of central and southern Illinois a little bit. Central-eastern. Not quite as polished as some. That doesn't rule you out of the national scene, but on the stump, he's no Barack Obama; he's not even a Rod Blagojevich—which is probably seen as a good thing. He was a nuts-and-bolts kind of guy who, I think, really understood Illinois and wanted to do good in Illinois. He even talked about, in an interview I did when he was leaving office, I don't exactly know what to do now because all I ever wanted to do was rise to governor, and now I've been it for eight years, and that's it. What am I going to...? It's like that had been the pinnacle. I think he's moved to where he wants to be after that. I think there was a national educational something of the states that he was the head of for a while as governor, which I think built on what he did in the city of Chicago.

DePue: But he's never even been considered for a Cabinet post, and somebody of his stature, you would think would be a natural in certain things.

Schoenburg: I'm speculating some. I think he's a homebody. I think you get into those national positions, and your life is much less your own, even than when you are governor. And especially, he was a governor that lived in the mansion and was with the family. His kids were older, but I think he was with the kids a lot through all of their schooling. He was around. They seem to be such strong family people that you would not want the disconnect that would have to happen in that part of your life if you moved on to the national scene.

DePue: Well, let's move on to a couple other names. We've already talked about them quite a bit, but I want you to get a chance to flesh them out a little bit more, moving beyond the Edgar years. You said that when Edgar made the announcement that he wouldn't run for re-election, that he immediately said...

Schoenburg: Threw support to George Ryan.

DePue: So, your impressions of George Ryan as governor, and your general impressions of the George Ryan administration, the George Ryan years.

Schoenburg: Well, it got progressively more difficult. As we know, he was inaugurated, gosh, in '99. I think that was the day of the accident with the Willis children—

DePue: Oh, yeah.

Schoenburg: —which is terrible, where six members of Duane and Janet Willis's family—I think they had nine children—but six died in the accident of their minivan or van traveling on a highway in Wisconsin after it ran over a part of a taillight assembly that fell off a truck that was driven by a driver who apparently had gotten his license through bribery at one of the George Ryan facilities as secretary of state. It was that case, ultimately, that led really to many people around Ryan and Ryan himself getting indicted in what was known as the licenses-for-bribes scandal. It took a long time for that to come out.

DePue: But even when he was running for office, there were allegations about all kinds of scandal going on at the Secretary of State's office, were there not?

Schoenburg: There were. I don't remember specifics now. If reminded, I probably would. But yeah, he had been controversial for some years. Even back in, I think it was '94, when Pat Quinn ran against him, who is now governor, he had alleged that people were—and I might have said this earlier—people from the Secretary of State's office were shaking down car dealerships, seeking campaign money while they were regulating [the] business. So Ryan had been able to fend off most of these allegations with a shrug, but tension was building.

He was able to win election anyway over Glenn Poshard, because again, he didn't raise as much money as Blagojevich would four years later, but I think he spent like thirteen million dollars beating Glenn Poshard, partly doing some very Chicago-centric stuff about how Glenn Poshard, the Democrat, had been pro-gun when he was running for the legislature or Congress in southern Illinois, where guns are much more a household item. That was able to scare the folks in Chicago.

DePue: Can you give us a thumbnail description of George Ryan's personality?

Schoenburg: George was always very affable. It really went through cycles. I remember when he was Speaker of the House. He was anti-ERA in the crazy session of 1982 when there were Phyllis Schlafly, and all of the anti-ERA people were at the State House every day dressed in red. Eleanor Smeal would sometimes come in as head of [the] National Organization for Women. But there were people dressed in green, pro-ERA, every day, on the year that was supposedly the deadline for ERA to pass by June 30 at the end of the session that year. It was a crazy time. I remember there's a picture that we have in our archives at the *State Journal-Register* of George Ryan walking over—not stepping on

them, but stepping over protestors who were doing a sit-in in the House over—

DePue: Chained to the railings?

Schoenburg: Well, it was similar. It might have been some of the same people. The chained to the railing [event] was over at the Senate, but this was in the House chamber when something was going on. George was known as kind of anti-labor union, which was interesting because later, when he was, I think, Lieutenant Governor or Secretary of State, he ended up presiding over the placement on the lawn of the Capitol the monument to fallen union workers. There was a giant labor rally when he was Speaker of the House—because he was allowing a right-to-work bill, which unions hated, to the floor of the House. It didn't pass, but just because that was happening like in '81, and there was this giant rally of maybe somewhere between eight and fifteen thousand people on the lawn of the Capitol.

So Ryan was like this conservative Republican guy from Kankakee County. Now, as you learn more about him, he was a really wheeler-dealer out of a Kankakee County Republican organization similar to the Cook County Democrats—very much a machine organization, very much help your friends kind of thing. It ultimately helped lead to his downfall, because it was a friend from there, Dean Bauer, who he named as Inspector General of the Secretary of State's office. Dean Bauer would later go to jail because it was proven that when people would bring to him allegations that they were selling licenses at the driver's license facility, he would either transfer people or shut it up instead of prosecuting or move forward and try to fix the problem, because those people were raising money for George, and we're just going to protect George. That was ultimately George's downfall: the insider stuff and the friendships and the people he had around him that he wanted to help.

I remember interviewing him when he was Lieutenant Governor. I sat in a chair. There was a big carpet, it was a very high-ceilinged office, and he was putting with his golf ball while he was talking. (loudly) "What do you need, Bernie?" (DePue laughs) He was just a fun guy to be around. He was open to the press. He was that kind of friendly. As governor in the early years, he had an annual reception at the new state library for staff or press or whatever; they'd serve drinks, and he'd come around. I think he met my wife in his first year and said, "Are you married to him? Sorry." (DePue laughs) You know, that kind of stuff.

But then, progressively, as people around him started to get indicted, toward the end of his term it got a lot more tense. I remember he went to the Old State Capital, to the Holocaust Memorial; he did go to every year and spoke. Traditionally, every year the governor goes to that in the spring. My son was with me, and he was probably about eight or something. George shook his hand and said, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And

he said, "I don't know." He said, "I hope it's not a journalist like your dad." (laughter) So you can see that kind of a thing.

By the end of George's term, and about for the last year and a half, unfortunately, more people were getting indicted, or more allegations were coming out about what his people had done and the investigation about them and the licenses-for-bribes scandal. So we felt, I think, as reporters at the State House, compelled to ask him about that, and he didn't want to talk about that. It became more and more of a confrontational situation where he would just turn away and not answer questions for a while; if I'd asked something, he would just ignore it. Ray Long of the *Tribune* got that treatment. So it just became more contentious. That didn't always happen, but it went in that direction so that by the end it was just difficult.

I remember when he came back after being out of office, I think not yet indicted, and there was an unveiling of his portrait in room 212 of the Capitol, which is a very ornate room which at one time was the Supreme Court chamber for the state. It was pretty nice. He was lauded by those speaking there, and he gave a little talk. Then he was surrounded by the press, and we asked some questions. I remember I asked him one question then. What about somebody who was the latest indictee. I think he just didn't answer that and started walking away at that point.

It got difficult. So there was a gruffness. It used to be cute; he liked the back-and-forth of the process. It's a little bit of lore in our editorial board at the paper when he came as governor once, and I was asking him—or maybe it was as a candidate for governor. I think it was as a candidate for governor because he had like this set of thirteen policy manuals that were going to be his program, and I asked him some questions about one of them because they were very detailed. I think I know who wrote them. It was somebody on his staff, of course, or who had been hired from his staff to the campaign staff. Who knows? They were obviously sharing resources at that time. I asked him some kind of question about what does this mean, and he said, "Did you read my book?" Or actually, I might have even said this at a press conference. At a press conference, he said, "Did you read my book?" and I said, "I don't know, did you?" which was kind of a Dan Rather question. One of my colleagues at a radio station is always surprised I asked that question. (laughter) But when I started asking him how much of the books he wrote, I think in our editorial board, his response after a period of time was, "You want a job?" So my colleagues have often said to me, "You want a job?" when we think of George.

But that was the cute part. Then it just got more serious and quiet toward the end. So it was a shame. I do think he cared about the state, and he cared about some things, and he could work well with legislators. Even when he was in serious trouble, he got like a standing ovation when he'd come in.

DePue: Yeah, he seemed the master of working that legislative process.

Schoenburg: He was of the legislature and understood it and worked well with it, so you respect him for that. You say it's a shame that he didn't realize times were changing and you can't really help your friends that way anymore, for the situations that got him in trouble. And, of course, the rabid fundraising and the bad people he ended up putting around him, particularly his chief of staff, whose name I will think of—Scott Fawell. Scott Fawell was really working the license facilities, apparently, for a lot of money, in ways that were not good. George should have had control of that because he was the officeholder; that's a shame, because Scott went to jail, too.

DePue: Well, that gets us to the next governor of Illinois, who's been much in print here in the last few months, and deservedly so, perhaps.

Schoenburg: Yeah. Rod Blagojevich. I remember a little bit about him as just seemed like a fun-loving, not-too-serious guy.

DePue: As a legislator?

Schoenburg: As a legislator in Illinois. I don't remember him taking on any particular issues in Illinois. I do remember that for a while, I was covering Jay Hoffman downstate, from Collinsville, State Representative, who was running for Congress against John Shimkus in 1996, if I've got the date right. I think I do.

DePue: Sounds about right.

Schoenburg: Because that was when Durbin was running for U.S. Senate. Shimkus had run for Congress before, but in '92 he was treasurer of Madison County and the only Republican to hold county-wide office in Madison County, had lost to Durbin and then had not run the next two years after that. That was like Congress or something—yeah, for Congress. But now Durbin was running for U.S. Senate, so the seat was open. So Shimkus thought he had a chance, and he did. He was one of like eight candidates, Republican, and won the primary. And Jay Hoffman was running. Well, Jay, I think, was seatmates or friends or officemates with Rod Blagojevich, so one time I had to be over at the Capitol like at 5:30 looking for Jay for comment on something about the campaign, and Rod was there. I think they were like throwing spitballs at each other or something. (laughter) I mean, that was my only real impression of Rod Blagojevich at the time, just this young guy having a good time being in the legislature when he's away from home in Chicago.

Then in 2000, I went to the Democratic National Convention for the *Journal-Register* and Copley Papers at the time, in Los Angeles. Blagojevich was in Congress by then because he had taken the Rostenkowski seat after Rostenkowski got in legal trouble; a Republican held the office for two years but was easy pickings. Then Blagojevich, with the help of his father-in-law, Alderman [Dick] Mell, won that race and was in Washington. But he showed

up a day late or so to the convention in California, where the Illinois delegation was staying. I remember I talked to him, just myself, outside the doors of the big meeting room to interview him. He says, [imitating Blagojevich's style] "I'm going to run for governor." I said, "Well, what if Dick Durbin runs?" which was still considered a possibility because Durbin was in the Senate. "I don't care who runs. I'm going to run, and I'm going to win." I remember him being just about one foot from my face, maybe two, and one of these kind of oddly close, like, you got to watch out (laughter) when you talk to him. I was surprised by his kind of odd enthusiasm that he could do this, and it doesn't matter who else is in the field. Well, he proved me wrong in thinking that was outlandish, didn't he?

DePue: Was this at the time, though, that the Democrats were thinking this was going to be a walkover election because of what was going on with Ryan's administration?

Schoenburg: Well, I think so. Ryan was already clearly in trouble, but it wasn't certain who was going to run, because this ended up being the race between—Durbin finally said he wouldn't do it—but then Vallas and Burris got in. Yeah, it was going to be a good Democratic year, or it certainly could have. But Blagojevich was not a household name. He even had a lot of fun with that during the campaign, because he'd always joke about his name and how nobody can pronounce it and nobody ever heard of it, and how could you run for political office with that name?

But I think at some point, I started getting suspicious of his veracity. He just seemed kind of phony. I didn't use the word in print. But there were things that he would say he would do that didn't make sense, like this downstate jobs-creating program. He'd throw around big numbers for what he wanted to do, but you didn't know how he was going to do it. I remember—I think it was during the primary season, but I'm not sure—he was at the State House and took out one of the hearing rooms, and had a press conference on health care; he said he wanted something like universal health care or to increase health care in Illinois. He packed the room with a lot of people from around Springfield. I knew some of them to be precinct committeemen, so they probably called, and there were a couple of ladies sitting in the front seat with veterans' hats on. And, you know, I want health care for you. Then he did it kind of like a press conference, where he opened it up to questions after talking for ten minutes. I'd ask a question, and he'd talk to the crowd. There was just a disingenuous nature to it that made me question what he was saying. I remember talking to one of the ladies who said that her husband had good health care anyway from his retirement, so she didn't need this. You know, it was a show, and Blagojevich was putting on a show.

One of the things I've always thought that journalists should do in a political situation is see what their words are and see how they match up either to reality or to what they end up doing, if the words are promises. His words

often didn't match up, and I ended up kind of—I've called it a cottage industry—out of listening to his speeches and checking into them, because a lot of times, he'd either be making stuff up or saying things that weren't right.

Maybe it was in the last election already that he talked about—he was in Decatur, and of course, went to a factory to make an announcement about some plan he had, and this will create—I think it was his Opportunity Returns plan, which is what he called his new regional Department of Commerce initiative for economic development, which took more than a year and a half to roll out after he announced it. And then he was only rolling out piece by piece, and a lot of it involved hiring people at big salaries to run his different areas. I'm just not sure how much it ever accomplished. But he said, This plan will create however many thousands of jobs in Illinois, 7,000 right here in Decatur.

Well, I ended up calling the spokesman at the time, Andrew Ross, for the Department of Commerce, who I often felt would not give me a straight answer on anything, especially if it was difficult for the governor. I said, What do you mean, 7,000 jobs right here in Decatur? Well, it turned out that was in a fifteen-county area that he was talking about, and that was "right here in Decatur," and so you're talking about several hundred square miles. And these things would just roll off his tongue, and he would never correct himself.

DePue: So that's something that comparing to the Edgar administration, did you ever have to wonder about the veracity of the things that Edgar was saying?

Schoenburg: There were probably certain predictions that you might not agree with, but no. Edgar seemed like a trustworthy person; he wasn't trying to sell you a used car every time he opened his mouth. Blagojevich was. It's not a heavy policy thing, but it kind of touches on just what I thought of him. It might be silliness on my part, but... there were a couple of things that Blagojevich did that I thought were kind of outrageous and that I was tipped to by various people also. All governors since Walker have had the Illinois Information Service, which is part of the Department of Central Management Services. IIS has camera video capability so that they could shoot video of the governor and then provide it to television stations for free, and also audio. There's actually audio feeds from the state every day, from various departments, that go to radio stations.

DePue: They also do all of the filming for the oral history programs.

Schoenburg: Well, there you go. There was some controversy along the way when Walker first did this thing: This is just promotion of the governor. On the other hand, there is some legitimate view that government ought to be able to tell its people what's going on; video and radio and TV feeds are a way to do that.

Well, Blagojevich—I think they might have lost a photographer or two in Chicago, so there might not have been one—but he ended up hiring still photographers and video photographers for pretty much everything he did. I also was noticing he wouldn't go in public anywhere if he wasn't the center of attention, which seems to be proved through his later escapades after being charged with crimes and then going on every TV show that would take him nationally. But he was spending between usually 1,000 and 2,000 dollars a day on the video to videotape him and then uplink it, meaning send it to satellites so that TV stations could get the video for free of the governor talking.

Sometimes if he wanted to promote a bill, he would just have them come to his house and shoot video of him talking about... Then it would be uplinked to stations, so it looked like it was a news clip, but there were no reporters there to ask him tough questions. So I did a story about how in his first couple years, he spent like a quarter-million dollars on photographers of himself, outside photographers, in addition to the Illinois Information Service.

But as part of my continuing look at how much he was spending on stuff like this, I asked for the tapes of a—they hired like a videographer when he went to New York to get some kind of a prize from a group that advocates for children's health, Families USA, I think it was Washington, DC—and as I'm looking over the tape one Friday on a VCR, after I'd finished my column—which was lucky, because it was early enough that I could have time to still do something else—I saw him tell this story that "On the way to the airport just today"—it was right near—he mentioned the name of the road that was somewhere near O'Hare Airport, "we stopped at the light, and I rolled down the window of this SUV they have me driving with tinted windows, and there's this young African-American girl in the next car, maybe eleven years old. She looks at me, and I look at her, and she goes, 'Mayor Daley!' and everybody laughed." I am looking at this, and I'm like, Oh, my goodness, I've heard this story. He didn't say this is a joke; he told it as if it had happened that day, and isn't it funny when people in your own state don't know who you are, ha ha ha.

So I had tapes from that Decatur commerce thing that I looked up, and I couldn't find it there. Then I went home and I was talking about it with my family. My son, who had been to the state fair that summer to see Barack Obama—so this would have been 2004—said, "I've heard that story." And it turned out that, okay, state fair rally that summer. So I actually found my little microcassette, which I still used at the time before digital recorders, and I found the tape from the state fair rally Democrats had that year. Blagojevich basically said he was at a church service or something, and Bill Clinton and he and Barack Obama were together, and he walked out, and somebody said, Hey, there's Bill Clinton. Wow. And then he said, "And there's this young African-American girl that looks at me and says, 'Mayor Daley!'"

We had just started to really enhance the website at the paper, so I had that tape converted to digital, and I had the other videotape converted to digital. We put both jokes on. I ended up doing a column saying, “You can’t believe what this man says.” I thought maybe there were two girls that would have said this, but he didn’t make it sound like a joke.

So the day before my column would run, about noon, I think, or one o’clock in the afternoon, I called the governor’s office, and I asked for comment on this. It took him until about four o’clock, so I recall it being about three hours. “Of course it’s a joke” was my e-mail, my response. “Of course it’s a joke.” I’d never seen other politicians tell jokes when they didn’t say, Nah, I’m just kidding. But Blagojevich never did that. So “of course it’s a joke.”

So I ended up running a story: you can’t believe what he says—which was very strong for me. I included things like the 7,000 jobs in Decatur, and I included other numbers he had used and other things that had gone wrong. But it fit a pattern with him of, he would say things, and you couldn’t believe it. One of the other examples in that column is he had told employees—and you asked about his downstate support—in I think Vandalia: I will never balance the state budget on your backs. And they all cheered for him during the campaign. Then he wanted to close the prison there after he was in. So the state employees’ union, AFSCME, ended up hating him, at least officially, because he was doing this kind of stuff.

So interestingly—and I’ll just finish up with this—just this last summer at the state fair, he spoke in the morning about all the trouble he was having, but he still believed in what he was doing because at Halloween, this family came to his door, and he noticed that this young girl, I think, had a shaved head. He could see there was brain surgery, and he asked the mother about it. They had found a tumor, and then it was because of KidCare that—and the mother said, “Thank you governor; you have saved my child’s life.” Didn’t use any names. So at the state fair, when I encountered him with other reporters around, I said, “Was that a real family?” He said, “What do you mean?” And Patti [his wife] looked shocked that I would say this and said, “Of course it was.” I said, “Well, when you told that joke about the girl who thought you were looking like Mayor Daley, your spokesperson told me a joke.” He said, “That was no joke; that happened.” So I ended up waiting a few weeks to figure out how to deal with this, and I ended up doing a column: even when his spokesperson says something, which is supposed to be the official word of the governor’s office, you don’t know what’s true with him.

He’s often said he got an eighteen on the ACT, or a nineteen. He said it when President Bush was in Springfield for the opening of that building next door from where we’re recording this, at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. The governor told the girl who got like a thirty-six on the ACT, “Look at me, I got an eighteen on the ACT, and I’m governor of

Illinois.” Well, I don’t know if it’s true. He said it many times, but I don’t know if it’s true, because you just could not believe what he said.

DePue: Well, most people would say, Why would a governor admit that he scored that poorly on a test anyway?

Schoenburg: I think the reason is populism, because he thinks it sells well with the regular folks out there who know he’s not putting on airs, even though he’s the one who ended up having about forty people on his state police detail, when Clinton’s probably got three. (laughs) So he was exactly what he claimed not to be, although I’m not sure he didn’t get the eighteen on the ACT.

DePue: Well, Bernie, you spent a career, at least the last close to twenty years, [as] State House reporter, so you had an opportunity to observe Barack Obama as a legislator here in Illinois as well. Your comments about him?

Schoenburg: I’ve been asked this more than you might believe, partly because even though there are many reporters at the State House, I am the *State Journal-Register’s* political writer and columnist; therefore, if people from out of town are looking for somebody in town, they come to me because I’m the local paper. I have said that there are a lot of smart, articulate legislators who seem to be good people wanting to do the right thing, and he was in that crowd. He would stop in the hallway as a state senator and talk to you. It was interesting to watch him debate on the floor on ethics and other matters when I saw him because he was good at it. He clearly was a nice guy.

I used to take my son to the State House since the time he was ten or twelve, the last night of the session, just to see what was going on, partly because the other State House reporters were doing the serious work, and I was there to pick up stuff for the column and just see what was going on because it was very interesting in those times. I would help out, reporting little impromptu press conferences with people and try to help my colleagues, but also showing my son around. One time, we were in the hallway outside the governor’s office, waiting for possibly the governor to come out or something, and Obama came up and chatted for ten minutes. You know, he was just a regular guy. To say that he would become president, it’s a big country. There’s 300 million people. I would not have predicted that.

I ended up being sent to cover the inauguration in Washington, which was an amazing thing because the magnetism that he created, the idea that so many had that they had to be there, despite the fact that it was kind of crazy logistically to get into the center of Washington and to get either a ticket or places without a ticket and then go through all that security... People just wanted to be part of this. It was **wild**.

But a favorite story I would tell people was that in December of 2003, Obama was not the favorite but was one of the Democratic candidates to be

nominated for United States Senate by his party. Now, in 2000, he had run in Chicago against Bobby Rush, a longtime congressman and a former Black Panther, for Congress. Rush was a longtime congressman by then. It was a very African-American district, and I think the hit on Obama was, He's not black enough, as we heard said at some points during the primary campaign of '08. Obama got like 30 percent of the vote. So for him then four years later to jump in and say, I'm running for United States Senate seemed like somewhat of a pipe dream. Yet, clearly, we know that he has certain talents that play even better to a wider audience.

But in December of '03, he had called a press conference one day. It was at the Illinois Federation of Teachers' headquarters, which is a few blocks from the State House. It was a weekday. The legislature was in session, so a lot of reporters were busy. But again, because I am able to float around a bit and find things that interest me, and cover campaigns in particular, I went. I was the only reporter that went. So it's me, Barack Obama, and the head of the Illinois Federation of Teachers sitting there and talking about his endorsement by the IFT. Even more interesting, and I've told this to some of the foreign reporters I've talked to, there were several Republicans still running for their nomination at that time. One of them was Steve Rauschenberger. He had had a press conference at the Blue Room. He was a state senator. Another reporter—not me, because I don't think I would have done it—asked him, "Have you ever used illegal drugs?" Rauschenberger said, "Well, when I was in college, I tried marijuana. I didn't like it much," and that was that. That created a little story a few inches long that ran in papers all over the state because it made the Associated Press.

So I thought it only fair to ask other candidates if they had used illegal drugs, to be on even footing with the one guy that got nailed with this question. So after talking about the Illinois Federation of Teachers with state senator then, Barack Obama, I pulled him aside. We actually went through a door into a hallway, and I said, "Listen. Rauschenberger got asked this, so I need to ask: did you ever use illegal drugs?" He said, "Well, when I was in Hawaii and a disaffected youth, I tried marijuana." I said, "That it?" He said, "That's enough"—something to that effect. I ended up putting this as like the third item out of five in a column shortly thereafter. Somebody called me and said, "You should find his book." (laughter)

DePue: I was thinking the same thing.

Schoenburg: His book was *Dreams from My Father*, which he wrote after being the first black, I guess they call it president, of the Harvard Law Review. It was out of print at that time because he had not yet given his 2004 speech, the next summer at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, that would make him instantly famous and cause the book to be reissued. But the public library in Springfield, also called Lincoln Library, had a copy of that book. So I paged through it—I had to find it myself—and on page eighty-six, it talked

about how he used blow also, while a disaffected youth in Hawaii, which I guess is commonly known as cocaine. So—

DePue: But I think also some usage while he was in New York, was there not? That he'd mentioned there.

Schoenburg: That, I don't recall. I remember in particular—it might have been. But clearly, he used cocaine and hadn't said so. He was, again, among others running for United States Senate, including Blair Hull, a rich guy from Chicago, and Dan Hynes, the comptroller of the state, who had a lot of the labor endorsements, as it turned out. So I put in a call to Obama's people. He talked to me from the car while he was on the campaign for about ten minutes. He explained to me he was sorry; he didn't want to step on his own story that day, the main story he wanted, which was the Federation of Teachers being for him. He should have said more, but he didn't, and on we go, and here's what it is, and my life is an open book, it's all written in the book, and I should have just said it. I wrote a column about that. Nobody cared. He got nominated, and now he's president. But it was an interesting thing. It's about the worst stumble that I personally was ever involved with, with him, to help create and then deal with that stumble of his. But it is interesting that since Bill Clinton became the president and was elected, what, in '92 and—

DePue: Ninety-two, '96.

Schoenburg: —and said that he smoked marijuana but didn't inhale, ha ha—the generation has changed some. Twenty years ago or thirty, it would have been a giant issue, and for Obama to admit this part of his youth did not get in the way of him getting elected to the United States Senate or beyond.

DePue: Any particular point in time when you realized, and maybe you were surprised, that, Holy cow, this guy is a lot bigger, he's got a lot more potential than I had thought?

Schoenburg: I will mirror Senator Dick Durbin from Springfield a little bit on this one. I was at the convention in 2004 in Boston where Obama gave the speech. I was working so hard that—I guess I'm not always a great judge of what's a great speech when I see it, although I should be in my job—I was just working hard. I quoted people saying how they cried, and they loved it, and I saw them grabbing for Obama signs that were on the floor of the convention center before they left, just to make sure they had those souvenirs. So I knew that was hot, but you know, you're in a very hyper-charged political situation, and people would even do that for Al Gore, you know. (laughter)

So I wasn't sure, but then I came back to Springfield, and he immediately took off on like a thirty-seven-city tour, mostly with Durbin, as part of his campaign for U.S. Senate, because he was by then the nominee. I went to a stop of that in Taylorville, which I think was the last stop. I'm not

sure of that. But there were like three or four hundred people that showed in Taylorville to see him. Some of them were Republican, but most of them were Democrats, and they were just excited. Taylorville is not an extremely diverse town; it's mostly white folks. And people were excited.

This is the kind of thing Durbin has talked about—Durbin, who actually had said he saw the way crowds reacted to Obama in the past and encouraged him to run for president, even before Obama had made the decision. Durbin was one of the earliest pushers of this. I had written about that because he had said that at our editorial board—to my surprise—when I had asked Durbin if he was interested in being vice president or something. He said, “No, I think Obama should run, because the longer you stay in the Senate, the more of a record you have and the more they can attack you, so he's at the right place right now.” That proved to be probably the right strategy, considering who's sitting in the White House right now.

But I think around the time of the Taylorville stop, I'm like, There's some magnetism to him. Something's going on. Because Durbin will say this, but through my own experience, I've never seen a politician with a lasting magnetism like him. I got to say, Blagojevich had some of it, because he has that intangible. When he was running, I met him once at the Crowne Plaza and drove in a van with him to interview him on the way out to the fairgrounds. There was a rally in the Food-O-Rama area, which is a big, covered place that they set up Steak 'n' Shake and other food vendors during the fair. It was full of people, and there was a line about a city-block long of people, mostly women, waiting to get his autograph, Blagojevich. So he had that thing, but he clearly squandered it over the next few years.

The thing with Obama, by the time he announced his campaign in Springfield, 17,000 people or so showed up, we think. I saw him in Newport News, Virginia during the campaign because—this is very odd—my son, independently of me, volunteered for Obama after his senior year of high school for eight weeks in Des Moines, then somebody he met there hired him to work in an Obama office in Virginia. So my son took a semester of his sophomore year of college off to work for Obama in Newport News, Virginia. They had like fifty offices, the Obama campaign, in Virginia. But my wife and I traveled to visit my son, set it up weeks in advance, and three or four days before we were going, it was announced that Obama was going to be in Newport News, Virginia at that time. So.

DePue: Fortuitous timing.

Schoenburg: Amazing. So we ended up seeing that rally. I didn't write anything about it because of the son connection, which I had announced in the paper when he got the job, just to be open. So we had tickets, so we had seats, whereas... But there was about a mile-long line of people to get in there, of people who just wanted to see this guy. My experience with politicians is that they get a small

room in a hotel so that they can make it looked packed for the TV cameras. The problem Obama always had was finding a place big enough to put all the people who wanted to go see him. It was just something very different; I've never seen anything like it and probably will never see anything like it again.

DePue: One other name comes to me, in talking about Barack Obama and knowing your years of reporting on the Illinois State legislature, and that would be the guy who some would consider Barack Obama's most important mentor or ally in the legislature, being Emil Jones. Your impressions of Emil Jones.

Schoenburg: Well, street-smart Chicago guy. I know he worked in the sewer department of the city of Chicago for many years. It's unfortunate; I think people underestimated him early on because he has such a nasal voice pronouncement—the way he pronounces words. People probably underestimated him early on and were surprised when he became Senate president. But a good, strong advocate for the city of Chicago. He's always for pay raises for legislators. He's often for tax increases. (laughs) He's a very traditional Illinois politician.

I think that in the Blagojevich years, his legacy was lowered, perhaps because—and it was widely said, although I don't have direct evidence, but I believe it—he was either jealous of or didn't like Mike Madigan. He was trying to establish his own kind of mark on the system. In doing that, he allied himself very strongly with Blagojevich, and I think that made him kind of a partner in some of Blagojevich's worst shenanigans. We were saddened when he lost his wife, but then he got remarried, and the person he remarried was working in the Department of Human Services and under Blagojevich, she ended up getting about an 80,000-dollar raise. He has a son that was getting some state contracts or contracts through a state contractor, and then of course, he put his son, Emil, III, in to replace him when he retired from the Senate.

All of those factors, I think, make him more of just a regular old I'm-in-it-for-me kind of politician than a person who was really a strong advocate for education and public services for those in the impoverished communities, particularly in Chicago. He played favorites for his district. Chicago State University got a whole lot of money that other universities didn't as they were cutting back because he was—I think it was in his district—and he was friends with the person who was president. But she ended up being the subject of some very unflattering news stories about wasteful spending. So all-in-all, a very accomplished man, but of the old school.

DePue: Ties to the Daley administration? Emil Jones, did he have close ties?

Schoenburg: Again, I try to keep up, but I'm not a total expert on this. I think he got along well enough with that whole organization, yes.

DePue: Well, we've been at this for a while, Bernie.

Schoenburg: We have.

DePue: You say that almost as to say, It's long enough! So just a couple questions, then, at the end here.

Schoenburg: But it's a great joy to be able to.

DePue: Well, I—

Schoenburg: Hopefully it's saying something.

DePue: Oh, it's been fascinating. I mean, just the names that we've been discussing here, holy cow. They have not just state-level recognition and implications, but nation-wide as well. Talk a little bit about how you've seen journalism evolve during your career.

Schoenburg: Well, the state of newspapering these days is difficult, which is a shame. It's just that the technology has caught up with things and caused tremendous and fast change. The last couple of years has been almost nothing but change as we see more and more people, especially young folks, get their news from the Internet and then think they don't need the daily newspaper. So that has caused some problems because the newspaper companies have had to cut back, so there are sometimes fewer people assigned to places like Washington and Springfield.

The State House: I think it's a very productive thing to have differing reporters, even though we sometimes seem to travel in a pack and follow the governor; everybody finds their own stories at some point. They have different friends, they have different contacts, they are able to hear different things and find different things. Not only do you feed off each other at press conferences, but the different people finding different things about our government, I think is very useful to the public. Just in the last year or two, the Champaign newspaper ended having a correspondent in Springfield; the Rockford paper ended having a correspondent in Springfield. Within the last couple years, as my newspaper was sold by the Copley family to Gatehouse News—Copley used to have a Chicago bureau that at one time had like five or six people, that was down to one—then they no longer have that. We don't have a person in Chicago. We used to have a Washington bureau that we could call on, as many as six or eight people, including like a military expert, which was wonderful when we were dealing with what happens to the fighter jet unit that was based in Springfield and has been moved to Indiana now. But we still have a military base presence and possibly new missions coming. So we don't have a Washington Bureau anymore. Everybody's cutting back, and that's difficult.

The reporters used to be more like the front page, when I started, which is thirty years ago. You know, go drink with the legislators more often; I did some of that. I don't think I was terribly compromised. Even Governor

Edgar ended up having a lunch—they weren't serving booze—but in the mansion for the press at Christmastime or sometime around the holiday season. Some of those things have faded away. They may have a resurgence, but they may not, because things seem more sparse, perhaps more ethical, that you don't mix in that way.

It's changed some. So we have fewer resources. We have the technology, while, on the newspaper end of things, it's hurting us, it's also helping in the sense that we can—almost all newspaper reporters now tape-record everything that big politicians say; when I started, that was those wimps at television and radio. (DePue laughs) But I'll tell you, it makes for much more accurate quotes. You always tried to be accurate, but you're sure now. The other thing is, we can post that audio or even video on the website; newspapers pretty much of any size all have websites. So I personally like that, even though it's more work and the news is constant. The news is now constant, but we can provide that real feel for what it sounds like or what it looks like when a person's saying it, because there's a lot you can get from inflection, I think.

DePue: What would you say to allegations you hear from conservative circles, at least, that the news, maybe in particular newspapers, are biased in their reporting.

Schoenburg: Yeah, you know, everybody has their biases. I think that I come from the school that says you get both sides of it; you just report it, and you see where you're at. Once in a while, it's interesting. The *Chicago Tribune* as we speak is on a kick where they say that our editorial page and our news page is going to go for reform in Illinois. I think they should have said, Our editorial page will, and the stories will be what the stories will be. But that's fine, because you do what you do. They do what they do. We just had a story in our paper that was basically saying that Dan Hynes, the comptroller, wasn't releasing a lot of documents about the cemetery fund that he oversees, the pre-need fund, but I might have thought that might have been a better editorial than a front-page story, but we have a reporter who's very aggressive on that stuff. And it's interesting to see how it's coming. Not everything would be done my way.

Clearly on the cable networks, there's bias: Fox is to the right, MSNBC is to the left. But I think some of them in the middle are just in the middle, and you try to do your job. I really think issues in Illinois are much more based on just where the finances actually are and who's honest. To the chagrin of some radicals, in a sense, or the people on the fringes of both parties, the parties really are pretty similar in Illinois. I think the stories reflect who's doing what and where the state budget is. I think that's okay. I know that I try to get both sides in my stories and even in my columns, usually I'm able to do that. I think that the training in journalism provides fairness. A lot of people tell me I'm fair, and I'm really happy about that, because fairness and accuracy are the two things that were drummed into me at journalism school at U of I and I've tried to maintain [that]. I think that speaks against the

bias part. Other than the selection of stories that you do, but we're all trying to just get to the truth.

DePue: If I can venture into editorial observation myself, I think that reputation is proven by the access that you have to so many different politicians and people who will bend your ear and talk to you because they trust you, and that you'll use that information wisely and judiciously.

Schoenburg: Thank you. I hope so.

DePue: Let's go back to Edgar for just a quick point in time. What most impressed you about him in your years of observing the man?

Schoenburg: Oh, that's an interesting one. In a sense, it's his demeanor—it's almost superficial—that he carries himself well, that he commands respect, and that seems to carry over into his reputation of being straight with you. There are many politicians that lose that, and once it's lost, it's gone. I don't think he's lost that, and I think that's impressive.

I often come back to that day, flying in the plane in 1994, when he was telling me what was going on in each county below, and just his knowledge of the political landscape of Illinois. I was very impressed by that. It showed me how smart he was, and it has kind of colored my view of him since.

DePue: Anything that you recall about him where you were especially disappointed or surprised in a negative way?

Schoenburg: I think that was the vote against the constitutional amendment in '92, when I thought, had he wanted to—

DePue: To make the state's contribution 50 percent or higher?

Schoenburg: Yeah. We can look up exactly what that was. But yes, it would have put into the constitution a tougher standard for the state to meet its obligation to fund schools and to help equalize school funding, which everybody has said for a long time is a main problem in the state. He took the way out that avoided making that happen right away, and he did it in a public way, which really did, I think, tilt the vote against it, because when people saw Edgar voted against it, they felt covered to vote against it themselves.

DePue: Okay, how about some closing comments or reflections here, Bernie?

Schoenburg: Well, I've been through a lot of governors, (laughs) and it's—

DePue: And you're still a young man.

Schoenburg: Well, sometimes I feel like it, and sometimes I don't. But it's nice to be able to—and especially, we said this, during the Blagojevich years—to have a

governor you can respect and who seems to be trying to do the right thing and take control, make some tough choices, and move forward in whatever way they feel is appropriate. In Edgar's public life, in what I've heard from people like Mike Lawrence about how some of these decisions were made that I might not have known about, for the majority of the people around him, and for the fact that he, even though he's not writing or grading tests, he's still providing his knowledge to students through the educational process through his affiliation with the U of I. I think shows kind of a good public service ethic at heart. The fact that he led a straight and square life and made it something to admire in the public was a good thing, too. And the fact that he has not jumped back into the political mill, even though he's been asked to, to run for election again. The fact that for whatever family or personal reasons, or political reasons, that he had, he's been able to maintain that look of the elder statesman. He's not that old, either, so it's a good situation. So for all those things, he's someone who I think comes out of this looking pretty good, looking quite good, as you line up governors in the state of Illinois and kind of a sordid history of the state and ethics and all of that. The family values thing is nice. Like I say, I'm not completely unbiased, because little things like getting the Christmas card every year don't hurt to know that the respect goes a couple of ways, and it's a nice thing.

DePue: Well, it's been a wonderful opportunity for me to talk to somebody like yourself who's been around the Springfield scene for a long time, who's very well-respected in political circles and certainly very well read, one of those columns, that everybody's looking forward to every week on Thursdays and Sundays. So Bernie, thank you very much for the experience, and hopefully we'll stay in touch as well.

Schoenburg: Mark, nice to get to know you over this and to talk about it.

(end of interview #2)