

Interview with Fred Edgar

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, April 22, 2009. My name is Mark DePue; I'm Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm here today talking to Fred Edgar. Good morning, Fred.

Edgar: Good morning.

DePue: Tell us exactly where we are.

Edgar: Well, we're actually sitting in my office in Charleston, Illinois. This was the former hospital in this community, which we purchased and renovated into offices for public and mental health programs.

DePue: And your title?

Edgar: I'm the administrator for the mental health and public health programs here in this county [Coles County].

DePue: This is part of the Jim Edgar oral history project, and for that reason I'm thrilled to have an opportunity with talk to you today, Fred, and especially interested in hearing about those early years of growing up and what the family life was like. I know you were pretty heavily involved with many of the campaigns, or maybe all of them, that Jim had throughout his career, as well, so we will certainly hear about that, but I always like to start with when and where you were born.

Edgar: Well, I was born in Tuscola, Illinois, which is thirty miles here from Charleston, in September of 1940.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about how your family ended up in this part of Illinois.

Edgar: Our mother and father were originally from this part of Illinois. Mom grew up in a little town of Humboldt, not far from Charleston, and my dad in another little town called Arcola, so their families were from here. They grew up in this area, so I guess it was natural to get back to here.

DePue: Any idea how long the families had been there, or when they originally immigrated to the state?

Edgar: No. To be honest, I don't really know. They probably had been here at least since the turn of the century and I don't know exactly when they came, I have to admit. I don't know that part of the history of the family.

DePue: What were their occupations on either side of the family?

Edgar: My father had his own office supply machine business that he had started.

DePue: But his parents.

Edgar: Oh, his parents? They were farmers.

DePue: On both sides?

Edgar: No, on my father's side. On my mother's side, her father ran a general store for years in Humboldt, Illinois, where she grew up.

DePue: You say you were born in Tuscola; what was your father doing at the time?

Edgar: He was doing some farming. He would help people farm.

DePue: And your mother and her maiden name?

Edgar: Her maiden name was Moore, Betty Moore, M-o-o-r-e, and until Dad was killed Mom did not work at all. She was just a homemaker.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about the personalities of both of them. Well, I guess we haven't heard your father's first name yet.

Edgar: Cecil. Their personalities... Dad was a hard worker. He was the kind of person that liked to get out and have a good time. I'm describing somebody that was gone by the time I was twelve, so... But from what I remember, he got along good with people. He had an easy-going kind of personality, just enjoyed sports, took me to a lot of football games and, you know, just... Most of my memories are very positive.

DePue: How about your mother?

Edgar: You couldn't have a better mom. Whatever we needed she helped do. After Dad was killed—maybe I'm jumping ahead a little with her, but—she just dedicated her life to raising Tom, Fred, and Jim. She did anything and she just... She went back to school. I'm jumping around, but to back up a little bit—Mom had one year of college. She actually came here to Eastern and went one year after graduating from Mattoon High School, so she had a little bit of training but really no experience or anything. She hadn't been in the workforce at all, so after Dad was killed she went back and brushed up her typing and her shorthand and went to work as a secretary. But more than that, we didn't have a lot of money. We didn't have much money at all, so... But she always made sure you had a clean shirt to wear. We always had a meal. She just totally dedicated her life to taking care of us, and she was as nice a person as I've ever been around. Everybody really thought the world of her. She never had a bad thing to say. She was always cheerful and just the kind of person that you're very lucky if you get to be around, and she was my mom.

DePue: When were the two of them married?

Edgar: Oh my. Tom was born in '37, so they probably were married in '35 or '6, somewhere in that area. I can't tell you exactly without digging around to find, but I know they'd been married a couple years when Tom was born. So I'm guessing probably around '35.

DePue: And you came along in 1940. Was Tom born in Tuscola, as well?

Edgar: No, Tom was born in Chicago. They had moved up there. Dad had gone up to go to work in the steel mills, and while they were living up there Tom was born, like I said, in 1937. They lived up there, and Dad worked up there until probably just before I was born. They moved back to this part of the state, and Dad went to work again at that time, farming and... Primarily farming.

DePue: Was he helping somebody else on the farm?

Edgar: Yes, yes.

DePue: He didn't have his own land.

Edgar: No, he didn't have his own land, no. They had always farmed for someone else.

DePue: Any interesting stories to tell about the days up in Chicago and working?

Edgar: My mom told the story later about—my dad worked in the steel mill, as I said, and they had a strike come along at the steel mill.

DePue: He was blue collar or white collar?

Edgar: He was blue collar. He was a laborer. But he didn't want to go on strike. I mean, he had a young wife and a baby on the way and all, so Mom said he decided he was going to go ahead and work. And as it turned out, Dad was in the last car that got into the plant before the picket line stopped the rest of the cars. In fact, Dad told Mom they turned the car over behind them and burned it, so it was a pretty serious strike. But anyway, they had to stay at the plant during the strike, and Mom said that in the middle of the night Dad showed up at home—he and another guy from the plant—and she said he was carrying a little billy-club kind of thing—blackjack I think maybe they called those—and a pistol, and in kidding he told Mother—but she didn't know he was kidding—that they'd been sent out to kill the union chief who was—

DePue: John Lewis?¹

Edgar: Yeah, I think it was John Lewis at the time. Now, he just made this story up, of course, but Mother, being a little gal from downstate Illinois, said she was just... She was really scared. She really thought that's what it was all about. But he finally told her that no, they had just come to get some supplies and things, and they would let one or two guys slip out at night to go get some things. So it was a pretty serious—when I look back and think about it, that was a pretty... And he had the gun and the club, they both did, to protect themselves.

DePue: Was that one of the reasons that led him to decide, I think I'll go back to living on farming?

Edgar: I have a feeling that that, and the fact that Tom was born, and they probably felt they'd rather try to raise him back down here, so... But then they came back here shortly before I was born, and they were living on a farm where he was working at the time. Mom went into Tuscola to the hospital, and that's why I was born there.

DePue: You were awfully young, and I would expect you to say you don't remember Pearl Harbor or much about the Second World War; is that the case?

Edgar: I don't remember Pearl Harbor, per se. The first things I really start remembering—I remember when the president died.

DePue: That was April of '45.²

Edgar: Right. The president died in '45. The two things I can remember are the president dying and then the end of the war. When the president died we were living in

¹ John L. Lewis was the colorful and controversial head of the United Mine Workers from 1929 through 1960.

² Franklin D. Roosevelt died April 12, 1945 in Warm Springs, Georgia.

Parsons, Kansas—and I'll take a second to back up and tell you... As I understand it, during that war sometimes when men were drafted they were assigned to a particular task that would reflect what they were doing before if that helped the war effort. And since Dad had worked in a steel mill he was assigned to a munitions plant, where they built shell casings, in Parsons, Kansas. So the family moved out there, and by that time, of course, the family was two—Tom and myself—and we lived in Parsons during the war, in this little town in Kansas. And I can remember that when the president died our neighbor came over from next door, crying, came in the back door, and was saying, "The president's dead! The president's dead!" That's how we actually found out about it. Then it wasn't too much longer, as we know, that the war was over, and I remember everybody got in cars and drove around town and ended up downtown. The whole town was out honking their horns when the war was over, and I can remember that.

DePue: Now, you indicated that your father was drafted and then they decided to leave him in the States and working in a critical industry. Was he actually in the military, or he just was not drafted?

Edgar: No, and I don't know that he was drafted. I'm not totally positive how it worked, but I know instead of being assigned to the military he was assigned to this plant. So possibly, they took civilians that had the background and assigned them to do this rather than draft them.

DePue: Yeah, my guess is that the draft board met and the draft board recommended that.

Edgar: Yeah, and again, I don't know for sure how that worked, but that's how he ended up there, I know, and how we ended up there.

DePue: Any idea what kind of munitions he was working on?

Edgar: All I can remember is either he or Mom telling me that they built shell casings, like for all sizes, all types of ammunition.

DePue: Was that the kind of work he liked to do?

Edgar: I think he did it because he had the background from working in the steel mill.

DePue: What happened after the war, then?

Edgar: When the war was over in '45 the plant was closed and Dad did not have a job, did not have anything back here to bring him back to Illinois at that time. We had some relatives in Oklahoma that, among other things, had a hay business, buying and selling hay. They had a big farm implement company, and part of the business was to buy and sell hay, as well. Dad went down to work for them and went on the road buying and selling hay all over Oklahoma and Texas, so that's how we ended up in Vinita, Oklahoma. We moved there in '45, and then in '46 Jim was born in Vinita, Oklahoma, while we were living there.

DePue: Which side of the family were these relatives on?

Edgar: They were my mother's side of the family.

DePue: One of her brothers, or—?

Edgar: She had a sister there, her husband, and then their offspring, which resulted in a lot of cousins that we would go to—we still go back to visit, in fact—but it was my mother's sister.

DePue: So you still have a branch of the family in Oklahoma, then.

Edgar: Yes. We try to go back every year to see [them].

DePue: I know Jim was born there July 22, 1946. Do you remember that?

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: You would have been six years old, right?

Edgar: Right. At the time he was born I think we were still living in an apartment near where Dad worked, and then shortly after that we moved to a house there in town that Dad was able to... To be honest, I don't know if he bought it or rented it, but we moved into a fairly nice house. It wasn't fancy, but as I recall it was a really big deal moving from the apartment to the house, so...

DePue: (laughter) This will put you on the spot, really, but do you recall at all what your reaction was at having a little brother coming, on the way?

Edgar: I think we were kind of excited about it. I know Mom, knowing her, would have made it out to be a big thing and how much fun it would be, so we were probably pretty receptive to the whole idea.

DePue: What was it like between you and Tom at that time? He was nine or in that neighborhood, and you're seven or six.

Edgar: Tom and I were close enough in age that we did a lot of things together, so we were pretty close. I think, like all brothers, we fought a lot, but we also were together a lot, so we had a good relationship. Our fighting was just over silly things, like you would do, and as I recall he won all the fights but that didn't slow me down much!

DePue: Who was the disciplinarian in this family?

Edgar: Oh, my dad was. Brother...

DePue: And when was it that you came back to Charleston?

Edgar: We moved back to Charleston in '49. That's when my dad decided he wanted to start his own business. He decided to start this office sales and supply business. My

mother's brother had already been trained in servicing office machines, so they decided to go into a partnership and start this business here in Charleston. My dad handled the sales end and my uncle handled the service end of the business.

DePue: What was his name?

Edgar: Bob Moore.

DePue: Do you recall that move?

Edgar: Oh, yes. The move back to Illinois, you're referring to?

DePue: Yes.

Edgar: Sure, very well. Actually, we didn't come right to Charleston because Dad was looking for two things: a place to live, a home; and also a place to start his business. We had friends that had a vacant house in Mattoon, old friends of my mom's that she had grown up with, and so temporarily we lived in Mattoon while Dad was locating both a house here and a place for the business. So we lived over there about six months in Mattoon before we came on to Charleston.

DePue: You were renting over in Mattoon, then?

Edgar: Yes, from these friends.

DePue: When the family moved to Charleston, did they purchase a house here?

Edgar: No, not to begin with. It was just a rental.

DePue: Okay. How was the business going then?

Edgar: The business had really kind of taken off. They started out in an upper level on the Square in Charleston, Illinois, and after they'd been in business a little while, it did well enough that they needed to expand and needed to get on the ground floor. They moved into a new location on the ground floor, they were doing a pretty good business, and then Dad got a break that would have really, really set him up for life. He had just signed a contract to provide Eastern Illinois University with all their office supplies and service their equipment, so he had really landed what would have sort of produced the golden egg.

DePue: I don't want to get too far ahead here in the story. What kind of a businessman do you think your father was?

Edgar: I think he was good with people. He was a salesman. He could talk to people, and he enjoyed doing that, so I think he probably would have been very successful if it hadn't been for the tragic death that followed very quickly, so...

DePue: Yes. And there are three brothers during these years. There's three years difference between you and Tom, and then there's a big six years difference between you and Jim.

Edgar: That's correct.

DePue: Can you flesh that relationship out a little bit, what the dynamics of the three boys were like?

Edgar: Jim was enough younger that he was kind of always the younger brother. Tom and I did more things together, and I did more things with his friends. I mean, I was close enough in age that I could associate with his friends, more than I could Jim's. Jim was six years younger so we didn't have as much interplay, interchange and so forth, in our lives as I did with Tom; and, of course, Tom and Jim, being nine years apart, didn't have much interplay at all, to be honest, so...

DePue: Did you all go to public schools in Charleston?

Edgar: The university at that time had what they called a lab school, so there were really two systems in Charleston: the actual public school and the lab school. At that time, when we first moved here, it went grades one through high school; they actually had a high school, as well, a lab high school. Tom went into the lab school program, and I went into just the regular public school program. I've never known for sure why, except Tom was a good student, and that was the furthest thing from my care, so...

DePue: That was a decision your parents made?

Edgar: Uh huh. And, of course, they could recognize Tom was a very good student. I'll jump ahead a little bit. Tom had all the brains in the family. He went on to be a straight-A student at Eastern and then went on and got his master's degree at the University of Illinois; all this in math and physics, and all As; just never got anything but As. I think they could recognize that early on. The lab school was really there for the college staff, for the professors' children more than anything, but they also embraced or brought in some of the community kids, as well, but not many. Most of them were associated with the university.

DePue: Was there any kind of competition to get into the lab school if you were not a child of a university employee?

Edgar: That I can't answer. I don't know how they selected, and not everybody wanted to go. Some did, some didn't, as I recall. I think some parents maybe wanted their children to go there and others didn't, and I'm not really sure how that was determined.

DePue: How about Jim? Which system—?

Edgar: Then when Jim came along he also went to the lab school. By the time Jim... The lab school high school discontinued. Tom was the last class to graduate, so when I was a sophomore we built a new high school in town and combined the two high schools, which would have been 1955, '6. So that was the end of the lab school high school, but Jim went through the grade school at the lab school and then transferred over to the public system.

DePue: Was religion a part of growing up for the family?

Edgar: Yes. Mom and Dad both were religious; my mom very much so, and so was Dad. He was actually a deacon in the church. And I remember we would go to Sunday school in church on Sunday morning, go back for Sunday night church, and then a lot of times go on a Wednesday night for a prayer meeting. They were Baptists and pretty involved in it.

DePue: What branch of the Baptist church?

Edgar: Southern Baptist. They had joined down in Oklahoma. All of our relatives down there were in that particular church, and I don't know what they were before that, but...

DePue: Being a Baptist in the late forties, early fifties, what kind of a lifestyle did that mean that you folks had?

Edgar: Well...

DePue: You smile! (laughter)

Edgar: Dad wasn't a teetotaler. I mean, he would enjoy a drink now and then, and it wasn't a strict kind of thing where there was no dancing or anything. I think we lived a pretty normal life, to be truthful, other than we went to church a lot, but I think that was more typical in that time anyway.

DePue: I ask because Jim, once he got to politics, had a reputation of being pretty straight in terms of things like drinking and smoking and swearing. People tell me that they'd never heard him say a swear word, and I wonder if that was part of the religious upbringing.

Edgar: Yes, yes. Jim stayed more involved in the religious side of his life than Tom and I did, for whatever reasons. Tom and I probably were—I don't know the right term, but we were definitely more involved in the party side of life, if that's the way to put it, (laughter) for lack of a better description. We did the little different lifestyle, and not to say that Jim was—he wasn't a prude. He enjoyed life, and he'd go to parties; he just didn't drink, himself, and he'd have to be awful mad to hear him even say, you know, anything, so he was...

DePue: Was not drinking, not going to parties, not dancing, part of the message that you all were hearing from the pulpit?

Edgar: Oh yeah, from the pulpit. Backing up to the Oklahoma days, when I can sort of start remembering being involved in the church and religion and stuff; the Baptist minister there just scared me to death! (laughter) I mean, he really preached that hellfire and damnation from the pulpit, and he used to just scare the heck out of me. But yeah, I think that had an influence on our lives, how we tried to live and stuff. I followed Tom through a fraternity here at Eastern, and Jim didn't join that fraternity, because he'd gone to a school elsewhere and then transferred back to Eastern, but became kind of a social member of our fraternity. And it just broadened our horizons a little bit, (laughter) and lived quite the same lifestyle, so...

DePue: When the family moved back to the Charleston area, it seems to me that they also came back to the roots of both sides of the family. Did you have an extended family then?

Edgar: Yes, we did, particularly my dad's side. My mother's brother that was my dad's partner in business here was actually pretty quiet himself. He never had any children. He did finally get married, but he was kind of into himself. His life was pretty quiet. But my dad's side had a lot of relatives close by, and we'd picnic with them and do a lot of things together, so we were very close, and, as you've said, the extended family was really important to us.

DePue: Tell us about what a Thanksgiving or a Christmas would be like with the extended family.

Edgar: A lot of Thanksgiving mornings we'd go to a football game. My dad played some football and was a big football fan. The little town he played for and the town that I was born in were big rivals, and they'd play on Thanksgiving morning, so we'd get up and go to the football game, and—

DePue: That had to be a serious game (laughter) with that kind of tradition!

Edgar: It was—very serious game—and he never missed it; he almost always took me once I got old enough to go with him.

DePue: What were the two towns' names?

Edgar: Arcola and Tuscola. He grew up in Arcola, and Tuscola was just eight miles away. They called it the Cola Wars. So that would start our day on Thanksgiving, and then we'd come home to a big meal, and either some of the family would be in, the extended family—we had some really close friends that sometimes would come and have dinner with us or we would go to their place—so usually there was a pretty big gathering for Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas would have been similar.

DePue: It all sounds like the idyllic childhood, at least up to 1953. Would you characterize it that way?

Edgar: Yes. You know, everybody has their tragedies or whatever; we didn't have a lot of money, but we didn't know that. We were happy and we had the things that we needed, so I'd say we had a real good childhood. We were very fortunate.

DePue: Tell us about 1953, then.

Edgar: I'm sure you're referring to when my dad was killed. As I said, he had started this office supply machine business, and had just signed his contract with Eastern to provide all the service and supplies. He was going to Chicago to some kind of a trade school to make him more current on the new machines that were being offered at that time so obviously he would be able to keep Eastern updated on what was available. He had a brother living up there, a younger brother that lived in Chicago at the time and worked up there, so he was going to go up and spend part of the weekend with him before he went to this school on Monday. He went up on a Saturday, late afternoon, and they assume that he had a blowout that pulled his truck over in front of another truck; and he was killed instantly.

Part of the tragedy of that whole thing was they didn't notify Mom, and the next morning—this was Sunday morning—a neighbor came over with a *Chicago Tribune* in his hand and knocked the door and asked to see Mom. When she came to the door he said, "Betty, there's a story in this paper about a Cecil Edgar being killed. That's not our Cecil, is it?" 'Cause I was standing right there listening. That's the first we knew about it. In fact, as luck would have it, we had a couple friends staying with us at that time. They got on the phone and started making some calls, and found out that he had been killed the night before and they just had not notified us, so...³

DePue: Do you remember your mother's immediate reaction when he asked the question?

Edgar: She was just like, "No, can't be." As I look back now, I'm sure she thought, I would surely know if it was, but the age and all was right on; so I think she probably was very concerned right off that it might be true, but I guess you don't want to accept that, and especially... You would think that if that had happened she would have been notified, and I'm sure she was thinking that way somewhat, but it didn't take long to get to the right people and find out that that was what had happened.

DePue: Nineteen fifty-three: that would make the three boys how old?

Edgar: Jim was six at the time, I was twelve, and Tom was fifteen; and it definitely had an impact on all of us.

DePue: What was your reaction, if I can ask?

Edgar: I was probably as close, if not closer, to Dad. Maybe the age had something to do with it. Tom was a little older and already going down his own path. He was a very

³ The story of Cecil Edgar's death appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* on Monday, September 28, 1953.

good student and knew what he wanted to do; it wasn't what Dad particularly wanted. Dad wanted him to follow in his business and take an interest in that, and Tom just wasn't interested in it, so...

DePue: Did that create a little bit of tension?

Edgar: There was a little friction there. I can even remember it so I'm sure that there was friction for Tom, but not to the point that it was adversarial, necessarily. It was just, every once in a while Dad would make comments about you ought to be doing this, you ought to be doing that, you ought to be learning this business. But at the same time I was very interested in it; of course, I was too young to do much, but I thought it would be the way to go. So even when I was younger, I would go with Dad to deliver things and just be with him a lot. And when he went to ballgames, that wasn't Tom's thing particularly, so I'd go to the ballgames with him and stuff, and Jim was too young at the time. Jim was only six, so when I look back it probably affected me more because of my involvement with Dad at the time.

DePue: When we met yesterday you told a little anecdote about actually helping your dad with a sale one time.

Edgar: Oh yeah, I thought that was really a big thing. When we first moved back and moved into this house in our little neighborhood—in those days there were a lot of little bitty grocery stores in neighborhoods. Today you wouldn't hardly recognize it as a grocery store, but nonetheless it was. It had the basics; it was just kind of across the street from us; gosh, I must have been in maybe fourth or fifth grade or something. I went over to get some bread or milk or something for Mom, and when I was in there the owner of the store was ringing it up on his old adding machine and it had a tape. I thought, You know, Dad sells that stuff, I wonder... So I said to the man, "You know, my dad sells the tapes for that adding machine if you would be interested," however you put it when you're that age. It led to him saying, "Well, I still have some but when I'm out I'll contact you," and he did, and ended up buying not only supplies but getting a new machine. I was really, really impressed with myself for getting that done.

DePue: You're on your way then!

Edgar: Yeah.

DePue: I expect that as tough as it must have been on the boys, it was even tougher on your mom. What was her reaction?

Edgar: That's the real impact, of course. You have to remember in those days women didn't work like they do today. Most women were homemakers. As it turned out, when Dad was killed Tom was the oldest of the boys and was only fifteen, and Mother did not have a driver's license. She'd never driven. So here Mom is: thirty-six, has three boys, no job, no car, no driver's license, and she's got to figure out how to take care of the family. My dad had a little insurance but it only took care of the bills that were there from the new business and all, so he really didn't leave her

with much in the way of any kind of money. She really had an uphill task to take care of. But Mom being the kind of person she was, she just dedicated her life from that time on to raising the three of us, and she always said—and I'm jumping ahead a little; I'll back up— "My goal was to see you three get through college and I knew you'd be okay."

So with that in mind, she went back and brushed up on some of her typing that she had taken when she was at Eastern, and shorthand, and went out and found a secretarial job. In the early days she made arrangements with somebody that worked there and was living in our neighborhood to pick her up so she'd have a ride to work. But she also knew she was going to have to come up with a driver's license and a car for the family, so she went out and learned to drive. After she worked a while, she had enough money to buy an older car, was able to get a car, and we had a car in the family; but that wasn't for probably a year or so. But she managed, she did really well. As I said before, we really didn't have any money then but we didn't know it. We were happy and we always had a clean shirt and a good meal and a caring mom, and you can't hardly beat that.

We had an uncle who really helped a lot. I think it would have been much tougher for the family, but my dad's oldest sister lived nearby. They were farmers, and her husband was really a fine guy; he stepped in and just kind of took over the family. I mean from a... He went out and helped us buy a house. There was just a little bit of insurance money, and knowing my uncle, he probably browbeat the people that were selling the house, using the story about Mom and the three kids and no money. But he was able to buy us a fairly decent, substantial house only a block from the university. Why that was so important: it was large enough that we were able to convert the upstairs into rooms for renters, so college students stayed with us the whole time we lived there, and she was able to take in four college roomers, which really supplemented the income.

DePue: Boys or girls?

Edgar: Unfortunately, boys. (laughter) With three boys, they weren't going to let us have any girls, I found out later! But—

DePue: What was his name?

Edgar: His name was Everett Seeman, and he farmed.

DePue: And your aunt's name?

Edgar: Maude.

DePue: Everett and Maude.

Edgar: Everett and Maude.

DePue: I like that.

Edgar: My dad came from a family of four girls and four boys; there were eight kids in the family, so... But anyway, he was extremely helpful. He negotiated, and he found this house for us and got it, and I don't know for sure but I wouldn't doubt that he probably helped a little bit with the buying of it and so forth. It was a great location. It was not far from the high school, it was only a block from the university. It allowed us to have those college students all the time we lived there, and they were quite an experience.

I was still in junior high when we first moved in there, and I'd get home and just get to sleep, and here they'd come, back from downtown; and they'd come busting in my room—it wouldn't matter what time it was—and get me up and talk. I'd come home sometimes and my bed would just be gone. I'd go in my room and there wouldn't be any bed. They'd take it apart, they'd hang the mattress out the window, and they'd hide the... I mean, it was just a real experience for us. Now, Tom by then was in high school so he could identify with them, but they just liked to taunt me. So it was quite an experience having those four college students living with us at that time. But they were great. They got to be almost like family. They'd come and stay with us, and two or three of them stayed like the whole four years they were in college, so they were practically family.

DePue: Your mom wasn't cooking for them, was she?

Edgar: No. Only on special occasions. It wasn't that she provided meals, but sometimes some of them would stick around instead of head home for the weekend, and she'd have them eat with us and stuff, so...

DePue: What was the progression of jobs she had after the schooling?

Edgar: First she went to work as a secretary at an elevator, and then shortly after that—

DePue: A grain elevator?

Edgar: A grain elevator. And then after that she was able to move out to the ASCS office, which is a governmental type of [probably Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service].

DePue: Department of Agriculture?

Edgar: Yes, and she worked there for a few years. Then she moved into the job that she really enjoyed and spent several years doing, and that was secretary for the athletic director out at Eastern. She always liked athletes and ball and stuff. I mean, I played a lot of ball and she never missed a game. She was a big fan, so she liked working there, and she worked there for many years. In fact, that's where she retired from, so it was an excellent job for her.

DePue: Did she ever start dating?

Edgar: Never. I'm pretty sure of this, but from the time my dad was killed until she died, I don't think she was ever with another man, and she was only thirty-six at the time. Later, I asked about it. She said, "I didn't have time. My whole goal was just to get you guys raised," so that's what she did. She just spent all her time either working or taking care of us.

DePue: Looking back at those years growing up, who do you think had the strongest influence on you?

Edgar: I don't think there's any question it was our mom—me, certainly Jim, and Tom. Even though Dad was a strong personality, and Dad was the disciplinarian—and I got the brunt of that most of the time and probably had it coming most of the time—all in all, Mom was the one who really had an effect on all of us. I'm sure Dad had an effect, too, but it's easier to remember Mom because she was with us so much longer, and during those years that things were so tough we really leaned on her. She got us out a lot of scrapes. I always laugh and say, "Well, Mom, you're sure lucky you had me, as much trouble as Tom and Jim were," but quite honestly, I'm the one that probably had her in more trouble than anybody, so... But she was great, and I know of Jim and me and Tom, we all got a lot from Mom; a lot of our personality, whatever it is, has to come from her. I think Jim reflects it even more than Tom and I do.

DePue: Describe for us a little bit about what Jim was like personality-wise growing up in those years.

Edgar: Jim kind of always knew where he was headed. I know you've probably heard stories, but he knew he wanted to be in politics when he was really young. In fact, you may or may not have heard a funny story. When he was running for a class office in one of the early grades—I can't tell you for sure, but maybe like the fifth or sixth grade they actually elected a class president—you had to have a petition; you had to have so many signatures on your petition to run. They got a real indoctrination to what the political arena was like. I may be off. It might have even been like the seventh grade, but probably not; I think it was younger than that. Anyway, Jim figured out that if you had to have so many signatures out of the class on a petition to run, if he got x number of signatures on his petition there wouldn't be enough left for anybody to run against him. So he passed out gum to everybody that would sign his petition. I've always accused him of buying his first election! (laughter) He passed out enough gum and got enough signatures that nobody could get enough signatures to run against him, so that's how he won his first election.

DePue: But in those years, I'm thinking, if you ask most kids what they want to be they don't say they want to be a politician. Did he take some guff because of that?

Edgar: Oh, I don't think anybody really took him serious enough to begin with, just... He always did. He was interested in politics from a very young age on, and no, he had the normal group of friends and played some ball and ran around. I mean, it wasn't like he was over in a corner just reading. Jim did read more than probably a lot of

people. He liked to read. He liked to read what he liked to read. I know he read a lot of history and things of that nature, but he was still pretty well rounded in that he was in the mainstream of things.

DePue: Was he the one who was always kind of the leader of the groups that he was in?

Edgar: A lot, as I recall, and again, his group, they were enough younger than me that I didn't know them as well as, say, Tom's group. But as I look back he was always kind of guiding things. He was a class officer when he was young, on up in high school and all. Even when he went to Eastern, he was a student body president out.

DePue: Let's get you to high school. What kind of things were you thinking in terms of your future? Now, you'd already mentioned that you were also in athletics in high school.

Edgar: To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted to be. Tom pretty well had charted his own course. He enjoyed the math, and he was really a dedicated student. He spent a lot of time studying. And Jim had kind of picked his track. But I hadn't; I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was just enjoying life day to day. That was kind of my approach to it, so...

DePue: How important were the sports to you?

Edgar: Totally. They were my whole life at that time. My dad was gone, and other than... My friends and sports were the most important thing to me, and—I've said this many times—sports did more to keep me on the right path than anything. I wasn't any different than most kids except I just didn't have a dad, and I've always thought if I didn't have that interest and dedication to sports, who knows where I might have ended up. But I was very interested in sports and so that's what I did with all my time. I played all year round in a different sport, so it kept me busy.

DePue: Football in the fall?

Edgar: Football, basketball, and baseball, and then all summer we worked on all of those.

DePue: Well, I don't know how to say this delicately—you're not a really big guy. What position did you play in football?

Edgar: I was a receiver. I was an end. Offense and defense—back then you played both ways, believe it or not, so I was a lot of tape! (laughter) By the time my senior year rolled around, it took them an extra twenty minutes to get me taped up for the ball games, I had so many things banged up! But I played a lot of football and really enjoyed it, and basketball and baseball, so...

DePue: A guard in basketball?

Edgar: No, I could really jump. Believe it or not—I think I've shrunk an inch or so in my life, but I was about six foot—I could jump with people a lot taller. I didn't want to,

but I had to play center some for our team because at the time our big men had some of their own problems. A lot of games the coach would be mad at the big men, so he'd stick me over in the center 'cause I could jump? All that meant was I was about elbow high on all these big guys, my head, you know, so... But no, I was a forward and played there a lot, played a lot of basketball, and we had a lot of success. We were very lucky. So sports was a lot of fun. We won all our football games, most of our basketball games, and so it made school a lot of fun; it made being in sports a lot of fun; so my life was really a lot of fun. I was involved, I had a lot of friends, and that made it fun. We did a lot of things together, so...

DePue: I asked about football and basketball. How about your position in baseball?

Edgar: I was an outfielder. I played center field in baseball.

DePue: Do you remember your batting average?

Edgar: No.. I was a so-so hitter; I wasn't the leading hitter. I would steal a lot of bases and stuff, so when I'd get on I could run, but I was a good outfielder and not a great hitter. But what happened my senior year, just after basketball was over when we'd gotten beaten out of the state tournament, we went to play basketball in a little town near here one day—just going in to play; it wasn't a game of any kind—and I was involved in an automobile accident, and it knocked me out for two weeks. Actually, this was the hospital at that time, and I was in here for a week in the hospital 'cause I had gone through a windshield. And I was out of school for over two weeks, so I missed the start of my baseball season my senior year and that kind of hurt, but...

DePue: What was your mother's reaction when you were banged up seriously in an auto accident?

Edgar: She was very concerned. They went and got her—my friends—because it was a Sunday afternoon, Easter Sunday 1958, and it happened right down the road here. We had finished playing basketball; we were just killing time while one of our buddies that had played ball with us was eating his Sunday meal. We had dropped him off, we were going to go back and get him after he ate. We were driving out to our little lake here. Some students were coming back to Eastern; a car pulled on the highway in front of them, and they swerved and missed that car and hit us head on. My head went through the windshield. In fact, probably real lucky to be here, from what the doctor told me. But two of my friends went to get Mom, and they said, You need to come with us, and she said, "Why?" They said, Fred's been in an accident. They said she just turned ashen, just like, "Is he all right?" And they said, Well, we don't know. At that time they didn't, because my head was in bad shape. I had to have a hundred stitches—

DePue: Probably bleeding all over the place.

Edgar: Oh God. The ambulance came, and the two guys both about died in the other car, but they did live. One of them was crippled for life. But the two guys with me—I was in the shotgun seat, as we called it then—the steering wheel held the driver and

the other guy with me hit the backseat, but I hit the windshield, and so... It was quite an experience. I was in the hospital for a week. It turned out half the high school came down, 'cause we're so close, and they'd keep sneaking in my room. I can still remember: the nurses would be running out one group and another group would sneak in. I think I was just an excuse to get out of class, you understand; that's why they came down.

DePue: As miserable as you had to be in the hospital, it sure must have been nice to see everybody come down and visit you.

Edgar: Yeah. Then, after the hospital, I had to stay home for a week in bed. It was that serious. In those days I had a little box 45 record player, and I bought all the 45s. That's the only thing I spent money for, those little seventy-nine cent, eighty-nine cent 45 discs, if you remember them, with the big hole.⁴ And I would hear kids come in after school was over. I'd hear the record player start; dance parties. Some of them would come in to say hello, some of them wouldn't, but that was typical every day just 'cause our house was kind of the meeting spot. So they just continued it anyway even though...

DePue: What kind of music were you buying?

Edgar: All the popular 45s, from Johnny Mathis to Elvis Presley. We're talking the late fifties here. In fact, I still have, believe it or not, like 450 of those original 45 records that I kept from that era, and every once in a while... We had a fiftieth class reunion—I guess I'm saying a lot here—but we had a fiftieth class reunion this summer, and I had the class over at the house for a party before our reunion. I had all those old 45s out, and we just had a ball going through those, everybody playing their old favorites. And I just happened to throw all my records in a box and put them in the attic when everybody else kind of threw them away, so I ended up with all those original 45s, and now they're like gold to us.

DePue: I would imagine they're mostly collectors' items.

Edgar: Oh yeah, they are. But we really had a great time getting all those out and reminiscing.

DePue: We've got you toward the tail end of high school. What are your career aspirations? What are your college goals?

Edgar: At this time I know I want to go to college. I already knew that, so going to college was... When I started college I thought I wanted to be a coach, so I started out the first year in physical education to become a coach. Sometime during that year I decided maybe that's not what I want to do. I thought things were changing a little

⁴ Introduced in 1949, 45s were seven-inch vinyl records that played at forty-five revolutions per minute and typically consisted of a single song on each side. Closely linked with the rise of rock-and-roll music, they were a wildly popular format in the 1950s and 1960s. Jim Dawson and Steve Propes, *45 RPM: The History, Heroes & Villains of a Pop Music Revolution* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003).

bit. I didn't think kids were as dedicated as they needed to be, and I didn't know if that would go over very well with me because I was pretty dedicated to sports when I went through, so I thought maybe I ought to get into business. After my freshman year I changed my major to business administration management, and I got clear out of education.

DePue: Why Eastern?

Edgar: Because we could afford it. It was here, local. Again, we still didn't have much money. Tom and I always worked and had jobs and made all our own spending money, and...

DePue: Since your mother worked at Eastern, did you get a break in that respect?

Edgar: She wasn't there yet, so this was way before she... At that time she was working out at the ASCS office, all the years that I can remember through high school and then during Eastern.

DePue: Was there any thought that you'd play sports in college? Did you play sports in college?

Edgar: No, I actually tore up my shoulder at football. (laughter) Like I said, I was mostly tape by the end of my senior year. I really wanted to play but the doctor told me I couldn't play football. There was no way. My shoulder was in too bad of shape. I wasn't big enough to play college football, but I did try out for basketball. I went out, and I made it all the way to the last cut and didn't make the last cut, so I spent the rest of my time in college playing intramural ball. We had great intramural programs, so that was a lot of fun.

DePue: If you'd gone to a smaller college, though, you would have had a better chance of playing a sport.

Edgar: Maybe, maybe. Yeah, I would. I might have at a smaller school, but I wasn't an outstanding athlete. I was just good enough to have a lot of fun, and we were good enough as a team to be successful and have a lot of fun, so...

DePue: What was it about your college experience, then, that started to crystallize your career plans?

Edgar: College, for me, especially for the first two or three years, was just a continuation of high school. We just had a lot of fun. I was in a fraternity; playing intramurals; just having a good time. School was kind of secondary, as it always had been for me; unlike Tom and Jim. So it wasn't until I was probably getting toward my senior year that I thought, "Oops, this is going to come to an end. I'm going to have to figure out something." I started thinking then about what I wanted to do, and I wanted to get into some kind of business where I dealt with people and stuff.

I interviewed my senior year and had a couple job offers from big companies. As I recall, we went up to Chicago, and they had a job fair or something where they had companies come in, had representatives interviewing college seniors from all over Illinois, and we spent two days up there interviewing. As a result of that I did have a couple offers with a couple companies; but as it turned out, the girl I was dating at that time, my former wife, her father was a district manager for State Farm Insurance, and he wanted me to go to work as an insurance agent for him. After considering everything, I decided—because I was going to go into an assistant manager role and work in the management end of it—that sounded good to me, so that's what I decided to do. When I graduated from college I started my own insurance agency here in Charleston, and that's where I got started in the business world.

DePue: What was your former wife's name?

Edgar: Her name was Karen, and her maiden name was Kinsall, K-i-n-s-a-l-l.

DePue: You said you were in the fraternity; that meant you were living in the fraternity?

Edgar: Yes. I was the president for two years, so I lived in the house three years. We had a fraternity house not far from campus, and so I lived in the fraternity house. I could live there, because of being president, free. The first year I paid, but it wasn't too expensive. Eastern wasn't even expensive in those days.

DePue: You said you were working most of those years, though, as well. What were you doing for work?

Edgar: Anything and everything I could do, practically, but during the school year I worked at the textbook library. We provided textbook rental for students; they didn't buy their books at Eastern, they rented them. So we would rent out books, and... Every quarter break we would check everybody's books back in and get them all cleared and ready, so when they came back they would rent them out again. And during the quarter you could work as many hours as you could get at the bookstore because there were always people coming in wanting to rent a particularly different book or something. So I spent all my college years working at the textbook library.

Then on breaks when we weren't working there, like Christmas break, they'd hire a dorm crew to go in and clean the dorm floors. You'd have those two weeks there, and we'd go in and clean the dorms, and that was a lot of fun. I wasn't going to go anywhere anyway, and I was right here in town, so I would always work on those dorm crews.

For two summers I ran the concession stand at the local Charleston drive-in, and I would do that every night, and then the last two years in the summer I worked as—I don't remember what my title was, but I ran the dishwashing operation at the student union for the university; so I always had a job.

DePue: Quite a bit of diversity in those jobs, too! (laughter)

Edgar: Yeah, right? And we always made them fun, so there was always some way to work it around.

DePue: How many meals were you catching at home?

Edgar: Oh, I ate every day at home; I mean, almost every day. I'd come home and eat the evening meal with Mom, and Jim was there. Tom was gone by then, but I'd come home and eat with Mom and Jim.

DePue: Weren't there meals in the fraternity house?

Edgar: No, our fraternity house didn't provide meals, so you were on your own. So the main meal for me was to go home in the evening and have a meal with Mom.

DePue: Was it the classic tradition of all three of you sitting down at the dinner table at the same time?

Edgar: Yeah, we did, pretty much so. She would plan a meal at a certain time and I would try to be there. I'm sure I missed some, and...

DePue: How close were you and Jim during those years in college?

Edgar: Pretty close. We kept in touch pretty well. Again, the six years made a difference, but I kept up with what he was doing, and we were pretty close, and going home every day I could talk to him, keep up that way, so...

DePue: You mentioned before that you and Tom were about three years off from each other, typical brothers getting into scrapes together, and he was winning most of the fights.

Edgar: Always!

DePue: Tell us about you and Jim.

Edgar: Jim and I had a totally different relationship. We didn't ever fight. Jim and I had a lot of fun playing wiffleball⁵ together. I don't know if you know what a wiffleball is.

DePue: Oh, yeah.

Edgar: Plastic ball and bat, and we'd have some great battles out in the back yard at Mom's house playing wiffleball. He won't like me telling this, but he could never beat me. We'd play, but he could never beat me; but he'd always want to go play. When I'd get home he'd say, "You got time for a wiffleball game?" Jim and I had a different kind of relationship than Tom and I, so we always got along good and spent some

⁵ The wiffleball is a perforated, lightweight rubbery-plastic ball which doesn't go far when batted.

time together, but again, not as much as Tom and I because of that difference in age.

DePue: Does that mean that—you're describing these games—was he really competitive?

Edgar: Oh, yeah. Probably not as bad about it as I was, but he was still competitive. As I said, he played ball in school. He played some football and basketball; not a lot, but he did play, and he enjoyed it; and he enjoyed those games. He'd battle, yeah.

DePue: Would you describe yourself as a jock in those years?

Edgar: I thought I was. Let's say that.

DePue: So a jock would never let his little brother beat him?

Edgar: Right, right, something like that, so... I was a fraternity champ. Nobody could beat me at the fraternity house in that wiffleball game, so I wasn't about to let Jim beat me. (laughter)

DePue: You mentioned State Farm. You graduated in what year?

Edgar: I graduated in '63; went to work for them. That's the year I got married. I worked for them until the service came along. That would have been three years, 'cause I was going to be drafted, so I got busy and signed up for an OCS⁶ program.

DePue: That was in what year?

Edgar: I went into the service in January of '66, and I had worked for State Farm until that time.

DePue: Did you have any kids at that time?

Edgar: No, when I first went into the service I did not. My first year was in training at Fort Gordon, Georgia. I'm ahead of myself. My basic training was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and my advanced infantry or individual training, whatever they called it, AIT, was also at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.⁷ It's in Columbia.

DePue: Were you thinking you were headed to the infantry at that time?

Edgar: Yeah, because I thought if I've got to go into the service... Let me back up even another step. I don't think I've ever been number one in my life at anything. The draft clerk called me up after President Johnson signed a bill that said married men that don't have families are now eligible for the draft. Well, until that time, because I was married, I was non-draftable. I'd never had a deferment, but I was not eligible for the draft because married men were not being drafted at that time.

⁶ OCS: Officer Candidate School

⁷ Advanced Individual Training.

DePue: That's 1965, when the war was really starting to escalate.⁸

Edgar: That's true. Then President Johnson signed a bill that said men who are married but do not have children, are now eligible for the draft. I'd never had a deferment. I was twenty-five and X number of months old. At twenty-six you're no longer eligible for the draft if you've never had deferments. So I was just a few months away from being twenty-six and home free when he signed that bill. Well, as you probably know, when they draft, they start with the top of the list, the most eligible. In other words, when he [Johnson] made that [decision], I was the most eligible draftee in the county because of my age factor; so I was number one on the draft list in this county.

The clerk, who I knew, called me up and said, "Fred, I have your draft notice. What do you want me to do with it?" Meaning, Do you want to look around? Do you want to try to get in some other program? 'Cause if I draft you, if I send you this, you can't do anything else; you're going to go right into the infantry and go right to Vietnam; that's what they were doing with people at that point. So when she said that I said, "Can you burn it?" (laughter) And she said, "No, I can't do that." And I said, "Can you hold it for me a little while and let me see what I can find?" And she said, "I can, but I can't hold it too long; probably two weeks would be about the most I can hold up before I send you your notice."

So I got busy. In fact, I went over to Terra Haute and took the tests, written and all the physicals and everything, to get into the Air National Guard, 'cause I thought, If I'm going to go in the service, I want to fly. I had everything clear and was okay to go, and the guy said, "All right, I'll give you a call when we have an opening." I looked at him—'cause I thought I was going to get in immediately—and I said, "Sir, I'm talking about I need to be in within two weeks." And he said, "Oh, it'll be two or three months, probably, before we have an opening," so that ended that.

I went on and looked around, and I finally decided that if I'm going to go in I might as well make the most of it, so I'll go to OCS, get a commission, and serve the time as an officer. So I had to go take all those tests and jump through the hoops to get a guaranteed OCS date, which meant I would go right through basic, right through AIT, and then be assigned to an OCS program immediately. If you didn't have this program, you might have to serve a year after your basic and AIT training before you would be in line for an opening in an OCS program. So that's what I did.

DePue: Did you have a choice of branches of service?

Edgar: Yes, actually, I did, and I thought communications would be interesting, so I put in for that, for—

DePue: For Signal Corps. And that's how you ended up at Fort Gordon, then, I assume?

⁸ Lyndon Johnson signed Executive Order 11241 on August 26, 1965, ending the favorable draft treatment married men had received.

Edgar: Right. The OCS program at that time for the Signal Corps was at Fort Gordon, Georgia, which is near Augusta.

DePue: I mentioned to you yesterday that I'd love to have a chance to interview you some other time about your military experience, especially in Vietnam. Let me ask you this, though: at the time when you enlisted—this is kind of before Vietnam became a really, really contentious issue in the country—how would you define your own political leanings?

Edgar: I didn't have any qualms, if that's what you mean, about ending up going to Vietnam. Quite honestly, the way I looked at it is that was a policy of the country at that time, and the thought of going off and not doing my part never entered my mind.

DePue: What was the tradition of the family? Do you know how your parents voted, what their political leanings were?

Edgar: Let me tell you how it ended when I came back. My dad was long gone but I think my dad would have probably felt very much like I did, and my mother would have been worried sick, but... Actually, she was worried sick, what do I mean would have been? But she probably would've understood that that's what I—that's what we needed to do, that's where the country was at the time.

But what I started to say to tell you the difference—Tom and I grew up every day in the same environment. When I came back from Vietnam, I was mustering out of the service but I was still in my uniform, and I flew from Travis Air Force Base at San Francisco down to LA where Tom was living, to meet him and spend a few days with him before I came back to Illinois. That's where we came in to: the West Coast. (laughs) Tom came to meet me at the airport, and Tom has hair down over his shoulders. He is so far left of me that it's hard to imagine that we're brothers. As fate would have it, we're sitting at the bar, and within an hour we're in a terrible argument over the Vietnamese conflict; so bad, that a guy sitting on the other side of Tom jumps in. I'm sitting here in a uniform, Tom's sitting next to me in long hair—really that hippie version back then—and the guy on the other side jumps in and starts giving Tom hell. I jump up and give that guy hell, (DePue laughs) tell him to keep his nose out of our business, and then I realized the whole place is looking at us. So I said, "Tom, we need to go." (laughter) But you ask how the family viewed... I mean, there was a world of difference between where Tom ended up—he was the liberal of the family. He was always very, very left.

DePue: But even before the war, do you have a sense of where your mother and father were on politics?

Edgar: Well, they were Democrats if you're talking about the true sense of Republican/Democrat. The entire family were Democrats.

DePue: Would they have seen themselves as New Deal Democrats?

Edgar: Probably, probably. But obviously, mother changed her—at least in terms of Jim and whatnot... But I actually was the first Republican in the family. All of our family were Democrats, and I just got that way because I had this interest in business and whatnot. I think that's probably what guided me that way more than anything else; and then, of course, Jim came along.

DePue: You say you were the first Republican. When did you decide or realize, I guess I'm a Republican, or I lean that way?

Edgar: First time I voted, when I was twenty-one and went to vote. I just felt like that was closer to the way I thought things ought to be.

DePue: Was that the '64 election?

Edgar: I'm trying to think what the first one was. (laughs) Now, we're going back a day or two. Let's see, I was—

DePue: Might have been '62.

Edgar: I was born in '40, so we're talking a '62 election would have been the first election, and to be honest... I'll tell you something else that influenced me: I really liked Ike. Remember? "I Like Ike," and all of that that went on?⁹ I think he had a big impression on me early on, probably had a lot to do with it, so when I look back... And I wasn't a real serious political type at that time, I got to tell you. It was just everybody goes one way or the other.

DePue: Do you recall the '64 election? Did you pull the lever for Goldwater?

Edgar: I wouldn't doubt that I did, but I don't remember for sure.

DePue: Because he was quite a different kind of a Republican than Eisenhower would have been.

Edgar: I know, I know. Well, he ran against—

DePue: LBJ.

Edgar: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I definitely would have...

DePue: So you weren't a fan of LBJ? [Lyndon B. Johnson]

Edgar: No, no. I'd forgotten that's who he ran against, so yeah, I did, definitely.

DePue: Okay. Since you've enticed us with your discussion about Vietnam, let's just kind of hit the highlights real quickly. Graduated from OCS—where'd you head after that?

⁹ "I Like Ike" was the popular slogan of Dwight D. Eisenhower's successful 1952 presidential campaign. <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1952>.

Edgar: I spent about a year getting my commission. I had a two-year commitment after I received a commission. Six months of that training was at OCS. The first three months, four months, were the other training, and then once I was commissioned I was assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington. I reported in to Fort Lewis, Washington, on a Monday morning. My entire military background had consisted of basic training, AIT training, and six months of OCS, so I really didn't have much military background. I reported in to my battalion commander—Colonel Hendricks, I believe, was his name—and he said, “Why don't you go get your billeting squared away, Lieutenant, and come back in and see me tomorrow? I am not quite sure what your assignment's going to be yet.” So when I walked back in the next morning, first thing he said was, “Congratulations, Lieutenant, you've just assumed command of Bravo Company.” Now, you can't imagine how shook that made me 'cause I knew I didn't know much about the military and suddenly, my first assignment is a company commander? I was shook, and I walked across the quad over to my company headquarters. I walked into the company headquarters, the first sergeant jumped up and hollered attention, and man, I snapped to attention! (laughter) I was so used to that from OCS and all, and all of a sudden I realized, Oh, wait a minute, that's for me.

So anyway, it turned out this top sergeant was really a good, good sergeant. He knew the military inside and out. He was a lifetime career soldier, so I actually called him in my office and said, “I don't know much about the military, I got to tell you upfront. I can deal with people a little bit, but if you can keep us out of trouble with the Army regs and all, maybe we can make this thing work a little bit.” And he started sort of laughing, and I remember asking him, “Top, what are you smiling about?” And he said, “Ah, don't worry about it, Lieutenant, you're not the first shave-tail¹⁰ I've had to save.” And we went on from there and had a great experience. But that was my first assignment in the military.

DePue: To finish this story—you mentioned hearing from somebody else, his opinion about OCS versus ROTC¹¹.

Edgar: Yeah, as I was told by some of my fellow officers after I'd been there a little while; they said, “You're just lucky that you were an OCS graduate, not an ROTC, because that guy hates ROTC officers, (laughs) and you would've had a really hard time.” Everybody that came out of OCS: you were spit and polish, and he believed in that, so that's the one thing that probably saved me.

DePue: So where after Fort Lewis?

Edgar: I spent a year at Fort Lewis, and while I was there my first son was born. Todd was born in August of that year. My tour there was up at the end of October, and I had a month leave, so I sent my wife at that time and my son home on a plane. I had a car there and a little dog, so we drove home, and then I had almost a month at home. I

¹⁰ A newly commissioned second lieutenant.

¹¹ ROTC: Reserve Officer Training Corps, usually as part of a college or university.

had three weeks leave or something, and then I went to Vietnam. So I spent a year at Fort Lewis, Washington, and the second year I spent in Vietnam.

DePue: Very quickly: your assignments while you were in Vietnam?

Edgar: I was in the Signal Corps, so my first assignment when I got there was very interesting. I was made an S2 for a battalion, and of course that's the intelligence officer, so I went to all the briefings, in-country briefings, and we were located right on the biggest base in the country. At this time, you have to realize, I had been commissioned to second lieutenant and I had not yet had a full year to even make first lieutenant. So when I first started going to those briefings I was a second lieutenant, and probably the lowest ranking officer in there was a colonel, maybe a lieutenant colonel. I think they thought I was in there to get their coffee and things. (DePue laughs) Here the second lieutenant is running around.

But I would sit in on the top-level briefings, and it made it very interesting. I knew what was going on. My assignment as soon as I got finished with that briefing was to head back and report in to our battalion commander and brief him on it, so it was an interesting start. I spent six months in that capacity, and then the second six months of Vietnam I was what they called an area signal commander, and I had signal sites all over Vietnam. A lot of them were on mountaintops, and the only way I could get there was by helicopter. So I spent every day in a helicopter, like I am in a car today, going in and out of sites all over two-thirds of Vietnam.

DePue: So getting the timeline here, I think you mentioned yesterday you got to Vietnam in December of '67. Interesting time to arrive in Vietnam. (DePue laughs)

Edgar: Right, right. Of course, what you're alluding to is that shortly after that, the Tet Offensive broke out and really, officially made it a hot war. I hadn't been in country a month when that happened. I got there the early part of December, but that happened, as you know, right after the new year of the following January there. So I'd only been in country like three weeks when that happened, and that was really an experience. I don't know how much you want me to get into this, but at that time I had some signal sites that I was responsible for in and around Saigon. Saigon, like all the major cities, was really hard hit. I can remember moving every morning, and that lasted three days and three nights, the Tet, and I'd have to move from one location to another to make sure that our communication sites were operating. If they had something knocked out, then I had to find a way to get stuff to them; so I had to move between these sites.

In the morning when you'd cross a bridge, there'd be hundreds of bodies on both sides of the bridge. They wouldn't even clear all the bodies out. There would be Viet Cong all over the place, and they'd clear a path just so we could move by Jeep convoy from one site to another. They'd try to knock out the bridges; those were some of the targets. And so they would actually *banzai*¹²—that was what we

¹² Banzai, in Japanese literally *ten thousand years*. During World War II it meant a last ditch military charge.

called it—they would just make a frontal charge into these machine guns, and there'd just be hundreds of bodies on both sides of those bridges. I will never, ever forget that sight. Now, the few Americans that got killed were, of course, already taken care of; but these bodies laid for days because the fighting went on all the time, so you couldn't really police up the bodies. And I can remember, by the third day out in that sun, those bodies that had been there three days were getting pretty ripe. So it was quite an introduction to Vietnam, I can tell you.

DePue: Obviously the timeline is such that when you get back home—and you've already told the story about the heated argument you had with your brother—you kind of ended up in a war of a different sort back in the United States.

Edgar: Yeah, yeah. This is the last time Tom and I ever discussed religion or politics. We were so far apart that we just decided we would never do that again, because if we got in such... We left there and went to his house—he had an apartment; he was living and working in LA—and we spent most of the night arguing and fighting; not physically, but really arguing over our beliefs and stuff to the point that we just realized that we weren't going to do that anymore. And we never did.

DePue: You mentioned you were pretty far apart on religion, as well. How had the two of you split on religion?

Edgar: That's a little harder to define than the political arena. He believed in certain things that I didn't, is the easiest way to say it; he was very staunch in his belief, and I was pretty staunch in my non-belief. We would get to a certain point, and there wasn't any middle ground, so we just decided that I wasn't going to change him and he wasn't going to change me; so it was silly to get to that point, so we never did. We never ever, from that time on, discussed politics or religion. We just left that alone.

DePue: This is about the same time that Jim graduated from college and had started to work in W. Russell Arrington's office at the state legislature. I think this might be a good point to take a very quick break and then come back with it, if that's okay with you.

Edgar: Yeah, sure.

DePue: (break in recording) We are back after a very short break, but this is kind of a natural transition for us, because I think from here on out what I want to focus on, with your agreement, is your involvement with Jim's career and getting into politics; and I know you told me yesterday in our pre-interview session that it was primarily helping him out with his many campaigns. But there's one piece of information I'd like to flesh out here, and that was this situation with you and Tom when you came back from Vietnam. What was Tom doing for a career at that time?

Edgar: When Tom graduated from college he went right into the aerospace industry. He was a very good student. He graduated from the University of Illinois with a master's and had nothing but As, and at that time he was offered a really big job in California, so—

DePue: What was his major when he was in graduate school?

Edgar: Physics.

DePue: Okay.

Edgar: What?

DePue: (laughs) Well, it impresses me. And he was growing up in those years when, because of Sputnik¹³ and everything else, every kid was encouraged to go into science and engineering and mathematics.

Edgar: Right, yeah. He never talked a whole lot about what he did, but I know at one time he was working on a guidance system for some of our missiles. He got into some classified work and pretty interesting work, I'm sure, for him, 'cause that's what he wanted to do. He went right from the University of Illinois to California and worked in the aerospace industry, and did that for many years, and finally called me one day and said, "I'm tired of what I'm doing and I'm going to do something else for a while." And I said, "Okay, what are you thinking about?" And he said, "I think I'm going to go to India and study under a guru." I didn't know much about that, and I still don't know much, but I thought, Oh, well, that's interesting. Going to India, that'd be kind of interesting. "When are you going to be gone, a couple weeks or a month or something?" He said, "No, a year. I'm going to go live in an ashram and study for a year, and I'll be gone for an entire year," and he did.

He just takes off; leaves his job; goes to India; stays a whole year; calls me when he gets back and I fly out and meet him, and he describes this year to me. Basically, what he did for a year was sit cross-legged on a hillside. His living quarters consisted of a cubicle about six by nine—had a little cot-like bed in it, a little single desk with a little single chair, and that was his living quarters for a year. All they did was meditate and listen to this guru that would expound whatever they do. So I begin to tell you some of the difference. I could no more do that a year—I couldn't do that for a week, you know! I was just amazed, but from then on he was totally changed. He did not want to go back into the aerospace industry, and he didn't want to have anything to do with anything that could be construed as destructive—war effort, anything like that.

So he went to work for the city of Los Angeles in their planning operation, and he worked at that for a while. Then he decided he didn't care for that, so he ended up getting a job washing fancy boats, just doing that kind of work. He just didn't want to be involved in anything. He did that for a while, and then he finally found his way into something that's kind of interesting: he became a day trader in the stock market and did that for the rest of his life, so... But somewhere in all of that, he got extremely left of where I was, and so when it came to any philosophical discussions we couldn't go very far without coming up with a vast, vast difference.

¹³ Sputnik was the first satellite sent into Earth orbit, a major accomplishment by the Soviet Union on October 4th, 1957.

DePue: He was in his Los Angeles phase when you came back from 'Nam, then?

Edgar: Yeah, right. He was long out of the...

DePue: Any idea what your mother thought about him going over to India for a year?

Edgar: By then it was obvious that Tom had a little different drummer in his life; and I guess even though it was surprising at the time, when you thought about Tom and his interest as he had progressed along, that wasn't too far because he'd already gotten into a lot of that kind of thing and was interested in the meditation part. That's an area that I don't know a whole lot about, but...

DePue: Let's go to the other brother, then, and talk about Jim while he's in college here at Eastern. How closely were you watching or in touch with Jim during that time?

Edgar: In the early part of it I was here because I had gone to work for State Farm, and we got together, his family and my family. He had a boy and I had a boy about the same age, so they played on Little League teams together, so we stayed in good contact. And then the military got into my life and I was gone for three years, so...

DePue: What did your mother think about Jim's political aspirations?

Edgar: It worried her, to begin with. She just didn't know. I think she was afraid that he might get in it and get hurt. She was always the one we worried about. If he would lose an election, including Jim, we'd all get over it all right, but Mom... was the one that we worried about. I remember when he ran for governor, and it was a really close race, the first run. She was the one we always worried about. We all knew there was a chance he might lose, but I don't think Mom would have been able to cope with it very well. So she worried about him being okay in it, maybe getting beat and what that would mean to him and all that; but I think after a while she began to realize that Jim knew what he was doing and he was on the right path and going to be very successful, so she accepted it.

DePue: You've got an older brother who—drifted might not be the right term—went to the left of the political spectrum. Jim headed a little bit to the right of the political spectrum. Can you talk about that migration, that move? Or maybe there wasn't a move; maybe I'm using the wrong phrase there.

Edgar: Again, I've always said how strange it is that the three of us grew up with pretty much the same environment, with the same kind of influences, and really turned out very different. Although Jim and I were a lot closer in the end in our beliefs that way, we were still different. I was probably even more conservative than Jim; although in some things probably not and in other things probably I am.

DePue: Did your mother have any views on that? Concerns?

Edgar: No. We talked a lot. Mom and I were really close, really close, so we talked all the time, and she... No, I'm not quite sure I'm following what you're asking me there, so...

DePue: You said she had voted Democratic most of her life.

Edgar: Oh, okay. She believed in Jim so much that it was pretty easy to make that change over. I don't know; I assume she never did really go into it, but she probably started voting Republican because she met President Bush also, so it's... And with Jim so involved where he was, and his beliefs and his leanings, I think it probably brought her that way. (unintelligible)

DePue: When did it become obvious to you that Jim was really serious about this politics thing and that he intended to run for office in the future?

Edgar: Somewhere in college when he was in the student senate and then was elected president of the student senate at the university, and in our talks he said then that he was very interested politically. That's really what he wanted to do. He was a political science major; and it was pretty obvious that that's what his interests were and that's probably what he was going to do.

DePue: When you found out about that, what did you think of his chances in the future?

Edgar: Didn't think about it until he decided to run for the House.

DePue: That was 1974?

Edgar: Mm-hmm. And at that point I thought, What the heck? He's got as much a chance as anybody, is kind of the way I looked at it. But Jim didn't know a lot of people at that time—not that he was an introvert, but he wasn't, let's say, as much of an extrovert, if that's the term. He didn't know as many people as I did, and so it was a natural for me to be able to bring a lot of people into being interested in supporting Jim. When he started, an awful lot of the people involved were just friends of mine, and that's how we got started. He came very close. As it turned out, another person got involved, and that's another whole story, but another person got involved and had the party's support locally, and so...

DePue: You mean somebody else ran against him?

Edgar: Yes, in that first election.

DePue: In the primary level?

Edgar: Yes, that's where he lost, in the primary. Back then it was a three-man race. Back then it was a bullet vote. Do you remember what the bullet vote was? You could give three votes to one person, one vote to three people, or one and a half to two—you could split your vote—so...

DePue: But that wasn't the case during the primary election, was it?

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: In the primary, as well?

Edgar: That's where it happened, in the primary.

DePue: But I thought that with the cumulative voting procedure, which I think you're explaining, a district would have one senator and three representatives. And oftentimes the senator might be Republican if it's a traditionally Republican district, and then two of the representatives would be Republican, and you'd almost always have the opposite party in that third position—a Democrat. And likewise, the same thing would play out in Chicago, where you have those traditional Democratic districts and you still have a Republican—

Edgar: I think you're right. My error here is I was thinking because there were three, but the third was a Democrat that won. That's right. There were four that ran, or five, even. You're right, I'm sorry. It's been so long since I've thought about that.

DePue: That's fine.

Edgar: Where I'm going with that is, he didn't have the local party support, and he came within like a thousand votes of still winning. We figured out if we would have turned around 350 of those bullet votes, that he'd have gone from third to first; that's how close that election was, that first election.

DePue: Can you roughly describe the geographical boundaries of the district he was running for? What would be some of the towns, for example?

Edgar: The main towns were Mattoon, Charleston, Paris, and Danville, some little towns. But if you can picture that, it went across east to Edgar County and then up into Vermillion County, and the main counties were Coles, Clark, Edgar, and Vermillion.

DePue: So geographically a big chunk of Illinois.

Edgar: It was, it was.

DePue: Talk about the political traditions in that district.

Edgar: Traditionally it was Republican.

DePue: Strong agricultural foundation to it?

Edgar: Right. So obviously he was in the right place. If he was going to be on the Republican ticket, this was obviously an area to be in. It would help.

DePue: He's very young in that first race. How did he manage to do as well as he did when he didn't have the traditional Republican Party backing at that time?

Edgar: He worked really hard, for one thing. He really spent a lot of time getting out and shaking hands and meeting people, and I think—well, I know, because people all over told me—that he made a really good impression. A lot of people that didn't know him at all got to know him, really liked him and decided they were going to back him. In fact, it was Coles County that beat him. He did really well outside of this county, but he got beat here because the local party had already committed to the other local candidate from here, and so he didn't do near as well in Coles County, per se, as he did in the other counties. Had it not been that the other person had the party's support, I don't think there's any doubt that Jim would've won that first election.

DePue: Do you remember his opponent?

Edgar: Sure, Max Coffey. Do you know that name? Max went on and became a very good friend and a very good supporter of Jim's, but that's—

DePue: Was he the florist?

Edgar: No.

DePue: I'm confusing another election then, or I got the profession wrong.

Edgar: You mean was he a florist at that time, is that what you're saying? His family were all farmers over around Kansas and Ashmore, and just a little bit east of us.

DePue: What was your involvement with the campaign?

Edgar: Just to do anything I could to help at that point. Of course, we didn't have any money. There wasn't—

DePue: That was my next question!

Edgar: (laughs) Let me tell you this: we raised twenty-one or twenty-two thousand dollars for that campaign and thought that was an unbelievable amount of money; and that's what we spent in that campaign. The last time he ran for governor we raised and spent over fourteen million dollars on that campaign, just to give you an idea. But I think it was twenty-one or twenty-two thousand, one or the other, we raised; we thought we had really raised a lot of money. Part of it was I helped with the fundraising, I helped with talking to people, and I got as many people involved as I could. We had lots of local meetings here. We'd bring in our friends, and we did a lot of door to door; I went out and knocked on a lot of doors myself all over the area, and so...

DePue: Did you stay primarily in the Mattoon and Charleston area when you were doing that or did you branch out to some of the other areas?

Edgar: Mainly that first election, I did stay here locally more than anything, but from then on I went all over the district.

DePue: You know how many people who worked in that first campaign would have been paid positions?

Edgar: In the first campaign?

DePue: Yeah.

Edgar: (pause) Nobody. Our own doctor was the treasurer of the campaign, and a very close friend of mine, and Jim's was the chairman. But nobody, there was nobody got paid. All the money went into the—when I say into the campaign, it went to pay for advertising and leaflets and commercials, that kind of thing. Nobody was paid.

DePue: Was Jim running this campaign out of his home, then?

Edgar: We had this little old broken-down office uptown. My father-in-law ran a travel agency at that time. He'd gotten out of the insurance business and had a travel agency, and he owned this building. Up above the travel agency there was a second level that nobody had been in for years. It was just kind of a dirty, dusty—there was just a little side stairway that went up to this, and when we first went in there it had one light cord hanging down with a light bulb on it. I've always said I wish we'd have taken pictures of that to show where Jim started, because people wouldn't believe. We went in and cleaned it up as best we could; set up a bunch of old tables and chairs, ran some phone lines in there, and obviously a few more lights; but that's where we worked out of, and got that for nothing. My father-in-law just gave that to us for nothing, of course. So we ran that campaign really on a shoestring. (DePue laughs)

DePue: What was the platform? How was Jim trying to set himself apart from the other Republican candidate?

Edgar: Boy... It's been a while, again, so...

DePue: From what I have read, one of the issues that he took on early was this whole notion that local school districts should have the option to impose their own income tax so that they could turn around and lower property taxes.

Edgar: He always felt that. One of his early themes or ideas was that the property tax wasn't the place to support those. It needed to be done some way through an income tax, and that was definitely one of his early programs.

DePue: Was that something that resonated among Republican voters?

Edgar: No, I think that was pretty much Jim's thought. A lot of Republican voters did not particularly like that idea, so... I think it was kind of new and different, but I tended to agree with him, and I still do. I think that's still the fairest way to do it, some

version of that, which we've never been able to put together. But yeah, you're right, and I'd kind of forgotten that that was probably as big a difference as anything that he ran on at that time.

DePue: How tough was it, then, when he lost that campaign?

Edgar: It was pretty tough. We put in a lot of time. He especially did, but we did and really thought he had a good chance to win. Had he done just a little better locally... We had so many people later tell us, We're already committed, we'd already made a commitment to the other person and so we got to stay where we are, and they did. It was a little tough, but let me tell you what kind of person Jim was; I think this went as far as to really give him a good start as anything else.

After he lost, he went up every day and worked at the Republican headquarters for the other candidates; every day went up and made calls and worked and did things. And several of the local party leaders and Republicans, mainly the party leaders and Republicans in the community, came to me afterwards and said, If he ever runs again we're going to support him. The fact that he showed that kind of integrity... But he came up and worked for the party and helped the people that actually beat him. That really made a big impression, and when he ran again—as fate had it, it worked out that he could run again in two years—they were all behind him, so he swept through here and won big.

DePue: Was Max Coffey not part of the equation at that time, or the Democrat won?

Edgar: No, what happened was Max went on to the Senate. The local senator got in trouble and had to leave office. Max ran for the Senate and won the Senate seat. That opened the House seat here, and Jim ran for the House seat and won; then it went on from there. He won that election, then he won the second election, and right after he won the second election is when the governor asked him to come over.

DePue: So we're talking '76; he won the election to the state legislature, freshman member of the House. Either of those two elections, '76, '78; anything really stick in your mind? You worked in both campaigns again?

Edgar: Mm-hmm.

DePue: An unpaid position or paid?

Edgar: No, unpaid.

DePue: What capacity were you helping out?

Edgar: Again, just where I could. It was not as formal as it got later on, obviously, when he became secretary of state and governor and so forth, but we would meet and map out a strategy, door to door in certain areas. I did a lot of door to door for him; just whatever. Helped with fundraisers—I was good at selling tickets and raising funds, so I did a lot of that.

DePue: I want to move through this fairly quickly because I know that you and I both have things to get to here. Nineteen seventy-nine, Jim Thompson, Governor Thompson, appoints Jim Edgar, your brother, as his legislative liaison. Did that move surprise you?

Edgar: Let me tell you how that happened. I'm sitting in my office—

DePue: This is right after he'd [Edgar] been re-elected.

Edgar: Right, and I got a telephone call, and it's Jim, middle of the morning or late morning, and he said, "I want to share something with you. I just had a telephone call from the governor, and he has asked me to come and be his director of legislative affairs, but that means that I would have to resign and come over here full-time on his staff." And he said, "I don't think I'm going to do that, but I just wanted to run that by you. What do you think?"

It hadn't been but a couple of weeks before that Jim and I were sitting and talking, and I said, "You know, I've never really asked you what your goals are, really, in this whole thing. What do you want to be? Do you want to be president of the Senate or Speaker of the House; what's your ambition?" He didn't bat an eye; he said, "I want to be governor, senator, and president," in that order. And he was serious. And he wasn't saying it flippantly; he just said, "My goals are to be governor, senator, and president." That kind of took me back; at the time I thought, Hmm, wow, that's pretty ambitious. I don't know, Jim! (laughs)

Now two weeks later I get this phone call from Jim, and he says, "I just want to share this with you," and he said, "What do you think?" I sat there—it didn't take me fifteen or twenty seconds—and I said, "Jim, this is probably going to surprise you"—and he later said it really surprised him—"but I think you ought to do it. The reason I think that, is, if you want to move on up the line like you're talking about, if you want to be governor or whatever someday, it's going to be a lot easier path to get there being over close to this governor and being in Springfield than working your way out of this little district over here. I think it can give you a lot better exposure." And Jim said, "Well, that's not the answer I expected to get from you." And so he said, "I'll call you back. I'm going to call some other people."

It was two hours, probably. He called back and he said, "I've talked to some other people. I told them what you thought, and I told them what my thoughts were. They agree with you, so I'm going to accept the position." He was really leery about doing that because he hated to leave the people that had just elected him. That really worried him, because he said, "These people went out and voted for me." And I said, "Jim, you can do them more good over there. You can do them more good over there than you can from here." So he ended up agreeing to do it if Governor Thompson would come over and explain to the people over here that Jim wasn't leaving them; that he was coming to a position where he could actually help them even more. Of course, you know how it all worked out.

DePue: The people that he was coming over to talk to were the Republican county chairman and the Republican leadership in the district?

Edgar: No, the people that voted for Jim. We had a general reception, if that's the right term, and invited everybody that had voted for Jim to come to this thing. It was held at the union at Easter, the student union, and it was packed. The governor came in and said, "You're not losing him. He's going to be in a position where he can really help you," and that's what Jim wanted him to do.

DePue: What was the mood of the crowd?

Edgar: By and large accepting it. I was kind of concerned, but I think they saw that probably he could do more. There wasn't that feeling of "He's abandoning us" at all. I think it made a lot of difference that he did it the way he did it, that he asked them all to come and asked the governor to come and explain, but he never lost their support. When he ran again, we had great support here.

DePue: After that particular event, that evening at the union here in town, what were your thoughts about how likely or unlikely his incredible ambitions were?

Edgar: It got a whole lot better, and I'll tell you why: When we were waiting over here for that program to start that day, that's when I first met Governor Thompson. In fact, he and I were sitting off on a wing while the crowd was gathering. I don't know where Jim was, but he wasn't right there at the time. Governor Thompson said to me, "I want to tell you something, Fred: this is just the start for your brother. He's making the right decision, and this is just the start for his political life." And he said, "You'll see what I mean." I don't remember how many years later...

DePue: Nineteen eighty-one was when he was appointed the secretary of state by Jim Thompson, because Alan Dixon moved on to the Senate, I believe.

Edgar: That's correct. And again, as fate would have it, I'm over there with Jim—by now I know the governor—and we're sitting and talking, again, before he goes on to say what he's going to [say to] the crowd. He said, "Remember what I told you when we were talking over at Eastern when Jim first came to work? I'm going to tell you something else." He said, "Jim is going to be the next governor of the state of Illinois when I'm through being governor. Now I'm not through being governor." (laughter)

DePue: Not by a long shot!

Edgar: No. But he said, "But when I'm through being governor, your brother will be the next governor of the state of Illinois," and believe it or not, he was right on. And when I talked to Governor Thompson later, when Jim got elected, he said, "Remember what I told you, don't you?" He remembered those conversations. But once I met Governor Thompson over here and he said, "This is just the start for your brother," then I really begin to realize that he's going to be in a position to

realize some of those ambitions. Then when the break came to get the appointment to secretary of state, then that really put him in a position, a strong position, so...

DePue: He ran for election in '82 for secretary of state and won, and won reelection in 1986 by one of the largest pluralities in Illinois history for any constitutional officer. Anything stand out in those two campaigns for you?

Edgar: What really stood out was, by then, people really, really liked Jim's approach to government. He was open and honest. I went all over the state, and people would just... He brings a different approach, they would say. He stayed on the positive side of things when he campaigned. He told people what was wrong and what needed to be done and what he was going to do, instead of dwelling on tearing down the other person and what they hadn't done and what they weren't going to do. He brought a different approach to it, and people liked that. People told me that. He built up such a strong base while he was secretary of state, and that's why he was able to win that first election as governor. I don't think there's any doubt.

Jim Thompson, who I thought the world of and had done a lot of good things for Illinois, probably stayed a little too long, and at the end probably tried to do too much for too many people. That's what led to some of the financial problems that Jim inherited, and I think people probably had had enough of Jim Thompson. And the fact that Jim Edgar could come right in, another Republican, on the heels of that and get elected really said a lot for the support that he had already built up. Had he not been secretary of state and had that strong base, I don't think any other Republican at that time would have been elected. I just don't think it would have been possible. There was a lot of sentiment at that time against Jim Thompson, just because he'd been there too long. I guess you can't stay too long and not make enemies.

DePue: But let's talk just very briefly about Jim Thompson and your brother. Both of them kind of fit into the political spectrum in the same place: moderate Republicans. (laughs) Once you get beyond that, there's an awful lot of difference, because by this time Jim Thompson's campaigning skills, and his skills working at the legislature, were legendary. Any comments on just the similarities and the differences between those two men?

Edgar: I think Jim watched him closely and learned a lot from him and his approach. Jim Edgar said that Jim Thompson was the best politician he'd ever been around. On his feet; he could walk into a crowd, or sense what was needed and what was going on and work a crowd; or in a speech he had the feel for what to say to his audience. Probably better—Jim always felt—than any politician he'd ever watched, so I think Jim probably learned some things from Jim Thompson on how to approach things. Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar were good friends. At the end, people thought there was a big conflict; that conflict was more between the staffs. Jim and Jim Thompson remain good friends.

DePue: What was the difference in personalities between the two, though?

Edgar: I think Jim Thompson—

DePue: Or was that overplayed?

Edgar: —was a little more flamboyant, a little more... I don't know the right term exactly, but he was probably a little more outgoing than Jim Edgar, just had that bigger than life kind of personality; where Jim was more kind of always the down to earth and middle of the road. I don't know that I'm saying this exactly right, but Jim Edgar was totally no nonsense about the whole thing. Not that Jim Thompson was particularly flippant about it, I don't mean that, but he just had a different approach, a little different aura about him.

DePue: What's your reaction when you hear people who make comments and make the comparisons—I mean, they're inevitable—and label your brother as being a straight arrow and somewhat aloof?

Edgar: When I think about that, I don't know that there's anything particularly wrong with being a straight arrow, because being a governor is an extremely difficult position. You have to be pretty serious about it, and Jim took it very serious, very seriously.

DePue: Did you, in fact, hear those kinds of criticisms?

Edgar: Oh, I've heard some of that, sure, over the years, but I've heard a lot more of the other. People appreciated the fact that he was that serious about it, that he was a straight arrow about it; that they could trust what he said; when he told them things, he didn't change them.

DePue: Just some general questions, again, since we're kind of running up against the clock here, but we're right where we need to be. You saw him in '74, you saw him all the way up through 1996 [Mark, do you mean 1994 or 1998?]. How would you describe an evolution in his campaigning style from those two years?

Edgar: Jim, to start out with, was pretty shy to be in that business. He had a hard time meeting and greeting, and public speaking was difficult for him. Not that he didn't know what he was talking about, it's just that he did not have that natural confidence that some people have early on. And as he progressed through those years he became, I think, a very good speaker. I think he was very accomplished at meeting people and talking to them about things that were pertinent, but in a very friendly, open way; and he got to be a very good speaker. It would be hard to ever compare anybody to Jim Thompson, I agree; but in his own right he became, I think, a very accomplished speaker; very good on his feet, also. So I think the biggest improvements were his ability to meet and greet people and make them feel at ease with him.

I think in the early days he was kind of stiff, and it made it uneasy for people that met him for the first time, but he really got better about that. He was always knowledgeable. He always worked hard at knowing both sides of an issue. I've been with him many times when somebody would ask a question and I'd think, Oh

my goodness, I bet he doesn't know much about that. Well criminy, he'd go down both sides of it! Jim was a real student of what he was doing. Once he became confident in his speaking and his ability to meet people, and with the knowledge that he really had from working hard at it, he became a real good campaigner.

DePue: In all your years of involvement—his many, many campaigns—what do you think you're most proud of in that relationship?

Edgar: Of him? What am I most proud of about him, what he's done? I think the respect that people have for him shows the kind of job that he did. As you know, he left with the highest approval rating any governor's ever had and maybe ever will have, and I think that's because people believed him. They knew he was honest. They knew if he told them something, that's what he was going to do. I think they knew he had a real good sense of what was right and wrong. He made all his decisions based on what he thought was right for the state; not any personal, not even always a party. It was basically what he thought was right for the people of the state of Illinois, and he had a real good sense, I think, of picking out what that was and going down that path. I think people realized that about him, and that's why they liked and respected him so much. I think that's...

DePue: Of the many things that he was able to accomplish, was there anything that really sticks out as a triumph for him or for the state?

Edgar: He was very good for children. I think one of the keys—I guess not just a program—but he came in when this state was really looking at financial chaos. We were over a billion dollars in debt when he took over. I remember those first few weeks when I would talk to him he said, "You know, this isn't nearly as much fun as I thought it was going to be. I always wanted to be governor. I thought that would be a lot of fun 'cause I could get a lot of things done, but so far all we're doing is cutting programs." And he said, "The bad thing is it's not we're cutting fat out of a budget; we're so broke we're having to cut two or three programs a day that are good programs just to try to make ends meet." So the fact that he was able to take a state that was really on the brink of some serious problems and turn it around quickly because he was able to make those tough calls... And when he left, the state had a surplus of a billion and a half dollars, so when I look at it in terms of the state, that's probably the thing that is the most meaningful. He had a lot of great programs, but I think that probably was the biggest single thing that he did.

DePue: On the flipside of that question, anything that really was a disappointment?

Edgar: Yeah, that he quit running. (laughs) No, I had a lot of people come to me and say, Gosh, don't you think we could get him to run one more time?

DePue: (laughs) I know that was certainly much in discussion in 2006 when Blagojevich was up for reelection.

Edgar: I really think—and yeah, he's my brother, but I'm saying this: it wouldn't matter—he did a tremendous job. It cost him some of his health, and that was... People

thought it was his eating, or this or that; it was all stress. Jim—we'd all like to live as clean a life. He ate fairly carefully, never smoked, never drank, did some exercising. Those health problems he had were totally stress related because Jim internalized a lot of that stress, and people didn't know that. I'm not disappointed in what he did, I'm just—that was a negative from that because it cost him quite a bit.

DePue: How surprised were you or how much were you involved in the decision of 1998 to run or not run again?

Edgar: We talked. I'm one of the people, I think, that he at least listened to. He had several people by then that he listened to. I really never thought he was going to run at all—and he almost did run—and he surprised me, even. We had lunch late in that decision making process, just a few days before he finally announced that he wasn't going to run, and when we met for lunch I really thought that he's not going to run at all, but he asked me what I thought he ought to do. And I said, "You ask me that as a brother or as a citizen?" He said, "Well, both." And I said, "Jim, you shouldn't run just because people want you to run. I don't want you to wake up in a few weeks and say 'What have I done?'" But if you want to run I don't think there's any doubt you're going to get reelected, so that's not even a problem. It's just whether you want to run, because you told me before"—after he was elected the second time, right afterwards we were flying somewhere, I still remember; he said, "Now, remember this: I'm only going to serve two terms as governor, so just keep that in mind. Two terms is all I'm going to serve." He ended up sticking to that. But I think he was giving it serious consideration.

DePue: When he said that on that airplane ride, were you thinking in the back of your mind, "Well, he'd told me before, senator and president, too?"

Edgar: Yeah, I was. And I said something to that effect to him, and he said, "Oh, I think by then I will have had enough, What I really want to do then is go to some university and lecture on political science," and guess what he did. He probably has come as close to running his life the way he always thought he would and doing the things that he mapped out to do, as anybody I know. So I think there was a time there at the end where he really considered maybe another run, but between you and me, he wouldn't have run for the Senate. If he ran again, he would've run for governor again, so I really think that was the only thing he was really considering at the time. And I said, "Jim, if you're going to do this"—and I meant this sincerely— "If you're going to consider running again, you'll get Illinois back out of the hole; you can do that."

But at that time the White House was calling and wanting him to stay and run, and I said, "If you're going to do that, you need some assurance from them that the next go around, that you're the person they're going to think about for president. Not vice president; president." Look at the background he's got. I think Jim could have run and been an awfully strong candidate. Think where he stands on all the major issues in this country. He's in the right place for the majority of the voters in this country. He happens to be that way. And I think for the image he could have

presented, leading Illinois twice, back to—I think he'd have been a strong presidential candidate. So I just said, "If you're going to get back in this, you don't need to be governor again. I mean, yeah, go back and do that, straighten the state out, but get the other thing you want out if you're going to get back in politics. Get support for being president." And I think he would've had a chance at that.

DePue: It's amazing to consider the possibilities, how history might have played out differently; and dangerous, from a historian's standpoint, to do that sometimes. Fred, it's been really fun to hear your stories today, and important in terms of this overall project to do that, too. Have any final closing comments?

Edgar: I just appreciate the opportunity. I've never sat down and really gone back through this before, so it's been interesting and enjoyable for me to think about it. I'm really glad to hear that you're doing this, not because he's my brother—well, that, too—but I think he did the kind of job that's deserving to record a lot of this, and so I'm really pleased to hear that it's being done.

DePue: Thank you very much, Fred. It's been a real pleasure.

Edgar: Thank you.

(end of interview)