

Interview with Brenda Edgar

ISG-A-L-2010-039.01

Interview # 1: August 17, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, August 17, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm very pleased to be with Brenda Edgar. Good afternoon.

Edgar: Good afternoon.

DePue: We've already talked quite a bit here about the ground rules, as is always important. We are at Erwin, Martinkus, & Cole, which is a law office of Mike McCormick's, here in Champaign, the first time that we've had an opportunity to sit down and actually record your story. So the place I always start is when and where you were born.

Edgar: I was born on August 31, 1948, in Tuscola, Illinois.

DePue: Where is Tuscola?

Edgar: It is twenty-five, maybe, miles south of Champaign.

DePue: But you didn't grow up there, did you?

Edgar: I did not. I lived for about two years on a farm near Hindsboro, which is just a few miles away from Tuscola, and then my family moved to southern Illinois.

DePue: What took them down there?

Edgar: There was a farm that my dad happened onto, and he wanted to have a good-sized farm of his own. That's what took us to southern Illinois. I think I was about two years old.

DePue: So that would have been 1950.

Edgar: Right.

DePue: Was he a veteran? Did he fight in the war?

Edgar: Yes, he did. He was in the army, and I know he was in Austria and Germany.

DePue: It sounds like he caught the tail end of the war, then.

Edgar: Yes. He was born in 1919, and I want to say that he was eighteen or nineteen when he went. He drove a truck for the medic operation.

DePue: He saw action in Europe. What was your father's name?

Edgar: Don Smith.

DePue: So you were Brenda Smith.

Edgar: That's right.

DePue: Can't get much more generic than that, can you?

Edgar: I don't think so.

DePue: What is your middle name?

Edgar: My middle name is Margaret.

DePue: And your mom's maiden name.

Edgar: My mother's maiden name is Margaret Chamberlin, C-h-a-m-b-e-r-l-i-n.

DePue: Were they both from the Tuscola area?

Edgar: My mother was from Charleston. She lived in Charleston, and she went to Eastern Illinois College from the age of kindergarten through high school, and on to graduate from college there. My dad grew up in Hindsboro.

DePue: It was a little bit unusual for a woman of that era to be going to college and graduating. What was her career path?

Edgar: Her career path at that time was business. She did go to Scott Air Force Base, and she did some training of men on Morse code. She taught that, and just got a real bug to learn how to fly. Then she went on to Sweetwater, Texas, where she was accepted as a WASP.¹ The war ended as her class was winding down. She was at the very tail end of the WASPs.

DePue: She was learning how to be a pilot?

Edgar: She did learn how to be a pilot, yes. She was the first in her WASP class to fly solo.

DePue: It sounds like she'd be too late for this, but I know there were a lot of WASPs doing shuttle service across the Atlantic Ocean at the time.

Edgar: You are correct in that, and she was too late for it. She did learn how to fly as a WASP. She soloed, but it wasn't too long after that that the war ended and all of the WASPs were sent back home.

DePue: But it still shows something of an adventurous streak in her, doesn't it?

Edgar: Absolutely, yes. When you said that—she was **quite** adventurous. (laughter)

DePue: Do you know how both of those families ended up in east central Illinois?

Edgar: You know, I can't tell you exactly how they ended up in east central Illinois. I don't know the history well enough to know. One family came from Pennsylvania. I know that my mother has roots that go back to a young man who was a part of the Drum and Fife Corps in the Revolutionary War. That young man came over from England.

DePue: You said you were two years old when the family moved to this farm in southern Illinois. Was your dad farming at that time? Would he come back from World War II and farm?

Edgar: Yes, he was farming in the Hindsboro area, which is fabulous and wonderful farm country.

DePue: Is that because he was working on his father's farm?

¹ Of the 350,000 women who served in the U.S. military during World War II, only 1,074 served as Women Airforce Service Pilots. The unit originated in 1942, took its WASP name in 1943, and was disbanded in December 1944. The pilots trained at Avenger Field in Sweetwater. Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3-7. For Brenda's mother's discussion of her experience during the war, see Margaret Chamberlin Smith, interview by Hermann Trojanowski, June 9, 2006, transcript, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Jackson Library, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. <http://library.uncg.edu/dp/wv/results5.aspx?i=2733&s=5>.

- Edgar: He was working on a section of his father's farm, but it was a smaller section. The farm that he came across—and they ended up buying with my grandfather—was a thousand acres in southern Illinois.
- DePue: Did you mention where that was?
- Edgar: It's located in Massac County. The address was Belknap, Illinois; it was located between Vienna² and Metropolis.
- DePue: Vienna was a tiny town, and Metropolis probably—I don't know if it was even smaller than that.
- Edgar: Actually, Metropolis was maybe a bit larger than Vienna.
- DePue: It's right on the Ohio River, though, isn't it?
- Edgar: Yes, it is.
- DePue: So here's your father, when you're two years old, moving away from Tuscola, which is arguably some of the very best farmland **in the world**, (laughs) to southern Illinois; would it be fair for me to characterize the farmland down there as not quite as good?
- Edgar: You're right, it was not good (laughs) farmland, but he farmed those thousand acres with crops as well as with cows, and I know at varying times there were sheep, and at other times there were horses. There were a lot of chickens, I remember. So part of that land was used for the livestock as well.
- DePue: Did your mother pursue a career when she was down there?
- Edgar: She had not intended to, but at that time there was a need for schoolteachers. The superintendent of a school in Grand Chain, which is smaller than Vienna, came to our home on the farm and asked if she would please, please come and teach high school business, if she would just come for one year. And that was the start of a thirty-five-year career in teaching. (laughs)
- DePue: I don't want to suggest anything, but you've already said she had quite an adventurous spirit; was living on a fairly large farm in rural southern Illinois necessarily her idea of what she wanted to do?
- Edgar: Of a great adventure? She was pretty game to give it a try. At that time, there was my brother—and when we moved down there, I think I was two and he was probably three—and then a sister that was older. She's eleven years older than I am.

² In Illinois the pronunciation is vy-ENna.

DePue: Which means you don't recall too much about her growing up? By the time you get to ten years old, she's long gone by that time, isn't she?

Edgar: That's right. Not too much.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about growing up on the farm, then. Is this a typical farm life for a young girl growing up?

Edgar: Oh, I think that different people experience growing up on a farm in different ways. I think a lot of the time it has a lot to do with the personality of the individual that's growing up on the farm. I was extraordinarily shy as a little girl, and even to this day I have a tendency to be more of an indoors person than an outdoors person. I do remember belonging to 4-H, where my mother belonged to 4-H many years before, of course. As a young girl, she showed cows at the Illinois State Fair; it was quite unusual and unique that she would do that. She also was outstanding, and even went to nationals in 4-H, for sewing. So I took sewing in 4-H, and she would try to direct my seams; they wouldn't be perfectly straight—as her seams had been, which made her a national champion. I'd take my seams out and sew them over again. (laughs) I think I took cooking. That didn't take very well either. I did have a calf, but I certainly didn't show it in 4-H. I think it was to sell, to save money for college. So I would go and pet it a few times, and maybe brush it a few times. (DePue laughs) Well, it was little.

DePue: But it doesn't sound like you got too into doing that.

Edgar: I wasn't real into the farm scene, other than just taking walks around the farm itself. It makes Jim laugh to think that I was a farm girl.

DePue: Did you say your brother was two years older than you?

Edgar: One year.

DePue: One year older. Was he out in the farm doing the standard list of chores?

Edgar: He was doing some of the chores. He was definitely out and about on the farm more than I was, and he was also out with my dad. But during the years we were in that particular home in southern Illinois, we were both young. As I said, when we arrived there, we were probably two and three. We were probably ten and eleven when we moved from there to another farm outside of town, a different, sort of smaller farm.

DePue: Different kind of farm. Was it more grain and less livestock?

Edgar: It was a smaller farm, and it had more livestock.

DePue: Yeah, a thousand acres—that's a big farm back in those days.

Edgar: It was enormous, yes.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your father's personality.

Edgar: He was an extraordinarily hardworking man. He grew up during the Depression time. There were six children in his family; they lived on a farm, and they worked hard as farm kids growing up on a farm. So he knew the ins and outs of farming. He was excellent with handling the livestock, and he knew how to give them their seasonal shots. He was really good with the livestock; he especially loved horses.

DePue: Work horses? draft horses?

Edgar: Actually—this was a little later than when we first moved to the farm—he had just a very few thoroughbred horses that he would raise. But he was a hardworking man—quieter, but very friendly and liked by everybody.

DePue: This is a bit of an awkward question. You've already mentioned that your interests were more of an inside person. Were your father and mother okay with that?

Edgar: Oh, they were. They were just fine with it.

DePue: Dad didn't have any expectation: You need to come out here and do a few more chores to help out on the farm?

Edgar: He really didn't at all. No, I never felt that kind of expectation. I guess (laughs) because my mother had grown up in town, there was a merger of town and country, and maybe they had ironed out those expectations before I came along. But I never felt that I was supposed to be doing chores that were uncomfortable for me to do.

DePue: Who would you say was the stronger of the influences on you, growing up?

Edgar: It would have been my mother. She was around, she was home, she was very—hmm, probably strong-willed woman, as you said, the adventuresome woman. After she started teaching school, I rode to school and home from school with her every day, so I was around her a great deal.

DePue: Who would you say you took after more?

Edgar: Probably more after my dad.

DePue: Because?

Edgar: It must have been in the genes; I'm not sure.

DePue: (laughs) In what way, I should say?

- Edgar: In what way? (pause) Little more reserved personalities, my dad and me. I think I took up his more frugal manner when it comes to money. I was asking my mother, who—of all the relatives she could remember—I most reminded her of, and she mentioned to me my dad's mother. I didn't spend all that much time with her, but there was something in the personality that I guess transferred into my personality.
- DePue: Are either of them still alive today?
- Edgar: My parents?
- DePue: Yes.
- Edgar: My mother is living. She's ninety-one.
- DePue: Oh, I've been looking for women to interview about service during World War II.
- Edgar: She has done quite a lot of interviews with people. I know there was a university that did an oral history with her at some time. She might be able to help you with that.
- DePue: (laughs) That would be fun. How about religion? Was religion important to the family growing up?
- Edgar: Once again, my mother was the influence. She took us to a little white country church—that's the first I can remember—and then we lived in Metropolis for a few years so my sister could go to high school there; it was a bigger school and they felt that was important for her. We went to the Methodist church there. As the years went by, we continued to go to the Methodist church, and it became very important to me personally, even as a young girl.
- DePue: Now, it almost sounds like it was something your mother thought you needed to have, but you kind of embraced it in your own way.
- Edgar: That's correct. That would be absolutely true. I think she felt like it was a parental responsibility. Primarily, I think a lot of that came from her mother, who was a Christian Scientist; it was just not even a question but what they would be at church on Sundays, and if I'm not mistaken, maybe on Wednesday nights. So I think that was something my mother had been given, a background in religion; she in turn made sure that we went to church. It was not something that was so in our home as much as going to church. That was important, but it wasn't something that was practiced in the home.
- DePue: What was it about the experience that appealed to you or drew you to it more closely? Do you know? That's a tough thing to ask when you're approaching it at that age.

Edgar: I think when I was a little girl, it was in part the kindness, the genuineness, of the people; I think I would reflect back to the people that taught my Sunday school at that age. They were a younger couple, and I just remember knowing there was something very special about them.

DePue: Let's get you into school and especially some of the high school years. I want to ask you about some of the other activities that were keeping you busy.

Edgar: In elementary school my first experience—I think we talked about this in preparation—was going to a private kindergarten because they didn't have public kindergarten at that time. Oh, I didn't like it, and I just cried every day. My mother had paid for a month, so I guess I went for a month. But I remember not liking it, and they didn't make me go after that. Of course, when first grade came around, you stayed whether you wanted to or not. (laughs) I was very sensitive and shy, so it was a bit of a hard transition, first grade. And then I liked it once I made friends and understood how it all operated.

When I was in second grade, we moved back to the farm that we had moved away from while my sister was going to high school. I traveled with my mother to the little school in Grand Chain. First and second grade were in the same room, [as were] third and fourth. By that time, I was in second grade, and I remember being again intimidated and afraid of staying in that environment. But I made friends, and that was fine. And I enjoyed my first-grade teacher. It was such a little town that once in a while she would send us walking to her house to water plants or do something. I just remember doing that and feeling so grown up, that I would be allowed to leave school, walk to her house, water the plants, and come back.

Then in third and fourth grade there was a lovely teacher, Mrs. Ferguson, and her husband was the superintendent. He was the one who had come to our house and asked my mother to please come back to teaching. She was just always so pretty and dressed up and sweet. She was a very sweet teacher, and I really enjoyed third and fourth grades with her. Then we moved on to another room for fifth and sixth grade. I was in fifth grade with a stern teacher, a woman who was a little bit on the cold side and kind of distant from the students.

After that we moved to the other type of farm that I mentioned earlier, and we lived outside of Anna. At that time Anna had a junior high school, so we went to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade at the Anna junior high school. I remember the first day of school because I went in and it was a much larger school. I didn't know anybody, and I was just about shaking in my boots. But I met another girl that was new to the community and didn't know anyone either, so we became friends, and that helped me transition to the bigger Anna junior high school.

DePue: I'm just curious about the relationship between you and your mom. You said she was a stronger influence on you. It sounds like she was a different personality than you as well, but—

Edgar: Oh, absolutely. She's a different personality than me, yes.

DePue: Was she encouraging, though?

Edgar: Her personality was more a firmer personality that was rather...

DePue: Assertive, maybe?

Edgar: Yeah, very assertive. Her expectations were that you would toe the line. That doesn't mean I was afraid of her—it wasn't that—it was just I knew that's what she expected. Of course my dad had expectations, too, and he was a firm person, but I would have never questioned what either one of them asked me to do. And again, probably my personality was to be a fairly compliant child.

DePue: Were you concerned about living up to their expectations?

Edgar: Probably to a degree, um-hm.

DePue: Let's talk about some of the activities you got into when you got into high school. Where did you go to high school?

Edgar: I went to Anna-Jonesboro High School, and (laughs) I was just a beehive of activity in high school. I was a cheerleader, and I had joined the FTA—Future Teachers of America. In high school, I was on the student council, I was at different times class officer...

DePue: What happened? (laughter) What happened to this shy girl growing up?

Edgar: I just don't know. Something did happen. It was like being a late bloomer. I guess I bloomed when I was a freshman in high school, (laughs) because that's when it was a big transition in my personality. I was extraordinary, as you can tell; I was very active in just about everything that was going on in high school. I can't tell you what exactly spurred me to that, but that's what happened.

DePue: Were you doing the plays and the musicals?

Edgar: I did everything, yes. Now, the musicals, I was involved in them, but I would sing in the chorus. I'm not a solo singer, and apparently our director knew that, it seems. (laughter)

DePue: Did you try out for those parts and—

Edgar: I didn't try out for the singing parts because I kind of got the idea. I was in a chorus. I was in the band. There wasn't too much you could be in that I wasn't in.

DePue: What instrument did you play?

Edgar: I played the flute.

DePue: Well?

Edgar: I would say (pause) a little above average. I was usually second or third seat. I was never first seat, and I never...

DePue: Were you disciplined in practicing these things?

Edgar: No, no. (DePue laughs) I fit it all in, but obviously I was very social.

DePue: So you were more interested in that side.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: I still am amazed that this transition occurred; (Edgar laughs) I'm trying to figure that out.

Edgar: I don't know, but that's when it happened. It wasn't in eighth grade, it wasn't in seventh or sixth, when I was in the junior high school, because at that time, when you came into a community, the cliques were fairly well formed, and it just took a while to get known and, I guess, accepted.

DePue: You obviously figured that out, though.

Edgar: I guess. It was fun. It was a great, fun four years of high school. I enjoyed it just immensely.

DePue: Did you have a job during that time period?

Edgar: I babysat a little bit, but I think I might have mentioned we lived in the country. Before you could drive, people would have to come out and pick me up and bring me home, and that was really quite an inconvenience because it was a good ways out of town. So I did a little babysitting, and then I also worked in a women's clothing store in town when I was—oh, I think I was a junior or senior in high school.

DePue: Is that something you liked?

Edgar: It was fine.

DePue: (laughs) Got to ask that, because clothing stores are going to factor into this story a little bit farther down the road.

Edgar: Yes, it was fun.

DePue: Now, when I talked to the governor, he also mentioned something about a beauty pageant.³

Edgar: Oh, (laughs) yeah, that's right. Let me think. Yes, in high school—I'm thinking—I might have been in three or four of those, um-hm.

DePue: Did you win?

Edgar: I was a finalist in something that was so long ago I can hardly remember it, but it was something like a Miss Teen USA. It was like they went to different regions, so it was a regional thing, and I was one of the ten finalists in that.

DePue: Were you the prom queen, by chance?

Edgar: No, I was not. I was a prom attendant for four years, and I was a homecoming attendant my senior year, but I was never the prom queen, and I wasn't the homecoming queen. DePue: How about sports? Were you involved in sports at all?

Edgar: No. At that time, there was something called GAA—Girls Athletic Association. The girls that really loved basketball and volleyball and softball played in that, but I really didn't pay too much attention to it because I was really (laughs) busy with doing other things. Cheerleading, I guess, was my sport. It took a lot of time and energy because it was football season and basketball season. I don't recall if there was girls' track back then. If there was, I wasn't involved in it.

DePue: This was all before Title IX, so the opportunities weren't there in most cases.⁴

Edgar: No, there was just minimal. And so sad, because there were some really good girl athletes in our school, but they just didn't have the opportunities.

DePue: As you got towards the end of high school, what did you think you wanted to do with your life?

Edgar: I knew I was going on to college, and I thought I probably—

DePue: Why did you know that?

³ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 22, 2009, 30. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

⁴ Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 provided that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance..." While this law had important implications for gender equality in all aspects of education, its most visible impact may have been in school sports. Deborah L. Brake, *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sports Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 18.

Edgar: Because my whole life, that was just part of growing up. You went to kindergarten, and you went to elementary school, junior high, high school, and college. That was just—

DePue: Had your dad gone to college too?

Edgar: No, unh-uh, he had not, but my mother (DePue laughs) was—it was not an option. (laughter)

DePue: I'm sorry, I interrupted there. Your career aspirations.

Edgar: I thought I would graduate from high school and go to college, get my degree, probably go into teaching—that was what I majored in when I went to Eastern.

DePue: Did you think that marriage and a family was in the future?

Edgar: I absolutely thought it was in the future. I think everyone thought that in our time—well, not everyone, but most everyone thought that—but I wasn't in any kind of rush for sure.

DePue: You graduated in 1966, then.

Edgar: Um-hm.

DePue: You ended up at Eastern, we know that. Why Eastern?

Edgar: I had looked at some other schools, but I guess I'm kind of a nester. We had visited Eastern homecoming parades because my grandparents all lived in Charleston, where Eastern is located. I think it just felt comfortable for me to go there. As I said, my grandfather had gone there and graduated from there, and my grandmother had gone—she didn't graduate—and my mother went.

DePue: These all on your mother's side?

Edgar: That's correct, yes. Actually, my grandparents only lived maybe two or three streets over from the campus.

DePue: Had you visited anywhere else?

Edgar: I visited a girls' school, close to St. Louis and St. Charles, and the name eludes me right at the moment. It may come to me in a minute. I also visited Memphis State; my brother was going to school there. I was quite familiar with the campus at SIU [Southern Illinois University at Carbondale]; my sister had graduated from SIU, and a lot of my friends were going to SIU.

DePue: A girls' school. Did that idea appeal to you at the time?

- Edgar: For some reason that school had come to our high school and recruited, invited anyone that might be interested to come and visit, so I went to visit.
- DePue: Were you dating in high school as well?
- Edgar: I was, um-hm.
- DePue: But nothing serious to keep you connected in that respect?
- Edgar: Oh, I had some serious loves in high school, but by the time I graduated I was not, you know.
- DePue: Talk about getting to Eastern, getting to the campus, and those first couple months while you were there.
- Edgar: I actually went to Eastern the summer after I graduated, so that would have been in 1966, in June.
- DePue: Why that early?
- Edgar: I went to summer school. I think my mother thought that was a good place for me to spend the summer, because I wasn't going to be working or anything. It turned out it was a real good decision, because summer school was much more laid-back. It was a good way to kind of get your footing, get a grip on what college living and life was like. The classes were a little more laid back; it was academically a good way to start out, I thought. I did well in that summer school. They were quarters at that time, they weren't semesters. That was a fun summer.
- DePue: Remember where your dorm was, then?
- Edgar: I do. It was Andrews Hall. It was on the eighth floor of Andrews Hall.
- DePue: Why do I have Pem Hall down?
- Edgar: Because that's where I lived when I came back to school in the fall. I was at Pem Hall.
- DePue: I've heard there's some kind of connection in your family with Pem Hall.⁵
- Edgar: That's right. My grandmother was there, and Jim's mother was there for a time, and then I was there. I have some just fabulous pictures of my grandmother in Pem Hall. (laughter)
- DePue: We're getting to the point where something else important happens to your life, so I won't belabor the point here. Isn't this about the time you met Jim?

⁵ Pemberton Hall is the oldest women's dormitory in Illinois. Jim Edgar, May 22, 2009, 11.

- Edgar: I did. Well, I don't know if you'd—yes, I guess I did meet him that summer after I graduated from high school. Actually, I think Father's Day is in June, so I had seen him on campus prior to Father's Day in June of 1966.
- DePue: You mean, you noticed him and he stuck in your mind?
- Edgar: Oh, absolutely.
- DePue: Why?
- Edgar: We crossed paths going to some class that summer, so I would see him every day. He'd be going one direction to a class and I was going the opposite direction, but we crossed paths on the same sidewalk.
- DePue: And said hello to each other?
- Edgar: I don't know if we said hello or not, actually. (DePue laughs) He oftentimes, not every day, was coming from his job at a clothing store—Cavins and Bales, on campus—so he had on a shirt and tie, and was quite handsome.
- DePue: Was that typical for the young students?
- Edgar: With the shirt and tie?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Edgar: It was more typical than you might have expected. Not as typical in the summer-school days, because people were more casual. I did try to figure him out, because one time he had on a sweatshirt, and it was a fraternity that wasn't on Eastern's campus. So I thought maybe he was someone who was just coming for summer school and then would go to another school in the fall. But I did see that he was working at this men's clothing store, so I went in to get my dad a Father's Day gift.
- DePue: Is that why you went to **that** store?
- Edgar: Oh, yeah. (laughter) Yes, that's why I went to that store. He helped me, and then we just kept seeing each other on campus that summer. I think by that time I probably had figured out—I knew his name, maybe somebody introduced us. But because the enrollment was so much smaller, if you went to anything on campus you would run into the same people, because there were just... So I remember going to a movie in the Union one night, and he was there. It seems like he sat fairly close to me. I do remember that. (laughs) Again, we really didn't have any conversations, you just kind of—Oh, there's that guy. When school started in the fall—I don't know how this happened—a friend of mine, her best friend was dating a guy who was working at the clothing store.

- DePue: Would it have been Jerry Gilbert?
- Edgar: Yeah, Jerry Gilbert. He was working at the clothing store. So through all these connections Jim invited me to go to a movie one night.
- DePue: Boy, wait a minute, now.
- Edgar: (laughs) I know what you're—go ahead.
- DePue: Did you through this friend of Jerry's—
- Edgar: I might have indicated.
- DePue: —and made it known that you were interested?
- Edgar: That probably did happen, I have to say. (DePue laughs) That probably happened. I tried to skip over that, but yes, (DePue laughs) I did.
- DePue: Now, why would you try to skip over that?
- Edgar: (laughs) I don't know. So yes, I said, "Gee, I would like to date him." Jim called, and we went to a movie. I don't remember if it was on a weekend. I can't remember that exactly. Jim probably could remember that.
- DePue: He remembers the movie on all these things.⁶
- Edgar: Oh, yeah. I don't remember what day of the week it was that we went out, but we went to a movie. Then he called me, like the next week or something, just to go get pizza, and we went to get pizza. I think maybe I had one date somewhere in between, that was already scheduled, but after that one, the rest was history.
- DePue: You were a couple after that.
- Edgar: We were a couple after that, yeah.
- DePue: When you first met him to go get the tie, I would assume before that, it's strictly a physical thing—here's a nice-looking guy, he's—
- Edgar: Yeah, exactly.
- DePue: What was your impression when you went to get the tie?
- Edgar: He seemed like a nice, quiet type of person that you would want to meet.

⁶ According to Jim Edgar, he and Brenda saw *Torn Curtain* (1966) on their first date. For his account of seeing Brenda for the first time, through their courtship and marriage, see Jim Edgar, May 22, 2009, 19-34. See also, Tony Sunderman, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, 19-20.

DePue: And tell me a little bit more about the impression you got after the first couple dates.

Edgar: The first date, we went to the movies, so there's not a lot of conversation going on here. Some. He definitely talked more than I did, which he still does to this very day.

DePue: Are you okay with that?

Edgar: Not always. (laughter) I was okay with it then because I think I was probably trying to figure out who this person is and learn something about their background, because you don't know that when you're in college.

DePue: Was there still a little bit of being the shy girl?

Edgar: Oh, yes. The second date, when we went just to get pizza, was more comfortable; we just visited and talked about where we had come from and what we were about more.

DePue: I'm going to put you on the spot here, then. After the first few dates and that initial impression you had with him, I want you to give some adjectives to describe who he was, your impressions of him at that time.

Edgar: A leader.

DePue: You knew that right from the beginning?

Edgar: Um-hm. I think I knew that just by (laughs) watching him walk past, which shouldn't be, but... He had a presence about him. Intelligent. How many adjectives you want? (laughter)

DePue: Keep going.

Edgar: This isn't an adjective, but somebody who knew what he wanted. I know that he did talk about politics, which—

DePue: What, the first couple times?

Edgar: Yeah, and I just kind of dismissed it, but I thought, Well, he's interested in that, no big deal. (DePue laughs) But obviously, he did mention it because that's what he wanted to do, and he knew what he wanted to do. So he was very focused; he knew what he liked, what he didn't like.

DePue: Would you say he was easygoing or intense, or somewhere in between?

Edgar: Intense. He was intense then, as he is today. Some things don't change. I also was attracted to the fact that he had a faith, that he was not swayed by the majority. If he thought something was right, he would do what he felt was the

right thing to do. I could tell that. That he went to church. I liked that. I liked that he didn't drink and he didn't smoke, and that was a unique character.

DePue: Did you have an opportunity to meet his family?

Edgar: I met his mother not too long after we started dating. His father was not living, as you know. I met her early on.

DePue: How about the brothers?

Edgar: They were away. I didn't meet either one of his brothers.

DePue: Fred might have been in the military at that time.

Edgar: I think he was. Yes, he was.

DePue: And Tom would have been out on the West Coast, right?

Edgar: California. That's right, that's where they were.

DePue: Different kind of personalities than Jim?

Edgar: Absolutely. (laughs) They're three unique individuals.

DePue: (laughs) Did it surprise you when you met them and found that out?

Edgar: Yeah, it was, although Jim had talked about it, and I knew enough from talking with Jim that they were quite different than he, and different from one another as well.

DePue: How did his mother strike you?

Edgar: She struck me as a very sweet, kind, hardworking woman, who had really worked hard to make things as good as she could in the situation when Jim's dad was killed in the accident. She just worked so hard, and I was aware of that. She was a hardworking woman.

DePue: Did he seem to be pretty close to his mother?

Edgar: Yes, he did.

DePue: Flipping the equation here, did he have a chance to meet your parents early on in this?

Edgar: I'm trying to think. When he took me home, maybe for Christmas break. I can't remember exactly. Once again, he probably would remember exactly (DePue laughs) when it was, but... He met my parents then.

- DePue: So this is only, what, five or six months into the relationship, even shorter than that.
- Edgar: That's right.
- DePue: It's already pretty serious by December.
- Edgar: Yeah, it is. Um-hm, it is.
- DePue: Do you recall when he proposed, then?
- Edgar: That would have been later on, in March or so. (pause) You know, I can't say a date. (laughter) I don't know. Did he have a date?
- DePue: I don't recall that he did. During that first year when you both were dating, was he also involved in campus politics?
- Edgar: Oh, absolutely he was. I thought, Well, that's his interest. His major's history; he likes politics. He was involved in student government. I had been involved in high school because it seemed like a fun thing to do. He was actually running for student body president, and I thought, That's good; I'll go around Pem Hall and knock on the doors and make sure everybody remembers to vote tomorrow, and say that I'd like it if they would vote for Jim Edgar for student body president. I remember doing that and remember thinking, Eh, we're in college, that's fun; he wants to do that, that's a good thing. Then the next night, election day was over and we went to the library and waited for the election returns; he won student body president. I went back to my dorm room, and they'd put a poster board sign on the door, a big one, that said, "First Lady—Eastern Illinois University." (laughter) So that was the beginning.
- DePue: At that time in the relationship and your understanding of who he is and what he wanted, did you have a clear understanding that he had such high aspirations of getting into elective office, being governor—perhaps going for the top and being president someday?
- Edgar: Not at that juncture, probably, not when he won for student body president. Probably by January or February, later on, I was getting the idea that indeed, he would want to run for office someday—having **not a clue** what that really involved, because you don't, sometimes, until you've gotten—
- DePue: That he didn't or you didn't?
- Edgar: I didn't have a clue what that involved for a family or for an individual or for a spouse. (laughs) I just didn't really know.
- DePue: It sounds like by that time you were already a pretty serious couple, that you were thinking, This probably is the guy I want to spend my life with.

Edgar: Yeah.

DePue: Did it scare you, or did you have any concerns?

Edgar: It didn't scare me, because I didn't know enough about it to be afraid of it. So from that perspective, I didn't know the sacrifices that lie ahead for political families. I just didn't know that much about it. I did have a friend in high school whose father was a state representative. I knew that he was gone a lot, because I knew that she and her sister and her mother would be at home alone a lot. I thought that was kind of unusual because my dad was always home, and he was gone.

DePue: How would you describe your own political views in 1967? Or did you even worry about those kinds of things?

Edgar: I didn't worry a great deal about those kinds of things, because things were happening in the country but they hadn't become as personal on the campus of Eastern Illinois University as they had on some other campuses across the country. It really wasn't until after Jim and I were married that some of the more intense national political upheaval started.

DePue: You got married in '67; '68 was an incredibly tumultuous year.

Edgar: Yes, yes. I remember then I was glad that Jim and I were married and together. It gave me more insight, because we watched all of that and talked about it. In those days, you didn't have televisions and all that you do now in the dorm room, so I don't think I would have been as in tune to what—I would have been, but I wouldn't have been watching it in my home on television like—

DePue: But now you're dating and getting married to a guy who is incredibly in tune with all of that.

Edgar: Yeah, exactly, so I learned. I was interested and I did care about what was happening; I just don't know how much I would have known or understood if I had been in a dorm at that time. I'm sure the discussions were going on in the dorms and in the classrooms, but probably not all classrooms and not all dorms either, because there's so much happening in college life.

DePue: Did Eastern have an ROTC program?⁷

Edgar: I think they did, and I could be wrong. I think I didn't pay a great deal of attention to that. For some reason I feel like they did.

DePue: I know they do now; I don't know if they did.

⁷ Reserve Officer Training Program. Eastern did not have an ROTC program. Jim Edgar, May 22, 2009, 48.

Edgar: I would just be real curious to know, but I think they did.

DePue: When you were growing up, was politics a matter of discussion in your home?

Edgar: Not a great deal. My mother tended toward Republican and my dad tended toward Democrats, so I think when they voted, one voted Republican and the other voted Democrat. I was aware of that, and I thought, Well, okay. The first president I remember seeing was Eisenhower, being aware that he was the President of the United States, but there was not a ton of political discussion. There might have been some, but I probably just didn't tune into it. And it would only have been around election time.

DePue: When were you married, then?

Edgar: We were married in April 1967.

DePue: What's your anniversary date?

Edgar: The twenty-first.

DePue: Do you remember all the preparations and the arrangements for it? Can you tell me a little bit about the wedding?

Edgar: Of course. It was a small wedding. We were still students. It was just a happy time. We just were married; we kind of had a weekend away.

DePue: Where were you married?

Edgar: At the Methodist church on campus. But what's really funny in retrospect—I mean, what did we know? We were in college. We got married, and we went to Springfield for the weekend. That was our “honeymoon” at the time. Jim says now, “Gee, if I'd have known we were going to end up living in Springfield for twenty years, maybe I would have taken you to Hawaii”—well, probably not—“over the weekend.”

DePue: Whose idea was it to go to Springfield?

Edgar: Well, guess. (laughter) That was kind of fortuitous, I guess; I don't know. But we went to Lincoln's home. It was just kind of a Lincoln-tour type of a weekend.

DePue: By April, now, you've already indicated you had some inkling of what he wanted to do with his life. Did you have conversations with him about that as you got ready to commit your life to him, about what you thought about all that?

- Edgar: Not in-depth conversations, because I knew that he would either go to law school or—I don't know at what juncture he found out about the legislative internship through the University of Illinois, which he—
- DePue: It probably would have been just a month or two after you got married, I think.⁸
- Edgar: Yeah, so I'm thinking that had it been law school, that would have just put us on a campus again for that length of time, so I wasn't thinking of elected office. Now, when he accepted the legislative internship in lieu of going to law school—actually he was accepted both to law school at the University of Illinois and to the legislative internship program, which is the University of Illinois.
- DePue: And I got way ahead. That happened in the spring of '68.
- Edgar: Yeah, I was thinking we missed a year in there. But that's kind of when the reality of the political world started. It was new to me when we moved to Springfield; it was a whole new world. We lived within walking distance of the Capitol, and Jim was with Senator Arrington. There were other interns who obviously all **loved** the political process, so we were kind of thrust into a very young political sphere.
- DePue: I don't want to race through '67 or '68 quite that fast, though, because that was a busy year for both of you. Did you live on campus?
- Edgar: We did.
- DePue: Did they have a married couples' area?
- Edgar: They had married housing, which was a teeny-tiny apartment, and then after—let's see. We lived there probably for about three or four months, and then we moved to what was like a mobile home that some friends of ours had lived in—they were moving into a little house—and that was like moving into a **mansion** after the married apartments, because they were so tiny. So that was a fun, big place.
- DePue: The first few months of marriage for any couple is learning about each other, so do you recall anything that you (laughs) learned about Jim during those months?
- Edgar: Yes. He thought at that time that all women were just born to cook like his mother did—and she was an absolutely fabulous cook. She loved to cook, and everything she made was just wonderful. On the other hand, that was not something that I had ever spent a whole lot of time doing or knew **how** to do very well. So it was **right soon** that he learned that all women weren't born

⁸ See Jim Edgar, May 22, 2009, 58-62, for his account of receiving the acceptance letter.

(DePue laughs) knowing how to cook, and I learned that his expectations for what I produced far exceeded my abilities. (laughs)

DePue: Was he a bit of a fussy eater, then?

Edgar: Oh my gosh, he was a **terribly** fussy eater at that time. He's much better now, but then he was just dreadfully fussy. It just was a horrible experience trying to fry chicken, and then you cut into it and blood comes out because you didn't know how long you were supposed to cook it or anything. It looked pretty good on the outside, but not so good on the inside. As well as having this little tiny-teeny kitchen area to try to...I If I had known how to cook, it would have been difficult, but not knowing how and then having this little teeny-tiny cooking space was a combination that ended in disaster. (laughs)

DePue: Now, I'm assuming you're still a full-time student as well.

Edgar: Yes, I was.

DePue: Had you changed your career goals any in the process?

Edgar: No, I hadn't.

DePue: Still wanted to be teaching?

Edgar: Yeah, I was good with that.

DePue: In elementary education?

Edgar: In elementary education.

DePue: How about dividing up some of the other tasks?

Edgar: (laughs) I think at one juncture soon after we were married, I had gone home to visit my parents, and when I came back some of the neighbors in the married apartments said that Jim had worked **so** hard cleaning our teeny-tiny apartment, that he had moved everything out, polished all the floors, and cleaned everything spic-and-span for when I got back. So that was a big contribution, (laughs) although it was really small quarters.

DePue: Was that the exception to the rule; he normally wasn't—

Edgar: That was the exception to the rule, I have to confess. Yes; yes, it was.

DePue: How about the budget? Because both of you are going to college, the budget's got to be very tight at the time.

Edgar: It was tight. It was tight.

DePue: Who's managing the books?

Edgar: Jim is.

DePue: Has that always been the case, then?

Edgar: Yes, he pretty much manages. I pay the bills, but he knows exactly where the nickels and dimes, what direction they go, even today.

DePue: Whether it's the state budget or the family budget, huh?

Edgar: That's right. He kind of keeps it all up in his head more than most people would, even though I pay the bills.

DePue: There's a story I heard from one of the people we interviewed about a vacuum cleaner.⁹

Edgar: Oh my goodness, I wonder who you interviewed?

DePue: (laughs) I don't even think it was Jim who told me this story; it may have been somebody else.

Edgar: Goodness sakes. Back in those days, they would come around, and if you were newly married, they would try to sell you a vacuum cleaner. This vacuum cleaner was, like, to last your entire life; it could just do everything, and if you didn't have this particular vacuum cleaner, your house would not be very clean. Right? Okay. (DePue laughs) Here was the really good deal: if you got twelve people that they could go show this vacuum cleaner to, twelve people, well then—I can't remember. It was a good deal. I don't know how many had to buy it, but it was a really good deal if you got twelve people that would listen to the spiel, which sounded like nothing. (sighs) So we bought the vacuum cleaner. It was called the Filter Clean or Queen. I think that we still have that vacuum cleaner. I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think it's still at our house, forty-three years later. It was a good vacuum cleaner—it was a very good vacuum cleaner—(laughter) so our house must have been very clean. But it just seemed like we were paying on this thing forever, because you got this little booklet, and you tear off the coupon, and you send off your payment every month, and...

DePue: Did you find twelve people to do the pitch to?

Edgar: We did not impose on twelve people to listen to the pitch. I can't remember how many did. I wonder if one of the people you talked to had to listen to the vacuum cleaner pitch. I don't know. But anyway, (DePue laughs) we didn't end up with the great deal that was presented.

⁹ Sunderman, May 21, 2009, 42.

- DePue: We're talking 1967 and then into '68. This is the height of the Vietnam buildup, and the draft is looming over most young men's heads. Was that something that was concerning you?
- Edgar: It turned out that Jim had an injury in high school football, a back injury, that they thought might be enough to prevent him from being drafted, but then we were also going to have a baby. There must have been just a window, a little window, whereby if you were a new father or something—I can't remember. Did you go through this with him?
- DePue: Yeah, we went through it with him. Bottom line, though, it sounds like it wasn't something that—
- Edgar: The bottom line was that between the football injury and becoming a dad, we knew that he was not going to be drafted.
- DePue: How about church? Did the two of you settle on a church very easily?
- Edgar: I think it was fairly easily. I think when we were first married that we went to the church that he attended; then we switched over to the Methodist church because that was the church I had come from. But there was never a disagreement over which one we'd go to.
- DePue: That senior year for Jim would have been '67-'68, right after the time you guys got married. Did he run for office during that year, some kind of student body, or did that happen right at the end of his junior year?
- Edgar: That was at the end of his junior year; actually, he was running for student body president in '66, in the fall of '66. Does that make sense?
- DePue: Yeah, about the time you first started dating.
- Edgar: Right, exactly.
- DePue: You already said you had helped with that particular campaign, such as it was.
- Edgar: I kind of just volunteered. He didn't ask me to. I just thought it'd be a nice thing to do.
- DePue: A fun thing to do?
- Edgar: Yeah, sure.
- DePue: I know that Brad was born during the last year that the two of you were in college. How did that change the equation?
- Edgar: It changed the equation to the point that I didn't take a full load of classes. Jim was going to school full time, he was working, and he was involved in student

government, so he was pretty on the go between his classes, his work, and student government.

DePue: Graduation in 1968. And it would have been about that time he's getting these offers.

Edgar: That's correct. You're right about that.

DePue: You already stated the offers are basically go to law school or take this legislative internship over at Springfield. Did you have a preference between the two?

Edgar: I knew that he would be ecstatic to do the legislative internship. That was just a dream for him, to be in the State Capitol, working. Also, we did have, as you mentioned earlier, the financial situation; the internship paid, whereas law school, we would have been paying. So financially and just as a dream come true for Jim to get to do this. He didn't know that he'd be accepted; I knew that when the telegram came, that's what he would choose to do.

DePue: Did he ask you what your preference was?

Edgar: I don't remember him saying, "Which one of these would you prefer?" I know we talked about it, but it seemed almost like a given at that time. I think we both thought, Eh, you can always go back to law school, but you got this acceptance, and so...

DePue: So you don't recall having strong feelings one way or another on the subject?

Edgar: No, no. I was very excited and happy for him, because I knew that this was just a thrill. I remember actually taking the telegram. I think he was on campus, and I knew sort of where he would be, so I jumped in the car and drove over and took the telegram to him. It's not like we had cell phones, (laughter) so I didn't call him, but I took the telegram to him.

DePue: Remember what his reaction was when he read it?

Edgar: Oh, I just remember he was so happy. It was almost like, This is it, you know, this is what we're going to do.

DePue: This kind of changes your career plans, though. What about college now for you?

Edgar: When we moved to Springfield, I took some classes. At that time it was Lincoln Land, at the community college there. I would take a class now and then. I just kept pecking away at my college, although it was difficult for me to kind of leave our little baby and just go away. I wanted to stay with him; he was little then, and I didn't know that many people in Springfield.

DePue: Was Brad a good baby?

Edgar: Yeah, he was a pretty good baby. Not a perfect baby.

DePue: (laughs) I don't know that you want a perfect baby.

Edgar: Didn't sleep real well at night. That was an issue.

DePue: Tell me about the other things, then. You've already kind of hinted around at this: the environment that the two of you are now living in, in Springfield; he's moving in some pretty fast lanes in terms of the legislature; and just listening to him and others talk about Russell Arrington, who was an incredibly powerful personality. He dominated the leadership in the Senate.

Edgar: And very demanding.

DePue: Demanding?

Edgar: Um-hm. He expected perfection. So it was a very—I don't know if Jim would have said this, I don't know if he would have said scary time for him. You know, can you measure up? As the interns went, he was one of the younger ones. A lot of them had been through graduate school or law school, so it's trying to compete with these very competitive young men.

I could back up and say to you that when we were still in school, he was working, going to school, and was involved in government still, so he was away a good deal of the time. That was a bit of an issue for me then. Then when we moved to Springfield, he was away even more a good bit of the time. (laughs) And that was an issue for me. They had early morning breakfasts, and it seemed like the legislature—when they were in session, they were in session all the time, and if they weren't in session, then they were working, researching legislation or whatever. That should have been a (laughs) great signal to me that that was kind of the way our married life would continue on for, always.

DePue: The early morning breakfast sessions with Arrington are rather legendary.¹⁰

Edgar: They're legendary because that is not Jim's best time of the day.

DePue: (laughs) That's right.

Edgar: He managed to get there, but it was a challenge for him.

DePue: It wasn't a casual kind of thing either, from what I understand.

Edgar: No, no.

¹⁰ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 28, 2009, 13-15.

DePue: It would fit perfectly, though, with the intensity that he seemed to be running his life at that time. Did he bring some of that stuff home?

Edgar: He didn't bring the stuff home so much, but what he brought home maybe was the... The intensity, he brought home, but there was also kind of a tiredness, by the time he got home, from all of that intensity he was with throughout the day. Breaking into this world, to him was like—I guess it would be like a wannabe movie actor was suddenly thrust upon Hollywood, and they were trying to measure up. Would they make it, and would they be one of those who stayed on, and all that kind of...

DePue: Was he a different person than you first married, then?

Edgar: It was hard then, because he was so consumed with this job.

DePue: Did you know at that time what he wanted out of life, his aspirations?

Edgar: Um-hm, I think so. I could see—

DePue: What was that?

Edgar: I could see that this was where he wanted to be. He didn't want to be a staffer for always; he wanted to be a player.

DePue: You mean run for office.

Edgar: Yeah, exactly, (laughter) the one making these decisions, not being...

DePue: Did he ever mention things like, I think I want to be governor someday?

Edgar: No. Well, I think I might have assumed it even though maybe we didn't talk about it, because it probably seemed out of reach at that time. We probably talked about—he really wanted to run for the legislature, and that would have been a doable sort of a thing. A little young the first time he ran, but that's where he wanted to go, and I knew that.

DePue: Did you express your views on the subject of running for office?

Edgar: Once again, I think I was young too at that time; I think I had no idea of the amount of time that would take. Not just running, but if you were elected, that meant you live over here and they live in Springfield. (laughter)

DePue: I'm getting a little bit ahead of the story. Where did you guys live when you first moved to Springfield, when he was an intern?

Edgar: Oh, (laughs) we went to Springfield after he accepted the internship. We found an apartment—they were building apartments—and it was close enough he could walk to the Capitol. It was on—I'm going to say Sixth and Edwards,

the corner there. When they were building it, it looked fine, but then when we were moving in, it was really small. We were there maybe two months, and after we'd kind of got the lay of the land in Springfield, we found a downstairs of an older home that was for rent. So we moved from the new, tiny apartment—also, there were a lot of student nurses living in it, and quite a lot of noise—over to the Fourth Street, which was the location of the older home. We had the first floor, and that was better.

DePue: You were talking earlier about those last few years in high school and being very social at that time. I assume that also was what was going on when you were in college—there's lots of things to do, always friends around. Moving to Springfield, did that change, or did that continue?

Edgar: It was rather abruptly...not continuous. Jim was kind of too busy for socializing, and if there was socializing among the interns, it was more of a bar scene; he was never a part of that kind of thing. We didn't do a lot of socializing in the early years that we were in Springfield. As I said, when he was home, he was glad to be home. And we went to a church that was kind of in the same vicinity from where we lived; Central Baptist Church was on Fourth Street, actually.

DePue: So within walking distance.

Edgar: Uh-huh. So we made friends there. The apartment on Sixth and Edwards—the back side of the [governor's] mansion is on Edwards Street, and another side of the mansion is on Fourth Street, so when we moved to Springfield that first time, we actually lived within two and four blocks of the mansion.

DePue: Did it ever occur to you that you might be living in that mansion someday?

Edgar: No, it didn't. It really didn't. It just seemed too big and too important and... (laughter)

DePue: But it occurred to your husband, didn't it? He might not have said it.

Edgar: He didn't say it, but it might have been in his thoughts.

DePue: The change from being a Methodist to a Baptist—was that...

Edgar: It wasn't a big deal because the Baptist church that Jim went to was American Baptist, so it's not a great difference between American Baptist and Methodist.

DePue: So this is '68 that he moves there, and for that first year, he's an intern. Then after that, I think there were a couple years where he works as Arrington's aide.

Edgar: That's correct.

DePue: Was part of that timeframe up in Chicago as well?

Edgar: Yes. We moved to Park Forest, which (laughs) I think is the farthest south you can get of the suburbs, and Jim took the train. We had a townhouse there. Actually, he walked to the gas station where he caught a bus, the bus took him to the train, the train took him downtown, and then I think he walked a mile or two to get on to Arrington's office. So by the end of the week, he was wiped out. He was so tired. By Sunday evening he was kind of coming around to being himself, and he went back to work the next morning. So that was a difficult time. Also, he spent some time in Springfield during those years that we were in—I think we were in Park Forest for maybe a year and a half, or two years—so he would be going back and forth to Springfield, or commuting on a very rigorous commute. He probably mentioned (laughs) that those trains—I don't think they were air-conditioned, so in the heat of the summer it was not comfortable.

DePue: What kind of a person was he when he was wiped out?

Edgar: Maybe a little more irritable, quieter. Not a lot of...

DePue: Part of the legend of Jim Edgar is that he doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, he never swears—he has a very even disposition. I don't know if you saw a different side of that, but you hear these stories all the time about how disciplined he is, how he never has an explosion of anger or anything like that, and there's never any curse words—

Edgar: Now, now; wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. (laughter) Wait a minute! How many people have you talked to?

DePue: Maybe I haven't talked to the right people yet.

Edgar: Maybe everybody thinks he's going to read or listen to what (laughter) they say. Because he can get angry. Not as much angry at a person as maybe at himself.

DePue: People did say they knew when he was upset about something.

Edgar: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

DePue: That was very clear.

Edgar: Yes, that's what I would say. So during those years in Park Forest, maybe something would go amiss, and he was tired and more irr... Something that might not bother anybody else, he might make a big deal out of it. (laughs)

DePue: How about yourself, when you got tired and irritable?

Edgar: My personality is: I can go along for a long time, and then after a long time, it might build up and I might get mad, and then I more likely just don't say anything. (laughter)

DePue: I also wanted to ask, you grew up in southern Illinois, going to school in tiny little Anna, Illinois. Charleston must have seemed like a really big place.

Edgar: It was.

DePue: Springfield must have seemed like a big place.

Edgar: Uh-huh. It just got bigger and bigger. I just kept moving up the state, and you're right—

DePue: What'd you think about living in Chicago, then?

Edgar: When I first moved there, I thought, Oh my gosh, machine guns, (DePue laughs) and surely the Mafia's around the corner. But Park Forest turned out to be a fine place. We lived in these townhouses that had been built right after World War II, I think, but we had wonderful... I had a good time because there were a lot of women who were home in that little square. They had small children, so the kids played together, and I had that outlet of communication and visiting with these women who were all kind of doing the same thing.

DePue: More so than in Springfield, then.

Edgar: Oh, absolutely. Yes, because we were all in very tight quarters, and most of the husbands were young and working long and hard hours.

DePue: I know Arrington was very important in his life at the time. Do you recall when he had a couple of strokes? I think it would have been January 1971.

Edgar: I'd have to stop and think about where we were when he had those, because Jim wasn't working for him at that time. But I do remember hearing about it and thinking, Oh my, how difficult for this powerful man to have that kind of health problem.

DePue: I know that 1972–1974 was the time period he was working as an aide to the Speaker of the House, W. Robert Blair.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: Would that take you back to Springfield, then?

Edgar: It did. Can we take a break here?

DePue: Yes, sure.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very short break. We were talking about the governor's time when he was working for Speaker of the House W. Robert Blair, another Republican, obviously. Now, Jim's a strong Republican at this time. Would you have defined yourself in those terms, or were you still kind of apolitical?

Edgar: I was still fairly apolitical—a Republican, but not in the sense of what you'd call strong Republican. I think I have remained somewhat apolitical through the whole career. It's just not my...

DePue: Nature?

Edgar: Nature, um-hm.

DePue: Did you have opportunities to go to social functions with some of the other people he was working with at the time?

Edgar: Yes, yes, I did.

DePue: What were those events like?

Edgar: They were very interesting. We went to the inauguration of Governor Ogilvie, and that was really quite an event.

DePue: Yeah, that would have been January 1969.

Edgar: '69, so we would have been in Springfield for about a year, I guess. That was exciting, and then the interns had gatherings together, and that was a fun thing to do.

DePue: Did they manage not to talk shop all the time?

Edgar: I don't think they ever stopped talking shop. These guys were so in their element and **so excited** to be doing what they were doing. I don't think it crossed their mind that they would want to change topics.

DePue: (laughs) Were you okay with that, though? Did you find that a little difficult?

Edgar: I visited with other people, or I would talk to them about different things. I didn't really join in the big political powwow conversations.

DePue: But otherwise you had fun at the events?

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: It's about this time too, that Elizabeth was born, October 18, 1973.

Edgar: 1973. Yes. We had moved back to Charleston by the time she was born.

DePue: In other words, this is about the time period he had made the decision: I'm going to run for the legislature.

Edgar: That's right. (laughs) Because we hadn't lived in Charleston for some time, he was traveling all over that legislative district, introducing himself—which didn't come natural to him at all, to go in and just say, "Hello, my name is Jim Edgar and I'm running..." That was just not his innate nature to say, "Here I am; I want you to know who I am and what I'm intending to do." But he did it. It also made him, once again, away from home a great deal of time while I was expecting Elizabeth. He was also in Springfield when I went to the hospital to have her, but he was able to get back to Charleston before she was born.

DePue: When did you move back to Charleston, then?

Edgar: It must have been in the summertime, because Brad was starting kindergarten that fall. I believe that we must have moved in either June or July, and I can't recall the exact month.

DePue: Where in Charleston did you live?

Edgar: We lived at 855 Eleventh Street in Charleston.

DePue: Another small place?

Edgar: It was an older home this time. Our first home that we bought was in Chatham, and that's when we had moved back from Park Forest to Springfield. We rented a place for a while and then found a house to buy in Chatham.

DePue: Which is a suburb of Springfield.

Edgar: That's right. We sold that house and bought an older, two-story home in Charleston. I liked antiques, so it was kind of a quaint, older house.

DePue: The buying of houses—the buying of a house in Chatham—normally that indicates that you plan to be there for at least a few years.

Edgar: It does, and so why we (DePue laughs) bought one and then moved so quickly...

DePue: Yeah, I guess that's my question.

Edgar: I guess we were there for two years in that house. I'm not sure what motivated the decision that that was the time he was going to run. I think there might have been an opening in the Republican Senate—wasn't an incumbent coming back in—so that's why he made the decision. There was a primary, Max Coffey and Jim, and that—

DePue: This is in the days when they had cumulative voting, and he was running in the 53rd District. The way it worked was that the Republicans would put up two candidates in the fall election, and the Democrats would put up two candidates in the fall election, so he would have been in the primary election.

Edgar: He was in the primary.

DePue: Now, I need to go back and look at this myself, but there would have been three candidates, because I know Coffey—

Edgar: In the primary?

DePue: Yeah. Coffey, and a gentleman by the name of Chuck Campbell won in the fall.¹¹

Edgar: That's correct, because Campbell had been a state representative for many years. He was an incumbent, and well established, from Danville. Jim and Max, as you know, were both from Charleston, so they were kind of the new guys on the ticket.

DePue: So basically, as he saw it, as you saw it, it was a race between Max Coffey and Jim for that seat?

Edgar: Exactly, yes.

DePue: When you moved back to Charleston, this had been a series of moves that you'd taken. Going to college, that's one thing, everybody accepts that; but you go over to Springfield, then up to Park Forest and back to Springfield, then to Chatham, and then over to Charleston in five or six years, maybe?

Edgar: Right. We had moved so many times that I can't even hardly count them. There's something like twenty-three, -four, -five, -six times, places that we've lived.

DePue: Most people would say that in a normal relationship there are things that cause some stress. Now obviously, kids are a blessing, but it changes some things. And moving is one of the more stressful things you can do in a marriage.

Edgar: That's right. We only do stressful things in our marriage. (DePue laughs) We move a lot, and Jim was in politics, so that's all very stressful.

DePue: I guess that's a signal to just move right along, and I will do that. Getting back close to his mother, was that helpful?

¹¹ In the primary held March 19, 1974, Coffey defeated Campbell by 927.5 votes, and Campbell defeated Edgar by 1,145.5 votes. Edgar defeated Coffey in Vermilion County, and he also defeated Campbell in Clark, Coles, Crawford, and Edgar counties. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 5, 1974*. For Jim Edgar's discussion of this campaign, see his interview with Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 11-58. See also, Fred Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2009.

Edgar: It was helpful, yes, because when we first moved back to Charleston, this older home that I thought was so quaint and charming was kind of creaky and scary at night, and Jim was gone a lot. So until I adapted to this older home—she didn't live too far from us—I would call her and say, "Oh, would it be okay if we came over and spent the night?" (laughs) We did that for a while.

DePue: It was not a fixer-upper, though; it didn't demand that somebody come there to fix something?

Edgar: Oh, no. It wasn't so much a fixer-upper. We did wallpaper and cosmetic things to it, but the fixer-upper-ing had already been done as much as it was going to get done while we were there.

DePue: What were the expectations on you in terms of helping with that initial campaign?

Edgar: That first campaign, I think Brad was in kindergarten, and I put Elizabeth in the stroller. There I was, going door-to-door again, reminding people that there was an election, and it would be so nice if they would vote for Jim Edgar for (laughs) state representative. Other than that, there were a few events—kind of mandatory—that I went (laughs) to with Jim.

DePue: Mainly around the Charleston area?

Edgar: Yes, pretty much. Maybe some in Danville, in the district. And we might have taken the kids a few times.

DePue: Did you like doing those things?

Edgar: No, not particularly. We also did parades—a **lot** of parades, hundreds and hundreds of parades—through the political days.

DePue: I know there are a couple parades that are especially memorable for you, and I don't know that this is the right timeline.

Edgar: It's not quite the right timeline for those parades. But the early parades I was involved in would be ones in Charleston: Eastern's homecoming parade, a lot of small-town parades. We would do those. I did what I could, but the expectation in that primary was the least of any—maybe because I had just had a baby, and they knew that there was only so much I could do.

DePue: "They"? It wasn't just Jim now, it was his campaign team?

Edgar: Probably, although I say "they" because I'm so used to the "they" of the secretary of state and governor. It probably was more Jim then, I would say.

DePue: Who was financing the campaign?

Edgar: Jim had some fundraisers. All I remember was that after the election was over, we had a campaign debt. Some people loaned Jim some money to pay off the campaign debts, then he paid them back. So I guess it was just from small fundraisers that we...

DePue: Was that stressful for the two of you?

Edgar: It was **very** stressful for both of us, yes. Very.

DePue: I assume you grew up in the kind of environment where people didn't have debt; you took care of your debts.

Edgar: Right, exactly, so it was very stressful.

DePue: Do you recall anything in particular that you did to deal with the campaign expenses?

Edgar: No, I don't. As a matter of fact, the debt itself, I maybe didn't learn about until later. I know that he was loaned the money to pay them. I didn't know that either at the time. I think he was probably trying to spare me that bit of anguish (laughs) on top of everything else.

DePue: I've got a name written down here, and I wanted to see if there's a story involved with this: Hazel Watson. (laughs) There is. Are you willing to talk about this?

Edgar: I will tell one story, and...

DePue: Let's start out with who she is.

Edgar: She was a very durable, longtime, devoted Republican woman who, as the years went by, became more and more and more and more entrenched in the Republican Party—and not just Coles County, but even statewide; her name was known among Republican women and Republicans.¹² So she was very powerful in her nook in Republican women. I do remember one time she came into our house. I don't know if I was home or not—maybe I was home—but I don't remember her knocking, just coming into the house, and explaining to me why Jim should not be running in this primary; that it was not a good thing, he shouldn't be running, and so forth. I was taken aback because I didn't really know who this woman was or why she'd just come into our house. Maybe I'd heard of her.

DePue: And you with a baby and a five-year-old in the house?

¹² Hazel Dooley Watson (May 20, 1906-March 18, 2001), who lived on Edgar's block when he was growing up, was a Republican Party activist from Charleston. In a 1995 interview with WILL-TV, Watson talked about her acquaintance with a young Jim Edgar. Hazel Watson, interview by Alison Davis, *Prairie Fire*, PBS, October 12, 1995. <http://will.illinois.edu/prairiefire/segment/pf1995-10-12-d/>.

Edgar: Yes, yes. It really took me off guard and was very unsettling and upsetting to me. So that was one of my early enlightenments (DePue laughs) of the degree of commitment that people had to their candidates (laughs) when they wanted them to win.

DePue: The kind of thing that you talk about when he gets back home, I take it.

Edgar: Yeah, absolutely. “Do you know what happened today? This lady came in here and told me why you should not be running.” (laughs)

DePue: What was your reaction when she said that?

Edgar: I know I had a response, but I can’t recall right now what it was, other than the fact that at the time... I just don’t know what I said. I was just taken back. And, again, I had this baby, and I don’t know if Brad was up—maybe I had to go pick him up at school, and he was in kindergarten. I don’t know what I said to her.

DePue: I’m doing some quick math. Jim would have been about twenty-eight at the time he was running for office that first time?

Edgar: I feel like it was twenty-seven when he ran the first time.

DePue: Did you have any doubts in your mind, though, that he was up to the task if he was elected legislator?

Edgar: Oh, absolutely. I knew that he was more than capable and very able to do the job in front of him, but I do remember thinking that he was really young and it would be quite an ego trip if he won. I just remember processing this in my mind: he was gone all the time now, then he would go to Springfield as a legislator, and it might not be the best thing in the whole wide world for him. As it turned out, and I don’t know if he would say this now or not, I absolutely believe that because he lost that first campaign, he became a better campaigner—although he was pretty good—and, in some ways, a better person because he knew that he could lose, even though if on pencil and paper he would have come out as the better choice for that district. He’d worked in Springfield and done the legislative business, so he should have known more and been a better state representative.

I think a person’s true colors are revealed. When he lost that night, he went and found Max Coffey and shook his hand and congratulated him; all the while, Jim was just devastated that he lost. He then went on to be the treasurer for the Coles County Republicans and do the things, kind of the grass-root work, that I’m sure a lot of the people who supported Max Coffey felt like Jim hadn’t done. He hadn’t lived in Coles County. He had been in Springfield, yes, but kind of, this young kid coming in and thinking he would just walk in and win. So he learned a great deal. It was a difficult lesson to learn, but it was

terribly important. Then it was only a few years later when Max ran for the state Senate, and Jim won that seat.

DePue: In his interview with me, he certainly expressed that he felt like his whole career plan, which he had laid out in his own mind, had been seriously derailed at that point in time.

Edgar: At twenty-seven he thought his political career was over, because of his intensity and his perfectionism of trying to get the job done and get it done right, and he didn't do it.

DePue: You've mentioned a lot about his intensity. (Edgar laughs) But how did he find the opportunity to relax and enjoy himself? Was there that side of him?

Edgar: Even to this day, it's a hard side for him to find, to relax. At that time, back when the kids were little and after he lost that race, he was looking for a different sort of career. He had to kind of regroup and rethink and find a way to make a living and take care of the money issues that we faced. I don't remember him relaxing very much. He used to play tennis; I would say that was a good way to—

DePue: I know later on he did a lot of hiking and biking and horseback riding.

Edgar: But not at that time. At that time he played tennis; I would say that was his main physical sport and outdoor activity, and a way to beat out the stress.

DePue: He also was not the kind of politician who was going with the other legislative aides to the bars at night and drinking or anything like that, so did he find that release coming home and just relaxing?

Edgar: Well, he would come home, but I don't exactly think he relaxed a lot. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Did that side of him surprise you, that he wasn't able to turn it down a little bit?

Edgar: Yeah, and it still surprises me today. All these years later, it surprises me that it's so hard for him. It's like it's not acceptable to relax.

DePue: Here's something on a little lighter side. Was there an Irish setter in your life at that time?

Edgar: Oh, mercy. It was a disaster. (laughs) He'd always wanted an Irish setter; our son Brad was maybe four years old, and it'd be nice for him to have a puppy. And this dog was just not really trainable. He was big, and he was beautiful, but he was not trained very well. And, oh my, he just caused havoc everywhere he went. He was one of those dogs that—I guess like in *Marley and Me*. He ran through the screen door, he let the other dogs out in the

neighborhood, he took people's garbage—just did all those naughty things. By the time we had moved to Charleston, Jim was gone, and I think he was barking or nipping at the mailman; that's when I just declared something had to be done here, and the dog needed to go away. Jim's very attached to his animals, and that was a hard thing to do, but it was quite clear to Jim that he needed to do something. (laughs)

DePue: And going back to him as a campaigner, one of the things he wasn't noted for at that point in time was his speaking ability. Do you recall that evolution in his speaking ability?

Edgar: Yeah, I do. I know that he was very uncomfortable with it, and it was evident. I imagine he might have mentioned that he had a speech impediment when he was in elementary school, and he went to the speech teacher. Those things kind of stick with you, so whether you still have the impediment or not, you might think that you do. So to stand up, speak out, and boldly enunciate your words was not something he had mastered the art of at that point.

DePue: But part of speaking ability, at least when you're doing an impromptu, is knowing the issues. Did he know the issues?

Edgar: If he was impromptu, he was much better. He's great with question-and-answer, he's great with impromptu—it's just that delivering prepared remarks to people kind of tripped him up, I think.

DePue: You've already talked about the end of that campaign, which ended in defeat when Max Coffey edged him out. So Max Coffee and Chuck Campbell were the Republicans in the 53rd District, and Bob Craig was the Democrat. Tom Merritt, who was another Republican, was the senator.

Edgar: That's right.

DePue: So what happens in his career now? Does he look to go back to Springfield and be a legislative aide again?

Edgar: He looks around and thinks about it, talks to people, and ends up going with an insurance company, Massachusetts Mutual. There's a man in Mattoon, Obud Henderson, who hired Jim, and that's what he was going to do. That's what he did for a time; it was not something that he had a passion for.

DePue: Yeah, I'm having a hard time—

Edgar: Seeing... (laughter)

DePue: —visualizing this.

Edgar: I don't know how long he did it, but not so long before he was asked to go with NCSL—National Conference of State Legislators. It was kind of a new

group, and they were headquartered in Denver, Colorado. So once again we packed up our bags. We moved west. Jim started that job ahead of me. I was waiting for the school year to end.

DePue: For Brad's school or your school?

Edgar: Brad's school. So we moved out after school, and we moved in either June or July. We bought a house in a suburb of Denver called Englewood. We were there until December, when we packed up our house again and moved back to Illinois, to Charleston. Jim had been traveling for the NCSL. He traveled all over the country to different state legislatures and had stopped in Illinois and learned that Max Coffey was going to run for the state Senate. At that moment, Jim decided he would run for the state legislature, called me, and said, "Well, we're going to be moving back to Illinois." There was not a lot of discussion about this.

DePue: He didn't ask you?

Edgar: No, no, no. Again, his eye is on the goal of getting into the political arena as an elected official. So we moved in December. He had announced before we got ourselves settled back. He had found a house, told me to draw a rectangle and draw a picture on it—I was still in Colorado—and where to put the rooms, and that would be the house. (DePue laughs) And that took us back to Charleston.

DePue: I know that during July and August of this year [2010] you guys were out in Colorado vacationing, so I would guess that the two of you really liked it out in Colorado.

Edgar: We liked it in Colorado, but I guess the real key to our being in Colorado this July and part of August is that both of our kids are in Colorado—Brad and his family and Elizabeth and her family—and that also means that our five grandchildren live in Colorado. So in order to be a part of their growing up, we go out as often as we can. The time that we lived there and the time that we vacationed there definitely took on our kids, because they both really like the state of Colorado and like living there.

DePue: But that wasn't in the cards for you in the fall of '75?

Edgar: That's right.

DePue: Because he was going to be running for election in '76.

Edgar: Yes, in '76. Actually, as I mentioned, we moved back to Charleston in December, just a couple weeks before Christmas, so we were in place for that.

DePue: For the spring semester for Brad, then.

Edgar: Um-hm.

DePue: Was there any different expectation on you, the second time around, for his election campaign?

Edgar: There was probably a little bit more. Still, again, nothing to compare what would come in the years ahead. The worst I remember—I think it was that campaign—was dealing with the press. It was going to be this big secret that Jim was going to announce the next day. A reporter called the house and kept asking, and I kept saying I didn't know. Finally one of his questions tripped me, and I said something about tomorrow or something, and I kind of blew the cover. (laughter) So that made me forever after guarded and cautious of anybody with the press.

DePue: In other words, you heard about it afterwards, after that happened?

Edgar: I think, yeah, there was probably made mention—

DePue: That Jim might have mentioned something about that?

Edgar: —that this was going to be a secret. Yeah, might have been. (laughs)

DePue: You're in Charleston again, and you've been going back and forth. Did you manage to get more progress on your own college career?

Edgar: I started back at school again, but every place we would move to, I would—when we were in Park Forest, I took a couple classes at what I think was then called Prairie State. When we were back in Charleston I probably took a couple classes at Eastern again. So I had this really...

DePue: You were constantly transferring your credits from one college to another.

Edgar: Uh-huh, I was, in my life, from one college to another.

DePue: That would normally indicate that you still had plans for your own personal career.

Edgar: Oh, I still did. I still had the intention—I was going to graduate from college. Jim was always gone a great deal, so I wanted to be at home with the kids, but at some point I would have possibly... But then we kept moving, and we kept running for another office, so (laughter) things kept changing.

DePue: But would you have been happy if you'd had the opportunity to get that teaching career and teach at the elementary level? Was that still the goal?

Edgar: That was still the goal at that point. I can't answer that since I never did it.

DePue: I also heard that you got a job when you went back to Charleston?

Edgar: Yes, that's the right house at the right time.

DePue: Merle Norman?

Edgar: Yes, thank you. Jim and I were sitting someplace. I don't know what we were talking about, and I said, "Well, the only business I'd ever want to have"—and I don't know where this came from—was, I said, "a Merle Norman cosmetic studio." My grandmother used Merle Norman and my mother used Merle Norman and I use Merle Norman. I've kind of always been more of an inside—probably what they call today, more of a girly-girl than a sports person.

DePue: Than a tomboy.

Edgar: Yeah, exactly. Always, always been that. I thought that would just be so much fun. As it happened, Jim went to high school with the son of the woman who owned the Merle Norman in Charleston, and she was thinking about selling it. We ended up buying it, and it was fun. I loved doing that. It was a nice little reprieve of my own.

DePue: Was this something you were able to do out of your own home, then?

Edgar: No, no, there was a business. Brad was in school, and I took Elizabeth to a neighbor who had a little girl, and they both went to an afternoon preschool. She would go to the friend's house, and then her mom took them to preschool and I picked up from preschool. So I think I maybe worked three or four days a week and had somebody else come in when I couldn't be there.

DePue: This is the second election campaign that he's run, and obviously he's going to be successful in this one. Was he a different campaigner, a better campaigner, the second time?

Edgar: Definitely a better campaigner. If possible, he was more determined.

DePue: "If possible?" Because he seemed pretty determined the first time.

Edgar: He was very determined the first time, but the second time he was—he has kind of a competitive spirit, so this time it was not going to happen again. (laughs)

DePue: Failure was not an option.

Edgar: No, that wasn't an option this time, because he had been a good loser and continued on with the Republican Party doing the grassroots work, and became a precinct committeeman and went door to door for people...

DePue: How about the financial side this time? Because that was another hard lesson from the first defeat.

- Edgar: Now, is he elected yet or not elected yet?
- DePue: No, this is when he's running for office in '76.
- Edgar: Okay.
- DePue: Because you had a debt when he walked away from that first defeat in '74, and you went to Colorado; I'm sure you had a debt at that time.
- Edgar: I know that he did the fundraisers, but I can't think... Maybe he had some kind of job. I can't think that we would have come back as a family of four... I can't remember what he did.
- DePue: That's fine. Do you remember the night of the election itself and his reaction to finding out he did win the election?
- Edgar: There's something about election nights that there are these people that can figure out fairly early on whether you win or you lose. The first election night, almost so early in the evening, he knew he wasn't going to win, so that was really quite a bummer. They can tell by precincts that have come in. By the second election night, he probably could tell early on that he was going to win, and yes, that was a much more celebratory type of an event. The first one was like a sad, (laughs) sad night out.
- DePue: Were you elated as well, or were you basically happy for him?
- Edgar: I was happy for him. We'd been through this process of running; losing; miserable because that life, he thought, was over; the reentry, and then the success. Once again, through all of these stages, I didn't know what the next stage was, in reality. You can hear about something, but until you live it you don't know what it's like. The reality of it was that he was gone all the time—either to Springfield or to Danville or to another place in the district—either campaigning or doing something that was required because of his position as state representative. The pay wasn't very good. Many legislators had another profession on the side, and Jim didn't.¹³ The kids were little; he was gone.
- DePue: Did you still live in Charleston?
- Edgar: We did, um-hm, at that time. I had this little business that was more just like a fun hobby on the side, which I did like doing, so that gave me time to be around people and with people and out and about, and that was a good thing.
- DePue: Still picking up a few credits at college as well?
- Edgar: Not at that exact moment. On down the line, after his second election as state representative. I think he was maybe almost a year into it when Governor

¹³ On legislators holding side jobs, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 9, 2009, 14-18.

Thompson asked if he would come to Springfield. Now, I will tell you that I was very happy about that, that we were going to Springfield; he was going to work for the governor but wasn't going to be in this **public** eye of elected office, where everybody wants something that you need to figure out how to help them with. The pay was going to be better, and this was good.

DePue: What you're talking about here: he won in '76, he ran again in '78, and April '79 is when Governor Thompson asked him to be his legislative liaison. So he's got a little over two years' experience in the legislature. Obviously he's not spending the entire time in Springfield, because the legislature is not in session all the time. From your perspective, did he find that rewarding, finally getting to one of his goals, or was it frustrating being a back-bencher after being in the inner circle with Arrington and Blair?

Edgar: It may have been somewhat frustrating. I think he hardly dared to say that. I think it was kind of a lonely time for him because he was in Springfield, and when he was there at night he was by himself because he wasn't a—you know, he might go to a movie or...

DePue: He did mention going to quite a few movies while he was there.¹⁴

Edgar: Yeah. I wasn't exactly the happiest person in the whole wide world. When he got around to getting home, (laughs) I was probably like, "You've been gone all the time." (pause) I just know that I was very happy when the decision was made that we were moving to Springfield.

DePue: Happy because you could get the family back together again?

Edgar: Yeah; I saw it as a more normal life, and we would have a better financial situation. We got just a lovely family home, and it was a good time. Brad was going into sixth grade—at that time in Chatham, sixth, seventh, and eighth were junior high—so it was a new school. Elizabeth was going into first grade. When I say Chatham schools—we lived in the Springfield city limits, but it was in the Chatham school district.

DePue: The kids are in school now; we like to get a little bit more continuity in their lives?

Edgar: Yes, and some stability, because as a legislator you're running every two years. So you're either raising money or you're campaigning; you just get elected, and then you're raising money and you're campaigning; and then you're... It's too short of a cycle.

DePue: Did you go to the same church, then?

¹⁴ Jim Edgar, June 9, 2009, 13-14.

Edgar: We went back to Central Baptist Church, the one that we had joined when he was legislative intern, and the one we joined when we came back from Chicago—we joined it for the third time.

DePue: I'm trying to get my timeline straight. Thompson runs for office in '76, wins; Governor Thompson runs in '78, wins; that would put him up for reelection in 1982. But I know that in 1980, Alan Dixon had stepped down from being secretary of state—

Edgar: Right. He won—

DePue: The office for senator, which means—

Edgar: That left a vacancy.

DePue: So Governor Thompson had the rare occasion to actually name his own secretary of state.

Edgar: Right, and there was talk that Jim was being considered. Again, he's youngish. I think he was thirty-four.

DePue: Did it surprise you to hear that talk?

Edgar: No, it didn't.

DePue: Why?

Edgar: Because I felt that Jim stood out in the crowd. I think he always had—

DePue: In what way?

Edgar: I want to say ability, but that might not have shown up. But if you had a conversation with him, whether it was Governor Thompson or anybody else, he would leave a good impression because he's so knowledgeable. The governor would have known that he was a smart, capable young man with a good presence and a lot of ambition, I guess.

DePue: Had you met Governor Thompson before all of this?

Edgar: I think I had met him, maybe just to say hello. Yeah, I had met him.

DePue: Because you probably spent your entire life after this moment having comparisons between the two men.

Edgar: You know, I really never compared the two men myself because I felt like they were very different personalities. To me it was an apple and an orange. They were both governors, but they were so different.

- DePue: I guess that's what I'm referring to. In terms of personality, Jim Thompson was a very different person than Jim Edgar.
- Edgar: Right, exactly. Yes.
- DePue: And yet, Governor Thompson obviously saw a lot of potential in Jim at that time.
- Edgar: He did. People would often attribute Governor Thompson with being able to discern those qualities in his interns and young people that were around the Capitol.
- DePue: Do you remember the call that Governor Thompson—
- Edgar: Oh, I sure do. I remember that we were home, and it was probably kind of a gloomy Friday evening. There was talk about it, and we talked about if it would happen, and Jim said, "It's not going to happen, because he would have called by now if he was going to call." It wasn't too much longer, and the phone rang. I answered the phone, and it was Governor Thompson, and I was asked if Jim was there. I said, "Yes, he is." And he asked him the question. I was standing there, so I knew what the question was. "Yes, Governor, I would be honored to do that," (laughs) something like that.
- DePue: What did you think about that particular change in his career path?
- Edgar: Once again—and I keep referring to this—I thought, Wow, that's exciting, that's exciting, having not a clue what that really meant, to run statewide. It's a big state. Illinois, when you go from Chicago to Cairo, oh my, and Quincy to... It's just an enormous state. So I didn't have a clue what that really involved. I knew Jim, but 95 percent of the population of Illinois that was going to be voting for secretary of state did not know who he was.
- DePue: So in 1980 when he gets the call, you're already thinking—I know he's already thinking, Two years down the road, I have to run for office.
- Edgar: He is on it like that. I am like, Well, that's exciting. I'm more at the moment here. But he moves ahead at a rapid pace (laughs) to be everywhere.
- DePue: Which means that...
- Edgar: Once again, that means he is away a great deal of the time.
- DePue: You had mentioned before, you've got an appointment to get to. This is probably an ideal time to stop for today. We can pick up the secretary of state years and maybe even get to the governorship, the next time around.
- Edgar: Okay.

DePue: So thank you very much. It's been a lot of fun and enlightening to talk to you; I hope you feel the same way.

Edgar: Thank you.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Brenda Edgar

ISG-A-L-2010-039.02

Interview # 2: September 14, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, September 14, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This afternoon it's my pleasure to interview Mrs. Brenda Edgar. Good afternoon.

Edgar: Good afternoon.

DePue: This is our second session. We think we might be able to finish up today, but there is quite a bit to cover because we've got the entire time that Governor Edgar served as secretary of state, then the years as governor, and then the years beyond that point. So we'll just see how it goes and take it from there. When we finished off, I think he had just been nominated as the secretary of state by Governor Thompson. Do you recall that phone call from the governor?

Edgar: I do remember that phone call. I remember Jim coming home and saying that he was pretty sure that he wasn't going to get this appointment because he would have heard by now. The phone rang. I answered the phone, and it was Governor Thompson asking to speak to Jim. I handed him the phone, and I usually say, "After half a second of deliberate consideration, he said yes, and that was that." (DePue laughs)

- DePue: Were you watching his expression, to try to anticipate what the phone call was about?
- Edgar: I was watching his expression, and I knew right away when he said yes. I can visualize him and where he was standing. So yes, I do remember that moment in time.
- DePue: Now, this is one that he certainly responded to, but I'm sure you're aware that George Ryan wanted to be the secretary of state at that time, too.
- Edgar: I was aware of the fact, yes.
- DePue: Was there any doubt in your mind who was the better candidate?
- Edgar: Of course I would have chosen Jim, but at the time I was very uncertain. Sometimes you have a knowing of something that was up ahead, and I wasn't sure who would be chosen.
- DePue: Were you happy?
- Edgar: Yes, I was. I was happy.
- DePue: At the time, was there any conversation between you and Jim about what his long-term ambitions were?
- Edgar: We didn't discuss that. I knew that was a **fabulous** opportunity that was being given to him, which would give him statewide visibility. Most people wouldn't be aware of what that means in Illinois. Statewide means big, it means a lot of time.
- DePue: There's a lot of distance between Anna and Chicago?
- Edgar: That's right. I was very happy about it, though, to answer your question.
- DePue: Did you have an understanding that when he said yes, that meant he'd be on the road **a lot**?
- Edgar: I knew that he'd be on the road a lot, but I think I didn't know that "a lot" meant almost all the time. (laughs)
- DePue: And here you have a couple of young kids at home still.
- Edgar: Right. They were pretty good ages by that time. I think our daughter was in second grade and our son was in junior high school, so they were both in school. Definitely that was easier than when he was a legislator; they were smaller and he was gone.
- DePue: Did they have any sense that, Hey, Dad's a big deal now; he's got this new job?

- Edgar: I don't think so. I don't think they absorbed what that meant, other than the fact that there was somebody who came to pick us up and drive us to the capitol building the day of the inauguration.
- DePue: Occasionally I'm going to be asking you about stories that I've heard from other people. This one is dealing with a Thanksgiving dinner in Anna, just after the time he'd been appointed.
- Edgar: That I do remember; I remember that was kind of a big deal, and someone coming by on Thanksgiving Day looking for some assistance. I'm guessing Jim is the only one who could have told you that story, (laughs) and he probably told it better than I could tell it.
- DePue: The essence of it was that as secretary of state, you control a lot of jobs; and patronage, especially in southern Illinois, is what politics is about. So you would have been exposed to that pretty early on.
- Edgar: We were, right away. (laughs)
- DePue: How about the implications that the next election is just two years away. From what he's told me, the reason he was on the road all the time is he's starting to campaign right away.
- Edgar: That's true. He was quite aware that most of the people in Illinois had never heard of Jim Edgar. So he was very politically astute and knew that this was a great opportunity, but he had to work really hard.
- DePue: Now, I'm going to ask you to reflect on what your thoughts were back then, and maybe that's a bit unfair. But he'd spent most of his career up to this point on the legislative side of state politics and state government. Now he's an executive. From what you knew about him at that time, did you think that was a good fit?
- Edgar: I did absolutely think it was a good fit. That is more the role I would see Jim in, as a leader—the executive branch.
- DePue: Do you think he was more comfortable with that role as well?
- Edgar: I think he was. I think it fit his personality better.
- DePue: Let's talk a little bit about getting into that 1982 campaign, then. Did you get involved in that campaign?
- Edgar: I did to a degree, but not to the degree that I would eventually be involved when he ran for governor. Jim understood and I understood there was a lot to be done, but we also still had our kids at home, and that was the most important place for me to be at that time, with him being gone so much.

DePue: I'm going to misplace a couple of these stories in terms of their timing, but there's a plane ride to a Moline fundraiser that didn't go well. I think maybe both you and he were on that aircraft.

Edgar: That's true, that's true. I remember that.

DePue: And it was a ride with Ken Zehnder. Do you remember that ride?

Edgar: I do remember that ride. I remember getting **home** (laughs) from that ride. It was a very short plane trip, as we took off from the Springfield airport, and the pilot said there was a problem with landing gear and that we would return to the airport, touch down, and just take off again. But when we touched down, the landing gear was intended to retract, and instead it collapsed under the plane. We were skidding along the runway. I did smell some smoke, and the fire trucks came rushing out onto the runway. Somebody said, "We need to get out of here fast," and I was happy to do that. (laughs) Someone said, "Let Mrs. Edgar go first," and I did, I think. As we got out, they hosed the airplane down, and that trip was canceled. We went back home, and I was real happy to be at home.¹⁵

DePue: Do you recall the next time you flew?

Edgar: Yes, it was very difficult. I spent several years overcoming, dealing with that landing. I would not want to fly, but when I was essential, I would fly. But every time the engine would change a gear or there was any sound, the fear would just pour through my whole body. I probably turned plain white. (laughs) It wasn't something that I could really control; it just went all through me, and sometimes I'd even just cry. So it was quite a challenge to overcome and be able to do what in the future I needed to do as far as flying on small planes.

DePue: Did that change how often you went out with the secretary to campaign?

Edgar: It did. It changed how often, and it also changed where I went, because sometimes they could send me someplace nearby by car, rather than the longer distance up or down the state that Jim would travel by plane.

DePue: What did you think about going out and campaigning on your own? This might not have been what you thought you were going to sign up for about twenty years—

Edgar: All those years ago.

DePue: Yeah.

¹⁵ The accident happened August 16, 1981, when Jim and Brenda Edgar were traveling with Ken Zehnder to a fundraiser in Moline for State Rep. Ben Polk (R-Moline). *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1981.

Edgar: It was kind of a training ground while Jim was secretary of state. It was a way, I think, of preparation for the campaigns for governor. So I think I learned a lot in those years.

DePue: What parts of it did you not like?

Edgar: From the beginning and to the end, the part of campaigning I didn't like the most was the press and their microphones and the kind of in-your-face questions that they knew I probably didn't want to answer or would find uncomfortable answering. Just the media. Also, I was hesitant that I would say something that would cause Jim problems, and I felt like he had plenty of things going on without me speaking out of turn about some issue.

DePue: Was the press asking you policy-type questions?

Edgar: They would do that, yes.

DePue: Did you try to steer away from the policy issues?

Edgar: I did, yes. I did steer away from it. I didn't feel that I was the candidate, and therefore I didn't feel that it was my place to answer some of those questions. If I was positive of the right reply, I would answer it. But they also had a way of kind of tricking their way around. (laughs)

DePue: Being persistent, I suspect.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: One of the most common fears that people have is public speaking, and now you're thrown right in the middle of that as well. Did that bother you at all?

Edgar: It did bother me. It was a different audience. I had done some public speaking prior to that time, but primarily it was to women, so the audience was different. Of course it was not difficult for me to talk about Jim, because I felt he was well-qualified and would be a terrific secretary of state. So that wasn't the hard part, it was...

DePue: Did you ever take the kids with you on the campaign trail?

Edgar: I don't remember taking them so much when Jim was running for secretary of state. Having said that, I'm sure we took them sometimes. But they were both at an age where they could make their choice if they wanted to go. I know that it's not much fun, so they really were not out and about all that much.

DePue: Do you remember a parade in Rantoul, and a gold Maverick? It was probably '82, because this was during the ERA fight, and you found yourself in the midst of that.¹⁶

Edgar: You know, I do remember that, yes. Actually, on that particular day—it was the Fourth of July—I had gone to Rantoul, and as it turned out, I did have our son and daughter with us. We had left our home in Springfield, driven to Rantoul, done a parade there, left there, came to Champaign-Urbana to do a parade—and by that time it was probably noon or one o'clock—Fourth of July parade in Champaign. Yes, it was the time when some women had been evicted from the capitol building; they had tossed blood and chained themselves to the Capitol building because of the ERA vote events. (clock chimes)

DePue: And as secretary of state...

Edgar: Yes, as secretary of state, Jim was in charge of the capitol complex, and it was his responsibility (laughs) to remove people—who had handcuffed themselves and tossed blood around—from the capitol building. Needless to say, they weren't very happy about that, and so it kind of fell over onto that parade day. People had been drinking, it seemed to me. It was about noon or one o'clock, it was hot, and it was Fourth of July. People were celebrating, and we were riding along. I believe our son was walking in the parade and our daughter was probably sitting with me, because after the parades we were headed on to Jim's mother's home, to go to the Fourth of July fireworks and have fun that evening. Someone yelled out, "Oh, your husband puts people in jail," and I didn't say anything. The parade progressed on, and someone else said something about, "Your husband puts women in jail." I kind of turned and said, "That's what happens when you break the law." I didn't say it very loud. I shouldn't have said anything. It's kind of one of those no-win situations; you just look straight ahead and smile at the next person and wave. But I think I had tried my patience enough that day. So I think I learned from that too, that no matter what the situation is, just don't say anything. Keep moving; look forward.

After the parade was over, we loaded up, got in the car, and headed towards Charleston. We got about halfway there—it was more of a two-lane road—the car just kept getting slower and slower, and the transmission went out. I didn't know the transmission was going out, but it did. So we got out of the car, went to the nearest house, and knocked on the door. A lady came, and I asked if we could use her phone, and she let us use the phone. Called Jim's mother. She came and picked us up and took us to Charleston. We were

¹⁶ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, 75-77. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

maybe thirty minutes from Charleston or maybe slightly less than that. So that turned out to be the beginning of my dislike of campaigning in parades.

DePue: (laughs) The governor told us another story—and maybe it was the same event—that he would be in one place and people were cheering and...

Edgar: That's right. I realized later, when I went with him to one of those Republican strongholds where he campaigned, that no wonder he liked parades. He got the biggest and the best parades, and then I think I had the leftovers—surely they must have been in more Democrat strongholds. So I understood why he liked them, and I **knew** why I didn't like them.

DePue: One of the things that it took him a while to grow into was public speaking, and going back to the public speaking, did you feel that you improved over time?

Edgar: I did improve over time. Jim and I have a very different style. We're very different individuals, but different style in speaking. He's just terrific with questions and answers, and I'm better with just telling a story. But that's what I elected to do, was tell the story of Jim Edgar.

DePue: What part of the campaigning did you like?

Edgar: I didn't like a lot of the campaigning, (laughter) because at the end of the campaign season, it was going to decide whether my husband was employed or not. So I guess I took it from a very basic, rudimentary approach: After election day, would Jim have a job, or would we be looking for a different house or moving?

DePue: He's going to be involved in a couple tight races. Eight-two was fairly tight, and 1990 was extremely tight. So from the wife's perspective, what were your thoughts in terms of, He might lose; what are we going to do then?

Edgar: Well, you just cannot help but think only one person's going to win. The outcome of election, I had learned, doesn't always depend on the ability, the qualifications of the candidate; it can depend on the weather that day. If it's raining, people might not want to go out; if it's cold and blowing they might not think it's safe to travel to the voting poll. So I knew that there were a lot of effects of Mother Nature that went into voting day, and even though you might be ahead in the polls—and I always thought Jim was the better candidate no matter who he was running against—that didn't mean that person would win. So you always knew that after election day, things could change and not end up in the way you expected. And a lot of that came from the fact that he had lost that first election way back in 1974.

DePue: Which you thought might have been a good experience for him at the time.

Edgar: I thought so, right. I really just didn't see how he probably could lose that time, being new to the election process and how it all works. DePue: But that's part of the maturation process that any politician would go through, I would think.

Edgar: Absolutely. You're right.

DePue: I know you remember this parade. It was in Nashville, Illinois, and involved Grace United Methodist Church. Why don't you tell us about that experience?

Edgar: That was a good experience. As we were walking down the middle of the road in Nashville, Illinois—it was about this time of year, a pretty day, blue skies, and—

DePue: Was the secretary with you at the time?

Edgar: Yes, he was, which is unusual, but that's when he was running for governor.

DePue: So this was a little bit later.

Edgar: Um-hm, it's when he was running for governor. He was with me, so it wasn't too long before election day. There was a train that went across the parade path, which happens to stop the parade. So you stand in the middle of the street and wait for the train to pass. Jim had gone to the edges of the road and was visiting with people, and I was still standing in the middle of the road waiting for the train to go through town. I saw the words "Grace United Methodist Church" as I was standing there, and what I really saw was the word "grace" and then "race" and then "ace," and I thought "grace, race, ace." I felt that it was just a touch from God that said, "I will give you the grace for the race, and it'll be an ace"—ace meaning it would be the best. At that point it didn't matter whether Jim won or lost; it was going to be the best for our family, whatever happened in the end. That gave me a reassurance, as we entered the final weeks of the campaign, that it was going to be fine. Whatever happened was going to be fine. I probably can't say Jim shared that feeling with me, and as a matter of fact, I don't remember even sharing what I had seen up there. It was kind of a private treasure of my own that I hung onto through the end of that campaign.

DePue: Did you tell him later on?

Edgar: Later. I did later.

DePue: A couple people that I've talked to—Carter Hendren, who was his campaign manager for both 1982 and 1990, and Mark Boozell, who was certainly

important in his career as governor—described you as an extremely good campaigner.¹⁷ Did you see yourself as that? You're smiling on that one.

Edgar: I think because I believed so much in Jim and his abilities, it was not difficult for me to show that, whether I was speaking to a group or walking in a parade. (pause) I'm sure that's what Carter and Mark Boozell might have seen, a willingness to work hard for what I felt like was the best candidate.

DePue: A real asset on the ticket. Let's talk a little bit about what it was like living in Springfield. He served for ten years as secretary of state, and it seems to me that your two children basically grew up in their formative years, in the years they remember as children, when their dad was secretary of state. So what was life like for the family in Springfield during that time?

Edgar: I think we were fortunate as a family to have moved to Springfield prior to Jim becoming secretary of state. We did not move into Springfield as the family of the secretary of state. I, in retrospect, know that was helpful to both of our kids and to me because we all were established in our own world and life as individuals. Our daughter was already in school, so she had her friends; our son was in school, and he had his friends and sports that he was doing; and I had my activities, so people knew all three of us as Brenda, Brad, Elizabeth, not, "Oh my goodness, they've just moved to town. That's the wife of the secretary of state or the kids of the secretary of state." So that was a really good part of the timing factor.

DePue: Where were you living at the time?

Edgar: We were living in Springfield, in the home where we lived the years that Jim was secretary of state. So we were already in that house. We lived there maybe a year or two prior to his becoming secretary of state, so our neighbors knew us, and it was just like, "Oh, that's just Jim and Brenda." Whereas if you move into a neighborhood and are already in a statewide office, I think people are a little more reticent to approach or learn who you are aside from the political.

DePue: Did the kids go to public schools?

Edgar: They did. Again, we lived in the Ball–Chatham school district, so they went to Chatham schools. Both of them graduated from Glenwood High School.

DePue: Had you chosen the house and chosen the neighborhood because it was in the Chatham school district?

¹⁷ Hendren called Brenda "an absolute dynamo on the campaign trail"; Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, May 7, 2009, 55. Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2009, 51. See also, Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, 2.

Edgar: Yes, we did. Fortunate for us, as the secretary of state needs to live in Springfield, our house just happened to be located in Springfield, but it was in the school district where we wanted to be, so it all worked out just right.

DePue: How about the church? Because I know that was certainly important to both of you. Where did you go to church?

Edgar: We had lived in Springfield when Jim was a legislative intern through the University of Illinois. We at that time had joined what was Central Baptist Church, American Baptist Church, right downtown Springfield. We moved away, and when we came back to Springfield a few years later, we joined that church again. When we had moved away and come back to Springfield for the third time, we joined that same church again, so that's where we were attending when he became secretary of state.

DePue: Were you able to go to that church—and maybe this extends into the time as governor as well—and have the congregation just treat you as regular folks, or did they treat you differently now that he had those positions?

Edgar: I feel like more during the years he was secretary of state, it seemed very normal to me. After he became governor, things changed a bit. I felt (pause) there was probably a different attitude towards us than there had been before. Actually, it might have been because we lived right across the street from the church at that time, in the governor's mansion. It would be hard to disassociate us with the mansion because you would drive by it and look at it as you were getting out of your car to walk into church, and it's quite a—

DePue: Imposing?

Edgar: —imposing place, and here are the people that live there now. Living in the mansion definitely gives people a different view of who you are. If you live in a mansion, then you must have changed, even though you didn't, overnight.

DePue: Was going to church, even those years as governor, a no-politics zone?

Edgar: It was a no-politics zone probably because for whatever reason, it seemed like we were always running slightly late, so we kind of just got in and then left. We did not socialize much at all at church during the years he was governor. We just went in and we left, and that was the best way to handle it, because people did have (clock chimes) issues that they wanted to ask Jim about. We would probably still be there. (DePue laughs) That's how we handled that.

DePue: I'm going to ask this question just specifically to the time as secretary of state. The family life: how did you keep things normal in that perspective?

Edgar: It was normal because we were in our own home; it was normal because the kids just kept up the same routine as they had before. Granted, Jim was picked up at home, and at the same time he was picked up at home and delivered

back home, he was gone a great deal. It was the three of us, and we had functioned as the three of us when he was a state legislator, so it was not a new role for us to kind of operate as a circle of three with one member missing a *lot*.

DePue: (laughs) More than you had anticipated.

Edgar: Right, exactly.

DePue: How did you keep yourself busy when the kids were off to school and he was gone on the road so much of the time?

Edgar: I had activities that I was involved in. I had no problem keeping busy between running kids and chauffeuring them and taking care of things at home and my own activities. I was busy enough and then some.

DePue: What were the kids involved in?

Edgar: Brad was involved in sports. He played football and basketball and track. Elizabeth was always busy with her friends and activities; she played on the tennis team in high school and she was on student government. They were both very involved in their school, so that took a lot of getting them there and after school driving them back; it was a lot of driving them back and forth, because we didn't live right next door to the school. (laughs) It was probably ten minutes or so away.

DePue: You've talked about the differences between you and your husband. Let's talk about the kids and their personalities and who they took after. Did either one of them have this driving, burning ambition for government service and politics, like their dad had?

Edgar: Neither one of them had that particular drive that Jim had. Our daughter was the president of the student council when she was a senior, and I think she was on the student council all the years of high school and maybe even in junior high. Our son was on student council in junior high, but he really chose not to be on it in high school. No, they didn't, but as I said, our daughter—it almost seemed like something that just kind of came natural to her, to be involved in that.

DePue: But did she have the ambition to pursue it beyond high school?

Edgar: Not beyond high school, no. Into college, she did not.

DePue: So did that mean that they took after you more in that respect?

Edgar: Probably. I would say they're both more private people; although having said that, I think Jim is too, but he did have, as you said, that burning ambition to be in public service.

DePue: Did they feel like they were living in a fishbowl sometimes?

Edgar: I would say they did, probably Brad somewhat more than Elizabeth because he was older. His friends, especially in high school, were starting to get their driver's license; Jim was the secretary of state, and that's where you went—to the secretary of state's office—to get your driver's license.

DePue: (laughs) Yeah, all the kids know who the secretary of state is.

Edgar: All the kids knew. Yes, yes they did. So although neither one of them said much about it at home, I do believe that both of them felt it, and I think Brad felt it more.

DePue: Because he was a little bit older, you think?

Edgar: Um-hm.

DePue: Did they have a security detail during those years?

Edgar: They did not.

DePue: The kids generally accepted them pretty well as just average kids?

Edgar: Oh, absolutely; they did, yes..

DePue: One other thing that I've heard—I don't recall who I heard it from—was one case where there was a threat made on Brad.

Edgar: That's right. I remember Jim getting a call from the security detail that someone had overheard someone threaten to kidnap Brad because this person had maybe lost their driver's license to a DUI.¹⁸ The security detail wanted to drive Brad to school and pick him up—I think he was a sophomore in high school—which was not something he was real excited about, especially as a guy. I think he was mortified at the thought that he'd have to be taken to school and picked up, but nonetheless, he went along with the plan. I said to him, “Now, be sure that there's someone with you all the time. Don't go into the restroom or anything without taking a friend with you,” which he, again, probably would never have done anyway. But the day went by and the security brought him home. We were talking, and he said, “Oh yeah, Dad would probably wait until they sent my ear in a little box before he would (laughs) capitulate with whatever the person”—maybe they wanted their license back, I don't know. But Brad has a wonderful, dry sense of humor, and that was his take on the whole thing.

DePue: I suspect you didn't appreciate that (laughs) sense of humor at the time.

¹⁸ Driving Under the Influence. Edgar was a strong advocate of cutting down drunk driving through tighter enforcement and the passage of new laws, a position that earned him strong support and equally strong opposition. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, 33-53, 63-67.

Edgar: I did not appreciate that. I didn't think that was a bit funny. (DePue laughs) And of course I was very concerned through that particular day. They did find that person, and they dealt with him, so things got back to normal.

DePue: But I'm sure it's a reminder that, boy, you are in the kind of position where—

Edgar: Retaliation because somebody (laughs) lost their driver's license, and that was infuriating to this man, especially when he was intoxicated again.

DePue: Let's get to the '86 campaign. Was there any doubt in your mind that the secretary would run again in '86?

Edgar: No, no.

DePue: Was that something even discussed?

Edgar: No, no. That would just—no.

DePue: When he reached these decisions, which happened every four years like clockwork, would he say, "Brenda, what do you think? You okay with me running again for office?"

Edgar: I don't remember any long discussions (DePue laughs) that we had about, "Was that okay?" After he had worked so hard to win that first election as secretary of state, there was no question that he would stay in that office. It was an office that he enjoyed, and I knew he was doing a good job and making a difference. I think it was kind of an unspoken knowing between us; that sure, that's what would happen.

DePue: I'm sure he campaigned very hard that election, but it wasn't anywhere as close as it was in 1982 for him. It was pretty much a landslide.

Edgar: I think he had developed name recognition across the state, and I think that what people knew about him was good. I think they trusted him and they believed in him, and I think that's what made the difference the second time.

DePue: Let's jump ahead another four years then. Nineteen eighty-nine, there is the discussion, "Gosh, Jim Thompson has been governor for just about forever." (Edgar laughs) There was a point in time when Governor Thompson decided he was not going to run again and picked up the phone—another phone call to your husband. Do you recall that phone conversation?

Edgar: I do. I remember the conversation. Jim and I were at the St. Louis airport. We were getting ready to board a plane to go to Colorado. Jim was the president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, and they were having their annual meeting in Colorado. Before we got on the plane, Jim talked to Governor Thompson—it was on a pay phone—and Governor Thompson said something to the effect, "It's all yours now." He was going to announce that

he was not going to run again. What I remember is we got on the plane, and we were talking about this as we were flying to Colorado. By the time we got to our hotel room, there were media already present, ready to interview Jim in the hotel room. I took a walk outside or something, and the kids and I kind of vanished from the room so this person could interview him, and that was the beginning.

DePue: Again, was there any conversation you recall, asking you if this was the right thing to do?

Edgar: It's interesting, because I remember so clearly the phone call at the airport, but I don't remember the conversation on the airplane as we traveled from St. Louis to Colorado. I do remember conversation after we kind of got settled—the press left for a bit—about who else might want to run, besides Jim. It wasn't a given that he would be the one and only candidate. So there was a lot of discussion about that, and there was a lot of conversation with different staff people of how to put this together and how to make an announcement and to move fast because Jim was onto it. I think the conversation between Jim and I was a lot like when he ran for secretary of state reelection: "Okay, it's your turn now, and let's go for it." I knew he'd make a good governor. I **knew** that intuitively, and so off we went.

DePue: This might be the perfect opportunity to ask you why you were so convinced that he was the best candidate for governor. What was it about your husband, the man you had married and had lived with for these last twenty years?

Edgar: Because he's a leader; because he can make difficult decisions even if it's not a popular political decision. He had the ability, and he proved that during those years that he was secretary of state. I remember walking in on election night and a reporter asking me, "If your husband wins this election, what will we see?" and I said, "You will see." I knew that they would be surprised because I also was quite aware that he was this guy from downstate Illinois, not a Chicago person—gone to public schools all through elementary, high school, and college. So there was this little bit of [thought] that maybe he wouldn't be up to the task, but I knew that he was, and I knew that he knew a lot more than people [realized] he knew. So I was excited that he had the opportunity to show that he did. I think I conveyed that some way to this reporter, that they'd be surprised.

DePue: Let's go back to the campaign season itself. The primary season, he had an opponent. But he won that rather handily, and then he got into a no-holds-barred campaign for the general election with Neil Hartigan. As the governor himself has described this, this is probably the quintessential, the classic gubernatorial campaign in recent Illinois history, because it was right down to the wire and it was a hard-fought campaign on both sides. Hartigan, coming from the attorney general position, had a high profile, and so did the secretary

of state position. Did you have to kind of up your game in terms of campaigning for him this time around?

Edgar: I do recall that. There was a story, and I don't know if I'll be able to tell it correctly. It's one of those things you think you'll never, ever forget, but... After Jim won the primary, they felt like they were probably more geared up than the other campaign because they'd been through the primary and had a challenger already in this gubernatorial campaign. So Jim kind of had a really good warm-up season with the primary.

I remember the first time we went to Chicago after Jim was the elected Republican candidate: going into this room full of people, and the press just mobbing him and nearly knocking me over to get to him, and being so intimidated by this whole venue. They had people that were going to be running on the statewide ticket standing up next to a man with a microphone, and he was introducing each of the people running for office. I was standing back in the crowd, standing back there feeling like a country mouse in the city at that time, and I thought, oh, all I wanted was for him not to ask me to come up and stand in that line. I was trying to be as invisible as you can be. And he did. He said, "Oh, and there's Mrs. Edgar. Come up here." And I thought, Oh, please, I can't say a word. It was the only time in my life that he just thrust the microphone in my hand and said, "Say a few words." (laughs)

I was like a blank chalkboard. I had nothing, nothing to say. But I heard, with my ears, my voice, and I said something like this: "I hope that this campaign brings the north and the south together." I would have loved to have had one of those drawers open where I could have just disappeared. "I hope this campaign brings the north and the south together"? And I remember thinking, Where did that come from? (DePue laughs) Although as I was standing along the edge, I remembered thinking, I don't belong here; I'm from the south (laughs) and this is the north. I don't know where the words came from, but all I could do was just want to get out of that place and not see anybody and not have anybody see me. So that was the first Chicago event of the campaign for governor for me, and it was just humiliating. (laughs)

DePue: Did you get a critique on that performance later on?

Edgar: Oh, I don't think so. No, nobody dared say anything. (DePue laughs) What could they say? "What were you thinking?"

DePue: The only person who might say something would be your husband, I would guess.

Edgar: He said nothing. (laughs) Like I said, I want out of here. What was I thinking? It sounded like the Civil War had just begun. (laughs)

DePue: But there is a parallel because—well, I don't need to tell you—there's a big difference between politics as it's played in southern Illinois and in Chicago.

- Edgar: The attitudes are very, very different, and I think I was aware of that. If I wasn't aware of it consciously, I guess subconsciously I certainly knew that there was a difference.
- DePue: I wanted to ask you about a parade, and I think this is another solo parade, and your husband's views on alcohol.
- Edgar: That's right. Yes, that's another parade, another reason I never like to walk in parades. Elizabeth was with me, and oh, it was so hot. It possibly was the Fourth of July, because there are lots and lots of parades on the Fourth of July, and Jim was doing one of those wonderful suburban parades where everybody loved him, while Elizabeth and I had been sent to an area that was, I'm sure, a Democrat area. Once again, we were stalled. For some reason the parade was not moving forward, so we were stopped in front of some taverns on the right and some taverns on the left. Jim's opponent had convinced those people that dreadful things would happen if Jim Edgar was elected governor, because he doesn't drink.
- DePue: He had passed all those tough DUI laws and things like that.
- Edgar: Right, right, and so he was public enemy number one of the tavern clientele. So our pause on that hot—it was asphalt, and the heat was coming up from the bottom and down from the top, and we were paused. Somebody flung Tootsie Rolls—Tootsie Rolls are often handed out to us in parade routes—and once again, I was angry, but I wasn't about to say anything. I'd learned my lesson: you just don't reply. Eventually the parade started, and along we went; I tried to smile, but it was really difficult.
- DePue: Another parade that stayed with you.
- Edgar: It stayed with me, yes—unforgettable experience. (laughs)
- DePue: Did you occasionally unload, when the two of you got together again, about these experiences?
- Edgar: Oh, I probably did share my experiences, with a bit of an edge to the conversation. (laughter)
- DePue: Here's another story that the governor and a couple other people were rather detailed in talking about. I think it's in Chicago, but there was a decision that needed to be made about whether or not the campaign should respond to negative ads from the Hartigan campaign. It's another story that involves Brad, because Brad chimed in on what his views were.¹⁹
- Edgar: I don't recall exactly. What did Brad say?

¹⁹ Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 23-26; Jim Edgar, September 2, 2009, 23.

DePue: He thought his dad should take his gloves off; he was all in favor of getting a little bit tougher. The secretary said that Brad was always the one who thought, He likes to read and he likes to stamp collect and things like that, and it just didn't seem to be the kind of impression that Brad liked. Brad wanted him to emphasize that, "Hey, he goes to the racetrack, he does that."

Edgar: (laughs) Yeah, Brad did think that he needed a little more **exciting** image out there, that Jim needed one. Yes.

DePue: How about this one, real close to the end of the campaign, when Channel 3 over in Champaign came out with a poll that showed he was significantly behind. He looked like he was going to be losing, and he introduced you at an event about that same timeframe, where he got rather emotional.²⁰

Edgar: I don't remember that exact event. I wish I could remember it. It will probably come to me.

DePue: Is he the kind of person who tends to wear his emotions on his sleeve, to get emotional in public, especially?

Edgar: No, he's not, but I will tell you—and anybody could—that by the time you get to the end of a campaign, you are **so frazzled**. It's a roller coaster of ups and downs and emotions that are just worn bare by the daily goings and doings and travel and the long, long hours. So by the time you get there, you are pretty well on empty.

DePue: Everybody.

Edgar: Everybody is.

DePue: Do you recall much about the night of the election, then? Where were you?

Edgar: Yes, I do. We were in Chicago at the Hyatt on Wacker Drive. Candidates usually have a group of supporters who come on election night. Some of our supporters had started drifting in early. Jim was probably doing some television interview, so I went in to greet them, and everybody seemed so somber. Everybody was saying things like, "Boy, Jim ran a good campaign. It was a good campaign; he really worked hard." But nobody was saying, "Oh, wow, we can't wait until the election returns are in; I think he's going to win." It was more of a quiet, hushed group. So I was going back to the room where we were going to be staying that night, and I just started crying because all of a sudden I thought, He's not going to win. He is not going to win. He's worked so hard, and he would be so good, and he is **not** going to win. So I went into that room and there were people milling around, and even Jim was there, and he said, "What's the matter?" Or somebody asked me that question, and I said, "Oh, I just realized Jim's not going to win." And they said, "No,

²⁰ Jim Edgar, September 2, 2009, 49.

no, no, he is going to win.” I said, “No, I’ve just come from this room and everybody’s all hushed and quiet.” “No, nope, he’s going to win.” So there was a guy who could figure up these things with his little—

DePue: Calculator?

Edgar: —numbers in his hand. He had a computer, I guess, and he was punching in numbers and adding them up. He said, “Look,” and he punched in a number, and he said, “Now, look, look, he is going to win.” I was thinking, Well, nobody else knows about it (laughs) if he’s going to win. But this man was so certain, and even Jim was in a really upbeat mood for the first time in a few weeks. He seemed to think he was going to win. I thought, I don’t know how this can be, because it doesn’t look that way to me. Long night, and I’m sure Jim told you that some of his friends said they had to wait till the next morning and pick up the newspaper to see who won. And he said, “How could you have gone to bed if you didn’t know (laughs) who won the campaign?”²¹ But anyway, it was a happy event.

DePue: Do you remember who it was who was crunching the numbers?

Edgar: Phil O’Connor.

DePue: At what point in the evening did you accept that he was going to win? Was it at that moment?

Edgar: I don’t know if it was that exact moment. They both seemed quite confident. I suppose that was my emotional moment: when you try to hold everything together and wait until the election night, and you try to make it like, Yes, this is going to happen, and then it was like, Oh my goodness, maybe it won’t happen.

DePue: How much sleep did you get that night?

Edgar: Not much. It was really late—early, I should say, in the morning. I did go to sleep. But Jim knew that he was up and off early in the morning to do interviews.

DePue: He told us that he slept in a chair.

Edgar: I think he did.

DePue: So he wouldn’t mess up his hair.

Edgar: Yeah, I don’t remember watching him sleep in a chair, because I was asleep in a bed.

²¹ Ibid., 66.

- DePue: I'll put you **really** on the spot here. He seemed to have the typical politician's concern about his public image, and especially the hair. Any comments about that?
- Edgar: Not really. I think there has always been kind of a big to-do about it, but to me that's just who Jim is. I'm so used to it that it doesn't even faze me. Even to this day, he'll wake up and his hair will be going all directions, and he'll be grumbling about it and put a cap on and go get the newspaper.
- DePue: What did you think—there was a cartoonist, Mike Thompson.
- Edgar: Yes, yes.
- DePue: Who always had the price tag on his hair.
- Edgar: I liked it. (laughter) I did. I liked him and I liked his cartoons, and I liked the way he depicted Jim. It was fun. It was just fine.
- DePue: In terms of dealing with the public and learning how to deal with the public, I know you had an occasion to learn a couple pointers from Barbara Bush as well.
- Edgar: That was just a wonderful opportunity that I had to travel with her when her husband was running for the president of the United States.
- DePue: This would have been 1988.
- Edgar: Yes. I watched her handle the media and be very firm with them in her answers, and I watched how she answered what she wanted to answer and didn't answer what she didn't want to answer. I also went to a fabulously fun fundraiser that they were having for her husband, and she presented this most beautiful slideshow of their years of marriage. It showed their family, it showed the vice president's residence, and just all kinds of family pictures. When it became my turn to be speaking for Jim, I felt like I wanted people to know more about him—who he was, where he came from. So from traveling with her, I learned many things, but I also put together a slideshow. Not as glamorous as the residence of the vice president of the United States, or their time in China when they were with the CIA, or in New York when he was the ambassador to the United Nations. But we put it together, and it was just a fun way to campaign; although once in a while there was always a glitch, like the light bulb didn't work in the projector, and then I just had to do something different, just give a speech. But I went to places where nobody else would go. I went to little towns where probably nobody had ever been for someone running for governor. People were so kind and so welcoming and so appreciative that someone would come to their little community.
- DePue: Did you do any campaigning in Chicago or the suburbs?

- Edgar: Not until closer to the election. I primarily was in downstate Illinois and primarily in smaller populated areas. I did a lot of small town–type radio stations and newspaper interviews—not WLS, not the *Tribune*—but I was happy where I was at, and it fit and worked for me, so that was fine.
- DePue: You were content to have the secretary work Chicago and that area.
- Edgar: Yeah, he had the north and I had the south. (laughter)
- DePue: That comment again.
- Edgar: See? Yes. They thought it was not appropriate, probably, but see, it was very apropos, wasn't it? (laughs)
- DePue: The inauguration is normally a big event. This is the culmination; this is the chance to party and celebrate because you've had this incredible victory, even in those darkest moments when you thought it wasn't going to happen. Anything that stays with you about the inauguration day?
- Edgar: Almost everything stays with me about that day. It was so exciting. We first went to a beautiful church service. Our church was just packed with people. There was a fabulous community choir that sang that day. All governors have a church service in the morning of their inauguration day, and it was beautiful.²² Then we went to the mansion, as tradition and protocol, to meet with Governor Thompson and Mrs. Thompson, and just had a cup of coffee or something to drink, and then we went to the Prairie Capital Convention Center. Everybody was getting sworn into their position, whether it was comptroller, state treasurer, and on down the line, and then Jim became governor.
- I think the moment that it really hit home on inauguration day is when that big event was over and we walked back to get in the car. I looked at the license plate and it said, "Governor 1," and I thought, Oh, this is the real thing. We got in the car and the security said, "Where to, Governor? The mansion?" And I thought, Ooh, we are going to the mansion; he **is** the governor now. We went to the mansion, where we had a quick lunch, and then we greeted six thousand people. The first time in all of my receptions and events that pain started shooting up my arm, but I just kept smiling because it was such a happy, happy day for us. After that, we went to another reception, and after that we had a family dinner at the mansion. Family came from five different states to be part of this exciting event.
- DePue: Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado...

²² See *Inaugural Service of Dedication and Consecration*, January 14, 1991, Central Baptist Church, Springfield, IL. [[Assuming Mark wants to post the scans I made of Arnie Kanter's copy of the service booklet, include the URL to it\(??\)](#)]

Edgar: Right. California. I can't even remember all the states, but it was fun to see them and have them there and show them through the mansion as much as we knew our way around, which wasn't very well. Then it was time to dress for the inauguration. My inaugural gown was made by a woman in Marion, Illinois, so that's definitely in southern Illinois. I really felt like Cinderella—I've told this so many times—getting dressed for the ball, and my Prince Charming. We went to the ball, and afterwards we came back and we lived in the mansion.

I also tell the story that when we came back from the inaugural ball, it was in the early morning hours, I still had on my inaugural ball gown, and I'm sure every light in the mansion was on. My dad, when I was growing up, would always be saying, "You must turn the lights off. Turn the lights off. Don't forget to turn the lights off." So I left the private quarters of the mansion, where we would be living, and started turning off lights. There's lamps and overhead lights, and I was still on what is actually the third floor of the mansion, and I thought, I don't think I can turn off all these lights. As I looked down the spiral staircase, there were two more floors, and there were lights on everywhere. So I saw a phone and I picked it up. I did know how to press a button for security. Someone answered, and I said, "I don't think I'm going to be able to turn off all these lights." (laughter) I think I heard just a chuckle on the other end of the line, and he said, "Don't worry, Mrs. Edgar, we take care of the lights." And I thought, Oh, okay, thank you, (laughter) so I hung up and went to bed.

The next morning, I got up and there I was in the governor's bedroom, with the crystal chandelier hanging above my head. I remember thinking, What are we doing here? But all I had to put on that day was the suit that I had worn to the inauguration, because I hadn't packed up all of our clothes and everything hadn't come to the mansion yet. We went that next morning to the church across the street where they were having a prayer service because the war was getting ready to start up.

DePue: It's during the First Gulf War, Desert Storm.²³

Edgar: That's correct. And after that, going back to our home to get some clothes and more things.

DePue: So a whirlwind of events that day.

Edgar: It was a whirlwind. Actually, the whirlwind began—oh, boy—(laughs) before the election, and then during the campaign, and then the election night; then the time between Jim's election and inauguration day was just an absolute blur of things to do—so much to do.

²³ Operation Desert Storm, the American-led counterattack against Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, began January 16, 1991 (EST).

DePue: Was your Prince Charming a good dancer?

Edgar: Actually, no. (DePue laughs) We took a couple of dance classes to make sure we could do this just fine, and then we would—

DePue: This was right before the inauguration you did this?

Edgar: Yeah, about three weeks before, we figured that out; we would do that. So we did—we went to a dance class, just the two of us, to learn how to dance to the song we'd chosen. Then sometimes if we were at home, we'd turn it on. I said, "We need to practice that dance. Even if it's just for three minutes, we need to practice," (laughs) and so we would practice it in the entryway of our home.

DePue: Gosh, that's something he hadn't told me about.

Edgar: I am surprised.

DePue: (laughs) What was the song?

Edgar: "Strangers in the Night." That's our song.

DePue: All the way back from when you were dating.

Edgar: All the way back from when we were dating.

DePue: Who was singing it when you first started dating?

Edgar: Frank Sinatra. It's a song that just crops up no matter where we are. One time we were at some pyramids in Mexico; we were coming around the corner, and somebody was playing that song on a little harpsichord. We hear it all over the world, even today. Sometimes I'll be walking in the grocery store and it will come on, or in the car, or just everywhere. So it was very, very fun.

DePue: Is there an emotion or a reaction that you get when you hear the song?

Edgar: Oh, yes, we both do. It's really very special to both of us.

DePue: Let's change gears a little bit and talk about learning how to be a first lady. Now, before we start, had you had any help from Jayne Thompson?

Edgar: I visited with her one lunchtime, prior to moving into the mansion. Jim and I had dinner with them one night at the mansion after he was elected, and on that night they showed us the private quarters where we would live. It had been recently redone, and it was really just so beautiful. Then we also went to what is—I guess they call it new governors' school. I don't know if that's the name of it, but the National Governors Association has kind of a long weekend meeting for all that are elected as new governors, and their spouses. You spend that time in a rather intense crash course on how to—the current

governors and their spouses serve as the teachers. They have different areas that they cover, and it was quite informative; it was very helpful.

DePue: Where did it occur?

Edgar: That year, it was in Kentucky.

DePue: And this is a bipartisan activity?

Edgar: Yes. Definitely it was bipartisan. You also get to know the new governors from other states because you're all starting out together; you're quite aware that they're new governors, so you don't go into the big Governors Association not knowing anybody. You also know the mentor governors and their spouses, who help you, and you can call them or get advice. I remember at that time, I did not feel a big partisan feeling. I think things have changed since then, and that's most unfortunate, because at that time I had good friends on both sides of the political aisle. I don't know that it's so much that way anymore.

DePue: You always hear in comments about the United States Senate that this is the most elite club in the world, but a group of American governors has got to be a pretty special group, too.

Edgar: Oh, it's a special group, and when they all come together, the media flocks in, and it is a... The first Governors Association meeting I went to, I remember thinking it was extraordinarily intimidating. I remember leaving our room and saying to myself, "Brenda, you are an adult. Put one foot in front of the other." But I know that I was not the only one who felt that way. There were many who did, although none of us just said it; we felt it.

DePue: Did the governor have any qualms about that, or was he just—

Edgar: No, he just seemed to jump right in and swim with (laughs) all of them.

DePue: Did you get envious of him in that respect, or proud?

Edgar: I was proud of him. Yes, I was.

DePue: Going back to the role as first lady, then, how did you envision the role? What had other people told you your role was supposed to be when you first stepped into that?

Edgar: (laughs) That's the problem: nobody tells you what the role is. There's not a handbook that you read and know what you're supposed to do. Even having gone to the new governors' school and having learned a lot from the other spouses, you had to pave your own way as a first lady, because what someone before you had done may not be something that you chose to do. What somebody in another state was doing might not fit you or your personality.

And governors' spouses are like governors. I think in that new class, a couple of them were lawyers; one of them was a schoolteacher; one of them still had six or seven children at home. So we were all different, and that affected how we played out our part of first lady, and what people chose to do.

DePue: Let me go through my perception of the different roles that the first lady has to assume (clock chimes) and let you respond to them. First of all, you're in the mansion and you're the governor's wife. You now have a staff to deal with, don't you?

Edgar: That's right. They did discuss that—the staff and the importance of the staff. You just walk in from your family home, and all of a sudden, every day, all day, people are saying to me, “Mrs. Edgar, what would you like? Mrs. Edgar, how do you want to do this?” I mean, there was a question a minute, and it was a lot. I have described it before as (laughs) being like a grain of sand that you would pick up off of the Sahara Desert, and then you put a giant, giant turtle shell over that little grain of sand. That would be me, the giant turtle shell would be the mansion, and I didn't think I fit in there. As the time passed, I feel like I grew into it, but you don't move in there already fitting into the mansion. Not many people live in a mansion.

DePue: Is there a danger of letting your ego get a little bit out of control because of that?

Edgar: There sure is, and I don't think you know when you go into that arena how you're going to be affected. You watch other people around you and how they're affected; how you meet them at one meeting and they're just moved in, and you meet them at the next meeting and they're suddenly thinking that they are a co-governor with their governor husband. I never had any desire to be a co-governor or a governor, so that was not an issue in our house, but I saw it happening all around me at these meetings.

DePue: Any people in particular on the staff, your personal staff, who were especially important?

Edgar: Oh, yes. And again, it takes a while to get everything to gel. You don't just move in and have all the right people in the right places. But there were two people that were invaluable to me, and one was Brenda Belasco.

DePue: With a B?

Edgar: Uh-huh. She became the manager of the mansion, and she was just wonderful. She managed the mansion in a quiet, efficient, effective way. It was so well-run. In retrospect I look back, and there was a lot that went on that I never knew about because she just would not have burdened me with those things. She was a very quiet person, so trustworthy with any bit of conversation. You knew that none of it would pass her lips again to anybody else. Just to have someone that trustworthy in that position, that I had all the confidence in the

world in, was just wonderful. So she ran the mansion, and it was an enormous job. It's a big job, a job of many, many hours, and it's a hard, hard work job. I also had two very good people that worked alongside with me. The first one was Julie Dill. She was my personal assistant when we first moved in, and then Tom Faulkner became my personal assistant. He was with me longer than Julie was, so we together were able to do so much. He was a talented young man who had boundless energy, just energy out the... (laughs) So we developed and worked hard together on some great programs.

DePue: As somebody who's never lived in that kind of environment, I've got all kinds of questions. Did it ever feel like this was your home?

Edgar: I don't remember it ever feeling like it was my home. It was an apartment above the office, beautiful. The most I can equate it to is living in a beautiful hotel room. I mean, it was more than just one room. There was a gorgeous living room, and there were three bedrooms. Our son had a bedroom, although he was not living at home—he was graduated from college by then; our daughter had her bedroom; we had ours; and then there was a library. Each of the bedrooms had a bathroom. There was a kitchenette, just a small kitchenette, where we ate breakfast. It had a dumbwaiter that brought food up and took dirty dishes away.

DePue: (laughs) I assume you were okay with that part.

Edgar: I was so okay with that part. (laughter) When we moved, there was no dumbwaiter, no coffee in the morning already made. It was a part of the mansion, and a few times we found people at parties who had stepped into the private quarters. There were no lights on. If there was a party, I turned everything off, meaning, "Do not enter," but sometimes people just would. So that was a little unsettling, that there'd be that happening. It's just enormous. There was only one night that I was afraid there. I was alone in the mansion; Jim was gone, and there was nobody else.

DePue: Isn't there security?

Edgar: There's security, but they have a building outside. They watch everything. But I had gone down on the elevator to the kitchen to get something. I thought I heard a person walk and get—anyway, so I called the security and they said no, there was nobody in the building. According to **them**, there was nobody in the building. I was very afraid that—I was afraid. The security then came immediately to our apartment, and they had a plan in place. Jim never saw it, but I did. They **immediately** locked **all** of the access doors to the apartment, and only one way in. There was a security man who sat there with a gun (laughs) all night, so nobody could have gotten in. But I was a bit terrified.

DePue: Did you also keep another residence while he was governor?

- Edgar: We did. We were so fortunate. We sold our family home after we moved into the mansion, and we found a log cabin outside of Springfield. It was about thirty minutes away. We knew that we would probably come up with some kind of a place away, but we thought it would be farther away than thirty minutes. But it turned out to be just great because we could go there easily on the weekend. It was a very casual place to go, and our kids loved to go there; it felt like home. It was our home during those years.
- DePue: Another one of the roles that first ladies have to assume is being a hostess for all different kinds of events, both inside the mansion and lots of other places. How did you warm up to that role?
- Edgar: I was just great at greeting people coming up the stairs to events. For eight years you stand and you greet everyone that comes to parties, unless it's a private party—and they did hold a lot of private parties at the mansion, where people paid to come and use the facility. I was never much for the planning of the menus, so oftentimes Jim would have a hand in the menu because he really cared about what was being served. I felt like other people could make those decisions just as well as I could. So he pretty much approved the menus, I think. If it was something for a group of women or something, I would look at it, but what would be served was planned by somebody else.
- DePue: This one's a bit delicate, but I'm sure you're aware that people were comparing events at your mansion versus Jim Thompson's mansion, and that the big difference (Edgar laughs) was the absence of alcohol.
- Edgar: You are right. It mattered a lot to some people. (laughs)
- DePue: Did you hear about that?
- Edgar: Not too much. I didn't hear about it. Jim might have heard about it, but nobody really said too much to me. I was comfortable with it, because that was Jim's call. It was important to him as an individual; that's the way he wanted his home to be, and that was our home for those years. I feel like that was the right thing to do, for him.
- DePue: Did you hear through the grapevine what the feelings were?
- Edgar: Oh, I didn't hear all of the more catty remarks that people might make. I didn't hear all that. I know they were out there. I know that people came to parties and left swiftly, probably, because there was nothing else. (laughs) I would guess that there were a lot of establishments in Springfield that enjoyed our eight years (DePue laughs) in office, because people would come visit them after they left us rather than just stay at the mansion.
- DePue: I know the role that would scare me in that kind of a position is trying to remember the names and the faces and who these people are who are just always coming at you and meeting you.

- Edgar: It's so difficult, and that truly is difficult. When they're at the mansion, we have a guest list of who will be attending. As invitations are sent out, they must respond, and their names would be on a list before they would be allowed to come in. So we had people wear nametags. But you also go to a lot of events—maybe it would be in southern Illinois or in Chicago or in Quincy—and people that you had met at the mansion would be there; they remembered you, but you might not remember their names. That was very difficult because people would always be going—they didn't just stay in one place.
- DePue: Did you have lots of occasions where people would come up and say, "I met you at such-and-such a place," with the expectation you're supposed to remember that?
- Edgar: A lot of people did that, but I learned from Jayne Thompson. She would always say to a person, "Hello, I'm Jayne Thompson," which meant that you should say, "Hi, I'm Brenda Edgar." Not everybody did that, but I would try to do that, hoping they would follow.
- DePue: Even though everybody knew who she was.
- Edgar: Exactly, exactly. The most difficult thing is when people would say, "Hi, Brenda," or, "Hello, Mrs. Edgar. I bet you don't remember who I am."
- DePue: So the test has begun, right?
- Edgar: It has begun. I never had a real good answer to say, "No, I really don't know who you are." (laughter)
- DePue: Which too often probably was the case.
- Edgar: Probably I didn't, right.
- DePue: Here's another role that you had as first lady. You didn't stop being a mother, so let's talk about being a mother in that fishbowl environment. Because you've said it's quite a bit different moving to the mansion.
- Edgar: It is, and Elizabeth started—the first day of her senior year was inauguration day—the second semester, not the first, because it was in January. So she actually lived at the mansion. Security did take her to school, and they brought her home. Different from when Jim was secretary of state, when the kids either drove themselves, I took them before they could drive, or they went with a friend. That was all different now. She was brought home by security, but she could take our own personal car and leave, feeling like she wasn't on a schedule pass, so nobody would know quite where she was going or... We had a really nondescript car. Our son by that time was, as I mentioned earlier, out of college, so he didn't actually live in the mansion full time.

DePue: Did he live in the state?

Edgar: No, I think he was living in Washington, DC, by that time. I'm pretty sure. So that half of her senior year—and the beginning of her senior year was probably more difficult for her because there was a lot of talk about this and that. Especially as a senior, you're getting it. It's not like she was in second grade, when Jim became secretary of state, and it was like, "Oh, well."

DePue: Yeah, "What's a secretary of state?"

Edgar: Yeah, exactly. It's not so big a deal when you're seven as it is when you're seventeen. She didn't ever particularly complain about it. I thought both kids were exceptional all through the years that they had to put up with whatever the public might have said. (clock chimes) They didn't repeat it to us very much.

DePue: Did they understand that they were under scrutiny and they had to behave themselves better than maybe other kids could?

Edgar: They did understand. I would say when they left, "Remember, be careful," which held a whole lot of, (laughs) "Be careful, your name will be on the front page of the newspaper if you trip out there."

DePue: But I would imagine it's not easy if you're a young girl in high school and want to date, and you're the governor's daughter.

Edgar: It was an interesting situation. Yeah, it was kind of different. At that point, the second half of her senior year, she was not dating one person, so she would just kind of go out, and maybe that was easier.

DePue: With a group of people.

Edgar: Yeah, at that time. It was different. I think there probably were a few things that happened that I never heard too much about.

DePue: That you were not supposed to find out about? (laughs)

Edgar: Yes, I think so. Probably. I think that happened. And probably Jim never knew either.

DePue: What was Elizabeth's intention for after high school?

Edgar: She went on to Miami of Ohio, in Oxford, Ohio.

DePue: Was there a reason behind going out of state?

Edgar: Oh, a big reason. Both of the kids went out of state to college because they did not want to carry that with them—the responsibility to be the son of the

secretary of state, the daughter of the governor. So I think it worked fairly well, although there were a lot of Illinois people who went to Miami or Ohio. There were a certain number of people that knew, but the general population there didn't know. Her professors didn't know.

DePue: Did she go by Elizabeth?

Edgar: She does go by Elizabeth, yes. I will say, though, I remember reading a paper that she wrote that had something to do with being the daughter of the governor, and she said that every day was like Thanksgiving Day, which was true. Every single day was a big deal. There were big things happening. You were going to a party; you were dressing up. Every day, there was a big deal. And she said, "Every day was like Thanksgiving Day, when some days you just want a peanut butter and jelly." (DePue laughs) And that was a hard thing to find when you lived at the mansion—a peanut butter and jelly day, just an ordinary, everyday... But our cabin did provide that.

DePue: What were the career aspirations for both of the kids?

Edgar: Brad's major was in economics, so he has gone into the world of business finance now, living in Colorado. Elizabeth majored in creative writing, and after she graduated, she worked one year in Chicago for an advertising company. Then she came to the University of Illinois, where she got a Master's in education. She taught high school English at Central High School in Champaign for a year and decided that if she was ever going to move west she'd better go before she got kind of...

DePue: Settled in?

Edgar: Settled into all that kind of life. So she graduated and taught one year here, and then moved on to Colorado.

DePue: I know that Brad got married while the two of you were in the mansion.

Edgar: That's right.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about his fiancée, his wife, and that experience.

Edgar: Stacey Nehring grew up in Hinckley, Illinois, which is a tiny town near Joliet. She went to Hinckley–Big Rock High School, and I know when she was a senior she went to Girls' State. Jim was governor at the time, and she had been elected governor of Girls State, so that was the first time she met Jim. Now—

DePue: Would that precede meeting Brad?

Edgar: Oh, yes, by several years. (DePue laughs) By the time she met Brad, I believe she was going to U of I, to get a Master's in social work. They met in Chicago. St. Patrick's Church has a big block party in the city every year; they

are known for these couples that meet at this block party and marry. They met there, and they married. Brad was working in Chicago at the time. They got married in June at the church we had attended across the street from the mansion, Central Baptist Church, and then we had the reception at the mansion. It was a really hot day in June, but it was a lot of fun for everybody.

DePue: The governor and I talked about that a lot because there was just a lot going on at that time.

Edgar: There was a lot going on.

DePue: He mentioned that he got pretty close to getting in trouble during that time.

Edgar: He did. He got close to getting in trouble with me because I didn't understand why he wasn't in the groove of this wedding planning and preparation and things going on. He was kind of tired and distant. I just didn't understand that, (laughter) because I was right in the middle of the whole planning and orchestrating, and I just thought he should be a little more interested in the whole picture.

DePue: Even though this was an election year?

Edgar: That's right. (DePue laughs) Yes. It was an election year. Just like the Thanksgiving Day analogy that Elizabeth made: every day, there was something big happening. I believe it was the day that they were having the rehearsal dinner. Jim had been in Chicago that day for the World Cup, and I think Kissinger was there—

DePue: Surrounded by all kinds of luminaries.

Edgar: All kinds of people from around the world, and I was like, "You **must** be home on time for this rehearsal." So he got there, and that was good, and then—

DePue: You said the wedding was in the mansion?

Edgar: No, it was just across the street, so people just walked from the church to the mansion for the reception. Then it wasn't a long time after that—actually, maybe only two or three weeks—when he found that he needed open-heart surgery, which attributed some of his...tiredness that I didn't understand.

DePue: Let's talk about that. This was not the first health problem that he'd had while he was in office. Let's take a step back even from that. September 1991, he'd been in office for just a few months; he'd just gotten through this brutal budget fight, and then his mother passed away. Was that sudden?

Edgar: She had been in the hospital. I don't think any of us thought that she would pass away at that hospital, but one day when I had gone to visit her, she said,

“I don’t know if I’m ever going to get out of here.” So she must have had an inner sense that something was very wrong. What it really turned out to be was multiple issues going on, and trying to correct one and the other and the other and the other, and medications—it was a very complex health concern that she was dealing with.

DePue: Now, his father had passed away when he was seven, I believe.

Edgar: That’s right.

DePue: I’ve gotten the impression that he was very close to his mother.

Edgar: He was, yes.

DePue: Was that difficult for him?

Edgar: It was, but it was like everything else at that time; you really didn’t deal too much with life as a normal person, because you didn’t have time. There just wasn’t time to step away from the events, the activities, the crisis here. Maybe there was a crisis in one city or another, and concerns about the prison situation. There was just something moving around that was major all the time, and you had to know about all of them and make decisions about all of them. You couldn’t step off of the—what’s the thing that spins around at the park?

DePue: The Ferris wheel?

Edgar: No. It’s flat, and it goes around.

DePue: Yeah, I know what you’re talking about.

Edgar: You just couldn’t hardly step off of it or you’d just fall down, when it’s going its fast pace, so you stay on it.

DePue: Merry-go-round.

Edgar: Yeah, but it was going faster than that. It’s like a park where the kids spin those things around—

DePue: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Edgar: —maybe it is a merry-go-round. He dealt with it, but not the way that he probably would have had he not been governor at that moment.

DePue: I would assume, then, that Tom and Fred took care of most of the affairs.

Edgar: Yes, they did. I know Jim and Fred met and did some things in Charleston, just maybe half a day or something.

- DePue: It was about a year later, October 1992, that he had his angioplasty.
- Edgar: Yeah, that was really quite a surprise. He was taking a walk—we were at the cabin—and he came in and said, “You know, I think there’s a problem,” and I said, “Well, what is it?” He said, “I feel this kind of pain.” I said, “You just have to go to the doctor. There’s really no other choice. You must have that checked.” So we found our way into the hospital, and they checked it and did a treadmill, which is a way of indicating if you have a problem. They could tell from that he needed to have an angiogram, which tests things out, and they could tell from that there was blockage and they needed to put a balloon in. So we did that. I think that was shocking to both of us because we just didn’t think we were old enough to be dealing with heart issues. We hadn’t given that a thought. And Jim had always been really healthy.
- DePue: Did you start to think at that time, Gosh, he’s in a rather high-stress job; this might not be the best thing for him to be doing if he’s got heart problems?
- Edgar: I think I didn’t know enough about heart problems at that juncture to realize what was ahead. I thought it was kind of fixed.
- DePue: Let’s jump ahead then. Spring of ’93—not that many months later—he has his gallbladder removed, and as the governor explained, “Oh, that’s no big thing.” What were you thinking at the time?
- Edgar: It wasn’t a big deal, particularly because of modern medical technology that made it really simple and quick. He was in and out and done.
- DePue: Well, July 7, 1994, maybe you took a little bit of a different attitude towards him complaining about some heart problems, and he ended up having quadruple bypass surgery.
- Edgar: That’s true. He was just going to go in and check it. To himself he thought, I may need to have another balloon put in, because something felt not right. This was just about three weeks after Brad and Stacey were married in June, or maybe not even that long. I had my bag packed because I was going out of state to something. I was just going to meet him at the hospital to kind of say, “I’m glad you’re doing okay,” spend the night if he had to have a balloon put in, then go off to this meeting. Elizabeth was with me; we got there, and they already had him in doing the angiogram, where they look at the heart. They came out and said, “We are going to keep him, and we are going to do quadruple bypass surgery now.” So they did. That was just shocking to me. I mean, it almost didn’t compute in my brain that this was happening. I didn’t think there was enough evidence but when they looked inside, there was. I mean outward evidence; you wouldn’t have known (clock chimes) just by looking at him, for sure.
- DePue: And again, it’s in the midst of a campaign.

Edgar: That's right.

DePue: By this time, he's way ahead of Dawn Clark Netsch, and hearing him talk about this whole experience, the heart attack in a political sense worked to his advantage in a couple respects.

Edgar: It probably did, from the perspective that people love a candidate who has something that they can understand and relate to besides the budget or what has to be done with the prison systems in order to make them the way they should... This is something everybody's grandfather or husband or uncle might have had—quadruple bypass surgery—so they understood what was happening to Jim. It was surprising to people, because if they had met him or seen him, he looked fit and healthy and fairly young. So that was kind of a shock point to people. I know Jim told you that Bob Collins was the one to announce that on his morning show. So it was just a big surprise to people that they could understand, and I think they felt like they knew him better after that.

DePue: He signed the budget while he was in the hospital. He went over to the window and waved to the press and all. And I'm sure very shortly after that he's ready to get back out on the campaign trail again. What were the conversations like about that?

Edgar: Those were good conversations, because what happened—I was out; I rather doubled my efforts out and about. But he had to have a window of time to recover from this. So we got through with the surgery; he got back to Springfield, to the mansion, and did the recovery thing, but also worked at the mansion while he was recovering. We went to Colorado.

DePue: You look like you weren't too happy about that.

Edgar: Well, (laughs) I'm remembering what he looked right after that, and he didn't look like somebody that needed to be working and doing what he was doing. But we had already had kind of a window of vacation time planned in August. So we went to Colorado, and he hiked around and did just amazingly well, because he was in good physical condition before the surgery. Even though the heart wasn't in good condition, his body was in good shape. So he recovered from that very nicely, very well. There are some parts to it that you don't know at the time or pay attention to, which you look back on and think, It was a little too fast, too much, too soon. But it's kind of like when his mother passed away: you can only step away just for the briefest bit of time, and then you just keep on keeping on.

DePue: So to a certain extent, he's kind of captive to his job?

Edgar: Right. And so probably after Labor Day that year, he was back in pretty full swing.

DePue: We know the rest of that story. He wins in a landslide by twenty or thirty points over Dawn Clark Netsch. And overwhelmingly popular in the polls for the rest of his time. But let's go back to your role and a couple other areas that I haven't pursued yet. You alluded to this already, but part of the job as first lady is dealing with the press. Did that relationship change once you were in that position?

Edgar: I think it got better for me because I just avoided them as much as I could. (laughter) One day I was talking to a friendly radio guy. He was interviewing me on something I was doing—what we would call my event—with children. I thought we were off the record. I don't know what happened at that table, but we were sitting around a table, and I felt like we were off the record. I remember kind of pushing back my chair, relaxing, kind of thinking, Okay, I'm done with that. It was kicking off some program; it was important, and it was done, and I felt good about it. Someone said, "Do you think that the governor will run again?" I said, just like this, "Oh, it depends on his health." And practically before I got out of that building and into the car, I got a call: "Did I say that he might not run again because of his health? Was he in bad health?"

I, again, thought we were talking off record. I thought we were done. Well, we were done with my part, but they really probably wanted to know more about what he was doing. That was always the case, you know. If they covered what I was doing, sometimes it was because of interest, but sometimes it was the hope that they would get an answer to a question that they couldn't get to Jim to ask. It took me a little while to learn that my event really was not their number-one agenda. (laughs) So that was everywhere. "Did I really say that?" Yeah, I did, but I didn't think anybody was...

DePue: Did you hear from the governor on that one?

Edgar: Yeah, I heard from everybody. (DePue laughs) "What in the world were you thinking?" I guess I wasn't. I was just so relieved that this announcement was over, and (sighs) I'm taking a sigh and just kind of having a conversation, and that's when they catch you off guard.

DePue: Yeah, it's dangerous letting your guard down.

Edgar: Oh, yeah. It is. (laughs)

DePue: How did you deal with the criticism that he got, especially in that first term when he was in the budget fights and was slashing, and they were calling him "Governor No" and "Edgar Scissorhands."

Edgar: I knew that they had to do all of this horrible stuff, and I knew he hated having to do it. My way of dealing with the press in that situation was I just didn't read the papers and I didn't watch too much TV, and that way, if I went to an event and somebody was there that had written something awful, I could be

pretty friendly and nice. I really didn't harbor any ill will, because I hadn't read the...

DePue: If you had read it, you were afraid that you would have?

Edgar: I probably would have. And it's kind of one of those things that if you read it and sort of store it up, all of the sudden one day, it's like a media person crosses your path and you just have to say something. I might have done that, so I didn't give myself an opportunity to do that. (laughs) I just was quiet as much as I could be.

DePue: The last thing is if you wanted to pursue or advocate a particular cause. Let's go back to role models that you might have had in other cases. You'd mentioned Barbara Bush, and you'd mentioned meeting all these other governors' wives. Were people suggesting to you that you needed to pick a cause to advocate? Did you have a role model in that case?

Edgar: Barbara Bush was an advocate for literacy. She was able to accomplish—and still today does accomplish—a great deal for literacy through her efforts. I cannot tell you, sitting here right now, exactly what other first ladies at that meeting were advocating for, but I do remember them saying, "This is an opportunity to make a difference, but you need to find something that you would enjoy, that you feel comfortable with." So it took me a while to just acclimate somewhat to living in the mansion. Elizabeth, as I mentioned, was still in high school. They had closed the mansion to tours right after we moved in; because of that war, they didn't want people touring. So I thought, This is a good time for me to adjust. I went with Jim where he needed me to go. I was home with Elizabeth as much as I could be, and when she went to college, the end of August that first year that we were there, I turned to seeking what would fit my personality, fit me.

I remember going to Head Start. I have always enjoyed little children, babies. Adoption—Jim and I worked on that together. From those beginnings that first year, it developed into a program called Help Me Grow, which was a statewide program. And on to women's health, which was an offshoot—I was on the board of the first ladies' organization, and we were presenting to the first ladies the need for awareness of issues that concerned women's health, and I wanted them to do that in Illinois. So those became my two focuses.

DePue: I wanted to spend quite a bit of time in asking about some of these different things that you were advocating for, but before we get there, you mentioned that you were struck when you went to some of these governors' sessions that some of the wives took on the role of being assistant governor as well.

Edgar: No, I said co-governor.

DePue: Co-governors.

Edgar: They weren't assistants; they were equals. (laughter)

DePue: Equals.

Edgar: And that was only a few.

DePue: But the public perception is that the wife of the governor, the wife of the president, has got the man's ear and has a lot of sway over policy issues as well. So was there a partnership in that sense? Did you let your views be known? Did he come and ask you what your views were?

Edgar: Yes, we did discuss those things. If he agreed with me, I thought that was good; if he didn't agree with me, I just thought, Well, maybe he knows more about this scenario than I do. I didn't get upset or...

DePue: Would he come home and talk to you about the current budget fight and ask your views on that?

Edgar: He might talk a lot about it, just kind of venting more. But it was so difficult and complex, I knew that I didn't know the tip of the iceberg of all that needed to be addressed with that first budget, so I just listened.

DePue: How about the issues that dealt with health and women's issues, and advocacy for Children and Family Services?

Edgar: Yeah, those things, I certainly voiced my opinion on how I felt about it. I did not want the responsibility, ever in my life, of becoming a governor, so I just admired anybody who did that big job and let him do whatever was right in his perception of it.

DePue: The area I wanted to start with, then, is one I know that both of you felt strongly about, and that was adoption issues. In 2002, the governor, or maybe the two of you together, got an excellence award for the work that you did in adoption. But let's start with Project HEART, which stands for Helping to Ease Adoption Red Tape. I believe you served on an advisory commission right from the beginning to try to figure out what was wrong with Illinois's adoption system, where kids weren't getting adopted at the beginning.

Edgar: We did, and there was of course a lot of discussion, and then there were some changes that were made. I felt good that that particular issue and the scope of the whole state was being looked at and addressed and made better through Project HEART.

DePue: How involved were you in the work of the commission?

Edgar: I attended the meetings, but they all had expertise in their contributions. I did not view myself as having expertise in that, other than a concern that these kids have permanent happy homes.

- DePue: Apparently, though, you were seen as enough of an expert on it that you got to testify before the House and the Senate?
- Edgar: I did. I think that was the first time that had happened, and I think it was to—
- DePue: Were you thrust into that role or did you volunteer to do that?
- Edgar: I can't remember. I think I was asked to do it, and I did it willingly because I cared about the situation and I wanted something to happen.
- DePue: Now, for other people who have to appear before the House or Senate on controversial issues, that can be somewhat of a bruising experience. How did they deal with you as the first lady?
- Edgar: I have to tell you that they were very kind, (DePue laughs) and I was very grateful.
- DePue: I'll leave it at that.
- Edgar: That was the best way to put it. (laughs)
- DePue: Do you recall any of the specific initiatives that changed? I would assume some of this has got to result in Illinois law to simplify the adoption process.
- Edgar: I would say the changes made it easier. It just was so...
- DePue: Cumbersome?
- Edgar: Yes, yes. Cumbersome, and unnecessarily.
- DePue: Some of the things that were done I would think would be kind of fun as well, like not just changing the law, but getting people to change their mind about the whole adoption process. So one of them was WGN having a child of the week and putting out newsletters that would encourage—
- Edgar: That's right, and that was fun. Meeting these children and just getting to be with them was a lot of fun for me. I liked that part.
- DePue: Let's go back to 1994, the same year that he's running for reelection and his son's getting married and he has the heart problems. It's also the year when the Baby Richard case really came to the forefront. It had been bubbling out there for several years, but that seems to be something that caught everybody's attention in that year.
- Edgar: It did, it did. And I did speak to Jim about that. Fortunately he shared my side on that, and...
- DePue: What was it about that case that got you so invested in that decision?

Edgar: The parents of Baby Richard had asked to—

DePue: The adoptive parents.

Edgar: Yes. Visiting with them, and just the understanding that this little boy had been with them since he was a baby—he knew no one else. He knew not a different life, and he had a brother that was his brother. You couldn't know them and not know what a good life he had with that family. To see what was happening was just wrenching.

DePue: And what was happening is that his biological father, who had been estranged from the mother right at the time of the birth, who didn't know about this until a couple years later, insists that he should have custody of the child. By 1994, how old was this little boy?

Edgar: I can't remember if he was four or something. Just a very tender age. Five. But just so young to be ripped, literally, out of the arms of his family and taken to live with a stranger. It was just...

DePue: Which was the decision of the courts.

Edgar: Um-hm.

DePue: You were obviously invested in this enough to have written a letter to the (Edgar laughs) biological father?

Edgar: I did, yes.

DePue: Did you send it to him and also release it to the press, or did you release it through the press?

Edgar: No, no, no. I didn't intend to release it to the press at all. I'm not going to be able to tell you an accurate progression of that letter, but I believe I mailed it to an attorney who represented the father, feeling that he would receive it that way. I was just trying to think how to get it into his hands, the biological father's hands. And in a most unusual situation, a reporter somehow knew about the letter and printed it in the front page of the *Sun-Times*. I don't remember how the reporter—I feel like the reporter was in the office somehow when the letter arrived. I could be totally wrong, but... I don't know how it happened. But I don't know who made the decision to hand the letter over to the press. I don't know who did that or why.

DePue: Let's face it—this is the kind of the story that always sells newspapers.

Edgar: (laughs) That's right.

DePue: And to get this letter that the governor's wife had written—

Edgar: Um-hm, privately.

DePue: —privately, that's quite a coup for that journalist.

Edgar: It was.

DePue: I'm sure you didn't appreciate it.

Edgar: I didn't. I was really out of state when it happened. I sound like I'm always out of state, but I might have been at a governors' meeting. And I just remember being, like, How could that have happened? That was my first thought. I remember thinking, How could that be in the front page of the paper? How did they get that letter? I just couldn't comprehend how that happened. As I said, I don't know for sure.

DePue: What was the public's reaction to the letter and to you being such a strong advocate in that?

Edgar: I think it was a positive reaction because the public was, I think overwhelmingly, in favor of this little boy staying with his adoptive family.

DePue: If you don't mind, I'm going to quote a little bit of this.

Edgar: Oh dear.

DePue: "Don't punish him, don't punish this little boy. Don't punish him for adult mistakes. Don't wound him or make him cry. Love him so much that as an adult, you can endure the pain of the choices made when he was a baby. Spare him any pain." So this is a pretty emotional letter that you're writing

Edgar: It was. I remember writing and feeling, Why would you hurt this little boy? I remember that so well. Why would you, as an adult, do this? Be the adult in this situation.

DePue: Did you think that you might be able to change his mind with this letter?

Edgar: I suppose I just wanted him to realize that he was going to inflict pain on a child, and if he really loved him, he would want what was the best for him. That's what I thought, and I thought maybe... I guess I did hope that he would at least read the letter and realize that he was going to hurt this child that he proclaimed he loved. (laughs) And I'm sure he did. I'm not saying he didn't.

DePue: Did the governor know that you'd written the letter?

Edgar: I can't remember if he did or not. I imagine he knew I'd written it. I doubt if I particularly showed him the letter. I don't remember that.

DePue: The way this particular story ended up, his father did regain custody of him, and that was a very emotional scene as well. But the footnote to this is that the law in Illinois was changed—something that I know the governor’s very proud of. From that time forward, the health and the safety and the welfare of the child is placed—

Edgar: Above.

DePue: —more important than the parent.²⁴

Edgar: Yeah.

DePue: Another related thing here is the governor is very open about his position on abortion. Obviously the counter to abortion is that you need to have a stronger adoption system, and that’s part of what motivated both of you. What were your views about abortion?

Edgar: I would say that Jim and I were not in total agreement on that very hot topic, so I just didn’t talk about it. That was my choice and preference.

DePue: Was that a position that the press was curious about and would ask you about on occasion?

Edgar: They were curious about it, but I can’t remember anybody specifically asking me about it or if they assumed that I didn’t agree with him, and I don’t know. I can’t remember that.

DePue: Part of the curiosity of the press and the general public has always been here’s this man who has such a reputation for being a good Christian, being a strong Baptist, not drinking, not smoking, and then they looked at the abortion issue and said, “Boy, this doesn’t match all those other things that we’re trying to put him into a box”.

Edgar: I think that’s true. I would say that Jim does have strong convictions, but that is one that he did not feel government should intervene in, for his own personal reasons, maybe. I don’t know if you discussed that with him or not.

DePue: Yeah, we did.²⁵ Let’s move on to one of the other areas that you really were a strong advocate for, and it’s pretty much the same focus on children. You mentioned already the Help Me Grow program. What exactly was that?

²⁴ On June 16, 1994, after a multi-year legal battle, the Illinois Supreme Court awarded custody of a three-year-old boy named Richard to his biological father. Justice James Heiple’s two page opinion, which did not cite any cases to support its argument, caused much controversy. On July 3, 1994, Governor Edgar signed a bill placed the best interests of a child ahead of parental rights in determining custody of a child following the denial or revocation of an adoption. The next year, April 30, 1995, the traumatic exchange of Richard between his adoptive and biological parents took place in view of the media. *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 1994; July 4, 1994; May 2, 1995. Mike Lawrence, April 1, 2009, 37-40.

Edgar: It was a blanket statement to help children grow up happy, healthy, and safe. Under the Help Me Grow program, we had separate programs. One was advocating for the use of child safety seats, and that children be placed in them correctly. We also advocated a CHAD Tag. A little boy named Chad was in an accident; his babysitter was driving. They got him to the hospital, but they didn't know who his parents were. So the CHAD tag stuck onto the child safety seat, giving the child's name, address, parent's name. So—

DePue: Children Have An iDentity.

Edgar: That's good. You're good. There was that component to Help Me Grow. There was an immunization component to Help Me Grow—just advocate for children receiving the right immunizations so that they could grow up happy and healthy.

DePue: The governor loves the picture of you in the book, *Meeting the Challenge*.²⁶

Edgar: Yeah, he knows that that's me with anybody getting a shot, whether it's me or a baby. (laughs) I'm not—

DePue: But you don't like to get a shot yourself.

Edgar: I don't. (laughter) So that's a very apropos picture. Also under Help Me Grow was PJ Huggabee, the bear that we partnered with Marshall Field's in Chicago. Fortunately, then-president Dan Skoda of Marshall Field's was on a child abuse prevention committee, and he understood what I was talking about when I went to him and asked if Marshall Fields would partner with me on this initiative. They did. I had a little piece of paper, and I wrote a description of this bear, what it should look like, and—

DePue: Where did you get the idea in the first place?

Edgar: Another first lady had some kind of—it was not sold through a store—a bear that was given to children. You know, at that time I think police officers gave children DARE bears, and I thought, Where am I going to get these bears, because I need a lot of them? I thought, Maybe some business would sell them and then donate another bear. So I think I just thought that up. Then the one that was donated would go to a child who was being taken from their home in the middle of the night with nothing that belonged to them.

DePue: Where the state would have to step in, the Children and Family Services would have to step in.

²⁵ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 39-40; Jim Edgar, September 2, 2009, 28-29.

²⁶ Tom Schafer, *Meeting the Challenge: the Edgar Administration, 1991-1999* (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, Office of the Governor), 1998.

Edgar: Correct, Children and Family Services would then take the child, and they may have nothing that belonged to them but this bear. Immediately, the child would be comforted by holding this bear. They needed to examine them—they would be comforted by the bear. It gave the children some security. It was a good program. We received a letter from someone in the Department of Children and Family Services, which had said, “Oh, just another thing we’re to deal with. Where are we going to put these bears, and how are we going to do it?” But she wrote to say how she had seen the effect that they had on the children and how appreciative she was that that program had been started.

DePue: I imagine letters like that mean the world to you when you’re out there and thinking, I wonder if this is going to make a difference or not?

Edgar: Yeah, it does. Another letter from a little girl that told about how she cried at night into this little bear that knew secrets that no one else knew. It was a beautifully written story about a little girl. We got pictures from people, and so it was very encouraging.

But I guess the most public viewing of PJ giving comfort, which is what he was created to do, was during the service honoring those who had been killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. Through a call that I made to then—first lady of Oklahoma, Cathy Keating, we arranged to have six or seven or eight hundred PJ bears flown to Oklahoma City for that service. On television, and on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* and all the books that were written about the Oklahoma City bombing, there was PJ being held tightly by people who needed comfort, and their hearts were broken because their children or a member of their family had been killed. He then became the star of Help Me Grow and actually went on to be used in other states where they had a Dayton Hudson or a Marshall Field’s. I know that Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio first ladies all took on the PJ program. They changed the color of the little bow around his neck. We used the green-and-white check of Marshall Field’s, but they all had a different color bow around their neck so you would know which state and which first lady PJ.

When people would come and buy a PJ bear, we would sign the paw. I signed it, and we had people that came and partnered with us. Chris Zorich was a big, strong Chicago Bear player that came and signed paws with me one day, and a couple of other great big Bear football players.

DePue: You’ve got a picture in the book of Ryan Wetnight as well.

Edgar: Yes, yes. And—

DePue: Did you have any idea when you started this it would have that kind of an impact?

Edgar: No, no. I had no idea. There were over thirty thousand sold. It had a long shelf life, and it was just quite a phenomenon.

DePue: We've got a little bit farther to go. Do you need to take a break, or you want to keep going here for a while?

Edgar: Let's keep going and see if we can...

DePue: Kids Care—that was another one of the initiatives.

Edgar: Um-hm. That came more from the governor's office than from my office.

DePue: How about your involvement with the national Ronald McDonald House?

Edgar: Yes. They were so good. Initially, when we started Help Me Grow, I went to them asking if they would partner with me to start this Help Me Grow program, and they were so good to give us some money that we asked for and help us start Help Me Grow. It turned out there was a toll number that you could call; no matter where you lived in the state, you could call the toll number and find out where you could go to get a safety seat if you didn't own one yourself, or a CHAD tag, or what immunizations you needed. It was kind of a hotline for parents to help their children grow up.

DePue: And one that you'd mentioned before, that Barbara Bush was so involved with, was literacy.

Edgar: Literacy.

DePue: But in this case, there was a little bit of a twist in the literacy, in terms of the focus that you put on literacy or that the state put on literacy: the READS program—Retirees Educating and Assisting in the Development of Students. That's a mouthful.

Edgar: That's a mouthful. I met (laughs) many retirees who were volunteering in a host of different areas with children, and I recognized that they had a twinkle in their eye and an energy that was given to **them** by the children that they were helping, and how healthy it was for the retirees as well as for the children to have someone to read to or read to them or listen to them read.

DePue: One other area in terms of advocacy was women's issues.

Edgar: Yes.

DePue: Any in particular that you were focusing on at the time?

Edgar: I think there were six. We focused on osteoporosis, which is a bone density problem that many women face. Jim's mother really had a terrible problem with that. Osteoporosis. Breast cancer at that time was not talked about nearly as much as it is today—just an awareness of self-examinations. Another one that we talked about was domestic violence. That was kind of a silent women's health issue because it was a women's health issue that was hidden

from the public. It might be your neighbor, but you wouldn't know about it because women didn't want to talk about it, but needed to.

DePue: I did hear this story from the governor. When it came to the point of a piece of legislation that dealt with covering mammograms on health care programs, that was a rare case where you did weigh in on the issue.

Edgar: Right, right. I did weigh in. I felt like it was just a common sense approach to dealing with a vitally important part of women's health. I don't know that this fits into this, but the young man that was my assistant at that time, Tom Faulkner, his wife is a forty-year-old woman; they have four children, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer and has had all the treatments, is going through it even right now. He's talked about how back then, there was so little and how it was so helpful to him as a husband and a father to know that the information we were working on then has helped him help her. So it's something that is still at work today.

DePue: One of the perks of being in this office, maybe—I don't know if you would see it this way—but you did get to meet lots of different people, and lots of different people who were rather famous.

Edgar: We did. I met the rich and the famous—I tell that sometimes—as well as the people who are making a huge difference every day by volunteering in the lives of people in Illinois. But on the rich and famous side of it, one day someone asked if I'd like to be in a movie, and I said, "Sure, I'd like to be in a movie." The movie turned out to be *My Best Friend's Wedding*; the star of that movie was Julia Roberts, and I was so excited. I went to Chicago to be an extra in the movie and spent fourteen hours working that day as an extra; it was great fun, but it was a long day.

DePue: I don't recall you in that movie.

Edgar: You would not have seen me in that movie. (DePue laughs) Jim and I went to the great opening premier of *My Best Friend's Wedding*, and we watched it from start to finish, and we didn't see me in it. They warned all of the extras that you might end up on the cutting room floor. Although I didn't see me and Jim didn't, I am in the movie for less than a second, if that's possible. That's how long I was in the movie. There is a picture that was freeze-frame, and you can see me with some other women at a wedding shower that was happening. All the footage that was taken that day of that wedding shower, there's only maybe thirty seconds of that whole day of filming in the movie itself. But I can say that I was in a movie with Julia Roberts. My roles did not come pouring in; calls didn't come pouring in, so I had to leave that career behind.

DePue: It sounds like you met the Bushes—seniors—and I assume you met the Clintons as well.

Edgar: Met the Bushes; the Clintons; the Fords, President and Mrs. Ford. Also met Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter—at separate events. And Laura—

DePue: Any of those people that really stick out to you?

Edgar: I think my favorite one—and maybe because I spent time with her—was Barbara Bush because I felt like she gave women freedom to be themselves. You know, she wasn't a size six, she let her hair be white, and she was very candid; she's a warm, friendly person, and you just couldn't help but like her, so everybody would want to be able to emulate her in some way, and she made a huge difference. She was a hard-, hardworking first lady, and I always thought she never got nearly enough credit for all that she did. But she was terrific.

DePue: Let me change gears here and talk about maybe one of the downsides in the administration, and that was the long, ongoing MSI investigation, and what the newspapers loved to label as a scandal.

Edgar: I'd learned, by the time that came up, how to separate myself from some of the bad and hard times. Of course I knew it was going on and I knew what was happening, and that was a hard time, but I didn't hang around that topic a lot. I was busy, because this is getting towards the end of these eight years. I had a lot going on, so I kept busy enough and I kept my mind away from that as much as I could.

DePue: What did you think about those people who brought some discredit to the administration, to the governor himself?

Edgar: (pause) I'm sure Jim made reference to this, but when you are **the one** that is responsible for I don't know how many thousands of people all across the state, I guess I feel like you do the best you can. Sometimes things slip through the cracks there, and I guess that's what happened.

DePue: Did you ever have any doubts about the governor himself—

Edgar: No.

DePue: —in this?

Edgar: I did not. Absolutely not.

DePue: I didn't expect any other (laughs) answer than that. The same timeframe that this is going on, he's wrestling with what to do with his future. This is the 1997 timeframe. You're getting to the point where you say, "Okay, if I'm going to run for reelection, I need to be announcing in the very near future." I know it was about the summer of 1997. Tell us about that whole process of deciding what to do.

Edgar: It was an interesting process, because I don't think there was a time when we sat down together that we didn't discuss. It was all part of Jim's talking it out, talking it out. We might finish a breakfast together, or a lunch or a dinner, and I'd think, I'm pretty sure he's going to run for the Senate. Another meal would come by, and I'd think, No, no, no, he's going to run for governor again, I'm pretty sure. Then another time I would think, I think he's going to actually leave politics (clock chimes) and enter the private sector. I just kept feeling this way for a long time, until he made the announcement. Even the night before and the morning of, if he had changed, I wouldn't have been a bit surprised, because it was so hard for him to leave.

But he'd worked **really** hard. He had given 150 percent to the job of governor. He was getting tired, and I think he was ready for a change. But when you have put so much in to this kind of a career, it's hard to just say, "See you later, folks. I'm out of here." We went to Washington, DC. We talked to people, they talked to us, they talked to him, they talked to me about what a wonderful thing it was to be in the United States Senate, how he would be such a good Senator. Then he would talk about it, but I never saw him get excited about running for the United States Senate, not ever, even after these wonderful trips where they would try to convince him and me that that's what he really wanted to do. As far as running for governor another time, he really loved being governor. He had done a lot, a lot of good things as governor, but it's almost like you fight these battles with people, and you work so hard to do what you think is right and to convince the legislature and the public and everything. It takes a lot out of you. So, as I know he told you, he had three speeches prepared—

DePue: We haven't actually had that conversation yet.

Edgar: Oh.

DePue: But that's okay, because I've heard it all in detail from Mike Lawrence.

Edgar: (laughs) Well, good, because Mike would tell you there were three speeches prepared. I was in my office the night before the announcement, and he was up in the room where he was going to make this announcement, practicing, and he came down—

DePue: This is in the mansion?

Edgar: Yeah, it was in the ballroom that accommodates many people. He came in and said, "You know, I've got a problem here with this speech." And I said, "Oh, what's the problem?" He said, "I cannot get through it. I can't get through this speech. I just kind of fall apart." And I said, "Well, you know, you do not have to say that you're not going to run again. You could run for governor again, or you could run for the United States Senate, and you don't have to decide if you don't want to till tomorrow. You do what you want to do. You

do not have to leave politics.” “Yeah, I know.” So then he leaves, and I go talk to Mike and say, “Mike, Jim’s got a problem; (laughs) he can’t get through this speech. What’s going to happen?” They just had it set up so that the next morning, he could make a decision what he was going to do.

DePue: It was still three things that were laying in front of him that close to the actual announcement?

Edgar: It was. They said it was a great secret, but the reason nobody knew is because he didn’t know either. (laughs) His staff didn’t know. People didn’t know. I didn’t know. I couldn’t have told anybody what he was going to do, because I wasn’t 100 percent sure myself.

DePue: But you know what the conventional wisdom is about this subject and about your role in the decision.

Edgar: Um-hm, I know what the conventional wisdom is, which is incorrect.

DePue: What is the conventional wisdom?

Edgar: That I did not want him to run and therefore he didn’t, which is not true. He will tell you, when you get to that point, that I would have supported him in whatever choice he made, and he knew that.

DePue: Why?

Edgar: You’d have to have walked in his shoes and my shoes to know what it takes for someone who does not come from money, who is from a small family, to become the governor of the state of Illinois. We had not the financial resources to put into this campaign for governor, or a prominent family background that was well-connected around the state. Not an elite education from Harvard or Yale or Stanford. It just took a lot of hard work, and Jim worked really hard. I would not have said...

DePue: Were you concerned about his health and what the impact would be?

Edgar: Yeah, I was concerned about his health. I know the kids and I have discussed the fact that unless he made the decision on his own of what he wanted to do, it’d be more stressful to leave. Some people leave a work they’ve had for many, many years, and a week later, they have a heart attack and die.

DePue: You told me before, in our first interview session, that he had a hard time coming home and relaxing.

Edgar: Um-hm.

- DePue: When you were going through this process and he was going through this process where the three options are run for the Senate, run for governor, retire—were you able to envision him as a retired guy?
- Edgar: I never have and wouldn't envision him as a retired person, because he will never be retired in the sense that we might consider somebody, with their feet up on the coffee table or sitting in a La-Z-Boy with their feet propped up. That is just not Jim Edgar, and he'll never (laughs) be doing that.
- DePue: We know what the final decision was. Do you remember that speech, then, when he actually told the public, and maybe you and everybody else on his staff as well, what the final decision was?
- Edgar: By the time he gave the speech, I pretty well knew what he was doing. And by the time he gave the speech, he felt good about it, which is quite amazing given that I was pretty sure what he was going to say. But I wouldn't have been surprised if he had switched it at the eleventh hour or one minute till.
- DePue: But he had indicated to you that he was going to give his speech to retire?
- Edgar: Um-hm. And by the time he gave it, I know that he knew it was the right thing for him. Not for anybody else, but for him he knew it was. Isn't there a song that goes, "You got to know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em"? And I think that other governors who came into that new governors' school with him and served four years and eight years and then elected to run again and serve twelve years, (pause) if they had it to do over again, would have known when to fold 'em.²⁷
- DePue: Jim Thompson would be the logical person to look to, because he wasn't for twelve years, he was for fourteen.
- Edgar: I mean, during that particular time period across the nation. Things changed fairly dramatically from the time Jim left the governor's office. The next four years held some different—those particular four years, it was hard to be a governor.
- DePue: I've heard from several different people about a meeting that was held at the state fairgrounds—this would have been before these three speeches were written—where the governor went around and asked this small group of very close advisors what their votes were: if it was the Senate, if it was the governorship, or if it was retirement. Everybody got a chance to vote, and they all remember which way they voted. Did you get a vote? I had been told you did get a vote.²⁸

²⁷ "The Gambler," by Kenny Rogers, was a number one hit in 1979 and won Rogers a Grammy award.

²⁸ For other perspectives on Jim Edgar's thinking about his course of action after his second term, see Al Grosboll, November 6, 2009, 44-46; Joan Walters, August 13, 2009, 31-32; Mike Lawrence, July 3, 2009, 2-12;

Edgar: I don't remember having a vote. That's interesting. I wonder if I was there. We'll have to ask somebody. They said I did have a vote?

DePue: Yeah—Mike Lawrence, Al Grosboll, Mike McCormick—

Edgar: They would remember how I voted because they remember all this better than I do.

DePue: Their recollection is that you voted for retirement—at least that's what I recall.

Edgar: Yeah, I probably did. I'm sure I would have. That's how I would have voted.

DePue: That gets us to the end of the term. In 1998, something else happened in your personal life, because I believe you got a college diploma.

Edgar: Yes, I sure did. Oh, that was an exciting happening.

DePue: Had you been working on this all the way through the secretary of state years and—

Edgar: No, I think I had stopped working on it by the time Jim became secretary of state. Then I had checked into what they called a Board of Trustees degree at Eastern, where I had done my college work. The woman who was the director of that program and still is, Kate Woodard, came over to the mansion, and she brought all the information and showed me exactly how much I had left and what I would need to do to graduate. She left, and I remember thinking, There's no way I can do this. I remember gathering all the papers and stuff she brought, and kind of throwing them into the bottom drawer of my file cabinet and thinking, Oh, I just can't get this all done. Then I revisited it about a year later and decided that if I was going to get this done, I really would want to get it done by my fiftieth birthday. So I mapped out what I needed to do and was able to take the courses and graduate, thirty years after Jim graduated. He was the commencement speaker at Eastern, which was not planned because I was going to be graduating; we didn't know, when he agreed to speak, that I was going to have everything finished and ready to graduate. So I was the last one who graduated that day; Jim gave me my diploma, and that was really quite a milestone. It was another one of those really fun moments in my life. Happy and...

DePue: Were there instructions that nobody was supposed to cheer as all the graduates came up? I'm wondering if there was a big round of applause and a lot of cheering when you were the last one to cross the stage.

Edgar: I just was so focused on Jim and walking towards him and getting the diploma. I don't remember exactly. (laughs) Jim probably would, but I don't.

DePue: Did you have an opportunity to help Mrs. Ryan, Lura Lynn Ryan, learn about what it was going to be like to live in the mansion, to be the first lady—those kinds of things?

Edgar: I would have been so happy to have shared with her different experiences, but I wasn't asked, so...

DePue: That didn't happen.

Edgar: It didn't happen.

DePue: This is probably a good time to stop for today. There are some things that I did want to talk to you about in terms of those years after retirement, but maybe I'll give you and the governor some options on how we want to deal with that.

Edgar: Okay.

DePue: But any final comments about the time you served as first lady, the time that Jim was the governor of the state?

Edgar: Oh my goodness. Looking back now, this many years later, how much I learned during that time, and how much I grew as a person; how much I respect, and I think I grew to a great tolerance, all different kinds of peoples and personalities because I had a chance to meet people on the West Side of Chicago...

One area that I would just mention: helping children grow up happy, healthy, and safe. I met with a group of young men who were gang members in Chicago, after I'd gone to a funeral (clock chimes) for a young man who had been shot by gang members; he was not in a gang, he was in a junior college, doing well, and had no connection to gangs. Then there was a cartoon in the *Chicago Tribune*, and it said, "Whose gang colors are baby blue and pink?" referring to small children who were even getting caught in the crossfires of the gangs and being killed. So we had a summit on violence at the mansion. I guess all these years later, in Chicago they're dealing with—it seems like it's almost daily—some young person being shot either in the crossfire or by a gang member. I reflect on that time. The *Tribune* did a big series about it, gang violence, and the number of kids that were dying. I'm thinking, Here we are. It's so bad there now. That bothers me. It troubles me quite a bit. That's just something that is kind of a leftover mystery, a leftover unsolved issue that—

DePue: Some unfinished business?

Edgar: Yeah, it really does bother me. I've been thinking about it lately because I do watch WGN news, and I read the *Tribune*. I don't know why I'm bringing that up, to be truthful, except that it's on my mind because it just keeps happening every day.

DePue: Of the many things that you were able to accomplish during those eight years, what's the one that you look back on most fondly or most proud of today?

Edgar: If I could have taken every child that was removed from their home because of abuse or neglect and hugged them, I would have done that, but I couldn't. So I guess I was most proud that I was able to see that they had that little PJ bear to hug. That involved the general public, because they wanted to help; they knew about it as well, and there wasn't anything they could do—like I feel right now—but they could go buy this bear, and they knew that what they were doing was helping abused and neglected kids. The *Tribune* was doing a series on abuse and neglect, not on gang violence, which is what I'm having trouble with right now, figuring out why it's so bad and got worse instead of better. I know why, but I don't have a solution. But I feel like with the help of a lot of caring citizens, we were able to touch those children in some way; that somehow they knew somebody out there, somewhere, cared about them and gave them this little gift.

DePue: To end the interview on a high note, how did you feel about Jim going out and the very high approval ratings at the time he turned over the reins?

Edgar: I was so proud of him because I felt like he earned it, he deserved it. As hard as it was to walk away from life in a mansion and being governor of the state of Illinois—that was a hard decision—he had done such a good job that it has given him and our entire family a place in history that is admired, and I am grateful to him for that.

DePue: Let's end on that note. Thank you very much, Mrs. Edgar.

(end of interview #2 #3 continues)

Interview with Brenda Edgar

ISG-A-L-2010-039.03

Interview # 3: November 23 & December 21, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, November 23, 2010. Actually, I'm sorry, it's Tuesday, December 21, 2010, and I'm with Mrs. Brenda Edgar. Good morning.

Edgar: Good morning.

DePue: A little bit of an explanation about why I got two dates in there. We met on November twenty-third, and about ten minutes of our interview did not record properly, so we're going back and picking up the beginning of that interview. But since that time, you're out in Colorado now?

Edgar: Yes, we are.

DePue: Spending some time with the children and grandchildren, I suspect.

Edgar: That's correct. We're getting ready for Christmas with everyone.

DePue: When we last started, we were talking about the timeframe when you and Governor Edgar were leaving office. And I wanted to read a quote from the book *Meeting the Challenge: The Edgar Administration, 1991-1999*. This is a quote about you: "No governor's wife has been more active than Mrs. Edgar. The high-profile position can be effective if the first lady wants to use it, but first they have to be good at it, and Mrs. Edgar is. She has a very winning personality." Did you feel like you were really successful, coming out of that position?²⁹

Edgar: Coming out of it, I felt like I had done the best that I could do in that position, and that was a good feeling. Not to say that there are not others that could have done better or more, but I felt like I did the best that I could do, and again, that did make me feel good.

²⁹ Tom Schafer, *Meeting the Challenge: the Edgar Administration, 1991-1999* (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, Office of the Governor), 1998.

DePue: I know, just talking to the governor, that he had high praise for you as well, and thought that even though maybe that wasn't what you had in mind when the two of you first got married, you rose to the challenge and did an excellent job. Let's go ahead and talk about the transition of leaving office, and the first challenge is you've got to move. Tell us about that.

Edgar: Oh, that was really just a **major** undertaking. As you can imagine, having lived in the mansion for eight years—there was an enormous attic at the mansion on the third level, which is really the fourth level, because you enter on the ground level at the mansion. As Jim would be given plaques, and honors and different things would come to us, they would kind of just quietly go up into that attic. When it was time to move, all of those memorabilia were packed up and loaded on two big semi moving vans and taken to our home outside of Champaign, in the country. Many people had a hand in packing our belongings when we left Springfield, and the Chicago office was packed up, Jim's office in the capitol was packed up, and our home was packed up. We even had a log home outside of town, where we went on weekends, and that was packed up, and everything was delivered to our home. It was just like a mountain of boxes.

DePue: You mentioned all of this was delivered to your home, but where was the new home?

Edgar: The new home was—is, actually, because we live there now—located outside of Champaign in a rural area between Mahomet and Seymour. It's a very quiet and peaceful place that we landed, although we had originally believed when Jim took the position with the university that he would walk to work and we would be just right near campus, and that didn't happen at all. There wasn't any home available at the time within walking distance of the campus, and as we started looking for a home, we just kept moving farther and farther away from the campus, actually, in order to have a place that had some privacy. Also, it was terribly important to Jim that it had mature trees and landscape. So we now sit right on the Sangamon River, a rather historic little spot.

DePue: Can you describe the property a little bit more for us?

Edgar: We have eight acres, and as I mentioned, we sit right on the Sangamon River. Our house is back from the road quite a ways, which gives us quite a lot of privacy back there. It is gated, and I'm grateful for that, because people do drive by. Especially when we first moved in, I think it kind of became a point of interest to see where we had landed after eight years in the governor's mansion. But if people drive—I can see them from our kitchen window if they creep along out on the road—but they can't see me, so that's fine.

DePue: Have you done any renovation to the property?

Edgar: We did. When we moved in, we (laughs) added a lot of storage, we added an office for Jim, and over the garage, an exercise room, which also has storage.

DePue: Back to that timeframe. How difficult was it for the two of you, and especially for the governor himself, to adjust to not being in office anymore?

Edgar: I think the first months were a bit euphoric for both of us. It was such a freedom of daily intense responsibilities, and being able to go where we wanted to go when we wanted to go and do what we wanted to do. We took eight weeks or twelve weeks—I can't think right now—off completely and went out of state. And at that time, it was just such freedom from being in a glass bowl that we both just kind of walked around smiling.

As time went by, we still had many leftover things to do, and that took probably a couple years, if not more, to complete all of those ties. So it was probably almost three to four years before we were not still in some way or another tied a little bit to who we had been. Now, I say that, “who we had been”—who I had been maybe as first lady. I think I have moved away from that. Jim, I think, will always—as you know, a governor is always called governor even after they're out of office, and it seems to me like the responsibility and the respectability of one who has served as governor remains with that person always, even after they're out. I think for a first lady, that's kind of a title that diminishes and goes away.

So I feel like there have been times, definitely—I know Jim and I both miss the people that we used to see all over the state. Actually, during the ten years that Jim was secretary of state, as well as the eight years he was governor, we were seeing people in Chicago and all over the state on a very regular basis. We would see them, and then suddenly we don't go to those same events and locations as often as we did. So you are kind of cut off from people that you've known for, really, eighteen years, and that part was difficult. And especially, I miss the people in the mansion, because I saw them every day. I know Jim missed the people in the mansion, in his offices, in security, because, again, you see those people all the time—you get to know them, you know their families—and that's a big adjustment.

DePue: Did you see any changes in the governor in those first few months after he was out of office?

Edgar: Well, he definitely had time, after probably twenty or more years, to kind of unwind, relax and be not so uptight all the time, and just enjoy the day.

DePue: Was he more like the young man you remember when you first started to date?

Edgar: Yes, I think so, and maybe even better, in the fact that he had great ambitions and he had achieved them, he had been successful, and we left on a positive foot when we drove out of the gates of the mansion in Springfield. So I think

it was even better. You had the sense at that time—I think we both did—of mission accomplished, and well done.

DePue: I know by the time you left office, the two of you were already grandparents, but we haven't talked much about the two children yet and what they've been doing since those years in office. So why don't we start with Brad?

Edgar: When we moved into the mansion, Brad was working in Washington, DC, as an advance person for the first President Bush. I guess he would have been the—

DePue: Well, now he goes by Bush 41.

Edgar: Okay, (laughs) fine. He was out there doing that, and I think he was out there two years and came back to Chicago, worked in the financial world, and met Stacey—Nehring at the time. They married. Of course, we were still in the mansion when they married. That was in 1994, and that was really quite a fun and happy time for everybody. They were married at our church, right directly across the street from the mansion, and we had the reception at the mansion, so that was a real fun, happy season of our lives, all of us. Brad and Stacey then lived in Chicago and moved to Colorado in, I think it would have been 1997, and they've been out here since then.

DePue: I think that's about to the point we got in our last interview, and it was at this point your cell phone rang. You might have saved the day (Edgar laughs) with that cell phone call.

Edgar: Well, good. After Brad and Stacey moved to Colorado, they had their second child while they were living out here. The first one was born in Chicago, at Evanston. The first one is Dakota. The second child is Cali Ann, and then they had a third child out here, Ellie. So we were with all three of them yesterday.

DePue: Well, very good.

Edgar: And they've grown up. (laughs) Growing up, they're growing up.

DePue: I want to thank you for allowing me to correct the record here and what was obviously my mistake on the recording end of it, and I take this opportunity to wish you a very merry Christmas. I'll put this back together again, and we'll have a complete record. Thank you again, Mrs. Edgar.

Edgar: Thank you, Mark, and Merry Christmas to you.

DePue: Goodbye.

Edgar: Bye.

(interview #3-Continued follows)

Interview with Brenda Edgar
ISG-A-L-2010-039.03 Continued
Interview # 3: November 23, 2010
Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: We were talking about Brad, and he was back from being on Bush's advance team.

Edgar: Yes, in Washington, DC. He came back to Illinois, and he lived in the Chicago area. He did some work in the financial sector of the world. After he and Stacey were married for a few years, they had the opportunity to move to Colorado, and they both wanted to move west. Our first grandson was two years old when they moved. Brad today is working to help secure monies for affordable housing projects.

DePue: How about Elizabeth?

Edgar: Elizabeth was in high school when we moved in the second semester of her senior year. She went off to college. After she graduated, she worked in Chicago for a year and then came to the University of Illinois, where she got her Master's degree in education. She taught high school English in Champaign for a year and decided that if she was ever going to make the move west, she better pack up her bags and go. So as we were kind of moving into Champaign, she moved on to Colorado where she taught high school, met the man that she married, and moved to Summit County, Colorado. She works part time for an early childhood education organization in Summit County.³⁰

DePue: Her husband's name?

³⁰ Colorado was not unfamiliar to the Edgars, who lived there from April 1975 to December 1975 while Jim Edgar worked for the National Conference of State Legislatures. Although Elizabeth was very young, Brad attended elementary school during this period. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 29, 2009, 64-80. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

- Edgar: John Lowe, and it's L-o-w-e.
- DePue: What does he do?
- Edgar: John is a nurse at the Summit County hospital, which is about two minutes from where they live.
- DePue: Have they managed to have a normal life even though they're both the children of an Illinois governor?
- Edgar: Yes, I think both of them live very much as private citizens and enjoy that and are happy to be exactly where they are.
- DePue: How many grandchildren do you have now?
- Edgar: We have five now. We added three after we moved from Springfield.
- DePue: Is one of them Brad's, so there's three now for Brad?
- Edgar: Three for Brad and two for Elizabeth and John.
- DePue: Why don't you walk me through the birth order and—here's a test for any grandmother—the year they were born and the name.
- Edgar: I can probably do that. Dakota is fifteen now, and he was born in 1995. Next was his sister Cali and she was born in 1998. Then in 2000 Ellie was born. Those three belong to Brad and Stacey. In 2001, John and Elizabeth had Jake, and 2005 they had Cecelia.
- DePue: Is it Jacob, or is it strictly Jake?
- Edgar: Just Jake.
- DePue: Well, that's interesting.
- Edgar: That is interesting. I don't know how they came to that, but that was **their call**.
- DePue: They didn't consult their parents?
- Edgar: They did not, and I have to tell you, for each one of our five grandchildren I made a list of names that I thought would be wonderful, and of my five lists, I do not believe any of my names were chosen. I made those lists because at the time I didn't realize that grandparents don't name their grandchildren. I know that now, but by the time I'd started making them, I had to keep making them for all five of them. I spent hours on those lists (laughter) and my grandmother duties.

- DePue: To put you on the spot—put them on the spot perhaps—any of these grandchildren have a political future, do you think?
- Edgar: One is on the student council. She's in the sixth grade. That's Ellie. Dakota's a very outgoing young man with lots and lots of friends. Jake is a serious young person, but very...very engaging with other people and a very articulate speaker.
- DePue: And he can't be that old for being an articulate speaker. How old is he?
- Edgar: He's very articulate. He's nine years old. (laughs)
- DePue: Well, his grandpa was never known for his speechmaking ability.
- Edgar: He wasn't, and Jake has been a good speechmaker. He's had the lead role in the summer play *Aladdin*. He's just articulate and speaks quite well in front of people.
- DePue: Spoken like a proud grandmother here.
- Edgar: Yes.
- DePue: Of the two children, Brad and Elizabeth, which side do they take after, you or the governor?
- Edgar: I will say both of them are a mix of both of us. If one of them would become more involved in the political arena, it would be our daughter Elizabeth. She's quite involved in her community. I don't know that either one of them would ever want to run for anything, but it would be her. Our daughter-in-law Stacey is also very involved.
- DePue: You mentioned before that at this point in your life you're pretty much traveled out, which would suggest you've done quite a bit of traveling over the last ten years or so.
- Edgar: Oh, my goodness. (laughs)
- DePue: Where all have you been?
- Edgar: I've been to so many places. In the last ten years, we have been to Ethiopia; we have been to—
- DePue: That doesn't sound like much of a vacation spot.
- Edgar: Well, it wasn't exactly a vacation. (laughs) We had traveled there with the World Food Program. We've been to Istanbul and the Mediterranean islands along there. We've been to England a couple of times; we've been to

Switzerland, we've been to the Netherlands, and to... I'm not naming all of them. (laughter)

DePue: That sounds like plenty anyway.

Edgar: There are more that could be added onto that list, as well as travel within the United States.

DePue: I was going to say, I'm sure you spent a lot of time traveling in the United States.

Edgar: Yes, yes we have.

DePue: Let's turn it back to politics some, because Governor Edgar's political career didn't end abruptly and then he never thought again about entering the political arena. It sounds like he thought about it quite a bit through a succession of years. Before we get to that, though, to kind of set the stage here: he's out of office, and George Ryan is in office. As that administration continues, there is more and more noise about the corruption within the Ryan administration; the allegations going on with the secretary of state years and the license scandal, all of that. Just wanted to get your thoughts about what that was like, hearing what had happened to the governorship after you and Governor Edgar were out of it.

Edgar: It was a series of very unfortunate events that happened after we left, and it was difficult. It was difficult for Jim and for me to watch things kind of unravel. Jim had worked incredibly hard to leave the state solvent, with reserves, and to watch it be...

DePue: Undermined?

Edgar: ...used so freely, (laughs) I think would be—was very difficult. Again, you'd have to have spent eight years working really hard to know what feelings he had and I had. So it was hard to see that happening.

DePue: That gets us to the run in 2002 for governor. Leading up to that, people could tell that George Ryan was an injured governor, and he announced fairly early that he was not going to run for reelection.³¹ Do you recall any people coming and talking to Governor Edgar about the possibility of running again?

Edgar: I do recall people talking about it. I don't think that I paid a great deal of attention to that at the time, because I didn't see that happening, personally.

DePue: Because he didn't seem to be interested in it?

³¹ Ryan announced his decision August 8, 2001.

- Edgar: It seems to me that there was a second approach to run that came to him, is that correct?
- DePue: Well, 2004 and 2006 are going to be much more involved in terms of the people coming and approaching him, at least from his side of the story.³²
- Edgar: Yes, right. Because I don't remember a whole lot of 2002, when you go back to that. I just don't remember thinking much of it at that time. Probably thinking, Well, yeah, there's plenty of people to take over.
- DePue: After Ryan is out of office and Blagojevich now is the governor, he goes to trial, and he's convicted. I think six and a half years is his conviction for a variety of charges—mail fraud and corruption charges, things like that—and he ends up going to federal prison.³³ What'd you think about the conviction?
- Edgar: I thought it was a very sad time for Illinois government. I just felt sad about it.
- DePue: In fact, he has been in the news lately because Lura Lynn Ryan is suffering from a serious lung ailment, and the doctors aren't giving her too much longer to live. There's a lot of talk now about him being released early. Would you be in favor of that?³⁴
- Edgar: I would be in favor of that. I would be, and I hope that comes to pass.
- DePue: For compassionate reasons or because he's served enough time, or both?
- Edgar: Both.
- DePue: Let's move on to 2004. Now, again, I've already talked to Governor Edgar about all this, and as he explained it, there wasn't much thought on his part in 2002, although there were people who were coming to him. That wasn't the case in 2004.
- Edgar: I do remember the case in 2004 when there was quite a lot of discussion.
- DePue: And this would have been for the U.S. Senate at that time.
- Edgar: At that time, um-hm.
- DePue: What were your feelings about that?

³² Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, November 18, 2010.

³³ As part of a federal investigation, Operation Safe Road, into corruption in the office of secretary of state, Ryan was indicted December 17, 2003. The investigation resulted in seventy-five convictions, including Ryan's. He was convicted April 17, 2006, on eighteen counts of the indictment, including racketeering, mail fraud, and lying to the FBI. *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 2006.

³⁴ Lura Lynn Ryan is George Ryan's wife. She was being treated for terminal lung cancer at the time of this interview, and on December 21, 2010, U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer denied Ryan's request for early release from prison to be with his wife. *Chicago Tribune*, December 22, 2010.

- Edgar: I would have been fine with it, but I never once felt like that was something that Jim really wanted to do. I don't know why; it's just a branch of government that didn't quite cause him to have this great desire to serve there. I would have been fine if he had really wanted to do it, but I didn't see that. I know that it doesn't matter what you're campaigning for if you don't have this burning passion; it takes so much work—more than anybody can imagine unless they've done it—to win those kind of things. And I'd also talked to a friend whose husband had been governor and ran for the United States Senate, and she was just saying what a different race that is when you're running for the United State Senate; all these outside entities come into your state, and it's just a different game. So I was willing, but I didn't see that spark in Jim's eye.
- DePue: If he had run for the Senate, that would put you in the position of having to decide, Do I live in Illinois or do I live in Washington, DC, if he wins?
- Edgar: It was a difficult time, because I would have been right there if he had decided to run, and yet I knew my geography well enough that with grandchildren in Colorado and Jim in Washington, DC, it certainly increased the distance between the grandkids and what I was hoping to do with them while they were young. It would have been challenging for me to have stepped up to the public life again.
- DePue: Would you have been ready at that time to hit the campaign trail as well?
- Edgar: I'm not sure that I would have been as energetic (laughter) maybe as in the past. I would have done what I could, but I don't know that I would have been as...
- DePue: Were you aware that he was getting approached not just from the Republican Party in Illinois, who was desperate to find a good candidate to run, but he was also getting people from the White House calling?
- Edgar: Yes, I was aware of that, and I knew that it was very difficult for him to make the call because it was a lot of pressure that was put on him. To do something that would have changed our lives immensely from where we had settled, and... It would just have required tremendous, tremendous changes all around us.
- DePue: Well, I've mentioned this before, and you know the conventional wisdom is that you are the one who was always saying, "Jim, don't do this. I don't want you to be running again."
- Edgar: Uh-huh.
- DePue: Did that conversation ever happen?

- Edgar: Oh, you know, we had the conversation, but it sure wasn't—and Jim probably told you that I've never, in any of his considerations for running, said, "Don't run," ever.³⁵
- DePue: Okay.
- Edgar: Okay.
- DePue: I won't ask again, because there's—
- Edgar: **Nobody** believes that. (laughs)
- DePue: There's one more opportunity, but I won't ask again.
- Edgar: But nobody believes that, so I don't think I can win on that one.
- DePue: You hear it all the time, then?
- Edgar: I do hear it all the time.
- DePue: After he bowed out—this is the 2004 election, he would have made his decision in late 2003 not to run—let's just say the election became rather bizarre after that, and we end up with Alan Keyes as the Republican candidate. They have to migrate him into the state—I think he was out in Maryland—and run for the Senate seat. What did you think of all of that?³⁶
- Edgar: I thought it was bizarre, so bizarre. I couldn't even understand it, and I don't to this day understand how that all happened. It was so strange. Politics is a very strange business.
- DePue: It certainly has seemed to be in Illinois.
- Edgar: It is, and it's not a very predictable world out there in the political world. I mean, you can't predict what might happen down the road, because things are so changeable.
- DePue: Maybe when we were growing up, we didn't think that was the case. Now there's no Soviet Union and there's a new enemy out there, and politics in the United States has certainly changed dramatically.
- Edgar: It has changed dramatically.

³⁵ Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 18, 2010, 8-9; Mark Boozell, interview by Mark DePue, September 9, 2009, 39.

³⁶ Republican nominee Jack Ryan withdrew from the U.S. Senate race June 25, 2004. On August 8, 2004, Keyes, who lived in Maryland and had no ties to Illinois, agreed to replace Ryan. *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 2004.

DePue: You're watching the Republican candidacy kind of unravel before your eyes. Did you ever think, Well, gosh, I wish that he was running?

Edgar: I felt, and I'm sure he did too, a sense of being torn, in that you were watching a disaster in front of your eyes with this person coming in from another state that nobody knew—running from our state, our state of Illinois, for the United States Senate seat—and thinking if Jim had chosen to run, that wouldn't have happened, and yet, knowing that had he chose to run, our life would have been turned upside down. I also, at that time and to this day, had a great concern about what a political campaign would have done to Jim's health. So that was kind of a bottom line for me, although had he chosen to do it, I would have supported him, and he knew that. I think he also knew that it would have been risky.

DePue: What we haven't mentioned about that 2004 senatorial election is the opponent, and that of course was Barack Obama, who was kind of under the radar screen. He was picking up momentum in Illinois, obviously, because he won the Democratic primary, but then he went out to the Democratic convention in Boston in August of 2004, and he delivered that speech, and now his career is going off like a skyrocket. Any comments about Barack Obama as a Senate candidate at that time?

Edgar: My comment would be that one day I was walking through our family room—the television was on, and there was some kind of a political talk show on—and I just stopped in my tracks and looked at the television, and there was this young man. I thought he was incredibly articulate, and he had a charisma about him. And I said something to Jim, I said, "This guy is really good." This was before the convention, but it was Barack Obama. Jim knew him from when Jim was governor and Obama was in the state Senate, and he said, yeah, he had met him, and he was articulate, and yes, he did have a charisma about him. But I don't ever remember before being just kind of stopped in my tracks by somebody on television. I think it was his articulate manner of speaking and ability to answer these questions, and I was kind of taken by him. So not to say that I am a judge of politicians—I'm not that—but at that time I thought, My goodness, he's really good. I think I said all that to say I wasn't shocked when he was asked to speak at the convention and wowed everybody and became from there a political rock star on national stage as president of the United States.

DePue: Now, here's a little bit of what-if: What if Jim Edgar had run for the Senate in 2004 against Barack Obama, assuming that Barack still makes this speech at the Democratic convention. Who would have been victorious?

Edgar: That is just a giant what-if, and we will never know the answer to that, will we?

DePue: (laughs) You're dodging the question altogether.

Edgar: You got it. (laughter)

DePue: Darn. If I was a political pundit, I'd ask you five or six times and keep pestering you. Let's move on one year down the road, because really by the time you get to 2005, you got to make a decision whether or not you're going to run for governor. Rod Blagojevich has been governor for three years, and already there is a lot of gnashing of teeth and people scratching their heads; certainly in Republican Party circles, because they're looking at the political bench of potential candidates to run against Blagojevich, who they know, as the governor himself said, has got to be beaten. So they start beating down his [Edgar's] door, your door as well. Do you remember that?

Edgar: I **definitely** remember that because there was so much discussion, so many phone calls, meetings with friends and former staffers, and conversations that Jim had with people. I was kind of watching all of it going on.

DePue: Did you feel even worse about the condition of the governorship seeing what Blagojevich was doing versus what Ryan had done?

Edgar: I did. I just was appalled at what was happening to the state of Illinois, and at the same time I was appalled, I kept thinking, But there has to be somebody besides Jim Edgar that could do this job. There's got to be somebody else out there. Once again, Jim and I had a lot of conversations about this, what he would do, and he knew that if he decided to run, that would have been fine with me.

DePue: I want you to elaborate a little bit more if you can about what Governor Blagojevich was doing that bothered you. Can you put your finger on it?

Edgar: I did not see him, from my vantage point, as a servant of the people of Illinois. I think from my vantage point, he had a mistaken idea of what his job was as governor of Illinois and almost turned himself into a king, making decisions that were not his to be made. You know, sidestepping the hard work that had to be done. He didn't do that. He wasn't there; he wasn't available; he wasn't—he was having, I think, a good time, but it's a big, important, hard job, and he made none of the difficult decisions that were so important to the well-being of Illinois.

DePue: When he came into office, he ran against George Ryan even though George Ryan wasn't on the ticket; Jim Ryan was. But it was George Ryan and that billion-dollar deficit he's handing over to me. Well, by that time [2005], Blagojevich had taken that one billion, and four years later it was somewhere between one and thirteen and a half billion, which is what it is now. Let's just cut it in half and say it's four or five billion. Did that come to mind as well when you're thinking about all of this?

Edgar: Oh, yeah, it just makes you like crazy because there's no (laughs)—no one at the head of the ship. It just had gone...amok.

- DePue: You had mentioned, though, when you were thinking about this—I guess this would be natural—you're going, Well, there ought to be somebody else out there.
- Edgar: This is a very big state, eleven and a half—
- DePue: Was anybody coming to mind?
- Edgar: Not exactly. I have to be honest. There was nobody that just stood at the—because this situation was like a gigantic avalanche (laughter) or snowball just rolling downhill. I knew that it was going to take somebody that had the inner strength to say no to a whole lot of people who had grown accustomed to getting a lot of financing that the state didn't have anymore. Jim had been there and done that, and I knew he could do it, and I didn't know anyone at that time who could. I kept thinking, There's probably somebody that's really tough in business who should come out and do that, but why would they want to do that?
- DePue: One of the leading candidates on the Republican side at the time was Judy Baar Topinka—and again, we're talking about 2005, a year and a half out. Did you not see Treasurer Topinka as being up to the task? Did you even know her?
- Edgar: Yes, I knew her. Maybe I'm to the wrong campaign. You think I am?
- DePue: No, I don't think so.
- Edgar: I felt that she would have been on task; she would have been there, in the office, working, which would have been a great improvement. And I guess I felt with her that if you have the ability not only to make difficult decisions herself, which I think she would have done, but chosen strong, strong people to work with you in that process, that she could have done it, yes.
- DePue: Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but you said, "She would have been there." Well, one of the digs on Rod Blagojevich was he wasn't there, literally and figuratively. He didn't even bother to live in Springfield, in the mansion. What's your thought about that, having spent eight years in that mansion?
- Edgar: It's a big responsibility, and I think you owe it to the people of Illinois to—it's a place, the mansion, that needs to be maintained almost daily; otherwise, it falls into disrepair because it was built in 1855. It had just constant little things that if you didn't tend to then they became great big things, which they are now, as I understand, although I haven't been there since we left. So that was just part of the big picture, things that weren't taken care of because he wasn't there.
- DePue: When I was talking to the governor about all of this—and I can't remember precisely at what point in this long process the two of you are going through

in trying to decide whether or not he needed to do this, if he had to do this—he said that at one point, you actually said, “Well, maybe you should do this.”

Edgar: At one point, I did. I don’t know how much he explained, but we had gone to Chicago. He wasn’t on a panel. I think he was a discussion leader? Is that what you recall or not?

DePue: I remember that this would have happened right before he went up to the event in Chicago.

Edgar: Well, actually I think we were at the event in Chicago, and we had—there’s been so much conversation about it, and you have to kind of—it’s a process to decide; you don’t just say, “Oh, yeah, I think I’ll run for governor again” or “I think I’ll run for governor” the first time or anything. It’s a real process and it takes a long time to make that kind of commitment. We got there, there were familiar faces, and I kind of looked around, and I guess I was kind of overcome by the great need that Illinois had for a good governor. I think I said to him, “Jim, maybe you should do this.” It’s just not too many minutes before he’s going to speak, and in the introduction—or maybe at the conclusion, I can’t remember—he’s going to say what he’s going to do. So we kind of slipped away to a private room and talked it through again, and he is, he isn’t, he is, he isn’t, what to do, what to do? Finally, I guess his sound mind maybe clicked in and knew that, No, not really. (laughs) Surely there is someone else who can do this job, you know. So he made that announcement that day.

DePue: It sounds like, though, that you’re torn between this notion that Illinois has to have a change and he’s the only guy who can do it or—

Edgar: I think we both felt a huge responsibility because we both knew that he knew what needed to be done and could have done it. But then the other side of the coin was, Okay, but at what cost to you physically? Do you, you know... (laughs)

DePue: Again, this is something that just recently I talked to the governor himself, and he put it to four years. That’s what he figured it would take off his life.

Edgar: Oh my goodness, at least four years, if it wasn’t more than that. Oh my, if he had survived four years. I am really honest in saying I’m not sure that the reentering and the condition of things wouldn’t have just about done him in, the stress would have been so great.

DePue: Which says a lot about your own thought process of almost getting to the point and saying, “Maybe we should do this.” That says a lot about what you thought about the condition of Illinois at the time.

Edgar: It was, yeah, just...disastrous.

- DePue: And it hasn't improved too much (laughter) since that time. Thank you for letting me kind of pry into that part of it, because I think that's important to understand the process—like you said yourself—of making these decisions. It's not just something you wake up one day and say, "Let's do this."
- Edgar: No, you wake up one day and say, "Let's do it," and by noontime you're saying, "Let's don't," and by mid-afternoon, "Maybe," and you just have to go through all of this process.
- DePue: Let's get back to the private side of your lives, and I want you to reflect on a couple of the other things that have taken up an awful lot of the governor's time since he's been out of office. So what would you put at the top of the list in terms of pleasant distractions, maybe, or other—
- Edgar: "Pleasant distractions" for Jim? (laughs)
- DePue: Yeah. There's the work that he's got here, but let's go beyond that. What else is keeping him busy?
- Edgar: He would tell you that his **pleasant** distraction is his love of horses.
- DePue: And that's all there is to say about that?
- Edgar: That is something that I really don't understand either. There's something about the history of the bloodlines of horses and the adrenaline of the race and trying to figure out how to make the race work, and so it's a very consuming, interesting game that those who love it really love it.
- DePue: Well, isn't it interesting, the analogy that you always hear about political races is, "It's a horse race."
- Edgar: And I think that Jim transferred his political figuring out how to make something happen over to the horse race.
- DePue: I think when we were talking before, you used the word "passion" or "intensity."
- Edgar: (laughs) Yes.
- DePue: Would that be appropriate, that he transferred that over to the horse races?
- Edgar: Absolutely, yes, the word "passion" would be a very apt description.
- DePue: Yeah, I don't want to put words in your mouth.
- Edgar: No, that would be just exactly right.
- DePue: But part of this passion he got into because of your own father.

- Edgar: Yeah, that's true. My dad did have the passion that Jim has, but with a lot more restraint.
- DePue: He described himself, though, he's not a big gambler; that's not the part of it that he's...
- Edgar: Oh, no, it's not that part, not at all. And neither was my dad, neither one of them. It's not that side of it, which people think about when they think about horse racing. They think about the gambling side of it, but nope, for both of them it was not that, it was just the game itself—putting it together and coming up with the horse that had the right bloodlines to win the Kentucky Derby.
- DePue: And that gets into the side of it that means that you're owners of lots of horses, right?
- Edgar: Yes, Jim is the owner of lots of horses. (laughs)
- DePue: But not you?
- Edgar: I don't know if I am or not. I don't think so. (laughs) Because that's kind of his thing.
- DePue: But there's a lot of money on the line for that. Do you see that as an investment, or do you see that as a hobby for him?
- Edgar: I see it as a hobby. Jim probably sees it as an investment, but I'm much more realistic. (laughs)
- DePue: You're not seeing much financial benefit from all of these horses?
- Edgar: No. I figure if he breaks even, then that's fine.
- DePue: Another one of the things I know that he is passionate about is history and reading. Has that been something that you've shared together?
- Edgar: I do love reading, although our choice of books naturally—we don't necessarily read the same books. But we do travel a lot, and we're in the car a lot, so we listen to books on tape. There's usually history along with suspense, mysteries that have a historical side to them, so we share those.
- DePue: Since we're two days out from Thanksgiving, I wonder if you could tell us about what the family traditions are for Thanksgivings and for Christmases.
- Edgar: They have been somewhat, I would say, interrupted just by our lifestyle. We probably don't have the cemented-in-place traditions that some families might have. Prior to Jim's being governor, we used to go to be with his mother or his brother and his family.

DePue: Fred, you're talking about?

Edgar: Yes. During the years that we were in the mansion, we had Thanksgiving there each year and invited family to come.³⁷ After that, we have pretty much been with my—not the whole time. We have gone to Colorado and had Thanksgiving with our kids, but as my parents got older, we would be more in Illinois and with them. So it's changed depending on where we have been in the state.

DePue: I understand your father has passed away re—

Edgar: Yes, that's right, uh-huh. My mother is still living. She's ninety-one, and she's in southern Illinois. The past three years, after my dad passed away, we have gone to visit my mother after Thanksgiving, and my brother is there. So he's with her on Thanksgiving, and we have stayed in Champaign and been happy to be the guests of some people who love to cook and have invited us very kindly to their home.

DePue: Well, it sounds like the kids and the grandkids don't often come back here for those holidays?

Edgar: They don't come back for Thanksgiving, and we're always out there for Christmas. It's rather difficult for them to be traveling that time of year. Our daughter—Elizabeth and John and their family—will be with Brad and Stacey, and they usually are together on Thanksgiving.

DePue: This is a peculiar question for you, but when you say “Colorado,” are you using the Southern Illinois accent or the Colorado accent?

Edgar: I don't know for sure. I'm not sure, because I think one of our grandsons recently caught me on that and told me I sounded like I was from somewhere because of the way I said Colorado. How do you say it?

DePue: Colorado. But you haven't been saying Colorado, you've been saying “Colorada.”

Edgar: Oh, I say “Colorada”?

DePue: Uh-huh.

Edgar: I don't know where that comes from, but apparently it might not be correct.

DePue: Well, it's just a colloquialism.

Edgar: I guess.

³⁷ For a memorable thanksgiving at Brenda's house shortly after Governor Thompson named him secretary of state, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 112.

DePue: And there's nothing **wrong** about it; it's part of who we are, I think. Let's kind of close up with some questions for you and a chance for you to reflect. We've talked about this a little bit, but having seen what has happened since Governor Edgar has been out of office for the last twelve years in Illinois, I think most people would say it's been quite an up-and-down bizarre kind of a political life for the state. (laughs) I think almost everybody might say that. Does it bother you—when people find out you're from Illinois and who you are, who your husband was—that Illinois ends up being a punch line for every joke out there?

Edgar: Truly it is a punch line for jokes. As a matter of fact, I can remember sitting at an outdoor restaurant out of state. I think we were out west, and there was a large table of people discussing Illinois politics and what a mess it was, not having a clue that we were sitting next to them. It was (laughs) pretty interesting, and I didn't say anything, and neither did Jim, but... So the subject of Illinois politics kind of springs up everywhere if you want to hear something entertaining or unbelievable, and yes, it bothers me, because I don't want our state to be viewed the way it is right now across the country.³⁸

DePue: It's a pretty deep hole that we're trying to dig ourselves out of.

Edgar: It sure is.

DePue: How about an overall assessment of your husband and as Governor Edgar—now maybe those are two different things.

Edgar: You know, he is pretty much who he is, and the overall assessment is that he has a very strong inner conviction of what he believes to be right, and he will defend that even if it's politically not popular. He did that when he was secretary of state, he did that when he was running for governor, and as an individual, Jim Edgar would do the same thing: to defend what is right or what he perceives to be right without—and that's not to say that he is not willing to listen to other people, because he is. That's another attribute that he has, that he's not unwilling to hear all the sides. But there are some issues that he feels very strong about as governor, as secretary of state, and as a private citizen. And I don't know if we talked about this—we probably did—back in the secretary of state years it was not popular to be the person promoting penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol. The DUI issue was something that they kind of said, "You really shouldn't do that. Politically, that's not a good issue." And then when he was running for governor, he said that a tax could not be erased, it had to stay on, while his opponent—

DePue: Yeah, the income tax surcharge.

³⁸ For the argument that Illinois is not especially distinctive in its governmental problems, see Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 142.

- Edgar: Yes. While his opponent said, “No, we can take that off.” He knew that you couldn’t. And that wouldn’t be very politically popular, because nobody wants to hear that. If one person’s saying, “Well, let’s just get rid of that tax,” and the other one’s saying, “No, we got to leave it,” you would think that politically that’s not a popular stand. So that just pretty much [describes him] as a person.
- DePue: He’s had a long political career, and he’s been out of office for a long time, but before that, you’ve got ten years as secretary of state, you’ve got eight years as governor, you’ve got a lot of years before that, as you well remember. During all that time, what would be the one thing or one issue you would look back with most pride that he had accomplished?
- Edgar: The one issue. As you can imagine, in forty-three years of marriage, there’s a lot of them, but I guess the best is leaving—I remember pulling out of the gates of the mansion and feeling that Jim had done a really good job and that we were leaving things in good shape. I’m very proud of that. And I’m proud of the reputation that he has in Illinois as a decent and honest man.
- DePue: And having said everything we’ve said up to this point about what’s going on in Illinois politics, that’s saying quite a bit.
- Edgar: It is.
- DePue: How about any disappointments, in terms of what he wasn’t able to accomplish in the administration?
- Edgar: Of course the biggest disappointment is what happened after he left, and I know that he feels that he should have done something different to have made it—
- DePue: But what would he have done, left a—
- Edgar: I don’t know (laughs) what he could have done.
- DePue: —deeper bench of Republicans ready to step forward?
- Edgar: Maybe, maybe. Maybe that was an oversight on his part, not to have—yeah, that could have been.
- DePue: Let’s turn the attention onto you, then, and the things that you were able to accomplish, especially as first lady. What do you feel most proud of?
- Edgar: Well, sometimes it’s hard to hone it down to the most important accomplishment. Maybe it was the adoption issue. I think that was probably the most important, although there were others. I don’t like leaving them behind, but maybe that was it.

DePue: You don't like leaving them...

Edgar: I don't like saying that they were not as important. (laughs)

DePue: Oh, okay, some of the other things that—

Edgar: Yes. Women's health—I think that was terribly important, and it had been neglected for always and forever. It came to light and is still coming to light, but that was the beginning back then. And the Help Me Grow program, I felt, was a really good, solid, useful, helpful program that we were able to share with other states. So there were other things, good things, that were done, but probably the adoption.

DePue: I'm going to take you back to when you first saw this young man in Cavins & Bayles, or maybe it was walking across the campus or something, and that first date. He's told me that he mentioned, that first date, that he had political ambitions, and I think you've told me that if he did, you didn't pay any attention to them at the time.

Edgar: You know, I suppose he did.

DePue: Here's the question for you: Girl from small town, Anna, Illinois, going to the big university campus, meeting this young man. How have you changed because of that encounter?

Edgar: I have grown as a person; I have had opportunities that one would only dream of, to meet fabulously wonderful people and to have been in good places and bad places around the world that I would have never seen if I had not met him. So my world has been expanded enormously.

DePue: Did it meet the expectations or the dreams that the little girl back in Anna had about when she was going to be grown up?

Edgar: I would say it probably exceeded any expectations that I might have had as a little girl.

DePue: On the positive side, I as—

Edgar: On the positive side, yes. Absolutely on the positive side.

DePue: How would you like to be remembered now?

Edgar: First of all, as the little girl; I had this great, wonderful opportunity to be a mother at home before Jim became governor. That was a great opportunity, I felt, for me; that in the world today, I was able to be a stay-at-home mom. I don't know what else they call it these days. But that really worked well for me. That's something I wanted to do, and I'm grateful for those years. We have two terrific kids, and I'm very thankful for that. And then when we

moved into the mansion, it was a whole—not until we moved into the mansion did my life then become much more public. Prior to that, Jim lived a public life as secretary of state, but I kept a real low-key. So when he became governor, the opportunities were in front of me, and I guess I would like to be remembered as having taken those opportunities and done good things for other people—children, women, people in need.

DePue: This project, these series of interviews that I've been working on for the last couple years, very much was Governor Edgar's idea, although that's what I wanted him to say in the first place. How do you feel about doing this, being interviewed, being part of this whole legacy?

Edgar: I do agree with Jim, because he is a historian, and he likes history to be written down and accessible to people because that's how others learn. I know that that's important. It's a little hard for me to be open. I mean, it's like opening up your life again.

DePue: When you thought you'd had that behind you, huh?

Edgar: Right, uh-huh. So you go back, and you kind of open up all the doors and windows and let everybody come in and see and hear, listen.

DePue: I'm glad you did.

Edgar: Little uncomfortable.

DePue: I appreciate your comments there, but I'm glad that you gave us the opportunity to do that. Any final comments for us, then?

Edgar: I hope that in all the hours of work that you have done, this material will be useful to other people in the future, for doing good things for other people and for the state of Illinois and for any other state that might come around—especially for any young person that might read it or hear this who might be contemplating going into public service.

DePue: Would you encourage young people to go into public service?

Edgar: Yes, I would.

DePue: Even after listening to all of this?

Edgar: I would. And I know that it takes special people to do it; it's not for everybody. I also hope that people understand that there's some personalities who go into a political arena, and they become oblivious to why they—or maybe they never did have an intention of going into public service. It is a job of serving people, not self-serving or becoming a dictator or a king. I have seen personalities go into a position where they are in front of a camera and a

microphone, and they're changed by it, and they don't become very nice people. So I do hope that this will be helpful to someone someday.

DePue: It has certainly been fun for me to have the opportunity to interview you, and I thank you for giving us the opportunity. I'm sure people will enjoy listening to your interview down the years.

Edgar: I hope they do, and thank you for the countless hours that have been put into this project.

(end of interview)