

Interview with Samantha Thompson

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Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki

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Czaplicki: Today is April 4, 2014. My name is Mike Czaplicki; I'm a staffer with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois. But I'm here today in Chicago for the Governor Jim Thompson Oral History Project, and I'm with his daughter, Samantha Thompson. How are you today, Sam?

Thompson: Very well, thank you.

Czaplicki: Thanks for having me over here. We're in your parents' apartment, overlooking the lake. As I said, we start this off by beginning at the beginning, even though most of us know when you began. When and where were you born?

Thompson: In Springfield, Illinois, on August 3, 1978, at Springfield Memorial Hospital.

Czaplicki: We know a lot about where you were born because the press eagerly covered this.

Thompson: Yes.

Czaplicki: For that first year of your life, it seemed the press followed every event that happened, whether it was your first steps or your birthday or anything like that. The press was very keen to focus on this. I was wondering if you had any reflections on why that was the case.

Thompson: Well, I was the first child born to a sitting governor since Bina Day Deneen, which we would have to check the dates on, but which was, I want to say, the late 1800s.

Czaplicki: Yeah. 1906.

Thompson: Nineteen-oh-six, okay. In fact, somewhere I have a double picture frame that had a picture of her as a baby and her birthday, and then a picture of me as a baby and my birthday, which she gave me. She was still alive when I was born.



Czaplicki: Holy cow.

Thompson: Yeah. I think that there was a certain fascination with just having a baby—I mean, people love babies—in the Governor’s Mansion, and I think some of that also was very, I don’t want to say “by design” because it makes it sound very calculated, but I think that my father definitely had an idea of what a governorship should look like. And it involved living in Springfield, living at the mansion, and governing from the Capitol. So even though my parents were Chicagoans, I was born in Springfield. I lived there until I was five. I think that the family was all kind of just one part of that image.

Czaplicki: You also came at a time when, as the press commented, there was sort of a slew of first babies. Apparently, the mayor of Gary, Indiana, had a child about a month before you.

Thompson: Oh, okay.

Czaplicki: And the Bilandics, the Mayor of Chicago at the time, were due that November.¹

Thompson: Yeah, sure, I went to high school with Mike Bilandic, actually. He was a year below me.

Czaplicki: Really?

Thompson: Yeah, he was my date for a dance. Nice guy. We were in Spanish class together. But yes, I think we were both on the cover of *Chicago* magazine at

¹ Gary’s mayor Richard Hatcher and his wife Ruthellyn had a girl on July 5. Heather Bilandic gave birth to Michael Jr. on November 21. Edith Herman, “Great Expectations as First Ladies Become First Mothers,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1978; Mary Elson, “A Boy for the Bilandics,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1978.

one point, or in *Chicago* magazine? There's a great Victor Skrebneski photo, and it was the New Year's Baby, or something like that. Mike was in it and I was in it.

Czaplicki: Interesting. Do you remember about when that would have been?

Thompson: Oh, this would have been probably January of '79?

Czaplicki: Oh, so quite literally babies.

Thompson: I was a baby, a little baby. I remember my mom telling me the story that they wanted to have a top hat and all of this New Year's Baby stuff, and she said, "No, no, no, absolutely not." It's a beautiful portrait by Victor Skrebneski, who's a famous photographer, took a lot of society portraits. Anyway, one of the perks.

Czaplicki: I think I saw the one of you that's ringing a bell, but I didn't know that Bilandic—

Thompson: I think we have it over there.

Czaplicki: Yeah, I didn't know Bilandic was in it.

Thompson: Yeah, because he was a baby too. I think I saw the magazine once.

Czaplicki: The public seemed to respond to this too. Apparently there were many cards and gifts, not to mention advice to your mom during her pregnancy.

Thompson: Oh, I'm sure that would have been absolutely fantastic. Unsolicited advice to pregnant women is always really well received! She probably also loved strangers touching her stomach. But yeah, I remember, even when I was older, like six or seven, people would send care packages to the mansion, or cards. It was **great**; it was nice to know that there are strangers out there who wish you well. Probably a lot of wing nuts too, but they didn't pass on those.

Czaplicki: So you weren't aware of the wing nuts?

Thompson: I have very early memories of the people picketing the mansion and people picketing the house. That was scary. I mean, it's one thing when they're picketing the mansion; you got a good half-acre between you and the protestors. But when they come to your—

Czaplicki: Was this the house on Fullerton?²

Thompson: The house on Fullerton. That would be frightening. We would have to close the drapes.

² Fullerton Avenue in Chicago

Czaplicki: That was a photo I had intended to show you. It's in one of your scrapbooks. I think it might have been '80 or '81, and some protesters came about daycare cuts. There's a photo of your father carrying you out to greet the leader of the protesters, who has her child with her, and you're just sort of regarding the scene. I was wondering if you remembered any particular protest.

Thompson: That, I don't remember. I remember being seven or eight and it happening.³

Czaplicki: Would you have security at the house?

Thompson: Yeah, we always had security at the house. They had an apartment around the corner.

Czaplicki: What's your first memory of any kind? Not necessarily political.

Thompson: I have memories of being in my parents' apartment in the mansion, crawling around on the sofa. They used to listen to old records a lot, and have happy hour, and just sit there and talk about the day. That, I remember.

Czaplicki: How about your first political memory? When did you first become aware that you were a public figure?

Thompson: I think I was always aware. I don't remember having a realization, Oh, my God, this is going on. It just was always around me. But I have very early memories of marching in parades, being carried in parades, going to events. Growing up in the mansion, there are always people around, and gradually



³ The photo is of a June 21, 1981 protest by the Day Care Action Council of Illinois outside Thompson's home at 554 West Fullerton. Mark Starr, "Thompson Won't Veto Day Care Funds If..." *Chicago Tribune*, June 22, 1981. In 1984, the Thompsons moved two miles north to the 800 block of Hutchinson Street. Sam might be thinking of a 1986 protest by three hundred homeless activists that gathered outside the side entrance to the Hutchinson Street home, which Sam watched "from a second-story window." The following year, Dykes and Gay Men Against Racism and Repression (DAGMAR) held a twenty-four hour vigil outside Thompson's home to protest several AIDS bills the General Assembly had passed and Governor Thompson was considering. During the protests, six activists chained themselves to Thompson's fence. Cheryl Devall, "Homeless Give Thompson a Wake Up Call," *Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1986; Susy Schultz, "Gay Protestors Ask Governor to Veto AIDS Bills," *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 17, 1987. [Placeholder for full cite to Bernard Turnock, interview by Mike Czaplicki]. [Placeholder for JRT's thoughts on protestors targeting his home.] Even pickets of the Executive Mansion could occasionally be cause for concern; see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, Volume III: 605. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Illinois Statecraft Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL

you become aware of what they're doing there, what their role is, and how it kind of interconnects with what your father does or your mother does. It's like anything, you know? You wake up one day and you're like, Okay, yeah, Dad's a fireman and that's the firehouse he goes to; okay, I get it. But it's not like you ever remember, Oh, I didn't know what he did, and then I knew what he did.

Czaplicki: The press often commented that you seemed like a natural. That was the frequent refrain, that you weren't a fussy baby, you didn't disrupt the State of the Union or anything like that.

Thompson: No, I was a very good baby. I think I was a pretty bad toddler, but I was an excellent baby. They used to take me to restaurants and I wouldn't cry, I was all right. I was a good infant. I got pneumonia when I was very, very young, which was—

Czaplicki: I guess your first campaign, right, '78? You did that train ride.

Thompson: It was my one-month checkup, and my mom took me in. When the nurse was weighing me, my mom said to the nurse, "Does the baby feel hot to you?" And then the nurse said, "Well, yeah, actually, she does," and they took my temperature, which was through the roof. A lot of kids in Springfield had come down with it after. I was one of the first. They didn't know what it was—they thought it was meningitis—they did spinal taps, everything. I was in the hospital.

Czaplicki: Yes, I think ten or twelve days.

Thompson: And my mother and father sat there the whole time ; somebody was always holding me. Or friends of the family would come. It was a scary time.

Czaplicki: Of course, that resulted in a rather infamous editorial from the *Chicago Tribune*. Did you ever come across that or read it?

Thompson: What did it say?

Czaplicki: Later on, after your father won, your parents brought you to the inaugural on a very cold January day. So the *Trib* actually questioned that decision, them bringing you out in this terrible weather considering you had had pneumonia, and used you too much in the

... And the perfect political baby

Samantha Jayne Thompson is a good baby—probably too good for her own good. There she was at her father's second inauguration as governor, an inviting and well-behaved target for photographers, the perfect political child.

Repeatedly exposed to crowds since she was six weeks old, Samantha hasn't been known to interrupt her father's speeches by squalling [at least not when the TV cameras are running]. She doesn't burp up orange juice on keetchy-cooing VIPs or do any of the other infantile things that discourage sensible adults from bringing babies to inappropriate gatherings.

But even such a perfect political infant isn't immune to the infectious diseases so common in this weather. So we hope her parents consider her age and medical history [she's already had bacterial pneumonia], think twice about exposing her to large crowds unnecessarily—and maybe go back to the Irish setter when they need a prop to make photo opportunities more attractive.

From Samantha's mother

SPRINGFIELD—On Jan. 10, The Tribune published an editorial entitled, "... And the Perfect Political Baby." It stated that Samantha Jayne's presence at the inauguration of her father as governor of Illinois was inappropriate and arranged without regard to her physical well-being, to make photo opportunities more attractive. Assuming that this editorial represents the official view of The Chicago Tribune and of some of your readers and assuming that similar situations and criticisms are likely to occur again, I feel that I, as Samantha's mother, should respond since I feel the editorial is unfair and, in certain respects, erroneous.

It is not true that Samantha has been exposed repeatedly to crowds since she was six weeks old. It is true that on certain specific occasions, such as election night and the inaugural ceremony, her father and I have wanted her, as we have wanted other members of our family, with us. On these occasions, there was a crowd present. However, Samantha was specifically kept separate and apart from the crowd. On election night, Samantha spent the evening sleeping or playing in a bedroom at the hotel. Only when the entire family was assembled on the stage for her father's victory

campaign, and so on and so on.⁴

Thompson: Oh, it happened after I had pneumonia?

Czaplicki: Yeah, several months later. You mom was actually moved to write a response to the *Trib*.

Thompson: Good for her. She must have been furious because she didn't respond to anything unless she was **really** furious. Good for her. Look, compared to what it's like now, back then was nothing—a nasty editorial, and it goes away. Now, it's Internet, blog, chat room—everybody's got an opinion that they feel the need to share with millions of people. When you have one kid, you bring them everywhere. I don't think it was much more than that.

Czaplicki: That was the crux to the response, “This is our daughter and family and we want to share these moments together.” You were never aware of that response; interesting.

Thompson: I think they tried to protect me from stuff like that. Plus, once it was over, it was over. Were they going to sit me down at the age of five and be like, “Oh, and then when you were a few months old, this one guy wrote this nasty thing.” They moved on. You have to have such a thick skin in that business. My dad, especially, has the ability to read something nasty and the next day, see the reporter, be like, “Oh, hey, how are you?” My mother's a bit more—she remembers who said what. But I think that you just kind of move on.

Czaplicki: Did you have to develop a thick skin? Because they shielded you from that kind of stuff, or...

Thompson: There's only so much you can shield your kid from. Because if you don't tell them about it, the kids at school will certainly tell them. So I don't know that you can develop a thick skin; I think you either have one or you don't. Some people are just more suited to this life than others. I took it very personally when people would say nasty things about my parents and about me. Because kids are weird, kids are always saying weird stuff and doing weird stuff, and then they move on, and a year later, they're a completely different person, you know? So to comment on a kid's behavior if they're tired or they're hungry or maybe they're just having a bad day, like it somehow defines who they are or who they're going to be when they grow up, I think that was hard. I always felt like I was fighting against a negative impression, kind of.

Czaplicki: When did you feel that? Presumably not when you were four or five.

⁴ Sam had made her first campaign appearance on September 23, 1978, traveling with her parents on a whistle-stop train tour of six southern Illinois cities. Dan Egler, “Gov. Thompson's Baby Stricken By Pneumonia,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 3, 1978. The hostile editorial was “...And the Perfect Political Baby,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 10, 1979; also see Dorothy Collins, “...While First Baby Steals All the Acclaim at Inaugural,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 9, 1979. The *Tribune* printed Jayne Thompson's response January 20, and two sympathetic letters February 1.

- Thompson: No, but when you get older and you're in school and the gossip columnists would say, "Oh, Samantha kicked a Coke machine," or "threw a fit in a restaurant," or did whatever—I mean, stuff kids do— then it becomes something that defines you, right? If you get teased about it or somebody says something, and it's just... I think my parents really tried to give me what they thought was a normal life by sending me to public school and trying to give me the same kind of idyllic childhood experiences that they had had. But when you're so different from everybody else, not necessarily in the way you're raised—because my parents raised me with the same values that I'm sure your parents raised you with—but the circumstances were different. We had security, we were in Springfield on the weekends, and we traveled. It's hard when you're different from your friends. I remember not always telling the truth about what I did on the weekend, because what are you going to say? "Oh, I took a helicopter, I got on the state plane, I went to this party, I did this." You just say, "Oh, you know, watched some TV," because you don't want to be different and you don't want to get teased for being different.
- Czaplicki: Did that stop after your father was out of politics, or at least out of the governorship? Or were you still an object of public interest?
- Thompson: You know what? I think it was a really natural transition because I went to high school two years later. I switched from a public school to a private school.
- Czaplicki: You went to Latin,⁵ correct?
- Thompson: I went to Latin. So it was not as fascinating to them. I was also lucky because in my year at Latin was my friend, Tiffany Madigan, so they were used to politics and all of that stuff. It was nothing new to them.
- Czaplicki: Where'd you go to school before high school?
- Thompson: I went to Hawthorne.
- Czaplicki: We're jumping ahead, so we'll back up a little bit as well. Do you remember your first campaign?
- Thompson: They all kind of ran together. I couldn't tell you which campaign was which, it was just like, "Oh, we're running again!" (laughter)
- Czaplicki: Any favorite activities within a campaign?
- Thompson: I liked passing out stickers and putting them on people, whether they wanted a sticker or not. That was my thing. I would get the rolls of stickers and I'd handle one side of the parade route. I'd go, sticker, sticker, sticker—I wanted to get all the Thompson stickers on there.

⁵ The Latin School of Chicago, a highly rated private school.

- Czaplicki: I see you cut a few ribbons at the [Illinois] State Fair.
- Thompson: Cut some ribbons. I don't think I got to do any groundbreaking. I think the shovel was too heavy, probably. Those things are heavy, especially once they put all the plaques and stuff on. We had so many shovels when Dad left office, I think it was like...
- Czaplicki: We're trying to find the shovels, because according to his assistant, John [Frier], they're in a warehouse somewhere in Chicago.
- Thompson: Well, I think a lot of them got given to charity. I think anything that didn't have a plaque got given to charity, because they're like, "It's a shovel. What are you going to do with it?"
- Czaplicki: Oh, there's no marking, it's just a shovel?
- Thompson: Sometimes they were just a shovel. Sometimes they went out of their way and got an engraved plaque. We may have one or two laying around in Michigan. I do remember seeing one used for garden work at some point—but how many shovels can you have?
- Czaplicki: That was probably the baseball stadium.
- Thompson: If he finds that warehouse in the South Side, I'd like my toys back. My toys are apparently in there too.
- Czaplicki: Your childhood toys are gone?
- Thompson: No. I always had toys in Springfield, and I think when we packed up my room, that got sent.
- Czaplicki: With all the other state stuff?
- Thompson: Yeah.
- Czaplicki: Okay.
- Thompson: Old schedules and random State Fair stuffed animals. And somewhere, there's a five-foot-tall portrait of me that this woman painted from a newspaper photo and mailed to me. We were campaigning for something, and it's me at ten, with a bunch of balloons. And because it was a black and white photo, she gave me brown hair, the coloring was all off, but it was still pretty good. I want that back.
- Czaplicki: We definitely have to find that warehouse. What was behind the decision to send you to school in Chicago, as opposed to Springfield?

- Thompson: I know that they didn't know how long Dad was going to be in office, whether or not he wanted to stay in office, or if he was going to win or lose. They just thought that instead of setting me up with a life in Springfield and then having to yank me out, change cities, and change schools, that they would put me in school in Chicago; then no matter what happened, it would be just like a normal trajectory.
- Czaplicki: Continuity throughout. But did that change? You started off saying that your father had a view of the governorship, that he was going to govern from Springfield, but I presume with you in school up here, that they shifted the amount of time that they spent in Springfield versus Chicago.
- Thompson: He still spent a lot of time in Springfield, and we would go back to Springfield a lot. But yeah, you have to make decisions sometimes for the benefit of your family. I think people understood that. I actually was happier in Springfield. I loved being in the mansion because there were always people around. There was always something to do. It was people working in the office, or you'd go talk to the butler, or you'd go sit in the kitchen and talk to the chef. It was fun.
- Czaplicki: All right, talking more about the mansion, I still have yet to take the tour, so I haven't gone to the mansion and seen it. I really would like to, but could you describe for me some of the spaces in there? Do you have any particular rooms that were your favorite?
- Thompson: When you get the tour, have Governor Quinn give you permission to see some of the family spaces, if you can get it, because we spent most of our time in the attic when I was a kid—the kids did.
- Czaplicki: Is it three floors?
- Thompson: There's the ground floor, then the first floor, which is the public spaces. The second floor is the governor's apartment, the private family apartment, which is, depending on how it's configured, I guess three or four bedrooms. Then there's the attic above, which is a huge, finished rec room, basically, with pinball machines, a TV, a sofa, a pool table, a jukebox, and a slot machine. Things that people had donated over the years for whatever reason were up there. My dad had a weight set up there.
- Czaplicki: I saw a reference to Ms. Pac-Man in one of the articles.
- Thompson: Yeah, there was a sit-down Ms. Pac-Man. We played for hours. My mom was really good. Years after Dad had left office, I was talking to Mayor Don Stephens, from Rosemont, who was an old family friend who collected these machines. He had the coolest house, with a spread of vintage cars and arcade games and all this stuff. I said we used to love playing Ms. Pac-Man and he

sent me one. So we have a sit-down Ms. Pac-Man from the '80s in our house in Michigan, from Don Stephens. He was a great guy.⁶

Czaplicki: That's a nice gift.

Thompson: Yeah. And it still works.

Czaplicki: So where else in the mansion, beside the rec room?

Thompson: There's a family breakfast room off of the kitchen downstairs, where we'd have breakfast and casual dinners and stuff like that, the family dining room. And then there's the private entryway, this long, tiled corridor where our dogs would be. We'd come in and the dogs would come running.

Czaplicki: How many dogs did you have?

Thompson: We had three.

Czaplicki: Three?

Thompson: Three. Guv—

Czaplicki: I knew about Guv.

Thompson: —Bo(??), and Sam.

Czaplicki: I didn't realize you had the other two.

Thompson: When I was born, my grandmothers were aghast that I was going to be named Samantha, because we had a dog named Sam and everybody was going to be like, "She has the same name as the dog." (laughter) The things people worry about.

Czaplicki: Did you have a routine to daily life in the mansion?

Thompson: I mean, I was so little. I went to preschool at the Baptist Church across the street. I remember going to dentist appointments. I took ballet and tap. But for the most part, my routine was coming down and having breakfast, and sitting in the kitchen, talking, because they had a huge staff table in the kitchen itself, where people would come for their breaks.

Czaplicki: For the house staff?

Thompson: For the whole mansion staff. So I'd sit there and talk to whoever was taking their break. And I knew everybody. It was great.

Czaplicki: The staff was fairly integrated into your daily life?

⁶ [Placeholder for cite to Stephens entry in the *Statecraft Handbook*]

Thompson: Oh, they were lovely, they were lovely. And I know especially with the troopers, for the family detail, they always chose troopers that had kids, who were good with kids. I don't know if any of that consideration went into other members of the household staff, but everybody was great with me.

Czaplicki: Any you felt particularly close to?

Thompson: Oh man, I mean...

Czaplicki: You mentioned talking to the butler.

Thompson: Yeah. We had a wonderful piano player who used to come and do all the parties. His name was Walt. And there was another guy named V.I. We had a butler named Leo. They were just great. My mom's secretaries, and then the staff, I guess. It's hard to remember whose duties were what. I know that my mom's office was in the mansion and my dad's was at the Capitol, but I feel like there was administrative staff in the mansion that also worked with him. They were just great. It was the '80s. It's secretaries with big hair and their power suits; they were just glamorous. It was fun. I'd go play on the typewriters, and...

Czaplicki: Office supplies galore?

Thompson: Oh, the Xerox machine? I mean, that's all a kid needs—hours of entertainment with a Xerox machine.

Czaplicki: Would you go over to the Capitol office much? I saw a few photos of you crawling around.

Thompson: Yeah. I remember going to my dad's office a lot, to go pick him up or have lunch with him—you'd go get horseshoes⁷—it was so close. And the Capitol is beautiful; his office in the Capitol is gorgeous. I remember playing and just running around. They used to let me be a page when I was little.

Czaplicki: By "horseshoe," you mean the sandwich, the Springfield delicacy?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. The best, the best. Dad used to have the chef at the mansion make them. He took horseshoe to a whole different level. I mean, he went through a whole horseshoe phase where he was having shrimp horseshoes. I think at one time they even made a lobster horseshoe, which is like the ultimate in high/low, ridiculous decadence. (laughter)

Czaplicki: Would you have regular family dinners, or did politics disrupt that a lot?

⁷ Springfield is famous – or some say infamous – for inventing the Horseshoe Sandwich, basically an open-faced hamburger covered and surrounded by french fries, with the whole agglomeration liberally swathed in cheese sauce. It's so common in the pubs, it's usually just ordered as a Shoe. A smaller version is called a Pony Shoe. Needless to say, there are frequent competitions for variations, especially in the cheesy sauces.

Thompson: No, I remember having dinner with my parents. There's a little kitchen in the family apartment, and I remember my mom feeding me in the kitchen, and a cuckoo clock. We were together a lot as a family. I think it's easier when you just have one kid, because you just kind of bring them along.

Czaplicki: What would you talk about at family dinners, either down there or even when you were in Chicago?

Thompson: Dad would talk about his day, what was going on with politics, who he had seen—anything. I mean, I knew everybody. He'd talk about Pate.⁸ I knew Pate. I'd come in, he'd be setting there, and he'd be like, "Hey kid, how are you?" It was just like anybody your dad would work with or friends of the family.

Czaplicki: Like his staff, all of those people?

Thompson: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Anybody stand out in your mind that you either liked particularly, or got along with, or would tease you?

Thompson: Oh yeah, this great advance lady named Elizabeth, who was my pal, and then Sue Leonis was also fantastic. I was lucky; they really took an interest in me. Now, being an adult, I see how annoying—this kid that you have to deal with—but you can't be rude to them because it's your boss's kid, what an annoyance. They were lovely. Everybody was just really, really nice. His bag boys were great. He always had this series of good-looking young guys as his bag boys, (laughs) so I was in love with half of them as a little five-year-old kid. They were all so much fun to be around. It was like having older brothers. Some of them I'm still close to, to this day.⁹

Czaplicki: If your mom was busy and your dad was busy, who tended to baby-sit you?

Thompson: We had nannies when I was younger.

Czaplicki: So that wouldn't be a bag boy?

Thompson: No, although I much preferred the bag boys and the staff to the nannies; (Czaplicki laughs) they were a lot more fun. We would always have a live-in nanny in Chicago, but I don't remember liking most of them very much. I had free run at the mansion. There was no trouble I could really get into, so I was off doing different things, like running around in the ballroom, then I'd get bored and go down to the kitchen and talk to people, and I'd go visit the

⁸ James "Pate" Philip, a long-time Republican member of the Illinois General Assembly.

⁹ Thompson is known for his loyalty to his bag boys, who form something of a fraternity; at the time of this interview, they still continued to meet annually to keep in touch and reminiscence. See Greg Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 6, 2013. [Placeholder for Thompson's discussion of the bag boys.]

secretaries. It was kind of like *Eloise at the Plaza*, but nobody needed to *watch* me.¹⁰ It's different in Chicago when you're in your house with the baby-sitter, and you're like, "Okay, I'll watch some TV now." It was a different experience.

Czaplicki: So you didn't get into trouble too much? No hijinks? Didn't get fresh?

Thompson: I used to slide down the banisters, which terrified everybody because it was a good story or two-story drop, depending. You'll see when you go on the tour, the banister in the public places. That was the only thing where they'd get a little upset.

Czaplicki: Epic games of hide-and-seek? Ever went missing for an hour?

Thompson: We used to play hide-and-seek. Yeah, I'd forgotten about that. But they never lost me. I think there are cameras in there too. The ballroom was fun, and we'd run around in the ballroom.

Czaplicki: We often think in terms of the state plane and the office at the Capitol, and there's a mansion and an office in Chicago, but I'm wondering if there was a state time-out chair?

Thompson: No, there was no state time-out chair.

Czaplicki: In general in your family, who would be more likely to be the disciplinarian?

Thompson: My mom. My mom, for sure, because mothers anywhere are the first line of discipline, right? I mean, it doesn't get to the dad unless you're really in trouble.

Czaplicki: Gets kicked upstairs?

Thompson: Yeah, it did not get kicked upstairs. (laughter) She dealt with it.

Czaplicki: As you got older, when you wanted to do something as a kid—have a sleepover, go over a friend's house, go to the movies—was that a straightforward process? Did the security ever get in the way of that?

Thompson: No, it was great. I always had a ride because the troopers were fantastic, so wherever I wanted to go, I could go. When I was really little, I think they tried to have a higher level of security in terms of sitting outside my kindergarten class. That didn't go over too well. We had this really bad school bus experiment where they would follow the school bus in their car, and that ended the day that the kids on the school bus were flipping the troopers the bird, and the troopers pulled over the school bus, and got on and gave them all

¹⁰ *Eloise at the Plaza* is a movie based on a 1950s series of books about a girl who lived at the top of New York's Plaza Hotel.

a lecture about manners. After that, I said, “Can’t we just give up the farce? Can they just take me to school? I mean, if they’re going to follow the school bus anyway? Like, really?”

Czaplicki: So that would be up in Chicago when that was happening?

Thompson: Yeah. But they were great; I *loved* the troopers. I mean, they were fantastic. In Chicago, when I’d get bored in the house, I’d go hang out with them in their little apartment: say hi, see what’s going on, show them what my outfit was for the day. They were all really patient and nice guys.

Czaplicki: Was it something you ever worried about?

Thompson: Security? No. The only time I ever remember being scared at all was when they would picket the house.

Czaplicki: So that was your sort of tripwire, personal space boundary?

Thompson: It’s like they’re coming for you; it’s like the scene in—what was it, the vampire movie, where they come with the pitchforks? (laughter) That’s how it feels!

Czaplicki: The townsfolk are in arms.

Thompson: The loudspeakers, and... People just don’t think, you know? They’re like, “Oh, we’re going to protest this; we’re going to go give him a piece of our mind.” They don’t think there’s a kid in there who’s going to be worried, his wife is going to be worried, and it’s their house. How would you like it if somebody showed up at your house? People just don’t think.

Czaplicki: In general, did you like crowds, or did that make you leery of them?

Thompson: You know what? It’s really funny: I was always able to find my dad in a crowd because he was so tall. So I remember, as a little kid, kind of going through legs and arms and around, and I could always find him. But to this day, I’m very claustrophobic in crowds.

Czaplicki: You must have met a lot of notable personalities in your days in there. Anybody stand out?

Thompson: Yes. I remember meeting John Cougar Mellencamp—well, when he was Cougar Mellencamp. It must have been for Farm Aid.¹¹ We went to his trailer,

¹¹ A reference to the singer’s series of name changes. He initially gained popularity as John Cougar, then John Cougar Mellencamp, before settling on John Mellencamp. He was a co-organizer of the first Farm Aid, a major multi-act concert to benefit American family farmers, which was held in Champaign, Illinois, on September 22, 1985. “Stars Hop on Bandwagon for Farm Aid Concert,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1985. [Placeholder for JRT discussion of his role in this event.]

and he called my mom Babe. Like, “Hey, Babe.” I was like, What’s wrong with this guy? (laughter)

Czaplicki: Was it just you and your mom doing this meeting?

Thompson: I don’t know why we were there—“Do you want to meet John Mellencamp?” “Oh, okay.” My rock star experience. We used to hang out with Willie Nelson. Willie would come play the State Fair every year, and they would do this chili competition called “Chili with Willie.” (Czaplicki laughs) Somebody on my dad’s side would bring out their best family chili recipe and Willie would make his chili, and then we’d sit out back where the RVs were parked, behind the grandstand, and everybody had a different chili. It was fun. The state troopers just could not deal with the pot. (laughter) Dad said he realized that Willie respected him when he made the band members stop smoking pot around him, like, “would you go play golf”. What are you going to do? It’s Willie Nelson. But the state troopers are like, “What do we do?” (laughter) “We can’t do anything!”

Czaplicki: How’d your mom react to being called Babe?

Thompson: I think she just took it in stride. She was like, Okay, what’s wrong with this guy?

Czaplicki: Former Deputy AG, Babe.¹²

Thompson: Yeah, “Hey, Babe.” I mean, there are worse things to be called than Babe. She was probably like, All right. Who else did we meet? I remember Arnold Schwarzenegger coming for the first President Bush’s fitness initiative. The first President Bush was lovely. Such a nice man. I met his son, too; he was playing basketball at the mansion when he was campaigning.¹³

Czaplicki: Which son?

Thompson: G.W.

Czaplicki: Oh, the ex-president?

Thompson: Yeah. I remember going to DC and meeting Reagan in the Oval Office, getting a tour of the Oval Office. Dad used to bring me back these M&Ms from the White House—they have their own M&Ms at the cafeteria in the White House—when he was on the President’s Intelligence Oversight Board. I’d just eat them and throw out the boxes. I really wish I had just kept them, although they apparently still make them and you can still get them. Who

¹² Jayne Thompson was the deputy chief of the Illinois Attorney General’s criminal justice division, resigning her post April 1, 1977. [Placeholder for cite to JCT’s discussion of her work in this office and her decision to resign. *Illinois Issues* (May 1977), 29.

¹³ For another encounter with George W. Bush at this point, see Greg Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 19, 2013.

else? My favorite was probably meeting the pop singer, Tiffany. Remember Tiffany? We went to one of her concerts, went backstage. That was a good perk.

Czaplicki: Out here in Illinois, or were you in New York?

Thompson: No, it was in Wisconsin. I'm trying to think of who else I met, from a random list of people. Lech Wałęsa, the Polish Solidarity Movement.

Czaplicki: The leader of Solidarity.

Thompson: I knew all of the local politicians, and the mayors and the legislators, and that whole crew. I remember meeting Michael Jackson when I was five, being scared, and hiding behind my dad. That was my first concert that I remember going to.

Czaplicki: You were five?

Thompson: Yeah.

Czaplicki: I'm trying to think if that would have been the Thriller concert.¹⁴

Thompson: I bet it was. I don't remember the concert, I just remember being backstage and not wanting to meet him, being really nervous.

Czaplicki: How are you with names? Did you have a good memory? Could you remember all of these people you were meeting in this whirlwind of faces?

Thompson: Yeah, I probably had a better memory from then than I certainly do now. But some of it's under the radar, too. You're like, Okay, whatever, whatever. That's not interesting. Tiffany is interesting.

Czaplicki: If you'd go with your parents to one of these political events, say you're going to the State Fair, would they worry much about you? Or did they feel comfortable just being out there?

Thompson: I think they were good because we had security, so they probably figured, How far can she get? I was friends with his advance team, so if I'm out there putting stickers on people, somebody's keeping an eye on me. I never got that far. Maybe it's just being a kid, but nobody ever did anything. I never heard any weirdoes or bad experiences, or crazy people saying anything to me. My mom had crazy people say stuff to her all the time. Some woman told her, in a receiving line at the mansion, "I hope you get hit by a truck so I can marry

¹⁴ Michael Jackson did not have a solo tour until 1987, so Sam most likely saw him at the Comiskey Park performances (October 12-14) of the Jackson family's record-breaking Victory tour in 1984, which consisted primarily of material from *Thriller*. "Victory Tour (The Jacksons Tour)," *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_Tour_\(The_Jacksons_tour\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_Tour_(The_Jacksons_tour)).

your husband.” What do you say to that? You’ve got to interview her; she’s got all the good stories. But nobody’s really said much to me.¹⁵

Czaplicki: Earlier, you said even if you didn’t read something in a paper—because you’re not reading papers yet, necessarily—the kids might certainly let you know. I was interested in you reflecting more on just meeting people, making friends. Was that hard to do? Was it something where you’re on your guard?

Thompson: I think I was pretty good at making friends because I was always meeting new people. I certainly got very good at it when it became harder in grade school, where you had to win people over. I’m lucky—it’s a skill now, where I feel, put me with anybody and I can talk to them and draw them out and make a good impression, or at least try to make a good impression. But it was always easier with adults. Kids would be jealous, or kids would not really know what to make of you. I was around adults all the time, so I could talk to adults.

Czaplicki: Were you wary of fellow kids’ intentions? Do they really want to be your friend, or are they just using you for your stuff? The dilemma every kid has.

Thompson: Man, I would have loved to have just been used for my stuff. Mainly, they were just mean. (laughter) I remember reading things about all these political kids, and everybody was sucking up to them. And I’m like, “Who are these people? That sounds great! Nobody’s sucking up to me.”

Czaplicki: What shape would the meanness take? Would they call you names? Was it just gossip behind your back?

Thompson: Oh, it was like, “Who do you think you are?,” “Governor’s daughter,” or “You think you’re so special because you get to do,” this, this, and this. I mean... I don’t know.

Czaplicki: Nasty notes?

Thompson: No, nobody was outright nasty. It was just you had to be careful what you said. You went too far, you said, “Oh, I met Michael Jackson,” I mean, that was it.

Czaplicki: So not, “Oh, that’s great?”

Thompson: Yeah, nobody was happy for you that you had this amazing experience and went on a helicopter and did all this cool stuff. No, no, no, no. But I had friends. You never wanted to be different. You never wanted it to be pointed out. And it’s not easy. My grade, the kids were fine, they all knew me,

¹⁵ See Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, Volume II: 371-372, for some examples of how politics “can come back on the family,” including a threat the Edgars received against their son. [Placeholder for cite to JRT or JCT’s remarks on this topic].

whatever. But the older kids or the younger kids or somebody would say something. And you just get used to it, but you're never that comfortable.

Czaplicki: You mentioned Madigan's daughter. Was it easier to make friends with other kids who were in similar situations, if not the exact same position you were in?

Thompson: Yes, but they weren't around that much. I would see Chelsea Clinton at the governors' conferences, but those were every few years.¹⁶ It's not like now, where you can call up your friend who's in the same position and you can talk on the phone. It was just different; you didn't see somebody for a few years, they were off your radar.

Czaplicki: No Internet, no cell phones—any of that.

Thompson: Yeah, I wasn't BBMing at the age of five.¹⁷ Tiffany, I would see periodically, but we weren't friends. I knew her, but I didn't know her super well, and then we became very good friends in high school. She's a friend of mine to this day. She's like my sister, in the sense that we were brought up with the same issues and things going on. She's my only friend that I have that shorthand with.

Czaplicki: Do you have a lot of friends today from back then?

Thompson: I have good friends from grade school, sure. I had the same best friend from the age of six onwards, so that also helped. She was basically like my rock when I was going through all of this stuff, and she would go to Springfield with me.

Czaplicki: She lived in Chicago?

Thompson: She lived in Chicago and went to grade school with me. Her name is Kate. She would go to the State Fair, and her parents were friends with my parents. They would come down, so I got to spend a lot of time with her. I got to spend a lot of time with her parents, who also basically helped raise me because my parents traveled a lot and I spent so much time at her house. That was nice; that was like a little bit of an escape.

Czaplicki: Did you have much opportunity to travel abroad on your dad's various foreign trips?

Thompson: Not a ton, and the one place I disagree with my parents—well, we disagree on different things—but the one parenting philosophy that they had was to try and make my life as normal as possible. They did not believe in pulling me

¹⁶ Prior to his election as president, Bill Clinton was governor of Arkansas for eleven years (1979-1981; 1983-1992).

¹⁷ BlackBerry Messaging, a popular communications client for cell phones and other mobile devices.

out of school; homework came first. I think in retrospect, my life was not going to be normal anyway; they might as well have just pulled me out and taken me everywhere, because the foreign trips were amazing. I remember going to Russia with my dad when it was still the Soviet Union; I remember going to Sweden, where he got the Swedish American of the Year award.¹⁸ Things like that were special, and I wish that I had done more of them. But I think they were just doing the best that they could. They were trying to figure out how to keep me normal and sane in the midst of all of this stuff that, for them, must have been hard to deal with. The last thing you're thinking is, Sure, let's take her to Paris. She's six. Why not?

Czaplicki: You've traveled a lot since, right?

Thompson: Yes.

Czaplicki: I'm trying to remember the litany of places you've been in, but Florence, and you've lived in Italy?

Thompson: I went to design school in Florence, and then I worked for a very famous Italian couturier from the Dolce Vita period—kind of a contemporary of Valentino's—called Fausto Sarli, in Rome, in this couture workshop, doing all the handwork, the sewing, and that kind of stuff.¹⁹ Then I lived outside of Milan, in a little town called Novara. I was working for the Gucci group. So I lived in Italy for about two years, and I lived in Geneva before that. Now, I'm back and forth between London and New York, and I'm moving to London in November.

Czaplicki: So, traveling with a member of the governor's party versus traveling as a private citizen?

Thompson: Doing anything as a private citizen is (laughs) totally different. It's nice, being anonymous. It was fun; we had so much fun on the trips, but we had fun on these trips because of the staff who was there and the other politicians who would go. It was like a big family. But it's different—you have obligations and you have a schedule and you have to stick to it. That's what I remember a lot from my childhood, the schedule: "We got to go here, and then we're going to go here, and we're going to do this, and we're going to do that." It's like, "We just drove past a playground that looks really cool, can we stop?" "No, we can't stop, we got to get to point B." I just remember being on more of a regimented routine, especially with my parents and events. And you could see how **tired** it would make them because when you're a kid, you have enough energy. Like, "Yeah, swings!" and my mother, who had been up since 6:00, is looking at me like, We're not going on the swings, kid.

¹⁸ Governor Thompson received the award August 4, 1985, in Stockholm. Sam accompanied her father on the trade mission he led to Leningrad, Moscow, and Paris in 1989 (March 26-April 6). [Placeholder for JRT's discussion of this trip and foreign travel more generally]

¹⁹ La Dolce Vita denotes a flowering of Italian expressive culture from the late 1950s through the 1960s.

Czaplicki: Did that frustrate you?

Thompson: I think it's frustrating when you're an only child and there are no other kids around, and you're trying to play with adults who are working. That's the only frustrating part of it. But at the same time, it's a lot better than being left at home in front of the television set.

Czaplicki: Did any of those habits carry over? To this day, are you a scheduled person? Do you like to structure your time?

Thompson: It's funny, nobody's ever pointed that out, but yeah, I like to be scheduled. I like to schedule months in advance. I want to know where I'm going to be, how long I'm going to be there, when I'm leaving.

Czaplicki: You need a bag boy.

Thompson: I need a bag boy.

Czaplicki: Did you have any nicknames as a kid?

Thompson: Sam.

Czaplicki: Just Sam. And what would be your official—were you first kid, first child, first daughter?

Thompson: I was Code Three; that was my State Police name.

Czaplicki: Code Three?

Thompson: Code Three. Real creative: Code One, Code Two, and Code Three. I'll give you one guess as to who Code One was.

Czaplicki: I'm surprised they didn't use Antique or Collector or something.

Thompson: Right? The Secret Service has much better names. (laughter)

Czaplicki: Did you talk to your parents much about just how you felt about life in government, or whether it's kids teasing you or the scheduling, or anything like that?

Thompson: Yeah, we talked about it.

Czaplicki: Was that something you felt you could just go to them?

Thompson: No, it wasn't like, "I'd like to make a couple of points about our schedule." You don't really think about it. Your parents say, "We're going here," and you're like, "Okay, I don't want to go." You're a kid, you go. But they gave me a lot of say; it wasn't a dictatorship. It wasn't a democracy either, as my mother likes to say, but it was like, "Oh, what restaurant do you want to go

to?” They’d talk to me. So when it was, “We’re going here,” you understood that it was because there was no other option. But I think it was less child-centric then. Now, it’s all about the kid and the development. I see it with my own friends, bringing up their kids, Oh, we’ve got to make everything perfect for the kid. I don’t remember it being like that. It was like, This is what we’re doing as a family, and whether you like it or you don’t like it, this is what we’re doing. I think most of us were raised like that. So I don’t know how much of that has to do with politics; it was just what you did.

Czaplicki: Makes sense. But you have a unique perspective on your parents. For outsiders, people knowing them only through what they read in the newspapers or see in a media report what is important to understand about them, to understand them better?

Thompson: I think the one thing people don’t understand about people in public life is that the vast majority of them are really there because they’re trying to make things better and because they actually care. I mean, my parents actually cared. My dad was actually trying to do things to help the State. And it’s, in a lot of ways, a very thankless job. Look, it’s got great perks, don’t get me wrong, but for a long time, we didn’t make any money. I remember as a kid [hearing], “We can’t afford that.” That’s a weird dichotomy because you’re like, We live in a mansion, I have a security detail, What do you mean I can’t have those Reeboks?

Czaplicki: You’re flying to Chicago, to Meigs Field.

Thompson: We have a plane! I think that’s hard, especially in the beginning: my parents are throwing state dinners, but you got to buy a dress for it and you’re not making a lot of money. My mom had a very hard time with her career; there were times when she couldn’t work, or she couldn’t work at the level that she should have been able to work at.²⁰ There are a lot of sacrifices, but people see the power and they see you live in a mansion or have a car and driver. Well, let me tell you, you would be so much happier in your little apartment, taking the bus, 75 percent of the time, you know? And not having to worry about what you say, who you said it to, why somebody’s being nice to you and what they want, and how you’re going to handle political life, governing, supporting somebody who’s governing. It’s not an easy life. It’s really not an easy life.

²⁰ The press took a keen interest in Jayne Thompson’s career plans throughout her tenure as first lady, especially during Sen. Charles Percy’s controversial 1982 decision to forward her name for consideration by bar association groups that were screening potential candidates for a federal judgeship. See Carol Kleiman, “Jayne Carr Thompson: First Lady’s Out of a Job, but ‘Working,’” *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1977; Joseph Tybor, “Should Jayne Thompson be a U.S. Judge,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1982; and Janet Cawley, “Jayne Thompson: Back in Business: After Detour for Samantha, Jayne’s Career is Back on Track,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1983. [Placeholder for cite to JCT’s recollections on this subject, as well as JRT’s on the judicial nomination.]

- Czaplicki: How about just personal trait-wise? The public image that you see of your dad—he's out there, he's being goofy at the fair—how does that translate to his domestic life? He's the same person?
- Thompson: Oh yeah, he's like that. I think he's quieter at home. Everybody is, right? You don't have to put on a show for your family. I think he's actually kind of a shy person by nature. I think he learned how to be more outgoing because he had to be, but he's happy-go-lucky, and he doesn't bear anybody any ill will. He's really like that. He's got a thick skin, and it's not even so much a thick skin, it's just willing to be oblivious, willing to not concentrate on things that are upsetting. Hillary Clinton used to talk about how she would be able to compartmentalize and put things in a box and put the box away mentally. I think in a lot of ways, he's like that.
- Czaplicki: Did you pick up that trait?
- Thompson: No. I'm much more like my mother. We remember who said what, when they said it, how it made us feel, and we are not going to forgive that person until we get an apology, which of course we never get. But that's why he's the politician.
- Czaplicki: So have you had any interest at all in politics?
- Thompson: Never. Never, never, never, never, never. I've put in my time.
- Czaplicki: It's just funny because, of course, the media reports always talk about what a natural you are.
- Thompson: It's a compliment; it's a huge compliment. But when you grow up always being told, "Be careful what you say," and you have to be so aware of what other people think, after a while, you're like, Honestly, why? Nobody really cares. Nobody really cares if I say anything shocking. It doesn't really affect anybody's life on an important level. I just didn't want to live like that, being concerned about my behavior.
- Czaplicki: Earlier, you had brought up social media. How different do you think it would have been? Are you thankful that this didn't happen in the age of Twitter?
- Thompson: I am so grateful, so grateful, so thankful. I think it must be so much harder today; I would not want to be a kid of a politician today. Even the most blameless politician, to still read that stuff and to have it... The Internet never goes away, it's always there. I just think it must be very, very hard. And God forbid something does happen, a scandal or a bad thing—because you do get people in politics who are there because they like being in the spotlight and because they need the attention and are narcissists—there is that—people aren't wrong about that. But you see what it does to the family. It's awful.

Czaplicki: I read one story where you were commenting about the Blagojeviches moving in, and I think they had a daughter who was six, Amy Blagojevich.²¹

Thompson: Yeah.

Czaplicki: Did you talk to any other gubernatorial children, or reach out to anybody, just to talk them?

Thompson: I knew Edgar's kids, but they were much older. They were already in college, I think.

Czaplicki: Yeah, Brad and Elizabeth.

Thompson: We were pages together at the Republican Convention in Houston, but they were older than me. I didn't know them very well. They're nice. George Ryan's kids were much older, but I knew them too, a little bit. You talk about things in passing, but Blagojevich's kids were much younger. They were little, so it's not like I was going to sit down and give them a pep talk. At that point, they already knew. They knew what they were getting themselves into.

Czaplicki: Do you feel bad for them?

Thompson: I feel horrible for them. Horrible. I feel horrible for him. To see your mistakes being played out on the public stage, to see your family lose everything. You can talk about punishment and people getting the time that they deserve, but at the same time, the collateral damage for something like that, whether he did it or not, it doesn't matter. Like, what does that matter to the kids? Or to his wife? It's still awful.

Czaplicki: But even beyond his particular difficulties, just in general, you see here's the new governor and here's the young child. Do you worry about that kid? Do you feel bad? Or do you think, Oh, it's going to be a great adventure?

Thompson: It is what it is. Everybody has their own set of challenges, right? This is something that comes with a lot of perks; this is something that comes with downsides. We all have bad things happen to us. Parents could get divorced, and that could be just as traumatizing as what I went through, in a different way. You know? I mean, that's life. But no, I don't think, Oh, my God, the poor child! Somebody send them to a boarding school; don't let them come back until they're 21! (Czaplicki laughs)

Czaplicki: You mentioned Houston, being a page down there. Do you remember that convention?

Thompson: Oh, yeah.

²¹ Dawn Turner Trice, "Growing Up a Governor's Kid," *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 2003.

Czaplicki: Yeah?

Thompson: I remember that. That was when you really started to see how conservative they were getting.

Czaplicki: That's what I was interested in, if you had felt that then.

Thompson: I remember Pat Buchanan's speech. I remember my dad being disgusted by Pat Buchanan's speech. And I remember how out of touch everybody was with what was going to happen. This was when Bush lost; they thought he was going to win. At any convention, they're rah-rah-rah, but they really thought he was going to win. I remember somebody saying, "Well, it's all over but the shouting," and I said, "Oh yeah, it's all over but the shouting." My dad's like, "No, no, it's all over!" (laughs)

Czaplicki: So even before the whole tax pledge and all that, just that tone there, you guys felt that?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. But I was a kid. I was more interested in running around buying t-shirts and collecting...

Czaplicki: You would have been fourteen, right?

Thompson: Yeah.

Czaplicki: But it's interesting you picked up on this. Other people have mentioned this in their interviews, so I was curious if you had the same sense when you were down there. And that is something your father noted as well.²²

Thompson: You could sense people starting to pull away too. I remember Jack Kemp really well, he was really nice to me—I met him a couple of times—and I remember Bill Weld and people like that. But you started to see that there were camps.²³

²² The tax pledge refers to Bush's 1988 Republican National Convention speech, in which he vowed, "read my lips, no new taxes." He reversed himself in 1990, with lasting political damage. Pat Buchanan's speech at the 1992 convention in Houston attracted much criticism at the time. It is known as the "Culture War Speech" after its assertion that "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America," and its call to "take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country." Speech text available at *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project*, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/>. For other views on this convention and its implication, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 23, 2010, Volume III: 634-635; Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 121; [Placeholder for other Thompson series discussion of this convention.].

²³ Jack Kemp served as a New York congressman from 1971 to 1989 and as President Bush's Housing and Urban Development secretary from 1989 to 1993. He received the Republican vice presidential nomination in 1996. Bill Weld was the governor of Massachusetts from 1991 to 1997. Kemp bucked the conservative position on several issues, while Weld was a Republican moderate similar to Thompson. A prime example of the divide

Czaplicki: Is that something that further alienated you from politics, or had you already made up your mind that that wasn't a world you wanted to be a part of?

Thompson: No, I always enjoyed it. It was interesting to me. If your dad's a baseball player, you're into baseball, right? Unless you're really just rebelling. So I always found it interesting; I always knew what was going on, and I always wanted to talk about it. I think my distaste with the Republican Party grew as I got older and got out in the world a bit more, and I saw that a lot of the opinions I had as a kid were just received opinions. And not even necessarily from my dad, because I remember when I was little, being more conservative than my parents. They were like, "What is wrong with you?" Kids go through these weird phases. I went through an Alex P. Keaton phase.²⁴ (Czaplicki laughs) I traveled so much, I went to school out of state, I did different things—your opinions just change. Then, when you see the party getting more and more conservative, you start to feel like it's been hijacked. I don't even know what to call myself anymore.

Czaplicki: I was going to ask how you identify, these days.

Thompson: This RINO stuff, Republicans In Name Only—these people are Republicans in name only—they come in and take my party away from me. I don't know. I don't know what you do anymore. I guess I'm a Libertarian: I think everybody should just leave each other alone and taxes should be low. (laughter)

Czaplicki: You haven't turned your back on Artie the Elephant, have you?

Thompson: Artie the Elephant was lost at the Plaza Hotel when I was five years old, and I'm really sort of not over it.

Czaplicki: Oh, no! (laughs)

Thompson: My mom had put it on the bed, and I think housekeeping thought it was a rag and threw it away. I still have Blankie, though. Blankie's still alive, and I have Kitty, who was Artie's replacement.

Czaplicki: So you didn't take to the antique toys? You had your own?

Thompson: No. Well, my dad and I would collect stuff together, like antique banks and antique tin toys and that kind of stuff, because I think it was a way to keep me occupied when they would go antiquing. Like, "Oh, look for this," or, "Keep your eyes peeled for that." Now, I have to say, I have a pretty good eye.

between the camps Thompson is describing came in 1997, when President Clinton nominated Weld to serve as ambassador to Mexico. Weld resigned his governorship to pursue the nomination, and conservative senator Jessie Helms (R-NC) effectively ended Weld's political career by blocking his confirmation.

²⁴ Arch-conservative character played by Michael J. Fox on the hit television sitcom *Family Ties*.

- Czaplicki: You've kept up collecting? You caught that bug?
- Thompson: Yeah, for sure. They've come to regret it; it's become a very expensive hobby. (laughs)
- Czaplicki: Much to your dad's joy, I'm sure. Wasn't that your first Father's Day present to him, the ceramic cat? Which I think might be in the living room.
- Thompson: Oh, wow, maybe.
- Czaplicki: Because I noticed something in there, and then I read this, so I said, "That must be the same piece." It was a doorstop, a cat doorstop.
- Thompson: Maybe. You'd have to ask him.
- Czaplicki: We will. When your father decided not to run again, how'd you feel about that?
- Thompson: I had very mixed feelings. I wasn't sure what to expect because it was a total life change. For me, the hardest part was letting go of Springfield and the mansion and the staff and the people that I knew— that part of my life— because I always felt protected.
- Czaplicki: Did you know a lot of the people beyond that media orbit around the mansion and your father's work? Did you know a lot of people out in the town?
- Thompson: No, it was all within the mansion. I had friends from preschool, but it wasn't like I kept up with them. But that was the hardest part for me: the structure of your life and the places you go and the houses you live in. Moving's hard for kids. But it was such a huge relief after, to kind of be out of the public eye. It happened gradually, and still, people recognize my name. If I pay by credit card in a store in Chicago, sometimes I'll get an older saleslady, "Well, I remember when you were born," or, "Are you Governor Thompson's daughter?" So you always have to be a bit aware. But it was nice to have more anonymity, especially getting older in high school. That wouldn't have been fun.
- Czaplicki: I know you were still fairly young, but did you have a family discussion about that decision?
- Thompson: Yeah. I think I voted against it, and I was outvoted. He would have won, but I think he was ready to move on.
- Czaplicki: Of course, at various points, especially earlier in your father's tenure but even up until the mid-'80s, there was always a lot of speculation about the presidential run; his own stated ambition was to be President.
- Thompson: Oh, for sure.

- Czaplicki: Did you ever think about that? Was that something that you were open to, or did that worry you?
- Thompson: I remember it being talked about, but the only time it was ever really talked about—and I could be wrong—Bush was interested in him maybe being a vice presidential candidate for him. So I remember the vetting process, but I also remember my dad saying, “I don’t want to be a vice president. I either want to be President or not be President. You don’t want to be Vice President.” It wasn’t like I had any immediate concerns about it, and then the timing was never right; it wasn’t like they were ever gearing up for the campaign, or raising funds for it. It just was out there, like, Eventually, I’d like to do this. Well, yeah, eventually I’d want to be a commodities trader or a fashion designer, but it’s not happening tomorrow, so...
- Czaplicki: Do you think that shift you saw at Houston closed the door on the possibility?
- Thompson: For sure, absolutely. He just never would have been able to move far enough right. Unlike a lot of candidates who did it whether they believed in it or not, I don’t think he had the stomach to backtrack on his position. He’s a socially liberal guy, and I’m proud of him for that. I really respect my dad’s views on these things. You know, he’s remarkable. He’s always keeping up on things. I’ll go in and he’s in there watching skateboarding on TV, and you’re like, what? And he knows the jumps and the tricks. He watches more TV than I do; he knows all these shows, and he watches all the movies. He is like the biggest pop culture fiend.
- Czaplicki: Omnivorous.
- Thompson: Yeah, but he’s always developing. People get set in their ways, and especially as they get older, they get stuck with their opinions. But I feel like he’s still exposing himself to changes in what’s going on in the world.
- Czaplicki: Does your mom share that trait?
- Thompson: She is more conservative, I think, in a law-and-order standpoint. She was the prosecutor for years, so she’s got more of a hang ’em high mentality.
- Czaplicki: He was, too, though ; they were both prosecutors.
- Thompson: Yeah, but I think Dad... My mom has her beliefs and they are what they are.
- Czaplicki: Do you take after your mom more?
- Thompson: Yeah. Oh, yeah. For changing opinions, no ; I tend to see things develop. But I’m also a lot younger. The more time you spend out in the world, and you get usually more set in your ways.

Czaplicki: You have been out in the world. You've gone all over the world, obviously, the state trips and things. But from your own standpoint as an autonomous individual, it seems like college was the big moment that happened, right? You chose to go to Georgetown.

Thompson: Yes. I wanted to get out of Illinois just to see what was going on, on the East Coast and the South, and Georgetown was kind of a mix of the two. And it was a very international school, which I liked.

Czaplicki: You had seen DC before.

Thompson: I had seen DC. I remember seeing DC as a kid and always loving it, and having a feeling that I wanted to go back. It was a good choice, because it was a way of being out there in the wider world, and living someplace where people didn't know your name or you didn't have to worry about that. The international part was nice, and I had a lot of friends who had had similar experiences to me. Kids in Latin America grew up with bodyguards, so we could relate on that level. I felt like I was meeting people who had been through some of the things that were a bit strange, or there were other kids of politicians there. It was a wonderful school. My dad's former law partner, Tommy Reynolds, was a huge Georgetown booster; I remember him talking to me about how much he loved it, and how you go there and it shapes you as a person. I thought it sounded pretty good to me.

Czaplicki: Were you already thinking about fashion at that point?

Thompson: Yeah. I wanted to be a designer from the time I was a senior in high school.

Czaplicki: What brought that on?

Thompson: I don't know. I think not finding things that I wanted to wear that I liked, or things not fitting, and coming up with solutions on my own or getting ideas of different ways that you could work an outfit. People have interests and that was mine. I just stuck with it.

Czaplicki: You were raised by two lawyers. Was law ever an option?

Thompson: I have really bad ADD.²⁵ (Czaplicki laughs) No, I'm serious, and I didn't think that I would be able to get through the parts of law that I thought were boring, because that was always a struggle of mine in school; classes that didn't appeal to me, I had a hard time focusing on. And I was diagnosed very late in the game, in design school. I always just knew that the writing part of it would be hard. I was always the last minute; I was the kid that would be watching TV, and then at ten o'clock at night would sit down and do their homework. And I would be tired the next day at school because I couldn't concentrate until it got dark, late. I'm still like that to this day; I do most of

²⁵ ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder

my work between ten and midnight. But because they were so successful as lawyers, I knew that if this was a career path I was going to take, I was going to have to be phenomenal at it, and I just didn't think I'd be able to do it.

Czaplicki: Why would you have to be phenomenal at it? The expectations from them, or from outsiders?

Thompson: I think both. I didn't want to let them down, and I know that it was very hard seeing me struggle in school, especially my mom because she had been such a good student. It was so hard for her to get her head around, like, "Just sit down and do it; just sit down and concentrate. We'll do this. We'll go over it again, we'll go over it again..." I didn't want to disappoint her with one more failure, like not being good at a career, especially at a career that meant so much to them. All their friends were hugely successful lawyers; all my aunts and uncles, courtesy aunts and uncles, were like appellate court judges. You want to be the lawyer that can't finish their brief because they can't concentrate? No. So I figured I'd play to my strengths.

Czaplicki: That reminds me, how involved were other family members when you'd be down in the mansion? I saw one photo, I guess it was the inaugural, where you were with your grandfather, sitting on his lap. Were they integrated much into everyday life?

Thompson: We had big family Thanksgivings at the mansion, but we had family scattered all over the country. The extended family was not involved on a daily basis, but my parents' friends were, to me, like aunts and uncles.

Czaplicki: I also read a story that talked about you sewing outrageous outfits for your Cabbage Patch dolls when you were a little kid—sequins and leopard print—down in the mansion.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. My best friend Kate and I used to make the *best* outfits.

Czaplicki: It seems like this talent of yours had some deep roots.

Thompson: Yeah, we loved it. Kids love stuff like that, but her mom was fantastic. She used to take us to the fabric stores and we'd buy fake fur and leopard print spandex, and we'd make these Jem and the Holograms outfits for the Cabbage Patch Kids. We had the most rocked-out, sexy Cabbage Patch Kids, which is saying a lot since it's not like a Bratz doll—it was a Cabbage Patch Kid.²⁶ (laughter)

Czaplicki: Some names I haven't thought about in a while.

²⁶ Cabbage Patch Kids is a line of dolls that developed into a major fad between 1983 and 1985, while *Jem* was a popular cartoon that ran from 1985 to 1988. Bratz is a later line of more mature dolls that first appeared in 2001.

Thompson: Right? We're showing our age.

Czaplicki: You were very consciously trying to carve out this path of independence, it sounds like.

Thompson: I never wanted this to be the most interesting thing that ever happened to me. I never wanted growing up the way that I did to be the highlight. I wanted to keep doing interesting things and new things. And I think a lot of it comes from my parents, especially from my dad. People don't realize this because he's never done it, but the man is unbelievably creative and has such an artistic eye and loves collecting. By the time I was an adult, I'd been exposed to so much art and antiques. It was all very visual, so in a sense, I was following in his footsteps. And they were both very supportive of me, whatever I wanted to do, whatever I wanted to study. My dad would bring home fashion books; he'd go to Rizzoli in New York and then fill up the entire overhead compartment of the plane. I'm sure everybody else in business class was thrilled, but I remember that, once he came home with fifteen fashion books, and I was like, "How did you get these?" "I just carried them on the plane." (laughs) "Okay." They were really supportive.

Czaplicki: As a well-trained designer and someone who's out there practicing in the field, how do you assess his eye? Do you share his sense of taste? Do you have very different aesthetic values than him?

Thompson: We all have our things that we care about and other things that we don't care about. For him, clothing is not interesting, but cufflinks are, or watches are, or match safes are. He likes objects—cocktail shakers.

Czaplicki: On that wall over there.

Thompson: My mom's eye tends more towards paintings, or fewer things, but beautiful things. My dad and I tend to be more like, "Oh, that's interesting! I need that. Oh, that's interesting! I need that." And then once you get it, you're like, "On to the next!"

Czaplicki: Would you go on the antiquing hunts that he would take sometimes in the middle of the day, down in Springfield?²⁷

Thompson: Oh, yeah. When we were up at our house in Wisconsin, he used to wake up at 5:30 in the morning to go to the flea market at 6:00. For years, I thought everybody went to the flea market at six o'clock in the morning. It goes on at ten? Who knew? All the good stuff is gone by then, apparently.

Czaplicki: Get there early.

²⁷ For Governor Thompson's antiquing breaks see Mike Lawrence, March 4, 2009, 48; Jim Reilly, August 11, 2009, 51; Jim Edgar, June 10, 2009, 276, 284, and 301; and Greg Baise, August 7, 2013. All interviews by Mark DePue. [Placeholder for cite to Thompson's discussion of antiquing.]

- Thompson: You got to get there early.
- Czaplicki: In the apartment here, is your mom choosing most of the artwork?
- Thompson: It's all Dad. This is all Dad.
- Czaplicki: Hallways, everything?
- Thompson: Everything except her room.
- Czaplicki: He gave us a tour, earlier.
- Thompson: At our house in Michigan, you can always tell the rooms he did versus the rooms that she did.
- Czaplicki: It's different stuff?
- Thompson: She's more the overall look; he's more about, This is a room that I can put my collections in. It's about the collections, or it's about the objects, and for her, it's about the space and feeling comfortable.
- Czaplicki: That's helpful. You said that you're leaving New York and you're going to move to the UK, next stop?
- Thompson: Moving on, yeah.
- Czaplicki: Given all the places you've been, and the traveling and moving again, where is home for you?
- Thompson: Chicago.
- Czaplicki: Chicago?
- Thompson: For sure.
- Czaplicki: Do you think you'll get back here some day?
- Thompson: I don't know—I hope so. The longer you spend away from it, I come back and I forget how warm people are and how nice it is; there's something to be said for being in a place where people know you. I mean, having friends from high school, or your parents' friends, or just running into people. It's nice, where you grow up.
- Czaplicki: Even the cashier remembering you being born in the paper?
- Thompson: Yeah, even that—that's nice! It's nice that people remember you, and remember you fondly. Like my dad says, you have to pick your successors well, so he's now more popular than ever. People are saying nice things to him all the time too, which is nice that they remember and they want to thank

him. And it's nice to live in a place where you can be surrounded by things that your father did, or built, like Navy Pier or the Thompson Center, or the Museum of Contemporary Art— he gave them the land for that.²⁸ That's not the same feeling you have in New York, where you're disconnected, or in London, which is a different culture, has nothing to do with you. These places are all very interesting, but at the end of the day, this is home. And it's a home that my family's contributed a lot to.

Czaplicki: I saw that as a very young tyke, you signed one of the beams that went up into the roof of the Thompson Center. So you're in there.

Thompson: Yeah.

Czaplicki: If you had to reflect back on it, what are the most powerful ways that you think your experience growing up in the governorship shaped you?

Thompson: I think it made me more outgoing and able to talk to anybody, and interested in people because you were meeting people from all walks of life. I like talking to people; I find people endlessly fascinating. It gives you a sympathy, obviously, for politicians and for people in the public eye that you wouldn't necessarily have, to see them as people. And that's it, really.

Czaplicki: Is there anything that we've left out? Something I've overlooked, or anything you'd want to add to the record?

Thompson: I got stories, but ... (laughter)

Czaplicki: Yeah, stories are always wonderful.

Thompson: Well, what are you hoping to achieve by this? What am I adding to this whole thing?

Czaplicki: You occupy a unique perspective, right? There have been plenty of children who live in there, but it's interesting, many of them don't seem to run again. I think they become private citizens, and we're aware of them; we know that they're out there, but we don't often get their perspectives. Oral history in general gives you another form of evidence, say, for scholars who want to come in and understand a particular period, or understand a time, or understand an administration. Certainly family life is one part of this, so getting some insight into that, thinking about family balance and public and private, and how these things balance. So those personal interviews really help with that. As I said, obviously we can't really talk policy, so talking to you is

²⁸ Governor Thompson backed a plan that allowed the Museum of Contemporary Art to demolish the Illinois National Guard Armory on Chicago Avenue and lease the property from the state for ninety-nine years at one dollar per year. Constanza Montana, "Museum to Build on Armory Site," *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1988. [Placeholder for other Thompson Project interviews that reference these projects.]

a way to do that and give a very unique view of this. We can't talk to Oglesby, these earlier people that we mentioned.

Thompson: It's funny—the kids of politicians either become very successful politicians, or they run a million miles in the other direction. Because there's a lot of that too. Look at Lisa Madigan. She saw it all growing up; she went through it all. I guess it just comes down to whether or not you like it. But at least they go in informed. In her case, her kids, she at least knows how to help them, or what to do, or what not to do, having been through the same experience.

Czaplicki: Have you ever assisted anybody who was running for something? Taken part in the political game that way, either as counsel or campaigning?

Thompson: No. I've contributed to campaigns, but I've never gotten back into the swing of things, and that was always a deal-breaker for me. I never wanted to date anybody who was interested in politics, marry anybody interested in politics... No, I'm done.

Czaplicki: I was thinking about this public/private balance: are there things that could be done to improve that balance, either legislatively or just a culture change?

Thompson: It is what it is. It's fame and celebrity, and that's true for anybody who has that. It's the same thing.

Czaplicki: So, any stories you want to tell?

Thompson: My favorite is the George Bush whapping story.

Czaplicki: Whapping?

Thompson: Oh, yes. I went through a phase when I was two of wanting to hit people. (Czaplicki laughs) I really had it in for babies—I don't know why. It's not like I had a baby sister that I felt threatened by; I just didn't like them. I would run up to baby carriages in the park and whap the babies—that's what we called it in the family, whapping—and then run away.

Czaplicki: Like a dope slap on the forehead?

Thompson: Oh yeah, I'd slap them and run away—boom. Which, looking back, it's a *miracle* that didn't make it into the papers. Of all the things that I got busted for, you would think random infant assaults would rank at the top, but apparently my mom was able to apologize enough. Imagine how mortifying that your toddler is this crazy person. Like I said, kids are crazy. But I would try it with adults, too. And unlike biting, where you could just pretend-bite the kid and they learn not to do it, you can't exactly hit your kid when they hit you. So I don't remember doing this, but I remember being told this for years after: We were having a fundraiser for George Bush at the house; he was running for vice president with Reagan. My mother and father were standing

in the receiving line, and my dad went to get me so that I could meet the vice president. He brings me down and he apparently tells me in the elevator, worst thing ever, “Now, Samantha, remember, no whapping.” (Czaplicki laughs) This puts the idea in my head; I don’t think it would have occurred to me, otherwise. He brings me up, and the vice president’s coming through the receiving line. He gets to my dad, and I haul off and slap him. And we have a photo of this.

Czaplicki: Really?

Thompson: Oh, yeah. My dad’s photographer, Mars, who was one of my all-time favorites—he used to drive me around in the golf cart in Springfield, on the fairgrounds—we had a big old time together. Mars takes this picture of me with my hand back like this, and it was a national wire photo. Like, “Illinois Governor’s Daughter, Samantha Thompson, Waves Hello to Vice President George Bush.” And I mean, I let him have it. He took a couple steps back. My mother was beside herself, mortified.²⁹

We saw him years later. They had a governors’ conference in Maine, and he had a thing at his house in Kennebunkport. He came up, he took one look at me, and he ran away and then he came back. I have a really nice note that he sent me at the time; he sent the press clipping with the article, and a note. He was apparently famous for that, sending people notes. What a class act. Nice, nice man, and I feel like history is redeeming him. The more we see, you know, he really was tempered and an excellent president.

Czaplicki: I hear similar things about his wife, that Barbara Bush was just a decent person.

Thompson: I don’t remember her as well. I’m sure. Most people in politics are decent. This is what I wish everybody would realize. Imagine having to run for things, how nerve-wracking that is. I ran for student council, lost, and it was **traumatic**. I can’t imagine what it’s like to walk down the street and think about all the thousands of people that didn’t vote for you.

Czaplicki: So that was your only campaign?

Thompson: Yeah. Boy, was that a . . . Apparently, I would have won too, except I was out sick that day, and a supplier who used to do the campaign t-shirts for my father thought it would be a cute idea to drop off campaign t-shirts for me. Well, of course, all the kids realized, Oh, who does she think she is, with t-shirts, blah, blah, blah, and they didn’t vote for me. You can’t win.

Czaplicki: With friends like that, right?

²⁹ [Placeholder for cite to Mars interview, as well as Jim or Jayne Thompson’s account.] Sam, do you have a copy of the photo we could scan? I couldn’t find it in the online Trib or Times(??)

Thompson: With friends like that, exactly. But it's funny how people also get involved in your life and try and do things for you. My mother has a great story about her wedding cake. She wanted a simple wedding cake, and the baker was like, "No, it's the wife of the future governor, we have to..." So she had this huge cake with a fountain, but she hated it. But people take it upon themselves to do things for you because you're somebody special, or they think you're somebody special. Sometimes it's great, sometimes it's like, "Thank you very much..."

Czaplicki: How do you stay grounded? What would your parents do to stay grounded, given that?

Thompson: I think they became more insular. Especially my mom ; I think that she was definitely the one who paid attention to who you could trust. They were lucky to have very old friends around them that they trusted, that they still have to this day. You just have to be aware. Plus you got to think: for everybody who's being nice to you, there are tons of people who are not being nice to you. It's not like being a king, where everybody's like ... (laughter)

Czaplicki: You brought up Mars. He's somebody who hasn't come up too often. Do you remember other people?

Thompson: We had another photographer who was absolutely fantastic, Matt Ferguson, who I still know. And we had this one trooper named Sully who could do the coolest tricks. He would do that trick where he would pretend to remove his thumb. Then he had the best trick I've ever seen: he could smoke a cigarette down to the filter while it was still burning, flip it backwards in his mouth, using his tongue, close his mouth, and then flip it back out again. I've never seen anything like it.

Czaplicki: Yeah, especially at that age. Those are the best things.

Thompson: Yeah. This was when everybody smoked. The tail car always smelled like smoke. When I got bigger, I was always in the tail car if my parents were in the main one, or if I was leaving, or if they were bringing me separately to something. The tail cars were always navy blue. The main car was black; it was like a black Cadillac. The tail car would be a navy blue Oldsmobile, and it would always smell like cigarette smoke.

Czaplicki: Would you snoop on the parties that they had? These legendary—

Thompson: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'd go, I'd pretend to tend bar at the parties— I was a nuisance. I was everywhere; I was part of the scene.

Czaplicki: Really? You weren't sent to bed?

Thompson: I didn't want to miss anything. They sent me to bed at bedtime, but if it was going on in my house, I was there. One of the bag boys had a wedding; was

really little—I must have been three or four years old—and I thought the presents were for me. I think I started unwrapping the presents at the present table. Hey, they were in my house, there were presents, they must be for me, right?

Czaplicki: An endearing child.

Thompson: Oh, yeah. A real handful.

Czaplicki: Other stories?

Thompson: That's all I got, but if I can think of any, I will let you know.

Czaplicki: All right. If there's nothing else that you'd want to add, I appreciate very much you taking some time out of your very busy day. You're exhausted from your travel, but you've been a trooper.

Thompson: Oh, this is fun. It's fun to think about these things I haven't thought about in years.

Czaplicki: Yeah, so thanks very much.

Thompson: Oh, we should talk about Du Quoin, actually.

Czaplicki: Du Quoin?

Thompson: Has anybody brought up the fair in Du Quoin and the house down there?

Czaplicki: It comes up now and then, but you seem to have a more focused idea in mind that doesn't ring a bell for me.

Thompson: It's interesting because—and I don't know the details behind it—it was the State Fair and the racetrack, and Dad bought it for the State of Illinois. It came with a house, and the mayor of Du Quoin, Mayor [John] Rednour, owned a twin house on the same property. The guy who had originally built both had built them for his daughters, so at some point that part of the estate had passed into Mayor Rednour's hands. He lived there with his wife, Wanda. When the State of Illinois bought the fairgrounds, that became sort of like the mansion in Southern Illinois, and we would go down there every summer for the State Fair.

It was always hot as Hades—it was like 102 degrees in Du Quoin—but it's such a beautiful part of the state. People don't realize how gorgeous Southern Illinois is, and how amazing the food is, and the scenery, and these rolling hills. For me, that was one of the most special things, and my mother, as well. She **loves** Southern Illinois, and Wanda Rednour and she became great friends. Mayor Rednour is a Democrat. They used to have Democrat Day at the fair, and they would have a big party at their house. Then the next

day, we'd have Republican Day, and she and Wanda would share the table and chair rentals. They would move them from one side of the lawn to the other, and then they would go to each other's parties. That, you don't see anymore.³⁰

Czaplicki: Yeah, times have changed.

Thompson: That was bipartisanship at its best. She had all these daughters-in-law, and you'd go over there—they had this *big* kitchen in the basement—and they'd be down there making pies and cakes. Mayor Rednour's granddaughter Jill was a really good friend of mine.

Speaking of people doing things for you. This was not in his best interest: the guy who had all of the concessions for the State Fair, all of the carnival games, gave me a note that basically let me play for free. It got to the point where the carnies would just see me coming and start handing over the toys, because I would just sit there until I won. (Czaplicki laughs) So Jill and I had this closet in the house set up like a secret clubhouse, and we had blow-up crayons and eight-foot-tall stuffed animals. All the stuff that you'd have to play for four hundred years to win, they would just hand over. Eventually, he took it away. He's like, "Listen, Sam, I think you've had enough fun." I mean, I was little.

I'd make the troopers go on the rides with me, and there was one who got motion-sick and threw up. (Czaplicki laughs) I liked all the really bad ones, the ones that would spin around and you'd stick to the wall, or the salt-and-pepper-shakers that would go upside-down. After a while, they decided it was not a big enough security risk; they could watch me from the ground and get me when I got off the ride. But we had so much fun. Mayor Rednour put in a pool because it was so hot, really, you could only go to the fair at night, and we would play in the pool all day. Jill had all sorts of cousins and friends and stuff who would come over, and they would have this cheerleading competition every year; cheerleaders from all over the state would come with their uniforms. I just thought it was the coolest thing in the entire world.

We would go and take the helicopter, and Dad would land on people's lawns. There was this one woman who painted quilts—we still have one, beautiful—and he was like, "Oh, you got to go see these quilts. This is amazing." And we landed on her lawn! We're like, "Hi, we're here to see the quilts," and this woman is like, Oh, my God, the Governor of Illinois landed on my lawn in a helicopter and he wants to see my work; they're like, Okay.

And he built these Illinois artisan shops—I don't know if anybody's talked to you about them, there's one in the Thompson Center—but they built them all over the state, and it was basically so Illinois artisans would have a

³⁰ [Placeholder for JCT's discussion of her friendship with Rednour.]

place to sell their work. They had everything—basket weavers and jewelry designers and potters, and it was fabulous. You'd see the work that all these different people were doing, and it was a great opportunity for them to get their work out there and to make some money, and to be able to keep doing it. Because most of them had other jobs.

I think his support of the arts was amazing. The things that he bought for the State of Illinois Center—before it was named after him, now it's the Thompson Center—the art in there was just incredible. And the furniture: he commissioned pieces. You can be in government, you can try and help people and pass laws and legislation, but he also looked for ways to help people just aside from that: let's promote the arts, let's start a store, let's bring people in. To me, that's what I admire the most, the random things like that.

Czaplicki: Did he ever explain where those policy ideas came from? Is that just something he did?

Thompson: I think he just liked that kind of stuff. He liked the arts, and he felt a responsibility to promote them. Has he talked to you about the Dana-Thomas House?

Czaplicki: I'm not sure. Mark DePue is going to be interviewing your father, so I don't know what they've talked about. I haven't seen those transcripts.

Thompson: It is, I think, the most complete Frank Lloyd Wright house in the world because of his efforts. He bought it for the State, and he went and raised money and bought the furnishings back because it just needed to be done. Historic preservation, supporting the arts, and things like that—people don't even really think about it. He kept the White Sox from going to Florida because he just felt like it needed to be done. And he was willing to go out on a limb for those things. I think that that's really special. You don't see people willing to go out on a limb a lot, these days. It wasn't anything that was a benefit to him, it wasn't anything that got him huge praise; it got him the respect of people who also believed in those things. But there's so many little things like that.

Czaplicki: Would you say that's his legacy to the state?

Thompson: I think so. The things that he built, people's lives that he helped. Now the talk, because we're all so broke, is budgets and this and that. But the infrastructure, and just being creative with things, is so important. That's all I got.

Czaplicki: That was all great, so thanks very much.

Thompson: Thank you. Of course. And if I think of anything, I will let you know.

Czaplicki: Okay. I'll stop us here.

Thompson: Are you guys going to interview my mom?

Czaplicki: Yes.