Governor Elmer A. Benson was born in Appleton in 1895 and attended public schools there. In 1918, he graduated from Saint Paul College of law and worked for a time at a law office in Saint Paul. He went off to work at the Farmers and Merchants State Bank in Appleton from 1923 to 1933 before serving as commissioner of banking under the administration of Governor Floyd B. Olson. Benson was commissioner until 1935, when he was appointed to complete the term of U.S. Senator Thomas Schall. With the strong support of the Farmer-Labor party, Benson was criticized for his so-called "left-wing" proposals and was accused of being a Communist. While governor, Benson developed a progressive package of legislation, which failed to become law due to a deadlock with the Senate. In 1938, Benson lost to the Republican Harold Stassen in his reelection attempt.

Benson continued to be politically active, although he was twice defeated in his bid for the U.S. Senate. He was elected chairman of the Farmer-Labor Association of Minnesota and worked towards the merging of the Democratic and Farmer-Labor parties in the state. Benson also served as chairman of the National Citizens Political Action Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) from 1944 to 1946, and as chairman of the Progressive party into the 1950s. Throughout his life, he remained active in farming and real estate transactions.

Although many of his proposals were considered socialistic at the time, several have since become law. These include homestead property tax relief; higher income tax rates for wealthy individuals and corporations; mandatory workers' compensation coverage; a state civil service system; party designation for the legislature; and expanded state aid for schools, financed by income tax.

Benson married Frances Miller in 1922. They had two children, Thomas and Lois. Benson died in 1985 at the age of eighty-nine.

Photo of Elmer Benson (1978) courtesy of the Star Tribune.
Interview with Governor Elmer A. Benson
Interviewed by Martin J. McGowan
Interviewed December 1981 and August 13, 1983 in Appleton and Bloomington, Minnesota

December 1981 (At Governor Benson's home in Appleton, Minnesota):

MJM: Does it bother you to sit back and reminisce about the old days?
EAB: No.

MJM: Is it painful or agonizing or tiring?
EAB: Not at all, Marty.

MJM: I appreciate the opportunity. As I said in my letter to you, I was really trying to view things from the perspective of the era in which things happened. Today, in an era of relative prosperity, we can't really quite visualize--at least the younger people can't--what it was like in the Depression. My children don't know what a depression is--they weren't around. It seems to me that the Depression era caused people to do things that we would regard as extreme today, but which, in their day, seemed like the proper things to do. I guess I'm really trying to reconstruct that era in which this history of the Farmer-Labor party and your experience evolved.

I can still remember the day in '34 when the dust blew right here in Appleton and clouded out the streetlights that were on during the daytime. I went out north of town to what we used to call the Schramm farm. I think it was the Hardwick farm in those days. The dust and the dirt had built up on the fences to where it almost covered them. Later on, windbreaks were planted to try to keep that erosion from occurring. You talk about that today, and young people just can't believe it.

EAB: Right across the road from there, on the north side of the road a mile or two--or maybe it isn't that far, it's right across the road a short distance from there--was some land that blew so much and was so light that people said it would never be farmed. Now they are irrigating it, and it's probably worth fifteen hundred dollars an acre. You could have bought it for fifteen dollars an acre then, I'm sure.
In those days, yes. Those people from Iowa were coming up here to get some of this cheap land. They couldn't afford it in Iowa, and they could get it cheaply here. If they irrigate or practice good farming, their farms have been productive.

John Cairns was sitting with Tom today. I think he has five of those big irrigators out there.

My narrative begins during the depression of 1922. You were pretty young in those days, but you would certainly remember it. This was a post-World War I-type depression. What happened, to your recollection, in that era? Was it just the usual economic downturn after a so-called wartime prosperity? From what I understand, farm prices evidently fell, and things were pretty hard up.

I was going to college at the time, but as I recall it, farm prices dropped fifty or a hundred percent in just a matter of days or weeks. I suppose that people just pulled in their belts—just didn't do anything, didn't go any place, didn't buy anything. They got by that way.

Do you think that from that came the origins of the Farmer-Labor party? Of course, you had the Nonpartisan League, which originated over in Dakota, moving in. They weren't as successful organizing in Minnesota as they were in North Dakota. Was that depression the beginning of the realization that the farmer and the laborer had something in common?

I think that had a lot to do with it, yes. Just why Townley and his crew were not as successful in organizing in Minnesota as they were in North Dakota, I don't know. But that was, of course, before television or radio. Their meetings were all held at big picnics, and I remember one picnic so well up at the Yellow Bank near Odessa. It seemed like a tremendous crowd to me. I don't know how big it was. It probably wasn't as big as it had seemed. But A.C. Townley was speaking, and I remember a man got up in the audience and said, "Mr. Townley, I'd like to ask you what I've been getting for the seventeen dollars that I've been paying into the Nonpartisan League." And Townley, the clever platform performer that he was, said, "Mister, if you didn't get anything more for your money than just nerve enough to get up and ask that question, you got your money's worth." [Laughs]

That's a good response. [Laughs]
EAB: And there's some truth in that, don't you know?

MJM: That's right. That's what you were saying about the American Agriculture Movement, in the sense that it has encouraged young farmers into taking an interest in speaking and in leading meetings.

EAB: Right.

MJM: I'm curious about the origin of some of the early Farmer-Laborites, like Ernest Lundine and Henrik Shipstead. They seem to have come in from the Republican side. There must have been some who were more or less disillusioned Republicans.

EAB: I think they probably became disillusioned with the Republican party. I never was close to Shipstead. I was closer to Ernie Lundeen than I was Shipstead, but never really close to either one of them in the sense that--

MJM: That you'd call them a personal friend.

EAB: No. They seemed to be traveling in a different group. I was with the Floyd B. Olson group, and Olson despised Shipstead. I guess Shipstead despised Olson.

MJM: But Olson came in from the Democratic side.

EAB: Yes, he did. [Laughs] I remember George Leonard, the Minneapolis lawyer told me that Olson came to him when he first decided that he wanted to enter statewide politics, or politics other than county attorney. Olson suggested that he wanted to run for either Congress or governor, I've forgotten which. George Leonard said to him, "Just what right have you got to run for office? What have you done in the Farmer-Labor party to warrant that?" or something like that. And Olson didn't pay any attention to him. He went right ahead. Of course, George Leonard supported him, but he called him down for thinking that he was brash, I guess.

MJM: Lundeen seems to have been kind of all over the map, in a sense. He ran for this and that—congressman, senator, governor, different offices.

EAB: I'll tell you a story about Ernie. I was in President Roosevelt's waiting room, waiting to go in and see him. Senator Joe Guffey came up to see me and said, "Say, Senator, can you talk to Ernie Lundeen about a certain bill?" It was a good bill. I said, "No, that wouldn't do me any good, because Tommy Corcoran had me talk to him about a bill here
just a matter of weeks ago, and Ernie made a promise to me, and he didn't carry it out. He didn't do what he said he'd do. So it wouldn't do me any good."

"Well," he said, "How can we get him?" "Well," I said, "I don't know." He said, "Can we buy him?" "No, I don't think you can buy him. You can buy his secretary, I know that." His secretary was a damn crook. He said, "Can we get him with a social racket?" I said, "No, I don't know if you can get him with a social racket, but you can get his wife with a social racket, I know that." And he said, "Well, how can we get him?" I said, "Well, I don't know. But I'll tell you, I think sometime if the president takes a ship down the Potomac River and has a few senators with him and invites Ernie to take a ride on the battleship down the Potomac River, you can get him. Ernie loves battleships." "Well," he said, "I guess we'll have Mrs. Peter Gary get after him." She was the wife of the richest man in the Senate at that time. So what they did, I don't know. [Laughs]

MJM: Is that when Lundeen was senator?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Speaking of you in the president's office, there's a story I read about how your predecessor as banking commissioner, Peyton, was named a federal judge.

EAB: He was president of the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis.

MJM: Otto Bremer asked that he not be reappointed. You had gone to Roosevelt, who said he knew of Bremer. Roosevelt, in your presence, slammed the table and said, "If my friend Bremer doesn't want him reappointed, he's not to be reappointed." You reassured Bremer of this fact, yet Peyton was reappointed. Is that about the way it happened?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Why do you think he chose to reappoint him?

EAB: Right after I was named to the Senate, Otto came up to see me in my office in the banking department. Of course, Otto and I were very good friends. He said, "Elmer, you're going down to Washington in a few days." I said, "Yes." Well, he said, "You don't want John Peyton reappointed president of the Federal Bank, do you?" I said, "I don't." He said, "I don't either, and my brother Adolf doesn't. But we don't have any candidate for the job. I wish you'd see
Mac---McIntyre---when you go down and make an appointment to see the president. Tell him that Otto Bremer and my brother Adolf don't want Peyton appointed, but we haven't any candidate for the job."

Well, I knew that Otto Bremer had good reason---good reason---for not wanting John Peyton appointed, and I'll tell you what it was. John Peyton actually tried to break Otto Bremer. I know that from my own knowledge. And those were tough times. That was right about the time that they raised two hundred thousand dollars to release Edward Bremer from the kidnappers. Banks were having hard times.

So I didn't have a good feeling toward Peyton either. Well, Roosevelt talked in such strong language to me. He said, "This just must not be! I certainly have got to do that much for my friend Otto Bremer."

I might add this. Your father invited me to a luncheon for Franklin Roosevelt at the Lowrey Hotel that Adolf and Otto Bremer were putting on when he was a candidate for president. I don't know that he even had announced yet, but he was building up to it. So I went to the luncheon, and we were invited to the dinner in the auditorium that evening. So I went with your father to the dinner. There were four or five thousand people there for dinner, and Otto and Adolf Bremer paid the whole bill. Otto told me later that he gave the president twenty-five thousand dollars for his campaign. He may have given much more, I don't know.

So the president of the United States was speaking strongly about an old friend, when he slapped his knee and said, "This just must not be!" He made some notes about it, and then he called in McIntyre and told him to be sure to remind him when Eccles came over that afternoon.

MJM: Why do you think it was changed?

EAB: I don't know. I've forgotten the man who was the head of the Minneapolis Tribune bureau at that time, but he came in to see me. I don't know where they get this information, but they sure get it. He knew what had taken place down at the White House. He said, "You don't want Peyton appointed, do you?" I said, "No, I don't." "You went to see the president about it?" "Yes." Well, he said, "He's going to be reappointed." I said, "It doesn't make any difference. I'm still going to oppose him." In about two weeks he was reappointed.

MJM: You don't know who got to him or why?
EAB: I don't. I haven't any idea.

MJM: Why did Floyd Olson appoint Peyton banking commissioner? He was a Republican, wasn't he?

EAB: He appointed him banking commissioner because the Independent Bankers Association recommended him.

MJM: Was the IBA pretty strong in those days? They were stronger later, weren't they?

EAB: No, not later they weren't. No, they weren't too strong at that time, either.

MJM: Olson appointed various people, didn't he?

EAB: Olson, of course, he asked them if they knew Elmer Benson. Yes, they said they knew Elmer Benson. He said, "I'd like to have you consider him." I should have added that he also had the endorsement of Ralph Manuel, president of the Marquette National Bank of Minneapolis. I think Ralph Manuel and Jack Devaney, who was Manuel's attorney at that time, I think they had a lot to do with it. But they got the Independent Bankers Association, too.

MJM: What about the Bremers? Were they liberals in a true sense?

EAB: Yes, Otto and Adolf were always on the Democratic side, always. I think probably they contributed money to the Republicans, too.

MJM: I suppose.

EAB: But if they gave five thousand dollars to the Republicans, they gave fifty thousand dollars to the Democrats. I think it would have been on that basis.

MJM: What's your earliest recollection of the Farmer-Labor party? Were you in it from the beginning of your political career? Did you start out as a Farmer-Laborite? Was that your original conviction?

EAB: I think I was in the Nonpartisan League first, and then the Farmer-Labor party.

MJM: It's unclear to me from the books how the NPL--it seemed to continue after the Farmer-Labor party became a party. I'm a little unclear as to when and how the Farmer-Labor party
was created as such. Was there a clear political party, a Farmer-Labor party, in 1922-24, in that era?

EAB: That's when they merged with the Working People's Nonpartisan League. There was a kind of controversy between the Working People's Nonpartisan League and the Farmer-Labor party. Farmers were envious or jealous or maybe I haven't got the right word yet--of the workers, and the workers had the same attitude toward the farmers. And it still exists to a certain extent, don't you know.

MJM: We were talking about how the success of the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota contrasted with that of Minnesota. I read that in North Dakota, it was fairly successful because that was a one-industry state--that is, farming.

EAB: That's probably true.

MJM: Whereas Minnesota is diverse, with lumbering, mining, industrial workers, whatever.

EAB: I have no doubt. That's no doubt true.

MJM: The Nonpartisan League wasn't able to transfer to them.

EAB: Sounds reasonable to me.

MJM: Howard Williams emerges quite a bit in the narratives in various ways. He was working for different groups as a fund-raiser and ran for office several times. It's kind of interesting. I met him myself in Saint Paul when I ran for the legislature there. He had turned up in our ward club and was active around there. I remember him once coming to Appleton as an advance man for some campaign--I don't remember which one it was--in the forties, it seems to me, running the sound truck around in advance of somebody's speech here. What was your impression of him? I know you probably were with him and against him in your career.

EAB: Howard was a preacher, to start with.

MJM: Yes, on the Chautauqua circuit. I guess he was a Methodist clergy or something.

EAB: He was Methodist or Presbyterian, one of those groups. A very clever speaker, very clever speaker, and a smart, smart fellow. But I thought he was a little unstable.

MJM: You get that impression just reading about him.
EAB: In that he would go overboard on things, sort of almost a religious fanatic. I don't know that Howard and I were ever very close. I did appoint him, I think, to head the Veterans Affairs Department.

MJM: That's mentioned in one of the books, yes. He ran for lieutenant governor in one of the later years. I don't know if it was when you ran for senator later on. But I guess he did get re-endorsement or nomination for lieutenant governor once on a ticket similar to yours.

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Speaking of religious fervor, Susy Stageberg--was that her name? Was she also a rather religious type of liberal?

EAB: Susy Stageberg was a remarkable woman, I think. She was a gentle, mild-mannered, motherly, grandmotherly sort of person. I think I can best describe her by telling you a story about her. We were in Chicago holding a meeting--I've forgotten the nature of the meeting--but some of the fellows said, "Let's go out and have dinner at the supper club." Well, as we walked out the door, I noticed Susy Stageberg was standing talking to Jack McManus, the editor of the National Guardian.

I didn't think anything of it. We had been out at the supper club for a half hour or so, and the fellows had had a few drinks. They were all talking a little loud--they were probably twenty or twenty-five of us--when who should show up but Jack McManus and Susy Stageberg. Suzy was the only woman there, see. Suzy sat down beside me, and I've forgotten where Jack sat. Anyway, Jack spoke up and said, "Suzy, what do you think of these men, anyway, talking loud and using vulgar language?" "Well, Mr. McManus, you know, I've always said that I hate sin, but I love sinners." [Laughs]

MJM: That was a good response. [Laughs]

EAB: Her husband was a professor in some church seminary that went out of business. But she ran for office. I think she started out in the Populist party and the Prohibition party and then came to the Farmer-Labor party. She was very, very fine, kind, and gentle, a fine person.

MJM: From the earliest, the Farmer-Labor party and the Nonpartisan League, at least in North Dakota, were advocating state-ownership of grain elevators and loan agencies. I guess I'm contrasting cooperative-owned elevators versus state-owned elevators. Did North Dakota ever get into state ownership?
EAB: Yes, they established a state-owned bank that's still in existence and is very prosperous.

MJM: What was the rationale—that they couldn't deal with the private bankers or the commission men?

EAB: Well, they established the state-owned bank, state elevator, state mill.

MJM: Cement plants?

EAB: South Dakota's got a state cement plant and a state insurance agency. I think it was just a case of they'd been gouged by these interests, and they wanted to improve on the situation. I don't know how successful the mill is now. It was successful for a long time. But the state insurance program still exists, and the Bank of North Dakota is very successful. One reason for its success is that all state banks have to keep their reserves in the Bank of North Dakota. Then they acquired, during the Depression, quite a bit of land.

MJM: It was more or less a Catholic spot on the court.

EAB: Yes, Jack mentioned that. Jack said that he couldn't afford to continue on the [inaudible]. His family was too expensive. He thought that a Catholic should be reappointed because he had just run for reelection. While Jack was a very, very sick Catholic, he was nominally so. I don't think he knew about church writing. Anyway, he thought that a Catholic should be reappointed because of that. And I suppose so.

MJM: One thing that seems to creep in through all the [inaudible] party history was the constant struggle between the left and right wing elements, I guess you would call them. There obviously were some with communist backing who were delegates and candidates. There are references in books that I have read that said that if they supported the Farmer-Labor aims, they should be admitted into the party. Yet at times, there are records which show that they were barred from conventions and caucuses. What was your feeling over the years about the communist infiltration in the party, if there was any?

WB: Well, yes, there was some. There isn't any question about that. There were a lot of socialists. Most of the old-time socialists who were leaders—of the Cosby Livingstone type—were tied in. John Sebastian, for one. The Minneapolis city council, at one time, was socialist. They all
came into the Farmer-Labor party, and with a few exceptions, I don't think they were dissatisfied. They all felt that they should be there. And then there were a few communists who came in. Of course, most of the communists would not. I think the best example of a well-known communist coming into the Farmer-Labor party was--I can't think of his name right now--

MJM: Well, there was a fellow by the name of Hathaway.

EAB: Clarence Hathaway--you're right—that's the man I was thinking of. Clarence Hathaway was a communist from Minnesota. His father was a Methodist minister here. He went to New York, and he was editor of the communist paper there. He got to drinking, and they expelled him from the party because of his excessive drinking. So he was an expelled communist, but there was no change in his beliefs—he was still a communist. He took a job as a mechanic—he was an expert machinist—and practiced his trade. He was elected as business agent of his union. He was a smart fellow. He was very, very sensible fellow—a very reasonable fellow. I knew him very well. How many others there were, I don't know. He was the only one whom I really know of.

MJM: Getting back to that era again, was there something special about that period of turmoil that encouraged the activity of the communists and the socialists? Something that made them feel the necessity of that kind of activity to change things? Was it more so then than it might be today? Or has it continued on gradually—I suppose we will always have leftists?

EAB: Well, I think there were many more communists back then than there are today. The communist party is a mere shell today.

MJM: Did it just come from times being hard and radical methods were called for?

EAB: I think so.

MJM: Were they trying to take over the Farmer-Labor party, or were they just there as individuals?

EAB: They didn't try to take over the party, and they didn't have a chance. There was just a handful. Oh, I know of one. He is a prominent lawyer in Minneapolis now. I can't think of his name. Anyway, he admitted he was a communist. Why, he did so, I don't know. Nobody thought he was—they just thought he was a lawyer who was to the left.
MJM: Judge Hall was one.

EAB: Yes, that was the man I was trying to think of. Yes, Douglas Hall. Well, he still is a judge. I don't know if he is still a member of the communist party or not. I thought he was stupid to admit that he was a member of the communist party. No one could have proved that he was. I don't think that he was that active in their affairs.

Bob Wirthschar was a leader of the largest union in Minnesota at that time—the Honeywell union at that time. He was a communist, I think. I have no other knowledge of that. I am reasonably sure that he was. Well, anyway, he and Doug Hall and Clarence Hathaway and probably a dozen others were at our meetings. They were the strongest supporters of Hubert Humphrey that Hubert Humphrey had. Hubert Humphrey never would have been nominated as mayor if it hadn't been for them. Martin Mackie was chairman of the communist party. He practically had his headquarters down at city hall.

MJM: You are often mentioned as being associated with what they call the left wing of the party. Did you feel that way? Was there that kind of division within the party?

EAB: Yes, I felt that I was.

MJM: As contrasted with someone like Hjalmar Petersen or Henrik Shipstead or some others?

EAB: Yes, that's right.

MJM: You were also called a radical. In fact, in some of the speeches—I don't know if you said it or Olson said it—but that you regarded yourself as a radical.

EAB: I think I was the first one who said, "I am what I want to be, a radical."

MJM: You said that. Olson said he was a radical, but with the disclaimer that he advocated gradual change.

EAB: I remember that Lindsay called me over to his office and wanted to know if I wanted to go with him to Detroit Lakes to try to get the endorsement for Congress for A.C. Townley. I told yes, that I would like to do that. That is where I made the statement, "I am what I want to be, a radical."

MJM: What did that mean to you? What did you mean by that?
EAB: What I meant was that I am an opposer of the establishment. I still am. I mentioned to you sometime ago about John Quincy Adams and Thomas Paine. Those people all warned of the dangers of the concentration of wealth—every one of them. Well, the concentration of wealth then was peanuts compared to the way it is today. There is the DuPont family in Delaware, the Mellon family in Pittsburgh, the Rockefellers in New York—they have power than all the monarchs of Europe ever had. I am a firm believer that we should let a man make as much money as he can during his lifetime. We should let him make one hundred thousand dollars, and anything above that, we should take every dime. During his lifetime or at his death, we should let him give away three million dollars—I'm just pulling a figure out of the air now, maybe it should be five million dollars. Everything above that, the government should take it away from him.

MJM: That's for individuals. What about corporations?

EAB: I don't think corporations should be permitted to hold more than let's say five hundred thousand dollars of tax-exempt securities. I don't think an individual should be able to hold let's say fifty thousand dollars of tax-exempt securities. I think people should be required to pay Social Security taxes on all their income, not just on the first fifteen thousand. If you make a million dollars, then you should be taxed on the whole business. In other words, I think the concentration of wealth and income has become dangerous to our nation.

MJM: Once when you were governor, you were invited to a dinner where one of the principal guests was Dick Lilly of the First National Bank of Saint Paul. It was reported that you laid out for them what your program would be as governor, and apparently, it was like a dash of cold water to them. Afterwards, somebody is supposed to have remarked that "Floyd Olson may have said those things, but that son-of-a-bitch Benson really believes them!" Did you ever hear that story?

EAB: The story of that meeting at the Minnesota Club was this. Charlie Ward once organized a meeting for the top businessmen in the Twin Cities. Finally, I was persuaded to attend by Abe Harris, with the understanding that there would be no newspapermen there. Well, Dick Lilly sat on my right hand side, and Billy Oppenheimer was on my left. Billy Oppenheimer at the time was probably the biggest lawyer in Saint Paul. During the dinner hour, Dick turned to me and said, "Senator, do you have family?" I said, "Yes, I have a wife and two children." He said, "Well, you know, we have
done it for others, and we would just as soon do it for you. We would like to set up a trust fund for your wife and children."

Well, you know that I used to have a reputation for being quick-tempered. I don't know what made me control myself at the time, but I pretended that I didn't fully hear or understand him. I started talking to Billy Oppenheimer, and Billy was more interesting than Dick, anyway. This was the first time that Dick Lilly had ever met me.

**MJM:** But it looked like a bribe to you?

**EAB:** Yes, and I thought to myself right away, "My God, how do you suppose he talks to a fellow he has been supporting for election, if he dares to talk that way to me?" Then later, I spoke to them. "I assume that no one in this room has voted for me. I assume that. I am going to be your governor for the next two years, and you might as well accept that. The newspapers have suggested that we ought to have a pay-as-you-go government. I thoroughly agree with that. But if that is the case, you folks are going to be doing the paying. You've got the wealth and the income, and that's okay with me."

**MJM:** But they hadn't anticipated on paying that heavily, had they?

**EAB:** No, they did not. But then later, I should tell you this, Abe Harris came to me during the special session of the legislature and said, "Elmer, Dick Lilly wants to see you." And I said, "Well, I don't care to see him." Abe said, "I think you ought to see him, Elmer. He is a good friend of Charlie Ward and he was a good friend of Olson." I said, "I don't want to see him in this office." So Abe said, "Well, how about Charlie Ward's apartment?" Then I said, "OK, that's all right. But I don't want anybody there except for Charlie Ward and Dick Lilly."

So I met with them, and Dick was arguing against the tax program that I had proposed. I was arguing the other way. Then finally, he said to me, just like that, "Governor, I talked to His Grace, the Archbishop yesterday, and he told me that he considered you to be a dangerous man. Unless you change your attitude, he is going to organize a Catholic campaign against you. And he is going to organize the other churches against you as well." Oh God, did that make me mad! I said to him, "Mister, I'm leaving now, and I'm going to try to get the best darn legislation that I know to get for the people of Minnesota. You know it's going to cost you and
the Archbishop plenty of money." That Archbishop--Murray, I
think it was--was a wealthy man. "Now, you can go and tell
that Archbishop to go to hell." Well, we had been talking
about taxes, so there was a religious connotation there. I'm
sure the Archbishop was not in any fear of my suggestion.

MJM: I don't know if the Archbishop did anything about that,
but I do remember that we had a pastor in that era, a Father
Pavelchy (?). He used to give sermons on Sunday criticizing
the Farmer-Laborites and would hand out pamphlets attacking
you and Olson. He was very political It used to disturb my
father no end, and I couldn't get along with him either. It
was really something.

EAB: I had some good friends in the church. There was father
Joe Kalsky was a good friend of mine. He asked me if he could
give the opening prayer of the legislature. Well, I didn't
have any control over that. That was the job of the Speaker.
So I called in Harold Barker if he wouldn't select him, and he
did. And I had some good friends among the priests in
Crookston and Little Falls.

MJM: During that era, why were the Democrats so weak? Was it
the fighting among themselves?

EAB: I think so. I think so.

MJM: Well, there was the Moonan (?) Regan faction and the Joe
Wolfe faction.

EAB: Yes, and there was Tom Gallagher. He later went on to
the Supreme Court. I don't think Tom had the following as did
the other two. But the Moonan faction had quite a following.
They were able fellows and damn good lawyers. I don't why,
but after I was defeated, Stassen had Joseph Johnson, who was
head of personnel, arrested. He was a kindly old man. God,
he was an old man! Well, he seemed old to me at the time. He
probably wasn't all that old. I don't know on what grounds he
was arrested, but he was thrown in the county jail. Joe
Moonan offered to help, and he did. We went down to the
county jail. On my recommendation, the judge released him,
and he was never tried.

MJM: The Moonan Regan faction seemed to be predominately
Irish. Their candidates through the years were always Irish.
My dad was affiliated more with Joe Wolfe and his group. In
fact, I read later that in the merger era, the Democrats could
never win in Minnesota with a strictly Irish ticket. They felt
that they had to have some affiliation with the Scandinavian
element.
EAB: I don't know anything about that period.

MJM: I never asked my dad why he always stuck with Joe Wolfe. Of course, he had the patronage. He was the national committeeman who controlled the postal and the carrier jobs to be dispensed.

EAB: And Joe was a pretty decent guy to deal with. He was a Bremer man. Speaking of newspaperman, there was a newspaperman who was a good friend of your father's. His mother was a good friend of my mother. She used to come in between trains and visit my mother. This fellow had run for governor when I was a kid, so he was probably forty or fifty years old. I heard my mother say to this woman, "How did your son turn out anyway?" And she said, "Oh, he turned out to be a good boy." [Laughs] And this "boy" was fifty years old, running for governor!

MJM: Magnus Johnson is a name that keeps cropping up periodically.

EAB: He was from Kimball.

MJM: Wasn't there a politician from Watson? What was his name?

EAB: His name was Magnus Johnson, too. He used to run the newspaper.

MJM: That's why I get confused between the two of them.

EAB: Magnus Johnson's son was the one who had all those antique farm machinery on his lawn out there on Highway 12.

MJM: Another one of the proposals from the old days was a tax on chain stores. I suppose they were regarded as a threat to small business in those days.

EAB: Yes, and I don't think they were any worse than the local merchants.

MJM: I suppose those days were the advent of J.C. Penney coming to small town and threatening local business. Now, of course, the chains are taking over all the local grocieries and making them chain operations. Was there any threat then of corporate farming?

EAB: I don't remember that being mentioned much. I don't think so.
MJJM: Your own success in farming operations has been said to fly in the face of your earlier beliefs. You were just defining how every person should be able to make only a certain amount in his lifetime.

EAB: Well, after all, I was living under this economy, so I couldn't fly in the face of that. If I was lucky enough to make it work in my favor, why, then I should do so. And I do think it is luck, primarily.

MJJM: You were saying at lunch that a lot of making money is luck--being at the right place and so on.

EAB: For instance, the land that we owned, if we had deeded, we would have been trillionaires.

EAB: This professor--Hy Berman--I didn't know him at all--supported me one hundred percent, one hundred percent! I was just amazed. Art Naftalin was just annihilated. I had never seen this fellow. I didn't know him, and haven't seen him since. But he's a political science professor at the University. He said he supported the position that I had taken against the United States Steel Corporation in the '38 campaign.

MJJM: I remember Hjalmar Petersen came here for your big kickoff in '36. I think it was here at the Appleton Armory, if I remember correctly. He was kind of reluctant. He was then running for the Railroad and Warehouse Commissioner, although he was acting governor by virtue of Olson's death.

EAB: Yes.

MJJM: Henrik Shipstead finally went back to the Republicans. Did Hjalmar Petersen file in the Republican primary once later on? I don't remember. It seems like he might have.

EAB: I don't know. I think Joe Ball beat Shipstead, didn't he?

MJJM: Yes, but Ball was appointed when Lundeen was killed in the automobile accident.

EAB: That's right.

MJJM: About the merger of the the Farmer-Labor and the Democratic parties, this book seems to allude to the fact that originally, you and your friends were opposed to merger. You felt that the Farmer-Labor party would more or less disappear. But when it came time in '44, with the war and the trend of
things, your thinking changed, and you were supportive of the merger.

EAB: Roosevelt asked me if I wouldn't go back to Minnesota and see if the Farmer-Laborer people would merge. He thought it important.

MJM: For the '44 election.

EAB: The '44 election. Then he put Jack Ewing, the vice chairman, in charge of that thing, and Jack did a lot of work on it. He was a good guy, too, a good guy. The merger wouldn't have taken place if it hadn't been for Jack Ewing. He came here the night of the merger, and his treasurer—I've forgotten his name—had sold advertising in various pamphlets and programs. Of course, they didn't want a merger.

MJM: That seems to come out in the book.

EAB: Ted Slen wanted it. But Jack Ewing came here the night of the merger, and he came drunk.

MJM: That's mentioned in the book.

EAB: He was really pretty drunk. But he wasn't so drunk that didn't know what had been agreed upon, because we'd had many, many, many meetings on this. I had been taking part in a lot of them. I was on a committee.

MJM: Well, at least I thought Kelm got a lot of credit for the merger, but in reading this and your statements indicate that he was dragging his feet on the merger.

EAB: He was.

MJM: Also, I was surprised to read that you are given a lot more credit for the merger than Humphrey, and said that Humphrey's part was largely a myth.

EAB: Humphrey didn't have anything to do.

MJM: All the work had been done before.

EAB: He didn't have anything to do with it. After the merger took place, they thought he would be a good candidate.

MJM: Yes, they may have focused on him for the future, but he hadn't been that active earlier.
EAB: Just like the Farmer-Labor Association picking a candidate for governor or picking a candidate for senator. That's what they were trying to do. I remember very distinctly what he said. He said that he wanted to join with his colleagues, so he could be exempt.

MJM: I got to know Kelm a little bit when I was in the legislature. I met him through my ham radio hobby. Kelm was a ham radio operator.

EAB: Is that so?

MJM: He had this place at Chanhassen. I used to drive home on the weekends, so I would stop in to see him. He was pretty well crippled up with a stroke or a heart condition. He was pretty much confined to his home.

EAB: He wasn't a bad guy. He wasn't a bad guy, but he wasn't as good a guy as Joe Wolfe. Joe Wolfe was a man you could work with. He was right with us. He was an old-time Democrat, but he was just as much a Farmer-Laborite as he was Democrat. He was like your dad.

MJM: Yes. I can remember the merger over in Swift County that night. I think your people met in one area, and the Democrats met in another, and I forget who extended an invitation to tell them that you were ready to meet. Then they all got together in one county unit. Of course, that was just ratifying, more or less, the state merger, I suppose.

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Did Shields visit with you while working on this book?

EAB: Yes, yes.

MJM: He mentioned something about your personal background here. He mentions Eddie Pederson and my dad as being some of your closest friends and your love of hunting and poker playing, although never for large stakes. [Laughs] I remember you were a poker player.

EAB: Yes. I don't know if I should tell you this. The only real disagreement your father and I ever had was before he built the church out here. There had been talk of it for several years. I said to your dad, "Martin, when you get ready to build that church, I'll give you five hundred dollars, but I want you to give it in your name. It's not mine. You're giving it." "Okay," he said.
Well, one time we went down to the damn shack. They had gathered there early. I came late, and your dad and Mel Ronning had had quite a few drinks. There was a candy salesman there, I believe, with an Irish name. Anyway, they were sitting together, the three of them, and they'd been drinking. And when I came in, one of them--I don't know which one--was referring to the electrical salesman they used to call Happy and said, "Oh, here comes that fellow, George Getty, a communist." Just about that time, this fellow appeared in the door, and oh, mercy! He'd been drinking. "That's a goddamn lie," he said. "And when is this fellow Benson Wallace ever coming? He's always late." Well, I tell you, one reason I came there late, Marty, was that I wanted to get away from all the drinking! [Laughs]

MJM: Right! I'm surprised you'd go there.

EAB: Well, I argued with Mel and this fellow. He was a friend of Pat's. He had a nightclub up above the highway here. Well, anyway, I don't know. Whiskey was talking for them, and I was trying my best to be myself.

MJM: What precipitated the argument?

EAB: Just that. Just that.

MJM: Too much whiskey talking.

EAB: Yes, and that remark that they had attributed to this fellow. And I guess that's the only time your dad and I ever had an argument.

MJM: Well, I'm curious. He was a true-blue Democrat and you were of the Farmer-Labor persuasion. How did you and he happen to get along so well? You just never argued over politics? Or was it that he supported you when you needed it? I'm sure he must have voted for you.

EAB: He sure did. He supported me in the paper, too.

MJM: He being an Irish drinker, and you being a dry Norwegian. [Laughs]

EAB: We used to have coffee every morning at ten o'clock, and every afternoon at three o'clock. Sometimes Reno Pesch, Les Briggs, and Eddie Pederson would be there too, but it was always Martin and me. But that was the only time that I ever recall that we argued.
MJM: After my dad was pretty much retired, but he always needed his exercise, so he'd get his cane and walk down from the house to Eddie Pederson's back room there on the main street. This is when he was on the alley there. He'd have the five o'clock "happy hour," and some bourbon and branch water out of Eddie's tap. Usually Mel Ronning or somebody else would drop in. I'd go over there after work and pick him up and take him home.

On one occasion, Humphrey was in town, speaking at the fair. I said he might want to come downtown and meet some of the fellows in Eddie's back room. Yeah, he didn't mind. So we went down there, and my dad was there, along with Eddie, Mel Ronning, and Les Hancock. They had already bent an elbow once before we got there. They offered Humphrey a drink, and I think he took one. But then my dad was motivated with the whiskey lubricant, and he started in on Humphrey. I had sought the postal appointment here in town after Gertrude died. Because I was not a veteran, I couldn't get the permanent appointment, but I thought maybe they could have named me as acting postmaster. But I got beat out by Gliskey or somebody. My dad really unleashed an attack on Humphrey. He said he could have arranged that appointment if he'd wanted to, and he really chewed him up for not fixing it. Humphrey took it quietly and didn't retort. Then afterwards, I felt pretty sheepish in taking him back out to the fair, but Humphrey said, "I guess I probably should have fixed that up." [laughs] My dad really chewed him out.

Later, I remember going through his files after my dad died. He had had a dispute with Humphrey when he was mayor of Minneapolis over something. I don't know what it was--an editorial dispute, I suppose. Humphrey wrote him a letter. That was an earlier battle. [laughs]

EAB: You know, whatever you say about Humphrey, I never agreed with him, but he was damn clever.

MJM: Oh, he was. He was a master politician.

EAB: He could remember names.

MJM: Fabulous. I ran into him in the Minneapolis airport one time. I was coming back from Washington, traveling for Channel 2, and he was there to meet his son. He spotted me, came up, and remembered me. Of course, he had spent a night in my home once in Appleton.

EAB: Our granddaughter, Ann, was traveling from Minneapolis to Aspen one time, and Humphrey got on the plane in
Minneapolis. How he found out that she was my granddaughter, I don't know. But anyway, God sakes, the fuss he made over her. Then Lois and Bob were in Washington in the Capitol, and they just met him by accident, not in his office. And he remembered them. They hadn't seen him for years.

MJM: Tell me a little bit about the Progressive movement and your feelings about that. I know we parted company at that time politically, and the party went its separate ways. I'm trying to think who were the candidates in that election when Wallace was the Progressive nominee, who were the others. That was '48, wasn't it?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: He was vice president. That was when Truman was running.

EAB: Truman, yes.

MJM: Wallace. The Republicans put up...

EAB: Dewey.

MJM: Dewey, in '48 again? No, Willkie in '44, wasn't he? Or was that Dewey's first race?

EAB: Dewey in '48.

MJM: As you speak now, you say you were pretty close friends with Truman, but you didn't have that kind of faith in him as a president that year?

EAB: No, I didn't. I didn't have the faith in him as president. I thought Wallace was much, much, much better.

MJM: Do you still think so today?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Think he would have made a good president?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: This was the post-war era, the era of reconstruction and the Marshall Plan. It was during the Cold War.

EAB: Truman was carrying on such a campaign against the Soviet Union, at that time. It was ridiculous, I thought. Bea Baldwin and I were going to make a trip out to the West Coast,
I remember, and we made an appointment to see the president. We went out to see him, and he met us at the door. That was a surprise to us, of course, after having been greeted with Roosevelt sitting at his desk all the time. That's when he reminded me about Charlie McNary.

MJM: Oh, yes, and greeting at the door of the Senate.

EAB: I said, "Well, Mr. President . . ." [George?] Meany said, "We're going to make a trip to the West Coast, and Elmer will tell you the things that we're interested in. If he's overlooked anything, I'll try to fill in."

I said, "First, as a veteran, I'm interested in who's going to be appointed to the head of the Veterans Administration." There was a vacancy. Hines was going out. "Politically," I said, "There's a lot of veterans in this country, so we're interested from that standpoint." He said, "You're going to be entirely satisfied with the man whom I'm appointing." He didn't tell us who it was, but who's going to argue with the president? I said, "Then there's the Secretary of Agriculture." He was going out. I said, "Just as the farmer is second, because I knew agriculture is tremendously important in this election, we're interested in that." He said, "Never mind. You're going to be perfectly satisfied. I've got a good man for that spot." Hell, we didn't argue with him about that. You don't argue with the president. Well, I wasn't too pleased with either one he appointed. Anderson was a big cotton merchant.

MJM: Senator Clinton Anderson.

EAB: Yes. Clinton Anderson.

MJM: For Agriculture.

EAB: Yes. Then I said, "Another thing is we don't like some of the things that are coming out of San Francisco and the United Nations--some of the remarks that are coming out of there." Stennis--was that his name, John Stennis?

MJM: The senator?

EAB: No, he was head of the steel corporation.

MJM: I don't know.

EAB: I've forgotten his name. He was the head guy out there. He says, "Well, I'll tell you, the United States is one hundred and seventy-five years old, Great Britain is much,
much older, and the Soviet Union is only twenty-five or thirty years old, and they're acting like a bull in a china shop. We've got to put them in their place." I said, "Listen, Mr. President, that may be true, but the Soviet Union is the second strongest nation in the world. They were our principal ally during the war. We've got to learn to get along with them, whether we like them or not." He said, "Well, I suppose that's true."

Then two or three days later, he sent Harry Hopkins over to Moscow. I don't know if it was because of what we said or not, but anyway, he did. Truman was too emotional. I didn't like--did you read his oral biography?

**MJM:** Yes, I did read that.

**EAB:** Well, I didn't like it, for a man eight-five years old and using the language he was using.

**MJM:** No, he was pretty outspoken.

**EAB:** The language he used was pretty rough.

**MJM:** He has developed a sainthood later on which wasn't there when he was active. He was regarded as sort of a fluke and a flop and an earthy man in his days in the presidency, and he had his scandals, you know. Now people are saying he was one of the greatest presidents of modern times.

**EAB:** I can't see it.

**MJM:** I don't quite see it quite in that light. When you were over at my father's one night, I recall a statement that's bothered me a little, and I'd like to hear your response. It was shortly after the war, and somehow we got to talking about war production. I think Knudsen, the former head of General Motors, was put in charge of war production. If he could turn out autos, the theory went, he could turn out tanks. And I remember you making a statement that you didn't think he was doing that great a job. It seems to me I recall you saying, "If I were the president, I would take Bill Knudsen out tomorrow morning and have him shot." Now, I don't know if you remember making that statement, but I recall it because it was so graphic. Now, were you just making a point?

**EAB:** I don't believe in capital punishment in the first place.

**MJM:** But you must have thought he was doing a pretty bad job to speak that way.
EAB: I don't believe in capital punishment for almost any crime, except for perhaps political crimes.

MJM: Did you think he was corrupt or he did a poor job? Why did you feel so strongly about this?

EAB: Wasn't he the man that said, "What's good for General Motors is good for the government"?

MJM: I think he did.

EAB: Well, I think it's just the other way: "What's good for the government is good for General Motors." In fact, the way I feel about those big companies is I don't give a damn who owns General Motors, you and I have got the right to tax 'em. I don't care who owns 'em, we've got the right to tax 'em.

MJM: You're not worried about taxing being confiscatory or taking away their incentive?

EAB: No.

MJM: If they can't make a corporate profit for the dividends of their stockholders, will they continue to work as hard?

EAB: I think so. For instance, you'd probably be able to pay the workers more, and there will be more incentive on the part of the workers. But I think in this country we're building up a dynasty, both in the military and in the civil government. The civil government isn't responsible to you and me like they used to be. Take your nephew, Rick Nolan. Hell, they're trying to wreck him.

MJM: Oh, yes.

EAB: They're trying to wreck him, because he's doing a good job for the people.

MJM: This is getting off a little. Do you think [are you referring to your nephew here?] he and Kennedy were wrong to speak out about the Shah?

EAB: No, I think they were right.

MJM: I subscribe to their philosophy, too.

EAB: The Shah was a bad man.

MJM: They only now seem to recognize it.
EAB: And Kissinger and David Rockefeller are the ones that are responsible for bringing him into this country.

MJM: Creating our present problems, right.

EAB: We brought him into this country.

MJM: I can't see why Carter did that in the face of knowing the troubles that would come from it.

EAB: I shouldn't think so. I don't think he's very smart.

MJM: Carter?

EAB: Carter.

MJM: No, I've certainly been disappointed in his work. I hope I haven't tired you out too much here.

EAB: Not at all. It's a great joy.

MJM: I welcome the opportunity. I may drop back for a shorter visit next time.

EAB: With great pleasure.

MJM: I've enjoyed it. It's good to see you looking so well.

EAB: You know, I've told not one person, I've told hundreds of people that my closest friend was Martin McGowan [Sr.].

August 13, 1983 (At the nursing home in which Governor Benson was living in Bloomington, Minnesota):

MJM: What I am most interested in today is your recollections of the thirties and the drought. I don't suppose the present conditions compare with those days.

EAB: No, it is quite different. It seems to me that in those days, just a few dollars went a long way. Now, it takes many more dollars. When I am told that a hotel room costs so much, or a tractor costs so much, it is just amazing to me.

MJM: I heard on the television this morning a discussion of medical costs. And this fellow was saying that it costs an average of a thousand dollars to have a baby these days. My wife Betty said to me, "My gosh, didn't it cost us about fifty dollars? We probably won't have had as many children if it had cost a thousand dollars!"
EAB: I forget how much a tonsillectomy costs these days, but I had it done in a doctor's office. I don't suppose it cost twenty-five dollars.

MJM: Well, when you were governor, what was the salary?

EAB: Seventy-five hundred dollars.

MJM: And now the salary is around seventy-five thousand dollars. So it is a ten-fold increase.

EAB: It's the same as when I was in the Senate. I was paid ten thousand dollars. Now it's around a hundred thousand dollars. Then they get some benefits which are tax-free.

MJM: Speaking of the Senate, you were there about a year. What were your impressions of the Senate as a legislative body? Were the people there pretty serious about the job?

EAB: Yes, there were some good people there at that time. Joe Robinson was the Majority Leader at the time.

MJM: From Arkansas, wasn't he?

EAB: Yes. He was a very capable fellow and a very good person.

MJM: Did the debates really influence anybody, or was it like most legislative bodies, where the committees decide everything?

EAB: Yes, I think the committees pretty much decided things. I remember one interesting thing. I forget what they were voting on, but my name, starting with a "B," was near the top of the list. My name was called, and I voted "no." Then it came to Senator Norris, and he voted "yes." I thought, "What is going on here? How can he be voting 'yes'? Something is wrong here." Then it came to Shipstead, and he voted "yes." Well, when the roll call was finished, Norris stood up and said, "Mr. President, when I voted, I voted under a misapprehension, and I want to change my vote." Then Shipstead stood up and did the same thing. What they had been doing was just following the votes of the Democrats. They didn't know what they were voting on.

MJM: Those are some pretty big names. So Norris was there.

EAB: Yes, and I.M. Johnson from California, and Wagner from New York.
MJJM: Yes, those were some great senators.

EAB: McAdoo was there. Burt Wheeler from Montana was also there.

MJJM: Was Harry Truman serving about that time?

EAB: Yes, he sat right next to me. There was one seat between us.

MJJM: He has been criticized for being a ward-heeler, a product of the Pendergasts. What was your impression of him? Did you think he was independent?

EAB: I don't think he followed that. I thought he was an independent person--very independent. He was very plain, very common. The one criticism I ever had of Truman was his language--it was something.

MJJM: Pretty rough.

EAB: At times. It wasn't during the real thing, during the debates. It was just occasionally.

MJJM: Well, the young people I work with at my job today--I am amazed at the language they ordinarily use. Even the young women speak like they are in a Marine barracks. I tell you, the language is just something.

EAB: What is the reason for that?

MJJM: I don't know. I just don't understand it. It seems to me that if you have to resort to that kind of language, that you have lost the power of words.

EAB: I am not used to that. When I was young, I would use a swear word at times, but gosh, they use vulgar words. Such language!

MJJM: Yes, with all kinds of sexual connotations today. It's awful. Things we wouldn't think of, they just toss out. I think of Joe Powell of Appleton--every other word he used was a swear word, but that was just his nature.

EAB: [Laughing] Yes, that was just the way he talked.

MJJM: [Laughing] I see that Mrs. Powell died not too long ago. Joe has been gone a while.

EAB: Mrs. Stutz died a few days ago.
MJM: Oh, no, I didn't know that. It seems that when I read the Appleton Press, the only people I recognize are the ones who are dying off.

EAB: No, I don't know anybody anymore. It doesn't do me much good to take the Appleton Press. Mrs. Stutz had told her son that she wasn't feeling very well and that she was going to lie down. When he came back, she was gone.

MJM: Her picture was in the paper last issue, but I forget the occasion. Something about Edison Township.

EAB: They had a picnic there.

MJM: Yes, she and Oscar Lindahl were pictured as being the oldest residents. Oscar Lindahl is eighty or ninety-something.

EAB: No, he is eighty-seven or thereabouts.

MJM: What did you think of the story they did on you in the Minneapolis Tribune?

EAB: Well, like all stories, it was not entirely accurate. But I thought it was probably the fairest they have been with me.

MJM: Why did they choose to interview you now?

EAB: I don't know. The young woman, Lori Sturdevant, who interviewed me has a program on Channel 2. I saw it last night. She was pretty good.

MJM: Well, it seemed like pretty fair treatment.

EAB: Yes, I thought it was fair. I was disappointed in one thing—in what Val Bjornson had to say.

MJM: Yes, that was unusual. I didn't think he would feel that way.

EAB: Val and I have been good friends, and he is one of the very, very, very few Republicans whom I ever voted for. [Laughing]

MJM: [Laughing] That's the same with me. I count him as about the only one.

EAB: Yeah, he is the only one I ever voted for.
MJJM: I voted for him every time except for when he ran against Humphrey for the Senate. Val had an unfortunate debate with Humphrey. I don't know if you remember that. I am trying to think of where it was held, but to get his courage up, he had too much to drink.

EAB: That was the fault of his family. His father was pretty bad about that.

MJJM: He made a kind of fool of himself during that debate—he lost control of himself. I think they debated in Montevideo, and that night he made a kind of a fool of himself. Well, I think you and Stassen were pretty charitable about each other.

EAB: I can't understand the guy. I'll tell you a couple of stories. When they had this one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary—

MJJM: Yes, I saw your picture with that.

EAB: I was the first one called, because of my age. Stassen was also called on. All the others, when they addressed the group, they said, "Mr. Chairman, Governor Perpich, former governors and honored guests..." Stassen got up and said, "Mr. Chairman, Governor Benson...", and then he went on with his address.

MJJM: [Laughing] Left the others out, eh?

EAB: Yes. I don't understand him. Then, we got over to the Hill mansion, where we had lunch. After the lunch, Stassen got up and said, "I would like to make a toast to Governor Benson, because I agree one hundred percent with what he had to say at the Capitol."

MJJM: Hard to believe, isn't it?

EAB: I can't believe it. Then he sent me a copy of the speech he gave on his seventy-sixth birthday. It was a pretty good speech.

MJJM: Yes, he is thinking fairly progressively.

EAB: He rapped Reagan pretty bad.

MJJM: Yes, I guess he made that speech before the legislature. And Perpich just named him to some commission to research a business school or some business development.

EAB: Yes, I noticed that.
MJM: Perpich always has some ideas. Some of his ideas seem pretty far-out at the moment.

EAB: He is getting some poor advice. I don't know who his advisors are.

MJM: Well, he has this Montgomery from Saint Cloud.

EAB: Yes, I know him.

MJM: Beyond that, I don't know the others.

EAB: I just know Montgomery. I don't know the others, but it seems to me that he is getting some poor advice. For instance, when he got into a debate with the governor of South Dakota.

MJM: Yes, he made himself look pretty bad. They had them on public television, and Perpich came across pretty poorly in that exchange on national TV.

EAB: And now he got into a public discussion with the chairman of the board of 3M. I don't know how important it was, but he should not have done that. He should have called him in private and talked to him in his office. He shouldn't get into a public debate.

MJM: Yes, he said something about that the other day. He said he couldn't understand why anyone would want to badmouth his state. You wouldn't badmouth your family, so similarly you shouldn't criticize your state. That didn't sound too good. I think Perpich shoots from the hip sometimes. I think he is a little quick, and he doesn't always think things through.

EAB: I think so. I think so. Of course, the appointments he makes, I don't know anything about. It's a new generation coming in.

MJM: In that Tribune interview, you used the term "fascist" to refer to someone you didn't care for. Did that term come largely from the thirties--Hitler, Mussolini, and so?

EAB: I suppose so.

MJM: What does that word mean to you?

EAB: Well, it means to me a person who will resort to the use of any sort of method to present his views. For instance, a good example of whom I would call a fascist--as we know it,
not in the way they mean in Europe—would be the performances Billy Parasol put on at that county convention.

MJJM: [Laughing] Okay, all right.

EAB: That was fascism to me.

MJJM: I get your point.

EAB: Then, of course, Orville Freeman carried that right through. Actually, the newspaper didn't really report accurately what I said about Freeman. I said that Freeman was a brilliant guy. That is what I told that reporter. He was the one who was really responsible for building the Humphrey machine. Even though he did it with strong-arms methods.

I think Humphrey's support of the Vietnam War was an indication of his fascism. He was working with the dictators of Vietnam, who had fought with the French against their own country, so they were traitors. Then they fought against their own country with us, so they were traitors again. In addition to that, they were bootleggers of gold and also of dope.

MJJM: Your opinions, as the article pointed out, have remained pretty consistent over the years. I guess that was the point of the article. Now you take Humphrey, for instance. Of course, he was vice president under Johnson, and Johnson was running the Vietnam War. Johnson wanted to escalate it, to make it bigger. He felt the only way they could solve it was to have more troops in there, but that was just getting us in deeper and deeper. It took a lot of us, myself included, a while to realize that the war wasn't going anywhere or wasn't getting us anywhere. Humphrey tried to change. He made a speech in Salt Lake City, as I recall, when he was running for president. He tried to pull away from Johnson. Do you think he could have really done more? Should he have disavowed Johnson?

EAB: Sure he should. Sure he should. Johnson was a brute, you know.

MJJM: Yes. Awful.

EAB: Awful, awful man.

MJJM: Terrible. He even made Humphrey look like a fool by getting him down on his ranch and putting him on a horse, when Humphrey had never been on one. Anything to embarrass him or to make him look small.
EAB: There's a man I met since I came to the retirement home who knew Johnson personally and worked with him. This fellow was with the Ford Motor Company. He said Johnson had a terrible temper, for one thing, awful. The language he used was terrible, and he would brow-beat people.

MJM: I suppose Humphrey should have been his own man when he was running for president. I don't know what Johnson would have done to him if Humphrey had disavowed him.

EAB: I suppose he would have. Yes, I suppose he would have. He was a cruel man, I guess. I didn't know him.

MJM: He was not around whenever you--

EAB: No.

MJM: He was working in the House.

EAB: I guess he was in the House, yes.

MJM: Came in '36.

EAB: He had to have been with the Youth Administration in Texas at the time.

MJM: That's right.

EAB: Another mistake they made at that time was not taxing us to pay for that war. That's what got us into trouble. We got hopelessly in debt and have kept on getting in debt ever since.

MJM: Right. How do you describe the conditions in the thirties that brought on the Farmer-Labor movement? That was a grass-roots movement, a populist movement largely made up of farmers, wasn't it?

EAB: I think you'd call it that.

MJM: Was the price for grain one of the reasons that they were brought together?

EAB: The grain prices had become so low, they were burning corn for fuel. They got nothing. I remember selling oats for eighteen cents. I suppose others sold it cheaper than that at times. Then taxes still stayed high. One thing in favor of that period was that debt was not so large. And interest was low. Even just a few dollars would--
MJM: Tide you over.

EAB: Yes. You could buy stuff real cheap. Everything was cheap.

MJM: Was the aim of the Farmer-Labor movement to put government more into control of things?

EAB: Oh, I think so. I think so, yes.

MJM: Well, I suppose today that would be kind of frowned on--too much government. Government programs have grown over the years since that time.

EAB: There are a lot of programs, I should say.

MJM: Maybe not all of them should have been continued.

EAB: No, but there's a lot of programs. Some of them should have been continued that were not continued.

MJM: Yes, it seems like they're cutting back the wrong ones. Food stamps are trying to feed people. I don't see why that should suffer while we pay for war.

EAB: That's right.

MJM: Or war preparation, at least.

EAB: And Marty, whenever you've got a big investment in something, you're going to use it, aren't you?

MJM: Sure.

EAB: And here we've got the biggest investment in the military. Well, if we get that way, we're bound to use it.

MJM: Can you see any sense in us going into Central America?

EAB: I can't. I can't. What's the man from the Eighth District?

MJM: Arlan Stangeland? Or James Oberstar?

EAB: Oberstar. I think he's doing a pretty good job.

MJM: Yes, he's tried to explain that it's hopeless to go in there. He's been down there.
EAB: Several congressmen and senators have been down there and said the same thing. Not all of them do, but some of them are in favor of staying out.

MJM: Do you think the so-called threat that Reagan claims, that the Soviet Union is feeding Castro, who in turn is feeding them Nicaragua--do you think that's valid? It's hard to know from this distance.

EAB: I wouldn't know. But I think Reagan is way off his base when he attacks the Soviet Union and says it's the most evil force in the world.

MJM: Yes. That doesn't help us get along.

EAB: No. After all, they're the second most powerful nation in the world. We've got to get along with them, and that isn't the way to get along.

MJM: No, hardly. Hardly.

EAB: And now he's attacking Cuba. Well, good God, we tried to poison Castro eight times!

MJM: [Laughs] Yes.

EAB: He hasn't done that. I don't know how bad he is, but he hasn't done that, anyway.

MJM: Do you really think that we could reach some accommodation with the Soviet Union?

EAB: Lord, I think they're hard up. They need it worse than we do. They need to cut back on military spending worse than we do.

MJM: Their economy is more fragile than ours, I would think.

EAB: Oh, sure. I think so. And after all, they don't want war. They've experienced war.

MJM: Yes. That is hard to make people understand. I'm certain the Russian people don't want war. I don't know about the government. But every time we threaten, of course, they counter-threat.

EAB: But they aren't fools. They know now with all this nuclear armament, why, we'd all be gone. We'd blow up everybody. And if they could just defeat us, what would they have left? There would be nothing here. [Laughs]
MJM: There's a new TV station in town, Channel 29, which is sort of a Christian broadcasting station. I saw somebody on there the other night who was lecturing on some Biblical prophecy, and he said, "Our mission is to defeat the Soviet Union. Our mission is to burn the Soviet Union, to bomb them." If we dropped atomic bombs on them, he doesn't seem to think that they're going to fire some back. The world would be destroyed!

EAB: Sure.

MJM: He is thinking of conventional war, when you could just drop bombs and get rid of them.

EAB: It doesn't make sense. I think these people in your church--

MJM: The [Roman Catholic? Episcopalian?] bishops.

EAB: Yes, they're doing a good job.

MJM: They're getting criticized for meddling in politics, but it's a moral question.

EAB: Sure it is. They're doing a good job.

MJM: I was glad to see them speak out.

EAB: They're doing a good job. And they're doing a good job down in Central America.

MJM: Yes. The people who have gone there are trying to give some benefit to the people and uplift them. They've been oppressed for so long.

EAB: Lois told me that she went to a wedding in the Catholic church, at which they had a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest. One of the priests was a really good friend of theirs. He used to be their babysitter when he was a kid. He's done so much for them--had the kids visit him in Rome when he was there. Anyway, he said, "They say that the problem down in Central America is between communism and capitalism. That isn't the problem. The problem is capitalism. Just half a dozen families own a whole country, and the rest of the people are living in misery." And he comes from a very wealthy family himself. [Laughs]

MJM: Yes, that's part of the Reagan philosophy. They want to maintain the status quo, and anything that threatens that is communistic, I guess.
EAB: Didn't they kill a cardinal down there?

MJM: Yes. A bishop. Shot him during mass.

EAB: Crazy!

MJM: Yes, it's hard to figure. What do you think of Mondale's chances here?

EAB: He seems to be getting labor support now.

MJM: Yes. He's always been, ever since he was attorney general, "Mr. Clean," you know. He never has alienated anybody or made anybody mad, but you watch him on "Meet the Press" or something like that, he doesn't really commit himself.

EAB: He doesn't click very well. Did you happen to hear the program on educational television when they had a birthday party for Morris Udall?

MJM: No, I didn't see that one.

EAB: [Laughs] It was really pretty clever. They had all the Democratic candidates for president there, and Ted Kennedy was the chairman.

MJM: Toastmaster?

EAB: Toastmaster. Each one of them spoke probably about two minutes, and he had something clever to say about each one of them. When he introduced Mondale, he said, "The next speaker is the former vice president of the United States, Walter Mondale. Everyone hopes that tonight he will commit himself on some subject." He said it even more cleverly than that.

MJM: Yes, he doesn't really want to make anybody mad. He will resort to "I'll look into it when I get elected." [Laughs]

EAB: Yes. [Laughs] I've never known him, so I don't know.

MJM: I knew him fairly well, but I've been a little disappointed with him since he got up to the higher office. You know, one of his chief aides is A.I. Johnson's son.

EAB: Oh, is that so?

MJM: Yes. Jim Johnson. He's Alfred I. Johnson's son. He's been with Mondale quite a bit.
EAB: My son Tom says that during the two years he spent in Washington, that it was impossible to contact Mondale.

MJM: Is that so?

EAB: Even his aides were difficult, if not impossible, to see.

MJM: Really?

EAB: Very unsatisfactory.

MJM: I'll bet. Has Tom given up on that effort now?

EAB: I think so. Pretty much, yes.

MJM: Just the other day some woman was in my wife Betty's shop. She said she was a hog farmer in Stearns County. Her family has thirty dollars invested in their hogs, and they're going to have to sell them for fifteen dollars. That really hasn't changed an awful lot since the thirties. You're still at the mercy of the market.

EAB: No, the hog farmers are getting a beating right now.

MJM: The NFO and other farm organizations have made an effort to improve things. But do you think that farmers are still too independent to join an organization that will be effective?

EAB: I really don't know. It's certainly a trouble to me. I can't understand it.

MJM: That article in the Tribune mentioned that there were some anti-Semitism in Stassen's campaign against you for governor. You had some Jewish people working with you. Was there some particular feeling at the time that caused it to be so nasty, or was it just the period we lived in then? Why was it so bitter?

EAB: I think anti-Semitism was rampant at that time, or pretty much so. It was like the way the feeling against black people used to be—in some instances, even more so. They were part of the business community, you know, and I think that was one reason.

MJM: You chose these people because of their knowledge of business?
EAB: Well, the only two whom I had any connection with. One was Abe Harris, who was the editor of the Minnesota Leader. He was a boyhood friend of Governor Olson's and they grew up together. Olson put him in government. The other one was Roger Rutchick, my secretary, who was an assistant attorney general when I was banking commissioner. He was assigned to me in the banking department.

MJM: So you knew him from those days in the banking department.

EAB: Yes. And those were the only two.

MJM: Well, that hardly seems like a major problem.

EAB: No. Then they did try to connect me with Art Jacobs. I didn't have anything to do with Art Jacobs. He was secretary to the Speaker of the House, and I had no connection with him whatever.

MJM: That article also quoted Ancher Nelson about the populist takeover of the Senate chamber while you were governor.

EAB: They made a lot of that. I didn't even know they were there until the next morning. I guess they came at night. I was told that morning that they were in there. So I went there and said, "Now you've done a good job. Go on home." If I'd have started ranting and raving at them, they wouldn't have gone home—they would have stayed there.

MJM: Sure, if you had gotten their backs up.

EAB: So I got 'em out of there, anyway, and that's what I went up there for. I don't know what their purpose was there, or if they had accomplished it. I don't think they did any good by occupying the Senate. The newspapers made a lot of that. I don't know.

MJM: I suppose they called it hooliganism.

EAB: But from all the information I got, they conducted themselves in a very gentlemanly manner.

MJM: They were there, but they didn't really make too much of a mess, did they?

EAB: No. Invading the Senate chamber, of course, they shouldn't have done that. But I imagine if a bunch of
businessmen had invaded the Senate, why, nothing would have been said about it. But it happened to be a bunch of farmers.

MJJM: [Laughs] Yes. Were you and your wife Frances high school classmates?

EAB: Yes.

MJJM: You had grown up together?

EAB: Yes.

MJJM: There was a newspaper article which made much of the fact that she was quite protective of your health, She would come and tell you it was time to go home and that sort of thing. Was that magnified out of proportion?

EAB: I think so, a little bit. I did have ulcers at that time, and the Mayo Clinic sent a doctor up there every once in a while. But it was magnified.

MJJM: I was just curious what you thought of that reference. [Laughs]

EAB: It was only a duodenal ulcer, as they call it, part of the intestines.

MJJM: Have you healed that over pretty well over the years?

EAB: Yes. But the thing that got me was that damn encephalitis.

MJJM: Yes, that threw you through a loop for quite a while.

EAB: That ruined me.

MJJM: Well, you were at University Hospital last fall, weren't you?

EAB: Yes.

MJJM: Was that a recurrence of that?

EAB: Yes. I was there nine weeks, I guess.

MJJM: Was Karl Rolvaag at this one hundred and twenty-fifth celebration?

EAB: Yes.
MJM: Was he? He's had some serious auto accident and broken his legs or something.

EAB: Yes, and he was an alcoholic, you know.

MJM: Yes.

EAB: But he claims he licked that.

MJM: I understand he did. He's apparently remarried. He divorced his wife and remarried, I guess.

EAB: Yes. He made a speech sometime before that. I don't remember when it was. I was there. I was amazed. He got up and made an actual confession, saying that he had had this problem and that he had conquered it. I was pleased with what he said, but some people thought he shouldn't have said it.

MJM: [Laughs] Well, that is the duty of an alcoholic, to admit it publicly. Of course, you were always quite a dry.

EAB: Yes.

MJM: It seems to me that one time you were in Chicago and you brought back a case of champagne. My dad brought it back to your drinking friends, anyway. [Laughs]

EAB: That's right. [Laughs] There were two cases there, anyway. Roger Rutchick was there, and he took one bottle.

MJM: I think my dad got a bottle or two.

EAB: Yes, Irought a couple of bottles back for Martin.

MJM: They saved it for some special occasion he had. I don't know what it was.

EAB: Everybody got a bottle. I remember the meeting. [Fiorello?] LaGuardia and Senator Norris put on a meeting. Somebody with a lot of money, I guess, must have distributed a lot of booze.

MJM: The pointis that my dad and you were always the greatest of friends, but you didn't always agree with him, and he didn't always agree with you. I suppose the time that you didn't agree was on the Wallace campaign.

EAB: Yes.

MJM: Do you have any regrets about that effort now?
EAB: No, I don't have any regrets.

MJM: Do you think it was necessary at the time?

EAB: We thought it was. We never thought we were going to be successful—never, never. Well, unless there was some crazy fellow in the outfit who believed that. But we thought that Wallace was forcing Truman to say better things and talk about issues. One problem we had with Wallace at that time was that the only thing he'd talk about was foreign policy. We couldn't get him to talk about domestic affairs. I think it was a terrible mistake.

MJM: The vice presidential candidate, was it Glenn Taylor, the senator from Idaho?

EAB: Yes.

MJM: He wasn't the greatest of candidates.

EAB: No.

MJM: Well, that's reminded me of Adlai Stevenson when he came to Benson, Minnesota, during his candidacy. He was speaking at the Benson Armory. Everybody thought he was going to make a speech on agriculture, but he talked foreign policy instead. Coming out of the Armory, Alma Timm came to me and said, "What was that all about? I thought he was going to talk about something else." In a farm area, you ought to talk to the farmers.

EAB: That was Wallace. That was Wallace. We talked to him half a dozen times, but we couldn't change him. He was a stubborn cuss.

MJM: Was he really pretty reliable, though? Was he pretty stable?

EAB: Oh, he was a brilliant guy.

MJM: Maybe he was just too brilliant.

EAB: Yes, that's right, too brilliant. For instance, I've seen him in a meeting with twenty-five of us, and if they got to talking about some subject that he wasn't interested in, he'd fall asleep.

MJM: Just ignore it?
EAB: Yes. Just fall right asleep. We'd have to wake him up. Oh, he was a strange guy, a strange guy. Another thing is that when he was Secretary of Agriculture, he had employees in every county in the United States. If he had organized them, if he had used them, then Roosevelt never would have dumped him. He couldn't have!

MJM: He would have been too powerful to drop.

EAB: Yes! [Laughs] But he wasn't very practical in some things. I guess he was practical in making a lot of money, he did do that.

MJM: When you went to the Senate to fill Senator Schall's unexpired term, did you and Floyd Olson really have an understanding about this prospective switch?

EAB: None whatever.

MJM: Not really?

EAB: None whatever. I was at Appleton, and Abe Harris called me. He said, "I think you'd better come down here. I think the governor's going to appoint you to the Senate." Well, Olson never talked to me.

MJM: He didn't talk to you about it?

EAB: Never. He never talked to me. The first time I actually heard of it officially was when I read it in the Saint Paul paper that morning. After I'd got through reading it, I had a call from the governor's office to come over. The governor called himself. He said, "You better come over here. The newspapers want to take some pictures."

MJM: He didn't even tell you what for? [Laughs] Well, there are some allegations I read that your appointment was forced on Olson because it was announced by somebody else prematurely. Supposedly, Olson really wasn't all that happy about being forced into your appointment.

EAB: Well, anyone who knew Olson knew he wasn't very easily forced. What they're talking about is that the Minnesota Leader came out with a big story.

MJM: I think that was it.

EAB: Well, anyone who knew Abe Harris and Governor Olson, and who knew their relationship, would know that it would have been impossible.
It had to be authentic, or Abe Harris wouldn't have run it.

Olson, no doubt, told him.

He dictated the story or told Harris, yes. Yes, that would seem to be the more logical explanation. How do you explain the great number of votes you received during your first campaign for governor to the small number of votes you received two two years later?

I don't know.

Was it Stassen or disenchantment, or what?

Peculiar things happened.

A number of things, perhaps.

You know I'm a dry.

Yes.

I'm a prohibitionist, both personally and politically. Yet the Anti-Saloon League was against me. How do you figure that out?

[Laughs] Yes, that's hard to figure. I'd think they would have been among your strongest supporters.

The AFL and the CIO were still fighting. They hadn't united yet. And if you did something for one of 'em, the other one was mad. So I don't think I really had the enthusiastic support of labor, but I was probably accused by the metropolitan press of being too friendly to labor.

He's a grandson.

Grandson? Okay.

Of the former candidate for president. Well, he's a strange guy.

Did he marry into one of the wealthy Twin Cities families, Pillsburys or something like that?

The Heffelfinger family.

Right.
EAB: Phil, he's a pretty good guy, but he's a strange guy. I imagine his mother—he probably inherited from his grandmother. She died just recently.

Anyway, when I was in the hospital one time, Phil came in to see me and he had a bunch of flowers. He said, "I just came from a visit with John Cowells, Sr. He lives just a few blocks from here. All the rich people have moved off of Park Avenue, but Cowells still lives there." Well, anyway, that didn't make any difference; I didn't care where he lived.

Well, he said, "I went in and said, 'Mr. Cowells, I'm a friend of Elmer Benson, and I'd like to ask you about the 1938 campaign.' Well, he said, 'That was a dirty campaign.'"

MJM: This is Cowells saying this?

EAB: Yes. "That was a dirty campaign. There was mud-slinging and anti-Semitism." But he said, "The Twin Cities business community had decided they wanted to get rid of Benson, so I went along with it."

MJM: And the paper was against you.

EAB: Sure. Sure.

MJM: Just a number of circumstances, I guess.

EAB: Well, La Follett was defeated in Wisconsin.

MJM: At the same time, was it?

EAB: Yes. And what's the name of the fellow in Michigan that Roosevelt appointed to the Supreme Court?

MJM: The name I'm thinking of is Vandenberg, but that isn't it. That was later. From Michigan.

EAB: He was governor, and he's a bachelor. Roosevelt appointed him later to the Supreme Court. He was defeated. Earl of Pennsylvania was defeated.

MJM: So it was a bad year for liberals that year all over.

EAB: I think all of them were defeated except John Kreshel of Iowa. He survived. All the other governors, I think, were defeated. But why that, I don't know. And in Wisconsin, where the La Folletts had been in power for 40 years. I don't know why. But that's a strange thing, too. Phil, you know, turned...
KJX: Conservative.

EAB: Oh, terrible. Oh, terrible. Awful, awful! Just awful! And he tried to turn during Roosevelt's administration, even. I don't know if you know what he did to me or not.

MJM: No, I never heard. While you were governor?

EAB: Yes. He had General Immel as the head of his National Guard come up here and contact most of our department heads for a meeting. I think he got to Pat about the day before the meeting. That's the first I ever heard of it. Usually, God, the dope information comes in and flows in! [Laughs] But nobody knew it. I won't say nobody; sure, the department heads knew it, but they didn't come and tell me. I got it from Pat.

MJM: What was the purpose of the meeting?

EAB: The meeting was out at Charlie Ward's farm, and here Phil made a big splash about he was organizing this--I don't know what he called it--some kind of a party. I don't know what he called it. And he had a big banner there, you know, and everything, an emblem. They must have put the pressure on me to get me to go along with it. I refused. I turned them down.

MJM: Was it to be anti-Roosevelt?

EAB: Sure! Sure! He was against Roosevelt, sure. So the next time I was in Washington, I don't know whether Roosevelt asked me to come down--it must have. He says, "Well, you didn't go to Phil's." He had a big meeting down in Madison, see. He said, "I understand you didn't go to Phil's meeting in Madison." "No, I didn't." He said, "You turned him down before the meeting." "Yeah." Of course, I told him something about the meeting. He says, "You know, a friend of mine told me that Phil had an emblem that he was passing out." "Yes, he did." He says, "Well, my friend says it looked like a circumcised swastika." [Laughs] And I read it in some book recently, I read a book, and this fellow said the very thing, that that was . . .

MJM: That's what it looked like.

EAB: What it looked like.

MJM: Well, I've taken an hour of your time. I think that's about enough for today. It's real nice to see you looking so good. [Tape recorder turned off]
EAB: Of course, I passed the blame on to Pat. It's always easy to pass the blame on to someone else, you know, when you yourself are responsible. When I was inaugurated, who should I have invited to be there in a favored spot? My best friend, of course. And I didn't do it. Marty Martin.

MJM: Well, I don't remember.

EAB: And I blamed Pat for it. [Laughs] But why should I blame him? I was closer to Martin than I was to Pat.

MJM: Sure. Sure.

EAB: And I felt--oh, I still think about it.

MJM: It must bother you if you still think about it. I don't know that my dad ever mentioned that or was disappointed.

EAB: I was. But I didn't think of it 'til it was all over. Just like Frances says, "Why didn't you invite him to lunch?" I didn't think of it 'til it was all over.

MJM: Sure. That's one of those things that comes to you later. You must have had many details.

EAB: I don't think I had anybody there except Frances and the family. They're the only ones that were there.

MJM: I did hear the--I suppose it's a criticism, that sometimes with Ruchik in the front office, it was difficult for your hometown people to get access to you.

EAB: That's probably true.

MJM: I guess it was Les Briggs who expressed that. But Les could have been kind of bothersome, too.

EAB: I doubt if hometown people would be turned away, but others had to be, you know.

MJM: Oh, yes, sure. No question.

EAB: I mean, there were a lot of cranks coming along.

MJM: You had to filter them out. You can't see everybody. I see Perpetch, in his first term, took the door off the office and let anybody wander in and out. But this term he seems to put the door back. [Laughs]
EAB: [Laughs] Well, that wouldn't work very well, I don't think.

MJM: No, I don't think so. It's interesting you mention that about the inaugural. I thought my dad always felt you were very cordial to him. I remember the day we went to the football game and sat in the box in the stadium, and you took us all over to your house afterward. That was a highlight I remember. Then when the Appleton basketball team was playing in a state tournament, high school basketball that year, I think you had them down into that dining area in the capitol basement, I remember.

EAB: But I had an experience just Tuesday of this week, Jim Youngdeo came over to see me, had a fellow with him by the name of Bob Zak. Well, I knew this fellow's father, and this fellow is already retired.

MJM: [Laughs] That puts the years on it.

EAB: Oh, gosh sakes!

MJM: Well, I've got a friend in St. Cloud who was a good friend of Ben DeBois, and he's always wanted to come and meet you and visit. He's not able right now, so I didn't bring him along, but sometime I thought I'd bring him. His name is Omar Mo, and he worked in the Social Security Administration around Morris and that area for many years. I don't know how he got to know Ben DeBois so well, but he did.

EAB: Ben was quite a guy, quite a buy. Do you see Pat occasionally?

MJM: Not too much recently. I had a couple of years ago, one time had occasion to.

EAB: It's been about two years since I've seen him. Pat is a different fellow than his father.

MJM: Yes, I would say so.

EAB: Quite different, but he's a good guy. A good businessman, I guess.

MJM: Yes, I think so. I was kind of surprised he lost out in the legislature, too. I served with him. He got to be assistant leader of the caucus, but then again, he veered off independently and didn't follow the caucus position all the time, and I think that hurt him with some of the people like Freddie Cheenan and some of the leaders.
EAB: They had an unfortunate thing happen in the family since Ben’s death. What's his name, who's married to their daughter? Doesn't make any difference. He works in the bank, is vice president of the bank. He walked home one day and found his wife dead on the kitchen floor—heart attack. She had taken care of Ben; she was a nurse.

MJM: Good to talk to you.