

An Interview with Chris Freese
Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission

Chris Freese worked in private practice from 1978-99, was a Public Defender in Moultrie County from 1979-80 and 1996-99, and was State's Attorney of Moultrie County from 1980-84. In 1999, he became an Associate Circuit Judge in the 6th Judicial Circuit, serving in that position until 2012.

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Abstract

Chris Freese

Biographical:

Chris Freese was born in Decatur, Illinois on September 23, 1952 and spent his early life in rural Sullivan, Illinois. After graduating from Sullivan High School in 1970, he attended and received a degree in architecture from the University of Illinois in Urbana/Champaign in 1974. After working in Miami, Florida in an architectural firm for a year he attended and graduated from the University of Louisville Law School in December, 1977. From 1978-99, he was a solo practitioner in Sullivan Illinois, and from 1979-80 and 1996-99 he was a Public Defender in Moultrie County. In 1980 he was elected the State's Attorney of Moultrie County, serving until 1984. Freese was elected an Associate Circuit Judge in the 6th Judicial Circuit by the Circuit Judges of the Circuit in 1999, and served in that position until 2012. Freese is the father of two daughters: Christie and Megan; and is married to his wife Shirley.

Topics Covered:

Parents and family history; growing up on a farm and in rural Sullivan; father's memories of WW2; mother; Sullivan, Illinois; Cold War; Kennedy assassination; teenage years; early jobs; years at Sullivan High School; Soviet Union and communism; Vietnam war; University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign; political and social views as a young man; conception of his generation; architectural education; decision to study law; University of Louisville Law School and Louisville, Kentucky; taking the bar; early professional career in Decatur; starting a solo practice in Sullivan; running for State's Attorney; work as State's Attorney; President Nixon and Watergate; tough economic times in the 70s; 1980 election; Muhammad Ali; running for State's Attorney; work as State's Attorney; Public Defender work and influence on work as State's Attorney; nature of the local bar; memories of judges; local bar and bar associations; thoughts of practicing law.

Note:

Readers of this oral history should note that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that it has been edited for clarity and elaboration. The interviewer, interviewee, and editors attempted to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources while also editing for clarity and elaboration. The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the oral history, nor for the views expressed therein.

Judge Chris Freese: An Oral History

LAW: This is an oral history interview with Judge Chris Freese. Today's date is June 7, 2016.

We are in his home in here is rural Sullivan, Illinois, and this is our first interview. Today we are going to talk about his background. Judge, I thought I would start with where and when were you born?

FREESE: I was born on September 23, 1952 in Decatur Illinois, at a hospital over there.

LAW: Tell me a little about your parents.

FREESE: My mother was a stay at home mom for many years and then she started working as a secretary for Country Companies Insurance Company in Sullivan.¹ And I was actually, of three children they had, I was the youngest and I was the only child in which she actually worked during the time while I was an infant. The other two children she stayed home and raised. My father was a farmer.² He farmed about three hundred something acres. He was also a letter carrier in the city of Sullivan. He worked both jobs. Carried mail during the day and farmed on the evenings and weekends.

LAW: Now did the family go back pretty far in this area?

FREESE: My family goes back a long ways in this area as far as farming. At one time there was a grandfather and four sons that all farmed within probably one mile radius of each other. So a lot of farmers in the family background.³

¹ Roberta Freese.

² Estel Freese.

³ Estel Freese was a fourth generation farmer in the area.

LAW: Any childhood memories of growing up on the farm? What comes to mind?

FREESE: We always had lots of livestock. We had cows, horses, chickens, hogs. We lived in a residence that was an older home. They rented that residence, they cash rented the farm. And when I was in grade school they bought a farm, the farm we are sitting on right now, eighty acres. And they moved and built a new home on this farm. And at that point the only livestock we then had was hogs. My brother and I would, through 4-H, show hogs at various fairs and the State Fair. So we always had animals around. So there were a lot of different experiences with them.

LAW: Okay, so 4-H, what else would you have been engaged in as a youngster?

FREESE: Lots of sports, obviously through grade school and into high school. I played organized basketball, softball, and when I got to high school played organized football and ran track.

LAW: Any other kind of extra-curricular activities besides sports?

FREESE: Not really, when you lived on a farm back in those days, unlike today, my wife and I were discussing this earlier, you really didn't in the summer, you didn't really leave the farm. You stayed in the country. I didn't see most of my classmates in the summer because I was out on the farm. And you didn't go to town. It was kind of rare that you would go into town. Occasionally you would go to the old A&W root beer, and that was kind of a treat. But other than that you stayed home and you played with your siblings. I had an older sister and an older brother and that's who I hung out with during the summers.

LAW: Now your dad, Estel, I think I read somewhere that he was a World War II veteran.

FREESE: He was.

LAW: I was curious if he ever talked to you about the war?

FREESE: Some, not a lot. He made various references to the fact that he was on a, in a unit that shot one of these long cannons. They would move around from spot to spot and setup and fire artillery shells onto various targets. And then they would pack it all up and move to another location. He did have the distinction he told me of actually meeting and shaking the hand of Dwight Eisenhower. He had come around and was inspecting some of the gunnery placements and met with the people on that gun and he got to shake his hand.

And they had different incidents were they had some problems with some of the locals where they found out that the local German women would be hanging out laundry and then shortly thereafter they would get strafed by German aircraft. Finally they figured out that was a signal they were using when there were gun placements in the area. So they no longer allowed those people to put out laundry on the laundry line and that stopped the strafing. To my knowledge he never came really close to being killed because the gun placements were always behind the front lines.

Met actually a childhood friend in Germany of all places. Not once, but twice they just happened to cross paths. They remained friends through my dad's entire life. And that friend still lives in Sullivan as well. Kind of odd you would meet somebody from your hometown twice in Europe. But didn't talk about the war as far as any gory details or bad experiences.

I know that he didn't like the trip over which was on the Queen Mary. Everyone on the ship was seasick. He actually volunteered to go down and help peel potatoes cause in the bottom of the boat, and in the middle of the boat, he got less seasick doing that job.

My father never liked to travel a lot and I always felt like he saw all of the world he wanted to see during World War II and was just more happy to be able to come home.

LAW: Now was he involved in any kind of veteran's organizations?

FREESE: He was a member of the American Legion but not real active. My father was not a drinker and of course the American Legion has a lot of people who drink a lot at their activities and he really didn't favor that behavior so he didn't engage in a lot of their activities, but was a member.

LAW: Now your mom, you said she was a homemaker, was she from, her family from this area?

FREESE: When my father met my mother she lived here in Sullivan. My mother went to high school here in Sullivan and as far as I know grade school in Sullivan. Her father was, worked in a dairy factory that was here in Sullivan at that time. Her mother did not work, she was a homemaker.⁴ So my mother grew up in the city of Sullivan and she and my father I believe dated before he went off to war but they did not marry until he returned. And then she was helping him farm for many years as I say until I came along. My brother and Sister she was a stay at home mom. But when I came along she had taken a job as a secretary in Sullivan.

LAW: So what do you remember about growing up in Sullivan in the fifties and early sixties? Tell me a little bit about the community.

FREESE: Small rural community. Farm oriented. Forty two to forty five hundred population. It's been that way forever. It doesn't fluctuate much. A little unique from the standpoint that when I was growing up there were no stoplights in the city of Sullivan, there was a stop sign, but no stop lights. It was an all white community. We had no African American

⁴ Chrissie and Mary Nicolay.

people of any kind. We had no Jews of any kind. We had no Muslims. We had nothing but white Anglo Saxon Protestants. And that's who I went to school with. Our school was completely one hundred percent white. So you get somewhat of a distorted perspective growing up in a community like that. But it was a good community. Safe and people didn't lock their doors, they didn't lock their car doors. It was a nice place to raise a family and a nice place to grow up. I have no complaints.

LAW: Now these are also the earliest years of the Cold War. Do you have any memories of the Cold War?

FREESE: I have a memory of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember listening to the President at home on the radio. And my parents being concerned that this could escalate into something very serious. But beyond that politics was not something that I was not paying much attention to. But I do remember the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I do obviously remember when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I was in class in school and they came on and turned the TV on and listened to Walter Cronkite announce that he had died. My family all of course watched the funeral and the procession and all that. That stands out in my memory as something from my early childhood that left a lasting impression.

LAW: Do you remember if there were any community events connected with the Kennedy assassination?

FREESE: No, there was prior when he was running for President against Nixon. Sullivan invited both John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon to come to Sullivan to speak. And amazingly Richard Nixon accepted and came here. That was a big deal, to have a presidential candidate come to the small town of Sullivan. He spoke out at the City Park,

Wyman Park. We went and listened to it. They also had buffalo burgers at that time that they were serving. And one of the residents of Sullivan actually got his hands on the buffalo burger that Nixon partially ate and saved it for many, many years. He ended up going on the Johnny Carson show years later with that buffalo burger of all things. But Nixon coming to Sullivan was a big deal. A lot of people turned out to see him.⁵

LAW: Now what was it like to be a teenager in the late sixties? How did your life change at all, if at all? How do you remember those years?

FREESE: Like most young kids in a small town like Sullivan the only thing to do was to go to the drive-in, which we had a drive-in theater here at that time. Or cruise around in your car on a Friday and Saturday night. And as you got a little older then you were interested of course in getting your hands on alcohol if you could. And then going out and sitting in the country and drink your alcohol and hope you wouldn't get caught. The challenge was always trying to get your hands on the alcohol without being caught doing that. You had to find somebody old enough to buy it and give it to you. And looking back it was, several times I could easily have been arrested for activities that I would later sentence people for. So I always kept that in mind.

LAW: Do you remember what were your first jobs?

FREESE: My first job I ever held was as a carpenter's helper. My dad knew a carpenter in town and he needed someone to assist him with some projects. So I was a carpenter's helper one summer. And I'm left handed and I discovered being left-handed, you don't make a very good carpenter. My skill level with hammering nails, I would always seem

⁵ See, Richard Nixon, "Remarks by the Vice President, Wyman Park, Sullivan, Illinois," September 22, 1960. Made available online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, as part of *The American Presidency Project*, see, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25426>.

to nail my thumb, not the nail. But it was an interesting experience learning how to work for someone and being on a schedule, doing difficult physical labor.

But more importantly after that I had jobs for several summers working at Finley Marina. When Lake Shelbyville came into play the marinas were built around the lake. And one of those marinas was in Finley and I got a job down there helping to build boat docks. And we would build those throughout the course of the summer. We would also help with the gas pumps at the dock where they would have the boats pull up and get refreshments and get gas. And that was an interesting job; you were out in the sun getting tan. The owners there would allow you to use one of their float boats, let you take it out in the evening. That was a great, great experience. And it was interesting from the standpoint that I would observe several of the patrons, wealthy patrons, and several of them were lawyers. In fact a couple lawyers from Mattoon who I actually would try cases against later in life. But they were somebody you looked at and thought gee, these guys have it made, lots of money, they had big float boat, and they'd always go out and have big parties on them, and drove fancy cars, had phones in their cars, when no one had phones in their cars. They were someone who made an impression. And I look back and I always envied the fact that those guys really had a pretty good thing going.

LAW: Now you went to Sullivan High School, what do you remember about high school?

Influential teachers or classes?

FREESE: Sullivan High School was a, again when I went there at that time period, again we were very isolated from the standpoint of being all white Anglo Saxon protestant students. And you lived a very sheltered existence to some extent. The teachers were all very good in high school.

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My emphasis was probably more into the sports activities than academic. But I did well academically; I really was not that good of a student until I got to high school. I was a very average student. And I did finish up I believe as the highest grade point average of any males in my class. There were some females who beat me as far as having the highest grade point average. But I liked school; it was not difficult for me. But my high school years were primarily emphasized with sports, playing basketball, football, running track.

LAW: Any memorable coaches?

FREESE: The football coach was a very memorable guy, Coach Calvin, who's now deceased, ex-marine, athletic director at the time. He was a very influential person in shaping the lives of a lot of young men at that time who played football. And at that time period if you were a male you went out for football. We had in a school of four hundred and fifty people we had a hundred people on the football team. All the guys would come out for football. Now days that's not the case.

Our basketball coach, Coach Shalyo was a very influential person, a younger individual. He was my basketball coach on the varsity level. And I still have contact with him today. He is still alive; we actually are friends on Facebook. He also ended up coming into my courtroom as a potential juror on one jury selection and was also a defendant in one incident where he had a driver's issue, with a license.

But it was, high school was primarily sports. My only claim to fame was that I was the field goal kicker. I felt like I wanted to take that beyond just high school. And then I did, I walked onto the University of Illinois as a field goal kicker my freshmen year. At that time the University of Illinois football team did not allow freshmen to

compete on the varsity. They had a separate freshmen team, you only played three games, and you didn't even get to play in memorial stadium. You had to play on the practice field. But they were regulation games, referees, the whole bit. People came out and watched them. But I was fortunate enough to win the starting kicking position for the freshmen football team and did that my freshmen year.

LAW: Now did you say earlier that you also played soccer?

FREESE: No, we only had football, basketball and track, that's all we had. There was no baseball team, there was a golf team. As far as sports at that time, there were no female sports teams. If you were female you had cheerleading, and that was it. There were no organized sports teams for females.

LAW: Okay, so you talked about the U of I, but I wanted to ask you a couple questions before we get there. I asked about the Cold War earlier, but do you remember at the time what your thoughts would have been in regards to the Soviet Union and communism?

FREESE: The Soviet Union was the evil empire. The one country that was threatening to attack the United States. The threat of nuclear war was something that was very real. People were building bomb shelters and putting them in their back yards. There were rehearsals at school in the event of a nuclear attack they would have those rehearsals just like they would for fire drills. It always seemed to me foolish that anyone would drop a nuclear bomb on the city of Sullivan. Pretty small town for a target, the more likely you'd have issues from radiation from St. Louis or Chicago. But it was always something that was always there and a possibility that it could happen.

LAW: These are also the years of the Vietnam War. Do you recall what your earliest memories of the Vietnam War are? What's the earliest memory you have of the war?

FREESE: Seeing things on the television about the Vietnam War. And as I approached draft age you started paying more attention to that. When I was eligible for the draft they had a lottery. And you had a lottery number and if you got a low lottery number you were probably going to be drafted unless you had some kind of exemption that you qualified for. And I remember the day they held the lottery and my number came up around 320, so I knew right then that my odds of being drafted were slim to none, so that was a relief. Because unlike people who were going to Canada, and people avoiding the draft, I knew that would never be an option for me. If I was drafted I would go, and I would serve.

LAW: What were your thoughts upon the war?

FREESE: It seemed a dumb place to be. It seemed to me that the United States wasn't going at it with full force. It seemed to me the war could be over in two weeks if they would have actually gone in there and done what they were supposed to do. You can't fight a war with one hand tied behind your back and it seemed to me that's was what we were doing, and it cost a lot of people their lives.

LAW: What about your dad, your mom and dad, what did they think?

FREESE: I'm sure the same way, that the United States should go in there full bore and end it. That's what my father was used to with World War II. All resources were put forth into the war effort and this was simply, again fighting with one hand tied behind your back and you can't win a war that way.

LAW: Did you have any friends that were drafted or served in the military?

FREESE: No close friends that were drafted. Ones who were close friends if they had a low

lottery number they probably got a deferment because of going to college. At that time you could defer your enlistment. But I don't have, I didn't have anyone that was actually killed in Vietnam conflict that I was close to.

LAW: So why the U of I?

FREESE: My brother and sister both went to Eastern Illinois University. I wanted first of all to play football. To play for the University of Illinois, not for Eastern. I had the option of walking on at Eastern as well. But I felt like I wanted to go to the best university in the state and to me that was the University of Illinois at that time. I wanted a good education and I felt the University of Illinois would provide me with a degree that I could use later and have a very prestigious degree from that university. I decided to go into architecture. My high school counselor brought me in and went over various careers I could look into. My focus was of all things, what I can get a degree in where I don't have to take college chemistry? Because I knew I would have a great deal of difficulty with college chemistry. Our chemistry teacher in Sullivan High School was not the best so my science background was weak. I knew I would have a lot of trouble getting a decent grade or even passing a chemistry course in college. Architecture did not require chemistry, so I chose architecture.

LAW: Did you live in Champaign or Urbana?

FREESE: I lived in Champaign, well my freshmen year I lived actually in Urbana because I was living in a dorm. Then I moved out of the dorm to an apartment that was over in Champaign. It was a good fifteen miles off campus, the outskirts of Champaign at the time on the west side. So I had a car that I would drive onto campus each day or I would walk if it was decent weather.

LAW: What were your first impressions of Champaign-Urbana?

FREESE: The big city. I came from a forty five hundred population town of white Anglo Saxon Protestants to a large community of thirty thousand plus students of all races and ethnicities, and it was a culture shock, took some getting used to. And I always felt I was a little bit backward from the standpoint of growing up in a small town like Sullivan, and ill-prepared for the bigger city of Champaign-Urbana. And I look back now and Champaign-Urbana looks like a small town. But at that time it was a big town for me. Again I didn't travel a lot as a child. We took very few trips, very few vacations. Leaving the state of Illinois or leaving Moultrie country, where Sullivan sits, was not a frequent thing growing up.

LAW: Give me an idea what campus life was like.

FREESE: Intimidating. Moving into a dorm where there is never a quiet night. Living in a space the size of the closet I have in this house with another person took some adjusting to. Communal showers, communal bathrooms. Just not things no one is used to when they go off to college and you have to adapt to. Classes were large, had very few small classes of twenty to thirty people in most classes. When you were a freshmen at Illinois at that time, there were two hundred plus people in large auditoriums. You were nothing but a number. You were your social security number. I didn't ever have my social security number memorized till I went to college. And there, that's how you were identified, by your social security number. So you learned very quickly. And going in and registering for classes was quite an experience, going into the University of Illinois Armory and there were all these tables setup and hundreds of people there. You had to try and go get the schedule that you wanted and the class you wanted at the right time. And that was a

very intimidating experience. Of course nowadays it's all computerized and no one does that anymore.

LAW: Now were you working while you were in school?

FREESE: I did not. I did not work anytime as an undergrad. I felt very fortunate that my parents paid for all of my undergraduate education. I didn't have to borrow any money or work; I worked summers, but did not during the school year.

LAW: So for them you getting your education must have been a very big deal?

FREESE: Very important. They put three kids through college and none of us borrowed any money and none of us worked during college. We worked during the summer but not during the school year. And for them to do that was I'm sure was a big sacrifice on their part.

LAW: You said you were working in the summers?

FREESE: In summers I would work at the marina.

LAW: So you were coming back and visiting?

FREESE: Yes, I had come back to live at home during the summer. When I rented the apartment it was still there and was rented to me throughout the year. But I would come back and live in Sullivan at my parent's house.

LAW: Any extracurricular activities outside of sports and classroom work? Did you join a fraternity or in any organizations?

FREESE: I looked into a fraternity but the cost was something I didn't want to impose upon my parents. I knew they were doing all they could to just to pay for my schooling. So a fraternity would have cost more money. I had a friend who was in a fraternity and I

would go over and visit him at his house quite a bit. It really wasn't a lifestyle I was all that interested in.

LAW: Looking back what was your political and social outlook at this time? What was your world view as a young man?

FREESE: Very liberal, just the opposite of what I am now, very conservative. At that time the Vietnam War protests were in full force. There were demonstrations on some weekends where they would go down, students would close off streets. Then of course the police would show up and march arm in arm and clear the road. I watched that from a distance, I was never actively involved in protesting. But I was there watching like a lot of students were. I saw students overturn a police car. Watched students throw rocks, never did any of those things myself but was there as an observer. I had a very liberal attitude at that point. Felt like Vietnam was a mistake and we should get out. But never was in favor of being out there and confronting the police. That was never something I considered as being appropriate. When police told you to disperse you disperse, and go home.⁶

LAW: Now did you come from a liberal family?

FREESE: No, my family was very conservative. They were politically Democrats, almost to a person

[00:30]

in the family. Later in life I ran as a Republican, I converted some of them to Republican. A very conservative family. Not into drinking, definitely not into drugs. Law abiding individuals, when the police told you to do something you did it. And you better not show

⁶ For more on the demonstrations at the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana during this time period, see, Patrick D. Kennedy, "Reactions Against the Vietnam War and Military-Related Targets on Campus: The University of Illinois as a Case Study, 1965-1972," *Illinois Historical Journal*, Vol. 84 (Summer 1991), pgs. 101-118.

up under arrest or the hell to pay at home would be worse than what you ever encountered from the arrest.

LAW: Did you have a conception of being part of a particular generation?

FREESE: Not really, I just didn't really focus on that. It wasn't talked about as much at that time as it is today where we have titles for all the generations. I always knew of the greatest generation being my father's generation. But didn't really have much thought about what my generation was called or what we were supposed to be.

LAW: Do you recall when the conception of being part of a particular generation first occurred to you?

FREESE: Probably after I graduated from college and it became more of something in the media. You know you're grouping people in a large group and saying they have certain traits that I didn't always believe in, I never really was one to follow the group anyways so it didn't really apply to me too much. I didn't pay much attention to it.

LAW: How did younger people, yourself, how were they similar or different to your parents and your parent's generation?

FREESE: Probably less hard working individuals, less focused, in my generation. A work ethic was not something that everyone possessed. I did. No one's born with a work ethic, and it's something you learn. I certainly learned that from my upbringing with my family on the farm. My father, many times, while I was growing up, if it would be a large snow and you couldn't drive to Sullivan from the farm, he would actually walk the three and a half miles to Sullivan to report to work, and walk his mail route, then walk home. Not showing up for work was not an option. You observed that growing up and you realize that you put your nose to the grindstone and you do what you have to do to be successful.

And you learn that as a youngster growing up. I had a very strong work ethic and I wasn't the smartest kid on the block so many times I just had to work harder to make the grade I wanted to make at school or accomplish whatever I set out to accomplish.

LAW: Now you said you studied architecture, were you intending on being an architect?

FREESE: I was. The program I went into was a six year program. You had to get a bachelors degree and you had to have a masters degree in architecture before you could sit for the architectural licensing exam. You also had to work one year for an architect or engineer before you could actually sit for the exam. So I went through and completed the four year degree in architecture in the four years. And then moved to Miami, Florida where I got a job working for an architectural engineering firm as a draftsman because I was going to get my year's experience and then go back and pickup the masters. I had applied to the University of Florida and was accepted to their Masters of Architecture program. I decided to decline that admission and play out the year doing work with the full intent of going back to University of Florida and finishing up my degree. I did actually apply there and was accepted for the following year. But during that time period, we're talking 1974, a major recession hit. And many people in the architecture and engineering field were laid off. And I thought to myself I don't want to be subject to this the rest of my life, if the economy goes bad and you get laid off from work. So I started thinking about what profession can I go into that I can make a living, a good living, in good times and bad. Lawyers make a good living whether the economy is good or bad if you have the right type of law practice. So I applied to the law school and did not go back to finish my degree when I got accepted to a law school, which was the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

LAW: Did you know any attorneys personally or was it just the attorneys at the marina?

FREESE: The attorneys at the marina. I never personally got to sit down with an attorney and talk about that as a career. It never even crossed my mind to be a lawyer until that year in 1974 when I was watching everyone in the architecture and engineering profession get laid off. And I thought maybe I should choose something else. That was the first time I ever even thought about being a lawyer.

LAW: What was your family's reaction to your choice to go in this different direction and study the law?

FREESE: They were very pleased when I was accepted. I applied to thirteen law schools and I was accepted at one. So, it wasn't going well for a long time and I kept getting rejection letters. But the one that accepted me put a lot of weight on the fact that my education was the University of Illinois, a major university, with a decent grade point average in a difficult undergrad degree. Going into law school I was competing against people who had degrees in political science where you had straight A's. I didn't have straight A's, on a five point scale I think my grade point average was 4.1 overall. That wasn't that good. And my law school admission test score was mediocre at best. So to me, the University of Illinois came back to do exactly what I thought it was going to do, and that would be a major university which would have influence, and it got me in. And so the University of Louisville accepted me and that's where I went.

LAW: What were your first impressions of Louisville?

FREESE: Big town, old town, fairly rundown community at that time. Big on horse racing obviously with Churchill Downs not far, just a few miles from Churchill Downs. Horse racing and basketball were the big things in Kentucky. And at that time Louisville and the

University of Kentucky were basketball rivals, but they didn't play each other during the course of the year, they do now. That was always a big topic of discussion, which one was better. It was a basketball community and a horse racing community.

LAW: I want to get a sense of the University of Louisville Law School. Maybe start with what was the nature of your legal education?

FREESE: Well first off I went to the University of Louisville Law School and before I went to my first day of class and I had long hair and a beard. So shave the beard, cut the hair to get a much more conservative look and just thought that was probably more appropriate going into the legal field. I show up the first day of class and there's some long haired bearded people and I'm like I shouldn't have shaved or cut my hair. It was an intimidating experience. You're not in an undergraduate classroom where you know you may be smarter than half the people in the room, and can probably get a better grade than those people. I looked around at the law school class and thought I was probably the dumbest person here. And if someone's going to flunk out it could very well be me. So again I had to buckle down and use the work ethic to just work harder than a lot of my classmates to make it through that experience. At that time students at the University of Louisville would routinely flunk out. About ten percent of them failed class. They did that intentionally. They wanted to weed out some people from the class. And that was a threat you had hanging over your head the entire first year. And unlike undergraduate classes where you had multiple tests, quizzes, projects throughout the year to make the grade, in law school you had one test in the semester, that's it. And you either make the grade or you don't. No other grading opportunities. So you sat in lecture halls, classrooms and you took your notes and you were called upon by professors to recite

what your opinion was on the reading assignment which was extensive. A lot of reading in law school and if you weren't prepared you paid the price. The professors would embarrass you if you didn't have the assignments read and didn't know what you were talking about. But it was a very intimidating experience that your entire grade, your entire future hanging on one grade on a test. A very stressful time, but I made it through. I went through a three year program in two and a half years. I was able to do that by going to summer school. Unlike undergrad I was paying for my law school myself. I borrowed money to go. I was married at that time, just gotten married. My wife was working so whatever money she brought in, and whatever I borrowed was all that we were living off of. Which wasn't very high existence, I remember that during the two and a half years I went to law school we went to dinner and a movie once, in two and a half years. It was literally every weekend spent reading and studying.

LAW: Would you say there was a particular legal philosophy associated with the school?

FREESE: Not really, Justice Brandeis was a Supreme Court Justice who attended the University of Louisville and was actually buried; his ashes were buried at the front steps of Louisville Law School. Which I always thought was kind of odd. It was this law school was the Brandeis School of Law. No particular philosophy. I became much more conservative in my political thinking as I went through law school.

LAW: Why?

FREESE: Probably because of reading the cases and particularly criminal law areas and things of that nature that you just start to see that there is some real dirt bags out there that you have to deal with. And people don't always do what is right, some civil case you'd see people were taken advantage of individuals. I became very conservative at that

point in my thinking. Law school is probably much more of a conservative institution than most.

LAW: Were there any particularly influential classes or professors?

FREESE: Not really as far as my attitude or philosophy. I do remember one contracts law professor who very much emulated the professor in the movie *The Paper Chase*, which was a popular movie at the time about a young man going to law school at Harvard.⁷ This professor was very similar to Professor Kingsfield in that movie. He would come in and be very strict and call on people and again, embarrass you if you didn't know what you were talking about or you weren't prepared. But another thing I remember about him very clearly is that he would wear a suit very frequently and it was in my opinion a blue suit. I was sitting in the pretty much in the far back row of the classroom. One day I kind of decided maybe I should have my eyes checked, because I was thinking I needed glasses. I went to the eye doctor and I could see the big E and that was about it. So I got glasses and it was like I'm looking through binoculars when I walked in the room now. And I went to class the first time after that and it was a pinstripe suit, it wasn't a blue suit at all. I couldn't see the pinstripes. That memory always stands out, that was my first time I actually had glasses my entire life. And that was probably from all the reading I was doing, my eyes went bad on me.

LAW: Did the wider world impact your legal education?

FREESE: Not really. There wasn't much I was paying attention to because again I hardly even watched the news at that time. I was pretty much out of it as far as those two and a half years. I literally spent every waking hour studying and reading. It was not a fun two and a half years time period for me because I was not a fast reader and I had to read fairly

⁷ 20th Century Fox, 1973.

slow to comprehend and retain what I was going to have to retain. So I spent a lot of time at it, and tried not to watch very much news or anything else as far as what was going on. I do recall one incident where we had exams during the summer and my exam was on July 5th. And I thought it was really terrible you're making us study July 4th for an exam the next day, and this was the Bicentennial Celebration of July 4th, which means I was missing the activities. I did turn the TV on a little bit but unfortunately we had no money, we had a little black and white TV. So I got to watch the July 4th Bicentennial fireworks on a black and white TV, not real thrilling to watch when it's black and white.

LAW: Now do you recall what some of the big constitutional issues would have been at the time? And were you studying them in class?

[00:45]

How did your constitutional law professor approach all of that?

FREESE: The constitutional law class I had was one and there was really nothing major that they emphasized in that class. There was no pressing issue at that point in time that I recall them ever discussing. They went back over how the Supreme Court can interpret the Constitution and bottom line is they can interpret it any way they want to.

LAW: If you had to distill it down what were the principles and legal skills that you were learning?

FREESE: Be prepared, that's probably the most important. By being prepared I mean knowing what the law is and how it's supposed to be applied. If you are going into a courtroom be current on what the law is and what you are arguing. I had the experience of working as a law clerk for a law firm when I was in law school. I took one summer and actually had a law clerk's job with a large law firm in downtown Louisville. The

lawyer I worked for was named Robert Troutwine. And he was a partner in this law firm and he had the big office and was a very intimidating individual. He had me looking for various documents, going through various documents in a big class action lawsuit they had going at the time. So I was working up in some storage closet almost and I had a little desk and a chair but I enjoyed that experience. First time I had ever been in a law firm. First time I ever worked in a law firm. So I got me a little bit of experience, got my foot in the door. One other summer when I was in law school I was able to do an internship with the county prosecutor's office, and actually handled, with the supervision of the attorneys, some juvenile delinquent cases. I got to actually appear in a courtroom in front of a judge and ask some questions. That was an interesting experience. But most of my law school time was, because I was going through in two and a half years in a three year program, I didn't have the time to do the things in the summer. I usually had three or four classes each summer on top of trying to work and get work experience.

LAW: Just a couple other questions. Do you recall the makeup of your law school class in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age?

FREESE: Mostly male, mostly white, we had a few African Americans, had a few females, but not many. And most of the people were in my age group. Most of them came straight from college and enrolled in law school. We had a couple individuals who were older individuals who had careers and were coming back to school.

LAW: And the school was, would you characterize the school as a national law school or were they training you to take the bar in Kentucky?

FREESE: It was a national law school. They did not really emphasize Kentucky law as far as

state law. They were more emphasizing the federal statutes than they were the state of Kentucky. But it was not a law school where they were trying to prepare you just for the law in Kentucky, which was good for me because that would have been of no use to me. I really had no set career path when I went to law school but as I got towards the end I figured that the best way for me to probably make a good living would be to come back to Illinois, which I did.

LAW: That's what I was going to ask you next, were you planning on returning. That being the case, how did you then go about preparing for the bar? Did you take a class?

FREESE: I did, I signed up to take a bar review class. It was offered in Champaign, Illinois. I rented an apartment. My wife and I went up there and I attended the classes and she got a part time job working. My parents, as I look back, I think they were somewhat helping us financially to help us get through the three or four months that it was going to take for that bar review course. I went to the bar exam up in the city of Chicago. What an experience, never would do that again.

LAW: Why's that?

FREESE: Such an intimidating experience. I went into this large building, large conference room where there were hundreds of us taking the Illinois bar exam. I sat down at a very narrow table with a chair and unfortunately my position at the table had the leg underneath it and the screws that were holding the leg to the table that I was writing over the whole time during the exam. Part of the exam was multiple choice and part of it was essay. It was over two days. Probably like most people when I finished the two days examination that I felt for sure that I had failed. I was not confident that I passed the bar exam at all. And much to my relief when I got the letter, I had passed. And back then, I

don't know what the rules are today, you were only allowed so many attempts to take the bar exam so a lot of pressure. You wanted to get it the first time if you could.

LAW: Okay, so after passing the bar then what was your first professional position?

FREESE: I had secured a position prior to actually taking, prior to actually getting the results of the bar exam with a law firm in Decatur, Illinois called Bennett, Willoughby & Latshaw. Three lawyers, I was the only associate attorney in that firm. At that time Allen Bennett was a state representative from Decatur, Macon County in the state legislature.⁸ So he was pretty much always doing legislative items and doing political items, not really practicing law. Willoughby and Latshaw were the practicing lawyers. So I had a position with them as an associate attorney waiting for the bar exam results. I couldn't appear in court till I received them and I received them and then I started practicing law immediately with them. And I was actually sworn in early by a Supreme Court Justice because Mr. Bennett, being a legislator, contacted the Supreme Court Justice, Justice [Robert C.] Underwood, and made arrangements for me to go up and I was sworn in, in his chambers.⁹ Which was an interesting experience; I had never met the man. But he swore me in and I came back and started practicing law early and then actually went back to the University of Louisville in May of 1978, and went through graduation because I had actually graduated in December of 1977 going through in two and a half years. So I went back for my graduation, I had already passed the bar and was a practicing attorney when I went to graduation. Most of the people there in my class were fretting the bar exam and I had already passed it and was practicing law. So that was an interesting

⁸ Judge Allen F. Bennett was the State's Attorney of Moultrie County from 1968-71, a State Representative from 1977-79, and was elected a Circuit Judge in 2012 in the 4th Judicial Circuit.

⁹ Justice Robert C. Underwood served as a Illinois Supreme Court Justice from 1962-84. Prior to that he was the County Judge of McLean County from 1946-62.

perspective on that as far as going back and seeing where I was a few months earlier and they were at that position, at that point.

LAW: So then I take it you probably practiced in the Decatur area then for a couple years?

FREESE: Actually it was less than a year. I practiced with them for about eight or nine months as I recall and I decided that the best way for me to make money was to not be an associate of a law firm and to have my own law firm. And I knew there was going to be a possibility of my running for state's attorney in Moultrie County. So I left their law firm and came back to Sullivan and opened my own law office. With the intent of running for state's attorney; which at that time was a part time job see, you had a job as a state's attorney and a law firm on the side. So that was my intention when I came back as to what I was going to do. I borrowed five thousand dollars from the State Bank of Arthur, Illinois, in Arthur, Illinois and opened my law firm with no indication if I was going to make it or not make it, but I was going to give it a shot. It was myself and one secretary, that was it.

LAW: So you would have considered yourself a general practice attorney?

FREESE: A general practice attorney. If you come to the door if I could help you I was going to try to help you. I didn't have any type of limits on what I was trying to do.

LAW: Was that common? Were most attorneys at that time?

FREESE: No. In fact I was the first attorney, to my knowledge, in probably over twenty five or thirty years had toe ever have come to Sullivan and opened a law practice on their own. All the attorneys who were practicing in Sullivan at that time had come to the town and joined an existing law firm. No one had come to town and just opened their door like I did. If they did it was many, many years before I came to Sullivan. A few people have

tried it after I stopped practicing law after I became a judge, and they failed. To my knowledge no one has done it since. They have always come to town and joined an existing firm. It was not easy. There was not a lot of business initially. I probably would have struggled and had a very difficult time except for the fact that I was able to secure an appointment as a public defender in Moultrie County which gave me enough money to just pay the bills. And that was a part time position also; you had to have a law practice on the side. That helped a lot.

LAW: So you said you knew there was the possibility of running for state's attorney. How did you know about that?

FREESE: The election was coming up and the current state's attorney was obviously going to have to run. And he was a Democrat and I was going to run as Republican. And it didn't matter to me who was there I was going to run against them as a republican and try to win as a Republican

LAW: You being a new young lawyer was that uncommon, to be running for state's attorney?

FREESE: Not so much uncommon I don't think. In most counties the person who runs for state's attorney is probably a younger lawyer than an older one. But some of the surrounding counties did have much more experienced state's attorneys, older lawyers. I was running because I felt like my family name gave me a chance to win. The Freese family had been in Moultrie County for many years and were well known farmers and I was counting on that because most were Democrats, to bring some of those Democratic votes to my name. But I felt like I could go in and win. As it turns out the person I was planning on running against didn't run against me. He resigned the office and I ran against somebody else.

LAW: Now you said this was still a part time position? State's attorney?

FREESE: Yes.

LAW: Did that change when you were state's attorney? Do you recall when that changed? Or was it because you were a smaller rural county that was still the situation?

FREESE: That has changed; I don't know the exact year it changed. But even in Moultrie County now it is a full time position and you cannot have a practice on the side. But the entire time I was there you were allowed to have a law practice on the side. It was considered a smaller county, had a different designation as far as income, it was less paying than larger counties. As I recall the income was \$31,500 a year for what was basically a part time position. But that was a lot of money back in those days.

LAW: Okay, I wanted to ask you also about some world events from this period. Like before I asked about Vietnam and what not. Any memories of President Nixon? This is kind of going back a little bit.

FREESE: I remember turning on the television and seeing "I am not a crook". I remember him always profusely sweating when he was on TV. He just gave the impression that he was lying when he was on television it seemed like. That's my only real memory of President Nixon.

LAW: Any memories of Watergate?

FREESE: I recall the news of Watergate. I recall the investigation and all the various hearings and the different people who were implicated in that in his administration. It was something that you just couldn't get away from. It was on the TV all the time and on the news.

LAW: It is said that those events marked a turning point in terms of people's trust in their government. Did you observe that? Would you say that that was accurate?

FREESE: I don't think so. I think that was just a situation where one individual

[01:00]

and the people who were for him made some really bad choices and then tried to cover it up. It was probably one of the first times that the media really came out and showed itself to be more investigative media rather than just reporting. Obviously the media had many opportunities to report negative things about President Kennedy, which they chose to not ever report. Those things were not secrets, they knew what he was doing, his activities. With Nixon it changed there, I'm not sure people had a loss of confidence in government as such. I think I noticed more of that when President Clinton came out and denied on camera having sex with that woman and flat out lied. To me that did change it and I did notice that in my job. People had no more hesitation to lie. Because if they President can lie, why not I?

LAW: You also mentioned earlier that the economy was changing. Any memories of stagflation, high inflation, gas lines?

FREESE: High inflation, I never sat in a gas line. But high inflation was an issue and interest rates were an issue. When I borrowed money for the first time to build a home my interest was eighteen percent. An ungodly amount of interest. And it was hard to get a loan and I only qualified for that loan because I went to a federal land bank and at that time to get a loan from a federal land bank you had to have a minimum of three acres. My parents gave me from their farm three acres so I could qualify for the loan. I had just been

elected state's attorney and had that income. But it was a lot of money to pay out in interest, at eighteen percent.

LAW: Any other world events that have stuck with you from that particular time? Anything come to mind? Memories of President Carter, 1980 election?

FREESE: I watched President Carter and have memories of him on television and the frustration that he would show about not being able to bring the hostages out. I was a big supporter of Reagan and was very happy to see him run and to win the presidency because I felt like the country was really in bad shape under President Carter. The military was very weak and President Reagan I felt was one of those rare guys that came along when the country needed a strong President, and he delivered. He brought the military back and he confronted the communist threats. I was a very big supporter of President Reagan, and what he stood for. I was very upset when they attempted assassinating him, Mr. Hinckley. I thought my god here we go again and we have a great president and he's not going to be able to serve, he's going to be killed. I felt like most, like my parents at that time, Kennedy was going to be a great President and he was struck down. So I thought here we go again we have a big strong leader again after Kennedy and he's also been assassinated. Fortunately he survived and went on and did a great job.

You talk about memories though and since he just recently died; Muhammad Ali was a memory I always had as a kid. You didn't ever get to watch Muhammad Ali fights on television back when I was growing up. You listened to them on the radio. And I remember seeing my dad around the radio listening to the Muhammad Ali fights. That always stuck out in my memory.

LAW: The Greatest.

FREESE: He was quite the character. Broadcasts back then were interesting to listen to. They of course tried to describe exactly what was going on, which is not easy to do when you're talking about boxing.

LAW: Right, right. Okay, so you have kind of been gone from Sullivan for a while. Had it changed in any significant way?

FREESE: Not really, came back and the town was pretty much the same. Sullivan never changes very much. It's pretty much stayed the same since I was a kid.

LAW: So you wanted to get elected state's attorney. How did you go about doing that?

FREESE: I contacted the Republican Party [county] chairman and advised him I wanted to run as a Republican, as their candidate for state's attorney. At that time the republican precinct committeeman did not ever endorse someone. I ran through the primary, I was unopposed so I won the primary. So then the precinct committeemen of course get behind you and try to promote your campaign. It was a campaign where it's all on you. It's not television, it's ads, it's radio ads and direct mailing. And then I went door to door, which in a small county like Moultrie County that was pretty much expected that you would knock on people's door and ask them for their vote. And I went door to door not just in every town in Moultrie, I drove the county and stopped at every house in rural Moultrie County when I was running for state's attorney. That was an experience. I recall I bought a pair of cowboy boots. I had never bought a pair of cowboy boots in my entire life. I bought them because they came up high to my knee in case I ran into a vicious dog and they would perhaps bite the boot and not my leg. And then on a couple occasions I did have some experiences with some vicious dogs, never got bit. However one small problem came about as I was knocking on the door. I looked down and the dog was

peeing on my shoes. The person never did answer the door. That was my only negative experience really campaigning door to door.

LAW: What were you running on? What did you want to do?

FREESE: I was wanting to limit plea bargaining and be much more aggressive prosecutor. I campaigned on that issue. And I felt like there was way too much plea bargaining going on. Too many deals being made. To me the person who committed the crime you prosecute, you don't drop the charge; you prosecute them of the crime they committed.

LAW: You won the election, you became state's attorney. Tell me was it a challenge to make that change and how did you go about it?

FREESE: It really wasn't a challenge, the biggest challenge I had was there was this huge backlog of police reports that my predecessor had left and never charged anyone on that we had to try and bring up to speed. The first six months in office we worked countless hours trying to get those reports read and charges filed and bringing everything up to where it was current. I initiated a policy of if I was going to charge you with what I thought I could prove. And once we filed the charges we were going to make those charges stick. If you wanted to negotiate a sentence we will talk about that. But many times I would simply say I would leave that to the judge. That is the judge's job, not the state's attorney. The state's attorney is there to get the conviction, and the court then imposes the sentence. But we would negotiate plea deals as far as the sentence goes. We did not negotiate reduction in the charge. If you didn't want to plead to the charge we had, we would go to trial. I remember one individual on a traffic ticket, a speeding ticket; we wouldn't drop the traffic tickets either. If they were filed by the police as long as we could substantiate it we would prosecute those traffic tickets. I remember one lawyer

calling me from Springfield who represented a very wealthy individual who had a speeding ticket. Also he also had a radar detector which at that time was not common at that time. And the police noted that on his ticket that the person had a radar detector and he wanted the charge dismissed or reduced to a non moving violation. And I said, "I am not going to do that." The lawyer said, "We will take it to trial." I said, "I will be there, be prepared to go." The individual paid the ticket. It was a matter of simply telling the defense lawyers that I am not going to negotiate with you and if you are going to insist that the charge be dropped or reduced we will see you in the courtroom at the trial. When it came right down to it they were not going to try the case. Their clients were not going to pay for a trial case they knew they were going to lose because the evidence was overwhelming against them. So we implemented that policy, I was not a favorite person of many defense lawyers. In fact I was probably disliked a great deal by many of them.

LAW: Now you had earlier had some experiences as a public defender. How did that inform your work as state's attorney?

FREESE: It was influential because as a public defender you get to talk to all kinds of individuals. Most of them are indigent. Most of them start out in jail when you first meet them and you quickly find out that a very high percentage of them are individuals who will lie about anything. I remember a story an individual who I went to the county jail to see for the first time after I had been appointed and I walked in the conference room they had for you to meet inmates at the old county jail they had. I said, "Tell me what happened that got you arrested?" And he went through this whole elaborate story and when he was done I just looked at him and said, "No one is going to believe that, why don't you tell me what really happened." He looked at me and said, "Okay, this was

what really happened.” He had made this whole elaborate story up to convince me as his appointed lawyer to see if this is going to fly. And it just struck me the gall that he would have of lying that blatantly. I quickly found out to working with people as a public defender that one thing they wanted to avoid among all else was jail. They would take probation in a heartbeat. They could walk their way through that; they could bullshit their way through the probation department. They would go to counseling and they would go to all the classes and do what they had to do. What they didn’t want to have was a jail sentence. And when I became a judge I always remembered that.

LAW: How were these different offices organized? How many people were working in them in terms of numbers?

FREESE: The public defender job was an office of one. I was it. No secretary no other public defenders, just me. State’s attorney’s office when I was state’s attorney we had an assistant state’s attorney, and a secretary and an investigator. That was it. And the assistant state’s attorney the county board always wanted to take that away and not give you one. They felt like you could do that job yourself. Which in many situations they were correct you could. But, there were cases where you would simply be overwhelmed by defense lawyers if you weren’t able to occasionally have someone else to take a trial. The defense lawyers want to get together and try ten cases in a row. Well they are trying one case and another one steps up and tries a case. You are the prosecutor, you are by yourself you are trying all ten of them. Physically that becomes very difficult to do. Jury trials for me were difficult because I always wanted to be one hundred percent prepared and I wanted to win the case.

LAW: Was there a system of at all of court appointed attorneys?

FREESE: We would have a system in this county of if the public defender could not be appointed for some reason because of a conflict or some other reason, then the local attorneys, the judge would sort of keep track and go around. He would appoint people to cases as their name came up. Some local attorneys would simply tell the judge they felt they weren't simply incompetent in criminal law; they didn't do that on a private basis and didn't want the appointed cases. But the judge for the most part at that time would just randomly go around and appoint people who would take the appointment and do a good job.

LAW: You speak of lawyers in town. Was it some lawyers were known for certain things? How did that break down?

FREESE: Most of the attorneys in Sullivan when I started practicing the law were non-criminal attorneys. Most of them did not handle divorce. Most of them did not handle bankruptcy. They would do contracts, they would do real estate transactions, they would do estates, wills; paper attorneys, pushing a pen, and generating paper documents for people. So I tried to fill the void. I would take criminal cases I would do divorce cases and I would handle bankruptcies. And it worked out pretty well.

LAW: Why do you think they didn't handle divorces or bankruptcy?

FREESE: A lot of attorneys don't like divorces because of the human conflict involved. And it's stressful and also there are lots of complaints against lawyers who handle family law cases with the attorney registration and disciplinary commission. Because a lot of times people are not happy about how it comes out. I always made it very clear at the beginning I was not going to decide your divorce case. I'm your lawyer and I'm going to put your best foot forward and the judge is going to decide your divorce case and who gets what,

not me. I'm just going to put the facts out there and the judge makes that decision. But I always enjoyed divorces; I enjoyed that interaction with them.

LAW: Why were they not handling a lot of criminal cases?

FREESE: Most lawyers don't want to be involved with that element of society and they don't want to keep up with criminal statutes. It's a whole different world outside of the civil world.

[01:15]

Different rules of procedure, different statutes you have to be familiar with. I always found it very interesting and fun. So I had no hesitation in taking criminal cases.

LAW: What type of crimes are we talking about? I know it's a...

FREESE: Not major murders, but a lot of felonies on burglaries, theft type crimes. Batteries, people getting in fights, occasionally sex related crimes, rapes, but mostly property crimes for the most part. We had very few murder cases and no murder cases while I was state's attorney. We have had very few over the years in this county. There is one pending now, but that just doesn't happen often in a small town.

LAW: Now you referred a little bit to a judge. Would that have been Joseph Munch?¹⁰

FREESE: Correct. When I started practicing law he was a circuit judge in Moultrie County and was, by all accounts a, "hanging judge." He would not hesitate to send people to jail who deserved it and repeat offenders. He was a very strict judge; you had to know what you were talking about before you appeared in front of him. If you didn't, he would again embarrass you. He did not like people who were not prepared. I went in and talked to him

¹⁰ Judge Joseph C. Munch served as State's Attorney of Moultrie County from 1944-64. In 1965, he was appointed a magistrate judge, and in 1970 he was elected an Associate Circuit Judge. Under the new 1970 Constitution he became a Circuit Judge in 1971, as did all of the state's current Associate Circuit Judges, and was retained by the voters in 1972. He served in that position until his resignation in 1980. He returned to the bench in 1987, for one year, to fill out the term of Worthy B. Kranz upon his retirement from the bench.

and I told him when I came to Sullivan and that I fully intended to run for state's attorney in the next election. And he was Republican, he ran as a Republican when he was elected circuit judge. And he was a former state's attorney himself for multiple terms before he became a judge. And we had a public defender at that time, who was in Decatur. None of the local attorneys wanted the public defender job so they went to Decatur to get an attorney to take the position of public defender in Moultrie County. So he was able to convince that attorney to give that job up and then I was appointed public defender which was very, very helpful in keeping my law practice doors open. Because it generated me an income of about ten thousand dollars a year. At that time that was enough to pay any bills for the year. And my law practice was actually money I would have on top of that.

LAW: He would have been the only judge until Judge [Worthy B.] Kranz?¹¹

FREESE: That is correct. Judge Kranz. Judge Munch suddenly resigned, was on vacation and called back and said, "I quit, I resign, I am taking retirement." After that the Supreme Court by the way put a rule in that you had to give sixty days notice that you were going to take retirement. They wanted some advance notice so they just didn't have a job open. Kranz was the associate judge at the time and he then was appointed to fill out Judge Munch's term. And he was the polar opposite of Judge Munch. Judge Kranz was very liberal, and would not send people to prison very often and unfortunately then this is the person who I am working with as state's attorney because Judge Munch was not there when I was state's attorney; he was there when I was public defender. When I became state's attorney it was Judge Kranz. I had a lot of difficulty when working with him to get him to impose what I thought was appropriate sentences.

¹¹ Judge Worthy B. "Dutch" Kranz became an Associate Circuit Judge in 1973, and was appointed to the vacancy created by Judge Munch's resignation in 1980. He was elected to that position in 1982, and served until his retirement in 1987.

LAW: Now was he from the area?

FREESE: I don't believe he was originally from the area; he had been here for quite some time. Was with a law firm I believe or working for a government position when he was appointed associate judge. But his history I am not real positive on, he was not a native to Sullivan.

LAW: Okay, you've kind of alluded to some of the local firms. Who would have been some of the more prominent attorneys or well known respected attorneys?

FREESE: We had the law firm of Elder & Elder which was a law firm that had been in town a long time. There was the father and two sons in that law firm. There was a law firm of Stone & Stone, father and son. And then the youngest Stone who ran against me as state's attorney when I was going up for reelection. He was the state's attorney who resigned when I was initially running for the office. We had a law firm of Ingram & Wood which was an older attorney, and a lawyer by the name of Steve Wood joined him. In Moultrie County there was another firm called McLaughlin & Florini, that was the only other law firm in Sullivan. Again an older attorney, McLaughlin, and a younger attorney Joe Florini who joined him. And that was the only law firms there were in Sullivan.

LAW: Was there an organized bar association?

FREESE: There was, we had a bar association that would meet fairly regularly back in those days. Now the bar association almost never meets. Back then we were much more active and I took the initiative to start activities for Law Day. May 1st is Law Day and our bar association had never done anything for Law Day. So for two years in a row when I first came back to Sullivan I was the chairman of Law Day activities and I started the first year a poster contest all the students would participate in. Winners would come to the

courthouse and the judge would give them an award, a paper award for their poster. The second year we had mock trials where we had the students come in and be jurors and we would prosecute an individual who was actually was our probation officer and bailiff as the defendant. And we tried him three times and as I recall twice he was convicted and once he was found not guilty, on the same evidence, so it was an interesting experience.

LAW: I don't know how much farther I want to go. Maybe just ask a couple more questions.

Was the practice of law what you thought it was going to be?

FREESE: Yes.

LAW: Why?

FREESE: You are helping people get out of problems they are in. Another thing is the law is a positive when you handle an adoption, you're adopting a member of a family and that is a very positive thing. But the rest of the things are lawyers for are negative. Whether you are charged with a crime, you are going bankrupt, you are getting divorced. The main things are negative factors. Real estate is a positive when you are buying a house, but there was not a lot of real estate transactions lawyers were involved in when I was practicing law. You are helping people get out of a tough spot and that was always rewarding.

LAW: I think I might stop there for now. I don't know much farther I want to go. Judge we will stop there for now.

FREESE: Thank You

LAW: Thank You

[Total Running Time: 01:22:43]

END OF INTERVIEW/END OF ORAL HISTORY