

An Interview with Arnold Blockman
Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission

Arnold F. Blockman was a law clerk to Hon. Leland Simkins, Fourth District Appellate Court, Springfield, Illinois, 1973-1975. He was an associate with Hatch and Baker, P.C., 1975-1979. A partner in Hatch, Blockman and McPheters, P.C., Champaign, Illinois, 1979-1996. He was elected a Champaign County Circuit Judge, Sixth Judicial Circuit of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, on December 2, 1996 for a six year term and was retained for additional six year terms December 2, 2002, December 2, 2008 and December 2, 2014 until his retirement in 2016. He served as presiding judge of the family law division since 2000 until his retirement in 2016.

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Abstract

Arnold Blockman

Biographical:

Arnold F. Blockman was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 1, 1947, and spent his early life growing up in his parent's home in eastern Memphis, which is now intercity Memphis. Blockman graduated from Memphis Central High School in 1964 and attended the University of Memphis from 1965-1969. He received a B.A. in History and Political Science. He then attended the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign School of Law and graduated in 1973. Blockman served as a Law Clerk for Justice Leland Simkins from 1973-1975. From 1975-1976 he was in private practice. He was an associate of Hatch and Baker, P.C., 1975-1979 and a partner in Hatch, Blockman and McPheters, P.C., Champaign, Illinois, 1979-1996. He was elected a Champaign County Circuit Judge, Sixth Judicial Circuit of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, on December 2, 1996 for a six year term and was retained for additional six year terms December 2, 2002, December 2, 2008 and December 2, 2014 until his retirement in 2016. He served as presiding judge of the family law division since 2000 until his retirement in 2016. Blockman also taught law beginning in 1974 and continued this until the present day. Classes included Business Law at Lincoln College in Lincoln, Illinois, in 1974, Business Law at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, 1974-1975, Business Law at Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois, 1972-1973, 1975-2000 and he served as Adjunct Professor at University of Illinois College of Law in Urbana, Illinois, January 1, 2007 – present day (2016) teaching a course called "Family Law Practice". Judge Blockman and his wife Rita have three children.

Topics Covered:

Parents and family background; growing up in Memphis, Tennessee; early education; helping in his family's store; memories of meeting Elvis; love of baseball; memories of his synagogue; growing up in a segregated city; graduating Memphis Central High and entering University of Memphis; demographics of University of Memphis; working while in college; parent's political affiliation; coaching girls basketball; Vietnam War and the draft; influential professors; his decision to attend University of Illinois Law School; conception of his generation; time in Waukegan, Illinois; his interest in law; living in Memphis, TN, when MLK Jr. was assassinated; memories of Dean Cribbet and Miss Mary Martin; definition of a national law school; demographics of his law school; jobs during his law school years; different mentors at law school; early impressions of Champaign-Urbana; case in front of the Appellate Court; how law school then differed from today; professional life after law school; clerking for Judge Leland Simkins; the Illinois Fourth District Appellate Court; private practice; composition of the local bar in Champaign-Urbana; types of law practiced in private practices; Illinois Pollution Control Board; Open Meetings Act case; cases in front of the Illinois Supreme Court; memories of judges; civil litigation and various types of cases he had; family law; memories of lawyers; changes in the law; family life; changes in the Champaign-Urbana community; judicial election; judicial assignments; continuing legal education; Illinois Judges Association; appeals of cases; teaching; demographics of the student body; social media and evidentiary issues in family law; cameras in the courtroom; relationship between judiciary and the media; enhancing public's awareness of judiciary; relationship between bar association and judiciary; role of judiciary and lawyer in society; pro-bono work; rules on philanthropic work as a judge; Planned Parenthood involvement; Court Appointed Special Advocates; reflections on judicial cases; future of the profession; reflections on legal career; legacy.

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 Arnold Blockman: An Oral History, Part 1

LAW: This is an oral history interview with Arnold Blockman. Today's date is March the 30th, 2016. We are here in the Champaign County Courthouse in his chambers, and this is our first interview. Today we are going to talk about his background. Judge Blockman, I thought I would start with when and where were you born?

BLOCKMAN: I was born February 1, 1947 in Memphis, Tennessee.

LAW: Tell me a little bit about your parents.

BLOCKMAN: My parents did not have a college education. My father had a high school degree from a public school in Memphis. My mother as we have talked about [before the interview] was born in Halls, Tennessee, which is a small town near Nashville. She went to public schools in Nashville and dropped out of high school in the tenth grade to help in the family business. Interesting, none of the siblings of my parents I knew of had any kind of college training at all. My mother had four siblings, three brothers and a sister. My father had two brothers, and none of that generation had any kind of college that I am aware of. But they were loving people. They gave me a tremendous amount of love and attention, and then basically let me develop. I have been doing the family law stuff here, I am sure we will be getting into that, for many, many, many years, and you see how structured a lot of these children are, but it was a different era. I never remember any kind of organized camp. I never remember any type of class, like piano lessons, violin lessons. I don't remember any particular training in baseball or basketball, or any kind of enhancement as far as with school. In the summers I would leave early in the morning

and go to the park and play baseball, and I would then spend the rest of the day with my friends, I would then come back home at night, and it was just a different era. I would also go to Kentucky. I had a first cousin, my mother's sister, that lived in a small town called Madisonville, Kentucky, and a lot of times I would go up and just spend time with Jerry. So, that would be how I spent my summers.

My father first got married during the war. He worked for the company called the American Fishing Company, and it was considered at that time a critical industry during the war. (Phone rings, interview paused)

I think I was talking about my father, so he worked with the American Fishing Company until the end of the war, and then my mother I don't think worked during that period. They had a small apartment in Memphis near where the university is now, the University of Memphis, and then right after the war (phone rings, interview paused). After the war my father and mother went to work in the family grocery store.

LAW: This was your father's family store?

BLOCKMAN: It would be my father's family's grocery store. Only my grandmother was alive, and she had a little house behind the grocery store. It was in mid-city Memphis near the old baseball park in Memphis called Russwood Park, which is quite famous in Southern League lore, near the hospital area right near downtown Memphis. And they both went into the grocery store business, and actually moved in. There was a house, and then there was the old corner grocery. Above the store there were apartments that they had turned into some rentals. My mom and dad lived on top, and my grandma, Celia, lived in the back of the house. My parents worked in the grocery store and helped grandma with the

grocery, and did that for a number of years, and then that's where they went right after the war. Then I believe in 1947, the year I was born, they purchased a house on Alicia Drive in Memphis, which was kind of then the eastern part of Memphis. Now it would be just about intercity Memphis the way things have developed. They stayed at that house until they moved up here in 1994.

LAW: Your dad, Louie, was he – he grew up then in Memphis?

BLOCKMAN: He grew up in Memphis, went to Memphis schools, and he was a nice person.

He was a sweet person. He had had an interest in golf, and liked to shoot pool and play cards. So, all of the memories of him skipping school to go play pool, and I don't think he was a great student, but he got through high school.

LAW: Now, you just knew his mother, Celia?

BLOCKMAN: I just knew my grandmother. I never knew and there weren't many stories of my paternal grandfather. So, I really didn't know much about him at all.¹

LAW: What do you remember about your grandmother?

BLOCKMAN: She was a lovely lady, very loving, took real good care of me. My father had two brothers. One was in the jewelry business and lived in Memphis.² The other had been injured in the war. His name was Willie, and he had some type of disability. He just – I don't think anybody knew quite what it was, but he was a sweet guy, but had a disability, and couldn't live independently. He actually lived until he died in either the upstairs or in a room in the little complex they had in central Memphis. But my father

¹ Abraham Blockman.

² David Blockman.

was a real sweet guy, didn't have a lot of friends, really wasn't involved politically in anything, didn't really read a lot, liked to watch TV, but was just a decent person. He was always really good to my mother, and they were, they were a great match I think.

LAW: Now you said your mother, Rebecca, she grew up working in a family business too?

BLOCKMAN: She also worked in the business, and I think once I was born I think she started devoting most of her attention to me. I was born in '47. So, for those couple of years she would have worked in the store with dad, and then even after I was born she helped out in the store, particularly during the busy period. And this was the, this was at the height of – the corner grocery store. It used to be the foundation for providing food for families.

LAW: Right.

BLOCKMAN: And then that was before the advent of the huge chains that basically put them out of business maybe, you know, in the late 50s.

LAW: Did you know either one of her parents?³

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I knew, I knew her mother, and she lived in Nashville, and I was real close to my maternal grandmother, but I never knew my maternal or paternal grandfather. I did know that mom was real proud of the fact that her mother was born in the United States. She was always proud of that.

LAW: I was wondering if any tales of immigrating to the United States made it down to you through family members?

³ Jacob and Sarah Rubenstein.

BLOCKMAN: You know, I never got much of that. I know they came through New York, but I really never got much of the story, and they really never discussed it very much. So, I really never – I just knew that they came through New York and Ellis Island, and that was pretty much it as far as what I knew about the immigration aspect of it. I know both families were like merchant type families, and were looking for opportunities, and I think that's probably why maybe you see one group going to the Nashville area, and the other going to the Memphis area, and I guess those were up and coming cities where there was economic opportunity.

LAW: So, help me get a better idea of what it was like growing up in Memphis in the 50s. I know you have talked a little bit about it, but give me a sense of that community at that time. What do you remember? What comes to mind?

BLOCKMAN: Well, I think the first thing that comes to mind is I was a kid. I wasn't politically motivated. I didn't particularly pay a lot of attention to political matters or events in the world. I led probably an idyllic childhood. My parents kind of left me alone as far as structure, and let me develop on my own, and I had the typical interest in baseball, and I thought it was the greatest thing in the world that we had a baseball stadium right down the street from our store where we had Southern League baseball, and the baseball players would come into the store. I used to think that was the greatest thing in the world to see these players. I would walk down and watch them practice at the ballpark, and I would help out at the store when I was younger. I would be at the register, and I would wait on people. So, but what was striking to me is I always was repulsed by the fact that there was segregation even then. Even not being politically aware it was very troubling because here in the school system that I went to, public schools in Memphis, there was,

there were no blacks, and they had segregated schools. Even when I graduated high school, Memphis Central, that would have been 1963, right, yes, 1963 or '64, when I graduated high school they still, they only integrated when my wife went there to the same high school. She started a couple years later, and they had, they had integrated the school; but there were no black kids in the schools, and really no minorities whatsoever. You had, you had separate lunch counters. You had separate restaurants. It is hard to believe you had separate drinking fountains. You would get on a bus, and the back section would be for blacks,

[00:15]

and you know, so even different doctors. You couldn't go to the same doctor.

LAW: Was your neighborhood segregated?

BLOCKMAN: Oh, yes. There were no black families in the neighborhood, and I always had a sense that that just wasn't right, and it was repulsive, but it was the culture. I mean it was accepted by at least everybody in my immediate group as that's just the way things were; but even as a kid I thought that was awful, and my wife when I talked to her later because she grew up in that same milieu, she thought it was awful too, but that was, that was what we grew up with. And the interesting thing is that every family that I knew of, and my parents even though they were, my father worked in the grocery store until they sold the store I believe in the late 50s, before I was thirteen, and then my dad went to work for a real estate company selling houses and renting apartments, a big company in Memphis, and my mother went to work for a dress shop in midtown, and then later worked for a big department store called Goldsmith's, but they were very modest as far as income. We

didn't have a lot of luxury items. We had a modest house in a middle class neighborhood. We had one car. I only remember – we took a number of trips like to Nashville to visit the family, and that was a lot of fun as a kid; and then we took two major trips, one to New York City and one to Florida, and that was a big deal. I think that was the beginning of my love of travel, but we were by no means an affluent family. But it seemed like everybody in our neighborhood, they all had maids, black maids, and the amazing thing, and they paid the maid bus fare and like four dollars a day. And our maid was Eva Bell Williams, and she became a member of the family. She was like a second mother to me. And the amazing thing, and I always really loved the lady, and I even kept in contact with her for many, many years. When we'd go back to Memphis to visit, I would go visit her, and she was living in a segregated area, and I just felt like she was a second mother to me. And the interesting thing to me is all of the families had maids that were considered, in most families they were an integral part of the family. They did all of the cleaning, and a lot of the cooking and everything else. So, we had her several days a week, and yet we were a very modest and middle class family, but some of the attitudes, and so that made me even feel, you know, an affinity towards blacks; but other people could like, it was such a dichotomy because other people would always talk about blacks in derogatory terms, and racial terms, and yet the people that worked for them they were different, you know, and that always struck me as kind of being interesting. So, that was, that was the way I grew up. And I just – again it was just kind of an accepted, it was just something that you kind of lived with, but I always thought it was wrong, and I couldn't believe that people would treat people like that even as a young kid.

LAW: Do you have any memories of the early Cold War?

BLOCKMAN: The only memory I have is during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and I believe that was, that would have been – I forget what year that was.

LAW: '62.

BLOCKMAN: I was, yes, I was about fifteen. That's about right, '62, and I remember coming home from school and reading about that, and really being frightened that we were going to have a world war, and really worried about our society. And it was like, you know, and there was like a doomsday scenario, and we went right to the brink of war, and apparently they ended up resolving it by, I guess their ships turned back, and apparently there was some, I guess, secret deal that nobody knew about until later, but they decided not to deliver the missiles to Cuba. Then I remember driving with my cousin in Kentucky and hearing about Sputnik, and the advances of the Soviets in space, but I really didn't give a lot of thought at that time, and again I am talking about the period until I graduated high school, to the dynamics of the Cold War, and the political implications of it, or anything of that nature. The only other prominent event that I do have a vivid recollection of was I was in my junior year of high school. So, this would have been 1963, and I remember being in a study hall in Central High School, which was a huge public high school, and I remember being in the study hall, and the teacher came in crying that the President had been shot. You know, it was one of those days where like 9/11 you always remember where you were, and I mean people were just shocked, and the kids were shocked, and we came home, and our family was shocked, and everybody

was watching television, and the President died, and it was a really traumatic event. That's the one thing that really stands out in my mind.

The other thing I think since Central was such a huge school, it was a large public high school, and I was a fairly good athlete, I played baseball and played basketball, but I was nowhere near good enough to play on any of the school teams. So, most of my involvement in sports, particularly baseball and basketball and some football, was in club teams; but I never was good enough to make the high school teams, which is unfortunate because I really loved sports, especially during that period of time.

The only other major event that I remember in that period was that Memphis was the home of Elvis Presley, and he was like the big hero in town. I will never forget one day when I was probably about eleven or twelve. I was really into baseball, and my parents took me to the gates of Graceland for some reason, and out comes Elvis, I don't know, walking, he is just walking out there to the gates. A lot of people were out there, and he saw me, and I gave him my baseball glove, and he signed my baseball glove, and I remember that being pretty cool, you know. Unfortunately I lost that glove, in a house fire in Bloomington, during my clerkship. It probably would be worth something these days to have Elvis' autograph on the glove, but that was a treasured memory of mine from that period in Memphis.

But for the most part it was like, I mean it really was an idyllic period in the sense that there was no fear of crime. Our neighborhood was – you just didn't hear about crime. The kids were free to roam around. Most of the kids that I knew didn't have any kind of structured environment. They were left alone to be kids. I am sure that wasn't

true of all families, just seemed like the kids I ran around with. So, it really was a time like you would see in a movie, that showed a prototype of that period.

So, it really was a carefree existence for a kid because even though my parents weren't wealthy, they were comfortable, and I had everything that I needed. I really think that was the basis for my future development, just the love and stability that I had from my parents, and the fact that we didn't have a lot of money, so I didn't want a lot of things. I think that really helped me in the future.

LAW: When you think back about being a teen-ager in the early 60s, what comes to mind? Was your life in any significant way different then when you were a younger person?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I think it was different in that as I became a later teen I kind of slowly lost my interest in baseball. I had not only – talking about baseball, not only did I love it, not only did I play it, but I was an avid baseball card collector. In fact, probably the most valuable possession I have now is my baseball card collection because that period apparently was the beginning of the Topps baseball card series. So, a lot of the cards I collected became very valuable. I will never forget one day I had left all these cards at home, I am talking about thousands of cards, and my dad was going through the attic and told my mom he was going to throw them out. And so my mom called me, and I said, “No,” I said, “You know what,” – I didn't realize the value of them – I said, “Why don't you save them. Tell dad to save them, and next time I come down to Memphis I will pick them up.” So, sure enough within a couple days my wife and I were walking along some kind of market, flea market in downtown Champaign, and so I see this guy was selling baseball cards, and I saw the cards that I had. Each one was selling for like thirty or forty

dollars. So, I said, “Oh, my God.” So, once I got the cards I put them in plastic; and at one point they were worth just thousands and thousands of dollars. They are still in our safety deposit box. But in any event I think I digressed some. I think the question was related to how my life changed in my later teen years; and I think yes, I stopped having such an interest in collecting baseball cards, and I had more of an interest in being with my friends, and social matters, and girls. And I remember going to dances where everybody would do the swing and other dances. That became my attention, and I was always a serious student in school. I wasn’t – I certainly wasn’t involved in a lot of school activities. In other words, I was never an officer in the class or even real popular. I was fairly popular, but basically stayed with the same group of friends. I had some club activities, but I really wasn’t active in school activities although I made real good grades. And at that time Memphis Central was a very, very good public school. They had an excellent staff of devoted teachers. Even though it was an intercity school a high percentage of kids from Central went on to college, which is unusual for a public school. So, it was a very good school system even though it was segregated and in basically what is now intercity Memphis.

LAW: Do you recall any influential teachers or classes, from your high school years?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I had a homeroom teacher that was an English teacher, Miss Metz, and she was tough, and they really concentrated on fundamentals. So, I felt like I could really write well, and I had a lot of writing assignments. They didn’t – history wasn’t usually an emphasis. I remember the history teacher was always a coach. That seemed to be the by-product of being a coach in Memphis at that era is that you also taught history. I am not so sure that was – I felt even then that he wasn’t a very good history teacher. Also

there were no disciplinary issues. I mean the biggest – there was no drug use going on. The biggest scandal was that somebody had sneaked outside and had a cigarette. I mean that was, and the cigarette was just a regular cigarette. That was the worst thing that would happen, and they would actually physically punish you if you broke their rules. I will never forget one day we were in a, and I was not only a good student, but I didn't generally get in trouble. I don't know, one day I threw a paper airplane in a study hall, and one of the teachers caught me and they immediately took me down to the PE coach, and they pulled, I mean they pulled your pants down, and pulled out a paddle.

[00:30]

And now that would be the subject of a lawsuit I am sure, but back then that was the accepted method of punishing you for transgressions. You would get, I guess that was considered minor, you get a couple of paddles, and I didn't think anything of it. I was embarrassed, and I didn't misbehave again, and I don't think there was much, it was like that was accepted as they were the authority figures. And I didn't go home, and when I got home and told my parents, they were saying, "You shouldn't have done that." They didn't like, you know, say, "We are going to talk to the teachers." It was like whatever the teachers thought was appropriate, we accept that punishment. It was quite a different society back then, and I am sure that changed very quickly over the years.

LAW: Do you recall any of your extracurricular activities? You mentioned a couple clubs.

BLOCKMAN: Yes, they were mainly related to – the main club was a youth group, a Jewish youth group, and they sponsored baseball teams, and softball teams, and basketball teams, and they had their own league. And we had like, they were like, they were like

fraternities, but on a club level; and I had a group of friends, and they were all Jewish, and we would have meetings. I held – I was never president, but I held some offices, and I think I was a treasurer or something one time. And so all my group of friends were from that same group, and they were involved in our synagogue or temple. And so that was my, that was generally my outside activities.

LAW: Your family then, they were practicing?

BLOCKMAN: Well, they were a member of, they were a member of what's called the orthodox congregation, which would be the more strict Jewish part of the religion, and yet they really weren't, they really weren't that observant. It was just kind of a traditional thing. I think that's how their parents had been orthodox, and they just accepted it. Yet they really weren't very strict except for you go to, you know, you had to go to Sunday school, and Hebrew school, and get bar mitzvahed. But the interesting thing was as a kid, even though I wasn't very politically astute just like I detested segregation, I always thought that the orthodox system was very hypocritical. You would see – as long as you complied with the rules, it didn't make any difference what kind of person you were outside as long as you didn't drive on Saturday, and you ate the right foods, and that never made any sense to me. And then when I was in Hebrew school and Sunday school I just thought all of the teachers were hypocritical. I thought they favored the kids that were from the wealthier families. I always felt that I knew just as much as these kids, but they would go to the front of the class, and they would be presented and promoted. And since my parents, you know, I am sure just paid the minimal dues, they weren't one of the big families supporting the congregation. You could see that as a kid. So, I was always

sensitive to that, and that's why we never belonged to any type of orthodox congregation. So, those are my memories of growing up in Memphis.

I do remember other memories. I remember downtown had a very vibrant commercial community. Main Street in Memphis had four major department stores. I know my mother would always go to one of the stores called Gerbers, and they had a tea room. And it was like all of the southern women would dress up in their southern best, and it was mostly women that would go to the tea room, and that was in downtown Memphis. Of course, over the years all of those stores basically, except for one, went out of business, but downtown was definitely then the hub of activity in Memphis.

I don't know, just going off subject, but going back to baseball the Southern League teams they didn't have any blacks; and I remember in the ballpark they had a section of Russwood Park that was reserved for black people. And then they also had a black league team, and they had a separate stadium, and it was part of the Negro League. I drove by it, but I would never go there. Just like Beale Street, which was the downtown area, it was like, you know, it was like you just, good kids didn't go there. I remember sneaking down there one day on the bus, and seeing all of the pawn shops and the bars. And now there is like a Disneyland version of Beale Street, but it was nothing like it used to be. It was just basically one pawn shop, and dingy bar after another, but it was considered to be the entertainment area and had good music down there.

LAW: You mentioned Elvis earlier. I am curious to what kind of music you were listening to as a young man?

BLOCKMAN: I loved Elvis. I loved early rock and roll. I listened to all of the standard hits of the 50s and 60s. Let's see, I think later on it was the Beach Boys, and Elvis, and Jerry Lee Lewis, and I am trying to think of – and of course, Elvis, later in life read a lot of his books about him, and he was heavily influenced by music in the black community, and the jazz movement, and the blues movement. But he was, in Memphis he was controversial because I think a lot of the elder or my parents' generation thought he was going to destroy their children because he would shake his body, and there was kind of a sexual overtone to his music. But he was, you know, I listened to all of the songs, and I remember listening on the old phonographs and the vinyl records. And so, I was definitely into the 50s and 60s rock and roll.

LAW: Why did you decide to go then to the University of Memphis? Was that because you were there, or was there any particular reason?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I think it was primarily money. I remember when it came time to applying for college my parents really never put any emphasis on education, never pushed me to do anything. And I think I just always innately knew that I wanted to go to college, you know, I wanted to study. I wanted to continue my studies. And I don't remember sitting down with my parents and my parents discussing it with me. I think they just always assumed that if I went to college, I would live at home and go to school at the University of Memphis, which now is the University of Memphis. It was called Memphis State University then. And I remember my junior year of high school taking the, whatever it is, the SAT or the ACT, and they asked where you wanted your transcripts sent, and I had it sent to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and to the University of Memphis, but I think I only put down the University of Tennessee just because all of the other kids

were doing that. I didn't want to be different, but I think I always knew that we could never afford, they could never afford to send me away to college, and they never offered. And I think I always knew that they could never – the only way I could afford to go to college was to live at home. So, I think that was the only college that I applied to, and I was accepted, and that was it. So, I never had the traditional college experience of living in a dorm. So, I went to Memphis with no idea what I wanted to do. I think I declared my major as – I don't think I declared a major that first, that first semester. I wanted to just take a number of liberal arts courses for some reason. And again I lived at home, and a number of my friends from high school they all went there from my club group. They all went there, and it was just the natural thing for me to do, and as a practical matter we couldn't afford to go anywhere else anyway. Tuition then was just, for an instate resident it was just unbelievably cheap. I don't remember what it was, but it was very minimal, and particularly when you lived at home, and then textbooks trust me weren't anywhere near like they are today. But being at the University of Memphis turned out to be an unbelievable experience for me. I will tell you more as we go on. But that was the public school, and I think Memphis State started out originally in the early days as a teachers college, and then it became a state university. And so back then it was a large public university, but they had a lot of commuting students because Memphis was a pretty large place. And so Memphis State, although they had a number of out of state students, they didn't have a huge out of state population. They did have several dorms and several private dorms, but I think a large percentage of the campus commuted from Memphis. So, you didn't get a broad diversity of people. They certainly, they had some blacks, but very little minority students, but they were integrated in that there were blacks

that went to school. And sporting teams back then starting when I started there in '64 were, they were still segregated. The first black basketball player at the University of Memphis was in 1960 – I think in 1969 was the first black player. In fact, one of the first black players at Memphis, being a basketball fan we were always shocked that all of the good basketball players from Memphis would leave and go to the northern schools, one of the biggest stars when I grew up was Rich Jones. He went to Illinois. He was the one that was involved in the big – I don't know if you remember the big slush fund scandal they had here at the University. You would have to be a basketball fan to know about that, but he had to leave Illinois, and he transferred back to Memphis back when they started accepting black players on the team. I think that was '69. He was one of the first black players to play at Memphis. So, in any event that was the milieu at that time at the University of Memphis.⁴

LAW: Were you working while you went to college?

BLOCKMAN: I had – that's a good question. I had always worked, and primarily my work was – my father by that time worked for a real estate company, and I did their yard work. In other words, I had a lawn mower, and I would go out and do the lawns of all of the rental properties. Then at some point I also worked at a roast beef place, Roy Rogers Roast Beef, and I'll never forget the owner of the establishment came up to me and said, you know, I have a future because he thought I prepared roast beef sandwiches very quickly. And so I do remember, and then I worked in a sporting goods section of a big department store called Zayers I think is the name of it. So, that was my work during college. But I

⁴ Rich Jones played for the University of Illinois from 1965-66, the University of Memphis from 1968-69, and went on to play in the A.B.A. and the N.B.A. The "slush fund scandal," occurred during the 1966-67 season.

really didn't have to, I didn't have to work a lot because it was so inexpensive. Memphis was so inexpensive. My parents paid for my tuition. Books were minimal. So, all I needed to do – and I lived at home. So, I just needed to work enough to get some spending money. I had plenty of spending money from my employment during that whole period.

LAW: Give me an idea of what campus life was like for you. What were you engaged in?

BLOCKMAN: I wasn't engaged in anything. I never really participated in any school activities. I would go to some of their sporting events.

LAW: So, it was just school, it was just school work?

BLOCKMAN: School work, I was very serious about school work. And interesting, even before I went to college, you know, I didn't really, I did get all A's and B's in my classes at Central. A lot of those were accelerated classes. I didn't do well in any of the religious schools. I remember sneaking out of Hebrew school once through the window because I wasn't good there, but I was good in public school. And when I got to Memphis, I was really a serious student, and that's when my intellectual interest peaked. My very first

[00:45]

course was a European history course with someone that became my mentor, and actually was the reason that we came to Illinois. His name was Dr. [Marcus W.] Orr, and he was –

LAW: Doctor what?

BLOCKMAN: Orr, O-R-R.

LAW: Okay.

BLOCKMAN: He was a history professor. It was my very first class, and he was tough. I mean he scared the heck out of me. He walked in there, and he assigned a whole book to read, and come back and discuss it, and I was like floored. He really developed my interest in everything. He was very political. He was disabled from the war, which is, and he had gone to the University of Illinois because the University of Illinois was like foremost in the country in its program with, dealing with people with disabilities, and that's why he had a love for the University of Illinois and always wanted me to come up here. So, he – and I loved the history courses, and ended up majoring, had a double major in history and political science, but I majored in, majored in European history, mainly because I just loved being in his class, the challenge. It made me, and I think it really gave me the basis for wanting to go to law school in that I loved to talk and debate issues. He would also invite me over to his apartment, and he had all of the books and art, and it just was a, and classical music playing. And even my wife, because I had started dating her at that time, I would bring her over; and we would, he would have other students and she would come over there with me. We were just mesmerized because we would discuss the war, the Vietnam War that was brewing then. We would discuss the civil rights issues in Memphis, and the segregation issues, and the civil rights issues, and world events, and literature, and it just peaked my interest in everything. It just changed my whole life, I

think.⁵ It was at that point that I developed an interest in reading newspapers and current events magazines. It was the beginning of my entire intellectual development.

LAW: Is this a good opportunity then to ask you what, thinking back, what was your political and social outlook at that time?

BLOCKMAN: I would say it was basically one of no real interest whatsoever. My parents considered themselves Democrats, but I don't remember them being involved politically. I do have a vague recollection of my father listening to the Kennedy, the Nixon/Kennedy, the big first debate, and they were big Kennedy fans. Both parents loved FDR. He was the savior of our country. So, they just were Democrats, but there was no more than that. So, I think growing up I just said, "Okay, I am a Democrat," but I really didn't pay a lot of attention to political events or anything, or never started questioning anything until I got to college. And then I had a strong interest in just about everything that first year in college. I took history courses every semester. I took Renaissance history, and Medieval history, and European history, and Reformation history, and Seventeenth Century history, and Eighteenth Century history. So, I really liked to read, and I liked to discuss things, and debate issues. I also loved talking in my classes and engaging in a dialogue with other students.

LAW: So, what would, what was – you are kind of giving me the impression that an outlook was developing in college. What was the outlook?

BLOCKMAN: I think the outlook was to question the status quo and why things were the way they were, and how institutions developed, and he was the perfect outlet to stimulate that.

⁵ For more on Dr. Marcus W. Orr, see, <http://www.memphis.edu/moch/about/index.php>.

I think we have got to keep in mind this is the same time my freshman year is when I met my wife, and so I would have been eighteen, and she was fifteen. And so, that was shortly before my freshman year. Talk about a great job – I was asked to coach a girls club basketball team because back then girls didn't, they didn't have any, there wasn't any parallel women's sports. The guys played basketball in the school. So, if the girls wanted to play basketball, they had to go play on club teams, and even then they had the old Iowa rules where there were three players on each side of the court, and they had some limited rules I guess in recognition that girls couldn't play basketball like guys. So, I was asked –

LAW: Pre Title IX.

BLOCKMAN: Yes, Pre Title IX. So, I was asked to coach, be paid to coach a girl's basketball team. And of course, what a job for a freshman in college. So, the first day we had our first practice, you know, I saw my wife, and I think I pretty much knew pretty quickly that she was the person of my dreams, and that's how we – so she was fifteen, and I was eighteen, and she was a pretty good basketball player. And we – the first year I think we actually may have won a game. The third year I coached – I coached them for three years, so tenth, eleventh, and twelfth – her tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade, and I think we won the league championship in her twelfth grade year, and she was my star player. We had actually started dating fairly quickly. You know, she was also from a family, an orthodox family from Memphis. So, she was Jewish. She immediately fit right into my family, and I started including her when I was in college. She was a good influence for me because she was very level headed, you know, she wasn't into any of the local social scene. She was very serious, very mature, and she started coming with me to Dr. Orr's

apartment. And then I remember afterwards we would go have coffee and talk, and talk about world and social issues. I think it helped her also develop an interest in issues, and institutions, and political matters. So, I think a lot of my time in my college years was devoted to Rita versus school. I wasn't really active in any kind of school activities except going to class and studying, and even though it was a large state university I really think it was, it gave you a good – first of all a good high school education, and I had the ability to read and write well, and communicate well. I think that carried over to college. Especially the history courses were, you had to read a lot, and you had essay exams. That's why I think partly I did well in law school because a lot of the kids would have multiple choice exams, and true/false exams, and I would have essay type exams, and you would have to read a whole book. I think I really got a good education even though I am sure Memphis wasn't considered a top line college, but it was a pretty rigorous place back then, and the teachers expected a lot of the students. And I think unlike some schools where once you get in if you have good enough grades, and scores, and stuff, they give you a pass. They let a lot of people in, but they expected that you produce and work hard, and that was back in the 60s where that was expected. It was development for me of my basic reading, writing and analysis skills. It was a good four year period. I worked hard and I loved, I loved history. Then I also developed a love of political science. It was so strong that when I became like a junior, my dream was to be a political science professor and teach political theory. Dr. Orr was influential in wanting me to come to the University of Illinois because at that time they supposedly had a very good political science department here.

LAW: What are your earliest memories of the Vietnam War?

BLOCKMAN: My earliest memories were – I think I knew that we were starting to escalate our involvement in the war. I think there was, I think there was some increase in ground troops in Vietnam in the early 60s, '61, '62. I think in the late 60s they had the big Tet Offensive, but things were heating up in the war.⁶ So, I always knew that I wanted to stay in school because, you know, being in college we were exempt from the draft. I always wanted to stay in school because I certainly didn't want to go fight in Vietnam. I thought it was an unjust war. I thought we should never have gotten involved there in the first place, and I think, I had had several years to discuss these issues with my professors, particularly Dr. Orr, and he was, he was a veteran, but he was strongly opposed to the war, the atrocities that were committed over there, and why we were there. I never actively participated in any kind of anti-war demonstrations. I know around the country the late 60s things were heating up on college campuses, and you have Kent State, and even at the University of Illinois the year before we came to law school here, '68 or '69, they had campus demonstrations even here, but I kind of stayed out of any organized activities, but certainly personally I was definitely opposed to the war.⁷ There was no way that I would have, there was no way that I was going to, if I could help it, go fight in that war.

LAW: How did that correspond with your parents? Were they of the same views?

BLOCKMAN: You know, I think they just, I think they were concerned about me. Therefore, that made them agree that I shouldn't have anything to do with this war, and whether – I

⁶ The Tet Offensive occurred in January of 1968.

⁷ 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.

never really strongly discussed it with them. I think they just knew that I didn't want anything to do with it. I think they were comfortable as long as I was in college.

LAW: What were your thoughts upon the draft, and how did it function in Memphis?

BLOCKMAN: I didn't – I was exempt because I was in college, and right at first if you went to graduate school, you were exempt, and they changed that. I don't know exactly when the change was.⁸ Then I got a job with Head Start, which was at least at that time was considered to be an important, I don't know what they called it. It was kind of an employment that exempted you from the draft. You were doing public service. So, therefore, that protected you; and so before I graduated college I got a job there, and that protected me. Then I think in Memphis there were just a lot of kids that had volunteered. They were southern kids, and they had more than their quota. So, that's how I avoided that problem.

LAW: Did you have any friends that were drafted or know anybody that was drafted?

BLOCKMAN: My best friend, Stanley Rubenstein, was a volunteer. I think he knew he was going to be drafted, and he volunteered, and he ended up getting deployed and actually got injured in the war, and he was different. I think that was just a traumatic event for him, and it was difficult to even talk about it with him. Eventually I lost contact with him. It was, you know, it was a tumultuous time in American history, but I managed to stay out of it fortunately.

⁸ In 1968, first year graduate students lost exemption status. See, <https://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document.php?id=cqal68-1282246>.

LAW: Now, you mentioned that you were studying political science, and political theory, political philosophy. I am curious what your thoughts were at that time about the Soviet Union and communism?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I had a dream, my dream was to be a political science professor, and I wanted to teach political theory, and I just immersed myself in everything from the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle to Machiavelli during the Renaissance Period, all of the way up to John Locke, and Rousseau, and Hegel, and I mean – and, of course, you studied the development of Marxist theory, and Lenin. And I had a professor that was in the CIA. He was always a mysterious guy, but he taught courses in the Soviet Union, and communism, and Marxism,

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and I was always fascinated by that. Obviously I didn't agree with their theories, but I was just fascinated about how these systems developed, and the whole communism type situation. So, that was my, that was my desire to be a professor, and that's why I originally wanted to go to graduate school at the University of Illinois and Dr. Orr pushed me to come up here and apply to the U of I in political science, which is one reason we ended up here. I didn't even know quite frankly when I was growing up where Champaign-Urbana was. I for some reason in my mind thought it was north of Chicago. Eventually I did look at a map to discover where Champaign-Urbana was. Then I remember my wife and I taking a train up here before we were married and visiting, and you know, just to see what it was like. I think I interviewed with the Department of Political Science, and that's when we decided to move up to the Chicago area, north of

Chicago. And I think I just couldn't afford, I couldn't – it was my recollection I couldn't get – we didn't have any money at all, and of course, we had no family help from either side of the family. So, I didn't see any way that I could afford out of state tuition. I think even though I could get some type of aid it wasn't enough, and we were very mature, and very serious, and didn't want to do anything unless we were financially able to. We thought the best bet was we would both move up to the Chicago area. My wife had a sister in Waukegan, and I thought, I think our objective at that time was to get in state residency status, and then come down to the U of I, and I would get in their political science program, and eventually become a professor of political science, and that's what we did. We moved up to the Chicago area. My wife got a job at a dental – he was a periodontist in Lake Forest, which was a real wealthy community near Waukegan, and I got a job at – this was after my, I graduated college. So, this would have been right after we got married, I would say June of '69. I quit my Head Start job. I went to Waukegan. My wife got a job at the periodontist's office in Lake Forest, worked full-time. We got an apartment in Waukegan, and I got – my first job up there was household finance. I was a loan officer. I will never forget my salary was \$450 a month. I was a college graduate, and I think I was happy to get that. Then I stayed there for about eight or nine months, and certainly didn't like that. Then I remember getting involved with an employment agency, and they placed me with a big company called Stone Container Corporation, and they were based in North Chicago, which was just fifteen minutes from Waukegan. They offered me a job at \$650 a month, and I thought I was in the big time then because my wife was making good money at the periodontist office. We managed

during that period to save money, and the objective was again to apply to the U of I in political science.

LAW: Before we move onto the U of I, I just wanted to ask if at that time you had the conception of being part of a particular generation, and if so, how would you have defined that at the time?

BLOCKMAN: See, I think that I was, because my wife was mature, and because we had our own interest, and we had our own desire to build our life, and we were very practical as far as money, and about taking a risk, and stuff like that. And I think the big generational divide was in the late 60s, and I was kind of out of the mainstream in that. I didn't participate in any campus anti-war activities. I wasn't a flower child. I didn't go to any commune. I may have had ideas that were in some areas supportive of certain issues, particularly social issues. I certainly was liberal from a social issue standpoint, and still am, but I didn't really feel part of the generation. I didn't feel the – I thought my parents sometimes didn't quite understand my political beliefs, and I didn't really discuss much with them. They would have certainly, I think, been more conservative than I was even though they considered themselves Democrats. So, I don't think I really felt like I was like part of a different generation. I mean I know I would be considered a baby boomer, I assume; but I didn't really identify with the anti-war, hippy movement, and I was too concerned with my own development intellectually, and my wife and I were just concerned with building a future, and we were solely directed toward our careers, and our jobs, our education, and stuff like that. So, I think that's what kept me out of the mainstream of the movement back then, which I considered good for my future development. You know, my wife was certainly a good influence on me. We never, I

don't ever remember doing drugs or even drinking to excess. I know I was in a fraternity for a couple of years at the University of Memphis, and I quit because I just thought it was so ridiculous. And I know now the fraternities a lot of times do good things, community service. Back then it was just a party, I thought it was just a party atmosphere, and there was no emphasis on public service, and I just thought it was a bunch of nonsense. I think having Rita around helped me with that too because she certainly thought that was a bunch of nonsense. I remember going to parties, and all there was was just a big drink fest, and we just didn't want anything to do with that. We would leave and go to some quiet place, and I remember we would, back then there was a big tiki craze, and it has kind of had a revival these days. But you listen to Polynesian music, and you would have rum based drinks, and it was quiet, and you could talk, and that was our idea of a – I think an exciting – our first date was at a Polynesian restaurant, and I think that was our idea of an exciting evening. And we liked, I remember the coffee house scene, we would go to coffee houses and talk, and they'd have folk, I remember going to folk concerts in coffee houses. Instead of applauding – even my kids now laugh at this, everybody would click their fingers, and that was the beat type way of – now it sounds so corny, but it was guitar music, and folk music, and a lot of it had anti-war, peace and social themes to it, but I was drawn to that type of music, and it wasn't loud, or rock, or anything like that.

LAW: So, what were your initial impressions of the State of Illinois, Waukegan, and how did it compare to Memphis?

BLOCKMAN: I think we were both glad to get out of Memphis. It just, it had more of an urban vibe mainly because you were so – even though Waukegan was a small community, you

were in the metro Chicago area, and you had access to everything that you would have in a metro area. I think we were glad to get out of Memphis, and also you got away from, you know, you had a set group of friends, and we could kind of spread our wings, and make our own friends, and be on our own, and you know, even though I loved my parents, you know, it was just I think there was some freedom that you were ready to spread your wings. In addition, Illinois back then was considered a very progressive state. Had I known then what I know now. But it was a robust economy. Things were pretty much booming. It was pretty easy to get employment. I had a college degree, and I certainly could have had a number of different jobs. So, politically I think it was fairly stable and the economy was good. Now, I think back they had some scandals in the Supreme Court back then, but I didn't really pay much attention to that; but I knew the State was very sound, that the Chicago area was thriving.⁹ There were a lot of jobs. The University of Illinois had an excellent reputation, and so I just – we just thought I think it was the place to be. And again Rita had a sister here, Ellen Helfer, and they owned a jewelry store up in the Waukegan area, and I think that just gave us some identity at least as to where we were.

LAW: Now, we kind of touched on it, but I did want to ask why did you decide to study law?

Why?

BLOCKMAN: I think why – I never forget. I was thinking about – I knew I didn't want to stay with Stone Container, and I did have an opportunity, in fact, I probably could have gone up because right after I decided to quit and go to law school, the president of the

⁹ See, Kenneth A. Manaster, *Illinois Justice: the Scandal of 1969 and the Rise of John Paul Stevens* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), for more on the scandal involving Justice Roy J. Solfisburg and Justice Ray I. Klingbiel.

company came up to me and said, “You know, we have a law department here, and we will help you out in law school if you agree to come back here and be in the corporate law department.” So, I just didn’t see that in my future, but also I could have stayed on in the company and who knows, but I just didn’t like the big corporate environment, and I just felt like a number and didn’t see corporate law in my future. So, I knew I needed to do something, and I knew I needed to get an advanced degree if I wanted to get real stable employment, something that I really wanted to do. So, again my first thought was applying again to the political science department, but then I kept thinking about in my own mind, and I was, I was just concerned that that wasn’t where I wanted to go. I guess I felt that I would be limited career wise. Because even then I think professors didn’t make a lot of money, and I was worried about jobs, and I kind of started thinking about law school because I did like to talk, and debate issues. I said hey, this could be a good career, and I will never forget one night I said, “I might want to go to law school,” and my wife was very supportive. And she said, “You know, you would make a good lawyer, and I will do whatever I can to help and work with me,” and then the more we talked about it, the more I felt that there would be a lot more opportunity because I could go into private practice. I could go into corporate law. I could go into government law. I just – I think we felt that I could go into, if I wanted to be a professor of law. I just felt there were a lot more opportunities that a law degree would offer, and that’s how the whole law school thing came about.

LAW: But why the U of I?

BLOCKMAN: I think the U of I was natural for two reasons. One, it was Dr. Orr’s, my mentor’s suggested place. Number two, the U of I Law School back then was a top

fifteen law school. So, it was one of the better, it was considered a national law school. It was one of the better schools in the country, but I think most importantly it was the only place we could afford. I remember looking at Northwestern. We would have to live downtown. I don't know whether I could have gotten in or not, but we would have to live downtown, and it was very expensive. So, we were – from a money standpoint that was really the only place I felt I could go, and I remember coming down to the law school, and there was – can we take a short break. (Pause in interview)

LAW: [What do you remember about] Dr. King's murder?

BLOCKMAN: Are we back? – Yes, that was another day that would stick in your mind. It was, I think spring of '68, and I was in Memphis, and I had some friends over for a sleep over, and that was when we got the announcement that Dr. King had been shot down in downtown, that was from a hotel in downtown Memphis, which is now the Civil Rights Museum. It was a scary time. There was rioting in the city, and they ordered nobody be out on the street. They had imposed a curfew. So, my friends and I just stayed in our house. They were at my house. I remember just spending the night and discussing that, and it was a frightening time. There was rioting going on downtown. You know, here is this event that was right in Memphis. So, we were there, and I remember that vividly.

LAW: What were your thoughts on Dr. King at that time?

BLOCKMAN: Well, I mean I thought he was a hero for the whole generation. I certainly was supportive of the Civil Rights Movement and the whole idea of non-violence that he represented.

[01:15]

It was, I mean it was a tragic occurrence, and I know that all of my friends agreed, and it was something that would have an impact on the nation. How I didn't quite know, but I knew it was not a good period. I think during that time there was some rioting in some other major cities, and it was a difficult period as a kid to digest. But I think at least at that point I could think about things on my own, and what this meant, and everything else.

LAW: At the time he was engaged with the sanitation workers strike?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, they had – the sanitation workers were on strike, and they were poorly paid in Memphis, and it was, you know, it was – and to be assassinated and then to be in Memphis at that time it was, it was, it was just a very interesting time to be in Memphis to say the least.

LAW: Is there any other, anything else we want covered about growing up before we move onto U of I?

BLOCKMAN: No. I think that – I think I hit everything that I could think of.

LAW: Okay. So, I asked you earlier about why the U of I. I think you told me a little bit about that. I just kind of wanted to get a sense of U of I Law School at that time. Was there a particular legal philosophy associated with the school?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I – you know, Dean [John] Cribbet was the dean of the law school back then, and he was famous for his opening when all of the first year students gathered.¹⁰

¹⁰ John Cribbet was a Professor at the University of Illinois from 1947-79, and Dean of the Law School from 1967-79. From 1979-84 he served as the Chancellor of the University. For more on Cribbet, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1978, No. 1, pgs. 1-20. Also see, David A. Myers, "Dean John Edward Cribbet: The Illinois Prophet of Property Law," *Marquette Law Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Fall 2011), pgs. 5-16.

You know, he would say, “Now look at the student to the left and to the right, when you get out they won’t be here,” which I don’t think was ever true because I think it was actually pretty hard to flunk out of law school. It wasn’t easy to do well in law school, but I think once you got in, you had to really work at flunking out of law school at least in that period of time. I also never forget my – it wasn’t like it is now, how I got accepted into law school. I had really good grades. My LSAT score was a little low, and I remember coming to the U of I and over the summer and meeting with a lady by the name of Miss [Mary] Martin, and she was like the whole, she was the registrar and registration person. I remember just walking into her office, not like today where everything is computerized. She had these little, each file for each separate student, and the wall was filled with hundreds and hundreds of files. And so I said, “Miss Martin, I want to go to school here, you think I have a chance to get in?” So, she thumbs through all the files, pulled mine out, and she looked at my grades, and she looked at my LSAT score, and she said, “I will take this out because this is not an academic course.” So, she threw this out. She had like – I don’t know what she had. She said, “We will accept you,” and I said, “Thank you very much, Miss Martin.” That was my introduction to the U of I Law School. I told you about the orientation where Dean Cribbet gave the address, but he was like a revered figure. He was a property instructor, and he was quite a figure on campus. He was an excellent administrator. I think he eventually became acting chancellor for awhile during some of the football scandals that U of I had later on, but he was a revered figure, and he was the dean of the law school.¹¹ I think – my first thoughts were I was a little apprehensive. Here I was coming from a, you know,

¹¹ Between 1982-84 the U of I football program was the subject of an NCAA investigation into recruiting violations. This investigation lead to a two year probation for the program, a barring of post-season play in 1984, and a TV ban for the 1985 season.

Memphis, and I think I still had some, you know, thoughts that maybe I wasn't academic enough for this law school, and I knew it was a national law school, and that quickly –

LAW: What do you mean by that phrase a national law school?

BLOCKMAN: They considered themselves – in other words they didn't concentrate on local law, that they, you know, dealt with the whole breadth of American law, and we didn't, we are not there to prepare you for the bar exam. We are here to give you quote, unquote, "traditional legal education," sort of like you would see in the *Paper Chase*; and the Socratic method was the method that they used, and they would call on somebody, and they would ask questions, and try to trip you up, and instead of using the lecture method like you had in most colleges, undergraduate courses, and like you have in a lot of graduate courses.¹² So, I think I quickly figured out that I could compete, and my writing was certainly comparable, and so I didn't have any problems at all. I loved being called on in class and talking about cases and distinguishing and analyzing cases. So, I think I fit right into the law school scene. I certainly jumped right into it. I remember the first person I met was Jim Lanter, L-A-N-T-E-R, and he had a career up in the Chicago area with the government. We are still friends with him these days. He had a locker next to me, and I remember how low tech it was back then. I remember they posted your assignment with the use of a tick tack on a bulletin board. That's how you got your assignment. I will never forget years later I was asked to teach a course at the University at the law school that I still teach, and I don't know why that stuck in my mind, and I prepared an elaborate syllabus, and I was all ready to go, and I get a call about a week before the class starts saying, "Where is your website?" Fortunately they had a good IT

¹² Twentieth Century Fox, 1973.

Department, and they put it up for me very quickly, and it was all posted online. And that was a surprise to me, and then when I walked in the class and all of the students had their laptops. We didn't have computers or anything. When I was in there, you would bring an ink pen. I would take notes on a legal pad, and so things have changed quite quickly as far as the use of technology. But the bottom line is I didn't, I really didn't care for the Socratic method. I enjoyed kind of BS-ing with the instructors, and I liked being called on, but I really didn't feel that that was a great method. I really liked the courses that were more lecture oriented, and that's why my favorite class my first year was Professor Stone, Vic Stone, and he was wonderful.¹³

LAW: Do you remember what the class was?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, it was civil procedure, which is not – both semesters, two semesters of civil procedure. I don't think they offer that first year anymore, which is not the most exciting course, but he was wonderful. He had a great vocabulary. He used more of a lecture method, and he didn't like call on students to put them on the spot, and I was really good at taking notes. And I guess the exam, the whole section, I think there was like a hundred of us in that section, I had the highest grade the first semester on the exam; and it was good for law school because I was really good at essay exams, and you had one exam a semester. That was your entire grade, and I remember him talking to me afterwards about how I had the top paper in his class. And eventually I actually did some research for him on some articles that he wrote. He also helped me later get my first job, my clerkship with Judge Simkins.

¹³ For more on Professor Victor J. Stone, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1991, No. 3, pgs. 619-637.

LAW: Do you recall what the make-up of your law school was in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and age?

BLOCKMAN: I don't remember – age very young.

LAW: Very young?

BLOCKMAN: I don't remember – there weren't very many women. I bet if there were five to six percent women, I don't remember any Asians or other ethnic groups. So, it was mostly young, white males. I don't even remember – there were a couple of black male students. I don't remember any black female students. There were some females, and I always thought that they were, I always thought that a lot of the professors didn't like the women students because I think they were of the old school belief that women weren't meant to be lawyers. They never said that, but I always felt that, and I always felt that they were called on more frequently than the men. I remember a lot of classes sitting next to a woman. It was a good place to sit because you are not going to get called, and I always felt that was unfair. It must have been my history growing up and segregation, but I always felt that a lot of the professors didn't like the women students. I know that certainly has changed, and now there is I am sure a lot more women in law school than there are men. At least in my current classes there are a lot more women than there are men, but I didn't think my class was very diverse, and a lot of people were just like me.

LAW: Were there any veterans?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, even Jim, my friend Jim Lanter, I think he had been in some capacity in the military, and there were a number of veterans who were, there were a lot – that's why I think this was one of the largest classes in Illinois law school history because you were getting – I think they started, in '70 they were withdrawing from Vietnam. There was a period over three or four years where they started slowly withdrawing. So, you had a lot of veterans coming back from being in the military, not necessarily in Vietnam, but in the military in some fashion. A lot of these kids were deciding to go back and go to law school, and, of course, they would have had veteran benefits. I think Jim was part of that. So, yes, we had a number of veterans, and I think that was one reason that our class size was so large. If you check the law school records, you will see that that was one of the largest classes in the history of the law school.

LAW: Now, did the wider world ever impact your law school education, the war, the Anti-War Movement, the Civil Rights Movement?

BLOCKMAN: No, I think I pretty much, I don't think I had enough time for that. I pretty much focused in on studying. I think at one point I was really, like the first three or four weeks I felt lost. I remember saying to my wife, "I don't think this is for me," but I quickly kind of liked it, and I think I did well, and I knew I could compete, and you know, I just kind of enjoyed it, but I don't think I had enough time to think about anything else. I was a serious student. I did all, whatever you were supposed to do as far as writing and reading assignments, and I always worked, and I had all kinds of jobs during law school.

LAW: What were you doing?

BLOCKMAN: The second and third year I was in charge of – we didn't have a café. So, I was in charge of coffee. I think I made like, I don't know, like eight, ten dollars a day, which was big money back then. And I remember the tuition, the first semester at the U of I Law School was, I think something like either \$180 or \$250 a semester, which is amazing because now the tuition for first year law school student instate at the U of I is about \$39,000 a year. Now, a lot of those kids have some type of aid that cuts it down, but still it is quite a difference. In any event I had the coffee job for two years. I worked for Professor Stone one year as his research assistant, and I think I got paid for that. I worked for the Urbana City Attorney's Office with Jack Waller as kind of an extern one year. I worked for a private lawyer here in Champaign-Urbana as a law clerk.

LAW: Was that – would that kind of work, would that have been fairly common for law students?

BLOCKMAN: I don't know. I don't know. I am sure it would have been common, but I was always very aggressive in having all kinds of jobs. I also actually taught, I actually called Parkland, which is our local community college to find out if they needed somebody to teach, and sure enough they were looking for somebody to teach an evening business law course, and that started my interest in teaching, which I think I continued to this day. So, I taught at Parkland one year, and then I had the City Attorney job. I had the law clerk job. I had the coffee job, and I had the research assistant job, and quite frankly I didn't have time to concentrate on events happening outside of the world. I remember somewhere during this period Elvis Presley died, and that was sad.¹⁴ He had come to the

¹⁴ August 17, 1977.

U of I, and was actually at the Assembly Hall not too long before he died.¹⁵ But I really, and I knew they were withdrawing, the war was winding down, and I think we had the – that would have been the second, I think that would have been the second term for Nixon was right when I was in law school. That would have been, was it McGovern, Nixon and McGovern, that was the second term for Nixon. He was elected, and just right after that the initial Watergate stuff broke early on, but in any event I really didn't pay much attention to outside events. I knew the war was winding down. They weren't, you know, it was just –

LAW: Do you feel the wider world impacted your professors at all?

BLOCKMAN: I really don't think it did. I really don't think there was very much discussion

[01:30]

about anything other than the law and what their special interests were within a legal context. They would periodically have speakers that came in that would address world issues and stuff like that, but I didn't, I didn't really pay much attention to that. I don't think that was a focus of the law school. The other thing that I think was striking about the law school was that they didn't have any practical courses. The only – they had a trial ad[vocacy] program that was in its infancy. Prentice Marshall, who went on to become a federal judge, was in charge of their trial ad program.¹⁶ He worked with Harold Baker, who I subsequently practiced law with, to get that all started, and that was

¹⁵ October 22, 1976.

¹⁶ For more on Judge Prentice H. Marshall, see, <http://www.lb7.uscourts.gov/oralHistories/MarshallPrentice.pdf>.

the early 70s, but they didn't offer anything like the practical courses that they have, the courses like I teach, family law practice, they didn't have anything like that.¹⁷

LAW: Let's stop and put in a new tape.

BLOCKMAN: Going back I did follow Miss Martin and did see her later on as she was, she stayed with the law school for a number of years, and she was quite a revered character in the law school.

Going back to one observation, I don't know if it is too late to talk about this, but one thing I remember about the grocery store is how friendly they were, and trustworthy. People in the neighborhood would come in and get things on credit, and they had a little, they had a little separate credit – I am sure you couldn't go to a grocery store these days and get it on credit. And it was really a neighborhood thing, and they had a relationship with the vendors and people, and I remember working with my grandmother making sandwiches in the grocery store. And it just – it was sad because I do have recollections as time went on it became harder and harder because people were going to the big grocery stores that came into town. But I thought it was very interesting those neighborhood businesses, and I think there were a number, I think a lot of neighborhoods had their own little neighborhood grocery, and it was kind of a sad thing when they started going out of business.

But going back to the law school Miss Martin was a revered character. They had a number of excellent professors there. I know they had – I loved Professor Stone. He was my favorite. He became my mentor, and he became real significant as we will talk

¹⁷ Judge Harold A. Baker became a U.S. District Judge in 1978, and assumed senior status in 1994.

about in getting my first job. But they had Professor Cribbet. They had Roger Findley for property. They had some good tax people in [J.] Nelson Young, and [John “Jack”] McCord.¹⁸ They had a Professor by the name of [David C.] Baum that died tragically of some type of illness right after I left.¹⁹ They named a lecture series after him, but I had him as a professor. I had actually worked with him, in fact, I think I published a couple articles during that period, one for – he had some kind of project dealing with home rule, Professor Baum did. I think it is referred to in my resume, and also I did an article for the Illinois Bar Journal, but normally I didn’t have time.²⁰ I didn’t try out for – I think I just missed the top ten percent, but I was offered to try out for law review, but I just didn’t – I had too many other things going on. I didn’t even do trial advocacy because I knew it was just too time consuming, and I had too much going on. I figured I had to work.

My wife by the way worked – our deal was that she would put me through school, and she worked across the street at the College of Education as secretary. Then the deal was once I got out of school she would go back to school. So, we were always concentrating on our finances, and making a go of it, and we were just practical about that.

LAW: What were your first impressions of Champaign-Urbana, and did you live in Champaign or Urbana?

¹⁸ For more on Professor J. Nelson Young, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1981, No. 3, pgs. 555-566. For more on Professor John “Jack” McCord, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 2000, No. 3.

¹⁹ For more on Professor David C. Baum, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1973, No. 1, pgs. 1-8

²⁰ See, “Home Rule in Illinois: Eminent Domain, Annexation, Internal Structure and Procedure,” *Illinois Municipal League Publication* (September, 1972). And, “Case Note,” *Illinois Bar Journal*, (November 1972), pgs. 157-159.

BLOCKMAN: We lived in Champaign out in Country Fair Apartments. There were a couple of law students that were in the same building as us. We had a – we called it the terrace level. It was the basement apartment because it was cheaper. I think the rent was about \$100 a month or \$105 a month. But it was a nice complex, and I remember when we came to Champaign we couldn't believe that anybody could live in a town like this. It was just, you know, it was so small. We had grown up in Memphis. We lived near Chicago for a couple of years. Our thought was how could anybody live in a town like this, but we thought it would be good because then there wouldn't be a lot of outside activities, and I could concentrate on going to school and making and developing a career, but I don't think we ever thought that we would end up being back here, and that was a later, a later development, but you know, I did love my law school experience. I liked the competition. I liked that I was in moot court. I loved participating in moot court. But I didn't do much else. I just didn't have time for much else. And again, my one professor that I had continuous contact with was Professor Stone. I liked a number of my courses particularly after the first year because you had some more choices. I had Professor [Harry D.] Krause for family law, and he is still alive.²¹ In fact, I think there are three professors – Professor Krause is still alive. The professor – there are two other professors. I had Charlie Bowman for criminal law. He helped write the 1970 Criminal Code. There are two other professors that are still, one of them is still on the faculty, and the name escapes me. He did international law. But they had a faculty that was considered tops, and I think slowly over the years they started losing some of their top people, and they have had their problems in recent years with American [U.S.] News and World Report, their ranking I think they have dropped, I don't know, down to the forty-

²¹ For more on Professor Harry D. Krause, see, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1997, No. 3.

one or something like that, but they had an excellent faculty back then, and I think overall I was pretty satisfied with my – I had a guy by the name of [Stephen B.] Goldberg for constitutional law. I think he moved up to Northwestern my second year, but he was, I thought he did a nice job with con law. I had Prentice Marshall for evidence. He was wonderful. He became a federal judge a couple of years later. He was superb. He and Professor Stone were my favorite teachers.

LAW: Did these professors have differing philosophies of the law, or would you consider them similar in their views?

BLOCKMAN: I would consider them similar. They never – we really didn't discuss outside political matters, and it was all their, whatever their law, whatever the areas they were teaching, whether it was torts or contracts, they were totally immersed in that. I don't ever remember going outside of that even with Professor Stone, even though I was enamored of his lecture techniques and his vocabulary. When we worked together, it was all cases, and I would do research for him, and I would make sure, and he was very meticulous, make sure everything was cited properly, and I really don't ever remember with any of the professors getting involved in political events or outside activities. It was just all legal education business. It was all understood that you were going to go into the profession, and it was an honorable profession. Even though back then there wasn't anything like ethics courses, or you didn't have required ethics courses. I think everybody was expected to kind of know what the ethical considerations were. There was never any specific training for the bar exam, and I think they didn't care that much about whether you passed the bar or not. They just wanted to produce the best lawyers

they could and the way they knew, and I think they delivered a pretty good product. So, I was pretty happy with my time, and I kind of liked most of the courses.

LAW: If I – at the time I was to throw terms at you like the legal reasoning school, or the legal process school, or natural law, or legal realism, would those terms have meant anything to you?

BLOCKMAN: Those terms wouldn't have meant anything to me, and I didn't feel they were part of any particular type of school nor did I spend much time philosophizing about it. I just felt they felt their job was – and they were immersed in their field. I am sure all of them published in their field, and I think that their job was just to, was just to, you know, I don't even know if most of them had much contact. Most of them were kind of not accessible to the students. There were a few exceptions. Most of them did their job, and I think they probably were more interested in their research and outside responsibilities, and quite frankly I think that's the case even today over at the law school. Even more so today because of the need to publish to advance your career in the law or at least as a professor of law.

LAW: What would have been the big constitutional issues at the time?

BLOCKMAN: You know, we discussed all of the major cases. I just, I remember in constitutional law going back to the early cases, you know, of the premise, the primacy of precedent, and all of the major cases that you could think of, and of course, the desegregation decision, and nothing particularly stands out, and I know a lot of kids, a lot of students just love constitutional law. I don't know, I just, it wasn't that exciting for me. You know, I did well in constitutional law, but there is nothing that just stands out. I

know the Illinois Supreme Court would come in, and I was fascinated with that. They would actually, they actually had a case at the law school, and they had oral arguments, and I remember just being fascinated by that. Then the Appellate Court, I believe they had started that back then, and I was fascinated by that. In fact, in later years I came back, the Appellate, I had a case in the Appellate Court when I was a trial lawyer, and they had the oral argument at the law school, and I remember Professor Stone invited me back to his class afterwards to talk about arguing orally in front of the Appellate Court, but so I was really interested in the practical aspects of practicing law and not major constitutional issues, which maybe made me different than a lot of the kids.

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

BLOCKMAN: I think research, we didn't have computerized research then. So, we had to learn how to do real research. I remember *Shephard's [Citation]* where you would have a case, and you would put it into *Shephard's [Citation]* to see what cases were cited, and you would have to pull it all out yourself. You didn't just punch in something or click in something in a computer. So, we didn't have any computerized research. It was learning the law, the black letter law, applying it to facts, and your skills as a writer to be able to convey that. I think that's why again I did well on exams is that everything was one exam a semester for the most part, and I did well under pressure. I am sure there were a lot of students that studied a lot more than I did as far as reading cases and everything, but I think I was really good at taking notes and performing well in a three hour exam; and some students even though they were excellent, they were probably brighter, they probably worked harder, just academically they probably didn't do as well if you don't

perform well under pressure like that. I think that helped me later on being a trial lawyer in being able to think on your feet and act under pressure. So, I think that helped me in my later years.

LAW: After graduating what was your first professional position?

BLOCKMAN: I looked into private practice. I applied to a law firm in Bloomington and Peoria, and a big firm in Chicago, and I don't know, I just wasn't quite sure that I wanted to go into private practice. I interviewed, and I remember going with my wife to the interview with this big firm in Chicago, and they were on the – big law firm, and they were on the, like the fiftieth floor of some bank building, and the guy was a U of I graduate that interviewed me, and liked me, and wanted me to come to work for them, and showed me my cubicle where I would work for the next two or three years. As we left I said, "I would get back with you," and as we left I looked at my wife, and I said, "We just can't, I can't work up here and live like this. I don't care what they offered me." They offered me a good salary to start back then. I don't know what it was, but it was a very good salary, and I just said, "I can't do this." So, then I had an opportunity to go with a firm in Bloomington. I had sent them a resume and had a good interview with them, and they were determining whether they were going to make me an offer. At that same time Professor Stone got a hold of me and said, "I have a good friend on the Appellate Court, and he is looking for a clerk, and would you like the interview?" At that time I talked to my wife, and it just clicked that this would be perfect because you could either do it for one year or two years,

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and you could defer making a decision, and Professor Stone said, “He is a great guy, and you can make a lot of contacts if you are a clerk on the Appellate Court,” and I thought it was a perfect thing because then I could defer making a decision about what I wanted to do from a practice standpoint. Plus it sounded like it would be a wonderful, wonderful job. It turned out – so, I interviewed with Judge [Leland] Simkins on the Illinois Appellate Court, and I think back then the Illinois Appellate Court, this would have been in ’73, there were only four judges.²² I believe there was Jim Craven from Springfield, Harold Trapp from Lincoln, Judge Simkins was also from Lincoln, and Sam Smith he was from someplace south of Springfield, and that was the old Illinois Appellate Court.²³ And then the second year that I was clerking for Judge Simkins, Judge [Frederick S.] Green came on the Appellate Court, and Judge Smith I think retired, but it was a very good court.²⁴ I really hit it off with Judge Simkins, and I remember we moved to Bloomington, and I worked in a – he let me do my research at State Farm in Bloomington. They had a law library, and then I would go to Lincoln some when he was in his chambers, and then periodically go to Springfield. He would let me listen to oral arguments, and it was wonderful. I still say to this day it was the best job I ever had. The phone never rang unless it was my wife. There were no stresses from clients and no stress of court cases. It was pure research. I loved listening to oral arguments. I would

²² Justice Leland Simkins was elected a Circuit Judge in 1961 for the Eleventh Circuit and assigned to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1971. He retired in 1976.

²³ Justice James C. Craven was an Assistant Attorney General and later was in private practice in Springfield prior to his election to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1964. He served in that position until 1981. Justice Harold F. Trapp practiced law in Lincoln, worked for the F.B.I. as a Special Agent during WW2, before being elected to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1964. He served in that position until 1986. Justice Sam Smith was a Circuit Judge in the Seventh Circuit from 1957-64. He was appointed to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1960, and elected to that position in 1964. He retired in 1974.

²⁴ Justice Frederick S. Green was elected a County Judge in 1955 for Champaign County, a Circuit Judge in 1964 for the Sixth Circuit, and a Fourth District Appellate Court Justice in 1974. He retired in 1998.

go to the Appellate Court and listen to oral arguments, and I was just fascinated by it. Judge Simkins would let me actually write opinions, and, of course, he would disagree with me or correct it, and it was a really heady experience. I do remember being real critical of trial judges and how could they make these stupid decisions. Of course, once I became a trial judge later on in my career I saw it wasn't as easy as you think coming out of law school. It is easy to sit there and criticize until you have to make a decision on the spot, in a courtroom with two fighting attorneys. It was a wonderful period to begin my legal career as a clerk. I stayed with Judge Simkins for two years, but it was a great court to work for. They had just taken their, I believe they followed the Michigan procedure for how they structured the Appellate Court. They had assignments of the pretrial memos, and each clerk would be responsible for a particular case, and do the research, and read the record, and it was just an ideal two years. We lived in Bloomington. We loved Bloomington. I told the firm that was considering me that I had gotten the clerkship, and they said think about it when you get out of the clerkship. It was Bill Brandt's old firm, Livingston, Barger & Brandt in Bloomington. My wife went back to school like we promised. She went to Illinois State to finish her degree, and it was just, we had good friends, and it was just an idyllic two years, and I loved the clerkship. I really did.

LAW: So, you have been to college. You have been through law school. I am wondering if your political and social outlook, your world view, changed at all during this time period?

BLOCKMAN: No, I think I – Judge Simkins was very conservative on I would say economic issues, but he had a very similar I think liberal philosophy as far as social issues, and that was real consistent with me. I know Judge Craven was considered the flaming liberal, but Judge Smith I know was very conservative, and Judge Green was a moderate conservative too when he came on the Court. The Fourth District had a reputation, except for Judge Craven, of being a conservative Court, but I always felt with Simkins that socially he was a liberal, and that was consistent with my philosophy, and was supportive of women’s right to obtain an abortion, choice, you know, the desegregation of the schools, equal rights, you know. Just from a social standpoint I was probably considered liberal, but when it came to economic issues and military issues, I probably was moderate conservative. So, it felt right with my views. I don’t think we ever discussed – I am sure Judge Simkins was a Republican. He hated the political process. He thought it was awful what judges go through. I am sure we will get into that at some later interview, but that political process he just hated, and I don’t think he ever ran for office. I think he was always appointed to his position. I know his appointment on the Appellate Court was by appointment of the Supreme Court. He just didn’t like anybody that would – he didn’t like the political process as far as it related to judges. He made that pretty clear. And I remember, you know, I remember going into Springfield, and they were all characters. They would take us out to lunch. I will never forget one day Jim Craven, we were – I was down with Judge Simkins. I think Judge [Brian L.] McPheters who was a partner with me in a law practice and became one of our associate judges, and he is still here right now.²⁵ In fact, he is with me with the family law section, but we gone to lunch one day, and Judge Craven said, “Let’s go to the Sangamo Club,” a

²⁵ Judge Brian L. McPheters became an Associate Judge in 2004, and continues to serve in that position.

downtown Springfield, private club. I said, “Okay, that’s great.” So, we are all walking down there, and Craven said, “Let’s go in the back.” So, one of us said, “Why are we going in the back for?” And Craven said, “My wife is picketing out front.” Because back then, I don’t know if you even remember this, the Sangamo Club was a private club, and in the daytime only men were allowed on the first floor. The women were only allowed in the balcony. I am sure it is hard for you to relate, but Craven, as liberal as he was, I just thought it was fascinating. I think he just died maybe a year ago, but his wife was out picketing in the front, and he is bringing us in through the rear, and she was picketing because women couldn’t sit downstairs at lunch. Then I would listen to all of the oral arguments, and I would see how bad some of the oral arguments were. And I remember sitting there, and there was an attorney arguing that had a hole in his pants, and all of the clerks, and this was the old, the old Fourth District Appellate Court met, their chambers or their courtroom was on the second floor of the Supreme Court Building. It was a beautiful courtroom. It was very small. You were very close. It is a gorgeous courtroom, but there wasn’t very much room for the public. I remember seeing attorneys arguing and making really stupid arguments, but I enjoyed that. I would go every time I could, and so we certainly would go down when cases we were assigned were set for oral arguments. I just loved that aspect of the clerkship.

LAW: Judge that’s all that I have for you today.

BLOCKMAN: I thank you very much. I enjoyed – is this kind of how it normally goes? I enjoyed it.

Judge Arnold F. Blockman: An Oral History, Part 2

LAW: This is an oral history with Judge Arnold Blockman. Today's date is June 24, 2016. We are here in his chambers in the Champaign County courthouse. It is our second interview and we are going to talk about his legal career. Judge Blockman, I thought I would start with, after you finished up your clerkship why did you decide, number one, to go into private practice and how did that private practice begin, how did it start and who were you with?

BLOCKMAN: The reason the clerkship, I think, was so helpful was it gave me an opportunity to think for a couple years about what I wanted to do with the rest of my legal career. I gave a lot of thought to this when I graduated from law school. I had thoughts which included a government career or some type of agency work. But as I spent my two years in the clerkship, I became really interested in the idea of private practice and participating and getting involved in some type of private practice. It was really easy because Judge [Leland] Simkins had become my mentor, and I had a real close relationship with him. Then, one day he said, "I know an attorney in Champaign who is highly thought of and they are looking for an associate." I interviewed with that firm and got hired, and it was just a smooth transition. The firm was known as Hatch & Baker. Judge Simkins had known Harold Baker who was the lead partner in the firm, because Judge Baker was on the Illinois Pattern Jury Instruction Committee with him for a number of years. He would have also been the appellate judge that heard a number of his cases. Harold Baker was a well known central Illinois trial lawyer. It was interesting, when I interviewed with the firm and this would have been the summer of 1975. Judge

Baker was actually in Washington, at the time he had been appointed to the Rockefeller Commission, and they were investigating various national security issues.²⁶

LAW: Did he ever talk about that with you?

BLOCKMAN: He never talked about the substance, because it was a highly sensitive topic.

In fact Judge Baker went on to not only become a federal judge, but I think in '78 he was appointed to the federal bench. He was also appointed later on in his career to a commission that would review requests for eavesdropping and national security interest concerns.

LAW: United States Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court Judge.

BLOCKMAN: Yes, that's exactly right. It was always so secretive that nobody ever discussed it with him. That was pretty much it. I also enjoyed the relationships with the people in the firm. In fact, they had also hired at the same time I was hired, Judge McPheters, who was a clerk for Judge Craven on the same appellate court, in which I was a clerk. So we started the same day.²⁷ I always joked with Judge McPheters that I started work that day thirty minutes earlier and therefore my name got on the letterhead before his. That may have been the last time I beat him to the office. That was the start of my career, and I really didn't interview in a lot of places. I had the contact, I interviewed and they hired me immediately.

LAW: Was Mr. Hatch still associated?

²⁶ The Rockefeller Commission was set up in 1975 under Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, during Gerald Ford's Administration to investigate the activities of the CIA.

²⁷ Fourth District Appellate Court.

BLOCKMAN: Bud Hatch was the senior partner and, in fact, it's one of the oldest law firms in Champaign-Urbana. It was a branch of the old Henry I. Green law office. They started, I believe, in the late twenties and in the early thirties they separated from an Urbana firm which became known as Phebus, Tummelson & Knox. My firm stayed in Champaign, at the old Lewis department store building, which is now owned by Busey Bank. The firm was in that building from the early thirties until about a month ago when they had to leave, because Busey had totally taken over the building. Basically the agreement at the time is that the Hatch firm would take all the railroad cases and then the Phebus firm, led by Darius Phebus, who went to Urbana, would take all the insurance cases. I know at the time they thought that we had gotten the better deal. However, slowly all the railroads went out of business, but all the insurance business became really valuable. It was a very good firm when I went there, and it was a good move for me because it was an already an established firm that had been at that location since the thirties.

LAW: Help me have a better understanding of the composition of the local bar at that time in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age? Start with that and then I have a few more questions about the local bar.

BLOCKMAN: The local bar at that time didn't have very many women at all. I can remember very few women ever coming in contact with me. I can remember no minority, no Black, no Hispanic people. There may have been a few women, but there weren't very many and certainly in all the major local firms, none had women that I knew of, except for Mary Perlstein with the Dobbins, Fraker firm.

LAW: What about age?

BLOCKMAN: I think the age range was varied in that we had young lawyers, middle aged lawyers and older lawyers. Some of the practitioners that I remember were the very well known practitioners. There was Burt Graves who was a well known local divorce lawyer. There was Art Lerner, who was also a well known local divorce lawyer. Jim Capel with the Meyer Capel firm was a well known civil lawyer. Joe Phebus, who recently died, was a very well known civil trial lawyer, personal injury lawyer. Trying to think of some of the other old-time lawyers. Herschal Tummelson was an insurance lawyer that was very well known. Harold Baker was a well known local trial lawyer and Charlie Palmer was a well known civil lawyer in town. Bud Hatch, whom I practiced with and his son Bill Hatch, were very well respected in the area of drainage, probate and real estate.

LAW: So I'm gathering then that perhaps most attorneys weren't general practice attorneys, that they were specialized?

BLOCKMAN: I would say that there were attorneys that did primarily divorce, there were certain attorneys that did primarily criminal. The civil attorneys would I think have done a variety of different types of work and it was simply a good environment for me. It was a good transition for my wife and me. We were living in Bloomington and, of course, when I was commuting for the clerkship, she finished her education at Illinois State University. When we moved back to Champaign, it was an easy transition for us. We bought a house in Champaign, and I know we were both real happy. I don't think we had ever considered Champaign as a place to live, but it became more and more a good selection after I started with the firm.

LAW: Were most attorneys, were their offices located near the courthouse? Or were they spread out throughout the city?

BLOCKMAN: They were spread out. Most were either in downtown Urbana or downtown Champaign. That's where they were primarily clustered.

LAW: Do you recall who the state's attorney was at that time?

BLOCKMAN: I believe the state's attorney at the time was either Larry Johnson or Jim Burgess.²⁸ Interestingly enough, both of those gentlemen ended up working in my political campaign in 1996. It was either one or the other that was the states attorney at that time. I didn't really have much to do with state's attorney's office because I did all civil litigation.

LAW: Ok so you start out with this firm, what are your initial duties as a new member of the firm?

BLOCKMAN: And then later on, I might add, I know that at the time of, you noted a case there called *People vs. Barr*. I know Tom Difanis was the state's attorney then so that would have been, that case would have been, let's see.²⁹

LAW: 1979

BLOCKMAN: Yes, 1979, so Tom Difanis was state's attorney, but I still think in that early period before then it was either Larry Johnson or Jim Burgess. I suspect it was Jim

²⁸ Tom Kacich, "Man hopes to have courthouse named for father, a military and legal pioneer," *The News-Gazette*, January 01, 2011, <http://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/2011-01-23/man-hopes-have-courthouse-named-father-military-and-legal-pioneer.html> (accessed October 13, 2016). According to the above mentioned article Larry Johnson was state's attorney in the year 1969, not sure when he started, and Jim (James) Burgess was elected state's attorney in 1972. Burgess would serve that role until 1976 when Tom Difanis took the seat.

²⁹ *People of the State of Illinois v. Joan Barr, et al.*, 83 Ill.2d 191, (1980).

Burgess. Then I think Tom Difanis took the office from him. Interestingly enough, Tom is now our presiding judge.

LAW: Initial duties as an attorney with the firm?

BLOCKMAN: I initially did civil litigation within maybe two or three weeks. I remember Judge Baker coming in and handing me a case that was getting ready to go to trial in Douglas County. That was my first jury trial, and we were representing the Northern Illinois Gas Company. It wasn't a very pleasant case for anybody defending because the facts were that there was a gas leak at this woman's house. I will never forget her name, it was Mitsdorffer. She had called the gas company and said you need to come over because I smell something. So they came over and said there was no problem. Then within a couple hours the whole place exploded. Her sister died, she survived. So the case I was involved in was basically a property damage claim by the sister, the survivor. That was not an easy case to try to a jury. I will never forget when we selected the jury that we ran out of jurors. The judge down there was Judge Sherrick (Jim Sherrick). He summoned the sheriff to bring jurors back and they went to some women's club where they were playing cards. So they had twelve jurors that were all in their eighties, and they were all women. And it was impossible to get a jury that didn't know about it. It was a small town so everybody really knew what had happened. We ended up getting a verdict that was way over the evidence. The only reason I succeeded was because I got the judge to reduce the damages because it was so much greater than what was proven. So that was my first experience, but I did all civil litigation of various types. That is basically what I did throughout my practicing career.

LAW: Weren't you at one time also associated with, as a city attorney of some kind?

BLOCKMAN: I had a part time contract with the Illinois Pollution Control Board. We periodically acted as a hearing officer on pollution type cases.

[00:15]

I think that is maybe what you're referring to.

LAW: I want to ask you about that but the one I was thinking of was this Open Meetings Act case you talked about.³⁰

BLOCKMAN: That was a fun case to work on. Judge Baker had been actively involved in the Democratic Party in Champaign County. This was in the very early days of the Illinois Open Meetings Act. What happened was that they had a Democratic Caucus where they met before the meeting to discuss issues. So the question was: I think the state's attorney filed criminal charges alleging that since they did not give notice of the meeting that violated the Illinois Open Meetings Act. So I represented them in this proceeding, *People ex rel. Difanis*, that was brought by then state's attorney, Tom Defanis, on behalf of the state against these individual Democratic Council Members of the Urbana City Council. There were nine council members that were defendants. It's been a while since I looked at that case, because they used to go around with signs saying "Free the Urbana Nine". Is it in there, can you see that? In any event, our argument was that it was simply a caucus and they had a constitutional right to caucus and it shouldn't

³⁰ 5 ILCS 120. The Illinois Open Meetings Act was created to create more transparency involving public bodies that serve the people's interest.

be within the purview of the Open Meetings Act. I will never forget Judge Steigmann, who is now on the Fourth District Appellate Court and was the trial judge at that time. We made that argument, and he made the comment that no reasonable person could make that argument and that clearly we violated the Open Meetings Act. I always pointed that out to Judge Steigmann. We appealed to the Fourth District Appellate Court, and it was a two to one decision against us in the appellate court. Then, I believe in the Illinois Supreme Court it was four, two and one. Four judges affirmed, so I always told Judge Steigmann, that we managed to get one judge in the appellate court and three Supreme Court judges to agree with us. He had said that no reasonable person could agree with my position. So it was kind of a fun case to handle, and it had a lot of publicity at the time. It was one of the leading cases at that time interpreting the Open Meetings Act.

LAW: Would that have been the first time you made an argument at the Supreme Court?

BLOCKMAN: It would have been my first Illinois Supreme Court argument. As a practicing lawyer I had that case and I had the Dethloff case that I did after Judge Baker went on the federal court, that went to the Illinois Supreme Court.³¹ Those were my two Illinois Supreme Court cases as a practicing lawyer.

LAW: What do you remember about appearing in front of the Supreme Court? How did you prepare; any memories of that experience?

BLOCKMAN: I argued the Supreme Court case in the Barr, *People ex rel. Barr* case. With the Dethloff case, I did all the work, and I did most of the brief. However, Leonard Ring, who was a prominent Chicago personal injury lawyer, did the actual argument in the Dethloff case. That was probably, at that time, the biggest case I had ever worked on.

³¹ *Phillip A. Dethloff et al., v. Zeigler Coal Co.*, 82 Ill. 2d 393, (1979).

The Dethloff case was a lawsuit against a coal company for illegally mining land without a lease. It became a big case in the area of mining law. Harold Baker and Raymond Lee, who was a Tuscola attorney - Raymond Lee got the client - called Judge Baker and I worked on the case from the very beginning, through the Supreme Court. Then they filed a petition for cert in the United States Supreme Court and were denied.³² That was certainly a fun case, and I still have the copy of the check here that we got after all the appeals were concluded. This was the check that we got at the end of the case, and that was a lot of money back in those days. I will never forget we found out that the United States Supreme Court had denied cert in the case and they cut a check for us. The old banking system back then was quite different than now. In those days you could deposit the check before noon and you would get interest for that day; things have changed so much. So, we chartered a plane to go - the company was out of Texas - picked up the check in the morning and got it back here before noon and deposited it. I think the interest on that was something like \$5,000 or \$6,000 a day. So that was a challenging case to be involved in. The appellate argument was handled by Leonard Ring who was a well know Chicago trial lawyer and quite a character. One thing I vividly remember about that case is we were going up to Chicago and spending a lot of time working on our appellate brief in the Supreme Court. I would do the draft and then Leonard would make his corrections and submit it back to me. I remember one day I made some corrections because it just wasn't grammatically correct. I will never forget, when he looked at me and said, "Boy, this ain't no English class, these judges aren't very smart, we have to talk their language." After that I didn't try to correct his grammar. That's just something I

³² A petition for cert (certiorari) is applied when someone wants a lower court's results to be reexamined by a higher court.

remember about that case. That was probably the most enjoyable case I worked on after becoming a lawyer. I will never forget when we got - Judge Baker already been selected to the federal bench - the call and that we had the case and the Supreme Court had denied cert. After we found out that we had won in the Illinois Supreme Court, we went over to Judge Baker's court room and when he came out the court we kind of gave him the thumbs up. That was back before the days of cell phones, email and text messages. This leads to another interesting point. When I started practice we had Selectric typewriters, and they had the old yellow carbon copies in the court file. Judge Baker was really interested in technology and I will never forget Bud Hatch, who was the old lawyer in the firm. He was always mad at Harold because he didn't like some of the new fancy technology. Harold was the first to get what is in essence now a word processor. Bud Hatch thought it was the end of the world that he was getting this fancy word processor. But that was just the beginning of the computer age. Judge Baker went on as a member of the federal bench to be in charge of the whole federal judicial program for technology and on their committee to expand the use of technology in the federal courts. He stayed on that, and it was a really primary area of interest for Judge Baker in the federal courts.

LAW: Ok, you kind of went and started talking about the Barr case, any memories at all of the arguments made at the Supreme Court?

BLOCKMAN: I did go off.

LAW: Any memories of that case?

BLOCKMAN: I remember going to Springfield and it was a very heady experience because I had clerked in the fourth district and at that time the courtroom was on the second floor of the Supreme Court building. So it was really fun to go back to the location of the appellate court and argue a case in the Illinois Supreme Court. Going upstairs instead of the second floor was a real heady experience and I don't remember anything else other than being real nervous. I do remember they asked a few questions, I felt like I answered properly and that increased my confidence. That's my only recollection of that.

LAW: Before you go on to the other appellate work you had, I wanted to ask you about some judges and see if you had any memories of any particular judges. So, when you first started practicing were there any memories of Birch Morgan?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, he was a well respected judge and everybody looked up to him. He was like a rock star as far as the local judiciary was concerned. He was the tier one judge. I will never forget when I would go and accompany Judge Baker in his courtroom and everyone appeared to be in awe of him. I had a few cases in front of him. I was petrified as a young lawyer to go in front of Judge Morgan, but he was very gracious and very nice to young lawyers. I believe that he retired shortly after I started practicing.³³ I only remember his being there a year or two after I started. So, I would guess that he retired in 1977. And then he went into private practice I believe in Monticello and did mediation and some legal work. He was quite a character.

LAW: Judge Little?

³³ Judge Morgan retired in 1976.

BLOCKMAN: Roger Little was a really nice guy, good judge, but early on had some kind of illness, I believe he died on the bench in probably '77, somewhere in that neighborhood, so I didn't get much of an opportunity to know him.³⁴ He was a neighbor of Judge Baker. Judge Tucker would have been on the bench, you should see Judge Tucker there, Creed Tucker, and he was one of my favorite judges and I always considered him also a mentor.³⁵ He did the civil, so I was in front of him quite a bit, especially later after Judge Baker left. I really enjoyed appearing in front of him and having him being involved in my cases.

LAW: What about Judge Harold Jensen?

BLOCKMAN: Harold Jensen, interestingly enough, was from my old law firm. So he practiced with Judge Baker. He went on the bench the year before I came there so he would have taken the bench in '74, would be my guess.³⁶ He came right from our firm. When he retired in '96 I actually was elected to his position. My position originally was Judge Green, when Judge Green went to the appellate court in '74. Judge Jensen was elected to my seat, then in '96 I was elected to Judge Jensen's seat. So that's kind of the three judges that have had this particular circuit seat. He was very well respected, he became the chief judge. He did both civil and criminal. I had a number of cases in front of Judge Jensen, he was an excellent judge.

[00:30]

³⁴ Circuit Judge Roger H. Little served Urbana until the years 1979 to 1980.

³⁵ Circuit Judge Creed D. Tucker served Champaign and Urbana until the years 1989 to 1990.

³⁶ Circuit Judge Harold L. Jensen served Urbana through '75-'76 until '95-'96.

He is still around, I see him periodically.

LAW: There were only about four circuit judges at that time. How did they divide up the work?

Do you remember?

BLOCKMAN: I remember Judge Tucker always handled the civil cases. Judge Jensen did both, Judge Little did civil and Judge Morgan did I think primarily criminal. He might have had some civil cases. So they managed to divvy it up. They also had the old magistrates back then; they had the old magistrate system where you didn't have to be a practicing lawyer to be a magistrate.³⁷ Judge Lumpp, Sarah Lumpp and [Wilbur] Flessner and the old magistrates. I believe there were four magistrates. Then in '79 they changed, and they got rid of all the magistrates.

LAW: Do you have any memories of Judge Lumpp?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, she did the small claims and I would appear in her courtroom some. She was a nice lady, was very easy to get along with and pleasant to present cases in front of her. There were several other magistrates. Their names will come to me; Flessner, Lumpp, do you have them listed there?

LAW: George Skillman? Andrew Stecyk?

BLOCKMAN: Yeah, I believe that only Sarah Lumpp was a lawyer. The rest of them were not legally trained, and you didn't have to be back then. But they were all let go in 1979 and there were four vacancies in '79 that were filled.

³⁷ A magistrate is, "a civil officer charged with the administration of the law." And, "a minor judicial officer, as a justice of the peace or the judge of a police court, having jurisdiction to try minor criminal cases and to conduct preliminary examinations of persons charged with serious crimes."

LAW: Did you ever appear in front of either?

BLOCKMAN: I appeared in front of all four of them with various cases. I did a variety of civil cases, especially early on everything from small claims to collections, to just about everything, except cases in the criminal area.

LAW: Did it seem to you to make a difference if they weren't legally trained?

BLOCKMAN: I didn't think anything about it then. For some of those cases I questioned whether you really needed to have judges that were lawyers. So, I think the system worked reasonably well. They seemed like they all had good common sense and could handle the matters that were in front of them.

LAW: Ok, I believe you mentioned Judge Steigmann. He would have taken over for Judge Morgan.

BLOCKMAN: Ok, yes he was elected as a Democrat and he would have taken over for Judge Morgan in 1976 I think?

LAW: Yeah.

BLOCKMAN: Judge Steigmann was on the circuit bench until he was appointed to the Fourth District Appellate Court. He stayed on the Fourth District Appellate Court by appointment for a number of years until he was eventually elected. Somewhere along the line he became a Republican and still is a Republican. He was the last circuit judge in this county that was elected as a Democrat in 1976 and I was the next one in '96.

LAW: Was Champaign Democratic and the county Republican?

BLOCKMAN: For some reason most of the county wide offices were Republican. I think in presidential elections it was a close call. It was pretty evenly divided in the presidential years. But for some reason the local offices were primarily held by Republicans. If you look now of our six circuit judges, five are Republicans, and, in fact the judge that Justice Rita Garman appointed for my position, Judge Weber, is a Republican. So there no longer are any Democratic judges in Champaign County as of September 2016.

LAW: Are you aware of any unwritten rule that if a judge retires, the person that's supposed to fill his spot is supposed to come from the same party?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, that is a rule that applies to the legislature, but traditionally that rule has not applied to the judiciary. So, presumably, political considerations don't enter into the picture in judicial nominations.

LAW: So in '79 these four new associates came in; Judges Clem, DeLaMar, Nicol and Townsend?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, Judge Nicol was also from my firm, and he was appointed an associate. I had an opportunity; I had several judges ask if I was interested in that associate position. But I think at the time I was just getting going in my private practice and was excited about it. I thought I could do a significant amount of work in the private practice area. I wasn't ready to go into the judiciary. Primarily, I always wanted to be a judge, but I couldn't see myself in traffic court, small claims court or arraignment court. It just didn't seem like as much of a challenge. So I didn't apply, not that I necessarily would have been selected, but I didn't even apply at that time.

LAW: Any memories of either one of those judges?

BLOCKMAN: I knew all those judges real well. Judge Nicol and I practiced with at the firm for several years, so I knew him well. Judge Clem has been on the bench and recently retired from the bench. So I knew Harry [Clem], I've practiced in front of him and he was my colleague for twenty years. When I first came in '96 I shared an office suite with Judge DeLaMar. He did primarily abuse and neglect matters and was an excellent judge. So, I knew "Jack" [John DeLaMar] real well. "Greg" [John G.] Townsend was our presiding judge when I was elected in '96 and he was instrumental in a lot of decisions around here including the building of the new courthouse. So I knew all those judges real well.

LAW: How did the circuit judges and the associate judges divide up work? Were there cases that only circuit judges could hear?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, unlike some counties, we were real good about filling in for each other even though the associates had what was generally associate assignments, meaning small claims court, traffic and arraignments. When it came time to fill in or people went on vacation we always had a tradition here, where the circuit judges filled in. I have substituted in traffic court, substituted in small claims court and arraignment court. I have done all of that as well as others and nobody had a problem. I think some counties are a little different in that a circuit judge would not step foot into something that would be considered an associate assignment.

LAW: So as the eighties progressed there is increasingly more associate judges. An additional one was Judge Parkinson; any memories of him?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, he is still a practicing lawyer. He was not, he resigned; I forget what year. You said he came in what year?

LAW: Probably '83.

BLOCKMAN: He resigned, I think, in maybe 2000, something like that. I don't know if you have it in there. Let's see, I think he was replaced by Judge Ford? Maybe it was before?

LAW: That could be, I would have to go through it.

BLOCKMAN: It gets confusing after all these years. He is still a practicing lawyer so I have known Don many years.

LAW: No, Judge Ford came in around '87.

BLOCKMAN: Do you show when Parkinson left?³⁸

LAW: Then Einhorn in '91, looks like he would have left around '99. Could he have been replaced by Judge [Holly F.] Clemons?

BLOCKMAN: That could be.

LAW: Or Judge [Michael Q.] Jones?

BLOCKMAN: I'm not sure. Sometimes I think about whether I should have applied back in '79, but I am glad I didn't because I got a lot of practice experience and my practice grew. I was really lucky in private practice in that I went to a firm that had an established business and I could really develop my own practice.

LAW: One more judge, George Miller.

BLOCKMAN: Yes, he was a circuit judge and he headed almost all civil cases. He was quite a character. In fact we have an award named after him that sits between my courtroom and Judge Jones' courtrooms. It's called the George Award and is awarded to the judge

³⁸ Donald R. Parkinson's last year as Associate Judge was 1998.

that does something that is kind of silly or people laugh at for fun. George was quite a character, he was an excellent attorney, and he had practiced in the Chicago area. He did insurance defense work and very knowledgeable, I think he had gone to Harvard Law School. He was quite a character. Half of the civil cases were with Judge Miller and half were with Judge Tucker during the latter part of my private practice career.

LAW: Ok, so in the eighties, give me a sense of the kind of cases, what kind of civil cases, what cases have stuck with you?

BLOCKMAN: In the first three or four years I did a little of everything. Then I began to concentrate on major civil litigation. I did insurance defense work. I got a big break when we were, the secondary attorneys in an Illinois Power case. I did real well in that case and then they started hiring me in all their defense work and that was a huge coup in the sense that if you could do defense work for a big power company like that, who was self insured, it was a pretty good chunk of business. And I did lots of cases, and there should be a number of appeals from the power company. But I did a lot of trials and other cases that didn't get appealed. It was a major client 'til I left in '96. So that was my big break, getting their defense work. I did some work at that time for various insurance companies, defending PI cases.³⁹ I had some plaintiff cases where I handled injured parties lawsuits. Then another big break I got was when I got asked by a local bank to represent a farmer. He owned the land where the present airport is located. This would have been probably early eighties. The state was condemning that land in order to build what is now the new Willard Airport terminal. We had a huge jury trial in front of Judge Tucker as to the value of that land. It was the university that was condemning it

³⁹ Personal Injury.

because they wanted to build the new terminal there. Because I think the airport was owned by the University of Illinois; Willard Airport. I did real well in that case and that's what started my career doing eminent domain work. After that I did most of the universities eminent domain work. This was back in the days when they were acquiring property, like the South Farms. The university was acquiring a lot of property and doing a lot of building in the late eighties and early nineties.

LAW: Do you recall the name of that initial case?

BLOCKMAN: Berbaun, *University of Illinois vs. Berbaun*. There was no appeal, but it was a jury trial as to the value of that land. I then started getting cases all over the state for individuals that were having their property condemned by various authorities, including the state for road purposes. Then the university hired me as their condemnation attorney. One of my last jury trials was against Charlie Palmer. It was a condemnation for the building on the MTD facility in

[00:45]

downtown Champaign.⁴⁰ They condemned what was then an old meat market or fish market, and they put their new MTD facility there. So I was involved in the jury trial of that. I had a little specialty area that I was always real proud of, and we did real well in those cases. The MTD case was my last jury trial as a lawyer, and my opponent was Charlie Palmer, a well established lawyer and a real gentleman.

⁴⁰ Mass Transit District.

LAW: You're also doing, tell me about the Pollution Control Board work.⁴¹

BLOCKMAN: We had a contract, I got a contract with the state to simply do Pollution Control Board cases, in other words cases brought against people or businesses that allegedly polluted the air, the water, generally companies. They would hire attorneys on a contract basis, a case by case basis. Basically what we did was go conduct a hearing and I think we made recommendations, but we didn't make decisions, we just made a record. Then the Pollution Control Board would make the decision. But it was kind of a fun secondary assignment in that it gave you an idea of what it was like to be a judge, even though you applied the administrative rules of evidence which are much more liberal than the Illinois rules of evidence. It gave me an idea that it would be fun someday to be a judge because in those cases you were a hearing officer which is administrative equivalent to being a judge.

LAW: You did mention working for the power company. I did want to ask about one specific case. I just thought this was interesting. This was, and I know I'm pronouncing his name wrong, Jarrett.

BLOCKMAN: *Knyal vs. Illinois Power*; K-N-Y-A-L.⁴²

LAW: We collected the oral history of the attorney on the other side, which is kind of why I'm drawn to it, Tom Londrigan; so I was just curious if you had anything to add?

BLOCKMAN: It's funny, he was well known, but my dealings in that case, Craig Randle was in his office, and my dealings in that case were all with Craig. I knew Craig from my work on the Illinois Patterned Jury Instruction Committee, which was one of my favorite

⁴¹ See www.ipcb.state.il.us to learn more about the Pollution Control Board.

⁴² *Jarrett Knyal v. Illinois Power Company*, 161 Ill. App.3d 440, (1988).

outside activities back during my practice period. I was appointed by the Supreme Court so I knew of Craig Randle from that. He was the plaintiff's attorney in that case.

Londrigan had the big name in the area but he wasn't, I never saw him in that case.

LAW: Do you remember anything about that particular one?

BLOCKMAN: The only thing that I remember is just that there was lots of money involved.

It was a big defense case and major injuries. Most of the power company defense work was people that got zapped getting near power lines or working around power lines and most of the injuries were pretty bad. So they were pretty major cases.

LAW: This was also interesting to me too because it involved some kids that went to basically the fraternity house and climbed on the roof to reach a sign and one got electrocuted. It raised, for me, this question of how does the university fit into this legal community? How do they, who represents them, are there a lot of cases involving them?

BLOCKMAN: Another big break I got later on in my career is that there was - the legal counsel's office which is responsible for distributing cases locally. The university legal counsel's office handles all of that. But back then if there was a case in our local court system against the university, it was framed out to local attorneys. Our firm had never done any work for the university. So about that time I started doing their condemnation work but I wasn't doing any of their other work, civil rights suits and civil litigation like that. We had somebody that used to be in our firm, Tim Madigan, that went from our firm to the legal counsel's office. So he got me involved in representing the university in other areas aside from condemnation. The big case I was involved in was the case in the

federal district court was *Probst vs. Bitzer*.⁴³ That case went all the way to the circuit court of appeals. I actually argued that case in the Federal Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit. The Plaintiff filed a petition for cert with the United States Supreme Court and was denied. We got a summary judgment eventually in that case and got it affirmed in my recollection.⁴⁴

LAW: I think you were defending.

BLOCKMAN: I was defending one of the administrators. All those cases were referred by the university so they appointed private legal counsel to represent all the top administrators. I remember that case because the plaintiff's attorney was Bob Kirchner who was a very aggressive trial lawyer, very well known trial lawyer. We represented all the major administrators of the university, Bitzer was kind of an inventor in the engineering department and was one of the people that had worked on the original computer, Plato, at the University of Illinois. All the administrators in that case were the top administrators on the U of I campus. They called themselves "The Troika". Which kind of played into the plaintiff's conspiracy theory. Every time I heard that term I wished they had picked a different name for the governing body of the university. That was a fun case to work on and there was a law firm from Chicago also involved in the defense of the case.

LAW: What were the issues?

⁴³ *Franklin M. Propst et al. v. Bitzer et al.*, 39 F.3d 148 (7th Cir. 1994) cert. den. 115 S.Ct. 1400 (1995).

⁴⁴ Summary judgment is, "a judgment, as in an action for debt, that is entered without the necessity of jury trial, based on affidavits of the creditor and debtor that convince the court that there is no arguable issue.

BLOCKMAN: The issue was that Probst, an administrator at the university, claimed that he had criticized Bitzer for violating university ethical rules and he was kind of a whistleblower. Then he claimed that he was discriminated against because of that, he was denied advancement and his office was moved to a closet. They were university retaliatory type issues. There were a number of cases, back then I was starting to get other defense work for the university. Most of the cases were alleged civil rights violations. They're claims where people were allegedly discriminated against. I had a case where a guy was working for O and M, which is Operations and Maintenance. He had always been assigned to the Illini Union, and he claimed they then changed his assignment because he had disclosed some wrongdoing. So they were all civil rights type actions brought under various sections of the civil rights act. They were fun cases because whenever you have a client that's a big corporate entity, that's a nice job, and pays hourly and that's a great job for a trial lawyer. I was doing real well in my private practice. I was doing the Illinois Power defense work, I had all the University condemnation work and some of their civil defense work, and I represented some insurance companies in personal injury claims. I was very busy in private practice all the way to the end.

LAW: There are a couple of others I wanted to ask you about that were on your CV [Curriculum Vitae]. One involved the *Board of School Trustees of Champaign County vs. Louie White*.⁴⁵ From what I gather it had to deal with, basically, wanting to create a new school district. Any memories at all with that one?

⁴⁵ *Louis J. White v. Regional Board of School Trustees of Champaign County Illinois, et al.*, 67 Ill. App. 3d 1031, (1979).

BLOCKMAN: It was real complicated and I don't have much recollection of that other than it was kind of boring. It involved a detailed analysis of the statutes at that time and that's about all I recollect about that case.

LAW: Then another was also a federal case, *Spicer vs. Fairman et al*?⁴⁶

BLOCKMAN: I think Fairman was a warden at one of the prisons and it was another civil rights claim violation that I represented through one of my insurance company clients.

LAW: Would that have been something you were appointed to?

BLOCKMAN: That would have been a case that would have come through some insurance company that was representing the governmental body. I think they were officials, public officials, so I would have gotten that defense work through an insurance company.

LAW: This Kmart case, *Drnek*?⁴⁷

BLOCKMAN: I represented the plaintiff in that case. I remember that case vividly because I had the injured party. He had gone boating in northern Illinois and had injured and lost his thumb in an accident. We alleged that whatever he was using was defective, and we ended up settling that case. It went up to the appellate court on the issue of venue and whether Champaign County was the appropriate venue. It turned out that just about that time they changed the venue statute; and we lost that case in the sense that we couldn't proceed in Champaign County and we had to proceed up in McHenry County. I ended up settling that case, and it was a decent settlement. We lost a little bargaining chip when we couldn't pursue it in Champaign County.

⁴⁶ *Edward Spicer v. J.W. Fairman, et al.*, 738 F.2d 442 (1984).

⁴⁷ *Scott Drnek v. K-Mart, et al.*, 177 Ill. App. 3d 1165, (1983).

LAW: You are also on the other side in personal injury cases as well, the IHOP [International House of Pancakes] case?⁴⁸

BLOCKMAN: A guy got burned with scalding coffee and claimed that the coffee was too hot. That case went up to the appellate court, and it actually was argued at the University of Illinois Law School. Every year the Appellate Court, Fourth District, comes to the law school and they pick cases for oral argument, and they happened to pick that case. So we had to argue that case in the appellate court. I think Bob Auler was the plaintiff's attorney. So we argued it and all the first year law students were there. My old professor and mentor, Vic Stone, asked me after the argument to come speak to the class about oral arguments. That was always fun in that I loved the appellate work because you didn't have to hassle with clients and you were free just to argue. I really enjoyed the idea of arguing a case. In my clerkship I listened to all the appellate arguments and then to be able to go into the appellate court and argue a case and do it solely on briefs, and for the most part not to have to worry about clients, was really a great experience. It was like the purest form of law and that is what I enjoyed most about my private practice experience.

LAW: One last personal injury case was this *King vs. Casad*?⁴⁹

BLOCKMAN: That was a personal injury accident. I think this young lady's case went to a jury trial and we got a verdict. I think the issue was whether she was contributorily negligent.

⁴⁸ *Arthur Slates v. International House of Pancakes, Inc.*, 90 Ill. App. 3d 716, (1980).

⁴⁹ *Jennifer King v. James R. Casad*, 122 Ill. App. 3d 566, (1984).

LAW: She slipped or something?

BLOCKMAN: Yeah, her mother who was a forensic artist had a big diagram of the scene. ,

We used to frequently use forensic diagrams of the scenes of accidents. I remember having that in the courtroom. It went to a jury trial, Dave Bailey defended it and he was a big defense lawyer for the Thomas, Mamer firm. That was an enjoyable case to try, and Dave was a real gentleman adversary.

LAW: A different type of case would be this *Phillips vs. J.R. Sinnott Carpentry Inc?*⁵⁰

BLOCKMAN: Jim Phillips was my client, and I represented a dorm on the U of I campus.

Jim Phillips was the president of the corporation that owned that dorm. That was a fun case. John Phipps, was a well known local attorney, was on the other side. Mr. Phipps was later to be a prominent member of my campaign committee, and is still a good friend. My client had hired Mr. Sinnott to build an addition to his house. But it was huge, like a \$100,000 addition, which back then was big money. The guy built it, and it just wasn't built correctly. A person couldn't stand up in the upstairs and the steps were incorrectly installed. It involved contractual responsibility and damages. We succeeded in getting a verdict and getting it affirmed in the appellate court. I always kid Mr. Phipps, that I

[01:00]

“beat him up” in that case. That was a fun case.

⁵⁰ *James Phillips v. J.R. Sinnott Carpentry, Inc.*, 110 Ill. App. 3d 632, (1982).

LAW: Now you were also involved in a lot of, I'm gathering, family law I guess, or would you call it domestic relations?

BLOCKMAN: That was the genesis of my interest in family law. I'd say it was only five to ten percent of my private practice. I didn't do any family law until one day, this would have been in '78, right before Judge Baker was appointed to the federal court. I will never forget he came in one day and slammed the door. I thought that I had done something wrong and this would be the end of my legal career. He threw all these files down on the floor and he looked at me and said, "Do you see all these grey hairs?" I said, yes, I see them. He said, here's the deal - we had a deal in the firm, if you brought a client in, whatever the fee was, the partner would set a percentage even if I did all the work. He said, here's the deal, these are your cases, I don't want my share, there is only one requirement, I don't want to hear about the case, I don't want to be asked any questions, I don't want any contact from the client. If you can comply with these requirements, these are all your cases. So, these were all family law cases, probably eight or nine family law cases. That started my interest in family law, but I was real careful in that I didn't let that interfere with the rest of my civil practice. I just thought it was an interesting sidelight to my litigation career. I certainly wasn't very well known in the family law practice community. But it gave me some idea of what's involved in handling family law cases which helped me in my later judicial career. I think I took a couple up on appeal.

LAW: They involved different issues from custody to maintenance payment?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, the Martin case is a well cited case that went to the appellate court.⁵¹

The Gleason case, there were a couple of cases and a number of other cases that weren't appealed that I was involved in. Little did I know that I would end up in that area. But at the time I just thought it was kind of an interesting sidelight to my general civil practice.

LAW: Why was Mr. Baker so eager to get rid of those cases?

BLOCKMAN: If you ever handled a family law case, it's very stressful, and a difficult, stressful period. The clients call you a million times. I can only imagine now with email and instant communication. But they call all the time, and there is always an emergency. Sometimes no matter how good a job you do it's not good enough. So it's a very difficult and stressful area to practice in. It can be a very lucrative area, some of the fees are very high and people are willing to fight over things that perhaps other people wouldn't fight over. Because of the emotional issues involved it takes a toll on people. If you talk to the family law attorneys, they could talk more about that. That's been my primary career as a judge. It's a very stressful area for everyone involved.

LAW: Were there only certain lawyers that would engage in that kind of work?

BLOCKMAN: There was primarily a family law bar. I think Art Lerner and Burt Graves were the big two family law attorneys in those days. They had a lot of the family law business; but it was spread all over. Harold Baker's name was so well known in the legal community that he got people that were fairly prominent that wanted to get divorced. But again, I was really lucky in that private practice was totally different back then, and we had a great mix of commercial cases and defense cases, insurance companies, and a couple of local banks. I had a dormitory client, Bromley Hall, and I did work for what

⁵¹ *In Re The Marriage of Martin*, 223 Ill. App. 3d 855, (1992).

was First National Bank with Paul Wilson at First National. I became friends with a lot of these people. Paul Wilson became my treasurer when I ran for political office. Jim Phillips, I knew well and was friends with him until he died. He would send me on business trips because their main office was in New York City, so I had a lot of fun experiences there. It was a variety of things and I really enjoyed the private practice and was lucky to have an established firm where I didn't have to spend my time soliciting business. The business was there, and it was just doing a good job with the business you had and getting more clients from that.

LAW: So in the first twenty years what were the big changes that you observed in the law?

BLOCKMAN: I think that women became more prominent in the law. You saw more minority and women representation in the bar. You had major changes legislatively. Some of the older established attorneys died or retired and so more younger attorneys would come to the forefront. I think that the two other major changes I saw were that it became harder and harder to have a really profitable private practice because we were noticing substantial increases in the costs of everything, particularly medical and malpractice insurance. The cost of a library was expensive, but now it's easy because there is Westlaw and you really don't need a library. Back then you had to have a library. So I think that and then the insurance companies became more difficult to represent. It used to be that when you represented an insurance company or a big corporate entity you bill within reason, the current rate. I think a lot of the big city law firms, the Chicago firms, were outrageously billing these insurance companies and these corporate entities and they really clamped down on letting attorneys take depositions in other cities with unlimited discovery and unlimited research. So the insurance companies and the big

corporate entities were clamping down more in the last four or five years of my practice on billing. They had independent review of your bills. It was becoming harder and harder to do your job. I think a lot of times the small town attorneys suffered because of the billing excesses of the larger firms. Then a lot of the insurance business became consolidated in certain firms. So maybe insurance companies would have their insurance business spread out over seven or eight Champaign firms. They all consolidated into these statewide firms like Heyl Royster and a couple of firms in Springfield that are big defense firms. There's another big firm out of Chicago, Hanshaw, that consolidated all of the insurance business and a lot of the local firms lost a lot of business because of that. So those are the changes I saw besides the turnover in the local bench. Judge Jensen, of course, retired and Judge Townsend came in and took over. So those were kind of the changes, but it was a fun twenty-one years. I was extremely busy, I had a lot of work, a lot of business and did really well, both professionally and financially. I really enjoyed the experience, and I got along really well with the other attorneys in my firm.

LAW: You were also at this time starting a family?

BLOCKMAN: Oh yes, we had a daughter and we lost her to a genetic illness, so that was a major setback personally. But then we adopted our daughter, Rachel, and then we adopted our son, Jonathan. My wife did a great job as an adoption social worker for a local agency called Lifelink, Bensenville Home Society, out of Chicago. Thank goodness she had a very flexible work schedule so she could work a lot of times in the evenings. Otherwise, I don't know how we would have done it with two young kids without her flexible schedule. I had a very busy practice and a lot of times I would have to go on depositions and the experts were in Chicago, St. Louis, Washington or

somewhere else. We couldn't have done it if she had not had a major contribution and had we not had a flexible schedule. She had a really good job there and so we were able to juggle responsibilities and yet still get to most of the kids' activities, baseball games, soccer games, music lessons; the usual activities that young people engage in. We sold several residences and in 1990 we built our house in southwest Champaign. We still live in that same location.

LAW: Now you were also very much becoming a part of the community here. You are part of Champaign-Urbana, how did the community change if at all over that period of time, from say college years to mid-nineties?

BLOCKMAN: I think that the university never kind of grew like we thought it would. I'm really disappointed with how the university area has developed. There are a lot of high-rise apartment buildings now. It didn't develop how I envisioned it would develop, and we were kind of disappointed by that. We have had a lot of suburban sprawl. There was thinking at the time I know during the condemnation of the airport that everybody thought that Champaign would develop to the south. It turns out that the development has been near Marketplace and North Prospect. You still haven't seen the development to the south of town as much as was expected. I have been real disappointed in downtown Urbana's development. I think it was a real major mistake when they moved the county facilities out of downtown Urbana and moved them out to Brookens, which is another direction from downtown Urbana. That really hurt downtown Urbana. Downtown Champaign I think has made some comeback. There's a lot of night activity and bars and restaurants down there. I think the town hasn't quite developed like we had hoped it would. I was always involved in the community as I was on the Board of

Directors of Planned Parenthood, I was president of Planned Parenthood and I was on the Board of Montessori School. I was also on the board and president of our local temple, religious group, Sinai Temple. We've always had an interest in the community. My wife always made major contributions to our temple and the schools, always helping out in the schools in which our children attended. I think we tried to do our share of helping out in the community and being just good citizens because we lived here.

LAW: Judging, first, why? Why did you want to be a judge?

BLOCKMAN: I think I always wanted to be a judge, and the interesting thing is my wife had always supported me in everything I had done. However, I will never forget the period of time around 1995. There were going to be a number of vacancies on the circuit bench because a number of these associate judges seats that were appointed back in '79 became open. So I knew the opportunity was there, I had been involved in the local Democratic Party and knew from meetings that they were looking for candidates to run for these positions. So I will never forget... I was in our bedroom one evening and I said, "I think I would like to run for judge." My wife's first comment was, "Are you crazy?" Looking back I could see why she would think that. I had a very successful practice, but I just thought I had always, from my clerkship days, wanted to be a judge. I saw there would be an opportunity. Once Rita knew I was serious, she donated a tremendous amount of time, was on the campaign committee and did a lot of different things to help in my campaign. But it was quite an undertaking and I think if I had known what was involved, I'm not so sure I would have jumped into the fray. But I decided to run and again we had not had a Democratic circuit judge since Judge Steigmann won, I think in '76. So it had been twenty years, and he became a Republican shortly thereafter. So really it had been

eighteen or nineteen years since we had a Democratic circuit judge. But I saw an opportunity in that I didn't want to run against Judge DeLeMar,

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Judge Clem and Judge Townsend. There were four positions open, but I didn't want to run against a sitting judge and I thought those judges had done a pretty good job. But there was one open seat which was Judge Jensen's seat so it was going to be filled by a non-sitting judge. So I saw that the opportunity and I tried to get the support of the local Democratic Party. That was my entrée into the election. Plus, I knew it was a presidential year, it was Bill Clinton's last hurrah it was right before the big scandal with Monica Lewinsky. I thought there would be a big turnout which would help. Plus, we had straight party voting in our circuit and statewide. All you had to do was punch one tab and you got all the Democratic candidates; so that's exactly what I did. I ran and I had primary opposition from a lady by the name of Trish Crowley who had been a clerk with me in the appellate court and was employed by the City of Champaign. And so we geared up for a primary battle with her and then the Republican candidate whose name was Terry Prillaman, and he was a practicing Champaign lawyer that had the support of Tim Johnson, who was our congressman and who was influential in the local Republican Party. We decided to throw our hat in the ring, and the rest is history. It was a grueling campaign, and having judges run for election in partisan elections is really a difficult experience.

LAW: Why?

BLOCKMAN: Because I think that the electorate doesn't know what they're voting for and they don't know the candidates. Just because you are a Democrat or a Republican doesn't have much meaning in the context of a judicial election. For instance, I will never forget they had a poll, and the attorneys were given a poll by the bar association as to judges running for political office. They recommended me and they recommended against my Republican opponent. So on the morning that I came out, I was real excited and happy because I got recommended. And Judge Baker called me and asked if I wanted a piece of advice? I said yes, and he said I wouldn't use that poll when you go campaigning. I said what do you mean? I thought - What a better poll for people to look at as to whom the lawyers recommend. He said that's my advice. I went out and I knocked on a lady's door and said I won a bar poll and the lawyers recommend me. She said I'm not voting for you. I said why? She said I don't want who the lawyers want. I guess what he was trying to tell me is that people don't pay attention to that, and they don't really want somebody that the lawyers like. Because I think they think there is something bad about that. So basically the whole campaign, when I was out on the campaign trail, was going to all these dinners and campaign events and participating in all these parades. I basically only got asked a couple of questions. Number one was my position on abortion, as if a circuit judge has anything to do with national abortion policy. And secondly, was I tough on crime. Like I said to my wife, what do you think I'm going to say, that I think crime is great for the economy. You say of course, I am tough on crime. I had one person the whole time ask for my resume. We had a tough primary fight and my opponent dropped out three weeks before the primary, so I won the primary.

Then we geared up for the general election and it was just a tough, grueling process. We got a good campaign committee headed by my wife. The official head of the campaign was Larry Johnson, who had been our first Democratic state's attorney from Champaign County. Then we got a fabulous committee together composed of Democrats and Republicans. Larry Johnson, who was our manager, my wife who did everything, was fantastic, campaigning and getting signs and doing everything. We had Jim Burges who had been the first black Democratic state's attorney in Champaign County and a former United State's Attorney for the Eastern District of Illinois. We had John Phipps who is a Republican, a well known local attorney. We had Paul Wilson, who was my campaign treasurer from First Federal, and he was a prominent Republican. Gloria Valenti, a good friend of ours who is head of Diversified Health Care, was a major Republican as well. We had a number of other people including our children Rachel and Jonathan. We had a lot of Republican support, and we planned our campaign carefully, had advertising and raised money. We had newspaper ads and television ads, and we spent a lot of time in Decatur. We had a lot of help from the local Democratic Party in Decatur. We had people really helping us here in the Democratic Party also. It was just a tough process, and it was tough because Democrats traditionally don't fare very well in judicial elections in central Illinois. We had to really push our Republican support and we had some ads like "Republicans for Blockman". We had a major ad with all the names of our Republican supporters. We had yard signs and all the traditional things you are supposed to have, and we marched in all the parades. Our kids were younger. I will never forget the first parade we did was the St. Patrick's Day parade in Decatur. My son, Jon, was dressed up like a leprechaun, and they were at the age where it was kind of an exciting

thing. Thank goodness they weren't much older; they kind of enjoyed that political stuff. My daughter, Rachel, also went door to door with me and actually knew the children of a lot of the homes I visited. We had fundraising events and I think our campaign spent about a hundred thousand dollars which is a lot of money. Back then for a judicial election, particularly a circuit judge election, it was quite a bit of money. We probably raised thirty five or forty thousand dollars. Then you got the whole issue of who is supporting judicial candidates and that is a major issue in itself. The only people normally interested are your family members and other lawyers which poses a problem. And it goes right to the heart of whether there should be an elected judiciary. But it's not the time to get into that. In any event, when the election evening came we had a tremendous plurality in Macon County. Our circuit is six counties. We lost all four of the small counties and we won Macon by a huge amount, and then we won Champaign by, I believe, fifteen hundred to two thousand votes. So I think we were helped by President Clinton's coattails, we were helped by the straight-party voting, and we were helped by the strong support of the Democratic Party in Macon County. When the final election results came out, I think there were several hundred thousand votes, I think over all we won by maybe three or four thousand votes, so it wasn't that large of a percentage. I will never forget that we didn't get the final results till about three o'clock in the morning, and then we finally celebrated. The first call I got in the morning was about seven thirty, and it was from Judge Jensen congratulating me on getting his seat. That was the beginning of my judicial career.

LAW: Where were you first assigned?

BLOCKMAN: My first assignment naturally was criminal, major criminal felonies. It was a shock to the system because I never really handled criminal cases as my background had been all civil. I had to really, quickly read up on criminal cases and criminal procedure, but what was frustrating was I couldn't understand the strategy behind the criminal cases. After a while I thought they were easier, quite frankly, than the civil cases. The jury instructions were easier. Everything was just a lot easier because I had been really involved on the Supreme Court Committee on Jury Instructions. We had rewritten a lot of the civil jury instructions for the state. So I was real familiar with jury instructions situations but not in the criminal area. Jury instructions were always easy, and the trials were always easy. I thought that once you get the strategy involved, once you get the suppression motions over with, the actual trials, the jury trials, were fairly easy. And if you look I think I said I tried over fifty jury trials. Most were during the early years when I did criminal proceedings because those went to trial regularly. So that was my first assignment, and I had that for a couple of years.

LAW: Was it on a rotation system?

BLOCKMAN: Back then and now, still, they rotated every three years, two to three years. We had a rotating system, and I participated in that rotation.

LAW: Did you have any sort of sway on where they put you? Or was that up to the Chief Judge?

BLOCKMAN: No, back then it was up to Judge Townsend. He had kind of a military bearing. He was a good man but you didn't rock the boat with him, with one major exception as to how I got into family. I can tell you about that later. He basically assigned wherever you were. That was needed at the time so I did what I was told. I

didn't really enjoy it that much because I didn't like the criminal. I knew my background had been civil, so I knew I wanted to do something in the civil area, because I thought it would be good experience when I first got on the bench.

LAW: Before we move on to family law, any memorable criminal cases?

BLOCKMAN: No, I never did any high profile murder cases, but I had some pretty serious drug cases and sexual assault cases, very serious matters, but no real high profile type case. So they were probably run-of-the-mill cases, but they were felony cases, and not misdemeanors.

LAW: What was it like to be on the other side, to be the judge?

BLOCKMAN: It was great, I loved the fact that you could just come to court and call the case, and you didn't have to deal with clients. It's just pure application of the law. You could call a case without spending half the night preparing for the case. It was just everything I had imagined. It was so much easier than being a practicing lawyer. You didn't have to worry about overhead. You didn't have to worry about keeping the clients happy. You didn't have to worry about office politics. You just concentrated on doing what you were doing. Then I think about that time I had applied again for the federal bench. And I think that was in '97, right after I became a judge, and I actually was one of the three finalists for the federal district court position. I actually got to go to Washington to interview with the senators. That was a fun experience. Obviously I didn't get the position, but it was fun to be a finalist for that. I'm really quite glad now, because I don't think I would have enjoyed being on the federal district court as much as I have enjoyed being on the state bench. But that's water under the bridge. I was also at the courthouse trying a malpractice case in 1997 when a man walked into the courtroom

above me and thru a firebomb at Judge Miller. He was slightly injured, and it almost burned the courthouse down. After this incident, we obtained security, and it eventually led to the building of the new courthouse that was completed in 2002.

LAW: So after a couple of rotations I'm guessing with criminal law, you moved to family law. Tell me how that came about?

[01:30]

I think you kind of alluded to it a little bit.

BLOCKMAN: Yes, Judge [Holly F.] Clemons had been assigned family law, and under the new assignments I had had some civil and abuse and neglect cases. I really didn't like abuse and neglect. So I was talking to Judge Clemons one day, and she was saying how she disliked family law and I was saying how I disliked abuse and neglect. I said why don't we go to Judge Townsend and see if we can switch assignments. I told you how he had this military type of personality. She said, "Don't you dare, he will really be mad at us if we do that." I said, well you never know, all he can say is no. So I caught him one day and said Judge Clemons doesn't like her assignment, and I don't like my assignment, can we switch? It must have been a good day because he said sure. So he entered an order on the spot switching us and put me in the family law. I think this would have been probably late nineties, maybe '99, '98 somewhere in that area. I got into family law and really enjoyed it.

LAW: Tell me what family law involves, what kind of cases are we talking about?

BLOCKMAN: Family law would be, in Champaign County, your traditional divorce cases, custody of children, child support enforcement, protective orders for people that are claiming domestic abuse, and adoption cases. That would be the main part of the assignment.

LAW: Some of those you had some experience.

BLOCKMAN: I had some experience, but the reason that I enjoyed it is that you really felt you were making an impact on families. I didn't enjoy the criminal trials. When I had done the civil trials, the cases that actually got tried were not the big cases that would have been fun. Those seem to get settled, so what you ended up getting were rear-end collisions with chiropractic injuries, dealing with motions and discovery issues and disputes between big firms and litigants. It just wasn't any fun. Whereas the family cases were actually litigated at a high degree, at a high rate, and you got all kinds of custody cases and division of property cases. So you got to be in the courtroom a lot more. You got to really know the families, you got to feel that you were making a difference with these families; you weren't just shuffling money around. In the article about hanging up my robe there was a quote. It is Judge Jones' quote, "We will never get anyone to fill his position - We will get someone to fill his position, but never anybody to replace him. In my assignment I am spreading money around, in his assignment he is dealing with the single most important thing on earth to people, namely their children. He is dealing with the most contentious litigants, most contentious lawyers, most hotly contested matters with the most emotion involved and for twenty years he has done it with grace and even temperament. People like him don't come along often." In any event, it was very nice of him to say that, but it shows my dedication to the assignment.

LAW: That was from the *News Gazette*?

BLOCKMAN: That was from the *News Gazette*, on January 21 of '16. Nice comments by Judge Jones, but that kind of gives you the idea of what my interest was in family law. Plus I liked the idea of staying in one area. The problem when you shift around every couple of years is just about the time you figure it out, and know the cases and know the area and know the attorneys, then you are moved onto something else. So, I also felt that I could develop some expertise, so I really concentrated on the family law area. I read all the cases, I did all the research, I got involved with organizations. I really developed some expertise, and I liked that feeling of being the most knowledgeable person in the courtroom. I became head of the family division in 2000, and I have kept it ever since. So every three years or so the Chief Judge, whether it was Townsend or Difanis, would come to me and say are you ready to move and each time I would say no I want to stay where I am, and they always accommodated me. So I developed I think some expertise in the area statewide. And I have enjoyed that feeling I always felt that it was important that judges be the most knowledgeable person in the court room, and you shouldn't have any lawyers leading you around. This assignment has allowed me to do that. I have had so many cases as we have a huge volume of cases. I think we average about seven hundred divorces a year, six hundred protective orders, six or seven hundred, what they call "F" cases, where people have children but they have never been married. Most of the litigation is custody related or allocation of responsibilities between parents. It's very emotional with a lot of experts testifying. You get to hear a lot of testimony from psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers. So it's a very interesting area, and the litigants are very emotionally involved.

LAW: What have you learned about each one of these, divorces, custody of children? Over this period of time what have you learned about these cases?

BLOCKMAN: Unfortunately, I have learned how much people hate each other and how they litigate often times just to get even with the other party. Every time I have run for retention I had organized campaigns against me, by groups. You can Google my name and see what I mean. I had billboards, I've had death threats, I've had black mail threats, and basically from what I would call father's rights groups that believe that in every case where there is a child, everybody should have equal parenting time and equal decision-making time. I have always been opposed to that. I have written several articles where I talk about the problems of people jointly being able to make decisions when they hate each other or have protective orders against each other or criminal cases against each other. It's just like a business, you can't run a business if you can't agree on anything if you're a partner. It is the same as with kids. Somebody has to be in control. In the best of all worlds, it would be great if every parent would cooperate and they could jointly make decisions as to what's best for the kids and divide the time equally. But it's not a perfect world and so you have a lot of people out there who have really tried to get rid of me because of that. Every time I have never really been seriously threatened for retention, but I've had organized campaigns against me. The other nice part is that, in 2007 I began teaching at the University of Illinois law school and that's played nicely into my profession. I teach the family law practice course at the law school. The students actually try a case, a hypothetical case, they actually come into our court and observe some of our calls. So that's played quite nicely into my judicial work. I'm actually going to keep that course even after I retire.

LAW: Are there any major changes that have taken place in the family law?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, it's interesting that you say that. The state of Illinois can't get a budget but in the last year have managed to change the entire family law statute. So January 1 of 2016 is a major date. They totally changed the entire family law statute. The legislature abolished the whole concept of custody; they replaced it with some allocation formula based on a Colorado statute. They changed all kinds of ways you do things in the family law area. Then another major change is coming because there is a bill that is supposed to be (it has passed both houses) submitted to the Governor, and he is expected to sign it. It will be effective July 1 of '17, and it will change the way we calculate child support. And I think it's going to hurt, particularly, women but they are not real clear as to how that is going to work. Instead of taking just a percentage from the person paying child support, percentage of their income, they are going to divide it equitably between the parties. But it's a very complicated formula. So, we are seeing great change in the family law area. In the twenty years I have been in family law, this is the biggest change we have seen and it's going on right now and we don't quite know the repercussions. The only thing I'm predicting is we will have a lot more cases, it will be a lot more difficult to settle cases. Because of the legislation it's going to be a lot more difficult and a lot more expensive, for clients. I think they would be better off spending time getting a budget than fussing around with our family law system; but that's how I guess things work in Springfield. The other nice thing that I managed to do, about four years ago was that I got appointed to the Family Law Section Council of the Illinois State Bar Association which monitors all of our family law statutes. We comment on the statutes as to whether the proposals are good or bad. It's given me a chance to have some input

on these statutory changes that have come into effect. I've had a chance to be involved with some of the top family law judges and family law lawyers in the state on that committee, so I really enjoy that. Along with that the Supreme Court appointed me, I think, or a year-and-a-half ago, or two years ago, to be on their education committee. So I presided over our family tract, what would be our local education, or judicial education conference. Every two years the judges get educated, so to speak, in various areas and they deal with every area. I was in charge of the entire family law tract for all the judges in the state at the Education Conference 2016. That was a lot of fun because I worked with a lot of good judges. We had a real good educational presentation. We had like twenty-one different sessions that we put on and it was quite enjoyable and satisfying professionally. It played into my idea that I think is good for judges to develop some expertise in an area. The family law attorneys do a tremendous job. They have the toughest job in the courthouse, because their clients are so emotional and people are so passionate about it. When it comes to dividing property and paying support and paying maintenance and who gets custody of children, it's a very emotionally laden area. I like to think we developed procedures to get cases through quickly. We've had sixteen years to think about how to improve the system. I think our system moves as efficiently as any family law system in the state. At least I am comfortable that it does.

LAW: You alluded to the Supreme Court committees but I did want to ask you about, and you kind of talked a little bit about, the CLE [continuing legal education] stuff, but why have you been involved in continuing legal education and the state bar association?

BLOCKMAN: I think, the Family Law Section Council puts on legal seminars for lawyers and I've had a great time. I enjoy the people. We've put on several seminars in New Orleans. We are going to New Orleans again in March of 2017. We've gone all over the state. I think I just want to promote attorneys having a better understanding of family law. We present things we do it in a very practical fashion. We give them tips and we give them ideas of what we would like to see. We tell them about and discuss all the new cases. We give them ideas about what they might do in their practice. I reached the attorneys through the section council and the seminars they put on through the Illinois State Bar Association, and then I got to reach the other family law judges through the education conference. I've had good feedback from judges because a lot of the judges that go to these Ed-con seminars maybe will only have

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a short time in family law or just periodically get family law cases. So I think it's helpful to have judges that do it all the time, be the presenters. We put on very practical seminars to help the judge's deal with these cases. We know what the problem areas are. For instance, we had one section called, "What drives you nuts," and we just talked about all kinds of areas that come up where it's very perplexing and difficult for judges when attorneys do certain things and clients, litigants do certain things. So I really think we've made some improvement and by participating, it would be easier to not to participate as I certainly do not get paid anything for putting on these seminars. I do enjoy the camaraderie between my colleagues, and I think we made progress in just creating a

better educational environment and more knowledgeable family law attorneys and family law judges.

LAW: I think you've also been involved with the Illinois Judges Association?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, that's our union. So I've always been supportive. I was on their board of directors for a number of years. I never had a leadership position in that organization, but they do a great job, both advocating for Illinois judges and also monitoring laws that are coming into play and helping with the educational training along with the Illinois Supreme Court. Judge Rita Garman on the Supreme Court has been instrumental in improving judicial education. When I first started, judicial education was not comprehensive enough. I would go to these seminars they would conduct in Chicago and you'd have some old Chicago judge who had been there for twenty years just telling war stories. And there was no research presented, there was no Power Point, there was just nothing substantive. Now they've developed their judicial education so that we have professional presentations. The Supreme Court monitors all the presentations. All judges have to give summaries and a summary presentation before they are allowed to present. The Supreme Court has to approve all the teachers at these seminars. We just completed one in Lombard last year and the difference between that and when I started is night and day. They have produced bench books for every area of the law. This is the family law bench book that's produced by the Judicial Conference Committee on Education and they have a similar bench book in every major area. So if you're a judge in family law, the first thing you do is you read their family law and procedure bench book. It is excellent. They are updating it constantly and this is the fourth edition. They do this in every area and it's made new judges feel much more comfortable as far as having the education and

knowledge to be able to take on any assignment. I think that's a major change in the judiciary. That's probably the biggest change I have seen in the judiciary is the emphasis on judicial education, and a lot of that I attribute to Judge Garman who is presently the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. All of these advancements have made my work really fun and I think it has made me much more knowledgeable about family law. In fact, as I am looking here, I have had 142 cases as we sit here today with several cases pending. So it might go up or down depending on what happens. I've been either affirmed or partially affirmed in 132 of 142 cases. I must add that of those 142 cases, a lot of those were family cases and a number of my reversals were in non-family law cases. But I think in the family law area I can only remember two cases that I have been reversed. So I think that we must be doing a good job. At least when my cases get reviewed by the appellate court, I get affirmed. I've had good feedback from the fourth district and many favorable appellate comments about my written opinions.

LAW: Help me understand a little bit more about how a trial judge follows a case once it's appealed; how do you track that?

BLOCKMAN: Very easily. You get a notice of appeal so you know it's on appeal. They now put their appellate arguments on the internet. In fact, for the past five years it has been possible to listen to it, and I actually listen to it because I just think it's interesting and educational. One side is saying what a great job I did and the other party is saying negative things about the job I did. Then you get an opinion from the appellate court telling you whether you were right or wrong and I love that. It all plays into my initial love of appellate arguments. Putting that online is the best thing that ever happened. You either get a published opinion or you get a Rule 23 non-published opinion. But, I've

had really good success, and most of the attorneys know that it's difficult to get me reversed in a family law case.

LAW: If you are reversed, what do you do?

BLOCKMAN: It would be sent back down to me. Unlike the federal courts you don't automatically get a recusal of the trial judge on a reversal. In the federal courts they automatically get rid of the trial judge and you get another judge if there is a reversal. In the state courts it just gets sent back to me for retrial or rehearing. Again I've had very few in the area of family law get reversed. A lot of it is that we do it right. I draft opinions, even though there is no presidential value, and publish the opinions to the bench; they can get copies of all of our opinions. They have a copy of every opinion I have written in the last twenty years on various areas of family law, and I do it so they know how I rule. A lot of times the issues are very similar and they can better advise their clients if they know how I have ruled on similar facts. They can advise their clients better and it's to our advantage to get cases settled. Most judges don't take the time to write opinions and they just rule from the bench. We have been real careful about that. I know the appellate court appreciates it if we tell them why we're doing what we are doing. Judge Knecht, presently a Fourth District Judge, had a presentation at one of the Ed-con's. His topic was how do you get reversed? If you are interested in getting reversed what's the best way? And one is, don't ever tell the appellate court why you are doing what you are doing. I always thought that it made sense if we could just explain in detail what we were doing so we would have a better chance. One, I think it's better for attorneys and their clients and they feel they have been treated fairly. Whether they agree with me or not, they know exactly why I am doing what I am doing. Secondly, when you

go to the appellate court if they appeal you, they have a better idea of what you are doing. I've been real proud of that aspect of our system and how we've organized things.

We've done things to make custody cases easier. We have a list of what we call limited guardian items where attorneys can act for people that can't afford a full blown home and background investigation with psychological. You can have an attorney for \$350 interview everybody in the household and give a custody opinion. So, we made it so that people who don't have a lot of money can still litigate custody and feel they can have their day in court. Those procedures have been followed in other circuits. So we're real happy with what we've tried to accomplish here and have accomplished in our family law system. I put a tremendous amount of work into all the teaching and the law school and the seminars to judges, seminars to lawyers. Thank goodness for the support I've had from my wife and family. The judicial years have been great. I married my daughter, Rachel, and she is married to Eddie who is an assistant state's attorney in Sangamon County. My daughter is a special education teacher in the Springfield area. She has had an interest in special education ever since grade school, and my wife and I have promoted and are very proud of her profession. My son, Jon, is getting married September 3, 2016, and I am marrying them. And then I am retiring September 16th. Jon lives in Bloomington and is marrying a lovely young lady named Leslie. Jon is employed by a subsidiary GROWMARK as a crop marketing associate and Leslie is a school social worker. So it has been a very rewarding period for me both professionally and personally. My wife and I are certainly looking forward to getting away, having some time in a warmer climate in the winter.

LAW: Tell me a little bit about the teaching.

BLOCKMAN: I've loved the teaching. If you look at my resume from the very beginning in law school in 1972 I actually taught a course in business law at Parkland College, our local junior college, and then in '74 at Illinois State University and Lincoln College. Then when I came back to practice I went back to teaching at Parkland from '75 until 2000, when I was on the bench, and then I gave it up. I was approached by the law school five or six years later, and I developed this family law course for the law school and I love it. I love the excitement of the young people. They're not jaded; they're excited about what they are doing and they are bright. The people who take my class tend to have a specific interest in family law. It's a very practice oriented class, and I've enjoyed watching the students develop and giving them practical pointers. It's just nice, and I do it just enough, which is one night a week during both semesters. I get good reviews, and I like coming into contact with the young people. I've had a number of lawyers in town that practice family law that were in my class. I think there are three or four in town here and a number in other parts of central Illinois and in Chicago. I enjoy following their careers. It's kind of nice when they were in your class and then all of a sudden they are in your courtroom; it's just a rare and rewarding experience.

LAW: How has the student body changed if at all in the last forty years?

BLOCKMAN: A majority of women have enrolled and certainly the advent of the computer has changed things immensely. It's interesting to compare. The first class I taught was in '07. When I went to law school our assignments were posted on a bulletin board in the law building, the index card said, "Read the first fifty pages of this text and these cases." Many years had passed since I graduated from the law school. I had prepared a syllabus

and I was all ready and I told them what my text was. I had preordered it and my syllabus was in good form, but I didn't think anything else about it. Then about two weeks before the class was getting ready to start I got a call from the law school asking for my website. I didn't realize that at the law school they had a website where you post your syllabus and all the material for the course on the site. Fortunately their IT department quickly helped me, and I have had no problem ever since. Then the next shock was coming into class and seeing all these computers lined up. Because when I was in law school, they didn't have computers. We took down notes with a pen on a yellow legal pad. You say something and they can just Google it. You mention a case, and they can look it up in just a few minutes on the internet. So the number of women and minority students, the advent of technology and the change from legal research, from having to do research manually to computerized research and Westlaw and Lexus Nexus. Those have been the major changes at the law school. The law building has been renovated and looks a little different than when I went to law school here, but it is the same basic classrooms and looks like the building I remember.

LAW: I did notice in your CV that in one of the most recent conferences you spoke of social media and other evidentiary issues in family law. Would you speak to how social media is?

BLOCKMAN: It's had a tremendous impact and people don't realize. I can't believe how uninformed people are and people think they can post things on social media and it will never come back to haunt them. I can't tell you the number of times that we've had custody cases determined by postings on social media that show their drug use and other improper activities. I've had at least four cases where during the course of the litigation

the litigants are on social media criticizing me. Then of course it comes back and somebody reads it.

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It is amazing that people talk about their cases on social media. People don't realize and they send emails or text messages. In almost every custody case now there are Facebook postings, emails, text messages and other forms of social media. That's why we had a special session because a lot of times the old rules of evidence weren't drafted in an age where you had social media. So, there are separate foundation requirements for introducing a Facebook page, or a text message or an email. That's what we concentrated on because again we are seeing more and more of that type of evidence and more and more cases decided based on that type of evidence. I think the first thing that attorneys need to tell their clients when they are involved in any kind of family law case is to stay away from social media, because that can only come back to haunt you.

LAW: Shows you the dramatic changes taking place.

BLOCKMAN: Certainly.

LAW: I have some philosophical questions for you. The first one is what are your thoughts on cameras in the courtroom?

BLOCKMAN: I know it's popular to want cameras in the courtroom. I think it's a mistake because I think the lawyers "perform" and I don't think you are as comfortable when there are cameras in the courtroom. I think you can have access if you're the media to a

courtroom without doing real time camera. I just think it detracts from the legal proceedings. I know from a philosophical standpoint I've always had a question as to why we even allow the public into a family law case and, also, why we allow family law court files to be open to the public. So, if I have a neighbor who's going through a divorce, I can come down to the courthouse and look at the file or go online; I could find financial information, I could find all kinds of information. We have taken steps to protect some of this information, and the Supreme Court has done a good job protecting Social Security numbers and identity information like that. The question is why is this even open to the public? Several times I went over to England and sat in their family law courts, and both times that I was in their family law court in London they couldn't comprehend two things about the American system. Number one was why in the world we elect judges as they can't even fathom that. In England every position is appointed, which may have its own problems just like our federal judiciary. They also can't comprehend why in the world family law cases are open to the public. In England it's a private affair. Judges don't wear the wigs and the robes. They have a coat and tie. The proceedings are closed to the public. They can't comprehend why we let the public in on family law cases. This is true all over our country. The only areas of family law cases that we don't allow in the public are abuse and neglect and adoption cases. In every other family law case, if you had nothing better to do, you could listen to people air their dirty laundry. So, I do question that philosophically. But going back to the general question of cameras in the courtroom, I just don't think it's a good idea. I know the media thinks it's great. To me it just promotes grandstanding it just makes it difficult for people. That's my own personal view.

LAW: How should the judiciary then relate to the media? And the corollary to that is how should the media relate to the judiciary?

BLOCKMAN: The media has access to every court proceeding. There is no provision against the media contacting judges. Judges can't talk about the case, but they can talk procedurally about what's going on and when there are going to be hearings and generally what happened. Maybe some judges don't feel comfortable about doing that. I know in this area Mary Schenk, who is the *News Gazette* reporter, has a good relationship with all the judges. It's been, I think, a very good relationship between the media and the judges here.

LAW: There is a reporter whose.

BLOCKMAN: Whose primary beat, so to speak, is the courthouse, Mary Schenk with the *News Gazette*. She does a great job reporting on any court related activity that is worth reporting on and that tends to be primarily criminal cases. Most of the time they are not interested in and won't report on divorce cases.

LAW: If it bleeds, it leads.

BLOCKMAN: That's right, the exception is when I had one case where a woman tried to kill her husband. That got reported on and there are some exceptional cases like that. In one case a woman got arrested for kidnapping the child. Those cases get reported on, but generally they leave the divorce cases alone, which they should.

LAW: As a lawyer and also as a judge, what are the best means to enhance the public's awareness of the judiciary and what the judiciary does?

BLOCKMAN: I think that is a difficult question. I don't think enough has been done. That is one thing the Illinois Judges Association has been doing for years. They have developed programs where judges go into the schools. They've encouraged the local judiciary, all over the state, to become more involved in the community. I think it's a big mistake for judges just to go and hide in their ivory tower. I think we have some obligation to go out in the community, to talk to service groups and to go into the schools. They've developed programs for drinking and driving and formal presentations that you can present in the local community. They've developed ways in which they have press releases whenever judges do something in the community. I think the Illinois Judges Association has really tried hard to increase the community awareness of the role of judges. The Illinois State Bar Association I know has all kinds of public interest programming. They have radio shows that are hosted by lawyers that answer basic questions by members of the public. They also have a referral service. I think there has been an attempt to make lawyers and judges more accessible to the general public. How successful has it been? I think lawyers are probably still on the low part of the totem pole for most people. I think because when people come in contact with lawyers it's usually during a crisis situation, a divorce or criminal or personal injury case, and they don't associate good things with that. I think judges are trying to do a better job of really going out in the community and showing what we do and presenting a human face to our system. I think the teaching can help in that way and can help young lawyers. All of this, I think, helps but you do have a lot of judges that won't do any teaching, won't go out in the community, and I think that is a mistake. We're trying to do the best we can to solve that problem.

LAW: Are you a member of any bar associations and what is the nature of the relationship between bar associations and the judiciary in your area?

BLOCKMAN: I am a member of the Champaign County Bar Association and the Illinois State Bar Association. I think the Champaign County Bar Association has poor communications with the judges. There are very few functioning committees. People involved I think do the best they can do, but I don't think there is much interest. I think other counties do a lot better job of having social functions and better communication between the bench and the bar. When I first started there was a bench-bar committee that worked on relationship issues between the bench and the bar. That committee hasn't functioned in fifteen years and it's unfortunate. I think the Illinois State Bar Association does a much better job and I have been real active in it. We had a local attorney, John Thies, who was president of the Illinois State Bar Association, a huge organization.⁵² He actually got me interested in the Illinois State Bar Association and I remain active in the state bar. In fact, they just had their semiannual meeting up in the Chicago area. The Family Law Section Council is a section of the state bar. Locally I don't think we've done a real good job of promoting relationships between the bench and the bar. I think that is something that could be improved upon tremendously.

LAW: What is the role of the judiciary in society and what is the role of a lawyer in society?

BLOCKMAN: I think the role of a lawyer is to zealously, within ethical boundaries, represent the interest of their client. Most lawyers do a pretty good job of that. Most can actively promote the interest of their clients in the courtroom and then leave the courtroom and be

⁵² John Thies was president of the ISBA from 2012-2013. See www.isba.org/leadership/pastpresidents for a list of past ISBA presidents.

friendly with the other attorney. Some have problems. So, their job is to vigorously represent the interests of their own clients, again within ethical boundaries and within various ethical obligations to the court, to give us applicable case law and tell us if we are citing the wrong law or the wrong cases. The role of the judiciary is to resolve disputes by applying the law to the facts of the case without regard to personal prejudices or biases. I just take the facts as presented and many times I have litigants that I can't stand personally, but I try to just put that out of my mind. Likewise, if I have lawyers I don't like, I say I'm going to disregard this and decide this case solely on what was presented in court as facts. How those facts apply and how the law applies to those facts, that's my job. I'm not here to make new law and I'm not here to make future law. I'm only here to do what I think is fair and equitable in a given case. I think the role of a trial judge and appellate judge is different, but a trial judge's job is to make sure there is a proper record, everybody gets their say and everybody gets treated fairly. One takes whatever facts are presented, you apply the law and make a decision, and do it quickly. I don't think it's good that some judges keep a case under advisement for months and months. I've had family law cases by other judges that have been under advisement for a year. I mean that's a disaster because even if you make a right decision, things change and family finances change. You could have a pension plan probably today that could have lost lots of money because of the downfall of the stock market or because of the Britain exit from the European Union. These things change, so if I'm dividing a marital asset I can't wait a year or even six months. I have to make a decision, and I think you owe it to the parties to do it quickly. You've got to do a good job, but sometimes it's better to have a decision than to sit on something. Now the courts have always had rules about how long you keep

a case under advisement, but for the most part there is no close scrutiny. What can the attorneys do? It's hard for them to do anything if the judge doesn't decide the case except call you and say, "Hey, have you forgotten about us?" So I think that's the role of the trial judge, and it's a different role than an appellate judge or a Supreme Court justice.

LAW: What are the benefits of doing pro-bono work? Were you engaged with that as an attorney? Generally, have you been engaged in any philanthropic work as a judge?

BLOCKMAN: I am not allowed to do any philanthropic work. I can't participate in any kind of fundraiser. I'm bound by these ethical rules as a judge. So obviously I can't do any pro-bono type work. I've seen lots of attorneys that do pro-bono work. I must say that I didn't participate when I was in private practice for twenty-one years in a pro-bono program. I always felt that my pro-bono work was that if I had an individual client that I felt couldn't afford our fees, I would handle that either at a tremendously reduced fee or no fee. That was my pro-bono work and at least I would do it for clients that I felt comfortable with and that I liked versus being assigned a case where you are expected to do it for free even if you don't like or respect the client. I thought it was a better way of doing pro-bono work, in my situation.

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I bet over the years I did enough of that so that it would be equal to what people do today in these formal pro-bono programs. Most of the pro-bono programs are in the area of family law. Now there is also major opportunity for pro-bono work in immigration law;

we have a big immigrant community in the area. But most of the pro-bono opportunity is in the area of family law. The local Land of Lincoln has a very extensive list of local attorneys that get pro-bono credit for working for them. It is admirable and a way of attorneys giving back to the community. Once again, like I said, I think there are other ways of doing it other than traditional pro-bono programs. I am sure there are plenty of lawyers that don't do anything. Another advancement we have made over the years is that there's now a requirement for lawyers and judges to have a certain number of continuing education credits. That is one of the reasons I have been involved in all these programs. Now it's required that every year or every two years in order to maintain your license, to be a judge in good standing, you have to have participated in a certain number of hours of continuing education programs. That's a change because when I was in practice we had a lot of programs of continuing education, but nothing was required. Judges, likewise, didn't have to go to anything and that has changed. I think it's for the good. You can still go to these programs and, if you are determined you don't want to learn anything, you could probably figure out how to do it and think about other things. I think the opportunity is there and it's required, and I think that's a good thing. It's been a good advancement for attorneys and judges.

LAW: What kind of civil organizations have you been a part of?

BLOCKMAN: I think I indicated I was president of the Planned Parenthood Board of Directors for a couple of years. I was on the Montessori board when my kids were there.

LAW: Why were you involved?

BLOCKMAN: I thought that Planned Parenthood was something that was good for the community. Their programs were excellent, and they needed support. I thought the Montessori School provided a great form of early childhood education and a great approach to education, generally, for young children and I wanted to support that. I was involved with our local temple and became president. I wanted to support the religious aspect of our community. Those have been my primary community activities. That's been an overview of my community activities. My wife right now is real excited as she is involved in a non-for-profit agency called the Immigration Project. I never realized before now, and I see what changes there are in the judiciary. My wife's work reminded me of that in that more and more people need interpreters. We are seeing more and more people from the immigrant and undocumented community that are involved in legal cases, either domestic violence cases or protective order cases or divorce or family law cases that are probably here illegally or undocumented. They are immigrants and are trying hard to make a living in the community. I saw a statistic that Champaign County had the highest numbers of immigrants outside of Chicago which I thought was interesting. I don't know why that is true. Part of it may be that there are a lot of foreign students that attend the U of I and that might contribute to the numbers. We are seeing more and more cases involving the immigrant population and the problems that have arisen. My wife has been involved in volunteering for the project. The Immigration Project has been trying to help out with helping people get the required documentation to become citizens, help with domestic violence issues and help with pro-bono legal services. There's a tremendous need in the community, and she's been real excited about her work in that area as a fundraiser. It's also alerted me to the needs that are involved in

that area. I have been invited to be on the board of directors when I retire, of the C.A.S.A. [Court Appointed Special Advocates], the organization that works with the abuse and neglect area. We get volunteers to go in and supervise family situations where there are allegations of abuse and neglect. That's an area I've had an interest in, and I think I could contribute in that area; again, something to give back to the community. I won't start that until I finish my work here.

LAW: Are there any cases that you've been involved in as a judge or as a lawyer that you continue to struggle with today? Or once it's over, it's over?

BLOCKMAN: I don't look back. It's interesting, I don't even know a lot of times whether, if I give custody, I know what happens. Actually every now and then I'll be out and somebody will come to me and say you don't remember me but you gave me custody years ago and things have worked out great. My kid's now at Harvard. That doesn't happen that often. Sometimes I will hear that there are problems in the family. Most of the time I don't find out what happened. There are a lot of very troubling cases, that we get, and you wonder, if you made the right decision. I think over the years that once I make the decision, I do the best I can and then forget about it. I just can't worry about what happens. You just hope that things work out in the future.

LAW: You have dealt with some really difficult cases, how do you not internalize all that?

BLOCKMAN: A lot of people wonder about that. I guess my personality is such that I don't take it personally and I try to disengage from the emotional aspect of the case and not get involved with the drama and the dynamics. I try to calm people down, and if they are out of hand, just have a recess or threaten somebody with contempt. I do everything I can to

keep from holding people in contempt because that is the last thing we need is to have civil litigants sitting in our jail. We have other problems in our jail system. I think that I've had at least three of my cases go to the Illinois Supreme Court as a judge and it's rewarding to see your cases go that far. A couple of the cases I never would guess have gone there. It's kind of interesting to see that happen. So I've had three in twenty years. You don't get a lot of cases in the family law area that get to the Illinois Supreme Court. I had two in the family law area, the Crook case and the Mathis case and then one that dealt with some pension litigation; it's on my resume'.⁵³ So that's been heartening to see those cases go up, and I do enjoy the appellate aspect of having your work reviewed by a higher authority. Unlike a lot of jobs you find out if you are doing a good job or not because your cases and your work are being reviewed. We had one seminar where I did a custody trial in front of seven other judges. We did it in Galena, no it was in near St. Louis. That was a financial trial. In Galena we did a custody trial, and I did it in front of seven or eight other judges and every time I'd make a ruling they would stop the trial and ask the other judges if I did the right thing and how they would have ruled. That was kind of a heady experience; having a trial and having instant appellate review. I thought that was a fascinating way to present continuing legal education credit. We did the same thing in Grafton but with a financial trial; dealing with division of finances. The Galena seminar was put on by the Family Law Section Council and actually won some natural CLE award.

⁵³ *In Re Marriage of Crook*, 334 Ill.App.3d 377, (2002), 211 Ill. 2d 437, (2004).
In Re Marriage of Mathis, 2011 IL App (4th) 110301, 2012 IL 113496.
Mattis v. The State Universities Retirement System, et al., 212 Ill. 2d 58, (2004).

LAW: What does the future of the profession hold, where are things going?

BLOCKMAN: That's a good question. I worry about the young people coming out of law school. It's getting so expensive to go to law school; I worry about the debt accumulated by young people in law school. When I was in law school it was very inexpensive. I think my tuition and fees my first semester at the University of Illinois Law School was something like \$190. I think there is a glut in the legal market right now although it's getting a little better. I suspect that as time goes on and more and more kids do not apply to law school, I think the market will improve. I don't think people should give up on law as a career.

LAW: Is it less of a profession and more of a business now?

BLOCKMAN: I think that people that are in private practice are forced to treat it more as a business than a profession. I know we had the old fashioned system, when I was talking about Bud Hatch, as he didn't believe in any kind of advertising. We had a huge debate in the firm about the yellow pages, as to where we had our firm and whether it should be listed in bold letters. He was opposed to that because he didn't think lawyers should ever advertise. He was shocked when he saw these legal advertisings you see all over the state. He never would let anybody even sue for a fee. In his opinion, it was not professional to sue somebody if they didn't pay your fee. Whereas lawyers these days, don't think a thing about it. You have got to run a business and you can't let people get services for free. I think it is becoming more of a business. There is more and more business that's consolidated into these big firms. I think people can get anything online these days, and I think that hurts that people are getting really bad advice. They are

forgoing legal services because they trust what they get on the internet. That is hurting a lot of small law firms. And I think you will find a lot of the smaller firms are hurting as far as business and more and more it's consolidated into these big firms. It's going from more of a profession to like you say a "pure business". Law traditionally was kind of at the intersection between a business and a profession, if that makes sense.

LAW: It does. It tracks with what we've been hearing from a lot of lawyers and judges we've been speaking with. If you had to do it all over again, in regards to your legal career, would you do anything differently?

BLOCKMAN: Yes, I think I would have become a judge a few years before I did. Being a judge is so much more consistent with having a family life and having less stress. Private practice is just about the most stressful thing, especially if it's a family law practice or a litigation practice where you have to travel and roll the dice on verdicts and juries. I think we are seeing less and less jury trials, particularly in the civil area. I think the jury trial is becoming a rare creature these days. You got a lot of criminal jury trials because a lot of criminal defendants will put their case in front of a jury. So the criminal area gets a lot of jury litigation, but in the civil area I think you are seeing less and less jury trials. That's something I think in the future, probably some of the people you have talked to have talked about it. I really think that social media and the internet have really impacted law firms. I know the state bar is dealing with some rule changes in regard to firms that can provide quasi legal services and how that would impact the present legal environment and business for lawyers. There is a lot and then you've got these firms that are national firms that purport to provide legal advice. You've got the Shapiro firm and LegalZoom and I think that takes business away from a lot of lawyers. That becomes kind of iffy for

people when they try to follow that if the advice is not consistent with Illinois law. I will say the Illinois Supreme Court, at least in the family area, has done a good job of having uniform forms to try to make it easier for the layperson.

[02:30]

If you just look at the Illinois Supreme Court website and look at approved forms you will see a whole variety of forms that they have tried to make that have instructions for people that are representing themselves, as to how to maneuver the legal system.⁵⁴ Even in our education conferences, more and more seminars are devoted to how to deal with litigants that are representing themselves. In the old days when I started nobody even thought about that. Now you are seeing more and more people, especially in the family law area, that are representing themselves because they can't afford the hourly rate which in Champaign County is \$200-\$250 an hour for legal services. I think it's about time the Court recognized that we have to train our judges to be able to fairly deal with these litigants. We can't help them, but we can help them fairly maneuver through the system by giving them the appropriate forms and some guidance as to how they should do things. I think the Supreme Court has done a good job dealing with that area also.

LAW: What do you want to be remembered for, what is your legacy as a judge?

BLOCKMAN: I would like to be remembered as someone who was fair and treated all the litigants and the attorneys professionally and respectfully until they proved that they were not deserving of being treated like that. I conscientiously made my decisions and tried to

⁵⁴ www.illinoiscourts.gov

do what I thought was right and consistent with the law. That is how I want to be remembered.

LAW: What's next?

BLOCKMAN: I'm going to continue to teach my family law practice course at the law school. My wife and I have a lease that starts December 1st in Solana Beach, California. It is a little apartment overlooking the ocean, and we have it for four months. I am going to teach each year the fall semester at the law school, and we will be in Solana Beach over the winter. I will come back and aside from working on the C.A.S.A. board, I'm going to keep my section council and I'm going to keep my activities in the Illinois State Bar Association. I will continue to work on their seminar series, and I will continue to stay current and keep track of all the family law litigation. Hopefully, I will continue to be able to write some about it and talk about it. As long as they will have me, I will keep my one semester of employment at the law school as an adjunct professor. So that's what I have in mind in the future, but compared to what I have been doing for the last many years, it's going to be quite different. My wife and I have lots of ideas. She has been retired for about seven years. She is interested in photography, yoga and we are going to go to a Y near the ocean that's really nice. There's a university, the University of California at San Diego, that offers courses, like OLLIE at the University of Illinois, continuing education courses for older people. We are going to try to do ballroom dancing and we are going to try and stay active. There are a lot of walking trails, and we've always wanted to live on the ocean. I'm actually looking forward to it. Although there is some anxiety because I'm so used to staying real busy, but I am looking forward

to September 16th. And if you have nothing better to do on September 16th, my retirement date.

LAW: Judge Blockman that is all I have for you.

BLOCKMAN: Thanks so much, Justin, and I hope things work out for you, I really do.

End of Interview