Gordon Sinykin

Interviewed by Ruth Doyle on July 17, 1985 at Mr. Sinykin's law office.

Oral history tape number: 10

I am in my office, in the conference room of my law office, with Ruth Doyle and we're talking about my early years.

I would like, Gordon, to have you tell us a little bit about your family, your parents, where they came from. You always lived in Madison, I gather? Tell us something about your sisters. Then I want to talk about you.

I was born in Madison, on June 18, 1910, on the second floor of the very small house at 522 South Park Street. The house is still there. I pass it often. My folks came from the state of Minsk of White Russia, back during the latter part of the nineteenth century, sometime between 1890 and 1895. They came to New York. They lived in New York for a while. My mother was a seamstress and my father ran a small lunch counter.

Did they come together?

They came together, yes. Then they moved to Madison about the turn of the century.

Why did they come to Madison?

The conditions in New York were very bad. They had gone through quite a Recession and Depression there. My eldest sister Ida was born there. Things were very difficult. Some of the Sinaikos had come out here to Madison and to Lake Mills and Ripon and they wrote that there were opportunities out here.

Were they friends of your family?

They were relatives. The Sinaikos and the Sinykins are related.

Was that the same name to begin with?

Originally our name was Sinaikin, with an a-i in the middle instead of the y. That comes from the word "Sinai," with the common ending in Russia of k-i-n or k-o. In some areas, the ending was k-i-n – commonly it was k-i-n – and in others it was k-o. The Sinaikins and the Sinykins came from a tiny, tiny village called Shemazavad in the state of Minsk. The Sinaikos come from a nearby larger village, but they're related. In fact, our grandfathers were brothers. My folks came to Madison. My other two sisters were born here in Madison and, of course, I was born subsequently. I was the youngest of the family of four. Three sisters were older than I.

Who idolized you, I imagine.

Well, I don't know about that.

The baby brother always seems to be.

Do you want to ask me questions?

No. I think this is very interesting. After a while I do want to talk a little bit about the neighborhood, the Bush area that you grew up in. But I think this is fascinating now.

I was born in this little house on Park Street, and I can't remember anything about that. At a very early age we moved to a house on Milton Street, between Park Street and Murray Street and, after living there for several years, my father bought an old house and moved it to 106 South Murray Street.

There was a great deal of house moving in those days, wasn't there?

In those days it was common to buy a house and to move it from one location to another. This

house was moved to 106 South Murray Street. My father was a junk dealer. That was a very hard way to make a living. I can recall big piles of junk in our yard during World War I which we finally sold. He came down with the flu. There was an epidemic of flu during World War I and he was very sick as a result. Later this developed into tuberculosis. He had a very serious situation.

I had that, too. My father had tuberculosis.

Is that so?

At the same time. Yes.

We couldn't afford to put him in a sanitarium so we kept him isolated in the house. He still worked and he changed from a junk peddler to a peddler of fruit and vegetables. He had a horse and a wagon. From a very early age on I used to help in this peddling. I would go in summertime and meet him. On days when he was on the east side I would take a streetcar from that area, Mills Street. I'd bring a basket of lunch that my mother would prepare for him. I'd get on the streetcar and go over to the east side and meet him there and then I'd work with him the rest of the day. During the days when he was on the west side I would either meet him or he would come home for lunch.

Where did he get the fruits and vegetables? He didn't raise all that?

No. These were purchased from a wholesale fruit and vegetable house known as the J. H. Heilprin Company, which was located on the railroad tracks on Bedford Street and Washington Avenue. This is what I would do during my early years from about ten years of age until about fourteen or fifteen.

During vacations, I assume.

During vacations.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Longfellow School. My elementary schooling was at Longfellow School. I have a debt of gratitude which I will never forget to the teachers of Longfellow School. They were very unusual in their attention, in their interest, and their energy in educating us.

It probably was really exciting for them to have students like the Sinykin kids in class.

They were sometimes very strict and they wouldn't let us get away with anything. But I have quite a feeling for them. They really drummed in English and grammar and arithmetic and they encouraged us so much to read. I'll never forget my fifth-grade teacher, Miss Evans, from Mankato, Minnesota. I just adored her. She was so interesting and inspiring. And I'll never forget the reading that she used to do. She used to read out loud to us every day for a half hour or so. She was a marvelous reader. We all looked forward to that period. She gave me some special time and effort and I did a number of things and, as a result, I felt that inspiration from her.

Did you speak English at home? Did your parents speak English?

Oh, yes, we spoke English at home. We spoke English. My parents, of course, also spoke Jewish.

But your language in the house was not Yiddish but English.

It was English.

That's a big help to all the children.

I remember my interest in reading and how I read on Saturdays. I would have my mother fix me a sandwich in a brown bag. Then I would walk downtown to the library, the city library, and spend the whole day at the city library, over here on the corner of Dayton and Carroll streets. I would take off for lunch, but I'd spend the whole day reading.

I gather your folks weren't religious in the traditional sense.

They were not religious, but I took Hebrew lessons.

Were you affiliated with the temple that was in the Bush area?

Yes. We were members of the congregation of the Orthodox synagogue there known as Agudas Achim.

But that didn't foreclose you from going to the library on Saturday?

Oh, no. No. My folks were not overly religious or observant, except on the various important holidays. My mother did keep a kosher house, so there were separate dishes for the meat meals and for what we called the dairy meals.

Were there many Jewish people in the Bush at that time?

Oh, yes, yes.

I have heard and I have mentioned to you before, I think, some conversations with black people from that area and Italian people about what a wonderful sort of integration apparently existed there. People did not resent each other.

No.

The Jewish people took leadership roles and nobody...

In the Ninth Ward, in this part of the Ninth Ward, let's say, the so-called "Bush," there were Jews, there were Italians, and there were blacks. We played with them, we lived with them, we had them in our house. There wasn't any discrimination, except perhaps some on the religious basis.

The Catholics and the Jews?

The Catholics and the Jews. Sometimes that reared its head.

You didn't, I gather, grow up with that feeling.

I didn't grow up with any feeling of prejudice. No. And blacks, you know, we played with them all the time and there were blacks in my house frequently.

That's what I was told – that your mother was very cordial to people, that they visited her, and that everybody liked her.

Yes. My mother was a very strong personality. She was very warm and outgoing. She really poured everything within her being into me. She used to sit there and talk to me, even when I was a little kid, as if I was a mature adult. She would talk to me about standards of life, of goals, of what I should be thinking about, what I should be aiming for.

Isn't it remarkable that she knew what you should be aiming for?

Yes.

She must have been quite sophisticated, too.

She could get me to do anything. I adored her. She was an inspiration constantly to me. But she didn't live very long during my life. She died when I had just turned sixteen.

What happened to her?

She had been ailing for a long time. She had problems with her stomach, her abdomen. These were ongoing problems. Finally she had surgery, very serious surgery. I remember doctors, Dr. Joe Dean. She did not recover from this operation. I don't know to this day whether it was cancer or what it was.

They didn't know themselves. But your father?

My mother died in 1926 at the age of fifty-two. My father died in 1932 at the age of fifty-nine.

So your sisters raised you. Did they keep the family together?

Yes, we were together. We continued to live at 106 South Murray Street until after my father's death and then we sold the house. We rented it first, then sold it. I finished up living in a little place on campus here. Of course, by that time I was at the university, at the time my father died.

You're a strong man yourself, Gordon. As strong as your mother. Wouldn't she be proud of all that you've accomplished in these many years? You've been in on everything that's gone on in Madison. Apparently she had taught you a lot of that from even an early age.

She gave me some wonderful instruction about life, about goals, and about how one must live and conduct himself. She poured her whole spirit into me.

So that she didn't really die.

No, no.

That's hard to realize, but it's true. One of your former neighbors has told me about always seeing you with a violin case. We talked about this a little before, but I think it should be on the tape – about your interest in music and the violin.

I think it began at about the age of ten. I had been interested in violin for some time and kept talking about it. My folks took me down to the Wisconsin School of Music and bought me a violin and started me taking lessons.

That must have represented a major investment.

That was a big investment.

I gather they were people of small income.

Oh, very, very, very small income. I didn't realize how poor we were. Everything was patched together. But, you know, I thought everything was wonderful. We always had enough food. My mother was a great cook and we all appreciated that. But it was really very, very tough going. We never had hot water, for example, except to take a bath on Saturdays.

The people in your neighborhood were in similar circumstances.

They were all in similar circumstances, yes.

You didn't have any feeling of being different or deprived.

No.

But let's get back to the violin.

I started out taking lessons. I finally came to Frank Bach and took lessons from him. He had an orchestra of about, let's say, thirty-five pieces, musicians from all over the city that he had collected. We used to practice once a week in his flat in the 600 block of University Avenue. We used to play all the classical music, all the symphonies. We used to work hard in his rehearsals. We used to play at various concerts and at various events and various places.

Who supported this orchestra financially?

We were all volunteers.

So there wasn't any expense?

There wasn't any expense.

And Mr. Bach did it as a volunteer, too?

He did it as a volunteer, too. He, of course, was teaching lessons to the violinists and cellists, so he was getting some income out of that. Otherwise he didn't get paid especially for this. When we would go out of town the parents would get together, those who had cars... we never had a car, by the way. Our family never had an automobile. They, the parents of the orchestra members, would get together with their cars and would transport us to Milwaukee or to wherever it was that we were going for the concert.

This was very much a part of my life – music and the violin. Although, as I mentioned to you before, I didn't have a good ear so I couldn't become a good violinist. But I could play better, I could do better with an orchestra where I could hear the melody from the other members of the orchestra. When I got in high school I played in the high school orchestra and eventually I ended up as the concert master of the orchestra of Madison Central High School. A pianist, who was David Weltner... He's a doctor.

In Madison?

No. I think he's at North Carolina now. And Roger [unclear] played the flute. He later married Janet Smith. This trio would go out to play at churches and all sorts of different places. That was a lot of fun.

Did Mr. Bach teach that, too?

No. The director of the high school orchestra, Paul Sanders, taught that. He became an especially good friend of mine and I kept in touch with him until he left Madison. In recent years he came back to Madison. He spent quite a bit of time in Hawaii with the orchestra there at McKinley High School. He came back here and died about two years ago. He was living up on the Wisconsin River near where we have a cottage and I used to see him from time to time. He was a marvelous person.

You put your violin away at some point, I guess?

When I got into college a whole new world opened up. I used to say the university here was to me like being at the World's Fair every day. There was so much to do, so much to see, so much to hear, so many interesting people to get to know. I just didn't have time to spend on the violin

so I gradually stopped playing the violin.

I gather you were always a very good student.

Yes, I was.

In grade school, and apparently you enjoyed school enormously.

Yes, I did. From grade school I went over a year or a year and a half to a junior high school at Randall School.

Was that a junior high there?

Yes, at that time. From there I went to Central High School. I particularly enjoyed Central High School. I enjoyed the teachers there very much. I took one summer school session at Wisconsin High School, which is no longer in existence. I did that so I could complete my high school graduation in three and one-half years. I then went on to the university and, of course, that was a new world and a very fascinating world. I worked hard and I did get very good grades, as you can see from the scrapbook.

I assume you had to have a job while you were in college.

I had to have a job when I was in high school. I can remember I worked in my brother-in-law's store, the [unclear] store on the east side, which was a general merchandise store.

This was your sister's husband?

Ida's husband, yes. When I was in high school I got a job as an usher at the Orpheum Theater on Monona Avenue, which later became the Garrick Theater. It became a stock company. The Al Jackson Players put on many plays every week there and one of the stars was [unclear]. I remember the first day she came there. I worked as an usher for a while, and then I went into the box office and worked on the telephones, taking reservations for performances. I would go there after school when I was in high school. I'd come about five o'clock and work through until about nine o'clock, and work all day on Saturday and Sunday.

There were performances every day in the season?

There were performances every day. That was a job for me.

Did you make enough to pay your way?

Well, yes. Of course, you know I was living at home. I was thinking I had to save some money so I could go to college. I continued to work all the time. Later on I used to work summers. When I was in college I used to work for the adjutant general, Ralph Immel. I would drive him around the state. I would work in the adjutant general's office doing clerical work and so forth.

That was the beginning of your political interests, was it?

No. I was interested in politics before that. My parents were very strong La Follette supporters. They were very strong supporters of the elder La Follette and stood by him during his opposition to America's entry into World War I. So I was brought up in that background. I was interested in politics right along. I did a lot of reading to try to keep up with it and would go to hear speeches at the university. I remember in my early years particularly hearing somebody like Eugene Debs and how fascinated I was by him. My parents would always try to come up with money for tickets for concerts, like Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, and so forth.

That was one of the wonderful things about Madison. All that came here, didn't it?

That's true. I got interested in politics at an early age. I joined the Young Progressive Club at the university and I can remember meeting Phil La Follette, who came and spoke there one time. Phil was an instructor in criminal law at the law school. He used to do this while he was practicing law and while he was district attorney. He would come for this class. When I entered law school he was running for governor. That was in 1930. He was there just for a short time, teaching criminal law. I was in his pre-law class. When he was elected governor Clint Roberts took over and finished the course.

How was that?

It was okay. Interesting. I was working for Immel during the summer. This was in 1932. My father had passed away in May of that year. But before that I had told the general that I would like to offer my services to Phil in the coming campaign. He said "That would be a good idea." I had called Ed Little, who was his secretary, and [unclear] came up to see Ed Little and told him I would like to do what I could, that I needed to work in the summer for [unclear], but I had saved up enough money so that I could go through a summer without earning that money.

He said "Well, would you like to meet Phil?" I said "Yes, I would!" So he took me in and introduced me to Phil. I spent about a minute with Phil. And he said "Let me get in touch with you." I didn't hear anything. Finally I got a call. This was the beginning. I got a call asking if I could drive Phil to Milwaukee and down to some place in Illinois, northern Illinois, that weekend. I did and that was the beginning of our association. From there I went on. He asked me to go with him on the campaign and I did.

This was in 1932?

1932. I spent the whole summer on the road and campaigned.

But Phil was defeated.

Phil was defeated. He would speak five or six times a day. My duties were to drive him, to get the meeting started, to distribute literature, to write releases for the local papers. We had prepared releases, but we would have to have a beginning with names of the local people. I would write those and run down to the newspaper office, either the weekly newspaper or the daily newspaper, if there was a daily, and file these releases. Each night I would also file releases by wire to Madison, and particularly to the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* to make their stories. I was pretty busy.

You had a real busy summer. Were you the only full time person traveling with Phil?

Yes, I was the only person traveling with him.

He was the governor then.

He was the governor then. This started in July and went through the primary, which was in the latter part of September. That was my initiation and it was a great experience. Of course, I also got very well acquainted with Bob [La Follette], Jr., who was in the state and also speaking every day.

I would like to have you say something about General Immel. What kind of a man was he?

I owe a great deal to him. He kind of looked after me as if I were a member of his family, always checking to make sure that I had enough to go on to school with. He was a very unusual person.

He kept no hours, and he was a great story teller. He was a brilliant person. His great capability was getting things done, as an administrator, as an executive. He demonstrated this as the adjutant general as the head of the [Wisconsin] National Guard. He demonstrated it later with what he did in eliminating the terrible forest fires we had in the state as the chairman of the conservation commission. He did quite an unusual job in conservation. Later he became head of the Works Progress Administration.

In Washington?

In Wisconsin. It was a federal agency in charge of a works program of the 1930s in the state of Wisconsin.

He's responsible for the state parks and the trails?

He is largely responsible for many of those projects.

Wonderful things that they did.

Yes. And he was indefatigable. He had no hour schedule, no time limit.

He expected that of you, too?

He expected that of everybody. He expected that of everybody!

That's where you got your habit of working twenty-four hours a day.

I guess so.

Now let's talk about Phil a little bit. I think it would be interesting to have some of the remarkable man that he was.

Yes, he was.

Phil La Follette, I should say for the tape.

He was a very unusual person. Very brilliant. He had a mind of unusual acumen. Very, very fast-thinking.

Was he like his father?

I didn't know the father. I really didn't know the father. The only time I saw the father was when he was lying in his casket at his funeral in the state Capitol and my mother took me down.

That was 1923?

1924. My mother took me downtown to the Capitol and we stood in line. There was a line about four abreast for all the blocks around the Capitol. We stood in line for hours before we could go by the casket. But I never knew the father, other than that. Phil was very brilliant.

Was he a difficult man to get along with?

No. But when I was with him on the campaign he didn't talk. He talked hardly at all.

He saved all his talk.

He saved all his energy and his throat for speaking. We would only talk when there were necessary things to discuss about the day's routine and arrangements. I remember having to keep him supplied with orange juice. In those days you didn't have cans of orange juice.

So you squeezed the oranges?

I even had to go out and buy oranges, squeeze them, and put them in the thermos jug. After every speech he would have one or two glasses of orange juice and then he would lie back and go to sleep. He could fall asleep at the drop of a hat. Always was organized to keep him in shape, save energy, to save his throat. He was, I would say, very easy to get along with. We got to know each other's personality and habits, characteristics, and so we got along fine. When the campaign was over Phil realized that he was going to be defeated. I did not. It was a greater surprise to me, I think, than it was to him. We [had been] getting big crowds everywhere.

There was a lot of interest that year.

There was a tremendous amount of interest. The farmers would put aside their tasks and take their family and drive into town.

They weren't making any money on the farm, I imagine. They felt they had more leisure.

That's right. We had large crowds, particularly at night. It was not unusual to have a crowd of anywhere from 2,000 to 4,000 people. It was a grueling campaign and, when the returns came through, I was shaken. Terribly disappointed by what had happened. I had to go back to school. I had another year of law school.

Did you take time out from school?

No, you see, because the primary came near the end of September and school didn't start until, I guess, the following week. It started late. In those days it started near the end of September so I didn't miss any school. I went back to school. The next thing I knew I got a call from Phil. He wanted to talk with me. We got together and he suggested that I go to work for his law firm mid-way. I said "Well, I had some other ideas about what I was going to do." But he talked me into it, so I went to work for the then firm that was known as La Follette, [Alfred T.] Rogers, and [Glenn D.] Roberts. I was to work part-time during my last year in law school at the law firm. I wasn't even admitted to the bar for part of that time! Then came the 1934 campaign and all the events leading up to it.

Before the 1934 campaign got underway, there was extensive discussion about whether to continue in the Republican party or to organize and establish a new political party. Meetings were called of progressive leaders from around the state, who met in groups, and this was discussed pro and con. It was finally decided at a meeting of leaders here in Madison to go ahead with the formation of a party.

What year are you talking about?

This is 1934. Then a convention of leaders was held in Fond du Lac, at which this decision was made final. Petitions were gotten out for the new party, and there was a problem as to how it could be done under the then existing statutes. We had to start an original action in the Supreme Court of the state to get a determination about formation of a new party.

Parties weren't part of the statutes at all, were they?

That's right. In any event, the new party came into being and the progressive candidates ran as candidates under the banner of the Progressive Party. That was the year in which Robert M. La Follette, Jr. came up for reelection. He also ran as a Progressive for reelection to the U. S. Senate. We had both La Follettes running for the top offices in the state, and it was a hard-fought campaign.

Did you have a county-by-county organization?

We had done a lot of work in organizing the state and we had organizations going in practically every county in the state. There was a great deal of enthusiasm generated and a lot of work was done. You must remember we had an incumbent governor, Governor [Albert] Schmedeman, a Democrat, to run against, who was endorsed by President [Franklin] Roosevelt. In any event, the election came. This time the crucial election was the election in November, not the primary election in September, when we were running in the Republican party. It was an exciting campaign and the results were equally exciting, with both Bob and Phil being elected under the new political party banner. So the Progressive Party was formed.

I was in that campaign. Instead of going with Phil, what I did was I stayed here in Madison and ran the personal campaigns of Phil and of Bob here in Madison. I devoted full time and had to leave the law practice to do it. Incidentally, we used a section of the law firm offices in which to operate.

And the clients didn't mind?

The clients didn't mind. Nobody objected. So that was it.

Both your partners were good friends with the La Follettes.

Oh, yes. The partners were old, good friends, like Glenn Roberts, Jack Roll, whose father had been a partner of the elder Robert M. La Follette as a lawyer. So Phil became governor and he asked me to come into the executive office. At first I didn't think I should.

You had then graduated from law school.

And I was practicing. I was supposedly practicing. Except for the time I spent on the campaign I had been practicing. He convinced me that I ought to do it and I came into the executive office as one of his secretaries and his executive counsel. I stayed there until February of 1938. Phil went into office in January of 1935, so I was there the whole three years. Those were very exciting years. Those were the years of the Depression. Nobody had the view of the Depression and the poverty and hardship that so many people were enduring as we did, sitting in the executive office and getting bag after bag of mail, calls, and visits from people who were out of work, who were terribly desperate, looking for some way to keep body and soul together. I won't go into the details of those years.

What was the governor's response to these people? Did Wisconsin set up separate programs?

In Wisconsin, of course, he worked and he got in real close with the national administration, the Roosevelt administration. The works program was set up under the sponsorship of the federal government with the cooperation of the state and this put a lot of people to work. Phil had also proposed a state works program but that didn't get through the legislature. People were put to work, and there were various programs. In addition to the works program, there was the larger public works programs or projects, and there were other projects, such as Rural Electrification, in Wisconsin. They led the way in developing a statewide rural electrification program. Anyhow a number of things were done and the conditions of the Depression were mitigated as time went on.

So 1938 was when you left?

Yes.

What made you leave that job?

I felt that I had to get back to the practice of law. I felt that if I didn't that I would just go on as a political worker.

Somebody's assistant always.

That's right. I couldn't see the future in that. I felt that my future, my best qualifications, were in the legal field.

That was a very mature kind of a view for a very young man to take.

I did go to New York to consider practicing there. I had an offer from one of the big Wall Street firms and thought hard about it. It was a difficult decision. But I decided that I ought to go back to Madison and practice in Madison. I often wonder what it would have been like if I had made the other decision.

You'd be terribly rich, probably; but then maybe you're terribly rich here anyway. But it would never have been home.

Yes. So I stayed on here. I went back to my previous firm, which was then called Roberts, Rowe, and Boardman, and I practiced there. The war came along. Phil was defeated in 1938, I should say. I worked in that campaign in Madison. Phil was defeated and he came back to the firm as counsel.

You made this decision before the election, before Phil was defeated?

This was made before the election, before Phil was defeated. But I had agreed to, and I did, devote a considerable amount of time to the election campaign.

I remember hearing about it, that Phil's group of close friends was very small and that people like you made enormous contributions. It wasn't a great mass movement.

In what respect do you mean?

I was thinking about the disagreements between him and some of his former followers about the war, and about the various ways things were happening, plus the peculiar position that the Progressives were in with reference to the national Democratic Party. Franklin Roosevelt was, after all, a sympathizer and a friend of the Progressives.

Phil disagreed with him and that motivated him to attempt to launch the national Progressive party, which proved to be a failure.

That took place after you left?

That took place after I left the governor's office, yes. When the Progressive Party started downhill the Democratic Party got stronger. The Democratic Party in Wisconsin had been a very conservative group, but it was taking on new members and leaders of a more liberal stripe.

Those came along mostly after the war.

Those came on mostly after the war.

So when Phil went to the Army, you went along?

Phil went into the service early. I went in later. I spent three and one-half years in the service and then came back here. When I had seen Phil in 1945 he talked about starting our own firm. I had

some misgivings about it because I liked the people in the old firm, but I finally went ahead with the idea. He got back here and was discharged in the spring of 1945. I went on some operations in the southwest Pacific and then on to Japan and I came back in the late fall of that year.

At the end of the war.

After the end of the war, yes. I found Phil had a two-room law office in the Tenney Building with the name "La Follette and Sinykin" on the door!

Was that a pleasing sight to you?

That was a pleasing sight. It was pretty slow going for a while because I was just starting from scratch.

Now that was 1945. That was forty years ago. And you've been a practicing lawyer, you've been the lawyer's lawyer and a practicing lawyer ever since, right?

Right. I probably should mention that in my military service overseas in the southwest Pacific I was on the fifth plane to land in Japan at Soogie airfield on that first day during the latter part of August and I was on the battleship *Missouri* for the surrender ceremony and saw many interesting things happen in that area at that time. Then I came back and I went to work as a lawyer with no practice. Things were tough for a while. Then Jim Doyle came along.

And things were still tough.

Things were still tough. I talked him into coming aboard and said we would share nothing in the way of fees because there was going to be very little, if any, fees. That was the real start of the firm, which became La Follette, Sinykin, and Doyle.

I think that one of the things we should talk about a little is your community service since that time. It seems to me there's hardly been a movement in Madison that you haven't been on the board of or chairman of the committee or something, and all these variety of things, including Methodist Hospital over here, which turns out to be an enormous monument that you built and that keeps spreading and increasing in size.

I got involved in many things, both in the profession and the bar, as well as outside the bar. One of the things I got into soon was the Community Welfare Council, which was the sister organization of the United Community Chest, now United Givers. It was the planning agency for Madison. I served on the board and served as president. I also served on the board as an officer of the Community Chest, now the United Givers. Then I served on the board and as an officer of the Health Planning Council. I served on the board and was chairman of the board of Methodist Hospital. I served on the board and as an officer of the *Progressive Magazine*. I was on that board for some forty-five years.

I was very active in bar activities. I served as president of the Dane County Bar Association. I served as a member of the board of governors of the state bar. I served as president of the Wisconsin Bar Foundation, the sister organization of the state bar. The Wisconsin Bar Foundation is involved in charitable and educational activities. We call them pro bono services, services for the good of the public. I served as a member of the House of Delegates of the American Bar Association. I served as president and as member of the board – and I'm still a member of the board – of the National Conference of Bar Foundations, consisting of over a hundred bar foundations in the United States and Canada.

Nobody is going to believe this, Gordon, when they hear it all. But go ahead.

I think I ought to stop.

No, I don't think you should. I think it's important to know how deeply involved people like you can get in a community. Had you gone to New York you wouldn't have had these opportunities, and Madison wouldn't have had you, which is a very important association.

These outside activities become very challenging and very, very interesting. You get to feel that you really can't do without them, so I wonder whether it isn't something I'm doing for myself rather than the public.

Probably, probably. You're using your talents, your lawyer talents and other talents, as a public service.

I have served and am now serving as a member of the Wisconsin Judicial Commission, which hears charges against judges of the state. There are many organizations that I belong to, both professional and otherwise.

It's one of the things that makes Madison a special kind of community, it seems to me, is that there are people like you who are willing to take on these community things. For instance, you were on the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights at the time of the open housing.

Yes, I was. Right.

You were one of the spearheads of that. I have done a number of interviews about open housing. That was a fascinating community effort, which gradually got the support of everybody and finally pushed it through. You were one of the instigators of that, as I remember.

Yes.

That was the mayor's commission, wasn't it?

Yes, the mayor's commission. On human rights. I see that I serve as president and as member of the board of the Wisconsin B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation. I had forgotten about that.

Where did you meet Dorothy? And how did you find time to get married with all of this going on?

Dorothy is a school teacher. She started out teaching in a one-room schoolhouse up in the northern part of Bayfield County. She lived with a farm family and she said she just loved it. They were wonderful to her. She came from there to Reedsburg. She taught in the high school there, and then she came to Madison and taught at Lakewood School in Maple Bluff. That's how I met her. I met her when she was in Madison.

This is before the war?

This was before the war. We married before the war. Then the war came along. I went into the service in August 1941, shortly after Midway. I see I also taught at the law school for a couple of years.

What did you teach?

I taught evidence and I taught torts. I liked teaching very much but it took too much time from my practice.

And they don't mind imposing on you. Both my husband and my son have gone to teach one course and they find themselves just absolutely overwhelmed with eighty students and no

assistant. And very little pay for your work. Now, tell me about La Follette, Sinykin, Anderson and Munson.

Well, our firm has gradually grown.

How many lawyers are there?

I didn't count them. The last count, I think, is twenty-one or twenty-two, with usually several law students. We have three law students right now. And we have one or more paralegals.

Twenty-two lawyers?

Yes.

That's a large group. That requires some management, doesn't it?

Yes. We have had to develop a whole management scheme. In fact, we now have an officemanager who takes charge of operating and running the office, hiring the non-lawyers, supervising them.

You've lost a partner recently.

We lost one partner this year, yes.

He really resigned and he retired.

He has retired, but Roy Anderson remains on as counsel so he will be doing some things from time to time.

That was an interesting and different way of approaching a career, to suddenly shift gears. Not many people do that when they're well established.

One of the interesting things I have done has been in the insurance field. Many years ago we talked with the then-insurance commissioner, Charles Manson, about overhauling the insurance laws of the state, which were out-of-date and needed extensive revision. A committee was set up by legislative fiat to study and revise the insurance laws. This covered a period of around twelve or thirteen years. A very extensive job was done under the leadership of the director of the project, Spencer Kimball who, during the course of the project, became dean of the law school.

I want to go back just for a minute to talk about the relations of the various ethnic groups in the Bush – the Jews and the blacks and the Catholics. We mentioned this briefly. And also about the splits that have occurred. Why, for instance, were there two small Jewish temples in the Bush area?

There was a Jewish synagogue.

Not temple, I guess.

They don't call an Orthodox place of worship a temple. We call it a synagogue. There were two of them. The oldest one was called Agudas Achim. This was the oldest one. This was on the corner of Mound and Park Street. A group split off from this congregation, formed a separate congregation and built a small synagogue on the corner of Murray and Mound streets called Adas Jeshurun. So there were two congregations down there in the Bush area, both Orthodox.

Both had staff, full time rabbis?

Well, both had rabbis, yes. And both had services daily and on the holidays.

The Russian Jews weren't separated from the Germans or the Polish or anything like that?

No. No. There was no such separation in this city at this time.

Why were there two?

Oh, just some differences about policy. I really can't recall what those differences were.

We also mentioned that there was a split in the Catholics, among the Italian people, which led to the formation of the Italian Methodist Church as opposed to the St. Joseph Catholic Church.

The split had nothing to do with doctrine, I know that.

Then also we mentioned the Prohibition time criminal activity in the Bush.

Yes. During the time of the Prohibition movement, particularly I recall the 1920s, of course, there was much bootlegging going on in the Italian sector in the Bush. People used to come there from all over town to get their liquor.

Were there speak-easies in the Bush? Taverns? Whatever? Were there places you could go and knock the door and peek through a window?

Yes, there were. I did not frequent any of them and was not familiar with them. What most of the traffic there was was traffic of people coming down and buying their whiskey and taking it away with them in their cars.

The whiskey came from, I suppose, the big organizations out of the big cities?

It came from outside the city. Some was manufactured in the city. I was very young at the time. There were two groups, or gangs, you might say, down there, according to gossip. Apparently there was a lot of competition between them in connection with this bootlegging traffic. There were shotgun – they always used a sawed-off shotgun – shotgun killings of people, probably of Italian vintage, during this period of time. I can remember, for example, coming home from a violin lesson at night, walking down Murray Street with my violin under my arm, and passing the alley between Milton and Regent Street and going on home. Five minutes later there were some shots and the person in this house that I had passed at that corner was killed. There were a number of these killings and none of them was ever solved.

That's interesting that that was going on in this integrated neighborhood at the same time. Were you aware of Neighborhood House when you were a little child?

Yes, but it was not used as much as it was later on. Neighborhood House was on Washington Avenue, right off of Mound Street.

It sort of concentrated on teaching English to the Italian women.

Yes. I never went there. As a boy I was in there, but I never frequented it or used it. I remember we used to have a theater, too, on the corner of Washington Avenue and Mound Street.

A movie theater?

A movie theater. We called it the "nickel show." It took a nickel to get in.

Were they the kind of movies your mother would let you go and see?

Oh, yes! These were like Pearl White and Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and so forth.

Let me just get one last statement from you. Are you getting ready to retire?

No. I guess not. I am groping for ways and means to cut down so that maybe I can go on a two-thirds or half-time basis. I tried it last year and for a while it seemed like it was going to work, but it didn't. I'm going to have to try again.

Take your fiddle out and start playing.

Yes. I should take my fiddle out and put some new strings on it and get a bow. I did try to take it out sometime ago and found that it needed new strings and a new bow. That would be something interesting to do.

Yes, to go back to. Thank you very much.