

Interview with John "Jack" Fahey

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Title: 40 years on the B&O

Date: June 23, 1994; Interview #: KK-CT-001-070

Jack Fahey: "My name is **Jack Fahey**. I am 65 years old. Moved to Wheeling when I was nine years old from Martins Ferry, Ohio. I moved to Wheeling because I come from a family of 11, and my mother had just died having twins; one of the twins died, and the twin was buried with my mother in her arms. Consequently, we moved to Wheeling because my father's sister lived down there, and we moved upstairs of those folks. That is how we got back over to Wheeling.

Michael Kline: Where was that you moved to?

JF: We moved from Martins Ferry, which is right across the River. We moved to South Wheeling. I lived in South Wheeling through grade school and high school, got married at 19 years of age, and then lived in East Wheeling, Goosetown in particular, for probably 35-40 years. My wife grew up in Goosetown. She lived there about 58 years. We lived in the house she was born in and that her father was born in, and it is still out there. So, basically she is a full-time Wheeling person. I am only Wheeling person from nine years old. We have 7 children and 14 grandchildren.

MK: Can you talk a little about your earliest memories of South Wheeling? You moved in with your aunt?

JF: We moved upstairs. It was a double house, and my oldest brother was 16. He worked in a coal mine with my father who owned a coal mine over in Lansing, Ohio, and my oldest sister was 10. Although there was 11 of us to start with, two of my younger sisters had died; one got scalded to death when she was only three years old, and one died at birth, so that left nine. Being that my father was going to be a widower with a brand new baby, a day old, and another daughter that was just one year and a few months, my mother's two sisters each took one of those children; so that only left us with seven. Now there was seven of us, and we lived in four rooms. My sister that was 10, believe it or not, did the cooking, and we were very happy. We grew up. We weren't poor; we weren't out of food or anything, but we were far from rich, living in a four room house. The aunt lived downstairs if there was ever an emergency, but my father worked in the mine so he wasn't there very often. The oldest brother, being 16, when he got finished at high school at 2:30 in the afternoon, he took a streetcar and went to Lansing, Ohio, and then came back home with my father. The same brother, later, became a detective on the Wheeling Police Force for 19 years, and then became the postmaster of Wheeling.

MK: His name is?

JF: George Fahey. He is now retired. He has been retired about two years. Two of my sisters entered the convent, the Sisters of St. Joseph, they were the two youngest. Five of them graduated from college. I did not go to college, as the postmaster did not go to college, but five of the other ones went through college.

MK: Can you give us some sense of that neighborhood?

JF: **South Wheeling, at that time when I lived there**, which would be in the area from 1938-1946 or 1947, was a very safe neighborhood. We never locked our doors. We lived one block away from Ritchie School, which was a public school. Ritchie was an unusual school because it had a marble swimming pool, and they opened that up to the public four nights a week; two nights a week was ladies or girls night, and the other two nights the men and the boys went there. It was a very elaborate swimming pool for that time. Outdoor basketball was a very recreational type of thing. We walked from 36th Street where we lived up to 26th Street, Webster School, which was another public school that had an outdoor basketball court. At that time most of the kids didn't even have bikes; just the elite had bikes, so it was just a case of walking up there or walking up to the 26th Street playground where the Cave Club was where they had a very nice baseball field. [[Return to Top](#)] There were a lot of good, semipro, ball players up there. **The Cave Club was actually a club that was built and the back of it was a cave**, and that was where they kept their beer and their pop, and they didn't need any insulation or refrigeration for that type of stuff. It just changed when the highway went through. When the new highway went through, then the Cave Club closed as a club, and they opened a new club down around 24th and Short Market by the new Post Office down there. It is strictly a man's club, there are no women involved. It seemed like everyone from Center Wheeling and South Wheeling belonged to the Cave Club. It was a place where young fellows and men--they allowed no underage drinking, and they patrolled themselves--they went in after a good ball game and drank a few beers,

smoked a few stogies, whatever. It was well known throughout the City. [[Return to Top](#)] **South Wheeling, in general, was a very safe place.** Most of the kids, when Ritchie pool wasn't open and it wasn't their day, went down to 33rd Street and swam in the river. They would dive off the barges. Standard Sand and Gravel had barges there along side the river bank, and these people would dive off the barges and swim in the river. So, it was a very nice growing up type of period. [[Return to Top](#)] (84)

MK: Was there, what you would call, an ethnic mix?

JF: Well there was. Anything below Ritchie School was mostly Polish. They were the Polish or Ukrainian people, and they were very clannish, but the biggest trait of the Polish people down there was their cleanliness and how tidy they were. I have a son-in-law who is Polish, and they are so clean, and I guess their mind set is that they are just prepared for everything. They do things not haphazardly. They make sure . . . Christmas comes, and he has all of his Christmas stuff and everything ready, I am sure, two weeks ahead of us. [[Return to Top](#)] **From Ritchie School above,** there were a lot of German people, and that extended clear up to the St. Alphonsus parish at 22nd and Market, and that was called the German Church and the German School. They were taught by the Sisters of Divine Providence who were very tough, and they called that the Dutch Prison. [[Return to Top](#)] **Down at St. Ladislaus,** which was where the Polish kids were, they were taught by, I think, the Felician nuns or whatever they were, but the school that was in between them was St. Mary's, and it was at 36th Street, and it was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph. So we have a tremendous amount of Catholic churches and Catholic schools in the city of Wheeling. I think there were 11 Catholic schools at one time. [[Return to Top](#)] (104)

MK: Did you interact at all with kids from those other neighborhoods?

JF: Oh, absolutely, because this was prior to the Little League. **They had a pretty good ball team,** and they played at what they called Pulaski field, that was the city playground down there, and of course we had a playground at 36th Street, and then the next playground was at 26th Street where the Cave Club was. So, it was almost like every ten blocks there was a playground. Yes, there was an awful lot of interaction, and at Ritchie School, besides having that nice swimming pool, they had a nice basketball court, and there was a lot of city basketball that was played there, the City League. They had very good teams in all three areas of the city, a lot of interaction. [[Return to Top](#)]

MK: But not what we see today of gang turf?

JF: Absolutely not. It was none of that, and for some strange reason, and it was not a prejudice thing, but there were hardly any blacks that lived from 22 on down to Benwood, to the end of 48th Street in South Wheeling. I would be less than candid to say that I knew of very few fights, as far as saying, "You people from the Cave Club area, you better stay away from Pulaski field or from the 36th Street . . ." No, that was not part of the growing up.

MK: Were you aware of neighborhood celebrations in any of those communities? Did you ever go to a Polish church dinner or . . .?

JF: Yes, because the Polish people down there, with pierogi--and you were within walking distance of all of this, it was no great thing if you didn't have a car, it was no problem; or even if you didn't have a bike. By our living at 36th Street, we were ten blocks away from either thing. **St. Alphonsus was quite a parish because they had**, what they called, the Columbia Club. It had a nice gymnasium, and it even had a bowling alley, and that was owned by St. Alphonsus. At one time there was an orphanage at St. Alphonsus. So, St. Alphonsus was a particularly nice parish because they had minstrels all the time, and that involved the kids from Center and South Wheeling along with the children from out the Pike. What we call out the Pike is where you live now and where I live. They would put these minstrel shows on. It was nothing for us to be able to have the gym for CYO dances, Catholic Youth Organization. [[Return to Top](#)] St. Alphonsus is particularly nice to use because my grandfather was the professor of music there for 40 years. He is also the grandfather of Bishop Schmidt, the Catholic bishop for the diocese of West Virginia. Although we lived in Martins Ferry my first nine years, when we moved to Wheeling we were not strangers because my grandparents lived right there and most of my father's and mother's brothers and sisters lived in Wheeling. They come from a large family of about ten. My father's family was rather small, there were only four of them. (150)

MK: You mentioned minstrels. Can you elaborate on that?

JF: Yes. That was when you were allowed to have the black face end men, and you would have six of them in every minstrel. We would have girls who would sing, and we would have young boys that could be Irish tenors. They had them every year, and they ran for at least two or three nights, and then each parish would have lawn fetes. They would block off the street, and they would have bingo, refreshments, and it was just a good way for the neighborhood and the church groups to get together and celebrate. Back then, they still had dunking pools where somebody would sit up on a board, and they would throw baseballs and hit the target, and it made them go down in the water. It was not a bit unusual for three or four weeks out of the summer, one parish or the other would be having a lawn fete.

MK: I am real interested in the minstrel stuff.

JF: In the minstrels they would have a lot of banjo playing, they would have different groups sing, they would have end men, they would have the whole choral group sing. Of course the interlocutor, he would get up and tell jokes in between the singing.

MK: End men?

JF: End men were fellows who were supposed to be black men. They would have their faces all blackened and big white lips and white gloves, and they were always joking around, and would get up and dance around a bit, but they could also sing.

MK: And what did they sing?

JF: Well, they would sing "Rosie O'Grady" or the "Sidewalks of New York", "In My Merry Oldsmobile", that type of stuff, barbershop quartet maybe. They had a lot of them.

CK: What was that other, the interlocuter?

JF: The interlocuter. He was the guy who would say, "Okay, now we are going to do this." He was the head man. The MC.

MK: What was the point of the black face?

JF: Well, back then, Al Jolson was very popular, singing "Mammy", and it was an imitation of that type of . . . Though different things they discontinued that because you were no longer allowed to do that. The Elks, right over here on 16th Street, always had big minstrels. They always had end men dressed with black face and the white gloves.

MK: End men? E N D?

JF: E N D M E N.

MK: Where does that come from?

JF: I have no idea where that comes from. [[Return to Top](#)] (188)

MK: You are doing great. Say more about the neighborhood.

JF: **The neighborhood was good** because it didn't matter in South Wheeling if you were rich or poor. There was an awful lot of little grocery stores. One store in particular, had what they called "book". You didn't pay cash for it. You could go over and put it on the bill, and then when you would pay the bill at the end of the week or the end of two weeks. They would usually send the kids over to pay the bill, and then the storekeeper would give the kid a little bag of candy. So there was kind of a little fight some time about who would go over and pay the store bill. So, when I grew up and my wife or the kids wanted to get something, I would say, "Put it on the store bill. It doesn't cost anything." I brought that into my adult life.

MK: What store was this?

JF: This was just a little regular grocery store where they would sell meat and bread, milk, canned goods, but they would let you run, what you would call "tick" or run a "book", and at the end of the week when the person got paid, then they would go over and pay the bill. What it did, it allowed parents to send kids to the store with notes. That way the mother didn't have to go and make the trip over to the store. In South Wheeling they had an awful lot of these stores where they delivered. You would call up on the phone, and there was a store down at 40th Street, Vogler's, and this old gentleman delivered clear to Warwood. He would deliver maybe a week's supply of meat to them or their boxed cereal, and he had quite a business just from delivering in his car.

CK: Vogler's do you say?

JF: Yes, Vogler's. It was at 40th and Jacob Streets. (214)

MK: What were some of the other local stores that you remember?

JF: Fisher's was one, that was on 36th and Jacob, Morningstar was down on 36th and Eoff, Staubb's was at 37th right across from Ritchie School, Seidler's's had a confectionery, Hoffman's had a little store, Pop Carpenter had a little store at 26th Street. We visited all of them, but back then we had penny candy and two cent candy, and pop was a nickel, Pepsi-Cola was a nickel. If you had a quarter, you were in great shape growing up in South Wheeling, because you walked to where you had to go, and Say-O bars and things were only a nickel or dime. There was a lot of homemade ice cream. Lash's drug store where I worked when I was in my sophomore and junior years at high school--what I did there, I made sodas, delivered packages on a bicycle. [[Return to Top](#)] I worked one summer at Bloch Brothers tobacco, and I worked every since I was a sophomore in high school. (231)

MK: Bloch Brothers Tobacco?

JF: That is Mail Pouch. It is now Helme's. It is down at 40th Street.

MK: Can you describe that plant and what you did there?

JF: Well, the youngest person that worked at the plant naturally had the worst job at the plant, because what happened is that, every night before they would quit, the last thing that they would do, is soak all the tobacco down. They would take hoses and water the tobacco, so when they would come out the next day, they could work with it. So, the first thing you had to do the next morning, if you were the new person, you had to go down in the basement and get that drainage. What they did with that drainage, I don't know, but it was the most awful smelling stuff, I mean it was enough to choke you. The fact is, the cellar that you were in, was not high enough that you could stand to do this, so you were bent over, and your nose was right in that stuff. I worked there for a whole summer.

CK: The drainage, the wet leaves, is that what you mean?

JF: Yes, the drainage from the wet leaves. It is like someone is chewing tobacco, and they spit, so you can imagine if that drained all night . . . I still don't remember what they did with the drainage. I do remember the lousy job I had, but I was very thankful to have that job because I got to work there three months. [[Return to Top](#)] I worked at a place over here that is close to Wheeling Wholesale. It is the back of where the library is now, and they handled roof shingles, and they would bring tractors and trailers in, and you had to unload those out of the tractor and trailer and take them into the warehouse, and they weighed about 80 or 90 pounds. I wasn't a very big person, because when I graduated from high school I only weighed 140 pounds. Thank goodness I didn't do that for a livelihood. I worked there one summer. I always had a paper route. I delivered morning papers, got up at 5 o'clock in the morning, delivered papers when I was in high school, rode the streetcar from 36th Street up to 14th Street in Wheeling, and then walked up to Central Catholic; but I got up early enough from the papers and going to school that I could go to Mass every morning while I was in high school. Religion has been a very big part of my life. Other than working at the drug store in high school and Telling's, then I went to work on the railroad.

MK: Before we get to that, I just wanted to get a . . . I haven't heard anybody talk about **Mail Pouch Tobacco**. Did that originate here in Wheeling?

JF: Yes. Their main office was here. It originated in Wheeling, and as you travel around, you may see many barns that are painted, "Mail Pouch Tobacco, chew Mail Pouch". **Mail Pouch was owned by Bloch Brothers**. Bloch is a very rich name in Wheeling, Stu Bloch, Tom Bloch, they are the country club set. They had all the money. They are the old time Wheeling money. One of the expressions from Mail Pouch was, "Chew Mail Pouch and spit for Blochs". It employed quite a few people. It covered two full blocks in South Wheeling, is how big their plants were. For years they had a spring outside their building down there. People would come from as far as Warwood and out the Pike to get fresh water down there, and it is right by the river bank. Bloch Brothers and Mail Pouch, one in the same, was a very big item for Wheeling.

MK: Until?

JF: Until the Blochs finally got out of it. The younger people went into the stock business. Stu Bloch is with an investment company, Hazlett, Burt and Watson, and of course, the father is retired.

CK: The father is who?

JF: The father was Tom. Stu was the son, and he is with the investment company, and just recently he was president of the Professional Golf Association when they had the PGA down in Atlanta. He was the one who was head of the rules committee and so on and so forth. They were very, very strong, and wielded a lot of power in the city of Wheeling. Then, Helme took it over. Then it looked like we were going to lose a hundred and some jobs down there because Helme's Tobacco was talking about moving out of here, and the county commissioners went and worked out a deal with Helme's by giving them a tax break, and we got them to move, not only people from New Jersey into here, so we retained those hundred jobs and brought about 50 more jobs to South Wheeling with Helme's Tobacco. Now what is going to happen to Helme's now, with all the things the Congress is putting on with smokeless tobacco and everything else, just remains to be seen. I only worked there once, so I can't relate too much . . . I am not quite sure how they make the chewing tobacco. I knew that it had to lay overnight. It was wetted down, is what they called it, and how they did it, I really couldn't tell you. I don't think they made stogies down there. [[Return to Top](#)] **Marsh Wheeling, up here around 10th Street**, they hand-rolled stogies for years, and they had people who were there, and it was almost like on a production line--the more stogies you rolled and the better you got, the more money you made. [[Return to Top](#)] I can't relate too much to Bloch Brothers other than working there that one summer.

MK: Do you know anybody who rolled those stogies?

JF: Yes, my uncle rolled them, Mr. Niggemeyer. In fact, Mr. Niggemeyer's son is a bailiff here for Judge Wilson. So, he could probably tell you. He is up on the fourth floor.

MK: Mr. Niggemeyer is still living?

JF: The one that rolled the stogies?

MK: Yes.

JF: No, but like I say, his son is, and he is 66. In fact, that was the family that we moved upstairs of when we moved from Ferry over to South Wheeling, because Mrs. Niggemeyer was a Fahey.

MK: Is Fahey German?

JF: No, Fahey is Irish. My mother's people were German, that was Schiffer. That was Professor Schiffer who was the organist at St. Alphonsus. They probably all married Germans, all the Schiffer people, but my father was Irish, so my mother married an Irish person.

MK: It was your grandfather on your mother's side who was the father of the bishop?

JF: Right. Bishop Schmidt's mother was Eulayal Schiffer. So Professor Schiffer was the father of my mother.³⁴⁴

MK: You must have been exposed to some of the German singing society?

JF: Beethoven down there, it was right at 36th and Jacob Streets, but I am not musically inclined, but Mr. Niggemeyer was. He was part of that group. He sang with them, with that barbershop quartet and all of that. They were very active for many years down there.

MK: There is no trace of that left now?

JF: No. None that I know of, and that is a disaster. The same as our trains is a disaster, but we will get to that later.³⁵⁴

MK: I guess we could start with the B&O. You went to work with them, you said, right out of high school?

JF: I went to work for the B&O Railroad in August 1947. I had been out of school one year, and in that one year I was out of school, I worked for Sealtest Ice Cream on the River Road, it is about 1st Street in Wheeling. It was a very nice job because I worked in the cooler a lot. You got to eat a lot of ice cream, but I knew that I wasn't going to be able to do that all my life. So how I got the job with the railroad was my wife was a bookkeeper at the **Catholic Women's League** which was a place similar to the YWCA, but it was for young girls who worked in town that may have lived as far as Moundsville, and they would stay there for five days, and then they would go home. They probably could stay there for one or two dollars a week. It was simply just a bed and a small room. My wife was the bookkeeper there, and she was also the cashier at lunch time because they had a cafeteria. [[Return to Top](#)] She happened to get very friendly with one of the ladies who was staying there who was the secretary to the superintendent of the B&O at 16th Street. We were talking about getting married, and Rosemary said, "Gee, why don't you get Jack to put an application in on the B&O." And we said we would love to, but we don't know anyone. She said she would get the application for you, and she did. In order for me to go to work for the

B&O, I went to Lorain, Ohio. I only stayed in Lorain, Ohio for two weeks, because at 19 years of age and never being away from home, I became rather homesick, so I came home, and a friend of mine from high school--by this time I had found out that his father was the chief clerk down at Benwood--and I talked to him. He said, "We don't do the hiring." We had a small flood out in Goosetown, and we went out and helped this lady, and her brother was the chief clerk in Wheeling. So, because of our helping her during the flood moving her stuff, she talked to her brother, and then he got me the job in Benwood. **I worked in Benwood most of my career with the B&O.** I was very lucky. I started out as what they called an "outside caller". What you did, was anybody who worked for the B&O that lived within a mile of the railroad and didn't have a telephone, you would walk to their houses and tell them what time they went to work, because the trains were going out at various hours. They would pull a lot of tricks on you, the ones that had phones. If they knew there was a run coming up that was going to Grafton, or was a run that wasn't going to make a whole lot of money--they worked off of an extra board, and they watched that extra board rather carefully to try to get the better jobs--they would deliberately not answer the phone. So, then the chief caller would send this outside caller down to McMechon, and you would walk down there and either find him at his house or the local thirst parlor. You would go in there, and once you caught him he was stuck. He had to go to work. So, I worked that job for about three months. It was only three days a week to start with. It paid \$8.24 a day because I recall telling my father that I wanted to get married, and he said, "How can you get married making \$8.24 a day, and you are only working three days a week?" I said, "Well, it is very simple, father. People work in town at these shoe stores, and they work six days a week, and some of them are making \$22. By only working three days a week, I have a lot of chance for extra work." And that is how it worked out. Besides having to go to these outside homes, we also had two sleeping facilities in Benwood. It was called the YMCA, we had a Railroad YMCA, and they had 28 beds in it, and a restaurant in it. Next door to it was a private person that had 16 beds, and it was called Snyder's, and he also cooked meals. These people had to be available around the clock because of the trains coming in at different times. If they came in and wanted a bed, there had to be a bed available and there had to be a cook available. I worked that outside calling job, I think, maybe six months or so. Then a job come open in the yard as an outside checker, and what that job involved was that as trains would pull into the yard, you would take a sheet of paper out with you, and you would take down the initial and number of every car as it went by. When the train went in, the conductor would bring the bills in. You would sit down, and you would go through what you checked going by, you would match it up with each car that went by, and when the bill and the car matched up, then you made a manifest with the numbers you had you would write a symbol out from that. If it was going to Newark, Ohio, it was CD. If it was going to Cincinnati it was CT. If it was going to St. Louis it was PO. If it was short of that, we would call them short hauls, and Bellaire would be 1,001, Barnesville was 1023, Cambridge 1039, Zanesville 1057. So that is how you listed the train. After you listed it, then you became the outside chalker. You would get a piece of yellow chalk. You would walk down over that train, and on the far corner you would put those initials that you just put on your list. What happened after that, then you would bring the list back up, you would give it to the yardmaster. The yardmaster would look it over, realize what tracks he had available, so that then he could break up that train, so he could start lining it up to go to different destinations. After he did that, then he went over to the conductor's shanty, lined the conductor and usually the two brakeman were there, he would line them up, given them that list that was prepared. The cars were marked so you only needed one list, you only needed the list for the conductor, because the guy who was

going to cut the cars off, which was called the field man, he would know just by looking at the ends of the cars, and they would put them into the different tracks. Once they got that switched up, then we would have trains come in from Parkersburg or Pittsburgh or Newark, Ohio. We had four divisions coming in. Then we would have to start worrying about building the trains up to start sending them back out. I only worked that outside checking and chalking job for maybe a year. We got to realize that this was probably 1949 or 1950 then. The teletype machines just came in on the railroad. These men that had been clerks on the railroad for 25-30 years, when they brought teletype machines in, they looked at them with total fear. They said, "Not me". Well, here I am, a young boy, 19-20 years old, and they said, "Can you operate a teletype machine?". I said, "Sure, I can." Well, I had taken typing for two years. These fellows wouldn't even touch them, so it didn't take you long from typing to a teletype machine. Then, I got a plum job simply because the men with all of the seniority didn't want to do it. They were afraid of them. So, I worked that job for, maybe, three years, and I had a very nice train master, who took a liking to me, and he said, "I would like you to start working yardmaster." Well, to work yardmaster at a young age was unheard of. So, he said, "I will start you out on the night general job." And all that was that you had a yardmaster, but you were there, more or less, on the job training, but these older fellows resented very much a young person coming in and doing that, but it gave you a terrific amount of experience. Back then, most of the yardmasters came out of train service. It was unheard of to come out of clerical forces; but, like I said, this man was very generous to me, and he gave me a lot of opportunities. By the time I was on the railroad three or four years at the most, I was working yardmaster. Then, I worked the yardmaster job for 36 years, and ultimately became the daylight yardmaster which is the prize, because you usually work 25-30 years before you get a daylight job on the railroad. At that time, the railroad was a very busy place. Wheeling was a hub of activities because of the amount of passenger trains we had in and out of Wheeling. We had three crews assigned to do nothing but Wheeling work. They worked the industries in South Wheeling, and they switched the passenger trains. When the passenger trains came in, it was the case of taking one Pullman off or adding a Pullman, so we had to have a crew available. We had a yard office in Center Wheeling, which is just about where the filtration plant is now, and that was manned around the clock. At one time we had a yard office in Bellaire, so we had quite a few . . . We probably had four yard offices within the Tri-State area, and then our next big office was in Holloway, Ohio, because that was where the coal came in and went to the lakes, up to Lorain and Toledo. It was a tremendously busy place. Usually when the trains went into Holloway, they would go in as 100 car shipments, so the same way, coming out there would be 100 cars of empties coming out. Most of our signings weren't that big, that we could only meet at certain places, so we probably ran, 2-3, what we called "humpers" a day. That is like 300 loads of coal going to Holloway, Ohio; like amount of empties coming out of there. They had to go through Benwood yard. This was the yardmaster's responsibility to make sure that you had tracks available, that you could keep open to get these trains through, but at the same time, you had to keep your main tracks open most of the time for the passenger trains. We had passenger trains in the morning running to Huntington. We had passenger trains in the morning running to Cleveland. We had a passenger train running to Pittsburgh. So, we probably had 8-10 passenger trains that we had to leave the main track open for. We could use the main track for freight, but we had to clear it off in time. It became risky business. A lot of times we would overload a train, thinking that we knew what the tonnage is, we know what the mileys and the steam engine are supposed to haul, but if it is a real good engineer, we could take a chance and put maybe one more load of coal on him; and a lot of times

it worked, and a lot of times it backfired, because when they had to make a run for the Bellaire Bridge to go across the bridge either to Newark, Ohio or to Holloway, they would hang up halfway out on the bridge. Then, we had two choices. We either backed him up and let him take another run for it, or we put a helper behind him. If the passenger train was due, we couldn't take a chance of letting him back up, so we had to cut our yard crew off, get it behind him, try to get word to him by way of the whistle, that, "Hey, we're behind you, we're ready to push you", because we didn't have telephones, we didn't have radios then. One time I started a train, and he hung up. He got one-fourth of the way out on the bridge. We couldn't get communication to him. I didn't have another crew there to go out and shove him, so I had to walk out on the cat walk to tell him to back up. It was dark. It was in the morning, and he backed up. I knew the passenger train was due, so I started running because I had to get off of the bridge. I ran about three or four steps, and my foot would fall down in between the ties. By the time I got to the other side, I didn't know whether I was dead or whether I was completely bruised from my shins hitting. Only one time, other than that, was I in serious trouble. We were re-railing a car in Benwood yard. When a car would kick a switch or something and the wheel would go off, then you had to try to put wooden things in there to try to walk it back on. So, they were trying to re-rail the car, and they were doing pretty good, when they called out from the yard office and they said, "Jack, you are wanted on the phone." So, I walked away and started back to the yard office, and just as I did, the wheel of the car caught one of these chunks, and it sailed right by my head. I didn't see it. If I did, I would have died, but the three people who were watching, one of them, I think, passed out, because they thought sure it was going to hit me in the back of the head. I did get caught in between a derailment. We could see it coming. We had kicked a car down the lead. The engineer that was pulling out of the track didn't see that it didn't clear, so I am standing out there with a lantern, and I am waving down and waving down trying to stop him, and he didn't see it, and finally he came out and hit the car. I was between the car and the engine. But, the railroad was a very, very rewarding job to me personally. We were able to raise seven children, because my wife didn't work then, at the time, and we got to raise a family and have a pretty nice house, and it is, I guess, because I was at the right place at the right time on the railroad.

MK: Great story. You did in 3-4 years what it would normally take a person 20-25 years . . . ?

JF: The fact that . . . Why they let me do it was, and I credit it to the teletype machines. The fact that I was willing, I was young, I had nothing to lose, so I was working a regular job with the teletype machines, while some of these older fellows with 25-30 years were just working extra or just working midnight. So, through the teletype machines, that kind of got me geared for the yardmaster's job. I didn't get the daylight yardmaster job until much later, but even the fact of being 22-23 and working the yardmaster job was unheard of; but, because I had a gentleman that really took a liking to me and he did me a tremendous favor. I was telling her that when I was mayor, I worked for the B&O. There were four mayors in our office that worked for the B&O; the mayor of Wheeling, the mayor of Benwood, the mayor of McMechon, and the mayor of Bellaire. The railroad advocated that we get involved in politics. They didn't frown on the amount of personal calls that we got on the telephones from constituents or because of business with the city. It was good for them. It was good for the railroad, because not only did it bring business through your political office, someone might say, "I want to talk to the mayor", and the first thing you know he finds out you work for the railroad, and maybe he would throw a little business our way. If we had problems, like if we had a street blocked, say the engine broke down

or one of the air hoses came apart and the train went into emergency, and there you are with traffic tied up and there is no problem, because, you know, we'll call the mayor. They are not going to call the Police Chief, because the mayor is not going to let the Police Chief do too much about it. So, it was fulfilling in that way. I told her that I have a favorite story about a mayor. "You can always tell a mayor, but you can't tell him much." I can say that, I guess, because of being a mayor.

MK: It must have been a tremendous lot to keep track of, being yardmaster. I can't imagine.

JF: Well, it was, and then I don't know if you ever played double pinochle, but if you are not a card player, in double pinochle you get 20 cards, and it is kind of like these cars that you are going to switch down there. You only have a certain amount of tracks that you can put them in, and a lot of times you have to double switch them because you have to put three of the same classification in that track because of the limited amount of tracks; but then it became an art in the form you knew what your crews could do. You had a lot of dead beats, but what we did have, we had a lot of young professional kids, college kids, who would want to work on the railroad during the summer, so they could get enough to go to medical school or law school; and that was rewarding because you knew those types of guys wanted the job, they were sincere in that they were going to make something out of themselves after they got through trying to work their way through school. So, that was great. I guess that was the nice part, knowing that these people were going to make something of themselves. We had, down at Benwood, a turntable, we had a diesel shop and a steam shop. We had car repair shop. They could only repair cars from 7:30 in the morning until 3:30 because, what would happen after 3:30, then the cars that got repaired, we would have to send a switch engine down, switch out the ones that they fixed; the ones that they didn't fix, we would have to place back, and then take them up and put them in their proper turn so they could go out. Sometimes you might delay a car for two or three days because it may have been in a derailment, it needed a new set of wheels, it needed a whole draw bar or something like that, and then we would get guys who would put an engine on the turntable, and when they would get the engine turned around and when they went to put it in the proper stall, they may not have had the rail matched with the rail that it was going in, and they would derail the engine, so then that turned out to be a tremendous amount of work. We would have to go and get the steam crane out to help lift that engine back up onto the track. Well, that delayed because you had to get the fire lit and get the steam up to a point where it could do this. It was, I guess, quite interesting, more interesting, when we had steam engines than when we had diesels. Now, that transition became tough for a lot of the older engineers. They would have much rather broken their backs shoveling that coal, than trying to work that diesel engine. People just hated change; because, then there was the automatic brake valve and that kind of stuff they didn't have, but they loved that steam engine, loved to hear that whistle blowing, that they are coming up. So, the diesels changed the railroad industry tremendously, because they could haul so much more. We could couple so many more of them together. On some of these areas, we could run 150 cars of coal. One time, after we got the diesels, we had the real heavy snow in 1950. Like I say, I lived in Goosetown, and it was adjacent to the railroad track, it came out of #1 tunnel, so I called and said, "I can't get to work this afternoon because I can't get in town to get the bus." They said, "No, no. There is going to be a piker come by, there is going to be a train from Pittsburgh come by. We will give them a message that they are to stop in front of your house and pick you up. So, the train came by, stopped, picked me up, and I went to work on the train, and that night I went

home on the train. I have a son-in-law who is an orthodontist, and one of his biggest thrills was getting to run a diesel from Benwood Yard out to our house. He still talks about that. Here he is, an orthodontist, and he could do all kinds of things, but that was a big thrill to him. We don't have as much as a toy train in our house. Not that I didn't really enjoy my tenure with the railroad, but I don't put a train up at Christmas, nor do any of my kids.

MK: Had enough.

JF: Had enough. As I said, the railroad was very good to me, and it upsets me when I hear people knock the railroad, because we had an awful lot of sandbaggers who would just delay on you, and they would go down in the yard, and they couldn't see you and you couldn't see them, and they would not pull out of a track for 20 or 30 minutes. So, finally you would have to walk down and see what the trouble was. They always had an excuse--"I couldn't get the hand brake knocked off of that car" or "The air brakes were sticking. I could get the bleed rod pulled out." So, there were a lot of the tricks of the trade, but I would say 90% of them were very earnest employees that really appreciated their job, wanted a job, and liked what the job paid. (787)

MK: At what point in your career did the transition to diesel occur?

JF: I would have to say I was there, if I started in 1947, I guess by the late 50s the diesels were coming in. They just changed the whole . . . Because the trains could run so much faster, they didn't have to stop. If we were running a train to Pittsburgh out of Benwood, it may have to stop at the sewage plant because we had a watering thing there, where they could stop and put additional water on to that steam engine, but with the diesels you didn't have to worry about that. When we had the steam engines, another delay we would get is if we were hauling livestock. Livestock had to be watered every so many hours, so as they would go from Benwood, before they could go past Wheeling up onto the viaduct, they had to stop there; stop so that the livestock would be spotted right at that thing, and then water the livestock. That took considerable time. You had to make sure that you had the livestock close to the engine, because that way they could see where they were going when they were ready to proceed. But, I guess, there was a terrific amount of love for steam engines. People that never worked on the railroad, just the sound of that whistle and the bell and the clickety-clack, was so much more.

MK: Especially in a hilly . . .

JF: Right. Where I lived, in Goosetown, the trains after they came out of the tunnel, if they would get a red block right before they made that crossing, then that meant they had to stop there. If they were to their full capacity of tonnage or even overloaded, then they would have to grind their wheels and grind the wheels, and then try to back up and put sand down, so that they could get a fresh start for it. The diesel changed the railroad completely, for good or bad. You could get your shipments there much faster. Then, they started bringing in the trailer cars on flat cars. That didn't make a whole big difference to us at Benwood, because we had our tofsy ramp just at Boggs Run, and it didn't take a whole lot to take an engine up there and switch them, because we didn't get that great amount. One of the big things of the yardmaster was trying to keep clear of the passenger trains to make sure your main tracks were open. You had to be extremely careful when you switched the cars in the yard, because of dangerous cars, of caustic

soda and stuff like that that came up from Pittsburgh Plate, chlorine. Because, if you would switch those cars and you would switch them into a track where there were cars sitting there and if they would hit solid, then that tank lid might pop off, and it could be very devastating to that poor trainman that might be going to set that brake on the next 828 car. There were very strict regulations that you couldn't put a dangerous car . . . it had to be at least five cars away from the engine. It had to be at least five cars ahead of the caboose. You couldn't put an explosive car within so many cars of the engine or the caboose. Then, they got to the point where they started putting "explosives" on this thing, and it might be a box of matches. The government came in and said you had to list this, and it might be matches they had in there. Then the technicalities and the rules became tighter than, in my opinion, what they should have been. The AAR, the American Association of Railroads, would come in, and they would have inspectors come in and they would check. Their job was necessary, but then they became nitpickers because to self-assure themselves that their jobs would stay on. They became a very big irritant to the yardmasters. Then, we became also like enemies, because, "You are doing this deliberately. You know we are on a close time here. You know we have to get this train moving, but you are coming in here and saying this car is defective." If the brake didn't come out far enough, the piston, then they would shop the car for air brakes. There were so many things that they could shop a car for, meaning that you would have to kick that car out of that train, put it in the bad order track. It means at least a one day delay to that car, but they were necessary, I am sure. At that time, they weren't necessary. One of my worst experiences was I was working the night turn yardmaster job, and we had a train of coal laying down around McMechon, and they had to use the bridge. They made their air test so they were all ready to go, and at the same time, we had a train of empties over in Bellaire that had called and asked for permission to use the bridge. We had some minor derailment in the yard, and I was out there, and the clerk said, "The humper is ready to go." I said, "Go ahead and turn him loose," not remembering that I had also turned the train of empties loose to use this same bridge. The fellow that was below had 110 loads of coal, and he was coming up the yard. He had a great big miley on the front end, and he had a steam helper on the back, so he had to run as hard as he could to get a run for that bridge. The empties were halfway out on the bridge, and it finally dawned on me what we did, so I am out there and I am trying to get the humper stopped, but I know that if he stops too fast, he is going to buckle the train or pull a draw-bar. We got him stopped, but not too far away from the bridge because there was no way we could get the empties stopped, they were clear out in the middle of the bridge. So, ultimately we had to get a hold of the flagman on the Holloway train with all of the coal, get him to go back down and make sure the switches were aligned, back down far enough so that I could bring that empty coal train through, and then he had to use the other main track down there; but I only had one clear track to send them up through the yard on, so that was my problem. But that was quite scary. I was quite young then and we had awfully good engineers, and they helped me a lot. They took care of me. Most of them really took care of me because they gave me the benefit of their experience, and it was very nice and I was very appreciative of it. (876)

CK: How do you give word? There weren't any radios then, how did you get word to a flagman on his way to Holloway?

JF: By a whistle signal. He would whistle two shorts and a long; that meant we are going to back up. They could hear that a mile or so . . . That is what you had. Other than that, other than the

head brakeman walk those 110 car lengths and go down and tell the flagman we have a problem, you have to open that switch back up and back down on there so this other train can come through this north siding and use the other main. Once he gets out, then we'll have the bridge. So it was either a case of using your feet or listening for the whistle to tell them when to back up. The radios, believe it or not, were not as beneficial to the railroad itself. It was very beneficial to the people using the radios, but where the railroad got stuck on them was that people would misuse them and use them for overtime. Where you could normally send a crew over to Martins Ferry and do all of our industrial work over there within an eight hour period, and we would have radio contact, very conveniently the radio didn't work, and they would get stuck for a train that was going to use the bridge, where, if they did their normal thing, listened on the radio like they were supposed to, . . . but they didn't hear the radio. "The radio or the battery must have went bad." Almost every derailment you had on the railroad after we got radio, it was, "The radio gave out on us. We didn't hear the stop signal." If he didn't get the switch over, "The radio cut out on us." So, the radio wasn't used to the best advantage of what it should have been because certain people saw the advantages of either getting overtime out of it or trying to escape a cause that should have been given to them for a discipline by saying, "Oh no, I couldn't hear. The radio didn't work. It malfunctioned." Human error was very seldom admitted. It was always a malfunction of the radio. I am sure you have heard enough. [[Return to Top](#)] (909)

MK: Let's take a stab at Goosetown now for a while. Maybe the way into that is to ask how you and your wife met?

JF: We were sophomores in high school. We went to a basketball game over at Bellaire. My sister was a year older than me. She had gone to the game, so we had gone over on the streetcar. After the game, my sister and I think there were only six or eight of us from Central Catholic that went to the game . . . At that time, Central Catholic was an all boys' school, and the girls' school was St. Joseph's Academy. They were side by side, but we did not have classes together, and in fact the nuns were so afraid that we might get to know the girls at the Academy, we had separate lunch hours. Anyhow, we had gone to this ball game, and my sister said, "We are going to stop here and get a hot dog." In order to do that, we left the gym, walked through this park in Bellaire, and so there were only two odd people and that was, at this time, my future wife and myself. So, evidently we walked together, and that is where we first met. We went together all through high school, and we graduated in 1946. We got married in 1948. We had our first child in eleven or thirteen months, I forget; in 1949, I know that. We got married in September, and we had Cassie in November 1949. Anyhow, when we got married, we moved in with her parents who lived in Goosetown. **The reason it is called Goosetown** is way back many, many years ago, a lady did raise geese down there, is what they tell us. That is the closest we have come to how the place got its name. It was a very, very active, little community. There were probably 75-100 homes there at one time. When the highway came in, it destroyed . . . There are probably 22 homes down there now. It is a dead-end street when you go down off McCollough Street down into Goosetown. [Top] **It is a dead-end, and it was a terrific place** to raise kids, because you had very little traffic, and it was just traffic of people who lived there. We had a big playground called Tunnel Green, and it got its name because of the tunnel, the B&O tunnel coming through there. [[Return to Top](#)] **There were two, so called, "thirst parlors"**. There was the Spot and there was the Duquesne Club. The Duquesne Club always had really good baseball teams. At Tunnel Green they played baseball and football. Wheeling Central Catholic used Tunnel Green

for their practice field for years, and we played our home baseball games there. It was just a nice place to raise kids. You knew everybody. Everybody knew everybody, and if a stranger came in, they knew that person didn't belong here. When you referred to South Wheeling, was there a turf battle, there was out there. If they didn't know you, they were going to ask, "Who are you? What are you doing out here?" [[Return to Top](#)]

MK: Pretty guarded.

JF: Yes, very much so. (956)

MK: And your wife's family was?

JF: My wife's family, her name was Flading. She was an only child. Her father worked for Blaw-Knox. He was laid off for quite a period of time, and when he was laid off, he would pick up any kind of work he could. **At that time, the city operated an incinerator out in Goosetown**, and he would work there when he could. There was also a glass works there, in Goosetown, and when it went out, then that is probably when they put the incinerator in. After the incinerator went out, there was an area there, and that is when the Ace Garage was built there. My father-in-law was out of work at that time, so he built the Ace Garage along with Vinnie Jacovetty, who was then the owner of the Ace Garage. When the road came in and it took the Ace Garage, all of the cement blocks that there were--they carried away and took them down to 40th Street which is now the Iola Club, which is right along the river by Bloch Brothers. [[Return to Top](#)] So it is funny, what goes around, comes around. You keep hearing about Bloch Brothers and the river . . . So, Katie was not only born in this house, but her father was born in that house. His mother died, and he, along with two of his sisters, were put in the St. Alphonsus Orphanage for a period of time. Then, later, his father remarried, and they took the kids out of the Orphanage. Back then, it was not an unusual situation to put kids in an orphanage, and one of their favorite sayings was, "If you don't behave yourself, I'm going to put you in the orphanage." It was kind of a retaliation method for the kids. Later it became, as parents, if you had a car and if they acted up and went to someone's home, you said, "If you don't behave, I am going to send you to the car, and you will sit in the car until we are ready to leave." Her father lived there, and a lot of them worked either up at the glass house or at the incinerator. (990)

MK: Were the German breweries active at that time?

JF: **The German breweries**, you had Schmulach and that was down at 33d Street, and they were very rich people and they built this mansion up in Roney's Point, and it burnt down. The county now owns that area. We have 500 acres up at Roney's Point. Hopefully, we are going to gut what was left of the Schmulach mansion, and where the . . . We had a TB sanitarium up there, and hopefully we are going to gut it, and maybe we can put some useful thing up there. We would love to sell part of the acreage. I tried to get the regional jail to build up there, but they didn't buy that. [[Return to Top](#)] The other brewery we had was Raymond's Brewery. I am not quite sure where that was. We had the Belmont Brewery in Bellaire. In fact, I have a mug that old Mr. Gompers gave me, and he has been dead 25-30 years, and the mug was over 100 years old when he gave it to me. We had three big breweries around here.

CK: Which Gompers is that?

JF: He was a brother to Sam Gompers.

CK: He lived here in Wheeling?

JF: The brother did. I think Sam did at one time, because his nephew is Joe Gompers who is with Gompers and Buch, and they are a very well known item here in Wheeling. They have one of the better law firms. The other person who was from Wheeling was Walter Reuther. There was rather a few famous people who . . . You could certainly put Tom Bloch in that same breath of people who did this kind of stuff.

CK: Did you know Walter Reuther?

JF: I met him once. [[Return to Top](#)] (1034)

MK: Your wife's family that had been in this house so long . . . Did they have any well established traditions around holidays, that sort of thing reflective of their German . . . ?

JF: Not really, because although her father--his name was Leo Adrian Flading, he married a girl from Martins Ferry who was born on St. Patrick's Day, but her name was Freda Wilhelmina Oberdick, so they were very German, between he and she, and so my wife is totally German; where I am half German and half Irish. No, I would think that our side of the family has more tradition because our children, the whole tribe, comes for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We have 26-28 for Thanksgiving, and we are very traditional for the holidays, Fourth of July, etc. My sister, Molly, who as I told you was my oldest sister, at the time when my mother died, was Molly McCormick, and she later became a councilwoman here in Wheeling, and her son is currently on City Council, Tim McCormick. She was the great organizer of our family for family picnics and parades and stuff. We love that kind of stuff, patriotic. They said if they would have a flag, Molly and I would be wanting to have a parade, so we really like family traditions.

MK: What were some of--any of your mother's recipes survive?

JF: No, not really. Pot roast and mashed potatoes. Our family is known that if they are going to have dinner, they have to have mashed potatoes. We were great meat and potato eaters. That was certainly a tradition with the Schiffer side of the family. They loved to eat, but it was homemade bread, meat, gravy, and mashed potatoes. (1056)

MK: Jumping back, I am sorry to jump around so much, but jumping back to the railroad--Were there labor problems or labor difficulties associated with the railroad?

JF: Very little. I was most fortunate. I probably lost one day in my 40 years with the railroad because of labor difficulties. They went on a strike, but the government would step in so quickly back then, that they wouldn't allow them to stay out on strike. I would say, that the most I probably ever lost was one day. I was never furloughed one day, and that is unusual. If I miss you on furlough, that mean that business got slow and they had to start laying off by seniority;

but, because of the job I took with the teletype machine, if they were going to reduce the forces, they would reduce the outside people first, and try to get by without someone going down and putting marks on the cars. I never lost a day that way. I lost, I think, one day. I told you about the railroad YMCA, and being at the right place at the right time, I was on the Board of Directors of the B&O YMCA, and I was about 24 years old, and it was a thrill for me, because the superintendent of the railroad was chairman of that board, train masters were on that board, and there I am, sitting there goggy-eyed, "What am I doing here?". It gave me a great amount of self-confidence. Later I ran for public office. I felt that they were responsible for letting me do that, and I thank them very much. (1084)

CK: What did you mean about the government stepping in?

JF: The government wouldn't let the railroad stay out on strike because, at that time, you would either have defense material or if there wasn't a war going on, you had produce that was coming from California. These people would be lobbyists and get after the Senate and say, "You know, that stuff is going to spoil. The meat is going to rot." So, the government would step in. You wouldn't have more than a one day strike.

CK: How would they do it? Would they have scabs on the line?

JF: No, no. The government forced us back to work.

MK: Injunction.

JF: Injunction, right. And, maybe there would be two or three strikes in my tenure on the railroad, but one might hit my relief day, that it was my day off, so I didn't miss a day's work anyhow. [[Return to Top](#)] **When I worked yardmaster**, for years it was a six day a week job. Like I say, if you worked day turn, you got Wednesday off. If you worked midnight, you got Tuesday off. If you worked afternoon turn, you got Monday off. The lousiest days of the week, and we worked six days a week. When we finally went on a five day work week, then I left Benwood to go to New Martinsville to work, which is called Brookland Junction, simply because it was a day turn job and it had Saturday and Sunday off; and I thought I was in heaven, because then, when the family had picnics, I could go, because they were on weekends. I would never lay off work just to go to a picnic. I would go to the picnic if it were on Saturday or Sunday, and I was on afternoon turn, so I would have to leave at 12 or 12:30 and go to work. [[Return to Top](#)] But, I had a family. I had to make sure that I could support the family. I did very little drinking because it was expensive. I never went out to drink, I mean to a bar. We would go and buy beer by the case, take it to our house, but to go to a beer place, that wasn't our way of living. (1133)

MK: How did you find time with this long work week and tremendous family responsibilities-- How did you find time to run for public office?

JF: It was 1971. Most of our children were--we probably had one in grade school, one or two, but by that time, I was now on day turn, and it was no great problem. The railroad advocated that . . . They certainly didn't deter us from going into public office, and I was allowed to take all the phone calls from outside that I wanted. I had a great interest in politics. My mother-in-law was

such a great believer in FDR. She thought he could walk on water. So, I did listen, and I made time available. When I went on day turn, my whole life changed, because things were done after working hours. I got a lot more active in the church. I became president of the Holy Name, and got involved in the Knights of Columbus, and they were family oriented things, so I wasn't leaving my family anywhere. I was still with the family. In other words, you didn't become complacent and said, "I'm going home. I am through work for the day, so I will just sit in the chair for the rest of the evening." I guess we were busybodies. We wanted to be busy. (1148)

MK: Tell me about your campaign to become mayor, how you organized it.

JF: Well, I ran for City Council. There were nine seats open on City Council, and the mayor was selected after the nine were voted in. Unbeknown to me, there was a slate of nine people who were running for City Council. I was not on the slate. I did not know there was a slate. It didn't bother me one way or the other, but I ran in a field of seven people, running for the second ward. I think I won by 28 votes. I was a lousy campaigner. I didn't like to go door to door. I would talk to people that I knew, but by that time, I had been involved in many church activities. I was an usher at church. I was a lector at church. I was very busy with our grade school because of having seven children, so the people in the parish knew me. The same way with the high school. Those people knew me. So, I just thought, "Well, I like politics." I told my wife, I think it was on April 1, and that was very fitting because it was April's Fools Day, and I said, "Katie, I am going to run for City Council." She said, "That is wonderful. You go ahead and run, because that would be a big joke and you would never get elected anyhow." So I said, "I'm running." My cousin who was the bishop, he was only a priest at that time, said, "I will back you. I will pay your filing fee." I did run, and I beat the other six people. Actually, I beat the slate, because the other eight on the slate, got elected. I served four years with one of the best mayors the City of Wheeling ever had, Jimmy Haranzo, who is an attorney in town and is on the Civic Center Auditorium Board, a very nice gentleman. After serving those four years, then I decided I was going to run again. The Vice Mayor got into a very tight race with a fellow and got very disgusted over it, and when he only beat him by a few votes, he came out with this big statement that, "It is no honor to be mayor in the City of Wheeling." The newspaper printed it. So, it kind of put him in a box about wanting to be mayor by downgrading it. I was the leading vote-getter throughout the city, and I thought, "Oh my God. I hope I am not going to have to be mayor," because I didn't want to be mayor. But it happened, and I was appointed mayor. It was a tremendous honor. You can do a lot of things in your life, and whether you are a good mayor or a bad mayor, you were mayor. The mayor was not what people think. We had a City Manager. The City Manager made the day to day decisions. You were just a ceremonial type of person. You ran the City Council meetings. You cut the ribbons or anything like that. If a dignitary came to town, that was your job. I accepted it in that manner. I was not anything beyond what my duty was supposed to be. Because, technically, I did not want the job. I took it, and I was proud to be mayor. I am proud to this day to say I was mayor of Wheeling. [[Return to Top](#)] Then, I did that for four years, and then I sat out for two years. Then, I got kind of itchy, and thought that I wouldn't mind being a county commissioner, because that is a good paying job. As the mayor you got \$1 a month, \$25 a meeting, you met every week, but because you were mayor, you got an extra \$100, because you were chairman of the sanitary board. I said, "My God, chairman of the Sanitary Board? I don't even know what a water line looks like, much less. . ." "No, no. The code says that the mayor has to be the chairman." I said, "The city engineer ought to be the

chairman." "No, no." Then I left that job. I fulfilled that four year term. Sat out the two years. Ran for county commissioner. Ran against an incumbent, but he had a few problems, because there are three county commissioners, and the other two county commissioners didn't like him. So I ran against him, and I was lucky. I beat him by quite a few votes, but you get lucky now and then. So, then I worked with two very talented county commissioners, one was a CPA. He had a lot of expertise as far as government financing, so on and so forth. The other gentleman had been in for twelve years, so he knew all about the county, water line extensions. So, then it came time for reelection, and I thought, "Oh, gee. This job actually pays money. The other one didn't." By that time, the county commissioner's job was paying \$12,000 a year compared to \$2,000 I was getting as mayor, so I ran for reelection I ran unopposed in the primary. I ran unopposed in the general. From there, here I am, six years later, still a county commissioner. I don't know if I did a good job or a bad job, but they haven't kicked me out yet, but I think they would like to.

CK: What is the job description of a county commissioner.

JF: When I find out, I will let you know. No, it is basically that you are in charge of the budgets of all the elected officials here, the assessor, you have charge of the sheriff's budget, you lay the tax levy. But, we in Ohio County are very fortunate. We have a county administrator, so again, I am not in here every day. It's not like that. Other counties in the State of West Virginia--we have 55 counties--54 of those counties have hearings for the mentally impaired, whether they have to send them to Weston. They have, almost like, but not quite, divorce proceedings, but if someone is going to be stable. Back in 1935 or 1939 a Ohio County was exempt from that. Back in 1935, Ohio County was exempt from any roads. We don't have so much as a shovel for road maintenance. All of our roads are either state road, city roads, or orphan roads. Orphan roads mean that the state road takes care of them, or that the people who live on those roads have to take care of them themselves. We don't even own a shovel. That is not the complete truth, because we do have the airport up there and we do have equipment at the airport, but we don't send it out beyond the airport.

MK: That is one big headache you don't have to worry about.

JF: You know, some guys fall into it.

MK: Sounds, luck of the Irish, I would say.

JF: I would say very much so. (1283)

MK: Wheeling is an incredible place. You know, it grows on me every day, and I can see why people love it so much. I was wondering if you were to try to describe this valley, the lay of the land and the river and so on, to someone who has never seen it before, how would you describe it?

JF: I would describe Wheeling a lot like Ireland. Our kids were gracious enough for our 25th wedding anniversary to give us a trip to Ireland. The grass is so beautiful over there. The people are so nice. The waiters and everyone, even help one another. I see Wheeling as a beautiful place. We have Oglebay Park. We have Wheeling Park. We have the dog track, which used to be

a horse track. There used to be an amusement park over there. We have the Jamboree. Now we have the wharf, the river. We have so much potential along with the people. The people are the most important thing in Wheeling. At one time, we had a lot of coal mines, a lot of steel. You know, that is gone. We are never going to get back to that point where we are going to have great big jobs coming in by the hundreds. So, by using our tourist attractions . . . We have a gentleman running the Civic Center, Denny Magruder, who's possibly the sharpest guy in the State of West Virginia. Denny used to be the Assistant City Manager here in the City of Wheeling, but that boy is sharp, aggressive. He is the guy who got the ice rink in here; and I will put a pitch in for the county commissioners, we put \$500,000 up front of county commissioner to help put that thing, and Denny will tell you from day one, that if the county commissioners didn't come forward first, we wouldn't have the ice thing. Maybe some of the citizens thought we were out of our heads doing that, but it has paid off handsomely. One other thing, when we cut the ribbon for the Civic Center, I was mayor, just gone in to be mayor. I voted against the Civic Center, probably, every time but one. I voted for it initially, but they came in and said we were only going to have to float \$900,000 in bonds, and I voted for that. The next week they came in, they brought a different ordinance in and said we are going to have to put \$250,000 in bonds. I said, "How can you do that? We vote one thing and you bring in something like that." "Well, it's got to be that way." Then, it became a matter of principle. I voted against it all the way down the line from then on. Then, low and behold, we had to cut the ribbon, and who is mayor, but me. I told Jimmy Haranzo, I said, "Jim, I want you. You are the outgoing mayor. I want you cutting the ribbon with me, because if I cut it, I would have to cut it with my teeth because of so many times I voted against it. That's life. (1342)

CK: If you would just tell us exactly how Goosetown lay? I don't know exactly which streets it included.

JF: Well, at one time, Goosetown consisted of Baltimore Street, Elizabeth Street, East 11th, East 12th, and there might have been two little more short streets, but now there are two streets, Baltimore Street and East 12th, and that only has one home on it. But, like I say, I think there were upwards to 100 homes down there. We got the flood very bad in Goosetown. In 1936, the house we lived in, has got a basement, first story, second story, third story, in that first floor above the basement, they had three feet of water. Now the highway came in and that served as a block, and we don't get water out there anymore. I say "we" like we still live there. We lived there up until six years ago, so my wife lived there, she is 65, she lived there until she was 58.

MK: In the same house?

JF: Same house.

MK: Did Goosetown used to border on Fulton?

JF: Well, once you go through the tunnel, then you would be in Fulton. The railroad track, you would have to walk, not going through the tunnel, like to the left of the railroad track, and that would be out Beau Street, McCollough Street, and that would take you right into Fulton. [[Return to Top](#)] (1381)

CK: What kind of neighborhood was it when you moved out as opposed to when you moved in there?

JF: It was still a nice neighborhood. A lot of the old time people who lived there had moved out, and you had more transients coming in, but I would say if there are 25 homes left out there, at least 10 of the original people are still there. We sold our home, just like on a handshake, with some people who had moved in down the street. But, we knew we were going to move, because my wife, after going three stories for years when all the kids . . . We now moved into a one story home. Unbelievable. When we needed the one floor, one bathroom, now we have like three bathrooms, but that is how it goes.

MK: That's life.

JF: Yes. But I am so thankful for every day. God has been so good to me and my family. Faith has meant so much to us. Of course when you marry in the same faith, it means a whole lot. With having two sisters in the convent and five first cousins who are priests and one who is a bishop, and grandpap being a professor at a Catholic church--some of it better have rubbed off on me, or God did a lousy job with us. Amen.

[**ATTENTION:** I was unable to verify the spellings of the Schmulach brewery, "mileys", or "tofsy" ramp. I made numerous calls and checked various references, but while the people I talked to had heard of the brewery, no one was certain of the spelling. The yardmaster at a railroad station I called had not heard of those terms. Thanks. **js D:** 6/23/94 **T:** 8/6/94 **js**]