

Narrator's Name: Otto Brandt
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GW: Well, I think what I'll do today is start off, even though you said you didn't know much about it, asking you a few questions about your brother and his political wheeling-dealings back in the days that he was Worth Township Committeeman for the Democratic Party and what kind of involvement he had, if any, with Chicago area politics, the kinds of things he was doing out here as committeeman and the whole political atmosphere at that time.

OB: I'd pretty near would be a blank on it because I never interfered much with him. But I always boosted him, you know. I always worked for him to get the committeeman, and of course, my father had it first; I think I told you that the first time.

GW: Well how many . . . that story about the votes is interesting.

OB: Three votes he had. (laughter) Yeah, three votes and the other fellow got two votes.

GW: And who voted for him? I . . .

OB: Well, my . . . (short laugh) I know my mother voted for him, and August Behrend, what used to be in the store here, Freddie Behrend's father. Because when he got to be the committeemanship (laugh), he got the post office for the Behrends back then. Jesus, now I don't remember when it was . . . anyway, it when he got to be the committeeman, he went downtown; and in those days, you know, when the politics changed, the post office

OB: changed, see. And so, of course, if the Republicans were in there, Schultz had it. And then Behrend . . . er, ah, William Krueger had it. And then when Wilson got in the first time, with peace and honor, you know, he kept us out of war, big sign, and so when it came up, why he went down there, and they moved the post office down to Behrend's. And, well, then, of course, he had it, and then later on they moved it down over to Emery's building. My cousin who was postmaster here after awhile on account of the politics, you know. Well, then my father built where Krauses' Tavern is now, and that was the post office then.

GW: Where was it?

OB: Right across the street here. Where Krause's tavern is.

GW: Oh, where Krause's Tavern is, that's where the post office was?

AF: Yes, it's got the eagle on top.

GW: Oh, it's still got the eagle on the top of the building, okay, yeah, all right.

OB: Well, then after awhile then, my father . . . ah, my brother went to work and built that post office over there when they said that they had to have a bigger post office, you know that this one here. So he went to work, and he bought some of that ground off to Lange, there, and he put up that post office. I guess they had signed some kind of a lease, you know, for it for so many years, you know, if he built one like that. Well, after that . . .

GW: So your mother and August Behrend and who was the third vote for your father?

OB: My father.

GW: Oh, he voted for himself, okay. (laughter)

OB: Oh yeah, he voted for himself. (laughter)

AF: Was that for the township or was that just for the . . .

OB: Worth Township, the Committeeman. He was the Democratic Committeeman, and who the hell was the . . . one of the Schultz's was the Republican because they were 1,000 percent Republican.

AF: Were they the most active among the Republicans, the Schultz's?

OB: Huh?

AF: Were the Schultz's the most active among the Republicans in town?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, Charlie Schultz, he was working downtown all the time. Down, I guess, in the Assessor's Office or someplace.

GW: He was working in the Assessor's Office, Charles Schultz?

OB: Yeah, I guess that's where he was working.

GW: What kind . . . so . . .

OB: Ah, the head guy there was a fellow by the name of Krutchkopf, and Charlie Schultz was a personal firend of his, so they were in there. That was as far as I can remember though.

GW: What was the fellow's name, Krutchkopf?

OB: Krutchkopf.

GW: Yeah, okay. Well, you mentioned that your father and the Schultz family managed to get along business-wise, at least as far as the rival taverns. Did they ever get into any heated arguments as far as politics were concerned?

OB: Oh no. What the hell, a fellow with three Democratic votes, what kind of an argument can he give anybody? (laughter)

GW: Well, I was just wondering, you know, if they ever engaged in any arguments like Schultz would come over to the tavern and they'd start arguing about how the country was run or that kind of thing.

OB: Well, Schultz never used to come over to my father's tavern, but my father used to go over there once and awhile.

GW: I see, all right. But they did get along pretty well personally, the two of them?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah. They were always sure what you'd say, good friends. Not that I ever knew that they had any words between them, but, you know, sometimes my father, you know, would be at the bar there, you know, and . . . beer was a nickel, you know, he'd give a guy a quarter. He'd say, "Go down by Schultz's and have a couple of beers." (laughter)

GW: When did your brother . . . when did the first . . . when is the first recollection of your brother getting involved in politics around here?

OB: Must have been right after 1925, I think. Cause my father died in '25 and then that. Then, of course, . . .

GW: So he wasn't involved before your father passed away, then, in politics at all before that?

OB: No, no, not that I know of.

GW: So, was his first position Township Committeeman?

OB: What?

GW: His first political position was as the Township Committeeman?

OB: Yeah.

GW: I'm presuming that there must have been more than three votes that elected him, though. I guess there must have been a few more Democrats here by 1925?

OB: Ah, well, yeah. Well, that was when my father got elected, by three votes. I don't know what, ah, recollection I got. I think I must have been about maybe 12 or 14 years old, see. Well, you know, at that time it was a sin to be a Democrat out here in Oak Lawn because, hell, there wasn't Democrats (laugh) and everything was Republican. Even my grandparents, they were all Republicans and the whole shebang. They were all related at that time. What you might say, they were all Republicans. And those Democrats, by God, that's . . . that was terrible.

GW: Well, did your father . . . was your father ostracized in any way? Did people not come to his business as a result of him being a Democrat? Do you think? Any of that kind of problem?

OB: Oh, no, I don't think so.

GW: They just kind of tsk-tsked behind his back that he would be foolish enough to be a Democrat and that was as far as it went, or were they harder on him than that?

OB: Oh no, no. I don't know. As much as I can ever remember, he never harbored causes. He just was a Democrat, I guess. A lone wolf out here, and had a couple of . . . like my mother and August Behrend. I don't even know if she voted for . . . or voted that time. It was when I first came back, when women could voted. Now wait a minute, it was Mrs. Harridge; she voted Democratic.

GW: What was her name?

OB: Harridge. Not my mother, but Mrs. Harridge. She lived over here at 96th Street.

GW: How did she spell her name? I'm not quite sure if I'm understanding you.

OB: H-a-r-r-, I guess. I really wouldn't know.

GW: But is it Harritch?

OB: Harridge.

GW: Harridge, okay. Harridge. It's a . . . have you heard that name before Al?

AF: Do you have any idea why your family were Democrats?

OB: I don't know. I figure he just wanted to be the other way. You know, you'd go kidding about it; well, so I'll go over to the other side.

GW: Figured the opposition wasn't as hard for a Democratic Committeeman as it would be for a Republican Committeeman so maybe something like that.

OB: What?

GW: Maybe he decided the competition wouldn't be quite so stiff for the Democratic Committeeman so, ah . . .

OB: Whatever he thought, I don't know, but . . .

GW: Did he do any speechmaking?

OB: No, no, he . . .

GW: Was he any kind of a public speaker or not?

OB: No, hell; (laugh) he couldn't make a speech if his life depended on it. (laughter) That's with me the same way. I could never make a speech when I was on the Village Board here. I'm _____ talking, and I couldn't do a damn bit of talking.

GW: Well, your brother must have done a little talking in his day, didn't he?

OB: Oh, he couldn't talk either. (laughter) You know, what the hell, you go to school until you're twelve years old. Then you go to German school to learn German and confirmation. Then when you get out, that's when you're 14 years old. Then you've got to work, you know. Then the school days and everything was all over. Of course, my father always used to say, well he says, "Well you want to be a preacher or a lawyer?" Hell, I turned out to be nothing but a farmer.

GW: He wanted you to be a preacher or a lawyer, hmm?

OB: Yeah.

GW: Definitely not a wagonmaker or a tavern worker, I guess.

OB: Ah, well that's what he said before, you know, I got old, you know. Before I started to work in the blacksmith shop. You know, figured that'd be an easy job for me, but then, what the hell, had to work in the blacksmith shop, you know, or the wagon shop. And do the, what you'd say, the rough work in there. That didn't take any learning to do it, see, like putting the wheels together, you know, putting the spokes in the wheels, you know. Then after awhile, then setting the tires, you know. We'd put them out there, and pile them up, and then put wood all around it, you know, to heat up the tires, see, and then when they'd go to work and . . .

Because when it would get hot, you see, then it would expand, and we'd bring it over and throw it on this here thing we had there that was full of water, and you'd put the tire on there, on the rim, and then they'd let the thing down in the water, see, and then she'd shrink up, and then it was tight. And, ah, that there, I did a lot of that stuff; I'd be doing drilling the holes and putting the bolts in the tires, and like I say, and making rain barrels. In those days, you know, they all saved their . . . they'd get a big rain barrel you know to save the soft water to do the washing with, so forth. Well, you done that when it was raining. There was always work, you know. If you couldn't work on the farm out there in the fields, well then, you worked in the blacksmith shop.

GW: Getting back to your brother for just a second, as far as your recollections of his getting elected Township Committeeman, do you remember any of his political cronies at that time? You know, the people he hung around with or helped him out in the election? I know you helped him out occasionally, too, but I was wondering if there were any other names you remember. People who were involved in politics around here that he used to . . .

OB: Oh, God, there were some, but I'll be damned if I could think of any now.

GW: There weren't any outstanding ones that you can recollect off hand?

OB: Well, he was kind of . . . well, he had to work it all by himself. Of course, you know, he didn't have too much money either, you know, and, hell, those days, like today, if you ain't got no money for to pay for the vote-getters, why you're just out of luck. And, of course, he would go to work and get a few dollars together. And, of course, he had different people like from Evergreen and Blue Island, there was no use going to Blue Island because that was 100 percent Republican, that is, you know, back in the years, early years. Well, I don't . . .

GW: Where was his basic support from in those days? Was it here in Oak Lawn or was it . . .?

OB: Yeah, Oak Lawn, Evergreen, and Chicago Ridge.

GW: Okay, those were his strongholds; that's where the Democrats were.

OB: Yeah, yeah. There's, like I say, that fellow that run against him, he got two votes and my father got three. I can't think of the guy's name now, but I guess they figured, you know he could maybe slip in there, you know, by running. If he could get, you know, some more votes, but I suppose he couldn't get any more Democratic votes either. (laugh)

AF: Was that another fellow from Oak Lawn, who ran against him?

OB: No, he was from Chicago Ridge. I can't think of his name.

GW: Can you remember any outstanding events during the time your brother was involved in politics around here, was he involved in any close elections

GW: or any kind of political scandals or anything like that that stand out in your mind? Or was everything just pretty mundane as far as all his political dealings were concerned? Was there any big excitement?

OB: No, there wasn't much. There were just a few big meetings in later years, you know, and dinners, you know.

GW: Like the ones where you were in that picture with your friends down there?

OB: Yeah, yeah, he had a few of them later on, but, you know, like I say, he started the Democratic Oak Lawn . . . no, the Worth Township Democratic Club. He started it, right down in the basement here. And so . . .

GW: About what time was it that he started the Democratic Club, do you remember?

OB: What?

GW: About what time was it that he started the Worth Township Democratic Club?

OB: Oh, God, I couldn't very well . . .

GW: In the '30's maybe?

OB: Well, yeah, yeah. It must have been around in the early '30's. Let me see . . . he had a couple meetings next door when I held the tavern. I went in the tavern in '36. It must have been around the early thirties.

GW: What did they do at these club meetings? Was it just kind of a rally to get everyone's morale up for the big election, that kind of thing, do a little drinking . . .

OB: How crooked the Republicans were and so forth (laughs) and everything. Well, then, of course, they got the different precincts, you know. It was all in one precinct at one time, and then they got it in the different precincts, you know. I don't know how many precincts there is now.

GW: A lot. Probably about 15 or 20 just in Oak Lawn, I think.

OB: Ah, I don't think there is that many, but pretty close to it.

GW: Yeah.

OB: Then, of course, you know, they had a lot of workers there, you know that had to go out and get the votes. Then, of course, you had to go and try to get them a job on the county or the state or something. And, of course, in later years, it kind of worked that way. But at first, nobody had any kind of prestige to get a job. Ha, what can you say when you ran for committeeman with three votes, and possibly they may have had a dozen people that voted Democratic at that time; I don't know. I wouldn't even like to say it, but, anyway, like I say, some of them thought it was a sin to vote Democratic.

GW: Well, was your brother involved with any of this patronage business, about trying to find people jobs with the county?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah. He handled a lot of that. Later on, but at first it didn't amount to anything. Even when my father had it, why there wasn't any patronage at that time. But, you know, you didn't have nothing to show. You had no votes.

GW: Well when did the demographics around here in Worth Township start to change. I mean, obviously, at some point more Democratic votes started

GW: living in Worth Township. Do you remember when did things start to change?'

OB: Well, ah, I would say it started to change after the St. Gerald's Church was built.

GW: Oh, after St. Gerald's was built.

OB: Yeah, the first one on 95th Street. It ah . . . then there started more Democrats came out. A lot of Irish come out, you know, and they were Democratic. So, then it kind of started to work up to fill up with more Democrats. But, hell, when was that? That must have been around the '30's. I . . . cause I ran for office in . . . I can't think now.

GW: It was '28 to '30, I think; wasn't that right, when you were on the Village Board?

OB: Yeah, I think it was '28 to '30 something like that there.

AF: Why did you decide to run?

OB: What?

AF: Why did you decide to run for office?

OB: I don't know. (laughter) A couple of other guys, you know, god-damnit to hell, I wasn't, like I say, with the education I had, twelve years old, but I guess I had a pretty good line of gab, you know.

GW: I thought you said you couldn't make speeches and now you say you had a pretty good line of gab.

OB: Well, you know, it's kind of smooth stuff.

GW: Oh, I see.

OB: Yeah, and I went along, with my brother, he was on one side, and I was on the other side. See, I ah, some of the guys were asking "Why don't you run for trustee?" I said, what the hell, and finally, "Okay, I'll run," and then they went and put up my brother against me! (laughter) And I beat him by four votes. (laughter) And I beat another guy by three votes.

GW: Was he mad at you for beating him? Was your brother mad at you? Did he really want to become trustee or did they just kind of do that to get your dander up?

OB: They just wanted to get me out of there. They figured I'd withdraw, you know, and if he'd be running. So, but anyway, I happened to be lucky. Anyway, we beat their ace-in-a-hole. They claimed they had one man on their ticket that couldn't be beat. And I beat him by three votes, and I beat my cousin by four votes. And the next year, was it four years later, I ran second, and I beat all the rest of them by ah . . . well the votes was around four hundred and something apiece. And I think it was 450. I'd have to lie if I said it, but I think it was 451, and I 451 and they had 458 or '48, something like that. Or was it 300; I couldn't say.

GW: Well, that's not really all that important. I couldn't expect you to remember 30 years or 40 years after the vote, what the totals were.

OB: Like I say, I think it was back around in '40. I've got a blotter around here somewheres, but I think that one's '28, 1928.

AF: How did you campaign? Did you go out to the farms and . . .?

OB: Well, I talked with different people. They had a couple of house meetings. I had a good friend over here in the next block down here, and he'd invite some of his neighbors over and so on and so forth. We want you to come over; we want to make a little talk here, want to tell you why (laughs) they should be elected and all kinds of bullshit. (laughter) And so we'd go to different places, you know. And then, of course, we had one big meeting. It used to be at St. Gerald's Church when it was on 95th Street. Always had one big meeting there, and get up and do a little talking, of course. I'd memorize a little stuff and I'd say it. It's all gone now. Don't know what the hell you want to fight for. I know the first election cost me, I guess, it was \$48 in money I spent.

GW: Big campaign treasury you need, yeah.

OB: But you see, all the fellows that worked, you know, they got \$5. Don't forget that those were Depression days, you know. Five dollars was like \$50 today. And so the printing and so forth, we'd split it, you know. See there were three trustees and the village clerk, so there would be four of us, and they'd split it four ways. Each one would put up his own share. And what the hell. Then, of course, after I was in there for two more years, I run for mayor. And I got my ass beat off, (laughter) and I went home.

GW: Who did you run against?

OB: I ran against Mr. Harnew, he was a hell of a good guy; I didn't want to run against him. It's my brother-in-law; he got in the field. I think I could have beat the other guy, but my brother-in-law got in the goddamn field, so I beat his ass off. I didn't care even if I lost.

GW: You were just after him rather than becoming mayor?

OB: Even my brother was kind of jealous. He thought, Jesus Christ, if I got to be mayor, Holy Christ.

GW: Well, was this before he was elected mayor that you were running?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah. But like I say, they put him up for trustee, and they figured they'd back me down. And I wouldn't back down. But I got elected for trustee running against him, or he running against me or whatever you want to call it.

AF: Do you remember any of the campaign issues?

OB: Well . . .

AF: Were there any?

OB: Well we didn't sling no mud. See, everything was on the legitimate, you know.

GW: Well, were there any big issues in the village that people were concerned about, you know, like putting in streets or sidewalks or anything like that?

OB: No, the water.

GW: Water, that was the big one then?

OB: Yeah, and I was against the contractor that they was giving it to because he was so much higher than the rest of them. But there was the three of us and three on the other side and the mayor, of course, he had the deciding vote, but one of our fellows left and went over to the other side and then

OB: the mayor didn't have to vote.

GW: At any rate, you lost on that one.

OB: Yeah, I lost there. So I figured that's okay. I picked up my tail and stuck it between my legs and I went home, and I said the hell with politics.

GW: So after you ran for mayor, you didn't run for anything after that?

OB: No, no that was it. But you know, they, even my brother-in-law went to work and had to get in the field. And, of course, that was the best deal. I always figured it was a deal made, you know, with Harnew. He was the mayor at that time, and so he put the brother-in-law in there. He got the brother-in-law to run. The brother-in-law was jealous of me, you know, running because I got in for trustee. So he got in the god-damned field. I beat him, you know, a hundred some votes, and I lost in the three-way battle, you know. The brother-in-law took my votes away, you know, and, of course, the other guy got elected.

GW: It sounds as if you had a pretty active political family, if you had your in-laws running for village office and you were running.

OB: Oh, they were just jealous, jealousy.

GW: Was this a Schmalen that you were running against?

OB: Yeah, but don't put that in there, though. He's dead now. Wouldn't want to talk about anybody that's dead now.

AF: Did you and your brother ever go to any conventions or anything like that, any political meetings outside of this area?

OB: Oh, I went to Springfield once. Yeah, I went to Springfield once. And he had about, oh, I don't know, about 25 or 30 all went, you know. I thought I'll go too, then. We went down to Springfield, and they had a big convention or something. Hell, I don't know what the hell it was. They had a tag on the coat, you know, "Polishittin," I always said. Well, that's a . . . I was not politician, in a way. The well cost more, which I was against. I was for a different contractor, you know, and some of the other improvements that went in that I happened to be voting on. And, of course, I always voted for the lowest bidder. And, of course, sometimes the attorneys, they would say, "Well, this guy isn't responsible, isn't reliable," and so forth; well, by God, if he's got a bond up there and everything else, I think he ought to be reliable.

GW: Do you remember any, other than arguing over who's got the low bid and that kind of thing, do you remember anything in particular about what the village was doing during your time when you were trustee? I mean, any major accomplishments like streets or a new water system, or . . .

OB: Well, the water system went in while I was in. That's why I say, I voted for the cheapest guy. And for God's sake, now I can't remember. You know, that's 50 years ago, 45 years ago. And my memory ain't that good any more.

GW: Well, you still continue to stupefy me with the things you do remember though. After you say, you can't remember anything about politics, we've been talking about politics for about 20 minutes. So, I've got no complaints.

OB: Well, like I say, I was no politician, and a fellow sat there and wanted me to go along with him and give them the contract, you know. And there was so much dough, you know, like you'd say laying around, you know. And

OB: all you'd have to do is pick it up, and I said no. I said, "That ain't my way of doing business."

GW: You mean the contractor came to you and said if I give you this will you vote and that kind of thing?

OB: Yeah, like a little offer made, you know. And I says, "The idea is the bid's got to be right," I says, "and if the bid is right and you get all through with it and if you've got any money you want to give away after awhile, okay I'll take it." (laughter) But first the job has got to be done right. Because I had a little trouble with the water main going down over here. They went to work and they dropped it along in the ditch, you know, and if the ditch went crooked, the pipe went crooked. (laughter)

GW: Where was this that they were putting the water main in?

OB: 94th here, between 93rd and 94th on Tully.

GW: Oh, uh hum. And you were out there kind of supervising to see that they didn't put it in any which way?

OB: Yeah, and I squawked about it. Well, one thing that happened, they went to work, and they didn't bother to take the old one out. I think they put another one in there and straightened it out, so I seen it that it was straight. And, uh, if Tubby Vinalick was here, he could tell you about it. When he goes to connect up the water for, I don't know, was it Adolph Larsen, or the fellow next door, and well, he taps the main and god-damnit-to-hell, he can't understand it, no water. So goes to both ends, ain't shut off on this end, ain't shut off on the other end.

GW: So it's got to be going in the ground somewhere then.

OB: Didn't know what the hell was what. He dug a little bit further out in the street and he found the other main. They left god-damned thing in there. (laughs) He had tapped a dry main. (laughter) At least that's what Tubby told me. He said, "There's two mains there." I said, "Yeah." I said, "One is, I suppose, I don't know, but the one that was laying in the ditch there," I says, "maybe kept laying there." So it must have, because that was the first one they came to from the property line, coming out. And that was, I guess, laying along, I guess, in the ditch, you know. Because the ditch was well at least three-foot deep in places. We had a lot of ditches in Oak Lawn those days, and it was a joke. They tapped the other main, and they had their water.

GW: You talked on a couple of occasions . . . now kind of moving away from politics now just some loose ends that were left over from last time we talked, where was Emery's Hall?

OB: By 54th there and 95th. Emery's Building, do you know where Emery's building is? Where the stores are in front there?

GW: It's on the north side of 95th there?

OB: Yeah, right on the . . .

GW: On the northwest corner there?

OB: Yeah, in the back there was a building like a hall. I think it's still there.

GW: Oh, okay. Well it may be, I just . . .

OB: Yeah, anyway, that used to be Emery's Hall. That was a dance hall then. I don't know if it's changed or not.

GW: Well, is there still a hall there, Alan? 95th and 54th.

OB: Right on the alley, facing 54th. I haven't been out that way . . .

GW: Well, it could be. I don't normally go that way so I . . . right there on 54th so I don't know if there's . . .

OB: If you want to take a ride down through there, when you get to that corner of 54th when you turn north, that's when you get in back there by the alley. Then there's the building facing 54th.

GW: Okay, well we'll just have to check it out.

OB: That was the dance hall there.

AF: How old was it? Do you know about when Emery's hall was built?

OB: Well, yeah, when I played the concertina, he had it. And well, oh that must be, what the hell, I was playing the concertina when I was about 19 years old. It goes back that many years, I would say, '20, 1920.

AF: What did Mr. Emery do for a living? Owned the hall or what. . .

OB: Well he put up that building there, where them stores are now.

AF: Was he a contractor?

OB: No, no, he had somebody else build it up. And he had a real estate office which he had there.

GW: Do you remember what his first name was, by chance?

OB: Who, Emery?

GW: Yeah.

OB: John, yeah.

END OF TAPE

Shirley A. Miller, Transcriptionist