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Interview #4: Russell Long and Retirement

(April 12, 1994)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

Nichols: I was at an award ceremony recently -- I had been assistant treasurer of my church, and the treasurer, Thomkins Ricks, received the first award. Ricks and I both served the same length of time. I'm a member of the Asbury Methodist Church at 11th and K. The pastor had asked me if I would serve as treasurer. I said, no, I didn't want to get involved in that. He kept the position open for almost a year, and then Ricks accepted it. So he said, "I'm not going to let you off the hook. I want you to be his assistant."

When I first left the Senate, I served as treasurer for a health station at 14th and Irving Street. It was under HEW [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] and Medicare. I served on the board of directors. And the turnover was awfully swift. Finally, they found out that they needed a treasurer, and HEW and Medicare people were interested in me getting it because of my connections with the Finance Committee.

Ritchie: Did you stay there long?

Nichols: I served about two and a half years after I left here.

Ritchie: Well, today I wanted to ask you about the years when [Russell Long](#) was chairman of the committee. He came on in 1965 after [Harry Byrd](#) left the Senate. Did the committee change much under Russell Long?

Nichols: The staff did. The staff increased almost two-fold under Russell Long. He had been around, and he saw the maneuvering and policy-making that Senator [Kerr](#) did. Senator Kerr was the floor manager on the major bills from Finance, also Senator Long, before he became chairman, handled several major floor bills for Senator Byrd.



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Ritchie: Why was that? Was Senator Byrd in ill-health, or just not as able as they were?

Nichols: I don't think he was skilled in doing that, even though he had been governor. His managing and legislating were more or less on the state level. Russell Long had come out of law school and he was young and eager. In my estimation, he was trying to change the picture that his father had created.

His father, [Huey Long](#), was a very colorful gentleman. Huey Long had been in the Senate before I got here. At the time that Huey Long was assassinated [in 1935], I was down at the RFC. But I'm sure that you have read some history on the senator's father. As I said, he was very colorful. If I'm not mistaken he holds a record for filibustering longer than anyone else. His favorite subject in filibustering was "potlikker." I don't know whether you're very familiar with "potlikker," but I'm from the South and I know exactly what he was talking about.

Senator Russell Long got the biggest kick out of telling stories on his Daddy and his Uncle Earl -- his Uncle Earl more so than his father. His father at one time was a medicine man. He went all over the state of Louisiana, before he became a senator. He sold an extract medicine that was supposed to cure all ills, regardless of what it was. He would get this extract from the bark of a tree down in Louisiana called Popalarum. It was a mild sickness, he would get the upper part of the tree bark and call it "Upper Popalarum." But the same medicine going from the middle of the tree down toward the root was called "Lower Popalarum."

[laughs] Anyway, he created quite a name for himself. He was very colorful and it helped him politically when he started running for office. He became governor and he had things going. Then when he left Louisiana and came to the Senate, he created quite a stir among the leadership in the Senate because he advocated a type of economics that would take from the rich. In other words, he was a modern Robin Hood. That disturbed quite a few of the people in the leadership. He came on the scene real strong during Roosevelt's administration.

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I don't think there was too much love between Senator Long's father and Senator [Harrison](#). For that particular reason, to have Senator Russell Long become chairman, and one of the first things that he did was to call his administrative assistant and say, "Go over to the disbursing office and give Jesse Nichols the salary that he's supposed to get. Give him the highest grade that they have." Naturally, that put me very much in love with the man!

Things moved very swiftly. I recall that was in December [1965], yes it was near the end of the year, and then the first thing that he did do when he became chairman, starting off the new year, was to have a luncheon for the staff over in the Capitol. During the whole time that I was on the committee, that had never happened. So he started right off with the staff. And I think he was making marks and points at the beginning. I would give him flying colors as the chairperson. A lot of the way you could weigh a chairman was how he handled himself in conference, because some of those Congressmen are very shrewd, and they do their homework. In fact, I could tell on the Senate, on my committee, which member was doing his homework. There was a history put out by the Finance Committee, the year I think before I retired, it must have been in '70. Did you see that?

Ritchie: Yes.

Nichols: He set out a goal for himself, and I think he stuck pretty close to that goal.

Ritchie: What was his goal?

Nichols: His goal was to have the government work smoothly with the people in charge of implementing the laws. When I say the laws I'm talking about specifically Social Security. I don't remember whether he was what you would call a free trader or not, but we had a lot of trade legislation going on at one time in the Finance Committee. We were in charge of sugar. Senator Long, coming from a sugar cane section of the country was at odds with the sugar beet people out in the West. He was very concerned about keeping the Finance Committee at the stature that he found it when he came.

Ritchie: You mentioned that he increased the size of the staff, did that complicate your work at all?

Nichols: No, because we had specialists in Social Security -- Jay Constantine handled that. Mike Stern worked right along with Jay. Then we had a staff of experts in taxation. Tom Vail had worked on the staff of the Joint Committee of Internal Revenue Taxation. And Larry -- I can't remember his last name -- but the two of them were like twins, Tom and Larry. They would follow the proceedings in the House, beginning with the subcommittee on up to the full committee and then all the way through the House on the floor. They were assigned -- this was before Tom came on the Finance Committee -- to work with the Senate Finance Committee.

Senator Long added other staff members, and we increased the size of the committee. Office space was provided in the lower part of the building for the staff members. I think he was very pleased with the input of the staff members.

Ritchie: Did you ever get a staff assistant? Or did you continue to do the job by yourself?

Nichols: No, I did it by myself. When I retired -- I retired at one of those periods where if you retired by midnight on Memorial Day, you would get an eight percent increase in salary. I had a little store room and store places all over the Dirksen Building, and the Russell Building. I had places up in the attic and elsewhere.

There was a Betty Thompson. Betty had asked Senator Long to promote her to assistant clerk, to give her the same position that Evelyn R. Thompson had had. Some of the staff people approached me and told me what was going on. They said, "We want you to have that position, Jesse, because of your seniority." They said, "Why don't you ask for it?" I didn't respond immediately, but I thought it over. Then I approached Tom and we talked it over, and he was telling me about the prejudices of the senators from the South. I told him he wasn't telling me anything, I knew about that. [laughs] I lived with it. But

anyway, we didn't reach a conclusion. As far as he was concerned, he wanted me to soft peddle it or wait. I thought I had waited long enough.

I called home and told my wife to look over our bills and see if I could afford to retire. The two of us worked on living together, and she did the book work. She

called me in a couple of hours and told me: "Retire whenever you want to. You can afford to." So that evening, before I left, Tom said, "Have you thought about that again?" I said, "Yeah, I've thought about it Tom. I'm going to retire." He said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not kidding." He said, "Well, I'll look for you here on Tuesday. Because Tuesday followed the Memorial Day holiday on Monday. That Tuesday I came in, but I came late, and started to clean out my desk, because before I had left, I went over to the Disbursing Office and signed all the necessary papers required for retirement.

I tried to get Tom to let me give instructions to a young black fellow in Long's office, but I couldn't pin Tom down. Anyway, they had to get two people to half-way try to do what I had been doing. They were fortunate because they didn't have any hearings going on that time. But I never thought that things could not go on, or work without me. I had seen that happen in several instances.

Ritchie: People who thought they were indispensable?

Nichols: Yes. I never thought that. But I was blessed with a very good memory. You may have noticed that while I've been talking to you I haven't had a note on it. They were just things that I remembered. But in my line of work a good memory came in very, very handy. I could take you right now to the committee's library, and you could take the committee calendar and I could tell you where each book is, and what it contains, because I put it together and had it bound, and put it up on the shelf.

Ritchie: And when they needed to know that information, they needed it right away.

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Nichols: Right away! As I was telling you the other day, when that fellow came in and started giving his testimony like a Biblical sermon, Senator Kerr stopped the proceeding. He said, "Wait a minute, where did you say that was?" Then he said, "Jesse, get me a Bible." I wound up getting him a Bible that belonged to a Christian Scientist. Senator Long was something like Senator Kerr. Senator Kerr, if you didn't know something, he would just cut you down into ribbons. But Long didn't do that.

Ritchie: Well, what kind of a person was Russell Long?

Nichols: He was an easy person to talk with. He was a person that would support his staff members one hundred percent. If he asked you something, he could tell in a minute if he believed what you were saying, or knew what you were saying. He was easy to associate with. He was a down-to-earth person, even though he had been exposed to some money, and his father and mother had been

senators. The whole family lived real well. I think that on the night that they spoke about me in the Senate, he gave me a gift of a sterling silver fruit basket. And the night that I retired, they sent for me to come back down to the committee to deliver some papers, which was a hoax. I knew that something was going on. Tom had cut the lights out in the committee room, and when he brought me in they turned the lights on and there were about ten members of the committee, and the chairman, and his wife Caroline -- who I had known for a long time. I had a good friend in the chairman, and if I didn't have any other person, I had a friend in his wife.

He was down to earth. And he had good staff members. He got the president to appoint one of his staff members to the Tariff Commission. Another one left after serving three or four years to go back to Louisiana to run for office. He would come up and visit and bring big plastic bags of those crawfish. We'd all eat them back in the executive conference room. But the senator was right down to earth with the rest of the staff. And he looked liked he enjoyed his work.

Ritchie: At one point you mentioned that he got you privileges of the floor of the Senate when he became chairman.

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Nichols: That's right.

Ritchie: What advantage was that for you?

Nichols: If the staff, Tom Vail and the others, needed something from the office, heretofore they'd call for me to bring such and such a thing over, all I could do was take it to the door and get a page to take it on in. Senator Long didn't like that. He said, "Jesse is a staff member, and when he brings something over here I want him to have the privilege to the floor." Now, when Miss Springer was over there, I'd bring things over. She could time me to see just when I'd get there, and she'd meet me and take it on in. Then she would go in and sit down on the couches in the chamber. That's the only thing that I wasn't in on. As I said, I sat in on every executive session but the one they held when the Republicans came in in the 80th Congress, and I purposely walked out of that one till they could get through. I knew they were talking about me. Then the chairperson, Senator [Millikin](#) came out, and told me what had happened, then I went back in. Other than that, I never missed a session, executive or otherwise. Even when they said a "strict executive," that meant clerks and everybody get out of there. I'd get out until they called me in because they wanted something.

Ritchie: The fact that you got floor privileges in the mid-1960s, under Senator Russell Long, do you think that the atmosphere in general was changing around

the Capitol in the 1960s? Civil rights legislation was being passed and there seemed to be more black staff members.

Nichols: I believe so. I know the Banking and Currency Committee, which was down on this end of the Russell Building, that was before we moved. We moved first, and then the other committees started to move [to the Dirksen Building]. But Banking and Currency installed a black person on their staff. And there were several senators who had black staff members. [\[Stuart\] Symington](#) was one. He had Chris McCrae as his secretary when he was Secretary of . . .

Ritchie: The Air Force.

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Nichols: Yes. When he came he brought Chris. There were several black staff members. Foreign Relations had Bertie [Bowman] and a woman, what was her name? I ran into her about three years ago on Christmas eve. Thomasine Scott. She was the daughter-in-law of Emmett J. Scott. [Laughs] That's the first and only time I tried to play a little politics. Her husband was Emory Scott, and he was a lawyer down in the Veterans Bureau. He decided that he wanted to put his name in for a federal judgeship. So I talked with Walter Little. Have you heard of Walter Little?

Ritchie: No.

Nichols: He was over on the House side. Walter Little was the right-hand man of [Wilbur Mills](#), and of the other chairmen prior to Wilbur Mills. Walter and I hooked up together. Walter was to work on Mr. Mills, and I was to work on some member of my committee who we thought could really swing the thing. I told Senator Dirksen. We almost succeeded. Walter was such a person that sometimes Mr. Mills would take him inside to see the president and talk to him. That's when [Lyndon Johnson](#) was there. Lyndon Johnson had asked one of his staff members, I think his name was Lightfoot.

Ritchie: That sounds familiar.

Nichols: But anyway, I submitted the name to Senator [Dirksen](#), and I received a beautiful letter from him. "Jesse," it said, "I'm pleased that you asked me and I'm going to look into it." And he brought it up to the president, and Walter got Mr. Mills to bring it up. But it turned out that the person who became the judge was the staff member in the White House. He decided he wanted the job himself, so he became the judge. Walter knew President Johnson better than I did, because he knew him when he had been over on the House side.

Walter came to be Mr. Mills' right-hand man. The chairperson of the Ways and Means Committee at that time was more powerful than the Speaker, because all assignments were made through him.

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Ritchie: Committee assignments?

Nichols: Yes. And this black Congresswoman from New York, [Shirley Chisholm](#), came to the Congress and was walking down the hall past the Ways and Means Committee. I know you've passed that room many, many a time, right off the House floor. Walter sat out in the front room. In the olden days, the Congressmen would come up and hand their hats and coats to the staff person, and they would take care of them, open the door for them and that kind of thing.

Shirley Chisholm was passing through the hall, and Walter followed her and approached her and said, "Mrs. Chisholm?" "Yes?" He said, "I'm Walter Little, if there's anything I can do to help you make your term pleasant, all you have to do is ask. Feel free to do that." [laughs] And Mrs. Chisholm squared off from him and said, "I'm Shirley Chisholm, and I represent such and such a district in Brooklyn, New York, and I'm in a position for you to come up to me and ask me if there's anything I can do for you." He said, "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chisholm, I was just trying to be helpful." She said, "I don't need you to be helpful!" All right, Mrs. Chisholm didn't know who the hell Walter was. He went back into the office, and Mr. Mills had a desk there and he said, "What's the matter with you, Walter?" He told him the experience he had just had with Mrs. Chisholm. Mr. Mills laughed, and he said, "As a matter of fact, here's her request for committee assignments. She wants to be on this committee and on that committee." Walter smiled to himself, and he said, "Well, I think an assignment on Agriculture would be good for her." [laughs] Now, if you think I'm lying, Mr. Ritchie, you can go find her committee assignments, and her first one was on Agriculture. She said, "Hell, there's nothing growing in Brooklyn, not even a tree!" [laughs]

But Walter was just like that. He had some clout with Mr. Mills, and we almost pulled that thing off. I didn't try another one. But I have no idea how many people I have helped -- my color. They would come up and I would speak to the right person for them. I'd help whites too. We had a senator on the committee from Indiana, [Vance Hartke](#). I spoke to the senator about a young fellow who was a brother to one staff member on the committee, and he pushed

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his chair back and said, "You go on and call my A.A. and tell him that whatever you want done, do it." Then he said, "No, I don't want you to do it. I'll go tell him

myself." So he went and called and had his administrative assistant come over to the committee. He knocked on the door and I went to the door, and he said, "The senator just called me." This youngster wanted to be on the Capitol police force. He said, "All right, he's got it." They put him right on.

We had another senator who was very colorful, that was Big [Ed Johnson](#) of Colorado. He was a Democrat when Millikin was the Republican senator from Colorado. I could speak to him if I wanted something.

Another story, going back to the era of Senator Long, we had this huge hearing going on, and the president of General Electric was in the committee room with his staff. He was interested in something, and when we broke at noon, the lunch hour, somebody knocked on the back door. See, nobody but the senators were allowed to go in and out of that door. There was this president of General Electric and three or four of his staff members. A fellow said, "What's your name?" I said, "My name is Nichols." He said, "Mr. so and so wants to meet you." I said, "Yeah?" He came up and said, "I'm Mr. so and so, president of General Electric." He said, "I was just telling my staff members, if they wanted to see somebody who really ran that committee, and the staff of that committee, it was you. And I just wanted to say hello and shake your hand." And he did, he shook my hand and introduced me to his staff. I thought that was pretty good. [chuckles]

Several of the members you could talk to. [Herman Talmadge](#), I could talk to him. I don't know. There was just something, when they were put on the Finance Committee if they didn't have that character, or that impulse to be a statesman, they soon tried to develop it.

Ritchie: Were there any that you felt didn't measure up?

Nichols: Oh, yes, quite a few. Being around them, like on the Revenue Code of '54, that was a huge thing. And all those trade agreements, and the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]. You would be put in

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association with men who really knew what they were doing. If you had something, it would come out.

I spoke about the youngsters at the door over on the House side. When I first became a member of the staff of the committee, when it was just Skeeter and I and Miss Smith, we had an executive session. Senator [\[Tom\] Connally](#) came in. He was a big tall Texan with flowing hair and bow ties. He just dropped his coat on the chair. Skeeter said, "Jesse, pick up the senator's coat and hang it on the rack." Senator Harrison came in right behind him, and he heard him. He called

Skeeter over and said, "Don't you ask Jesse any more." [laughs] He said, "If he's too damn lazy to hang up his own coat, don't you bother him."

Ritchie: One other event in the '60s. I think we touched on it just briefly last time, was the riots in Washington in 1968. Did you say that the committee was meeting the day of the riots?

Nichols: That's right.

Ritchie: What was the impact on the Capitol?

Nichols: Well, we had had this morning session. Executive sessions were usually from ten to noon. And at lunchtime I went home -- no, I didn't, I went to the bank. I drove my car. I had a place where I used to park on the street that faces the Senate side of the Capitol, I had a place there to park my car. I went downtown to 15th and Pennsylvania Avenue, it was right across from the Treasury, where the Old Ebbitt Grill is located. I used to go there quite often. I happened to look toward Howard University in that direction, and I saw all that smoke coming up. I went back to the office and I had my radio on in the car to hear what was going on. When I got back to the office, I told Tom, I said, "Tom, you'd better let these young girls go home, because all hell's breaking loose out there." He said, "You can't be serious." I said, "I am serious." So he hurriedly got them all together and let them go home.

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But I was fortunate. My home, as I said the other day, is across from Soldiers' Home. The president had ordered in troops, I think they must have been from Kentucky. Their helicopters and all landed in that area in front of my house. I was glad that they did, because my property was secured.

Ritchie: Did it disrupt work around the Capitol for a while?

Nichols: No.

Ritchie: I remember the pictures of the soldiers standing on the steps of the Capitol for a while.

Nichols: Mmm-hmm. We've been awfully fortunate to have the separate [Capitol Police](#) force. But after that, they started to increase security around certain entrances to the Capitol. They started to put barricades up. Before that, you could go all over the Capitol, anywhere you wanted, any time of the day or night.

Ritchie: Well, your service here stretched a long time, from 1937 to 1971. How different was the Senate by 1971, when you were getting ready to leave than it was when you first came in 1937? You mentioned security as one of the things, but how did it change over time?

Nichols: It changed with the increase in personnel. Enlarging the staff. If you go back and review the history of the Finance Committee, you will find that at one time they had one standing subcommittee, and that was on veterans' affairs. It was up to the chairmen from time to time to appoint different subcommittees. The minority side would be permitted to have a staff member, maybe a secretary for him or for her -- in this case it always was a he. And a subcommittee might be created as needed. But if you go back in the history of the committee you will find no subcommittees. The change started about the time I left, under Russell Long they were creating subcommittees on this and subcommittees on the other thing. That was a good way to increase the personnel on the staff.

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For instance, I passed this office this morning, just before I turned the corner to come to your office. I saw Finance on the glass. I pushed open the door and asked to speak to a friend of mine who still works for the committee, Bruce. But I don't know where Bruce is located. See, everything when I was here was located either in the committee room, or in the section downstairs. I guess another good reason why the staff used to be so small was that the staff from the top floor of the Russell Building, the Legislative Counsel always provided staff people to sit with that committee, even in executive session. And as I said, we had some pretty smart tax lawyers.

It came up that Mr. Stam's office -- [Colin F.] Stam was chief of staff of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation. Before Stam, the man ahead of him was a fellow named L.H. Parker. He was a brilliant lawyer and he was a very close friend of Harrison's. Then Stam's office started increasing. So I would say that the expansion of the staff, of subcommittees, and that type of thing brought about a tremendous change.

Ritchie: Any other changes that you noticed over time?

Nichols: No, I can't say. I've only been back here twice, Mr. Ritchie, since I retired -- when I came to the reception for Senator [Mansfield](#) the other day, and once before when they had a retirement party for Senator Russell Long.

Ritchie: How is it that you stayed away so much?

Nichols: Well, when I first retired, I stayed home I'd say three to four months. Tom was trying to place me somewhere downtown where some of the lobbying

people that bothered us were located, to give me something to do where I would be doing something light. I had wanted to go into my business but I promised my wife that I wouldn't do that.

Ritchie: What kind of business?

Nichols: I was in the cabinet-making and decorating business. I built about fifty recreation rooms all over this town. I had electric power tools, and

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I finished cabinet-making in high school. I was the foreman of the cabinet shop. When I came on the staff of the committee, we used to have those real long periods of time when the Congress was not in session. Sometimes I'd be on two days a week, or one day a week. All of the rest of it I had the time off. So I utilized it, I put it to use.

When I went to the Investment Bankers, they wanted somebody to take over the new mail room that they had installed. Tom succeeded in getting the director of the Investment Bankers to give me an interview, and he was impressed. He wanted me, and they called this mailing company that put out the mailing machines, each post office has them. I can't recall the company name now, but all of the postal scales and addressographs were put out by those people. The Investment Bankers were on 13th and Pennsylvania Avenue. We were on the top floor. They called this instructor to come down and he started telling me about running the addressograph. He asked me if I had any questions, and I looked at it and said no. They had this machine that would take a ream of paper and it would fold it, stuff it in the envelope, seal it, and stamp it, all at the same time.

He asked me this question and that question and he saw that I was saying yes when I actually didn't know what the heck he was talking about. [laughs] So he said, "Now, I've been here four days and I'm not supposed to leave until I have taught you how to run these machines." He said, "These people want to keep you. Now, you start asking some questions." I had the manual, and at night I took the manual home and I read, and read, and read, until finally I understood the principle of the thing. I stayed with them for about two and a half years, until they left to move their office to New York. They dabbled in municipal bonds and that type of stuff. They'd come in and program the machine, they'd write a work order and that kind of thing, and go on about their business. They might want several sub offices in this particular state to be skipped, and that kind of thing. You had red pens that you used to program the machine, and that's the result that you got.

When I was getting ready to leave there, one of the suppliers came around. He would go all up and down K Street. He spoke to the head man at

the National Council for Senior Citizens. So I went down and worked for them for about two years.

Ritchie: What did you do there?

Nichols: The same thing, running the mailing machines. That was my connection with the AFL-CIO -- they gave me that history of the Congress when I retired -- because they had people on the staff there.

Ritchie: Of course, the Finance Committee spent a lot of time on Social Security issues.

Nichols: Yes, this fellow had testified several times before the Finance Committee on Social Security. The same thing brought me to that health organization that I told you about. Because of my connections with Social Security, they wanted me act as treasurer. I was signing notes for \$40,000 and \$50,000 as health plans.

Ritchie: What kind of health organization was that?

Nichols: For the whole community. The Social Security people would give them grants and things for indigent people.

Ritchie: Here in the District of Columbia?

Nichols: Yes, at 14th and Irving Street, N.W., it's still in existence right now.

Ritchie: What's the name of it?

Nichols: I think its called the Cardoza Health Center. I believe that's what it's called. When I first agreed to go, I was on the board for one meeting a month. Then when I agreed to serve as treasurer, then my phone would start to ring at 7:30 in the morning, and I would have to go by that office and sign some emergency check for this, that and the other thing.

Ritchie: Now was that connected with your church, or was that separate?

Nichols: A person in the church was on the executive staff, and she knew that I had retired. She was the one that put my name in. And there was no compensation at all for doing what I was doing.

Ritchie: So you've had a very varied retirement since you left the Senate.

Nichols: Yes. I wouldn't have had any problem, but I had promised my wife that we would live in our means, and would take on what came along.

Ritchie: But she didn't want you go into the cabinet business?

Nichols: No.

Ritchie: She thought that would take too much of your time?

Nichols: It did. Then when I started playing golf, I was playing golf on Saturdays and Sundays. My wife died in '77. I haven't played a game of golf but once since then. I played in my son's tournament on Sunday. If I realized then how ill she was, I never would have done that. But I do think that certain people, if they've been real active, and keyed up -- sometimes I was very tense -- that they do need something to let themselves unwind. I really believe that healthwise, that was very beneficial to me. When I would leave the office I would be doing something entirely different from what I had been doing. I've had a very rich life. See, I've been retired twenty-three years. The average person is retired for three to five years, if they can make it that far.

Ritchie: Well you've had a fascinating life and some wonderful opportunities. And you have a remarkably good memories of that period, and the people that you worked with.

Nichols: Thank you very much, sir.

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Ritchie: I've enjoyed enormously hearing your stories, and this is going to be a very good contribution to our oral history collection.

Nichols: You think so?

Ritchie: Oh, I think so, definitely. What's interesting is that so many people tell different portions of the same story. I had heard about some of the things that you talked about from other perspectives, but what you've said helps to make more sense out of some of the stories that I knew just a little bit about before. That's the reason for collecting so many stories, because everybody gives their own piece of the puzzle. You've provided a lot of clues about how this institution works.

Nichols: Well, I was not one to reveal things. I thought that when you worked as closely with the members of the Finance Committee as I did, that you don't go off and try to commercialize or capitalize on it.

Ritchie: But you've made a contribution here. You've certainly left a good record now for historians in the future who will be interested in how the Senate operated during the time you were here.

Nichols: Tell me this, Mr. Ritchie, how did you come to touch me on the shoulder the other day at that reception for Senator [Mansfield](#) [to present him the [Paul Douglas](#) Ethics in Government award]?

Ritchie: Well, when you turned around and spoke to Mr. Bookbinder -- I was sitting next to Hyman Bookbinder -- you introduced yourself to him and said that you worked on the staff of the Finance Committee from 1937 to 1971. Of course, there aren't that many people that I get to meet anymore who can say that they started to work for the Senate in the 1930s. We've been doing interviews with people for almost twenty years now, and leaving these as a record. And I knew as soon as you introduced yourself that you were someone we would want to include in this collection. Nowadays, the current staff members don't stay here very long. They're here for two or three years and they're onto something else. But you're in a generation of people who made a

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career out of working on Capitol Hill, and that's become a rare commodity. So it was a wonderful coincidence that we both were invited to the same reception and wound up sitting near each other.

Nichols: I was curious, because when they were establishing the Paul Douglas Foundation, they had a luncheon at one of the hotels downtown, on 14th Street, near Pennsylvania Avenue. That was my first time in there. Howard Shuman had contacted me, and I went. I met Senator [\[Paul\] Simon](#) and quite a few people who knew me, but I didn't know them.

Ritchie: I had done an interview with Howard Shuman, that's one of the other interviews in our collection, and he invited me to come to that reception, because of the acquaintance we had struck up, and just by chance I happened to be sitting there when you reintroduced yourself to Mr. Bookbinder.

Nichols: Mmm-hmm. Well, I met Senator Mansfield as I came in the door. I looked around as I came in, and I didn't see many people I knew. I did see Howard over in the corner. I had seen Senator Mansfield any number of times when he came before the committee, so I just reintroduced myself. And the president of the University of Illinois was standing there. I told him, "I'm Jesse

Nichols," and he said, "I'm president of the university." But that's one thing, if I received nothing else, Mr. Ritchie, I got a chance to see how extremely wealthy people would respond, how they treat people, and that kind of thing. That's been a pleasure to me.

I'm going to be taking an advanced music lesson this Friday, and I'm going to be playing at my alumni -- Alcorn's alumni charter program on the 24th. They were supposed to have another person, but that person can't be present, so she said, "Be sure that you prepare for two selections." I'm going to play of some of Duke Ellington's stuff.

Ritchie: We were planning to send a copy of your interview to Howard University -- I know the oral historian up there, they have a very good oral history collection at the Moorland-Spingarn Library -- and we'll be glad to send a copy to Alcorn too.

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Nichols: I'd appreciate that.

Ritchie: Also I have a good friend, Alferdteen Harrison, who teaches at Jackson State in Mississippi, and does oral history in Mississippi. We'll send her a copy of the interview.

Nichols: That would be fine, because most of my cousins went to Tougaloo. Tougaloo is about ten to twelve miles out of Jackson. That's where my father wanted my sisters and I to go. But we pulled a switcheroo on him and we went to Alcorn because most of the kids in Clarksdale were going to Alcorn. But that will be fine. I was out Saturday to a meeting of the Alcorn alumni, and I mentioned that this was in progress and that I might have something for them.

Ritchie: Well, good, we'll be glad to make copies for them.

Nichols: Okay, Mr. Ritchie, I appreciate it.

End of Interview #4

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