

WITH BRIEN McMAHON

Interview #1

October 12, 2006

RITCHIE: I'd like to talk about you and your background. I see that you were born in Norfolk, Connecticut.

LANE: Norwalk.

RITCHIE: Norwalk, okay. And I wondered what your family did there. What was your family story in Norwalk?

LANE: My father was born in 1888 in Waterbury, Connecticut. His father came here at age three from Ireland and had worked in the mills. Connecticut, particularly in those days, had big factories and mills in every town. And somehow the family moved to Norwalk. Somewhere around the turn of the century they wound up there. My mother was born in New York City in 1890, and she graduated from New York Teachers College which is now Hunter College. She taught school in Connecticut. Her family moved out of New York City to Connecticut somewhere around 1910, and I was born in 1921.

RITCHIE: And you grew up in Norwalk?

LANE: Yes. My father was originally a chauffeur and he then saved his money and bought a failing gas station and put a lot of energy and effort into it and made it into a successful business. I used to have to work there after school and summers and vacations, which work I enjoyed. He was kind enough to give me a good education. Sent me to Georgetown. I graduated from the Foreign Service School at Georgetown.

RITCHIE: I saw that you were a graduate of Norwalk High School. They had you on the distinguished alumni list, and I noticed that Senator Brien McMahon was a graduate of that school as well.

LANE: That's right, about 20 years before me.

RITCHIE: So I wondered if perhaps the high school might have been an important connection for you in that regard.

LANE: It really wasn't. This is the depths of the Depression, and in those days there weren't many scholarships available. Only the rich kids went to college. I never thought I would go to college. I was looking forward to probably working, like most of my classmates, in the factories around there. My mother just got so upset when I told her that I wasn't going to go to college that she insisted that I straighten out and apply. I was accepted at NYU, but I was a year young for my age. My father gave me a year in a prep school so that I could get into almost any college. Somehow I picked Georgetown, because I was fascinated by Washington, D.C., and the opportunities and all the action, particularly with the New Deal. I wanted to get here—and I came.

RITCHIE: What year was that when you came?

LANE: The fall of 1940. I was in my second year when the war broke out in December of 1941. The following week I joined the marines. I went down to the Washington Navy Yard and joined the marines along with a whole group of students, most of them athletes.

RITCHIE: How did you decide to join the marines?

LANE: I wanted to get out of school. [laughs] I liked the marine uniform and the tradition. I kind of was attracted by it. There was a former president of the yard at Georgetown who was doing recruiting. His dress blues looked very good. I think he was a second or first lieutenant, but he was recruiting college students. And they had a program, which I didn't realize at the time, they took us in the marines—I never had to register for the draft because I was in the service—and they sent us back to Georgetown in the reserves but not on active duty. I went on the accelerated program and finished four years of college in three. Then they sent us, as soon as we graduated, off to boot camp.

RITCHIE: Parris Island.

LANE: Parris Island, and then from there to Quantico to the OCS [Officers Candidate School], and then what they call Reserve Officer's Class followed that. And then they sent you to some more schools. It was a great experience.

RITCHIE: Did you get into the war at all?

LANE: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: Where were you stationed?

LANE: Well, I was all over the place. They sent me to Harvard for awhile, to the navy communications school. Well, then I picked up a specialty, besides being an infantry troop commander, I was a communications officer. I went out, first down to Cherry Point, North Carolina, and then to California and San Diego and then out to the Pacific. I was on an aircraft carrier for awhile. I wound up at the headquarters of the Commanding General of the Fleet Marine Force Air, and became more than just the communications officer. It was a small staff, and about once a month he'd take a trip around to the hot spots.

RITCHIE: All over the Pacific?

LANE: Right. Flying around in a DC-3, island hopping.

RITCHIE: Pretty dangerous, wasn't it?

LANE: I suppose so. Of course, everything was dangerous then. They were very dark days. No sign of any let up. It just was getting worse. The further we went toward Japan, the tougher it got. And those last two big battles were horrible. Iwo—I lost several of my friends there, classmates of mine at Georgetown. And Okinawa was terrible. Then we found out about the bomb. Nobody knew about it. The highest levels of the Marine Corps, they had no knowledge of it. And the whole world changed over night.

RITCHIE: And the war ended.

LANE: And I was one of the first out. I came back in September 1945.

RITCHIE: That was very fortunate.

LANE: It was, but I got back and there were no jobs. All of industry had been on a war footing and all of the sudden there's no war, and there's no business, and nobody's hiring anybody. Plants were shutting down and cutting back. So I had the GI bill and I decided that I should use it because I couldn't sit around home, in my mother's home. [laughs] So I went to Georgetown and they gave me a room and board scholarship, plus the GI bill to pay for tuition and books. It cost me nothing to go to law school.

RITCHIE: That's great. Now, as an undergraduate, you were in foreign service. Did you think about continuing on with that?

LANE: Yes, I wanted to take the State Department exam while I was out in the Pacific and they said no, it's only given at certain times and I think they gave it in San Francisco. There was no way I could get there. I wrote a letter to my senator and said this is unfair. I got a letter back from, I think it was Cordell Hull saying, "It's unfortunate, but we can't give it to the troops stationed around the world.." When I got back I looked at business and I did get an offer from Socony-Vacuum—it's now Mobil, Exxon Mobil—but it was in Indonesia. Ten thousand dollars a year, which was more money than I ever thought I'd make. But I had enough foreign service, so I wasn't about to go back out there. When we were out there, we never thought we'd get back. We just lived from day to day.

RITCHIE: When you decided, then, to go to law school, did you have anything in mind as to what you were going to do with the law?

LANE: No, not really. I never thought I'd be a lawyer. But then, as I got into it, I liked it. And I did quite well in law school. When I got out, again, there was a recession. There weren't any jobs. It took me a long time, but I found a job. I figured I wanted to be a tax lawyer because that was a new field in law, because taxes until the war came along were not important. The only way you became a tax lawyer was to work in the Internal Revenue, so I shot for that and I finally made it. I got there and I found it was a terrible job. It was a fate worse than death. I mean, you were just a glorified file clerk, the government lawyer. It was very slow and you couldn't do anything without getting all these approvals from supervisors and section chiefs. It was very dull.

RITCHIE: Could you tell me the story again about taking your bar exam?

LANE: Oh, yes. As I recall, it was a three-day exam and we prepped for it by going to a bar review course. It was given in the summertime down at the old Georgetown Law School at 6th and E Northwest. In those days, they had no air conditioning. The windows were open and they had a couple of fans, but it was hotter than Hades for those days. I got through it and passed.

RITCHIE: You mentioned who you were sitting next to when you took the exam.

LANE: Oh yes, James McCauley Landis, I didn't know who he was. He was writing feverishly and I was writing these relatively short answers, and I was very worried. Then I found out during one of the breaks that it was Jim Landis who had been Dean of the Harvard Law School. He was sitting right next to me. We went alphabetical: L-A-N-D . . . L-A-N-E.

RITCHIE: He had never taken the bar exam.

LANE: Yes, he told me he'd never taken it. He had just been fired by [President Harry] Truman at the time. He had been chairman of the CAB, and I guess he was out of a job and he figured he needed to get the bar in order to be able to do legal work. He became Joe Kennedy's lawyer. I think Joe took care of him.

RITCHIE: Yes, thanks to Tommy Corcoran, who set the two of them up.

LANE: Yes, Tommy was Joe's lawyer at one time and they had a big falling out.

RITCHIE: How, then, did you come from the Internal Revenue Service to Capitol Hill?

LANE: An accident. One of my friends at the Internal Revenue Service, another young lawyer, his brother was the U.S. attorney in the District. He was a United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, Morris Fay—George Morris Fay—and Bill Fay was my friend. I told Bill that I didn't like the job. I wanted to be a trial lawyer and go

down there and be an assistant DA. So he introduced me to his brother and his brother said, “Well, you have to get a letter from your senator.” And Fay knew Senator McMahon. So I said, “Okay, let me see what I can do, because we’re from the same hometown. But, you know, he’s older than I am.” Frankly, I’d never met him. But I had followed his career as a lawyer in the Justice Department. He had a tremendous career fighting the mob in Chicago with a series of important trials that he had won and made his reputation and ran for the Senate based on that.

I went up to Capitol Hill—and it was hard getting an appointment—I was dealing with his administrative assistant at the time. Finally I got to see him and he started asking me some questions and he said, “Well I know this guy. Are you any relation to George Lane?” I said, “Yeah, that’s my uncle.” He said, “Well, he was in my class in high school.” He says, “How’d you like to run this office?” I almost fell off my chair. He said, “When I was your age, I’d give my right arm right up to here for this job.” He said, “I’ve got to run for reelection. I’ve got to raise money. I’ve got to carry the load of the Foreign Relations Committee. I’ve got to run the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. I’m on the Commerce Committee but I haven’t got any time for it. And I’ve got to be on the floor. This office is a mess. Take it and run it.” Wow! This is the job I really wanted and never applied for!

When I was in the Internal Revenue, I parked my car on the Mall. Literally on the Mall, just park right out there and then walk across Constitution Avenue and into the building. When I finished work I’d head back, walking across the Mall, and I’d look up and the sun would be setting and it would shine on that glass up there in the Capitol dome. I used to look at that thing every day and I thought, man, that’s where I want to be. I would love to work up there. That is the place to be. And lo and behold, my prayers were answered. His office was unique in that his senatorial office was in the Capitol, on the first floor. That’s why I said when I came in, I had a parking space right at the entrance to the Capitol, the Senate entrance but near the dome. There’s a second set of doors before you go under the big, main steps, not the Senate side steps but the other steps?

RITCHIE: Yes.

LANE: Right there along that sidewalk right by the entrance. That's where the Supreme Court Chamber is.

RITCHIE: They used to call it the Law Library door.

LANE: Yes, it was the law library. Well, the law library is upstairs on the gallery, but actually it was the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy offices during that period, in the Old Supreme Court Chamber.

RITCHIE: So he had his office close to that?

LANE: Right across the main hallway. His office looked down the Mall on the other side of the Capitol, on the west side. There were three rooms there. One like a reception room, a small office, and then his office, a big office. Then we had some additional space down below, out you know where that—

RITCHIE: The terraces, yes.

LANE: Yes, under that terrace, there's offices. You could look out my window and I could see where they were working down there.

RITCHIE: So how many people were on the staff then?

LANE: We had relatively small staffs. Not like today. Nothing was like today. Gee, we had four people in that office which is the entrance to the suite, and there were two people in the small one, that's six, and then the senator. And then I think I had four more people down below. How many is that?

RITCHIE: About 10 or 12, something like that.

LANE: Yeah, that's right. See, I'm saying, "yeah," and I shouldn't.

RITCHIE: That's okay. But when he said, "take over the office," what did you have to do?

LANE: Well, I became what they call executive secretary, which was the number two person. He had a very talented man by the name of Eddie Roddan—Edward L. Roddan—who was appointed ambassador to Uruguay by Truman while I was working there. Then I became the administrative assistant, the top job. Eddie was a former newspaper man. He had been a White House correspondent for Hearst. He was very close to FDR and wrote Farley's book, *Behind the Ballots*.

RITCHIE: Oh, yes?

LANE: A very talented writer, but had nothing to do with the administration of the office. He was working on strategy and helping with speeches—not so much writing the speeches, but developing the thoughts and the theme. He was a very bright guy, very talented. So I had to run the secretaries and handle the mail. That's really what I started out doing. The mail would come in in the morning and we had somebody open it and pile it up on my desk. Then I'd call the secretaries in and start dictating.

I learned very fast that to find out what was going on in Washington, you had to know, and the way to do it was to read the *New York Times* every morning. From then on, every day of my life, I read the *New York Times*, because they had the top guys covering the Pentagon, the State Department, the Treasury Department, both sides of Capitol Hill. Then we had a news ticker in the office so we could stay on top of developing stories, which was very important because there were a lot of little crises going on in foreign affairs and in national affairs. The senator was kind of a central figure in a lot of this and the press would come running over. They'd all of the sudden descend on the office and he had to be briefed before they hit the door. So things that were happening, I could follow during the day and go over and rip and read. It was an AP [Associated Press] ticker in a soundproof box, so it wouldn't be too noisy. It was a very exciting period. I was very young. The Hartford paper said I was the youngest administrative assistant in the Senate.

RITCHIE: Well, Senator McMahon was pretty young also, wasn't he?

LANE: Forty-eight when he died, yes. I was looking, just to refresh my recollection, I looked at the old Senate Directory, for 1952. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which he was very much interested in, much more than anything else, even

though he chaired Atomic Energy and went through all those problems of the AEC investigations and all that. The senators ahead of him in seniority, and this was over 50 years ago, Walter George was 75 and more occupied and interested in the Finance Committee and taxes. Tom Connally was 75, and Theodore Francis Green was 85. This was 50 years ago when 75 was much older than it is today. And they weren't in that great shape, physically or mentally, in my judgement. I mean, they were all great men, but So the administration realized that, and the guy that was the hod carrier for the administration on a lot of these important things was Brien McMahon. Jack McFall was the assistant secretary of state. Before that, a guy that was killed—he was our ambassador in Guatemala.

RITCHIE: Peurifoy?

LANE: Jack Peurifoy, he was [Dean] Acheson's lobbyist/liaison with the Senate, and he used to practically live in our office. He was there almost every day.

RITCHIE: To know what was going on?

LANE: Yes, or to tell us.

RITCHIE: And the Foreign Relations Committee met in the Capitol in those days, too. On the first floor.

LANE: Right, just down the hall. McMahon used to like to have lunch in his own office and they used to just haul it right down from the Senate Restaurant which was just down the hall. He'd invite people in for lunch and, once in awhile, invite me along with important people like the secretary of the air force or the secretary of the navy, or other senators.

RITCHIE: What can you tell me about Senator McMahon? What kind of a person was he?

Photograph on following page of Senator Brien McMahon (D-Connecticut, 1945-1952)

LANE: He was a great guy, actually. He was so young and most everybody he dealt with, with any power—people that had power—were all so much older. Even though he was so young, he always tried to make himself older. You know what I mean? For people who didn't know him, he had sort of a gruff exterior, but he was very bright and really had a heart of gold. Not a real sensitive fellow, but his exterior appearance was a very strong personality. He'd look right through you. But he was actually a real nice guy. A lot of fun to work with.

RITCHIE: I was looking at Francis Wilcox's interview and he admired Senator McMahon's ability to question people at hearings.

LANE: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: He particularly thought he did a terrific job when General MacArthur came to testify, that McMahon really got MacArthur in a corner in his testimony.

LANE: He nailed him. And you know who developed that line of cross-examination? That's the one big moment of my life.

RITCHIE: Oh!

LANE: I did it.

RITCHIE: Can you tell me about that?

LANE: Oh, yes. That's a great story. I have to back up a little bit. McMahon had fought the battle of civilian control over the bomb, with the army. Of course, he was accused of taking the bomb away from the military, and that's what happened when they created the civilian AEC. The original draft legislation that was approved by Truman, the May-Johnson Bill, was to have the Pentagon run the nuclear business, the old atomic energy bomb building. McMahon thought it was a mistake and that this ought to be run by civilians. He had a big battle, a historic battle, turning the administration around, and turning the president around, and beating the Pentagon for the establishment of what kind of an apparatus we'd have for dealing with it in the future. So he's very sensitive on the importance of civilian control of the military.

When Truman decided to fire MacArthur, he called McMahon down and told him he was going to do it. McMahon said, "Chief, I think it's a mistake to fire him and leave him out there running around. I think you ought to call him back to here or to Wake Island again or to Hawaii or someplace, and then fire him." But Truman asked him whether he would back him up if he did it. He said, "I will." So the day that it broke into the press that Truman had canned him, McMahon was making a speech that night in Portland, Oregon, to the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. We worked that speech. He was actually the first one to back up Truman in that speech that night in Portland, Oregon. I remember I sent that speech to all of the newspapers around the country and I made the mistake of sending it under his frank. It was a political speech and it should have had postage. Some newspaper got a hold of it and wrote an editorial, I think it was the *Wall Street Journal* or something, saying, you know, "This is atrocious." Geez, I got a hold of the Post Office department and got a check down there immediately, and paid the postage on it.

So, he was committed to backing Truman on this very unpopular decision. I was here, and I don't know where you were at that time, but when MacArthur made that speech to the Joint Session of Congress, I was over there in the Capitol. He just took the country by storm. I mean, it was a very, very good speech. When they started preparing for these hearings—I'll tell you a few stories about the hearings because it gets kind of interesting. And this brings back my own memory. I haven't refreshed my recollection on this at all. So McMahon gets me involved directly with him as his counsel on this whole thing, and I turned over my routine stuff to another young man from Connecticut, a Harvard Law School graduate, George Carroll. And I just worked with the senator and the White House, and the Pentagon.

We had to prepare for this onslaught. Truman had appointed a former Congressman from Colorado, and later a senator, John Carroll, to head the White House effort on rebutting MacArthur and getting out what they claimed was the real story or the truth. A former professor of mine at Georgetown, Frank Nash, who was assistant secretary of defense, was the Pentagon lead, with Felix Larkin, the general counsel at the Pentagon. We began to have a couple of meetings, and they said to me, "We're going to release all of these cables to you." I remember John Carroll saying, "You're going to get the whole thing! It's going to be devastating. Wait until you see this stuff." (He hadn't even read it). But these cables were very routine and they were all on basic military

matters. So I started reading this stuff. Piles of it. I go through it and I said, “God, this stuff is nothing.”

We had a big meeting at McMahon’s house. It was the night before the hearing started, and let me remember this, Frank Nash was there, John Carroll was there, Eddie Roddan, who I had mentioned earlier, yours truly, and McMahon. I think that was it. This was to prepare for the hearing. They’re all talking about these cables and what MacArthur said, and what he did, and the Joint Chiefs and everything. I said, after they got into this and they weren’t getting anywhere—I mean, it was just a lot of who struck john garbage, you know? I said, “I don’t mean to talk out of turn, but I don’t think you’ll get anywhere arguing with MacArthur on strictly military matters. The guy’s an expert at military matters. I think that the biggest thing that I see, where his big weakness is, and nobody has picked it up, is the key in his speech—and I can remember the words—when he said ‘the issues are global, and to neglect one area of the globe at the expense of another is to court disaster.’”

By the way of background, Russia and China had a mutual assistance pact. If one of them would go to war, the other one would come in and help. And we knew that. If we went to war with China, we’d be fighting the Russians, too. McMahon knew and the Pentagon and the top brass at the White House should have known that at that particular point in time our so-called “nuclear arsenal,” atomic weapons, were not in the best of shape, because the bombs that we had had—I think it was all highly classified but all of our top leaders knew or should have known about it—were being removed to make smaller weapons and to trigger the H-bomb. So this would be the worst possible time, during that period, if we had to go to war, if we had to go into a nuclear showdown with the Russians. By this time, the Russians had the bomb.

So I developed a line of cross-examination—well, McMahon was smart, he picked it up very quickly—to test MacArthur’s knowledge of, since he said “the issues are global,” the state of the globe. See, he thought we were all just interested in Europe at the expense of the Far East, which wasn’t true, but Europe was always more important to us than the Far East. That was clear from our policies. But nevertheless, we developed this where McMahon would ask him a question about the state of our nuclear arsenal. He said, “Senator, I have no knowledge of that. I’m just an area commander.” And another one, “I remind you, Senator, I’m just an area commander. I don’t have that

responsibility.” Or “I don’t have that.” And then McMahon just pulls his own speech on him and says “You’ve proved my point. You are just an area commander and therefore, there are other considerations than just what you see in an area.”

“When we were in the marines, we had a name for it,” I remember telling McMahon that night. You become “Asiatic.” If you’re out there long enough the whole world revolves around Asia. Everything else is relatively unimportant. I said, “This guy’s been out there so long that he’s Asiatic, but he’s a very bright guy.” And so I remember Eddie Roddan saying, “Goddamn it, he has it! John’s got it! That’s it. Just focus on that and you’ll take him down.” And he did. The trouble is a reporter called him the morning before and started talking to him about MacArthur going on a “reconnaissance in force,” and McMahon led with that rather than with my line of questioning. So he sort of fell into the same old trap and started talking about military maneuvering and stuff. You’re not gonna do anything to him there. At the same time, in the hearings—these hearings were very critical. And they were holding it in closed sessions and releasing—

RITCHIE: A sanitized version.

LANE: Yes, like shortly thereafter. They were issuing these like three or four times a day while the hearings were going on. And the hearings went on. I remember McMahon saying, “Geez, this guy is really strong. He just sits there. He comes there in the morning, and he doesn’t go to the bathroom or anything. He just sits there and is very, very strong.” He was living in the Waldorf and flying down here every day. Did you know that?

RITCHIE: No.

LANE: Yes. He had his military plane. Somehow they would go back to New York at night and go live in the Waldorf Towers.

RITCHIE: One of the staff, I think it was Pat Holt, said that MacArthur would never take a drink of water while he was testifying.

LANE: Yes, that is why he never had to go to the bathroom. That's the thing that got McMahon. I think Pat Holt is quoted in some book that I read where McMahon's the one who got to MacArthur.

RITCHIE: Yes, and Francis Wilcox was also very impressed with McMahon about how good he was at questioning him and pinning him on that stuff.

LANE: Well, he was a very good trial lawyer, as just a young kid in the Justice Department out in Chicago. I'll tell you about some of those stories. They were fabulous.

RITCHIE: Oh, sure.

LANE: What happened was McMahon got a job in the Justice Department, given to him by Homer Cummings, who was the attorney general for Roosevelt. Cummings was from Stamford, Connecticut, which is close to Norwalk. Homer Cummings told me this story because I was writing a book on McMahon, so I got a lot of really good stuff before Homer died. He said, "A lot of people think that I, you know, brought him along and favored him in the department." He said, "Quite the contrary." He said this mutual friend of theirs introduced him and wanted him to give McMahon a job in the Department of Justice. He said, "I saw him and I gave him the lowest job in the department, a lawyer in the bowels of the tax division. And I never expected to see him again the rest of my life." [laughs] He said, "He rose to my attention by winning cases." He said, "I was reluctant to promote him because I might be accused of favoritism because he came from Connecticut, but he earned everything." Finally, he said, "I made him assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division." He was the youngest assistant that ever held the job, only because he won.

RITCHIE: What qualities do you attribute that to?

LANE: He was a very bright guy. Very broad in his education. Heavy reader. Read everything. Always had a book. Very much interested in foreign affairs and very much interested in peace. That was his mission. He could not figure out why we can't have peace in the world. And we should wage it. Instead of waging war, we should be waging peace. He offered to give up the chairmanship of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy if he could get the subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee on the

Voice of America. His real passion was penetrating the Iron Curtain to get to the people. He believed that you could turn that, if you could only get through and get around the tyrants in the Kremlin.

Right in the middle of the Cold War, he proposed a peace resolution. I don't know if you ever saw that. It was a Joint Resolution in the Senate expressing the friendship of the American people for the Russian people, or I guess the Soviet people, and all the peoples of the world. Right in the heart of the worst part of the Cold War. He got it through the Senate, and through the House, and Truman signed it. Then he went to the Voice of America and said, "Truman has sent this and they are silent. They're not telling their people about it. Start hitting them!" Finally the Russians acknowledged it. But we were able to say that they don't want the people to know that we're friends and we're not looking for a war. Same problem you have in North Korea today. Nobody's getting through to those poor dumb people. But this was his passion. And this was why he wanted to get the Foreign Relations Committee chairmanship eventually.

And, you know, the three guys ahead of him, as I started to tell you before, Walter George was 75, and Tom Connally was 75—but they were old 75—and Theodore Francis Green was 85.

RITCHIE: And [J. William] Fulbright became chairman by 1959.

LANE: Well, Fulbright told me, "If McMahan hadn't died, I never would have been chairman."

RITCHIE: He just assumed that McMahan was going to be chairman.

LANE: Well he was ahead of him in seniority. Yes, he would have been, McMahan was the next in line, and then Fulbright. Fulbright had worked for McMahan in the Justice Department. They were friends but Fulbright resented the fact that McMahan had seniority. They both came to the Senate in 1944. Fulbright contended that since he had served in the House he should get seniority. McMahan prevailed in countering that Connecticut was a state longer than Arkansas.

RITCHIE: It's interesting that he would take on atomic energy as issue right away, given the fact that he was—

LANE: He was a brand new senator, yes.

RITCHIE: And that was a very technical issue to be involved in.

LANE: It was technical and it was also strategic. I don't know how far you've gotten into that early Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and the previous select committee of the Senate that McMahon chaired, because he put a resolution in to do it and they made him chairman. When they finally got the bill through, the McMahon Act, then he became chairman of the Joint Committee. You know, all the other Senate committee members were the chairmen to the standing committees?

RITCHIE: Oh.

LANE: They were the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, chairman of the Commerce Committee, chairman of the Finance Committee. It was the elders of the Senate on the Senate side. Now the House was different. But on the Senate side you had all the seniors and young McMahon in his first term. I'm not sure they trusted him that much. That's the reason the elders all got on the committee.

RITCHIE: People like Richard Russell and others.

LANE: Yes, Russell was on the committee, from the Armed Services Committee, and before him Tydings. But that's all it was, was just the standing committee chairmen were the other members of the Senate side of the Joint Committee.

RITCHIE: So they wanted him to handle it but they wanted to keep an eye on him while he was handling it.

LANE: Right. I think so. But he handled it with grace, and got along with them.

RITCHIE: And he seemed very much part of the institution or the establishment.

LANE: Oh, yes. He was secretary of the Democratic Conference. He was on the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. Yes, he was somebody to reckon with. And very young.

RITCHIE: That was when Scott Lucas was the majority leader—and the Democrats were a hard majority to control.

LANE: But in 1950, Lucas was defeated. Francis Myers, who was the whip, was defeated, and McMahon was reelected in—in those days—a Republican state. So he was somebody to reckon with.

RITCHIE: I was wondering about the Joint Committee. Today everything is pretty bureaucratic here and a senator's office is separate from a committee office. Was that true then or was there more of a connection?

LANE: No, he kept it separate. This was the time of the [Joseph] McCarthys and the [Pat] McCarrans and the [William] Jenners and the spooks, so he kept the committee really walled off from everything else. I didn't get too involved with the committee other than keeping track of what was going on. I kept my hand out of that committee. There was a young lawyer by the name of Bill Borden who ran it. He was the staff director. No, it was quite isolated from everything else and from McMahon's office, even though it was across the hall.

RITCHIE: They actually met in the Old Supreme Court Chamber?

LANE: Yes, they had their meetings in there, because it was a secure place. Somehow they put in some kind of security protection. They had a security officer and, you know, you couldn't go in or out of there without signing in or being cleared.

RITCHIE: The Senate still uses the Old Senate Chamber above it for debates on classified information. They move from the current chamber down to that chamber.

LANE: They do? To go into executive session?

RITCHIE: Yes.

LANE: I thought they had that room upstairs in the new part of the Capitol.

RITCHIE: They do but that's just a small committee room and that's just for when the Intelligence Committee or another committee has a classified briefing.

LANE: In those days I almost never had to go to the Senate Office Building. See, he was on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee too, and that was up on the gallery level of the Capitol on the Senate side. So all of his committees were in the Capitol.

RITCHIE: So you never really had any cause to go across the street.

LANE: No, and he didn't park in that Senate garage, he parked right where I did. I had a parking space on the Capitol plaza and he had a space right there at the entrance. So I never had to go to the Senate Office Building. Hardly ever.

RITCHIE: Was that a conscious choice on his part? He didn't want to be over there in the office building with the other senators? He'd rather be near his committees?

LANE: Not only that, but it was Hiram Johnson's old office.

RITCHIE: Oh.

LANE: One of the great senators from California. Hiram died in office and that office was empty and McMahon said, "Gee that would be great but I don't have seniority." But nobody else put in for it and he got it. He just moved everything over there. And also it was hard to find, which meant he wasn't bothered with all the peddlers and the lobbyists and everything.

RITCHIE: The constituents, I suppose, didn't drop by very often back then.

LANE: Yes, but if they did, they were very impressed, because he was the only senator with his offices in the Capitol. Very impressive and beautiful. It wasn't very big, but right out his window you could look right down the Mall at the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.

RITCHIE: Those offices are used by the sergeant at arms right now.

LANE: It was the secretary of the majority's office for awhile.

RITCHIE: Yes.

LANE: And after McMahon died they gave it to a senator from Michigan who was crippled—

RITCHIE: Oh, Charles Potter.

LANE: Charles Potter, yes. Hiram Johnson had his whole operation there and I think he only had one person who was his secretary, a woman who sat out in the front. If people wanted jobs, he said, "I'm not an employment office. The people of California sent me here to legislate." He used to spend his time on the floor. The elevator right outside the door went right up to the chamber floor. It was a very, very good spot to be.

RITCHIE: Yes. Now you mentioned that you got a security clearance when you were there?

LANE: Yes.

RITCHIE: You felt that even though you weren't part of the Joint Committee—

LANE: Well, just to protect McMahon and protect me. Yes, I got it.

RITCHIE: Because he had to deal with so much classified information.

LANE: Highest level, yes.

RITCHIE: And you must have had people coming into the office who were talking to him about classified information all the time.

LANE: Oh, all the time. I mean, [J. Robert] Oppenheimer would be sitting on my couch out in front of my office. [Admiral Hyman] Rickover, cabinet officers. I had

security clearance when I was in the marines, because I was with the Communications Office—you get the top-secret clearance. But I had to get a whole new one because the AEC had their own Q clearance.

RITCHIE: Right. And Senator McMahon—people seem to be impressed that he sort of knew what he was talking about when he dealt with classified issues.

LANE: Well, when this stuff broke he went to school at the Bureau of Standards. There was Doctor [Edward U.] Condon—he later went to Corning Glass—he was a governmental expert on matters nuclear. McMahon went and got a crash course from him on what this is all about. Then he held a whole series of hearings where he brought all the top scientific people, all the best minds in, to advise us as to what should be done. A lot of the hearings were not published because they couldn't get a reporter that was cleared. But Chris Boland, a McMahon protege, is still alive and he was the counsel for that Special Senate Committee on Atomic Energy that held that series of hearings. I've got the hearings that they have and the report in my library.

But Hiram Johnson didn't have a staff.

RITCHIE: That's amazing for a senator from California.

LANE: I remember [Alben] Barkley when he was vice president, and the vice president's office was upstairs on the floor level. He just had a woman, Flo Bratten, and a guy who was like a runner or messenger, a guy by the name of [William W.] Vaughn. And I think he had one other person. He used to drive his own car. He'd park it in the garage. It was a convertible with the top down! No security of any kind. One night, I remember talking to him maybe the week after they tried to assassinate Truman down there at the Blair House, those Puerto Rican terrorists. Truman ordered Secret Service protection for Barkley, but Barkley just had the reception room and his office and that was it. So this one Secret Service agent appears, and Barkley didn't know what to do with him. He didn't want him anyway. So he took a chair out of his office and put it out in the hall by his door, so the guy didn't have to stand in the corridor. For him to sit there.

RITCHIE: It's a lot different today.

LANE: Oh, my God! How the times have changed. You could walk in that Capitol Building any time day or night. And you know they did bomb it one time. Do you remember that?

RITCHIE: Yes.

LANE: When was that, back in the '50s or '60s?

RITCHIE: We've had several bombings. There was one in the '70s and one in the '80s here.

LANE: Seventies, but it was in the bathroom that we used to use.

RITCHIE: Yes, on the ground floor of the Capitol.

LANE: That was our toilet. Next to the senator's barber shop.

RITCHIE: Yes.

LANE: There's a couple of hideaway offices in there. That was the lavatory. That's where they put a bomb. It's right next to the main corridor.

RITCHIE: Yes, that was in 1971. So you mentioned the fact that Connecticut is a Republican state—

LANE: It was then.

RITCHIE: Was, at least. McMahon never won by huge amounts. He was always winning by about 52 percent of the vote or something like that—

LANE: He won handily. He won a 60,000 majority, which was unheard of in an off-year election. If there was a strong presidential candidate, like [Franklin] Roosevelt, running, the Democrats would win, but if it was an off-year election, the Democrats couldn't win.

RITCHIE: I was just wondering how much of the business of his office was local business, Connecticut business? I mean, he was dealing with all of these national issues and international issues, but you never can forget your home base if you're going to get reelected.

LANE: He didn't spend a lot of time on the home base. After he left the Department of Justice, he started a law firm here in Washington, and he made money. He was one of the first of the New Dealers that knew their way around Washington. He also had some very important cases in the Supreme Court that he argued. And he made very good money—in those days it was considered to be very good money. He had a beautiful home here up on Woodland Drive, in the best part of town. And he belonged to Burning Tree Golf Club. He loved golf. He loved to “get the hell out of the Senate” and go play golf.

He didn't have a home in Connecticut. He used to use his brother's address. And he would go up there—like when he was running in 1950—in 1949, when they got out of here in, I think it was like September or something like that. He'd head for Connecticut and in the meantime I would set up speaking engagements for him all over the state. He'd tell me where he wanted to go and I'd find a Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club meeting, things like that. A year before the election, you could get in to these groups, and he would talk to them mainly about foreign affairs and the problems we faced in the world, and what we have to do, and how important it is that we try to promote peace in the world. He got a very good reception. Very bright guy. He could handle himself very well.

One day we'd be in Stamford, the next day, Bridgeport, and the next day another town. Very seldom would we be away over night. That's how he campaigned. In 1950, he put most of his money in television. It was the first major Senate campaign that used television, and it worked. He went on live every night in New Haven [chuckles], on the only television station in the state. It didn't get into the southern part, near New York, but got the rest of the state. And he just talked to the people. He was very good at it. He could look right at the tube and he was fairly convincing. He made a nice, clean campaign. Never said anything bad about his opponent. Didn't even have to mention him.

RITCHIE: All of the work on foreign policy didn't work against him in those days, it worked for him.

LANE: It worked for him there, because Connecticut was a pretty interesting state in that there's a base of intelligentsia there with the whole Fairfield County, the more affluent people that work in New York and all. Then you've got Yale in New Haven, and then you've got the University of Connecticut, and Wesleyan. He was always close to all of the educational institutions. He graduated from Yale Law School. He helped the University of Bridgeport, and he helped Wesleyan. He always said that he'd like to pitch his campaign to the intelligentsia.

RITCHIE: Usually foreign policy works against senators. Voters vote pocketbook issues, but I guess that in the late '40s the foreign policy was on the front page every day.

LANE: Well, when he ran in '44 we were in the war, so that's all foreign policy, and then in '50—

RITCHIE: The Cold War.

LANE: Yes, the heart of the Cold War, and also we were in an economic recession, too. We were beginning to lose industry in Connecticut. They've lost it all since then, but every town had major industrial operations. Bridgeport, for instance, during World War II they called it the "arsenal of democracy." The Remington Rand, and GE had their second-largest unit there. They made all of the washing machines and dryers and what they call "white goods"; Singer sewing machines, Sikorsky, Chance Vought Aircraft, Bridgeport, the whole brass industry was there, and the hardware industry, the ball bearing industry, the machine tool industry. The first automobiles were made there. It's all changed radically.

RITCHIE: Would you have seen many lobbyists from any of those industries in your office in those days?

LANE: Not too many. Lobbying wasn't as important, or wasn't as bad, I guess, in those days, at least from what I saw. Maybe it was just as bad, but from my own

perspective, there wasn't a great deal of it. For instance, I never heard of a fund-raiser for a senator when I was there. I'm sure they had them, but I never heard about them. They must have done it secretly. You know, shaking down the lobbyists for \$1,000 or \$5,000 or whatever you can get. That wasn't done.

Of course, this was before television. We were ahead of the game because we used television, but we didn't use a lot of the other. I mean, we put all of our money on TV. Since then, the way they now use television with these spot ads, it's big money. Politics has become big, big money. It's terrible.

RITCHIE: Yes, that's sort of consumed it. Well, I was just wondering, as the administrative assistant, did you have to be the middle person between the senator and some of the interests in the state? Did you have to keep an eye on what was going on back home?

LANE: I had to, yes. I used to read the local papers. We subscribed to the major papers in the state and read them all. We had a little office in Connecticut that had one person in it who used to clip the papers and I never bothered reading the clippings. By the time I'd get them, I'd already know about it and I'd throw them in the wastebasket.

It was a lot of fun, particularly for a young guy. But it really scared me in the beginning. My God, it was such a change in my life and I thought I was going to have a heart attack for awhile. I had long hours, and worked very hard. I'd be there relatively early in the morning and there until late at night. He was a guy that would come busting in just before the hearing in the morning. If it was like a 10 o'clock hearing or a 9:30 hearing, he'd come in at 9:27 and a half and we'd go right into the hearing. Then he would stay late at night. I wanted to do a good job and I wanted him to appreciate it. So I always made sure that I was there before he got there, and I was always there when he left at night.

RITCHIE: Which meant a long day.

LANE: Oh, very long. It was hard on my dear wife.

RITCHIE: But the Congress wasn't in session all the time.

LANE: It was, because of the war, the Korean War.

RITCHIE: Oh, of course, yes. So they were in a lot.

LANE: That was awful. In the 80th Congress, when the Republicans controlled it, they were finished in June or something like that. But no, when the Korean War came, we just went around the clock.

RITCHIE: That was also the era when Joe McCarthy came to notice.

LANE: Oh, boy, tell me about it! The first one to take him on was McMahan. He was appointed to that Select Committee of the—

RITCHIE: Foreign Relations Committee.

LANE: Special Committee of the Foreign Relations Committee, to investigate Senator McCarthy's charges concerning the State Department. They had hearings, and it was a very tough period. I counseled McMahan on that. I said, "Look, try to control your temper." He wanted to go get McCarthy. I mean, he hated him, and he wanted to tear his guts out. You know, McMahan was a tough guy. I said, "Don't do that. Don't do that. You're playing right into him. Please don't. Act like a judge up there. The guy apparently doesn't have that much evidence. Give him enough rope."

Well, they started the hearings and the first day McMahan gets his temper up. He turns red and he starts going after him. He's pointing at him. And McCarthy says, "See, you're more interested in attacking McCarthy than getting the Communists out of the State Department." I thought, "Oh, God, he fell for it." But anyway, that committee had [Henry] Cabot Lodge, [Bourke] Hickenlooper on the Republican side, and McMahan and Green and—

RITCHIE: Millard Tydings.

LANE: —and Tydings was the chairman. They originally asked McMahan to chair the committee and he tentatively agreed, but Ed Roddan and I persuaded him to

decline. We thought it would adversely affect his chances for reelection. We said give it to Tydings, he will win easily in Maryland.

That was the committee. Then they would have these front page cartoons of—I remember a trash can that was reeking and McMahon and Tydings and Green were trying to hold the cover on it. It was all pro-McCarthy. The leading paper in the morning here at that time was the *Washington Times Herald*. And then the Hearst papers in New York, and the Scripps Howard papers, and they were awful. I mean brutal. Accusing us of treason. And then they had a guy who was the chief counsel of that committee, who had been recommended by, apparently, J. Edgar Hoover. What was his name?¹ Great big tall guy. Oh shoot. I'll think of it. He wrote a very tough report. It was too tough. I remember I tried to tone it down and it boomeranged on them. As a result, Tydings, who was virtually unopposed before—they had some kind of a political deal that the Republicans weren't going to go after him and they'd give them the governorship and the Democrats would get the Senate seat—well, that all fell apart and an unknown lawyer in Baltimore became the senator from Maryland. Tydings got beat by McCarthy. McCarthy came to Connecticut three times during the campaign, but we were able to handle him. McMahon did not answer him. He got somebody else, a surrogate, to ask, “Who is this man from Wisconsin who's coming and trying to tell you how to vote?”

RITCHIE: So you think that the Tydings Committee made a mistake in trying to be adversarial?

LANE: Right.

RITCHIE: They should have been more neutral, to hear the evidence.

LANE: A little bit. At least appear like they're judicious.

RITCHIE: What was it about McCarthy that made people like McMahon lose their temper?

¹Edward P. Morgan, a former FBI agent, served as chief counsel to the special committee.

LANE: Well, he was such a son of a bitch, and McMahan knew it. I shouldn't have said that. [laughs]

RITCHIE: That's all right. The whole institution just couldn't figure out how to deal with McCarthy.

LANE: No, and the administration didn't know how to deal with him, either. I remember, I said to McMahan, "You know, this guy is running wild." I think McCarthy was largely responsible for the Republicans winning in 1952. [Dwight] Eisenhower was a strong candidate, of course, but they won both houses of the Congress. I think McCarthy was responsible for that.

RITCHIE: He created an atmosphere.

LANE: Right. Of distrust and got people frightened. Yes, I said to McMahan, "We've got to have an undercover secret operation against this guy." I said, "From what I hear, he's no good and there's got to be a lot of skeletons in his closet." He said, "Well, you got a good idea." He calls up Charlie Murphy, who's the counsel for Truman and he said, "Charlie, I want you to talk to John." He said, "I want him to come down and talk to you about . . . he's got some ideas. Let's see what we can do."

I had some really specific things that I thought ought to be done. I'll never forget, I went down to see Charlie Murphy and he says, "Oh, I think they pay too much attention to McCarthy. I think we should just let him rant and rave." He wasn't interested at all in McCarthy. I said, "You've got subpoena power. You've got IRS." I was going to really do something.

RITCHIE: But they never did.

LANE: It might have been frowned upon now, but no, they wouldn't do a thing. Weren't interested.

RITCHIE: Well, what was it like working in the Senate, when McCarthy was operating? Did it permeate into everything, or was it fairly isolated?

LANE: I think the Senate was okay. It was the public outside. Some of the right-wing groups were emboldened. The only thing that saved McMahan in Connecticut from being defeated was not just that he was a pretty damn good senator, but he was a Catholic.

It was hard for McCarthy to say that McMahan was a Communist or a Communist sympathizer. I think that if he hadn't been a Roman Catholic, he would have been defeated. Because see, he went after a lot of the kind of stupid right-wing know-nothings. Some of them very well-intentioned but not very broad gauged.

RITCHIE: Well, McMahan really got a good press, looking at the newspaper clippings. People really thought highly of him. It seems like—

LANE: Yes. Did you see the editorials when he died?

RITCHIE: Oh yes, I saw some of them, at least.

LANE: *The New York Times* said that he gave politics a good name.

RITCHIE: Clearly a lot of people were talking about him as a presidential candidate.

LANE: Oh, yes. I was his campaign manager. And we were running.

RITCHIE: So he was pretty serious about it in '52?

LANE: Oh yes.

RITCHIE: When did he start thinking about that?

LANE: Oh, he was thinking about it for years. He thought that after getting reelected in '50, that was the next step to go. He had to win with a good result in order to be a viable presidential candidate. Sure, he was very much interested. I remember we had a meeting up in Connecticut one night and a bunch of his friends and some of his advisors, and they were asking him, "Why don't you throw your hat in the ring?" He

turns to me and he says, “John what do you think I ought to do?” I said, “I don’t think you ought to do anything until you find out what Truman’s going to do, and we don’t know whether he’s going to run for reelection. But if he doesn’t run, I think, then we throw the hat right in the ring, immediately.” He said, “Yeah, I think you’re right.” So when Truman said he wasn’t going to run, McMahan went down and talked to him. He entered the primary in Illinois. I remember Truman telling him [chuckles], he said, “Brien, good luck, but those Ku-Kluckers in Southern Illinois will cut you up.” That’s what Truman said.

RITCHIE: Well, Truman had a good sense of the Midwest.

LANE: Yes, down where he was, you know, Kansas City.

RITCHIE: How did McMahan deal with the issue of being a Catholic candidate? At that point, the only Catholic candidate had been Al Smith.

LANE: Yes, we knew it would be a handicap, but he thought he could do it. He thought, you know, the time will come. And he thought maybe I’ll be it. And [John F.] Kennedy told me later that if McMahan hadn’t died he probably would have never gotten a chance.

RITCHIE: That McMahan would have been the person that everybody turned to. Because he was still young enough that even if he hadn’t gotten elected in ’52, he would have only been in his fifties in 1960.

LANE: Right.

RITCHIE: Well, I’d like to talk more about Senator McMahan and especially about the presidential race in ’52. And I’d like to talk about what you did after that period. But this might be a good place for us to take a break.

LANE: Sure. We’ve been here a long time.

RITCHIE: You said you’re going to be back after Thanksgiving?

LANE: Right.

RITCHIE: Maybe sometime in early December we can do a follow-up.

LANE: That would be nice. This is very enjoyable. It gives me a chance to remember things. Things come to mind that I've completely forgotten about.

RITCHIE: Right, and you're talking about a Senate that is very different than the one of today. We're trying to preserve memories of that time period, those senators and those issues, and just how different the place was, how it has changed over time.

LANE: Yes, they were quite respectful of each other. Well, there were very tough partisan differences, but it didn't get personal like it is today, where you see a lot of good senators just quitting because it gets too nasty here. And that's terrible, isn't it?

RITCHIE: Yes, it's gotten very polarized.

LANE: Yes. The meanness, you didn't see that. There was a certain decorum. A certain way that they treated each other. McMahon was considered one of the more partisan ones by a lot of the Republicans. They've talked to me about it over the years, you know. And he was partisan, but he was polite and respectful.

RITCHIE: Well, this has been excellent. Thank you very much.

End of the First Interview