

Interview with Judge Bertil Johnson on 4-8-94

Born on May 7, 1901

Burt Johnson attended Lincoln Elementary School and graduated from Stadium High School in 1919. Following High School, Bertil attended the University of Washington, applied for Law School, and received his Law Degree in 1925.

Admitted to the Bar Association in June, 1925, Bertil Johnson began private practice in the office of Fred G. Remann. That same year, Remann went to the Superior Court where he served until his death in 1949. Bertil was appointed assistant U.S. Attorney in September 1926 and held office for a year. At that time, the four Superior Court Judges, Carr, Chapman, Hodge and Remann appointed Bertil acting prosecuting attorney in Pierce County. He was elected in office in 1930 and served until January 1935 when he went into private practice. He also served on the U.S. District Court from 1951 until 1974. This interview is a series of questions involving different events and personalities in the Tacoma area and his impressions and remembrances of them.

SIDE 1, tape 1

JOHN: The members I have listed for the original members are George D. Poe, Sheriff Lou Croft, Fred Remann, AB Comfort, ... Dobler, Arnold Clevenger, Arthur Klaus, yourself Bertil Johnson, Al Austerberg, Al Davies and Virgil Miller...

JUDGE JOHNSON: I'll tell you how the boys club came about. Judge Raymond, that's Fred Raymond, a supreme court judge here in Tacoma. He was very much concerned about the number of cases he was getting down and around Tacoma Avenue, G Street, Yakima Avenue... from 15th Street down to about 25th in Tacoma. As a matter of fact, he had gone to the rotary club and the rotary club did a survey. They found that the worse

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place in Tacoma for juvenile delinquency was in this particular area. So Judge Raymond wanted to do something in this area in order to alleviate a lot of this difficulty these kids were having living adjacent to the area. So he went back to the rotary club to see if they would sponsor an organization. The early club felt that they were not able to sponsor. Judge Raymond wanted to put Boys club affiliated with the Boys Clubs of America. He had read a good deal about the Boys Clubs of America and was convinced that the best organization to help clean up that district was a boys club that was affiliated with the boys clubs of America. He also went to the Kiwanis Clubs to see if they would sponsor a drive to raise money to build a building for the boys clubs. They felt that they were not able to sponsor that big of a project.

I was a member of the Lion's Club. And Judge Remann talked to me and I went to the Lion's Club and tried to get them to sponsor it, but they too felt that they were not able to sponsor that big of a project. I was also the chairman of the salvation army advisory board. The SAB was a group of people here in Tacoma that were purely advisory so far as the Salvation Army was concerned, and I served on that board for almost 25 years as the chairman of the board. So I went to the Salvation Army to see if they would be willing to sponsor a Boys Club.

Major Williams, the commanding officer of the Salvation army, thought that maybe they could start doing something for a boys club. They had a building down on 13th and A street, so they started a little Boys Club in that building as a beginning and that went on for a year or so and finally we talked to the District Commander of the Salvation Army and we agreed that they could act as a sponsor to raise funds for a building for the Tacoma Boys Club.

They had a person who they had used who came from back east someplace in Missouri who was in charge of raising funds for the Salvation Army in various parts of the country. In the mean time, we got together with the community chest in an attempt to support a Boys club. The Community Chest now is known as the United Way, but then it was known as the Community Chest. The CC said, no they would not support a Boys club and would not pay anything for the Boys club and if they were going to raise funds for a Boys Club, they'd have to completely support themselves and not get help from the Community Chest. That went on for quite some time. Judge Remann and I had several meetings with the CC leaders and they were adamant that they would not do anything at all for the boys clubs. As a result of that, the Salvation Army pulled out of the Community Chest and decided that they would sponsor a Boys Club and would help us raise the money.

So we went ahead and had a campaign to raise funds for the Boys Club, and we were fairly successful when you think of the value of money back in those days. We raised around \$30,000 which was quite a lot of money then. Particularly when you think of it in terms of a pound of butter. A pound of butter today costs over \$1.00. In those days, you'd get 3 pounds of butter for a dollar and so forth. So there was a lot of difference in value.

We had our drive and in that drive, we were joined by Sheriff Lee Croft who was the Sheriff of Pierce County at that time, and labor. Labor was a great help to us. We went to the Labor temple and presented our situation to them and they had a secretary by the name of McIlvaigh who was a very fine gentlemen. He was the secretary of the labor council here in Tacoma. RL Clevenger was President (if I can recollect correctly) of the Pierce County Labor Council. Clevenger was also president of the Clerk's Union. Harold

Dabilar was also one of the Union representatives who joined us in this campaign to raise some funds.

George D. Poe was a particular friend of Judge Remann's. G. D. Poe was in the real estate business. He had his office in what is now the Pantages, called the Jones' building. That was the same building that Judge Remann had his office in before he went on the bench -- on the corner of 9th and Commerce Street.

JOHN: May I ask you something? So it was Judge Remann that was leading the program?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Oh yeah. No question about it. Judge Remann was the one pushing it -- not only leading it, but he was really pushing it and wanted to get something going so that he could do something to crack the neighborhood around 25th.. 23rd... 21st and Yakima or G Street and Tacoma Avenue and up to K Street. So this was a method that he felt we ought to follow.

Al Davies was a businessman here in Tacoma. Al Davies had a business making tanks -- hiring tanks like oil tanks, and he was the one who had more money than anybody else for the exception of George Poe. But with the help of these people, we raised about \$30,000.

JOHN: Did they provide seed money themselves then solicit other businesses and businessmen?

JUDGE JOHNSON: They all contributed of course, and then a system in calling on other business people to raise money. There was a fellow that doesn't appear anyplace probably in any of the minutes of the Boys Club, but who was a big help to us. His name was

Peterman. He had the Peterman Manufacturing Company down on the Tideflats and was a very good friend of Judge Remann's, and he pledged to give considerable amount of lumber for the building and when we were ready to build, he did just that.

After we had raised the money, we had to find a place to put a building.

JOHN: What was Mr. Peterson's first name? Do you remember?

JUDGE JOHNSON: No, I don't.

At this time, the Tacoma School District had a school that was situated on 25th and G Street. In the alley between Tacoma Avenue and G Street. And they were going to tear that school down and they were going to put a new school around there someplace, and they were not going to use that property and they had given up on it as a matter of fact and vacated the school. So we made an offer to the city -- the school board in the amount of \$1,800 for that property on the lower side of Yakima between the alley of G Street and Yakima -- that 1/2 of the block and it was probably 200 feet long on Yakima and down to the alley on G Street. And they put it up for sale -- we got them to put it up for sale and we made an offer of \$1,800 and they accepted the offer. And that's when the first Boys Club building was erected. There's a lot that can be said about the building of that building. Most everything we got for nothing. We had to buy a considerable amount too, but we got a lot of lumber from Peterman lumber company. The labor unions, the plumbers, the carpenters... gave us a lot of free labor. The labor unions were very supportive of the Boys Club. The painting -- the union painters painted the building. The carpenters, plumbers and so on contributed a great deal by coming up on their own time to build the building.

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JOHN: So you would say that labor was well represented?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Yes, very, very well represented, and labor has always been very supportive of the boys club. The fact is that we could not have gotten along had it not been for labor.

JOHN: So it's a good example of the businessman and labor working together very well?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Yes, very well. No question about it and the result of the building of that building was that we got youngsters from all around who came there and got into the program. We had a young man as the director -- can't think of his name, but you'll find it in the minutes -- Vincent somebody was our first director, and then we opened the Boys Club about 1942 -- or thereabouts, and the minutes will show. Vincent was a young man who came here from the east and was a Boys Club director and was recommended by the Boys Club of America and he stayed about 1 to 1-1/2 years and then he was drafted into the service and left us. He was followed as a director by a fellow named E.S. Ostberg who was quite a guy, not married, spent lots of time, lived there in the building and administered to the youngsters and did a tremendous job.

Sometime (I've forgotten the dates) they needed a lot of equipment...

JOHN: So they had a vocational program there also?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Oh yeah. They had a vocational program, they had basketball courts, they had games and all that sort of thing.

JOHN: So it was a recreational area as well as a place to learn something?

JUDGE JOHNSON: They needed a lot of equipment in their carpenter shop and I got the Lion's Club to agree to put on a drive -- a paper drive. In those days they didn't recycle paper like they do, not as much as they do now. Anyway, we put on a paper drive and I was the chairman of the committee and we raised about \$3,000. Every Saturday we went to the Lion's Club and the members went out door to door and collected papers and magazines and all of that kind of stuff and we raised about \$3,000 and bought a lot of equipment for their shop.

After the Boys Clubs been in business... in operation, Judge Remann's dream came true because the rate of delinquency in that particular district went way down. And it really accomplished the purpose that the boys club was formed for. It was a very necessary thing for that particular part of Tacoma and it proved out to do the thing we intended it should.

Al Davies who was on that board (the Tacoma Boys Club is now named after Al Davies)... when he died he left a will which gave to the boys clubs about 1.5 million dollars.

I'm getting ahead of the story now but now as long as I'm talking about Al Davies, and we used \$800,000 to build the present building up there on 17th by the Stewart School. In view of the fact that we got so much from his estate, we thought that we ought to rename the club.

The meetings that we generally had were at the Elks Club down on Broadway. We would meet at least once a month. Some of the other fellows that were on that board, about the beginning of it -- I think of Anderson who was a very prominent printer in Tacoma and he

was in the printing business... Emmitt became famous by reason of the fact that in 1949 Emmitt was elected as the Grand Exalted Ruler of the order of Elks in the United States.

JOHN: Did the original members, the founding members of the boys club -- did you all stay active for quite a while?

JUDGE JOHNSON: We added -- kept adding (members). We got 2 people who were interested. I'm trying to think of some of the others we added early. Al Whitman who was the Vice President of the Puget Sound National Bank was a member of the board from almost the beginning. A.B. Comfort who was on the original board was in the Real Estate and Insurance business. Comfort had been a client of Judge Remann's when Judge Remann had been in private practice and Author Brouse who was on that original board was President of the National Bank of Washington.

JOHN: So these were fairly prominent members of the community I would say.

JUDGE JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN: Excuse me, would you repeat what you said about Author Brouse please?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Author Brouse was the President of the National Bank of Washington, or the National Bank of Tacoma then. He was a very fine, fine gentleman. We were scrambling along and grew and we had our problems. It wasn't always easy to get enough money to operate. We didn't get the Salvation Army (support) because they withdrew from the Community Chest because they would not support the Boys Club. The Community Chest relented.

JOHN: After you guys already had it going, right?

JUDGE JOHNSON: No, they relented just as we started our drive to raise some money. They agreed to take the S.A. back into the community chest and they agreed to support the Boys Club.

JOHN: Was there some politics going on there in your opinion?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well, I think so.

JOHN: I mean, the withdrawal?

JUDGE JOHNSON: I think that the members -- the directors of the Community Chest at that time were sincere in saying that they just didn't want to go out and raise that much more money and they didn't want to pay for a new organization that would be dependent upon them. I think they were sincere in that, but they saw that we had a good deal of enthusiastic support for the community, so they changed their mind and decided that they would support the Boys club and the Salvation Army.

Another think that I should tell you -- up to that time, the Community Chest did not have representatives of labor on their board and one of the conditions of going back into the community chest is that they would put a representative of labor on their board. So they followed through and did that. I have a letter somewhere in my files -- Mr. Mackelvey who was the secretary of the Pierce County Labor Organization in which he says that that was one of the best things that ever happened to labor when the Community Chest was forced to take a member of labor on their board.

JOHN: The Community Chest later became what?

JUDGE JOHNSON: The CC in 1952 became The United Way. The CC was not covering all of the charitable organizations. All of them did not join. I can tell you something about that in 1952 if you'd like to have me.

JOHN: Sure.

JUDGE JOHNSON: People in the community felt that all charitable organizations should be under one head, and they should only have to have one drive for funds. So they decided to form what is known as the United Way in 1952. They went to all of the charitable organizations and almost all in Tacoma joined in under the United Way. There were three or four that did not, one of them was the March of Dimes. They refused to join in the United Way because they said they could have their own campaign and make more money than they could get out of the United Way, so they've never been in the United Way, and some other organizations did the same thing. I have never, ever forgiven the March of Dimes for that attitude because I think they were very selfish and not willing to do anything for the community.

So the United Way came into being in 1952 and it happened that I was the campaign chairman for the United Way in 1952, the first year that it was in being. And by campaign being, I was the chairman of the group that did the solicitation and raised the money and that sort of think.

JOHN: How did you get that job -- who asked you to do that?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well, the president of the United Way at that time was Baker of the News Tribune. And he came to me and insisted that I should act as the campaign chairman. I have been active in the solicitation of the Community Chest, but not the head of anything, so I took it. That was my second year on the bench. I had only been a judge for a year at that time and the truth of the matter John, from about April until September, I think I spent at least two or three nights a week, every week for that period of time working on United Way. It took a lot of time and a lot of effort. But we succeeded and at that time was the beginning of what we not have and that is payroll deductions. In other words, before that time, they would have to go to each person who was employed some place and have them sign a pledge card, and then that individual would have to pay that pledge card himself. We succeeded in getting most of industry in Tacoma to agree that their employees could sign their pledge cards and turn it into to their employers and then their employers would then deduct a dollar a week or whatever they wanted them to deduct and send it to the United Way as part of giving to their community. And that wasn't easy to get either because Labor Unions didn't want to do that. And really the industry didn't want to do it because it would cost them money for bookkeeping and that sort of think and labor didn't want it, but we finally got them to do that and that has been a Godsend so far as the solicitation for United Way here.

JOHN: Do you remember why labor wasn't interested in doing that?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well, you have to remember there was a lot of difficulty between labor and industry in those days. We had quite a number of strikes and problems with labor. Labor didn't trust industry and industry didn't trust labor -- really and truly. We finally came about that year, and it has been working very well for them since.

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JOHN: Did you have labor people and industry people involved on the same board if the United Way?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Oh yeah.

JOHN: So there was representation from both sides.

JUDGE JOHNSON: We did you see after we went back into the Community Chest and then on the United Way. They were represented both in the United Way and the Community Chest. Now, we got along with the Salvation Army until about, well I'll have to get you the dates -- until the Salvation Army tried to take over the Boys Club. You got a commanding officer here -- I'm trying to think of his name, but can't off hand -- who insisted that he wanted to take charge of the boys club.

JOHN: What was the reasoning for that -- why do you think he wanted to take over the Boys Club?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well because he thought we were very sinful up there. We used to once in a while have a party and a dance up there to raise money for the Boys Club, and he didn't think we should do that. He thought there ought be some kind of religious ceremony in the Boys Club and that we were not doing that and he was quite a trouble maker.

JOHN: What eventually happened in regards to that?

JUDGE JOHNSON: The members of the board, the Boys Club board told him, "you keep your fingers out of there." We are members of the Boys Club of America. This is not a

Salvations Army unit. You sponsored us but it's not a S.A. unit, it's a Boys Club unit affiliated with the Boys Club of America. And so he made so much trouble that the commanding officer, a fellow by the name of Johnstone, who was in charge of all this Northwest District finally wrote a letter to all the members of the board of the Boys Club and told them that they were fired and that the Salvation Army was going to take over the Tacoma Boys Club.

JOHN: How could he fire you guys?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well, he thought he could. He wrote us all letters and told us that we were no longer members of the Boys Club board and that the S.A. was going to take over, and so we started a lawsuit against the S.A. and had a trial. And Judge Sutton from Kitsap County was a judge who heard the case here and he found that actually the S.A. was only a sponsor and they were merely holding the property in trust for the Boys Club, and we had been incorporated as a Boys Club, you see and we had been affiliated with the Boys Club of America. So he held that they really were sponsors and therefore had no right to fire the board or to take over the building or to take over the Boys Club as they tried to do. And that case went to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court agreed with Judge Sutton and upheld his decision. So then we withdrew entirely from the Salvation Army.

JOHN: Who represented the Boys Club, do you remember?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Yeah, Earl Mann and Dick Hodge.

JOHN: Just as an off the record question, is Earl Mann -- is there a school named after Earl Mann?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Earl Mann is still living. I don't think so, no.

Earl Mann is still living -- he's a lawyer. He's not practicing. I'm sure he's retired. M-A-N-N.

JOHN: Does your involvement in the boys club go to the present? Are you still involved or are you retired from the Boys Club?

JUDGE JOHNSON: I was involved and an active member of the board until about two years ago. And then they started having their meetings at six o'clock in the morning or seven o'clock in the morning and I wasn't going to get up and be at a meeting at seven o'clock in the morning, so I'm now an honorary member.

JOHN: As far as the Salvation Army goes -- their lawsuit -- did they donate the land that the building is built on?

JUDGE JOHNSON: No, no, no. The S.A. didn't donate anything.

JOHN: You see, I don't understand -- what was their involvement in sponsorship then?

JUDGE JOHNSON: They were involved in this sense -- we had to have somebody sponsor a group of people who were willing to build a boys club.

JOHN: So you needed an established organization?

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JUDGE JOHNSON: Yeah. And then the Salvation Army -- actually the S.A. came about because I was the chairman of the advisory committee of S.A. and I asked them if they would act as a sponsor for the Boys Club to help us raise funds because as a group we were not organized for that purpose. You see? And that's the way that came about.

JOHN: So I take it that you were no longer involved on the advisory council when the lawsuit came to be?

JUDGE JOHNSON: Yeah, they fired me after that too.

SIDE 2, Tape 1

JUDGE JOHNSON: When I talk about Major Williams, I don't know where that letter came from... I can tell you that the name of first director of the Boys Club in Tacoma is Vincent Russell. And as a matter of fact, there is a letter from Vincent Russell to Tacoma Boys Club in which he tells about the beginnings of the Boys Club -- some of the things when he was there and he says...

Tape delay

I heard Major Earl N. Williams. Major Williams. I don't get that Miller. I don't know where that Miller came from but there is a letter that you might like to take a look at. It might give you... You see that's a letter from Vincent when he wanted to get his job back really and truly.

JOHN: It says right here, "I can't explain... who Major Williams was and no correspondence revealed his organizational affiliation."

JUDGE JOHNSON: Maybe Williams was the officer in charge of the Salvation Army. Earl N. Williams was in charge of the S.A. here in Tacoma and I don't know how that name Miller got in there because I don't recall a fellow by the name of Miller at all.

JOHN: Consciously I was surprised because I expected a Starlight line Boys Club set up with Major Williams assumed as a U.S. Army officer as spokesman for the board of the directors. Let me state for clarity and accuracy, the word disappointed does not reflect on Major Williams. He was very, good, kind, and a wonderful person. I never expected to meet anyone better. The word disappointed involves my personal disapproval of religious or sectarian affiliation of a Boys Club. Nevertheless, I tried to subordinate my personal feelings.

This is kind of an interesting letter. It says a lot of things in here.

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well, if you'd like to take that letter with you...

JOHN: I wouldn't mind... I didn't ask you if you'd mind if I take - make another copy of your bibliography. I think I gave you my last copy...

JUDGE JOHNSON: John, I was born in Tacoma on 7th and Cushman. In those days, the mothers didn't go to hospitals to have their babies, they had them at home with a midwife and I was born in a house next to the corner of S. 7th and Cushman in Tacoma on May 7, 1901.

JOHN: South 7th and Cushman, do you know the address of that house?

JUDGE JOHNSON: No I don't, and I had an older brother who was about five years older than I and an older sister who's still living. She's approximately four years older than I am. She's ninety-seven. And I had another sister who was approximately two years older than I and as a matter of fact, she had her birthday on the same day that I had, May the 7th, only she was two years older than I. She died two years ago on the 10th of May 1992. We spoke Swedish at home most of the time and couldn't speak very much English until I started grammar school. I learned from my brothers and sisters who spoke around home, but I could speak very much... good English when I was in school. And then we move from Cushman down to 1412 S. Sheridan, and I went to the old Lincoln Grammar School on the corner of 16th and K Street. They have now torn that school down. It's got pretty well used up and I think about 4 or 5 years after I graduated from that elementary school, they tore it down. In those days, in the Hilltop - the so-called Hilltop area - in those days almost all of the people who lived in the Hilltop area were either Scandinavian, Italians, Russians, or Germans. Most all of them were immigrants. There were some who had been born in this country that had lived there but most of them were immigrants who had come over from either Sweden or Denmark, Norway, Italy, Germany, Russia. Germans lived up around the 17th Street and Ainsworth and around in there and the Russians lived up around the 19th Street by where the water tower is up there by 19th Street.

And in those days when I went to school, we had as far as I know, only one black family in the whole community and one Jewish family and of course as you know from what you hear and what you've seen, the Hilltop area has changed quite considerably since the time I lived there.

I went to Stadium High School. I walked every morning from 14th and Sheridan down to Stadium High School. I worked after school when I was at Stadium High School down at

the Tacoma Butter Store downtown on Pacific Avenue. So I walked downtown from the Stadium High School and I worked from three o'clock to six o'clock and I went home by way of cable car which we had in those days. The cable car went up 11th Street and down to 13th Street. It wasn't unusual for me to try to save a nickel and walk up 11th Street straight all the way up to Sheridan from Pacific Avenue and that's quite a little walk. You ought to try it sometime.

Then I stayed out a year because I wanted to go to college. I stayed out a year because I didn't have any money and I worked and saved some money and then went to the University of Washington.

My mother and the minister of my church had worked on me to enter a seminary to be a preacher. The minister of my church was a fellow by the name of Bloomquist. Rev. E.C. Bloomquist was a very fine, fine preacher and a fine gentleman and my mother really worked on me to go into the ministry. But I always had the feeling that nobody should enter into the ministry unless they had a calling. And I hadn't had a calling to enter into the ministry and I didn't think I should start out that way unless I had a calling, so I went to the University and I went into the Business of Administration.

I had an Uncle, my father's brother who was down in Argentina and was a businessman down there and had a big cattle ranch and I was going to go down there and be a big shot businessman and make a lot of money, so I went into Business Administration. The second year, I had to take accounting and I didn't like accounting so I transferred to the Liberal Arts college and still didn't know what I wanted to do really and truly.

I should say to you what I say to everybody -- I prayed very consistent, morning and evening, asking God to direct me as to where I should go and what I should do in life. And he didn't answer my prayers very well because I was at Sea.

I was in the Arts college and then I was going to register for my 3rd year, and went over to the University and was going to register as I had before but for some reason or another, I walked up to the law school and registered in law school. I don't know why I registered in Law School. I have always felt that God had answered my prayer and decided that's where I should go. So I went and entered Law School and graduated -- well while I was in Law School I should tell you that I worked almost every day after school from anywhere to two to four or five hours. I'd go to school from eight to twelve and work usually from one to four or five then have dinner then I'd study until about two in the morning and then I'd get up about six o'clock again and go back to school at eight o'clock. Then we had to be there at eight.

I graduated in 1925. I can tell you that I did not earn Phi Beta Kappa. I was not a member of the top ten percent of my class. I think I was lucky that I passed every year, but I passed anyway.

My last year I worked in the Law Library at the University, every afternoon. That was a little easier on me because I could study some while I was at the Library and so forth. I took the bar exam in Olympia and in those days, the Bar Exam was held in the old legislative building which is now out of existence. It's where the former Thurston County Court House was and you had to wait around to get your grades.

JOHN: Did you get your grades the day of the exam? How long did you have to wait?

JUDGE JOHNSON: We had to wait until the next day and then you had to appear at the Supreme Court of the State of Washington and there they would announce who had passed and who had flunked.

JOHN: How many people would be taking the test at one time.

JUDGE JOHNSON: Well at that time, not nearly what they do now. Now, they have four or five hundred take it. But when I was there, I don't think there were over forty or fifty who'd took it. And they gave you a number. You'd have a number so they'd know your identification. Anyway there was three days written examination and after the last written examination, I think I walked the street all night. I went to the Supreme Court building at two o'clock and sat there breathless to see whether or not they would call my number. And thank God they did. I passed.

JOHN: Was that a great feeling of relief?

JUDGE JOHNSON: It was a great feeling of relief. While I was in Olympia, walking the streets in the morning after the exam, about nine o'clock I met a friend of mine, Judge Askeren. Judge Askeren had been the prosecuting attorney of Pierce County and had been the Superior Court Judge here in Pierce County and had been elected to the Supreme Court and was sitting on the Supreme Court at that time. And I only knew him because we used to go over to Supreme Beach in the summer for a week. My mother used to take us kids over there for a week and Judge Askeren had a home, a summer home over there and I just met him -- I knew him. I had never talked to him about going to law school. I had never talked to him about studying law and he had never ever talked to me about it. I had never talked to any lawyer as a matter of fact about going to law school. I was just kind of a dumb Swede who (went after) the Almighty said, Go to Law School.

But then I met Judge Askeren and he said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said well I think that I'm going to go down to Shelton. Shelton is in Mason County and Mason County was not very big in those days and not a very great population in those days and they had only one lawyer in Mason County and he was the prosecuting attorney and his term was going to be up.

So I thought I'd go to Shelton and start to practice and by the time I been practicing a month or two why the election would come up and this fellow couldn't run for office again, so I would run for prosecuting attorney. And I told him that and (Judge Askeren) said, "No, that isn't what you should do." You should go to Tacoma. That's where you belong. That's where you know people, that's where you should start your practice.

I said that I didn't know any lawyers in Tacoma and he said, well let me see what I can do for you. Apparently he talked to Judge Fred Remann and F.R. told him, O.K., he could come down and I could put in the room with my stenographer and tell him if he wants to do that, why he can do that.

I was admitted to practice on the 14th day of May, 1925. I started down in Fred Remann's office in a big old roll top desk in the reception room with the stenographer and I didn't have any clients except I was appointed by one of the judges to represent somebody who was in trouble. Judge Remann asked me to do some research for him and I did my very best on that, and he didn't pay me anything, so I was making about \$50 a month for the first three or four months that I was in practice. But I was happy there and I did a lot of work for Remann. So at any rate, I went there I think in June and was there with him until the first part of January, 1926, when he was appointed Superior Court Judge here in Pierce County. I took over his office then and finished what I could finish

for him. I was there about six months and then I moved to the Washington Building and I office with Henry R.O. Peterson who was a lawyer here in Tacoma, and his son Bob Peterson has been one of our Superior Court judges recently and I was there until September of 1926 when I was appointed the assistant U.S. Attorney of Tacoma and took over the U.S. Attorney's office here for the U.S. Attorney. And those were the days of prohibition. And we had a lot of cases that were really police court cases, but they had to be tried in the Federal Court because (it was) a federal violation and so I used to try three or four cases a day before Judge Cushman... He was a very, very tough guy -- a good judge, excellent judge, but he never spoke to anybody. He'd pass you in the hall and not even say hello to you unless you said hello first, and then he'd say hello to you.

JOHN: I want to ask you something about your family ... As immigrants (your parents and family), was education highly valued? Did it have importance?

JUDGE JOHNSON: My mother and father both insisted that we have an education. My father was a streetcar motorman. He didn't make very much money. My older sister gone to Bellingham up to the teacher's college up in Bellingham which is not Western Washington University. She worked up there in a family while she went to school and that's the way she had her room and board. And my mother who wanted all of us to get a good education, couldn't convince my brother that he should do it because he quit after he got through high school and had to go out in the business world because he wanted to make money. My other sister went to retail business college and became a secretary. And then I of course went to the University. My mother and father both felt that it was very important that we get an education.

JOHN: Why don't we just stop for the day.