

Interview with Jean Sonntag, February 6, 1994

ALISON: Do you know what they were doing in Los Angeles when Jack was born? Do you know why they were there?

JEAN: I really don't know. I don't think they lived there. Maybe they went down to think about settling there. That could be, I am just not sure.

ALISON: Now you said that even after you were married his father was part of your life.

JEAN: Oh, we would see him, his father lived in the Washington Apartments. Every Sunday I would always cook a big roast dinner with the trimmings and we would take a dinner down to him. He would love that.

ALISON: That would be special -- Was he still alive when any of the boys were born?

JEAN: Yes. Not Brian.

ALISON: Jack and Dick may have met him?

JEAN: Well, Richard -- Let me think. I had two boys. I had Jack and I had little Richard. I am sure I had Richard while he was still living. Yes! Because he would give them each \$10.00 at Christmas.

ALISON: Oh. Wow! That's a lot of money then.

JEAN: It was a big deal.

ALISON: Do you have any idea why his dad agreed to have him adopted? Did he just not want to try to raise him by

himself?

JEAN: He was eleven (11). I figured [his father] must have consented because --

ALISON: He did.

JEAN: And of course the grandparents wanted him, so the paternal grandparents would not get him.

ALISON: Did you ever meet them? The Wilsons, the grandparents.

JEAN: No. Oh. They were gone.

ALISON: They maybe never even came over. His dad was born Scotland, maybe they were still back there.

JEAN: I think so -- I don't know the details of that at all.

ALISON: Oh. But that could be -- That would certainly make sense if they did not want the Wilsons to get him if the Wilsons were not even here.

JEAN: Yeah. The Mathees, Jack's aunt, Jean Mathee. I don't know whether they would have adopted him, they might have. They were wonderful people. They were from Scotland, I'm sure. Because Auntie Jean had that little brogue.

ALISON: Oh.. did she?

JEAN: Yeah.

ALISON: Did you know his grandparents? Were they still alive when you guys met? The Sonntags... they were gone?

JEAN: They were gone. I think, just before.

ALISON: O.K.

JEAN: His grandmother might have been living, because I knew where she lived. On South 48th. I was never there.

ALISON: O.K. Tell me about -- Lets see, I know a little bit about your family history. Where did you go to high school?

JEAN: Lincoln High.

ALISON: And where did Jack go?

JEAN: Lincoln.

ALISON: Did you guys meet there?

JEAN: No. No. He was older. Seven years older.

ALISON: How did you meet?

...

JEAN: Our first official date was on New Year's Eve. We went to Seattle. I was not supposed to go to Seattle, according to my parents, but I did.

ALISON: How old were you?

JEAN: I think I was close to 19, I had been going with someone else off and on for four (4) years.. My dad took a liking to Jack, he did not like the other guy, so he was happy then. We were married in 1934.

ALISON: Right in the middle of the depression?

JEAN: Oh. Yes. We got along fine.

ALISON: Did you keep working?

JEAN: I did for awhile yes. Then, on my lunch hour one day, I went up to -- it was called the Jarad Apartments. ... Now, you would not want to live there. Then, they were nice and I rented an apartment for \$20.00 a month! ... Which included heat and everything. It [had only] a bed in the wall that you pull down.

Well, that tells you a little bit about the depression. I could go to the meat market and get a nice roast beef for .60 (60 cents), a pot roast.

ALISON: For the whole thing? For the whole roast?

JEAN: Oh yes. Oh yes. We did not have a car until after Jack was born. Oh, I think he was close to two years old when we got our car. ... Oh, I had access to my dad's car, so it was okay, if I had to have one.

ALISON: What did Jack do to learn a living during this time?

JEAN: He went to work for Standard Oil.

ALISON: Did he have his own station?

JEAN: No. Then in... what year was it...He had his own station which was Gilmore Oil then, I have not seen that for along time. That must have been about, close to 1938 I would say.

ALISON: We don't have to be exact. What did he do for Standard Oil? Did he just work at a station?

JEAN: Yes, at a station. That was a good job in those days.

ALISON:

ALISON: Oh yes. Well any job was a good job...

JEAN: Jack was smart. He was good at figures, figuring out

ALISON:

man power. He would do it for other fellows in other stations.

ALISON: Interesting.

JEAN: Real, real sharp with figures.

ALISON: Well, so is Dick. So is my son Jack.

JEAN: That's wonderful.

ALISON: Yeah. Inherited right down. How did he get interested in politics?

JEAN: Well, we got interested in a campaign and we would go to the meetings and I would go down once in awhile to the Democratic headquarters, just volunteer. That was a little bit interesting.

ALISON: Yeah.

JEAN: And then when this office came up. I don't want to put anybody on the spot..but Joe Ford was [removed from office]. So, Jack was appointed to fill the unexpired term.... Jack was well known in all of Pierce County for sports and everything... he was well known. But, so many people in the courthouse didn't know. [His

ALISON: opponent] didn't have a chance. [Jack] won big. That was the 1948 election. Then he had to run again I believe in two (2) years.

ALISON: O.K. he was originally appointed in 1948 and then he ran [the following summer] and won big. This Joe Ford, was he actually recalled, was he actually removed from office?

ALISON: ... Now, it is interesting to me, your husband came into the Auditor's office because someone was removed who was doing things wrong. His son Brian came into the Auditor's office because someone was removed who was doing things wrong, isn't that interesting.

They both got in office because somebody left because of corruption. So, the Sonntag's have been reform candidates since way back. Now, tell me about sports. You say everybody knew him because of sports.

JEAN: Jack, for years, coached the junior league baseball team. They had some good teams.

ALISON: Does that mean kids?

JEAN: Yes, oh like, I would say seventeen, eighteen years old, maybe even sixteen. I don't know.

ALISON: That was baseball. So he liked baseball.

JEAN: Oh, he was a baseball nut.

ALISON: That's like Brian too.

JEAN: Yes.

ALISON: That's fascinating. So he usually had winning teams?

JEAN: They did pretty well. They would go out of town to play.

ALISON: How long did he do that? Did he stop that when he got into office?

JEAN: Before he got into office. He was into that, I think when I met him.

ALISON: Did you go to any of the games?

JEAN: Yes, if they were here and convenient.

ALISON: How long were you married before he went into politics?

JEAN: It must have been 10 years or so. We were married in 1934, it was 1948 he was elected, so 14 years.

ALISON: But you were interested in politics earlier?

JEAN: Oh, yes, yes.

ALISON: It was because of a campaign that you got involved with politics? What was life like for you during the depression?

JEAN: Well, I didn't suffer or anything, my dad bought that store and carried on there, my dad would not sign up for Social Security... No way! He thought it was...

ALISON: Charity?

JEAN: He thought it was charity. He could have had it all

that time.. and my mother also. ... No, no, we didn't want any part of that. If you shut that off I will tell you something else.

Recorder shut off.

Recording resumes.

ALISON: She [Jean's mother] used to call you your dad's name, when she got mad at you?

JEAN: Yeah. Because of my quick temper. Then my dad was always for the underdog, always, always, and he would help people. But if he didn't like you, watch out. He wouldn't harm you, but he would leave you alone.

...

ALISON: Do you think that part of the reason that Jack went in to politics or that you got interested in politics has anything to do with feeling like you need to give something back to the community?

JEAN: No. ... It was a lot of work. That was his decision. ... And at one time, the party wanted him to run for, or be appointed to an office in Olympia. I just left it up to Jack, because I thought we would not want to move there if he won. That would be just like Brian. ... And I just left it up to him. When he decided to stay where he was, I was happy.

ALISON: But you would not have stopped him if he would have wanted to go?

JEAN: No. No.

...

ALISON: ... Do you think when Jack was Auditor and he was real popular as an elected official and as a Democrat, was he a political leader in your opinion? You know for the Democrats.

JEAN: No. I wouldn't have ever called him a political leader.

ALISON: He just got in there and did his job?

JEAN: A lot of them looked up to him.

ALISON: Did they ask his advice?

JEAN: Oh, I'm sure.

ALISON: But he didn't try to boss anybody around?

JEAN: No. Jack was well liked and....

ALISON: Well, that's what I hear. Everybody who knew him just talks about what a great guy he was.

JEAN: I still hear that.

ALISON: How about his employees, how did he feel about them and how did they feel about him?

JEAN: They were very loyal, but when he took office, of course there were some that were for Barney MacFarland, the former Chief Deputy who ran against Jack. Of course, [some employees] were definitely for Barney.

JACK: Jack had the personality and everything to be nice to them too, and he never fired anyone for that reason. But, they eventually went elsewhere, I think.

ALISON: It sounds like Brian must be a lot like his dad.

JEAN: I remember one, she sat on a stool at a counter with these huge books entering...

ALISON: Recording?

JEAN: Yes. I do think that she was against him, but I think Jack would kid her a little bit once in a while, but she really got to love Jack. She was a nice person.

ALISON: Yeah. I suppose everything was done by hand when he took office. There would not have been microfilming or anything. Every document just had to be recorded by hand.

JEAN: Oh yes. That's true. I hadn't even thought about that part. Like the attorneys that come in to record Deeds and things.

ALISON: Right. Dick said that Jack hired the first black person to work in the County, do you remember anything about that person or what he did or?

JEAN: You don't know the name?

ALISON: I don't, no. Dick might know.

JEAN: For his office?

ALISON: Yes, he hired the first black person in the County.

JEAN: He would.

ALISON: Was he like your dad? Did he go for the underdog?

JEAN: Jack?

ALISON: Yes.

JEAN: To a certain extent. He just wasn't biased. That was it.

ALISON: Well that's good. That's quite amazing.

JEAN: He hired one black girl, her name was Willy. She was so shy, but she did beautiful work. He was so nice to her. We would have at Christmas time -- everybody would bring food. I'd send about 50,000 homemade cookies that I had been baking for a long time. That was my contribution.

ALISON: 50,000 huh?

[Laughter]

JEAN: I think so, about nine different kinds, they were delicious. Everybody would call about the recipes. We would all gather around at a certain place at noon time and have all this food, then there would be Willy way over by her desk and that bothered Jack. I know that bothered me too. [Later] she was going to go to California and he wrote her a beautiful recommendation. I'm sure she got a good job.

ALISON: That was nice.

JEAN: She didn't leave the office for any special reason.

ALISON: Just wanted to go.

JEAN: She got a good job done there.

ALISON: That's great. Did you -- this is not on my list, but did you have a good time being a political wife, was that kind of trying at times?

JEAN: Oh, I was in the background. I would go to meetings and I would go to the Democratic Women's luncheons. A lot of nice people.

ALISON: He was in office 22 years or --

JEAN: 21.

ALISON: That's a long time. Did you get kind of tired of it?

JEAN: I didn't know anything else. Then he finally got a raise. I think Jack went to Olympia to work for it. And then Jack died, I think he might have received one increased paycheck.

ALISON: Is that right?

JEAN: But he got it. Because it was not easy in those days.

ALISON: No. I know. They did not pay elected officials anything.

JEAN: When he quit, he was getting \$14,000.00.

ALISON: That's amazing.

JEAN: So they got up that high.

ALISON: \$14,000.00 wow. That was in the late 1960's.

JEAN: Yes.

ALISON: That was not much.

JEAN: He died in 1969 didn't he?

ALISON: Yes. ... Are you happy with what your children have done as far as politics? Would you have wished a political life on them, or do you think that that is --

JEAN: Well, I feel this way. If you are a good person and you do your best and people realize that, I am happy.

ALISON: Well, I think that you have an awful lot to be proud of. You don't have an lemon in the bunch. Jack has done very well at what he has done and Dick and Brian have both done very well.

Well that's the end of my questions. Do you have anything that you think that I should know about you or Jack or something I forgot to ask about?

JEAN: He died October 4th, so we had just had our 35th wedding anniversary.

ALISON: He had had a heart attack before the one that --

JEAN: Yes.

ALISON: October 4, 1969, when was your anniversary?

JEAN: September 10th. I think that comes out right. That was a shock. That is when it is nice to have children.

ALISON: I don't know that it

JEAN: Jack and Betsy got the call. I don't know how. They have always had an unlisted number. We did have an unlisted number, but I put in the book after Jack died. [It was unlisted] because of the marriage licenses. They would call at midnight. Betsy got the call and I guess she was just going like this [puts her hands over her face], and handed it to Jack.

Jack had just been at my place and I was finishing up the yard work. I was doing the stepping stones. I had finished those and I had my little bucket there and Jack had been there. Then he came back, and I thought what's he coming back for. He says, "Are you through?" So, he carried the clippings out back, then we went in the house. I don't know what I thought then, nothing horrible I'm sure. Ten or fifteen minutes later Richard pulls up at about 80 miles an hour and he comes in the back door.

Jack and Richard there. I thought, "are they having a fight or something?" They were never like that. That was all I could think of. Jack put his hand here [on her shoulder, and sat me down on the davenport and said, "Dad collapsed." Well, collapsing and dying are two different things. It took me awhile to sink in.

Another or the same day Richard went with Gaffney's over to Seattle to bring Dad's body back. Richard came in the house and ... at the bottom of the stairway, Bingo [their dog] was down on the floor as low as he

could get, because they sense things.

ALISON: Yeah, they do. Gosh, I can't think of many things harder to go through.

JEAN: And so sudden.

ALISON: Not expecting it or having a clue.

JEAN: Oh, I have clippings of that.