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Interviewee: Frederica Wheeler Johnson
Interviewer: Bob Brown
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Bob Brown: Okay.

Frederica Wheeler Johnson: I think that was important to him.

BB: Let's definitely include that. Count to seven.

FJ: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.

BB: This is Bob Brown. Today is July 8, 2012, and I'm interviewing Frederica Wheeler Johnson, granddaughter of Montana United States Senator Burton K. Wheeler at the Wheeler family summer home on Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park. And Frederica, can I call you Rica?

FJ: Yes, you may.

BB: Okay, great. When and where were you born?

FJ: I was born in Chevy Chase, Maryland, [full date of birth restricted] 1941.

BB: Do you have any early recollections of—Senator Wheeler, obviously, left the U.S. Senate in January of 1947, so you may not have a lot of, really, recollections about him specifically, but you might have some. What are your early recollections?

FJ: During the time that he was still senator, I was pretty young, but I do remember that my father was in the Second World War, and he sent me with my grandparents to Glacier Park from Washington, D.C. And I traveled with them, just the three of us, and I do recall, when we stopped over in Chicago, there was this bevy of press. So, that stuck in my mind. Most people do not have a bevy of press when they stop over in Chicago (laughs).

BB: So, you knew your grandfather was a significant person. He wasn't just your ordinary old garden-variety grandfather (laughs).

FJ: The other thing I remember, and it was particularly up here, and again, I was a little girl so big things impress one. One, well, several times it seemed to me like a quite a great number of Indians would come to call here at the lake. And they wouldn't just come to call. They would be dressed in their full regalia. The complete, I don't know, bonnet, or feather, eagle feathers hanging all the way down to the ground, and—

BB: They had come over from Browning, or up from Flathead Lake?

FJ: My guess is that they were the Blackfeet over from Browning. And they—we were big outdoor lovers. I mean, we'd sit inside if the weather were bad, but most of the time we were outside. So, down in our main cabin, we have outdoor porches. And they'd all come out and sit, Indians and grandfather, on these outdoor porches. And so that impressed me a lot as a little girl.

BB: You know, I also interviewed James Hoag [John T. Hoag], and he knew your grandfather when he was a teenager up here at Glacier Park. And he described the difference between Senator Walsh and Senator Wheeler. He said Walsh was very formal, almost austere. He said he generally wore a tie when he had dinner, and he said the dinners at the Walsh cabin were quite formal. Just next to yours here. But at the Wheeler cabin, he said, heck, there were kids running all over the place, there was noise, there was chaos, and he said there were Indians standing around with headdresses on, smoking cigarettes, and talking to your grandfather, and that sort of thing. And he said you couldn't imagine a different household situation than the Walsh household and the Wheeler household.

FJ: Absolutely. I would certainly say, I can't attest to the Walsh household, and the tie, and all that formality, except that I did know that he was a very strict pedagogue to his only daughter, Genevieve. And he made her learn Latin, stuck in my mind. I thought, "Good grief, if my father had forced me to learn Latin as a little girl, I don't know."

BB: You knew he was Irish?

FJ: Yes.

BB: In the descriptions I've heard of him, you kind of wonder, how could someone with that kind of a personality, as he's described, be Irish, you know? I don't know what Senator Wheeler was, but he behaved more like an Irishman.

FJ: Well, Senator Wheeler, now that's another thing that's very interesting, because he's always thought of, of course, as being a Montanan, which he was. But, he was not born in Montana. He was born in Massachusetts. Hudson, Massachusetts, and he was the youngest of 11 children. And, well, just to stay on that subject momentarily, most of his brothers and sisters stayed in Montana. Hudson—

BB: (unintelligible) Massachusetts.

FJ: I mean, in Massachusetts. Hudson, Massachusetts. But, he went to law school at the University of Michigan. In fact, in those days, you didn't have to go to college to go to law school. He went right out of high school to law school at the University of Michigan. And then, he had such terrible asthma, and that that's why he came West. But, his family actually dates

back to the Mayflower days. Because his ancestor, Obadiah Wheeler, married one of the descendants of Susan White, who was on the Mayflower. And, both my Aunt Elizabeth, and my sister and myself, have continued this, to honor our descendants from the Mayflower by belonging to a group called The Colonial Dames of the United States of America. So, grandfather—that's the real place that grandfather comes from, is Massachusetts and the Puritans.

BB: Well, you can remember, I know, certainly better than I can, because I had one extended visit with your grandfather, and I think when we talked about this before, we think that was about 1972. Anyway, I could still hear the Massachusetts—

FJ: It never left him.

BB: Yes, he still, had that accent—

FJ: It never left him. His wife's name was Lulu. L-u-l-u. But you would never know it, the way he pronounced it. She was Lu-ler (laughs).

BB: (Laughs) So he sounded more like John F. Kennedy than he sounded like Gary Cooper.

FJ: He did. He definitely did. He never picked up that western twang, or whatever you might say. He was—if you knew what Massachusetts people sounded like, he still sounded like one.

BB: Do you have a—like, he didn't die until when? Seventy-three or '74? [January 6, 1975]

FJ: I don't remember the exact date?

BB: So, you would have known him real well. I mean, by the time—

FJ: I really did, I really did.

BB: Give us, just, introduce us to the real Burton K. Wheeler.

FJ: Well, the thing—first of all, both Grandmother and Grandfather—I had four grandparents, so I have a basis of comparison. And they were formidable people. They were, they had a presence about them, both of them. Now, Grandmother was a very reserved person. Grandfather was a tall man, anyway.

BB: Senator Wheeler?

FJ: Yes, Senator Wheeler was a tall man, so that already gives you presence, but he had some innate character about him, that he commanded respect. And when Grandfather spoke, I mean, everybody listened, just like E.F. Hutton.

BB: I remember a sharpness in his voice, and it wasn't an intimidating sharpness, but it was a—you knew he knew how to give a command.

FJ: Absolutely.

BB: Would you agree?

FJ: Absolutely. But the thing about him is that he was always smiling. And so, he could say the most irritating thing to you, and you would forgive him. He had this way about him that you just couldn't stay mad at Grandfather for long. And I don't think he stayed mad at people.

BB: Well, but those are wonderfully good traits for a politician. You know, a politician is someone who needs to be taken seriously if he's going to accomplish anything for his ideals, but if he does nothing but make enemies, that's not good. And so your grandfather's ready smile, and I remember that too, but also that you could just tell, you could just see beneath the surface there, this is somebody you better take seriously.

FJ: (laughs) Well—

BB: You felt that as a little girl, even?

FJ: Oh, definitely. But the funniest story, and I hate to tell this on one of my first cousins, but he was a little boy, he's not like this anymore he's a grown man now (laughs). But we had to work around this place here at, you know, Grand—there are politicians who make a lot of money out of being politicians. I'm not sure quite how it's done. But Grandfather didn't. He played the deck straight, and the small salaries that they made, that's what he supported his six children on, and it wasn't a lot of money.

And so, when we were up here, we didn't have servants and all kinds of people running around doing things for us. We had to do them ourselves. So, we children and grandchildren, the children and grandchildren, we had to work. And we worked all morning until noon. There was no playing around, no going down to the lake, no doing anything. We had to do chores. Well, I remember this is toward the—this is after Grandmother died, toward the end of Grandfather's life. This chore business still went on, and my little first cousin, I'm not even going to say his name, because I'm sure he wouldn't want me to be telling tales on him. But he, his big thing was to dig weeds out of—see, we're—this is really rocks under here. You see grass on top, but if we didn't, if we hadn't made an effort to put grass there, it would just be rocks. So, in order to expand the grass area, you had to dig up the weeds. So, Grandfather would stand next to this cousin of mine with his cane. Just standing there, and usually it was hot during the day, and he'd have, Grandfather would have his shirt off. And he'd be telling this boy, "Dig up that weed." And the poor boy would be digging away, and tears coming down his cheeks, but he didn't dare not dig up that weed (laughs).

BB: (laughs). So, he was somewhat of a perfectionist, too. I mean, he wanted all the weeds gone.

FJ: Those weeds had to be gone, and we were going to have grass. And this poor little guy, with Grandfather standing right over him. I mean, looming over him. "Dig up that weed."

BB: Was he patient? Like, did he read to you as a child?

FJ: He didn't. But the one I remember who really spent time with me, and sang to me, was my grandmother, Lulu. And, as I say, I did come out here with them one time, when my father was in the Navy, and I think my sister had just been born. So, she stayed home, but my parents sent me with my grandparents to come here to Glacier Park. And, you know, I was a little scared, and, you know by myself here, and not having been away from my parents in the past. So, every night, we'd—we all slept on what's called a sleeping porch. I don't know if anybody knows what that is, but it's a—

BB: Yes. It's a screened-in porch.

FJ: It's a screened-in, it's a large building, sort of. It was a rectangular-shaped building, and it had a roof and a wooden floor, but in between, it was screen, so that the fresh air came in. So, we'd go up to the screened-in porch, and Grandmother would tuck me in, and she'd start singing hymns to me. She had a lovely singing voice.

BB: Was he a terrifying father-in-law? How did your husband get along with him?

FJ: Oh, everybody loved him.

BB: Ok.

FJ: Everybody loved him. You know, he was jovial and, as I say he had a commanding presence, but maybe even Grandmother, even more. Because Grandmother didn't add much of the smile part (laughs).

BB: (laughs) I remember, too, although I don't remember in my experience with your grandfather, but I—the story about him was that he smoked cigars. Is that a recollection you made?

FJ: Oh, definitely, definitely. You know, people don't do that today. And I say, "I don't mind cigar smoking, because both of my grandfathers smoked cigars, and I sort of liked the smell."

BB: At a distance. You kind of don't like to get a big dose of it—

FJ: It doesn't bother me. I guess it's because I'm used to it.

BB: You're used to it, yes.

FJ: I associated it with my grandparents, whom I loved, and it has a good association for me.

BB: Now, your dad and your grandfather were in law practice together.

FJ: Yes.

BB: Do you remember anything about that? What they specialized in, or what they did?

FJ: Oh yes, oh yes. In fact—well, how it happened that way, maybe you don't know the background of why it is they practiced law together in the first place. That Dad graduated from Harvard Law School, and my father, Edward, was the middle child. There was John, Elizabeth, my father Edward, Frances, Dick, and Marion. So, anyway, Dad graduated from Harvard, and came to Washington, D.C., where he was raised, and he went into a private law firm. And he was doing fine. Everything was copacetic. But then came Grandfather's defeat from the U.S. Senate and Grandfather wanted to come back to Montana and live here full-time. But Grandmother said, "No way." And so, it was Grandmother who approached Dad and said, "Would you practice law with your father?"

BB: With your son, with your son Edward?

FJ: Dad. Right. She said to my father, Edward, "Would you practice law"—

BB: With your father?

FJ: "With your father. My husband."

BB: Got you.

FJ: So, that's how this law firm, Wheeler & Wheeler, was started. And as I recall, the real foundation of their practice was before the Interstate Commerce Commission. It's called administrative law, because these—the FCC, the SEC, and the former ICC, because it does not exist as a separate regulatory body any longer, it's part of the Transportation Department now. But in those days, it was independent regulatory agency, and Grandfather was chairman of the Interstate Commerce Committee in the Senate. So, it was a natural for him to develop that kind of law practice.

BB: Okay, you bet.

FJ: That was—they did other things, but that was their main—

BB: Might they have also, maybe, represented railroads in litigation, that kind of stuff?

FJ: They did, they did. And that's, again, transportation.

BB: Yes. And I think Edward Wheeler, your father, is credited with the guy that put together the merger between the—

FJ: New York—

BB: Great Northern and the Northern Pacific, and the Burlington and so on, to create the Burlington Northern Railroad?

FJ: Yes. Yes. I believe so.

BB: And I don't remember if your grandfather was still alive when that happened, or not. I don't think he was, but anyway, that was a major accomplishment of that law firm.

FJ: And Dad did a lot of work for the New York Central, and the president at that time was Robert Young.

BB: Ok.

FJ: And there was a merger there with the New York Central, and I think the Penn Central, and Dad handled that.

BB: Now, obviously, Senator Wheeler, having been a U.S. senator for 24 years, and having spent a fair number of those years with Harry Truman, who was a senator at the same time as your grandfather, from Missouri, must have known each other quite well. Then, as it turns out, Truman is up in the White House, and your dad is there in a government affairs-related law practice in Washington, D.C. So, certainly it must have benefited their law firm that he had this personal connection with many other U.S. senators as well as with Truman. Do you remember anything about anything like that?

FJ: Oh, Truman, I believe would have been a junior senator—

BB: To your grandfather?

FJ: To Grandfather. And they did know each other, and they were friends. They were on friendly terms. But, I don't think they were really, really close. Now, the story I heard from our family is that FDR asked grandfather to serve as his vice president before he asked Harry Truman.

BB: And that would have been in 1944?

FJ: Right. And Grandfather turned him down. And I think it was an attempt by FDR to neutralize Grandfather, because Grandfather had been an opponent in his final days. And if you put your opponent on your ticket with you, you sort of neutralize them.

BB: You'd keep him neutralized, for sure.

FJ: But, Grandmother, who was a real powerhouse, she said, "No."

BB: Is it possible, and I don't know, but, you know, Truman—whether FDR changed vice presidents both in 1940 and 1944. Are you sure that he asked him on ticket in '40, or was it '44? Do you know for sure which year that was?

FJ: It was the year that he asked Harry Truman.

BB: Ok.

FJ: So, if Grandfather had been on the ticket, and, of course you know what happened to FDR, he died—

BB: Yes, absolutely.

FJ: Grandfather would have been president.

BB: He would have been president. Wow, I had not heard that story.

FJ: Yes.

BB: I had not heard that story.

FJ: And, I mean, that's the story that I get from the family.

BB: Did you ever meet Truman?

FJ: I did, I did. Again, I was a little girl, but I did go into the—I guess it was the Oval Office, I'm not sure if they had an Oval Office at that time, but I do remember going in and meeting him, and seeing him behind his desk, and reading that sign that everybody said existed, and I can attest to the fact, it exists. "The buck stops here."

BB: And you saw that personally.

FJ: And I saw that with my own eyes.

BB: Were you with your grandfather?

FJ: Yes, yes.

BB: And this was after he was out of office, obviously?

FJ: Oh yes, oh yes.

BB: Did you ever meet Bess Truman?

FJ: No, I did not.

BB: Did you ever meet Eleanor Roosevelt?

FJ: No.

BB: Do you remember any politicians during the 1950s or '60s that you might have met? Your grandfather would have served—

FJ: The '50s, yes. See—

BB: Well, LBJ was the majority leader in the '50s, and he was in the he was in the U.S. House when your grandfather was in the Senate. Certainly, they knew each other?

FJ: Yes, and the thing about it is, back in my day, they made what they called “debut,” when you—usually a senior in high school, your family would introduce you as a grown person to their friends in a formal occasion. So, my grandparents sponsored a, sort of a tea for me at the Sulgrave Club in Washington, D.C.

BB: The what club?

FJ: The Sulgrave Club. It's a woman's club. Downtown Washington, very old club. So, they invited a lot of their politician friends. And the one that stood out to me was Speaker Sam.

BB: (laughs) And he came to your—

FJ: And he came to my party, Sam Rayburn.

BB: Really?

FJ: And of course, Sam Rayburn and LBJ had a very, very close relationship. And, in fact, LBJ did not think very highly of his own father, because his father had gone from a rather successful person to really the pits, and it shamed LBJ. I mean people would laugh when he'd go by. So, he

sort of attached himself to Sam Rayburn. And when Sam Rayburn died, this was a real tragedy for LBJ.

BB: I think I remember something about LBJ saying, referring to Sam Rayburn, saying, "He was like a daddy to me."

FJ: Yes. And that's the truth. And they carried his picture around with them. Wherever LBJ was, Speaker Sam—after Sam died, Speaker Sam's picture went with him.

BB: Do you remember anything at all, maybe about Senator Taft [Robert A. Taft], or Senator Dirksen [Everett Dirksen], who both would have been well known to your grandfather?

FJ: No, I don't, I don't. Except, generally speaking, Taft was held in very high esteem by our family.

BB: And he was the Republican leader in the U.S. Senate, actually, I think in most in the '40s.

FJ: Yes.

BB: Yes. How about Nixon?

FJ: Not really. I mean, we all, we actually—my father knew Nixon, because Nixon was a golfer, and Dad, as I mentioned to you, played golf at this men's golf club called Burning Tree. And Nixon played there, Eisenhower played there, a lot of Congress people played there, and Dad played with them.

BB: Any anecdote or any story or anything about Nixon that you can remember. He ever mentioned anything about him?

FJ: He swore a lot. He swore a lot.

BB: (Laughs)

FJ: I mean, if you just heard his public speaking, you wouldn't—he never swore in public.

BB: Well, he was another Quaker. Brought up as one.

FJ: That's right.

BB: Yes.

FJ: Butt when he was in private he swore a lot.

BB: Yes, and the tapes revealed that, too. The Nixon tapes. Senator Tom Walsh.

FJ: Yes. My ex-grandfather-in-law.

BB: So, you married Walsh's son?

FJ: I married Walsh's grandson.

BB: Grandson, excuse me, yes.

FJ: Robert Parks. But, see, we have these family compounds. The reason this term came up is because I think the term was coined by the Kennedys, who had a family compound at Hyannis Port. So, that became a rather familiar term to describe a group of houses on one property, where people from the same family would reunite.

BB: And what are there, four cottages on this property?

FJ: And there are four on this property—

BB: And then Senator Walsh had some property just a couple hundred yards down the road.

FJ: Well, then there's the ranger station. Then there's the Clacks. H. Earl Clack was a big oil man. And then, after that, the Aaron Howes, and then after that, the Walshes. So we, generations starting with my grandparents' generation, the whole family compound thing began at that time, almost simultaneously with these families. And so, they all knew each other, then the next generation, and I'm the next generation. We all knew each other, and all the tales about everybody.

BB: Now, Senator Walsh died before you were born?

FJ: Yes, yes. But I heard a lot about him.

BB: Heard a lot about him, and you knew his, well obviously, married his grandson.

FJ: I married his grandson, and I knew his—well, actually, it might have been great-grandson. It was his great-grandson, see. Senator Wheeler was my grandfather, and it would have been Robert's great-grandfather.

BB: Okay, okay. And then also, you were also married to John Snow, who was Secretary of the Treasury?

FJ: That's correct. Yes, we met each other in graduate school at the University of Virginia, and

I was mentioning to you that each of us were assigned a little study area, called a carrel, in the main library at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. And he would pass by my carrel going on the way to his, and somehow we struck up a conversation, and within a year's time, we were Mr. and Mrs. John W. Snow.

BB: Oh, that's neat. So, he probably lived in New York, didn't he? I don't know where his career was.

FJ: No, not at all. He was a small—well, I wouldn't—Toledo, Ohio, is where he was from. I guess that's not exactly a small town; that's a pretty big town on the map of Ohio. But he was an Ohioan.

BB: Why do I think he was some kind of a Wall Street banker?

FJ: He was not at all.

BB: When he—and he was Secretary of the Treasury, I think, in the second Bush administration, wasn't he?

FJ: Yes.

BB: What was he doing before that?

FJ: Before that he was president, chairman, CEO, chairman of the board of the CSX Corporation.

BB: Which is what?

FJ: Which is their main hold—it's a transportation company.

BB: Like the railroad?

FJ: Their main holding is the railroad.

BB: I got you, I see. But he was still headquartering out of Ohio?

FJ: No, he just—that's where he was born and raised, was Ohio, and he went to Ohio State. That's where he—and then he got a fellowship to the University of Virginia to pursue his doctoral studies in economics. That's how I got to know him. But he was from Ohio.

BB: And that's where he—that's—the CSX was headquartered in—

FJ: CSX. Well, actually, they were headquartered in Cleveland. But then, after—I've forgotten who the last president was. I know Walter Tuohy was president of Chesapeake and Ohio

Railroad when it was headquartered in Cleveland. But they moved their headquarters to Richmond, Jacksonville, and then Richmond, Virginia.

BB: Okay, okay. Well, your dad would have had some things to talk to him about, wouldn't they? I mean, both their interest in railroads—

FJ: Well, the reason why John Snow ended up in the railroad business is because he started practicing law with Dad.

BB: Oh, I didn't know that.

FJ: Yes, that's how he made all the contacts, which he ultimately parlayed into president of the railroad.

BB: (laughs) Isn't the old boys network wonderful?

FJ: (laughs)

BB: So, he would have been a law partner with Senator Wheeler, as well as your dad?

FJ: Well, he wasn't a partner then, because he was newly out of law school.

BB: I see.

FJ: But, at any rate, he practiced in the law firm.

BB: I see. I got you. Do you remember anything more about Senator Walsh before we go on?

FJ: Oh, just that story about him teaching his daughter, Genevieve, Latin (laughs). In the home, when she was a little girl. I thought that was astounding.

BB: Your grandfather was defeated in the Democratic primary for the United States Senate in 1946. He'd been known for being one of the leading progressive voices in the U.S. Senate when he arrived there in the 1920s. But by the '40s, he was seen as the opposite of that, in the Democratic primary. And he had some opposition in 1946, and lost in what was a pretty stunning upset, to a fellow named Leif Erickson. Do you remember anything, any discussions of Erickson, or the defeat of your grandfather—

FJ: I remember a little bit about it and, I mean, hearsay, because I was really too—

BB: You were 3 years old at the time.

FJ: I was really too young, so this is way after the fact. But one thing that stuck in my mind is that when he, when Grandfather first went out to Montana, came back out to campaign, the first few meetings he went to, he knew. He saw the handwriting on the wall. He said, "I'm going to be defeated." And I—what also has come down in the family, is that one of the big reasons for this was his stance against going into the Second World War. And as I recall, Jeannette Rankin also lost for the same reason.

BB: Yes, that's right. I think, whereas Rankin was a member of Congress and voted against the declaration, your grandfather didn't.

FJ: No.

BB: You grandfather was a—I've forgotten, and I mean I hope I'm accurate in this. I think your grandfather was what people called an "America first-er."

FJ: He was. You got it exactly right.

BB: So, but with—

FJ: With Charles Lindbergh and General Woods [Robert E. Wood].

BB: But when the actual Pearl Harbor incident occurred—

FJ: That was it.

BB: That was it, and—

FJ: Forget it. You know, all of that opposition to the war, finished. That's in the past, and he got, jumped right—both feet into the war effort, and supporting the war effort.

BB: So, well, he and Jeannette Rankin were somewhat allies in opposing, or getting involved in the war after Pearl Harbor. That was altogether different.

FJ: Yes.

BB: I mean, she voted against the declaration of the war even after the Pearl Harbor attack. Your grandfather didn't do that.

FJ: Grandfather did not. But, the voting public—

BB: Still remembered his opposition—

FJ: Still remembered, and they did not like it. And I also heard that there was a lot of Wall Street money coming into that primary to oppose Grandfather.

BB: Really?

FJ: Yes.

BB: Do you know anything about why that would have been?

FJ: (Sighs.) I hate to be prejudiced, but I think there were a lot of Jewish people who were very upset—

BB: Oh, because of his opposition to the war?

FJ: With his opposition to the war.

BB: I see, I see.

FJ: I think there was a lot of money from that source. That's the rumor.

BB: Yes. Did you ever—

FJ: But I think it was more than that.

BB: Sure.

FJ: I mean, it wasn't just outside money. Because money can't buy or lose an election for you. There really has to be some sentiment on the part of the voting public, and the sentiment definitely was against Grandfather.

BB: And Senator Wheeler, too, remember, he kind of had the misfortune of very weak opponents for two elections in a row. If you've had a hard fight, and you've had to come, you know, really earn your reelection, you've reestablished your connections, you've—

FJ: And I think, you know, I think that's another thing that when it went down, is that he really didn't campaign early or hard. And when he finally got around to it, he'd lost. He assessed Immediately, "I've lost."

BB: Yes. His last tough reelection fight was in 1928 against Joe Dixon. That was a tough fight, and it was a tough one getting into the Senate, 1922. But in 1934, in 1940, he had just token opposition. So, here he is in 1946, 12 years later, and he's essentially hasn't really run for anything. I mean, a lot of his old connections and things have passed away, and—

FJ: His old organization, and he just didn't get out there and fight.

BB: And that he might not have seen it coming until he got here—

FJ: He didn't see it coming, he didn't see it coming—

BB: And then his intuition told him when he got back in the state—

FJ: He didn't organize right. But he sensed immediately from the crowds, this is not going well at all.

BB: And his opponents had probably been conspiring behind his back for several years, somewhat unbeknownst to him, too. I think that might be the case. Do you think there was any connection, or did you ever hear anybody in your family mention any connection to Senator Murray [James E. Murray] in this regard? Because Murray and Wheeler were rivals is well-known.

FJ: Right. I never heard anything. No aspersions cast against his character, or anything like that. I just think they thought he was a weak sister.

BB: Yes. But you don't know anything about whether Murray would have, kind of got the word out through. Because Murray, you know, was a—they were fellow Democrats, and some of the Democratic loyalists might have been more loyal to Murray than to Wheeler at that point. I don't know.

FJ: I didn't hear anything.

BB: You didn't ever hear that?

FJ: No, no.

BB: Have you ever heard about any relationship between your grandfather and Wellington D. Rankin? Does Wellington D. Rankin ring a bell with you?

FJ: It does ring a bell, but I don't really know any details about it.

BB: They were contemporaries for a long time, and Rankin was a Republican, and your grandfather was a Democrat, and—

FJ: It was always favorable—

BB: Yes.

FJ: Whatever remarks were ever made about him. And you know, I'd just sit there as a little child, hearing names float around.

BB: Well, I think one of the ways your grandfather got in trouble with the Democrats was that he was friendly with both Wheeler [meaning Rankin] and Governor Sam Ford. Ford was also a Republican, and that, you know, your—in fact, I think I saw a cartoon once, maybe appeared in the *Great Falls Trib* [Great Falls Tribune], and it showed something like B.K. Wheeler and Sam Ford, and they were sitting side-by-side on a bench, and the theme of the cartoon was that they'd tried to turn the two parties in Montana into a bench. In other words, that they got along well with each other, and cooperated with each other. Well, there were some real Republicans, and real Democrats, that kind of thought Democrats and Republicans should, you know, be in conflict with each other.

FJ: We probably could use a little of that today, right?

BB: We could use a little more—a little, what is it they say? We could use a little less “e pluribus” and a little more “unum?” Probably is true.

FJ: (laughs)

BB: Anything you can ever remember about any connection in your—with the law firm, your grandfather or anything, with John F. Kennedy?

FJ: No. No, we really didn't have any connection with the Ken—well, yes we did. I take it back. Joe Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's father, was an “America first-er.”

BB: Ok.

FJ: So, yes. Joe Kennedy definitely supported the anti-war effort that Grandfather was involved in.

BB: So, you don't know for sure, but you assume they probably knew each other pretty well?

FJ: They definitely knew each other.

BB: Yes, okay.

FJ: Yes.

BB: You don't ever—well, of course, you wouldn't know, because that was before you were born, again, or about the time you were born. Oh, geez, I'm running out of questions here.

FJ: May I just make one remark about Grandfather?

BB: Yes, you bet, absolutely. Yes.

FJ: Because he, you know, he came from this very dour New England family. I've seen pictures of his brother Ernest on the cover of a paper, with his little rimless glasses, and his little thin lips, unsmiling even though he was on the cover of the paper. So, somehow, when they got to Grandfather, the youngest of 11 children, I bet he was probably his mother's pet. That's my guess. Because Grandfather was always smiling. And not only that, but he loved people. He could go into a room and not know a single soul, and he'd feel right at home, because he just loved human beings, and he just smiled, and he talked to them. And this, to me, was his genius. [This] was his, not only his love for them, but then they reciprocated with love back for him. As I said, you just couldn't help but like Grandfather. It didn't matter if he said the most insulting, horrible thing to you.

BB: (laughs)

FJ: You forgave him. And how—what is it, what was it about him that allowed you to not hold a grudge, no matter what this guy said?

BB: What I remember about him that squares with that, and I just had that one lengthy conversation with him, but it was a great one, was that he put me at ease, he was warm, he was friendly, he was congenial, but he could, he could be very direct. But not in a threatening way, not in an insulting way. And that, I think, kind of fits with what you've just said. He was a very diplomatic individual, he was a friendly and kind individual, but at the same time, he could be direct, but it wasn't in an insulting way.

FJ: Well, I think direct is right. He was a very honest person. He was a very straightforward person.

BB: Spoke his mind.

FJ: Spoke his mind, and furthermore, he held his position, and it didn't matter if he were on the winning side or the losing side. This was a man with principle.

BB: Yes. And he admired that in other people.

FJ: Yes. And the other thing about him is he always was for the underdog. And I see these characteristics, I really think they're in the genes, in my children.

BB: I remember we talked about this before our interview, Rica, but I don't think it's, I don't think—I think we talked about this before we turn on the recorder. But, Senator Wheeler, in my conversation with him, made a comment about Senator Mansfield. And you heard a similar comment.

FJ: Yes, I know I feel a little uneasy when I would go and talk to Senator Baucus, who held Senator Mansfield in such high esteem, but I told you, I'm reading this book about Robert Caro—that Robert Caro wrote about LBJ, and he made an observation about Mansfield and Mansfield's—really did LBJ's bidding. It didn't matter what, whether he agreed, or he didn't agree. And I think, since Grandfather was such a man of principle, I don't think he respected Mansfield, because Mansfield did not seem to be a person who would stand up for what he really thought.

BB: Well, certainly Mansfield showed courage in his opposition to the Vietnam War, but when I talked to your grandfather, it was—I think it even came up in that context. It's an old memory, but he seemed to think that whereas he, Wheeler, had opposed our entry into World War Two, when it was tough to do—

FJ: Yes.

BB: When it was controversial, Mansfield, who had these misgivings about the Vietnam War, went for six, eight, 10 years before he thought, finally, that the public opinion is lined up so that it's safe for him to do that. And he was not harshly critical, but mildly critical of Mansfield for not being stronger. For not being more of a stand-up guy.

FJ: Right, right. It wasn't—I mean, different people do things different ways. It's not that Mansfield wasn't a good, fine man, and a really supreme and superb intellect. But, I just think that in this particular realm, he and Grandfather were not the same. They diverged (laughs).

BB: Anything else? You mentioned Senator Baucus?

FJ: Oh, well we have been friends of his. You know, he's served longer than Grandfather, as of now. Grandfather served four terms.

BB: Right. Max is completing his fifth, I think, isn't he?

FJ: Yes. So—and I guess he started as a fairly young man. But we we've always been friends of Max's. And as I say, Max, he was always a supporter of Grandfather's, yes. But I think his real fondness was for Mike Mansfield.

BB: Yes. Oh, yes, I know that, too. Anything else?

FJ: Oh, well, I guess, I said I wanted to really emphasize his—I told you he was for the underdog.

BB: Yes.

FJ: And he felt that the Indians were underdogs. And he fought tooth and nail for Indian rights.

BB: And treated them as equals.

FJ: Definitely.

BB: I mean, he had them at his dinner table.

FJ: Oh, definitely.

BB: He associated with them on an equal basis, here on Lake McDonald.

FJ: Definitely, and he did all kinds of pro bono work for the Indians, because he just felt that these had been people who had not received the respect, and certainly had not been treated, in history—

BB: Well, what is the Wheeler-Howard Act [also known as the Indian Reorganization Act]? Wasn't that an Indian-related act?

FJ: It's my vague understanding of that is that that it gave Indians self-government over their reservations.

BB: Yes, yes. So, that'd be hard evidence of what you just said.

FJ: Yes.

BB: And that was sometime in the '30s? [1934] It just popped into my mind just now. But that was an Indian rights piece of legislation that was probably the—probably would illustrate his feeling toward Indians as well as anything.

FJ: Oh, and then I might mention to you, the picture up above our fireplace. That took place in the '50s, when myself, my sister, who was sick, so she couldn't go, and my two first cousins, Leslie and Susan, were inducted into the Blackfeet Indian tribe. And we were each given beautiful beaded amulets, and Indian names. And Grandfather, of course, had already gotten his Indian name, but because of his work for the Indians, the Indians conferred this great compliment on myself, my sister, and my two first cousins.

BB: Well, you know, what I got to ask you now?

FJ: What?

BB: What are the names?

FJ: Okay, my name is *piksakee*, which means "bird woman."

BB: Like the waterfall in Glacier Park [Bird Woman Falls].

FJ: And somebody said to me, while I was saying, "*piksakee*," and I said, "It means 'bird woman.'" They said, "That's what they told you." (laughs).

BB: (laughs) Well, there's Bird Woman Falls in Glacier Park.

FJ: That's right. That's right; it's beautiful, going up to Logan Pass, one of the most outstanding falls as you approach the pass, from the bend, is Bird Woman Falls.

BB: Do you remember at all what Senator Wheeler's Indian name was?

FJ: I don't remember his name. Because he was conferred earlier, at another, an earlier occasion. But there's his picture, right up there, with the Indian chief, with his full regalia on.

BB: Pretty neat. Okay, well, I've been interviewing—

FJ: Oh, may I just say one last thing—

BB: Yes.

FJ: And that is that Grandfather—I was telling you privately that, like socialist Norman Thomas toward the end of his days, said, "Actually, most of the socialist ideas, progressive ideas that I advocated for many years, have come to pass." And I do think, in Grandfather's later years, he felt the same. A lot of what he had fought for had actually happened.

BB: So, by that comment do you mean that Senator Wheeler was a socialist in his early life, and then—

FJ: Not a socialist. I didn't mean to say that he held the same philosophy that Norman Thomas did, but he did fight for a lot of progressive ideas that he felt were realized, either by himself or others, over time.

BB: But then, as time marched on, he felt there was less need for some of the progressivism that, in other words, that having accomplished these things—

FJ: Right.

BB: He wasn't known for his progressivism in the 1940s like he was in the 1920s.

FJ: Right. And certainly, as he, you know, got older, I think he—I mean, I just think he felt—got more conservative. But it wasn't that he evolved. It's that time had accomplished what he had tried to set out to accomplish.

BB: Well, I know this. I remember when I was a kid, there was a little boomlit in the Republican Party in Montana, to get Burton K. Wheeler to come back to Montana and run for governor. I think that was in 1960.

FJ: Interesting.

BB: They thought he might be interested in running for governor as a Republican.

FJ: I—that doesn't surprise me at all.

BB: So, you think he might have been kind of edging over, at least kind of in the middle between the two parties, as he got older?

FJ: I do, I do. I mean, he stayed a registered Democrat, no doubt. But I'll bet you when the screens closed behind that voting booth, there was some Republican votes cast (laughs).

BB: (laughs) Okay, anything else?

FJ: Oh, that's sort of it, I think, except that he was a great guy, he was a wonderful grandfather, and that's how I really remember him, as the person that he was. A fine, upstanding, wonderful person, and I don't think you could say that about too many politicians today.

BB: Thank you. Thank you, Frederica Wheeler Johnson.

FJ: You're very welcome.

[End of Interview]