

INTERVIEW – MR. JIM SWEENY

INTERVIEWER: RON CODY

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 NATIONAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR

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ABBREVIATIONS USED: RC = Ron Cody
 JS = Jim Sweeny
 JA = Junior Achievement
 PR = Public Relations

RC: Alright, ladies and gentlemen, we are sitting this afternoon in the very comfortable home of Mr. & Mrs. Hugh B. Sweeny in Westport, Connecticut. The date is Friday, February 21, 2003. The home of the folks better known as Jim & Johnnie Sweeny, known to thousands, better still hundreds of thousands of both young and old adults. Jim as Mr. Junior Achievement, literally a gentleman who probably knows more, remembers more, and has had more input and impact on the Junior Achievement organization than any other individual that I can identify or that we can think of. So it's a great honor to be talking to Jim this afternoon and to capture some of the history of the organization, but especially his role; something about his life and his role in the tremendous success of the Junior Achievement organization over the years.

Jim, if we can begin, we'll ask you to share a few comments about where you were born, where you grew up, where you went to school.

JS: I was born and grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey, a town southwest of New York. Mostly commuters these days; it used to be a manufacturing town. I went to Plainfield High School, the class of 1931; Princeton class of '35. I worked a few years at the telephone company as a student engineer, because I needed a job. Then the army came along and gave me a job for five years. I came out in 1945, back from Germany, looking for a job and had a temporary one with the March of Dimes Commerce and Industry Campaign. That led indirectly to Junior

Achievement because one of the contacts was J.M. Mathis, of the advertising agency, to send out a letter to that field. His secretary said he probably couldn't do it this year because he was so interested and so busy with Junior Achievement. And she showed me some of the literature. I casually noticed that it was a very interesting program that involved some top business people in the country supporting it. So a couple of months later when my temporary job ended I mentioned my fund raising experience at one of the employment interviews, and at that time JA was starting a class of new staff people. I got to see the office the day they were packing up to go to the training session and was given an option to go along with them with no commitment. If at the end of the two weeks we could agree on whether I would work there or not and at what several salary ranges that were offered, we had a deal. Well, I went and we had a deal. I was impressed with the training and with the people involved. It was very familiar in some of the concepts to what I had experienced in my early years in the Army at a training center and I knew I could do that sort of thing. My first assignment was in –

RC: Jim, I'm going to interrupt you one second because we've raced through and covered an awful lot of early history very quickly and I really think the folks would like to know a little bit more about some of your earlier years before we get into your JA career. You mentioned where you grew up and where you went to school and so forth. Do you have any significant childhood memories that you'd care to share?

JS: Well there were two that had a particular significance. One was that my family moved to the outskirts of town near the football field/baseball field of the local high school and when I was a freshman in the high school the coach for football and baseball, who was a neighbor of ours, asked me if I'd like to be a manager of the baseball team; to start in and I could become manager after three years. I guess it was because I lived near where the gate was that the players went home through and I could lock up after them. Anyway, that gave me some status in school that I had never had before and led in my senior year my making an announcement of some activity at the high school assembly program. There was a stranger on the platform along with the superintendent of schools and the principal. Turned out he was Lefty Davies, secretary of the Princeton Alumni Council, giving an Encyclopedia Britannica set to the school because last year's freshmen at Princeton, Bob Coats from that same high school, had the highest grades of any freshman and that was their way of rewarding the school. After the program I went over to

be introduced and Lefty Davies, in front of the superintendent, asked me where I was going to college. This was in the spring of 1931 and I really wasn't thinking much about college with the way things were in the community and my family. I said if I did anything I'd buy a second-hand car and day-student at Rutgers. But he said, for the benefit of the superintendent and principal and ultimately for my benefit, said if you will go to Princeton and interview with the Director of Admissions, see what could be worked out, would you do it? Well, I did and it was worked out and through the help of some scholarship aid and four years working in the dining halls I got a degree in 1935. That really was a momentous occasion because I would have gone an entirely different route had Lefty Davies not been on the program that day.

RC: What type of degree was it, Jim?

JS: Bachelor of Arts. I majored in philosophy. My senior thesis covered three departments: politics, economics and philosophy. It was the story of the National Recovery Administration Act that was very important in the politics and in the economy of the time.

RC: I'm going to take a brief pause here just to double check that we are recording with quality here. Just a quick pause [recording paused]

RC: Jim, thanks for that background. Now let's go back to as you mentioned earlier your first employment experience in New Jersey.

JS: Right at the beginning an incident occurred that was typical of what I knew all through 32 years in JA. A wonderful program and organization that very often failed miserably. My whole faith in JA changed because in New York, right after the training for some orientation [I was] in the office of the executive director George Tamblyn. We came out after the meeting and the switchboard operator said, "Oh by the way, Mr. Tamblyn, there's a call for you from Mr. Pew in Philadelphia. I told him you were in conference." Well George, knowing Mr. Pew, who was the president of Sun Oil, dashed to his phone to call Pew back and was told Mr. Pew was in conference and would be for quite a while. I had been slated to go to Philadelphia, but Philadelphia didn't start for years later and with the help of the electric company, not the Sun Oil. As a result of that experience, a fork in the road if you will, I was farmed out to the New Jersey program in Newark for a few months.

RC: What kind of training had you had up to this point, Jim?

JS: Two weeks of how to tie the underwriters knot and a bit of history of the program and a description of a tentative new program synthesizing what had been done in the past and elaborated upon by Herman Gall, who had been with JA in St. Louis, and Jerome Collin, who had been with an industry training program. It was a merger of these men collaborating, one on the idea of what to do, the other, the trainer, on how to put the idea across.

RC: Let me just stop here and ask you, what intrigued you about signing on with Junior Achievement? What was appealing about it?

JS: I needed a job and I felt that it was something I could do. It involved a move to some other location, that was obvious, but that was okay because we were living in a tiny apartment my wife had found while I was overseas during the war. So we were ready to move and I was impressed with that interview at the Mathis place months before where I was given insight into just the kind of good people who were backing JA. And I thought that was something worth trying.

RC: Let's remember where we are now, you're on your way to Philadelphia but now you mentioned two things –

JS: Now I don't go to Philadelphia because Mr. Pew was insulted.

RC: That's right, well we'll pick up here. But let's back up a little bit. You mentioned two things I'd like to talk about. First of all, you mentioned your wife I'm assuming that's Johnnie –

JS: Right.

RC: And you mentioned the military. Tell us a little bit first of all about your military experience. What years, and what did you do.

JS: I was in ROTC in college and went to a few summer camps and then in the spring of 1940 the telephone company decided that I was going to be taken off of the trainee program and in a tactful way I took the hint and quit. The very night that I quit my job... I was in a little theater group in Plainfield. We had our annual party for the members and their friends and that's where I met Johnnie, the day I lost my job. I had attempted to get into the insurance business through an uncle of mine with Northwestern Mutual, but the war was on and the Germans in May 1940 of

course invaded the lowlands in France. In my area, in my regiment of artillery, I was one of the first three called up involuntarily, although I was ready for it, in November 1940. I went to school out in Oklahoma and then to the training center in Oklahoma and stayed there, grew up with it from first lieutenant to major until I left in the spring of '43. Then I went to an infantry division, the 102nd Infantry, training in Texas. I went overseas in the summer of '44, through France and Holland and Germany and came back in September of '45.

RC: So you saw plenty of action, then.

JS: Yes, we were in a couple of substantial attacks. An interesting part of it was that from the middle of April, really, until I came back we were involved before military governments were established. Units were assigned an area of territory to supervise, look for contraband, look for Nazis and just try to get things going again. That was very interesting because there were some positive things and, sadly enough, there some eye-opener things like some of the atrocities that the Germans created. One of my most memorable experiences was just before the war was over. I went into the town hall where a very well-spoken German woman, well-dressed, was harassing the Lieutenant in charge. He turned her over to me and she said, "I've been trying to explain to this young man. I want some soldiers to come and make my Poles go back to work" on her farm. The war wasn't over yet and I said, "Madam, you must realize that they are not your Poles anymore." Actually I thought she was lucky that all they did was not go to work because in other places they were looting and getting revenge at the people who'd oppressed them for so long. But I was glad to taper off that way and come back to the states and by then I was a Lieutenant Colonel. The very first week back a friend of mine working for Northwestern Mutual knew I was back and called up and said that a client of his in New York was looking for men in their Commerce and Industry Division of the March of Dimes just to call on business people, to write letters to other people in the same line of business to contribute to the March of Dimes. And that little bit of fundraising experience was really what got me going into Junior Achievement, because they were looking for both supervisory skills and fundraising experience.

RC: And how did you meet Johnnie.

JS: We met at this drones party, the theater group party.

RC: And how long before you popped the questions, before you proposed?

JS: Well that was some years later. We stopped going together before I went into the Army because there was no future for me without a job. And then I got sent back east to Fort Monmouth in the Fall of '41. looked her up and we resumed dating. I went back to Fort Sill with nothing decided but after a few months I proposed by telephone and came east to get married in June of '42.

RC: And now let's advance to the opportunity to take your first Junior Achievement position.

JS: Well, I was there –

RC: You were telling me that weren't going to go to Philadelphia, so –

JS: They farmed me out to an office in Newark that had programs in towns in northern New Jersey. The staff conference that year was at a small one in Michigan and I was not on the budget to go, so I spent the time while the others were away liquidating defunct JA companies in the area. At that time the program supposedly went on and on, but it didn't. And when I got to Hartford in the second year of the new two-year program I found that that didn't work either.

RC: Now what do you mean that the program supposedly went on and on, Jim?

JS: In the old days it before 1941 there was the idea was that people... well, for instance, what I found in Newark was that a lot of the companies were internal within particular plants. The young people, who weren't employees, were invited to have this activity experience and then they went on to other things. The war came along and the bank account was sitting there and nothing was being done about it. So I closed them out. What Mr. Gall and Mr. Rome Collin had done was construct a theoretical program with no practical testing that would last two years, the junior and senior year in high school. You would recruit people in their junior year and they would continue on in their senior year. The fact is, in the very first two years of it, it all fell apart because they did not continue, they had other interests. The dilemma was that if the first year had been successful and made money, those people left without cashing in what they had earned and if they lost money they had to recruit new people the second year to come into a losing proposition.

RC: Interesting. Jim, what was wrong –

JS: My attention to JA program came, I think, from my objective –

RC: From that experience –

JC: ...to that experience at staff meetings.

RC: And the rest is history.

JS: The rest is history. The first thing I did when I got to New York, this little office, was to get rid of a complicated awards program like Sunday School pins, and also to get rid of the so-called two-year program which wasn't.

RC: Right. What was Rome Collin's role in Junior Achievement? You mentioned –

JS: He started out as a trainer and then in 1946, after he finished his initial training role for the new trainees, he repeated with other groups of new staff and then he also became like executive assistant to George Tamblyn, the director.

RC: George Tamblyn was the chief staff officer of Junior Achievement.

JS: He had come to the New York program as a fund raiser. His father had a fund raising business and he latched onto the beauty of the idea and got himself to be director.

RC: And Herman –

JS: Herman Gall had –

RC: His role was to recruit –

JS: His role was to develop the program. He had been the director of a small program in St. Louis and out of that he evolved this more formalized complicated program that didn't work.

RC: Jim, when you first came on board, how large was Junior Achievement? How much of the country was being served

JS: The furthest west was Chicago and Saint Louis, although they called themselves "national" but they did go as far as Denver in 1949 and they went to the west coast in 1950 and then filled in in-between through the '50's.

RC: Okay. Let's go back now. Describe your first assignment.

JS: Well, my first assignment after Newark –

RC: Yes, after Newark.

JS: At the conference that I did not attend in Michigan, the new director in Connecticut, a man named E. J. McCabe, thrilled them all with his stories of how great he was and what a wonderful program he developed. While they were checking up on the ground, Mr. McCabe was hired as national field director and he failed in that in a most spectacular way. So I took his place in Connecticut in the fall of '46 when he became National Field Director.

RC: What was the responsibility then that you took on?

JS: The whole state. A real program was going in Bristol, Connecticut that was the epitome of all that the Junior Achievement company program was ever supposed to be. It had top leadership in the community, it had cooperation in the schools, it had wonderful kids and a lot of them and in a small way. There were ten JA companies in a town of twenty-some thousand. I was there only a year and a half when Mr. McCabe's failings caught up with him and he was gracefully moved back to Connecticut which brought me to New York. Not to replace him, but to create a new program job called Program Director because Herman Gall was trying to run the program from St. Louis the way some of the modern JA field people try to run the program from their homes far from where the action is. Mr. Gall was in that same position. I came in New York –

RC: Now what year was that?

JS: 1948.

RC: And when you say you came to New York, so the national office –

JS: The national office was in New York, 345 Madison Avenue. Been there for a few years. It was a nice commute. I found a house in town next to where we'd grown up so our relatives were near.

RC: What town was that?

JS: Fanwood, New Jersey. A wonderful little place with a joint school district and one high school. We lived on a dead-end street, a half a mile of woods behind us and a little field down at the foot of the street where the kids could play ball. It was wonderful for our boys growing up.

RC: How did you commute every day?

JS: By train for a few years, then after about ten years we moved to the other side of town to a little bigger place. At that time I found there was an express bus right down at the corner so I took the bus in instead of the train. After only a short time on the bus I met a man who got out on the next stop. Together we formed a car pool and for years after that I commuted into New York by car pool until I left in 1974.

RC: Jim, you mentioned your family and your boys and so-forth. Let's back-track a little bit and have you talk about when they were born, where they were born and tell us a little but about your family during this period of time.

JS: Well, Chip had been born in Austin, Texas and David in Hartford in 1948. Shortly after David was born the JA office wanted to have some of the staff people go to areas that had been organized out of phase with the new one-year program that was under way. I went to Cleveland to hold the fort with the new board and to make preparations for hiring a staff man to go into spring training and start a program in the fall. And it all worked out just as planned. Cleveland was a good interlude because it gave me a chance to test some of the theories I was forming in my new job in New York and to visit around a little bit in that part of the country. I had a chance to find a wonderful site for the National Achiever's Conference at Denison University, the first time we had it in a college which is was the pattern was from then on.

RC: Whose idea was it for the National Junior Achiever's Conference? How did that come about?

JS: The National Junior Achiever's Conference was an idea dating from 1944 when the first one was held. It was supposed to be the National Association of Junior Achievement Companies, with one representative from each company. But in a practical way it never worked out that way. Only a few people came. It was held outside Middletown, Ohio. Then in 1946 it was held in connection with the staff conference in Michigan, and that was not very successful because they

had elected a kid as president who was very abrasive. The long and short of it was that the acronym was retained but the representative basis was conceded and abolished. So 1947 they had a conference at a run-down summer camp in northern New Jersey that was a great welder of the people who took part because all the adversities they had in the physical layout made them very good friends for the rest of their lives. I found out when I came there in '48 that I was supposed to run the conferences as part of my duties. It had already been reserved at Oglebay Park in Wheeling, West Virginia, a lovely estate that had been given by Crispin Oglebay who I had worked with in starting up Cleveland. The only trouble was, again the difference between the program and the organization of it, Wheeling was segregated. And so some very fine black kids, including Cecil Brown from Milwaukee who'd been written up in our national magazine, weren't able to go. It was too late to change the reservation, but I did take it on as a challenge. I went out there, looked in on the Pittsburgh JA office, which was something out of this world, made arrangements to receive the kids at the station, parked them at the Bell phone company auditorium until all were in, rented a bus to go down to Wheeling, made a deal with US Steel to have a luncheon and a plant tour at their Homestead plant at the last day of the conference. Down there we had three cabins, the girls in one cabin, the boys divided into two cabins.

RC: How many delegates, total?

JS: About sixty.

RC: So this was your first conference.

JS: I was all by myself. They had a woman adviser chaperone, a nice lady, from Boston, Sears Roebuck. There was a couple from St. Louis, because that had been the pattern to have adult chaperones. The couple took one look at the accommodations and disappeared for the rest of the week. I set myself in what I called the big-boys cabin. It was a smaller cabin but it was the kids that had been in the 1947 conference. I put some of the kids I had known from Hartford into what I called the little boys cabin, which was the big cabin with Dan O'Keefe, who was in college and was working as editor of the Achievement magazine. So it was a very informal time but I got a feeling for the flavor of it and the great enthusiasm that could be engendered. And I'm still in touch with the conference secretary that year, Betty Krenin, who works in Ann Arbor Michigan.

RC: That great.

RC: Saw her here just a couple of years ago. The Hartford kids that were there helped me too because they knew who I was and they were supportive. But I just knew that it had to get better than that, so in 1949 we went to, as I said, Denison University because I found the location when I was in Cleveland. And from then on it was colleges with a long run at Indiana University from 1957 through 1977 for me, and they continued on until 1983.

RC: And of course the conference grew every year from that point on.

JS: It did. My last year, 1977, there were about 3,000 Achievers, about 350 on the volunteer staff and a couple hundred visitors. It really was big and the problem was that you lost something with the bigness, but you sure gained something too because you had a larger nut for administrative costs, you had more excitement, you had a chance for greater diversity and programming. For instance, in later years I made a point of segregating the returning delegates, except for a few leadership types, in each of the sixty groups of fifty each. That meant that most of them were not going to be back in the program. They won the trip as an award for what they'd done in the past. They were on their way to jobs or college. So the program for them that week was not discussing much about a JA company, but about college and about jobs and about things that were significant to them.

RC: Jim, in just a moment I want go back to your other duties as National Program Director. But talking about the Achiever's conference, what do you think the greatest value of that conference was to both the students and to Junior Achievement?

JS: Well I think the advantage to the students, very definitely, or Achievers, I intend to call them Achievers. This is their JA role –

RC: I should know better, of course, they're Achievers, right?

JS: They're not school kids anymore. The advantage to them was the chance to size up their own experience with that of the others. And early on I made arrangements in these college dormitories that a criterion for a roommate was to select someone from another part of the country. It was always someone from the same grade in school, so they had comparable maturity level and experience level. But it was always someone from another part of the country. And that

became one of the most valued parts of the conference to the participants. They told me that over and over. The other aspect of it was that, even with the size, I was able to have some planned diversification. Like we had a program called the correspondence plan for very small towns, maybe one or two JA companies with no staff person. I put all of them in the same group so they had a chance to share experiences. We had visiting delegates from Mexico and from Puerto Rico when there were programs there. They got in groups with a counselor who spoke Spanish and with other kids that had shown on their registration card that they had some knowledge of Spanish. We even had kids from France when the program started there. They were in a group where the counselor spoke French, a couple other kids spoke French. That sort of thing. It was a chance to make the arrangements conducive to the best interaction between the kids.

RC: How did you staff the conference, Jim, as it grew?

JS: At the start it was just me. By 1952 I had developed enough association with kids that had gone through the conference that I set up a full-fledged counselor program with a structure that was still going strong when I left in '77. Although it was diluted it continued as long as the conference continued. The idea was that I wanted people who had finished one year of college. They were only one year older than the oldest of the delegates. They were close to them but also they were maybe too close to them. So early on I put in what I called a unit structure. Every six or seven groups had a supervisory staff of older experienced successful counselors. And if that wasn't enough, units were formed into divisions. At the end we had three divisions of one thousand kids each at Indiana University. So there was a structure that provided continuity all the way. I was always a great believer in that. In my later years we started having summer interns to help with the registrations and to some extent with the contests, planning for them. There was continuity there. I insisted that I didn't want anybody if they were only going to do it one year. I wanted them to be able to come back a few years, bring in new people.

RC: Jim, how did the agenda, the conference makeup evolve over the years? For example, contests obviously became a very important part of the week's activities.

JS: Well, when I started with JA we had a few contests tied in with various trade associations that consisted of examining records and a sample of the product. It was in New York with no contact with the kids. The evolution that I worked toward and succeeded with at the conference

was that the contest there, again sponsored by various appropriate business associations, had representatives to be interviewed, to be tested, to be examined right there on the spot with their record. And that made all the difference in the world because you weren't playing games like the college admissions people do, you had the real live person there to interrogate. The Company of the Year program had three representatives of the company. The Officer of the Year, of course, each had just the one officer.

RC: No question in terms of the benefit to the young people that went through that conference. And we could run through thousands and thousands of names of folks that would really testify to the fact that it was the experience of a lifetime.

JS: As a matter of fact you mentioned earlier working for Orin Smith in Milwaukee. He was one of the staff people that I tangled with more than once because he didn't like the fact that kids would come back from the conference with ideas that things could be better.

RC: Tell him how to run Junior Achievement (laughs).

JS: They knew more than he did!

RC: Right

JS: When you're dealing with other people in a friendly basis and you have the common denominator of that company experience, no matter what they're making, the basic makeup of the structure is always the same. You can't help but succeed. You're either confirmed in your knowledge that you're on the right track or you're challenged by the opportunity to cash in on some of these ideas that you'd picked up.

RC: Jim, are there any moments at NAJAC that especially stand out in your mind?

JS: Yes, there are several, some a little sensitive.

RC: Any that you'd care to share. Something that you'd love to reminisce about, that you're proud of?

JS: I remember we had a PR director in JA named Jim Langston who he had been director for a year or two in Hamilton, Ohio, which was our host at one of the conferences at Miami of Ohio.

He had this great idea that he could get coverage in Life Magazine if I would let them photograph the kids having a panty raid. I told him I didn't think that was a very good idea, but the very rumor of it spread around and I would get stories that there was going to be a panty raid. Maybe he was going behind my back in trying to organize something. So my reaction was well, by definition it ain't no panty raid until the first panty gets raided. And we'll wait until that happens and at that time we'll take appropriate action. It never happened.

Another occasion that I remember in the early days we were still at, you remember what was it called, the big eight state dormitory

RC: Not at Miami.

JS: At Bloomington.

RC: Brisco? No. I don't remember the names. There was McNutt, there was Brisco –

JS: McNutt. That was up in the new area.

RC: OK, and the other one

JS: Whatever. I went to Indiana because Frank Johnson –

RC: Foster.

JS: No, that was up in the new area. Frank Johnson, an Achiever from New York went to IU after he came back from Korea and he sent me a postcard of this dorm, "This would be a great place to hold a conference." So on one of my trips I looked in there and it was a great place and so that's why we had such a long and happy association. But this particular time I had a rule from the early days that the counselors were free in their free time if they conducted themselves properly. They were responsible for conducting themselves properly. But certainly there would be no drinking in the dormitory area to set an example to the kids. Well, late one night I was roaming around making sure everything was okay and I came upon two young men. Both looked up guiltily with a bottle between them. One of them was Joe Cronin, who later became Commissioner of Education for the State of Massachusetts, and one of our featured speakers at one of the conferences getting the Achievement Award. I could trust Joe Cronin for an amicable discussion, but the boy with him had a gleam in his eye that told me that if I ever walked away

from this the word would be all over by morning. So I told them both that they knew the rules, they were both to go home the next day. There was a bit of an abortive counselor rebellion. I told them that it was okay if they wanted to quit because where I got people like them, I can find their replacement in a minute within the delegates that were there.

RC: True.

JS: So that was a dramatic time, but we never had another problem with that. Another occasion was during the time of desegregation. We were absorbing very handily, probably better than anybody else, even including the US Army, kids from all over. For the first time, people were meeting people that they had never met before in their lives. And under the focus of the Junior Achievement program it worked. But we had a lecture program, brief lecture when they got off the bus, saying a few things more specifically than we'd said in the printed material. The chief one was that we're all in this together to benefit from our JA experience. Regardless of who the other person is, you're going to treat them with respect. We can't control what's in your mind, wish we could. We can't control what's in your mind. But we can control your action and no action of discourtesy to another Achiever will be tolerated. Well, that went fine all week long. Thursday afternoon at our final meeting a white boy from Boston got up in the auditorium and started shouting that we were discriminating. He had overheard some boys talking negatively about the fact that blacks were there. They hadn't done anything to a black, they were talking among themselves. He was an eavesdropper, but he threw the thing in turmoil. I came down there to straighten it out. That night it was self-segregation by blacks at the dinner table which we'd never had before and I was so hurt and sorry. Because that boy had... well my text maybe should have been more detailed, but then it would have been unintelligible. We hit the main point. But he was misguided, he was wrong. Fortunately it was the last day and by the next conference he sure didn't come back and we improved from then on.

RC: Jim, you opened the campus to outside visitors one day a week, I think it was called BI&E Day. Was that a successful effort? Was that your idea?

JS: No it was Joe Francomano's idea, and a great idea. The Bloomington airport used to have the largest conglomeration of private executive planes in the country that day. Unfortunately, two things militated against it. One was that the busy executive, after the first time he went, the next

year was all too inclined to send a substitute, someone lower in the hierarchy. And so we lost his participation. The other thing that happened was that our executive office wanted more catering to these people than really they wanted and the net effect was that Wednesday night they had a dinner and they were supposed to go to the talent night in the auditorium. They were supposed to get there at the intermission and see the rest of Talent Night. There were some awkward moments when they were late and they loused up the whole evening's program. In terms of the greater good for the greater number, it was a mistake. But it was a great advantage to have them there. I tried to sell the idea that instead of them coming in interrupting the conference it would be better having them observe during the afternoon if they were there and to have the conference come to them at an after-dinner program in the person of some of our more expressive Achievers. But I couldn't sell that idea. I think it would have been better.

RC: Just for the record, you mentioned Joe Francomano, a name certainly that all who know JA are familiar with, but what was Joe's role at that moment? What was his role at the national organization and its relationship to you, Jim?

JS: At the national organization he was a featured speaker. He was in the JA program in Long Island in his teens, the old program. He worked as a stock room boy, actually, at JA and with then his fluency and poise they started using him to make talks as the Achiever. Of course, as he matured he had to shave more often and powder up to keep on the impression. [laughter] But Joe's place in JA is best expressed by a tribute that Charles Hook of Armco Steel gave Joe. At the time Charles Hook was honored at a meeting in New York. Mr. Hook had been president of the National Association of Manufacturers when JA got its big boost at a Waldorf dinner in 1941 that's legendary in the organization. In his response Mr. Hook said, "I appreciate being honored here, but who you ought to honor is the person who got me interested in the first place, and that's Joe Francomano. Because when Mr. Hook was in New York at a convention he had been taken to a JA meeting that Joe was presiding at and was so impressed by this kid. Joe was miscast in his later years in JA because his forte was expansion. All of the expansion in the '50's was Joe holding an organization meeting and recruiting a local board, moving on to another town. When Rome Collin was fired Joe was brought into New York to be the assistant to John Hain, the temporary executive on loan from Chrysler in Detroit.

RC: And what year was that, Jim?

JS: This was around 1955 or 1956. Collin was fired and Hain came in.

RC: Where was the national office in New York, still on Madison?

JS: Still on Madison, yes. No, it might have moved.

RC: Okay.

JS: This was the kind of organization problems that always plagued the program. I happened to be in my early days. To me it must have been one of the key meetings in JA. It was a staff conference in Chicago that must have been after I had been moved to the New York office. At a luncheon in the hotel, I came late and there was this empty seat at a table with George Tamblyn, Tom Pendergast, the director in Chicago, and his program director Marion Jackson. I got right into the middle of the discussion about whether Chicago would pay participation charges. They had never paid them when the national office was set up because they claimed, and truly so, they were set up before the national office was set up. They had a deal with Mr. Moses in Springfield. So they didn't owe participation. George Tamblyn was a very creative guy. I guess on the spur of the moment he said, "Well if you're not going to pay participation charges, which are another way of calling a franchise charge, you don't have the franchise. So I can then notify all JA areas that they may have their vendors who do business with anybody in Chicago try to get money for JA." Tom said, "They'll never get it." Marion Jackson, to his credit, broke in and said, "Yes, Tom, but they won't give to us either if they have such confusion." Chicago started paying participation and within a year Tamblyn came up with a vendor campaign where areas got their vendors to write to people that they bought things from. All over the country if there was an operating area, that area got the money. If it was not an operating area, national got the money and Francomano got the clue of people to call on to start a new area. It was dramatically brilliant and I think it all came of that little sparring in Chicago.

RC: Jim, let's back up to 1947 again. The National Achiever's Conference was a big part of your responsibilities and your life, as a matter of fact. But you certainly had other duties as National Program Director. Let's develop those a little bit. What other things did you focus on?

JS: The first thing I did when I came to New York, before I had this temporary thing in Cleveland in the fall and winter of '48-'49, I started studying this two-year program. I got into charter applications.

RC: Tell me again what the two year program was.

JS: The idea was that they would start as juniors and continue back the second year.

RC: For two years.

JS: To get two years' experience.

RC: During the school year.

JS: During the school year. It didn't work for one reason or another. It didn't work because at that time they did not start uniformly in the fall; they should start uniformly all around the country. It was in the papers: follow the school schedule. When I studied charter applications I found that the names on the second year renewal charter were not the same as on the first. I had to do over the book; the advisor handbook had all the details of the two-year program. Well, I had to take that out. I could do the part that was typed, but Rome Collin had done all the lesson plans for the first meeting in script, in printed script, you know, to make it look real personal. Well I had to try to copy his script, which I didn't do too successfully, to make those changes. So I got that changed.

Then at the 1948 staff conference I had one contribution my first conference in that job. I went around the table and asked, "How many actual operating JA companies did you have this year, never mind the publicity, never mind counting last year's and this year's all together. How many do you actually have, if I were to come in there and interview people?" We ended up with the magic number of 440. And we grew from then on because we were expanding. We were going to have growth anyway because Joe was doing the expansion.

RC: 440. And the year was again –

JS: 1947-48

RC: Okay, great.

JS: For the '49 conference the then-PR director had sold George Tamblyn on a catchword theme that we were going to have 1,321 companies next year. When I found that out at the last minute, I hadn't been consulted, I pointed out to George that we're getting on solid ground. That would be a big mistake, because nobody was going to produce 1,321 companies from 440. It wasn't in the works. So I respect him for the fact that he accepted my suggestion, threw out the 1,321 and we had a good conference. We'd grown every year since.

RC: Let me –

JS: But we grew every year until 1970 when the then-president stopped expansion.

RC: Let me ask you, what role did you have in getting out into the field? I remember when I was a youngster the first time I saw you was when you visited the JA center in Milwaukee. But you must have done a lot of on-site –

JS: This was part of my charge from George Tamblyn, particularly because of my pointing out the failure of the two-year program. Nobody was checking up to see whether the printed word was being implemented. So he authorized me, got the budget. I was to take a prop plane, I started going this interim of Cleveland, this interim of going back up to Hartford to get it going again after McCabe was fired. By the late fall of '49 into 1950 I started two weeks travel, one week back in the office, two weeks travel, one week back in the office. And one of those trips to Johnnie's continued regret I took our new car out through the Midwest because it's so easy to get from city to city by car. So she was stranded with nothing but a wagon to take the groceries home.

RC: And you were living in, your home was –

JS: In Fanwood, New Jersey. But I did travel and George was very right. I could see he's right because the difference between the theory and the practice is where the rub comes. Now I also was able then to pick up ideas to share with the other guys as I went around, those at least who were receptive.

RC: Tell me about the one-year program. You said when we did the two-year program and then the one-year program. Clarify that, Jim.

JS: The idea of the one-year program was that they would organize, capitalize, manufacture, sell, close down, all within one school year.

RC: This was like the thirty-week program. Wasn't it about thirty weeks?

JS: About that. I didn't mean a calendar year, I meant one school year.

RC: Yes, that's what I wanted to clarify.

JS: And then around the time I'd left there was a trend, which I understand was started by Karl Flemke in Los Angeles, to two semesters a year program. In the couple of years before I left I found some of the same flaws that were in the two-year program because there was considerable misrepresentation as to the number of people involved. They were counting the same people twice.

RC: It was a quick way to increase enrollment.

JS: Right.

RC: But there was maybe some justification in terms of volunteer participation.

JS: The big negative in JA is also the biggest positive from the theoretical point of view. And let me back-track a bit. One of my earliest experiences in Connecticut, I went to a high school program to observe it in New Britain. There was a new movie being shown, good enthusiasm. Talking with the principal afterwards, he said, "This is a great idea. I'm surprised the schools haven't taken it over." Then he caught himself. He said, "No that's what's so great about the idea. Schools couldn't tolerate the chance of failure in a profit and loss system and we would doctor it up and it would lose meaning. The way you guys are doing it there are guts to it." He was right then and it's still was right at the time I left and probably still right today. What happened in the negative side of Junior Achievement is that because the Achievers in the company program were volunteers recruited from the whole school system. Because they were volunteers they could vote with their feet. If they didn't like what they were getting, if it wasn't a challenge, if it wasn't delivering what they'd been promised at the assembly, they didn't come back. So we had attrition. But even that attrition was not loss. The opinion research survey in 1965 developed the fact in the school side of it where they had interviews with random kids in

school that even if they'd been in the program only a part of the year they still retained understanding and attitude toward business that put them above those that had not taken part. But the attrition was a serious problem always because it represented all too sensitive measure the success the effectiveness of the local staff directing the thing. If a kid dropped out it might have been because they weren't doing their job right. So part of my obsession as Program Director was to have attendance reports from the areas to identify those areas that were suffering undue attrition. And that was a sure sign there was a problem. Another sign of a problem was the charter application would show a boy-girl relationship that was way out of whack.

I had two organized ways of getting information to evaluate what was going on and to test and formulate new ideas. One was the kids at the Achiever's Conference. For instance, in 1952 at Valley Forge Military Academy I launched, through the discussion groups, the idea that JA companies really ought to pay a tax just like business does. I had a volunteer develop a one-page corporate tax form following the same percentages as the national form but simpler. The group sold themselves and they went back home flush with the idea. Then I sold it at the staff conference and we put it in.

RC: Jim, I'd like to chat a little bit about some of the many, many innovations and improvements that you made over the years as National Program Director. Recall for us some of the things that come to mind.

JS: Well after the tax thing way back in '52, I think the most significant was the development of the company manual, which came out in '66. I'd had the idea for years that we were depending too much on just the advisors to guide the kids in what they should do, give the words for them to say. I had the idea, why not put the words right in front of the kids themselves? So working through the program development committee and through seminars at the conference we had the idea of the company manual. The first draft of it that Gil Follaher and I prepared was explained to the kids from the six areas that were going to test it, areas that were staffed by the people on the program development committee. We did that and then the next year, after one year experience with it in those six areas, Bob Richards led a seminar with kids from those same areas making suggestion of how it could be improved. Some very definite significant changes were made so that the when the whole big thing was printed in 1966 it involved the input of the Achievers at the conference. And I found that very helpful.

At the conference itself, I tried to provide both continuity and innovation so that people kept coming back and as many as twenty-so percent would be returning, providing continuity. But I didn't want too much continuity or they would get complacent. So I did put little differences in over the years, the biggest one really in group dynamics, separating most of the returning delegates into special groups so that they did not dominate the conversation of the young people. So they had a chance to discuss topics more appropriate to the fact that most of them were graduating seniors. The first year I did it, with no prior notice I assigned all of them to one unit in McNutt, if you'd recall. By Wednesday a kind of a rebellion broke out among them because some of them who'd come back expecting to lord it over the new kids found that they were just with more of the same and had nobody to lord it over. Joe Kaslowski, from Chicago, the unit supervisor found me in my office and said there was a rebellion going on, so-to-speak, in the basement of McNutt in the rec room. I went over, found out the problem, and talked them out of anything drastic. Well, the upside of it was that the next year I still kept them separated. I took from the records the returning delegates who had the best record of participation the previous year. I called them chairmen and had two or three in every group to provide a model for the new ones and to be help to the counselor. All the others were in the lowest numbered group within a unit in McNutt, they were on the ground floor. They were larger than the other groups and instead of two first year counselors they had three counselors, at least one of whom had two or three years, on the way of being the unit supervisor. Then no problem after that.

One of the aspects of the program that I felt was very important was attendance, particularly retention. Did people stay on and go through the year. I tried with limited results to get the regional men to monitor this. I developed a sampling system where on a visit to a program you could physically – rough numbers – count the number of Achievers there and compare that with the attendance reports submitted for that center for that night. There's no question that there were occasions where reports were doctored and therefore the objective validity of looking at the numbers was lost if the numbers were not real. Now Henry Heffner was the only one of the regional men that I knew that gave any indication that he took that to heart and tried to implement it. He was a bulldog that way. He discovered defects in the administration in Detroit that were valid. And it made him very controversial because he was critical of Wally Fleming in Wally Fleming's heyday on his organizational side. Wally Fleming's organizational skills were

not masked by his ability to supervise the program. After he lost people like Harry Siminec and Ed Bloom, the program was not the same.

Going back to the conference, the idea, in both the conference and in JA, of introducing new contests, new procedures, was a way of making the experience more meaningful to those who already were in and yet not so radical a change that you're going to make it hard to transmit the idea to those who are new. But the continuity that was provided in the program and at the conference was very important. And it's important to the success of any organization. I learned that very definitely during my years in the training center in the Army that the continuity of the staff made all the difference in the world.

RC: Jim, I wanted to ask you, how long did you remain in the role of National Program Director? Was that until you retired?

JS: Yes. It was sort of a tricky thing when I first went I was to be the Program Director, but out of deference to Herman Gall I didn't have the title. But the big change came for sure when John Hayne came to New York because he re-installed at the start the idea that I should report to Herman Gall, who was out in St. Louis. So I was able to play a nice game with that. John would ask me a question and I would say, I'll have to check with Herman. So he'd say, no, you can do that some other time, you tell me right now. So I would tell him and gradually we forgot about Herman. That again gets to what I mentioned earlier that the organization side of JA is what always gave me fits because the program was so good that it deserved to be better organized.

One of the chief things at the very beginning was that from the success of the big fund raiser at the Waldorf in 1941, JA started some areas during the war years and in 1945, particularly, on the basis that the national office would do all the fundraising until the area was able to get on its feet. Well that didn't work. Talking about it with Mr. Fuller of the Fuller Brush Company, who was my chairman in Hartford and a wonderful man, had such a great interest in JA. He told me, "Look," he said, "I questioned that at the time but this is another field of business I figured they know what they doing. They obviously didn't." So I had the privilege, based on some lean months in Hartford, that when I was able to get Bridgeport started my predecessor had raised money in Bridgeport but not provided any program. I felt a moral obligation in the fall of '46 to get a program going. I did and after one year and John Monahan was the director, assistant out of

Hartford, I sold the Bridgeport board on taking on full responsibility for their own funds and hiring Monahan to be their director. I understand the only other area at that time that had started with money, with a commitment, was Peoria. That was told to me when I first came with JA. But the point was that the money was there but to not ask for it, to say we'll get it for you later, it just didn't work. And Cleveland was an example where the money was brought in first. That why it was easy to get it started there so well.

RC: Jim, you mentioned Mr. Fuller and you mentioned Mr. Colgate earlier. Who are some of the individuals that you most remember, business leaders and so forth that, leaders in their field that you had a chance to get to know and work with.

JS: Well, I would say Mr. Fuller most of all and then the people at what was then known as the Wallace Barnes Company now known as Barnes Associates in Bristol Connecticut. Mr. Barnes set the budget for the program and raised all the money in one day at a luncheon for the business executives in town. Just before I left there in '48, Mr. Barnes told me "There's no limit to how big this program could get here, but you've got to depend on me to set the scale of it." He said, "My wife, my family will participate with another philanthropist here in town. We have to feel out way. We don't want to hog it all, we want to bring others along, and we want to do it at a solid pace that will last. You deliver the program I'll deliver the money and we'll agree on how much program the money will buy or dole out that way." And it was. What led to McCabe's downfall was that he went behind Mr. Fuller's back and tried to raise money for the general program from Bristol people that Mr. Barnes had not solicited and that made him very upset and he closed the program down.

RC: Any others that really stick out in your mind?

JS: The one that is the most interesting was when we had Jack Rathbone of Standard Oil in New Jersey heading up a fund raising on a national level. And he had some wonderful results, some limited results because areas like Chicago wouldn't take part, but it was really great. He was kind enough at one of the meetings to comment favorably on a presentation I had made at a previous one, so that made a hit. After we moved up here I looked up the widow of the operations sergeant in my field artillery battalion, Grace Rathbone. I never made the connection until we were taking Grace out to dinner. We passed an Esso station and she said, "Oh, there's another

station. My brother in law always said he was proud of those stations.” I said, “You mean he is that Jack Rathbone?” “Why yes!” And it would have been so wonderful if I could have told Jack while he was still alive about my experiences with his brother, an older man, who was an art professor, volunteered in the army at the age of forty and was wonderful in our battalion. I could have told him that I knew about the good things about each of them. That was the closest I ever came to really regretting that I hadn’t said that one more word when you hear a new name.

RC: Jim, how long did you remain with the national headquarters? When did you elect to retire from JA and what prompted that decision?

JC: I retired at the end of February 1978. What prompted it was some internal things with Mr. Maxwell because...

RC: Mr. Maxwell at that point was the president of Junior Achievement.

JC: First there was the question of moving to Connecticut. When they moved, I was kind of reluctant after living all my life there in Jersey. I offered to work part-time on NAJAC and the seminar and he didn’t buy that. Then I came up here with Johnnie, we looked around and liked what we saw so they moved us up here in ’75. The...

RC: I was just asking you when you retired –

JS: Oh, in the fall of ’77, I remember it well, I was invited to a meeting that Julie Hubbard had called. She’d been hired from Fort Wayne to set up this in-school program.

RC: The first in-school program.

JS: No, it wasn’t the first, really. The first was, two things: one was a school savings banks in Georgia and Birmingham, and the other was the stuff that Jim Rich did in Dayton Ohio.

RC: He was way ahead of his time.

JS: Well, ahead or behind according to how you look at it. Anyway, I was at this meeting and there were some things stated as assumptions that I questioned. I was about to speak but then something was said that we’ve got to get this in shape for launching in two years. So it came over me that I was sixty three at the time. I was due to retire at sixty five. I wouldn’t be around to

stay with the idea and I felt morally and ethically that I shouldn't muddy the waters when I was that close to retirement. And then to top that thought was the realization that had they recognized I was so close they probably wouldn't have invited me to the meeting. So I think within a day or so of that, just as I was about to away on a trip for the program development committee meeting, I popped in, caught Mr. Maxwell in. I told him I was leaving. So left when I was about sixty three and a half.

RC: After a very, very illustrious career with JA I might add.

JS: It had some great disappointments but it had some great thrills and probably for me personally the greatest thing about it has been the continued association by visits, by mail, by phone calls, with people like yourself that I knew as Achievers. As I say, dating back to 1948 I'm still in touch with Betty Krenin.

RC: Hundreds and hundreds, I'm sure. Jim, I want to come back to the program a little later, but I have some other questions I want to share with you, or ask of you. You mentioned a memorable experience, if you look back in retrospect are you able to identify any one or two most memorable experiences in your entire career with JA?

JS: Well, I'd like to think one and, unlike so many others didn't always pan out, the day that DeWitt Wallace of the Reader's Digest dropped in the office unannounced looking for Joe Francomano, who was out of town. I was referred to him. Mr. Wallace pulled notes out of his pocket that he had taken at lunch. This was at the time of the '60s protests and all. And he said, "I think that Junior Achievers could make a contribution to the problems in this country today with their diligence, what they learn about working for a living." He said, "I'd be willing to pay the expenses for Achievers to go places and give talks to businessmen conventions to show them that there are young people today that have their feet on the ground." Well I did some quick thinking and I thought, that's a great idea but where would you get the kids? And the answer was quite obvious: we'd get them from what we knew of people and their participation at the Achiever's Conference. And so I told him that in a few words. He asked me write it up. I consulted with Joe, we went up to the Digest once, prepared a presentation and the long and short of it was that he paid the expenses for the first Reader's Digest Speaker's Corps seminar, as we called it, in New York City. Ann Landers was the moderator; the panel were the kids that had

been developed over a couple of preceding days were on the panel with businessmen and great result. Mr. Wallace liked it so much because I had the kids always write him after they made a speech and he got into personal correspondence with these kids to the mutual enjoyment of all. He liked it so much that he endowed it with \$500,000. We were able to pay expenses; we were able to pay for a seminar in the fall to train the kids that we had selected. They had to apply, they had to agree to come to the seminar, and we gave them... we got better each year at it. The last few years we had it at a conference center here in Connecticut with closed-circuit television so that each person could make a presentation at the start, learn how to make presentations, and then at the end make another and compare the two. Wonderful stuff. Well anyway, that really had so many ramifications because they spoke at a number of business conventions and they spoke at a lot of JA meetings where they would be a good example for the other kids in the audience. They just made a big difference and I was very sorry to learn that JA had dropped it. I guess it was hard to administer.

All the years I was there I feel I was understaffed, I know I was understaffed. My problem was that when I hired good people like Gil Follaher or Mary Beth Vernon, after a few years they would be tapped for some other greater responsibility. Glad to see them go, but then they're gone. And I was always trying to find somebody new to take their place.

RC: But Jim Sweeny disciples nonetheless. Jim, it may be hard to top that one, but any other most memorable experiences before we move on?

JS: Well, I showed you earlier the plaque that you folks gave me in 1968. At the 1968 conference, for the first time, having been invited many times before, Johnnie said she would come to the thing, which delightfully surprised me. I found out why, because she got there late in the week and then by some device I was hornswoggled into turning in my rented car, or lending it to someone else, and Tom Shelber would take me up to the airport with Johnnie. Well that was fine; it was different from what we'd done before. I was the last to leave as always. As we get up to the airport, just at the entrance going toward the terminal, there was a Holiday Inn motel. Great big sign out front: Welcome Jim Sweeney. God, there was another Jim Sweeney. It was me! It was a complete surprise. And there were people there from the very first conference, Alvin Outcall. And everything in between. A lot of the current counselors. Ron Cody, I guess.

RC: Absolutely, I remember it well.

JS: And it was a real thrill. I should have quit when I was ahead, right then and there. But it was so nice I thought I'd stay around for a little longer.

RC: A very important event.

JS: But you know this touches on a lot of things about JA and about its attention. At that conference, Alvin Outcall had been elected president at the first conference in 1944. He was an achiever from Belleville, New Jersey. At the time they tracked him down and invited him, he had just gone to work as public relations director for International Paper. He was reluctant to hit his new boss with the need to have extra time off to go to this meeting. But he went in to tell the boss that he hoped he could get off this extra date and found to his great surprise that the boss didn't know he was in Junior Achievement. Why he didn't know? Alvin never told him. Why didn't Alvin ever tell him? Alvin was not aware of the growth JA had experienced. It was something to be proud of, to share with other people. The boss immediately said, take all the time you want. No wonder you're so good, no wonder I hired you, you were in JA.

RC: Ah, good story. Jim, you have influenced a lot of people during your life and during your career in Junior Achievement. There must be a few individuals that have most influenced you during your lifetime and during your career. Now I know you've got to pause and think about that for a moment, but what individuals come to mind in terms of having the greatest impact or influence on you and who you are.

JS: Well, it is right off the top my head, but I would say George Tamblyn because he picked me for the job and he accepted some of my recommendations which were contrary to what had been going on. I think Alfred Fuller, who set an example of integrity in business, of generosity, of calmness, of wisdom, that I so admired. I would be in his office – I learned if I went to see him at 11:30 in the morning I could get my business done and be invited to lunch in the company cafeteria with him. And since I was sending letters in his name all over the state, his phone would ring and I could tell from whom he addressed who he was talking to. There were businessmen all over the state and all over the country that called Alfred Fuller for advice and comment on their proposals because he had such a reputation for judgement and one thing impressed me about him was his utter humility. He told me that the success of the Fuller Brush Company, the stereotype of the

Fuller Brush Man, was because early on he recognized his innate shyness. He had trouble selling his first brushes when he was making them all himself on a little hand mandrel. So his first move to business success was to hire someone to do the selling. That lasted all his life, putting the right people in the right job within that organization and he outlived the organization because he had to give it up when his sons couldn't take it over – it was a private company and he sold it. But he had such integrity and such wisdom that just being around him a little had to rub off.

Another man I greatly respected was Kirby Risk in Lafayette, Indiana. He tried to get an intermediate program started there and was turned aside by Herman Gall. Then he heard about the correspondence plan and he started that with me. I hadn't known about the Gall incident. That confidence he had in the program, it became an intermediate program, it became a full-time program, been there for years and he gave so much to it. In a relatively small town to have such an impact certainly made a difference. He was the big motivator of that wonderful multi-purpose community center that serves both for the senior center, the JA business center, and the parks department shops. A wonderful combination of practical way. And also it served to release the \$60,000 that kicked it off from the trust fund. It's Jenks Rest. It also served as a community restroom because it has a door to the outside in terms of stipulation in Mr. Jenk's will.

Another one that I learned to admire – I didn't see him that closely, but every time I did it was so impressive – it was Mr. DeWitt Wallace because he put his money where his mouth was. Always was that way, very generous. For instance, he came to me with a proposition to sponsor a scholarship to Macalester College. By then I knew him well enough that I could talk frankly. I said, Mr. Wallace the best kids in JA that you want frankly don't want to go to Macalester. So I would be happy to advertise the Macalester scholarship, but I suggest you offer some cash awards also for kids that are going to go the more selective schools so that you'll have contact with them and know what you've achieved with your money. And he bought that idea and I don't know if it's still going, but it worked for a number of years. Macalester didn't last. The one boy that won the first year went part of the year and then he continued back home in Detroit.

But people like that, of that generation of businessmen, they were accessible to you. One day in Middletown Ohio for some meeting, Joe Francamano and I were in the hotel late at night after the meeting and there's Mr. Hook walking down the hallway. And so we introduced – Joe of course had seen more of Mr. Hook than I had – and they get talking. “What are you doing here

late at night like this, Mr. Hook?” “Well,” he said, “some secretaries in the office were having a farewell party for one who’s retiring and I just thought I ought to look in.” That’s an example of the kind of, you know, some people would call it paternalism, but I would call it just good human relations. And that sort of thing is sorely lacking. The scandals, the problems in recent years just – I can’t believe it’s the same kind of people. I know it’s not the same kind of people.

In one of our earlier meetings, I had Mr. Fuller go along with me to some promotional meetings in other towns. And the first time I asked him, he said, “You get an expense account for your car don’t you?” I said yes. “Well,” he said, “I’d like you to take me because I don’t feel right about keeping my chauffeur out on my private business.” And, you know, that kind of attitude of doing things right. Mr. Fuller, for example, had put in machine shop as an adjunct to his plant, making war material because in the old plant in Hartford there were all those machines they had invented and made for themselves to do all these brush-making operations. After the war other plants were selling off their shops for nothing. Mr. Fuller had built up a skilled force of people there and he felt an obligation to them not to throw them out in the street. He felt an obligation to his business to keep on making money, so he got into the contract machine tool business for the companies around New England where they would make the tools on a contract basis and kept that part humming and I’m sure that any of the machines that had to be made for Fuller Brush were that much better because they had this trained force of men working. That kind of attitude.

RC: It is obvious to everyone who will have the great pleasure and opportunity to listen to this tape to know that Jim could go on for hours and we may have to do a phase two interview.

[laughter] But I do want to keep us on track and ask another tough question that may cause you to think a little bit. You probably touched on some of this in the nearly two hours we’ve been talking now, but looking back over your career, Jim, what is – if you had to point to a single greatest success, and least in your own terms, and a disappointment, something that you wish had gone differently, does anything come to mind, especially the success.

JS: Well, I think one of the most dramatic successes was this company manual because it greatly extended the scope of the advisor job. They didn’t have to tell the kids things the kids could read themselves. They could really give them advice. I had the experience the first year of the completed manual, to visit the program in Bridgeport which I kept in touch with because I lived around here and I had started it. There was a young man presiding by the book – unassuming sort

of a fellow. The kids had elected him for whatever reason the previous week. With the book in front of him, he led that meeting in a way that had everybody's respect, attention, decision-making followed right along. The advisors were sitting there in their role as advisors. And it just was so much better than the advisor having to tell the kid every time to lift a finger and what to do because they could read it in the book. By the same token, the beauty of that manual was that the advisor had the same manual except they had additional instructions and suggestions in red ink for the advisor's use. You remember it. I visited all the areas that were part of the test and it really went over great. It was the biggest publication job the JA ever had. It was nice to know that so many hundreds of thousands of these books were going to be lying around the country gathering memento value –

RC: I've got mine.

JS: But it worked. And the other aspect related to it was that our experimental programs, first the intermediate program in small towns then the correspondence program in very small towns was a constant test of the value of the expository materials. One, two, three – you read it, it makes sense, you can do it. And I made a point in my trips of always tying in a side trip somewhere to one of those small companies because there was nothing but the book. And the program itself had such inherent merit. I remember going on one trip stopping in a small town near Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, forgot the name. The Chamber of Commerce executive wanted to have JA and she'd arranged for some of the business people and some of the school people to be at the meeting. I gave my presentation and they were to have assembly programs the next week with a film and applications and all. I finished, and the school superintendent let me down very easily. He said, "You know this is very interesting but you won't find anyone who wants to be in it here because our young people have everything. They have all kinds of activities, they won't be interested." Well, I thought on the spur of the moment, "Well, the worst can happen nobody signs up we'll get Life magazine in here this is the town that has everything." The next week the Chamber of Commerce secretary calls up. She said, "This is the town that now has JA. The program went over great. We're flooded with applications, the school people have red in the face. The kids love this idea. That made such a hit."

RC: Hard to top that one. Any disappointment or thing you really didn't get finished before you retired from JA?

JS: Well, my retiring, as I told you, was sort of impulsive. But I did give plenty of notice. I told at the end of November that I wanted to leave the end of February. There was no effort that I know of to find a replacement while I was still there so there could be an orderly transition, the kind of orderly transition that had been part of my makeup for the program and for the conference all those years. Didn't happen. It was months after I left before Alan Kirtley was brought in and even then on a reorganized basis. But before I left I did leave word on all the things that were pending so it wasn't a complete loss. But that was a very great disappointment.

And another one was, of course, I was hacked in '93 at the Achiever's Conference in Indiana, the last time it was there and the next-to-the-last time that it ever was; I was so disappointed after the years we were there and all the favorable association the way those folks had given us so much support. We gave them a lot of attention, too. Herman Wells, when he was president, used to sit in on the discussion groups. It was great. And then to look out the window of the office and see them loading up the truck with the supplies from the supply room that had built up – they gave us a room of our own to keep the supplies in from year-to-year. It was disappointing. And to find that the counselor's organization had been thrown away, continuity lost, all that sort of thing. I could see it was on the way out but it took fifteen years after I left for it to finally die off. But it did have to be refreshed, it did have to have somebody running that knew what he wanted and worked at it.

The other thing that I was very sorry to see disappear was the machinery. That was one of the fascinations for the kids.

RC: It made it real.

JS: Made it real. And it made participation – it was hard. In many cases it was hard. It challenged the advisors to find things that could be made. Much ingenuity there. Now I – I forget how it happened – but I got on the National Safety Council for years and I applied National Safety Council standards to JA reporting, only more so. And the accident record was pretty good. The way I understand it, it fell off fast after a couple of years and led to the insurance company telling us we couldn't have machinery. Well, my feeling would have been to make the corrective steps to still use the machinery, against just giving up. Because with that went a lot.

Another problem that seemed to have gotten worse with time was this matter of desegregation. JA and the JA conference was way ahead of the rest of the country in properly, effectively integrating people from all parts of society. We had been for many years, even when the South was segregated the North was, of course, integrated, JA was integrated. Within a few years after I left I came across the fact that JA was seeking out segregated situations for business centers. My theory was when I started Cleveland we found a location for the first business center that was equally accessible to Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, and the Woodland District of Cleveland which anyone from around there knows. That was the best kind of integration because the kind of people we wanted came to the JA meeting. And it got so refined that there was an example when Henry Heffner was in Cleveland he invited me to look in there at a problem. In the Woodland area, big project, they wanted to have the center there, in effect segregated. I met with the folks there and the reason they wanted it was that their best kids wanted to be in the program but they didn't want to spend the travel time to the JA center where it was located. They knew that if they had a program in their own community they could go to the city-wide things without any problem, but they would save that travel time. Now I'm not sure whether they were right or wrong, but you had to respect their initiative and their judgement and Henry went along with it. And I looked in later on and it was going great.

Things like that come to you, but there were many challenges that happened over the years. The program ones were by and large solved. The organization ones weren't. They really weren't and some of the top staff people were – for instance one that doesn't get much attention at JA was the couple of years that John Davis Lodge was president. There was a man came with no experience in the field. He sized us up, he let us do our job, and he did his job which was to sell JA. He did it very effectively. Right?

RC: Absolutely.

JS: Very effectively.

RC: Yes, I think so.

JS: Akron got started during his term. He did a very effective job. But others, well there were two cases where people came off the executive committee and neither of them was effective. We had so many good people involved that we should have done better on an organizational basis.

RC: Jim, to continue our interview and drive to a conclusion – and I say we may have to continue this sometime – in terms of your career with Junior Achievement, what would you like to be remembered for?

JS: Well, I think on a personal basis the Achiever's Conference meant a lot to me because I got to know people personally and it was a way of checking up on the program which sometimes the local areas didn't appreciate. But it was the personal side of it. As I think what I really would like to be remembered for is that at the time I started, JA was on the threshold of a great expansion. It had a basic program that was very moving, very effective but it originally, as it was launched in '45 before I came with it, had a number of irritations that kept it from being truly effective – like the two-year program. So I feel I made a contribution by doing what it took in the way of agitating and demonstrating to replace the two-year program with a one-year program; to begin measuring quantity by attendance reports; to begin measuring quality by contests that would give evidence of the results that could be attained; to begin measuring effectiveness by the work that we did with the opinion research survey back in '65. All those things that perhaps had they been continued at a constant pace would have helped the program evolve into what needed to be done in the changing economic situation. Because certainly the disappearance of the kind of manufacturing industries in this country that where we recruited advisors and sponsors had made a big difference in something like Junior Achievement where people are asked to volunteer their time and do a job. The program itself was proven time and again through the remote operations like the correspondence plan to be something that could be done. People could read it and do it. We had the materials to make it possible. We had that wonderful bookkeeping system that we worked out with the American Institution of Public Accountants back when that association was noted for its integrity and its precision and it was accepted by advisors all over the country. Things like that.

The other thing I tried to do was to capitalize on the human possibility, the people that were developed through the conference. And I felt so highly that the Reader's Digest Seminar achieved that purpose by giving a limited number of our most fluent Achievers a chance to speak on our behalf and in their own. Things like that. I think to classify it would be a matter of helping people develop their personal goals.

Did I say earlier about the meeting in Washington where Dee Polinski answered the question?

RC: Go ahead, tell us.

JS: Photographic Manufacturer's Convention at the Madison Hotel in Washington. After the four Achiever panelists had finished their presentation a woman in the audience, one of the members of the association, challenged Dee Polinski: "Dee, this was all very good, but you certainly are not a typical Achiever, you're not a typical young person." And Dee said forthrightly, "I should hope not. I worked too hard to be a little better than I don't want to be called typical." And that epitomizes so many of the kids who found themselves in JA.

You know, time and again when we go to new areas and the people there, both business and school people, would wonder about who would join. We knew people would join from all parts of the school community. The nerd, the slow one, not good in a social setting, but in JA, being social with a small s, they would blossom. They would take responsibility; they would win the respect of their fellows. That happened time and again. Thousands of times.

At the same time, it's important to remember that JA in its heyday, in the '50s, sold itself as a public relations program for industry. We got our support only from industry. We weren't looking for handouts from government or private individuals, only from industry whom we benefitted. We benefitted by the attitude we'd convey in the town, that the business people were interested in the young people. In small towns it had a particular flavor because in individual examples I can remember it reversed that pattern of the kid from the small town sees no future in the plant where Dad worked so they go looking elsewhere. At the same time the plant brings in someone from out of town that is not accustomed to that atmosphere and is not happy. One example was once I had an occasion to call Donald Rennie the personnel man at Chesapeake Corporation of Virginia, who had a very successful correspondence plan in about five delta towns there in Virginia. I called and asked for Mr. Rennie. The voice of the switchboard operator said, Hello Mr. Sweeny. This is so-and-so, one of the Achiever's who'd been at the national conference, and had been hired to be their receptionist where otherwise she would have gone to Richmond or Newport News looking for a job because there weren't many jobs in West Point. Things like that; the human side of it was very important, very exciting, very satisfying.

RC: Jim, I should ask you before we conclude, is there any other topic, area of your career that we should touch on? I might add a couple words in terms of what an individual like yourself will

be remembered for by the graduate Achievers – I can speak on behalf of a man of tremendous integrity, honesty, commitment, compassion, for young people and for the values of the JA program and so forth. I've been so honored to sit here and interview you, and I mean that. I have to acknowledge, I wish we had video as well as audio because I have to mention the fact that Jim Sweeny is sitting here with his JA tie on today. I'm terribly, terribly impressed.

JS: That's in your honor. [laughter]

RC: Well in honor of the interview, let's put it that way. But I was very impressed. I noticed it the minute I walked up to you. Jim, any closing comments that you want to share on the tape?

JS: No, except that, as I say, the dividend of those years with JA has been on the personal, human side and the fact of the people that have kept in touch. And I just hope that this audio history program will reach out and catch some of them. And not just the first one you come across, but someone that person has kept in touch with, and so on and so on, ad infinitum. The idea is very sound to me and the reason I brought it up at that first meeting I got in on a couple years ago is that JA is much more than a collection of manuals and souvenirs and trivia. It's the people who took part and not just the Achievers: their parents, their advisers, the towns and the school people. All of them have contributed because there was a lot of involvement. The big negative was that it did operate in the best tenets of a profit and loss system. Kids dropped out, companies failed sometimes. Some had fantastic success. But even those that dropped out got something from the time they were in JA. The opinion research survey proves that. It just is a good experience and the nicest thing is that it is a continuing experience through keeping in touch with these people.

RC: Thanks a lot, Jim. Thanks for sharing all your views. After we listen to the tape if we find we missed anything we'll come back. One more thought?

JS: One of the disappointments from the organizational side was the pension plan, because in 1948 George Tamblyn introduced a plan for the first time. A five percent participation by employees and by management. To make it palatable, everybody got an automatic five percent raise in '48 to cover that five percent so, mechanically, from then on you never noticed it. In addition to any merit raise you might have gotten. But, when they decentralized after George Tamblyn left in 1950, areas were allowed to withdraw not just the employees – if an employee

left early he could not only withdraw what he put in plus interest, but instead of leaving the area's side there to go towards the pension for his successor, he was allowed to take that out at the request of his local board. That really gutted the potential for those that go the whole route and stay with it effectively, successfully through retirement. It would have been much more attractive had that stayed in place as it was intended. It also originally was a compulsory plan, a condition of employment. That was diluted over the years and areas were allowed for staff to have their own sort of plan and then they came back to JA because it didn't work. A lot of that's gone on that led to misunderstanding and bad results within the organization. But the original plan was really great and I don't know where I fit into it. My benefit was paid with right at the threshold between the original system and the newer system that was instituted later. So they tried to figure out the best way for me. I hope they did. But actually, the positive effect of that disaster was that I learned early that if I wanted to stay with this, and I did enjoy it, I'd better put some money aside because it wasn't going to come from the organization. And it was because of the idea of the pension plan is that if the fund builds up the earnings on which will pay for the pension of future employees.

RC: A lesson that young people are having to learn today. Again, Jim, thanks a lot. We'll hope that Gil and the crew are satisfied with the tape.