

EARLY YEARS WITH TOM CURTIS

Interview #1

August 27, 1993

RITCHIE: I wondered if you can clear up a mystery: I have two biographical statements. One says you were born in Shamokin, and the other says you were born in Danville.

VASTINE: I was born in a hospital in Danville. [Laughs] I didn't know there was that discrepancy.

RITCHIE: Shamokin is close by Danville.

VASTINE: Quite close by, yes. My family is originally from Danville, which is, as you may know, a little river town. The beautiful Susquehannah. It's a remarkable river. Passive and calm. And Danville's a farming town, and my father's father came from the little town. Let's see, my father was the tenth or eleventh doctor in this family that stretched back, I guess, into the eighteenth century.

But anyway, they settled in Danville. The family name was originally Van de Woerstyne, a Dutch name. They settled in Bucks County in the early part of the eighteenth century, and then they moved west to the Susquehannah area. My grandfather, who was a doctor, had a farm along that river. When he was a young man, Shamokin, Pennsylvania, nearby was a booming coal town, full of immigrants, and he established his practice to Shamokin. He graduated from the University of Maryland medical school.

He moved his practice to Shamokin and found his wife, Helen Bencoter, the daughter of a Methodist minister. Very well brought up young lady who had been to finishing school at the Greer School. Knew how to comport herself. She knew Latin. She knew the piano, and literature; and she knew how to be a doctor's wife. So they lived in Shamokin. My father was one of four sons. There was a daughter who died at age 2 in the great post-World War I flu epidemic.

Anyway, my father became a doctor and followed in his father's footsteps. After going to Jefferson Medical College he came back in 1935 to Shamokin and set up his practice. And then went away in the army during the Second World War, and then came back after having done a residency at Mayo Clinic. He came back and practiced medicine, mainly diseases of the chest and cardiology.

RITCHIE: In a coal area, that would be prevalent.

VASTINE: He did some work in the identification of diseases related to silicosis. Saw a lot of miners. Saw a *lot* of folks. It was a very polyglot town. There was every brand of Catholic, from Eastern Europe, the Baltic, and the Balkans, full of different people, Irish and all kinds of folks.

RITCHIE: Now, when you were growing up was the town stratified, or did you mingle with all these groups?

VASTINE: Went to high school so there was a lot of mingling. [Laughs]. I did go off to Mercersburg Academy. I *was* privileged in the sense that my family was highly educated. My mom and dad were both college graduates. Mother had gone to college at Wilson College, and then to the Pennsylvania School of Social Work. And she was very conscious of community service. Finally, I think before leaving Shamokin for their retirement in 1975, she had been the president of the Pennsylvania Association of Hospital Auxiliaries and was active in the Pennsylvania YWCA and the AAUW [American Association of University Women] and had really played her part in community service. She was elected to the school board and was president and treasurer from 1951 to 1961.

I went to Mercersburg. Part of the benefit of being the doctor's son is that we had a lovely resort that we went to in the summer time called Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania. You may have heard of it. It is a marvelous nineteenth-century resort way up in the highlands of Pennsylvania called the Sullivan Highlands around a pristine lake where there are no motorboats allowed, surrounded by

large, old cottages—some with servants’ quarters—for the wealthy Philadelphia-Wilmington families who took a special narrow-gauge train to get up the mountain top, to go there—pre World War II.

We bought one of those old cottages for \$11,000 in 1948 or ’49, with 500 feet across the front and maybe 500 or 600 down the mountainside to the lake, and repaired there every summer. I, therefore, got to know a wider community of friends than I would have in Shamokin. These kids were all going to prep schools, and they were all going to Princeton and Yale; and I was going to high school. They were learning things that I wasn’t learning, and I realized that I might be in trouble. So I got my parents to send me to Mercersburg Academy where my mother’s father had gone. This was his only school. It was then a kind of academy or a junior college, I think.

RITCHIE: Very much a prep school for Princeton, in those days.

VASTINE: Yes. Oh, you know it.

RITCHIE: I wrote a book about a man named James Landis, and he graduated from there in 1916.

VASTINE: Oh, really. Yes, well, it was then entering its golden period. Calvin Coolidge’s son went there. In fact, he died as a result of a blister or a blood infection contracted while he was playing tennis there. But, anyway, Mercersburg was *extremely* strict, and a very good school. I was very glad to go there, partly because my mother was the first woman elected president of the school board and my father was a town doctor. And I was very much constrained by my home environment. Going to Mercersburg was, in a sense, an escape.

For most kids it was like going to jail. But for me it was a freeing in some sense. Anyway, I did well enough to get into Haverford College. And then came here to graduate school.

RITCHIE: How did you choose Haverford?

VASTINE: How does one make these choices in life? You know, it's all happenstantial in the end. My mother's parents lived in Narberth, and during the Second World War when my father was off to war and we were in between the Mayo Clinic and going back home to Shamokin we stayed very frequently in Narberth with my grandmother and my two great aunts, Aunt Victoria and Aunt Madeline. I remember one time dad took us on the Paoli local to Merion—I think it must have been 1946 or '47. Then we walked a very long way to the Merion Golf Club. Well, the Merion Golf Course is a very famous golf course, and we watched Sam Snead play in the Open. [Laughs]

We had to walk past Haverford College campus. So it made an impression on me. When it came time for me to go to college I always remembered Haverford, and it was then one of the best—was thought to be one of the best colleges. I went there. It's just one of those things.

RITCHIE: It's a Quaker-based school. Isn't it?

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: But your family wasn't Quaker.

VASTINE: Not at all Quaker, but at Eagles Mere our next-door neighbor was a maiden lady of some great years, Mrs. Elizabeth Roberts. She was then eighty, I think. Tremendous fortitude and character. Ran a little gift shop, and I was her employee during parts of the summers. She was very critical of me. She was very demanding of *all* people. I told her at one stage that I wanted to be a diplomat. She asked me one day as I was cleaning out something or other—one of her bird baths—she said, "What do you want to be?" I said, "I want to be a diplomat." And she didn't say a thing! The next day she said, out of the blue—this is a characteristic of Quakers of this school—she said, "Don't diplomats lie?" That was all she said! She had nothing further to say about it.

She turned and walked away. She said, “Don’t diplomats lie?” [Laughs] And just left the scene. [Laughs] So that’s what she thought about my career choice.

RITCHIE: Well, there’s something of a truth to that comment.

VASTINE: Yes, right. Well, it’s true; but don’t we all. But she was a woman of great strength, and character, and backbone. She played golf into her late, late age. And I enjoyed Quaker meeting. I enjoyed the Quaker experience such as it touched our lives. At Haverford we had what was called Fifth-Day meeting, which was then obligatory. I think, twice a month or three times a month we had to go—the *whole* college gathered at the meeting house. At that time, Haverford was four hundred students. The faculty, some of them—the Quaker faculty—sat on the facing benches, and the students sat and read *Time* magazine and snored.

But some students spoke; and in general, I enjoyed it. I am very disestablishmentarian in my church views, so I quite approve of Quakers except for their politics which are wildly unreasonably liberal, usually. American Friends Service Committee folks tend to be off-the-wall peaceniks.

RITCHIE: Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon both started out as Quakers.

VASTINE: Yes, well, I suppose, there’s something to be said for it. Are they the only two?

RITCHIE: The only two Quaker presidents.

VASTINE: Hmm. Well, I think by the time Richard Nixon got to be president he was *very* far from being a Quaker. [Laughs] Didn’t he embrace Billy Graham?

RITCHIE: Yes. He left his Quakerism behind when he left Whittier.

VASTINE: And I don't want to try to characterize Herbert Hoover. Anyway, I enjoyed the Quaker aspect of Haverford, and Haverford was a pretty good school, I thought.

RITCHIE: Were there any professors who were particularly influential to you in those days?

VASTINE: Hmmmm, we had a very good history professor, Wallace McCaffrey who later taught at Harvard. A very, very fine man. But my favorite of all was Clayton Holmes who was the head of the engineering department—faculty of two, Haverford being so small—and he was probably my favorite because he had an absolutely complete woodworking shop and because he was a crusty, crusty Yankee. And because I bought from a departing senior a tall armoire which he called his lazerkuhl, so-called because he could open the top drawer of the bottom section of this cabinet and put his bag of ice in the top drawer, and then just reach out, you see, on Friday night—when it came to be party-time—and pick out his ice to replenish his drink.

So I bought this very banged-up, early nineteenth-century furniture—one of which had been in every Haverford student's room in 1833 when the college was founded. This particular specimen's door hinges were all cracked off. And having been a lazerkuhl, it was very badly marked. I took it—I still have it—it's a giant thing. It's about seven feet tall. Quite heavy. Cherry wood and walnut. I took it to Professor Holmes, and he and I worked on it together to restore it. And, boy, did it need it! [Laughs] So we had quite a good time, and I got to know him well. He was a good influence, very nice man.

RITCHIE: But you kept up your interest in diplomacy all through there?

VASTINE: Yes. I've *always* been interested. I've always been extremely interested in foreign economic affairs, foreign economic policy—something that used to be called commercial policy. When it came time to finish Haverford and I realized I wasn't fit to do anything, I thought I'd better go to graduate school. So I chose instead—unwisely instead of law school or business school—I chose

SAIS, the School of Advanced International Studies here in Washington. *Not* as good a school as Haverford. And in those days a shadow of its current self.

Lots of good-old-boy senior faculty who'd all been in the foreign service. *Loved* martini lunches—three martini lunches. The assistant to good old Dean Thayer, Priscilla Mason, ran the place. Her family had a lot of money, and that had a lot to do with it. It was then in the old—what's the name of the school that Harry Truman sent his daughter to? Holton Arms! It was in an old Holton Arms School, where Margaret Truman went to school, at Florida and 19th Street. Great, big, old, red-brick building. The students in those days lived in the third or fourth floor, in dormitory rooms, essentially. And I had one of those in the corner.

In some sense I really flowered at SAIS. I studied Arabic, God only knows why! Because of the 1957 crisis—because you had to choose an area study, and everybody chose Europe. And I wanted to be different, so I chose Middle East. So I learned Arabic, and I got a National Defense foreign language fellowship to help me do that and spent the summer between years in Beirut. Then traveled in Syria and Egypt and Israel.

RITCHIE: You were there before the troops were landed.

VASTINE: Well, no, actually, the first Marines landed in '57. And they were still talking about them in 1960, the summer I was there. But Beirut was its own particular—was its own particular kind of paradise in those years. It was a very, lovely place. Life was very sweet, the weather was gorgeous, and every weekend there was a festival. Great, old Roman ruins in the Bekaa Valley which, I gather now, are a part of the Hezbollah command structure. But they had been taken over by, I suppose the government; and the French had been invited to come and install *son et lumiere*. So this wonderful old temple of Bacchus with its four sides intact, a magnificent structure, was bathed in golden light and paved in gravel. And in this theater, former temple, performed on summer evenings the Bristol Old Vic, and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra,

dancers from the Royal Ballet. Whatever. I saw some wonderful things there. Get on the bus and go to Bekaa. Go to Baalbek. It was a real privilege to know Beirut before it became a battle zone.

RITCHIE: Were you associated with the American University there when you were there?

VASTINE: I went ostensibly to take courses there; but what ended up was that I lived in the community center there—the Christian Youth Center, I think it was. And I found myself a tutor in Arabic. But what I really did was live in Beirut and get to know Beirut. Meet people, including diplomats, and get around. Have a good time.

RITCHIE: Actually, the Foreign Service was very weak in terms of the Middle East. They hadn't had much of a presence there up to that point. So that would have been a wise area, it seems to me, in which to specialize. Did you assume you were then going to go into the State Department or Foreign Service?

VASTINE: Well, I think everybody at SAIS felt that was something that they might somehow be destined to do. But, very fortunately, I didn't end up doing that. Partly because I knew I had to do something about military service. So I decided to get that out of the way first, and I was accepted in fact in Monterey in the language school. But I ended up not doing the navy for reasons I don't remember and just enlisted in the army as a private and went off to basic training at Fort Knox. You know, bivouac was a big deal, a big training, and you went off for a couple of days in the fields and woods, and dug foxholes. And on our first night in the field and woods our commanding officer, a very stern young first lieutenant, made the announcement about the Cuban missile crisis, which added a stark quality of reality.

RITCHIE: You went in as an enlisted man, but then you went to Officers Candidate School?

VASTINE: Yes. I was assigned to the 352nd Civil Affairs unit which met at Georgetown University. And after basic training came back to that unit as my “mother” unit, and I found an intolerable situation. First of all, it was extremely boring. Secondly, we sat in these *awful*—this was the unit that was supposed to take over the governance of the Middle East in time of war! Such nonsense! These folks couldn’t—I mean it was just a *laugh*, and we sat through these incredibly boring lectures and stupid exercises. And a group of us privates decided that we were going to have to find something else, some way to do this—live through this—so we all signed up, four or so of us, signed up for Officer Candidate School which we did at the National Guard out here at the armory. And that took two years, but it was a lot more interesting than sitting around at—and to make a long story short, I was made a first lieutenant. At that point I had to go back to the 352nd. The commanding officer was a general; and there were a whole bunch of majors and colonels and a few captains and three or four lieutenants. And that meant: guess who did all the work!

They assigned me to the supply room. Just at the time when the army, in its wisdom, decided this unit needed to have full, field equipment. That meant weapons! And field tents and a field kitchen! And this all had to be accounted for and maintained by me and my sergeants who were absolute idiots! It was a *nightmare*. And we were going up to a general inspection—just at the moment when I was coming up with my full, six years of service and had every right to get out. Also at that moment I had just taken a new job, and I was very, very busy.

I went to the commanding general, who was in fact a lobbyist for the Rural Electrification Association, and explained to him that, as I was a lobbyist, I had to go and lobby the Democrat and Republican conventions. He understood that a hundred percent, and I said I just couldn’t possibly take care of the supply room in such a way as to get us past the inspection. Would he understand, please, that I really had to leave the army.

RITCHIE: This was for the reserves at that stage?

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: So you were wearing your two hats?

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: But, did you do your reserve duty here in Washington?

VASTINE: Yes. Partly at the National Guard Candidate School, which I enjoyed. I enjoyed the camaraderie, and we had, as a class, a lot of esprit de corps. It was awful getting up at four on Saturday morning, but it was a lot better than going to Georgetown to be bored all day long.

RITCHIE: But after a year or so, after the officers' candidate school you were, in a sense, able to go back to civilian life except for reserve duty?

VASTINE: Well, it was Reserve Officers' Candidate School. It was just weekends.

RITCHIE: Oh, I see.

VASTINE: That was the remarkable thing about it. It was a weekend program with two weeks in the summer that lasts about two years. I think we had two summer camps up in Pennsylvania, at Indiantown Gap.

RITCHIE: So then did you stay in SAIS, or what else did you do while you were in the reserves?

VASTINE: Oh, that's when I was in my first job at the U.S. Chamber.

RITCHIE: How did that come about?

VASTINE: How did that come about? I came back from the army from active duty training in Fort Knox having decided I didn't want to come back to

Washington. But I got home to Shamokin and took a look around and said, there's no place else. I borrowed my brother's Austin Healy and drove down to Washington. And, as these things happen, in three or four days I got a job at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in their international department. My specific task assignment was to run the US-Mexico committee of the Chamber which was a group of Mexican and American businessmen who met periodically to discuss problems that they each faced in doing business in each other's countries.

So I organized their meetings, I wrote their policy papers, I did just a basic secretariat function that one does. It's a standard job, one of the many such in Washington. It's that sort of half-policy, half-organizational effort. There was a *little* bit of Hill work, but not very much. I found the Chamber stultifying. Very little happened there, and probably very little does today. There's a tremendous amount of time spent in meetings, writing, drafting papers that never see the light of day and don't really matter anyway. Not a lot of time, actually, affecting policy. Government policy. Much more time spent deciding what to say. And in an organization the size of the Chamber, when the policy is finally settled upon and decided it tends to be awfully generalized and, perhaps, not too helpful.

But it was a good way to get one's feet on the ground in Washington and learn a lot about how the city works. The guy who had the job before I did was a SAIS graduate. And I heard that he was thinking of leaving so someone suggested I call about it. That was the specific pivot on which the job rested. So I did that for two years and found it unsatisfying. I was not happy. I did not like my boss who was a petty tyrant. A very difficult man, neurotic, really. I had a good friend—again from SAIS—who was working on the Joint Economic Committee; he was the minority staff director, Don Webster. Perhaps you know him, Don.

RITCHIE: I don't think so.

VASTINE: He was here for quite awhile. He left finally to join the Nixon administration. And he was very close to Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri, the ranking House Republican member of the Joint Economic Committee. When Mr. Curtis succeeded in getting an increase in the clerk-hire of the House members for employing legislative assistants for the purpose of focusing, he intended, on economics, he asked Don for a recommendation. Don took me over to meet him.

It was a very interesting interview. We went in and sat down. I had my nice blue suit on, and I wore a good tie, and I had a nice, white shirt. Went in, and I listened to him talk for about half an hour. Maybe forty minutes he talked—looking at me occasionally—and then, finally he said, “Great!” And I learned from his secretary that I had the job. There was no real interview. I think he took Don Webster’s recommendation on faith, but I think he was one of those sorts of fellows that did it by feel. He kind of liked the way he felt about me, and I guess my blue suit or something. [Laughs] I had the kind of background he liked, and it fitted with him—perfectly—the Chamber of Commerce experience fitted perfectly with his way of looking at the world. And I was certainly interested in foreign economic policy and the trade policy side of his work. So I seized on that job. I guess the first week into it I realized I had really gotten a great job! Because Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri was *very* influential in the House, especially in the area of foreign trade policy which was then, much more than now, dominated by the Ways and Means Committee. Now you know the responsibility is bifurcated somewhat with the Energy and Commerce Committee. Am I saying that right? It’s Dingell’s committee. Energy and Commerce or Commerce and Energy.

RITCHIE: Energy first.

VASTINE: Yes. The Ways and Means Committee then was run by Wilbur Mills, and there were no subcommittees. Tom Curtis was second ranking Republican next to a formidable man named John Byrnes. But Curtis had his own niche, believe me, carved out. He worked very hard and he had been, for the Kennedy administration, very central to the passage of the Trade Expansion Act

of 1962 for which he received an award—or at least an honor. He was given the chance to give the annual Christian Herter memorial speech at Tufts or something like that.

Christian Herter had been a long-time diplomat, and I think an under secretary if not deputy secretary of state, but was Kennedy's first U.S. Trade Representative. And Tom Curtis had a great deal to do with writing into the law the requirement that there be a separate office in the Executive Office of the President for a U.S. Trade Representative—an ambassador who would speak for the President and conduct trade negotiations and form a small staff—very small staff—to do that. That person was Christian Herter, and he had a political appointee as his deputy, a somewhat effete, tall, sophisticated San Franciscan named William Matson Roth, the scion of the Matson line's Roths whose family home, Filoli, is now a National Trust property just below San Francisco. It's the site where "Dynasty" was filmed.

This very aesthetic man had a fabulous art collection, a house in Georgetown, English tailoring, beautiful custom-made shirts, beautiful manners—this man, really, without sufficient training in economics or foreign affairs, took over as special representative for trade negotiations because Christian Herter's health began to fail. I developed a relationship between my boss, Tom Curtis, and William Matson Roth—Ambassador Roth—who eventually became trade representative, and his staff. I think I may have mentioned I had *carte blanche* to arrange Curtis' breakfasts at the University Club. He breakfasted at the University Club—Tom Curtis did—in the big dining room there.

RITCHIE: You said he lived there.

VASTINE: That's right, he lived there on the weekdays. He was a Monday-to-Thursday Club member—or was it Tuesday-to-Thursday?—and he went home to his wife and family every weekend. But during the week he lived at the University Club and stayed in his office working late most nights and would get up for breakfast early, and I would meet him there quite frequently

and bring in a guest for breakfast from wherever in the government, or private sector, that I felt might be useful for him. For the development of our views on trade policy, and—where was that story leading?

RITCHIE: You were bringing Roth.

VASTINE: Oh, yes. Roth and some of his deputies and other members of his staff. People from foreign embassies. Commercial ministers at some of the embassies. And people from the private sector, the business sector here in Washington; lawyers, foreign-trade lawyers.

There were lots of hot issues as in all trade negotiations. There was textiles and chemicals and something called the American selling-price system, customs valuation. Very, very controversial—especially in Tom Curtis' home district where Malenkrot Chemical and Monsanto were very well established, old-line companies with, I would say, protectionists points of view. And here was this Curtis fellow, a true conservative, therefore, a market economist—an Adam Smith economist—who believed in free trade but had to condition it and talk around it every now and then because of his constituencies.

But I set out to make us expert, and we really learned all about the trade negotiations. We traveled several times in Europe to go to negotiations and talk to negotiators; to go to foreign capitals and talk to their negotiators. After each one of these I would write a *long* report and explain to the world what was going on in these negotiations. And they were always given some press coverage. They were long, and they were turgid, as I now realize looking back on them.

I was thinking the other day how we had to do that. This was 1965 and '66, and '67, and we had to do these on long mimeograph sheets. I would create these impossible deadlines and end up with eighteen or twenty or twenty-five single-spaced, legal-size mimeograph sheets to correct. Oh, what a trial! All night long, because I would say, we are going to put these in the *Congressional Record* by four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon so we'd get Friday press, or whatever the deadline was. We had a press man who worked with us to try to

get news coverage, Fred Sontag. Eventually, I took these and converted them into a book called *The Kennedy Round and the Future of the American Trade* published by Praeger [in 1971]. So I guess they served some purpose.

At the time they were really one way in which the public generally would find out what was going on. Particular sectors—industry sectors—found them interesting. They were ways in which Tom Curtis, who was *very* influential, could say what he thought and give signals to folks about what was going to pass and what he would support and what he wouldn't. I remember the chief clerk—his name was Leo Irwin, very estimable guy. He once said to me at a reception at the British Embassy up on Mass Avenue, after we had written a speech about there being no need for steel quotas 'cause the steel industry just at that moment was experiencing, for the first time since before the Second World War, import competition and its pricing structure, its oligopolistic pricing structure was being challenged, severely challenged by the Europeans, especially, and somewhat by the Japanese. So they were beginning to mount a little bit of a campaign in the Ways and Means Committee to try and get some quotas. And we were *firmly* in their way! There was no need. They had, what, less than 7 percent import penetration. They needed quotas? And Leo Irwin commended me for a speech that Curtis had made. He said, "You know, you guys are doing a great job keeping those folks from getting their import protection."

It was very exciting. Very challenging, and very exciting. And a lot of fun. By the end of it—several years into it—the *New York Times* editorially referred to Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri as "Congress' expert on foreign trade." That led a group of congressmen which represented—hmmm, can't remember which particular interests—but some protectionist congressmen to go to the floor and proclaim the *real* experts were somebody else. I can't recall, but there was kind of a rebuttal, a reaction to that on the House floor.

RITCHIE: Did you come to Curtis' office with your ideas fairly set, or did you find that being in Curtis' office changed your point of view about trade issues?

VASTINE: Well, unfortunately, I was an ideologue. I really believed in free trade. And I still do, but it's somewhat tempered.

RITCHIE: How did that start? Where do you trace its roots back to?

VASTINE: The study of economics at SAIS, I think. I had a very good professor in a man named William Phillips, who was a very good lecturer and very good seminar leader. He was one of the senior people among the SAIS faculty. At SAIS in those days you had to have an area of concentration, but you also had to study international law, international economics, and international diplomacy. In international diplomacy there was a wonderful fellow named William Franklin, who was head of the State Department's historical office, who was in charge of publishing the great volumes on U.S. foreign policy. He taught European diplomacy, and he was wonderful! I really liked it. Liked him, though he was a crusty, odd character.

William Phillips, the economics professor, was equally good. So I just studied my classical economics and took the lessons of Adam Smith and David Ricardo to heart and believed in comparative advantage. A simple idea which I wanted to apply. [chuckles] And, also, I was inspired, I think, by the course of liberalization from the time of the Smoot-Hawley tariff under the great liberalizing trade act of the Roosevelt years.

RITCHIE: Reciprocal Trade. . .

VASTINE: The Reciprocal Trade Act. And we were then, you know, the Kennedy Round was the sixth round of trade negotiations. So it was a traceable, historical, kind of an evolutionary process of trying to undo those evil tariffs that led to world-wide recession in the thirties. And there was a bit of a cause about that, the cause of freer trade. I really believed in the cause of free trade. Freer trade, we now say. I think I believed a little bit harder than Tom Curtis believed. And I think sometimes it was a little embarrassing to him to have this young zealot on his staff bugging the chemical-industry folks all the time,

because we really were a thorn in their side. *I* was a thorn in their side, and they did not like me. And he knew that. But he never overtly curbed me. I mean, I was never rebuked.

He sometimes wouldn't agree, and he sometimes changed the words; but he gave me great scope. He was a wonderful boss because he believed in delegating. He liked people who knew what they were interested in, and then he could watch all that energy froth and bubble, and curb it when it had to be curbed, but he could take advantage of it while it was cooking. That was a technique he used with other folks as well. I saw him do it to other people. He was very wise in his way, astute. An observer of human nature with a wry kind of ironic sense of humor. A very nice man who had a *formidable* public style that really turned people off. He could be a terrible curmudgeon. He could be awful to people, especially to Democratic administration witnesses, like the secretary of the treasury. He would come before the Ways and Means Committee, half prepared, Curtis felt; and of course he had thoroughly prepared himself. Part of his role was to embarrass them over their lack of knowledge and thereby impugn their policy goals.

His favorite thing would be to look out over his little half-moon glasses with his funny, little bow tie, and his round face and sort of balding, bristling head and wag his finger and say [demonstrates]: "You haven't done your home work! You gotta go back down there and do your homework. You haven't done your home work!" He had a funny way of talking, you know. Sort of sounded like a country bumpkin, but he was—for the appearances of a country lawyer—a very sophisticated mind, a trustee of Dartmouth, and very highly educated man.

RITCHIE: How would you describe your politics by the time you got to Curtis' office?

VASTINE: I was kind of a knee-jerk Rockefeller Republican. For no particular reason. I'd never really thought it through. It's taken a long time for me to become really sophisticated, or savvy, or clever. In those days, I mean, if I'd seen the writing on the wall and I wanted to be an opportunist, uh, more of

an opportunist [chuckles], I would've, I think, converted to Reaganism and gotten on the bandwagon. But, I guess probably because of my parents' influence I find myself much more of a moderate, a moderate Republican, and that's where I've mainly stayed.

RITCHIE: Were your parents interested in politics or involved at all?

VASTINE: Mother ran for office, and she was the first woman elected school board president or woman elected to any kind of post in Shamokin, Pennsylvania. But she wasn't really a politician. She was well known and the doctor's wife; and she was able.

RITCHIE: What about Haverford? Did you have any particular leanings at that stage?

VASTINE: I was an Eisenhower Republican.

RITCHIE: How about SAIS? When I think of SAIS I think of Francis Wilcox who was dean there later on, because he was in the Eisenhower Administration.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: Was there sort of an Eisenhower Republican leaning there as well?

VASTINE: I don't remember anything political about the tone of SAIS except that I won my first office there. I was elected a member of the school council, and I was chairman of the speaker's program. And one of my first speakers was Dean Acheson, whom I remember escorting back down Florida Avenue to Connecticut Avenue. And remember him saying to me, "Gee!," he said—his was in reference to the Kennedy administration—"I sure hope Paul Nitze gets something good. He certainly deserves it." Or something like that. Funny.

RITCHIE: But Tom Curtis wasn't a Rockefeller Republican; you wouldn't describe him that way, would you?

VASTINE: No, I wouldn't describe him that way. I don't exactly know how to describe his politics now. He was certainly a liberal, I mean a moderate. You know, this will show you that I'm not very good at this. . .

RITCHIE: He did sign on to work for Gerald Ford when Ford beat Halleck as the leader.

VASTINE: Right.

RITCHIE: And he was called a "Young Turk" although he was in his mid-fifties at the time.

VASTINE: He was in his fifties. Do you remember that?

RITCHIE: Oh, I remember it from the time; but I also looked back.

VASTINE: You have? Good. Well, yes, he was a reformer in the House. Part of it was he believed in staff and the need for more staff, especially minority staff. He felt that the leaders could do better by the Republicans than they had been doing.

He wrote a famous letter, an open letter to his colleagues in which he outlined the reforms that he felt necessary and questioned the leadership of Charlie Halleck. I think he indicated that since Halleck had done nothing to get these, he was going to support Gerald Ford. In any case, that letter had a great deal to do with Ford's election as leader—minority leader.

Fiscally, he was very conservative. From the standpoint of civil rights he was aggressive and very committed. On international trade, I think he was a crypto-free trader, and I kind of pushed him out of the closet. But that was okay because his role became much more acknowledged.

RITCHIE: He was not a go-along type of person. He was often the one person or two people who vote against this bill or that bill. This was the LBJ era as well . . .

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: . . . and I gather that John Byrnes was a go-along fellow with Wilbur Mills. The two of them could cut a deal.

VASTINE: Umhmmm.

RITCHIE: But Curtis seems like the type who was not into the cutting the deal. He'd rather lose or speak out against something than compromise.

VASTINE: Well that was the foundation of his popularity. Even at Dartmouth he had apparently demonstrated this remarkable bent to go against the crowd. There's a story about him having walked around campus for a week as a blind person because he wanted to know and experience what it was like to be blind. So he apparently blind-folded himself and was a blind man for awhile because he wanted to have that experience or show people what the experience was like.

His very independence of mind was the foundation of his reputation in his home district. He was regarded as somebody who would always speak his mind and be honest and do what he thought was right and do his homework. In polls which explored why he was popular and why he was well esteemed those were always the things that came out. Independent-minded and honest. And if you looked at the man—if you walked in the room and looked at him—you would think: Here's an honest man. He had that quality about him. There was no pretense. There was no artifice. He dressed terribly. He used to refer to clothing as something used to clothe the gourd. And no superficial polish. You just wanted to trust him.

I remember a friend of mine with whom I'd gone to Haverford, who lived in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, with his family, calling me after a television show in which Curtis had been chosen to give the response to a presidential address or an economic message of some sort. He was on television, saying what he thought about the program. My friend called me up and said, "Oh, what a wonderful man you work for! You just can tell, here's really an honest man!" Somehow that conveyed itself through the tube. Quite remarkable 'cause he was not, in any sense, photogenic in the way we think a politician needs to be these days. He was a very remarkable fellow, and that was his reputation.

RITCHIE: It was not the best of times for him, however, in the sense that 1965 was the high point of Johnson's Great Society.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: With spending for everything, when he was a man who was very suspicious of federal spending programs.

VASTINE: It gave him heartburn. I remember I just came to work for him as the Medicare-Medicaid bill was being refined and voted out of the Ways and Means Committee. I didn't see a lot of him in the first couple of weeks or months of my work there because he was so tied up in that. But he was very unhappy about it. It really troubled his soul. I remember him being very, very disgruntled and working very, very long hours and being sick with a bad cold the whole time. He was very distressed about that program and other programs.

He used his Joint Economic Committee position to attack spending and express concern about inflation as it became clear that we were going to spend for war as well as for butter! We would do a monthly spending watch.

Curtis would watch the statistics. He cared tremendously about statistics. The integrity of U.S. government statistics and statistical series were very important to him. And, therefore, the Joint Economic Committee because it

compiled—or had begun to compile—its own, publish its own statistical compendia, monthly. And still does, I'm sure. He relied on them enormously, and he would watch for the publication of the government spending as it ratcheted up by quarter, or even by month. Part of my job was to watch out for that and bring it to his attention. He would put out a press release each time saying: See I told you so! Spending is going up.

In those days we didn't have the budget process. Very few of us around remember what it was like *not* to have the budget process. You had to rely on OMB [Office of Management and Budget]. Obviously, a Republican could not rely on OMB for good statistics. Getting a grip on what government was really spending was really very difficult. But he had tremendous interest in that material.

RITCHIE: It strikes me, although I've worked exclusively for the Senate, that in the House the rules are very different. There the rules are all geared towards the majority. To let the majority have its way and to push things through.

VASTINE: Umhmmm.

RITCHIE: How does the minority operate in an institution where the majority can bend everything pretty much the way it wants to?

VASTINE: Well, there are two ways of operating. One is go along and get along, and the other is to buck the system. I guess that right now is the classic problem. We see it in human terms being played out by Bob Michel, who is the product of this Ford—wasn't he Jerry Ford's successor?

RITCHIE: John Rhodes came in between.

VASTINE: But Bob Michel was in office then. And he's a product of that era when it was decided you do better by working with the majority than you do by bucking it. Of course, now he's being challenged by a group of Young Turks

in the House who feel differently. He feels that trying to get along, trying to have influence by being part of the coalition that passes bills, is more effective. Even though Curtis supported Ford, he was more inclined to buck the system than to go along.

RITCHIE: I know in Medicare, he offered the main alternative to medicare.

VASTINE: That's right.

RITCHIE: I gather it's sort of a parliamentary sense: You state an alternative position and you know you're going to lose, but at least you have stated your position. You don't identify yourself with what actually does go through.

VASTINE: Precisely. He worked very closely with the U.S. Chamber in doing that, actually. There was a guy from the Chamber—I've forgotten whom—who was in and out of the office a lot. Did a lot of the backup work on that.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you what was his relationship with Wilbur Mills. You said he didn't get along with Byrnes, but how well did he get along with Mills?

VASTINE: Well, he had a lot of respect for Mills, I think. And Mills for him.

RITCHIE: It's funny, though, when you said he didn't get along with Byrnes, my reaction was: I bet he got along better with Mills.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: You confirmed my suspicions [laughs].

VASTINE: Well, with Mills, you know, it was wonderful to watch him work. He was just as smooth as silk. He understood how to work with people. He apparently had picked [Dan] Rostenkowski very early as his successor. And Rostenkowski was kind of a favorite, fair-haired boy even then. I'm just trying to find a way I can illustrate their relationship, but it doesn't pop to mind at the moment.

I know that Mills appreciated Curtis' work in foreign trade because it made it a lot easier for Mills, who wasn't by any stretch of the imagination a protectionist. He made it much easier for Mills to contain protectionist pressures. In fact, by the end of the Kennedy Round, by '67 and '68, there were so many claims for protection, I think we counted 120—some large number—of different bills being put in for protection for different products, even strawberries. There was quite a concern that the flood of protectionist legislation that would undo the trade negotiations and set things back.

So Curtis' role on the committee was really pivotal at that time in the foreign trade area. He had influence beyond the influence that one man ordinarily has in the way that committee handled legislation. I think his colleagues found him trying. They got very tired of his lecturing and tired of, in a sense, his superiority. But I think he was very influential.

RITCHIE: I was interested in the politics of trade. Historically the Republicans are identified with protection and high tariffs, and the Democrats with reciprocal trade. Nowadays Republicans are much more likely to be for free trade and the Democrats for protection. When did it change? Was it happening then?

VASTINE: It changed with Reagan. I was amazed to see and to watch the Right Wing—[Jack] Kemp—lead that wing of the Republican Party into free trade. It was amazing! Does this ring true to you? This is my feeling about it.

RITCHIE: I know it happened somewhere around there, but I've never quite figured out when.

VASTINE: No. It's amazing. It suddenly became a plank. You know, a true-blue, right-wing Republican was a free trader.

RITCHIE: But Tom Curtis, when he was doing it, was actually going out ahead of the curve, wasn't he, in free trade?

VASTINE: Yes. Definitely. And, of course, if you told him he was a free trader he would probably deny that. He probably wouldn't accept the label. But that was the effect of his support of the Trade Expansion Act, to permit the negotiations to go forward; and it was, I think, quite successful as a negotiation.

RITCHIE: One other thing I associate Curtis with is that in 1967 he introduced the resolution to expel Adam Clayton Powell.

VASTINE: Oh, yes!

RITCHIE: How did he get involved in that, and what was the story behind that?

VASTINE: Moral outrage. He was just offended beyond words that this person should claim a seat in the House of Representatives. It was a matter of personal pride and institutional pride and outrage that somebody like this guy from New York, with all of his problems could take a seat in the House! He just did it! No one knew it ahead of time. He was a great parliamentarian. I don't know whether you know that about him. He was the parliamentarian for years of the Republican Convention. He was an authority to the point that he would go over to the House every day at noon and sit in the well in the House. He was a fixture in the House. He would make a point of going there; and I think his colleagues came to consult him. When somebody had a problem, they would consult him. He and H.R. Gross—who played a kind of obstructionist role in the House—had some understanding.

Curtis was very highly regarded as a parliamentarian. He hired summer interns solely for the purpose of clipping back copies of the *Congressional Record*

so that he would have his own record and compendium of the rulings of the parliamentarian of the House. Because, at some point, the Speaker stopped publishing his rules in order to frustrate—Curtis felt—Curtis. Deliberately to frustrate him and other obstructionists and would-be parliamentarians on the Republican side. He actually hired kids to come in and clip the *Records* to get these precedents. It was the precedents of the House. He wouldn't stop talking about it! He had a tremendous interest in that and needed it, of course, in order to challenge rulings of the chair and to be an expert.

The workings of the House and its rules and who should sit there as the people's representative, I think, was very important to him. He chafed tremendously under the tactics of the majority.

RITCHIE: In a sense, he was an institution man even though he was in the minority and anti-institutional, or at least opposed to what the majority was doing; but he had a sense of the dignity of the preservation of the institution.

VASTINE: Yes, well he also had a way of saying that Rayburn had picked him out. He was very proud that very early—I think in his second term—he was made a member of the Ways and Means Committee. He felt that Rayburn had eyed him; that, somehow, he had fallen into Rayburn's favor very early. And then got tapped. I think he shared the view of Rayburn as an extremely estimable person and worthy to lead the House of Representatives. Yes, he had respect for the institution; but tremendous disregard for [John] McCormack and the way McCormack ran the House and for the abused position of the minority in the House.

And, of course, recall that he had come into the Congress in the two years in which there had been a Republican majority—so, with Congressman Joe Martin of Pennsylvania, or Massachusetts?

RITCHIE: Massachusetts.

VASTINE: Massachusetts, as the Republican leader. So he knew what it was like to be in the majority. And like a lot of senators who came here when we were in the majority in the Senate, the transition to being in the minority was pretty bitter.

RITCHIE: How did he get along with Richard Bolling?

VASTINE: They were friends. They were fellow reformers. They were institutional men. They definitely had a community of interest. They served on the Joint Economic Committee together, and though Richard Bolling could be styled a liberal Democrat there was something about Bolling's approach to the institution that Curtis respected. They worked together. I can't think if there was an effort at reform in the House in those years. Bolling was later in charge of House reform. In fact, I guess that led in part to the taking of power from the Ways and Means Committee—when was that, the 70s?

RITCHIE: Seventy-four, somewhere in there.

VASTINE: I think about that. It was after Wilbur Mills' fall. After Fannie Fox.

RITCHIE: What was it like to be a staff member in the House of Representatives in those days?

VASTINE: Extremely exciting. I came there after the Goldwater debacle. There were a lot more moderates. I guess those are the ones that survived. Statistically, I can't recall how many Republicans there were; and I can't recall how you divide them between conservative and moderate. But I definitely fell into the moderate camp.

Curtis' cronies—the folks we naturally fell in with—Joint Economic people and others—well, Bob Taft [Jr.]. Where do you put Bob Taft?

RITCHIE: Not as conservative as his father.

VASTINE: No. I think people think of him as a moderate to conservative member. He and Curtis worked together. And William Widnall, the ranking member of the Banking Committee, was definitely a moderate. And others. So we staff people formed a club. What was it called. The Republican Discussion Group. And I was the treasurer, and Carol Khosrovi, who was then working for Taft and is now Carol Mayor-Marshall and lives in San Francisco and was recently director of the San Francisco Mint and a candidate for state office in California. She, and I, and a group of others formed this group. We had interesting speakers come, representing a moderate viewpoint.

So our response was to form a support group, I suppose. The volunteer army was one of our projects. This was a project that was spawned in Curtis' office: the volunteer army. I just now recall. This is an idea that he had a great deal to do with.

RITCHIE: I gather you had free access to him pretty much at any time?

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: Is that a difference between the Senate and the House—that easier to deal with the members or more accessible in the House than in the Senate?

VASTINE: Well, I tell you, I worked for [Charles] Percy and [John] Chafee, and I didn't have a problem with access either with senators or the Congress. When I needed to see them, I was always able to. A senator is a bit harder. You may have to wait a little bit longer and be a little bit more flexible, like going to the Senate and walk him back from a vote; or go find him in a hearing room. As I told you, I could see Curtis for as many breakfasts as I wanted to. I could see him every evening when he came back from the House and worked in his office. And he always read and commented on my memos. So he was very accessible.

And you know the House office in those days—he had, for then, a very big office in the Longworth Building. Room 1336. But, still, it was only two and one-half rooms. Later on, we got an annex, so I could go off and write my foreign trade speeches in this annex.

RITCHIE: Now, you were a legislative person. But because it was a small staff, did you wind up getting involved in other things; or were you able to specialize?

VASTINE: Actually, no. He really wanted me to be a legislative person. He called me his economic assistant. I was on the letterhead as economic assistant. He believed that every congressman should have an economic assistant. He wanted me to concentrate.

The office was an interesting office because it was run by a cadre of five, senior women who had been with him forever! They had their jobs figured out right down to the last paper clip! Each of them knew what she was to do and what the others were to do. And he relied on them totally and completely. They were utterly devoted to him, and I think some of them had been with him his whole term. Is that possible? Eighteen years! But a long time. They were wonderful ladies. At first, the chief one, Marilyn, who became Senator [J. Glenn] Beall's executive secretary later, didn't cotton to me. She didn't call me to tell me I had my job for some weeks because she didn't figure I was the right person, I guess. She did not like my blue suit! [chuckles] Or my polished shoes, I guess. But we overcame it and became very good friends.

Why did I start on that track? Oh! His AA was a very junior young man, a very young lawyer right out of school. The job of the AA was to read and manage the mail. He did not need an AA to tell him how to run his district or to run his politics, or figure out how to vote. He was not an AA in the sense that so many House members have very senior AA's. It was different.

RITCHIE: Curtis had been in for eighteen years.

VASTINE: Nine terms.

RITCHIE: He could have held that seat for the rest of his life if he wanted to.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: Why did he take the risk of running for the Senate in '68?

VASTINE: I think he was bored. I think I asked him that once. He said "I'm bored. I'm getting tired of the House. I'm just fed up with it." I think he wanted the freedom of a senator. He would have been a wonderful senator. He would have been unstoppable. He came very close to being a senator. He was very substantially supported by the publisher of the number two St. Louis paper. The first was the *Post-Dispatch*, and there was another one that may have folded.

RITCHIE: *The Globe?*

VASTINE: I can't remember it. The *Post-Dispatch* didn't like Curtis much, editorially. But the other paper did, and they were very—the publisher was very strongly in his corner.

Well, that publisher died before the election. And there was another key backer who, I think, also died. And also I remember the "blessing." He went to Gettysburg. Bryce Harlow took him in a limousine to Gettysburg to get the blessings of the General [Eisenhower]. Very interesting. That was 1967, that trip would have had to be. And they were still traveling to Gettysburg. The distant presence of the general was palpable in Washington in those days.

RITCHIE: Got the endorsement to take back.

VASTINE: Yeah, so he had all his ducks in a row. Then the publisher died. *Globe Dispatch?*

RITCHIE: Something like that.

VASTINE: *Globe Democrat*. His campaign manager was a very feisty, then young, Episcopal minister, the Reverend Roy Pfauch who is now a big influence peddler in Washington. A character! Who both preached and ran campaigns.

Curtis was so dedicated to the House, and we had launched an effort to get a special anti-dumping code. Something that had to do with anti-dumping, and this code required implementation by the House and the Senate. It just drug out and drug out and drug out. And there was a long, long conference committee. Congress couldn't adjourn. It was the middle of October and Curtis was spending much too much time on this stupid thing.

But it was very substantially his—our—idea, and he was really committed to it. And he shouldn't have been! He should have been home campaigning, and it meant that he just didn't do a lot of campaign appearances that he should have. But he was so committed to the work he was in that he figured he could win. In fact, he misjudged; and he lost. I think he lost substantially because he didn't pull enough of the Republican votes in Kansas City. And somehow he offended the Kansas City Republican establishment by not giving enough attention to them and maybe by canceling some events. I can't recall precisely. But he didn't poll well enough in Kansas City to overcome the big Democratic vote in St. Louis. And, as I recall, he lost by some 30,000 votes. But we outpolled Nixon, I think, substantially. Nixon may have lost by 50,000. I don't recall. I was told at the time and then subsequently it was confirmed to me that he—that [Thomas] Eagleton—it was the tradition in Missouri to buy the black wards—the vote of the black wards in St. Louis. And Eagleton's campaign manager, later AA, told me at a conference on campaigning that they had done that for Eagleton.

But I remember Tom Eagleton coming into our office a vibrant, young lieutenant governor. Had great ties. He always had these just terrific bright green ties, silk rep. Very preppy. Wonderful, deep voice. A very big presence. I

mean, you could tell him the minute he walked in the office. He came in rather frequently, when I first worked for Curtis, to say hello, when he was in Washington. It was quite a race. I volunteered on the campaign for a couple of weeks.

Poor, old Tom Curtis, he just got lost in details. He just didn't have a flair for the big, political—I guess what has become kind of standard political speech. He would get lost in details about the budget. He had a very hard time portraying the forest. He was very, very good at describing all the trees. And, along the way while describing the trees, he could convince people he knew a lot about trees, and he was a student and he was hard-working, and he was honest. But somehow the message got lost. And he came off kind of looking like a fusty, old curmudgeon with his funny, little glasses, and his round belly and his ill-fitting suits.

Eagleton was much more the media candidate—much more the handsome, charming, very articulate, if perhaps superficial, much more liberal Democrat.

RITCHIE: The state was still more a Democratic state. It has become a more Republican state now, but in those days they hadn't elected a Republican governor or senator for some time. So it was a big risk to run statewide.

VASTINE: Right.

RITCHIE: It was clearly an uphill race for any Republican.

VASTINE: I think only old Congressman Doc Hall and Tom Curtis were the only two Republicans. So the character of the state has changed a lot, as I guess the South has changed; although I don't think we think of Missouri as being a Southern state, or do we?

RITCHIE: Well, it's always a border line. But as you say, Southern politics changed after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.

Curtis voted for both of those, but opposed open housing legislation in 1968. What I wondered was how did a Republican stake out that territory at that time? For instance, you mentioned the black vote in 1968. Was there any chance that he could ever have gotten the black vote in Missouri, regardless if anybody paid for it?

VASTINE: No, I don't think so.

RITCHIE: So in a sense he was perhaps trying to win over some of the Southern Democrats who were leaving their party at that stage?

VASTINE: I can't say. I just don't know. I was a legislative assistant.

RITCHIE: There was a political revolution going on at that stage. People who were lifelong Democrats became Republicans, some Republicans became Democrats. The South as a political entity changed and the Solid South disappeared.

VASTINE: Well, there has been a revolution. When it started, I think we have to go to Goldwater for a defining moment in Republican Party politics, and to Johnson. What do you think? You're much more of a historian than I am.

RITCHIE: I'm not sure, but when you think that Hillary Clinton was a "Goldwater Girl" in 1964, you know that the world has changed in the last thirty years! It's interesting to me that people have gone in such different directions. I think you're right that '64 was a pivotal moment for many reason. Curtis again was ahead of the curve. He probably would have a much easier time winning a statewide election in Missouri now than in 1968.

VASTINE: Oh, I'm sure that's true. He used to say that "Selling a politician is like selling a bar of soap." That was a phrase he used. And he said, "I'm not an easy bar of soap to sell." He knew that he was kind of a difficult person, and I guess it was a tremendous risk. But I don't think it ever occurred to him he would lose. I flew around the state with him the day before the

election. We chartered a little private plane and I went with him and his press secretary. Just the three of us plus a pilot and copilot. We touched down at about six places and mainly got interviewed on radio, went to little radio stations in little trailers and third floor walkups all over Missouri, and some big places, too. We got interviewed by a television reporter at the Kansas City airport. We could tell he wasn't going to win. We just could feel that there wasn't a lot of excitement, but I don't think he could tell that. I don't think he was happy at the end of the day. I think he was plain exhausted. But his press secretary and I were pretty sure he wasn't going to win. On election day, I think it came as a surprise to him. I was extremely depressed. I tell you, if Nixon hadn't won! At least that was a ray of hope.

RITCHIE: But you didn't even know that until the next day.

VASTINE: No. I remember talking to Bryce Harlow at Nixon headquarters sometime during the last couple of weeks of the race. It was touch and go. It was not at all clear they were going to win.

RITCHIE: I think this would be a good place to break, with you poised between the House and the Senate. But this has been a very interesting session, I really enjoyed it and learned from it.

VASTINE: You say that to everybody.

RITCHIE: No, no, I learned a lot from it.

VASTINE: I think as a codicil to this we should say that Curtis went over to Reagan. He rebelled. Jerry Ford appointed him to be the first chairman of the Federal Election Commission. I can't remember the issue, but Curtis felt that Ford took a position that undercut the FEC, and Curtis fought him tooth and nail, and was so distressed, so upset by Ford and the way Ford conducted his presidency that he turned against Ford and became a backer of Reagan, parliamentarian of the Reagan movement at the '76 convention, and author of the key parliamentary challenge to Ford, which threatened to unseat Ford. If

Ford had not turned back that challenge, it really would have been open for Reagan to take the convention. I can't recall what it was.

RITCHIE: It probably had to do with Mississippi, because there was a challenge to the seating of the Mississippi delegation that was a critical moment to the convention.

VASTINE: So Curtis became a Reaganite, full out, an unabashed Reaganite. Maybe he would contest that. Maybe he'd say, [mimics] "Well, now, Bob, I really wasn't a Reaganite," and he would lecture me a little bit about the subtlety and nuance that I had missed, that he believed in some of this but some of that. Always for him it wasn't black and white, there was some gray thrown in.

RITCHIE: Well, the wonderful thing about Congress is that it's a stage on which characters perform, and some of the characters are much more interesting than others. And he clearly performed on the stage.

VASTINE: Oh, he was wonderful, he really was. I think I should tell you that about a year ago I talked to Warren Erdman, Senator [Christopher] Bond's AA and campaign manager, before the Bond campaign. I said, "Do you ever hear from Tom Curtis." He said, "Oh, my God, do I ever hear from Tom Curtis!" He said, "He was on the phone with me last week and it must have taken an hour. I finally said, 'Mr. Curtis, I can't do for you what you want me to do. I will do so much and I will do no more. And I'm very sorry sir, I cannot do what you want me to do.'" And Curtis took this very hard. [laughs] He wouldn't take no for answer. But he was not the least bit shy in calling the contemporary representatives of his party in state and telling them what he thought and asking them to do the right thing as he saw it.

Anyway, thank you for giving me the opportunity to relive my years with Tom Curtis. He was a wonderful man.

End of Interview #1