

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Torrey Maynard Johnson (CN 285, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Marissa Lemmen and Paul Ericksen and was completed in February 2001.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

Collection 285, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Torrey Johnson by Robert Shuster on October 23, 1984.

JOHNSON: Are you picking up okay now?

SHUSTER: Well, I give it a prologue first. This is an interview with toct...Doctor Torrey Johnson for the Billy Graham Center Archives. It took place on October 23rd at 10:00 A.M. at the offices of the Archives. Dr. Johnson, why don't we start off with a little of your family background. Can you tell me something about your parents?

JOHNSON: Yes, I can. I was born and raised in a Christian home. My father's name was Jacob Martin Johnson, born in the south of Norway. His native community was what we call Lyngdal, L-Y-N-G-D-A-L, Norway. My mother likewise is a Norwegian and she was born in Farsund, F-A-R-S-U-N-D, Norway. The two communities are quite close together, but my parents met in Chicago, and they met in connection with the Scandinavian YMCA. I think my father was converted in the YMCA. I'm not quite sure where my mother was converted. But they were godly people, and I was raised in that atmosphere.

SHUSTER: Why did they immigrate to the United States?

JOHNSON: My parents immigrated to the United States to...I think, for opportunity, liberty, and because they had family and friends who were here, who had prospered and been blessed in the States. I think all of those factors went into the coming to the States. My mother's people were here shortly after the Civil War. My father had other relatives here, and as they did in those days, we had colonies. We had colonies of people that settled in different communities. They settled in the Norwegian community of Chicago. And that Norwegian community had moved from one place to another as other migrations came from Europe. I think the Italians followed them...the area where they were, and they moved out to an area called Humboldt Park in Logan Square. And I was raised in the Humboldt Park area. I was born there March 15, 1909. On a Monday morning to be exact, about four o'clock in the morning, interrupted my mother's Monday morning wash because in those days you washed on Monday and you ironed on Tuesday. That was the custom. That was done in all the families. So that's kind of the home I was raised in. The church I was raised in was a Salem Evangelical Free Church, of which Doctor C.T. Dyrness, D-Y-R-N-E-S-S, was the pastor for forty-three years. He was a godly man, a good man.

SHUSTER: What kind of a preacher was he? What kind of sermons did he preach?

JOHNSON: Well, he was a thoroughly Evangelical, evangelistic missionary. His strength was organization and administration, and promotion, I think. Preaching was not his strength, but his spiritual life was his strength. He had a son [Enoch Dyrness] that was a registrar at Wheaton College for many years and another son that graduated from Wheaton College who now lives in Quarryville, Pennsylvania, Franklin. And we lived two doors away from the church. The pastor lived in a parsonage which was on the church property, and we lived the second door away from the church. In those days as I grew up as a boy, I was baptized as a baby in that church. I was



confirmed in that church, having studied and completed my work in confirmation in the Norwegian language.

SHUSTER: Are you still fluent in Norwegian?

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: Are you still fluent in Norwegian?

JOHNSON: Well, I ca...I can get along well. I can give a testimony in Norwegian, and I can carry on a conversation very well, read it well. We...it was our custom in those days to learn the language of our people.

SHUSTER: You mentioned....

JOHNSON: And Dr. Dyrness...Dr. Dyrness was one of the leaders of the Evangelical Free Church movement at that time, the Norwegian Free Church movement. I think he had been trained at the Chicago Theological Seminary in the Norwegian department. He also was one of the founders of the Evangelical Alliance Mission [TEAM], and I think was the president of it for a period of time. He was the administrative head really to put the thing together. The founder was a man named Frederick Franzen, and he was an evangelist, a missionary, a promoter, but very poor on organization and administration. And Dr. Dyrness, as he later became, was a great administrator. He put the thing together.

SHUSTER: So they were a team or....

JOHNSON: A good team. They were a good team and.... So that's the home I was raised in.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that your parents came over, one of the reasons, for opportunity. What was your father's trade in Norway?

JOHNSON: Well, my father moved from several different things. When he came here, I think the first thing he did here, he became a licensed pilot on a ship on the Great Lakes. He sailed on the Great Lakes. Then either before or after that, I'm not sure which, he became a painter. You didn't have to have much skill. You just had to have good health and courage and know how to use a brush. He painted at that time, as I understand it, for the Chicago Elevated System [Chicago's above-ground transportation system]. He painted the superstructures for the Elevated System of the Loop of Chicago and so forth.

SHUSTER: So that's why he needed courage, to be up there painting while the trains came by?

JOHNSON: I suppose he did paint while the trains were coming by and so on, you know.

SHUSTER: Because you said he needed courage....

JOHNSON: Well, I meant courage to do something that you weren't particularly trained for. Then he...he went into the coffee business, employed by the Jebne Coffee Company, J.-E-B-N-E Coffee Company, which was together with a Jewel Coffee Company, the two leading coffee companies of the area. Jewel Coffee Company since that time became Jewel Tea and now it's Jewel Food Stores. Jebne Company's out of business. But the Jebnes were, I think, Norwegian people, and they took a lot of these Norwegian immigrants into the business. [tape stopped and restarted] My father was a very skilled salesman. In those days you sold coffee, not only over the counter in the store, but more primarily with customers, and you went from house to house and neighborhood to neighborhood with your horse and wagon to your customers. So on a particular street you might have one or two customers or you may have to go four or five blocks before you got to some of your customers. So he had a route as they called them, a different route for every day, I think for two weeks. And you repeated the route again, delivering his coffee and his tea, sometimes eggs and butter, promotional items and so on. He was an excellent salesman, a very warm heart man, very personable, both loving and loved. My mother was more quiet, reserved, a good homemaker, good mother, good wife, both of them very spiritual, loyal to the church, faithful to the Sunday school, concerned for missions, burdened for their family. In fact my name...my first name, of course, comes from Dr. Reuben Archer Torrey [American evangelist and educator]. My second name came from a colonel in the British military...

SHUSTER: Named?

JOHNSON: ...who my father admired, Maynard. And then, of course, my last name is Johnson, which was the name my father took when he came to America.

SHUSTER: What was the name in Norway?

JOHNSON: Well, he had...he had a brother here who took the name of Johnson. He had sisters here who retained the family name from the old country, Jacobson.

SHUSTER: Jacobson.

JOHNSON: So that they say...they say rather humorously, and I think probably truly, that when my father came there were so many Jacobsons around he wanted a name that was quite distinct and different, and that not too many people had, say, chosen the name of Johnson. And that's the way it is with people from the old country. Very few of them have the old country name because the old country name is identified with the place they were born, and some of those names are very difficult.

SHUSTER: Difficult to pronounce and....

JOHNSON: Difficult to pronounce or to spell. So many of them changed their names when they came here to this country, and that's supposedly how our name was changed.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that your father was a very good salesman. Why do you think that was?

JOHNSON: It was an innate ability given to him by God, I'm sure. Later on after he... (I'll just continue with his business because you wanted to know)...he got to dealing in real estate and began buying and selling houses. In fact, our family moved quite a bit. He'd either buy a house or build a house, and then we'd live in it, and then he'd sell it. So we lived a number of different places in Chicago and Oak Park, Illinois. As he went along, Daddy [?] became identified with Mr. Carl A. Gunderson, for whom Gunderson Drive in Wheaton is named, and we were family friends. Our families had cottages in Williams Bay on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. And he prospered at real estate and continued real estate until...until God took him home.

SHUSTER: And when was that?

JOHNSON: [Pauses] I can't tell you exactly when my father died. I could get the information for you. My father must have...my father died at the age of seventy-three, and I think he was born in 1879. So he's been dead, I guess, what, about thirty years?

SHUSTER: Yes, I'd say seventy [?]...late '40s, early '50s.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SHUSTER: What were some of his methods in selling and how did he approach people?

JOHNSON: Well, he was very sociable, very [unclear] amiable [?], very warm. He had a faculty [clears throat]...he had a faculty of taking a person through a house and listening to the husband and wife tell all the things they didn't like in the house and all the things that were wrong about the house, but somehow when they got through the house he got the contract. And he did it with no pressure, that is no seeming pressure of any kind, but just a warm way of either explaining away or resolving what seemed to be some difficulties or obstacles along the way. He was always ready for a cup of coffee, and he either bought it or received it. And with his customers, for instance, along the way, in those days, people weren't afraid of the men that came regularly to sell. In those days, you didn't go to the supermarket. The supermarket came to you. The butter and egg man came to your house; the fruit and vegetable man came to your house; the coffee man came to your house; the ice man came with ice for your ice [pauses] refrigerator. So there was a lot of communication in the home like that, and the home...the homes were open. We didn't have bars on the windows and didn't have locks on the doors particularly. There was more trust, more neighborliness. So Father oftentimes had coffee with the customers along the way. He knew when he got to Mrs. Smith's place that she'd have a cup of coffee and maybe a homemade piece of cake or something like that. So in the salesmanship, that warmth of contagious confidence, good-will, helpfulness all was a part of it.

SHUSTER: Did you ever go with him, or help in, say, the real estate business or...?

JOHNSON: Well, I helped him in his coffee business on Saturdays. It was a real pleasure to go down to the barn and hitch the horse and go with him on the wagon. And sometimes I'd run in to a customer for him. It'd be the second or third floor, run up the steps, and leave the coffee if it was marked down in a little book he had as what was transpired, and then to hold the reigns of

the horse, you know, and the wagon. That was quite a treat. And when the day was over the horse always knew when it got to the last stop.

SHUSTER: Knew the way home.

JOHNSON: Because he knew the way home. There was no holding the horse then. And to put the feed bag of the horse at noon when we had our lunch, to throw the weight out that held the horse and held the wagon and then put the no...nose bag we called it, the feed bag, on the horse with the oats. That was always a big thing. So we had good times. I...I didn't participate in real estate with him at all. I was too busy going to school and in the ministry.

SHUSTER: When you were growing up in Chicago there was...was about 1918...there was Billy Sunday evangelistic meetings in Chicago and then through the '20s and '30s Paul Rader was very active. Were you involved in any...?

JOHNSON: My father was involved in the Billy Sunday meetings down on Chicago Avenue by...by the lake shore at that time. The lake has been filled in now and where his meetings were is not on the lake shore anymore, but it was at that time. And my father was usher at the Billy Sunday meetings, and my father was a great admirer of Paul Rader, and I was also a great admirer, almost a...almost a disciple of Paul Rader. So that while I went to my own church a great deal, getting into my later teens and early twenties, I took every opportunity I could to hear Paul Rader preach, both in the tabernacle which he had on North Avenue, which is now the Moody Church and also when he moved to the tabernacle on Barry and Halsted Streets. And I heard him many, many times. I was greatly blessed and greatly challenged. To my way of thinking and in my lifetime, Dr. [Harold A.] Ironside was the great Bible teacher of Chicago in my lifetime, and Paul Rader was by far the great evangelist of Chicago, and I was blessed by both those men.

SHUSTER: You said that you greatly admired him. What was it that you admired most about him?

JOHNSON: I think his world vision. He had a vision for the world, and he had a heart that was big enough to take in the whole world. He was very daring. He was a great promoter. He had a great deal of imagination. He probably was a little bit ahead of his time. I think probably a part of his difficulty was he was too far ahead of the people, and they couldn't quite either catch up or keep up with him. So that he pioneered a great deal of what other people did later on. And I think when you come to ask me about Youth for Christ, I think I would tell you this, that I received my vision of the world from Paul Rader and also from my pastor, Dr. C.T. Dyrness and the missionary program he had. The difference between Rader and Dyrness was Dyrness was conventional, traditional, but with a burden for the world. Rader was more daring and imaginative and was a pioneer in taking missions out of the nineteenth century and putting it into the twentieth century. So, I received a good deal from both of them, but I think my fires were lit more in that regard from Paul Rader than from Dyrness, and I think that was one of...that was one of my biggest contributions to Youth for Christ: world vision. Some of my associates in Youth for Christ came out of very provincial and parochial areas and really didn't have much vision beyond winning souls for Christ. But I saw the world and I wanted the world and I dared



to believe for the world. And in fact the World Vision organization grew out of a slogan that I had, that you've documented in many ways: our world vision rallies. And then Bob Pierce who was one of us took that name, which I was glad he did. Another young fellow out in Spokane, Washington, took the word "vision." He didn't dare to take "world vision" when Bob Pierce had it, so he took the word "vision" and it carried on that way.

SHUSTER: Do you recall any specific examples of Rader's daring or his innovativeness?

JOHNSON: Yes, I do. He first broadcast in Chicago in a tower or something. I wasn't in it, but something in connection with a Wrigley Tower on Chicago River and Michigan Boulevard. He first broadcast on radio station WHT in Chicago at that time. I'm not sure how far it reached, but we...we had little crystal sets, and we improvised with quick oats boxes and wired them up and had a little crystal. And that was a great thing to put an earphone on and hear the voice of Paul Rader, the first voice for radio in Chicago as a gospel voice. And he was the first man to broadcast on network across the United States, so far as I know, out of the Columbia Broadcasting System, the early morning Breakfast Hour...Breakfast Brigade...whatever he called it, every day of the week I think, at least five days during the week. The pioneer utilizing radio for the gospel in America. And he was a pioneer also in providing [sound of passing train] radio sets for India. There was a graduate...I think he was a graduate of Wheaton College, David Gillespie. There were two Gillespies, David and Bob, here in the '20s, and David, I think, was a coach here in football in the '30s for a while. But David was also a preacher. And David went under Paul Rader's inspiration with others out to India to distribute receiving sets so that people could hear. Now that was way back when radio was very primitive.

SHUSTER: What wa...was there a Christian broadcasting station in India?

JOHNSON: There must of been some way of doing it. I don't...I'm not sure of the detail. But then he was the inspiration for HCJB in Quito, Ecuador. Clarence Jones was one of his boys and Howard Jones, his brother, and they went down there with just courage, and vision, and concern, and prayer, and faith, and started HCJB with Reuben Larson. So that Paul Rader, in my opinion, and I think I'm correct in saying...he was a pioneer both in Christian radio in America and Christian radio overseas, and for that we owe him a great debt of gratitude. So I got...I learned that from him. I remember one time, Mrs. Johnson and I had gotten married, we went to hear him while we were on our honeymoon. He was going to India as a...on a missionary program, and we gave him our honeymoon money to go. [Shuster laughs] He had other money besides. There wasn't much in that, but we gave him that.

SHUSTER: What...how would you describe him as a preacher?

JOHNSON: Paul Rader was a man's man. He appealed enormously to men. He had a reputation of having been a boxer and a professional football player. Although he couldn't have been much of a professional football player at that time because that never really developed until the time of Red Grange. But at least he, I suppose, was kind of a semi-pro football and boxing. [Pauses] And he was a big...he...two-fisted man, and he had very great masculinity. He was a great storyteller. He often started his sermons with some kind of a story, and you didn't know where he was going, but

he was sneaking in through the back door, or...or some approach like that. And he preached a length...his sermons were lengthy.

SHUSTER: How long were they?

JOHNSON: Oh, I think...I think Rader must have preached on the average never less than an hour. Probably between an hour and an hour-and-a-half. But he held you spellbound. And the services in the church were always long. He had a great musical program, a great musical staff. He was somewhat musical himself. His brother Ralph was with him; he was musical. Luke Rader was musical. So I would say they had music in the family. And he surrounded himself with some...an excellent group of musicians, and they had a great musical program, and always surprises, always testimonies, always challenges, always people from near and far, and then he would preach. And he rarely was on the platform very much before it was time to preach. He had a room down below that he came from where he had been quiet and meditating and praying, so that he was what you would call spiritually red-hot when he got to the platform and the pulpit inspired. And he held you spellbound. He...at one time he had a campaign in the old tabernacle on North Avenue where the Moody Church now is. I think they had meetings almost every night for a whole year. They had well filled that place with four or five thousand people, and when he gave the invitation to receive Christ, there was a continual stream of people coming. And later on the air, multitudes were converted to Christ by listening on the air. He was the first one, I think, also to [pauses]...to raise missionary pledges, both in the congregation and over the radio. I remember one year they raised a hundred thousand dollars.

SHUSTER: In the 1920s that's a....

JOHNSON: About that for...for missions, which was unheard of or unthinkable. What that would be in currency today, I don't know, but it'd be considerably more. So you can see, he'd made a big contribution to my life at that particular time. Now, I want to get back to Dr. Dyrness too and the people associated with him because I was with him and in that church until I was seventeen years old. So that my earlier...my pre-teen years and my earlier teen years were molded under the influence of a godly home, a godly church, a godly minister, and a godly Sunday school teacher. But then from seventeen on I came away to college and never got back to the church too much after that, just on occasion, between semesters and so forth, and Rader then became a larger influence at that time. So each had their time in my life of influence.

SHUSTER: You mentioned the godly Sunday school teacher. Who was that?

JOHNSON: His name was Oscar Larson. He was a...he was a contractor, a concrete, cement, and concrete contractor, building foundations and sidewalks and those kind of things. He was a relative, I think, of Carl Gunderson. You notice the name Larson, Gunderson, and so on. My roommate at college here was Franklin Olson. So we weren't clannish, we were just a clan [Shuster laughs]. And Oscar Larson was a great Sunday school teacher, and he had a group of young fellows in their teens in a class that met on a week night called Christian Crusader's Class. He also was an admirer of Paul Rader and received a great deal of use [?] from Paul Rader. And he...he taught me the book of Acts in that class and the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the



Acts of the Apostles. And this Bible class was for Bible study and prayer. There may have been between ten and twenty-five, I think, in that class that met week after week. The social was minimal. There was nothing athletic about it. It was simply a Bible study class. I suppose you would call it deeper life class, for people who meant business with the Lord. And I was in that class, and he influenced me a great deal. And when I struggled about my own life, my own future, he spent many an hour with me even late into the night, ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night, talking about what the future had and what the Lord had for me.

SHUSTER: What was your relationship to Christ as you were growing up?

JOHNSON: Well, that's an interesting question. I date...I date the assurance of salvation in my life to the third Sunday of January, 1927, here at Wheaton College in what was then called Pierce Chapel. Prior to that, I had spiritual experiences, emotions. I don't know that I had assurance of salvation prior to that time. I remember as a little fellow, about eleven or twelve, weeping profusely at the altar in the church, Salem Evangelical Free Church under the ministry of a very prominent evangelist, Harry Vom Bruch. Harry Vom Bruch was in the school of evangelists with Billy Sunday and William Biederwolf and Gipsy Smith and that crowd. And he was in the church and had a campaign. I remember I went to the altar and I wept profusely over my sins and my need of Christ. Whether I met the Lord at that time, I can't say. But I meant business at that time, and I did whatever business I understood I could do at that time. But when I was seventeen, the third Sunday of January in 1927, here at the College, I came into the assurance of salvation and surrendered my life to the Lord.

SHUSTER: What was the occasion?

JOHNSON: I had been sick during the holiday season as I recall it. I had worked the mail trains to earn some money during the holidays, worked the mail train from Chicago to Des Moines and back. Several trips back and forth for two, three weeks. And I got the flu and a mastoid condition, and quite critical and so on, but the Lord touched me and strengthened me, and I came back to school. And I think it was the first Sunday night that I came back. I'm not quite sure, but it seems that way to me. And there was nothing else to do but go to church because at that time Wheaton was pretty well closed downtown on Sunday. So I thought, "Well, I'll go to church, and by the time church is over my buddies and pals will be back and...and we'll see what we'll do," thinking about some activity afterward that young college kids will do, nothing especially mischievous but just to blow off a little steam or something. So I went to church that night and I sat in the balcony, in the second row in the balcony, I recall. I can point out the seat to you. And Evan Welsh, who was my friend, and with whom I played football the year before, was there. And when the invitation was given, he put his arm around me, and that was all I needed. Evidently from the weakness of being sick at the holidays, and perhaps pondering something about life and what all it meant, had gotten to me in the subconscious person. And God prepared me so that I can't tell you what the man preached. He had an accordion, I remember, and he sang with his...he sang to the accompaniment of his accordion, and I thought he was a rather interesting fellow, but didn't impress me overly much.

SHUSTER: Can you think of who...?

JOHNSON: But the thing that did impress me was that the invitation got me, and I...perhaps Evan Welsh got me. So that I walked down the aisle that night and received Christ. And I was the only one that came that night, and I often wondered what people thought afterward and "Well, just one probably came. It wasn't much of a meeting." But I always said it was the best meeting ever because I got in.

SHUSTER: If we could backtrack a little bit. When you were growing up in Chicago you went to public schools?

JOHNSON: Yes. I went to the Salmon P. Chase Grammar School. S-A-L-M-O-N P. Chase Grammar School, located within about two blocks of our home, near the church. If I recall right, Mr. Chase I think was a member of the Supreme Court, perhaps chief justice.

SHUSTER: He was the Secretary of Treasury under Lincoln, too.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think...he...the school was named for him. But then when we moved up into a new community called Ravenswood Manor, I went to the Thomas Waters, W-A-T-E-R-S, Waters school, from which I graduated. Then I went to the Carl Schurz High School, which is located on Milwaukee and Addison streets in Chicago, and finished four years at the Carl Schurz High School. Mrs. Johnson, my wife, graduated from that school as well. She graduated a half a year following me. I didn't know her in high school at all, except I did with other fellows pull some tricks from time to time on different ones, and she was involved in those groups, so I...I knew who she was, but I really didn't know her. But she went to the same school I did.

SHUSTER: What were some of the tricks you played?

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: What were some of the tricks you played?

JOHNSON: Well, one of the tricks we played was we used to go to school on what we call the street cars, trolley cars. The trolley car had a platform in the front where the motorman operated, and it had a platform in the back from which the conductor operated. You got onto the street car in the back, gave the conductor your money, your fare, or your transfer if you came from a different street car. Then you walked through a couple of sliding door into the car itself. Then when they got off, you had to open those doors to get on the black [back] pl...platform and down, or you had to open the front doors where the motorman was and go out the front steps. So the main part of the car was closed. In wintertime, cold and so on, it would be cold. So what, one little trick we did to the girls was, when they got into the car we'd hold the doors closed, so when the time came for them to get off, they couldn't get off. Very childish thing now, to you, but those are the kind of things we did in those days, you know.

SHUSTER: I guess it got their attention anyway.

JOHNSON: Yeah, and nothing harmful about it. Little things of that kind that we did. I remember she probably had to walk a half a mile back home because she couldn't get off at her stop, and not only her but others with her.

SHUSTER: Weren't you also in several all-Chicago athletic competitions?

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: Weren't you in some all-Chicago athletic competitions too?

JOHNSON: Yes, I...I...I was a swimmer. You can't be a Scandinavian without being a swimmer. We used to say my father took us boys out boat [?] and threw us in the water and said, "Sink or swim." And so they said, "What did you do?" Well, we're still here. But we had a cottage at Williams Bay, Wisconsin, and a very modest little cottage to begin with. It did...had no running water, no bath facilities, hardly more than a two-room simple little thing, almost like a two car garage divided in two. As time went on, we prospered and of course we improved on that. If you...if you were a Scandinavian, you'd understand, and I didn't understand 'til I went to Scandinavia years later that the Scandinavian people have their home in town, but then they have a place up in the mountains where the cows feed up in the mountains during the summertime and the goats feed up in the mountains. So they have a little shack up in the mountains where they stay with the cattle during the summer season, and the cattle are out grazing and so on, and they have that little shack that's in provide [?]. Well, when the Scandinavians came to this country, they brought that background with them, so they got a little place out in the country somewhere where they can get away from the city and the traffic, and that's the way we started. And all of these families are.... We had a colony of Scandinavian people up there in Williams Bay. That was a wholesome, happy thing for all of us, good church. The Calvary Community Church of Williams Bay was, in its earlier days, what we called the Swedish Church because the meetings were all in Swedish, and Sunday school was in English. So we went to Sunday school in English and went to church in Scandinavian. But as time went on, things developed, and out of that came what we have now the Calvary Community Church with Norman Sweeting as the pastor.

SHUSTER: Was there a...how did the Swedish and Norwegians get along?

JOHNSON: Well, that's...that's an interesting thing, because you...you [laughs]...we used to say that Norwegians and the Swedish were like the English and the Irish, or the Germans and the Dutch. The background, politically, historically is a certain amount of feeling, adverse feeling of one toward the other, growing out of historic experiences of other years. So we were raised with a little of that, but more in a humorous vein. We...we knew a lot of stories that we would tell about the Swedes, and then the Swedes would take the same stories and just change it around about the Norwegians. So there was that little competition, mostly wholesome, mostly happy, mostly humorous, but still a little dig as it were in with it. So, there was a Swedish Evangelical Free Church and there was a Norwegian Evangelical Free Church. Both of them were pretty largely sponsored in the United States by the Congregational Home Missionary Organization, and we must pay tribute to the Congregationalists for their concern for the Scandinavian immigrants, because they did a great deal for them. As I said, our men studied in the Chicago Theological

Seminary, which was Congregational at that time. Well, as time went on, of course, the Scandinavian people become absorbed in the American culture rapidly, and altogether too rapidly sometimes. They lose their identity as Scandinavians. So I would say that by the time three generations have rolled along, they're pretty much well Americanized and Scandinavians in their blood, but not particularly in their culture anymore. So the Scandinavian churches, as young people grow up, they wanted English services. So the first step usually was, the Scandinavian church service was occupying the main sanctuary, and the English church service was occupying the basement auditorium. So you'd have two services going on simultaneously, one in English, and one in Scandinavian. Well, of course that created problems as well as solved them, because the young people went downstairs, and the older people went upstairs, but sometimes the older people wanted to be with the younger people, and sometimes the older people thought the young people ought to learn the Norwegian language and ought to be upstairs. So you had that struggle. But then a third generation came along, and the older generation began to die out, and the immigration began to slacken off, in fact almost cease for a period of time. So there weren't any more immigrants coming in. So gradually it just came over to be English. Well, when the Swedish churches became English-speaking, and the Norwegian churches became English-speaking, and they didn't have quite the same feeling that they might have had in other days in the old country. They knew that they believed the same thing, were headed in the same direction. It was simply just good common sense for the two of them to get together, and they did, and they did it remarkably well. There was practically no difficulty at all in the amalgamation of the two of them, and they're getting along very well as we all know, and the Evangelical Free Church [unclear] is going forward in a mighty way.

SHUSTER: What were some of your work experience as you were growing up? What were some of the jobs you held?

JOHNSON: Oh, I had all kinds of jobs when I was a kid. The first job I remember was in the Chinese laundry, after school, sometimes in the morning, certainly Saturday, ironing collars and cuffs, starched collars and starched cuffs in the Chinese laundry, and then packaging for the customers. That was my first job. But in those days it was a rumor that went around that the Chinese people carried leprosy, that you had to be very careful about the Chinese because you'd get leprosy. And there was a certain mystique about them, a mystery connected with them, identified with a certain amount of fear. And I remember one time, the owner of that little laundry opened a trunk in the back and he showed me...showed a gun to me that he had. That scared me. I was getting fifty cents a week and I quit the job. [Shuster laughs] And I mentioned...

SHUSTER: About how old...about how old were you...?

JOHNSON: Oh, I was...I couldn't have been over ten years of age. See, we all worked to bring in money, and Mother was the treasurer. We brought our money home, and then we got whatever she thought we ought to have, which wasn't very much and didn't need to be very much. For a few cents you could buy a lot of things. Then we...my next job was a "printer's devil." I worked in print shop taking type apart and putting it back into the little slots, you know, the As here, the Bs there and so on. They called us fellows "printer's devils." That's what we did there. My next job was in a glove factory, turning gloves. Gloves are sewn on the inside out, and then they have

to turn them. And you had a little metal hand, and you put the glove on that metal hand, and you had to turn it the right way. And my job was in the glove factory, turning the gloves that had been sewed so the right side came out. But I wasn't fourteen years old, and when they found out I was four...wasn't fourteen years old, they had to dismiss me. So I lost that job. Then when I was in high school I became a tinsmith. I worked in a tin shop with gutters, down spouts, coal heating furnaces, those kind of things. I worked all the way through high school in a tin shop. And God was very good to me because the men for whom I worked were atheists and evolutionists and very outspoken about it. And the fact that that never influenced me adversely is a remarkable thing when I reflect back. It would seem that I would have been influenced by them, but I was really influenced against what they were saying by them, and I was stronger in my Evangelical convictions for having been there. And I worked all...all through my high school days I worked there.

SHUSTER: Did you ever talk with them about Christianity or about evolution?

JOHNSON: Not a...not a great deal, no. Not what I should have done, no. I...I missed that opportunity. They knew where I stood, and maybe I had a silent witness, but I should have had an articulate witness. And I think I did articulate to some extent, but I was a kid, and they were great, big, overpowering Teutonics from the old country, and I guess maybe I had a certain amount of timidity and just sort of kept my mouth shut and did my job. But as I look back, from this point of view, I could have done and should have done more. Then when I was in college, I had two special jobs in college. The first was...when I finished high school, having spent my summers at Williams Bay, Wisconsin, I had some odd jobs up there, like being a...a baggage boy at the railroad station and so on. I decided that I'd either work for the grocery store there or at the ice business. The Dyrness boys, they worked for Gramsell [?] and Peterson Grocery Store. So I went to Mr. Peterson and I said, "Do you got a job for me?" And then he told me, yes, he did, and he told me how much money it was. But I wasn't satisfied, thought I could do better. So I went to the Ambrose Brothers, who had an ice business there, cutting the ice out of the lake and storing it and then selling it in the summertime to the people who lived around the lake. It was a resort area, and we had a lot of resort people, you see, in cottages and so on. And they looked at me and they said, "Well, we don't think you can handle it." "Well," I said, "give me a chance." So they did. And I had a truck, and these big slabs of ice were put on the truck and I had to cut them into twenty-five, fifty, a hundred pound, two hundred pound slabs and so on and deliver them. I got along just fine. I had no problem in my own thinking. I knew I could do it. So I did. Well, Joe Ambrose had rheumatism from having been around ice too much and so on, and he's having trouble. So I said to Joe and Mike, the two brothers, I said, "Now Joe's having trouble with this here rheumatism. He's having trouble. Why don't I take his route and mine" That'll relieve him. He can work around the ice house, and I'll make a little more money. And they said, "Well, go ahead and try it." So I did. So I worked with them that summer, and I forget what I got paid. I...I know I started at thirty dollars a week, and Mike Peterson was going to pay me twenty at the grocery store, so that was fifty percent better. And maybe I got more when I took two routes, I'm not sure. Well, at the end of the summer I thought, "Goodness sakes, I'd like to own this route. I can live better still." So I...I said, "Why don't you fellows sell me the route. Then you don't have to bother with it at all. It'd be my trucks and my route and...and you fellas are free just to be at the ice house. Well, that sounded good to them. So how much would I pay? We settled at a price of five hundred dollars. Well, that was an

enormous amount of money, and I was shaking in my boots to take such a big step. So I said to my pop, I said, "Dad, I think I can buy that for five hundred dollars. I think I can make a go of it." So he said, "Okay, I'll...I'll stake you the money." So I bought the business, and I had the business then each summer and I worked my way through college. It was a very, very seasonally profitable business because it cost two cents a hundred at that time to cut the ice out of the lake, and we would sell it for sixty or seventy cents a hundred.

SHUSTER: [Laughs] That is profitable.

JOHNSON: So that was a pretty good margin there. Of course, I had my trucks and I had my helpers, but it worked out just fine. Then at Christmas season I was working on the mail trains, at Christmastime. So I always had jobs, and I've never feared in all my life about being without work. I've always felt within my heart that if I ever was without work and I wanted work, I could get it. And I feel that way today. It never bothers me. I have no anxiety at all about the future in that regard.

SHUSTER: How did you choose Wheaton to go to?

JOHNSON: Well, I don't know that I chose it. I think my father chose it. Reverend Dyrness from the Salem Evangelical Free Church was very close to Jonath...not Jonathan Blanchard, but Charles Blanchard. And Charles Blanchard preached in our church from time to time. The two men were...were a kinship of spirit. They both were identified with what we would call the Fundamentalist Association. I think it was called at that time the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, and there were a lot of fine men identified with that work at that time. Later it deteriorated, but at that time it was probably an organization with a lot of stature to it. And Dr. Blanchard was struggling with a small college out here. And Mr. Dyrness...Reverend Dyrness sent his sons, I think both of them, Enoch and Frank, went to the academy...Wheaton Academy. Then they went to the College. And because we were in that church, the people were encouraged to send their young people there, and my father felt I should go here. So I think it was his choice more than mine. Not that I was adverse to it. I wasn't adverse to it. I just didn't have any background as young people have today of understanding that there might be choices and there might be options. At that time, you know, it was...well, it's as common today to graduate from college as it was at that time to graduate from high school. And a college graduate was something quite distinct at that time. So my brother...my older brother and sister did not go to college. I was the first of the six children (I'm number three of six) to go to college. And so I came here, I think at my father and minister's influence.

SHUSTER: What were your plans at that time? What were you...?

JOHNSON: To be a dentist and an oral surgeon.

SHUSTER: How...why dentist and oral surgeon?

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: Why did you choose that? Why....?

JOHNSON: I can't tell you why. I still love it. I still love it. I still have a yen in my heart to...to do that same thing. I have very nimble fingers, very nimble fingers. And people tell me when there are little things that require detailed and delicate handling for the fingers that I have that particular gift. And I have a curious fascination toward that. And in my heart I think that if God would have wanted me to do it, and God would have let me do it, I might have been quite able at it. But that I'll never know [laughs].

SHUSTER: What...of course when you came to Wheaton in 1926, and that was towards the beginning of the administration of James Buswell. Do you recall any impressions of him as a teacher or a man?

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes. Dr. James Oliver Buswell was a great man. (I think it's hard to distinguish at Wheaton College.) Each president has made his own contribution. Probably, it is my conviction, that Wheaton owes more to its academic stand...for its academic standing and for the depth and strength of its spiritual life to James Oliver Buswell than any other man. I feel that. I feel he layed certain foundations upon which others have built well. But without those foundations that he built at that time, it might have been different. I have very good impressions of Dr. Buswell. I graduated in 1930. I was president of the alumni association from 1936 to 1940. I was president during the time of uncertainty approaching the finish of his work here. My impressions of Dr. Buswell: a sincere man, a dedicated man, a man with a consuming passion to do the right thing and to do it as well as he could. At the same time a very stubborn man. And when he was right it was good, and when he was wrong it was bad [laughs]. He had a...he had a, what we call a low boiling point. I remember one time I was in ethics class with him as my teacher. It was on the first floor of Blanchard Hall on the northeast corner. We had a flagpole just outside of that room, and some young people were carrying on some activity around that pole. It seemed to disturb him. And instead of going around through the door and seeing what there was or perhaps speaking through an open window, he jumped through the window, and got into....

SHUSTER: It was the first story I hope.

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: Was it the first story or....?

JOHNSON: The first story. Yes, it was just ground level. He tried to settle it. And I remember another time with a young...these are just trivia, but then they indicate something. We had a man coming from Winnipeg County by the name of Smith who was the wheat king of Canada. And Wheaton needed all the money and all the good will it could get. So we were told he was coming and that we should welcome him warmly and commend the College to him. So we decided that day (I was not in on it though I was...the story goes around that I was)...alarm clocks were put in the chapel to ring every few minutes all during the chapel hour when Mr. Smith, this wealthy and dignified businessman from Winnipeg was to speak. At the close of that hour, the president was in a rage. And he asked that the perpetrator of that trick report to his office within fifteen minutes

after chapel was over. Well, so far as I know no one has reported yet [Shuster laughs] on it. But having said that, when it came to separation from the world and worldly ways and worldly practices, he was very deep and strong in his convictions. And while some of his convictions may seem obsolete and irrelevant today, they were quite relevant at that particular time.

SHUSTER: What were some of those convictions?

JOHNSON: Well, he had the...the code of the College: no smoking, no drinking, no theater going, no dancing, no use of tobacco, alcohol, but I mentioned that. Those kind of things. And they were very relevant at that time, and maybe they could have a little more relevance today. Some of the things that he stood for at that time perhaps in some ways you could stand more for them today than then because the problems identified with some of them are worse. But be that as it may, to walk a...what the Bible says "as strangers and pilgrims through the world" [Hebrews 11:13]. I think his generation of young people at that time came through with a strong witness for the Lord, and "if by their fruit ye shall know them," [Matthew 7:16 or 7:20] there are a lot of people that came through the '30s that...that made an outstanding record. When it came to...I had one interesting experience for him when he was in the midst of all his troubles. I went with him for lunch one day at his invitation to the Baker Hotel in St. Charles, which was quite a fine hotel at that time. We used to have banquets there and other occasions. So he invited me there for lunch, and I was in the midst of the controversy because I was president of the Alumni Association. And I think at that time he was looking for friends and looking for support, and I had mixed emotions. So I wondered what would develop. We spent the whole lunch time and went out in the garden, I remember, afterward, and we talked about baseball and football and current events, and we talked about all kinds of other things apart from anything identified with the College. And I thought that was strange and quite interesting, but I didn't think it was my responsibility to raise up...raise any question because he had invited me to lunch, and if he had wanted to open up something, he should. So when I came back again, I talked with Herman Fischer who was chairman of the board of the College, and he said, "How'd you make out?" "Well," I said, "we talked about batting averages, and we talked about touchdowns, and talked about the weather, but we didn't get into any of the problems." He said, "Well, that's good." He said, "You both probably wouldn't have gotten anywhere anyway." But that was interesting to me that we would occupy our time that way. But he was a good man, a godly man, a student, had high aims academically, high aims spiritually. I think his problem was he couldn't...he couldn't understand that being the president of Wheaton College, that everything he did and every decision he made reflected upon the College in one way or another.

SHUSTER: Such as what kind of decisions?

JOHNSON: Sir?

SHUSTER: Such as what kind of decisions or actions did he...?

JOHNSON: Well, the Presbyterian controversy was raging at that time, and he was identified with Carl McIntyre and, I think, certain others with the Westminster Seminary at that particular time.

SHUSTER: Dr. [J. Gresham] Machen.

JOHNSON: Machen and Robert Dick Wilson and so on. And he didn't understand that when he took a stand with those men that he would alienate a potential segment of support for Wheaton College. He thought he could take a stand as a Presbyterian, period, and separate himself into two parts, a sort of dichotomy. So he'd be a Presbyterian on one hand and be a president of the College on the other hand, and what he did as a Presbyterian didn't influence the College, when other people felt that being the president of the College, whatever he did, wherever he went, reflected for good or bad or otherwise on the College. And I think that was one of his major problems.

SHUSTER: Why don't we just take a break there. I need to switch the tape.

END OF TAPE

