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Biographical Note and Abstract

Richard Nicholson was born on October 2, 1948, and grew up on King Street (now North King Street) in South Windsor, CT. His parents were both children of Irish immigrants, grew up in farming families, and ran a tobacco farm. He attended Union School through eighth grade and then went to East Catholic High School in Manchester, CT. Nicholson received a bachelor's degree from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA, and a law degree from the University of Connecticut. He spent his career as a tax lawyer in the private and public sector, becoming Commissioner of Taxes for the State of CT from 2010 to 2011.

In this interview, Nicholson discusses his mother's experiences of working for Travelers Insurance Company in Hartford, CT, and the biases that the company's management appeared to have against Democrats. He discusses Connecticut state and local Democratic Party politics, and the influence of politics on infrastructure developments in South Windsor and the surrounding area during Nicholson's lifetime, including roads, bridges, and flood-control projects. He also discusses South Windsor's African American population, including the harsh living conditions of black brickyard workers.

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Richard Nicholson, 2013

Richard Nicholson
Oral History Interview #2
Interviewed by Anthony Macro
May 3, 2012

MACRO: **[00:24]** This is the second interview of Richard Nicholson conducted on behalf of the Wood Memorial Library's oral history project by Anthony Macro and recorded on the morning of the third of May, 2012, in Richard's house in Glastonbury, Connecticut. Good morning, Richard.

NICHOLSON: Good morning, Tony.

MACRO: Thank you very much for agreeing to this second interview—this follow-up interview.

NICHOLSON: I so much enjoyed the first time that I was glad to do a second.

MACRO: One is very happy about that. We thought we'd give you an opportunity to add to parts of your first account, as you wish. Perhaps we should start off with that section in the first interview, where you spoke of your mother's [Annie Fahey Nicholson] experience at Travelers [Travelers Insurance Company] in Hartford. Specifically, it had to do with employees leaving the building to see a presidential candidate.

NICHOLSON: Yes, actually, I thought about that afterwards. My mother worked for Travelers, as I think I said in the first interview. She was a secretary in—I think—how shall I say this—I think that secretaries in that era had a very important job—a little bit more than they turned out in the latter part of the twentieth century. She had a lot of responsibility. She worked for one of the vice presidents or something—secretary of the vice president, as secretary of the company. She would tell me that she was politically an Independent. She would not register with a political party, because it was perceived at Travelers—and I'm sure at the other insurance companies—that if you were a registered Democrat, it could have affected your career.

Now, I don't think she had any proof that anybody was researching the voter rolls in all the towns, but I think that the management probably sensed employees' political affiliations by their conversations or something like that. Now, we have to bear in mind, and to this day, this is the case, that the insurance companies and most banks and businesses are non-union. They don't have a union workforce, so although there is tremendous more protection for non-union laborers today than there was in the 1920's or '30s, when we're talking about my mother's work experience, they still don't have as many labor protections as union members will always have. So anyway, in those days somebody could really be let go, even without cause.

[04:01] That brings me to a story she always told me about. One tradition in Hartford—I think going back to probably the late 1800's—was that the presidential candidates would always

come to Hartford and speak from the Times portico. The Times building was on Prospect Street and had a very impressive portico. I actually remember my mother, after she had left Travelers, had gone to see Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 speak from the Times portico. I believe she voted for Dwight Eisenhower, being the independent person that she was, and she thought he was a good president. We can talk about my aunts later, but they were diehard Adlai Stevenson people.

When a presidential candidate would come to Hartford, there would be some sort of motorcade. There would be a parade—probably a mini parade down Main Street—to the Times portico, where the people would amass in front of the portico, and there would be a political speech, and then they would go off to Brainard Airport—that was the airport at the time. They flew in and out of Brainard Airport on some little plane. One of the things my mother told me was that when a presidential candidate came, you had to take some sort of time off for being away from your desk to go to see the presidential candidate. One of her jobs was to keep tally of who went to see which presidential candidate. This became a very important function in 1928, when Al Smith, who was the first Roman Catholic candidate, was running against Herbert Hoover.

If you remember, we had a prior conversation about the anti-Catholic sentiment that emerged in the 1960 election, when John Kennedy was running; you can only imagine the vitriol that was there in 1928, when Al Smith was running for president. In fact, I did a term paper in college about the 1928 election—the anti-Catholic campaign that was waged, especially in the South, against Al Smith. Now, there probably were some other factors that people didn't like about Al Smith. He was a New Yorker. New York always had some sort of distinction, if I can use that word, of being maybe not as—what shall I say—not as holy and reverent to religious values as the rest of the country.

In any event, it troubled her a lot that she had to keep track of who—and it was mostly women—who went out to see the presidential candidate Al Smith, because she was a very big supporter of Al Smith, even though she was Independent. It was a big issue for her. In fact, I think she talked to me about how she used to play his campaign theme song on the piano: "The Sidewalks of New York." FDR's campaign song was "Happy Days are Here Again," his was, "The Sidewalks of New York (East Side, West Side)." Taking a tally of names posed some ethical dilemmas for her, but that was part of her job, and she had to do it. I think she found it very, very distasteful that the company would track who was going out to see a political candidate.

MACRO: That really is fascinating. It crossed my mind that now secretaries are called 'administrative assistants.'

NICHOLSON: That's correct.

MACRO: She was that and more in name, presumably, in her job.

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NICHOLSON: **[08:43]** Yes, I think she was the second in charge of whatever department, because she sort of ran it. She was sort of the business manager for that area, because her boss delegated to her that responsibility, besides his correspondence. It was amazing the way she could take dictation—the shorthand. My father depended a lot on the weather report in his business, since he was out on the farm all morning, and you didn't have radios when you were out on the farm. This is pre-transistor era. Now, I date myself with mention of transistor. She would make sure she heard the noon weather, transcribe it verbatim with shorthand and tell him over lunch what the weather report for the day was or for the next day, because then he could plan—if there was rain or thunderstorms or whatever in the forecast—what he could or couldn't do.

MACRO: Should we move on to one of the items to which we thought we would return to in this session: John Bailey?

NICHOLSON: John Bailey, yes.

MACRO: A powerful man in the Democratic Party in Connecticut.

NICHOLSON: I would modify what you just said by 'powerful man in Connecticut,' period. John Bailey became Democratic state chairman in Connecticut—I think—in the early '40s. He was a lawyer in Hartford, but his—I would say he was a very, very tightly controlled person. He believed in control of politics—the tight control at the top. Those people that were involved in politics served him by what he believed was the right course. For instance—which probably would never happen today—my understanding from reading his biography that Joseph Lieberman wrote and stories that I heard from those that were close to him—was that he would be in the legislature, which—I think—in those days only met once every 2 years—but he would actually be in the hall of the capital—pretty much dictating what would happen—what votes should be taken, what bills should advance, what bills shouldn't advance. He was a very powerful person.

[12:10] In South Windsor, it is very interesting, because he had a close relationship growing up in Young Democrats. I think there was a Young Democrat Club, and he had a close relationship with a number of people in South Windsor, primarily Harry Odlum, who became—in the 1950's, I believe—the Democratic Party chair in South Windsor. He also socially knew my aunts who were also active in the Young Democratic Club in Connecticut.

MACRO: John Bailey knew your aunts.

NICHOLSON: John Bailey, yes. John Bailey knew my aunts. I think his relationship with Harry Odlum was central, because I think Harry was somewhat of a player. The town chairman, in those days, was a very important person, because Bailey, the state chair,

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depended on the town chair. He kept him happy. If they were in his camp, then that gave him more power to get things done. For instance, if you had a lawyer in town who wanted to become a judge, it was important that you go to the town chairman, who would then go to John Bailey, and then that favor would be bestowed upon the lawyer who wanted to be appointed as judge. There was no screening in those days. It was just somebody that had political connections that would become a county court judge or a superior court judge or whatever the levels of judicial appointments were back in the 1950's.

[14:11] I think in my first interview I talked about the importance of voter registration. Because of the influx of the immigrants coming from Europe and other places—England and Ireland, there was a tremendous rise in potential Democratic voters. John Bailey and Harry Odlum believed how important those voter registration drives were, because once they were registered to vote, there was a tremendous get-out-to-vote push town by town. They would have things that you would never dream of. If they had a local election, they would have motorcades; they would have huge town parties, where everybody would be invited, and there would be free food and people would imbibe; and all sorts of other stuff that I don't think that you could even consider doing today. The town chairs were very important.

One aspect of Main Street history that was quite controversial was the decision to build a bridge from Windsor to South Windsor and where to locate that bridge [Bissell Bridge]. At the time there was speculation that the location of the bridge may have been politically motivated. I grew up as a child in the 1950's, when that bridge was being constructed. It was an enormous construction project, because it went through a very, very lengthy corridor of the South Windsor meadow, which is essentially a flood plain. Probably from about—maybe say 250 to 500 feet behind the Main Street homes, the balance of the meadow, all the way to the river was just flood plain. It would flood in the spring, and of course, if there was a serious flood—as there was in 1938 and 1954—it would come up and cover Main Street, to come extent, and some of the houses on Main Street were surrounded by water.

MACRO: May I break in a minute with a question here? Was that before the dikes were built in Hartford?

NICHOLSON: No, the dikes were built after the great flood of 1938.

MACRO: There was still a flood plain. So was it the building of the dikes in Hartford that caused that serious flooding here?

NICHOLSON: Interesting enough, we are going to get on to the topic of—what I will call—I-284, and we can do this right next to this, because it may segue into a very important conversation about the South Windsor meadow.

MACRO: Whatever you wish.

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NICHOLSON: **[17:18]** We'll talk about that, but this particular area was an area that needed to be built up tremendously, as you can imagine, because you're going through a flood plain, so the amount of earth that you had to move to elevate the highway from the flood waters, was very great. I can't probably tell you how high the bank is, sitting here today, but it is probably 15 to 25 feet off the ground—maybe even more than that.

MACRO: Yes, maybe even more than that.

NICHOLSON: Right—how high it is from the terrain around it. There was a huge, huge construction involved in moving that earth, and for a kid growing up—I know—me and my friends on the street, nothing could be more fascinating to watch than construction take place and all of these huge pay-loaders—or whatever they used—to move the dirt and pack it down and everything. It was absolutely fascinating to watch the construction. There were problems with critical parts of the construction that I know people became annoyed about.

One is that the bridge, when it was first constructed, was meant to go over to Route 5, but it was not completed. Now, I don't know the reason why—whether they ran out of funding or whatever. They just put it off. They—and I'll use the word 'dumped'—they dumped all the traffic onto the local roads, so little King Street, which was a two-lane road that hardly anybody would even come down and went all the way to East Hartford—it now became the basic route. If you lived on Main Street or whatever, you would take an exit right off of King Street, and our street became packed with traffic, as you can imagine. I mean—you just couldn't imagine. At some point, it became difficult to get out of your driveway. This was totally foreign to people that lived on King Street. McGuire Road—you go the other way—McGuire Road to Route 5—that had been a small little country lane—that just became the opposite. It just became a reckless thoroughfare.

[19:53] A lot of people blamed local and state politicians for the mess created by the bridge's location. It was perceived that while some suffered from the bridge others stood to gain. For instance the fill for creating the earthen banks on which the roads were built was taken from all of the surrounding land, benefitting those landowners. Now, these massive earth removal processes stripped away all the farmland—pretty much—a considerable area on both sides of the highway, so that therefore there are these huge—they're not so much evident now, but they were when it was first built—huge caverns that must have been probably 20 feet down below the terrain where the earth was taken out and moved to the highway.

As you can see, there were a number of people that were not happy about this, and you lost some farmland. My father had some good farmland down in the meadows that became unusable because it was so inaccessible. At different points in its history, the meadow near the bridge had an unsavory feel about it. It wasn't safe to be down there, because people would

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cruise down there and be drinking, perhaps using drugs. This is later, obviously, but I think it just came to the point where most people just abandoned it.

The combination of ruining some local country roads—and they eventually came back to being country roads when—a number of years later— the highway was extended to Route 5—became a point of consternation with a number of the people. I won't mention any names, but I know one person in particular that I—an older fellow that I knew growing up—not in my family—that was very, very hostile about this.

Now, in Glastonbury down here, at the same time, they were doing the same thing. They were building a road, but I don't think—I don't know how controversial it was down in Glastonbury, but the Glastonbury road goes through their meadow too, and I suspect it took the same amount of fill. One thing I'd note about the Glastonbury meadow, however, is that it seems to have been intact. It still is intact as farmland, so they didn't devastate the surrounding property so that it couldn't be used for farmland anymore.

MACRO: Two questions come up. Was it the case, prior to the building of this bridge—the Bissell Bridge—that the meadows were used as farmland?

NICHOLSON: Oh, absolutely. They were pristine farmlands. If you drove down, and as you have—if you drive down different roads where—when I grew up—it was called Station 39, because they were known by trolley stations—if you drove down there, it was farmland as far as the eye could see, and it still is, in some places. Station 31, which was the King Street area, was exactly the same.

MACRO: You mean right down to the riverbanks?

NICHOLSON: Right down to the riverbanks—it was just all farmland. Now you have to get almost up to the Chapel Road area before you find farmland there, but that was once farmland from East Windsor Hill—an area that you're familiar with—all the way into East Hartford—just before the Knights of Columbus. That whole area was one huge plot of farmland.

MACRO: It's very different in that particular area—the East Hartford area—today.

NICHOLSON: Yes.

MACRO: The other question I had had to do with the siting of the bridge. Was there no public discussion in South Windsor as to where the Bissell Bridge would be sited, as far as you remember? You mentioned that there were those who objected and resented the fact that the bridge was put where it was, but prior to the building, was there no public discussion?

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NICHOLSON: **[25:54]** Well, that's an interesting question for historians to look at. I think there was. I'm pretty sure there was, but as an 8 or 9-year-old kid, I don't remember exactly how they went about it, but I know that they must have had some hearings. I know the person that I remember who was so upset about it, I believe that person went and spoke out. Now, what the forum was—I'm not positive, and I don't really know how much objection there was, but that would be an interesting thing for the Wood Memorial Library oral history project to explore—or any history project—to get contemporary *Hartford Times* articles that refer to the siting of it.

Now, I don't know if there were alternate places to put it, because this person claimed that it was probably the worst place logistically to put it. Now, I don't know what that opinion was based upon, but that is what I heard.

MACRO: That would indeed be worth investigating, wouldn't it?

NICHOLSON: Yes. That is probably a good segue to I-284.

MACRO: I-284—let's do that next.

NICHOLSON: Yes, because I think—let me start by saying, in the late 1970's there were massive highway projects in Connecticut, in the Hartford area. One of the major projects on the drawing board was to widen I-91. I-91 was a four-lane highway, and it was in very bad shape; and it was always congested. There were probably two decades of plans on how to deal with the widening of it. One of the problems with widening it was that the town of Windsor had quite a bit of its housing up close to the existing I-91. Now we're in an era where we're talking about widening highways in the 1970's, and there is a lot of resistance to taking housing away, which wasn't an issue in building highways in the '50s, but it became much more of an issue in the subsequent decades, when you tried to avoid taking houses.

[28:56] One of the alternates that arose for widening I-91 was to put a parallel highway on the South Windsor side of the map—on the east side of the Connecticut River. That plan would bring the highway from East Hartford all the way up to East Windsor, where it would connect with the existing I-91, which—I think—north of East Windsor, was already three lanes. It was a much more modern version of I-91. That was put out as an alternate. One of the features of that alternate was to minimize the taking of housing, because it would go right through the meadowland, all the way out from East Hartford to East Windsor.

It is interesting, because it became a very, very important political football when the idea was proposed, because the state representative, Tom Donnelly, the East Windsor Hill community and the Main Street community—say north of Pleasant Valley Road—were absolutely completely and inalterably opposed to this idea, and they poured out with their opposition. I think that they felt that—I don't know what opposition there was in East Windsor, but I know

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that in South Windsor, the Main Street and East Windsor Hill crowd—and crowd—I mean—as an endearing term—successfully put this on the back burner. I think they basically killed it as an idea. I think they killed it for the right reasons, because the history had been with—what is now I-291 with the Bissell Bridge—that when you build that type of structure through your wetlands or your meadowlands, you essentially destroy them, as witness to the farmland being destroyed near that highway.

Now, the swath—if I'll use that word—that the Bissell Bridge cut was going east to west. The proposed swath would be north and south, so it would bisect the meadowlands, which I think at that point, everybody was starting to get much more appreciation for and the importance that meadow both for farming and flood control. That goes to your point of the dikes in Hartford and the importance of the meadowlands. After the 1938 flood—I think it was the 1938 flood that devastated downtown Hartford—subsequent to that time, probably part of it was the work project—WPA—that Roosevelt put together. They were these elaborate dikes that were built to protect Hartford and East Hartford, originally, from the flood waters, so that they are built so high that the floodwaters were kept out and I don't think they've ever been breached in any subsequent floods that have occurred after 1938.

[33:06] But the question is, by building the dikes, did that make the area above it in South Windsor and East Windsor and Windsor on the other side, more prone to flooding? I don't know if I know the answer to that, but I do think that when you take away flood lands—and you don't want to flood populated areas, so it was the right thing to do for Hartford— when you take away flood lands, you basically take away the area that will be the relief valve for water providing more devastation downstream. The South Windsor meadows provided basically a relief valve for the Hartford area and downstream for more severe flooding. I think everybody valued the ideas of the meadowlands, even though they were farmlands, and everybody knew that they flooded in the spring and that they would be under water.

Now, that brings me to this proposal that was put forth in the mid '70s, and that was a proposal to basically bring that highway that I talked about that would run parallel to I-91 on the east side of the river, but bring it only as far as the Bissell Bridge. It would go only as far as the Bissell Bridge. Then it would connect with the Bissell Bridge, so traffic would go either west to Windsor or east to Manchester. This was slated to hook up with what now has become I-291, so therefore we add another interstate connection with an interstate. I was pretty active in politics at that point, and at that point, I was also on the town council. I and a number of others convinced people that this was a bad idea.

I sensed that there was a little—I don't know how to say it—I sensed there was a little politics involved here, because while the upper area of South Windsor's Main Street got relief, because the proposal to go up the entire meadows was basically scrapped, the area that probably is not as economically robust as the other part—Main Street—of South Windsor—was still going to have this highway coming through their backdoor. I convinced Ed Havens, who was the mayor at the time, to see if we could mount an opposition to this highway, because it had quite a bit of support. It had the support of the governor. It had the support of the Department of

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Transportation. The governor was Bill O'Neill, so it was heavily lobbied. It was an important project.

I got involved with some conservation groups who had been successful in killing most of I-291, as a proposal to ring around Hartford. Part of that was also the part that was going to go through the reservoirs in West Hartford. They were successful in killing all of it, except the part between Manchester and Windsor, which has been opened as a part of that highway—the only part that ever was built. We hooked up with them—those conservation groups—and they were very instrumental in identifying people in the governing body that would have the veto power over where the highway would be built, and that was the Capital Region Council of Government—the regional meeting of first selectman or the mayor of each town. Over in Hartford's case, they had four representatives, and each of the other towns had one representative.

The town of East Hartford was very much for this road, and part of that reason was because a lot of the Hartford traffic went on the local streets though Governor's Street and Prospect Street up to Route 5. They were very much in favor of this, and they did a lot of lobbying. I really give a lot of credit to Ed Havens, because he was the type of mayor who was very personable, so he got to know the other members of the Capital Region Council of Government. I remember he told me he lobbied Mayor Thurman Milner, Councilman Rudy Arnold from Hartford, because they were on this council. He basically, plus the conservation groups—were instrumental in defeating the proposal. Windsor was very much in favor of the highway too, because it would limit the scope of a reconstructed I-91 through their town.

[39:06] The proposal was decided by the Capital Region Council of Government, and it was a lopsided vote. It was a very, very important victory and was one of the first defeats of a proposed highway, so it was an important milestone for South Windsor to preserve its meadowland. One of the principal arguments we used in coming back full circle to the issue about flood control was—once you put, essentially, a dike in the middle of the South Windsor meadow and East Hartford that means that you are going to have more water going downstream and more possible devastation of flood situations coupled with what our history has been. You put a highway through a meadowland, you essentially—even though there are arguments that there is going to be passage up and down for farm vehicles—you essentially lose it—the farmland.

MACRO: I remember reading in the newspaper that Donnelly was a proponent of the interstate highway on the east side of the river. I wonder if he was a proponent of just that part up to the Bissell Bridge, rather than the whole length, because Donnelly lived on Main Street. It is unlikely, if he was a representative to the state, that he would be so out of feeling—out of sympathy—with the upper Main Street crew, who were opposed. Do you remember?

NICHOLSON: When he served as a state representative, he didn't live on Main Street. He

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basically had moved to Main Street after he had left his position as state representative. I think he served until 1970. I think he maybe served two terms, but he was involved, obviously, with this I-284 proposal. I had always thought that he was part of the opposition to the highway through East Windsor Hill. There were some very important—you probably know, because you live there—there are some very important and influential people who live up there, and they made their voices known.

MACRO: Now, the other item that we thought we'd return to was the matter of blacks working in the local brickyard in South Windsor.

NICHOLSON: Okay, I thought about this after the first interview. When I was in grade school at Union School, probably first through fourth and maybe fifth grade there were five or six black students in our class. Let's take the first grade. There were probably four or five black students in the first grade class. I didn't know them. I knew that they didn't live in the Main Street area. They didn't live on the Main Street area, except I think there was a black family who lived down at the end of what became Ferry Road—in the house at the end of the old Bissell property. I think it was the Bissell house at the end. Other than that, I didn't know much about where the black kids that were in my class or in Union School came from. I think my parents said that they were from the brickyard. I didn't really know what that meant.

[44:25] At that time there were two brickyards when I was growing up—one near Chapel Road, and I don't remember the name of it, but the area is still there. It has some industrial places, but it is just north of Chapel Road on Route 5, but the bigger one, by far, was the one that is up in Route 5 near Strong Road. That was the brickyard that employed the black laborers whose children went to Union School.

MACRO: Is that the one Pola owned?

NICHOLSON: Yes, it was the Pola brickyard at that point. You're right. I forgot the name. Thank you. Then it became—I forget—was it Kelsey Ferguson?

MACRO: I don't know. I'm not sure what it is now.

NICHOLSON: Yes, I think after Pola, it became Kelsey Ferguson, but anyway, you're right, the Polas founded the brickyard. Interestingly enough, when I went with my aunts on a campaigning trip in—I think it was—1956—probably when my aunt was running for state representative, which we talked about last time—against Front Porch Clint [Clint Buckland]…

MACRO: Yes.

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NICHOLSON: …we went to the brickyard with coffee and donuts, and we drove in there, and I immediately had the shock of my life, because I saw in the back of the brickyard there were what I think could best be called shacks. There was very, very primitive housing. I saw a couple of my classmates. I probably was in third grade then. I saw a couple of my classmates, and I was pretty shocked—very shocked to see how they were living. I think that I could sense that they were embarrassed that I saw how they were living. That was a huge eye-opener for me. I didn't know a lot about the way that—I mean—I just assumed they were employed by the brickyard.

[47:22] The brickyard had these "housing" units that they let them stay in as long as they worked there. My recollection is that even though Pleasant Valley School was built in 1957—or '59, one or the other—and the students east of Route 5, which would have included the brickyard, would go to Pleasant Valley School, for some reason, I don't recall that they stayed at the brickyard. I think that—I mean—I don't recall anyone talking about it, but I think somebody decided that these shacks needed to be closed down, because it probably was illegal housing. It was very, very rudimentary, very, very dilapidated, and probably something that you would see in the black areas of the South in that era.

I do recall one very unfortunate incident. When I was in third grade, one of the black students was—I guess what I would now call harassment—was being harassed by the teacher. She called him up to her desk. I remember her saying to him, "You smell like gasoline. Why do you smell like gasoline?" He was very soft-spoken, and he must have said something like, "I was carrying something." I believe he said, "I was carrying kerosene for my mother." I don't recall at that time whether I had seen where they lived or this was before I saw where they lived, but she basically belittled him, because of the gasoline or the kerosene smell. She made him go out to the boy's room, scrub up, and try to get rid of the smell. I don't think he was able to do it. It was on his clothes. I really remember that as a very, very—sort of—vile experience seeing that—the way he was treated. He didn't deserve it. It was awful, but we had an integrated school growing up, which I think never happened much after the black laborers at the brickyard left—wherever they went to.

MACRO: Relations with the black students in the grade school were easy, amicable, natural?

NICHOLSON: Yes, I don't think any of us thought anything about it. There is a picture of my first grade class, and it will show the four or five black students out of maybe 30 students that they were integrated in Union School. I do think that there was some tension among the older grades. I perceived that. I think the younger students got along fine. I think the older ones—there might have been some tension. I do remember an incident—it is amazing when you grow up, how little incidents stand out in your mind.

[51:33] One of my best friends growing up was on the little league. I was not a little league type of person. I tried out for little league, but I was hopelessly inadequate in little league

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that summer. One of my great regrets to this day is that failure—not being able to make the little league; but he was very good—Bobby Murray. He was a pitcher. His little league team was in the championship. I can't remember whether this was the state championship or what, but they were beyond South Windsor. His mother would take a bunch of us to go see him pitch, and we went to Rockville. His brother and a couple of his brother's friends were there also, and I remember that we took home a fellow who was in Jimmy's class—Bobby's older brother—and he lived on Governor's Highway.

Governor's Highway, during the 1950's was not the Governor's Highway as we know it today. It was just a dirt path and probably up near the Fuel Cells Building there was another area of somewhat dilapidated housing. This fellow that we took home lived there, and Mrs. Murray dropped him off. I was surprised that there was this housing there. I never knew it was there, because nobody ever went up Governor's Highway. As a kid, it was just a farm road. One of the kids in the car who lived on Main Street—not one of the Murrays, but a friend of his—made a snide remark about where he lived. I remember Barbara Murray, to this day—and I always remember that—she cut him right off—probably a 12 or 13-year-old kid—cut him right off and said—called him by his first name—"Just be thankful for where you live and don't run down other people." This is an important memory of mine to this day. I saw her last week, by the way. She is 93. She is in pain, but I still ask her questions of events or people that I can't fully remember, and she is sharp as a tack. She is a very dear friend.

MACRO: Yes, the lessons we learn at youth, they stay with us, don't they? Speaking more generally, what would you say about how your upbringing and your life into adulthood in South Windsor have affected your attitude towards the world around you? How has it affected you—would you say?

NICHOLSON: Well, let me take a small bite—just a little bit. I think that the kind of—what I'll call the varied experience that I had growing up in South Windsor—both having lived on a farm, growing up on a farm and having all of those experiences, which I certainly didn't appreciate growing up… I didn't appreciate living on a farm. I didn't like the hard work, but in hindsight, the older I get, the more I appreciate the hard work of farmers and the labor that they put up with and the varied experience of these folks. That experience probably was an important part of me growing up. It gave me some discipline—important discipline—provided a good education at the Union School. I think I got a topnotch education there. I was a good student and enjoyed learning. I had some mediocre teachers—a couple of mediocre teachers, but for the most part, they were good teachers.

Growing up in a small town—I think—it was an important experience for the type of person I am. I mean—I was not an outgoing extrovert, so I don't think I would've survived in a big urban environment. I feel fortunate that I lived in a small community. Living in the same community as your family has lived for a number of years provides you some benefits and also can provide you some drawbacks. I consider it a benefit, because our family was well known,

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and it opened doors for me in politics, when I decided that—and actually, it was probably decided for me, because I was sort of drafted to run for political office. It wasn't something I yearned for.

[57:35] People can accuse me of being overly ambitious in certain areas. Well, politics wasn't one of them. I didn't seek out political office. It sought me, but I was glad for that experience, because it opened my eyes to the important work that local government officials do that people take for granted—that citizens take for granted: stuff that is very important. That goes on at every level of government, although I'm not sure I would say that about—and I'm not an anti-Washington person—but the most recent history in Washington is not something that I would talk about—not appreciating all the hard work that they do—if you can follow that. That was a little convoluted. I would say it was a plus growing up in South Windsor, living there. It was a plus, and I think it contributed to my overall personality and my overall character, if you will.

MACRO: Did you find it a tough decision to leave South Windsor eventually and move down here to Glastonbury?

NICHOLSON: Surprisingly no, because when I left as an adult I didn't have a lot of contact with South Windsor institutions. I wasn't really strongly involved in the community at that time. I think I was involved in the Wood Library. I was doing some volunteer work there, but other than that, I really didn't have much contact. I was a little frustrated with the fact that South Windsor, at that point in time, really didn't have some of the amenities—the creature comforts—that I learned to like—like being able to go to a restaurant—different types of restaurants, do some local shopping. I wanted to get a more modern structure to live in.

This just happened to meet my needs, and I've been very happy the last—I've been here 10 years this July, and that shocked me that I've been here 10 years, but I do have strong roots. I have roots now in Glastonbury. I'm involved in the Association here, and I spend a lot of my time working on Association matters. I'm going to get more involved in the community. I'm trying to convince you to join me in starting a book group, so that we can reform the political world in Connecticut and the nation. I'll keep enticing you to do that. I like Glastonbury—the community. I'm very pleased here. I think it is a more expensive place, tax-wise, to live. The school system is very admirable. They have a very good reputation, and I know a lot of people that I meet at the gym and other places, so all in all, I don't have a lot of regrets for leaving South Windsor when I did, but I'm glad I grew up there.

MACRO: Well, we miss you, but thank you very much, Richard, for submitting to this second interview. We are most grateful, and on behalf of the library, we wish you well.

NICHOLSON: Thank you.

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[Audio ends] (1:01:26)

[This text was amended by ADM according to revision by RDN, Winter 2012/Spring 2013.]

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