Interview

with

Steve Griffith and Watson Dorn
Interviewer:

Herbert J. Hartsook

Date:

29 March 2006

Length:

2 hours

Location:

Steve Griffith home, Prosperity, S.C.

Topics:

Chiefly relates the 1950 campaign by William Jennings Bryan Dorn to be returned to Congress. Watson Dorn, Bryan Dorn’s youngest brother, and cousin Steve Griffith, helped Dorn defeat incumbent James B. Hare and win election to regain the seat he had first won in 1946. In 1948, rather than seek reelection to the House, Dorn had unsuccessfully challenged Burnet Maybank for the U.S. Senate.

Transcriber:

Micki Blakely, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina, March 2006
Interview begins with Steve Griffith discussing materials assembled from the Dorn Collection regarding the 1950 campaign.

Griffith: Here’s what Herb found in his research in the Dorn papers. This was a statement of monies expended after the close of the first primary and before the second primary. It’s $1,245.50. The secretary is eighty bucks, that’s Miss…

Dorn: I made a copy of a check sent to Mrs. Lambert Pratt.

Griffith: Yeah. And then the largest expenditure on this is for radio. $409. Loud speaker for stump speaker, $20. (Laughter) That’s right interesting.

Dorn: This is by Margaret B. Pratt.

Hartsook: It’s interesting that the July 11th Index-Journal noted what each of the candidates had spent, and they said Mr. Dorn had spent $4,944 so far on his campaign. They had Hare down as just $1,426; Vaughan $2,728; and Haywood at $2,771. So Mr. Dorn outspent Hare by three to one. And Hare spent less than anybody. Now, he did have a fifteen minute radio show, just like Mr. Dorn.

Griffith: I wish we could get a copy of that radio address. That was a great one. I didn’t ask WKDK, the Newberry station, which Jimmy Coggins was the owner. He was the one who MC’d the radio address. You remember that one? It started off, Jimmy Coggins said “Remember. Remember.” And then he started detailing what Bryan Dorn had done in his career, “He was elected to the House. He was elected to the Senate. He volunteered for the armed forces. He fought Hitler. You remember, remember. . . .” It was well done. And then Bryan came on, and I believe that the first thing he said was “I want to say hello to my brother T.E. in Korea.” Was T.E. in Korea? Or was it Charlie? It was either T.E. or Charlie. Well he must have been in Japan or in Korea at that time, because, you know, the Korean War started just before the first primary. The first primary in 1950 was July the eleventh. He made this broadcast. I am not sure whether they had it on the radio that night, the night before the election. But I do know they had it on the radio the morning of the election. I think the morning hours they got more listeners. But we had a big hookup. The radio stations. And Bryan started that speech by “I want to say hello to my brother service in the armed forces in Korea.” Charlie was not in the Navy in the Korean War, was he?

Dorn: Yes, he was throughout the Korean War. I don’t know what his position was. He was probably instructing. Later, he became a military air transport pilot, ferrying people from Korea to. . . .

Griffith: Well Bryan could have easily said hello to both Charlie and T.E. in the beginning of his talk.

Dorn: Probably it was Charlie, because he was in the Naval Air Force and he was possibly ferrying troops from Korea and Japan back to the west coast. T.E. was in the Auditor General Squadron of the U.S. Air Force.

Griffith: What I thought we might do is, I would ask some questions and give some of the answers, but you would give more answers probably than I would and then if you want to ask a question, you could do so.
All right, Bryan says in his book *Dorn of the People*, “Before the end of the session” — he’s talking about the congressional session in 1947 — “I married Millie Johnson of Coats, North Carolina.” Now, my recollection was that they did not come back down here, but went on out west from Washington. And the next time I remember seeing Bryan, was at my father’s house in Newberry when he had come over to talk to my father about running for Congress in 1950.

**Dorn:** And that was in the spring, the late spring of 1950.

**Griffith:** I think it was. We were outside, I do remember that. We were standing in the front yard. So my recollection — I had worked for Bryan in the senatorial race in 19…

**Dorn:** ‘48.

**Griffith:** ‘48, yeah, ’48 is the year he got married, that’s right. They had had the primary in August and he had been defeated. Then he got involved in the Dixiecrat campaign.

**Dorn:** Strom Thurmond.

**Griffith:** He made a number of speeches for Thurmond, not just in South Carolina, but in Virginia and maybe Alabama and some other places. But then he went back to Washington. I guess Congress was probably in session. Then, before the session ended he and Millie got married.

**Dorn:** Millie was the Washington editor of *U.S. News & World Report*.

**Griffith:** Then he went out west. And I never did know what the hell he did out there.

**Dorn:** Well, my understanding is that he was a laborer. Potato fields, that type of thing. The only thing he knew was farming. And they worked…

**Griffith:** Well, he and Millie just went from place to place.

**Dorn:** And [daughter] Brianna was born out in Denver or Wyoming or somewhere out there.

**Hartsook:** Before we get away from that ’48 campaign, let me ask you, I was really intrigued with when he was trying to decide to run for governor in ’74. He wrote a lot of his supporters and asked what they thought of that idea. And almost to a man they wrote him back begging him to stay in Congress where he had accrued such influence and power. Did he talk to people before his decision to run for the Senate?

**Dorn:** You have asked whether or not Bryan ever sought or received a consensus or approval from his supporters to run for any political office. It is important to understand that throughout his political career Bryan was extremely independent. He was never a hand-picked candidate. In his campaign speeches, he emphasized that he was no man’s stooge, in nobody’s pocket, that he was not the servant or stooge of any group, and that his only allegiance was to the voters who put him in office, etc. In Bryan’s political life there was no “Pendergrass machine,” no “Daley machine,” no “Tammany Hall” or anyone else that held any strings on him.

I remember the 1940 race for Greenwood County state senator. Two representatives of Greenwood Mills, or actually of James C. Self, came to our home to ask my father, a cousin of Jim
Self and a never-defeated officeholder, to run for the state senate. In two campaigns, 1932 and 1936, they had backed and financed a candidate to defeat Senator W. H. Nicholson, but both times were unsuccessful. My father, age 70, was not interested but he said that Bryan, age 24, could win, provided that the Self empire would not openly support Bryan in any way and under no circumstances provide any campaign finances. Bryan won on the first ballot.

Bryan was fiercely independent and he never let any group or clique or machine control or sponsor his candidacy for any office. Oh, he may have discussed his plans with family or friends, but he had his own agenda and he made his own decisions. Other than seeking the approval of my father he never sought the sponsorship, approval or financing of any groups in his campaigns for the state House of Representatives, state senator, U.S. Congress (thirteen campaigns), U.S. Senator or governor.

Hartsook: But if he was going to talk to people, wouldn’t he talk to your dad?

Griffith: I am sure he talked to a number of people, yeah.

Hartsook: What do you think they told him?

Griffith: I think most of them told him to stay in the House. But you see, if you look back on his career, his career was running for the higher office. He ran for the [state] House, got elected. He ran for the [state] Senate, got elected. He was all set to run for Congress, but World War II came along and interrupted that, so he had to wait till ’46. Then he ran for Congress. The only thing that would have kept him from running for the United States Senate was if they had moved the primary up from August to May. They were talking about doing that. He goes into it in his book. Judge Waring down in Charleston had ruled that the blacks could vote in the Democratic primary and they wanted to go ahead and have the primary before the blacks could get registered to vote. That was the idea. But what that was going to do would mean that most of the incumbents would have a free ride because being able to mount a campaign so early by May would have won and Bryan was of the opinion that he could not mount a campaign if they moved the primary from August to May. He says in his book, I just read that today, that he went to the Executive Committee meeting of the Democratic Party of South Carolina and spoke against moving the primary. He said that it looked like they were going to move the primary until Olin Johnston, who was there and he was a United States Senator at that time, got up and said, “We ought to leave it like it is.” And he said the vote was seventeen to sixteen to leave the primary in August. Now, if you believe what he says in that book, and I have no reason to doubt it, had they moved that primary to May, I don’t think he would have run. But in my view, knowing Bryan like I knew him, I don’t think anything short of that could have kept him from running for the United States Senate. Do you agree with that?

Dorn: Probably so. Bryan was victimized by three basic things. Burnet Maybank’s wife died of cancer, and he got a lot of sympathy votes. That was an unexpected type of thing. Secondly, [Judge] J. Waties Waring opened the primaries, from Charleston, to the blacks that registered. And over 40,000 blacks voted, most of whom were from the lower part of the state, Charleston area. And Bryan got practically none.

Griffith: Yes, he says that he thinks Maybank got about 33,000 black votes.

Dorn: Yeah. And the third thing — President Truman. Bryan was eating Maybank up on the stump and on the speaking. Maybank was not a good speaker and orator. Bryan was a legend, [one] of the best. And he was eating him up. When President Truman called a special session of the
Congress of the United States, and Maybank went back to Washington on the theory that he had to go to Washington to defend the people of South Carolina against that. And how could Bryan speak against it. It was the Senate that was being called, not the Congress. But in that race, I remember Bryan was taken out of it for a while.

**Griffith:** Yeah, he went back to Washington for a little bit but he didn’t stay very long.

**Dorn:** And not for the same purpose that Maybank gave.

**Griffith:** The big action was in the Senate where they were filibustering the Civil Rights bill. But getting back to whether or not Bryan got advice not to run for the United States Senate. Do you agree with me that he got plenty of advice not to run?

**Dorn:** Yes, sir.

**Griffith:** But he was hell-bent to run.

**Dorn:** He was determined. He had it on his agenda. . . . [Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei] Vishinsky had made mention of him.

**Griffith:** Yeah, he was a national figure.

**Dorn:** Yeah. And he had all that publicity. Burnet Maybank was not a good speaker. He operated by organization and power groups, county to county. Bryan was a stump speaker, going from county to county, and he was eating him up on that score. But all these other things happening, he didn’t get…

**Griffith:** There’s another reason I think he ran. Remember, when he first went to Congress, ’46, that was the freshman class of Jack Kennedy and Richard Nixon. And he became buddies of both of those guys in that Congress. And Nixon ran for the United States Senate in ‘48 and was elected. Kennedy ran in ’50 and was elected. And so I’m sure they had had conversations. . .

**Hartsook:** I hadn’t thought of that.

**Griffith:** . . . about that. And in this book, in Bryan’s book, when the Taft-Hartley Act was before Congress he voted for it, for the Taft-Hartley. Then Truman vetoed it. So it was coming back to the House to override the President’s veto, and he says that Jack Kennedy came to him and said, “If you will vote to override the veto, I think I can get you some money to run for the United States Senate.” Well, I don’t think Bryan thought he needed any damn money. All he needed to do was get out and make speeches, and if he did that then he would be elected. That’s my feeling. Now, going back to the spring of 1950. What did he tell you about his plans?

**Dorn:** This morning, before I came down here, I wrote down three basic things. I’m reading from my own notes. First thing is the background and decision to run for Congress in 1950. Bryan was personally broke after the 1948 campaign. No job, no profession, no avocation, nothing. He was without a job, was unemployed. He married Millie in early 1949 and a baby girl in 1949 — Brianna. During 1949 and early 1950 he worked as a laborer in western states and returned to South Carolina in the spring of 1950. His only job experience was an office-holder — holding political
office, the military, and a part-time farmer. He batched it down there in the late thirties and helped manage my father’s farm while he did it. It was now or never in his political career, there was no other feasible alternative. He was broke, he was married, he had no job, his talents and his abilities lay in the political arena. After carefully considering his options, he made the decision to run for Congress, in spite of the tremendous obstacles including lack of finances and the unheard-of attempt to defeat the incumbent son of the former congressman he defeated only four years earlier. That, in itself, was a formidable thing to approach. He was returning from out west. No money. Busted. I think he had the old ’37 Chevrolet. I personally advised him to run, and I offered both financial and personal assistance at no cost. So, that’s the background of his running, and bringing it up to the time that he ran.

Now, his biggest problem in the beginning, aside from the mechanics of defeating an incumbent who was the son of a man he had defeated only four years before, was overcoming financial limitation. And he had to really scramble to come up with that. Bryan, Millie and Brianna boarded at my mother’s house, and of course, he made no contribution to food or anything else. My mother actually housed him and fed him and Millie and Brianna and the rest of them. He had no income, or that type of thing. He had very cheap transportation, an old 1937 Chevrolet, and had donated vehicles and gas. I had a car. My car was put to full use throughout the campaign. They had to go everywhere and, of course I put the gas in. I had the free campaign headquarters. I was just starting to practice law in 1949. I had an office up there in the Textile Building, as you well know Steve. During the campaign, I don’t know whether I made fifty cents practicing law the whole time there. Office was taken over. Mrs. Lambert Pratt became secretary and they had all the…

/Tape 1, Side 2 begins/

Dorn: He had free campaign workers. Bryan utilized his family. And he had nine brothers and sisters, and my mother was still living, and his cousins like Steve Griffith here, Jack Tracy, Millie’s sister’s future husband—what was his name?


Dorn: No, not. . . . My sister Grace not only made financial contributions, because he had no money, had to get it from somewhere, before he ever started his campaign. He didn’t have anybody to make financial contributions before he announced or before he started. But in lieu of that, he had free campaign workers. Family. Kate took care of his daughter Brianna, she stayed there practically all the time.

Griffith: And Millie was sick.

Dorn: Millie got sick after the campaign started.

Griffith: Almost died.

Dorn: We borrowed a car from John Coleman, it was a 1949 Chrysler automobile, which was a right big comfortable car at that time. And I drove her to Thomasville, Georgia, to my cousin Rudolph Bell, who was a specialist in kidney urology. Kate went down there with me and stayed with Millie in Thomasville, and Bryan and I came back to go on the campaign and Kate stayed down there till Millie recuperated. And then after she recuperated she came back
up. During that time we had to take care of Brianna, that’s their child, and so forth and so on. But free campaign workers from family and friends and relatives. Loans from family members and limited donations by family and friends and supporters. I gave you a bunch of checks where I bought suits for him. Clothes to wear. Paid all the advertisements on all the newspapers. I wasn’t making any darn money myself, but anyway that was a commitment I made and delighted to have done so. But the fact is that he didn’t have any money at that time. And the supplies, the checks are there for publishing, for cards and for pamphlets and so forth and so on. All of that was there. Great personal effort by him, his family and friends, without cost. I don’t know how you could value, or put a dollar sign on Steve Griffith’s personal contribution to that campaign — from pushing the cards, to handing out the pamphlets, to managing the speaking engagements — the itinerary, meeting mill shifts night and day, all these type things, and not only for him but there were others in the family — Jackson, Aunt Ella, my wife, my mother, Grace, and others, were all willing to work. And there was a giant cooperative effort. A personal campaign instead of a media campaign. I mean by that, we didn’t rely very much on the newspapers and radio — was no television then. He didn’t have money to buy radio time, and he was not very good in making a speech on the radio. He was a stump speaker, and this new-fangled thing of a radio and a microphone, his voice — he would turn and gesticulate and walk around, and it would fade out and it just wouldn’t come across. So radio and television were never his forte. That ruined him in the gubernatorial race.

Griffith: Yep, killed him.

Dorn: But even in radio, it was not his style. But we didn’t even try to. We did not try to have mammoth organizations, top to bottom campaign organizations, and it was a personal thing. He relied upon a personal campaign. He would campaign and use the cards. And complete personally delivered stuff. You can remember meeting mill shifts day and night. You can remember the pamphlets. Things like this right here [pointing to some 1950 campaign literature], that we personally delivered to every textile home in the Third Congressional District. That means Easley, Pickens, Anderson, all up there, everywhere else. Either cards or sometimes we’d have pamphlets. Steve and I would go down and get us a couple of boys, get the printed material, we’d be in the car and they’d have to go down each mill street and deliver it to the door of every single house. Bryan would go out in the country and go to public places like grocery stores or everywhere else and he would go in and shake hands. He would go out on the farm, see people walking around and the farmer’s plowing. Go out there and speak to him and say, shirt sleeves rolled up, hot, and speak to him personally. Just say, “I just wanted to come by and speak to you.” So forth and so on. Did a lot of that. He practically walked the Third Congressional District by foot. All over. I mean eighteen hours a day.

Griffith: At least. At least. Sometimes he was working even more than that.

Dorn: So it was a personal campaign, instead of a media campaign of press and radio and other means of communication. He personally dealt with and met people, and was very very effective in doing that. He also had innovative and effective strategy and tactics. For instance, nobody—and Steve and I were talking about this—ever had the strategy of having speakings every hour in the popular sections of the Third Congressional District. We didn’t do so in McCormick or Edgefield or Saluda, I don’t know if we did in Newberry or not.

Griffith: No, we didn’t campaign in Newberry at all.
Dorn:    We concentrated on three counties. Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens.

Griffith:    And Abbeville.

Dorn:    Yeah. And thought if we could get those counties, we would be a long way… because we figured we were going to carry Greenwood, and that left small towns of Newberry—well Newberry wasn’t that small—but Newberry, Saluda, which is Jim Ayres home town, Edgefield, and McCormick. Now, we had our people down there, we were from Edgefield, and we had Uncle Jeff and all in Saluda, had Uncle Steve and all in Newberry, we left that primarily to the family and the friends that we had there. We concentrated on those counties where we had to have a majority in order to win that election. That was Anderson, which is the biggest county in the district, populous, Oconee, Pickens was big, and I think we carried Anderson by a substantial amount. Abbeville and Pickens, but I am not sure about Oconee. But anyway that was the tactics, at very little cost. I don’t want to dwell on that I am just trying to cover some things here.

“Campaign tactics” I have listed here. He maximized personal contact—I have already talked about. Like he delivered pamphlets and literature to homes at little or no cost. He met mill shifts day and night. He personally contacted people in public and private places. Effective and unusual speaking tour and schedules, like we’ve talked about. That Steve remembers so well, of scheduling on a Saturday, six or seven. Publicizing it beforehand, contacted the mayors and people of each of those towns to get permission and understanding that we wanted to meet there on the town square at such and such a time. We were very careful to get the police and the officials on our side. We made a very definite strenuous effort to not impose on anybody, to seek their permission and their help. Not to get their vote, but just to give us an opportunity to have a thing there. That was innovative.

Hartsook:    Did that bother the local Democratic Party officials that you were kind of getting away from what they had done…

Griffith:    He says in his book it did. Said it bothered a lot of folks that this was such a departure from the other thing. But looking back on it, that was the key to victory.

Dorn:    But on the other hand, on that point, of course we made an effort. Each county would have precinct speakings or meetings. You would have a general meeting for Congressional candidates, United States Senate, for Governor and state offices and things of that kind. But on [the] county level, you would have people running for Sheriff and House of Representatives, and Senator and Auditor and Clerk of Court, and so forth and so on. They would have an itinerary all over that county, and every county was Pickens, Oconee and Anderson. Well, Bryan would attend as many as he could on those nights at the larger precinct meetings. And he wasn’t scheduled to speak, and I would go out [too]. For instance, take Anderson County and Pickens County, I remember specifically, I got to know the executive director or the county chairman of the Democratic Party. And they recognized that I wanted to say a few words, and whenever I showed up at a meeting, he would say, “We have with us today Watson Dorn, the brother of Bryan Dorn who is running for Congress, and I want him to say a few words.” And he’d invite me down and I’d get up and he’d say “Not over five minutes.” And [I’d] just try to make a desperate speech, enough to get their attention. And Bryan would be doing the same thing. I would leave that precinct, go to the next precinct. I would cover three or
four meetings in the counties, different counties. Bryan would do the same. That was effective personal-type thing. Other than that, Jackson sometimes would help out at that, but primarily it was Bryan and myself. And we had some very innovative fund raising events. Steve and I were talking the other day about the catfish stew that we had at Milford Spring. That’s one of the springboards of the success to our campaign.

Bryan was very impressed with great political rallies that had materially influenced local, state, national and international events. In South Carolina political history there had been regular campaign political rallies for all candidates at places like “Jolly Street,” Gallivants’ Ferry, etc. Bryan wanted a personal campaign rally, with no other candidates, in the 1950 congressional race to generate enthusiasm and support for his campaign and to “whip-up the crowd.”

It was Bryan’s idea. He wanted to “fire-up” his campaign workers and supporters from every county in the Third District and to generate enthusiasm, great support, and hopefully, campaign contributions. So, we planned a “catfish stew,” which could be cheaply and easily prepared by old friends, cooks and cronies of Bryan’s. We planned for old fashioned and tested entertainment like a local string band and local quartet, introductory prayer, the Star Spangled Banner and other patriotic music, a master of ceremonies who introduced notables from each county, short independent reports of progress and the need for campaign financing, and featuring a “rip-snorting,” “fire-eating,” and “spell binding” stump speech by Bryan Dorn in shirt sleeves and with collar unbuttoned. It turned out to be a tremendous and outstanding success and raised considerable campaign contributions. Also, it was an opportunity to supply campaign workers and supporters from every county with cards, pamphlets, posters, bumper stickers and other campaign materials.

In our planning, it was absolutely crucial to have a large crowd including key workers and supporters from every county and to have plenty and extra catfish stew or whatever food is provided. You can’t have a successful political “rally” without a large crowd and you do whatever is necessary to “drum up” a crowd. You can’t have a successful “catfish stew” political rally if you run out of catfish stew. If properly handled and announced beforehand, many people at a political rally will make generous campaign contributions for “expenses,” especially when any leftover or extra catfish stew can be handed out or is available.

Griffith: It jump started the campaign. Until we had that, we were mired down. It was kind of like, if you think of the invasion at Normandy, and you got bogged down in the hedgerows and when Patton came over there they broke out. That’s what happened.

Hartsook: I was surprised reading in the book about the preparation for that, how much effort.

Griffith: Oh yeah, it was a big deal. Because if it had been a flop, everybody would have known it. I say this. Bryan could not have made that campaign without Watson. There was no way under the sun he could have done it. His contribution to Bryan’s campaign was enormous. I can’t overemphasize that. But when we first got started, there were three people, and it was Watson, and me, and the candidate. That was it. And you remember, Jackson was tied up—or tied down, so to speak—because Lester Bates was running for governor. Well, Jackson, Bryan’s brother, sold insurance for Lester Bates. So he couldn’t spend all of his time working for Bryan, he had to spend time working for Lester, and show him that he was working for him, too! And Bryan had a sister up in Oconee County, but her husband was running for probate judge. Russ Carter.
Dorn: Yeah, that’s right.

Griffith: Now, I am sure they were doing everything they could for Bryan in Oconee, but I’m sure number one was trying to get ol’ Russ elected. Now, Gracie campaigned, we got a letter in here where she wrote Bryan and told him what all she was doing. But she made a number of appearances for him, but she was working in Columbia, Columbia is a long way from the Third District, especially if you are talking about the other part of the District where we were campaigning. T.E. was in the armed forces. Charlie was in the armed forces. Griffith Dorn lived in Baltimore, Maryland. So the family was fairly restricted. Aunt Pearl, Bryan and Watson’s mother, was doing the cooking and ironing and washing for the family right there at the home place, and Millie couldn’t do a thing. She came close to dying during that…

Dorn: Very serious. The people at the urologist in Greenwood, Dr. Phil Bates and others, said that the only alternative we have is to take out that kidney. She’ll have to lose it. And she would not accept that and we had a first cousin, Dr. Rudolph Bell, who was recognized as one of the urology experts in the entire southeast. And Millie said, “We are not going to give up on this. I want Dr. Bell. I want Rudolph.” That’s G.D.’s brother, to do that, and he was in Thomasville, Georgia. And he did he was able to salvage that kidney. He did a miraculous job and it took some time.

Griffith: I remember that it was on a Sunday afternoon when Bryan showed up in Newberry. And he and my father and I were out in the yard—in the front yard—and Bryan told Daddy, said, “Uncle Steve says I got to run for Congress again because I got nothing else I can do.” And Daddy said, “Well, you know it’s gonna be a mighty tough race.” He said, “I fully understand that. But it’s the only chance I got.” And Daddy said, “Well, I will do everything I can to help you. And when school gets out, Stevie,” referring to me “can come over there and work for you full time and I’ll take care of all his expenses. We will do everything we can to get you back in, but it’s gonna be tough.”

Hartsook: And you were how old?

Griffith: I was seventeen.

Dorn: Just finishing high school.

Griffith: High school, yeah. And so as soon as school was out, I came over to Greenwood and I remember we, the three of us, met in your office and we looked at the Third Congressional District. We had the population figures, the registered voters, all of that sort of thing. And Bryan said, “Well, there’s nothing I can do in Saluda. They’re going to vote for Hare, so there’s not a thing I can do about that. They are probably going to vote for Hare in Newberry.”

Dorn: There was a fairly close relationship between the Hare’s and Newberry.

Griffith: Well, they’re Lutherans. See, you get onto Newberry College and Newberry was a big Lutheran town and all of that. And so Bryan says the thing for us to do is concentrate our efforts in Anderson, Pickens, Oconee, and Abbeville, that’s where the votes are. And so that’s where we started off. And we were staying in the Plaza Hotel in downtown Anderson.
Dorn: Yeah, I remember that.

Griffith: And the reason we were staying in the Plaza Hotel is because a Mr. Fowler ran it. And he had had a case in which my father was the judge. And my father had ruled in favor of Fowler in this case. And he says, “I’ll do anything for Judge Griffith.” So he gave us a room free of charge. It was one double bed, and you can imagine how it was. It just went down like a V in the middle. But we didn’t spend much time in that bed.

Another instance that I have a very clear recollection of, Bryan and I were in Belton, and Belton’s got a wide Main Street. I mean it’s wide. Because you got the railroad coming through it, you know all those towns had railroads coming through. And we were walking in what I would guess to be a northerly direction. We were walking toward the mountains on a sidewalk there in downtown Belton, and here were three men coming toward us, some distance away. And Bryan recognized at least one of them, probably all three. And those guys crossed the street, so they didn’t have to speak to us. That’s how bad it was when we first started. People were mad at Bryan. He describes it pretty good in his book, said that, “they talked about me being too big for my britches. They talked about me not getting the seat warm in Congress till I was running for the United States Senate. That I had let the people down.” And there was a lot of that. And all of the issues in the previous congressional campaign against Congressman Hare were gone. Because in that campaign you had the returning war hero—young, vigorous, attractive—running against an old man. Had a good record in Congress, he was a fine Congressman, but against this young, good-looking fellow, he didn’t have a chance. Now here’s his son, he’s good looking, he’s a war veteran, Naval hero, and carries himself well. I mean, he’s a nice-looking fellow, and he’s just been elected. Why should we turn him out when his record is the same as Dorn’s? I mean, the votes of the two men in Congress were almost identical. So it was one tough race.

What we were doing during the day was meeting mill shifts, going from business to business in the downtown areas of the towns up there, and visiting people that Bryan had done something for when he was in Congress. One of the things that he did that was very effective, was when he met somebody during the day that indicated that he might be a supporter, or some of them would say, slap him on the back, “Don’t worry about me Bryan. You can count on me.” He immediately, when he got away from that guy, wrote his name down, and his address. And he would send that to Watson, and they would write letters in Bryan’s name to these people. “It was good to talk to you yesterday. I appreciate your encouragement. I won’t let you down.” Something like that. Very short. But boy it was effective because we ran into people the second time around that had gotten that letter. They had gotten fired up. Now, as I looked at these newspapers during this period of time, and especially the Anderson Independent and the Greenwood Index-Journal, just about every day there was a headline on the front page about Russia. It was a big deal back then. And a lot of people thought, remember they quoted Mendel Rivers who was in Congress, as saying World War III is not very far away. That we’re going to have to fight the Russians. So that was very big stuff in the minds of people, and the fact that Vishinsky had called Bryan Dorn “the number one war monger in Congress.” He turned that around to be “the biggest enemy of communism in the Congress.” That’s what he said it was—what Bryan did. And that gave him a stature that, frankly, James Hare didn’t have.

[Tape 2 begins]
Dorn: ... Bryan Dorn is the number one enemy of communism in the United States!

Griffith: Yes, but Vishinsky called him the number one war monger. But anyway, when Bryan said, “I am the man who told the truth,” that’s what he is referring to. Now, the other thing that he was running on in this campaign was that he wanted a strong Air Force. He said we can’t match Russia soldier for soldier, but we can beat them in the Air Force. We can beat them technologically. And that was the theme of his campaign. Now, he had voted against the Marshall Plan when he was in Congress the first time. He modified his opposition to the Marshall Plan, by saying that we shouldn’t spend all the money on Europe, we should spend some of the money in the United States, and a lot of it should go to the Air Force to build it up. The other interesting thing about this congressional race that you get a flavor from in looking at these newspapers is the Senate race between Johnston and Thurmond was not on national defense, as the congressional race was—for Congress in the Third District. But was on who was more against the black man. It was the most racial campaign in the...

Dorn: Olin D. Johnston and Strom Thurmond were just anti-Black, just racial.

Griffith: It was just awful. And one was just as bad as the other. I remember Thurmond was accusing Johnston of not doing anything to stop the integration of the armed forces, as if he could have done something. Truman desegregated the armed forces by executive order. But Thurmond says that Johnston did nothing, and therefore he was jeopardizing national defense. Well Johnston didn’t answer that, he just said that Strom Thurmond, as Governor, had appointed this black man to a medical board, and he Johnston would have cut off his right arm before he would have signed that appointment. Boy, I tell you it was the most racial campaign I’ve ever heard of.

Dorn: In Newberry didn’t they...

Griffith: Oh, in Newberry Thurmond was speaking and Johnston was sitting right there. I was in the courtroom because Bryan was going to speak next. And it was packed. I tell you there wasn’t a place for any more people to get into. They were standing on top of each other almost. And Thurmond says, “And the armed forces were integrated and the Senator did not do a thing!” And old Olin, he got up—it was slow, everybody in there knew he was getting up, but it took him a while to get out of his chair. Great big fellow. He says “You are an unmitigated liar.” And Thurmond says, “Nobody can call me a liar and get away with it! I’ll see you outside after this thing’s over!” He stood there, I remember, folded his arms over his chest, he says, “I landed in a glider behind enemy lines in Normandy during the invasion. And I wasn’t scared of those Germans then, and I’m not scared of you now!” (Laughter)

In the congressional race, there wasn’t any of that. The only thing I can find in anybody’s speeches as they’re covered in the newspapers that I looked at was a comment by Bryan, who referred to Booker T. Washington as a great man, who believed in caring about both races. And he said, “That’s what we need to do in South Carolina, is emulate Booker T. Washington.” And that was it.

The gubernatorial campaign was another interesting thing. Byrnes was running. And the other three in the race were Lester Bates, Tom Pope of Newberry, who had been Speaker of the House, and Marcus Stone. Marcus Stone ran for something every two years. And Byrnes would get up at these meetings in the court houses and just thank the people for their past support, and
he said, “I will look forward to working with you as your governor.” And he would wave to the crowd and walk out of the courthouse. And he didn’t speak to a soul. Just would throw up his arm. Unless they were right in his way, and he would shake hands with that guy. Then he would get in his Cadillac limousine in the back seat and old [Willie] Byrd, his black chauffeur, was dressed in a chauffeur’s uniform, would open the door for him, and he would throw up his hand, and off they’d go. And that was that campaign. Now the rest of them, Pope and Bates and Marcus Stone, spent all their [time] lambasting Byrnes, which was a mistake, because the more they lambasted Byrnes, the less votes they got. I mean it was just one of those things where Jimmy Byrnes was just… he was a god almost. So you had those three different races, and it was something.

Dorn: Probably was the most bitter and hard-fought senatorial campaign. . .

Griffith: Senatorial, yeah.

Dorn: . . . in 1950, between Olin Johnston and Strom Thurmond, since Cole Blease and Ira B. Jones was running for reelection. . .

Griffith: Right, for governor in 1912. Anyway, we were up there in Anderson, traveling around, and most of the nights we would meet the twelve o’clock shift, mill shift, at some mill. And then we would go to bed. And we were back up at five o’clock the next morning to meet the six o’clock shift.

Hartsook: And the late shift would be seeing you still there, when they’re coming off. How impressive must that have been?

Griffith: Right. Now, sometimes, Bryan would let me go to bed, and he wouldn’t get to bed until two o’clock, because there might be some small mill changing shifts after twelve o’clock. And he just simply crawl through bed. Now, as we were going from place to place, I was driving the car. He would sleep. And he mentions in his book about sometimes the biggest meal of the day would be a watermelon. Well, that was the truth. We would stop and get a watermelon, I guess we’d pay a quarter. Sometimes they’d give them to us. But we didn’t even have a knife. We would just take the watermelon and bust it on a rock. And he’d take half and I’d take half and we’d eat it with our hands. But anyway, Bryan and Watson decided that we were going to have this catfish stew at Milford’s Pond and the first thing I saw in the newspaper was that on Monday, June the 12th—the election was going to be on the 11th, [the] primary. Of course that was THE election, there was no general election of any consequence. There was a news article. It was not an advertisement. We did not advertise this thing in the newspapers at all. “Friends to give catfish stew in honor of Bryan Dorn in Milford Springs, Thursday at 6pm. Drop a card to Mrs. Lambert Pratt at 432 Textile Building, or phone 9-2176.” That’s Watson’s office. Then they had it. And the front page of the Index-Journal on Friday, June the 16th, says, with a big picture on the front page, “1400 people attend Bryan Dorn rally last night.” And it mentions Wilbur Luquire and his band of Dave McCoy, Walter Rush, Luke Adams, and Louis McNeil played. A quartet of Edgar Davis, Harold Herd, Richard Demont-Battem and Tommy Chandler sang. R.M. Rush was master of ceremonies. And this is an interesting thing, it says Winifred Wills, that’s a cousin of ours, she’s also a lawyer, was married to an Episcopal priest who died not too long ago, “Winifred Wills, Steve Griffith, Jr., and Mrs. Watson Dorn decorated the truck from which Dorn spoke. Carl Daniels made an impromptu solicitation for funds.
Several hundred dollars put in hats.” Well, I think he probably got a couple thousand. I remember Colonel Dave Hayes from Newberry, who was a good friend of my father’s, was there, and he got very excited because Bryan made a great speech. He was a big Thurmond man first, big Thurmond man. But, he was a Bryan Dorn man second. And he came up to Bryan and pulled out what looked like to me a big roll of bills, and I think he gave Bryan about five hundred dollars that night. Bryan said in that speech, “During World War II there was a western front and an eastern front. The war was won on both of those fronts. And then the peace was lost on the cocktail front in Washington, DC,” and the crowd just whooped and hollered, they just loved that. (Laughter) “On the cocktail front!”

Hartsook: When you all were planning this, how many people did you think you would attract?

Griffith: I think we would have been happy with 500.

Hartsook: And when did you realize it was going to be over a thousand?

Griffith: Well, we were down there early, and people started coming early, and you could tell it was going to be a big deal, couldn’t you?

Dorn: Yeah, that’s right.

Griffith: It was a lovely evening in June. Probably pretty hot because that was a hot time. I remember the newspapers talking about how hot it was on some of those days in June. But you could tell it was going to be a big crowd. And everything went great. The catfish stew was as good as anybody ever tasted, which was unusual because you know Watson described the catfish stew. A lot of time the cooks get drunk and couldn’t cook the damn thing, and get dirt in the stew, you know all kind of things.

Hartsook: I know with barbecue you start cooking the night before, I don’t know about catfish stew.

Griffith: Catfish stew, you probably cook it a couple of hours, wouldn’t you say?

Dorn: Yeah, it has to simmer good.

Griffith: You got these big old black pots out there and they got these paddles, and they got potatoes and onions and…

Dorn: Seasoning.

Griffith: All kind of stuff to go in there, and that’s got to cook and then they put the catfish in last. Anyway, another thing he said, “Use some of the Marshall Plan money to build up the Air Force. All I want is another chance to take a crack at Vishinsky and Joe Stalin and apply old Greenwood County horse sense to current problems.”

Dorn: (Laughing) That’s right.
Griffith: And of course, that wasn’t all he would say. He would always quote some historical figure on something. He would make a speech in which people would get excited. And I remember old Colonel Hayes getting so excited there that night. He ran up to give him that money, and he was tight fisted.

Hartsook: How long was a typical Bryan Dorn speech?

Griffith: Probably about an hour. Wouldn’t you say? At least thirty minutes.

Dorn: Yeah, at least thirty minutes, or maybe—varying on the circumstances—if it was like a catfish stew or something like that he would speak longer.

Griffith: Now, after that success we had some money. And we had this truck down there that Bryan spoke—it was a big old flat-bedded truck, probably carried logs or lumber or something like that.

Dorn: Real long body.

Griffith: Anyway it was a great truck to use as a platform and it was mobile. And so what we decided to do—and I say we, I was just a bystander in the decision process, really—but we decided to make speeches in the small towns on Saturdays. And so we scoped out an itinerary. And the first itinerary was for Saturday June the 24th. The second itinerary was for Saturday July the 1st. The third one was for Saturday July the 8th. I have found ads in the papers for two of those things, and I don’t have it for Saturday July the 1st, but I can reconstruct that, I think, from memory. The first one for Saturday June the 24th began at Williamston—that’s in Anderson County—at 10am. Then we were going to speak in Belton at 11am, in Honea Path at 12 noon, at Abbeville at 3pm, Calhoun Falls at 4:30pm and Iva at 8pm.

Now what we would do is we would get in touch with the mayor of the town and the police chief and say this is what we would like to do. We would have scouted the town out to decide where’s the best place to speak, and we would get their permission to do this. And Watson would drive the flatbed truck, and if we were going to speak in the town square in Belton, then that’s where he would park the truck, set up the loud speaker—we had a record player and he would play patriotic songs, John Phillip Sousa, Under the Double Eagles, Stars and Stripes Forever, and announce periodically that Bryan Dorn, candidate for Congress, number one enemy of Communism, going to speak at ten o’clock. Now, I was in another car and it was a coupe. It had a loud speaker on the top of the car and we would drive this car through the mill villages or the towns, residential areas, and say the same thing, ‘Bryan Dorn will speak at ten o’clock in the town square.’ And of course back then on Saturdays people went to town. And we attracted real good crowds, at least two or three hundred at every one, wouldn’t he?

Dorn: Farmers—this to them was a social thing. It was an entertainment-type thing.

Griffith: Now that was the first one. There was one, two, three, four, five, six speeches. I don’t know how many we had Saturday, July the 1st, because we don’t have that information. But I do know we spoke at Pelzer, we spoke at Liberty, we spoke at Easley, we spoke at Pickens. I remember particularly speaking at Pelzer, because I was standing there—there’s an open area there in the little town of Pelzer, right across from where the mill is. It’s a good area to speak from. And we had a pretty good crowd there, several hundred people at least. And Bryan made
a speech about the Marshall Plan—giving away money to the Arabs. And I remember he asked the rhetorical question, he said, “Where are the good roads around here that they promised you?” I don’t know who “they” were, but “they” had promised them some good roads around Pelzer. He said, “I’ll tell you where they are! They’re in the desert! In Saudi Arabia! They are building super highways for the camel, the goat, and the donkey!” Well this guy standing there beside me got so excited, he said, “I just don’t think that anybody can vote against this man!” I said, “Well, you make sure your wife’s registered to vote.” He was talking to me because he didn’t know who the hell I was. I said, “You make sure your friends are registered, and you get all your family registered, and you all vote on Election Day for Bryan Dorn.” He says “By George, we’re gonna do it!” Then, on the last Saturday of this campaign, on July the 8th, he spoke one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight times. Started at ten o’clock and ended at nine o’clock. Started in La France, Clemson, Erie, Westminster, Walhalla, Seneca, Salem, and then we ended up in Anderson on Glenn Street.

Hartsook: It’s even more impressive than that. It didn’t end at nine, that’s when he started his last speech. Probably ended at ten…

Griffith: That’s when he started his last speech. And I suspect that that was probably the one where his voice was cracking so bad. I remember, we would get hot lemonade, no sugar, just lemon juice squeezed in a glass of hot water, to keep his vocal cords open. But I know sometimes he’d speak for over an hour in one of these places, because we were always behind schedule. We were never on time. And in the meantime, we got out this brochure, which I thought, at the time, was the best political advertisement I had ever seen like this. And I don’t think anybody else had ever used anything like this, do you?

Dorn: I don’t believe so. Not on that same level.

Griffith: This was mailed to ever rural box holder in the Third District. And we personally delivered it to just about every house. Certainly in Greenwood, Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, all up in there. And the way we would do that is we would get some drivers and they would have a whole batch of these things and we would go to these towns and we would hire some boys—kids. And we would go down the street and they’d go down each side and deliver these things, and we’d turn and go down the next street. And it was an organized effort, and everybody that was doing this did it the same way, we were trained to do it that way. The catfish stew at Milford Springs, the speakings in these towns on Saturdays, and this thing, this delivery of this thing right here [picking up flyer], I think were all unique to this campaign, without which we would not have won. Now, if you look at the vote in the Third District, Hare carried Newberry and Saluda by about the same margin over Dorn as Dorn did over Hare in Greenwood, that was his best county of course, by far. And Dorn won Greenwood two-to-one and we were counting on that. We were counting on Greenwood. Because he was so well-known and was well-liked. The other big turning point was in Anderson, and Dorn got 5,091 votes to Hare’s 4,221. We didn’t carry Abbeville. We lost Abbeville by about 300 votes. We lost Oconee by about 200 votes. But, we carried Pickens by about 500 votes and we carried Edgefield by 400 and we carried McCormick by about a hundred. So in the end, we had about a thousand vote lead over Hare. Dorn got 22,851, and Hare got 21,764. Haywood got 1,830 and Vaughn got 4,189. So that made it a second race. And by the time the second race came around, things were really going our way.
Herb found this letter from Daddy to you [Watson Dorn]. It’s dated July the 15th. He says: “Dear Watson, I tried to call you this morning and am now writing you in hopes that this will reach you by Sunday morning. Unless you have some particular objection, I think that I should use Steve Jr. here, and now plan to come there tomorrow afternoon for him. Please get him word to be expecting me and be prepared to bring a supply of cards and other material for use in this county.” [He believes his father wanted to get active promoting Dorn in the runoff] Because he was embarrassed that Hare had gotten so many votes in Newberry. I didn’t have time to go into that second race, but I think Bryan carried Newberry the second time. Anyway he won by about five or six thousand votes in the second race.

Hartsook:  And the Greenwood paper makes a big deal about the first election having such a strong voter turnout. And the second one, they say, was low voter turnout. But really, the difference is only about 6,000 votes. I thought that was a very strong turnout for that second race because you don’t have all the excitement that you had for the first one…

Griffith:  Right. You didn’t have the gubernatorial race, you didn’t have the senatorial race. Most of the time, you didn’t have the sheriff’s race. Sheriff’s race will bring out more people than any other race. But, we could, of course, do some research and it would be mammoth [undertaking] to do it, but I don’t believe there is a race like this in the history of this country, where you have a man defeating an incumbent congressman, and leaving that seat, and running for another office, and then coming back and running against the son of the man who succeeded him.

Hartsook:  What do you remember about Hare as a candidate? I know the book says that it sounds like he was, perhaps, a little formal.

Griffith:  Yeah.

Hartsook:  I know he could not come and spend nearly the time that Mr. Dorn did on the campaign trail because he had to be in Washington…

Griffith:  Yeah, there was a special session of Congress during that time, but there wasn’t much going on in the House. The action was in the Senate. But he did leave the campaign and went back to Washington. I don’t think Hare thought that Bryan had a ghost of a chance against him, do you?

[Tape 2 Side 2 begins]

Dorn:  James B. Hare—and I hope I am not saying anything critical—he was a little bit stuffy. He was a little bit aloof. He grew up as a congressman’s son. He was a graduate of law school. He was an officer in the Navy in World War II, and a veteran, and here he was, an officer in service, an attorney at law, educated, the son of a…

Griffith:  Well, he had been to Harvard. Been to Harvard Law School.
Dorn: . . . a former congressman from a distinguished family, and distinguished record, and here was a fellow who had no formal education other than high school, who served as a corporal, or something like that, in World War II. And here he was, had been defeated and stepped out of the thing and practically made a jackass of himself by leaving the job that he had, and he just couldn’t conceive of his being defeated. He didn’t think it was necessary for him to campaign hardly at all. What he didn’t know until the last thing, until there was…, what our strategy was. If we could carry the first race, that’s why we worked so darn hard, if we could carry that first race over the incumbent, we knew we had it in the sack.

Griffith: We knew we were going to win. Yeah. Going to win. During the campaign you very rarely saw ol’ Hare. We would run into him at the county courthouses when the congressional candidates would all speak. In that year, they divided the campaign between the state offices and the federal offices. So you had Thurmond and Johnston and Bryan and Hare and the rest of them speaking on one circuit, and you have the gubernatorial candidates with the other state offices like attorney general, Mr. T.C. Callison was running for attorney general. Remember, Charlie Plowden ran against him?

Dorn: Yeah.

Griffith: But Mr. Callison won, didn’t he?

Dorn: Yeah, he did.

Griffith: Yeah. He was a great character. A great gentleman. Wasn’t he?

Dorn: He was a very distinguished-looking gentleman. Gray hair, tall. Very suave.

Griffith: Yeah, he was a Southern aristocrat, wasn’t he? He had those differences but, we would go—I know Bryan and I would go—to all the campaign meetings. We didn’t just go to the ones where he was speaking. But we would go to the ones where Byrnes and those were speaking. Now he didn’t get to make a speech, but he got to shake hands with everybody there. Byrnes didn’t shake any hands, but Bryan Dorn did, because I remember we were at Abbeville and Mr. Byrnes came over and shook Bryan’s hand. Bryan was standing there by his car. And Miss Maude [Mrs. Byrnes] was in the car. She was in the back seat. And old Byrd [Mr. Byrnes’ chauffeur, Willie Byrd] was out there greeting everybody, he was a hell of a fellow, well met, I mean he knew all the politicians.

Hartsook: We talked about the funding of the campaign a good bit. In that memoir, Mr. Dorn says that after the Milford Springs event, I don’t know how long after, a textile man gave him $5,000 cash.

Dorn: Ok, that’s Brother Abney. John S. Abney, of the Abney Mills. Brother Abney was a character…

Griffith: And he was the guy who built that house across the street from Bryan.

Hartsook: Ok.
Dorn: But never lived in it. He died.

Griffith: Yeah, he died before he got in that house.

Hartsook: Now $5,000 for that campaign, that was just a fortune.

Dorn: That was the big, big gift that really, other than the Milford Springs thing and the contributions that came in right there.

Griffith: Well, didn’t Mr. Rush give some money? I know he gave some cars.

Dorn: Yeah.

Griffith: We used a number of his cars. This was all after the Milford Springs thing.

Hartsook: Because that’s when he shows that he’s a viable candidate?

Griffith: That’s the dividing line in the campaign. Until Milford Springs, it didn’t look too good.

Hartsook: Now who is Mr. Rush?

Griffith: Am I right about… Who was the automobile…? He was a used automobile dealer.

Dorn: There was a John Coleman, there was a Clinton Ouzts.

Griffith: Ouzts, Ouzts, Ouzts. Ouzts was the guy I was thinking about. I remember he had some Desotos, Dodges or something.

Dorn: Yeah, John Coleman and Clinton Ouzts…

Griffith: Because that ’37 Chevrolet just quit. I was telling _____. If only we’d gone up to White Water Falls up above Walhalla in the mountains, they were having a big celebration up there and there were several hundred people. And we were coming back and the car just quit. Wasn’t a thing to do, just quit. And it was just pouring down rain, it was just cats and dogs, I’ve never seen the rain so damn hard in my life. And so I got out and was thumbing’, and this guy stopped and said “Where you want to go Bryan?” and Bryan said “We’ll go anywhere you going. I was trying to get home to Greenwood.” He says “I’ll take you.” So he took us to Greenwood. And I think that was the end of that car. We may have picked it up, but I don’t think we did.

Hartsook: Now, you talk about the really long days, and certainly I can see that in the last month of the campaign. But when did he really start putting in those twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen hour days?

Griffith: Oh that started early. I don’t know when I got out of school, but I am guessing it was probably May the 25th or 6th, somewhere along in there, because I remember we got out of school in May, didn’t run into June. And I got out of school and went right over to Bryan’s and that’s when we went up to Anderson. And those sixteen hour days started right then.
Hartsook: So really two months of really intense. . . ?

Griffith: He was in the best shape of anybody I can ever remember. There wasn’t an inch of fat on him. He says in his book that he went in this grocery store and picked up two twenty-five pound sacks of sugar and held them out. Nobody else could do that in that thing. He called it “muscling out.” I don’t remember that. I don’t have any recollection of that. But I was with him every day for a month. He and I were not separated, except for the times that he would let me go to bed and he would stay out and continue to work. We would always come home on Saturday nights. We did not campaign on Sunday. That was kind of a no-no.

Hartsook: And would you stay with him that Sunday, go with him to his church?

Griffith: Oh yeah, we would go to his Momma’s home, his Daddy had died.

Dorn: Myrtle Manor at that time.

Griffith: Yeah, Myrtle Manor.

Hartsook: Somewhere, I forget where I saw that, there was a reference that Olin Johnston and his brother Bill were strongly supporting Mr. Dorn. Do you remember that? And what form did that support take, if you do recall?

Dorn: I do remember this, Strom Thurmond and Olin Johnston were in a dead heat for the United States Senate in that campaign, and I imagine Bill and everybody else was concentrating on that race…

Griffith: And Bill was running for reelection for Mayor of Anderson.

Dorn: And probably would not try to take any part in it. But when Bryan, later when Burnet Maybank died, and he had already had been nominated in the primary without opposition for another term in the United States Senate, that opened it up, when he died, before the general election. And Bryan was in the Congress and was the runner up in 1948 against Burnet Maybank and was the natural selection. But Edgar Brown was state chairman of the Democratic Party of the Executive Committee, and he had run for the United States Senate in 1938 when ‘Cotton Ed’ Smith and Olin D. Johnston were running neck-to-neck for the United States Senate in 1938. Edgar Brown dropped out and decided to forego the election. But he had his eyes on that Senate seat if he could get it. He was well-known as the “Duke of Barnwell” and so he had pretty well sewed up the Executive Committee of South Carolina, which assumed that they could nominate a nominee since Burnet Maybank had been elected, but had died. So they substituted a nominee for the Democratic nominee for United States Senate. Bryan, of course, was the logical selection for that, and Bill Johnston came down from Anderson, and particularly tried to do everything he could to get Bryan to move down to Columbia to actively solicit this position. But Bryan was kind of hesitant about that because he didn’t think it was correct and ethically correct to jump in there for a man that’s hardly cold and hadn’t been buried, to jump in there immediately to try to seek a nomination. And he held off. Well, in the meantime, Edgar Brown had consolidated his position and he was nominated as the candidate. And that’s when Strom Thurmond, realizing the potential of somebody like Edgar Brown, who had locked up the
Barnwell ring and had horse-collared everybody and got himself put in as the nominee without any vote from the people at all, that’s when he decided to go on the write-in ticket and was elected.

**Griffith:** I don’t know that there was any overt action on the part of Senator Johnston or Bill Johnston supporting Bryan.

**Dorn:** Not in 1950.

**Griffith:** I think that Bill Johnston could or did, where he thought he could, put in a favorable word for Bryan. You got this letter here in the files from John Henry Burley, saying, “I was in Columbia at Senator Johnston’s headquarters on election night and had occasion to talk to quite a few people from your district. Mostly from Anderson and the majority were of the opinion that you would win.” Well, by the time the first primary was over, that was true. But, I do think that the Johnston crowd preferred Bryan over Hare. And that Johnston-Thurmond race was too tight to get into other races. But I think they helped us, now.

**Dorn:** Wilton Hall, the publisher and owner of the *Anderson Independent* was a very strong personality, but he was close to Bryan and wrote a lot of editorials, and all in favor of Bryan when he was in the Congress of the United States and in this election. So he definitely, in Anderson, did all he could, as far as he could within the limits of propriety of the paper, to support Bryan. And he, of course, was a great supporter of Olin Johnston and Bill Johnston, and wrote editorials in the *Anderson Independent*. So all that kind of ties in. But as far as any overt actions in the 1950 campaign, I don’t believe either Olin Johnston or Bill Johnston had the desire to try to enter into a separate race which could effect their race.

**Hartsook:** Mr. Dorn repeatedly talks about running a “clean campaign” and correspondence told him of smears being made by the opposition, particularly in that two-week runoff period. Were the Hare and Dorn campaigns dramatically different?

**Griffith:** I wasn’t very much involved in that second primary. I was a delegate to Boy’s Nation and I went up there, so I wasn’t really involved in the second primary. But there were some rumors circulated by both sides.

**Hartsook:** What were the rumors that the Hare campaign was circulating? What were the smears?

**Dorn:** It was generally accepted that Hare had drinking problem and that perhaps that may have gotten out somehow or talked about. Maybe somebody else was responsible for it.

**Hartsook:** But what kind of smears was the Hare campaign putting out about Mr. Dorn?

**Dorn:** Other than the fact that he had quit a job that he held previously, and now was trying…, something along that line, emphasizing that type of thing. Not anything that would be any moral thing, not that I recall.

**Hartsook:** What do you recall about that two-week period for the runoff election. Did the campaign change much, other than losing Steve?
Dorn: Well, I don’t recall any speaking, like itinerary or going to these towns, like we did in the first campaign. But he kept up his strenuous activity because he didn’t want to let it down in any way, shape, or form. And he made efforts to get Theo Vaughan, and the other fellow…

Griffith: Haywood.

Dorn: …to try and influence their supporters to swing for Dorn against Hare, because they had voted for them.

Griffith: But here’s a letter you found in this thing. This is the second race. It’s to a Miss Richardson in Townville [19 July 1950]. “With regard to the false rumors and stories that are being circulated and which may be circulated against me, I can only say I am running a clean campaign and I have never flung mud or lambasted my opponents. Unfortunately, in this second election false rumors and all kinds of stories are being circulated against me. Among the business people and farmers they are saying that I am being backed by the C.I.O. In textile villages they are saying I am backed by the Manufacturer’s Association. In Edgefield they say I worked for Olin Johnston, and in Anderson they say I am going to run against Olin Johnston.” (Laughter)

Hartsook: Can you talk just a little bit about his [Dorn’s] energy and his drive, and his ambition? Because he notes that he basically outworked the opposition and probably would have beaten anybody with the kind of effort that he and you all put into that campaign, which clearly seems to be true. But was that kind of energy—was that contagious? I mean, why did you work so hard for him?

Dorn: Well, if I do say so, our family is a close-knit family. My father was never defeated in public office and he was considered by many to try to persuade him to run for Congress against [John C.] Taylor. You remember Taylor? And my father said no, he had reached an age that he was not wanting to get back in—he retired from the superintendent of education job when he was sixty-two, and he didn’t want to get back into that situation. But, see we had ten children and my mother’s brother was Jeff Griffith who was Solicitor for the 11th Judicial Circuit and was highly promoted to maybe run for governor. And then, of course, Steve’s daddy was a judge and Eugene Blease was the former Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court, and he had been counted out, so to speak, by the Charleston crowd against Maybank. And he was very much in the foreground in that respect. And, of course, Judge Griffith has always been very close to my mother. Just a tight family.

Griffith: Well, Bryan had a magnetic personality. You just enjoyed being around him. He was always up to something, wasn’t he?

Dorn: Yeah.

Griffith: He liked to do things. We’d go seining in the creeks and rivers, and catch fish and fry them. He enjoyed that sort of stuff. He enjoyed going to football games. He just was, a great…
**Dorn:** He was a person who could associate and enjoy relationships with the common man, the working man, if you want to think of it that way. He was never considered a stiff-neck or something of that kind. He was always down to earth.

**Griffith:** No, there was never any protocol about him. Now, he never did say this, but I think he expected those around him to work as hard as he did. I know his office was managed that way. The people that worked in his office in Congress worked like heck. He had a rule, if you got a letter it was going to be answered. And not next week, the next day, if at all possible.

**Dorn:** But the work ethic comes from my father, if I do say so, having seven boys. He was a pretty strict taskmaster. He had us boys working on the farm, through Saturday. All the time we were brought up to work, to compete, to be competitive. To attain scholastic excellence. Oratorical contests. I can remember the time I was in the fourth grade in oratorical contests. And Jackson and Bryan and Charlie and George and Griffith and all of them, practicing at home. My mother sometimes would write the speeches and we would practice at home. But a competitive spirit that permeated the whole family, whether it was my father’s sisters were all very much, all their children went to college, which was unusual back in the days for women to do that. They all excelled academically and became professional people on the Griffith side of the family. I think your dad and Uncle Jeff, and all of them attributed a lot of that to my father’s influence as the headmaster of Zoar High School. And training these people back in those days, to have speaking contests, and to have political speakers at their commencements. I think he placed some of them in the—like your Uncle Jeff skipped the freshman class at Wofford College.

**Griffith:** Yeah.

**Hartsook:** Now, am I right that Miss Millie basically did not participate in the campaign? That she would occasionally appear on stage, but her health did not allow her to do more than that?

**Griffith:** Right.

**Hartsook:** And did she appear many times, or was that very rare.

**Griffith:** I think the only time I remember seeing her was at Milford Springs, on the campaign trail. Now, I would see her on the weekends, at Myrtle Manor, Barrett house, they called it.

**Hartsook:** Do you know how many copies were published of the handout? [holding up a campaign flyer titled, “Another Step To Socialism: Excerpts From A Chapter Of A Forthcoming Book by Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn.”]

**Griffith:** I’ve never seen that before in my life!

**Hartsook:** Because he talks about it as a chapter of his book. And when I first saw it I assumed somehow I had missed the book. This was, you know, fifteen years ago, but…

**Griffith:** Not that I know of. When I saw that in that material I was just amazed. He talked about writing a book all the time, but hell, he never got around to it. And this book [the memoir
written with Scott Derks] wouldn’t ever have been written if it hadn’t of been for Millie. Millie was really the author of this book.

Hartsook: I didn’t know that.

Griffith: Yeah. She typed it. And Millie had a lot of energy too, you know? God almighty. Phone would ring at two o’clock in the morning, you knew damn well who it was. It was Millie and she had some damn crazy idea about—mostly about Strom Thurmond. She was not involved much in that.

Dorn: But in the 1950 campaign, which we were relating to, see she had had no prior experience in any campaign in Bryan’s life. Not in the senatorial campaign. Not in the congressional campaign. She had just married [Dorn] in 1949. She had a baby and they were out West, and she had not been into the family at all. And then she had that illness. So she was slow at that time to aggressively assert any knowledge of political campaigning because she had not had any experience in her life. Now, as time grew on she became very adept at it. Very good.

Hartsook: I’ve got two more questions for you.

Dorn: Yes.

Hartsook: One of the letters—to you—from Mr. C.O. Bowie of Belton notes that a Mr. Strickland “will make fiery speeches at textile mills.” Do you recall a Mr. Strickland?

Dorn: There was a Fickland. . . . A Strickland? For or against? (Laughs)

Hartsook: Oh, I’m sure he was making pro-Dorn speeches.

Dorn: I remember—he was up there from Belton?

Hartsook: That was the person who wrote you, was from Belton, so…

Dorn: There was a Strickland that was a supervisor, a person in the Belton mills. I think that’s what he had alluded to.

Hartsook: Ok. The last thing I want to ask is, John J. Riley was also returned to Congress that year, also defeating the man that had defeated him in ’48. Did you pay much attention to Riley’s race against Hugo Sims?
Dorn: Not really. I didn’t.

Griffith: No.

Dorn: I remember Hugo Sims, he was from Orangeburg.

Griffith: Hugo was a liberal.

Dorn: Yeah. He was a little bit out of the mainstream. And he kind of got himself cast in the wrong way there.

Griffith: Now there have been many many campaigns where a former incumbent beats an incumbent. You see that all over. But this was not that.

Hartsook: Right.

Griffith: This was entirely different.

Dorn: Have we answered your questions?

Hartsook: I’m done, yes.

Griffith: I think this is just a super piece. And I think that the house [The Dorn home, Barratt House] looks better with these porches on it than it does without. What do you think?

Dorn: Of course, I spent my childhood sitting on those porches, and having many conversations with my father and all that.

Griffith: Watson’s daddy was a great guy. He was a character. I mean to tell you, he was a character. But he was a brilliant educator. He came over there to the school that my grandfather had built. He had given the land for it and had built the school, and he was the one responsible for hiring Mr. Dorn as the principal or the headmaster. They had older boys going to school there. I mean these were in their twenties. And they were kind of roughneck, they were rednecks. And they ran off the previous headmaster. And Watson’s daddy got over there and he stood up before that crowd and he says, “I am six feet two, weigh 185 pounds and wear a size thirteen shoe,” or something like that. He says, “I can handle any one of you individually, or probably most all of you together.” (Laughter). And my granddaddy says, “I don’t believe Brother Dorn’s gonna have any trouble.” (Laughter). But they had a great school there for—I don’t know how many lawyers and preachers and doctors that he graduated, but bishops in the church and judges and lawyers and distinguished physicians.

[End of interview]