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## **Interview with Jack Parker**

13 August 2009

Location: The home of Jack Parker, 3410 Union Avenue, Chicago, Illinois  
Present: Jack Anderson, Dr. David W. Veenstra Ph.D., and Jason Marcus Waak

### **Corrections by Jack Parker made 2014**

[The interview has already begun]

Jason Marcus Waak: We're recording the interview now. We are in the home of Jack Parker at 3410 South Union Avenue in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood. Jack grew up as a kid knowing Mayor Richard J. Daley.

Jack Parker: Here are some newspaper clippings. Here is one from the funeral. They're kind of beaten up. Here's a great picture of the president [looking through his photographs]. You know guys, at his wake I stood in line for a couple of hours. And it was zero weather. Many thousands of people were standing in line outside the church to visit him. Do you want to look at this stuff? [DWV and JMW look through old photographs and newspaper articles]

David W. Veenstra: Yes. It says here that Carter came to the funeral, too. He was coming. This was before the funeral.

JP: That was after the mass or coming out of the church [looking at a photograph].

DWV: Sure. Here's Rockefeller. So the vice president came, and the president elect. That's pretty amazing.

JP: This is Kup's column. I think there was something in there about him.

DWV: Yes. The language is really interesting because this was on Christmas. Right away, the headline says [reading the newspaper clipping], "Mr. Daley's death put a damper on the Christmas spirit in Chicago."

JP: [Looking at a newspaper clipping] This is Ted Kennedy here. My son was invited to appear on the altar during Daley's mass. He's a priest. Mrs. Daley invited him to be on the altar.

DWV: That's interesting.

JP: He's now the pastor at All Saints Church at Twenty Eighth and Wallace.

DWV: Walter Mondale was at Richard J. Daley's funeral. It makes sense as he was the vice president-elect.

JP: Did you read that poem? That's a hell of a poem.

DWV: I did. Here, let me read it. "He was just a kid from Bridgeport, near the yards across the track, that grew up to love the city, and the city loved him back. He could smile and charm your socks off, and he always drew a crowd. But his first love was Chicago, where they made him tough and proud. And though he walked with presidents and royalty as such, his strength was with the people. It's called the common touch. Now his city by the lakefront and his monumental crown, for that kid that came from Bridgeport, 'twas indeed his kind of town."

JMW: That's very nice.

DWV: That's "A requiem for the Mayor." Maybe we could start with a couple of early questions. When did you first become neighbors with the mayor?

JP: I forget the years that it was. But we lived on Emerald Avenue, here on Thirty-third. When he married his wife, we didn't know him. He moved into the house across the alley from our house. We had a big yard with a basketball hoop. We were kids shooting baskets. He moved into the house across. A couple of days later, he'd come out and kind

of be watching us from the alley playing. And he got to join us shooting baskets. We might have been, I don't know, eight, nine, or ten years old.

JMW: You were on Emerald and he lived on Lowe.

JP: No. They were on Union.

JMW: Oh, they were on Union.

JP: But the house was across the alley. I remember that we were playing catch with a hardball that was taped. You know, it was during the Depression. If we had a ball, we'd wear the cover off of it while we were playing with it. And then we'd tape it with some black tape. So he came over one day playing catch. He said, "Where did you get this? Don't you have a better ball?" We said, "No." The next day he came over with a new hard ball for us to play catch with [DWV laughs]. They didn't stay there too long.

Then they moved to Thirty-fifth and Emerald. It was like a temporary boys club with some vacant apartments upstairs. When they moved there, his mother and father lived with him and his wife. They didn't have any children. We'd be in the boys club there. They were rebuilding the new building. It was just a temporary thing. When his mother would go to the store on Halsted, we'd all watch for her to help her carry the bundles upstairs because she was good for a quarter for whoever helped her [DWV and JMW laugh]. We used to watch for her. Then we'd all wrestle each other to try to get to her first so we could help her [JMW laughs].

But they were great people. I think if everybody in the world was like him -- his wife, his mother, his father, and his family -- it would be a bit of a better place to live in. But he was much older, of course, about eighteen years. He became more of a fatherly-type guy to me. I lost my father when I was a year old. I never knew him. He was kind of a father to me a little bit. He'd take me to a Notre Dame game once in a while. He'd take me to a Sox game once in a while. You were talking about Mike Daley. Do you know Mike?

JMW: Yes. We know Michael.

JP: Here's a picture of Mike [handing DWV a photograph]. That's me and a judge by the name of Wosik. Don't ask me what the occasion was. I don't remember [DWV laughs].

DWV: Actually, this has been Michael's idea as anyone's. Our office, a couple of years ago, started interviewing with Mrs. Daley before she passed away. Michael was pleased with those interviews. So he asked that we conduct more of them. It also helps our story with the history of UIC. But as we've been doing this, we've covered a lot of his political career. We're trying to get a little bit more of the other stories -- the stories people don't know about the mayor, such as playing basketball. You mentioned it. It's a great story. So, just to kind of pick it up, he was at Thirty-fifth and Emerald at the old boys club. That's where his family was?

JP: Are you familiar with the boys club? It's right over here on Emerald Avenue.

JMW: Yes.

JP: It's a brand new big club. Before the building was there, when they started the boys club, they had a little house on the corner here at Emerald. When they started to build a new place, they moved it temporarily to Thirty-fifth and Emerald, where Daley was. He wasn't mayor then. They moved into it, his wife, his mother, and his father. They all lived together.

DWV: So from there, when did he move to the house on Lowe?

JP: I don't remember the year.

DWV: Okay.

JP: I have no idea. Mike could tell you that. I'm sure.

JMW: Okay. So you said that he'd taken you to some Notre Dame games and some White Sox games.

JP: Yes. It was not all of them, but once in a while.

JMW: Yes. How old were you at the time, probably?

JP: I was probably ten, eleven, or twelve, in that area.

JMW: Then, you would see him every so often from then on out? He was still in the neighborhood.

JP: Well, that's another picture I got. He was a sports-minded guy. He always figured that if you were stealing second base, you couldn't be stealing a car or something [JMW laughs]. He was sports-minded. At the Hamburg Club, which he was the president of, they had great athletic teams. Well, I was just a kid. We used to go and watch them. They got older. Then I got older. I was playing with a good basketball and softball team. The Hamburgs were all older guys and they weren't winning anymore. And he wanted to get some youth in the club to rebuild the athletic program. So he got a hold of me. I was playing with this other team in the neighborhood. We were pretty good. He thought that our team would be a good basis to start athletics at Hamburg again and start winning. He was very competitive. He wanted to win. So he got me to get the guys in. I've got a picture of the basketball team, if you want to look at that.

JMW: Sure.

JP: So we got playing. He was a state senator then. Do you see him on the end there [pointing to a picture on the wall]?

DWV: Yes.

JP: We won a lot of championships. He was really pleased with the team we had. I'm in that picture, if you're interested. I call it the Senator Daley Hamburgs. Did you ever hear of Ed Krause, the athletic director at Notre Dame? This is his brother, who was on that team [pointing to the picture].

JMW: Okay. So he grew up in the neighborhood.

JP: Bill wasn't from this neighborhood. He was from the Town of Lakes neighborhood, over around McKinley Park, by Forty-seventh and Ashland.

JMW: Okay. So he brought you guys into the Hamburg Athletic Club, playing sports.

JP: Yes. Then he brought us all in as members. We kept representing them playing softball. They had a handball court at the Hamburg Club in the back. He was a hell of a handball player. We used to play. He was just a competitive guy.

JMW: And where was the Hamburg Club at?

JP: It was at 3523 Emerald. It's still there. Now, they've got a gym in the back, instead of the handball court. They built a gym in the back where the members' kids play and they play.

DWV: This was the time when he was the president of the Hamburg Club. What was it like playing for him? You said he was a good leader. Can you give us a couple of examples of that? It sounds like he was an excellent organizer at that place.

JP: Well, he was a supporter. He supported the team. He got it going. I don't know how you would say that, since he was the president of the club. He was just a sports-minded guy. He wanted guys playing sports a lot. And he played, years before I got around there.

He played football. They called it the Coronal Hamburg. They told me he was a hell of a football player. He played basketball years back.

JMW: So, what year would this have been, about?

JP: I think it would have been about 1939 or 1940.

JMW: So then, was that mostly how you knew him, from the athletic events? Your relationship was focused mostly on the athletic events?

JP: Yes. Like I said, he was kind of a father image. You know, I grew up without a father.

JMW: I didn't realize that your relationship went back so far. When Michael said that you were a neighbor, I thought you lived maybe across the street or something.

JP: Well, the whole area were neighbors.

JMW: Okay.

JP: In those days, everybody was neighbors. You didn't have to lock your doors or anything. You slept in your backyard. Nobody bothered you.

JMW: So what was the relationship like between the neighborhood and the mayor, as he was growing in prominence?

JP: Oh, he was well thought of, yes. He was a good guy. He always tried to help somebody, in whatever way he could. They loved him around there.

JMW: What were some of the ways that he helped people in the neighborhood?



JP: Well, when he became the ward committeeman, it was during the Depression years. He'd distribute baskets with turkey and vegetables in them. Whoever needed help, he would get together with his help and arrange some baskets to send them for Christmas or whatever.

DWV: So people were coming to him. If they didn't have work, they were coming to him?

JP: Well, he was the ward committeeman. Yes. He gave up that when he became the mayor. He gave up ward committeeman. I think his son Richard took it over when he left. When the war started, he kept in touch with all of the members that went away. He was too old. And he had children then. I don't know how many children he had then. Of course, Bob Bagarzet went into the war.

DWV: You see, we don't have a lot of those stories from his early years. I've never heard about that before, corresponding with the soldiers during the war.

JP: Well, they were members.

JMW: So it was the members in the Hamburg Club that were inducted into the military.

JP: Here's a picture when they came home. Here's a picture of all of the guys that came home from the war [passing the photograph to DWV]. They had a party at the club to welcome home all of the members.

DWV: So you fought in the war?

JP: Yes.

JMW: What branch did you serve in?

JP: I was in the Army Air Corps. But I wasn't a flyer. I was a member of an air-sea rescue unit for planes that went down. We'd go searching for them and stuff like that. I was no hero [JMW laughs]. I think we lost three members from the club.

JMW: Where did you serve?

JP: A faraway place out in the South Atlantic.

JMW: Ascension Island?

JP: Why yes, how did you know?

JMW: I study naval history; Ascension Island was a major staging area for the British during the Falkland Islands War.

DWV: Do you have any other stories? I guess this was through while he was in the state house and the state senate. What did he say about education? I mean, the sports part is really interesting. What about education?

JP: Oh, he definitely encouraged all of us younger guys, when we came out of the service, to go to college. We could go for free under the G.I. Bill of Rights for serving. You could go to college with no tuition. He tried to talk to all of us who hadn't had an education. Most of us didn't have an education. But he did his damndest to try to get us to go to college. But I never did it. I got married during the service. I got my wife pregnant right away. So I had a child when I came out. I wasn't interested in going to school. I'm sorry I didn't.

JMW: Sure. So he encouraged education. He went to DePaul. Did he ever go with guys on visits to campus?

JP: I don't remember his college days at all. I think he went to school at night, most of the time.

JMW: Yes he did.

JP: It took him a long time to get his law degree. But when he wanted to do something, he did it.

JMW: Yes. Do you have any stories about his determination once he made up his mind on things?

JP: No, not really. I can't think of any. I'm going to be ninety years old. The brain slows down a lot. I can't remember a lot of things. But all I can tell you is that they were a great family, they were great people, and neighbors.

JMW: Do you have any stories that we haven't asked about?

JP: No, not really.

DWV: He was married. He had some children. Did you see him playing ball in the yard with his kids?

JP: No. He was just fooling around in the yard and that, shooting baskets. When he was playing handball, he was a very good handball player. I'd seen him do that. But I'd never seen him play football.

DWV: The mayor struck me as extremely disciplined. I mean, he went to mass every day.

JP: He went every day.

DWV: That's always the example I think of when I think about his discipline. His work habits were incredible. Do you remember any of that kind of discipline from the early days of the club?

JP: Well, he was the president. The members wouldn't do anything wrong. I remember when we first joined. One of the guys was cursing a little bit. He said, "We don't appreciate that kind of language around here. We don't want to hear it again." The guys would all listen to him. He had that certain knack. When he wanted it, you went along with him. Well, that's about it. I can't remember much more.

DWV: Okay. It's been very interesting. These interviews have given us a much broader picture of the mayor.

JMW: That most people never see.

DWV: Nobody ever sees it. I'm going to remember the story of basketball.

JP: It's a good story. Yes.

DWV: Why do you think the Mayor's kids went into politics? John and William are in politics, and of course, the current mayor.

JP: He may have encouraged them. I don't know.

DWV: Was that his kind of personality, that he encouraged public service of others?

JP: He might have encouraged it. But he didn't force it, I'm sure.

JMW: Thanks for sitting with us Jack.

\*\*\*\*\*END OF INTERVIEW\*\*\*\*\*