

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

RICK E. AZAR
(born Ricardo Carballada)

June 25, 2011

Interviewer

Brien R. Williams

Jack Kemp Foundation
Washington, DC

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview for the Jack Kemp Foundation with former Buffalo sportscaster Rick Azar. We are in his home in Whispering Pines, near Pinehurst, New Jersey—

Rick Azar: North Carolina.

Williams: North Carolina. I'm distracted because this microphone is not there. Okay, now we're set.

Pinehurst, North Carolina. Today is Saturday, June 25, 2011, and I'm Brien Williams.

Rick, let's start with a little bit of your background.

Azar: I was born in Buffalo. Don't remember much of that at the time because we moved to Brooklyn, New York, at an early age. Spent the early days of my life in Brooklyn, started grammar school in Brooklyn. Then just before the war, World War II, my family moved back to Buffalo. My father got a job at Bethlehem Steel Company; he ended up as a millwright there. My mother owned a beauty shop in Brooklyn, New York, called Puss 'N Boots Beauty Shop.

Then my education continued in Buffalo and I graduated from Canisius College, and sort of didn't know what I really wanted to do. I was an English major. I got a job at a fire insurance company in

Hartford, Connecticut, because I was bilingual. My parents spoke Spanish to me when I was a child, and I still am bilingual in Spanish. So anyway, I got this job because of the fact that I happen to be bilingual, and that was in Hartford. I spent a little over a year there. I had been involved a lot in college before that, actually, CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] in dramatics and all that kind of thing, and had done some radio work while I was in school.

When I went to Hartford, I got connected with a group called the Mark Twain Maskers. They were a semiprofessional theater group that produced five plays a year. They hired a professional director. I was in a couple of plays with them. The director owned a summer stock theater in Farmington, Connecticut, and he asked me to do a play with them in repertoire one summer. So I did that, and a New York director saw me and said, "What are you doing here?"

I said, "Well, I work."

He said, "You should be in New York."

Well, that's all I needed. For several other reasons, I wasn't that happy with the job, although the people were great. So I packed up my bags and off I went to New York to become an actor. Don't ever try doing that. [laughs] Because I learned quite early that success in the theater is one-in-a-million shot for anybody who tries to do it. I

met a lot of those people in New York, several of whom did go on and got to Hollywood and studied and did all that kind of stuff.

Finally, I landed a part in a play that was on tour. I'd done some summer stock in Barnsville, Pennsylvania, and the owner there had a play in residence in Chicago. So one of the guys was leaving there and asked me if I'd like the job. Well, to go from maybe 25 bucks a week as an intern to 125 bucks a week as a legitimate actor, I said, "Sure thing."

So off I went and toured for about six months in that play and made some money, met a lot of great people. *New Faces* was in residence in Chicago at the same time. Met Eartha Kitt and a lot of very famous people, Ronnie Graham and Paul Lynde and all those people. They were there and we used to hang out a lot after both shows were over.

Williams: What was the title of your show?

Azar: *Maid in the Ozarks*, done by John Kenley, who was a very famous producer and quite a character. As a matter of fact, I got an email from somebody who was doing a history on John Kenley and had seen my name. I don't know how he got in touch with me, but he did. The list of what they call Kenley Players is unbelievable. I mean,

every actor I ever heard of worked for John Kenley at one time in his career.

Well, anyway, the show closed in Pittsburgh just before Christmas. I went back to New York. I now had an agent, so my career was starting to move forward. This was December 15th, something like that. I said, "I'm going back home for Christmas and I'll come back after the holidays."

"Okay, great." Go back to Buffalo.

Williams: About what year was this?

Azar: This was in the early fifties. While I was in college, I had worked at a couple of radio stations with summer jobs and things like that, and I ran into a guy who was an announcer in a station in Niagara Falls, New York, and I ran into him. He said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "Well, I'm going back to New York."

"No, come to work for us. We need a guy right away."

I said, "Nah." So I'm thinking, "Well, I'll work until April and then I'll leave. I'll save a few bucks and I'll go back to New York in April," because that's when stuff starts to happen on Broadway and things like that.

So I did that. I took the job. I was at a big function that I was invited to, some big sports thing, and I went to it and ran into a fellow who went to high school with me. His name was Delmonico [phonetic] and he was a violin player like I was, and he said, "You got any connections in New York?"

I said, "Yeah, one of the big record producers, a good friend of mine, Danny Kessler. I know him well."

He said, "Gee, that's great. I've got this young lady here who is a great singer. Maybe you can do something for her."

I said, "Yeah, sure. Where is she?"

He says, "See the girl over there in the yellow dress?"

I said, "Yeah. That's the girl I'm going to marry. There she is." [Gestures to wife sitting by his side.] That's a true story. So I stayed. I never went back to New York. That's what happened.

So eventually I went from that radio station to an NBC station that opened in Buffalo, WBUF. From there I went to New York City and I was on the staff at New York. I was a staff announcer at NBC.

Williams: Network or local?

Azar: Everything. When you were on the staff there at NBC, you worked for four stations. You worked for local and network radio, local

and network television, and you were in all studios right in the RCA Building, the whole thing.

Williams: Let's just backtrack for a second. You were at WHLV in Niagara Falls. What was your role there?

Azar: I was just an announcer. You did all kinds of things. You did station breaks. I had a show called *Azar's Attic*, which was just before a show by Joe Rico, who was a big jazz impresario. We're friends to this day. I learned all about jazz and stuff like that. As a matter of fact, did a show up here in Sanford for three or four years. I just stopped doing that. But at any rate, that's how it happened.

I went from NBC to NBC in New York, and a new station was opening up in Buffalo, Channel 7, WKBW. They called me. They said, "We'd like you to come back and be on the staff at WKBW."

So I went to the people at NBC, because in those days you worked on twelve-week contracts which were renewable every twelve weeks. Strange arrangement, but I understand it from their point of view. So I went to them. This was in November. I said, "I have a job offer. I would like to have you guarantee me work from now until April, and then give me one of the summer replacement jobs in April," that went all the way through to October. I said, "If you guarantee me

work from now all the way through October, I'll stay. I'll move my family down and take a shot."

"Well, I don't know if we can do that."

I said, "Okay, you got two weeks' notice."

And they said, "What?"

I said, "You have two weeks' notice. I got two little babies at home and I need to take care of my family, and I can't do it on the [unclear]. So I quit."

He said to me, "I think you're the only staff announcer who ever gave notice. Most of the time they get fired, but nobody ever gave notice."

Well, I did, and I went back and I put Channel 7 on the air. I announced them on the air. It was owned by [Clinton R.] "Doc" Churchill at the time, that station. Then CapCities [Capital Cities Communications] came along a couple, three years later, and bought the station.

I have to say Cap Cities is probably one of the all-time great not only broadcast corporations, but any corporation that ever existed, because they did work for everybody at the station. They had profit-sharing, they had stock options, and that's not just for the upper echelon; the mail boy was included in those things. I've often thought, I said, boy, if every corporation was run like that, we'd never

have any problems. That's how good they were. A guy named Tom Murphy was the chairman of the board. We still meet every two years in New York. They ended up buying ABC, that company.

So that was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I became sports director there, and the rest is just one of the best things that ever happened, as I said.

Williams: What brought you to sports in particular?

Azar: Well, I had done a little bit of that. I was a pseudo athlete, not good enough to make the school teams, but enough to play all the time. Played basketball morning, noon, and night. Wasn't good enough in some of the other sports. Played sandlot football, you know, played baseball. I did all of that stuff and I was very interested in sports and teams and things like that, the Buffalo Bisons [minor league baseball team], when the Buffalo Bills first came into Buffalo at the All-America [Football] Conference back in the late forties. So it was a natural for me.

When Cap Cities bought the station, I had been doing the news there, and they said, "We'd like you to be news director."

I said, "Well, I'm not so sure. You want me to do the six and eleven? I'm not going to come in at eight o'clock in the morning and

work until midnight. And if you're news director, you've got to be here at eight o'clock in the morning."

They said, "No, we want you to do the six and eleven."

I said, "Then I'm turning the job down."

They said, "Well, how about sports director?"

I said, "Done deal." That's how it happened, and I was there till the day I retired.

Williams: So that was, according to my records, 1958.

Azar: That's when I first went there.

Williams: Give me just a brief account on the Buffalo Bisons. Did they go out of business at a certain point or were they still there when—

Azar: They were there when I was there, when I took that job. The Bisons were a viable thing. They played in old Offermann Stadium. I'm doing a little memoir thing, remembering some of the things that happened with the old Bisons and some of the players who came through there and went on to great things. Of course, that was more in my young days, before I was actually in the profession.

But the Bisons were still there and I would go to games sometimes. The only two people in the press box was the guy covering them for the [*Buffalo*] *Courier Express* and the guy covering them for the *Buffalo News* and me. That was it. It wasn't the kind of thing that everybody was, "We've got to go to the Bisons game," which is the case today.

Then they lost the franchise for quite some time. I'm trying to think of who the mayor was that decided to bring baseball back. [James D.] Jimmy Griffin. He got a franchise in AA, which was below AAA, and people thought he was crazy, but it was fairly successful. He put the team in the old War Memorial Stadium, which was strictly a football stadium and it wasn't conducive to baseball, really, although they filmed the movie *The Natural* in that stadium. That was another big thing. I almost had a part in that movie. [laughs] But they decided to eliminate the part altogether.

But anyway, that got some interest. Then Bob Rich came along, of Rich Products, and got involved in doing the baseball thing, and Jimmy got them to build a new stadium.

Williams: Jimmy?

Azar: Jimmy Griffin, the mayor. They built this terrific Minor League ballpark, seats 20,000, expandable to 40,000, because at the time there was a lot of talk about them going to Major League baseball. Bob Rich got involved and he was going to be the guy and so on and so forth. So there was all kinds of talk and several other cities that were involved. My company was involved in bringing the franchise, because they were getting involved in a lot of different things. I can go into a lot of stuff that really doesn't matter because we're not into that.

Williams: Let me ask you this. Before [Ralph] Wilson and the Bills come in '60, how would you characterize Buffalo as a sports town?

Azar: I think it was probably one of the great sports towns because the city is strictly an ethnic town. It's one of the things that makes it, in my opinion, one of the unique cities in the country. There are some cities like it. Chicago is an overgrown Buffalo. That's the best example I can give you, because Chicago is very ethnic, they're very sports-minded, they have everybody in the world living there from one country or another, and Buffalo is the same, not nearly as diversified, but they have a big Italian, a lot of Polish people, all kinds of things like that. The ethnic quality of the city is the thing that makes it a

great city, a great small city. Somebody said that to me just the other day about Buffalo being a great small city, and it is. The people there are very much together, they're very proud of the place. I mean, people say, "I wouldn't do back there. It snows too much." It snows all over the place. It snowed more in Washington this past year than it did in Buffalo. But they have to live with that reputation and they're stuck with it, and that's it. And they don't mind. But that's the kind of city it is.

They had that Minor League baseball. They still have Minor League baseball. They had professional basketball for a while, and because of a lot of skullduggery, in my opinion, that went on in the departure of that, because some guys got involved in, "Well, we'll do this and we'll do that," bought the team, giving the impression that they were going to keep it there, and six months later they were gone.

Williams: To?

Azar: Actually, they ended up in San Diego, but they did a switch with the Celtics in Boston. It was very contrived, and I don't want to go into that. But that's what happened.

Then the Sabers came along at the same time, in 1970. They both started at the same time. The Sabers have been hugely

successful. So the city is a good sports town. They don't have the outlets because of the limited marketplace, but other than that, the fans in Buffalo are hugely—I want to use the right word. They have a lot of fervor, and it shows.

Williams: So talk about the arrival of Ralph Wilson. How did that happen?

Azar: That was a strange time, because in 1946 the All-America Conference came to Buffalo, which precursed the American Football League. The Buffalo Bills, they were originally called the Buffalo Bisons, after the baseball team. That only lasted one season. So they had a contest and somebody came up with Buffalo Bills, and they weren't sure what that really meant, but supposedly after Buffalo Bill Cody. I'm not sure if that's the real reason, but they decided on Buffalo Bills, and they became the Buffalo Bills.

They had a very good football team. George [W.] Ratterman was the quarterback. The only other team that really could compete with them at the end were the Cleveland Browns, which became a huge factor in the National Football League. Well, they went out of business and they absorbed Cleveland, San Francisco, and Baltimore, and the people in Buffalo were outraged, because we had played

Cleveland for the championship and had them beat, and they scored three touchdowns in the fourth quarter, whatever it is, to win, the Browns. So the Bills were very, very, very competitive in the All-American Football Conference. So they were out of football for quite a while, until Ralph Wilson came along with the American Football League, and the rest is history, as far as he's concerned.

Williams: Did he visit Buffalo beforehand to sort of see whether this was the town he wanted to commit to?

Azar: I would expect that he did. I can't tell you for sure that he did, but I would expect that he did. But he chose Buffalo over Miami. There were several expansion teams, but Miami was part of that expansion, the Dolphins. He could have gone there. There was a lot going on there, too, with Dallas supposed to be in there and then they bowed out. There were troubles with Oakland. It was all kinds of stuff going on. Ralph, for whatever reason—and I never asked him—maybe it was the proximity to Detroit, because he still lives in Detroit, but he chose Buffalo. Of course, the people in Buffalo are, to this day, thankful, some of them. Some of them still say, "Get that guy out of here. He's a cheapskate and he doesn't do this." But that's normal. That's a normal part of professional sports.

Williams: So what was it like the first season, the inaugural season in '60?

Azar: That was a time really when I was pretty new to doing sports. They trained out at the Knox's estate in East Aurora, and Buster Ramsey was the coach. They didn't have a very good team, but they did okay. They played in old Civic Stadium, War Memorial Stadium. They expanded that stadium at Ralph's request so that they could have access to more people being able to come into the game and so on and so forth, because I think the original War Memorial Stadium had something like 30,000 seats, and they expanded it to 45,000 or something like that. You would have no idea some of the venues that were being used in the early days of the American Football League. You would not believe it. Jeppesen Stadium [Houston, Texas] and the one out in Oakland, the one in Boston. But they managed. They managed. These guys were bound and determined to be successful in the league.

As far as Buffalo was concerned, they didn't really start having a representative team for quite some time. In the early days, they didn't have a quarterback. Tommy O'Connell, who was former quarterback for the Cleveland Browns, he was a veteran, ended up

coming to Buffalo and opened up a clothing business or something. [laughs] O'Connell, Lucas & Shelf, I think was the name of the store. [Richard J.] Richie Lucas was their first draft choice. None of these guys were really any good, but they managed. They kept their nose above water and they obviously became very successful.

Williams: So in 1962, account for Kemp coming to Buffalo.

Azar: That was the thing that changed everything for Buffalo, really, because, as I said, they didn't have a quarterback. Jack was with the San Diego Chargers—and the Chargers were a very successful team already—broke this finger, and he was put on waivers. Nobody thought that—he's injured. Who's going to claim him? But the Bills claimed him, and they were shocked, for 100 bucks they claimed him. He's off to Buffalo, and I don't think he was too happy about that at the very beginning. I don't think he was. But he did, he came to Buffalo and they waited for that finger to heal.

This is how we got to meet him originally. He wasn't even playing yet. I got a call from a Dr. Bernstein [phonetic], who happened to be a friend of Edith [Azar]'s family. I knew him, not well, but enough that they knew who I was and so forth. Got a call from

Dr. Bernstein and said, "How would you like to have lunch with Jack Kemp?" Dr. Bernstein was taking care of him.

So he drags me out to Niagara Falls because they were at Niagara at training camp, and that's how I met Jack Kemp. We became good friends, which at the time there was a whole metamorphosis in the sports business. It was okay to be friendly with professional or nonprofessional or athletes or anything. It was okay. But then that kind of changed as we went through all of that. Suddenly, "You can't be friendly with them. They'll be too influential," and all that kind of thing. But I was there when those guys were at my house eating spaghetti that my wife made and playing bumper pool.

There was a funny thing about Jack, who was a very competitive guy. We were playing bumper pool in my basement, and he got so upset with missing a shot, he took the cue [demonstrates] and he stuck it through the ceiling. It had the powder-blue thing that you put at the end of a cue stick. It was all around the hole and I never had it fixed because I was able to tell people, "You see that? Jack Kemp did that." [laughs] He was quite a character. He was quite a guy.

[Pause.]

Williams: So what kind of an impact did Jack Kemp have on the team?

Azar: Huge.

Williams: In what way?

Azar: That's an understatement. It was a huge impact because of who he was, because he was not afraid to speak his mind, and he was a legitimate quarterback who could throw the football a mile, had a very, very strong arm. He was a very competitive guy. But that wasn't all of him. A lot of athletes I could have said the same thing about and that would be the end of it, but Jack was a heck of a lot more than that. He got involved.

I can remember—this is moving ahead a little bit—when they renegotiated his contract. The Bills had a small office in the Statler Hotel at the time. I happened to be there. He negotiated his own contract. He didn't have an agent or anything. He negotiated his own contract.

Williams: Was that unusual for the day?

Azar: Yes, it was. I wouldn't say unusual, but not usual. I don't really know about a lot of other players, but I knew a lot of other players had agents. Jack did not have an agent. He went in there and

he's negotiating and he's negotiating and he's negotiating, and I'm sitting outside. He came out and he came over to me and he said, "They offered me 50,000."

And I almost fainted. That was a lot of money. I said, "You took it, didn't you?"

He said, "Well, what do you think?" See, that's part of him too. "What do you think?"

I said, "That's a huge amount of money." Back then.

He said, "You think so?"

I said, "Yeah." Bing! He went in and signed the contract.

He wasn't afraid to speak his mind, and that got him into trouble sometimes, because even in those days, you could tell this guy's going to be in politics. You could just sense it. You could feel it. He used to get into arguments with George [T.] Saimes, who was an all-pro safety and a terrific football player, was on the total opposite end of the political spectrum that Jack was. Well, they would get into it on team playing and all that, I mean *really* got into it, but when they were on the football field, they were family.

It was an interesting thing to see how intense and how much it really meant to Jack. This guy wasn't an ordinary politician. I'm kind of getting ahead of it here, but he was the kind of a guy that I would have political discussions with. Several times, she [Edith Azar] can

remember in our living room when we really got into it, but I would vote for him any day in the week because he was the most sincere politician I ever met, and I met a lot of them. They're nice guys. I'm not trying to put anybody down. But Jack was unique. He was different. He believed all this stuff. He never said anything for political reasons. He wouldn't do that. It wasn't in him to do that.

I remember giving him, when he opened his office in Buffalo and became a congressman—there was a guy at our station that used to do drawings, and he would do drawings of, like, *Time* magazine Man of the Year or something or other and put that person in the thing. So I went to him and I said, "I want you to do one of these for me for Jack Kemp." Man of the Year or whatever it was. And he did that for me, and I signed it for him and told him why I thought of him the way I thought of him, and I called him a true patriot. And that's what I think about Jack, because that's what he was. He identified to me what the founding fathers, who all had differences of opinion, but all had the love of this country in the pit of their stomach, and that's what Jack did. That's what he had.

My wife worked for Mac McGarry [Richard D. "Max" McCarthy], who was total opposite, because Max was a good friend of mine, he was a congressman, decided to run for the Senate, and so that thing became open. So Jack was on the phone, "What's Max going to do?"

What's Max going to do?" So we were very involved. Edith worked for Max. She worked for Jack. I mean, that says a lot to me about who Jack Kemp was, because a lot of people, "He's too conservative for me," or whatever. But I think he transcended that in Buffalo because of who he was, being the man that he was, known to everybody. Everybody knew who he was and so on and so forth. He had a leg up on winning that election. But having said that, he deserved to win it. He deserved to win it because he deserved to be in Congress because of the kind of individual he was. There was no skullduggery. There was no political aptitude or anything—I shouldn't say the word "aptitude"—advantage for him. He didn't play politics. It's unusual for a politician not to play politics, but that was Jack. I think that stayed with him all the time that he was in Washington. That's why I admired him a lot.

I disagreed with him. I said, "What are you talking about, supply-side economics? What is that?" And I would kid him about that, but it didn't matter, because I knew what he had in his heart was the best for this country.

Williams: Well, you're making me do a lot of editing of my notes here.
[laughs] That's great.

Let's just finish with him and football. You say that he was critical to the success those championship years. Then what happened?

Azar: We'll talk about the football thing for a while. The Bills drafted a guy named Daryle Lamonica. Jack had an up-and-down relationship with the fans because of what he did on the field sometimes. Sometimes he was terrific. Other times he's running around and gets tackled for a 20-yard loss. But that's because he was competitive, not because he was a dumb guy. So he had a love-hate relationship with a lot of fans. So along comes Daryle Lamonica. Well, Daryle Lamonica was a threat to Jack. He didn't confide that to too many people. He did with me because I was more than just a guy who was doing sports; I was a confidant of his. We would talk about Lamonica all the time. So Daryle had some great success, a huge arm and all of that, was not near as smart as Jack was, and I think anybody would tell you that. He was a great guy and all that, I'm not saying anything negative about him, but he didn't have the brain that Jack had.

So this was a competition for him, and Jack was very uncomfortable with it. He would come to me. I'll tell you the exact situation. We had to go to Boston to play the Patriots in a game that would determine who would go to the championship game. People

were saying, "Lamonica ought to start." "Jack ought to start." All of that. It really bothered him a lot, and he said, "Who are they going to start? You know who?" He was asking me for information. "Am I going to get the job?" That kind of thing.

I said, "Jack, I don't have any idea. They wouldn't tell me anyway."

But Jack got to start and won the game, so that meant a lot to him that he was able to do that. Shortly after that, they traded Lamonica to the Oakland Raiders.

He was well liked by the players. Most of them liked him. I didn't ever talk to anybody who had a bad thing to say about Jack, as a player now we're talking, but he was never sure, Jack was never positive about that as a player. He had that certain little doubt about what was going on. I'm talking about not during a game; outside the game. He had doubts about it.

Williams: About what?

Azar: About himself, about whether he was good enough or whether the people running the team thought he was good enough to be *the* guy. He obviously was. When he came there, he saved the franchise,

he really did, but when Lamonica came, the competition, he just wasn't sure.

Williams: What was the team management's objective in bringing Lamonica? Just because he was available?

Azar: Don't have any idea. That's a very, very, very good question, because we thought about it too. Well, I think probably—and I'm going to guess here—that Jack had enough times when he wasn't successful and when he did things that he probably shouldn't have done on the field, that they had some doubts. So he was probably right; they did have doubts about him. So that's when they decided to bring in Lamonica, and that really created a terrible time for both of those guys and especially for Jack, because he already was having doubts. So it was difficult for him at the time.

Williams: Where was [Louis H.] Lou Saban in all of this?

Azar: Boy, you're talking about another character. Lou, in a lot of ways he was very much like Jack in the doubt thing. I'll tell you a little story about Lou. Lou came on, was successful with the team. They won two AFL championships back to back. He came into the studio

one time. I got to know him pretty well. A couple of stories. I got to know him quite well. He came into the studio, and in those days you were a staff announcer in addition to doing the sports, in addition to doing the news, in addition to doing what you might call it, and I'm on duty in the booth. He comes into the booth, plops down—boom! I turn around and he's used a few expletives, and I said, "What's the matter, Lou? What's going on?"

He says, "I can't believe it. I can't believe—," and he started to go off. "They won't give me a country club membership. Can you believe that? Ralph, he's the cheap—," and he was on a tirade. I thought, "Oh, my god, this guy's going to quit. He's going to quit right here in front of me."

He almost did that in an interview I had with him after a game. I'm doing the post-game interview. Lou comes in. His kicker missed the field goal from 27 yards. I thought he was going to fire him on the air. But that's the way Lou was.

Jack had that same kind of quality, and they got along very well. They really did. Lou was an up-and-down guy too. He would be very happy for two or three years, and off he's gone. He quit. He became president of the New York Yankees, incidentally, which everybody said, "What's he doing as president of the New York Yankees?" Well, the

guy who owned the team was a good friend of his, so he made him president. I liked Lou a lot, and he was a fun guy.

A story about him. After a game playing the Houston Oilers in Buffalo, and the score is 13—I got to get this right now; I’ve got to remember, because it was very vital. It was 13 to 10? No, no, that’s not right. Fourteen to 13. Score’s 14 to 13. The Bills have the ball and Jack was quarterback. He’s driving the team down in the closing minutes of the game. They’re down around the three yard line, two yard line, and all they’ve got to do is kick a field goal and they win the game. So Jack comes running off the field and kicking team starts going out, and all of a sudden the kicking team’s coming back and Jack is going back out on the field. I said, “What are they doing?” They run a running play and they don’t score the touchdown and lose the game.

This is old Civic Stadium, and I’m up in there doing interviews. The place is just ridiculous, because they were so down. Turns out I’m the last guy there with my camera guy, and we’re getting things together. Everybody else is gone. And out of the coach’s room comes Lou Saban, bare-ass naked. He didn’t have a stitch of clothes on. He’s going into the shower. He stops and he sees me. He said, “Azar, get in here!”

I said, “Lou, what are you talking about?”

"Get in here!"

So I go into the room with him. He slams the door and it was a tirade. "I'll never do—," and he was screaming.

I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do. What am I doing in here?"

Turns out Johnny Majors [phonetic]—I don't know if this story's ever been made public, but Johnny Majors, who was one of his assistant coaches, convinced him to go for the touchdown instead of kicking the field goal. I thought, "Boy, it's a good thing Majors isn't around here," because he probably would have choked him. And he told me that story. "I'll never listen to one of those—." I mean, he used every expletive in the world. I mean, he was furious. I never used that story, because he swore me to secrecy.

Williams: Did Johnny Majors stay with the team?

Azar: Not very long. He wasn't there the next year. [laughs] But that was Lou. And in a lot of ways Jack was that enthusiastic about that. I mean, he had that kind of feeling. He was very competitive, wanted to win at all costs. I saw him running backwards 25 yards trying to get a pass off, and people were saying, "What are you

doing?" The reason he did it, because he wanted to be successful at what he was trying to do.

Williams: So was his field style different from other quarterbacks? Was he kind of unique in that way?

Azar: Yes, I think so.

Williams: What words would you use to describe—inventive or what?

Azar: That's kind of very interesting. I'd like to think about the word that I would like to use in describing that. He was very competitive, no question about it. He would do some dumb things occasionally, not because he didn't have a brain, but because he wanted to be successful in what he was trying to do. A lot of quarterbacks would say, "This is silly. I'm just going to kneel down," and probably was the smart thing to do, but Jack didn't think that way. That wasn't the object; the object was to be successful, and he would do anything to try to do that. There were several times when he wasn't successful and he had to pay the piper.

Williams: Was he calling his own plays?

Azar: That's difficult to say. I am not sure. I'm not sure about that. I think in those days these guys did call their own plays a lot more than later on. The Green Bay Packers changed that because the guards used to go in and out all the time, bringing in the play. I never really questioned that about calling their own plays. It wasn't like [James E. "Jim"] Kelly, when they ran the no-huddle. They called their own plays. [laughs]

Williams: In '66, I guess, is that when Lamonica left? Is that your recollection?

Azar: That sounds right.

Williams: And Saban left too.

Azar: Right.

Williams: How come?

Azar: Don't ask me. That's a question we're still asking. I wouldn't be surprised if maybe Saban quit, because he was that volatile. As I

told you, he came in all upset because they wouldn't give him a country club membership, which was not a lot of money in those days. I'm not really sure that he might have left on equal terms and maybe both decided that "It's time for me to go on." That I couldn't tell you, so I really don't know.

Williams: So how would you describe the fortunes of the team in '66 until Jack left it in '69?

Azar: I've got to start thinking about that a little bit. I haven't in a while. [laughs]

Williams: We don't need to spend a lot of time on it, but I guess I'm interested in how much Kemp played in the decline of the team and just a few words about why you think the team declined.

Azar: Yes, there's no question that it declined, and I think Jack's leaving had a lot—well, I shouldn't say Jack's leaving. The failure to replace Jack was really the downfall, because Jack was ready to quit. He was ready to leave. He wanted a political career. That's what he really wanted to do. He loved playing football, I would never doubt that for a moment, he loved it. He was a huge skier. He used to go

skiing the day before a game, and I'd say, "Are you crazy? What if you—?"

"Oh," he said, "I won't hurt myself. Don't worry." I mean, he was that sure of himself.

But I think that hurt the team, and they didn't replace him for quite some time.

Williams: If he had continued to play, was he in his own personal decline by '68, '69? I know he had health issues.

Azar: Yes. Yes, he did.

Williams: Were his playing days sort of over naturally?

Azar: I'd have to say yes to that. I'd have to say yes to that. I would like to say no to it, but I think he'd run the gamut by that time.

Williams: Before we leave football, talk a little bit about Ralph Wilson as the owner and how he and Saban got along, how he and Jack got along and so forth.

Azar: Well, Ralph is not known to the general public in western New York. He really isn't. He's done some things for players that aren't public, on his own. A lot of people, he's a cheapskate; that was it, as far as Ralph was concerned, and never did do the right things. He could have done this or could have done that. But that's indigenous to most franchises. I mean, with the exception of the Patriots, since they signed [William S. "Bill"] Belichick, they were doormats. So it's part of professional football that you have good days, you have bad days. You have a team that's successful for so many years, then it's not successful for so many years until it gets built back up again. And every franchise can go through that same story.

Ralph, I give him a lot of credit for staying in Buffalo all of this time. He stayed there in spite of a lot of things. He managed to get a new stadium, which is another story about where we went with that. I can remember the big fights in the newspapers and the places, the sides that they took in getting the new stadium. This is relative to Ralph. I can remember I took the stand that the stadium needed to be built, period. I really didn't care where it was built. One of the newspapers wanted it to be built in the city, and that's where it should have been built, in the city.

Well, it never was built in the city, but they finally passed a 50-million-dollar bond issue to get a stadium built. I was at the

legislature's meetings every day, because I had taken a big-time stand on it. Well, they get the bond issue. There was a guy who wanted to build a geodesic-dome stadium, and I was all for that, because this was something unique. It would make Buffalo different from anybody else. We get the thing done, everybody's all excited, Ralph Wilson says, "I won't deal with anybody private. I'll only deal with the county." [makes the sound of an explosion] Down it went. The geodesic dome didn't have a chance.

The guy from the news, Paul [E.] Neville was his name, was the managing editor, I believe, called me and thanked me for my stand on it because I happened to be with what they wanted too. He and I had never talked, never, never. It was only after that bond issue was passed that he called me. Then Ralph says no, and shortly after that, Neville had a heart attack. I don't know whether it was connected or not. Maybe, maybe not.

That stadium then got to be built in Orchard Park, and Ralph's stand on that had an awful lot to do with what went on. Now, having said that, the stadium now bears his name. [laughs]

Williams: I'm interested in how—was he a hands-on owner?

Azar: Oh, yes.

Williams: Did he make decisions on field personnel and so forth?

Azar: I'm not so sure that he did that, but he was a hands-on guy. He was here a lot. "Here." He was in Buffalo a lot. People said, "Why don't you move here?" Because his business interests were in Detroit. That's an easy answer. He was a hands-on guy, but he gave authority to the people that he hired, to his general manager and all that. He's hired some good general managers, he's hired some terrible general managers, and he got rid of them when he felt that they weren't doing the job that they could have been doing.

Williams: Was there one particular GM while Kemp was playing that comes to mind or not?

Azar: Yes, and I can't think of his name.

Williams: Then let's move on. How was Jack as an interviewee?

Azar: Pretty good. I decided one day, when he became the president of the American Football League Players Association, which is a union, and I got a big kick out of that position that he now had as an

ultraconservative being head of a union, so I went to him and I said, "Let's do this interview. I want to know why you're doing this."

So we did. I did a big long interview, and I took the interview to Howard Cosell, thinking that he would really be interested because of this juxtaposition that we had sitting in our laps. I went in to see Howard. I had the film in the case. This is before videotape. "Well, tell me about Marshall Wingate, black player at Niagara University. I want to know more about him. Don't tell me about Jack Kemp."

That's a true story. And that video only was shown on my station and I thought that was a national story. What I should have done is gone to CBS or NBC. This was at ABC. But I didn't do that. I don't know why. Because I thought it was a fascinating interview. I mean, we really got to know who Jack Kemp was in that interview.

Williams: How extensive was it?

Azar: Well, it was a whole reel, so it had to be about ten, fifteen minutes. It wasn't just a short five-minute thing. It was a very extensive interview. I don't know what ever happened to it. I guess it's in the files of Channel 7 somewhere.

Williams: As he took that position, did that affect his on-field play?

Azar: No, no. I don't think so. No. When Jack went on the field, he was a football player, period. He wasn't anything else. The only time he got into those other things was when he was at a party or when he was with some people or he discussed those things with players after practice, but when he was playing, he was a football player.

Williams: Talk about his relationship with his teammates.

Azar: Very good, actually. It was a pretty good relationship because they had a lot of respect for him. They had respect for his mind; they had respect for his ability. He was pretty good at what he did. He wasn't a ho-hum kind of—I'll tell you one thing, he was exciting to watch all the time, good or bad. He brought excitement to the field, and people, I think, appreciated that about Jack, and his relationship with the players, in my humble opinion, was very good.

Williams: Talk about the race issue a little bit.

Azar: That was a very interesting part about Jack. At a time when race issues were still prominent, I'd guess you'd have to say that, the one area that I always appreciated about the race issue that most of

the time wasn't an issue, was on a sports team. Yes, there might have been people who didn't want to associate, maybe, on a different level outside of work because this person happened to be black. I don't think I noticed that very much. Jack certainly didn't. He would not differentiate. A lot of guys who were athletes, especially on a professional level, felt that way.

I became very good friends with several. I never thought about it, okay? It never was an issue with me. I became friends with a guy because I thought he was a good guy and he became friends with me because he thought the same, and we had a positive relationship. Race was never an issue with me, and I don't think race was ever an issue with Jack.

He did a lot. For example, his relationship with [Charlton Chester] "Cookie" Gilchrist, who was a phenomenal football player, Larry Felser and I both said ample times that he was the greatest football player we ever saw, and I believe that to this day. I had several conversations with Cookie prior to his passing away, for a lot of different reasons. We don't have to get into that unless you want to. But Jack took that up with Cookie and wanted to help Cookie, because Cookie was a free spirit, but a good guy. He never had a drink. He never got into problems, although he did get into problems with the Buffalo police that I happened to be involved with.

This is an interesting story. He went through a stop sign or something, and they gave him a ticket. He said, "Why are you giving me this ticket?" Anyway, they ended up taking him to the police station because he went through a stop sign. Cookie really got upset. So as the story goes, some cop or something grabbed him by the arm. You never knew Cookie Gilchrist. He was a huge mammoth. His shoulders were this big and his waist was that big. He just took his arm and he threw this guy, and the guy went flying up against a wall and down. Well, they booked him.

Who do you think's on the grand jury during that case? Me. [laughs] True story. There was a lot of rigmarole about me being on the grand jury, and the sheriff at the time said, "No, I want him to stay on the grand jury. He has a right to be there," and so on and so on and so on. So I heard the whole case, but I didn't vote, because I didn't think it would be right for me to vote. But he was no-billed, but I did not vote. I excused myself from that. I don't even know if Cookie ever knew that. I may have told him many, many, many years later. But he got out of that okay. They had a double-indemnity thing or something that got him off, so it was not a problem.

But Cookie got into hot water with Ralph because of some investments. Cookie was always trying to make a buck, and I don't blame him, because those guys didn't make that kind of money in

those days. He got involved in some tin mines or something—don't quote me on that one—up in Canada, and he got Ralph to invest with that, and it all went down the drain. So Ralph got very distant from Cookie.

Years later, Cookie called me here and wanted to get on the Wall of Fame in Buffalo, and there's a lot of talk about it now. I was one of the founding members of the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame back in the early nineties, and we tried to get Cookie into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame. He wanted appearance money. [laughs] That's who he was, you know. "I want appearance money."

I said, "Cookie, we'll pay all your expenses. We don't pay appearance."

He would not come. And that was indigenous of him with a lot of things. Ralph says today that they never put Cookie on the Wall of Fame because he wasn't sure Cookie would show up, and I wouldn't be surprised if Cookie asked for appearance money. I don't know that, but I wouldn't be surprised if he did.

It got to the point, just before he wasted away, he weighed 250 pounds when he played football. He weighed 175 pounds when he died. I had several conversations with him at that desk over there, and we both tried to finagle some way to get him on the good side of

Ralph, and he wrote him a letter. He read me the letter. "What do you think about the letter?"

I said, "I think it's a good letter," but I knew it wasn't going to go anyplace because Ralph had already said, "Cookie Gilchrist will never be on the Wall of Fame while I'm alive."

Now there's a big push because the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame put him in posthumously. I said, "Gee, that's great. Why didn't we put him in while he was still alive?" But they were able to do that and did it right away, and I give them a lot of credit for doing that. They put him in right away, so that puts a lot more pressure on Ralph to get him on the Wall of Fame in Buffalo.

Williams: Let's transition to Kemp and politics. I think you had a kind of consulting role to play in that, is that right? He was thinking about doing it.

Azar: Yes. I don't know what role I had. I predicted that that's where he was going to go. I mean, this guy's made for politics.

Williams: Did he discuss the decision with you?

Azar: Yes, he did. He asked me what do I think, because he knew that I was very close with Max, and Edith was very involved in the promotion of Max and getting him elected in a very conservative district, which was unusual in those days because Max lived in our area, but it was a very conservative area, and they'd had a Republican congressmen for I don't know how many years in that district. Max comes along and wins.

So because of that relationship that Jack knew I had with Max, he came to me a lot and we discussed a lot of what was going on and Max's ill-fated decision to run for the Senate. "Is he going to stay out? Is he going to stay out?" I got a call from him every day, asking me what Max is going to do. Max couldn't very well abandon that and say, "Now I'm going to run back," because—who was the guy who ran, Fitzpatrick? I can't remember . . .

Williams: [Thomas P.] Tom Flaherty ran instead of Max McCarthy.

Azar: That's it. Tom Flaherty. That's exactly right. Because Jack was concerned that Max was going to come back and oust Flaherty, but Max didn't do that. He had more class than that. So that's when Jack really got involved.

Williams: What was Jack's thinking before McCarthy decided to run for the Senate?

Azar: I don't know that he thought he would have a chance of running against Max. He might have. He might have won, but he had a lot of doubts about it. He wasn't sure. I don't think he made a decision to run until after Max made the decision to go for the Senate. I don't think he did. I wouldn't write that in stone, but having been involved in that with both of those guys at the time, my guess is that Jack decided to do it when he knew Max wasn't going to be there. I think it was a better deal for him without Max, because Max was the incumbent.

Williams: What path might Kemp have taken had Max not decided to run?

Azar: I doubt that he would have stayed in western New York. That's my feeling. He had already worked with [Ronald] Reagan in California. It was obvious that that's where he was going. He had a lot of stuff going for him in San Diego politically. It would have been probably a very good move for him to go back to San Diego if politics was—that's what he was going to do. There was no "if" about it. He was going to

get into politics one way or another, whether it was in western New York or in California. That's where he was going. I think he would have been very, very successful, obviously, if he had gone back to California, but he didn't do that. He stayed, and it turned out great for him.

Williams: Did McCarthy seek your advice on whether or not to run for the Senate?

Azar: Yes. [laughs]

Williams: What did you tell him?

Azar: As a matter of fact, that's a very interesting question, because I was in Washington, in the gallery, when Max was a congressman, and Max knew we were there, obviously, and came up and sat with us for a while. I said to him, I said, "You going to run for the Senate?" I brought it up to him.

He said, "Oh, well, I don't think so."

"Well, there's talk about that, Max. You should run for the Senate."

I tried to get Jack to do that, but he didn't want to run against—
who was—

Williams: Jacob Javits was the—

Azar: Jacob Javits.

Williams: But that was later on.

Azar: It was later on. Yes, it was later on. I thought he should run for the Senate or he should run for governor, because he would have won. He would have won. He didn't want to run against Javits. He didn't want to present that to Javits. As it turned out, Javits passed away shortly after that. But I did try to talk Jack into running for the Senate, and I brought it up to Max, and Max said no. But he had a guy, a money guy. He did have a guy that was going to fund him to run for the Senate, and the guy pulls out on him after he declared. I don't think you know who he is. If I did some research—I'll see if I can find out and let you know. But he was a big-time money guy in Buffalo. That's what happened to Max, and poor Max was stuck. He didn't have a prayer because he didn't have a dime. He had some

people giving him some—real money that you need to run a campaign like that was gone, and that's what happened to Max.

Williams: Do you think that possibly Jack—that the Senate didn't really appeal to him, nor did the governorship, that he was really thinking beyond that to presidential politics?

Azar: Probably, yes. I would say yes. I think he had that in mind, but I didn't think he was taking the right path, you see. I thought he needed to have something more than just being a congressman, not that that's not a big deal, but I think he needed more on his résumé, and I thought the Senate, as far as I was concerned, and I wish I could have convinced him to do that, was a sure-fire way to run for the presidency.

I have the feeling, unfortunately, the Republican Party didn't do right by Jack. I really don't think they did. They kind of threw him under the bus for some reason. They gave him the run for vice presidency, which never was going to happen. They were never going to get elected. I mean, if you're really into politics, you can see those kinds of things that are happening and things that are not happening, you know. I was involved in those kind of things, not because I had

any interest in politics, but I can understand politics. I can see that this is there and that's over here and this is somewhere else.

Jack, I think, would have had a direct road to the presidency if he'd have gone for the Senate. Back there, yes, I think he had visions of something like that because of his relationship with Reagan.

Reagan thought an awful lot of him, and he had a great mind, he was a terrific speaker. You know, people liked him, they did. You might have politics differences with him, but if you knew him like I did, and I had political differences with him, I'd vote for him because I know who he is. This guy's a real American.

Williams: So you think even though he was a representative from far western New York, out of the New York City mainstream, that he had a real chance of winning both the Senate and the governorship.

Azar: Absolutely. I think he did, because, see, he still had a name. People knew who he was as a football player, and that's a very positive thing for people all over the state, you see. People don't have that. They say, "Who's this guy? Where'd he come from?" And he had to go out. Jack didn't have to do that.

Williams: So who was throwing him under the bus?

Azar: I don't really know. I think they kind of shoved him aside until the vice presidency thing. To me, I'll tell you my honest feeling, I thought they were throwing Jack a bone. That's what I felt, because this guy had a lot more than that to give, but it never happened. I still think that if he had run for the Senate, as I suggested, if he'd have won, he could have been president.

Williams: What was your sense of his relationship with the Republican Party in the state?

Azar: That's a difficult question, because I don't know the answer to that. From that point of view, Jack was less a politician. I don't think it mattered to Jack about party. He was a Republican because he needed to be, because that's what he thought, and that's fine, but I don't think Jack had an undying thing about being a Republican. He never impressed me that way, that the Republicans are this and the Republicans are that, or whatever, as Democrats are, you know, that party stuff. That's why I admired him a lot, because I'm not that way either, you see. I'm proud of the fact that I'm a registered Independent, you know. That's important to me. I think Jack didn't have that fervor about the party. He had fervor, a lot of fervor about

being an American and what was good for this country. He had that in his heart. You don't find people like that anymore.

Williams: So would it be correct to say that he was a philosophical Republican, but not a party working Republican]?

Azar: Exactly. Very well put. He certainly was a philosophical Republican, because most of the stuff that he believed in was in the Republican Party, but he was not a party guy. I don't think he was. I would be really surprised if somebody would convince me that he was a real Republican. He wasn't that. That isn't who he was. That isn't why he was in Congress.

Williams: The western New York members of Congress, as a group, did they do a lot of things sort of together? I'm thinking of Barber [B.] Conable and [Thaddeus] Ted Dulski].

Azar: I really don't know what Jack's relationship was with people like Conable. Very powerful people. He was a very powerful congressman. Very frankly, I don't know that it would have mattered to Jack. He was his own guy and he'd stick to his guns, no matter

what, and I admired him for that. I could disagree with him from now until doomsday, but I've got to admire this guy. I always did.

Williams: Who else in Buffalo was he seeking the advice of besides yourself?

Azar: Who knows. Who knows. I mean, I think he looked to [Edward J. A.] Eddie [Rutkowski], because he and Eddie were very, very close. Eddie is a dear, dear, dear, dear friend of mine. We worked together, we had a lot of laughs together, our families knew each other. But Eddie wasn't Jack, and I think Eddie would tell you that. He was a great guy, won a big election in Buffalo as county executive, but they threw him down too. [laughs] It was sad. Although it was an accomplishment that he got elected. I thought it was great.

Williams: How would you describe the political community circa 1970 in terms of party bosses or the real powerhouse? What was it like in western New York?

Azar: Big. It was very important in Buffalo. You knew who the party bosses were, both Republican and Democrats. They kind of ruled the roost. They were in the news. This guy's head of the Republican Party

and this guy's head of the Democrats, and they're pulling this string to do this. That was taken as a rule of thumb in western New York. Yes, party politics was very strong. Jack didn't fit that bill, but they grabbed him because he was going to win. That's why. Everybody knew that. You didn't have to be a genius to figure that out. And Jack ran a good campaign, besides all of that. He was a good candidate.

[Pause.]

Williams: A couple of things occur to me. Describe the district that Jack won in 1970.

Azar: It was a Republican district. I don't think anybody had a doubt, although it wasn't a runaway victory for Jack, because the guy he was running against, Flaherty, ran a very good campaign and he was well known in western New York. So it wasn't a runaway for Jack, and Jack really had to knuckle down and get to business to win that thing, especially since they had already elected a Democrat in that district. But Jack knew that and he did all of the things that was necessary to do, and he got that district back into the Republican coffers.

Williams: Looking over the names of some of his opponents, Flaherty, [Anthony P.] LoRusso, [Peter J.] Geraci [phonetic], [Peter J.] Martinelli, [James P.] Keane, these are all presumably Catholics.

Azar: Yes. Yes, that's right.

Williams: And at that time, was Jack still Christian Science or was he Presbyterian, or did religion just never enter the picture?

Azar: It never entered the picture, but Jack was always a very religious guy. I'm trying to think if we ever discussed that. I don't think we ever did. I didn't know what denomination he was involved in. I did not know, and I never asked him because it wasn't important, as far as we were concerned, but I knew he was a very, very religious guy.

After games, we used to go over to a restaurant that I had a piece of, and he would always want to go into the office and call the kids. I said, "Sure, come on." So we'd go in the office. He said, "You don't have to go." He'd talk to the kids, so on, so on, so on, so on. He taught me something that I do to this day. When he was finished talking to them, he said, "I love you." I never heard a father,

especially, say that to his children over the phone. Because of that, I do that to this day. Because of hearing Jack do that, I do that.

Williams: How much did supply-side economics play in the district? I know it was central to his national—

Azar: Yes, it was, but I don't think it was that big an issue till after he got into Congress. I don't remember there being any kind of big-time discussion over supply-side economics until after he got into the Congress. Then it became, obviously, a very big issue, some good things, some bad things. I never agreed with it personally because I thought he was full of baloney. [laughs] And I told him so. But it didn't matter. As I said before, he and I had a lot of political discussions. I hate to tell you what we called each other sometimes, but it was healthy, you know. I don't think supply-side had anything to do with his first election. After that, it didn't matter.

Williams: What about as he became a national figure? Was there resentment within the district that he was spending, quote, unquote, so little time there, or was—

Azar: Yes, that did come up. I have to say that it did come up, because I heard some people say, "Well, he's never here," you know, that kind of thing. I think that was a fault on his part, but he had other things in view, as we've already discussed, and I think he wanted to become more of a national figure than a guy just representing his own district and doing what he could for his district. Not that he was negligent. I would never accuse him of being negligent, but I think he had other things in view, and as a result, he wasn't around the area as much as maybe some people thought he should have been.

Williams: I know on one of his campaigns the claim was made that he didn't even really have a residence in the district anymore.

Azar: I don't know if that's true. I don't know if that's true. No, he had a residence. He kept a residence there in Hamburg, as a matter of fact. No, if anybody claims that, they're wrong, because he did have a residence in Hamburg throughout his career.

Williams: Did he have a lot of support in '88 when he ran for president, for the nomination?

Azar: I don't know if he had a lot of support. I didn't find a lot of people, even in his own district, saying, "Come on, we're going to get Jack the presidency of the United States." I don't think that happened. I don't know why. I really don't know why. I think there were people ready to put up the money, and he had a lot of other sources, not just in western New York. He had already become a national congressman, as we discussed. So I don't think the money part of it was a problem for Jack. I don't know whether his experience—and I'm going to go back to saying he should have run for the Senate. If he had run for the Senate, I don't think there would have been a question of him being a presidential candidate.

Williams: In the period from 1986 to '88, did he have any discussion with you about whether he should undertake a run for the nomination?

Azar: Yes, we discussed it, but not really as much as we did before, when he first got into the political arena. Yes, he brought it up, but it was never a real heart-to-heart, me saying, "You should have run for Senate like I told you to do." No, that never happened.

Williams: Anything to say about the—I'll use a football term here now—the hand-off from Kemp to [L. William "Bill"]Paxon?

Azar: To who?

Williams: Paxon, who succeeded him in the seat. Bill Paxon.

Azar: No. That might have come up in conversation, but never to the point where we really had a heart-to-heart about it.

Williams: So your close ties with him sort of extended up to a certain period during his congressional career and then because he became distracted, it eased off.

Azar: Right.

Williams: Do you associate any Buffalo-specific activity while he was HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] secretary? Did he come up and do things for the district then or not?

Yes? Okay. Let's hold up on that for a moment. Let's see.

What about his run for the vice presidency? You've indicated that was a bone thrown—

Azar: Yes.

Williams: Maybe a bone thrown for two candidates.

Azar: Could be. Yes, probably was. It probably was. I never really thought about that, but I think you're right about that. But I definitely, as far as Jack was concerned, I thought it was a bone, and it was unfortunate. Maybe I thought that because they did the same thing to [Robert J.] Dole, and he came to Buffalo and had meetings with a lot of players. I got invited to this shindig and so on and so forth, and I didn't go. I'm not sure why, but I felt, myself, that, "I don't think I should be there." And I don't know why I thought that, but I was very uneasy about going there. It's funny that that should come up, because he invited me, obviously. I would have been probably upset if he hadn't, because we were that close at the time. As time goes, that closeness, you know, fades a little bit. But I decided that I wasn't going to go to that. I don't know why I decided not to, but I didn't.

Williams: That was Kemp who came, not Dole.

Azar: Kemp.

Williams: How do you think Jack Kemp should be remembered?

Azar: I have a very definitive idea about how he should be remembered, but I'm concerned that he won't be. I stated earlier that Jack, to me, embodied what Americanism means. There aren't too many people around anymore that feel that way about Americanism and what it really means. We throw all kinds of "He's a real American," and that's baloney. I recoil at people that use that term. I would never recoil with it in relationship to Jack Kemp, because that's what he was. I'd love it if he would be remembered as that, but people throw that term around now and use it so loosely that they forget its real meaning is lost. It's gone by the wayside because we use it, "Real American." What does that really mean? But Jack was that, in my eyes, always was. He had this country in the pit of his stomach and in the depths of his heart. He really did. You don't find people like that anymore. They're in it for the political gain, they're in it for this or they're in it for that, and it's sad. It's sad that this country has gotten to that point. I'm sure there are people in Congress who feel this way, who feel like they're doing something for their country. I'm sure there are. I hope there are. I hope there are more of them. But I was sure about Jack. I was sure that he was that. That's why I'd vote for him. I could scream and yell at him and

call him all kinds of names about, "How can you be so stupid?" and all that, really, and we did that. She's a witness to it. My wife is a witness to it; I should put it that way. But it didn't matter because I knew who he was. I knew what he meant. I knew about his love for his family. We knew this guy, a real politician who had all of those values. They're rare, unfortunately.

Williams: You're comparing him with other politicians, but it's also a comment on American citizens.

Azar: No question. There's no question about that. I've often said that if Jack Kemp was living at the time of the implementation of the Constitution of the United States, he would have been one of the founding fathers. That's what I think about him, and I believe this. I've read a lot of books about all of those people who were involved in the birth of this country, and I say to myself, that's Jack Kemp. He would have been there. He would have been fighting and yelling and screaming, but it would have been for the right reasons. I can't emphasize that enough.

You asked me about him being remembered. It would be great if he would be remembered that way. I would hope that somehow he is remembered that way. I hope I see that day before I die.

Williams: You've just made a major contribution to it yourself. You understand that? By this interview.

Azar: Well, I hope so. I never thought of that. When you first called me, Brien, to chat about this, I was a little flattered, frankly, but then I thought about it a little bit more and more and more, and I could sit and talk about Jack Kemp for two, three, four hours. It would be easy because of who he was and what he meant to us and what a friend he was to us. And it's sad. No, not sad. I don't say sad. Strike that word. It's unfortunate that relationships like that sort of fade. The feelings never change, but the relationship changes. He goes on and he goes on to doing this or that, and he becomes a hugely public figure, a national public figure, and I'm not in that boat by any stretch of the imagination, but I know that if Jack walked in this door, it would be like we saw each other the day before. And that's special. It's special to me, it's special to my wife, it was special to our family. The fact that someone even told you to call me about this is a great tribute. I don't know whether I deserve it or not, but it's still a tribute.

Williams: I think the evidence is here. Thank you very much, Rick, for this interview.

Azar: My pleasure.

[End of interview]