Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foriegn Affairs Oral History Collection

AMBASSADOR CHARLES T. MANATT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: Ambassador Manatt died before completing this interview.]

Q: When and where were you born?

MANATT: June 9, 1936 in Chicago.

Q: On your father's side, where did they come from?

MANATT: We think we are Huguenots that came by way of France to Belgium to Scotland to Northern Ireland to Washington County, Pennsylvania to Jones County, Iowa to Poweshiek County, Iowa. We were part of the Scots-Irish integration. We think we made landfall in Philadelphia in 1817.

Q: Were they mainly farmers?

MANATT: They would have been farmers.

Q: Let's talk about your grandfather on your father's side, what was he up to?

MANATT: He would have been a post-civil war entry who was born in 1869, and left us in 1954. The longer he stayed with us the longer he looked like Joseph Stalin, who lived ten years fewer than he did. My grandfather would have been the traditional post-civil war mid-Westerner. He was a disdained democrat, probably disdained Catholics. Had a very secure life; he had seven sons and one daughter, a real big family. They never trusted the banks because the bank in Rector, a little town in eastern Iowa, went broke once. So he kept the money in the bank, but it was in his bank box; that's where he kept his money with the bank.

Q: Under the bed?

MANATT: Well under the bed at home perhaps but certainly in the bank box with the money.

Q: What sort of farming?

MANATT: By the time we got there in 1847, there was the Homestead Act and there were 160 acres in Iowa so we started out with that farm. By the time grandfather was in the business of farming, I think he had two, two others, which would be about 500 acres.

Q: How about your father, what was he up to?

MANATT: Dad was the youngest of the seven sons so he had the chance to go to high school because somebody in town would let him board with them, board and check. I think a relative of the family. So he, one brother, and their sister were the only ones that went to high school. He had a chance to go to college; so he went one year at Iowa State before going off into the area of retail meat sales. With _____ and then I think eventually Swift and then eventually Wilson packing company.

Q: These are all southern Chicago / the Chicago area.

MANATT: His first assignment was Audubon, Iowa and his second assignment was Atlanta, Georgia, and then we went to Chicago. So that was his first career; his second career was in farming. We came to Iowa just as the war was getting underway and grandfather needed some help on the farm. Dad was just at the age where you could be drafted; you couldn't be drafted—

Q: This is World War—?

MANATT: Two; he was 35-36 years old then. So he came at that point and he farmed for 17 years. Then he went into Squirter Hail Insurance. Hail Insurance is important for farming and those in the agricultural area. So for 17 years, he was in the business of sales and adjustments for crop losses for insurance companies.

Q: Hail Insurance has to be quite a mathematical operation. It seems to occur at just anytime but there has to be some regularity in the aggregate?

MANATT: Yes, actually it's done just like a life cycle or something else. In the average ten years you might have two minor hail storms in the area. In 20 years you might have one serious hail storm.

Q: Where did your mother and father meet?

MANATT: She would have been a two-year certificated teacher from Iowa State Normal, which is northern Iowa now. At 19 she would've come to the town of Brooklyn also in Poweshiek County as a fourth grade teacher when my father was a junior in high school. So that's where they would've met and ten-twelve years later in Mason City where the famous Music Man showed.

Q: That's Meredith Wilson, right?

MANATT: That's right. They got married in 1929.

Q: What is your mother's background?

MANATT: That would be largely English. They landed two parts of the family, one in the early times in Massachusetts, real early times. And the other came in through, in this case, the Port of Baltimore. They were farmers in Delaware and then scratching-out farmers in Massachusetts, but they eventually, again, wound up going to Ohio and then Iowa.

Q: Your mother and father got married just when the depression started but as farmers, did the depression have a large effect on them?

MANATT: Yes and no. The boom time for farming was World War I and they were about six years after that. Then it went into a deep depression. So the fact of the matter was the farm depression started six years earlier than the national economic depression. Then again farmers had different desires and different wills; had cattle, had hogs, had gardens, had food, and had housing—different than some of the city folks.

Q: Where did you grow up?

MANATT: I grew up on a farm four miles north of Mahogunin, (round here it's pronounced Autobon). We pronounce it Audubon, Iowa, which is Audubon County, in the town of Audubon. 85 miles from Des Moines, 85 miles from Omaha, and 85 miles from Sioux City.

Q: It doesn't sound like you're in the middle of the metropolis.

MANATT: No, it was rural America.

Q: What was elementary school like there?

MANATT: Probably idyllic. It was something we didn't really like to think about, in the sense of when we came from Chicago my brother and I went to country school, one room country school, one teacher, and about 15 kids. Then by the time we were in fourth and fifth grade the folks sent us to town school. That's what we called them. They had wide, open spaces. We didn't particularly have bicycles because on farm ground it wouldn't be real easy to ride a bicycle on farm ground. But we had horses and ponies and different ways of moving around. We had the great advantage of organized rural activities such as 4H. When you're a little kid in town, they have cub scouts and boy scouts. In high school, we were Future Farmers so we got involved in agriculture that way and you know we had the whole wide outdoors to—

Q: Well, for children it got to a point where if you didn't have cub scouts they were just turned loose until dinner-time.

MANATT: That's a good point; this was before television. So we had much more freedom. We viewed television as a _____. For us in 1950, we got indoor plumbing, television, and we quit milking cows. I have to say I'm not sure which was a better event. You could be in the neighboring county in the afternoon so long as you went if you were home for dinner, or supper as we called it, by six o'clock or whenever it was. Mother wouldn't mind.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

MANATT: Yes. My brother got scarlet fever. Probably I could work that out—probably just at the end of the war in 1944. So I was quarantined because my brother was sick and the teacher was good enough to bring the homework home each day. That would take about twenty minutes. So I started reading books. One summer a little later I read 56 books. I really got into reading.

Q: Do you recall any books that were important to you as a kid?

MANATT: Well, some of the famous ones, you know: Black Beauty (different things for you to cry and cry about), Robinson Crusoe (which is always so fascinating), and a whole series of war books Dave Dawson at Dunkirk, Dave Dawson at Cloverfield. I read about 14 of those.

Q: Oh, books like the Hardy Boys or Tom Swift.

MANATT: Yeah.

Q: How were you at school? Did school take?

MANATT: School took and took reasonably easily; I had probably more intellectual interest in the social sciences than the hard sciences. A big influence was our vocational education teacher, Jim Hamilton, who is still with us, believe it or not, at 92 or 3. Mind is clear as a bell. I was active in school in a good way; I was no good at sports, so there had to be something to make up for that. That's why I got into debate, student government, politics, poetry reading and other things like that.

Q: When you were in a one-room schoolhouse, could you explain your impression of how this worked? It's hard for people who haven't experienced it to imagine several classes being taught at the same time.

MANATT: The teacher would organize her lesson plan around the fact that the most mischievous group was typically going to be the older group. She would start out with the 7th and 8th grade boys to try to keep them busy and out of getting into trouble, anymore than they needed to. Then she would go down the ranks to the age of the younger ones. In my time in country school—that was with my brother—she would first check on the 3rd and 4th grade. Along from there we would perhaps be in the seventh inning of a

nine-inning game she was having. Then in the afternoon she would basically repeat the same process; at 2:30 or 2:45 we would be picked up for our recitations and our reports and our writing on the blackboard, and our doing our math tables.

Q: I find that in country school the students are exposed to a lot more by picking up things from their seniors than if they had been in the traditional class—

MANATT: class by themselves? We picked up like that; yes, we picked up like that.

Q: Then you went to a real graded school; where was that?

MANATT: For town school? It was Ottoman. We would have had a high school that was built in 1917, when my mother was first going to high school. We would have had through the graduating class about 73 members of our class. It was quite an experience, because at the end you would have a couple of classes older, a couple of classes younger than you were involved in student activities or sports or different things with—

Q: With a teacher for a mother, she must have been keeping an eye on you.

MANATT: Well you came home and did your homework first. The timing, for me, was good because by the time television came in I had fairly firm study habits. When television came in, it was black and white, out of Omaha, Sioux City or Kansas City or Des Moines, I think. But we could barely hit it because 85 miles away with a transmitter from those days it was kind of snowflaky. So I didn't really get into watching television.

Q: What about radio? It was the golden age of radio: Jack Benny, Fred Allen—

MANATT: I regularly watched The Shadow and the Five Pounder. There were more regular listeners on Saturday and Sunday nights rather than the school nights.

Q: Did you have a town that you went to for the movies?

MANATT: We did; we had _____. At one point Audubon had two movie houses. Now they sort of have half of one. It is a video and occasionally a film. I go there. Then once you get to drive you could kind of go to Carroll or Atlantic, Harlan, some of the neighboring towns as well. The advantage of course of growing up on a farm would include learning to drive very early, because you drive tractors, which in some ways is more complicated than driving a car or a truck. My student learner permit, in those days you get them at 14. So I had wheels by the time I was 14.

Q: I talked to one man Jim Collins, former ambassador to Russia, and he was driving a tractor around at seven or eight years old.

MANATT: Tractor's early. I'm talking about cars. As soon as you can reach fourteen. He may have had the kind of tractor. The two different types at the time were the

Farmalls and John Deere; they are the big ones. One had the foot pedals and the other had him peddling. He may as well have the hand peddle.

Q: Did farming appeal to you?

MANATT: Yes. The 4H and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) projects were very interesting. I developed both a cattle and a hog project so it was interesting. The change in the work was happening just at the right time. What do I mean by that? When I worked my way up to senior water boy on the threshing ring, which meant that the next year I was really going to have to go to work. And halfway, what other thing did I mention and forget about—In 1950, we got new machines. Mostly mechanage from there, from there on.

Q: You were in a very industrial area of the country

MANATT: We think so; we think we've got 27% of the grade A in the blue states.

Q: Did you get out to the big cities from time to time? What was the big city? Was it Chicago?

MANATT: No, it was Des Moines or Omaha. Sure, oh yeah state fair and different things in Des Moines. And others like _____ in Omaha. We were growing a very nice zoo and peonies park in _____. We went twice a year.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

MANATT: That would be Ottoman and that is when we had 73 in our class. At that point I had already met the lady who was going to be my wife for a very long time including this morning. We had basically the only immigrants of the first generation. We had displaced people from Latvia who got out ahead of the Russians. They went, obviously, to camps in West Germany and then came over. I don't know if it was a Lutheran church or who it was that settled in a different town so we had one immigrant family.

Q: Did you have settlements of Czechs or Slovaks coming over from before even World War I?

MANATT: We would be 40% Danish, 30% Swedish, 20% German, and 10% other. I know that you speak of Illinois, parts of Wisconsin and a couple of areas in north-central Minnesota would have had some of those settlements you're talking about. We would be the Scandinavian and the German.

Q: How important was religion in your family?

MANATT: Reasonably so. You know we were a practicing Methodist family. I will never forget one Palm Sunday. My mother thought we were fools and Dad and I said no we are going to church. Not once but twice we got stuck in the snow bank in Iowa trying

to get to church, but that was a good community event. You have your Methodist youth fellowship and different activities. Minorities, religiously, of course at the time would be Catholics. In an area like that we'd probably have an 8% Catholic population then; it's higher today.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

MANATT: We would be democrats.

Q: Were there Democratic and Republican enclaves in Iowa?

MANATT: Iowa would be a historically republican state, back to my grandfather as far as post-civil war. The only two democratic enclaves would be wherever in the state you had a majority of Catholics. By chance there was Carroll County just north of us and Dubuque, over on the Mississippi river. So those would be the two heavy enclaves. Then as different groups moved into Sioux City or Cedar Rapids or Des Moines then you'd have more and more development of immigrant groups and different ones would be democrats. But the state was by far a republican state in history certainly, almost entirely so up until the depression. After the depression was over it reverted back to the main. Then for a very long time and including today it's been a feminization of politics and the nurses and the teachers. The public officials, not public officials, public workers, government workers, are getting more and more into politics a little bit more Democratic.

Q: I think this represents one of the greatest moments we've experienced in our lifetime, the change of the male-dominated political society to one with a much stronger female influence.

MANATT: Much of our farm system now is run by women as far as county recorder, county treasurer, and the state legislator, state senator who are from the _____. It's very obvious and yet Iowa would be one of two states, I think, that's never sent a woman to congress yet. This time we'll see.

Q: Well, Virginia is the same way, isn't it?

MANATT: No, what's her name Byrne—

Q: Leslie Byrne didn't make the House of Reps?

MANATT: She was elected to the House of Representatives in 1992.

Q: Oh, she just didn't make it for governor.

MANATT: You got to be a clinical freak to remember some of those things. Mississippi and Iowa are supposedly the only two.

Q: Did you get involved in student politics?

MANATT: Oh sure, you run for class officer, student council, and FFA officer . Yeah, with FFA, and so as a sophomore I was president of our FFA chapter. Then junior year, I was treasurer of the class. Don't know if we had much money to worry about at that time. Then when I was a senior, I served as president of the student council and president of the class. You get involved in that. I don't think for a minute I was involved in sports in one sense. When I could never figure out what my talents were, I started out as the team statistician and then worked my way up. Once a senior graduated as a junior and senior often I was the student manager of the football and basketball teams. So I had some good moments.

Q: At the high school level what was the sport that engaged the neighborhood?

MANATT: Each town and each state of course were different. For our town, at that time, it would be football. We were proud of our football team and most of the guys were excited for the games for the day, I know who beat us and they aren't going to _____.

Q: You graduated from high school when?

MANATT: '54.

Q: You were in the middle of the country, in a small town. How much did the outside world intrude? We were in the middle of the Cold War; we had the Korean War—it wasn't a benign place but it was the Eisenhower era with a certain amount of stability.

MANATT: Yes, well kind of. If you were a reader, you could read almost anything that they published. Obviously I was not aware of the "Economist" and other magazines, assuming they were being published in those days. But you know you'd have "Time", and in our case "The Des Moines Register." You'd have a farm publication and you'd have the radio. By then, you know, in high school, we had television to start informing of things. You're absolutely right on the benign nature of the time being that it was our time. But still we had Korea going on. From the time it started in '50 to when Truman fired McArthur to when we finally had the armistice, the Korean War was very much front and center in people's minds. The boys two years ahead of me were being drafted. So that if the war continued we would have been in the rent.

Q: Did you look upon military service as being something you expected to do while in high school?

MANATT: In those days for most of us it was a given. My brother finished college and was drafted just at the end of Korea in '53. I was going to college the next year in '54. My big brother said that I'll kick you into the next colony if you don't take Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). So I took the army ROTC.

Q: It was a given that you were going to finish college?

MANATT: Yes, for both of us.

Q: What about your parents?

MANATT: My mother had two years and my father had one year. My mother went on to finish all of the course work at Drake University in Des Moines for her bachelors. So they have to understand that people didn't go to college often. Three percent is a whole lot.

Q: It's interesting I've done maybe a thousand interviews of American diplomats and the great majority of the first generation don't have college degrees. They read and were as well educated as any generation.

MANATT: The standards have changed with time.

Q: Where did you go for college and why?

MANATT: Iowa State. My dad had gone there for a year. My brother had gone there and was coming back for a masters. My sister-in-law was going there. It was just easy—not easy—but it was the comfortable thing to do.

Q: Was Iowa State basically an agricultural college?

MANATT: In other states, it would be like Oklahoma, in agricultural and mechanical arts. So science, engineering, agriculture, and home economics would be the four big ones.

Q: What was Iowa State like?

MANATT: It was very pleasant. My problem was that I could never find a major. I wound up with five minors with speech and government and history and all these different things. The dedicated major was agriculture. I enjoyed that part of it; it was quite idyllic. In those days we didn't have liquor by the drink, so nobody had any particular problem with drinking. It was before the time of drugs. I remember my Ag (agriculture) instructor, Jim Hamilton, who always said beer looked and smelled and tasted like the liquid part of horse manure. To this day I don't drink much beer. It was easier that way and we had nice parties and you know social events on the weekend.

Q: I know it's unlikely but were there any movements on campus like the campus Marxists?

MANATT: Yes. There were different issues. The two big issues at the time were the communists and civil rights. Obviously, ends are, or is as you've implied, a long ways from either circumstance. But as far as student activities and national student associations we conceived ourselves as student leaders in the social discussion. We got involved in both of those things but it sounds—not juvenile—it sounds quaint today. I wound up the

president of the student body, and we beat Wilt Chamberlain. It came 37-36 in a slowed down game and all of the students wanted a day off school. That was a challenge. I as the student body president and the dean of students would negotiate and have _____ then I would come back in, "Don't you realize we just beat Wilt the Stilt." It was great fun. We compromised for half a day off of school.

Q: Well it shows that you can reach compromise, especially in that generation.

MANATT: They were really fired up; I'll tell you that much.

Q: Were there any social activities?

MANATT: Social would be based around Friday and Saturday nights. The girls had to be in the dorms by 10 o'clock and we would have a limited number of places to go. Off campus, if you weren't twenty-one, not that you could get a drink, but you could get a beer. Pizza was just beginning to filter in through Des Moines and a few places so we did that on occasion. The Friday and Saturday nights would be the organized social activities and the sororities and the fraternities and different things. Sunday night was largely dark by way of food facilities except (this was a good technique) the Catholic Student Union—what's it called—and the Methodist Student Union, a different one, would have nice events and food on Sunday nights. So many of us—not every Sunday night—but maybe twice a month would go.

Q: I suppose you went to sporting events too?

MANATT: Oh yeah.

Q: You had five different minors; did any one of them particularly interest you?

MANATT: Yes sir. They interested me a great deal. There are three of them: government, what today would be known obviously as political science, and sociology. I don't think I had a minor in it. Psychology, you know, the soft sciences interested me a great deal. With the exception of preparation, I also was one of the Iowa State debaters. Part of it was laying the foundation for a legal career. I didn't think—I never even thought of it—when I was going to college about going to law school. But otherwise, you know, politics and history and government were a big part of my avocation, at least. I also got off onto farming. I bought a farm—ten years after we got out of college, I bought a farm. Then I bought ten more.

Q: Did you look at other countries as far as history goes or was it very generalized? Were you looking at European History or Asian History or—

MANATT: American, European, and world history; those were the three we were looking at. I just loved history. Once in high school we were told if we earned 500 points we could get a good grade. It was based on how much we read on the different assignments and, for whatever reason, I read them all; I got 900 points. I just loved it.

Q: And it was very helpful?

MANATT: As you know with your career in the FED (federal government), if you know history, geography, and the culture, and the language you're way ahead.

Q: Absolutely, history to me is the most important thing; It's where you're going and where you've been. As you were getting ready to graduate was Iowa getting to feel a little small for you? Did you want to get out?

MANATT: No, I thought we were going to Northwestern where I had a fellowship for a Phd. in political science. The lady-teacher at New Trier High School in Winnetka either didn't get pregnant, didn't get married, didn't get engaged, or didn't do something because she was leaving that year but then she didn't leave. So my wife's job fell through, on the chance that we were moving in there.

Q: Her brothers must have been thrilled.

MANATT: Quiet school, a lot of pretty girls. So on the way back to Ames, we discussed what we should do, knowing full well that I had to go into the Army within a year of graduation. I don't know exactly how it came about, but then in the event we said, "Well why don't we see if you could get a good teaching job near Iowa City and I start law school. See what we like about law school." So that was still fairly encapsulated within Iowa. Then the service—the service was the service—we fought the war between the wars; they had nothing for us to do. So once you finished all your training at Fort Hill, Fort Lewis and Fort Lee, once you finished all your training and you graduated from your officer's course and you had your gold bars on as a ROTC grad what were they going to do with you? So they asked, do we mind being reduced from two years to six months? Not really a problem; I wanted to get back to law school.

Q: When did you get married?

MANATT: In 1957 as a senior in college.

Q: What was the background of your wife?

MANATT: Well, she would be an O'Brien from the Irish side and a Klinkefuss [sp] from the German side. Her families would have come to Audubon probably twenty years after my family, the Taylor side, would have come to Audubon. She lived on a farm until 1946. I moved into town just after the war. Her father was especially good with sales, land assessments and land appraisals, clerking the sale of all farm equipment and cattle, and everything that he wound up owning and running the stock yards in our town.

Q: That's a very responsible and influential position in a farming community.

MANATT: That's right. True you've got to be honest.

Q: Was law a fallback position?

MANATT: No, not as it turns out. The question is fascinating to me because I got involved again in Young Democrats as a teenager. Then I was college president of our Young Democrats, which Senator Hurkin eventually was after I was. Then I noticed all these big shots that looked like they were running the Young Democrats were all lawyers. The lawyers in my hometown would have been much older; so I didn't have that same frame of reference on the fact that now I'm 21 or 22 and these other lawyers were 29 and 30 or so. So if I'm really interested in pursuing my avocation I'll bet you it would be very helpful to have a law degree.

Q: A law degree isn't just law; it leads to many other things.

MANATT: That's right. That's right.

Q: How did you find law as a study?

MANATT: As a study. Oh quite good, quite good. Again, maybe a third of it was history. So a lot of the ancient English customs and evolution of common law was obviously coming down through history. That part I found very interesting. Again you don't really take enough of one course as a third year law student, or over three years, to get really hugely deep into any one subject. But real property and personal property and common law, I enjoyed quite a bit.

Q: From an Iowa perspective, law would be different from a place like the University of Massachusetts where politics intrudes very much into the law profession.

MANATT: I think you're right on that but _____. I had a semester at Iowa and on coming through town (Washington D.C.) here, one fateful day in April of 1959, I thought well I'm interested in politics. Maybe it would be fun to go to law school here in town. I spent two and a half years at George Washington (GW). That began the earlier question, so it was beginning to open up the world to me.

Q: George Washington is the nice school for the gentlemen [39:11].

MANATT: It would have considered itself that today, but yes, of course, you're right. On those days whether it's public administration for Colin Powell or going to law school for something like me who's a full-time working _____ you're a hundred percent in those days _____.

Q: Did you have children at this time?

MANATT: Just at the end, our daughter was born three months before I finished.

Q: Can you compare and contrast Iowa State and George Washington Law?

MANATT: One was an undergraduate and the other was a professional school.

Q: How did you find law being taught at George Washington (GW)?

MANATT: I found it to be taught very well. I had some comparison because I had the semester at Iowa. Both of them today are highly ranked on the top 25. Iowa is a smaller school, but a very good one. I found them very similar in the quality of the teaching.

Q: I would think that, in Washington D.C., there would be quite a few people in your class who were looking towards a political career or getting involved in the political process.

MANATT: I think that's true. We had an equal number of women and Mormon students in my class. I gathered there was no law school in Utah for the longest time. The father of the senator now who is being tied around the neck by the Tea Party people sort of cut a deal with the dean at GW law school so we had about 24 Mormons and 24 women students while I was going there. But so many of them would be in the service. Many, probably 20-25, were senior lieutenants in the Coast Guard or the Navy and going to law school at night.

Q: This would be in '50…?

MANATT: '59-'62

Q: So women in law school today, I'm not sure that they're not a majority

MANATT: Oh, they are a majority.

Q: But in that period it seems that it would be rather unusual to have an equal number of women.

MANATT: It would be. It was usually friendlier in town because instead of being a GS-11 (Government Schedule level of employment) you might get to be a GS-15, if you had a law degree. You could go at night and still have a full time job. It was more nurturing, I guess the term would be for women candidates here more than almost anywhere else.

Q: What sort of work were you doing? Did you have a day job?

MANATT: Yes, I started out as a clerk for a Congressman for one semester but then my entire time was either college director or executive director of the Young Democrats of America. So I had a regular day job as well as going to law school.

Q: You appeared to be really steeped in the Democratic Party, weren't you?

MANATT: That's true, very much so.

Q: How did the Kennedy—Nixon election of 1960 affect you? In those I've interviewed, this has been a pivotal point in getting many engaged in government.

MANATT: As far as the political work I was already engaged; it was my thing. Because of the job I had, as _____ college director and the national college chairman of, as it was called at that time, the Democratic National Student Federation it gave me the chance to get a broadened view of the world. I went to Denver for the National Student Association Council (NSAC) meeting and to Swarthmore College for other things. I had a number of debates with a young man from Wisconsin who was my counterpart on the Republican side. For me it was a time of certainly invigoration and also a chance to sharpen some of my skills politically.

Q: What were some of these student organizations about?

MANATT: You mean the Young Democrats? They were promoting civil rights and social justice and anti-communism and, you know, different issues of the day.

Q: Here you were in Washington, DC, a southern city, how were civil rights being treated when you first came here?

MANATT: Well many things I see, of course, would be in Virginia during the army. I took a first lieutenant at that point back to base with me, who lived here, and I and the second lieutenant went out. I had to go in to get the hamburgers and I had to be able to be _____ and they couldn't go into the restroom or anything like that. That would be largely what you would come across in law school; I didn't come across it particularly in the DNC (Democratic National Committee) of course. It didn't at all.

Q: Were there a significant number of African Americans in the Democratic Party or were these still the early days?

MANATT: It would be at the black colleges as it were. Two or three of them around Atlanta are where we had some activities. So they were involved. Be mindful of the Kennedy election; people tend to forget, but for many people the question was Catholicism. I was parked on a train and I went to Charlotte, North Carolina and to two other places in Memphis trying to swindle the Methodists and Baptists college students. That's how it was _____. So that was the unusual issue we dealt with in that campaign.

Q: For generations protestants didn't marry Catholics and vice versa, but suddenly that mentality just disappeared. One election and suddenly—

MANATT: Right. Right. We've never had another Catholic since then. I've never—the Supreme Court all Catholics and Jews.

Q: Since then I don't think people pay much attention.

MANATT: That's my point; it's astounding. My wife's Catholic. So people every once in a while say, "I see her in a mixed-marriage," It's a term of those days, like I've said.

Q: In your town were there any Jews?

MANATT: We had one, the Krasney family. They had a grocery store called the People's Store, which of course the townspeople called the Jew Store. Probably about 1948, Mr. Bud Krasney, who I think is still with us but his wife left us a couple of years ago, had told me that they were moving to Kansas City so their new-born son could get a good education. I thought, "My God, I'm stuck here in Audubon and you're moving to Kansas City." I was kind of envious of the guy. So they moved and that was the last of the Jewish family.

Q: When did you get your law degree?

MANATT: February '62.

Q: What were you going to do with it?

MANATT: I went to California to try to pass the California bar and try to get a job in a law firm to provide for my family. For me I wasn't going to law school to the sake of it or drop the profession or not pursue it. People then might not think of it quite that way but at 25 and 26 and for many years after I was interested in developing a law firm.

Q: Why California?

MANATT: Well, I looked for work in Iowa unsuccessfully. I interviewed in Seattle unsuccessfully. I interviewed three nice firms in Denver and I had one offer. I often wondered if we'd taken that how our lives might have been different. I had an offer from O'Melveny & Myers in Los Angeles, which we accepted and decided to move out there.

Q: Was it a difficult time for legal jobs in 1962 or was it just that you didn't fit?

MANATT: We had been in a recession as you know in '58-'59. So the economy had to get going again and then we slowly started to—

Q: So this wasn't a great market for lawyers?

MANATT: That's probably true but in finding what we found in Southern California it was probably the right time to move there.

Q: Where in Southern California did you move?

MANATT: To begin with we were in what we called the Miracle Mile area.

Q: Wiltshire Boulevard?

MANATT: Exactly, five miles west of downtown. Then Van Ives out in the San Fernando Valley, then Westwood on the northeast corner of UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles).

Q: I had aunts that lived on Hamilton and Curzon Drive. I used to walk the Miracle Mile.

MANATT: I'm sure, Curzon? I remember that street.

Q: What type of law were you involved in?

MANATT: To begin with, they place you in four or five different specialties to see what you might be good at or interested in. I wound up in banking and savings and _____.

Q: I assume California would be a wild place regarding banking. There was a lot to develop.

MANATT: In those days, you were close to being right on savings and loans, and banking. For reasons unknown to me, we had a City National Bank and a Community National Bank, which were the only two chartered, really, after WWII. So, that's 15-17 years after the end of war and of course none were chartered during the war. At the end of the depression they were all being closed; they weren't being opened. So, you had Bank of America and the Security Bank and California Bank and First Western Bank, many big ones, but you didn't have many community banks. So that's what you would call the day of the niche that I found as far as helping groups in Salinas, in El Centro, in Bakersville, in Palm Springs, in Hollywood and in Long Beach organize and get started community banks.

Q: Within banking, did you specialize in any particular area?

MANATT: Sure, in small banks.

Q: Small banks?

MANATT: Small banks. Our firm probably did 110 of them. I probably did 40 before I wore out. Then I finally thought, "This is so much fun, why don't we start one ourselves?" So, we started the first Los Angeles (LA) Bank in 1973.

Q: You also said you bought a farm at this time.

MANATT: Yeah we did. We were so turned off by the convention in 1968 in Chicago that we really wondered. We also had the Tate-LaBianca murders and things in LA. We knew the LaBiancas, a lovely couple. We thought maybe eventually we might want to

move back to Audubon, and get out of the big city. So on the way back from the convention we came back to Iowa and within a week or so after the convention was over we bought our first farm.

Q: For those looking at this later on the 1968 Convention—could you explain why it was awful?

MANATT: Where do you want to start? It was civil rights; it was a daily problem; it was soft on communism; it was Vietnam.

Q: The student demonstrations—

MANATT: Oh yeah, it was very bad, how it is manifested. With Tom Haden and that crowd with Grant Park, throwing you know what in peoples' faces. It was awful.

Q: Did you find yourself taking a position or have any feeling about our involvement in the Vietnam War?

MANATT: Sure. I had been in two or three different discussion groups organized by some congressmen. Perhaps more of a loyalist than some, but I had the chance with a Warren Christopher, who you'd remember. Two other people and I met at Christopher's house on a Saturday in March to start organizing the Johnson for President Campaign and he pulled out the next night.

Q: Who?

MANATT: Johnson. So that was the end of my support of the Vietnam War.

Q: How did Humphrey strike you?

MANATT: Wonderful. It was so confusing because he and Bobby Kennedy had a good race in California and then Senator Kennedy was shot on primary night. It just went on and on. And Dr. King was shot in April.

Q: It was a terrible time.

MANATT: Terrible. Worst time ever.

Q: You also might mention what the LaBianca thing was. This was Charles Manson; he is still in jail.

MANATT: I hope he rots there forever. Two of his people now have already died in jail. It was basically he and a guy named Tex, and four or five women. On a Friday night they killed Sharon Tate, a movie actress who was seven or eight months pregnant, I think, at the time. They killed some other people in their compound up in Benedict Canyon, which is just north of Beverly Hills and south of the San Fernando Valley. And then—just

almost driving around at random on the Sunday night, as I remember, two nights later in the Los Feliz area of Los Angeles, which would be just north and primarily east of Hollywood—they just saw somebody's face in the window or something and they went in and killed Mr. and Mrs. LaBianca. Just totally at random. No connection whatsoever. I can assure that disturbed the Manatt family for quite a while.

Q: So what developed after that? I mean you bought a farm. What do you do with it if you are a lawyer?

MANATT: You have good farmers farm it; you either lease it out to them, you cash rent it, or you crop share it. Not share-crop, crop share; we are not southerners. Or you hire someone's equipment and you contract farm it; that's how you get that started. Be mindful also in '65 I started my law practice. So I left it (farming) alone at that point and started the law practice. Then in '65 Tom Phelps came with me so we started a law partnership. The next year Ellen Rothenberg came with us and some others guys. That's the point at which we started the law firm, so we had that going along. The farm thing we picked up in 1968. I really got heavily involved in the Tony Fersonate campaign in 1970 in Southern California. I was chairman of it and organizer of the campaign.

Q: How did you find California politics?

MANATT: Well, at the time I found it very refreshing because it was so open. As far as the party there wasn't much competition because there weren't that many people interested in the party. Hiram Johnson passed the laws, many years earlier, truncating the parties, cutting them off, having cross-filing. A number of different hollow type reforms, all of which had degraded the party.

Q: With the recall and the referendum, which sort of devastated the situation.

MANATT: Oh in recent years, the referendum. If you don't like something you file a referendum. What is going on with Cap and Trade this year? I think there are 14 referendums.

Q: There's Proposition 13? Something about the school systems—

MANATT: Very famous. Kept us from paying real estate taxes; very high but it sure ruined a lot of things. 1978.

Q: I was a kid, but I remember watching the newsreels when Townson ran for governor and the movie industry did a number on him. He was a little bit out of the normal being a governor. California was always a good _____ .

MANATT: Oh yeah, it still is.

Q: Did you look, as you got into politics, as this being a way to get involved in government itself?

MANATT: As a matter of fact, I have always been much more interested in politics then I had been at the time I was serving in government. My two times in serving the government were 40 years apart; the army and the ambassadorship. Precisely 40 years apart, from '59-'99. Politics was a calling for me, as far as trying to do some things that I thought needed to be done. People always ask, "Well, you must have gotten into politics to help your law practice." Well I got involved in politics at 15, so it was long before the idea of a law firm or even being a lawyer ever came about. To the degree I was spending time in politics and not on the law firm, I was probably disadvantaging myself at the law firm because of all the time I spent in politics.

Q: When I think of California and I think of democratic politics, I think of Hollywood. Well at least it attracts the headlines of this is where you are a politician; this is where you go to get money. Was Hollywood much of a factor?

MANATT: Less of it then, less than it is now. It really started evolving with the democrats reactions to President Reagan. I would say the last 30 years have really been the time when it has gone up, front and center. By front and center, I mean the two things you raise: you raise money around the sparklies and then you have a celebrity show up at Dinuba or in Santa Ynez Valley to highlight the support of either some cause or some candidate. Otherwise they're not involved in politics, just those two things.

Q: Did the universities sort of get involved in what you were doing in politics? Was there sort of an academic element to it? This is the time that students were active as all hell and not trusting anyone over 30.

MANATT: As an aside, I've gotten very involved in universities, but we can cover that the next time. Most of my activity would be after Vietnam. By activity I mean as far as state party leadership. I was elected state party chairman in '71, southern chairman '73, state party chairman '75, western chairman in '77, national finance chairman '78, and national chairman in '81. So to begin with Vietnam: Vietnam was still an issue but going down to about 2/3 of my conversations _____.

Q: How did Vietnam affect you in explaining it? Was this a democratic issue?

MANATT: Well of course it was a democratic issue, a republican issue, an American issue. The problem was that often we democrats had different views on the issue. That's why I tried to be supportive of the administration up to the time that President Johnson pulled out of the race, as I mentioned, in 1968. Then it seemed like as the generals, I say we had to have—today we'd call it—a big surge or else we've got to get out of there, one way or the other. Well we had half of a big surge I gather and we still had to get out of there.

Q: I was consul general to Saigon in '69-'70, so I remember when they were getting ready to pull out the troops. For me it was an interesting time.

MANATT: It would be. I'm sure you were glad to be gone by 1970.

Q: Absolutely.

MANATT: Yeah, yeah. I could understand that.

Q: How did you find the political environment in California? It seemed open compared to Massachusetts and places where there are political machines.

MANATT: I've got about five more minutes. I think you pretty well put your finger on it. One of the advantages I think actually existed was it was so open and somewhat free willed. That would be the time and the environment in which a young lawyer from Iowa, from Van Ives, could be elected state party chairman. To the degree in those days there we were evolving machines or organizations. It would be the Burton operation in San Francisco, that's Willie Brown. It would be the Waxman-Berman operation in Los Angeles. But they, within reason, until Willie eventually married, they were really interested in congressional reapportionment and obviously legislative _____ before then. But not the statewide things, not what was going on in Fresno or other things like that. There was no organization like that.

Q: I have to ask, was there such a thing as the Iowa Mafia? Because as a kid I remember farmers of Iowa getting away for the winters and retiring to Long Beach.

MANATT: A lot of that in my opinion would—and I went to two of them—would have been workers that came out before and after the war, when they were forced off the farm. They went to work for Douglass in Long Beach. That was more of the group I would remember than farmers coming out in the winter time.

Q: It wasn't retirees?

MANATT: Well, some of those. I remember one of the two I went to, a governor flew out; so the governor would be more interested in the farmers who were going back after the winter than they would be in the retirees. Most of those would have been republican so there's no—

Q: So it wasn't your particular province?

MANATT: No, if there was an Iowa mafia I was not aware of it. The interesting thing—there's not a Nebraska mafia but we've got the then sheriff, two of the supervisors, I think Sam Yorty?, obviously Charlie Munger (Buffett's partner)—we got about ten or so people from Nebraska that actually wielded or wield, mostly wielded, great political power, from Nebraska.

Q: I had to sign Sam Yorty into Vietnam; he had been with the president and had gone to Romania, I think. The trip was with Nixon and since he had a communist visa in his

passport, the South Vietnamese weren't going to let him in, unless they got a guarantee from somebody.

MANATT: He went on to be our mayor for three terms and then Tom Bradley finally whipped him on the second try.

Q: Next time we will pick this up around the '70s with your involvement in the state and national party. Then we'll move on to your ambassadorship, but this is sort of setting the stage.

MANATT: Sure thing. Looking forward to it.

End of Interview

Editor's Note: Charles Taylor Manatt (June 9, 1936 – July 22, 2011) was a U.S. Democratic Party political appointee. Manatt served as ambassador to the Dominican Republic from 1999 to 2001, representing the government of President Bill Clinton.