

INTERVIEW-MRS. LORENE BURKHART
SEPTEMBER 7, 2000

INTERVIEWER:

Dr. Philip V. Scarpino
Chair
Indiana University-Purdue
University, Indianapolis

NARRATOR:

Mrs. Lorene Burkhart

DATE OF INTERVIEW:

September 7, 2000

[Start of Tape One, Side One]

Scarpino: Today is September 7, 2000, and I am conducting the second interview with Mrs. Lorene Burkhart. This interview is part of a pilot project that will, over the long run, build a library of oral history interviews on the general subject of philanthropy. The co-sponsors are the IUPUI Archives and Special Collections and the Department of History at IUPUI. The co-sponsors have received considerable help from the IU Center on Philanthropy. The interviewer is Dr. Phillip V. Scarpino, Chair, Department of History.

Mrs. Burkhart was born in Vincennes, Indiana. Her father was an Undersecretary of Agriculture under President Truman, and her mother was active in the Vincennes community. She attended Purdue University and graduated in 1956 with a degree in home economics. Purdue recognized her with an honorary doctor of letters in 1997. This action on Purdue's part acknowledged a lengthy service to the university including the donation of one million dollars in 1993 to establish the Center for Families. A former home economics teacher, Mrs. Burkhart had a long career in business including Director of Consumer Services, Ruben Montgomery & Associates, 1972 to 1975; Director of Consumer Services, JennAir Corporation, 1975 to 1978; and Director of Strategic Planning-Foods & Dairy Division, Borden, Inc., 1981 to 1983. She was the founder/owner of the Women's Investment Network, 1983 to 1985, owner of the *Register*, 1992 to 1998, and Chairman of Metro Magazines, Inc, 1997 to 1998. Mrs. Burkhart worked in media in various capacities including a syndicated radio show, 1967 to 1968; a daily radio show on WXLW, 1967 to 1970; Noon News on WTHR, 1970 to 1971; and a one-hour TV show on Channel 16, 1994 to 1995. Mrs. Burkhart has a long and impressive list of civic and volunteer activities including service on a number of boards of directors and trustees, such as the Indiana Historical Society, 1997 to the present, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988 to the present. Among other things, she raised more than a million dollars for the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She has volunteered and raised funds for organizations devoted to the arts, youth, the elderly, healthcare, and education. Mrs. Burkhart has won numerous awards and recognitions for philanthropic work, among them the National Spirit of Philanthropy Award given by Kappa Alpha Theta in 1998, and she was named a Most Influential Woman by the *Indianapolis Business Journal* in 1996.

Scarpino: All right, it's on. I'd like to thank you very much for agreeing to sit for this second interview, and as I said before I turned the tape recorder on, I need once again to ask your permission to record this interview, to transcribe the tape, and to deposit the tape and transcript in the IUPUI Archives and Special Collections. Can I have your permission to do that?

Burkhart: Yes, you may have.

Scarpino: Okay. Well, during our last interview we talked at length about your work life, and then we talked about your involvement in philanthropy. I'd like to start this interview by asking you to talk about what you've learned about the personal value of philanthropy.

Burkhart: Well, it's an evolving process because I really think of myself as a new philanthropist. Whatever I had done in my early years of giving of my time and leadership and my energy, I just, I never thought of philanthropy. It was just involvement, sharing what I knew and what I knew about how to do things and so forth. So it was always a joy for me to grow by sharing what I knew. I guess I didn't think of myself as a philanthropist until I began to do major things in the community. And I know now that that isn't true. I know that we are philanthropists at a very early stage, and we don't think of it in that way, so that's why I'm saying that I had a little catching up to do on this in my own mind. But when I—in 1985, '86, when I really got involved in the community and in civic organizations, I really was giving, you know, working full-time, probably forty hours a week or more, for different kinds of volunteer organizations. And then when I became a publisher of the Register, which was a monthly publication that focused on non-profits and philanthropy, I began to really understand so much more about philanthropy and understand my role in it in using my life-learned, life-long learned skills, and then as I began to have the resources to share more financially, I guess I began to recognize myself as growing into a full-fledged philanthropist. And I was particularly proud, and have been really proud, of the publication that I had, that where not only was I personally involved in philanthropy, but where I felt that I had helped so many people in the community to understand more about what non-profit organizations do, and the role that they play in the community, as well as the role of all of these people that give their time and their money to make these non-profits work. So I am really pleased that I had that six years of being able to do that kind of education in the community. My—I guess the zenith of my feeling a philanthropist was when I decided to make a major gift to Purdue University, and it was sort of a feeling like well, gee, you know, I've arrived. I never in my life thought I would be making this kind of gift. So

what I have learned is that philanthropy is a growing process. It is wonderfully fulfilling whether you are just giving your time—and I don't mean just because that's so important—or whether you are a major donor or whether you give to your church and that's all. All of those things help all of us in so many ways. You know, it helps the whole community, but then as an individual, it says something about our generous spirit and our need to reach out to other people and not just focus on ourselves. So, in the last year I've really been thinking about those words, generous spirit, and how that fits my life and . . .

Scarpino: Which is the next question I want to ask you, so if you can tell us what that means to you, I would sure appreciate that.

Burkhart: Okay, yes. Well, I really hadn't thought of those words until my husband passed away a year ago, and as I reflected on his life, and I thought about what he had done in his ninety years for the community, and how he had given of his leadership and his time while running these big businesses, and then I really wasn't a part of his life, whatever major financial gifts he gave, because after we married it was more of a joint thing and then it took a different turn. But I know that he did make major financial gifts as well. But I think that his personal leadership, using his wonderful skills, his wonderful intellectual ability, to do so many things that have such a long-term, such a lasting effect, nationwide, and to think that he found the time to do this in addition to running companies. You know, that just continues to just bowl me over because I think I do a lot and give a lot, but his has just had such a huge impact.

Scarpino: Can I ask you give me some examples of some of the things that he has done that have had a lasting effect nationwide?

Burkhart: Yes, and then you'll see why I identified those words "generous spirit" with him. One was the founding of USA Funds, which has allowed millions and millions of young people to go to college. And that was his concept, and it was founded as a non-profit organization and was recently sold for seven hundred and—or one part of it sold for \$740 million or something like that, it's not even the whole company. So the long-term impact of that, you can't even calculate what that has meant to people, the parents of the young people, and to young people, and the ongoing lasting effect from that. He also, with a group of people—but he was the instigator—founded the parent-teachers organizations which replaced the Parent-teachers Associations in lots of schools all over the country, because when John felt strongly about something, he really put his money and his mouth where his convictions were, and he really felt that any involvement

that teacher organizations had with unions and that kind of thing ended up being detrimental in many ways, so he was instrumental in founding that organization. Now I don't know what the real differences are, but I know that schools all over the country now have parent-teacher organizations.

Scarpino: Right.

Burkhart: And then of course he was very much involved in the founding of Unigov in Indianapolis and spent a tremendous amount of time meeting with two or three other people in figuring out how that could work and then making sure it happened. And the impact on our community--Indianapolis, with Unigov, is so admired by cities throughout the country who have to deal with two sets of people, county and city, to get anything done. And it's very expensive to operate that way. Unigov certainly isn't perfect, but in a democracy, that's not what you are striving for. You're striving to have things work for the greater good. And then, well, he was the president of the Capital Improvements Board when the first Convention Center was built here and was instrumental in making that happen. He was very involved in governments. He liked politics, but his real interest was governments and how to make things better for people. So that's, in the past year as I've reflected on his role in so many ways and in his own university. He graduated from—because he would not have been able to go to college if he had not received a scholarship. And so, he was always very involved in anything that would help young people to go to college. So when I came across those words—and I don't even know where they came from—of “generous spirit,” I just felt that that described so perfectly what I came to realize, not only during his life but after he died, that he was the epitome of this because he didn't do things for his personal glory or the money that was in them. He did them for the greater good, and I think that really describes what a generous spirit is.

Scarpino: Where do you think a generous spirit comes from? Is somebody born with it . . .

Burkhart: . . . no . . .

Scarpino: . . . Do you learn to have it? Is it inculcated as a part of you growing up in a culture?

Burkhart: Yes, and it doesn't even have to do with growing up with hard knocks, as we say, you know, of really having to struggle for everything and make his own way. But I've seen very wealthy people who inherited what they have and have a wonderfully generous spirit. So I think it has to do with the loving heart of realizing that we all have a need to reach out, and some people don't choose to do that, they don't see a need, but I watch them and see that their lives

are—I would call them not really complete, because they are so turned inwardly in terms of their own personal satisfactions, gratifications, and bent or satisfying whatever they want, whether its more money or whatever, station in life or whatever. So, you know, I feel that the loving heart goes with the generous spirit.

Scarpino: Do you see your role as a leader in philanthropy as one of trying to point out to people that buried inside most of us there's a generous spirit?

Burkhart: Yes, and that's what I think that my publication did so much more effectively more than I could ever do as one person. John never looked at it that way, as one person. He did these things that had worldwide impact, and generally that is the case, it's one person that spearheads things. And I think as one person I certainly have made an impact going back to my early years where I gave speeches all over the country, particularly to women's groups, young professional women or women who were trying to find their way in a new world of women having jobs in the working world and explaining how to balance their lives so that they had time for themselves and their families and their work. But, yeah, I feel that I have had the opportunity to explain this philosophy and then have had the opportunity to actually exhibit this in a variety of ways in the gifts that I've made and just the way that I go about living my life.

Scarpino: You mentioned the talks that you gave all over the county earlier in your career, and I'm wondering if you've ever had the opportunity to have, later in your life, have an opportunity to meet any of the women that you spoke to . . .

Burkhart: . . . Uh-hum . . .

Scarpino: . . . and find out what kind of an impact you had on them.

Burkhart: Yes. In fact, it was interesting—for a number of years, I might be traveling, be in an airport someplace, and a woman would come up to me and say, you probably don't remember me, but you gave a talk in Atlanta, Georgia, or Houston, Texas or wherever it was, that changed my life. And, you know, that makes you really feel good because I take that as meaning changed their life in terms of helping them find a direction that made their life more fulfilling, which was my goal.

Scarpino: Before we turned the tape recorder on, you mentioned to me that you'd been tapped to give another speech, and that the title of the speech is What's New in Philanthropy. I'm going to ask you to preempt that a little bit. What do you think is new in philanthropy, as a person who's really in a position to have experience and have thought about that?

Burkhart: Well, several things that are new in philanthropy. One is the amount of money that women are distributing. We know in our own community that the biggest philanthropists here are female, one of them who inherited money, the other one who earned it herself. And there are several women in our community, some that are ready and others that are moving into that position, I think we'll see some major gifts from them as time goes on. So that's new, is the number of female donors.

Scarpino: To what do you attribute that?

Burkhart: Well, a lot of it is just because they are in the work world, and they're making a lot of money. And they realize—and some of it's just being practical in terms of their taxes, but other, the other part is they have found that it's very gratifying to give money in your own name to cause that are very personal to you. And women we know give more to things that have to do with children, families, that whole arena, whether it's protection from abuse or things that make life better or whatever it is, women like to give to those types of causes. So that's been very good. The creation of the Women's Fund in Indianapolis is an example of that, where we saw that female organizations were underfunded compared to men's of the same type, like YMCA versus YW, Boy Scouts versus Girl Scouts—you know, all of that. So that's, our hope is to become an equalizer, picking up where other funders drop off. Then another thing is that people are, couples as well as singles, are giving at a much younger age. And again, I attribute that to the economy, and how affluent our nation is, and that where even ten years ago, people in their forties, early fifties—it was their heaviest time in their lives for outgoing money, of kids in college and all of that kind of thing, and now we find a lot of those—you know, they have a lot of money. They either made it in the stock market boom, or they've started companies that have done extremely well, or they're two professional people. So we're seeing the money coming from much younger people all of the time. And the third thing, I think, is the sophistication of the whole arena of the business side of philanthropy, of people understanding how to protect their assets and how to give, that is meaningful as far as their own financial picture is concerned but also how to begin to think about things that are of interest to them that they might want to become involved with, and they're finding that it's kind of boring just making money and going to work, and it's a lot of fun to make things better for people. I mean, even our young athletes, who are setting up foundation in their early twenties and doing wonderful things with them, so I think . . .

Scarpino: You're talking about professional athletes here in town?

Burkhart: Yes. So I think the philanthropy, the whole philanthropic business has done a good job of education, of having people understand how to go about it and how fulfilling it is.

Scarpino: Is the development of a philanthropy business something new on the scene as well?

Burkhart: Oh yes.

Scarpino: Professional fundraisers and professional fund-raising organizations and that kind of thing?

Burkhart: Uh-hum. It's become quite sophisticated, and of course, having our Center on Philanthropy here in Indianapolis is really, was a new idea ten years ago. We were really pacesetters, leaders in that arena. It's been wonderful to have that in our community, and I think that has done a lot for this community, of feeling that we are probably one of the leading communities. And I don't know how we compare with other cities, but I can't imagine that there, even though size-wise, but if you go percentage-wise, we certainly must have a high percentage of major donors and support of organizations in this community.

Scarpino: What kind of advice would you have for someone who might be reading this transcript or listening to this tape who might be thinking about getting involved in philanthropy?

Burkhart: Well, my advice would be to first do some reflection on who you are and what your interests are. And sometimes that goes back to your childhood, if you had some difficult incidents in your life, whether--let's say abuse or any number of things that may have happened to you. And that's why I mention with my husband, of his interest in education because of his own experiences. And I think many of us, it is our own experiences that lead us, later on, into the things that we do. So I would suggest first a reflection. Then, if you've narrowed down to two or three things that you think are organizations or interests that you want to either put time or money into, call them and say, you know I'd really like to come visit, I'd like to know more about what you do, would you send me some materials. Get acquainted with them, find out how they, what their fiscal situation is so you don't get involved in something that is not on the up and up. They all have to keep those kinds of records if they want to be classified as a 501(c3), a non-profit organization. And so you want to make sure that you're dealing with ethical people. And then explore it, go to some of their events or some of their activities, or volunteer and see if it's something that you feel good about. And if you think, you know, they do good work but this just doesn't fit me, go on to the next one. There are certainly plenty to look at. So I think that

you really have to, if you're shopping around, shop just like you would for a new car or a set of tires or anything like that, unless—you know, many of us have a built in legacy, so to speak, that follows us along, from what we learned from our parents or what we did in our younger years. And that's especially true in terms of the college we graduated from. Of course, all the colleges are trying to maintain a good relationship with their alums so that when that graduate begins to have some money, that they will feel that they will need to give some of it back. It's kind of funny to watch how the universities have become so sophisticated in fundraising. I think that you have to feel good about what you've chosen, and that's why I say it has to be a personal thing. So what a woman's going to feel good about is probably quite different than what her husband's going to feel good about.

Scarpino: Well, is there any particular advice that you would give to women that might be interested in becoming active in philanthropy?

Burkhart: Yeah. You know women need to look at, as I mentioned earlier, the areas that have to do with families, that have to do with children, whether it's an advocacy kind of situation, whether you want what I call instant gratification, where you are actually working with the children or the elderly people or the abused women or whatever, or whether you want to be a more stand-offish situation where you are providing funding for professionals to work with them. Many older women are involved in helping to raise money by having, being involved in fundraisers and that kind of thing. And a lot of career women, because they have limited time. There are other women who really want to have that personal connection to where their time goes, and then generally the money will follow. So I've watched women become Big Sisters, for instance. Be involved in Girls Incorporated, in Girl Scouts, in organizations like Meals on Wheels or senior citizens organizations because they can identify with it, and they're comfortable with that.

Scarpino: Do you think that, generally speaking, that women are more likely to get involved with the kinds of activities and groups that are directly related to their own children than men are?

Burkhart: Well, yes, that's true. As a couple, you're probably—the first thing that couples are involved with are school activities, church activities, things that their children are involved with. So they don't have maybe much time to do anything else until the children are beyond those years and are not in the organizations where parents are involved. So . . . and I think that's

where a lot of people get started in giving of their time and money is with organizations through the schools and churches and Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, all of the organizations that children are involved with.

Scarpino: You talked last time we spoke and today about gender differences and philanthropic activity. I'm wondering if you think there are any age differences. That people are likely to engage in different activities or different types of giving depending on their age.

Burkhart: Absolutely, yes. Younger people are probably going to be involved in things that have to do with people their age or with their children's activities. As, or if they have aging parents, that may lead them into giving time and money into things like Meals on Wheels or the various organizations that help elderly people, just because, again, of their own experiences. Or maybe they've lost a spouse or they've lost a relative—that's where your health organizations come into play. Many people who become involved with hospice work and the cancer organization, lung, all of those health organizations—many of those people are involved because of the loss of someone or their own personal experience with it. For instance, a friend of mine, who with two other women, founded an organization called Ovarcoming because these three women had survived ovarian cancer, and they felt very strongly about the fact that women do have recognizable symptoms even though the doctors have said that they don't, and they enlisted doctors to work with them and got the Lilly company involved and really have a wonderful organization now.

Scarpino: So this is a local organization?

Burkhart: Uh-hum.

Scarpino: What are the women's names?

Burkhart: Kay Binford and Pam Faber and Nancy Hines. So their organization has to do with education, information to women on what these symptoms are.

Scarpino: Speaking of generational patterns in philanthropy, last time after I turned the tape recorder off, you told me a little bit about the Young Ambassadors.

Burkhart: Yes.

Scarpino: Could you me tell me about that now for the record? Explain what it is and what they do?

Burkhart: Yes. That is an organization of young, professional people in Indianapolis who--I think most of them are college graduates, now I'm not positive about that—but they would be in

late teens, early twenties age group up to mid-thirties, probably. And the sole role, objective of the organization is to volunteer their time. Now I suppose some of them probably give a little bit of money, but they aren't the ones who have very much to give at this point. But they—oh, I think they're four hundred or more young people in that organization. They meet monthly, so it has a social aspect to it, which is great because it gives them an opportunity to meet new people in a safe situation and where they have something in common. And then they have a newsletter, and they have these opportunities to sign up for events and, oh, a whole range of things that they can volunteer for. And they even have waiting lists to sign up to volunteer their time to particular things. So they might be on a Saturday, for instance, out in their old, grubby clothes, cleaning up a playground of a community child-care center and washing the windows or painting the walls or that kind of thing. Or they may be on Saturday night at some big fancy black tie fundraiser, if they've got the clothes for it, where they're manning . . .

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Start of Tape One, Side Two]

Scarpino: So they might have their bartender licenses.

Burkhart: Yes! And so that they can volunteer their services at private events for non-profits to be bartenders. You know, they just do all kinds of things. The joy of organ—well, there are so many wonderful things about that organizations—but I spoke to them a couple of years ago, and I was so struck when I looked out at this audience of these smiling, happy faces of young people who were there to give their time away to make all of our lives better. Ah, it was just almost overwhelming! I mean, the looks on their faces, you just--I mean it was just like a ray of sunshine to see this. It's pretty phenomenal that they keep this going, and everything is volunteer in it. The president of the organization does that in addition to whatever they do to make a living.

Scarpino: Do you remember what message you tried to impart to these eager people who were already prepared to believe?

Burkhart: Well, I probably—I can't remember for sure. I remember where I was, but I probably was talking about the role of philanthropy in the community and what impact they make, and

then the larger picture of when you total all that up, of all kinds of people giving their time and their money, the impact that it has then on our community.

Scarpino: Okay, last time that we spoke, when we did the taped interview, we ended up talking at some length about individuals and circumstances that had an impact on you and the person that you became and the philanthropist that you are. But as I went back and listened to the tape, the one thing that I didn't ask you was obvious, and that is about religion. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person, and has religion played a role in the philanthropic activity that you have engaged in during your lifetime?

Burkhart: Absolutely, uh-hum. It started at a very early age because I grew up on a farm and we went to a little country church, where my parents actually met . . .

Scarpino: And the denomination was . . . ?

Burkhart: Methodist. So that was just something that we did. The only reason you didn't go to Sunday School and church on Sunday morning was if you had a—not just a temperature, but a high temperature, then you were excused from going to church, but that didn't happen very often. So church was very much a part of our lives and continued to be. When I'd be home from college, for instance, I would just know that on Sunday morning I was going to go to Sunday School and church. So when I was married and had children, church was a major part of my life and has continued to be through the years. I do consider myself to be a spiritual person. I always felt at a very early age that God had given me particular talents and skills and wherewithal to do important things in terms of service, and that some people do their service in a mission field, others do—you know, we do our service in all kinds of ways. When I was young, I remember, the only way that I knew 'cause we would have these revivals at our little church, and I remember thinking, but I don't want to be a missionary and go to China, because that was the only way that I saw that you were being of service as far as religion was concerned. But I came to realize, as time went on, that you find people in walks of life who are living their convictions and who are really participating in things because they feel that it is a part of their mission, a part of what they see their calling to be. And so I have always felt particularly blessed that God has always given me tremendous challenges, sometimes so overwhelming that I think, now okay, let's see, I don't know how to do that, I wonder why I'm supposed to do this. But then I always knew that whatever challenges were presented to me, the wherewithal to do them would follow. So there's a tremendous amount of faith that goes with that, and if you don't have

the faith, when big opportunities come along, you think, well, I couldn't do that, and you don't because you don't have the faith that you're going to be given the wherewithal. I know just recently I was sitting, oh, in a wonderful setting looking out at the gulf and thinking, you know I could never have dreamed in a million years when I was a little girl that my life would turn out the way that it has. And while I sitting there thinking about this, then this whole campaign to raise money came to me that we're going to do for the Girl Scouts. And it's called, Remember When You Were a Girl. It's already been approved, we're already well into the planning of it. So you see what I'm talking about is that while I'm reflecting on my own blessings, then I'm given another blessing, which is the knowledge on how to do something that's going to help a lot of people. So that's just the way my life has always been and because I believe that it's going to be good and that I'm always going to be given the wonderful opportunities. I never look at them, oh my gosh, like, I don't have the time to do that and I don't want to do that. It's always, oh, isn't this a great opportunity and how can I use my skill and talent. Then really, I guess I would be saying, praising the Lord in a way that will impact a lot of people.

Scarpino: Do you see any relationship between religion and spirituality and a generous heart—a generous spirit and a loving heart?

Burkhart: Well, yes.

Scarpino: Are those things somehow connected?

Burkhart: Well, yes, although my husband didn't have the same kind of belief that I had because—I always laughed and said, he just--I guess that he really wasn't agnostic because he couldn't quite let himself believe in something he couldn't touch, feel, you know, kind of thing. And I said, I'm glad that I didn't have quite the intelligence he did because then I could go on blind faith, you know. (Laughing) He didn't quite fly that way. But yet, he was the epitome of what we know as a Christian person, of giving without expecting anything in return. So I saw this dichotomy where—and he lived it, but inwardly, if you would have asked him, he would have not, he wouldn't have seen that what he did was a particularly Christian motivation, where I start with that, and see that is what motivates me and gives me my strength and my courage and my convictions and so forth. So it is woven together, but differently for different people.

Scarpino: But in your mind, and as far as you're concerned as a person and a philanthropist, they are connected.

Burkhart: Yes, but then I see examples of--you know, I don't know anything about Bill Gates's religious convictions, or what's-his-name, Soro or whatever it is in New York, whose given millions and millions of dollars, who was a Russian immigrant, I think. So it doesn't have to be connected, but I don't know what motivates them. I mean, certainly with Bill Gates it is because he has so much and wants to share what he has to make the world a better place, and same thing with Ted Turner and a lot of those. But I don't know that it is woven in with a spiritual faith. I have no idea because I haven't read anything about that.

Scarpino: In a minute I'm going to say thank you for being kind enough to sit for two interviews with me, but before I do that, I want to ask you if there's anything you would like to say that I haven't asked you about, or anything that I should've asked you that I just didn't know enough to ask you about. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Burkhart: Well, I guess yes, what I would like to add is how rewarding it is to me to now see my children and their children beginning to share what they have. To know that they are--that my children are beginning at around age forty, a little less and a little more, to make contributions to things, to be involved in their communities at this point with their children's activities, but with church and so forth, but so it makes—it's very rewarding to me to have my grandchildren say, well, I had this paper route, but I, a percent of it goes to a gift to the church or to an organization that I choose. So it makes me feel that apparently my life has been an example, and when I gave my major gift to Purdue, it was given in honor of my grandchildren, so their names are listed there, and they've seen that and had their pictures taken there. I don't think that they quite understand it, but So I think the legacy of a giving life is something that we would all hope for, and it makes you feel that you certainly have impacted the ones that are, of course, nearest and dearest to you.

Scarpino: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to sit with me and talk to me. It's been very interesting.

[End of Tape One, Side Two]