

CLAWS AND WINGS:

AN ORAL HISTORY EXPLORATION OF DISABILITY IN DELAWARE 1917-2017

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Interviewer: Kim Burdick, MA, MPA (Referred to hereafter as KB)

Interviewee: Vince Boehm (Referred to hereafter as VB), Advocate

Topics included: Hunger Strike, Mental Health, Self-Determination

Run time: 54:36

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KB: We're currently interviewing Vince Boehm from the Developmental Disabilities Council. Vince, tell us where you grew up and where you live now.

VB: Yes, I, I grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, and I live in, in Wilmington area now. And I bet we've been here almost enough time to be considered native-born Delawareans. We've been here for more than 35 years. So I think we could claim that title. [Laughs] Delaware's a crazy place because hardly anybody actually is born here. [Laughs]

KB: So, you came here through Boy Scouts, right?

VB: Yes, I was a professional with the, with the Boy Scouts. I worked in basically in the Scout office and I had charge of the Exploring program, oh, I think 5,600 kids spread over four counties. And so it was very, very busy job and eventually things caught up with me and I went "bonkers" one day and it was a, a little bit of a rough situation.

KB: So, tell me about your activism.

VB: [Laughs] Oh, wow! That, it was a, about eight years that, that I was spent in hard core stuff and it turns out that mental health is a real mess and it took a lot of doing but I think we got together on it. One of my early things was the hunger strike out in Pasadena, and that's quite historic! In the consumer bus..., in the consumer-end of things. It's about the first time that the people confronted the powers that be about some very serious things. And, I didn't organize it. I... Another large consumer group – these are all consumers, by the way. They weren't anybody's mamas and daddies running the show. And we called a hunger strike and we set it up in Pasadena, California. And that was about the first year I was on the Council, think I did that.

And, us, we had a lot of serious questions about things that were going on at the time. One of the things that we – we had, I think eight different demands that we wanted to be met. One of them was, of course, the fact that the, the drug companies were selling them pills that claimed to prevent suicide when they weren't admitting that the pills might actually be causing suicide. Now this goes way back to the Prozac hearings in '92, but our, our hunger strike was in 2004. And it was the second one exploring that thing. And they, and, one of the... Another consumer member that, that I know was actually a Holocaust survivor. It's a, a woman, and she lost her child to, lost her son to psychoactive drugs and it was, it was a horrendous experience I heard. That made her a real advocate, you know? When they talk of people...

I, I orig..., I originally got involved with a lot of this, this type of thing. And we, we got a black box warning on all of the, what they called, the SSRI medications [Editor: Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor], which is the Prozacs and things. And then without any

more to-do, they also admitted that the antipsychotics were causing the same problem. And, and when I...

With this hunger strike lasted for 21 days and out there I met the, the, the – one of the ladies that planned on testifying at, at the public comments period in the February, 2004 hearing. And I – it was held in Bethesda, Maryland, which is a suburb of DC – and I, I knew. I said, “Well, heck! I’m only 100 miles away or so and I might go up and do that.” And actually I signed up to, to speak at it. It was a historic... But I found a... There were, had real tight limits on who could come in and how much time, and the cut-off point. And when, when they were going to... They only wanted a few people and they got 65 and everybody had three minutes. But then, anyway, I, I yielded my time to a woman who had lost her child. And it was a bad thing. I’m not gonna get into it. But, you know, six- or nine-year-old kid.

And, but anyway, getting back to my friend. She found out, you know, the gal in New York, lost a child also, she found out... She was running a mail, mail list and she found out, she got that the FDA was actually muzzling their, their safety officer. They wouldn’t let him present his material at this hearing. So, about a week... She, she had – she’s well-connected – she had a, tipped off the (what is it?), *Los Angeles Times* about it and they broke the story about, oh, a week or two before the thing. And they were between a rock and a hard place because they couldn’t get this guy on and admit that they were wrong.

But what the, what the results of that first hearing was, is that they, they rescheduled another hearing on, on the same premise, in, it was, I think it was August, you know, six months later or so. And, and that’s when they decided to black box warn, the, the class of drugs that we were saying. And, and that... In a black box warning you notice you get into the actual drug label, they call it. You know, one of, it’s usually about 17 pages of fine print. But the first thing you see right up on this, even above the name of the product, is things that they really want to get over, you know, tell people about. And that, and that black box warning on the, on the medications we, we actually... Well, I’m not gonna take full credit! [Laughs] But there is a, quite a few people that came to that hearing, wound up on a mailing list that I, I put out at, at the time of the, of the hearing, and then for about 8 years or 9 years afterwards.

KB: So, how did the... Who were the people that came for the hunger strike and why was it in Pasadena?

VB: Well, oh, the hunger strike. Yeah. Yeah, we had a blind girl from, from Chicago. We had a Latino from New York City. Myself. Fellow that, that was, run, run the group here was from state of Wa... No wait, he was, he was from Oregon. And, let’s see. I think I’m missing one. Oh, and, Valley Girl. [Laughs] She, she, she was a local out there. Nice, nice gal. And...

Yeah, we, we decided to confront the, the powers that be, the [unclear]. And we found out something very interesting about something like that. They’re not, they weren’t used to getting a, confrontations by a consumer group. We’re supposed to be nice little people that sit back and say “yes” to everything. And hopefully potty-trained, you know? But, then, then when you got into that they were, they were a bit... Well, it was a very, you know... The thing that Gandhi said, you know, first they ignore you, then they make, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win. It, it, it works. And ended

up, we found... I, I couldn't believe when we got that black box warning. Oh, actual, actually we can make people pay attention to what our issues. And, it was, it was amazing and I'm... And it's a, a good thing [unclear].

KB: And what were the days like, those 21 days? What did you do all day?

VB: Well, we had... The first week was pretty busy. We had a, a... We had a public... We, we had public sessions where we let people in and talked about what we were gonna do and what we were doing. And they were well-attended. In fact, we had a packed house every night.

During the days, very little. Oh, we could, we could get out and walk and go out of the building and everything. It was right on, it was right by, two blocks west of the actual, place where they have the, the Pasadena Rose Parade. [Laughs] It was a big main, main avenue there. But, and there was stuff to do, but we weren't, we weren't exactly tourists or anything like that. Big deal when we'd go down to maybe the corner and get a, a soda or something, but no, no, no solid food, on a hunger strike we didn't.

KB: How did you happen to pick that church to host your strike?

VB: Ah, one of the, one of the fellows that was involved with it was a member of the, of the church. And we rented a, a building out back of the church for, actually, three weeks. I, I forget how that was done. I, I think... Maybe it's, it's, was a, a, a friend of ours in the movement. But it was a, a professional I think paid for that, that rental and stuff.

KB: And was there a name for that particular movement?

VB: Yeah. It, it was, it was called the Consumer Coalition, but it's now called MindFreedom. And it's, it's, it's still around. We, we lost our, the guy that organized it. Well, he's still alive but he had a serious accident and not involved any more. And, we, yeah. It was Mind, MindFreedom, it's, it was the name of the organization. And it's international.

KB: And was that the year that it started or had it, did it exist before you did this...?

VB: Oh, yes! Yes, yes. They were around for, oh, maybe, maybe ten years before we did the... And I, I was in a conference up in Washington about a, oh, the spring of that year, and I ran into a fellow that goes by some chance from the same town as the, as the guy that was running the MindFreedom organization, David Oaks. And I said, "Hey!" you know, "Dave Oaks!" And he says, "Yes," and you know, and then he took me, told me about the hunger strike and I was, I was very interested. He, he was going to go but he decided not to. It was... He, he had a professional career and he thought, it was the state or something, you know, he'd be blackballed or something. There, there was an awful, in that per...in that time there was a tremendous amount of, of stuff like that going back. You know. Not so much any more.

KB: How, about how old were you in that time? [VB: How was I what?] How old were you then?

VB: I, I was there for three weeks.

KB: Yeah, but, I mean, were you 20? Were you 50?

VB: Oh, no. I was, I was 63.

KB: Yeah? So had you been a protester in the '60s, too?

VB: Well, no, I... That, that's strange. That's a good question, because I kind of missed the, the '60s. I was in... It was a... I was in the army at that point and a few things like that, so. I just missed all the, some of the interesting parts of... I thank god [unclear] were in terrible shape for parts of it. Okay, you know. [Murmurs]

KB: At the end of 21 days, how did you feel?

VB: Hungry! [KB: Hungry!] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I got a, a... There's a lawyer friend of MindFreedom, he was a member out there and, I remember him picking me up. Well, he picked me up at the airport to bring me to places and he picked me up again to go out and get the plane to go home. And, I, I remember we stopped in a steak restaurant and I had, honest to god, I think about a 16 ounce or something. [Laughs] At one of these, it was one of these chain restaurants. I don't remember which one. But... But yeah, I, I, I really, really, really made up for that three weeks of fasting.

KB: And it didn't impact your health at all not to eat?

VB: Yeah, it did. Absolutely. Couple weeks after that I had a minor stroke. [KB: Yeah?] Which was a rough, rough deal. But...

KB: And, was there much publicity about this...?

VB: Oh, yes! Oh my gosh, yeah. Before... What happened is, a couple weeks before, they, the strike, person that was supposed to do the publicity, we found out did nothing, so I said, "Throw it open to the group." And I knew a, a reporter on the *Washington Post* and I, I got him in on the thing. And then, of course, he called also the *Los Angeles Times* and, and so we, we got interviewed, some stuff like that. And it was... It was crazy, 'cause when, you know, sittin' there, we mostly answered the phones and stuff, you know? And you pick up the phone and, "London calling!" I, no, I mean, we really did cause an international thing. In fact, there were 40 other people that we know of around the world were fasting in, in, along with us. So... We got front page, you know, made the front page of the *Washington Post*. We made the... We were on the cover of the *Los Angeles Times* Sunday, you know, the Sunday supplement thing. And they covered it. God, we had TV, radio. We did interviews and stuff like that. It...

We caused quite a, a sensation considering, you know, what was it? A half a dozen guys in a church building, but it was good. We, we had some... We also had some... We, we challenged a, a, you know, three different organizations: the, the APA, the psychiatrists, and NAMI, and the Surgeon General. We, we sent letters before that. We wanted the question answered... All we wanted was simple answers to, you know, straight answers to simple questions. And, and they weren't able to do that. They referred us to a book.

Now, we had a psychia... we had a, a scientific panel backing us up, so anything that, that was coming in, we had professionals look at the stuff over that they were saying, you know, you know. They sent us... They told us to read a book on psychiatry and how great it was. And, we, we had, oh, god! We, we had the guy that chaired the, see, schizophrenia section of the American, or the National Mental Health thing, the big government deal – Council or whatever they call it. And he was, he, he came... Showed

up, by the way, and gave a talk at one of our, one of our public things, he was out in California.

But... And uh... We were pretty busy, I mean, and that was the jump-off, because I did a lot of other research and a lot of other leadership... I offered leadership roles and, and some of that and... But eventually through my little newsletter, which I, I put out only things that were in mainstream news. I didn't put out that Mickey Mouse stuff. And if it wasn't in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or *Wall Street Journal* or something, it wouldn't get printed, you know. But I just reprinted those and [unclear] and sent 'em out, e-mail-wise. And I did that for darn near nine years and then I, and got sick. I had to get out of it.

But in that, in that era, as, the group itself participated in ten FDA hearings, and we won all but one. No kidding! And, and, the last one we, we did we focused, we went to bat for a...electroshock thing. And, and the FDA wanted to bump the, the classification of electroshock machines to the amount of scrutiny and the amount of proof they had been, back to the level of what, what they would do with a wheelchair or something like that. And, and this stuff is, is terrible. I'm not gonna get into it. But, we got... We even won. They had, Kitty Dukakis was one of the people on the other side, too. She's smart and she wrote a book about it, or half a book. And so we, we beat her at that thing and prevented that classification. Just... And that was about a half a dozen of my guys.

KB: And Kitty Dukakis herself had had some issues?

VB: Oh, yeah, yeah. She, she testified. But, but she, she testified on, in favor of the electroshock. And... I won't get into it, okay? I prob...may even get it wrong, but she was there testifying.

KB: And was it at the Supreme Court? Where was it? [VB: What?] Where did you testify? At the Supreme Court? Where?

VB: It was, it was held like a court, I mean it, you know, these FDA hearings and, and we, we did pretty well there. And, but we, we, we were used to winning by that time. But, you know, the first two that I went to, I, I didn't, never seen it happen, even. And some of that, that was part of what we did. And we also did things... Well, we picketed the White House at one point. That wasn't my... One of my MF members sat down and we had a, an interesting time, I'll say that!

KB: Who was the President then? [VB: Huh?] Who was the President of the United States then?

VB: Oh, I, I think it was, oh gosh, I think Bill Clinton. I'm, I'm not sure. Maybe not. Oh, I, I, I don't know. [KB: But it was around that time?] In 2004, who was President? I, I, I don't know. I think it was LB... No... Bush, G.W. Bush. Yeah. But, yeah, he was President. He didn't, he didn't come out and, and shake hands or any of that stuff.

KB: And not, not Al Gore or anybody?

VB: It, but it, it was funny, though. I mean, honest to god, I mean, they, they had, you know, the security up there. And you know, they had people hanging out of trees with photo, telephoto (lenses)! I'm not putting this on! And then they, they rolled up a, rolled into a deal where it looked like a, a camera for news, news folks, you know? And they –

everybody got up and dutifully marched around in a circle out there and we had about 50 people I think. And, I, I realized it afterwards that it was just, it was the Secret Service [laughs] checking, they checked out all the protesters.

KB: How many protesters were there?

VB: Oh, on that deal, we had about 50. We had the first kid that was shot at Columbine attended. We had a, a woman whose 12 years old grandson got into serious problems at that point and eventually convicted, doing life sentence. But we were, we were working on that issue also. We, we work on serious stuff. We, we didn't...nothing...nitty-gritty.

KB: So, was the protest just signs or...?

VB: Oh, yeah, yeah. We, so, we had that and we had, oh, I don't know. We, we played to the press a little bit. We didn't get as much press with, with that because, you know, they, they have constant protests in front of the White House, Lafayette Park. But, so, I don't think it's bad. It's old news to Washington. We got one, I think, in, in *New York Post*, not the...or *Washington*... No, it wasn't *Washington Post*. What's the other one? I forget what, what it is. It was the second, second largest newspaper. And, and anyway, we, we did well.

And, and then after that went along for all kinds of stuff involved with the, the Council. I was a, a, chaired their Policy and Law Committee for about ten years.

KB: And that was in Dover?

VB: Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, but we, we also did a bunch of traveling to conferences and things, too.

KB: So you were targeting state and federal officials?

VB: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I was... Yeah, we, we would go and, and meet with our representatives in Washington. By the way, those guys were great to us, and, and so there's no, no problem or... I... It, it was an interesting thing in, in... One of the things that, you know, when we look at the movement, the consumer movement at that time, they had a bunch of them that were working with the United Nations to develop this, this paper on the Rights and Privileges of the Mentally ... Of the, not Mentally Ill, Disabled People. It was a, a, I forget what they... Convention on the, on Rights of Disabled People.

KB: And tell me about Diamond State Advocacy.

VB: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, we, we started meeting around 2002. There was a former organization, a consumer organization that fell apart. And, and I can't get in, before that. And that, that kinda was, is what got me started. I, we would meet and discuss issues and sometime take up positions. I think one of the first positions, position that I remember is Delaware is one of the two states in the union that still had laws concerning sterilization. And we, we fought that through the ACLU and, and eventually they took that language out of the law. But, but again, I, I don't... Well, I'm not gonna get into it. It's gonna be... But it, it was a rough deal and...

Lots of the stuff that I got into was serious, deeply serious stuff. It wasn't you know, on a, you know, just odd stuff that we were unhappy about.

KB: And your kids are all grown up so you could fight, huh?

VB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, we, anyway, it's, it's been interesting and I... When I look back on what it was in, say, 2003, and what it is today in 2017, it's a difference of night and day. Just even stuff that, that would see things on our, on the consumer thing. They, they were in a phase then that they would ignore us or ridicule us.

KB: Tell me about the Bush's New Freedom Commission. [VB: The which?] Bush's New Freedom Commission?

VB: Oh yeah! One of, one of my good friends and list member, Dan Fisher, Dr. Dan Fisher who was a recovered schizophrenic, and, again, that was one of the things that they used to tell, tell us that you couldn't get well and then they changed their mind when the New Freedom Commission came in. But it was 14 people, 14 psychiatrists that, that met to develop a plan for this day forward into mental health field. And it seems like every, every president comes along has a plan for something like that. But, anyway, Dan, Dan was appointed and he, he really did do a great job with that. And he's the, he's in Boston and he's, runs a large government-supported consumer organization and there's just two of them in the country and one of them is in Philadelphia and the other's in, and that. I'm just trying to think what they call it. Well, I'm terrible in names anymore.

But, yeah, but he's, he's been around for a long time, and I, I knew him. In fact, he, he even came to, and testified in person to, to that, that shock treatment business. And he was the only psychiatrist that testified against shock. And, but we won. But anyway, Dan is, was a neat guy and I still consider him a good friend [unclear].

KB: So, and what else did the New Freedom Commission accomplish?

VB: You're telling "New Freedom"?

KB: Is that what it's called, the Bush's New Freedom? Yeah.

VB: New Freedom Commission, that, now that's debatable. [KB: Oh, yeah, Bush.] They set a lot of lofty goals and so forth, but I, I don't know if they actually accomplished much. [Laughs] I mean it's, it's politics, right! But, but it was an honor to be on it, and there is the best thing that came out of it was, was the, I mentioned that you can recover from mental problems. And, in other words, this, the thing is, just keep taking your pills and you're gonna take these 'til the day you die! They didn't happen to tell you that you die a little sooner than everybody else. You know, by the, the studies that we have. Thirty, thirty... And if you're in the public sector there's 30 years short of a comparable person on the outside. You know in Medicaid or in mental health.

KB: Was that Bob Whitaker involved at all?

VB: No, Bob, Bob... That's interesting. Bob, I met him at the International Center for Study... Psychology and Psychiatry. He just wrote a book called, oh, *Mad in America*, which really rocked some boats. And he was a medical writer and for, on a newspaper assignment for the *Boston Globe*. And he tackled a problem.

The drug companies were, were testing some product, and they, they had to stop everybody with what they were doing, whatever pills, and let them sit for a couple weeks before they went back. And Bob thought that was terrible because he, he'd been told by

the powers that be, the, mainly in the mamas and the papas-type [unclear] advocacy groups that the pills are just like insulin to a diabetic. So he went in with that thing, but then when he got into it, he realized that there was a, a problem. That it wasn't actually the case and he, he found, he found a couple of troubling different studies. He found one that had been done by the United Nations, fact I think there was two of them. They surveyed, I think it was, six different countries. One of them was, or three of them were first world countries: us and Russia and, I think, the UK. And and then they, three third world countries: India, Nigeria, and some, some country in, Libya, maybe, I'm not sure.

And they found out a strange thing. That the people who, you know, in these third world countries didn't get very many expensive drugs, not hardly. And, and, and they found out that they were, they had, you know, total recoveries going on in life, marrying, having children, working regular jobs, and stuff like that. While we have put everybody in a box and, you know, and it's a, it's an interesting story. And, well, anyway, yeah. Bob found that out and he, I was... I met him, I think in 2004 in New York, and was into it, the ISEP conference, you know, the, the professional organization I joined, and I, I was at the time, buying his books by the dozen. And, and we were running our little, our little thing, our little, my, you know, First State, Diamond State Advocates thing at the same time. And I wound up chairing that.

But, so, I went to, I went to New York on that, for that conference. And it was, it was pretty... I, I met a lot of interesting people. And, I think probably at least 100 wound up subscribing to my newsletter. I mean I had like 35 psychiatrists and well over a 100 psychologists, oh god, about 30 or 35 lawyers and then the rest were just ordinary people, mostly victims of the thing, and, or parents of, or whatever.

Interesting you laugh. Interested see you laugh. In my professionals I had some medical doctors also, regular ones, and one of them was a dentist. And I, I had to take him. I said... Jack, Jack Nicholson thing, *Little, Little House of Horrors* or whatever that he played a dentist and I, you know, I just laughed, but I, I never met the guy. I also had a veterinarian, too, but her, her father had been, worked, I think, had a role in the National Institute of Medicine's mental health section. And so she... She, she was, was a very good source for me. If I had a question or anything I'd call her. Even if I had a question with the dog.

KB: Tell me about Diamond State Advocates. Who, who were they and how did you find them and what did they do?

VB: Well, they found me. I, I, I was involved with the Consumer Coalition and I, I had a heart attack, I had to leave that. This is late '90s. And so I, I got out of that and then, what happened, there was a leadership change in the Coalition and the, and the new, new director just let it go, fall apart, and... Well, I'm not gonna get into it. But, so, they still had the money and, and NAMI helped organize it. The guys...what? [KB: What's NAMI?] National Association of Mental, for Mental Illness. They're, well, I'm not gonna get into that. But anyway, they wanted a consumer organization, so I, I chaired that for, oh, I don't...two or three years.

KB: And did that lead to coming on the Council thing, or...? [VB: What?] Did that lead to coming on the Council in Dover?

VB: Yeah, exactly. They called me up one day and I didn't, oh, I, I think it was Pat Maichle, and I thought that the, the Developmental Disability thing was only for people with serious, oh, retardation, or whatever they call it now. Well, and, no, I found out, by definition, if you had any problems at all that are life threatening in your first 22 years, you're actually considered, in, not, not in something that isn't concerning anything that would go away, and so, a lot of us didn't know that was gonna go on. But, it was a, it was kind of a game changer for me because it, it got me involved with a lot of other disabilities and problems, too, other than what I was doing with my own.

KB: Were you working on ADA? Did you work on the ADA?

VB: Uh, no. Uh, yeah. I was, as a matter of fact, I was, all I was in the ADA, we had an organization called SCADA, and I was elected treasurer and I served as treasurer for a couple years. But, and then that, that kinda went, went, fell apart at that point.

KB: So, if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about this whole thing, what would you change and how would you do it? 'Cause you're the magician! [Laughs]

VB: Oh, god. My god, I, I think, it comes, comes to a few things that, that are really, really, really important. Self-determination, for one thing, okay? And, empowerment, and, and just changing the public's attitude on things. I mean, we're the only disability in the world that we get vilified and, even in some cases, there were some laws that we couldn't marry, we couldn't own a gun, we couldn't vote, and, you know, which is silly in a lot of ways. You know, I mean, there's just a, a lot of preconceived notions as to what, what we can and we cannot do, or, or what limitations we allegedly am. And, by god, I've, I've met people with mental health problems and just about every, every, every stratus, statuses (in) society. In fact, one of my, one of my good members was a, a woman that was a movie star a, a few years ago, and she, of course, she's very, very active in this, too. But, but she was also a member of my group. But it was a, it was interesting and a lot of fun. Now I, now I wound up, the only thing I do right now, I am president of the local magic club, Delaware Knights of Magic.

KB: [Laughs] And we will get to that! If, if you could tell people one thing about yourself and about your experiences in your lifetime, what would it be? What would you want a big article in the *New York Times* or an obituary, god forbid? What would you say? [VB: I think that would be the last thing I need is an article in the *New York Times*!] What do you want people to remember about you?

VB: Oh, I, that, that's a, that's a great question. I was just a small part of a very large movement. I, I was happy to have facilitated a lot of things, organizing the, getting people out to, go to FDA hearings. In fact, I remember one night when they moved the suicide thing. It was started, they had it at 18 and they moved it to 24, the, the danger area, and they, actually the, the FDA was holding a hearing on that and we got it and done but they, they, that's where they left it. They didn't look at the rest of the age groups, but anyway, that's a...

But, to, to really understand what... You know, I, I just saw so much happening and mostly positive over the years. I mean, my gosh. If we'd showed up to picket the White House that time. My god, we, we didn't, the dang psychiatric hospital before we even, when your feet never even touched the ground and [KB: So now you can do it.] shot full

some kind of dope that you wouldn't even be sure what planet you're on, you know? And, but, I, but I see now all that change. Because, you know, if, if, you gotta know your, you, you have to know what you're talking about. You can't just go out and rant and rave. So, in, you always go on, on pretty firm ground and then, if you do get into a discussion you, you've got some valid arguments.

I got into a lot of arguments over the years, my gosh! I, there were... I, and one, and one time, though, it, it was funny when, 'cause I was testifying before the, the budget committee in, in the state of Delaware, you know, and, I was telling, I was, you know, I'm a magician, right? And I, you know, held up a dollar bill and I folded it and, click, and the dollar bill was still intact but it was, was shorter. And then I clicked that off and I tell them, "Well, this is money you spend on this and that." And [snipping noise]. And then finally, when you get down to the... "This is the money you spend on [unclear] consumers." They, they were listening, but... But that was a, that's just an old, old magic trick. It's old, as they all said then. But it got, it got some attention, you know.

So, I, and I, I like to do, I, I would usually do a little bit of magic at a meeting or something. Not, not a lot, but I used to go, I sat on so many councils and things and committees that once in a while I'd have something to show.

KB: I think that's about it. But you are magical yourself, you know. You did a lot of cool stuff in your life.

VB: I could just for the heck of it, I can, I can give you guys a sample of my magic. Now, now you know. Look at, nothing in my hands and, of course, nothing up my sleeve. [Puff.] Turn this down. [Puff.] Abracadabra. Oh, ho ho ho ho! Oh my goodness, what have we got here! [Pulls green scarf out his fist.] Here you go. Check it out. That's, that's real, isn't it? [KB: Yeah, it's real.] Let me just put this back in. And we're gonna, we're gonna pack it in there pretty good into my fist. And I found the best way to do it is just curl it around like that. [Puff.] [Uncurls fingers – hand is empty.]

KB: What did you do with that?

VB: Anyway, no. I have a lot of fun with, with magic, and it's a good way... I don't, normally, I just drag it around, you know, like the, I think it was, I guess Hemingway had the line in one of his books, you know, and somebody walked up to another person and went, "You like card tricks?" And she said, "No." So he just showed her three! You know, I mean that, you know, you can't just push [unclear] onto people like that.

KB: But somehow there's an analogy there between magic and the changes that you've seen.

VB: Oh, well, I, I don't know. When you're looking at public opinion, that's... Well, you know, at the first, at the first suicide hearing I went when I was just brand new at this, you look out into the parking lot and it was like the O.J. trial. All kinds of satellite, the whole parking lot full of satellite uplinks and microphones in the faces of my, the people I got to testify – four, five, six. I don't remember what that was. But they, but they got the message out to around the world.

So, I, you know, but if you don't... If you have something [unclear] like the, oh, the White House thing, you're not gonna get that much, but... But, but we did do a lot. I

remember, you know, working on the Convention for Rights of, of People with Disabilities and it was kinda cool. 'Cause I was sitting in the United Nations chamber and about where you're sitting there was a podium that Khrushchev pounded. [Laughs] I mean, you know, I mean, wow! And here, here I am, you know? That was interesting as heck. But, we, I went up to two different settings, situations like that up there in New York.

KB: I think you made magic!

VB: Yeah. But, it was, you know, it was funny though, because we had a good time with it, too. And we made some terrific friends. But, but that type of thing was not happening... Consumer organization, at that point when I got into it, had been around for a few years but they weren't getting the, the, the publicity and you mentioned changing public attitudes. I, I don't know. It wasn't spontaneous, either. It's just a change in people I think where, my god, they won't lock us up anymore for protesting something, you know? So that's interesting. And it was, but it's been, been amazingly interesting thing that we got involved with.

KB: So thank you very much.

VB: Yeah. But it was stuff that had to be done.