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Andrew Huse (AH): Okay, could you please give us your name and address, please?

Joe Engressia (JE): Okay, it's Joybubbles, that's J-o-y-b-u-b-b-l-e-s, all one word.
Twenty-two E 22nd Street, Apartment 107. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55404-2510.

AH: Okay. And the form goes like this: [reading from copyright form] you hereby give, convey, and assign copyright in my oral video history memoir, as well as any related documents, illustrations, or photographs, to the University of South Florida to have and to hold the same absolutely and forever. I understand that the University of South Florida will use my memoir and related materials for such historical and scholarly purposes as it sees fit, and that, by this conveyance, I relinquish: one, a legal title and literary property rights which I have, or may be deemed to have, in said work; and, two, all my right, title, and interest in copyright which I have, or may deem to have, in said work and, more particularly, the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, and display. I hereto warrant that I have not assigned or in any manner encumbered or impaired any of the aforementioned rights in my oral video memoir. The only condition is that I place an unrestricted gift or list it below. Do you have any restrictions?

JE: No.

AH: Okay, so, as your signature, I would just like you to say that you agree to the above conditions.

JE: I agree to the above conditions.

AH: Great. Thank you. Well, to get started, this is part of an ongoing oral history project. We've done about 200 so far, with various students, faculty, staff, and alumni, to commemorate 50 years of university history. And one especially interesting and colorful episode is involved with you. When you came to campus, your name wasn't yet

Joybubbles, it was Joe Engressia, or some called you “The Whistler.” First, just let us know, how did you get to USF? Give us a little bit of background.

JE: I was living in Miami at the time, and some of my good friends were going to USF. Eddie Boardman and—well, he was in [University of] Tampa. But anyway, just felt like it was closer to Miami and kind of new facilities, and I’d heard great things about it, so I decided to go there.

AH: So what year did you arrive?

JE: Fall of ’68.

AH: Okay. So what were some of your impressions when you first got on campus?

JE: It was good—well, the facilities kind of impressed me. I was, of course, deflated that there wasn’t phones in the rooms.

AH: Ah, yes.

JE: Seeing that I’m a real phone artist. My ham radio¹ call letters are WBORPA², and RPA even stands for “real phone artist.” So I felt kind of a let down that there wasn’t able to be because of the way the building was at that time or something. I think, since, they did put phones in there, but that was after I left. But, I guess, too, I wasn’t really sure why I was in college. I wasn’t really properly motivated back then to really know what my goals are.

AH: So did you have a major declared early on?

JE: At the time, it was electrical engineering, and then I switched to math later, and then business administration. I didn’t really know why I’d come except that was just the next step that you do, and I hadn’t really thought through at the time, you know, what I really wanted.

AH: Sure. Well, tell us a little bit, too, about how you became kind of obsessed with the telephone and technology.

JE: Well, back when I was three years old, in 1953 actually, I wasn’t quite four. I remember one day, particularly, is kind of significant. I was playing on the floor, running phone wire, and Mother wouldn’t let me do it on the wall anymore because I glued it on with modeling clay, and it made marks on the wall. And I said, “Mommy, I’m a telephone man forever.” And last year I celebrated 50 years of that, of being a telephone man. And I still am just fascinated with how the oldest crank phone system could still work with the

¹Ham radio, or amateur radio, is a hobby. Licensed ham operators use radio technology (digital, analog, pulse, and spread-spectrum emission) for personal two-way communication both locally and across the globe.

²Call letters, or call signs, are assigned to stations or operators as a means of identification.

latest dial technology. At that time, in '68, and even in the 1980s, there were a few crank phones left.

AH: Oh, yeah.

JE: And they could work with the latest in digital, and it all works together. And, I don't know, ever since I was three, when I learned how to dial and everything, the phone was magic for me.

AH: Now, if you don't mind me asking, when did you become blind?

JE: I was born totally blind. So was my sister, actually.

AH: Okay, I see. So is it the fact that it's sound, or is it the electronics that you're interested in? Is there any real explanation, or did it just, kind of, choose you?

JE: It chose me. It was more of a calling. It is, like, you're right—the electronics, the sound, reaching out to people, the technical challenge, the learning, that I could learn it so good that I could do things with it that people never knew to be done. Like at 6 years old, I could dial with the hook switch and hang up with the dial. So like, I could pick up a phone, and I could turn the dial and let it turn back just slowly enough to where it would be in between digits and it would actually hang up the line. And I could be sitting there with the receiver up and get a call, and the phone would ring. And people'd say, "Don't tie up the phone." "Oh, I'm not." "Oh, they can't come in with the receiver off-hook." "Yeah, it can." (imitates sound of phone ringing) "Hello?"

You know, and, "How did you do that?" Or the babysitter that had a lock on the dial, I just found out I could push the hook buttons like up and down 5 times for 5 and 8 times for 8. And I justified it theoretically because the dial clicked when you turned it and so did the hook switch. And I said, "If I can dial with the hook switch, they must be doing the same thing, only faster." And in that case, the dial must be, if I turned it slow, the dial could act as the hook switch, theoretically. Do I understand it right? So I would do an experiment to prove or disprove it. You know, at like, six years old, I would say, "If the dial truly is like the hook switch, if I dial slowly enough, it'll hang up." And when it did, I said, "Yeah, I'm on the right track."

AH: And this really set a precedent for the rest of your life, constantly pushing the envelope and seeing the limits of the technology and testing it, right?

JE: Yeah, and about that time, five or six, for instance, I'd call up the repair service and they'd connect me with the telephone office. And I said, "Dear dial tone party, your phone line is wrong. It's broken. When I'd pick up, I'd get dial tone right away. But then when I pick it up again, it doesn't get dial toned." And they said, "Well, maybe it's just busy." I said, "No, I can hang it up, and it'll get dial tone right away then," and they said, "Maybe it was busy one of the times."

And so, I said, "At three thirty in the morning?" and they said, "You were up at three

thirty in the morning?” and I said, “Yeah, because I decided, if it was busy, it would be less busy at three thirty in the morning, and that would enable me to find out.” And so, then, they went over and called me and said, “You know what? We just found a broken rotary pole(??) in your line finder switch.” And I said, “Say that again. I want to remember it.” And that was in like 1954 or ’55.

And so, when I was in 1969, I was touring a telephone office, and I got in there that morning, and the foreman had to do a little bit of work before he started showing me around. And so, I asked if I could use the phone, and I picked up one of his lines and heard that same sound that I had heard in 1955. So when he came back to me, I said, “This line sounds just like one that had a broken rotary pole(??) in the line finder switch,” and he said, “Well, we could go over and see. You know this place; you don’t need a tour. Here it is.” The only thing is, I’ve never touched one. I have no idea even what it is. He showed me a little piece of metal that was broken off that goes into a ratchet and all of that, so that’s what one looked like. But I mean, fascinating. Just one of thousands of examples of how you hear one thing, and 20 years later, you hear it again, and you put the two together.

AH: You know it sounds, too, like just from the very earliest years of your life, you were very interested in learning about all of these things and that somehow you were unable to get a line of study that related to what you were really passionate about, is that right?

JE: That’s right. I mean, there were no books on telephony available, and even the phone company things, they were like particular circuit descriptions or particular pieces of equipment. There wasn’t a book that a four-year-old could read that said, “You have negative 48 volts on the ring side of the line, and the tip is positive 48, and it’s grounded, so that the electrolysis won’t eat away at the lead cable.” Just a real basic theory about how telephones worked.

AH: Why do you think that information wasn’t available?

JE: I guess they considered the telephone their private domain, and a real, comprehensive, basic book on the real fundamentals of telephony is just really hard to find. I didn’t get one until I just happened to be at USF, and I ordered this book from the army, actually, from the early ’50s, a field manual. And it was the first basic book I really had that really explained a lot of the telephony fundamentals. It was even called *Fundamentals of Telephony*. But it was, like, I think based on World War II stuff. It was a real good explanation. And then I had it recorded by Recording for the Blind³. But I was playing that a lot while I was at USF, instead of studying like I should.

AH: Yeah, I can see how that passion could take away from the emphasis of study. So you went from electrical engineering to mathematics. Tell us about some of your—well, you just mentioned some of your classroom experiences. Do you have any academic

³Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic is now Learning Ally. The service was started in the 1940s to provide service for soldiers who had lost their sight. The organization helps children with learning disabilities and visual impairment by turning written text into audio text.

memories? Any professors that stood out for you?

JE: There was one, the last semester I was there. He was like a continuing education, but I don't remember the man's name. He was teaching Esperanto⁴. And I took that for no credit, and I realized that I'm more attuned to taking no-credit courses and stuff. I just loved that course and learning "to be" and all these words. The verbs all end in "a" I think. The nouns end in "o." Some of the rules of Esperanto and finding out what a logical language it is. And I used to kid that I'm going to study until I can speak Esperanto like a native. I never did take that trip I talked about to the Esperanto embassy and become an honorary citizen or anything, but I sure enjoyed the class. And that's one I always remembered, just before I left.

AH: So what other things do you remember? What was happening around campus while you were here?

JE: Well, there was a lot of passion about the Vietnam War and demonstrations and different things. You know, people would protest, I should say, at different times. They were more passionate about that than I was then. I feel more passionate about it now, some of those things, than I did then. I guess I was so into my telephones and stuff that I really—swimming pools and going to Holiday Inn and smelling the chlorine and playing with kids. I loved Holiday Inns at that time. That's even one of the reasons, when I left USF, I went onto Memphis, where Holiday Inn's headquarters were. And a year before that, a year before I moved to Memphis, I had taken a trip up there and met the chairman of the board and the founder of Holiday Inn, [Charles] Kemmons Wilson. He was real nice to me.

AH: Oh, yes.

JE: Had a trip up there. And he just died last year. And I called his administrative assistant, and she had a taped book by him and sent it to me, sent me a copy and stuff.

AH: Why did you become obsessed with Holiday Inn?

JE: Partly, it was a place of peace for me. It had a bathtub that I could play in and be away from campus and kind of a different world that I really liked.

AH: Would you go there by yourself?

JE: Yeah.

AH: Okay.

JE: As a matter of fact, in the spring of '69 was the first time I'd really been away on a

⁴Esperanto is a constructed language developed by L.L. Zamenhof. His goal was to develop a language that was easy to learn and could be used as an international second language both in political and social situations.

separate trip by myself. I went to the Holiday Inn in Jacksonville, and that's actually where I toured that telephone office I was mentioning about on the broken rotary pole(??) later. But I had stayed at the Holiday Inn on Phillips Highway there at Jacksonville, and that was really when I first realized that I could actually move away from home and live by myself. I stayed at the motel for a few days, and I first put together that I could actually get out on my own. I think it was sort of assumed, as I was growing up, that I would live with my parents the rest of their lives. So it was a real, critical, spiritual turning point there on Friday, May 30th of 1969, when I arrived at room 136 there.

AH: And you realized that you could live an independent life.

JE: Yeah, and it was the beginning of a change for me, and that's when I started working on getting out on my own and stuff.

AH: So were you still a student at USF at that time?

JE: Yeah.

AH: Okay, but did that experience have some bearing on why you left? You felt like you could do your own thing?

JE: Yeah, and so, I left in March of '71 from USF. I didn't have my degree or anything, but I didn't know, really, why I wanted it or what it would do for me that I wanted. And the telephone company is kind of structured where they usually hire people from inside, and I didn't really want to be just a plain old electrical engineer designing radar or something like that or color TVs. I was strictly with phones, and there was really nothing like that taught.

AH: I see.

JE: Like, when I was little, a day in seventh grade, when I was just so overwhelmed by the hurt and stuff from schools: teachers yelling and stuff. I just had to take off a day. And I was listening to shortwave [radio] and learned so much about overseas telephone calls, and the technical supervisor was on there. They had a problem and they were discussing circuit descriptions; they were going through—and I learned more that day that was relevant and passionate to me than if I had gone to school.

AH: Sure.

JE: And those kinds of things. I wasn't getting what I needed or what I felt I wanted from the education system. Now I pick and choose, and it is valuable. But I mean, it was just something that was compulsory and I was told to do.

AH: Okay. So tell us about your social life on campus. What was that like?

JE: I really didn't do much of that. Well, until November, I guess, when I started the

whistling, whistling into the phone. I mean, it was just something that I had known since I was seven or eight years old, and I never really thought much of it. I mean, sure, I could whistle, but I just happened to—I was asking the telephone company for a test number to hear some signal or something, and some kid was asking, “Well, what could you do with a telephone?” I said, “Oh, I can just pick it up, and if you wanted, I could whistle and call Hawaii or North Carolina or something, free, just by whistling.” And he didn’t believe me, and I said, “Bet you a buck I can.” And he bet me a buck, and so I started whistling these illegal calls, and I started charging a dollar for no particular reason. But that’s how it started.

AH: So when was this? How far along were you at USF by that point?

JE: A couple of months.

AH: Okay, so it was early.

JE: Yeah.

AH: So he found out about it and obviously the word spread, and lots of people wanted to make calls. So how many of these do you think you did?

JE: Thirty, 25 or 30 maybe?

AH: Oh, okay, not too many.

JE: No, I considered it a lot but not too many. It wasn’t—I guess, if it would’ve gone on longer, it could’ve gone on more.

AH: Sure. So at what point did you know something went wrong?

JE: When a security agent came to see me, from General Telephone⁵. I don’t remember clearly what exactly happened. I know we kind of had a hearing at the school or something. It was, then—you probably have more in writing about that than I have in my memory.

AH: Yeah, well, according to an article I read, one of the tones that you whistled must have been wrong, so it didn’t go to the number it was supposed to; it went to an operator instead, right?

JE: No, I quite often used the operators to have them ring a number for me, so I usually intended—because the operator codes ended in 1-2-1, which was like (whistles dial tone). And that was a lot easier to whistle than numbers that, let’s say, had a lot of zeros, which would be 10 whistles each. So I quite often purposely used the operator.

AH: Oh, I see. Well, according to the article, then, the person who you made the call for

⁵GTE Corporation, formerly General Telephone & Electric Corporation, was an independent phone company in the United States; in 2000, it merged with Bell Atlantic to become Verizon.

got into some kind of panic, and she could tell something was afoot.

JE: Well, I think they told something was afoot because the people were talking two hours and said it was a free call. And it's possible that the operator was on there when the person said that, I don't know. But they may have been talking about how neat it was that you could talk as long as they want, this guy whistled the call for free or something like that. I don't know exactly how it may have happened, but this could've been it.

AH: So then, you were contacted by the agent, and there was a hearing here at USF about it?

JE: What did you say?

AH: I said, you were contacted by the agent, and you had a hearing here at USF about that?

JE: Yeah.

AH: Okay, and basically, it was kind of a disciplinary hearing, right? They were trying to figure out—

JE: What do you do with a guy that whistles?

AH: Yeah, it was kind of unprecedented. It was called phone freaking at the time?

JE: Yeah, although that really came into being in 1971 with the *Esquire* article.⁶

AH: Okay, gotcha.

JE: We called it that, though it wasn't as well known. But yeah, friends around the country that I gradually met, once I got in the papers and everything from the USF thing; there were newspapers and whatnot that picked it up. And all these other phone freak networks started contacting me. And then each one that contacted me, their network, I was introduced to another network. So it was kind of an old version of the Internet, I guess. There were some southern California people, and I said, "Here are some numbers from the northern California people that contacted me, and here's a couple from the Seattle." And so, they would all get together. And before long, there was a lot of people that knew each other that hadn't, because of me.

AH: Okay, interesting. So basically, then, a lot of these likeminded people were able to get in contact with each other because of you, because you were the first one to get this kind of press attention, then.

JE: Yeah

⁶In October of 1971, author Ron Rosenbaum published an article entitled "Secrets of the Little Blue Box" in *Esquire* magazine. The article told the stories of several telephone hackers, including Joybubbles, and largely introduced the idea of phone freaking to the general public.

AH: Okay.

JE: Because a lot of people were doing it, like me, for 20-some years. It's just nothing that people took too much interest in. You know, if you're sitting in your fourth grade class, and you say, "Oh, yeah, Mommy was reading me about the line link originating register connectors, and we were reading about completing markers in the forebay, completing markers at route relay cross-connect." You say that in your fourth grade class, and people are not going to really take that much of an interest. They'll walk away and go out to recess or something, you know. But all that talk. I was studying this thing in fourth grade, Number Five Crossbar⁷, which was a type of phone system that was quite advanced for its time. And it was evidently quite different from what the other fourth graders were studying, but yet I was more passionate about it.

AH: So when did you make this call that went around the world back to yourself on another phone?

JE: I don't know. I did those occasionally. I know there was one on TV, when they were filming in Memphis, after I had moved to my new apartment in 1973. And I just happened to go up to Illinois and call the other phone beside me, and we picked it up, and we were talking via Illinois because I had whistled a number of my other phones. But yeah, I did things like that periodically. I could dial within five seconds, for instance, I could have a number in North Korea on with us, for no particular good reason. Or Australia, it's all just so close, you know.

AH: Yeah. So you had the disciplinary hearing. Do you remember what the results of that were?

JE: I think I was going to get suspended for the rest of the term or something. I don't really remember.

AH: Yeah, I do remember something to that effect. I also remember you had—some sorority provided an escort for you on campus.

JE: Oh, yeah, Delta Gamma, and they decided not to guide me anymore because of my legal troubles. I wasn't the upstanding citizen that they wanted to be associated with.

AH: Yeah, exactly, so obviously, that probably made it a little bit more trouble to get around campus, it being so big especially.

JE: Yeah, it did make it a little more of a challenge at the time. That was before I was used to using a cane a lot and everything. I used to ask people along the way.

AH: Okay, so that's how you managed to get from place to place, then?

⁷Number Five Crossbar Switching System was a telephone switch used in telephone exchanges between 1948 and the 1990s.

JE: Yeah.

AH: So do you remember getting a lot of attention after the articles came out, just on campus?

JE: Yeah and then more I remember the off-campus. I was on the Larry King show and places in Pittsburgh, and there were interviews over the phone from Ireland and stuff like that. And it was quite novel then. Now, I'm more used to stuff like that. But back then it was pretty exciting; stuff that I had known since I was six or seven years old, after all these years, somebody was actually taking an interest. It was quite gratifying.

AH: Sure.

JE: I guess I'm as much of an egotist as probably anybody. It was flattering that they would call me up and say, "You were learning about Number Five Crossbar systems at eight years old?" You know, some technician would hear me talking on a talk show; he called in and said, "I've been with the company 20 years, and I'm still learning about the Number Five Crossbar." And I said, "So am I. I learn something new every day, and will be until the day I die."

AH: How do you explain all of that? I mean, learning it so young? Did it seem to come natural to you? Did you not have a lot of other things to put your time and energy into? Are you considered to be a genius? Do you have any explanation?

JE: I think all of those. I know when I was four years old, they sent me to school because they felt I was ready and too advanced for kindergarten. I was already having people reading me books by spelling them because I liked to know how words were spelled, at four years old. I think I have—172 or something, they said [is what] my IQ was at one point, or something, which I don't know how relevant all of that is to anything real practical, but they do these tests and give you a number. But the phone was more—people would always say, "Well, if you just took up ham radio." So I went and got my extra class ham radio license at 11 or 12, which is the highest ham radio license there is. But still, it was nothing compared to the phone. The phone was my passion, so that was partly what it was. I could get more thrill out of understanding some way a two out of five binary counting chain relay tree worked, which I still only half understand. But I'm still learning about the stuff that's obsolete, much less the new stuff.

AH: Well, and after the disciplinary hearing, there was some talk about GT [General Telephone] giving you a job.

JE: They never actually offered me anything, but I'm sure there probably was talk about it that I didn't know about.

AH: Yeah, it was just mentioned that they might hire you as a troubleshooter or something like that.

JE: I had been doing it since I was little anyway, so it would've been something I already was. Because I would tell them, like, just the other day, I called up and said, "Well, this exchange is outside the LATA, or should be outside the LATA"—the local access transport area—"and it's put as if it's inside. Now, this exchange is wrong because it's supposed to require a one and be a toll call, and you've got it in as free. And it won't charge the proper revenues, and you deserve everything you're legally entitled to, so could you please fix that one." And I just reported those just a week or so ago, and they fixed them. And then there were 11 exchanges that were another wrong billing type thing, and they fixed those. So yeah, I call up and tell them where troubles are.

AH: Sure. Maybe they figured that you would be doing it anyway, so that they didn't need to pay you for it.

JE: Yeah, that's probably true. And it's more convenient not to be paid because if you're paid, you have to document hours and all this silly stuff of being there and being tardy, even though you work seven days a week because they call you tardy if you're not sitting at the desk right—all these little "schoolish" sort of things that I just wanted to avoid. And then the phone, too, I like to have conversations and stuff. For instance, I set up local numbers in Australia as one of my big obsessions. And so, people in Queensland can dial a local number, like in Brisbon, and they leave messages for me when they see ads in the local paper that I enjoy phone friends of all ages.

And I get a call, like a lady that her little boy only lived four days, and we talked six hours, and she got a chance to cry and stuff. And a man who had some old reel-to-reel tapes that he had put on cassette of Cyclone Tracy, a big hurricane that destroyed Darwin in 1974. And just all different subjects, you never know what it'll be about, somebody from the Stolen Generation⁸, an Aborigine. So the phone actually is many things. Like, just the other day, I found out about a number in Sacramento that I can dial and listen to 250 or so movies that are audio described for the blind.

AH: Oh wow.

JE: So I listen to movies over the phone. I dial another number that I can read 100-some newspapers over the phone. I touch tone and then the voice comes back. So I do a lot of the stuff over the phone that other people use computers for.

Indeed, I dial a number up in Chicago, and I spell on touch-tone, two-letter touch-tone symbols. And I can send and receive text, e-mail, voicemail, search on Google, look at some websites, if they're accessible, and stuff like that. For me, the phone is an awfully rich thing. I just set up a new voicemail that's in Chicago, so when you call my local number in Minnesota, and I'm not here, you actually leave a message in Chicago. And it'll take 90-minute incoming messages. The average person doesn't leave one that long.

⁸The Stolen Generation were children of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait descent who were forcibly removed from their families due to government policy. Once removed from their families, the children were forbidden to speak in their native language and were forced to adopt white culture.

It shows just how things that were not very practical years ago are now common. I've got a free conference number that I can dial into that would hold 96 people, and you can have a conference for six hours, and the only charge is long distance. But since I get a flat rate between the US and Canada, I can make all the calls I want, so legal phone freak.

AH: Yeah, exactly. And actually, I wanted to wind up your time at USF. Is there anything else that stands out in your memory? Anything, whether in or out of the classroom, that you might remember?

JE: I remember one lady, and I don't remember her name. I met her on campus. I'd love to talk to her again, if I just remembered her name. She was determined to do something that seemed impossible at the time. She had a goal to humanize me. And now, with me getting to be an eternal child and everything, I see the wisdom she had then. She got me two teddy bears. I mean, the farthest thing from my mind was having a teddy bear. But to sort of balance things, she did buy me a toy telephone. I've still got it right here. It's one of my favorite telephones, and she got it there. And she was at USF. It was like in '70 and '71. And I can't remember her name for the life of me. But I remember her and the spirited conversations we had about how, within me, there was magic and joy and a happy part that I could release. And she did want to humanize me. And I didn't understand it at the time. That was way beyond my emotional capabilities, to realize what she was saying.

AH: Why do you think that she'd think that you needed to be humanized? Did she think everybody did? Or did you have certain things about you?

JE: Probably because I was so single-mindedly focused on my telephones and stuff. And for instance, back then, I probably would have never thought or wanted to talk to a lady that had lost her baby after four days. That was something totally different than what I did. I kind of began the bare outlines of it 1973, when I started a thing called a talk line and put ads in a local Memphis paper and just got wonderful bunches of calls and talked to kids and grown-ups and everything and had a regular talk thing. I got to start reaching out. That really opened up a new world for me. Still, the phone is a big part, but now the technical side of the phone is only a small portion of the phone. It's now, you know, the talking to terminally ill kids. There's a bunch of things I've learned from children and stories of heroic parents, and it still came over the phone, but entirely different than studying a DMS-100 digital switch⁹ or something.

AH: Well, yeah, instead of the hardware, it's now about connecting with other people, right?

JE: Yeah because, really, the basis for all this hardware is not just for the hardware, it's actually connecting with the people.

AH: That's right.

⁹The DMS-11 Switch was a line of telephone exchange switches that came into use in 1979 with the purpose of providing local service and connections to the public telephone network.

JE: And to somebody like you or the people I report the troubles to, they're much more important than any phone system ever will be. And it shows, like, when I was 10 years old, I was very interested in being right. If I reported a trouble, I'd tell somebody that had been there at the phone company for 29 years, "No. You're dead wrong, and I'm right." And now, I explain it more. I say, "Well, you're right, but in this particular case, it's like an exception." And, "Normally, in 98% of the cases, it is just the way you said it was. Except, now, this one, it sort of is, but it's different." And explain it all. It's more important for us to part friends than for me to prove I'm right or get the trouble fixed. That's way different from my thinking 30 years ago.

AH: Sure. Well, let's talk about it to kind of get you up to the present day and everything. So your preoccupations now, I guess—obviously, the woman who wanted to humanize you kind of set you on a new path. You didn't really know at the time, but in '73, you talked about setting up the ads in Memphis, et cetera.

JE: That was actually two years after she sort of planted the seed. And I had no idea that she—and, over the years, other influences—what she was starting. I kind of didn't seem to accept much of what she said, but I've still got the two teddy bears around here, and she always was a real caring person. Maybe she'll read this someday and recognize herself if she's still around.

AH: Yeah, that would be interesting.

JE: I wish I knew because she read for me some with the reader, and I don't know why I just can't remember her name.

AH: Yeah, I'm dreadful with names too. But your new name, Joybubbles, is hard to forget. Tell us about when you changed your name and why Joybubbles?

JE: Well, it kind of started with an episode that I sort of forgot for a number of years. I'm a survivor of child sexual abuse at a blind school in New Jersey, from 1955. And I think that, and going to school when I was four, and other things contributed to me feeling that I never had a childhood. As little as six years old, I would tell people that I was all the way grown up, and I would recite the quadratic formula in all its gory details to prove that I was a grownup and say the formula for inductive capacitive resonant frequency in one breath when I was seven and stuff like that. I felt that I was too smart to need to play like other kids did.

And in 1988, I decided to have a childhood at last. And I had been in a spiritual retreat two years before that, and we just kind of were asked to use a name for the week. And I had no idea what I was going to say, and when my turn came around, and I took a breath, I said, "My name is Joybubbles." And even the class just resonated with this; people were calling me Joybubbles years after the class had been in the class with me. And two years later, in '88, when I took up childhood, I had it listed in the phonebook. In 1991, I let it settle long enough and decided to take the plunge, and I went to court and changed it

legally. And once I got the certified court order, then I sent that to the vital statistics in Richmond and changed it on my original birth certificate.

AH: Okay.

JE: And oh, boy, you really find how many places have your name. I mean, FCC radio licenses, commercial stuff, the minister's ordination, hundreds of places. Not to mention, social security, the banks, the IRS—

AH: Oh, sure.

JE: It's an adventure.

AH: You had mentioned ordination or something like that, and I saw on a web piece about you that you got a ministerial certificate from a community of spiritual seekers in Florida.

JE: Yeah.

AH: Was that connected with that session you were talking about, when you came up with Joybubbles?

JE: No, that was sort of separate. That was kind of connected to the people that brought the terminally ill kids over the phone for me to talk to.

AH: Oh, okay.

JE: And then, I studied in person with a man that would come down from New York and would do events and retreats and classes and stuff, that eventually led to ordination. I got ordained by Dan Chesboro, who does a Sanctuary of the Beloved from New York, and got a metaphysical ordination from him and got it registered with the state, so I could legally marry people and everything, if I knew how, which I don't.

AH: I see. Well, let me see, what else? Is there anything else you want to leave us with before we end the interview?

JE: Well, I'm still glad I went to University of South Florida, for instance, because I feel all those education things—regardless of how much I feel I don't need them at the time—I think everything you learn goes together to make your life more rounded and interesting. Now, when I hear somebody winning the lottery and convert it back to present worth factor or something, I remember those grueling days in engineering economics and trying to understand that stuff. And from taking that, even though it didn't take well with me at the time, I thought I at least knew what they were talking about, and just learning things that I otherwise wouldn't learn. I think the university experience is valuable.

AH: All right. Well, it sounds like you have had a fascinating life and a lot to teach people. And I don't mean just in the technical sense, but in the kind of spiritual, humanist sense as well. And it said in the web that you like to share children's songs and poems. Do you just use the favorites that you know, or do you write them?

JE: Oh, I write them, all my stories. Well, I tell stories, and I did write a story in rhyme about two little girls; one stole the other's ponytail while she was sleeping, and they ended up forgiving each other. It was kind of while I was working on forgiving for the sexual abuse.

AH: I see.

JE: But mostly I tell stories about everything from, like, going to one of the hotels and playing in the pool and with kids, and it turned out that a lady was watching me, who had come there with the intention of killing herself, and the joy of our playing kind of helped change her mind. Or a little girl that I went over to her house and played. She hadn't talked in two years since she had seen her father get shot. And she didn't talk, and one day, while I was playing there, she said her first words in two years.

AH: Wow.

JE: And, you know, you just learn a lot from children, and you learn that, when you know you're a winner, people treat you like one.

AH: Yeah, definitely. Well, there are some very inspiring stories you could tell. And I want to thank you for talking to me today.

JE: Well, I sure enjoyed it. And if somebody wants to hear those stories, naturally, it's over the phone, it's a free—well, it's not free long-distance, but it's a recording, so you can hang up on it, and I'll never know. I just got a new number. It's up in Chicago. You wouldn't think I have one in Minneapolis just because I live here.

AH: Okay, and what's the number?

JE: 773-572-3125, and it's sometimes stories and sometimes stuff, so I call it, "Stories and Stuff."

AH: Okay, yeah. Well, I'll be—I plan on writing a profile about you for the *USF Oracle*, the newspaper here. So if you don't mind, I'll leave your number there, so people can call if they'd like.

JE: Yeah, and I'll even do the release for them, too, if they tell me what to say, like—well, not tell me what to say, but tell me how to, I'll say, "Yes," or "I agree," or whatever it is. Because I feel I gained from the experience of USF, and I'd like to give back what I can, share what I can.

AH: All right. Well, thanks again, Joybubbles. It's been a really interesting conversation.

JE: Well, thank you, and it's been a pleasure.

AH: Okay. Bye-bye.

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JE: Bye.

End of Interview