



**EDDIE BASHA**  
1937 -2013

Honored as a Historymaker 2001  
Humanitarian and Grocer Extraordinaire



The following is an oral history interview with Eddie Basha (**EB**) conducted by Pam Stevenson (**PS**) for Historical League, Inc. and video-graphed by Bill Leverton on May 8, 2000 at Basha's Corporate Headquarters, Chandler, Arizona.

*Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.  
Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Heritage Center Archives, an Historical Society Museum, Tempe, Arizona.*

**PS:** Because this is an oral history, we want to have your name.

**EB:** My name is Edward Najeeb Basha, Jr., and I go by Eddie.

**PS:** And your middle name is unusual. Where is that from?

**EB:** Najeeb is my grandfather's name, Najeeb Basha. My middle name is Najeeb. My father was Edward Najeeb, named after his father, who was born in Lebanon and came to this country in 1887.

**PS:** For the record, when and where were you born?

**EB:** I was born in Mesa at the hospital there. Our family lived in Chandler but there was no medical facility there at the time I was born.

**PS:** And what was your place in the family of brothers and sisters....?

**EB:** I was the oldest of three children. There were seven years between my sister and eight years between me and my brother.

**PS:** Let's go back and talk a little bit about your family background. To start, why don't you tell me a little about your family and how they happened to come to America?



**EB:** Well, my great grandfather, Tanoose Basha, came to the United States in 1884 and he opened an import-export business. He became ill and sent for his oldest son, Najeeb Basha. And Najeeb Basha, my grandfather, came in 1887. He stayed in the United States and ultimately the rest of the family came over. Before the turn of the century or right at the turn of the century, my grandfather, Najeeb Basha, met and married my grandmother, and her name was Najeeby Srour. They were married in New York and, in 1910 with four children, my grandfather and grandmother came to Ray-Sonora, Arizona where my grandfather went in business with a relative of his. They remained in Ray-Sonora for nine years and then in 1919, the family moved permanently to Chandler.

In all there were nine children. One died at an early age and there were then six girls and two boys who lived and were born to my grandfather and grandmother. My Dad was number five, and he was the first of the remainder of the Basha children to be born in Arizona. He was born May 1, 1911, a year before statehood.

**PS:** What effect has your Lebanese heritage had on your life?

**EB:** Oh, I always, laughingly, refer to my Lebanese ancestry as helping to mold my life. I was born into a household where my widowed grandmother lived, and four unmarried aunts, and then a bachelor uncle, and everybody worked in the business. And, from an early age, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I called it the Guild, like the old medieval Guilds, you know. I grew up in what I believe to be kind of a grocery guild. And being that the Lebanese people are merchants and traders, it's something that I always felt I wanted to do. And it was almost innate. Something intrinsic. Something that was not forcibly, but something that was naturally imbued in me by my family, by watching my family and by going to work at a very early age. I started working for my Dad when I was 11 and from then every summer on I was part of the family business. So it's been my life.

**PS:** You answered several of the questions I had here, but we'll go back in a little bit. Why did your family decide to come to Arizona? Of all places.

**EB:** Well, the mines in the early part of the last century were very buoyant. The economy was very crisp and growing; and they had heard about the opportunities. A lot of people were working in the mines and most of the Lebanese were merchants. They had small stores; they peddled goods and were mostly small, like general stores. Pots and pans, some basic food stuffs. But they were all driven by the lure of the mines. To serve the miners.

**PS:** And so they came to?

**EB:** Ray-Sonora.

**PS:** And where is that?



**EB:** Well, that's 20 miles outside of Superior. It's a huge open pit mine today. Most of the town was moved to Kearney. Kearney is the contemporary Ray-Sonora of yesteryear. In fact, in 1968, the year my Daddy died, we went back to Ray-Sonora where the home was. The mine had already bought all the property and there were no standing structures at all; but we went back to the hill where my Dad's home was and kinda reminisced. Then I think the next year is when the mining company started excavating. It's a big, huge open pit mine today.

**PS:** And, so, did you grow up in that area then?

**EB:** No, I was born in Chandler. My family moved to Chandler in 1919 and stayed there permanently.

**PS:** Why did they move to Chandler?

**EB:** My grandfather felt that there were more opportunities in the Valley than there were in the mining communities. He felt that the long-term growth of the Valley afforded more opportunity for the family to earn a livelihood. And that's why they moved.

**PS:** You said you went back to the old family home and reminisced. That's why I thought maybe you'd spent some time there.

**EB:** Well, it was my Dad's home, not mine. My Dad's family home.

**PS:** Okay. One of the things we're asking people who are landmarks of history is, how did your family get through the Depression years?

**EB:** Well, actually, my grandfather died in 1932 and the family was bankrupted. My grandfather had built a building. When he moved, from Ray-Sonora to Chandler, he built this big building in downtown Chandler for a store. And it was really never successful. And, as a consequence, he was virtually penniless when he died in 1932. My Dad told me on several occasions that the family had to wait for some small insurance premium that he had in order to pay the mortician for the death costs of my grandfather. It was my Dad and my Uncle and the rest of the family that started our business right here where you are, in 1932. And that very first year they opened a grocery store, right here. This was a big farming community and if you recall, cotton was very important. There was a lot of migratory workers that came through this country. And it was that year, 1932, that my Dad and my Uncle opened this store in, what was then Goodyear. As you may or may not know, this was the original farming operation of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. And in the early 1920's they uprooted and moved to Litchfield Park and to Goodyear. So for a long period of time, there were two Goodyears. But this is where my Dad and Uncle started 1932. And they survived the depression and in fact made \$11,000 their first year in operation. Buying cattle from the Gila River, Pima Indians, buying their grain, buying their mesquite wood. Selling those groceries: selling groceries to the migratory workers. And it was just from that foundation that the company business



grew.

**PS:** So by the time you came along, it was fairly successful then?

**EB:** Yes, in fact when my Dad died in 1968, we had 16 stores. We had 13 Basha Stores and 3 Discount Stores, which we ultimately closed. But we had a nice, small company and we were doing okay.

**PS:** One of the other historical landmarks we've asked people about is the war years. You were pretty young during the war...

**EB:** Well I remember the war years, because my mother was an Air Raid Warden on our block. And I remember that as a young boy, we had to have all the lights out and I remember I never liked it. I always had a claustrophobic feeling. I remember I always gravitated to the old stand-up radio because of that little green light in it. I could focus on that green light and I knew there was light. I remember when WWII ended. It was in the summer and we were up in our summer place in Iron Springs. All the kids and the women got their pots and pans and walked through camp, you know, hitting the pans. It was a victory parade for everybody. The only person who served in WW II was my Uncle Ike. He was an officer in the Quartermaster Corps.

**PS:** I imagine that the grocery business was considered pretty essential so father was needed at home...

**EB:** No, my Uncle was the older of the two brothers; but my Dad had a medical condition and during the War was in the oh, what, the private aircraft that searched for missing planes. I'm having a senior moment.

**PS:** Civil Air Patrol

**EB:** Civil Air Patrol, yeah. He was a member of the Civil Air Patrol during WW II. But he had a medical condition that precluded him from being in the service. But I'm not sure; I think in those days maybe if there were only two brothers they wouldn't take them both in the service. Wasn't there something to do about the Sullivan Brothers? All five of Sullivan Brothers were on the same. . . and it sank and the entire family, was destroyed.

**PS:** Let's talk a little bit more about your growing up years.

**EB:** Okay

**PS:** What were your first memories as a boy growing up?

**EB:** Oh, I just remember, you know, living in a houseful of people. Everything revolved around our dinner. My grandmother was the cook. I always remember my grandmother and how frugal she was, because she came over third class on a boat. Being very poor, you know, left indelible memories and the



family really never had a lot of money. But dinner time was the family time for everybody.

Everybody worked and we all congregated around dinner at night. And then Christmas. Christmas was really a fabulous time at our home. My Aunt Selma was the youngest of the Basha family and she was an artist. She made a career out of Christmas. She would flock the tree entirely white and decorate it with only red bulbs and red lights. It was a time when everybody shared and there were a lot of gifts and a lot of gift-giving. And a lot of love and conviviality. And, just a lot of warmth and joy at Christmas. It was really a great time that I remember.

**PS:** You remember any special of foods? You talked about dinner being important. Did you have special . . . ?

**EB:** Well my grandmother was just an excellent cook. She made a plethora of Lebanese recipes. In fact, we did a cookbook of my granny's recipes. I always recall granny's favorite dishes were made with. . . she never used much meat. Meat was expensive; so she'd take a leg of lamb and she'd feed the whole family on leg of lamb virtually the entire week. She'd take the lamb and, I mean, she was an expert with a knife. She'd carve that lamb up and she didn't leave one piece of meat on the bone. Then she would cut it up. She would use lettuce leaves with a little meat and rice and cook it in a pot with tomatoes. And then she would take the same ingredients and wrap cabbage rolls. She'd take the same ingredients and she'd stuff zucchini squash. And, she'd take the insides of the squash and she'd add onions and cheese and green chili and some tomatoes and make like a casserole. But, everything that my grandmother made was always good.

I remember Fridays being Catholic. And this is an interesting chapter in our religious history. My grandmother was really not Catholic. She was an Episcopal and always prided herself in being Episcopal. She went to the Episcopal Church in New York and my grandfather was a Mason. But my grandmother for what reasons unknown to me, insisted that her children be raised Catholic. They went to all the churches in Chandler when they moved here; and she just decided she wanted her children to be Catholic. So during that era Catholics couldn't eat meat. And I always remember Friday was the day, you know, we either had beans and noodles; or we had lentils. She made a wonderful dish called mjadra in Lebanese. It was noodles, and lentils and rice. That was an old. . . always a favorite. You talk about eating, I can talk to you all day.

**PS:** Growing up Catholic then, would be part of the reason that Christmas was an important holiday, too? Was it a religious holiday as well as a family?

**EB:** Oh, sure. We always went to church. Talk about incidents, you never forget. Midnight Mass at the small St. Mary's Church in Chandler, I'll never forget going with my Aunt Mary Felix. She was probably the most devout Catholic in the family and, God love her, we went early: she and my cousin Richard. He's deceased now. We went together with her and sat in the pew there from about 9:30 on so that we could have a seat for Midnight Mass. And I'll never forget that when all the people started coming in, the ushers came and they pulled Richard and me out of the pew. They made us stand against the wall, so some people



that were Catholic (laughs) could come and sit down. Oh God that really irritated me. I'll never forget, you know, there was doctor in town and his wife. It always irritated me that I had to give up my seat, you know. But I'm more Christian now than I was then I guess (laughs). Those are the sort of things you remember.

**PS:** Certainly made an impression. Tell me about some of your other memories growing up as a boy in Chandler. What kind of things did you do for fun?

**EB:** Oh, I had a great friendship with a lot of kids in the neighborhood. And we just did a lot of things. We played softball and we played guns. We were always playing cowboys and Indians. Nothing changes almost. We had caps and guns and we did a lot of playing. I remember going in the summer time up to Prescott and spending time up there in Iron Springs. It's a family summer community. There were 50 homes there and I have a lot of vivid and wonderful memories of being in Iron Springs. Just family gatherings, family get-togethers. Playing with kids. I don't remember the games I played but there was a lot of opportunities to interact with my friends in Chandler and friends in Iron Springs.

**PS:** I was going to ask you about keeping cool during the summer, but sounds like you didn't: you went away for the summer.

**EB:** Well, we did when I was younger. After I turned 11 years old, then I had to start working. So from then on every summer it was in the stores. I worked in the summers from then on. And then in our warehouse here. This used to be our warehouse. Our wholesale warehouse.

**PS:** Nice transformation.

**EB:** Yeah. Well we ran out of space and to build a new facility.

**PS:** So it was at 11 that you started working in the stores?

**EB:** In the downtown Chandler store.

**PS:** What did you do?

**EB:** I stocked and I was a carryout. I'll never forget that was a very fateful day in my life you know. You talk about those defining moments: that was a defining moment. My mother had sent me down to the store on my bike to get some baking powder. She was making a chocolate cake. And I walked in the store and my Uncle Ike managed the store at the time. He managed that store and my Dad managed the store in Mesa. I think there were four stores at the time. And my Uncle Ike said to me, "Well, what are you doing here? Why aren't you in school?" I said, "Well, school's out." He says, "Well then you'd better come back and go to work?" I says, "You're kidding?" "No," he said, "I'm not kidding." So I took the baking powder home and told my Mom, I says, "Mom, Uncle Ike said I have to go to work." And she said, "Well, Honey,



if he said you have to go to work, you have to start." And I said, "Gosh!" And I started to cry. I didn't want to go to work. I had my summer planned, you know. I knew everything I wanted to do. It was so well-defined and laid out, but boy, let me tell you, that was a shock.

But from then on, it was always the same. But let me tell you, after that first paycheck, I loved to go to work. Boy, having a little money in wallet was really great. I was pretty proud of that. Made 60 cents an hour; and worked a lot of hours. It was a lot of money and I was able to save up enough working in the summer time to pay for my first two years of college. But then my Dad had to bail me out, the last two.

**PS:** What kind of hours did you work?

**EB:** Oh, gosh all day long. And Saturdays. Six days a week. But I enjoyed it; it was fun.

**PS:** And before that you never had to do any work in the stores; or did you do chores at home as a younger boy?

**EB:** Oh, chores at home . . . I don't remember what they were, you know. I didn't mow the lawn. I was limited to what physical exertion to do. I was limited by the fact; I had a medical problem that wasn't corrected until I was 13 years of age. So I couldn't do a lot of heavy work. But it required surgery. I had responsibilities in my room, etc. But I'm talking about full weeks of work in the summer. I always thought 11 was kind of young to start. But . . .

**PS:** It didn't sound like you were eased into it. You just started from nothing to working full-time.

**EB:** Hoooh, it was a shock. It was an outright shock.

**PS:** Had you hung around the stores before that at all, or did you stay away from it.

**EB:** No, I was always at the stores, 'cause my mother worked there. My mother was a cashier. When I was young boy growing up in Chandler I was often at home with my grandmother who had been rendered incapacitated with a dog bite. She was out calling on people. See they used to vend on weekends. They'd take goods and go out to the different communities and sell pots and pans and goods. One time my grandmother was somewhere and a dog bit her. And it almost paralyzed her. She couldn't really stay on her leg a lot; so in the later years of my grandmother's life, she was at home. So I would spend time at home with her. And that's why she was doing all the cooking. Before, she used to get up, go to the market with my Dad and my Uncle Ike at three o'clock in the morning. And take the money and pay the people for the produce that they bought, you know. But she was incapacitated somewhat. So, being with her at home, I would pick up the phone in those days . . . the operator came on. All I had to say was, "Hi, I want to talk to my Mommy." And the operator would dial the store and I could talk to my Mommy. I've always been a Mommy's Boy. I remind her of that when I talk to her now. In fact I talk to her two or three times a week. She comes to stay with me once in a while. She lives in Stockton, California. But I've always been a



Mommy's Boy.

**PS:** It's a different world now that . . . you can't pick up the phone and have the operator know who "Mommy" is.

**EB:** No, you sure can't. But in those days, Chandler was a very small community. At the, the end of block where we lived, the 300 Block of Washington Street, from there totally northward to Mesa was all agriculture. There was nothing. It was all agriculture.

**PS:** You really grew up kind of in the rural.

**EB:** Absolutely. Very rural area. I remember coming home when I went to Stanford. I would fly home at the end of the quarter and I would remember driving home from the airport down Baseline and down Dobson Road. It was a two lane road, and all the beautiful barley crops and the smell of agriculture as you drove by and you know it has all disappeared. Vast transformation in the last half century. Just, almost unimaginable what's happened.

**PS:** Well, we'll talk about some of that a little later too. Were there any particular neighbors that you remember as a boy?

**EB:** Well the Spears boys lived across the street. I played a lot with Jimmy Spears and John Spears, and, and Bobby Martinez lived down the block. Across the street and down the block. He was probably one of my best friends, Bobby Martinez. And those were basically my friends. The Lewises lived next door when I was very young and then the Sanfords and the Clowards, across. Mrs. Bernard, the Bernards lived next door to us and next door to them were the Williams. Lynn Williams and his wife, Ann. He was the publisher of the Chandler paper. So it was kind of the extent of the neighborhood.

**PS:** Were they all farm families pretty much, or...?

**EB:** Well, the Bernards were farmers and I think Mr. Spears worked for the railroad. I don't recall what the Lewises did. I think Mr. Cloward was a farmer, and as I say, Lynn Williams was publisher of the newspaper. Mr. Martinez was a butcher. And then later for a while.

**PS:** We mentioned school a couple of times. Why don't we talk a little about where you went to school?

**EB:** I went all twelve years to Chandler schools. I went to the Cleveland Elementary School through six grades. And I distinctly remember my teachers. And then for Junior High and High School I went to Chandler High School. The Junior High and the High School were all together in the same building. So I was at Chandler High School for Junior High and High School for six years there. And I graduated in 1955. I loved high school. I had a lot of great friends. And a lot of wonderful memories. In fact, every year we have a class reunion right here in our Museum that I sponsor, to bring all our friends back together.



And we've expanded it to the class of `56 as well as the class of `54 because you know; we're not getting any younger. Tragically, each year we lose somebody. Or we lose several people. So it's good to get back together and see each other for at least one night out of the year. But I really did enjoy high school. I was involved in football, baseball. I love baseball.

Let me tell you my baseball story. I love baseball. I was on the JV team and after the season, I was promoted to varsity. I really thought I was hot stuff. That was the JV team again and then was promoted to varsity. Well, my junior year, there was no JV team and, and I was on varsity. There was just one position left and two people were vying for it and I was one of them and I was cut. And I've gotta tell ya, that was probably the biggest disappointment in my life. That I couldn't make the varsity baseball. Because I love baseball. Ahhh, I just, I still love baseball. I memorized all the old players. Loved the Boston Red Sox and the Cleveland Indians. And I knew every Boston Red Sox player. I knew their batting average and the Cleveland Indians. And their pictures, you know. I remember Bob Lemon and Bob Feller, and Early Wynn and Big Bear Garcia. Just love baseball. Oh, that was a terrible disappointment.

And I played football and one year I went out for track. I was a student officer. I was a freshman class president. I was the junior class vice president and then I was a student body president my senior year. So I really was involved in high school and activities. It was a great time for me.

**PS:** How large was the high school?

**EB:** My graduating class was 116 students. So I think there were roughly probably five hundred students in nine through twelve.

**PS:** Small enough you could know everybody.

**EB:** Yeah. Perfect size.

**PS:** Getting back to the sports. You played baseball--what position did you play?

**EB:** I was an outfielder and I was a utility catcher. And in football I was a linebacker; I was a offensive center. I was an offensive guard and an offensive tackle. Played the line.

**PS:** We talked about how you loved baseball. Did you collect baseball cards?

**EB:** No, I never did. I'm not sure they had baseball cards then. Maybe they did, but I didn't.

**PS:** Now, why would you pick the teams like Boston Red Sox rather than closer teams or there wasn't a team obviously in Arizona.

**EB:** I don't remember .



PS Dodgers come to Los Angeles? Was that after that?

**EB:** Afterwards. Yeah, they came to Chavez Ravine, yeah later on.

**PS:** So there probably weren't any. . . .

**EB:** When I was in college I was a great fan of the San Francisco Giants cause I loved Willie Mays. Oh, my God, he was my hero. I still love Willie Mays. I think he's one of the great class acts in professional sports. Yeah.

**PS:** What about the academic part of school? What were your favorite subjects?

**EB:** Oh, I loved it all. I especially liked history. And the social sciences. Geometry and algebra were a little difficult; so was chemistry. I really wasn't very scientifically prone. I didn't have a bent. But I did well in school. I was always on the honor roll. And my Dad expected me to study hard and get good grades. Education was very important in our family. Because none of our family, other than my Aunt Selma, went to college. And my Aunt Larissa was a two-year teacher. Nobody else went to college or university. So that was a momentous occasion and I planned for that early on. I mean, my Dad instilled that in me that "I want you to go to college and I want you to, you know, get a good education." That was important.

**PS:** Tell me about how you decided where to go to college.

**EB:** I didn't. My Dad decided for me. My Dad was in business in California. He and Horace Steele were partners. After the war they got into the oil drilling business and hit a few dry holes and then they hit a couple of good wells. He and Mr. Steele, when they were together, shared a suite in the Jonathan Club in Los Angeles. Dad was more actively involved in the oil well operation than Mr. Steele was. In all of his contacts with petroleum engineers and geologists, he would always ask them where they went to college. And invariably every one, to the person, was a Stanford graduate. And Dad became very impressed with Stanford and did a lot of research. One of the individuals he befriended in the Jonathan Club was a member whose name was Jim Reynolds. And Uncle Jim was Mr. Stanford in Los Angeles. And Dad became very enamored with the University and told Jim that he wanted me, his son, to go there.

And that's how it all came about. And I applied and I was accepted. I laughingly tell people I got a football scholarship but I didn't play football. I (laughs) didn't qualify, believe me.

**PS:** You didn't play baseball either?

**EB:** No (laughs). I, unfortunately, no. Wish I'd been good enough, but I never was.



**PS:** So when you did go to college what was your major?

**EB:** History. I had intended to go to business school, which was a graduate school. And in my junior year my Uncle Ike, my Dad's partner, died. This was 1958. And I came home for my Uncle Ike's funeral and I told my Dad that I was going to leave school and join him in the business. And he reminded me who was the father and who was the boss. And he said, "You will finish your college degree and then you can come back to work, if that's your choice." So I finished out my senior year. And, I forfeited any plans for graduate school and went to work in the company. And I've been here ever since.

**PS:** Had you ever thought about other careers at some point?

**EB:** At one time, when I was in college I flirted with the idea of being an educator. I loved education. I loved knowledge. I loved reading. Those were really, you know, a very dynamic time in my life being in college. But my true calling was the business.

**PS:** Hmmm. So when you came back after college. What kind of role did you take in the business?

**EB:** I really became, what I always laughingly say a "factotum." And I'll let you look that up in the dictionary, but just kind of a jack of all trades. I started working: I worked seven days a week, morning through night trying to become totally conversant with every dimension of our business.

There isn't anything in our store operation at the time that I didn't do. I was a meat cutter. I learned to cut meat. I worked in the produce department. I worked in the warehouse, loading trucks. I was a cashier. I was courtesy clerk and a stock man. I did everything. There was only thing that I didn't learn to do and until this day I can't do. That's why I have so much respect for them. I was never was able to drive a long-haul truck. A semi. I used to watch with amazement. Those fellows backed those trucks up, with 18 inches on each side of the trailers. I remember a number of times I tried and I jack knifed that trailer and that truck, every time.

But I just learned the business and worked in the business and prepared for the day when I thought I might be in charge. And that day came very prematurely. I was only 30 years old when my Daddy died. I never expected him to die at such a young age. But it happened; and it was, you know, one of the bleakest moments in my life. And, I still miss my father very much. He was a great teacher and a great friend and a great man.

**PS:** Quite a tribute to him. When you came back from college, how large was your father's business, the family business?

**EB:** I think we had probably seven stores. I remember we opened 16th Street and Bethany in 1960 and that was store number nine. So, I do believe we had somewhere between seven and ten stores. And then during that time, I was associated with my father, we built the chain up to 16 stores. We had 16 stores when he



died.

**PS:** Originally it was your father and your uncle?

**EB:** Ike, yes.

**PS:** Then, when you came, was your uncle still in the business?

**EB:** No, my uncle had died in 1958. And I joined the company in 1959.

**PS:** So it was basically you and your Dad that were running it at that point?

**EB:** Well, from the family perspective. But I mean we had an organization of people. We had cousins involved in the company and, and we had others, non-related family members, who were in management positions. We had a good company. And good people. Been with us for years. One thing about Bashas' was people. People at Bashas' usually stay till they retire. So many of them do at least. Unless they're career-hopping.

We provided opportunities for countless young people to go to college. They used the grocery store as that bridge and the money they earned paid for their living expenses and their colleges expenses on their way to an engineering degree or a teaching degree. We've done a lot of that. But people who wanted to make the grocery business their career, countless of them stayed with us.

**PS:** Well, we've heard that employees here feel like they're a family.

**EB:** Well, they are. And we never use the word employee in our business here. We refer to everybody as a member. I personally believe that when you use the word employee, you're creating a dichotomy: a division between employee and employer. And it's not that way. We're a group of people, association. We're a family. We all have our responsibilities. We respect one another for what we contribute to the whole.

**PS:** And you're still, you know, one of the few businesses, I think, that closes for the Holidays. It always says you're closed so that your . . . .

**EB:** We close Christmas and we close Thanksgiving. Yes ma'am.

**PS:** And your reason for that?

**EB:** They're family holidays. Is greed so important that you have to glean the last dollar? I don't think so.

**PS:** Other businesses seem to (laughs)



**EB:** Well. . .

**PS:** One of the other things unique about Bashas', I think, is that you've done business on Indian Reservations.

**EB:** Yes, ma'am, I have.

**PS:** I remember going to a news conference around `80, `81, you were opening, I think, the first . . . .

**EB:** In Chinle? Hmmm?

**PS:** I went to that news conference for Channel 8.

**EB:** Did you? Well.

**PS:** Tell me about doing business on the reservation.

**EB:** Well, that was a momentous occasion for me. I received a letter from the Navaho Tribe that Dine' Incorporated requested our interest in a proposed site in Chinle. And, when I got the letter I was very excited. At the time, we only had one store out of the Valley area; and that was in Sedona. And because of my interest in art, I used to go to Sedona, about every other week with a friend of mine. A fellow by the name of Rick Benson, who is retired and lives in Prescott. Still a dear friend and gentleman I love very much. And, we fell in love with Sedona and befriended artists and people up there. We got excited about Sedona and ultimately built a store up there. And that was our first store out of the area.

And Chinle was an opportunity to expand for us beyond the Valley beyond Sedona. When I got the letter, I was really excited. And, and it conjured up, you know, old memories. You recall the history of our company. It began right here in, in what was then Goodyear. That is now Ocotillo. The first customers in 1932 were the Gila River Pima Indians. They brought their cattle, they brought their grain, and they brought their mesquite wood. And I remembered that foundation, you know.

And it was kind of a, almost a spiritual connection there and so I called them on the phone. I said, "Hey, I'm Eddie Basha. I got your letter here. I'm really interested. In fact, I want to be your grocer. Unbeknownst to me, I was the only one that responded. Nobody else did. So in 48 hours they were down in our office here. Seven people and we hammered out an agreement. Within two hours I laid out an agenda for `em. I said "This is what I will do and this is what I would like you to do," and we had an agreement. I said, "The only thing I ask you is that if you build a second store, that you give me the first right of refusal on the second store because of transportation costs." It would help mitigate those costs if we had two stores. 'Cause I didn't know what the load factor was. And in the event we were going up with half loads, if we had two stores, it would be increased volume and might justify, you know, full loads. As



it worked out, we never had any half loads with that store.

But at any rate, they made a commitment to me. We opened a store and it was a great success. The second store came along in Tuba City. And they lived up to their commitment to me and we opened the second store. That's when the Navaho Economic Development Department said, "Well, look, we're planning a third store in Kayenta, but that's Babbitt's store. And, I said to them as I'm want to say on occasions such as that, I said, "Hey, you know, pigs eat, hogs get slaughtered." I said, "I understand. I didn't ask you for it. It's whatever, you know, you want."

And I made them a very favorable deal. I told them that we would pay them 25 cents of every dollar profit that we made and I wanted to do that because I didn't want Native Americans to think that non Native Americans were coming up to take advantage of them. I wanted to use this as an opportunity to introduce capitalism to the Native Americans. Native Americans, as a rule, have no concept of capitalism, of private enterprise. They don't have private property. Everything is tribal. As a consequence, they have little collateral. With little equity, they have little opportunity to generate credit. So I wanted to take this opportunity to generate some capital for them that they could invest in small businesses for Native Americans that lived on the reservation. So each deal provided for 25 percent of our profits going back. So, and I say this because the Navajos came to me on Kayenta, and said, "Babbitt backed out. Will you take the store? We want you to take the store." I said sure. I said same deal. So it's always been 25 percent of the profits.

And that's how we grew. Today we have six stores on the Navajo Nation. Two of them were unplanned. The presidents had a requested that we go to Crown Point and Piñon and put smaller stores, which we did. Ordinarily we wouldn't have done that. And now we're planning a seventh store with the Tribe in Dilkon. So it's been a good mix. It's been a good fit for the Navajos. It's been good for us. We've trained an incredible number of Navajo people who as store directors, store managers, meat managers and produce managers. We're one of the largest non-Indian private employers on the Navajo Nation today.

**PS:** I've often heard from other businesses that it's difficult, some say impossible, to do business with the Native Americans on the reservation. That it takes too long, everything takes too long.

**EB:** There's no question about this, this is absolutely factual. Last week I gave a speech to the Navajo Economic Development Forum in Flagstaff. And I told them that they're going to have to look how they do business. That they have some systemic obstacles that they're going to have to overcome. Give you a tangible example. President Zau said to us, "We want a store in Piñon." The Tribe built the store, we put the fixtures and inventory in it. It amounted to a \$2 million investment on their part; \$2 million investment in our part. We went to the ribbon cutting, and President Zau and I were sitting there eating fried chicken. I said, "President Zau, this store is a true testament to the bonds of friendship and trust that we have between one another." I says, "You know, we don't have a lease. He says, "We don't?" I says, "No, sir, we still don't have a lease." That was December 15, 1993. Two weeks ago, on April 15, I received a letter from the BIA telling me, addressed to me, that for \$250, a \$250 check remitted to the BIA, they would send an



executed lease of Piñon to our corporate offices. Mind you, we were opened on December 15, 1993. I reminded the Navajo congregation in Flagstaff that last year we paid \$88,000 in rent in Piñon. We paid another \$32,000 in percentage rent; we paid a million dollars worth of labor and, and benefits to our Navajo members, without a lease and the BIA wanted \$250 to send me an executed copy of the lease.

Some, some dramatic changes are going to have to occur. But I'm there and I wanta be one of the architects to help them. Because they're our brethren. They're our citizens of this country and this state. And it behooves us to raise their standard of living, by virtue of the only means that we all know. And that's capitalism. That's the only way: private enterprise, capitalism. And we have to work together. Non-Indian, Indians working together in collaboration.

**PS:** I can see now why you've been able to do it. Because as an individual you believe in it. But in the corporate culture, corporate lawyers wouldn't put up with that.

**EB:** I know and I explained that to them. I says, "You know I love you like brothers." And I says, "I understand the culture. I grew up in it here. I negotiated a contract for the City of Chandler for effluent where the Gila River Pima Tribe. I negotiated it through three different Chandler Mayors. I took me two years to negotiate the contract. And the contract was worth a million dollars to the Gila River Pima Indians. One million dollars but it took me two years to negotiate with them. You would go to their meetings in Sacaton and you would go and you would find out if you were on the agenda. You would sit there all morning and they would come out and say, "Well, you're not on the agenda." I, . . . they were my friends. Loved with them. Grew up with them. We'd go to lunch; come back. They'd go back in their meeting. Four o'clock they'd come out and say, "Well, I guess you're not going to be on the agenda today." Okay, fine, you know. I was incensed by it. I wasn't irritated. I know how the Native Americans believe, think and act. Time is meaningless. They have been here for centuries. We're short-termers here. They're not. So you have to empathize with them. You have to project yourself. But in order to generate economic development and prosperity, they're going to have (laughing) to expedite (laughing) considerably to get people to come up there.

**PS:** I did the Copper State Show on the Navajos in 1980 so that's why I spent a lot of time in Piñon. No grocery store there then.

**EB:** No

**PS:** Why don't you talk just a little about . . . you have already in various ways, but just to encapsulate your general philosophy of running the business.

**EB:** (takes deep breath, exhales) Well, first of all, one of my heroes was always Henry Ford, because he had a saying, "Take my empire, but leave me my people." And I think what constitutes a great company, the foundation of a great company, is great people. And I think Bashas' has always been very fortunate to have strong, good, intelligent, far-thinking individuals at prominent positions. And something that I've



always believed in is autonomy. I've accorded the leaders in our company, those department leaders and division leaders, an extraordinary amount of autonomy. I believe that's what helps, you know, engender success. The person has that autonomy. They can make those decisions once in a while, an error, a mistake is made and you have to step in and work the thing out together. But I think it's very important that people realize that they have the authority to make the decisions and that you're dependent upon them. And you rely upon them and that you have faith and trust in them. I think that builds self-esteem and builds confidence.

And we've always worked that way. My Dad was that way. And we've always tried to be fair with people. We were a small, private company at the time. We were the first company with a pension plan for our people. A pension plan that is managed internally. It's, our own plan, it belongs to Basha members. Our own credit union, you know, we have a member-to-member program that we feel is crucial today. If somebody has a death in the family or fire, we have this fund that's set up. If you buy a pop from a Bashas' pop from anyone of our 80 pop machines around the state. All the money goes into this member-to-member fund. After the pop is paid for, but all the profit generated goes into this member-to-member fund and it helps our members in times of need or, or whatever. We just believe in, in supporting people. I think that's important in our success.

We've tried to learn from the mistakes made by other people in our business. We've tried to continuously upgrade and modernize. We've always believed that we are part of the community. I think that if you look at us as a company and look at our competition, who are outstanding, they're excellent. They're super large, super big and super good. But, I think there's a real differentiation if you will a real dichotomy between who we are and what we are, and who they are and what they are. They are more interested, in my opinion, in their stockholders, their dividends and their profits. We have to make a profit to survive because, you know, we don't have any stock. We only grow by virtue of our profits and, our borrowing. But we look at the people in the communities we serve as our stakeholders. They have stockholders. We have stakeholders. And we are very much interested in the well-being and the life, the quality of life in the communities. And really make a strong commitment to this state. Arizonans are the stakeholders of Basha's. And we live and breathe and act that every day that we open the doors of our business. We think this is an incredible differentiation.

**PS:** And becoming more and more unique as there's less family businesses. It seems like in my field, in broadcasting, there are no more. The Lewises finally sold out; Chauncey sold out years ago. There are no family TV stations anymore. Do you think they'll continue to be a family place for family grocery business?

**EB:** Well, if there will be as far as the Bashas are concerned because I am committed to this I am committed to this state. As long as I am alive Bashas' is not for sale. And will never be for sale. As long as I'm alive. After I'm gone, I can't answer.

But our company has grown. We have 95 stores. By the end of this year, we will have, good Lord willing,



a hundred stores in operation. We do an awful lot for the communities in Arizona and for our state. We make incredible contributions to education, to the homeless shelters, St. Vincent de Paul, our annual Christmas Drive. Last year we raised over a hundred thousand pounds of food from external sources. And we matched it internally. A hundred thousand pounds of food that we share with food banks to help the homeless and the hungry. But we do an incredible amount, and I don't mean to be tooting our horn, because, you know, I find that's something that's very repugnant.

But, what I'm saying is that when these consolidations take place, and when corporate offices are moved out of Arizona, they begin to lose sight of what's important in communities and states. They become insulated from the day-to-day, you know, operations. The day-to-day operations of a community. The day-to-day life of schools and clubs and organizations. I think it's critical that we have more Arizona companies. I hope we can build more.

**PS:** One more question here and then we'll change tapes. Do you think as a business that the grocery business . . . can you compete with these big huge nationwide companies?

**EB:** Well, we've competed up to now and, I believe we have the ability to compete. We have a good company. We have a lot of smart people running Bashas, present company excluded. We have sharp people and a vertically integrated company. Well we couldn't compete if we weren't vertically integrated. By vertical integration, I mean we have our own wholesale operation; our own produce, frozen food, meats, cheese, dry groceries. We do as much as we can to supply our stores because today there is only profit in the grocery business. In days of old, there were two profits: There was a wholesale profit and there was a retail profit. You had wholesalers and you had retailers. Today, those two profits have been collapsed into one. And there's only one profit. And if you don't have the wholesale operation, it's very difficult to survive.

**PS:** So do you see Bashas' as continuing to expand and even outside of Arizona?

**EB:** No. I see us expanding. We will look at opportunities to grow within Arizona. Our secret to success, the little success that we have achieved is the fact that we have our own warehouse: our own wholesale facility that we can supply our stores from a central unit. If we expand beyond our ability to supply our stores, then we will lose that edge. We will lose that, that competitive edge that we need. And so we cannot, we cannot afford, practically or physically or philosophically to expand beyond our ability to supply. So that means that only Arizona or along the periphery of Arizona is within our sphere of influence.

**PS:** Let's talk a little bit about your personal life.

**EB:** Okay.

**PS:** When did you . . . ?



**EB:** I was married in 1962. And, I was married, let's see . . . twenty-four years. And Sherry and I had four sons: Edward the Third, his name is Trey; Ike, Mike and David. And then I remarried. Nadine and I were married and we've been married 13 years. And we have two sons: Joshua, who will be 12 in May; and Jeremy, who will be 11 in June. So we were married, Nadine and I were married, in 1986.

**PS:** So it's all sons.

**EB:** All sons; six sons. Yeah. My youngest will be 11 and my oldest is 36.

**PS:** Why don't you tell me a little bit about each of them and what they're doing. The 11 year old is going to school (laughs), but. . . .

**EB:** Okay, well, my oldest son, Trey, is married to Lee Ann. They have five children. The oldest is 18 and one 16 and one 13, one 11, one 8. They're all boys, but the little girl who is 11, Madison. She has rather unique stature in the Basha family. She's the only little girl. Trey is a graduate of Arizona State University and he works for Bashes in the real estate department and in store planning; and he is our company spokesperson.

My son, Ike is 35 and he works . . . all my sons are with the company. I gave them that option. I said all I expect from you is that you get a college degree and you can do anything you want. If you choose the business, it's yours, you know, for the asking. When I die I leave you the company as my Dad left for me. And I leave it to you and so you can either be actively involved or you can be passive. It's your choice. They all chose to be part of the company. Ike and Trey had to do a major. He was an English Major and Business Major. My son, Ike is 35 and he started out at NAU in computers and, transferred to ASU and studied Business and French and ended up with a History degree. And he went to school five years. My son Mike is 34 and he was a purist. I say purist, he did go to NAU, but came back to ASU and graduated with a Business degree. He was . . . he didn't vary it one iota. And then Ike and Mike went back to business school and in two years graduated with MBA degrees.

My youngest son in my first family is David. He was born in 1972, so he's going to be. . . he's 27. He'll be 28 this year. He and his wife Cory married last year. He's been married a year. They're studying for the entrance exam of the business school. And he works in real estate. He assists my, cousin, Johnny, who's a senior vice president over all real estate. New stores remodeling, remodeled stores and, construction.

I didn't mention Ike is in Finance. He was our computer guru and is now moving into finance and Michael, my third son, is a group vice president over all the wholesale operations which are the trucking and the delivery and the warehousing. I've been blessed. God's blessed me abundantly. I have wonderful sons. They're fine young men; they're honest. They're moral. They're up, they're righteous and upright; and they're good boys. They serve their communities in various ways. My younger sons are just kinda my pets. It's a whole different ballgame with my two younger boys. My whole life revolves around my two younger



boys. I worked a lot more; I was gone a lot more when my older boys were growing up. With my younger boys, it's different. I think the times are different. I think they require more supervision; more of a father image. It's important; it's critical. Every child should have a father. One of the real, inherent weaknesses in our society today too many children are being raised without a father at home. And that's unfortunate.

**PS:** You mentioned your youngest son is 11.

**EB:** Uh-huh.

**PS:** And that's the age when you went to work at the store. Are you going to be putting him to work soon? Or, are things different today?

**EB:** You know things are different today. And there wasn't seemingly any problem then, you know, the work. But today you have laws and labor laws and child labor laws. And his mother keeps him pretty busy though. She has a tight leash.

**PS:** Did all of your sons that are in the business now start like you did as courtesy clerks?

**EB:** Oh, sure. They all did, yeah. I never felt they worked as hard as I did, but they always had more excuses than I could ever conjure up.

**PS:** Sounds like you are justifiably very proud of your family.

**EB:** I am. I said God's blessed me abundantly. My older boys had a wonderful mother. Sherry was an outstanding mother. Did a great job. And Nadine is a great mother in her own right, you know. Very well educated. She's just a paper away from her doctorate in childhood education so her whole life, Nadine's whole life has been education.

**PS:** How did you meet her?

**EB:** She was a teacher in the Chandler schools when I was on school board. That's how I met her.

**PS:** Let's talk about some of your community involvement. I'm not quite sure where to start. We'll go back and talk about some of the school things, but let's start with politics. Now, you ran for governor. Everyone knows that.

**EB:** Yes.

**PS:** How did you first get involved in, in politics?

**EB:** Well, I'm not sure that I understand your question. In 1968, let me take you back. In 1968 a group of



people in Chandler came to me and asked me to run for the school board. And that's a non-partisan election. And I did. I ran against an incumbent. And I was elected. And that was the beginning of my involvement in public service activities. Prior to that, I was gonna run for the city council. And my Dad found out about it and he made it clarion and clear to me that I could not run for the city council. That he didn't believe that, in his view, partisan politics and business mixed. And so in deference to him, I did not participate in any of the election activities. And I was just narrowly defeated by a few votes, which was, you know, very beneficial for me. I just got graduated from college because I would have had to resign had I been elected.

But in 1968, I was elected to the school board. And my Dad never said anything to me about it. He recognized the fact that I ran and that I was elected and I began my service in January. But then as I said, unfortunately, my Dad died October 5, 1968. So we really never had an opportunity to discuss it in any detail whatsoever.

But that was the beginning and I ran two more times and, after 13 years of service, I retired from the Chandler Board. I didn't want to but I believed in term limits. I thought that, always thought, I was the best school board member Chandler ever had. And probably could convince a couple of other people to vote for me on that. But I loved being on the school board. I used to visit schools every Thursday and talk to teachers. I talked to people who worked in the schools and I talked to parents. We did a lot of innovative things at Chandler. We opened up our schools. Instead of having district boundaries we had open enrollment. If you lived in the Chandler school district, if you wanted to take your child to any school, you could. If there was a place there for them, you could take them. We met with parents every month at one of the schools. We did a lot of things, I think that enhanced the image of Chandler schools. And we worked to achieve a quality education program. I look back in retrospect and wish we could have been a lot more successful but because of certain factors, mobility and poverty and things of that nature, some of our students didn't learn to the level that I would have liked to have seen them learn.

But from there I went to the State Board of Education where I was appointed by Gov. Babbitt for two terms. And then from that point, that was 1982 to 1990 and then 1990, while I was still on the State Board, my term was expiring, Gov. Mofford appointed me to the Board of Regents. So I've run the gamut, public education from early K all the way through graduate school. And during that time I was also President of the Catholic Board of Education, when it was under the diocese of Tucson. We were still one diocese and had not divided. So I did serve some time in Catholic education as well. But I've spent 29 years in public education and several years in Catholic education for the last three decades.

**PS:** Pretty incredible. Especially if you're talking about the Chandler School Board. I've often heard people say that serving on a school board is a thankless job.

**EB:** Well, you don't get paid and that's good. I think it's the purist form of a representative government in our country because you don't get paid. You're not paid for it and it's non-partisan. And I think that's what makes it so rewarding. That it transcends the politics. You're there for one purpose: it's to serve children.



And I can't think of a nobler goal or aim in society than to serve children. And in fact that's the reason that prompted me to run for Governor; because I was so disappointed and so disenchanted with the lack of vision in this state. I mean it's a continuum. You look at virtually every, measuring device that relates to children. We're not last; we're very close to the bottom. And I don't feel that augurs well for the future of this state. I don't say this from any liberal or conservative or moderate position; I say it from the position of a capitalist. First and foremost I'm a capitalist. And every dollar that we have as family is invested in this state. And the prosperity of this state is directly related to the education attainment of every citizen. And if we want to be competitive not only globally, but within the United States; we have to have an educated citizenry. And when you're last at every level, I think prosperity could be very elusive. And I find that very frightening. I'm paranoid about that. And I put myself up before the public as a candidate because I believe that change needed to be effected. I still believe that change needs to be effected.

**PS:** I think you're right. Some of the questions I had here about education was pretty much said, but maybe you can rephrase it. How do you see the quality of Arizona education today?

**EB:** Well, I think we do an excellent job for students who live in the middle class and upper middle class neighborhoods. And I think we do a very poor job for children who come from lower socio-economic levels. We don't have the infrastructure to serve those children. We need community based schools. And I know that that probably augurs some kind of horrendous, you know, nightmare for some people who, who have certain ideologies. But, you know, let's move out of the idiocy level for a moment and let's talk about the real needs. There are so many children who don't have fathers at home. We have so many children who are latch key.

We have an agrarian calendar. We still have an agrarian calendar for our children. They go 175 days. We really need more time on task. And, interestingly enough, we created that program in Chandler in 1989. We developed a 25 day school year in the summer time. We brought kids that were not functioning at grade level, back to school. Did a terrific job with free breakfast, free lunch. And we had curriculum that kept them interested and kept them enthused. When you furlough children three months out of the year, they lose so much of what they've learned. They've got to stay on task. And it just doesn't have to be the rote/cognitive learning. It can be programs where they, for example: let's teach every child how to swim in the summer time. Part of swimming is, you read about the English Channel. Well, where is the English Channel? Well, it's in England. All of a sudden, we're studying geography and then we read about the breast stroke and the crawl. And all of a sudden we're reading; we're exercising our reading skills. So then we talk about the Olympics. We talk about the sporting activities. We learn more about the world; we can do that kind of what we call interdisciplinary things with children. One year in Chandler the whole curriculum revolved around the Olympics in Spain. And everything was about Spain: Spanish music, Spanish history, Spanish cultures, and Spanish cuisine. You know everything was about Spain. It was an exercise for those children that they probably never would have. You know, it was exposing them to more in their life than just going to school every day, with reading, writing and arithmetic.

We've got to expand the opportunities for children. More music, more art. I was very impressed with this



school in New York. Ninety-six of virtually all African-American students; 96 percent graduation rate. They all played one or more instruments, you know. And, so we need more arts for our children. More music. We need to expose them to all facets of education. It takes time on task. We need to be involved with the clubs such as Boys' and Girls' Clubs and houses of worship. Everybody needs to help build these children. We're fighting insuperable odds today in society. America is being destroyed from within. One of my greatest memories of working out here in the store (and I'm moving back so you can cut whatever you want, but...) Ira Hayes was one of our customers. Do you remember Ira Hayes? He was the Marine that helped to raise the flag on Mt. Surabachi. And he was one of my heroes and inspired and me to join the Marine Corps when I was at Stanford. I was in the Platoon Leaders' class when I was at Stanford. Didn't make it because I had a serious back ailment; and I was in the Marine Reserves. I go to the Marine Luncheons when we have our Marine Corps Luncheons. Have a decal on my car. But I love what the Marines stand for: Duty, Honor, Country. And I think one of the greatest speeches I ever gave in my life, was to the 220th of the Marine Corps. And I talked to my fellow Marines about the enemy that is not from without; the enemy in America is from within. And we have those insuperable odds that we're fighting against drugs, fatherless homes and television and radio and music that propagate sex, promiscuity, violence, drugs. America is destroying from within and we have a tremendous task: all of us to come together to help secure a quality of life for our children. It's critical.

**PS:** Very well said. There's a couple of issues I just wanted to have you touch on and you sort of have but they're kind of key issues in education today: the debate over charter schools vs. public schools.

**EB:** Let me say this: As far as competition, in 1970 or thereabouts, I'd been on the school board in Chandler. I made a categorical statement and it troubled some of my people involved, you know, when I ran for Governor. When I made a categorical statement that I believe in competition in education. I believe that no child should be punished by virtue of where their parents want them to go school. I believe this from the bottom of my heart. So I support charter schools. I support the public schools concept. I support vouchers. The only thing that I ask is that we have an accountability test. Litmus for every school that receives some kind of aid from the state. I think that teachers should be certified and I think there should be some kind of general curriculum that students are exposed to. I think as one Harvard professor once said: Four fundamentals for any student to graduate from high school that would ensure success are: algebra, a foreign language, a grounding in character education values and an ability to write a 25 page term paper. Those are the four criteria that he said. And I think that we need to ensure that our children, wherever they go to school, are going to schools that are accountable to them, because they are the most precious thing we have. So anything we can do collectively and collaboratively to ensure quality education for students, I think it's incumbent upon us as a society to do it.

**PS:** You touch on a couple of things I was going to ask you about. The teaching of languages. I know you speak several languages.

**EB:** In 1986, when I was a member of the state board of education, we came together and mandated foreign language for elementary students. We went to the Legislature and tried to persuade the Legislature



to fund this. It was around 1986; '85-'86. The Legislature would not fund any pilot programs. The districts had to, you see, but there was no meat. If we mandated it upon them to educate children in a foreign language, we would have seen today at least three of four classes of graduating seniors who were fluent in at least one language. And let me tell you again, I'm wearing my capitalist hat. I always wear my capitalist hat. We are involved in a global economy. Our customers basically are the people who live to the South of us. There between 400 and 450 million people who live to the South of us. And each day we see the growing importance of that trade back and forth. People buy, you can sell. You sell in the language of your customer. You can buy in any language, but you sell in the language of your customer. And I think it's just so crucial and so critical that everybody speaks at least Spanish in this Southwest because that's our market. We are going to be the bankers, the merchants and the people of commerce in Central and South America. We ought to be able to speak their language.

**PS:** Can you speak Spanish?

**EB:** I do speak Spanish.

**PS:** Have you learned any Navajo (laughs)?

**EB:** No, I haven't. I should have. But you see there's a trigger mechanism for children. It makes the point; you're making the point for me. It's effortless for children to learn a language because they don't have this affective problem, that, "Ooooh, I'm going to make a mistake if I say this word. If I use the wrong tense, the wrong word." You know, there's no trepidation. No hesitancy. They say it. They intermingle; they speak; they talk. When you're an adult, it's much more difficult. Children have a trigger mechanism. So, it's a cardinal sin that this state has not provided funds and it requires schools to teach foreign language. And I promise you one thing, if children knew a foreign language; they would have a better command of English. That's a given.

**PS:** You touched on the issue of, of character and ethics education. And that's something I'm hearing more and more about. Schools didn't used to have to think teaching character.

**EB:** Well, in 1989, while in my last year as president of State Board of Education, we put together a values task force. And we sent people from our State Department throughout the United States. And that year and the next year, when David Silva was the president, we created a values curriculum for schools. There was no money. Our company, Bashas, printed the values curriculum. Distributed it to every school board member and every superintendent in Arizona. Sent out letters encouraging school districts to incorporate this value, those five values that were: respect for self, respect for others, respect for knowledge, you know, public participation. At any rate nothing really ever happened. Jane Hull, our Governor, thank God for Jane. She's a bright light in many dark tunnels in this state. But Jane is a visionary. Recently she's put together a "character counts" task force and she's asked me to chair it. And we're moving forward. Not at the rate I would like, because in the bureaucracy it takes time to do things. But we have four of these cornerstone characters Cornerstones of, you know truthfulness and, well anyway, we have the six



cornerstones and I'll talk about them at another time.

**PS:** What about the AIM test? What do you think about that?

**EB:** Well, we've always had, since I first went on the state board, the Stanford Achievement Test. We had the Iowa Test for basic skills. My argument is that it's a test that the outcomes are more penalizing than they are beneficial to students. I think we ought to work; I think we ought to determine ways to build students' self esteem and students' dignity. And to do that you need to teach. In 1996, the Superintendent of Public Instruction knew this: that 45 percent of our students were scoring below the math proficiency level. We've done nothing tangibly to strengthen our teaching to bring those children up. But throw a rigorous test at them and, you know, I think that's just very mean-spirited. I think the major thrust ought to be, how we teach our students. How do we school them and establish a strong foundation for them in math curriculum. That's what I think our objectives ought to be; not some kind of test that's going to fail an exceedingly high number of students.

It's ironic that she had to have tutoring to pass the test herself. I mean, come on. Let's be real. These are students. We're trying to build students; not tear them down.

**PS:** At the company you've made a lot of contributions to education. I know you have the thing with your register . . . .

**EB:** Register tapes.

**PS:** Talk a little bit about what contributions that you've made as a corporation to education. And how you think business could be involved in education.

**EB:** Well, it sounds a little self-serving. The register tapes over the last number of years have probably contributed over three and a half million dollars to public and private schools in Arizona for books and for equipment and for whatever they might need: whatever is available to them. I've given of my time although probably some on the other side of the aisle would say I've probably been more a disadvantage: more of a negative than a positive. But I've contributed a great amount of my life to education to try and improve public education. Just at the university level alone, I was totally committed to access and affordability.

Every graph or chart that you see shows irrefutably that the higher the person's education, the greater their income level. And all this reflects on a higher standard of living for all Americans. And so it's important that we support and promote education.

I think one of the great disappointments when I was on the State Board of Education during the years of 1982-1990, was that I wasn't able to convince my colleagues and the superintendent and we should have a statewide adopt-a-school program. I'd like to see every business or combinations of businesses adopt



schools and support and help those schools. So that every school can turn to one business or a number of businesses that have united together, and draw upon their expertise. And draw on them for some financial help. But to be a partnership, mentors, and stewards to help those schools, and to use the people in those businesses as role models for the students. I mean you just can't divorce public education or private education from all aspects of life. You know, it's a continuum.

**PS:** Getting back to your political career which a lot of your education things led to. Tell me about why you then decided to get fully involved in partisan politics and run for governor.

**EB:** Because very succinctly I was very frustrated with the lack of vision, leadership, support and commitment to an educated citizenry which would lead ultimately to a vibrant economy in our state. I think that we were short-changing too many students. I think that the political philosophy and still carried over in the Legislature is very short term. There is no real commitment to investment in human capital. Or investment in physical infrastructure. Arizona is a state: it's a beautiful state with great potential, but without infrastructure of railroad and the waterways; without human capital; without having access to education in every community. By the way, I think we did yeoman service when I was on the board of regents to develop connectivity between NAU and all these various communities for baccalaureate degrees. These are the kinds of investments that we needed to make and to make more of. And I didn't see the state doing it. And I didn't see any commitment to children. I think it's morally outrageous that Arizona has one million people without health insurance. We have more uninsured children in Arizona than any state in the Union. Does that speak for our character? Does that speak for our values? Does that speak for what we profess to believe in as a Judeo-Christian nation? I don't think so.

**PS:** You'd been working on a lot of those issues though in other ways. What was it that made you decide, what was going on in Arizona politics, I guess, that . . . ?

**EB:** Well, I think the bully pulpit of the Governor. The Governor has the bully pulpit and the Governor can be the spokesperson. The Governor can set the agenda; can set the tone to speak to the communities and to the state. To marshal the forces. To marshal and influence the people. To be passionate, as I am, and stand out there. And, if you have to dodge the bullets, dodge the bullets. But to convince the people that these are the investments that need to be made to ensure a greater tomorrow for our children and those that follow. It was that leadership position that the Governor had that I think he, that last Governor, not the current, miserably failed. Miserably failed. To say that you gave back a million dollars, a billion dollars rather to the taxpayers in Arizona and brag about it and take it right out of the classrooms, of the buildings that are really building the future for tomorrow. I think it's disgraceful.

**PS:** And that was Governor Symington?

**EB:** And that was Governor Symington, yes, ma'am.

**PS:** Who you ran against?



**EB:** That's right. And he beat me.

**PS:** But not by very much.

**EB:** He beat me. A miss is, you know, it doesn't matter. I was defeated.

**PS:** What did you learn from that?

**EB:** Well, I learned that honesty doesn't always ensure victory. That when you believe and have a passion and a belief that, it doesn't always work. You know when my grandparents moved to Chandler from Ray-Sonora in 1919, their first visitors, their first people that visited them, were the Ku Klux Klan. And they burned a cross in the alley. And they burned that cross because we were Semitic people. The Lebanese are like Jews, they're Semite; we're Semites. 'Cause my grandmother was an Episcopal, my grandfather was a Mason. So it wasn't because they were Catholic. That was determined subsequently. Well, that lesson that was taught to me by my Dad is very ingrained in my mind. And I've always been very, very patriotic and very passionate about the civil rights of people.

But this great country is founded, on the rights for all people. Not just straight people but all people. And during the election when I said that gays ought to have the right to civil union, it was phrased different then. The phrased question was; "Should gays be all – if the legislature passed a law to allow the gays to marry, would you sign it?" Well, naturally I wasn't thinking about the religious aspect because I don't; and unfortunately, the way it was couched I surely must have made a grand mistake. What I was talking, what I was answering to was the right of gays to have a civil union. And I believe then as I believe today that every person should have the guarantees of their civil rights, guaranteed under the Constitution. But that statement alone, led more to my defeat than anything else. Three hundred thousand faxes went out that weekend and I lost my own community, the East Valley. I was . . . and that's okay. I learned an invaluable lesson about right and wrong. But it was more important to me to be right. It would be more important for me today to still be right than to lie to somebody to get elected. What I did learn was, it reinforced my passions and my belief in what is right.

**PS:** How do you see Arizona politics today? I hear people saying we can't even get people to run for office anymore. Good people, people that should be leading, don't want to get involved in politics.

**EB:** Oh, I think that's true. And I think as a consequence, we have institutionalized idiocy at the legislature. I think it's a disgrace. The leadership that we have in our state today at the legislature. The lack of commitment to education. Interestingly enough I was part of that task force, and I support the people's right to vote on the stadium and vote that out of the legislature. But we couldn't vote out the Governor's agenda on education. It's a tragedy. It's just an outrage and it's a disgrace. It's a poor chapter in Arizona history.



**PS:** Do you have any hope that it'll change?

**EB:** I pray a lot. And I hope that more people get involved and do something about it.

**PS:** Some people think that we'll be seeing more women in office. That that might have some effect. How do you feel about seeing the women in office? I know you supported Jane Hull. Do you think that women may be able to change it?

**EB:** I'm always encouraged when a woman runs for office because I think those motherly instincts that women naturally possess will cause them to be more concerned about education and the needs of children than are men.

**PS:** It's a sad commentary in some ways, though. Over your life you've seen Arizona change from being a very Democratic state to now becoming a conservative Republican state. I just interviewed Paul Fannin a couple of weeks ago, he's one of the Historymakers™, and when he was elected Governor, there were like two Republicans in the Legislature. How do you see the shift in the Democratic - Republican make up of the political landscape?

**EB:** Well, historically, when the Democrats were in power, they were very conservative and the Democrats in the Senate were controlled by the mines and cattle industry and by the banks. I mean, they weren't the liberal Democrats, they were very conservative Democrats.

And it was the moderate Republicans. I remember my dear friend Uncle Marty Humphrey, who ran for the Legislature, was the moderate Republican. It was the people like Burton Barr, Marty Humphrey and Stan Turley. You know Jacque Steiner, Ann Linderman, and Bill DeLong. They're the great leaders in our state who are the moderate Republicans who believed in children and families and education. And then this horrendous swing to the right by the Republican Party. In my opinion, it's going to be their ultimate death knell.

I see Arizona politics moving more to the center. I think more and more people are interested in an independent status. I would feel more comfortable as an Independent than anything else having the opportunity to vote in a primary for one or the other parties. But I see more and more. . . . well look at the registration. More and more people are registering Independent. We tend to see the Republicans as being very radical right. We see the Democrats oftentimes be very leftist liberal. But the great movement in our state and I think America today is that middle of the road. And that's what I see occurring in Arizona. Hopefully, we'll have more middle of the road people; more moderates elected in our state legislature. At least there's a great hue and cry for that. And people working very actively to bring that about.

**PS:** And I know you've been involved in, in the Kids Voting program. Getting people to vote seems to be difficult these days.



**EB:** Yeah, it is. It would be. I would encourage everybody to read Bill Greider's book who will tell the American people about the *Betrayal of Democracy*. Politics has changed dramatically. It's become big money. Money talks and, everything else walks. And you can extrapolate from that what you want; but money has become, you know, the mother's milk of politics. And people who would like to run can ill afford to because they don't have the wherewithal. They just don't have the money to run.

And we've done a good job, unfortunately, of creating an elitist cult in politics today. And I think that's going to have to change before more people become involved. A Senate race in Arizona or a legislative House race could cost upwards of \$50,000, you know. Where's the ordinary person, who has a passion to serve his or her state gonna find those kind of resources? That's a problem.

**PS:** But it doesn't cost anything to go to the polls and cast a ballot and yet people aren't even doing that.

**EB:** No, they're not (laughs). And that's a problem. I think that everybody is going to have to just work harder to generate more interest among those who are apathetic. It's gonna take a lot of effort on the part of the media, those in office, those running for office back to beating the bushes. I think voting by mail is going to help considerably. I think that will increase the voter participation.

**PS:** How about you personally? Do you have any future political plans?

**EB:** No, I sure don't.

**PS:** Not that you want to talk about today anyway (laughs)

**EB:** (laughs)

**PS:** Let's talk just a little bit about a couple other areas that have been pretty major that you've been involved and you've touched on. Health care. You were involved with the DePaul Campaign for Healing? Do you want to talk about the healthcare?

**EB:** Well, there are a million people in Arizona without healthcare. I mean, I find that very problematic. Very troublesome. Very concerned about it. I don't know. I've wrestled with healthcare for a long time. I don't know what the answer is. I don't think a status policy or a central policy that emanates from Washington is necessarily the answer. I think that every time government tries to engage in something it becomes very cumbersome, very bureaucratic and very ineffective.

But I think if we could, I think if the state and federal government partnership could negotiate with doctors, and health organizations and HMOs. If they could license people like St. Vincent de Paul with their health clinic to provide health services to indigents and others. I don't think there's one set answer. I think there're a number of delivery services that we need to look to. St. Vincent de Paul for the present, serves the needs of the indigent; people who have no healthcare. It's a wonderful program, you know. It



comes right out of Matthew: "I was hungry and you fed me; and thirsty and you gave me drink. And I was sick and you comforted me." That's what St. Vincent de Paul is all about. It's Probably one of the noblest pursuits that I know. And they do a great job. I'm proud to be an infinitesimal part of the St. Vincent de Paul endeavor. I continue to support them. Run another capital fund campaign to develop an endowment to enable the medical clinic to provide the monies to sustain itself on an annual basis. It's important that we take care of our fellow human beings. Who can they turn to? Those in need, if they can't turn to us? And St. Vincent de Paul has always been there. It's a magnificent humanitarian organization.

**PS:** And part of the Catholic Church which you've been involved. . . .

**EB:** Well, it is, but, but there're no barriers there. We don't ask people. If you're hungry, you're hungry. You know, you don't have to be. Whatever your religious persuasion is, if you have one, it doesn't matter. You know the only thing. I don't think Christ or God whatever your persuasion is, asked people what their faith was. He spoke to all. He wasn't interested in sectarianism.

When I taught religion, I'm on a sabbatical now, but when I taught religion to sixth graders, I always reminded my students when they walked into class of the first two commandments: Love God and love your fellow human beings. And I would footnote it: Love your fellow human being means not only loving your fellow Catholic; but your fellow Christian, your fellow Jew, your fellow Moslem, your fellow Buddhist, your fellow Baha'i. Whatever the person's religion was, it's irrelevant. We're all humans. We're all children of God. And St. Vincent de Paul projects this as well as any organization in this country that I know. Doesn't matter what your color, creed or complexion is. If you're hungry, we feed you. If you need medical care to the extent we have it available, we're gonna serve you. It's incredible.

**PS:** It seems like there's a lot more services for the homeless than there were 20 or 30 years ago. I was doing news stories about it. You've been involved with some of those. Do you think we're doing a better job today?

**EB:** We can always do more. I laughingly say, in a serious way, there's so much religion in America and Arizona but not enough spirituality. St. Vincent de Paul is all about spirituality. Taking care of the hungry and the homeless. It's about spirituality. And there's a difference.

**PS:** How do you find time, with all of the running of big business, to be so involved in the community?

**EB:** Because I have outstanding leaders in my company, who are, who are enablers? They enable me to be involved. I have a company president, Wayne Manning, who is an exceptional leader. I have an outstanding vice president, and my sons and everybody works very hard at Bashas'. That gives me time to do some of the things that I need to do. And still maintain an involvement in our company.

**PS:** Simple answer. I just have a couple more things here. Talk a little bit about how you've seen Arizona



and the Phoenix area, grow and change during your lifetime.

**EB:** Well, the change has been, you know. It's been dramatic. I mean, how do you describe growth to the proportion that we've countenanced in our Valley? In one respect I'm very saddened by it. I mean the dirty air and the pollution. I suffer from it. Every day I wake up with sinus problems, headaches and problems being stuffed up: can't see, can't hear and can't talk.

On the other hand, it's been very good for our business. We've grown exponentially. So how do you blend that together? I think this Growing Smarter proposal is just so, so important. We need to have more open space. We need to have more parks and more open space and more room. We need a greater transportation system that joins us together. We've gotta get cars off the road. We need to look at variegated schedules for people who work. We need to move people out of the inner city. We need to move government and collapse government down and move it out into the hinterland.

When I ran for Governor, I talked about community schools where people would go to the school and around the school and all their needs were serviced right there. It was a family-friendly environment. If they needed help they didn't have to go to this agency or that agency. There was familial and collaborative. And we did it all together. We need to begin to think how we can take people off the road. Develop more of that village concept that Phoenix is talking about.

The change has been good and great. The change has been bad. It depends upon, you know, on what glasses you're looking through.

**PS:** And you talked about how when you came home from college and all the farm fields and '72 and remember that? Kids today don't see that change.

**EB:** Well, they see a compressed urban area. What I truly miss is the clean air. Phoenix used to be beautiful. We didn't have the pollution. We had pollution that sometimes came from the mines, you know. But with all the traffic, the cars and the automobiles, we're just polluting our environment.

**PS:** Another question I've been asking everybody is, "What advice for young people who are starting their careers today. If they can be inspired by all the Historymakers™ and what you've accomplished in your lives in so many diverse areas. What advice do you for young people that you talk to today about getting a career or life?"

**EB:** Well, I think that to me there are five cornerstones in society. And I think that every young person should be familiar with these five cornerstones and in some way these five cornerstones should impact on their life.

The first cornerstone is the family. You know, maintain a strong family relationship. It is the bulwark of our society. And if we've seen disintegration in America it's because of the family, it's the disarray of



family. So a strong family is critical.

Secondly, is the house of worship. You know whatever your faith is, to me, it's irrelevant. It's that you have a faith. Because what that faith provides you is a value system. A belief in a God or whatever that Supreme Being might be. That to me is crucial in growing up and, and growing through life.

The third is community. Jeremiah said it best thousands of years ago when he said, "We will find our good in the good of the whole community." We need to regain that community spirit. I think we've all learned that Washington can't solve our problems for us. Never have and never will. Sure Washington does some things right; but it's the community ultimately that's going to make the difference in our lives.

The next is education. The education system. It's so vital that young people take advantage of every educational opportunity that they have.

The last is a job. A good job. It might mean moving up the economic ladder. But enterprise, economics, capitalism, and jobs are a cornerstone in our society. And I would encourage every young person to begin at a level and move up that ladder or change careers if that's their choice. But to be involved in the vibrant economy.

**PS:** Very good advice. A couple of things we haven't touched on are some of the other parts of your life. One, I think is your passion as you say for art. You've started a collection. Talk a little about how you collected this wonderful gallery.

**EB:** Well, my, our art gallery is honor of my Aunt Selma: Zelma Basha Salmeri. She was the youngest member of the Basha family: my Dad's youngest sister. And sometimes it devolved to her to look after me when I was young and everybody else was working. And she would sit and draw pictures for me and entertain me. And, early on, she encouraged me to invest in art. And we started going together to art shows beginning in 1970. And I started buying art under her mentorship. And she would come to the Cowboy Artist Exhibition in October and we would buy paintings together and that was the onset of this collection. And everything in this art museum has the fine hand of my late Aunt Zelma. She loved art, she believed in art. She supported art. And she was that passionate mentor to me. And because of that, I've developed a very strong affinity most especially for Western Art and Native American art. And, I'm very proud of the collection we've put together. It's a fine collection and we share it on a daily basis with everybody. And it's a growing collection. We continue to buy throughout the year, especially from our Native American artists because of our presence on the Native American nations. We also have stores on the Apache reservation down to Tohono O'Odhom. So we do buy from Indian craftsmen constantly.

**PS:** Quite a collection. We could talk forever, but I know you have time constraints here. Is there anything that I didn't ask you about? One thing I think I read and I may have mentioned it in passing, is your love of reading.



**EB:** I do read. I do read voraciously. I read a number of books at one time. It's hard for me to stay focused on one book unless it's a junk book and just for entertainment. But I love to read. I love to read for knowledge. I underline and I have my underlines typed up. I have a notebook full of underlines from books that I've read. But I like to read for knowledge and, and I read as much as I can. But as I get older I find out I get tired earlier in the evening and so I'm not reading as much as I used to.

**PS:** How did you develop that love for reading?

**EB:** Oh, I think as a consequence of, you know, studying in school and going to university. And studying and always having a love for history and the social sciences. I think having a love for history naturally begs the question; read and I think it's all just that natural relationship.

**PS:** Did you read as a child too?

**EB:** I was read to. Yeah, and I read. Yeah, I did read as a child.

**PS:** Do you encourage your children to read?

**EB:** Oh, my wife reads to our children every night. Television is not allowed at our home in the evening. No television during school nights. She reads to our 11 year old and my 13 year old, will be 13, he reads every night. We expect him to read 30 minutes every night. But it's a chore. It's a battle. Fighting them all the time. They'd rather be on the computer, you know. And that's the competition we have today in education. The computer, television, movies and music, you know. And none of it very positive.

**PS:** Anything else that we didn't touch on?

**EB:** Well, not that I know of. I mean, you asked the questions (laughing) and I tried to respond.

**PS:** (Laughs) You've done a wonderful job and I can tell you're about to lose your voice too.

**EB:** Yeah, I am. It's that sinus. It's that dirty air. We'll probably do it again, I'm sure.

**PS:** I've enjoyed it.

**EB:** Thank you.

**PS:** Thank you.

