

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: George A. Jackins

Date of Interview: June 2001

Interviewed by: Bernard Nagengast

Bernard Nagengast

George, would you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life as far as where it started out.

George Jackins

Well, I was born in 1934 in Baltimore, Maryland. Went through elementary and high school in Baltimore. Decided early on that I was going to be an engineer and the high school I went to was the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute which was an all male technically oriented high school. And when I was a junior in high school I went to a Navy Georgia Tech foot ball game in Baltimore, Maryland and heard them sing "I'm a Rambling Wreck from Georgia Tech and I Drink My Whiskey Clear". And I made a decision right then and there that I was going to Georgia Tech. And so after graduating from high school in 1952, I went to Atlanta, Georgia and got my education and got an engineering degree from Georgia Tech. What else you need to know?

B.N.

Well one thing I'd like to know is what caused you to go into HVAC&R?

G.J.

Well, when I graduated from Georgia Tech, well let's say even going back before that as a senior at Georgia Tech I got a part time job with a very well known consulting engineering firm in Atlanta called Newcomb and Boyd. And in those days they may have been maybe 15, 20 people. Today they're maybe 150 people so they have really prospered. And I met a gentleman named Pat Gupton who was also a graduate of Georgia Tech and one day while I was back there on my drawing board, I was a part time draftsman, he brought a gentleman back to meet me who was named Bill McKinney. And Bill McKinney happened to be the regional manager for the American Blower Company. And they're in Atlanta. So he asked that I come out and interview him and as a result of that I took a job and both Pat Gupton and Bill McKinney told me that I had needed to join ASHRAE. So as a student at Georgia Tech I joined ASHRAE in 1958 before I graduated. Now Bill McKinney is still alive today and I think he's like 95 years old and serves on the ASHRAE A&A committee and religiously goes to every meeting. And this guy is really quite an institution in the society today.

B.N.

Well when you joined that organization, what was your actual first position there?

G.J.

With American Blower? Well they hired me as a sales engineer and sent me to Birmingham, Alabama. And as a Baltimore boy who married a girl from Norfolk, Virginia I guess Birmingham, Alabama was the last place I ever expected to land but we have lived in Birmingham, Alabama since 1959. So I've been there 42 years. We went there from Atlanta with a brand new baby daughter and now she's grown, has two daughters our granddaughters. And then we had two sons following that. One of them now lives in Atlanta, the older one lives in Birmingham. We have 5 grandchildren now and life is good in Birmingham, Alabama.

B.N.

Well that's good. Well you know when you're a young engineer in your first job and everything, there's always some things that stick out in your mind as far as your first experience or whatever. Do you have any interesting things to tell us about that?

G.J.

Well I remember calling on a major mechanical contractor and this was one of the very early projects that I worked on and I estimated the cost of the equipment and I got an order and then found out that I made a looloo of a mistake and sold it too cheap and so that broke me in real quick at how to be careful. But what I remember then is I learned how to be a fan engineer and trying to draw fan curves by plotting points individually on graph paper using a slide rule and how things have changed today where you press a button and you get a fan curve out now you know.

B.N.

As a fan engineer, you know back in those days, what were the kind of challenges that fan engineering faced?

G.J.

Oh, Gee whiz Bern. I think that proper fan application was a major issue. Trying to select the right fan for the right duty and there were a lot of different, a lot of different applications required some expertise to select the fan that was going to do the best job.

B.N.

You said you joined ASHRAE as a student member early on. How soon did you get really active in ASHRAE?

G.J.

Well as soon as I went through a training program with the American Blower Company in Detroit, Michigan I went back to Atlanta for a short period of time before I moved to Atlanta and that was primarily because we were expecting our first child and they let us stay in Atlanta until she was born. When I went to Birmingham one of the first things I did and my boss took me to the ASHRAE meeting. So I have been active in ASHRAE since the very, very beginning of my career and I've never strayed from the HVAC industry. I've always been involved in the HVAC industry since I started.

B.N.

As far as your ASHRAE career, what types of things did you do in the organization as time went?

G.J.

Well of course I started off in the Birmingham chapter and you know I held chapter committee responsibilities. I became, I got involved in the leadership of the Birmingham chapter in the early 70s. Was president of the Birmingham chapter in 1974-75 and immediately thereafter was selected as the regional vice chairman for education for region VII which was the region that Birmingham was in. And

from that point on I've always had a job. I don't think that in the 40-what 43 years since I joined ASHRAE I've had a job in ASHRAE every year. There was never a year that I missed doing something, either at the chapter, the regional, or the Society level.

B.N.

Of course the ultimate job in ASHRAE was to become the president.

G.J.

Absolutely, absolutely.

B.N.

Which you did. Why don't you talk a little bit about your presidential theme for that year.

G.J.

Well of course I had an opportunity to see some things that I felt needed to be done. One of them was the fact that we had been messing around with the training institute or the Learning Institute. So learning became the principle focus. I felt like it needed to finally be brought into focus and something done definitively. It was going to define the future of ASHRAE's learning endeavors and so I was committed to getting the learning institute off ground the year I was president. The other was, other things which I call bridges to the future were learning, unity and visibility. I felt like you know we needed to have more unity among all of the technical societies, particularly internally in ASHRAE. And I tried to focus on that and visibility, it seemed to me that ASHRAE did a lot for the public and was never given any public recognition. And you and I were fortunate enough to participate in the exhibition at the (National) Building Museum and how that brought to light the things that we do for society and the important things in refrigeration and air conditioning. And it's particularly rewarding in the south. I've read many times that when I went to Birmingham, Alabama it was a very warm muggy climate and this was in the late 50s and air conditioning was just getting cranked up down there. But there had been in the 40s and even before that an exodus of people from the south because it was just uncomfortable to live. And in recent years the air conditioning has made it possible for people to live comfortably in the south so a lot of folks are coming back because it's a good place to live and it's very comfortable.

B.N.

You know that brings up you know a very interesting idea and that's that what you just talked about was really the fact that ASHRAE's efforts and its people have changed society in a certain way. Of course society in its turn changes ASHRAE. And what, when you were president, what kind of things did you see happening along those lines as far as that give and take. How did society impact ASHRAE? The big things that were going on at the time.

G.J.

I'm not sure I know how to answer that Bern. I'm thinking, I know he's going to cut this, so can you cut this crap out but.

Unknown observer

I just walked in front of the lens.

G.J.

Oh you did. How has society impacted ASHRAE?

B.N.

And impacted what we do.

G.J.

In a technological way or just in a personal way, in a people way?

B.N.

In any kind of a way especially from the standpoint of what kind of direction it causes us to go in maybe.

G.J.

We are certainly guided by the necessity for energy conservation and I guess that was one of the very early involvements in committee activities beyond the Education Committee which I served on first. But I had decided that in the early 70s as a result of the Arab oil embargo to go into the consulting engineering business. I had been a manufacturer's – I had been involved with a manufacturer and became a manufacturer's rep selling air conditioning equipment. Then I went to work for a mechanical contractor. That didn't work out too well. That's when I decided to go into the consulting engineering business which is still my, what you might call my endeavor. And energy conservation was the principle incentive that I had at that time. It occurred to me that a professional engineer who was knowledgeable in our technologies could provide a very viable service to the people who were owning and operating buildings and that was my concept of starting a firm called Energy Management Consultants. And this was probably 1973-74 and I struggled with that mightily for about 5 years. But then all of a sudden things started catching on and as a result I built a pretty sizable consulting engineering business that did nothing but energy conservation, energy studies, retro fit designs and until the late 80s when there was a significant emphasis or de-emphasis on energy conservation which all of us know about, kind of put me in a bind because the business had declined significantly and I got back into providing traditional design services for architectural type clients. And this just wasn't my cup of tea. I was not very happy doing that but you know that kind of got me in, I'd say that ASHRAE had more impact on my career paths and the decisions that I made in doing my business than anything else that I've ever been involved in. I bet you it was the same way with you.

B.N.

Yeah, and you know when you talked about the impact of ASHRAE, would you say that ASHRAE kind of leads society in a certain direction?

G.J.

I personally, I may be biased but I don't think that anything that we enjoy in our tremendous quality of life would be possible without the works that ASHRAE and its members have done to make refrigeration possible and to make air conditioning and heating, you know as available to everybody. It's just a major thing in our lives.

B.N.

You talked about your involvement in education too. You obviously are very interested in that area. What kind of comments would you make as far as the status of engineering education and what they're doing?

G.J.

Well, I wish that our engineering education had more involvement in the HVAC&R industry. I think that this is a frustration that we all have as we go out and talk to educators and because HVAC&R does not seem to be a high priority in engineering schools. And so you know I think we're all trying to do something about that. But you know engineering is a great profession and we just need to interest young men to come into the HVAC&R industry.

B.N.

As somebody who's now an employer of young engineers and has dealt with many other employers, do you feel it's important for a young engineer to get hands on experience? Does that make you a better engineer?

G.J.

I don't think there's, that's absolutely. I went through Georgia Tech on what they called the co-op program. And although that didn't specifically impact my choice of going into the HVAC&R industry, which I've already told you about, I did have a chance to work in industry and that was a very, very great opportunity to see what was going on and that helped me tremendously in making my career decisions in the future.

B.N.

What do you think that ASHRAE itself can do to encourage those kinds of trends?

G.J.

I think we're doing it with the ASHRAE learning institute, which I think is now coming into being with courses that are easily accessible to people who are interested in learning our technology and becoming proficient applying the technology. And this is happening now. I see this improving as time goes on and I think it'll continue to do so.

B.N.

You know let's get back a little bit more personal. What, you mentioned some people who have some influence on you. Who would you say were some of the very influential people in your life in terms of engineering and general inspiration?

G.J.

Well I had an uncle who was an engineer when I was a little boy and I always admired him and he always talked to me about being an engineer. But also had a knack for mechanical things and taking things apart, which I think many of us do when we're young. Kind of gives us some guidance as to what we're going to do in the future. But I guess that I decided when I went to this all, this technical high school that I was going to be an engineer so it was pretty well predetermined at that point in time. Where I went from there I think was impacted by Pat Gupton, by Bill McKinney. My business partner David Butler. And people like this have all been a part of just a great career and a wonderful opportunity to deal with people who were really great engineers and impacted me tremendously. ASHRAE has been a major part of my life without question.

B.N.

What about the question of ethics in engineering. How important do you think that is?

G.J.

Good gracious. I mean you know as a professional engineer I think it's absolutely critical not only to engineering but to the conduct of any business. And it's been something that I've worked very hard to be sure that you know, when you do it, do it in an ethical, straight forward honest manor. And don't leave any skeletons in your closet or whatever you want to call it. You know what I mean.

B.N.

Yeah that's for sure. You know, when you got into the presidency of ASHRAE, you obviously, each person does their presidency in a different type of style. What would you say was your style as far as how you conducted yourself?

G.J.

Well I think we talked earlier about the fact that I was committed to enjoying that year and so was my wife Donna Lee. And I think that we had a wonderful time dealing with people all over the world who were and are involved in our industry and I considered myself an ambassador of ASHRAE and I tried my very best to leave the best possible impression wherever I went. That we were a world class organization, which we are. And that was very important to me. And I have a lot of great memories of people that I had contact with in the year of travel.

B.N.

For someone who is aspiring to be the president of ASHRAE or who is on their way towards that position, what kind of advice would you give them?

G.J.

Good gracious. Do your job and do it with great commitment and be kind, and kind to people. Mentor people, bring them along and make sure that they know the best way to do it is going to be to be a good people person. I think this is really important. And I think that, you know ASHRAE has this rule that the job seeks the man and if you aspire to be the president of the Society and you do everything you can to do your job and treat people well then you're going to have the best opportunity to serve the Society in that capacity.

B.N.

And that really leads into my next question which is a lot of younger engineers will say, why should I join ASHRAE, what good does it do me to join ASHRAE ? What would you say to them?

G.J.

Well beyond the ability to have access to the very best technology that would guide you in your career, your engineering career, the friends that you make and that you enjoy are really lasting friendships that you know I go way back and say that I'm just so glad that I had this opportunity to walk this path and meet these people and still have many of them as my friends. And that's the most important thing in life in my opinion. I mean you know you've got to get from here to there but people are very, very important in doing that.

B.N.

And as far as a young person who isn't necessarily in this industry yet, what would you say to someone as to why they should get into this industry.

G.J.

Well it is a very, very important industry and the benefits that we provide mankind are immense and I think that the contribution that a young person can make could be significant in this area. And I can't think of a better area to get involved in something that would impact people's lives any more than HVAC&R.

B.N.

Well George we've still got a little more tape left. Is there anything else that you would like to expand upon as far as-

G.J.

Where do I need to hit.

B.N.

Things that you would like to say. For posterity.

G.J.

For posterity. Well I received an award yesterday that I thought was just, I never expected it. It was just absolutely incredible to be awarded the Exceptional Service Award. I think I got the Distinguished Service Award some 10 or 15 years ago. But there's no way I could ever do enough for ASHRAE and what ASHRAE's done for me has just been immense in my life. I can't even describe the pleasure that I've had and the good that I've gotten out of being a part of this organization. So what I've gotten is far, far more, you hear this a lot, but it was far, far more than I've ever given. And because what I've given was just a great pleasure. What else can I say, Bern. I don't know. You know, I still got a lot of years to hang around. We were sitting at lunch today and all the presidents were at the luncheon, the board luncheon. We started comparing ages and it was Rod Kirkwood and Clint Philips and Fred Kohloss. Fred was the youngest of this group. He was 79. And Clint Philips is 86 and he's still coming to these meetings. This is fantastic. And I'm sitting there saying, I hope that in 20 years I'll be 86 that I can be sitting at that luncheon again because it was just incredible. I've never seen anything to equal the number of presidents. They come to this meeting until they're just not able. I mean I think that traditionally we have 17 to 18 past presidents that come to this meeting every year. Now if that doesn't say something, I don't know what does. It's absolutely incredible. And these people have all been a part of my life and I just hope that I can you know give back the same little bit to the people who are coming along now. It's been an incredible opportunity. What else can we say Bern?

Cameraman

I'm going to ask you to hang on to that thought because I have to change the tape.

B.N.

That's what all the noise was.

Cameraman

But I also wanted you to introduce George at the very beginning. You kind of started right into the first.

G.J.

I hope there's a little bit of stuff in there that's worth .

Cameraman

Absolutely. And the points you made about all the presidents was one of the good ones. Yeah, I thought that was good.

G.J.

Well it's true, isn't it Mort?

Mort Slone

I think so. We've got one on the historical committee now. We had one last year. Bill Chapman was this year.

G.J.

Oh yeah, yeah.

Mort Slone

I see Fred at every meeting.

G.J.

Fred's just, I mean he's a work horse. I mean he's involved in standards and all that kind of stuff.

Cameraman

Okay, do you want to do the intro first or do you want to continue.

B.N.

I guess we'll continue that thought and then we'll do the intro.

Cameraman

Okay, alright and you can go any time.

B.N.

When you were talking about the fact that so many past presidents continue to show up at the meeting because they want to, does that say anything about the fact that ASHRAE is a voluntary society?

G.J.

I think what it says is that people fall in love with ASHRAE. I mean I think that's the honest goodness truth that everybody is, they become a part of the family. And I think that my feeling is exemplary of this these at people that not only me but my wife - she has to come just as I do to see these people and we look forward to these meetings and the friendships and relationships that we've made with a great deal of enthusiasm. Now to be doing the work of the Society which benefits the industry while this type of environment exists is really a remarkable pleasure and remarkable thing. So you know it's just a win-win situation. I don't know anybody in the Society who doesn't enjoy what they do for ASHRAE, particularly you. And I think that one of the things that I tell a story a lot is when the president elect is asked to sit down and make all of the committee appointments for his presidential year and you gather in Atlanta with Gloria (Cofer) and the incoming president elect and you have this huge list of people who have been either recommended or write letters wanting a job in the society and it never fails that you don't have enough jobs. And this is a testimony of the commitment of these people. And after all of this appointing process is done and you run into people in the halls they either come up to you and shake your hand and thank you for the job or they say damn, George you didn't give me a job. And so it was really, I thought that was just remarkable because I don't know if I've ever been in an organization where people stand in line to get a job and work in a volunteer organization such as this.

B.N.

And work for no pay.

G.J.

And work for no pay. And work hard for no pay.

B.N.

Well good. Well thanks so much for the time George. We appreciate you.

G.J.

Okay. It was my great pleasure Bern.

B.N.

Okay.