The Anthony Canavan Bowe Interview of William John Bowe, Jr.

Regarding Augustine Joseph and Julia Lecour Bowe

January 29, 2021

Transcript Summary

A. Getting to Know Gus and Julia Bowe

- **Family Connections:** This section details the intertwined family history of Anthony Bowe, Bill Bowe, Augustine Bowe, and Julia Lecour Bowe. It highlights the close bond between the Bowe brothers and the unique living arrangement of the two families.
- **Gus Bowe: A Profile in "Decent" and "Competent":** Bill describes Gus as a highly competent individual with a strong sense of common sense and decency. He emphasizes Gus's ability to apply practical wisdom to complex legal matters.
- **Julia Lecour Bowe: Scholar and Polyglot:** This section focuses on Julia's intellectual curiosity and her dedication to scholarly pursuits, including her research on family history and her interest in languages like Spanish and Arabic.
- **Developing a Relationship with Gus and Julia:** Bill recounts his initial encounters with Gus and Julia, including a memorable trip to Paris and anecdotes that illustrate their personalities and values.
- **Tracing Family History in Chicago:** Bill describes a trip he took with Gus and Julia to visit the various residences of Gus's family, offering a glimpse into Chicago's evolving neighborhoods and the Bowe family's history.

B. Entertaining by Gus and Julia at Apartment 4D

- **Julia's Generosity and Artistry:** Bill shares how Julia, following the death of Gus, helped him settle into his bachelor apartment, highlighting her sewing skills and thoughtfulness.
- **An Evening at 4D:** This section describes typical dinners hosted by Gus and Julia, showcasing their simple yet elegant style of entertaining and Gus's playful sense of humor.
- **Gus's Brilliance and Early Achievements:** Bill delves into Gus's intellectual prowess, recounting his exceptional academic record and early career successes, emphasizing his unique combination of talent, drive, and love of learning.
- **A Dinner with Political Luminaries:** Bill describes a remarkable dinner at 4D where Gus and Julia hosted Adlai Stevenson III, Nancy Stevenson, Senator Paul Douglas, and Emily Douglas, highlighting Gus and Julia's role in connecting people and fostering political dialogue.

- **Poetry Magazine and its Supporters:** Bill details Gus and Julia's vital role in saving Poetry Magazine, establishing the Modern Poetry Association, and hosting poetry readings and gatherings at their apartment. He also mentions their interactions with various poets and figures associated with the magazine.

C. A Passion for the Arts

- **Cultivating Artistic Interests:** This section explores the Bowe brothers' unexpected passion for the arts, given their modest upbringing. Bill attributes their cultural engagement to Gus's wide-ranging curiosity, their wives' shared interests, and their embrace of a "broad education" and the "cultural feasts" available to them.
- **Connections to the Visual Arts:** Bill highlights Julia's familial connection to the art world through her sister, Josephine Lecour Freborg, and her husband, artist Stanley Freborg. He discusses the Freborgs' influence on Julia and Gus's appreciation of art, particularly the abstract expressionist movement.
- **Neighborly Ties with Claes Oldenburg:** Bill recounts the connection between the Bowe family and renowned sculptor Claes Oldenburg, their Elm Street neighbor. He shares a personal anecdote of Oldenburg visiting Julia and his mother, highlighting the artist's thoughtfulness and respect for old ties.

D. Civic Engagement - Giving Back and Improving Race Relations

- **Religious Beliefs and Practices:** Bill discusses the Bowe family's Catholic faith and their active involvement in church affairs, particularly Gus's leadership role in Loyola University Chicago's Citizen's Board. He reflects on the influence of their religious upbringing on their values and social conscience.
- **Dedication to Improving Race Relations:** This section focuses on Gus and Bill's commitment to racial justice and their involvement in organizations like the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) and the Catholic Interracial Council.
- **Addressing Racial Inequality in Chicago:** Bill details Gus's leadership in Chicago's Commission on Human Relations, his work to improve race relations, and his advocacy for fair housing and employment practices during a time of significant social change and racial tension.

E. Gus is Elected Chief Justice of the Municipal Court of Chicago

- **The Bail Bond Scandal and Gus's Appointment:** Bill recounts the political climate surrounding Gus's appointment as Chief Justice, highlighting the Bail Bond Scandal that plagued the Municipal Court and Mayor Daley's decision to select Gus as a reformer with a reputation for integrity and independence.
- **An Anecdote about Daley and Ethnic Politics:** Bill shares a humorous story about Gus's meeting with Mayor Daley after his appointment, revealing Daley's initial misjudgment of Gus's ethnicity and his pragmatic approach to balancing the political ticket.
- **Gus's Straightforward Style and Controversial Statements:** This section explores Gus's tendency to speak his mind, which sometimes led to controversy. Bill mentions a column by Chicago journalist Mike Royko that captured Gus's blunt yet admirable personality.

- **Challenges in Historic Preservation:** Bill describes Gus's appointment as chairman of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, highlighting the challenges he faced in attempting to save historic buildings like the Garrick Theater and the Chicago Stock Exchange Building.
- **Navigating Corruption in the Chicago Court System:** This section discusses the pervasive corruption within Chicago's court system, contrasting Gus's ethical approach to leadership with the later Greylord Scandal that implicated numerous judges. Bill recounts an anecdote about Gus resolving a financial impropriety within the court system, demonstrating his pragmatic yet principled approach.

F. The Bowe and Bowe Law Firm

- **Early Success and Sources of Business:** This section details the origins and success of the Bowe & Bowe law firm, highlighting their specialization in workers' compensation law and personal injury cases. Bill mentions individuals like Henry Horner and Tom Nash who provided them with early referrals and potential connections to Chicago's political landscape.
- **The Rise of Workers' Compensation Law:** Bill explains the historical context of the firm's success, connecting it to the widespread enactment of workers' compensation laws across the United States. He discusses the positive impact of this legal reform on injured workers and the growth of a specialized legal field.
- **Declining Fortunes and Changing Legal Landscape:** This section examines the challenges faced by the firm in the years after World War II, including Bill Bowe Sr.'s declining health, the rise of legal competition, and the changing dynamics of the labor movement. Bill mentions the impact of these factors on the family's financial stability.
- **A Legacy of Legal Expertise and Advocacy:** Bill emphasizes the Bowe & Bowe firm's significant contributions to workers' compensation law in Illinois, highlighting their frequent appeals to the Illinois Supreme Court and their role in shaping legal precedent in this area. He recounts a notable case, the Grasse case, that exemplifies their legal expertise and advocacy for workers' rights.

G. Bowe Family History and Personalities

- **The Bowe Family Origins:** This section delves into the Bowe family history, starting with Moses Bowe, Gus and Bill's paternal grandfather. Bill outlines Moses's journey from an Irish orphan to a laborer on the Erie Canal and later the Illinois Central Railway. He describes Moses's marriage to Honora Hurley and their eventual purchase of a farm near Peotone, Illinois.
- **John Joseph Bowe and Ellen Canavan Bowe: A Pivotal Union:** Bill discusses the marriage of John Joseph Bowe and Ellen Canavan, recognizing the significant contribution Ellen made to the success of her sons. He details John Joseph's career as a telegraph worker and his struggles with illness, highlighting Ellen's resilience and resourcefulness in supporting the family.
- **Ellen Canavan Bowe: A Force to be Reckoned With:** This section provides a detailed portrait of Ellen Canavan Bowe, emphasizing her strong personality, entrepreneurial spirit, and unwavering dedication to her children's education. Bill shares anecdotes that illustrate her salesmanship and her ability to overcome financial hardship.

- **The Influence of Ellen on Her Sons' Success:** Bill explores how Ellen Canavan Bowe's values and determination shaped the character of her sons, Gus and Bill. He emphasizes the importance she placed on education and her role in instilling a strong work ethic and entrepreneurial mindset in them.
- **Family Dynamics and Relationships:** This section examines the relationships between Ellen Canavan Bowe and her daughters-in-law, Mary Gwinn Bowe and Julia Lecour Bowe. Bill suggests that Ellen, while respected, maintained a dominant position within the family. He also touches upon the dynamics between Gus and Bill as brothers and business partners, and their interactions with their sister, Anna Bowe Walters.

H. Summing Up Julia and Gus

- **A Legacy of Love, Passion, and Social Conscience:** Bill offers a heartfelt tribute to Julia and Gus, summarizing their impact on his life and highlighting their enduring qualities. He emphasizes their love for each other, their shared passion for the arts, and their commitment to social justice.
- **A Lasting Impression of Character and Integrity:** Bill concludes by praising Julia and Gus as role models, emphasizing their well-rounded education, their compassion for those less fortunate, and their dedication to making a positive difference in the world. He leaves a lasting impression of their strength of character, integrity, and enduring legacy.