

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

Regarding Augustine Joseph and Julia Lecour Bowe

January 29, 2021

Transcript

A. Getting to Know Gus and Julia Bowe

Anthony Canavan Bowe (TNB). Perhaps as a starting point just to establish your credibility on this topic, could you just quickly describe how you knew Gus and just a little bit about the time that you came to be reasonably close with him and then perhaps then we could just drop back and start talking as you suggest on a chronological basis.

William John Bowe, Jr. (WJB). That's a central place to start because as it turned out, Gus, more than my own father, was the role model that was very important for me and that I was looked up to directly in terms of in a way how to live my life, but how to go about my professional life, which was very similar to the one that my father and Gus had formed for themselves.

What is a little bit interesting to me is if you start at my introduction to Gus and his wife, Julia Lecour, my mother's roommate from Trinity College in Washington, D.C., class of 1923, thank you very much, in an era when not many women went to college. Those sisters I think, or those roommates, Julia had introduced Gus's brother, my father, to her college roommate along the way. They'd been fast friends during college. Julia had gone with my mother up to Baltimore where my mother's family was, the Gwinn family.

I had pictures of Julia there. So, when Julia came back to Illinois and pursued a relationship with her cousin, her distant cousin Gus, and then they were married, a recommendation no doubt for her college roommate, my mother, to meet my father was naturally followed on a visit.

And so what was really curious about these two families, as it turned out, was the Bowes under Ellen Canavan Bowe, Gus Bowe, and my father's mother, she was quite a figure and she was not to be denied. And she was going to be taken care of. She had taken care of the boys, they were successful. So, the families lived together. And poor Julia found herself when she was married, I think in 1926, to Gus, Heavens to Murgatroyd, she moves in 1927 into the newly built the 1120 Lake Shore Drive, apartment 4D.

And who does she find there? She finds Gus, of course, her new husband, she finds Gus's mother, and Gus's brother, my father are there. And of course, Anna also was there at that time, the sister of the boys. So, all are living in 4D. All living in 4D.

So, my mother comes out to visit. She falls in love with my father after. And where do they move? Well, that was too much even for 4D. It was a nice duplex apartment, but it had already been stretched to the limit. And yet, the brothers were close, they were in business together in the law firm. So, my parents bought an apartment in the 1120 as well, just on the other elevator tier. I suppose that was to give a patina of distance.

TNB. You once said we had lunch at The Cliff Dwellers a couple of years ago and you said that Gus was a particularly competent person, which is an interesting way of describing Someone and one that I've used since in thinking about people, but can you expand on that?

WJB. Yes, and there's another word that comes to mind. That was a word that Gus would use when referring to somebody else that we might be talking about. He would use this word as a high compliment. Competent was in my view. There was another word he would often use. He would say, "Well, so-and-so, he's very decent." Or "She's very decent. They're very decent, decent people. That was in the hierarchy, when somebody was decent. That was the word that put together moral values, it put together whatever spiritual values there were or weren't and it mostly dealt with the way that that person was in dealing with other people, in dealing with the world. Decent and competent are in my mind in thinking about Gus. He was much in command of such a broad range of subjects that it just it struck me as a good way to to sum him up as competent.

I remember when I was starting in the practice of law and I was thinking, "So, this is what I ended up doing in life." It's Gus and my father. I had a brief moment of, "How could I have gone down this path? I was tricked." I used to joke that one of the problems when you're practicing law, is that it's all right except all day long other people are bringing you their problems. You're working on their problems, not yours.

I was thinking, to get back to the competence issue, “What is it that other lawyers that are competent are selling? In my mind, it’s really nothing more than a refined common sense. In a world awash with uncertainty, there are lawyers because with natural conflicts in life it’s better to avoid resolving disputes with a blow to the head. It’s very sensible that we’ve created a system to get these kinds of disputes resolved in a civil manner.

But what else is it about those skills. What is it? Well, you need an overload of common sense. In a way, it’s not much. And there are a lot of competent people. But to me, I guess that’s Gus in a big nutshell: decent, competent, with a highly refined common sense.

TNB. We've talked a lot about Julia, but only in the context of Gus. Tell us what you can about her and perhaps the time that you spent with her after Gus died.

WJB. Julia was a remarkable woman. She was enormously bright and had a scholarly bent. You only have to look at her book, *The Generations*, which was a history of the family coming from France and French Canada down to Kankakee County, Illinois. There’s much history in the book. She goes into the Potawatomi tribe that was displaced to Council Bluffs, Iowa from along the Kankakee River where the Treaty of Tippecanoe in 1832 had settled them peacefully. I mean throughout that work you can see as a scholarly bent and skill set at work.

She was also just interested, as Gus was, in lots of different things. I can remember later in her life --- after your father and your aunt Julie Anne were out of the house and raising their own families. Julia was taking up the guitar.

TNB. I remember when she did that. Yes.

WJB. I also remember she started taking Spanish classes at Loyola as a senior. Why? Well, she wanted to be able to read the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca and have a better sense of his poetry than she could get through whatever translations there were. The one that I think amazed me most, that points to her scholarly nature, is there was a big to-do in the late 1940s when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Indeed, it’s been a remarkable story ever since. She was learning Arabic or a derivative of Arabic. The goal was she wanted to get a better feeling for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Not that she was going to spend any time in any serious translation, but she was interested in it. How do you really get into something like that? Well, a little language perhaps? Even one as foreign as whatever the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in? Or maybe she was trying to learn Arabic to read about someone else talking about the Dead Sea Scrolls. I’m not sure, but she was quite remarkable.

Then she was head of The Modern Poetry Association. That wasn't a gift or anything like that. Gus had plenty to do elsewhere. She was running that. She really was a motive force with Gus in saving the magazine. Of course it was later really saved by the grant from the Lily heiress. That put it on a finally firm foundation. Later in life, she just kept up a remarkably broad set of interests.

What has always been sort of a curiosity of fate for me is that just because of the age differences, I was never close to your parents [John Edward Bowe and Katherine Pargellis Bowe. Now they're my generation, but your dad was much younger than my dad. Your dad was born in 1928, and I think that his sister [Julie Anne Bowe-Thompson] was born in about 1932, maybe 1933.

But what has always been sort of a curiosity of fate for me is that I was never close to your parents just because of the age difference. Now they're my generation, but my brother Dick [Richard Gwinn Bowe] was born in 1938, and I was born in 1942. I was a decade older than Julie Anne, and you know, your father was way ahead of me, being born in 1928, by 14 years. I think that your father's sister Julie Anne was born in 1931. So, I missed observing Gus and Julia raising the children, because they were pretty much through with that by the time. I was born in 1942, and your father was leaving high school, I think, in the Latin school class of [1946]. So, I don't have that kind of a view of him then.

TNB. I know you've talked about this a bit before, but how did you come to get to know Gus and Julia? I've kind of imagined that this took place over an extended period of time, but in reality, actually, you would have graduated from college in May or June of 64. And both your dad and Gus were deceased by February of 66. So it's actually in a somewhat compressed period of time that this relationship developed.

WJB. I had a wonderful European adventure with Gus and Julia. In the mid-1950s, I was in Paris visiting my aunt Nancy Gwinn Riboud and her family. And Gus and Julia were there in Paris, too. It was a pure vacation stop for them. They were planning to explore their old haunts from their days as young marrieds getting away from it all to Paris in the summers. They knew Paris well and they asked if I'd like to join them and motor around. So, as it turned out, I was drafted further into chauffeuring them around in their little rent-a-car.

The first stop was quite the number one on their nostalgia trip. When they visited Paris, they always stayed at the St. James Albany Hotel. It's right on the Rue de Rivoli, a major

drag there. It's between the Place de la Concorde and the Louvre, with the Place de la Concorde not far away. Well, for all their visits they had a favorite room. It wasn't out with the noise and action on the Rue de Rivoli. It was an interior courtyard room and they got the hotel management to let them see it again. There were French doors as I remember opening onto a little courtyard. It was just marvelous. I could see why they could enjoy that so much.

They knew a fellow from Chicago. I think he'd been a diplomat of some sort or maybe a diplomatic consul in Chicago named Tony Pavelich. I think he'd also been married to a woman named Mary Ann Smith. He was living in Paris, had invited Gus and Julia to dinner, and I was invited to join them. He was quite gracious and added me as a guest. What a meal! It was really unforgettable. At my age, I'd never had anything like that. It was a complete multi-course dinner, with exotic fare, and great conversation. It was then followed by a box of cigars being put in front of you so you could choose one of many fine selections. Espresso and a liqueur also followed after dinner. So this was a really first-rate event, but it was followed by one awful moment of embarrassment for me.

I was driving a small little car, Julia and Gus in the back seat. I'm drive into one of the major intersections, the Place de la Concorde, and I make a wrong turn. Right in front of a gendarme, I make a driving error. SI don't remember if I was properly licensed. I certainly had my state license.

The gendarme comes over to me speaking French. Although I did study at some, it was never my long suit. All I was thinking was, oh my God, I've got my aunt and uncle in back and I'm getting a ticket. Are they going to take me in for this kind of thing? It wasn't that bad, but I was pretty nervous. I thought I would play the sympathy card in French so that the gendarme would know I was a tourist and maybe give me a break. I rolled down the window and I said to the gendarme, "Je suis tres triste." You know, I'm sorry. Well, at first that didn't seem to work. Then the gendarme puts on this big shit-eating grin, and I hear Julia beginning to stifle a chuckle in the backseat. Then the gendarme waves me off. So off I drive and say to Julia, "What was that all about?" And she says, "Well, I don't think you realize this, but what you said to the gendarme wasn't 'I'm sorry.' It was, 'I am so sad,' meaning distraught.

Of course, Julia was quite well-versed in French. She grew up in a French family, the Lecour family in Kankakee, Illinois. They didn't speak French at home. Although her father was French, he had married Mabel Canavan. So she wasn't speaking French in her upbringing, it was English. The home of Julia and her sister Dodi was an English-speaking home. Julia actually got her French proficiency by going to an aunt's house for

French lessons in Kankakee or nearby. She was pretty well integrated in terms of the languages. She talks a little bit in her book, "The Families," about some discrimination against those with a French accent in Kankakee County. Many of those who had settled there that came directly from France or maybe from French Canada. So, they were not native English speakers. Julia writes, she never saw a bit of that kind of discrimination because she grew up in a French accent-free home.

I have one other thought on Julia and languages. Ellen Canavan, Gus and Bill Bowe's mother, and Julia and Mary Bowe's mother-in-law, was the one who encouraged Julia to really pursue her family's French background. This had a lot to do with Julia writing her great scholarly work on the Lecour and Pallisard families in France and America that she wrote with one of her Pallisard relatives. It was Ellen Canavan, an Irish descendant, who encouraged Julia to pursue recording her French heritage. I was very surprised that Julia said she would never have really written *The Generations* genealogy work had it not been from her mother-in-law's encouragement.

WJB. There was another fascinating trip with Julia and Gus, about the same time, probably in 1965. I was talking with them about the family's history, and they saw I was interested in it. They were at that age, of course, sort of thinking back over the years too. The idea we came up with was, they'd pile in the back of my Volkswagen. I had bought it secondhand to commute down to the University of Chicago Law School. They'd pile in the back and for a day, starting on a Saturday morning until we dropped, I would drive them around in sequence to all of the residences that Gus's family had been in since Gus's birth.

The very first stop was 1239 North Ashland. I have a great picture of Gus and Julia standing before that building back in 1965. A long time before that, it was an Irish immigrant neighborhood. But at the time that we were looking at it, as you can see from the signage on the building, this three-story house Gus was born in had a retail store on the first floor engaged in sending gift parcels back home to Poland. The second floor has business signage for insurance agent and a notary public. Up and down Ashland in that part are Spanish language signs. So, the neighborhood had changed quite a bit. To me it was sort of a microcosm of Chicago. I mean, that's what happens. The neighborhoods all change as one ethnic group comes in and another one moves along and scatters or whatever.

The next stop was a house at 2441 West Superior Street. That was where Anna Bowe Walters was born. I think both boys were born on Ashland, but Anna was born at 2441 West Superior Street. I have another picture of Gus and Julia there.

Then it was on to 2852 West Fulton Street. This is an area due west of the Loop. The first Ashland apartment was just north of Division Street, but now they're due west of the Loop.

After that came 2946 West Walnut Street. This was notable as we were driving by because Frank Lloyd Wright had designed the very famous Francisco Terrace apartments nearby. It was destroyed not long after our trip.

So, we took a look at those apartments. Then, they had moved after the turn of the century, around 1900, to an apartment at near Fulton and Albany Streets.

After that they moved to 3220 West Fulton Street. They must have loved Fulton Street. They probably kept the same the parish. It might have been St. Matthew's church back in that era that they went to. That residence was the first non-apartment they lived in. It was a house that they bought. They were only able to afford it because their Gus, Bill, and Anna's mother, Ellen Canavan Bowe, had inherited \$1,000 from the estate of her mother, Ann Hughes Canavan. She was the widow of Anthony Canavan and owned farmland down in Kankakee County. That inheritance was a big help at a time when the family was having its financial struggles.

B. Entertaining by Gus and Julia at Apartment 4D

TNB. Can you tell me more about your getting to know Julia and how she and Gus entertained at their apartment?

WJB. The two widows, Julia and my mother decided to live together in my mother's apartment 4B at 1120 Lake Shore Drive. Then in 1967, a year and a half after Gus died, I got out of law school and went into the Army for three years. During my Army years, I would come back on leave to Chicago often. I would stay, of course, with Julia and my mother at 1120. I got to know Julia much better in this period, and she went out of her way for me. She got along just fine with her nephew and particularly once we'd gotten to know each other as adults. And I remember over time I acquired an increased appreciation of her scholarly bent. She just as brilliant in her way as Gus was in his.

What I didn't realize before this time was that she also had command of the then more common female skills like sewing. Without being asked, she and my mother had taken one look at the sorry bachelor apartment that I was moving into and decided, "The

poor boy needs help.” Unasked, Julia sewed a beautiful Marimekko fabric bedspread filled with bold colors.

TNB. Describe an evening with Julia and Gus at their apartment 4D.

WJB. I can certainly describe that. I enjoyed enough of them. It would usually be a dinner preceded by conversation. Hors d'oeuvres and a drink would be served in the living room. Gus would be at his familiar chair in the corner where he had this narrow, angled view of Lake Michigan from Elm Street. You could see some of Oak Street beach from this angle and it was good light for his reading.

Typically, Julia would cook and serve a simple meat or fish meal. And then after dinner, it would be back to the living room for a liqueur and an espresso. Gus had a regular standing joke that he'd play on first time guests. He would offer them a liqueur after dinner in the living room, and he would tell the guests that it was a wonderful Ecuadorian brandy that he was very fond of. Well, who's going to turn that down if you're going to have anything? Usually, the clear liquid you'd get in a little liqueur glass would go down well, with the guests complementing Gus on his fine Ecuadorian brandy. At which point, Gus would explain to them that well, he'd kind of exaggerated and what he'd given them was a straight shot of gin. They all did quite well with that anyway.

You can see looking back that Gus was brilliant. It's something I never fully appreciated in my relationship with him. I mean, you can see it through his career and the fact that he'd risen to a very significant public position, elected position. He was Chief Justice of the Municipal Court of the City of Chicago. But in his personal dealings, at my age at the time, I wasn't able to assess that. I'm in a better position to do that now.

He was just a brilliant student growing up. My father was not in any way, the student that Gus was.

And Julia herself was an extremely capable, intelligent, well-educated person. Both had terrific educations. A story that my mother told was that when Gus was an altar boy at St. Matthew's Church, the pastor thought he'd make a good priest and thought he should head off to St. Ignatius. The boys, Gus and Bill, were living on Fulton Street at the time and they had to walk to St. Ignatius at 12th Street and Blue Island. They had to take this walk during both the good weather as well as in the winter. Along their way, there was a library. In the winter, the boys used to stop on their way to or from school at the library to get warm. And what do you do if you're getting warm in the library? It's a nice place, really, so you read. So, that's how Gus could tell people that he'd read all of Ibsen by the time he was 12. And I think that it was true,

TNB. Wow, yes.

WJB. There's a wonderful picture of Gus and Julia in a family portrait: Gus, Julia, your dad John, and Julie Anne. The picture of the four of them is on www.wbowe.com, with Gus is in his favorite chair, the one by the window on Elm Street that gives him kind of an angled view of Lake Michigan. He must have sat in that chair for ages.

TNB. Even I remember him sitting in that chair.

WJB. So for four decades, basically, he was in that chair. Behind him, I'm not sure it's in the late 1940s picture, but when I was there, behind him in a bookcase was a set of Dickens. Dickens was so prolific that the set of his volumes was a yard or more. Gus was always ready to give you advice. He'd say, "Well, you have to, if you're going to know anything in life." He would talk like that. "If you're going to learn anything in life, you've got to read Dickens." And then with that, he'd wave his hand at a shelf of books, an entire shelf.

TNB. Do you think he'd actually read all of those?

WJB. You know, I think he did. I think he did. Now, he was also not beyond pretending knowledge he didn't have. I was at a dinner with him once. I think it was a Loyola University function. There was a priest at a round table of eight at a fundraising dinner for the school. For some reason or other, the Gobi Desert comes up, the Gobi Desert in Outer Mongolia. I don't know how that entered the conversation, but Gus, in his passing, offhand manner, says, "Oh yes, that's in North Africa." Well, the priest had the strength of character to correct Gus. "No, Judge Bowe, it really is over in Mongolia, in East Asia." "Oh, no," says Gus insistently. "The Gobi Desert is in Africa."

Look at Gus's success in the law practice, first with my father Bill Bowe, Senior, then with their cousin John Casey, and finally when your father John Bowe arrives. Gus's intelligence was really at work from the beginning in making the firm successful.

At the time they started higher education, you didn't go four years to college, then three years to law school. That was my life. Back then, after getting through high school, college and law school were compressed. Gus was born in 1892, and got his law degree and his license in 1913.

TNB. So, he would have been 21 at the time?

WJB. Yes. When I got out of college, I was 22, and 25 when I got out of law school. My father was two years behind Gus, so he got out of law school in 1915. That was a

rapid-fire thing to do. And what also makes it clear that Gus was quite unusual and brilliant beyond being just smart, is that by [1917], he is selling Liberty Bonds in the war effort, according to my mother's account. Then along the way, he's teaching torts at the law school that he just graduated from. And Gus was not only was teaching torts right out of law school. In the medical school, he was teaching medical jurisprudence.

TNB. Wow. I have on a bookshelf in our house in the Poconos one of these sets of Dickens. And you know what, I've always assumed that it came from my mother's side of the family.

WJB. Oh, I bet not.

TNB. Well, you know what, I'll take a photo. The covers are slightly green with gold leaf.

WJB. That sounds right. That sounds right. Well, I think it was in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was not common, but often upper middle-class families had a set of dickens.

TNB. Yes.

WJB. I mean, he didn't invent the novel for nothing.

TNB. Well, I was looking for something to read during all of this pandemic stuff and I tried.

WJB. *Tale of Two Cities?*

TNB. No. Nancy is a real Victorian literature hound and so she reads a lot and she kind of got me hooked on it. I read *Tale of Two Cities* in high school and then reread it again about 10 or 15 years ago. And I've read several other Dickens, but I tried about 10 or maybe 15 years ago to read *Bleak House*. I don't know if you're familiar with *Bleak House*. It's a big one. It's 1,100 pages. And I failed when I tried. I got about 150 pages into it and abandoned it. But I took the project up again in I don't know when it was August or September.

WJB. *Bleak House* again?

TNB. Yes, I got punishment. I got through it this time. I finished it in December. It took a long time. But it's a great story, all his are. I'm delighted to

think that that set that I have come from 1120. That could very easily have happened, right?

Who were some of the people that came to dinner at 4D when you were there?

WJB. Your folks happened to be at the most amazing dinner I had with Gus and Julia. They had invited your parents, and I was kind of a nice afterthought. At the time, Adlai Stevenson III was running for statewide office in Illinois, as his father had. His father had been governor of Illinois, of course, and had lost twice to Dwight Eisenhower in his runs for the presidency. So young Adlai and his wife Nancy were invited to dinner to meet the U.S. Senator from Illinois, Paul Douglas, and his wife, Emily.

TNB. And they hadn't met before?

WJB. No. That was really the purpose of the dinner.

TNB. That's pretty interesting.

WJB. The purpose was to introduce them and let them get to know each other. So that's what Gus and Julia did. They should know each other, so let's get it done. And so, Senator Douglas, was there.

TNB. Was he ultimately the Sente Majority Leader?

WJB. I don't remember what position in the Senate Douglas had. I think he'd run for the presidency, for the Democratic nomination unsuccessfully in 1952, or maybe earlier.

TNB. Maybe he never met the young Stevenson because he ran against his father.

WJB. I had a nice moment with Senator Douglas. I had just finished a biography of Chicago mayor, Anton Cermak. He was killed when an assassin missed Roosevelt and killed the mayor of Chicago instead. I had thought there might be some conversation about the old Chicago politics during dinner, but there was none.

TNB. Oh, really?

WJB. It was all current politics. After dinner, I was going down the elevator to the lobby with Senator Douglas and his wife. He saw I had this book about Cermak and asked about it. "Well, here," I said. "I've read it and if you have the time, you'll find it

fascinating.” Then of course, I beat it upstairs on the other elevator tier to excitedly report to my mother on the dinner’s happenings.

TNB. It's interesting to note that over your left shoulder I see a photograph of your bookshelf. It's a photo of Gus, Adlai Stevenson and Paul Douglas, if I'm not mistaken.

WJB. Yes, indeed. I think Gus at the time led the Illinois Citizens Committee or one of them. Gus, for most of his life, was never an office holder. He never ran for office until he was 68 and was slated by Mayor Richard J. Daley as Chief Justice of the Municipal Court. Today that would be the head of the Municipal Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County. Until then, his life was full of civic engagements, as was Julia’s. Somehow, he seemed to know everybody and everybody that knew him certainly respected him.

TNB. Do you remember others entertained by Gus and Julia?

WJB. There were many others, and a lot of them related to Poetry Magazine. The magazine held periodic poetry readings as fundraisers. It was a critical part of their ability to get funds to keep Poetry alive through the 1940s and 50s. Harriet Monroe had founded the journal in 1912. After her death in 1936, it nearly died. It nearly went away. The only reason it was saved was because Gus and Julia formed an organization called the Mountain Poetry Association. They called all the folks they knew that might be able to help put up enough money to save this cultural icon of Chicago. They rounded up enough people and, right there in their living room in 4D, the Modern Poetry Association was founded. Patrick Lannon, their old friend from summers in Palos Park, was a big help financially in saving Poetry Magazine over the decades ahead.

One of the poets that came to town for a reading and stayed with Gus and Julia for a week was an Irish poet. Apart from the reading he was doing as the fundraiser went forward, he had brought along a documentary film about the Irish poet Bill Butler Yeats. And he was interested in selling that in Chicago to Encyclopaedia Britannica. Britannica then had a big documentary film operation I later headed up. The film unit offices were up in Wilmette, as I remember, and I drove him up to Wilmette with the documentary and we watched it in the screening room. The Britannica executives decided there was no market for it, so they couldn't buy and distribute it. However, the way they told this eager person looking for support was so delightful. While it was a “No,” you really had to listen carefully to hear that through the layers of politesse that were laid on.

This memory was odd for me personally, because in 1986, I became General Counsel of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Newton Minow, like Gus, was one of my legal heroes and role models. Also, Nubiw had preceded me as General Counsel of Britannica a few years before I arrived. That was before he was chairman of the Federal Communications Commission under President John Kennedy and made his famous television is a “Vast Wasteland” speech.

At Britannica, in addition to being General Counsel, for a period of years I was president of its film distribution company, Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation. It had continued distributing films. I always remembered back to the time I was in its old North Shore office. In my Britannica tenure I worked first at 310 South Michigan Avenue. It's now all condominiums. The building had been built in 1924. I think it might have been a bank to begin with. It was called the Straus Building. But Continental Insurance had owned it for a while before Britannica occupied the building's lower half in 1982. In my later dealings with the executives in the film company, though decades had passed since my first exposure to them in Wilmette, what had stayed the same was the skill of these executives in making “No” sound like “Yes.” This talent was just part of the enterprise's DNA at that point.

There were lots of other regulars at dinner at 4D. Henry Rago, the editor of Poetry Magazine was certainly one of those. They also had a good friend, a Catholic priest, Father Don Temple. He was omnipresent with all the Bowes. The poet and translator John Nims was often around. He was the person that wrote the Preface to Gus's book of poetry, *No Gods Are False*, that was published posthumously. Also, Patrick Lannon was around from time to time, although he moved down to Palm Beach, Florida at some point. I recall very well meeting the poet, James Dickey at 4D. You may remember him as the fellow who wrote the novel that the movie *Deliverance* with Burt Reynolds was based on. He was in Chicago for poetry reading and was a very interesting fellow.

C. A Passion for the Arts

TNB. I'm curious, and perhaps I have a misconception here, but I wonder how two guys, Bill and Gus, who grew up in a, shall we say, middle class environment, end up being so culturally invested. They had an interest in opera, poetry and painting, and frequently traveled to Europe. Was it something they inherited from their mother? It just strikes me as a little unusual.

WJB. Yes, I think you're right about that. They didn't inherit it from their mother. They were prosperous later in their married lives, but the family fortunes were not as healthy towards the end of their. They had come from very modest circumstances. The family

had been poor. It had struggled after their father, the breadwinner, died in 1910. The boys were still young and younger still was their sister.

So, they were coming from very modest circumstances. You're right, no opera and the like. I think a big part of it had to do with Gus's general interest in interesting things. He was a Renaissance man. It's no accident he ended up a successful politician, a noted poet, the president of the Bar Association in Chicago, and a well-respected lawyer prominent in the profession. His interests were very broad.

Gus and Bill enjoyed the arts as a part of life that they didn't have any exposure to as kids. And it was like a great feast opening for them as they aged. I would say one last thing about their drift into the arts from an unlikely starting place. They both married bright, intelligent women.

TNB. And who were also culturally invested.

WJB. Who were also interested in a variety of things. They had a broad education themselves. Gus and Bill had benefited from a Jesuit education and both my mother and Juli had a Catholic education and catholic in the best broadest sense of the word, a universal education. So, they were ready for whatever cultural feasts were there to be had.

In the painting arts, Julia's sister and Gus's sister-in-law, Josephine Lecour Freborg, was married to the artist Stanley Freborg. He'd been trained at the Art Institute of Chicago and spent World War II in the Mediterranean theater as a Army Air Force reconnaissance officer. I remember him telling me about bombing raids on the Nazi oil fields in Ploiesti, [Romania].

After WWII for a time, he was a real estate broker in Arizona before resuming a career as an artist when Stan moved with his wife, known as Dodi, to Provincetown on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. There's an art colony there and I remember visiting them there at Six Cook Street. Stan studied under Hans Hoffman, a master of Abstract Expressionism, as that mode of painting became known in the 1950s. Dodi picked up a paintbrush as well with great skill and great color.

So that family connection gave Julia and Gus entrees into not just the opera that they knew and loved, but the changing world of post-war painting. You may remember too, that there was a wonderful abstract piece that hung over the mantle in their 4D living room. Named *La Tour de France*, it was painted by Joan Mitchell, often referred to as part of the second generation of great abstract expressionists. I don't think she liked to

be referred to that way, however she was one of the few women able to carve out an amazing career as an artist in that era.

Then also they had a good relationship with their Elm Street neighbor, Claes Oldenburg and his family. Claes Oldenburg was a 1945 Latin School graduate that your father knew. Your father was in the Class of 1946. Oldenburg became a world-renowned sculptor. His public art has graced Philadelphia near the Liberty Bell, and his alma mater Yale had a wonderful giant lipstick on tank treads in front of the Beineke Library for a time. Here in Chicago, you probably know his Bat Column in front of the Social Security office building just west of the Loop downtown.

I think his father had been the Swedish counsel in Chicago. Oldenburg paid a very nice visit to 1120 when I was briefly living at 4B after the Army. He was in Chicago and wanted to pay a courtesy call on Julia and my mother. The three of us had a really nice conversation with him and I always thought it was pretty decent of him to not forget old neighbors, widows at that time.

TNB. Because Oldenburg had know my parents, after my mother died I wrote Claes Oldenburg to tell him that now both my mother and father had passed away. I guess Oldenburg must have come back to Chicago after he graduated from college in the 1950s and they socialized together then. We have some sketches that he did and gave to my parents then. In any event, I sent a note to Claes, and he wrote back. I'll send you a copy of it so that you can put it, or I'll put it up on the www.wbowe.com website.

He was living in Manhattan at the time. And then somehow I became aware of the fact that his daughter lived here by me in Brooklyn Heights. About 18 months ago, I figured out that she was a member of the same racquet club that I belong to here in Brooklyn. I got in touch with her and found out he also now lives here in Brooklyn Heights right around the corner from us.

WJB. Is he still alive?

TNB. I think he moved here three or four years ago and is now living with his daughter here in Brooklyn.

WJB. Really?

TNB. She's probably about my age. And he would be 92 now. I hadn't heard that Claes Oldenburg had passed away. And I'm sure we would have heard. So, he presumably is still around. [Claes Oldenburg died at the age of 93 on July 18,

2022]. I wrote her a letter saying my father and your father knew each other at the Latin school in Chicago. I said that I'd never met Claes but lived just around the corner. I asked if I could stop by some time and just introduce myself. She wrote back and said, "Oh, that would be wonderful." I can't remember exactly, but she had some reason she couldn't do it then. Maybe it was the weather, I don't know. Long story short is that then COVID happened.

WJB. Really?

TNB. This is a kind of up in the air still. You can't invite yourself over to a 92-year-old person's house in the middle of all of this. In any event, I'm delighted he lives right here.

WJB. I'm delighted to hear that. I remember I met him at 4B when Julia was living with my mother. How did I meet him? What prompted him? He was in Chicago and thought enough about his relationship with Julia that he wanted to just stop by and just pay his respects to her. Because the Oldenburg and Bowe families had been neighbors, he had that kind of a feeling about the long relationship. I thought that was a very decent thing and I had a very nice chat with him as he paid his respects to Julia. That was a nice moment. It would be terrific if you could arrange COVID to be over soon enough before either one of you dies.

TNB. Right. That's great. He probably qualifies for a vaccination unlike me.

WJB. All the Bowes loved the opera. They had traveled in the 1930s frequently to Europe in the summers when the courts were closed. Typically, Julie and Gus would go in June and July. And the next two months, my father and mother would go over. So, they loved opera.

Curiously, when the Lyric Opera got started in Chicago in the 1950s there was a dispute over who was going to manage the Lyric. Gus was president of the Chicago Bar Association in 1955 and 1956. In this role, he was very prominent and was often an arbitrator for significant disputes. He had a reputation for independence and integrity. Not only could he be counted on to rule in an independent and fair manner, but he had the reputation for making the right call. Also, he was known for being plain spoken. When he ruled, people understood exactly why he came out where he did. That, in the political world, is something that people often appreciate. In the case of the Lyric Opera, he came squarely down on the side of Carol Fox, and Fox continued on with a very successful career as the Managing Director of the Lyric Opera for many years after that. That was Gus's early engagement with the Lyric Opera.

D. Civic Engagement - Giving Back and Working to Improve Race Relations

TNB. Do you get the sense that they were religious?

WJB. Yes, but in a way that the later generations really have no understanding of them because there were always vocations in the Irish families. It wasn't just boys headed into the priesthood. The girls were not infrequently off into convents. That was very true in my mother's family when she was growing up in Baltimore. There were female relatives in convents that she knew and visited.

Throughout Gus and Julia's life and that of my own parents, they were church-going Catholics. Not infrequently, they would entertain and have a priest for dinner. Perhaps it would be a Maryknoll, one back from a mission somewhere. They'd be interested in talking about the cultures where they'd been. Maybe it would be a priest back from China or somewhere in South America. Yes, I would say that they were believers.

My father wasn't much of a churchgoer in my later time with him as his health declined. I'm not sure about Gus and Julia's habits. Speaking of Bill and Gus, both were very active in church affairs, whatever their church-going activities might have been. Gus was particularly active. At Loyola Gus was chairman of the Citizens' Board for perhaps a decade and a half.

TNB. Of the university?

WJB. Yes, Loyola University Chicago. They were quite engaged there.

Thinking about their religious views, I remember after dinner talking to Gus one evening, I was asking him about the Jesuit education at Saint Ignatius and how that worked out. He said with a smile on his face something like, "Ah, yes, the Jesuits, they're pretty smart. They figured out I was a very good candidate to become a priest. They took a run at it, but I escaped."

As to their detailed religious beliefs and actions, given our age separation, I never went to church with them, so I'm not really familiar with that. Of course, both Gus and Julia were Catholics, as my parents were. I'm sure that Julia and my mother were probably similar in their regular churchgoing activities.

If you also go back, both Bowe families, Gus and Julia, Bill and Mary, were all very much engaged from the 1930s on in efforts to better race relations and improve, in that day's terminology, the lot of the Negro or colored people. It was something that I think

that came partly if not entirely out of the moral education embedded in their Catholic educations.

TNB. Why is that, though?

WJB. I think the origins were also partly their being Irish growing up when they did. Those were not the Know-Nothing riot days of the mid-19th century, but they must have seen that breaking into this world in America was not an easy path. They must have had some sense of discrimination, because it had been there early on in their lives. The law firms of the day tended to be set up certainly along ethnic lines. There came to be Jewish law firms and Catholic law firms, but those that came before that were primarily white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant or WASP in their makeup. So, they'd seen that.

I think their Catholic education and sensitivity to the plight of the underdog was something that they grew up with and were keenly aware of. It was in their bones. What separated them from many was that they really acted on their principles. Both Gus and Bill were very active the National Conference of Christians and Jews National Organization starting in the 1930s. Your mother once asked me the question. Why do you think they were so engaged early on with the NCCJ in improving race relations? Why were the Catholics and the Jews of the National Conference of Catholic and Jews so focused on Black people? Well, both the Jews and the Catholics had in their day borne the brunt of society's discrimination.

Of course, we had then and have today a highly segregated housing pattern. Housing was completely segregated in that period and perpetuated by restrictive race covenants in real estate deeds. Those were knocked down as unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in the late 1940s. However, the discrimination in the job market was vastly more extreme in that era. Remember, too, in their law practice, they were very close to working people and what they were facing in the struggles of the day. They weren't just taking Black or white clients, one or the other.

Race relations had been fraught with trouble in Chicago and other cities right after the First World War. There were terrible riots in 1919. And during World War II, there was a terrible riot in Detroit in 1943. Chicago's Mayor Edward Kelly was worried that if you can have a problem like that in Detroit, other Midwestern cities can have race-based civil disorder potentially as well. He was somewhat forward thinking, and he set up a City of Chicago organization focused on improving race relations to show that the city was concerned about this. When asked by Mayor Kelly to head this up, Gus said yes. Gus was already well known for his prior work in this area.

When Mayor Kelly was succeeded by Mayor Martin Kennelly in 1947, Kennelly also wanted stability in this area and Gus carried on as he had before under Kelly. Gus told me that he had backed Kennelly for re-election in 1955, but Kennelly ended up losing to Richard J. Daley in the Democratic primary for mayor. Typically, winning the Democratic primary was always tantamount to election. Gus told me that he went to see Daley to offer his resignation given that he had endorsed Kennelly. Gus told me that Daley wasn't having it and said that was no reason to resign as head of what became the Commission on Human Relations of the City of Chicago.

Gus said that under Daley, for the first time the Commission boasted a paid staff, an executive director, and a broader board. Gus remained Chair throughout the 1950s until he was elected Chief Justice of the Municipal Court of the City of Chicago in 1960. During his entire working life he remained very prominent in working on these race relations issues. He also served as one of the founders of the Catholic Interracial Council. Since the church wasn't all that speedy in getting aboard the civil rights train in the 1950s, John McDermott led the Catholic Interracial Council in doing its part to get the Church's focus moved along in this area. These engagements help give you a sense of Gus and the Bowe families civic engagement in the race relations issues of the day.

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

TNB. While we're on the topic, can you expand on how Gus came to be slated for the candidacy of the Chief Justice?

WJB. It was the Municipal Court of Chicago, before the court was reorganized into a county-wide system later in the early 1960s. There had been a terrible scandal in the court in the late 1950s. It was called the Bail Bond Scandal. What happened was that judges had been taking bribes to sign a blank pad of bail bond forms. They'd sign the forms in blank at the bottom, say a pad of 50. In return for a cash bribe they'd give this blank set of bail bond forms to crooked lawyers. Filled in by the lawyers, the forms were really a get out of jail free card. That's what it really amounted to for their criminal clients. The public outcry was very substantial. Mayor Daley had normally slated this judicial position for someone from the Polish community. Raymond Drymalski was the Polish lawyer currently Chief Justice of the Municipal Court. He had to take the fall, and Daley felt he had to fill the position with someone new. And here was Gus, a lifelong prominent Democrat. I think he'd headed up one of the citizens' campaigns for the a statewide office. Maybe it was Senator Paul Douglas. So, he was well known. He was known from being quoted in the newspapers as being plain speaking. Known as a lawyer of integrity, other lawyers had elected him president of the Chicago Bar Association. Also, he didn't have any taint from association with Daley's political

machine or other possible political negatives associated with him. He was a logical choice for Daley, who was under substantial public pressure to clean up the courts.

I remember asking Gus when I was over at 4D for dinner one night about the politics at the time and why Daley had slated him exactly. He told me a funny story. He said that after he had been slated, he went in to see Daley to thank him. Just being slated meant being elected later. Gus said Daley said to him, "Now tell me Gus, what part of Germany are your folks from? Gus said he told Daley, "Germany? I'm as Irish as you are." At which point Gus said Daley began laughing and said, "Well Gus, shut up about it. The last thing I need right now is another Irish Catholic on the ticket." Daley's made an understandable mistake because many pious Germans named their children after St. Augustine, a founder of the Christian Church. And Daley had just got Augustine Bowe's ethnic background wrong in constructing his always ethnically balanced political ticket.

I mentioned Gus's prominence. He would sometimes get himself in trouble with what he said. He would be quoted in the papers and sometimes it would be controversial. When Gus Bowe died, the great Chicago columnist Mike Royko wrote a column celebrating this unusual lack of a political filter. Several years after Royko himself had died, his widow Judy Arndt Royko, who, as fate would have it, was my first wife, was going through Royko's papers and came across this column. She remembered Gus and Julia and was kind enough to send it to me. I've put it up on my website because it's such a nice way to remember Gus. The column captured Gus's personality in a way that only Royko could.

In terms of other political engagements Gus got involved with, the Mayor Richard Daley had a terrible problem with the historic preservationists during Gus's tenure first as Chief Justice of the Municipal Court and later a Presiding Judge of the Municipal Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County. The Garrick Theater across from the Daley Center downtown was scheduled to be torn down. The newly organizing preservationist movement regarded it properly as a Dankmar Adler, Louis Sullivan classic part of Chicago's architectural history that should be saved for posterity. To insulate himself from the growing political controversy, Mayor Daley appointed Gus the chairman of the newly created Commission on Chicago Landmarks and charged it with seeing how the building might be saved.

Gus was thrown into this battle as a well-known distinguished arbiter who would try and do what was right in hopes that it would be taken out of the political battle that Daley didn't want to be dragged into. The problem of preserving Chicago's architectural landmarks became saving not just the Garrick Theater, but also Louis Sullivan's great Chicago Stock Exchange Building. The task at the outset was too challenging. The laws weren't there to do it, and there was no money or financial incentives available to help

meet the cost saving landmarks. The system just wasn't geared up for any kind of success at that point. Both buildings were lost, though in the case of the Garrick some of the sculptural facade went off to the Second City Theater's façade on Wells Street. Gus had also saved an interior decorative plaster motif that Sullivan had designed for the Garrick Theater. I got it from Julia and gave it to the Newberry Library where it now resides.

TNB. Thinking of the court system in Chicago, it's a notoriously rough and tumble place, perhaps in the 1950s before Gus was put in place to clean it up a little bit. But then certainly a couple of decades later it went through another whole spasm of horrible corruption when my father was a judge there. I just wonder, was it possible to be a perfectly spit and polish clean guy and run the court system in Chicago? Or did you have to put up with a certain amount of bad behavior? And can you give us any insight into that?

WJB. I think I can. When your father was a sitting judge there was a different kind of court scandal and it was called the Greylord Scandal. It infected the criminal justice part of the courts and it was very widespread. Chicago has had an endemic problem with political corruption over the decades, as has the State of Illinois. In that regard, it was sadly business as usual.

I remember Gus telling me that when he was the presiding judge there was another court official that the outside auditors brought to his attention. Funds under the official's charge had been moved around inappropriately. Apparently, the fund movement wasn't clearly criminal on its face, but the suspicion was that somebody might have been thinking about putting their hand in the cookie jar. So, the evidence of any criminality was apparently not a slam-dunk. I remember asking Gus what he did. Did you get the FBI involved? He said he had a practical way of dealing with court funds not being in the right account. He said he went down to official office, sat down with the man, and said, "Put the money back." That was his way of cutting through any question of whether there was a real impropriety afoot or not. Something was amiss. It may or may not have been somebody trying to get cookies out of the cookie jar. Without clear evidence of impropriety, Gus just cut through it.

So, I think he was not blind to the fact that in politics in Chicago, and we're not alone in this, lots of people find it a very remunerative business. Just look at the Illinois Speaker of the House of Representatives that just resigned here, Michael Madigan. He made a fortune on the side reducing real estate taxes for people that own buildings in the Loops. There's always been a buck to be made in politics for lots of people.

TNB. Gus passed away in 1966.

WJB. Yes, February 6, 1966. I think one of the reasons that he made the front page here of the Chicago Tribune was he had gone missing. He went out that night for his usual evening walk. It was the wintertime and he had a heart attack and keeled over in a snowbank at 1420 Lake Shore Drive, a few blocks north of where he lived. He'd had heart trouble and finally dropped dead of a heart attack. But as was his practice, he hadn't taken a wallet out for his evening stroll, his constitutional. Thus, there was no means of identification on the body. Julia called the police and my mother at some point. That's when I was involved to help figure out what was going on. Gus has gone missing! As it turned out, Gus was in the morgue as an unidentified corpse initially. When the dust settled on the whereabouts of the missing, prominent judge, there was more than the usual bit of interest. Hence, you saw the front page of the Chicago Tribune headline, "Judge Bowe, Dies at 73."

TNB. I remember that evening we were at home at 2431 North Orchard Street, and my dad got that call from his mother that Gus had gone missing. And we went over to 1120. And I don't know if you remember there was a little room inside the front door where the telephone was. The telephone room.

WJB. That's where I was later talking to the Tribune reporter from.

TNB. Well, Julia got a call from... I guess it was the morgue. Perhaps you were standing right there as well. They said that they'd found a corpse, and that the corpse was wearing a particular hat which they described to Julia over the phone. She looked on the shelf and the hat wasn't there. He'd put it on before he went out and then she knew.

He'd been ill. Was he ill before he had his heart attack? My understanding was that he had perhaps cancer of some sort?

WJB. There were two things that were going to kill him before long. One was that he had been earlier diagnosed with a heart aneurysm. Heart aneurysms, an arterial balloon, weren't a good thing to have.

TNB. Right and particularly not good in 1966 either.

WJB. And that was kind of the problem because that can be dealt with today. Even then there was a Dr. Mickael DeBakey down in Texas that was doing pioneering work. But it just wasn't refined enough to help Gus in Chicago then. An operation that 10 years later would have eliminated the issue would have probably killed him then. So that wasn't on a medical option for Gus. I remember talking to Gus and Julia about this option. But then again, that wasn't the only think that was about to end his life.

He was also diagnosed then with lung cancer. Both he and my father had been camel smokers all their lives. That probably contributed to the lung cancer. I don't know that he had started any treatment for either condition. But I think he and Julia were certainly looking at that point at that one of the two conditions doing him in shortly. That being said, it didn't stop Gus from enjoying his usual evening walk. In that sense, he was fully prepared to go to whatever life has left to give you or is about to take away from you. Either way, Gus was getting on with it.

TNB. I remember there's a funeral home on the near north side just [east] of Michigan Avenue.

WJB. Oh, the Carroll funeral home in the old Ransom Cable House. That's a beautiful building. I think the building isn't now a funeral home, but now is the Driehaus financial headquarters.

TNB. I remember going. There was a wake for Gus, and I remember quite a few people came to the wake amongst them was Mayor Daley and his entourage. He was very gracious with Julia and it was noteworthy. Then the next day they had a massive service at Holy Name Cathedral, which is a big building, and it was it was standing room only in the back. I don't remember much about the service. Bear in mind I was nine at the time, but I do recollect that once the service was over we drove in a motorcade with a police escort from Holy Name up to Calvary Cemetery where we buried Gus.

WJB. You're mentioning of Richard J. Daley did bring back remembering him coming to the Carroll funeral home. It must have been Gus's for sure, but I also kind of remember him coming there for my father's wake at Carroll's several weeks before. Daley had written Gus a very nice letter after my father died saying to Gus that he was sorry to hear about the loss of his brother. I think I met Daley at my father's wake when he was showing this respect because of his relationship with Gus. Of course, Daley was working wakes routinely every week. Y

TNB. Right.

WJB. I mean that kind of afterhours work by Daley was part of the glue that held his organization together. What else I remember about those wakes, whichever one it was, my father's or Gus's, in addition to Daley, there were other political figures that I remember. The basic comment of those that were Irish was, "I'm sorry for your trouble." That was the common thing to say when meeting the bereaved relative at an Irish wake, "Sorry for your troubles." Ireland itself had "the troubles," but that word sufficed as well for bereavement comfort.

F. The Bowe and Bowe Law Firm

TNB. Tell me something about the family business.

WJB. My mother writes that once Gus and Bill were out of law school, Gus in 1913 and Bill in 1915, were earning \$10,000 a year in 1919. They were now the ones supporting their sister Anna, and their mother Ellen. They were also increasingly able to support them in good style for the day.

TNB. \$10,000 a year then was quite a bit of money.

WJB. Yes, they were doing all right with that, and they bought a home on West Washington Boulevard in a neighborhood that was populated by more prosperous Irish than before. Gus and Bill moved very quickly into a more affluent lifestyle than what they'd grown up with.

TNB. Was the law practice from the get-go focused on workers?

WJB. Yes, and that was fortuitous. My mother mentions in her book two names of people that gave them a good deal of business in their early years. Henry Horner was one name I recognized. That's the name of a later governor of Illinois. Whatever Henry Horner was doing before he was Governor, he must have known these boys were smart young lawyers, and he was apparently sending them business.

There was another fellow my mother mentions. Tom Nash. Now, I wondered if that was any connection to Patrick Nash of the Kelly-Nash political machine. He was later Chairman of the Chicago's Democratic Party in the 1930s. I don't know if there was any connection between those two Nashes. If so, you can maybe see another reason that Gus was so politically engaged later. He would have been by his own instincts anyway, but he may have well known some of these people and may have know them for a long time.

TNB. In the law practice, did they typically represent workers or did they represent companies?

WJB. The practice was based on the Illinois Workers' Compensation Law and the Bowe and Bowe law firm only representing injured workers. It was a benefit here that they happened to graduate from law school at the exact same time that across the country many states were enacting a uniform law in this area at the state level. The reform legislation was designed to take out of the clogged court systems the disputes involving injured workers. These were workers who could lose a finger, lose a thumb, lose an

arm, lose a leg, lose their life, while doing dangerous work. They had to go to the regular courts before the workman's compensation laws were passed, and the regular courts were very slow to bring these cases to trial. This was when you might have a distraught family wiped out with the death or serious injury of the breadwinner, a disabling injury inherent in a dangerous job. Those laws took these disputes out of the regular court system and put them into a special workers' tribunal.

The new Illinois Industrial Commission in this state has a whole dispute resolution system that continues to this day. Many people today complain the system costs too much for employers and there's still probably a good deal of politics sloshing around in that pool. As was true of Gus and Bill, I'm sure many of these lawyers today are Democrats.

In the case of Gus and Bill, they happened to arrive as they got out of law school just as those workers' compensation laws were coming into being. It's like in our lifetimes on the federal level, we've watched the Environmental Protection Agency arrive, together with the whole realm of environmental laws at both the state and federal levels.

Leave aside all the new internet laws, the environmental laws when they got started also spawned what's now a legal industry. There are lots of disputes and a requirement to resolve these often very difficult conflicts. With the workers' compensation laws, the whole area of doing justice to injured workers was really simplified. If you lost four fingers rather than one little finger, the recompense of that kind of injury began to be regularized, disputes were diminished over time, and the arrival of this area of law helped the Bowe & Bowe law practice absolutely take off.

TNB. Do you suppose they took on these cases on a contingent basis?

WJB. Yes, always on a contingent basis. Now, their law practice wasn't just workers' compensation law. That had been certainly the early backbone of the firm, but it was personal injury, plaintiff's work that they did as well. If a person was run over by a truck, this might give rise to a negligence claim.

My father told some funny stories about clients in those early days that my mother recounts in her book *The Families*. Gus started the practice first and together they were quite a capable pair of young lawyers starting out. In one of these stories, they had a circus injury case I remember. Later the circus manager became good friends Gus and Bill, even though he had to pay out for an injury of some sort. So, this kind of case was part of their early practice too.

TNB. Did World War I affect the Bowe & Bowe law firm?

WJB. It was a big change for the family when the law firm started. While Gus was out of law school in 1913, and Bill 1915, my father was in a quartermaster unit in the Illinois National Guard when World War I started. His unit was quickly federalized in World War I and sent to France. Gus now had a more difficult and challenging job. He has started a brand-new business, and it needs revenue coming in to pay expenses and the office rent. It was immediately more difficult without my father, because he was very good in attracting business.

My father was not the intellect that Gus was, but he was very good with people and very good at bringing in business. That was a big help to the firm later, but he was gone in France during the First World War. Early in his time in France he came a cropper under a troop train and lost half of a foot. That put him for an extended period in a couple of French hospitals, in Blois and in Orleans, before he finally comes home. When he gets back to the firm, it starts taking off and, as my mother reported, in 1919 the firm took in \$10,000. That was a lot of money then. That was the effect of World War I on the firm. It had thrown a big task your grandfather Gus's way early on, because he alone was in charge of making sure his sister Anna and his mother got through this period. I'm sure his mother was foremost in his mind then.

TNB. Gus practiced law with your father, through the 1920s and 1930s as the practice evolved. It was always a pretty lucrative practice, I sense.

WJB. Well, I think it was lucrative through World War II. After World War II, things had changed a little bit. Their prominence in the law hadn't really changed, partly because the firm was taking cases to the Illinois Supreme Court more frequently than anybody else. Now, we can easily look up the lawyers that argued before the Supreme Court. The court dockets are now all electronically available. Even when Gus was alive pre-internet, somebody told him that they researched it, and Gus and Bill and the Bowe, Bowe & Casey law firm had been to the Illinois Supreme Court representing clients more than Abraham Lincoln. Gus never vouched for that to be true, although I think it could well be true.

TNB. I wonder is it still true perhaps?

WJB. I would say so as to Lincoln. I don't recall looking into it when I had access to those legal databases, but how many times would Abraham Lincoln have gone up to the Illinois Supreme Court? The answer is a lot. Well, Bowe, Bowe & Casey was a law firm that was really making the law in the workers' compensation field. They were appealing all of these close calls. If they lost in the trial court they were very frequently off to the appellate court or appealing cases all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court.

In some of these cases they were making Illinois constitutional law. There's a famous case from about 1943 called the Grasse case. This case of theirs before the Illinois Supreme Court is still cited today for a basic principle of law in the Illinois Constitution.

So, the firm continued to have a varied practice within their general realm of personal injury. However, business began to decline in the years after World War II. My father in the early 1950s began to be less of a factor in the firm. I'm sure his drinking didn't help him hold up his end of the practice, and then his Alzheimer's disease ate away at his competence during the latter part of the 1950s. Remember that he died in 1965, so he had at least a good decade of his health declining after the War.

If Gus was the legal intellect in the firm, my father would have been the rain maker. He was a very outgoing and friendly person and a great business getter. Over time, his role faded, and the unions began to steer law business to legal competition that hadn't been there earlier. Over the years, legal options grew for lots of injured people.

The family fortunes declined through the 1950s. That was also the case for Julia's family in Kankakee. Gus's wife Julia had an interest in the Kankakee store Lecours, and her income from the store was also declining. That being said, the law firm and the store businesses carried on. The Bowe families were still able to maintain their living situations, but they were certainly watching their pennies more than they had in earlier decades.

G. Bowe Family History and Personalities

TNB: So having touched on your grandmother Ellen Canavan Bowe, perhaps you could just tell us a little bit more about Ellen and her husband John Joseph Bowe.

WJB: Let me start with John Joseph Bowe. We know less about the Bowe families than about the Canavans, if for no other reason that the Canavans bred like rabbits and the Bowes were not as prolific.

As to the Bowes, in figuring this history out, we have two great accounts of what they knew. These came from Julia Lecour Bowe and Mary Gwinn Bowe in their different books. Julia's books are *The Generations* and *Julia and Gus*, and my mother's book is *The Families*.

It's worth thinking a little bit about what helped Gus and Bill Bowe have such successful legal careers. You really have to go back, not just to their parents John Joseph Bowe

and Ellen Canavan, but to Gus and Bill's grandparents. Their paternal grandfather, the father of John Joseph Bowe, who died of ulcers in 1910, was Moses Bowe. Born in Ireland, he was orphaned at the age of 11. An uncle in the United States had sent for him, and he came over to the United States when he was very young. It wasn't too long before he ran away, unhappy with life with the uncle. He worked as a laborer helping to dig the Erie Canal. Later he worked for the Illinois Central Railway.

The Illinois Central had been awarded a railroad right-of-way corridor south of Chicago and the IC arrived in Kankakee in 1853. The rail link from Chicago to the east, to New York, had been built that same year, with the trestle coming into Chicago right over the lakefront where the Art Institute is today. If you look at the old photographs, you see the train trestles where the METRA now comes in underneath the Art Institute.

Moses Bowe later worked for Illinois Central in this area, probably still as a laborer. We know Moses lived in Monee, Illinois, and there married Honora Hurley. Honora operated a house in Monee for railway workers. Not long after they were married, her brother Patrick, a recent immigrant, was killed in the Civil War. As I recall, he was drafted and died in the Battle of Chattanooga. It followed that his sister, Honora, got a "bounty" from the federal government in recompense. And with that award, Moses and she purchased a farm. Their sons grew up there near Peotone, Illinois.

My paternal grandfather, John Joseph Bowe, had other male siblings, Philip and Michael Bowe. My grandfather also had a sister, Agnes, who married John T. Rice. I never knew anything about those folks. My mother had a couple of pictures of them in an album, but I never heard anybody speak about them or saw anything written about them. So, we don't know much about them.

Clearly the greatest contribution to the later success of Gus and Bill was when Moses and Honora's Bowe's son, John Joseph Bowe, had the exceptional good fortune to marry Ellen Frances Canavan, the daughter of Anthony and Ann Hughes Canavan.

John Joseph Bowe had grown up not far from Ellen Canavan's home in Sumner Township in Kankakee County. He had become a telegraph worker for the St. Paul Railroad. After they were married, his job took them out to Salt Lake City. My mother, Mary Gwinn Bowe, reports that he promised her that if she ever got homesick and wanted to get back closer to family, they'd move back east. Well, that's exactly what happened. That's why they moved back to 1239 North Ashland when they did, as their children began to come along. Around the turn of the century, John Bowe began to be plagued by tuberculosis and later ulcers, which I think is what he died from in 1910.

And I have copies of correspondence between him and my father when John Joseph Bowe was away dealing with his illness. And the language is very interesting to our ears, our 21st century ears. The relationship between the father and son in the correspondence was much more formal and stilted back at that time. That always struck me as another way things were different then.

Ellen Canavan Bowe was a pistol. She was called “Lib” by the family. She was a real go-getter with an entrepreneurial drive that she passed on to her sons. She was, in all respects, the little engine that could. Perhaps the most important contribution she made, apart from financially keeping food on the table, was to see that her children got the exceptional education that they did. That was very important to them all. I'm sure that that was top of mind for Gus and Bill as well, when raising their own children. Gus was always the better student, but both Gus and Bill realized that education was critical to their future. Down the road, their sister Anna, after her own schooling, worked as a receptionist [and switchboard operator] in the Bowe & Bowe law firm.

Ellen was selling insurance for New York Life Insurance Company, even before her husband died. It was a necessity and was the only family income in the period after 1910. The family was clearly struggling.

Gus would look after his sister Anna as my grandmother Ellen Bowe would take my then young father Bill out in the evening to her calls on Irish families in the neighborhood that Ellen was pitching to buy life insurance. My father would stand by her mute, he told me, as she made her sales pitch. And you can imagine how effective a pitch it would have been, because here's a widow who's lost her husband. She's out in the street in the evenings with a kid with no father, and two more at home, talking about the value of life insurance.

Well, the product spoke for itself in a way. She was probably a terrific salesperson anyway before her husband died. It's not completely clear for my mother's record, but probably before he died, she was supplementing the family income. At some point along the way, she'd become a licensed agent for the New York Life Insurance Company.

She was remarkably effective selling life insurance to the Irish families in the neighborhood. With Gus looking after young Anna, Ellen Canavan Bowe would head out into the night with my young father, who would stand silently by as Ellen would talk to an Irish couple, probably in front of their children, about life insurance.

And what better sales prop could you have after her husband died? She was the widow, and here's she's got to get out of the house and sell life insurance, which can't have

appeared to be a good way to make a living if you were a normal stay at home housekeeper raising the children. So that was their situation.

TNB: So, it was characterized by some degree of economic hardship.

WJB: Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

They were in a very difficult situation and were completely dependent on the chutzpah of Ellen Canavan Bowe to keep that family together. I mean, three kids, no male wage earner at the time. That was not just common. That income was about the only upshot of the situation. Ellen was quite, quite a figure.

There's another story that my mother told me about that reflects on Ellen Bowe's entrepreneurial bent, her "Get it done any way you can." spirit. The tale has Ellen standing on south Wabash Avenue outside a music store. Probably it was the Lyon and Healy music store. It sold pianos and used sheet music for decades at that location.

The story is that Ellen was happily standing outside looking in the window, when a potential customer stops by to look at a piano there. And Ellen strikes up a conversation with the stranger. The stranger is interested in buying a piano, and Ellen convinces him on the spot that she can get him a better deal than he could because she knows how to do this. He's convinced, perhaps not unreasonably. She goes in, she gets a good price and a cut of the savings. She gets help in keeping the family together, and it's all in a day's work just because she strikes up a conversation. I think a lot of that get up and go. Don't wait for somebody to tell you what to do. You know, figure it out and get at it. Gus and Bill had that spirit.

In terms of how her personality worked its way into Gus and Bill's life, the education that they got, as I mentioned, was first and foremost. Gus later said that at St. Ignatius, it was seven years of Greek, six of Latin, some modern history, and a little scholastic philosophy. Well, that's quite an education.

In the winter months, Gus and Bill were walking from an apartment or rowhouse on Fulton Street down to 12th Street, Roosevelt Road at Blue Island, where Ignatius was. It was cold, and both boys would stop in the winter in a library that they walked past on their way to and from school. They went in there to get warm. And what do you do if you go into a warm library in the middle of winter? You read something. That let Gus proudly tell people, "When I was 12, I'd read all of Ibsen." And I think that was probably true.

A little bit like Gus and Dickens. He once told me as he waved his hand at the bookshelf behind him. "It's the collected works of Dickens. You ever read Dickens?"

Well, I said, "The Tale of Two Cities." "Well, you really need to read all of Dickens if you're going to be really educated." Gus could talk that way. I think it wasn't just Braggadocio. I think he had read Dickens that way. All his life, he had a voluminous intake of reading material, much as my brother did. So, Gus was quite well read.

But given Ellen Bowe's forceful personality, I do think that she was off-putting to some people. Certainly, cousin James Austin Hart in his memoirs thought so. He talks about having a visit with the Bowes in Chicago when he was in town once. It was a hot summer day, and he writes that he was looking forward to going over from the Bowe apartment to Oak Street Beach for a swim. I'll read you what he says in his memoir. He says,

"She informed me that, 'We don't swim in Lake Michigan. You can swim tonight at the pool in Palos Park.' There was a public swimming pool in Palos, where they had a summer cottage. Sure enough, we all drove through to their summer cottage in Palos Park, a western Chicago summer. There we swim in hot soup with a mob of locals. What a letdown."

So that's James Hart on Ellen Canavan Bowe.

Hart also writes that he got along fine with all the other Bowes. He reports that when he used to visit Gus and Bill, they would tell him stories about their uncle John Canavan, who was Jim Hart's grandfather. The story was that he would bring in a load of cattle to the stockyards, and he'd be there at the stockyards at dawn. The auction would soon go forward, and when he sold off his lot of cattle at the stockyards, he would then go downtown to meet his nephews, Bill and Gus, at their law office at 127 North Dearborn Street.

Gus and Bill told him John Canavan would get there at 8.30 a.m., before they got in. They'd usually walk down to the Loop from Elm Street at 1120 Lake Shore Drive in the good weather. They'd just walk down there, and John would be waiting when they'd turn up. According to Jim Hart, John Canavan took great pleasure in telling the boys that he thought they had a rather poor work ethic to not really get going in the morning the way farmers did. So that was Jim Hart. [*James Austin Hart's Memoirs*](#) are on my website www.wbowe.com. Jim Hart's memoirs are terrific. If you want to find them, they are in the Hart Family part of the Documents section.

Jim Hart also wrote in his memoirs something else I want to read to you. It's a very nice comment about my dad. He wrote,

"Bill Bowe was one of the nicest, kindest, most personable men I've ever known. Later, during my years in Chicago, Bill and his wife Mary were delightful friends."

Well, you can sort of see probably why my father was a business getter and a rainmaker at the law firm. That was a big part of the firm's success as well.

TNB: Can you tell us about Gus and Bill's sister, Anna Bowe?

WJB: I think so. Yes, there are pictures of Ellen Bowe going to church in her Sunday finest with John Casey and Anna Bowe Walters, her husband Raymond Joseph Walters, and their son Raymond Bowe Walters. They're all in their finery. The men have got bowler hats on. Anna and Raymond Walters had their apartment on East Walton Street. It's quite a wonderful little snapshot of the family being out and about in their Sunday finest. Then there's Ellen in the picture, ready for battle.

TNB: There's a tale that my father used to tell me involving something that my dad used to describe as a luminous crucifix. Are you familiar with this story?

WJB: Yes. This is the famous story of Gus and Bill's Mission Art Company. They had their law office for many years at 127 North Dearborn Street. That's across from what's now the Daley Center. Their office building has long since been demolished.

Gus and Bill knew the building because their uncle, Austin Canavan, had an office in that building. He was a lawyer and had graduated from Yale Law School no less. My father started to work in that building when he was 14. He was already a Democrat, but he went to work for a man that owned a Republican political news sheet. The fellow was also a Democrat, as it turns out.

In the next round at 127 North Dearborn, the boys are older, and they have a business idea that they're going to pursue. They organize the Mission Art Company, a little office in 127 North Dearborn.

TNB: This is what year, approximately?

WJB: I would say probably between 1912 and 1916, something like that. They're practicing law at this time as well and my father got out of law school in 1915. It was probably earlier from Gus's standpoint. The boys had gone through high school and

college and law school in record time. I was 25 by the time I got out of law school, and I think they were like 21. So, they were fast-tracked.

The Mission Art Company sold religious goods. The luminous crosses were the product that was the best seller. There was way of infusing wax or using a phosphorescent wax of some sort for the luminescence in the evening of the Christ on the Cross. It sold like hotcakes. What can I say? That's what I heard. While they sold portraits of Jesus, and portraits of the bleeding heart of Jesus were in the line as well, the luminous crucifixes were the best sellers. The products were mostly being sold to Irish immigrants of the day. Then they had a tragedy with the luminous crucifixes. They wanted to expand the business and found a buyer in--I think in Mexico. My mother reports this in her book, *The Families*. Lo and behold, when shipped, the luminous crosses melt in bulk.

Forget the expansion of the business. They were going to do something else anyway as lawyers. That story always signified to me that they were hungry, and they were entrepreneurially oriented. I'm sure they got that from Ellen Canavan Bowe. And necessity certainly helped get the family through very, very difficult times financially. It was a very stressful period. That was quite clear.

TNB: What about the relationship between Ellen Canavan Bowe and her daughters-in-law, Mary Gwinn Bowe and Julia Lecour Bowe.

WJB: Well, I got this clear impression when I talked to both of those ladies about Ellen. You didn't mess with her. Neither Julia nor my mother had anything other than respectful comments to make about their mother-in-law Ellen. But reading between the lines, the impression I got was that she was indeed "Queen of the Roost. If there was something she felt strongly about, she would get her way with her boys over the two perfectly nice young women that had married her sons. From Ellen's point of view, they were nice girls. They were really educated. But neither one of them had supported the family, run Gus and Bill through school, and turned them into successes. She was going to get her payback for her earlier efforts.

I wrote a little bit about in the Preface I wrote to Julia's memoir, *Julia and Gus*, that Charley Bowe brought to light. It speaks very directly to Ellen Bowe's situation.

"The personality traits that drove widowed Ellen Bowe to single-mindedly rise out of poverty and successfully raise three children were not always seen by others as entirely benign. Julia recounts that the only cautionary word she ever heard as she contemplated marrying Gus came from her father."

And then here is Julia in her own voice.

“He told me that he had been very patient with all of Mabel's relatives and that I would need every bit of patience I had if I was going to get along with Ellen Canavan Bowe, Mabel's aunt. He doubted the wisdom of such a decision. If I was eager to go into such an alliance with my eyes wide open to the pitfalls that lay ahead, all right. He would back me up. But it would not be easy, he counseled.”

Imagine sending your daughter into that. I wrote in the Preface,

“Julia was quickly confronted with Gus and Bill’s profound solicitude for their mother. And when Julia and Gus began their marriage in Chicago in 1926 and bought 4D, she found herself living with Gus on the fourth floor with Ellen Canavan and Bill above them on five.”

And as Julia later recounted, “It was a crazy idea, but I was young and naive.”

TNB: I wonder if you could comment on the relationship between your father and Gus over time. Obviously, they were a couple of years apart from one another and struggled through childhood and then we became law partners together. They must have been close for a long time, at least.

WJB: Yes, I think they were. Their closeness as brothers was certainly compounded in a family business like that. I couldn't imagine that myself, but it was very common in those days and a necessity for them. You really needed the strength of a family then to make your way through a difficult world.

We're much more variegated now in that way, but not then. I'm sure they had their issues over the years.

I know their sister, Anna Bowe Walters, was the Bowe & Bowe law firm’s receptionist for a period in the 1950s and figured in their relationship as brothers. I know when I was living at home as a kid, Anna often would call my father in the evening to talk. My take was that she seemed to know how to rile folks up and enjoyed doing it.

My mother used to tell me that if you were to say to Anna, "Well, Anna, ‘Look, it's a beautiful day. The sun is shining.’" She might just simply say, ‘Yes, that's true. But it could be raining tomorrow.’" There was never a bright side to anything with Anna. I always had that impression of her, though I never knew her well at all. She was certainly remote from me, as was her husband, Raymond Joseph Walters. I knew their son, Raymond Bowe Walters, much better. He was a very nice fellow. Like your dad, he was a good deal older than me.

Anna was a little piece of work. To the extent that they had their issues later in life, some I think revolved around Anna's role in the business. It was a tight little family situation. You think about Ellen living with her sons and daughter-in-law in 1120. And Anna acting as the receptionist in the law firm. The two brothers are the partners, and then they're being joined by John Casey and then subsequently Gus's son, John.

TNB: I wonder if you could just tell us your perceptions of Gus and Julia as parents.

WJB: I'm not a very good witness to that because both Gus and Julia's children were grown up and out of the nest by the time I came of age. Your father graduated from high school in 1946, when I was four. So, I never directly saw that parenting until much later in life, and they were done with the parenting burden at that time. I was occasionally told things about your father and Julie Anne and Willard, but I didn't have a good firsthand view. I just had snippets of events where my mother might explain, "Well, John is doing this, and Julie Anne is doing that. Julie Anne, Gus, are thinking about this in relation to that." But beyond that, I was just not a good or present witness.

TNB: And I hope we'll have a chance to talk about that as we go on here. It's probably worth noting that your mother and my grandmother were close friends until your mother's death. And in fact, they reunited as roommates again in the, I guess it would have been late 1960s at 1120 when my grandmother moved into what was your childhood apartment at that point, right?

WJB: Yes. Well, they started off in the same cohort. They were both born in 1901, Julia Lecour Bowe in Kankakee and my mother in Baltimore. They were classmates at Trinity College, a Catholic women's college in Washington, D.C., graduating in the Class of 1923, and during those college years, they were roommates.

Julia visit my mother's family, the Gwinns, near Trinity up in Baltimore. Julia met my mother's three Gwinn sisters, Nancy Gwinn Riboud, Martha Gwinn Casey, and Betty Gwinn. So, they were all good close friends then. Later, Julia introduced my father, her brother-in-law, to my mother. And then Julia and Mary Bowe spend an entire lifetime raising their families in the same building. Then, they're both widowed within a month and a half of each other. As you point out, they were very sensible about their finances, so Julia, now a widow, sells Apartment 4D and moves back in with her former roommate into Apartment 4B. They were roommates again, Class of '23, redux.

H. Summing Up Julia and Gus

TNB: Do you have some final words on Julia and Gus?

WJB: Well, I do have some final thoughts about Gus and Julia are certainly at the top of the list of people in my life that I most admire and have looked up to and respected. They were in love and passionate about the arts and they were also committed and were hardworking in helping those that were less fortunate than they were. Even though they had come from modest backgrounds, they had become well-rounded in their education, and they never forgot that there were others that hadn't been as fortunate and lucky as they had been coming along the way.

Gus was a brilliant lawyer and a brilliant man. Beyond that, he was a Renaissance Man with a broad base of knowledge and interests. Julia was a wonderful mother, a multi-talented scholarly woman. She threw herself successfully into battle, not just to save Poetry Magazine with Gus, but she and Gus had countless their worthy battles.

In short, I loved and admired them both to pieces. So that's all she wrote.

TNB: Thank you for your reminiscences. It's been a wonderful experience working with you on it.

WJB: Yes, indeed. We can come back to other things if there's ever an interest. I think what I'll do is I think ruminant some more. I'm glad you got me thinking about all of this because I've wanted to capture some of it myself over the years. You've been a good stimulus, and I thank you for that.