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Jackson, Thad oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Interview with Thad Jackson by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Jackson, Thad

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don

Date
January 30, 2003

Place
Washington, DC

ID Number
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Biographical Note

Thad Jackson was born in Dallas, Texas on May 21, 1933 to parents Opal (Miller) and Thad Jackson. He is an immunologist, specializing in pediatric immunology. He has extensive experience in overseas research and organized health care delivery. He was, for several years, a senior scientist and staff member with the Nestle Corporation and while there served as liaison to NIFAC. He is now vice president of INMED, a non-profit organization providing and supporting health and social services for children and adults in the US and overseas.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background; Nestle Infant Formula Audit Commission (NIFAC); infant deaths; working with Muskie; Nestle's reaction to the commission; and Muskie's temper.

Indexed Names

Galbraith, John
Greenwald, Daniel J. “Jack”
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Wogaman, J. Philip

Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Thursday, the 30th of January, the year 2003. We are in Washington, D.C. in the offices of the Muskie Foundation, and Don Nicoll is interviewing Dr. Thad Jackson. Dr. Jackson, would you give us your full name and spell it, and also give us your date of birth and the names of your parents?

Thad Jackson: Okay, first name is Thad, T-H-A-D, M for Marshall, and Jackson, J-A-C-K-S-O-N. I was born May the 21st, 1933.

DN: And where were you born?

TJ: Dallas, Texas.

DN: And what were your parents' names?

TJ: My mother's maiden name was Opal Miller, and my father's name was Thad Jackson.

DN: So, are you a junior?

TJ: Yeah, I'm a junior.

DN: Now, you grew up in Texas, I assume?

TJ: No, I left when I was about twelve and went to California. My father was with the Federal Reserve Bank in Dallas, and he later went to Okinawa for the federal government, and came back to San Francisco and we just never left.

DN: Had he been a native of Texas?

TJ: Yes, a real native. Both my parents were, had come from families who were founding families of the Texas University.

DN: And did you have brothers and sisters?

TJ: Yes, I have two sisters, both of which are teachers and are retiring, as everybody around me seems to be doing right now. One is in special education, and the other is a history teacher.

DN: Now, when you were growing up in Texas and then in California, did you attend the public schools?

TJ: Yes.

DN: And where did you go to college?

TJ: I went, my undergraduate, to San Francisco, University of San Francisco State, and I have a master's from the University of San Francisco, they're different for those who don't know that, and I got my Ph.D. at the University of California Berkeley.

DN: What was your field at Berkeley?

TJ: It was immunology and infectious diseases.

DN: So you're a Ph.D., very much involved in medical-related work.

TJ: That's right, I've spent a good portion of my life in hospitals somewhere, someplace.

DN: And today you're the executive vice president of INMET.

TJ: That's right, I work for my wife. She started the organization about sixteen years ago, and I retired for twelve days and she said, "Oh no," and so about, I guess about five years ago, I joined INMET then in that position as executive vice president, and I'm in charge of programs for the organization.

DN: And INMET is dedicated to doing what?

TJ: It's a 501(c)3, a nonprofit, and basically we're, our programs are to develop communities, and we do that in various ways depending on the community that we're working in, but basically we work with mothers and young children in a community setting.

DN: Now, our reason for interviewing you primarily is the fact that you had an association with Senator Muskie in connection with NIFAC, the Nestlè Infant Formula Audit Commission.

TJ: Commonly known as the Muskie Commission, I don't think anybody ever really knew the other name.

DN: And what were you doing at Nestlè when the commission was formed?

TJ: Well, when I, I was in Bangladesh for five years back in the seventies, from '72 to '77. I

was the medical research director for Johns Hopkins for the subcontinent, in Bangladesh and Nepal. And I came out and was actually living in England doing some work at the London School of Tropical Medicine when I saw this ad in, I think it was the *Economist*, and it was a Nestlè ad asking for somebody with my kind of background. And I was just curious why Nestlè would be doing that. So I answered the ad, and they immediately had me come over and be interviewed. And then that's when I found out about the whole infant formula issue, because it was not an issue where I was coming from. And I had just developed a hospital for severely malnourished children and had been using some very specialized formula that Nestlè produced for, which was lactose free formula, for these very severely malnourished children.

So I got intrigued by it and I, because I, once I heard the story, at least from their side, it just seemed like a terrible waste of resources that two sides were fighting like this, over an issue where this was really not the central issue. It was just part of a very complex thing in which, and those resources could, if people would work together as much as they were fighting with those resources that they were using, it could be utilized for something much more positive than that. And so I got involved from that angle.

DN: And what year was that?

TJ: That was in 1980?

DN: So, two years before the commission was formed.

TJ: Right. And I spent a year in Switzerland, but essentially traveling back and forth to the States. And about that time, Nestlè realized they'd made some really gross mistakes, gross in the sense that, about the public opinion of them, and they realized they had to do something about it. And they were trying to tackle it strictly from a scientific standpoint, and it obviously had become something much more than that. And while they felt the science was still important, and that is the role that I played in the thing, it was also important to get the whole message of this complex interaction between economics and environment and mothers and poverty, and all the things that go with that. So they formed a thing called the Nestlè Center for Nutrition, Nestlè Coordinating Center for Nutrition, and the idea was that this would be a center that would talk about the issues of the Third World, and again, to try to develop a dialogue between some of our biggest critics.

And one of our more severe critics and groups that we were most concerned about was Phil Wogaman and the Methodist church. Because about the time that we began to set this company up, it was a separate company of which I was the vice president, and they were getting ready to look at the whole issue of whether the Methodist church would come out and boycott, which some of the other churches had done. And we just felt that here was an opportunity to talk to the churches before they actually took action; it's much more difficult once they take an action.

And so that's when I first met Phil Wogaman. And Phil, to give him credit, he said this openly, he may have said something to you in other interviews, that he fully expected to come out of that boycotting Nestlè. But after we had some dialogue with him and talked about the issues, and

offered to turn over all of our internal documents, anything that they wanted to see related to the infant formula issue, that we were prepared to do that. And this was contrasted then to some of the critics on the other side, who were less than open to the commission, the Methodist commission, and it was on the basis of that that we began a dialogue.

And ultimately the commission came out with a report that said if we had to look at the veracity between the two groups, that we would have to come down on the side of Nestlè, and they recommended that the church not be boycotting. And it was at that point then we began to work in consultation with Phil Wogaman and others about setting up some sort of a commission that would act as a third party that could look at the issues and see if the allegations were really true or not. And Senator Muskie was on the top of the list, we dreamed that we would get him, and but he was on the top of the list. And we had four or five others, but he was our first choice and he consented to do it, so we were very fortunate having him as a commissioner.

DN: So you were involved in the discussions and the negotiations that led up to the formation of the commission.

TJ: Yes, that's right. Ray Pagone at that time was the president of the Nutrition Center that I just mentioned that Nestlè had set up, and I was the vice president. And a lot of people take credit for where the commission came from, the idea. I think it probably was just one of those things that evolved from everybody, it was just, it looked like a natural. So I won't give, I won't take full credit for having thought of the idea because it came from many other of the staff.

DN: What was Ray Pagone's background?

TJ: Ray was, he was a, I think he was full bird colonel in the Army, had been in Army intelligence, and had also worked in public affairs for various companies, one of which was the United Fruit, I believe it was, you may have to check on that, but I think it was United Fruit. And of course he was involved in the problems that they had dealing with the Third World issues that they were dealing with in terms of salaries and housing and other issues, which I'm not that versed on. But he certainly had a similar kind of experience, and so he was, he had been recruited by Nestlè. I didn't meet Ray until after, I was actually hired before Ray was, I was in Switzerland and Ray was hired here in the States. And then I met with Ray, and then Ray, Ray was one of the reasons why, he recommended that I be transferred back to the States, that it would be easier to operate from.

DN: So in essence, you helped with setting up the center, he was the president of the center and it was based here?

TJ: Right.

DN: And then you were transferred to become part of the center.

TJ: That's right.

DN: And how long was it before Ray left the firm and you, in essence, took over the liaison role?

TJ: Well, Ray was there, there were two periods in the, there was from, when was the commission formed? Do you remember?

DN: Nineteen eighty-two [1982], as I recall.

TJ: Eighty-two? So somewhere around '81 we started this process of putting the Nutrition Center, I couldn't give you the exact date, but we started putting that together. And Ray stayed on until the end of the boycott, the first phase of the boycott in which the National Council of Churches and the American Public Health Association and others got together and made a joint statement, with Nestlè, saying that the boycott is over and they felt that we were doing the right things and had things in place. And someone actually even got up and said, "Nestlè makes the very best chocolate," over television, one of our most severe critics actually. So that ended in late '84 maybe, I'm not sure of the dates. And Ray continued, I left then and I went back to England where I had worked before, at the London School. And I think Ray may have stayed on for another six months or something, and then the company was disbanded, principally because Ray wanted to leave and start his own company, and I had no desire to be in the public relations company, so I opted out.

And then about eighteen months later, another sort of much smaller scale of boycotts started up again. And I was asked to come back, which I did, and started an office here just up the street actually, on K Street, to deal with the issue. It was never a big thing, but the commission was reactivated at that point just so that we could continue looking at allegations that were being made. And that lasted for, probably to '89, somewhere in '90, so it just kind -

DN: Just before the commission ended?

TJ: Yeah, just before Ed, the commission was kind of, when the commission ended that was essentially the end of the boycott. There were still some people who, and I'm sure there are still people out here that still feel strongly about the issue, but that was, as far as the movement was concerned, that was the end of it.

DN: So you had some dealings with the commission, Senator Muskie, in the formation of the commission, and then you went back to England for a while, and then you came back into the picture.

TJ: Right.

DN: What was your sense about the reasons for selecting Senator Muskie as the chairman of the commission?

TJ: Well, he had such a high profile, having been a candidate for the presidency and vice presidency, and was secretary of state, and had an extremely good reputation for being an honest,

open. I don't think anyone has ever accused Muskie of being devious, and just had that reputation in the eyes of the public, and we just felt he was a natural. I'm not sure, I think we were given the name of Muskie as a possibility, somebody suggested him to us, because by this time he had retired and was working for the law firm, and they felt that he might be interested in such a unique kind of situation. I have to say, I think the whole infant formula issue was a most bizarre thing. And I think as we look back at this thing in history we'll wonder how in the world we ever, number one, how the company allowed themselves to get into that mess, and secondly, how the public got so involved in such a small portion of the real issue of what kills babies.

DN: Let's talk about that. From your perspective, what was the issue and why was it bizarre?

TJ: Well, the issue was that poverty, ignorance, and disease kills babies. We, to me it was always a cop out for all of us; it was easier to blame a big multi-national company, I mean, who feels sorry for, you know, at that time a twelve billion dollar company? They're now a forty billion, some fifty billion, so it didn't hurt them very much. But it just seemed like a cop out to be, to project that this, that all these deaths were occurring principally because these babies were being fed infant formula, when the reality was that where we have the highest incidence of infant mortality, mothers couldn't even afford infant formula, and there's very little infant formula even available to them.

We once estimated that if you took all of the sales of infant formula in the Third World and you assumed that the mothers stretched it out as far as they could, it would have only accounted for ten percent of the deaths, if you attributed that every kid would die that had infant formula. So you can see how the logic of that, if you carried it out to the full extent. Now, that doesn't mean that the company, I think the company made some really terrible mistakes, and I think they would be the first to own up to those mistakes, certainly at this point. And it was really in a way kind of a shame, because of the one company out there that had a history of being in the developing world, Nestlè had been in Thailand, for example, seventy-five years, and they were a, Galbraith once said that Nestlè was the model for multi-national companies to follow. That was before the infant formula issue.

And so it was, in a way it was kind of a shame, but they were coming from a very isolated position in that they were a Swiss company, their headquarters were in Switzerland, though they had people here running their company here in the States. But they just didn't have that mentality of how the American public operates, in that it's a give-and-take kind of situation. And if someone says something, you're supposed to stand up and say, "No, that's not right. This is my position." Well, they didn't do that. Instead, they took a legalistic kind of position and a scientific position, pulling out all of the data to show this and that and the other, and most of the public didn't understand it, number one, and number two, they just thought they had something to hide if they did all of this. And so they made some really terrible mistakes in the early stages of the thing that got them into very, they just got so far behind the eight ball on this thing that it was very difficult for them to recover.

DN: How did the commission fit with this situation? That is, how did they deal with the scientific issues that you're talking about? You say that even at the extreme end, ten percent of

the babies who die could be dying for reasons attributable to the formula.

TJ: Well, I was saying if you took it to its extremity, which, I mean.

DN: But I'm not so much concerned with the numbers as I am, you presented this as an example of the bizarreness of the issue from the point of view of the company. How did the commission come at that question, and the position that the company was taking in comparison with the general public?

TJ: Yeah. I think certainly among the scientists and medical people on the commission, I think, number one, their position would have been similar to mine, that Nestlè was very stupid in the way they handled the issue, but that it was not the major issue in terms of mortality in the Third World. Having said that, I mean that doesn't relieve the company from the responsibility to make sure that they try to do as much as they can to make, that their product is used properly. And by that I mean promoting to the wrong sets of people and a whole range of things. And so I think from their, I'm putting words in their mouth, but I think from their standpoint, certainly the medical and scientific people there would have said, they still have a responsibility, we don't think this is the big issue in terms of, if we solve this issue we're not going to solve the major issue of why children are dying, but that it is a distraction away from what should be done and where we should be going, and that the company does have a responsibility to be responsible for their product and make sure that it's used, as much as they possibly can, make sure that it's used properly.

DN: In the end, from your point of view, did the commissions members in general come to that conclusion?

TJ: Yeah, I think they did. And I think they really, towards the end they all, I think they generally felt that the company was trying to do the right thing. Now, in any large company like this, you have people in the field and you have turnover. And one of the big problems, and this is something that needs to be, this isn't my field, but this should certainly be followed up on, is institutional memory, because sales managers turn over pretty fast. They don't have the history of something like this, and you don't keep reinforcing the institutional memory and why it's important you have to do these things. You can get yourself back into a similar situation, and so I think that's a very important thing.

I think that lesson was learned in the sense that, and that was one of the roles of the commission, was that even though there was turnover, you know, there was that commission there all the time, and if they got out of line and somebody reported it, we were on it in a flash. And the company actually, I don't think they actually ever fired anyone, they just told them that they were not getting promoted, and they left. And that happened particularly in Central America, on several occasions we had some problems there where they had abrogated the rules and regulations that the company had set down for them.

DN: What was it like bringing Senator Muskie up to speed on the issues at the beginning of the commission?

TJ: Well, it was an interesting time. We had a few stormy, not from my standpoint, but from his, particularly his standpoint about where, exactly how the commission was going to play the role, and it was my job, you know. I was the messenger sort of thing, and I had to go back and explain the situation to people who wanted to do, wanted very much wanted the senator's support and the commission's support, and didn't, still really hadn't fully grasped all the nuances of things. And so there was, we were acting as a buffer between those two issues. But once the commission was established there was, I never, I had access, direct access to the CEO, Malford, so if anything went wrong I had, I could go directly to Malford and say, "I don't like what's happening." So I didn't have to, I rarely ever did that because you only do that when you really need it, but that's how strongly they felt about it. And so when Muskie had something to say, they listened. And that was true right up to the very end of it.

DN: Now, one issue obviously from the beginning would be how independent the commission would be, and how independent he would be of the company, since the company was paying the bills. And it seems to me the second question is, how comfortable, or not comfortable but reasonably assured was the company that he understood the issues as you laid them out?

TJ: Well, he understood the issues because he was getting it from both sides, particularly when it first started. He would listen to both sides of the argument. It became maybe a little less so as we went along, because he had a better feel for where everybody was coming from, and it would depend on the source obviously. There were some of the sources that were not very credible, let's put it that way. But there were others, but people were genuinely concerned about what was happening and whether this was a real issue.

From the standpoint of the fact that Nestlè was paying for it, we looked at that issue and there really was no choice, nobody else was going to fund it. And we couldn't, Nestlè was the one that was on the hot seat, much more so than the other pharmaceutical companies, even though in many cases, according to the World Health Code, they were in violation at that time. So they weren't anxious to get up front, which you could well understand, so really Nestlè had no choice but to put up the money. But they did try to build as many firewalls as they could between themselves and the commission, so that the commission could be perceived as, and I would think if you were to talk to many of the activists, and you probably have at this point, they would feel that, ultimately they would have to admit that the commission was pretty fair in how they approached things.

DN: What was it like, and can you describe what it was like, in bringing Senator Muskie up to speed on the issues involved in the case from the perspective of the company, and from your perspective as a scientist?

TJ: Well, he's a quick study, as you know. And he also, at that, when we first started we had Jack Greenwald who was assistant for Muskie, and so I spent a lot of time bringing Jack on the stream as much as Senator Muskie, because Senator Muskie obviously was doing a lot of other things as well. And so it was really sort of an education process between the two of us, and I would give my side and Jack, being a good lawyer, would say, well why do you say this, and

what is this and what is that. And so it was a learning process really between myself and Jack and Senator Muskie. And I, certainly in the first, early days, I'd probably be over there at least once or twice a week, spending an hour or so, principally with Jack at that point, until we began to get the full commission going and the people set up, and then we had formal meetings and that was a different thing. But at the early stages it was as important to bring Jack up, as it was everybody else on the commission.

DN: What was it like watching Senator Muskie working with the members of the commission?

TJ: Well, that was an interesting interaction, because, you know of course, he had been secretary of state and was used to a lot of deference, and on the commission were a lot of people who also were used to a fair amount of deference. Maybe not quite as much as Senator Muskie, and who were not terribly awed by titles and so on and so forth. And so I'm sure at times he was a little, I'm not sure, I know, he was, he and some of the other members would have a clash because they'd just say, well, we don't agree with you, and we think you're wrong. And many of them being academics, that came very natural to them, and so there was a certain friction between the academics and the lawyer approach to things that went on within the commission.

It is interesting to, I was trying to remember some of the specific issues but I can't think of any right now. But there were some pretty strong sessions there. Phil Wogaman and Muskie could, I think they used to do it just for the fun of it sometimes, they'd go back and forth on some issue, and it wouldn't even necessarily be a big issue, just something that they disagreed on and they both loved to debate something. And another one was Shelly Morgan. I don't know, have you spoken to Shelly?

DN: No, I haven't yet.

TJ: He's in California. He's getting a little frail now so if you want to talk to him, you probably talk to him soon.

DN: Well, I hope to get out to California this spring.

TJ: Now, he and Muskie used to go at it quite a bit. But it was never malicious, it was just the different approaches that (*unintelligible phrase*).

DN: What were the nature of the issues that they were zeroing in on at that point?

TJ: I was trying to think of a specific issue. Usually it had to do with wording and how they were using words. Muskie was a real stickler about how, he said, "You just can't be fuzzy about this, you have to, it has to be this." And they'd say, "Well, it isn't this or that, I mean you're talking about human beings and they don't, it isn't just this or that." And this would go, they could go back and forth, I can't, I'm sorry, right now I just can't -

DN: Did this have to do with the way the formula was distributed?

TJ: No, it had usually more to do with policy. Because in many ways, what ultimately came out of the commission, was that the commission and Nestlè's instructions became the standard for the rest of the industry. The commission couldn't speak for the rest of industry, or even attempt to, to defend or even look into their practices. If they saw something really gross, they would say so, if they thought that was inappropriate and they shouldn't be doing it. So that ultimately, within I would say eighteen months after we actually put in a set of directions and description of how the formula should be marketed, virtually all the major companies had adopted something very, very similar to it.

That was one of the things that Senator Muskie and I did early on, was to take the World Health Code and its various sectors, and break, because we went to, and this is where Senator Muskie really began to get very frustrated and became a little more sympathetic to our cause I think, was that we went to the World Health Organization, and they said, "Well this is a guideline, we can't tell you what to do." And Senator Muskie said, "Well why can't you, I mean you're the international body, everybody's looking at you, why can't you tell us what these guidelines mean in terms of practical application?" And they said, "Well, we can't do that. We represent all the nations, and we'd have to have the approval of every nation to say that that's what it meant to them, because this is a guideline for countries and not a guideline for individuals or companies." So that's when we decided we had to do something that we, because you couldn't just form a commission and say, well it's in violation of the Code, because nobody, you couldn't get everybody to agree on what the Code was.

So what we did is that we actually, Senator Muskie, myself and Jack Greenwald, began to break the Code down, and we looked at it on a paragraph by paragraph basis. And we said, "Well, this is what, this is how we interpret the Code, and in order to do that, this is what the company must do to follow the Code." And so I actually took that to one of our more severe critics, which is UNICEF, incidentally still it's a major critic of Nestlè, and sat down with some of their people, at least the people that they had at that time, they're all gone now. And we, you know, I got an agreement from them, and I got it unofficially, because they couldn't, they're part of the UN, too, they couldn't say anything officially. And then some of the World Health Organization groups and others, and we went over step-by-step to see if we, if they thought what we were saying was totally off base or was reasonable in terms of the Code and where we were coming from. And we got a general consensus, and then we took, I did most of the leg work on that, and then we brought it back and Senator Muskie and the commission began then to set that up, and they presented it to the company and the company accepted it.

DN: So the process in broad terms involved you, Senator Muskie, Jack Greenwald, working on those issues related to the WHO Code, and trying to interpret that in practical terms and negotiating a bit with WHO, UNICEF, and then bringing back recommendations through Senator Muskie to the full commission?

TJ: Right. And the commission then, and again, and this is where a lot of that discussion went back and forth about how the language should read. And the commission ultimately came up with this set of guidelines which they felt comfortable with, and that ultimately then was submitted on a formal basis to the company, and the company agreed to abide by that.

DN: Was that the major accomplishment of the commission, from your point of view?

TJ: That was certainly the first big accomplishment. I think there were two things that ultimately resolved the boycott. One was, the Methodist church and Phil Wogaman's group, and the second was the commission setting up these guidelines and then following through and judging the company on the basis of those guidelines.

DN: They became the criteria for evaluating performance.

TJ: Right. And some of the things were kind of weird. For example, we had I think it was in Malaysia or Sri Lanka or someplace, or Ceylon I guess it is now, and there was on a wall a big thing for one of the infant formulas, (*name*) I think, or, I don't remember which brand it was. But anyway, it was on the, and it had been there for twenty years, and it belonged to this pharmacist, and it was his wall. And he'd put it up there and he'd paid for it, or somebody had twenty years ago, and he refused to take it down. But it was in violation of the Code, from our standpoint. The company offered him money, everything. "No," he wasn't going to change it.

Well, of course the activists would come out then and it would be all over their papers and things saying, "We saw this sign and," you know, and so some of the things were really way out. And so what the commission did, rather than being, taking one side or the other, they would just simply state the facts, and it is in their opinion that if it is possible, somehow or another that sign should come down, if it's possible. Here's the facts, these are the reasons, and this is what we think should be done.

Others were, you know, there were times when Nestlè was in violation of those guidelines, and they would very clearly come out and say, this has to stop, and it did. And this went on for, at first the activists saw that this was a, was not a good thing for them, very early on. At first they said, "Oh boy, here we go" you know, because they'd kind of swamp the commission. And when they didn't swamp the commission and it began to be broken down in a rational way, they began to realize that they had a problem, and so then they ignored the commission. They tried ignoring the commission for a while, and that didn't work and so they finally came back to the commission, and by that time it had begun to lose a lot of its steam, and people were looking at it a little more rationally. And that's when they began to realize that they were really losing ground and that they had to get out of it in a graceful way.

DN: In the end, when the commission concluded its work, how did the company, that is Nestlè, feel about the results of that experiment?

TJ: Well, I think you'd have to, it would depend on who you talk to. I mean, like in any large organizations there are dinosaurs, and I'm sure some of the dinosaurs were not too happy. They probably felt it was the, they had done no wrong and that this was an infringement on their ability to operate as a company. I think certainly at the top, very top management, there was a real understanding of the commission's role and an appreciation of what the commission had done. And hopefully there were some lessons learned there that would apply to their activities in

the future. It certainly made them much more aware that a company as big as they are, without even trying, can get into trouble with misperceptions or outright, maybe not intentional, but actions that affect others.

And so I think for the first, I mean, you know, the world had not seen anything quite like this before, in the business world, so this was, I mean this is a real study on what to do and what not to do in terms of how you operate as a company. I mean, their taking it to the court and, you know, they really, they won the case but lost the war when they sued that group in Switzerland. But, you know, they were a very Calvinistic company in little Switzerland overlooking the lake, and they'd been called baby killers, and they felt indignant about it, and that was their response. It was the wrong response, but that was maybe a natural response.

And they weren't totally innocent, I mean there were activities that needed to be cleaned up, and they did, to their credit. But, and a lot, a good, I mean, I'm not here to defend them in the sense of, because I've never been, I would never call myself or be a company man as such, but a lot of the activities they were accused of, they had done in the past but at the time they were accused of it they were no longer doing it. They had already made the change, some of them for very practical reasons.

A good example of that would be in the early, in the sixties, they used to, at the request of many of the health industries, actually advertise on radio telling mothers exactly how to mix the formula, so that, you know, you mix so much with, this scoop with so much water, and you boil the water before you pour it in, and all those things. And they would get the script approved by the health ministry. And in the sixties, they were targeting a population of people that were in a cash economy, because they all had radios. You didn't own a radio unless you were in a cash economy. But by the seventies, you had the Japanese transistor radios that flooded the market and you could buy one for two dollars. That market had changed, and so the messages that they were sending out were not appropriate.

Most of the countries where this had occurred, they pulled, they had pulled all these back. Not because they saw it as a real danger, but they simply realized that they were not marketing to the people they wanted to market to. They were marketing to people who had no money, and they hadn't rec-, maybe some of them hadn't recognized, but I think the main, and maybe I'm putting motivations in people's mouth, I don't know, but my perception was that they did it principally because of market pressures that had nothing to do with the boycott issues.

DN: As you look back on the work you did in connection with the commission and the connection with Senator Muskie, what did you learn from him about dealing with this kind of a thorny public policy issue?

TJ: There's one quote from him I'll never forget, and I use it all the time. And he said, “Thad, every time you solve one problem, you create two more issues.” And I think he's right. He said, “That's been my experience.”

DN: What was his style dealing with you, and then dealing with the commission?

TJ: Well, he could be pretty autocratic sometimes, and of course he could put on a splendid display of temper tantrums. I mean he, he was the world's expert at that. And some of it was staged, I mean, I know most of it was, he used it for effect. Every once in a while he'd get carried up in his own rhetoric and he'd lose it. So, there were occasions when we had, and I would get it when the company would do something stupid. I can't think, but you know, something that was just obvious to everybody that should never have happened, and it did. And of course if I came in on the wrong day, then I had to listen to why it was so stupid. But he never, it never, it was never projected at me personally, it was just the issue and the situation. But he could be a very intimidating person if he wanted to be.

DN: I've got a question for you: his secretary, Carole Parmelee, told me that you were very helpful when he was traveling to Switzerland, for example, in arrangements. Did you ever encounter a situation where the travel went awry for reasons beyond your control, or the airline's control?

TJ: The only time that actually happened, and where he got upset about it, it happened because, particularly when, actually I never traveled, you know, they did some trips into the Third World countries and nobody from Nestlè went. We toed, we set up a worldwide message to the company that, at any time a commission can show up on your door, show their passport, and you're to open your books to, any, if they ask, anything that has to do with infant formula that ask for, you have to give it to them. And I deliberately did not go around when they were doing that kind of traveling, because I didn't want to know where they were going, I didn't think that was appropriate. But when we were traveling as, when the commission was traveling, particularly within the United States or Switzerland to meet with the board in Switzerland, of course I did travel with the group.

And once we went to Berkeley, I can't remember why we went to Berkeley, but anyway we went there, and it was a holiday or something, and there aren't that many hotels at Berkeley anyway, but we ended up in this hotel across the street from the campus, and it was, it doesn't usually get hot there, but it got really hot that day and the air conditioning wasn't working. And I was reminded that he was the ex secretary of state and this was no way to be treated.

End of Side A
Side B

DN: We are now on the second side of the January 30th interview with Dr. Thad Jackson. Dr. Jackson, we were talking about dealing with Senator Muskie and his use of temper, and sometimes his temper getting ahead of him, as it were. How did the commission evolve as an entity? Here you had very independent, strong willed people coming together on a contentious, sometimes contentious issue. How did they evolve as an institution?

TJ: I think, remember I said there were two phases, the first phase, and then later on sort of a die down and then a resurrection. The first phase I think there was a very strong institutional camaraderie that developed within the commission, even to the extent that myself, even though I

was obviously paid, hired by the company, I took a lot of stances. And I'm sure you have looked through the transcripts and things, where I could literally have been fired, I'm sure, had some of the other people looked at that, except that I had the backing of the very top of the management. We all took it very serious, and you know, if I felt the company wasn't doing, that wasn't the right thing, I said so. And that was true of the whole commission, there was a real effort to be even handed, even though at times some of them were, some of their allegations were really ludicrous.

Other times they were just difficult because we just didn't have enough facts to act to. But there was a real effort on all of their parts, and like I say, there were some heated discussions between some of the more vocal members of the group, but no one, I don't think anyone ever left there mad at one another at any time. It was just this sense of, that this issue had to be dealt with properly, that it was an important thing to do. You know, it's like any group, like a group of soldiers or a group of, any group, where the group becomes very important within the group, and so the integrity of the group becomes very important. So from that standpoint, I don't think they would have ever sacrificed the integrity of the group to the benefit of the company, or to any group outside. I mean, they were an entity of themselves, in and of themselves, and they were as much concerned about their own perception of that integrity as they were about the individual issues. So I think from that standpoint, it was a very unique group.

DN: Now, you spoke of the two phases. Was that attitude prevalent in the second phase, too?

TJ: The second phase, you know, it was kind of anticlimatic, and this thing just kept kind of trickling along. And so allegations were coming through and the commission would look at it, but there wasn't quite the same urgency that we had before. And some of the, we had added to the commission, I don't think we lost anybody, but we added to the commission and they worked with the original group, so they didn't have quite the same history.

I think at the request of one of the activist groups, we actually put someone, I can't think of his name now, he's at Boston, anyway, he was added to the group, and he had not gone through the same set of experiences, and so there just wasn't quite the same urgency about it the second half of the thing. As I say, the central boycott issue was over, and these were just, it's Nestlè's kind of slipping back was kind of the way I think that the commission was looking at it at that point. So there wasn't quite the same dynamic interaction that we had the first go around.

DN: Are there any items that we've missed in talking about the commission, and working with Senator Muskie?

TJ: No, it's been so long since I've had a chance to talk about it. I usually, you know, I just don't usually talk, well, not many people ever really knew the issues very much to begin with, though it was a very visible thing. It's amazing, when you'd ask people, well, "Why do you think that this was so terrible?" "Well, it was terrible," but then they couldn't tell you why. They just knew that something terrible had happened out there, and I think that this is a legacy that companies need to look at very, very carefully. The role that I play now in a nonprofit working with private sector, there's just a different, there's a difference of how companies perceive their,

particularly large international companies, how they perceive their role in the countries they work in now, than say late seventies, early eighties.

DN: How do they see their role today?

TJ: Well, I think most of them see that they have a responsibility to do something for the communities that they work in, and some of them even feel strongly about the whole country, but certainly within the communities, and that that's a cost of operation. We certainly see that now from extraction companies that you would never have seen twenty years ago, like the oil industry, energy industries have changed enormously. Companies like Monsanto, for example, who have some real issues not unsimilar to what Nestlè had in the sense that it's perception more than fact of where they're coming from with genetically modified foods and things. They certainly have learned that they really do have to have, be responsible in the communities they're working in, and be perceived as being responsible so that they get a kind of third party endorsement of what they're doing. So I don't think the environment's quite the same as it was in the late seventies, early eighties.

And I think, you know, the Nestlè experience has, I mean you go to any business school and that case study is one of the classic studies that every school teaches. It's going to be unique. I think as we really begin to deal with this, I always felt, if I could have had all the money that was spent on this issue on both sides, and somebody had given it to me, I could have set up four national public health programs that would have alleviated the death and disease that goes on in these really poor countries. I mean, the amount of money that was spent was tremendous, relative to what came out of it. And that money could have been used, had we all gotten together, and I say all, I mean, I put the monkey on the back of everybody that got involved in that issue. Their egos, their perception of who they were, their perception of what their politics were, all of that was involved. It had nothing to do with mothers and children. All that got involved in all of that, so that people could no longer see the issues.

And even in a big forum like the World Health Organization meetings, those, it got to the point where people who knew better wouldn't say anything because it wasn't worth it. I've had, I can't tell you how many leading authorities on infant nutrition and health I've talked to who said, “It isn't my fight, and I can't get into this issue because people you're dealing with aren't rational.” It's become something bigger than what the issue is, and you can't fight that. It's like fighting religion.

DN: And that problem is continuing?

TJ: It is on a smaller scale. I think that, I'm probably not the one to talk about it because I haven't been in this issue for a while, but I think the issue that Nestlè's dealing with now has to do with weaning foods, and their role in weaning foods. And it's a little bit of a, it's a little bit technical in the sense of when, and it's something again where the World Health Organization has had a hard time coming up with a set of directives. And again, Nestlè had arbitrarily said that weaning should begin the ages of four and six months, and UNICEF came out and said it should begin at six months. But we know that a lot of babies are already being fed at, some of

them, at two and three months. And that doesn't mean it's right, but that's what's happening. So if it is what's happening, there should be some instructions out there guiding these mothers on how to do it properly. So that's been an issue that's, you know, that we could spend the rest of the evening talking about that. But it's an issue that's still out there, and I think that's, I could be wrong, but I think that's the main issue that UNICEF still has with Nestlè over this whole issue.

DN: Well, this must have been a fascinating period for you as an immunologist, dealing with the issues of child, or infant immunology and then nutrition, malnutrition.

TJ: It was. Many times I look back and I think, "How in the world did I ever get myself into this position?" Because it did take up a good chunk of my time, my professional time, dealing with it. But it was, it was a fascinating thing. It was a fascinating study in dynamics of people and movements and how things get started, and how do you stop them once they get started. Nestlè was really the classic example of what not to do, and then I think ultimately was a good example of how to rectify a really bad situation.

And so from that standpoint, if I were a professor in business administration, I would think this would have been a fascinating. . . . I guess it has been; a lot of people have written about it. But the actual, how it ever gained, and I've talked to, over time you actually, you develop respect for certain members of your, the critics. And I've talked to some of the ones, and I asked them, I said, "How in the world?" And they said, well, you know, "We never dreamt that it would ever get this big when we started this, it just happened." The idea was actually perceived on the plane going from Geneva to New York, two of the activists were sitting together on the plane, and they decided to pick Nestlè because it wasn't an American company, and they had been so vocal about it. And that's what started it, and I don't think anybody dreamt that it would ever become the worldwide issue that it ultimately became.

DN: Well, thank you very much.

End of Interview