

Bill Goodwin

Singing in the House Chamber

Recollections of the frivolity on the House Floor before adjournment of the first session of the 84th Congress (1955–1957).

Interview recorded November 2, 2009

And in this case, the House was just sitting around waiting for the Senate to finish their business and send notice over to the House that, yes, we're going to adjourn *sine die*. They call it, adjourn *sine die*. So during that time, the House went into recess and we just had to wait. And they had to have a quorum there, so a good number of Members of the House were there. We just had to sit around and wait and so it became a light-hearted time. Members of Congress would get down there in the well of the House and tell their favorite joke, something like that. Or get down in the well of the House and sing. Or they even had a quartet, I remember, one time. Not that year. But Congressman Louis Rabaut and Congressman Percy Priest—Mr. Rabaut was from Michigan and Mr. Priest was from Tennessee—they liked to sing. They just enjoyed music, mainly barbershop quartet singing. I remember them doing that. Well, I was in the cloakroom working, and they sent word to me that Mr. Rabaut wanted to see me. And I said, "OK, where is he?" He says, "He's down there in the well." He was standing at the podium at the well, where they speak. That's unusual to have a Page boy come down there to the well of the House. Usually they're in their chair. I thought, "Are you sure?" "Yeah, Mr. Rabaut, right down there in the well. He wants you to come down there." So I went down to see him and he was there at the speaker's podium. He said, "Bill, I understand you sing." I said, "Yes, sir, I do." Mind you, there's a live mic going on. The gallery is full of visitors and the House was full of Members. I said, "Yes." He said, "I understand you sang at your graduation from Page School." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, can you sing for us again?" I said, "I . . . sure." So I agreed to sing. I sang "The Lord's Prayer" at the time. It was quite an honor to be asked like that. I sang "The Lord's Prayer" and it got very, very quiet because it had been a kind of boisterous audience. But it got very, very quiet and they all listened. And it was quite an honor—a very great honor. And I sang "The Lord's Prayer." Even afterward they applauded. And even the visitors in the gallery—and they're not normally allowed to applaud or cheer or anything like that, and they did. It was a great experience. And great. . . And then afterward, Mrs. Knutson, Coya Knutson from Minnesota, who was a music teacher in her pre-Member of Congress days, she wanted to sing with me and so. . . I don't remember the duet we did, but we sang a duet down there at the well of the House also. I sang, and she sang harmony, and we sang. Then, of course, afterward they dragged us out into the hallway to take photos of us. And the members of the press took photos of us.