

**Interview of Past President Edward B. Krinsky by George R. Fleischli**  
**September 30, 2023**

George: Why don't we start with some background facts about your childhood? When and where were you born and raised?

Ed: I was born in Brooklyn, New York and lived there until I went to college. I was the middle brother of three, each of us five years apart. As the middle child I was the troublemaker, which is ironic given my chosen career as a peacemaker. My parents valued and encouraged education and their expectation and mine was always that I would go to college. I did not know what I wanted to study, perhaps math, perhaps pre-med. I had not even heard of economics until I took coursework and then majored in it.

George: What caused you to be interested in labor relations--family background?

Ed: No one in my family was involved in labor relations, either in unions or management. They were doctors (father, uncle) and lawyers (grandfather).

My parents liked to take road trip vacations and they took the kids along. Whenever there were industrial plants giving public tours, we did that. I got to observe auto workers, brewery workers, candy makers, pretzel makers and bakery workers and saw what people did for a living and their working conditions. Growing up in New York City, I also occasionally observed picket lines and asked the family about what was going on. The New York Times was a daily fixture in our house and it frequently contained labor news.

There is one humorous story which illustrates my sophistication about such matters. On one trip we passed a statue of Samuel Gompers. Who was he? I asked. My father answered, I thought, "He was a famous label eater." "Why does someone eat labels?" I asked. Only then was the answer given slowly and with less of a New York accent, "He was a famous labor leader." Additional questions followed.

George: Then, what was it that ultimately sparked your interest in mediation and arbitration?

Ed: As an undergraduate at Antioch College I took a course in labor relations which included Lloyd Reynolds' Labor Relations book and elective labor history readings. The class also had the opportunity to attend a monthly Machinists Union meeting in Dayton.

What really inspired me was a book written by Cyrus Ching who became the first director of FMCS. His book, "Review and Reflection: A Half Century of Labor Relations" was full of his war stories as a mediator. As I read it I thought that I might be good at that kind of work.

As an undergraduate I learned that the Economics Department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison had a strong labor economics faculty. I applied and was accepted and started grad school in 1963. As very good luck would have it, on one of my first days there I met James (Jim) Stern who was on the faculty and also an Antioch alum. When he learned that I did not have financial

support he invited me to be his Research Assistant, which supported me for my first two years there. In addition to Jim there were a number of other professors with strong interests in labor relations: David Johnson, Gerald Somers, Jack Barbash, Reed Tripp, Everett Kassalow and Glen Cain. In my third year I was fortunate enough to be the Teaching Assistant for Everett Kassalow's Labor Problems course.

I eventually completed a Ph.D, but I wrestled with whether to go to Law School. I chose Law as my Ph.D. minor. I was able to take Nathan Feinsinger's labor law course and an arbitration seminar co-taught by Jim Stern and Abner Brodie.

I had another stroke of good fortune during my third year. I was taking a course in the new subject of public sector bargaining. It was co-taught by Dave Johnson and Arvid Anderson. During the course Arvid, who was a Commissioner of the Wisconsin Employment Relations Board, announced that the WERB had staff openings for mediators. I applied and became a staff member in summer 1966. At the same time I was getting a further education in public sector collective bargaining while doing research for my Ph.D. thesis, which was an analysis of the Fact Finding procedure, which was being used in Wisconsin and several other states.

George: When/how did you begin your career as an arbitrator?

Ed: My career began at the WERB [now WERC]. The WERB's functions included all aspects of labor relations and labor dispute settlement in both the private and public sectors: determining collective bargaining units; conducting representation elections; providing mediation and arbitration by staff members; and hearing and deciding unfair labor practice allegations.

The agency was unique in that it was willing to hire untrained, inexperienced staff members with Masters or Law degrees, and provide them with the necessary training. There were initial ride-alongs with veteran staff members, but in short order new staff members were assigned their own cases. Every day was a new learning experience. Upon returning to the office there was the opportunity to discuss cases with colleagues and to learn how to overcome problems. Each morning there was a mandatory coffee break which was akin to a labor relations seminar.

Labor and management parties could get mediators and arbitrators from the WERB for their cases at no cost. As a result, I and many of my colleagues got lots of experience in a short time. Thus, when I left the agency in 1970 I had issued more than 40 arbitration decisions and thus had established myself as an acceptable arbitrator in the Wisconsin labor-management community, at the young age of 29.

George: Why did you leave your job at the WERB?

Ed: In August, 1970 I was offered a position at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Just prior to that there had been a strike by the Teaching Assistants Association, an unaffiliated union of teaching assistants, which had caused major disruptions in the College of Letters and Science. The strike ended when Chancellor Edwin Young (himself a labor economist) agreed to voluntarily recognize the TAA and to bargain with it. Ed Young, Jim Stern and perhaps others believed that

I would be an ideal person to head the University's bargaining team since I had experience with mediation and arbitration, had studied labor relations, had a PhD which would stand me in good stead with the faculty, and I had been a Teaching Assistant.

I accepted the position after doing some negotiation of my own. I took an 80%-time position (later reduced to 60%) to do the TAA work and teach one course, while enabling me to use 20% time for my arbitration practice. The other reason for taking the job was that it enabled me to stay in Madison where I had a wife and young child, and I would no longer be required to spend many nights a week going around the State as a mediator.

I should note that my role at the University served to further increase my knowledge of collective bargaining and arbitration.. In addition to the TAA, I was involved in bargaining with student labor unions in the residence halls and the Memorial Union. With the TAA I led the University's bargaining team of faculty and administrative members, which gave me great insight into what is involved in developing bargaining proposals acceptable to diverse managerial interests. I also presented grievance arbitration cases which gave me insight into what preparation and presentation of arbitrations entailed.

George: What led you to becoming a successful arbitrator?

Ed: Clearly the WERB experience launched my career. The agency and its staff were very well respected by the labor-management community. As all good arbitrators know, the other ingredients involved careful writing and decision-making while maintaining neutrality and integrity. Having gained that level of acceptance, what followed was applying and being accepted to FMCS and AAA panels, and benefitting from the ever expanding network of attorneys and representatives who consulted with one another about which arbitrators they deemed to be acceptable.

George: When did you learn about the NAA, and what led you to apply?

Ed: I learned about the Academy while I was in graduate school. Professors Stern, Somers and Johnson were Academy members in the Economics Department, as were Feinsinger and Brodie in the Law School. At the WERB, Chairman Morris Slavney and Commissioners Arvid Anderson and Zel Rice were members as well as staff member Neil Gundermann. Everything that I heard about the Academy and its programs led me to want to apply. I applied in 1970 and was accepted by the Membership Committee, but was rejected by the Board of Governors because I had run afoul of the NAA's new purity rule, which no longer allowed new members to also serve as advocates. When I left the University in 1976 and was no longer an advocate, I reapplied to the Academy and was admitted to membership.

George: How did you become an NAA officer?

Ed: As I said previously, when I joined the NAA I knew quite a few members including some in the leadership. They recommended me for committee assignments. Along the way I became national Program Chair and CPRG Chair and was elected to the BOG and then a Vice President before ultimately being elected President.

George: Your service history reflects that you completed numerous assignments for the Academy. Which ones did you find to be the most enjoyable, difficult, frustrating, or rewarding?

Ed: I found all of my assignments rewarding, and especially so when other officers and members were pleased with what I had done. I was able to get to know many of the committee members in ways that I had not known them previously, and I benefitted from their many constructive observations and suggestions about how to proceed.

The most difficult assignment was the Chairmanship of the CPRG. In that role I received complaints about the conduct of members. I had to investigate the complaints and determine what needed to be done. This required diplomacy and on occasion the need to deal with the anger or frustration of members over what had been alleged.

George: I understand there were special circumstance leading up to your tenure as President. Why don't you describe those circumstances?

Ed: I was nominated to be President-elect. David Peterson was nominated to be President. Sadly, David died before either of us took office. I then was named to the Presidency. Not only did I lose a good friend, but I lost the opportunity to work with David and observe him in his role as President for a year before taking office. Fortunately, I received invaluable guidance from Secretary-Treasurer Walt DeTreu, who had been working closely with David, and from Bill McKee who David had designated as his Program Chair. Walt was especially helpful as I went about the business of appointing Committee Chairs and dealing with the numerous issues which arose during my Presidency.

George: In your opinion, what are the most important qualification(s) needed to become a successful president of the Academy?

- Being a good listener
- Ability to achieve consensus among the Executive Committee members
- Having been a participant in Academy governance over many years
- Gaining the respect and friendship of many members whose support you can count on.
- Being sensitive to the issues which members feel strongly about.

George: What about your NAA membership has been most meaningful to you?

Ed: Several things.

I became a better arbitrator as a result of absorbing many papers and discussions presented at NAA meetings, and having continued discussions with other members about these topics.

I valued, and still do, a great many friendships with colleagues, and I looked forward to socializing with them at meetings and having discussions with them about arbitration cases.

I valued my contribution to the Academy and doing what I could to maintain its reputation as the quality standard bearer in the labor-management arbitration field.

George: Thanks Ed. You made my job easy. Consistent with your own advice and reputation, you are a good listener. You listened to my questions and offered straightforward responses, with sufficient detail to clearly explain the response. You demonstrate why you are such an effective arbitrator and mediator.

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