

Jump Shot Transcribes--John Christgau 2013 / 2014

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01:47:03:11 - (Interviewer) Thanks for sitting down with us. This is so exciting to finally meet you. I think it was a year and a half ago maybe?

01:47:11:02 - (John) About a year

01:47:14:01 - (Interviewer) It was in the summer of 2012 when I first emailed you and this has been a long time coming but we finally made it happen.

01:47:24:12 - (John) Well I understand why given all your other projects. You have to kind of pick away at this.

01:47:39:02 - (Interviewer) Would you mind saying who you are and what you do as a living or a profession, or what your passions are?

01:47:47:12 - (John) Sure. My name is John Christgau. I'm a retired teacher, and a writer. Been writing most of my life, and in the last ten or fifteen years since I've retired from teaching, those have been the most productive years... And I intend to keep going for another ten or twenty years.

01:48:13:06 - (Interviewer) What type of books do you write?

01:48:16:15 - (John) I wrote books about just about any subject that catches my imagination. My friends tell me, 'John, you're schizophrenic, you never stay in the same subject. You're all over the place. You have attention deficit disorder.' Because I've written about aviation, World War II, the Civil War, basketball, horse racing.. So, when I jump around like that, it's difficult to find an audience that knows me and knows of some specific book or area of the books that I like. So, for each new book I have to earn a new audience because the subject is always a different one-with the one exception, basketball. I've written about that two or three times. So my audience for basketball and the people who love basketball books, they know and are attentive to new books that come out from me.

01:49:24:03 - (Interviewer) What is it about the game of basketball that keeps you coming back to it?

01:49:29:07 - (John) That's a mystery. I don't know what it is about the game. I know for me, it's very personal. As a kid, I participated in all sports. Baseball, football, track, basketball. None of them presented to me the notion of knowing before something happens that it's going to happen, and for me that was-I'm left handed. And I would shoot a jump shot, and there are moments you know when it rolls off the tip of your fingers, it's good. And you see that today if you watch players

in the NBA. They crank off a jump shot, and they're already backing up because they know it's good. And that is as close as I can come to the mystical psychological reality of precognition. You know something is gonna happen before it happens. For me that's the allure of basketball, on a playing level. On a spectator level my interest is a little sketchy. I don't like the pros too much these days. College basketball is what I love, and high school basketball, and girls' basketball I've become very fond of. So, what the attachment of that is, is that it's a game that is increasingly fast and furious and it features jump shots, all of which I love.

01:51:21:08 - (Interviewer) So tell me why did you decide to take this journey to discover who was the originator of the jump shot or where it began, the origin of it?

01:51:33:17 - (John) My father was a baseball player for the University of Minnesota, and he had absolute prime seats in Williams Arena in Minneapolis, for U of M basketball games. They called it the Old Barn. Huge, it seated 18 to 20,000 people. And, as a kid, I was a basketball player in Minneapolis. And subject to the absolute restrictions of coaches you never leave the floor. You stay in the floor and you shoot with two hands. And that was such a cardinal rule that if you had any intention of leaping or jumping except for rebounds, the coach would sit you down and not play you. Well one night my father took me to see a University of Minnesota game. I think it was versus Indiana. 18,000 people in the audience. Perfect seats. I was, I think probably a Freshman or Sophomore in high school and totally victim of staying floor bound in a basketball game. The University of Minnesota team had a player at that time named Myer "Whitey" Skoog. And he had flaming white hair. Absolutely impassive face, he never changed his facial expression. And he would come down the floor and the college fans would start chanting, "Fire Myer, Fire Myer!" He would leap in the air, off the dribble, and kick his legs, bend his legs and then kick them and then release his jump shot. Well I had never seen anybody in basketball do that, and the curiosity of the shot and the excitement of it. This was the middle of winter. The next night I was at my garage basket in five feet of snow trying to learn to shoot a jump shot. And in the coming weeks, when I experimented with it at my high school, my coach told me, "Whatcha doing? You can't do that. You stay on the floor!" Well it was such an attractive shot, and such an exciting shot, that I defied him, and as a consequence sat on the bench. But at some point in my life I realized, particularly in the last twenty or thirty years, that the jump shot is what basketball is all about. And about 1995 or '96 I was looking for a new book subject and I said, "Who were the first jump shooters? Was it Myer "Whitey" Skoog? Or was it somebody before him?" And so I set out on the journey to find out who was or who were the first jump shooters. And that's what the origins for me what my interest in it was.

01:55:04:17 - (Interviewer) So, what did that journey look like? How long did it take? How far did you have to go? Who did you meet along the way?

01:55:15:00 - (John) The journey took a year. I went to, by my count, 12 states from North Carolina to Nevada to Arizona to Washington. I interviewed probably 100 people. And what I tried to do was say to myself, "there's probably no way I can find out absolutely who was the first. But I can find out who the very first probably were, in various regions of the country." And I started in

Minnesota because no one in Minnesota had seen the jump shot until Whitey Skoog shot his. And that was my starting point. And that was, I discovered after I found Whitey who was my boyhood hero, it was like sitting having an audience with God to sit down with Whitey Skoog and have him talk about where he discovered his jump shot in a high school gym in Bemige Minnesota in 1942 I think, maybe '43. And then I began to talk to people from various parts of the country who had basketball coaching experience or just basketball histories. And they told me, "in this area the first jump shooter I saw was such-and-such." And the reason it was restricted to areas is because there wasn't the media connection in those days that brought the whole world together around basketball. Basketball was very secular.. The West, the Northwest, the Midwest, the South, the Southeast, the West, the Northwest. So I focused on each of those areas and tried to find in each area a historian, elderly usually, who would know something about the history of that area. And my first question always to them was who was the first jump shooter you saw? And all of them were convinced that they had a candidate for the first jump shooter. And, as it turned out, I kept working back in time... '42, '41, '39, '38, '37, and I finally got to 1934, and that was two players: Kenny Sailors, and Belus Smalley. And they were as far back as I could go, and as far back as any of my advisors or interviewees could go in finding out who might have been the first jump shooter. Kenny Sailors himself says, "I don't know if I'm the first jump shooter. Who knows? Who will ever know?" But my interview experience was he's as close as I could come to the very first guy, the pioneer jump shooter.

01:58:38:00 - (Interviewer) We're going dive into Kenny in a little bit. We're going to talk more about the book. What were some of the challenges you found along the way?

01:59:03:00 - (John) I think the challenges was finding these guys. First of all, somebody would tell me... Kurt Gaudy told me over the phone: "Well the first jump shooter clearly was jumping Johnny Adams from Arkansas." well, I spent 2 months looking for him and found out he had died about 20 years ago. But still I located by phone, all of his relatives and his brother who had played with him at the University of Arkansas. So they gave me information on 'Jumping Johnny Adams'. Well Joe Folks was also another early jump shooter, and he had been murdered in an incident in Kentucky in the 1960s. So for him I went back to Kentucky and found, with the help of a lawyer in Kentucky, whose now a Kentucky Supreme Court judge. That circuit judge at the time in Kentucky was a basketball historian who lived in Kuttawa, which was Joe Folks's home. And the judge's name was Bill Cunningham, and he connected me to all of Joe Folks's high school teammates. And so I was able to put together his story, so for each person, the difficulty was not just finding the person but finding people that surrounded that person and who were spectators and onlookers of the sport who could verify the kind of jump shot this guy had. Because there were a lot of dead ends, people told me... my own college basketball coach when I asked him, because this was West Coast, I said "Who was the first jump shooter you ever saw?". My coach's name was Paul Rundell, magnificent coach and he knew basketball up and down, he said "Awe that's easy, that's Hank Lewsetti at Stanford". I was a little skeptical because I had never, from the other sources I'd gone to no one has mentioned Lewsetti. Well he lived in Burlingame, which is a community just five miles north of here. You guys probably went through it on the way down here. And he was about 82 or 83 and I called him saying, "Mr. Lewsetti, my

name is John Christgau, I'm working on a story on the origins of the jump shot. I'm told by my college coach that you were the first jump shooter ever.". And he was absolutely quick to say, "I was not, I didn't have a jump shot! I had a running one hander, and that's what I'm credited for inventing. But I never had a jump shot.", and those kinds of dead ends meant okay so this guy doesn't 'fit the bill' of being an early jump shooter. So I had to keep going back to my area sources, to say "this guy was reputed to be a jump shooter but he's not, who else can you tell me?". And then, it meant following up with relatives, observers and friends that 'yes in fact' or pictures, news stories that he was in fact a jump shooter. Those were the most difficult challenges, the easiest part of it was the travel, and the exciting part. Travel in search of any story, is thrilling. It's in some ways, more thrilling that the actual writing of the story. And the search for people is thrilling, makes you feel a bit like a detective. And so, the challenge for finding people, tracking them down, and sitting down with them, that was the easiest part of it all because in all cases, those who were still alive they were just eager to talk about basketball, basketball history. And all of them were humble, all of them were not inclined to see themselves as pioneers of any kind. That was my interpretation once I talked to all of them. These guys were ALL pioneers, they all did something to basketball. Which was have the courage to leave the floor and shoot. In absolute opposition to what basketball coaches were telling them at that time. They became heroes to me and they didn't want to take credit for that, but I did.

02:04:36:00 - (Interviewer) Do you remember what some of these guys jump shots were like? Can you describe what Belis Smalley's was or Johnny Adams?

02:05:02:00 - (John) Yes I can and one of the reasons I can is because I saw maybe 5 or 6 of them play. I saw 'Whitey' Skoog, I saw Joe Folks when he was playing the warriors and the old Minneapolis Lakers. I saw Bud Palmer played with the New York Knicks against the Minneapolis Lakers. Saw Kenny Sailors play in the old Minneapolis auditorium, he hated Minnesota. It was cold and he didn't like it at all. I saw Belis Smalley playing with the St. Louis bombers, so I saw them all. And I saw them executing jump shots, that I had first seen 'Whitey' Skoog execute. And there were, for me, made a distinct mark in my mind, these guys have the same shot that 'Whitey' Skoog had. So eventually when I found them and interviewed them, I had my own experience to draw on, with respect to verify whether or not they did have a jump shot. And they were all, different. Johnny Adams who learned to play in a small gym in Arkansas with a low ceiling, had a ceiling about as high as this one, he had a jump shot that was at best 'bizarre'. He jumped in the air and shot with two hands, but because the ceiling was so low he felt like he had to put a top spin to make the trajectory go like this (top to bottom). And not hit the ceiling and still go in the basket, well sports writers who wrote about it, remarked it "this is the only guy in basketball who has an absolutely flat shot". Belis Smalley's jump shot, there's pictures of it, one of them is on my book. He always jumped with his body not squared up to the basket, and then he would twist in the air and shoot. Joe Folks didn't jump off both feet, he jumped off one foot, but got himself straight up in the air and then shot his jump shot. A lot of people said at the time, and a lot of people still say today who film of Joe Folks, they say "well that wasn't really a pure jump shot". Well it wasn't, probably the purest of the first jump shots was Kenny Sailors who squared himself to the basket, jumped straight up, and then shot with one hand. And that's why I became,

after I talked to a lot of different people who had seen jump shots and jump shooters, that's why I became convinced that he was surely one the earliest shooters of what we call a pure jump shot today.

02:08:04:00 - (Interviewer) How would you describe a jump shot?

02:08:06:00 - (John) Oh boy.

02:08:07:00 - (Interviewer) Because Kenny will say, "look at a layup, your feet leave the floor there, is that considered a jump shot?" There's many different ways people would say what a jump shot is.

02:08:22:00 - (John) I would describe the pure jump shot of today this way. You're dribbling, you stop, you plant both feet, you're at range 10-15-30 feet, today even longer. In the NBA, 32-33 feet. You go straight up, you're squared up to the basket. You put the ball on your head, and one hand drops off, the release is entirely one hand. That's the pure jump shot of today. I don't think any of the players in my book, those 8 men who shook the world of basketball. I don't think any of them had a jump shot as pure as that. Kenny probably came the closest, the others all had variations of it. So it was all something that subsequent players saw, like I did, admired and improvised on or improved upon. For instance, 'Whitey' Skoog, that 'leg kick' it made absolutely no basketball sense. You're up there in the air, you're trying to hold your body still and he kicks his legs which makes his whole body twitch and quiver, how can he take a shot? It made no sense whatsoever. And he soon recognized that, he told me, and by the time he was a Minneapolis Laker his legs hung perfectly straight. Well as a high school kid trying to imitate him, I tried first to kick my legs for the jump shot, and you know, slammed it off the backboard, drilled it into the floor. I had no accuracy and I said "well I'm trying to do two things at once", I'm trying to coordinate the movement of my legs to obey with the movement of my arms and that's like doing this (rubs stomach and pats head). You can't do both, cut out one. So I said I'll let my legs hang straight. And that made me a more accurate jump shooter, I know it made 'Whitey' Skoog and absolutely perfect jump shooter by the time reached the Minneapolis Lakers. And all jump shooters you see today, the very very best of them, they all have that same shot. Squared up to the basket, straight up, some of them of course like Michael Jordan can fall away and still shoot it. But it's essentially among all of them, the very same shot.

02:11:02:00 - (Interviewer) Why were people so against, the stigma against the jump shot was so horrendous. I mean people were benched because of it. People were not taught to leave the floor. Why was that?

02:11:15:00 - (John) It was the game itself. It was a game that seemed to favor passing and dribbling to some extent. Movement of people on the floor and passing of the ball on the floor. And I don't recall exactly what coach told me this, or maybe it was one of the 8 jump shooters, that he had been told by his coach, "don't ever jump in the air, because once you get up in the air you've foreclosed every other opportunity. You gotta do things at leisure.". And it was a leisurely

game in those days, there was no shot clock people took time going up and down the court. But if you leaped up in the air, suddenly it was a game of haste and promptness, you had to pass or shoot before you came back down. And coaches said "no can think fast enough to do those things". It's a game that has to be controlled and the movement of players has to be rigid and careful. And it was tough to get away from that and it was only the pioneer players who had the courage to say, this is not the way the game should go, the game should be faster, deliberate, have more improvisation to it. And as a consequence, I'm going to experiment with shots myself other than those that originated with my feet planted on the floor.

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02:32:35:00 - (Interviewer) We are talking about the book and the different types of shots, and how you introduced to the jump shot originally and who were some of the other pioneers along the journey, how did meet Kenny? Where did you know his story?

02:32:50:00 - (John) On that same phone interview I had with Hank Lewsetti, he abused me of any idea that he might of had a jump shot. I said "who do you think was the first jump shooter and who did you see?" He said that's easy, "That was Kenny Sailors.". And I had seen Kenny Sailors and knew him, I'd see him as a player and knew him and knew he was a very good NBA player. When I interviewed Kurt Gaudy over the phone, he put me on Jumping Johnny Adams but said, "you also should check out Kenny Sailors.". So when you get verification from 2 authoritative sources, it's worth pursuing. So I called Kenny, I'm exactly sure how I tracked him down... Oh I do remember! There's a guy in Portland, Oregon who keeps a file of the NBL. A lot of people don't know that the precursor of the NBA was the National Basketball League. Which got swallowed by the BAA or the two of them combined. The NBL had the players and the BAA had the stadiums, and the two combined. So you had the BAA and that became the NBA. Well when I began to find some of these player who could tell me some of the history of basketball and jump shooters. I found a guy in Portland, Oregon whose name I don't recall right now but had a rolodex file on all NBL and BAA players. And he told me, "well Kenny Sailors lives in Wickenburg, Arizona". So I called him, he had his phone number this guy in Oregon. And I said, "my name is John Christgau, I'm working on a book on the origins of the jump shot. The trail leads to you from numerous sources. I'd like to come down, spend a day with you and interview you.". And he said with his typical Wyoming accent, "Well ya'll come!", and I was absolutely thrilled to be able to go in a car in Phoenix and drive to Wickenburg which is an hour out, and find his house and sit down with him, interview him and his 6'5" brother 'Bud', and Kenny's wife Boke. That was probably half way through tracking down players. But when he gave the origins of his first jump shot at that windmill in Hillsdale, Wyoming I just knew immediately 'I'm probably not going to get any farther back than this'. And subsequently, as I've told you, people have written me saying, "Well why didn't you talk to my uncle Rupert, he had a jump shot in 1884, 5 years before they invented the game of basketball", well some of them were very interesting leads and probably were possible early jump shooters. I just was content myself that nobody is going to have as pure a jump shot as Kenny Sailors' or a story of it as fascinating to tell as Kenny Sailors'.

02:37:50:00 - (Interviewer) I'd love to hear from you, just because you did such a great job crafting that story, could you describe the first shot that he did [Kenny Sailors] on the farm?

02:38:07:00 - (John) The farm itself was about 120-130 acres and it was in the middle of nowhere. South of Hillsdale, Wyoming. With a barn, a farmhouse, a windmill, a couple other buildings and it was about 1932 or 33 that Bud Sailors who was 6 foot 5 and a star player for the Hillsdale high school team, went to his coach and said "We want to put a basket on the windmill and we want to practice", my little brother Kenny and I. Kenny being 5'5", almost a foot shorter than his brother. The coach was reluctant because basketballs in those days were leather and they were clumsy artificial and you couldn't bounce them on gravel for more than 6 times before they began to disintegrate. But the coach reluctantly gave them a ball, they hammered a fashioned a basket to the windmill that had a little over hang to it. And they put a steel rim on it, no net, and they began to play. And Kenny's experience was, he was a dribbler, he was a jackrabbit dribbler, that's how they characterized him in the Hillsdale gym. They could hit the ball and he could dribble forever, nobody to take it away from him. But when he played against his brother who was a foot taller, all that dribbling meant nothing. His brother just stood there and waited, and when Kenny tried to come in and get a shot, "Fwham!" he just stuffed it right back down his throat. And at some point, Kenny said "I got to figure out a way to get up and get over my brother's outstretched arms". And it was one afternoon in the hot day in the sun in Wyoming, that Kenny leaped into the air and cranked up a jump shot that Bud could not block. And Kenny landed and said, "Oh my, there's a shot I've got to work on". Which he then did, but that was in May, I believe of 1934. From there it became one, because he was always a small player, it became on that he knew he had to rely on over taller players to get the shot off. And basketball at that time was in transition from small, quick players to storks, big guys. George Michat and the Minneapolis Lakers at 6'10". Well you couldn't get inside and get a shot over him so you go outside and they had these leisurely two hand set shots. But you were going against a guy who was your height, and you were both on the floor, so you didn't have any trouble getting that shot off. But if you had somebody defending you who was taller, as Kenny did, then you couldn't do this leisurely two hand shot because, "Bam!" you'd get that slapped down your throat. And for Kenny the answer was, for a lot of small men like him, the answer was for in a game where taller and taller players were becoming the rule, the answer was leap in the air and shoot. And if you went up before the defender, than you could go up against anybody of any height and get the shot off. And that's what Kenny discovered on May of 1934 on a farm with a windmill basket in Hillsdale, Wyoming.

02:42:39:00 - (Interviewer) What was your time like with Kenny when you got in Arizona?

02:42:45:00 - (John) How much time did we spend together? We spent about the whole day together got there early in the morning took me an hour to drive to Wickenburg. I think Bud was already there or shortly after arrived he came because Kenny had told me "you want to talk to Bud my brother because he also knows the history of the first jump shot". Both of them showed up and we interviewed all morning then took a break because I like to give my subjects a break.

We went out to a beautiful Chinese dinner and then came back and continued the interview and Kenny's wife Boke then joined in and contributed some really interesting anecdotes that I eventually used in my book. That gave me not just who he was as a basketball player but also who he was in his character. And it struck a common note to all players, at that time, I had interviewed. And that common note was this, several of them had come from single parent homes, several of them had come from very strict religious backgrounds and training. Crobell Sailors was very strict religiously. All of them had come from communities where you were expected to behave. And the idea that you could be creative and independent, you had to declare that, every child has to declare that in some way. You can conform only so much but part of you has to say, I want to be a little different than something everybody else wanted me to be. Well that independent streak was in 6 or 7 of my jump shooter pioneers. And I think that was the emotional and psychological innovation that made them say to their coaches, "I'm defying you, I'm shooting a jump shot regardless what what you think I ought to be doing". Because that's who I am, I'm creative and I'm independent, and I'm going to do it my way.

02:45:46:00 - (Interviewer) What was the relationship like between Bud and Kenny, because I never had a chance to meet Bud he passed away...

02:45:57:00 - (John) Yeah he did, it was a sweet relationship. I have an older brother who is now gone, who was about the same age difference between me and my older brother, and the height difference as kids was about the same. My older brother was the closest person in my life, and my observations at the relationship between Kenny and Bud is that they were just two very close brothers. And sibling rivalry is often an issue in any brother-brother, brother-sister relationship, I saw none of that. Over and over Kenny told me, "Bud was my hero as a young kid because he was the star of the Hillsdale high school team, took 'em to the state championships. He was my hero". My question was "weren't you jealous that he had all that height and you were just a little guy", he said "No! I admired him and wanted to pursue basketball with as much enthusiasm as he did, I could see what it meant for him and his life and I wanted it to be the same in my life". And there wasn't a moment that whole time that I didn't sense a deep admiration between both of them. Bud for what Kenny had achieved, and Kenny for the role model Bud had been for him as a kid growing up.

02:47:44:00 - (Interviewer) In what amount, Boke, what was she like because I never got to meet her.

02:47:50:00 - (John) She was just a very wonderful lady, completely wedded to basketball and to Kenny. They were a wonderful couple, she loved everything he loved. Including hunting and fishing, and would accompany him on fishing trips and I already told the story but it's worth repeating. The two of them early on in their courtship for a fishing trip in Wyoming and she deliberately went up river for him because didn't want any, in her words, any 'hanky panky' going on while they were out in the wilderness. That kind of genuine, honest endearing relationship, I observed it when I interviewed them and they probably were at that time going on over 50 years of marriage. And that's a rare commodity in this world, people don't stay married, they don't stay



close to each other and families dissolve. So for me to sit there and see all the good family dynamics go on between Boke and Kenny, and Kenny and Bud, that was an inspiration to me.

02:49:22:00 - (Interviewer) I wish I could've met all of them, they were wonderful people.

02:49:26:00 - (John) They were wonderful.

02:49:30:00 - (Interviewer) My favorite scene of the movie Kenny talking about Boke and the entire short that I have, so I'm looking forward to sharing that with you.

02:49:41:00 - (John) Will I cry watching it?

02:49:55:00 - (Interviewer) Talking about Kenny's character, is there anything that you'd like to add to that? Anything specific?

02:50:07:00 - (John) I think probably, the one thing I would add is that he has the quality of patience, that I found admirable. And in his basketball life, that patience exhibited in the slow take hold that his took, in the BAA and then the NBA. Initially with Cleveland, they didn't respond to him, they didn't like his game. They said, you can't dribble, do all that and jump. And he sat on the bench. But he was patient and eventually when he confronted the manager he was told to continue to be patient, things are going to change, you'll get an opportunity. Well that was a mark of his character, he was patient. Where did that come from? My judgement was from hunting and fishing, you can't be a hunter and be impatient, you just can't be. Nor can you be a farmer, which in effect he was for the first 20 years of his life and be impatient. Things take time, crops take a whole season to grow, nothing gets done in a matter of days. So that quality of patience was remarkable as his independence as well as remarkable as his extraordinary basketball talent.

02:52:00:00 - (Interviewer) For soundbytes sake, could you say "Boke was amazing?", because you said she was amazing, just so we have some context when you're referring to 'she'.

02:52:21:00 - (John) Boke was amazing because she was so genuinely in love with Kenny. Not because he was genuinely in love with her, it was because she saw in things in him that regardless of who he loved, that was her attraction. And I'm sure, not just because he was a good looking guy as a young man, he at one point in my interview told me, he told me some story about some NBA contacts when he characterized some other player saying, "Awe he was ugly, he wasn't as good looking as I was". Kenny was a good looking, strapping guy and he would've caught the eye of any young woman, and regardless if she felt like he would reciprocate, she loved who he was and a quality of that, that's what makes for a good marriage. You don't love somebody just because they love you back, you love somebody because you find something in their character that is absolutely attractive and is indefinable, and you don't find it anyplace else in your life.

02:53:59:00 - (Interviewer) Going back to the book, why did you end at 8 people? What mark did you reach where you went, okay I'm not going any further with this.

02:54:13:00 - (John) I've never been asked that, and it's a mark what a good interviewer you are to ask me. And I'm thinking on my feet, I think probably part of the answer is what I've already given you is that I can't possibly work any farther back than Kenny Sailors in 1934. And even if I can, nobody's story is going to be more exciting than his. Or Belis Smallie's who discovered his jump shot in an abandoned railroad depot in North Carolina. Those two stories, and I found Belis Smallie's brother also who played with him and gave me back-up stories of what player Belis was and how he could jump and how they had learned to jump by reaching up to touch, they were both farm boys, by reaching up to touch a limb from a tree that was 8 or 9 feet over their head. I said I can't find 2 more interesting stories than those, I can't find a better story than Bud Palmer, whose father was a Hollywood actor. I can't a better story, or a more dramatic one, or a more tragic one than the Joe Folks story. I find a better story than Mouse Gonzalez, a mere midget who distinguished himself in basketball and who happened to live no more than an hour and a half from me. So when you begin to tell yourself, I can't find anybody better to tell a story than these people, you say it's over. There may be somebody out there, but that's fine let somebody else find him, I'm done. And there was part of me that said, these guys are all elderly, they're all not going be here long. And I would at least like to get the story to those that are still alive, that was 6 of them. I'd like to get the story published so they can see that somebody is recognizing the contribution they made to the game. And I was kind of rushing to meet that deadline also. And I missed it by this much in one case. Davig Minor, who somebody put me on who said he was the first black jump shooter they'd seen anywhere or jump shooter at all in the Midwest. Playing for high school in Gary, Indiana, I never met him personally we talked only over the phone, and in all of those conversations, must of been 20 of them. We became close as I've ever to been to anybody on the phone, he was just a wonderful, generous, funny, good storytelling type of guy. Which was full of all kinds of adventure, and was raised by his two aunts compelling story. And I called him one night, not long before the book was published and I said Kenny, I need your approval to put your story in my book, and I had mailed him the form, all he had to do was sign it and drop it in a mailbox. And he said John, I'm heading straight out to put it in a mailbox, we talked a little longer, hung up, put the letter in the mailbox and dropped dead. That was the end of Davig Minor, and he never knew the legend he was in the Midwest and is in basketball. And I regret that, I wish I would've beaten that deadline, I did beat it for the others. Whitey Skoog I think knows how much he meant to the game. Kenny Sailor surely does. Belus Smallie, who is now also gone, he knew. Bud Palmer knew. Mouse Gonzalez who is still alive but fading a bit, he knows. So I met the measure who they were and what their position was in basketball, in all but three or four of the cases. And Davig was a tragic case of not being able to meet it, just missing it.

02:59:29:00 - (Interviewer) It's fascinating that you have that perspective that it's your responsibility that these guys are heard of.

02:59:38:00 - (John) It is my responsibility and that should be deep within the heart of every

documentarian and a writer who chooses a non-fiction subject or a person to focus on. It's your responsibility to take this story to the large audience that it deserves, these guys shouldn't have to suffer anonymity their entire life and even in death not be recognized. So John your job is to write their story, tell it well, and bring it to a larger audience. And I feel that with every book I undertake.

03:00:27:00 - (Interviewer) Real quick, earlier you said Davig go to your mailbox, but you said Kenny go to your mailbox. Can you correct that?

02:44:40:00 - (John) Yes. After I had the phone conversation with Davig, to get him to put the letter in the mailbox, that would give me approval to use his story. He was very excited, he said "ah I'm gonna be in a book! I'm gonna be in a book! I can't wait to tell my family, I'll go straight out and put the letter in the mailbox". And Davig went out of his house in Gary I believe, when to the mailbox, put the letter in the mailbox and dropped dead.

03:01:27:00 - (Interviewer, 29:12) What a wild story.

03:01:32:00 - (John) When I found out, his son called me and it just destroyed me.

03:01:37:00 - (Interviewer) Everytime I get a phone call from a Wyoming area code, I'm always worried that that's going to be the phone call.

03:01:46:00 - (John) Well if you get that make sure you let me know.

03:01:50:00 - (Interviewer) Absolutely, we've talked briefly about it but if there were any other stories on the controversy of who was the first, if it was met with hostility were people offended, you met with hate letters, is there any kind of funny story to share?

03:02:17:00 - (John) No, not hate letters. True basketball fans are too much in love with the game of basketball to harbor hate. So I don't think I ever had a letter than was anything but advisory. And I received one from the family of a guy in the Midwest named Cooper, and I think the Basketball Hall of Fame credits him for being the first jump shooter from 1928 or 1930 maybe. One of their family sent me a letter, I think it was the nephews sent me a letter saying, how come you didn't look into my uncle, he sent me some clippings, this is his story, acknowledge him. Then he sent me some local news clippings that also credited this guy, Cooper with having been the first jump shooter. And I gave the response that I've given a 100 times since then, I wasn't looking for the absolute very first, I was looking for the pioneers. In the acknowledgments of my book, in the prelude to my book I say that. And Kenny Sailors himself says, "who's gonna ever know who the first jump shooter was", and I certainly don't claim to have found him, someone else might and maybe it was Cooper. And there are other people who sent me funny letters, with the story with people with odd names, 'you should've seen my uncle Rupert play in Burning Hole, Nebraska. He had a jump shot in 1912.', well unless I could get verification. None of those calls came during the book, so I was well beyond the point I could

amend the book and include these people. People had read the book and said "well I know somebody who was before these guys Christgau talks about, I better call him and tell him he missed the real story", well maybe I did. But I think the story I told of the eight men were the first I could find in various areas of the country. I think in each case, those stories are compelling.

03:05:10:00 - (Interviewer 32:55) Agreed. How significant is the jump shot in the game of basketball?

03:05:29:00 - (John 33:10) The significance of the jump shot in my lifetime is the most significant thing. And I started playing basketball when i was 5 years old in 1935, 1939 and '40. At that time, i believe at that time, you center jumped in every basket. There were no 10 second rules, no 3 second rules, no backcourt violations. The game was slow and tedious, and the changes to speed up the game to something where there were 3 second shot zones and restrictions against big men in the key and the widening of the lane. Those things were important changes that keep the game of basketball competitive. So that the tall men didn't absolutely dominant it, the short men has been pretty much eliminated from the game but it hasn't been that the 7-foot giant can completely dominant the way John Otton did with AshKash in the 1950s or George Mikan did in the 1950s. It's become a game where the premier shot, it makes a difference in the game and almost every player has. Power forward, center, guard whoever, it's become a game where the jump shot allows you to get a shot off against a player who can leave the floor almost as quickly as you do. The defensive reactions in the good old days, was if a guy went up you stood and watched him go up and then you made up your mind, well I better leap too or there was no hope of blocking it. Now, all of the good defenders in this country have absolute trigger springs in their feet. They rise in a split second, so if you go up you better get up quick, you better get up fast and you better get up high. And that's how you get the shot off, and that's made the difference for me in my observation that's made the biggest difference in the game. I think it is the premier difference, there is no other shot people have that's as common as that one to the game. I mean you could watch Dr. J and that absolute classic shot, where he comes in on his right hand side and he goes up in his right hand, and floats underneath the basket and comes around with his backhand, that's one in a million shots. You can watch Michael Jordan, driving the key in that NBA game coming straight at the basket into a clutch of player and he goes up with one hand and there's this picket fence of front of him and he pulls the ball back down, keeps floating right through the players, shoots the ball with is left hand and takes it off the backboard bottom of the net. That's a one in a million shot, there's only a handful of guys that can do those things but what can everybody in the game do today? They can shoot jumpers, and if they can't they better learn or they're not going to succeed.

03:09:30:00 - (Interviewer 37:13) So you have Dr. James Naismith, he invents the game. Is it safe to say Kenny or pioneers like Kenny reinvented this game?

03:09:42:00 - (John 37:27) I think it's safe to say that the game maybe wasn't reinvented, but game took, with the invention of the jump shot and the development of the jump shot, the game took a dramatic turn from a game that was slow and stationary and very, very rough. In my

research I found the first basketball game played in the west coast was at the University of California in a P.E. class in about i think 1899 or 1900. 50 guys came on the floor and they just fought and scrapped and battled and beat the hell out of each other. One guy had a 120 fouls called on him, and that was the game. It was rough. They played it. Where does the term cagers come from? Because they played in the early days the game was so rough that they had a cage around the court. Those were...that was the game. It was restricted. It was confined. It was rough, but it was slow. With the development of the jump shot came a game that became faster, quicker. Guys could get shots off quicker, and the whole direction of the game changed. So, reinvent the game? No. Change it dramatically? Yes.

(Interviewer 03:11:20) Its interesting. Thats a great question. It seems that theres always these moments in which the game of basketball something comes along that's controversial like the jump shot or the dunk and its met with resistance. But whoever is making these decisions to allow these antics, you know, to happen realize that the audience wants to see it. Its something that brings more attention to the game. It speeds it up and makes it more exciting. Therefor the jump shot was one of those things that people came to the game cause they heard about this jump shot and same with the dunk. I believe at one point in time the dunk was not allowed. And they brought it back because the audiences wanted it.

(John 03:12:08) That is so true. I have a personal experience to relate that exemplifies that. I was coaching at a high school on the peninsula in 1966. I had, we were a brand new school. I had a very, very small and not necessarily expert team. And we were going up against a big high school with tall players who could leap. And in the warm ups in our gym the other highschool players were stuffing the ball. It wasn't illegal at the time but they were just stuffing it down. And I went up to the opposing coach before the game and I said "those guys are going to bust the backboard" you can't--tell them to stop. They were not only intimidating but they were going to delay the game. The coach told me because this was true. Hey John, the fans love this, this is what they came to see. I'm not sure I love it, but the fans do and that's what brings them to games. And that is exactly what does it just as much as probably the jump shot, and you could make a case, just as you asked before if the game was reinvented because of the jump shot, some people could make a case the game was reinvented with the slam dunk because a third of the baskets scored in the NBA today are from slam dunks.

(Interviewer 3:13:10) Would you say that the breakthrough of the jump shot is compared to any other eventful like in football like was the forward pass a breakthrough or anything in baseball like the homerun. Is there anything you can compare it to?

(John 3:14:29) No, and it's not because there isn't such a thing that was innovative, I'm not a historian in general. I'm a write of interesting stories, I hope. I'm not particularly a writer of other sports--basketball only. I don't try to claim I'm a comprehensive historian of basketball. There are other people who know a lot more about the game and the history of the game than do, so that would be a tough comparison for me to make to say any other sport had something that instrumental in changing the game.

(Interviewer 3:15:15) What would you say the most interesting thing you discovered upon completion of the book. About the jump shot, about basketball in general, is there anything that after completing that section that season of life that you learned?

(John 3:15:34) Probably the most interesting thing consequence to that book was how well it did. How much it sold. How well it's still selling. How well it will probably sell forever. And when I'm talking about how well it sold I'm not talking about a best seller for the kind of writer best sellers are not in the offing. But, for in comparison to the other books I've written it is almost without historical limitations. People will want to know forever who were the first guys to do this or that. It's like aviation. Who were the wright brothers? I want to know about them. I want to read about them. How the hell did they figure out how to get an airplane up in the air. And forever people will be reading about the wright brothers. I like to think, I've been encouraged to think, because I get 20, 30, 40 e-mails a year from people who read the book - young guys who are a lot younger than I am who said thanks, that was a great story I didn't know anything about the history of the jump shot. So the best part of it for me was the sense that there's an audience out there for the story that will go on for a long long time.

(Interviewer 3:17:19) I think one thing that's interesting about the book, and that you felt like it needed to be written because nobody knew, all these men were forgotten and needed to be rediscovered again. Can you talk about why these men who were pioneers of this game that changed the way the game was played around the world - how can somebody like that be forgotten how can someone like Kenny be forgotten in time for what he contributed to basketball?

(John 3:17:55) I think the answer to that is complicated on one level but simple. Basketball in those days was not one of self promotion or self aggrandisement or pumping your fist in the air after you made a basket or doing anything theatrical or showboating. And none of these players were someone who would engage in self promotion. Largely because the whole era didn't glorify the individual, it glorified the team. So here were these guys who did some remarkable things on a basketball court who would never have indulged in any kind of self promotion. If asked them - if you asked Kenny if anyone sought him out as many did he would be eager to talk, but to take it to another level - to take it to a national level of historic recognition that you've got to participate in that as - you've got to put aside all your humility and that lack of self-aggrandisement you gotta become a shameless self-promoter as a lot of professional athletes are today. They tend to, whether they admit it or not, participate in glorifying themselves. These guys didn't. And their story will disappear if there aren't books written about them and there aren't movies made about them their story will disappear. As surely as the stories of all kind of historical people - famous people would disappear if someone hadn't focused on them and decided that these are people who made a difference and I'm going to take their story to a larger audience.

(Interviewer 3:20:00) When I first started making this film I was searching for...What is one of the themes of this? What is the heart of this story? There's the jump shot, and that's going to get people there, but what's deeper than that? What's going to challenge people? I was thinking

about - I don't know my great grandfather's name. I know he's a Hamilton - but I don't know who he is....I don't know anything about him and that's family. And that blew my mind. The things we accomplish in this lifetime is going to be forgotten. Even something as significant as changing the way a game is played around the world and it blew my mind when I really thought about what we accomplish in our lifetime is going to be forgotten. So, a part of this film is about legacy and what you leave behind and where true significance is. I'm curious to hear what your definition of legacy - what is legacy to you?

(John 3:21:16) That's another good question and for me legacy on the first level is family legacy - exactly as it would be in yours and anyone else's. Where did I come from and who were my progenitors? How did I become who I am? And I think that is a curiosity that all people have and increasingly today because of the absolute explosion of interest in genealogy people are chasing that down everywhere. And that's just one level of my interest - I just like to know where things came from. And that begins with my own family - who did what to whom in my own family and who were the early people? But I also like to be able to trace the origins of a lot of other things - including the jump shot in basketball. For me, chasing down the genealogy of basketball or horse racing or aviation - how did the P51 Mustang become so famous? Why? What were the circumstances that time that created it? All of those things play heavy in my mind. One of the subjects in my storyboard is polevulting. Talk about an esoteric subject there probably aren't a hundred people in the world who give a damn about polevulting except polevulters. I was a high school polevulter. I don't think I ever went higher than nine to ten feet and I was pretty much a flop as a polevulter, but I have always been interested in how that originated as a sport. Where in Greek sport did they get the idea to run down a runway with a pole and leap over a crossbar? And part of that interest carries over into other areas. Someday I'm going to pursue who were the first polevulters - the one sport in which man almost escapes the atmosphere in the earth. Who were the polevulters and what extraordinary courage did it take to go nowadays twenty feet in the air and then drop onto...(clip cuts out)

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(John 3:24:06) (continued from previous clip)...a tiny little postage stamp mattress. If they miss, they kill themselves. Who were the first? The origins in my own interest are in my family genealogy but then spill into the history of anything. I guess I would say that I confess I am an amateur historian.

(Interviewer 3:24:29) What type of legacy do you think Kenny is leaving behind on and off the court?

(John 3:25:03) That's tough for me to answer because I think it's difficult to know who else knows about him. Except a handful of sportswriters, historians, documentarians like you...We won't know his legacy until his story is taken to a larger audience and we see the extent in which people begin to appreciate. Particularly young players who have no idea where the shot came from that they're so good at. You come up to a young jump shooter today, as I've done, and say:

Who do you think came up with that shot? And the answer is: Well, it's always been here. And my answer is no it hasn't. This is a shot that changed basketball. Who do you think changed it? 'Well, I don't know, all I care about is my own jump shot.' We need to get away from that kind of provincial thinking and selfish thinking and as an audience of basketball fans and players need to begin to appreciate what that history is - then we'll know what that legacy is. What is it that other people now appreciate and see in the story of Kenny Sailors and Bealis Smally and Joe Folks and Whitey Skoog and Mouse Gonzales and Bud Palmer and Jumpin' Johnny Adams. What do they all see in that story that represents not just something historic about basketball but something about life that is usable as a legacy in my own life.

(Interviewer 3:28:05) What about the same question but more about the personal legacy aspect about what you'll be leaving behind for your family. Maybe the general public doesn't know about his legacy but what do you think knowing his story he's leaving behind for his family, knowing his story, what kind of legacy is he leaving behind for them?

(John 3:28:25) Well I wish I knew more about his family than I do. I know what he's leaving behind - I know what he left behind for Boke and I know what he left behind for his brother Bud and I think he has a son or two - who one of them is a pilot in Alaska. Talk about independence and creativity and courage. I think it's clear what he left behind for his family and friends. He was a role model for independence, creativity, perseverance and kindness. He's an awfully kind man. And a generous man. Those are the kinds of things he's left behind for the family. What the larger public will see and understand and appreciate will depend on you and me and I hope we tell the story right so that people can see who he was based on what we describe.

(Interviewer 3:29:43) Did I ever tell you the story when we screened the film at SXSW so the short film that I'll show you, we had a screening at a film festival and it was sold out. And when the film completed they had the filmmakers come up on stage for the different shorts that screened and when I was up there - somebody - it was the end of the question and answer period and there said 'if no one else has anything else to say, we're going to wrap up' and this gentleman in the very back theater stands up and says 'I have one last thing to say' and everyone turns, he now has the floor, and he starts 'I've known Kenny Sailors for over fifty years.' And I was wondering, what was he going to say, and silence fell over the room. And I felt like I was standing there by myself on the stage and he said 'And you couldn't of done a more incredible job at capturing the spirit and his character and the way he's chosen to live his life in his faith - even in basketball, you did a phenomenal job, I hope this film brings lots of success.' That was the best comment I've ever received. This guy's dad was Kenny's campaign manager when he was running for senate in the 60's and just happened to live in Austin and...It was unbelievable.

(John 3:31:40) Let me tell you one reaction I have, and this isn't in response to any question you have, and may just end up on the cutting floor as you say. After origins came out I did book signings in various parts of the company - one was in Branard Minnesota, which was where Whitey's school was from, and most authors have absolutely chilling and horrendous stories to



tell about book signings where nobody shows up. So here I am in a shopping mall in Branard, Minnesota with my copies of *Origins of the Jump Shot* featuring a town hero, Whitey Skoog, one person came to the book signing. One. Whitey's coach in high school, who was about 90. And his wife dropped him off at the curb he stumbles on the curb, smashes into the curb, his wife is driving off, he's bleeding, he comes stumbling into the book signing table, he's dripping blood onto my books, and he wants me to sign a book. One person. One person cared about the origins of the jump shot. Well the postscript to this story is one other person showed up, she happened to be a triage nurse in Brandard and she took this guy, this guy, this old coach, and fixed his wound and his bleeding and and I gave her a free book just as a thank you. But two people showed up. But that story illustrates not only how sad some book signings can be for some authors but that the story of jump shooters and Whitey Skoog and Kenny Sailors still needs a wider audience than I brought to it or maybe even you will bring to it. And maybe your documentary will be one small step in bringing it to a much larger audience. I hope so.

(Interviewer 3:34:08) Do you have any comments about or thoughts just personally why - how does it make you feel that Kenny is not in the national basketball hall of fame?

(John 3:34:25) I've not had good experiences - and this is off camera - the basketball hall of fame is incestuous. They cater to their own inbred group of people who are promoting basketball with their own personal views and visions. They are very parochial in terms of who's done what in basketball and the people they focus on are often not the people they should and so the basketball hall of fame in my judgment has only about half the people who are historic and famous in basketball. And consequently it's no surprise to me they don't recognize or haven't recognized Kenny Sailors. Marcus Hayne, the other pivotal basketball player of my youth with the globetrotters because he could dribble like no one else ever has seen anyone dribble, including Kenny Sailors. He didn't get in until a year or two ago, and I don't know what it took to get them to recognize him. I think Marcus is capable of self promotion - maybe he did it, and that's how he got in. Maybe Kenny - because he isn't a relentless self promoter - maybe that's why he hasn't gotten in. It's a shame and it's an oversight and it needs to be corrected. You can use half of that. Leave out the inbred part.

(Interviewer 3:38:02) There are two questions I have. One thing I found interesting, you mentioned speaking with Kurt Goudie, and the first person he responded to with the jump shot was Johnny Adams. Now, Kurt played with Kenny in Wyoming, why would he not say, of course Kenny Sailors.

(John 3:38:22) Well, I wondered that, but then he did in his second breath - you also gotta track down Kenny Sailors. But I don't know why the first name of Kurt Goudie's lips - maybe Kurt was, he had such a comprehensive view of basketball maybe things - once you become so universal of your understandings and observations of basketball things tend to merge together. Maybe - he was looking back forty or fifty years, I just know that the phone rings one day and I pick it up, 'John Christgau', and immediately knew who it was - Mr. Goudie! Thank you for calling. 'This is Kurt Goudie, what do you want to know about the jump shot?' I was just so grateful then for his

time and his interview generosity that I never pursued the issue of why Kenny Sailors wasn't the first name off his lips. He knew Sailors was early, and that's all that mattered to me. And he was in a way confirmation to what many others had told me - that Sailors was, if not one of the first.

(Interviewer 3:40:01) I believe Kenny took his starting position when he was...

(John 3:40:07) That could be, some teammate rivalry there. That's very likely. I was not courageous enough to pursue the issue. I don't know if Kurt Goudie is still around...He's gone.

(Interviewer 3:40:33) Why did you not include - well, first off, but we'll clarify it to make sure it's 100% there - would you say in your opinion after all the research you've done, and I would say you've done more research probably than anyone else ever has on this subject. Would you agree to that?

(John 3:40:55) I think so. I think that the fact that the university of Nebraska press, my publisher which published the best line of basketball history books in the country - their editor I think recognized in my manuscript that nobody's dug as deep as this guys and that was for confirmation that nobody else has dug that deep for it.

(Interviewer 3:41:29) In your opinion, after the research you've done, who would you say deserves the title of the father of the jump shot?

(John 3:41:38) I can't answer that. I would say, Kenny Sailors as much as anybody. That's the best answer I can give. I don't want to offend all those nephews of Uncle Theodore in someplace in Oklahoma who claims he was the first jump shooter, because maybe Uncle Theodore was.

(Interviewer 3:42:16) But the shot that's used today?

(John 3:42:20) Kenny Sailors, clearly. Nobody had as pure and as clear a resemblance of the jump shot of today as Kenny did. You can see that in the picture of him in Madison Square Garden. That famous picture that was in life magazine, I think, 1946.

(Interviewer 3:42:44) Can you describe that picture to me? Have you seen it recently?

(John 3:42:48) I have a glossy picture that I got from life and I wanted to use it on the cover of my book, but life magazine - how much they wanted for the rights to use that on a cover of a book - \$5000. So I said no thank you. Benny Belius Molly had the picture of him which is just as good - he's five feet in the air twisting to shoot his jump shot. It's a good picture, so I choose that one instead. The picture of Kenny Sailors in 1946 in Madison Square Garden was one that went around the world, or at least around the United States. Because Life was a national magazine, there wasn't any national television at that time, so the instrument of broadcasting that awareness about anything, the instrument was usually magazines or newspapers. But a lot of newspapers were really provincial in local, the New York Times wasn't as universal then as it is

today. Everybody everywhere reads the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. So here's this life magazine picture, read by and looked at by kids like me all over the country saying 'what is happening here?' And if you look at that picture you can see that his jump shot - he's high in the air, he's almost squared up to the basket, I think his left hand is dropping of the ball or about the drop off it and that is - if you were to shoot a hundred jump shots today you'd have almost the same picture that you had of Kenny Sailors in 1946 in Madison Square Garden.

(Interviewer 3:44:56) Just to piggyback on the end of I guess, why do you - when you started writing the book you were trying to find out who was the true originator and you realized there were several men who really did do this but there is somebody who more than likely - there's the shot, the purest form of it - but you never really - you didn't include that in your book - why did you not want to make any type of conclusions?

(John 3:45:27) Well I didn't want to make those distinctions because it seemed to me that all of the early shooters had something unique about their shot that they were proud of and I didn't want to - I don't think Kenny knew it at the time - the uniqueness of his shot in terms of squaring up to the basket - probably Johnny Adams didn't know the oddness of his shot with the flatness. Whitey Skoog probably thought well, everybody kicks their feet. So I didn't want to take away from what I thought was the glory of each man's story and the uniqueness of each man's story. And the uniqueness for me of Kenny's story wasn't necessarily that he squared up to the basket and went straight up and shot it off of the dribble and released with one hand, we now know what was unique, but at the time the uniqueness was more that he jumped. That he got up in the air. That was the uniqueness. That is what defied the prevailing ethics of basketball, coaching and otherwise at the time. That's what was most unique, not just about Kenny, but about all of them.

(Interviewer 3:47:02) Is there anything that I am forgetting or neglecting to ask you that you'd like to share?

(John 3:47:09) What you're favorite entree in a chinese restaurant?

They talk until the end of the clip.