

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: BERNIE MANN

INTERVIEWER: KATHELENE MCCARTY SMITH

DATE: May 2, 2008

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KS: Hello Mr. Mann, I appreciate you spending some time with us on the Greensboro oral history project. It is May 2, and my name is Kathelene Smith. We'll begin the interview with when and where you were born.

BM: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and I was born seventy-two years ago. Not today seventy-two years, but seventy-two years ago and three months.

KS: So did you grow up in New York?

BM: I did. I grew up in Brooklyn, and then when I was in my teens we moved to Queens which was another borough of New York City. But yes, most of my life was in New York City.

KS: Well tell me about growing up in New York and your family.

BM: You learn how to play ball in the street and you learn that you don't trust anybody and you learn that you need to make it on your own if you're going to make it and you learn to do it your own way and that there are no set rules. You learn that you make rules based upon what works for yourself and when you grow up in a very tough neighborhood where most of the families, most of the friends that you make are just fighting to make ends meet. It's a very different environment than my own children grew up in but one that I think has an effect. And in fact, I was kind of concerned when my kids were growing up that they were going to live too much of a vanilla life and that they would not have the benefit, which has both pros and cons, but the benefit of living in New York which I think has a certain formative way to it. It gives you a chance to make it. You know the old song, if you make it in New York, you can make it anywhere; and I think that there is some truth to that. I think that there is so much competition and so much intensity; and it has a lot to do with the ethnicity of New York, the melting pot, the fact that there are so many people. My grandparents were immigrants and they come with nothing and they come with the hope that so many immigrants do that one way or another – one way or another, they're going to make it. And the

thought of making it is so foreign because they have no other choice, they've got to.

KS: Where did they come over from?

BM: They came from Russia; both my mother's parents and my father's parents.

KS: So did they have the Ellis Island experience?

BM: Of course, you know, and never sure what their real name was because they got it changed often by the inspector who either couldn't pronounce it or couldn't write it down so he made some kind of definition of what their name will be and that's what they had. And my grandfather had a little store where he was a tailor working with his hands and my other grandfather eventually had a grocery store that his sons, my father, would work in and then after he got rid of that, he was a messenger. He would deliver messages in mid-town New York.

KS: Now tell me, do you have any brothers and sisters?

BM: I have a sister who still lives in the New York area; she lives in New Jersey. And I have cousins in New York.

KS: So did you grow up around a lot of your cousins?

BM: We grew up around some of them. We didn't have a very close or large family. And of course my sister, being nine years younger than me, I was really an only child for a good portion of my growing up. And it was something that was very important to me to kind of figure out what I wanted to do. I don't know why it was so important, but it seemed to be. And as I was growing up I decided very early that I wanted to be in radio and I wanted to be, at that time, I thought that I wanted to be a radio announcer or a sportscaster.

KS: From all that ball in the street. [Laughs]

BM: The ball in the street and the fact that I couldn't catch. So I figured it if I can't catch it and I can't hit it, then the next best thing is to tell about people who do. And so I went through much of my life deciding that's what I was going to do. I went to a college that had a radio and television program, I was president of the college radio station. I had a radio show and in fact, met my wife there. We didn't get married in college, but I met her at the radio station and I was the PA announcer for four years at the basketball games and really did a lot of the sports and audio work; did the play by play of the games for the college, the away basketball games. And then I'd go into the real world and realize that I wasn't any good at all. [Laughs]

- KS: I'm going to back you up a little bit and ask you a little bit more about your childhood. Now did you grow up going to games?
- BM: Well it's a little hard to go to a professional game – we would go to – I happened to be a Giant fan living in Brooklyn which I don't know how that happened but I think that – I know that I got beat up a lot because I was a Giant fan and everybody was a Dodger fan. And when you grow up in Brooklyn, you're a Brooklyn Dodger fan. That's what you are and here I am a dumb kid and a Giant fan. I liked Mel Ott and all the Giant players and we went to the polo grounds, my father and I, to see Giant baseball games. But yes, sports was a big factor in New York and the Dodgers were more than just the baseball game, they were part of the – they were the essence; they spoke of what Brooklyn was and they were called “the bums” and they were a very exciting team. I just hated them. [Both laugh]
- KS: So where did you go to high school?
- BM: I went to high school in Brooklyn at Thomas Jefferson High School and went there for a year and then my parents bought a house in Queens and so we moved to Queens, to Jamaica, Queens, which was a little different. That was a much more residential – the homes, we had what was called an attached house whereas when we lived in Brooklyn, we lived in an apartment building. So this was a step up for my father to have a house that he owned even though it was what we would call a “row house” but we were the end house so that was called “semi-attached.” If you are in the middle you have houses on both sides. So – but it was a step up. We had a little bit of lawn; a plot of land that I think was twenty-five by one hundred. Not much, but in New York that was something; it was a little bit of a piece of grass and there was a tree on it.
- KS: Did you go into New York City very much?
- BM: We'd go into New York a lot and use the subway. When I was a kid, life was a little bit easier and I would go every Saturday; every Saturday I would go by myself into Manhattan and go to radio shows. And they used to have radio shows with audiences and you could write in, like they do now, you write in and you get tickets and they don't charge for the tickets to the shows. So I never would have tickets, but I would go and walk along the lines and say, “Anybody have an extra ticket? Anybody have an extra ticket?” All I needed was one. And so I'd go from one radio show to another. They were in theaters in mid-town New York. And there were a number of shows Saturday morning and I would go to these shows. It was a way for me to see radio in action and feel a part of it.
- KS: Now what shows did you see specifically?
- BM: Well, I think there was; I forgot the names of some of the shows. There were some interview shows, there were some quiz shows, there was a children's

dramatic show that was fun to watch, you know, and of course you can't beat the price.

KS: Right, right. It's like that movie "Radio Days."

BM: "Radio Days" and that was the forties and early fifties, before television really, really came in. And those were the days when people had a radio in their living room and then television came and the radio went out of the living room and the television set went in the living room. And, of course, instead of radios being thrown away, radio changed and that gave me then an opportunity to have a career in radio that was different than old kind of radio with radio programs. Radio changed to be music, and still is, of course, a music facility where most of all programs today at most radio stations is music based.

KS: So you went into college knowing that's what you wanted to major in.

BM: No question about it.

KS: And which college was this?

BM: I went to Adelphi University in Garden City, Long Island, and I wanted to go to Michigan and I got in but my family couldn't afford it. So, in fact, they really couldn't afford going to Adelphi which was a private school so I worked weekends and summers to pay for my tuition.

KS: So did you work in the radio?

BM: No, I didn't work in radio, I worked in a job where I could make a little bit of money and that was I would sell a newspaper door to door in New York. And we went to all the boroughs and we went everywhere. And I think I – I often thought I learned as much doing that for five years as I did for five years in college.

KS: Really, in what way?

BM: The sense of going in knocking on doors, going into people's homes, all over the city, getting rejected, having doors slammed in your face, going into tenements, going into some of the lowest and some of the most luxurious apartment buildings, seeing city life, seeing people, trying to understand the difference between people. When someone opens the door trying to estimate are they a prospect? Will they be nice to me? Will they pour water on me and throw me down the stair? I mean, you never know when you are a door-to-door salesperson. And it's difficult but oh my goodness, what a terrific experience; and what a wonderful way of getting to know so much about every neighborhood. And going into – I mean you just can't beat the difference between going into someone's home, if they permit you of course, and seeing it as you drive by in a car. And so the experience taught me an awful lot about people, taught me about

myself, taught me about tenacity and perseverance. And when you have doors slammed in your face, you know that you just have to keep going because if you don't, you never know and you never know until you knock on the door what's going to happen. That person could be very gracious, very welcoming, or they could be mean and you get a balance. It's just like life. There are some days you meet the most wonderful people and some days you say, "There are a run of some real nut cases out there." [Both laugh]

KS: That's true.

BM: So, it left me in good stead and gave me a lot of sense that I think I could sell something if I needed to.

KS: Well tell me, you met your wife in college?

BM: I met my wife at Adelphi. She came to the radio station and we met and we then decided to have a program together and we had a program together for the full four years that we were in college together. And then we graduated together and it was goodbye. We dated, but we never dated together. We have pictures of us dating other people and we would double date. And we always had this kind of a friendship, but it was never anything more than a friendship except she was a good friend, and I enjoyed being with her. And then I left and went away and she stayed in New York. And then three years later we wound up – I was promoted back. I had gotten into radio and didn't do well as an announcer. So I figured I better try something else and I had a little sales experience so I asked could I be in sales. So I got a sales job in Atlanta selling for a radio station. And I did pretty well and then that company bought a radio station in New York and they promoted me home.

So now I'm in New York and I'm working for this radio station and they needed somebody and so I called my friend Bobby, I said, "Bobby, you looking for a job?" And so about a year later, we got married.

KS: What a great story!

BM: We've been together a long time.

KS: And she understands your passion for broadcasting too.

BM: She did too, and she understood. She understood the passion as much for the excitement, the vitality, of this kind of business and it's been a good business for us.

KS: So you came back up to New York and you got married. Did you stay in New York for a while?

BM: I stayed in New York for about a year and then I had a chance to be a sales manager of a station in Albany, New York. So I moved to Albany and then shortly after that we got married. So Bobby moved with me, and then I had a chance to be a general manager. So that was in Plattsburg, New York, which is right near the Canadian border; pretty far north. So we stayed there for a while, and then I had a chance to come back to the South as general manager of a station in Roanoke, Virginia, and so we moved south. My wife had never been south. South to her was going to Jersey. And so we – and I loved living in Atlanta.

KS: Really.

BM: I thought Atlanta was so wonderful, and I met so many interesting people. So I loved the chance to move back south and we moved to Roanoke for several years. And then there came a chance to buy a radio station. A station that was just in terrible shape and terribly in debt and had virtually no listeners, but it was a chance to buy it. And so we had five thousand dollars of money that we had been given for our wedding and you know gifts and bonds and whatever people give to you. And so we put all of that on the line and I got a one third interest in a radio station in Winston-Salem that was – it was awful, just terrible, and our five thousand dollars went down a rat hole very quickly. It was gone.

KS: So did you move to Winston?

BM: Oh yes, and two of our children were born in Winston.

KS: That's where I'm living now, as a matter of fact.

BM: We liked Winston a lot. Winston is interesting because at that time, it was a city that – when they were telling me why I should move there they said, “Look, we have Hanes, we have Reynolds, we have Wachovia. People are always going to wear underwear, they're always going to smoke, and they're always going to need banking.” Wrong! There's no such thing as Hanes making underwear there anymore, people are not smoking, and Wachovia has moved to Charlotte; so much for that.

But we loved being in Winston. It was a chance for me to own something of my own. It was very hard. It was just – we had no money, it was totally underfinanced; we couldn't borrow anything. No one would loan money to a radio station, at least not that one anyway. And I only had a third of it. I had partners for the other. But, we had two children there. It was a wonderful place for the children to grow up. And then we had gotten to the point when I said, “You know, I think we've got this on the road and it's starting to do well. Why don't we buy more radio stations?” I said to my partners. And that's when I learned another wonderful lesson. It's now how you get in, it's how you get out. [Both laugh] And my partners said, “No, we're very happy with things.” And I said, “Well, let's expand.” And they said, “No, I don't want to expand.” So I

said, “Well if you don’t want to expand, I want to leave. Buy me out.” And they said, “No, we’re not going to buy you out.” And I said, “Well, if you don’t buy me out, I have no money. I put everything I have into this. I have no money to do anything or go anywhere. Everything I have is here.” And they said, “Well, that’s your problem.”

So it took a while until I was able to convince them that they should buy me out. I had no alternative, you know, how are you go on if you can’t take the assets you build up? The assets weren’t liquid and you can’t find really anybody to buy it from you. Nobody really wants a one third, although I did find someone who wanted it and that was Billy Packer who was a broadcaster and he does a lot of basketball games and he was interested and he lived in Winston at the time. So he bought my share. And Billy, we’ve remained friends to this day. So now I had the opportunity – I had a little money, not much, to try to find something else to do. I didn’t have enough money to do something really good, just enough to get into trouble. [Both laugh]

So we looked around and we found a radio station that was in Little Rock, Arkansas. Wasn’t my first choice of where to go, and it was a program for the black community. And the blacks wanted it but they couldn’t afford it; the African-Americans. They didn’t know they were African-Americans; they were blacks at the time. And the white community didn’t have any interest in buying a station like that. So, the way you do things in life is you do things that no one else wants. That’s called opportunity. And to me this was an opportunity to take something that no one else wanted, but I thought that I could make something of it. And the thing that I found fascinating was that here was a radio station in the community and goodness gracious, Little Rock was about as biased a community as you can imagine. That is where [Orval] Faubus stood in the doorway and wouldn’t let the kids go into high school. And it’s the state capital and this radio station was so interesting because all of the rock and roll stations in Little Rock wouldn’t play any black artists and here were the Temptations and all the great rock and roll artists of the ‘70s and they wouldn’t be heard on the rock and roll radio stations.

KS: In the seventies.

BM: In the early seventies. This was 1970 to 1975. So I thought, “Now goodness gracious, if we could program these great artists.” I mean people were going to Las Vegas and there were white people sitting there listening to the Temptations, listening to all of the great artists; and they paid money. And it has nothing to do with whether you are white or black; you’re just hearing great music. So we programmed this radio station to reach a mass audience, not just a black audience. And all the disc jockeys I hired didn’t sound African-American, they just looked good; high quality, well trained, really talented people. The station shot up in the ratings and became the number one station in Little Rock.

And we did different things. We would put on events that no one ever thought of a minority station doing. We did everything. We never thought of ourselves as a minority anything. We would put on a Christmas parade. I got the balloons from Philadelphia. In New York, the Macy's parade has these tall balloons, the Christmas parade, but in Philadelphia, the Macy's store has balloons that are low because they have wires. The wires in Philadelphia have never been buried. In New York, they are buried so you can have these tall balloons go through the streets. In Philadelphia they don't, so that was the same in Little Rock. We had a lot of the street wires still up carrying the power and so you couldn't have tall balloons but you could have low balloons. And so all of a sudden, I became an expert in balloons.

KS: And Macy's lent them to you?

BM: And Macy's let me rent them from them.

KS: That's amazing that you even thought of that.

BM: What's the most incredible thing? It's to have is a parade at Christmastime and wouldn't it be just a gas if this parade instead of being put on by what is normally the mainstream center of the community, what if it was done by a minority, you know? And everything we did was to do things – we had the – the five kids who were – the Jacksons – the Jackson Five.

KS: You didn't!

BM: We had the Jackson Five; and they were all kids at the time. And so I got myself a – and this Christmas parade now had started to be a tradition and Dale Bumpers would come and an attorney general by the name of Bill Clinton, he would come and they would sit with us in the reviewing stand and come to my home in the evening. And so the Jackson Five, we wanted to have them come for an appearance that night, as the attraction. So I got myself one of these London buses, you know, when they have the open top, and so we put them on the top waving at everybody and then we put the most burly policeman we possibly could in the stairwell so that no one could go up there and bother them. And the kids were riding down the street and waving with a big sign, "See us tonight at this event." And it was a great event.

KS: I bet! I bet Little Rock had not seen anything like that.

BM: We had a lot of fun; a lot of fun and a lot of interesting events. And it was very good for us as a family. My youngest daughter, whose birthday it is today actually, she was born in Little Rock. And we were there five years.

KS: So you have three children?

BM: Three children, yes. And so, after five years – and then I bought an FM station and started to develop that in a different format, we said to ourselves, “We’ve lived a lot of different places, where is the best place to live? We want to make one move. Where is the best place to live?” Well the truth is there isn’t a best place to live; there are a lot of different places that are wonderful. San Diego is a magnificent city with great weather and San Francisco is wonderful and we have friends in the Midwest and there are a lot of nice places. But we thought of all the places we’ve ever been to, North Carolina was really the very best. There’s a trade off everywhere you go, but North Carolina had less of a trade off than everywhere else. We loved the weather, we loved the atmosphere, the people, the friendliness, the warmth – the whole business climate that we liked when we lived in Winston-Salem. And we liked its proximity to New York, proximity to the ocean, proximity to the mountains; just a general sense. So I looked for a radio station I could buy and I found one in High Point that had the potential to cover Winston-Salem, High Point, and Greensboro, and when we were in Winston we realized that that was the key. If you could ever get a station that could cover all three cities then you really would have something.

KS: So this is in the early eighties?

BM: This was 1975.

KS: In ’75, OK.

BM: So, I bought this radio station and it was the first time now I was able to buy something all my own without any partners. The Little Rock station I had one partner. I had seventy percent, he had thirty percent and he was a great partner and he was just wonderful. But I felt that partners are terrific, sometimes they are and sometimes they’re not. I’ve been fortunate in having good partners. The thing about a partner though, I felt if it was wonderful, if it was a terrific opportunity, why am I sharing it? And if it’s very touchy and I’m not sure it’s going to work, I feel badly about asking someone to put their money into it and lose. I would feel very guilty about that. So nothing is a sure thing but I’d rather take a gamble on myself if I can summon up the money. And I was able to buy the station in High Point. Again, the station wasn’t doing very well, but I was able to figure out that I could take the FM part of that station and put up a tower on Country Club Road that would reach all three cities; I could just – we engineered it just enough – we used every flip of land that we had to put up a 400 foot tower because the towers stand up by having guide wires, that’s how they stand. You’ve got to have guide wires to hold them up in the air. The guide wires have to go the length of the tower.

KS: Oh, so that’s a lot of property.

BM: So you’ve got to have enough property. For a tower of 400 feet, you’ve got to go 400 feet away from the tower. So, but we had this piece of property that we could

do that on; 400 feet is not terrific, but it's OK, but in any event it gave us the chance to have an FM that would cover the whole area. So that is what we did. We called it WGLD Gold and started up in 1976 promoting it. I promoted it on television and I promoted it everywhere I possibly could and it got off the ground. And then I bought other stations in Raleigh and over the years, I've had twelve radio stations.

KS: But you decided to go ahead and settle in High Point?

BM: We settled – we settled, actually the radio station was in High Point but we said, “Where would we like to live?” We had known enough about the community and Winston is a nice community, but Winston never had a middle class. We found that there were very rich people and there were the worker bees and not much in between. Now Winston has changed. There is a terrific medical community there and of course, Wake Forest has grown, so there are so many people working there and it's a different type of environment. But in the sixties it was a tobacco town and the people who worked – the working people were very heavily – it was like Durham, the people were very heavily tobacco orientated and that usually low paying jobs. So we thought that Greensboro would be the best of the three cities to live in and it had a middle class, it had people who would sell things and use Greensboro as a base and go for the week and would go for a weeks selling throughout this area and a wide variety of other people who built a nice career as a middle class. So they had a good size middle class community and even though I had to commute to High Point, that's not that far. It was still a better place for my family.

KS: So what was the move to Greensboro like? What did you find when you actually settled in Greensboro?

BM: We found it very friendly, and we enjoyed it and, we felt that the community was very giving. It permitted me if I wanted to be involved, it would let me. I became president of the symphony, and my wife became president of the community theater. She then went on to become president of the opera company and I've been involved in a lot of different things because I believe very strongly that you cannot live in a community without giving back to it. If a community is good to you, if you have a quality of life, that doesn't come free. You've got to give back. And my kids went to Greensboro Day School and I was on the board of the Greensboro Day School, and I've been on the board of the Eastern Music Festival, and I've been on the board of the Shakespeare Festival and a variety of different things that I think enrich this community. And then I was asked to be a member of Rotary, and I've enjoyed my membership there and then they asked me – the old joke the W.C. Fields' joke, he doesn't want to be a member of a club who would have him as a member. [Both laugh] So they asked me to be president and I thought, “My goodness, they have really run out of people. If they're getting down to asking me to be president, they are in deep, deep trouble.” But I was really flattered to be asked and this club has such a history of outstanding

leadership and it is ninety-one years old and in ninety-one years when you look at the list of who has been president of this club, it really reads like the who's who of who makes Greensboro great.

KS: And your name should be up there, so there you go.

BM: You know, it was hard to turn it down. I remember [Charles] "Buddy" Weill who was a brilliant, brilliant man in Greensboro.

KS: We've interviewed Mr. Weill.

BM: Have you? Well, Buddy said to me. I went to every one of the presidents I could, the previous presidents, and I had lunch with him and I said, "Give me your advice. What should I do? What should I not do and how can I make my year a good year." And Buddy said, "You know," he said, "when they asked me to be president, I was very busy. I was on the hospital board and I was doing a lot of different things." He said, "But I was so afraid they'd never ask me again," he said, "that I took it." I appreciated that, I thought it was telling of the fact that when you're asked to be president of a club that has this much stature, three hundred and twenty-two members and one of the oldest clubs in the world. It started ten years after the whole Rotary concept started. Gosh, you don't turn that down. And for me, I just loved it. I just had such a good time, because the club is so big there were so many people I had never met, or I had seen them and never really got a chance to meet with them. So I took the chance to be Rotary president and before every meeting, I'd walk around and welcome everybody and thank them for coming and get a chance to talk to as many people as I could. I just had a great time.

KS: That's great. Well, I wanted to ask you when you moved into town, they were kind of having some social issues in the city too. I think that '79 was the Klan/Nazi rally. You missed the sit-ins but there were a lot of things. I'm not from here but as I research, I understand that. What were your impressions of that time?

BM: Well, the difficulty with that Klan/Nazi rally is that although it is part of the history of Greensboro, it's not a – it didn't really touch the lives of people who were living here. It's something that happened, you read about it, it was happening in your own city, but you never saw it. Now, when we lived in Winston, there was an event that occurred where the National Guard was called in. I don't remember the details of it but I remember that we were going to a football game at Bowman Gray Stadium which was where Wake Forest played their football games before they built the current stadium and we had to go on a bus that had National Guard troops on the bus and we passed a couple of intersections that had tanks in the streets. So, I mean, that touches your life, but the Klan/Nazi rally, we knew about it, we'd heard about it, but it really didn't affect us on a day to day basis. Nor did we think, "Oh my goodness, there's

anarchy here.” I think the more research that is done that there were a lot of people involved in that who were not Greensboro residents; they had come either to cause some trouble or cause – or had a real beef that they wanted to get exposed. And I don’t think anybody except the trouble makers really thought there would be bloodshed.

KS: So tell me how you got involved with *Our State* magazine?

BM: Well, I had come to a point – it was a hard decision to leave radio. My whole life had been in radio, I knew nothing else and I thought it was just time to get out of radio. Radio was not getting – was not staying in a direction that was meaningful for me. I’m an entrepreneur, I like to buy things that are not doing well, build them up. And then all of a sudden the rules changed, because what protected me was the fact that the FCC, which governs radio stations, said no company can add more than seven AMs or seven FMs in any city in America. And that was the rule and that made it possible for a guy like me to own a radio station and be up against other people like me; no big companies could push you out. It’s not like you open a grocery and then Harris Teeter opens right next to you. So, then the rules changed and the FCC took away the limit and made it so that big companies could own radio stations and big companies who are financed on the public market, which they had never been before, would now be owners.

KS: Why is that, why did that happen?

BM: It just felt that there was enough diversity that limiting the number of people who owned the number of stations you could own was going to be in the public interest. And they never asked me. [Laughs]

KS: I hate that. [Laughs]

BM: So, I mean, I came to Greensboro and there were twenty-one radio stations and twenty-one owners. And then one day there are still twenty-one radio stations but now there’s only four owners because the big companies have not only bought into this market, but had bought up other radio stations so that one owner might have six radio – I mean right now there are only three owners of all the radio stations and two or three or five are owned by the same company. So, I could see the handwriting on the wall. It was not going to be the same business I was in and I couldn’t control it. And if – we always tried to make our station local and these stations were operating very successfully but they sounded like they were from Anywhere, USA. It was just changing so I thought the best thing to do was to get out.

And so I opened up just because I didn’t want to work out of my house but I didn’t know what I was going to do. So I opened up a little office and the ACC was very nice to me; the Atlantic Coast Conference, and they gave me a chance to produce a program for their basketball tournament which is a wonderful tournament. Throughout the county, everybody looks to the ACC and says, “That

is the premiere conference; that is the premiere event.” So, that’s what I had and that only happens once a year and I still needed something to do the rest of the year. But it was that something. So I looked for other things. I tried a school for salespeople. I tried to set up a school where we would train salespeople. That failed. I tried a television network that was satellite delivered that would have programming from the various catalog companies; we called it the American Catalog Shoppers Network and it would – we signed L.L. Bean, we signed Lands’ End, we signed all the top catalog companies but we couldn’t get the cable companies to put us on their cable systems. So that failed. Then I tried promoting rock and roll shows; that didn’t do well. So we kept looking for things, something to do. And then somebody came to me and said, “Gee I have this chance to buy this magazine. Would you be a partner with me?” I know myself well enough; I’m not a very good silent partner. [Both laugh] I have too many opinions about things so I said, “I don’t think so, you know, but thanks for the offer.” So after about a year, the owner calls me and said, “Hey, that other guy couldn’t put,” and I had met him by now, and he said, “that other guy couldn’t put the deal together; would you like to buy it yourself?” And I didn’t know much about the magazine business and I still don’t know a whole lot more, but I knew that I had to do better than what they were doing, it was so crummy and it looked to me like the crummy radio stations I would buy, that looked awful but had potential.

Now I have to tell you, I had no idea the potential, but you never do, you know. It is very hard to take something and say, “I know this is going to be such and such.” But I think the thing that you can say is, “I think it can do better than what it’s doing.” I think if I bring life, and vitality, and enthusiasm, and passion, and excellence, I think I can make it better. Sometimes you can make it really better. Sometimes it’s a modicum of difference but in any event, I did a lot of things because I’m so stupid and don’t know any better, I did things no one else did to promote the magazine and we set up some rules for the magazine very early, just because it seemed so obvious such as it would be totally Pollyanna, that we would have nothing but positiveness, that we’d be unabashedly in love with North Carolina, that it would be gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous. This thing was black and white and I said to myself, “North Carolina is so beautiful. How can you have a black and white magazine about North Carolina?” So we just said everything in the magazine is going to be color and we had advertisers who had black and white ads and we said to them, “You can have whatever you want but it’s not any extra for color.” All of a sudden, everybody had color ads. But I never could figure out, why would you give people a discount for having a black and white ad to make your magazine look crummy. You want your magazine to look great.

You know I had studied enough businesses over the years and after I left Adelphi, I had gone to the Harvard Business School and had been able to get some work in there and learned enough about the fact that you want to emulate the best companies in the world and the best companies in the world, you know the names; there’s Sony, there’s Starbucks, there’s Proctor and Gamble, there’s

Lexis. I mean there are just some wonderful companies who are all: I mean Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, I mean the names conjure up excellence, that they do everything right. And those are the companies you want to pattern yourself after. And what they do is not only do they do it right, but they promote it effectively because you just can't just have a great product, you've got to tell people about it.

So I said, "So let's start off by saying, 'let's make our product the greatest it can be.'" So every month we start off and I'm told now by other people who work on the magazine or in the newspaper business particularly that they don't value the product. They are just interested in how much money they're taking in, and if they're not taking in enough ads, they cut down on the product. That to me is like Proctor and Gamble putting a little sticker on Tide, you know, the little box on Tide, putting a little sticky note that says, "We did not have a good month this month so there's less detergent in the box, but next month, if business gets better, we'll put more detergent in." How ridiculous is that, you know? But that's what I'm seeing happening and quite frankly, it's wonderful because it sets us apart because we start off and we say, "We're going to make this magazine great every month."

KS: And it's such a great reflection of our state. It's amazing.

BM: That's what we want it to be. Yes.

KS: And one of the reasons I love it is that there is so much of everything, I mean one month you'll pick it up and there will be history, or a personal interest story. We keep all of our back issues because when we decide to take a weekend somewhere, we go through our *Our State* and see where we want to go.

BM: And North Carolina history is taught in the fourth and the eighth grades. So our magazine is in hundreds and hundreds of fourth grade classrooms as a textbook. Now that also means that I have a responsibility, I feel, that I cannot ever let anything be in this magazine that a fourth grader would have any trouble with so we are very sensitive to the ads that we run. Of course, the stories, there's no question about. The stories we control, the ads we don't. But we can say to an advertiser like we did just a couple of months ago, we said, "Look, this ad has too much cleavage." And the advertiser said, "Oh yeah, but we're running it different places." So I said, "Well fine, but you're not going to run it my magazine."

[End of Tape 1, Side A] [Start of Side B]

KS: And you were saying you had advertisers –

BM: We had advertisers who have said, "Look you either run our ad the way we've given to you or you don't get it; or we will cancel our advertising" And I think you have to be true to yourself. You have to say, "This is what we're about. I'm sorry, we'd love to have your money but this is our standard." Gosh, we made a

decision several years ago, not to take political advertising. It's so painful. I'd love to get that money. I mean, you can imagine how much money is being spent this year.

KS: This year!

BM: We've got a senatorial race, we've got a governor's race, we've got a president's race; the money, they just throw it at you. But the ads are so horrible and I just don't think it's a fit for our magazine, so we don't take it. We don't take any hard liquor advertising. I don't know if that means we're going to corrupt people by showing a bottle of vodka, but I think that if we're going to be Pollyanna, we're going to say, "Hey, we'll take wine advertising, but we just don't take hard liquor." We don't take any advertising from the lottery. Again, I don't know if the lottery is such a horrible thing, but I just don't think it's positive enough. Unless things are ninety-nine percent positive, we just say, "Why do it?" You know.

We had trouble with a beer company who gave us an ad. We were happy to have their business. They give us this ad and they had the lighthouse and made it into a beer tap. So we said, "You know, that's not a good use of – that's an icon for North Carolina and in our magazine, our readers love lighthouses and making the lighthouse into a beer tap, you're going to get some feedback and some very angry people." They said, "Oh no, we're doing it everywhere. We're running the same ad everywhere." And again, that same story of saying "Well, you know, I don't think it's right, we're not going to take it." They said, "If you don't take it, you'll never get any business from us." And they were right; we have never gotten business from them. But I think it's the right thing to do. I think you've got to protect, and that means vigilance all the time.

It was interesting. We had an opening for an editor. We have only had two editors since I bought the magazine, but we had an opening for an editor about six years ago. A woman comes to see me and she said, "I'm the managing editor of the Greensboro *News & Record*. I have 126 reporters that report to me." I said to her, "You know, I'm glad you're here, but you're so overqualified. Why are you here? We've got a little, tiny magazine." She said, "I want to be here because you respect the product. The newspaper has no interest in the product. The product just goes between the ads and if there are not enough ads, they don't want the news. They just keep shucking it away." And it's gotten worse from six years ago when she said that to me to where it is today. And all you have to do is see the newspapers and they're having less circulation and they're having a number of problems.

But I think it does get down to a respect for the reader. And to say, "I think the reader is pretty smart. I think the reader is going to know if you're shortchanging him." I know readers who give me twenty-four dollars and ninety-five cents for a year's subscription. I feel a fiduciary responsibility, not to give

them eight or nine good issues and three or four skimpy ones just because we didn't sell enough advertising. I don't think that's right.

KS: There's an incredible value for what you get. I can speak as a consumer, because I have a subscription too. [Both laugh] And I mean it's always just great when it comes in the mail, you know.

BM: Thank you.

KS: Really, it gives you a great feeling when it comes in the mail. I've got a son and I can hand it to him. And I'm worried when he goes for *Sports Illustrated* because he will see worse things on beer commercials than he will on most things. [Both laugh] It's something as a parent that I'm concerned about, so I appreciate the fact that you don't have to go through it before you hand it to your child. It can be a family event, looking through it and figuring out where we might want to go the next weekend because it's been featured in *Our State*.

BM: Yes, right.

KS: Well, let me ask you about this. Tell me about winning the Charles Kurault Media Award.

BM: Oh, that was very nice and I was flattered to get that. It came from the Travel Council of North Carolina based upon promoting North Carolina. And as I said, we are – every page of our magazine is promoting North Carolina; promoting places to go, promoting places to see, and also promoting the people that you never heard of who do great things. We are so blessed in North Carolina to have a place that – you know it's so interesting, if you travel anywhere, as I'm sure you do, and people start a conversation and they say, "Oh, where you from?" And you say, "Well, I'm from North Carolina." You can almost predict what people are going to say. There're going to say, "Oh, that's a beautiful place."

KS: It's everybody's favorite place!

BM: It's everybody's favorite place. A lot of people have never even been here, but they've heard of our mountains, or our oceans, or our basketball players or something; but there's a positive feeling about North Carolina. I'm not sure there's such a positive feeling about Arkansas, nationwide, but there is about North Carolina. And we early on developed the slogan we use for the magazine and we use it all the time and that is, "If you like North Carolina, you'll love *Our State*." And I think it is really important to make it so that we're tied to the beauty of the state and that every page shows that the beauty, the physical beauty, I mean we go twenty, twenty-two pages of nothing but the beauty of the state and that's an important feature for us. Now what's interesting for us is when we first got started, we had to scramble to find any good photography. Now, we're so fortunate to have the best photographers. I mean, these people are just so talented.

And they come to us and they say, “We’d like to have our work in your magazine.”

KS: And you have a photo contest, don’t you?

BM: We do, we just had a photo contest and it was so interesting. We did it a year ago and our editor, Vicky Jarrett, who is just magnificent, she wanted to do this and I said, “I’m not sure, you’re going to get a bunch of amateurs.” She said, “You’ve got about 500 entries.” She blew out the door so often I said, “I’m sorry you’re right.”

KS: It’s great. It’s our standard of family photography. When ever we take a really good picture we say, “We’re going to enter that in *Our State*.”

BM: We just did it. We had 1,400 entries, some of the most magnificent. And of course the stipulation is you can not win if you are a professional photographer. If you’ve ever sold, and we check them out very carefully, if you’ve ever sold a picture, this is not for you. This is just folks having a good time trying to take pictures. Oh my goodness, the most wonderful pictures. It’s going to be in our July/August issues and it was just hard, hard to pick the top two or three.

KS: That’s always one of my favorite issues to see if what we’re taking compares to what wins in *Our State*. [Both laugh]

BM: Yes, well see if it is.

KS: So, and you also won the Winner’s Circle Award for North Carolina Tourist Industry in 2006. Tell me about that.

BM: That was given by the governor and that was at what was called the Governor’s Conference which is the industry once a year meeting and they select some people, and I was very flattered to be in that group; some magnificent people in the travel industry who have been given that recognition.

KS: So some of the issues facing Greensboro such as population growth, economic growth, leadership, race relations, water shortage; what do you think about all that and how can it be solved?

BM: Yes. You know, if you were to say what is the single most significant part of that laundry list you just mentioned, it’s all leadership. We have not, as a community, been blessed with great leadership.

KS: Why is that do you think? We’ve got the talent.

BM: I don’t know why. We have the talent, but since Jim Melvin was mayor here we have not been fortunate enough to have someone with the type of leadership

skills, the kind of ability to unite, to have that “follow me” kind of way of getting things done. Charlotte has had a good mayor; he’s in his seventh term. My goodness, you get elected seven times to anything you must either be doing something good or you pay a lot of people off. He’s done a lot and my goodness, what that city has done. Now they do have the benefit of some company with deep pockets. We have always suffered from not having a bank that’s home officed here or that the large companies here have just not been the kind of philanthropic companies that can make a big difference. I mean Charlotte, when they want to get the NASCAR museum for a hundred million dollars, they just make a few phone calls and up ponies Bank of America, Wachovia, and five or six other companies and it gets done. We haven’t had that, and the companies that we have had have not been as philanthropic. Jefferson, I think, has been a good company, but they’ve never led the way in making Greensboro a better place.

We’ve never had a bank that’s home officed here. Some of our biggest employers, of course, are UNCG [University of North Carolina Greensboro], Moses Cone Hospital, but those are non-profits. They don’t lead the way in the same way that a profit making business would. That’s where Winston had so much benefit. Winston was where they had the first arts council and it was started by someone from the Hanes family. And Hanes was a big giver to things that were important to the community. And Reynolds would give a great deal and it was way before they were trying to make people like them because of cigarette advertising. They just said, “We want to make this a great place to live. We want to recruit and we want to be able to say to somebody, ‘Hey, here’s what we have and we have the arts, and the theater and all of this.’” And they, Reynolds family, paid to have Wake Forest University moved to Winston lock, stock, and barrel. They picked the whole thing up, put it in the back of a U-haul and moved it down here. [Both laugh] And they gave them a campus and they built the buildings for it, and out of nowhere it becomes a university.

KS: Although downtown growth wise, Winston can’t seem to get itself off the ground, but Greensboro is growing hand over fist.

BM: That’s so interesting that Greensboro’s growing downtown and I’m not sure why and if you were to say five or six years ago, would downtown Greensboro grow – it was dilapidated and dumpy looking but to some people, it’s charming. And my son was here in town this past weekend and he hadn’t been here in a while to come out late at night and go on Elm Street after ten o’clock. He couldn’t believe it.

KS: Right. It’s great. I have some friends here and I come and there’s always something to do and there are different ages and you can bring your family downtown.

BM: Your fourteen year old son doesn’t go downtown after ten.

KS: No, he doesn't.

BM: But he will.

KS: Don't even say that! [Laughs]

BM: Two more years.

KS: I'm not ready for that yet, but it's amazing to see the kind of things going on in Greensboro.

BM: Sort of a spontaneous kind of thing.

KS: What do you see as Greensboro's future?

BM: Well, you know, we all seem to think that the FedEx plant can make a difference. A lot of people thought that the Dell plant would make a difference, and it has not.

KS: I wonder why?

BM: It just hasn't attracted other companies to be around it. That was one of the things they used to say, that Dell is one of those unique companies that doesn't own any of the components and they just have people deliver the components within minutes of when they need to install it into the computers that they're making. It is a very innovative way and it's also a very financially impressive way of running a business in which you don't buy the inventory, you just have it shipped to you. So the shipping, they thought everyone would open up these little satellite plants to be able to be ready to feed into Dell. Well, that was five years ago, Dell was a different company. Today Dell is having some problems.

KS: Have they bought into the community do you think, really?

BM: I haven't seen much from them.

KS: I don't think I've met anybody who works at Dell.

BM: No, they don't seem to have been to have been the sponsor of things, have been supportive of things. It makes a big difference.

KS: It really makes people in the community happy.

BM: Oh, no doubt about it, it makes a difference. So, FedEx will make it possible for a business to bring something to their plant by as late as midnight and it to be anywhere in America by 8:30 the next morning. That's pretty impressive, so that could have certain kind of companies that would want to want to be able to give

late shipment where someone could order something by 11 o'clock at night and have it 8:30 the next morning. Wow. So we'll see if it makes a difference. It certainly has been a big investment to get them here; redo the Bryan Boulevard, redo the airport, redo all of this to make it possible for them. So, I hope so.

KS: One of the interesting things about Greensboro is the strong Jewish community here. Are y'all involved with that?

BM: We are.

KS: I've been on their website. It's absolutely incredible.

BM: Yes, and it is really a very interesting, philanthropic community. There are some people who have just done great things. And not just within the Jewish community, but do things they feel – there's a very financially secure family that when the house for battered women burnt down, they just built a new one. They didn't even want their name on the door or anything. They just said, "This is the right thing to do." They gave them a million dollars to build a new building. They have contributed to things in the Jewish community, they've built the Federation building, they've built a building for [unclear] on the campus of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Jews still account for less than one percent of the population of North Carolina.

KS: Really?

BM: Very, very small.

KS: It just seems like a strong community in Greensboro that has done so much.

BM: Yes. Right. There is a sense of enthusiasm for education, there's a sense of community involvement, there's a feeling as I expressed a little while ago, you can't live in a community without giving back. My goodness, I was president of Rotary last year, this year it's Bob Cone is president, and not only do his Jewish roots go deep, but his family roots are so much a part of the history of this community.

KS: I've interviewed Alan Cone and he's wonderful; really nice.

BM: Interesting stories he would have to tell wouldn't he.

KS: Yes, he's a very nice man.

BM: How many years did he work for the company?

KS: Oh gosh, for years until he sold his, and then now he does commercial real estate and still flies, you know, he's really amazing. Well, is there anything that we haven't touched on that you would like to speak about?

BM: Oh goodness, you have just been wonderful in dragging things out of me.

KS: Well, you've been wonderful.

BM: I think you've covered most of the things; things I may not have remembered myself you've been able to get out of me.

KS: Well, great, we've touched on everything except politically. What about politics?

BM: I would love to be a United States Senator. I think that's the best job in America. A United States Senator because you're one of only a hundred and no matter what you do, you can't really do anything, you've got to get the others all to agree. And that's what's so funny about all these people who run for the Senate they say, "Well, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that." There're not going to do a darn thing. They're just going to be one of a hundred, ninety-nine others. But it has so much prestige and you feel like you can have a bully pulpit to say what you feel.

KS: Well, what do you think? Why don't you do it?

BM: No, because it's so awful. Why do we have such poor leadership? A lot of it is because people say, "I don't want to get into that." There is so much mud raking. I mean this little race that we have now for the primary for the Democratic nominee for governor, Mrs. Purdue and her opponent. My goodness, you know, I don't know which one I favor, it doesn't really matter, but I do know that the race is terrible. One knocking the other then finally Mrs. Purdue says, "I'm not going to run negative," and then she has someone else knock the other candidates. So, I mean, that's why you see such poor quality people run for office. But in any event, that would be fun; and also, centerfielder for the Yankees. [Both laugh] Those are my two dreams.

KS: Your dreams, I love it. So you still like baseball?

BM: I love baseball.

KS: Do you really.

BM: Yes.

KS: We're getting a new stadium in Winston, and there's the Greensboro Grasshoppers. Are you a Grasshopper fan?

- BM: We go occasionally. It's just fun, I mean the whole atmosphere. And now, you know, we're building a carousel.
- KS: That's right, I heard about that.
- BM: And that will be downtown and that will be another one of those things that you say, "How can we make Greensboro a better place?" We all love living here. This community has been good to every one of us. And in our Rotary Club – it's interesting because I've been asked to speak at a number of different places and it's because of my magazine. So I was asked to speak in Wadesboro. Wadesboro is the old joke, it's not the end of the earth, but I can see it from here.
- KS: Where is that?
- BM: Way, way south. It's two and a half hours south of here near Rockingham. So I go down there, and the people were so lovely and so gracious. Before my speech they started explaining that Wadesboro has had some terrible problems. They've lost some of their plants, the plants closed, they have tremendous unemployment, and the community was just feeling so down. So the Rotary Club decided that they were going to do something to make the community develop some pride. They took over an abandoned school; of course, the population had drifted down so they had an abandoned school. They took over the abandoned school and built a planetarium. Wow!
- KS: Wow!
- BM: So now they have busloads of kids coming from eighty miles around to Wadesboro to the planetarium. And they were all so filled of pride to tell me about it. They wanted to take me over there to see it and all. So I have this long drive back and I'm thinking to myself, "You know, Greensboro is so fortunate. We've lost some employment and all that but we don't have the situation of Wadesboro; that dire situation. But still and all, wouldn't be wonderful if we could build something, create something that would be a sense of pride?" So I thought, "Well, my goodness, what about a carousel?" Rotary, carousel, you know it makes a lot of sense. So, I came back to our club and told them about it and generated enough enthusiasm so they voted to do it, and now we're in the process of raising the money. We have two committees; about fifty people involved in this thing. Of course it's a lot of money. We need to raise about three million bucks, and so we have one committee of logistics who are going to try to figure out what it should look like and how we can make it totally Greensboro with thirty-six panels overhead about the history of Greensboro. The horses, the animals, are all going to be mascots from the various schools and universities, everything hand carved, very expensive.
- KS: So it's going to be made. You don't have one you're going to purchase. It's going to be specialized.

BM: You can buy one for far less, but we said, “We’re only doing this one time. Let’s do it great.” Thoreau said, “Do nothing ordinary.” And I like to think of that. I like to say, “Why shouldn’t we? Why can’t we? What stands in the way of doing something exceptional? Only your attitude, that’s the only thing that stands in the way.” So we said, “We’re going to do something exceptional. We’re going to build a carousel that is unlike anything else because it’s going to be a Greensboro carousel.” And it will be hand carved by craftsmen to what we want and everything on this carousel is going to be about Greensboro. So that’s one committee doing that, and then we have another committee to raise the funds and we hired a full-time person to help put all this together because all of us have day jobs. But the overriding feeling is that all of us; all 322 of us in Greensboro Rotary and the other eight clubs, we all love living in Greensboro. We’re proud of this city and as taxpayers, I think that we should be paying our taxes for the things the city needs: police, fire, sewer, water, you know, those things. That’s what the city needs. But what about what the city would like? What would be wonderful to have? It’s got to come from some funds that aren’t normally used for hospitals and other things.

Now, I have had people say to me, “Well, if you’re going to raise three million dollars, why don’t you give it to the homeless? If you’re going to raise three million dollars, why don’t you give it to Meals on Wheels? Why don’t you give it to the historical museum? Why don’t you give it to the Civil Rights Museum?” There is no end to the things that need money, but we seem to feel that there would be something special about doing a unique thing for Greensboro. Frankly, I think that it will help my members to feel a sense of pride, of being able to say, “Look what we were able to create.” For us as a club, for our children and our grandchildren to be able to enjoy something like this. But mostly for the city itself too, because we’re going to put this downtown so that it’s easily accessible to everybody and we’ll add – you know you’re talking about the ball park, the ball park has been such a homerun, such a wonderful thing and the Warthogs are going to be downtown in Winston-Salem which seems to be what sort of unites a community and that’s great.

KS: There’s nothing like one of those Carolina games with the big dice. The first time I saw that, where they did the rubber chicken run and dropped the dice off the roof, I thought, “This is the greatest thing since sliced bread!” [Laughs]

BM: It is nice, yes.

KS: Well, this has been such a pleasure.

BM: Thank you very much Kathelene.

KS: I really appreciate you meeting with me today.

BM: Sure.

KS: Thank you so much.

[End of interview]

[End Tape 1, Side B]
