

**PRESERVE OUR HISTORY:
ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO**

INTERVIEWEE: John Rosser

INTERVIEWER: Kathelene Smith

DATE: May 8, 2013

KS: My name is Kathelene Smith. It's May 8, 2013. I'm in the office of Mr. John Rosser on Market Street for the Preserving Our History Rotary Club of Greensboro Oral History interview. Hello, Mr. Rosser. Thank you for having me to your office today.

JR: Thank you, Kathelene.

KS: We'll start with just some general questions about your early life. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

JR: I was born in Sanford, North Carolina in the Lee County Hospital where my mother worked as a registered nurse, to the parents of John Fletcher Rosser and Dorothy Allen Bethune Rosser, and I was a junior.

KS: Oh, great. Well, tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Sanford.

JR: Sanford was wonderful community: very warm. There were probably forty to fifty kids in my neighborhood. I remember as a kid that there was a lock on the door of the house, but I don't ever remember the door being locked and I don't ever remember seeing a key because all of us kids were in all of the houses all of the time, in and out, and kind of like all the parents kind of helped raise the whole neighborhood. One of the guys across the street's Dad was the local veterinarian, and they had a dog pen full of beagles, and so after school, Griggs McKinnon and I would go let the dogs run. And we had a lot of woods in the area, and we'd just have a great time in the afternoon. Two blocks was a city park where there were six tennis courts, two basketball goals, and a swimming pool. And I grew up swimming for the Sanford Squids, and we'd have practice three times a day at six in the morning, twelve noon, and then six in the evening, and one year we had a swimmer from NC State who was an all-American, Peter Fogarasee [?], who was our coach, and without his glasses on, he was almost blind, and he would get into the pool to show us different strokes, and what have you, and all of us would be standing on the deck watching Coach Fogarasee give instructions, and he would always say, "Where are my kids? Where are my kids?" So Sanford was just a wonderful place to grow up.

KS: So where did you go to school when you were there?

- JR: I started off At St. Claire Elementary School, and Mrs. Hickman was my principal all six years—a lovely lady; then Sanford Junior High with Mr. Clements as the principal there for three years; and then to Sanford Central, and had a couple of different principals there. I played football and wrestled, and our senior year we were the Eastern 3A champions in football, and I was president of the student body.
- KS: Wow, that's impressive. It's great. So tell me a little bit about your family life. Did you have brothers and sisters?
- JR: I have one younger sister who was nineteen months younger than me, and we were together, you know, an awful lot being that close in age, and we were probably like a lot of siblings—at each other's throats—and she would do anything she could to antagonize me so that I would get in trouble.
- KS: I've got one like that myself. [laughter] That's great. Well, what was your favorite subject in school?
- JR: I was good in math and science and history. I was real poor in French. I could read it, but something about my auditory skills made it very difficult for me to hear it and then speak it. So Latin was not a problem since that was mainly read, but French was my weakness, but all of the other courses, I enjoyed, and I was a good student, and did fine. I was actually a Morehead Scholar nominee from our high school.
- KS: Oh, great. Anything else about your childhood. Did you have grandparents nearby or—
- JR: Yes, that was actually a very important part of my life. My grandmother and grandfather Rosser lived in Broadway, North Carolina. My grandmother Rosser was actually a graduate of Woman's College, Dr. McIver's academy, and was a schoolteacher in a single room schoolhouse in Mamers, North Carolina after graduation. May Leak Aster. And my grandmother Bethune lived in Bunnlevel, about twenty-five miles away. Broadway is about eight miles away so growing up, every Sunday after church, we would get in the car, and we'd go to one of my grandparents' house for—in eastern North Carolina, it's called—dinner, Sunday dinner, which is the noon meal, and there would always be two or three meats, and a half-dozen bowls of vegetables, and two or three desserts. And after dinner, we would go visiting, and there was always Aunt so-and-so, or Uncle so-and-so, or cousin so-and-so. Broadway had about three hundred people in that community, and Bunnlevel had about three hundred people in that community, and I almost thought I was kin to everybody growing up because I spent my Sundays with family until I was probably about fourteen years of age.
- KS: That's great, all those relatives. So when did you graduate?
- JR: I finished high school in '68. That was an interesting year in our country, and I went to Wake Forest University. I was there from '68 until '72. I was a member of a fraternity, an economics major, and I did a lot better in my high school academics than I did in my college academics, but I was a walk-on on the football team freshman year at Wake

Forest. My lottery number in the draft was 108 in 1968, so they guaranteed us that we were going to be drafted so I was a member of ROTC, US Army ROTC, and went through four years of college being told that I was going to be commissioned upon graduation as a second lieutenant in the infantry, and I would be going to Vietnam to be in charge of a forty-man infantry platoon. As it turned out, they were winding down in Vietnam starting in the spring of '72, and my active duty consisted of Officer Basic School in the Medical Service Corps at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. I actually thoroughly enjoyed my military career. [laughter]

KS: San Antonio. Well, back to Wake Forest for a minute: so you were going to Wake Forest in the sixties. Did—and I know college life be kind of insular—Did you have a feeling of what was going on politically in the country? I mean, I know that you knew, of course, Vietnam was looming, and you were in ROTC, but what other kind of things did—were you all thinking about in college in the sixties?

JR: Just the different, I'll say, societal tensions that were going on. Wasn't it '68 that the democratic national convention was in Chicago, and there was a lot of rioting, and the spring of '68 was when Martin Luther King was murdered, and Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, so it was, in some ways nationally, a political unrest all around, but in the monastic setting of Wake Forest and that campus, you really didn't experience it in your day-to-day life, except for what you read and what you saw on TV on the news because we had such a small campus. There were only three thousand students when I was there. You knew everybody on campus, or you at least spoke to everybody on campus. You had the Pit, which was the dining hall that all your meals were at. You had one post office, one bank so it was really a very safe college experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed my experience there. My mother had passed away—she had multiple sclerosis—in December of my senior of high school, so in some ways Wake Forest was a part of my family that having lost my mother, made my Wake Forest college experience even that much more comforting to me.

KS: Now did you all kind of—as a rule, did you all go outside of the campus into the city of Winston-Salem, or did you all mostly stay on the campus at that time?

JR: You mostly stayed on the campus. I mean, it was, I don't know how many, hundreds or thousands of acres. You didn't have to go off-campus. You know, you might go off-campus from time to time to eat a meal, or to drive down to Salem or UNCG for a date, but there really wasn't a need, per se, to be off-campus unless there was some reason why you wanted to.

KS: Now we know from a WC point of view, they were busing the girls to, I think, Chapel Hill. Did they bus any of the WC girls over to Wake Forest?

JR: I don't remember busing the students from UNCG, but the house minority leader, Gerald Ford, had a son Michael who was a freshman with me at Wake Forest, and he was dating his high school girlfriend who was at UNCG, and my high school girlfriend was at

UNCG, so Michael and I actually did right much double dating our freshman year together, because I had a vehicle and he didn't. But then he joined a different fraternity than I did so our ways split and our social life went on different tracks.

KS: So you spent a lot of time in Greensboro during your college years, too.

JR: Did some, but, again, most of the activities were on campus at Wake Forest because there weren't the kind of activities at UNCG back in '68 to make it attractive for the guys to hang out at UNCG.

KS: So what were your favorite subjects in school? Did you kind of continue on a math/science kind of track?

JR: Well yes, economics. I was an econ major and thoroughly loved it. I had a lot of history courses initially, but I found that economics was actually more descriptive of history than maybe some of the history courses.

KS: Good point.

JR: You know, the history could tell you what happened. The economics could tell you what was going to happen, so I actually kind of fell in love with economics just from the macro picture of what's going on in the world, and having, to me, a better understanding of why it's going on.

KS: Now you said that you were in a fraternity. What fraternity were you in?

JR: Kappa Alpha order.

KS: KA.

JR: Yes.

KS: And were you involved in any other campus organizations?

JR: Other than ROTC and the Economics Club, I was supportive of the student government, but I wasn't an elected officer, or never ran for a political position, but Reverend Mike Aiken here in Greensboro was treasurer of the student body when he was in school, and he and I were good friends then, and are still good friends, and spoke today at Rotary, and ran into each other yesterday at Tex and Shirley's at breakfast, supporting Urban Ministry because May 7 was Eating Out for Urban Ministry in Greensboro.

KS: So you said you walked on to the football team?

JR: Yes, ma'am.

KS: So how long did that last? Did you play football very long on the team?

JR: Well, my freshman year, and the understanding was if I had a good spring training—spring practice—that I'd be given a scholarship for my sophomore year, so when I got the letter to report to football camp in August of '69, I called Coach Ron Stark who was the offensive line coach, about the scholarship, and he said, "Well, you know if you have a good fall, then we'll give you a scholarship." By that time I was recognizing the pleasure of the social life of college, and, you know, I honestly knew that at 6'2, 195 pounds [height and weight], I wasn't going to be, probably, an All-American offensive lineman, so I offered not to come to summer camp. [laughter]

KS: Then you were involved with ROTC anyway, so you were a busy guy.

JR: That's right.

KS: So you graduated, and you ended up in San Antonio.

JR: Yes, Officer Basic School in the Medical Service Corps was at San Antonio, and in the spring of '72, they had rifted—they were winding down in Vietnam—they had rifted twelve thousand captains out of service, and so the first week I'm at Fort Sam, they offered me two years active, or six months active and seven and a half years of Reserve, and I said, "Well, I'll take the six months and the Reserve," and then I got a job at Jefferson Pilot at equity sales in the home office, the investment company of Jefferson Pilot, and started to work there in March of '73, and there was a medical unit in Durham, North Carolina, and a medical unit in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I assumed the army placed them there because of the med schools and the teaching facilities, and so I drove over to both reserve centers and offered my services and they had no slots for a second lieutenant. My military occupation specialty was 70 Bravo or 3506, which is a field hospital administrator, so that put me in the inactive reserve component, out of control in St. Louis, Missouri, and they promoted me to a first lieutenant with no credits toward my retirement, but denied me promotion to captain twice with no credits toward my retirement because I wasn't attending any drills or any summer camps because there wasn't a medical unit that had a slot for me. So after eight years of reserves, I got honorably discharged as a first lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve.

KS: That's wonderful. [laughter] So anything special you wanted to talk about with being in San Antonio for that period of time? I think it's beautiful; it's a beautiful city.

JR: It's a beautiful city, and, quite frankly, coming out of college, I never had so much money in my life. As a college student, you know, you live to scrimp by working in the summers, and making money, and stuff like that. My dad was very supportive of my college education, but it wasn't a luxurious lifestyle in college, so the first day at Fort Sam, they gave me a thousand dollars for uniforms, and in San Antonio in July, two sets of khakis is about all you need to go to class. I didn't need dress blues, and all of the other uniforms. I had my greens, army greens, for parades and stuff. They gave me two hundred and fifty dollars a month for officer housing allowance since they had no on-base housing for temporary duty. I'm going to school, and I ran into a guy from East

Tennessee State University—Jim McLachlan—who was there on temporary duty for the same school that I was, and we found an apartment off-base, a block off-base, really, a hundred and seventy five dollars a month, and so we split that, so that was money in the pocket. They gave us \$28.75 per day per diem for meals, and so you had breakfast and lunch on your own, and then at three o'clock when you got out of class, you went to the Officer's Club for twenty-five cent draft beers, and free hot hor d'oeuvres, so for a dollar and a half an evening, you got fed. So I actually sent my dad three thousand dollars to put in a savings account for me, and I put three thousand dollars into traveler's checks, and I spent in the next months travelling around out west all by myself, seeing national parks, and the world because I knew I'd never have a two-month vacation again.

KS: Right, what an adventure. Did anything exciting happen during those two months?

JR: Up in the Grand Tetons, I ran into a bull moose on a hiking trail. I was on a three-day hike and ran into a bull moose, but that turned out I was probably more scared than he was, and he didn't chase me or anything. It snowed on me up in Glacier National Park pretty heavily one night, but just, you know. I'd never been to the Pacific so I rode down the Pacific coast highway, and then across over to Arizona and New Mexico. And so I spent some time in Colorado with a high school and college buddy who was living in Colorado. I spent some time in Twin Falls, Idaho, with a high school buddy who was living in Twin Falls, so I got to see Evil Knievel's ramp for his Snake River jump a year or two before he actually participated in the Snake River jump. So I just did a lot of fun things, and was visiting a lot of fun friends, and just, you know, having a great time seeing the world.

KS: Now did any thoughts, as you were traveling around the United States, of maybe settling somewhere else? Or did you know you wanted to basically come home to North Carolina.

JR: Well, I honestly, knowing that I had a commitment to the army—and at the time, two years—my senior year in college I went to no job interviews because I didn't see any need of wasting a lot of people's time, and probably a waste of my time for what might happen after I got out of the army, so I didn't go to any job interviews so when I got the job at Jefferson Pilot Equity Sales, it was because my dad had some friends in Greensboro that basically got me the job because I was an econ major just out of the army. And I stayed there for eleven months, and worked with a fellow Rotarian, Sherrill Hall, who I had dinner with last night at a Rotary dinner, and went to work for a company out of Worcester, Massachusetts. After that I called State Mutual and did that for eighteen years, and then went with Consolidated Planning in 1990, so I've just always used my economics major in the business world, and it's been a lot of fun.

KS: So you were here for eleven months, and then you decided to make a jump to Massachusetts.

JR: Well, no, I—The company was headquartered in Massachusetts, but I stayed in Greensboro.

KS: Oh, okay, alright.

JR: I was wholesaling retirement plans for this company called State Mutual. I did a lot of defined benefit pension plan work, and that was prior even to 401Ks being a law. That was a 1978 law that the final regs didn't come of the IRS until 1984.

KS: So you just stayed here. You were basically here for the—

JR: I've been in Greensboro since 1973.

KS: Well, that's wonderful. Well, so you raised a family here.

JR: Right, I met a lovely native in the spring of '74. We got married in February of '75. We had a five-year no-cut, no-kid contract, and she threw in a stereo for signing, and [laughter] our first son was born in July of '80, and our second son was born in November of '83, so we've been in Greensboro ever since. And our older son still lives in Greensboro. He's the director of planning and engineering for the Piedmont Triad International Airport, and our younger son is a police officer in High Point, so they're close by.

KS: So what was it like during those years in Greensboro?

JR: Well, I remember the first year we were married. My wife is Marty; she was Marty Squires. Her mother was Martha Sikes, whose dad was Eugene Sikes who owned Sikes drugstore down on Elm Street with his brother Archie, Archibald—

KS: Now is that S y?

JR: S y k e s.

KS: Y k e s.

JR: Yes. And in fact, Kathelene, the first telephone number in Greensboro was actually a physician who was upstairs above the drugstore, and the physician's phone number was one, zero. A two-digit phone number. That was the very, very first phone in Greensboro, and it's in one of the Greensboro history books. And Bill Craft[?] actually gave Marty—about ten years ago—an embossed Sykes Drugstore bottle that he had found in some garbage heap, cleaning up. You know Bill was in Mr. Greensboro Beautiful; worked in all the gardens in the city, and somewhere he found this bottle, and he knew Marty's mom and dad and knew the family history, and so he cleaned up this embossed drugstore bottle, probably for cough syrup or something, and gave it to Marty. So we're very grateful to Bill Craft for remembering the family.

But Greensboro was a lovely place to grow up. We went to the Janus theater in our first few months of marriage, and we went to the movies, and after the movies I told

my wife, who is a psychotherapist, that I'm feeling depressed, and she says, "Oh no, what's wrong?"

I said, "Well, having grown up in Sanford, I knew everybody. And I just went to the Janus Theater, and I didn't see anybody I'd even seen before, much less know them." [laughter]

KS: I bet that was different.

JR: So, you know, I was used to small towns, and here I am in the big city of Greensboro, and there were a lot of people I had no idea who they were.

KS: Now were you able to take your children back to Sanford through the years and kind of give them that experience?

JR: Oh yes, oh yes. My dad played football at NC State, and so he was fond to take his grandsons to NC State, and my dad never met a stranger. He was 6'5", 265 [height and weight], and head of the Wolfpack Club down in Lee County, and my assignment to my two sons was, "Watch your papa work the crowds. See what you can learn from your papa," because, you know, he was Mr. Personality.

KS: That's great. So did you continue that visiting tradition?

JR: Yes. In fact, the very first time we went to Sanford after Alex, our older son, was born, I'm saying we were supposed to be there at twelve-thirty for a Sunday dinner, and about—and it's an hour drive—so about eleven-fifteen, I called my dad, and I said, "Dad, it's taking longer to pack the car than I anticipated. I think we're going to be fifteen or twenty minutes late," and he just died laughing. You know, the new travails of fatherhood.

KS: Well, what kind of traditions did you start with your own family? Any kind of things that you all particularly liked, or maybe did on a yearly basis, like the Christmas parade or anything like that that your children liked to do?

JR: We went to the county fair at the coliseum frequently, and we'd take the boys to see the animals and that kind of stuff. Petting zoo at the Natural Science Center; Troy Johnston Park [?] was at the end of the street, and the creek in front of our house—we live on Blair Street—was between Blair Street and Nottingham, and it's a two-block long park. It's now called Bill Craft Park, and there's a creek in the middle of the park, and so we bought the house from Marty's cousins in October of 1981 at 18 ½% interest rates, but I wanted it because I wanted my boys to grow up in the creek, playing with crayfish and, you know, that kind of stuff, so it was just a great place to raise children, playing in the park.

KS: Now what about your career, as it's moved along? What were you—How did you build that up?

JR: With that five-year no-cut, no-kid contract, Marty and I focused on our careers real seriously the first five years. She was the head of the psychiatric social work component at the Memorial Hospital in Burlington those five years, and I was traveling eastern North Carolina wholesaling retirement plans and benefit programs for companies. And on weekends we had a great time, and we would cook casseroles together, and during the week, we'd leave the house at seven in the morning, get home about seven o'clock at night, and pop in a casserole, and eat leftovers the rest of the week. And one time Marty asked me, do I get tired of that. I said, why, it's good. You know, so I'm not one that's fussy about food. You know, I'm pretty easy when it comes to that, so we just focused on our careers, and our relationship with each other, and we've been married thirty-eight years.

KS: Good. Congratulations.

JR: And in fact, probably the most things in my life is in 19—in 2002, after twenty-seven years of marriage, we found out some family information up at Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Our son David started playing the bagpipes at age twelve and really became quite good. In fact, he still plays. Last weekend at a memorial service in Durham, North Carolina, for fallen police officers, he played at the memorial service. And I don't think there's anything more stirring than the bagpipes. In fact, I know what it sounds like in heaven, Kathelene. One summer up at Grandfather Mountain, there were four hundred pipers playing "Amazing Grace," and it can't sound any more moving in heaven than that. So Marty and I were—I knew that her great-grandmother was Mary Texa[?] McDuffie Sykes from Fayetteville, North Carolina, who was the mother of Eugene, and so we went to the McDuffie tent and found out that the head of the McDuffie clan was Marty's second cousin. His family—He lived in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, but his family was the Fayetteville McDuffies. And so the next summer we're up at Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, and Fritz McDuffie is his name—He's still living in his nineties. Sometimes, Kathelene, I can be full of it. So I walked into the McDuffie tent, and I knew that I had in my family tree, an Isabella McDuffie who married a John Patterson down in Moore County—Aberdeen—who had given some of the land for the old Bethesda Presbyterian Church in the 1700s. So I walk into the McDuffie tent, and I said, "Well, cousin Fritz, are Marty and I cousins." So this gentlemen reaches down and brings up a four-inch ring binder, doesn't say a word to me except turns to tab six. On the second page of tab six, I find John Fletcher Rosser Jr.'s name. "Well, cousin Fritz, are Marty and I cousins?" He said, "Keep turning." Well, I flip over the pages, and on page ten, I find Marty Squires Rosser. I said, "Well, cousin Fritz, are Marty and I cousins."

He said, "You're both in tab six, aren't you?" Our common ancestors are Finwall and Daniel McDuffie who came from [unclear], Scotland, to North Carolina in September of 1739 on the first Argyll[?] Colony ship. I'm a descendent of Isabella who was their first-born; Marty is a descendent of Archibald who was their second-born. Our mothers were fifth cousins.

KS: That's incredible.

JR: Marty and I are sixth cousins, and my biggest regret in life is that my mother-in-law passed away before she knew I was her cousin.

KS: That is incredible.

JR: Marty was born two days before her mother's fortieth birthday, so I was the only son my mother-in-law had, and I got away with stuff that her daughter couldn't get away with. [laughter]

KS: Well, that may explain the talent that your son has for the bagpipes, a double dose of it. That's incredible.

JR: We think probably when he was about ten, we were watching the movie *Braveheart*, and he said something to the effect, "Dad, there's something that really has got me going about this movie," and I said, "Well, you know, you've got a Scottish ancestry." He said, "I do."

KS: How exciting. So have you all traveled to Scotland?

JR: [unclear] Our first trip was in '04, and we went for three weeks because neither one of us had been. Then '05 there was an international gathering of the McFee, McDuffies, and we went to that, and then we went again in '09 for the international gathering of the McDuffies.

KS: So where is the gathering in Scotland?

JR: It always ends up in Colonsay. There's usually about a week on Colonsay, but we've been to Inverness, and we've been to Nethy Bridge. Both were in the highlands, but now they try to have it in different locations so that everybody from all over the world that comes in, can get to see some of the different areas of Scotland.

KS: Well, what a wonderful link with history. That is great.

JR: Kathelene, I don't know anything I've had more fun with. [laughter]

KS: That is great; that is really wonderful. And your grandchildren and great grandchildren: everybody will have that link.

JR: All the guys in the family had kilts, even the two grandsons, so yes.

KS: So anything else about your career or living in Greensboro that you want to touch on? For example, how have things changed since you've lived here in the—

JR: Well, Greensboro has gotten a lot bigger. In 1956 at the northwest corner of Battleground and Cornwallis was Miss Minnie's chicken coop, and every Saturday my mother-in-law, and my six-year-old, soon-to-be wife would go to Miss Minnie's and get two dozen eggs.

KS: A real chicken coop.

JR: A real chicken coop. Yes.

KS: I thought that was the name of a store.

JR: No. So now, from that intersection, which is not that far out in downtown, you have to go—what—six or eight miles up Battleground to get out of town, so Greensboro in the last fifty years has grown tremendously—last sixty years—it's grown tremendously. It's a much bigger place than when I showed up in '73.

KS: Sure. There is a lot of changes downtown. What do you think about some of the changes they've made there over the years?

JR: Well, in October of '74, Marty was living in Massachusetts, and she came down to go to Wake Forest homecoming with me, and on Monday, after homecoming in October, we'd gone to the Hub, which was at the corner of Elm Street and Friendly Avenue—No, West Market, West Market and Elm Street—and bought me a navy blue wool blazer for the winter, and then afterwards, I said, "Why don't we walk down the street and see if we can find something for you?" Well, in '74 downtown Greensboro, there was very little commercial enterprise down there, but Schiffman's was still there, so Marty was smart enough to figure out. Well, there's nothing else down here. I'd better say yes to this. So we walked down to Schiffman's and she selected an engagement ring, so between you and me, Kathelene, I never asked her to marry me. In sales terms it's called implied consent. If they say yes, you never have to actually ask.

KS: [laughter] That's a great story. So I'd heard that downtown Greensboro was very different back then as far as not really—kind of going through a trough.

JR: In the middle seventies, there was basically no commercial enterprise. Friendly Shopping Center was the commercial enterprise.

KS: It's really picked up. They did some great work downtown.

JR: I think in—what's the mall out on High Point Road, where the Koury Center is?

KS: Oh, like the Four Seasons.

JR: Four Seasons. The Four Seasons was there. That was fairly new at that point. I think it had started in the late sixties, so it was five or six years old. But Friendly and Four Seasons was "the downtown" for commercial retail sales.

KS: Well, anything that you can think about, like as far as how Greensboro could improve the quality of life for its citizens? Do you think there could be improvements in the city that you would like to see, or do you think things are pretty good the way they are?

JR: Well, I confess that I really don't spend much energy on that kind of situation. You know, I reckon you kind of trust your city leaders to be in charge of the vision, and—

KS: So no political aspirations or—[laughs]

JR: Not on my part; not on my part. You know, I've been real involved with the Boy Scouts. I was an Eagle Scout at age thirteen. The scouting was really important to me, and my dad was one of my scout leaders, and with my mother's illness with multiple sclerosis, it was a way that I could lose myself in an activity and do things with my dad that were, you know, were important to both of us. And both of our sons are Eagle Scouts. Both of them went to Philmont Scout Ranch; both of them have been to the National Jamboree. I went with them on both of the treks to the Philmont.

KS: Well, that's great.

JR: Yes. We went backpacking every summer. We went hiking up at Mt. Rogers, and we actually bought a farm in Grayson County, Virginia, fourteen miles east of Mt. Rogers just because we kind of fell in love with the area, and we're growing fraser fir Christmas trees using my forestry merit badge skills.

KS: So what gave you the idea that that's what you wanted to kind of do at this point, to kind of shift gears a little bit and go into entrepreneurship actually.

JR: Yes, but it was more of a spiritual thing. Marty and I've worked on our spiritual journey fairly seriously in the last twenty-five years, I'll say. We've gone through the Servant Leadership School sponsored by Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. We were in the very first class, and the rector there, Reverend Tim Patterson, has been an important friend, and his wife Kathleen have been, you know, great couple friends for us. So we've enjoyed the spiritual aspect, and somewhat got into Celtic spirituality. And let me contrast that to Roman spirituality. St. Aquinas and St. Augustus—As a historian, you might know about how you had to understand God and understand the spiritual world. Celtic spirituality is very different. You just acknowledge that God's presence is within and all-around and everything, and you spend your time getting in touch with it from the within[?], the quiet place. So we call the farm that Marty bought through her IRA, using a section of the Internal Revenue Code called 72T, which allows a reallocation of assets. Even though it's taxable, it avoids the 10% penalty tax of pre-59 ½ distributions, and so she used that to buy the farm, and we call it The Shepherd's Retreat. We don't know why we're there. It happened way too easily for it not to have been for a purpose, and so we use it as a spiritual retreat, and we have a lot of church groups and boy scout troops that come up there and stay at the farm, and they use our trees as fund-raisers for their ministries and their activities. So we just acknowledge that we're given stewardship of this piece of God's creation, and we try to make as available as we can for other groups.

KS: What a great way to give back. That is wonderful. That is really great. And just because you all kind of fell in love with the area.

JR: Right.

KS: That is amazing. That really is amazing. So I know that you some connections with the local colleges. Was your relative actually going to—probably it was State Normal Industrial back then when she went? Do you all still kind of keep in touch with either the colleges here or your own alma maters?

JR: Well, Marty went to Hollins and then went to Chapel Hill and got her MSW in psychiatric social work. Her second year of marriage, we were going to Wake Forest for a football game about the middle of the year, and Marty shared with me that it seemed to her that Wake Forest athletics was beginning to interfere with our social life, to which I responded, “My dear, Wake Forest athletics is our social life.” So she gave me two sons to take to athletic events.

When David was ten, he was playing lacrosse on a club team here in Greensboro that would play other club teams around the state. One March Saturday, they had a game at some high school in Chapel Hill, and we had a van load of guys, and so after the game I said to them, “Would you boys like to go down to the Rathskellar down on Franklin Street and have a sizzling hamburger.” And they thought that was a great idea, so we went and ate, and after lunch I said, “Would you boys like to go watch the big boys play lacrosse. The University of Maryland is playing the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in lacrosse across campus.” They said, “Yes, that would be a great idea.” So we’re walking through campus, and Marty is pointing out this building and that building, and this building and that building, and little ten-year-old David says to his mother, “How do you know this?” And she says, “Well, I went to school here.” And David says, “Well, you’ve never told me that.” And I bent down and I whispered to him, “David, there are some things we’re just not very proud of in our family.” He was ten years old before he knew his mama had a Chapel Hill diploma. But of course, she was there for grad school, so athletics meant nothing to her.

KS: Sure. It is, it’s what team you follow. I know that. So what about—I know you’ve been very involved with your church and, of course, boy scouts, but anything—any other philanthropic cause in Greensboro?

JR: I’ve served on the board at Greensboro Urban Ministry. I mentioned that Reverend Mike Aiken is a good friend of mine. And I’ve been real involved in Rotary. I’ve been a member almost twenty-five years now. My dad was a Rotarian and had been president of his club. In the ninth grade, I was given the Rotary citizenship award in junior high.

KS: It was foreshadowing of your involvement to come

JR: Who knows. And so I’ve been vice president of our club, president, club secretary—I think—five or six times. I’m getting ready to do it again to help my good friend and one of my best friends, Freddy Robinson, who is going to be president (starting in July) of the Rotary Club. I’ve worked on six different district conferences and was actually co-chair of the year that Bob Newton, a member of our club, was district governor, so, you know,

it's just been something that's been fun. For instance, Bob Cone and I did Cub Scouts together, and he was district chairman of Battlefield District in the Boy Scouts. I was his vice chairman for two years, and I love Bob Cone. And so an opening came up for the chairs at our Rotary Club, and I really encouraged Bob to be president of our club. I said, "Bob, I'll give it to you straight. It gave me an awful lot of energy for twelve months, because I thoroughly enjoyed it, and twelve months is the right length of time." [laughs] Bob Cone is a fifth generation—fifth generation—Greensboro Rotarian.

KS: That is amazing.

JR: Isn't that amazing.

KS: Isn't that a legacy.

JR: Yes, he's just a wonderful guy.

KS: Now what are some of your favorite Rotary projects that you've worked on through the years?

JR: Well, Polio Plus is probably the one that we're most known for. That's our efforts working with the United Nations to eradicate polio around the world. I don't know how many hundreds of millions of dollars Rotarians have given towards that, and that's not all the funds necessary to eradicate polio, but I think there are a few polio cases left in maybe five countries in the world. Most of them are in countries where there's conflict, armed conflict, and it's sometimes difficult to get to all the children for the vaccination. So that certainly is one that we're well known for. On a local level, our Rotary Club and the other Rotary Clubs in Greensboro were real instrumental in the development of Eastside Park. We gave hundreds of thousands of dollars for that, plus a lot of leadership, and vision, and commitment in time helping to build some Habitat for Humanity houses, et cetera. Our Rotary Club is really one of the largest Rotary Clubs in North Carolina—We've got almost three hundred in members—and have been instrumental in the development of Greensboro over the years. All the Cones, a lot of your mayors have been members of our club. Our club was started in 1917 with the help of Winston-Salem who was our sponsoring organization, and who was sponsored by Roanoke, Virginia's Rotary Club because another club has to sponsor. And we've sponsored, I think it's eight or ten additional Rotary Clubs over our history since then. And there are like three thousand Rotarians just in like an eight or ten county area in piedmont, North Carolina that we've got ten percent of the membership of Rotary. We've got a lot of past district governors who've come through from our club, including Dr. Arnold Schiffman, Dr. Charlie Phillips, Wade Phillips, Bob Newton, Charlie Younce. You know, we've brought a lot of talent from our club. And Luther Hodges, former governor of North Carolina, was president of Rotary International, you know, just up the road a couple of miles from Greensboro. So Rotary has been an important aspect of the communities in Greensboro, the communities in North Carolina, and, I'm going to say, the communities of the world. We're real involved with education; we're real involved with health and humanity services around the world, so it's just, to me, a wonderful civic organization.

KS: Have you gotten—ever gotten involved with the more international aspect of it? Or mostly you're concentrating on local.

JR: My energy has certainly been more local and district. I was the district permanent fund of the rotary foundation chair for two or three years, maybe ten or fifteen years ago. Marty and I—Our Rotary Club sends the incoming president to the International Convention each year, and the June before I was installed as president in July, it was in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and that was the first time we had been south of the equator.

KS: You all went down. Oh, my goodness.

JR: We went down to the international and we spent a week there at the convention, and actually took a week of vacation, then went to Monterrey, Argentina, and stayed there a week, so we could—There's about five hundred thousand people in Monterrey, and it's basically a university town but a lot of your Malbec wineries are there. It's not far from the Chilean border, and so just to experience, you know, a different part of the world and see something, you know. There are just an awful lot of opportunities in Rotary, if you seek them out.

KS: Sure. Well, what was it like to meet Rotarians from all over the world? Did you find some commonality?

JR: Well, I mean, almost by definition, if you believe in service above self, to be a Rotarian, when you show up, you're already—

KS: Especially, I guess, at that level of leadership, you've shown a real commitment to the organization. That must be thrilling.

JR: It really is. There are a lot of nice people, and sometimes you're lucky, and sometimes you're not. You know, I mentioned that Marty and I went to Buenos Aires. Freddy Robinson and Susan are going to Lisbon. And Bob Newton—the International Meeting was at Indianapolis, Indiana, and he got to stay in the YMCA. [laughter]

KS: Oh, that hurt.

JR: But Bob, in a lot of ways—

KS: A good sport.

JR: Yes. In a lot of ways, Bob is Mr. Rotarian. His dad was a district governor from Wyoming in Rotary, and there's not much that goes on in Rotary that Bob hasn't done. He's just been a real inspiring friend.

KS: That's exciting. Is there anything that we have not covered that you'd like to discuss? Any other hobbies. It sounds like you're very busy, but I know you all have the farm. Any other hobbies you'd like to speak about or grandchildren, anything?

JR: Yes, we've got two grandsons: four-year-old Gavin, and two-year-old Findley, and we've got two in the oven, so their mom and dad—that would be four, four and under. So when Alex came to us in January and said they were expecting twins, he said, "Dad, I might not sleep for the next two years." And I just giggled; I just giggled.

KS: So it sound like you has got some future Boy Scouts and Rotarians coming up through the ranks.

JR: It's amazing actually, Kathelene. When Alex was engaged, we took him and his fiancée, and David and his wife out to dinner, and at that dinner, Alex declared that all his sons were going to be Eagle Scouts, and all his daughters were going to get the Gold Award, and Allison said, "Well, what is we have a prissy little girl." Alex says, "We're going camping every month, no exceptions."

David chimed in, all his sons were going to be Eagle Scouts and all his daughters were going to get the Gold Award." So Marty and I are leaving Green Valley Grill heading home, and I turned to my wife and my cousin, and I say, "Our sons sound more like me than I do." [laughter]

KS: And that's a great thing; that's a great thing to be. Well, thank you so much for this wonderful interview. I really appreciate it. It's been really great.

JR:: Thank you for your time.

KS: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]