PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Cone

INTERVIEWER: Kathelene McCarty Smith

DATE: June 26, 2015

[Begin Interview]

KS: It's June 26, 2015. This is Kathelene Smith at the office of Robert Cone at 100 North Green Street to take his oral history. This is for the Preserving Our History: Rotary Club of Greensboro Project.
Hello, Bob. How are you today?

RC: I'm well. Thank you.

KS: Great. Thanks for allowing me to come in and interview you.

RC: A pleasure.

KS: Tell me when and where you were born.

RC: I was born here in Greensboro in 1952.

KS: And did you grow up in Greensboro as well?

RC: I did. I went to public schools through, what was then called, Junior High. Then I went to a boarding school in Asheville for three years. Then I went to undergraduate and law school in Chapel Hill [NC]. And I traveled some, but except for that I came back to Greensboro. I've been practicing law here since 1978.

KS: So tell me a little bit about your family and your home-life growing up.

RC: Well, my father was Herman Cone, Jr. He married my mother when he was twenty-six and she was twenty. They got married in my mother's hometown of Wilmington [NC]. They came to Greensboro. My father went to work for, what was then, the family business; Cone Mills Corporation. It became a public company starting in about 1950. He spent his career with Cone Mills. But interestingly, he always advised me to go into a profession, and so that's what I did.

KS: Did you grow up with brothers and sisters?

RC: I have a younger brother and an older brother. My younger brother is also a lawyer here in Greensboro, and my older brother is a retired electrical engineer in Lynchburg, Virginia. He spent a lot of his career working for GE [General Electric], so he—He worked for a big company for quite a while. And towards the end of his career he set up his own consulting engineering firm with a partner.

KS: So tell me a little bit about growing up in Greensboro. What are the things that you remember about Greensboro in those years?

RC: Well, that's a good question. I think certainly compared to what we're seeing today you could probably call Greensboro "The New South." Although, segregation certainly existed when I was small, which is up until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, so I was twelve when that passed. And you don't really pay very much attention to the fabric of society, but we avoided things like they had, like, in Mississippi and Alabama. We largely avoided violence here. We had some very forward thinking people, one of whom was the mayor, David Schenck, during the Civil Rights era. And I know his brother was a Rotarian. David Schenck, the mayor, died very young, in about 1970, and I believe he also was a Rotarian. And there's actually on the Chapel Hill oral history website of the Southern Historical Collection, there's a taped conversation between Mayor Schenck and then Governor—I want to say it was Luther [Hartwell] Hodges. I don't think it was [James] Terry Sanford. I believe it was Luther Hodges. But they were, sort of, of a like mind, that integration is the only way to go. It's now a federal law. And this may even be before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, but it didn't matter, they wanted to move Greensboro and North Carolina forward. But I can't say that I had any real grasp of that when it was happening, but in hindsight I can see that Greensboro was, at the time, progressive.

KS: Did you have any special family traditions? I know some people have talked about going downtown for different parades and things that were kind of unique to Greensboro.

RC: [chuckles]

KS: So was downtown a shopping area at that time, when you were younger? Was downtown kind of a mecca of shopping? It's just amazing to me, just being here the last twenty years, how much Greensboro has progressed, especially in the downtown area, so I often wonder what it was like earlier on.

RC: So this would have been in the late 50's, early and middle 60's. Yeah, you would go downtown—to downtown Greensboro to shop. There were quite a number of stores. There were department stores, there were men's clothing stores and ladies' clothing stores. But Friendly Shopping Center was also in existence and many of these stores were slowly moving to Friendly. They didn't open second stores there, they just—in general they moved. And so, I was growing up during the time that this was happening and it was

sort of in transition at the time. So honestly, I probably remember shopping at Friendly Shopping Center. Like, my mother would take me to get clothes, sometimes it was downtown, sometimes it was Friendly Shopping Center. I remember Younts-DeBeo [Co.] was downtown and that was the fancy place, and [chuckling] my mother didn't usually take me there.

KS: [chuckles]

RC: There was a men's clothing store that was actually in the—the sister building of the building we're in now, it was the Jefferson Standard Building at the time, and it was—the family who owned that store—Vanstory, that's what it was—there are still Vanstory's here in Greensboro.

KS: Vance Stores?

RC: Vanstory; V-A-N-S-T-O-R-Y.

KS: Okay.

RC: Vanstory's Clothier [Vanstory's Clothing Co.]; that was the name of the store; Vanstory's Clothing Store. But I think all of them are in some other line of business now and not the clothing store. I think Younts-DeBeo moved to one of the shopping centers. They were one of the last men's clothing stores to go. And then you even had some new men's clothing stores come here, like, in the 80's and 90's, but they couldn't quite make it work. I mean, I think there are other pressures there too. It's hard for any independent men's clothing store to last today. But—I mean, as you see today, downtown Greensboro is vibrant but it's not a shopping mecca, I wouldn't say; it's a nightclub mecca. And a microbrew mecca. Which is fine. I like beer. [both laugh]

KS: Any other childhood memories that you'd like to share, or favorite sports in high school, or favorite subjects?

RC: Well, since you asked, I guess I can share one thing. I had a couple of outstanding public school teachers. One of them, his—I can't remember his first name—Mr. Orgel[?]; I might have never known his first name. I had him in junior high school, and he basically taught me all the math I ever needed to know. I did not have to work particularly hard in math when I got to the boarding school in Asheville. I was on a same level as people coming from other places. And his son, by the way, was a Morehead Scholar at Chapel Hill. They're very bright people. I mean, anybody that can teach math, especially in the public schools, is a pretty bright person.

And I had a similar situation with English, and that teacher's name was Dorothy Touchstone, and her husband also was a teacher; he later taught me Driver's Ed. But I had Mrs. Touchstone for both seventh grade and ninth grade, and she taught me all the English I ever needed to know. We did diagraming sentences, and the subject had to agree with the predicate, and she would never allow you to have a sentence like—something like, "Everybody must do their homework;" it was, "Everybody must do his

homework," or "Everybody must do her homework." She wasn't fond of "Everybody must do his or her homework." Of course, back in this time it wasn't considered bad; "he" was a universal pronoun and it could mean "she" too.

KS: Yes. [chuckles]

RC: You can't really get away with that today.

KS: No.

RC: She was stickler for all these things, and you had to learn it; you had to learn how the English language worked. But she also wanted us to read and had us read a lot of great literature, which meant a lot to her and she was able to convey that to us. We read a lot of classics. These were two rigorous courses, and so consequently I didn't have to work that hard in English either when I got to boarding school, much, I think, to everyone's surprise. [both chuckle]

KS: What schools were these teachers from?

RC: They were both at—it was then Aycock Junior High School, now it's Aycock Middle School, and it was before—They built a new junior high school in New Irving Park and I can't remember the name of that, but I never went to that one. My younger brother went there for his middle school years.

KS: How was going to school in Asheville? I imagine that was a lot of fun.

RC: Well, actually, no. It was a very strict boarding school. It was all boys. And Asheville then wasn't what Asheville is now. Asheville was still in the midst of the Great Depression, if you want to know the truth. I was there from—let's see—from 1967-1970, and—I mean, in a way, the Depression lasting so long and Asheville benefits it today because they never had any money to do what we did in Greensboro, which was tear down a lot of these Art Deco buildings that were built in the '20s. Nobody had any money to do anything so they just pretty much left everything the way it was, and now they have this rich heritage—architectural heritage—in Asheville. And if you go there today there are people downtown all the time there and it's vibrant and happening, but it wasn't that way at all.

As a matter of fact, there's a place in Asheville now, and it's called the Fine Arts Theatre, and you go there today and they're showing foreign films and films that are not going to get shown very many places. The Fine Arts Theatre was there when I was there but it was a porno [pornography] house. [chuckles]

KS: So things have changed for the better.

RC: Well, it depends on your point of view.

KS: [chuckles] True.

RC: My teachers at Asheville School were called "Masters." There was one Master who had actually—taken us in to see the porno flicks, and I'm sure he would—that wouldn't work today.

KS: Right.

RC: I was questioned by the lady who was selling the tickets one time, and she looked at me and she said, "Are you eighteen?"

And the Master who was letting us in quickly said, "It's okay, ma'am, I'm acting in loco parentis." [Latin for "in the place of a parent"]

KS: [laughs]

RC: She looked at him kind of puzzled and said, "Okay, well, here are the tickets." [chuckles]

KS: That's hilarious.

RC: That is a true story.

KS: So you were probably pretty glad to get to Carolina [the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill]?

RC: Yeah, I was too glad to get to Carolina. My freshman year was pretty much a disaster, which unfortunately I spent—I was able to spend the next three years, sort of, recovering from—I worked so hard my second year actually trying to recover from the first year that I decided I was tired of school. So I went—I spent a year in Israel, where I got some credit, but I was really not in school anytime for that whole year. I was mostly working in the banana plantations on a kibbutz [a communal settlement in Israel] on the Lebanese border, where the Lebanese border and the Mediterranean coastline intersect.

KS: How did that happen?

RC: Well, I decided I need a break from school.

KS: Yes.

RC: And I'd spent too much time not doing much of anything my freshman year, and then I got tired of doing all that reading. And I made good grades my second year but—

KS: But how do you make that connection at a banana plantation in Israel? I mean, that's amazing.

RC: Well, like everything you do at that age, there's not any particular rhyme or reason. An organization sent me some literature. It was a Jewish organization recruiting young people to spend time in Israel, and most particularly on kibbutzim, which were—they

were—even at the time they called themselves, sort of, socialist experiments. They were on a very small scale. It was "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." And so, you went there and they would provide you with everything you needed and you were expected to work to the best of your ability, and they really lived that out. I mean, for me, I knew I was there for a year, and you can't really say that you're doing that—I mean, they gave me work clothes and they fed me three meals a day, and I got a little bit of a spending allowance, but I could use all the facilities there. They had a swimming pool and a gymnasium and a beach, and they had sail boats you could sail in the Mediterranean but the people who lived there permanently, and who were members of the kibbutz, their children were educated there, they got a free college education if they were college material; post-graduate study if they were qualified for that. They got to use—no one owned cars individually but you could have use of the community cars so many hours a month.

And so, it really was an experiment, sort of, in communism on a small scale. It was also intensely democratic. They had monthly meetings and they voted on everything, including—there was a dining hall which was—it was not just a place to eat, it was part of the culture, and the idea was you don't eat meals by yourself, you eat meals with your friends and you talk about politics and community affairs.

And so, there was a vote—it was a close vote and it was a contentious vote, on whether the members were going to buy refrigerators. In other words, the community was going to buy these small refrigerators, about two feet by two feet, and each member would have one in his apartment. And it was a very controversial vote because the thinking was, "Well, if we buy these refrigerators people are going to start putting food in the refrigerator and then they're going to stop coming to eat in the dining hall. They're going to start taking food from the dining hall, put it in the refrigerator." First it'll be breakfast. People will just get fifteen minutes more sleep, eat breakfast at home in their apartments. And then the next thing it will be dinner. "Well, I'm tired. I think I'll take a nap." And then it'll be lunch, and lunch was the big meal of the day. And the workday was ten hours but lunch was a lavish affair, and lunch was always—usually an hour and a half, and it was a time to relax. Some people would eat and then take a little nap after lunch, and—because everything was close. Like, your apartment was a five minute walk away from the dining hall. Well, the thinking was this getting these refrigerators will be the beginning of the end. And in fact, the vote passed, everybody got their refrigerator, but the people who voted against it were right.

The kibbutz movement, is—it’s only a remnant now in Israel of what it once was. There are very few that still have this classical model where it's "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." In other words, whether you're the president of the kibbutz and you're in charge of managing the economy and deciding, "Are we going to plant fewer bananas and more oranges this year?"

And because they were intensely capitalistic as far as selling what they grew, and it was almost completely agricultural. They did have one small factory which was very successful, too, but the thinking was, "It's—once people start staying away from the dining hall, they next thing is they're not going to come—" they called it "The House of Culture"—that people would go there. It was like a clubhouse in the evening. Then they'll stop coming there. Then the whole thing will become—we're just in it for the money. And they were right.

I visited there as recently as a year and a half ago, and I still had some friends there that still live there, but they were telling me how things changed and—well, everything still looked the same. They had beautiful gardens and everything, and the landscape was beautiful and, of course, the sea was still beautiful. So they took me to the dining hall and you walked in the door of the dining hall and there was a cash register; I mean, you had to pay to eat.

I mean, this was a shock. But anyway, you know, things change everywhere; things change in this country. There's still a few kibbutzim that fall the classical model but most of them—and a few of them actually folded up, but most of them just sort of changed with the times and—the big problem was they weren't attracting young people, and if you can't attract young people you have to change, and it's either fail completely or attract young people, and we're seeing that in Rotary a little bit today, as a matter of fact. And I don't know exactly—I—at one time I was an officer of the club and I was involved in thinking along these lines, but we're going to have to make some changes. Our club is still in pretty good shape—the downtown Greensboro club—but the other clubs, whenever I visit them I see that they're shrinking, and the population is aging, as is true in our club. I'm still—at sixty-three, I'm still about the median age, no matter how old I get, and I get older every day.

KS: [chuckles]

RC: I seem to stay at the median age. [chuckling] We're blessed—one of our members is ninety-seven years old, and he still comes regularly. We have quite a number in their eighties, and—and they are among the most regular attenders. So that's good for membership but you have to have a succession plan. If you don't ever get any new members then you're—in fifteen or twenty years your club is going to totally disappear.

KS: Sure.

RC: So. But getting back to my education, I guess that's what we were talking about.

KS: Let me ask you this. You were so young when you did that, so what was your take-away from it?

RC: Well, I was twenty. I did manual labor all day, six days a week; it was a six day work week. So it was literally a sixty hour week. I knew I probably did not want to do manual labor for the rest of my life, and I had always pretty much thought I wanted to go to law school. This, sort of, convinced me that when I returned to school—and I always planned to return—"I probably do need to keep up the program and make good grades. I want to get into a good law school," because even then it made a difference if you went to a good law school or a not so good law school; that's true in spades today, by the way.

But I made some friends that, to this day, I have remained in touch with. And I learned some valuable lessons that—and I just learned a lot of things. I mean, I was, literally, part of another culture; I wasn't just a visitor.

The one formal study I had was Intensive Conversational Hebrew, both reading—and it has a different alphabet—but speaking it. I mean, that's the conversational part, but

also learning to read it. And I wasn't the greatest success at either one, but after a few months I could use Hebrew to communicate with people. And so, I felt like I was part of a different culture, or at least I wasn't just visiting, and it was valuable.

KS: You'll always have that.

RC: Exactly.

KS: So you came back and you buckled down, and you graduated and then went right—Did you go right to law school from there?

RC: Well, I graduated—Since I'd spent a year away I ended up graduating a semester late, but all I needed was one extra semester. So I graduated undergraduate in December 1974 from Chapel Hill.

Well, I had still never been to Europe before, so I got a Eurail pass, which was good for three months in Europe. I spent three months in Europe, and then I spent another four months after that in Israel. And I had gotten into Chapel Hill to go to law school, so I came back, literally—I returned from Israel—and I spent most of that time working at the same kibbutz again. I started—I came back in mid-August and started law school in late August, 1975.

KS: So you went to Chapel Hill. Any experiences there you would like to share, in law school or any of your European travels before you went?

RC: Well, I enjoyed law school. I actually liked it better than undergraduate school. The things I was studying were a lot more interesting in general, and I could see how, sort of, things fit together more, whereas in undergraduate school you take this sociology course and this art history course, and it's just a smorgasbord of a lot of different things. I mean, in law school you take the evidence course, but you also take the torts course, and the torts is civil wrongs, like car wreck cases are tort cases, medical malpractice cases are tort cases. Well, if you're going to—A tort practice is all trial practice, so you have to know the rules of evidence, you have to have studied trial advocacy. Not that you're going to try every car wreck case you file or defend, but if one of them has to be tried you have to know what you're doing, and you have to know the rules of civil procedure because that governs how things work once a lawsuit—a civil lawsuit is filed. And so, my mind just worked better and it was easier for me to make better grades; not that I actually burned it up in law school. But I—In general, I did better in law school.

KS: What was your—is it—area of concentration? Is that how they put it? I mean, as far as being a tax attorney or—what kind of law did you study or practice?

RC: Well, in law school they don't even talk about that. You just—typically—Or this is how is was when I was in Chapel Hill, you had no choices at all what courses you took your first year. You took a standard curriculum of criminal law, torts, real property law, civil procedure, and contracts; I believe that was it. And even if you never wanted to do a car wreck case in your whole life, you had to take that tort course. Even if you never planned

to be involved in any litigation of any kind, civil or criminal, you had to take the civil procedure course. And then second and third year was 100% elective. So you could concentrate a little bit but not very much.

If you knew you wanted to be a class action lawyer, let's say, specialize in—in price fixing cases. Well, there was one anti-trust case and that that's all there was. It included price fixing, but it included a lot of other things too. You couldn't do some kind of intensive course on price fixing litigation, because it—it wasn't there. And the idea still at that time—This is probably the high water mark for the way legal education worked at the time. They didn't consider it their duty to teach you how to be a lawyer. They considered it their duty to teach you to think like a lawyer. Then once you graduated a real lawyer would teach you how to be a lawyer.

And the—and that was probably a product—pretty good idea when it was first developed, because law had become—and even more so today—so broad it covers everything, and there's no way to teach you how to practice law in three years—there's just not time—"So we want to teach you as much law as we can and have you learn how to deal with it later in any particular situation, but we're not going to show you where—which is the plaintiff side in a courtroom because we don't have time to do that. We're not going to teach you how a well drafted complaint should read; we're too busy for that. You've got too much to learn, and that's easy so a real lawyer will teach you that later."

Well, it reversing now. And Elon Law School is sort of a front runner. There they're concentrating much more on practical skills, and we'll see if it works for them.

KS: Through internships, and things like that?

RC: They're doing internships, and even the way they teach courses. They're having students draw up complaints, write wills, draft deeds, draft contracts, and all this. I never saw a complete contract till after I was out of law school; I never drafted a contract till after I was out of law school and—Now, there—there are form books and if you know what you're doing you can go to a form book, and if you have this broad knowledge of the law, of contracts, it doesn't take you all that long, but it's still something that has to be done, and you can't do it right out of law school without some help. You do need some mentoring, and you don't know how to behave yourself in a courtroom if you've never been in a courtroom and you've never seen what a real lawyer does in a courtroom. It's not an automatic thing, so it does have to be done and it probably is a good idea to get as much of that done as you can in law school.

So it's coming back, really, 180°, because before the modern—the so-called modern trend that was at its high-water mark when I was in law school, learning to be a lawyer was kind of like learning to be a plumber. You apprenticed yourself to a lawyer and you watched him and you stuck by his side, and he would send you for coffee and—I mean, you would help him some too; maybe you could do some legal research. But it was more like you would, sort of, tag along for free. Really, much like a lot of medical education is like that today. I mean, these fellowships—surgical fellowships, they watch the surgeon and he may say, "Put your finger there and hold that blood vessel firm," but he's doing the surgery and you're watching him and—So anyway—

KS: Is that what you did after you graduated?

RC: Yeah. After I graduated I was fortunate enough to—I joined a small law firm and I was fortunate enough to have several people that I could watch what they do, interesting, not so much in the courtroom, which is ultimately what I ended up doing. Mentorship is never a perfect situation. I kind of had to mentor myself in the courtroom, but on contracts and real estate work we had a very broad practice. The small firm I started with I was able to see how others did it.

I learned to pick a jury by—my first jury trial I was the lawyer for the defendant. I watched what the plaintiff did in picking the jury, and so I copied that; not the best way to pick a jury. [both chuckle]

KS: But mentorship can come from all different ways.

RC: You get it where you can.

KS: So did you settle in Greensboro?

RC: Yeah.

KS: Okay.

RC: Although I have tried cases elsewhere, my whole legal career has been in Greensboro.

KS: And you've been here ever since. Well, that's great.

RC: I've been here ever since.

KS: So any significant events that you'd like to talk about in your career?

RC: Well, I've had some very—I've have some very unusual cases. You want me to tell a story about an unusual case?

KS: Sure.

RC: Okay.

KS: [chuckles]

RC: Well, I like telling this story. I got written up on the front page of *Lawyers Weekly* for this story. The dog who figures very prominently in the story, he got his picture on the front page of *Lawyers Weekly*, above the fold. There was a smaller picture of me below the fold. But I got a call from a non-profit that—what they do is they raise and train service dogs, and this particular service dog was a seizure alert dog that could tell its owner he was about to have an epileptic seizure, as much as ten or fifteen minutes in advance, so that he could sit down, lie down, get himself safe; he knew what was going to happen and the dog was meant to save his life; that's why the dog was trained. And so, in order to get

the dog he had to attend a—it was about a three week training course in Pennsylvania where the dog was raised, and he learned to bond with the dog, and how they react to each other; they learn each other. It might have even been a month long course, now that I think about it.

And these—the people at the non-profit were very, very serious about this. I mean, they loved these dogs. They would spend over a year training the dog, even before the owner who was going to get the dog came up to be trained with the dog. Well, the problem was, they got wind that this man was mistreating the dog; he was using a choke collar and jerking the dog to the extent that the dog was literally hanging by its neck. And they had witnesses calling them because their phone number was on the dog's service bag.

So they called me; "What can we do? We want the dog back."

"Well, this is a little bit of an unusual case." So I said, "Well, did you have a contract with him?"

"Yes, we had a contract."

"Send me the contract."

So I get the contract, and I read the contract, and it said if he mistreats the dog they get the dog back. They have to make a written demand within—and within five days after the written demand, he's supposed to give them the dog back. So I do the written demand letter.

Of course, he says, "No, you can't have the dog."

We show up at the appointed time to get the dog, because I said in the demand letter, "Our guy will be here at such-and-such a time." He refused to turn over the dog. So at this point you can't take the law into your own hands; you can't break into his house at night.

So they called me again and said, "Well, he wouldn't let us have the dog. Now what?"

And, well, I didn't know, but I started thinking about it and I thought, "Well, why don't we do—this is what banks do when somebody won't turn over the car after he defaults on the loan." There's a procedure—it's called claim and delivery; in some jurisdictions it's called replevin. You can have a very quick hearing and the issues are very limited, and then the clerk will decide, in this case, who gets the dog. If we, the non-profit, got the dog, we would have to post a bond to protect him, and then there would be a full-blown trial, whenever that happens; in six months. In the meantime, we get the dog.

And so, I filed the claim and delivery papers. And then on the morning of the hearing before the clerk, the dog owner does not show up, nor does the dog, but a lawyer—who I thought was a very good lawyer—showed up and we work out a deal. And it's to our advantage to make a deal, because at the end of the day proving abuse of a dog is not unlike proving abuse of a child. You're going to have two different stories, and you have people, they'll say one thing on the telephone to me but getting them to show up at a hearing, or sign an affidavit under oath, that's a horse of a different story. People don't want to get involved, and people will have a way of saying things a little differently when they're under oath, and you don't know what's going to happen.

So we strike a written agreement, which is put in the form of a court order, and the written agreement says, "He will not mistreat the dog," but it also says, "He will repeat the training course in Pennsylvania. He will submit to regular psychological

counseling himself, and he will let us see the interview records to prove that he's getting counseling for himself. He will take the dog—" There was some kind of dog counseling, too, and he agreed to do that. He agreed he would turn over to me any and all choke collars.

And now, these are significant, provable things; if he doesn't do these things it's a lot easier to prove he didn't those things. So this is where my learning to think like a lawyer came in handy. I'm glad I spent that time because maybe I didn't know how to think like a lawyer. Maybe it took me all three years to do that in law school.

So we get this signed order. I think it's win-win for everybody, because he—He does need this dog, and it is true that maybe the dog has saved his life maybe more than once. At this point, I'm very pleased with myself; I'm a great lawyer.

KS: [chuckles]

RC: It's not all about being adversarial. Sometimes it's about thinking about the good of your—the adversary as well. So I send this story to *Lawyers Weekly*, the reporter interviews me, the other guy, gets pictures. Okay. A month later I get a call. He's still mistreating the dog. And he hasn't sent us the records about going to counseling. And he was supposed to be here Tuesday for the training course; he didn't show up. "By the way, did he send you the choke collar?"

"No, he didn't send me the choke collar."

So it has, sort of, a bittersweet end, I guess. I put the case back in court, with affidavits saying he didn't do these things. Well, this time the lawyer shows up with affidavits. One of them is from a veterinarian saying, "I've examined the dog. The dog is perfect. Nobody's ever treated this—mistreated this dog in his whole life." And I don't know exactly how a veterinarian can say this, but the veterinarian goes on to say in his affidavit, "This dog is saving this man's life. And this man needs this dog to stay alive."

Well, this worries me because—I mean, it may well be true; I don't know. But my marching orders are, "He's mistreating the dog, he didn't do these things, we want the dog back. And it is not an unreasonable position."

So the lawyer shows up, and the owner himself shows up with the dog, and they're in the back of the courtroom, and the judge starts calling the calendar; what he's going to hear that day. And so, all of a sudden I hear this kind of shaking in the back of the courtroom, and I turn around and the man is going—he's starting to shake—

KS: Oh no!

RC: —and he's in these tremors and everything, and then he just, sort of, slides over on the bench and he's just, like, totally still. And the judge is seeing everything, because the judge is already looking that way; he's facing the back of the courtroom. But I also noticed the dog is doing absolutely nothing. The dog is lying on the floor like—the dog opens one eye, looks at the guy, and puts his back head down [both chuckling] and goes back to sleep.

And so, the lawyer for the owner makes sort of a production, he says, "Your Honor, Your Honor, my client is having a seizure. We need to do something."

And the judge says, "Well—" This isn't the lawyer's real name—"Well, Mr. Jones, you—and the bailiff can help him out of the courtroom. This is a motion and we have affidavits. We don't really need him here to hear the motion."

So immediately I knew we were going to get the dog back, which is—which is ultimately what happened. I mean, wisely and correctly, in spite of all this, sort of, very hyperbolic statements by the lawyer on the other side about how the man was going to die without the dog. The judge said, "Well, Mr. Jones, he agreed to do these certain things and he doesn't even say that he did those things. He didn't even give back the choke collar. He doesn't say that he attended the course. He doesn't say that he got counseling. I just don't think I have any choice. I'm going to have to sign an order that the non-profit can get the dog back." And so, that was the story.

KS: So everything after that must have been pretty dull. I mean, that's a pretty exciting story. Did your career continue on like that? [laughing]

RC: Since I'm here—I have at least a dozen stories like that. I will have to say, it—here my—and I've done mostly litigation, and I'm also a mediator. It's not a good way to make piles of money, but it is a good way to have a very interesting life, and I have at least a dozen stories like that that are just as good as that story. But anyway.

KS: So you've had a very interesting career, and colorful, as well.

RC: I have, I have. I've been richly blessed.

KS: So you were still in Greensboro the whole time. And so, how has Greensboro and North Carolina changed since you've lived here? We've talked a little bit about the downtown area, but what are your thoughts about how it's changed in the time you've lived here?

RC: Well, I'm going to start talking about Rotary a little bit here because I think Rotary has actually made a little bit of a difference. On account of textiles, furniture, and tobacco, there was always a place to go work in Greensboro. If somebody wanted to work you could work. The blue-collar jobs, although they weren't the greatest paying jobs, ever—people could support a family on those jobs. And if you were smart and had some initiative, there was middle management and there was upper management. And there were legal professionals and accounting professionals, all of which served these industries.

So Greensboro got a little lazy, and I mean, for a hundred years we had a pretty good deal and we didn't—we weren't doing all that much in the way of economic development. But that all started to change when—I mean, everything started falling apart all at about the same time, as far as textiles, furniture, and tobacco.

And another thing that happened is, I think big industry now is—they're a little more cutthroat than they used to be, and they will eliminate plants and they'll move somewhere else if—if that's going to make more money for they shareholder. And that's not all bad either. I mean, you live by the sword and you die by the sword. I mean, we're trying to recruit—and Rotary is involved in this—we're trying to recruit companies to come here. We would love for a company to move from Germany and build cars here,

and we don't care so much about what happens to those workers in Germany. We don't care so much what happens to those workers in South Carolina if BMW [Bayerische Motoren Werke; English: Bavarian Motor Works] would decide, "Well, maybe we'll move everything from South Carolina to North Carolina." And I mean, this is just the way it works and we can't change that.

But I think organizations like Rotary, which is far from unique, although I think we were the first—I'll come back to that—they're trying to make things better. They're, in general, trying to improve the community. They're trying to improve education. They have volunteers working in all areas of the nonprofit world. And we sort of subtly encourage one another to—to be our better selves. And nothing happens overnight either. You don't join Rotary and then all of a sudden you start comparing things with the four way test: Will—I have two choices here, will one of them be more beneficial to mankind than the other choice? And it doesn't happen overnight. But after many, many years it tends to soak in.

And now, some of the people just leave. I mean, it's not for everybody. But the people that stay, I think they tend to internalize these values. They want to help their communities. They want to do nice things for other people. They want to socialize among themselves, and this is—this is, sort of, the unique mix that Rotary came up with; it's now been copied around the world. And the unique—well, it's not unique anymore, and we're happy for others to steal it; we want others to steal it. Let's have, like, a nice luncheon group. We'll have nice lunches together once a week, and we'll get together periodically for drinks in the evening too. And we'll periodically have other kinds of parties together, so we'll socialize, but we'll also have this component where we encourage one another to work on, for example, the Operation Clean-up, which once a year cleans up water courses in Greensboro, and be a lunch buddy or a reading tutor in the public school. So Rotary had formal programs to get volunteers to take part in all these things, and we probably don't do as much as we should, a lot of these programs we're lucky if we get 10% of our members to sign up for any one of them.

But we also just raise money and give it away. We have an annual fundraiser. That's actually—Rotarians like that a little better. They like writing checks a little better than actually walking around in a water stream and picking up trash. [chuckles] But we do all of these things.

And it was a unique thing when it got started in Chicago by—it may not surprise you that a lawyer started it. Because lawyers, they couldn't advertise, and it's hard to get your name out, and so lawyers—although I've been lucky. I've done quite a lot of work for other lawyers; I have represented other lawyers in litigation. But typically, your client is not a lawyer; your client typically is in another profession; he's an accounting professional, a banking professional, insurance professional, or he owns a small business. Well, guess what—guess how Rotary was started. It was these small business owners and professionals who got together to hear about how the others spend their day, and there's nothing formal about it, but we can also refer work to one another. And we can also hire one another, although it's considered a no-no—you're really not supposed to give somebody a discount just because he's a Rotarian, and you're not supposed to deal with him exclusively because he's a Rotarian and somebody is not. Still, there's nothing wrong with sending work to your friends.

KS: It's a relationship.

RC: It's a relationship, and that's all part of the mix about, "Let's socialize, let's do good work, and let's do business together;" that's, sort of, the three legs of the stool.

KS: When did you join Rotary, and why did you decide to get involved at that time?

RC: A great question. My father asked me to join, which probably happens more often than not. I would say more than half—more than half of all Rotarians have been asked to join by their fathers. And it's only during my tenure that women were admitted. I mean, I'm sure there are cases now where women are asked to join by their mothers and—or I definitely think we have instances in our own club where women are asked to join by their fathers. I think it was only in the late eighties when Rotary started admitting women.

So I was asked to join by my father, and Rotary has changed some with the times. I couldn't get in at first, because there were already lawyers in the club who controlled lawyer spots, so I couldn't get in.

KS: When did that start to loosen up?

RC: That started loosening up, maybe, about twenty years ago, and now, supposed—and individual clubs can still pretty much do whatever they want in this regard, but the tendency is—and this is—I mean, this is just the way it is, all these great things about Rotary—the tendency is, "Well, I want to protect my turf too. Helping the poor is great and economic development is great, but now you're talking about my turf here, and I don't want my competitor in this club, okay?"

So somehow my father, and others who were in control, figured out a way around it and said—and the club had started doing this anyway—if there was somebody they wanted in the club they figured out a way to get that person in the club; "Well, okay, it's not just law. Now we're going to have, like, banking law, insurance law, tax law," and so I think they made up one for me. I think I was banking law, because at that time I was doing a lot of litigation for Northwestern Bank, which—I mean, it still exists; it merged into something. But as far as Greensboro's concerned it doesn't exist anymore because it's—whatever it merged into is now headquartered in Charlotte. But in any event—so clever people devised a way to get me in. Now I think it's not supposed to be more than any—not more than 10% of your club can be any profession. But I bet you we probably do have more than 10% lawyers, and I don't know if anybody's counting or not. And see, it can fluctuate. If several people resign and they're insurance people, I mean, that could push the number of lawyers above 10%, just because the universe shrank and the lawyers in it didn't, so. But anyway. So I was only about thirty, because my father immediately wanted me to join. I was twenty-six when I first started practicing law here, and I think it was about—it took about four years to get the wheels greased for me to come in, so I'm pretty sure it was about 1982. And I felt like I should be sitting at the kids' table, except there wasn't a kids' table; I mean, I was it. I'm sure I was the youngest person in the room for several years. But gradually it started to change, and I actually brought in a few people my own age. One of them is Freddy Robinson, who later became a president of the club.

KS: Sure. I've interviewed him.

RC: And so, I pat myself on the back about that a lot. And I brought in some other younger people too. Not all of them stayed. We're still, sort of, a boring club for old men and that is our image. I think it's not completely deserved but there's still a kernel of truth there to it. And I'll have to say, at first I did it because my father wanted me to do it, and that was—I didn't see it as any—anything other than that, but gradually I saw it does have real value, because you start to internalize these things, and it is not lost on the rest of the world. And you and I were talking at lunch not too long ago, but I actually spent some time researching this, and the year I was president I talked about this during my speech. Rotary is still unique and it still has a lot to offer, because literally we are—this is my own editorial take on this—but we are the fruition of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was all about the brotherhood of man, and everybody may have different religions and different creeds and so forth, but we're, sort of, all in this together, and we can all accept one another on an equal basis. And before the Enlightenment it was—it was, you were born to a certain station in life and if your—if you were the wrong religion, A, that you couldn't change that and you couldn't—you couldn't improve your station no matter what you did. And we look at people according to their station in life and, well, the Enlightenment deal said, "No, that's not the way to do it." And Freemasonry had a lot to do that. Freemasonry grew out of the Enlightenment, but Freemasonry, it had its own creed.

And so, Rotary, in many ways, is sort of Freemasonry-lite. It takes these Enlightenment ideals—and let's accept and help and appreciate one another for who we are, and we don't have to have the same religion, but we can all be equal, and we should all be equal, and we ought to view one another as equals despite religion, ethnicity, and this type of thing.

And so, Rotary sort of took the Enlightenment—in my view, it took Freemasonry a step further, and there is no creed. And when you become a Rotarian your proposer introduces you, and then you sit down. You don't say anything. Nobody holds up a book or give you an apron or a trowel. They give you a Rotary pin, but you don't even have to wear it if you don't want to wear it; you don't take an oath; you don't swear that you will abide by the four-way test; everybody hopes that you will. And in many clubs the four-way test is recited at every meeting. At our club it's not and—I mean, it's there, it's pinned to the wall, sometimes, not even every time. And my club is very lax on, kind of, these hallmarky-type things, and I'm not even sure since we've been meeting in the [Greensboro] Coliseum and it's hard to hang things up. To tell you the truth, I don't even think that the four-way test is there, and we never recite it. And that's fine and nobody is going to—There will never be a Rotary inquisition: "We have got word that you did not follow the four-way test, Mr. Cone. We heard that this, that, and the other—"

It's not going to happen because that's just not how Rotary works. We encourage one another by—it's really—I would call it a mentoring organization, because you see how people operate, and you have lunch with people once a week and you learn that, for example, they always return telephone calls, they always—if they get a letter they always answer it, if they get an invitation they always answer the invitation; they say, "I can attend; No, I can't attend;" whatever. They tend to do the right thing. They do tend to be

leaders in business and profession, and one reason I think is, because people who are not successful tend to drop out, for a number of reasons. I mean, one of them is, they don't have time for it; they want to use the money for something else. And it's not inexpensive. I should know what dues—quarterly dues are by now, shouldn't I? But I think it's three hundred dollars a month, about, and it includes lunch, and you're expected to donate at least three hundred dollars a month to charity at the annual fundraiser, and other things come along too. And so, it's not insignificant. I mean, it depends on how much money you have, or how much money you're making.

But I would have never said this back in the eighties, but I think it's just been an invaluable thing, and you can keep going after you're retired. We have many retirees; they will go nameless. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but they have friends through Rotary, they have a weekly luncheon that they can go to. If they can't go to—or are not well, for Wednesday luncheon they can go to a different one, and there's one meeting every day in the city. They are—they will never lack for volunteer work to do, and people who are retired, volunteer work is a wonderful thing. I think it helps the people who are the recipients, and it helps the people who are doing it, especially retirees, and it helps keep your mind sharp. So it's probably much more valuable in this aspect that is serving our retired members than it was fifty years ago, because people are living longer now and people are having healthy retirements where they are able to do things and give back to the community.

For example, our ninety-seven year old—that's Sheriff [Walter] "Sticky" Burch—

KS: I interviewed him.

RC: Well, I'm putting words in his mouth, and I haven't studied his life, but I just know that Rotary means a lot to him, and he was in Rotary while he was the sheriff. And this is another thing I've noticed. To some people, who it doesn't really mean that much to them, and as soon as they retire and their organization is—or their employer is not going to pay their Rotary dues anymore, they're gone. But we have many, many members like Sheriff Burch who—that's not the way. I mean, even at the time, he was in Rotary because he loved Rotary and what it does and what it stands for. So we may have him another twenty-five years. I mean, he seems to be in great health. Buddy Weill, who you interviewed is the same way. I mean, they're legion; they're legion in our club. If you'd asked me thirty years ago if I thought the retirees are a great asset to the club, I would have thought, "Well, no. I mean, the assets are—they're the professional people. They're busy making things happen and—"

So that's something I've definitely learned from Rotary. I consider that a life lesson. I mean, all these things that I've been talking about are things that—they don't teach you these things in school.

KS: Yes.

RC: I lost a thought here, but I was going to talk about—this person will go nameless—but she—I'll use her gender—she left a larger company and started her own company and—and she dropped out of Rotary. And so, she was asked, "Well, why?" And this was

relayed to me third-hand, okay? I did not interview her, but it doesn't matter whether it's a true story or not it's a meaningful story, and I tend to think it's a true story.

Her answer was, "Well, when I first joined Rotary it was really the leaders of the community that were in Rotary. We had the chancellor or the president of all the colleges. We had—we had the—the mayor; we had the chief of police; we had the president of Lorillard [Tobacco Company], and every major industry, its president; we had the top professionals. It's not that way now."

Like these big organizations, like, for example, if the chancellor is a member he may be a member in name only but he doesn't come. Or we'll ask him to join and he'll say, "No. Why don't I send So-and-so?"

But we still—we've been able to maintain our membership and so the people that are joining are—they're younger people, they're not necessarily at the top of their profession, and they're certainly not the leader of large industry. And I'm trying to think if we even have the leader—any leader of a large industry in our Rotary club right now, and if there is one I don't know who it is and they're certainly not one who attends regularly.

But we have some people—and I will name names—like Gary Graham, who has a small business which is successful, and he's very active. When he's asked to do things he does them. He's a great volunteer, as is his wife, who started her own non-profit; she's a lawyer; Garland [G.] Graham. She started a non-profit that recues animals [Red Dog Farm Animal Rescue Network]—like pet animals—like dogs and cats, but also farm animals—donkeys and horses—and gives them a place to stay on their farm until they can be adopted somewhere. And so, they're not necessarily the leaders of industry but these people are the future of Greensboro.

Maybe the future of Greensboro is we're never going to have any more big industry. Maybe it's going to be a lot of small mom and pop businesses again, and I'm not sure there's—I mean, economically, that's maybe not the best model. I think you want to have a mix if you can get one; you want to have big industry and small business both. And it's hard to have only small business if you don't have some big industry that's hiring a lot of this small business.

But nevertheless, I think she gave exactly the wrong answer, because the people who were going to continue Rotary, I mean, we can't change the way the world works, and the way the world works is the leaders of major industry are not going to show up to weekly Rotary meetings anymore. We're going to have to drastically change that part of the organization, or we're just going to have to console ourselves that they'll join but not come, if we want to continue the networking where you actually show up in person on a weekly basis to network. So I found her statement that, "Well, I—When I first joined the leaders of industry were there but now they're not so I don't consider it worth my time anymore," I think that's a misguided answer, and maybe she never understood how Rotary was supposed to work to begin with.

Because when Rotary was started, it wasn't the titans of industry in the club. It was people, basically, who—I mean, they wanted to do good work but they wanted—also wanted to figure out a way to expand their little professional business that wasn't quite off the ground yet. And so, I think the future of Rotary may be in the past.

KS: That's interesting.

RC: But we have at least up until now—you never know what the future holds—our model has been successful, because it's been copied by the Kiwanis Club and other civic organizations. They're very similar. I don't really know that much about them, but they're civic clubs in that they're not fraternal; you don't have to take an oath or something like that. And this model is not lost on people who disagree with our worldview. For example, the Charter of Hamas [Hamas Charter?], which controls the Gaza Strip [Palestine]—and I've continued to follow events in the Middle East very closely.

I can tell you one thing. I was on a different kibbutz, which was within walking distance of Gaza, in 1973 and I would literally walk there along the beach and back. I mean, it was occupied territory but nobody really seemed to care. And so, we would literally walk there and drink coffee in the coffee shops and walk back. It was maybe an hour walk—one way along the beach.

But anyway, the fundamentalist Islam, it's not just the Charter of Hamas. You can find it in other places too. But the Charter of Hamas is, in no small part, a screed against Rotary [A screed is a long speech or piece of writing], and they're railing against—what they're railing against is people who don't have a worldview where God is at the center of that worldview and you have to do things our way. For example, the—in the fundamentalist Islamic world ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], for example, they're Sunni; "Well, Shi'ite Muslims, they deserve to die, because maybe they call themselves Muslims but they're not according to us, and they're doing it all wrong. And they're apostates and they shouldn't be allowed to live."

And so, there hasn't been a reformation, there hasn't been an enlightenment, but they see what Rotary does that—"Well, you all don't even have a creed," and for some reason they have it in their head that Rotary is largely responsible for the Zionist movement which created Israel, and the freemasons, too, and they sort of—they conflate [combine] Freemasonry, Rotarians, and Zions all together; they mention them specifically by name. But it's basically this concept that—where Rotary, and similar organizations, are live and let live; let's live and let's help each other; that is anathema [a thing detested or loathed] to fundamentalist Islam.

And so, it hasn't worked yet, but there are some Rotary clubs in some Muslim countries. For example, Egypt has some Rotary clubs. There're not any in, like, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia. I mean, the more fundamentalist they tend to be, Rotary is not there. But just like Rotary has been working for decades to eliminate polio, and has almost had some success—I mean, we've has a lot of success, but eliminating it completely, that's a tough nut to crack. It's almost eliminated.

KS: I was going to ask you what some of your favorite Rotary projects were. Is that one of them?

RC: I think that's definitely one of them, and I think eventually it will happen, but getting rid of those last few cases—And again, they're in some of these very countries that are controlled by absolute dictators, fundamentalist Islamic dictators, and they don't trust outsiders, and they tell their people, "Don't take that vaccine. They're trying to poison you." And so, that's what we're fighting against, and it's a very expensive, and it's a very tough battle and nobody really knows exactly how to fight it. But if we could convince the rest of the world this idea that we have that grew out of the Enlightenment, maybe if

we could somehow accomplish that, that would be a greater gift to the world than eliminating polio. But I think we're close on polio. I think it'll eventually happen, but I don't know if our worldview ideas, I don't know if we can win that battle; I'm getting a little pessimistic in my old age. [chuckles] But that doesn't mean you stop, and that doesn't mean you don't declare victories where you see them.

KS: Sure.

RC: And we've had a lot of victories. And the fact that there continue to be Rotary Clubs in Egypt today, that's a victory.

KS: In Israel as well?

RC: Oh yeah, there are a lot of them in Israel. I couldn't go, I was on a trial calendar, I couldn't go, but the Rotary Club in Tel Aviv celebrated—I think it was something like—its fiftieth anniversary about fifteen years ago. I mean, it predated the establishment of the state of Israel, and our club was willing to send me—buy me a ticket to go to the dinner and everything, but I couldn't go.

KS: Oh, that's heartbreaking that you weren't able to go.

RC: It was. But no, just every town. They're big Rotarians in Israel and they show up to all the international events and—which is another great thing which—my predecessor was not—the year I was president, which was 2007, 2008, his idea was, "We're going to concentrate on Greensboro my year. We are a local civic club. I don't care anything about—" He didn't cut off what we were doing for the polio project, but he cut back everything else; the money that we were sending for the international projects.

Well, my year, you would have thought I was some kind of hero, which I wasn't. And all I did was ask the board, "I think we ought to just put it back where it was." And so, they agreed to do that.

And, I mean, the other—like, the District Governor called me, he sent me a letter, he would send me text messages, "Thank you so much."

But I think the international aspect is extremely important. I mean, we're all in one world here, and Rotary, almost from day one, was an international organization. I mean, it started out in Chicago but it quickly grew to other states, and then it quickly grew international. Within the first ten years there were—I think London [England] was the first international Rotary Club, and that happened within the first ten years. And soon it's all over the free world, and I think it's very important.

KS: Does the Soviet Union have one? I guess it's Russia—

RC: Now, but during the Cold War, no, But now. And we helped sister clubs. The Greensboro club has a sister club in Moldova, and we did a project with them to—I think it was to build a hospice in Moldova. Have you interviewed Robert Newton yet; Bob Newton?

KS: No.

RC: Okay, well, he knows all about that.

KS: Okay. He'll be next week, I think.

RC: So he was the Chief Financial Officer for Cone Health at the time, and he basically single-handedly made that happen. He got all this equipment—a lot of it was not being used or wasn't needed anymore—shipped from Greensboro to Moldova, and he visited there at least a couple of times himself. And so, definitely have on your list of things to—because he's very modest. He may not—as a lot of these—I'll put him in the class of older Rotarians although he's probably not that much older than me—and he's also in the model that his father was a Rotarian. His father was a District Governor, as Bob Newton was, but he's very modest so he's not necessarily going to blurt this all out, so you'll have to cross-examine his a little bit.

KS: [chuckles] Okay.

RC: And so—I mean, it just—it just broke my heart to think that our club, as big as we are—and we're one of the largest in the world—we're not going to do our share on the international front. I mean—but I got no resistance at all from the board about that.

KS: Well, speaking of modest, I know you've held some offices in the club, and I know you were president, so would you like to talk about your specific role in the Rotary? You were president for which years?

RC: I should have checked to be sure. I think it was 2000—I mean 2007, 2008. I think I went out of office July of 2008. Well, my idea was, "Let's go back to our traditional roots, but if something's not working, let's change it, and let's not be afraid to try something new. But if so—if we think the traditional things have value, keep doing them."

Well—and so, "Alright, well, what are you talking about, Bob?"

Well, it turned out I wasn't really talking about anything big. I mean, one thing certainly was restoring what we were doing for international. Another thing was—See, Rotary started out, they would meet—and it was small in Chicago; it was, like, four people at first. They would meet in one another's offices for their meetings. So I came up with this idea, and I got a very effective woman, Judy Peters, who agreed to chair the committee.

"Let's quarterly—Instead of having the regular meeting, let's meet in someone's office." So we had the first one here. It was, like, a 5:30 [pm] social hour. There was no program, we didn't have a speaker, it was just purely beer, wine, cheese, and networking here in my office from about 5:30 to 7:00. And we did that quarterly, and Judy recruited some great people to host those. One of them was at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery.

So it's fun to see people's offices, where they work, and this kind of thing. And it doesn't have to be everyone in somebody's office. You could do it at some event space, too, if you wanted to. I was not a stickler for where it had to be, but that was—I thought that was a good thing, and that has lasted; my successors have continued to do that.

The other thing—and this may be the only thing—so we're talking about three things—is, we always had a head table where the president would sit in the middle, and it was all strung out. These people would be facing the group, sitting at round tables having lunch. And what would happen was, nobody wanted to sit at that head table, because you sort of feel like you're on view. And so, what would happen is, the executive director—I mean the executive secretary—Anne Fragola—She's retiring soon. Anyway, very nice lady. She would start recruiting, like, early in the week, sending people emails, or before email, calling people; "Would you be willing to sit at the head table?" And she still wouldn't have it full, so at the meeting people would be going down the buffet line, "Would you mind sitting at the head table?" And people wouldn't want to do it.

And a lot of times people would say, "No, I don't want to do it today because I'm sitting with my son," or—they would always have some excuse. [both chuckle]

So a lot of energy was going into this, and so I said, "Well, let's just try this. If it doesn't work we can go back. But what do we need a head table for? The president can be at one of the round tables near the podium, and then when it's time to start the meeting he can just stand up and walk three steps to the podium, and the speaker can do the same thing. Whoever says the invocation can do the same thing."

I mean, you never had a problem getting those three people to sit at the head table, but frequently they would be there almost by themselves, and they felt lonely, and a lot of time there would be spaces between them because they would expect Anne would fill in those spaces, and they didn't get filled in. So anyway, that's another tradition that as soon as I tried something different [chuckling] nobody has ever gone back, and I think it's probably saved some resources. Anne has had more time to do other things, instead of worry about the head table.

KS: And you were instrumental in this project; the oral history project.

RC: Right, and thank you for reminding me of that. I do consider it, with your help—and it's been great working with you and other wonderful folks at UNCG, and Sandy Neerman, who is a professional librarian and knows about archiving and everything. It may have even been—she was the first person I contacted when the board approved it, and anyway, I think it may have even been her suggestion to bring you and UNCG on board. We also talked to the late Pat [Patricia] Sullivan—[Patricia A. Sullivan was chancellor of UNCG from 1995 to 2008] who was great, and she immediately thought it was a great idea. I've actually gotten a little hazy on exactly how we got it implemented, but I know that Sandy and Pat were instrumental. It was important to me at the time that—and this is a lesson that I learned in Israel. I was there in 1972 and '73, and I was surrounded by people—and this is one of the things I've talked about when I said I was—in my acceptance speech—that I was surrounded then by people who had survived the Holocaust and—sorry. Excuse me. I'll try not to be emotional, but—and built a state from scratch; a functioning democracy industry; farms that they built from sand and swamps. Excuse me. And I was surrounded by them. They were in their forties and fifties. I did get some of their personal stories, but sadly not enough. I mean, I wish I'd gone around with a microphone and a Dictaphone, and everybody who was forty-five or older, I wish I'd interviewed them for two hours and asked, "How long have you been here? How did you get here? What was

your life like before that? Tell me about your wartime experience. What have you done since then? How did you end up here where you are?"

And there were many—and I got some of these stories, but sadly not enough. I felt like I was prying or something. Well, I did not want to repeat that mistake, because we had people—it was too late for my dad because he was—already had a fair amount of senility due to—he had Parkinson's and he had difficulty speaking, but it also affected his mind and he had difficulty communicating. You were never sure if he understood questions you were asking him or not. Sometimes his responses made sense and sometimes they didn't.

So I knew we had people in the club. For example, Horace Kornegay, [Richard] Dick Cochran, Buddy Weill. And I knew that these were great men, but—

KS: Well, it's been a wonderful project, and I want to say for the record also, that Pat Sullivan was the UNCG chancellor—

RC: Right.

KS: —because people may not know that. And she, I believe, also contacted our archivist that was there, actually just as I was coming on board, Betty Carter.

RC: Right.

KS: And I think that realizing it was a wonderful project, they were certainly willing to gladly take that on, and it's been part of the University Archives project as well. It's—I think we have over thirty interviews at this point, and we've really, really strengthened our relationship with the Rotary. As a matter of fact, the other day when I was doing some research at the archives I saw a scrapbook from a student from the 1950s, and she was asked several times to come to dinners and luncheons hosted by the Rotary for Rotarians' daughters who had come to school from other areas of the state.

RC: Right.

KS: And then she was not only welcomed by the school and the community, but specifically by Rotary, which consistently had these social events for these girls who may have come to town not knowing anyone.

RC: Right.

KS: And so, I thought that was a wonderful connection with our school. It's interesting to continue to unfold the relationship that UNCG, and back then Women's College, had with the Rotary of Greensboro.

RC: Right.

KS: That was kind of interesting as well, but we've really enjoyed the project.

RC: And this goes, I think, maybe under the heading of—I had the opportunity to see how these people operated, how they conducted their lives, but I didn't really know their backgrounds. I just knew that they didn't plop out of the sky the way they are today, and it was important that I know their stories, and it was important that other people be able to know their stories and learn their stories, and that they be preserved in a systematic way so that scholars and others can know, particularly, this World War II group. But others in the club too. I mean, we're all getting there. We're not all going to be in the World War II group, but we're all—if we live that long we'll be old guys that nobody really knows how they got to where they are.

KS: But it's really fascinating because it—just in doing these interviews—Some people are, like yourself, who have been born and raised here, and have continued your life here. Other people have moved in from other areas but have really embraced Greensboro, and there has to be a reason for that, and I think that that's what their stories unfold, is the uniqueness of Greensboro and their experience and why they decided to stay and build a life here.

RC: Right.

KS: So the combination of everybody has been really interesting, and I think it tells a very rich story.

RC: At the meeting Wednesday of our Rotary Club, I sat down—and I try to do this periodically; not just sit with people I already know, but sit with people that I don't necessarily know, and particularly if they're older than me. And so, I sat at Sticky Burch's table, and a guy came in and sat down, and he had a visitor tag on, and none of us had ever met him. It turned out he was from California. Well, this is something that you can do, is, you can visit any Rotary Club you want and just pay $8.00 for the meal or whatever. And so, he sat down and immediately Sticky said, "Now, tell me where you're from, and tell me why it is you're visiting Greensboro;" he could look at his tag and see that he was from California.

And so, instantly, he knew he could go to a place, because he can look online and see where the—what Rotary Clubs are meeting when during his visit. And even if he's here for a week he doesn't have to have lunch alone on a single day. He has a place where he has friends and he can talk about things and have a pleasant lunch, instead of going to a drive-up or something and eating a burger in the car. [chuckles]

KS: What a nice connection.

RC: It's a wonderful thing.

KS: I know we've talked a little bit about philanthropy and volunteerism and some of the changes—you tend to have less participation, and I think this is probably true in all of the philanthropic organizations. And you also talked about some ideas that might change that, and shake it up a little bit. Any other ideas about what you've seen in Greensboro, as far as the non-profit sector change?

RC: Well, they're all hurting for younger volunteers, is what I'm told, and all these organizations—Last weekend I was at the North Carolina Bar Association Convention, which is actually—it's smaller now than it was thirty years ago, even though there's probably a third again—maybe twice as many lawyers now as there were thirty—thirty years ago. And there are many reasons but one reason in particular is younger people are not showing up for this type of thing, and I am—I don't think it's a crime to change what you're doing to try to attract younger people. I think we're going to have to do that in Rotary, and I would not mind—I don't think this'll happen, because it's extremely important to a lot of people, but instead of a weekly meeting, maybe it ought to be twice a month, maybe it ought be once a month. Instead of a luncheon maybe it ought to be after work. I don't know. Maybe we ought to expect more from our members, as far as volunteer work. Maybe it's not a bad idea to require a certain minimum number of volunteer hours. I really don't know. But I think we're going to at least have to try some things, because while our club is still okay we're—our numbers are somewhat smaller than they were ten years ago. The other clubs are suffering more—the smaller clubs—and they're shrinking in numbers, and I can just tell this when I go and visit.

And so, I mean, you can do surveys and you can ask people what they think till you're blue in the face, but at the end of the day if you don't try something different you're never going to know. And I think we're going to have to try some different things and see what happens, and if something is not working, quit doing it, but if it is working, keep doing it. I mean, something I'm—I'm fond of saying a lot is, if you keep on doing what you've been doing, you're going to keep on getting what you got. And if we keep on doing exactly what we've been doing, Rotary is going to be much diminished twenty years from now. It'll probably still be here but it'll be much diminished. Whereas, I think we have an opportunity to see if something will maybe get us on a different path and start building our numbers.

I mean, literally, when I first joined—I alluded to this earlier—I mean, I couldn't get in, there were a lot of people that couldn't get in. There were a lot of people that wanted to get in and couldn't. It's not that way now.

KS: Was there a membership cap?

RC: At one time there was a membership cap. There literally was a cap, and it was—I think it was more because we were meeting in a place that could only hold so many.

KS: Yes.

RC: And, of course, we—on a good day we'd get maybe forty or 50% of the membership, but still, that was the high water mark. The cap was imposed and I don't think we ever even got to the cap. I mean, the tide started shifting. I think imposing that cap was bad luck or something. And we never used to actually do recruiting, never, but now the club has a formal recruitment process, and they have recruiting events. They'll have a particular event where—"Now, bring a prospective new member to this event." I mean, you were never encouraged to bring prospective new members before. And so, I think we're just going to have to do more of that, and I think we should do more of that. I don't think we

should allow ourselves to disappear, because I think we have a—our core things that we do I think we do well, and we should keep trying to do those things. I mean, they're proven things that are good and work, and we can't just let it diminish. That's my view.

KS: It's a great organization. Now, let me ask you this. Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to mention?

RC: Well, I brought this gavel with me and I'll read what's on the gavel. It says: Herman Cone, President, Greensboro Rotary Club, 1932, 1933, Made from White Oak tree. So gavel was presented to my grandfather.

KS: Your grandfather?

RC: Right, and he was the president of the same club that I was the president of in 2007, 2008. And so, White Oak was—it may still be, it's still around; it's not part of Cone Mills anymore, which doesn't exist anymore, but it's now owned by International Textile Group. But there really was a White Oak tree that the White Oak Denim Plant—which was—still is, I think, the largest denim manufacturing facility in the world. So this gavel was made from the White Oak, and—and so the club presented this to my grandfather, and it had been owned by my father, who was in the same club for—I would say—sixty years, more or less. And so, when my parents—I'm trying to think. It was among my father's belongings but everyone has forgotten about it, and it was discovered—I don't know—a month or so before I was installed as president. And I need to get the story about how it was discovered. Either my mother found it, or it could be Alan Cone, my father's brother. Who's also a member of the same Rotary Club, and he has been a member for approximately sixty years as well.

KS: I've interviewed him as well.

RC: Okay. Alright. So—well, this was—the Herman Cone on the gavel was his father, and sadly I really never knew him because he died at age sixty and I was three at the time. I only have a fleeting memory of him, but he was a much loved figure, both in the Rotary Club and Greensboro, so this gavel has a lot of significance for me.

KS: How special that they found that before your presidential year.

RC: Right. And so, Alan presented it to me, and it was a complete surprise when I was installed as president.

KS: What a great story.

RC: I think it is a great story. So I'm now working on my son, and—

KS: [chuckles] There you go!

RC: —and it's a challenge. I mean, it's a challenge.

KS: Of course he's local?

RC: He lives in Greensboro. He just turned thirty-four, so he's at least four years older now than I was when I joined the club. But his friends are not in Rotary and—which was true when I joined, too, and it's just not the first thing that people in that generation think of, and—but I'm not going to give up—because he would be the fifth generation all in the same club.

KS: That's incredible.

RC: And I'm not sure that's ever happened.

KS: Do you have any daughters that you could hit up? [chuckles]

RC: I have a daughter in New York and—

KS: Okay, so maybe in her future, but not right now.

RC: I haven't been pressuring her because A, I don't think it's going to work, and B, I'm not sure—I know nothing about Rotary in New York. I mean, I don't want—I don't have any connections. Although—I mean, I can make them quickly and I'm sure they would be delighted to have my daughter, but I don't—I'm just going to—she has a brand new job. I will probably—maybe I'm a sexist, too, but I don't want to admit that part, but I'll probably direct my energies in that direction after she gets a little more established in her job.

KS: Right.

RC: She's a writer and an editor for two magazines owned by the same company that publish about trends in the shoe industry and children's wear, and her schedule is completely up in the air. She has to go and do interviews and meet deadlines right now, and she's only been doing it for a month. So things will hopefully settle down in a little while, and then I'll work on her to join.

KS: So we'll get the son first!

RC: Yeah.

KS: The gavel would be a great thing to pass on.

RC: He's in my crosshairs.

KS: [chuckles]

RC: And so, the next thing—I'm having some other people in our club give him a call too, and see if we can get that angle working.

KS: Okay, great. Well, thank you so much for being interviewed.

RC: Well, thank you very much.

KS: I really appreciate the time. It's a wonderful interview.

RC: It's been a pleasure. I can't wait to see the transcript. [both chuckle]

KS: You will. Thank you very much.

RC: Okay.

[End of Interview]