

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH J. CHRIS PIKE

CONDUCTED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

EDITED BY LAURENCE STACEY AND THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Interview with J. Chris Pike
Conducted, by Thomas A. Scott
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Monday, 31 August 2009
Location: Alumni House, Kennesaw State University

TS: The interview today is with Chris Pike who was president of the Alumni Association between 1992 and '94. Chris, why don't we just start with your background, where you were born, where you grew up and things like that?

CP: I was born in Kennestone Hospital in 1960, one of the few people that is a true native.

TS: In 1960?

CP: November of 1960. We lived in Smyrna at the time. A couple of years later we moved out to west Cobb to Stilesboro Road. It was paved, but a lot of the other roads leading off of Stilesboro Road were not paved. The only time we ever had traffic was about four o'clock when Lockheed got out. They got out at 3:30, and the time they got out there it was four o'clock. We'd have four or five cars and that was about it.

TS: How far out Stilesboro Road are you talking about?

CP: Past Mack Dobbs Road, if you're familiar with that. We're on Old Stilesboro, so it's right off of Stilesboro. I've lived here my whole life. I went to Due West Elementary School, Autrey Middle School, and North Cobb High School.

TS: What year did you get through with high school?

CP: In 1978.

TS: Out of high school did you go straight to college?

CP: I was the first one in my family that went straight to college, and I went to Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

TS: That's a nice school.

CP: It is a nice school—first time living on my own. I went there one quarter and a part. We had a death in the family, and I moved back home. That spring I came to Kennesaw. I'm pretty sure it was that spring or the next fall.

TS: Why did you go to ABAC?

CP: I wanted a career in agriculture.

TS: You did? Did you all have some land on Stilesboro?

CP: We did.

TS: So you actually had a little farm out there?

CP: We had cows and pigs and chickens and those things. The guy who lived next to us had hogs, and he would come up here [to the old Student Services Building] every day after lunch and get the stuff they threw away in barrels, put it on his truck, and we would take it back and feed it to the hogs.

TS: How about that?

CP: And so I would come up with him every summer in the afternoon or whenever there were enough students, but when they had enough we'd take fifty-five gallon barrels and get their garbage. We would take it back and feed it to the hogs. So I've been coming up here since it was built.

TS: Did they know he was doing that?

CP: Oh, yes, he was getting rid of their food.

TS: So they didn't have to contract with anybody.

CP: Exactly.

TS: Well, that's all right.

CP: Yes.

TS: What did your father do for a living?

CP: My father worked at Lockheed for thirty-six years.

TS: What's his name?

CP: Jasper Reece Pike. He and my mother came from east Alabama.

TS: What did he do at Lockheed?

CP: He worked on the flight line. He painted in the paint shop for thirty-six years. But they moved up here to Smyrna when—I've got three older siblings—when the first sibling was born. He and his brother both came.

TS: What's your mother's name?

CP: Dolly Jackson.

TS: Did she stay home and run the farm?

CP: She did for a long time, and then she went to work at the union hall at Lockheed.

TS: Yes, over on the South Loop.

CP: Right, by the bus [CCT transfer] station. She worked there with them, and we knew the president, Clyde Williams, and people there, but she worked there for several years.

TS: Was your father active in the union?

CP: No. He joined, but he was not active, not overly active. But Lockheed was good to us, and he never got laid off.

TS: That's unusual, the way that the number of workers went up and down with contracts.

CP: He worked there for thirty-six years and is still in good health, better health than I am.

TS: The land—did you all grow anything?

CP: We would grow stuff for us to eat. My mom would freeze stuff and can beans and corn and tomatoes.

TS: So basically a garden patch.

CP: A garden patch, but both of them came from rural backgrounds. I mean, you grew what you ate, that's just the way they were raised. But we would take hogs and have them butchered and take them to . . .

TS: Take hogs that you raised?

CP: That we grew. Well, used to, we killed them ourselves. We would butcher them and put up the meat. Then we started taking them to up around Crabapple. There was a processor there, so we would do that in the fall, and then you would have your meat for the wintertime.

TS: Well, sounds like a great way to grow up.

CP: It was. We didn't know any better. We thought it was good. We didn't have air conditioning. We got two channels on TV because we were behind Pine Mountain, and if you got two you were lucky.

TS: Oh, that knocked it off.

CP: Yes, it did. We didn't know any better, so it was great.

TS: Maybe you ought to say something about North Cobb High School when you were going through there.

CP: I'm sure I could have gotten a better education there if I would have chosen, but I chose not to, and I severely paid for it when I came to college.

TS: Really? You played or you worked instead of going to school and studying?

CP: Well, I worked during school. When I was sixteen I started working, and I've worked pretty much ever since.

TS: What kind of jobs were you doing?

CP: At that time there was a grocery store in Elizabeth, which is where EMC is now, at Brown's Grocery Store. They were friends of ours. I worked there bagging groceries and sweeping and stocking and everything associated with that. I worked there through high school. Then I worked across the street one summer at a little lumber place called Lits Lumber. It's where MUST Ministries is now. Frank [F.] Wilson [former Coordinator of Student Activities and former Director of Alumni Affairs] was at MUST Ministries after he left here. It was there. Then I went to Abraham Baldwin, and then when I came back, I worked with a local house builder. I was still going to school, but I was helping him in the afternoons. Then about midway through my freshman year, they opened a new Kroger on Dallas Highway that's now the [location of Cobb County] government services.

TS: Sure, I know exactly where you're talking about.

CP: When that store opened I worked there.

TS: Near Burnt Hickory Road.

CP: Burnt Hickory Road. I worked there all through school until I graduated. Then when I graduated, I worked at a temporary labor force for a while, but I was looking to get on with Procter & Gamble, and that helped me to get with Procter & Gamble in sales.

TS: Okay, you started at Kennesaw in, I guess, winter of '79?

CP: It was probably spring.

TS: Why don't you describe what Kennesaw was like when you came here?

CP: To the best of my memory I'm going to say it was 1,800 students or 2,500 students at the most.

TS: I think we were a little more than that, but not a lot. [Ed. note: 3,825 in Fall Quarter, 1978 with the enrollment of the first junior class as Kennesaw College transitioned to four-year status].

CP: Dr. Sturgis was here at that particular time, and I had to test to get my classes. I had to take remedial English, and I had to take remedial math just right off the bat, and then I might have had a psychology class. I remember one of my first history classes was Tom [Thomas H.] Keene. Nice guy, a little strange.

TS: He's still here.

CP: A little different, but nice guy. One of the facts I'll never forget that he taught us was Anne Bolyn had six fingers. So that is one thing that I do remember from him. I took the remedial classes, and I think I had to take English twice, but it was a good learning experience. The teachers were good. They cared about you. They were small classes; there might have been ten or twelve or fifteen people in the classes.

TS: Of course, this was at a time when a lot of the students at Kenensaw were taking those remedial or developmental courses. In '79, we had just begun to offer junior and senior level courses, but we're still operating on a junior college model very much, I think.

CP: And most of the students here—it was either the people who couldn't afford to go off, which was my case, and there were some older people here also, or people that were working and maybe getting a degree. So it was, older people and then the people who didn't have the money to go off somewhere. That's pretty much what it was.

TS: I guess at ABAC you had to take the remedial courses too.

CP: No.

TS: No?

CP: No.

TS: Didn't for them but you have to here?

CP: I had to here because they did a little test before you got in, and they said, "You need to take this and this and this." But their track was a little different down there. There wasn't as much English and math.

TS: Because it was agricultural?

CP: Exactly.

TS: Geared to more scientific things?

CP: Exactly.

TS: So small campus, small classes . . .

CP: Parked about where you wanted to. I don't even know if we had stickers. We might have had parking stickers, but it was very laid back. The campus looks nothing like it does now. You could get here, and, of course, traffic was nothing. From my house I could leave twenty minutes or thirty minutes before class and walk down and sit down and be fine at pretty much any time of the day.

TS: So you decided you were going to be a business major early on?

CP: I did.

TS: How did that happen?

CP: I just thought my best opportunity to provide for myself and my family was being a business major at the time.

TS: And of course the business program was in an embryonic stage at that point too.

CP: Very much so. My recollections of the business department at the time, I can't even remember who the dean was at the time.

TS: Probably Bill Thompson.

CP: That name doesn't ring a bell, but that doesn't mean that he wasn't. All the teachers that we had were ex-Georgia State people, and that's my recollection. Some people had some business experience. It wasn't a lot, but they had taught at Georgia State, and then they came here because it was closer to their house or easier commute for them.

TS: Yes, I think for a long time, and still to some degree, lots of the faculty had their degrees from Georgia State.

CP: And they had taught there for a year or two or three or four years, and then they came back down to Kennesaw.

TS: Any of them that stick out in your mind?

CP: Steven Chang [Dr. Steven S. Chang]—he might not have been in business but he was in economics, and he made a big impression on me. I thought about majoring in economics, and he was a very good economics teacher. He had an accent, but he was very straightforward. You knew where you stood. He would tell you, "You made mistake, people think you stupid." If you make a mistake on paper, they know you're stupid, so check your work, and you're not going to make mistakes because I think you're stupid.

Good guy though. I don't know where he is, but he did make an impression. In the business department not a huge—[S.] Alan Schlact [Business Law], and we're still friends today.

TS: Are you?

CP: Yes we are; great guy.

TS: I have an interview with him. He got the Distinguished Teaching Award in 1990.

CP: Yes—great guy. He was probably a year or two out of law school when he came here.

TS: And he was teaching business law.

CP: Business law. I liked Alan a lot and still like Alan a lot. I think he retired recently. That's what he was telling me.

TS: Yes, he's retired now.

CP: What's the other business law, Roper?

TS: Tom Roper [Thomas B. Roper, Jr.].

CP: Tom Roper. He was good.

TS: So you had both of them?

CP: I think I did have Tom Roper. I know I had Alan. Most of them weren't doctors at the time. We didn't have a lot of doctorates teaching, but that changed over the years. As far as the marketing guys—a lot of room for improvement. I'm trying to think what else I took because my major was marketing.

TS: You graduated long before we had the Burruss Building, so I guess your classes were in what is now Willingham Hall, the building next to Social Science?

CP: Yes, real small. But you had other things in there at the same time. It wasn't just a business building. You had political science classes and things like that. We still had the old gym at the time also.

TS: Right. Had Dr. Craig E. Aronoff arrived before you left?

CP: No, I don't think so. [Ed. Note: Aronoff joined the faculty as Chair of Private Enterprise in 1983]. My overall experience was great. I did have to leave for a quarter and think about doing better at my grades. They had to ask me to take a time out, but after that, I was able to get my grades back up and do a lot better.

TS: Did you engage in any student activities while you were an undergraduate?

CP: Not formal. We did a lot of the intramural sports, and there was a fairly large group of kids that either went to North Cobb, or we knew people that went to other schools, Lassiter or Wheeler. We would do a lot on our own. There weren't a lot of formal organizations on campus. There was no Greek stuff at the time. There was a student government.

TS: You weren't involved in that?

CP: No.

TS: We used to have a fairly active intramural program, I guess.

CP: We did. There was always a basketball team. You had softball teams. You had flag football teams. So you could always find something to do in the afternoon if you wanted to play.

TS: I guess we continued it after we got athletics but after athletics came in in '82 I don't remember as much about intramurals as in the old days. The faculty used to have a basketball team that played against the students.

CP: Dr. Silver, I remember.

TS: Yes, Pete Silver [Dr. Joseph H. Silver].

CP: I remember that. We would come and play. When I was in high school, we would come up and use the gym. I don't know if they let us, but we just kind of came in, and somebody would open the door for us, and we went in.

TS: There weren't that many people to compete with to use it.

CP: There weren't. If you'd knock on the door, somebody would open the door, and you could go use the weight room. You could go swim in the pool. You could jump on the trampoline. You could play basketball, and nobody ever gave us a hard time or said you can't do that. We just did it.

TS: Well, you know, a lot of people when you were here were still using Kennesaw as a junior college and starting here and then going elsewhere. Were you ever tempted to go elsewhere to finish up?

CP: I was, except I was working then, and I was living out on my own at that time. I probably could have. My grades at that point were better. I could have gone to [the University of] Georgia, but I was happy here. I was going well. I was making money. At that time, it seemed like millions of dollars because I had free and clear money. I was

very content, and I'd made a lot of good friends here, and so I was content to stay here. I knew it was growing, and I was getting a good education.

TS: I was going to ask you, on a whole, how would you assess the quality of the education that you got?

CP: It was a good education. I wouldn't say it was a rigorous education. I'm sure I could have learned more if I chose to, but it suited me, it did well for me.

TS: So you graduated in '84, and then what happens after that?

CP: Well, then I went to work with Procter & Gamble in sales, and I stayed there about five years. About five or six years is my itch cycle, and I have to do something a little different. Then I worked with a company....

TS: Before we go on, did Kennesaw help you get a job once you got out of here?

CP: I think it did. Having a degree...

TS: I'm trying to remember what we had in the way of Career Services.

CP: I think it was very slim at the time. They had some resources, I think, but, you know...

TS: But basically you got the job on your own.

CP: I got the job on my own, absolutely. No, the college degree did help, absolutely did help, but I got it on my own. As far as Career Services, none stick in my mind at all. I know nobody came to recruit here except maybe the armed services. There might have been a recruiting day for that, but as far as anybody else coming to campus, I don't remember anything. Or I didn't avail myself of those services.

TS: At least if they were there, you weren't aware.

CP: I wasn't aware or if I was aware I didn't take advantage of them.

TS: Okay. So Procter & Gamble for six years, and then you had to move on.

CP: You had to move on. I would have had to move with Procter & Gamble to go up. I've got deep roots here, so I wanted to stay.

TS: Were you married by that time?

CP: Yes, I was.

TS: Did that help keep you here?

CP: Yes, it did. I married a Georgia alum.

TS: Really? What's her name?

CP: Debbie.

TS: An alum of the University of Georgia.

CP: Yes. She's not from here. She's from Ohio, but she played volleyball there. Her family moved here. She was playing volleyball in northern Illinois. Her father got transferred here with Amoco foam products like paper plates. She came to visit, loved it, and went over on her own and toured at Georgia, and just talked to the volleyball coach and said, "I want to play," got a scholarship, and she transferred down.

TS: Fantastic.

CP: Then she went to work at Procter & Gamble. I didn't meet her there. I went to school with her sister here at Kenensaw, and that's how I met her. After that, I was married, and I wanted to stay in Cobb County—not just Atlanta, but Cobb County. After Procter & Gamble, I worked with a manufacturer's rep company selling to Home Depot, and that was five or six years. Then I went with another related vendor at Home Depot with Mills Pride Cabinets that used to come in a box. I think they've been bought out by Masco now, but it was a private company. They own Price Pfister and a lot of building related products, but it was private at the time. They were by themselves. I worked there for about five or six years, and then when I left there, I had rental houses and other income, so I didn't do a whole lot. Then for about the last ten years I'm running a wholesale nursery.

TS: What's the name of it?

CP: Landscaper's Select. We sell to wholesale nurseries, like a Skinner's. We had some Home Depot business, some Pike business.

TS: Close to agriculture.

CP: It is. It's very close to that. In fact, that's exactly what it is is just a fancy form of agriculture.

TS: So talk about this a little bit. How did you get into that?

CP: A friend of mine had a small greenhouse, and he wasn't going to make it. So I was trying to help him out, and I had an interest in it, and so I just stayed with it.

TS: Did you buy him out?

CP: Yes. He worked with me for six or seven years, and then finally he had enough and wanted to do his own, so we're just going forward.

TS: So where are you headquartered?

CP: We have a farm in Ringgold, Georgia, and we have a farm in Dahlonega, but mostly I work out of my house. If I'm not at one of the farms, I do most of the paperwork out of the house.

TS: So a lot of your job is to get the various nurseries to buy your products, so it's still sales?

CP: Still sales. I'm the chief sales person, I guess, you could say.

TS: Do you supervise the farms also?

CP: Yes. I have growers there and managers, but I go up at least once a week, usually, and make sure we're all on the same page.

TS: What all are you growing?

CP: Annuals and some trees, but mainly annuals. The flowers you plant in your beds. So two big seasons a year, spring and fall.

TS: Is this the busy season right now or is it coming up in a few weeks.

CP: It's coming up in about a month. We're busy planting right now....

TS: Planting?

CP: Planting so that it will be grown up in October.

TS: So you just grow up enough so that you have the plants that people buy in the nurseries.

CP: Exactly.

TS: You mentioned The Home Depot, do you have a lot of small nurseries that you do business with?

CP: Not a lot. We have probably about fifteen customers that we stick with.

TS: And these are majors?

CP: Right. Exactly.

TS: All right. That one quarter at ABAC may have been worth something after all. Certainly growing up....

CP: Yes, it helps.

TS: With some land and hogs and so on.

CP: It did.

TS: So you got back to your true love, I guess.

CP: So far.

TS: When did you start getting involved with the Alumni Association?

CP: Well, I would come back. They were building buildings, and I'd like to see what was going on. I'd come back and talk with Dr. Schlact. I said, "I want to do something with you." He suggested that I go talk to Frank Wilson.

TS: Frank Wilson was the director?

CP: He was the Alumni Association director at the time. He [Schlact] said they always need somebody over there, so I went and talk with Frank, and he was like, "Absolutely, we need help." So I was a board member. I don't even remember when I started being on the board of directors, but it was a lot different than it is now. It was very informal.

TS: Well, there's really only eight years from the time you graduated until the time that you became alumni president.

CP: I was on the board for probably six years before that.

TS: So just about the whole time after you graduated you were involved.

CP: After a couple of years I think it was. But it was very informal, and we were kind of the stepchildren as far as all the organizations on campus because our main funding was through donations. We would have a call-a-thon in one section of the newer library. We had a bank of phones that we would set up every fall, and we would talk people into coming in and helping. We would actually call people on the phone and ask them for money, and that went on several years.

TS: Where was it in the Sturgis library?

CP: I want to say it was the third floor, and it would be, I remember, facing west. I don't think there was a partition. They just put up some phones.

TS: Oh, out in the library.

CP: In the library. It was kind of against the wall. There might have been a room.

- TS: And facing west would be the side that's facing the old library.
- CP: Facing this way. That's my recollection of that. We had these sheets that we'd print out. I don't even know how they printed them, but it said what they gave last year, and that was our sheet when we called. Most people were very nice, "Yes, I can", or "No, I can't." We got a lot of answering machines, real answering machines at the time, but that's how we raised the majority of the funds that we had to operate on at the time. And I think we had to give part of that to the Foundation. I don't remember the split, but they got part of that money. Or they might have gotten it all, and we got a little bit back.
- TS: Well, the whole idea for raising the money was for scholarships and things like that anyway, and I don't guess a lot of people were giving money specifically to support the Alumni Association.
- CP: I think our dues at the time were twelve dollars or fifteen dollars. I think at one time we got the first twenty-five and the Foundation got the rest, if my memory serves me correctly.
- TS: But you weren't dealing in large contributions anyway, were you?
- CP: You'd occasionally get \$5,000, and I still remember that person.
- TS: Okay.
- CP: He's still around. But you'd get \$50, \$100, \$75, \$20, \$30. Then Frank and them would tabulate it, and I don't know if Myra [Morgan] was there at the time. She might have been with Frank. I don't know if she was or not, but that's what I remember with Frank, and then Dr. [Dennis] Durden came aboard to help.
- TS: Let's see, this would be like mid- to late-1980s we're talking about where you start doing that, helping out with the phone-a-thons.
- CP: And they'd been doing that a long time before I'd gotten there. We did have some faculty members come over and help. I couldn't tell you their names, but I just remember we did have some faculty members. But mainly it was the board and whoever else they could talk into helping.
- TS: In the '80s the Foundation wasn't doing a whole lot more than that themselves.
- CP: No, they weren't. It was very, very, in their growth mode; they had not started growing a lot at the time.
- TS: I've got some interviews with some Foundation members where they were talking about if they got \$100 contribution that was a lot.

CP: It was.

TS: So you did that. Do you remember anything else that the Alumni Association was doing other than the annual phone-a-thon?

CP: No, I don't. Not when Frank was director that I remember. When Dr. Durden came on we started in November the luncheon and having the Distinguished Alumni Awards, and I think we gave a teacher award, didn't we?

TS: Yes.

CP: He facilitated that. That was his deal.

TS: And you were saying before we started the interview that you think this was right before you became president?

CP: It was when I was vice-president or first vice-president or second vice-president, ever now it was first.

TS: So probably when Cindy Gentry was president?

CP: Probably Robbi Hicks-Wylie.

TS: Okay, the president before the president before you.

CP: Exactly, because if I remember correctly you were second vice-president, then you went to first vice-president, and then you were president, so it was a four-year span there.

TS: And Robbi was president '89-'90, one year it looks like, and then Cindy, '90-'92, so maybe she was two years and then you were '92-'94 so you were two years.

CP: It's supposed to be a two-year term.

TS: Who was the alumni president when you started getting active? Would it have been Don Sams or June Krise or John Delves?

CP: It might have been Don [Donald H. Sams], and Don and I were causal friends during school. I want to say it was Don Sams.

TS: So, Don was president in '88-'89.

CP: He might have been first vice-president or second vice-president.

TS: So it could have been June.

CP: But I knew Don from school. Did you say June Krise?

TS: June R. Krise was '87-'88.

CP: That's ringing a bell. I think I was serving at that time. I came on when June was president. Have you interviewed Don?

TS: Don, no. I need to.

CP: He's around.

TS: Yes, I've got an Atlanta address for him.

CP: Are you going to interview Dr. Siegel?

TS: Well, yes, we've already got a whole bunch of interviews with her that I started doing back in the 1992. I think we've got five interviews with her.

CP: My wife's work—we know them socially outside of the school.

TS: Oh, Betty and Joel?

CP: Yes. One of my wife's partners and Dr. Siegel owned a horse together. They're Kentucky people, and my wife was at RTM. You know, they made the RTM chair and then they let her name it.

TS: Yes, RTM at one point had all the Arby's and gave us a whole lot of money at one time. At least a million dollars, I think.

CP: Yes, and my wife was a partner at RTM. One of the best, and I got Russ Umphenour, who was the founder, to speak here.

TS: I remember him speaking at a graduation.

CP: I got him to come. I've still got the tape, and the school should have the tape. It was a great speech.

TS: I hope we've still got it.

CP: If you don't, I do.

TS: Fantastic.

CP: I still have the tape. He did it twice; we had to do it twice.

TS: Oh, in a couple of graduations.

CP: Yes, you had to do it twice.

TS: We've got four graduations now.

CP: Well, this was in the old gym and there was a stage and we did it twice. You did it in the morning, and you did it in the afternoon, and in between we went over to the Jolley Lodge, and we ate lunch. I met Governor Miller over there too. We had the thirtieth anniversary when I was president, and so he gave a proclamation on that.

TS: Yes, that would be right, '63-'93. I remember Zell Miller speaking at graduation.

CP: Yes. They drove him here in a state trooper car, just him and a trooper. He just pulled up and got out and said, "Hey, how you doing?"

TS: I just remember that he paid particular attention to exactly what the person that was introducing him was saying in the introduction. I think most people just take it all with a grain of salt and don't pay too much attention to the good things that people are saying about you, but he was listening. He was hanging on any word to see if there was any nuance, any hidden meaning behind what was being said.

CP: As alumni president you went to graduations, so I didn't miss any. I think we only had spring. Did we have winter graduations then?

TS: We must have by then, didn't we?

CP: Maybe we did. If we did I went to them. You know, you went as alumni president to the graduation. But watch Russ Umphenour's speech; it's great. They guy that we had speak at our graduation was the worst. He was like president of UPI. He was the worst, I mean, I hope we didn't pay him much.

TS: We don't pay to have them come speak. It's supposed to be an honor for them. I remember for awhile there I tried to buy things at Arby's as much as possible since they were supporting us, and we've got the Siegel Institute on campus now, and it was the RTM until I guess RTM left.

CP: Right. And I assume Dennis Cooper is still a [KSU Foundation] trustee, and he was a partner at RTM also.

TS: Did it go out of business?

CP: No, they sold it to Arby's.

TS: But they had like 100 Arby's stores, didn't they?

CP: No, they had 775.

TS: Oh, okay.

CP: They had 100 Mrs. Winner's stores.

TS: But basically they bought all these franchises, and so now they've sold out to the main company.

CP: He started with eleven that were losing money, and he was, long story short, up North, and he said, "I've got all these ideas." The guy said, "You're crazy." And he was a partner with him, and he said, "Well, give me these eleven stores in the southeast that are losing money to buy me out." They said sure. He came down, made them successful, kept acquiring and acquiring and acquiring, and then the Arby's company stores at one time, there were 300 and they weren't operating very well. He bought those too, and he about 350 then, and then he bought those 300, and they got up to 750, and they own Mrs. Winner's also. Then they sold it back to Arby's, the whole thing, sold Mrs. Winner's and then sold all the Arby's stores back to the parent company, when Dave Benham was president of Arby's. But Dennis Cooper was a partner at RTM, and he's a trustee, I assume he's still a trustee [trustee emeritus]. That's the Kentucky connection with Dr. Siegel. But we would go to a lot of charity, black tie events, and Dennis would invite the Siegels, so we would see them at least two or three times a year in that respect.

TS: Okay, so talk a little bit, whatever you want to say about the leadership of the alumni. I guess the staff leadership of the Alumni Association was Frank Wilson. Frank left before you became president I guess.

CP: Right. He was here when I was serving on the board. Frank's a great guy. Probably not the right job for Frank, but Frank tried hard, and he loved the school, he loved the students, he loved the kids.

TS: Of course, he started as a counselor here.

CP: Right. It just needed to go in a different direction, and I think that's why Dr. Siegel had asked Dennis Durden to come in, who made just great strides and put us on the path to find a new director, which was Phil Barco.

TS: Who was Dennis Durden?

CP: My recollection is he was at RJR Nabisco when they were in Marietta, and he moved with them from North Carolina during the buy-out. They have the buy-out of RJR Nabisco. I can't remember the president's name. It might have been the last name of Johnson [F. Ross Johnson]. But he [Durden] was his administrative assistant, and then once they got it resold, or if you'll look at *Barbarians at the Gate*, Dennis's name is in there.

TS: Really? What is *Barbarians at the Gate*?

- CP: It's a book about the RJR Nabisco take over. [Bryan Burrough and John Helyar, *Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco* (Harper & Row, 1990)]. The thing I remember is the footnote in there. Dennis had to fly somewhere on their private jet to get [Johnson's] German shepherd and bring it back or something. So that's Dennis's footnote in there. But he worked for them.
- TS: And they had just recently established a headquarters in Cobb County?
- CP: In Cumberland Mall. I assume Dr. Siegel had met Dennis at a charity function or some such, and they became friends. He was her special advisor, and one of the things that did need advising was the Alumni Association, how to make it better, how to make it grow and become a viable part of the college structure. He set us on that path to get better, to get better board members, more accomplished board members and to do something, not just raise money, but to do something, and that's where his idea was the Alumni Achievement award and then the teaching award, if I'm correct.
- TS: Yes, it was to a faculty member for service, wasn't it?
- CP: For service or teaching excellence. I think Dr. Siegel was the first one. We had that luncheon in the student center.
- TS: So this was the homecoming.
- CP: It was the start of homecoming. I don't think they even had homecoming then, or a formal homecoming.
- TS: But it was lunch on a Saturday afternoon in the student center each year.
- CP: This was the start of homecoming to the best of my memory. They put it together and said, this is homecoming week, which I've got great ideas on that too. We could do a much better job, but we'll do that another day.
- TS: So Durden comes in and says, "Look, you've got to do more than raise money."
- CP: Yes, you've got to get better, and here's how you do it. You need better systems, you need better staff, and he helped facilitate that.
- TS: And at that time you'd gotten almost no money from the college?
- CP: Not to my knowledge. They were probably paying the director and maybe a secretary or an assistant, but that was it to handle the database.
- TS: Where was Frank's office?
- CP: If my memory serves me right, it might have been part of the library but there was an annex.

TS: There were some offices in what became the Pilcher Building, what was the old library.

CP: I'll say it was in the Pilcher Building, the old library. I think it was in there, to the best of my memory. I think they were already interviewing when Frank left, and Dennis was kind of the interim or helping with that. They were interviewing and I think they came up with Phil Barco.

TS: Were you on the committee?

CP: No. I think Cindy Gentry was.

TS: But this was before you were president.

CP: Before I was president; I don't think I was. Again, good guy, probably not a good fit or not the fit that we needed at the time. I'm trying to think, Dennis, and then Dennis got Phil started, and I don't even know if Dennis was on the committee either. I don't think he was. You'd have to go back and look who was on the committee. I'm not sure.

TS: Unfortunately we don't have any minutes.

CP: That does not surprise me. And I haven't looked when you asked about records.

TS: We've got a KSU Archives now. We've got records from President Siegel's office, and they may be in that collection.

CP: I would look at the Foundation too. When Phil came on he kept doing the things that Dennis was doing and....

TS: The things that Dennis started like the brunch.

CP: Yes, like the alumni appreciation brunch. I don't know how much more he did, but we needed more. We needed to keep growing, so I think we outgrew his abilities. I'm not familiar with the director now.

TS: Lisa Duke.

CP: Lisa. I met Lisa. I don't get a lot from them. I'm a lifetime member. I get a note when we give again, but that's about all I get.

TS: They've got a website and e-mail list. Are you on that?

CP: I don't know. Maybe I am. I do get a mailing. They're doing some, what is it, like when you go meet people, what's the word I'm looking for? Like a connection type of thing.

TS: Oh for different colleges or whatever. So you get invitations for that?

- CP: They have about five, and I haven't been to any yet.
- TS: You were talking about Phil Barco coming in as the alumni director. You said [before the interview began] that you thought maybe as time passed the position outgrew the talents that he had to offer. Could you be more specific?
- CP: I just think we needed to grow in a different direction. From my understanding he had done some alumni work at Florida State before he came here, and I think it was just a different animal. Our Alumni Association was not like a Florida State. We had more alumni who lived here. They didn't move off. They were in the community, and we needed better ways to reach those people and to get them to become active. Our biggest problem, our opportunity, has always been to get more people involved, not just monetarily but with their other talents, not just their treasures. It takes a little bit different when it's a mostly commuter school at the time, and those graduates were commuter graduates. We didn't have on-campus living at the time, and we needed better ways to reach those people and to serve those people and to get them to want to contribute back with their talents and treasures.
- TS: So you're suggesting that people that live on campus have a closer affinity to the institution than those that just come for classes and then leave?
- CP: I think so. And especially when we were going here, no one lived on campus at all, but when they got out of school, they stayed here in this community. Let's take Athens, for example. If you went to Athens, you did your four or as they say your six years, the best six years of my life, but you didn't stay there to work. You came back home. But you did have an affinity for the school, for the sports or for the other things, but you would be more willing to contribute time and talent back to that school, whereas here it was a lot of people went at night. The night classes were big. The other thing that we looked at when I was Alumni president was what percentage of the people did we get to become Alumni Association members. I think it was twelve dollars to be a member, and that got you into the library. You could check out books, you could use the career services, and there might have been one more thing.
- TS: Did they give you a parking spot on campus?
- CP: I don't think you got a parking spot necessarily. I think you could have, but I don't think it was like, "We're going to mail you a sticker." Because parking was at a premium, it really was. I got one I could stick in my windshield when I was up here at meetings.
- TS: But basically you could check books out of the library.
- CP: You could use the resources; you could use the career resources.
- TS: And I guess that included athletic events maybe?

- CP: I don't even think we offered that at the time. We didn't offer a lot to be part of the Alumni Association, but we did start putting out the magazine. I think that was one of Dennis's—I don't think before that that we did anything.
- TS: Well, there was a newsletter back in the 1980s, but it was gone by the time you were here.
- CP: Right. But I think Dennis had said, "We need to do a magazine." And I think he started that also, if I remember right. We were looking at our graduates at the time. If you took the KSU graduates—a lot of people went here for one year and then went somewhere else, went here two years and went somewhere else.
- TS: Right. I think the first baccalaureate graduating class was 1980. We only had twelve years of graduates with bachelor's degrees at the time you came in as president.
- CP: Right. We kept looking at the percentage of who we got to become members, and it might have been one percent, two percent. It wasn't many, and at the time the product that we were selling, that's probably about what it was worth. I think we've upgraded, and we need to continue to upgrade to make sure your diploma from here is worth more and more. That's why I wanted to get involved mainly was I want to make this degree worth more in the marketplace.
- TS: So you served two years as president, and what would you say were the achievements that you're proudest of in those two years?
- CP: The alumni lunches that we had just started or we started when I was alumni president. I think the main thing was we got a better working relationship with the Foundation. We worked together more than against each other to try to help each other.
- TS: So up to that time you all weren't working in sync.
- CP: At all. I think Dr. [James A.] Fleming was at the Foundation at the time, and then during my presidency we got to be more on the same page, so that we were working towards the same goal, which is to help the college and to help our alumni. I would say that would be my biggest [contribution]. The alumni lunches, they might have started when Cindy was president, but I helped get that going. We got it started, and it's continuing on today—the magazine and just a better working relationship with the Foundation.
- TS: When you say a better working relationship what were you doing together?
- CP: Nothing. At the time it was totally separate, but we got to where Dr. Durden or Phil would be talking with Jim Fleming, "Here's what we're working on; here's what we want to try to accomplish; and how can we help you?" They were helping us. They got to where they would help us with resources. Myra Morgan, I think she worked with Dr. Durden. She might have worked with Frank a little bit, and Connie Bostick might have worked for Frank.

- TS: She did.
- CP: That was one of her stops. And then Myra came, great person, she really helped a lot and she was with Phil and I think she stayed after Phil had left, she was here for a year or two.
- TS: I can't remember exactly how all that worked out.
- CP: It was close. I ran into her at the store one day and spoke with her. I would think the things we talked about, the greatest accomplishments. Then I got other people to come volunteer like Steve [Stephen A.] Prather and Kristie Duckworth to say, "Hey guys, if you've got some time"—she was a board member. I went to school with her husband. He's an alumnus also and we still stay in touch. But those are the accomplishments, and also our fundraising got better. We were doing more letters. We quit doing the phone-a-thon, but we did a mail campaign—this was before e-mail and we had to pay for postage—but we were able to do the same amount but not have to call people on the phone.
- TS: I guess the Foundation was basically raising money for people who weren't alums and the Foundation was trying to raise money from people who were.
- CP: If memory serves me correctly Ralph Walker was the first alum who was a trustee, if I remember correctly.
- TS: That's probably right.
- CP: And at the time there were no....
- TS: There are still just a few. Stevan Crew was a student back in the 1960s. He's an emeritus Foundation trustee now, and I understand there are one or two more, but there's not many.
- CP: Exactly. And they're doing their own thing and trying to raise money. We were going through such a growth stage—I think the college was. We need more money: "Ya'll need to raise, raise, raise."
- TS: You talked about Dennis Durden wanting to upgrade the board itself. Could you talk a little more specifically about just exactly what that meant? Who were you trying to recruit, and who were they going to replace?
- CP: You had two terms if memory serves me correctly, but his idea was why don't you get people who are going to do something, not just come sit in a seat and take notes and go home, but go out and find people who will do something, who will help you and not just go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." You can say, "Let's break this up." They'll actually do some work and contribute back. I think that was his idea, you need a better board, a more active board because if you don't you're going to be doing all the work, and you don't

have the resources to just dump it back on the director's lap and say, "Here you go." You need some actual workers.

TS: So you're defining quality in terms of work ethic.

CP: Yes—or wanting to contribute.

TS: The reason I'm asking this is that in more recent years they've been trying to bring in more people that were CEOs or own their own businesses or things like that. Of course, when you were president, unless somebody already had their career well established before they came to Kennesaw, they hadn't had that much time to move up a corporate hierarchy yet.

CP: Exactly. Our alumni base was not matured in the market place. They were still entry level or right above entry level positions for the most part.

TS: Right. So nowadays they're going more for people that have had more time to accomplish things.

CP: More accomplished. And with our MBA program that's going to help also. I think the business school does their own Alumni Association some now, don't they?

TS: Yes, they have. I think maybe they're trying to move away from that a little bit now.

CP: To come back?

TS: Yes, if I understand that. I'm trying to remember exactly what Lisa [Duke] told me when I interviewed her, but, yes, I think they're trying to pull some of that back together again. But you're right, the business college, in fact, that's where Lisa came from was the business college and they were doing a lot over there. So harder working board, the luncheon once a year, and trying to increase the percentage of members—that's a pretty good list of accomplishments.

CP: I feel good about it.

TS: That's basically it, isn't it?

CP: Yes.

TS: So you served your two years, and then did you continue to be active on the board after that time?

CP: No. I had kids and was pretty entrepreneurial. I had plenty to do, and I'd done my six or eight years. I said, "Hey, I'm going to let them do it for awhile." And I knew Steve was here and that he would do a good job, and so I just kind of dropped out. I haven't been back to anything alumni that I remember but I've done stuff with the athletic department,

knew Dr. Siegel socially, so she would keep me up to date on what's going on here, here and here.

TS: You mentioned a golf tournament before we started.

CP: The Dot Martin.

TS: You've been involved with the Dot Martin golf....

CP: For six or seven years now.

TS: Which is to raise money for....

CP: Athletic scholarships. It's a great tournament; we go to it every year. It's in the spring, probably the second or third Monday in May, and I go to that every year. I send in money every year. I still contribute, but I do restrict it to the business school. That's where my passion is.

TS: Sure. Looking at things from an outsider's perspective now, where do you see the Alumni Association? As an alumnus who is not actively involved in the association, but still hears from the university occasionally, where do you see the Alumni Association?

CP: My analogy is like when I went to North Cobb. I'm sure it's out there. I just haven't looked for it or I don't know exactly what they're doing. I don't know the programs they're running. I do get the mailer about the mixers—that's not the right word but where alumni are hosting events to know other alumni. I think that's a good start, but with the technology we have today, I think we've got to tap into more constant contact, more resources, even career resources for people even my age that can help them retrain, retool. I think there could be more from the school as far as, "Hey, you've got your degree. How about an MBA? Come back, we want you as a customer again." That way. But as far as the Alumni Association, you know, I think they've still got to do more events. Homecoming needs to be bigger. They could do a campus tour, because I haven't seen all the buildings, and I ride through every now and then just to look.

TS: Oh, that would be nice, wouldn't it, to give a tour?

CP: Well, we're going to do one this year. I'm going to work with Wes and I think he'll help me.

TS: Wes Wicker?

CP: Yes. What I want to do is the people that I was close to when we were at school, some of them might have graduated, some of them might not have, but I think we can come back and have like lunch at the Jolley Lodge, get a tour of the campus, and go to a basketball game, and that would be a reunion. This is our twenty-fifth year, so I'm going to do that hopefully in January. The basketball schedule's out. [Hopefully,] we can do the

President's suite at basketball. Do lunch—but I want a tour of the campus, I want to go through the buildings, not just drive by, but let's get out, let's walk in and look and see what it looks like, and hear about the dorms and our future plans. I'm almost fifty years old—if the Foundation and the Alumni Association do want to start getting the money, not just money but the talent and the treasures from people, they've got to do a little something. Just like my children, I've got one at Athens and one at Tuscaloosa. Kennesaw was never on the radar screen, never, and we've got to change that. I've talked to other people that went to school, and I say, "But did y'all look at Kennesaw?" She says, "No. It was not even on the list." For a lot of people that I went to school with, their children aren't going.

TS: Why do you think that's so?

CP: They want a more prestigious [college]. They want the football experience, the big school experience.

TS: Do you think we need a football team?

CP: That's coming. From my understanding, it's coming. I think it would help, absolutely, but I think you could build more around basketball and baseball than we are currently doing right now, and ladies' soccer. I don't know what other sports we do.

TS: We've got sixteen different teams, I think, and a lot of club sports too.

CP: A lot of club sports. But I think the football will help, I really do. But my children wanted the big school experience. They had been in smaller, private schools growing up, and they wanted the big school.

TS: Twenty-two thousand students are not enough?

CP: Are not enough. Well, we've only got 3,000 on campus, so that's the number really.

TS: They want to go off and live in a dormitory?

CP: Exactly. My son is a junior at Georgia now. His mom's an alumna, but he loves it and is doing great. Then my daughter is a freshman at Tuscaloosa.

TS: At least one Saturday in the year . . .

CP: They don't play this year.

TS: Oh they don't?

CP: They don't play every year, but I grew up an Alabama fan, so I was never a Georgia guy.

TS: Where do you see Kennesaw now in general?

CP: I'm very proud of this school, I'm very proud of what Dr. Sturgis did and what Dr. Siegel did, and I think Dr. Papp can take it to another level. I hope he can, I think he can. I've spoken with him a couple of times just casually, and I think he can. But I think where Kenensaw needs to be is a destination for anybody in the state of Georgia and outside of Georgia. We've got to set the bar high, academically. When I came here, I don't know if we talked about it, you didn't have the brains, you didn't have the money to go somewhere else. That's why you came here; that's what it was, or it was convenient. We've got to make it where people want to get here. I've talked with Dr. Schlact, and he says it's harder and harder to get in, and we need to make it harder and harder, but we need to attract the best students possible. When those students go out in the market place and accomplish themselves, it will make everybody's degree worth more, which I want. I want our degree to be more valuable. We need more dormitories, more living on campus where you have a campus community, and I think the football will help. I've never been to a baseball game. I've been to some soccer games because my daughter played soccer. They might have to publicize that better in the community. I've been to basketball games.

TS: Well, once they get the 8,300 seat stadium for soccer that ought to help.

CP: That will help but they could publicize—the basketball games are a great bargains, \$2.00 or \$5.00 whatever it is for the general public. We bring my son's basketball team here in high school—he went to Walker—and we would come to a game, but there weren't that many people here.

TS: No.

CP: But if they could publicize that more, get more of the community into the sporting, and then you start getting a passion for the school.

TS: Well, now that we're Division I officially, we can actually play in the tournaments at the end of the year. Hopefully that'll help.

CP: I think it will.

TS: Well, I think I'm about out of questions unless you can think of anything we haven't covered that you think we should have.

CP: No, I really can't. I loved it here. I'm still proud of the school, and I will continue to contribute. As things get better or easier at work for me, I'll have more time to do some other things with the school.

TS: Very good. Thank you very much.

CP: Thank you Dr. Scott.

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