

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SPSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 12

INTERVIEW WITH RANDY BROWN, JR.

CONDUCTED BY KATHLEEN HARPER

EDITED AND INDEXED BY KATHLEEN HARPER AND THOMAS A. SCOTT

THURSDAY, JULY 24, 2014

Kennesaw State University holds legal title and all literary property rights, including copyright, to this oral history. It is not to be reproduced without permission from the director of the Kennesaw State University Oral History Project.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Southern Polytechnic State University Series, No. 12
Interview with Randy Brown Jr.
Conducted by Kathleen Harper
Edited and indexed by Kathleen Harper and Thomas A. Scott
Thursday, July 24, 2014
Location: Atrium Building, Southern Polytechnic State University

KH: Tell me a little bit about your background.

RB: I graduated in May [2014]. I was an English and Professional Communications major. I came to Southern Poly[technic State University] as an Architecture student. I did a year in the program, and then afterwards I transferred to the English, [Technical Communications & Media Arts] department. I started working for the student newspaper here in 2011, in the fall. I'm from Union City. It took me about six years to complete my undergraduate degree because I dropped out of school after my freshman year. Then, I just worked for four years and ended up coming back to school to finish.

KH: Where did you grow up?

RB: I grew up in Union City, Georgia. It's about ten minutes outside of Atlanta (southwest) near College Park and East Point, Georgia. So, I grew up down there pretty much all my life, until I moved up here to Marietta for school.

KH: And when was that?

RB: Let's see. I moved here in 2010 in the summer to start architecture with Southern Poly. Before that, I was living at home. I did my freshman year in Alabama, so I had left home to go there and then came back.

KH: What made you choose Southern Poly?

RB: Well since I was going into architecture, I talked to some of the employers in the area, and a lot of people mentioned Southern Poly over Georgia Tech. My first choice was to go to Georgia Tech. A lot of people talked about how the classes were smaller, more hands-on, and allowed the Southern Poly students to do much better work in the field. That's what I heard. This is from employers, so I thought since it was coming from employers and these are the people who are going to hire me, I should go to Southern Poly. I checked out the school, and I really liked what I saw, so I ended up coming here. It was probably the best choice I ever made so far.

KH: So why did you switch to Communications?

RB: I do love architecture, but I just couldn't see myself doing it after graduating. I didn't think it would be something I would want to do as a career, so I switched. I was really into writing at the time, and it was something that had kind of come out of nowhere, because I had stopped writing a while back and started up again. I was reading a lot. It was the obvious choice at the time. I had a plan.

KH: What do you see yourself doing with it?

RB: Well, I'm going to graduate school, and that's for an MFA in Creative Writing. I'll probably start working on screenplays and doing some work in theatre. Ultimately, the goal is to write books, so to be able to wake up in the morning and not have to work for anybody. I can just write books and submit them to publishers. That's what I want to do.

KH: Sounds like a great job.

RB: Yes. A lot of people tell me it's really hard, and it doesn't pay a lot, but these days that's what you hear about most jobs anyway. I figured I would rather be doing something that I love to do.

KH: So choose the best choice out of all of them?

RB: Yes.

KH: What has your experience [at Southern Poly] been like?

RB: My experience here was interesting, because when I came to Southern Poly, I really didn't want to do anything outside of class. I just wanted to get my class work done and graduate, but I saw how much time I had. I don't know if you know, but in Architecture, you don't have a lot of time to do much else. The people that do manage to do things outside of class (or studio, as we like to call it)—it's pretty impressive. When I left, I realized I had a lot of time on my hands. I finished a book. I wrote an entire book after I left. I joined the newspaper, and I started doing work with housing. It just kind of happened over night. The more I became involved with on-campus activities, the more I realized that there were big opportunities for me to contribute and give back to the student body. So that's what I did. It was really great experience, and things just flourished from there. It just happened, I don't want to say overnight, but everything just started happening really fast. It was a great experience. I used to tell people all the time that school is just a practice ground for what's going to happen when you get out in the real world, so if you can start applying what you're learning in class on campus now, then you'll be much more prepared for what's going to happen when you leave here. That's the Southern Poly experience all in a nutshell; it's very much hands-on, with a lot of projects in class that are more [connected] to what you're going to do when you leave.

KH: Speaking of projects, I noticed on your LinkedIn [profile] that you participated in "High without Walls."

RB: Yes, that was with Dr. [Mark] Nunes.

KH: We spoke with him a few weeks ago, and he talked about it a little bit. Could you tell me how it was from a student's perspective?

RB: Yes. He came up with this crazy idea to work with the High Museum. The High Museum was having trouble at the time attracting students, you know, people our age—somewhere between 18 to 25—the young people. So, they set out to talk to students and try to get us to do projects with them. Then that way we could tell our friends, "Hey, our

projects are going to be at the High.” That’s what we did. I think there were three different groups working on projects at the time. Then Julia Forbes [head of museum interpretation at the High Museum of Art] would come to our classroom and talk to us. We weren’t the only class; there was another class [she worked with], Dr. [James P.] Werner’s class. In both classes, there were three groups, and everybody would just interchange and work on projects together. Then, we had this huge showcase at the High, where it was like a College Night, and students would come out. Have you ever been to a College Night there?

KH: No.

RB: It’s really cool. They have live music, and you have all these students from around the metro area come out. You pretty much just talk and mingle and network. That’s where we presented out projects. I wasn’t able to go to that one (I was out of town), but it was a really cool experience. Some of my friends actually got internships from that, so that was really cool. I think the thing about that is that you bring in people who are already in the industry, and they come in and they see the work you’re doing and think, “Oh these kids. They do have really good work. I would like to hire some of them.” That’s just really good exposure for us. That was awesome.

KH: That sounds like a lot of fun.

RB: Yes, it was fun.

KH: I’ll have to go. I also found that you listed “Breaths of a Dis-Unified Army” as one of your projects?

RB: Yes. That’s a book I wrote in the spring of 2010, me and a group of students. We were in a creative writing class at Georgia Military College. We published a book, and the book had all of our work from the entire semester in there. The professor would give us an assignment, and we would do the assignment, and then we would workshop it. What that means is if I write a poem or a short story, I would give it to everybody in class, and then you guys would just rip it apart and tell me what I can fix, what works and what doesn’t. Then I would get it back, and I have to apply those changes. We just kept doing that with each project. I think each student had ten to eleven assignments. A lot of them were poems. We had a short story. Then there was a biography for each of us that we put in there. We published it. The president of the university let us publish it, so instead of them spending money on textbooks, they spent money on us getting those printed and published. So that was really cool. I still have two or three of them, and that professor is now one of my mentors. He helped me with graduate [schools].

KH: Did you go to Georgia Military College before you came here?

RB: Yes, I went there from the summer of 2009 to the spring of 2010. That’s the Georgia Military [College] in Fairburn. They have [nine] different locations. The main campus is in Milledgeville.

KH: I noticed you have quite a bit of experience with your stay at SPSU, including an internship at The Bert Show.

RB: Right.

KH: How was that?

RB: That was interesting. Going into my senior year here, I wanted to experiment with different internships, or just different jobs. Since I'm a communications major, I figured I would try radio. I was going to start an AJC [*Atlanta Journal Constitution*] internship, but that fell through. Then The Bert Show opened up the next week, and I took that. I had to be there at five o'clock in the morning. It was from five to ten [in the morning] on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the fall. It was interesting because a lot of people said, "Oh, I want to go on the radio. This is what I want to do." Unless you do an internship, you just don't know what to expect. So for me, going in, it was interesting because I was open to almost anything. Cassie (she was my boss) would say, "Hey, Randy, whatever you want to do, let me know now." I just told her that I wanted to do a little bit of everything: from producing, to transcribing, to working with the foundation (The Bert Show foundation). I did a little bit of everything. The cool thing was that we actually worked in the studio with Bert [Bert Weiss], Kristin [Kristin Klingshirn], Tommy [Tommy Owen], and all of those guys. We worked in studio with them, so every day I would come in, make sure they had everything they needed, and then we would get started. I was there for the entire show. Sometimes, you would get actors and singers (like local artists, or just celebrities from Hollywood or wherever) and they would come into the studio. We would do interviews and stuff like that, and I would have a chance to meet them. It was just a really, really good experience. And those guys, because we're young and we don't know much about the industry, would just share a lot of knowledge with us. They would say, "You know, if you want to do this, this is what you need to do. This is what you need to look out for here." So that was a really cool experience. I don't think I would want to do radio, but if I did, I could definitely use that as a platform. That was a really cool experience.

KH: You should stop by the Kennesaw [college] radio station.

RB: Yes, you guys have a really good gig going on over there with the radio station. It's really good. I think it's grown since I've started here in 2010. I'm impressed.

KH: It grows every semester.

RB: Cool.

KH: I actually work there, so if you ever want to drop by...

RB: [laughter] That's nice.

KH: It's about to get a lot better, too. We're changing everything around again.

RB: With the consolidation, that definitely helps. That's what I was telling a lot of the students. For both schools, with both campuses, everybody just has more resources now. That's the really cool part about it.

KH: Even though there is a twenty-minute commute between them?

RB: Right.

KH: Again, you do have more resources.

RB: Yes, definitely.

KH: I'm honestly looking forward to having a merged Student Media.

RB: It's going to be interesting. That's definitely going to be interesting. I'm personally glad I don't have to be a part of getting all that stuff together because I was the editor of the paper here, and just figuring all that stuff out—there's so much. It's not just publications, but also budgets, staff. There's a lot that I'm glad I didn't have to sort through.

KH: Why did you choose to work at *The Sting*?

RB: I chose to work there mainly because I wanted to have my work published, and I thought it would be an easy route to go for employers. If they want to look at some of my work, they could just Google the name or look it up. I was being naïve, just really innocent about it. I had no plans to pursue any type of editorial position. I just wanted to write. So I was just like, "I write short stories, and I write some poems for a newspaper. Not articles. Then, I ended up doing all of it.

KH: What kept you at *The Sting*?

RB: I saw a really cool opportunity to push the newspaper further along than where it was. The editor before me, Vicki Nix, had started that process when she took over as editor, because before, the paper was just eight pages, it was black and white (there was no color on it), and there were only three people that actually did all the work: the editor, the copy editor, and then someone who was doing advertising. That's it. So when Vicki took over, [she] opened up the staff to anybody to work with her on the editorial board. She wanted to have editors for each section, and she wanted copy editors, and all of it. That's when I started to see it. In all honesty, at all other schools, they have all of this already, and we didn't. So I thought, "I'm actually going to be a part of creating something." We weren't going to just sustain what we had, because we didn't have anything. You have to build everything from scratch, and I love creating new things. Vicki helped with that, and when she handed it over to me, I just pushed it further. That's why I stayed. That's definitely why I stayed.

KH: Do you think you're going to work for a newspaper in the future?

RB: I don't want to. I really don't want to. My focus is now shifting towards writing books and more work in fiction and nonfiction. I don't want to go back to journalism. I know I can do it if I need to, so I never want to say never, but I would hope that I don't and that I wouldn't have to go back. I enjoyed it while I did it, but I don't know. Even if I did go back, it probably wouldn't be in print. It would probably be doing video interviews and stuff like that. I find those really interesting. I would definitely do that.

KH: What kind of topics do you focus on in your writing, if you don't mind my asking?

RB: Well it depends. I have a blog. Actually I have five blogs. But my main blog is on Tumblr™ and that focuses on my process of writing. So, a lot of the stuff that goes on there are quotes, ideas, theories, short stories, poems (more of on a personal level), and then, like the book, for instance, it's just a post-apocalyptic story about a family trying to find their way through the world. And then, what do you call it, a lot of the short stories that I do are more focused on fiction, but it's based on people that I know, people that I experienced through my walks in life. That's mostly what the focus is. I've learned through a lot of readings so far that a lot of reality is in fiction, so I just use fiction, because people think, "Oh, it's not real." So I use that, and I enjoy that mask, because people go, "Well, this isn't real, so I'll read it." I'm like, "All right, you'll read it."

KH: It does seem to make reading a lot easier when you think it's not real, so you don't have to take it as seriously.

RB: Yes. Exactly.

KH: But you also mentioned you write a little bit of nonfiction as well?

RB: Yes.

KH: What kind?

RB: The nonfiction is more focused on my life in general. So, just my path to get where I am. I think everybody's life is very interesting. When I sit down and talk with people, I find the stories they give me about their experience is very fascinating, but they don't look at them that way. I don't look at mine as fascinating either, but I think it would be hypocritical of me to say, "Oh, you guys are fascinating," and not think the same thing about myself. So, I think that, for me to be able to write down what I've been through and share it with other people, it's not for me. It's more so for people to understand that we're all alike, and we all go through the same things, and "Here's an alternate route to solve this problem," or "Here's what I went through." It's kind of similar to what I went through, to what you're going through, and maybe, by us exchanging experiences, it can help me get through something that I'm going through. So, I'm probably going to use this whole story about everything I went through my senior year to write my thesis for graduate school. So, that's probably what I'm going to do with that.

KH: That sounds really interesting.

RB: Yes, it was a crazy senior year. It was awesome, but it was definitely crazy.

KH: I watched your commencement speech, and I really enjoyed it.

RB: Thank you.

KH: But I was wondering. I know you mentioned this in your speech—that you were just standing up there the year before, and you looked down and said, "I think that would be really cool to do."

RB: Yes.

KH: Was that all that really went through your mind?

RB: I was there [the first time] because some of my editors were graduating. I know I don't like going to graduations that I will have to participate in, and I knew it was going to be the following year, so I wanted that whole experience to be new. I went there, and when I went I said, "What is that?" It was just a thought, like, "You know, I could do that," and I like to think about things in deep thought. So, I just told myself, "I can do that." I think it's just a lesson in life that we can just about do anything that we want to do, but a lot of people are afraid. They're really afraid of what's going to happen and how they'll be looked upon, judged, or maybe they'll just fail. They won't be able to accomplish what they set out to do. So, for me, I thought it was cool because, through my life, up until maybe the past four years, I've failed at a lot of things, and I haven't been very successful with a lot. So I like it now. I like to fail, because I'm just learning a lot from it, and "Oh, you know, well, that happened," but because that happened, I know this and I know this and I know this. I just saw it as another challenge. I said, "You know, this would be really cool. I can do that. I'm definitely going to do that." I didn't really push for it. I just said I wasn't going to graduation, and that's how it all started. I said I wasn't going to go.

KH: So, you said you weren't going to go to your own graduation?

RB: Right.

KH: And then you became the commencement speaker?

RB: Right. Well, we're standing in line, and there was a Pulitzer Prize winner [in 1994 for her work as Chicago Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*] that came to our school to speak. Her name was Isabel Wilkerson [author of the *Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Random House 2010)]. She came last spring, and we were standing in line for the book signing. One of my professors had been talking to me about graduation, and I had told her I didn't want to go. She said, "Why?" I said, "I'm almost twenty-eight, and I'll be twenty-eight when I graduate. I think I've gone through college enough to know that I don't want to be there for that. I just want the diploma, and I think that I would rather be on a plane, leaving for Europe or something and traveling and letting that be the celebration of receiving my undergraduate degree. She said, "No, you have to go to graduation. It is important. What about your family?" I said, "Well, you know, if my family wants to come with me on the trip, they can, but I don't think graduation is for me."

I made the statement about some of the speakers that we have had in the past. From the comments I have received from people I know that are now alumni, in the past, [the commencement speakers] just didn't really connect well with the students. For me, it wasn't negative, but if I'm going to graduate, and I'm going through this road, you know, and taking all these classes, the nights that you never had to sleep, and just a lot of memories with your friends, you want that final day with them to be memorable. I felt like, in order for that to happen, I would want one of my peers to be on stage talking to me. So I told my professor [that] the only way I'll go to graduation is if one of my peers was speaking. She said, "Why won't you do it?" I said, "I don't want to do it. I just

wanted someone up there that I can relate to.” She said, “Well, we’ve never had a student ever, *ever* do it here.” I said, “Well, that’s cool. Maybe the SGA [Student Government Association] president should do it, maybe the Valedictorian should do it.” “No, you should do it.” Then she challenged me by saying, “What? Are you scared?” That’s when it all happened. She contacted Dr. [Lisa A.] Rossbacher, president at the time, and it just went from there.

KH: Which professor was this?

RB: This was Dr. [Kim] Haimes-Korn. She’s an English and Technical Communications professor here. She challenged me with that. When Dr. Rossbacher said yes, Dr. Haimes-Korn was my advisor for the speech, so we sat down for months, long nights, writing that speech.

KH: So had you worked on that speech since the last [previously mentioned] graduation?

RB: Well, there were five speeches. I wrote five speeches. The speech that I gave on graduation [day] I did not actually write until two weeks before graduation. There were three out of the four I had at the time that I strongly considered, but something wasn’t right. Every day I went into her office, and I would have a new idea. She was like, “Randy, you have to settle on something. Graduation is in seven weeks.” I had a thought the night before when I was watching this really cool video (Larry Smith, “Why You Will Fail to Have a Great Career”). So I was watching that, and I really enjoyed it. I wrote this speech from there. I gave it to her, and she cried when she read it. She [said], “This is really good. I think this one works.” “All right, that’s the one we’ll use.” [This was] two weeks before graduation.

KH: I admit, when I first watched it, and you said, “You’re going to fail,” I had to stop and think about it like, “Why would you say that at a graduation?” [*laughter*]

RB: The [SPSU] attorney, Alana Kyriakakis, looked over it, and she said, “You know, Randy, it’s a little dark. I’m not telling you how to write your speech, but let’s lighten it up in some areas, towards the middle or the end.” I listened and touched it up in some areas, but I’m all about the truth. I think the only way that people succeed is if they know everything that’s going on. They know what’s going to happen, and that’s the honest truth. You’re just going to fail. You fail at everything. You’re driving, and you get a flat tire. “Okay, I failed to get to work on time because I have a flat tire. What am I going to do about it? Am I going to sit here and just pout, or am I going to pull out the jack and change the tire or call a tow truck?” It’s life. You fail, and sometimes it’s small and sometimes it’s huge. You just have to learn how to deal with it. So it sucks, but that’s what it is. The more you learn, the better off you are.

KH: I know I’m not as afraid to fail now. [*laughter*] Who was it that said it was dark?

RB: She was the SPSU attorney at the time. She’s not here anymore.

KH: I also understand that you were a technical writer at SPSU.

RB: Yes.

KH: What did that involve?

RB: I worked in the office of Faculty Support and Development, and, basically, I help out with the online classes. If a professor doesn't know how to use D2L [Desire2Learn], we make the instructional documents. "This is how you create your course." "This is how you create a test." "This is how you do discussion posts." It's dry. It's really dry. But it's basically saying, "This is how you do it," without all "the birds are flying, the sun is bright." For me, it was a little hard because I'm a creative writer, but technical writing has to be straightforward: "This is how you do it, you press this button, and you do this." I'm not the head guy in there. I'm just a student assistant. The senior technical writers pass the work down to us, like "Hey, can you edit this?" or "Hey, can you write this?" or "Can you just look through it and make sure the graph is okay?" Sometimes, I was creating entire documents. We're talking about thirty, forty, fifty pages worth of stuff, and then all the guys in there would work on it. You would have some people that are doing design for it (making sure it looks aesthetically appealing). We would do all that and turn it in. The [senior technical writers] would look through it, and our boss's boss would look through it. If it was okay, they would post it, and the professors would be able to use it. I've done that since May of last year [2013].

KH: So, you're the reason that professors know how to teach us.

RB: I wouldn't say that I'm a reason, but I guess that I am a small part of how that happens. That's really interesting to see.

KH: What drew you to become an RA [Resident Assistant]?

RB: I was an RA in my freshman year in college, and that happened just off of a good word from a friend. What drew me to be an RA here was that a lot of student leaders on campus here are RAs. Pretty much everyone going through SGA [Student Government Association], you have people from fraternities and sororities, and people that are a part of a lot of the student clubs and organizations on campus, like the big leaders, the Who's Who [award to recognize student excellence], they've all been RAs. I figured, I need to be an RA. I want to be a part of that. It's a really good department to be in, and you get to work with students, your peers and residents, and help people with conflict resolution. I've always been really good at all those things and creating events, hanging out, so I just wanted to be a part of it. It's just something I wanted to check off from the bucket list. It's been really great. It was an awesome experience. I'm still doing it. I'm now a senior RA, so I'm helping out until next week, but it's been awesome. It's a really great experience, really cool coordinators, and directors that I worked for.

KH: Do you think you'll be doing anything similar in graduate school?

RB: If the opportunity presents itself, I would, only because it's New York and everything's crazy expensive. I'm already familiar with the work, so I wouldn't say no. I would keep the option open if it's something I could possibly do, although the move to New York is more so for networking with a community of writers and bettering myself as a writer, but if I have the opportunity, why not?

KH: I'm going to go ahead and move us over to the primary reason [for the interview], which is the consolidation. When did you first hear about it, and what was your initial reaction?

RB: I heard about it on November 1st, which was the day that they announced it to the universities. My initial thoughts were like anybody else that had been here for a while: I didn't like it, and that's more so because by this time I'm enthralled in everything and pretty much all over campus and doing a lot of work. For me, I felt like a lot of the things I had done would not exist after the consolidation happened. So those were my initial thoughts going into it. It was rough.

KH: What would you say your role was, either going against it, or in any action you took? What was the role of *The Sting*?

RB: The cool thing about being a part of media is that you try not to be biased. Your job is not to be biased; your job is to report what you see (the facts). That helped me wrap my mind around everything that was going on. I just played the middle. If I was biased, then there's no credibility for the paper. I sat the staff down, on the Monday after Dr. [Daniel S.] Papp and Dr. Rossbacher had their big meeting in the auditorium, and said, "Listen, this is our job. This is what we're going to be doing and, moving forward, there will be no biased comments on FaceBook or social media. If you want to make those comments, you don't make them as a member of this staff, because we're reporting the news."

From then on, it was just the middle for me, and looking at the entire situation as something that just happens. In life, you have to make adjustments and you just have to adapt. So, you can look at this and say, "I hate this. I hate this." All right, then leave. That's what you'll have to do, or you stay and you adapt. Some people are leaving. They have better opportunities in other places. Then some people are staying. That's just how it is. It sucks. You're leaving people that you've worked with for a very long time, and it's hard, but, as with life, you have to move on. We have to move on. That's how I look at it. I still have mixed feelings about it, but that's how I choose to look at it. I'm leaving too, so I think leaving has a big role in how I look at it now. If I were still here, maybe my feelings would be different, but I'm not going to be here. I will still be a part of the SPSU community, but I don't know what the new university will look like moving forward because I won't be here. I think that plays a role in how I feel about it.

KH: What impact do you think *The Sting* had on the student population when you first started publishing about this issue?

RB: Really, really big. That's probably the best word, and we've done a lot of really good work. We've grown since I took over as editor, but that was probably the best that we've done since I have been here, and I think it had a lot to do with the moment. [There's] breaking news every day. Sometimes in a couple hours, things are coming out. So, we were there, because we're on campus. I was well-connected with a lot of the administrators and a lot of the professors, so I'm hearing stuff as it's happening. I was able to get that to people. Then, our Creative Marketing Director was all over. So anytime something happened, we were live-streaming it to the student body. They had Twitter. We had FaceBook, and all that stuff. Today, students have the luxury of using all these devices and all these apps, so it was just a lot easier for us to reach out to people.

I think we played a really, really, *really* big role in helping people get information as it was happening. That was a big role.

KH: Who was your Creative Marketing Director at the time?

RB: Desmond Hilson. He's now the Editor-in-Chief of *The Sting*.

KH: Okay. What methods were used to cover the story? I know you said social media, along with the actual paper. How did you acquire the information?

RB: The good thing about being in a small school was that everybody does a little bit of everything. So, my News Editor [Christopher Harris] is also the president of his fraternity. He was able to get information about what was happening with the Greeks and how they're doing their whole consolidation and things working out on that end. Then, I also had someone who was working in admissions, so whenever they got information, they would work with us. One of my lead writers was working for PR [Public Relations] at the time, so she could not release information until it was released to the public, but even then, some of the students would get it. So she would say, "Hey, Randy. Heads up. This is going to happen. Just thought you might want to get it prepped." So, we would already have it prepped and, when it was okay to send that information out, we would send it out.

I had people everywhere. I was an RA, so I was hearing about things going on with Housing and Resident's Life, and in other departments. I knew people in architecture—professors here, deans in other departments—so I was getting that information. I also had other people that would just filter it down to me. Now, the tricky thing with that is some of that information is not supposed to be made public, so I had to decide. If it's not supposed to be made public, there's nothing I can really do with it. I know what's going on, but in the situation where another story comes in, I can say "I know that's true because I was here, so let's make sure our sources are good on this end." I was also going to the consolidation meetings with Dr. Rossbacher and Dr. Papp. Desmond and I were actually sitting in on those meetings with all the VPs and directors. We were actually there getting a lot of the information before the students ever got it. That was really cool as well.

KH: Is there any information that you couldn't share then that you can share now?

RB: No. At this point, pretty much everything's out there now, like this person's leaving. Some of it was of "this person's leaving, this person's going to be moving to this university here" or "they're probably cutting this budget here," but now, everything's out now. I think the best parts, reporting wise, are already out at this point. They have a website for the consolidation, so people can go there, look at it, but in those first four weeks, oh my God, things were crazy. It was interesting. A great time to be a reporter, I'll say that.

KH: What role did you have with the Board of Regents? Did you go downtown?

RB: Yes. I was there as a member of the media, so I just went there to report. Did I know a lot of people in there? Yes, but I'm not a protestor or anything; I'm just there as a member of the media. That was my role, specifically.

KH: How did you cover the meeting?

RB: Desmond actually streamed it live, and then we had someone outside covering the protests that SPSU students had going on across the street. I was inside doing a live tweet to everybody that followed us on Twitter. We covered those angles.

KH: Was the live stream audio or video?

RB: It was actually video, but it cut in and out because the WiFi in the building was really bad. The people that weren't able to stream it to their website were able to get it [on Twitter].

KH: Were you there both days?

RB: No, I was there when they voted and made the decision. That's when I went.

KH: What was your reaction when they made it official?

RB: I wasn't surprised. It was just really sad, overall, but I wasn't surprised at all.

KH: Had you been expecting it?

RB: Yes. I mean, just talking to the people that I talked to, and a lot of them were really close to the decision-makers, the entire process had been moving along before the entire public knew about it. And that's just me saying that. You could interview somebody else and they'll say no, but that's just from the people that I've talked to. It seemed like everything was moving along before then.

KH: Did you participate in any of the operational working groups?

RB: I was supposed to participate in the Student Media working group, but I never got an email back from them. I'm trying to think if there was anything else, because there were two or three groups that people signed me up for, but I never worked on any of them. I'm happy that I didn't, because just going to the meetings with the presidents and all their people is nerve-wrecking. Everyone has stake on their side, and the work that they've done. You're telling some people, "We're going to cut back here." It's just really stressful. In that sense, I'm glad that I didn't have to sit in on any of them, but going to those meetings, I actually had information from all the working groups because all the working groups reported to those people, and so that information was there. In that sense, I really didn't have to go to any of them because I was getting all the information there. They would send me emails with the information that was discussed, and I would get packets with all the stuff in there. I pretty much had everything that I needed. Then I was on the Student Life committee here, and we would discuss things—the SGA president; we had people from Student Life. So they would discuss things, and we would just go back and forth there as well.

KH: Did you ever travel up to KSU to meet with people?

RB: Yes. Initially, I went up there to speak with the newspaper, *The Sentinel*, and I talked to their faculty advisor. Then I talked to Dr. Papp very briefly during those meetings, and some of the people on his side, and some of the people on the SPSU side during those meetings. I did a lot of traveling back and forth to KSU early on, definitely. It was in the schedule.

KH: Do you know which faculty advisor? Was it Ed Bonza?

RB: Yes. Very cool guy. Very enthusiastic. He's awesome.

KH: Yes. He's a great guy. So, overall, what would you say your experience with the consolidation was like? Do you wish it had gone differently?

RB: I can't say I wish it had gone differently. It's eye-opening. A lot of politics—a lot of politics, yes. There's politics everywhere. It is what it is, but I've fully accepted the consolidation for what it is, and, for me, it's a lot of politics. But for the student—I think, the students will benefit the most because they'll get a lot of resources. Now, on one end, you have this big school that already has twenty-six thousand students. Then you have another school that's really small, six thousand. But a lot of the students are commuters, so, really I would say two to three thousand students that are constantly here. For us, it's just a real small, close-knit community. Everybody knows everybody. Now, you're going to a bigger school, and it won't be like that anymore, like the smaller classes. Here, the biggest class may be thirty-five to forty students, and at Kennesaw, it may be a lot more than that (it may be double). But now, with the consolidation, you may say, "Well, we could use an auditorium to have class" and stuff like that.

Then, you have operations and the bracket of people that work under one another. It's a lot more. It's huge, whereas here, it's just you answer to this person; you can go to this person's office and knock on the door and go in. Now, you have to send emails and wait. You know, things like that. But, overall, I think that the students coming into the new university will love it. I'm just happy that I did not have to go through it, because I don't know how I would feel about being tugged this way, tugged that way. Thankfully, I didn't have to experience it. But for the students that will go through that, just learning to adapt and looking at the positives over the negatives is the best way to do it, because I talked to a lot of students at Kennesaw, and they didn't care. They didn't—either way. Some didn't even want it to happen, but most just didn't care. Some people just looked at it as, "Oh, Kennesaw is coming in here and taking everything." Well, the students really had no say in it. So, there's no point in us being bitter towards them.

KH: Do you think you'll come back to visit?

RB: Initially, no, but that's mainly because I want to move on and go for myself to New York City and just put my feet down there, and work. I will be back for graduation next spring because the group that I started with in Architecture at Southern Poly will be graduating as fifth-year students. So all of those guys graduate next year, and they're like my best friends. I've been in some of their weddings. I'll definitely be back for graduation next spring, whether it's here or at Kennesaw. Other than that, I don't really plan on coming

back too much. I think I've done enough. [laughter] I've been heavily involved for a while. I think I just need a break, just to breathe a little bit. I'm interested to see what's going to happen in the weeks and months and years that follow. I'll definitely keep up with everything. I did an interview for the documentary they're doing on Southern Poly [*The Five Eras of Southern Polytechnic State University*, directed by John Cotton, produced by Jim Cooper, released March 13, 2015], and I was interviewed for something else that another group of students were working on, so I'm definitely going to keep my ears to the wall in terms of that. I still have people that I know that are still working here, so I definitely want to keep in touch with them, but as far as coming back, I don't know about that.

KH: I'm going to go in a slightly different direction now.

RB: Okay.

KH: What was your personal experience with the diversity on campus?

RB: The beautiful thing about Southern Poly is the ratio of men and women. As you know, there're not a lot of women here, but I thought that was an advantage for me, because I can stay focused. When there's more women, us guys tend to want to party all the time, and, "Oh, she's in class," but when you're in a class with nothing but guys, you've got your buddies, but other than that, you're focused on work. So, for me, that was a plus. If I wanted to hang out and socialize or meet people, I would go to Atlanta, because I worked in Atlanta for a year and a half. So if I wanted to meet people, I would go to Atlanta. Here, it was more so just getting work done. Again, I've met a lot of women on campus. If you go to Architecture, there are a lot of women there, but that's just the talk that you get. If you ask anybody about social life, this is what they're going to bring up. "There's not a lot of women on campus at Southern Poly, but if you go to Kennesaw, there's more women than guys." So people started making memes once the consolidation happened. It was like, "Well now, we both can come together and balance it out," and stuff like that. You get a lot of that, but just social wise, I thought it was really cool. The university as a whole—because we have a lot of activities that are going on, and you have a lot of gamers here, in Southern Poly, there was no pressure to be cool. You could be weird, you could be yourself, you could be that guy that walks around barefoot, or you could be the guy that never combs his hair. I'm not saying that's the thing to do, but you could just be yourself, and nobody was judging you. Nobody. We're... I don't want to say weird, but just different. We're just a different breed of a lot of smart, intelligent students who don't care about trying to fit in. We just do what we do. You go to the student center and you find guys playing Magic. You go to Corner Village Suites, and you'll see guys playing video games in their pajamas. There was never really an urge or pressure to fit in. That's what I love about Southern Poly. You could just be yourself. You could be different, and different was okay here.

KH: Do you think there are any pressures?

RB: Academic wise yes. Here, academics are everything. That's the measuring stick: your academics here. Engineering is tough. Mechatronics, electrical, I don't care what major you pick, it's rough. Architecture is rough. Survival of the fittest. That's how it is,

that's the pressure here. It's getting through programs here at Southern Poly. We have that stigma that it's harder to get through here than it is at Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] and being ranked in the top thirty-five or top fifteen hardest schools to graduate from. From that aspect, that's the pressure: not to fit in, but to, you know, get through coursework. I knew friends that were in math and sciences, and it's not easy. Is it fun? Yes. It's hands-on, but those professors want to make sure that you know what you're doing. You can't be an engineer if you don't know math. How can you expect to solve equations and create these robots if you don't know your work? So, at the entry level coursework, which is math and science, physics and calculus, and then moving on, you have to know that stuff. That's good, because when you leave here, you know your stuff. Anybody can hire you and say "Do this," and you know exactly what you're doing. That was really cool. I know a lot of brilliant minds here. I know kids that are starting their own patents and just crazy stuff. It's happening before they even graduate. That's really cool.

KH: If you had known that you would want to go into Communications, would you have followed that path initially instead of going into Architecture? Would you still have chosen SPSU?

RB: No.

KH: Where would you have gone?

RB: I don't know. I know after my first year of Architecture, when I did decide to transfer to Communications, I had a thought of moving to Kennesaw, because they had a Creative Writing bachelor's degree. But by that time, Southern Poly was my third school, and I didn't want to transfer again. I'm really glad that I didn't. If I had not come here for Architecture, I don't know where I would've gone. I mean, maybe West Georgia (my mentor was from West Georgia). I don't know. I have no idea, but I know I had a thought about transferring to Kennesaw because they have Creative Writing there.

KH: Was Georgia Military College your first college, or your second?

RB: Oh, no. That was my second college. That was after I decided to go back to school. Before I dropped out, I was at Wallace State Community College. It's a junior college in Alabama. I went there for a year. I ran track. I was an art major, so I did a lot of writing. I was big on painting and drawing and pastels and all that stuff.

KH: Did you live in Alabama at the time?

RB: Yes, I lived in Alabama from 2004 to 2005. It was Cullman County; Hanceville was the city. It was like forty-five minutes from Birmingham. It was pretty cool. There was nothing to do in the middle of nowhere in that county. Either you did work, or you got in trouble. I chose to do work.

KH: Do you prefer Alabama or Georgia at this point?

RB: Georgia. I mean, Alabama's fine, a lot of passionate people in Alabama. They love their Tigers, or they love The Tide. I enjoyed my experience there. I met one of my best

friends, who I still keep in contact with; he's like a brother to me. I met him there. Just really good experiences, and life lessons I've learned there from track and my coach and athletes there. But Georgia all day. I really love Georgia, and I'm running from Georgia to go to New York, but there's no way I'll pick Alabama over Georgia. No way.

KH: So you think you'll come back to Georgia after grad school?

RB: Initially, no. I don't want to, and that has nothing to do with the fact that living here sucks. I love here, but I've been here for twenty-eight years and, at this point in my life, I just want to have as many new experiences as possible. If I don't stay in New York, maybe I'll move out west or move to Europe or something, or I don't know. I want something different. I've been here forever. If I want to have children, start a family and I'm trying to pick a city, Atlanta's the city. It's slow, but at the same time, you can get work done. You don't want to do that in New York.

KH: What advice would you give to either incoming freshmen or college students in general?

RB: Whatever you learn in class, find a way to use it outside of class. Everything, anything and everything, even if you take a class and you don't like it, find something that you're learning in that class and apply it to what you want to do when you leave. I don't care if you have straight A's, a 4.0 GPA, and you have all these awards. If you don't know what to do with what you learn, you will not make it. People don't care about you outside of campus. People aren't going to care about the GPA, or the transcript. They want to see what you can do. That's what people want to see. They want to know what you can do, how can you contribute to this company, how can you help. If you have nothing to contribute, that you know nothing, and you can't apply anything, you are useless. That's what I would tell everybody. Nobody cares about how cool you look, or your friends. Nobody cares about any of that. The real world is real. It's rough, and only the best survive. There's a lot of beauty to life, but you cannot enjoy if you don't learn anything. So, don't waste time in college. Find what it is you want to do and do it. There's nothing wrong with not knowing what you want to do. That's what college is for: to figure it out, but figure it out. Put effort into trying to figure out what it is you want to do, and not just going through the motions, and just hanging out, and partying all the time, or just wasting time pretty much. Don't waste it. It's somebody's money you're using, so put it to good use.

KH: Thank you for allowing me to interview you and for coming in.

RB: Thanks for having me.

INDEX

- Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, 11-12
Bonza, Ed, 13
Brown, Randy, Jr.
 Background, 1, 15
 Reasons for enrolling at SPSU, 1
 Decision to major in English and Professional Communication, 1-2
 Graduate school plans, 2, 9, 13
 Decision to become involved in on-campus activities, 2
 Involvement in “High without Walls,” 2-3
 Book, blogs, and other writings, 3, 6
 Internship on The Bert Show, 3-4
 Editor of *The Sting*, 5, 10-11
 Commencement speech, 6-8
 Technical writing, 8-9
 Resident Assistant (RA), 9
 Involvement in the consolidation of SPSU and KSU, 10-13
 Interviewed for documentary on the history of SPSU, 14
 Plans after graduate school, 16
 Advice to college students, 16
- Forbes, Julia, 3
- Georgia Military College, Fairburn campus, 3, 15
Georgia Tech, 1, 14
- Haimes-Korn, Kim, 7-8
Hanceville, Cullman County, Alabama, 15
Harris, Christopher, 11
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2-3
Hilson, Desmond, 10-12
- Kennesaw State University, 4-5, 13-15
Klingshirn, Kristin, 3
Kyriakakis, Alana, 8
- Nix, Vicki, 5
Nunes, Mark, 2
- Owen, Tommy, 3
- Papp, Daniel S., 10-11, 13
- Rossbacher, Lisa A., 8, 10-11

Smith, Larry, "Why You Will Fail to Have a Great Career," 8
Southern Polytechnic State University

Focus on applied, hands-on learning, 1-2, 14

"High without Walls" project, 2

Consolidation with KSU, 4-5, 10-13

The Sting, 5, 10-11

Office of Faculty Support and Development, 9

Diversity, 13

Campus culture, 13-14

Wallace State Community College, 15

Weiss, Bert, 3

Werner, James P., 3

Wilkerson, Isabel, 7