

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH RON R. KOGER

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Southern Polytechnic State University Series, No. 16
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Friday, March 11, 2016
Location: Administration Building, Marietta campus, Kennesaw State University

TS: Dr. Koger, I wanted to start with some questions about your background. It looks like you must have grown up in Kansas and started your schooling there and then Pittsburg State University [Pittsburg, Kansas]. I know you got a degree in math education, but could you talk about your background? And then of course you went on to the University of Kansas from there.

RK: I did grow up in southeast Kansas in Cherokee County, which is right in the most southeastern corner of the state. Pittsburg State University is about twenty-five miles away. I graduated from Pittsburg State, but it wasn't Pittsburg State then.

TS: What was it called?

RK: When I started, it was KSTC, Kansas State Teacher's College. Before I graduated it became Kansas State College of Pittsburg, but then I went back to work there several years later, and it was called Pittsburg State University. So it's Pittsburg State now but it's the same school.

TS: Was it originally affiliated with Kansas State University?

RK: No, it was a teacher's college. The universities were University of Kansas, Kansas State University, and Wichita State. Then there were three teacher's colleges: Emporia, Fort Hays, and Pittsburg.

TS: How big a college was it?

RK: I don't know how big it was when I was a student, but when I went back to work there it was about 3,500.

TS: What year did you get your BS degree?

RK: I graduated in '61.

TS: So you were three years ahead of me. I got my college degree in '64.

RK: I started in '57 and finished in January of '61, so I went straight through.

TS: Did you teach school for a while?

RK: I taught school in the Shawnee Mission School District, which is in the Kansas City area. I started in the middle of the year and taught seventh and eighth grade math for three and

a half years. During that time I finished my master's at the University of Kansas in Psych. So then I became a school counselor.

TS: That takes us through '65. Then you went back and finished your doctorate after that?

RK: After I finished my master's, I worked as a school counselor. Then I decided to work on a doctorate. So I resigned my counseling position and started in the summer at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. But they changed the program during the summer. In the fall it was more like a clinical psychology program than it was a counseling program. So I decided I didn't want to fool around with it anymore. I contacted Shawnee Mission district to see if they needed a school counselor, and they didn't, but they said if I would teach for them for a semester, they'd give me a counseling position in the fall. Well, my wife said, "You ought to look at something else other than teaching." So I did. I ended up getting a job at Baptist Memorial Hospital as a job analyst. The reason that was even a job is because hospitals came under wage and hour laws in the 1960s. So I worked for Baptist Hospital for a few years, writing job descriptions, doing job analysis, and setting up salary scales, salary ranges and all that. Then they decided to reorganize the hospital and go to a different model where we had nurse coordinators and a director of patient care services that all these head nurses reported to. They moved me into that position as a director of patient care services. So I had all the nursing departments reporting to me. My staff consisted of RNs that were coordinators in a particular area like medical services, orthopedic services, surgical, and Ob-Gyn.

TS: So how many years did you do that?

RK: I did that until about '67, I think.

TS: So that wasn't too long.

RK: Yes. I was working at the hospital, and one day they said, "We're going down to Pittsburg State to a health career fair and try to hire some nurses. Do you want to come along?" They knew I was a graduate. So I took my wife with me, and we met my parents for dinner that night because they lived in southeast Kansas. I said, "I need to get back into education. This hospital stuff is not for me." I think I was pretty successful, but I saw a job advertised probably a week after that discussion for an admissions counselor. I had not a clue what that was, but I applied. Next thing I know, I got a call, and they wanted to interview me. It happened that I had taken a week off for vacation. We were going south of Kansas City to Silver Dollar City [theme park, Branson, Missouri] for about a week vacation. They wanted to interview me. I said, "Well, we're on our way down there anyhow." So I interviewed with them while my wife and son spent the day roaming around Pittsburg, Kansas. When they picked me up, I said, "It's been awhile since I've interviewed for a job, but I think I'm going to be offered a job. You need to be thinking about this because this means moving." Sure enough, I got a call on Saturday morning, and they offered me the job as admissions counselor. I think they called me associate director of admissions or something like that.

TS: I jotted down 1977 for associate director of admissions. Does that sound right?

RK: Yes.

TS: So we're talking ten years from when you were working at Baptist Hospital. Is that correct?

RK: Between 1969 and 1977 I was at the hospital or the University of Kansas working on my doctorate. While going to school, I was teaching for William Jewell College, which is a private school in Liberty, Missouri [suburban Kansas City]. I was teaching Psych to nursing students. In Missouri nurses needed a course in educational psychology to be certified. So I was teaching for William Jewell College, but the classes were at Baptist Memorial Hospital. One day I got a call from a guy I worked for before at the hospital. He wanted to know when I was going to be back in the building. I said, "I'm going to teach my class tomorrow." He said, "Well, come by my office. I want to talk to you about something." Sounded real innocent. I just finished my class and went down to his office. He said, "How would you like your old job back?" I'd been gone two or three years, I guess. I took my old job back at the hospital. Then I went to Pittsburg State in '77.

TS: So you were associate director of admissions. What all did that entail at that time?

RK: Well, the first thing we did was the director was going to show me how to be an admissions recruiter. I actually covered the whole State of Kansas that fall doing college fairs. For a couple of weeks he worked with me. Then after that he said, "It's yours." The state was divided into six areas, and schools would get together and move from area to area and hold college fairs in the high schools. I did that until I decided I was through doing that. Then I became director of admissions at Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

TS: I saw that you were there from 1981 to '83. What year did you earn your doctorate?

RK: In '75.

TS: What was the doctorate in?

RK: Educational Administration. I was going to be a school superintendent. But that never happened. That was what I was preparing for, and I interviewed for some principal jobs because I'd never been a principal. If you haven't been a principal, you aren't going to be a superintendent, unless you're in Cobb County. Anyhow, I got a doctorate and moved to Pittsburg State and then moved on to Illinois Institute of Technology.

TS: So you wanted to go to the big city?

RK: Well, there was a job there, and it was an engineering school. Pittsburg State is a large engineering technology school. So I thought I knew a lot about engineering, but IIT in Chicago is a big research school. It competes with Georgia Tech in research.

TS: Okay, so you're going to an R-I.

RK: Yes.

TS: And director of admissions, no associate in the title.

RK: No, I was director.

TS: Definitely a step up. So you stayed there two years and then you go on to Indiana State?

RK: Indiana State. If you want to go back to the story at IIT, it was very comfortable there, except they had a president who was a nice guy, but basically any of his vice presidents could change the direction of the school any day of the week if they wanted to. So constantly our goals for recruiting changed. One week we're going to try to take the east coast and bring those kids to Chicago. Then the next week they say to me, "We need to do more recruiting in the Midwest." I said, "What?" The Midwest to me was Kansas and Nebraska and places like that.

TS: Definitely not Ohio or Indiana.

RK: That's not the Midwest. I said, "Kansas alone has three engineering schools. We don't need to be in Kansas." They said, "We're talking about the Midwest." "Oh, how do you define the Midwest?" That was Ohio and places like that. So after a while the president was terminated. At that point I told my boss, "I'm getting out of here. These are really nice guys, but you've got a different boss every week. I don't want to do this." So I went to Indiana State. Two months later IIT called my old boss in and said, "We're going to make a change. We're going to bring somebody new in." So they gave him six months' severance. He got on the bus and went home. I got out two months before he did.

TS: So you stayed at Indiana State for five years as director of admissions and university/high school relations.

RK: Yes, that was all in recruiting in those days. We had a lot of success at Indiana State. I enjoyed my five years. My son graduated from high school in Terre Haute. Then I went to a meeting in Louisville. I met a woman there and had dinner with her. I was going to stay at Indiana State, but about the first of December I got a call from her telling me that she worked at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and they were looking for a director of admissions. They looked at several, and they couldn't find anyone they wanted. She said, "Why don't you apply?" So I sent along my credentials. The week before Christmas they asked me to come for an interview. They delivered airline tickets right to my door. I flew down right after the first of the year to Huntsville, Alabama,

interviewed, and they offered me the job. I was there ten years, and then I came to Southern Poly.

TS: Obviously, you hadn't worked in the south before this time. What was it about the University of Alabama in Huntsville that attracted you?

RK: Well, I'm not sure that I even know why. I had to fly from Chicago to Memphis over to Huntsville. When I got to Huntsville, there was snow on the ground—and I thought this was the South! Anyhow, they had a freak snowstorm.

TS: Northern Alabama.

RK: Yes, it was northern Alabama. The weather probably more than anything was the reason why we left Indiana. I mean, Chicago is bad enough, but Indiana was also bad with snow.

TS: You knew that snow in Alabama wasn't going to last that long.

RK: Right, it wasn't going to be there more than a day.

TS: Well, Huntsville too has the Marshall Space Flight Center.

RK: Space center and it was a great job. We had a great president there. He was really into growing the enrollment. I reported to the provost there and went to all the academic deans' meetings. I taught there for them also in the education department. I probably could have retired at Huntsville, but a search firm called me. They had this job in some place in Atlanta called Southern College of Technology or Southern Tech. Then during the time they were talking to me the place changes its name to Southern Polytechnic State University. I looked for Southern Polytechnic State University in the view books and I couldn't find anything. I didn't know where it was. So my first thought was, "Is this a state school or is this a proprietary school?" I told them I wasn't really interested. Jon McRae was the search firm. He later went with Emily Parker Myers, and so it became Myers McRae for a while. She's down in Macon. Anyhow, they asked me to send in my resume, and I said, "No, not really interested." Then one day I got a call from Jon McRae. He was in Birmingham, and he wanted to know if I could meet him for lunch. He'd drive up to Huntsville if we could have lunch together. So I said, "Yes." Lunch with anybody is good. I met him for lunch, and after about two and a half hours I agreed to send him my resume. The next thing I knew I was over here interviewing.

TS: Wow. Was Dr. Stephen R. Cheshier [president, 1980-1997] still here?

RK: When I came for my first interview, I had lunch with all the deans or department heads and Cheshier and Dan [Daniel S.] Papp were there. So at that point they knew Papp was coming as an interim. I started on June 1, 1997.

TS: And Dan came in on July 1.

RK: July 1 as the interim president. So Dan and I worked together until August 1, 1998 when Lisa A. Rossbacher came as president. So Dan was [officially] here thirteen months.

TS: So you had a good chance to get to know him.

RK: Yes, I knew Dan, and we worked together here.

TS: But it must have been a shock to come to Southern Poly and find yourself in the midst of a major controversy on campus.

RK: Well, yes, I didn't know about the controversy when I was interviewing, but I knew that the president was retiring and a new president was coming in.

TS: Who actually hired you? Which president?

RK: Well, Cheshier was retiring.

TS: So both of them made the decision?

RK: I don't know who made the decision. I really don't know. I know they were both at lunch that day, and they both left early, so I have no idea who made the decision. But a few days later they offered me the job.

TS: So you may have been Dan's first hire.

RK: Yes, I may have been. I have no idea. But I came June 1 and Dan July 1, 1997, so I worked one month with Cheshier. I didn't really get to know him. Then when Dan got here, he had his own ideas about how we were going to grow this place, and we did.

TS: The position of vice president for enrollment management—of course, you were an assistant vice president at Huntsville. So again this is a move up.

RK: Yes, it was my first VP job.

TS: What exactly did the position entail? Were you over the registrar?

RK: I was over the registrar, the admissions office, and that was it. There was a vice president for student affairs, a man named Charles "Charlie" Smith. He had been here about twenty-five years. I came in 1997. Papp was here for a year. Papp left. Lisa Rossbacher came in August 1, 1998, and about two years later Charlie Smith came into my office, which was right across the hall here in the Administration Building. He said something and referred to me as "boss." I said, "What's the "boss" stuff?" Lisa Rossbacher and I would disagree on this totally, but I don't remember her ever telling me that Charlie was going to start reporting to me and I was going to take on Student Affairs. Now, she says she did. And I must have slept through it. Anyhow, Charlie told me, "I'm going to start

reporting to you.” I said, “Okay, so what are you doing?” And he said, “Well, I’m going to stay around here as dean of students, and then I’m going to retire.” I said, “Oh, okay.”

TS: So this was what he wanted at that time?

RK: I think so. He was retiring. He had been here twenty-five years. Lisa let him stay on for his last year as dean of students.

TS: So then you become VP for student and enrollment services?

RK: Student and enrollment services. So I had all the student affairs responsibilities and enrollment, and that continued up until consolidation.

TS: I don’t know whether you want to talk about it, but you obviously were aware of the controversy that led to the firing of the department chairs and . . .

RK: That happened on the Friday before I started on Monday.

TS: They fired four . . .

RK: Five, I think. Steve Cheshier was here, and Dr. Harris T. Travis was the vice president for academic affairs. These guys [the department chairs] were fed up with Harris. Anyhow, he just fired them all. Some of them ended up being department chairs later, and some of them moved on to other positions. Sandy [William Sanborn] Pfeiffer got his job back [as chair of the Department of Humanities and Technical Communication] and then left here [in 2003] for Ramapo College of New Jersey. He was president of Warren Wilson College in North Carolina [from 2006 to 2012], and now he’s retired from there and lives in North Carolina.

Back then several administrators typically came into the office around 9:00 or 10:00 o’clock. Dan Papp was an early bird. I get here now at 6:00 in the morning, but in those days I think I was getting here about 7:00. Dan was getting here right after I was, and he was in that adjacent office. One morning Charlie Smith showed up about 7:30, and I said, “What are you doing here?” He said, “I just wanted to see if it was true. I heard you guys are coming in here at daybreak.” He added, “Is Papp here?” I could smell the coffee, and I said, “I think he’s over there.” Charlie couldn’t believe that we were coming to work that early. Nancy Ford was Cheshier’s secretary. I told her my first day, “We’ve got a place over in Sandy Springs that we’re renting, and I’ll probably be here around 7:00 each day.” Nancy said, “None of the rest of us will be here that early.” So I went and found Cynthia Clayton, the administrative assistant to the vice president for business, and told her I was the new guy.

TS: The switch from quarters to the semester system occurred not long after you arrived at SPSU. I’ve heard that was bad for engineering schools.

- RK: Oh, yes. Also there were a lot of part-time students because in a quarter system they could go for a quarter, take a quarter off, take classes for another quarter, and so on.
- TS: I was thinking particularly of the co-op program. It made a lot of sense when you could go one quarter and then co-op the next.
- RK: Yes, it really messed up co-op, but with the semester system we lost enrollment. Interesting enough, when I got to Huntsville, we were on the quarter system. Then they hired a new president [1988-1990] named Louis Padulo [who had been dean of the College of Engineering] at Boston University. He thought we should go to the semester system. So he sent me up to the University of Tennessee to find out what happened when they went from quarters to semesters. They dropped from 26,000 to 23,000 or so. Every school I checked, nationwide, lost enrollment. But Padulo was like, "We're going to do it." Well, luckily enough, he got in trouble in a hurry, and the Alabama system fired him and moved him out of here. But then coming here we were in the quarter system weren't we?
- TS: Yes, the University System of Georgia went from quarters to semesters in the fall of 1998.
- RK: Yes, it was a funny system wasn't it? Anyhow, we went to the semester system and we lost enrollment.
- TS: We went down 2 percent on the Kennesaw campus [from 13,094 in Fall 1997 to 12,861 in Fall 1998] because everybody really sped up their work to graduate while we were still on quarters.
- RK: So we went to the semester system here, and then we started slowly to build up the enrollment again under the semester system [finally surpassing the 1997 enrollment in Fall 2006 with 4,207 students].
- TS: And that becomes your responsibility, I guess, trying to drive up the enrollment.
- RK: Joe F. Head [KSU's assistant vice president for enrollment] told me here in Cobb County 90 percent of the students were his and the other 10 percent belonged to me.
- TS: He said that?
- RK: Yes.
- TS: What did you say to that?
- RK: I said, "We can work this out." We're an engineering school. It's a selective group of kids that are going to major in engineering fields, and at that point we had none of the large majors. It was strictly engineering technology. So he was probably right; 90 percent of the graduates in Cobb County were his, and the other 10 percent were mine.

TS: Was he being very competitive?

RK: No, Joe and I got along very well.

TS: He was just telling you the facts?

RK: Yes, he was just telling me. I pretty well understood since I've always worked in engineering schools. You can't just go out and recruit the whole high school because 90 percent of them can't do the math.

TS: Why don't you talk about what Southern Poly was like when you got here? Between 3,000 and 4,000 students, and you've talked about a campus culture that was laid back, but what about the students and campus atmosphere in general at that point?

RK: Well, the atmosphere was okay for me because I had worked in engineering schools, and engineering schools are mostly male. We were like 90 percent male, I think, when I got here. The kids are usually pretty well behaved. They're in a major, and if they aren't in their major then they leave and go somewhere else. For me that was not strange because I had experienced it. I had always worked in engineering schools. That was pretty much the culture. The culture was all engineering technology. Even the faculty were more down to earth, and it was kind of a laid back place. I mean, there are people that would get upset. They were pretty upset with Cheshier. But he was gone within thirty days of my coming here, and then Dan was here, and they loved Dan.

The secretary was Nancy Ford. Dan was driving her crazy because she never knew where he was. He'd be in his office, and she thought he was there, but he'd go out the back door. Dan's the kind of person if you call and say, "Can I talk to you," he'd say, "Yes, I'll be over in a few minutes." He'd just run out the back door and go over to the building. Well, Cheshier never was out on the campus. People didn't know him. But Dan was all over the campus, and people knew him immediately. They were really upset when he left, although Lisa quickly got their love. Dan started to change the culture to the day starts when the sun comes up and it ends when it goes down. That was good. Then Lisa came on with the same work ethic. She wasn't an early person, but she was here by 8:00, and she might be here at midnight. She forgot to go home most nights.

TS: So do you still get to work at 7:00 in the morning?

RK: No, I'm here at 6:00 every morning. I put the coffee on and get the place awake.

TS: So you get a couple of hours before other people show up?

RK: Well, part of this is not necessarily me. My wife is a medical transcriptionist at Northside Hospital, and she clocks in at 6:00 a.m. She leaves the house at about 5:15, and I'm about ten minutes behind her. My responsibility is to be sure the garage door is closed and the thermostats are all set correctly. Of course, other people don't understand why we go to bed at 8:30. If you get up at 4:00 in the morning, you go to bed at 8:30.

- TS: Absolutely, if not earlier. So the culture changes in a hurry, I guess. I'm astounded at how Lisa Rossbacher was hired for this job without very many people on campus having seen her. Did you get a chance to meet with her before she was hired?
- RK: No. I knew they were interviewing, but they never interviewed on campus when anyone was here. I guess that was the way Board of Regents was doing it. It was pretty much secretive. I didn't know at the time, but afterwards Lisa knew who some of the men were that were interviewed. They brought in some strong candidates, I think.
- TS: Bringing in meant they met them at the airport, I guess.
- RK: Yes. They didn't interview them on campus.
- TS: This was a big change from when Betty Siegel was hired in '81. The faculty met with ten different semi-finalists, I think. But when Dan Papp was hired in 2006 they did the interviews down at the airport. I guess they came out to campus when they got it down to the final three, but without much input from faculty by that time. So Dr. Rossbacher comes in, and within two years you take on student affairs as well as everything else. I've done an interview with James W. "Jim" Cooper where he talks about coming over from the University of Alabama in Huntsville about four months after you go here.
- RK: He would have come sooner, but his wife was expecting, and he decided to stay until his daughter was born.
- TS: Do you want to talk about those years as vice-president for student and enrollment services? The enrollment really starts growing about a decade ago, if I'm not mistaken [with an enrollment increase from 3,807 in Fall 2005 to 5,514 in Fall 2010].
- RK: We started seeing small growth [after 1998], but no one here knew the community. They didn't know the school counselors or anything. And also they didn't understand the difference between Georgia Tech and Southern Tech.
- TS: "They" meaning the people in the community didn't know the difference between Georgia Tech and Southern Tech?
- RK: Yes, the people in the community. It was like maybe we caned chairs or were a vo-tech type school or something. They really didn't know. I knew engineering since I had worked in all these engineering schools, and I also knew engineering technology because Pittsburg State was engineering technology. So I just made appointments with all the high schools in Cobb County, and I took a textbook with me. I pointed out to them that this is the book we use, and it's the same book they use at Georgia Tech. I went through the whole thing. Georgia Tech is more theoretical. They've got to read the book at Georgia Tech for the theory behind it. I said, "At Southern Poly students will read the same book for the theory behind it, but then they're going to go do it, and that's the big difference. When they graduate they're going to compete for the same jobs. Depending

on the company, they're maybe going to hire the engineer. But it depends on what the company is actually doing and how theoretical they want their engineers to be. If they're not looking for a lot of theoretical stuff, then they're probably going to hire the Southern Poly grad."

You had to explain that to parents too. They didn't understand what the school was. So I went to every high school and met with the counselors, either the head counselor or the whole crew. I would explain to them the difference between engineering and engineering technology. I was honest. I told them some of your students are going to be 4.0 [grade point average] kids, and they're probably going to Georgia Tech. But our kids get jobs too and pretty well paying jobs, so you need to think about that. I'm going to give credit to a woman named Harriet Mitchell who was the director of school counseling in the Cobb County school system. Her significant other is a guy who was in the architecture school here. They are both retired now.

Anyhow, Barbara Anderson worked here when I came. When Dan came, we were a few months from a SACS [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools] visit, and nothing had been prepared. Luckily, I had just finished a SACS visit at Huntsville, so I had probably as much knowledge about it as anyone here, although I was a new kid on the block. Dan came in, and he hired Barbara Anderson [as director of strategic planning, assessment, and institutional research]. She worked with a computer science professor, Rebecca "Becky" Rutherford. Dan put them in offices here in the presidential suite, and they started putting the accreditation thing together. When the visiting SACS team came, I don't know that we had any findings. But it was a challenge getting there. There were no academic files, no faculty files.

TS: So they had to put all that together?

RK: They had to put it all together.

TS: Wow.

RK: And they found several faculty, in fact one person in construction management, who didn't even have a bachelor's degree. He knew how to operate a widget over there, so they hired him to teach whatever that was.

TS: Widget?

RK: Cost estimating or something. He was a craftsman, and he probably knew more about it than anyone in town, but he didn't have any of the academic credentials. But he taught you how to operate that thing.

TS: Okay, so Dan had a lot of stuff going on.

RK: Dan had a lot of stuff on his tray right in a hurry. Harris Travis was nice. He was always nice to me. So was Steve Cheshier. They still are. But one of the first things that

happened when I got here was Nancy Ford brought these files into me. She said, “Dr. Cheshier would like for you to look at these. These are kids who have been dismissed, and they have petitioned to come back.” I said, “He wants me to look at them?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “That usually belongs to Academic Affairs. I’m getting into somebody else’s area.” She said, “Well, no, Dr. Travis has already looked at them and made a decision.” I said, “Why am I looking at them?” She said, “I don’t know. He wants you to look at them.” I thought this is [strange]. I had never worked anywhere where I had anything to do with academic decisions. I was out recruiting students. That was my job.

TS: Were you supposed to second-guess Dr. Travis?

RK: Well, I thought, “He want’s my opinion.” There were several kids. I took them in to Dr. Cheshier, maybe the only time I was ever in his office.

TS: Really? Well, of course, he only had a month left.

RK: Yes. I went in and I said, “Of these four files, I agree with Dr. Travis that these three definitely should not be readmitted. They’ve had multiple opportunities, and this person is a math major, and she’s never passed a math course. Something should have been done long before this. Now, this one I think could make it, but not in her current major. If we keep her, I think she needs to change her major and get somebody to work with her. But the other three I think are beyond hope.” So I turned to walk away and he said, “Well, wait a minute. Who’s going to tell them?” I’m not making this stuff up. I’m thinking, “I guess me if it’s my decision.” He said, “Yes, could you?” So I said, “Fine.” I told the three that their appeal had been denied, and they were out of here. The other one I asked her to come talk to me. The young lady came in, and I said, “We’re going to readmit you, but you need to change your major. I want you to go talk to Dr. [Robert J.] Yancy [dean of the school of management] because I think you could be a business major, but you can’t be a math major. You haven’t passed a math course since you’ve been here.” She was a little upset, but to get back in she went and talked to Bob. He made out a schedule for her, and we let her back in. A few years later she graduated. That was strange. That only lasted a month, and then Papp came and things changed.

TS: I bet. So you didn’t have to approve any more . . .

RK: I thought what have I done? Things were nice in Huntsville.

TS: So things had been going that way for the last seventeen years, I guess.

RK: Yes. Lisa came, and she was all about recruiting and growing the university, and so we really got into it. We started doing a lot of things. When Jim came, of course, he had been doing that for me in Huntsville. I told him it was a mess. Southern Polytechnic had no high school files. So I didn’t know anything about any of the high schools. I told him, “I went out and had meetings with the high schools, and I’m making a profile of what they’re like and what kinds of students they have.” Southern Poly had no data, and I said, “All you’ve got to do is make it your job because no one else is doing it.”

I didn't just go out recruiting. I started asking the person who was supposed to be gathering the data questions like, "Where are the high school files? Where are the data on what high schools are our major feeders?" All that kind of stuff. He had no idea. After about a week of me asking questions, he came in and said he was going to resign. He was going to go back to work and get another degree at Georgia State or somewhere. I said, "Fine." That's when I called Cooper. He said, "No, I'm not moving to Atlanta; there's no way. Michelle is expecting; we're not moving over there." So I said, "Just come and interview and see what the place is like; you'll love it." The search committee decided they would interview him and a woman who was director of undergraduate admission at Georgia Tech. They were both very qualified. Ingrid W. Hayes and Jim Cooper back and forth. Finally the committee recommended that I hire Jim, and I did.

I don't think I influenced the committee. I think the committee realized that he and I knew each other, that we'd done this before, and that if we'd grown enrollment at UAH we can do it here. I felt bad because Ingrid was also very qualified, so I took her out to lunch down at OK Café, I think, and told her that the cards weren't necessarily stacked against her, but the committee recommended and I accepted Jim Cooper. I said, "I don't want you to feel discouraged because there are other jobs, and any time I can be of assistance to you and recommend you, I'll be glad to." Anyhow she left Georgia Tech [to become associate vice president for enrollment management at Spelman College]. She had a master's [of science in social foundations of education] from Georgia State. Then she ended up in Huntsville holding my old job [as assistant provost for enrollment services]!

TS: How about that?

RK: And now she's back at Spelman College as vice president for enrollment management. And she and Cooper served together with NACAC, National Association for College Admission Counseling. It wasn't unusual to see the three of us having dinner together or something like that.

TS: So you remained friends.

RK: We remained friends. Although I didn't hire her, I recommended her for several jobs.

TS: So you got your records in order and got to know the schools. Cobb County, I guess, was the primary feeder for Southern Poly. Did you recruit statewide at that time?

RK: Initially, we just recruited Cobb County because they had no idea who we were. The first college fair I did was something right down here at the Cobb Civic Center on South Marietta Parkway. I did that fair myself. It was a community thing, and a woman came up and said, "So where is this school?" I said, "About four blocks east of here." That was the biggest thing—where is this school? She had no idea. She said, "Four blocks east of here?" I said, "Yes." She said, "That's Southern Tech. I think if you're Southern

Polytechnic, you must be on that other road.” I thought if your own neighborhood doesn’t know who you are. . .

So it took a while to convince the community that we were a real university and had real degrees and we were fully accredited and all that. It took a lot of time out pounding the pavement, but I went to every high school and got to know every counselor. Then Harriet Mitchell [from the Cobb County School District] wanted to know if she could come here and have meetings because we are a central location. They had been trying to meet up at Kennesaw State, but it was just too crowded up there. Of course, Kennesaw was only about 12,000 or 13,000 [in 1998 and 1999], but the parking wasn’t easy. So I said, “You can meet on this campus any time you want to, and I’ll provide you coffee. Just tell me when you’re going to be here.” They met for years in the ballroom of the Joe Mack Wilson Student Center over here until the consolidation. I don’t know where they’re meeting now. But they’d come here, and Lisa and I would go over and welcome them. They’ve been here once since consolidation because I spoke to them. We got to know all the counselors, and they knew how to find us.

Then we decided the state was next, and we did some out of state trips to Tennessee, South Carolina, and Florida and started pulling kids out of Florida. In Alabama every school has an engineering program, so that was a waste of time going over to Alabama. But when I was at IIT in Chicago, we got kids out of Florida, so I thought there was no reason they should be going from Florida to Illinois when there were two engineering schools in Atlanta. It’s a lot closer from Florida to Atlanta than it is to Chicago. Of course, Georgia Tech is so selective, they wouldn’t take all of them, but we weren’t that selective, so, yes, they could come here.

TS: So, how did it change over time with regard to where students came from? I know by the time of the consolidation there were lots of international students here. I guess enrollment came predominately from Metro Atlanta, but were there some people from other places?

RK: Yes, but mostly Metro Atlanta because we went into the high schools all over Atlanta and out east, south, everywhere. Originally, Georgia Tech was our major competitor, but that changed over time because Georgia Tech changed. They wanted to be more of a national university. They wanted to compete with Penn State and places like that.

TS: So they were less interested in Georgia students?

RK: Yes, so we became Georgia’s engineering school. At one point they were the number one competitor. Before consolidation, the last time I saw the data Georgia Tech was number eleven of the schools with whom we were competing. The school we competed with the most was Georgia Southern because they added some engineering programs. Kids were going from Cobb County to Georgia Southern because they had football and other things that Kennesaw didn’t have then. I would guess, if I looked at the data now, that’s probably changed because a lot of those kids that used to go to Georgia Southern are probably going to Kennesaw State now.

- TS: Well, Kennesaw State didn't have resident halls until 2002.
- RK: You didn't have resident halls; we didn't have any extracurricular activities like football and things like that. That's probably changed the whole thing.
- TS: Yes, the last time I checked the Kennesaw campus was getting students from all but maybe twenty counties in Georgia and almost every state in the United States.
- RK: The data that I've looked at tells me we still need to be more than the "University of the Northern Arch." We've got everything from I-285 north, and there are plenty of students who come from west, east, and south of I-285, even if we don't want to get into the middle. There are some school districts that we couldn't recruit because they couldn't get in, but there are a lot of good students all the way around Atlanta. Football is going to enhance our reputation, having a successful first year right away. Kids notice this.
- TS: Right. Another thing that Southern Poly was noted for over the years was the diversity of the student body with regard to black students on campus. Was that part of your job to try to bring in more minority students?
- RK: Well, it was never stated that way, but I realized you just can't have an all-white campus. I mean, there are good kids out there, and I don't care what color they are. So we started going into black-majority schools. No one here had ever gone over into DeKalb County or those counties. I did, and I didn't care. People asked, "You're going to go there at night?" I said, "Yes." I mean, I worked in Chicago! So, yes, we went everywhere. I've always had a diverse recruiting staff.
- TS: What would you attribute Southern Poly's success to in recruiting minority students?
- RK: There was a program going on when I got here that Mary Ellen McGee [director of affirmative action EEO and training] was conducting. She had workshops in the summer for African American students. So there was already a core here because they'd gone through the summer program. But when we started visiting the schools in DeKalb County and over in Gwinnett and Atlanta, kids came here and saw kids that looked like them.
- About 40 percent of our population was nonwhite at Southern Poly. About 26 percent was African-American. We had this large international group [7.4 percent in fall 2011] and large Hispanic group [6.2 percent in fall 2011, and 5.7 percent Asian]. The last number I saw we were growing with students coming here from South America. I don't see any of that data any more. After consolidation when programs like Psychology moved to the Kennesaw campus we are back to about 90 percent male on the Marietta campus now. We did get it up to about 21 percent female, but its back to about 10 percent.
- TS: Well, you've got Georgia Highlands on the Marietta campus.
- RK: Yes, they're not in our numbers but a lot of those are nursing students.

TS: When you got the engineering majors as opposed to engineering technology, how did that affect recruitment and enrollment?

RK: As soon as we were approved to offer engineering courses, we really thought we might get some static from Georgia Tech, but I don't think we ever did because they were changing their whole idea of what they wanted to be. They wanted to become more national, so I don't know that we had any static from them, but Lisa met with the president who was there before G. P. "Bud" Peterson.

TS: G. Wayne Clough [president 1994-2008]?

RK: Maybe, [or interim president Gary Schuster, 2008-2009]. Anyhow, they knew what we were trying to do, and finally they approved it for five different engineering programs, I think [mechatronics engineering in 2006, systems engineering in 2007, and electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering in 2009]. Then the numbers just went out the roof.

TS: Enrollment just took off?

RK: Yes. In fact, my projections were that we would be at 10,000 in no time. But one of the fastest growing majors we had was not engineering in the last few years; it was technical and professional communications. That program is now up at Kennesaw, but that was really bringing a lot of women, and but it was really growing. The only thing that was slowing engineering down was having enough lab space to get them all in.

TS: What about the New Media Arts? Is that still on the Marietta campus?

RK: No.

TS: It's gone to the Kennesaw campus? I heard I think yesterday that the Math Department is headquartered down here now?

RK: Yes. In fact they remodeled D building. The chair is Joseph DeMaio. He's down at the end of that hall in [D 123].

TS: So 2013 comes around, and the chancellor announces that a consolidation is going to take place. Let me ask you when you first heard about it and how you heard about it?

RK: We had a staff meeting Friday morning [November 1, 2013] at about 11:00 or so. I don't remember exactly when it started. Lisa said that it was going to be announced at noon that day. That was the first time I heard about it.

TS: Really?

RK: Yes.

TS: So your friend Jim Cooper didn't tell you?

RK: He didn't know it either until just about that time, although he figured it out because he knew she had been downtown, and he knew that when she came back she was pretty upset. We knew consolidation was happening. I mean, if you looked at it, you'd have to be a blind man not to see that they were going to put these two together, although the chancellor stood right over there in the ballroom [of the Joe Mack Wilson Student Center] and told us it wasn't going to happen.

TS: He said it wasn't going to happen?

RK: It wasn't going to happen then. And the first one wasn't SPSU. The first one was North Georgia I think, wasn't it?

TS: That's right. There were four consolidations that the chancellor announced in January 2012 and were finalized in January 2013. So in 2011 the chancellor is saying it won't happen, but he qualifies it.

RK: Yes.

TS: Well, Jim Cooper said he found out officially the day before [October 31, 2013] because he had to coordinate with the Kennesaw campus on how they were going to handle the press announcement.

RK: This [Dr. Koger's current office] was Cooper's old office. He gives me static because I messed it up.

TS: He said the opposite—that the office would be a lot cleaner than when he was in here.

RK: Yes, it is much cleaner than when he was in here. He wouldn't have been able to sit down here. But, anyhow, he did a lot of writing for Lisa, and so he was really her confidant.

TS: So you didn't find out from Mr. Cooper?

RK: I found out when she made the announcement.

TS: Just an hour or so before?

RK: An hour before. The first thing I did was I ran to all of my department heads. I literally ran, so they wouldn't hear it on the news. The first person I went to was Jill Brady who I'd just hired from the University of North Georgia as my registrar. She came in April, and this was November.

TS: And, of course, they had just gone through consolidation.

- RK: They had gone through that, and she didn't come out on the top up there. So she was pretty bitter. I wanted to tell her it's happening again. I think she is very good, but she's not working as a registrar in the new university. She's director of business process transformation and support systems in the office of the associate vice president for enrollment services. She reports to associate vice president Kim West but is back in the corner somewhere in Town Point. She was the first registrar I'd had here that actually knew what the Board of Regents' policies were and was sure that we followed them. Steve Hamrick had been my registrar for several years. At some point, and I still fault Lisa for this, he got dual reporting. He reported to me and he reported to the vice president for academic affairs. So the academic VP got involved in registrar responsibilities, which I don't think should happen at any school. But it wasn't my gig at that point.
- TS: But she was the first one who actually understood what the policies were?
- RK: She knew what the University System of Georgia wanted, and she knew what the catalog said. I think she told the faculty they couldn't do a few things, and I supported her.
- TS: You mean like adding a student to your class?
- RK: Oh, no, not like that. She didn't have any trouble with that if the faculty was okay taking another student. It was policy matters about what you do with this kind of grade or that kind of grade. I don't think any vice president of academic affairs ought to ever have any responsibility over what the registrar does.
- TS: The recording of the grades?
- RK: Yes, Zvi [Szafran] would approve anything. I'm not a registrar. I have trouble with registrars because we look at life differently. They look at life as the ones, twos and threes. I'm more open than that. But I realize they are supposed to follow policy all the time.
- TS: So they don't make it.
- RK: They don't make it; they follow it. But the vice president of academic affairs was making policy faster than we could keep track of it, and that's my problem. But Lisa didn't like or dislike it.
- TS: Okay. So you go tell Jill, and she probably was ready to go out and shoot herself at that point.
- RK: Yes, she was really upset. So then I told all of the others, and we started consolidating.
- TS: Okay. What was your reaction?

RK: My reaction was probably quite a bit different than some of the people I worked with. A lot of people had been here forever. I worked at other schools, and to me, "Okay, we're going to consolidate. We're just going to be a different school. We're still going to have the same programs probably." Then other people were saying, "Oh, they're going to move everything to Kennesaw!" "Well, come on, folks; let's look at reality. They're already crowded up there on the Kennesaw campus. They're growing like weeds. When I came here they were under 10,000, and now they're over 25,000. Their campus is not going to grow. We can't move up there. Something has to stay here. There's not enough money in the state to duplicate this ten miles north of here. It would be convenient if you didn't have to drive back and forth that ten miles. [The Marietta campus might be closed] somewhere down the road, but it's not going to happen right now. There's more land here than they have up there." To me it was just changing bosses and things like that and new procedures and those type things.

TS: So you figured you were going to have a place in the new university?

RK: No, I didn't know. Dan told me in March I wasn't.

TS: In March?

RK: Yes, sometime in March [2014].

TS: The announcement was in November 2013, so you're up in the air until March 2014?

RK: Well, I thought I would have a position, but then he met with me and the vice president for advancement and I don't know whom else.

TS: That was Ron Dempsey?

RK: Ron Dempsey. I don't know who all he told. Some of them had already decided they were leaving, but he told me back in March that he didn't have a place for me. So I got my name out to search firms just like that, and I interviewed two or three places. Then I decided, no, my wife has a good job here. We didn't really want to move. So I thought, I'm just going to start looking in Atlanta.

TS: I know you're older than I am, so you would have been old enough to retire.

RK: Oh, yes, I could have retired. I wasn't ready to retire.

TS: What about your wife? Has she been working all these years too?

RK: She's older than I am! By about ten months! I interviewed out in Missouri; I interviewed up in Pennsylvania. It just wasn't clicking. Then somebody told me about a job at Brenau University. So I sent a letter up there. The president called me, and we talked for two hours one day. He was pretty dynamic. He's done a lot of work for Brenau. They're opening up another campus in Jacksonville, Florida, and that whole

thing. This was on a Friday. He said “My secretary has already left for the day, so call her Monday morning and tell her to get you an appointment for next week. Let’s start talking about money. I don’t think I can afford you.” I said, “Well, you probably can afford me because you’re not a state school, so I’ll retire in the system.” He said, “Oh, I hadn’t thought about that.” I said, “But that doesn’t mean I’m not going to want money.” He laughed and we got along fine. So I hung up the phone, and it was probably two hours later then Dan Papp called me.

TS: He knew about this?

RK: No.

TS: He didn’t know anything?

RK: He didn’t know anything. He called me and he said, “How would you like to be interim president?” I said, “You’re joking?” He said, “No, we have to appoint an interim president because this doesn’t happen until the Board of Regents approves it in January 2015, blah, blah, blah. But you’ve got to go meet with the chancellor because he’s got to approve it.” I said, “Well, why not? When do I need to go?” He said, “We will make the appointment and will let you know.” So I started getting calls from downtown. I met with [Chancellor Henry M.] “Hank” Huckaby on Monday. I came in, and he said, “Have we met before?” I said, “Yes, we met at a summer meeting of vice presidents for enrollment and academics. We were there. In fact you and your wife had just moved to Atlanta, and we talked about what it was like living in the city.” He said, “Oh, I remember that!” So we sat there and we talked and he said, “You’ve done some hospital stuff.”

TS: He remembered that?

RK: Well, we sent my resume down. He told me he was on the board at Athens Regional Health System. We talked on, and I thought, “This is weird. I just don’t know what’s going on here. Just two old men talking, we might as well have been talking over coffee. So he says, “Well, you going to do it?” I thought, “What did he just ask?” He said, “You going to do it?” I said, “The interim president? Yes, if you’ll have me.” He said, “The job is yours. They’ll have some papers for you to sign out there. If not, we may have to fax them to you.” That was it!

TS: What month would this be? How long before you actually became interim president?

RK: This was in May toward about the third week or last week of May.

TS: July 1 is when you started?

RK: Well, I really started on June 1 because Lisa said, “Well, if you’re going to be the interim president, I can appoint you as acting president through June,” because she was still president. So I became acting president on June 1, and she left. She was here, in and out,

but she was packing and moving. In June I was acting president and then July 1 I was interim president.

TS: Not too many people get to be interim president of an institution that's not going to exist more than six months, I guess. Why don't you talk about maybe the unique challenges of being an interim president during a consolidation?

RK: Well first July 1 I had to appoint a cabinet because the academic VP was leaving, so I needed an interim academic vice president. I appointed Richard Cole [presently, dean of KSU's College of Architecture and Construction Management] as the interim vice president for academic affairs.

TS: From architecture?

RK: Yes, and Michael Foxman was already here in an interim position as chief business officer, so he just continued on as the interim. He had already been appointed interim by Lisa or somebody from downtown, but he was here trying to clean up a business office issue. Then I needed a VP for Student and Enrollment Service because that was my job so I appointed Karl Staber as the interim VP for Student and Enrollment. He was director of the recreation center. Ron Dempsey was still here and he was the advancement VP.

TS: I saw that he recently got a job as vice president for advancement at Winona State University.

RK: Minnesota.

TS: Yes, up in Minnesota.

RK: So what other positions? Jim Cooper continued on with whatever he was doing.

TS: Communications.

RK: Yes, he was doing the marketing and communications stuff, so he stayed. I'm trying to think; I'm going around the table. The Chief Information Officer left, so I appointed Jim Herbert. [Editor's note: In the new KSU Herbert would become executive director of classroom technologies and infrastructure programs under University Information Technology Services]. Flora B. Devine [general counsel/special assistant to the president] started coming to my meetings. We met every Monday morning at 10:00 o'clock, so she started coming down here.

TS: For the legal?

RK: Yes. Alana Kyriakakis was our lawyer, and she took a job in Baltimore. This may not have just happened the day I became interim, but as people moved out I had to appoint interims. I didn't appoint a new lawyer, but Flora started coming down here. That pretty well covers the group. We would meet and discuss what was going on and what we

needed to do, and I was talking to Dan and we were working all these OWGs, Operational Working Groups.

TS: Which of those groups were you on?

RK: I wasn't on any of them.

TS: Oh, you never were?

RK: No. I was not part of that because remember I was fired in March, so I hadn't gotten around to doing it. I signed papers and everything then.

TS: You signed papers saying you would be terminated?

RK: Yes, or I wouldn't have a job after June 30. But then in May I became the interim president.

TS: I'm assuming that there were lots of morale problems at that period on this campus.

RK: Not as much as you would think. It was kind of weird. I think I mentioned before that people thought they're going to move us all up there. No, that's not real, so I had a lot of that. I saw people all day long, telling staff, "They're not going to fire you, you know. People that are going to be fired have already been told."

TS: Oh, like you were told?

RK: Like I was told. "So you're okay. It's the upper administration. They don't need two of all of us. They only need one. So that level is going to have to leave. Zvi left. The CIO left. I don't know who else left. Some of the deans. We had new deans. So we started operating as part of Kennesaw State.

TS: I guess it was pretty early on that they decided what the colleges were going to be. So I guess architecture, engineering and computing and software engineering. I interviewed Han Reichgelt [dean of the School of Computing and Software Engineering] right before he left.

RK: Yes. He should never have left. I mean, come on, he would still be doing the same thing. I was disappointed that the consolidation was going to happen, but there was still a job to do, so that didn't mean I was not going to come to work at 6:00 in the morning just because I didn't have a job. I knew I was going to be here until at least January 2015 when the consolidation was final.

TS: I would think that it would have created at least a little resentment down here because every position where you had comparable people on the two campuses seemed to go to the person that was on the Kennesaw campus.

RK: Yes, but some of the people that didn't get the job left, so they weren't here stirring up trouble. If I would have been the president, some of them wouldn't have worked for me anyhow.

TS: I understand. Well, let me just ask you how you think the consolidation went. How would you evaluate the whole process?

RK: I haven't tried to second guess anyone on this, but I think we would have been better off if some of us had been a little better informed about what was happening.

TS: During the consolidation?

RK: During the process because I wasn't even on the OWGs, so I wasn't going to any of those meetings and didn't know what was being talked about. I've been here so long that a lot of people come to me with their problems, but I couldn't tell them anything.

TS: You didn't know anything?

RK: I didn't know anything anymore than they did, but I tried to find out. Some people that worked here a long time just assumed they were going to be fired; no, no, no, no! In fact, I think the number of people that were let go I could probably count on one hand. The first day I was interim president, July 1, I was told I had to fire the director of human resources. I knew him, and he knew me, and I went to his office and told him that, "Friday is your last day. Here's the offer they're making you." Charles said, "Well, what do you think I ought to do?" I said, "Charles, you can do whatever. I'm not your lawyer, but this parachute that you're being given—I'd take the damn thing and go find another job. Charles, I've never seen anything as sweet as this is. Take what they've offered you and leave here." So Charles left, and we appointed an interim director of human resources.

TS: Why did they wait so long to tell Charles that he was being fired?

RK: I have no idea.

TS: Because they told you in March, so I'm surprised it took three or four months more to tell the human resources director. Did they offer you a parachute?

RK: No. It didn't come up.

TS: Whom did you meet with? Did you meet with Dan Papp?

RK: Yes.

TS: Was this a meeting where you and Ron Dempsey and others were told?

RK: No, no, he met with each of us individually. It was Dan, me, and somebody from downtown [the Board of Regents] from the department of human resources. I didn't know her. I don't even remember much about it. Dan read a statement to me. It was kind of weird, but I guess he was following what the lawyers had told him to do.

TS: When you were told to fire the director of human resources, did the order come straight from Dan or from the chancellor?

RK: Not from the chancellor; from Dan.

TS: So your first day on the job he says, "Fire the director of human resources?"

RK: Yes. Now, I don't disagree with that decision. If I had been president here, I would have terminated him years before we did. That's beside the point. He was a nice guy, but he was not a good personnel director. Charles was a nice guy, but he was not dynamic. His staff did all the work for him. But he got a job at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He used me as a reference.

TS: If you want to edit any of this when you get the transcript you can. I gather after July 1 there weren't a whole lot left that were going to go that hadn't already gone.

RK: Well, the CIO [Chief Information Officer] knew he was leaving, and he appointed somebody as his replacement. It wasn't his job to pick his replacement, so I had to unravel that. I'd been CIO for three and a half years at one point because Lisa had asked me to do that. I remind her it was supposed to be for five months, but it lasted three and a half years.

TS: I've heard some stories. Maybe you can confirm or not confirm that this campus was way behind where it should have been in terms of IT, in terms of internet access for everybody, and so on. I guess that would be under the CIO.

RK: I don't know that.

TS: Well, I understand that some of the redirected funds from consolidation have gone to IT upgrades in the last year.

RK: Well, we probably weren't at the same level as Kennesaw was. Although Wayne Dennison [until 2014 KSU's executive director of enterprise systems and services] worked for me down here in financial aid, and then when he was working on his doctorate at Georgia State University [in instructional technology], he did his internship down here in the IT department. So he was part of my staff over there during that summer. I think we were probably limited by money more than anything else.

TS: So it wasn't the CIO's fault?

RK: No, Sam Conn hadn't been here that long.

- TS: Oh, that's right. [He became chief information officer at SPSU in March 2012].
- RK: He went to [Empire State College of the State University of] New York [in June 2014 as chief information officer]. But one of the things that I think we didn't do correctly—although we thought we were doing it correctly—was the IT fee that the students had to pay. I think we charged \$75.00 a student, which was high, but we were of the opinion that we couldn't use the fee for operating funds and that money had to go back to student projects and such as that. So there was this elaborate system where a department head or a department could submit a proposal to get part of the money. Then we'd have this whole hearing all summer long about how they would use the money. We had all these projects going on, but none of it was going to the operation of IT. I was losing people that were taking jobs at Kennesaw, because I was paying them \$35,000 and they were paying them \$65,000. Or they were going everywhere else if they were really good. I now understand that other schools were using some of the IT fee that they charged every student for operational matters, to make their computers better and things like that. So from that standpoint we probably were behind, but we were probably miles ahead on other projects because the departments were getting the money, frankly.
- TS: During that six or seven months that you were interim president was there a point where morale tended to improve or did it stay about the same?
- RK: Well, some of the malcontents left. I'm pretty visible on campus, so if I heard somebody was upset about something, I would go find out what was going on.
- TS: You'd check on it?
- RK: Yes. I'm a counselor remember, so my door was always open. It's closed more this afternoon than it has been in two months.
- TS: So did you get a lot of complaints?
- RK: No, they wouldn't come in and complain. They'd come in with stories that "we heard they're going to make us do this; we heard they're going to make us do that." Well, I would tell them, "Until you see it in writing, don't believe it. I don't know if this is true or not, but until you see it in writing just because somebody called you from Kennesaw and said you've got to do this, until they tell me that's what we're going to do, that's not going to happen." But there were a lot of rumors.
- TS: Well, I know there was some late hiring too because of the confusion. I was over here doing an interview in July or August 2014, and they were still hiring people for English positions. So that must have added to the tension too.
- RK: Definitely, and people just didn't know what was going to happen. "So, go teach your class. They're not going to get rid of you because we have more students now than before. There's a hiring demand for you."

TS: Enrollment has continued to grow, hasn't it?

RK: Not as fast as I would have projected, but I'm not in the enrollment side any more.

TS: I know that both Georgia State and Georgia Perimeter have lost students this fall [of 2015] with their consolidation. So to just hold our own on both campuses, I guess, was a good thing.

RK: We were 33,252 [in Fall 2015].

TS: Yes, I think we've grown by 2.3 percent [over Fall 2014].

RK: I think we could have gone higher than that if we had really been working together.

TS: If we'd been working together?

RK: If people on this campus that were in charge of recruiting knew what was actually happening.

TS: Oh, lack of information.

RK: Yes. The public didn't know for sure what the consolidation meant either, so I think we lost some students. I think that now that we've been through it for a year and we've added all these other amenities, I think that was just a one-time thing. I mean, because the community didn't understand what consolidation was, they [feared] that they would close the Marietta campus and eliminate programs, and people would be fired and shot in the streets.

TS: So on the whole do you think the consolidation was justified or do you think they should have left well enough alone?

RK: No, in this day and age with the way they're cutting up the tax dollars, I don't know. This is probably the best way to do it. I am not a big believer that we need big schools, but I don't know that there's any other way to finance them any more without reducing the administrative overhead and getting that down as low as you can. I'd be the first to say that I think we have too many administrators. At this point we still have them.

TS: Right. Do you think this campus has maintained its character or its culture with the consolidation?

RK: The culture is all messed up now. Part of it is people going back and forth. It's a different culture up there [on the Kennesaw campus] because it's a large school. We're a small school, and the people who have been sent down here have always worked in a large institution. I don't know that that's all that bad. It's going to take a while. I can sit around and say, "Oh, this is terrible," because this is going on or that's going on. But in

the whole scheme of things you don't need two widget makers, one up there and one down here.

TS: What about the students? Are they going to run back from one campus to the other to take their classes?

RK: I think some of them are doing it, but I'm not sure that's because they have to. I realized last fall that students whose classes are all at Kennesaw are parking here. It's easier to park here and then take BOB [the Big Owl Bus]. I don't think anybody thought that was going to happen. There are even faculty who teach on the Kennesaw campus, and they park here and get on the BOB and ride up to their classes.

TS: How about that?

RK: Yes. Dan has made some changes or [Provost] Ken Harmon and the new VP for student affairs [Kathleen "K. C." White]. She's very active on this campus. I don't know that [previous vice president for student affairs] Jerome Ratchford came down here more than a couple of times before he retired.

TS: But K. C. White . . .

RK: Oh, K. C. White sits in that office over there in the presidential suite. She's here, and of course Charles Ross [vice president for economic development and community engagement] has an office down here on the Marietta campus. Randy [C.] Hinds [vice president for operations, chief information officer, and chief business officer] usually comes Wednesday mornings. [W.] Ken Harmon is here every Wednesday or at least his administrative assistant is here, if he is not.

TS: For all day?

RK: Yes, for all day. Of course, she would like to move down here because she lives on Lower Roswell. Dan's here in and out on Thursdays and Fridays. His administrative assistant is here today. She comes here when he comes down.

TS: Oh, [executive administrator to the president] Lynda Johnson?

RK: No, [secretary to the president] Dianne Summey.

TS: Oh, yes. What exactly are your duties as special assistant to the president for consolidation?

RK: Well, that's ill defined, but I'm working with [vice provost for institutional effectiveness] Jorge Perez on the new strategic plan. I'm part of that team up there. So I'm up there at least two days a week for two or three hours at a time. I also teach in the College of Education up there [as part-time associate professor of educational leadership], but that's in the evenings, and I usually do it from my desk because it's online. Then Dan has

asked me to work with Charlie Ross who is the new economic development person. Again, I sit in on his meetings, and I'm the history person like you are. I need to say, "No, we've tried that. This is what happened." Or, "if you're going to do that, you may want to talk to this or that legislator," because I know these people; I've been here eighteen years. Or I see something on the e-mail, and I send that to Charles Ross and say, "Check this out." I'm probably more involved in Charles' operation than any other operation.

TS: So economic development and community engagement?

RK: Community engagement is a part I'm probably most involved in because I know the community. Other things are just minor projects that Dan might give me, but those are far and few between. Most of today I've been preparing for a SACS visit to the University of North Texas, so I'll be doing that the week after next.

TS: That's part of your public and professional service?

RK: That's part of what I do. I was already on the SACS list because I've done some of these before as part of the administration at Southern Poly.

TS: I know we're gearing up for a SACS reaccreditation now that we're consolidated.

RK: Yes, and I've been working with Jorge Perez and his crew up there.

TS: Is this going to be a permanent position?

RK: I have no idea. I think probably most people think I'm going to retire. Although Dan will come and ask me about things, and I try to keep my eyes on things that are going on here.

TS: What are you proudest of in your almost nineteen years here on this campus?

RK: Oh, gosh! I think probably if you're going to consider all the different jobs I've done while I've been on this campus, for me to be the CIO and not even really know how to set up my own computer . . . but fortunately the people were there who had the skills. I'll tell you a story. Lisa fired the former CIO about the first of February. She told me that she wanted me to take the job and lead the search [for a permanent CIO]. I've done all of her search jobs. She said, "Do the search and get a new CIO in here," and she lied. That was in 2009. We didn't hire a CIO until 2012. So I did that. The first meeting lasted four hours because those guys couldn't make a decision. So I said, "Okay, we're going to ease into this because I'm not meeting for four hours in a staff meeting. No, we're going to nail this down, and the next one will be two hours." Then maybe Jim Herbert said, "Then I'm assuming the next one will be one hour." I said, "Good. You got it; that's what it's going to be. This is how I operate, and everybody who works for me knows that. I'm available to you twenty-four hours a day if you have a question. If you can't make a decision, fine, but don't give me your IT problems. I can't answer that. But

I can help you find somebody that can, and we'll make it happen. I'm not the authority. I'm just managing this group. But we're going to meet, and we're going to get everything done in an hour once a week." There were like five guys were around the table—all guys—and I said, "You can walk in my office any time. You don't have to have an appointment. Just show up, and we'll take care of the problem."

So that was it. Advancement was another one. Cooper and I took on that. Lisa asked us when she changed the chief advancement officer for Jim to take on the alumni matters and me to take on advancement. Neither one of us could spell alumni, but I have a friend that worked for me in admissions at Indiana State. He went the advancement route, and he was up in Iowa, but he had even consulted at UGA on alumni issues. As soon as Lisa said you're in charge, we got in my office and talked to Todd Coleman on speakerphone. We said, "Okay, we just inherited the alumni operation, so in fifteen minutes tell us everything we need to know about alumni." He had done consulting, so he just started rattling off: "Do this, do that." So I said, "Okay, that's enough. We're not going to do this job forever. That's enough to get us started."

Todd Coleman's son ended up going to Jacksonville University in Florida, so he came through here one time just before the Georgia-Missouri football game. Lisa Rossbacher's husband is a Missouri grad, so I introduced them to Todd. Todd had worked at the University of Missouri [as executive director of the alumni association from 1994 to 2004]. So he asked if they were going out to the Georgia-Missouri game, and Lisa said, "We would if we could get tickets." Coleman said, "Do you want tickets?" She said, "Sure." He said, "I know the AD there. I'll get you tickets right now." He just dialed the phone, and the AD said, "Sure, they can have my seats. I never use them. I'm roaming around the crowd all the time." So they actually sat in the AD's seats at the Missouri-Georgia game. Anyhow, now Todd knows her and her whole operation. So Cooper and I consulted with him.

TS: About how much money did advancement collect at SPSU? What kind of endowment do they have?

RK: I think the endowment here is really small, maybe \$15 million, something like that.

TS: Do they still do annual campaigns?

RK: We do. We did it this year, and I didn't like the way we did it, but I'm not in charge of it. We usually have a pretty good employee-giving rate, and I don't think we had anything this year.

TS: I know that Kennesaw is gearing up for another comprehensive campaign now. I think Jim Cooper said the Marietta campus might get a construction management building out of it. Do you know about that?

RK: That's probably the next building on this campus. They'd like to do it without state money or at least to finance part of it with private donors. I don't think they've started

yet, but they will. I don't think that's going to be that hard, but I'm not in that business. The construction industry in Atlanta knows that this is the program. Tech doesn't have one anymore, and I think Georgia Southern closed theirs. The first thing I discovered is that we had all these kids from Alabama coming in. The construction management program was at Auburn, and they only take let's say forty kids a year, so the rest of them have to come here. I said, "What are all those Alabama kids doing in construction management?" Well, this is it in the South. So that program is a good one, and I think there is a lot of community support.

TS: Good. Anything else you want to say about what you're proud of?

RK: I'm proud of the way we grew the enrollment here.

TS: Yes, it was really going up in the decade before consolidation.

RK: Yes. And also just being able to be in these other positions and hold it together until something better came along.

TS: What haven't I asked that you think I should have asked in the interview today?

RK: Oh, my management style is a little different from that of a lot of people. Part of it is just the open door style. In 1996 while still at the University of Alabama in Huntsville I was president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling [NACAC]. It's a three-year thing. The first year you're president-elect and then president and then past president. They asked for this write up that they're publishing this week if I could list five adjectives that describe me. So I asked Cooper for five; I asked Todd Coleman for five; I asked Gary Bush [director of student recruitment and admission at SPSU; director of enrollment services-Marietta campus in the new KSU] for five; I asked my son for five; I asked Matthew "Matt" Griffin for five [athletics director at SPSU; currently director of trustee relations and development in the new KSU]. I actually gave all of them [to NACAC]. Cooper's, since you've met the "jerk" . . . [laughs]

TS: Your best friend?

RK: Yes, Cooper listed five adjectives, and he said, "I would have listed 'respect,' but I couldn't do that for all the times you told me to go to hell!" [laughs]

TS: I assume the others gave you some more positive ones.

RK: Oh, yes, they were all good. I still know them, and in the conferences we still get together. [Editor's note: Dr. Koger was featured in the "Member Spotlight" of the *NACAC Bulletin* for March 9, 2016 (nacacnet.org). The five adjectives listed to describe him are "generous, thoughtful, courageous, honest, and empathetic."]

TS: So three years on the national level and then you were president of . . .

RK: Well, after I was national president, I was president of the Southern Association for College Admission Counseling. Until I moved to Alabama I was never in the Southern group. I was in Indiana and Illinois. But after they elected me president of the Southern group, Sam Moss, a counselor up at Darlington School [Rome, Georgia], said, "We don't let just anybody be president of this group; you have to have some credentials." Because I had been national president I was good enough to be Southern.

TS: Any particular accomplishments in that period?

RK: No, we had some budget issues, and we got those taken care of. There was a person at Agnes Scott at the time, and she and I worked on that one, but I don't remember the details on that.

TS: But I imagine it was good for Southern Poly to have that kind of exposure.

RK: Oh, yes, and in fact I wanted all of my recruiters to belong to Southern, and I wanted them at every conference because the only other people there are high school people.

TS: Well, I'm just about out of questions. I usually ask people why they've stayed in their job for so long, but I think you've pretty much talked about that already today.

RK: Yes. You get in a rut. You go somewhere like Huntsville. I was there ten years, and I just did one thing. I haven't gotten in a rut here. I've never been one thing, and it's changed constantly. I was always VP for enrollment, and then I picked up student affairs, and then I picked up advancement for a while, and then I picked up CIO for a while, and then . . . I never knew what Lisa was going to throw at me, so I did all of her searches, I think.

TS: The impression I get is that the campus has adjusted to the consolidation?

RK: I think so. Probably more hierarchical up there [on the Kennesaw campus] than it is here, but my door is still open. If something starts festering, I try to let whomever know.

TS: So you think you're keeping more of a small college atmosphere on this campus?

RK: I think so to a certain extent. People are coming down, and it's taking them a while to figure that out. This is going to sound negative, but it's not necessarily negative. There are a lot of military types at Kennesaw, and you follow the chain of command. There are no military types on this campus. So there's not a lot of chain of command stuff. In my world everybody can drink out of that coffee pot. That's a little different than the Kennesaw campus. I'm not critical because I've never worked in a big place like Kennesaw, but it has to be a different structure. So when somebody gets sent down here, as far as I know, they like working here. Now, I'm talking the first or second level administrator there. The staff on the Kennesaw campus find them bossy. That's the thing that I hear that their bosses are bossy. When they had bosses here, they weren't bossy like that. I'm analyzing people, and I don't really know, but I think there are some

people that either think that's the way they're supposed to operate or that's been their model. I think you can terminate people and still be their friends.

TS: And you've done so.

RK: Yes, I've had examples of that. But I don't know that that's the belief north of here. When you're terminating someone, I don't think you have to bloody him. I mean, people know when they're not doing their job. You just say, "Look, I told you here; I've told you there; I'm finished telling you. Now let's go to lunch." [laughs] And that's the way it works. It's not easy to do sometimes, but I discovered that working in the hospital. In the hospital you can't fool around. Somebody makes a mistake, and they're gone. That's life and death stuff. I've terminated them and then helped them get their next job. You can't work for me if you're not going to follow the procedures. Those meds have to be counted at the end of every shift, and when meds start disappearing, then someone else is going to disappear.

TS: I guess I always thought that in college teaching the worst you could do is to bore them to death. All right, thank you very much. I appreciate your time today and your insights.

RK: For whatever they're worth!

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