

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH RONALD H. MATSON

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Interview with Ronald H. Matson  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
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TS: Ron, you have been at Kennesaw since 1989, have been a full-time member of the teaching faculty and an administrator for many years, and now you are interim provost [from November 1, 2018, to February 15, 2019]. Let's start the interview with your background. I know you are a native of Los Angeles, and you went to California State University Long Beach, majored in Zoology, and got a Bachelor of Science degree in 1976. I'm assuming you were a traditional aged student, right out of high school, going to college.

RM: Yes, sir, I was. To be honest, I lived at home for both my bachelor's and master's degrees. I lived about thirty miles from Cal State Long Beach. It was a commuter campus—quite honestly, bigger, but similar to Kennesaw when I started here, being an all commuter school. I worked at a department store there in Torrance where my parents lived. I did commute back and forth for both my bachelor's and master's degrees at Cal State Long Beach. I started when I was, I guess, eighteen or so, right out of high school.

TS: What attracted you to Zoology?

RM: I used to do a lot of backpacking. My parents had a cabin up in the mountains out of southern California in Big Bear [Lake, San Bernardino County]. I backpacked and climbed in southern California and in the Sierra Nevada [mountain range]. So I was always outside, and I always liked that. Then, quite frankly, as you very well know, in the late 1960s and 1970s, I was very involved with Earth Day on my high school campus. I did things like the petition for the Coastal Protection Act there in southern California.<sup>1</sup> So, anyway, just when I was a teenager in high school, I was interested in environmental sorts of things. Being exposed to the outdoors and backpacking and whatever, I was interested in nature. Why I picked Zoology instead of just general Biology, I'm not 100 percent sure other than I was more interested in animals. So I did it just out of interest.

TS: What were you thinking at that time? That you were going to have a career in college teaching or that you were going to be working out in nature?

RM: It was probably more of the latter. Initially, no, being a college professor was not an initial goal. To be completely honest with you, my first choice for my undergrad was not

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: In 1972, California voters approved Proposition 20, the California Coastal Zone Conservation Act. It created a temporary California Coastal Commission to protect and conserve the California coastline, and it called for the development of a long-term coastal management plan. After four years of research and public input, the state government passed the California Coastal Act of 1976, making the coastal commission permanent.

Cal State Long Beach; it was actually Humboldt State [University]. Back in those days, for environmental [programs] and whatever, it was very a popular place.

TS: That is where Lisa [A.] Rossbacher [president emerita of Southern Polytechnic State University] went [as president of Humboldt State].

RM: Yes, exactly. I didn't get there. So Cal State Long Beach was number two. Based on that and my prior interest, I really wished at that particular time to work with California [Department of] Fish and Game or the Feds or something along those lines. That was actually where I thought I was going. It was not academia at first.

TS: Right. You said that CSU Long Beach in the 1970s was similar but larger than Kennesaw was when you started here in 1989. How large was it?

RM: Back in those days, if I remember right, it was up in the high 20s. When I came here, Kennesaw had less than 10,000.

TS: Yes, that's right. In fall 1990 we passed 10,000 for the first time. California had a dream system, I thought, maybe the best system anywhere.

RM: Yes, I think it was a model for a lot of the other systems, especially the dual system with Cal State the masters' granting degree schools, the teacher education institutions, and those sorts of things, compared to the UC [University of California] system, which was the doctoral granting system and the medical schools and professional schools.

TS: So masters' degrees were the highest degrees at Long Beach at that time?

RM: Yes, sir.

TS: Probably not now I would imagine.

RM: They offer a few doctorates, but when some of the Cal State schools started offering doctorates, they were actually done through the auspices of a UC school. Nowadays, I haven't looked.<sup>2</sup>

TS: Well, there are four years between your bachelor's and the master's degrees, so I am assuming you were doing something other than just taking classes for four years.

RM: It took me five years to graduate with my bachelor's degree, in part, because I made a D in two chemistry courses that I had to repeat, and, in part, because I wanted to take some extra classes. I took some additional history classes that I didn't "need." I took two

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: According to its current graduate studies website, CSULB offers four doctorates: a PhD in Engineering & Industrial Applied Mathematics (offered jointly with the Claremont Graduate University), an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, a DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy), and a DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice, offered jointly with CSU Fullerton and CSU Los Angeles).

additional philosophy classes, a course in symbolic logic, and a course in the philosophy of science that I didn't "need" [in order to graduate]. For my master's degree, it took me longer than it should have for a simple reason—a freezer failure. To start with, I had some fits and starts with getting a research project. First, I was going to work on lizards, but then I switched to working on birds. Then I had a freezer failure during my master's degree, and I lost my specimens and all kinds of chemicals. That in and of itself, in reality, cost me at least a year.

TS: That can turn you against getting a master's degree.

RM: Well, it was one of those things, but that is where I was very fortunate that I lived at home. My parents were very supportive. I didn't pay rent. So it wasn't like I was in the hurry because I had bills or anything like that. It was very frustrating, but umpteen years later now, I've used that story to tell students that when you're doing science, things like that happen. You need to be prepared for it, hopefully to prevent it. But if you are simply going to give up, then maybe you shouldn't be doing this because there are those kinds of roadblocks. It was nobody's fault that the power went out in the building. There was no warning. So there was a good life lesson there.

TS: Sure. I noticed that you were doing some teaching as a TA [teaching assistant] along the way before you got your master's. You even did a workshop at UCLA [entitled "Moving with Style: Anatomy and Motion Analysis for Animators"] that I guess was related to your master's research.

RM: It was indirectly. It was related to it because I worked on birds. What had happened is that one of my graduate student colleagues at UCLA had met somebody in their art/animation department, and they were doing a series called "Anatomy and Motion Analysis for Animators." Those of us who specialized in different organisms would go up and talk to the animators. I would go up to the art department and discuss the dynamics of flight. Flight, for example, is not just straight up and down, flapping of the arms.

TS: Was this for cartoons and things like that where the artists that you were dealing with needed to know more about anatomy?

RM: Yes, that is exactly what it was. My grad student friend who did that is a guy named Dr. Stuart [S.] Sumida. Stuart now is a professor at Cal State San Bernardino. Stuart is a technical advisor [consultant] on some of the Disney films [including *The Lion King* and *Kung Fu Panda*]. He helps their animators, shall we say, to more or less properly animate the movement of the animals. So that was just something that I fell into. Because I happened to be a person who worked on birds and Stuart worked on reptiles, I got asked to go up and give these lectures. It was fun.

TS: Wow, that's great. You were getting some grants as well, including a Frank M. Chapman Memorial Grant from the American Museum of Natural History, and you completed a master's thesis entitled, "Genetic Variation in Two Insular Populations of the House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus* (Aves: Fringillidae)." What did you find out?

RM: Not much. Something that was happening back in the 1970s was a thing called the theory of island biogeography. My major professor at Cal State Long Beach actually was studying that, but he had worked on lizards.

TS: In other words, they had become isolated on an island from the mainland?

RM: Exactly.

TS: But birds can fly from an island to the mainland.

RM: Precisely. So that's what I was interested in. I said that for birds it is easier to have gene flow [from island to mainland] than in lizards. But what had happened with these house finches is that back in 1898 a gentleman named [E. A.] Mearns described two different subspecies of house finch, some on the mainland in the northern Channel Islands and a different subspecies on the southern Channel Islands. The way he described the difference between the subspecies was something to the effect that one of the characteristics was the tail was "a trifle bit longer."<sup>3</sup>

Back in those days, as you know with your background, they described things differently. So I said, "This might be a good way to test [Mearns' thesis]." My idea was to see whether I could use biochemical genetic characters using electrophoresis as a technique to ascertain a difference between populations on the southern islands compared to those on the northern islands and mainland. I found no difference, but, here again, it was one of those things where nobody at Cal State Long Beach used the technique of electrophoresis. Nobody knew how to do it.

TS: What exactly is that?

RM: The official definition of electrophoresis is "the movement of charged particles through an electrical field." What I was looking at back in those days was proteins, to see if comparing individuals from the different populations on a gel showed whether their proteins migrated at a different rate. That would have indicated that there was a different genetic control. But like I say, I didn't find any differences, in part, because I had a very small sample size. Doing this technique that I was using was very limited. But it is also how I got to UCLA. I was doing this all by myself. Nobody at Cal State Long Beach knew how to do this. My major professor at Cal State Long Beach knew a professor up at UCLA who was using electrophoresis, and he got me into his lab to learn the technique. So I made contact with people up there, and eventually that led to my Ph.D.

TS: Did you go immediately to UCLA then?

RM: Yes, sir.

TS: And you spent the next six or seven years there?

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<sup>3</sup> E. A. Mearns (1898), "Descriptions of Two New Birds from the Santa Barbara Islands, Southern California," *The Auk: Ornithological Advances* 15: 258-64.

RM: Yes sir.

TS: Then you graduated in 1987 with your doctorate. Electrophoresis, obviously, still played a role with your doctoral work. We might as well talk about the dissertation now if you want to. The title was “Biochemical Genetics and Systematic Applications of Avian Isozyme Characters.” Talk about that. I know electrophoresis played a part in that—enzymes and molecules and all of that.

RM: It did.

TS: What did you discover on that?

RM: Well, end of the story is not a whole lot in a positive sense. I had a lot of negative data.

TS: At least that proves something—that there is not a difference.

RM: It does, yes. Evolutionary relationships of birds are unclear. Even today they are still unclear. Back in the 1980s, there were a couple of things happening. One was a refinement of the use of electrophoresis as a tool to look at biochemical characters. Instead of using morphological characters, like the tails are a trifle bit longer, we use biochemical characters. Of course, fast-forwarding to today, they use DNA. Back in the day, we would use proteins.

The other thing that happened was there was, shall we say, a philosophical shift on how to analyze data. There was a school of thought called cladistics, which was a way to analyze data. It was a perspective, a school of thought, that was developed by a German entomologist called [Emil Hans] Willi Hennig [1913-1976]. It had finally made its way to the United States, and people were analyzing data differently.

What I wanted to do was to see if using these biochemical characters and analyzing them with this cladistic methodology would maybe help elucidate evolutionary relationships among birds. What I found out overall was that, at least for the characters that I looked at in the birds [I studied], birds were birds. I couldn't really find something that helped answer the questions that I was looking for.

TS: Right. I noticed along the way that you were doing a lot of teaching in a lot of different subjects. Are these all as a TA [teaching assistant]? Are they letting you loose to teach classes on your own? Or what?

RM: When I was UCLA those were all as a TA. I did teach a variety of courses. One of the things that I really enjoyed doing was teaching.

TS: You got an award [the Schechtman Award for Distinguished Teaching Assistant in the Department of Biology (1986)]. Why don't you talk about that?

RM: That is something I was very proud of. I liked teaching at the time. Hopefully, I was good at it. Obviously, I was recognized by my department. I did teach a number of different classes. I even had a professor tell me that I was going to TA his course, and it

was in an area that was not my area of expertise. But it was something that I was drawn to that I thought was very, very important, even at a place like UCLA. I did TA a lot.

TS: When you say, “even at a place like UCLA,” do you mean because it was a research institution, an R1?

RM: Yes, exactly. They are an R1. As you very well know, Tom, it is the attitude and the perspective and what is required of faculty and, for that matter, graduate students. But an R1 is very different than where I had come from at Cal State Long Beach, which today is probably an R2. It is still not the Research 1 environment, and especially was not back in the [time I was there].

TS: So what are you thinking at that time? When I get out of here, I want to go to a place where I can teach, or, I want to go to a place where I can do research?

RM: I wanted both. What I was hoping for, and it influenced me a great deal when I was here, is to go back to a place like Cal State Long Beach. I did not want an R1. I was not interested in that. I didn’t want the pressures, number one, in terms of grantsmanship.

TS: You received a lot of grants, by the way.

RM: I got a few, but nothing compared to what people get nowadays. But the other thing was, as I said, I truly valued teaching. I thought that a school like Cal State Long Beach [was an institution] where teaching was very important. My professors at Cal State Long Beach were absolutely excellent. That is not to say they weren’t at UCLA. But Cal State Long Beach was focused on [teaching]. We had a master’s degree, and the faculty were actively engaged [in research], and they took people like me to be a master’s student. In the best of all worlds, that is what I wanted. But, by the same token, as I said, teaching was very important. I enjoyed teaching. I think it is a challenge. It keeps you on your toes. I never applied to R1 institutions. When I had an opportunity after my post-doc, I was looking at places like Kennesaw and Georgia Southern. Coming to a place where they truly honored and valued teaching was something that just fit into my worldview.

TS: What about mentors along the way?

RM: I had a couple of different mentors. Both my major professors, Dr. [Robert C.] Bob Clover at Cal State Long Beach and Dr. [Donald G.] Don Buth at UCLA, were very good in that they supported me, but they also allowed me to do the things that I wanted. The fact, for example, that I did win that teaching award at UCLA was in part because of Don being supportive of his graduate students. The fact that both of those guys, Bob and Don, took teaching seriously, I think, set a good example for me. There were a couple of other faculty, especially at Cal State Long Beach, that I had had for a couple of classes that I saw how a professor could, in fact, still be active in their field, but were truly dedicated to helping the students. So I think that here again, the environment in which I grew up academically supported both of those things—the scholarship, the research, was not something that was mutually exclusive to teaching. I think that that attitude was inculcated into me early on, and it was something that I brought when I came to KSU.

TS: Good. Why the post-doc [Postdoctoral Scientist] at the University of Alabama? That is a long way from California.

RM: It is a long way from California. In science in particular, and probably in other disciplines, doing a post-doc was important to get more research. I had two offers of a post-doc. One was at Wayne State working on birds. The other was at University of Alabama working with a guy who had been a post-doc at UCLA, a guy named [Richard L.] Rick Mayden. Rick had asked me to come with him. It was one of those things. What were the opportunities? Well, Rick worked on fish. I thought it would broaden my horizons a little bit. I had been focused on birds. Working with a different group of organisms might make me more employable. It gave me a chance to do some different kinds of fieldwork in the Southeast. Even though I do a lot of lab work, in my heart I'm a field biologist, going back to why I got into Zoology. So when Rick offered me that position I took it.

TS: You were studying population genetics and phylogenetics freshwater fish. I don't understand that.

RM: Okay, here again, it was sort of conceptually what I was doing for my doctoral degree, but switching to fish. What we were interested in was looking at evolutionary relationships among fish—that is the phylogenetics part—by studying local populations. We were using, once again, electrophoresis to look at proteins to look at biochemical characters to see if we examined, for example, the same species of fish in different drainages, were they all the same or were they different? Here again, as you pointed out, unlike birds, fish don't move very easily. So if you have the isolated populations, what are the evolutionary, what are the genetic consequences of that? In some places we could find distinct same species, but very distinct populations. Sometimes we didn't. So then that raises questions about gene flow, about how the genes move, which is how do individuals move? It comes into ideas about biogeography, etc. So that's what I started to look at when I was a post-doc at Alabama.

TS: I saw that you did a seminar on Electrophoresis for Systematists while you were there.

RM: I did. It was a graduate seminar. So I even taught a little bit as a post-doc.

TS: Right. You were getting some publications out in those years [three refereed publications in 1989 alone].

RM: Yes, sir, I was.

TS: Not that you didn't continue after you came to Kennesaw, but it almost looks like you were prepared for an R1 even though you said you weren't interested in teaching at an R1.

RM: I was, and, of course, that's what I did. The interesting thing when I came to Kennesaw [in 1989] was I had a sheet in my attache case about what I would ask for startup funds, because I thought maybe this was going to be like Cal State Long Beach. Now, by the time I got here, I knew this wasn't true. But when I prepared conceptually for interviews,

[my plan] was to have that because I was hoping that there might be a place to do some research. When I got here, it became very clear that we didn't have those things. In fact, to be honest with you, during my interview I was told to forget doing research.

TS: Oh, really?

RM: Yes, they said it was just a teaching school. Being "just a teaching school" was perfectly fine because I valued teaching. But it was also clear that they didn't have things like startups and whatever, so I never even brought that out.

TS: Do you think it was different in the sciences than the humanities with regard to what they were telling people in those days? Because until you built the Science Laboratory Building [in 2012], there really wasn't that much opportunity for people to continue to work in their fields in the sciences, whereas I can do oral histories and things like that with relatively little institutional support.

RM: I do think that there is a difference. In fact, when I was a department chair and we were starting to talk about startup funds and startup packages, I went around to some of my friends and colleagues in humanities and other disciplines, and I said, "What do you guys do for startup funds?" A lot of them just looked at me and went, "What are startup funds?" I mean, that was a foreign concept to them. So, yes, I think that is true. I also have to say though that while there were no facilities here to do research the way I was doing it, there was still some expectation to do some things.

TS: Yes. You know, it was really not that many years after you arrived before a lot of our biology faculty were out in Paulding County at Raccoon Creek or at Lake Allatoona doing water quality studies under contract with various governments.

RM: Precisely. Exactly right. And that is what we had to do was to switch [our research focus]. I had one or two directed studies students where, because I had done research on fish at the University of Alabama, now, all of a sudden, I could do some things dealing with fish and streams that I wasn't technically trained for. My field wasn't population genetics. The evolutionary biology was more ecology. But it wasn't too difficult for me to start doing some of that because of [the research] I had done. So that actually worked out pretty well. Some of the other scholarship I did here—it was interesting. I remember trying to write some papers and analyze data, but I had to do all my data analysis at home because the computer I had when I started here did not have a math coprocessor. So I had to use my home computer where I had a math coprocessor. But things eventually changed.

TS: So why did you come to Kennesaw once you found out that we really didn't have the funds to support your research?

RM: I came here, once again, back to the idea that it was a teaching school, where people valued teaching and where I thought that there was a lot of potential. When I interviewed with the faculty here, it was a good experience with the guys and gals that were on my search committee and just talking to everybody else. It was, obviously, a growing place, where I thought that I could contribute, and I haven't been disappointed.

- TS: Good. Would you say that CSU Long Beach was like a generation ahead of Kennesaw at that time?
- RM: Yes, sir. I haven't looked lately at any numbers, but, conceptually, I would say that we are at the same level now [37,622 students in the 2017-18 academic year at CSULB, including 6,056 graduate students, compared to KSU's fall 2017 enrollment of 35,846, of whom 2,843 were graduate students], but they were twenty some odd years ahead of us.
- TS: Did you have any sense that people were aspiring to become a Cal State Long Beach or a Cal State Fullerton or something like that?
- RM: Initially, no. I think when I first got here people were very content with being the school that I walked into. Some people were concerned about how we might change and how we might lose our identity as being this school that valued teaching. I think, sometimes, there was even resistance to change.
- TS: I was going to ask you about that—if there was a fear, particularly on the part of those that had lost touch with their discipline in terms of research whether, if we changed, they were going to be left out?
- RM: I do think that is true. I think it is true today. At least in the sciences, if you're out of your discipline for not too long of a time, it is really hard to get back into the game, given how everything changes and how competitive it is.
- TS: That is where the Boyer model<sup>4</sup> came in with Betty Siegel: “Let them do scholarship of teaching and learning.”
- RM: Correct. Of course, we had some people in the Biology Department at the time that did exactly that—Ben [R.] Golden, [Pamela Jean] Pam Rhyne, and others—that was their focus.
- TS: Bowman [O.] Davis.
- RM: Bowman Davis. They made good contributions in that particular area. Here again, it was just a different way of looking at things. They were all very successful, and let's be real. The foundation that people like Bowman and Pam and Ben and [Kathleen A.] Kathy Fleiszar and [P. Edward] Ed [Bostick] laid is what makes, number one, the Biology Department successful today, that we have masters programs. But, quite frankly, it is people like them and other people in other colleges that did analogous things that helped us build Kennesaw to what we are today.
- TS: I think those names you mentioned are probably the ones that were on your search committee back then.

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<sup>4</sup> Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Carnegie Foundation 1990).

RM: Some of them were, that's correct. R.C. [Robert C.] Paul was on my search committee. I don't know that Ben was. But, yes, that is exactly right.

TS: Well, you are already describing the culture of Kennesaw, the intellectual life at Kennesaw, in those years. I guess as long as you were a good teacher, you fit in.

RM: Yes, sir, good teacher, and, obviously, service was very important. That is how I got to meet a whole lot of different people in different colleges and departments. But there was also still some scholarship expectations. Once again, it wasn't at the level maybe it is today. It certainly wasn't what I was used to from an R1. But whether it was scholarship of teaching and learning or even, like in my case, publishing on data that either I had already collected, or in one case some colleagues from Portugal sent me their data because they didn't have the tools to analyze it. I couldn't collect those data, but I could help analyze it. There were still ways to keep at least one finger on the pulse, but there were some requirements to do scholarship even back in those days.

TS: Right. What courses were you teaching?

RM: Well, back in those days when we were on the quarter system, I taught Biology 103 and 104, which were the introductory courses. I taught Evolution, which is what I was actually hired to do. That was in the job ad. I taught Vertebrate Zoology. I taught Comparative Anatomy. Eventually, I also taught the introductory biology course for biology majors, which, if I remember right, back in the quarter system, was Biology 200 [and 201, Biological Principles I and II]. It is basically Biology 1107 and 1108 today.

TS: I think I saw where you taught a Biology of Dinosaurs course at one time.

RM: I did. Boy, you have looked at my CV more recently than I have. Being a vertebrate zoologist and being an evolutionary biologist, [but before that], just being a kid, [I have always found that] dinosaurs were interesting. I did go up to New York to the American Museum of Natural History for one of the Chautauqua courses they had on dinosaurs. I did that just to add to my repertoire, whatever. I remember one day very shortly thereafter, Dorothy [D.] Zinsmeister, who was the chair of Biology at the time, said we needed some more classes. I said, "Well, I just came from this seminar, and I'll be happy to do a special topics on the biology of dinosaurs." So that is the genesis of that course. It was a lot of fun. It was a good course.

TS: Was it a shock at all coming to Georgia and teaching evolution?

RM: Yes and no. Obviously, Georgia and the South in particular, whether it is the Scope trial [*State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, Dayton, Tennessee, 1925] or other things, has had a history of issues with evolution. I knew what I was getting into from that perspective. By the same token, coming to a university with a biology department, since evolutionary biology is the fundamental concept that ties all of biology together, the fact that they would have it here and want people to teach it, that made perfectly good sense to me.

TS: Right. When I was in high school in Tennessee, the biology teachers could not teach evolution, and that made it tremendously attractive to a teenage boy [laughs]. I had to go out and get [Charles Darwin's] *The Origin of Species* [1859]. What is a 10th grader doing reading *Origin of Species*? But because it was frowned upon in Tennessee, it was interesting.

RM: Yes, I can understand that. That is an interesting read not just from a biologist perspective, but for me just reading something written, shall we say, in Victorian English in the style and the way Darwin presented his arguments was always an interesting point of view.

TS: And it was written for everybody, I think, because I could read it, and I was a 10th grader.

RM: Sure, yes.

TS: Well, you were nominated a number of times for teaching awards. You got service awards. One that I thought was intriguing was an Outstanding Advisor Award [in 2000] from NACADA [the National Conference on Academic Advising]. That is a pretty big deal. How did that come about?

RM: Just for the record, the way they did it, at least back in those days, was there were actually several people that won that award [each year]. It wasn't just a single award, so just truth in advertising. I don't want it to sound like I'm bragging on something that I shouldn't. Back in those days, once again, especially as an assistant chair, I was the advising guru, shall we say, in Biology and for a lot of the College of Science and Mathematics. I just felt that advising was very important. Once again, I think that ties in with my love and respect for teaching.

I had been working with a lot of people on campus, and so people knew who I was and what I was trying to do. We had an advising council with people from different colleges where the advisors would get together. Here again as part of my service and teaching, I just got heavily involved in that. I think it was Nancy [S.] King [vice president for Student Success and Enrollment Services] who recognized what I was doing, and Nancy was the one who nominated me. As you guys say, the rest is history. The committee, however the process worked out, selected me for that award.

TS: Somewhere along the way Nancy was president of NACADA. I know she was very active in that.

RM: Absolutely she was, and we still have some of our professional advisors here today that are very active in NACADA. I with my change in jobs have gotten out of that, so I don't know details anymore, but, yes, that was a very surprising and very nice recognition.

TS: You also had a College of Science and Mathematics Distinguished Service Award in 1999.

RM: Yes.

TS: It's pretty clear the direction your career was taking, teaching and service and scholarship as maybe an important third field, would you say, or would you say they're all integrated together?

RM: Well, to some degree I think they are all integrated together. I tried to do that, and I try not to look at those as silos. It is important from a mental health perspective that you don't kill yourself to put them together, but I think, more importantly, it is to be able to work effectively, to make sure that what you are doing for your students and what you are doing for your colleagues is more holistic. That's the way I look at it.

TS: Sure. You certainly got promoted on time, to associate in 1994 and full professor in 1999. Would you say the way your career progressed was exactly what Kennesaw was in those years or was looking for?

RM: Yes, it was, absolutely. I knew when I got here what I needed to do. It fit what I wanted to do. When I got here, I had a personal goal of reaching the rank of [full] professor. I tried to do a good job, so that I would get promoted, and that was important to me.

TS: Well, it didn't take you long to get involved in administration. How did that come about? Was that something that you were aspiring to?

RM: Absolutely not! The fact that we started today saying, "We are sitting in the provost's office with the interim provost," there's no way. I had no interest, desire, or thought about coming to these positions. I can either thank or blame, depending on how you want to look at it, Dorothy Zinsmeister. Dorothy was the chair of Biology who hired me. I don't know, a year or so after I got here, Dorothy asked me to be her assistant, the assistant to the chair.

TS: I have 1993.

RM: Okay, then it was a little longer [after I got here]. You would have to ask Dorothy why she picked me over somebody else. But she did, and I accepted the position to work with her as the assistant to the chair and eventually the assistant chair. I'm not sure, I may have been either the first or second assistant chair at the time.

TS: It was a while before we really had assistant chairs of the departments.

RM: Yes, exactly. The rest is history. Dorothy took me under her wings. She made sure I met people. She, shall I say, showed me the ropes in terms of doing certain administrative things. Hopefully, I helped her by taking some of the burden off of her, and then I just stayed assistant chair and eventually chair and interim dean and et cetera, et cetera.

TS: You were called the Department of Biological and Physical Sciences at that time.

RM: Yes. When I got here, it was Biology, and at the time Physics was actually part of Chemistry [Department of Chemistry and Physics].

TS: Was it?

RM: Yes. Shall we say that there were some political issues going on, and one day, at least from my perspective—I say one day, but I’m sure there was lots of stuff going on that I wasn’t aware of—the dean at the time, [Herbert L.] Herb Davis, basically said, “Physics is moving from Chemistry to Biology.”

TS: Just like that [snap of fingers]?

RM: Just like that. That was what happened. I don’t know why was it Biology and Physical Sciences and not just Physics. That was always weird because Chemistry is physical science. There was not a Physics degree at the time. So, yes, we became the Department of Biological and Physical Sciences [by the printing of the 1993-94 undergraduate catalog].

TS: How many people did we have teaching Physics at that time? There weren’t very many, were there?

RM: Four or so. I can’t remember. [C. Donald] Don Norman, Gary [C.] Lewis, [G. Russell] Russ Akridge. I’m missing somebody [Henri A. Brittain]. Anyway, it was a very small number of people.

TS: What were your duties as assistant to the chair? You didn’t even have tenure in 1993, I wouldn’t think.

RM: No, sir. I did not. My two biggest duties were scheduling and advising. I did the scheduling for the department. Now, Dorothy or whoever the chair was still looked at it. They were ultimately responsible, but I did all the first passes. The other thing is I was essentially the department advisor. The faculty still had advisees, but, especially, initial questions would come to me. Then, the third thing as an assistant chair, eventually, it took a little time, but, because I wasn’t in the direct chain of command, I could be a conduit between the faculty and the department chair. I was able to go to Dorothy or when Ralph [J.] Rascati became chair, go to Ralph and say, “You know, the faculty are a little concerned about certain things.” Since I wasn’t in the direct chain, the faculty could say things to me, and that was fine. I could say it to the chair. Ralph was a very good friend of mine, and Dorothy is too. So I could tell them up front, so they could then use that information how they wanted.

TS: Any problems with the change of chairs in continuing as assistant chair?

RM: No, none whatsoever. That didn’t make any difference at all.

TS: Dorothy left sometime along the line for the Board of Regents, I guess.

RM: Yes, sir.

TS: Then Ralph replaced her. You were assistant chair nine years, I guess, from 1993 to 2002.

RM: That sounds about right. Yes, sir.

TS: Then where does Ralph go at that point?

RM: Ralph comes over here as associate vice president for academic affairs. He worked with [vice president for academic affairs Lendley C.] Lynn Black dealing with some of what I do in my other job right now as the senior associate vice president for academic affairs. So when Ralph moved over here to Kennesaw Hall, there was a need for a department chair. Initially, as the assistant chair, I became the acting chair. [Laurence I.] Larry Peterson, who was the dean at the time, said, "We're going to do a national search," so we did a national search. I applied for that and became the department chair.

TS: It took two years to do a national search?

RM: Yes, sir. I don't remember all the details, Tom, in terms of why he waited. It was like a year.

TS: Actually, it was not two. It was September of 2002 to February 2004, so that's a year and a half.

RM: I think it was just the way the stars aligned in terms of when we started the search.

TS: So you enjoyed administration enough that you wanted to be chair at that time, I guess.

RM: Yes. It was one of those things. I had whet my whistle, and I was doing certain things as the interim chair that I thought, if I was selected, I could continue to contribute to the growth and guidance, shall we say, of the department, and help people do the things that we needed to do.

TS: You were chair for eight years [September 2002 to July 2010].

RM: Yes, sir.

TS: I saw where the name changed somewhere along the line to be more accurate, I guess, as the Department of Biology and Physics. Could you talk about what you perceive as your accomplishments as chair in those years?

RM: I hope that I helped the department mature in a couple of ways. There was a lot of growth in the department in terms of number of majors. There was a change in some of the newer, mostly younger, faculty in terms of their expectations. We were doing more research and that sort of thing. Number one, I hope that I helped with that transition. There were a couple things that I ended up doing which were not necessarily popular, but it was a transitional thing. As has been the case at Kennesaw, we've been resource limited. For example, one of the things that I ended up doing was taking our Science 1101/1102 courses [Science, Society and the Environment], the non-science major courses. They were built on the idea of relatively small classes with writing. We would have these labs. What I had to do was say, "We're going to go to online labs." We had

new faculty that did that. I increased the class size to two hundred, which required, obviously, a pedagogical shift.

There were some very good reasons to resist some of that, but here was the problem. We had also been seeing an increase in the number of Biology majors. I did not have enough faculty to teach a whole bunch of small sections of 1101/1102 and support what we needed to have for our biology majors. It was a resource issue. One way around that was to cut the number of sections of Science 1101/1102. I still had to serve the same number of students or more because Kennesaw itself was growing, and so the way to do that was increase class size. While there were obviously pedagogical sacrifices made to do that, it was something that I felt we needed to do to keep teaching all our undergrads science, which is very important to me, but to serve my majors.

That was a very important thing that we did, and it started the department down a different path. I think one of the most important things any department chair does, but she or he is not doing this by themselves, is hiring new people. We hired some really good people that helped Kennesaw move to the next level. The last thing that I got involved in as a department chair, but ended up finishing up when I became the dean, was what you had mentioned a little bit earlier. That's the Science Lab [Building] addition. That is tied in with getting a master's program. When I was interviewing for the department chair, I said, "We need to have a master's program. But we can't do it without more facilities." Luckily, the stars aligned that we finally got that new building, and so we could start doing the Master of Integrative Biology. I probably still have on my computer the slides where I talked about that.

I started calling it that because I realized that in today's world having things that are multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary is more and more important. I started going down that, and I championed that. I was very, very fortunate to get some of the faculty involved, so that truly was an organic process by which the faculty developed that master's program. I'm very, very happy, and I'll go on tape and say that I'm proud that we finally got that. Between the building that allowed for some of the expansion and having this graduate program, I was part of the team that developed both of those things, and I'm very, very pleased with that. I think in my mind that those were the things that helped the Biology department transition to the model I talked about earlier of how we are becoming more like Cal State Long Beach.

TS: It was [October 25,] 2012 that the Science Lab addition opened up.

RM: Yes, sir. It was right when I stepped down as dean and moved over here [to the provost's office]. I remember because when we had the opening ceremony, Mark [R.] Anderson was the new dean of the College of Science and Math.

TS: Did the Master of Science in Integrative Biology come in about the same time or earlier?

RM: Yes, sir. [The Board of Regents approved the MSIB program on January 11, 2012]. We were doing some of the paperwork and sending things down to the board while I was the dean.

TS: Did you have a problem that they didn't want just a straight Master of Biology at the Board of Regents, and you had to do something more innovative?

RM: That was part of it too, yes. Some of it was more philosophical of an approach for the way things are nowadays compared to back when I was a student. But, yes, some of it was also making the board understand we were trying to do something different. It wasn't just the same old, same old. Rightfully so, the board is concerned about unnecessary duplication, resource allocation, and those sorts of things. Yes, that had something to do with it.

TS: What kind of jobs were you preparing students for?

RM: Well, I think what we were looking at was a number of different things, realizing that, in the world of biology and just our whole society, being able to interact with different people is important. It is typical that it could be jobs in industry or jobs in government, whether it was Fish and Game sorts of things or whether it was working for CryoLife [Inc.] or some of the [other] local firms. Here again, and this is not different than a traditional Biology degree, a lot of it depends on what the student focuses in on as to where they are going to go.

I was hoping that at least part of it was to help fill the niche for the students. Obviously, what they wanted to do was the most important thing, but also we wanted to help some of the local agencies, whether it was a governmental or private sector agency. We've had some success in that. The other thing is we've had some of our successful graduates of the Master of Integrative Biology make it into grad school. I don't have details because since I've been out of [the dean's office], I don't know the names or anything. But I am pleased that it has been successful.

TS: Did you see any changes in new faculty that we hired from 1989 through 2012? Have the faculty coming in had different goals than maybe you did in 1989 or were they essentially the same?

RM: There is obviously a different faculty because, in part, we have changed in what we are looking for. We've brought in a number of faculty members who are much more research active and grant active. They are go-getters in their field. But I still think that we are bringing in faculty that are dedicated to our students and that truly like teaching. A lot of us came to Kennesaw, not because we could not get a position in an R1, but because we wanted to work at a school like KSU. Now admittedly, there are a finite number of those positions, but I think, more importantly, [an institution that valued students was] what our faculty wanted. To that degree, the answer is no. Part of my motivation and the motivation of the new people is the same.

Because of the changes, we can offer some more things to the faculty, specifically in terms of research. Here maybe I'm being a little biased towards the biologist that's in me, but we have startup funds to some degree, and we have lab space. That allows us to bring in a different group of people. But even in my current position, when I look at some of the faculty that we brought in—right now I'm in the process of reading promotion and tenure portfolios, which is wonderful for me as a biologist to see what

other people do in other disciplines—the faculty here are incredible. There are a lot of people that are doing a lot of really different things, but they are still dedicated to their students. A lot of them in the portfolios I'm reading talk, for example, about going to CETL [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning] workshops about teaching and pedagogy and stuff. So, yes, there are differences, but I still think there is this underlying current that transcends the almost thirty years that I've been here.

TS: To what degree do you think that department chairs and search committees are on the same page in what they are looking for?

RM: For the most part I think that they are on the same page. Sometimes there have been some miscommunications, and which direction that miscommunication came from I honestly don't know. As I think you are well aware, there has been a concern expressed by a number of faculty members about our R3 and now currently R2 status. They are concerned that more emphasis on scholarship or research is detrimental to Kennesaw. I get it. I do understand that. But I also go back to seeing that same evolution occur in the Biology Department. I'm going to sit here and argue to you that those changes in our faculty and the changes by having masters' degrees have made us a better institution for both undergraduates and graduates.

TS: I just wondered your reaction because I have oftentimes sensed that in hiring, the search committees were more focused on pushing us toward being an R1 than the administration was.

RM: Sometimes, I think that is true, and I think that is because in all of our fields that is in some ways an easier metric. You can just look at the number of publications or presentations or juried art, whatever is appropriate for your discipline, and count those things and say, "Well, this person is going to be the way to go." While we clearly need people like that, and I think that is a metric that we need to measure, there are some of the things that are maybe a little more intangible. Hopefully, that does come out when we have interviews with the candidates about purposefully coming to a Kennesaw State that is not an R1.

TS: Right. Well, you were interim dean for two years at the College of Science and Math, July 2010 to June 2012, between Larry Peterson and Mark Anderson. I had the sense that there were some internal problems in the college when Peterson left. Would you agree or disagree with that, and were there any problems you had to deal with as interim dean that had to do with those problems, if they existed?

RM: Yes, there were some problems. Some of it was probably the leadership style of Larry, number one. But also some of it was the direction that Larry was taking us. When Larry got here, the kinds of facilities we had or didn't have made it difficult to do the traditional scientific research. Larry saw an opportunity probably to do more things, to get more grant support, etc., by doing science education. I think we had always balanced people who were more discipline-oriented in terms of scholarship/research and those who were more SOTL-type of research, but the shift was going down that alley.

TS: SOTL was the scholarship of teaching and learning.

RM: Yes, sir. That I think concerned some people. Then there were some leadership issues that people were not happy with. When I got in there as dean, I tried to change a little bit of the culture to be more open about things, to say that while we still respected the scholarship of teaching and learning that doing more discipline-based scholarship was [valued]. I just have a different style of leadership, and so I did try to change a few things. I think I did start down a somewhat different path that we've continued on over there today.

TS: I think saw on your CV that you had a role in creating a Department of Computer Science in that period.

RM: Yes, that was an interesting thing.

TS: I thought we already had one.

RM: Well, what we had when I was the dean was we had a Department of Computer Science and Information Systems. To put it politely, there was some discord and disagreements amongst those faculty members about what their department was. When I analyzed it and looked at it, there were really two different groups of people. There were computer scientists who had primarily degrees in computer science or, if they had been here for a little while, had degrees in math, and there were the folks who had degrees in information systems. If I remember correctly, 100 percent of the faculty who had degrees in information systems all had degrees from business colleges.

TS: I was wondering about that.

RM: Yes. Of course, the computer scientists, as I said, had degrees in engineering or math or computer science or things along those lines. So here again, there was obviously overlap between the disciplines, but the backgrounds and the perspectives and the expectations were very different. So I went to the department, and I asked them, "What do you guys want to do? If splitting this department makes better sense for you, and if we can work more cohesively and in the long run serve the students, whether they are College of Science and Math students or College of Business students, if we are helping the students, then I would support splitting the department." Of course, some people thought I was nuts, giving resources away to the College of Business, but that was not the way I looked at it. I looked at what is going to be best for the faculty, which ultimately is what is best for the students. The faculty there decided to split, and so I supported that, Kat [Coles College of Business dean Kathy Schwaig] supported that, President [Daniel S.] Dan Papp supported it. [W.] Ken Harmon, who was the provost at the time, supported it. I mean, the people higher up the food chain than me supported it. So we ended up splitting the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems into the Department of Computer Science, which at that time stayed in Science and Math, and Information Systems went over to the Coles College of Business, where it exists today.

TS: Right, and so it was a happy division then, I guess.

RM: Yes, sir, it was. It was not forced on the faculty by administrators.

TS: Were you involved with tenure and promotion revisions as interim dean?

RM: I was.

TS: Can you talk about that a little?

RM: Well, it was just that we needed to have fairly clear guidelines that were established so that, number one, the faculty knew what was expected of them, but also, as we go up the chain to the department chair and the dean, the person should be judged in situation context. So I thought, and still think, that the best way to do that was to have relatively explicit guidelines that people can read. Now, it is not a checkbox, and people still have to use their professional judgment, but it provides a framework. I did encourage that. I pushed my chairs and departments to do that. Like everything, it's not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but I think it was a step in the right direction.

TS: One thing I'm very happy about is that I don't have to be on tenure and promotion committees anymore.

RM: You know, I haven't done tenure and promotion since I was the dean in 2012 until right now as the interim provost, where I'm reading them again. For the most part, it is a very interesting, time-consuming, experience, because you get to see things that people do, and it is really impressive. But there are hard decisions to make too, and that's not always fun.

TS: Do you think the decisions are being made increasingly on the basis of people's scholarship or their teaching?

RM: Neither. I think that it is the whole thing. Now, obviously, the scholarship is important, and if people have not been producing to a certain level, that clearly is going to ...

TS: They're not going to be full professors.

RM: They're not going to be full professors, and that's absolutely clear. Nowadays, because we have switched from tenure and promotion to promotion and tenure, where you have to be promoted first, there are the guidelines with the expectations of having the scholarship. But I've got to tell you, looking at the ones I've been reading, people still are taking teaching seriously, and when I say people, I mean at all the different levels, the candidates themselves, but the review committees, the chairs, the deans, and I am as well. I'm looking to see, yes, student evaluations, but I want to see that the faculty are being reflective, that the faculty are taking into consideration some of the comments, and that they are making changes because they see that it is necessary, or, if they're not, that they at least say, "Here is the reason why I'm not," which indicates that they're doing more than simply walking into the classroom, talking or whatever. So looking at the ones that I have read so far, both from my personal perspective in the provost role, but also looking at some of the comments that are being made by the levels that preceded me, that people still take this teaching seriously.

TS: I guess at the provost level, you are just getting the ones that were controversial coming to you.

RM: No, sir, I get all of them. Good, bad, or indifferent, I get all of them.

TS: Even if it is unanimous on the department level?

RM: Yes, I am still reading them. That's the good thing, Tom, about our system. I look at it as a series of checks and balances. I'm looking at it now from across campus. You can't compare the different disciplines by any stretch of the imagination, but you can see whether within that discipline the candidate has scholarship, is talking about service, and is talking about teaching. And not just talking about it, but there is something demonstrable. I think that most of us see the same thing, but it is an independent eye, and I think that is important.

TS: Did you have any aspirations to be the permanent dean in Science and Math?

RM: I did apply for that position, and did not get selected. When I started, it wasn't something that I was out to do. Once I was in the interim dean position, I went ahead and applied in big part because I had started certain things going, as I described earlier. Be it ego or whatever, I wanted to finish things. It's my personality not to stop in the middle of things and to see something through. But it didn't happen, and that was okay.

TS: They were looking for an outsider?

RM: Yes, sir, I think they were looking for an outsider. I think they were looking for someone who had more publications, or more recent publications, and more current research experience than I have, which is all true.

TS: Which is the way that we are changing as an institution.

RM: That's correct, yes.

TS: So you came over to the vice president for academic affairs office as, originally, associate vice president for faculty, and then eventually senior associate vice president for academic affairs.

RM: Correct.

TS: Could you talk about that? Why did you want to come here as opposed to going back to full-time teaching?

RM: I think the reason I accepted coming over here was because I felt I could contribute, that I had a lot of experience as a faculty member, as a department chair, and as a dean. I had been in all three of those positions, and so I can view things from those different perspectives. Then in my previous roles at different levels, I had been involved with a lot of different things on campus, especially writing things about policies and procedures. I

had been involved with all of that. What had happened was that Ken Harmon had come over a little bit before I had moved over here. He was now the provost, and the way Dan Papp was organizing things, and as big as we were getting and as complex as we were getting, Ken thought he needed to add another position up here to change things. [Valerie] Val Whittlesey was not just doing curriculum, but she was doing all sorts of things, including dealing with faculty issues, and what have you. It was just too much for one person. So Ken created the position of associate vice president for faculty. There were certain expectations about faculty development and helping with the faculty, dealing with faculty issues, that he had talked about. But some of it was also a little open-ended as to what the position was going to be. Given my administrative experience, I threw my name in the hat. It was only an internal search. This was not an external search. I know that they interviewed a couple of people, but I don't know all the details, and Ken selected me.

TS: What were your duties?

RM: A couple of different things. I oversaw faculty affairs, and that would be the office [of faculty and academic services] run by Lynn Lamanac and Jennifer Clarkson that deals, I would say, with the bureaucracy of academic affairs, the hiring, dealing with the faculty handbooks, making sure that policies are interpreted, and a very little bit of being a liaison with the Board of Regents. On the other side, it was supposed to be more faculty development, which kind of got waylaid because of consolidation, but eventually CETL got moved to report to me. So there was some faculty development. There were policy interpretations and guidance.

The biggest one is with tenure and promotion, doing the workshops for that during the promotion and tenure process. So if anybody, whether it is a department chair, a dean, or a faculty member, has questions about the process, they can come to me because in my job as associate vice president I was not in the direct line. So I can give advice and perspective, but I don't have a dog in the fight. I'm as neutral as I can be in giving advice, so hopefully that's a value added there. When there are other kinds of issues that deans or chairs have about their departments, whatever it is, the fact that I've worn all the different hats, I think, gives me an understanding of what the people are going through. When there are questions about interpretations of policy, oftentimes I'm the person making those. It is not necessarily in a vacuum. I may talk to Lynn Lamanac and ask about what is the board policy. Obviously, I talk to my boss, who would be the provost, and make sure that he or she is on the same page, if it comes down to that. But I do those sorts of things.

And then the other thing that it has evolved into is, quite frankly, just being the second for the provost. I do simple things for the provost like approving bylaws and guidelines before he sees them or she sees them, doing some of the bureaucracy of approving hiring and those sorts of things. So I try to take some of the burden off of the provost, and some of that is ad hoc, and some of it is just things that Ken and then Linda [M.] Noble, who was the interim provost before me, wanted me to do to take things off them. So I guess that is the ubiquitous other duties as assigned.

- TS: It sounds like, to some degree, you're an advocate for the faculty in these things, or you at least present a faculty point of view.
- RM: I try to do that as much as I can. That is correct. I work with the faculty. I attend the senate meetings, the faculty senate executive committee. I work with the president of the faculty senate very closely. I even have a good working relationship with the Ombud's office. If there are issues there, they can call me up, and we talk it out.
- TS: Would they come in and say something like, "You've got this problem over in the Chemistry Department"?
- RM: Heads up. That's exactly what it is. Obviously, they can't tell me specifics, but they can tell me that there are issues out there that might need to be addressed. And I still work with AAUP [American Association of University Professors]. Sometimes what I've done that started with them is [Christine B.] Chris Ziegler and [Timothy K.] Tim Hedeem, and then more recently Tim Hedeem and [Andrew L.] Andy Pieper, the three of us go out and do presentation to departments or colleges about what shared governance is. I've had some other conversations, either personal conversations or emails, like right now, with [Michael] Todd Harper, who is the current president of the AAUP. We communicate with each other when there are issues of concern. I try to bring those concerns up, when appropriate, to the provost or the president. By the same token, I also tell them, "Now wait a minute, guys, you need to understand this other perspective as well." So I do things that I hope facilitates the conversation and ultimately keeps blood pressures down and keeps us moving forward.
- TS: Well, it was just a little over a year after you became the associate vice president for faculty that the consolidation was announced. Why don't you talk about how that affected your job here?
- RM: Well, like everybody else's job, mine got affected. Originally, Ken said that what he envisioned for me was to do more faculty development. And clearly we need the faculty development. We need training of chairs that is better and more deliberate kinds of actions, and we're working on those things. But what happened with consolidation was that Dan asked me to co-chair a couple of the operational working groups, the OWGs, and just with everything else that went on with consolidation. Some of what I think Ken had originally envisioned that I would do basically got stopped. and all the focus was on the consolidation. Because of my history here and what I've done, I think I was able to reach out and help some of the transition, especially with the deans and the chairs down at SPSU [Southern Polytechnic State University]. Their roles were a little bit different than the deans and the chairs here. The way that things were structured was different. So I think I helped that transition. I clearly did co-chair a couple of the OWGs with people [from the Marietta campus].
- TS: Which ones?
- RM: One was with faculty policies and tenure and promotion, and I forget the name of the other one.

TS: Tenure and promotion became a bit controversial.

RM: Oh, it became very controversial, yes. It made sense for me to do those in the sense that I was already dealing with some of those issues here in my job at the time. Then the job transitioned to helping pull the two universities together. It fit in with what I was doing. But, obviously, all of us had to shift gears to work on the consolidation. We had some good groups of people with my OWGs, representatives of teaching faculty and administrative faculty. There were some disagreements at time, but I will tell you that people were always professional. There were no knockdown, drag-out fights, at least in my OWGs. I think by the time we worked through things, the final recommendations that we sent to that oversight committee and that eventually went to the president, we supported. So it worked out fine in the long run, but it was disruptive for all of us. It was a lot of work for all of us.

TS: What was your sense of culture of the Kennesaw campus, as opposed to the Marietta campus? Were they more of what we had been, do you think?

RM: That is exactly what it was. That was one of the things that I hoped that people would understand. It wasn't good or bad. It was just different. In many respects, because they were smaller, I could look down at Southern Poly and go, "Yes, what you are doing and how you are doing it makes good sense. That is exactly what we did fifteen years ago when we were about your size." The problem was that things at Kennesaw, the old Kennesaw, had to change as we got bigger. So I hopefully was able to help convey that it is what it is. The consolidation was not anybody's idea on either campus, but some of the policies and procedures and operations that they had just didn't scale, jumping from a school of seven or eight thousand roughly into a school of thirty-one thousand. I mean, it just didn't work.

TS: Did we do anything to help young faculty on that campus that still had tenure and promotion in front of them to meet the P&T guidelines, once consolidation took place?

RM: To some degree, the answer is yes. They may argue that maybe it wasn't enough. But one of the things we did—it turned out there were different ways of counting years of service. What we ended up doing was saying to those faculty members, "It's your choice. We can either move you on to the SPSU schedule or you can follow the Kennesaw schedule, which means you are going to come up earlier. Of course, if you are ready to do that, the sooner you are tenured and promoted the better for you. Or if you are more comfortable, we will go by the Southern Poly clock, which would essentially give you an extra year to come up to speed. Okay?"

So the first thing we did was give those faculty the choice of whichever one they thought was best for them. It was entirely their decision. We also tried to tell [administrators and P&T committees], and I think were successful, at least to some degree, that when faculty members came up for tenure and promotion, you needed to take their situational context into consideration. One of the things that became clear from the system office was that we were not going to have two different schools and two different systems. It is all one. For example, there may have been more scholarship expectations up here than down there. So the situational context was that maybe [faculty members on the Marietta

campus] were not all publishing at the level of journals, or maybe not as much. Now, could they not have any scholarship? No, that was not on the table. But filtering that and looking at that in terms of the person's perspective, when it came time to do the deliberations, you needed to take [the previous expectations on the two campuses] into consideration. I will say that, at least from what I know, the majority of the people who transitioned are doing fine.

There are exceptions, but the truth is I think there would have been [anyway]. By exception, I'm saying people who do not get tenured and promoted. But that was true of people who started at Kennesaw as well. Okay, so I don't think it was anything that was a direct result of the consolidation. So, yes, we tried from the perspective of the departments, to encourage people to take that into consideration, as well as some of the bureaucratic things on how we looked at the clock to give them the benefit, either way they saw it as a benefit.

TS: January of 2015 is when consolidation became official, and that is also the same time that your old home department divided into two, presumably because of consolidation, wasn't it?

RM: It was, in part. They had Biology down there [on the Marietta campus], and they had Physics down there. So the first thing, we pulled Physics out. The physicists that were in the Department of Biology and Physics at the old Kennesaw got put into the Department of Physics at the new Kennesaw. Number one, that was good for the physicists. For the biologists, even when I was the department chair, I had something like forty-three direct reports. It was a large department. There are a couple like that right now. English may have even more. There are obvious issues with having super big departments, or even moderately big, like forty-some-odd or fifty-some-odd people. That, I think, was part of the motivation. The other thing is, and this is not unusual, that biology departments split based on sub-disciplines. In this case, we had [a new Department of] Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology, versus [a new department of] Molecular and Cellular Biology. Having those splits in one way or another is fairly common. So I think that is probably part of the natural evolution.

TS: And I would think you could have gone either way, if you wanted, in terms of your own identity with a department.

RM: I could. I had, historically, feet in both fields or both perspectives. So you might say I'm a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. My current academic home is EEOB, not Molecular and Cellular. And the honest truth is, with the advances that have gone on in molecular and cellular, I'm not qualified. The new techniques and the things that they're doing, I haven't kept up with.

TS: I know the answer to this question, but I ask everybody. Did you have any inkling that the consolidation was going to take place before they announced it?

RM: No, sir.

- TS: Did anybody around here think. “This is really peculiar that they didn’t ask anybody’s opinion before they did it?”
- RM: I don’t think so. I say that there was an inkling, and maybe there was in the sense that they had already done the consolidations in North Georgia and Gainesville. So we knew the board was thinking of that. There were rumors going on that we might consolidate with Southern Poly or we might consolidate with Georgia Highlands. So there were some of those rumors going on. But in terms of the actual inkling from an official point of view of knowing that the hammer was about to fall or the shoe drop, I don’t think so.
- TS: We are starting back up again after a five-minute break. I think we probably covered consolidation enough, unless you can think of anything else.
- RM: No, that’s the bottom line. It is just the challenges that all of us, across the board on both campuses faced. Obviously, we are still dealing with some of those things, but, overall, I think we are making really good progress. Even though there were issues and concerns and what have you with the consolidation, I think, in retrospect, it has been a good thing. It offered a whole lot more opportunities for our students. The one thing I was hoping for that hasn’t quite come to fruition is that I think it actually offers more opportunities for our faculty, whether they are in engineering, for example, or computer science or Science and Math or WellStar [College of Health and Human Services or Humanities and Social Sciences. I mean, stuff going on with Information Security or whatever—there are policy issues that folks in your college, the Humanities and Social Sciences [could implement]. So I think if we were a little bit more proactive in reaching out, that we would see those opportunities. That is where I’m optimistic that it will still take a little while longer, but we are going to get there. A couple of years from now [we can say], “Yes, it was rough; no arguments about that. But, overall, it has helped both the students and our faculty and staff.”
- TS: Well, from my perspective, it has been fabulous to have the two campuses together. I’ve done a number of interviews down there [on the Marietta campus].
- RM: Oh, cool, okay.
- TS: So it gave me a chance to get to know some people that I wouldn’t have known otherwise.
- RM: Yes, exactly.
- TS: And we have some good folks that came to this campus from their campus too, like [Albert J.] Al Churella in History and [Thomas E.] Tom Rotnem in Political Science.
- RM: Absolutely. Yes, Al is interesting, all his stuff on the trains. I like talking to him about that.
- TS: Pennsylvania Railroad and all that [Albert J. Churella, *The Pennsylvania Railroad*, Vol. 1, *Building an Empire, 1846-1917* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2013); and *From*

*Steam to Diesel: Managerial Customs and Organizational Capabilities in the Twentieth-Century American Locomotive Industry* (Princeton University Press 1998)].

RM: Yes.

TS: To me, it is really depressing to think how little the faculty on the two campuses knew about each other before the consolidation. Just think how many opportunities that consolidation has created.

RM: Yes.

TS: Well, I want to turn next to our controversies of the last few years. Since 2016, we've experienced five presidents on the Kennesaw campus. If you go back to 2014, the Marietta campus has had seven presidents, from [Lisa A.] Rossbacher [and SPSU's last interim president Ron R. Koger] to [Pamela S.] Whitten. On the Kennesaw campus, from Dan Papp, we have had interim president Houston [D.] Davis, president Samuel S. Olens, interim president W. Ken Harmon, and Pamela Whitten, five in just two years.

RM: Right.

TS: One of the things I've heard big time from the deans that I've interviewed in the last year, [Robert H.] Robin Dorff among them, was that there was a certain degree of frustration. Just as soon as they explained to one president what their college was doing, we had another one in place, and they had to start all over again. First of all, let me ask you, did you see any of this coming when Dan Papp announced his retirement in 2016?

RM: No, I personally did not. I happened to be in the Convocation Center hospitality suite waiting for the graduation that evening when the doors were shut, and Dan made the announcement.

TS: Were you really?

RM: Yes, and you could have heard a pin drop. It surprised everybody big time, myself included. I'm not in a position to know that [kind of thing]. It was obviously above my pay grade, but it really surprised everybody when that happened. Then the subsequent rollercoaster with all these interims—I agree with what Robin must have told you, without knowing exactly what he said, but frustration may not even be a strong enough word to describe what has been going on with the topsy-turvy leadership and lack of direction and just duplication of effort, as you're trying to bring new people on board. It's been a very challenging time, definitely so.

TS: Were there any challenges for you in particular in any areas that you deal with?

RM: Well, not for me personally in one sense because I'm one step below the president, and I'm insulated by the provost. So my job goes on. But, having said that, where it does affect me is the fear, the consternation, the uncertainty, sometimes the lack of communication, and the fact that it has caused concerns and consternation amongst the faculty, which percolates up to me. So when I'm trying to deal with faculty issues and

trying to do my best to allay concerns, I try to keep things going on a certain course, and say, “Look, guys, we still have students to teach. You guys still do what you do.” Nonetheless, because of all the changes that happened and the rapidity at which they happened, morale has gotten low. It is probably the lowest I’ve ever seen it.

I know in general faculty members are always going to complain about certain things, but, you know, we [at KSU] have always had such a positive attitude about things, and we’ve taken things in stride. It’s not that I don’t think we’re taking things in stride now, but it makes it more difficult. So when I deal with those things, it’s hard to know what to say. Sometimes I don’t know who to talk to. Or sometimes I may say something today, and then if the president changes tomorrow, it may be a completely different thing. So when Robin says there is frustration, I completely agree with him. I’ve seen that when I sit on the deans’ council, because I’m a member of that. Those are concerns. It makes it really hard for the deans to provide the leadership if they are not sure what the person at the top wants to do. So I’ve definitely seen that, and it definitely has made things more difficult.

TS: So when you were in the meeting in the Convocation Center before the spring 2016 graduation, and Dan Papp made the surprise announcement that he was going to retire, and, of course, he was not forthcoming on really why he was retiring at that time, was everybody in there scratching their heads and saying, “There’s got to be more to the story”?

RM: Well, I think people probably thought that because people didn’t know, but initially I’m not sure that was the first thing that crossed their minds. I think the first thing truly was kind of a shock. Maybe there were other people who knew things that I didn’t, but it caught me flatfooted. I was just flabbergasted that Dan said he was going to step down, effective, I think, at the end of June? Well, somebody said, “You mean June next year [2017], right? That you’re giving a year’s notice?” And when he goes, “No, I’m giving a month’s notice,” or whatever it was, once again, people were just surprised at that, myself included.

TS: I’m sure everybody thought, “How is this going to affect my area?”

RM: Absolutely, yes.

TS: Well, I think probably the good news from your perspective in all of this is that the problems that we’ve had had absolutely nothing to do with academic affairs.

RM: This is absolutely true. We’ve managed to hold a steady course.

TS: Did you have any inkling of the problems that surfaced in the audits after Dan Papp announced his retirement? Did you have any inkling that we had problems with food services and so on?

RM: No, that was completely out of my lane, and the fact that some of those issues surfaced, especially from the financial part of it, no, sir, I did not.

TS: How would you rate Dan Papp's performance from an academic affairs perspective?

RM: I always thought Dan did a good job. He was very open with people, at least to the degree that a president can be. He was very approachable. I always thought that he was trying to develop leaders in people around here. One thing I can remember, Tom—this happened not very frequently, because I'm at a second level and don't directly deal with the president very often—but I can remember a couple of times emailing at 10:00 or 11:00 at night. Once it was me and Dan and Ralph Rascati. There may have been somebody else, but we were all sitting there, and it's Dan. It was not wait until the morning. He was in there, and there was a give-and-take in these email exchanges. The fact that he had that kind of approach, I always liked and respected.

TS: I've had that experience too of sending him an email at 10:00 at night, not expecting to hear anything for a month, and getting a response in fifteen minutes.

RM: Exactly, yes, and that is just the kind of guy Dan is.

TS: Well, of course, you were reporting to the provost and not to the president, but how did things work out with Houston Davis?

RM: The very little that I interacted with Houston in the short amount of time he was here was positive. Obviously, Houston came in and had to do some heavy lifting in terms of some reorganization and what happened after that, but I also found Houston approachable. I thought that given his background and his understanding of academics, he understood a fair amount about the heart and soul of what a university is. From my perspective, which quite honestly was quite limited—he never tried to come down, at least directly, to say to do something in my shop—everything was positive. I liked Houston. I liked Houston, just to talk to. He is a nice guy.

TS: Were you surprised he didn't get the permanent job?

RM: Yes, I think a little bit. I think a lot of us were. A lot of us felt that Houston would have made a good president here. I think he is probably making a good president right now at [the University of] Central Arkansas. With the background that he had and the perspective that he had, at the time we thought that he had good rapport with the folks down at the Board of Regents, that he understood that level of politics, and that that would be something good for Kennesaw.

TS: What happened with Sam Olens?

RM: The little that I knew Sam, he was a real nice guy, very personable kind of guy, but given the politics and how he was put in here, that was really unconscionable the way it happened.

TS: Being appointed without a national search?

RM: Being appointed without a search and being appointed with somebody who has no academic background. I realize that does happen in other places, but that was highly

problematic, and that was not the way to help Kennesaw expand. But it was the politics of the State of Georgia, and I get that. My attitude with Sam, like I say, he was a real nice guy, real personable, but in my personal opinion, they didn't do him a favor by appointing him. He was a fish out of water, and they didn't help him.

I know there was a lot of controversy amongst the faculty, at least some of them, which I completely get and understand, but I also felt that there was nothing any of us could do about how he got here. It was what it was, and even if I disagreed with how it happened, which I did, you've got to give the man a chance, both for his personal sake, but also for the sake of Kennesaw.

We needed to help the guy succeed because it was in our selfish interest to help him succeed. It was in his interest too, but I always approach things, whether it's the presidents, or just my attitude as an assistant chair or a chair or a dean or AVP or even now as the provost, that it is a team effort. It is not about the one person. We all have different jobs to do. Clearly, the higher up the food chain you go, you have a different perspective on things. You have to. But realizing that, that just means that if I'm part of a team, and the president tells me now to do something as provost, I'm going to be honest, and I'll push back, and I will argue, and I will give my best advice, but we're here to help each other. At the end, I will support the president's decision as part of the team. That is the way I try to approach things.

TS: It obviously affected you when Ken Harmon became interim president.

RM: Correct.

TS: Talk about how that affected your job.

RM: Well, it made it more complicated, especially with Linda Noble being here. When she came here, there were certain things that Ken and she, or eventually Pam Whitten, and she were trying to do. Knowing that she was going to be relatively short time, she did ask me to do, shall we say, more things that the provost would do. I don't mean the personnel issues or some of the big policy issues that had to be done, but to pick up some of the slack on the more bureaucratic things. So I did that. Then there were certain things where she would make the policy, but the implementation and the interpretation did in fact fall on my lap. One example is when she put out the new workload policy, which I had seen in advance, and I knew it was coming. But when she sent out the email, the very last sentence was something to the effect, "If you have questions, call Ron Matson." My thought was, "Oh, thanks, Linda. You just threw me under the bus." But that was not the intent, and I say it jokingly.

TS: Did you get a lot of flak from it?

RM: I didn't get a lot of flak from it, no. Of course, with Linda, she and I have known each other for a long time, and so it was fine. In all seriousness, the truth is because of my position, interpreting those things would naturally fall on my lap. Now, there has obviously been a lot of concern and consternation about that workload policy, so to that degree, yes. I got flak, but I didn't get flak in a personal sense.

- TS: I was surprised. I thought that she would stay as interim provost until we had a permanent provost. Why did she go back to the regents?
- RM: Well, she didn't go back to the regents. She retired. When Sam stepped down [in February 2018], Linda had already retired from the Board of Regents. She had moved to Savannah. I don't know if Ken Harmon or [chancellor] Steve [W.] Wrigley asked her to come up here to be the interim provost. She literally came out of retirement because of her dedication and respect for and love of Kennesaw State. She came out to do this job as interim provost. She intended it to be a fairly short gig and go back to being retired. My understanding is that when Dr. Whitten got here, Pam asked Linda to stay on for a little while longer. And so Linda said, "yes," but apparently had told Pam that this wasn't going to be indefinite. They had set, I guess, the 1 November date. And so Linda tried to do some of the assignments that Pam had given her, and on 1 November she just went back to retirement. She was tired, she had put in a whole lot of effort since February to November, and it's a well-deserved retirement for her.
- TS: So at that point you became the interim provost.
- RM: That is correct, yes.
- TS: Now, I gather that they weren't happy with the search [for permanent provost], and they've extended the search. What's going on with that?
- RM: That one I really don't know a whole lot about, Tom. I am not on the committee. I don't go asking people. I don't like to put people in a bad position. Either the candidate declined or Dr. Whitten didn't think it was a good fit, whatever. So they just went ahead and extended the search. I believe that with this extended search, the candidates have until 7 January 2019 to apply. I do know that the committee has been asked to have a fairly short turnaround on finding candidates. I'm assuming that they'll be brought into campus in February, and then Dr. Whitten will go from there and negotiate and make a decision, whatever the case may be.
- TS: So at least for another couple of months, you're going to be interim provost, it looks like.
- RM: It looks that way, yes. [Editor's note: On 29 January 2019 President Whitten announced the selection of Kathy "Kat" Schwaig, dean of KSU's Coles College of Business, as KSU's new provost, effective 18 February 2019].
- TS: So how has that been? Have you enjoyed being interim provost?
- RM: It is very interesting. I'm pretty tired and exhausted because I still have my old job as well, so I'm doing two jobs. I did that because trying to get somebody to take my old job just for a couple months is more work [than it is worth]. But if I were staying in this job longer, I would have to get help there. So it is very tiring, and it is very frustrating in those respects. It is interesting in many respects. Certain things that have not been in my lane for a long time, I'm having to come back up to speed on. A good example is curriculum because, you know, Valerie Whittlesey, who is the associate vice president of curriculum, stepped down in December from that position to go back to faculty. She is

gone, and I've appointed Dr. [Pamela B.] Pam Cole who was an associate dean over in Bagwell [College of Education] to be Val's replacement on an interim basis.

So I've had to learn about that. As I talked about earlier, I'm now reviewing promotion and tenure, so I'm seeing that sort of thing writ large. So that part is very interesting. It is interesting to be in discussions, like with the president's cabinet and such. Even at this stage in my career and being sixty-five years old, I'm still learning new things. And so that's very good. I would like to think in this transition that I'm helping the president with her mission, but I'm also doing some of the things I've been doing for the last umpteen years, and that's presenting different perspectives and trying to communicate what we're doing. That part has been really interesting. It's both frustrating at times and very, very tiring, but it is also very interesting and rewarding.

TS: What are your long-range plans?

RM: Well, that's a good question. I've been here a little over twenty-nine years. I'm in the optional retirement plan, so I can retire any time I want. I don't have to wait for Teachers Retirement [System of Georgia]. I see myself retiring within the next couple of years, a year or two. It just depends. In part I'm waiting to see what Cheryl does. Cheryl Matson, my wife, is the director of operations for KSU's undergraduate admissions. When we retire, I hope to do some more traveling. We both like to travel a lot. I'll probably have to learn some new hobbies since I don't really have any. All I do right now is work, and that is all I've done for thirty years.

TS: Go back out in nature.

RM: Yes, bird watch and do stuff like that, exactly. That is on the not too distant horizon. It is not tomorrow, but a lot closer than it was when I started in 1989.

TS: What has kept you at KSU all these years?

RM: The people and what we've done. I've had a sense of helping to move the place forward and being part of a team that has been interested in building. It has been a great group of people to work with. I think we can honestly say that what we as faculty and staff do in terms of supporting students and getting our students an excellent degree at, relatively speaking, a very low cost has been a fantastic job. The fact that I'm part of that, and that I've been allowed to have different roles that keep me fresh and give me different perspectives, has been an opportunity. Another thing is we like living here, geographically. It's a convenient place. We like having seasons.

We had two daughters. One of them, our older daughter Monica, now lives back here in Georgia. Monica is a KSU graduate. She recently moved back here from Seattle. Our younger daughter, Diana, is in the Peace Corps right now in China. When she comes back, she will be here. She is in Gansu Province [in north-central China] about a five-hour bus ride to the west of Xi'an, which is where the terracotta soldiers are. She is there teaching English to freshmen at the Gansu Medical College. But, anyway, we have some family, our daughters, so as long as they are here, we will see what happens. But it has been a fantastic place to work. As I tell people, the bad news is that I've been at

Kennesaw for thirty years. I only know Kennesaw. I don't have the experience that some people have by going to multiple institutions. The good news is I've been here for thirty years, almost. I understand the history here. I've seen it change. I have been part of that change. I have played a role that I truly think has made Kennesaw a better place to be.

TS: Well, the latest change: our interview was delayed a half-hour because the president popped in to tell you that we are an R2 now.

RM: That's correct.

TS: Can you talk about what that is going to mean for us?

RM: In a practical sense not a lot. President Whitten has said that what she wants us to be is the best R3 institution. Mike [L.] Dishman, who is the dean of the graduate college, and [Donald J.] Don McGarey [professor of biology and interim vice president for research] and some other people have been doing a lot of work to find metrics as to what that means. We are trying to come up with ways to show that we were the best R3, or what it takes to get to the best. We are not necessarily there. But in terms of improving graduation rates, in terms of getting higher retention numbers, in terms of increasing scholarship and getting more grant dollars, and reaching out to the community, all of those sorts of things that we can probably have benchmarks and metrics to measure. I think that is still what we are doing. Within the last couple days, Carnegie has changed classifications, and essentially done away with the R3, and we're now classified as R2.

TS: So there aren't any R3s anymore?

RM: No, the old R3 is now called doctoral/professional. There are still three categories, R1, R2, and this doctoral/professional group. So there are still the three categories, but they just don't give that bottom one an R designation. To that degree, things didn't change. We still need to improve the things that the president wants us to improve. We still need to go out and increase scholarships. We need to help educate our students and our community. So I think that will be there. I think some of the benchmarks are already going to be there. Now, obviously, we are in a different group. It did pull out certain things, and I think it does mean we are in a more select group, maybe is the way to say it. But I think that is something that is well deserved. It is something that there are numbers there to show that we should be in those categories.

TS: Well, is the primary factor how many doctorates you turn out?

RM: In the new definition, it is at least twenty research/scholarship doctoral degrees during the upgrade year and at least \$5 million in research expenditures. Those are the two characteristics.

TS: So external funding?

RM: Well, it's external plus internal, but whatever. Those were the new criteria by which Carnegie redefined these things. We meet both of those criteria. The way they

reclassified it, does it change anything substantially? Probably not. Does it recognize who we are and what we have become? I think it really does. And so to that degree, I think it is well-deserved recognition. I think that's good. Here again, that is a whole lot different than the school I started at in 1989, or the school you started at before I did.

TS: In 1968 when Kennesaw was a junior college.

RM: Okay, so you've even got a whole heck of a lot more perspective than I do. Both of us have seen a whole lot of change, you obviously much more than I have. But I hope you agree that it has been a great place to be.

TS: Absolutely! I am about out of questions. Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we haven't?

RM: No, I think we've ended up covering a lot of things directly or indirectly. Like I say, it has been a really good experience for me. I'm very glad that when Dorothy Zinsmeister called me back in 1989 and offered me the job, I accepted it. It was a good choice in the long run on my part. I also want to thank you, Tom, for doing this. One of the things I do want to say is that I've known you for many years. That was the other neat thing. When we were smaller, I did get to meet people and work with people on committees across campus. Whether it was some of the faculty, like you, and Hugh [C.] Hunt [associate professor of philosophy], and [Thomas H.] Tom Keene [professor of history], and [Kenneth P.] Ken Gilliam in business [professor of economics and Coles College associate dean for undergraduate programs], or some of the staff, like [Robert W.] Bob Eisenhardt [director of auxiliary services] and other people like him, or [William H.] Bill Wallace [Jr., director of personnel services], or whatever.

I could name all kinds of names. That also helped a lot. I learned a lot and got different perspectives from different people. One of the things I used to do is when I was the chair, I would have lunch with [Joseph D.] Joe Meeks, who was the dean of the College of the Arts. So we had a biologist and a musician, and being able to have that kind of an interaction and learn from different people with different perspectives has also been good for me personally. But it has also been, I think, good professionally for all of us, and that was a great opportunity that we've had all along here at Kennesaw.

TS: Well, one of the great things about doing these interviews is I get to talk to people from all over campus.

RM: Yes, and you learn new things and get different perspectives, and it's fun, and it's interesting, and it's hopeful. So, anyway, I thank you, both as a former colleague, but also as a person leading this interview. I'm truly honored that you would consider me for part of your project. That was really cool when you asked me to do this. So I thank you very much for that.

TS: Thank you for the interview.

RM: My pleasure.

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