

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH RALPH W. WALKER, III

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KSU Oral History Series No. 74  
Interview with Ralph W. Walker III  
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Wednesday, 9 May 2007  
Location: CIE/CETL House, Kennesaw State University

TS: Ralph, why don't we just begin, as we do in all these interviews by just asking you when and where you were born and a little bit about your background?

RW: All right. Well, I was born September of '55 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. My father was born there. His mother and father were both born there. At six months of age my father moved our family to the panhandle of Florida, Marianna, Florida. He took a position as director of what was then the Florida School for Boys and my mother was a guidance counselor at Chipola Junior College. Then when I was eight years old my father became a professor of psychology at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama, so our family moved there. Then in 1970, the year I was fourteen, a week before I started the tenth grade my father relocated us to Marietta, Georgia, not far here from the university. So I went to Wheeler High School and graduated in '72, and that's what initially brought me here to what was then Kennesaw Junior College.

TS: What did your father do after he came here? He obviously was Ralph Walker, II.

RW: He was Ralph Walker, II. My father—I like to tease—wasn't able to keep a job much! I'm being facetious. He had gotten his Ph.D. in psychology from Auburn University while he had been director of the Florida School for Boys, and that's why we moved into Jacksonville, Alabama, so he could teach. But while he was living in Alabama he drove two, sometimes three nights a week, for six years from Alabama to Emory University Law School at night. At the time they had a night program. So the reason we moved here in 1970 was because he had taken and passed the Georgia bar and wanted to start practicing as an attorney. He set up a firm in Marietta, which later became Walker and Walker.

TS: After you joined it?

RW: Well, actually it was after my older brother joined it. My mother, a sister, and a brother all became attorneys, so I was one of five attorneys in a family. They practiced for many years. My father, then, after he became an attorney here then started going to medical school and eventually became a medical doctor and then he did a residency in psychiatry and became what was called a forensic psychiatrist. When people claimed to be insane, he would go in for the state; and being an attorney and a psychiatrist and a psychologist, he would go in and determine whether they were just crazy or really mean.

TS: Legally insane?

RW: Right. So what brought us here was he had started practicing law and I went to Kennesaw Junior College and then Georgia State [University].

TS: Sounds like he had trouble making up his mind.

RW: Yes, he did. That's why I tease him that, "You just weren't one for keeping a job, were you, dad?"

TS: Right. I know you've got a brother also named Ralph.

RW: That's correct. There's a history behind that. My sisters take great delight in teasing, if we're both at the same gathering, saying, "This is my brother Ralph and this is my other brother, Ralph." Sort of like Daryl and Daryl in the *Bob Newhart Show*. My older brother's got a different middle name. In the family we all call him Jerry, Ralph Gerald Walker, and I'm Ralph Waldo Walker, III, named after my father who was named after an uncle.

TS: And he's Ralph Gerald?

RW: He's Ralph Gerald Walker, so we call him Jerry, but publicly he goes by Ralph. He started that in college. It was quite a thing sometimes at home. People would call and ask to speak to Ralph Walker, and there was a point in time after my brother got out of law school that he came back to live at home for a little bit, and I wasn't out yet. They'd say, "Which one?" They'd say, "Well, the lawyer." They'd say, "Which one of those?" They'd say, "Well, the son." They'd say, "All right, well there's two of them, which one of those?" People always thought we were kidding around or lying [laughter].

TS: Did your mother have a law degree before your father did?

RW: Afterwards. My father had graduated from Emory in 1970. My mother decided to go to law school at my father's urging and somewhat as an afterthought. My mother was a guidance counselor at Wheeler High School, so she went to Woodrow Wilson College of Law and graduated in '74. Reportedly—she never wanted this spoken or didn't want this publicized—but supposedly she was the oldest person to have taken and passed the bar at the time. At that time she was in her 50s. She graduated in '74 and that's the year I started law school that fall. She was an attorney after my father was.

TS: What's your mother's name?

RW: Naomi Filbeck Walker. She was originally from North Carolina, and her grandfather, her father's father, was the last living Confederate soldier in North Carolina. He was fifteen and fought in the Battle of Gettysburg and lived to be ninety-five. The governor at the time came and spoke at his funeral. But she's from North Carolina and was a Filbeck and then met my father in Hot Springs and he was a Walker.

- TS: Well, let me just ask you a little bit about coming out of high school in '72. With your family background you must have had good grades and all that.
- RW: Well, not really [laughter]. My wife graduated magna cum laude and I tell people I got "laude how come." But I did okay. I made decent grades.
- TS: Well, I guess my question was why did you pick Kennesaw Junior College in 1972?
- RW: Well, I had heard very good things about Kennesaw Junior College. Part of it was simply that it was close to home, part of it was economics, and part of it was this: I had started school when I was five and then I had skipped a grade my senior year—I graduated as a junior really from high school—and I knew that I wanted to go to law school. I had known from the time I was five years old. So my purpose in my education, particularly of that of college, was to get in, to get a good foundation, to get through, so I could go on and be an attorney. I felt that it would be smart of me to go to Kennesaw Junior College because I could get a good foundation for an education. It wasn't a four-year school at the time or I'd have stayed here all four years. So it was because I felt like it would be a very, very good place for me to get an education and go on to law school.
- TS: What was your impression of Kennesaw Junior College after you got here?
- RW: Well, first of all, I liked the fact that it was small at the time. It was nearby. It was local. I had a few friends that were here. But I have to tell the truth that my appreciation for Kennesaw grew as the years went by—and it didn't take long. It grew by leaps and bounds after I had transferred from here and gone on to Georgia State. I actually did transfer for two quarters—back then it was a quarter system—and I went two quarters to the University of Georgia because I thought then, after having been here two years that I wanted to get away.
- TS: So you got an associate degree from here?
- RW: I did, but now, it didn't happen quite in that order, Tom. I lacked a quarter or two from getting my associate's degree. I was in the middle really of my second year when I transferred over to University of Georgia. While I had a wonderful experience there, academically, I wasn't doing well at all. It wasn't the right thing, so I came back here for one quarter, which was the spring of '75 and got my two-year degree. There were two quarters that I was at the University of Georgia after having started here and then came back here one more quarter and got my degree. I was armed with the two-year degree and then transferred to Georgia State and did my junior and senior years. But just the experience both at University of Georgia and later at Georgia State I have for many years told many people that, far and away, not even closely, far and away the best education I got, what I learned the most, what I took the most from, was the two years here at Kennesaw. I felt like the professors—they were smaller classes for me, they were more attentive, the professors were. It was a better fit for me. While I liked and appreciated

the time I was here while I was here, I came very quickly to appreciate it a lot more after I was gone, even while I was still in college. If I had to do it over again, I would do exactly the same thing. I'd come back here and start here, and if it were a four-year institution as it was by the time my wife graduated, I would have gone all four years here. My wife has said the same thing.

TS: She graduated from here?

RW: She graduated from here with a four-year degree in biology in '81, the year that Dr. [Horace W.] Sturgis was leaving and Dr. [Betty L.] Siegel was coming in, [and] then went on to Emory Dental School. She said far and away the best education she got was here at Kennesaw. So we both feel that way.

TS: Wow. Other than the lousy history professors you had . . . [laughter].

RW: No, I had a very good one named Dr. Tom Scott [laughter].

TS: Are there any mentors or any one that particularly stands out?

RW: Yes, as a matter of fact, a couple of them do. One was Dr. Ira [B.] Guy. Ira was a mathematics professor. He ended up marrying a cousin of mine, but Ira was a very good mentor to me, and so was Tom [Thomas L.] Gooch.

TS: So two from math.

RW: Yes, both from math. It's kind of interesting because I ended up for a couple of years putting down as my major mathematics. I think it was because of their teaching and my interest was directly tied to them and their abilities, so I became very interested in mathematics and majored in it. Finally, in my third year at Georgia State, I switched to psychology because I was in law school at night at the time and going to college during the day at Georgia State, and I thought, "Why am I beating my brains out? I know I want to be an attorney. I'm going to ease up a little bit on the mathematics." They were two people. And there were a bunch of nice people here. I really liked all the teachers that I had. Dr. [George H.] Beggs was a very good professor for me for political science. Pam [Pamela J.] Rhyne had been, ironically, my high school biology teacher at Wheeler High school and then came here. So there were several people who helped me, but I'd say Tom Gooch and Ira Guy became what I would call friends afterwards.

TS: Afterwards? After you got through their classes?

RW: After I got through their classes. But I liked them during the classes.

TS: Were they helpful to you later on?

RW: They were. There were times when I called Ira just about life advice in the intervening years, and there were a few times I spoke to Tom Gooch afterwards.

TS: Are you still in contact with them?

RW: No, I'm not. I haven't spoken to Tom in probably three or four years, and I haven't spoken to Ira in probably ten years. He and my cousin are no longer married. He went on, ironically, and became a dentist.

TS: Oh, he did. I didn't know that.

RW: He went to Augusta, the Medical College of Georgia and opened a practice out that way. They have two children, a son and a daughter. Then my wife went on to dental school, but I haven't talked to Ira probably in ten years.

TS: Okay, so you got through Kennesaw, and did you get a bachelor's from Georgia State?

RW: Yes. I had my Associate's Degree from Kennesaw in what was called pre-law, and I got that degree in '75. I got my Bachelor of Science in Psychology in '76, and I got my law degree in '77, so in three years I had a two-year degree, a four-year degree and a law degree. But what I did was that after I graduated from Kennesaw I had applied to and gotten into Woodrow Wilson College of Law where my mother had gone to law school. It was located down in Atlanta. During the day I would go to Georgia State, and I finished my junior and senior years in college during the day while I did my first two years of law school at night. I graduated from college in '76, and then my senior year of law school I was only in law school. Now I held a couple of jobs, but that enabled me to really study for the bar. The bar was given twice a year, in February and I believe July—so February of my senior year they allowed seniors to take the bar if they wanted to. I graduated and had to wait another week or two—in May they gave the results—I had to wait another week or two to get sworn in. But I found out I'd passed the bar before I graduated from law school.

TS: That's great to pass the first time, I understand.

RW: Well, I was very, very relieved and happy and glad to do that. It was a relief to me because I wanted to be done with it and had some pressure with a father and a mother and a brother and a sister who had all passed the bar.

TS: Right. So you hadn't gotten married at that time?

RW: No, I had started law school when I was eighteen, so I was twenty-one when I had passed the bar. Now I had met the girl of my dreams, a French foreign exchange student, Corinne, when I was twenty years old, in December of '75. She was a sixteen-year-old high school exchange student here for the year from France, living with a family that my family was friends with. My family rented a house from this particular family, Dr. McClain, and he had five children. His oldest daughter had wanted an exchange student and my wife was their exchange student that first year.

TS: What's Dr. McClain's first name?

RW: William R. McClain who is a pediatrician for probably forty years in Marietta Pediatrics over behind [WellStar] Kennestone Hospital. His oldest daughter is now an ob-gyn. They had this exchange student named Corinne, and my mother kept coming home and telling me the McClains had an exchange student and she was here from France and she had been here six months and had not been out on a date and wouldn't I consider asking her out. I'm thinking okay, six months and no date, uh, I bet she cooks well or . . . personality; you know how it is when you're twenty. Then one day I was over at their house, and this girl came walking through. My jaw dropped, and I said, "Who is that?" They said, "Oh, that's Corinne our foreign exchange student from France." I went home that night and I said . . . .

TS: You did your duty [laughter].

RW: Yes, I said, "Mama, I thought about it, I think that girl needs a date there." She said, "You saw her didn't you, honey?" I said, "Yes, why didn't you tell me?" We were married September of '79, and we're coming up on our twenty-eighth anniversary. I like to tell her it's the best twenty-eight years of her life [laughter]! We have four children; our oldest son Jonathan is about to turn twenty-six, and then a son, Nicholas, who is nineteen, a son, Jeremy, who just turned eighteen, and a daughter, Alexia, who is soon to be sixteen. The three younger ones have gone to the Walker School in Marietta. The oldest is working, and the second one is finishing his first year of college. Then we have a rising senior and a rising sophomore. My wife went on to Kennesaw. After she had finished her year at Sprayberry High School, she then had to go back to France to . . . .

TS: She went to Sprayberry, not Wheeler?

RW: She went to Sprayberry, not Wheeler. Technically, I lived in the Sprayberry district, living in the house that this family, the McClains owned. Because my mother was a guidance counselor at Wheeler I ended up going to Wheeler, but we lived in the Sprayberry district. Corinne had to go back July 16. It was her birthday in '76, her first year was up, and she had to go back to France for a year. The school system there has an exit exam called the baccalaureate that you must take to graduate from high school. Just that you've completed it doesn't get you a degree. The system there didn't count her high school year here as anything, so they said, "You're coming back here, and you're still the equivalent of a junior." But she made an appointment with and spoke to the director of the school, the equivalent of a principal, and asked, "Could I try to do two years in one?" No one had ever done that, but they said, "Okay, you can try." And she passed her baccalaureate, and her parents said, "Okay, you can come back to the U.S." So we corresponded during that year mostly by sending each other cassette tapes. At the time, the price of a phone call to France was \$6.75 if they answered the phone and \$2.25 a minute. It's hard to imagine in '76 the price of phone calls was astronomically more expensive than today.

TS: No cell phone and no Internet.

RW: No cell phone, no Internet. So she was there for a year, and then she came back here. That's when she applied to Kennesaw and got in. It was transforming into a four-year school, so she was here all four years at Kennesaw. We did have a little bit of a surprise—we were married September 1 of '79 and in September of '80 I flew with her to France. We spent two weeks to celebrate our one-year anniversary and came back and lo and behold she was pregnant with our first child. It was rare back then for a student to be married, but particularly to be married and to be pregnant and to be going to college. Corinne was a senior at that point, and her due date was May 15 of '81. Corinne was an outstanding student. She made just straight A's basically. She had majored in biology. She wanted to go to medical school, she felt, at the time, and all of her professors said, "Well, Corinne you're such a good student, you've done so well, when you have the baby May 15 you're exempt from your final exams, and we're going to all come and see you at the hospital." She was really excited about that. May 15 came and went, May 20, May 30, finally, June 4, 1981, she comes home and she plops down at the kitchen table, and she says, "Well, I've taken my last final exam of my last course of my last quarter of college."

TS: She didn't get out of finals.

RW: Didn't get out of it. June 4, about midnight, she goes into labor, and he was born June 5. So she's told him over the years, "You're responsible for me having had to take all those final exams. If you'd come when you were expected I wouldn't have had to take any of those finals." It was interesting, the date of graduation. He was seven days old, and she was bound and determined that she was going to walk through the line and she did. I still remember there was a woman who was there in a wheel chair. She had had a baby that morning, and she went through the receiving line. So there were two ladies who got their degrees on June 12 of '81, so it was very interesting.

TS: I guess Gene [Eugene R.] Huck presided over that graduation.

RW: Yes, I believe that's correct.

TS: He was the acting president because Betty hadn't come in yet.

RW: You know what, that's correct, that's true. The air conditioning didn't work that evening either in the gymnasium.

TS: I'm not even sure we had air conditioning in the gymnasium.

RW: Well, you know, it may have been that was the case; it may have been not air-conditioned.



TS: I remember Dr. Sturgis had to just unzip that robe up front when he was trying to—because we graduate in May now, but this was like the second week of June, I guess, when we held the ceremonies.

RW: Yes, it was. It was June 12 because it was seven days to the day after he was born June 5, and it was so hot. It was at night, and my wife, poor thing, it was hot. Of course the baby was home, and then a baby in the audience started crying, and so it was just quite the mess. But she was so glad and grateful, she was very proud of that. We're extremely proud of the other educational degrees we have—but in our hearts Kennesaw means the most to us. That's just how I feel.

TS: Right. Did you get involved in any student activities while you were at Kennesaw?

RW: Not too many. I was very, very, very focused on getting through and getting to law school and becoming an attorney. I was so singularly focused. I did one year play intramural football with a group of guys and it's kind embarrassing—we were the Flying Beavers. I don't know who thought of that name, but we won the intramural championship that year, and there were some good friends on the team: Mike [Michael W.] Nelson, Bob [Robert M.] Gill and Mike [Michael C.] Comerford and Gary [Edward] Robinson. We had a bunch of good friends on the team—Morgan [T.] Medford and Eddie was our quarterback. We had a good time doing that, and so there was some of that. I didn't belong to any clubs in particular. I just came and went.

TS: Typical student of the period.

RW: A typical student of the period. I can remember so vividly the enormous parking lot that just stretched from one end of the campus to the other really in front of the older buildings, what is now the Student Center and the Student Center has been there for many years now, was just a great, big parking lot. I can remember it being this vast space. You could always find a space then. It was pretty interesting. The Student Center and the cafeteria were one and the same then. But I just loved the small, homey atmosphere it had. You could sit outside and read or study or visit with friends or you could go to the library, but I loved the woods and the trails. Sometimes I would just walk through that and enjoy the scenery. It was fascinating and exciting to watch it grow, and it was different, too. It was really different.

TS: Yes. You didn't ever encounter our first residential student when you were walking through the woods, did you?

RW: No, I never did.

TS: We did have one that lived out in a tree house out in the woods [laughter].

RW: I did not know that.

TS: It might have been a year or so after you were there.

RW: Really? I hadn't heard that story [laughter].

TS: Well, you graduated from law school and then went into the family practice, I guess.

RW: I did initially go into the family practice and for a couple of years did that. Then got married in September of '79, and just prior to getting married, about three months prior, I had gone to work with three commercial real estate brokers who had offices down near Cumberland. I went [to work with them], got married, came back, and went back to the job. [By then] these three guys had split up, and so they no longer needed me. I went home for lunch, and I was trying to find some way to tell my new bride that I had lost my job. While I was trying to find my courage she mentioned to me that my mother had called and that a gentleman named Eddie Paul had been trying to find me, that he had seen our wedding picture. He was an attorney with the firm Mitchell, Clark, Pate, Anderson down in Atlanta, and they did real estate closings. They did all of what was then Georgia Federal's closings. The Mitchell in the firm, Stephens Mitchell—it was an old Atlanta firm—his sister had written a little book called *Gone with the Wind* [Margaret Mitchell, New York: Macmillan Books, 1936], and so it was Margaret Mitchell's brother. You talk about a southern law firm that had been from Atlanta—that was them. It had been Mitchell and Mitchell. Then it was Mitchell and Clark. The Clark of the firm, Howell Clark, was on the Federal Reserve Board. Mr. Pate was a labor lawyer, and Mr. Anderson was a litigator. Unbelievably fine people, very, very, well connected, all connected to Atlanta. They handled all the rights to *Gone with the Wind* and represented major, major clients. So I'm sitting down at lunch trying to figure out how to tell my wife I'd lost my \$1,000 a month paying job, my \$12,000 a year job, and she mentions that.

TS: That wasn't bad in '79.

RW: That wasn't bad in '79; I was happy [laughter]. She mentioned that he had called, and I said why. She said, "Well, he saw our wedding announcement in the Marietta paper, and he is looking for a closing attorney." She said, "I know you're not interested in calling," and I said, "No," and I snuck out and went back to the bedroom. Of course, we didn't have cell phones then. I called the number and arranged for an interview the next day. So the next day I went and got hired. I really couldn't even spell FHA at that time, but I sort of faked my way through the interview and said, "Oh, yes, I can do closings," since they were looking for a closing attorney [laughter]. The next day I come home and I say, "Honey, there's good news and there's bad news. The bad news is yesterday I lost my job, and I didn't want to tell you." She said, "What?" But I said, "The good news is I got another job, and I got a \$2,000 a year raise." I was making \$14,000 a year. So I thought I was doing pretty good. I [originally] worked for Walker & Walker from '77, but in September 1979 I went to work for Mitchell, Clark, Pate, Anderson. I worked for a

fabulous fellow named John Turpin who worked with the firm, and he taught me how to close loans. I owe John an enormous gratitude of debt because that very first day he didn't know what to do as far as training me was concerned. He sent me into a private room with a blank closing statement and said, "Why don't you just fill this out." He didn't know how to train me. It's one of those things like, you're sitting down to take a test, it's one of those nightmares come true—I had dreams when I was younger of I'd be in class and sitting down taking an exam, and I would know nothing; all I could do was fill out the name. Well, this closing statement situation was one of those things. All I could do was fill out my name. I had no idea where to put anything. A few minutes later he stuck his head in the door. He looked down at the paper, and he looked at me, and he had this curious look on his face for a moment. It quickly changed to he knew what was going on, and he said, "You don't know how to close loans, do you?" I said, "No, I really don't." He said, "Don't worry." He called the main office, and he told them, "Oh, the guy's doing great. He knows what he's doing; he's going to be great." And he covered for me until I knew how to do closings. I've been eternally grateful to him for that. So from '79 to '83 I worked for Mitchell, Clark, Pate, Anderson. But in '81-82 interest rates got crazy high. They were up in the 16 and 17 percent, literally, and prime got to 18.5 percent.

TS: That's when the Fed tightened the money supply.

RW: That's right. Paul Volcker. They tightened the money supply big time. [Ronald] Reagan got in, and he said, "Look it's going to be tough." Then there was some real squeezing out of the system. Unfortunately, people were laid off left and right at the firm. I was kept, and I had no qualms about why I was being kept. I was the lowest paid guy on the totem pole, and so it was an efficient thing. But then in March of '83 I was invited, given the fabulous opportunity—John Turpin had left the firm and gone with a guy named Sanford (Sandy) Cohn, who had been considered in Atlanta the king of real estate closing attorneys. Back in the late '70s it was a much different world than it is today as far as real estate closings were concerned. Then, there were only a handful. For example, Georgia Federal had only one law firm do their closings. If you got a loan from Georgia Federal it closed with that firm—Mitchell, Clark, Pate, Anderson. If you got a loan with Decatur Federal, it closed with McCurdy & Candler out of Decatur. There was no choice in the matter. My understanding is that at some time in the mid or late '60s Georgia Federal held one out of three mortgages on homes in Atlanta. So there weren't many lenders that did that, and those that did were exclusive as far as who closed the transactions for them. That was beginning to change in the late '70s, and then it really changed in the '80s. Sandy Cohn—he went by Sandy—was the king of closing attorneys. He did more closings than anybody else, and so in '82 when John Turpin left Mitchell, Clark, he went with Sandy Cohn. Sandy had never taken on partners. John opened an office in Lilburn. In '83 through mutual agreement, I left Mitchell, Clark and opened a little office in Woodstock, Georgia. The firm became Cohn, Turpin and Walker, but Sandy Cohn had his office where he'd had it for years and still does in Sandy Springs, Georgia. John Turpin had his office in Lilburn, Georgia—Gwinnett County—but I had opened my office in Woodstock, Georgia. I was very lucky. I guessed well. I

guessed that so much growth was coming that way that if I was in the path of that growth that being a closing attorney would be a good thing to be at that time and in that place.

TS: I-575 opened up. I guess it was opened by then, early '80s.

RW: That's correct. Exactly. First it was completed to [State Route] 92, and then it was pushed past that up to Sixes Road, and then it went on up to Highway 5. Eventually, it was completed in '85 or '86; somewhere around the mid to late 1980s was when they opened Town Center Mall [1986]. All these things were happening at the same time. My first office was near Bells Ferry [Road] and Highway 92.

TS: Yes, there used to be a Bank of Canton on the corner.

RW: That's right, Bank of Canton was on the corner. On the other corner was a bait and tackle shop, Jack Meeks Bait & Tackle Shop. I opened an office where there was a four-way stop there.

TS: Yes, I remember that.

RW: Do you remember that? I had to be careful . . . .

TS: Where was your office?

RW: It was in a State Farm building, Calvin Dubose State Farm Insurance, a brick house. It looked like a house, and it was about three hundred yards off the intersection towards Roswell, towards Highway 5. Calvin was a wonderful man, just like a father. I've had so many people that have been so kind to me over the years. He wrote a lot of policies for homeowner's insurance, so he said, "Hey, put a little office here, and I'll introduce you to the agents that send me insurance policies." The first month I opened up I did three closings. I thought, "Oh my goodness, what have I done? I've left a \$14,000 a year paying job for this." So I took a job waiting tables at Steak & Ale down at [I] 285 and Highway 41, which is where I worked through law school and college.

TS: Did your wife go over to Augusta while you were there?

RW: No, she stayed home for two years after graduating—our son was born the week before she graduated—she stayed home, but she decided to go to dental school—actually, Emory Dental School. She had applied at Emory Medical School, and she had applied at Augusta, and she'd been accepted at Augusta, but she was on the alternate list I believe. We were really concerned about what we would do if we'd gone there. I'd never heard of this before or since, but ironically Emory Dental School called her. She had not applied, but they called her. They said, "Would you consider going to dental school here?" They had looked at the medial school application and liked her so much. Corinne had gotten a job at Kennestone Hospital and had been working on the pediatric ward. Her heart is so big. I can remember she came home one day, and there was this little boy there named Jack. He was a couple of years old. He was there because he was sick all

the time, and he was abused. The only time the mom came and saw him was when she was forced to. Long story short, she came home one night, and she was talking about how at the end of the shift the door at the end of the hall is left unlocked. She keeps telling me these weird components and things, and finally about five minutes into it I realized to my horror, “Corrine, you want to kidnap this baby and bring him home don’t you?” She said, “Yes, I do.” I said, “No, honey, we can’t do that. That’s breaking the law.” Our son was about the same age. It was at that time that I said, “Sweetie, don’t you think maybe you ought to consider something besides medicine?” It just crushed her if somebody was sick. I said, “The worst thing that could happen is that somebody could lose a tooth.” I said that half jokingly, and lo and behold the dental school called her and said, “Mrs. Walker, would you consider it?” The class was already filled out. I still don’t know to this day how it worked. I think it was some sort of divine intervention. But she decided then at the last minute, and they made a space for her and sucked her application over from the medical school side into the dental school side. She’s been forever grateful that she became a dentist and not a [physician]. She just knows that for her that was the right thing.

TS: And then Emory abandoned their dental program; what happened?

RW: They did, Tom. You are so informed. The year after she got in they announced then that they were closing the dental school.

TS: I never understood that.

RW: Well, I didn’t either. She was in the next to last graduating class, and that made it a very different experience for her because when she was a junior and senior there were no freshman and sophomore classes; it was just the class behind them. Then when she went through there were no classes ahead of them. So it was really a lonely, different experience. To this day there’s but one dental school in Georgia, and that’s Medical College of Georgia. But supposedly there were “too many dentists.” Well, I don’t see that, but my wife, knock on wood, she’s six months booked in advance. She’s a very good dentist, and people love her. But I never understood that either. They were making the dental school into a medical library. Maybe Kennesaw State needs to start a dental school. That would be what we would need to do.

TS: With our new Health Sciences building.

RW: You know what, the only one is not around Atlanta. It’s over in Augusta. It’s closer to South Carolina than it is to Atlanta.

TS: Try to get that through the Board of Regents [laughter].

RS: Yes, it might go. So that’s why she ended up going to dental school and she went to Emory.

TS: Okay. I guess the reason I was thinking of you only having three closings the first month and if you were paying the bill for her to go to dental school also . . . .

RW: Well, yes, as a matter of fact, we took out student loans. It was such a tough time, so to speak, financially. I did nine closings the second month and then seventeen closings the third month and then fifty-three closing the fourth month. Then it was off and running. I practiced up until January of '05. When I retired from the practice I had done 33,000 closings. It was quite an experience.

TS: I guess you were an expert on closings!

RW: I knew a little bit about closings by the time it was said and done. And it kept me tied to Kennesaw for a lot of reasons. Joel Siegel, Betty's husband, had gone back to law school. Betty and I had been friends. Their boys had gone to Wheeler High School, and my mother was their sons' high school guidance counselor, so we had a connection there. They lived over in the Wheeler district. Then Joel, actually, after graduating from law school came to work for me as a closing attorney for a couple of years. Then he practiced some on his own and continued to teach and then went back to teaching. So the connection with Kennesaw was just a lot of different ways. I'm trying to remember the year that Betty asked me to be on the board of trustees.

TS: Well, it was '88 that you went on.

RW: Okay, well, then it'll be twenty years ago next year. So 1988 was when I came on with the Board of Trustees. I do remember being told then I was the only [Kennesaw] graduate at the time that was on the board, so I was very proud to be asked to be on the board.

TS: Was Joel through law school by that time in '88?

RW: You know, I'm trying to remember now. I think that he was and it was about that time that he worked for me, but I'd have to go back and look. I'm bad about dates.

TS: Well, Betty would say in graduation periodically that Joel liked the study of law better than the practice of law.

RW: Yes, yes. I think there was some truth to that. He did an outstanding job as a closing attorney, but I think he liked the study of things. It was like my father. He liked the study of things more than the practice of it. He liked the study of psychology better than the practice of it, the study of law better than the practice of it, the study of medicine better than the practice of it. He enjoyed learning, and he was truly a student of life and a student of information. I think Joel's the same thing.

- TS: Okay. So your contacts with Betty Siegel then go back through your mother and through Joel?
- RW: Yes, through my mother, through Joel, through the university, even through Corrine. Just through all the years here I consider Betty a very close, personal friend, even more than just a trustee-university president relationship, but a close, personal friend.
- TS: Okay, so '88 you go on the Foundation. Why don't you describe what the Foundation was like when you went on the Foundation?
- RW: Well, I remember the first thing that I thought was, "Wow, I'm certainly out of my element here. All these ladies and gentlemen here are ultra-successful business people, entrepreneurs, leaders in the community." I certainly felt—not that anyone made me feel that way; everyone always made me feel extremely welcome and always made me feel an integral part of everything; but for myself I thought, whoa, I'm a little bit out of my league seeing all these people here.
- TS: Let's see, if my math is right you were about thirty-three years old at that time?
- RW: That would be right, yes, that's correct. So I was about thirty-two or thirty-three years old.
- TS: So you were probably about the youngest one on the Foundation, too.
- RW: Oh, yes, I'm sure I was. I could try to offend everybody saying they were all a bunch of old people—nope, I'm just kidding. I'm sure I was the youngest person in the room and felt it, but it was a very small group. The big event was meeting for our annual fund-raising drive. I'm sure everybody remembers this. We kept records of who had given the year before. It would be a little sort of like an IBM punch card. It was a little bit bigger than a note card. It was a card that showed their name and address and the contact person that we had and then on the back in a little pencil hand-written number, which was usually twenty-five or fifty and sometimes a hundred and it was in dollars. It was how much they had given before. I do not recall—
- TS: Now is this actually an IBM punch card?
- RW: It may have been because it appeared to have been computer generated on the front side with type, so to speak; there was no such thing as laser.
- TS: And you started to say . . . .
- RW: Right, on the back there was just a hand-written amount. The goal, of course, was to just get at least that amount and maybe to get a little more. And heaven forbid that you got less than what you'd gotten at least from that year. During the meeting we would have a nice lunch, and usually the president of the university spoke, and then we'd go over the

minutes and what we were trying to do with the money and how much we were trying to raise. Then we would go through and peruse the cards. Everybody would look at them and say, "Well, I know them." If nobody knew the person then somebody would say, "All right, you take that one and I'll take this one." I'd finally gotten three or four people or entities that I had met, so I'd always grab those cards off and think, "Good, I've already talked to them before." As I've heard as was recently repeated to me, it was kind of funny sometimes having trouble getting \$25.00 out of, say, a doctor. You're like, "Wait a minute." But it's interesting that that's where our sights were set. We had a good idea of who and what we were at that time; the businessmen and women that were on the board of trustees were volunteering their time. At that time KSU had been Kennesaw Junior College, and there had not been time for the graduates of the institution to have gone out there and to have made big marks on the world, not too much time to have done that. So we weren't dealing with being able to go to, say, alumni who were nearing their golden years and retiring and looking for things like planned gifts or large donations. We were going around in the community to doctors and lawyers and dentists and owners of businesses.

TS: Who had no connection to Kennesaw.

RW: Who had no connection to Kennesaw. It was in this geographical area; and since it was, it was, "Would you consider giving to this institution? We're putting out some really fine graduates." People were very nice, but, basically, it was the way the world was then for us. We dealt with the hand we had.

TS: So they were very nice, and if they gave you \$100.00 it was a big deal.

RW: We were thrilled.

TS: Right, because they were really supporting UGA or Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] or somebody else.

RW: Exactly, exactly. Almost no one that we were calling on had graduated from Kennesaw or gone to Kennesaw. Of course, by '88 it had been a four-year school, but not for many years, so somebody who had graduated . . . .

TS: Your wife would have been in the second graduating class.

RW: That's right, in '81. Some of them were still in school going on getting graduate degrees and whatnot. So we're just entering an era now where some of the people who have graduated from Kennesaw are like me; they're in their fifties and they're—not that I have—but they're making a mark or trying to make a mark on the world. Some of them have had an opportunity to have some business success. Still, people who graduated from there haven't necessarily had the same experience as those who have gone and lived on campus for a four-year experience. We're still finding people are very open, they're very generous, and yet we're still waiting, as time goes, [for the day] when some of the



challenges that Kennesaw has had in the past of raising money [to not] be the same challenges. There will always be challenges, but they're evolving.

TS: But you think the residence halls are going to make a difference.

RW: Oh, I think it makes a big difference. I think when somebody has come here and had a four-year experience, and they lived on campus, then that stays in their memory. It settles in in a very different way than someone who commuted back and forth. It's simply a different experience. You've lived there if you lived on campus. You ate there. You slept there. It's different. It's different than if you drove eight miles, and you drove home, and you slept at home. I think Kennesaw has done an outstanding job. They've always made do with less. They've done more with less, and they've always done better with less. Now, of course, we, as trustees, hope to be able to deliver and give more. We want to go to another level.

TS: Didn't Jack [H.] Gibson come on as Director of Development about the time you came on the board?

RW: Yes, Jack was definitely there during the time I was there [following Norman H. McCrummen and Ronald P. Hyde]. Jack was a patient of Corrine's for a little while and Corrine had somehow had lost her diploma from graduating in 1981. Before Jack died, and I think it was the last time I ever saw him, they surprised us, Corrine and I. He had heard the story, and at an annual meeting at the Board of Trustees, Jack presented Corrine with a duplicate diploma for her four-year degree, which she now proudly hangs on her office wall. That was Jack that did that. Then he passed away shortly after that, and he was young—he was fifty-something, he was young.

TS: [James A.] Jim Fleming was Assistant to the President for College Advancement during all those years, I think.

RW: That's right. And Jim is who I have most of my memories with. Again, there seems to be so many personal ties for me personally to the university. When Nicholas, our nineteen year-old, who is just finishing his first year of college, was about to start school, we had decided we would like to see if he could get in at the Walker School. Jim had a son who might have been a junior that year, or a senior, and was an outstanding wrestler. I called Jim, and I asked him if he would make a recommendation for the Walker School because it was very, very competitive to get in. He did, and there's no doubt in my mind that that's what made the difference for Nicholas getting in. Then once he was in, our other two children got in, so I've always felt a personal debt of gratitude for Jim writing a very nice letter and making a call to help our son get into the Walker School. Of course, now, I've told Jim, "Well, it's a good thing they named that school Walker because they'd have to name a building or something after all the tuition that Corrine and I have paid [laughter]. I figure now with three kids having gone pre-K to twelve, that's forty-two years of tuition, three times, fourteen, we've paid. But I understand from the head master we're still nowhere near the top [laughter]. People have had five kids go there. Jim Fleming was the head for a long, long time, and that's when I was put on the

executive committee during Jim's tenure. I was asked to be secretary of the Foundation and put on the executive committee.

TS: Do you remember about when that was?

RW: I'd like to say it was early 1990s.

TS: So you've been secretary for . . . .

RW: For a good ten or twelve years. For a good, long time.

TS: In '88 when you came on, about how much money did the Foundation raise a year?

RW: It was much less than a million dollars. I want to say \$300,000.00 is the number that sticks in my head. I also want to say that I remember thinking there's no way. That is too big a number. I could be off, and I would remember if I looked back at some of the minutes we have, but it was absolutely less than a million dollars. We'd never seen any kind of a gift anywhere near seven figures at that time. I would have to verify the exact number, but what I remember now is how extraordinarily low that number seems now, but how big the number seemed then. I remember then thinking, "Golly, at \$25.00 and \$50.00 a whack how are we ever going to raise that much money?"

TS: Well, at \$25.00 and \$50.00 you wouldn't.

RW: Exactly. And that's how we felt about it.

TS: What would you see as the big turning points or the big moments in the growth of the Foundation's role on the campus?

RW: Well, I would say—that's a good question. Could we go off the record for a second?

TS: Sure. Do you want me to turn it off?

RW: Yes.

[Recorder turned off.]

TS: Well, we're starting back after about a fifteen or twenty minute break. I think maybe a good way to start back is, when I interviewed [J.] Larry Stevens, he thought one of the turning points was when the Foundation began to move outside of Cobb County and recruit people for the Foundation who were established in Atlanta, or whatever. I think he gives Michael Coles a lot of credit for bringing in a number of new trustees and so on. Would you see that as a turning point for the Foundation, to get away from OMs [Old Mariettans] maybe?

RW: Yes, as a matter of fact I would. I think Larry makes an excellent point. That was a big turning point for the Foundation. When we began to look outside of Cobb County we did expand our horizons both externally and internally. So Larry's right; that was a big turning point because it brought in people from much further outside the areas that we had normally gone, and that expanded our vision as well. I think it helped us think more globally when we started looking outside as opposed to locally for things. Yes, that pretty much graduated us away from the cards and hoping to get \$25.00 from somebody, hopefully, to more of a business-type approach and a more world-centric approach as to a Cobb County-centric approach. So I think that was a big change. I think we were forced to grow up in some areas, too. It's safe to say that the Board of Trustees has been in lock step with the university in terms of its growth and its maturation. Sometimes we've been a little bit reactive, and sometimes we've been proactive. I'd say that what Larry was referring to a little earlier was we were being a little reactive, and we realized, hey, the university is really growing now, and we need to expand out beyond Cobb County in looking at trustees. So then we played catch-up. I think the trustees have really had a huge vision in the last few years and helped the university grow in ways it wouldn't have otherwise been able to. For example, the building of the dorms and the parking lots—I'm not saying it never would have happened, but the facilities that have been brought on line in the last few years are really world-class facilities. People from around the country, for example, other universities, have come and looked at the way we did these dorms. I think that was not just because we were here at Kennesaw, but also because of the leadership that was provided at the Board of Trustees. Michael [J.] Coles, Tommy [Thomas M.] Holder, Norm [Norman J.] Radow are tremendous real estate people. There's an art to real estate, so developing that kind of expertise is almost the kind that money couldn't buy. You could buy it, but it would cost millions of dollars for that kind of advice.

TS: Right, we couldn't afford it.

RW: We couldn't afford the advice; right that's a good way of putting it. We couldn't possibly afford the advice [or the leadership] over these last years from Larry through Michael on down today through Tommy and the people that are now on the board. We've got bankers and ex-bankers, we've got finance people, we've got real estate people, and it's as if the right team has been in the right place at the right time. We are now turning our focus toward another very important issue that's been on the horizon for years; we've always known it was there, but for various and sundry reasons we've not done as much as we're going to do about it. That is that we want to build a fund so there's an endowment. We want to go beyond. First we were just raising some money, and that money helped contribute to a few things here at the university. Then we were trying to raise enough money to make a significant impact on the university. Now, one of the things we want to set our sites on is to raise large sums of money that can be invested wisely, so that there can be recurring income. Where a university really wants to be is [to have] such a large endowment that the [interest] income pays for everything they want to do and [the principal] continues to grow. I've heard the term used in terms of personal finances: getting out of the rat race, where your income from passive investments exceeds your expenses. When it does that then you can continue to raise more money, but the

money that you've already raised makes enough that it exceeds what your annual budget and expenses are already.

TS: What does "passive investments" mean?

RW: Well, in the personal sense it would mean not having to get up and go to work. It'd be like, and it's not quite the same applicability here, but passive investments meaning like not having to go fill teeth as a dentist. She's invested in her office, my wife has, but she still has to get up and go work the equipment in order to be able to make money from it. But if we had enough money set aside in a CD or rental income to replace her income, then that would be passive because we wouldn't have to get up and hit a lick for that income. So we'd like for the university to be in a position that it has got enough money through the Foundation to pay for the things it would like to pay for without having to go raise it each year, but rather it would come from the income off the investments already made and money raised.

TS: Do you have any idea what proportion of the money is designated for certain purposes when it comes in and what proportion is unrestricted?

RW: The numbers are constantly changing and I don't know what they are right now, but historically there's always been much more that comes in that's restricted than just purely unrestricted. The university loves any gift and every gift that it can get and it does not want to turn away gifts to the university. But 95 percent of the time it's just better and easier for the university if they get unrestricted funds because they get to decide where they're going to put it and what they're going to do with it. But I don't know what the percentage is right now. Historically, there's always been a lot more restricted money that came in than unrestricted. I'd have to look and see.

TS: So I guess somebody could say, I'm giving this money for the endowment, but ordinarily they would give unrestricted gifts and then the Foundation decides to put it in an endowment.

RW: That's correct, yes. You hear about capital campaign sort of things. I don't know what the final word is on what Dr. [Daniel S.] Papp is going to want to do, but I'm just saying the trustees know (and it's the way virtually all universities, eventually, get to) that [the goal is] to have a capital campaign or to have a variety of campaigns where they are raising funds to be able to hold on to and keep as income, not spend in that current year.

TS: That's the purpose of the capital campaign?

RW: Yes.

TS: To build an endowment?

RW: Yes. Sometimes it's to build a specific thing or whatnot, but sometimes it's just to build an endowment. Kennesaw State needs that. I don't know what Tech's is, but literally there are universities [with] endowments in the billions. They've got more than a billion dollars, and so if they're getting 10 percent on that they've got \$100 million dollars a year coming in without raising money from the public or private sectors. So Kennesaw State University needs to do that. I see the trustees, certainly, as being those that can lead the charge.

TS: What is the endowment now? How much money?

RW: I'd have to look at it again. I don't know. It's less than ten million.

TS: Less than ten million.

RW: Yes.

TS: So it's not really a lot at this point.

RW: No.

TS: I think we figured out, if you have a million dollars you get what, like \$20,000 income a year or something like that.

RW: Yes, to count on safely.

TS: So we're talking about less than \$100,000.00 of endowment money that can be spent each year.

RW: Yes, that comes in that way, that's right.

TS: Which isn't really a lot.

RW: No, not at all. That could easily be used up in one project.

TS: Right, for a university with 20,000 students.

RW: Oh, yes. It is what it is, and it's certainly no one's fault, but I would be willing to guess that disproportionately we have far and away the smallest endowment as compared to the number of students here of any university in the state. It's got to be.

TS: So the Foundation since 2000 has really increased its assets, but that's not really income you can spend.

RW: That is correct. It is not income you can spend. The Foundation has done a fabulous job, an incredible job of increasing our asset base. And those assets are such as the dorms and some of the centers that have been built and some of the properties that have been acquired for expanding the university's physical capacity, have been extremely smart investments. We've made very good real estate moves. If this was a privately held company it would be an up and comer from any angle you viewed it because we've been making very intelligent decisions about what to do with the real estate and then in leasing it out. However, right now, since these things are new, we just borrowed on it and it's at the top of the debt, so that all the debt is being serviced. You take out the liabilities, the net is still there. But you're correct. It's not that it's putting a lot of money in our pockets to be able to spend it right now.

TS: Yes. The assets are more from appreciation of value, but you can't spend that.

RW: You can't spend that. And a lot of it is from value that was just built flat into it because they were smart about how they did it.

TS: Did you act as a closing attorney for all these purchases for the Foundation?

RW: No, I did not. It would have been a conflict. I was signing off on all the documents as secretary because it required the president's and secretary's signature. But outside firms did that. Most often the lender dictated who did the closing. Now, I did do, years ago, a number of closings on some of the houses. I may have closed this house that we're sitting in here right now.

TS: On Campus Loop Road.

RW: Yes, but not any of the bond or development loans or anything like that. That would have been a conflict.

TS: I see. But you acted as attorney for the Foundation on these?

RW: Well, actually, we've had a couple of firms that have done advice. Now, I certainly have, of course, been asked advice before, and I've looked at stuff that the Foundation has done.

TS: You've given free advice.

RW: I've given free advice and it was probably worth about what I charged for it, nothing! But we have such bright, experienced people already on the Board of Trustees, specifically in regards to real estate. There are very knowledgeable men and women on this board, more so, I'd say, than on average, in the real estate direction.

TS: What are your memories on how the residence halls came about and how that was handled?

RW: Well, the thing that stuck in my mind most about it was how quickly we went from the conceptual stage to breaking ground to putting those things in. I remember when we had some of the contractors come in to make presentations to the board. I remember silently saying to myself that we had really overshot what we were going to be able to do; that there was no way that we were going to be able to pull off that big of a deal in that period of time. I was amazed at how quickly everything came together. Usually it takes years and years of talking about it, discussing it. It was as if we hit the ground running and never looked back. That's what I remember most is how quickly that went from the time we started talking about it to making a decision to do it. No one messed around. It got done.

TS: I guess about the same time that the residence halls were being done the Foundation was also helping with the parking decks. I guess the Foundation paid to build the parking decks and then they're getting paid back through student parking fees, is that the way it works?

RW: Yes, that's correct. Bonds were raised, and the Foundation has acted as the borrower and borrowed the money in order to have them constructed, and then the Foundation pays back the loan through the payment of fees. I think this has been an ideal, cooperative partnership where the Foundation has been able to do things that have benefited the university; such as borrowing the money and having the decks built and then enabling it to be paid back out of fees; and doing things such as the dorms that the university would have otherwise had much more difficulty doing, particularly doing it as quickly as we did it. I can't say that I'm completely familiar with all the various steps that one must take when a university is doing something through the Board of Regents, but suffice it to say that there is more red tape and the process is much lengthier, or can be, when the university is trying to do the very same thing than it is if we as trustees step in and are able to do it in a quasi or semi-private/public partnership. It's not always the case and it's not true of all things—but two of the biggest needs the university had at the time were parking—and [parking] issues still exist today—and the ability for students to live on campus. Those were not new issues. Those had been around for years. But because the Board of Trustees did take that on it shifted (a) the burden from the university from having to deal with some of that, and (b) it was done a lot quicker, and at the end of the day everybody got what it was that was needed for the university anyway.

TS: Right, so if it weren't for the Foundation we probably wouldn't have the parking decks or the residence halls yet, would we?

RW: Very possibly wouldn't have them even today. Somebody would have had to take the ball and go with it, and it would have taken a lot of approval processes, and so on.

TS: And the Foundation is now buying up property in the Town Point area?

RW: Yes.

TS: Do you see that as the direction that the university will grow?

RW: Yes, I do. We know that the university has got the freeway on one side. If it were a perfect world there would be raw land adjacent to the university that was undeveloped and inexpensive to buy, but that's not nearly the case. It does appear now though that the direction, physically, that the university is going to grow in is going to be on the other side of Chastain Road. There's more opportunity there than there is anywhere else and it makes more sense to go in that direction. If you look at a map there's not any particular spot that you look at and say, "Oh, that's just perfect. It's just waiting for us." [But] it's the best alternative right now. It's the best among competing alternatives. We've found an advantage in a couple of instances in buying some of these properties that were already developed. On the one hand, they're very expensive, more so than if it were raw land. But on the other hand, they provide the opportunity for income producing, so it can offset the carry of it while we own it. Without question, we know now is the time, that later will be more expensive, regardless of the ups and downs in the real estate market. It's just going to be more expensive.

TS: How long do you think it will be until we get the pedestrian bridge over Chastain Road?

RW: I don't know, but hopefully within a couple of years. We want to do it quickly. I think that will really open up the gateway for development on that side.

TS: Let me change the subject a little bit and go back when you were relatively new on the board, the controversy over Newt Gingrich and the course that he taught here and the Foundation's role in that. Were you on the executive committee at that time?

RW: I was not on the executive committee in the beginning. No, I wasn't at that time. I was on the Board of Trustees. I can tell you we felt it was very politically motivated and that we were sort of the "baby with the bath water" kind of thing. I can attest to not having any personal knowledge of any of the goings on behind the scenes. But I can tell you so far as I've ever known there wasn't a thing in the world the Foundation or the university or anybody was trying to do that was wrong or underhanded or anything.

TS: Nobody really wanted to help Newt's career.

RW: Right, it wasn't about trying to help somebody's career or anything, but it was something that somebody got a hold of and started reporting and made a big deal out of it. My personal opinion is that once a big deal was made of it that made it a deal in and of itself to some degree. But it wasn't because there was anything underneath there that was anything to be made a deal of.



TS: Were you involved at all in the negotiations with the IRS toward the end of '98?

RW: No I was not. It was reported to me, but I was not a part of it.

TS: My understanding is that the deal was that the Foundation would maybe become more independent in some ways of the president's office or the administration—at least to the extent that it wouldn't be a rubber stamp for everything?

RW: Yes. And interestingly, I do remember that now, and I think in a sense that an unintended benefit to us was it somewhat cut the umbilical cord with us; that, unwittingly, we were a little more tied to the university than we realized or knew. Of course, we want to have the strongest bonds that we can, but we want those bonds to be appropriate bonds. It wouldn't be appropriate from any of my four children to still be attached by an umbilical cord to their mom. There was a time for that, and then there was a time when you still had that connection, but it would not be the same. So now that I think back on it, an unintended benefit is that there was a sense among us that, gosh, we've got to do more of this on our own. It's not as if we felt we weren't grown up, but it was a sense of needing to grow up and stand up a little more on our own two feet that resulted from that. It was like, okay, we need to know more about what's going on with the university, and we need to be a little more independent, and we need to stand on our own two feet and not rely on them as much. In fact, we realized then, I think after that—and I'm not saying this was overtly spoken—but then there was also this sense then that, shoot, we need to not just be carried, but we need to carry them. You know, like a child that grows up to take care of the parent maybe, we need to start stepping into that role of let's do things for them. I'm not sure when that threshold was crossed, but I'm pretty sure there was a time where we probably were more a drain on the university than we were a benefit financially speaking. It's complicated and it would probably be difficult to figure out, but there was an assignment of jobs and salaries amongst them, and in that division I think at times it came out that we were costing money, so to speak. We might have raised \$300,000, but it was costing \$500,000.

TS: The salaried people?

RW: Right, the people that were assigned under us. But then Newt Gingrich made us realize, I mean, we were told, "You've got to be a little more separate," and then we thought, well, yes, we should be and then we thought, gosh, we need to be leading the way in some stuff, not following.

TS: I guess in this light, I know President Siegel wanted those residence halls for years before we got them, or at least I think she did.

RW: Yes.

- TS: Did she provide the leadership on that or did Michael Coles or who would you say really initiated those projects?
- RW: Honestly, I think it was Michael. Now, what I don't know is what may have been encouraged behind doors or where the idea actually first came from. I don't know. But I think that in terms of getting the dorms built and everything, it was Michael and the Board of Trustees. That's my understanding, but again I'm coming from the perspective of the board and having sat in on those meetings and not having sat in on meetings with Betty or the university side.
- TS: Right. What about the parking decks?
- RW: Well, again, I think in terms of getting the reality in the ground it was mostly the Board of Trustees. We would sit down every year with Betty, and there'd be a wish list of what was wanted, and I guess the need for dorms and parking was so apparent and obvious it was always in the room. Let me put it this way, it didn't take Betty coming to us to say, "Gosh, we could use some parking around here," for us to know it. We'd be in those meetings saying, "Boy, we need some parking around here!" So I'm not saying that Betty didn't come to us and say could you do something about it first. It's just that we would have had to be blind and deaf not to see what was needed. Those couple of things, we knew they were issues. They had been issues for years, and they needed to be addressed. What I am saying is that I think what really got it from the talking about stage to really doing something about it was, boom, Michael Coles and that board when we started. Because it may have started a little before he came into office or right when he did, but, boy, it was a group of people then that suddenly the room became energized and something was going to be done about it and then it was just, "Katy, bar the door."
- TS: Were these issues controversial in the Foundation, like people saying we could never afford to do this?
- RW: Interestingly, my recollection was never was it controversial. Now, we have some men and women on that board that absolutely will turn every stone over when considering spending money, will investigate every potential pitfall as well as the rewards, the benefits and the rewards. We laugh about George [W. Kalafut], our treasurer, and everybody on that board loves and respects him deeply for his tendency to bear hug every dollar we've got there. He is so cautious and careful about things, and that's exactly what we want. So there was such a spirit of "can-do." There weren't arguments or dissension in the board about whether we should or shouldn't do it. There was lots of discussion and hashing out of how we were going to do it and what direction we should take. Would it be best to float the rate for a while or lock it down—things like that. But it was as if the goal of getting those things done, that never was a question. When we decided it was over, it was over. It was just, "Well, what are the details?"

TS: Okay. Let me jump to I guess just a couple of years ago now. Chancellor [Thomas C.] Meredith and the controversy over at UGA with the foundation there, Vince Dooley and all that, and then the Memorandum of Understanding that he asked foundations to sign, and I understand that our Foundation at first wouldn't sign it.

RW: Yes.

TS: Would you talk about that a little bit?

RW: [Laughs]

TS: But eventually they did sign it.

RW: We eventually did sign. Well, by that point in our evolution, we were no longer going to be pushed over or just be a compliant child in the situation. We were going to take a reasoned look at everything. Just because the University of Georgia was going to do that or Georgia Tech was going to do that, we had decided, not in a defiant way, just in, I'd like to think, an intelligent way, we said, "Wait, we're going to look and see what is right and best for us in context to the university, our history with them, and where we want to go." So, there were things in the initial memorandum that we felt were a bit onerous and that we didn't necessarily agree that we wanted to have apply to us. We went back and forth with them a couple of times, and some things were changed, and then it finally reached a point where both sides agreed to agree. So we did finally come up with a Memorandum of Understanding. But we weren't in a rush to go sign it and just sign off on it, to rubberstamp it. We had been years earlier something of a rubberstamp organization, and I'm going back many years. Then in the Gingrich thing, we grew up. Then once we did that it was like, we weren't necessarily going to go home and sleep in the bunk bed. We'd grown up and moved out [laughter]. But never was it our intention to be obstinate or we weren't trying to define ourselves by that. We were our own entity and group and we were going to look at it, and say, "We don't care how it applies to them or them or them or them; we don't care if everyone else in the world's done it. We want to see what it means to us and whether we're willing to do that or not."

TS: Was there a broad consensus in the Foundation on what you're talking about?

RW: Yes, there was.

TS: Or was it divisive?

RW: No, no, we were together as a group. We were together as a group and stayed that way. I'd like to say this: I sense now more than ever, and I've sensed for a number of years, we have an outstanding board [with] trust among all the people there. Everyone seems to have a genuine appreciation and admiration for the others that are on the board. My experience is that when anyone there has something to say, everybody there is listening. I don't feel that way about some groups, some boards, and some organizations. Sometimes you've got different personalities or egos or whatnot that are there that they

pontificate and people roll their eyes. There's not any of that in our group. There's just none of that. Not everybody there has the same background or expertise. So, there's really a value and an appreciation and even an admiration. For example, Tommy Holder—he has so much knowledge in the area of real estate and other areas, management, and I admire the way he conducts our meetings and keeps things on track and moving. I mentioned George before. I can't think . . . .

TS: George Kalafut.

RW: George Kalafut . . . could not think of a better person or individual to be overseeing the finances of the foundation. Norman [Radow], he's so smart—it's almost scary—about real estate. Everybody on that board contributes to the whole, and I'm not just saying that because I've been on a lot of committees and a lot of boards and a lot of things, and often there's just one person or two people that, basically, run the show, and everybody else listens and nods their head. But Mark [R.] Kirk in real estate, and even our new trustees on the board . . . somebody's doing an outstanding job of choosing our new trustees. They bring stuff to the table from the get-go.

TS: How do you decide who to elect as new trustees?

RW: It's a nominating process, and it begins among the existing trustees. We've gotten a much better picture of what we want and like. I can't say that there's a set formula, but there's kind of a feeling. Sometimes we are specifically looking for somebody, maybe, in an area, an industry or something that, gosh, we don't have a person that's on the board from this area of work or experience. So sometimes that's a reason. Sometimes it may be because they're with a large company that has historically had a relationship or a tie to the university. There's a variety of reasons. We're basically looking for getting the right people on the bus, though. We're looking for quality human beings.

TS: Everyone on the Foundation pledges to give so much money each year?

RW: Not necessarily. Being on the Foundation has absolutely nothing to do with what they have given or will give or would give. So, although we've sought 100 percent participation by the board, no one is on the Board of Trustees because of what they've given or would give or have given.

TS: Do you have fixed terms? Like you serve a three-year term?

RW: Yes, a three-year term, and they are staggered throughout. We can go up as high as sixty, and I think right now we're at forty-five.

TS: Something I wanted to ask you about with your background as an alumnus of Kennesaw is what you see for the future of the Alumni Association and its role in conjunction with the Foundation. Do you expect to ever see a day where maybe the majority of the trustees are alums of Kennesaw?

RW: I do. I think that day may be a few years off. I don't know that that's good or bad. I just see one day, years down the road, that there will be more and perhaps even maybe a majority. I see the alumni really starting to grow in strength and in influence over the next few years. Speaking both as an alumnus and as a trustee of the Foundation, I'd say one of the most important things that can be done by the university would be to give the alumni focal points for coming back and giving or contributing back to the university. I think many universities have natural focal points that cause the alumni to gravitate back to them such as football programs. Living on campus contributes to that focal point because, remember, if a young person is leaving home for the very first time, it may be the first place they ever lived away from home was at college. So if they've gone through and graduated, then they've had something of a positive experience because they didn't quit or flunk out or whatnot. That's going to be a memory, just the very nature of that experience, the first place you lived away from home, and it sort of marked a milestone of, "By golly, I was on my own." Whether they really were or not, they felt that for themselves. That's a very strong tie in a memory of somebody to come back to later with children or grandchildren or whatnot. Say, forty years from now, Kennesaw has a football team, and there are people who are in their fifties and sixties that went and lived there, then there will be some natural ties back to the university, whether the university is contacting them through the mail or not. But the real ties that bind are the ones that are in your heart and in your head. What I think needs to start happening now, and the alumni should do, and the university and the Foundation should support them, is find projects, things that would cause the alumni to want to come back to Kennesaw and give of their money or give of their time or just come back here some in order to be able to get that sense of camaraderie among them. I think that time will take care of that eventually, but we can be proactive about it. Then I think there will be more people on the Board of Trustees down the road. For example, I have many reasons to come back here, but if I had no other ties to the university other than I'd come here for two years, the question would be, what's going on over at Kennesaw that would cause me to want to go back there and see what they're doing or give them something to help them do something. Well, at this point it would take the university reaching out to me to shake the bushes and get my attention for that to happen. That's what I'm saying the university should focus some efforts on. The Alumni Association should focus some efforts, not just a letter of, "Hey, you went here, could you give us some money?" The alumni needs to create some focal points; they need to arbitrarily and consciously create some focal points that would be attractive to the alumni to get them focused back here, and then the next twenty or thirty years will take care of itself.

TS: Yes. Are you in favor of football at Kennesaw?

RW: I'm neutral on it, and when I say I'm neutral, I have absolutely nothing in the world against it, nothing whatsoever. I would be supportive and thrilled and happy if Kennesaw had a football team. It's a very, very expensive sport. I would love to see it, if it helped the university and wasn't a big financial drain. But I love Kennesaw either way. I think it's maybe sooner or later going to happen, if it doesn't happen sooner, thirty years from now, I think it would happen, so I think at some point it would. I don't mean to sound coy. I really mean at this young stage, financially speaking, of the university, I want

what's best for the university as a whole. So if that means getting a football team let's do it. But I wouldn't be for getting a football team if it was a big drain and pulled it down. On the other hand, if it was going to make a bunch of money, I'd be all for that. I do think very strongly this: the university should absolutely stick with and support the heck out of the fabulous things they have got here already that have been outstanding—like the cheerleaders, the softball, baseball—we've won national championships in so many things, and we must vigorously support those things. I would be completely against dropping any of those successful things already for anything, even if it was ice hockey. Let's add some, but let's don't take away what we've got.

TS: Do you see the alumni taking over the annual campaign?

RW: Not soon. I think ultimately, yes, perhaps, but not soon. And that's not because I wish it so or not so. It's just that I don't see it happening soon.

TS: Right. Just not ready yet.

RW: Just not ready yet. If it was a different situation, yes, but again, Kennesaw, it does have its unique issues. The nature of this university is different than the nature of others that are the same size or age.

TS: Where do you see Kennesaw in 2007 in terms of faculty and students, and so on? Maybe, what should we be saying to the world about who Kennesaw is now?

RW: I'd be saying to the world that Kennesaw State University offers the finest education that can be had in this area in the southeast, in Atlanta metro area. The quality of your education doesn't have to do with one thing. It has to do with several factors, and both faculty and staff, everyone that I've ever known here, was genuinely committed to the good of the university and to the students that were here. My personal experience was that it was the best education that I got. I learned more here than I did before or after.

TS: Thanks, Ralph.

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