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Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with
Randall Ferguson Jr.
March 28, 2006
Lee's Summit, Missouri

Interviewer: Scott Lunsford

[00:00:00.00]

Scott Lunsford: We gotta [got to] do a little business here first.

Franklin Evarts: Speed.

Randall Ferguson: Okay.

SL: I've got to say that we're here, Randall, we're gonna [going to] do a oral and visual history of you today, and this is for the Barbara and David Pryor Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History.

RF: Okay.

SL: This tape—all the things we gather and take with this are going to reside in the Special Collections Department in Mullins Library on the [University of Arkansas] Fayetteville campus. Two things that we're—I'm charged with putting together a video that will be shown at the Silas Hunt Legacy Award Dinner. And it—it's going to consist of all the interviews that I am doing with all ten awardees. Now, I—I'm gonna tell you that they've given me as much as fifteen minutes . . .

RF: *[Laughs]*

SL: . . . which is a pretty long video in the—in video world . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . for a dinner video. But I'll take all fifteen minutes. But even taking all fifteen minutes, that means each awardee basically gets ninety seconds.

RF: Right.

SL: So I'm gonna walk away from our talk today with probably a good four hours of videotape, and out of that four hours, I'm going pick about ninety seconds . . .

RF: . . . Pick ninety seconds. Okay.

SL: So, that gives you the scope of what we're trying to do today . . .

RF: Well—well, that guarantees that it'll probably be halfway decent then.

[Laughter]

SL: Well, I'll get—I'll take what I think is the most compelling stuff. You know, and I—I look for not only, you know, dramatic stuff or—or interesting stuff. I look for funny stuff, and sad stuff, challenges that people have had, you know, how they overcome them. I look for inspirational things. I like—I like to give the audience a full range of emotions. I don't want to bore anyone, but I—I don't want to make anyone sad all the time. I—I want it to be kind of uplifting, too. So I'll be looking for that kind of stuff when I'm going through, and it's kind of a elementary thing, but let's our guy that's gonna be doing our editing know exactly how to spell your name, so there's no . . .

RF: Okay.

SL: . . . mistakes. So if you could do that now, that'd be great.

[00:02:11] RF: Okay, my name is Randall Carter Ferguson Jr. R-A-N-D-A-L-L, C-A-R-T-E-R, F-E-R-G-U-S-O-N, Junior.

SL: Junior. All right. Great. Thanks. Okay, so this video that I'm gonna be doing with the Silas Hunt event, it started out kind of as a history of [*unclear word*] African American involvement at the University of Arkansas. And I have since—and I—I've got to have some of that in there, but I've found that these stories that I'm getting from everybody that I'm talking to—the early years are so compelling, that I'm going to divide this video up into three sections: before your time at the University of Arkansas, your time at the University of Arkansas, and then what happens with you after that, and including where—what you see the University of Arkansas—how it is now and its future and maybe your recommendations and hopes for it. So with that picture in mind, it kind of plays well for the Pryor Center as well, 'cause [because] I get to go back and get to start with your earliest memory. And I'm gonna try and take you through your entire life as much as we can do in—in one afternoon.

RF: Okay.

SL: Knowing that we may want to come back at some other time after April, you know, to—to talk with you again. And these projects can expand. I mean we may end up going and visiting your mom and dad, and your, you know.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: It—it can grow . . .

RF: Okay.

SL: . . . as—as it needs to grow. So I'm interested in your very earliest memory. You were born in Camden, Arkansas.

[00:04:08] RL: Yes. Born in Camden, Arkansas on November 11, 1951. My earliest memory is of being in kindergarten. It isn't of being at home, but being in kindergarten. I started kindergarten at three years old. So today, as you know, kindergartens start at five. So this was a combined daycare and kindergarten.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But it was sort of neat, at three years old, being there with five year olds who were learning to read. You saw how they behaved as a five year-old versus you as a three year-old. And I also—later I remember riding to kindergarten. My father would take me over in his truck, or he would—he owned his own restaurant and sometimes, someone who worked in the restaurant would come and pick us up, and—or pick me up, and take me to—take me to kindergarten. So most of my earlier memories are in kindergarten—gettin' [getting] in trouble for hitting someone with a rock.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh! Yes.

RF: And I wasn't trying to hit them. I was saying I was throwing it over their head, which I was really trying to do. I got—I got in a lot of trouble for—for that one. I remember my sixth year birthday party.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: We had it at our house, and it was a—it was a lot of fun. I—I remember that party very well. But I don't remember between the three years old and six years old . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . except for kindergarten, I don't really remember a lot from those days.

[00:05:57] SL: So, population of Camden at this time was probably—it probably hadn't changed much, is my understanding—that it's pretty much been stagnant . . .

RF: . . . It—it's gone down a little bit, but it's . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . been—back then, as I—I don't remember what it was at three . . .

SL: . . . Yeah. Mm-hmm.

RF: As I was growing up, I remember the population being fourteen–fifteen thousand.

SL: Right.

RF: And, but we had people living—leaving, but what we did, it is that Camden would annex areas. And, what was Camden when I was growing up, I bet it's probably ten or eleven thousand.

SL: Right.

RF: Because there were other parts that were considered suburbs, if you [*laughs*—if you can believe it, of Camden that are now considered in Camden.

[00:06:47] SL: Uh-huh. Well, I'm just—I'm going to assume Camden was probably like everywhere else in the state. Was—in your kindergarten, was that in a house, or was it . . . ?

RF: Yes, it was at—in was in someone's home.

SL: Uh-huh. And was it segregated or, I mean, did you have both black and white kids?

RF: All black.

SL: All black.

RF: Right. The—the teacher was black.

SL: Mm-hmm.



RF: I—I was in school—I was in all-black schools until I was a sophomore in high school. And, Camden High School, I think, had its first black the year before I went. And there was a single—as I remember, there was a single black student that went, and then the next year, I was among a group of people that went.

SL: That'd be like [19]68, [19]69 probably?

RF: I graduated in [19]70.

SL: Right.

[00:07:52] RF: So [19]69-[19]70 would have been my senior year . . .

SL: . . . Senior year.

RF: So [19]67-[19]68 . . .

SL: . . . [19]67-[19]68, yeah.

RF: . . . would have been my sophomore year. And it was interesting how I got to go. I—I had just—I was a decent basketball player, and I had done very well, my ninth grade year in—in scoring and rebounding. And I came home and my father [Randall Ferguson], the—our minister, and the black high school principal were in my living room.

SL: [*Laughs*] Uh-oh. [*Laughs*]

RF: And I came in, said “Hello,” ’cause I had to walk right through them . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and I say, “Hello, Reverend Dunn,” and “Hello, Mr. [Ivory? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING], Dad” and came—walked through. And a few minutes later, my father called me into the living room. And he said, “Junior, as you know—” and I’m paraphrasing, I don’t remember the details, but I remember him saying, you know, we had a black student go to Camden High School last year, good athlete, but when football season was over, he’d flunked out. And they’re looking to have blacks go to school that are good students, and they want you to go. And I remember saying that I didn’t want to go, not in a disrespectful way, but—but I was told that I was going. So—so that’s how I got to Camden High School as a sophomore. I was the—there were only two sophomore males. In fact, when I graduated from high school, I graduated either fourth or sixth in my high school class . . .

SL: Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . and I was the only black male to graduate in that—that class. There were four or five women, young ladies, that graduated in that . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . class, but I was the only black male.

[00:10:00] SL: Let’s go backwards just a little bit here. Let’s talk a little bit about your mom and your dad. You said that your dad owned a restaurant?

RF: Right. He—he had a restaurant and a lounge, a bar . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . in the back he—well he ran it. It was actually—the building was actually owned by his sister and her husband . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and he had a restaurant there—he had a lounge. In the back was a place for live entertainment. Little Milton, B.B. King, Bobby “Blue” Bland, all of those people used to come and perform at Ferguson’s Lounge, it was called. So he knew all of these entertainers.

SL: Sounds hot.

[00:10:48] RF: Yeah, yeah. He was—he’s—while he had a lot of different food, like soul food . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . he loved to barbecue. I used to go with him to barbecue. He would go to a pit that he had at a second home that his sister had—probably ten miles outside of Camden.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I would go with him and barbecue. So, and those—those outings were—were a lot of fun. I had no idea what I was doing.

SL: Right.

RF: But I was there. He would tell me when to turn the meat [*laughs*].

[00:12:24] SL: So was this wet or dry barbecue? I guess his . . .

RF: Oh, wet.

SL: Wet. Yeah.

RF: Well, what he did is that he cooked it, and he did a variety of ways. He basically cooked it, okay, and then you could put a barbecue sauce on it. But there were times that he would cook the barbecue sauce in at the very end. Okay?

SL: I see.

RF: But he had his own marinade that he made.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Okay, so he kept it moist with this marinade that he—he made himself. And I remember—I remember vinegar, onions, lemon—I don't know what else, but—but that was part of the recipe.

SL: Doesn't sound real sweet.

RF: Uh, no, but—but that's the marinade.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He—the—the sauce was a little sweeter . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . not real sweet.

SL: Uh-huh. That's good . . .

RF: . . . But he did put sugar in it.

SL: So does he still do that now? I mean will he—will he . . . ?

RF: . . . Some. Oh yes, oh yes. He—he will still—he will still do it. In fact . . .

SL: . . . Now see that would have been an advantage for me to go down there and get some photos.

RF: Exactly.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: In fact, he—he occasionally will barbecue at the church.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: The church will have some sort of an outing there, and, he will go up there and he will barbecue for 'em [them].

[00:12:40] SL: So he had a sister that had this place out in the country with the pit.

RF: Right.

SL: Were there any other relatives? What about your grandma and granddads?

RF: My—I never knew my grandfather . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . on my father's side.

SL: Okay.

RF: He lived to be eighty-six, but he died, God, in the [19]30s. I knew my grandmother, my father's mother, and she came to lived—live with my father's sister. Her name was—she was—her name was Sophie . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . called her Aunt Sophie. And his mother's name was Lula. L-U-L-A. And we spent a lot of time with her. She died at ninety. I—I forgot what year it was.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But and, on my mother's side, I knew my grandmother and grandfather. My grandfather died in his sixties. So, I was—so I was fortunate that I knew three . . .

SL: . . . Three of the four . . .

RF: . . . three of the four grandparents that I had. And they lived right there, in Camden.

[00:13:56] SL: Do you—do you remember any stories, or particularly poignant times you had with them. Or . . . ?

RF: I remember my grandfather on my mother's side very well.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: We were at a kitchen table in Louisiana—I'll never forget that—and I was acting up a little bit, not really bad, but I was pretending to, like, spit, not really do it but, like, bubble up.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And he asked me to stop doing it. He was just the nicest guy in the world, just the nicest guy in the world. But to me this was fun. You know, he asked me to stop doing it. And then, I did it again and kind of smiled. And he asked me, said, "I'm going to ask you one more time not to do that," very calmly. So I looked at him and smiled and I did it again. He got out of that table. He came and snatched my little but up off of that table . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . and gave me the spanking of my life.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: I—I remember that to this day. I can still see him raising up out of that chair. 'Cause when he went up, fear came into me—instant fear. But he was—he was just the nicest, mild-mannered, low voiced guy. I just—I just couldn't imagine that this was about to happen to me. But I never did that again.

SL: [*Laughs*] I bet you didn't.

RF: In fact I never did anything . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . that he asked me not to do.

SL: [Laughs] I bet you did.

RF: So. [Laughs]

SL: I bet you learned right then.

RF: So that—yeah, that’s the memory I have of him.

SL: It only takes one time, huh?

RF: Yeah.

FE: Could you just adjust his mic Scott? I think his hand hit it. Just . . .

SL: Okay.

FE: Just—just in a little bit.

SL: Yeah.

FE: Oh, I’m sorry.

SL: Okay.

FE: Back in a little bit.

SL: There we go.

FE: Great.

SL: Okay.

FE: Thank you.

[00:15:46] SL: Yeah. Well, what a great story.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Was your—was your mom and dad with you at that time? Or were you visiting—
you don’t remember?

RF: You know, I . . .

SL: . . . You remember who . . . ?

RF: . . . think—I think that my mother was with me.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Y’know [you know] . . .

SL: . . . ’Cause he probably would have deferred to your father, if your father had been at the table . . .

RF: . . . Well . . .

SL: . . . I bet.

RF: When I grew up, anyone could discipline you.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean, everyone understood what was expected of you. And had my father been there I don’t think that he—he would have done it but he had no problem doing it with my—with my mother there. I’m not sure he would have cared if my father was there. I mean, but they had great respect for each other, but, y’know, everybody had the same standards. There was no disagreement about what was right and wrong and how you should behave. So you didn’t have one person that tended to me more lenient than another.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So, if we got out of line, it was everybody’s job to get us back in line. Even if you were walking home from school and you were doing something, the neighbors would come outside and say, “Randall Jr., you know you aren’t supposed to be doin’ [doing] that.” *Neighbors* would do that. And if we kept doin’ it, the phone rang at home. And we were met by our parents [*laughs*] when we got home.

SL: What a great community . . .

RF: . . . And said “Mrs. So-and-so just said she saw you doing this in front the house, her house.”

SL: Boy, we’re a long way from that these days.

RF: Oh no. You’re—you’re exactly right. I mean people are . . .

SL: . . . Golly.

[00:17:32] RF: I mean, you know, it was—when I was in junior high school, if you missed a math question, then you got hit in the hand with a strap. [*Laughs*]

SL: Whoa.

RF: Oh, yeah. We would go up to the board, and the math teacher would call out problems, and we’d—we’d put them on the board. And we—it was for accuracy and speed. We—we had these—and you know, to this day, I just look at numbers and see answers. I mean, people who worked for me, who were not very good with numbers, tended to get nervous because if they brought numbers to me they knew that I could just see something wrong without saying—counting things out. It’s just—it’s like it popped out at me that this is wrong, with that. And I think that came from the math. As a—I remember, as a ninth-grader, we had a math contest that everyone in high school could take, be a part of—I mean, twelfth graders, juniors. I won that math contest as a freshman in high school.

SL: Wow.

RF: So numbers were—was just something that, for some reason, came easy, and it—I don’t—there’s nothing that I can remember that I did . . .

SL: Other than . . .

RF: . . . to get . . .

SL: . . . avoiding punishment, you think?

RF: I have no idea.

SL: Or just—the discipline that was instilled early?

RF: Oh, yeah. And—and my a—of course, my father had the business, so he had to deal with money.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And, so I felt that he was pretty good with that. My mother [Lizzie Bea Howard? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING] also, because she would occasionally work there in the business . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . with him.

[00:19:24] SL: Was she pretty much a homemaker?

RF: Early, she worked there in the—the business, but mainly she would—yeah, she was there at home raising us. We saw her much more than we saw her father.

SL: Well, I would assume. Yeah.

RF: Yeah.

SL: And that's any entrepreneurial . . .

RF: Oh, absolutely. I mean he would be down there early; he'd be there late, because you can imagine if you've got a lounge, you've got B.B. King, I mean, people didn't go home until one o'clock in the morning—midnight. But I remember him taking me down there on Saturday mornings after a Friday night, and, I got a chance to clean the place up. [*Laughs*]

[00:20:06] SL: Well, I was gonna ask you about your work, and a lot of times when the father is on businesses, it was expected the sons and even the daughters would come in and—and do hours at the place of business . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . whatever it is.

RF: Yeah. And you know he never pushed it. I started doin' that around twelve years old.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But, I never felt forced to do it, you know. I—I never, like, on Saturday mornings woke up and said, "Oh my god, I've gotta go down and do that." It was, it really wasn't that bad I mean . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . y'know I was meeting people. People were very respectful. They *had* to be around my father. Someone was cursing one time, and he came back there with a gun and told him they didn't curse around his son. I remember that.

SL: And, I bet they didn't.

RF: They—they didn't anymore.

SL: Ever again.

RF: And of course, he knew these people.

SL: Right.

RF: But I mean—but he didn't point the gun at anybody or anything like that.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean, back—he could actually—I—he could actually carry a gun in holster,
[laughs] you know.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And you know, running your own business, especially a cash business, and
with—with people drinking, and you know . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . dancing and having a good time, you know, it could be—it could be
dangerous. You'd have to be able to protect yourself in that environment.

[00:21:37] SL: Well, you had to be respected in order to survive in that business, I'm
sure.

RF: Right.

SL: And I bet—I bet you—those Saturday mornings where you knew you were gonna
be helping down at the—at the restaurant, that there was a certain amount of pride
that you were there, and your father was the owner of the business, and . . .

RF: Oh, it—it really was . . .

SL: . . . everyone was—paid—had the respect for him and . . .

RF: . . . Yeah. We—in fact, we sort of grew up in an environment where we didn't
have more than everybody, but the perception was that we had more than—than
some others. My parents built their first house in the early [19]50s, okay.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And, I mean, he did a great job of—of caring for us. I mean he knew everybody
in town; everybody knew him. People came to our house all the time, needing

money, and he would give them money. But he'd say, "You need to bring me your stereo or . . ."

SL: Right.

RF: Y'know it was almost like he had his little pawnshop or whatever.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: But when people needed something, they came to our house. I mean, there were just so many people that—that were there all the time, coming over and needing something. Well, when—when people, usually, when they needed something, they would come to him.

[00:23:15] SL: Back to your grandparents. Were they farmers in any way? What—what—where—what's their lineage as far as . . .

RF: My . . .

SL: . . . what their life was like? I—I'm thinkin' [thinking] they probably experienced the Great Depression and getting through all that . . .

RF: . . . Yeah . . .

SL: . . . I'm just wondering how that impacted your . . .

RF: . . . Well they—they . . .

SL: . . . dad and your mom.

RF: . . . on my—on my mother's side, they came out of Louisiana, northern Louisiana.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I'm—and when I—we would go back down there to visit, it was on a farm. But I can't tell you anything about my grandparents' upbringing. When I knew my grandparents, they lived in Camden . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . okay, across town. And my grandfather actually, I'm not sure where he—he worked. I mean he had a job . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and I think it was in—at some industrial place, I'm—you know . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . I—I can't remember.

[00:24:16] SL: The house where the barbecue pit was, was it by any water? I mean, I . . .

RF: No.

SL: . . . I have fished and stayed out at Mustin Lake . . .

RF: . . . Well, there are lakes. Yeah, yeah there are . . .

SL: . . . I've been to Mustin Lake.

RF: Yeah, there are lakes. There was no lake, like, on the property . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . but you passed right by the lake to . . .

SL: . . . Uh-huh . . .

RF: . . . get to that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . that house. And I spent, you know, when I was growing up, I spent a lot of time with my aunt Sophie.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I mean I would spend the night with her. I had—and so, that’s my father’s sister. But I had another aunt on my mother’s side. She was married to my mother’s brother, Dalton. And, I would spend the—she was—she and I were—she was probably the closest aunt that I had, because I would spend the night with her *every* Friday night—every without fail. And we would watch horror movies together.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh, my gosh.

RF: And with my aunt Sophie, she owned the complex there. It had a small motel—a hotel . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . a coffee shop.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And, she actually let me work in the coffee shop, when I was growing up. So I did that younger, and then as I got older, then I went over to do some things with my father, ’cause, you know, obviously it was more of an adult establishment, and I didn’t need to be over there at seven or eight or . . .

SL: . . . Right . . .

RF: . . . nine or anything like that . . .

SL: . . . Right, right.

RF: Twelve is still young, but at least I could—I could do some things, then I could actually help clean the place up.

[00:25:53] SL: Well, it sounds like your dad’s sister was also an entrepreneur.

RF: Oh, yes, yes.

SL: So, really . . . ?

RF: Yes, she—she and her husband.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Yeah.

SL: You really got a dose of business from the word go. You were surrounded with business and what it took to make businesses work, and the discipline.

RF: Yeah, and—and I do—I wasn't thinking about what makes a business work, but I was there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, you know, while it was neat to have a father who had his own business, I mean, it's not like it was glamorous, I mean . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . I mean from the standpoint that—I remember him showing me how to wash dishes down there. .

SL: Yeah?

RF: Okay. And—and talking about the importance of cleanliness, and, from a food preparation standpoint, you know, you should always be washing your hands and, he wants the floor spotless back in the—back in the back. And then, with her, she actually let me run the cash register. So, you had . . .

SL: . . . At the coffee shop . . .

RF: Yeah. Yeah . . .

SL: . . . hotel, yeah?

RF: . . . And so you—you had to—you had to know how to do change.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And you—and you didn't have time to grab a calculator or write it down, I mean, it had to be kind of, I mean, come natural to you.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So giving change at a very young age, I mean it—y'know numbers just—it—that—it just happened. It—it was—it was very easy, and—and—and math is something that was always easy for me, all the way through college. I think when I got to college I was able to take calculus my freshman year. I never had calculus in high school. I made an A in it, so, I mean . . .

SL: . . . Yeah.

RF: . . . numbers just came easy for me . . .

[00:27:59] SL: . . . Well, I—and also, you're back in that kindergarten when you're three years old and you're watching the other kids . . .

RF: . . . Well, that—that probably had something to do . . .

SL: . . . get their learnin' [learning] right there in front of you. And you—of course, you want to emulate what they're doing.

RF: Exactly. You know . . .

SL: . . . You want to be a part of . . .

RF: . . . you want to be—you want to be like the older kids, right?

SL: Yeah, that's right. Right, so you had role models early, that a lot of kids—most kids—didn't. I mean, most kids didn't go to—didn't have that kind of situation that early.

RF: Right. I—I did. It was a—I graduated from high—not high school, from—from kindergarten—I spent, I think two years there, maybe three years there, and I graduated with cap and gown.

SL: *[Laughs]*

RF: White cap and gown, from kindergarten. And then I showed up at the first grade, and this is in September; my birthday is November 11th. They would not let me in.

SL: 'Cause you weren't old enough.

RF: Exactly. I went back to kindergarten for another year. *[Laughs]*

SL: Oh, that's crazy.

RF: So I got—I got plenty of—plenty of early childhood education.

[00:29:21] SL: Okay, so let's talk a little bit about Camden and the community that you were in, your neighborhood. It sounds like to me, that on one side, you've—you got your dad doing his business, you've got your aunt on the other side doin' her business. Was there, in Camden—I mean, I—I've talked to people about Pine Bluff quite a bit. But in Camden, was there just really a separate, self-supporting black community, where you had your own motel and coffee shop, your own bar, your own grocery store, your own—I mean was the separate but equal thing that was all over the country, was that the way it was entrenched?

RF: Yeah. I mean we had our own park.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: The—the—the white students had their own park. In our park, where we played baseball, like—just like they played baseball in their park.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: They had a gym though, for basketball.

SL: Right.

RF: We did not. We had outside basketball though, which for us was fine.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: We did everything outside in the—in the summers. We did not have a swimming pool, and they did.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So, I learned how to swim as a senior in college. Friends of mine learned how to swim, because they'd go visit family up north. Or they learned how to swim in a lake or a river.

SL: Mm-hmm.



[00:30:51] RF: When I was growing up, if I lost a friend, it wasn't to a shooting or stabbing, I lost someone because, a friend of mine, someone that I knew, because they drowned. Because we weren't allowed to swim in *that* swimming pool, so people that wanted to swim had to go in rivers, lakes, and the river was just very, very dangerous.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: It had undercurrents, and—and people would just get—they'd be swimming, and they just—[got] pulled away . . .

SL: . . . Ouachita.

RF: Yeah. Yeah, exactly . . .

SL: . . . Ouachita River. Yeah.

RF: . . . Ouachita River.

[00:31:23] SL: They used to have barges on the Ouachita, as I remember. There was—it was navigable.

RF: Okay.

SL: Commerce went up and down that . . .

RF: . . . Okay. I didn't remember that. But . . .

SL: Yeah. Well, I mean, that's a long time ago.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I mean, it is a big piece of water.

RF: Oh, it is.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

[00:31:36] RF: But—but there were—[*pause*]. So we had that. I told you I didn't go to—I was in black schools . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . until my sophomore year in—in high school. The—the restaurants that we went to were black. There was a restaurant near our home, the Duck Inn. You could come there if you were black and order take-out, but you weren't allowed to come and sit down . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and eat. In fact, you couldn't do that in—and then there were some restaurants that you couldn't even order take out.

SL: Right.

RF: Let me see, so—there wasn't—I don't remember there being a black grocery store, but there may—there may have been. But, I mean, we had a black gas station. Auto repair was owned by someone black. I mean it was—it was—it was pretty separate, I mean you . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . you—Ouachita County, I don't know about Camden, but the county that Camden is in, is—is about 40 percent black. So, I mean there were lots of black people. Now I don't know how much it's changed since I . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . was growing up, I mean, but the—I mean we had our own separate economy. And I don't think that was any different from a lot of the Southern . . .

SL: Exactly.

RF: . . . cities.

SL: Exactly. That's the . . .

RF: . . . I don't think it was any . . .

SL: . . . way it evolved.

RF: Mm-hmm. And—and when we did have integration, I mean, it was slow. Like I said, we had one student go the year before I went.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Then the year that I went, myself and another guy and maybe four or five women. 'Cause I don't any seniors went, I think it was just sophomores and—and juniors. So, but then like I said, two years later when I graduated, I think there were five

or six of us that—that graduated. And I think that a couple years later, they—they started by class.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: They—the whole freshman class was integrated. And then it became the—then they became sophomores, and—and it—and it moved like that.

[00:34:13] SL: You know, it's—seems like, what I've heard in most of these interviews, is that the communities, the black and white communities, pretty much got along with each other. They pretty much—I mean there—things were the way they were. It wasn't like someone was dictating this and dictating that. It was like everyone just kind of assumed this is the way it was, and they tried to get along as best as they knew how and could, at the time. Was Camden still a good place, a friendly place? Did you have any kind of interaction with the white community at all when you were—until you got to high school? Was there—like, what about the movie theater? Was there *a* movie theater in Camden?

RF: There were two, and blacks sat in the balcony.

SL: Like everywhere else.

RF: Right. We sat in the balcony, and the whites sat down . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . on the—on the floor. And one of 'em closed, and the other stayed—was called the Malco, I think.

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

RF: But—but there were two.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And I can't remem[ber]—I remember paying twenty cents to go to a movie.

SL: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

RF: Twenty cents to go to a movie . . .

SL: . . . Yeah, I know.

[00:35:32] RF: Yeah, yeah. But no, in terms of was it a friendly place, yes. I—I never got into any—I never had any run-ins with anyone white, either students or adults. I never [pause] for instance, I don't have any memory, of either a young white or a male calling me a "nigger." I have—I have no memory of that. I—I heard of those things . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . happening, but that never—that never happened, to me. When I was in high school, at Camden High School, Lincoln High School was the black high school . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and Camden High School was the white high school. I had a good relationship with the students. I think it helped that I was a starter on the basketball team.

SL: Right.

RF: Athletes tended to be popular . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . so I went from being almost six feet tall as a freshman . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . playing center.

SL: Okay.

RF: Okay. As a seventh grader, I was five [foot], four [inches] . . .

SL: Wow.

RF: . . . and as a ninth grader, I was almost six feet tall. So I grew seven and a half inches in two years. So as a seventh grader, I was a guard.

SL: Right.

RF: And as a ninth grader, I played center, but I didn't lose any of my quickness. I played the center position with more quickness than any center that—that played against me. And—and . . .

SL: So you were a monster on the boards.

RF: Well, the thing . . .

SL: And you could [*unclear phrase*].

RF: . . . what—but what happened to show you how I did lose that quickness, I was the starting guard as a sophomore . . .

SL: Ahh.

RF: . . . on the varsity.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: So I mean, this is just not something that was in my—in my head [*laughs*]. I mean . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . I really was able at—but I never grew. I—I'd—I'm—I'm six feet and a quarter of an inch now bare-footed, and I was six feet and a quarter of an inch as a sophomore, and after I started at five [foot] four [inches] in the seventh grade, I

was extrapolating myself out to like six [foot] ten [inches]—six [foot], eleven [inches] . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . which—which never happened.

SL: Right.

RF: I just stopped.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well. That's all right. Settled in to a role, and . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . I bet you did well.

 [00:37:57] RF: Yeah. I—but I—I enjoyed it. The—the worst experience for me in high school—it was two. One is that even though I finished either fourth or sixth, I can't tell you which it was, in my class, I was never voted into the National Honor Society [national organization that recognizes outstanding high school students].

SL: Hmm.

RF: The teachers voted for that.

SL: Oh.

RF: And while I was an all-district basketball player, I never got in trouble, my last five semesters there I had all A's and one B, I was never suspended, the teachers were all nice to me; they never voted me into the National Honor Society.

SL: So there was some prejudice—there was polite prejudice going on.

RF: Oh! Oh, right. There was prejudice.

SL: And the prejudice that you didn't really see.

RF: Oh, there was clearly prejudice. I—you know, just because I said that no one called me names or this type . . .

SL: . . . Right.

RF: . . . of thing it was clear that being black, I wasn't supposed to be in the National Honor Society, even though there were fifteen honor graduates that year.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And like I said, I was either fourth or sixth, I—I can't remember. Every honor graduate, there were—of—of the top fif[teen]—of the honor graduates, there was one black and that was me. The fourteen other honor graduates were all in the National Honor Society, even those that I outranked in terms of . . .

SL: Most of them.

RF: . . . in terms of—right.

SL: Yeah. Wow.

[00:39:47] RF: So that was—that was pretty—that was pretty disappointing. And that was the first time I really noticed—and said, “Wait a minute. What’s going on here? I mean, I’m working my butt off. I mean, how are these people getting elected into the National Honor Society, and they don’t even have my grades?” So, that was—before that, you know, we lived in our own world. You know, things were good. I dealt with other black kids, I grew up with other black kids, and things were great. We—at least for me, I thought they were great, and then that happened. And—and it’s interesting that, well, I didn’t get it my sophomore year, didn’t get it my junior year. I was hoping that my senior year, that that

would be the year that it would happen. But, I was—I had P.E. [physical education]. Athletes had P.E. the last period of the . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . of the school year—of—of the school day. Well I had study hall the period before. And, so what—since I had good grades, I was allowed to come over to . . .

SL: P.E. early.

RF: . . . P.E. early, and there was a girl's P.E. class going on. So I would sit up in the stands doing my homework. And when they went to get dressed, which was maybe fifteen – twenty minutes before the bell rang, then I went and put on my basketball practice stuff.

SL: Right.

RF: And then I came out and shot baskets, getting ready for the last period.

SL: Right.

RF: Unbeknownst to me, the girls that were watching me went back to study hall, and one of 'em passed a note to the other one, that got intercepted that said, "I love Randall Ferguson."

SL: Yeah.

RF: Now I don't know any of them.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: I got called into the principal's office.

SL: Uh oh.

RF: And they want to know if I knew some young lady. I said, “No, I don’t. I don’t know her.” They said, “Are you sure?” I said, “I’m—I mean—I’m positive. I don’t—I don’t know her.” Then they told me she was a freshman; I’m a senior. [Laughs] Then they told me she was a freshman. I said, “I—I do not know her.” And, I remember finally saying—he kept asking me as if he didn’t believe me, and this was the principal—never will forget, Mr. [Seymour? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING]. And, I told him that I didn’t know her; I didn’t know what he was talking about. He said he had called the girl’s mother, and the mother didn’t know anything about it. And, finally, you know, I said, “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but, I mean if—if I *had*, what’s—what’s the big deal?” And he looked at me—I’ll never forget, he looked at me and said, “I thought you were one of the good ones.” He said, “You can go on back.” “I thought you were one of the *good* ones.” I mean I was the—good—I’m—I’ve got straight A’s, well behaved . . .

SL: . . . Right, right.

RF: . . . all-district basketball player. I remember when—when I made all-district, they announced it over the intercom system of the whole school for myself and another guy who we called Tree—he was six [foot] nine [inches].

SL: Yeah.

RF: But I never—I—I never got in trouble at that—that was the only thing that ever happened. And I remember meeting the young lady, and her telling me, “I want you to know that the principal just called me into his office, and he wanted me to

know that you did not make the National Honor Society again, and that I'm the reason why."

SL: [Gasps]

[00:43:56] RF: I—I don't even think I ever told my parents this story, actually. But those were the two—and, those two things sort of made me even work harder. It didn't make me say, "Well I worked my butt off in high school, obviously nothing good is going to come from working hard." And I had—what got me through that is I had two people that I could talk to. [Ernie Sterling? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING], who was my fourth grade teacher, the first male teacher I had ever seen. He was the only male teacher I in our elementary school. My first grade, second grade, third grade, all—the principal—was a woman . . .

SL: Of course.

RF: . . . in my elementary school . . .

SL: . . . Yeah. That was typical.

RF: And I got in the fourth grade, and here's a *guy*. You know, wow. And he was a—he taught general fourth grade . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but he also taught art.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And then when I got to high school, he had left for a while to go and work somewhere then he came back to teach high school. And—and then there was Harriet Washington, who was a librarian, and both of these people were—were

black. They were people that I could talk to whenever I—whenever I needed to.
And I talked to her more.

[00:45:25] SL: So did you talk to 'em about this deal with the principal and the . . .

RF: Yeah. Yeah, I mean . . .

SL: What'd they—what'd they have to say? Is it . . .

RF: It was terrible.

SL: That's the way it is?

RF: And you know, he's a racist, and everybody knows that he's a racist and [*pause*]
but, you know, I wasn't, like, down in the dumps or anything over—over this
thing. I mean, you know, I still had a great family, and [*pause*] yeah. For some—
I don't know how, but I did not get depressed over it.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I just sort of—I saw it as what it was, very unfair, and then I moved on. I mean
I—I had a great basketball coach who—who I felt was very—very fair with me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Lobbied for me to get all-district. Made me captain of the basketball team as a
senior.

SL: That's big.

RF: You know—I mean co-captain. Tree and I were the co-captains of the—of the
team. I mean, he didn't have—he didn't have to do that. He left there to go
coach in college. And I remember they made the NI—NAIA [National
Association of Intercollegiate Athletics] tournament in Kansas City.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I was at the hotel and saw him.

SL: Aww.

RF: Years later.

SL: Aww.

RF: And he remembered me.

SL: That was a good stroke, wasn't it?

RF: Yeah. We—we talked. Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: Yeah. Absolutely.

SL: You know I want to . . .

RF: Monroe Ingram . . .

SL: Monroe Ingram.

RF: . . . is his name.

SL: What—what team was he?

RF: He was—I think it was Southern Arkansas.

SL: Hmm.

RF: SAU. I think it was Southern Arkansas University is where he coached. He coached me at . . .

SL: Is that Monticello? Or where?

RF: No, no. It was south. It was either Magnolia—I think it was Magnolia.

SL: . . . Uh-huh. Magnolia. Yeah.

RF: Yeah. He was my—he was my—he—he coached the varsity my senior year.

[00:47:31] SL: Uh-huh. This—this whole thing about the National Honor Society and the note, and all that stuff, and your reaction to it; not only did you just not give up, and say why do all this work if it doesn't mean anything—you pushed on. I mean, you just kept going. And I've got to—I've got to think, okay, what was going on when you were a kid, back at your home, the way your mom and dad raised you, that set in your mind and set in your heart this desire to excel, because obviously those kind of grades, that kind of athleticism, that kind of attitude, when faced. It's kind of late in your life, and—in that it—you didn't—it didn't come down on you personally until high school, but—I—I guess what I'm trying to roll around is, is there—is there something that you can recall in your times with your mom and dad at home? For instance, let's talk about, why don't we talk about the dinner table? Tell me what—tell me how dinners were. What—what happened at the dinner table? First of all, was everybody there at the same time? Was it . . .

RF: We all sat down together.

SL: Okay.

RF: Most of the time with my mother, because my father would be working.

SL: Right.

RF: But, we—as we got older, we didn't do that, but when we were younger, we all sat down at the table together. My mother and my father would say grace over the food, and we all had to say a Bible verse.

SL: All right.

RF: Or say a—got to recite one.

SL: You . . .

RF: I took the easy way out, and said, “Jesus wept.” [*Laughter*] But we all had to do that. We went to Sunday school, every Sunday *without fail*. And then went to church, *without fail*. We went to Vacation Bible School every summer *without fail*.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: So, I mean from a very young—I joined the church at eight years old.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I was youth superintendent of the Sunday school, for two or three years. So I—I led the youth service in Sunday school, I said the prayer, I summarized the lesson, all at a very young age. I was president of the Youth Usher Board . . .

[00:50:27] SL: You think you started your . . .

RF: . . . at this church.

SL: . . . your civic—your—oh, just looking at all the civic things you’ve done—you’ve got listed on your information. That’s probably where that attitude started maybe, is in your church involvement. You started assuming responsibilities for your community in the church environment.

RF: In the church environment, not—not so much outside of that . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . just in the—in—in the church environment. I mean, I—I always had a desire to do well at whatever I did, and—and I really tried to do that. I also had a strong desire to want to please my parents. And I knew that working hard, making good grades, all those things, would please them. And I did not—I did not want to

disappoint them, I mean I was just driven to just be the best that I could be. And while I—I had a father who worked hard, I had a mother who worked hard raising the five of us, four boys and a girl . . .

SL: . . . Yeah, see we haven't even touched that yet.

RF: . . . you know. So I was around people who worked hard. I mean we weren't allowed, for instance, to get up and leave our room without having made our bed. You don't even walk out the door. I mean, you don't get up and walk into the kitchen! [*Laughs*] I mean, you made your bed when you got up. I mean that's just the way it was in—in my house. You clean up behind yourself. We all learned to wash dishes at an early age. I kind of got out of that, I . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . I—I told my mother that when I stuck my hand in the—in the soap . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . it made my—made me tingle and it felt uncomfortable. So she—I did other things, but oh, my brothers, they hated me, because I was able to get out of washing dishes. “Ugh, my hand tingles when I stick it in here,” or something. You know, I got a hard time over that. But, it was—it was just natural. I mean it was—it was—it was a pretty—and being the—the oldest, I think that had something to—to do with it. I mean I wasn't seeing—when the—when the expectation was there, “You ought to work hard. You can be anything you want to be if you just don't give up and guess what you're going to have to work awfully hard.” I didn't have an older brother that was acting differently to, “That's what they said you should do.” That's what I was hearing in Sunday

school. Every Sunday, I was hearing it in church all the time. You even heard it in kindergarten. I mean it's just—it's the only thing that, I mean that I knew. I mean I just thought—I remember coming home with a report card that had seventeen A's and three B's on it. This was in elementary school.

SL: *[Laughs]*

RF: I showed it to my mother. She just—oh, she—“Oh, I'm so proud of you.” And showed it to my father. He looked at it and he said, “Where did these B's come from?”

SL: *[Laughs]*

RF: He didn't yell at me?

SL: *[Laughs]* I know. I know. [?I do the?] same thing *[Laughs]*

RF: He just said, “Where did the B's come from?”

SL: *[Laughs]* And it probably crushed you, because . . .

RF: You know, whoa. My mother just said, “Oh, Junior, I'm so—I'm so proud of you.”

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: But you—but you know what? I didn't get upset with him. My deal was that then I need to have eighteen, nineteen, twenty A's.

SL: Right.

RF: If he's gonna be—so it—it wasn't like I said, “Gosh, what a mean person he is.” You know.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[00:54:39] RF: I mean I was afraid of my father, but it wasn't because I thought he was mean. He was a disciplinarian. I mean—I mean he was a tough guy. But it wasn't something about, you know, in terms of his being mean. But I wanted to please him, and I wanted to please my mother, so I did whatever I could to do that.

SL: Now you—you were saying when you were talking—you about to run out of tape?

FE: We're at fifty-seven [minutes], so.

SL: Why don't you just go ahead and change tape?

FE: All right.

[Tape stopped]

[00:55:05] FE: We are good, sir. And double check here. We're good.

SL: So back to the church thing, you—you talked about all the things that you all did. And you emphasized “without fail” each—with each of those items. And I—and I know that, sometimes when you're *made* to do things, maybe you're not sure that you would have done them if you hadn't been made to do them. But I can safely say that everybody I've talked to is glad they did and continues with that—with that experience. In other words, are—are you still involved with . . .

RF: I teach Sunday school . . .

SL: . . . church? There you go. So . . .

RF: . . . for first grade through sixth graders.

SL: I mean . . .

RF: I'm the only male. [*Laughter*] And—and I don't do it year round.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Okay.

SL: Yeah. Well did you . . .

RF: We ro[tate]—at our Sunday school, we rotate people, so not—so as not to burn people out. I—I was doing it through January.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Okay. And I'll be going back to do it. You—you take some time off, and then you go back.

[00:56:18] SL: So, but you—do you think—can you remember enjoying, going to—to church and all those activities? Or was it something . . .

RF: . . . Well, understand . . .

SL: . . . that you felt like you had to do, and . . .

RF: Well, it's—it clearly started off being something that you had to do. But my parents didn't make me become president of the Usher Board.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean they didn't *make me* become the superintendent of the Sunday school. That's something that I wanted to do. I mean I wanted to—I wanted to lead [laughs].

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: My brothers and my—my sister would tell you that I wanted to lead too much, because [laughs] I wanted to lead at home.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I remember when my father became ill and—and went to the veterans hospital for like six or seven months. I was the oldest, so as far as I’m concerned, I’m in charge.

SL: Man of the house . . .

RF: . . . And—and so, I would, you know, I—I was—I became “Daddy,” I mean—and I would say some of the same things that he would say to them [*laughs*]. And it kinda [kind of] got on their nerves a little bit.

SL: They weren’t ready for that.

RF: They—they—well, I really wasn’t ready either, I just didn’t—I just didn’t know any better. But it was just something about leading that I liked. I mean I liked being captain of the basketball team. I actually liked being in charge when my father was gone. I liked, I mean I wanted to be the president of the Usher Board, I just didn’t look into it. I *wanted* to be the superintendent of Sunday school. Before I became superintendent of Sunday school, a buddy of mine was superintendent of Sunday school. But I was an officer in the Sunday school, so I still sat up at the front. And, I did—I didn’t feel forced to do that at all.

[00:58:13] SL: I wonder where you got that, this leadership thing? I mean when—is that—is the church stuff the earliest stuff you can remember where you wanted to be out front?

RF: Mmm. [*Pause*] Yeah, pretty—I mean, you know, I mean I wanted to . . . [*pause*].

[00:58:37] SL: What about the games in the neighborhood, like the basketball . . .

RF: Well, oh, yeah. If—if we . . .

SL: . . . games and baseball?

RF: . . . were playing—my brother and I played baseball together. If we played baseball, I mean I kinda wanted to be the guy, I mean, you know. Plus, I—I—I was a catcher, so I—I saw the whole game. I saw everything that was going on in the game. And I was involved in *every* part of it, because I got—had every pitch. I—I was one who was supposed to throw the runners out, who were trying to steal. I was the one that had to settle my brother down, who could be a hothead, you know, come out and talk to him. And you know, get him under control.

SL: Pitcher?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Ah!

RF: I mean so it's just—like I said, with my brothers and sisters, it—it was—it was a bit much for them . . .

[00:59:34] SL: . . . Well, how old were you when your daddy got sick?

RF: I was a ninth-grader.

SL: Ah. That probably is a little early for you to take over [*laughs*].

RF: Okay. So fifteen, sixteen [years old].

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RF: And, yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] But still, there's some . . .

RF: . . . Well but my—my sister is like, six years younger than me. So I mean fifteen versus nine, I mean.

SL: Right. Right

RF: I mean that's a big difference, so I . . .

[01:00:00] SL: Do you want to talk about your brothers and sisters at all? What's the story with them?

RF: Let's see. I'm the oldest.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: J.B., James Henry Ferguson, but we all called him J.B., because he was left-handed, and there was a star basketball player at the high school, his name was J.B., so my brother James named himself J.B. [*Laughs*]

SL: Okay.

RF: He's the second.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He's—he's in Little Rock [Arkansas], now. The—the third is Robert . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . Robert Charles Ferguson. He's in Shreveport [Louisiana]. And then my sister, Jeanette is in the Boston area, I believe it's Andover [Massachusetts].

SL: Okay.

RF: And, my youngest brother [John] lives at Knoxville.

SL: Tennessee.

RF: Tennessee. He went to school at the University of Tennessee. He was—he was an engineering graduate, so he is still there. I mean he left and went to Louisiana for a while, and then back to—back to Knoxville. And he's the one that—that has his own company . . .

SL: Timing.

RF: . . . that times track meets, and he's done track meets all over the—all over the country. And so that's them. I mean we were—and we grew up—we didn't fight a lot—the—I think the normal, regular skirmishes that we had. My sister would tell you that her brothers were way too overprotective.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well.

RF: In terms of—and—and understand I was so much older than her that—and in fact, I'm trying to think, am—am I six years, or nine years? One, three—I guess six, yeah. But I had—it was more J.B. and—and Robert who were the protective ones, because I was gone off to college . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . by the time she got old enough to—to have boys coming over, so.

SL: Had you been there though? [*Laughs*] You've . . .

RF: Well, yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And—and I might have—there may be some—may have been some things happen when I came back from college to—to visit.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But, I mean she thought we were—that we were pretty protective.

SL: Well.

[01:02:42] RF: And, my second—J.B., had asthma. And my youngest brother John—interesting—I—I—I call him Don, you notice I had to think about that. He was born Don, or Donald Matthew Ferguson.

SL: Okay.

RF: I called him Don for six years. He goes to first grade and pulls out his birth certificate, and it says John. For six years . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . his mother, his father, his brothers, and his sister have been calling him Don. And in first grade, he became John.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, so was that like a typo on the certificate?

RF: My mother clearly planned to name him Don, and the doctor just didn't hear it right . . .

SL: John.

RF: . . . and put John.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's great.

RF: And to this day, he's programmed into my phone as Don. Everybody in the family calls him John but me. And I th[ink]—what happened, is that when he was a first grader, I was a tenth grader, so everyone else, many of them, stayed there with him, but two years later, I was in college.

SL: Gone. Yeah.

RF: And everyone, by the way, at home, called him Don for the next few years. Everyone at school, though, called him John, because the teachers introduced him as John. And people would come over to the house, and we're calling him Don—they're calling him—"Who's Don?"

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: But over the years—over the years—my mother and father both called him John now.

SL: Okay.

RF: And I think I'm the only one that still calls him Don. I tried Don John for a while, but I—I just fell back into—into Don.

SL: He probably—he probably loves it that you still call him Don.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Maybe not [*laughs*].

RF: Well, he—he and I talk. I talk to him more than anyone.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Not because we're closer, but because he hooked up my wireless system.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And I—I have—I have no idea . . .

SL: He's your support.

RF: . . . I have no idea what to—what to do with it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah.

[01:05:12] SL: Okay, so anything else you can think of around the home, growing up, that in some way, looking back on it now, maybe had more—has more weight in your life than you realized at the time. I mean I know this, being around the business stuff, you didn't really think about it, being around business all the time. But believe me, folks that grew up not being around business didn't have any of those experiences.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: Didn't have any of that mindset around the household or that kind of schedule, or that kind of involvement, say. What about—what about music? What kind of music what happening?

[01:06:04] RF: Temptations . . .

SL: . . . I mean you had . . .

RF: . . . Smokey Robinson is what we grew up on.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And of course, then when [pause] and you know, and also, even though I was at a black school, I liked the Beatles. You know, The Beatles were early [19]60s.

SL: You bet.

RF: And I was still in elementary school . . .

SL: I've still got Beatlemania [the fan frenzy directed toward The Beatles] so.

RF: . . . when they first started.

SL: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

RF: But clearly, initially it was all R&B [rhythm and blues] . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . because that's what I heard at home.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, when I went down to—on Saturday mornings and clean up the lounge, there was a jukebox in there. Okay. And it had Bobby “Blue” Bland, B.B. King, the Temptations, the Miracles, Martha—the, you know, Martha Vandella—is that who? [Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, 1967-1972] It had all of these.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So that's what I heard all the time.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And—and on the radio you'd hear the Beatles. And I think the Beatles—and what a lot of people I don't think understood—realized is that several of the Beatles' songs were remakes of R&B hits.

SL: . . . Oh. That's correct. Yeah.

RF: So, I think that appealed to me. So it needed, for me, it needed to have some R&B kind of a sound to it. Oh, I would wake up on Saturday mornings and watch all the Beatle cartoons.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Well, I thought that . . .

SL: Well, they . . .

RF: . . . I thought that was the coolest thing.

SL: . . . they made a big influence, big . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: I blame them for a lot of things. [*Laughter*] I mean I ended up being in a—I—when they came out I was in fifth grade. I—I put on a Beatle wig and did a concert in front of the fifth grade classes.

RF: Okay.

SL: The girls on the front row acted like they were fainting. [*Laughter*] I mean I was ruined. [*Laughter*] I continued with rock and roll bands all the way through college.

RF: Yeah.

SL: So I—I understand.

RF: So I . . .

[01:08:07] SL: What about now? What—what’s your favorite music now?

RF: I still like R&B. I like—listen to a lot of Jazz. Helen and I went on a jazz cruise . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . in January of [20]04.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And that was a blast. Yeah.

SL: Any particular couple of artists you’re fondest of?

RF: Well, Kirk Whalum, who plays saxophone.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I like him. Peter White plays guitar.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I like him a lot. Joe McBride plays keyboard.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I like—I mean there—there are just—there are several . . .

SL: Well, once you step into the Jazz world . . .

RF: Right, right. Right, there—Quincy Jones.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I love . . .

SL: I got to meet him once.

RF: Oh, did you? Okay. I’ve—I’ve never met him.

SL: He's—what a nice guy.

RF: Yeah.

SL: I mean he ended up spending many minutes with me.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: And I was just so honored.

RF: Well that—well they had Wayman Tisdale, the former Oklahoma All-American basketball player . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . plays bass guitar . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and—and has become very famous doing it. Like I said, Kirk Whalum, Warren Hill, they were all on this cruise.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: It was—it was very nice.

[01:09:27] SL: Did you ever play anything?

RF: No. No, no.

SL: What about singin'? Do you ever do . . . ?

RF: No, no. I—what I did is that I took piano lessons.

SL: Okay.

RF: And, from my kindergarten teacher, and I remember doing that, and if I remember this right, what happened is that she called my parents . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . and said, “We should save your money and my time. Don’t make him do this.”

SL: [*Laughter*] It’s not gonna work, huh?

RF: Yeah, I don’t think I made it—I don’t think I made it a year.

SL: Did y’all [you all] have a piano in the house?

RF: Yes.

SL: Who played?

RF: No one. [*Laughs*]

SL: No one. Except for . . .

RF: But my mother was going to have—well, that’s not true. I think—my sister, I think, took quite a few lessons.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I’m trying to just remember. But I wasn’t the only one that took lessons, it’s just—it just didn’t . . .

SL: Didn’t take.

RF: . . . it didn’t take with me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: It didn’t take with me at all. I mean I wanted to be doing baseball or doing basketball, or whatever. I didn’t—quite—quite frankly, I didn’t see the piano as a glamorous deal.

SL: So an opening of any kind, I mean, yeah.

RF: Yeah, I mean, it’s just—I—I was—you know, I didn’t get in—I didn’t get—I mean I did my share of sneaky stuff, okay, when I was in high school. I mean I

drank beer that my folks didn't know about. But I didn't get drunk. I mean, I just, you know, we'd sneak a taste of it, but . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . .it was never a situation where I was getting drunk, drinking. But a lot of things I didn't do, because first of all like I said, I was absolutely frightened of my father. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, I had this thing about me that I didn't want it, 'cause I rashly believed that the things he was telling us was right. And I didn't want anything to derail me from what I wanted to do, and that was to go get an education and be the best that I could be in whatever field that I chose. And I just saw people gettin' in trouble, and their lives would be, like, ruined, I mean . . .

SL: . . . Right . . .

RF: . . . at a very early, early age. And, I mean, that sort of stuck with me. And so I—I did whatever I could to try to avoid being in those—those situations, even though growing up, I mean I did—I mean I did—I mean I did crazy things, but I tried to stay out of a situation that could really be, I mean really be bad.

[01:12:22] SL: Well, we grew up in a time when people were stepping outside the box. I mean it was kinda wide open . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . back, by the time you and I got to college.

RF: Oh, yeah. No, no. Yeah—when I got to college, I mean—I mean, there were some wild times. But, I mean I—I still—I had one bad year in college. My



freshman year, I made the dean's list both semesters, and I was a—I was a math major at the time . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . in the School of Arts and Sciences.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And even then I was thinking—I—I talked to one of my math professors. And I asked, “What can I do with my math degree?” And I remember him saying, “Well, you can be a math teacher. You can work in an insurance company, an actuary department.” And I said, “Well, what do—what do they do?” And so we—we talked about these things. And I'm sure he told me other things, but whatever he told me did not interest me.

SL: Right.

RF: The next semester, I was in the school of business.

SL: There you go.

RF: Having spent two semesters on the dean's list, so I wasn't running away from math, because it was tough. But my freshman year, I was thinking, I don't want to be anywhere that's not gonna lead me to do something that I think is fun—more fun than being a math teacher.

SL: Right.

RF: There's nothing wrong with being a math teacher. I just didn't have a desire to be a math teacher.

SL: Right.

RF: I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to be something in business. So I was going to the school of business, and then concentrate on statistics, finance, 'cause I love numbers.

SL: Right.

RF: So that's what I did. And my first semester, or was it my second semester? My girlfriend at the time was doing an internship in Oklahoma City.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And I was going over to see her all the time and was missing classes.

SL: Sure.

RF: That semester I had, like, a 2.5 [grade point average].

SL: Right, which is still . . .

RF: Right . . .

SL: . . . fine, but . . .

RF: . . . Yeah. But—but . . .

SL: . . . putting that in front your dad is a different deal . . .

RF: . . . but for me, it was . . .

SL: . . . [Laughs] Yeah . . .

RF: . . . it was not good. And then I got back on track my junior and—and senior year and was able to—to get it back up again to the point that I graduated with honors when I—when I graduated from the business school . . .

[01:14:49] SL: . . . Okay. Let's—let's go back to Camden just a minute, before we get—we're talking Fayetteville now, but before we get to Fayetteville. I'm

hearing that your—it was pretty much a segregated experience until—in high school . . .

RF: . . . Sophomore year, high school. And it was still very much so, 'cause even when I graduated, I was the only black male to graduate from—from that high school.

[01:15:15] SL: Did you develop any friendships with white kids, I mean, that you can say lasted beyond high school or was there—what—what I'm—where I'm headed for on this, is I want to compare and contrast what happened with you in Camden in your growing up, and then, you're in Fayetteville. And you're lucky in that, you had a couple of years under your belt, in an integrated situation before you hit Fayetteville.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: And—but still most of your life, you came from the segregated, separate but equal doctrine and that was all across the country. So, what was it that you took from Camden to Fayetteville, in—in the relationships with the white community? Was there—I mean, those things in the high school are just awful, what happened to you. And that's very—that's prejudice in it's most insidious form, I think. I mean, it's not really out there. Nobody's screaming. There's not a big drama going on there, but it's still, you know it's—it's that invisible . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . prejudice that didn't hit you until high school. But what—so, talk to me a little bit about the difference between Camden and Fayetteville—first impression when you get to Fayetteville.

[01:16:41] RF: Yeah. Well, I—I had lots of white friends. I mean, I say *white* friends, I mean but, there—there were people that I, even after high school, there—there were some people that went to the University of Arkansas ahead of me, and some who went with me. A guy, his name was Tom Watts, his father owned a clothing store called Watts [Department Store, formerly M. P. Watts & Bros.] in downtown Camden.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He was the quarterback on the football team . . .

SL: Okay . . .

RF: . . . my senior year. We knew each other. My parents shopped at Watts'. We were allowed to do that. I knew Mr. Watts, 'cause he was there in the store, before I knew Tom. I mean, I knew the guy who owned that—that clothing store before I went to Camden High School, 'cause that's where my folks bought my—our clothing, or some of our clothing. So he and I, you know, the whole time I was at the University of Arkansas, we knew each other. In fact, he was—when I was there, I was elected into the Blue Key Honor Society [scholastic honor society recognizing college students with an emphasis on leadership and service].

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He had a lot to do with that. He nominated me. He was the only person in Blue Key that I knew. But he nominated me, and went to bat, and said “This guy needs to be a member of Blue Key.” And I was elected as a member. I remember when I was a summer hire for IBM [International Business Machines Corporation], or when they were talking about me being a summer hire, it was

only then when I recognized the significance of the Blue Key thing, because the guy I was talking to had it on his wall in his office, my first manager.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And he said that one of the things that attracted him to me, other than the good grades and those things, was the fact that I was elected into Blue Key, and I had to be elected by all white people. But it wasn't because of those—it was Tom—his nickname was Tombo . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . he—there's no doubt in my mind that he made that happen. He was either, at that time, the president of the organization or the—or the past president, or the president elect—I can't remember—but he held a leadership role.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And so—and even after that we—what he did is that he took over his father's store, and so I would see him when I would come to visit.

SL: Uh-huh, home.

[01:19:42] RF: Lance Womack was a guy who was a year ahead of me. You know Lance?

SL: I know Lance. What a great guy.

RF: Lance . . .

SL: And his dad Dooley.

RF: Yeah, Dooley . . .

SL: . . . just died.

RF: . . . brother, Tim.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I was a year ahead of Tim and a year behind Lance. Lance went to the University of Arkansas ahead of me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Now Lance had a lot of fun at the University of Arkansas [*laughs*].

SL: I played with Lance.

RF: Did you?

SL: Yeah, for a few months.

RF: Yeah.

SL: A drummer.

RF: Yeah, he—and so, Lance and I—and I—I’ve seen Lance since in—in Camden.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: It’s been years since I’ve seen him. L.E. Lindsey, who was a year ahead of me, I’ve seen L.E. as, probably as recent as three or four years ago. When I go home now, I’m there to be with me parents.

SL: Right.

RF: So I don’t see many people, especially that I don’t have the grandparents . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . to go visit. My Aunt Sophie has passed. My father had a brother who lived in Camden that I didn’t mention, his birthday is November 11, so he and I . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: He had a place, a little bar, didn’t have the lounge where people could perform . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but I worked for him a little bit.

SL: Okay.

RF: Okay. His name was Henry Ferguson, and he was the first person that I knew that had my birthday. I thought that was so neat that he's my uncle and we had the same birthday, November 11.

SL: [*Laughs*] That is neat.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So I felt—I felt pretty close to him. He died from cancer I think, in his—in his—in his fifties.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So, no, I had—there were several people . . .

SL: . . . That's . . .

RF: . . . from my class that went to Fayetteville.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I never blamed the students for the National Honor Society deal. I mean, they didn't vote.

SL: Right.

RF: And—and I had a great relationship with the—the players on the basketball team.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Even players on—on the football team, because the—the athletes tended to spend time together. I would go to, when I was at Camden High School, I would go to parties. I would be invited to parties by white friends. So University of

Arkansas . . .

SL: . . . You had some camaraderie before . . .

RF: Oh, oh yeah. I mean . . .

SL: . . . you hit [came to] Fayetteville.

RF: Oh, oh yeah. Absolutely. And I continued to have, my black friends that I grew up with . . .

SL: . . . You know, you and I probably crossed paths and don't remember and don't know.

RF: May have.

SL: Didn't know.

RF: Yeah. But I stayed close to black friends. Lincoln High School, the black high school, still has reunions, but I didn't graduate there. But I went to a couple—I was invited to a couple of their reunions and—and went to them. They usually have them in July, and July is a tough time for me to get back home. I've never been to a Camden High School reunion—high school reunion. Never. I actually went and participated in a party for a Camden High School reunion for the class ahead of me.

SL: Hmm.

RF: My best friend in the latter part of high school, because I didn't meet him until the latter part of high school, was a guy named [Dwight Witcher? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING].

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And Dwight loved going back to the high school reunion, and I just happened to be visiting my parents when that was going on. And I, went over there, because—and a lot—I knew—I was closest to the people who were a year ahead of me, than I was to—I mean Dwight was a year ahead of me. Lance was a year ahead of me. L.E. was a year ahead of me.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: All these folks were a year ahead of me. So, I tended to feel more comfortable, because it was—I played on the basketball team with them. And there are other names that I'm—I—I know that I'm forgetting [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Yeah, no . . .

RF: . . . that played on that team.

SL: . . . that's—that's funny that we know some of the same folks. Of course, the Lindseys are related to the Pryors. What's—David's sister is married to L.E.'s dad.

RF: Okay.

SL: In fact, they—they used to give him all kinds of grief on his liberal ways. [*Laughs*] You know, as far as his voting record.

RF: David did, you mean?

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RF: 'Cause L.E. is not liberal [*laughs*].

SL: No. I know. But—but his dad was pretty—well, and his—his mother were both pretty—pretty staunch. They got that way, conservative. Very conservative.

RF: Yeah. I—I—you know, I don't know what grade it was, I'm—either as an eighth grader or a ninth grader, I was a page..

SL: Oh, really?

RF: Yeah, I was a page for, oh God, the guy's last name was Cook. What was his first name? But he owned a sort of supply store, and he was in the State House [Arkansas House of Representatives], and I—I got a chance to go to Little Rock.

SL: Yeah.

RF: To the capital . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and spend time up there as a page. So that was a different experience.

[01:25:18] SL: So, now, is that your—between your junior and senior year?

RF: I can't—no, I—it was earlier than that.

SL: Really.

RF: I thought.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Now I went to Boy's State [summer leadership and citizenship program for high school students sponsored by the American Legion] . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . which is, I think, between your junior . . .

SL: . . . Me too . . .

RF: . . . and senior year. Yeah.

SL: We may have been there together . . .

RF: I did that.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I went to—I went to Boy's State, which was quite an honor.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Because I—I got a chance to do that from Camden High School.

SL: Yeah.

RF: That I qualified. So, I—I got sent to Boy's State. I was an honor graduate.

Something that was very interesting is that, that night that—of our graduation from high school, there was an organization, I think it was the Rotary, but I'm not sure.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: They recognized the outstanding male graduate from that class.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And, I got that, that night, which—which felt pretty good . . .

SL: Well, yeah.

RF: . . . to be—to be recognized. Because there were several other male honor graduates . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . that—that could have gotten that, that—that did not, including Tom Watts, whose father . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . owned the . . .

SL: Right.

SL: . . . clothing store. So that was my National Honor Society.

[01:26:41] SL: Well, I was gonna say, you know, and in some ways that probably meant—well I'm sure it meant more to you, minus not having gettin' the national merit thing, but also, you were voted on by folks that knew you.

RF: Yeah.

SL: You know.

RF: Yeah, so it was—it was—it was pretty neat.

SL: yeah.

RF: So my transition to the University of Arkansas was not that difficult in terms of—in terms of I did not come out of a all black high school and all of a sudden thrust into an environment.

SL: Right.

RF: When I got to the University of Arkansas, my freshman year, there were approximately two hundred and fifty blacks on a campus of about twelve thousand students.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But that's not a big number.

SL: Hm-mm.

RF: But we all—we knew each other, so it didn't feel like two hundred and fifty, because you couldn't—you couldn't get two hundred and fifty people in a room anyway.

SL: Right.

RF: But so, whenever there was an activity, a party, or something like that, a lot of people would be there.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So, it—it felt that way as you were walking across campus though. When you—
[coughs]—Excuse me. When you walked across campus, you felt isolated.

SL: Yeah. Well.

RF: [*Drinks water*] But not in the evenings and the weekends.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: We were . . .

[01:28:10] SL: Did you live on campus?

RF: I lived on campus my freshman year.

SL: Right.

RF: And, my roommate was a guy named Dean, who—who aspired to be a dentist. I
don't know if he ever did that. And, I actually came back my sophomore year and
hadn't filled out my paperwork to—to be in a dorm.

SL: Uh oh.

RF: So I stayed with—well that's not true. What happened—I stayed with Dean my
freshman year and Jerry my sophomore year, and—and Jerry moved into an
apartment, and I moved—I moved with him. And then my—all of my junior
year, three of us, Al Carter, Dean, and I, got a two bedroom apartment that was
across the street from the business school.

SL: That was handy.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Good stroke.

RF: And—and now it's offices, but it was . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . but it was—it was some apartments that were really close.

[01:29:17] SL: So, what dorm were you in?

RF: Hotz.

SL: That's where my office is now. [*Laughs*]

RF: Yeah, I know—800.

SL: 800, were you on the eighth floor?

RF: Hmm?

SL: Were you on the eighth floor?

RF: I can't remember what floor—I was saying that, you—you—I have your address, 'cause I had to give it to my . . .

SL: Right. Right.

RF: . . . my mother. I don't remember what floor I was on.

SL: Yeah. It was pretty new then, wasn't it? I think it was.

RF: 1970.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I think so.

SL: I think it was pretty new. Hotz, Reid, and what was the other one? I forget. It's still there, isn't it? Fulbright?

RF: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yep. I was—I was—I was there in Hotz.

SL: Well, when my wife moved from Long Beach [California], she moved into Reid when we were still courting.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: Yeah, so, I—I was a little familiar with those—those three.

RF: Mm-hmm.

[01:30:11] SL: Okay, so, life was good in Fayetteville, for the most part.



RF: It was. I mean I was doing well in school. But, I could feel the racism on that campus then. I mean people were not very [*pause*] as friendly as the people were in Camden, believe it or not, when I went to the University of Ar[kansas]—and—and there was a lot of controversy; there was—people were trying to get people to stop waving the Confederate flag and singing “Dixie” and y’know, playing “Dixie” and, a black student had been in—in—in some sort of a pass by or something—had been shot in the leg.

SL: Yeah, now that was—wasn’t that [19]68 . . .

RF: . . . That was the year before I got there . . .

SL: . . . or [19]69? Yeah, [19]69 . . .

RF: . . . That was the year before I got—so . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: But . . .

SL: But that was still—all that . . .

RF: . . . I came to the campus knowing that that had occurred . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . and it—and it occurred I think, the year before I got there, so there was still talk about it, and that student was still on campus.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean, I'd had nothing like that in Camden. I mean, y'know, someone . . .

SL: Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . gettin' shot. Clearly debate, black versus white, was—was going on. I mean I wasn't—I—I would never worry about getting shot or anything like that, but you could *feel* the tension . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . on that campus when I—when I got there.

[01:31:55] SL: Let's see. When did they have the sit-in in Mullins' office? Was that the year before as well?

RF: Yeah, it was the year before.

SL: Okay . . .

RF: . . . That did not happen in my freshman year.

SL: Okay..

RF: And y'know, I was a—I—I was a pretty quiet kinda guy. I mean I played freshman basketball.

[01:32:22] SL: Mm-hmm. Now did you get any kind of financial support on that— from it?

RF: No. What happened is that I was being recruited . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . by a lot of schools. Tennessee, Southern Illinois, some of the local Arkansas schools, even the University of Arkansas had, called me. But it was—it was Coach [P.T. “Duddy”] Waller [1966-1970]. When [Larry] Van Eman became coach [1970-1974] . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . they didn’t recruit me.

SL: Hmm.

RF: Okay. And I had not made a—what—he—they had to accept a couple of students, athletes, who had been offered scholarships and said, “Yes.” I never said, “Yes.” So, since I had not said, “Yes,” I wasn’t offered anything. I’d already made up my mind; I was going to the University of Arkansas.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean basketball wasn’t my life . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . anyway. I enjoyed doing it, but I mean, I never dreamed about playing in the NBA [National Basketball Association]; I loved NBA basketball, but I could play basketball or not play basketball.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[01:33:28] RF: I mean I could’ve decided to go to some other school on scholarship, but I chose not to. I mean, University of Arkansas was where I wanted to go. So I went up there and was watching people workout. It wasn’t basketball season yet. It was just the scholarship athletes just practicing on their own.

SL: Pick up games.

RF: Exactly.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, so I went to the coach and told him I wanted to walk on. He actually recognized me, which kinda surprised me. He—I remember him saying, “How is your knee?” [*Laughs*] ‘Cause I’d hurt my knee. [*Telephone rings*]

SL: Uh oh. Oh, we’ve got to let this go. [*Telephone rings*]

RF: That sounds like the f—I think that’s the front door.

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: We answer—we can answer our phone?

SL: Yeah.

[Tape stopped]

[01:34:17] SL: Okay, so you’re walking on the basketball team.

RF: Oh, yes.

SL: The coach recognizes you.

RF: Right. Well I went . . .

SL: . . . Which coach was this?

RF: This was Van Eman.

SL: Okay.

RF: And he said, “Sure, we’d love to have you come out for the team.” And I did.

And I played that year, played at guard.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Got a chance to *start* a few games at the end of the season, because we—we went to a game—and I—I came off the bench. Dean Tolson . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . who played NBA basketball was on the team with me. And, I got a chance to start instead of come off the bench, because we had this one game where we were down, and I went into the game and made five out of six jump shots. So I got a chance to start the next game [*laughs*].

SL: Sure.

RF: So I really—I really enjoyed doing that. I really, really enjoyed playing basketball for the university.

SL: That's your freshman year?

RF: Yeah, my freshman year. I did not play my sophomore year.

SL: You were too busy going to Oklahoma City [*laughs*].

RF: Well, but—but that was the—really the second semester . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: . . . that that occurred. But I—my old freshman coach did approach me. What—what happened is that Coach Van Eman talked to all the non-scholarship players, after the season, and let them know whether he—y'know, where they stood with him. And he basically said that he wanted me to come out for the team, that I would not get a scholarship, but he would love for me to come out, and he was very nice, it's just that, it—it was—it was—it was at a time that, you know, I had a—had a loan. I was doing work-study. It wasn't easy playing freshman basketball and working on campus. And—and I decided that if I couldn't get a scholarship—and by the way I—and I'd—hadn't earned a scholarship as a—as a freshman, in my opinion, but that I wanted to work to help pay for my college . . .

SL: You bet.

RF: . . . you know, versus going, and he—he wanted me to stay in the athletic dorm.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But, and—and it wasn't the main—there was another athletic dorm that—that was behind the main one up on—on the hill that had . . .

SL: Gregson was the main one, right? Back then?

RF: I—I can't remember. But I remember it was across the street from the . . .

SL: Brough [Commons dining hall]? Or Fine Arts or the . . . ?

RF: . . . the—the football stadium. And—and . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and Barnhart. Was—is that what it was called?

FE: Barnhill [Arena].

RF: Barnhill. Yeah. You know, they—they were right there together.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So, I decided that I wasn't gonna do it, and—and I—but I played intramural basketball. And I remember Almer Lee [first black scholarship basketball player at U of A, 1969] hurting his knee.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And my freshman coach came to me and said, "I noticed you've been playing intramural basketball. If I can talk the coach into letting you play to replace Almer Lee, will you do it?" I said, "Sure, I'm in great shape." And he came back to me and said, "Well I couldn't convince the coach to do it." So what they did, they went and got a guy, who was a great guy, who was on baseball

scholarship . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and had him play guard . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . for the team. And I think it just that—if I had played on the varsity, then they would have been forced to give me a scholarship.

SL: Right.

RF: So it was easier to go get a baseball player . . .

SL: Sure it was.

RF: . . . who was already on scholarship.

SL: Right. They didn't have to anything to the books.

RF: And it was a smart thing to do. I mean I—I didn't resent the fact that that occurred. But . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . I almost played basketball my sophomore year.

SL: Yeah.

RF: But didn't.

[01:38:20] SL: Trying to think, there was something that I—that came to mind when you were talking about all that. [*Sighs*] Shoot. Well, I've lost it. Oh, I know what it was. What was your work-study? What'd you do for work-study?

RF: I worked in the computer center.

SL: Uh-huh. [*Laughs*]

RF: And that's how IBM found me. I—the computer center that was in the bottom of the administration building.

SL: Okay.

RF: And they also had one in the, I think, engineering. But the head of that, was a former IBM-er [employee of IBM] . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . who had worked with IBM, took a leave to get his master's, took a leave later to get his Ph.D., and—and left IBM to go to work for the university. And he was heading up their computer centers. And . . .

SL: That was back in the days of the cards, punch cards.

RF: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. So I was assigned by Financial Aid to work over there. And I wasn't doing a lot of working, I mean I was studying, and I was—they'd given me these programming books to read. So I was learning how to program. And he came down to talk to me. His named was Jim [Shankleford? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING], I believe.

SL: Okay.

RF: And, he wanted to know how did I enjoy the work-study and what was my major. And so I told him that I was a math major. He wanted to know how were my grades, and I told him, y'know, I was on the dean's list. So he actually called IBM—and this was my sophomore year—he called IBM and said, "I've got this guy that you gotta come talk to."

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: “He’s—,” y’know, “he’s on the dean’s list. He’s really good in math. He’s taking programming courses, and he’s learning how to program by reading books.” And so they came and talked to me. And, long story short, they—they hired me for the summer.

[01:40:43] SL: In Little Rock.

RF: In Little Rock. And, they put me in a room and said, “Do—have you heard of RPG [Report Program Generator programming language]?” I said, “No.” They said, “Here’s—here’s the books on it. Read ’em.” So I went through beginning to end. And it was programming—it—it was actually instruction—it wasn’t just reading a book.

SL: Right.

RF: So, [*clears throat*] then they put me at a client, where we were writing thirteen programs for the client, for their computer that they were buying from IBM. And during the summer, I wrote seven of ’em, and the IBM-er who had been with IBM for, I don’t know, twenty years, wrote six of the programs. And, they invited me back the next summer.

SL: Well sure they did.

RF: ’Cause, usually you—you—you—in this program you work after your junior year. So they can make a decision on you, so that when you go back for your senior year, they can offer you a job.

SL: Right.

[01:41:44] RF: But I was actually hired after my sophomore year. And I turned them down, which they just couldn’t believe, I mean, how can you turn IBM down for a

summer job? And I told them, I said, “Well it’s—it’s not that there’s anything wrong. I enjoyed my summer.” But with me, as I was always trying to think ahead, . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . what I told him is that “I can work for you for the summer at a \$130 a week for ten weeks, \$1300. Or I can go to summer school and get out in December. And come to work for you and make that in a month. Which would you do?”

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And he said “Oh.” And he was shocked that I was even thinking about it that way. I mean, he—he just thought that I would just jump at the opportunity to come and—and work for IBM. But clearly, I could start making what I considered big bucks in January, or I could work for them for the summer and wait for May to start making them.

SL: Right.

RF: And to me, that was just—that was just a no-brainer. So, and I did get out, and I went to work for—for IBM. So that’s—that was—I—I didn’t have a stated goal to work for IBM. I didn’t know who I wanted to work for.

SL: Right.

RF: But that’s how I got exposure to them, and I spent thirty years there.

[01:43:19] SL: Okay, so, now I’m a little bit confused. You’re—we’re talking [about] your sophomore year. Y—you’re doing work-study in the basement of the admin [administration] building, reading I guess about programming . . .

RF: Mm-hmm. And taking programming courses.

SL: And taking programming courses.

RF: Right.

SL: Now, but, this is when you're still in math?

RF: No, no. No, no.

SL: No, you had moved to business . . .

RF: . . . Math was my freshman year.

SL: Okay.

RF: I started my sophomore year in the school of business.

SL: Okay.

RF: And so I started work-study in math.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: So I—I did work-study for—in the computer center for like three of my four years.

SL: Okay.

RF: And it was during my sophomore year . . .

SL: That they came to you.

RF: . . . that I got approached.

[01:44:11] SL: Yeah. Okay. So you go—you—you go work for them between your . . .

RF: Sophomore and junior year . . .

SL: . . . sophomore and junior year. And then you—you ended up graduating a semester early . . .

RF: Right.

SL: . . . because you went to . . .

RF: I graduated in December.

SL: I see.

RF: I—I went to summer school. Took, I believe if I remember right, took twelve hours of . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . 'cause you can take six hours, two courses, each session. There were two summer sessions.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I took twelve hours and worked forty hours a week at Tyson's [Tyson Foods, Inc.].

SL: Wow.

RF: So I would, go to work at Tyson's.

[01:44:52] SL: Were you workin' the line at Tyson's?

RF: No, I was working—no I was working back in the back where the frozen processed food was coming out.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And put that in boxes to be shipped off to grocery stores.

SL: Right. Okay.

RF: So, that's what I did. I didn't even—I heard about the other part . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . but I never went in to see . . .

SL: . . . Well I've . . .

RF: . . . the chicken hanging upside down.

SL: . . . I've videotaped it. Yeah, I've been in there . . .

RF: . . . I—I did not have that experience.

SL: Right.

RF: But I did that. I would go to work at four, get off at midnight. And my first class was seven-thirty in the morning. And so, what I would do is I had a seven-thirty class for—or it may have been seven—but it was like a two and a half hour class, and then I'd have another one, and I wanted 'em back to back, and then I would study until it was time to go . . .

SL: To work.

RF: . . . to work. And as soon as I got home, I went to bed, because I didn't have time to be studying at—at midnight. And—and, for me, I was getting out of school a semester early and it was worth the effort. And that summer, I had like a 3.75 [GPA], so I was—I mean I was driven. I mean it was, "I want to get out."

[Laughs] So . . .

[01:46:11] SL: So you—sounds like maybe other than weekends, you didn't have much social activity going on those coup[le]—last couple years.

RF: No, not—not really, especially that summer. That summer it was nothing—I was on a mission, okay. I was there strictly to make good grades, make some money at—at—at Tyson's, and put myself in a position to get out of school early. And then I believe, I had to take like seventeen or eighteen hours that fall . . .

SL: Right, in order to make it.

RF: . . . in order—in order to make it. But—and—and the fall, wasn't that bad. I mean the—the—the roughest part was that summer.

[01:46:54] SL: Now, was it just the summer you worked at Tyson's or was it?

RF: I just did that for the summer. I did not . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . do that—I mean that was strictly a summer job.

SL: Okay.

RF: I did not do that during the fall.

[01:47:07] SL: Man, so really, you essentially—yeah, you turned down a job in Little Rock in IBM in the summer, but you just—you went ahead and took a job anyway.

RF: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah.

SL: And went to school too.

RF: Oh, yeah. No, no, no, no.

SL: So it wasn't like an either or thing for you. You've . . .

RF: No, it's just that . . .

SL: . . . you doubled up.

RF: . . . I couldn't go to school if I'm working for IBM.

SL: Right.

RF: Because I didn't have the flexibility of getting a job from four [p.m.] to midnight.

SL: Right.

RF: Because IBM's was gonna be eight [a.m.] to five [p.m.].

SL: Right.

RF: And, it just—I couldn't do both if I was—if I was in Little Rock.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So I didn't go . . .

[01:47:47] SL: . . . So what about—let's talk about classrooms. Let's keep you at the university before we exit there. What—what where the classrooms like for you as far as the integration thing that was going on and the ten[sion]—you mentioned that you could *feel* the tension of racism on the campus, but you didn't really have anything physical or ugly happen to you?

RF: No, no. It's just that people were always talkin' [talking] about it.

SL: Mm-hmm. Now you—were you a member of—of BAD [Black Americans for Democracy, established at U of A in 1968] . . .

RF: Yes.

SL: . . . on the campus?

RF: Yes, I was.

SL: And at that time, Gerald Alley?

RF: Mm-hmm. My freshman year, he was a—he was a sophomore. He had already been there a year when I got there.

SL: Uh-huh. And, who was—was it [*pauses and sighs*]?

RF: Gene McKissick was there.

SL: Gene McKissick, yeah, and Adolph Reed was in and out . . .

RF: Yes, yes.

SL: . . . at that time.

RF: And—and I was in Hotz [residence hall]. I was there with Wendell Griffen.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: We were very close. We even studied together. Of all the people at the University of Arkansas the person that I was closest to—first of all, was my first roommate, Dean—but—but—but Wendell and I to this day, are still—are still very close. We exchanged e-mails couple of weeks ago.

[01:49:32] SL: Uh-huh. I'm trying to think who else was in BAD at that time. It seems like . . .

RF: And I wasn't a leader. I mean I wasn't an officer . . .

SL: . . . Right. Mm-hmm.

RF: I mean I knew of what was going on.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I considered myself a member. But as a freshman, I was still trying to get acclimated. I was playing basketball.

SL: Right.

RF: So, I mean, I wasn't as active ear[ly]—early on. And—and—and even when—when I wasn't playing basketball, I worked at McDonald's. I had worked my way up to be a student manager.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I mean, I was trusted enough that I was closing the place down.

SL: Yeah.

RF: You know, putting the money up, I mean, in fact, when I left, when I graduated from the university, one of the offers that I got was to go to work for McDonald's

for money close to what IBM was going to pay me. You never know, I—I may have owned a few McDonald's stores that—[*laughter*].

[01:50:51] SL: Well, I think you've done fine with . . .

RF: . . . No, I—I have . . .

SL: . . . IBM. Well, so, was there—I mean you're—you're saying that there was some unspoken tension, but there was also—people were talking about it all the time. Was there ever—did you have much activism going on with you? I mean did you participate in . . . ?

RF: I participated in some things, but my—my participation was always quiet participation, I mean just . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: They'd say, "We're gonna go to this place and just be there."

SL: Right.

RF: Okay. But I wasn't very outspoken.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[01:51:36] RF: I, except for being with Wendell and the some of the guys in Hotz, I—I was pretty much to myself.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I would—I remember going into—I would—and I began to expect it to happen—I would—at the business school, each classroom had two doors.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And the teacher was up by one door . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and there'd be a wall there. Okay. I always walked in the back door, sat down in the back row, never raised my hand, didn't ask questions, just sat there and took notes and studied. And without fail, after the first test was graded, the instructor would say, "I'd like to see Randall Ferguson." And—and then I would walk up. And not all the time but—because, y'know, it's not like when we got into class, they had us go around and introduce ourselves. The teacher got to know your name when you raised your hand to answer questions and said, "What's your name?" I never did that. So, what was happening is that I always made high scores on the tests, so that he'd call me up, and then a couple of times, there would be a look of surprise . . .

SL: Well, sure.

RF: . . . as—as I came, because I didn't look the part, I'm sure. I had a huge, you saw my picture, I have a—had a huge Afro, long sideburns. I wore army fatigues, almost all the time, green army fatigues. There were people who thought when I was nineteen or twenty, that I was twenty-seven, twenty-eight. And because I wore army fatigues, people thought I was a veteran.

SL: Or a [Black] Panther [Party member] maybe.

RF: Oh, ex[actly]—could—could have been that. Exactly.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So, when I would make a ninety-five or whatever on a test and than I get called up, once I got up there you know, he would just say, "Oh you did—you did very well on the test. Congratulations." And that would sort of be—be it. A couple of

times, professors were at a loss for words. I mean, they'd call me up, and I'd get there. They're, "Uh, uh," you know, "uh, uh congratulations." Y'know.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And—and then, it—it would—it would be pretty awkward. But I had professors that wanted to help me get into graduate school. I had a professor, who graduated from Harvard, and he approached me after, again, after we took our first test. He saw the grade; he wanted to know how was I doin' in other classes, and I told him. And he said, "Have you ever thought about going to graduate school?" And I said, "Not very much." And he said, "I'd love for you to consider Harvard." I had a similar thing happen with a professor who had gone to Cornell, saying, "I'll get the applications, come to my office, my—my secretary will type 'em up if you would consider going to Cornell." And I looked at a lot of different schools . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and I decided to apply to Cornell. And, ended up not going because I got the job with IBM.

SL: Right.

RF: But I told IBM, I said, "I may go to grad school." They said, "We'll hire you anyway." Well, they hire me. I buy a car. [*Laughs*]

[01:55:13] SL: Your life goes down that path.

RF: It's all . . .

[Tape stopped]

SL: Okay, now this is what I'm hearing. In high school, you had all of the qualifications—overqualified—National Merit Scholar, all that stuff, didn't—

didn't get the awards you deserved. You get to Fayetteville. You sit in the back of the room. You're quiet. You take notes. Take the tests. You get noticed from your work that's anonymous to these guys.

RF: Right. I—many of them had no idea who Randall Ferguson was. I mean they were—you know, it's like, how could someone be making a ninety-five, ninety-eight, ninety-nine . . .

SL: And . . .

RF: . . . I don't even know who the—I don't even know who it is?

SL: Right. And so now, you're in an environment where you're recognized for your work first. And—and once they meet you, they want to push you further up.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: They—they want to—they want to expand your horizons even more. I mean, we're talking about Harvard and Cornell . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know.

[01:56:25] RF: Well, once they talked to me, when they see me coming . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . they think one thing. But then when they saw my grades and they carried on a conversation with me, then it was different. And, I mean I had several that wanted to be—that wanted to be very supportive of me. I—I really didn't have any problems in the business school. I mean, I had some problems that I created on my own. I mean, I had this one course, and in fact, this—it was—this is when I was going to Oklahoma City—had this one course that I didn't go to class. I

went to the first class and then stopped going, because I was planning on dropping it. Well, I'd never dropped a class. I didn't know what the process was. So when I went—finally went to drop it, they said, "It's too late." I said, "What do you mean it's too late?" I said, "I haven't been to class, since the first class, I decided to drop it. So you can talk to the teacher. I've not been there." They said, "Then you've been skipping class." [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah, that's tough.

RF: So, I had also been missing an accounting class, but that was because I was going out of town. I didn't miss all of those, but I missed half of 'em. And they had a thing that says, for every three classes you missed, you lost a letter grade.

SL: Ugh.

RF: Well, I had missed about twelve—that's four letter grades. But I always came back for the tests . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and I had an A average in the class. And then when I took the final, I had an A. And the instructor gave me a C.

SL: 'Cause that's what the rules were.

RF: And so . . .

SL: . . . And they'd given you some there.

RF: Oh, absolutely. And—and I went to talk to him—I had nerve enough to go and talk to him about it . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . to sort of challenge. I said, “I came and took your test. I made a A in your course. I made a A in the final. I don’t think it’s fair that you would ignore my work and give me a C.” He said, “Letter grade for every three classes you missed. I could have flunked you. Leave my office.” [*Laughs*] I got up and left.

[01:58:50] SL: Yeah, probably a smart decision.

RF: Yeah. And—and I . . .

SL: . . . Probably—probably had nothing to do with it . . .

RF: . . . and when I was talking to him, I wasn’t angry or . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . acting angry or militant, or any—anything.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I was just trying to have a reasoned conversation with him.

SL: But you—you’d have to say that your presence and the—the—your huge Afro . . .

RF: Oh, yeah, I’m sure that . . .

SL: . . . your fatigues . . .

RF: . . . yeah.

SL: . . . there was something . . .

RF: But . . .

SL: . . . intimidating . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . about . . .

RF: But, y’know, I never thought about that though.

SL: Yeah.

[01:59:16] RF: I—I never really—I mean, I thought about it from the sense that, not so much intimidating, but they would not expect much of me, from a performance standpoint. I—I never thought that much about it being intimidating. The—the course by the way that I—that was not the course that I tried to drop. That was a different . . .

SL: Right.

RF: The course that I tried to drop, I went to the professor. They said, “Look, if you can pass the final, then we’ll give you a passing grade.” Okay. So I went to the professor, and he told me what to study, and, I just studied on my own. Took the final, and passed it. And got a passing grade just from—just from reading—reading the book.

[02:00:04] SL: That’s . . .

RF: So . . .

SL: . . . learning to work within the system there.

RF: Yeah, those were my—I mean those were my worst two classes that I had: the accounting class and the—in—in fact, the worst grades that I got—in those two courses . . .

SL: . . . Well, I tell you, anyone’s college career with only two classes that presented any serious threat to your grade point, that’s pretty—pretty damn good.

RF: And—and you know, the other thing is that there may be some that I’ve forgotten about. I mean those two, you just—you don’t forget having to take the final of a class that you haven’t been in but once. Right?

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

RF: And you just don't forget . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . missing half of your classes in—in accounting. You know, I—I wouldn't be surprised if there're other classes that from a gr—that—that were challenging. But those are two that I remember very well.

[02:00:55] SL: Yeah. You know, here's a thread that came upon me a—a couple of interviews ago. And it—it relates to the story about, you know, the teachers calling you out after they've seen your work, not knowing who you are and their—their reactions to you, and probably the realization that they're looking at an African American's work. That—and I think you kind of indicated that you—that your presence kind of caught them off guard. I mean, not only Afro-American but huge Afro, fatigues, you know, the whole late [19]60s, early [19]70s garb . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . that came with student life. And I'm thinkin', you know, this whole integration thing that the University of Arkansas did, and they did it early to their credit, and they were ahead of the curve on that. And they did it to kind of—the spirit really was to give equal opportunity to folks in an integrated situation. But I believe, of course, I'm talking with folks that are off the scale as far as achievement goes in their life and their career, and their character, and their contributions to society, but I believe, in this case, you had as much to do with improving the university in a real “where the rubber meets the road,” as the university had to offer you to further your career. Do you—do you understand

what I'm sayin' [saying]? I—I—for that professor—for those professors to have you coming up to them after they're in love with your work, not knowing you or what you look like or who you are, and to be faced with an African American that is doing excellent work without them knowing you and without you really engaging in their classroom other than taking notes and sitting in the back; that's got to be an education in it—in itself for them. That's got to be—you've got to remember that these guys weren't integrated either early. I mean—I mean . . .

RF: . . . Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . they were by the time you got there, but at the same time, I think this is a new experience on the *white* side of things, and for the university, I think it's a big plus. I think it makes the university stronger. I think after a session with you, after meeting you, after reviewing your work, meeting you for the first time, I think that professor—I think a door opens up in his head, too. Y'know what I'm sayin'?

[02:03:45] RF: Yeah, but y'know there were people ahead of me though. I mean Gerald Alley graduated, I think, from—from business.

SL: Yes. Mm-hmm.

RF: And he was one year ahead of me.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I mean, so he was dealing—I—I'm sure he would probably have similar experiences. I don't know—you've already talked to him.

SL: Yes. Mm-hmm.

RF: But he was—he was there before me, so.

SL: Right.

RF: And there was another guy who, I remember when he graduated, he went to work for Proctor and Gamble. He was the older brother of [Ursuline Lanks? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING]. I can't remember his first name, but anyway, he was—he was there, I believe, even a year before Gerald. And—and both of them did well, I think in the—in the school of business, unless Gerald told you differently. I—I never knew what his grades were, or any of that.

[02:04:34] SL: They were not off the scale.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Gerald was very clever. Much like your talk with IBM—just thinking in a different way . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . you know, and Gerald had—I mean yes, Gerald did good work, but he wasn't off the scale. I don't think he had the kind of grade point that you did. Anyway, I—I just get the sense that, you know, when I—maybe it's just from the way I was raised and the way I grew up and stuff, but when I got this, when I was asked to do this video, you know, and it's history of African Americans at the University of Arkansas, and I'm thinkin', you know, "Well, okay it happened before *Brown vs. Board of Education* and all that stuff, and that's great and, you know, the whole diversity effort's a—is a really good thing." But, what—what I'm learning is, is that, at least from the folks that I'm interviewing now, they had as much to offer the university as the university had to offer them.

RF: Oh, yeah.

SL: And I don't think anyone got that, at the time. Maybe I'm wrong.

RF: Yeah. I—I—you know, I—I think you make—I think you make a good point. It's not easy for me to throw *myself* in that group that . . .

SL: Yeah. Well, I understand that but . . .

RF: . . . that did that. But, based on the—the racial tensions that were going on, I was pleasantly surprised by the professor's reaction to my work, because I had come from—I had just come from an environment where my work got me no recognition. And it was clearly outstanding work, because I, you know, I finished so high in my—in my high school class. So to me, that was—that was—that was a bit of a surprise. I mean, I came in there, sat in the back, didn't ask any questions, cause I just wanted to get my grades and move on, show someone that when I got ready to graduate that I was doing good work. I had no expectation that a professor was going to say, "I'd like to help you get into graduate school."

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Because in high school, except for Mr. Sterling and Mrs. Washington, no white teacher offered to help me get anything, except for one; my English teacher my senior year, I can't remember his name, was very, very supportive of me. And no one was mean to me. No one called me names. I mean they smiled.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: They were friendly. None of the teachers at Camden High School treated me in any obvious negative way. They just, when it counted, made sure that I didn't get into the National Honor Society. And—and that was totally different at the—at the University of Arkansas. There was a time at the University of Arkansas that

my experiences were not jiving [coinciding] with other experiences. And you know, there was times I'd say, "God, I don't—I don't understand. I mean, I—I'm not seeing these things happen to me that some of my friends are talking about." I'm not saying they didn't happen to them, cause I know for a fact they did. I couldn't understand, I really couldn't understand why I wasn't having some of those same experiences as an individual. As a group, I was in with everybody else [*laughs*].

SL: Right.

RF: Okay. But when people got a chance to deal with me individually, it—it tended to work out for me at the university.

[02:08:36] SL: You know, I—no one's ever quite put it that way, but I get the feeling that everyone has pretty good feeling for the university. That they did—it—came out of it in a positive way. Okay, let's say—let's—let's do this: if you could sum up your university experience in Fayetteville, what—and you could do it, you know, in a few sentences, what—what would those sentences be?

RF: Ooh gosh, that's difficult.

SL: I know.

[02:09:12] RF: Because I felt like I went through different phases. You know, I had my freshman year as a math major.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Then I had, moving over into the business school, the—the bad semester, then coming back and having the good semesters. My God, it's—it's—I don't know. It's—it's tough to [*pause*] I—I know this it—everything that happened to me at—

at—at the—at the university I think really prepared me, in—including the work piece that led to the—to the IBM. I mean, IBM first heard about me because the guy who was running that department was a former IBM-er, who continued to have ties with the people with IBM in the—in—in Arkansas. So the university did a great job of—of preparing me to go out and be successful. I—and—and I developed some really great friendships, especially Wendell Griffen that . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . that continues today. You know, I—I look at high school basketball players that go straight to the pros, I just feel like they miss so much by not being on college campuses experiencing life and experiences—the balancing that you have to do in terms of making choices about studying and whether you're gonna have extra-curricular activities and—and developing those lifelong friendships. So the—but I think that's the case at any university. I don't think there's anything unique about the University of—of Arkansas. So it, again, it—it's just hard for me to make the sum of—I—I . . .

[02:11:21] SL: . . . Well I think—I think—I think your point about it preparing you for your life and—and what you have found after the university is—is pretty strong. I've heard similar things. That as difficult as it was sometimes, or they do feel prepared.

RF: See, the—the—the university when—even though we had *enough* black students, the environment there was such that the university—they—they did recruit black students. In fact, by 19[--]—I—I had—there were two hundred and fifty on campus when I was there . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . by 1980 or 1981, there were over a thousand black students on campus. I don't think there are a thousand right now.

SL: Just under.

RF: Yeah, just under a thousand right now.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: What happened, the University of Arkansas recruited heavily, but once you—what happened is that once you got up there, you couldn't buy black hair products. You—everything you needed, you got when you went home. The Student Union didn't sell anything.

SL: Right.

RF: The stores out in the community didn't sell anything.

SL: Because there's not a huge . . .

RF: . . . Yeah . . .

SL: . . . black population . . .

RF: . . .it just didn't feel like home.

SL: Right.

[02:12:54] RF: So, the thing that made the University of Arkansas a tolerable place was the friendships that I developed, and—and then these professors. My last year and a half or so at the—at the university, I mean there—there're several people that would tell you that they had a lot worse experience than I did at the University of Arkansas. But, I mean overall, it—it—it was a good experience, but it still didn't feel like home. And the reason the university got to a thousand

and then, I—in my opinion, started dropping, is that that’s the way it felt with those students. I mean, all of a sudden, you had all these students up there but it—it still did not feel like—there weren’t enough black staff. There weren’t enough black professors. You had no one that you could go and talk to. The few black professors that they had was pretty much expected to counsel or talk to all these black students. Well they had—they had other things that they were concerned about.

SL: Sure.

RF: I mean, they wanted to be tenured. They wanted to do research. They wanted to write. They wanted to do things. I mean, they couldn’t spend time dealing—it—it wasn’t *their* job, in my opinion. They didn’t say this, but I’m saying this. You know, it wasn’t their job to be the counselors to all of the black students. And the black students quite frankly didn’t feel that comfortable talking to the other counselors and professors on—on campus. And what the university had to do, and—and why I think they’re rebuilding the numbers, is that there *are* things that—for black students on campus. I mean you can do things. You can buy products. Wal-Mart started selling products. And not just recently but—yeah but some time a—some time ago, so.

[02:15:05] SL: Well, it’s good business . . .

RF: Oh yeah, absolutely.

SL: . . . for one thing [*laughs*].

RF: It is good business.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Absolutely. So, my sense is that the—the university today is a much bet—better place for black students. *We made* it a good place.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I wasn't—I'm not convinced that it was the university that was making it a good place for us. *We* took it upon ourselves to make the most of our experience at the University of Arkansas. And I think that went on for years, and I get the sense now that the university is trying to do their part. Some would say, you know, "not enough," but I—I really believe that the university is—is making an attempt, and—and having—and having some success.

[02:16:04] SL: I think, without question, they have at least recognized that they've got to do that. I—I really believe that. And I think—I think it's happening, too, I do. I mean I—I can't really point to anything specifically, but [*sighs*] . . .

RF: Well, I mean—I mean some of—it's been up and down. Some of the hires . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . I—I think there's been a real attempt to—to bring in blacks to the university, in—in significant positions. But then, you lose them to—to other places. I don't know if there're a lot that would say that they were "run out" or—or anything like that, but, I mean I do think that—I—I chaired the Student Affairs Fundraising Committee . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . for the Campaign for the Twenty First Century, and Johnetta [Cross-Brazzell] just does a wonderful, wonderful job. And, I think she's making a real attempt. And Chancellor [John A.] White hired her and gave her that opportunity to—to do

that. So y'know I—I've had involvement with her. I don't know much about things that are going on on other parts . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . of the campus. I used to see numbers in terms of faculty, staff and the growth or lack of growth. I—I don't know where that stands.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But right now, it was something that Wendell Griffen and I focused a lot on when we were both serving on the Alumni Association . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . Board. But recently I haven't seen—seen what those numbers look like.

[02:18:12] SL: Why don't we pause just for a second.

[Tape stopped]

SL: I—I just want to let you know that I'm hearing you, and—and you know, I'm sure you know all the issues . . .

RF: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . if you're that close to him.

RF: Oh, oh, I am.

SL: And you know them much more inside and out than I do.

RF: Yeah. I do.

SL: So I'm kind of a babe in the woods here on this deal, but, I'd—will—I—I've told you what I've told you. I respect the guy. I respect his voice. I understand exactly many of the things that I know that he said, and I—I—I see his point.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: So I don't think we can not talk about him, if you . . .

RF: . . . Right. I agree . . .

SL: . . . want to talk about him. So let's talk.

RF: Okay.

[02:18:46] SL: Okay. So how did you and Wendell meet? What?

RF: Wendell was in school a year before I got there.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I don't know if you know, but Wendell started college at sixteen.

SL: That's the way that George Haley did.

RF: Started college at sixteen. Very quiet guy.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And we were in Hotz together.

SL: Okay.

RF: And I don't remember *how* we met, I just know that we did. And he invited me to study with him. Now, he's an upperclassman inviting me to study with him. And I remember he would—he had this ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] coffee that must have been 50 percent caffeine.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: Because I tell you, we did—we'd stay up all night studying—*all night long*. We'd do a little talking. But we were mainly very serious. He and I studied together a lot during the time that I was at the—at the university, and—and we got to be very close. We kept in touch after college. We joined the University of Arkansas Alumni Association. I think at the same time, I'm not sure of that.

SL: Mm-hmm . . .

[02:20:04] RF: . . . But—but we served on that, and we served on a committee that was looking at diversity at the university. Wendell chaired it for a while, and then he left the Alumni Association Board, and I became chair of it. And then, I worked through that process to—and that’s how I know some of these numbers that I . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . that I shared with you. And then, he and I became charter board members of the Black Alumni Society. And I believe that Wendell may have chaired that, I cannot remember.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I believe—in fact, I’m—I know that he did. He—and we were part of that organization, I believe, six years together. And we remain close today. You know, Wendell and I tend to want the same things. I mean I agree with a lot of things that he says, okay? But we tend to—we respect that we tend to have different approaches to get to where we want to get. Wendell has said a lot of things, and there is very little that I disagree with him on. I kind of view myself as sort of the Mr. Inside, and he’s Mr. Outside [*laughter*], both—both working some of the—on some of the same things. But he’s—and—and we do disagree on some things. But we don’t disagree on—on our friendship. So, he’ll—he’ll—he’s a lifelong friend, lifelong, so.

[02:22:17] SL: Well, I still have the sense that he’s also a valuable asset to the school.



RF: Oh, I—I—Wendell Griffen remains today a valuable asset to the University of Arkansas. Y’know, people who disagree with us are still valuable. You know, two heads are better than one only if they’re two different heads. That’s the only way that two heads are better than one. Because if it’s two heads that think alike, then you’ve really got only one head. So I—I think that you need someone who thinks you aren’t moving fast enough. I mean, that is . . .

SL: Yeah, what happened to these three peas? [*Laughs*]

RF: That’s absolute—it is absolutely necessary for you to have someone who thinks you aren’t moving fast enough. I resigned from a board—resigned from a board that I was serving on that I was president of that board for eight years. And I resigned after changing the by-laws to create a president-elect position, a past-president position, so that they would feel comfortable with—with the transition, but it was the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. Buck O’Neil is chair of that organization. I went to Buck and told him that I—that we need to start looking for a new leadership. He said, “Oh, no. You’re going to be president of this board for life.” And while I was flattered by that, I told him that that’s not healthy, that what we need to do is to get someone who looks at my accomplishments over the last eight years and say, “You know, Randall didn’t do anything.” I mean that’s the attitude you need. “Randall, y’all think he was such a great president, and yeah, he raised a little money. He helped with a few things, but you haven’t seen *anything* until you see *me* as president of this organization.” I said—I mean that’s the kind of person that you need, that—that we need to build to be the president of this organization. Not someone who looks at me, and says,

“Oh, your shoes are gonna be hard to fill. I have no idea how I’m gonna do this. Oh no, I don’t wanna [want to] do that.” You gotta find somebody who thinks that what I did was—was nothing. So, I tell you that to say that the university needs somebody pushing on them even when they think they’re doing good, okay, you—to drive you even—to drive you even further. And, again Wendell and I agree on a lot of things. They’re some things that we don’t agree on, but I tell you, I agree that whatever approach he takes, however he says it, that in the end, Wendell Griffen will help the University of Arkansas get done what it needs to get done.

[02:25:33] SL: That’s so perfect. I really like that [*laughs*]. I like the whole thing about the museum and putting that in perspec[tive]—that’s really good. That’s really good. I was gonna ask you about—and I will ask you about the museum a little bit later but . . .

RF: . . . Okay.

SL: That’s really the health—healthiest thing I’ve ever heard about Wendell Griffen and how to think about all that stuff. I mean, and you’re right. You’re exactly right.

RF: Well . . .

SL: . . . And, you know, also I like in the—in the museum piece the way you tried to set it up where you had a past-president’s position, so there is that—not only do you need someone that says, “Okay, Randall didn’t do enough, or watch what I can do,” still even when that person comes in, the stuff that—that the former president did, it’s got to match. You just can’t just . . .

RF: Oh, oh no.

SL: It—it doesn't—that's counterproductive. You've got to build on what was there. You don't take away what was there.

[02:26:29] RF: You—you—absolutely. But one thing that I did in—in that situation, is—is that I—I did not—I worked with this person one-on-one. I intentionally did not go, when I stepped down as president, I intentionally did not go to the next six board meetings, because they were accustomed to me being president for eight years.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: You know, I negotiate contracts. I raised money. And I didn't think it was fair for me to show up, the new guy is president, and everybody was gonna—when a question got asked, they were gonna turn . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . to me. And that wasn't fair to him. So while I did work with him, I didn't come to meetings. I would have lunch with him. I'd meet with him. I'd give him my knowledge as—as much as I could, but I was not going to go there and be in those meetings and have people act like I was still the pres[ident]—and that would have been out of no disrespect to him. He's a wonderful guy, very well known, great attorney in—in—in Kansas City. But that's something I think is important, too. Sometimes people do that, and they don't do it intentionally, but it really it—it hurts the new person talking charge.

SL: Takes them longer . . .

RF: Yeah, absolutely . . .

SL: . . . to grab hold and for everyone to adjust.

RF: Yeah, yeah. No it—it does . . .

SL: . . . You're right . . .

RF: . . . You—so—so . . .

SL: . . . That's really insightful. That's really good . . .

RF: . . . you have to force the thing . . .

[02:28:00] SL: That's really good. You know, I think that you have said all there is to say about your experiences—well, may—I'm not gonna say that. I think you have given me plenty to work with on your University of Arkansas experience. And also, I think you've touched pretty good on where you think the university is and maybe enough on where you think it's going. Is there anything else? And I always ask this in all the interviews; is there anything else about the University of Arkansas that either I haven't asked you about or that you can think of that you really feel needs to be said?

RF: Well, one thing and that's [*pause*] everyone understands that Wendell and I have this close relationship. And—and I want to make it clear that at no time, has Wendell ever come to me and asked me not to support the university the way that I do. And he seems to have this [*pause*] I'd be willing to bet you there're people who think that probably happened because of our relationship . . .

SL: Hmm.

RF: . . . but, never has. I mean he—he respects what I do; I respect what—what he does. I—I—I just want to mention that . . .

SL: Good.

RF: . . . that Wendell does not try to “poison” other people. He—he respects—he t—he says what he thinks, but I mean he, y’know, Wendell believes that if he’s been heard, then—then y’know, he’s—he’s been heard. He’s—he’s—he’s had his opportunity. And, I mean I think—that’s why we—we remain as—as—as close as we are today. In terms of anything else at the university, you know, I—I really can’t. We talked about my brief basketball career.

[02:30:09] SL: Yeah. And it was good, too.

RF: I told you that I worked—by the way, when I worked at McDonald’s, I—I did that several semesters. At one time, [*laughs*] I was doing, work-study, McDonald’s, and school [*laughs*]. All—I didn’t sleep a lot I mean I—I mean I—I was very, very hyper. I mean I—I just—I needed to be doing something all the time. And I . . .

SL: . . . You think you get that from your mom or your dad? Or both? Or your aunt?

RF: I—I think [*pause*] I think more from my father, and I say that—I mean my mother worked very hard. But because my father—I didn’t see him as much as I saw her, he appeared to be the more hyper one. You know?

SL: Right. Mm-hmm.

RF: That—that is—I don’t know that he was . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

[02:31:11] RF: . . . but he’d leave early in the morning, he’d come back late at night. I’ll tell you one story though about my father though that you’ll probably get a kick out of. He would come home almost every Friday night from work, and our one-car garage got turned into a bedroom for the three oldest boys.

SL: Okay.

RF: Because we—we had three bedrooms. We had two bedrooms in the house, and then they added a third bedroom. They put our air conditioner in it—it was the only place with air conditioning in the house—because our youngest brother had very severe asthma . . .

SL: Yeah, now you mentioned something . . .

RF: . . . and needed the air.

SL: . . . about that.

RF: My second brother had asthma, but not as bad as the last one.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[02:31:56] RF: So they built a bedroom there and then they turned the garage into a—into a bedroom. He would come in on Fridays from work, and would sit there at the foot of the bed. And we got the same lecture *every Friday night* about what it was like to be a Ferguson man.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And it was things like you'll be respectful. He—it was a big thing about how you treated Ferguson women. I mean—I mean he told us, if we disrespected our mother, we could be outta [out of] here. I remember him telling us one time that your mother can still have more children.

SL: [*Laughs*] As a threat. [*Laughs*]

RF: He may not remember this [*laughter*], but he—it was—I don't know how many Fridays it happened, but it happened Friday after Friday after Friday. And—and I think that had such an effect on me. I—I—I because my—people talk about how

I open doors. I have this thing that when I'm walking with a woman, whether it's my wife or whoever, I always move to the street side.

SL: Sure.

RF: Always, without, I mean, I'd—it's not even conscious. I just—I just find myself doing it. I mean, that—there—there were just things that you—you learned growing up that—my fourth grade teacher, my first male teacher . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . the *only* male teacher in my elementary school, [Ernie? Earnest? Sterling? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING]. Back in that day, the girls—in third and fourth grade the girls—some of the girls were bigger than the guys.

SL: Absolutely.

RF: And so, you didn't think much about wrestling with them, because they were bigger than you.

SL: Right.

RF: You know. Not fighting, but just . . .

SL: Sure.

RF: . . . out on the playground . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He stopped that. He said, "You can't do that, because one day you're gonna be larger, and you'll still think you can do that." So there would be no wrestling with girls. Period. And then he told the girls, "Now you act like girls, not like boys." You know.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And—and he, I mean it was just *sinful* for a guy to hit a girl, and therefore, for a man to hit a woman. I mean—I mean these were—real men just didn't do things like that. So those are things that we, I mean—so I had, also my father who I didn't see as much of, but—but who was a strong, strong role model. I had my mother who, I mean, did a super job of raising *five* of us—I mean five—I mean five! And when my father was in the hospital, I mean you know, she was working, and—and she finally retired ten or eleven years ago. My father is finally retired now. He tried several times to do it. I mean, so—I mean, just looking at the whole—the work ethic that you saw was that you should work and that you should work hard, and you should always, you should always try to do—do the best that—that you can do. So I was—I was—I was a fortunate one. I was—I was very fortunate to have the . . .

SL: . . . Had great role models . . .

RF: . . . the parents and the other people in my life. I mean, my seventh grade math teacher, who was, like six [foot] six [inches], real intimidating man, deep voice; he was the math teacher that I—I—that I told you about. Just—I mean I was just very, very fortunate. But—but I tell you, high school, those high school days—when the two schools came together, the black high school and the white high school came together, the white high school had gone to the state championship [in basketball] but had never won a game, when I was there. I don't think we got past the first round. The black high school won the state championship—not the black state championship. So before we were integrated in the schools, they integrated the championships, so you could be a black school playing against a

white school. I'll never forget this: when the two schools merged, the black high school had just won the state championship. That black coach became the junior high coach at the new school. He didn't win the black state championship, he won the overall state championship and became the junior high coach, while the junior high coach became the varsity coach, having never coached varsity at that school before. So, you see that, and then you saw the things that happened to me with the National Honor Society. While I didn't give up, I mean I went to college just a little, "Hmm, gosh, I don't know, Daddy, you know, you say if I work hard everything is gonna be okay, and life will work out. And then I see that happen to the *state championship coach*." I mean that—that was a real bummer for me when that—when that happened.

[02:38:36] SL: So that probably had as much to do with the principal, the high school, and the school board, as much as anybody, right?

RF: I would imagine. I—and I don't know how that stuff works but I'm—I—I can see the school board's—y'know, this guy had proved himself.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And again, I'm being repetitive, but he didn't win—he had won several black state championships, but that's not what this was.

SL: Yeah, it's overall. So, but you know, it didn't sound like you came to Fayetteville with a chip on your shoulder . . .

RF: Oh no. No, I didn't.

SL: . . . but—but you had gotten a dose.

RF: Oh, y—absolutely. And—and—and I didn't come to Fayetteville with a chip on my shoulder, seeing things that weren't there, or looking over my shoulder. I mean I—I didn't come there—I came there very disappointed in Camden.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Is what I did. I—I you know, I—I came there very disappointed in—in—in my high school that I had spent three years in. I mean that—it just—and—and the coaching thing happened while I was in college.

SL: Oh.

[02:39:55] RF: I mean I looked back . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and—and saw that happen, but it was, like, the next year. And I know what we did in the state championship, because I played on those state . . .

SL: Teams.

RF: . . . those teams.

SL: Yeah, both ways . . .

RF: Yeah.

SL: . . . black and white.

RF: And—no, I—I never played on the one with Lincoln, but I . . .

SL: Oh.

RF: . . . I saw that. I mean, I wanted to . . .

SL: Oh.

RF: . . . this guy's name—his name was Coach Webster.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I—he was the reason why I originally told my father I didn’t want to go to Camden High School, because I wanted to—I wanted to play for Coach Webster. That’s—that’s what I wanted to do. I mean he had won black state championships, he’d had, I mean great basketball players, and that’s what I wanted to do. But, people had different ideas.

[02:40:49] SL: Well, you know, that deal does sound like that went down before you ever entered that room, that you were gonna go. I mean, they decided.

RF: Oh, oh yeah.

SL: It’s also interesting that, to me that . . .

RF: Well, they were trying to convince my f[ather]—they were there to convince my father . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . to talk to me about it.

SL: Mm-hmm. No . . .

RF: Not convince me, but you know, “We want him” and—and I wasn’t the only one that went, by the way.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I’m sure this conversation occurred in other living rooms . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . because when I got there, I wasn’t—I . . .

[02:41:23] SL: Now what’s going on with the national scene, at this time, when you’re gettin’ ready to go to the white high school? What—what’s happening nationally? Let’s see this is [19]6 . . .?

RF: This is [19]67.

SL: . . . [196]7.

RF: This is [19]67.

SL: So . . .

RF: Martin Luther King [Jr.] is assassinated in [19]68.

SL: So really the peak of the Civil Rights Movement is—I mean it’s building. And
it’s . . .

RF: Oh, oh, absolutely . . .

SL: . . . and it’s definitely out there on the . . .

RF: . . . You have the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

SL: Right.

RF: The Voting Rights, or well the Voter’s Rights—Voting Right Acts in 1964. I
mean it—there, you know, and we’re wearing our Afros [*laughs*] and you know it
was . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . you were just—it was during that time that Tommie Smith stood on the
podium in—in Mexico [City] with [John] Carlos and raised . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . the fist [signifying the “Black Power” salute on the medals podium at the
1968 Summer Olympic Games].

SL: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

RF: I mean there was a lot going on at that time. A lot goin’ [going] on.

[02:42:25] SL: So, it was time. It was time to do it.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: People made sacrifices to do that.

RF: Oh, absolutely.

SL: I mean, I'm thinkin' back now if you 'd stuck with that—with that coach, it's a possibility that you could've gotten a scholarship.

RF: Oh, and—and I could've gotten a scholarship out of—the reality of it is that I had more of a chance to play at Camden High School than I did at Lincoln High School.

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: I *never* would have started as a sophomore at Camden High School.

SL: Right.

RF: Never.

SL: Okay.

[02:43:02] RF: I got my chance to shine as a basketball player, because I went to Camden High School. Y'know I don't—I mean, Lincoln High School was so deep in talent. I remember playing—Camden High School playing Lincoln High School—and I was a leading scorer for Camden High School, and we beat Lincoln High School. And I remember my mother's best friend, as we're all happy, she walked out on the floor, and she said, "Randall Jr., shame on you."

SL: Really?

RF: Oh, yeah. I—I re—she wasn't upset, y'know.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean, well she wasn't, I mean like she was, y'know, yelling at me or anything.

SL: Right.

RF: You know, she's goin', she said, "Randall Jr. shame on you for beating Lincoln High School like this." And she kind of smiled, and then she . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . walked—but still there was some meaning to that . . .

SL: Yes . . .

RF: . . . irregardless . . .

SL: . . . there's some of that sentiment that was in the community probably.

RF: Oh, yeah, and then I'm s—I'm, y'know, I'm kind of thinking, "Well I didn't ask to go over here, but once I get here, I'm supposed to do my best. What am I supposed to do when I play Lincoln High School?"

SL: Right.

RF: "Not play my best though I'm supposed to," you know?

SL: Sounds like you had a good game.

RF: Yeah, yeah. I—I did that night. [*Laughs*]

SL: It happens. It happens. Sometimes it happens. Sometimes it doesn't.

RF: Yeah, I did that night, but I—but I—I was really—I was really happy to see them win the state championship. They had great players on that team. And—and I was—I was real happy for Coach Webster. I—I thought that was gonna be the thing that was gonna really open this thing up, because we know—we knew the schools were merging.

SL: Right.

RF: We knew that was gonna happen. And I guess my—I was so disappointed, because I was just certain that he was going to get it, because my coach left. He left to go coach the college.

SL: Right.

RF: So there was an open—the opening was there.

[02:45:21] SL: So what—whatever happened to Coach Webster?

RF: He stayed there—did great coaching—the junior high. He may have won a state championship for junior high. I—I'm not—I'm—I'm not certain of that.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But he did very well and retired and eventually passed away. His wife was my third grade teacher. So I—so I really felt like I knew him.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean I'd gone to his house several times.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: The first puppy I had, she gave it to me.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: So—so I really knew him b—before—I mean I'm [in] third grade, so I'm not even thinkin' about playing high school basketball.

SL: Right. So you . . .

RF: But I'm goin' over to her house, and I'm seein' [seeing] this guy. I mean . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . he's a legend.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean, so, it—it wasn't just me as a ninth grade basketball player wanting to go into a sophomore and play with him, I've been seeing this guy since third grade . . .

SL: . . . It's like family.

RF: Oh, yeah. I mean we lived on the same street.

SL: Right.

[02:46:23] RF: I mean so when he didn't get that [coaching job], I mean, I—I felt like it had happened to my uncle or—or something . . .

SL: . . . Right.

RF: I mean, it just—and—and—and he never talked about it—I mean I have no idea. By then, I was going off to college so . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . I never talked to him about it. But I j—I j—I just thought it was, I mean such an injustice. That—I mean, how could that possibly have occurred?

SL: [*Sighs*]

RF: So. And understand, my father was not one who talked to us about racism . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . nor—nor my mother. I mean, it's—they just talked about workin' hard and gettin' ahead and doin' the best you can do, and it was not like they prepared us by saying things like, "All right. There's a racist world out there, and you have to do this." They didn't—I mean—I mean, they didn't do that. But at the same time, I was prepared for it, without them saying those types of things to me.

[02:47:33] SL: There weren't an—ever any times—I mean, have there been times before and at—at college where you ever were really scared, felt like you were in some place that was really some place you ought to get out of, or, you know, like being on the road or somethin' or—? I mean, you were driving back and forth between Fayetteville and Oklahoma City, you know, I'm assuming maybe sometimes at—at night, and I—I don't know, I mean . . .

RF: Yeah. I, y'know, I can't really, [*pause*] I can't really think of anything. I mean I—I tried to avoid—for instance, when I—and now I do it out of habit. I—I don't think it's necessary, but, I've been here since 1980, so that's just seven years out of college. So I'm—I'm still pretty—I'm not even thirty yet [at that time]. You didn't drive—if you left Kansas City, you took [Highway] 71 down to Fayetteville into Alma, [Interstate] 40 over to Little Rock and down. A shorter route was to drive down through Branson [Missouri] and through north central Arkansas. If you were black, you didn't do that. Or if you did, you stopped in Branson, and you filled up with gas, and you made sure you got pretty far . . .

SL: . . . South . . .

RF: . . . south. 'Cause I don't know if you remember it, but—but Arkansas, back then, in north central Arkansas, had Aryan Nation or skin head camps, I forgot which it was . . .

SL: . . . Absolutely.

RF: And in fact, there was a movie . . .

SL: The Dragon, the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan was there.

RF: Exactly. So, and, I've heard horror stories about people driving—that—that I mean that, they survived it, where they'd be black and someone would pull up beside them in a truck and show 'em—show 'em a gun.

SL: Yeah.

RF: It's just something that you—so, I never went that way, so it was [*laughs*] never . . .

SL: . . . Yeah.

RF: . . . it was never an issue. So I never—I never had any of those—I never had any of those experiences. I mean I h—again here's another example of me hearing a lot of horror stories about things, but that—but they didn't happen to me. And when I say that, just like when I say that about the campus, understand I'm not saying that those things didn't happen to them. I'm just telling you, they didn't happen to me.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean these were friends of mine. I believed them when they told me these things that occurred. And I was never one who—who would say, “Well, those things don't happen to me, so I don't believe you.”

SL: Right.

[02:50:19] RF: You know, I just figured there was some other reason why those things weren't . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . weren't happening to me. And I think one reason—I was a pretty low key—I didn't challenge people. I mean, I had friends who were in-your-face, "Why did you give me that C?"

SL: Yeah.

RF: [*Laughs*] You know?

SL: Mm-hmm

RF: You know, "I deserved a B, and you *gave* me a C." Y'know, my deal, un—unless you think that they falsified the test, it's—it's up to you to make—make the grade. And, you know, I tell you there was a time I—I wouldn't be surprised if some—if some things got changed, though, with some people. But, I—I believe—I know that people had bad experiences driving through north central Arkansas. I just didn't do it. For one thing, I only did it once, I think. And I did what I told ya [you]; I spent the night in Branson; I gassed up; I left early in the morning. I didn't want to be anywhere near that place at night.

SL: You bet.

RF: Because of all the horror stories that I—I had heard, which later came to be true. I mean there was a TV movie . . .

SL: Yep.

RF: . . . on—on that, how the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] went in and, you know, the—they—they had a shoot-out and I mean, it was just . . .

[02:51:41] SL: As a matter of fact, just three weeks ago—do you know Roy Reed?

RF: Roy Reed?

SL: He's a journalist—professor emeritus of the journalism department—did a lot of civil rights reporting in Mississippi. Great guy, great guy. But he also does interviews for the Pryor Center, in fact, he's done the bulk of 'em, for the past seven years. And he just did an interview with Floyd Thomas. I don't know if you know Frank Thomas.

RF: Only Frank Thomas I know used to be with Chicago—White Sox [Major League Baseball team] and . . .

SL: . . . No . . .

RF: . . . now with Oakland [*laughs*].

SL: No, no. This Frank—Frank was part of [David] Pryor's staffs through his political career, but his father—Roy Reed just did an interview with him in El Dorado, I think, and he—he was the FBI guy that infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan.

RF: Oh, okay.

SL: So we—I haven't heard that interview yet; I haven't seen the transcript or anything, but I bet it's . . .

RF: Oh, that—that would be . . .

SL: . . . quite remarkable.

RF: . . . interesting.

SL: Mm-hmm.

FE: Change . . .

[Tape stopped]

SL: You got speed?

FE: Yep.

SL: Okay. Where were we? We were talking about [pause] . . .

FE: You asked him about . . .

SL: . . . Oh, we were talking about you traveling though central—north central Arkansas . . .

RF: Oh, yeah. Right. Right.

RF: . . . and the—and the fear thing.

RF: Yeah . . .

SL: The fear thing, you know, just . . .

[02:53:08] RF: I—I haven't had—I—I haven't had that much. I mean, I can remember, when I went through—I spent a summer in Cleveland [Ohio] . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . with my best friend from high school, Dwight Witcher. I spent the summer with Dwight. And I would go out at night to go use a pay phone to call my girlfriend at the University of Arkansas.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And so, one night I came back, and I thought nothing of it. And one night I came back, he said, "Where did you go to use the phone?" And I told him where I went. He said, "Oh no, don't do that again." He said, "Oh, you—you cannot go across 55th Street at night on this part—this part of town." I thought nothing of it. Well, the next time I went, cause there was no other phone to use, when I saw somebody on the street that I probably would have seen before, it scared the crap out of me . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . only because he had told me that.

SL: He put the fear in you. Yeah . . .

RF: . . . But before that, I wasn't—I wasn't afraid at—I—I w[asn't]—I didn't think anything of it, but then, it—it bothered me. So, you know, I've had something like that. I've—I've been out walking, and—and—and, you get a little concerned when you see young kids with sweatshirts and hoods and things approaching you, and y—you wonder if you ought to be crossing the street and—and that type of thing. But I—I just haven't had . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . I haven't had much of that kind of stuff happen to me. And the other thing, I think that something that keeps me going, is I have both a bad memory and a good memory. I don't—except for those things like at Camden, a lot of things that happen to me that are negative, I'm able to forget.

SL: Hmm.

RF: So I have a hard time when people start saying, "Tell us about the top ten worst things that ever happened to you."

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean I can talk about the National Honor Society. I can—you know, I mean, there are a few things—I can talk about Coach Webster. I mean, but things that just happen to me, that are not life changing, I—the—it kind of rolls of my back.

SL: Well, it's healthy. Let it go . . .

RF: You know I—I just . . .

SL: . . . especially if it doesn't matter.

RF: I—I let it go.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, I can be reminded of it, and—and I believe that I have enough of it in my subconscious it helps me when I'm faced with something else.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But I just don't let it linger, because I think it's, unhealthy. I used to tell my old—oldest son, Randall the third [*telephone rings*] . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] [*Telephone rings*] Is that your front door or is that the . . . [*telephone rings*]

RF: I think that's the front door.

FE: Gonna pause.

[Tape stopped]

[02:56:41] FE: And we got speed.

SL: Oh, we—we were goin' down a, you know, how we don't hold on to the negative things.

RF: Oh, right. Right.

SL: Doesn't—it doesn't serve much purpose unless you really get burned.

RF: Yeah. And . . .

SL: And then you remembered not to touch the burner.

RF: Exactly . . .

SL: . . . You know. Yeah.

RF: I would—I would tell my oldest son, whether it be baseball or basketball or whatever, that, get rid of the negative emotion, because it's gonna do nothing but

hurt you. Okay. That it's okay to be emotional, but getting all upset and—and that type of thing, will not—will not serve you well. So it—it's something that I've—that I've tried to do is, remember enough about it to keep you out of trouble . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . but don't let it consume you and—and—and cause you to be a different person. That it—that—that—that tends to make you very unproductive, so.

[02:57:51] SL: We could probably move on to your family, except I wanna ask you this; it seems like I got a pretty good portrait of your dad, but I'm still a little bit fuzzy on your mom.

RF: Okay.

SL: You say that she retired. What—what was it that she had been doing she retired from?

[02:58:11] RF: She worked in—there is this industrial park in Camden.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Okay. And I can't remember the name of the company, but she worked in a plant doing something . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and I'm not—I'm not really, you know—on an assembly line or something like that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . doing some—and I think it was the—it was—it was a company that was—that was making something for the defense department or things that went into weapons or—or something like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And—and she started—at—at first, she, when we were growing up, she was home with us.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I can't remember when she went to work there, but she worked there long enough to retire, I mean, she retired I believe at sixty-five.

[02:58:56] SL: So—so did she start working there while you were still at home?

[02:59:04] RF: [*Pauses*] Let me think. I left home in [19]6—[*pause*]—[19]69.

Y'know, I cannot remember. I kind of remember my mother being around all the time.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Is—is what I remember. I don't remember my mother working a lot while—except to go down to help my—help my father.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I think she started doing some work when—when he was in the hospital my freshman year, so she—she would have done something then. And I can't remember if she started at that job or not. I just . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

[02:59:50] RF: . . . I just—w—what—I remember my mother being around all the time . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and I remember my father working all the time. I do remember though that when we would have a—a home game, we got out of school early, and the—and the purpose was for us to go home and have a meal early.

SL: Right.

RF: So you weren't eatin' [eating] right before the game.

SL: Been there. Mm-hmm.

RF: And my father came home. My mother must have been working, because I was home by my—my father came home and would cook my game . . .

SL: . . . Pre-game meal . . .

RF: . . . meal.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And, he did that all the time. And—and he didn't say a lot. He would ask me who were playing.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: You know, how good they were. "Do you expect to win?" Asked three or four questions. He prepared the meal. He put it on the table, and then he'd leave and go back to work. And, it was—it—it wasn't a lot of talk, but it was the most time that [*laughs*]*—*that I spent with my father, just the two of us, alone. I mean, I—because I didn't get a lot of one-on-one, because he worked all the time. And when he came home, a lot of the time, he was tired.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He would fall a sleep in a chair.

SL: And there were five kids.

RF: Well, yeah. Well, and—and—and so we were—we were all—we were pretty much raised by my mother—and w—don't get me wrong; we were raised by my father. It's just . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . that, I mean to—to take care of us, I mean he worked a lotta [lot of] lotta hours. And we wouldn't bother him when he—I mean, when we came home.

SL: Well, it sounds like he was a great provider though.

RF: Oh! Absolutely.

SL: I mean, I'm not hearing any stories about you going to school barefoot or . . .

RF: Oh, no. No. No. No.

SL: . . . any of that stuff.

RF: No. No, we didn't have—we didn't have anything like that.

[03:02:02] SL: So what about homework at night? Did your mom help you with that?

Or was that onus just on—on each kid to get that—that was his job to get the homework done? Or I mean, did you rely on anyone to help you at all with your homework or your schoolwork?

RF: No.

SL: No?

RF: Not really, I just did it myself.

[03:02:27] SL: Did either of your parents—did they go to high school, finish high school, or . . .?

RF: My—my parents have finished high school, but they got it from a GED [General Education Development] standpoint.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: Okay. So when—I can't remember when they got their high school—my father quit high—as a good student, my father quit high school when his father died.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And . . .

[03:02:51] SL: Now that was unexpected. Was that—did he die young, his father?

RF: Oh no, he was eighty-six.

SL: Oh, he was. Okay.

RF: Right.

SL: Okay.

RF: He died from—he—he died from cancer. But I'm not sure that back then, they—I mean I don't think it was, like, sudden [*snaps fingers*]. I mean, he—he died from prostate cancer over . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . I think over some time, but my father I think was like a sophomore in high school or junior high school. And he quit high school to go to work. And he worked and provided for his younger brothers and sisters. And from that t—that's what he did, from that time on, he—he worked.

[03:03:37] SL: Well now, did his father own the restaurant/bar?

RF: No. No . . .

SL: . . . No, no . . .

RF: . . . he started—he did that himself.

SL: Oh, okay. Okay.

RF: He—he was not—he was not in Camden. My father grew up in Hope.

SL: Okay.

RF: And I believe that my grandfather died while they were in Hope. I'm not—I'm—
I'm not sure . . .

SL: . . . Okay . . .

RF: . . . of that. I'm . . .

SL: . . . Okay . . .

RF: . . . I'm a little fuzzy on—on that, but my father met my—my mother worked in
my father's restaurant. That's how they met. In fact, my grandparents, my
mother's parents, did not like my father. Because, you see, when my—when my
father was thirty, my mother was nineteen [*laughs*].

SL: Right.

RF: You don't think about their ten-year difference in age . . .

SL: Now . . .

RF: . . . and sometimes eleven, depending on when the birthdays fall, right?

SL: Right.

RF: So it's ten plus. But back then a thirty-year-old with a twenty-year-old or
nineteen—year—I mean, it was—but—but a nineteen-year-old woman back then
was an adult. I mean—I mean . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . she was a—so that was not—that they did not—and—and then he had a bar.

[Laughs]

SL: Right.

RF: And she worked in the restaurant part of it, I believe. But no, they did not take too kindly to him.

[03:05:04] SL: But they've had to have warmed up to him.

RF: Oh! Oh, they did. Absolutely . . .

SL: . . . Yeah, I mean . . .

RF: . . . I mean . . .

SL: . . . because they've stuff—[unclear words] stuff . . .

RF: . . . The—the whole time I knew my grandparents, they got along fine with my father.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean, I wasn't even born, obviously, when . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . when this was going on.

SL: Right.

RF: No, they—they ended up having a, what I saw as, a very good—a very good relationship. Very good. So, again, my mother was the—was the one that we spent—I mean, before I went to school, I mean it was like, all the time, and then during the summers, it would—it would be all day long—except for us goin' out and playing baseball and . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and doing those types of things.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I mean, we were kind of—I spent the time with my mother. And of course, I was the oldest, and—and I always, again I wanted to please my mother, and I wanted to please my father, so I mean, I—I worked—I worked to do that. I mean it—it—it was something that was important to me. I mean . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . had it not been, then I guess I wouldn't have gone the direction that I did, but they let you know what pleased them. So there was no guessing.

SL: [*Laughs*] You didn't have to figure it out.

[03:06:33] RF: There was no guessing about what pleased my parents. And, so I knew what it was, so, that's what I strove to do.

SL: Well, they've got to be proud of you. I mean, you've—surely—surely, they're pleased. They gotta be pleased [*laughs*]. My gosh.

RF: I hope so [*laughs*].

SL: I'm sure they are. I'm sure they are. Well let's—let's talk about your family now . . .

RF: Okay.

SL: . . . and your life. I mean I don't need a litany of all your work experiences.

RF: Okay.

[03:07:11] SL: I mean, we can see that. But, it is interesting to me that your—your boss in—in the work-study program got some attention from IBM directed your way. And they came and talked to you. What—so tell me what it was like. I

mean, this came out of the blue to you. You—this is not what you thought your life was going to be, of course . . .

RF: Well I—and but I had no idea. All . . .

SL: . . . Right . . .

RF: . . . all I was doing is preparing for whatever showed up . . .

SL: . . . Right . . .

RF: . . . because, what I wanted to do is do as good as I could in—in college . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . go to the office where people interviewed you [*laughs*].

SL: Right.

RF: . . . and . . .

SL: Get a job.

RF: . . . and get a—and interview as many companies as possible, get as many offers as possible, and then pick the one that I wanted to go to work for.

SL: Right.

RF: But after my sophomore year in college, I wasn't—I wasn't even thinking about a summer job.

SL: Right.

[03:08:11] RF: I—I wasn't. I was—the summer before my sophomore—when I got out of high school, I went to, and this will tie together, my father sent me to stay with his brother, my Uncle Harold.

SL: In?

RF: In Detroit.

SL: Okay.

RF: And we looked for jobs, and he finally took me out to Ford Motor Company, filled out an application, and I remember the guy—and there were tons of people out there—I remember the guy saying, “So why do you want to work for us?” And I said, “Well, I only want to work for the summer.” I said, “I’m gonna be a college freshman. And I just want to save some money for college.” And—and I was saying, you know, “This is not the right answer, cause this guy probably wants somebody who’s not going to college.”

SL: Right.

RF: And he looked at me and smiled, he said, “Great. When can you start?” I mean that was it. And I was netting \$200 a week in the summer of 1970.

SL: Cool.

RF: Before that, I worked in a grocery store for I think \$2 and something an hour
[laughs].

SL: Oh, yeah.

[03:09:26] RF: And what this was is that I was a summer hire, but they weren’t paying me like a summer hire. They were paying me like . . .

SL: . . . An employee . . .

RF: . . . anybody. What they did is that they—they would—I w—I was in their steel mill. They were “pickling” the steel, which was running it through acid, cleaning it.

SL: Mm-hmm . . .

RF: . . . Okay. And you would get assigned to certain machines. They as[signed]—and—and you got paid bonuses by how much steel you ran through the machine. And there were maintenance people responsible for keeping it going. I got assigned to the fastest machine.

SL: [Laughs]

RF: And—and what was I doin’? I was sweeping stuff and, I wasn’t operating the machine. I was running errands and netted \$200 a week. But there were only like five weeks left to go, and I’d already been up there five weeks and didn’t have a job.

SL: Right.

[03:10:20] RF: And I remember when I got my first check, my uncle said, “Let me have your check.” He took me to the bank. He opened up me an account. He had me sign it. He deposited it, and then he gave me like twenty bucks. I said, “But I made two hundred and something.” “You’re gonna save that.” I was so upset with him.

SL: [Laughs]

RF: Now if—if I came close to hating someone, he did this to me *every week*. I was so upset with him. I was so ready to come back home. And the last check they sent to me. But when I got back, my mother was at work. I went down to s—and I don’t—this is not the day that I arrived, I mean—she went to work. I went down to Sears [department store], because we had a washer in our house but not a dryer. And I remember my mother hanging up clothes on a clothesline . . .

SL: . . . Mine did . . .

RF: . . . in the back.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I remember it would be raining, and we'd all run out to get it.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I was the oldest and the biggest, and I would run out there. Well I'm getting ready to go to college. I'm not going to be there to do that, so I went down to Sears, bought her a washer—

SL: Dryer . . .

RF: . . . dryer. Had to bring it there, and I remember there was a problem. I think I bought a gas one, and there wasn't a gas line into the room or something like that. I forgot how we fixed that, but I was concerned that it wasn't going to be there when my mother got home. But it was. So that's how I spent two hundred of my dollars and the rest just put it in the bank. And all of a sudden, I started thinking, "You know, my uncle is not such a bad guy."

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: You know, I never would have bought my mother this dryer. And my mother loved it . . .

SL: Well, of course . . .

RF: . . . as you can imagine. She came home. She cried.

SL: . . . Of course, she did . . .

RF: . . . She hugged me. She couldn't believe that I would spend two hundred dollars of my money to buy her a dryer. And so, I'm j—again, I pleased her.

SL: Right.

RF: And it—and this was not something I did to get her to hug me and . . .

SL: No.

RF: . . . I was really thinking, you know, “She needs a dryer. She doesn’t need to be—” I mean, you had to go down these steps outside. The—the—the back yard was graded down. I mean, it just—it just—it just wasn’t a—it just wasn’t a—a good deal. But I *loved* her reaction. I mean I always *loved* it whenever I did anything to make my mother proud. I mean it just—I wanted to make her proud again. You know, I just wanted to have never ending make-her-proud, make-her-proud, make-her-proud, make my father proud. [*Clears throat*] But I did more things—I never felt my father needed anything. I mean there is nothing that I could—I felt that I could—I couldn’t buy him a dryer, you know.

SL: Right.

RF: But doing that for my mother I mean really, really made her happy. And—and it—it helped me realize, “You know, my uncle was right.” You know, had it not been for him, there’s no telling what I would have done with that money. So that—that—that was a really, really good experience for me to—to do that. And then . . .

[03:13:58] SL: . . . Did you ever call him and thank him? Thank your uncle?

RF: I—I did. I did.

SL: Good.

RF: Well, he came to live in Arkansas . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . on the same street that my parents live on now.

SL: Okay.

RF: And—and no, I’ve sit down with him and I said, “You know, I did not like you that summer.” [*Laughter*] “But I do appreciate what you did . . .”

SL: . . . Yeah. [*Laughs*]

RF: “. . . because you made me save.” So—so after that, if I got a job, I think about saving, because of that experience. And when you have a little job in high school, you aren’t thinking much about saving anything. This was the first—really job—forty hours a week, that was real money.

SL: Right.

RF: And being able to put money up, real money. And so that’s how I spent my first two hundred [dollars]—the next summer I was in Cleveland with my best friend. And then it was the next summer that I went to summer school and worked.

SL: So.

RF: Now I don’t even know what—what I was answering with that [*laughs*].

[03:15:02] SL: Well, we start—we started talking about your family and IBM and all that, but—but this is good. All that stuff’s great stuff. I do feel like we ought to get to some of your family.

RF: Okay.

SL: I mean at least some—a bit of your family. We’re gonna have to do something about our lighting here in a minute, cause that sun is starting to creep up . . .

FE: John, go grab a C-stand with a solid, please. Thanks. Quiet—we’re gonna try to keep working.

SL: Yeah. So, you’ve got how many children? You’ve got two?

[03:15:40] RF: I've got two sons by my first marriage . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . okay, and Keyen. Helen and I have been married since 2000.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And Keyen is her son so . . .

SL: Her son. So . . .

RF: . . . therefore, my son.

SL: Yeah. So you've got basically three kids.

RF: Three. And she has two adult kids . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . that are close to the age of my boys. My sons are thirty-one and twenty-eight.

SL: Okay.

RF: Okay, Randall III and Cameron.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Her sons are approximately thirty-three and thirty.

SL: Okay.

RF: Or thirty-four and thirty, or thirty-four, thirty-one.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And then, of course, Keyen is fifteen and—and a sophomore at Blue Spring South High School [Blue Springs, Missouri].

SL: So he's with y'all.

RF: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

[03:16:34] SL: So you're not quite empty nesters yet.

RF: Oh no. No, no, no, no. Helen and I got married in February of 2000 . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and they were living in Dallas.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And they moved here the summer of 2000.

SL: Okay.

RF: So we've—all three of us have been together as a family since July of 2000.

SL: So . . .

FE: I'm just gonna pause here for a second Scott.

SL: Okay.

FE: He's gonna walk in.

[Tape Stopped]

FE: We've got speed.

SL: I know it's hard to put up with this guy.

RF: [*Laughs*]

SL: We were talkin' about—we were talkin' . . .

FE: . . . Yeah he—he knows. [*Laughter*] I'm just the man behind the camera . . .

SL: Yeah.

FE: . . . like the Wizard of Oz, y'know . . .

SL: . . . Yeah right.

FE: . . . I'm the man behind the curtain.

[03:17:12] SL: All right, so, we—we've got to talk about your family a bit.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: You've got two sons from a first marriage.

RF: Yes, I've got Randall the third and Cameron, and they—Randall the third is thirty-one, and Cameron is twenty-eight. And Randall is in—I call him Trey, I'm not accustomed to calling him Randall, he's in the San Francisco area. He works for Bank of America.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He's a vice president for them. And Cameron is in Ann Arbor. He works for the University of Michigan, but he's really preparing to go to grad school, so . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . he's—he's just up there. He's—he's applied to different schools, so.

[03:17:58] SL: What's he interested in?

RF: Well, he went to the University of Southern California, graduated . . .

SL: . . . Uh-huh.

RF: . . . with honors . . .

SL: Gosh, that's strong . . .

RF: . . . in vocal performance.

SL: Is that right?

RF: Opera singer.

SL: All right.

RF: And now, he's spent a couple summers in Italy. In fact, he performed this past summer in—in Italy. But he has decided he wants to get a master's, which in effect and I'm paraphrasing it, is the business side of the arts.

SL: Okay.

RF: Okay. So that if he is not performing, then he wants to work for a symphony or a lyric as development guy or vice president of artistic whatever.

SL: What a fascinating career.

RF: Right. So—so that's what he wants to do. And then, of course, at home here now, we have Keyen . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . K-E-Y-E-N. Helen and I got married in 2000 . . .

SL: K-E-Y?

RF: Yeah, K-E-Y-E-N. So, it's not Ken, like K-E-N. It's Key-en.

SL: Great name.

RF: Yeah. Helen and I got married in—in 2000 . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and she and Keyen lived in the Dallas area. So they moved up here in July of 2000, so we've been together . . .

SL: Now how did y'all meet?

RF: . . . since then. We both worked for IBM.

SL: Ah, office—does IBM look favorably on that?

RF: Well . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . we were in totally different offices . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . in different—in different towns . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . different cities. And—and we met because I was a part of a group that started a diversity council . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . inside of IBM for the Southwestern part of the United States. And she was an HR [human resources] manager that was assigned to our group . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . by our executive sponsor to provide us with the right information that we needed to under . . .

SL: . . . Yeah.

RF: . . . understand diversity and—and how we were doing in certain areas. Should we have diversity education? And, but—but this was back, I'm gonna be guessing here, but this was the early [19]90s that we met.

SL: Wow.

RF: Yeah, that—this . . .

[03:20:27] SL: So you all have known each other for a while.

RF: Yeah, but—and—and I became the chair of that diversity council . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . and she was our liaison into HR, so we would work together preparing the agenda for the meeting. She'll tell you that she did all the agenda preparing because . . .

SL: . . . I'm sure.

RF: . . . she reminded me . . .

SL: . . . And that's probably true.

RF: . . . a few days she said—she'd call me—say, “You know we have a council meeting comin' up. What are you—what do you plan the agenda to be?” Said, “I'll figure it out. I—I'll get it down. We got plenty of time. What do we got, three—three or four days?”

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: So she would then go to work on the agenda and—and force me to—force me to think about it. But it wasn't until the late [19]90s that—that we started seeing each other. I mean, we had known each other for a while before . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and it just—I'll tell you what happened, is that we were—this council—well I was going to be in town for a meeting.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And some other people were going to be in town, I mean they were flying in . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . and so I said, “Hey, why don't the members of the diversity council just get together for dinner?” And, what happened is that—and everybody thought it was a great idea.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Like she and like three or four other people lived there in Dallas, and we had people flying in. And, well, I didn't know this, but as I'm flying in, since she's there and she's the person who sort of was the glue to this whole thing, people started calling her and said, “I can't make it.”

SL: Oh.

RF: She'd get call after call after call, until it was just she and I going to dinner. Well, she had no way of reaching me. So the deal was that we're gonna meet in the hotel lobby at a certain time.

SL: Right.

RF: She didn't want to go.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: Said "I don't have any interest in going to dinner with him. This is supposed to be a group thing." Well, she had no way of reaching me.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So, because I was just barely getting there to put stuff up and meet, so I'm waiting in the lobby. And so she shows up and she says, "Everybody cancelled." You know, and I said, "Well, you're here. Let's go to dinner." And we went to dinner and started talking about different things. And I talked about my boys, and she talked about hers. And one thing led to another, and I was here in town—I'm sorry, in Dallas—my sister was giving birth to her second child.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And—and I called her and say, "Hey, I'm gonna be here a couple days, you wanna get together?" And—and we went out, and that kind of started it. But it wasn't a real long, you know, we were strictly business associates early—early on.

[03:23:36] SL: So she had dinner with you and decided you weren't so bad after all.

[*Laughter*]

RF: Well, what she will tell you . . .

SL: . . . You weren't so much trouble.

RF: What she will tell you is that it wasn't such a bad evening, because she never had to talk.

SL: [*Laughs*] Really? [*Laughs*]

RF: Now I remember her talking a lot and telling me about herself. She remembers that—that she learned my whole life story that evening . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . and that I didn't learn very much about her.

SL: So she and I have a lot in common then. [*Laughter*]

RF: Yeah.

[03:24:07] SL: Well, let's talk about your—your sons and raising them. Now where were you when—when y'all—when you had your sons?

RF: Little Rock.

SL: In Little Rock.

RF: Right. Trey was born in [19]74.

SL: Okay. And so you were working for IBM?

RF: I was working for IBM.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He was born in July . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . of that year. I started working for IBM officially December 28, 1973.

SL: Okay.

RF: And my wife [Carolyn Rhoades? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING] at the time, started—went to work for Southwestern Bell [Telephone Company].

SL: Okay.

RF: And . . .

SL: So a two-income family.

RF: Mm-hmm

SL: First born. Y'all were . . .

RF: . . . Oh yeah . . .

SL: . . . probably pretty comfortable.

RF: . . . yeah. We were—we were doing fine. In fact, by the fall of [19]75, we bought our first house.

SL: That's pretty big.

RF: Yeah, we're saving and saving and saving . . .

[03:25:05] SL: . . . Let—let me ask you this, just—I mean—George Haley mentioned this in my talk with him, and we're talking about invisible ways prejudice manifests itself, and he mentioned loans, house loans and—and stuff like that. And I know Gerald Alley was talking about one of the campus things that the—that BAD was concerned with was the way the financial aid was structured and—and probation, grade probation and all that stuff and how it kind of worked against blacks in a certain way. Did you run across, in your early days, getting a loan, buying your first house or—you didn't run across any of that?

RF: No. A lot of the—the—not a lot, but you—you’ve had a lot of discrimination in inner cities.

SL: Right.

RF: Because what—what—what would happen is that these areas would be considered zoned a certain way. I don’t mean like commercial or whatever . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . but in terms of risk.

SL: Yes.

RF: And, it was difficult for blacks who lived in the inner-city then to get loans, because they would be considered risk, and the only thing that made these areas high risk is because they were black neighborhoods.

SL: That’s right.

RF: And, that—so that made it very difficult. You know, having a two-income family, one working for IBM, one working for Southwestern Bell, that—that really wasn’t—that really wasn’t an issue.

[03:26:55] SL: Yeah. What about the neighborhood that you could buy into? Was that a problem? I mean like you—you mentioned, there’s black neighborhoods, there’s white neighborhoods, so I know that sometimes . . .

RF: This was . . .

SL: . . . that kind of tripped things up, too.

RF: Yeah. This was a mixed neighborhood. It was not . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . a black neighborhood . . .

SL: So you weren't breaking any ground or . . . ?

RF: No, no, no. And if fact there were already a c[ouple]—at least a couple of black families in this neighborhood . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . when—when we bought the house there.

SL: Okay.

RF: So that really . . .

SL: . . . Totally different world now . . .

RF: . . . wasn't an issue

SL: . . . than Camden.

RF: Oh, oh . . .

SL: I mean you're in Little Rock, it's so far removed from the way things were in Camden in some ways.

RF: Oh you're [?right?]. In—in Camden, we were clearly—we were in an all black neighborhood. Everybody up and down the street, all black. My—my parents now bought another house.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: They live in a mixed neighborhood now.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:27:51] RF: But in, again, coming out of college working for, like I said, Southwestern Bell and IBM, that—that really wasn't—there really wasn't issue. I—I didn't really feel like there was any place that I couldn't go.

SL: Right.

RF: That—and that it was—it was driven by my financial ability to—to buy . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . a home. And I don't remember a lot of discrimination that—that was going—
it—it could have been going on. I was trying to buy a home close to where I
worked.

SL: Right. Being practical.

RF: Yeah. And the couple or three places that I looked at, it was—it was just—it was
just a non-issue. Now there was another part of Little Rock, which was mostly
white, that I didn't even—I didn't even try. And I wasn't because someone told
me I couldn't. It was just too far from work for me.

SL: Right, right. Well, that's good news. Well, what about—how much—what about
Randall Ferguson the father now? And I'm thinking about your father. And now
you're in those sets of shoes.

RF: Mm-hmm.

[03:29:13] SL: Are you—are you telling your sons, when you're bringing them up,
the same sort of things your father told you? What about making the bed before
you leave the room?

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Okay.

RF: We had that rule—rule that they had to—had to make their bed every morning
before going to school.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And you know, I mean, the rule doesn't apply to getting up and going to the bathroom or something like that.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean but when they got downstairs to eat breakfast, their—their . . .

SL: Things were in order.

RF: . . . their things should be in order. And, they had to do a major cleaning during the weekends. Okay. That's when they took—took out the vacuum cleaner and—and did all of that. They took turns cleaning their bathroom.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: They alternated. I didn't clean their bathroom. That was—that was their job. And I showed them what a clean bathroom was. Okay. And if it got screwed up, why we'd go back and say, "Okay. Here's what it looks like." So just—and—and of course, they'd get frustrated, cause they were not gonna stop until it looked the way it was supposed to look. And I would say, "Call me when you think you're finished."

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I come, I'd say, "Nope, your not finished." "Well, what's wrong?"

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: "Well, look at this. You haven't even touched this."

SL: [*Laughs*] Right.

RF: No we [*pause*] I did that, and—and you know I expected a lot of them. And—and—and they delivered pretty much. The—the old—Trey, the oldest—Cameron

graduated from high school at the top 5 percent of his class, president of the National Honor Society in a white school—mostly white.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean it—it was—it was integrated. But, of course, went to USC [University of Southern California, Los Angeles]. They had straight A's until junior high, and then kind of struggled. And I think what he—I think he struggled with his mother and I's divorce.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: He was the oldest, and he—he felt like he had to be the one to take care of his brother. And . . .

SL: That's tough.

RF: . . . and—and—and there was some things that made that difficult.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[03:31:44] RF: I ended up with custody of my sons after—a few months after the divorce, so.

SL: So did it take him a couple years to bounce back?

RF: It—it took him—it took him a little longer.

SL: Yeah.

RF: He really struggled. He—when he—when he—when he turned eighteen, he—he wanted to move out of the house, and—and I allowed him to—I—I couldn't chain him up.

SL: Right.

RF: So he did do that. And, I told him that he was welcome back any time, but the rules don't change. He said he wanted to leave, cause he—he was tired of my rules.

SL: Right.

RF: And he called me maybe six—seven months later wanted to come back: the—the guys that he was staying with had trashed the apartment; they were being kicked out; he couldn't find a job over minimum wage. And so I went over and talked to him. And I said, “You can always come back, but I want you to think about this. The rules haven't changed at home, and you have to abide by those rules.” And I said, “So I'm going back home you think about it.” “Well, no, I've already thought about it.” [*Laughs*] I said, “No, I really want you to think about it and call me in the morning.” And I remember him saying, “But we don't have a phone.” I said, “You called me this morning. I'll talk to you in the morning.” [*Laughs*] Six o'clock in the morning he called me.

SL: Good.

RF: So I went and got him. But the things I told him that he had—I was not gonna send him to a four-year college. He would have to go to community college and stay at home and prove himself. He had to get a job. I didn't care how many hours he worked. They would control that. Okay, it wouldn't be too little. So, “Go to community college. Get a job. And guess what, you don't have a car. So figure out a way how to get to community college.”

SL: Okay.

RF: He did that for two years . . .

SL: Good.

RF: . . . got a 3.5 grade point average . . .

SL: Big turnaround.

RF: . . . chose between Arkansas, Kansas, and some others. Came to Arkansas; graduated with honors from the University of Arkansas, and he is now a vice president for Bank of America.

[03:33:55] SL: What a great story. What a great, great story.

RF: And he is just a great kid. I mean, both of them are. But I think the key with him—I refused to give up. And—and you know, I—I could have said, “Just get out of here.” But we just kept fighting. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

RF: Not physically, but . . .

SL: Yeah, I know.

RF: . . . you know, it was . . .

SL: Negotiating.

RF: . . . that this is the way, you know, this—this is what a responsible person acts like.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Okay, and “You weren’t doing that right now.” I remember him telling me when—after he became an adult that it—it helped him to know that no matter what, I was always going to be there. And he said, “You were—you were such a hard ass. I mean you just never, never quit.”

SL: [*Laughs*]

[03:34:53] RF: And he said, “I’ve seen people, you know, some of my friends, I’ve—
I’ve seen their—their parents just say, ‘Oh my God, there’s no hope. This kid
is—is never gonna amount to anything. I just give up. Just come—just—okay
[slaps legs] come in whenever you want to. I mean, I—I’m just finished with
you.”” But I just—I said, “As long as you’re in this house, these are the rules, end
of—end of discussion so.” The key for him is that, not believing in me, but was
to—the fact that he went out there and struggled. Had he stayed at the house, it
would have taken him even longer . . .

SL: That’s right . . .

RF: . . . cause he would have fought me the whole time.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But once he went out and stayed with friends, that he thought was gonna be more
fun, and then find out that it didn’t work out. He bought a car that got
repossessed. How in the world? Oh, I know—I know what he did, he signed my
name. But he is just—I mean he and I, you know, we talk pretty often. I mean,
he is, like I said, I mean I’m—I’m really fortunate with—to have raised those
guys. And—and—and to answer your first question, a lot of it was based on how
my father—in terms of things that—that—in terms of things that I—what I
thought was important.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Went to Sunday school, and church.

[03:36:31] SL: Without question.

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: We went. And—and so, we would—I mean they were—I mean they were—they were—they were raised in the church so. They, in fact, Trey, the oldest, is still very involved in church. He—he mentors youth. Cameron got Trey involved in church. I think when Trey got out of college, he—he had sort of had enough [*laughs*], because he—he—he was have—having to go to church all the time. And I think Trey went, because I made him go. I mean he—he didn't have . . .

SL: . . . Right . . .

RF: . . . any desire to be president of the usher board or any—any of those types of things. But Cameron was, all through college, was very involved with Young Life [a Christian non-denominational ministry focusing on adolescents]. Is—is that right?

SL: Yes.

RF: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: He—he was involved with that group. And then he got his brother involved in the church. And Trey has remained; Cameron isn't as active . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but Trey to this day is very, very—very active in his church working—working with youth.

[03:37:49] SL: So have they started their own families now.

RF: No.

SL: No?

RF: Trey came close . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but just wasn't ready.

SL: Right.

RF: Focused on his career. He has some things that he wants to do. He was studying very hard for the C.F.A., which I can't—the F.A. is financial analysts, and I'm assuming the C is certified [Chartered Financial Analyst] . . .

SL: Probably.

RF: . . . financial analyst testing? I—I don't know.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And that was taking up a whole bunch of his time, and he was dating someone that—that wanted . . .

SL: Now . . .

RF: . . . most of his time.

SL: . . . yeah. Mm-hmm.

RF: He really—he really—he—he—[*growling noise*] that's my stomach! Do you hear that?

SL: I thought it was a car outside.

RF: No, that's my stomach! [*Laughter*] So—so he—so he came close, but I mean, right now, he's pretty focused. He wants to go to grad school also eventually.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah.

[03:38:44] SL: Well, he ought to be able to do that pretty easily.

RF: Oh, yeah, he—he won't have any problems . . .

SL: . . . I mean USC and spending . . .

RF: And Cameron . . .

SL: . . . [*unclear word*] . . .

RF: . . . Ca—y'know, Cameron won't have any problems. Cameron is at USC. Oh, they went to University of Arkansas.

SL: Oh, he did.

RF: Yeah he graduated from the University of Arkansas in business.

[03:39:01] SL: [*Laughs*] Okay, now how long ago was that? That would have been?

RF: Okay. Probably [19]97.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I'm guessing. I can't remember. I got a [19]97 yearbook down there. I probably have it because of him. He graduated from high school in [19]92; went to community college for a couple years to [19]94, and I think [19]96-[19]97.

SL: Yeah.

RF: Yeah that's when he's—when he graduated. So he was—he was down there I think two and a half years.

SL: That's cool.

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: Gotta be proud of him.

[03:39:51] RF: In fact, he was there while I was on the Alumni Association Board.

SL: So you got to see him . . .

RF: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . when you came to town . . .

RF: . . . I'd—I'd go down there and—and the Alumni Association also had meetings every year in Hot Springs . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . in February.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: My father's birthday is February, so I . . .

SL: . . . Perfect . . .

RF: . . . always before or after, went to visit he and my mother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: . . . for that meeting. So I did that six years in a row.

SL: That worked out great.

RF: Yeah so that was—that was—cause I was only about seventy miles from my hometown.

[03:40:23] SL: Now did your sons get to know your grandparents very well growing up? I mean, not your grandparents—your parents.

RF: Oh yeah, absolutely.

SL: Yeah.

RF: We—we—we went down there every year without fail.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: When they were growing up, every year we went to visit my—there—there wasn't a missed year. We went to visit them, so—so they know their grandparents . . .

SL: . . . And your first wife's family was down in Camden, too?

RF: Exactly . . .

SL: So there was . . .

RF: . . . exactly.

SL: . . . great incentive to do that.

RF: Yeah, so—no they—they would see both sides of their . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . in—in terms of their grandparents. The—their grandparents on my first wife's side have—have passed.

SL: Uh-huh, that's too bad.

RF: But—but—but my—my parents are going strong.

SL: Yeah.

RF: In—in fact, they are—the three of us are going to be there in July, there's going to be a family—a Ferguson family reunion.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: So Trey, Cameron, and I are—are going down for that. Looking forward to that. And I went to—Trey was here last year visiting, and Cameron is in Detroit. I flew and spent the weekend with Cameron. In fact, I've been to—to Detroit once a year for the last two years and—and spent a weekend with—with Cameron.

[03:41:48] SL: So Cameron has applied where to . . .?

RF: He's applied to Michigan, and I don't know all of them . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . Cincinnati, Indiana. And, he loves Michigan, because someone who was a—a visiting professor . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . of music, he met him, Cameron did, when Cameron was at USC.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: This guy is the director of the music department at Michigan.

SL: Oh, okay.

RF: So Cameron, who graduated from college, went to work in California, then decided he wanted to go to Korea and teach English to Koreans. His roommate was South Korean when he was in college.

SL: Man.

RF: And so, what he did, his roommate could speak English. He thought, “Well, if my roommate could speak English, why can’t I speak Korean?” So he took Korean classes in college . . .

SL: Smart man.

RF: . . . and learned to speak Korean.

SL: That’s valuable.

[03:43:01] RF: And, then he was trying to figure out what he wanted to do after he—he went to work for this internet company, knowing all along he’s gonna go back to grad school, ’cause he wanted to get a master’s . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . in—in—in vocal performance. But he wanted to take a break. And, he was looking into another Korean class, I believe, and they told him about the

opportunity to go to Korea to teach English to Koreans. But it was a two-year commitment. Well I think they were desperate enough he—he told them, “I’ll do it for a year, then see what I thought.” Well, he did it for eighteen months, and then came back and moved to Michigan to take private voice lessons.

SL: With the guy that . . . ?

RF: With this guy.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And the plan was to take lessons with him until this guy said, “You’re ready.” And then he was gonna apply to grad school.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: So this guy has told him, “You’re ready.” So, the little twist now though is that this guy thought he was preparing Cameron just for performing.

SL: Right.

RF: Now he wants to look at the business side of it.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And Michigan doesn’t offer—offer that. What—what—what Michigan offers is a master’s in vocal performance, and he could also take some business classes, but it wouldn’t be an official degree. Cincinnati offers an official degree in this, I mean they—they actually . . .

SL: . . . But then he loses his—I mean would he still be under the tutelage of his . . . ?

RF: No. No, he would—he would have to—he would have to leave him.

SL: Yeah. That’s hard—hard decision.

RF: Yeah.

SL: Hmm.

RF: But—but he's more serious now in the business side versus the performing side anyway . . .

[03:44:52] SL: . . . Mm-hmm. Who is it—well, there's Belmont in Tennessee is a business music—music business school . . .

RF: . . . Really? See, I'm not—I'm not familiar with them. He—he can get . . .

SL: I mean . . .

RF: . . . in Cincinnati he can get a . . .

SL: . . . I'm not gonna say it's opera or . . .

RF: Yeah . . .

SL: . . . or any of that stuff . . .

RF: . . . yeah . . .

SL: . . . but . . .

RF: Well, he can get a M.B.A. *and* something—this other thing.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: An M.B.A. and a . . .

SL: Voice degree at the same time.

RF: Yes, yeah. Is it—you get both of them . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . at one of the schools, and he thought that would be a good thing—that if he decided, I mean, “What if I decide I don't want to be in this world at all?”

SL: Right. Well, he can always join the diplomatic corps . . .

RF: Yeah, well . . .

SL: . . . for one thing.

RF: Well, you know, and—and . . .

SL: . . . I mean . . .

RF: . . . well you know . . .

SL: . . . being able to—to speak Korean [*laughs*] is a big plus.

RF: Well, not just that, but he speaks German, French, Italian, and Korean.

SL: He's—he's gonna have [*unclear words*] . . .

RF: Because he has to sing in all of those.

SL: Yes. Wow.

RF: Okay. And the Korean part has nothing to do with the voice.

SL: Right.

RF: I mean, the—the singing. He did that because of his roommate.

[03:46:09] SL: Yeah, but still. He's got a propensity to understand the foreign languages. That's . . .

RF: Oh! Oh, absolutely.

SL: . . . that will serve him.

[Tape stopped]

SL: Thank you.

FE: Got speed.

SL: Thank you John. Thanks.

FE: Yeah, thanks John. Speed.

[03:46:21] SL: Well, I was just saying you gotta to be proud of these kids. And that I suspect that they came by the—the urge to not disappoint their father honestly.

RF: [Laughs]

SL: And probably in their genes, I would guess.

RF: Probably. Yeah.

[03:46:38] SL: Yeah. So what do you want to talk about now? You want to talk about your career at IBM? Is there anything—I mean, what an amazing career you—Little Rock, Kansas City, St. Louis, back to Kansas City?

RF: Right.

SL: Is that how that went?

RF: Yes. And you know, I know that you—your first summer job with them was writing programs, but I've had another conversation with you since, and you don't sound like you're a program writer for 'em. And it doesn't sound like you were a technician in any way for 'em that you really became more management oriented pretty quickly . . .

RF: . . . Right. I started off as a technician.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: IBM wanted me—what IBM in Little Rock did is that they hired you on the technical side . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and after you learn the technical side, in about a year or two, they would put you into sales.

SL: Okay.

RF: They had a few career technical people . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but they saw me as being sales.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But what happened is that because I got the technical experience in the *summer*, they wanted to bring me in in sales, and I didn't want to.

SL: Right.

RF: This was back in a time that I didn't handle rejection real well. Okay? And the thought of trying to sell something to someone, and someone said "No," just didn't appeal to me.

SL: Right.

RF: But I like the technical side, because I had learned all this programming and actually done the programming . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . at . . .

SL: . . . You could see results . . .

RF: . . . IBM.

SL: . . . and they were determined by your effort.

RF: Exactly.

SL: Yes.

RF: So I—I did that for almost five years.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[03:48:24] RF: And in September of [19]78, I got a promotion to St. Louis for a staff job, 'cause you tended to go from the field, to staff, then back to the field as a manager. And I—I moved up there in September and left in—of [19]78 and left

in July, so it wasn't quite two years. And I came to Kansas City as a manager on the technical side.

SL: Okay.

RF: Still. But yet I've got people talking to me about "You really belong in sales. I mean you—you just have a sales flair about you."

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And, but I was very comfortable with what I was doing. I was very sales oriented, but I managed technical people.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[03:49:10] RF: And then I had a guy come in who was on the sales side. He and I teamed together. I was the, what they called the systems engineering manager and he was the marketing manager. And we had TWA [Trans World Airlines] as an account . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . and we had some other smaller accounts. Well, what happened is that he got promoted back to staff, and the regional manager at the time came to me and said—oh, and well, first of all, his name was David Moore, and he went to the regional manager—he became the regional manager's assistant. And he told the regional manager—he and I had become good friends, "Randall needs to be in sales."

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: The regional manager then called my boss, who was David's boss, and told him that his new marketing manager was going to be Randall Ferguson.

SL: [*Coughs*]

RF: Now, as you can imagine he wasn't too happy about being told that, but then I was a good performer for him. So—he just didn't like being told that.

SL: Right.

RF: And besides, he didn't know that I was interested in a career change. I didn't ask for a career change. This was the regional—he did come and talk to me about it. He said, "Here's what we're gonna do: you're only gonna have one account, and that's TWA. So the technical people that work for you today are gonna continue working for you. That's gonna be a piece of cake. You won't worry about that—worry about that. And we're gonna have these three sales people work for you, that are one or two years in the business. And the twenty-year sales person we're gonna report somewhere else and—and they're gonna kinda be like your partner on this thing." So, I've never been a sales rep at IBM, so my first sales job was a management job. Then I—I did that for a couple of years. And then I went to St. Louis, and became a manager on the staff and became the regional manager's, a different Regional Manager's, assistant. IBM re—reorganized, and I was only there on a temporary assignment, because I—I did not move from here.

SL: Okay.

RF: I came back on the weekends. And by then, I was divorced and wanted to be back, because I did not want to take the boys out of . . .

SL: That's right.

RF: . . . Kansas City.

[03:52:03] SL: Couple other lives you had to be thinking about.

[Tape stopped]

FE: Got speed.

SL: So that—that's the responsible thing to do. I mean you've got a couple of kids that are in the school system. You don't rip them out of their social situation or their academic situation.

[03:52:16] RF: Well, IBM had been trying to get me to move for six to nine months.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And I had said, "No." And it—what worked out is that, my wife and I, my first wife and I getting separated. Well, since we're separated, I had to go find a place to stay. IBM came back not knowing what had happened, and say, "Okay, fine. You won't move. What if we pay you a forty-seven dollars a day per diem? You go get an apartment and come back every weekend." So I said, "So I gotta get an apartment in Kansas City anyway."

SL: Yeah.

RF: "I can only see the boys on the weekend anyway." [*Laughs*]

SL: Right.

RF: So it—it was a great thing. So I went over there, did that. I became the regional manager's assistant, and IBM reorganized and put the area office in Kansas City.

SL: Perfect timing.

RF: But they left the regional office in St. Louis, and I was gonna be in St. Louis as a regional manager assistant, but the area manager was a marketing manager in Little Rock . . .

SL: Oh.

RF: . . . when I was there, and he called up and said, “I want Randall to be my assistant.” So I got a chance to come back to Kansas City. Within, I don’t know, seven or eight months of coming back, I got custody of the boys. And so, it—it just worked out. And—and—and at that time, I wasn’t interested in leaving, and—and I had a—a boss and mentor, Tom [Sprock? PLEASE CONFIRM OR CORRECT SPELLING], who, even though he knew I didn’t want to leave, he didn’t tell IBM that. ’Cause if you tell people you don’t want to move, you can forget about it. What happened is that there was always a reason why this opportunity wasn’t quite right for Randall.

SL: Mm-hmm.

[03:54:09] RF: And—and then IBM started to change, and you didn’t have to move to get different jobs. You may travel a lot.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And so, it—it—it worked out, and when—when Tom retired, I became the senior exec [executive] for the Kansas City area and, did that for five years before—before retiring, and was, as you know, very involved in the community—vice chair of the greater Kansas City Chamber. I was a member of the Civic Council, which was a—is for CEO’s [Chief Executive Officer] or head of regions for international—national companies. And because of my role at IBM, I was invited to be a part of that. It was—you don’t join it; it’s invitation only. And the Negro League’s Baseball Museum; I was president of that board for eight years working with Buck O’Neil. Vice chair of the Urban League Board. So I just got—I was very involved in the community and had gotten exposure to a lot of different

things and so I was, after my time with IBM, I decided that I wanted to go try something—try something different. So—so when I left IBM, it was very—it was a very smooth transition. I told IBM I was thinking about leaving fifteen months before I left.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I told 'em that I was finally leaving six months—well it was six months before I planned to leave, they asked me to stay an extra two months to help with some transition things.

SL: Sure.

RF: So, I—I told them I was leaving the end of December; they asked me to stay through January. And in January, they asked me if I would stay through February. I told them, “Okay, but this is it.” And, so it was kind of neat to have that smooth of a transition out . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . to decide on your own, “I’m ready to go do something else.”

[03:56:02] SL: Then you ended up—didn’t you end up doing something with the Chamber?

RF: I was the senior vice president for . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . the Chamber. I was—they say I was their number two person. The Chamber had about thirty-eight people, and, seventeen or eighteen of 'em were in my department.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So I had, you know, five directors and a manager and the people that reported in to them. Before I took that job, I was vice chair of the Chamber Board, so that—that was an interesting transition. But as vice chair, I was responsible for membership, and the membership director was working for me when I went over there. I was a judge for the small business celebration, so I selected the top ten businesses in Kansas City every year. The person who, the two people who ran that, were gonna work for me. So when I got there, of the six people that were working directly for me, I had worked closely with four of 'em. And knew . . .

SL: . . . So that was comfortable . . .

RF: . . . the other two.

SL: That was comfortable.

RF: Oh, it was—it was very—it was—it was very comfortable.

SL: Good fit.

[03:57:05] RF: Yeah. And I did that for a couple years, and, last year was invited to be a part of the—the consulting company that I'm in now.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: I'm actually buying into the firm. The guy who started the firm, I mentored at IBM.

SL: Wow.

RF: His first day on the job, they brought him up to meet the boss.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And, it was toward the end of the day, I told them to leave him, and I'd bring him back down. And we started talking; got to know each other. He would come and

see me three or four times a year to just talk about things. And this was in [19]98 that he came to work for IBM. IBM actually recruited him from Deloitte Consulting to come and start a practice for them. In 2001, he's—decided to start his own business, and he came and talked to me about it. And we discussed it; I encouraged him. And then [20]03, I retire and go to work for the Chamber, and his company joins the Chamber.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I got him involved with that, and then he—we were just having what I thought was our normal mentor-mentee lunch when he asked me to—if I would join the firm. But he was so nervous. I mean I—it was—I've never seen him nervous before. I thought he was getting ready to tell me something was wrong with his company.

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: And, finally, I didn't notice, but he kept looking for an opening, kept looking for an opening, and so he said, "Well, how—how are things at the Chamber?" And I said, "Well, things are wonderful at the Chamber, but the Chamber is not a long-term thing for me." He said, "Oh, it's not?" I said, "No it's not a negative." I said, "I'm making a big difference there. I mean people are saying wonderful things about me. The problem is that I don't wanna run the Chamber, and that's what people want me to do, you know, when the current guy retires." And they weren't driving him out. He was wonderful . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . but they wanted someone who could—who they felt could run the Chamber when I took that job.

SL: Mm-hmm . . .

[03:59:28] RF: . . . That was very important to 'em. They told the search firm, “We don’t want a number two person that can’t run this thing.” And they heard that I had finally s—that I agreed to talk to them about it. The first time they asked me, I said, “No, I wasn’t interested.”

SL: Right.

RF: But that because—that was because I thought I was interested in some other thing that I decided not to do, so when they called me back, I agreed to talk. The guy I was talking to started telling board members; board members started calling me at home about you really need to do this. “This would be great. We haven’t hired anybody, because we didn’t have anyone who we thought could replace Pete . . .”

SL: Right.

RF: “. . . when he got ready to leave.” So after being there I decided I didn’t wanna—I didn’t—I wasn’t interested, not that I couldn’t do it. But I had been the senior exec for IBM for five years, and I walked—I walked away from that. I mean I walked away from a pretty decent job.

SL: Yeah.

RF: And I just wasn’t interested in running the Chamber, and part of it was that I’m not a public policy guy; I’m a business guy. And with the Chamber, you have to determine how to get—like right now, we’ve got a thing going April 4, we’re

voting on a three-eighths cent sales tax, I think, is what it is, to provide \$850,000 to renovate the two stadiums here, the baseball and football stadiums . . .

SL: . . . Right.

RF: Well, the—the Chamber is campaigning for that. I never—I—I didn't—that's not something I thought I would enjoy doing. Again, I like the business side, so I just made the decision that I—I didn't want to run the Chamber. So I'm gonna have to leave the Chamber, because I don't want to be sitting there when Pete retires.

SL: Right.

RF: So . . .

SL: Well, and it also wouldn't be fair to the Chamber.

RF: Exactly. Exactly.

SL: Right.

RF: Would not be—if I've already made up my mind . . .

SL: That's right.

RF: . . . that I'm not gonna run the Chamber.

SL: . . . That's right . . .

RF: . . . Give them the chance to hire a new number two who . . .

SL: Can run it . . .

RF: . . . they can prepare.

SL: Yeah.

[04:01:28] RF: So I was—I was sharing this with Oscar, and he smiled . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . that's his name, Oscar. And—and then he said, “Have you thought about what you want to do?” I said, “Well Oscar, I don't have to think about it for another two or three years, but actually I have.” I said, “What I'd love to do is find a small company that's very, very good. They have great references, and the only reason they aren't growing is that they don't know anybody. So you combine a good product and service with someone who knows lots of people—that would be a real good combination.” I said, “But I want to already know—I—this is not someone that I want recruiting me. I wanna already know 'em.” So he looked at me, and he said . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . he said, “That's my company.” And to show you how dense I was, I said, “Really? Let me give some thought to it. I probably can think of somebody . . .”

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: “. . . that might fit.” I did. He'll tell you that I said this to him. He looked at me said, “No, I want you.” [*Laughter*] And I almost fell out of my seat. We're having lunch, I mean. I didn't see that coming. I had no idea. I mean, I was completely blinded—I mean blindsided by the—by—by the whole thing. This was in December of [20]04. I talked to him a few more times. I wanted to talk to his management team one-on-one, and in February, I agreed to do it. So I'm—I'm buying into the business—he's always gonna be majority owner, because it's—it—we have a model that our more senior managers will get an opportunity to become partners also. So there has to be room . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . for—for them. But I'm . . .

[04:03:16] SL: . . . But you're happy?

RF: Oh, very. Very happy. I'm just having . . .

SL: . . . And it's the kind of firm you were lookin' for?

RF: Absolutely . . .

SL: . . . Bright, great credentials.

RF: And I—I started this in [20]05; I've been mentoring him since [19]98.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: So I felt like I really knew him, but I still wanted to talk to the—the people in the business, because I've just seen so many situations where friends get together . . .

SL: . . . And it ruins it.

RF: . . . and the thing just falls apart.

SL: Yeah.

RF: So, I couldn't determine if that would happen just by talking to him.

SL: Right.

RF: I needed to talk to *them* . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . and find out what *their* expectations were and what *they* thought of him.

What did *they* see in him as . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . a manager, not just what—what I've seen.

SL: Right.

RF: And all the conversations were very positive. In fact, they were appealing to me to come do this, and they didn't even know me, because he sent them my bio.

SL: Uh-huh. Oh. So *[laughs]* . . .

RF: . . . And—and when—when they—so they came into the deal having already read my bio.

[04:04:26] SL: *[Laughs]* That's not unlike the professor getting your test and wanting to meet you. *[Laughs]*

RF: So—so I've—I've been doing this exactly a year now.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And, things haven't gone as quickly as I would like, but—but we're doin' fine. We've gotten some good contracts. We're—got some proposals in front of companies for additional. And the consulting business, companies tend to have very close relationships with their consultants. That's not easy to break into, even though I know a lot of people. So it—it's taken some patience to—so that the right opportunity to—c—c—come along. And some companies don't have as close a relationship. Others do.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But . . .

SL: Those ones with the close relationships, you just have to wait for them to play out probably.

RF: Exactly, but you still go talk to 'em though.

SL: Yeah.

RF: I mean you still go . . .

SL: . . . [*Unclear word*] . . .

RF: . . . talk to 'em—I'm—I'm talkin' to everybody that will listen to me.

SL: Yeah.

[04:05:33] RF: So it's going well. I'm—I'm really—I'm really enjoyin' that. Helen retired from IBM in July of [20]04.

SL: Okay.

RF: And, we started building this house in December of [20]04, so the timing was good. So she could supervise that. She built her house in—in the Dallas area—it was really Bedford, Texas.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: Her last house she was in, she had built it.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And it had some neat touches in it that she wanted. I had bought this house, the—the last house that we were in, which is in this neighborhood also.

SL: Uh-huh.

RF: And, so I had this idea, said, “Why don't we build a—why don't we build a house. You've got time to kind of watch over it.” And so—and so we did.

[04:06:27] SL: I was gonna say—I was gonna say to both you and Helen that my sister is in the interior decorating business. I mean, she doesn't do much of it anymore. She kind of retired from it, but she would love this house . . .

RF: Oh . . .

SL: . . . and the space and the volumes that you've got . . .

RF: . . . yeah . . .

SL: . . . going on here . . .

RF: . . . And Helen—w—we didn't hire a decorator, she did . . .

SL: . . . Yeah . . .

RF: . . . all this herself.

SL: Well, I was gonna say, it feels like somebody knew what . . .

RF: . . . She did . . .

SL: . . . they were doing here.

RF: . . . she did all of this herself . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

[04:06:57] RF: . . . and—and just did a—and just did a great job of it. She's headed right now to pick up Keyen. He's actually got a track meet today . . .

SL: . . . Are we missing that?

RF: Oh, yeah. But this is—this is a preliminary track meet. He—he had a track meet Saturday.

SL: Okay. How'd he do?

RF: He did fine. He—his specialty is the hurdles, and they didn't run the hurdles.

SL: Ah. Okay.

RF: So they put him in some other things just to get him some—some activity.

SL: Right.

RF: He runs the high hurdles . . .

SL: Wow.

RF: . . . and he does the high jump. He's a sophomore. He never ran track until the eighth grade.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And I—I encouraged him to—to do it. I just wanted him to have another activity in his springs—that’s why I did it.

SL: Right.

RF: And, as an eighth grader he set the—the eighth grade hurdles record and long jump record.

SL: [*Laughs*] Having never done it before.

RF: Right. Now hurdles, you know, you have to have some technique first.

SL: No kiddin’.

RF: He set the eighth grade record in hurdles and long jump. As a ninth grader, he did not do long jump. He did the high jump, which he had never done before. He set the ninth grade record in the high jump. And he—then he set the ninth grade record in the high hurdles.

SL: He’s on his way.

RF: He finished second in the conference. He got beat by a tenth of a second by somebody who’s been doing hurdles, I understand, for years and years and years and little track clubs and things like that.

SL: So he’s excited about this.

RF: Oh, yeah. When the freshman season was over with . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . they put him on the varsity team, and he lettered on the varsity team as a freshman.

SL: Man, he’s on his way . . .

RF: . . . So, I mean, but—but now though, it's different. He's a sophomore, and he's competin' [competing] against seniors . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . who are two years stronger and, so he—he's got to build his way up to that. I mean, setting records in the eighth and ninth grade, I mean he—he was still slower than the seniors . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . the junior and—juniors and seniors on the—and—and—and—and that's expected.

SL: Sure.

RF: So he—he's got to work real hard this year. And—and one thing that helps him is that he plays football, so he does weights almost year round. But he's still, like, this big. [*Laughs*]

SL: Huh.

RF: He has zero percent fat, but he's—he's—he's a—he's not a big kid, so . . .

[04:09:34] SL: . . . What's he play in football?

RF: Cornerback and wide receiver. In the eighth grade, he was a running back. He was the—the starting running back on the team . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . but in the eighth grade, he was like five [foot] nine [inches], now he's six [foot] three [inches], and you don't see many skinny six [foot] three [inches] running backs. [*Laughs*] So . . .

SL: . . . No.

RF: . . . so they moved him to wide receiver . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . and, he played most of his time at cornerback. He had, like, five interceptions last year, five or six interceptions on the . . . [*Telephone rings*]

[04:10:14] SL: He's got a good pair of hands then. [*Telephone rings*]

RF: Yeah.

SL: Soft hands.

RF: There goes the phone. [*Telephone rings*] Let me just look at the caller ID . . .

SL: Okay.

RF: . . . and make sure it's not Helen . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . who needs . . .

[Tape stopped]

[04:10:26] SL: Okay, we have—we're pretty up to date here. What—is there anything—well, first of all, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to talk about?

RF: Hmm.

SL: I mean, I—I don't know if you had any preconception of what [*different telephone ring tone*] you wanted to say.

RF: Is that . . . ?

SL: It's calling back. Or that's a recording.

RF: You know what—I know—I know . . .

[Tape stopped]

[04:10:56] SL: First of all, I want you to say everything that you want to say. I don't want us to leave out anything that I may have not thought of, or between the two of us, we haven't thought of till now. Is there anything that we need to look at?

RF: I can't really think of anything . . .

SL: . . . I mean you sound like you got great kids.

RF: Yeah, I mean, you know, I've—I've talked a lot about Trey and Cameron.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: But Keyen is a great kid. I mean, first semester, he got a 3.7 grade point average, you know, good athlete. That has been a blessing, you know. I tell ya, if you had asked me ten years ago if I was gonna be raising a teenager—teenager again, I would have said, "Absolutely not . . ."

SL: Yeah but you know what . . .

RF: ". . . I don't—I don't see that happening . . ."

SL: . . . you're—you're probably better at it now. I mean, I—I have kind of a similar situation at my home. We took on somebody that needed to move out of her situation, and, so we were empty nesters for a couple of months. And you know, we were starting to adjust to that and we—we ended up essentially got another high school student living with us . . .

RF: Mm-hmm.

SL: . . . and so, I—I'm coming at it from a different perspective now as far as the parenting thing goes.

[04:12:31] RF: Well—well, kids are different today.

SL: They are.

RF: I mean, you—you. And you know, I was—when I was raising Trey and Cameron, I was raising them at a pretty decent time. If I were raising them five years after that, it could have been—it could have been a little—it could have been a lot different . . .

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: . . . given the—the peer pressure that kids have. The—I mean, the video game thing has changed everything so much, and they were not as much a part of that, so, I mean, they have—they have these video games that are just so violent now that you have to have different rules about what you can view and can't view. And you—you really have to pay attention, you—you have to pay more attention to parental controls on computers and . . .

SL: Television . . .

RF: . . . and television. I didn't—I didn't worry about that. I didn't worry about that—there—there wasn't anything on TV you could see that was gonna be an issue. There wasn't a video game that—that you had to worry about your kids playing. So today is, I mean it is—it is—it is totally different. I just—I just think you have to be much more attentive today than you had to be when I was raisin' Trey and Cameron. Much more, because I mean even the *best*, the very best of kids exposed to the wrong things, I mean . . .

SL: Constantly . . .

RF: . . . can. Right.

[04:14:25] SL: [*Laughs*] It's not like a bad movie comes out, and they go see it at the movie theater. It's twenty-four [hours a day] seven [days a week].

RF: Oh, ex—ex—exactly. And I'm beginning to relax some on Keyen, I mean, but shoot every television had parental controls, and they—the internet. We have AOL [America Online LLC], and—and—and they have age categories. And he's fifteen, and he's in the thirteen to fifteen; he thinks he ought to be in the fifteen to seventeen—no sixteen and seventeen-year. So you just—you just—and plus, there're so many ways for them to beat it also. You know. You can go straight into Internet Explorer; there are no controls there [*laughs*].

SL: That's correct.

RF: So—so, I've got a router that looks for certain keywords, so that—that sort of keeps him out of some sites. But then as he gets older, then I've got to relax that, because . . .

SL: He's gotta make his own decisions . . .

RF: . . . I've—oh absolutely. I mean, I—I—I saw, when I went to college, I saw kids that had been so protected in high school, they went crazy when they got to college on their own. Absolutely crazy. I mean I had enough of—balance that I went and spent a summer with my uncle. I mean I—I went and spent a summer with my best friend and—and—and his family. My parents gave me freedom to do things. I mean, my father bought me a car, didn't pay a lot of money for it, but it was a car . . .

SL: It has wheels, yeah.

[04:16:08] RF: And so I got a chance to make decisions. I mean I got a chance to *choose* to want to be president of the usher board. I got a chance to *choose* that I wasn't gonna go out and do some things that my friends were doing, and if I was

with my friends and they started doin', I got a chance to choose that "I'm outta here, guys." Okay. And it wasn't just my parents scaring the hell out of me about that—that there was some of that [*laughs*] but . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . I felt like I was given the choice to choose. I mean—I mean I was given enough rope that I could have done some—you know, I had the freedom to do some pretty bad things.

SL: Sure.

RF: Okay. And I did some stupid things growing up. But I think I—I think I learned from those. So you can—you can be too protective, and as soon as your child is out on their own they just . . .

SL: They're vulnerable.

RF: Right. They—they wanna—I would rather—I mean I did a little experimenting while I was still with my parents . . .

SL: Yeah.

RF: . . . in high school.

SL: Mm-hmm.

RF: And learned from some mistakes and, a lot more than they realize [*laughs*].

SL: Well, sure.

RF: And . . .

[04:17:36] SL: There's always that stuff that you do you can't tell your parents.

RF: And—and—and so, but I tell ya I—I—I’ve learned a lot. You know, one thing that I did is that I can remember—let me back up; my sons and I, Trey and Cameron, we went to the movie every Saturday, for years.

SL: I love that.

RF: Friday—unless there was a baseball game, but usually, we could work around that. Okay . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm.

RF: We—we’d sit down with the paper, and we’d decide what movie was—gonna go see. And we’d go. For about a two or three year period there we were really into the ninjas, *American Ninja* [1985] and I don’t—you know . . .

SL: . . . Right. Right.

RF: They wanted to . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . an aside, they wanted to take karate, ’cause they thought it meant doing pinwheels and kicking and all this . . .

SL: Right.

RF: . . . type of thing . . .

SL: . . . Right. Right . . .

RF: . . . and so I signed ’em up for it; it was nothing like what they . . .

SL: Yeah, right.

RF: . . . what they thought. But we would—and I—and we would go to these movies, and I remember we were doing this one Friday night. We’re looking at—
[*telephone rings*] trying to figure this out, and my oldest said, “Dad, I—I—I think

I want to—I want to go the movies with some friends tomorrow.” I was absolutely crushed. Now, he was getting of the age . . .

SL: Sure.

RF: . . . that, you know. And—but I didn’t say anything. I wasn’t upset or anything like that. And so, but the look on my face, my youngest came over to me and put his arm on my shoulder . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . and said, “Dad, I’m gonna go to the movie with you.” [*Laughter*]

SL: That’s priceless.

RF: Oh, God, I mean, it was . . .

SL: [*Laughs*]

RF: . . . but we—we—we didn’t worry about what movies we—we went to see. I mean my point—it’s just a totally different . . .

SL: Different world now.

[04:19:50] RF: . . . a totally different world now. Kids can go and buy tickets for one movie, and nothing keeps them from going to . . .

SL: . . . to the other . . .

RF: . . . any movie . . .

SL: That’s right.

RF: . . . any—any movie. But there’s no way I was gonna try to control that. I mean, you just learn from that. If—if you get away with that, then you get away with it. I mean, you know, you have to get away with something. [*Laughs*] You know, so.

SL: Well, it has something to do with enterprise.

RF: Yeah.

SL: You know, being enterprising . . .

RF: . . . And—and . . .

SL: . . . enough to do . . .

RF: . . . and there've been . . .

SL: . . . something you want to do.

RF: Yeah, and they've have been times that I've looked the other way on something. I mean, you know . . .

SL: Sure.

RF: . . . you know, you win the battle and lose the war. You know . . .

SL: . . . That's right.

RF: So, I mean, there—there've been times that I knew something was going on. If I just judge that it wasn't gonna hurt 'em or turn them into thieves or . . .

SL: . . . Or hurt someone else.

RF: Yeah, I just . . .

SL: Yeah, I hear ya.

RF: . . . I just—I just let it go, so.

[04:20:48] SL: Okay. Let's talk—is there—if you had something you wanted to say to the audience during—they're out there sitting, they're watching this video, is there anything, and I'm not saying I'll use it, but is there anything that you would like to say particularly to this audience at the Silas Hunt dinner?

RF: Um.

SL: I mean, you're gonna get a couple of minutes at the podium . . .

RF: . . . Oh yeah, yeah—I—that's what . . .

SL: . . . anyway, but I—this is beyond that.

RF: Yeah, yeah. Hmm, I tell ya . . .

SL: I mean, you've said a lot that I can give them . . .

RF: . . . I know—I know. I mean—I—I feel incredibly lucky and—and—and blessed that I'm where I am today. And as I look back, even all the ups and downs that I've had in my life, I—I—I tell my sons and I tell people, "There is nothing that I would change, because all the things that happened to me made me who I am today. And I'm happy with who I am today. And I'd be afraid that if I got rid of any of the bad things, I wouldn't be the same person. You know, you kind of have to take it all." And, you know, I'm really honored to be recognized with the group of people, many who I knew and was in college with, but it's—at the same time, I was a little surprised when I got—got the phone call. I mean I—I know I've done some things in my life. I know that I've done some things for—for the university but it's never anything that I would have expected. And—and to be honored with the group that I'm being honored with, to be honored the first time at the university decided to honor African American students or—or alum, I mean, it's—it just seems un—unbelievable. I mean, you know, I—I'm used to reading about Gerald Alley and the great things that he's done with his company. Lynn Harris of course has written so many best-selling books. I mean, he's a celebrity, I mean, you know [*laughs*]. Janice Kearney—though Kearney's not her last name now. Dr. Morgan who of course was there before I got there and was

there after I left. I mean, it's—I mean—and I—I men—mention those, because those were people who were at the university when—when I was there. Though Lynn actually came a year after I left . . .

SL: . . . Mm-hmm

RF: . . . I believe. But, Lynn and I stayed in touch. I mean Lynn and I came to work—Lynn came to work for IBM . . .

SL: I didn't know that.

RF: . . . in the IBM office in—in Little Rock. I helped recruit him.

[04:24:35] SL: [*Laughs*] Okay.

RF: I helped recruit Lynn . . .

SL: . . . Small world . . .

RF: . . . to IBM. He—I don't know how long he stayed with IBM, three or four years, got the itch to do other things, and—and then started writing. And there—so my—my point is this: it's kind of a humbling experience just to even think about the fact that I would be a part of this first group, you know, I—I would have thought that maybe I would have a chance but—I—I may—I may get in in the third or fourth or fifth ballot. [*Laughs*]

SL: No, man, you're so in it's unbelievable [*Laughs*] . . .

RF: . . . Like—like not making the Hall of Fame after you're five years out of—out of baseball. But I—I guess you know, I—I've already said it, you know, I—I had such great role models, parents and others. I mean, I'm telling you in Camden, Arkansas, it's like you got raised by the whole neighborhood. I—I'm—and I'm serious. You got raised by the neighborhood. I mean people that were not even



your relatives. And I tell you, I have done some things that if something had happened, it could have been different. Give you an example. There's a guy in our neighborhood who was a bully. He was probably six inches taller than me at this time, and probably outweighed me by thirty—thirty pounds. And we would be playing baseball in our backyard. He would come over bullying people. And he came over doing that at a time that I was batting. And I told him to leave some guys alone. And he came over to me and started pushin' [pushing] on me. I hit him with the baseball bat, [on] the side of the head. I could have killed him. I hit him, he kind of shook his head, looked at me, and turned around and walked off. Now, when he first shook his head and he's looked at me, I said, "This is not good [laughs]." He just turned around and walked off. My point is—that's just one example of my life could have been ruined—had I killed him, it could have ruined my life.

[04:27:16] SL: Totally different path.

RF: And—and there are other situations of things that happened to me, and I wasn't—I was protecting myself and the other kids. I wasn't being a *bad* kid. So I haven't had things where I was being a bad person that worked out for me, but things that happened that had they gone the other way, we—we wouldn't be sitting here having this conver—this conversation. And that didn't happen because of anything that I did. I mean, I hit him with the bat!

SL: Yeah.

RF: But, it wasn't . . .

SL: . . . He brought it on.

RF: He did, but still, I—I—I did that. And I've had other situations were things have happened and that I always, for some reason, end up on the right road versus the wrong road, even though I've come to those things—those things in my life. And when they happened, I somehow end up being on the right road. So, I look back on my life and clearly recognize that a tot[ally]—I could have had a totally different life. And I am so pleased that [*laughs*]—that it worked out this way, because it, in—in—in some of those cases, it wasn't choices that I made that put me on the right road. It just worked out for me. So I think I made some good choices in life, but I've been awfully lucky, awfully lucky to—to be where I am today. And I—and I feel pretty darn good about having had that kind of luck in my life.

[04:29:10] SL: I think—I mean, I—I know where you're coming from. I feel blessed, too. I mean, there's—you're right. I mean, probably everyone sittin' around here, if they hadn't had some kind of luck or cards hadn't fallen just right . . .

RF: . . . Mm-hmm . . .

SL: . . . we'd be somewhere else. Yeah, I hear ya. I'm lucky—I feel like I'm lucky to be alive, sittin' here across from you, so I—I understand that.

RF: Oh, yeah. It's—it's a real humbling experience to even . . .

SL: . . . Yeah. And all that stuff happens . . .

RF: . . . think about it . . .

SL: . . . in an instant.

RF: Oh, yeah. You know, I, even today, I could be driving down the street, and think about merging into another lane, and just think about doing it, and then just stop—something stops me. And I look, and there's a car right there.

SL: Right.

RF: You know, I mean just a simple something like that. I mean, so it—it to me, it's a—it's a reminder, and that happens enough that it becomes a reminder to me just how blessed I am, to be where I am. And it's not like I decided ten years ago that I was blessed and I've just kept that, I get daily reminders.

SL: Yep.

RF: Daily reminders.

SL: I hear you. Me too . . .

RF: . . . about it. So, anyway.

SL: I think we're done. You think we're done?

RF: Think we're done. I can't think of . . .

SL: . . . I think we've done enough, man.

RF: I'm—I'm beginning to ramble now. [*Laughs*]

SL: No.

[04:30:57 End of interview]

[Edited by Joy Endicott, September 28, 2009]