The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History

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Arkansas Memories Project

Robert Cochran

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

December 21, 2016

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at http://pryorcenter.uark.edu. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Double underscores indicate two people talking at the same time.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as *Laughter*, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.
- All geographic locations mentioned in the transcript are in the state of Arkansas unless otherwise indicated.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Robert Cochran on December 21, 2016, in Fayetteville, Arkansas

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. Robert Brady Cochran—um—you're in the—uh—vault at the Pryor Center for a Pryor Center interview. I'm Scott Lunsford. I'm with the Pryor Center, and you're with the Pryor Center, actually.

Robert Cochran: That's right.

SL: Uh—so this is kind of a—a fellow worker . . .

RC: In-house deal. Yeah.

SL: . . . in-house deal. Uh—today's date is December 21—um—hmm—uh—2016. And—um—I have to tell you that—um—when I do these basketball games . . .

RC: Mh-hmm.

SL: I did a basketball game last night—beca—I've got this watch now that tracks how far I go and how many steps I take. I walked eleven and a half miles and over 20,000 steps last night.

RC: Wow!

[00:00:52] SL: [*Laughs*] So you know—and when you get—when I get home from one of those, I'm kind of wound up.

RC: Mh-hmm. So you can't sleep.

SL: It takes a while to sleep, so I—I'm a little sleep deprived, so you may

have to be patient with me a little bit. I'll—I'll try and keep us in a con—in a chronology . . .

RC: Okay.

SL: . . . but it's okay to go way forward, or if we're further in the interview and you think of something earlier, it's—there are no rules.

RC: Okay to go back. Okay.

SL: There are no rules.

RC: All right.

[00:01:20] SL: Um—and you know that—um—you'll be able to redact anything. I mean, it's rare when anyone asks to redact something. Um—I think we had someone—um—I'm not even gonna say that.

RC: Okay.

SL: [*Laughs*] But—um—uh—and then, you know, once it gets transcribed and we do the highlights and all that stuff, we'll want to post it on the—our website so the whole world will have it available to them.

RC: Eagerly waiting. Right. [*Laughter*] Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So I just want to make sure you're okay and you're comfortable with all that. And you know, you just need to tell me that you are, and that's kind of a—a—an on-camera release . . .

RC: Yeah. No, I'm totally comfortable. . .

SL: . . . to be doing what we're doing.

RC: . . . with it. I've—I've—as you know—uh—it is an in-house deal. I've

sat in on any number of interviews you've done. And while I normally wouldn't look forward to somethin' like this, I am sorta lookin' forward to this, in a way.

SL: Well . . .

[00:02:19] RC: 'Cause I've admired the—what the Pryor Center does for a long time.

SL: Well, thank you. Uh—I'm not so sure that's shared across the historian community. Um—you know, we're—we're kind of in the now. I mean, we're talking about things in the past, but—um—our—our oral histories are—are more of a *This Is Your Life* kind of thing instead of narrow and focused. Uh—so we'll go through a lot of things, but I'm most interested in—in the imagery that I know that you can spin for us—uh—across the things that you've witnessed and—and the places you've been and—and just—um—uh—the American experience because just knowing what I know about you, you've moved and traveled quite bit in your life. And you're—you're very—uh—dynamic on your educational career, and I'm—I also am looking very forward to this.

RC: Yeah. Well, it's American and with a—with a real center in Arkansas.

SL: Yeah.

RC: So that—that should be interesting.

[00:03:26] SL: Um—okay. So I always start with when and where you

were born.

RC: Okay. I was born in 1943 on May 24—uh—in Lake Forest, Illinois. Um—that is a function of what my parents were doin' at the time. It was during World War II, of course.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RC: And my father was in the military. He was a surgeon—uh—in the marine corps—um—so he was stationed at—at Glenview Naval Air Station in Illinois, just north of Chicago. Lake Forest is a—is a—you know, it's misleading today 'cause they were young marrieds, but it's a—it's a pretty posh northern suburb of Chicago. Uh—but he was—he was attached to the Naval Air Station there.

[00:04:16] SL: So by the time that—that you were born, your—your father was already a—a doctor. Is that . . .

RC: That's right. He was in medical school when the war broke out, and as I understand it—he was at Temple, the Temple University medical school, in Philadelphia. And as I understand it—uh—he was allowed—even though the war had broken out, to complete his education, to complete his medical school education, with the understanding that when he got his M.D., that he would enter the service as a surgeon, which is what he did. He served in the Pacific. He was—he was dispatched to a number of Pacific islands—most—the most important one for him, the one that he, you know, had memories of, was Guam.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RC: And he was a—so he served in the Pacific theater of Second World War.

[00:05:04] SL: Uh—before we go any further with your father, what was your father's name?

RC: My father's name is the same as mine, but if you really formalize my name, there's a two at the end of mine. Uh—so he was Robert Brady Cochran. His father was not a Robert Brady. His father was Robert Norman . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RC: . . . Cochran. So I became the second. I didn't like that. Uh—and as a kid I was actually—the middle—my middle name, Brady, was used as my name. I was called Brad. [*SL laughs*] And—and my grandmother, till she died, called me Brad. But I took advantage of one of my family's frequent moves—uh—between my th—we'll get to this, probably—but between my third-grade year in school in Bismarck, North Dakota, and my fourth-grade year in school in Honolulu—uh—I took advantage of that move to change my name to Bob. [*SL laughs*] [00:05:56] And the—uh—the reason for that was complicated, but it—it tells you somethin' about early development of certain kinds of loyalties. I mistakenly thought—and I confess that it was a mistake—I thought that—that Brad was a sort of high-fallutin,

snooty name. Um—something on the order of Reginald [*SL laughs*] or somethin' like that—Archibald. [*SL laughs*] And—uh—I'm sure there's nothin' wrong with those names, either, but I already had a sense that I did not—I did not aspire to—uh—any sort of aristocracy. I mean, even as a third grader, I aspired to be a sort of common-man-type guy. And I understood that Robert—Bob—was maybe the most common name for—for males. So I—when I went to the first day of school in Honolulu, I announced that my name was Bob. [00:06:51] There was one other thing that pushed that, and this is—this is—uh—actually more cogent, and I w—it's not totally in error. When I was a third grader, I received, as a Christmas present from my grandparents, a briefcase. Well, you can't—you can't carry a briefcase to school in—in—uh—in elementary school. And this is Bismarck, North Dakota. I mean, that's—that's the Frontier, roughly . . .

SL: Right, right.

RC: . . . at that time. And so I had this briefcase, and not only did I have a briefcase, but my name was embossed on it in golden letters.

SL: Oh my gosh.

RC: And it said, you know, Robert Brady Cochran. And that—that just sorta added to my populist impulse [*laughter*] to get rid of this—what my parents, no doubt, thought was a nice moniker. In fact, Brady is actually a family name on my mother's side. But I ditched it. I

ditched the Brad between third and fourth grade, and I've been Bob ever since.

SL: Was—so . . .

RC: So—that's—my dad's name was the same as mine.

[00:07:49] SL: Well, did your dad go by Robert or . . .

RC: He did. He did.

SL: Ah. Okay.

RC: He did. He got called—he got ba—he got called Doc in most pla—you know.

SL: Right.

RC: And—and Dr. Bob. But he went by Bob. Yeah.

[00:08:01] SL: Well, what about—um—your dad's parents? Did you ever get to know them?

RC: Yes, I did. Um—I got to know all my grandparents.

SL: Okay.

RC: Um—and . . .

SL: Well, let's talk about your dad's first.

RC: . . . my dad's—uh—parent—both my parents are from West Virginia. We're West Virginians in our background. And my dad's parents—uh—my—my dad's father—um—Robert Norman Cochran, was—I never really had an exact sense of what he did. But he was—he was more or less associated with small-town politics. Uh—they lived in a little town

north of Wheeling, West Virginia, called New Cumberland. It's right on the Ohio River. I mean, literally right on the Ohio River. And you know, houses on that—you can walk down the bluff and be in the river. And that's where my dad went to high school. And his father was active in the politics of that town. I don't know, you could use uncomplimentary names like ward heeler and stuff like that, but I think he worked in social services in—in the town. I have some correspondence from him where he would seem to be the person making decisions about public support for indigent families. He was—he was like a social worker in the town. And my grandmother, as far as I know—uh—I don't think either of them completed college. Um—and . . .

SL: But they made it through high school. Uh-huh.

RC: They made it through high school, at least.

SL: Yeah.

[00:09:31] RC: Um—my grandfather's brother was a principal of a high school, so they were tied in—they were—they were tied into the educational system in one way. So where I ended up seemed kinda—seemed kinda natural there. But my grandmother, whose maiden name was Zane—um—uh—no, I'm sorry—yeah, uh—Richardson. Her name—her maiden name was Richardson. I'm not a great genealogy guy. But—uh—she, as far as I know, stayed home. She didn't work

until after the death of her—her—uh—husband, and then she worked as a seamstress. She was a—she was—she worked in a department store doing alterations on suits and things like that. [00:10:12] Um—but she was—I think she stayed at home. My—my father had one sibling, a sister. Um—so they came from that northern part of West Virginia.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RC: And my maternal grandparents—uh—were highly educated for their day. My—my maternal grandmother was a college graduate—uh—which was relatively unusual in those days. Um—her name was Buzzerd, but it was spelled with an *E* on the end—*B-U-Z-Z-E-R-D*. Um—Eugenia was her name. And she was a—she was a severe woman. I r—she was very kind to me. I guess I would have to say that my maternal grandmother was the grandparent I knew best—um—and—but—and she was very kind to me, but she was a—she was a strict, rigid woman in her views, and she—and she enforced those views. So that's what I remember about her. She was called Granny.

SL: So—um—I guess we ought to talk about her enforcement. What—I mean . . .

[00:11:18] RC: Oh, it wasn't physical. She didn't—she didn't lam—she didn't lay into us, but she just expressed disapproval when you fell short of her expectations.

SL: Uh-huh.

RC: Here's a—maybe a one-liner is she referred to her husband, whose name was Gerwig. Everett Gerwig was his name. He was a—he was a high-school basketball star in a little town—and baseball. He was a—he was the best all-around athlete in his class. And—and—uh—to me they didn't seem ideally suited to each other because she was so reserved and—and strict. And he was called Boppy. [*SL laughs*] I mean, you know, and—and he was a distant figure in some ways. But the key would be that she all ray—she always referred to her husband as Mr. Gerwig. "Mr. Gerwig will be home soon," you know. And I'd be visiting there and this—by this time I'm a teenager, and they're very—my early teens I sometimes spent a couple weeks at their house by myself. I'd be the only—only member of my immediate family there, and he would take me to ball games. He'd take me to—Charleston, West Virginia had a triple-A baseball team, the Charleston Senators. My—and my grandfather was a fan. And he'd—he'd been a gr—he'd been a fine—I didn't realize it at the time, but he'd been a fine high-school-level athlete. Uh—in fact, this is to jump forward a little bit—he once came to watch me pitch a high-school baseball game, a big play-off game, and he happened to be in—in our hometown of Muncie, Indiana. And he came early, and he got a seat behind the plate, and I got shelled. I was [*laughs*]—I was the pitcher, and I got shelled. I

musta given up four or five runs in the first three or four innings.

SL: Uh-oh.

[00:12:59] RC: And—and my team was defeated, and I took the loss. And after the game his—his terse summary was that I needed to develop a curveball—um—'cause—so he was—you know, but I didn't realize that when I was kid. I didn't realize how much he knew about baseball. He just took me to these games. Um—and when we would b—when we'd be at home waiting, my grandmother would say, "Well, Mr. Gerwig should be home soon." So she was a fairly formal and reserved woman. Um—and—and my paternal grandparents—they were both—they were both pieces of cake for—for grandkids. They were—they'd give you candy and they—you never heard a harsh word from—from either, you know, my paternal grandfather, whose name was Punch. And—uh—and my paternal grandmother was just called Grandma.

[00:13:52] SL: So—um—before I forget, what was your mother's name?

RC: My mother's name was Ruth. Ruth Gerwig. Um—and—and she and my dad met at—met—uh—while they were college students in West Virginia. My father went to West Virginia University, and my mother went to West Virginia Wesleyan—uh—College.

SL: That's a Methodist . . .

RC: I think so. Yeah.

SL: . . . school.

RC: And—uh—and they met at some sort of church camp in the summer. And—uh—the summary line would be that they were West Virginians, and they were loyal West Virginians, but they couldn't wait to get outta town. I mean, they were very—my father, in particular—and this, I think, was really formative for me—my father was, while a devoted family man, was geographically footloose. He l—he liked to travel. And his ideal way of living, once he was a practicing physician after the war, would be to relocate every now and then, just whenever he got the feeling that it was time to move again. So that—what was unusual about my background was how often we moved. [00:15:03] And then my favorite terse summary of that is I went to third grade in Bismarck, North Dakota, fourth grade in Honolulu, fifth grade in Atlanta, and sixth grade in Muncie, Indiana, where my father put a s—where my mother put a stop to my father's [*SL laughs*]—my mother said, "The kids"—and I was the oldest, so I actually heard her say this. "The kids need to go to high school in the same place." She—my mother had not gone to high school in the same place. My mother had gone to three different high schools, and she thought it was disruptive. You know, she experienced it herself as disruptive. So my father—you know, he—my mother went along with my father. I mean, or she went off . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, whenever he wanted to pack up and move his doctor show to a different town, she went along with him until they got to Indiana. And then she [*vocalized noise*] [makes grabbing and pulling back motion with his hand] put the brakes on him and said—and—uh—said—uh—"It's time to settle down."

SL: Well, I think she's probably right.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: I mean, you had no childhood friends that . . .

RC: That were durable.

SL: . . . that were durable.

RC: You got it.

SL: And you lost contact with all that.

RC: I lost contact with all that.

[00:16:09] SL: And so—and I would think that that would—um—um—knowing that your father may decide to move at any moment, that probably affected an attitude toward childhood friendships.

RC: It did, although as a child, I loved it. I gotta tell you, my father sold it successfully to the kids.

SL: Uh-huh.

RC: Basically a "We're going everywhere" thing. [*SL laughs*] And there was a sense—it was never made fully articulate, but my father—my

parents—and I think my mom actually agreed with this. I think—she was—she liked movin' places, too. God knows she loved Hawaii. She [*laughs*]—she yearned to go back to Hawaii for the rest of her life, in some ways.

SL: Uh-huh.

RC: But—uh—I think her maternal instincts took over, and I think she said, "For the kids, we have to—we have to stop." But I've always romanticized that a little bit in my mind and thought, "What an adventure it must've been for my parents." When my dad got out of the army, there were already three of us as kids, and we were all young. And he—of course, when he got out in 1945, he came back to West Virginia, where my mother and the—my two—my two oldest sisters were livin'. And I've always romanticized this. They lit out for North Dakota. I mean, none of 'em had the—there were no family members of ours in North Dakota—um—and I think they must have seen that—again, I can only speculate here 'cause I wasn't old enough to really be part of their discussions. But I think they must've seen it as—as, you know, an adventure. They—they were goin' to North Dakota. That's like goin' to—you know, it's Siberia . . .

[00:17:45] SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, to their own parents who were deeply rooted West Virginians. And their siblings stayed in West Virginia. My mother had

one s—my—she had one sibling, a brother. He lived his whole life in West Virginia. Uh—my father had one sibling, a sister, and she lived her whole life in either West Virginia or right next to it in Ohio. So . . .

SL: Were both sets of grandparents . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . there too?

RC: And they both—both sets of grandparents were West Virginians, so re—I mean, so they just took off. And to add insult to injury, if you were the grandparents, three years after they go to North Dakota, where it's already hard to visit from West Virginia, right . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . they go to Hawaii. [*SL laughs*] Which is like twice as far or three times as far. So they—uh—they were—they were wanderers, and they sold it to us as a kind of adventure, and it was cool. It was better than just—you know, it was better to leave than be left behind, you know. And—and so—even though you're right—that my mother was right to stop, you know, to call a halt to it—um—as kids, we thought it was wonderful. We thought—at least I did. I can't speak for all my siblings. We kinda cluster. There—there—the three older kids were—were older as a group than the three younger ones, but one of 'em was born—you know, my third sister was born the year we were in Hawaii. My only brother was born the year we were in Georgia, and

then my last sister, Emily, was born—uh—in Muncie, where we stayed. Once—once they hit there, they . . .

SL: Landed there.

RC: . . . stayed. They're buried there. My dad and mom are buried in—in Indiana. So that's the family background.

[00:19:23] SL: So—um—I always like to—uh—talk about the households—in your case, plural.

RC: M'kay.

SL: Um—do you remember much about the houses that you occupied in your moving around? I mean—uh—you may have been—how—how old were you when they left West Virginia?

RC: Um—I was—uh—either three or four.

SL: Oh, so you don't really . . .

RC: I don't remember anything before North Dakota, basically.

SL: Okay.

RC: I have—I've had the—I have shadowy memories of specific events, but I couldn't tell you where they were. Um—and even my mother, when I ask her—you know, my very earliest memory is sorta standing by a window that—where it's raining. It's dark, and the—the—there's rain on the window, and I'm waitin' for my dad to come home. We're in an apartment building of some sort. I don't know how far . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RC: . . . off the ground we are. But when I asked my mother about tryin' to locate that memory, she wasn't even actually sure where it was.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:21] RC: So North Dakota is the first place I remember. And during our roughly four years in North Dakota, we lived in two different houses, and I remember both of 'em. My parents built the second one. I mean, they really were a young couple flush with what seemed to them money for the first time in their lives. I mean, he was a doctor.

SL: Right.

[00:20:44] RC: And they built a house in what today would be called a subdivision. But even then they had this kind of instinct for the edges. Their—the house they built was, like, on the top of a hill, and it was the end of town, literally. When I got my first bicycle, you could go out our—my driveway and turn left, which was north, and it used to—I—you know, I mean, I thought it was a vast distance, but I probably rode a mile at the most . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . or a mile and a half. But there was nothing. It was North Dakota plains. And my father told me, "Yeah, you turn left, and if you keep pedalin' long enough, you'll be in Canada." [*Laughter*] Which, course, was—but I've—I never left the county, but . . .

SL: Right.

[00:21:24] RC: But there was a softball field, and maybe a half-mile outta town there was a skeet-shooting range. I used to go out and collect—you know, every now and then when the shooters would miss, you'd get these . . .

SL: The whole skeet.

RC: . . . little discuses . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . that you could throw 'em like heavy Frisbees. And I would drive out there on my bike and lug unbroken skeet clays back to the house and throw 'em till they broke. I imagined myself already as some sorta terrific athlete, and I turned 'em into discuses. But it was—they had an instinct for—they had a nomadic gene in 'em somewhere and they—and so when I think about it in retrospect, I sorta think of that as a great leap for them—leavin' West Virginia and, you know, goin' to a place. So that when they told their families—North Dakota? I mean . . .

SL: Yeah, what town in North Dakota?

RC: It was Bismarck. It was the capital.

SL: Bismarck. So that's pretty big town.

RC: It was a pretty big town, but it was—you could walk across that town 'cause we lived on the absolute northern edge of down. When—the

first house we lived in was a duplex shared with another family. We were upstairs; they were downstairs. [00:22:34] And I remember the house, and I remember the people. I was friends with a kid roughly my age who was in the other family. But then we moved out, and we moved up and out to the edge of town. And I remember it—you know, again, my father had a sense of wonder about the world. I'm really a daddy's boy. I mean, I love my mother, and my mother was more of an academic than my dad. But I was a daddy's boy and he—one of the things he communicated to me was a kind of boyish wonder. He—the—one of my vivid memories is that one night, he—without any warning he came down, and it was late in the evening. It was after dinner. And he said, "Put your coat on there. We're goin' outside. I got somethin' I want to show you." So I bundled—and he told me to dress warmly. So we went outside, and I hadn't paid any attention to the weather or anything. And we walked to the end of our little driveway, which was paved, and then you got to the main road, which was not. [00:23:33] And we were standin' in the gravel in the road lookin' up at the sky, and he said, "Temperature is forty-two degrees below zero. It's the coldest I've ever been in. And I just wanted to share the"—you know, I mean, I don't know that he used the word share, but he said, "I wanted to show you this. You know, it's l—you—there's every chance you will never be in temperature this

cold again. Forty-two degrees below zero." And the sky was, of course, absolutely empty of clouds 'cause it wouldn't have gotten that cold.

SL: Right.

RC: So the stars looked like they were, like, half as far away as . . .

SL: Right.

[00:24:05] RC: And he called my particular attention to the way the snow sounded when you walked on it. It'd squeak. It was squeaky it was so cold. And so you know, he would do things like that. When the ice would go out on the Missouri River, from our window—they had a big picture window they were very proud of that you could see over the whole town of Bismarck and see clear to the Missouri River. And when the ice would go out on that river you could hear these booms. You know, 'cause the ice . . .

SL: Would these . . .

RC: . . . would be three or four feet thick.

SL: Right.

RC: You could drive trucks across that ice in the winter. I mean, all—it's just—you know, when you're a kid, that's just marvelous.

SL: Oh yeah.

RC: You go down there, and semi trucks are drivin' across the ice. [*SL laughs*] And when that ice would go out—and you know, when it

would crack up in the—and these huge icebergs would hit into the bridge pilings and—but just the cracking of it—you could hear 'em from our house. And he would call me outside to say, "Listen to those booms. That's the ice goin' out on the river." So he had this sense of, you know, amazement at the world. And I've always thought that—I wasn't aware of it at the time, you know, but I—you know of how—that he would be passing on a kind of attitude. You know, a kind of wonderment, but he did. Whereas—and my mother was the more savvy of the group. She—and he would tell me that. And when we were older and I used to caddy for him on the golf course, over and over he would say, "You know, your mom—you want to find a woman like your mom. She's—your mom's smarter than I am." [*SL laughs*] He would make it comparatively, you know, and he said, "Almost every good thing I've ever done, she told me to do." [*SL laughs*] So the—you know, I was—I admired my mom a lot, but I gravitated naturally and emotionally more to my father.

[00:25:50] SL: So you were there in Bismarck through third grade then, maybe?

RC: Yeah. Kindergarten, which I don't remember at all. My mother told me I went to kindergarten. I don't have a shiver of me—if you would ask me, I'd just say, "I don't know."

SL: All right.

RC: But I remember my first, second, and third grades pretty clearly, and then we moved to Hawaii.

[00:26:11] SL: So tell me about your first three grades, then. And I'm assuming it was a public school?

RC: It was. It was Roosevelt School was the name of it. I once drove through Bismarck, you know, as a young professor when—I spent a year doin' a tour with the National Humanities Series. And I drove to Seattle once from Indiana. And I stopped in Bismarck, and Roosevelt School was still there. I drove around—I—the first house that we had lived in had been razed. It had been torn down. But the house my parents built was still there. It was surrounded by other houses and was no longer at the edge of town.

SL: Right.

[00:26:57] RC: But it was still there, and Roosevelt School was still there. I enjoyed the first three years of school. I've always enjoyed school. Probably why I'm still on a campus, you know, but . . .

SL: That's right.

RC: . . . I had good teachers. I had a particularly kind first-grade teacher, I think. This is not real memory, but it's passed down by my parents and their photographs. I was so enamored of my first-grade teacher that I invited her to my birthday party, and she came.

SL: Neat.

RC: Which I thought was pretty . . .

SL: That's pretty great.

RC: . . . above and beyond, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:27:32] RC: So there's a photograph of a whole bunch of little boys and my mother and my first-grade teacher, taken by my father. The picture was taken by my father. So her name was Miss Hammond, and she was very kind to me. Evidently, singing used to be big, and penmanship used to . . .

SL: Oh, absolutely.

RC: . . . be big.

SL: I remember. Yes.

RC: And so I got grades on my first things, and Miss Hammond at one point wrote that "while Brad"—I was still called Brad then—"Brad enjoyed singing a great deal, but had not mastered singing scales." He—I had no sense of what [*laughter*] . . .

SL: You were tone deaf.

RC: But evidently I was absolutely tone deaf. But I seemed to throw myself into it with great gusto.

SL: Right.

[00:28:19] RC: So—and I was ahead of the curve in reading. My mother was an ambitious-for-her-kids mother, and I was her oldest, and so I

was spoiled. But I was taught to read long before I went to school. And Miss Hammond was great there, too, because she just let me read. You know, she handed out this book—you know, it's the *See Spot Run* stuff and those . . .

SL: Right.

RC: And you know, that book was child's play to me in the first grade. I read the whole book in the first day that she handed it out, and she saw that. She noticed that I just whipped through the book. And so when it came time for reading, she would just make sure that I had books, you know. And that was an enormous encouragement to me. And you know, later on in high school, I had a high school English teacher who was the first teacher who said, "You know, you could do this. You know, if you—if you're interested in this, you could do it." And then I had one teacher in college—a guy named Peter Jacobi at Northwestern. He's still an emeritus teacher at IU in Bloomington. He's the first real college teacher who said, "You know, this—you can do this writing stuff." You know, I was a journalism major, and I took a basic writing course from him, and he told me that I could do it. He said, "You don't really need to pay much attention to what's goin' on in this class. Just do your assignments." [*Laughter*] [00:29:48] And this is a great jump-ahead story. Unbeknownst to me, twenty years after I left Northwestern, Jacobi published a book about how to write.

One of these, sort of, how-to-write books. And without me knowing it, he included an essay I'd written for his class. [*SL laughs*] And just—and put my name in it and everything. He said, "He doesn't know this is being published, but I assume he would be happy with it." And then maybe fifteen years after that, on my initiative—I always felt grateful to this guy, but I'd never really said anything to him, you know. So I looked him up, thanks to the internet.

SL: Right.

[00:30:29] RC: And I found out he had moved from Northwestern to Bloomington, so I wrote him a note. I mean, you know where this story is gonna go. I wrote him a thank-you note, you know, like, forty years after I'd graduated.

SL: Right. Right.

RC: And I said, "Look, you know, you often don't see the people who matter to you until later, you know. And you were the first person to really tell me that I had a knack for this writing stuff, and thanks." And that's when he told me that—he said, "Well, I got a little surprise for you. Fifteen years ago"—in his reply he said, "Fifteen, twenty years ago, I published one of your essays, and it's in this book. And if you want to see it, I'll send you a copy." And so we had a brief correspondence, and then we stopped again 'cause I had said what I wanted to say. I had wanted to thank him.

SL: Right.

RC: So goin' clear back to first grade, I would say that, you know, like at—probably most people—there were three or four teachers in my life that sort of encouraged me at pivotal times. And maybe the first one was Miss Hammond, who just sorta turned me loose in her classroom when other people were reading out loud, "See Spot run," you know, *Dick and Jane* . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . I was sittin' back there readin' whatever.

SL: *Moby Dick*. [*Laughs*]

[00:31:41] RC: Well, I wasn't quite that far yet. [*SL laughs*] There is a funny story there. I—the—my school had a fund-raiser, and they had an auction in the fund-raiser. I forget—I couldn't tell you whether this is second or third grade, but it was—it wasn't first grade. And my parents had given me fifty cents to spend at this auction, which is, you know—I mean, it was paltry money, but it was—you could buy things for fifty cents there.

SL: Right.

RC: And one of the things that was being auctioned at some point in the evening—I just wanted to participate, you know. I mean, I wanted to bid and thing.

SL: Right. Sure.

RC: And so I'd watched this—the deal that people bid, and I sorta thought I understood it. And so at a certain point, a Walter Scott novel called *Ivanhoe* was put up. It was a little, you know—maybe reduced for kids even, but I don't think so 'cause it had a couple hundred pages in it, and that's the point. So I ended up bidding, like, twenty-five cents for this book, just to participate. And of course, nobody bid except me. So bang, bang, the hammer came down and I [*laughs*]—so here I found myself . . .

SL: With Walter Scott.

RC: . . . with one quarter. Half my money spent, and I owned *Ivanhoe*. And I took it home, and I couldn't read it. It was over my head at that time.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You know, Walter Scott's flowery language was . . .

SL: Sure.

RC: And I couldn't handle it, but I was so goddamned determined by the fact that I'd spent money on this book. So it might've been my first book in my personal library that was acquired by me. And I fought for weeks—and I failed, I have to tell you. I just didn't get it. I couldn't read it. But . . .

SL: That was a blow.

RC: . . . that was my first book-buyin' experience, [*laughter*] so.

[00:33:20] SL: Let's talk a little bit about the house in Bismarck. So . . .

RC: Okay.

SL: . . . it's on top of a hill. It's overlookin' the Bismarck—what are the mountains around Bismarck?

RC: It's real flat.

SL: It's real flat.

RC: It's real flat. Yeah.

SL: Okay, so it's just kind of a . . .

RC: So if you got a—I mean—yeah, it's just a hill.

SL: . . . plat . . .

RC: And it's probably not more than a hundred feet high off there—maybe a couple hundred at—you know, I'm not good at that.

SL: Okay.

RC: But we're maybe three or four miles, five miles, from the Missouri River, and you could still see it. It was—they designed the house so that you would have this panoramic view of the river valley. But we're not talk—it's—when you would—when I turned my bike out left of town to go north all the way to Canada, as my father said, there wasn't a fifteen-foot rise for the next twenty miles. It was flat. It was plains. It was prairie. You know, *Little House on the Prairie*.

SL: Okay.

RC: That's what we're talkin' about.

[00:34:12] SL: Okay. All right. So tell me about—what kind of heat did the house have?

RC: You know, I don't know, but it was warm. I mean . . .

SL: So you think it was gas or . . .

RC: Probably. Yeah, although, again, that—I just don't know.

SL: That's kinda far out of town to . . .

RC: Well, we were still in town.

SL: Okay.

RC: I mean—but we—the pavement hadn't reached there yet, but . . .

SL: I see.

RC: . . . we walked to school. We walked to—we still—we didn't change schools. Roosevelt School was still our school. And—but we were maybe—the first year I was two blocks from the school. My mother could watch me. Yeah, Suzanne is shocked when I say that I was allowed to walk to school by myself in the first grade. But the—you have—that has to be remembered that my mother could watch me from the door to the school.

SL: Right.

[00:35:00] RC: And my sister, Mary, started school the next year, and I was the brother, the big brother, so I was supposed to escort my sisters to the school, and the same thing was true. By third grade my sister Sarah was a kindergartener, and I was responsible for getting

them home. And that was true even when we were a mile away at that point. By that time I was in the third grade. So it's a town. We're in town, but we're right on the edge of town. It's a new house then. And it was—you know, it was—it had—it was white siding. I don't know whether it was wood or already some kind of, you know . . .

SL: Vinyl or . . .

RC: . . . plasticized vinyl thing.

SL: . . . somethin'.

RC: But it had a breezeway, and they got—they designed it themselves. They were very . . .

SL: A breezeway.

RC: Yeah.

SL: So the house was divided in two?

RC: Yeah, it had a garage. Had a garage. And between the garage and the house, there was this little porch that . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

RC: . . . didn't—wasn't walled in.

SL: Okay.

[00:35:58] RC: We saw it as a definite move up from the first house, just in terms of quality. We had our own house as opposed to sharing a house with another family. But yeah, I member the houses. I wasn't

a person who paid a tremendous amount of attention to my surroundings. That's probably still true. I don't—Suzanne buys our houses. I don't care where we live, you know. [*SL laughs*]

[00:36:20] SL: So were you expected to have chores? I mean, did you have chores around the house? What . . .

RC: Yeah, I did and—in Bismarck I didn't have substantial chores. I had to set the table and, you know . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: But the first time I really had substantial chores was when we got to Muncie, where I was in the sixth grade. Then I was—then all of a sudden, and it was quite sudden, I was turned loose to—on the yard. I was—I had all the—I was supposed to mow the yard. I was supposed to put up Christmas lights. My father [*laughs*]—the house we lived in in Muncie—we lived in three different houses in Muncie, but the one I remember the best was a tall house. It was easily the most manorial house that my parents ever owned. It's still a beautiful house. But it had gutters that were a full two stories off the ground and so—and I had to clean 'em.

SL: Oh man!

RC: I had to get a ladder up there and take leaves out of the gutters.

SL: And that's a thirty-foot ladder, at least.

RC: Yeah. It's a long ladder, and it was a little bit on the scary side.

[00:37:28] And my father did have a weakness for flamboyant Christmas decorations. He liked a lotta lights. [*SL laughs*] And he never did a damn thing. He'd just buy 'em. He'd go to buy the things. If I'd say, "I need another thirty feet of lights," he'd go buy 'em. He was happy to supply me with everything I needed. But he expected me, single-handedly, to turn the house into Disneyland—a kind of resplendently lit place. And it was precarious, man. You're up there leanin' over . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . tryin' to get a light hooked on some corner.

SL: Right.

RC: You're, you know, twenty feet [*laughs*] off the ground.

SL: Yeah.

RC: It's cold. It's a—'cause this isn't Hawaii anymore. This is Indiana.

SL: Right.

RC: And so there were times I thought, "Dad, you don't have any idea what you're just so blithely tellin' me to do here, you know."

[00:38:14] SL: You're in sixth grade?

RC: I'm—started in the sixth grade. By the time I'm doin' this, I'm in high school.

SL: Ah.

RC: You know, so I'm okay, you know. But still, I thought he didn't really

have—he liked the idea of things. He liked the resplendent house. And he was appreciative. He'd go outside and admire my work. But the whole time I'm doin' that, he's sittin' in warm comfort inside the house. So there was a part of me that said, "He doesn't get it. He doesn't understand how dangerous this is. This is scary." Especially there was one place on the back where I had to put the—there was a porch, but it was a flagstone porch that was raised up off the ground, so I wasn't quite as far off the ground. But if I fell I was gonna hit flagstones, and it was slippery in the winter.

SL: Well, yes. Yeah.

RC: You know, those rocks—you know, they get a little icy sheen on 'em and stuff.

SL: That's right.

RC: So—I mean, I don't want to overdramatize it, but there—that was a time when I thought—maybe one of the first times I thought, "Dad's—Dad doesn't get this. Dad does—he hasn't been up this ladder, you know. He—if he climbed this ladder, he'd be a little less cavalier about sendin' me out here." But I always loved the guy so much that—he even—like he liked to describe himself as a camper. [00:39:28] That's another story. Well, I could fill up an hour. But you know, once we had six kids, and we'd go on these summer vacations—even though he made a good living, it made sense if you were gonna go on

a two- or three-week vacation, you could save a whole lotta money by campin'.

SL: Sure.

RC: So they bought this trailer. It was called a Heilite trailer. *H-E-I-L*—like Heil Hitler. Heilite trailer. [*SL laughs*] And we camped. But my father never slept in the tent. He had the—he had this huge double mattress in his station wagon, and camping for him was luxury. My mother would get up—I slept on top of the car in the car carrier when it was unloaded. And I remember every morning began the same way. There'd be this alarm and the car radio would come on 'cause my father—he loved to buy gadgets. So any gadget, you know, he could buy—you know, so the radio would come on. And my mother would get up, get out of the tent, start firin' up the Coleman camp stove, and make coffee and stuff. And pretty soon everybody would be in motion, gettin' dressed, doin'—except my dad. He was like the lord of the manor, and he would only emerge [*laughs*]—you know, the car would be heated up. [00:40:37] I'd be up there on top of the car, and I hear the ignition [*laughs*] turn. So he—what that meant was that he was heating up the interior, you know, so he'd be comfortable. And he would only emerge when his coffee was ready. But we'd get back home—he was all about roughing it and being out there in the woods and stuff like that. And he was a good hiker, and he was a

wonderful person to sorta show us around and things like that. He loved to, you know, look at maps. He taught me to love maps. But he was physically—he was attached to his comforts. You know, the guy [*laughs*]—and I don't think he fully realized that my mom was out there in the cold, you know, makin' the coffee and that, you know, I was gettin' firewood or my sisters were doin' this and that. He was—I mean, there was part of this sort of patriarchal privilege that my father indulged himself in. He didn't give orders. He didn't yell around. He didn't spank people.

SL: Right.

RC: But he just—he thought he had earned it, you know. [*Laughs*] He just laid back.

[00:41:40] SL: You know, it's interesting—the American culture at that time, the wife was the homemaker.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And so all things home-related were kind of her domain, and the male would be the bread-winner, would go out and—so the wife would be all things home, all things children—makin' sure—tracking all that activity, and the husband would be at work.

RC: Yeah, and . . .

SL: And he'd come home from work . . .

RC: You got it, Scott. That's . . .

SL: . . . and it would be, you know, expected that he could relax and not be working.

RC: Well, he—they—my family fit that pretty closely. You just—yeah, of course, you've laid out *Father Knows Best* [*laughter*], which was a show they liked to watch.

SL: Well, of course.

RC: Yeah.

SL: All of America . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . loved father . . .

RC: Yeah, they liked to watch that show.

SL: Yeah. *Leave it to Beaver* and all that stuff.

RC: And he fit it, I gotta say, in that one regard. He fit it. Now he absolutely doted on my mom and would, you know, buy her fancy clothes and kimonos 'cause when we went to Hawaii, she fell in love with muumuus and kimonos and—so he would—you know, he sorta held up his end of the deal, but he didn't mow the grass, and he didn't trim hedges and—or hang Christmas lights. And on camping trips he didn't—he emerged to accept a cup of hot coffee. That was—so you know, but . . .

[00:43:06] SL: Okay, I want to get back to the camping trips in a little bit.

RC: Okay.

SL: But I want to go back to that house in Bismarck.

RC: Okay.

SL: 'Cause I feel like this is your earliest domestic memories, really.

RC: Absolutely. Yeah.

SL: So you said something about setting the table.

RC: Yeah.

SL: So was there—was it dinner or—where everyone gathered around the table? I mean, were you expected . . .

RC: Yes.

SL: It was a scheduled thing.

RC: Yes.

SL: Your mother had worked to prepare the dinner, and you were expected to be at the table and, in your case, actually set it. But—so—you and your—I guess there are two daughters at this point.

RC: By that time—you're—that's exactly right.

SL: Right.

RC: There are three of us.

SL: And . . .

[00:44:00] RC: Now Sally or Sarah would've been too young to do much in the way of things. But I'm sure Mary was also clearing or setting and—you know, Mary and I had light chores, but they were very light.

SL: So there's a couple years' difference between you and Mary?

RC: Mary and I are a year and a half apart.

SL: Yeah. Okay. So let's say it's dinnertime, and you're sitting there. Was there ever anything said over the meal as far as grace or . . .

RC: Absolutely.

SL: Really?

RC: Yeah.

SL: Okay. So . . .

RC: Yeah, both my parents were—they were both Presbyterians.

SL: Okay.

RC: They took it reasonably seriously. My mother, very seriously. One of my mother's claims to fame was that she was the first female moderator of the presbytery in Indiana. She was very active in church work, especially with youth work. My father was also active in church. I don't want to underplay this. He wasn't as—he wasn't—I think it's fair to say my father just wasn't much interested in theological issues. And we could get into that. I think my father's theology was connected with his job. He delivered babies for a living.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And that was—for him, he just thought it was miraculous. And he would say things like that to me, you know.

SL: Well, it is.

RC: "I see miracles every day."

SL: Yeah, and they are.

[00:45:25] RC: And that's where I think his spiritual life was centered. But he went to church, and he took an active role in the church. He believed in supporting the church and tithing. I learned the word tithing relatively early. And he was kind of a bigwig in this little town church. I think he served on the sort of council and stuff, but the driving force there was my mother, who was genuinely devout.

SL: So the position—did you say monitor or moderator?

RC: Moderator. Yeah, it's . . .

SL: Now what does a moderator do?

[00:45:57] RC: Well, the mode—I don't know 'cause, you know, I mean, I was skeptical about religion's claims real early. I can remember—and my parents were very good about this 'cause I told 'em—pretty—you know, I think I was fifteen or fourteen, and I said, "You know, this ain't workin' for me. I don't get it." And I did all the things you're suppose—I was a very tractable kid. I mean, my father was interested in Boy Scouts. He was always a little dismayed that he never got to be an Eagle Scout.

SL: Right.

RC: He got to be a Life Scout and didn't get Eagle. So I was a Cub Scout, and I started out in Boy Scouts. But I reached, I'd say, fourteen or fifteen, and I had kinda had it with that. And I had my own interests

by this time. I wanted to be a great athlete. I had—unfortunately, I did not have the skills to be a great athlete [*laughs*], but I had the interest. I certainly had the interest and the drive. And it turns out the only sport I really had much success in was long-distance running, which requires primarily that you be able to withstand pain. [*Laughs*] It doesn't require great eye-hand coordination or any of those other skills. It just means you have to be willing to suffer. And my thirst for athletic glory was so great that I was willing to suffer more than the average person. [00:47:14] But I had my own interests by this time, and I was certainly a skeptic when it came to theological or even just general knowledge, you know, what a philosopher would call epistimological issues. I always had a heightened sense that there are real strong limits on what we know. So I told my parents that church wasn't workin' for me, that it just wasn't an important part of my life, and it was just a pure chore to go to church. And that was upsetting to my mother. Probably a little disappointing to my dad, but genuinely upsetting to my mother. I mean, she made me promise when I went to college that I would go to at least one meeting of the Presbyterian youth group at Northwestern. Well, I did. I went to one meeting [*laughs*], and so I did what my mom wanted. But I asked 'em—I said, "Look, I don't want to"—you know, and I dropped out of Boy Scouts, too, even though I had the God and Country award, so I'd done this

religion thing. And I said "How long do you want me to go to church?" you know, and they said, and I think they agreed on this, "Till you go away to college. We expect you to go to church with us on Sunday till you go away to college, and then you're on your own. You can do whatever you want." So I did. I mean, I went to church unfailingly until I graduated, and then I never went to church again the rest of my life, except to go friends' weddings and things like that.

SL: Right.

[00:48:33] RC: So the—my parents were genuinely religious, and to get back to what started this, we did say grace. And the—I think my mom usually said it, but my father was perfectly capable of saying it. When we had guests, I think my—you know, there was—I'm not sure what my parents' protocol was, but if I had to guess, I'd say that when we had guests, my father said grace, and just ordinary evenings at home, my mother would either say grace or ask one of us to do it.

SL: Ah.

RC: So yeah, we said grace.

[00:49:06] SL: And so there was a Presbyterian youth group as well when . . .

RC: Well, there was at my church. Yeah. And for the m—and I participated sporadically in that. By that time, I was real active in sports. I went to a small high school, and it was a good thing. I didn't

realize it at the time, but had I gone to a big high school—like when my kids—our kids went to Fayetteville High School. And two of our kids, two of Suzanne's and my five kids, were good athletes. Masie was really a good runner, and Taylor, of course, was a very good basketball player. And they were—I'd say they were about the same, but they were central aspects of their careers. Taylor got more ink because he was a basketball player, but . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . but Masie was, you know, on two state championship teams and finished second in the state and individual events, distance events.

SL: Well, that's big.

RC: So she was real good. [00:50:03] I realize that had I gone to Fayetteville High School, I would not have been a star athlete. I went to a school that if you did not have a handicap sticker on your car, you were gonna start. [*Laughter*] You were—so, you know, if you were an athlete, you played all sports, so from the beginning of the year to the end. [00:50:22] So I told you the story about my grandfather. I was—my senior year I was a pitcher on the baseball team who could not really throw a curveball. I could not—that was not part of my repertoire. Sometimes it would curve, but other times it'd just be a half-speed, perfect pitch to hammer.

SL: Right. You could get it over the plate.

RC: I could get it over the plate, and I could throw fast. That was the only—we didn't have any real pitchers my senior year, and I played second base up until my senior year. But—and I—you know, I was in track. And I was, you know, I was a good but not gre—I was good at everything. I would've been the second-best player on our tennis team but they—it overlapped with track. But I could beat everybody on the tennis team except the top guy, and I could beat him some of the time.

SL: Right.

RC: But we weren't good. We were a little school. Burris high school. We were a lab school for the college, for Ball State, you know. Ball State University started as Ball State Teachers College. That's what it was called when I was a kid. Now it's Ball State uni . . .

SL: So this is back at Muncie.

RC: It's back in Muncie. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[00:51:24] RC: Where I went from sixth grade through the end of high school.

SL: Okay.

RC: And I was the one that my mother's policy went into effect for first 'cause Mary was a year behind me and Sarah was two more years behind Mary. So they stopped for us. They stopped movin' for us.

SL: Right.

RC: And I don't know where we—oh, you were still on religion. So that's when I told 'em that I didn't want to go to church and—but I just wanted them to tell me what they'd be comfortable with, and it worked.

SL: So . . .

RC: Sarah became a clergyman—I mean, the second sister became a Presbyterian preacher.

SL: Sarah?

RC: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:52:04] SL: So it goes Bob . . .

RC: Mary . . .

SL: Mary, Sarah.

RC: Sarah. And then Alison.

SL: Alice.

RC: The only sister of mine who's deceased.

SL: Okay.

RC: She was born in Hawaii.

SL: Okay.

RC: And then my only brother, Steve, and then Emily, the baby of the family.

SL: Okay.

RC: Born in Muncie.

[00:52:20] SL: So now, in the early [19]50s when you're in Bismarck, I'm assuming, or late [19]40s . . .

RC: Yeah, we go there in [19]47, and we leave in [19]51.

SL: So that's pre-television.

RC: Yeah.

SL: So you have radio.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And do you remember much about radio?

RC: Not till—that's a great question. God, you're a terrific interviewer. [*SL laughs*] No, I remember no radio in Bismarck and no radio in Hawaii. I became an avid listener of the radio the year we were in Atlanta. I listened to baseball games. I listened to westerns on the radio. And I listened to—yeah, that's probably it for Atlanta. I listened to Southern League baseball games, and I listened to cowboy shows. Then when we got to Muncie, we got our first television. I can tell you the year. We got our first television in 1955.

SL: Yeah.

[00:53:19] RC: And I became—I was still an avid radio listener, but I shifted over. I no longer listened to westerns after the first year. I no longer listened to baseball games, but I listened to music. That's when I discovered popular music. I had a paper route and you—I'll

bet you've heard this story a lot—the first time I heard Elvis or the first time I heard rock and roll. I had a paper route, and I used to stop and buy a Coke at a—and this is between my sixth- and seventh-grade years—first year in Muncie. I used to stop and buy a Coke at a grocery store/luncheonette named Ray Keesling. The guy's name was Ray Keesling. It was Keesling's grocery and then lunch bar or something, and I would stop there every day to get a Coke. And they had a jukebox. And one day while I was just a kid buyin' the Coke, I heard a sound that I'd never heard before. I couldn't tell you what it was. It—well, I couldn't tell you for sure it was Elvis or whether it was Jerry Lee Lewis, but it was rock and roll.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And my ears just lit up. [*SL laughs*] You know, and I'm sure you've heard that story. You probably experienced . . .

SL: No, no, I haven't.

RC: You probably experienced that story over and over but . . .

SL: The first time that I saw or knew anything of Elvis was on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

RC: Okay.

[00:54:38] SL: But so you know, radio is the media.

RC: It's huge. Yeah.

SL: Medium there. And so the family didn't gather around the radio early

on or . . .

RC: No.

SL: It was just a . . .

RC: Because it was—we were a standard family there. My father was hostile. I mean, he was the sweetest guy in the world, but he was hostile to rock and roll at the beginning.

SL: Ah.

RC: He called it noise. It was one of the ways that my sister Mary and I said, "We're different." You know, we asserted our independence via music. It was—you know, we dressed the way our parents wanted us to dress, and we didn't deviate from that. I can't speak for Mary, but I never really put a lotta pressure on my parents to look like Gene Vincent or, you know, I . . .

SL: Right.

RC: I'd dress the way they dressed me. But with music I bought my own records 'cause I had my paper route.

[00:55:31] SL: What was your first record?

RC: Oh, that I can tell you. It was a Chuck Berry record.

SL: Ah!

RC: Very first record. And the second was "Good Golly Miss Molly," you know, Little Richard's. So I bought—Little Richard and Chuck Berry were my first two 45 records. And my father—I mean, this is probably

one of his low points—he thought that—he didn't mess with me, but he did mess with my sister Mary. My sister Mary brought home an Elvis Presley record. You might remember it. It was called "One Night With You." It's—it was just called "One Night."

SL: Okay.

[00:56:05] RC: But [*SL laughs*] my sister and my dad got in an argument about that, and they argued—you know, she argued that "One Night" simply meant a date. My father said, "I know what a night is," you know. [*Laughs*] And he broke the record. He took the . . .

SL: Oh my gosh!

RC: He took the record and broke it over his knee. And she just went out and bought another one. It cost eighty-nine cents . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know. And she just didn't play it loud around him. She had her own little—you know, those little tiny 45 things that cost twenty bucks.

SL: Little portable—yeah, you could take it with you.

RC: Take it—it looked like a suitcase.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: So she—you know—she d—and I was completely on her side. I thought my father was completely unjustified.

SL: Right.

RC: Still do, you know.

SL: Right.

[00:56:45] RC: And it was one of his low points. He had t—he only had two. There was a point when I was older—I was in college—I member gettin' mad at him this time. My brother Steve you know, was—he's a decade younger than I am. I got—I was home from college, and he was a swimmer, but he wasn't the athlete that I was, you know. It's like, you know, two of my five kids are athletes, and the other three aren't. So—but he was on the swim team. And we were at the breakfast table, and Steve said, "You know, I'm gonna be swimmin' today, and there's a meet today, Dad. Are you gonna come and watch me swim?" And I wouldn't have been surprised if my father said no 'cause he was very busy, and my mother attended every race and every ball game that I ever played. My dad came when he could.

SL: Right.

[00:57:31] RC: And when he came he was sometimes embarrassing 'cause he'd—he was loud, you know. [*SL laughs*]

SL: That sounds like my dad.

RC: He only had one line. In track races he would say, if you were not leading the race—and it's often foolish, as you know, in a longer race, to lead it.

SL: Right.

RC: It's—you know, then you're the hunted, right?

SL: Right.

RC: You don't want to be the hunted till the last lap.

SL: Right.

RC: But at any rate, he would always say—whenever I'd go by, if I wasn't in first place, he would say, "Pass him now." That's what he'd say. "Pass him now."

SL: No matter where in the race . . .

RC: No matter when. It could be two hundred yards into the race or the second lap. In other words, he didn't know jack about racing.

SL: Management. [*Laughs*]

[00:58:07] RC: Yeah. But anyway, he said to my brother, "Are you swimmin' varsity?" Meaning, like, if he was JV, it wouldn't be worth his time to come. And I just exploded. You know, by this time—I had a sense of myself. I was nineteen or twenty.

SL: Right.

RC: And I said, "Come on. That's not—you know, you don't get to say that kinda shit. You're his dad, you know."

SL: Right. Right.

RC: You're supposed to say, "If I can, I'll come, you know." [00:58:34] And I went on to coach as a volunteer out here at Fayetteville High School, and I ran into the same kinda parents.

SL: Right.

RC: These stage-door parents. And you know, there were times that I had to restrain myself from just sayin', "Can you hear yourself?" You know, I had a good runner that I coached—no names will be mentioned—but I had a good runner that I coached here, and the Chile Pepper run—dad comes out to watch. Well, Chile Pepper's huge, as you know. I mean . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . people—teams come from Texas and . . .

SL: Oh yeah. Yeah.

RC: . . . all over to run the Chile Pepper. So she's probably gonna win the state—the runner. She's been—probably gonna be the best girl high school cross country runner in the state. She doesn't really have a bad day. She doesn't have a great day, but she finishes somethin' like twenty-first in a field of, like, three hundred, right?

SL: Right.

RC: And the dad comes up after it's over. She's a little disconsolate 'cause she had hoping that she'd make top ten.

SL: Right.

RC: You know, but Milton and—Milton Burke and I were the coaches.

SL: Yeah. Yes.

RC: And we didn't have a complete sense of who was gonna be there. We

knew who maybe half the good runners were gonna be. The dad comes up and says, "My God, I should've just stayed at home and mowed the yard." I mean, you know, Milton and I [*laughs*] just looked at each other. What do you say? You can't invade the parent-child relationship.

SL: That's right.

RC: You can't say, "Sir, get lost," to the dad.

SL: Right.

[00:59:53] RC: So—but I saw that with my own dad with Steve. So you know . . .

SL: That hurt him, didn't it?

RC: He under—he told me later I was right. He was—he got mad at the time.

SL: Yeah.

RC: But later on he said, "You're right. I'll never—I will never do that again. I'll either go or not go. Doesn't matter whether he's swimmin' varsity or JV."

SL: Right.

RC: So you know, you're a parent here. You're not a coach. I'm the coach—you know, I'm jumpin' between events. So anyway, he was—but I want to convey an overwhelmingly positive picture of both my parents and particularly of my father. He was emotionally very easy

for me. We didn't have very much at all of that [butts fists together] standard, you know, father/son . . .

SL: Confrontation.

RC: . . . confrontations. Yeah.

[01:00:42] Sarah Moore: Scott, we just crossed the one-hour mark.

SL: Okay. Do you want to keep going a little bit or . . .

RC: Sure, I'm good.

SL: . . . do you want take a break?

RC: I'm good.

SL: Sarah, we're gonna go just a little bit longer, okay?

SM: That's fine.

SL: And then maybe fifteen minutes from now, let's—why don't you cut us off, and we'll talk about lunch and then get back into it.

SM: All right, sounds good.

SL: Okay, thanks.

RC: Yeah, maybe we can get us to Arkansas by that time.

SL: Probably not.

RC: Okay.

SL: So . . .

RC: You're in charge, so.

[01:01:09] SL: Yeah, so what about musical instruments in the house?

RC: I think it's fair to say that—well, neither of my parents played a

musical instrument.

SL: Okay.

RC: So we didn't have any musical instruments in the house. But several of my siblings—me, conspicuously excepted—two in particular showed a real gift for music. My sister Alison, the fourth child, was a very good violin player and fiddler, depending on what kind of music she [*laughs*] was playing. And my sister Emily is a decent cello player.

SL: Oh yeah.

RC: And they both have real—they had gift for it. Alison worked harder, I think. I'd—Emily might object to that, but [*SL laughs*] I—my impression was that Alison was more tractable just as a student. She did what she was told. Emily had a very early, strong streak of "I'll do what I want to do."

SL: Right.

RC: And I've always admired that in Emily. It made her, you know, really well-suited for some of the challenging jobs she was asked—you know, that she did during her nursing career. But my family was not conspicuously gifted musically. And I tried really hard 'cause I fell hard for music. As we said, I fell hard for rock and roll and you know, to this day teach classes on folk and popular music up at the school. But I tried very hard to become a guitar player. Physically, I have real limits. My hands are really quite small.

SL: Right.

[01:02:46] RC: They also limit me on the basketball court. [*Laughs*] You know, I don't have Kawhi Leonard type hands. And Taylor, my son, even when he was eight, his hands were as big as mine. And Taylor's are out to here, I mean.

SL: Right.

RC: So he—there were reasons he became a really good basketball player. But I tried really hard for about three or four years to become a guitar player, and suffice it to say that the ceiling was really low, you know. [*SL laughs*] So the music—we can just—we loved music. And my parents played a lotta records in the house. But we were not a musical family, with those two exceptions.

[01:03:22] SL: So your parents' taste in music were any—were they leaning toward classical music, or was it big band?

RC: You got it. Big band and . . .

SL: Big band stuff.

RC: My dad was a big-band fan. We had a lotta Glenn Miller records, a lotta Artie Shaw records. The—yeah, big band was their music.

SL: It was great music.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: Really nice.

RC: Yeah, and he would make me listen to it. When he saw that I was

interested in music, he'd play me Benny Goodman or play me . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know. My mother, not so much. I mean, she listened to it, but she was—she didn't try to sell her music at all.

[01:04:01] SL: So you—but you did listen to baseball.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Was there—what—your favorite team was . . .

RC: From the middle 1950s, from [19]54, [19]55, Chicago Cubs. So, course, last year was absolutely wonderful for me.

SL: Right.

[01:04:18] RC: I think there was—they never said so, but I think there was some worry in my family when I passed seventy—I'm the first male in my family to get to seventy in, like, three generations. The . . .

SL: Ah.

RC: . . . Cochran women live a long time. My mother's mother was, like, ninety-five, ninety-four. My mother lived to be ninety-two. The—but the men don't make it. Maybe the most conspicuous thing in my life as far as a loss was my father died at fifty-one.

SL: Wow.

RC: I was the first guy in my age cohort to lose his father, and given how close I was to my father, that was—it's still the biggest death that I've

had to live with.

SL: So you were—how old were you when that happened?

RC: I was twenty-six.

SL: Ah.

RC: So I wasn't an infant child. You know, I wasn't an orphan child. But I was young, and I didn't know anybody my age whose father was dead.

SL: Right.

RC: But the reason we brought that up here—let's see, where were we? We were on some—we were talkin' about . . .

SL: Well, we—let's see . . .

[01:05:33] RC: There's some reason I—oh, the Cubs. I became—you know, my—people in my family, when I hit seventy, they started to think, "Is Dad gonna live to see the Cubs win a World Series" . . .

SL: Right, and so you did.

RC: . . . "ever?" Since 1908. [*SL laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

RC: And so there was some—I think, some relief among people—you know, my kids and stuff. They—my kids were very good about understanding how pleased Dad would be that the Cubs finally won.

SL: That they finally won.

RC: And I was. I was.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I became a Cub fan, and for no better reason than I liked the cute little bear. But Muncie, Indiana, is—you know, Chicago and St. Louis and Cincinnati—the first major-league game I saw was the Cincinnati Reds game. [01:06:14] That's a funny story because my father served in the service. In World War II he got to know, slightly, Duke Snider . . .

SL: Ah.

RC: . . . of the then Brooklyn Dodgers.

SL: Right.

RC: And the Brooklyn Dodgers played the Cincinnati Reds, and my father bought tickets for just the two of us. And we went over to Crosley Field in Cincinnati and watched the Dodgers play the Reds. I have no memory of who won the game, but after the game we went to the visitors' dressing room so that I could get Duke Snider's autograph, and I was very impressed by my father 'cause he—we went to the door and he—there was a guard there, an attendant, and my dad said, "Just tell Mr. Snider that, you know, Doc Cochran is here and would" . . .

SL: So . . .

RC: . . . "like to see him." And we go in, and there he is. They're all smokin' and drinkin' beer.

SL: Sure, that's the . . .

RC: And Duke Snider says—my dad says, "Duke," and all that. They shake hands, and my dad says, "My son here has a request, if that'd be all right." And I'm a little guy. I'm like eleven.

SL: Right.

RC: And I say, "Sir, can I have your autograph?" And he said—this is exact words—he said, "Sure, kid. Here, hold my beer." [*Laughter*] So I'm holdin' this paper cup with beer on—in it.

SL: Right.

RC: And he signs the program . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . for me. It's gone—I—we've lost it, but for years I had this Duke Snider signature. But the thing that impressed me the most was that Duke Snider recognized and remembered my old man.

[01:07:46] SL: So have we talked about Brooklyn at all? What—how did that connection happen?

RC: It happened overseas.

SL: Oh.

RC: He was in—he came through with some USO show or somethin'.

SL: Okay.

[01:08:00] RC: There is a tie to Brooklyn. My sister Sarah was born in Brooklyn. And at one period, again, during his time in the service, my father was either stationed at—you know, I was so young I don't

remember the details, but at Brooklyn Navy Yard. My father either went through there or was stationed there—I think was stationed there for a while, maybe just after the war. You know, maybe even from between the cessation of hostilities and his discharge. I'm not sure. But Sarah was born in Brooklyn during that time.

SL: Okay.

RC: But we have no real ties in Brooklyn. He met Duke Snider in the Pacific.

SL: Oh, I see. Okay.

RC: You know, he was doin' one of those Joe Lewis-type . . .

SL: Right, right.

RC: . . . USO tours.

SL: Right, right. Okay, I just didn't want to miss anything there.

RC: No, you didn't miss anything.

[01:08:43] SL: Okay. So you were—there were still children at home when your father died.

RC: There were. Yeah, Emily was. . .

SL: Couple?

RC: . . . twelve. I think there were two. Alison was just headed to college. She went to DePaul . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . right there in Indiana. And Steve and Emily were still in Muncie,

still in high school.

SL: So . . .

RC: He died in 1969.

[01:09:21] SL: So that makes you kind of the man.

RC: Yeah. Oh yeah. And it was a tough time. I mean, you know, I guess that's true in any family when—'cause, you know, if my mother was the brains, my father was the heart. I mean, he was the emotional heart of the family. I think that all my siblings—well, I can't speak for them, but my guess is that my experience was somehow shared that—my father in some ways, even though he wasn't older, his attitude toward his kids was more grandparental than parental. My mother was the supervisor. She was the one who imposed the standards and said, "This is how you're supposed to behave, and you gotta get your homework done," and stuff like that. And Dad was Santa. I mean, Dad was just, you know, a cupcake.

SL: He was there to spoil.

RC: Yeah, he spoiled us, and he [*SL laughs*] was jovial—I mean, his demeanor was jovial and not in any way stern or forbidding. So when he disappeared, it was—there was—I never really gave it much thought at the time, but here's a—just a factoid. I came here in 1976, seven years after my dad died. Every one of my siblings except one, Alison, has at one time or another lived here.

[01:10:40] SL: That's kind of unusual.

RC: It's very unusual, and you know, I was not in any obvious sense the draw. I didn't help them get jobs, you know. The—in other words, I didn't arrange for them to come here. But all of them except one did. And they stayed for—I mean, two of 'em live here now. Mary lives here now, and of course, she has all her own genuine ties, and there wasn't—it wasn't that—there wasn't any obvious sense that she was comin' where I was. And the same—and Emily's here now.

SL: So . . .

RC: So I became a kinda—your point is, you know, I become—surrogate father is probably way too strong because Mary's only eighteen months younger [*laughs*] than I am. And in 1976 I am thirty-three years old, so Mary's already thirty. It's not as if—she's already thirty-one. But yeah, they—that I become—you know, and my mother died here, too. My mother spent her last two years—eighteen months of her life livin' in Fayetteville.

[01:11:48] SL: So when your father died, did you go back home?

RC: I did. I spent a year—I got lucky, but I was determined—he knew he was gonna die. He knew—you know, he was a doctor, and he knew what he had. When he found out—when he realized that he was sick, he went to the Mayo Clinic because he had sort of professional privileges.

SL: Right.

RC: So he got the best he could get in medical care.

SL: So I'm assuming cancer or . . .

RC: Yeah, it was a kidney cancer or renal cancer. He—so he sorta knew he was gonna die. I used to caddy for him on the golf course, and he said, "I—here's a—you know, I don't really know quite how long I've got left but"—and so I moved there to spend his last year with him. And at first I got a job as a truck driver. I was a UPS driver. That's one of those guys in a brown suit.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[01:12:42] RC: And the—and then halfway through that time period—maybe not exactly, but in the middle of that time period somewhere an ope—there was an opening. I'd gone by just on the outside chance 'cause I was what they called ABD. You know that is? You've got all your work done except you haven't written your dissertation yet.

SL: Oh, okay.

RC: All but dissertation.

SL: Okay.

RC: ABD. I had—that's what—that was my educational status at that point. I was at the University of Toronto because of Vietnam thing. I wanted to be able to not go in the army and get my Ph.D.

SL: So you got the 2-S exemption.

RC: Yeah, and that worked for the part of the time. There was one little window there where I was in a kinda limbo. But at any rate, I went by Ball State and said, "If you need somebody, you know, I'm available." And then I went back to drivin' my truck. And then that second semester—my dad died in December two days before his fifty-second birthday. And in January I did one semester teachin' English as an instructor at Ball State. And then I went on and got my first real academic—you know, there—that was a real academic job, but I got my first appointment. I was an assistant professor the following year in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, at Southern Miss. That's another story.

SL: Well, we'll get to that.

RC: Yeah, we'll get to that. But anyway, yeah—we—it—that's—I did spend the last year of my dad's life with—in Muncie with him.

[01:14:12] SL: Well, I'm just going to speculate that that probably had something to do with holding the siblings together, that you came back, and you were there, and at least the two children that were still there got to have you around, and . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . you were probably in some kind of a—your father was maybe just kind of in maintenance mode.

RC: Yeah, he wasn't doin' real well most of that time. There were ups and downs. I mean, he went back to work briefly.

SL: Right.

RC: I gotta say that I was not consciously—this is maybe not a great thing to say about myself, but it's true—I did not consciously play any kind of paternal role with either Emily or Steve. But physically, you're right. I was there, and that may have had some sort of adhesive effect—cohesion factor in why they might find it normal to relocate where I was. But that was—I was, for the most part, oblivious to that.

[01:15:21] SL: So how was the—how did your mother hold up during all this? I mean, it seems like to me that you were probably—I can't help but feel like just you being there kind of changed the dynamic in the house 'cause you hadn't been there for a while. And now all of a sudden, it's—even though you're not consciously doing this, you've kind of stepped up in some way.

RC: Well, that's a very nice way to put it, and I can certainly appreciate that. My mother was very strong during the—during his illness. I think she was kind of bushwhacked by it. I know—you know, I mean, this would almost always be the case. You're doin' fine. You know, you're thriving economically. Your kids are goin' to school.

SL: Everyone's healthy.

RC: Everyone's happy, and then, bang, you know, eighteen months later, you're dead.

SL: Right.

RC: Maybe even less than that. The—so she tried to do some things—she did—here's the way I'll put it—she did one thing very successfully. She went into church work even more assiduously than she had done before. She went back to school. She picked up a master's degree at Ball State in German.

SL: Wow. [*Laughs*]

RC: My mother was smart. I mean, she could do her academic stuff left-handed.

SL: Right.

[01:16:44] RC: She also did somethin' she probably, in retrospect, should not have done. She went to—she went into the workforce. Well, she hadn't been in the workforce for, you know, thirty years or twenty years, anyway.

SL: Right.

RC: Sh—and she immediately went into a fairly high-pressure job. She—I'll tell you what she did. She became the director of the county level—Muncie is in Delaware County, Indiana—she became the director of Delaware County Planned Parenthood.

SL: Wow.

RC: And she did not thrive in that job. The pressure of it got to her. She resigned. She resigned the job in less than a year. She wasn't poor. I mean, she had—you know, my father had left her in pretty good

shape. I don't think she had planned—you know, they had anticipated that she would be a widow longer than she had been a wife. You know, she lived nearly a half a century as a widow.

SL: Wow.

RC: But she was okay financially, at least for the first two decades of—and then by that time her kids are grown up and, you know, like Mary . . .

SL: Could band together.

RC: Yeah, when she really needed help at the end, Alison was a kind of caretaker daughter for a long, long time. And then in the final years, Mary stepped up, and she lived with Mary and Mary's husband, Garen, for the last year and a half of her life. And then she had—I was here and Emily was here. So she was—she had, you know . . .

[01:18:15] SL: She had her children around her.

RC: She had half of her kids local.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And she was visited—she lived with one and was visited every day by the others. So yeah, I mean, they did—I think that the most of the credit there goes to our parents. They did impose upon us a strong sense of family, which managed, for the most part, to withstand the [19]60s. You know, the [19]60s were just a horrible time for families, generally. They—all the stresses of, you know, that [19]60s revolutions of various kinds. It . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . tore families apart.

SL: Cuban Missile Crisis.

RC: Yeah. So at any rate, it's a—that's—I've never really thought of that, that my presence there might've been a kind of subliminal encouraging factor. It's a nice thought [*SL laughs*], but I was oblivious to it.

SM: Hey, Scott, we're at—almost eleven thirty now. Is now a good time to break?

SL: Yeah, let's stand up and . . .

RC: Walk around.

SL: . . . take a break.

[Tape stopped]

[01:19:16] SL: So, Bob, I just asked you, "Where were we?" We were just taking a little break . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . and you said, "I don't know," and I don't know.

RC: But I have this general sense that for the most part, we'd gone chronologically forward to at least Indiana. Is it—does that fit with your own recollection?

SL: Yeah, you know, I guess there's no memory of Hawaii at all.

RC: A lot of memory of Hawaii.

[01:19:43] SL: Oh, well, we need to probably talk about Hawaii.

RC: Okay. Yeah, no, I remember Hawaii vividly 'cause that was fourth grade.

SL: Okay.

RC: So you know, we talked a good bit about Bismarck, and Hawaii followed that.

SL: So you're not living in a grass hut in Hawaii.

RC: Oh no, we're living [*SL laughs*] in a very nice house. We're living in the home of a University of Hawaii botany professor who's on sabbatical.

SL: Ah.

[01:20:08] RC: 'Cause we're only—we know when we go, we're only gonna be there a year. I don't know, though—well, I sorta know that, but it was a residency. My father—you know, after you finish medical school when you have a specialty, in order to be board certified in that specialty, you undergo additional sort of apprenticeship.

SL: Right.

RC: And my father did two one-year residencies—one at a hospital that did nothing but deliver babies and he—his specialty was obstetrics. So he did a one-year residency at Kapiolani maternity hospital in Honolulu.

SL: In Hawaii. In Honolulu.

RC: And then he did a second, finishing-up residency in Atlanta at Emory . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . University Hospital, I think. I'm not absolutely certain of that, but I know it was in Atlanta. And that's where I went to fifth grade. So when we got to Hawaii in the fourth grade, we knew—the family knew they were gonna be there one year. We stayed in this very nice house, and I had new chores. [01:21:08] You had asked about chores. This house, because it belonged to a botany professor, had three greenhouses.

SL: Wow.

RC: And I was in charge—or not in charge, but I was charged with turning on the water at certain times to water the orchids.

SL: Whoa.

RC: You know, it's a very fancy place.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And again, my father—I told you how coddled he was as a camper. In Hawaii, he was coddled at the breakfast table 'cause he could literally look out the window, and there were papaya trees and mango trees and guava trees and fig trees, all because of this botany professor had really—he'd lived there a long time, and he had turned his yard into a kind of orchard.

SL: Orchard. Yeah.

RC: And I would be sent outside. He would point out the window—this is

literally true, Scott—he would point out the window and say, "You see that papaya in that second clump off there on the left-hand side? Get me that papaya, would you?" And I'd go outside, and I had these long clippers, you know. 'Cause you can't climb papaya trees. Their trunks are . . .

SL: Too fragile.

RC: They won't support you.

SL: Yeah.

[01:22:16] RC: And I would clip the—clip that papaya and catch it, you know, and bring it in, and he would eat it. So he would order his fruit, breakfast fruit, from the table. This happened—you know, it didn't happen every day, but it happened, you know, quite a few times. "I'd like that mango." You know, "Get me"—he wouldn't specify—"Get me a couple of guavas," you know. So it was wonderful. It was . . .

SL: That is paradise.

RC: I experienced Hawaii as a paradise. And ethnically—I'm really glad you brought this up—it set me up ethnically for the rest of my life . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . in terms of attitudes toward ethnicity and race.

SL: Okay.

[01:22:53] RC: I went to a school called Manoa Valley elementary school. There were—I was in the fourth grade, like I said. There were maybe

twenty-five kids—my class—twenty, twenty-five kids. Maybe five of those kids were what Hawaiians call haoles—*H-A-O-L-E*, which means white folks. And it was like the United Nations in there. There were Philippine kids, there were Chinese kids, there were Japanese kids, Korean kids—you know, you name it. So I was in a fourth-grade classroom where a bigot would've been crazed. You know, he wouldn't have b—he or she wouldn't have been able to figure out who the hell they were supposed to hate, you know. [*Laughter*] And it was—they were fourth graders. Now Hawaii, as you probably know, has a good bit of tension in it. You know, there's a lot of tensions between different ethnic groups in Hawaii. Not in the fourth grade. Fourth grade was insulated from that. Now maybe it was at the school level. Maybe it was just at my classroom teacher level. But I remember that year as just habituating me to the world that, increasingly, we all live in. [01:24:03] I was livin' in that world in 1952 when the school was utterly integrated. Integrated to a level that many schools would find it difficult to imagine, even today. And where it played out with kids, the only place we even noticed ethnicity or cultural difference in background was there was no cafeteria. We all brought our lunches.

SL: Ah.

RC: Every kid brought lunch in a bag. And when the bell rang and we were dismissed—and it's Hawaii, right?

SL: Yeah.

RC: I mean, we spent a year there. My father was proud of this. The lowest temperature he experienced in his year and two months, maybe, in Hawaii, was fifty-seven degrees. And the highest temperature that he experienced in his entire year was eighty-three degrees.

SL: Perfect.

[01:24:49] RC: So in short, unless it was raining, we ate outside. And so we'd all come charging out of the classroom—picture this—every one of us carrying a lunch bag or lunch box—and a market would be set up because everybody exoticized the food of other people. So I was able, just to give an example—I would go out there with ham and cheese sandwiches or bologna sandwiches, whatever my mother had made. And I would trade those sandwiches for teriyaki sticks [*SL laughs*] or seaweed rolls . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . or, you know—and every other kid was doin' the same thing. So it was . . .

SL: So the white—you were the guy with the white bread.

RC: I was the guy with the white bread. Yeah. And it was [*SL laughs*], in retrospect, absolutely paradisal. Because I moved from there to haw—from Hawaii to Atlanta, where it was the exact opposite.

[01:25:43] When I was in the fifth grade I would look out the window—this happened once a month. A truck would pull up, and people would get out of the truck with leg irons on, and somebody would unlock the leg irons. And these prisoners would then pick up rakes and stuff and lawn-mowing equipment, and they would do the grounds. They would clean the grounds of the school in Atlanta. It was done by prisoners, many of them . . .

SL: Mostly African American.

[01:26:12] RC: Mostly African Americans. No African Americans in my class. Class in the fifth grade was 100 percent haoles, 100 percent white folks. And the—every day in my class in Atlanta in the fifth grade, we said the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. There was a flag over in the corner.

SL: Sure.

RC: The teacher read a Bible verse and then—you're not gonna believe this, but I swear it's true—we sang "Dixie." We sang "Dixie" every day in my fifth-grade class. And the first day there . . .

SL: Wow.

RC: . . . my first day in class, I didn't know "Dixie." Never heard of "Dixie," you know. So the teacher asked me. She was very nice. I liked her. Her name was Miss Gillam. Miss Gillam asked me—and she was very pretty, as I remember—Miss Gillam asked me, you know,

that—you know, why I didn't know—"You don't know 'Dixie', and where did you come from?" And I said that I had just arrived from Hawaii. And this cracked up my parents. She then explained to the class that I would—that it would take me a little time to learn "Dixie," that I had just arrived from Hawaii, which was at that time not a state. It was a territory still—from the territory of Hawaii. "So he is a Yankee." She used the word Yankee. So I didn't get it at the time but, you know, Miss Gillam's head was constructed in such a way that if . . .

SL: If you weren't from . . .

RC: . . . you were an American citizen not from the Confederate States, you were a Yankee.

SL: Yeah.

[01:27:36] RC: You didn't have to be from New England. You could be from Hawaii. So imagine that contrast, Scott, between Manoa Valley with nine or ten or eleven different ethnic and cultural mixes in a fourth-grade classroom, to Morningside high—Morningside School in Atlanta. I had it, and I had it down after that. You know, I mean, I—there—one was better than the other in my head. And . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . one was retrograde. And my parents were, you know, they were social liberals and they—you know. Somebody asked me in that same

year whether I was Jewish or Gentile, and I knew the word Jewish, but I'd never heard the word Gentile in the fifth grade. And I said, "I guess I'm just an American," which, you know, I have a Ph.D. now, and I can't do better.

SL: Right.

RC: That's it. That's—so the fourth and fifth grade—you—if we hadn't done that, we wouldn't have got either of those stories. You know, that was absolutely formative for me, that fourth-grade year in Hawaii. It's been my image of an unfallen social world, you know, kind of prelapsarian Eden, ever since.

[01:28:54] SL: Well, and for that matter, fifth grade.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Completely . . .

RC: Completely different. Really highlighted it.

SL: Hundred and eighty degrees.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And the leg irons.

RC: Yeah, they would stand there. You know, they knew the drill . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . so they'd clump off the truck, you know, in order and then just stand there till the guy went and unlocked their leg irons. And they had stripes. I mean, they—it's that old Johnny Cash song, "I Got

Stripes." They were wearin', you know, sorta grey-and-white stripes.

SL: The stripes.

RC: Now and I don't want to exaggerate. I mean, there was no gun-toting guy on a horse or anything like that from—that you picture from movies.

SL: Right.

RC: I'm not sure I ever . . .

SL: You weren't . . .

RC: . . . remember seeing a gun.

SL: Didn't see . . .

RC: Maybe somebody had a pistol in a holster but, you know.

SL: Steve McQueen wasn't shakin' it out here, Boss, or . . .

RC: No, no. [*SL laughs*] Uh-uh. But it was sufficiently depressing, nonetheless, you know, to see people in chains. I never heard of such a thing.

[01:29:52] SL: So I am assuming you eventually learned to sing "Dixie."

RC: I did. Yeah. And I had no objection to singing "Dixie." And once I learned the words, you know, my parents were pretty quick to say the sooner old times there were forgotten, the better off we are.

SL: Right.

RC: But no, I did not become ideologically Southern. I did become—while I was here, I became Southern in certain ways. I love Southern

cookin', you know.

SL: Well, yeah.

RC: My way—I'm not a up-to-date person in the way I handle vegetables. I cook the hell out of 'em, just like Southern, you know, people do. [*Laughter*] But ideologically, I was—I did not make the transition.

[01:30:39] SL: Well, so were you—in fifth grade, you're still just basically doing recess. There's not any real elementary athletics going on.

RC: No, no.

SL: I'm assuming you probably were playing four square and hopscotch and tag.

RC: Yeah, and we played softball.

SL: And maybe some softball.

RC: We had softball teams, yeah.

SL: Oh, you did.

RC: But . . .

SL: And so those were totally segregated.

RC: Yeah, the school was totally segregated. There were only white people at my school. I had no black teachers or stu—fellow students.

SL: So were—how—were you in a suburb of Atlanta or were you actually in . . .

RC: We were actually in Atlanta. Yeah.

[01:31:27] SL: And so—let's see, you're probably seeing movies by then.

RC: A little bit, but not much. That's—mostly starts in Indiana . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . in sixth grade.

SL: Well, I'm just thinking of all the segregated places. I mean, were—did you see any of the whites only or . . .

RC: Yeah, I did.

SL: . . . colored stuff here?

RC: I did, but not in Atlanta very much. I saw it—where I saw it—and it was focused on one thing—my folks stopped to have a picnic lunch. I think we were somewhere in Texas, although it could've been Louisiana. We stopped to have a picnic lunch, and the water fountains were labeled white and colored. Having been away from Hawaii for three days, I honestly thought when I first heard it that there would be something like red or white or, you know, red or yellow water come out of the colored fountain. I didn't understand its racial tie at all.

[01:32:25] SL: Dan Ferritor had the same experience.

RC: Really?

SL: Yeah.

RC: Yeah. Now—and I had experienced a water f—this is just a ten-second sidebar—my family—we flew around to visit other Hawaiian islands while we lived in Hawaii. My parents continued their travel.

SL: Right.

RC: And so we went to this big—we took an official tour of a big pineapple plantation, Dole, a big Dole pineapple plantation.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And they had a fountain in their reception room that you pushed on a button and pineapple juice came out.

SL: Wow!

RC: And I was thrilled by that.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I thought that was really cool.

SL: That is really cool. [*Laughs*]

[01:33:04] RC: So then down there in Texas, I see this fountain labeled white and colored.

SL: Right. You didn't know what flavor you were gonna get.

RC: And I actually expected colored water to come out. And my parents hipped me to—you know, when we left—you know, 'cause I was disappointed. Just regular water came out.

SL: So you were actually drinking from the colored . . .

RC: I was. Yeah, I thought it had a greater appeal, you know. But—and nobody saw me. There was no scene or no . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . objection or anything. But my parents then—I don't remember their talks, but we had little talks about how the South was different.

[01:33:38] By that time my parents were—you know, they were middle-class people, and my mother had, you know, five kids to take care of. So we had a housekeeper, and we had a maid, as they called 'em, who came in two or three times a week to help my mother.

SL: And she was African American.

RC: And that was—she was African American, yeah. And I did notice one thing, that even kids called her by her first name. I did—I was aware of that. And my parents didn't object to that. She—they asked her what her name was, and she told 'em the first name. I don't remember her name. But then when in Muncie, we had a housekeeper who came for years and years. And you know, this sort of ventures to the edge of stereotype, but she became, you know, very much beloved in our . . .

SL: Part of the family.

RC: . . . family.

SL: Yeah.

[01:34:26] RC: And my—I bought my—you—we'd talked earlier about my first records. The first records I bought were from her husband, who was a blind man. Ran a record store out of his home. And when she heard that I was gettin' interested to—in buyin' records, she said, "My husband, Herman, sells records." And so you know, she would bring me my Chuck Berry records and my things, and I would pay her, and

that was very nice. I took her and my mother—they both wanted to go to the Kentucky Derby. And so I took—this is much, much later—I drove them, these two women together, to the Kentucky Derby, one white; one black. And she wasn't workin' that day. She was, you know—but you know, there were times when I was obnoxious, when I became sort of aggressively aware of civil rights issues. [01:35:21] I remember once we were goin' to a funeral, and I asked her to sit up front with me, and she refused. She said—and she wa—she rebuked me—she said, "You know, you don't live here. I do."

SL: There you go.

RC: You know, it was that simple. She said she didn't need any . . .

SL: That's the way Helena is now.

RC: She was like, you know, "I know where you're comin' from, young folks, but you know" . . .

SL: Don't stir it up.

RC: . . . "you're out of town next week, and I'm not. So" . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . "thanks for the invite, but I'm sittin' back here."

SL: Man, that stuff is still around.

[01:35:54] SL: Yeah, so—you know, and there's some nice stuff to that story. She—my father was a person who liked to have new cars, you know. And he was wealthy by this time. By this time—by the time I

was in college he had his own plane. He'd gotten a—he hadn't gotten to move, so he had these little—he had the—you know, my mom made him settle down, so he had these ways of sort of indulging his nomad thing. So he got a pilot's license, right.

SL: Right.

RC: And he bought a plane, and he'd fly around in it. At any rate . . .

SL: So you got to fly with him?

RC: I did. I did, yeah.

SL: Okay.

RC: Quite a few times, actually.

SL: Yeah.

[01:36:31] RC: But he loved to buy a new car every two years. He liked to—and he had bu—he was a Buick guy. He loved Buicks. So every year—every two years he would get a new Buick. [*SL laughs*] And he found out that one of the things that Della—Della Russell was her name—that was the housekeeper. He found out—she occasionally expressed admiration for his Buicks and thought they—so he said, "Well, how's your car?", basically, you know, and she said, well, she needed to get a different car. This car wasn't workin' real well. So he worked out a deal for the last two or three cars. Every time he bought a new car, he would sell her the old car for some, you know, like, very rock bottom . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . thing. And my sister, Emily, is the one to tell that story 'cause she was still at home. And she said that Della would relish the decision when my father would announce that he was gonna get a new car because . . .

SL: Meant . . .

RC: . . . she knew she would be comin' into the next car.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And she would tool around in his big—in her . . .

SL: Two-year-old Buick.

RC: . . . two-year-old—new—you know . . .

SL: Which . . .

RC: . . . her new Buick.

SL: Right.

[01:37:40] RC: And so we—they had a very good relationship. But she and my mother became very close. When the first granddaughter was born, my mother was afraid to fly in my dad's little plane. When Mary had her first child, which was the first grandchild for my parents and the only one my dad lived to see—you know, he died before the second grandchild was born. He came home and announced, when the call came in from Nashville—they lived in Nashville then 'cause Mary went to Vanderbilt. They—he said that the child had been born

and that he was gonna to fly down to see her. And she and Della, my mom and Della, were welcome to join him if they were willing to fly in his plane. But otherwise, he was—he wasn't gonna drive. He was flyin'. And they overcame their fear. Della and my mom got on the plane for the only time in their lives—the only time in their lives they flew to Nashville with him to see the new baby. So you know, we fit that standard stereotype of the beloved retainer in some way.

SL: Right.

RC: But you know, there were limits to that, and we sorta learned to—at least I learned when she told me, "You know, thanks, but I'll [*laughs*] sit in the back," you know.

SL: Yeah.

RC: "You live—you don't live here, and I do."

[01:38:59] SL: You know, I guess it was your dad's dad that did the social work?

RC: Yeah. Boy, you're right. Yeah, exactly right.

SL: And so I wonder if that engagement with community somehow or nother became intrinsic in your father's look on life, and somehow or another, you know, that social interaction with the community kinda opened you up to—opened your family up to being more accepting or understanding where someone is coming from, you know, in a social way.

RC: Well, I hope that would be true. It would've been appropriate. I think my dad was an extensive—was an instinctive social liberal. Now he may have gotten it from his father and his father's involvement with the public, you know, welfare systems. I just don't know. We never talked about that. [01:40:06] I do know, in support of that, that the one friend he made the year in Hawaii was a fellow resident at that Kapiolani maternity hospital. He made a lifelong friend of a Japanese . . .

SL: Ah.

RC: . . . obstetrician named Ogami. Well, you know, Dr. Noboru Ogami. He had s—he was—he hadn't served in the Japanese Army. He had—he was from Hawaii, and he had served in the American Army in the 442nd. But he . . .

SL: Yeah, but that doesn't necessarily mean great things . . .

RC: No.

SL: . . . for that family.

RC: But he—no, but he was still Japanese, you know.

SL: Right. Exactly.

RC: And they became very close friends. They were real buddies. So I think in a—my father was not a political activist, you know. And in fact he could be pretty conservative. He voted for Goldwater. But socially, I think he was a liberal—in—you know, just an instinctive

liberal. And when he died the two clergymen who conducted this memorial service for him—'cause he was a doctor. He was kind of a cheese in the town . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, fairly big wheel. He would—he had been active enough in providing medical services for underserved populations, which were basically two in that town. Students at Ball State University . . .

SL: And African Americans.

RC: . . . and African Americans.

SL: Right.

RC: One of the two clergymen was the pastor of one of the African American churches in town who had become a good friend.

SL: Gotta be proud.

RC: So we weren't frontline social activists at all, but my parents set a—I'll just leave it that—they set a liberal example. They set a good example.

[01:41:43] SL: You know, I forgot to ask you this—and this is a question about your father. Did he ever talk at all about his war experiences?

RC: Yeah, but he only had one war story.

SL: All right.

RC: He loved World War II books by Bill Mauldin. He loved the cartoonist.

SL: Okay.

RC: He thought Bill ma—one of the first books he ever shared with me was a book called *Up Front,* which is a Bill Mauldin—you know, it's a—he wrote—Bill Mauldin wrote it, but it's mostly—the appeal is these cartoons . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . of Willie and Joe, you know, the . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: But the only war story he liked to tell me—'cause I asked him the usual dumb-ass questions. You know, "Did you ever shoot anybody?" and stuff life that.

SL: Well, yeah.

RC: "And did you ever get shot at?" And he just parried those. He said, "That's not interesting. Here's what's interesting."

SL: Hmm. That's . . .

[01:42:32] RC: And he said, "That's"—you know, he said, "Here's the story you need to hear. When I was on Guam, you know, we didn't take very many Japanese prisoners 'cause Japanese soldiers were reluctant to—you know, their honor required them to die."

SL: Right.

RC: Says, "But when we did, you know who sewed 'em up? Me." He said, "You know, they—when I would be operating, you know, and then that"—he would tell the story that said, "Look, when a guy's covered in

blood and you're sort of cutting his uniform off of him so you can get the shrapnel out of him, you know, you can't really tell which army he's in for a while, you know."

SL: Right.

RC: So he said that the—he made it clear in the abstract that being a doctor trumped everything. When he went into the operating room, he was a doctor. And what they put on the table in front of him was what he was supposed to sew up and . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . make well to the best of his ability. That's the war story he liked to tell. He said that occasionally he sewed up Japanese prisoners. That was his—that was really his only war story.

[01:43:50] SL: That kinda falls into . . .

RC: Falls right into what you've been talkin' about.

SL: . . . the typical veteran stance. As far as family goes, many veterans just wouldn't say anything about the war.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Wouldn't talk about it.

RC: And that was—he—except for that one story, which he—you know, whenever he was asked, that's what would roll out . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . you know.

SL: So it was not—you never really got any definitive answers from him. He just parried into that story.

RC: He parried into that story, yeah.

SL: So that thing . . .

RC: He wanted to tell doctor stories, not war stories.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Well, apparently he was sparing you . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . the nightmares, I'm sure.

[01:44:27] RC: And I, of course, in retrospect, I realize that my questions were pretty callow, you know.

SL: Yeah, but they're—it's—you know, how many—by that time, how many war films had there been? And you know, there's all the newspaper stuff about casualties and . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . kids coming home in boxes and you know . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: The whole—there's a cost.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And one of the costs is, you know, dying . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . getting wounded, or killing someone.

RC: Sure.

SL: So I think that's a very honest question.

RC: Yeah.

SL: But that doesn't make it any—it doesn't provide any haven for the veteran . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . to respond.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[01:45:13] RC: And I think that even he, to some degree—because if you're a surgeon, of course, you're not—you're—armies don't like to have their surgeons get killed, you know, so surgeons are never really right . . .

SL: Are not out on the front lines.

RC: . . . out on the front lines.

SL: But they're messin' with the carnage.

RC: They're—yeah, and so he had a sense that he had been spared the worst of it himself, I think. You know, he was waiting, when the worst of it was over or when the worst of it was happened, he was waiting to clean it up, you know.

SL: That's a tough place to be.

RC: Yeah. And you know, he did say that there were times that he worked till he was just bone tired, that he would go in to, you know, to . . .

SL: Well, they were standing.

RC: . . . sew up one body, and they pulled it off the table and slap another one right down.

SL: Here comes the other one. Yeah.

RC: Yeah.

[01:46:03] SL: Not nearly as pretty as *M*A*S*H*.

RC: No. Uh-uh. And so he—I mean, I'm sure it was horrific, but what came to the surface at—in the pictures he sent home from Guam, in particular. He spent more time on Guam than any other, by far—any other place. They were mostly what you'd call tourist or ethnographic pictures. I have a lot of old pictures at home labeled something like, "Chamorro man with ox cart" on the back . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know. He was a camera buff, you know.

[01:46:31] SL: You know, I was gonna ask you about—because I did have some—what was it—was it a videotape that I digitized and gave a DVD or . . .

RC: You made . . .

SL: . . . copied a DVD or so . . .

RC: You did, and it was—what it was was—he was one of the earliest

eight- and mainly sixteen-millimeter . . .

SL: Wow.

RC: . . . film buffs. Here's the story. As early as 1951 when we went to Hawaii, we drove to the West Coast. And my father—I'm old enough to remember this 'cause I was privileged. My dad used to—this made me feel special—there were a good number of times—he wu—it'd be like that forty-two below zero thing.

SL: Right.

[01:47:14] RC: He didn't take everybody. He just took me, you know. So in some ways he favored me, and partly just 'cause I was the oldest, but maybe partly 'cause I was male. Who knows? But when we got to . . .

SL: One doesn't deny the other, by the way.

RC: Yeah, when he got to—when we got to LA, he told me—he explained everything to me. He said, "I wanna go out to the airport and take a picture of a plane, Pan Am Airways plane, takin' off for Hawaii because when I'm on the plane, I won't be able to take a picture of it. And I want a" . . .

SL: So he was . . .

RC: . . . "narrative of our trip to" . . .

SL: He was thinking.

RC: So he was a film director.

SL: Editing.

RC: So when he got all done—he had one of those little splicing machines and . . .

SL: Absolutely.

RC: . . . stuff. So you know, I got to go with him. I didn't share his interest in the mechanics of it, but I saw—but I did see this kind of amateur Cecil B. DeMille. You know, that he was—so he had to do three things. He had to go out to the airport in L.A. and take a picture of this plane takin' off. And then when we were on the plane he took—he filmed the interior of the plane, out the window and the props and stuff.

SL: Right.

[01:48:16] RC: And then once we landed in Hawaii, he made another special trip out . . .

SL: To get one . . .

RC: . . . to the Honolulu Airport. You got it. And then he spliced it all together to create a narrative. We had—I mean, I'm ashamed to say that we lost 90 percent of it 'cause it just deteriorated—you know, just family movies. But he was a tireless shooter. And most of it was boring because I don't give a shit about his pictures of Boulder Dam, finally.

SL: Right.

RC: 'Cause if it doesn't have one of us in it . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . then I just skip through it, you know. But he would linger for thirty seconds on a—we had a—our front yard in Hawaii had a big century plant—one of those big agave kind of . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:48:56] RC: And there's a—we had a movie where he shot that thing for a minute and a half. You know, he just stayed on that plant. And we all just think, "What in the world are you doing, you know." So anyway, he—it was a little bit of the frustrated ethnographer in him.

SL: Yeah, but . . .

RC: He was entirely happy in his obstetrician gig, but . . .

SL: Right, right. But you know, that—of course, coming from a videographer . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, that is a resume of what—of interest. Or of . . .

RC: Yeah, of what a good—what a person could have been a good videographer. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean that he chose that plant to burn a minute and a half of film, which is a lot of film.

RC: Yeah.

SL: But . . .

RC: And I might have exaggerated a little bit, but it seemed forever, you know. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right. Well . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, the—obviously there was something about it, and he may have been messing—I don't know—he may have been messing with the mechanics of the camera.

RC: Yeah, and I might—I wouldn't have even noticed that. You're right. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, but you know, it might be worth a—if you have that kind of stuff layin' around, you might be worth a second visit to notice the subtle things that are going on because that's him.

RC: Yeah.

SL: I mean, that's actually him . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . delivering something there that's—you know, that would interest me.

RC: And it tells you somethin' about his personality.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And you're quite right.

SL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:50:19] RC: And I think at the most general level, I did get to say that

to you earlier. He was a—he—it's wrong to use old age for him 'cause he didn't live to old age, but he lived—he kept for his whole life a kind of boyish capacity for wonder and enthusiasm, you know. And to some—whenever people say that—'cause that's an adjective that's been applied to me . . .

SL: Sure.

RC: . . . sometimes. And I'm always pleased when I hear it 'cause I think, "Well, yeah, I'm that guy's son," you know.

SL: You came by it honest.

RC: Yeah, that—'cause he had that.

SL: Yeah. And it's a—you know, it's that old—it's the good die young thing. I mean, it sounds like he really burned, you know, for those fifty-one years.

RC: Yeah. No, he packed a lot in.

SL: He really maximized—yeah.

RC: He did pack a lot into it. Yeah, he wasn't a guy who was burning for a particular cause, but he just enjoyed himself.

SL: Right.

[01:51:16] RC: Yeah, that's true. And my mother—whenever she would talk about it, she said, "You know, it was wonderful to be with him." So I think she appreciate—she—they were very well-matched in that sense 'cause they were complimentary. They weren't the same.

SL: Yeah.

RC: But they were radically complimentary, you know.

SL: Well . . .

[01:51:39] RC: I feel the same way about Suzanne and I, in some ways. You know, that in some ways . . .

SL: I think of both of y'all as being totally academic with . . .

RC: Yeah, but I'm lookin'—I mean, when I look at them and compare them to—I think this is just a cliché, but I mean—I obviously didn't consciously go looking for my mother.

SL: Right.

RC: But Suzanne has a capacity for seeing the big picture that I lack. I can be real tunnel if I'm workin' on somethin' at a given time. She is, you know, she is a person who's—as she uses—this is the phrase she uses: Planted by the water. I mean, she's a planted person. She puts down roots. And I'm not, and I needed that. I needed, you know, somethin'—somebody to say—it's just like my mom told my dad in Muncie. "Time to stop. You know, kids [*SL laughs*] need one place to go to high school."

SL: Right.

RC: And so I've benefitted from that. And she's real well organized, you know, and she's a good manager over there at the university running a big shop. And whereas I'm the guy who works on one thing at a

time or two, but not, you know, handling a big deal. I couldn't manage eight or ten people, let alone ninety, you know.

[01:52:58] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, I got to do a few things with Suzanne when I was over in Media Services. And it was always just a great—I mean, whenever I'd turn something in to her and she liked it, it was like, you know, "This is great!" [*Laughs*]

RC: Yeah, 'cause you know she's payin' attention.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Yeah. It's not just automa . . .

SL: Yeah, there's a bar there that . . .

RC: It's not just automatic, like, "Yeah, this is fine. Get outta here." No, she's lookin' at it.

SL: No.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Right, right, right.

[01:53:23] RC: Oh yeah, when the—I think the University Press when they first—I mean, and this is a great—you brought it up. It's a great story to show the difference. When Suzanne and I wrote that book together for the film exhib . . .

SL: Movies.

RC: Movies book.

SL: Yeah.

RC: The first cover they had was derived from the monster film, you know, the—not *Boggy Creek*, but the *Creature From The Black Lagoon*.

SL: From the back—loon, yeah.

RC: And [*SL laughs*] they sent the cover around, and I said, "Terrific," and passed it on. She said, "You gotta be kidding." She said [*laughs*]—'cause she—you know, she did exactly what you said, she looked at it, and she said, "Did you notice that my name," meaning her in this case, "is right there beside the woman in the bathing suit? And your picture as an [*SL laughs*] author is right under the monster. You really want this?" You know, and so she let the Press know that this wasn't cool—and back to the drawing board. And then they came out with that cover with the big, enlarged single-frame from a—beautiful.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You know. And she said what she said to you—"This is good. Thank you very much. This will do."

SL: Yeah.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RC: See, I would've just passed on it, you know, and I did. I did just say, "That's fine with me." Did a barely glanced at it 'cause it wasn't what I what I was workin' on at that time. So it's a perfect example of what you're talkin' about.

[01:54:41] SL: Okay, so here's another question that—and it's—you're within viewing of the Missouri River. You end up in Hawaii. You're surrounded [*laughs*] by the ocean.

RC: Yeah.

SL: So tell me, did you—did your dad or anyone ever take you to the river to fish, or did you spend any time in a boat or a canoe or—I mean, was there any kind of interaction with the bodies of water that you were raised around?

RC: Yeah, I di—but it didn't take. My grandparents—especially my maternal grandfather was an avid fisherman. My other grandfather didn't fish. But my mom's dad was an avid fisherman, and he and my dad together would take me fishing in West Virginia. I was a terrible fisherman. And . . .

SL: Gosh, that's great water though.

RC: Yeah, and they were good. And they hunted, too. In Bismarck they went pheasant hunting. So it's one of the things that Dad did with his father-in-law, was hunt and fish. It didn't catch with me. [01:55:49] I was clumsy as a fisherman. On one particularly embarrassing occasion—you know, when you fish with minnows, you go out and get the minnows early in the morning.

SL: That's right.

RC: And you store 'em in the creek.

SL: Yep.

RC: Well, I didn't . . .

SL: In a tin bucket with holes in it.

RC: . . . take the outer bucket off.

SL: Oh!

RC: And they all died . . .

SL: Yes.

RC: . . . while we were having breakfast. And it was the one time in my life that my grandfather spoke with—he lost his temper just for a minute with me—not so bad that my father intervened or anything, but you know, he turned to me, and he said, "How could you do that, you know?" [*SL laughs*] And of course, I didn't—and I was defensive. I didn't say anything. I just tucked under. [gesture] I turtled.

SL: Right.

RC: But I member thinkin', "Well, you know"—I don't want to say bad words on this interview, but I remember thinkin', "What the hell? You know, I'm a kid. I'm twelve years old. I've never been fishin'. I'm supposed to know this? You know, you told me to put the bucket in the creek. I put the bucket in the creek."

SL: Right.

RC: In other words, I wasn't intimidated, but I did feel like maybe I should've figured that out, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Maybe I should've—you know, that I wasn't cut out for life as an outdoorsman. [*SL laughs*] So I—the thing is, yes, I was exposed to that 'cause my dad was a water rat. Here's a funny story on that. When I was in Muncie in my sophomore, junior year in high school, I was a lifeguard . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . at the pool.

SL: Okay.

RC: Well, you're at that age where your parents are an embarrassment, period—you know.

SL: Well . . .

RC: They—they're there, they're an embarrassment.

SL: Right.

[01:38:59] RC: My father was terrific in the water. He courted my mother with his skills as a swimmer and diver. So while all the other dads are out on the golf course, my dad, in Hawaiian swimming trunks in Muncie, Indiana, 'cause he loved gawdy Hawaiian swimming trunks—would go up on a high board and do somersaults. I mean, the guy was a great diver. I mean, he's on the upper high board goin' off, doin' somersaults, going into the water. And I'm on the lifeguard stand just cringing, you know. There's my dad with with his Hawaiian

trunks. [*SL laughs*] And he—and my mother was a good swimmer, too, so they were water people, but I was not. And I would say, "Dad, come on, man. You know, you—there're no other dads up there doin' this." And my dad was utterly unintimidated. He said, "That's 'cause they can't."

SL: That's right.

RC: He said—says, "They can't. When you can do—the day you get up there and do that, I'll get down." He knew for—you know, I couldn't . . .

SL: Not gonna happen.

RC: One, I couldn't do it. And so he said—but he used to tease me that way. He said, "The day you want to take my place up there, I'm off the high board, you know. But you know, get used to it. You know, I enjoy it. I'm good at it. Get used to it." And so no, it didn't take. [01:58:29] And then in Hawaii, where we had the ocean, he would take us to the ocean a lot. My mother worried a lot about undertows and things like that.

SL: Well, sure.

RC: And we would bodysurf, but I did not—I wasn't quite old enough—fifth—fourth grade.

SL: Right.

RC: Not quite old enough to really get out beyond the reef and . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . try to learn how to surf. And my dad didn't know to surf.

SL: Right.

RC: So we went out on these glass-bottom boats to see reefs and fish and stuff like that. But no, I would say that I did not really . . .

SL: You didn't have a big attraction to it.

RC: No. Uh-uh.

[01:59:00] SL: Well, what about the scouting thing?

RC: That lasted till Muncie. And about the same time I asked 'em about church, I asked 'em about scouting. I said, "You know, I'm gettin' too old for that. I'm busy with sports. Can I quit scouting?" And again, they were pretty good about it. They wanted me to go to church, but they didn't insist that I stay in scouting a day longer. I didn't even make it as far as my dad. I forget what the rank was.

SL: First class.

RC: But it—yeah, but then there's one between that and, like, Star.

SL: Star.

RC: I was a Star Scout.

SL: Yeah, Star, then Life, then Eagle. Yeah.

RC: Yeah, I made it to Star but then stopped.

SL: I didn't get past second class. [*Laughs*]

RC: Yeah. It just wasn't for me. And then also—then, in retrospect, the

kind of—the—my Scoutmaster may have had somethin' to do with it. He was a jerk.

SL: Ah.

RC: He was one of these paramilitary guys.

SL: Right.

RC: Attention and this kinda bullshit. And then I . . .

SL: Right.

RC: You know [*SL laughs*], and I didn't need it. You know, I was reachin' the age where I just didn't need that.

SL: Right.

[01:59:58] RC: Which brings us—if you want, thi—I did have one traumatic school experience in high school. My sophomore year I got in a fight with another kid, the richest kid in school. We were good friends most of the time, but we got in a physical fight—a guy named Mike Fisher, richest kid in my class. He and I—you know, we didn't hurt each other. We just pummeled away at each other, and we were separated. And the gym teacher took us in his office and paddled us. And he did it in a way that today would get him arrested. He made us pull down our shorts so we were bare-assed, and he had one of these fraternity paddles, and he made us bend over and grab our ankles, and he paddled us, and it hurt. It hurt a lot. And I—and for the rest of my life, I've thought, "You son of a bitch. You know, if you—if one

more year—one year later you had told me to do that, I'd told you to shove that paddle up your ass." But that—he got me in the last vulnerable year, where I was just deferential enough. I knew it was wrong. I knew he couldn't do it, in my head. But I didn't have the strength of character to stand up to this—what I now perceive as a sadistic and even pedophilic . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . guy, and tell him where to put his paddle. [02:01:28] But—so if you had to take the thing—it's not the biggest trauma. The biggest trauma was the death of my dad. But the thing where I most regret that I can't wind time back and redo that particular scene that—you know, that has—you won't see that kind of ferocity in me in this whole interview except there—that's the one I would pick, and I would wring that mother's neck. I'd say, you know—I wouldn't physically assault him, but I'd say, "Good luck with that. Good luck with gettin' me to go into your office and pull my shorts down for you and your paddle." And—but I didn't . . .

SL: Yeah, but back then he probably wouldn't have gotten in trouble for that.

RC: Yeah, maybe not. He would've gotten in trouble with my old man.

SL: Yeah?

RC: My old man [*laughs*] would've . . .

SL: Yeah, there's that.

[02:02:08] RC: Yeah. But at any rate, I've—you know, I'd've walked out of the school the next year, you know. "I'll be at home. Call me if I'm suspended," you know.

SL: Really?

RC: Yeah. One year later, I was—I turned a corner after that 'cause I boiled inside after that.

SL: Right.

RC: I said, "Okay, that's happened. And the lesson I've drawn from this one is this will not happen again, you know. Over my dead body, this will happen again." So it was—I mean, and what reminded—I'm not sure what triggered that, you know, in the course of our discussion but—remember I said I got in trouble for somethin'. Anyway, enough on that one.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I had a mostly privileged and sheltered and happy youth, as I hope has become clear here, but . . .

[02:02:57] SL: So let's see, in fifth grade were you . . .

RC: I was . . .

SL: . . . in Muncie already or . . .

RC: No, sixth grade . . .

SL: Sixth grade.

RC: . . . was the first grade in Muncie. And that happened in, like, eighth grade—somethin' like that.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Still junior high.

SL: Yeah.

[02:03:10] RC: But yeah, by the time I—I was a sassy kid by the time I got into high school, you know. I—'cause I knew—I mean, I realized by that time that I could protect myself verbally. Hell, my senior year in high school, when I was pitchin' a baseball team, I was talkin' one time and I probably shouldn't have been talkin', and the coach said—he turned to me—head coach—and they didn't know quite how to deal with me at this time. The head coach turned, and he said, "Shut up, Cochran." Said, "You got diarrhea of the mouth." [*SL laughs*] And I said, "Well, I wouldn't tr—you know, that may be true, but I don't have anemia of the mind."

SL: Ooh!

RC: And you know, just [slaps hands together] like that. And he was—I mean, it's like I'd slapped him.

SL: Well, yeah. You did.

RC: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] And I don't know if—you know, he didn't do anything. He just sorta took in a deep breath and went on to what he was doin'. But you know [*laughs*], I don't know what caused me to do

stuff like that, but I was—by the time I was a junior and senior, I'd talk back. But before that, I was Mr. Tractable.

SL: So you . . .

SM: Hey, Scott.

SL: Yeah.

SM: Excuse me. We're at twelve thirty and forty-five minutes in.

SL: Okay.

SM: Pizza should be here shortly.

SL: Okay. Well, why don't we go ahead and break right here?

RC: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:04:35] SL: So we've had our lunch break.

RC: Yeah, we're ready to go. Ready to roll.

SL: We pigged out on some pizza. And I think where we left off—I think I've gotten you to high school.

RC: Okay.

SL: Junior high, high school. And so where are we now? Where are we living now?

RC: Muncie, Indiana.

SL: Muncie, Indiana.

RC: And that's gonna be stable all through high school.

SL: Okay. So lots of things happen when you get to high school. Lots of

social things . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . start to happen, primarily boys and girls happen . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . at that time. And all the intrigue and competition and, you know, the whole adolescence now comes into bloom. So I'm assuming that girls are starting to enter your life about now.

RC: Well, they might've been mostly entering my head. I was—I would—I think I would be described as a socially slow person. I think by the time I was in high school I had done enough in the academic world that my teachers sorta saw me as a good student, however left-handed my efforts had been. So what I remember is being eager to avoid the mantle of dork or nerd or whatever the word at that period would've been. I don't remember nerd being a part of the vocabulary . . .

[02:06:11] SL: Been a little early for nerd.

RC: . . . when I was in that then, but dork and geek—geek might not've been there, either. The one name—you just didn't want to be a dork. [*SL laughs*] And the only thing I had goin' for me—and I think I mentioned this in passing—was that I went to a small enough school. My graduating class had seventy-four people in it.

SL: Oh, that's small.

RC: So it was a laboratory school for Ball State University, so I had a lotta teachers who were faculty members at the college, which in general, with some conspicuous exceptions, meant that I had over qual—or you know, very highly-qualified teachers.

SL: Right.

RC: I had a lotta Ph.D.s in English teachin' my English classes and, you know, math—college math professors teachin' my math classes. The—but it meant that it was easier to excel athletically, and that was my escape. So most of my life—I was socially—you mentioned social, so I'll go back to it—I was a terrible dancer, and still am. [*SL laughs*] [02:07:14] Felt obliged to tell Suzanne when we got together for the first time, that I would be a disappointment on the dance floor. [*SL laughs*] And she was very kind. And but at any rate, in high school I'd—I was not what I would describe as a socially popular kid. Oh, it's not that I was an outcast or anything, but what saved me was sports. If you were—and I don't know—I think this may be pretty widely true, but if you were in any way conspicuous as an athlete in high school, that carried a certain minimal level of sort of automatic cachet.

SL: Yes.

RC: You were at least minimally cool.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And I was a good high school athlete in the sense that at the level that

I—you know, the size of the school and the competition we faced and stuff—I excelled. I mean, just to put it bluntly, I was the—in cross country, which—and track, which, you know, if you did all three, you mostly pretty much did it year round. Baseball was played in the summer. I played basketball for two years, but I only really excelled in track. And there, I was—from my sophomore year on through the rest of the year, I was the best distance runner in the school. And they gave letters, and they gave letter jackets and stuff like that.

SL: Sure.

[02:08:42] RC: And so it was all—you know, you were modestly—not like if you were a—we didn't have a football team. The school was too small. So if you were an athlete, it gave you a kind of social pass. But I didn't have a girlfriend—at no time in high school did—would I have been associated with a particular classmate or schoolmate as a girlfriend. I had my little crushes and stuff on—of course, I picked the—what I regarded as the loveliest women in the school to have crushes on. But I didn't go on dates. I was pretty busy with sports. Sports took up most of my time and school probably took up the most of the rest of it. I didn't have—I mean, and college is a good comparison—I didn't really form a serious relationship in the sense that my friends would've associated me with a particular woman till my junior year in college.

SL: Wow.

[02:09:42] RC: Now I certainly spent more time with women in college than I did in high school but—no, I can answer it pretty briefly. In high—I was slow to develop. I was physically slow to, you know, just sort of be post-pubescent, and I was—you know, I grew in college. I grew another inch in my—between my sophomore and junior year in college. So I was—and I was socially slow. I think my social skills matched that. I was a clumsy kid, socially. I sometimes said injurious things to people without even realizing it. So—I mean, the terms get tossed around. I was certainly not an Asperger's kid, but I was socially different, and I understood that. And I attributed it—part of the—you know, this might've been wrong—I attributed it in part to moving all the time . . .

SL: Well, I was gonna say, that's . . .

RC: . . . you know.

SL: . . . probably a contributing factor.

RC: 'Cause a lotta those kids had been to school—you know, they'd been classmates for nine years by the time they went in the ninth grade.

SL: Right.

RC: 'Cause it was in one building. It was an—it was a K-12 building, one building.

SL: Sounds like the way Peabody used to be here.

RC: Yeah, and I came rockin' in to that building in the sixth grade, you know, as a new kid.

SL: Right.

RC: But—so that'd be the one-liner, and then the second line would be that I excelled, at least to a modest degree, academically. But what saved me was sports, that I was good enough at it that it gave me an identity.

[02:11:11] SL: So cross-country. We used run cross-country in off-season football. Just . . .

RC: Mh-hmm. Yeah, and you hated it, didn't you?

SL: . . . to be running. I didn't particularly hate it.

RC: Okay.

SL: I mean, we also did some things that they probably wouldn't allow now. I mean, we used to run over to Razorback Stadium and run the bleachers.

RC: Run the bleacher steps. Yeah.

SL: And then run back to Fayetteville High School and go through the weight room . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . after running all that.

RC: That's a lot.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Hope you got a lotta hydration in there.

SL: It—by the time I was a junior, the salt and hydration thing . . .

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . became a little bit more evident, but . . .

RC: Yeah.

[02:11:58] SL: So what attracted you to running? I mean . . .

RC: Partly what attracted me to it was that I was good at it. You know, I mean, it was—I learned it really young. I learned it—it was a silly thing, but clear back in the day that I was in Boy Scouts—this is already in Muncie, so it was past sixth grade. But I went to a sort of Scout Jamboree.

SL: Yeah?

RC: And they had what they—I'm not even sure they called it a cross-country run. But they had a race. And it was around the sort of perimeter of the campground, and you had to run two laps around the perimeter of the campground. My guess is that the whole race was maybe a mile and a half long or somethin' like that. But I'd never thought of track or anything. I'd never thought of being a racer. I played baseball until I got to Indiana, and then I realized that basketball was the king sport there.

SL: It was, yeah.

RC: I'd never held a basketball till I was in the sixth grade. But you know,

I generally would—had good coordination and stuff, so I picked it up. But anyway, a couple years earlier—I want to say this is probably between—maybe seventh grade, maybe sixth grade—my troop suggested that I run in this race 'cause it was a troop competition, right. They kept a total with different troops. Well, I won the race by half a lap. I went—and I remember I was wearing swimming trunks. I didn't have running shoes at the time. I just went to the starting line, and I took off, and I ran, and I just didn't get tired as soon as the other people. There was no training involved at all in it. All these guys just sprinted out of the starting line, you know.

SL: Yeah, right.

[02:13:43] RC: So by the end of the first lap, they're—most of 'em are walkin', you know. And I member I—it was a great—one of the great surprises of my life. 'Cause people are yellin' all the time, and you wonder what they—you know, you can't tell what's goin' on unless you look around.

SL: Right.

RC: And at first I didn't. I just sorta ran and [*SL laughs*] turned when people pointed to me. And at some point I went by my own troop, and they were all yellin', and it looked like they were really bein' enthusiastic. So I turned around and looked, and I couldn't even see the guy in second place. I mean, I was, like, seventy-five, eighty, a

hundred yards ahead. And so I just sort of continued around and finished, and in the back of my mind—I didn't run for another year—but I member thinkin', "Hell, that's—that was pretty easy, and I must have some built-in advantage here." I'm—I mean, I didn't have the language, but I must have some kind of cardiovascular advantage over these guys because as other people got tired, I didn't get tired. I wasn't particularly fast. All kinds of people could beat me in sprints, but then when we—the first year you're allowed to be in organized competition, I ran the mile run for Burris high school as a ninth grader. And I was the second-best miler already. And then . . .

SL: At ninth grade.

[02:15:01] RC: And the guy that beat me was a senior, so I just inherited the best position. And I didn't run particularly well. I ran right around five minutes as a ninth grader. When I was a volunteer coach, I would've regarded that as promising but not outstanding or anything. But it sort of—I said, "Okay, this is what I am. I'm a runner. And I'm a distance runner. Eight hundred meters on up." High school cross-country in Indiana then was two miles. It wasn't 5K like it is now.

SL: Right.

RC: So you runnin' two miles is the longest thing you can run in high school. And I could compete in anything from eight hundred meters to two miles. And you know, I was good, but not great. I mean, I never

even placed in a state meet. My top finish was a second place in our conference, and anybody who was really good could beat me, you know. And anybody who's gonna get a college scholarship could beat me.

SL: Right.

RC: So—but it was—in my little world, it was plenty.

SL: Yeah, in that little school.

RC: That's—in that little school, I could walk the halls with pride, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[02:16:11] RC: And so I got voted best athlete in my class, and I had more little stripes on my letter than anybody else. So . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] 'Cause you started at ninth grade with it.

RC: Yeah, started in ninth grade and got, you know, got lettered in baseball as well as track and cross-country. So—I forget, but I think it had, like, six or seven stripes or somethin' at the end.

SL: Right.

RC: So I was—it—that saved me, as I saw it. And I still see it basically that way. It saved me from a great deal of social anxiety because I was slow to develop any kind of social confidence, you know. And here I don't know the sources of it. It might've been my parents. But it never crossed my mind that I would grow up and live in Muncie.

You know, I always knew—always—not with any kind of particular hostility. I mean, I wasn't hostile to Muncie. But—and I was a Cub fan, and it was natural for me to want to go away from home to college, and so I went to Northwestern, which [*SL laughs*]—you know, I got into Northwestern, which people seemed to think—I didn't have any sense of what were tough schools to get into or not, and I applied to Northwestern only because it was in Chicago.

SL: Right.

RC: And so sports saved me from social anxiety. I mean, I had some, but I didn't have—as I sort of hear other people talk about it—it wasn't a trial by fire. High school was not the kind of difficult period that—for me that it was for a lotta people.

[02:17:45] SL: So this incredibly small school—I mean, a graduating class of only seventy-four and it . . .

RC: Four. Yeah, and K-12 in one building, you know.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, that's really, really small.

RC: Yeah.

SL: So—and was Northwestern the only place you applied?

RC: That was the only place I completed the application. Yeah, I mean, it [*SL laughs*]—I started applying to other places, but once I knew I was gettin' into Northwestern, I was—I thought, "That's perfect. I can go to Cub games."

SL: Right.

RC: It's a good school. They—I applied to their journalism school, and people told me it was a good journalism school, and it turns out that was true. It's one of the five or six best journalism schools in the country. And I prospered there. I liked it there. The one teacher I told you about who, unbeknownst to me, published one of my . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . class pieces, was in the journalism school there. So they—high school was—I think that's probably about enough in high school. I was socially maladroit, clumsy. [*SL laughs*] But sports saved me. Sports, as I saw it, saved me. And I was encouraged academically by a number of teachers. There was a—in particular, there was an English teacher who was a fac—college faculty member named Anthony Tovatt [pronounced TO vatt] or Tovatt [pronounced To VATT] who was very encouraging to me. He loaned me books every summer. You know, when school would go out he would give me a book and say, "When you finish this, just bring it by my house. I'll give you another one." And he did.

[02:19:16] SL: So it sounds like that the academic side of your life—your closest social ties may have been your instructors. Is that right?

RC: Well, that and the guys on my teams and my coaches.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I looked up to some of the coaches, too. I mean, I had some numb—I had some knuckleheads as coaches, but I had some—I—well—I liked the coaches, but my main social ties were with, since you put it in those terms, were with my high school teammates.

SL: So do you—did you stay in touch with them? Did . . .

RC: Well, at least one. The one guy I told you from—and I brought a picture of him in—that I st—I'll see him over Christmas.

[02:20:03] SL: Pickerill? Is that . . .

RC: John Pickerill. Yeah. He's my oldest friend. He was one year behind me. He was a better athlete than I am. He was—he placed in the national triple-jump competitions at Wabash College as an undergraduate. So he was a better athlete, but we were—we became friends by being on the cross-country team together. Cross-country team is small enough that there's a real sense of camaraderie there.

SL: Well, yeah.

RC: I mean, you're only got seven guys you're sendin' out there. And it's an individual sport but—you know, when you're out there on the course, you're by yourself. But you do have a sense that you better do pretty well because your team's expectin' you to, in my case, lead it. And in fact, the only person to beat me—no, there were two people—only person to ever beat me after my sophomore year was John Pickerill. He beat me once. [*SL laughs*] And he tells a wonderful

story about how the next week he—it was clear that I was not gonna let him beat me again.

SL: You bowed up.

RC: I defended my turf. [*SL laughs*] And he said, "You were relentless that week. You wouldn't let me stay with you even in one interval of a workout. If I was beside you, you would sprint on ahead. [*SL laughs*] You were not gonna let—it was"—and I think that's probably accurate that I wanted it. You know, it was a crucial linchpin in my identity at that point.

[02:21:27] SL: Well, did that kind of trait cross over academically as well?

RC: No.

SL: I mean, was there anybody competing with you academically or . . .

RC: If they were, I didn't even know it. I was oblivious to it. And that remained true even—now I got a quick comeuppance in sports when I went to college bec—yeah.

SL: I was gon—yeah, we're gonna talk about that transition but . . .

RC: Okay. Yeah, that was—that's a real wake-up call.

SL: Right.

[02:21:55] RC: But academically, the truth is I was better academically, of course, than I ever was in sports, but I didn't see academics as competitive. You know, I mean, you're not tryin' necessarily to beat anybody. I was completely unaware of things like class rankings. I

mean, I graduated, like, something—either sixteenth or twelfth or somewhere like that in my class. I wasn't one of the people who cared about being a valedictorian or somethin' like that. And that was true in college, too. I don't know how many teachers—I had one teacher in particular in college—we'll talk more about college later, but I had one teacher in college who really sort of begged me to devote a better part of my energies to being a student of literature, and I just didn't. Oh, I hadn't reached the age where I was gonna really engage with that. The—so academically, I was never competitive. But I could always pretty much do it in the humanities left-handed. [02:22:59] Now there is a quirk in that. My dad had—you know, being a doctor, he—there was a period in my life where he really thought I might want to be a doctor. And I went to—you know, I went to watch him work. I attended a good number of his deliveries. I'm probably one of the few kids that had witnessed maybe twenty-five or thirty childbirths . . .

SL: Wow.

RC: . . . by the time—you know, and I was right there in the operating room. And he would just bring me in and identify and say, "My son's, you know, gonna be a doctor, and he needs—you know, this is helpful." So—but when I went to college, that was another wake-up call that organic chemistry and embryology were not easy classes for me, and I did not do well in them, whereas I could coast in English

classes and history classes and anthropology classes. I could write—you know, 'cause you wrote essays. In general it, for me, it divided that way. If you had to get the numbers right—C, B, maybe, if I was lucky. If I got to bullshit, if I got to write an essay, easy A. But in general, there's some exceptions to that, but in general, that was my experience with the academic world, which the one line precipitate that comes out of that is "be a writer," you know.

[02:24:13] SL: So this all goes back to your mom's attention early on, doesn't it?

RC: Yeah. Yeah, I was ahead of everybody when it came to reading and courage to write.

SL: And . . .

RC: I was writing—I didn't tell you this—I was writing my family's condolence letters when I was in grade school, almost. When some disaster would happen in the family and my busy dad, the doctor, and my mother would—well, they'd have to write a letter saying, "We're really sorry to hear about this." I wrote 'em. I wrote 'em 'cause I had already mastered the clichés, you know. "Never to be forgotten," [*laughs*] you know. "Deeply missed," [*laughs*] you know. "Sorry," you know—I knew all the euphemisms for death. "So and so had passed away," you know, I mean—so I was a born bullshitter, you know, and I could do it in my sleep.

[02:24:58] SL: Did any of the other siblings inherit that kinda stuff, too?

RC: Well, none of 'em have—actually, I think our children have—you know, my son Jesse is a scientist, but he said the only place he'd—or the most conspicuous place here where he really stands out in his scientific cohort—he said this to me—he said, "I'm not the best stats guy. I'm not the best field guy. But I am the best writer." So when it comes time to write up the article . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . they choose him, you know, to do . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . the prose. So my mother was a good writer, but she didn't aspire to be a writer. [02:25:37] I think it jumped a generation. The person that really aspired to be a kind of writer was my mother's mother. She was a—she was an avid, you know, journal-keeper, and she wrote lots of local history things, but she wasn't in a position in life, you know, to . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . find publication outlets for it. But I think she was a—she would've been more like me in terms of personality. I think if she had been—lived in a world where women had more opportunities, she might've ended up bein' an academic in the humanities. But that's a pretty remote guess. I mean, here's . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . a woman born in the nineteenth century. But it was the one—and I guess I don't think any of my siblings would advertise themselves. They would all say, "Well, yeah, I can write." But I don't think any of them self—anyone would say, "I'm a writer."

SL: Right.

RC: You know, I'm the only one.

[02:26:26] SL: So how large a town was Muncie?

RC: Muncie was a middle-sized—you know Indiana. I mean, Indiana's an interesting state that way. But there's one really big city, Indianapolis. One, you know, major metropolitan area. And then there's—they're kinda second-line cities, like Evansville or Gary . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . up near Chicago. And Muncie would be in the third tier. Muncie was a town of maybe—it's shrinking. It's, you know, it's kinda sad to go back there 'cause it's losing population. It used to be in the middle of a farm area. It used to be an industrial town. It—Delco battery was there and . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . the Ball jar company was there. That's what Ball State's . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . named after.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And Warner Gear was there, and they're all closed. They're all gone. So the town when I was there probably had fifty thousand people in it.

[02:27:20] SL: And when you get to Northwestern?

RC: I'm in Chicago. I'm in heaven. I loved it. I mean, I absolutely . . .

SL: So but Chicago is huge . . .

RC: Huge.

SL: . . . compared to . . .

RC: And I was a yokel. I mean, I was a small-town guy.

SL: Yeah.

RC: But I loved Chicago, and I spent countless hours just ridin' the L, learnin' how to—I didn't have a car my freshman year. My sophomore year my dad got me a—an old Buick, you know, one of his old Buicks. [02:27:45] [*Laughter*] But the—but my freshman year I rode the L all over Chicago. I was absolutely fascinated by it, and I took advantage of it. I went to the Art Institute. You know, I went to the big museums.

SL: Right.

RC: I was—and I went to Wrigley Field over and over. I—and I think I sorta took advantage of Northwestern. I liked my classes. I liked meetin' . . .

SL: Now, how big a school was Northwestern then?

RC: It's by far the smallest school in the Big Ten. You know, it's in the Big Ten, but it's . . .

SL: No, I didn't n—even know that.

RC: Yeah, it's—yeah, when I was there it had six thousand students. The second-smallest school in the Big Ten had twenty-five thousand, so it's a small liberal-arts college . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . posing as a Big Ten power. [*SL laughs*] [02:28:31] And the wake-up call we talked about, the wake-up call in sports, I can describe real quickly. Everybody who shows up and even tries out for a college team usually was one of the best players in whatever sport in his or her high school.

SL: High school. Yeah.

RC: So I go up there, and I muddle through two years, and I'm—you know, I'm good enough to be on the team, but I'm never the leader. Never anywhere close to bein' the leader. And I trained really hard 'cause I'm primarily a miler at that age. I have enough speed and two-milers are just too good for me. So I'm primarily a miler in college. And I'm running times that—you know, the Razorbacks wouldn't even blink an eye. But I'm tryin'—just to put it bluntly, I'm tryin' to break 4:20 in the mile, and it's still not fifteen hundred meters. They're still doin'—well, they're not even gonna recruit

somebody in Arkansas that isn't runnin', you know, under 4:10 in high school. I'm tryin' to get under 4:20, and I've had a good year. I've set a personal record my sophomore year, and I go home for the summer. I come back in the fall, and Coach greets me. He says, "We got this new recruit. We—you know, would you be willin' to show him around town? You know, show him around the campus." And so you know, the kind of conversation you make you—it comes up—"What'd you do in high school?" "Four-oh-six."

SL: Oh, geez.

RC: This guy ran 4:06 in high school. He's a freshman. I'm a junior.

SL: Sounds like . . .

RC: I'm tryin to get a personal record under 4:20. Never happens, by the way. But at any rate, yeah, I'm down in the low 4:20s and my goal is to get under 4:20. And never happens. But this guy comes on—the day he's on campus—and I member thinking—when he told me that, I went home and told one of my close friends, who wasn't in sports at all—I member usin' this phrase—said, "Do you realize what that did to me? I'm listenin' to this, and this kid says, '4:06.' And I said, 'Not in this body. This body doesn't have 4:06 in it.'" You know, I mean . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: I, you know—by this time I know my body pretty well.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Kid's name was Craig Boydston. He was from Wisconsin. He was eighteen years old, and he'd run 4:06 in high school. So that's what [*claps*] college does to you.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You know, I mean—you know, you think, "Okay, whole different world."

SL: Great leveler.

[02:30:49] RC: Yeah, 4:06. Man, nobody ever ran that in high school in Indiana, and no one ever ran under 4:20 in high school in Indiana when I was a high school kid. Now they have, but you know, not then. So—but the one thing that stayed with me—just to keep this thing coherent—the thing that I kept being able to meet—match the bar—was humanities classes and specifically those that encouraged writing, encouraged essay writing, and things like that. And that was where the teacher was who said, "Look, you can be" . . .

SL: You can do this.

RC: . . . "outstanding even in this—on this field. You're as good or better than your classmates here." So I didn't see it as competitive, but it was encouraging to me. I just had stuff I wanted to do, you know. And I was always pretty self motivated. You and I have known each other a long time.

SL: Right.

RC: I'm a project-oriented guy. I mean, I find a project to work on. I work on it till it's done, and then I start another one.

SL: The next one.

[02:31:47] RC: Yeah. And here—and there you run into obstacles. I'm jumpin' way ahead now, but after I published the biography of Vance Randolph, which was my first book that got any attention in the world, I got asked to write a book about Samuel Beckett by a commercial publisher in New York.

SL: M'kay.

RC: And I said, "Sure," 'cause they offered to pay me. And I'm—my bachelor's degree is in journalism, you know. I don't give a—you know, again, I want to speak pretty well—I'm not real interested in whether something is academically advantageous to me or not. If it's somethin' that attracts me—well, I love Samuel Beckett. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on his plays. These guys wanted a book written about his short fiction for a series on short fiction by different people. So my chairman asked me what I was workin' on, and I told him. I had just been offered this thing. It was guaranteed publication, too. And you know the world out there.

SL: Right.

RC: These guys write books and then search for somebody to publish it.

SL: Right.

[02:32:45] RC: Here I had a publisher waitin' for a book. So I told him, and he said, "Nah, you don't wanna do that." This is Kenneth Kinnamon, my chair at the time.

SL: Kinnamon. I remember him.

RC: Yeah. He says—'cause he's a Harvard guy, you know. He's real interested in it.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And he said, "Bob, the most important book you'll write in your career is your second book. You've gotten off to really good start with this, you know, Vance Randolph biography. It won you a little prize, and you know, you got this big fellowship because of it. So your second book, you're supposed to consolidate your position. You're supposed to, you know, show that you're" . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: Everybody—he said every cliché in the book. He said, "Everybody's got one book in 'em. The question is whether you got two." And he advised me not to do that. He said, "This publisher is not Harvard University Press or anything. It's not even a university press at all. It's a Twayne Publisher. It's a, you know, commercial publisher." And I said, "I'm sorry, Ken. I'm gonna do the book. I can do it in the summer. I got—all I have to do is download my head here. This is a easy book for me to write. I'll have it done at the end of the summer."

And I tried to console him. I said, "And then I'll turn to some book that you'll approve of, but I'm gonna do this book." And I did. And he was kind of mildly disappointed in me for not consolidating my position in the academic world. But I—it's just worked for me, doin' it one project at a time and letting the decision be whether the project attracts you or not, as opposed to whether this project is gonna maneuver you around in the profession.

SL: In the politics of publishing.

RC: . . . in the profession has worked for me, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[02:34:17] RC: And the university's been extremely good to me in that regard.

SL: This university.

RC: This university.

SL: Yeah.

RC: The University of Arkansas. The—and you'll remember these names, too. When I interviewed for a job here, I had had a bad experience. Not a—you know, it wasn't traumatic or anything, but I had had a bad experience at Indiana University South Bend campus the previous year, which is one of the reasons I was on the job market. I had published an article in a very prestigious journal—a little article—but it was in *American Literature* . . .

SL: Okay. Yeah.

RC: . . . which in a little ball park there, that's a good journal. [02:34:49] And I—when I went in for my year-end review with the chairman, I expected—you know, I was puffed up with a certain amount of vainglory, and I expected to be praised for that. What I got was a warning from the chairman. He said, "This is all very good. You know, it looks great. But you must remember that we hired you to be a scholar in contemporary drama because you had written your dissertation on Samuel Beckett. And this article in *American Literature*, no matter how distinguished, is about Herman Melville. It's not about contemporary drama. So I expect you in the next year or two"—he was a little bit like a general givin' orders. Said, "I expect you to turn your attention to contemporary drama." And I—you know, this is typical of me at the time. I said, "Well, that—yes, sir, I'll get right on it." And I walked outside, and I said, "I'm outta here. These assholes aren't gonna tell me what to do."

SL: Right.

[02:35:39] RC: You know, so I came down to Arkansas, and I'd just heard this from the chair here. So I had my presentation—interview with, you know, the department, gave a little talk and stuff. And afterwards, somebody asked me what I was workin' on. And so I said what I thought that chairman would like to hear. I said, "Well, I

understand that you're hiring me as—to do—to teach your folklore classes, primarily, and also do English classes." So—fact, the question said, "We noticed here on your, you know, your CV that you published a short story last year." And so I threw it away. I said, "You know, I understand you're hirin' me as a folklorist, and I would consider"—I used this phrase. I said, "I would consider—I would understand if you considered any fiction writing I did as something on the order of that I happen to collect stamps." [02:36:32] And Jim Whitehead [*SL laughs*], you know, big, booming Jim Whitehead.

SL: Sure.

RC: Who was a creative writer.

SL: Right.

RC: And I was—I knew what I was doin'. I was throwin' that away so that they wouldn't think they had a would-be fiction writer in their midst, which I thought they might be skittish about. So I throw it away. I say, "That's the equivalent of stamp collecting." Whitehead says—this is—"That's bullshit." He said just at the—you know how Whitehead spoke.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: And he said, "Listen, son." You know, he spoke to me as if I were fifteen. He said, "Listen, son, we only care about one thing down here." He said, "You come in here, and you publish stuff. You can

publish stuff on anything you want, and you'll get credit for it." Said, "We're not gonna try to put you in"—like that chair at . . .

SL: Pigeonhole.

RC: . . . Indiana. You know, the contemporary-drama pigeonhole. Said, "You just do stuff, and you get it done, and get it out, and we'll reward you." Then he sat down.

SL: What a treat.

RC: And then I said, "Well, thank you." And—but behind my skull there's the exact opposite of what I thought up there in Indiana, where I said, "I'm outta here." I thought, "This place is for me. [*SL laughs*] If they're serious about that." And they have been.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I have never been told by any chairman or dean not to do something. Not once. You know, and you know I've been all over the map.

SL: Yeah.

[02:37:50] RC: I mean, I have failed my entire career [*SL laughs*] to specialize in any kind of decent way.

SL: Right.

RC: If it—I don't care whether it's an African American photographer from Pine Bluff or, you know, a Grandma Moses painter from Conway or Samuel Beckett—you know, whatever I've done, they have—they've been true to their word. They have encouraged me, and they put me

in charge of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, and you know, I've been in there for twenty-five years. And I never really have to undergo any formal reviews, so I'm nothin' but grateful.

I mean, I know I jumped way ahead here, but you want the summary line. Smartest thing I ever did was sign a contract over there on that campus and—'cause they just let me do what I wanted to do. And I've been a happy camper ever since.

[02:38:41] SL: You know, it was Bill Schwab that suggested that you have a space here at the Pryor Center.

RC: Yeah, I've been really grateful for that, too.

SL: And I gotta tell you, the—we're very grateful that there's a—it's quite an honor to have your name over here because . . .

RC: Well, there's a synergy here. You know, all of us really have overlapping interests to a huge degree. And you know, you've got some younger people here who are really talented and Randy and all. It's a just—it's a perfect place for me to end up. And it's not only Bill, it's also Judy.

SL: Judy.

RC: Bill and Judy Schwab . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . really superintended that connection, and I'm real grateful to 'em. But that's just the latest. And what I want to stress to you is that's

just the latest in a long line, starting with Jim Whitehead's stentorian, "That's bullshit." [*SL laughs*] That's really the first link in that chain.

SL: Yeah.

RC: 'Cause he was the first one to articulate a kind of carte blanche. "You can do anything down here except sit on your ass. If you come down here and you do stuff, you'll be encouraged." Well, he started it; Bill and Judy Schwab were, you know, near the other end of that chain, but it never broke. [02:39:59] Ben Kimpel? Ben Kimpel didn't understand a thing about what I did. Bill—Ben Kimpel's, you know, a classic . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . scholar. You know, reads Greek. Ree . . .

SL: Right.

RC: My office was right next door to him. Anytime I read—found something in a foreign language I didn't understand, next door was UNIVAC.

SL: The guy.

RC: You know [*laughs*], this guy.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: And so—and he encouraged me. You know, he didn't care anything about Vance Randolph or folklore. He was off with Ezra Pound and, you know . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . the big literary lights. But he—nonetheless, he was super encouraging. Ken Kinnamon, even though he told me not to do this book, he was—there were times when he thought that I was unprofessional, like in dress and things like that.

SL: Right.

RC: But he was encouraging of my work despite all that, every time. [02:40:47] Chuck Adams—all the—I just had a lot of people, you know. Randall Woods. I went in to try to get review—you know, I said to him, "Maybe I'm due to review to be whether I get reappointed." He just waved me out the door. He said, "Bob, just go back to wherever [*laughter*] you do what you do." He just sort of ushered me out of his office. He said, "Just stay busy and everything'll be fine." So it's been wonderful. And this is—and you're right to bring up the Pryor Center 'cause the last two or three years—I mean, look at this thing we're gonna get to do together. We're—the—we now have a really nice three-cornered thing with Pryor Center, Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, and the UA Press.

SL: It's magic.

RC: You know. Yeah.

SL: Now . . .

RC: It takes a village, as Hillary said.

SL: It is. It is. A good village to be in.

RC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SL: You know, speaking of Dr. Kinnamon, I got to have him for a class, and he was encouraging. He was encouraging to me.

RC: Yeah.

[02:41:48] SL: Didn't know me from Adam, but he liked what I wrote.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And for me personally, I know how that—I know this feeling of, "Wow, okay, so maybe I can do something, you know."

RC: Yeah.

SL: It's—it was neat. And he was—I mean, he was tough, but he was good.

RC: Yeah.

SL: I really—I think I grew a little bit just in that one class I had with him.

RC: Yeah.

[02:42:16] SL: You know, it's kinda like how people say—who's the guy in journalism that everyone says you gotta take a course under him. I'll get back to that but . . .

RC: Roy Reed or [*unclear words*] . . .

SL: Well, Roy—yeah, but it was Gerald.

RC: Gerald Jordan.

SL: Jordan. Yeah.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I mean, I don't know how many times I've heard people say, "If you're gonna take a class—U of A—whether you're in journalism or not" . . .

RC: Take . . .

SL: . . . "go to Gerald Jordan."

RC: Yeah.

[02:42:44] SL: Yeah. Okay, so we're gonna—I'm gonna backtrack a little bit . . .

RC: Okay. Yeah, I jumped way ahead there.

SL: . . . because we talked about drama . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . and I want to talk about a play that you were in in high school. [*RC laughs*] *Charley's Aunt*?

RC: Yeah, *Charley's Aunt*.

SL: Okay, so . . .

RC: Yeah, I've forgotten the name of the author, but it's a—yeah, it was my high school senior play.

SL: Oh my gosh. Well, it wasn't a musical, was it?

RC: No.

SL: 'Cause ours were always musicals here, but . . .

RC: Yeah, we had musicals, too, but I can't sing in that way . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . so I'd sang in the choir, and I sang in the quartets and stuff, but I couldn't carry a tune. The only danger for me was that I'd go off onto somebody else's and start singin' in unison with somebody else.

SL: Right.

RC: When I had to sing my own part, I had to really know it.

SL: Right.

RC: And so the choir teacher—I guess I had a decent voice at whatever range I was in, but I had no ability to carry the tune by myself. But at any rate, I was—I've worked in stage crews and things like that. It was a really small school, like you've observed.

SL: Right.

[02:43:47] RC: But the senior play—I was asked to try out by the faculty member who directed it. And I played a role which required me at some point in the play to dress up as a woman. And I had no problem with that. Other people might've thought that was a threat to their masculinity, but [*SL laughs*] I'm—I probably didn't have that great a masculine imp—you know, sports had saved me from certain levels of ostracism, but anyway, I didn't worry about it for whatever reason. And I enjoyed doin' it. It was a comedy, of course.

SL: Yeah.

[02:44:22] RC: And I—yeah, I did it, but it was my only participation as an

actor. I never saw myself as a thespian [*SL laughs*] at all. I was a writer. I should've—there—if I was gonna be involved with plays, I would've written 'em. And I took a play-writing class at Northwestern, where I did not distinguish myself. Turns out I didn't have a real good sense of choreography, either—that my skills as a writer were limited to the words, you know. I didn't . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: I couldn't really envision the whole scene very well.

SL: Right.

RC: So . . .

SL: Well, if you write good enough . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . words, the choreographer . . .

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . can figure that out for you.

RC: Yeah, they—maybe so.

SL: Yeah, that's kind of a—that's a whole nother realm.

RC: Yeah.

SL: I think.

RC: But the older you get, the more you realize how circumscribed your skills really are. You know, I mean, now that I'm in my seventies I realize that they are really circumscribed to language. That's really

the only thing that I've got, to the extent that I have any kind of, you know, idiosyncratic gift, it would be there and nowhere else.

SL: Well, I don't—I may . . .

RC: I mean, the guitar—very low ceiling.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You know, and then—see, you know what I mean.

[02:45:27] SL: Yeah, but I will say that you have—I mean, I think the first time I ever knew—came to know you was when I was across the street.

RC: Oh yeah, in Continuing Ed, right?

SL: In Continuing Ed. And we were doing some documentary stuff, and this was big time for me 'cause I'd never done sound for documentary, and Jim Borden was teachin' me to shoot video and all this stuff. And you enter the picture, and it's like all of a sudden our—we're no longer just talking business meetings and athletics, we're now out in the art world and doing what I really would prefer . . .

RC: Well, that was probably an earlier iteration of the scene we have now in the Pryor Center—that I had a little bit of money from the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, a guru—you just named him. The guru for me was Jim.

SL: No kidding.

RC: That guy—I had never made a film. The first one we did was about

that quilt maker down in . . .

SL: Yep.

RC: . . . down by the airport.

SL: Yep.

[02:46:30] RC: And they we did . . .

SL: Walk on.

RC: Walk on. *Walking On*. That's the—that was a breakthrough for me. I—the first one I realized it was just basically to teach me some of the basics. But Jim was the one who said, "You know, get your soundtrack, and then we'll lay the pictures in. You know, we'll lay the video in over the audio. Get your audio."

SL: Right.

RC: "Get a sense of what you want for audio." And that was great fun because we were all flyin' by the seat of our pants, weren't we?

SL: Yeah.

RC: I mean, everyone was.

SL: We were.

RC: And then we did Frankie Kelly.

SL: Yep.

RC: Yeah. And those two hold up pretty well, I think.

SL: They do.

RC: You know, AETN still shows 'em—every—AETN still runs 'em every now

and then.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Not the first one. Not the quilt one, but *Walking On*, the Walter Williams film, and the Frankie Kelly film, *Music's Easier*. Or that's what we called it.

[02:47:21] SL: And then what—*Songs of Zion*?

RC: Yeah, it's a book. That's . . .

SL: Yeah, but I—seems like I recorded some stuff . . .

RC: You probably did . . .

SL: . . . for that on the stage . . .

RC: . . . although . . .

SL: . . . that we had the family in . . .

RC: That's right.

SL: . . . the women, and we got 'em . . .

RC: Yeah, that was very ni . . .

SL: . . . before they passed.

RC: Yeah, that's true. But they didn't publish any of that.

SL: Right.

RC: Remember, it's 'cause there was no disk in that book.

SL: Right.

[02:47:45] RC: That was a book that began out of a class. One of the women, Phydella Hogan . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Phydella.

RC: . . . was a student in my class.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And she came up one day in my introductory folklore class, and she said—she was real diffident—she said, "I don't know whether you'd be interested in this, but you know, these music you're talkin' about all this time—your predecessor, Mary Parler, recorded my sisters and me singin' these songs" . . .

SL: Wow.

RC: . . . "back in nineteen fifty-you know, whatever." And I said, "Yeah, I'm very interested in that." And that got me the longest book project. It took me ten years to write that book 'cause I didn't know—you know, I'd never written anything about music at that time. Think of what that guy—I mean, I'm jumpin' all over now, but you—you're—we can speak shorthand. That Indiana chairman that I had—he'd've turned over in his grave. The guy he spent—he thinks is writin' about Samuel Beckett or Eugène Ionesco is all out in the country talkin' to three old ladies about—you know, he would've had conniptions. [*SL laughs*] But Whitehead and his followers had just cleared the decks.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I could do whatever I wanted.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

[02:48:48] RC: So we're out there and all these projects—we're out there—there's no model for us. Nobody's out there tellin' you or Jim or me how to make a film about Walter Williams because he digs ginseng and makes maple syrup [*SL laughs*], you know. We're flyin' by the seat of our pants. But it was wonderful. I—it was wonderful to do—you know, just in the act of doing it was fun. I got to bring Masie along—the one time I had to bring Masie along 'cause Suzanne had somethin' she had to do, and I was babysittin'.

SL: Right.

[02:49:19] RC: [*Snaps*] And this little light bulb goes on in my head because Williams—he's focused on Masie. He doesn't care about the camera or anything. She was the best ice breaker . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you could possibly have.

SL: Right.

RC: Well, that's a family treasure to us now. You know, Suzanne—when we premiered the film, Masie handed out the—she was nine or somethin' [*laughs*]—she handed out the programs.

SL: I remember. Yeah.

RC: So it was fun to do. It was—it—you know, got a decent reception, so it made us all look good. And the people who we did it about loved it. One of the eeriest experiences of my life was goin' to Walter Williams's

funeral in Harrison when he died, and I parked the car, and I started goin' in—walkin' into the chapel, and I hear my own voice. And I get inside. It was the scariest thing. I thought, "What?" You know, it took me a minute just to process that. I thought, you know, that some sort of mental breakdown was—and then I realized what had happened. They were playin' that video that we made at his funeral.

SL: Wow.

[02:50:22] RC: So it was—you know, they were really proud of the fact—and you know this, workin' for the Pryor Center and the university generally—we have this power of validation. You know, if we produce something about somebody, and it says that this person is, you know, a western swing fiddler, to use Frankie Kelly. Well, then we've kind of imprinted that this guy is a certified western swing fiddler, you know.

SL: Right.

RC: And it sort of—it proves to the world that they are what they always thought they were. And because the university wouldn't crank up this whole institutional apparatus to, you know, document it if it wasn't true. So they, at his funeral, his family, in their grief, said, "This sel—this gets our guy. This celebrates our guy in a durable way." And we got tons of requests, you know, from everybody who knew Walter.

SL: Right.

RC: You know, and you found yourself makin' . . .

SL: Copies. [*Laughs*]

RC: . . . thirty, forty copies of that.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Well, hell, I couldn't have found that anywhere else. I would—I did not find that at Indiana, and it's just an accident who your supervisors are and what sort of resources are available.

[02:51:38] SL: Okay now, one—so you get your degree—your first degree in Northwestern.

RC: Journalism. Two degrees. I got a journalism degree and an English—master's in English. Bachelor's in journalism; master's in English.

SL: Okay. Don't—somewhere in here, don't you go to Mississippi?

RC: It's later. That's later.

SL: Okay.

RC: The next place I go is Toronto. And I . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . go into a Ph.D. program there.

SL: In . . .

RC: And by that time, that's a watershed because, you know, I've got a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in English—I can still go into journalism. I can still—you know, I can become an English professor. I've still got a number of options. I can still aspire to be a—you know, what a—my first real articulated sense of what I

wanted to be was impossible. The first thing I thought of myself as wanting to be was a writer for the *National Geographic*.

SL: M'kay.

[02:52:35] RC: And it turns out that that job does not exist. You know, they don't have staff writers. They have scholars who do occasional articles for them. They have staff photographers.

SL: Right.

RC: But—so—but when I went to—when I went into the Ph.D. program at Toronto, I member tellin' myself, "Okay, that means you're walkin' through a door and closin' a lot of others, and you're gonna be an English professor." So that—I was pretty late to come to that decision. I went to there in 1967, so I was twenty-four, and that was when I said, "Okay, I gotta—'cause I got some catchin' up to do." Other people in the Ph.D. program had known for years they were gonna be English professors, and they'd read . . .

SL: And you . . .

RC: . . . a lot more than I have.

SL: Yeah.

RC: So I'm—I spent a year or two—I spent two years in Toronto doin' nothin' but heavy-duty catch-up reading. I mean, I had a calendar. I was by myself. I didn't have a girlfriend at the time that was there, anyway. When I first went up there, I had sort of a girlfriend in Boyd,

Wisconsin. But I made a calendar—and there was one month that I just, before the month started, I just wrote down the name of a Shakespeare play every day 'cause there're twenty-nine Shakespeare plays or somethin'. And I just read all of Shakespeare in a month, you know, and I did stuff like that. You know, I just read to try to catch up to be a—to be an English professor. [02:53:56] And then I went—you mentioned Mississippi—then my dad died at the end of that second year, and I came home to live in Muncie. And by that time I'd done all my coursework, but I hadn't written my dissertation. And I came home and lived at my dad's place until he died, and for one semester after that. And at that point I got a job at Southern Mississippi. I went to the MLA meeting and interviewed just like, you know, the standard English professor jobs market. And I got . . .

[02:54:23] SL: That's Hattiesburg?

RC: Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Yeah. They have postcards there. There are so many—you know, Jamestowns and so many Springfields, but only one Hattiesburg. So I went down there as a—on a tenure-track position. I was an assistant professor, although I hadn't finished my dissertation. Pretty easy job market then.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And I got fired there in one year. I had a good time there, but the—again, the—I wasn't gonna just be told what to do. I was always pretty skittish when people tell—especially people tellin' me when I'm not to do somethin'. But I got in trouble over dress there. I think I've told you this story. I was reprimanded for not dressing like a professor should, and so I rented a tux. [*SL laughs*] And taught for a week wearing this tux. The school newspaper came and took pictures, and I'm—you know, and I was fired instantly. But I didn't care. I mean, you know, I didn't have any kids yet and the—and then I figured, "Okay, you gotta get a dissertation. You gotta get a Ph.D."

[02:55:28] SL: Okay, now, wait a minute. In Mississippi, what year is this?

RC: It's [19]70-71. My dad dies in [19]69.

SL: Okay.

RC: Mississippi is [19]70, so you know, the academic year—goin' over two calendar years.

SL: Right.

RC: Fall of [19]70, spring of [19]71. The—then I spend a year as a traveling lecturer with the National Humanities Series. It's not worth talkin' much about, but it got me through a year. They did travel a lot. We went to Alaska, and it's the only time I've ever landed on a sea plane and stuff like that. But it was a year on the road. And then

I got serious. When I got done with that, I got serious about gettin' a Ph.D. 'cause I wanted to get back into the academic world. I had tossed away this Mississippi job.

SL: Right.

[02:56:14] RC: So I went to . . .

SL: With great flair, by the way.

RC: With great flair. Oh yeah, there was a book written about it. I have a kind of cameo role in this book. [*SL laughs*] But at any rate, I spend the next year and a half bartending in Austin, Texas.

SL: Whoa!

RC: And . . .

SL: I did not know this about you.

RC: And wrote my dissertation there.

SL: Wow.

RC: Okay.

SL: Which bar?

RC: It was a place called the Cattle Pen or the—I've forgot—you know, it's been fifty years, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: Well, the thing—there were two prize bovines feeding at one end of the bar. [*SL laughs*] I still have—somewhere I've got the—you know, sort of a brochure from this [*unclear word*], but it's called something

like, The Feed Pen or the c—you know, but at any rate, I was a bartender, and I wrote my dissertation and got it accepted, so that I ended up getting my Ph.D. in 1973. And that's when I was able to parlay that into a job at Indiana University South Bend where the chair told me that he had hired me as a contemporary drama guy. And I came from there to here. End of story. So Ball State for one semester while being a UPS truck driver. One year at University of Southern Mississippi, fired for violations of the dress code.

[02:57:35] SL: [*Laughs*] You should wear that . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . with pride.

RC: Four years at Indiana University, South Bend, where I was quite happy. I mean, academically it was a nice place. It was rich for a folklorist. People think of folklorists, they think of cabins and rural stuff. But South Bend, Indiana, when I was there, had newspapers in, like, six or seven different languages. I mean, 'cause it's a town of immigrants.

SL: I see.

RC: Studebaker was made there as a car.

SL: Okay. All right.

RC: And the sports pages of the *South Bend Tribune* reported the results of pigeon races because Belgian immigrants, Flemish people, raced

pigeons. So I mean, you know, it was—for a guy with my interests . . .

SL: It's pretty rich . . .

RC: Yeah, it's rich stuff.

SL: . . . mining. Yeah.

RC: Rich mining. But the guy said this thing about, "You gotta do this," and I said, "I'm outta here." And so I came down here in 1976 and been happy as a clam ever since.

SL: Well, now . . .

RC: That's the summary.

[02:58:32] SL: [*Laughs*] So when did you get started on your family?

RC: The—I've got—Suzanne and I have five kids. I brought two of 'em to our marriage. My first child was born in 1971, and our last child was born—and I should say "our" for all of 'em—one great virtue of Suzanne—I courted Suzanne with Bobby, the oldest child. And she was wonderful to him and just sort of made him her oldest kid. And our youngest is Taylor, born in 1992. So we have kids born from 1971 to 1992, a twenty-one-year . . .

SL: That's a pretty big spread.

RC: . . . range. Pretty big spread. The second child is Shannon, and then Masie, Jesse, and Taylor. So we started our family in 1971, and we're still goin' strong. We have grandchildren. We have four

grandchildren, all boys. So our two daughters have married and produced boys as grandchildren. Shannon has produced three of 'em and Masie's produced one. And our three boys have yet to marry [*SL laughs*], so we'll see. We'll see what happens.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Bobby's got a serious girlfriend, and so we'll see. We'll just let them tell their own story. But anyway, it's—that's the central—and in some ways it's entirely inverted 'cause, you know, we're primarily interested—I may have to stand up 'cause I got a cramp.

SL: Okay.

RC: Is that okay?

SL: Yeah, go ahead.

RC: Okay.

[Recording stopped]

[03:00:16] SL: So Bob . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: We just had another break, this time for both of us 'cause we were cramping up sitting . . .

RC: We were. We had hamstring pulls.

SL: It's the old guys . . .

RC: That's right. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . sittin' around too long, doin' too much jawin'.

RC: Yeah.

SL: But—so I feel like we've kind of mapped out your studying and your degree accomplishments.

RC: Okay.

SL: And you've now landed at the University of Arkansas—unless there's something in that path that we haven't really talked about that you feel like we should. And if you think of something . . .

RC: I'll go back and get . . .

SL: . . . that we've kinda left . . .

RC: . . . it, but . . .

SL: Yeah, we can go back and . . .

RC: There's nothin' jumpin in right now.

[03:01:01] SL: Okay. All right. So University of Arkansas. What prompted you to even consider the University of Arkansas?

RC: That's a—an easy question to answer. Not all your questions are easy to answer, but this one is. I saw a job ad—this is after I'd thought in the back of my head with the—after my conference with the Indiana chairman that . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . "I'm outta here."

SL: Right.

RC: I saw a job advertisement in the standard, you know, English

professor job list, which is published, you know, every fall by the Modern Language Association.

SL: 'Kay.

RC: The University of Arkansas had an ad in there, and the essence of the ad was that they wanted someone who could teach both folklore and literature.

SL: Wow.

[03:01:52] RC: And by this time, you know, I was already interested and publishing my first efforts as a folklore scholar—tiny, little—I didn't have a lot of confidence, so those articles were basically interview-based. I think my first three or four articles were "Blank, sub—colon, An Interview with So-and-so," you know. And that was—'cause I didn't have a lot of sense that I could do a lot of interpreting. I was just doin' field work. But I was interested in folklore, and I had a Ph.D. in English. I'd published stuff in folklore. So I member thinkin' at the time, "You know, I could compete with God for this job." In other words, I'm well-qualified for this job. On paper, I should be a strong candidate . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . for this job. So I applied, and they invited me down to Fayetteville for an interview, and I came down and interviewed for the job. I told you about the Jim Whitehead remark already . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . during that interview. I had some other good experiences there in that interview. [03:02:51] Margaret Bolsterli took me aside after the interview and told me—she did it in quite, you know, sort of straightforward speech for someone she'd just met. She said that she was gonna support me for the job. And then she told me, pretty straightforwardly, that she was an influential person, and since she was supporting me, she expected I would probably get the job. [*SL laughs*] So she—and I member—I was impressed by a number of people. I was—of course, I'm impressed by Whitehead. [03:03:22] I didn't get—on the basis of one meeting, I didn't quite get Ben Kimpel. You know, he was a shy man and I—did you ever know Ben Kimpel?

SL: No.

RC: Okay. He's the biggest data bank I ever met.

SL: Okay.

RC: He knew more, just flat out knew more than anyone before or since, that I've ever met. But I didn't get that on the very—my office was right next door to his, and I came to know that, but I didn't get it on first acquaintance. But I was very impressed by the writers. You know, they were a crew. They went around together, so they took me to lunch—Whitehead, Miller Williams . . .

SL: Bill . . .

RC: Bill Harris . . .

SL: Harrison.

RC: . . . and Bill Harrison.

SL: And Margaret . . .

[03:04:03] RC: Margaret wasn't a writer. She's a good writer and wrote—she's written a number of books even recently, but she was—at that point in time they were the mainstays of the writing program, just those three. Margaret Bolsterli was an English professor.

SL: Okay.

RC: Straight-up English professor.

SL: Okay.

RC: She—but of course, she was the leading feminist in the department and . . .

SL: Well, I was gonna say, her and—wasn't her and—wasn't she and—oh, who's the other lady that was in the writing department. Gilchrist.

RC: Yeah, she wasn't there yet.

SL: She wasn't there yet.

RC: She wasn't there yet.

SL: So you were before the women . . .

RC: That's right.

SL: . . . came in.

RC: That's right.

SL: Okay.

RC: They had a poet named Carolyn Forché, who came in for a few years. But that, again, that was after me. I was already there before she came.

SL: Okay. All right.

RC: So they took me to lunch. Anyway, they offered me the job.

[03:04:57] SL: Where'd you go?

RC: Just the union.

SL: Oh, okay.

RC: Just the union. And so I was—I thought I had a good chance of getting' that job just—and I was pretty honest. I told 'em I was interested in both those things and that I would teach a—that I would try to carry on the folklore program that Mary Celestia Parler had done for so many years. I'd barely heard of Vance Randolph at that time, so a lot of my future awaited me, but I had little sense of it at that time.

SL: Right.

RC: And—but I liked the English department. You know, I liked the—they were a varied group even then. You know, I thought, "Wow, Jim Whitehead and Lyna Lee Montgomery and Margaret Bolsterli, the pretty interesting combi—and these three writers—pretty interesting combination." So they offered me the job. And I was eager to get out

of Indiana University at South Bend at that time just 'cause I didn't want this guy tellin' me what I couldn't do, so I came down here. And I heard that thing about, "You can do anything." I heard—Jim Whitehead was the biggest single voice that I heard. That really . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] In more ways than one.

RC: Yeah, in more ways than one. But what he said really spoke to me and, like I already told you that, that's been true. They've never—not the slightest discouragement from any subject, from any topic that I wanted to work on. That's just so—that's such a blessing, you know. So—and I've been—basically, I've been happy here ever since. [03:06:28] The—this—let me talk, if it's okay with you, just a little about the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies.

SL: Yes, absolutely.

RC: Whitehead saved me even there because it was established in 1980. I'd been here for four years, and I'd already sorta demonstrated an interest in learning about Arkansas. But member, when I came to Arkansas I knew nothing about Arkansas.

SL: Right.

RC: Had no family here or anything. So when Miller Williams and the history guy, Gatewood.

SL: Gatewood, God.

RC: Willard Gatewood and Miller Williams founded not only the University

of Arkansas Press, but they also were part of the founding group of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies. Willard was the first director. When they put together a steering committee for it, I was in the room 'cause I'd been invited to the meeting. But I wasn't appointed to the steering committee 'cause I was still a young assistant professor, and it was only, like, my third year here. I think this is in 1979. They actually launch it in 1980. And again, this voice comes out of the back of the room. It's Whitehead. You know, he's there, and he says, "You gotta put Cochran on that committee." You know, and he shouts everything he says. He says [*SL laughs*]—and he was incredibly emphatic. He says, "There's nobody here doin' anything as much in Arkansas as Cochran is, and he should be on it." I wouldn't, you know, I wouldn't have had the temerity at that point, only having been here for three years, to sorta put my own hand up and say, "You know, I'd really like to be on this committee. I mean, I am doin' a lotta stuff in Arkansas." But Whitehead just carried the day. And I forget who it was—Willard or somebody said, "Oh yeah, of course, you know. Bob, would you be willing to be on this committee?" I said, "Sure." [03:08:10] So on two occasions, Whitehead's sort of bullhorn voice, you know, advanced me, helped me. So I was always grateful for that. I mean, I understood there were people who objected to being intimi—you know, bullied by Jim.

But Jim was a smart guy underneath all the blather.

SL: Oh.

RC: And . . .

SL: Smart.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Beautiful—great writer and football player.

RC: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, and he wasn't afraid to let you know that either, was he?

SL: Yeah, right. Right.

RC: So I admired him in—for what he was good at, and he was very helpful to me. And for one reason or another, things like that just kept happening here. [03:08:50] You know, then four or five years later I was not only on the steering committee, but after Willard finished being the head and then Margaret Bolsterli was the head, they made me the head, the director, of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies. And they've let me stay there for the rest of my career. Well, that's wonderful.

SL: It is.

RC: And I've been—and I've never coveted any other—you know, I'm a poor administrator [*SL laughs*], and fortunately, the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies doesn't have to supervise other people. It's just perfect. It's just been perfect. And over time, I've gotten—

I've, you know, I've developed a network of people that I know. You know, I mean, one of the reasons that Bill and Judy Schwab put me in the Pryor Center is that, you know, I knew you guys. And when I—the first time I got to be a guest curator down at the Old State House in Little Rock, I got to meet Bill Jr.

SL: Is—was . . .

RC: You know, Bill—Willard Gatewood's son, Bill.

SL: Yes.

RC: And that was a wonderful experience, and I got to know those people. And now I've guest curated three exhibits and been a talking head on two or three other, you know, of their exhibits. So and Margaret had an exhibit that she—Margaret Bolsterli had an exhibit. So pretty soon I got to know the people at the Old State House, Shiloh Museum—you know, one of my former students is the second in command.

[03:10:13] SL: Susan Young.

RC: Susan Young is the second or—you know, second in command out there at the Shiloh Museum. So you spend this k—that kind of time, you know. And now the Press. I mean, I have lots of good friends who work at the Press, you know. And one of the things that—just about the same time I got appointed down here at the Pryor Center, Mike Bieker came over, and I got along fine with Larry Malley. I mean, Larry—I thought Larry was a great guy. But I get along really

well with Mike Bieker. And it was Mike's idea to push some of these series is that—that are just a home for me. So just time after time—there's a—I'll just call 'em Whitehead. There's a Whitehead figure who keeps gettin' up and saying, "Cochran can do this." [03:10:58] Maybe here's a good example—the Geleve Grice thing, which you know about.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You and I have looked at . . .

SL: African American . . .

RC: . . . a lot of these pi—photographer.

SL: . . . photographer from Pine Bluff.

RC: You got it. You know who I hear about that from? I don't discover him. Michael Dabrishus is the Special Collections guy . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . at the library. He's in Pine Bluff in the art department gallery at UAPB. He sees a Geleve Grice Exhibit. And for that moment, he's the Jim Whitehead of that story. He says, "Cochran should know about this. Cochran will like this." You know, so he calls me up and tells me about this. And so I get a head start. I go down—I get alerted. I go down to Pine Bluff. I meet Grice, you know. Well, actually, I meet the director and te—who tells me that Grice is still alive and lives in Pine Bluff, and everything takes off from there. Well, by that time I had

these other connections, so I can get an exhibit on Grice into the Old State House, you know. I can get a book about Grice at the Press.

SL: Press. Yeah.

RC: But it's Mike Dabrishus. There's a—there's—just time and time again, there's been a Jim Whitehead—as I'm calling him for this context—a Jim Whitehead figure who gets me into it, who sort of gets me started. Now Phydella Hogan did it for herself. She just came up and started talkin'.

SL: Right.

RC: And then *Singing in Zion* came out of that. But you know, just the latest thing, this Stilley book. I didn't know who Stilley was. You know who I got—who I owe that one to? Russell.

SL: Oh.

[03:12:29] RC: Russell Cothren. Russell Cothren told me to go to that exhibit, the one I . . .

SL: It was unbelievable . . .

RC: . . . called you . . .

SL: . . . exhibit.

RC: Wasn't that a great exhibit? And you were one of the first people I called.

SL: God. Yeah.

RC: I called Suzanne and [*laughter*] called you and—but Russell Cothren

said, "You should go to this exhibit." Well, that's where I met Kelly. So Mike Dabrishus, Jim Whitehead, Russell Cothren—you know, so the longer you stay in a place, the more people . . .

SL: You're connected to.

RC: . . . know what you do. And so they're likely to have that epiphany moment where they say, "I should tell Cochran about this." And Cochran has benefitted, over and over and over.

[03:13:10] SL: Now what was the exhibit at the State House that you and I went down, and I videotaped. It was about—I think Patsy Cline was in it and . . .

RC: Yeah, it was the one on Arkansas music.

SL: Arkansas music.

RC: It's the one that produced the book, *Our Own Sweet Sounds*.

SL: Right.

RC: Yeah.

[03:13:24] SL: Right. So was that your first or second . . .

RC: That was the only one.

SL: That's was—that's why—I think that's why we went down and did the videotape.

RC: Yeah, and that—member, they had to do that twice because that's when they—they first put that huge exhibit up, and that was their big exhibit. They had those foundational problems at the building.

SL: Right. Oh yeah.

RC: And they had to close it.

SL: That's right.

RC: So they shut it down, and when they reopened, we did part two.

SL: Right.

RC: Which gave me a chance to enlarge the book. And that was what got me started with them. And it was such a success that it gave me cachet with them. [03:14:00] And so they were—I initiated the Grice book. I showed up at their door with the Grice project and said, "You guys ought to do an exhibit." And they were willin' to do it. They introduced the movie one. They brought the movie one to me. And very frequently—and this was true with the music one—when they first called me—and this was the first time they'd ever asked me to work with 'em. I said, "Look, in good conscience, I have to tell you, there's a guy over in Mountain View who knows a whole lot more about Arkansas music than I do, Bill McNeil." And they said, "Yeah, he does know more about Arkan—he knows more about music than you do, but you can write a book in a year," you know. [*Laughter*] He said—you—he said . . .

SL: Bottom line.

RC: [*Laughs*] Yeah. He said, "We need this book pretty quickly because we have an exhibit going up on April 11," or whatever day it was.

SL: Right.

[03:14:47] RC: With the movie book, I said the same thing. "I don't know jack about movies, basically." I said, "I know a lot about documentary movies, but I don't have much—you know, I'm not a film scholar. And the guy you need to talk to is Frank Scheide." And they said exactly the same thing. They said, "We need a book, and we need it in less than a year, in this case." And so Suzanne and I did it together, as you know.

SL: And that was great.

RC: And it was fun, and I learned a ton. So—but again and again, I have the sense that somebody calls me. Somebody speaks up for me, like Whitehead did, and that's happened here just time and time again. So every—if I ever doubted it, I get reminded every now and then, that even though I didn't grow up in this state, people have gone out of their way to sort of make me at home here and give me the advantage of their contacts, you know. Russell knew Kelly, and I trusted Russell. I mean, Russell and I had talked, you know, 'cause he's the ph—you know him.

[03:15:50] SL: Yeah. Great photographer.

RC: And when he said to me . . .

SL: And a good soul.

RC: Yeah, he said, "You'll be interested in this." [*SL laughs*] I trusted

that, you know.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: And so I went. It was—and it wasn't easy. I had to get out of a class early and stuff like that, but it blew me away, as you know 'cause you heard from me the next day on the telephone. [*SL laughs*] And then look what's happened now. That whole circle is complete. That book that they had rejected at the Press has now been published by the Press. There's an exhibit up just the last month—just opened three weeks ago of Stilley instruments at the Old State House. You know how I got that to happen? I sent 'em the book. I didn't have to do anything else.

SL: It's incredible book.

RC: I just sent three copies of the book to Bill Gatewood, Jo Ellen Maack, and Gail Moore, you know. And all of the—then the rest, their energy takes over. They say, "Wow! This is great stuff!" And they call Kelly and, you know.

[03:16:42] SL: Now Gail Moore.

RC: Yeah. She's the—as I understand it—and I think I do understand it pretty well. You know, Bill's the sort of executive.

SL: Right.

RC: But when they decide they're gonna do an exhibit, first of all, they—and I think Bill sort of supervises this, but first of all they decide which

gallery they're gonna put it in. Once they make that decision, the basic person they talk to is Gail. Gail is—I don't have the language for this, but Gail is a kind of exhibit-space choreographer. In other words, she breaks up the space, decides how many chapters, more or less, this exhibit is gonna have. I member with the movie thing, she wrote to me, and she said, "Well, we have this entered. What about we do this silents, and we'll do this section for westerns and, you know, should it be strictly chronological? Should it be by genre?" And she's the one who decides how many free-standing cases you're gonna put and where you're gonna put 'em. In other words, she choreographs the space.

SL: Right.

[03:17:39] RC: Jo Ellen's job is to get people to loan you stuff and to buy stuff. She has a budget, so if they—like, they ended up—she'd gone out and bought harmonicas. For the music exhibit, she'd bought a, you know, a Sonny Boy Williamson harmonica. Her big thing—they had to pay a lot of money for this. They bought Scott Joplin's piano.

SL: Wow.

RC: And you know, that was in a big, prominent space. And those two together—they're what make it actually happen. You know, Gail decides how the room's gonna be arranged. Jo Ellen gets the stuff to put in it. [*Laughter*] And so she gets it loaned, or she buys it.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And they're both really good at what they do. So a guy like me—my participation when I was the guest curator is I'd get messages from 'em, "We need *x* number of words about *y* topic for the signage." So for the movie one, Suzanne and I had to write the little cards that go on the pictures and the dress that, you know, so-and-so wore—that, you know, Mary Steenburgen wore in this thing and . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . and so we do the words. And that's all. And they do the space. And it's worked time and time again, you know. Over and over.

[03:18:49] SL: I bet Suzanne loved doing that project.

RC: She was great, except she's a perfectionist. I mean, it's tough for us to do a book together because she's always wantin' more time—and they're right down there to say, "You'll get it done in a year," 'cause I will. But that's 'cause of that journalism background. You know.

SL: Right.

RC: And she's a perfectionist, though, so we had words occasionally. You know, she—and she saved our butts several times 'cause I would [*snaps*] write too hastily, and she would catch things that I had made a mistake on. But I did most of the filler. I mean, we were smart about the way we broke it down. If somebody—basically it worked like this: If something was big, like *True Grit*, that was gonna get three or

four pages in the book, she was gonna write it. If there were thirty people that were gonna get two lines each, that was me and—'cause I would just crank it out, you know. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right.

RC: And if you needed an extended, sort of more thoughtful thing, then she would write it. And then we'd each go over each other's stuff.

SL: Each other's work. Yeah.

[03:19:49] RC: But the only thing we really squabbled about was—and she yielded to me 'cause she understood that the exhibit was gonna come down on day *y* and they wanted the book. She would yield to me on issues of time, but quality would have to—you know, if she wanted another couple of weeks to do *x*, I would try to talk her out of it, you know. Or "We need to get a little more information about *y*." I'd say, "We don't have time to do that. We just gotta get this done." And so it was fun. And I wanted—I wouldn't have written it without her. I made that a condition, you know, with the Old State House. I said, "I'll do this if I can do it with Suzanne," 'cause I'd always wanted to do one with her. You know, always wanted to do a coauthored book with her. 'Cause she, you know, she's got five or six books of her own that she—that's in the field of post-graduate fellowships. You know, she's the editor, and she writes articles in each one. So in other words, she's got her own active publication list, but our fields really don't

overlap. I do the crazy guys, and she does post-graduate [*SL laughs*] fellowships. It gave us a . . .

SL: The socially mature. [*Laughs*]

RC: Yeah, it gave us a chance to do somethin' together.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And I jumped at that.

[03:20:58] SL: All right, so your first—what was your first book?

RC: Randolph.

SL: Let's talk about Vance Randolph.

RC: Okay. He's in a nursing home down here when I first show up in 1976.

SL: 'Kay.

RC: With his wife, Mary Parler, who was one of my predecessors as the folklore teacher. I knew about him because of his famous best seller, *Pissing in the Snow*. You know, his collection of Ozark bawdy stories.

SL: Right.

[03:21:27] RC: So I go out with Leo Van Scyoc, who's a kind of senior member of the English Department, to be introduced to him, because he and Leo are friends.

SL: Okay.

RC: And Mary. And for me at that time—I'm embarrassed a little bit to admit this—I wasn't lookin' forward to it 'cause I had no sense of him

as a personality at that time. And I thought he would be a kind of retired academic. And I thought, "What could be more boring, you know." [*SL laughs*] So—but I was completely wrong, and it's really been a little bit of a lesson to me ever since. You know, you never know when your next gift is gonna come around the corner, right? So I go out there, and there's this codger. I mean, he's profane. He's a little bit drunk. [*SL laughs*] He speaks with a lisp that's hard to understand at first, but he's hilarious. You know, he's a great raconteur. He tells stories with, you know, with just professional flourish. And the—so I went—and he was canny, too. That before I left the first time, he asked me to do him a favor. And that favor was always the same. It varied in its substance, but it was always a trick to get me to come back out there. He asked me to get him some pen refills the very first time. He had one of those pens that . . .

SL: Fountain pens that . . .

RC: . . . had cartridges that you could fit in 'em.

SL: Yes. Yeah.

[03:22:48] RC: So I go back out there—and almost invariably—and after a while he had me [*snaps*] hooked because, you know, we'd be in the middle of some big story. But the beginning, there was always this favor that I was gonna do. I was gonna bring in—you know, you take a library book back or somethin'.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

RC: But pretty soon I was hooked on him, just as a personality. And so I wrote a couple of short sketches about him. I wrote—member that glossy—one mon—that monthly magazine out of Little Rock. I think it was called *Arkansas Monthly.*

SL: Maybe.

RC: Or *Arkansas Times* or some . . .

SL: Well, there was *Arkansas Times.*

RC: *Times*, but that was always a tabloid.

SL: Yeah.

RC: But this was a glossy *Texas Monthly* knockoff, in a way.

SL: Okay.

[03:23:26] RC: I've got issues. I made a lot of money. I mean, not a lot, but helpful to me. I wrote a cover story about Eddie Sutton. I wrote a cover story about Lou Holtz for those guys. [*SL laughs*] And I wrote a piece about Vance Randolph. That's the connection. It was my first—and they would pay me two or three hundred bucks for these things, you know, and that was money . . .

SL: Yeah, sure.

RC: . . . back then. And I think I brought along in my papers for them to—I thought—I'll see if I did—I tried to put in there my contract for my second year here. You know how much I made? Twelve thousand.

SL: Wow!

RC: I think it's in there. I think you guys are copying my contract for my . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . second year, 1977–[19]78. University of Arkansas, $12,006, somethin' like that. So three hundred bucks—you know . . .

SL: That's big.

[03:24:18] RC: Yeah. So I must've written eight or nine of those pieces, and they were double dips 'cause they allowed me to teach myself about Arkansas and get paid for it. I found the three earliest published travelers accounts. The—you know, these are all nineteenth century stuff—Schoolcraft, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft comes to Arkansas and writes a book about it, 1819. That's one of the earliest ones. The botanist, Thomas Nuttall comes up the Arkansas River and publishes an account. And I write popular magazine articles about both those guys and Gerstäcker, the German guy. And I get paid two or three hundred bucks, and I've read that thing now.

SL: Right.

RC: So I'm teachin' myself . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . about Arkansas history. And so by the time Whitehead stands up and says, "Hey, put Cochran on the steering committee," you know,

Cochran's done all . . .

SL: You had some stuff.

RC: I'd done some homework.

SL: Yeah.

[03:25:09] RC: But anyway, Randolph—my first article about Randolph was published—I think I published two or three pieces about him before I did the book. And here's what happened. It's the same thing with that Twain publisher that Kinnamon didn't want me to take. The University of Illinois Press wrote to me and said, "Have you considered doing a biography of"—you know, I'd never done a biography at that time—"of Randolph?" Basically, they said, "If you do, we'll publish it." Well, I was an assistant professor. I needed to get tenure.

SL: Right.

RC: So I did. I wrote a little bibliography with Mike Luster before.

SL: Mike Luster. Yeah.

RC: Before that. And that's technically my first book. It's kind of a booklet. I was unconscionably proud of it at the time just 'cause it was my first book. But the Randolph book was the thing that really took me over the top—that nobo—you know, and I don't want to overstate this, but there were people who judge you by traditional academic standards and—you know, just the way I dressed and the way I behave and the way I didn't take care of my career, à la

Kinnamon, I was gonna get downgraded by those people. Willard Gatewood's one of 'em, and there was a guy in my department, Brian Wilkie, who was a pretty . . .

SL: Yeah, I knew him.

RC: . . . pretty distinguished scholar.

SL: Yeah.

RC: When I got my Guggenheim Fellowship, he said—and it was half jocular, but it was partly serious—he said, "Well, now I guess I have to respect you, you know, despite how you look and despite the fact you don't comport yourself like an academic." So it was the Randolph book that did that for me. The Randolph book got me the Guggenheim, and it got me the Elsie Clews Parsons Prize, which in my little field in folklore—it's awarded each year to the best book in that field. And I didn't win it, I shared it. I co-won it with another guy. But the other guy was really distinguished. It was Dennis Tedlock and he had done a new translation of this Mayan Popol Vuh.

SL: Whoa! [*Laughs*]

[03:27:14] RC: So I was in real good company.

SL: Yeah, I would say.

RC: I was in real good company. So that cleared it with someone like Willard Gatewood. Willard Gatewood was a sweet guy, but he plugged in the absolutely standard academic criteria for evaluation, just like

Kinnamon. And to be frank, I didn't meet that. I was okay. I was a, you know, passable guy, but nobody they had to see as equal. Nobody that a guy like Willard Gatewood had to see as his equal. And the Guggenheim will do that for you. [*Laughs*] It'll . . .

SL: No shit. [*Laughter*]

RC: They—you know, and so there were—just person after person. Elizabeth Payne in the history department. She—there were many people for whom Bob Cochran with a Guggenheim became a different guy than Bob Cochran before the Guggenheim.

SL: Pre-Guggenheim.

RC: Yeah. So I've been grateful for the rest of my life 'cause then I can just go about my business and those people aren't gonna mess with me. No, and most of 'em were nice people. I mean, I don't mean to say they were hostile. But the—if they were hostile, they had to shut up. And that's even sweeter when people that you know think you're a kind of disgrace [*SL laughs*]—they just have to be quiet. And it gives your field a little respectability.

SL: Yep.

[03:28:29] RC: You know, 'cause it's not just me. It's—you know, most people when they think of Walter Williams or Ed Stilley, they don't think of them the way they think of Shakespeare or Chaucer.

SL: Right.

RC: You know, it's just not the same ball park. So I did hear this—and I'll name this guy 'cause he's a friend of mine—but—and it was jocular, but there's an element of seriousness to it. I'd be walkin' down the hall in Kimpel Hall on my way to class, and I'd be carryin' some kind of boom box or, you know—now, an iPad, you know, or an iPod, carryin' my music. In the first years I was rolling a turntable, you know.

SL: Sure.

RC: And they'd be—and I'd pass him in the hall, and he'd be carrying, you know, the *Riverside Shakespeare* or somethin' like that.

SL: Right.

RC: And they would say things like, "Teaching Elvis today, Professor Cochran?" You know, and there was a little bit of—a little jab, you know, there.

SL: Right.

[03:29:18] RC: And then when your books start to come out—and it was Randolph that did that for me—that was a—I had some padding. You know, those jabs weren't gonna go very deep at that point. They didn't go deep anywhere, but it was nice. It was nice. Randolph launched me in that sense.

SL: All right . . .

RC: 'Cause everybody loved Randolph. You know enough about the background of Randolph. I don't know whether I should say that, but

Randolph had written a whole shelf load of books about the Ozarks. He was the best-known chronicler-student of Ozark traditional life. And I wrote—what I did was not do that kind of study, I wrote his biography. So I read all that stuff and talked to him. And that book—you know, then it was serious. It was between hard covers. [03:30:09] First time I saw it I was thrilled out of my mind. I was in Romania [*SL laughs*] on my first Fulbright, and this book showed up in a package. And I hadn't even seen the cover. You know, I didn't know what it was gonna look like. I thought it was lovely, and so I felt like a made guy. I mean, it was maybe the first time in life I felt like—from a professional point of view, I thought, "Okay, if I die tomorrow, I'm on the" . . .

SL: I've at least got this.

RC: . . . "I did this, and this baby's on the shelves, you know."

[03:30:35] SL: I'm gonna ask you a production question.

RC: Okay.

SL: Did you record these talks with Randolph?

RC: I did, but there's a real problem with 'em. The library has 'em. The library hired Mike Luster to transcribe 'em because most people can't understand him. You know, on tape—these are little cassettes—and even on good tape, he's hard to understand because of his lisp. You can get used to him, and Mike and I did, but y—the answer is yes, in a

kind of haphazard way. There were days I went out there without a tape recorder and just—notebook. But we recorded probably fifteen, twenty hours of him.

SL: Well, I just . . .

RC: I know that's not enough, but . . .

SL: No, it is.

RC: . . . by your standards, but . . .

SL: No, that's plenty. I mean, I'm just wondering if—number one, have those been digitized?

RC: I don't think so.

SL: We should—I don't know if you have access to 'em or not, but I would be interested in preserving those.

RC: Okay, why don't I get you at least one. I—I'm sure I can get you one of 'em.

[03:31:33] SL: Okay.

RC: You can give it a listen and see what you think of the quality and . . .

SL: Well, I mean, we can enhance and . . .

RC: Okay, yeah.

SL: To a certain point.

RC: You guys have some—and just see how bad you think the lisp makes it.

SL: Well, you know, it's . . .

RC: It's pretty pronounced. I want to warn you.

SL: Even if there's—if there's transcription . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . available for it, then it is worth posting with the transcript.

RC: Okay.

SL: 'Cause you get to hear the guy.

RC: Yeah.

SL: You know, and so—I mean, the Pryor Center's built on being able to hear and see what's written.

RC: Okay, I'll try to get you at least one of 'em just . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: . . . so you can use it as a test case.

SL: Okay.

[03:32:13] RC: I think I still have one in my office, actually.

SL: Okay. Okay. And I don't know if—I would think the library would help us with this if we—I mean, if they're the—I'm assuming it's in Special Collections and . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So . . .

RC: 'Cause they pay—what I remember clearly—is they paid Mike to do some transcribing at one point. So I was off doin' some other project by then.

[03:32:37] SL: Yeah, you know, I met Mike Luster a long, long time ago and maybe had two or three times with him, but he was married to the Simmons girl at the time.

RC: Robin.

SL: Robin. Yeah. And I got to see Robin last year . . .

RC: Oh, okay.

SL: . . . 'cause Jim . . .

RC: Oh, yeah, he came back into town and did some program, didn't he? Yeah.

SL: . . . and his wife came from New Zealand for their show up at the—which I thought was a great program.

RC: Yeah, I wish I'd seen it.

SL: And you would've loved his talk.

RC: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, 'cause—you know the images are great . . .

RC: I woulda gone. I was out of town. If I'd been in town, I woulda gone.

SL: Yeah.

[03:33:16] RC: Yeah. Mike was my first student—and you talked about a little bit about teaching. Mike was the first student I encountered who basically, you know, had the conversion experience. He came to the front of the room after one of my classes and said, "Basically, I want to do what you're doin'. How do I do it?" So—you know, [*SL laughs*]

he went and got a Ph.D. at Penn in folklore, and I wrote letters to help him get in with my pal Henry Glassie and Roger Abrahams. So yeah, he was my—he was the first serious—the guy that was in my class who became a folklorist.

SL: And how is he now?

RC: I don't know.

SL: Yeah.

RC: I mean, I'm in touch with him a little bit.

SL: Right.

RC: He's—he lives in Missouri.

SL: Yeah, I think I knew that.

RC: He was the state folklorist until they canceled the . . .

SL: Prgoram.

RC: . . . the program just a year or so ago. So . . .

SL: Okay, so . . .

RC: He's had an up-and-down domestic career, like so many people.

[03:34:12] SL: Well, now I have to read Vance Randolph.

RC: Yeah, and you can start—a good place to start is with that *Pissing in the Snow* book. It's hilarious.

SL: Okay.

RC: And there's a good backstory to that, which I can give you quite briefly.

SL: Okay.

RC: When he—he mainly collected from the 1920s to about 1950. The overwhelming majority of the stories he collected will be from that period. And in the 1950s a very prestigious university imprint, Columbia University Press, published—you know, I used to know this right on the tip of my fingers when I was writin' about him, but published, you know, four or five volumes of his Ozark folktales. And they have a standard format. There's a title, which is one of the stories. And then it says, *And Other Ozark Folktales*. And so one of 'em is something like, *Who Blowed Up the Church House*, or *We Always Lie to Strangers*. That's a different one, but—*The Talking Turtle and Other Ozark Folktales*, and so on. Randolph's idea for these volumes was each one would have about a hundred stories, give or take eight or ten.

SL: Wow.

RC: A lotta stories. They're short, for the most part.

SL: Oh, okay.

RC: 'Cause they're oral stories with some kind of annotation about whether this is a variant of a famous, you know, Grimm fairy tale or somethin'.

SL: Right.

[03:35:31] RC: But his idea was that about ten of those would be bawdy tales. And his argument, I thought, was flawless. His argument was

that would give you an accurate picture of Ozark storytelling. It's mostly pretty clean stories, but there are bawdy stories. In 1950s they wouldn't touch the bawdy stories, so they come out with one hundred clean stories, okay?

SL: Right.

RC: So, twp, fast-forward twenty years.

SL: Yeah.

RC: You got five volumes from the 1950s. Nineteen seventies, University of Illinois Press calls up, and they say, "You got any more folktales? We think there's a market here for, you know, anything like that." And he says, "Well, I gave all those stories except the dirty ones to Columbia." Says, "They wouldn't publish the bawdy ones, so I got about a hundred and fifty bawdy stories here, and no other ones." And they said, "Well, would you send 'em up to us?" And that was *Pissing in the Snow* comes out and takes off. Best-selling book he ever wrote. [*SL laughs*] Goes into a paperback edition—you know, published in hardback by University of Illinois Press with all sorts of scholarly stuff. [03:36:34] And then—it's not Penguin—what is it—Bantam? Some—I've forgotten the name of the publisher now, but cheap paperback, like, $4.95, $3.95 at that time—comes out and sells like hotcakes. I mean, Randolph's sitting out there at that old folks home gettin' four-figure royalty checks every month—gettin', you

know, twelve hundred bucks one month; fifteen hundred bucks the next month. He's been poor his whole life. Never had any money. Now he's bedridden. He can't do shit.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And he's gettin' these checks, you know. [03:37:03] And the—so he p—here's the kicker on this—he plans—I don't know—you'll have to edit some of this out. He plans a sequel, and he and I are talkin' by this time. I'm writin' his biography, and he's pretty happy with me. So he says, "You know, we gotta capitalize on this, Cochran." [*SL laughs*] He says, "There's—you know, this book is sellin'. I need a sequel." And he says, "I already have a title. *The Worn-out Pussy*." [*Laughter*] And he said—he had a hell of a time gettin' *Pissin' in the Snow* titled. So in the back of my head I'm sayin', "You got no chance with the university presses with this."

SL: Right.

RC: And he says, "But I'm—I got—there's a shortage of material, you know, and I need about thirty or forty more stories." So he says to me—this is just typical Randolph—he says, "You go over there on the campus." He said, "That's a hotbed. People are always tellin' dirty stories over there on the campus. And you just keep an open ear, and when you hear people tell you a dirty story, you bring it out here to me, and I'll Ozark it." [*SL laughs*] Which, you know, meant he would

just trap it up in all that kind of Ozark lingo.

SL: Right, right.

[03:38:00] RC: So he was—the lesson in this is he was absolutely conscienceless. He would pass these things off as folktales. You know, he'd make up somebody who was the so-called—tellin'—you know [*Laughter*], and he'd pass—the—'cause he had next to zero respect for those kind of boundaries or limits, you know. And I say that—you know, the Press is republishing his first book next year, and they asked me to edit it and write the intro. And I understated it just a little. I said that scholars were right to suspect his level of loyalty to their standards. But if I'd stated it really honestly—that's how I put it in the intro, that they were right to suspect that he wasn't wholly of their camp. [*Laughs*] What he was was just wholly an army of one. I mean, that guy was out—he wa—if it was great stuff, you know—I could fill up your whole tape with stuff about Randolph. He would . . .

SL: I don't mind. We can do that.

[03:38:58] RC: He would—he told stories—he only was in the army for, like, four months, right.

SL: Right.

RC: And most of that he was in the infirmary [*SL laughs*] 'cause he got mumps. He got orchitis, you know, which means his testicles swelled up to the size of volleyballs. I mean, he was, you know, he was just

unbelievably bad soldier. [*SL laughs*] So—but he was a veteran, right?

SL: Yeah.

RC: I mean, four months he's out. But he's a veteran, so he lives the rest of his long life—he goes to the VA Hospital, he's buried at the National Cemetery. He's—everything is paid for by the government, which he found absolutely hilarious. And the tapes—when he told me about it—this is the line that stuck with me just word perfect—he said, "Aren't—just a handful of soldiers like me and the whole goddamn army would be brought to its knees." [*Laughter*] You know, so that's the kind of phrasing he would use.

SL: Yeah.

RC: "Just a handful of soldiers like me." I've never forgotten that. "The whole godda"—when I asked him who he was gonna vote for in the 1980 election, he said, and this is, again, a direct quote, he says, "I don't give a tinker's damn who gets elected." I mean, he was absolutely unregenerate, you know. [*SL laughs*] And I needed that. An earnest guy like me. I mean, I was always had a comic sense.

SL: Right.

[03:40:14] RC: But I al—there still is a tiny little bit of direct earnestness in me. [*SL laughs*] And—but there was way too much back then.

SL: Right.

RC: And I needed some of that knocked out, and he was the perfect guy to do it.

SL: He brought you to the mat.

RC: He did. And he taught me—well, you know, he says, "Above all"—and more than—and it helped me stand up to a guy like Kinnamon later. When Kinnamon told me not to do that book for Twain, you know, I probably wasn't conscious of it, but I was the product of it already, of Randolph's influence, that I was askin' myself, "Am I gonna enjoy this? Am I gonna enjoy doin' this book for Twain? Is this gonna be fun? Then if the answer to that question is yes, then the hell with all this other stuff."

SL: Right.

RC: "I'm gonna do it." And it was Randolph—he—Randolph just—he didn't care about any of this stuff, you know. [*Laughter*] [03:41:06] You know, there—in songs there's a big rule—you're not supposed to produce composites. You're not supposed to take—let's say you get three people who sing the same song. And one of 'em only knows a two-verse fragment and can't remember the rest. But one of those verses is in no other version, and it's a cool verse, okay. And then your—one of your other informants knows a good, long version, but it doesn't include that verse. And then you got a third one that has some mix of the two, you know, that—and so what you do to produce

a great version of that song is, kwkkk, pull 'em all together. Put that stanza in a plausible, you know, place in the narrative so it's not out of place. And that's called a composite, right? You made a . . .

SL: Okay.

RC: And you're not supposed to do that because that song as you print it does not exist. You did not record that song as you print it. You recorded this song and this song and this song and . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you've stitched 'em all together to make a longer, more complete version. Well, that was an absolute no-no. Randolph did it all the time. [*SL laughs*] Did it all the time. [*Laughter*] He didn't give a damn about that. But he claimed to do it. You know, he claimed . . .

SL: Right.

[03:42:09] RC: And when somebody told him they want to do something he didn't want to do, he could sound like Professor So-and-so. He'd say, "Oh, no, this—you know, you can't do that. Academic standards don't allow you to do that." [*Laughter*] Well, he just . . .

SL: He didn't have any.

RC: It just meant he didn't want to do it. That's all it meant.

SL: Right.

RC: It meant exactly that. "I don't want to do it." So I learned a lot from him and in—I'm not the level of cynic he was. I do care who gets

elected.

SL: Right.

RC: But the—but he taught me to care just a little bit less about that kind of stuff.

SL: It kept—gave you a better perspective.

RC: You got it. Yeah, he . . .

SL: Now that you got out of yourself . . .

RC: . . . was the single most important figure in the finishing off of Bob Cochran. [*SL laughs*] You know, the sort of final step . . .

SL: Breakin' him down. Breakin' him down.

RC: Yeah, breakin' him—yeah.

SL: Breakin' him down.

RC: Gettin' him ready to—for the wars.

SL: Here comes Vance.

[03:42:55] RC: Gettin' him ready to be sent out to do his thing. It was Randolph. So that was the first book. And it made possible everything else, because the other books required some help. You know, they required some faith on the part of the Press. You know, they put a lot of money into that Stilley book, and I gave 'em some from the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies. The Grice book, a photography book, cost 'em a little more to produce. But I think if I'd been a new guy on the block with the Grice book and I didn't have the

connections at the Old State House and stuff, I wouldn't have been able to convince 'em as easily. And I may be wrong about some of this . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . but I think the—I've always viewed the Randolph book as just throwin' open doors for me. You know, that I was carryin' around a kind of academic respectability after that book that I didn't have before that. That make sense?

SL: Yeah, it does.

RC: Okay.

SL: It does. And that—and it's a good lesson.

RC: Yeah. He was—in some ways—you talk about people being a mentor—in the intro to this new book, I call him an anti-mentor, you know. [*Laughter*] He's—you know . . .

SL: You don't want to do anything this guy tells you. But . . .

[03:44:10] RC: Yeah. [*Laughs*] So—but he was perfect for me. He just gave me a bounce, you know, or encouraged a kind of, you know, swagger—or bounce would be a better word, I think, for me 'cause I wouldn't want to be seen as a swaggerer. But somebody who's not gonna be pushed into a pigeonhole.

SL: Right.

RC: Well, there was already some of that in me. I left Indiana 'cause that

guy tried to shove me into a pigeonhole.

SL: Right, right.

RC: But he really validated that. Randolph really said, "That's the right way to go 'cause you'll still be laughin' when you're eighty," you know.

SL: So this was your first one.

RC: It was my first book. Yeah.

SL: My God.

RC: Yeah.

SL: What a way to start.

RC: Nineteen eighty-five.

SL: What a way to start.

RC: Yeah, and it was handed to me on a platter. I mean, he was waitin' here when I showed up. And the Press wrote to me and asked me to do it. So all those agonies that many academics do—they write their book, and then they try to shop it. I didn't have to do that. I didn't have to do that.

SL: What a gift.

[03:45:10] RC: Yeah, and there're more. I mean, I could go on forever. The—when Jeannie Whayne was the editor of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, and then Patrick came in later.

SL: Right.

RC: Both of those, for me, have been absolutely wonderful editors. Patrick asked me once for a twelve-hundred-word essay on a book, a review of a book, and I got really interested in the book, and I wrote him four thousand words on it. And I apologized, and I said, "Is there any way—you know, I—if you tell me just to take this and walk out the door, I will." He said, "No, no, no." He said, "You know, we'll just call it a review essay." And he published it. Well, you know, any academic who has somebody who will do that for him—Jeannie Whayne did that with my "Rock Island Line" piece. She published musical notations, which they were hesitant to do the costs involved with that. And Jeannie just—she was the editor, and she said, "We'll do it." And so I've benefitted—I mean, I just couldn't detail you how many times somebody has sort of gone to bat for my stuff.

[03:46:16] SL: Well, let's—okay, so after Randolph, what do you follow up with? What's your next book?

RC: Well, the next one was that book that Kinnamon told me not to do. It was a book on Samuel Beckett's short fiction, which I did it. And I'll tell you a little story about that. I mean, it's—you know, you live as long as I do, these things happen. [03:46:33] A year after that book came out, I did a Fulbright lectureship in Korea. So I go over to Korea, and it's for the first time and I—there was a certain amount of

vanity in this. One of the reasons that I was attracted to this job—its official title was distinguished lecturer. Nobody'd ever called anything I did distinguished, so [*SL laughs*] I liked that idea. And there was a certain amount of protocol to it. Korea is a real status-based society, so when my daughter came over there to visit and I would go to give a lecture at another university—that's what meant by distinguished. You were housed at one university, but you were contracted to go give lectures all over the country. So they made a very big deal of this in ways that surprised me. I mean, they would come and pick you up in some sort of embassy car with flags on the front, and then when you would pull up to the administration building, there would literally be the staff would be standing there at attention, you know, to receive you. Well, my daughter thought this was, you know, unbelievably cool . . .

SL: Right. Now all of a sudden you're heads of state.

RC: . . . 'cause she was a college undergraduate, you know, and so on. [*SL laughter*] [03:47:35] Anyway, I felt like I wasn't able to really live up to the standard of that, you know. And I had some Korean colleagues who you could tell—you know, when they ask about my books and my research, you could tell they weren't really impressed. And then one day in downtown Seoul, we were in an academic book store that had an English language section. And to my great surprise,

they did have one of my books on the stand. Guess which one it was? The Beckett book . . .

SL: Ah!

RC: . . . that Kinnamon told . . .

SL: Not to do.

RC: . . . that Kinnamon told me not to write. So the Randolph book was not there, of course, because it wasn't—Randolph was not a figure known there.

SL: Right.

RC: But Samuel Beckett was a Nobel Prize winning author. So there it was. It was the short fiction of Samuel Beckett. I pull it out, and I say, "Oh, let me buy a copy of this for you, sir," and you know, the—and all of a sudden, my status in Korea went up because of a book that Kinnamon told me not to write.

SL: Not to do.

RC: Who knew? I had no idea. My—I was using Randolph's criterion. "This'll be fun. I can do it quickly. They're paying me," you know. And I didn't think it was any possible benefit, but [*snaps*] down the road in Korea, it was useful. It was useful to me. Cost a fortune over there. Cost like forty-five bucks to buy this book that I could've bought for twenty here. But I happily paid it. That's what happened in the book store.

[03:49:04] SL: Well, I think that's a good test of whatever project you want to work on. If it's—if it seems like it's gonna be fun, if you know it's gonna be fun, that should be the driving force.

RC: I couldn't agree more.

SL: I mean, there's only—especially now that we've gotten older and we've been through a lot of things, there's only so much time left.

RC: That's right.

SL: So why be miserable? And when you can find goodness in something and it also be fun.

RC: Yeah, it's rewarding every day.

SL: Yeah.

RC: When you get up to work on it. Yeah.

SL: It makes you want to get up.

[03:49:40] RC: Yeah. No, I couldn't agree more. And Randolph certainly had that down. He had that lesson down.

SL: Well, and this book that . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . shows up in Korea.

RC: Shows up in Korea.

SL: It was your belief that it was going to be fun.

RC: And it was fun to write. You know . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . like I said, all I had to do was download my head. And it was fun to write. It was fun to write 'cause Beckett was a funny writer [*SL laughs*], and it was fun to write about his stuff.

[03:50:04] SL: Right. All right, so what was . . .

RC: And then we did—and then the third book—let's see—third book would be probably *Singing in Zion.* I may mess this up, but that was the long one.

SL: So was it *Singing in Zion* or *Songs of Zion*?

RC: *Singing in Zion.*

SL: *Singing of Zion.*

RC: *Singing in Zion.* Yeah. It was a pun, of course. It's on the name of that little town.

SL: Right, Zion. Right.

RC: Zion out here, Zion Road. But there's a line of gospel songs—"We'll all—one day we'll all be singing in Zion," you know.

SL: Yeah.

RC: So it's a—that one took ten years. That was a long effort.

SL: I wonder if those recordings are anywhere over there.

RC: They—where i . . .

SL: Did I—did you ever get a copy the recordings?

RC: I think I got a copy of part of 'em, but I couldn't tell you for sure at this time but—and they would've been on cassettes, and I may still

have some of that stuff.

[03:50:55] SL: Yeah, it seems like I remember being really a bit stressed about that session. It seems like—were there three, four voices up there?

RC: I've forgotten, to tell you the truth. I think there might've been four.

SL: I think there were four.

RC: Because there were my standard people, you know, Helen and Phydella.

SL: Right.

RC: Who were there—they were there for most of my interviews.

SL: And then two daughters.

RC: Two daughters. Yeah. And—yeah, Jeannie would've been one of 'em 'cause she was the best singer by that time. The other two womens' voices were . . .

SL: It seems like to me—I don't know why, but I got a flash that there may have been a technical problem that happened on one of those songs or part of it.

RC: I don't remember.

[03:51:44] SL: I member that it seemed like the older women—we—there was some concern about their frailty. I mean, they were . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: They'd been doing this a long time.

RC: Yeah, and they weren't . . .

SL: Maybe in the nineties? Was one of 'em the nineties, maybe? The oldest one or . . .

RC: I don't think they lived quite that long, but they might've looked like that.

SL: Yeah.

RC: And it would've been Phydella. Phydella died . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . before Helen, quite a few years. Helen—Phydella didn't live to see the book, quite. She lived to see the dummy, but she didn't live to see the actual book.

SL: Well, it's interesting that there's—there ought to be—there's some media out there of that story.

[03:52:26] RC: Yeah. I'll tell you, too—one thing that mystified me about that was that was not a project that I was the primary driver for. I'm not sayin' it was you 'cause I don't know who did it for sure, but I was—it wasn't gonna—I knew it wasn't gonna be a part of the book. I knew that it was primarily archival or for them, so I was interested in it, but I didn't have the kind of intense interest in it that I would've had if it were gonna be involved in a project that I was gonna supervise 'cause I knew they weren't gonna put a CD in the book at that time. It was all—but it was the best-quality recording ever done

of them.

SL: Of them.

RC: Yeah.

[03:53:07] SL: You know, here's the thing, though, now with the internet and—you can now, within a transcript of the book or . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . within the text of the book online, you can put links . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . to media. So you don't even really have to have hardware. You know, a CD . . .

RC: Yeah, a disk in the book. Yeah.

SL: . . . or a tape or something. You just go online, and you read the book online and . . .

RC: And then you can link to those . . .

SL: . . . link to whatever . . .

RC: . . . things right away.

SL: . . . you want to link to. But it could be a different article, it could be someone else's study of the . . .

RC: Sure.

SL: . . . same area. You know, it's just a—it opens so many doors.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And so . . .

[03:53:54] RC: A real multi-platform . . .

SL: . . . all these projects that you . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . that have just been in print, analog print, I'm—in the back of my mind, I'm goin', "Okay, well, now, where are the interview tapes?"

RC: Yeah.

SL: "You know, where are the recordings?"

RC: You're lookin' ahead to the e-book versions, aren't you?

SL: Yeah, I am, because . . .

RC: Where you can put all these other platforms in it.

SL: Yeah. Well, I mean . . .

RC: Yeah. And that would be great stuff. It really would.

SL: It would be ground-breaking stuff, but the content would be great.

RC: Yeah, it would amplify the content greatly.

SL: Okay, so . . .

[03:54:24] RC: So then *Singing in Zion . . .*

SL: *Singing in Zion*—you know, so . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

RC: And then they come in pretty rapid-fire for a while there because right after that, I get asked to edit a book of paintings of Dorris Curtis's. These are the Grandma Moses painter from Conway.

SL: Right.

RC: All I do there is write the intro and edit the text 'cause she was a good painter, but not a good writer. So when the Press got the book, their reviewer said, "You gotta clean up the prose." So they hired me. They paid me—well, the Press didn't pay me, but UCA paid me to spend a summer editing that book. And . . .

SL: And did you enjoy that?

RC: I did, but not as much as the other ones. That was partly a job of work.

SL: Right.

RC: And I did it as a favor to Larry, basically.

SL: Larry Malley?

RC: Yeah. And it's a good—I'm proud of the book 'cause she was a really interesting painter, and I got to like her. We had an adversarial relationship during this 'cause she didn't—she thought her prose was just fine. And the—but the Press was right. Her prose was schlocky and repetitive. She'd written six different introductions. She wrote an introduction to every chapter, and I collapsed 'em all into one introduction at the beginning. But I paid myself really well for that time. It was three months, and I picked up eight grand doin' it.

SL: Yeah.

[03:55:43] RC: But I came to like her at the end. You know, I good

copped me and bad copped Larry a good bit. I told him I was gonna do that. I—'cause when she would really be recalcitrant about a change that I had made, I would say, "Miss Curtis, I couldn't agree with you more, but the people at the Press are just, you know, firm on this. We gotta cut it down, you know. So if you want to talk to the people at the Press, you know, of course, I can't discourage you from doing that, but I can tell you, you're probably not gonna get anywhere with 'em. [*Laughs*] It's gonna come down to, 'Do you want to have this book published or not?'"

SL: Or not. Right.

[03:56:17] RC: And one thing she was particularly incensed about was my removal of her poems. I kept one just as a little sop to her, but she'd written a lot of really bad poetry, along with her very good paintings. And there I was absolutely shameless. I told her—I said, "Miss Curtis, your poetry deserves a volume of its own." [*Laughter*]

SL: Oh God.

RC: And you know, just that the woman's ninety-four.

SL: Right.

RC: You know, this was gonna be her only book. I understand her instincts. She knows this is gonna be her one time to . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . ascend the soap box.

SL: Right.

RC: And she wants to throw the kitchen sink in.

SL: Right. Sure.

RC: She wants everything in there.

SL: And why wouldn't she?

[03:56:55] RC: Yeah. And she—but boy, when it came out, I have a photograph of her. It's one of my favorite photographs. When she actually got the physical book, we took it over to her house in Conway, and she laid it out on a table in front of her, and she's turning the pages, and she's just overwhelmed with pleasure. 'Cause you know the difference. There's this f—and she goes [smiles and spreads arms wide open]—like that. She—and the photographer took a picture of her just like that. I'm standin' behind her. You can only see me up to here. You can't see my face, but I'm surely smiling. She just felt like [*SL laughs*] she'd died and gone to heaven. So—and she wrote me a truly extravagant thank-you note, so it all came out in the wash. But there were times when she was pissed, you know, that her prose was bein' mutilated, and it was. I mean, it was—I probably tossed out—I didn't write a word, except connectives every now—and I never wrote a coherent sentence in it. I just—a complete sentence. I just edited her down mercilessly, you know, just squeezed it and squeezed it, and all this sugar came out and fat and stuff.

SL: Right.

RC: But at the end, she absolutely loved it, because it foregrounded the paintings.

SL: Well, and . . .

RC: You know, it wasn't buried . . .

SL: . . . that's what it was about.

RC: . . . under all this crap that she'd written.

SL: Right.

[03:58:05] RC: So that was the next book. And then I decided that I—and this was the—I had written a entry for *American National Biography* on Louise Pound. You probably—you might never've heard of her, but she's a—she was a woman who was famous in the study of regional speecvh. She founded the *Journal of American Speech*. And she—if you pick the years right—say, 1925 to 1940, she would've been as distinguished a humanity scholar—female—as anybody in the country. She would've been a candidate for most distinguished female humanity scholar. She was at the University of Nebraska. She only wrote one really full-length book, but it was pivotal in the study of folksong. Anyway, I'd written a five-page, four- or five-page entry on her for the *American National Biography* 'cause she helped Randolph. She reviewed Randolph's books positively and encouraged Randolph's work, so that's how I came to know even a little about her. And the

University of Nebraska Press told me the same thing. They said, "We need a biography of Louise Pound. Would you be" . . .

SL: Was she still alive?

RC: No, she had been dead since the 1950s, [19]58, I think.

SL: Okay.

[03:59:16] RC: So I spent four or five years driving to Lincoln, you know, ten or fifteen times, and I published a book, a biography of her.

SL: Now, why—oh, Lincoln, Nebraska.

RC: Yeah, Lincoln, Nebraska.

SL: Yeah, right. Okay.

RC: And that was at the University of Nebraska Press. And I did sort of realize—this was internal 'cause by this time I was already a full professor, and I didn't need to make anybody happy. But I wanted to make myself happy. I didn't want to be known as the guy who was publishing only with the University of Arkansas Press 'cause I'd published two or three books in a row with them.

SL: Right.

RC: So I wanted to get out in the world and just show that I could still do whatever I wanted. [*SL laughs*] So I—it was sort of proof to myself that I wasn't just slackin' off. So I wrote this—and it's a standard full-length biography. And that came out in 2011 or [20]12. And that's the last thing of that difficulty that I did. Since then it's been like the

Stilley book.

SL: Intros and . . .

[04:00:36] RC: Intros. Things like that. Yeah. So that pretty well—I think that touch—then the movie book. That's a short book with Suzanne.

SL: So how many movies did you review on that?

RC: Well, we claim to have seen two hundred, but that might be a slight exaggeration, but we go way over that if you count the number of *Star Trek* episodes that Suzanne has watched. [*SL laughs*] I haven't watched them, but she—when I said, "We can't really say" . . .

SL: You mean, for George Takei?

RC: Yeah, yeah, and—yeah, and we treasure that book. You got it signed for us—you know, that book that . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: So . . .

[04:00:59] SL: Have you ever—you've—I don't guess we've ever—we've—we haven't released that interview.

RC: Yeah, I haven't seen it, but . . .

SL: It's amazing.

RC: . . . you told me about doin' it, and he's really c—you know, the little I learned about him, he's really quite an impressive guy. He's an advocate for gay rights . . .

SL: He is.

RC: . . . in a way that I didn't know about at all.

SL: Oh yeah.

RC: Yeah.

SL: There's no question.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: I mean—yeah.

[04:01:19] RC: So—and now we got this—you know, we got our first book out, and the second one will be out before the end of this year. The Kent Bonar book.

SL: Yeah. Now let's go ahead and talk about Kent Bonar, then.

RC: Well, he's another guy that just mesmerizes me, like Stilley. I mean, he's a one—he's an absolute one-of-a-kind.

SL: And he illustrates.

RC: Yeah, he's a naturalist, and he's a good artist, too. So what he did, just to put it in one line, is he took a pioneering Arkansas botany book by a professor who's still alive, Ed Smith, Professor Ed Smith from the botany department here, biology department here, published in 1978, a book with a very long title—you know, *Annotated List of the Vascular Flora of Arkansas*. And it's a huge list, and it attempts to be exhaustive. If there's a plant that grows in Arkansas, he's . . .

SL: He's got it.

RC: . . . tried to get it in there. [*SL laughs*] But it was—it didn't—it wasn't illustrated. He had to—it was published on mimeograph paper at first.

SL: Oh, wow! [*Laughs*]

RC: He had no money. [04:02:25] So Bonar gets this book in 1978. He's livin' out in Newton County, no electricity, no plumbing. You know, he's a hermit. Kind of an Arkansas Thoreau guy, although he's way more back in the woods than Thoreau. Thoreau liked his creature comforts, finally.

SL: Right.

RC: But he starts luggin' this book through the woods, entering into the book drawings of the plants that he sees and little continent—little comments, little annotations about the elevation and stuff like that. And he does this for an unconscionably long period of time. He does this for about thirty years. [04:03:05] So the book comes out in 1978, the product of about twenty years of work on Smith's part 'cause Smith becomes the director of the UA Herbarium in about 1960.

SL: 'Kay.

RC: Twenty years later, nearly nineteen se—1980—he's—1978—he publishes his book. Twenty twelve, 2014, somewhere in there, a collection of his friends, a collection of Bonar's friends—and the one that I know is Trey, going back to Trey. A collection of his friends, mostly from Newton County, start to worry that this book is gonna get

lost 'cause it's a one—you know, there's no copies of it. He's dropped it once in an Ozark stream. He slipped, and the book fell in the water, and he fished it out and dried it out page by page. Fortunately, that copy had really good paper quality, and the ink didn't run or anything. It's hard to tell now, you know, that it was soaked in a stream. But it was real beat up. The binding was falling apart. He had taped it together with duct tape. At some point in the middle, he stopped doing the annotations because another book had been published doing the annotations, so he just concentrated on the drawings then. But my guess is—and I didn't do the—I didn't count all the drawings, but what I did was take a twenty-page section of the book and count all the drawings—and then extrapolate that to a 560-page book.

SL: Wow!

RC: And there are about thirty-five hundred drawings in this book. I mean, just a huge number. And some of 'em are really quite ornate. Others are quite simple. But at one point in time, too, he stopped drawing them directly into the book, and he started carrying little notebooks to make the initial drawings, and then he would ink them in to the sort of master book. [04:04:57] So I took it by the Press, and they agreed to publish it. It's gonna cost 'em a fortune because it's big—it's a big thick book.

SL: It's bi—huge. Yeah.

RC: And Mike Bieker's been wonderful on that. 'Cause some of the people said, "Well, you know, every other page is just a distribution map," which is really boring if you're not interested in this stuff. It's an outline map of Arkansas with all the counties.

SL: Right.

RC: And if that plant is found in that county, there's a little dot in there. Well, they were tempted to just cut the production costs in half, almost, by just eliminating those. [04:05:29] But I had promised Smith, when I asked him for permission to republish the book, I had promised him—the guy's got Alzheimer's. He may not even be all there at this point. But I promised him 'cause he asked—he said, "Will you—are you gonna republish the whole book, including the indexes?" That's what he was the most interested in the back.

SL: Right.

RC: And I said, "Yes." I told Bieker that, and Bieker just bit the bullet. Bieker said—he was wonderful—the last thing Bieker said was, "Look, there's some books you just have to publish, you know. If we take a bath on this one, we take a bath. But it's a—you know, there's nothin' like it. Thirty years this guy"—so I told him I'd write a bang-up introduction, and I'd really try to pull out all the stops and write a good introduction, and I did the best I could do. And so we'll see. But it—you know, and now I trust those guys at the Press. I mean, look at

the job they did with the Stilley book.

SL: Yeah.

RC: So I think it'll look good as a book. It'll be expensive. It'll probably be a $65, $70 book, but I don't—you know, I don't have any role in that at all. I just—and it's—one of the pleasures for me is just to wait now and see what they do, you know.

SL: Yeah, but God, thirty-five-hundred illustrations . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . at $75. That's . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . a bargain.

[04:06:44] RC: And I got a go—one thing I did through Masie—are we still gettin' recording?

SL: Yeah.

RC: Okay. Masie knows a great—a wonderful woman who is a *New York Times* best-selling author about botany. She's not a scholar, but she has a scholar-level knowledge. She wrote a wonderful book about earthworms, but didn't—it didn't sell a whole lot. [*SL laughs*] But she wrote a book called *The Wicked Botanist* and *Drunken Plants* that were both *New York Times* best sellers. And we sent her an electronic .pdf of this thing, and she wrote a bang-up blurb for us. And that was a Masie connection. Masie knew her.

SL: How cool is that?

[04:07:25] RC: And that's a great story, too, 'cause the woman lost interest in writing nonfiction books about botany after she'd written three of 'em. And she had a three-book series about a female detective agency that actually existed. So it was a historical novel, but she wanted to build fiction around it. Well, her publisher said, "Come on, girl, you're sellin'—you're makin' a fortune. Just write us another botany book." And they wouldn't touch her fiction. And Masie, as an editor at Tin House, said, "Let me see this book." And got—and built up a relationship with her, and the woman now signed, you know, a $500,000 contract for . . .

SL: Wow.

RC: . . . three books. Two of 'em are out now, and they're selling quite well. Books about dete—you know, a female detective agency.

SL: Right.

RC: So she ga—because of may—she likes Masie. She did this beautiful blurb, calls Bonar a genius, and says that it's a miracle that this book is—can be seen.

SL: It is.

RC: So she wrote a great—he—this woman wrote us a great blurb. You know, Melissa King loves that down there where she can say, "*New York Times* best-selling author," and put this big blurb up there.

SL: Right. Sure.

[04:08:31] RC: So we'll see that book sometime around August or September of next year. And then who knows will be number three?

SL: Well, we really—I don't know what's goin' on with Rocket.

RC: Yeah. Well, we . . .

SL: I mean . . .

RC: . . . got Jack Hill lined up for number three if . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . necessary. I've gone down and talked to Anne Hill now.

SL: Okay.

[04:08:52] RC: And I got another book I'm workin' on that may not be able to go to the Press simply because the person I'm writin' about has designs on bigger things. But it's the one—I may have mentioned this to you—this woman that worked with AIDS patients in the first decade.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Yeah, I—that's been my main activity this fall. I interview this woman every week, and I'll interview her—I mean, I'll interview her again tomorrow.

SL: You're keeping the tapes.

RC: Yeah, although the—maybe I'll talk to you about that sometime. They're just on my phone at this point.

SL: That's all right.

RC: Yeah. She's marvelous. But—and Masie—again, Masie seems to have lined up an agent who's interested in this.

SL: Man!

[04:09:33] RC: So I've been—here I'm startin' to benefit. I'm startin' to ride my daughter's coat tails. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, that's kind of the way it should be . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know.

RC: And she's a smart girl when it comes to . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . written stuff. Books. She's a marketing person. She's interested—you know, she knows stuff I don't have the slightest dream about. But she also sees the big picture on structure and fiction in ways that I don't. She's actually said that. She said, "I'm not a great line editor, Dad. I'm not gonna change people's phrasing within a sentence or a paragraph. But what I can see is places where the whole architecture of the book doesn't work." And she says, "I've taken novels and shortened 'em by a hundred pages and made 'em better." And that's what she does for a living. So it's exciting.

SL: Acorn doesn't fall far from the tree.

RC: No, it's—she's the one closest to me in that regard. Yeah.

SL: You want to stand up?

RC: No, I'm okay at this point.

SL: Okay.

SM: Hey, Scott, just to let you know, we're at one hour and ten minutes.

SL: Okay. Why don't—I think I do want to take a little break and maybe strategize with Bob here.

[Recording stopped]

[04:10:43] SL: All right, so, Bob.

RC: Yeah.

SL: We've covered a lot of things, and I propose that we go for maybe another hour . . .

RC: Okay.

SL: . . . today, and if we need to do more, we'll come back and do more.

RC: Okay.

SL: Or even less. I know it's already four twenty.

RC: Oh, I didn't realize it was that late.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Yeah, I probably oughta call Suzanne shortly after five.

SL: Okay.

RC: So let's . . .

SL: All right. Why don't we—why don't you give us a five o'clock, Sarah.

SM: Okay, I will.

SL: Okay, thanks. So what we really—we've talked a lot about your

projects.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And—but we haven't really talked—and your schooling. Different places you've gone to school and different places you've traveled with family growing up. But we haven't talked about your teaching that much. We—you know, there was a—you answered a—an ad to come to the University of Arkansas—teach English and folk studies. But we really haven't talked about your work in the classroom and any of the—any of your abroad stuff.

RC: Okay.

[04:11:59] SL: So I've—you've mentioned Fulbright . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . travel a couple of times. And I got to interview Lee Williams and David—oh, gosh, I'm forgetting David's name now, but they were intrically involved with the Fulbright program and the . . .

RC: Okay.

SL: . . . Fulbright Scholars. And so . . .

RC: Yeah.

[04:12:21] SL: But let's talk a little bit about—you—we did mention Mike Luster.

RC: [*Coughs*] Pardon. Yeah.

SL: First student to really grab ahold of wanting to be a folklorist, I would

guess.

RC: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

SL: So what was it—what's the difference between teaching English and being part of the folklore academia? What . . .

RC: Yeah, there's a real difference there and it—to—for my taste it works to the advantage of folklore, and not because of the disciplines themselves or not because of the subject matter, but it's because of the sort of age and level of entrenchment of the disciplines. And here's what I mean by that. If you tell your supervisor or you apply for a job that's got an English department head—English departments have been around for a very long time. They've had English departments as long as they've had universities in English-speaking countries. And so they're more or less traditional—you know, they get changed a lot, and there're fashions, but there're general subheadings under the field, so that anybody who's an English professor—if you say, "I'm in Renaissance" or "I'm a medievalist" or "I'm an eighteenth-century person," or you know, that "I'm in drama."

SL: American literature.

[04:13:41] RC: You can name it by genre. You can name it by . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, time period. And they are sort of well-defined, although slightly pliable. You know, I mean, what's—in the last fifteen

years or so, there's been a great emphasis on so-called interdisciplinarity. And when I say so-called, I don't mean to make fun of it. You know, a lot of those things'd be extraordinarily reproductive—you know, or productive and useful in stimulating certain kinds of useful research. It's probably analogous to—you know, you got a department of chemistry, and you got a department of biology, and then somewhere in the historical spectrum, you have a biochemistry department.

SL: Right.

RC: You know, where the two overlap. Well—but when you have a well-entrenched discipline, the—I think there are all sorts of consequences when you com—or differences when you compare that to a newly emergent discipline. And I'll try to get to that, but a newl—folklore is a newly emergent discipline. [04:14:37] There are only a handful of universities in the country when I was comin' through school that gave degrees in folklore or allowed you to major in folklore. And I did not. So I made myself—quote—"a folklorist" simply by doin' research in that field and publishing articles and, later, books. I had exactly one folklore course as a formal course at Northwestern. It was labeled folklore. It was boring. It bored me. But the field work interested me. But I did notice, later on—and why I started teachin' folklore in school, was that when you told people you were an English professor,

they thought they knew what you did. When you t—this is the heart of what I'm tryin' to get at—when they told—when you told someone you were a folklorist, they had no clue. [04:15:24] So as long as you had enough chutzpah, you know, you put it forth with a certain amount of confidence and brio, then you could say almost anything. You know, if you said, "I'm a folklorist" and somebody said—I'll use Leighton Rudolph as an example—a colleague at the university.

SL: Yeah.

RC: He asked me repeatedly—he would say, "What exactly do folklorists do?" And there was this faint implication that they were, you know, featherbedders on a, you know, diesel train shovelin' coal. The—but [*SL laughs*] I would say—you know, I would always tell 'em what I was doin' at that time, and say it with great confidence as if, of course, everybody would understand that this is the legitimate work of a folklorist. [04:16:06] So just to put this in one line, I learned over time to bill myself more often as a folklorist than as an English professor simply to carve out elbow room that I could do what I wanted to do. Now if I was writin' a book about Samuel Beckett, I could say, "I'm an English professor," and no one would give me any grief at all. But let's say you said we wanted to talk somethin' about the Stilley book. Let's say I'm writing a book about a—you know, or I'm writin' an introduction for a book written about a luthier who had

no clue about how to build guitars—you know, that God told him to build guitars with a knowledge base starting at zero. And I told 'em I was an English professor—they would say, "What the hell are you doin'?" But if I told him I was a folklorist, they were put off guard a little bit. They didn't feel like they had a firm foothold for condemnation or [*SL laughs*]—you know what I'm sayin'? So a folklorist—it gave me a lotta elbow room, okay. [04:17:04] That's good pedagogically, too. If you teach a course called folklore, you, just for example, you can do a whole lotta popular culture. You know, there are popular culture degrees now, and there's a real difference. Tradi—you know, folklore is supposed to deal with traditional culture, and there's all sorts of fancy—you know, I could spend a half-hour saying, "Well, popular culture has very wide distribution and short time duration. It's real popular, and then it's gone. Traditional culture is not real popular, but it's real durable." You know, and so you get these kind of cute definitions that hold if you don't push 'em too hard, you know. But in English, it's been around longer, it's more firmly subdivided into accepted subdivisions, and there's less wiggle room. So when I taught folklore classes here, I felt free to do pretty much whatever I wanted to do within some obvious limits. I didn't have 'em read, you know, a Persian epic in there, but I did do pretty much what I wanted to do. Whereas in English—when I taught English classes, I

pretty much wanted to teach what my colleagues would expect me to teach, for the most part, so that if they went into a—let's say I—this semester I taught, you know, Introduction to Contemporary American Literature, Survey of Contemporary American Literature, Modern American Literature. Well, I read *The Waste Land*. One of the reasons I read *The Waste Land* for the umpteenth time for me is that some kid who has taken my class and is in a later class where the professor knows that that student has taken my class in Modern American Literature, and they haven't read the—I—they haven't read *The Wasteland*? They think, "What in the world was Cochran doin' in that class?" Whereas in a folklore class, they don't know what I was supposed to do, and it's all fine. [04:18:56] Now having said all that, I don't want to overstate the differences. I like teachin', and you know, obviously I wouldn't still be doin' it if I didn't like it, 'cause I could reti—I could've retired, you know, a long time ago. But I enjoy the work. It's stimulating to be around students, you know, good students. In the privacy of my head—I try to treat all students, you know, with respect, and I try to encourage 'em. But in the privacy of my head, increasingly, over the years, I'm always lookin' for the best students, you know, more and more unabashedly than I was when I started. You know, when I started I was sort of absolutely eager beaver.

SL: Right.

RC: To sort—meet every student on her or his own . . .

SL: Naïve.

RC: . . . ground. And that was a little naïve 'cause you spread yourself too thin.

SL: Right.

RC: So now I've tried to do it where I do the job for everybody. Try to do the best they can. If the best I can do for this person is to teach 'em the difference between possessive and contractive apostrophes, then I'll try to do that. But I'm always lookin' for the student who may have a gift for this kinda thing. And I—and my goal is to convey my sense of that to that student 'cause it was so helpful to me, you know, with my best teachers. To at some point in the semester, say to this or that student, "You know, I don't know what your interest level is, but you got a—you have a flair for this." [04:20:17] So you know, I've got a kind of inartic—semi-articulate sort of philosophy of teaching. You always have to write those out now. I'm blessed that during my time on the job market, you didn't have to have a written teaching statement 'cause it's mostly boilerplate when you read 'em.

SL: Right.

RC: But I have a kind of implicit one that I've figured out over the years. [04:20:41] One of the things I've greatly enjoyed doin', and we've

talked a little about this, is teachin' overseas. I've had a lot of opportunities to travel over and give everything from short courses and individual lectures to full semesters and, in one case, a full year. That—Suzanne and I spent a full year, 1985 to 1986, with our daughter Masie as a Fulbright lecturer in Romania. That was pivotal for us in a lotta ways. It was my first real experience of a totalitarian state cause it was still—it was an SSR. Well, it was in the Soviet Bloc. It wasn't—you know—had more independence than a standard SSR, but it was a Soviet-block country run by a thug, by Nicolae Ceausescu, with the great security police and all that. It was whole new experience for us, and it was great. And I couldn't get enough of that at a certain point in my life. [04:21:40] So the very next year, when some Fulbright lecturer in Hungary bailed out, just couldn't take it, came home, they called me, and I went over in the middle of the semester to sorta do a rescue on this guy's class on—in Mark Twain. [*SL laughs*] I did a sudden short course on Mark Twain. There I went by myself, and Suzanne took over one of my classes here so I could do it. And the Fulbright people were really happy with me 'cause I had bailed 'em out of a tough situation. You know, I went over there on a week's notice. And God bless him, Ken Kinnamon helped it happen. He thought—you know, so it was one of those other cases where he could've said, "No, Professor Cochran, you know, you're obliged to

your duties here," but he didn't. He hired Mike Luster to do one of my classes [*laughs*], and hired Suzanne to do the other one.

SL: Yeah, it seems like I kinda remember that.

RC: Yeah. So and there I go. A week later I'm in Hungary, and I teach a semester there. I couldn't get a—I couldn't believe how you could go over—around the world and run your mouth on other people's money. [*SL laughs*] And so it took me a while to get tired of that. Suzanne got tired of it after a year.

SL: Right.

RC: And she was gonna stay home. So then I only took shorter ones. The Korea stint was one semester. The Albania stint was a summer. Then there were times I went to Poland, basically to give, you know, a couple of talks and—you know, I gave maybe a handful of talks there. But I—but . . .

[04:23:05] SL: But these—for instance, the one in Romania was about Mark Twain. Is that right?

RC: No, that was Hungary.

SL: Hungary.

RC: That—you're—yeah.

SL: So what about all these others? I mean, when you say you're acti—this is part of being an English professor, and you're giving lectures or you're teaching a course for a semester or something. What is it that

you're teaching?

RC: Teaching American literature . . .

SL: American literature.

RC: . . . in almost every case.

SL: Okay.

RC: In fact, I think in every case, I'm teachin' American literature. There was exactly—as far as I could tell, except for maybe lectures on one topic—you know, just one—like meetings—there was exactly zero demand for courses in American folklore at that time. But many universities in Europe had American studies programs and they—they're—you could offer courses, survey courses, in American literature. That was true in Romania. It was true in—in Hungary I taught two classes. The Mark Twain one was a kind of advanced course, and I had a course in—you know, a survey course in American literature. That was true in Korea as well. So I liked that. [04:24:16] But the Korea one was [19]95, so I'm getting' older. [Nineteen] ninety-five I realized that I was lonely over there. And Suzanne had sorta told me—she said, "Are you sure you want me to—you want to do this?" 'Cause, you know, she—we had young kids. Taylor was, like, one at the time, and it was a mistake. It was a little bit of vanity on my part to get this distinguished lectureship and stuff.

SL: Right.

RC: And I told her while I was over there that I wouldn't be doing that again. And it wasn't an act of generosity on my part, it was just an act of realizing . . .

SL: What's important.

RC: . . . what I wanted at this point in my life. Yeah. "Here's my youngest kid, you know, and we only get this one chance to raise these kids together."

SL: That's right.

RC: So the—yeah, I'm a slow learner in some ways. [*SL laughs*] And slow learner is not the exact word. What I am is blinded by what I want to do at a given time. I'll get a bee in my bonnet, and it's shocking to me how I can be blinded by that to—you know, there's somethin' I decide I want to do that—and I mean, I could phrase it almost even more strongly. There's somethin' I decide I must do, you know, I have to do it. And I don't really have to do it. [*Laughs*] You know. But it took me a while to realize that and to step back. [04:25:40] And so it was fun, and I do think that is one of the perks of academic life is, you know, traveling and lecturing and teaching with the sponsorship of other people. And if you stay a long time—you stay a year, like we did in Romania—you learn a good deal. You—it's a real learning experience. You really do get . . .

SL: Works both ways.

RC: Yeah, you really get transported out of your own comfort zone, and that was good for both of us. And I think Suzanne would agree with that. We had a good time.

[04:26:11] SL: Well, do you ever feel not safe?

RC: Well, if you ask Suzanne the question, you know, she would be—it would be an emphatic yes. She felt not safe a fair amount. And in fact, our year together in Romania was ended by Chernobyl, so there were times when we weren't safe, you know.

SL: Right, in reality.

RC: And they came home early. Suzanne and Masie came home a month ahead of me. And it was a good—it was—you know, Suzanne was pretty adamant. "You know, we need to get our baby outta here." And she took Masie home. And that—I didn't disagree with that at all, but yeah, we—I'm not prone to feel unsafe. Probably not enough. I mean, I'm—I just assume everything's gonna be okay and nobody's gonna mess with me.

SL: Right.

RC: Not because I think I'm particularly threatening, but I don't—I think I don't look rich, and I don't look—anyway, for one reason or another, I tend not to worry as much as in retrospect I should. [04:27:13] I have a personal story about you with this. When I first told you about—showed you the pictures of that—member that guy that

decorated his yard in such a bizarre way . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . and I'd taken those pictures? You said to me, "You just went into his—you know, you just knocked on his door and went into this guy's house who could, you know, from the look of things externally there, might've been a fairly weird citizen." [*Laughs*] I took your subtext there. I said, "Scott is saying, 'That might not've been the smartest thing in the world to do.'" [*SL laughs*] And in retrospect, of course you're right. The—this guy had all the markings of a potential ax murderer, you know, but . . .

SL: Well . . .

RC: But he wasn't.

SL: . . . at least a different . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . coming from . . .

RC: No.

SL: . . . a different place.

RC: Yeah. And you know—and the truth is I'm—I can be relatively thoughtless about that. I get so fascinated with—you know, at least in that situation, I said, "Okay, what the hell is this?" [*Laughter*] You know, and you saw the pictures.

SL: Right. Yeah, yeah.

RC: I mean, it's a very strange assemblage there.

SL: Well, I'm attracted to that image, too.

[04:28:10] RC: Yeah, but you have a little more sense, and you would've thought, "Maybe let's just talk in the yard here."

SL: Well . . .

RC: You know.

SL: . . . I think once I'd seen the person's eyes . . .

RC: You would've read it.

SL: . . . I probably would've read it.

RC: All right. But I remember that conversation . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . where you did phrase it—you know, "You just walked in there?" Remember the place was a fire trap, too. Just . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . unbelievable fire trap.

SL: Right, right.

RC: Anyway, that's just a side bar. [04:28:32] But yeah, teaching has been great for me. And I was kind of a natural at the just sort of entertainment aspect of it. That—I learned a lot, I think, over the years, in how to be a little better at sort of pitching things right to classes. But I always was able just to, sort of on my feet to keep 'em awake, you know, just by tellin' a few more jokes or, you know,

pitching it . . .

SL: Sure.

RC: . . . in a certain way. I'm not a master teacher. I mean, I've seen some master teachers. You know, on our own faculty here there are people who are, you know, to my own eye—I mean, I can perceive the difference that they are more—better thought out teachers than I am. [04:29:26] Joe Candido in my own department, I think, is just a stellar teacher.

SL: Yeah.

RC: Elliott West, of course, is nationally famous . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . in the history department as a teacher.

SL: Right.

RC: And I could name some others. I think Lynda Coon—I've heard Lynda Coon give a number of lectures, you know, in the H2P classes.

SL: Right.

RC: Daniel Levine. There are some teachers . . .

SL: Sure. Greek.

RC: . . . who—he was my Greek teacher . . .

SL: Yeah, Greek.

RC: . . . and he was fabulous.

SL: Yeah.

[04:29:49] RC: And he was—and you know, he was adaptable. He understood that what I wanted to do was not really get good at Greek, but be able to read Homer a little bit by myself, so that I wasn't gonna stop and slow down for the grammatical exactitude of gettin' it exactly right. And many teachers would've been frustrated and a little irritated by that. Not him. He understood my goals right away and helped me. [*Claps*] So you know, I'm somewhere in the middle of the spectrum as a teacher. I really think my gifts, such as they are, are compositional as writing. I mean, I think that that's the thing that on the spectrum I would do the best is as a writer.

SL: So . . .

RC: Pure writer.

[04:30:33] SL: So when you're teaching, are you teaching folklore? Is that . . .

RC: Yeah. And literature. And you know, I have separate classes.

SL: Okay, so one would be Contemporary American Literature . . .

RC: Yeah, and another is called Introduction to Folklore. Yeah.

SL: And tell me what you teach in a folklore class.

RC: Well—see, I can tell—I mean, basically I break it down, and I tell 'em the first day of class, "We're gonna break this class down into three basic units." That the first third of the term, roughly, we're gonna deal with verbal genres of traditional culture. So those would be folk tales.

We have a unit on jokes. We have urban legends, you know, 'cause they always love that 'cause they tell 'em. Fairy tales. You know, we do it—in other words, different forms of traditional culture which are primarily verbal. And then the second third of the term, and usually this takes more than a third, a little bit, because I know more about it now, is music. So we do, you know, different kinds of traditional music. Old Child Ballads, but we also do work songs, prison songs, polkas. You know, there—one of my favorite documentary films is a Les Blank film called *In Heaven there Is No Beer?* And it's about polka culture among Polish Americans. [*SL laughs*] And we do some—you know, Tejano music—norteño—music from the Texas-Mexico border. [04:32:01] But you know, then we end up in more popular forms because one of the things I love to do is play rock and roll songs which are versions of old folk songs. You know, that's always—you know, when I can start with an old ballad—maybe you—maybe gets an old folk singer to sing it or an up to—more up-to-date singer, like Joan Baez, who, by the way, I just heard is gettin' into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, which is a very generous definition of rock and roll.

SL: Right.

RC: But still I'm glad to see her in there. But then play "Gallows Pole" of Led Zep's.

SL: Led Zeppelin. Yeah.

RC: And that's the same song, right? I mean . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . it's just a—it's an old Child Ballad, updated. So we do verbal things, musical, and then material culture. And I usually end with one book. And I tell 'em we can't cover all of material culture, but this semester we're gonna do pottery or this semester we're gonna do basketry. In other words, I pick—I get 'em a really one heavy-weight, scholarly book about—like the last year I taught that class, we read a book on the traditional pottery of Georgia. It was a full-length book on the different pottery traditions of the state of Georgia. And I say, "We're—I'm not particularly interested that you master this. I just want you to see how this kind of thing is done and what it would be if this were a book about basketry in Virginia, it would be structured in the same way as a book about pottery in Georgia."

SL: Georgia.

RC: "That we start out by showin' you how pots are made and sort of just the technology involved, and then the history. Who set up basketries or potteries, and where they did it." [04:33:39] So that's the basic breakdown, verbal, musical, material. One semester we spent the whole time lookin' at barns . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know, for the material culture part—different kinds of barns in

different parts of the country. A real expert like Henry Glassie on this stuff—[*snaps*] you show that guy a photograph of a barn with no other information—take, you know, topography and no signage or anything, just show him the pure architecture of the barn. He can make a very educated guess about where it is on the landscape, you know. So that's the basic—that's the tripartite breakdown.

[04:34:15] SL: So you know, as an emerging subset of English you have a freedom here to pretty much define the study. Is that what . . .

RC: Yeah, and in many universities—it's just a historical accident that they're in English, you know, because the earliest folklore classes in English departments, and this would go back to the beginning of the twentieth century, would be ballad classes. There would be classes in old English ballads. They would have 'em at Harvard. One of the most famous early ballad scholars was a Harvard professor. Well, gradually, they enlarged to more traditional culture more generally. [04:34:57] If I were just fi—if i were doin' it from above, I'd put a folklore course in the anthropology department. That's the place where they really belong. It's a subset really not of English, but of cultural anthropology. That's—you know, that's where it really belongs.

SL: I can see it in sociology as well.

RC: Yeah, of course. You're absolutely right. But again, in the history—

that goes back to Randolph. Randolph tried to get the kingpin of anthropology in early twentieth-century, Franz Boas, at Columbia, to let him be a doctoral student in anthropology with work on the Ozarks. And Boas said to him, "That's not anthropology." It's utter bullshit. It's just arbitrary. But for Boas, anthropology didn't involve white folks, just to put it really bluntly. Anthropology involved others—you know, Indians, African Americans [*SL laughs*], you know, sometimes immigrant groups. He wasn't absolutely sure about Italians and things like that. But if they were Anglo American white folks, that wasn't anthropology. That was sociology. So it's just crazy.

[04:36:02] SL: It's crazy, isn't it?

RC: Just absolutely crazy. So it's just accidental. But most folklore courses are taught in English departments because they're an offshoot of those ballad classes, when conceptually, you're quite right, they belong over in cultural anthropology. Now what's happening now is that the word folklore is sort of disappearing from curricula, and you get courses labeled traditional culture, you know, ethnographic studies and things like that. Indiana's big Ph.D. program still calls itself folklore, but it's folklore and something else. I've forgotten—ethnomusicology. I think it's called folklore and ethnomusicology. But it used to just be a free-standing word. Folklore. And I'm a product of that generation, even though I never formally studied folklore.

SL: Well . . .

[04:36:48] RC: That's another thing the Randolph book did for me, by the way. Nobody told me I wasn't a folklorist after I wrote the bio. You know, because I had a degree in English and—but after I wrote the Randolph biography, which is not a piece of folklore, it's a biography. But somehow that still qualified me as a folklorist, so go figure. [*SL laughs*] You know, it's—you just do what you do.

[04:37:09] SL: Well, so in your classes, do you—if you're doing music, then you're listening.

RC: Yeah, I play a lot of music.

SL: People are listening.

RC: Yeah.

SL: And then I'm certain you use moving images as well.

RC: I do. Yeah. Good documentary films. Films that I think are good documentary films about traditional culture or traditional music. Hell, I shamelessly show the Frankie Kelly film in the folklore class, and I shamelessly show the Walter Williams film, you know.

SL: Well . . .

RC: And there's a brilliant film that I didn't have anything to with makin', but it was made in Arkansas by Joe York. You know, the guy from missi—down in Mississippi. He made a film called *Bump*. That's the whole film. That's the whole title. *Bump*. It's a family name. Dallas

Bump. He's a furniture maker from down in south Arkansas, and it's a twenty minute, twenty-five-minute film about this furniture maker. So yeah, I show visuals a lot. I show Les Blanc films. I'm a big Les Blanc fan.

SL: Well, yeah.

RC: So yeah, films are incredibly useful, ethnographically, 'cause they get the gestures, they get the facial expressions.

[04:38:22] SL: So how many students do you usually have a semester?

RC: It varies, but at the top I've had thirty, thirty-five people in those introductory folklore classes. My most popular class over the years ha—there are two 'cause I've taught 'em for years. And one of 'em would technically be a literature class. It's called World Epics. I just got interested in epics from other parts of the world, besides the Iliad and Odyssey and stuff . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . like that. And the other ones would be a folklore class. It's called Folk and Popular Music Traditions. And it's all music, and it starts with traditional ballads and ends with Bruce Springsteen. I just made an arbitrary sign-off. I said, "Look, there are limits to a guy seventy-three years old [*SL laughs*] playin' rap music for kids who know it better than he ever will."

SL: Right.

RC: So I say, "I'm gonna walk you, in this semester, from ancient ballads to about the 1970s, when I sort of let go of the ring."

[04:39:19] SL: What—where does the Delta figure in, the blues?

RC: Well, of course, it's huge. I mean, there are—that's one of the things that I was interested in when I first came down here was that everybody kept talkin' about the Mississippi Delta, you know. And they always meant—and all the famous guys were associated with Mississippi—and you'll remember this—you know, you—and—as if the Mississippi River was some sort of cultural barrier.

[04:39:45] SL: Right.

RC: You know. And so I spent a fair amount of time early on sayin', "Look, you know, this state has a tremendous blues heritage." And so I became a booster early on for just, you know, in Arkansas studies for sayin', "Look, you know, I know that there's no Nashville in Arkansas and"—but I developed this sense—and you've heard part of this—I say, "Look, we are the perfect crossroads state for music." That if you put our state on a map, roughly a square map, you can find great musical centers on every side of us. You got the greatest one in the country, for my money, Memphis, is on—right on our eastern border. You know all this stuff.

SL: Right.

RC: Tulsa and Oklahoma City and Dallas are the epicenters of western

swing music.

SL: Right.

RC: And they're right on our west. Shreveport . . .

SL: Cajun.

RC: Cajun. Country. You know, Louisiana Hayride is twenty-five, thirty miles south of the we—of the Arkansas-Louisiana border in Shreveport. And the first nationally syndicated country music television show in the country was in Springfield, Missouri. So if you grow up—and Sleepy's my example for this—if you grow up in Arkansas and you turn on a radio—if you ask Sleepy LaBeef who the two biggest influences on him musically were—and I've done this. You probably have, too. He says, without any hesitation, "Rosetta Tharpe" . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . "and Lefty Frizzell."

SL: Yeah.

[04:41:17] RC: So he—the—this is a great state for music of all kinds, from country, as you say, to gospel to—both white and black gospel music, rock and roll—it's got it all. It's got it all. Its weakest one is probably jazz, and when I used to say that, I didn't know enough about jazz. And I still don't, but I know a little more. There are some important jazz figures with roots in Arkansas, too. So it's a—the—it

was—to do that museum ex—all those things pulled together—every one of those things. When I agree to curate that exhibit on Arkansas music, I go back to my classroom better prepared as a teacher. You know, I've done—I've learned some stuff.

SL: You've done the research.

RC: Yeah, I've done some research, and I've learned more stuff. So my proudest blurb on any book of mine—not many professors get a book of theirs blurbed by Ronnie Hawkins. Well, I have a book. I'm a professor of English, one of whose books is blurbed by Ronnie Hawkins. It's the briefest of all possible blurbs. It says, "Keep rockin', Bob." That's [*laughter*] the whole—but I had a hell of a time with Ronnie. You know that story. That's a story we haven't told.

[04:42:29] SL: Well, he was about—he was on his—he was about to die.

RC: That's right.

SL: And President Clinton said, "We need to get this guy's story." And Ronnie was gonna have—and they were gonna have some kind of farewell [*laughs*] birthday party kind of . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . kind of thing.

RC: And the Clinton Library sent me to Canada to interview him for their archive.

SL: Yeah, and so you had Jim Blair there and . . .

RC: No, I wasn't there.

SL: Oh.

RC: Those were two separate occasions.

SL: Two separate occasions.

RC: Yeah, I wouldn't have wanted that, actually. I would've loved to be there.

SL: Yeah.

RC: But nobody wanted to be interviewed during that. That was a party.

SL: It was a party.

RC: Yeah, Don Tyson was there and . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RC: . . . so—and that—and I'm not a member of that group.

SL: Right.

[04:43:09] RC: I mean, I'm younger, a little bit, than those people. I'm not younger than Clinton but the—I'm younger than Ronnie by eight years, and I wasn't really a member of that group. I didn't hang with Don and Jim and [*laughs*] those people.

SL: Right.

RC: But no, they sent me up there by myself to do a formal interview—not as long as what we're doin' today, but you know, a full morning. Four hours, because they thought his death was imminent.

SL: Right.

RC: They thought he was gonna be dead in a month . . .

SL: Right.

RC: . . . you know. And you know that story—that he was faith healed. He was healed by a faith healer and . . .

SL: Over the phone.

RC: Over the phone. Yeah.

SL: Yeah. You know, you—I guess you haven't seen—I mean, you went with us . . .

RC: Yeah.

SL: . . . on one of our interviews to the family reunion.

RC: That was a wonderful time because it brought them together. It brought Dale and Ronnie together.

SL: Dale and Ronnie together.

[04:44:03] RC: That was one of the great afternoons I spent. Remember, it was a real soft, misty rain.

SL: Yeah. We were under a tarp.

RC: And they were so relaxed. And you were doin' your thing. You were interviewin' those guys and Dale . . .

SL: Well, actually you were going to do the interview. I was doin' sound.

RC: Well, I didn't do as much of the interview as anybody—that's—you did . . .

SL: Well, it was the woman—a relative just stepped into the thing and took

over.

RC: It was great. [*SL laughs*] It was one of the great afternoons of my life. I thought—you know, and I'd never seen Dale—Dale—you know, tell me if you think this is right 'cause you did full-bore interviews with Dale.

SL: You were there, too.

RC: Yeah, I was there, but I thought Dale was real pleased at that—the reunion thing because maybe for the only time, it was like he was getting his due. And Ronnie was in a real generous mood. Ronnie wasn't takin' over the stage like he does sometimes. Ronnie was—there was a time I was almost mad at Ronnie. You member that time we had Billy Lee Riley up here?

SL: Yeah.

[04:45:07] RC: And Billy—he was our featured guy.

SL: Yeah.

RC: We were featuring Billy Lee Riley.

SL: And that's one of my favorite tapes. I don't even know where that tape is.

RC: Yeah. Well, Jeannie still has it.

SL: Okay, good.

RC: But at any rate, Ronnie came in and kinda stole the show. Does that make sense to you? Ronnie came in and . . .

SL: Told his Bob Dylan story.

RC: Made a little too much noise, at least for my taste.

SL: Well, but that was after the show, wasn't it?

RC: Yeah, but even—he made a kinda grand entrance and stuff.

SL: Right, right.

RC: And I thought Ronnie shoulda muted it a little.

SL: Right.

RC: I mean, 'cause Ronnie could take over a whole room, and it's one of his great virtues, right?

SL: Yeah.

RC: I mean, he could swell to the size of any room.

SL: Right.

RC: The [*SL laughs*]—and I—it was the one time I thought, "Ronnie, come on, give it a break. You know, let Billy Lee, you know, Billy Lee have his day." But that day with Dale, he was generous, and Dale just blossomed.

SL: He did.

RC: That's what I remember.

SL: He was still getting' chemo then.

[04:46:01] RC: Yeah, but he was a—he just looked happy and justified and validated, and he just looked like a happy man. And I didn't see that a lot from Dale. I thought Dale had "Susie-Q" and a downhill ride for

most after that. And I thought that was really nice, and I gave Ronnie some credit for it. I thought Ronnie was an important part of that.

SL: Yeah, I did, too.

SM: Hey, Scott, it's five . . .

RC: There were times he actually handed it over to Dale. "You, Dale, you know that's"—you know how Ronnie could cue you . . .

SL: Yeah.

RC: . . . in effect. He would just cue Dale.

SL: Right.

RC: Go—you got us?

SM: I'm sorry to interrupt. It's gettin' close to five. I just wanted to give you a heads up.

SL: Okay.

RC: This is great. We wouldn't have talked—we wouldn't have—neither of us would've thought of the Ronnie story till right now. [*Laughter*] Yeah, and that's a great story.

[04:46:50] SL: So I think you qualify for being from Arkansas.

RC: Well, thank you. I'm sure—I mean, I've sure lived here longer than anywhere else.

SL: So, Sarah, do we want him to the proud-to-be thing?

SM: Yeah, I can set that up for you.

SL: Why don't we go ahead and get that done now, and then if we come

back and do some more, we'll already have this done.

SM: Okay. All right, Bob, just look straight into the camera.

SL: You know . . .

RC: Am I looking straight into the camera?

SL: Nope. [*Unclear words*]

RC: Oh, I see the camera. He's so . . .

SL: You've heard me do this before, haven't you?

RC: No, I haven't. I don't know what you're talkin' about.

SL: Okay, well, what we're asking . . .

RC: But Scott is so adept that this is the first time I've even noticed the camera. [*SL laughs*]

SM: [*Unclear words*]

RC: I've been looking rivetedly at Scott for four hours.

SL: It's such a terrible fate. [*Laughter*] So what's gonna happen—I'm gonna stand up and get out of the way. And I—what we're asking you to do is to look at the camera, straight into the lens, just like you're looking . . .

RC: Okay.

SL: . . . in my eyes and say, "I'm Bob Cochran, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas."

RC: Just say that?

SL: Yeah.

RC: Sure.

SL: Okay. All right. So I'm out of the shot now.

SM: [*Unclear words*]

SL: And . . .

RC: You tell me when.

SM: All right, Scott's out of the way?

RC: He is.

SM: Okay. Go ahead and try the first take.

RC: I'm Bob Cochran, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas.

SM: That was lovely.

SL: Yeah.

SM: What do you think, Scott?

SL: Yeah. Perfect.

[End of interview 04:48:50]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center Staff]