

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Rodney Slater
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
March 15, 2006
Washington, DC

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.
- 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

See the Citation Guide at

<http://pryorcenter.uark.edu/about.asp#citations>.

Scott Lunsford conducted two interviews with Rodney Slater on March 15, 2006, in Washington, DC. The first interview took place at the "America on the Move" exhibition in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The second interview, which is presented first in this transcript, took place in Mr. Slater's office at Patton Boggs LLP.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: First we've got some business we've got to take care of.

Rodney Slater: Okay.

SL: First of all, I have to say on the tape that this is—uh—a project for the—uh—Barbara and David Pryor Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History [The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History].

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: It will be archived in the Special Collections unit of Mullins Library on the University of Arkansas campus, Fayetteville. Um—a second purpose for this interview is—um—that we're working on a Silas Hunt Legacy Award . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . video to be shown at that dinner April 28 [2006]. So I'm gonna [going to] try to get as much of your story as we can with

the time that we have.

RS: Sure. Sure.

SL: And I will cull out little segments of what we do today and what we did at the museum.

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . um—to support that video. But from this point on, we're actually on the Rondey—Rodney Slater project . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . in the oral and visual history program. So this is our start. I—I don't want you to think that this is the end of it, or that I will get everything that we wanna [want to] get from you in our time today but . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . you are now about to enter into—the—um—the [Pryor] Center's archives.

RS: Okay, very good.

SL: And I can talk at length about our template and what we hope to do with the archives.

RS: Sure.

SL: And maybe we'll do that at another time.

RS: We'll do that at some point. I'd like to hear that.

SL: But I do wanna make it very accessible on the Web as much as

possible. I—I don't want these things to be transcripts sitting on a bookshelf.

RS: Sure. Well, I think that would be—that would be great because—um—number one, the program couldn't honor two more deserving individuals.

SL: Oh, that's sweet.

RS: And we've talked about—uh—you know, their wonderful partnership, not only as a—a political family . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but also as just—um—good—um—uh—representatives of what Arkansas is all about. Uh—and it is about the stories, you know. It's about the history. It's about the culture. And—uh—Barbara and David Pryor represent that better than anyone I can think of.

SL: They—they love—they have loved their life and . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . what they've gotten to do—the opportunities they've had.

RS: Oh, they've done a great job. Great job.

[00:02:06] SL: Um—so usually I have the—um—interviewee . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . uh—say their full name and spell it for our editor . . .

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . so we make sure when we put your name at the bottom of the screen, we get it all right. And . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . so at this point . . .

RS: Right. Well, my full name is Rodney Earl Slater.

SL: Okay.

RS: And that's R-O-D-N-E-Y . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . uh—E-A-R-L S-L-A-T-E-R.

SL: Good. See, we could've gotten E-A-R-L-E.

RS: Right. That's right.

SL: And it could've been L . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:02:37] SL: Okay. So Rodney, I have this belief—and it may be naïve—but I have this belief that early on, when you were—from the ages of the time you were born till you were about five years old, all that stuff that was around you before you could ever remember really helped shape and gave the foundation of who you have become. And I—I don't—I'm not gonna put you under hypnosis and try to get you back before five years of age, but I am—I do think that it helps—try to conjure your earliest memories. What—where you were. Maybe the first time you

realized you were seeing your mother or your father.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Or where you were in the house—one—one of the earliest memories of your house. If you could—and you can take all the time you want.

RS: Sure.

[00:03:37] SL: Um—if you can just kind of remember the earliest stuff that you can, I think it'll help us get started on your story.

RS: Okay. Okay.

SL: And I—I do like to try to take it chronologically—very early and all—and we'll try to get to the . . .

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . up to the University of Arkansas . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . today.

RS: Okay. Okay.

SL: Okay.

[00:03:55] RS: Well—um—Scott, some of the earliest—um—uh—remembrances I have—uh—clearly they deal with growing up. They deal with—uh—shooting marbles and learning to ride a bike and learning to read. Um—uh—there's also the work that's involved as well. Uh—I remember early on—uh—picking

cotton—uh—doing many of these things with my—with my mother. Uh—and—uh—I remember early on—uh—instruction given to me not only by mother, but my grandmother as well. Uh—Mrs. Bessie Glayson. She lives in Cotton Plant, Arkansas.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then—uh—my mother—uh—Velma. Uh—and—uh—and I remember my—uh—stepfather and the hard work that he personified. You know, three and four jobs—uh—mechanic—uh—tow truck driver—uh—sold cars—uh—did any number of things—uh—cleaning up two or three places on the side. I remember that. Uh—and from those experiences, I learned—uh—an appreciation for family to be sure. Uh—I learned a lot about faith, too. I mean, believing that tomorrow could be better than today.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—believing that—um—you know, the stories we read about—uh—clearly, in the—in the Bible and especially those Old Testament stories, it seems, of people overcoming and having faith to endure. Those were the kinds of things that I was taught early on. Um—I—uh—remember—uh—interesting things, too. I remember—um—the—um—evening news and how that was as much an educational experience as—as anything. Uh—

we watched a little television for entertainment, but it was, you know, one of those little black-and-white, nine—eleven-inch . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . deals. And you'd have to put a little hanger—uh—in the top of it and move it around . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . because—uh—maybe the antenna was—uh—was broken over time. I remember those kinds of things. I remember the early Sunday—early Saturday morning, you know, [*The Lone Ranger* [TV series, 1949–1957], *Superman* [TV series, 1952–1958], that kind of thing. But what I remember most, though, is the evening news. And I remember being—uh—encouraged to listen to how the people were speaking. Um—[Eric] Sevareid. [Walter] Cronkite. All of those names and just listening to what they were talking about. Now the interesting thing is that, you know, some of the blood and gore that we see on television today was not—that was not the story. But there were clearly human-interest stories that were being told. And it was fascinating because it gave you an insight to a part of the world and a part of the country that was not necessarily your day-to-day—uh—experience.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—but I re—I remember that—uh—quite well. Um—I remember—um—the orientation of many of those stations, when it came to a local news, was Memphis [Tennessee] more so than Little Rock . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and other parts of Arkansas, which was kind of interesting. You're growing up in the Delta region of Arkansas, but most of what you're hearing about is Memphis. And I remember things like the King Cotton Classic and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . you know, and—um—a—again—the musical reviews—a lot of things happening in Memphis. And that was so exciting 'cause [because], you know, it's not like I was gonna go necessarily, but I could go in my mind's eye.

SL: Right.

[00:07:37] RS: Uh—and—uh—you know, some of the games we—I mentioned marbles and riding a bike and all of that, but one special game that my sisters and I used to play—uh—we've got two younger brothers, but they had not been born at this time. But my sisters, Jacqueline, who's the oldest, and Louise—uh—and we used to watch the cars go by—on our front porch—and we lived in the north end [of Marianna]. You know, this is one of

those traditional shotgun houses—three rooms—uh—and—uh—
you're on the front porch, and you're watching the cars go by.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you play this game: "The next car is your car. The next car
is mine. The next, yours—next, mine." And—uh—I can just
remember the belly laughs of that experience because my cars
used to always seem to need some repair. [*SL laughs*] Uh—
whether it's painting or . . .

SL: The muffler.

RS: Yeah, somethin' [something]. [*SL laughs*] But that didn't
matter because it was the anticipation, and then it was the
wonder, you know, "Where they're going—where are they going?
Can they make it there?" [*laughs*] if it's a bad car. But the fact
that they were traveling.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—and I say that because so much of my experience over the
years has been related to transportation. Um—I remember also
some of the—uh—songs, a lot of the religious songs—uh—"This
Little Light of Mine" and—uh—you know, "Jesus Loves Me"
and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . those kinds of—uh—songs that we got—uh—as members of

Bethlehem Baptist Church early on and then years later Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Uh—but I remember those things, and they did shape, you know, who I am . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . uh—with again—um—uh—one who understands the importance of faith and family and friends and—and hard work.

SL: You mentioned—uh . . .

Franklin Evarts [Camera Operator]: Scott?

[Tape stopped]

[00:09:34] SL: So let's go back to the—the house that you were living in.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—um—now was your—was it your mother and your grandmother and your stepfather that—that raised you? Is that . . .

RS: Well, no, it was just my mother and stepfather.

SL: Okay.

RS: My grandmother—I just remember her because we'd visit her.

SL: Uh-huh. And did—was she . . .

RS: And she was . . .

SL: . . . in Marianna as well?

RS: No, she was—she lived in Cotton Plant.

SL: Okay.

RS: Still in eastern Arkansas but . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . some miles away.

SL: Um—is that—I—I'm not real familiar with the distance there . . .

RS: That's . . .

SL: . . . was that a big trip to . . .

RS: Oh, that was a great trip.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Not a long trip—maybe forty-five minutes to an hour.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Uh—Cotton Plant is near Brinkley.

SL: Right.

RS: But—uh—but, you know, you know going to Grandmother's, you're gonna [going to]—uh—get treats.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And—uh—you're probably gonna be able to get away with a few things [*SL laughs*] that you don't get away with at home.

SL: She didn't dote on you, did she?

RS: Uh—she—well, it's interesting—not in the way you think about it today.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, she's a pretty matter-of-fact—uh—uh—individual, but she always had good counsel.

SL: I've heard the same thing about you, by the way.

RS: Is that right?

SL: Yeah.

RS: Okay.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: But she always had good counsel.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: She generally had a—um—a—a biblical verse or a—um—or a phrase, you know . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . I'd say maybe a line of, you might say, poetry or something. But it was just a little catchphrase that you'd always get. So these were little nuggets of wisdom that I always looked—uh—look forward to—that and the cooking, you know. [*Laughs*]

[00:11:09] SL: What about your grandfather?

RS: Well, my grandfather—we were very close later in life . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . uh—but early on, it was my grandfa—grand—uh—mother.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Uh—but Sloan Slater—uh—good man. Uh—he actually—uh—

served in World War II.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—he's buried in—um—uh—in Little Rock in the—um—um—
National Cemetery, as we . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . as we call it. Not too far from—uh—Mr. [George W.] Haley's
father. Uh—we generally will go see . . .

SL: Together?

RS: Yeah.

SL: That's good.

RS: He'll go—or sometimes when we're there, separately.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But that's something that we've been doing now for almost thirty
years.

[00:11:53] SL: Um—so you remember your stepfather, I guess—did
you not ever know your father or . . .

RS: Um—no, my stepfather was really the . . .

SL: Really raised you?

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: And you mentioned how hard he worked and all that. Wa—was
your mother—um—a—a housewife? Did she stay at home and
take care of the kids and . . .

RS: Well, not—not—I mean, she did, but my mother—I remember picking cotton alongside my . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . my mother. Um—and for a period, she served as a domestic. I mean, she got work where she could.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—then later on, fortunately she was able to get a job at Sanyo, which was a manufacturing plant in Forrest City . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and worked there for a number of years. Uh—but—but early on—uh—her work was—was in the field . . .

SL: In the fields.

RS: . . . just as mine was.

[00:12:43] SL: Now, Rodney, when were you born?

RS: I was born in 1955. February.

SL: [19]55. You're younger than I am.

RS: No, not by much, I bet.

SL: [*Laughs*] Um—you know, for a time in Arkansas, you didn't have to go to school after junior high.

RS: Right.

SL: And—um—um—some folks I've interviewed actually took off from school to do the work in the fields when it was time.

RS: Oh, we did—we did as well.

SL: And so did you just stay out of school during that fall season, or did you—you did your studies at night when you got home from working in the fields, or how did that work?



RS: Well—uh—we weren't gonna stay out of sch—school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, one thing about my family was that, y'know [you know], they really stressed education . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . even my—uh—my grandmother. Uh—and, y'know, it's interesting, you'll find this in African American families where a lot of the older children may not get a chance to go to college . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . in a family, and then the younger kids get a chance to do so. I've got uncles and some aunts—uh—who were able to do that. Uh—and so when I was coming along, I was able to see that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: To see that—uh—y'know, the family was making this kind of a—of a—of a move and—and was encouraging that. Uh—and so you have to balance that with the need to—if you're sharecropping or whatever . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . to do that work. And uh—there're these wonderful stories that—um—an uncle, an Uncle Leroy would—uh—tell. But he talks about my mother's family, in particular, picking cotton at night . . .

SL: *Wow.*

RS: . . . uh—and doing it because it was necessary, and you do it by the light of the moon, and you do it because you have to. And the good thing is when you tell that story, and you're doing it because you have to, you understand what that—uh—old Negro spiritual is all about, "I Don't Feel No Ways Tired," because you're doing it for your family and for yourself. And y'know, in the course of the daylight hours, you're doing that job. But at night, you're working to make sure that you're carrying out your responsibilities when it comes to moving your family forward. And—um—I remember those—uh—those stories. Now when I was coming along, we had what we called—um—um—early—um—uh—uh—what would you say—um—the school days were not as long. You'd probably end the school day at the appropriate time—say, harvest time—at maybe—um—one-thirty, two o'clock . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . so you could go to school early, and then in the afternoons you could probably put in four to six hours because you've got a long evening. Y'know, you—it is probably not getting dark until seven-thirty—uh—eight o'clock. And I—I remember those times. Uh—and I was—I was glad to have the work. Uh—now you look back on it, and you—you know that there is the cost of all of that—uh—but—but I was pleased to have the work. I was able to—um—do some things that I—that I probably could not have done otherwise, I mean, as a—a young child able to, y'know, maybe buy school clothes or buy a bike or get something nice for—uh—y'know—uh—parents or grandparents. Um—and—um I remember neighbors, Mrs. Cindy and others.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, you'd be in the fields, and they'd make it fun because you're racing to a point in the field, and—uh—you know [*SL laughs*], you don't know it then, but they are sort of helping you set goals, and they're giving you the satisfaction of victory because if you get to that location before they get there, then you get a treat, you know. You get a reward. And—um—those lessons kinda [kind of] stick with you.

SL: Well, there can't be much harder work anywhere.

RS: No.

SL: And . . .

RS: And that [*laughs*] makes the work we do now much easier.

SL: Yes, I'm just saying it's ingrained early that . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . you work hard, and you get the rewards for that.

RS: Right. Exactly. And I don't have any problem with working hard. So, you know . . .

SL: [*Laughter*] Been there.

RS: Been there . . .

SL: Yeah.

RS: . . . that's right. Still there, you know. [*Laughs*]

[00:17:20] SL: Well—um—so—let's talk about your two sisters then . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . the older—they're older than you or . . .

RS: No, they're younger.

SL: They're younger?

RS: Yes.

SL: So you were the oldest?

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: And then you had two sisters, and then there were . . .

RS: Two brothers.

SL: . . . children after that?

RS: Two brothers.

SL: Two younger—much younger brothers.

RS: Mh-hmm. Not—not very—not too much younger . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . a few years.

SL: So—um—gosh, they all looked up to you.

RS: Well—uh—yes. And I—y'know—and part of my goal even to this day is to, y'know . . .

SL: Look after them.

RS: . . . beyond being a good father and husband, y'know, being a good son and—and brother.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Yeah, uncle—that sort of thing.

[00:18:09] SL: So at the table then, you'd have as many as—um—what is that—six, seven bodies around the table?

RS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: That's a big meal.

RS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Was that your mom's doing? Did she do all the cookin' [cooking] or . . .

RS: She would basic—while I was there—pretty much do all the

cooking. My sisters were younger.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Uh—they'd do—they'd do some, but mostly it was—it was Mom.

SL: Uh-huh. And did you do the dishes?

RS: We all . . .

SL: Took turns?

RS: Yeah.

SL: Dry.

RS: Took turns . . .

SL: "I wash. You dry."

RS: Yeah, we all took turns . . .

SL: That's what we did.

RS: . . . doin' [doing]—doin' the dishes.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

RS: And you never left dishes in the sink overnight.

SL: That's right.

RS: [*Laughs*] So . . .

SL: There's some more stuff there that's . . .

RS: That's right.

SL: . . . that shapes us.

RS: That's right.

SL: That kind of stuff.

RS: That's right.

[00:18:59] SL: Um—well, how about your—what about the quality of life at that time for you? Was it . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: I mean, was it—w—were you middle class? Were you poor? Was it—was it always a struggle?

RS: Well, it's interesting—uh—because—um—you know, clearly we did not have a lot of—uh—money. I mean, we—my, as I mentioned, my stepfather had, I remember, at one time, five jobs. Uh—my mother—uh—after a time had a pretty good job at Sanyo.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But it was difficult to—to keep it all going and all together. Now—um—it's tough—oh, and—uh—and there were times when, you know, we would—um—be very pleased to get a box of clothes.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—but—um—but, yeah, I can't—you know, it's—it's hard to say we were poor because that means certain things.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Clearly we didn't have a lot of money, but I can never—uh—recall not having what was needed.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—now there were times we couldn't do a lot, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You, I mean, we never traveled—uh—to any foreign and exotic places. We would drive to Chicago [Illinois] and visit with family members, but that was a vacation.

SL: That's a big drive.

RS: That's right.

SL: I mean, that's more than I ever did.

RS: [*Laughs*] We could go to Cotton Plant and see my grandmother.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: We could do the things that—uh—made life enjoyable. Uh—but the Delta is the Delta.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Lee County is one of the—uh—poorest counties in America.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: That was the way it was then. That's the way it is now.

Although farming, you know, is pretty big in that part of the . . .

[00:20:48] SL: Now is that . . .

RS: . . . part of the state.

SL: . . . Helena? No, that's Phillips.

RS: Phillips is Helena. [Editor's Note: Helena is in Phillips County.]

SL: Right.

RS: Marianna is [in] Lee [County].

SL: Okay.

RS: And then you've got St. Francis [County]—Forrest City.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Uh—Wynne [is in] Cross [County]. You know, Crittenden [County].

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

RS: Those are the principal counties in that area. Uh—but—uh—no, we didn't have a lot of money, uh—but—and we definitely weren't miss—middle class.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:21:09] SL: Right.

RS: But we worked for what we had, and that was enough.

[00:21:15] SL: So until you got to, was it junior high, you were in a segregated school?

RS: Really it was senior high.

SL: Senior high.



RS: We integrated our schools my tenth-grade year.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I mentioned the movie, *Remember the Titans* [released 2000].

SL: Right.

RS: All of this was happening around the same time. It was really 1970.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you can see that's what—that's sixteen years after *Brown [v. Board of Education, 1954]*.

SL: Right.

RS: You know, it's thirteen years after [the Little Rock] Central [High School desegregation crisis of 1957], but that's what all deliberate speed represented.

SL: Right.

RS: Now there were what were called freedom-of-choice opportunities, and we did have some kids to do that, where they would just choose to go to what was then, you know, called, for lack of a better term, the white school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I had some friends who did that. I did not do it. But I can tell you, tenth grade I couldn't wait to do it . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . because I wanted, as I've said, I wanted to see. I wanted to, you know, play on the team with individuals that I'd read about. I'm sure they read about our teams.

SL: Right.

RS: And this is interesting. My friends and I used to go, you know, and you'd just stand on the outside of the gate and watch a game or two. I mean—and I'm sure they did the same with our teams because you wanted to see good play.

SL: Good play. You bet.

RS: It didn't matter whether you could do it or not.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But again, even there, there was not the mixing because it's not like you bought a ticket, and you went inside to watch the game. And that was the case with both sides.

[00:23:17] SL: You know, most everybody that I've talked to didn't really have any real confrontations or any real challenges in their communities—that was—it was separate, yes. It was segregated, yes. There were signs . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . that pointed to that—those conditions. But they didn't really have any what I would call run-ins or confrontations or any trauma because of that. It was like the people tried to get along.

RS: Right. Right.

SL: It was kind of the attitude. Is that the way Marianna was when

you were growing up or . . .

RS: Well, I think Marianna was a traditional sort of southern town in that regard . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . where people accepted their places. But there were also moves to alter that. I remember early on in Marianna there was an effort to establish a clinic, and I remember that caused quite a ruckus.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then when the schools were integrated, there were issues. I mean, again much like *Remember the Titans*, my junior year we actually had quite an incident, and the schools—there was a boycotting of the schools and all that goes along with that.

[00:24:47] SL: What was it that happened?

RS: Well, basically it was the school had given the students permission to have a program honoring Dr. [Martin Luther] King [Jr].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so this was [19]72, and he had been assassinated in [19]68 . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . in Memphis. And so the commitment had been given to do

it, and then it was just cancelled without much discussion. And so there was then the sit-in and the, you know, the water hoses and all of that.

SL: Really?

RS: Oh, yeah. It's pretty tough. But we ultimately got through it, but it was a tough time for the school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It was a tough time for the city. [US] Senator [Dale] Bumpers was governor [of Arkansas] at the time.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And some of this would involve [US] Senator [David] Pryor as well, but he would basically sort of get the, you know, the back end of it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But Senator Bumpers was actually governor as we were going through a lot of it.

SL: I guess David [Pryor] was probably a congressman then, I bet.

RS: I bet he was, yes.

[00:26:02] SL: Yeah. So was that a—principal of the high school driven, or was it a school board thing that they—or was it . . .

RS: You know, it's tough to really—I—it's tough . . .

SL: Don't know where that came from?

RS: Right. Right. Because interestingly the town had done much of what was done and displayed in *Remember the Titans*, where you have—you're bringing these two schools together, so in one instance you've got a head coach that you may take from one of the schools and assis—and an assistant from the other. That sort of thing happened. With the administration, you take a principal from one school, principal from the other, one might end up being vice and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and the other principal. Those kinds of things were done, and I think, you know, for the most part, was handled pretty well. But we did have our difficulties. And, you know, it was a tough time, I mean, very tough time.

[00:27:09] SL: Well, did folks get hurt? I mean, was it violent or—I mean, you mentioned the hoses and stuff . . .

RS: There was some. Yeah, there was some violence. I remember Dennis Winston and I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . we were—I've shared this with you before, but we were actually walking near his home, as I recall.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I can't remember whether we were coming from his home or

going there, but we actually had someone stop and point a gun at us . . .

SL: Hmm.

RS: . . . and say, basically, "I will," you know, " right here." I [laughs] remember Dennis—it's quite interesting—he said, "Well, do it."

SL: Called the bluff.

RS: Yeah. I mean, it was—it's just a tough time.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But fortunately, we made it home. [Laughs]

SL: Man!

RS: So . . .

SL: I don't know what I would've done if I'd been in that situation. I'd run, I guess. I don't know.

RS: [Laughs] Well, we didn't run. [Telephone rings]

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: We didn't run.

SL: Is that . . .

RS: Now Barbara should get that. Okay.

SL: Well, that's kind of bad news. I hate to hear that.

[00:28:21] RS: Yeah. But again—and that's the—it's interesting how that played out our senior year because we could not have an

athletic team—football. I think in the second semester with track and other things, we could do it. But part of the penalty for those who did not go back to school was to not be able to participate in extracurricular activities.

SL: Right.

RS: But again, and it's amazing how these things work out. Fortunately, we had played—just from an athletic vantage point, I mean . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and I don't wanna suggest that this was more important than anything else, but in my own experience, it was very important because we played Little Rock Central . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and there was that film, okay?

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And a coach looking for players has an opportunity to see that film . . .

SL: Yes.

RS: . . . from a junior year. That's—him—that's good enough for him.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so that was, for me, that was . . .

SL: Opened up a door for you.

RS: . . . the ticket for—yes . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . to go to Eastern [Michigan University]. May have been good enough to walk on at [the University of] Arkansas . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but I chose to go to Eastern.

[00:29:41] SL: You know, Janis [F.] Kearney's [author and publisher] brothers—I mean, that's really how she ended up in Fayetteville because her brothers had gotten to the University of Arkansas by their athletic abilities.

RS: Right.

SL: Ended up not really continuing with it once they got there.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: But athletics was . . .

RS: Very much so. Very much so. I remember being recruited.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Dennis and I actually went on a recruiting trip to Fayetteville.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Jon Richardson—we had an opportunity to. . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . meet him. I'd only read about him. [Editor's Note: Jon

Richardson was the University of Arkansas's first African American scholarship football player.]

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Dickey Morton, I think, was on the team at the time.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Running back as well.

[00:30:21] SL: When did [Razorback football player] Brison Manor hit?

RS: This would've been after.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: See, that's the—it would've been right in that time period though.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Because that was really the first time that Arkansas made a major step in that regard.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Dennis was a part of that effort.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But up until that point, there were just very few. I mean, Jon, I think, may have been the only African American on the team at that time. There may have been one other player . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but in that [19]73 class, you had a number of people. And, as I said, Dennis was one.

[00:31:05] SL: Yeah. So you still stay pretty close contact with Dennis.

RS: Pretty close. Now he moves around a little bit. He's actually in Canada now.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: But for a good while he actually coached in my old college conference, the . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Mid-America Conference [Mid-American Conference].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: He was a coach at [University of] Toledo [Toledo, Ohio].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And they had a good run while he was there. But we stay in touch, yes.

[00:31:29] SL: Okay. Let's see now, I think we're getting a little bit ahead. I'm really reluctant to leave Marianna just yet.

RS: Okay, that's fine.

SL: The—I'm assuming that in the segregated schools, all your teachers were black as well?

RS: Yes.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I can't recall—although we may have had one or two—because again with the freedom of choice, we actually had one or two African American teachers who were assigned . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . to the quote "white school."

SL: Right.

RS: And then one or two white teachers who were assigned to the quote "black school."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I believe, during that period, I may have had a teacher who was white. I should actually look into that a bit . . .

SL: In the yearbook or something?

RS: Yes.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And also, you know, the interesting thing about that is, I really think that the teachers who did that—they've got a story to tell. I think the students who did that have a story to tell, because that was, you know, again it was something I chose not to do.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But a few students did.

[00:32:42] SL: So when you left Marianna for Eastern Michigan . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . were all—your family—you were leaving two sis—sisters and two brothers.

RS: Right.

SL: Is that right?

RS: Right.

SL: And it had—you app—you talked about going to Chicago. So you had made a journey north before.

RS: Yeah, one or two trips.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I mean, just—and probably more, but it was principally to Chicago.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Mh-hmm.

[00:33:18] SL: Well, so—and where is Eastern Michigan?

RS: Eastern is in Ypsilanti. It's twin city with Ann Arbor.

SL: Okay. So . . .

RS: So it's near Detroit.

SL: . . . you moved out of Marianna into a pretty metropolitan situation.

RS: Well, in one sense. Ypsi is larger than Marianna . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but it's about maybe the size of—a little smaller than Little Rock.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Ann Arbor—you get it all together, so definitely—it's definitely a different kind of environment.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You got all these students—I remember noticing that there were college students on the city council, which fascinated me.

SL: Right.

RS: And I think we had a college student who ran for mayor during that period. So that was . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . very intriguing, and there was a sense of excitement about that. But I . . .

SL: It sounds pretty liberal.

RS: It—oh, it is.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It is. And then Kent State [University, Kent, Ohio], by the way, is in that conference. And as you know, shortly—a few years earlier, you'd had the situation at Kent State. [Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, four students protesting President Richard Nixon's decision to send troops to Cambodia were killed by the

Ohio National Guard on the Kent State University campus.]

SL: Right.

RS: I knew about the conference generally based on that particular fact.

SL: Right.

RS: I didn't know much more.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But Dennis and I actually went to Eastern to be recruited together.

SL: Right.

RS: So that was a great trip for both of us. I think he thought the weather was a little cold. [*SL laughs*] And I thought it was cold, but I thought everything else was just right.

SL: What time of year did you all go?

RS: We went early spring.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: So—well, I would say winter . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . because it was sort of one of the last trips that you would take before making a decision.

[00:35:05] SL: So you were carrying with you up there your athleticism, but what in high school—what—were there favorite

classes you had in high school or a favorite teacher that kind of . . .

RS: Oh, sure.

SL: . . . turned the light on for you?

RS: Right. But I was also taking—I was also taking my scholarship, my . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.



RS: . . . being a student athlete, because I remember in the seventh grade when I requested the opportunity to go out for sports, my mother only allowed it if I remained a good student.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so early on, that was the agreement.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I don't know that there was much talk about student athletes or scholar athletes at the time, but I relished the idea of being a good student and a good athlete. I knew that that was a good combination. Number one, I knew that there were athletes that were better.

SL: Right.

[00:36:05] RS: And there were students who were smarter. But having the combination . . .

SL: Both.

RS: . . . of the two was a good thing. And so I took that with me as well. But then, you know, and we should probably say this, too. I remember we—there was this housing that was built in Arkan—in Marianna—two things about it that were special. Number one—this is—it's on Anna Strong Circle. Anna Strong was a noted educator . . .

SL: Okay.

RS: . . . in Marianna—friends with Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune and . . .

SL: Hmm.

RS: . . . really a pillar of that community. She had basically retired though, as I was coming into my early school years.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I knew her.

SL: Right.

RS: And I knew how much she was respected. Another was Mr. Jordan, who was a principal during that period as well—I think first in the junior high school. But this was in the all-black setting.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:37:12] RS: But this housing development, subsidized housing, was named in their honor, and I remember having—recognizing

that there was a street named by someone African American—
black, at the time, as we probably said it. But I liked that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I also liked the fact, and I remember early on, the fact that there
was a bathtub in this house, and that you were not taking a bath
in a number three tub, which is just one of these little round
tubs . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . that's right. I remember that. And that was about third
grade. And I remember you had the sink. You had these
amenities that you just didn't have before. Three bedrooms, so
everyone, you know, you're—can spread out a little bit. No
one's sleeping in the living room on the sofa . . .

SL: So now this . . .

RS: . . . or the let-out bed.

SL: . . . this is the development that happened . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . on that street? And did you all move into that development?

RS: We did. We moved . . .

SL: I see. Okay.

RS: . . . there when I was third grade.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: So I would've been, oh, eight or so—nine. But that was a big deal. I remember that because I remember you could stretch out in the tub.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Little things like that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I remember you could have water—its temperature you could regulate.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, you didn't have to heat it and then pour it in the tub. And I remember you could, you know, you could probably take more than one bath a week.

SL: Right [*laughs*].

RS: Okay? And those are things I remember. I remember that.

SL: So . . .

RS: And I remember how thankful I was for that.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And I remember how you had a neighborhood as well with all the kids . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and how you had a playground and, you know, and how that was so important. And I met one of my best friends during that

period—Larry Lanes . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . who was down the street, who I'd never really known that well.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I did know him because of a chance meeting. But I—those were good experiences.

[00:39:42] SL: So the house that you were born into, was it more rural? It was more on a . . .

RS: Well, it was a . . .

SL: . . . country road out by itself or . . .

RS: No, it was actually—it was on a—it was right off . . .

SL: It was . . .

RS: . . . the highway.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: This was the house on the north end of Marianna.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And—but this other house was on Anna Strong Circle.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And that was near the schools.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And it was closer into the heart, if you will, of . . .

SL: Marianna.

RS: . . . of Marianna . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . but it was a big change as far as the living quarters and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . the living conditions.

[00:40:24] SL: Well, were the—I'm assuming that the first house that you spent time in was in a predominantly black neighborhood.

RS: Oh, they both were.

SL: They both were.

RS: Yes.

SL: So that was still—the segregation . . .

RS: Oh . . .

SL: was still happening even though this was a new development.

RS: . . . very much so.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: So you all of a sudden probably had more kids to play with when . . .

RS: A lot more kids.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, especially a lot of—a lot more boys . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . you know, in this kind of a setting.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Because you've got a number of houses. And, y'know, lot more games.

SL: Right.

RS: You know, and you play a little basketball with—you just use the rim of a bicycle . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . tire.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Right?

SL: Yeah.

RS: And if you get lucky, you find a court with some nets.

SL: Right.

RS: Okay. But if you aren't lucky, you play anyway.

SL: Yeah.

[00:41:25] RS: And, you know, your first basketball game may be with a beach ball rather than—or one of those little—you know, it's not a basketball, but it's a ball.

SL: Dodge ball kind of thing.

RS: Yeah, exactly.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

RS: Or a milk carton.

SL: Milk carton. Yeah.

RS: I mean, you just improvise . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . if you will. Yeah.

[00:41:47] SL: It's interesting—you were talking about some of the TV shows that you grew up watching, same that I grew up watching.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Was there—and you've mentioned—I think you did at the museum—watching *Perry Mason* [TV series, 1957–1966]. Did you ever think that you wanted to be a lawyer early?

RS: Well, y—I thought about it pretty early.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I wasn't sure I could—I didn't know how to figure out how to do it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I thought about it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, if you've got a pretty good gift of gab, as they say

[*SL laughs*] a gift for gab—then you can be a lawyer, you can be a minister, you can be, you know, any number of—salesperson—whatever.

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

RS: And so you would hear, you know, people say things like that. I also had a friend whose father's first name was Lawyer [*SL laughs*], which was very interesting. Very interesting.

SL: Yeah.

RS: It was a wonderful family—the Smith family. But . . .

SL: Lawyer Smith. Wow.

RS: That's right. But very interesting, but I knew [*SL laughs*] a little bit about it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And, interestingly—and I think I read this story in *Ebony* magazine, but I read about a gentleman by the name of Fred[erick Wayman] "Duke" Slater . . .

SL: Okay.

RS: . . . who, as I recall, went to the University of Iowa [Iowa City, Iowa] and then went to law school later. I can't remember where he went—may have been Rutgers [New Brunswick, New Jersey] or someplace. [Editor's Note: Frederick Slater went back to the University of Iowa for law school.] But he was a star

athlete who became a lawyer and later a judge.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: No relation. But it was an important story to read.

SL: Right.

RS: And, you know, he later ended up in the [College Football] Hall of Fame [inducted 1951], actually. He was quite a—quite an athlete.

[00:43:43] SL: So what—did you read the story early or . . .

RS: I read it early.

SL: Yeah, so . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . you saw—you had evidence that there was a way to make this work . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . and that you could do that.

RS: And you just kind of put your pieces together as you're . . .

[00:43:56] SL: As the oldest child, did anyone help you with your homework?

RS: [Pause] You know, I can't—I wouldn't say—I would say no.

SL: Mh-hmm.



RS: I would say—it's interesting though—I could read before I went to school.

SL: Did you all—so your mom had books laying around the house.

RS: She had magazines.

SL: Ahh.

RS: You see?

SL: Yeah.

RS: You'd get an *Ebony* or a *Jet* . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . or a—you know, you just—something. I would—it—you didn't have a lot of books. Now . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . I don't want to suggest that. We did not have a library.

SL: Right.

RS: [*Laughs*] But—and then the Bible. I mean, that was *the* book.

SL: Well, it still is.

RS: [*Laughter*] That's right. That's right. So—but there was that assistance.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: But for the most part, it was "no playing until you get your homework—no television." I mean, it was just that kind of regimen.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And, you know, you got it done.

[00:45:20] SL: Well, let's think for just a second. I'm [pause]—so you had already been reading by the time you went to first grade. You knew something about that.

RS: Yes.

SL: Spelling and . . .

RS: Right.

SL: Surely, someone—I mean, was it your mom that kind of . . .

RS: Oh, definitely.

SL: . . . did that for you?

RS: Oh, yes. Yes.

SL: Yeah.

RS: But we were talking about the studying.

SL: Right.

RS: And, you know, I remember maybe early on . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But for the most part, it was—you know, "This is" . . .

SL: Your job.

RS: . . . "this is your job," basically.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: "And if you need any help, you let me know."

SL: Right.

RS: And it was—that's the way it was pretty much done. And, you

know, but I remember. I remembered knowing that, interestingly. I remember my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Price.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And actually, you know, and it was just—I don't know how good I really was, but actually, working with her—moving around the classroom—I don't know whether I was supposed to be helping other kids or not. I don't want to suggest that. [*Telephone rings*] But my point is that she just made it clear that "you can help me do this." And that was a great experience.

SL: That is. That's a big stroke.

RS: That's a great experience.

SL: So you finished up your schooling in Marianna with a pretty good grade point, then.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And your—the scholars—did you get a scholarship from Eastern Michigan?

RS: Yes.

SL: But that—was it both academic and athletic?

RS: It was. Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, that's cool

RS: Mh-hmm.

[00:47:17] SL: So when you got to Eastern Michigan, what was your

preconceived notion of what you would do there academically? I mean, did you know what kind of major you were gonna look at or . . .

RS: Oh, I knew.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: It didn't take me long to figure out—political science, speech communications. I think that with the speech communications that I was gonna do a minor, but I enjoyed that so much . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . that I made it—double major. And I did have—I was a pre-law student.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: So clearly I had made . . .

SL: A commitment early.

RS: . . . a judgment about that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then I, you know, I was in athletics. And I had a—as I said, I had a great time. There were things—but that experience was quite interesting as well because I realized early on that many of my friends knew a lot more about the give and take of the world than I did. Meaning they just knew more about singers, and, you know, and many of them were from Detroit, so they knew

about Motown [Record Corporation] in a way . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . that I didn't.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: They knew about places that I didn't know about. And this was my African American friends as well as, you know, whites that I met . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and worked with. Also, for the first time I was introduced to a broader culture than just blacks and whites. In Detroit and that whole region, you know, you've just got—you've got a wonderful mix . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . of people. And if there's any regret actually about college, it was that I did not play that out more. I did, you know, as best as I could, but I—on hindsight I would've—I think that that was something to really set a goal to do even more. A lot of my colleagues were from the Caribbean.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:49:30] RS: I didn't—I'd never been to the Caribbean, so . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . so when I met Hasely Crawford, who was from Trinidad . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . all I knew was that he had been, you know, the 100-meter [dash] champ in the [1976 Summer] Olympics [in Montreal, Canada]. But I did not know anything about Trinidad.

SL: Right.

RS: But meeting him and getting to know him—it just exposed me to something that was fascinating and attractive, you know, that was worth learning more about. You know, there were a number of students from the Middle East and, you know, I just—a number of my instructors were from the Middle East. And, you know, it was just—it was an interesting experience. It was—and a very good experience.

[00:50:28] SL: So you ran—you ran headlong into some true diversity . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . by the time you got to Michigan.

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: Something that you didn't really have at Marianna.

RS: No. And I enjoyed it. And my—by the way, it's interesting—my roommate was from Arkansas. His name was Darrion Price.

SL: Okay.

RS: We're still very close.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: He's from Pine Bluff.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But we had never met.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:50:52] RS: [*Laughs*] And I remember one of my, you know, first missteps, though it was not obvious to anyone. He and I talked about it later, but I remember telling my mother that I thought he was much older just because he had a beard.

SL: Mh-hmm. [*Laughs*]

RS: I mean, you know, he just had a beard.

SL: Right.

RS: And we, you know, you just didn't wear beards at the time.

SL: Right.

RS: But he was capable of growing one. [*Laughter*] And I remember thinking that he was older . . .

SL: Right . . .

RS: . . . but he was younger. And it was just—it was like, "Wake up." [*SL laughs*] You know, you can't make these kinds of judgments just . . .

SL: Judgments on what people look like.

RS: That's right.

SL: That's right.

RS: And—but we were roommates all four years. We were both actually captains of the team our senior year. He played football as well. So . . .

SL: Well, that's great.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:51:51] SL: So did you continue on offense all through . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . college?

RS: Yes. Yes. And I had a good experience. We recently recognized our coach. He was admitted—inducted into our Hall of Fame.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It was a good experience. There were things I learned, though.



I think one of the most difficult mistakes was—one of the most important learning experiences was, when you're early in a process—when you're young and doing something . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . be willing to accept any task. And I remember being told, "You're ready to play now." Now it was a limited, I mean, role. They basically wanted me to do the special stuff, the specialty teams . . .

SL: Special teams. Yeah.

RS: . . . kick-off, punt returns.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And punt returns in particular. And for some reason I was just not ready in that moment.

SL: Right.

RS: You know. I just—I mean, I was ready to try to do what I'd always done.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I'd actually done this. But I was just not ready. I mean, I think the way you get ready is you do three times the work when you're that young.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You don't worry about making mistakes when you're that young.

SL: That's right.

RS: You know, you seek guidance when you're that young, but you step in there, and you step up. And that was something that I needed a year to learn. But my experience was great. The forensics team actually brought me my national championship. We came to Washington.

[00:53:46] SL: Speech and debate?

RS: Yes. And that's a great—that was a great opportunity.

SL: Yep.

RS: That was probably one of the most significant things to occur for me at Eastern because Eastern was the premier school at that time in forensics.

SL: Is that right?

RS: They have always been good, but I didn't know this.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Actually they tried to get me to go out for the team my sophomore year.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Because Dennis Beagen, who was the coach then, was my persuasive speech instructor.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And he had been an athlete as well, and he said, "You know, we can do this stuff." And I was not ready though. I was then a pretty good athlete on campus and recognized, and I thought that was enough.

SL: Enough. Yeah.

RS: Plus forensics didn't seem quite the thing that a jock would do.

[Laughter]

[00:54:48] SL: Well, I understand that. You know, I played football. I was on the debate team in high school.

RS: Oh great.

SL: In fact I was David Gearhart's debate partner.

RS: Is that right?

SL: Yeah. He and I go way back.

RS: Well, we have to talk about that.

SL: Yes.

RS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, we can.

RS: Yeah, because that is a wonderful . . .

SL: It's great. It certainly organizes—or you can almost argue anything.

RS: Exactly. Exactly.

SL: For the sake of argument.

RS: Right.

SL: You can present—you can get yourself to gather your logic . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . a premise.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: What—you know . . .

RS: Yeah.

SL: . . . define the question.

RS: Exactly.

SL: You know.

RS: Exactly.

SL: Limit its scope.

RS: Right.

SL: Yeah.



RS: And, you know, the competition, it's interesting, can be as exhilarating as the quote "athletic" competition.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Which was something I just didn't have an appreciation for until, frankly, the second semester—the last semester of my senior year—football is over.

SL: Right.

RS: And for the first time in fifteen years, you just don't have anything to do in the afternoon.

SL: Right.

RS: Because, you know, you've gotten used to taking your classes early . . .

SL: So you can get to practice.

RS: . . . so you're available to practice. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And that's when I went out for forensics. And interestingly . . .

[00:56:14] SL: It's good that you ended up in competition in Washington, DC, because that's Nationals.

RS: Yeah, that's right. That's right. Well, there . . .

SL: Not everyone gets to go to Nationals.

RS: The national event—it was here.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And it was great. And we won.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh!

RS: We won. You know, what's interesting and I . . .

[00:56:30] SL: What was the question?

RS: Well, it—for me—see now, this was forensics.

SL: Yes.

RS: It wasn't the debate piece.

SL: Oh, okay.

RS: And it's all, you know, poetry, prose, extemp [*extemporaneous*],
impromptu . . .

SL: Ah.

RS: . . . all of that. That's . . .

SL: Okay.

RS: Okay. Anyw—and then there was the debate side . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but I didn't participate in that. But the thing that got me
interested, and it goes back to what we talked about this
morning—when I—they said, "Why don't you come to a

practice?" And Ray Quiel, who is now the coach of the forensics team at Eastern—he was a student then.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:57:10] RS: And he and Dennis and others had been trying to get me to come out. And they said, "Well, we decided not to have a practice, but we'd like for you to just listen to an after-dinner speech." And they gave me the name of the gentleman who had done—who did the after-dinner speech.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: He had been a national champion. I knew him, and we are listening to it, and everybody—we're all around the wall. It's a room that's pretty large, as I recall. And all I remember is that it's all, not only is the room all white, but all of my colleagues are white as well.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And this speech is about the stereotypes of African Americans.

[*SL laughs*] There you go.

SL: Wow. [*Laughs*]

RS: And the brother who does it—the brother who does it now is African American, and he's talking about the glide in our stride and the dip in our hip. [*SL laughs*] And all of this stuff.

SL: Right.

RS: And there you go. It's so funny, but after a while . . .

SL: It's not.

RS: . . . it's not.

SL: Yeah.

RS: I can laugh at it because I've got all of my friends, and we're kind of laughing at me at that point.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I said to Dennis, I said, "Dennis, how could you ask me to do something like this?"

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I said, "I'm not going to do this." And he said, "Just trust me."

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And then it went on. And, again, it's probably getting better and better. This guy was as funny as [comedian] Richard Pryor . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . who was at his height at this time. By the way, he had a daughter on the Eastern campus.

SL: Is that right?

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: Richard Pryor did?

RS: Richard Pryor did.

SL: Out of tape? Okay.

RS: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:04] RS: It's one of those long days.

FE: Okay. Okay, Scott, we've got speed.

SL: Okay, you got us both on audio?

FE: Yes, sir.

SL: All right. Good.

RS: Okay. But it was an after-dinner speech. After-dinner speeches are humorous, but they have a serious point.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But this speech was about the stereotypes of African Americans. And as I said, it was very funny . . .

SL: At first.

RS: . . . at first—glide and stride, cut and strut, dip and hip—all of that stuff—good rhythm—you know. I mean, and he was in his element. But after a while, I just felt as though my potential colleagues were laughing at me rather than with me. And that was really ultimately his serious point, although in the course of the speech, I got up to leave a couple of times. And my professor and colleagues on the forensics team encouraged me to stay. Anyway long story short, he gets to the end, and he says, "You know, stereotypes can be crippling to those who are

the object of them, and they can create a false sense of superiority in the minds of those who speak of them, who perpetuate them." And he said, "If these stereotypes were true, how can we account for the genius of Charles Drew, who discovered blood plasma? Or the moral conviction of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." or whatever. And you can see where he's going. And I'm just sitting there and catching myself because now I'm just sobbing because I'm saying, "This is so powerful."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: "And this is something I've always wanted to do." And so I joined the forensics team. But that's the thing that does it. And it was great. And—but the real story about it is our first meet is at the University of Michigan, which is right down the street. Remember I've said that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:01:19] RS: And with the University of Michigan you have a sort of University of Arkansas, maybe Arkansas State [University] kind of deal.

SL: Right.

RS: All right? Because you're there in the shadow . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and you want to play in the big house.

SL: Right.

RS: You want to take on the big dog.

SL: Right.

RS: And with Eastern, you know, we used to play our games at night, so that we wouldn't have to compete against that one hundred thousand attendance . . .

SL: At their stadium.

RS: . . . of the University of Michigan. You know, and we'd get our thirty-five thousand or whatever, but still you just could not do these games at the same time. [*Laughs*] So you can see what's going on. So we make the trip, and we're in a room before the competition, and the Big 10 is there, the Ivy Leaguers, you know, you can tell, they've got their beautiful blazers with the . . .

SL: Crests.

RS: . . . school emblem.

SL: Yeah.

RS: I mean, it's just—it's beautiful stuff. And so we're going around the room saying, "Well, where are you in school?" and "What's your major?" and all of that, just chit-chat, breaking the ice. And so they finally come to me, and I said, rather sheepishly, "Well, I'm from Eastern Michigan." And the room just goes

quiet. And so then one of the individuals said, "Where, now?"

And I said it again. I guess he just—he didn't hear . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . but the others evidently had. And I said, "Eastern Michigan," and he said, "Well," he said, "well, I guess you guys think that you're going to win the national championship again this year." And I said, "Well, you know, I'm not—I don't know." And he said—then he gets everyone else involved, and he says, "Listen to him." [*SL laughs*] You know, and he says, "You guys have won the thing the last four or five years in a row." [*SL laughs*] And he said, "But I've got news for you," and then, "Isn't that right, guys?" or "ladies?" He said, "We're gonna take it to you this year." Well, in that moment, I'm just totally oblivious to the fact that Eastern has this prominence in this area because it's never really an item of . . .

SL: Discussion. You'd never heard it . . .

RS: . . . discussion, news, or whatever. And it's not like athletics. I mean, it's like most other extracurricular activities, taking a sort of back seat to athletics.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But once I got into it, it was the most enriching experience, and the competition was just as keen, just as great, just as

significant. And we did win. [*SL laughs*] [01:04:17] And we had a gentleman on our team, and his—he was our Michael. But he won five individual championships. I mean, and he was just—and I say our Michael because he was from Chicago, so we called him our Michael. But he was just fascinating to listen to. And he's now in theater. Some of the team members are in the movies. And many are teaching. But it was a wonderful experience, and it actually introduced me to an aspect of communications that I just didn't fully appreciate—you know, all the—again the poetry, the prose, the extemp, and impromptu. And frankly, had I had time—'cause what I did was I did everything, just because it was the taste of it all.

SL: Right.

RS: It's like a . . .

SL: A smorgasbord.

RS: . . . a buffet. That's right, a smorgasbord. It's like, "It's all there. Taste it." And I did. And did actually pretty well in a number of areas, but extemp and impromptu were two areas I wanted to get into, but you really needed more than I had time, I mean, you really needed to get ready for that. We had guys who were like walking computers. They had their file cabinets. They had the most up-to-date articles on any number of

subjects, and they were just weaving this into a statement that says, "You know, it's—you're—it's five o'clock in the morning. You wake up. What are you thinking about? What are you thinkin' [thinking] about?" And your challenge is to [*laughs*—to really woo them . . .

SL: Yeah.

RS: . . . with what you're thinking about, and you have to put them in the moment of five a.m., you know, and "Do you hear a bird chirping?" And "Has the sun broken through the clouds?" I mean, and can you manage that and then apply the substance of a given topic to carry the moment? I mean, it's just fascinating, but I never got a chance to do that part of it.

SL: Sounds like . . .

FE: I need to do one thing real quick, Scott.

SL: Okay. [*FE adjusts microphone*] [01:07:02] Sounds like you honed your wordsmithing at that time . . .

RS: Definitely.

SL: That it brought you to a focus of the power of the spoken word.



RS: Of words. That's right. As a matter of fact, the most powerful lesson I learned was from a woman by the name of Ava Banks. She was from Bradley [University, Peoria, Illinois].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And if you look at the number of teams that have won the most national championships, you will find Bradley probably first and Eastern second, with, just again, the number of individual champions and national championships. But she said to me once—she said—I said, "How do you deal with nervousness, or how do you deal with getting ready for the moment?" And she said, "I've got a little secret." She said, "I basically go into a room, and hopefully it has no windows, but if it does, I will draw the shades, close out the light, turn off the light, and then I will listen to my own voice." She said, "It's the most beautiful sound in the world" . . .

SL: Wow.

RS: . . . "when you do that." And she said, "The thing about the voice is that it covers all space."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I never thought about this. So when you turn out that light, you actually free yourself of the distractions of all that is, and the thing that becomes the living being is your voice.

SL: That's beautiful.

[01:08:36] RS: I had never thought about it. It's so—and she said, "You know, people—when they say, 'I sing better in the shower,' that's really what they're getting into. It's the soothing, you



know, experience of the water and the—and it's the freeing of all that, you know, we have to put on to make an appearance.

When you're shedding all of that, then the appearance becomes that which is natural to you." The other person who was very

helpful to me in that regard was an instructor who—who

basically said, "Silence is speech as well," and he said, "Most

people are afraid of silence. And if you aren't, and you can use

it, it has a rhythm and a melody to it that is fascinating." I'd

never thought about that either. You know, if anything, if you've

got an opportunity to speak, you usually want to say something

for fear that if you're not saying something, people in your

audience . . .

SL: Don't listen.

RS: . . . well, they don't listen, but they also wonder whether you've got anything to say.

SL: Right.

RS: But the silence actually . . .

SL: Emphasizes what you've . . .

RS: That's right.

SL: . . . got to say.

RS: And it forces them—you know, if you wait, and you don't wait too long, it just forces them to come into the moment with you.

Otherwise, they're thinking about what they're thinking about—

"You've got a speech to give."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: There's all kinds of racket . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . you know. There's all—there's—there are other things that are there. And at the end of the day, they may or not [telephone rings] remember what you said. But I never thought about that, you know. But just that little silence at the beginning. It's just—those were things that, you know, were—and if you notice, speakers, really good speakers, they do that, these endings where it's not an "in conclusion." But it's like someone takes you to a cliff, and they just leave you there, you know.

SL: [Laughs] Yes.

RS: That's done as well, right?

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RS: With great effect.

SL: Yes.

RS: It's like [laughs], you know, "Come on, I got to have more," [SL laughs] but it's over [laughs], you know, it's over.

SL: Do with it what you will.

RS: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

RS: That's exactly right.

SL: The ball's in your court. *[RS laughs]*

SL: Yeah.

RS: So anyway . . .

[01:11:17] SL: That's a good story. So—but you didn't get to that till your senior year?

RS: I didn't get to that until my senior year, although I'd been taking—I had taken a number of communications courses.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I did not participate in forensics until my senior year.

[01:11:32] SL: Tell me about your living quarters when you were at Eastern Michigan.

RS: Hmm. The one thing that I was impressed with was that Eastern really did not have an athletic dorm.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Athletes could stay anyplace on campus—I think the freshmen basically had to stay on campus, but beyond that, you could live anyplace.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I found that fascinating. Also they had co-ed dorms.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I found that fascinating. Not only—not so much because you wanted to be a part of all of that . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but it was just—that was different, and it was like, "That's not happening back home." Now you do have that in schools, probably all around now but that was at . . .

SL: Now but back then . . .

RS: . . . at Eastern then—and I just found that fascinating. But I lived in the dorm . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . basically two years.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:12:36] RS: I did move off campus, my roommate and I, our junior and senior year. You know [*laughs*], I remember one of the first sights I saw, and it was at the dorm—it was at one particular dorm which was on campus, and it was basically built like condos or apartments . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . which was also rather interesting, this particular dorm. But the [*laughs*] first person I saw was George Gervin. He was back—I guess he was playing for the [National Basketball

Association's team San Antonio] Spurs then. He had been an Eastern student and athlete . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and he was driving a Rolls Royce.

SL: Oh, my God.

RS: I had not seen one before. [*Laughter*] But that was kind of interesting, but that was not the average dorm life of a [*laughs*] student at Eastern. But I just remember that in connection with this particular dorm on campus.

[01:13:34] SL: So you—now what degree did you get from Eastern?

RS: It was a political science . . .

SL: Political science.

RS: . . . and speech communications.

SL: And speech communications.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Oh, I just wanted to tell you that the one humorous interp that I did in forensics in high school was *Horton Hatches the Egg* [Dr. Seuss, 1940].

RS: Oh, okay. [*Laughter*] Okay.

SL: So, that—that's about as far outside of the debate squad that I got.

RS: That you got.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Okay. Okay.

[01:14:03] SL: The—so you decided to go to law school.

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: Okay, now did you apply to a lot of law schools, or did you just know that you wanted to go to the University of Arkansas [School of Law, Fayetteville]?

RS: Well, I knew I wanted to go to the University of Arkansas.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I knew that I wanted to come home.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I knew that I wanted to build a professional career in Arkansas.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Now this was before I really knew about Bill Clinton . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Steve Clark, Paul Riviere . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Jimmie Lou Fisher. I mention them because they were very young and a part of the political process. I knew about Senator Bumpers, I knew about Senator Pryor, and I knew they were young.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I knew they were very progressive, but I did not really learn about the others until I returned home. But I always wanted to work in Arkansas. I always wanted to live in Arkansas.

SL: Well, now had you . . .

FE: Gotta [got to] pause for a second. I'm sorry.

[Tape stopped]

FE: Okay, Scott, we've got speed.

RS: Okay.

[01:15:10] SL: Okay, we were talking about your decision to come to the University of Arkansas law school.

RS: Right.

SL: That you wanted to come back to Arkansas.

RS: Right.

SL: That you were aware of the progressive—young, progressive politicians in the state at that time.

RS: Right. Right.

SL: But you didn't know much else other than Jimmie Lou Fisher, Pryor, Bumpers—you didn't know much about Clinton.

RS: No, I did not.

SL: And, let's see, there was someone else you mentioned.

RS: Well, and I had known about [Winthrop] Rockefeller.

SL: Right.

RS: And I'd known about, you know, some of the other progressive politicians in earlier years.

SL: I know what I was going to ask you.

RS: Sid McMath, in particular. I should mention Sid—Governor McMath.

[01:16:02] SL: Had you been to Fayetteville before?

RS: Oh, yes. See, remember I was actually—I went on a visit, a recruiting visit to Fayetteville.

SL: That's right, with Dennis.

RS: With Dennis.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And I loved the area. I thought it was beautiful.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But again, at that point out of high school, I wanted to venture out, and Eastern afforded me that opportunity.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, a bit more urban. And you mentioned that earlier.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And the dynamism of that area. And—a—and just a way to sort of test, again, all of those lingering thoughts about, "What's beyond that bend in the road? What's down Highway 79?"

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: "What's beyond Memphis? What's beyond Chicago?"

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Eastern afforded me that opportunity.

[01:17:03] SL: Okay, so you've come from Marianna. You went to Eastern Michigan. And now you're landing in Fayetteville. Tell me what you—as far as the African American population in the communities in those three places—kind of compare and contrast if you could. I mean, I think . . .

RS: Marianna, Eastern . . .

SL: Yeah, and then—and Fayetteville.

RS: . . . Fayetteville.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Yeah. Well, Fayetteville actually has a small African American population.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Now it's a population that is generally isolated in one area of the city.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you've got your historically black churches in that area.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I attended St. James United Methodist Church by the way.

SL: My brother is the current pastor there.

RS: He's the current? Well, my brother-in-law-to-be, Hank
Wilkins . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Henry Wilkins IV was actually the—became the pastor there.
We met on one occasion in Michigan . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . because as I mentioned, my roommate was from Pine Bluff.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But we also had another friend who had been recruited from
Arkansas, Greg Bankston . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . who was from Pine Bluff.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Greg knew Hank, and so we went to visit Hank on one
occasion, as I recall, but I never knew Hank had a sister, and I
never really knew that I would become connected [*laughs*] to
the Wilkins family, because when I got to Arkansas, Hank was in
law school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And—but Cassandra had already left the university. She actually
went to the University of Texas Law School [Austin, Texas], but
she did her undergraduate work at . . .

SL: UA.

RS: . . . the university in Fayetteville. So I never really met her.

[*Laughter*] It's amazing, but then Hank and I did share a few stories. We—I was looking at a photo album of his, and we were talking about who we knew in common and that sort of thing.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:19:24] RS: And I recall asking him, you know, "Who is this?"

SL: Mh-hmm. [*Laughs*]

RS: And "Looks like a keeper," da-da-da-da-da. [He said,] "No, man, we fought all the time"—never, ever could've, you know, married or dated her—whatever. [*SL laughs*] Then eventually in the same conversation said he would—said that she was his sister. And at that point, I was quite embarrassed . . .

SL: Sure.

RS: . . . because, you know, number one, I couldn't recall what I might've said and how I might've said it, but I didn't say anything else. And then later said, "Still, would've been a keeper."

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

RS: And eventually he introduced us.

SL: That's good.

RS: Yeah, it's very good.

SL: Okay, now we're going to get to the romance . . .

RS: [*Laughs*] Very good. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . here in a little bit, but I want to get back to the . . .

RS: The dif—yeah. That was a good question.

[01:20:19] SL: . . . yeah, the differences between the three communities, 'cause I'm thinking . . .

RS: And, you know . . .

SL: . . . the—these experiences are further shaping you.



RS: Right. That's true. It's interesting—in Marianna, as we've talked about it, there was, you know, sort of a place. And in many respects, those places were bordered or cut off from one another by transportation arteries. You know, maybe on this side of the track, one community. That side of the track, another community. This roadway—and actually, if you look across America, you will find the same thing . . .

SL: Zoning kind of . . .

RS: . . . as relates to the races.

SL: Yeah.

RS: That's right. Housing patterns and the like. Now at that time I really didn't understand that . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . in the same way. Also if you go to communities you can

pretty much make a judgment based on where you find sidewalks, where you find—and today it's interesting—today a different sort of thing, where you find walking trails, bike trails. Y'know, it's very . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . subtle but very interesting—where you find curbs and gutters or where you find open ditches.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Where you find, you know, ditches that have been covered over, but you've still got your, you know, your way of handling your water and that kind of thing, your runoff and everything.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But it's not as open . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . you know, and you've got twice as much space for cars, and you've got a sidewalk. I mean, it's just amazing. I—that part of it, I picked up on in a very dramatic way later. But it's interesting—I was living it then, but it's almost like it's what you've known, so you expect it or you accept it in a way that you don't after you have been exposed . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and after you mature, you see it in a different way.

SL: You bet.

[01:22:33] RS: Now Michigan—it's interesting—there was a difference. There was a—the movement was much faster, and the music—it's interesting, the song that I remember—there was a lot of Motown, and those were—that was my favorite music. But I remember the song that we were listening to when I first made my trip to Michigan was a song by the—was it the Average White Band?

SL: Okay.

RS: What's the name of that group?

FE: Average White Band.

RS: Average White Band.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And it was—what was the name of this song? But it was something "white boy." What was the name . . .

SL: "Play That Funky Music?"

RS: "Play That Funky Music, White Boy." [Editor's Note: The song title is "Play That Funky Music" by Wild Cherry, released in 1976.]

SL: Funky music, white boy. Mh-hmm.

RS: That was the song that we were listening to driving through the streets of Detroit, and this was one of the songs that my

partners-to-be, surrounded by Motown and playing Motown 90 percent of the time, but that's also a song . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . that they were playing, which was very interesting—Average White Band.

SL: Right.

RS: That was the name of the group.

SL: Right.

RS: And that was different. These big boxes—you know, music machines.

SL: Right.

RS: I'd never seen anything like that, with a speaker as big as anything [*SL laughs*] I'd seen growing up in Arkansas.

SL: Right.

[01:24:01] RS: And then—but still, those communities were quite segregated as well although some of my friends at Eastern had gone to private schools for their high school experience.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And they were—those—that was a different experience, and this was a different person in some respects in the way they would deal with the system. Let's say that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Then you had—I had friends who had gone to high schools in the suburbs as compared to friends who had gone to high schools in central Detroit. There was one school that was a school that was really into technology called Cass Tech[nical High School].

SL: Okay.

RS: And it produced a very interesting kind of student. These are all my friends, either in the classroom or on the football team or whatever, and that was quite different from my experiences back home.

[01:25:11] SL: So the interests are now much more diversified . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . when you get to Michigan.

RS: Exactly. Exactly. And there was the—clearly there was a different kind of mix among the races, but the races were not just two anymore. There were, you know, Asians and Native Americans and Hispanics, and then all of the international students, and the mix of that. And it was all quite fascinating. The student-body size was in excess of twenty thousand. So you're talking about a lot of people with a lot of motion—a lot of movement—and you're trying to see and catch and understand all of it. And the good thing about it is that the football team—the athletic department becomes sort of the place where you

retreat to, to catch your breath. [*SL laughs*] You know.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Because that's kind of the same every day, but once you move out from that, and there's all this motion and all this activity, that's what you're trying to understand and appreciate and learn from and, you know, and gain from.

[01:26:24] SL: You were exhilarated by all that, weren't you?

RS: Oh, I was. I was. And then you go back to Arkansas—you're going to an interesting part of the state. You know, it didn't—it—Fayetteville is a very liberal part of Arkansas. Northwest Arkansas—you're going from the Delta to hill country in the Ozarks.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And it's a different kind of terrain, and it's very beautiful, picturesque.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, it's—you're catching all of that. You're moving into a professional school, but you're on a college campus. So your interaction with undergraduates is very limited for the most part . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . unless you choose to do that. I had friends, but basically,

you're in a professional setting with students who are going after advanced degrees, and you're at a different level at a different point in your life as well. And I mentioned that you've got the African American community, but you also have a number of professors on campus who are African Americans, and they are living in different places.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you're conscious of some of that, but unless you're really dealing with them in a more social fashion, some of that you don't really see. You are a part of that campus life. And for a time I lived on campus, but ultimately moved into the community.

[01:28:14] SL: So how many blacks were in the law school when you came in?

RS: Actually my class was a pretty large class.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I think there may have been eleven to come into that class. We ended up with just three of us, though, graduating. T. K. Robinson and Larry Dunklin and myself.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And that's the—you know, looking . . .

SL: Attrition.

RS: . . . to your left, your right—all of that—and the attrition. Now interestingly, and I applaud the university and the law school for this today, we probably have one of the most diverse law schools of any in the country. And Dean [James K.] Miller, who was there welcoming me, has played an important role in that regard.

SL: Yes.

RS: And Dean [Richard B.] Atkinson, who was one of our young professors—he actually did the commencement for my graduating law class—was a part of that as well. And, y'know, we lost a special person when we lost him.

[01:29:21] SL: I knew Dick. And actually, my son is in law school there now.

RS: Oh, is that right?

SL: And he had Dick his first year.

RS: Oh.

SL: And he actually did—I produced his memorial service and those . . .

RS: Oh, you did all of the . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . that slide and the . . .

SL: Yes.

RS: Oh, that was beautifully done.

SL: You were there?

RS: I was there.

SL: Oh, okay.

RS: I didn't know that.

SL: That's one of my . . .

RS: That was beautifully done.

SL: . . . things.

RS: And if I recall, that theme was something about life.

SL: Yes, "Love, Laugh, and Live." "Live" . . .

RS: That's right.

SL: . . . "Love and Laugh." I can't remember.

RS: Something like that.

SL: I've actually, I think I've got . . .

RS: Do you?

SL: . . . a DVD of it in my . . .

RS: But I remember that. That was—that caught my eye, too.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: That was well done. That was well done.

SL: Well, thanks.

RS: Yeah.

SL: It—I was emotionally involved.

RS: Yeah.

SL: It meant a lot to me to be asked to do it.

RS: Well, it was . . .

SL: Anyway, my son was one of those . . .

RS: Yeah.

SL: . . . student voices.

RS: Oh, is that right?

SL: Yeah. Yeah, he actually read a couple of pieces.

RS: I thought that was well done as well.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And all of them had—you know, they spoke to the unique characteristics and the total character of Dick quite well.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And, you know, there was the humor.

SL: He was a remarkable guy.

RS: Yeah. And what he did in two and a half years is remarkable.

But really, it's hard to kind of separate what he did the two and a half years as dean from what he was doing . . .

SL: Already.

RS: . . . all—that's right—all the years as a professor. He just added to that. You know, it was like an exclamation point . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . with that. But Dick was there and Professor [Albert M.] Witte.

SL: Al Witte.

RS: Professor [Howard W.] Brill. I mean, they were all—it was a good time. Dean [Robert A.] Leflar, I mentioned.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:31:17] RS: The other thing about Arkansas that impressed me was I actually did a little study. Now I came to know much more about this, but I knew a little bit about Arkansas's role in admitting African Americans early on in the process, and I, as I said, I came to know a lot more about Silas Hunt—1948—the fact that you know, you had Wiley Branton, who was later—who would later become a student, traveling with him on that fateful day, along with W. Harold Flowers, who was a noted lawyer . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . at the time in Arkansas. I did not really know about the Pine Bluff connection to all of those young lawyers who were coming to Fayetteville.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, Silas Hunt had graduated from Branch Normal [College]—UAPB or AM&N [Editor's Note: Branch Normal College became Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in 1927 and

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in 1972] . . .

SL: Right.

RS: And then Wiley Branton—his family, you know, living in Pine Bluff—was a graduate of AM&N. We talked about, you know, self-sustaining communities, well, Wiley Branton's family was in business. They owned a number of taxi . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . services . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and other businesses. But then George [W.] Haley—and George will get into all of this with you in a much more knowledgeable way, but his father had been at the law—I mean, at the AM&N as dean for a number of years.

SL: Oh. Now see, I didn't know that.

RS: Yes. And George and Alex [Haley, author] would actually come to Pine Bluff many summers and live there with their father even though they were growing up in Henning, Tennessee.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:33:23] RS: And then Judge [George] Howard [Jr.] from Pine Bluff, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: C. C. [Christopher Columbus] Mercer [Jr.] had graduated from

Pine Bluff—I mean, from AM&N. I mean, all of these connections to that institution and then preparation for their movement on. Philander [Smith College, Little Rock] played an important role as well. I think that Dr. Edith Irby Jones—I'm not sure where she went to . . .

SL: Undergraduate school?

RS: Yes.

SL: I'm not sure either. [Editor's Note: Dr. Jones attended Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee.] I do know that because I've read it but . . .

RS: Okay. But Philander was also important . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . in this regard as well. But then, you know—but these lawyers—I picked that up from my friends, who were from Pine Bluff, once I got to law school. Judge Marion Humphrey—we were in law school together. Reverend Joseph Washington, Wendell Griffen . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . all of us, and they—especially Marion and Joe Washington—talking about these lawyers from Pine Bluff that they grew up with. And I'm saying, "These are beautiful stories" [*SL laughs*] because these are stories I just didn't have. I just didn't know.

I couldn't see that . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . growing up. But I was on the edge of my seat listening to their stories about Judge Howard handling some case for the family or Wiley Branton—Mr. Branton handling some case with a family. You know, and their teaming up with John Walker and Attorney Branton arguing the Little Rock Nine case. I mean, this was what I was getting in law school, and it was—to me, that was in keeping with what President Clinton had talked about with the Oliver Wendell Holmes statement of . . .

SL: Passion.

RS: . . . "Life is action and passion." And then actually with more research during that period, I became introduced to Charles Hamilton Houston.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:35:56] RS: And Charles Hamilton Houston was actually the lawyer who—he was dean of the Howard Law School, and he brought in the Thurgood Marshalls and all of the other lawyers who were prepared to actually take on Jim Crow . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . you know. I mean, and just—and the preparation for that. That's, you know, that's good stuff. [*SL laughs*] And Wiley

Branton, you know, would become a part of that circle as he came to Washington, DC, and became the dean of the law school at Howard University Law School and, you know, and would again sort of carry that mantle forward. But again, Mr. [George] Haley will get—will I'm sure get into all of that with you.

SL: I can't wait to sit down. We're gonna actually be with him in his house.

RS: Yes.

SL: And I just can't . . .

RS: Well, he'll . . .

SL: . . . I hope I don't wear him out [*RS laughs*] because, you know, I'll go for as long as y'all will go.

RS: Yeah.

SL: I mean, I'll just keep going.

RS: Well, you'll get . . .

SL: Tape—the tape is cheap, so . . .

RS: . . . you'll get a lot from him.

SL: Yeah.

[01:36:41] RS: But when I was in law school, I became the president of BALSA.

SL: Okay, and that stands for . . .

RS: The Black [American] Law Students Association.

SL: Okay.

RS: But we also had a W. Harold Flowers Law—well, we had a W. Harold Flowers Law Society, which was named—it was the African American Association—Bar Association—named in honor of W. Harold Flowers. Remember he . . .

SL: That's nice. That's good . . .

RS: . . . he took Silas Hunt. And, by the way, Attorney Branton actually tried to apply for the business school in February of [19]48.

SL: And was turned down.

RS: He was turned down. That's right. Silas Hunt—and you think about that being—you know, you got three—there're three of you going up [*laughs*] but the other two, they leave . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . and you're sort of there by yourself . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . and that's, you know, and that's what we're honoring, that perseverance. And Silas Hunt could've gone to the University of Indiana

SL: Yeah, I have read that, too.

RS: Yes. And Ambassador [George] Haley could've gone to any number of law schools as well but chose Arkansas. His

father . . .

[01:37:56] SL: Now when did George come into the law school?

RS: He came in in [19]49.

SL: Right after Silas and . . .

RS: No, it was right after—well, you had Jackie Shropshire, who came in, I think, in the spring of [19]49.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Then Mr. Haley was just right after that.

SL: Okay.

RS: And, you know, [*telephone rings*] just right there together. All three of 'em [them]. But as you know, Silas Hunt, I think, was only there a year and became ill.

SL: Right.

RS: Yeah. And passed away.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But [*telephone rings*] that's why, again, this is so important.

[01:38:37] SL: So you got—you were civic and politically active when you got to Arkansas. I mean, you . . .

RS: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

SL: Did you head up any organizations in Eastern Michigan?

RS: At Eastern, no. I think—well, other than what we've talked about—football . . .

SL: Right. Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . athletics—I can remember one thing. I remember reading "Who's Who in Colleges and Universities" . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And I was just scanning, and I remember reading about this young man who was at Notre Dame [University, Notre Dame, Indiana] and played football and was student body president.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And I said [*snaps fingers*], "I wish I had thought about that."

SL: Yeah.

RS: You know. In high school, I did that.

SL: Oh.

RS: You know, class officer and those kinds of things.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: But for some reason—again in college there're other things that you're doing, and I'm glad I did all of that. But there were things that I still just did not know. I mean, I just did not know certain things.

SL: Mh-hmm.

SL: And what—and by the way, one of my [*laughs*] sort of goals for each day is learn something every day. Y'know, 'cause you got—you gotta [*telephone rings*—you gotta do that to keep, you

know, moving.

SL: To keep renewing yourself.

RS: That's right.

SL: Really.

RS: That's exactly right.

[01:40:13] SL: Why do I suspect that your speech classes and your forensics in your senior year kind of—for some reason, I get this feeling it kind of planted your feet square on the ground . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . where you could really address things in front of you eloquently—that you had become familiar with the power of speech. And you plant yourself in Fayetteville, Arkansas, law school, where, by all history I know, is a tough law school.

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: That—I mean, law school in general is tough.

RS: Right.

SL: But there is a certain amount of respect that I think that law school has pretty much always had.

RS: I agree. I agree.

SL: So—and my having a son in that school right now [*laughter*—I know how much stress it is, so [*RS laughs*] and he came—he went to his—he went to a really tough undergraduate school,

and he thought, "Well, come back to Arkansas—you know, it's not going to be much of anything" . . .

RS: No.

SL: . . . compared to where he came from. But it got on him real quick, so . . .

RS: Right. That's good.

SL: . . . I know how hard . . .

RS: That's good.

SL: . . . law school is. And here you are—you land in Fayetteville, and not only are you in law school, but you start taking on these leadership roles . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . as well. So it's like you're on fire . . .

RS: That's . . .

SL: . . . when you get to Fayetteville.

RS: I think so.

SL: You are ready to . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . take it on, I think.

[01:41:40] RS: Right. I think so. I think, actually I always knew that athletics for me was a means to an end.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I knew that. I remember the promise I made to my mother was not only would I keep my grades up—this is seventh grade—I said, "But I'll also win a scholarship, and I'll pay my way to college." I remember that. And one of the big fears I had actually—I remember we talked about the situation in Marianna with the boycott and not being able to play . . .

SL: Yes.

RS: . . . my senior year. One big fear I had was that I was not going to be able to meet that promise because I was not really in a position to have a lot of attention.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, it's really—usually it's your senior year when, you know, you're at—you're able to add it all up . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and sort of, you know, have your breakout year or whatever.

SL Well, and you're making contacts and . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . your coach is helping you . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . making a few calls for you.

RS: Exactly.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[01:42:48] RS: And so when you—when you're not playing your senior year, you've got to answer that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You've got to be able to answer that question.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you've got to be able to make the point that you've still got potential, you've—you're still growing, you're mature. That—I mean, there are a lot of things that you've got to be able to answer to a prospective coach. And fortunately, you know, that—we could do that. But the big fear was that we wouldn't have that opportunity. But my point is, for me, athletics was—it was a wonderful experience, but it was a means to end. It was to develop leadership skills. It was to test myself. It was to be a part of a team. It was to grow and to mature. It was to have an opportunity to go to college. It was not necessarily to go to the pros. It was to put me where I wanted to be for the next step. And then I got lucky, and forensics gave me an even broader, and in some respects, much more dynamic arena to play in because this was a team that was nationally ranked, that was competing against the best, and that was winning at a different level even though the athletic program at Eastern at



the time was quite successful. Now we were going through a transition during my period but still quite successful. But not like forensics on that level of national ranking. And so it opened my eyes to, number one, something that I could continue to do—though not necessarily competitively—that could take me forward in ways that I had not really . . .

SL: Considered.

RS: . . . appreciated.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: So you're right. And the law school became, you know, that platform.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then after that, you know, it was just the experience with practicing law.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: The attorney general's office and that kind of thing.

[01:45:24] SL: So you didn't really engage very much with the undergraduate student body at Arkansas, but I know that it was a pretty tight-knit group in law school. [*Knock at the door*]

RS: Yes.

FE: Pause.

[Tape stopped]

FE: Stand by. And we've got speed.

[01:45:42] SL: So I know that the law school student population is a pretty finite group of bright minds . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . that are constantly concerned with rank.

RS: Oh! [*Laughs*] Yes. Yes.

SL: [*Laughs*] Because everyone, you know, is worried about paying the bills and gettin' a job when they . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . get out. And the companies that come in and do the interviews are . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . gonna—"What's your rank," you know.

RS: Right. Right.

SL: And, of course, I—currently there are very few professors that will test in the middle of the semester or . . .

RS: Oh my, that's right.

SL: . . . incrementally. It's all at the end.

RS: It's all at the end.

SL: It's one test at the end. [*Laughs*]

RS: It's all at the end.

SL: I mean, there's some philosophies out there—you don't even

need to go to class.

RS: Yeah. Yeah, that's true.

SL: That . . .

RS: That's true.

SL: . . . as long as you know the material . . .

RS: That's right.

SL: . . . you're gonna be fine.

RS: That's right.

SL: So you had to have—be experiencing some stress on this while you were . . .

RS: Well, there was a lot of stress.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:46:40] RS: Interestingly two thoughts come to mind. One was this experience at the end of the year, where you're taking that exam. I do remember specifically calling home, and I was talking to my mother, and I said something to the effect—"This is difficult." And I said, "And I'm not sure about this. I think I may have—I don't even know—we're on the phone, and maybe I'm just talking out loud because I'm—I don't know that I'm saying this within a conversation as much as just saying it. And I said something to the effect—"I'm not sure that I can do this." And I remember my mother said, "But we can't quit." And I

remember thinking on the other end, "Just a moment. We?"
You know, and kind of, you know, almost laughing about that
but almost puzzled by that at the same time. It's a mixed
feeling . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . 'cause it's like, "We?" You know, I'm really the one that's
[*laughs*] got to take this exam. "We?"

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But then also puzzled about the "we" and in this, y'know,
pregnant moment with all of its variations—"We can't quit." And
then she basically said, "I think it's time." [*Weeps*]

SL: It's okay. [Long pause] I was . . .

RS: She said, "I think it's time for this family to have a lawyer."

[*SL laughs*] [Long pause] And we did it.

[01:49:39] SL: I have to tell you that I was talking with my son over
the phone, and he's—he'll be finishing up his second year. And
he had—he doesn't have a job yet this—for this coming summer.
He's really worried about that. And I said something, you know,
like, "You're going to be fine. I know it seems like it never ends,
but you're going to be fine." And he broke down. He—you
know, I think that you just got a really strong—you went back to
that moment with your conversation with your mom, and I had a

similar moment with my son just recently. I think that it is difficult—that it was difficult, and there is a time in that process where you don't know that you can do it. And I think my son was feeling the same way, and I pray that I say the right things to him.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: I wish I had said, "We can do this." [RS *Laughs*] You know, because the truth is your mom is with you. She was with you.

RS: Mh-hmm. [*Laughs*]

[Tape stopped]

SL: That's a wonderful story that you just told.

[01:51:11] RS: Right. Right. I—you know, there's this movie, and it's actually about a legal case. It's about the slave ship *Amistad* [movie by the same name, released 1997].

SL: Okay, I've not seen that.

RS: Right. But they're dealing with John Quincy Adams's representation of the quote "slaves."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Cinque, who is the principal slave, is saying to him as they're preparing to go into the courtroom, he said—John Quincy Adams says, "Now when we go in this courtroom—into the courtroom, it will be threatening. It will be intimidating. It will

be, you know, a moment cloaked with officialdom, and there will be a judge." And he was just describing the experience. And he said, "And we will go in, and we will be alone." He said, "But we'll be all right because we'll have the Constitution" and that sort of thing. And this gentleman says—he said, "But we will not be alone." He said, "Because in that moment all of my ancestors will be with us, because in that moment I am the only reason for their having existed, and they will take us through that moment." That was a beautiful piece in that story and in that movie. And I think that's—you know . . .

SL: That's true.

RS: Yeah. That's right. That's right. And professionally, you know, I've talked about—we've talked about a lot of things . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . but for me professionally, it's really been that law school experience because—and now this was my thinking about it. I viewed it a little differently from most—from a lot of students maybe.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I said to myself, "I know what I want to be when it's over" . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . "and all along the way, I've just got so much to learn, you

know 'cause I'm not—I've never seen it up close. I don't know how you make it. But I'm here."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: "And we're gonna make it," you know. And there are the, you know, the mountaintop experiences and the valleys.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:54:07] RS: But still, I wouldn't trade it for the world, because you've got to get ready. I mean, one of the most difficult things was—I know that I went looking for quote "justice" because I wanted to use it.

SL: Well, sure.

RS: I wanted to take that prize and bring it out into a reality that did not fully square with my own expectations of reality and use it.

SL: Yeah.



RS: And, you know, and use it for good. And I remember one of the most confusing experiences was having two cases, you know, one in California generally and one in New York, and the facts are basically the same. And you've got different outcomes. And you're saying, "Where is the justice in this?" Y'know, "Where is the—where is that which is pure?"

SL: Absolute.

RS: Absolute, you know. And then you work through that process,

and you come to realize that the law is basically a tool, and the justice has to be in the heart and in the hearts of those who are using that tool. And—but that's a maturing process that takes time. Because for me, it wasn't to just become a lawyer to have a job. It was to become to a lawyer to have a cause.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so . . . [pause]

FE: Gotta change tapes, Scott.

SL: Okay, let's change tapes.

[Tape stopped]

[01:56:08] FE: On here. Are you comfortable, sir? Can I get you anything?

RS: Mh-hmm. I'm fine.

FE: Maybe some water?

RS: Yeah, you know, don't worry about it, but we're fine.

FE: Okay. We've got speed, Scott.

RS: That water was good.

SL: Okay.

RS: Okay.

SL: So we're back at law school.

RS: Yes.

SL: You had a moment of uncertainty . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . 'cause it is [*laughs*] difficult.

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: I know this from my own personal experience with my family, and it's always—I've always heard that it was difficult. I understand where you were coming from on that.

RS: Right. Right. And over—let me just offer this. I think after a while you understand that it has to be.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Because it's training ground, and as a lawyer you are presented with any number of challenges on behalf of a—of the client in his or her interest—its interest if it's a corporation or some other entity—in your hands. And so you've got to be prepared for that. But as you're going through it, that's a different kinda thing.

SL: Hard to see the forest for the trees.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:57:17] SL: Well, so obviously, you ended up doing fine in law school.

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: You got your degree.

RS: Yes.

SL: Passed the bar [examination].

RS: Right. Right.

SL: Before we leave the university though . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . let's—let me ask you just a couple of things. Was there anything at the University of Arkansas that really—I don't know—pulled things together for you? I mean, you told me that it was that law school experience that pretty much cast you, I think . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . as far as your life's path goes.

RS: Oh, no doubt about it.

SL: Like you had been put into the fire . . .

RS: Right. Right.

SL: . . . and all of that.

RS: Right.

SL: So I guess you've already answered that question in a way.
What about . . .

[01:58:13] RS: But I would say this . . .

SL: Okay.



RS: . . . it's interesting, and I just thought about this. If I had to identify one experience that clearly opened the way where I

could see it—you know, they say you can't judge the value of a diamond by looking at the tip. You've gotta unearth it and get under it a little bit. The one thing that really opened it up for me to really see it and to know that it was mine to have was attending an event, and I guess this was in 1978. But it was the thirtieth anniversary of Silas Hunt's admission to the law school. There was an event that was sponsored by the W. Harold Flowers Law Society, or at that time, it may have been called the Black Lawyers Association—Arkansas Black Lawyers Association. And the five pioneers were honored. So you had Jackie Shropshire, George Haley, Wiley Branton, Judge Howard, C. C. Mercer. You had all five of 'em there. And Silas Hunt was not there—couldn't be there—but I was selected as the student representative to speak on his importance, which was a great experience, because that forced me and encouraged me to delve deeper into his story. And then meeting the five and seeing all of them and just marveling over the fact that not only had they endured this, had they gone through, had they passed the bar, had they gone into the profession, but they had all done things that were very, very significant, honorable, quite distinct—distinguishing in all of their many activities. And seeing them in the flesh was a very, very important experience. And to also

have them—and I just—I think lawyers and professors can do this as no one else can—but to have them then take an interest in my own personal experience at the time and the experience of my fellow students was really wonderful. And that's when I really developed a strong bond with, clearly, all of them, and Mr. Haley and I have maintained that bond over the years. But it was a wonderful experience. And I try to stay in touch, you know, with all of them. But that was a time when I could see it. I could see it, and I could know that Arkansas and its law school had prepared them and that they had come to Arkansas to get everything they could while there to take it wherever they would take it. And all of them have gone in many different, you know, avenues of the law. And so you've got that before you, and you say, "Just a little more time, you know, and I'm there." But that was a—quite an experience. One other thing that sort of helped me to understand that there was the path after law school was the fact that Professor Clinton, now [Arkansas] Attorney General Clinton, had actually taken a number of the law students from the law school to the attorney general's office with him. And, y'know, it was a wonderful mix of students, and I noticed clearly that it wasn't just one African American or one woman or whatever, but it was a number of the law students. And I found

that attractive, and I found that, y'know, heartwarming. I found it encouraging—because you're thinking, "What will I do next? How—what will I do with this once I" . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . "once I get it." So.

[02:03:07] SL: Well, you mentioned earlier that you entered with a cause.

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: And the pioneers probably entered with a cause.

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Although I wonder if they had any idea what they would achieve or how much of the greater good they would contribute to.

RS: Right.

SL: I mean, it is quite remarkable . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . where they took the tools that they were given . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . and honed . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . what they've done for the society, so . . .



RS: Exactly. And I say this as well for the law school. I mean, this was six years before *Brown*.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: This was . . .

SL: Mh-hmm. That's right.

RS: . . . clearly before Central—nine years. This was a southern law school, without the encouragement of court order, deciding to move in this direction. Now clearly there were challenges there. I mean, Silas Hunt and his being taught in the basement and those kinds of things. But eventually, you're working through all of that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And at least—I mean, he's in the law school, and he's enduring this. And then you've got others who join him. And over time, you know, you're making straight the way. You know, you're making smooth, or at least smoother, the way. And I think Arkansas can take a lot of pride in that, and I think that's what, you know, the celebration is all about, the Silas Hunt recognition, the naming of the building adjacent . . .

SL: Adjacent.

RS: . . . to the law school in his honor, the Pioneer Room—the commitment that Dean Atkinson had to the pioneer presence in the new construction. All of those things really say, "We're here. We want the best and the brightest from all avenues of society,

and this is the place where we're going to prepare you to again serve your clients but also serve your state and serve your country."

[02:05:42] FE: Sean, go pull that picture of all of the gentlemen there.

SL: That's really good.

FE: Just pull it just out of the scene. Yeah, there you go.

SL: You know . . .

FE: Thank you.

SL: . . . one of my challenges with all of these interviews is picking the two minutes that I can cull out of all of our talk for this video that's about to happen. But I need that kind of stuff. I need to know how—what—your perspective on the university and . . .

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . in this case, it's the law school for you 'cause that's . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . where you landed but . . .

RS: Right. Right.

[02:06:08] SL: . . . if you had something to say to the university, what kind of advice would you give them? I mean, knowing where the university is now, you've had a few—some time with Chancellor [John] White.

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: You know his—what his concerns are . . .

RS: Right, what he's doing. Yes.

SL: . . . and what he's trying to do. If you had a—if you could give the University of Arkansas some pointers or some advice . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . or if you could direct the university in a certain direction or path, what—where would you send them? Where . . .



[02:06:46] RS: Well, I would just say that it's clear that the university can prepare its students to not just function but also lead in arenas across the professional landscape in any number of disciplines. And I just think that it's very important for the university to continue to play that role, but to do so today with the recognition that, you know, Arkansas is not a state any longer that says, "We can build a wall around ourselves and survive," but that Arkansas is, y'know, sort of in the epicenter of the U[nited] States], and it's got all of this economic activity occurring not only in its capital city but in northwest Arkansas in a way that is far beyond what's occurring in almost any part of the country. And so we've got something to say, I think, to the nation and to the world, and you've got examples of people who've been doing this over time, whether it's [US Senator J.

William] Fulbright, or we've talked about Pryor and Bumpers and President Clinton and, y'know, others, the people who'll be honored, and the chancellor with his billion-dollar Campaign [for the Twenty-first Century]—that's the kind of thing that we have to continue to do. I think that we are ready—many, many more of us—to play in that bigger arena. And I think that that arena is a national arena, but I think it's also an international arena as well. And I would just want the university to keep its sights on that kind of opportunity and help its students understand that opportunity. Many of those students will be as I was, the first in my family to go to college. Some of them will be maintaining a family tradition, you know, the fourth and fifth generation, whatever. But all of them can be prepared to not only function in society as the professionals they will be but to be leaders in society as well.

[02:09:32] SL: That's great. That's really good. Okay. Let's move on past the university . . .

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . and try to get as much of up to now as we can.

RS: Okay.

SL: So h—tell me how you hooked up with Bill Clinton.

RS: Well . . .

SL: How did that happen?

RS: . . . it's interesting. I was introduced to him in 1979. It was the summer of [19]79—early spring—well, late spring/early summer. Arkansas was having a constitutional convention.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And by that time, I had met the Cassandra of the Wilkins family, and we had . . .

SL: Now this is a Fayetteville family—Fayetteville Wilkins.

RS: No, this is . . .

SL: Pine Bluff?

RS: . . . Pine Bluff Wilkins.

SL: Wilkins. Okay.

RS: Yes. And we were, y'know, about to be—well, we were married. But my father-in-law-to-be [Henry Wilkins III], a little earlier, was introducing me to President Clinton . . .

SL: Okay.

RS: . . . I mean to Governor Clinton, because they knew each other. And this was a constitutional convention.

SL: In Hot Springs.

RS: No. No. It was actually in . . .

SL: Oh, it was . . .

RS: . . . Little Rock.

SL: It was? Okay.

RS: Dean Leflar was the head of the constitutional convention . . .

SL: Okay.

RS: . . . which was great.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Judge [Thomas F.] Butt from Fayetteville was the head of the judicial article, and I then had an opportunity to work for the constitutional convention and was assigned to the judicial article.

SL: Okay.

RS: So Judge Butt and I developed a wonderful relationship, but it was Delegate Wilkins who was in the legislature who introduced me to Bill Clinton.

[02:11:31] SL: What was your first impression?

RS: That he was young, that he was dynamic, and that I wanted to keep my eye on him.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It's interesting, but at that time you had Bill Clinton, who was governor; Steve Clark, who was attorney general; Paul Riviere, who was secretary of state; I mentioned Jimmie Lou Fisher and others—they were all very young.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And that was *electrifying*. That was exciting. Because, you

know, you're looking at the ages, and you're saying, "Hey, I like this. This is good for Arkansas. This is Arkansas being projected in a very, you know, youthful and progressive and positive light." And almost all of them were playing important roles in the—their national—their respective national organizations, whether it was the National Governors Association for President Clinton or the Attorneys General Association—Steve Clark . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Secretaries of State for Paul Riviere and the like. So—but that's how we met. And then when I left law school, though, I actually [*laughs*—I met Hillary [Rodham Clinton] first because she was recruiting for the Rose Law Firm [Little Rock], and I remember interviewing with the firm on campus.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And had a wonderful, you know, experience doing that. But I ended up going with the attorney general's office—Steve Clark was attorney general—and had a great experience there.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:13:20] RS: But in 1982 I decided that when Steve Clark decided he was not going to run for governor, and at that time Bill Clinton had lost . . .

SL: To Frank White.

RS: . . . in [19]80. That's right.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But he was coming back in [19]82, and I decided that I would leave, frankly, the security of the work at the attorney general's office to join the campaign. And it was a decision that I could not have made but for being a lawyer because I could reason, "If this doesn't work out, I'll hang up my shingle. I'll go to a law firm" or I mean, just any number of ways . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . of handling what was not, clearly, an outcome that was hoped for but a reality that you just at least had to think about and consider.

SL: You bet. Mh-hmm.

RS: But being a lawyer, I think, was very important in that decision.

SL: Giving you the freedom to . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . do what you wanted to do.

RS: Exactly.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And the other thing was we had to make a case, and it was in some respects a very difficult case to make . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . because no one in Arkansas had ever lost the
governorship . . .

SL: And come back.

RS: . . . and come back. And Bill Clinton, a lawyer, knew that it was
a difficult case to make.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But he was willing to make it, and he made education his
number-one priority.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: He talked about the minimum standards. For me, that was
important because I wanted Marianna—eastern Arkansas—to
have that benefit. And that was a part of the state that would
benefit as much or more than any.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Because you're making sure that everyone has this. Now there
may be other districts for whatever reason that can offer more,
but we're going to make sure that everyone can have this, and
we're gonna raise the resources for the teachers and the like to
ensure that. That was important to me.

[02:15:30] SL: What was your best moment in that campaign?

RS: Let me think. Oh, the best moment in the campaign was
probably going to Crumley's Barbecue in Forrest City, Arkansas.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And—[*SL laughs*—and . . .

SL: It's funny how all these political events [*RS laughs*—you get people there when you feed 'em. [*Laughter*]

RS: Yeah, that's right. [*Laughter*] That's right.

SL: Okay, go ahead. [*Laughs*]

RS: But Jim Guy Tucker, who was in the race, had gone before us.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Jim Guy was very attractive. He had been in Congress. He was in that historic Senate race . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . with Senator Pryor . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . had lost but had shown very, very well.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And he was Arkansas's wonder boy in many respects.

SL: Yep.

RS: And he had done well before this audience. And that was just a turning point in the campaign because there were some voices that suggested that Bill Clinton was a loser because he had lost. And the president talks about that experience in saying that those arguments were true, and that's what hurt the most. And



then there was another person. His name was John Lee Wilson. He was the mayor of Haynes, Arkansas, not far from Forrest City.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And not quite as polished, but he had something to say as well. And he made the point that I will never forget. He said, "If you're not for people who've been for you, what does that say about you?" He said, "They may lose, but if you aren't for people who've been for you, what does that say about you?" And then he went on to say, "Bill Clinton may lose, but I'm going to be for him because when there was sewage running in the streets of my little town, he was the person who came, and he was the person who helped me to address that issue. And now we don't have that, and my little babies aren't sick anymore." He said, "So he may lose, but we're going to lose together if we lose because he was there for us." I thought that was just so powerful.

SL: Crowd got quiet, didn't it?



[02:18:18] RS: That's right. And this is the thing about speech that really helps us to underscore the point. You know, I think it was [Thomas] Jefferson who said that if truth were self-evident, there would be no need for eloquence. Well, eloquence can

occur even when verbs and nouns don't match. Eloquence can occur when sentences are truncated, and they're—and the language is rough. If it comes from the heart, you can have eloquence. And that's what we had that day.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It wasn't the polish. It wasn't the—but it was truth, and it was powerful. And Bill Clinton makes reference to it in his book [*My Life*, 2004], and he talks about it as one of the turning points in his political career.

SL: It inspired him, didn't it?

RS: It did.

SL: It gave him hope.



[02:19:24] RS: Exactly. Now the thing that I learned the most from was actually, in that campaign, was actually something that was duplicated ten years later. And just quickly on that because it sort of relates to what we've talked about. I remember early in the campaign President Clinton said that he was not going to anymore segregated events in eastern Arkansas, and he basically was saying to one of the parts of the state that he had to have and that he would generally carry by, you know, by a supermajority.

SL: Sixty [percent] . . .

RS: Yeah, because he's . . .

SL: . . . seventy?

RS: . . . taking that vote . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . to [*laughs*], you know, cover losses in other places.

SL: You bet.

RS: And—but he said, "I'm not gonna come over for anymore segregated events," he said, "because I don't want to just win, I want to have what I need to govern. And that means people willing to work together and especially across racial lines." And I'm wondering . . .

SL: Admirable to say that . . .

RS: Admirable. That's right.

SL: . . . but a gamble.

RS: Exactly. A big gamble.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I'm saying, "Number one, this is my home area, so if I'm going to make any contribution to this campaign, it's got to be here. And we're putting all of this in the balance." And then, two, "I know this area. [*Laughs*] I know this area. Admirable, but where does it take us?" And for weeks, no one's really moving until they finally realize that he's for real, and he's taking

a stand on principle. And so they say, "Well now, okay, let's figure out where we're going to hold this event. If we do it at the public school—well, if you look at the mix and the match of that, you know, is that neutral territory?" You can't do it at the academy. You can't really do it at the courthouse because, you know, you've got a mix there, but you've . . .

SL: There's baggage.

RS: . . . got people on one side of the—*[laughs]*—the rail. And you've got people on the other side of the bar.

SL: Right.

RS: And so what do we do? You—if you go to a church in one community [unclear word] y'know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:21:53] RS: And so eventually Sheriff Hickey and Dr. Robert Miller decide, "We can do this, but our site should probably be someplace that's neutral. How do we do it?" And they had the event at the airport hangar.

SL: Logistically that's good, too.

RS: Exactly.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And they had one heck of an event. And everybody had a good time. *[SL laughs]* And it reminded me of something that I had

seen as a child when I would go to Rockefeller Farms at Petit Jean [Mountain].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Governor [Winthrop] Rockefeller would have these events where for the first time in my mind's eye, I could see blacks and whites together in a social setting where they were dealing with one another as equals and where they were enjoying it and having a good time. And that's what we did with this event. And he actually did the same thing in the presidential race ten years later. This was in [19]82.

SL: Right. [19]92.

[02:23:12] RS: In 1992, he went to Macomb County, Michigan.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And Macomb County, Michigan, was the home of the Reagan Democrats, and he had studied politics enough to know that, "Look, I've got to have my Democrats, and I'm going to make a play for progressive Republicans. But I've got to have my Democrats. How do I do that?" So you take the message to Macomb County, Michigan, on one day, and then the very next day you take the same message to the heart of Detroit, and you let the press know what you're doing, and you make the point, "I can do this. No one else in this race can do this. I can do it."

SL: He was right.

RS: And he was right. And the people responded in kind in both places. And then he was, frankly, free after the LA [Los Angeles, California] riots to go right into LA before President [George H. W.] Bush and to deal with the dynamics of that and to come out whole—southern governor, doing things that were just causing people to shake their heads. But it had been tested actually . . .

SL: Ten years earlier.

RS: . . . ten years earlier in eastern Arkansas.

SL: It was—and for you it was like Petit Jean had come to Marianna.

RS: Exactly. I mean, it's—and you're just seeing this.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you're saying, "Yes. Yes, this makes sense." And it's also, I think, the kind of thing that leaders have to do because if they're only going in the direction of their followers, they're not leading. They're not leading.

SL: That's right.

RS: So.

FE: Got a little bit of . . .

RS: Got a little bit there?

FE: . . . something to deal with there. [Crew adjusts lighting.]

[02:25:16] SL: That's—those are great campaign stories.

RS: Mh-hmm. Oh, and then one—we're in Flatbush in New York.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And we're—there's this crowd that's building, and this is before [California Governor] Jerry Brown is out of the race. This is before we have a good relationship with Reverend [Jesse] Jackson. This is before the president has demonstrated himself as more than a regional candidate. You know, he had won Super Tuesday, but he was still considered regional. Then we're coming to Illinois—Michigan—but you've still got to do New York.

SL: Yeah.

RS: You've gotta make it here before you can say, "I'm a player" . . .

SL: Yeah.

RS: . . . "of national significance." And so you're walking along Flatbush, and then you've got—you're visiting all these little shops, and you're talking about how you can bring urban America back. And people are questioning, "Well, how can you do that with your experiences limited to" . . .

SL: Arkansas.

RS: . . . "the South and Arkansas?" And he's talking to the people, and then you've got three or four people who are of the community who are saying, you know, "White boy, go back to

the South." You know, "Bill Clinton—southern governor—racist—go back to the South." And this is the first time I'd ever heard anyone say this about Bill Clinton.

SL: Right.

RS: I mean, I'd never heard this before.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And it's almost—when we first hear it, we're kind of walking along together. And it's like, we look at one another, and, you know, there is a sense of concern and alarm and wonderment, and you're trying to figure this out. And you know you can't just fold your tent because this is the arena.

SL: That's right.

RS: This is the arena. And I just watch him as he continues to go into these shops, and these voices continue to . . .

SL: Beat on him.

RS: . . . beat on him. And then it gets louder and louder. And Secret Service is coming up and saying, you know, "Governor, we need to go to the car. You need to exit the situation. We're concerned. You've got a crowd that's building. We have no idea what might happen here." And so, you know, we're continuing to move, and I'm saying, "Governor, I think we've made our point, and we probably do need to exit."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: So eventually we get back into the limousine, and we're driving off. And all of a sudden, you know, he's a car or two ahead, but all of a sudden everything stops, and he's out of the vehicle now, after we have [SL laughs] done this. Because he sees Dr. Robert Miller from Helena and a number of Arkansas Travelers, who've come to New York, and he's out of the vehicle in the midst of all of this chaos, giving high-fives [laughs] to all of these friends [Editor's Note: The Arkansas Travelers was an Arkansas-based group of supporters who campaigned for Bill Clinton in both the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns.] . . .

SL: Yeah.

RS: . . . that he sees in this very difficult environment. And we're still concerned about [laughs] his safety and everybody's safety.

SL: You bet.

[02:28:55] RS: But that was quite remarkable from a number of perspectives. One was, I had never really thought about how he might be labeled in a way that was not complimentary. And I had never ever thought about anyone suggesting that he was racist.

SL: It's that Arkansas yoke . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . around his neck.

RS: Exactly.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then, you know, once you sort of go back and you look at it, and you say, "Well, [US Congressman] John Lewis, [former Secretary of Agriculture] Mike Espy, [US Congressman] Bill Jefferson," I mean, these are the first people who are stepping forward to say, "This guy can do it." But they're basically southerners.

SL: That's right.

RS: They're basically southerners. And then eventually, with—we—we're reaching out to Ambassador [Andrew] Young, and we're making, you know, headway with the [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] family, and it's coming together. And then you're going into Chicago, and you're dealing with—and this is quite remarkable there. You're dealing with [Cook County, Illinois, Board President] John Stroger from Arkansas. You're dealing with [*Ebony* and *Jet Magazine* publisher] John Johnson from Arkansas.

SL: That's right.

RS: You're dealing with [attorney] Cecil Partee from Arkansas. You're dealing—you follow where I'm goin'?

SL: Yeah.

[02:30:30] RS: It's really those Arkansans who are there in the North, who are beginning to give us the support of their voices that sort of take you forward. And these are individuals who, because of their leadership positions or because of their own renown, have credibility, and they're giving you that credibility because they know you. Much like the peanut gallery—Peanut Brigade—gave Jimmy Carter . . .

SL: Yep.

RS: . . . the same kind of credibility [Editor's Note: The Peanut Brigade was a group of volunteers who campaigned for Jimmy Carter in the 1976 presidential campaign.]. Much like the call from Senator Kennedy to Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King when Dr. King was in jail, giving one credibility. And that credibility then turning into support, and that support leading to victory. It was amazing to see how that played out. And many of the people that we were dealing with in Chicago and some of the other places were people that we had identified in the work around the [Arkansas] sesquicentennial celebration [in 1986], where we were inviting all native Arkansans . . .

SL: You bet.

RS: . . . back to Arkansas.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Because until that time, we really didn't know where a lot of people were.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And that event was an event that allowed me—afforded me an opportunity to see how so many Arkansans were in so many places doing so many magnificent things. And it sort of takes you back to, again, that experience in [19]78 with the pioneers gathering at the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the Arkansas . . .

SL: Silas . . .

RS: . . . Black Lawyers Association . . .

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . celebrating Silas Hunt's admission to the law school, you know, just in a broader sense.

[02:32:51] SL: You ever think about coming back to Arkansas?

RS: Oh, definitely.

SL: Gonna come back and teach or . . .

RS: You know, I don't know. I mean, I'd love to get back.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I'll tell you this—we almost came back after the administration.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I talked to a number of people, and they basically shared with me that there were parts of Washington that I just had no appreciation for.

SL: Right.

RS: Because, you know, when you're here as a part of an administration [*laughs*], you are dealing with a certain group of people about certain things.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And while it's important, it's still rather limiting.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And limited.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I talked to, you know, [Clinton Advisor] Vernon Jordan. I talked to [former Ambassador to Russia] Bob Strauss.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: [Special assistant to President Lyndon Johnson] Jack Valenti.

SL: He's great.

RS: [Presidential counselor] Lloyd Cutler.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, just a number of wonderful people here in the city.

SL: That had been part of administrations and then . . .

RS: That's right. And they just said, "You know, there is—there's

something else here for you."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: "You decide whether you want to partake of that, but you really can't enjoy it. You really can't become a part of it until you have left the administration."

SL: Right.

RS: An administration.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And w—that's true.

SL: Yeah.

RS: That's true.

[02:34:15] SL: Well, so, are you enjoying it? I mean, do you like doing what you're doin' now?

RS: I do, but I can tell you that I'm back in Arkansas more and more.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: My work with James Lee [Witt Associates] . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and we actually have an office in Little Rock.

SL: Okay.

RS: And we're doing a lot of work on behalf of clients and interests in Little Rock. Just this morning, my breakfast meeting was with

[Little Rock] Mayor [Jim] Dailey and Ernie Green and Brent Glass, who's the head of the history museum [Smithsonian National Museum of American History].

SL: Right.

RS: And we're talking about Central High.

SL: Right.

RS: And how the Smithsonian can be helpful to the Mayor in that regard. So, you know, Arkansas is still central, and as I said, I'm getting back more and more. I'm actually on the Philander Smith [College] Board [of Trustees].

SL: Good.

RS: And I'm on Southern Development Bank Corp—that board.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: So I'm doing a number of things that involve Arkansas.

SL: That's good news.

RS: Yeah.

[02:35:25 End of interview in Mr. Slater's office]

[02:35:26 Beginning of interview in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Editor's Note: Background noises, which include sounds of children talking and train whistles, can be heard throughout the interview.]

SL: What do you want to talk about here?

RS: Well, clearly, *Brown* versus the Board of Education was a very historic case.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And as a lawyer, I would have a lot of interest in it from that vantage point. But it was a case decided in 1954. I was born in 1955.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And even though I was in the tenth grade before our schools were integrated in Marianna, the sweep of *Brown*, you could feel it. You could sense it as it was becoming the law of the land. It's one thing to be declared the law of the land. It's another thing to become the law of the land. And so, having grown up really in a—in the segregated South for much of my life, I am clearly a product of the South coming together and America coming together. And I daresay but for a case like *Brown*, it's highly unlikely that I would've been afforded some of the opportunities that I have enjoyed. I acknowledge that because I think that as we're taught, much is required of those to whom much is given.

[02:36:41] SL: You mentioned Marianna. So that's where you grew up?

RS: I grew up in Marianna.

SL: But by the time you hit the public schools, were they integrated by then?

RS: Oh, no. No.

SL: Ah, so they were still segregated.

RS: My classes were segregated through junior high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: It was only after entering the tenth grade around 1970 that I experienced an integrated education. And I can tell you, I looked forward to it, because there were certain things I wanted to know. [*Laughs*] I wanted to know the capability of my fellow students in the classrooms. I wanted to feel, if you will, the excitement of being in the same classroom and of competing for the best grades and being student leaders and the like. I was also an athlete. And, you know, you'd have pick-up games, which is interesting. It's interesting that in our neighborhoods we could have pick-up games, but we could never play in the same school. And so you also wanted to experience that in its full breadth and degree, meaning you wanted to suit up. You wanted to practice. You wanted to prepare for the game and play that game as a city representing all of the city, rather than just a part of it.

[02:38:11] SL: Well, back then there were schools that just wouldn't

play each other, too, because of segregation.

RS: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

SL: I mean, I remember some of that talk when I got to high school . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . that it was groundbreaking when an all-white school would play an all-black school.

RS: No doubt about it. And, you know, it's interesting that some of those stories are now getting a lot of prom—prominence.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: You know, one interesting movie that's a bit dated now but still quite well, I believe—it captures quite well what I was feeling in my school experience the year of our integration, the movie, *Remember the Titans*.

SL: Absolutely.

RS: You remember that?

SL: Yeah.

RS: I mean, quality athletes coming together in one school, but at a very difficult time. The good thing about that experience was that, you know, they went on to win a championship. I remember in our own—two great teams coming together, and we did quite well, but we had some difficulties near the end of

the season. But you watch it, and you say, "Oh, I know who that is."

SL: Right.

RS: You know, you're looking at the athletes, and you're saying, "That's Dennis Winston. That's John Wood." You know, two perennial [*laughs*] All-Americans. One . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . John would later go on to the University of Texas. Dennis Winston would later go to play for the [Arkansas] Razorbacks and onto the professional ranks with the [National Football League's Pittsburgh] Steelers . . .

SL: Steelers, abso . . .

RS: . . . a good friend of mine. But you're looking at them, and you're saying, "This breaking down of the barriers allows us to have not only a school where they both attend but a team on which they both play." And that's a good thing. That's moving the city forward, and it's moving the state and the nation forward as well.

[02:40:07] SL: So were you on the same team with Dennis?

RS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

SL: Wow!

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: Wow! Was he the headhunter there, too?

RS: [*Laughs*] Well, he was the headhunter there as well.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: He was a great athlete and a dear friend.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And just a wonderful human being.

SL: Well, did you go to the University of Arkansas . . .

RS: No, I didn't.

SL: . . . as an athlete?

RS: I didn't. I didn't. Actually, we were both recruited by the university, but Dennis was really recruited by the university.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: Clearly, I had an opportunity to maybe run a little track and try out for the team, but I was actually recruited by Eastern Mich— Eastern Michigan, as was Dennis, and I chose to go to Eastern Michigan University.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Had a great time there.

[02:40:52] SL: Well, did you play at Eastern?

RS: Oh, yes. Yes.

SL: Yeah.

RS: I was captain of our team.

SL: Oh.

RS: I had a wonderful career there.

SL: And the—I wonder how—did you and Dennis ever compare notes as to how things were at Eastern Michigan compared to what was happening in Fayetteville?

RS: Well, we did. And interestingly, he ended up playing with a number of my former colleagues at Eastern with the Steelers during their heyday. And I know they had a wonderful celebration this past Super Bowl [XL in 2006] . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . because the Steelers won again.

SL: Of course. Absolutely.

RS: But we talked about that. We talked about that. We talked about John Banaszak, who is a friend of mine—Ron Johnson, Reggie Garrett, Greg Bankston—all of them I played with at Eastern. They met Dennis in Philly—I mean, I'm sorry, in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I remember the one experience I had as a freshman at Eastern was watching with my friends the University of Arkansas [versus] USC [University of Southern California, Los Angeles] game . . .

SL: Uh-huh . . .

RS: . . . where Dennis, as a freshman, played quite a game.

SL: Quite a game.

RS: And Anthony Davis, a favorite of mine [*laughs*], who happened to play for USC, got to know Dennis Winston that night.

SL: Yes. [*Laughs*]

RS: So but I remember just pulling all of my colleagues together and saying, "You know, this is a teammate. Clearly he was recruited by Eastern, but he made the right decision going to the University of Arkansas." I made the right decision going to Eastern Michigan University.

SL: Well, did you all keep in touch your freshman . . .

RS: Definitely.

SL: . . . or all through college?

RS: All through college.

[02:42:33] SL: And, were things—was it comfortable for you at Eastern Michigan?

RS: Oh, very. Very. Cold but comfortable. [*Laughs*] And I think, you know, we're gonna talk a little bit about transportation later but . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . I wanted to stretch . . .

SL: You bet.

RS: . . . my wings a little bit . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and not—I mean, and not just the college experience 'cause that's a part of stretching your wings, and I know that Dennis's parents wanted him to go on to college. My parents wanted me to go to college. All of our family members did.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Other good friends, Larry Lanes and many others. And they encouraged us to go to college. Many of them had not had that opportunity. But I wanted to do something else beyond just going to college. I wanted to go. I wanted to travel Highway 79 through Memphis, through Chicago, and on to Michigan. I wanted to do a little something else with the experience, and Eastern afforded me an opportunity to do that. Eastern gave me my first opportunity to come to the nation's capital.

SL Is that right?

RS: Oh yes.

SL: How'd that happen?

RS: Well we came in 1977. At that time I was a senior.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But I was also a member of the EMU [Eastern Michigan

University] Forensics Team, and our national championship was here in Washington.

SL: Wow.

RS: Needless to say, I liked it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: So I decided to try to get back, and fortunately I met another Arkansan [Bill Clinton] a few years later, and he, over time in our work together, gave me a chance to come back to Washington.

[Tape stopped]

[02:44:19] SL: You know, there was a disparity though . . .

RS: Oh, definitely.

SL: . . . between the segregated schools.

RS: Sure.

SL: I mean, the facilities that the black schools had were not . . .

RS: The same.

SL: . . . the same as the white.



RS: That's right. You know, I recall many times getting books that were a bit tattered, sometimes with ten names in them—that kind of thing, where they had been used before. But still, they contained information that I needed . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . and that I wanted. And fortunately, even with the limited resources, we had teachers with enthusiasm and commitment of abundance. And they worked with us, and they encouraged us to believe in ourselves and to prepare ourselves for the opportunities that were surely to come.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And those were good times. You know, it's—those were good times, but they were not fair or equal times.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But they were good times. Again because of the people you were surrounded by, your family, and that sense of community, you had that as well. But you also wanted to try to bridge some of the divides, and you wanted that opportunity to compete on a broader stage. And they encouraged us to do that as well. And I can say this, too, you know, one of my best experiences in Marianna was even as—after we integrated, you know, we competed against Little Rock Central, Fort Smith Northside [High School, Fort Smith], and the like. That was good because it gave those of us from Marianna an opportunity to compete on a broader stage. And that's something that I have always, I guess, sought to do. And again, President Clinton years later as governor first, but then as president, would afford me and so

many other Arkansans an occasion to compete and perform on a broader stage.

[02:46:38] SL: Yeah. You know, there's some folks that say that Clinton was the first black president. *[Laughter]*

RS: Well, that's true. That's true. And he chuckles at that.

SL: Yeah, I know.

RS: But I think that's because there is clearly this connection, and I think it's born out of trust and a sense of fair play.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And the recognition that if you have that, then with hard work, you can do anything. He had to have that, coming from Hope and from Hot Springs and moving on to Georgetown [University, Washington, DC] as a southerner and then on to Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] and then Oxford [University, Oxford, England].

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And he recognized, I believe, the need to afford others that opportunity as well. And I think African Americans identified with that. But I can say this, too, that as I had occasion to travel with him around the world, people would identify with that. Trust, fair play, hard work, a commitment to the belief that tomorrow can be better than today. Those are sentiments

that resonate with all people.

SL: Yeah, those are constants. I was gonna—now how big a town was Marianna?

RS: Marianna is about five thousand [residents].

SL: And you found yourself . . .

RS: That's if you're counting everybody now. If you're counting everybody.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

[02:48:04] SL: So was the—like in Pine Bluff . . .

RS: Yeah.

SL: . . . there was a huge . . .

RS: Are you from Pine Bluff?

SL: No.

RS: Oh, okay.

SL: But several of the folks that I've talked to have . . .

RS: That's a good point.

SL: . . . done—you know, worked in Pine Bluff . . .

RS: That's right.

SL: . . . or grew up in Pine Bluff or . . .

RS: And Mr. Haley will talk to you about Pine Bluff.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

SL: There was an entire black entrepreneurial . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . population there.

RS: Sure.

SL: I mean, restaurants, service stations . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . stores—you know, it was just a self-sustaining community.

RS: Mh-hmm.

[02:48:41] SL: So in Marianna, did you all have any of that or was it . . .

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: . . . definitely—I mean, did you see the segregation in Marianna?

RS: Well, you saw the segregation.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But there was also enough again in your own community to feel a sense of pride.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: You had your teachers. You did have businessmen and women. You did have—we didn't have lawyers at the time though.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And that was the thing that—frankly, I was in the eleventh grade

before I saw an African American lawyer.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But before that, I mean, I'd seen *Perry Mason*. I'd seen other lawyers play out roles . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . that interest me.

SL: Oh, what a great show that was.

RS: That's right. And there were other lawyers in the city, the Daggett family and others. And so I got a chance, at least from a distance, to sort of see what being a lawyer might mean.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But John Walker was actually the first African American lawyer I met.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And then, you know, others that I would meet through reading, whether it was Charles Hamilton Houston or Thurgood Marshall or later Wiley Branton and . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . Judge Howard, Ambassador Haley, individuals that I'd meet later. But it was really John Walker who I met. I guess that was 1970—1978 so—I'm sorry, 1972.

SL: Mh-hmm.



[02:50:17] RS: So clearly, y'know, there were barriers, the movies and the water fountains, those kinds of things. But again, there were those moments when the barriers were torn down. I can remember experiences when I was in my teen years early, before integration, when we would participate in these picnics at the Rockefeller estate.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: When . . .

SL: Up on Petit Jean [Mountain].

RS: . . . the govern—that's right.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: But as governor, with these events, he was actually affording people an opportunity to interface.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And you were going to those events as an equal because the person who really had the power to make that possible decided to do so. And I think that that was very important for our state. I know it was very important for me because I can remember that experience quite vividly even to this day.

SL: He—in a lot of regard, he was quite remarkable.

[02:51:22] RS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But Arkansas has been fortunate in that regard to have a—some very progressive state

leadership.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Sid McMath—I was with someone last week, and we were just talking about him and the importance of his tenure.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And then . . .

SL: Edith Irby Jones.

RS: Oh, Edith Irby Jones. Did she talk about . . .

SL: Well, I see her in a couple weeks . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . in Houston, but I underst—I have read about and heard some interviews about his role in her education at UAMS [University of Arkansas Medical School, Little Rock].

RS: Oh, very good.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Very good. Well, he . . .

SL: And it was very quiet.

RS: Exactly.

SL: And actually he never met her till something like . . .

RS: Some years later.

SL: . . . twenty-four years later or something.

RS: Hmm, that's interesting.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: I did—I didn't know that.

[Tape stopped]

[02:52:12] SL: Well the thing—I guess the compare and contrast between Marianna and Pine Bluff, in Pine Bluff—well, for instance, I was talking with Gerald Alley. Did you ever know Gerald Alley?

RS: Gerald? Gerald Alley?

SL: He was a little earlier . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . than you were. He was there, like, in [19]68.

RS: Okay—at the university?

SL: Yeah.

RS: Oh, okay.

SL: And—but he was from Pine Bluff. His dad . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . ran a service station but . . .

RS: Sure.

SL: . . . what happened with him was when he got to the University of Arkansas, that was really his first white experience.

RS: Mh-hmm. Yeah because he . . .

SL: Because there was such a big community in Pine Bluff . . .

RS: Right.

SL: . . . that were kind of self-sufficient.

RS: Right.

SL: They didn't have to . . .

RS: Cross—yeah.

SL: . . . cross the lines.

RS: Mh-hmm.

[02:52:55] SL: So—but in Marianna it sounds like the town was
small enough where you all interacted with whites quite a bit.

RS: We did. But now, you know, you don't want to overstate . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . the case. There was the interaction because, you know, my
stepfather worked at Marianna Motor Company.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so you had that experience.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: My mother early on, you know, did domestic work.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then later on worked at Sanyo. But you did have some
interaction.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And—but still, it was a segregated community.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, by tradition, for the most part. But there was some interaction. But once the schools became integrated, then not only were the kids interacting, but their parents through the PTA [Parents Teachers Association] . . .

SL: PTA. Sure.

RS: . . . through the games.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I mean, it really afforded all of us an opportunity to become much more engaged.

SL: Share those human conditions.

RS: Yes, that—that's exactly right.

[02:54:10] SL: Okay. Well, let's talk a little bit about—so you come to the University of Arkansas after getting a degree in . . .

RS: Political science . . .

SL: Political science.

RS: . . . and speech communications.

SL: And speech communications.

RS: Double major.

SL: And so you enter law school . . .

RS: Yes.

SL: . . . at the U of A and was . . .

RS: 1977.

[02:54:27] SL: . . . so was Bill Clinton teaching then?

RS: No.

SL: No, he had already left.

RS: He left the year before.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And it's interesting that you mention that because while he had left and gone on, he had become attorney general.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And later he and [US] Senator [Hillary Rodham] Clinton would become husband and wife.

SL: Right.

RS: But the students were still talking about them.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: They actually talked about what was called the "Mod Squad," which was Bill Clinton . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . Hillary Rodham, and another gentleman by the name of George Knox . . .

SL: Yes.

RS: . . . who's actually in Miami [Florida] now.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: A lawyer there.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:55:05] RS: But they talked about the three of them in particular as just instructors who were saying to the—professors who were saying to the students, "You know, you've got to figure out how you're going to use this degree, not just come here to get it, but how are you going to use it?" And I remember getting what President Clinton had shared with them about Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., that "as life is action and passion, we must be engaged in the action and passion of our time, or be judged by future generations never to have lived." And so there was that, that was going on. And it was quite positive. It had a wonderful impact on the students. And so, the students were sharing this when I came on board. Y'know, [Wendell Griffen, who's now on the [Arkansas] Court [of Appeals] in Arkansas . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . [attorney] Eddie Walker and [attorney] Othello Cross, just a number of wonderful human beings. And I had a wonderful law school experience.

[02:56:09] SL: Did you ever—did you hear any talk about—this is a name that has come up and apparently was quite a colorful character, too, was a guy named Williams—Bootleg Williams?

He . . .

RS: Oh, I know who you're talking about. It's Wilson.

SL: Wilson.

RS: Yes. Yes.

SL: I'm sorry.

RS: Yes, I heard about Jimmie Wilson. He's a lawyer in Helena now.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And I know Jimmie well. Yeah.

SL: I have a feeling I've got to do an interview with him.

RS: [*Laughs*] Well, you may have to. You may have to. You know, it's interesting, but he—and I think this goes back to a subject I was talking about earlier when—there was a time when there were really no, or few, African American lawyers in the Delta region.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And then there was this period just before my period where there was a—and around the time as well—but there was Judge Neal—Olly Neal [Jr.] . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . who's now on the Court of Appeals in Arkansas.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: Senator—former [Arkansas state] Senator Roy [C. "Bill"]

Lewellen, who's a cousin of mine, Jimmie Wilson, [Arkansas Circuit Court Judge] L.T. Simes, [Judge] Kathleen Bell, [attorney and artist] Vashti Varnado—individuals who were just before me . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . who were going to law school, some of them really working and going to law school at the same time, who were really then coming back to the Delta region, not going to Little Rock or to Pine Bluff or some of the larger cities in Arkansas. But Jimmie and others were among that group.

SL: Committed to community.

RS: Exactly.

[02:57:53] SL: Well, the interesting thing—and the reason why I bring up Jimmie in this conversation is that he mentioned—he talked about Bill Clinton as an instructor . . .

RS: Hmm. Okay.

SL: . . . to some of the folks that I've interviewed, and apparently Bill was very active in kind of equalizing the law school. Apparently there was some concern that the testing was not really fair or not—it just made it more difficult for minorities to get through law school.

RS: Well, it was difficult now, and it—actually [*laughs*] one of the

exercises that we would always do in the law school, and I couldn't really understand this at the time, but I guess there's a part of the experience that—where this is done at least in some places, but you're saying—you said—you're asked, "Look to your right, look to your left, you know, at the end of the experience one of you, two of you will not be here."

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I think that that's a way of sort of underscoring the seriousness of it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But, you know, also I think that when you come in, a school has made a judgment about you and your capability. And being a partner with you to prepare you to do battle . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . outside of the classroom and in the arena of the law is another way of looking at it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I do think that that was probably an attitude that President Clinton as Professor Clinton took to the classroom. It was something to the effect maybe—"Look, 'Life is action and passion, and you have to be engaged in the action and passion of your times or be judged by future generations never to have

lived.' Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. We've got to get ready. This is where we get ready. And each and every person here will play a role in not only getting themselves ready, but helping to get this entire class ready. Because we've got a world of clients to serve, and some of them will have small causes, some large but all important." And I can't tell you how important it is to have someone who has traveled the road that you're seeking to travel who's there with you, and who's saying, "You can do it. And, by the way, it is worth it. It's worth it." And that's the kind of story I got about not only President Clinton but also others as well.

SL: Right.

[03:00:49] RS: I thought Professor Leflar was, you know, I enjoyed him as an instructor, and I took more than my required classes from him.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And I knew of his story later on as I learned of Silas Hunt and Jackie Shropshire and George Haley and Judge Howard and C. C. Mercer and all of them coming through the law school experience. So—and how important he was in those early years as the . . .

SL: Absolutely.

RS: . . . dean of the law school.

SL: Absolutely.

RS: So, y'know, I've heard those wonderful stories about Professor
[*laughs*] Clinton as well.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And I—and as someone who's had the joy of working with him, I
can say that that continues even to this day.

SL: I suspect it does. [*RS Laughs*] Yeah, you get that from him
just . . .

RS: Yeah.

SL: . . . being in the same room with him . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . for more than five minutes.

RS: Exactly.

SL: He really lights up the energy . . .

RS: Right. Right.

SL: . . . level.

RS: Right.

SL: Okay. So should we move?

FE: Sure.

SL: Should we . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: Do you want to do something in transportation?

SL: Well, why don't we just talk about this display . . .

RS: Okay.

SL: . . . or this . . .

RS: Yeah. All right, that'd be good.

SL: . . . exhibit?

RS: Well, we're here in the American History Museum [Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Washington, DC].

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And, by the way, you can see all of these little ones here . . .

SL: Yeah, let's let them through. You all go ahead.

RS: [*Laughs*] No. No. No, you can go ahead if you like.

SL: Yeah.

RS: But you see all the little ones here.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: We get about three million visitors a year, and they're . . .

SL: Wow.

RS: . . . all concerned about transportation. And I [*laughs*]*—*and that's really what I think developed*—*helped me develop my interest in transportation*—*watching the cars go by in front of our house on the north end of Arkans*—*of Marianna . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . and wondering where they were going. Being able to almost

determine the location of a car, meaning where they're registered because of the color . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . of the license plate.

SL: License plate, yeah. Mh-hmm.

RS: And I think we've all sort of played that game.

SL: Yes.

RS: But also in your mind's eye, sort of wondering where they were going.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And being intrigued by that. And as a young man from—a little boy, better yet from Marianna, I wondered that.

[03:03:18] SL: So when did you first pursue it as a career—transportation? Was it not until . . .

RS: Well, it was actually not until 1987 . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . when I was appointed to the Arkansas Highway and Transportation . . .

SL: Right.

RS: . . . Commission by then-Governor Clinton.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: I had worked on his staff for about five years after his reelection

and had an opportunity to serve on the commission—thoroughly enjoyed it and then ten years later was [*SL laughs*] afforded the opportunity to serve as secretary of transportation.

SL: Your tenure there is quite remarkable by the way.

RS: Well, I had a great time.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Good people.

SL: Yeah. Well, it seems like it expanded—its purview expanded under your administration of it.

RS: Well, it did. It did.

SL: Security and safety became—environmental concerns . . .

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: . . . were introduced.

RS: Exactly. Exactly.

[03:04:17] SL: So I have to think it's pretty progressive thoughts—you know, enlightened leadership there . . .

RS: Right. Right.

SL: . . . so you've got to be proud about . . .

RS: Well, very proud.

SL: . . . what happened.

RS: Very proud. But in one instance actually the Congress—there was a special group in the Congress promoting these sorts of

things.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And they gave us a very good piece of legislation that I worked on as a member of the state commission in Arkansas. But when I became federal highway administrator, I had that piece of legislation to work with. And my desire along with my deputy administrator, Jane Garvey . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . was to really test its limits. Fortunately she was from Massachusetts, so we couldn't have been, you know, better suited. I mean, she brought a sort of urban understanding to it. I brought clearly the ru . . .

SL: The rural.

RS: . . . the rural and the road perspective, and I learned a lot from her. I think she learned a lot from me. And then, you know, once you get that experience, you're then able to, I think, put it together if you're receptive.

[03:05:35] SL: You know, I can't help but remember in some of the things I've read about the [Governor Orville] Faubus administration in Arkansas . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . just how powerful the highway commission was.

RS: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

SL: And it really brought home the effect—or the need for roads . . .

RS: Oh, yes.

SL: . . . in rural communities.

RS: Right.

SL: That was life and death . . .

RS: Exactly.

SL: . . . to those communities.

RS: And it opened up the state.

SL: Op—and so his program was really aggressive in getting—I mean, some people say if nothing else . . .

RS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . he did that.

RS: Well . . .

SL: He built the roads.

RS: . . . not only did he build the roads though—actually prior to Central and then even to some degree after Central, the Faubus administration had some progressive aspects of his agenda.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: It's really the, you know, the Central High incident that put him . . .

SL: Narrows—paints his . . .

RS: Exactly. Put him a box that was quite narrow. But before that, bringing African Americans into his circle—very little is known about that. But unfortunately for purposes that only—well, that he would clearly know, and I think for purposes that were being played out in other places across the South, he chose a different course.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: But again, the transportation program—very important. A good friend of mine and very important to President Clinton was Maurice Smith.

SL: Yes.

RS: Maurice Smith was actually on the commission during those years and shortly thereafter. George Kell . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . a wonderful individual whose family member actually taught me in Marianna.

SL: Is that right?

RS: Yes, Mrs. Kell. So—but I got a chance to, you know, to become a part of that family of commissioners. And I learned a lot. Learned of its importance to the state. I was able to bring that understanding to Washington.

[03:07:45] SL: So really you had an Arkansas template to work

with . . .

RS: Oh, definitely.

SL: . . . that you brought here.

RS: Definitely.

SL: And then hooking up with the lady from a metropolitan world . . .

RS: Right. Jane Garvey.

SL: . . . just completely rounded it out.

RS: Exactly. Exactly. And then when I became secretary, I actually asked the president to consider appointing her FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] administrator.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And he did that, so she headed up the FAA, which is a very tough job within [*laughs*] the Department of Transportation, and did a magnificent job.

SL: I noticed some of the initiatives—seems like there was one that was called AIR-21 [Aviation Investment and Reform Act].

RS: AIR-21.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Right. Big . . .

SL: But twenty-one, referencing the twenty-first century.

RS: Exactly.

SL: That your programs had twenty-first century . . .

RS: Focus to them.

SL: . . . everything was geared toward that.

RS: That's exactly right. And I—that's the way I think about things.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[03:08:50] RS: I remember one experience I had in Arkansas that was really insightful for me was when we celebrated our sesquicentennial.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And Governor Clinton afforded me an opportunity to serve on the [Arkansas] Sesquicentennial Commission. But it gave me a chance to look at Arkansas's history over a hundred-and-fifty-year period and then to imagine the future because that was part of the theme as well—as well. I think it was "celebrating the past; imagining the future," or something like that.

SL: Right.

RS: But it really gave me a frame of reference that I actually used in a number of ways in experiences after that. When I became federal highway administrator, we were about to celebrate our one hundredth year . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: . . . of existence. And so I used that knowledge to challenge the

team to think about the next one hundred years. When I became secretary, we were celebrating our thirtieth anniversary as a department, and I used the experience to talk about the next thirty years. And so it was a way of really somewhat challenging the status quo, but actually asking my team members to imagine a future that could be better than the present we are experiencing. And then once you imagine it, well, what's necessary to make it happen?

[03:10:17] SL: So as most things in government, you initiate something or you get an idea and you spend your tenure working on getting that out, but the fruits of that labor . . .

RS: Oh . . .

SL: . . . is much later.

RS: . . . exactly.

SL: So do you see the difference that you made?

RS: Oh, definitely.

SL: Do you see it blossoming now? Do you . . .

RS: I do. I do because, number one, as I said we had a good piece of legislation to work with. We have built on that legislation with every piece of succeeding legislation. So now we have—we had TEA-21 [Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century], and now we've got SAFE-TEA[-LU] Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient

Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users]. And so again, just building on that. But also one thing that I did within the department was to focus on leadership and leadership development.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And to really work with people who were not only at the top level—the top rung . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: . . . but also mid-level . . .

SL: Mid-management.

RS: . . . and down through the bowels of the organization.

SL: Uh-huh.

RS: And now many of them . . .

SL: Have come up.

RS: . . . have come up. And they've come into leadership posts. And that's the way ya [you] . . .

SL: Uh-huh. That's got to be rewarding personally . . .

RS: . . . that's the way you do that.

SL: . . . for you to see those successes.

RS: Right. Right.

SL: That's really what it's kind of all about.

RS: Exactly. Exactly.

SL: It's back to people.

RS: [*Laughs*] That's right.

SL: It's being people.

RS: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

RS: So.

[Tape stopped]

[03:11:41] RS: You've got a street, you've got an interstate, you've got a metro line—everybody's got that transportation artery that connects them to those things that give meaning . . .

SL: Yes.

RS: . . . and satisfaction to our lives. Everybody's got that. It's all about that journey.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RS: And so—and that's how I talked about transportation, by the way, as secretary. And that way you make it a sort of a family room discussion. I mean, it's not just for the engineer.

[03:12:22 End of interview in the National Museum of American History]

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