

Oral History Interview_Tom Ralston

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Participating: Paul Adams, Chris Breiseth, Tim Gilmour, Tom Ralston, and Jim Rodechko

Christopher Breiseth (CB): One thing I want to say, independent of what we're going to learn from you, your support of your mother is absolutely beautiful.

Tom Ralston (TR): Thank you.

(CB): It's unparalleled in my experience. You've been there for her in so many ways, through many ups and downs. You're a gift to each other.

(TR): That's what it's all about, Chris. People need help at certain times of their lives. She gave it to me sixty-five years ago, and I'm giving it to her now. She's shy of 101 by a few months. I won't lie, it's trying and difficult. I've been down there in Wilkes-Barre for a week every month. I just got back a few days ago to do a few things here, but I need to go back down again for the board meeting and the Founders Gala. At least they coincide. So yes, it's a challenge, but I love her. What am I going to do, not pay attention to her? The thing that I'm comfortable with now in her situation is that it's been about a year since we finally convinced her that she had to move out of the house. I now know she's covered 24/7 by a bunch of people until I get there. She likes to get out of the apartment, so I sometimes take her home. I think it does amazing things for her mood. I can tell the difference.

Tim Gilmour (TG): I had a similar situation with my mother. She was not quite as old, but she hated the institution. We'd get her out whenever we could.

(TR): Good. Are you doing well, Tim?

(TG): Yeah! How about you?

(TR): I'm doing fine. I have aches and pains, but that's it, luckily.

(TG): That's part of it. Chris and I can give you an aches and pains report at the end of this!

(CB): I think Jim may take the cake.

(TR): He has us all beat!

Paul Adams (PA): Tom, which home is your mom in right now?

(TR): She's at Allied Services on Meade Street.

(PA): Oh, okay.

(TR): I never knew that area existed until we found that place for her there. I mean, I knew there was something over there, but I didn't know what. I never had any reason to go up there.

Jim Rodechko (JR): Isn't that right off of Mundy Street?

(TR): No. That's another one we looked at, but she didn't want to go there. It used to be called Little Flower. My mom told me she remembered visiting Jane Lampe there.

(PA): I was going to say Jane was there.

(TR): That's why Mom was more comfortable going to this place than one of the others that we looked at.

(CB): We are now all assembled. I'm sure you've heard from Paul, but this project began totally informally at a John Chwalek Golf tournament. At the end of the dinner, four Wilkes presidents had a discussion of Wilkes and what our own experiences have been. All of us have had our bruises, and we all were ready to talk about them. Tim had just figured out that he had a time limit on his presidency, so we all thought of what we could do for the next president, in terms of interpreting Wilkes' culture. So Tim then began hosting us at the Westmoreland Club, and we only had about two or three. Right, Tim?

(TG): Well, I'm an old man now, so I can't remember exactly, but I think it was at least three. I also remember a dinner that we had downtown. Tom, I think you remember, but I got a vote of no confidence as I was going out the door. I had already decided to retire, but I felt like we really had to clean up some things financially, which then led to the vote of no confidence. I figured my successor shouldn't have to deal with that. I'll turn this back over to Chris, but that is what led us to talk about some of our challenges with the faculty. We felt my successor should know about these things in a way that was positive and affirmative.

(CB): And some issues with the trustees, also. So the bottom line is that we established a kind of rapport with each other that allowed us to talk about things we could not with virtually anyone else. We put together a memo for what turned out to be Pat Leahy, which he was very appreciative of. I think it also led to the way he handled the inauguration, in which he focused on

Wilkes' history in terms of major achievements through the years. He identified those achievements with each of us individually, which was very creative. It was the Bill Clinton approach. And then, since Bob Capin was still alive, we decided we should interview each other to get more of our stories. Mike Michelini was the aggressor on that. You won't be surprised, but mine was the longest. I think it was two days of interviewing.

(TR): You had a lot to talk about.

(CB): And then we thought we needed to get other people who were part of Wilkes. We needed to record them as well. I don't know how long ago that was, Tim, but it has to be a decade now.

(TG): Has it been that long? It seems like yesterday.

(JR): I think so.

(CB): That's because we both feel our youth!

(JR): When you're retired, everything seems like yesterday!

(CB): It's remarkable. And then, in the midst of this, Zoom came into existence and produced transcripts from the interviews. They only need to be edited.

(TG): At that point, we became really dangerous, Tom.

(CB): We've done over fifty now. They include alumni, trustees, faculty, and staff, and we still have a long list that we want to get through. You're at the cross-section of virtually all of those categories. You're active in the Alumni Association, a member of the Board of Trustees, and your family has interacted with all of us, including Bob and Mike, who have gone on beyond us. So your perspective on your Wilkes story should be captured. So with that, I invite you to reflect on your growing up as a Wilkes kid. You have the floor, and you can take as long as you want.

(TR): Well, as you all know, I was born with blue and gold blood. My mom was a student, and my dad was the dean, so I had that DNA in me from the very first moment, as did my brother John and Jamie. There's a lot to reflect on, but I will do my best to remember. I sometimes forget things, but my brother John has a mind that you might want to tap. He recalls things that happened when we were children. Dad would take us to wrestling meets, we would go to basketball games, we'd go to the football games on Saturdays, and we used to be the pooper scoopers for donkey basketball in the old gym.

(CB): That's a fact we have not gotten from anybody!

(TR): Okay, well, there you got it!

(TG): I mean, this is already a peak interview, Tom!

(TR): They were hysterical for those of you who remember them. Jim, you probably saw them. I don't know when donkey basketball stopped, but it became not so politically correct after a while, so Wilkes gave up on it. It was a great fundraiser. All I really know is the guys that played were faculty, staff, and administration. I remember my father always had to dress like a woman. I mean, he had big breasts, a big wig, and makeup. He was on the donkey while John and I had to run around after them all. There were about eight or ten of them on the floor at one time, and somebody was always pooping. So those are the kinds of things that I can remember. There were also the picnics that we used to have at Farley Farm. I don't remember Gene Farley well, but I remember meeting him many times, especially at holiday events at the Commons. That was back when the Commons was still there before Pickering Hall was built. All of the events were held at the Commons, and Gene Farley was always there. I remember Gene Farley introducing me to Freddy Wall, who was our chef. Paul, do you remember Fred?

(PA): Oh, sure. It was very tasty.

(TR): Very tasty. While he was mixing up this powdered cheese dip to put on a cheeseburger, I was thinking, "Oh, God!" It wasn't that bad, but it wasn't what you would look to get.

(CB): It was not gourmet.

(TR): Yeah. I have phenomenal memories of those days and all of the subsequent years thereafter. From a kid all the way through, there was always something Wilkes-focused in our family. And when Jamie came around, John and I were sent off to the babysitters while Dad was going to the board meetings for one organization or another. Mom was teaching and going to practices in the evening with her church choir. We had many evenings with babysitters, but they were all my mother's students. We knew them, so that worked out. Once in a while, we got a Wilkes guy. I remember we couldn't get one of Mom's students, so Dad would call somebody. It was usually a football player. Joe Zakowski babysat us once. I mean, there we were, a 12-year-old kid and my 13-year-old brother, with this massive linebacker putting us to bed. I was thinking, "Okay, this is interesting." But, yeah, there were great times. Everything was always Wilkes-focused. It didn't not exist at any point in time. Even when Dad was home, he was taking calls from people all of the time. During dinner, after dinner, before dinner, he'd be on the phone with either faculty, staff, students, or alumni a lot, of course. It was a very rewarding experience growing up like that. So many people don't have that opportunity and all that it afforded us, especially as we got older and involved ourselves more with school, and then ultimately attended

and graduated from Wilkes, That's the only thing I wish I had done more with my years at Wilkes. I did a lot with Wilkes leading up to it because my mother and father would take me along to do things, but when I got to Wilkes, I was so focused on my major that it just took all of my time. And for whatever reason, I never got around to getting as involved as I wish I had. Hindsight is 20-20, right? I mean, I made a lot of friends, could have made a whole lot more, could have been a lot more involved, but I was just so focused on my major. I think I also had a little bit of trepidation that I always thought I may have been looked at by others as a priority. I was the dean's son. So I kind of kept a low profile, and John did the same. John was a better student than I was. He focused a lot on his major and in his electives. I think he graduated with a 4.0 So that was the only thing that I wish I had been more involved with. I mean, I was involved with everything associated with Dart Hall and the music crew, but I didn't experience the rest of the college that I should have experienced.

(TG): For the record, Tom, what was your major? Did you live at home, or did you live on campus?

(TR): It was music education, but when I first experienced student teaching, I decided there was no way I was going to be a teacher. It was just not what I wanted to do with my music. In Northeastern Pennsylvania, I had become a pretty strong, pretty impressive trombone player. I was getting hired to do things right all around, so I figured, "This is fun. I'm getting paid to play my trombone," and I really enjoyed it. So at that point, Bill Gasparo had suggested to me that I find a really good graduate program to study. The year before he had stepped down as our department chair, Jerry Campbell had taken over. I started talking to Jerry because he was my teacher, he was the chairman, and he had me as an advisee. He introduced me to Boston University (BU), and I thought it sounded really cool, but I didn't want to just focus on one school for music. I knew they had a great music program, but I auditioned in a few places. I auditioned at Eastman in Rochester and was accepted. What's the conservatory in Baltimore? How can I forget? Anyway, I was accepted there as well, and then I was also accepted at BU. So I thought about the places. Baltimore I didn't really know, and Rochester I certainly did not want to go to. Within a month or two after graduation, I ended up moving to Boston, and I've been here since. I went to BU for my graduate degree, which I never completed. I was one credit shy, but time went by, and I could not go back to make that credit up. It just had to do with doing a second recital, because I had studied professional performance music. And like I said, the BU College of Fine Arts was renowned at the time. I think they've slipped a little bit over the past couple of decades, but at the time, they were fantastic. That also opened my eyes, because in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I was the big fish in a little pond. If you go to these big cities, like Boston or New York, where the musicians are really top-notch, you need an extra level. I figured out after about three or four years that I wasn't going to be making it as a professional musician. Then my father said, "Well, I'm tired of paying your rent, so go find a job." He then found one for me. Al Nicholas, who was a football player back in the '50s, had a son who worked as a

manager of a restaurant on the 52nd floor of the Prudential Center in Boston. He was essentially looking for a host, and he said, "Send him up. I'll interview him." So Dad said, "Tom, you go up there, and you find out what they can do for you." I ended up getting a job up there, and played a little bit on the side, but not a lot. I had spent more time earning money to pay rent. I was only twenty-two years old, but that turned into a real goldmine for me. That job only lasted a few years, because I met some really phenomenal business-experienced people in Boston. That was the only place in the city that was as exclusive as it was. It was high-end, and the Prudential Center was loaded with Boston Edison and Gillette people. I got to know all of them, which ended up leading me into my corporate life when I went to work for New England Mutual Life Insurance. I stayed with them for twenty years until my last ten years with Bentley. But back to what I was originally saying, I really loved my Wilkes experience. I loved everything about it, but I wish I had done more at the time. I think that's why I got involved with the Alumni Board. I was called a regional vice president when Tony Shipula was running this thing back in the '90s. I left for a little while, and then they brought me back. Sandra Carroll was running it at that time, and then I was elected president of the Alumni Association. That was in Tim's next-to-last year. I sat on your board as a member, and then Pat Leahy appointed me full-time to the board. This week I actually have to step down because I've reached the bylaw maximum for the trustees. I think I've been more interested in staying involved with Wilkes more since I've been out than I was when I was there. I am enjoying it very much and love my association with the university. Every time I go home to see Mom, I go to campus. I want to see what's going on over there, and it looks good.

(PA): Tom, did you have a favorite faculty member?

(TR): Yeah, Bill Gasparo was really key for me. He had certain things I disagreed with him about, but I respectfully disagreed with him. Ted Veremeychick also comes to my mind. He was a trumpet player, and he taught all of the brass students. I always had a good affinity with Dick Chaplin. Les Turoczi was a good friend for a long time. The first year I was at Wilkes, I went out to Aspen for the music festival for a summer program. Les told me he was going out, and I told him to give me a call when he got there. I ended up driving up to Maroon Bells and hanging out with him up in the boonies. The two of us were so high up that we couldn't breathe, and when we came back down, everybody thought we were smoking!

(PA): Wasn't Bill Gasparo your neighbor, or was this Chaplin?

(TR): It was Dick Chaplin. We lived right next door. Well, everybody practically lived right next door. From where we lived on Mallery Place, Herb Garber was across the street, Chaplin was next door, Rizzo and Gutin were two or three houses down, there was another professor down at the other far end of Mallery Place, and then around the corner was Bill Gasparo. It was almost like a little Wilkes community a block and a half off of campus.

(PA): Wilbur Hayes lived over on Stanley, didn't he? That's where he died anyway.

(CB): Were you at Gasparo's funeral?

(TR): I was not.

(CB): Jim or Paul, were you there?

(PA): I don't think so.

(CB): It was quite extraordinary. One of the top clarinetists in the country, Stoltzman, had been one of his pupils as a very young student. He came and played at his funeral. Gasparo's youngest student, who had been a young woman, also played. He had the two ends of his career there. We didn't record it, but it was magic. It was not a university event, but it was in the Dart Center. It was one of the most moving funerals I have ever been to. His death, of course, was very sudden, so people were really shocked. There was no preparation for this. Stoltzman was magnificent, and he talked a lot about how they were in Ohio, his time as a student, and how he continued to interact with Gasparo as a fellow musician. The whole thing was very moving for me. I can't think of any comparable funeral with quite that impact.

(TR): Back at the time when Gasparo passed, I was up in Boston. I was a little bit detached at that point. I would have probably been there had I known more in advance. I missed a lot of those.

(CB): Say something about Dick Chaplin and Ross Santos. They have not been mentioned, as far as I can recall.

(TR): Chaplin I knew from childhood, because he and my mom sang in the same choir at First Presbyterian Church. He was also always our next-door neighbor. Between my mom and her students in the house, and Dick and his students in his house, the whole corner of Mallery Place and Stanley Street has a cacophony of musical sounds coming out of the windows and doors. We kids playing out on the street were asked to keep quiet so that we didn't interrupt their lessons. We were also playing baseball, wiffle ball, and kickball out in front of the house, screaming as kids do. But anyway, Dick was a good guy. I really liked everything about him. He took me for a ride once when I was a young teenager. I forget where we went, but we took his brand new blue Cutlass convertible with a white top. It was summer, so he said, "Come on, we'll put the roof down." So we put the roof down, and off he drove. At the time, I thought he was a maniac, but maybe I drive the same way today. We had to go somewhere to pick up some furniture that he was having refinished, and he asked me to go along with him. We had a great time on that ride.

And of course, he was blasting his opera on the radio. He was an over-the-wall kind of neighbor. There was no fence between our houses, so when Mom and Dad would sit out on the patio, Dick would sit on his porch, and they'd all just talk back and forth. But he was a really effective teacher. He was an advanced theory teacher. Santos did most of the theory, but Dick did some theory and some conducting. I got a lot out of him. Similarly, Ross Santos was a genius. I don't know how anybody could deny that. The guy was a musical genius. His brain just never stopped with music, ever. I did as a sophomore, which was the first time they ever let a sophomore do a recital at Wilkes, but Gasparo said, "You're ready. You can handle it. I know you can do it." They usually make you wait until you are a junior before you can do your first recital, but they let me do it. I said to Santos, "I'd love to do a piece that you write for me." The next day, he came with this three-movement trombone sonata. It was full orchestration and piano score. The thing was flawless! He made it overnight, and he would do that time after time after time. I don't know if they would be doing that anymore, because they don't have the major, but as a music major, you had to do what we call 'juries' at the end of your semester. It was like your final exam. You played up in the front of Geis Hall with your accompanist, the entire faculty would sit in the back, and they would listen and critique. That would be your grade for your final. Santos would crack me up because everybody was back there taking notes, doing what they were supposed to do, and they would come back with really good responses and critiques. Santos, on the other hand, would always draw a caricature of whoever was performing at the time! I've still got at least two years' worth of them before he was no longer around. I look at them, and I think, "Man, this guy could even draw! He could write music in a heartbeat." I mean, he was a very impressive individual.

(CB): He produced three sons, all of whom were musicians.

(TR): Right.

(TG): Great taste in automobiles, too. I mean, the list just goes on.

(CB): His funeral was marked by his wife's peroration, which went on at some length. He was a low-key guy. I mean, I don't think most people on campus knew much about him if they weren't a part of the Dart Center. But his funeral, again, to someone like me, opened up this incredible background that he had. He had an extensive connection to the music world, was highly regarded, and some of his compositions were performed at the funeral. It did him proud.

(TR): Good. He deserves it.

(JR): I was the dean of Arts and Sciences at the time, and he and his wife came in to see me. He was about seventy at the time, and he had cancer for several years. They wanted to see if they could get a pay raise. I said to him, "Ross, why not think about retirement?" His wife was his

financial advisor, and she was a minister, so that raised a red flag in my mind. He said, "Well, I'd lose too much money if I retired. We couldn't afford it." I said, "I think in retirement you'll make more with your TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America)." So I called somebody from the financial office down, we sat with them, and it turned out he would have made about \$500 more a month if he had retired than if he stayed working! Well, by the time we left that meeting, he was glaring at his wife. He retired immediately, and he died a few months later from cancer. He could have retired five years before that. It was a tough thing.

(CB): Speaking of the greats of music, what is your perspective on the Levas?

(TR): Ann Leva was wonderful. I enjoyed her. I didn't have a lot of interaction with her because she was focused on private instruction with piano players. I took one semester of lessons with her just because when I asked her, she said yes. As much as I would like to have been able to play piano, I just didn't have the coordination between my hands, feet, and eyes. It takes a special person to play piano well. But Ana Leva was always a gem, and she always had her chauffeurs with her. She didn't drive, so somebody was always driving her somewhere in one of her big Cadillacs. It is my understanding that she had a lot of success with students. I knew them just from playing with them in orchestral and oratorio settings. I knew Ferdinand and Enzo, but I didn't know them well.

(CB): Tim, do you know that story at all?

(TG): No. I know her name, but that's about it.

(CB): Well, they had been married, but she would not produce children. He then became involved with another woman and produced three boys.

(TR): Yeah, I think he had a big family.

(CB): She became involved with all of them musically, and they continued to be part of the Wilkes family. Ferdinand himself was a conductor, wasn't he?

(TR): He was a conductor and a violinist. Enzo was a cellist, I think.

(CB): I know more about her because of Joe Matteo. She had her piano at her house.

(TR): He was one of her chauffeurs.

(CB): Right, okay. He's coming up to visit me. I will refer to his time driving the Cadillac. Anyways, we periodically got pretty close to the music scene at Wilkes, and we got to know a

couple of the Leva boys and Santos boys in a non-musical way. That's a story which we've not touched on at all in any of these. Who was the great piano student of Ann's, who was from Central Europe?

(PA): Thomas Hrynkiw

(CB): He was a superb musician. It was a very, very gifted group, and Dick Chaplin was a key part of that. My memory of Chaplin is when we had a party at his house. I met Jim Merryman and his wife that night, and they were one of the few hires that I made on my own. It was not a power that I wanted, nor sought, but I was so impressed with the two of them standing around Dick Chaplin's piano that I started the process. She taught at Keystone, but Jim became a key part of the cosmopolitanization of the Wilkes faculty. So that all happened around Dick Chaplin's piano. I remember that vividly. I could sketch the scene.

(PA): Tom, where does John Vita fit in all this?

(TR): I didn't know John Vita until he took over as the organist at the First Presbyterian Church. I never knew him in any way associated with Wilkes. I think he teaches it at day school, right?

(PA): Well, he did forever, but I don't know if he still does.

(TR): I think he's still there, but I don't know if he fits into my Wilkes picture.

(PA): Well, his son actually teaches now. I used to hire him for commencement stuff all the time. John Michael Vita, I think his name was.

(TR): He was a violin player, right?

(PA): Yeah.

(JR): It's a little out of your area, Tom, but did you have much to do with Klaus Holm?

(TR): No. I know the name, but that's all I could tell you.

(CB): We've never referred to the tension between Al Groh and Klaus Holm. When I got to Wilkes, and we started to do some things at the Dart Center, that became a palpable problem. I'm not sure I've got enough accurate information to describe it, but it's an important story. The Dart Center has a stage, which is comparable to Lincoln Center, and its creation had the involvement of both Al Groh and Klaus Holm. Neither of them would acknowledge the role of the other in helping to design that space. Klaus Holm was highly thought of in New York and

brought his talents, but he also brought some attitudes that were awful echoes of World War II, and Al Groh was unforgiving. I had to fight to get a plaque at the entryway of the Darte Center to recognize Klaus. We had a little ceremony with his daughters and his wife, but Al Groh was very unforgiving, and it all had to do with anti-Semitism. So that was another little explosion going on at the Darte Center. Tom, we need to get some thoughts from you on your father, who really was Mr. Wilkes. I came in 1984, but he arrived in '47 or '48. It was almost forty years that he'd been at Wilkes by the time I got there. And while I never knew Farley, I have tremendous respect for him from everything I've learned about his stamp on Wilkes' culture. Similarly, I also see your dad as putting a moral stamp on Wilkes, beyond just the Student Affairs area. I'm interested in what your perspective was as a son growing up with him, and then being a student while he was the Dean of Students. Did he ever call you into his office?

(TR): Oh! I was not just called into his office, but I was also called into his den at home. He called me Tommy Tucker, so I knew it was okay when he called me that, but when I heard "Son," I knew I was about to get chewed out for something. He was never mean, cruel, or abusive in any way, shape, or form, but he was very matter-of-fact. "Son, you got a D on your bio exam. I don't ever want to see that again." I got called on the carpet a lot from that, but I expected it. He was a real special guy. I don't know how to explain it at all anymore. I've just gotten so used to knowing him as a real special individual to so many people. And that was the thing that always surprised me, and still does to this day. I can't think of a time when I ever ran into a Wilkes-affiliated individual who ever had anything other than complimentary statements to make about him. I always wondered how he could be so good and if I could ever achieve that. I tend to doubt I ever did, and I probably never will. For some reason, he was able to connect to people, and it was always for the good of that individual. He was never in anything for himself, to my understanding. I could never read that in him. It was always for someone else's benefit that he would do the things he did. Begrudgingly, he would accept a thanks or an award here and there. The Salvation Army gave him their top award, the YMCA, the General Hospital, and then there's a boardroom named after him in perpetuity from the Mental Health Associates. So he would accept that acknowledgement, but he didn't like it. He just didn't like to be recognized. He figured, "I'm doing what I want to do, I'm going to help others, and I don't need to have any kind of recognition for it." But anyway, I've never totally figured out how he was so good at doing that. He was genuine, and that was just the way he was. He was also deeply religious, and that's where most of his life's values came from. He served in World War II for close to four years. He was on his way to the Pacific when they dropped the bomb, so they turned the boat around. He had been in Africa for most of his time. He was an artillery officer. So whenever I tried to bring that up as a kid, it was an automatic shutdown. He was like, "This is a part of my life that I'm never going to go back to because it was destructive. It was something that was not forward-thinking or positive in nature." I mean, it was just one of those things I was always curious about. I just wanted to know, "Dad, what was it like to be in the Army?" He wouldn't talk about it. So when I think about it, I realized that if it wasn't something that was going to have a positive

outcome, or if it wasn't good for humanity, he didn't want to have anything to do with it. But for anything else, he was the first one in line to help whenever he could. He lived his life the way he thought it. He didn't just talk about the way things should be. He lived the way he knew it should be, and he instilled that in us. I've done my best, but it's probably nowhere near his. I'm sure my brothers have done their best, but also probably nowhere near his. I don't think that if he were still around, he would be disappointed in any of us, but he might have said, "Tom, you should have done this instead," or, "Tom, why didn't you go another step forward and do that?" So that's the way I think about him today. And again, like I said earlier, when I was a student, I didn't want to be thought of as privileged. I kind of got that feeling on a couple of occasions, so I started to back off and just focus on my own major. Never did I have issues with anybody, but I could always tell that I was the dean's kid. That's how I would be introduced, and then somebody else would say, "Oh, wow. That's cool." But by introducing me as the dean's kid, it was what it was. And of course, as a kid, your parents are the best at unknowingly embarrassing you whenever they possibly can. That happened to me time and time again. He'd get out at the football field, cheer, run back and forth in front of everybody, come back up to sit down, and just about have a heart attack. I said, "Dad, you're going to do this again and again and again and again. What do you expect?" I guess he was always funny, too. I was referring earlier to that donkey basketball event when he would dress up and put makeup on. Now it's fine with me, but back then, I wanted to hide.

(TG): Sure! You're human!

(CB): One of my Wilkes stories that I would tell at several alumni events is about when he was a football coach. The number of players was very limited, so when someone would be knocked out on the field, he would go out there and say, "Get up! We need you!" Alumni in the audience would say, "That was me! That was me!" There were at least five people who had been laid out on the ground, and your dad told them to get up because they needed them. The other is that his aphorisms, of course, were legion.

(TR): Oh, God, yes.

(CB): At his retirement, I probably took the greatest risk, in terms of tastefulness, by saying the following, which I'd heard him say very often. "Praise God, and keep your bowels open."

(TR): That's one!

(CB): There was a huge crowd, and I got a huge laugh.

(TR): I was there. I remember that! There were a couple of others, too.

(PA): "Open the sweeper. Let's have the dirt."

(TR): Okay, that's a good one!

(PA): "I don't give a gnat's nut."

(JR): "Judas Priest."

(TR): That was a good one!

(TG): I remember that one.

(TR): I remember I had written to you, Chris, when I was a graduate. I was up in Boston, and I knew Dad was retiring, so I just wanted to say a few things about him. You ended up reading from it at the podium. I wasn't aware you were going to do that. You even acknowledged it when you got up. You said, "Tom, I apologize, but I'm telling everybody in the house what you wrote to me. Tom doesn't know I'm going to do this." I think my dad actually had a tear in his eye. He walked up to me, and he gave me a thumbs up. If I could find that letter again, I bet you I could recount a better answer to the question you just asked me, because it was much fresher. It was forty-five years ago!

(PA): You know, we have that video.

(TR): I have it too, but I don't have a VCR player anymore.

(TG): That's a problem, isn't it? Jean just whispered to me, "If you can't sing, then make a joyful noise."

(JR): That's right!

(TR): Wasn't there "A huckleberry above a persimmon" or something? I don't know what that one meant. I remember when he told Jane Lampe that. Jane was having trouble with a freshman female student. The girl was really homesick, and Jane was trying to counsel the girl, but Jane couldn't get through to this young lady. She happened to be from a rural area, so my father said to Jane, "Go ask her about her cow." Apparently, my dad knew she came from a farm. How he knew, I don't really know all those details. The next time Jane met with the girl, she started asking about her cow, and the girl opened up. Apparently she had a great four years at Wilkes thereafter. "Go talk about her cow." Who's going to think of that other than my dad?

(PA): Aren't there stories, Tom, about him bringing pets home from the residence hall that they

confiscated?

(TR): Yeah. We had very original names for our pets! We got a cat named Whiskers, a dog named Poochie, and then a guinea pig named Streaky, because it had a white streak from its nose down its back. Obviously, pets weren't allowed in the dorms, so we got them. The other thing we ended up with was a lot of his woodwork. He was a pretty talented woodworker. There used to be a maintenance place right behind Weiss Hall, and they had all kinds of lumber. The school would scavenge, and they kept all of it in that building. So whenever he didn't have a board meeting or something to do at home, he was at that shop. I went with them a lot. They had a lot of woodworking tools, and he taught himself how to use them. He made these for my mom. Using these pretty fancy Newell posts, he would fix them up, put some kind of a top on it, and give it to my mother so that she could put a plant on it. We still have them at our house. He was always wanting to go the step ahead, always wanting to learn, and always wanting to figure the next move out.

(PA): If I remember this right, he used to order life as God, Wilkes, and then family!

(TR): We were usually around third!

(CB): That's a variation on Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*. I like George's better!

(TR): I think a year or two before he died, he was always telling my mom how much he wished he had spent more time with the boys. Again, as you said, Paul, we came in third. And I don't even know if a specific board that he was really into, like the Salvation Army or the YMCA, would also fall above us.

(PA): Don't forget Rotary!

(TR): Oh, yeah! Now, I'm not at all saying we ever lacked his attention, but I'm just saying that his attention was elsewhere most of the time. We never missed out on anything that we needed or wanted from what a father should be, but I do remember my mom telling me that he wished he had spent more time with us. I thought we spent enough time together, but he was probably nostalgic at that point.

(CB): I agree. I just happened to be coming through Wilkes-Barre after he went to the hospital, and I went in to see him. He was sitting up in bed and was absolutely bright and talkative. He seemed very happy to see me. I think he died the next day. It was a very powerful experience for me. But at the same time, I also visited Tom Bigler right before he died. So I was in Wilkes-Barre for three days, and I spent critical time with both George Ralston and Tom Bigler. It was spooky. One thing I've never asked for a definitive answer on, now that I've got you, is your

dad's southern roots.

(TR): Well, he was born and raised in Virginia. I think that's where he got most of his mannerisms and mindset, but most of his formative years were in Harrisburg. His father was a dairy farmer, but he was not a wealthy guy. I guess there was a means by which he rented the land, farmed it, and made his profit. It was almost like a fiefdom back when a king owned the land. So that's how he grew up with his eight siblings. I guess in those days, that was the only way you could run a farm. You had to have your family doing it for you, so you needed a lot of family members. So anyway, he began in Virginia, and then as the family migrated up, they ended up in Harrisburg, where my grandfather rented another farm. That is when they all learned their life lessons. It was the mindset of "you work hard, and you get your results by working hard." How much of that came from the southern roots, I really don't know for sure. I only ever remember him focusing most of his discussions with his siblings around the Harrisburg property. That's how he learned how to deal with people, and it's probably where he got that phrase when he told Jane Lampe to talk to the girl about her cow. He was working the farms until he went to school.

(CB): He went to North Carolina for school?

(TR): Chapel Hill, yep. Then after Columbia, he was drafted. Then he came back and went to Harvard, but he didn't finish at Harvard because he didn't like the thesis they wanted him to write.

(PA): Wasn't he at Columbia for a while?

(TR): Yeah, that was his master's degree. I'm trying to think when he got drafted. I don't know if it was between Columbia and Harvard or between UNC and Columbia. I'd have to really look back at that. I forget where I was going with that. What was the question? I got yapping, so I forgot what you wanted to know!

(CB): His southern roots.

(TR): Oh, yes. It all just kind of morphed from the family that he grew up with. They all respected each other and worked hard together to manage the farm. He said he would get the horses to pull the hay thrasher. I can't remember if he was doing that right before he got drafted, or if he was doing that right before he went to school. That's where I'm getting caught with the timeframe.

(CB): No, that's helpful. I knew about Harrisburg, but I had a hard time relating his southern courtliness to Pennsylvania. That really makes sense now. I knew he had his time at UNC, and

your dad respected the chancellor enormously. I think he had a relationship with him, too.

(TR): He was a senator, too.

(PA): Terry Sanford.

(TR): Yeah. They had a good relationship, from what I've understood.

(CB): Your dad played football at UNC, right?

(PA): And baseball.

(TR): Yep.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(CB): Say something about your parents' relationship. I knew them both at First Presbyterian Church when my daughter sang in the choir with your mom. I had some pretty private conversations with your mom about her earlier life. There were also stories about the Buick convertible, which created popularity for your father with the student body. But their relationship itself was a treasured part of Wilkes. A son's reflection on that would be good.

(TR): A contemporary of Dad's introduced him to my mom at a dinner dance at the Sterling Hotel in the mid-50s. Mom always says how formal he was and that they enjoyed talking with each other that first time. They danced, he said goodnight, and they went their separate ways. Obviously, she was a student, and he was the dean of men at that point. He was also the football coach and athletic director on top of that. He had so many hats in those days. But then they would run into each other on the sidewalks of campus. My mom didn't spend much time on the campus. She was all music. At the time, the Darte Center wasn't there, so I think it was Chase Hall where she was all of the time.

(PA): It was Gies Hall. It was right next to the old location of the library.

(TR): Right. And because then there was the Chase Garage, right?

(PA): Chase Theater.

(TR): So that was her expanse of campus. Dad was a little bit more around and about. Whenever they saw each other on the sidewalk, she would always say, "Hello," and he would always tip his hat and ask, "How do you do?" I guess that continued to develop over time. He lived on the third floor of Bedford Hall at the time, and that's when he had the Buick that he would loan out to students to go out on dates. I guess he loaned out the Buick for somebody to go out on a date, and at the same time, he invited my mother to come up to his room to listen to records. Apparently, that was one of their first dates. She went upstairs, and they listened to records until his car got back. She was living in Ashley at the time. She wasn't in Wilkes-Barre, but I guess they had a trolley or a bus that went out that way. So they started to develop a relationship, and it just worked out. It got better and better, and it was actually only a couple of years that they were dating before they got married. As soon as they were married, John showed up, and then I showed up nine months after John. John was born in '57, and I was born in '58. Then Jamie was born seven years later. It was an accident, according to both of them. They weren't expecting to have any more after John and me, but they were glad Jamie came along. But they had a wonderful relationship, and they were extremely supportive of each other. Whatever one did, the other was in agreement. They took care of each other that way, and they took care of us in the same way. When one wasn't available, the other was. And when they both weren't, we had a football player to watch over us! It sounds a little cliché, but I think they had a real love affair for fifty years. I think my mother still does, and she's still trying to figure her way around missing him. I think that their love was true. There was nothing phony about it. They just were so extremely supportive of each other for whatever was needed, and we had a great life growing up. They took care of us, and we knew we were loved. You didn't always have everything you wanted back in those days, but we never wanted for something that we needed. I want to say when I was around ten years old, my dad was getting paid \$4,000 a year. The first house he bought was \$13,000. The second house he bought was \$21,000, and I think even then he was making around \$10,000 a year. When you think of how things have progressed in that way, it's staggering. In how the first forty years were versus these past forty years, that all has exploded. But again, we were well taken care of, and that family support was always there.

(CB): Tell us about your perspective on Wilkes, having been a member of the Board of Trustees.

(TR): I think Wilkes is a great institution and has a great history. I hope it can continue that history and create new history for itself. I know we've gone through some rough waters, but a

school like Wilkes is always going to have rough ups and downs. You're a tuition-dependent institution, so you live and die by your enrollment. But I think over the years, through every administration, they've all managed to find their way through those waves. They've all come out better on the other side, and I think that is what's going to happen now as well. I've very much enjoyed being on the inside, having served on the board for the past nine years, and just seeing and better understanding the inner workings. What I always heard, even through growing up, is that there's always a headbutt between faculty and administration. It's never clear sailing. There's always going to be somebody who's going to be problematic for you, and I've witnessed several of those in my past nine years. But they all seemed to work out in the end, and I think Wilkes has a bright future. I think that, especially with some of the results I'm hearing from this campaign that we're currently in, it looks like it's coming through very successfully. I haven't seen any real details, but I've heard conjecturally that there has been some real progress made on this campaign. That's going to help immensely. But it's time for me to go. I'm glad the bylaws are kicking me off, because I think there are a lot of people out there who should be coming on. They should be the new generation, bring new insight, and bring a new energy level. I think that if a board is stagnant, or if too many of the same people are there all the time, you're asking for trouble. But I think what I've learned a lot at Wilkes, not just as a trustee, but from day one. It's always going to be my DNA.

(CB): That's great. Well, I've dominated the questioning, so I will turn to the rest of you.

(JR): Tom, how are your brothers doing? John was one of my students, and Jamie was a friend of my daughter and also Umid Nejib's son.

(TR): Oh, okay! Jamie's great. He's an electrical engineer working in Wilkes-Barre for Martin & Rogers. He has his professional certificate, so he's as busy as can be. He's pretty much the premier electrical engineer for that company who does all of the new Geisinger buildings. He has his wife, Colleen, of thirty-five years now, and he has three grown children, two of which are graduates of Wilkes. Breanne and Alyssa are both married and both on their own. Alyssa's a licensed psychotherapist, and Breanne is a corporate insurance specialist. They're both doing extremely well. Alyssa's husband is a Scranton cop, and Breanne's husband is a CPA and an entrepreneur now. He and a buddy started a business, and so far it's looking pretty good. And Colleen, Jamie's wife, teaches at Hanover Area High School. So they keep busy. John is up in Leominster, which is North Central Massachusetts. I'm about as east as you can get. Step off my balcony, and you're in the ocean. So he's more central in the state than I am. He's the culinary director for a very large nursing home facility in Canton, Massachusetts. He's been there for about twelve years now, working very hard. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

 He's got it hard, but he's good at it. He knows how to handle it, and he does it well. We were all together last weekend for the Ralston Memorial. I didn't play, though. I've got too much hardware in my back, so I usually drive the cart. This year, Greg Cant wanted to play, and I said, "Well, I'm not playing, but why don't you play with my brothers?" So Greg played with my brothers, and I think they all had a good time. I think John was excited to get three days away from work and his kids.

(CB): Now, you have a half-brother who's an economist, right?

(TR): My oldest brother, David, came from my mother's prior marriage. David just turned seventy-nine. He's been in Fort Myers for a long time, but he now has two new places somewhere else in Florida that he just bought over the past year or two. I don't know where his energy comes from at his age, but he buys all of these fixer-uppers. I always say, "My God, why do you want to do that at your age? Why don't you just relax?" But yes, David was from my mom's first marriage that lasted maybe a year. She doesn't have any problems talking about the mistake that was. David was married and divorced quite a while ago. He then married again to a former girlfriend of his who was diagnosed with glioblastoma. She passed away within a year of their marriage about twenty years ago. So he's single, and I think that's why he's always looking for a project to do.

(CB): He was an economist, wasn't he?

(JR): He was at UConn for years.

(TR): Yeah, he taught at UConn for a long time. Then he taught at Oklahoma University, and then he taught at Florida International. He wasn't an economist, but it was a business field. It was something managerial. He published a lot of papers on management.

(TG): Yeah, there is something known as managerial economics.

(TR): I can't remember exactly what his field was. But he still researches with a group of people that he's worked with for the past fifty years, and they do a lot of publications. I guess he's been noted pretty recently in one of the highest publications in that industry. So he keeps himself active like that, too. But that's all of us!

(TG): That's quite a crew!

(PA): I was going to ask you, Tom, if you wanted to reflect on the college during the flood. What are your recollections of that?

(TR): I was thirteen when we had the flood, and I remember we had not done any preparation of any kind. No one expected there was going to be a flood. They just figured it was an alarm. But we got evacuated, and we loaded into the car what basics we needed. It was the five of us, and we went up to my mother's father's house in Ashley. Dad took John, told me to stay with my mother, and they went down to start filling sandbags. I guess they were right across from where Stark is now, filling up sandbags until the alarm went off. They said, "You guys need to get out of here. This river's going over, and we don't want to have all of you washed away." So they all dropped their shovels and their sandbags, and John and Dad came home. For the next couple of days, obviously, as everyone else did, we watched it unfold on television. When we got back into the city, my dad made me stay with my mom and Jamie while he and John went back into town as far as they could. John was only a little older than me, but I don't think my dad wanted to go by himself. When they got to the city, there was a parking blockade, so they had to walk the rest of the way in. I guess they did some scavenging around to see how things were, and they realized it was going to be a pretty big mess. We ended up spending close to two years at my grandfather's house in Ashley while Wilkes-Barre was cleaning up. Dad also spent a lot of time on campus with Michelin cleaning out all of the stuff. The house came second to everything else. The Lord was still number one, Wilkes was two, and the house was three. So we worked on it, and we moved back full-time into our real house a couple of years later. It was painstaking. It was definitely a time that you're never going to forget if you lived through it. Anybody who did realizes that it was an amazing amount of force that was unleashed upon the valley. The flood was so turbulent, damaging, and destructive. But then again, everybody was in the same boat. There was a feeling that everybody was equal and together. Our street alone had about nine grand pianos sitting out in the gardens.

(CB): There wasn't a piano left in Wilkes-Barre.

(TR): And then in front of the house, it was five or six feet high of debris. We had an old pool table in the cellar that Dad got from one of the dorms. The slate was thick on the base, and the legs were two feet by two feet of solid wood. This thing probably weighed two tons. It went up, flipped over, and came down in the cellar. I remember Dad had help getting that out. John and I were useless! But when you think about the power of the water to lift that thing, it had to be thousands of pounds. And then that slate sat in our backyard for a long time until Dad figured out a way to get rid of it. I don't even remember what he did with it. But everybody was equal. Everybody was on the same footing at that point in time. You weren't any better than your neighbor, and your neighbor wasn't any better than you. You were all suffering from the same issues. The good thing about it was that the people came together. It was so unlike today. People found common good within each other and supported each other.

(CB): That's what's called the Minneapolis neighboring effect. A rediscovered sense of community.

(JR): I recall walking on Academy Street two days after we were let back into the city, and I saw a washing machine with the rollers hanging from a telephone line! That was probably near where you lived.

(TR): We were right between Academy and Riverside Drive. You can't see the river anymore. The dike is higher than the second floor. My mom lives near where the dike broke, and the houses that occupied the lots that her house is on now were all wiped away. It was all completely flattened.

(CB): Anybody have any final thoughts?

(TG): This has been an incredible interview, especially for somebody who is the newest to Wilkes. I have had a tremendous amount of learning and a lot of insights, Tom. I really appreciate it. I don't think we've had quite this sense of your dad or the family in our project. It's just great that you've been so open and helpful.

(TR): Thank you.

(TG): Thank you so much.

(JR): Thank you very much.

(CB): By the way, you'll get the transcript, and you can add things that you think would amplify what you want to share.

(TR): I will try to clarify some things.

(CB): Right. And this is going to be online, so people from Wilkes will be able to find out about you and your parents. It's a wonderful opportunity to capture that all. So, I'm going to say goodbye, and thank you, Tom.

(TR): I appreciate everybody's time. Thank you.

(JR): Thank you.

(TG): Thanks so much.