RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAY H. BURSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH
and
DAVID FULVIO
and
GREG FLYNN

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
MAY 15, 2008

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Ray H. Burson on May 15, 2008, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

David Fulvio: … David Fulvio …

Greg Flynn: … Greg Flynn.

SI: Mr. Burson, thank you very much for coming all this way. You drove out from Missouri. You are here for your reunion, but we appreciate your taking time to sit with us.

RB: Okay, thank you.

SI: To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

RB: I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, on January 16, 1937. My mom was a registered nurse, working there. My dad worked for Standard Oil of New Jersey, and the day I was born, he saw me and got on an oil tanker and went to Aruba [laughter] to work for the oil company down there. … I went a few months later and spent my early years and high school there. …

SI: Okay. What were your parents' names?

RB: My dad was Frank Ray Burson and my mom was Claire Heyden. My dad was from Pittsburgh and my mom was born in Weatherly, Pennsylvania, but their family, they were Pennsylvania Dutch, they moved to New Jersey in the 1920s. My grandfather was a mason, carpenter. So, the family was the Heyden Family and they lived in Elizabeth, and that was sort of, like, the New Jersey connection. … I have aunts and uncles buried in Hillside, New Jersey, and [through] that New Jersey connection and Standard Oil of New Jersey, where I was born, I ended up at the State University, [Rutgers University]. Although I had applied to other places, they sent me up here and … it all worked out. [laughter]

SI: What do you know about your father's family's background?

RB: The Bursons were Quaker. They came over in the late 1600s, to the Valley Forge area, the first was George Burson, and they had four sons and the family spread out over the United States. … My dad's relatives and parents were from Waynesville and Wellsville, Ohio, which is not too far from Pittsburgh. So, that's where that side of the family, Scots-Irish, came over. Now, on my mother's side, they didn't come over from Germany until after the Civil War. I think my grandfather was born in the Berlin area, and so, my mother was full German and she spoke Pennsylvania Dutch when they grew up, and so, I'm fifty percent German background.

SI: What did your father do for Standard Oil?

RB: Okay, my dad, in 1930, I like to tell this story today, when people are worried about things, in 1930, at the height of the Depression, he got his college degree in chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh and an immediate job with Standard Oil. So, he was a chemical engineer, worked in the oil refinery in Aruba, doing the various kinds of tests they do on

petroleum, to make gasoline, to make sulfur, acid. He worked in an acid plant, a lab, spent his whole career there, and so, our family lived in Aruba from 1937 until 1960. When I was in college, that's where I went for my summer vacations, or for my summer work periods.

SI: You grew up in Aruba. What are some of your earliest memories about where you grew up?

RB: Well, it was a very artificial society, in the fact that, … actually, we lived in a colony, which had a fence around it and it had a refinery, and … other people lived out in the village. … It was a white community, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, European, American, an international community, but, in a sense, it was a bit of an artificiality, although we maintained all the American customs and habits. … You went to the States every two years for a two or three-month home leave. You saw the latest movies, and no TV or computers in those days. … It was a small town, very small town atmosphere. Everybody went swimming. … We played basketball. I did a lot of spearfishing, back in the '50s, before scuba. We used to go out and, when I was about twelve years old, I got started on that. … Being a kid down there, there's no summer and winter. It's, you know, rainy season or dry season. So, one of my most traumatic experiences was coming to Rutgers, my first semester, and seeing snow. … The boys in the dorm I was living in threw me out in it when they knew I hadn't seen it yet. [laughter]

SI: Was there only one camp on Aruba, or were there numerous camps for each company?

RB: No, there was Lago Colony, which was the oil colony, oil refinery. [Editor's Note: Lago Oil and Transport Company, Limited, was a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey.] At the other end of the island, there was a small Shell depot, Eagle Refinery, but … it was more of a depot than a refinery, storage and stuff like that. Everybody worked for the same company, so, there was this hierarchy. You knew who the bosses were and you lived in bungalows. … Some of these bungalows are still down there. They were on oil pots, so that the lizards and the scorpions wouldn't get in, the ants, and so forth, and, you know, you played outdoors … a lot of outdoor stuff. You'd hear the refinery whistle at seven o'clock in the morning, your dad'd go to work. Noon whistle, he'd come home. One o'clock, he'd go back. Four o'clock, he'd come home, you know. … He's work until noon on Saturday and then go out to the golf course. I think the parents probably thought the place was totally boring, but kids, … we found a lot to do in those days. You had to be creative. [laughter] Now, World War II, I remember quite a bit, because I've written a paper about the submarine attack on Aruba. … All of us kids and family who grew up down there still stay together. There's a chronicle that's put out and people go to yearly reunions around the States and go back to Aruba once every three years. … A few years ago, they started to get into some of this research in[to] World War II stuff, and I found it quite fascinating and fitting in with your interests in World War II. I was five years old. My mom brought me to the States on an oil tanker, the *Esso Aruba*, because, … it was January 1942, and I'd had vision problems at Christmastime. I was getting double vision and my left eye was crossing. I was getting the cross-eye that, sometimes, kids get, and there were no eye doctors there. There were optometrists who made spectacles, but there weren't any eye doctors, but my mom … wanted to take me back to New Jersey, to Dr. Greismere in Elizabeth, to see if they were going to operate on me or what. So, we found ourselves on an oil tanker (*the Esso Aruba*) coming up to the States in January of 1942, and that's when the Germans launched their submarine attacks on the New York City area. … I can still remember being on that tanker, and

you always saw, I think it was called the *Ambrose* Lightship out there, off of Perth Amboy. When you saw the Jersey Shore, you knew you were getting to New York, knew you were getting to Bayonne or New York City. … There was a big explosion at night and I remember my mom waking me up, and we had those cork lifejackets you'd put on, and I looked out the porthole and I remember this totally red sky on one side. … Then, I heard noises of other boats, and there was, like, a destroyer running around, and, that's it. I have those vague memories, and then, my mom would always tell the story, and then, I looked it up a few years later, that … this ship called the *Norness* was torpedoed by the Germans right off of Long Island Sound, and it was the first one, and a torpedo was said to have passed in front of our ship. [Editor's Note: The *Norness*, an oil tanker registered in Panama, was sunk on January 14, 1942, by *U-123*.] So, I was a five-year-old kid in World War II and I was in it for a little bit, there. So, while I was in the States, the Germans had their attack on Aruba, which was the first attack on a land target in the Western Hemisphere. [Editor's Note: On February 16, 1942, Aruba was attacked by *U-156* as part of Operation: WEST INDIAN. The German sub first sank the shallow-draft lake tankers *Oranjestad* and *Pedernales,* which were anchored outside Lago Harbor. It then surfaced and prepared to fire its 105-millimeter deck cannon at the well-lit refinery. The first round exploded in the barrel, killing one sailor. The U-boat then fired several rounds from its thirty-seven-millimeter antiaircraft gun, causing little damage. Then, it proceeded to the west end of the island where it torpedoed the Texaco tanker *Arkansas,* which was docked at Shell Oil's Eagle Beach pier. Mr. Burson has also authored a history of the incident entitled "When Lago Was Lucky: The U-Boat Attack on Aruba."] … We didn't know about it, my mom and I didn't know about it, until we saw, I think, a *Life* Magazine or *Time* Magazine picture, and we didn't know if we could get back. They had taken our passports when we got here. The State Department had the passports, and my mom wanted to get back home. Now, back in Aruba, they were giving the civilians choices then, to either leave or stay, and a lot of them went back to the States, but my mom wanted to get back [to Aruba]. She was a nurse, she was in the Red Cross, so, she played that nurse's/Red Cross card with the State Department. They gave us back our passports and we shuttled, flew on little airplanes, down to Brownsville, Texas, hopped through Central America on small planes, and then, over to Aruba. So, I came back, and then, the one thing I remember about that is, being in the States, I'd bought all these little toys, little toy soldiers and things, and I was going to be "the kid with all the new toys." … In Costa Rica, we changed planes and I left mine on the plane, a DC-3, and I never forgot it. I had it in a pillow sack, you know, these little [toys]. Back in those days, they'd be classics now, some of these toys, and I was going to be the kingpin, the only kid coming back during the wartime [with new toys]. … When we got back there, then, of course, we had American soldiers. So, we'd have American soldiers over for Thanksgiving and for Christmas. … Some of them, you'd see them around, … there were hundreds of them there. We had big guns up on Colorado Point, which is [at] one end of the island. … If you ever get to Aruba on a vacation, go up to that end of the island and you'll still see the gun emplacements up there. The circles are still up there. They'd test fire them and, whenever they were going to test fire the guns, a notice would come around to everybody, saying, "Take the china off the wall, take the pictures down, because it's going to shake." We had the Air Force there. They flew P-39 Airacobras. So, sometimes, [when] you were a kid, you'd see them fly over. Some of the pilots had girlfriends … in the colony and they'd buzz them once in a while and, sometimes, they'd have some target practice … right out over the ocean. I can still remember being a kid and seeing them trailing one of these targets.

SI: The sleeves.

RB: Sleeves, yes, and so, it was a real wartime environment, you know. … At the very beginning of the war, before [Pearl Harbor], when I was even younger, we had … French there for a little bit and we had the Scots Fourth Battalion Queen's own Cameron Highlanders [who] were there, and then, the Americans came in after the attack, but, then, … all the American troops went to D-Day. … We can remember, my mom remembers, and I still remember, a guy named Arthur Porter. … We'd picked him up hitchhiking and took him home and had him over for dinner and he became a friend of the family. … He was a private in the Army and went over, and, then my mom got a letter from him, and then, he was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. There was another guy named (Joe Bell?), who was in the Air Force, … because we had Air Force there, and I remember, after the war, one time, we visited his family back in Kentucky. So, you know, there was this interplay, but, when the Americans …

SI: Was he killed?

RB: No, no, but, when the Americans left, in '44, Puerto Ricans came and the Puerto Rican soldiers were, I would say, not as disciplined. I mean, you know, … kids'd go up to the Puerto Rican soldiers and, … up there by this Colorado Point, they had tents on concrete slabs that they were living in. … The soldiers would always give the kids stuff, you know, like, I had little medals and, once in a while, I got a hat. … We used to have some of those plastic airplanes, hard, black plastic airplanes that they used in classes, … for showing what enemy planes looked like, and you sort of got into military stuff. It was quite interesting, but, as I was saying, the Puerto Ricans, you'd go up to them and say, "Oh, that looks pretty nice," and I remember, one time, a Puerto Rican soldier took a fifty-caliber shell. He opened it. He said, "I'm going to make it safe for you. You can have this." He opened it up. He poured the powder on the concrete slab and lit it. Then, he put the shell back in and gave it to me. I took it home, had it there. My dad came home from work. He said, "What's this?" I said, "Oh, they gave me a fifty-caliber shell." He looked at the back, at the cap. He said, "You're crazy. That's still a live shell," and he took it down and he took me with him and he threw it out in the ocean. [laughter] … Those are kind of the … early wartime experiences we had, and we had bomb shelters. I had a bomb shelter, it's still there, in our old front yard. They dug out a square in the coral, made some steps for one family and put a concrete slab on top of it, and, if there was an air raid, you'd go in there. … Everybody had black tape on their headlights on their cars, with just a little square open, for blackout. My dad was an air raid warden. He had a white pith helmet. When they're having the blackout practices, he'd get up on the roof of the house and look around, to see if anybody was violating the [rules] by showing lights. So, we had [some appreciation of the war]; it was definitely war, you know. … Ships would be torpedoed, and you depended on the ships. In Aruba, you depended on the ships. See, the oil tankers would come to Aruba empty, but with water, fresh water. That's how you got your water. They had a desalinization plant, but it was small, and that was out in the Dutch part of the island. … So, tankers would come in, they'd pump out the water, and … that's how we had the fresh water, and then, they'd take the oil and go back to the States. … Then, they'd bring supplies back, but, sometimes, with the German U-boats, … early on, [they] were very strong, it was kind of touch-and-go sometimes, how much stuff you had, … you know, around, but, after that one U-boat attack, which could have really, really done something, had they followed up on it, [there were no more land attacks]. … One of

the things that, when I got into this, I didn't [know was] everybody knew about the attack, but, from a historical standpoint, there were all kinds of details that were mixed up, and that got me into this history stuff, too.

SI: When you say "the attack," do you mean the attack off of New York Harbor?

RB: No, the one in Aruba, the *U-156* attack.

SI: Okay.

RB: … When I started to look into this, there was a lot of confusion. Over time, people's minds change, and, if you're doing history, be careful with eyewitnesses long after, [because] things … can get changed, can get mixed up, because, three days after the U-boat attack, there was another scare and a US destroyer [*Winslow*] fired some star shells over the area, over the colony, and the casings dropped down. So, people thought that there was another attack and the Navy didn't come out immediately [to dispel that idea]. They took a little while, because they don't want to say, "Hey, we made a mistake," but, in people's minds, over the years, those two events become mixed, sometimes, and that took some sorting out. … Earlier, about two days after the attack, a German submarine [that] surfaced off Oranjestad, which was the other end of the island, and everybody claimed that it was inside the harbor, but we came here, years later, and looked at it, and we said it couldn't have been inside the harbor. Look at the depths, I mean, you know, look at the depth of the water; he had to have surfaced just outside, but maybe it looked, to all these kids who saw it, as inside. So, you get those kinds of things, "And where did these shells land?" and stuff like that. So, it's interesting background, and I find it fascinating to go back.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, what did you know about what was happening in the world?

RB: I was, what? three, four years old; I didn't know much. I remember some things, you know. You'd hear BBC radio, and I guess it was *The Voice of America* then, or we had a shortwave broadcast from the States, you could get, too, but BBC was the one, originally. … When the German *Graf Spee* was sunk, in 1940, off Montevideo, Uruguay, where the British got a hold of the *Graf Spee*, that resonated up in our area, because one of those British ships, I think it was the *Ajax* or the *Achilles*, one of their cruisers, had taken on oil, had taken on petroleum, in Aruba before it went down there. [Editor's Note: The *Admiral Graf Spee* was a German pocket battleship that sank several Allied merchant ships. In December 1939, a group of British cruisers eventually located the *Graf Spee* off South America and, in the Battle of the River Plate, inflicted enough damage on it for the ship's captain to decide to scuttle it and avoid risking his crew.] … All the time, whenever these, during the war, … Navy ships would come in, we'd have a picnic and all the Navy guys would come over to the picnic. … Maybe there'd be a softball game, with the Navy against the colony team, so that there were these kinds of things. … Then, sometimes, if a warship came in, once in a while, there might be a tour onboard, but I was pretty young back then. … I remember something about Pearl Harbor, but very vague, just that … something terrible had happened, we were getting into something. Now, I remember, much later, I remember perfectly well when Roosevelt died, I was a kid and I was out at our house and I was up on the garage roof. … My mom came out and said, "It's on the radio, on the radio." I said, "What happened?" She said, "President Roosevelt died." Of course, here it was, April 1945, the

war was almost over. We thought, "Uh-oh, what a setback." You know, everybody was all [shocked], thought it was quite a setback.

SI: As the war progressed and the Axis forces were rolled back, did the wartime atmosphere start abating on Aruba?

RB: Well, you know, we kept these [shelters]; you had these bomb shelters. Kids always played in them, and there were a couple of them that were, like, Quonset hut bomb shelters. So, they were, like, for a whole bunch of families, above the ground, with sandbags. So, the kids all played war the whole time, you know, and, in fact, when the war was about over, sometimes, we'd have different sides and kids'd get out with their BB guns. … One gang would hold on to the bomb shelter and the other gang'd try to chase them out and run them around. So, [as] little kids, you were always sort of there, but you kind of felt like, once the Americans left and the Puerto Ricans were there, things were starting to quiet down, but it sort of blurs at the end, because, … even after the war, for a while, these air raid shelters stayed up, for a year or two. … I remember 1946, coming back to the States on leave, with my folks, I think we flew back in a Lockheed [L-18] Lodestar airplane, which was what they had then. So, it was interesting times, and there was always a lot of stuff coming out of the refinery about the war effort. We used to ride on the bus as kids and sing, "Whistle while you work, Hitler is a jerk, Mussolini is a meany, but the Japs are worse." We also would frequently have, you know, flag raisings and sing the *National Anthem*, but, of course, being an international community, if we did the American one, we had to do the British one and the Dutch one. So, they would do that. So, it was all very patriotic, war effort, organized that way, the whole thing, and that refinery got up to, was putting out, you know, four or five hundred thousand barrels of oil a day and made a big difference.

SI: Did your father have to work a lot more during the war?

RB: I don't think … his schedule was any different, but I will recall one thing. My dad was a lieutenant in the Coastal Artillery, because I think he'd been in ROTC, and, when World War II started and he was in Aruba, he volunteered. He said, "Okay, I'll [serve]." He told them he had a lieutenant's commission in the Coastal Artillery. So, he said, "I'm ready. I'll go back." … Up here, they said, "Uh-uh, a chemical engineer at that refinery is [worth] much more to us than a lieutenant in the Coastal Artillery. So, you're exempt," but there were other people down there that did go into the service while they were working, and then, came back afterwards.

SI: Was your father disappointed that he was not able to go back in the service?

RB: I don't think so, because it'd been a while, you know, because he got out in 1930 and … this is 1941 already, … but I also had an aunt and uncle who were there, in Aruba, my mother's sister, and she was a nurse. … She was there when this submarine attack took place, and … she worked at the hospital. Her name was Grayce Reynolds and she was my mom's younger sister, grew up in New Jersey, and so forth, and married Frank Reynolds, who was an oil inspector for a company called Saybolt, which was a contract company down there that would inspect the oil tanks to see that everything was okay. So, we had family down there, … more than just my folks. …

SI: Was your mother working as a nurse when you were younger?

RB: She would go in from time-to-time, but she didn't do it regularly. She kept up her credentials. When we came back to the States, she kept up her New Jersey license, and, after the war, she did some work at Beth Israel Hospital. I think that's in Newark. … She always kept her nursing stuff [up-to-date], and, when my folks retired, she got back into it.

DF: You mentioned that there were preparations for air raid drills. Were there any drones or antiaircraft guns that would be available in case of an air raid to defend the island?

RB: After this attack, yes, they had guns around the refinery, and then, they had those coast artillery guns, which were, basically, in case ships came to attack. … I always wondered about the air raid part of it, because we were so far away from that, but South America was one of these areas where, you know, you couldn't tell what was going to happen in some of these countries. … One, you look at Venezuela today, with Hugo Chavez, [it] will give you a reason, tell you why Standard Oil was in Aruba in 1929, with a big refinery starting up, instead of in Venezuela, and it was political decisions. So, I think that on the air raid idea, the threat would have had to come from Venezuela or from Germans over there. … Once the submarine threat was big, … when the Germans realized that the Japanese could take an aircraft carrier and hit Pearl Harbor, then, the Germans said, "Well, maybe we can do more with these submarines." … At the same time, the Americans started to look toward the Panama Canal, because that was over in that direction, and, if the Japanese could do an air strike on Pearl Harbor, maybe they could do one on the Panama Canal. … They had that threat on the West Coast, too, and some balloons they put over there in those days. [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson is referring to high-altitude balloons with bombs attached which the Japanese used to attack North America.] … I don't know how the adults felt in those days; us kids, we didn't [know], you know, but the United States was really unprepared when things first got started. …

SI: The fact that Aruba was a Dutch colony, and the Dutch were obviously at war much earlier than the Americans, that did not have any impact on life on the island.

RB: Well, yes, … we had a lot of Dutch employees who had family back in occupied Holland. There were some Arubans who were back there. There was one young fellow who was killed, … and they [have] got a statue for him down there now. So, there was always this sort of thing about occupied Europe. We had some people from Denmark and some of these other countries, and some people were interned when the war first started. … There were three German freighters that were anchored off our coast in 1940. … I think they were picking up phosphates from … the other side of the island. Two of them got out, but, on the day that Germany invaded Holland, the last one scuttled itself there. So, we always had [the wreckage there]. There's a sunken German freighter [that] was out there, at the other end of the island, and it's still there today, what's left of it, and that's a real World War II, 1940 monument, the *Antilla*.

SI: Was there any fear of German saboteurs or Germans coming ashore?

RB: At the beginning, yes, yes, and there was at least one case where … a sentry was shot, and nobody knew if it was an accident or what. There was also fear of German sympathizers and

people who might, you know, help them out. If the Germans had put a little more resources into what they were doing against … that area in the beginning, it would have been a tougher war, for everybody.

GF: You have two brothers.

RB: Yes, younger brothers. One of them's passed away and the other one's still working. He's about to retire. I'm going to his retirement party … this next weekend. They were both in the military.

GF: What was that like, growing up in Aruba with your two brothers?

RB: Well, I was the oldest one and we were kids that got around and did all kinds of things. Some of them, Halloween night, you know, you'd go out and, oh, we'd shoot out streetlights with the BB guns until the local police could chase us off, … but everybody knew everybody down there. … My little brother, Donald, we called him "Captain Fearless," because he built a raft. He and some kids built a raft down at the lagoon and they were going to sail off on it. [laughter] We said, "No, you can't do that," and we used to do that kind of stuff, and I remember, one Christmas, toward the end of the war, I think my dad's folks sent us a little life raft. … We put it out, and it was one of those like the pilots had. You had a little mirror that you could signal with. So, we'd get out and play with the life raft, blow it up and get in it and signal with the mirror, make believe we were floating out somewhere. … Oh, kids would read the Hardy Boys books, and then, there were some other books … that came out right toward the end of the war, kid stories about the war. … Of course, we had an Esso Club and, in there, we had a magazine stand. So, we got all into the comics in those days. … I can still remember even the early baseball cards. I just wonder how many dollars in baseball cards I had making noise on my bicycle spokes when they should have been someplace else. [laughter]

DF: Were you able to follow American sports?

RB: Yes, yes.

DF: Like baseball; was it on the radio?

RB: You could get some shortwave, sometimes, baseball. … I'm thinking more after the war, though. Now, after the war, like 1950, '51, you could hear it, especially the World Series. That was when the kids would get all excited, and Bobby Thomson's homerun, we heard that on the radio, … Giants of '51. [Editor's Note: The New York Giants defeated the Brooklyn Dodgers in the 1951 National League pennant race, which concluded with a homerun by Bobby Thomson dubbed "the Shot Heard 'Round the World."]

SI: You mentioned that the water situation was sometimes critical because of the German U-boats. Were there other shortages or supply problems on the island?

RB: Not that I recall as a kid. Now, I imagine, you know, we didn't have fresh milk, ever. We grew up with Klim, which is milk spelled backwards, and tastes like it, I guess. [laughter] We

grew up with powdered milk, because … that was one of the things down there, but we didn't have ration cards like in the States. Of course, there was, … a commissary and dad had a payroll number. So, you went in the commissary to go shopping and you'd just give the payroll number and that's the way it would work. … There was a club and you had Esso club tickets you could buy, and we had softball leagues and stuff like that.

SI: What kind of organized activity was there for children?

RB: In the early times, there wasn't much. There were swimming classes and summer recreation programs, but, in about 1948, the high school actually hired a coach. They brought a coach down to be an athletic coach and he got into, you know, putting up gymnastic stuff and got us out there throwing footballs and playing soccer. … Then, we had a high school softball team and a high school basketball team that played around the island. … We had those sports. There was a yearly track meet.

SI: Is that when you started getting into track and field?

RB: Well, I was a skinny kid. I was tall, but I didn't have the weight to play basketball and I was kind of awkward. … I was, I don't know, in tenth or eleventh grade and the coach got us, all the basketball players, together before the season was about to start, and some of these guys were bullies to me and some of them were bigger. … He'd set us on about a three-mile run, and I get out there and I left these guys. … I got back to the bleachers and I sat there and I waited. … They gradually came in, and then, I said to myself, "You know, Ray, maybe you've got a future in something else besides basketball," and so, when I got to Rutgers, I went out for the cross-country team. … I didn't realize it then, but I probably had pretty good aerobics from the swimming and the diving, and I made the team. In those days, the freshmen were separate from the varsity. They had freshman teams, and then, varsity teams. … I remember, our first meet was against Princeton, down there, at Princeton, our first cross-country race, and I didn't know anything. I just went down there and ran, and some people passed me and I passed some people. When I got finished, they said, "You did good for Rutgers," and I said, "What do you mean, good?" [They] said, "You were the third man." I said, "Well, what does that mean, … being the third man?" [They] said, "Well, the other two are on scholarship." "Oh," I said, "okay." So, I think that motivated me that way.

DF: How many high schools were there in Aruba?

RB: Okay, there was the one that we went to, that was in the colony and had all the teachers from the States. We had a very high level of education. Most of the teachers had master's degrees. … In order to graduate, you took the New York State Regents Exam. So, I had a very sound high school background, which really paid off when I came up here in a totally different environment. … There were several schools outside, some of them Catholic schools, some private schools, vocational. There was a vocational school that the refinery had set up, and there were some clubs out there. …

DF: Were there conference championships or island championships for sports?

RB: Yes. I think we were in sort of, like, a little league with about six teams, … but only in basketball. Now, baseball, they were bigger in baseball, and some of our kids would play on the semi-pro or the amateur baseball teams, that they had a bunch of them out there, sponsored by paint companies, cigarette companies and stuff like that. … Sometimes, the team would go to Curaçao, the next island. That would be a big deal. That was like [an honor], you know, and play somebody over there. They did that once in a while. There was a lot to do.

GF: I am going to backtrack a bit. Was the elementary school that you went to of the same caliber?

RB: Yes.

GF: Do you remember your first summer job?

RB: Well, I sold soft drinks at the softball games, when I was … still about ten or twelve years old. … They'd have a fifty-gallon oil drum, with big chunks of ice in it and load it up with drinks … at the ballgame, and then, people'd come around, you'd sell that stuff. I was a paper boy. I delivered the paper for a while, *Miami Herald, New York Times,* and then, we had a weekly paper. … There was a gate to the colony, out on the side, called Gate Number Six, and, on Saturday morning, I'd go out there and sell the local *Pan Aruban* they had, get them Friday night, and then, stand out [at the gate]. As the guys came in through the gate, I'd sell them to the cars. So, yes, I was a paper boy, I remember that …

SI: Did you have the opportunity to explore other parts of the island?

RB: Oh, yes, the island was only a sixty-nine-square-mile island, eighteen miles long. So, you knew the whole place. We'd go on Scout hikes. We … did a lot of Boy Scouts/Cub Scouts; Sea Scouts, too. So, we'd go on overnight hikes. They'd take us out a ways in a truck and we'd walk across the sand dunes and coral rock for several miles, while the counselors would ride in the truck with all the cots and tents and be at the camp, and then, you'd camp overnight among the palm trees, and then, come back on Sunday. We did that. That was a lot of fun.

GF: How often did you visit the States?

RB: … Every two years, but I don't think we came back in '44. I don't remember, because I don't think we came back until right after the war. The company paid. … Sometimes, you flew to the States and came back on a Grace Line cruise, and they'd take care of all that. In 1948, … we went to the States on a [leave], and came back on a tanker. I was on several … oil tankers, and up until the early '50s. … I remember, 1948, we came to the States and my dad bought a new '48 Oldsmobile. … We came back, and … I don't remember if it was a Grace Line [ship] or a tanker, but we came back by ship and the car came with us. So, that was pretty neat.

DF: How long did you say your stays were for in America when you would visit?

RB: A couple months, yes.

DF: Did you interact with American children and make friends in America that maybe you would try to keep in contact with when you went back to Aruba?

RB: Mainly relatives. Well, we'd visit the relatives in New Jersey, in Cleveland and in Pittsburgh. We'd visit my cousins, … and some of their friends.

SI: Being in Aruba for so long and it being a Dutch colony, did you ever notice any unrest among the people living there, about being ruled?

RB: … In 1951, there was a strike and there was some violence, and this was back in the days when Cheddi Jagan was the Communist leader in Guyana. … There were Guyana folks working [there], and this oil refinery also had a lot of island people working there, from other islands, like … from Surinam, Grenada, Guyana, and there were attempts to unionize. … Of course, the colony wanted to have it as a labor relations board and … not get any outside unions in there, and this was during the Korean War. … Anyway, there was a strike over all this and the people from the village, the local employees, we called them; now, the refinery employed seven thousand people at its maximum, of which about a thousand or so were the Americans or the Europeans, what today they call expatriates. I wouldn't use the term "expatriate" for my folks, because we always came back to the States. To me, an expatriate stays out there, you know, but, yes, there was a strike and there was a demonstration. Dutch police were called in from Curaçao and the refinery kept operating full steam, with the American employees and us kids. I worked in a mess hall and made sandwiches and stuff for the guys who were working. People were working twelve, fourteen hours, but, by keeping it going, then, once the strikers spent their pay, then, they came to the table and negotiated.

SI: How long did that last?

RB: About four days, four or five days. Of course, [for] us kids, it was a big deal, because, all of a sudden, you were down there working in the refinery, you were going to get paid money. I bought my first spear gun with the money from that. Of course, you got, it was Dutch money down there, *guilders*, Dutch *guilders*. So, yes, that was an interesting [episode]. I'd love to see somebody do some research on that particular incident and see how it ties in with the Communist threat … and early Cold War stuff.

SI: Was that something that was talked about a lot in the colony?

RB: It still is, yes, yes. People all [say], "Remember the strike?" …

SI: I also meant Communism in general, the threat of Communism.

RB: Oh. … I don't recall that. My introduction to all that was coming to Rutgers, and the Army-McCarthy hearings were underway when I got here. That's what I remember. I can talk a little bit about that, because that was the first Cold War sort of experience I had, and, of course, … if you remember, I believe that one of the guys that McCarthy was after was this Army general at Camp Kilmer, and, of course, Camp Kilmer was right here and everybody knew him. … In fact, Cliff Ellis might have dated the daughter of that general, back in those days. [Editor's

Note: Brigadier General Ralph W. Zwicker, the commanding officer of Camp Kilmer, was called before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy, in February 1954 to answer questions relating to an Army dentist previously under Zwicker's command. McCarthy's verbal abuse of Zwicker during the hearing caused a public backlash and added to animosity building between the Senator and the Army. The Army-McCarthy Hearings, which ran from March to June of 1954, initiated over a separate dispute, were televised nationally and led to the demise of Senator McCarthy's political career.]

SI: Yes?

RB: He might have mentioned that, but, anyway, we were all into that sort of thing, because there were some professors here who'd been blacklisted. I had a very good teacher, John Ciardi, who was a poet and … he'd been on the blacklist. So, everybody was, you know, into that. … Of course, then, I found out more about it later, when I got in the diplomatic service and went to work in Latin America and saw what had happened to some of our libraries from those days, with ideological changes that McCarthyism brought in, some stuff. … I can talk a little bit about the Cold War in general, if you'd like to hear some of that.

SI: Sure.

RB: Or take a break. …

SI: Do you want to take a break now?

RB: I'm okay.

SI: Okay. Yes, we will get into that when we get into Rutgers, and then, your career beyond.

RB: Okay.

SI: When you were in elementary school, but particularly in high school, what were your favorite subjects and interests?

RB: We had a bowling alley right by the high school. [laughter] So, I was always on the bowling team. I still bowl, my wife bowls; we've always been bowlers. The bell would ring and you'd run to the bowling alley, once a week, … when the high school teams were playing. Of course, you didn't have your own bowling ball in those days, so, you used a house ball. So, sometimes, I'd go over to the bowling alley the night before. When the men finished their bowling, I'd find my ball and I'd hide it in one of those ashtrays in a column thing. You could lift the top off, put the ball in there, and then, when the bell rang and you could go out after school to your bowling league, I could get over there and, usually, get my ball before somebody else got it. So, I had bowling, yes. Spear fishing, we went out all the time. We had all kinds of spear fishing stories, about sharks and barracudas, and did a lot of that in the pre-scuba days. I pitched softball. I got into fast-pitch softball in high school and later in Costa Rica. We did a lot of, you know, like I said, Scouts and camping. …

SI: How far did you go with the Scouts?

RB: I came to the Valley Forge Jamboree, 1950. My mom sent me up here and I was with Union County, New Jersey, and we had a training session, I think up around Lake Hopatcong, and then, we went to Valley Forge. [I] went to a Caribbean Jamboree in Jamaica in 1952. I was a First Class Scout and then, I went on into Sea Scouts after that. … In the Summer of '53, I worked up here in a Scout camp, Winnebago, up by Lake Hopatcong, up there in Northern New Jersey. My mom got a job that summer as the camp nurse and I went up and worked in the kitchen. The year before that, I'd gone to a camp called Camp Wawayanda. I don't know if anybody ever heard of that. That was somewhere out in the mountains of Northern New Jersey, Sussex County. So, I did have that experience. … When I went to Valley Forge, I was the kid from Aruba who was originally from Elizabeth attached to these guys. So, that was a lot of fun back then, and that was the start of the Korean War. I remember being at Valley Forge, and then, seeing these, oh, they put up these pictures and stuff, and I think Truman came by or something. … Nobody knew where Korea was. [Editor's Note: The 1950 National Boy Scouts of America Jamboree in Valley Forge opened on June 27, 1950, two days after the start of the Korean War. President Truman addressed the Jamboree attendees on June 30th.]

SI: What were the pictures of?

RB: The war starting, war pictures, the Korean War starting. … It was kind of interesting; when I got to Rutgers, I didn't know anybody. … I think I came in a week early, for freshman orientation, and there was some big outdoor thing here, with the deans or the faculty talking to us. … A kid came up and said, "Hey, Ray," and it was a kid I'd worked with the summer before in summer camp. Suddenly, I knew somebody, you know. So, we went and we'd eat at the Commons for a while, and he, eventually, dropped off. … Then, there was another kid who worked for the *Targum*, who said to me, "Hey," he said, "I interviewed you for the *Elizabeth Daily Journal* when you were at Valley Forge." I said, "You did?" so, just these kinds of connections.

SI: Before we leave Aruba, just a general question; are there any aspects of living in that kind of environment, in this corporate colony, that, now, looking back, stand out as being unique?

RB: Well, yes. … I had no experience with blacks, for example, didn't know them. So, when I got up here, it wasn't like I'd grown up in the South or the North or anything. The only black kids we knew were caddies at the golf course, and they were the people "out there." So, there was a sort of … artificiality to that growing up that insulated you and, you know, had some effect, I think. So, I think that, in my time, I don't feel that I've had some of the type of hang-ups that people who grew up in mixed communities, in the South and places like that, would have carried with them. Now, obviously, from the parents' side, once in a while, you might hear something, … this "them" and "us" sort of thing, like that. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Coming towards the end of your high school career, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do, if you wanted to go on to college? Were you encouraged to go on to college?

RB: Yes, yes. … Most of the kids I graduated with went to college, because their parents were technicians and people who'd been trained and a lot of them had university degrees. So, a number of us went to college, others went in the Army, some of the others got jobs. A couple of them got jobs locally for a little while, with the refinery, … or went to the States and worked, but I was definitely on the college program and I'd wanted to get into journalism. So, I applied to Northwestern … and, since [I had] the New Jersey connection, I applied to Rutgers, and one or two other places, I guess.

GF: Why were you interested in journalism?

RB: Well, … in high school, I'd write. I was writing, doing some sports, and we had a weekly high school paper and I wrote a gossip column for a little bit. [laughter] I was always sort of the kid who was getting the news and passing it on, you know.

GF: Was there a local paper for the Aruban colony?

RB: Yes. … We had a *Pan Aruban*, which was a Saturday paper, and I worked for that a little bit, when I was still in high school. I remember interviewing Jack Kramer, the tennis player. He and Pancho Gonzales, they came down, back in the early '50s, with Tony Trabert, on a tour to play in different places. … They were staying in the bachelor quarters and I went down with the sportswriter and interviewed them. I remember that. So, that … sort of got me that way.

SI: Was the *Pan Aruban* only distributed to the people in the colony?

RB: No, those from outside could buy it. … In my first year of college up here, of course, you know, you took the basic courses first, so, … really, your major wasn't decided at the beginning. You had to have two years of a science, two years of a language and some basic liberal arts courses. So, my first summer job, I went home and I worked on the refinery newspaper. They put out a biweekly paper called the *Aruba Esso News*, which was … all refinery stuff, and it was in both English and the local Papiamento language, and I worked the first summer on that job. …

SI: Had you learned to speak the local language?

RB: I took Spanish. We had local Spanish teachers. … When I was a kid, I took Spanish and I took Spanish in high school, I took it in college. I think I still can handle it pretty good, but we picked up; Papiamento is a mixture of Spanish and a little bit of Dutch, and, sort of, I would call it "coastal Spanish," slang Spanish or Creole Spanish. So, you knew some of the words that you could use … and you could sort of read it, if you had studied Spanish, but it wasn't something that we spoke, no. [Editor's Note: The Papiamento language is also influenced by Portuguese, French, Arawak Indian and African languages.]

SI: How did you decide on Rutgers?

RB: I guess it was in my folks being from New Jersey, and they knew people here. … My mom had a friend who worked in the bank in New Brunswick. There was another family from Aruba … who retired and … lived out on Easton Avenue for a while. So, there were some people I knew, and then, [I had] been to these Scout things up here and I had an uncle, … my uncle and aunt, lived in Colonia, New Jersey, which isn't far, and I had another aunt who lived up in the Oranges, up in East Orange, that we'd visit. So, we had relatives around. … So, I would say it was the family connection that [did it].

DF: What kind of reputation did Rutgers have? When you would tell people in the Aruban colony, "I am going to Rutgers," did they know what you were talking about?

RB: Oh, yes. Well, a lot of them did, and it was fine, yes, it was good. … Sometimes, when I did something up here, … they put it in the paper down there, like, when I got a track trophy, they put it in. When I ran cross-country, we used to run the ICAAAA [Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletes of America] meets in Van Cortlandt Park, New York, and I'd send home the results. … They'd put a little article down there in the paper; so, yes.

DF: They still have those meets now.

RB: They do, don't they? yes.

SI: Can you tell us how you came to Rutgers and what your first few days and weeks were like at Rutgers?

RB: Okay, well, … my folks left me off at Hegeman Hall and they got back in their car and they said goodbye and they went on vacation. … They went out to Cleveland, Ohio, to visit relatives and see the World Series, and said, "We'll stop by and see you on the way back." … I went into that dormitory and I didn't know anybody, and it was all football players and they called me "Bones." [laughter] So, one of the reasons I'm back now is, I know the football players and … they're the ones who are the key reunion guys.

DF: Were you put in Hegeman because you were an athlete?

RB: No. …

DF: Just a coincidence?

RB: Just a coincidence. I just fell in there, but I pledged a fraternity. I belonged to Gamma Sigma Fraternity, which, I don't know what it is today, it was an independent fraternity in those days and had all kinds of interesting people in it. … So, I got in with those guys my freshman year.

DF: For both the fraternity and Rutgers in general, did you have to go through any hazing or rituals?

RB: Well, … when you're a freshman, you wore a beanie. [laughter] You know, it sounds pretty funny in this day and age, and they'd have a freshman-sophomore tug of war. There was a big field by the old [gym], by the basketball court over here, and there'd be some [activities]. I don't know, we'd play some tug of war and there'd be some games or something like that, or volleyball or something like that. … When you were a pledge, now, … they didn't paddle me, but other fraternities had that, but you had to do little chores and things like that.

GF: Where was Gamma Sigma located?

RB: Right where it is today, 19 Union Street.

GF: Okay. You said one of the reasons you chose it was the interesting people. Were there other reasons?

RB: Oh, yes. Well, it was [after] I'd met a couple of people in class, and it was an independent fraternity, so, it didn't have all the ritual and the Greek stuff and all that stuff. I wasn't [into that], you know. … It was also the only fraternity that had blacks in it then, and had other foreign students, and they also had people who just ate over there. So, they told me, "Look, you can come on over and eat and you can see if you want to join or not." So, I went over there and it was very intellectual, very stimulating. We had a lot of guys, we had a piano, and I ended up moving over there after my freshman year and lived there the next three years.

DF: Were there housemothers or anything like that?

RB: We had a housemother, Mrs. Johnson. Oh, she was revered and she was the one who you went to when things were dire. … The one thing I remember a lot about it was, I was the … fraternity steward. So, for a couple of years, I was in charge of collecting the food money from everybody. Now, you could … eat for free if you washed dishes. … So, people [would] take turns being the dishwasher, and then, those meals wouldn't cost them, but I'd go around and do all the collecting.

DF: Who did the shopping? Who picked up the groceries or food supplies?

RB: You know, I don't remember. I think we had a committee, or something like that, and I basically handled the finances, took the money.

GF: Did you guys have events or, say, dances?

RB: Oh, yes. There was the Military Ball that they had. You all … moved out of the fraternity and girls moved in. Different now; they're there already, [laughter] but you'd all move out, it was this time of year, May, and you'd go live in a dorm for a day or two, and then, your date would live in the fraternity. … They'd have block parties and, after football games, you'd go down to the fraternity houses and there'd be kegs of beer and chugalugging, in those days.

DF: On those Saturday afternoons on campus, did everything revolve around the football games and, pretty much, would most people on campus attend the football games?

RB: I think so, I think so. … In the fall, that was pretty much [the case]. You really knew the change of seasons. When spring came, when it was, like, exam time, you went to the shore. If you could get away, you went to the shore, you know, and everybody got out and sunbathed and played the music outside. In the wintertime, [there were] some good snowball fights and there were some times, with the football, when it got [rowdy]. I remember, … one time, the deans came around to the fraternities and said, "Look, we're playing Boston College, and these kids are rough, you know. Don't let them hang around the place too long and, you know, take it easy on all the drinking," and so on, and so forth, but there wasn't any drug culture in those days. It was mainly [alcohol], it was cigarettes. Everybody smoked. A lot of people smoked. I didn't. I was running. I couldn't. I picked that habit up later.

SI: Did Rutgers not have ties with beer and cigarette companies, like Rheingold, I believe?

RB: I don't remember, … but I'll tell you one interesting Rutgers story here. In the Summer of 1957, I stayed here and I worked for American Can Company, on the Pulaski Skyway, up in Jersey City. My folks let me have a car. I bought an old Dodge for three hundred bucks at the end of my junior year, and several of us in the fraternity, … there's a boy named John Gideonse, whose dad [Harry Gideonse] was the president of Brooklyn College for a while, and he had connections with American Can Company. … John said that American Can Company was hiring summer help, because they got a lot more work in the summer; they've got to make all these beer cans. [laughter] … They would pay pretty good, back in those days, I don't know, maybe, five bucks an hour, or something like that, four or five bucks an hour. … They needed people, like, for a four-to-twelve shift. So, me and about three or four other guys from the fraternity lived in a place called "the Co-op," which was on Somerset Street then, that summer, and I would drive in, we'd drive in, about four of us, to Jersey City, punch the clock in at four o'clock. I worked on a spot welding machine. I welded keys on coffee lids. You'd pick up the key thing and put it here, and then, the cylinder, and then, you put the can lids here, and then, this big cylinder thing would turn around and punch, punch, punch. Then, they'd come out the other side and you'd stack them, and the idea was, you never stopped. It was that kind of machine work. … Then, a couple of times, I worked in the beer line, where the beer cans would come rolling down from the floor above. They'd come down, and then, you'd pack them in a box. They had no lids on them, yet, and you'd flip the box over and they'd put it on a cart, and then, they went to the brewery, where they got the beer and the lid on them, and you'd work from four o'clock to twelve o'clock. They'd give you a half-hour break to eat, and there was an inspector and your machine had a counter on it and there was a union steward who checked around. Then, twelve o'clock, you'd get off and come home, and there was a bar on Easton Avenue called Herm's and Herm was pretty good. He'd let you in underage, to drink, if you had somebody with you who was twenty-one. … In those days, they had ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] agents and these agents would sometimes come around Rutgers, around the campus, to see if they could catch kids drinking under twenty-one, or get the bartender that way. So, the bartender, you'd go in there and he'd say, he knew I wasn't twenty-one, … "Okay, just come with Bob, or somebody else who's of age, and, if the agent comes in, you just slide your beer over to him and I'll pour you something else." [laughter] So, we'd get off work at midnight. We'd get in my car, come back to Rutgers as quick as we could. Herm's closed at one-thirty, you'd get in there about ten to one and you could get six oysters on the half shell for twenty-five cents and you'd get a couple of

draft beers, and you might still catch the end of the ballgame, or something like that, or something on TV. … Then, at one-thirty, when he closed, you'd get yourself a quart of beer in a cardboard container and you'd go back to the room and solve all the problems of the world, until about three in the morning. … Then, you go to bed and get up around eleven, get a bite to eat and go to work. That was a great time.

DF: Was there ever an instance in which one of those inspectors came around and you had to pretend you were not drinking?

RB: Well, not quite, but similar. [laughter] It was, I guess it might have been the start of my senior year, and we were all out at Herm's Bar when these bunch of kids came over from the dorm with a guy who was twenty-one. I don't know who he was. He was maybe a freshman, maybe he'd been a veteran, but they weren't regulars. They came in and we were sitting there, drinking, and they came in and this guy wanted [to get drinks], and Herm threw them out, because they weren't old enough to drink. [laughter] I sat there, and I think he let the guy who was twenty-one take some away, but he wouldn't serve these kids, and there were stories of these people checking like that. …

SI: How was the relationship between your fraternity and the administration? Was the administration constantly trying to crack down on fraternities?

RB: No, I don't recall that. The thing I do recall is the fact that we were an independent fraternity. So, we were a little bit at odds with the other fraternities by not being "totally Greek" to them, you know.

SI: What would be some of the differences that would set you apart?

RB: Well, the ritual. We didn't do much in the way of that, and then, we didn't have any national organization. You know, there weren't any fraternity alumni coming back. It was just all local stuff.

DF: Your fraternity did not take part in inter-fraternity sports or the fraternity dances or anything like that.

RB: No, just Military Ball, we'd do, but I'll just tell you one other little sidelight from that summer. One of the guys who was working with me then was a fellow named Lucas Samaras, I don't know if you've heard of Lucas Samaras, but he's a famous artist. He's a painter of renown in New York and he came to Rutgers on an art scholarship. Allan Kaprow was the guru of the Art Department in those days, and Lucas was a Greek-American and he was in the fraternity and worked with us that summer. … He was painting, he was doing canvasses, he was going through stages of stuff like that, and he said he'd do a portrait of me, just for the fun of it, and, if I liked it, I could buy it, maybe. So, I remember, a few nights, going up, after getting the beer at Herm's, and going up there and sitting there, and he painted. … This got finished and everything and didn't look like me. He said, "I was interested in the color of the eyes," and stuff like that. … I said, "Well, what do you want?" He said, "Well," he said, "I [will] tell you what. I'll sell it to you for thirty dollars." Thirty dollars is a lot of money then. I said, "No, Lucas." I said, "What

are you going to do [with it]?" He said, "Well, I'll just scrape it off and do something else." I said, "Okay." Well, that was 1957. 1963, I was living in Izmir, Turkey, where I was teaching English, with a wife and one little kid, and I bought *Time* Magazine and he had a four-page spread. If I'd only invested those thirty dollars; it's one of those little Rutgers vignettes. [laughter]

SI: Wow. When you came here, you majored in journalism.

RB: Yes. Professor Jennings, I remember, in those days, and … one of the real good things about the Rutgers "J School" [was], you took a course in newspaper design and newspaper layout. We had a layout type of course, where the kids got together and decided [the layout]. We had an AP [Associated Press] ticker, so [that] you'd know the stories of the day, and you'd get together and you'd lay out the front page and you'd decide, "What's the main story?" and you'd make the paper up. … Then, the professor, Jennings, would go down to the railroad station and he'd get the *Newark Star Ledger* and he'd come back and you'd compare with the pros. … Then, you'd discuss … the different decisions, and there'd always be discussion before you put the thing together. … I just remember one thing, back then. … One day, when I was the editor of something, the news was there was an earthquake somewhere, there was a plane crash somewhere, and Elvis Presley'd gone in the Army. … I looked there and I said, "You've got to put Elvis Presley on the front page, going in the Army." "What?" I said, "Do it;" Jennings went and got the paper, sure enough, that was the big story. So, it was that kind of stuff. … I wrote for the *Targum,* sometimes, did some writing for *Targum*. We had a fraternity brother, a year ahead of me, named [H. Joseph] "Doc" Volz, Joe Volz. He was the editor for a while. So, I, sometimes, … wrote the cross-country stories, once in a while. I wrote a couple of other things I've got home in a scrapbook. I wrote an article about the Schanck Observatory, eightieth [ninetieth] anniversary, and, one time, they discovered copper mines around here, a copper mine shaft, and I wrote up something about that.

SI: Probably right down here.

RB: Yes. Mine Street, is there a Mine Street still?

SI: There is a Mine Street, and, from what I hear, Van Dyck Hall, the building the History Department is in, it is in their basement. Below the building, there are mines.

RB: Yes, copper, copper. I think about copper today, people are stealing it left and right, you know. [laughter] Maybe you ought to reopen some of that.

SI: What were the focuses of the *Targum* then? I mean, today, there is a lot of state and world news.

RB: None of that, none of that, only local.

SI: Just collegiate-type issues.

RB: Yes, yes.

DF: Today, in the *Targum*, they have an editorial page and, usually, there is a heated back-and-forth discussion.

RB: Yes, there was some of that.

DF: Was that a big deal, politics on campus?

RB: There was a period here, and it was actually before I got here, when all the veterans came back from World War II, … and it lasted up until, when I came here, it was Korean War guys, then, but there was an older group, after the war. … That's when this fraternity got started, independent, because a lot of these older guys were more independent and didn't want to get into this kind of [stuff], into the whole, you know, deep fraternity stuff. So, there was one time when there was some big argument going on, … I guess between the fraternities and the independent guys, and the veterans were being criticized and they had a night called the "Rain of Terror." Did you ever hear of the "Rain of Terror?"

SI: A little bit.

RB: Where all the veterans went down and peed on the *Targum* Building. [laughter] That was a big story when I got here, still.

SI: There were still a lot of veterans on campus when you were here.

RB: Yes, and then, they'd come in from the Korean War. There were quite a few of them, and, of course, Camp Kilmer was here. … When the Hungarian Revolution was on, that was big stuff around here. The Hungarians came to Camp Kilmer. So, you saw [them]; that had an impact. Everybody knew about that, … but the *Targum* was local stuff, yes.

SI: Do you remember what the issues were that were debated in the *Targum*?

RB: Well, I remember, with the McCarthy stuff, early, they were in on [that]. That went on. I think there were questions about girls attending Rutgers, "Could the Coopies come over to class or not? [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson is referring to women from the New Jersey College for Women, nicknamed the "Coop."] … Was that integration type [action] going to take place?" There was always a bit of tension between the townies and the Rutgers people, too, and there was a commuting group. You got to know who the commuters were, because they didn't live here, you know. Of course, you had Newark-Rutgers, but nobody heard much about that, and Trenton State Teacher's College, too, but Princeton was … the big foe. You'd have the Princeton-Rutgers football games. We went down there. My freshman year, I think, … a guy in our fraternity, Doc Volz, had a hearse and we got on the halftime show at Palmer Stadium. That was back before the Scarlet Knight; it was a chanticleer, [the Rutgers mascot]. … We went down there and the plan was that we'd go down there and the Chanticleer would be dancing around and singing, or something like that, and then, somebody'd go shoot him and we'd put him in the hearse and drive around the stadium and out the back. So, we did it, but … they were

having a hazing week at Princeton and all these kids there, they had bags of water and oranges and stuff like that, and, boy, we got pelted. [laughter]

SI: Did it not change during your time here from the Chanticleer to the Knight?

RB: Yes, yes. After the first year, we weren't chickens anymore. [laughter]

DF: Was that popular among the students, to change the mascot?

RB: Yes, yes.

DF: They welcomed that.

RB: … Yes. Well, you know, it had been the Chanticleer. … I forget what dance they did with it, the struts, or something like that [the Charleston]. The Scarlet Knights, that hit pretty good. Now, I was told how that started. Bill [William] Whitacre said he wrote it up, he was a quarterback on the football team, and that they picked it up from the Knights of "the Black Knights of the Hudson," which was the Army team. … Our football team never [did that well]. The only time they got really good was the year after I left, the year I was gone. When I went to graduate school, they were up there in the top levels, but those days, we were Lehigh, Lafayette, Rutgers. They were the [main competitors]. When we drove in yesterday, we came across through Allentown, that way, and I was telling my wife, Ruth, "You know, this was Lehigh, Bethlehem, Easton; that was the level that we went at." Penn State was the big one that you went out to, but Rutgers didn't have a level of program that they do now, and, certainly, girls didn't play basketball in those days. I mean, they did. In Aruba, we had a girls' basketball team, when I was a kid, but this was not a girls' campus at that time at all.

DF: Did you attend a lot of men's basketball games?

RB: Yes, yes.

DF: Was that also popular?

RB: Yes, and they had guys who … became famous basketball players. Remember, Chuck Forte, from Colombia, was good, and Jerry West. Like, maybe Jerry West was after, but there was another West Virginia guy that played before that, Hot Rod Hundley … and I went into the NIT [National Invitation Tournament] games, once or twice. See, we'd go into Madison Square Garden. … Our track team would run an indoor in Madison Square Garden, sometimes, … in an event, and, then, you'd stay to watch the track meet at night.

DF: Was that the Millrose Games?

RB: Yes, yes, and then, you'd stay to watch the games. We'd run in the afternoon, handicap race, or something like that, … or we'd run at the armory, and then, we'd go and maybe watch the Millrose Games, and then, come back, yes. … Then, we went to Penn Relays. That was a big thing. I still follow Penn Relays.

DF: In track, what were your events?

RB: Mile and two mile, yes. I never caught Cliff Ellis, but I almost caught him once. [laughter]

DF: Do you remember your personal records?

RB: I ran the 4:30s, and I ran the two mile close to ten minutes. I lettered. I scored points, and, in cross-country, I was second for the team in the last meet of my career. … I was scoring all the time, not first, but always getting something.

DF: I do not know if they did it in kilometers back then. How long was the race?

RB: Okay. When we were freshman, the freshman team ran in Buccleuch Park, two-and-a-half-miles, and the varsity ran out at the Heights. Joe Makin was the coach. You started your race in the old football stadium. You went up out the back gate, and then, up the hill, and then, went around, I forget, [the] Microbiology Building was out there somewhere, and other buildings, and you eventually came back and it was five miles. … All the away meets were five miles and we ran several times at Van Cortlandt Park. I got down to about twenty-eight minutes at that. So, it was a lot of fun.

SI: Was it difficult to keep up with your academic schedule, your athletic schedule and your social schedule?

RB: … Well, a couple of things. You know, you'd be tired from training and not want to do the homework, … but it all eventually worked in, but I tell people, and I [will] put this on the record about schools today, you know, I was at Rutgers for four years. I never made an "A," never made an "F," but I was a "B" student and I went to graduate school and got a master's degree. … You know, I see people now, they get [in the mindset of], "Oh, everybody's got to have an 'A.'" … I never got an "A," I never got an "F," and I was terrible in science, but I was good in Spanish. So, when I'd get the "D" in biology, I'd get the "B" in Spanish, [laughter] but they made you take these courses. You had to have the basic courses. … Your science course was a big course with a whole bunch of people, then, you had labs, and the professors knew that a bunch of us were taking this stuff because we had to. … The first thing I decided was, "I'm going to take the easiest science course I can." So, I took [a look and said], "Well, they've got geology and geography." I said, "Well, that's great. Geography, that's good. I can handle that. I've lived around, you know, been here, been there, world's round." [laughter] So, I signed up and I went into the first class and the professor was an old European guy who was big on Karst topography from Europe, and he said, "I know a lot of you are here just because you think that this is going to be an easy course, but it's not." So, the first thing they did was send us out to survey stuff, and I was sent out to Buccleuch Park, where I was running cross-country. I should have known what the hills were. I couldn't read a map. I couldn't read these contour lines. They meant nothing to me. … Are they up? Are they down? I had to get some help, and I squeezed by. … Rutgers was a demanding school. I mean, you had to do the work and you had to read a lot of stuff and … you had blue book exams at the end of the year, and the hard thing for me was, the exams'd be in January. Well, I'd go home to Aruba for Christmas. Sure, I took the books, but, hey, there's

two weeks of partying going on on the beaches and it's summertime again. You've been in wintertime. You'd come back on a plane, the first days of January, and you've got a week or ten days, and then, exams are coming up. Of course, you've erased everything out of your mind that had happened all fall, have to get back to it. That was not easy, that was not easy, but I found, when I went to graduate school, directly from here, that I'd had a good background and that I didn't think that graduate school was as hard as the undergraduate had been. …

GF: You talked about one of your favorite professors being blacklisted, John …

RB: Ciardi.

GF: What did he teach?

RB: Poetry. He was poetry editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature.* … He'd translated *Dante's Inferno* and was famous for that. He'd written a critical report in *The Saturday Review*. I don't think *The Saturday Review* exists any more. [Editor's Note: *The Saturday Review in Literature* ceased publication in 1986.] … *The Saturday Review of Literature,* Norman Cousins was the publisher and Ciardi was the poetry editor, and he'd written a critical attack, sort of, on Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who had written some books, and this was like striking out at an icon. … He was criticized for hitting a butterfly with a baseball bat and stuff like that, but he was a terrific professor. … I took a creative writing course with him and a poetry course … when I was a junior in college and I can still remember when the exam came up. He wrote some exam questions on the board, and then, he left. He left. So, we all looked around and everybody started to do what they wanted to do and, after a while, he came back with a big sack of candy, [laughter] you know, and he'd give you little things and make you work. … He was with this Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. So, he'd sometimes bring in outside people. I can still remember hearing Robert Frost, over at the chapel, one time, reading poetry; stimulating. [Editor's Note: The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference is an esteemed writers' conference held once a year at the Bread Loaf Inn near Bread Loaf Mountain in Vermont; Robert Frost was closely associated with the conference.] … Then, I took another course, called "Readings in the Novel," when I was a senior. … Once a week, you had a class. A graduate student would give you [your instruction]. You'd read a novel a week, and then, you'd go to class and you'd discuss it and get into it and write something about it, and go on to the next one, like that. That was interesting. American history course, I had a class in Bishop House. I loved it. It was right near the dorm my freshman year. I had a freshman class in Bishop House, and then, later on, I had an American history class and that was good. That was pretty good stuff.

SI: Do any of those professors stand out?

RB: Well, I didn't have Edward McNall Burns, who's probably the most famous Rutgers one. I didn't have him. I had another guy whose name I forget, but … I do remember American history, having to do a paper. I did a paper on the Indian Wars, or something like the Indian Wars in the West, that I kept some of those and looked back on them years later. They're pretty primitive. [laughter]

DF: Just out of curiosity, what exactly were the allegations against Ciardi, the professor, which got him blacklisted?

RB: I don't know if it was people he knew out there in those days. … I'm not really sure, because it had happened; when I got here, he was known for having had that happen to him in '53.

DF: Was it something people took seriously or just shrugged off?

RB: Oh, yes. No, it was [serious]. When they got into the persecuting after the General, then, it became local, the McCarthy hearings and stuff.

SI: Was that something people would watch every day and follow every day?

RB: Yes, yes, follow, pretty much, okay.

SI: It is interesting that Ciardi came here when Rutgers was also known for letting two professors go who had been blacklisted or had ties to Communism. Did you know about that case, I think it was a little earlier, when President Lewis Webster Jones let them go? [Editor's Note: In the early 1950s, under President Lewis Webster Jones, three Rutgers University faculty members, Professor Simon W. Heimlich, Professor Moses I. Finley, and Professor Abraham Glasser, who refused to testify before Congressional committees investigating Communists were either dismissed or pressured into resigning.]

RB: I might have heard about it, but it doesn't stay with me.

GF: You were talking earlier about the sense of community on Aruba, because it was so small. Also, when we were walking in, you were talking about how Rutgers is much bigger now. I was wondering about the sense of community at Rutgers and in New Brunswick, if it seemed much bigger than what you were dealing with in Aruba.

RB: … Yes, when I came here, it seemed bigger than what I'd been [accustomed to], of course, because I think the freshman class was, like, about, I don't know, like nine hundred, or something like that. … I remember one thing; the freshman orientation week, they got us in Demarest Hall, one time, maybe just those of us who were living over here, and the dean came in and he said to us, he said, "You know, you're here," and he said, "I want you to look at the guy to your left and I want you to look at the guy to your right. … Four years from now, only one of you's going to be here. The other two'll be gone. Is it going to be you?" [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson gulps hard.] … Then, I remember one other time, … see, my first year, they had probation. It was 3.25 [grade point average that] put you on probation. … A "1" was an "A" and a "4" was a "D." I don't know what it is now. … My freshman year, I was 3.21, instead of 3.25, but I kept getting better after that. … I remember, things were [grim]. You know, I was down and feeling bad and I was thinking of transferring to the University of Miami, because I had friends down there from Aruba. … You had to go to compulsory chapel once a week, and I remember going in there and the dean got up, I don't know [if] it was Dean [Cornelius B.] Boocock, or one of those deans got up, and he said, "Look," he said, "you guys, … I know, this time of year, things

are tough and some of you think you're not going to make it, but you can make it, or we wouldn't have let you in here in the first place." So, I went back home and I kept thinking, "They wouldn't have let me in if I couldn't do it, okay, okay." So, I still remember that. … My Spanish teacher, he was [memorable]. The Spanish House was just around the corner from Gamma Sigma, on the other side there. I had a Mexican, Doctor Jose Vasquez-Amaral and we'd speak Spanish. … He used to come out, once in a while, out to the stadium and he'd work out, just to stay in shape, and we'd chat in Spanish. So, that was all long ago.

SI: The compulsory chapel, was that just a convocation for announcements or was it a service?

RB: I think there might have been, like, a prayer, but there wasn't any sermon or anything like that. It was more of a …

SI: Like a class meeting.

RB: Yes, yes, but it was compulsory, chapel. … Sometimes, they had a program as part of it.

SI: Would they have guest speakers?

RB: Maybe have a guest speaker, yes.

DF: Did you know any of the deans? I know you mentioned your Spanish professor.

RB: Well, Mason Gross was famous, because he was on TV, as the answer man. [Editor's Note: Mason Gross, a Professor of Philosophy, was Provost during Mr. Burson's undergraduate days and became President of Rutgers University in 1959. He appeared on the television game shows *Think Fast* and *Two for the Money* in the late 1940s and early 1950s as an expert and/or judge.]

DF: Did you know any personally, have a meal with them, talk to them often, anything like that?

RB: No. Dean Boocock, we knew, but [on a] very casual basis.

SI: You mentioned that your fraternity was somewhat at odds with other official Greek fraternities. What form did that take? How did that manifest itself?

RB: Well, I think, sometimes, they'd vote on activities, or something, you know, and we'd stay out of it. … We were the only ones that had blacks when I was first [in], my first year or two here, and then, I think, eventually, some of the others did. Now, we had several, but we were the only ones. …

SI: Was there still the religious segregation of the fraternities? Were there Jewish fraternities and so forth?

RB: Yes, oh, yes, the Zeta, Zeta what, Zeta something, was a Jewish fraternity. …

SI: ZBT [Zeta Beta Tau].

RB: Yes, and then, there were kids that were in fraternities because their dad had come here and gone to the fraternity, or something like that, you know, and there were "jock houses." Some of them were more for the football players.

GF: Did you stay friends with the football players that you knew from Hegeman?

RB: Yes, a couple of them. I've seen Bobby [Robert] Max, I've seen [him] a couple of times, and there [are] others I'll see [today], that I haven't seen in fifty years. I'll see several of them.

DF: Do they still call you "Bones?"

RB: Yes, they might, you know. [laughter] Yes, I was known as one of the Hegeman crowd.

SI: What was dorm life like then?

RB: Well, the football players all went off to practice, and Bob [Robert] Lusardi was one of them, who, with Jack Canal … lived next-door to me, and Bobby [Robert] Bear and Bobby Max on the other side. … One night a week, we might go over swimming at the pool. … I remember, one time, I went over there to go swimming and … I'd been running hard. I'd had a hard, hard workout, and I was bragging to these guys that I could swim down to the end of the pool and back underwater. It was twenty-five, each way, and I shouldn't have done that. I mean, I could have [drowned]. It wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't had worked out real hard, but we went over there and I went in, and I knew, in those days, … you'd hyperventilate a bit before you swam underwater, and, on the way back, I had just come to the ladder and I passed out. … I sank to the bottom of the pool and one of them jumped in and pulled me out. … The next thing I knew, there I was, at the side of the pool. I was embarrassed. I said to myself, you know, "Caribbean skin diver dies in college pool, [laughter] you know, drowns in college pool." … If they hadn't pulled me out, the guys hadn't jumped in, the football players hadn't jumped in, [I would have drowned]. They said, "You just got there and reached for the ladder, and, 'Brrrrrrr,' all your air went out and down you went." [laughter]

DF: Did they pretty much respect that you were able to swim back and forth?

RB: Oh, they had fun.

DF: Were they on your case about it?

RB: … No, they were a little scared, too, I think.

DF: It was a serious thing.

RB: Yes, yes.

SI: Did you have to take ROTC when you were here?

RB: Yes, I did, Air Force ROTC. Two years, I took it, had a uniform and went to class and tried to do little navigation projects and stuff like that. I guess the thing I liked about it was the uniform. I mean, hey, I had a nice, warm coat, you know, extra pair of shoes, didn't have to buy them, but everybody was [in ROTC]. ROTC was standard stuff, back in those days.

SI: Why did you choose the Air Force?

RB: Well, I figured that if I ever came to the military, I'd probably be 4-F with my glasses, with my vision, and Air Force [ROTC] just seemed a little more intellectual than Army ROTC, maybe. At least I'd be into reading, airplanes and maps.

SI: Did you think about going on to Advanced ROTC?

RB: No, although I did later work for the military, Air Force. Okay, … we can move on.

SI: Okay. Do you have to be somewhere?

RB: No, no.

GF: After Rutgers, you went on to the University of Missouri for graduate school in journalism.

RB: Yes.

GF: The University of Missouri has a reputation for being a very good journalism school. Did it have the same reputation then?

RB: Today, it does, I think, and I went out there and … Missouri University was having the fiftieth anniversary of their journalism school. … The editor, or the owner, of the *New Brunswick Daily News* came out there and I think he offered me a job. … I was taking J school, but they were making me repeat what I'd done here and work on the local paper. So, I thought, "Well, if I'm going to [get a degree], it doesn't make any sense to do this stuff in J school." [At] the graduate school out there, the J students had already been working on papers and [had] come back for their master's degree. I said, "I really ought to, you know, stay with this and get a master's degree, but, if I really want to, right now, do journalism, I might [as well] go back to New Brunswick and have a job." So, I switched to the English Department and got a master's degree. I got a master's degree. So, when I went into the work force, I had a graduate degree. … All my life, when … the job came up and me and the other person had equal qualifications and experience, and I had the other degree, I got the job. … I recommend, you know, [to] anybody, if they've got the ability and the time, get the education, get … at least one graduate degree, if you can, or while you're working, right away. … I tell these people out in Missouri, these kids [who] are graduating from high school, I said, "Look," I said, "the only thing I can tell you about what I've done with my life is, I got the education first and took it from there."

DF: Going back to your applying to the University and preparing for graduate school, did you have to take a standardized test, like the GREs [Graduate Record Examination] or anything?

RB: No, no.

GF: Was it commonplace for people to go for the master's in journalism?

RB: Yes, yes, but, usually, … most of the ones that I was with had … done some writing and their newspapers would help them pay for their graduate degree. So, I switched over to English and got back into novels and all that stuff and started out my career as an English teacher, and then, eventually, got back into the journalism side.

SI: Before you made the switch to English, did you just see yourself becoming a copywriter or a reporter, or doing something else?

RB: Yes, reporting. I can move on and we can expand on that, at this point. When I got out of graduate school, I took a job in South America as a teaching fellow on a grant, … with a … bi-national cultural center in Cali, Colombia. … My fiancée, Ruth, was at MU, and she had just gotten a degree in education. … I got down there and I said, "Jeez, if I can get you a job down here, maybe we can even get married and live happily ever after." So, I went to the American School, and this is one of these crazy things in life, that you wonder about the [world], if there's some bigger powers, but I went to the American School and I said, "Where's the principal? I want to talk to him, see if I can get … my future wife a job." "Oh, he's not here." "Oh, man, where is he?" "He's in the States, in summer school." "Oh, no. Where?" "University of Missouri." I said, "So is Ruth." [laughter] … I sent a telegram to her. I said, "Go find this guy." She went, got an interview, got a job, came down, taught a year of school. We got married. We're still together, but, heck, he could have been in graduate school anywhere.

DF: How did you meet your wife?

RB: We sat next to each other in Shakespeare class, because it was alphabetical and her name was Burlison and mine was Burson. [laughter] …

SI: What was that year in Colombia like?

RB: Well, I was there two years, the first time, and [Santiago de] Cali, Colombia, was not a drug haven in those days. … There was unrest and some guerilla stuff, that you still have today, even stronger. There was some of that. They had just gotten over the Protestant/Catholic warfare of the early '50s and late '40s. When we got married, … it was an Episcopal church, … but it was, like, non-denominational Protestant. … The reverend didn't want to marry us until we had the civil ceremony first, because they were negotiating for land for their church and they didn't want to get in any problems. So, we had banns published in Spanish, and then, when it was time to get married, we first went before a Spanish judge, who read a whole series of things, you know, "Don't let your wife run out in the street unclothed," and blah, blah, "You won't do this, you won't do that," and then, the church service the next day. … I was teaching and I got back into running down there with the guys, for a semester, ran in some local meets down there, and we'd go to the bullfights. Christmas time, they'd have a big fair. … It was a fun place. That was, of course, 1960 [to] '62, and then, came back to the States from there and got a job with English Language Services and went over to Turkey and taught English for two years at the Turkish Air

Academy. So, I was in the Air Force. I was a captain. I was a contract technical service employee with a captain rating. They gave me travel orders and I spent eight weeks at Lackland Air Force Base, waiting to go. So, … the Air Force eventually got me. [laughter]

SI: Your family was able to come with you to Turkey.

RB: Yes, yes. Our son, Matt, had been born in Colombia and our daughter, Joyce, was born in Turkey.

GF: Where is Izmir in Turkey?

RB: On the Aegean.

GF: Okay, it is more towards the east.

RB: It's in western Turkey, east of Athens, Southern Aegean, and … not far from what they … today call the Turkish Riviera, and, of course, we had all the antiquities there. Ephesus was nearby.

SI: Having grown up in Aruba and the States, did you find it much different being in the Near East?

RB: I have found, in my whole lifetime, the experience of living in a Muslim country was totally different from a Western country. You just felt it, the minarets, the way the people looked at you, the way the women were dressed, and that was just [different]. It felt alien to me, … and you see it today. I mean, it hasn't changed. I mean, it didn't feel, let me say this, it didn't feel negative, it just felt alien, and you knew you were no longer in the West, yes.

GF: In contrast, Colombia was somewhat similar.

RB: Yes, sure. It was Latin America, you know, and, when I first went down there, my folks were still in Aruba, so, I went over and saw them, while they were retiring, and then, came back. … Then, after two years in Turkey, I had a year of teaching junior college in North Carolina, then, I went into the diplomatic work and I went back to Colombia and Bogota, which was quite different from Cali, up high, and then, over to Aruba, once, on vacation, from there. So, no, Latin America, the time in Latin America was almost like home, sort of.

SI: Being in Turkey with the Air Force, was it almost, perhaps, similar to being in the colony in Aruba, where you did not have as much contact with the native culture?

RB: Well, we lived in town, and I lived in a Turkish house, in a duplex, and the landlord lived upstairs, but I worked on the base and … we studied Turkish downtown at the cultural center. … I taught Turkish Air Force guys and, sometimes, we'd go out partying with them. So, no, it was different.

SI: You were teaching the Turkish Air Force.

RB: Yes.

SI: Okay.

RB: I'll tell you a little side story about that, … and this has a little New Jersey in it, but, in whenever it was in 1962, it was the Cuban Missile Crisis. At the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was at McGuire Air Force Base, waiting for my military plane flight to Germany. I was in the bar, watching Adlai Stevenson showing the pictures of these missiles. [Editor's Note: This is Adlai Stevenson's famous confrontation with Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962.] … I'd been in Washington the day before and the taxi driver, taking me in from the airport, said, "Something's going on. The Pentagon was all lit up all last night," something like that. That [day], I was scared, and I was at McGuire Air Force Base to fly over to Rhein-Main [Air Base], Germany, me and another guy, and then, to go to Turkey. … I called up my wife in North Carolina. She was at my … folks' house in Hendersonville. She was going to come over later and I said, "Keep your eye on the news and, you know, be careful. We've got some real problems going on here," and then, they cancelled the air flights. So, we went over to get our plane, everything had stopped. Everything was cancelled. "Man, I'm [stuck]," and then, they cleared it up. We got on the plane and didn't know anything, flew, flew, flew, and got over into Germany and got off and went to bed, got up and it was all over. They'd solved the missile crisis. [I] got over to Turkey and we were teaching Turkish Air Force missile guys. There was a program called the Ibrahim II Missile Program, and we had missiles in Turkey. … We were saying, back home, "Nope, we've got the Russians out. There's no tradeoffs made," but, all of a sudden, we're over there in Turkey and all these missile guys are trying to change their jobs. We were taking the missiles out of Turkey, top secret stuff, and it wasn't until years and years later, [it] came out that they'd done a trade with missiles in Turkey, but we knew something was up. [Editor's Note: The Kennedy Administration secretly negotiated with the USSR to remove its Jupiter (Ibrahim II in Turkey) medium-range ballistic missiles from Turkey in exchange for the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba during the crisis.] We knew what had happened, because we were teaching these guys English, so [that] they could handle, you know, run these missiles, man these silos, and then, all of a sudden, they all wanted to be on submarines. [laughter] …

SI: At the time, did you associate the two?

RB: Yes. … Then, the press said, "Oh, nothing happened." Well, gee, the program just got obsolete all of a sudden? Now, nobody ever said, "Hey, this happened or that happened," but you'd figured it out, and then, years later, it came out, but … we would teach the Turks English, and then, they'd go to Lackland Air Force Base, which taught people from all over the world, and that's why I was down there for eight weeks. It was a language training program, and then, they'd come back, and, you know, fly the planes and stuff like that. I remember, … when I was first at Lackland, I said to one of the military instructors, "Why are we teaching these guys English?" and he said, "Well, we had these Italian pilots over here not too long ago and there were three of them [who] were flying in formation. … The first plane had a problem and the guy on the ground said, 'Plane number one, you've got a problem. Eject,' and all three jumped out, and we lost millions of dollars in aircraft, because the guys didn't speak enough English." So,

English is the language of the military, in that respect. So, then, of course, we trained them and the first thing they had problems with was the Greeks, [laughter] but I did that for two years, and then, … I was at Brevard College a year before I went … on with my career.

SI: Were you able to get a sense of how the Turks viewed the Americans, how they felt about you being there?

RB: Well, I remember when Kennedy was assassinated, we were over there and that was a big thing, because you heard it on the news. … I remember somebody coming to my house, Friday night, banging on the door, one of my teaching buddies. He lived about a mile down the road. My wife and I were there, and I guess we were playing Scrabble, or something, you know. We had a little kid. "Bang, bang, bang," on the door, and I opened the door and I said, "What's the matter?" and he said, "They've shot Kennedy. They've shot Kennedy." I said, "What?" … and he ran around the room. This guy said, "Kennedy's been shot. Castro might have done it," and we turned on the radio and heard it, and then, we went up to another friend's house and told him, and then, a bunch of us went down to another guy's house and told him. Oh, that night, … you could hear [that] the airplanes went on red alert and, at our jet base over there, planes were flying around. You didn't know what was going on, and the next morning, I got on the bus to go downtown to get the *Stars and Stripes.* Man, people were crying on the bus. The Turks were even shaking my hand. … In those days, that was pretty dramatic stuff.

DF: Even the international community reacted heavily to it.

RB: Yes.

DF: They did not look at it as, "This is an American issue; it is not important to us."

RB: No, no, it was …

DF: It was global.

RB: It was global, yes, yes, the headlines in all the papers, all the Turkish papers.

DF: What was the Turkish attitude towards the Soviets?

RB: Oh, they were anti-Soviet and they weren't very happy with the Iranians, either. They still aren't. [laughter] The toughest thing that we had [to do was], if a Turkish student, if the students flunked their English, then, they were given other assignments. … There was a board that I sat on that would review and test these guys, orally, to see if they had a chance, and, if they didn't, they were sent out to Eastern Turkey, on the Iranian border. I saw some pretty tough grown men cry when they were told they didn't pass the course. They'd washed out, you know.

SI: Did you have to learn any Turkish?

RB: Didn't have to. I had a Turkish counterpart professor, teacher, and he taught them, also, but … we studied it a bit, learned how to count, learned a few words, learned some basics, nothing

like later on, when I studied Danish … for the State Department. It was different, much more intense.

GF: Did your background, growing up in Aruba, and, also, the fact that you had traveled a bit as a kid and later on, allow you to adapt easier to these different countries, perhaps?

RB: Probably, but you also end up, in life, not having the roots that other people have. Like, when we're out in Missouri, you know, we still have the family farm my wife was born on, twenty minutes from where we live. So, you go out there and she knows every nook and cranny and every hollow and hill, and I've learned them all, but … I can't really go back to Aruba. … Sure, there's a place still there, but almost nobody there that we ever knew. So, yes, there's an easier adaptability, but there's also a loss of continuity, you know, sort of a, "You can't go home again," sort of thing.

GF: How did your wife adjust to the move to Colombia?

RB: Pretty good, pretty good. Of course, the in-laws are always slower to come around, [laughter] but she studied Spanish and she taught in the school down there, and she taught some English classes at the cultural center. … Later on, she taught some business courses. So, the life of moving around hasn't been too bad. Of course, … after a while, you got [tired of moving]; I was glad when assignments in my life were four years, instead of two. Several times, it was two years, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

SI: After two years in Turkey, you came back to North Carolina.

RB: Let's see, yes, I'd taken the Foreign Service written exam in Turkey and passed it. … I came back and I had a panel interview with the State Department, and I didn't pass it, but I went down and had a panel interview with the US Information Agency. … They wanted me, but they said it was going to take a year, with the FBI, the checks, and so on. So, I came out to Missouri and I wrote letters to colleges to see if I could get a job teaching English for a year, couldn't find anything going on. It wasn't much time. My mom was in North Carolina. My dad was retired and my mom was running a migrant health clinic, a pilot project, in Western Carolina. … She'd been to a conference and she was on the plane coming back from Charlotte with a trustee from Brevard College, [which] was a junior college in the area. … Here it was, August; in September, school started. They still needed an English teacher. So, she said, "Well, I've got just the one for you." So, I got a hold [of the contact] and sent over a resume. They hired me to be a freshman English teacher. So, I taught college English for a year. I taught all those freshmen essay course stuff, teaching … the students how to write a complete sentence and the term paper. … I taught a course in survey of English literature and speech, and then, the second semester, I coached the track team, instead of teaching speech. … So, I had that year in junior college while I was waiting for the clearances, and, one day, the FBI came to the campus. Everybody said, "Some guys came around, asking all this stuff about you." [laughter] "Don't worry about it." So, I had a good year there. … When the year was over, two things happened. The president of the school said that I could stay on and they'd send me to Chapel Hill, to North Carolina, for a PhD in summer schools, if I kept teaching there, and I could, you know, be one of the English professors. … Then, they called me up from Washington and said, "Look, do you want to take a

grant and work in the Bi-National Center Program as a grantee?" … The salary was the same, but the incentives were better and … I left academics and did the government, and never regretted that.

SI: Just one quick question about your year there. Was it the middle of the 1960s?

RB: '64-'65.

SI: In the South, did you see any signs of the Civil Rights struggle in that area, or segregation?

RB: Well, I had gotten involved in that at the University of Missouri. I belonged to CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] for a while, and I integrated Walgreen's Drug Store, in Colombia, Missouri, with a black student. A black girl student and I went in and had a soda. Nothing happened. The lawyer was outside on the street, waiting. It turned out that the person behind the counter was a friend of my wife's, [laughter] served us the sodas, we had them and came out, and I said, "What's that all about?" [laughter] "Well," the guy [said], "cross that one off." … When I was in graduate school, I was into that stuff, and I came back East in the Spring of '60, when they were having the bussing and I had a friend. One of the guys who roomed with me had been from Brooklyn College. He was a graduate history student, went back to his house and went out and put together leaflets, or something, one time. So, … that was when I was in that, and, when I was … at Brevard College, by '64, '65, North Carolina wasn't [an area of contention]; the big thing was, would the county stay dry or not? … My mom was in the next county and said, "We want to keep it dry. We want all your business over here." [laughter] It was a Methodist school, small, but I coached the track team. We went to national championships, finished in the top twenty, because I had a kid who [was] All-State and everything, and built a team around him and had a fun time.

DF: Were your training tactics pretty much derived from how you were trained at Rutgers, or did you come up with your own system for training?

RB: Well, … a combination. When I got to South America, the coach there had been training with the Europeans. So, he was in a little bit more to alternative workouts, what they call, like, *fartlek* training, you know, where you're fast and slow and there are some formulas, run, do things different ways. … Then, I applied some of that, and I gave … them goals. … I did the runners, somebody else did the field men, but I gave the runners all goals that I knew they could make, and then, when they made them, I said, "Thanks, you've done that. Now, here's the next set." So, they would hold together, and this one kid I had took third in the nation, in the four hundred for junior colleges, out in Garden City, Kansas. So, that was a lot of fun, and then, later on, I coached my son. He was much better than me. … He got his half mile down to 1:54 and ran at Tennessee. So, I've always said I had a great fondness for track and field. It's kind of died in recent years, with all this drug stuff and marketing of it, and so forth, but it's still a good thing. … You know, it gives you discipline, and you need it.

SI: Just to go back to your involvement in CORE, why did you decide to get involved with CORE?

RB: Well, I'd been at Rutgers here and it was integrated, to a degree, you know, … but I guess it was my roommate out there, my last semester, who was more into it, from New York. … There were black football players out there, Mel West, Norris Stevenson and these guys, were good players, and Missouri went to the Orange Bowl those years. They couldn't get into the burger house for a burger. They were only allowed to drive through the back, by the back window. So, that kind of stuff was going on, and I was hanging around with a crowd of activists, I guess.

DF: Would there just be random meetings or would it be a weekly thing?

RB: Yes. I think it started up and ran for a while. The problem we had was getting the blacks to get involved and not making it just radical white guys doing things. It took some encouragement; out there, it did.

SI: How did the local population, or the people you were trying to change, react to this kind of activism?

RB: I suppose, out there in the Midwest, it was much more of a separation between town and school than it is here, because it was a different type of town and not as fluid a society, I suppose, and a bigger school, of course. So, I don't remember much about it, but I imagine it was not looked upon by the town people as a big deal, … or as a good deal, necessarily, at that time, but I just did a little bit of that. Also, I hung around with a lot of foreign students out there and they were different nationalities, races.

DF: Did this issue influence your political affiliation?

RB: You know, I guess I'm one of these common cases. You start out young and you're leftist and you're going to change the world, and the older you get, the more conservative you get. … I was with Students for Stevenson here, you know, and then, gradually, things kept changing over. … I think I voted for Jimmy Carter, but … I didn't vote for any Democrats after Carter, and I certainly didn't vote for Carter the second time, although I'd met him three times.

SI: Tell us about joining the US Information Agency.

RB: … Okay, I don't want to get this thing too long for you. …

SI: No, we have all day. [laughter] Talk as much as you want. You are not taking our time.

RB: Okay, I'll try to move it along, though, because my wife's back at the hotel.

SI: Okay.

RB: … I started out in the Bi-National Center Program, … directing English courses in Bogota. … During my time in Latin America was when I really started to get into the Cold War idea, started [thinking] about the Cold War, because, every place that there was any Soviet influence, things got difficult for us. In 1966, I was in Bogota and they were having their first parliamentary elections of a democratic nature. … I was working … as … assistant director of

courses, in this big cultural center, where we had several thousand students, and a terrorist came in and put a bomb in that building one afternoon. He came in, dressed as a woman, and he put five sticks of dynamite in the women's bathroom and lit the fuse and came out and left. Some people saw the smoke and went in that direction, and that bomb blew up and killed five people. I was in my office, … but I had glass fall on me and and it was a real introduction [to terrorism]. … My little brother, Donald, who was getting ready to go to [Vietnam] was down visiting. He was in the office with me when this bomb went off. So, I had a very early terrorist experience in that. … See, this building had a big cafeteria and had stairs going up to the classrooms, and the offices were on one side, the bathrooms were in behind the stairs on the other side. … The guy wanted to catch the students between classes and really do a job of carnage, but he was a little late. People had gotten up to the classes, but one of the people who was killed was an American who was the cafeteria director. … I'd only been sitting out with him ten minutes earlier, talking baseball, had gone back in my office and he went over there and [Mr. Burson claps his hands], that was it. … Terrorism like that is just; the shock is in the no warning. You know, it's not like, you know, "Here comes the incoming round," or, "Here come the planes," or, "Here's the guy. I see the guy with the gun." It's just [that] you're sitting there, in a normal situation, all of a sudden, "Boom." So, I can understand a whole lot about that stuff, you know.

SI: How long did it take to recover from that attack?

RB: Well, we were closed for a couple of days. I found out, a couple of years later, that they took care of the guys who had done this. The Colombians had found out who they were and had sent them a bomb, and there was a little article in the paper about fireworks exploding, or something. … I had dreams for a while and, you know, looking under the car for something. It took a while to get over it. I guess I eventually did, but it took a little while, yes.

DF: Did it have the same effect on your brother as well?

RB: Oh, yes; … well, maybe not, but he later went on to Vietnam. So, he was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. …

SI: Can you describe what your daily activities were like there, what you did, what your job entailed?

RB: Oh, okay. Sometimes, I taught English classes, sometimes, I did stuff like, you know, registration, grades. Maybe I'd teach a conversation course, handle the office. We'd have cultural programs, visitors from the States. … When I first went down there, I met Norman Rockwell, [who] came by. Earl Warren came down. He was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The astronauts, the early astronauts, before they went to the Moon, I met [Neil] Armstrong, they came down. We had these cultural programs and teaching programs.

SI: How effective do you think these programs were?

RB: I thought they did a lot, you know, and I'm really dismayed at the situation today, because we did a lot of targeted stuff with people. … You looked for those who were going to be agenda setters in their country later on and you tried to give them an understanding of the United States,

and the easiest way to get any appreciation is for them to learn the language. … We're still doing English teaching in a lot of places, but we're not doing it much the way we used to. It's happening commercially, and so forth, but we used to, you know, we had American content in our stuff. Our libraries didn't have British books, just American books, American authors. … We had a big network in Latin America of cultural centers. We had, like, eight or nine … in Colombia at the time. A lot of them are still there. So, I did that in Colombia. I went to Paraguay and I directed … an overall program there for two years. I started out with the English courses, and then, took over the whole program, and got into all kinds of administrative and management things, like inventories and maintenance of buildings and cultural programming. … From two years in Paraguay, I went to Bolivia, did the same thing. Now, there, we had a lot of Cold War stuff. … The Soviet Union had opened an embassy when we were there and there was a revolution and our cultural center got closed. I was out of business for about eight or nine months. They, leftist students, took the place over and hung on to it, and … I transferred out to Costa Rica while they still had it, but, then, we reopened and we're back in down there. Years later, I got a medal from their board, for being one of the ones they remembered. [laughter] I did the same in Costa Rica, but, in Costa Rica, we built a cultural center. I had the day to day responsibility for building a large cultural center. We had twenty classrooms, we had a three-hundred-seat theater, library, cafeteria, and that was a major project. … I was in the Rotary Club, knew the president of the country. I was, probably, because of the nature of my job, the second most popular person to the Ambassador, because, when the minister of education for the country calls you up and says, "Do you mind if my national symphony comes out and practices in your theater, because our place is being renovated?" I said, "Come right over." So, now, I went back a couple years ago and it's all changed around, and Costa Rica's infrastructure has gone downhill with all the Central American violence.

GF: In the different countries in Central America, what would be the differences that you were noticing when you would go to them?

RB: Well, Costa Rica was the most advanced. They always … had pride of spending more on education than on the military. Nicaragua under Somoza was a dictatorship. … In 1973, we came on home leave … from Costa Rica, bought a Volkswagen Microbus in North Carolina and drove back with our kids. … It was just after the big earthquake, if you remember the history, that earthquake in Nicaragua and Roberto Clemente was the ballplayer who was going to take help down there and he crashed. [Editor's Note: On December 23, 1972, an earthquake struck the capital of Managua, causing widespread devastation. After the ruling *junta* was accused of hoarding foreign relief aid, baseball player Roberto Clemente chose to fly into Nicaragua on an aid flight to investigate; the plane crashed on December 31st.] We got down there to the Nicaragua border and had to pay a bribe to get through customs without them going through our vehicle. … A couple of these guys there were wearing some of these hard hats that we'd sent down for the earthquake people. So, … definitely, there were dictators in Central America and you could see problems were on the way. … Then, after that Latin American experience, I came back to Washington and, for one year, I was in the USIA management office for cultural centers around the world. That earned me a trip around the world in '76. … We were doing management studies on these cultural centers, to see if they were worth supporting. So, that got me to Indonesia, to Thailand, and Iran. I had two weeks in Iran, back then, and afterwards, my advisors, you have personnel advisors, … they said, "Well, if you want to get ahead in this game,

the rest of your career, get out of the cultural center stuff." So, I said, "Okay." So, I went over to the information side; we had a wireless file that did reporting for the embassies around the world. I was a Congressional correspondent for two years. I worked on Capitol Hill and I would go on the Senate floor and I'd go hear [Speaker of the House of Representatives] Tip O'Neill give his morning briefings. It was a great study of America to be there, and then, I'd write articles about [it]. I'd write up about what had gone on, and then, they'd send it around to the embassies, and that was the Carter years. I went to the Kennedy assassination hearings. I went to the Martin Luther King hearings. [Editor's Note: The United States House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations investigated both the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., from 1976 to 1978 and published a report on its findings the following year.] I've got a letter, at home, from Congressman Stokes, the head of the Martin Luther King hearings, allowing me into the hearing, because, … see, I was a government employee, so, I wasn't really a journalist. I had to be careful about how I did things. … So, I didn't have a credential, but I knew all of the doorkeepers. So, I went to the hearings and got the information. … I'd ask questions, maybe, but after everybody else had their turn. … Then, I'd take this stuff and I'd ship [it]. Every day, a messenger'd take a whole bunch of documents and press releases back to the main office, and I might write a little something, fax it back, and then, they'd send it around to all the embassies around the world. … I'll just tell you, for the record, a little, on the Martin Luther King hearings; I was there the day James Earl Ray testified. I sat in the front row, next to Jesse Jackson, because I arrived late and there were no seats at the press table. … James Earl Ray, they'd had a big fracas with him. He'd been roughed up a little bit, they thought, and the hearings were all on public TV. I called my mom. I said, "Turn on your TV. You'll see me all morning on PBS." … I sat in the front row here, at the hearing, and the press table was over on one side. James Earl Ray was taken in, he was put in a chair facing the committee. Two marshals sat next to him, facing the audience. … James Earl Ray went through the testimony of his last hours [prior to the assassination] and at the motel in Memphis. The closer he got to the end of that story, the more I noticed his foot jumping up and down under the table, and I turned to Jesse Jackson, I said, "Jesse, look, look," and he looked. … I said, "What do you think that is?" and he said, "That guy's not telling the truth," and, from that day, I've never had any doubts that … it's always been James Earl Ray who shot Martin Luther King. Now, you may hear, and read [in] books and all, this conspiracy stuff and that somebody else did it, and so forth, but I sat there in the room and I saw the pressure on this guy. … He [Jesse Jackson] and I, we could see the body English when his alibi came up at the very end. … So, I've always thought that was a little historic moment and, I remember, in the Kennedy hearings, they let this Cuban consul testify, who came up from Mexico. So, the Cuban journalists were allowed in the States to do that, to hear that. … I can remember the consul up there, saying that, "Lee Harvey Oswald is a strange man. He came and asked for the visa. When I didn't give it to him, he slammed the door." [laughter] So, that was a fun time. … A lot of American history goes on in Congress, an awful lot.

SI: To go back to this tour that you took of the cultural centers around the world, what was your assessment of these different centers? Did you think that they were doing a good job?

RB: Well, by the time I got to this job in Washington, all the nice places had been visited. You know, I had the leftovers, which was Indonesia, Iran and Thailand, but we had good programs in every place. Of course, the Shah was still in power, but we had four cultural centers in Iran, and

then, a big one in Thailand. In Indonesia, we had them, and they were all doing really good. … It was a trip around the world and, in those days, we had a lot of Indian *rupees* in the US Government. India was paying the US in *rupees* for agricultural products under the Food for Peace Program, PL 480. So, you flew, they bought your ticket with *rupees* and you had to spend forty-eight hours in India, just sitting around, to justify the *rupees.* So, that's how I got to the Taj Mahal. [laughter]

SI: In the 1970s, from what I have read, that was when a lot of things started coming out about what the government was doing overseas. I forget the name of the committee that investigated …

RB: [The] Church Committee? [Editor's Note: In 1975, the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, chaired by Senator Frank Church of Idaho, investigated alleged abuses by the US intelligence community, such as organizing the assassination of foreign leaders.]

SI: Yes, that investigated the CIA and things happening in Latin America.

RB: Yes.

SI: What was it like to be in the government at that time?

RB: Well, what was really strange was Watergate because we'd always been getting direction from Washington, and programming from Washington, but that final year of Watergate, we didn't get anything, basically. Everybody in Washington was keeping their head down, and I was in Costa Rica then and an inspector came through, and we were doing local programming, working with the Peace Corps and artists and stuff like that. … He started to criticize me for not having more American politically-oriented programming, and I said, "Look, we've asked you guys to send us stuff, and, in the past year, you know what you've sent us? You sent us one thing, that I saw. That was the definition of the word impeachment." That was what we got. … That time, there was a disconnect, but, in terms of the other stuff, like you're mentioning, I didn't get into any of that.

SI: Okay. That seems to be the breaking point, where people started to not trust the government or had a change of opinion about the government. Did you feel any of that, being a government employee?

RB: Well, certainly, during the Vietnam War, … that type of stuff was out there, and you saw a lot of that. … See, when you're working overseas, you're getting material. … There's domestic implications in how you get the messages from Washington, sometimes. … Then, you get the questions from the foreign audiences. So, yes, when there'd be this kind of stuff in the press in the States, about the government and the military, you'd have to deal with things like that overseas, and one of the things you had to make sure [of] was that you weren't out there peddling something that turned out to be false. Now, that happens sometimes. With the Iran-Contra Hearings, if you remember those days, I took something that [President Ronald] Reagan had put out, … it was [all] US official government stuff, about shipping aid to the Contras. [Editor's

Note: During the Iran-Contra Affair, members of the US Government sold arms to Iran in exchange for aid in getting hostages in Lebanon released. Proceeds from the arms sales were then used to fund anti-Communist Contra forces in Nicaragua.] … These Danish union guys, … I guess they were leftists from the Danish sailors union, … were saying that they'd been sending some weapons over there for the Contras and we'd been using some of these Danish [vessels], a Danish ship, or something like that. "Well, no, no, no," and I wrote a letter to this union leader, denying all this, and just quoting from what I'd gotten from the States, from Reagan's people. … Then, when the story broke, yes, I turned on my TV set one day and, there, my letter came on the national television. [laughter] I said, "Well, you know, sorry about that," [laughter] but I've always, in my whole career, … you know, I used to tell the journalists, "Look," you know, "I'm telling you the US Government position. This is it, and I'm not saying it's my position or not, but this is what it is and here's where we got it." … I never ran into any credibility problems, personally, but we had a lot in Europe in the '80s, with the SS-20s and the intermediate range missiles. [Editor's Note: The Soviet Union began deploying SS-20 medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) to Eastern Europe in the mid-1970s. The deployment of US and NATO MRBMs to Western Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s spurred large-scale protests across Europe.] We had a lot of back and forth with the Russians and, in Copenhagen, our embassy was here, on one side, there was a cemetery, and then, there was the Russian Embassy on the other side. … That was very symbolic to everybody.

SI: Can we go from when you were the Congressional correspondent to your career afterwards?

RB: Yes, okay. I went to Spain for four years, where I was in the press section of the American Embassy, just after the Franco years. I would take journalists on NATO tours. Spain was thinking of coming into NATO then. Spain was thinking of coming into the Common Market. Jimmy Carter came over for a state visit. I worked on that.

DF: Is that how you met Jimmy Carter? You mentioned that you met him.

RB: Jimmy Carter came to Costa Rica, as Governor [of Georgia], when I was building the cultural center, and he gave me a check, … from [the] Coca-Cola Company, for 750 dollars. I wish I'd kept a copy, because it was signed by [Thomas Bertram] Bert Lance, who had been his budget man, who'd been thrown out. … Then, I met Carter when he came to Spain. Carter's people were kind of; you had to really work with these guys. I'll tell you one little story. There was a cable that went out from our embassy … to the White House, to President Carter. They said, … "King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia would like to invite President and Mrs. Carter to dinner, … white tie, ten PM." White House came back, "How about six o'clock, business suits?" They did a luncheon program. … Then, another thing was, the director of the Prado Museum volunteered to give Mrs. Carter a tour of the Prado Museum, and the White House questioned his credentials; yes, come on. So, that was fun and games, and, when Carter came to visit, you'd have different press events and we'd take charge of different press events. So, I thought I'd take the easy one, be the press officer at the Ambassador's house when he met with Felipe Gonzalez, who was a Socialist Party opponent, who later became the head of the Spanish Government. We set up a photo op and Felipe would come up in a limousine and get out and Carter'd come out the door of Ambassador Terence Todman's residence and shake his hand, they'd go in and meet. So, I'd set up the press on the lawn and they'd get the photo op on it. I thought it was going to be

simple, and I had a Spanish counterpart. Well, the Spanish Government didn't want Felipe Gonzalez to get any publicity. So, they didn't send their guy to help me at that event. Meantime, the Spanish press was clamoring for this thing. There was … scores of these guys, and women, and cameras and everything, out in front of the Ambassador's residence. … The motor pool came up with the American correspondents, … eight or ten, and the White House guy with them, and he was mad. He said, "They messed up this, they messed up that," and he says, "You're only going to let in the same number of guys that I've got," and he had, like, ten or twelve. I said, "I've got to live with these people." I pushed in forty against the Secret Service … before they shut the gate on my necktie, and I got inside, but it worked and we saw Jimmy, and then, I saw Carter one more time. I had, I'd say, one of the most memorable experiences of my life, when Sadat's funeral took place. [Editor's Note: Anwar El Sadat, the third President of Egypt, was assassinated in 1981.] *Air Force One* had to refuel at Torrejon Air Force Base while going to and from Cairo for the funeral and it was October and it was a nice, fall day. … I got assigned to go out to there, in case any press people had a question, … on the way back from the funeral. So, we went on a picnic. … I think it was a Sunday and I got back home. … The driver was waiting for me. This was 1980, … early '80s, and [I] went out to the airport and *Air Force One* came in just as I got out there and we had the passwords and the IDs. … I went out there and, if you can imagine this, here's *Air Force One* parked on this runway. … All this green grass is here. There are three or four huge tables set up, and these Spanish waiters, in these red vest tuxedoes, and all these people are standing around, having a drink. … I walked in there, there's Jimmy Carter, there's Jerry [Gerald] Ford, there's Howard Baker, there's Chuck Percy, there's [Alexander] Haig, you know, and [Henry] Kissinger. They're all [there], and I went around and talked to these people and shook their hand and said hello and had a drink. … Then, they all got on a plane and flew away, and I went back home. Came in the door, wife's getting dinner ready. "What went on?" "You won't believe this last hour of my life," [laughter] [I] saw them all, only Nixon didn't come back with them. Nixon did something else. He went out [separately], but, someday, I'll look up that passenger list and write a little story about it, maybe.

SI: After Spain, you were reassigned to Copenhagen.

RB: Yes, went, four years, to Copenhagen again with Ambassador Todman. That's when I went over to Ireland on the Reagan visit. …

SI: You were based in Copenhagen. Did you have a large territory to cover, or just Copenhagen?

RB: Yes, … just Denmark, just Copenhagen, but I did go to Greenland on this musk ox trip that I sent you a copy of. [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson authored an article titled "Musk Ox Becomes Cold War Weapon" for the booklet "The United States Information Agency: A Commemoration," available online at: http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/.] I also had a trip to the Faroe Islands.

DF: Did you get to meet Reagan?

RB: When he was Governor [of California], I saw him on Capitol Hill, the Panama Canal Treaties, [The Torrijos-Carter Treaties, signed in September 1977], and I saw him in Toronto,

but I didn't meet him; Carter, yes, three times, and Bush, George [H. W.] Bush, Senior, met him in Australia, briefly.

SI: Even though you were stationed in Copenhagen, how did you help with the Ireland visit?

RB: Oh, they brought people from all over Europe to help with that.

SI: Okay.

RB: … We had a one-man post in Dublin and we brought forty more press officers in for the Reagan visit and divided them into sections, east and west, and so forth, and it was huge.

GF: What was the purpose of Reagan's visit to Ireland?

RB: Reagan was making a trip to Europe and wanted to visit his ancestors' homeland. … Reagan had the best orchestrated foreign policy of any President I ever saw. They had the media totally controlled. What they would do [was], you've heard of Helen Thomas, the famous senior White House correspondent? They would get Reagan's … speech together, and the Atlantic Alliance speeches were done in a series, and James Baker was big in making those up, and they would have a whole series of speeches on the Cold War and on the intermediate range missile crisis. Reagan's speech would be prepared ahead of time. In Ireland, I got his speech to the Irish Parliament the night before he gave it. I had it in my pocket and sat there listening to Sam Donaldson and other correspondents speculate on what he was going to say the next morning. [laughter] Took it back to the office, they put it in a cable, sent it to Washington. It was translated into various languages, sent back out, and then, as soon as Reagan was talking, everybody … had the speech. … The White House would have a briefing before Reagan would speak, and they would tell the journalists what they were going to emphasize, but, before that, Helen Thomas would be given some tidbits and she'd write something, and they, the rest of the journalists, would go over and copy it from her, you know. It was just orchestrated and [had] follow-through. They don't have that today. … We're not doing that now, but it worked in the Cold War.

SI: Does anything stand out about the assassination attempt on Reagan?

RB: Yes. I was at the embassy in Madrid, and what really got everybody excited was Alexander Haig saying, "I'm in the White House and in control," and people were wondering about that, but I was called in that night, when Reagan was shot. … Also, we had another thing there. The Spaniards attempted a coup while we were there. The generals attempted to get back in and they held the Spanish Parliament hostage for a while, and the only one outside who could keep Spanish democracy alive was King Juan Carlos. [Editor's Note: On February 23, 1981, elements of the Spanish Army, influenced by the late Fascist dictator Francisco Franco, seized the Cortes, Spain's Parliament. The coup was quelled less than a day later after the King called on the military to support the democratically elected government.] Alexander Haig was Secretary of State, and he was asked, back in Washington, he didn't know the answer, because things were happening too fast, he was asked about what was going on in Spain at that moment, and he said, cautiously, … "Well, that's an internal affair." Well, saving Spanish democracy was not an

internal affair and the Spaniards beat us over the head for months with that statement afterwards, because, … we didn't, you know, … support them as quick as we should have ...

SI: In your job, would you have to deal with irate reporters just trying to sort through all this?

RB: Yes, not too much, but questions, hard questions, and you need to know the people. You have to get out and meet them and know them and work with them.

SI: What is it like in a situation, like the assassination attempt, where you really have no idea, possibly, of what is going on?

RB: … You can't wing it too much, because you might say the wrong thing, but you have to be confident, you know. Like, I wrote one of these little stories here about this *Skylab* [incident], when *Skylab* was coming down. [Editor's Note: *Skylab* was the United States' first space station, in Earth's orbit from 1973 to 1979.] We knew, technically, … that it probably wouldn't be a problem, and I went on national television in Spain and they joked with me a little bit. They said, "Oh, this gentleman comes on the TV and he's jovial and he's telling us, showing us these models, and saying this thing can't happen to us, and who's he kidding, you know? It just might come down and pulverize us." … When that *Skylab* was going around, we took charge of it and said, "No, it's not. It's going to go someplace else," and then, I was in the office and sending out reports and they were calling me on the phone, and this Spanish Air Force general called me, … because it was, like, the last orbit or so of this *Skylab*, and he said, "You just went on the radio and you said that the Iberian Peninsula is not threatened anymore." He said, "What about the Canary Islands?" [laughter] I looked at the orbits, we had the orbits for the [*Skylab*] from NASA. I said, "Oops, you still have to worry about that." [laughter] So, you get some of those things.

SI: Did you find any major differences between the press in Spain and the press in Denmark, working with the two different countries?

RB: Yes. In Denmark, … they hadn't had the Franco years of censorship, so, … it was more sophisticated. In Spain, they were still learning. That's why our space shuttle programs were much more popular in a place like Spain than in other places that had been up, because, during the earlier space things, Franco had kept things censored a lot in Spain. … When the very first space shuttle went up, I went to Rota Naval Air Station and I was there with a team of journalists, in case that plane had to land in Rota. I had a message prepared of what we would say if it crashed, what we would say if it landed. We didn't want it to have to land, because we would have had to pick up the pieces or pick up that shuttle and, somehow, get it back to the States, but the Spaniards were fascinated with that, and I gave some talks about it. I went to the binational cultural center in Barcelona, and the NASA people had given me a tile, a space shuttle tile, and that was back when the tiles were coming off of the shuttles. … I remember going into it, I was in a talk with some Spanish scientists at the cultural center in Barcelona, hundreds of people there, and we were up on a stage. When I got to a certain point, I held up that tile and there was this, "Ahh," gasp. It was almost like the Holy Grail. [laughter] When the talk was over, everybody came up and wanted to see it.

SI: Are those just things that you pick up or does the agency try to train you in the different cultural customs?

RB: Yes, yes. They have area study seminars and, before I went to Denmark, … I took six months of language training. So, I could read the papers. Of course, everybody there speaks English, but you had to be able to read the local press, if you want to know what's going on.

SI: When you were in these foreign countries, did they encourage you to live among the population and get to know them?

RB: Yes, yes. We never lived in a compound. We always rented out. Sometimes, it was an embassy-owned house, sometimes, it wasn't, but, yes, you definitely got out.

SI: Particularly during, like you said, the intermediate missile problems in Denmark, was there any hostility directed towards Americans?

RB: There was. We were getting it more from Central American policy, Nicaraguan demonstrations. … When Reagan attacked Libya, bombed Libya, then, we had demonstrations, [Editor's Note: On April 15, 1986, US Armed Forces conducted an air strike against targets in Libya.] There were leftist Danes who wanted us to debate the Soviets there, but we wouldn't do it, because that's a NATO country, but Denmark was weak in those days and it was a footnote nation on missile stuff, and we had to do a lot of cajoling. One of the big problems was that the Danish Government has always been fragmented. There'd be, like, thirteen, fourteen political parties. So, there's never one majority party, so, you govern and have to give away some things. So, when we were there, the conservative prime minister, he could only get his economic plan … through Parliament if he gave way on foreign policy to the left. So, he was in that kind of a problem and we had to work with it. … I was fortunate to have Terence Todman as Ambassador when I served in Spain and Denmark, as well as earlier, for one year, in Costa Rica. Todman was a career Foreign Service Officer who came from the Virgin Islands. He was a consummate professional who set high standards and expected his staff to live up to them. He was the first black diplomat to become a Career Ambassador, the highest rank in the Foreign Service. One writer has called him "the Jackie Robinson of the Foreign Service." He was a great Cold Warrior. You could not write a speech for him and just mention the word "peace." You had to add "with freedom."

DF: Do you want some water?

RB: Yes, and I'm going to have to, at some point, wrap it up.

SI: Sure.

RB: … Time is flying; go ahead.

DF: You attended the G-7 Summits.

RB: Yes, in Venice in 1987 and Toronto in 1988.

DF: Did you get to meet with other world leaders there?

RB: I, basically, stayed with the American press and I was running a foreign media reaction office in Washington, in those days, so, I had a product. I was delivering a product around to our people. So, I really didn't get much into the other [aspects of the events].

DF: You also attended the Bush-Gorbachev Summit, [the Spring Summit, May 30-June 3, 1990], I see.

RB: In Washington. We had a press center at George Washington University.

DF: Right. This was obviously a huge deal, in prepping the entire world, I can imagine. Were you dealing with the press representatives of several countries?

RB: No, not at those summits. At those summits, I was getting our world press reaction to what we were doing around to our leaders. That's what I was doing. In other words, … Bush is going to talk to Gorbachev, "Okay, what did all the German press say about that this morning? Let's make sure that Bush and his people know it." So, we put together [press summaries]. I ran this media reaction office for four years. I think the Pentagon does a lot of it now, and we put out a watch list of topics, of what we were interested in, and the embassies reported those back on the computer. … Then, you built a report, two reports a day, an early report, with just a few key countries, for key people, at seven AM, and then, one at noon that's called a daily digest, which brought in all the comments on the different topics. We usually ran five or six topics, [there would] be a trade topic, a foreign policy, a couple foreign policy topics, maybe some domestic issue that was of international importance, and it was pretty high level work, because it was something you could use, and information is worth a lot. … I ran the only office in Washington that wasn't serving the field. I was serving the other way around, and then, every time an inspection unit was going to go to the field, they stopped at our office and asked me, "How is that country doing out there?" and then, when any press officers from our embassies around the world came into Washington, they had to stop and see me about how their press reporting was going. So, it was a high level, very high level job. I know I'm maybe jumping ahead, but … I only got called in, from Washington, … to work once at night, and it was Panama, when we went into Panama. [Editor's Note: During Operation: JUST CAUSE, spanning from December 20, 1989 to January 12, 1990, US Armed Forces invaded Panama to depose dictator Manuel Noriega.] I got a call, three, four o'clock in the morning, because we have what they call duty officers, an operations center, we had, and they would call you up. That was the flash point. The guy called me on the phone, I was living out in Fairfax, in Virginia, and he said, "Ray, you've got to come [in]. Mike," who was my boss, "wants you to come in right away." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "We're kicking ass in Panama." So, I went in and called up my first assistant, Mildred Neely. She came in and the two of us started going, and, by seven o'clock, we had a report out, from the Latin American area, of how they were reacting to what was going on, and worked that through and it helped our policy. We got an honor award for it later. Now, I'll jump back for a minute on another sort of flash story, real quick. I almost went to Jonestown, Guyana, before I went to Spain. I was in Washington, getting my physical to go to Spain, and you remember the Guyana story, the Kool-Aid and all these people dying down there, and the

Congressman who was shot? [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson is referring to the November 18, 1978, mass suicide of the Peoples Temple, a cult from the United States that had relocated to Jonestown, Guyana, led by Jim Jones.]

SI: Yes.

RB: Congressman [Leo] Ryan. [Editor's Note: Congressman Leo Ryan (D) (CA-11th District) led a delegation to Jonestown that was ambushed by Peoples Temple supporters at an airstrip near Jonestown just prior to the mass suicide. Five delegation members were murdered, including Ryan, the first and only Congressman to be killed in the line of duty, and eleven wounded.] Well, I was in-between jobs and it was Thanksgiving time, and the Latin American office said, "Hey, maybe we can send Ray to Guyana, because he worked on Capitol Hill. He just got finished working on Capitol Hill. … He'd met the Congressman who'd been shot and he knows about that Congressional connection, and he grew up in the West Indies, not far from Guyana, and he speaks Spanish, and he's not on his other job yet." They called me up, said, "You want to go to Jonestown? Your plane is going to be leaving … Andrews [Air Force Base] tonight," you know. I didn't want to go. … My parents were up for Thanksgiving and the kids were in school, and I knew it was a mess. I knew it'd be a mess down there. So, I went over to the office and there was a guy there, Fred Shaver, bless his heart, he was going through a divorce, he had nothing to do for Thanksgiving and he was a desk officer for that area. So, I said, … "You want to go down there?" He said, "Sure, I'll go." So, I went in the office, I said, "I've got a guy who'll go down there. He can do it." So, I missed out on that one, but I'm glad, because, then, it got worse and worse there. It was only when they got down there, then, they found all the other people. So, that was one of those things I remember.

DF: You say you lived in Fairfax. How long were you in Fairfax, four years?

RB: Four years the first time, in the '70s, and four more later.

DF: You would have to commute into Washington, DC, every day.

RB: Yes, I drove, or went by carpool or bus.

DF: At this time, were you raising your family?

RB: My kids were in school, high school.

DF: How did they adjust to all the traveling?

RB: … The hard point they had was going to Spain, because our son was a junior in high school and had … not too much longer to go, and it took a little while. That was the hard [part]. The rest of it wasn't any problem over the years, but that was kind of rough, because they left in the middle of the year. They left in January and went into a different school, when they were in the high school level, but they got in pretty quick and my son found … he could do the track stuff and our daughter had the music and the basketball and soccer. So, you know, they loved it after a while, but the first few months were not easy.

DF: Did they become multilingual?

RB: Kids spoke Spanish. … They grew up speaking Spanish. They speak it better than I do, and, when we were in Paraguay for a while, when they were little, they started to speak Guarani, which was what the maid spoke. … In Latin America, you had a maid all the time, a live-in. Okay, if you want to move on. …

SI: Okay.

RB: Okay, then, after the four years in Washington with the media reaction office, I went out to Australia as information officer at the embassy and to be a speechwriter for the Ambassador, and … that was my final four-year assignment. When I came to the end of that assignment, I thought about staying on, but I had what they called time-in-grade. I was up to the 01 level and they weren't promoting many people. They were pushing minorities then, and it didn't look like I'd go any further. I could have extended my time and maybe gone to some small African country for a couple of years, but I figured, "Okay, I've pretty much done it." … In Australia, we had a Bush visit. We had the fiftieth anniversary of the [World War II Battle of the] Coral Sea. [Senator] Lamar Alexander was the guest speaker who came out for that one. I got around the country with Ambassador Mel Sembler a lot, because I wrote his speeches. He had a military plane you could fly on to go to some places. So, I got to the Gold Coast and a few other places, and really liked it out there and got to know all the press guys, got in one squabble with them, when we made a comment that got into local politics a little bit. … There was an election coming up and the opposition leader … or his press people had made some statements, saying that, "Oh, obviously, George Bush is taking the advice of our leader," because he said this or said that, which wasn't true, but we shouldn't have bothered to say it, because, when we did say it, they got after us. … A guy named Alexander Peacock, … he later became ambassador to Washington, he called me on the phone and said, "Why had I said what they had said was exaggerated and farfetched?" [laughter] you know, the terms we'd used, and I said, "You'll have to ask the Ambassador." … The Ambassador heard from this man and, boy, the Ambassador got a hold of me. … One thing you always do in this business [is], you clear it with somebody, and you'd clear your words. … You make sure that whatever you say on the record has been vouched for by a boss, by somebody, and the Deputy Chief of Mission had done that, the deputy had cleared those words. So, I told him that I'd cleared it with the deputy, then, I was okay, but that was one time out there when I was worried. The second time, we were having maneuvers with the Australians and a Qantas jet plane had been painted by the radar from one of our cruisers and had been forced to alter course and got home furious. Well, our military was having exercises with the Australians out there, but this wasn't too long after, remember the [United States Navy's guided missile cruiser USS] *Vincennes* that shot down the Iranian commercial plane? … The Australian, the pilot, got off and made some statement, saying, you know, "What's going on?" blah, blah, blah, and a flap was starting. [Editor's Note: In July 1988, the *Vincennes* destroyed the commercial Iran Air Flight 665, mistakenly identifying the Airbus as an F-14 Tomcat fighter.] Now, in Australia, you've got the advantage of the time difference, because, when it's daytime out there, everybody in Washington's asleep, not going to bother you, and you're as far away as you can get, but … this flap was coming up. So, the Ambassador asked me, "What should we do?" and I said, "They just want us to say we're sorry. They just want us to

apologize." The Navy didn't want to do that. The commander … out there in Hawaii, the CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific Command] commander, [Admiral Charles R.] Larson, didn't want to apologize for the US Navy, and he was sending out messages, "We're going to look into this. We'll investigate. We'll get back to you in a few days." So, I said to the Ambassador, "Mr. Ambassador, if we say we regret the inconvenience, the story will go away. If we don't, it'll stick around." So, the Ambassador said, "Do it." I said, "Okay." So, I went on the radio with a Qantas spokesman and I said, "There was never any danger to anybody by these maneuvers. It's frequent, in these maneuvers, that sometimes, one side will make it look like they're flying in a commercial plane in your direction," and so forth, "there was never any danger, but we do regret the inconvenience," and headlines [read], "Yanks Say They're Sorry," end of story. [The] Navy was furious. I was worried, the next morning, at the Pentagon briefing, at the State Department briefing, that question came up and they said the field had answered it. … I went into the Ambassador's morning meeting and he had a letter of apology from the Pentagon for the naval attaché to deliver immediately to Qantas Airways. You know, I let out a big sigh of relief, but the right thing had been done. … That was some of these Australian highlights, … a great country. We go back. We've been back a couple times, and then, to get into retirement a little bit, when you retire, they give you a seminar. You go to a retirement seminar in Washington, and then, they tell you, "Where are you going to retire?" and they say most people retire close to where they came from. Well, we went out to Missouri. We still have the family farm. My wife Ruth's parents had passed away. My mom was still alive, and she'd hoped we'd retire in North Carolina, but we didn't know anybody in North Carolina. … So, we went out to the family farm, 280 acres, some in pasture, mostly hills and oak trees and the Ozarks. … We looked around. We went over to Branson, we went to Kentucky, and we ended up buying a house on the east side of town and going out to the farm on the weekends, but we lived out on the farm for a year or so. So, after we'd been back for awhile, I got in the historical society, went to some meetings. … My wife's mom had run the historical group out there before, so, we had her papers and we started to get into genealogy a little bit and into some research. … Then, we decided to write a history book and, if you guys are interested in this, from the History Department standpoint, the best way to write a county history book, and … anybody can do this, if they want to work at it, you go out to everybody in the county and you say, "Look, … we're going to do a county history book. Send us your story, five hundred words and two pictures, and buy a book. That's all we ask, pre-order a book." … These were coffee table books, sixty dollars. We had a list of names of some people who bought a photograph book from the previous local publisher, that had never been published. So, she gave us the money and those names. We got 750 people to send in their stories. So, we had the money to publish the book and we put in a whole lot of local history and published it three times, sold 1500 copies. Then, we turned around and did this smaller version of the same book, without the family stories, but Ruth worked real hard with the local genealogist and she did a foldout map, [I will] see if I can get it out here, … of all the known cemeteries in the county, 140 some of them. … It'll show you by section and township. So, if you had a relative who died out there and you kind of know where they might be, you can, hopefully, find out where they are. … In doing this, I got into this Civil War stuff and we got into some fracases with the Civil War, because there'd been a guy out there earlier, a local fellow who had … been in military intelligence and he decided, when he came back, he was going to write the local Confederate history the way it should have been. So, he started to write and he was self-publishing books, and a lot of it wasn't true and we eventually were able to pull the plug on this stuff, but it wasn't easy. [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson is referring

to the works of Jerry Ponder.] … That's when I got into this *Enemy Women* book problem. [Editor's Note: Mr. Burson is referring to the novel *Enemy Women* by Paulette Jiles.] … That's when I found out that, in America today, there's such a marketing of fiction, and you get historical fiction, and, if you start to market historical fiction for the historical value of it, well, then, you should be correct with what you're doing, and up comes this book review in the *Post Dispatch* about ethnic cleansing, massacre of civilians, you know, by the Government of the United States, and not true. …

SI: Can you explain that, just a little bit, for the record?

RB: Yes. In December 1863, in our area of Missouri, a group of Confederates had gone north and had captured a fort at Centerville and a hundred Union prisoners, took them down to our county, to a recruitment camp, where, I guess, they were going to send them on to prison or trade them back for captured guys. … The Union forces at Pilot Knob, Missouri, which wasn't too far away, got word that the men had been captured and they sent a rescue mission out. … These guys were cavalry [Third Missouri State Militia] and they went across country, real quick, and they came down and they surprised these guys on Christmas Day of 1863. The Confederates never expected them. So, in the skirmish, they killed about thirty-five Confederates, they freed all the Union prisoners, they captured a hundred or so Confederates, and there were no Union losses. Then, this Colonel [Timothy] Reeves, who was the guerilla leader, … he and some of his men got away. … One of the reasons they got away is, they were by their horses when the attack took place. So, it was a Confederate debacle, and this other writer [Jerry Ponder] came along in the '80s and he turned that debacle into a Union atrocity, calling it the "Christmas Massacre", and it plays well with people who think that their government can operate that way. You know, Wounded Knee, we know about, and stuff like that, and it started to get a lot of credibility, but we couldn't find anything from those days that didn't support the official record, and there is an official record of the Civil War called the *OR* [*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*], and that's volumes and volumes of books, and they're all in the libraries everywhere. … We'd gone through letters of contemporaries, eyewitness reports, and not one person ever mentioned anything about women and children being killed. Now, massacre, sure, thirty-five Confederates, no Union, that's a pretty good score. That's a massacre in a way, you know, and some of them [were] new recruits. So, when we started to question this thing, this man, who's since passed away, who had written the earlier books, made a big attack in the local press, debunking this and making a personal attack on me, "From New Jersey." He didn't know I was from New Jersey, but he said, "From the East," you know, "and … his family must have been in the Civil War." Well, I grew up in Aruba. I didn't know anything about the Civil War. My mom's parents were from Germany, came over in the late 1800s. I had a distant relative in the Civil War, who I don't even know, but he wrote a book that I had a copy of, and I mentioned it to somebody out there and that got around. But, then, some of the more mainstream historians were getting interested and asking me. … One guy told me something that's, you know, worth repeating for people who are studying this subject, [which is] what the lawyer says, "If you don't have the facts, argue the law. If you don't have the law, argue the facts. If you don't have the facts and you don't have the law, get personal," and that's what this was, but, by the time I started to criticize this book, all the big writers had written in the *New York Times* and everything like that. … When I sent letters out to people, saying, "Hey, this is baloney," nobody wanted to pay any attention to me. They'd written

their pieces, they'd done their marketing. The book publisher and the critics are all hand-in-glove with each other, and I sent out eight or ten letters to papers and only *Christian Science Monitor* published the letter. Then, this book [*Enemy Women*] was selected by Missouri Librarians as the Book of the Year to be read, and that's when I went and got a whole group of people and we documented all this stuff and we sent it in to the people who were doing the Book of the Year thing. … I did it this way; I said, "They're going to put out a book for people to read as a guide with this book and I want in that guide that our county historical society says that the preface to this book is not based on any historical truths, but this book is marketed on its historical value, and the author's called, 'A gifted Missouri historian,' when she really lives in Texas and lived in Canada for a number of years, and has dual citizenship." So, they managed to let me get in the *Post Dispatch.* The reporters from the *Post Dispatch* came down and saw us and went out to this battlefield site. … We explained the situation, we showed the evidence. They didn't want to write it up, because they'd already gone the other way. Then, on a bit of a lark, I sent an e-mail … to the head of the Pulitzer group, Sig Gissler, saying, "I don't know if this book is on your possible Pulitzer Prize books [nomination list], but the prologue to that book is fiction, not fact. … There are several other things wrong with it, the geography and a few other things, but they're marketing it as history. This massacre never occurred." That was the key prologue part to it. So, he sent me back a letter, saying, "Thanks, what do you mean? Explain some more." Well, we'd just written all this up. I mailed it in to him. I never heard another word, but she didn't make the final cut. So, then, she came to Missouri and gave talks, and, in one public library talk, she called me, "the Doniphan Crank," [laughter] … but that took up a lot of my time and it sort of reminded me of Soviet disinformation during the Cold War. … So, now, we still have a historical society. I've been involved a bit with [the] Trail of Tears. The [National] Park Service is doing a new trail. … You know the Trail of Tears of the Cherokee removal of the 1830s; one of those trails comes through our county, as part of the old Military Road, which was called the Natchitoches Trail or the old Southwest Trail. You can still see pieces of it in our county, Stephen Austin marched down it when they went to settle Texas. So, it's … a lot of known local history, but that was a famous road in those days, and there was one party of Cherokees [the Benge party] that took that route, but very little documentation, very little evidence. … The National Park Service had been working on this and they have approved some places as historical sites, but we are in disagreement with them on where this Indian group crossed Current River. … So, I'm in a long, ongoing discussion with the preservation people about possibly getting the location that they've agreed on changed, because it's not the right place. … If you're involved in history, geography'll tell you a lot, timelines'll tell you a lot. … About writing history, I'm trying to remember this now, but [there are] three or four things that I always tell people. You're only as good as your sources. Do what Ronald Reagan said, "Trust, but verify." Don't assume anything. Every time you see the word, "assume," say, "Wait a minute," and this is contentious, don't judge yesterday's history by today's values. I think we do that a lot. You can't really do it, because that wasn't the value in those days. What you can do is go back and say, "This is what we know. This is what happened. Was it moral, immoral, right or wrong? By today's standards, terrible, but you can't characterize it … in a historical context with those values," I don't believe. They do it all the time. A lot of people write history with agendas, a lot of people do it. That guy, [Jerry Ponder, who] wrote it had an agenda. So, anyway, that's my hot air for you. [laughter]

SI: No, it is not. It is very interesting. Is there anything else you want to add for the record?

RB: I don't think so. I've got to go on. We're going to try to find my grandparents' graves this afternoon. So, that's it.

SI: Good luck. If you want to add anything later to the transcript, you may. If you want to keep sending us copies of this stuff, we will be happy to receive them.

RB: … Okay.

SI: Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

---END OF INTERVIEW---

Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 6/30/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 8/14/09
Reviewed by Ray H. Burson 10/5/09 & 11/1/09