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Richard Robb Oral History Interview, 1998 June 3

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EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
HISTORY

INTERVIEW
WITH
Dr. RICHARD ROBB
I'm here interviewing Richard Robb who is a former member of our Board of Regents, the longest serving Board Member in the history of the university. Became a Board Member in 1967 and served until 1993. A graduate of Eastern Michigan University, this is a re-interview, the first part of the interview we forgot to turn this special microphone on so we have a beautiful quiet tape but it's on now and we'll just basically recap. Dick grew up in Ypsilanti, he was born in Ypsilanti and I'll let him tell a little bit of his story real fast so we can get to a little bit more about his time when he became a City Council Member and a Board Member at the University at the same time so. Thank you Dick.

LNS: Very, very briefly, you were born in Ypsilanti? Your parents?

RR: Born in Ypsilanti, my father was a physician in Ypsilanti, both he and my mother graduated from Michigan State Normal College, both taught for a short while and then my father went on to medical school. Mary, my mother, after medical school and then she stayed home to raise three children.

LNS: You had a brother?

RR: I had two brothers. Both are Eastern Grads. One is teaching now, one has got a Degree in Business and is living in Colorado

LNS: Where in Colorado?

RR: Denver.

LNS: Your mother and father ended up staying in Ypsilanti.

RR: Well my father was from Belleville and when he graduated from Medical School he ended up in Ypsilanti because there was no room. There were two doctors in Belleville and that was plenty and some older fellow, I think his name was Kellogg retired in Ypsilanti so there was an opportunity. My mother was from White Cloud Michigan. Little poor farming area in the middle of the state up by Big Rapids and she was, I think, sixteen when she came down here to go to school. She was a very strong, adventurous woman and left the poor farmland to come down here to become a teacher.

LNS: And she decided to stay. You mentioned earlier when we were talking that she went to Kentucky too she was one of the pioneers in sort of an early what fifties?

RR: This would have been in the thirties.

LNS: She went to be a..
RR: So that was very much an adventure. To teach in poor, rural areas in fact there were no roads to the school. She had to ride a mule back up the creek bed to get to the school. Kids were so poor that in the winter they never took baths. I mean it was very, very poor. No buttons on their shirts, so their mothers sewed the cuffs together. It was just amazing.

LNS: And so she did that for a few years. Sort of here Vista Program or Americorp. And she came back to Ypsi.

RR: And she was very involved, I remember the Second World War with the USO had a big building was where Materials Unlimited are. And there was a big contingency of service men out at Willow Run because of the bomber plant. And I remember folding sheets and things that they made bandages out of for the war. So she was very involved in community activities. Maybe that's where I get some of this.

LNS: Probably is. Now your father practiced here and unfortunately, he passed away at a very young age.

RR: Yeah, he was forty-five when he passed away. I was ten.

LNS: Heart attack?

RR: Yep.

LNS: That had to be a major influence on your life or certainly shattering. You were ten years old you said.

RR: Yeah, I guess when you're ten and that kind of stuff happens, you just may be easier than when you're older. I mean, my mother had MS very badly so that was a difficult time for her when he passed away. Because he could help take care of her in the home and that kind of stuff.

LNS: So she wasn't teaching at that point?

RR: No. She didn't teach after they got married and had children. And then she was pretty much an invalid. She couldn't walk and move around. That was the tough part for three little boys and a mom that was in poor health.

LNS: Did you work when you were a young kid? Did you have a..

RR: Yeah, I always earned enough for my own spending money. We used to back in those days when Ypsi was a real viable town I used to sell papers there used to be three Detroit Papers we used to sell them in front of
Kresge Building on Sunday morning and get there to 6:00 till probably about 12:30 - 1:00 until you sold all your papers. You could catch a lot of people coming and going from church and that was better that was very prime job. That was better than delivering papers to the houses every day because you could make more money in one day than those people made doing it seven days a week. So that was a prime job.

LNS: And you went to elementary school in Ypsi? And you went to the same school all thirteen years?

RR: Yes.

LNS: And that was where?

RR: Well, it was old Ypsi High School on Cross Street. The grade school is called Central Elementary.

LNS: Part of the high school building?

RR: Same building, yeah. They just kind of had one wing and so it really didn't have much traffic with the rest of the school and you're in the same class all day too. But it was nice because they had the swimming pool, the gym so we got to use that while we were in school. As I recall back then there was Woodruff School which is now a Christian School, Adams School, which was called Prospect and then Perry School and there was segregation.

LNS: The city was pretty divided?

RR: The schools were. There were no racial tensions or anything. Once we got to junior high there was only the one building so everyone came together and there was no animosity or problems. But I can recall when we lived on South Huron Street that Perry school was much closer for me and I went to Central and a block away, the black families and they went to Perry School.

LNS: So there was a pretty conscious design.

RR: Oh yeah. As a kid I was unaware of it but yes, there was.

LNS: As you look back. The city was mentioned in earlier conversation, Downtown was a real viable enterprise, people spent their time down there, there was entertainment down there, movie theatres.

RR: Real good stores, grocery stores, dime stores, movie theatres. I think that as you look back, I'm sure you can relate to this that even though my
father was a physician even though it was a pretty good job, although
during the war he got paid in chickens and potatoes and things like that.
We only had one car and my father would take that to go to work and I
think that most families only had one automobile. So you did live near the
shopping so mom needed something you'd hop on your bike and you'd go
get it. With the advent of people being able to afford two cars I think that
made the shopping centers more viable and the downtown was less
attractive.

LNS: When you were growing up there was another school in town called
Roosevelt How was Roosevelt received?

RR: Roosevelt was by the public school kids was perceived as a little snobby.
We felt the kids at Roosevelt kind of looked down their nose at the public
school kids.

LNS: Did they?

RR: I don't think kids did. Maybe their parents did but I don't think the kids did.

LNS: Ok, your wife you said was also a Roosevelt High School graduate right?

RR: Right.

LNS: So what do you think?

RR: Well she still blames me for the closing.

LNS: She blames you for the closing We'll come back to that.

RR: It's just friendly bantering like a Michigan or Michigan State grad would do.

LNS: I see. As you grow up do you remember any of the kids that you grew up
with? Are they still in town here? Who were some of the people you
might remember from your childhood?

RR: I think I still have friends that I went to high school with, I can't think of
anybody's that is that prominent. You know I went to (Law) school right
after school and moved to other places but I've kind of gone to new groups
of friends as you develop.

LNS: So you don't have high school reunions at this point?

RR: Yeah we have those about every, we never had them on quite the right
year. Our class always seems to miss it by about a year but we have
about every five years.
LNS: Is there a strong sense in the community about those people who grow up in the community? Is there any special bonds?

RR: The only bond is the recollections of the days gone by, but probably, my wives and my closest friends now are people who did not grow up in Ypsilanti but are very very involved in churches and communities and festivals. So they bought into the community and

LNS: So community has welcomed outsiders into it and basically that has given it a lot of its vibrancy.

RR: Oh yeah.

LNS: Where you involved in anything when the Township wanted to merge with the city? Was that something that?

RR: That was before I became involved politically. And one of those situations were the city didn't want the added expense of running water and sewer and those kinds of services. It was very expensive. Now

LNS: Do you think they regret it now?

RR: Maybe the political people don't regret it that much, but I think as a community as a person having lived half of my life in the city and half in the township I still feel it as one community. And the savings and the development the common sense of having it one governmental entity as opposed to two seems to make sense to me.

LNS: What was going on in the township? Was there a different type of people that lived in the township or did more people come from Willow to work in the factories and everything the township or the city?

RR: I think they're only, you're right. Back in that time the township was mainly people who had come up to work, and I can say come up, because a good portion of them were from Kentucky and Tennessee. And they lived in the township. In fact, I think Ford did build the buildings that the people lived in and they were unbelievable. One wall, no insulation, I mean you can see the outside from the inside and it's just in fact, after the war, the U of M students lived there, the Veterans lived there.

LNS: In Ypsilanti?

RR: It's out where the where Green Oaks Golf Course is. I can't think of the name, it wasn't the projects. Anyway, there were just rows and rows and rows of this temporary housing that lasted much longer than it was
anticipated that it would. But anyway, back to the original question. That was where the majority of the township population was. And I guess it just wasn't felt advantageous to bring that into the city although that's where a lot of the kids came to public schools before Willow Run District was started and then there was a guy in the township, I don't know if he was the equivalent of a DPW guy but anyway, he ran somehow or another, I don't know if he got the township chartered and then they ran the water and the sewer all over the place. Even though there was no buildings. And when he did that, then the township just boomed.

LNS: So the city folks made a bad decision when they didn't decide to combine both areas. Now we just worked on a Millage campaigns, to provide a library for both the township and the city new building, so we're starting to come together a little bit, here all these years later.

RR: Well the township fought that.

LNS: Still tense times.

RR: The Township board was not supportive of that, but luckily we prevailed.

LNS: The people prevailed. See the people voted for.

RR: Right

LNS: So here you are growing up in a town which basically a small town as you were saying earlier you grow up in this small town the school plays a dominant role in the community at this time and Washtenaw Avenue is still a two way street.

RR: Two lane, two way.

LNS: Two lane, two way. So you were there for the widening of Washtenaw. I understand you voted for this. This was a decision that wasn't made until...

RR: When I was in City Council and I was quite early into the term. That's a drawback of growing up in a community too because you know so many people and I knew quite a few people who lived on the street that was a two lane street which turns into a five lane and gobbles up a lot of their front yard. Plus puts cars and trucks, in some cases within ten, fifteen feet of their front door. I agonized on that one a long time. I knew what was right but I felt so badly for the people that it directly involved there.

LNS: Is there still the homes are still relatively prosperous type homes there.
RR: Amazingly so. I mean the street has kept up very well.

LNS: You mentioned when we were also talking before we realized that the tape recorder wasn't working that you got on City Council in '67 you made decisions that the south part of the city that was predominantly African American in those days still is I believe but the streets weren't paved out there.

RR: Many were not paved and urban renewal was a Federal Project that poured millions of dollars into areas and probably, well I think for the betterment of the community although again, it was disruptive to some people, some people's homes were taken from them by eminent domain and you know that just gives you a bad feeling when you do that. Because of the paving and the widening of the streets. I think in some cases there may not have been water and sewer out there. It was that bad.

LNS: So it was really grow America in Ypsilanti.

RR: And due to segregation and inability of good jobs to African Americans.

LNS: When I came to town and this was only twenty-three years ago people called this Ypsi-Tucky. Was that name deserved?

RR: I guess every place has somebody who kind of looks down their nose at them and I think Ann Arbor kind of looks down at us where we may look down on someone else a little bit. But because of the large influx of people from Kentucky and Tennessee, that's where the name came from. They are people from Kentucky are good hard working people they just came up and worked in the factories and helped build armors. But they definitely there was this large enough influx that it did significantly affect the community.

LNS: They brought some of their institutions from Kentucky and their ways of doing things.

RR: Well yeah and mostly their you pick up on the accents right away. They didn't have the mid-west twang, they had the southern drawl.

LNS: Was that an issue when you were going to high school at all? Were there any.. or was that part of the flavor of living in the community?

RR: I think most of our prejudices are usually developed more as adults. Kids, if you're having a good time with somebody, I still have a couple of my very closest friends man and woman they married each other, one is from Tennessee, one is from Kentucky and just wonderful hard working folks
and they were good friends in high school, we used to kid about their accent and they'd kid us about ours. But no we're better than you type stuff.

LNS: So it wasn't a malicious thing. Just growing up and looking at all the differences. 1967 was an important year for you. Became a member of the Board of Regents and you also became a member of the City Council.

RR: We did say '67 and it should've been '69 that I became a member of the Board of Regents. The reason I was thinking '67 City Council but yeah, I was elected City Council in '67 and that ran through '70 and then I was appointed to the Board in '69.

LNS: Why did you run for City Council?

RR: I...a good question. Several people approached me to do it. A good friend wanted to be mayor he thought I could be elected. If I was elected, he could get my vote for Mayor. I really, I had no burning issues that I felt needed to be done. I just truly liked the community I was single at the time I wanted to become involved. Like I say, it was no burning issues.

LNS: You were a dentist at that point?

RR: Yeah.

LNS: So you were a young guy starting out in practice.

RR: That's not a way to build a practice.

LNS: No I didn't think so.

RR: And you make it probably, make more, not more enemies is too strong, you make people unhappy more often than you make them happy. So yeah. I just thought it sounded like something that would be interesting and I could've hopefully accomplished something positive for the community but I didn't ride forth on a white horse and have a cause.

LNS: What were the burning issues that you thought as a City Council member?

RR: I think the biggest ones back then were urban renewal, public housing, you may find this interesting I was at a council meeting and this young African American they were debating on whether to build public housing over there on Michigan Avenue, you know where it is.

LNS: Summit?
RR: Yeah. That area and this young African-American kind of firebrand says it's about time we had some public housing north of Michigan Avenue. Because it was all south of Michigan Avenue in the African American area and that was Doug Harris.

LNS: Oh really?

RR: And he was just a firebrand. I mean, who was this guy. I just, his attitude was in your face type thing. I wasn't real fond of him and as years went on he mellowed and maybe I changed too, but we became good friends after that. Woo, he was tough. That was tough, Washtenaw Avenue widening of that, they may not sound like tough decisions but they are when you are dealing with people, you know. Other than that, just trying to balance the budget and keep the parks running and streetlights going.

LNS: Now the friend you'd mentioned, got you to run that was Tim Dyer?

RR: Yeah.

LNS: And Tim he became the Mayor didn't he? Now he ran the same time you ran?

RR: He was already on Council. I think he may have just been elected. Now when I did go on the very first thing you do is vote for Mayor and which is kind of difficult if you're a new member and it happens that John Burton had been on the Council fifteen or twenty years and never been elected Mayor because he was African-American. And I personally, just didn't think that that was right and so I made some people unhappy with that vote, when I voted for John Burton to be Mayor. Which he was.

LNS: He became Mayor. Ultimately he also became a member of our Board of Regents and Chairman of our Board of Regents. He broke a lot of barriers down. And

RR: One of the few politicians that never forgot what I did. Because he was within hours of being the first black Mayor in the State of Michigan. Saginaw beat us by hours. It was the same night. I think the part that made me feel best about it because there was no question that he deserved it, so that was a no-brainer for me, I didn't care. But the part that made me happiest was twenty-five years later, he still remembered me. It was appreciated.

LNS: He was a remarkable man. He was a good example of the evils of racism here's a guy that had so many qualities and been given some of the same advantages as others even in spite of not having those advantages, he did very well. So you're on the City Council. You make friends with Tim Dyer
who you probably knew. Did you know him from high school when he was another Ypsi High guy and he grew up in Ypsi and he was probably involved in lots of stuff in high school was the kind of guy who wanted to be involved. You're on the Council and now you get to be a Board Member in '69 and Sponberg is President of the University and up to that time your relationship with the university is more just as a community member. When did you start Eastern?

RR: '54.

LNS: '54.

RR: '57 I went in the service for two years, came back in '59 left in June of '60 and went to Dental School at the University of Michigan.

LNS: And you graduated from U of M Dental School in?

RR: '64.

LNS: '64 and then I recall in you got your Bachelor Degree formally awarded sometime in...

RR: Seventies.

LNS: Late seventies.

RR: It was in between presidents

LNS: In between Brickley and

RR: Tony Evans, he was not pleased that I got it.

LNS: Oh, really? He didn't think that it was appropriate to do?

RR: I guess he thought some people might take issue with it that maybe I really didn't earn it but Don Drummond.

LNS: Who was the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

RR: He looked at my transcript at Michigan and said, I was missing six hours max and I guess they do that. I know that Albion does that kind of thing.

LNS: You know we did it for others.

RR: Anyway, as I said then, just as well in that degree as my other one. That fits with my close affiliation with Eastern.
LNS: So you truly are a son of Eastern Michigan University. On the Board, you get on the Board in '69 and it's a time of great turmoil for the university. In '67 or so there was a lot of contention among African-American students on campus in those days referred to as black students who feel the school is very racist and give the administration, hammer it with a series of demands and so the school is dealing with that. The war in Vietnam is going on at this time, there is a tremendous amount of strife, this campus is no exception to most of the great American campuses students are upset about the war there are organizations, there's an underground student newspaper called The Second Coming. Things that are tough on the campus, the university has just gone through a massive building program, sixties seems that every Board meeting during the sixties, they're voting more bond resolutions to expand the campus and here arrives Dick Robb and was Tim Dyer on the Board at the same time?

RR: No.

LNS: No, he came later.

RR: No. He came later.

LNS: He came later then. You were thirty years old or so the youngest board member probably?

RR: Yeah, thirty-two.

LNS: Thirty-two. So you were pretty young. The board was pretty old and well-established. What were you experiencing when you got on the board?

RR: I was by far the youngest Board Member in the whole State. And the students kind of looked to me, as maybe I would be the voice for them. I think Ed McCormick was Chairman of the Board then and I think he was a little leery as to why the Governor appointed such a young person.

LNS: Why did the Governor appoint you?

RR: It's a process where of course the Governor, I had met the Governor but I certainly was not a close personal friend of the Governor. It was George Romney. But some of my friends were close personal friends.

LNS: Peter Fletcher one of them?

RR: Yes.
RR: And so my name was recommended to the Governor and it prevailed. I knew this guy named Rolly Anderson he VP up here, he was very concerned that I was gonna come up and rock the boat too much. I don't know if you're aware, I was appointed because the Attorney General had ruled that three of the members of the Board of Regents could not serve because they were Board Members of banks that the university could or did do business with and said it was a conflict of interests. So I was appointed to fill an uncompleted term for a Dr. Pat O'Hara, who also happened to be a dentist. So that's how the position became available. But anyway, when I did arrive on the Board after a few meetings they saw that I was probably as conservative or moderate or whatever the case may be. That I was not a flaming liberal ready to take on the administration or the Board with issues that I became very close friends with Ed McCormick and his family. So the fears were alleviated. But it was a time of turmoil it was I think when I arrived and you'd have to look it up I think there were only under four thousand students. That's how small it was.

LNS: Small school. Grow pretty fast. You have a small school Forest Avenue still runs through the campus, lots of new buildings going up on the northern part of the land, lots of land acquisition and this kind of stuff more Bond in debtedness, more residence halls being built, named after famous Ypsi people good times?

RR: I enjoyed all the years. Even there were decisions that were tough but I guess I cared so much about this place because it meant so much to my whole family and I knew and as you become involved with an organization, it sounds kind of trite and maybe insincere, but it's not. You like the institution because of the people involved of course. And so it was twenty-five years of a labor of love. And it's always good, when you see how well a university is doing and how well it's perceived state-wide and nation-wide and you're a part of it it just makes you feel good.

LNS: Where you here when the students had taken over the campus in '69 and what was going on?

RR: That was a bad time because the president had a wife and young family living in the house. And they were throwing rocks through the windows and he was very fearful for and he was not a timid man, but he was fearful for his family. And he was a wonderful communicator and I think that probably maybe that even bothered him some that he couldn't quell this thing with just talking the issues out, but it was a time where I think that students weren't willing to listen anyway it was almost a national...

LNS: It wasn't almost, it was the thing.
RR: Thing to do. Back when we were in school, the panty raids were the things to do, well this was a lot more serious but it was really kind of the same thing. They're doing that in Ann Arbor maybe we should be doing this kind of stuff.

LNS: But as also we could be drafted and be killed. Pretty heavy duty, wasn't being expelled from school, this was pretty heavy-duty issue. And some more resentment builds and builds. Did the university handle it well do you think?

RR: I think so. There were some times when the Sheriff, Sheriff Harvey, that's another story, he was kind of a hard-nosed guy he certainly was the brunt of a lot of dislike for the students. And we as a Board and the Administration tried to not be heavy-handed. You know let some of it play out as opposed to coming in as storm troopers and clearing it out. That seemed to work I think there were a few arrests or at least police carrying off a few people. Not the night sticks and the tear gas, that kind of thing just let it play out.

LNS: So it wasn't buildings being bombed on the campus and those kinds of things.

RR: Some buildings were taken over, and the doors were chained with the kids inside.

LNS: Strong demonstration.

RR: Yeah.

LNS: The two other things that linger prior to you getting on the Board there was a number of black student issues that were raised and black students took over I think Pierce Hall as well and a lot of demands being made. There was also still the lingering legacy of the John Norman Collins affair. Do you recall those things?

RR: I recall those days very well. Even though I wasn't on the Board, because the community as a whole lived in fear of another one of these heinous, horrible murders and the inability to find out who was the cause of it. So that brought a great concern by parents and everyone for the safety of the women of the community and the campus. Fortunately, he was finally caught.

LNS: Whether he was guilty or not there was some controversy over that everything stopped once he was arrested.
RR: I was privy to some information that evidently they couldn't use in court. That there was no question.

LNS: There was no question in people's minds. That's what I understand as well. Sponberg was president, he came in mid-60's he's been president for a while. All of a sudden Sponberg falls into some kind of differences of opinion with the Board or something because he abruptly resigns at the end of what, 1972 or '73 or '74. What was going on in the Board that brought about this deterioration in relationships?

RR: I think that as I look back at it, we were constantly at odds with the administration, we were getting information, especially budget information. They would give us a budget to pass with blank lines on it and so we would just continually ask for more information and I think the administration felt that that might have been an infringement upon their ability to make those kind of decisions. But as the governing body, we didn't say you have to spend the money here or there, we just said we just want to see where you are spending the money and where you propose to spend it. And for some reason and I don't know why we've heard this from legislators that Sponberg had quit going to Lansing and that was one of his strong suits. And he was a good speaker, he could lobby better than probably any other president and he just knew how to take the common man type position with dealing with the Legislature instead of looking kind of down your nose the University of Michigan had that reputation their president, when dealing with he would get in the trenches and talk with it. For some reason or other he quit going. And he sent his Vice President for Finance up and so he fell in kind of disrepute with the legislature, which is a serious concern for the Board.

LNS: Especially for a State institution that gets all of its funding from the legislature.

RR: Yep. And then the Vice President for Finance got up there and said some things that weren't exactly correct and then the legislature got mad at the university.

LNS: Things about the university that weren't correct?

RR: Yeah, some of the things that we were going to be doing and then we weren't going to be doing. So he got caught up in that. So the administration kind of got themselves in trouble in Lansing. As you said, was a very serious concern for us. So we would kind of press Sponberg on that issue and evidently, he had just had had enough.

LNS: Rumor has it a number of others that I've talked with that Sponberg was not in full control of himself at this time and he had taken to drinking rather
heavily. That there were all kinds of pressures on him and end of the decade of pretty hectic times a lot of faculty discontentment, discontentment in Lansing and others. Was all of that pretty much true?

RR: I don't know about faculty. I think they liked him. They unionized during that period, of his presidency and he did not fight that that endeared him to them. So to this day, I still hear that he was the best president from the faculty.

LNS: All of the other things are pretty much accurate that I described.


LNS: That was the prevailing rumor. That was the sentiment on the campus. What made the faculty organize? Do you have any idea? Why all of a sudden did they unionize? What were the issues that would make people want to go from the traditions of the academy to the unionization?

RR: I think it was economics. I think that maybe the area that we live in is high union. I don't know if the State organizations or the national organizations, other ones that instigated the unionization. I guess there was a faculty senate and but there wasn't much negotiating. I mean, the university, this is what you are getting next year and there wasn't any give and take on the issue.

LNS: Tough times in the economy coming. This is the early Seventies, late sixties. Tim Dyer gets on the Board at this time?

RR: I'm trying to think when Tim got on the Board. I don't know if you can pull that together but I put a charter together because I was having trouble with the overlap of who came on when.

LNS: I have it all documented.

RR: Well I've got it in a bar chart so it's kind of interesting cause it goes on and on and on.

LNS: I'd love to see a copy of that.

RR: Yeah, you know, Carl Rush and Vida Anderson and Dee Kinsell and on....and the overlap. It's kind of interesting.

LNS: Prior to those guys getting on, Tim gets on and a lot of people have triggered here comes a Board out to get the President. Was that true?
RR: Yep. I think that's what people thought, cause Tim was there when Harold resigned.

LNS: Not only did Harold resign, there was a massive turnover, Vice President for Instruction, Vice President for Finance other officers. There's an ascendancy of Gray Hawks who was in the Personnel Office and all kinds of feelings that hey, this is a whole conspiracy to get the president. This was the reason that everybody got on the Board and now the Board is in control of the university. Is that a misreading on that of it or am I putting words in...

RR: Well there's no question that this was the perception. I think because of Tim's personality and his abrupt style that I could see where the administration would have been a little fearful of what his mission was. He because of his background in education, he was much better attuned to finance, etc. of a large educational organization and he asked a lot of very good questions which the administration found I think intimidating. Where before the board was...

RR: So because of his more probing questions, I think they took it personally. Whether he had a personal agenda or not, I don't know.. I know that it certainly made the administration uncomfortable.

LNS: But everybody did leave and now we have a interim period and Ralph Gilden is serving as Interim president sort of a...

RR: Caretaker.

LNS: Very Caretaker-ish. Not seen very Presidentially, is not a contender for the position or anything. Was the best choice available to pick or feel the people that picked for this interim Vice President?

RR: It's purely a Board decision. Their decision is made on who they're familiar with, who they're comfortable with.

LNS: Even a Dean of Admissions and Financial. It was no Vice President was picked. It was rather interesting that he was picked. Not an academic leader.

RR: Lou Profit was still there, I think Bruce Nelson was Vice President for Academic Affairs.

LNS: Why Gilden of all of the people on the university?

RR: I think purely just caretaker. I think if you picked a Vice President, it either assumes that maybe that person's got the inside track. Or you feel that it
may cause a feeling if that person steps back to the Vice Presidency then you've got this problem the power concerns of the other Vice Presidents. So we can pick someone that isn't going to be in a position and someone when they step back probably won't have the advantage of the position when they did step in.

LNS: So he's picked, some people feels that it's because he could be controlled more by the board. Is that a fair assessment?

RR: You know really not. I don't think so I don't think that Board did not want to run the university day-to-day.

LNS: So Gilden's time is over and Brickley is the new President. And that is a major controversial thing. Let me hold for one second.

LNS: So Jim Brickley becomes president of the university. The faculty are really upset, big time upset. There are demonstrations, faculty go on strike during this early months of his presidency over all kinds of issues. The economy is going south, enrollment has gone south at the institution. What was a school built for twenty-two thousand's now at about seventeen thousand students. People are really getting concerned there's all kinds of issues going on whether or not even the school should be kept alive. Brickley's the former Lt. Governor, no experience in higher education. How did he get picked?

RR: Well, you made an assumption there that's incorrect. There was some higher education involved, he had taught some and he did have an advanced degree past his Law degree, which I consider an advanced degree. He had a Master's in Law from...

LNS: New York University, I believe. NYU.

RR: Well, maybe anyway. I don't question him why people would be upset, not so much with a person, but with the position he had previously held so it looked purely political. Certainly his visibility was a factor in making him more known to the Board. He certainly had not been, who sound I'm gonna defensive here and, I guess I am because I was one of the people who made this decision. When you go through a Presidential Search and you start culling through the names it's amazing. It is truly amazing the type of people who think they should be university presidents. You get retired generals, you get city managers, you get, just the gamut of people who feel they are competent and qualified to do this. I've been involved in let's see, three presidential searches. Brickley, Porter and Shelton. And I can honestly say that if you come down to two or three people that you would accept that maybe the times when we did it I don't know. There's not a lot out there. There really isn't. They're either totally...
LNS: You mean there's a lot more opportunity than candidates?

RR: Yeah. I was just surprised how it narrows down very quickly and then when you get down to it there's still not a helluva lot left to pick from. During that particular period of time the pickings were slim. I don't mean that Jim Brickley was just the best of the not very good. He had very strong administrative skills, he had which you don't see happen much anymore, he had the ability to come in and say ok, things need to be changed and he made tough administrative decisions. He had a Vice President step back into the classroom who had held a position for a good many years.

LNS: Bruce Nelson?

RR: Yeah, Bruce Nelson was one of the finest people you would ever meet. He really was. Whether he was strong enough administrator to move and he's a friend of mine so, I don't, please...be careful how you repeat, whether he was strong enough to make tough decisions with faculty, to move to a bigger more diversified university and I guess Jim didn't think he was. And Jim had the misfortune of picking that fellow, McGee?

LNS: Jim McGee. Who then had a stroke. Bright, brilliant man so he was never able to fulfill his potential. Then he had the ability to pick this marvelous Vice President for Student Affairs who's still here.

LNS: Say it a little louder.

RR: But you know how he went about choosing people. It was very thorough, I was impressed.

LNS: My references told me, one of them, not realizing Brickley's background said, I thought I was being interrogated by the FBI. I said, what do you mean? I mean this guy who's president of the school called me, I've never been through an interview for a reference. He said, who is this guy? And I said, well he's a former FBI Special Agent. Boy, I've never been checked out as thoroughly as anything as I was for this position.

RR: So he brought strong administrative skills. Certainly faculty would like a person with strong academic credentials, strong teaching credentials, Ph.D. in some kind of educational area as opposed to a Law Degree. I think the fellow at Michigan State has a Business Degree and they were all upset with that. Prior to that, they had a Dentist. You don't have to I know right now, faculty is very unhappy with our present president and he has the kind of credentials that they thought a Jim Brickley should have. So you cannot win when it comes to picking a president like making
people happy so. As I say, when you look. I had the privilege of looking at the candidates available. Their strengths and weaknesses, the university was going through tremendous change in the size, diversity and I hear we were an education school, we wanted to become more than a regional teacher's training school. And we thought we needed someone with strong administrative skills to come in and shake the bushes and so Jim Brickley was the man.

LNS: So you get Jim Brickley. Was the Governor involved at all in this decision?

RR: No.

LNS: A lot of people feel that because he was Lt. Governor that Milliken.

RR: The only time I talked to Milliken about this particular issue was three years later when he called and said he wanted Jim back on his ticket for Lt. Governor.

LNS: Now you were Chairman of the Board at that point so that's how, you were Chairman for what about ten years? That's a long Chairmanship good years and tough years right? So Brickley's president now and the faculty are very unhappy and there's a big strike going on.

RR: Wasn't that over salary issues?

LNS: Yeah, it wasn't over Brickley's appointment. But the faculty used everything they could, they talk about presidential mansion and repairs to the house and the Brickley china, which never existed, and I mean, you remember all those things. Then comes the economy goes really down hill. Times are really tough and there's no question, we use up any reserves we have in the institution, probably recall those days, tough decisions are made, young guys are on the Board. Like a John Ulrich pushing for a rehabbing of buildings that have gone down, 1982 comes by and we're talking about building an IM Rec. Building and everybody's saying why are we building this when it looks like we might be closing our doors. Times are really difficult and Brickley decides to run for Lt. Governor again at Milliken's request as you mentioned. The years are a little cloudy but and there is a major, major brew-ha on the campus over the selection of the next president. Tim Dyer is appointed to Chair the committee to set up the criteria for the new president, the faculty are upset because they don't like Tim Dyer apparently, a lot of concerns over his style and his brashness as you mentioned earlier. And the first thing he does is says let's remove that you have to have a Higher Education experience to become president. Do you remember those days and the faculty go really bonkers cause they say oh my god, this doesn't look like
this is going to be an open search. There must be somebody that they have in mind. And as the story unfolds and the times are tense and Dyer becomes a candidate correct for the presidency. Do you remember those years?

RR: Yes.

LNS: Any comments?

RR: Yeah, I'm trying to recollect all of the ins and outs of that. I think that as I recall the Board did want the ability to open the search to more diversified candidacy because of what we had seen in the past. It had only been three years since we had gone through this and we were not really impressed with the candidates that we had seen in that case. I was and I am a friend of Tim Dyer's. I was surprised that he ran for Presidency. I really was. I didn't know that one was coming. That certainly caused me a great deal of anguish and anxiety because if he made the first, second cut whatever the case may be then I'm caught between and betwixt on loyalty to a friend and maybe that person is not the ultimate candidate in my opinion. And friendship and loyalty are very important to me and so I was anxious, I never talked to Tim about that concern to mind about it. I thought, I'll just have to deal with when I have to deal with it. And the day he came into the Board meeting and five minutes before the Board meeting, he told me that he was going to withdraw his name and continue on with the Superintendency in the Wayne-Westland. He was happy enough there that he saw the difficulties if he were to become President might be insurmountable. The unrest, the unhappiness with the faculty.

LNS: The faculty and it was unusual act for our faculty took out a full-page ad in the newspapers.

RR: That figures. I'd forgot that.

LNS: Speaking out against it.

RR: That he realized that sometimes you can win people over but that one was gonna be tough one.

LNS: Was one of the problems that Beth Milford was gonna change her vote?

RR: I can't speak for Beth. No one can. Not even Beth. I don't know, she told me that very morning that she was ready to vote for him as I recall, if that's easy to say when you withdraw. You can say anything you want.

LNS: It was a sort of a fractious time though.
RR: Oh god yeah.

LNS: The rumor is she was or the feeling was that the way that she got re-appointed to the board was that she wasn't, she would not vote for Tim as president and that changed the balance.

RR: You know, you're dragging up stuff that I've put way back in the old memory bank Larry and I don't know if I can pull it all out. But I do recall something I think she, I heard and I don't know, because the Governor didn't talk to me about her re-appointment but there seems to me like there was some kind of expectation. I don't know whether it was to vote for him or against him I wouldn't say.

LNS: Some of the information is that there was a great feeling that he would so destroy the fabric of the institution. There would be such a controversy.

RR: Yes.

LNS: Even if he had the votes that it would be so destructive that was one of the conditions about it whether it was true or not. Eventually I'll come to that. I've heard it from...

RR: I know and I'm trying to, I don't know.

LNS: But, nonetheless the decision is made. That was a horrible day as I recall that was also Brickley's going away party that night. That was one of the most strange affairs in the history of Eastern that I've ever attended.

RR: What was that? I forgot.

LNS: It was Brickley it was the same the day of the Board meeting where all of this occurred was the same day that Brickley had scheduled his going away dinner at that Board Meeting. So it was a rather tense day. That's neither here nor there. Porter is a candidate. Porter withdraws says that he doesn't like the process that's going on. He will not be a candidate unless the Board opens up the whole search and involves more faculty and student input. Do you recall that at all?

RR: Yeah, now that you're saying it, I recall.

LNS: Porter becomes President. You're still Chairman of the Board at this point.

RR: Yeah, almost.

LNS: He sent this letter for us you know he says I sent my letter to Tim Dyer.
RR: Yeah, I recall it now.

LNS: Yeah, I didn't know he was a candidate. Somehow my letter didn't get there, it was very confused so Porter says he didn't want any part of it unless it was all started over again. We started all over again had a new search committee and Porter ends up being president. Any comments about John Porter? Any assessment? As you look at Brickley's term and Porter's term, do you have any assessment?

RR: Well, I felt very badly that Jim Brickley in effect was only president three years. Because once you say you are running for Lt. Governorship you become a lame duck and I think the time involved you just don't start the new initiatives you're just more caretaker again and I think that had Jim stayed three or four more years and when you retire you don't linger on that long that probably some of the successes that John enjoyed maybe Brickley because when John came he didn't shake up the staff and in fact that's one of the things I told him, I don't know if you know that, I say's John if you're chosen these people have not been on the job that long I don't want another wholesale clearing of the house I said after you've been there a while if you're uncomfortable with them certainly that is your prerogative to change your administrative staff but I said I don't want to see that for the first year or two. These people have got initiatives started, they've just settled in and they haven't had a fair shot at doing the job. He agreed with me a hundred percent. So I feel badly, I think Jim Brickley whether he'd been great, good, mediocre, who knows? But, he didn't give the university the opportunity to find out and I regret that for the university and it's a disappointment for me that he did that also. I understand it, I understand the Governor's position, he had a Lt. Governor that was not helpful at all and Jim had done a good job, he was a visible Lt. Governor, which is unusual and had done a good job. So it is kind of hard to compare cause Jim really hadn't gotten things going how long had he been president before you'd been appointed?

LNS: I came in '75. He had been in there for about...he came in '74. He had been here less than a year.

RR: And so the first year, year and a half, two years of his term Brickley's was getting sapped in administration. So we can't say. So, John came, John, I have, still do, always will have great admiration for John Porter as we know a lot of idiosyncrasies as we all do. And styles that you know, once you learn them you just kind of smile and say, that's John and you move on. You as an administrator could speak more to his style than I could. I just found him a person who was never short of new initiatives, always on the go, always looking for new and better ways of doing things. As I say, I have the utmost respect for John Porter. Another difficult situation, it was not a political decision, it was a decision of a known you know when you
are picking the president when you come down to the final three or four candidates. I think we're all probably guilty of that. We pick people who we know and are comfortable with. Why pick an unknown that you don't know? John's track record had been right out there for full view of the Whole State. You know, his initiative for MEAP exams had just ticked off teachers in public education and you'd look at the reasoning behind it and say that's excellent. Yet needs some tweaking needs some fixing. But they looked at it as a infringement on their ability or mistrust of the job they were doing where I viewed it as a public says, well let's test these kids, if they're weak in math let's figure out how to fix it.

LNS: In terms of the assessment of higher education he gave it to us a little bit too early.

LNS: We're back here with Dr. Richard Robb to finish the session that we didn't yesterday. I appreciate your coming back that.

LNS: We were talking about John Porter when we stopped yesterday. We were talking about the tests and the MEAP tests and that he was a man who wasn't afraid of assessment, etc. And now's a time that we could do a little assessment of John Porter. One of the things that people have described him as is the man who saved the university and I was just curious as to how you would react to that appellation for him.

RR: That's a strong statement and I think that certainly one man couldn't have done it. But I think that his leadership probably, I don't, the university probably wasn't going to go anywhere. It certainly was being bombarded by the Legislature and questioning our viability, etc, and then later the MAC Conference, etc. But I was impressed with John's, he always had a plan and always put a time date on it and it was kind of John's way of doing things. But I think from my perspective it appeared to me that he gave pretty good directions to his Vice Presidents. I know that we were struggling with our enrollments and from what I could see from my advantage point that he gave you a lot of leeway and authority to come up with a retention plan which made a significant difference in holding students. And I think he from again from a Board perspective, that he seemed to expect a lot from his VP's and but he gave them pretty much free reign to come up with the ideas. There's no question he had veto on any ideas and suggestions but as I say from my point of view it looked like he gave them the operative to do it. And he of course, had his own visions of where things should be and where they should go but I think he was the leader of a group of people that saved the university if saving is the right word.

LNS: It's a word that people do use and the legislature had from the time he came on board was talking about closing the university and they were
trying to get us to consider renting the Residence Halls up on the hill to the prison systems. In many ways he certainly did stabilize the institution during his tenure as president. Did you feel that the Board ran Porter or Porter ran the Board?

RR: I think John had a very good understanding of the relationship with the Board and the President. He something you delegate.

LNS: I propose, and you dispose. Something like that.

RR: Something, you delegate and I do it. Whatever. So I think as one Board Member I certainly didn't want to be involved in the day-to-day operations but I certainly didn't want to see the reputation of the university suffer or the ultimate disaster of closing it, which as you look at it now almost unfathomable. I kind of like John's style from a Board Members point of view. He came forth with ideas and if you as a Board disagree he didn't appear to take it that personally. He said, ok, we'll try it another way. If you don't think that's going to work. I personally had an excellent relationship cause I was Chairman of the Board a good many of the years that he was here and every month we would go to lunch before the Board meeting and go over the Agenda and I, about all I would do is just tell him my perspective of how that might fly in the community from a community point of view. Very seldom, I mean and he welcomed that.

LNS: When you look back at the Porter years, you were here for almost all of them.

RR: I was.

LNS: You were here for all of them. And you were here and you were Chairman of the Board for most of them. What do you think were the strengths of the President other than what you are talking about? Do you see any other strengths?

RR: You know, we really have limited contact with him. But I had a feeling that he was quite visible on campus that even though people may not agree with him. I thought for the most part there was respect for John Porter. As any leader of any organization, there's a good many people who will disagree with you. I didn't sense it as personal dislike as I've seen with some of the others. I don't think people were he said it's daylight, they'd say it's night. Just out of spite.

LNS: Do you think people were afraid of Porter?

RR: I couldn't answer that.
LNS: He certainly had a lot of paper during his administration. When I look at the files, they are pretty extensive. When you think a little bit more during the Porter years the university's enrollment turns around, very significant turnaround, we begin planting the seeds for the Doctorate in the College of Education, we see a great amount of reinvestment into the physical attractiveness of the campus these are some of his goals, the enhancement of retention, lots of planning.

RR: Many plans.

LNS: More and more plans. We basically see a re-invigoration of city / campus relationships with the president being an African-American, the City Manager being an African-American, the school superintendent being an African-American, we see a coming together of a whole new appreciation for contributions of Black leaders in our community that is very significant. Something people still point to with pride in terms of that this is an institution that is there to serve all of the people and the president's rhetoric matches that and so it's a good time. Yet there still persists in a lot of people's minds that campus community relations have never been good. The university has never been a major player in the community. Here you were a former City Council member and a Board Member at the same time and now you look back. Is that a fair assessment?

RR: I think when I was on the City Council lo those many years ago that there was a division. Because the university did take a hard line about responsible they didn't have a Public Safety Department then they did not and still do not have a Fire Department and they take up a large percentage of the city land and don't pay taxes. And I think they also took a hard nose position that they weren't going to. That the value of the university was important enough to the community that the community should accept that. And I think that John was you know, the first president to be here for a while after Sponberg and he really bought into the community. His children attended the public schools, when he retired, he bought a home in the community. He I think he really adopted this community so he did have a feeling for the community and he did keep dialogue with city government. So I think, I didn't hear the Town and Gown fracture nearly as much when John was here.

LNS: Well you're still active in the community now. What's your assessment of Eastern in the community at this point?

RR: You know I don't hear anything one way or the other. I know there's a fair number of faculty who do live in the community, are involved in the community activities other than the university, so that certainly bodes well for the community to have those people doing that. I think right now the
city's got so many other problems that the university is not one of them that's high on the list. I really don't see that as an issue right now.

LNS: During your tenure as Chairman of the Board, twenty-five years of being a Board Member, twenty-five right?
RR: Right.
LNS: What stands out in your mind, before we get to the current president, what stands out in your mind as the most important achievements of the university?
RR: I think its ability to change its image of a small regional teacher's training school into a multi-faceted university. Certainly, I think in academic circles I think that Eastern Michigan is not considered just a regional university. Its outreaches are better than that. Certainly that's would be from going from a small school to a major university is the biggest accomplishment.
LNS: How do you assess having the Doctorate? Is that important?
RR: Oh yeah. I just didn't feel comfortable calling the University without a Doctorate Program. It's one of those things that you constantly mention but just never seem to get going but finally John and timing and everything was better. It's hard to push for Doctorate Program when enrollments are going down and you're fighting other battles so I was very pleased when that came to fruition.
LNS: Any other, now the fire in Sherzer in '89 you were still Chair of the Board? No that was Simmons was Chair of the Board. Do you remember that event?
RR: That yeah I was very, very pleased they were able to restore it because four years of my college life I probably spent a third of the time in that building. And it's just a unique building and it has architectural integrity that I would have hated to lose so I was extremely pleased that the State was willing to let us refurbish that.
LNS: Now you had an important role in preserving this building. I don't know if you remember it but Mr. Ronkama was the Vice President for Business Finance and the building was starting to deteriorate and the Board of Regents meeting where we had a condition where we had to tear this building and open up the campus to the street and you got up out of your chair and said that that was not going to happen. That stands out in my mind as one of the things or you said that long time investment, you weren't gonna allow this building to deteriorate any further and we have to do something to stop it or there would have to be some other changes in
the administration. Sort of gave some of the impetuous for re-doing at Welch Hall. Then for several years. You complained about the building you complained about the fountain. I don't know if you remember that. The fountain still needs to be done. But the building is sort of a monument to what you can do with an old building. That's not something you recall?

RR: I don't.

LNS: It's in my notes.

RR: I believe I would have said it.

LNS: Now you can take credit for it. There was something that comes in 1989 is President of the university and he talks about the selection process for Bill, the man that was appointed.

RR: I think having been involved in let's see, Brickley, Porter and the selection of three presidents including Shelton, because of I mean we went back over procedures that we used in prior times and tried to make it as inclusive of as many constituencies as possible. And we were mindful of criticisms of the past for Brickley and for Porter. And even though I still think they were both good decisions. It's as I recall it, I thought it was as open of a search as possible. There's things I wish I'd been, I know there were some candidates that that were interviewed by the screening committee and set up as finalists and some of those people have told me that their first choice was not our first choice. But I am privy to information that I wouldn't disclose of why we did pick the best man for the job.

LNS: You feel there's still things that are not out there.

RR: Yeah, they just serve no purpose to bring them out. Just some of the interviews with the people trying to think who was on that committee with me, the final, final interview might've been Don Shelton. But there was a woman finalist, there was a fellow from Marshall a finalist, there was Bill. I don't know if there's a fourth or not. But those two, I can recall. I believe that we made the right decision.

LNS: When you look at the Shelton administration starts out, one of the first things he encounters is a strike, not a strike, a demonstration by faculty members. Do you recall that at all?

RR: What was the issue?

LNS: Well the issue was over the president thing that he was not going to be a man of the faculty. There was something going on and they boycotted his Inaugural Speech to some degree do you remember that?
RR: Yeah I do. And that may have been related I think that relates to just what I had mentioned previously. I think the faculty members of the screening committee, first of all they were not supposed to rank them which I think they did if I recall. We said, send the finals, we don't want any one, two, three. We want the finalists period. That as I do recall and I think their number one person was not chosen. As I say, I would love to be able to divulge why but there's no purpose served and it's over and done, I don't even know if the guy is still in Marshall or not, cause I think that's the one that they wanted. Cause he had been a President at Marshall, Bill had just been a Vice President so they thought, plus other things. You know, I'm sure credentials, etc. they felt were stronger but.

LNS: There were some sentiments that Shelton was picked and Wilbanks was going to be the inside President and Shelton was going to be the outside President.

RR: Oh, I had heard that a great deal.

LNS: Was that a Board decision?

RR: Oh no. We as a Board I think that was as a good many rumors or predictions people assume the worst. It was not our intention was that Roy Wilbanks was the Interim President and when we picked a new one he was no longer Interim President. No, I mean and we made that perfectly clear to President Shelton and I think because of Roy's high visibility even after Shelton's appointment, people assumed that. That was not at all a consideration. If that had been an option then, we've taken the heat before, we could've appointed Roy if that was what we had planned and why put on a sham, just go up front and do it. That was certainly not in any way a plan that Roy would be. We told the President that he could realign assignments of Vice Presidents any way he wanted to if he saw a better way of doing it. We gave him full reign to be the Administrator of the university.

LNS: Do you think the Board was sensitive to the whole issue of the dynamics of what was going on in the institution. There had to be some discussions on the Board about power struggles that were going on within the institution at that point.

RR: Yeah, they were aware of it. I think that they felt when we did pick a new president that that was kind of his problem.
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
HISTORY

INTERVIEW
WITH
Dr. RICHARD ROBB
LNS: Tape two interview with Dr. Richard Robb. We were just talking about power struggles and things going on within the university. I know time is running out. But the Huron Logo is an issue that you were deeply involved with. You being a former student at Eastern and being an Alum of Eastern and former Chairman of the Board this issue comes up the Board turns to the president and says make a recommendation to us. What do you think about that decision?

RR: Oh I think that it was the right decision. As difficult as it was that the only regret that I have is because I think that one of Bill Shelton's strongest attributes is his congeniality, his ability to talk, a story teller, just a person that social person that could meet with alumni and friends and talk to anybody at their own level and make them very comfortable. Having forced that decision on him at the and again beginning it was an issue that had to be resolved because it was there and but the timing I think was really too bad because there are people that when they see me they would turn bright red and look like they were going to have a heart attack they despised me.

LNS: Still as of this day?

RR: Oh yeah. I can probably monthly get a letter from Jim Martin. It's so sad. And that's his quote. And quoting things I had said at Board Meetings in support of the logo change. I think it was sort of the right thing to do. I think that time will show that it was the right thing to do. You see more university's doing it, some that I never thought I would see Miami of Ohio do. I just really surprised that they did it and I commend them for. So it was the right decision at a bad time. Bill had not had a chance to really build a rapport with the alumni and friends, etc., and so now when he goes out on the road, he meets a hostile group and it makes life a lot more difficult.

LNS: Well the proof is that among the campus, very few, most people were in support of the change.

RR: Right.

LNSL Small little group of people that were upset with the change.

RR: I you know I, it's less and less but there's still a hardcore, you know, peripheral friends of mine that are no longer friends because of the issue.

LNS: So you did lose a few friends over this?

RR: Not close friends.
LNS: Not close friends. Some acquaintances.

RR: Acquaintances.

LNS: You would make the same decision over the same way?

RR: Yes. I could debate the pros and cons of maybe going Huron Eagles if that would help mitigate the hate. Keep the name but the logo would be the Eagle. That I could live with that. I don't know if the opposition could. I don't think minds are gone so strong or if it matters that much any more. It doesn't matter that much to the student body any more, I don't think. Most of those kids are graduated and have moved on.

LNS: Well it's student body's Eagles now, right?

RR: Too bad when you lose people that had an affinity for the university. That they, the issue is that important to them that they disassociate themselves with the university. That is the sad part. Plus the timing was so poor. But we had no control.

LNS: As you walk about the campus, is there a favorite spot on the campus or anything. Now that you mention Sherzer you took a lot of classes do you have any other?

RR: I truly enjoy walking between McKenney and over to Goodison and the old, now the old Library and not having to dodge cars going Forest Avenue. I think it's a beautiful campus now. Much more pedestrian-oriented than when I went here. And I just enjoy walking around. Every now and then someone will say hi, Dr. Robb, that makes me feel good. Just like a Lawyer, it doesn't take long before you're gone to be forgotten. Which is fine that's not a problem. But it is nice when you are recognized once in a while.

LNS: Do you have a special feeling when you see your name on a building?

RR: Yeah. I, that, that meeting I do recall when Vice President Ronkama said we can't afford to do it and I said, find a way to do it. I just truly felt deep down that that was critical to continue the retention of the student body and make this place more attractive to students. And I knew it could be done somehow. I didn't know how, but I, so I, yeah. That means a lot to me. And then to have my name on it.

LNS: It was that building that people know that Eastern has a future. We were going to create a future. We were building that building in spite of how bad things were. And the economy was bad too.
RR: I remember the students had to foot the bill. It was...

LNS: When you were a student here, Elliott was the President?

RR: Yep.

LNS: Did you ever meet him?

RR: No.

LNS: Do you know much about him or anything?

RR: No I had no idea how the school was governed. I met Bingo Brown because he would call me into his office every semester cause I was getting a D in ROTC because I would play euchre instead of going to ROTC. So he'd give me this pep talk. And I'm sure you've heard tapes of him talking. It was amazing.

LNS: Men of Ypsilanti.

RR: You know it really was. It may sound hokey on tapes but if you just saw the guy, it grabbed you.

LNS: He was a compelling person.

RR: Oh just amazing.

LNS: Touched a lot of people's lives?

RR: Oh yeah. Really, really cared for the students and he would, he gave up on me after about the third semester. Cause he knew my family and he sent me to a guy named Brownery who may be down at Gilbert Residence, if you want to look and see if he is still... and he gave me, he tried, he was, Bingo was a good guy, Brownery was a bad guy. He told me, if I don't shape up, I may as well get out of here. So I joined the Army, came back and shaped up.

LNS: Did you see any military duty in the Army or were you in there in a good time?

RR: Fortunately, peacetime.

LNS: Peacetime. As you look at the development of intercollegiate athletics at Eastern, during your time, a lot of decisions were made, vision one, right? Built a strong program as a result of all those efforts now some $50 million now invested in a physical facility. Was all of it worth it on athletics?
RR: Let me say I hope so.

LNS: You hope so. You don't have a strong opinion?

RR: I have a strong opinion that I think intercollegiate athletics is important to the image of the university. A winning team whether it has any affect on academics or not builds the pride of the student body and you saw it happen after the California Bowl. I mean people were really proud with Eastern. I hardly ever saw an Eastern sweatshirt, now people wear them and they are prouder of the school. So I think image-wise athletics is very important degree and level. I don't know if you're the champion of a Division II school, you're just as proud cause you know you are playing on the same caliber. I know my daughter goes to Albion and they've had a tradition of winning football, kids are real proud of that. You know we are national champs, Division III. Level, I just kind of that was scary decisions, it's so expensive to play Division I, so expensive.

LNS: So you think we made the right decisions in building all the committing all the resources we did to that physical facility?

RR: As I say, I hope so.

LNS: You hope so. Ok.

RR: I still ______.

LNS: Let me close with a question. What do you think the legacy of Eastern Michigan University is or should be?

RR: I think the legacy and I think it's fulfilling as far as I can see is to give a good education, excellent education to students at a cost that is as reasonable as it can be. I realize these kids, a lot of them are struggling, even at our tuition. Which is less than Michigan or Michigan State. It's still expensive. And I wish it wasn't, but I like the opportunities Eastern gives students that may have not reached their potential in high school for whatever the reason, maturity is usually the reason. And here we, were not a second rate university, by accepting them. We keep our standards high academically, we expect the same of them, but we nurture them, give them opportunities to catch up if they didn't have those opportunities or didn't take advantage of those opportunities. I know that certainly when I walked in here out of high school, I wasn't prepared for it. And even opportunities were made available to me way back when. That helped me plus a faculty that cared. So, I guess an excellent education that's available to not only the excellent students but others that are now ready to face the challenge.
LNS: And when you look back at the twenty-five years that you served as a board member, ten of which was as the Chairman of the board, what do you think your most important contribution was to the university?

RR: I, you know, as you get older, you find out how insignificant you really are.

LNS: You're not that old. For the record, you sound like you're ninety, but you're only

RR: Sixty-two.

LNS: Sixty-two.

RR: Almost sixty-two. Not quite. You know, the university gave me a whole lot more than I gave them. The joy I had of dealing with a wide variety of interesting people, administrators, faculty, students, not being hokey, surely, I gained a whole lot more than I gave. It was a labor of love. If I look back and counted the meetings and counted the hours out of my office that were non-productive to my profession, I would hate to put a dollar amount on it. I just looked forward to the meetings and I wasn't afraid to make decisions. Maybe that's a legacy. I went in and thought that I was making an informed decision that I felt was right. And hopefully, I didn't do any damage to the university. But I got a whole lot more than I gave.

LNS: What did you get more?

RR: Just the, it was like almost a hobby, you know, something away from the day-to-day grind of my job. And where else, what more exciting place than a university where you have bright, intelligent people and enthusiastic young people and bright minds and a little bit of pettiness here and there, just a stimulating atmosphere.

LNS: Well we thank you very much. It's two o'clock and you have a Dental appointment waiting.