

Interviewee: Ekermeier, Edward
Interviewer: Robin Sellers
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Sellers: Colonel Ekermeier, if you will, tell me a little bit about what you remember about your grandfather, Edward Conradi.

Ekermeier: Well, it's hard to remember a lot. What I do have are memories of what my mother would tell me. I was three years old when he died, and later as I got older I realized that he had died from a heart attack. We lived on College Avenue, at the intersection of McComb and College. Actually, it's across the street from Potbellies, for current reference. What I remember is only fond memories of him just being a grandfather and being the only grandchild that lived in the house with him. My mother told a great number of stories about him, so my memory would be based secondhand. And that was one of the things that I always had to live with in my house – was my mother always comparing me to my grandfather.

Sellers: You were born in '41, right before World War II started.

Ekermeier: That's right.

Sellers: Did your father go off to serve in the war?

Ekermeier: Yes, he went into the Navy. Since he was a medical doctor, he went into the Medical Corps and served in epidemiology; was in the Pacific and was one of the first Americans in Japan just after the surrender.

Sellers: So that explains why you and your mother were living in your grandfather's house.

Ekermeier: Yes. I think they must have lived in the house even after being married, when they moved back from Ohio. I think they moved here in 1938. My father was here about three years before the war came, and then he went into the Navy.

Sellers: Your grandfather, of course, had been president of Florida State College for Women for years and years and years, from 1909 until 1941, and probably retired from that just about the time you were born. But that does hang over you as you grow up here in Tallahassee, doesn't it?

Ekermeier: Absolutely. And it's probably one of the reasons that once I left in 1963, I made no effort to move back to Tallahassee. I felt I had to find my own way and prove my own sense

of who I am.

Sellers: You went to the schools that were connected with Florida State College for Women and then Florida State University as you grew up?

Ekermeier: Well, let's see. When I started to school, I went to kindergarten. The kindergarten building (I walked around yesterday, doing field reconnaissance) was on Collegiate Way, there's a curve behind the Montgomery Building. And as it curves, there's a tree and some bushes and behind it is a parking lot. That was the general area of where the kindergarten class was located. In talking to a friend of mine today, we think it may have only been there a couple of years and then the kindergarten moved to some other place.

After that, I went to the Demonstration School, as it was called, and the high school was called Florida High. And so seventeen years with the same institution.

Sellers: Did you always get connected to your grandfather, because your name was different.

Ekermeier: Yes, I think so. Certainly my father had a reputation in town as well.

Sellers: Your father was a pediatrician, was he not?

Ekermeier: That's correct. He was the first specialist in Tallahassee. I remember him talking about being ridiculed by other physicians who were general practitioners. And by the time he died in 1972, everyone was a specialist.

Sellers: He was just ahead of his time?

Ekermeier: Well, the Ekermeier family is, too, ahead of its time. So that's not too unusual for us.

Sellers: How was your mother treated as you grew up, as the daughter of someone who had been beloved here in town?

Ekermeier: I think to some extent, or maybe to a large extent, she tended to live and move in the old — under the old lightbulb. She tended to spend more time thinking about that. Later she came not to participate in university activities.

Sellers: Do you know why?

Ekermeier: I think part of it is, as I became aware of it in 1959-1960, was a general awareness that the university and many of the students wanted to forget Florida State College for Women. I can remember when the ivy was taken off of Westcott building, and suddenly it was discovered that there in the stone Florida State College for Women; it didn't take long for the university to get that sandblasted off. So I think that was part of it. I also gather she didn't really think the

successors were up to the caliber of her father. Then she began to withdraw from university activities. My sister has been affected by our mother's attitude, because she has received invitations, even very recently, and really hasn't always taken advantage of them. Now, I personally would criticize my mother on that. As I found out about her refusals, I would say, "How can you do that when you've been invited and you don't participate?" I wasn't going to be participating; I didn't think it was my place at that time to do it. This is about the first time in forty-three years that I have allowed anybody to know who I am. I've kept my identity quiet. Part of it, I don't live in Tallahassee, and part of it, I had to find my own way, and I'm comfortable now with who I am.

Sellers: Why don't you take me back, now, and talk about your growing up.

Ekermeier: Well, of course I went to the Demonstration School. I have a dear friend of mine, Bland Blackford, who I approached about the Reichelt Oral History Program. She is not going to participate; her mother was a staff member here. We grew up together. Mrs. Blackford and Bland lived in an apartment house on College Avenue, so she was my only playmate, and then she and her mother moved over to Woodward Street. I asked my sister, "I wonder if I walked over to the Dem School from College Avenue?" And my sister said, "Oh, no, your mother wouldn't let you do that. Not the grandson of Edward Conradi. You might be kidnaped for ransom." So I don't remember walking over. I know I never rode a bus to school. I never was in a school bus except to go on high school football, basketball, baseball, and band trips.

We had an excellent first grade teacher. After the war — of course, this was in the late '40s, I'm in elementary school. The second grade teacher was not a good teacher. I had broken my arm; I fell off the concrete wall on College Avenue. So all I remember in the second grade is moving around a lot. Now, when I move students around, they are usually in trouble. So I must have been in trouble a lot. You have some teachers that you get along with, some you do not. I didn't get along with my fourth grade teacher, but my sister did.

Sellers: Do you think they treated you differently at the Dem School because of who you were?

Ekermeier: I don't think so.

Sellers: And I guess unless they were "old-timers" who were teaching at the Dem School, they probably didn't make the connection anyway.

Ekermeier: I don't think many of the kids did. I suffered from being the only red-headed kid in the school, so that was the teasing I got. You know, I've talked to some of my high school chums (one of them I spent the morning with) and he is happy for me that this is happening. His father worked with the school as well. So I've been accepted by the classmates and the students and the buddies in the high school, so the kids didn't present any problem.

Sellers: This was when you went on to Leon?

Ekermeier: No. I didn't go to Leon. I went to Florida High.

Sellers: So Florida High was there by then.

Ekermeier: Oh, yes. It was there when I was in elementary school. The Dem School building was on Ivy, Call, and over to —. The high school even had a sight saving class.

Sellers: I didn't realize the high school was part of it until they build over where the med school is now.

Ekermeier: Right. There was always a high school. Now, the high school played basketball in the women's gym as we called it. But of course, it's Montgomery Building now. The students and the spectators sat in the oval above and looked down on the game. We went over there for swimming lessons; we had Physical Education swimming classes. We had to use their suits, the girls and boys used the suits, and we all had to wear caps.

Sellers: Tell me the boys didn't use the same style suits the girls did.

Ekermeier: One day – a couple of days – we did, because the boys' suits were all out. I can assure you, it didn't go the other way [laughter]. I noticed the pool was gone; I walked over there just to see if it was still there, but it was gone.

Sellers: Just in the last year or two.

Ekermeier: Shucks. What a historic pool, you know, swimming pool, indoors in the 1950s. Anyway, so we went over there for phys ed, and the boys played basketball there. In the early days, when it was still the Dem School up in the old building — we didn't have football, but we did have basketball, and the high school called itself – the students called it themselves “Florida High.” And the mascot was Demons – **demonstration** school. That's where the Demons came from. And when I was at Florida High, the School of Education always was trying to impose University School on us, and we always resisted. They would call it “University High School” and we'd say, “No, it's Florida High.” I know over the years it changed. Finally they won, but it took them a long time. But the students didn't like the name University School, mainly because I think it's the School of Education ordering the name change. So the students were even resistant then.

Sellers: So you graduated from high school here.

Ekermeier: Right, from Florida High.

Sellers: Why did you not go to college somewhere else?

Ekermeier: Good question. One that I have thought about for quite a number of years. My father attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and is a graduate of the University of

Cincinnati medical school. Almost every summer, we would go to Ohio for a visit. Now interestingly, he did not take me by University of Cincinnati or Miami University in most of those years. If we went to Cincinnati, we would go to a baseball game. So I still root for the Reds. I forced the issue of trying to see his old roommate from medical school, and to see the university. I was at Florida State by then. I believe that I didn't have a choice. I think I was late in applying in my senior year; I remember sitting at the dining room table at Buena Vista Drive, filling it out in pen and ink and turning it in, April, May — no, not May, maybe February, March, April. Willis Caldwell was the registrar; my father and mother were close friends with the Caldwells. I think my Florida test scores — I was in the 60th percentile — were not great. I was a B student in the high school. I think no matter what, I was going to be accepted. Even if it might not have been in the proper window, it was not going to be a problem. Because when I finished high school in June, I went to summer school. So I went right here. And by the time I was a senior, I was ready to go, in terms of the new experiences.

Sellers: Did you live off campus still, at home?

Ekermeier: I lived off campus for four years. I think part of it was financial.

Sellers: Would you have lived where? In a fraternity house or —?

Ekermeier: I was in a fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha. I think there was going to be one time I might live there, but it was ruled out, and it was based on cost reasons.

Sellers: And this would have been in the early '60s?

Ekermeier: Right.

Sellers: You were here from '59 till —?

Ekermeier: '63.

Sellers: And your degree was in —?

Ekermeier: History.

Sellers: Who do you remember? Not just in the History Department, but other faculty members.

Ekermeier: Well, I'll tell you the people I — I also made a list. I took a class — I took James Prothro for introductory government. Also in the government department I had Ilka Frank; she was a close friend of Marion Irish. I had Vincent Thursby for two classes; Claude Flory for two. Dr. Jordan — Tyree (I never called him Tyree). I had him as an advisor from June of 1959 till when I graduated. I can tell you, it was sheer pleasure, because I could take any course I wanted, any time I wanted. But he told me — going into my senior year, I already had history credits

more than well satisfied. He said, "I think you should take an English course." "Ah, Dr. Jordan, please." He said, "It will be the most beneficial course that this university teaches. You'll get more out of that than any history course you'll ever take." And you know something? He was right. So I took "American Writers from 1865."

Sellers: Who taught that?

Ekermeier: Claude Flory. And I then took "American Dramatic Literature" from him. I never will forget him saying, "I can detect from the shuffle of shoes and the rustle of skirts, the time has come for us to depart."

Sellers: He was such a Southern gentleman.

Ekermeier: He and Daisy were already linked, romantically linked. You saw them everywhere. My mother said, "When his mother dies, they'll get married." And that was years before his mother died. Daisy was a patient woman.

Sellers: Did you know her?

Ekermeier: Oh, yes, I knew her; I didn't take any classes from her. My interest wasn't state and local government; I was interested in European, central European history and international relations. I mean, I was in Air Force ROTC and I knew I would be in the Air Force for a while, so I was interested in the world scene rather than the local scene.

So let me see — Royal Mattice —

Sellers: He was economics, wasn't he?

Ekermeier: Yes. I took industrial relations; you know, he and his wife were friends of my parents, too.

Vincent Thursby and my father were model railroaders, so they would get together once a month at somebody's house.

Sellers: Did that rub off on you?

Ekermeier: Railroading? I don't do the little stuff; I do the big stuff. I mean Amtrak. So if I wanted to take a week, I would have come to Jacksonville by train. But you know, they were into that.

Sellers: Talk to me about pledging Pikes and how you stayed out of trouble while you were in PiKA.

Ekermeier: Well, at the time that I was here, the Pikes were not the cause of a lot of trouble, although we had some incidents. I think we would — you know, I saw a TV show this week (my wife likes "Cold Case"), and there was a show on a fraternity and there were drugs, alcohol, six,

murder, and a fire at an orgy which had been covered up. That's something our chapter would never do, and did not do. We were upset with the Phi Deltas when they had a pig party and snickered, you know, "They're animals when they do something like that."

Sellers: The Pike house at that time was on Woodward?

Ekermeier: Woodward and Park. And we and the Kappa Sigs (their house is just up for sale), we were the only two fraternities that owned their own property. I don't know why I picked PiKA. My mother insisted that I be in a fraternity; she put her foot down on that. My father was never a fraternity guy, and really it was, in a sense, uncomfortable because I'm like my father in that he was a very quiet man. And while he was — well, I look back at him — he was a very smart physician and may have been smarter than most of them here, but he would never impose that on anybody. So you'd talk to him, and he was a very quiet man. But there were times where he would be very forceful, but very quietly.

So anyway, being in this fraternity, I don't know why I picked it. I may have known someone, because I do remember Bill Boyce now. So I went in the fall of '59. So 1960 was initiation time. The weekend before we were to be initiated, we went on a road trip. There were eight of us. The four in my group went to Auburn, Milsaps in Jackson, Mississippi, and I don't know what they call themselves now — it's the Mississippi school in Hattiesburg. I know they've changed names, and I can't remember if the Southern comes first or not. And the other group, I think, went to Georgia, South Carolina, and some other school up there. A thousand miles in two and a half days. And we had to collect a number of things (which I won't discuss). One of them was rather humorous — we had to get the underwear of the Dean of Women at each of these schools. One of them wrote a letter to, I think, the dean here. So anyway, I get back — we pulled off the road somewhere east of Pensacola because we're so tired — early Monday morning, and I think we somehow got ahold of my parents and told them we were late. Because the other three were from out of town and I used my father's car.

Sellers: So the four of you were alone — you didn't have a pledge master with you?

Ekermeier: No. We successfully painted the SAE lion at Auburn.

Sellers: What color?

Ekermeier: I don't know. It was one of those things, we just dumped it and left, as in the movies. Because Auburn was an agricultural school, we were supposed to get a skull of a cow, and we weren't able to do that. When I spoke to my father, he said, "I have a friend in the Geology Department." And so he got it for me. So we had it. And they returned it to me, so the Geology Department got it back. Reported in on Monday, and I don't remember whether it was Tuesday afternoon, I was arriving at the fraternity house for dinner (because you had to eat there all that week, even the day students), and as I walked on the property, the president and the vice president, the secretary, and the treasurer were all standing waiting for me. And they wanted to know what I had done. I said, "What are you talking about? I've just been in class all day. What do you want?" And they showed me a letter that they had received from the Dean of Students,

Ralph Oglesby. Every sorority and fraternity received this letter. There would be no road trips, local or out of town, again. Any fraternity or sorority so doing it would be on social probation subject to dismissal.

Sellers: Why was that considered your fault?

Ekermeier: Because they knew of the eight pledges, I was the only one with connections. I know who did it, because I confronted my mother about it. She called Oglesby. They were in the same Sunday school class together, they went to church together. I mean, I knew him from church. Now, Bill Cheek and I've talked about this. He thinks Rod Shaw might have been the final say in this —

Sellers: He was the business manager.

Ekermeier: Yes, because apparently he was a very powerful man in a lot of things but very quiet, behind the scenes. But Oglesby signed the letter. So they know who did it. They didn't know who did it; they thought I did it.

Sellers: How many other times —

Ekermeier: You know, at the time it irritated me. I was very upset with my mother. Over the years, I've come to realize that when she wanted to be, she was an extremely powerful woman. She also had a very powerful personality, one which I have, too, and I do have to guard from being overbearing to other people, particularly my students.

Sellers: I noticed when I was dealing with her that she did have a stubborn streak.

Ekermeier: Oh, yes. And she saw nothing wrong in making those phone calls. I still contend that she is probably the most powerful person I have seen to use the phone effectively. She got the policy changed by telephone calls. I don't know how she convinced them to do it, but I know she did it. And she did it without my father's permission. When I say that, I mean, it's a German family, but my father wasn't overbearing. She never asked my father, "Ernest, do you think it would be all right if I make these phone calls, because it's our son that's at stake, here." She would never ask that question; she just did it. Because my father thought the trip was a good idea — after all, he had gotten the skull —. My father would not call Oglesby, who he knew, or Dean Loucks, whose children were patients. My father would not do that. And my mother admitted it under cross examination.

Sellers: Interesting that you confronted her about it.

Ekermeier: We had some other discussions, but see, to her I was still wrong. And she would say, "Face it, you'll see it my way when you get to be my age."

Sellers: And —?

Ekermeier: I do not! I still will recommend this type of trip. I think that it is a wonderful idea for sororities and fraternities to send their pledges to a sister or brother fraternity or sorority for a weekend. I wouldn't do it the way we did it, for three days. I'd send them to one school where they're to be hosted, they're to do certain tasks, and they're to return home —

Sellers: And they are assisted by a sister sorority or brother fraternity —

Ekermeier: That's right. So if it were a PiKA, you would go to Auburn, and Auburn would host them and see to it that you're taken care of, feed you, feed the group, help them with solving some of the tasks – as they did with the SAE lion for us. Guide and help solve these tasks.

Sellers: You mean, the Auburn Pikes got you to the lion?

Ekermeier: No, but we were going to paint it that night when we got there, Friday night. They said, "Don't do that. This is the SAE's weekend. What happens is the dates moved into the fraternity house and it's now eleven-thirty or twelve, they'll be sneaking the girls out, and you drive up there, they'll be in the yard. Hit them around four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning. We did that at daybreak so we could take a picture of us doing it. And there was one person standing in front of their house. It was a circular drive, so we opened the car – there was a driver – I wasn't driving – the three of us leaped out with cans of paint, dumped it on the lion, got back in the car and sped away. Just like a New York murder. But see, I would recommend that; I would recommend that to somebody to do. I think that's healthy. And I recommend that for confirmation classes. You have a confirmation class (because I'm now a Christian educator) — you have a confirmation class in Tallahassee, why not send those children to another church in Pensacola or to Charleston, South Carolina. So you see other people like you in another place. So after a while we never talked about it, and at times I still — you know, I laugh about it, but it was an uncomfortable situation.

Sellers: Did your sister have problems like that with your mom?

Ekermeier: No, we're six years apart, and so it's two different families.

Sellers: You're older?

Ekermeier: Yes. My sister is fun-loving — I don't mean it in an ugly way —

Sellers: Easy going?

Ekermeier: Perhaps. You know, she is named after my father's mother and aunt. So my mother would not have the same emphasis on the children, since I was named after her father. She didn't let me forget that.

Sellers: You were the title-bearer.

Ekermeier: That's right. She never let me forget that, all the way until I got into the service.

Sellers: You were in the Air Force ROTC here. Were you commissioned?

Ekermeier: Yes, I was.

Sellers: This would have been 1963 – where did you go?

Ekermeier: I became an Intelligence Officer, and I worked in intelligence for thirty years. My first assignment was West Berlin, Germany. From there, I worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency. I have briefed the Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff, the Deputy National Security Advisor, Brent Skowcroft, the commander-in-chief of Military Airlift (now called Air Mobility), was a regular lecturer at the Armed Forces Staff College, taught at the Defense Intelligence College, and later developed and ran the Indications and Warnings Short Course, and for that I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal. My last assignment with the Air Force was the National Warning Staff. My field of expertise is indications and warning, Soviet space reconnaissance, and Soviet military capabilities. I have co-authored, after I retired, with another fellow, a handbook on the Soviet railroads. I came across the Trans-Siberian Container Service. My geography students hear about the Trans-Siberian Container Service; the Russians were ahead of us in routing this high-value Japanese freight to western Europe. Russians, even though they were Commies at the time, ran it for profit and they knew how to do it, and they did it – and still do. So anyway, that's what I did.

Sellers: Well, that takes care of my question about did you experience Vietnam.

Ekermeier: I volunteered for Vietnam, but the Air Force did not send me. And by the time I was heavily involved in current intelligence, offensive missiles, strategic attack of the United States by the Soviet Union, and I just never got assigned. I had some friends of mine from my high school class went, and I had said to both of them, you know, "I wish I had gone." And they've said, "No, Ed, we don't want you to have gone." They were in the Army, and one was in Special Forces. "It's best that you did not go. We spent a lot of time recovering from it."

Sellers: After you retired from the military, how did you get into Christian education?

Ekermeier: Well, I was at Wright-Patterson Air Force base, and while I'd been a church-goer, I was invited to a class on Romans by Chuck Maggio, who was the civilian engineer for the B-1 Bombers Special Project Office. He was an elder in our church and invited me to this class on Romans. So I spent a whole year with it, whole academic year with it, September to June. I realized that I had missed out on something, and really got interested in Christian education. So when I returned to the Washington area and I went to church in Vienna, Virginia, there was a guy who had retired from the Navy who was going to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond. My two older children were then seniors in high school. I thought about this and decided — and I had put together a course for Sunday school on men and women as partners. So I said, "I don't have credibility as an intelligence officer writing something like this. I need to go to Seminary."

They said, “No, you can’t leave; you can’t go to Richmond and you can’t go to Princeton.” The first woman associate that that church had graduated from Wesley theological Seminary. So I talked to her. Put my application in in August, got accepted, started going to school at night. Took me seven years. I got confused for faculty because I was there so long. You know, they don’t have summer classes like they do here, so what is available – and if you have already taken it, you can’t take it again, and going to school at night and working, you can only really take two classes. I thought I would be an educator in a church, but I couldn’t get any work after I graduated. Then finally I had put in for this position for a church in Babylon, New York, I saw in *Presbyterian Outlook Magazine*. I got up there and lo and behold, the church had a Christian school. I had Sunday school responsibilities and the school. What was intended was the school would be run by the person they had had, and I would just have oversight. Well, she left, so I became de facto principal. Pre-school to fourth grade. Regretfully, it didn’t work out. I really liked it, but the pastor and I didn’t get along. He didn’t work very hard, and I did. Now that he’s gone, the church realizes that they made a mistake.

So after an accident and a year of disability, I went back to work. I didn’t know what else to do, so I started teaching at a Christian middle school, found out another school had a baseball program (was interested in continuing baseball), so I coached there for the spring. The middle school kids went away. I got hired by Our Savior New America school. That is how I got into it. I still coach baseball, and I teach there, and in the summer I go into Queens and teach at Martin Luther High School. Again, I saw an ad in the paper, called it in; Steve Hicks hired me on the spot. I grade state Regents exams, teach US history in six weeks.

Sellers: You finally used your history for real.

Ekermeier: Well, at Our Savior I teach geography, and I convinced them to teach geography, and it may be the only geography class in New York. Real geography. I have taught global history; well, I haven’t taught Global at Our Savior because another teacher does that for tenth graders. So the freshmen get geography. I teach them to read maps and plot things and stuff like that. So in the summertime I teach real World history and US history.

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Ekermeier: I don’t foresee myself retiring. In fact, I’m working on a new way of looking at US history, and I’ve given a presentation to the teachers’ conference on October 20th, last year (2005). I haven’t done any more work on it. I’ve got some buddies of mine that I’ve had as teachers – one is at Wesley, he’s a church historian – and the other is the acting dean of New York Theological Seminary. They’re encouraging me to write this. The focus will be on the Christian aspect of American history; it will be geared for Christian schools. The listeners liked the idea. Because as I told these teachers at this conference in New York – New York City Christian school teachers — you know, I hadn’t been in general, sweeping US history class since I was a sophomore at FSU. And I come back to teach it again and it’s taught the same way, except there’s just more stuff to put on at the end. Let’s look at US history more thematically. So if you can take a theme, you can work all the way to the present tense. And you’ll interact with the other themes, but you’ll always be getting to the present tense. And on the Regents

exam this past year (I'll give myself kudos), I had some students in for a review, which was after the regular class, and these students had gone to other schools than Martin Luther, and I'd start talking about the theme and "maybe you can organize and as you go study for this exam in ten days, you can maybe catalogue your information." If you catalogue it in these broad categories, and then when you deal with the essays and so forth, you can come up the solution. Well, they said, "Mr. E" (that's what they called me), "What happened after 1960?" And some of these kids were going to very good private schools in Brooklyn and Queens. "What do you mean?" "What happened in America? We ended there." Okay. Well, you know, my forte is really international relations at that point, because I am a Cold War guy. I said, "Okay, we'll have something tomorrow." The next day I started with the Voting Rights Act and got them down to the present time in an hour and a half. I asked, "By the way, did you learn anything about the Cold War?" Their head motion indicated a response in the negative. I got my Cold War stuff together. The next day's hour and a half, I outlined it all from the Berlin Airlift — actually, from the dropping of the atomic bomb to the 21st century. The Regents examination has multiple choice, fifty questions, a document-based essay question, and a thematic essay. I don't have to tell you what the theme of the thematic question was. It was the Cold War. Of those four students, one got a 98[%], one got a 94[%], one got an 89[%], and the lowest grade was 79[%].

Sellers: Which are all passing?

Ekermeier: Well, yeah. Sixty-five percent is passing on the Regents. But those two 90s wouldn't have scored that high if they hadn't had the Cold War with me. I don't know who was happier about the scores, them or me, because I graded them. I went home at the end of that day feeling really great because I really hit it.

Sellers: You said when we started that it took you a long time to learn to like yourself, more or less, or to learn to be happy with yourself.

Ekermeier: Well, I wasn't unhappy, but who am I? Am I really as good as I think I am?

Sellers: And do you expect to be as good as you think you are because of what your mother held you up to as an example, or did you have to run away from that and then come back? How did that affect you?

Ekermeier: Well, somehow I knew that — my wife contends that I am (she's an elementary school teacher from here) — ADD, and I think she's right. My best academic work was done at Seminary when I was an older student. And about halfway through, I said, "If being a B student is what you want me to be, Lord, I'll be happy." So I just did the work just to be the best I could; I became an A student. Now, I didn't graduate cum laude and summa cum laude, because the first half I had been a B student. Got an A here or there. So maybe subconsciously I knew that I was content with an MA and I would never really be able to pull off a Ph.D., although I think I can do it intellectually. But the work habits that are necessary to do it were not academically there. I have a work ethic — my habit's to do other things.

Tallahassee did not offer what I needed. Once I got in the Air Force, I realized that

Tallahassee had really nothing to offer me anymore. I really liked being an intelligence officer. And I was good at it! I'm a very good analyst. But there's nothing here other than Florida State for me. I would probably do very well in this history department, but I don't have the credentials to do it. And I know that.

Sellers: And once you left the Bellamy Building, there would be nothing outside in Tallahassee.

Ekermeier: Absolutely. In fact, my wife's step-grandmother, Helen Shelley — talk about a brilliant woman, businesswoman, Helen Shelley was it. She's dead now. I wanted to name our daughter Helen Shelley, but Rosalind didn't like the name Helen. Helen Shelley said when she visited us in Germany, "You'd be in a lot of trouble because you are not in tune with the way race was run in this country." Still not. I did have arguments with people in Tallahassee. "How can you draft a black boy and not bury him in a public cemetery? How can you draft a nineteen-year-old and tell him he can't vote or have a drink? Wake up, folks. That's not right!" In 1960s, we were drafting men for the Army.

Sellers: But that wasn't necessarily Tallahassee.

Ekermeier: No, that was all over. But nevertheless, I'm in Tallahassee. There just wasn't anything here. And so I knew it was not sensible to return. So I didn't.

Over the years I have come to realize, based on what my mother told me about her father, Edward Conradi, that I do have some of his skills, and my daughter definitely does. And I really do appreciate her stories. I have even used some of his techniques, because my mother told of a story of a male faculty member who was getting a little close with a woman student. He called the gentleman in to his office and said, "There's a train leaving at eight o'clock; you will be on that train." And the man protested and he said, "If you're on the train, I'll write you a recommendation. If you're not on the train, you'll never work in academia again." The man was gone. Well, in the 1930s or '20s or whenever that occurred, this institution could not have a single male faculty member – or married – having any kind of intimate relationship or sexual relationship with a woman student. Still shouldn't be.

Sellers: No, but back then it was so incredibly dependent on the good will of the people of Florida and it's own reputation.

Ekermeier: Right. And you can't do it today, either. Shouldn't do it today.

Sellers: No, you shouldn't; but it won't keep people from sending their girls here.

Ekermeier: No, and it shouldn't be the other way; a woman shouldn't take advantage of a male. If you can't keep your hands off, you need to go other place.

I've used my grandfather's method; I had to use that once with a man who had a drinking problem. I told him, "You know, you have this job because you have a unique security clearance. You lose it because of alcohol and you're gone. I'm not going to put up with it." My

boss said, "You can't say that." I responded, "Well, I did." My boss said, "You can't say that." Well, I did it. You know, the man held the job and cleaned himself up. I think that my grandfather and his staff were ahead of their time.

Sellers: In some instances. I think in some cases they lagged a little.

Ekermeier: Well, you're not perfect in everything.

Sellers: And certainly in not a way that would be harmful to anybody. If they were overprotective, it can't hurt.

Do you have any recollection of how Doak and Edna Campbell might have treated your mother?

Ekermeier: I remember him coming and visiting when we lived on college Avenue, but I don't remember when. I know he called me "Sarge." I was between probably four, five, and seven years old. I must have been more pre-school, kindergarten. He would come and visit. I remember him coming and doing it; I don't necessarily remember her. See, there's a lot of Edward Ekermeier here. I would say, "You were invited; why didn't you go? Bury the axe; you're not the hostess for the school, Mother. Why did you not go? Why?" I cannot understand but I don't live here. I'm the only one who can get along with my cousins; my sister can't get along with them, and they don't get along with her. But I've made suggestions about managing the beach cottage property; they accepted them. Hey, yesterday was yesterday; today is today. So how can you turn them down. I do have a feeling that she was miffed over the Conradi Building.

Sellers: I definitely got that impression. She did not want to talk about that, and —

Ekermeier: She was miffed over that. She felt that was an intentional slight by Doak or whoever was president.

Sellers: It seems to me that she told me that she felt like all of a sudden they realized that they should probably name something after your grandfather before they named something after somebody else, and that was the building that was available at the time.

Ekermeier: I don't know why you couldn't call the Psychology Building the Conradi Building.

Sellers: That would have been the logical thing. It had no name; that would have been logical.

Ekermeier: Why not name it after one of the biology guys or gals, like Deviney or somebody like her.

Sellers: But I do remember, we talked about that, and she didn't want to talk about it. She

was very dismissive of it.

Ekermeier: Yes, and I think she was miffed by it. I can't quote it, I sense a discussion that I overheard or was part of when the stadium was named after Doak Campbell. I think she must have thought he was a lightweight, because she thought that was a fitting thing to do, to name the stadium after him. I'm sorry to bear that, but I hadn't thought about it until you asked me these questions. As I say, I came prepared a little differently, but that's all right.

Sellers: Don't let me stop you from telling me what you wanted to say.

Ekermeier: Well, I know you have your little thing there, and if there's time left over, we'll talk about it. So I think there was a little bit of that. Now my own personal opinion is that I think one of the reasons that I'm very willing to do this now — is there was a period of time where even I was irritated. But if I'd been invited — but they didn't know I was around — had I been invited, I still would have come. I was getting annoyed at the “booster-ism” of the university, and I was annoyed at the fact that in the '50s and '60s, let's not mention anything about Florida State College for Women. And I notice that now we're putting 1851, and it includes the Seminary, too. I think that's great. And I was involved in Mary Holland's party in Washington, DC — and the president talk turned me off, too, because it was tacky — so probably in that sense I can share a little bit of my mother's sense of tackiness. Early '70s, Spessard Holland was retiring from the Senate. My wife, Rosalind and I (who graduated here, and I will tell you a Reichelt story later), the two of us with Frank Milwee and one or two staffers in Holland's office and the Washington alumni association, we put on a birthday party for Mary Holland, a retirement-birthday party for Mary Holland. It was in May. The house that we got was in Spring Valley. I don't know if you know anything about Washington, DC. Spring Valley is the place that you want to live. I don't even remember the woman's name. Her husband was a Navy Captain and had just published an article on the volcanoes of Iceland. The Navy was very interested in the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, for many reasons. So they gave him plenty of time to do this. The party's in her home. Nixon was still president, and one of his counselors had taught government here before Nixon picked him. I don't remember his name and he wasn't here when I was a student. And there were a host of other luminaries. Now most of these were coming through the women who were FSCW graduates. I think it was Stanley Marshall who was president. So they fly up. And I forget who the VP for public relations was. Well, part of the afternoon they're trying to get Spessard to change his mind about his papers; give them to Florida State. Well, I overheard this and Frank and I talked about this. “Look, he's a graduate of Emory and University of Florida. If he wants to send his papers to Gainesville, so what!” Well, I don't know if Spessard changed his mind or not, but anyway —

Sellers: They're not here.

Ekermeier: Well, I know how this university could have gotten them, but the president missed the chance. Now, Mary Holland went here one year, okay? So now the president is here and everyone gathers, and what does Marshall talk about? The upcoming football season. And all of those people didn't care about Florida State football. I mean, they did, they were graduates; of

course, they don't want them to lose. But there he's talking about the football team, and Frank and I are asking, "What is he doing?"

Sellers: And that's still the problem today.

Ekermeier: And our eyes rolled. Frank won't have anything to do with the school because of the booster-ism. We talked about it afterwards, and we said, "You know, what Marshall should have done? 'Mrs. Holland, would you join us this August? We'll give you an honorary degree.'" They would have gotten Spessard's papers just like that. Spessard took Frank, Rosalind, and me to dinner at his exclusive Cosmos Club, and I learned a lot about Spessard Holland. And that was a French cuff, white shirt, blue suit, red tie kind of a dinner. He was just as at ease in that kind of setting, and the stories that he told — I could just see him sitting down on that general store in Bartow, talking to the men and women that came by to see him about seeds and tractors and oranges. And he's there in Washington and the coveralls are put away. I can just see that. And he took us to dinner because he was so happy that someone had done something for Mary. And he let us know that. So if Stanley Marshall had said, "Mary Holland, come to our August commencement; we will award you some sort of honorary degree," — it doesn't have to be a bachelor of science, it didn't have to be law letters or whatever it is — and have her come up and put a hood on and do whatever — make up some something. Geez, I can do that; I can figure something out, and I wasn't a university president. Rosalind, Frank and I were just shocked when we had this. So there was too much of booster-ism. And I talked to Donna McKuen [sic] and she said to me over the phone that FSU is the best university in the Southeast. Because in my letter she read — that I had written to Wetherell, I wrote said that Florida State is a complete university. Now "complete" means the arts, music, business, arts and sciences, medicine, law. A student here has a full range, and it's — criminology, meteorology — you have a full range of quality programs. There can't be one best university, just as there isn't one greatest baseball player of all time. I think Florida State fits into that category, and I say that from not being here. See, I went to Boston University. And if you took Boston University out of Boston, Massachusetts, and put it in the state of Florida, it would rival Florida State as the best university in the state, not Gainesville. Across the board quality. She said that, and I thought about it. And I said, "Other than possibly the University of Virginia, you're right." But I had said that in a letter and she had seen the letter. I said, "There's a way to tell that story. I think I have one solution. But that story's not being told." And you see, it is. And I used to get sick of these people telling me how great Florida State was going to be. I kept saying to myself, "What if it is? What if it already is what you want it to be?" So if I had an interview with Wetherell, I would say, "It is. And it always has been 'is' from 1905 or whenever it became FSCW." Because I have it somewhere in my papers that I'll dig up (I didn't have time to do it) — FSCW was one of the top five women's colleges in the country. And Donna says she saw something as one of the top three. And maybe the only public university, because it would be probably Wellesley or Vassar or something.

Sellers: In the Southeast.

Ekermeier: Well, this one that I have had Florida State and Wellesley and Vassar — that's the

one I saw. Nationally. That's what I said to her, nationally. Now she said three; I thought she meant nationally. I have to find it; I have it somewhere in a stack of stuff. We should tell the story "is." The key is "will." We live in the present. It's great in the past, but we live in the present. So the secret for the president is to build on it, to take the present out to the future. Now that's why I say that I have the capability of my grandfather to see the future (my father, too, but not into the future). So I think a story can actually be told that way. And I'm not saying that to be patronizing to you on it; I really believe it.

The Air Force ROTC detachment, when I graduated, was in the top ten. One year it was the best in the Air Force. The professor of Air Science was a buddy of mine in the Air Force, Victor Williams. I knew him back in my airlift days and we were both intelligence officers. I can't address the army, but FSU always been a top Air Force ROTC detachment school. So even in ROTC, it's been there. If I had time, and I may do it next time, I'll go down to the ROTC and say, "Let's collect — take a look at the graduates and find out who did what," because there was one guy, a buddy, a fraternity brother of mine, Joaquin Hailey, was the program manager for the Joint Stars Program. That's how we won in Iraq. He was responsible for that when he was at Hanscom Air Force base in Massachusetts. We were chatting a couple years ago and he sent one of his children, his daughter (I don't know how many he has) to Lexington Christian Academy. And I said, "Why, Joaquin, we play you in baseball. I got that school on my schedule." We go up to Boston and we have a northeastern swing every year. We're on the schedule again this year; we'll be up there in April. So find out who was here. But at the same time, "it is," and the story has to be told.

So I'm encouraged — people have told me as I've listened that D'Alemberte began the emphasis to change the way things were being looked at. That's what I've been told.

Sellers: It was Dale Lick, who came before D'Alemberte. Because Dale Lick was discredited, he was here for two years and was asked to step down, they don't mention him. But he's the one that started paying attention to the women's college.

Ekermeier: Was he the guy that wanted to go to Michigan? That I do remember now that you mention it.

Sellers: He was the one that first said we need to stop neglecting these graduates from the early days, because that's our liberal arts foundation. D'Alemberte picked up from there, but D'Alemberte is a Tallahassee boy.

Ekermeier: That is strange. There's a guy who I know here in town. I haven't seen [him] in years, Ken Van Assenderp?

Sellers: Ken was here —

Ekermeier: Yeah, Ken and I are friends, or were friends. One of them told me they'd gone to this Touchdown Club — it must have been Ken, because he asked me about Bobby Bowden. He was at VPI and I was living in Virginia at the time. And he said that there was an FSCW woman who suddenly — and he told me her name, and I knew her — had come to this Monday

Touchdown Club meeting after the game and asked a question during a question and answer. Verne [sic] Mudra asked if there were any questions? She said, “Yes, I have one.” Coach Mudra, why do you coach from the press box?” And according, I think, to Ken, Coach Mudra said, “I can see the whole field from the press box and then give the instructions down to my associates on the side of the field.” And then she says, “You know, Coach, Woody Hayes, Joe Paterno, Bear Bryant – they coach from the sidelines and they win.” Sat down. And that was when they bought him out.

And I got a call, “Hey, what about Bobby Bowden? Do you know anything about him, being in Virginia?” So you know, even when FSCW got up set about losing.

Sellers: Bowden was at WVU.

Ekermeier: Yeah. I think he was at VPI and he’s been at — was it Morgantown? I think he was there, too. But he was also at VPI, I think.

[Some incidental conversation not transcribed]

Sellers: Tell me your stories about Wally [Reichelt].

Ekermeier: Oh, yes. I got stories on a number of these guys. [James P.] Jones and [William] Rogers —

Sellers: You do know Jones?

Ekermeier: I had Jones for a class. In the history department — and then I’ll tell you the Wally stories. I had Dr. Jordan, I had Earl Beck, Maurice Vance (and there’s a personal story because he was a member of this church that my parents went to – my father was not very happy about what Vance did, so that’s another story). W. W. Rogers, Jim Jones, and Victor Mamatey. I did not have Dr. Horward. And there was a woman here at the time, and her field was English history and I don’t remember her name. All I remember is she had a rubber band every class, and would twist that rubber band through her hands as she lectured. I’ve never been a fan of English history, and I guess the more I study history, the more I come to dislike the British Empire. I don’t advocate empires. I’ve spent a lot of time studying the Boer War – what can be learned from that. Anyway, I had Dr. Jordan for Southern History, and two or three times with Wally. One was American history. I took Latin American history from him, too, and maybe another American history class.

Well, the Wally stories are — I remember him saying one time – first time — this was the second time I had him, so this was 215-216. And he said to the students, “You don’t have to attend class. I know the university allows you three excused cuts. You don’t have to, but you can take more if you’d like. My tests do come from my lectures, of course. So if you miss, you need to get them.” And with that, he proceeded to open the roll book and read the roll. And he did that every class, every one. Now, he showed up fifteen minutes before the students did, and stood outside the classroom — everything would be out on the little lectern . He was all set to go. You didn’t have to wait on him. And you knew to be there. Anybody knew to be there.

And as soon as that bell rang, he started to call roll. Even for Latin American history. And he knew everybody in the class. But he still called the roll.

Now he also smoked Raleigh cigarettes. He was asked (I didn't ask him but was there), "Mr. Reichelt, why do you smoke Raleighs?" He replied, "Well, they have coupons and I get so many coupons, I can get something from the tobacco company." Okay. Then he had a plastic case where he put the pack, and when he took them out — and he smoked filtered Raleighs — so he took them out from the tobacco end and put the filter tip in his mouth. It went in this way. Ever see that?

Sellers: He was not smoking when I knew him.

Ekermeier: So he was asked, "Why do you do that?" I didn't ask him either, but I was there when it was asked. He said, "Well, you see, what goes in your mouth but the filter. Your hands are dirty. Why should you put what your dirty hands touched on the filter which goes into your mouth?. So it's just out and in." I thought that was funny, clever at the time.

But I always thought he was a good teacher. And maybe the first time — this is probably why I took him more than once — I had four grades: there were two Bs and two As. I did the math and it was a B+ / A-. So I went up with trepidation and asked him what grade I got. "An A, of course." Again, I don't know if that was because I was Dr. Jordan's student. I always got As from him. I remember there was a time when somebody in the department didn't want him to run the registration. He and Tyree were able to assign students to history classes faster than any other department — and those were the days in Tully Gym, you had punch cards and people stood in line. There wasn't any advanced registration; you had to negotiate, particularly if you're taking English 101 or Chemistry 105 or History 181/182. There were many sections —. Well, Wally and Dr. Jordan had the reputation — the history department had the reputation of making a decision on the spot. There wasn't any rearranging. Wally knew the numbers and let's say you needed a section — okay, you're in. "I think one more won't matter." There was a problem, a real problem, he might call Tyree. But Dr. Jordan trusted him to work that all out, and it was the only department that was able to satisfy students on the spot. Everything went just on like clockwork. However, somebody in the department got mad and forced Wally out of it. Registration was in shambles. And the history department got very badly embarrassed. Wally was back in in about a year, the next year. Wally never told me who led the failed coup d'etat. When Tyree and Wally were here, the history department — while not everybody liked history courses, the students didn't dislike the department. You can say that across the board. "While I don't like history and I'm a chemistry guy, they're great guys, it's a great department." And you could always get what you wanted, and Wally saw to that.

My wife Rosalind is a Tallahassee Lassie and she went off for a year and she liked horseback riding. She went to Converse College.

End Side B, tape 1

Ekermeier: Well, so Rosalind is back and has to take history. Well, of course she isn't my wife, she's my girlfriend then. And she says, "I have to take history. Who should I take?" [laughs] I said, "Mr. Reichelt. I'll speak to him when you're coming in and I'll recommend you

to his class. Just identify who you are when you go into the class; introduce yourself to Mr. Reichelt.” I think I told him she was coming and she wasn’t very good in history.

Sellers: She was supposed to introduce herself as your girlfriend?

Ekermeier: No, no. “Hi, I’m Rosalind. I think Ed Ekermeier talked to you about me being a student in your class.” She will tell you that — I think she got a C, but she says “I passed history because of Mr. Reichelt.”

[remainder of tape 2 is conversation and not transcribed]