



Jean Starker Roth Oral History Interviews, October 31, 2007

Title

“Home and Family”

Date

October 31, 2007

Location

Starker Roth residence, Corvallis, Oregon.

Summary

Starker Roth begins interview 3 by recounting the first time that she met her future husband, Kermit, as well as their courtship and eventual marriage. As part of this discussion, she shares details about Kermit's background as well as their wedding day and honeymoon.

The session then moves on to the couple's settling in Portland, Kermit's work at Hyster, and the family's decision to move back to Corvallis. Starker Roth next describes a few memorable trips that she enjoyed with her husband, the structure of the family business, and Jean's involvement with a handful of early real estate acquisitions.

A major focus of the interview is Starker Roth's experience of motherhood and family life. She recalls family recreational activities and holiday celebrations, as well as the various interests that Jean's children pursued as youths. Starker Roth likewise shares her thoughts on her strengths as a mother and the ways that she changed as her children grew.

The session concludes with the story of Kermit's sudden passing from a heart attack suffered in 1979.

Interviewee

Jean Starker Roth

Interviewer

Maia Fischler

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/starkerj/>

Transcript

***Note: Interview recorded to audio only.**

Maia Fischler: This is Maia Fischler and I'm in the home of Jean Starker Roth. Today is Oct. 31, 2007, and Jean and I are going to be talking about the years when she was raising a family here in Corvallis, and her life with Kermit. You did a great job in your earlier interview telling about how you met Kermit, and I'm not going to ask you to repeat that story. But I'd like to know more about what it was about Kermit that attracted you. What was it about him that told you he was the right man for you in those early days?

Jean Starker Roth: Well, I had been dating a lot of boys, not only at Camp Adair but also in Astoria at the USO and Officer's Club up there. I don't know what it was about Kermit, but when I met him, we just hit it off. The first date that we had after the original date at the fraternity house, we just talked and talked and talked, and we just agreed on a lot of things. And of course he was tall and good looking. A lot of people said he looked just like Gary Cooper. In fact, when I obtained his picture to put in my apartment there in Astoria, when I had people come they'd say, "Why do you have Gary Cooper's picture in your room?" And also, after we were married, sometimes we would go to a gas station and the gas station boys would come up and knock on my door – several times this happened. They'd say, "Did anybody ever tell you your husband looks like Gary Cooper?"

MF: So you dated for about a year before you got married?

JSR: No, we met in September, because that was State Fair and PI — which was Pacific International -- that was a big thing with the Extension. Then at Thanksgiving, he planted his fraternity pin, and at Christmas, we announced our engagement, and we were married in June.

MF: Wow, that was a pretty quick turnaround. You must have been pretty sure that he was the right guy.

JSR: There was never any doubt in my mind.

MF: What kind of things did you do in those first six months that helped to secure your relationship?

JSR: Well, I think we spent a lot of time with our families, and I think that was very educational, because from then on, from the time we met, he would come to Astoria, and I had an apartment in a big old house, and the people I lived with had two little girls. And I think they wanted me to live there because I could occasionally baby-sit if they wanted to go to a late movie -- they knew I'd be home to watch the girls. Well, he would come up, and they offered for him to stay in their bedroom, a bedroom adjoining my unit. Then the next weekend, we'd go to his mother's house in Canby, we'd meet there. Then the next weekend, we'd come down to Corvallis and I'd be with my parents. In those days, you didn't live together before you married. But we were at one of those three places every weekend for that time on.

MF: So your parents got to know him pretty quickly? How did they like him?

JSR: They thought he was fine. We never really discussed it, but I remember very distinctly saying, "Now I'm going to marry this man, and if you've got any objections, tell me now."

MF: So he was still going to school at that time?

JSR: Yes, because he had started school and... Do you want me to tell you a little bit about his background?

MF: Yes, absolutely.

JSR: Well Kermit was raised in Monmouth, because his father was superintendent of schools there. And I guess Corvallis played Monmouth in football, and he played football, but I didn't know him then. And then his father wanted to get his doctorate degree. So Kermit joined the CCC. Well he went to school I think one term, and then his dad didn't have enough money to go and get a doctorate, so Kermit joined the CCC and he sent his money home from that so his dad could get his doctorate. And then his father did get his doctorate, but it was during the war by then, and he was asked to go to Portland to teach welders how to teach welders. Because a lot of them knew how to weld but they couldn't teach people how to

weld. So he was employed to do that. And then Kermit went in the service, and his father died while he was overseas. So the Red Cross flew him home – I didn't know him at this point in life. Then, his mother had always taught school, and she moved to Canby and bought a house, and it was a 4- or 5-bedroom house, and she took in teachers because she was so lonely. That developed when we were married, and she died, and when we bought a house, we had to get a house that would fit our furniture, because she had all these beds and mattresses. We inherited all her furniture. But the bedding and all of that was so good, too good to just give away. So we tried to keep it, and of course eventually, we used it with all our kids.

MF: Where was Kermit in the war?

JSR: Tinian, which is a little island about a mile by a mile-and-a-half, very close to -- I'll have to get you the name of it, but you'd know it if you heard it, it was very much in the news. It was a small island and there were Japs on it, and they never knew when they were going to run into someone who was hiding on the island. But that was when he learned to scuba dive. Because he was a mechanic repairing airplanes that had been shot down, so he took the Plexiglas and made a mask, and took the rubber off the tires that had blown and made the back of the mask. He made quite a little money during that period because he would dive for shells. And I had I don't know how many shoeboxes of shells when we were married -- he took those with him.

He always blessed the government for sending him to a warm climate. He said he never would had survived in Europe with the cold -- he didn't like to be cold.

MF: So he was with the Air Force? But he didn't fly?

JSR: He intended to fly, but by the time he got through his schooling, they didn't need pilots anymore, and he was a very handy man and knew how to fix anything, so they put him in a good job for him.

MF: Did he have to be in combat?

JSR: No, not really, he was never a shooting person, he just worked on the airplanes. But when they walked across the island, they were exposed to Japs, and I know he said he dug some holes to hide in if they were around.

MF: But he wasn't in a situation where he was particularly traumatized. When he came back he was in pretty good shape?

JSR: Well he was in pretty good shape, but he told me that when he came back, and of course he'd lost his dad and so his mother wanted a lot of things done around the house, and he said he didn't go out at all, he just wanted to stay home. So he did a lot of repair work that she wanted done. I think it was over six months that he just didn't do anything.

And then when he came back to school, he was ready to get on with his life. And his goal when he came back to school was to get a Tomlinson commission. It must be a thing of the past, because I asked some military men not too long ago if they knew what a Tomlinson commission was, and they didn't know anything about it. But as I understood it at the time, it was a commission given to people with proper qualifications that would give them a permanent place in the military -- not a reserve commission, which most of the kids who go through ROTC receive. So that was quite an honor to get that. And then we were going to be married in June, and he received the Tomlinson commission in May before we were to be married, and he never consulted me, he just said, "I just figured you wouldn't make a very good military wife," and he turned it down.

MF: Why do you think he felt that way? Was it the moving around he thought you wouldn't like?

JSR: I think so, and I also think he blamed it on me a little bit, but I think at the time we decided to get married, that he wanted to be settled down, he didn't want to travel. So I think it was a little bit of both.

MF: What was his major in college?

JSR: Industrial engineering. And he worked for Hyster Company the first year or so. He was commissioned in the morning, and he got the Tomlinson commission. At noon, he was graduated from Oregon State, and it was 107 degrees in Corvallis. At that time they graduated from the Men's Gym, which is now something else, I don't know, and they had ice,

a big 50-pound box of ice, in all the windows. I remember looking at his collar and he had perspired clear through it. And then we were married in the evening. That was a big day!

But after the honeymoon, and that was also a little crisis, because we had the Vanport flood at that moment. We were going up to Lake Quinault, we had to get up to Washington, so Kermit said, well we were going to spend the first night in Salem, cause we didn't want to drive very far after the wedding and the day we'd had. There was a thunderstorm that night because of the heat. And as we drove up the highway, there were power lines coming down, and flopping on the highway, and I thought, "Oh, we're going to get electrocuted before we ever have a honeymoon." But we made it to Salem, and we knew that the bridges in Portland were all closed, so the only way to get north was through Longview or Bridge of the Gods. So he said, "Which do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, we're off on a holiday, let's go to the Bridge of the Gods, I've never been across the Bridge of the Gods." And he said OK, and we went up there and we got as far as – someplace in Washington, it was something with a K... Anyway, we got that far, and the town was under water, so we had to turn back, go back over the Bridge of the Gods, back to Longview and across.

MF: The Vanport flood? I don't think I've heard of that.

JSR: Well Vanport was where a lot of people lived during the war, it was kind of low-income housing, and it all flooded. It was very well known.

MF: It was a section of Portland?

JSR: Yes, out by Janzen Beach.

MF: So you were going to tell me about your wedding. It was at the Presbyterian Church?

JSR: Yes, and at first I said to my parents, I don't want to be married in the Presbyterian Church because at that time – it's been remodeled since – it was pretty barny and cold, I felt, and I just didn't want to be married there. Well we got to looking at the wedding list, and of course Kermit's family was from Monmouth and my family had lived here forever, and the guest list was getting so big that that was about the only place we could have the wedding. So bless my father, he decided that he would fix it. That morning, he and I don't know who else, I wasn't aware of what was going on, but somebody helped him and they brought in about 50 fir trees. There were a lot of them, and they put them all around the front of the church. And it was so hot, it was in June when the new growth was on the fir trees, and so they wilted, and it looked like a little ornament on each limb of the trees. It was just beautiful. They put them all around the inside of the church. And all of the fir trees, because it was so hot, they just wilted, and all those little new growths just hung down and looked like a little ornament. It was really quite effective. And we had those white flowers that you take to Memorial Day – what are they called?

MF: I don't know, but I can look it up and we'll sneak it in there.

JSR: Maybe I'll think of it, but anyway it was really pretty, all white and then the shades of green, it was really quite lovely, and people were quite impressed by it.

MF: Tell me about your dress.

JSR: Well I made my dress. You know in those days, there weren't the bridal stores that there are now. And I wanted to wear my mother's wedding dress, but it was too small. My mother was a very petite lady when she was married, but she had a lot of lace on her dress and on the veil, so I took the lace and put a sheer yoke on my dress, and the lace was from her wedding dress. So it was quite a sentimental affair. But I made it because I was a home economist and I sewed, and there were patterns in sewing books to use. It worked out just fine. And then her veil had been kind of eaten through over the years with moths or something, and anyway, I used the lace from her veil around the edge of my veil. So I thought that was quite nice.

MF: Was it a large group of family?

JSR: Well there weren't too many, because there was my father's sister and her husband, and then my grandmother was – my father's mother was alive at that time, and her wish was that she live to see me married, and she got her wish. She

came in a wheel chair, and she couldn't see very well, but we had a nice conversation. And during our honeymoon, she died. So we had to come home from our honeymoon to go to her funeral.

MF: These days there's so much planning that goes into a wedding, it can be a huge endeavor. Did you have a big build-up to yours?

JSR: Well, no, I think in those days, it wasn't a three day affair like it is now. No, as I say, we were pretty busy all day, but we just had the wedding and then the reception, and people didn't stay long at that reception, it was too hot. I think we just had cake and punch.

I guess my folks did a groom's dinner the night before, and we had a lot of the fraternity boys and some of the family, but there were only just those few people. I don't think my grandmother came to that, because she was too frail. And they gave it because Kermit's mother lived in Canby, it wasn't convenient for her to do it. And in those days, we didn't go to restaurants -- it was all done in your home. You know we only had one or two restaurants in Corvallis -- Custer's In and Out and The Gables, that was about it.

MF: Did either of your daughters use your dress?

JSR: No, they wanted their own.

MF: Do you still have that dress?

JSR: Yes I do.

MF: I'd love to have a picture of you in that dress.

JSR: Well I don't think it would fit now! But I do have a picture.

MF: So you went off and had your honeymoon, and he ended up with a job in Portland. How did he get that job with Hyster?

JSR: Well, I think through the college. In those days, they had placement people. I know I was placed in a job by a placement person on the campus, and I presume that's how he got his job. We lived in an apartment, a very small apartment, for a few months.

Kermit's mother wanted to do three things before she died. She wanted to go down to see her other son, Norman, who lived in California, she wanted to fly in an airplane... what was the third thing? Well she did all three anyway, whatever they were. And so she said, "Why don't you and Kermit live in my house while I go do these things? Cause she spent a month, maybe more, down in California. And she had a garden -- she was a great gardener, and of course Canby soil is wonderful for gardening. And so we stayed at the house, and took care of the garden, and I did a lot of canning for her and made use of what was in the garden.

And then she came home and I had an offer -- I think maybe I told Wade this -- I had an offer to go down to The Dalles and judge a fair. So I said to her, "Wouldn't you like to go with me? It would be a nice trip for you, and I'm just going for the day." And she said, "I'd love to." Well she went with me, and I judged embroidered pillow slips among many other things. And I gave first prize to the white embroidered pillow slips, because a lot of the women had done multi-colored ones and they were pretty bad. So anyway, there was quite some discussion, apparently, about this judge who was doing this. And she sat in the corner and listened to her new daughter-in-law being criticized. She could hardly wait to get in the car and tell me what these women had said. And she was just laughing -- she thought that was the funniest thing. She had quite a sense of humor and she used it often. She just had a great sense of humor, we got along just great.

And then I suppose we ought to put in something about how she died. It wasn't more than a couple of months after she came home. We got a call when we were in Portland. We had moved from the house where we had lived while she was away, and had gotten a house in Portland. We lived where the Safeway is now in Lloyd Center. And we got a call one morning about 5:30 or 6, and you know telephones were hard to get right after the war. She had no telephone in her house and we had no telephone in our apartment, so the landlady tapped on our door and said, "Your mother had a heart attack,

and you have to go." So we just dressed and left. She had had the heart attack and had gotten up and tried to make it over to the neighbors, but she had fallen in her garden. And the neighbors had found her early in the morning, fortunately. And so they got her back into the house and in bed. And of course, we got there and called the doctor. And what we know about hearts now, it's just night and day. Because we didn't know that minutes -- in fact seconds -- are important at that time. And the doctors in that era made house calls. So the doctor came to the house, but by that time, she had quite a lot of problems. Well she lasted two or three days. I remember Kermit went back to our apartment to clean out the refrigerator and get things squared away, cause we had just left, and brought some clothes for us to wear. While he was gone to Portland to get those things taken care of, she had another attack. I was feeding her some apple sauce that I had made her from her own apples, and she said, "Oh that smells so good, I would like to have a taste." So I said, "Well fine, I'll fix you some." So I was feeding her, and all of a sudden, she just died. Kermit came home about the time that that happened, and he immediately called the doctor, and the doctor said, "Well, she's gone."

I didn't know anything about death, but it was pretty awful. We had to call her brother down in California, and they came up. That's how we got all the furniture. They had been married for quite a number of years, and he was the oldest brother -- Kermit was the youngest -- so he said, "You just take all the furniture." So that's what we did.

MF: You said she had a few things she wanted to do before she died. Do you think she knew she was near the end of her life?

JSR: I think she knew, and I really think that Kermit sensed that he was not going to live very long. He was always so insistent that I know everything about our business. His father was milking a cow and he fell off a stool and died. So Kermit had bad genes.

MF: Did Kermit have that same sense of humor as his mother?

JSR: I don't think it was quite as broad as her sense of humor. She got a big kick out of life. It was nice to know her briefly.

MF: So there you were in the big city of Portland. Was it a pretty happening town at the time?

JSR: Oh yes. I really enjoyed Portland -- I didn't want to move back to Corvallis. But Kermit thought it was the thing to do. We had two children by then, and he thought it was the thing to do. My father was putting a lot of pressure on him to come back and start a plywood plant, and of course Kermit had the industrial engineering training. There were 10 men who put their money together and built the plywood plant, and Kermit designed it and was in charge of it cause the rest of the men all had other jobs. So he did that for three or four years -- I don't remember just how long. But then the plywood market went kaput, so they sold it to somebody, I don't remember who. So then Kermit went into partnership with a man, Gordon Larson. And that's -- do you know Beverly Larson who runs the Old Mill School? Well it was her father. And my dad was sort of putting up the money for this mill. Gordon had had a mill at the Y in Philomath, on the Waldport side -- it wasn't very far up that road. He'd always had a sawmill. But they decided they'd build it down here at 53rd and Reservoir Road. So Kermit designed that mill, and they built it and ran it for eight or nine years. And then they had a -- well they disagreed just a little bit on how it should be run. So Kermit said he'd like to buy Gordon out. Gordon didn't have the money to buy him out. So Kermit did buy the mill. And then Gordon died probably six months after that was all settled. Cause, of course, they had to divide up all the timberland. They'd bought a lot of timberland in order to have timber in the wintertime when they couldn't log other places. They bought timberland that could be logged in the wintertime. That was very fortunate that he got all that done before he died. He died of a heart attack too, as I remember.

MF: That mill's not there anymore, is it?

JSR: No. They started to run sheep there, but they couldn't do it because it was annexed. I ran the property for a number of years after my husband died. I rented it out to various people who ran the mill, and then timber prices weren't very good, and the last people who owned it -- it was ready not to be run anymore. So one day, they were putting in the water pipe down Reservoir Road and it came into the fairgrounds, and they wanted someplace to dump the dirt, and I said, "Just dump it in the pond, cause I'd just as soon fill in those ponds." Well it seems as though that was not the thing to do, because there are rules about filling ponds, I found out. Well one day, I spent I don't know how long on the telephone -- it was all one afternoon and into the next day -- talking to governmental agencies. Finally I got hold of someone, I don't

remember which one, and they said, "Oh, Mrs. Roth, we don't talk to owners -- we just talk to lawyers." And that was the living end. I decided I wasn't going to have anything to do with that. So I was mumping to my son about it, and he said, "Mom, you shouldn't have that stress -- I'll take over running it." So he ran it for four or five years. But he was in California, and it was just too much. So he finally sold it. And that's when they started to run the goats. Then they found out they couldn't run the goats because he had annexed it. It's in city limits. And it's very odd, because soon after Ken got through and sold it, now they've put in all that lovely area in front of the fairgrounds, and they've got the dirt ready, and they're going to put 53rd up over the railroad. They're going to do that right away.

MF: So Kermit stayed at that mill till. . .

JSR: Yes. He shut it down after he'd run it 12 years. He didn't do anything with it -- I can't remember if he rented it to anybody or not. But he played the stock market, he was very sharp about it. He would get up in the morning and look at all the listings in the paper. He made a lot of money on the stock market -- he just had a feel for it. One time, we bought Fuji photo stock, and we made a lot of money on that, cause it was just when it was starting to come into the US. And he said, "I think we should take a little trip." And I said, "Well, we made our money on Fuji photo, I think we should go to Japan." And so we did! And that was real fun, we had a lovely, lovely trip.

We got a lady to stay. In the meantime, my mother had passed away, and we got a lady to stay with the children. But she had to also feed my father, because after my mother died -- of course that day I said, "Stay for dinner," and he just kept coming and coming and that lasted 15 years. He didn't have an invitation, but he came. And at first, he lived just through the woods between Jackson and Van Buren, but then later, he moved out into Timian addition out on 53rd Street. And by that time, Kim was learning to drive, so she'd go out and get him and bring him in, cause he wasn't driving by that time.

MF: So you had a woman who took care of things at home, and you packed off to Asia. That must have been a very extravagant trip at that time.

JSR: Oh it was. We stopped over in Fiji going, and we had a couple of days there, and then we went to Japan, and on the way back, we stopped in Bora Bora. I think we were gone three weeks. That was a pretty long trip.

MF: Was that your first trip out of the country?

JSR: We'd been to Hawaii a couple of times. We took all the family to Hawaii a couple of times.

MF: Was Kermit more of a traveler since he'd done his time there during the war?

JSR: He really enjoyed the trip to Japan. He really didn't have any desire to go to Europe at all, I think he'd heard too many tales during the war of the hardships in Europe, but I don't know why, he just thought that Japan was great.

MF: So having been in the second world war, and over in that part of the world, was it hard for him to embrace the Japanese? Did he have any prejudice against them?

JSR: No, he didn't seem to have any feelings about the Japanese. We were there during the World's Fair, and of course we were so tall, we'd put our arms out like this and the Japanese would get underneath and they'd want their pictures taken.

MF: I'd like to take us back to where we were when you were talking about Kermit's career. When did he start getting involved in property management? How did he move from being an industrial engineer through the lumber business and into property management?

JSR: Well, I told you that my mother had died and I had inherited the Bi-Mart property through my mother's will when she died. My dad had given me that property in exchange for some property that he had. That's a 1031 real estate exchange. He's probably more well known for that in the United States than for his forestry. Are you familiar with that?

MF: When I first started researching your family, I did find that many references to TJ Starker have to do with that real estate judgment that has been the standard from then on.

JSR: Yes, well we inherited that, and then we bought several, when he was working with the stock market, we bought several pieces of property and in turn did some 1031 exchanges with that and we always traded up. And that was our income, because we didn't have anything, we had to have some flow. But when Kermit died, there was not much property that was giving me any real secure monthly money flow. And so that's when I started doing the real estate things, because I traded some of the timberland that was left over from the mill, I traded that for real estate. And I would really like there to be some emphasis put on that. Because when my father died, he left me nothing. In fact in his will, it says, "To my daughter Jean, I leave nothing." His whole point in establishing his timber was to create a Starker Forest Legacy. He didn't want it broken up. And everybody thinks I got some money from him and that's how I got started, but that's not how it was.

MF: He wanted everything to be kept within the structure of the business?

JSR: That's right. And you know, I could be bitter, but it's – I have two sayings that I think I'd like to put in this, because that's what I live by. One is something about if you have an acid in a container, it sometimes eats at the container that it's in. And I think that that's true. I could be really bitter. And I could be very upset with my nephews. But they had nothing to do with it! It was all my dad's object to leave that as a unit. And he didn't really appreciate women, either, you know. He didn't like the fact that women were in the forestry school, and he didn't really like -- my sister-in-law got interested in the timber business, and he really didn't like that either. He was a German. The oldest son.

MF: Well, you did very well, probably by Kermit's hard work in the stock market and buying things at the right time. And does the Roth Property Services still exist?

JSR: Oh yes, that's what I do. Three times a week, I work at that. I have a bookkeeper who comes and keeps track of things, and I manage the properties. And I have four major properties that I'm leaving one to each one of my children.

MF: How did you learn to do that real estate business?

JSR: I don't know, I think it was by osmosis of hearing my dad speak about it. I think I just absorbed, the way it was supposed to be done. Because his talk at the dinner table was always about business. And I think I must have just absorbed it.

MF: Did you and Kermit work together in those early days on the properties business?

JSR: Oh yes, absolutely we did. I remember one time that property down at the corner of – it's where that pottery painting place is – we owned that building at one time, and the real estate man—I remember this so vividly, he called up and asked if we wanted to sell it. And Kermit put down the phone and said, "Do we want to sell that?" There was a lot of agitation at the time that they were going to change downtown, the Madison Avenue Task Force was starting, and the guy that's chairman of the Madison Avenue Task Force is a very good friend of ours, but I didn't always agree with what they were doing. So I said to Kermit, "You know, I think we're going to be charged a lot for doing a makeover there," and I said, "What do they want to give us for it?" So the realtor said, "What will you take for it?" We'd only held it a year or so, and I said, "Well, \$50,000 more than we paid for it," and he said, "My buyers will take it." I thought that was a pretty good way to make \$50,000 real quick.

MF: So the two of you were kind of a business team?

JSR: Yes, we were, and we always kind of saw eye to eye on how we did it. We never had any discussions -- we'd just talk about it and that was it, go on from there.

MF: Did he ever regret leaving off being an industrial engineer?

JSR: No, I don't think he ever did. It was very much – I think he really enjoyed the business aspect of it.

MF: Sounds like he was a natural at that.

JSR: Yes. I'm sure he did.

MF: So you had your first two children there in Portland?

JSR: Yes, and then we moved down here. We had a house on 10th and Adams. Right by the railroad, Pacific Fruit, do you know where that is? And we bought the house because it had enough bedrooms for us to put the furniture. And then my dad was developing Cedarhurst, which was the corner of 35th and Harrison, and he had, I think, 32 acres in there, and he developed that with the division of Van Buren and Jackson. He gave us a hunk of property down on Jackson Street, cause he'd given my brother a piece of that area between Van Buren and Jackson, but clear at the end where the dairy barns were. And of course, they lived at the last house out on Harrison, they built that when I was in high school. So that's where we lived. So after we moved back to Corvallis, he gave Kermit and I this piece at the end of Jackson, and Kermit just took a year off and built that house. And he built it with the help of one carpenter, and I think he only subcontracted – he did the wiring, so he subcontracted the heating and the water – seems to me there was something else, but he did all the rest of it himself, because he was capable of that. And I back-primed all that siding, I would go out there after the children got up from their naps in the afternoon, and I'd go out and they'd play in the yard while I was painting. So we did it together, but mostly Kermit.

MF: Is that house still standing?

JSR: Yes, the Keims live there.

MF: Oh yes, I remember seeing an article in the paper about that house recently. And how long did you live in that house then?

JSR: We lived there 35 years. And he died from that house, and I lived there six years after he died. But you know, it was a seven-bedroom house, and it was a little big for one lady. So when Kathy, my last one, married, I knew she wanted to be married at that house -- she's a very sentimental girl. So as soon as she was married, I thought, "Boy, it's time to take care of Jean," so I then bought this house. And Ike Guilder built this house. But Kathy in the meantime had gotten an architectural degree, and so she designed the house pretty much for me, and then Guilder built it. So I really supervised the building of this house. Then later, I built the house at Newport. So I built two houses.

MF: Do you like building?

JSR: Yes I do. I just thoroughly enjoyed it.

MF: I'm trying to envision your life here in Corvallis with four children, all pretty close in age.

JSR: Actually, they were 10 years apart. The first three were two years apart, and then we waited four years, and then had the next one.

MF: Still, you had your hands full.

JSR: Yes, I was busy with the children.

MF: Had you stopped working before you had the children?

JSR: Yes I did, but I did a lot of volunteering and also some teaching at the high school with – what do they call that? Well it's where you teach certain courses to adults. I don't know what they call that now.

MF: It used to be night school, but now it does have another name, you're right.

JSR: Yeah, and I don't know what that is. But I taught – Pendleton jackets were very popular, so I taught a class on Pendleton jackets. A Pendleton jacket had a lot of the principles of sewing, the pockets and such. It wasn't really complicated, but it had a lot of the principles. So I found that very much fun, to teach people the basics.

MF: So what kind of things did your family do together? Were you able to do things with all six of you, or was that too many people to take on little trips and so forth?

JSR: Oh no, we used to take the kids fishing every Sunday out at Quartz Crick, and then Bruce and Betty had a pond out – well it was out towards – you went out toward the Y and turned toward Waldport – what do they call that? They had some timberland out there that had a pond on it. There was a group of us that was quite – the Jim Howlands, the Archie Rices, the Bud Krolls, and who else? I guess that was it – Bruce and Betty and us, and we all were together, usually on Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day... we usually went out to the pond. And then Kermit and I always took the kids – we owned some property out at Big Elk, and we went out there crawdadding. I've got a great picture to put in the book of the crawdads. And then we'd ask somebody to come and eat crawdads. And then, as I said, we'd take the kids fishing up Quartz Creek. Finally, we got a boat, and by then, the Rices had a place at Triangle Lake. We'd go down there with our boat and the kids water-skied.

MF: It sounds like Kermit enjoyed his family life.

JSR: Oh yes, he was a family man, I'll tell you. When he had the mill, he would sometimes go and get equipment from other mills that were maybe no longer in service, and he would say when he left, "I may not be back tonight because we might have trouble loading ..." Almost always, he'd be home by midnight – he never stayed over anyplace. He wanted to be home with the family. I never had any concerns about him philandering. He was definitely a family man.

MF: How about summer vacations. Did you guys ever take any trips?

JSR: Not really as summer vacations, but we had the place up the McKenzie, which was really nice, because he had been in the CCC up there. So we had that in common, because I taught school up there. So when we came to having a second home, it wasn't really a home, it was a mobile home – so when we bought the property to put the trailer on, it was up the McKenzie, cause we'd been up there a lot, we liked that area.

MF: He had done trail building when he was there with the CC?

JSR: Yes.

MF: So that made for a great weekend getaway.

JSR: Yes, it was a great place and the kids loved it. They loved to fish, and we had three great fishing holes on that property. We liked it so well that after we'd had the single-wide mobile home for a while, we decided we liked it well enough that we wanted a fireplace, so it would be cozy for us to use in the wintertime. So we had them haul away that one and bring up a doublewide. I had that for a number of years after Kermit died, and then all of a sudden, there was a crack house next door. The people who owned that were from California, and they brought up a lot of antiques to put in it, and it was just a gorgeous place. And they rented it out and it became a crack place, and the people who had it needed wood for their fireplace, and they burned up all of the antiques. And I thought, "They'll probably be over here next, this is no place for me." So I sold it. It just killed me to sell it. But it was 40 miles from any fire or police help -- it was no place for a single woman. So I had to give it up, and I still hate it that we had to give that up.

MF: Well it sounds like you had lots of good years out there.

JSR: Yes, lot of good memories.

MF: So you've mentioned having your holidays with Bruce and Betty, and I realized I've never asked you what the transition was from when Bruce was just a nerdy kid who read the encyclopedia all the time – when did you start to get close to him?

JSR: Well I think that Betty had a lot to do with that, because she met Bruce because I had invited her to a slumber party when we were in high school, when she was going to college here. Her father was an ROTC professor, he was a military man, so Bruce offered to take her home after the slumber party. So they were soon married, and we did a lot of things together. We used to camp up at Spirit Lake, where Bruce and I had spent our childhood. And then after Bruce died, Betty and I traveled a lot together.

MF: So she brought the two of you closer together?

JSR: Yes, and he became a lot more – after he was in the military, he became a lot more social.

MF: Well I'd love to hear a little bit about your children.

JSR: Now or early?

MF: I guess we should start early.

JSR: Well, Ken's the oldest, and he was born in Portland. He was a good baby, he was real – we had him – I don't know, did we talk about the house that we had in Portland?

MF: Not in detail, no.

JSR: Well I told you the first house was this apartment where the Safeway is now, in Lloyd Center. Well then we moved into the house that Ken was born from -- it was the Westminster Presbyterian church manse. It was a four-story house, it had a basement, a main floor, a four-bedroom second floor and a floored attic. We called it the Roth Hotel, because everybody who came to Portland stayed with us. Well Ken was born from there, and then Kreg came along and that was when... Kreg was about six months old when we moved to Corvallis. And the house that we had there had all these floors, and it had six plug-ins. Gas lights, and a sink that was way down here, and I was pregnant with Kreg. So Kermit took out the kitchen and put in a Youngstown sink. It was a sink with drain boards all one piece, so he put it up so I could do dishes. And then we had Kreg, and the thing that I remember about Ken when he was a little kid, he had a rabbit that he loved, a stuffed rabbit. And we had a back yard that we'd fenced. And so one day, he was missing. The lady who had been helping me with Kreg had left the gate open. Well I was just beside myself. We lived at Weidler, I think it was, anyway it was two blocks down to Broadway. And here he was walking along, holding the ears of the rabbit, just wandering around, having a good time. I was just frantic! He was a very adventuresome child.

Then Kreg came along, and he was born with no bicep or tricep in his left arm. They think I had intrauterine polio. That was when polio was just becoming something—everybody had to have a shot. So Kreg was never very athletic. Ken was very athletic. But Kreg was – when he'd ride a tricycle, he could do a tricycle pretty well, but when it came to bicycles, he couldn't balance, because he couldn't get that arm up. So about – we moved to Corvallis, and when he was about, I would say six weeks or so into kindergarten, the doctor that we had here in Corvallis said, "I want you to go down to San Francisco, and go to Stanford medical school and see what they can do for him." Cause he'd come in, and his little face... he'd fallen off his bicycle, and his face was all scarred up, he just didn't have any balance. So we took him down there, and the story I love to tell about Kreg is my folks took us down. We were going to fly down to San Francisco, but it was fogged in, so we had to go by rail. Well Kermit and I were just beside our selves – this was a very nerve-wracking experience for both of us to be taking this child down to the hospital. We didn't know what were going to be the results of this. So because my father was a teetotaler, we didn't ever drink at home, we always called it "juice." So we went in to have some juice in the railroad car, and we got a coke for Kreg. And the bartender there put a cherry in it. And so he had the operation, and came out of the anesthesia, and his legs and his arms were just thrashing. And he yelled out in a loud voice, "I want a cherry in mine!" We were never able to tell my parents about that! But I think that's such a funny story.

So anyway, we got through that. And then Kathy was born, and we just expected another boy. We were just thrilled to have this daughter! And then Kim was born four years later, and the girls were really quite good seamstresses. I suppose I taught them a lot of those things. They were blue ribbon winners for 4-H for their dresses that they made, and I think it was Kathy who went on to state fair and got a blue ribbon. They were really good seamstresses. Now, they don't do much. I think Kathy does more than Kim, but they were very active in 4-H.

MF: Were you still involved in 4-H during their growing up years?

JSR: Uh huh. And later I was a trustee for the 4-H state board. My dad was very instrumental in obtaining the property for the 4-H camp that's over near Salem, and I was very active in that for a long time.

MF: Were you a 4-H leader as well when your children were younger?

JSR: Yes. And I think I told you that Helen Seymour was my 4-H leader, I think we talked about that. So I've always been active in 4-H, and still am to a certain extent. We support the swimming pool at the camp.

MF: Were the boys in 4-H as well?

JSR: No, they were both Eagle Scouts. In fact that [earlier telephone] conversation was about that, because my great grandson is now in scouting, so I took – the scouts always wear red flannel jackets, and I happened to remember that in the cupboard out there, I had Kreg's jacket from his scouting, so I gave it to my great grandchild. I took all the badges off of it, so it's at the cleaner's and it's going down there!

MF: I think I read somewhere that Kermit was involved too with boy scouting?

JSR: Yes he was with the – I don't know what they call that – the headquarters are in Eugene for this area, and he was active in the management of that. I don't know what they call them, trustees or what they call them, but he was active in that for quite a while.

MF: So as a home economist, do you think you were more prepared than other women, going into this whole child-rearing experience?

JSR: I suppose so, because we learned a lot of child education and what we were supposed to do and how we were supposed to handle problems, that sort of thing.

MF: Did you continue to do the kinds of things you had been teaching other women to do in terms of preserving food and such?

JSR: Well I've always worked with the Extension Service to a certain extent, even as a volunteer. And I think that I followed through on a lot of that.

MF: What do you think were your strengths as a mother? What did everyone depend on you for?

JSR: Cooking, I think. Having a good meal. And I think we cooked healthy meals, because I had learned that. You know, we always had meat and probably potatoes or rice of some sort, and vegetables or salad. My husband always wanted salad, because when he was in the service, he never had any greens at all. I think I mentioned he wanted lettuce when his brother came to visit him, because he never had any greens. We always had balanced meals, and we always sat down to eat together, and of course later, my dad ate with us. That is something that I would not do again, because I don't think it was fair to my children. When you sit down to eat your evening meal, the kids want to talk about their days. And my dad thought he was the conversationalist, and he wanted to tell us about his day. And I don't think it was fair to my children to do that. But you did what you had to do at that time.

But as a result, Kermit came home every day for lunch, because you know it was just a short distance. And that was our quiet time together. And often, well quite often, he would bring salesmen home for lunch. Because the thing to do was for the salesman to take him out. And he'd say, "Oh no, let's go home, Jean will cook us something." I think that was our time together, and it was also – I always had something in the pantry, like a can of chicken. I could do a zillion things with chicken. Chicken salad, chicken soup, chicken dumplings, there were lots of things I could do on the spur of the moment. He'd call and say, "Could I bring so-and-so home?" and I'd say, "Oh sure."

MF: When you say a can of chicken, was that something you had canned?

JSR: Oh no. I didn't want anything to do with those chickens. I wanted them prepared.

MF: I'm almost in the same age range with your children and I'm thinking about the era when you were raising them. It was such an era of change and more permissiveness, certainly from the era when you had been raised. And you had been raised in such a strict way. Was that a tough transition for you to set rules and discipline for your kids?

JSR: Well I think there was a lot of discipline in that -- you don't do this because your grand father was this way. And the other thing that I remember vividly, and I don't remember if I told Wade this or not. But one day, the teacher called me up when Kim was in school, and said, "We're talking about letting the girls wear pants to school," and what did I think about it? And I said, "It makes a lot of sense to me. They turn their little bottoms upside down on the playground, it makes a lot

of sense to me." So that's when children... because otherwise, I see pictures of my kids in their grade school era, and they always had dresses on, and then all of a sudden the pants became popular.

MF: Yes, I remember having to change from school clothes to play clothes when I got home.

JSR: Yes, and those play clothes were pants.

MF: But you got through those teenage years without too much turmoil?

JSR: Well, my girls didn't date. Ken dated in college – well he did date when he was a senior, but I don't remember that we had any concerns about that. They were pretty, they had learned... I used to tell them, "Don't misbehave, because somebody knows you, and somebody is going to tattle on you."

MF: Were there particular stages of childhood that you enjoyed more than others. Did you love that stage when they were very little?

JSR: Yes, I did, and I probably enjoyed the girls when they were maybe six to twelve -- I really liked that age. They were old enough to be talked to and sensible, and you could kind of guide them through that period. I really enjoyed that part of it, I think.

MF: What about the boys?

JSR: The boys were always so active in scouting, and I think Kermit did a lot of the parenting at that age with the boys. He would take them camping with the scouts and he would arrange to have them go and meet with other people to get their badges. I think he did a lot of the parenting with the boys. And of course he'd take them to the mill, and lots of times, he'd come home if he had to go to Eugene or Portland for a part or something, he'd come by to grab one of the boys and take them. And of course that was very helpful to me, that gave me a little freedom. I remember one time when he was coming back from Eugene, he and Kreg were singing and he wasn't watching the speedometer and he got stopped. And the cop said something about what were they doing and then Kreg piped up and said, "Oh, daddy and I were singing!" And the cop said "You know if more dads would do that, we'd be a lot better off. You can go." He didn't arrest him!

MF: But neither of your boys went into that field, wood products or forestry?

JSR: No. Ken started out in forestry, and then he would go out and have field trips and he'd get poison oak. And he came back one day and said, "Forestry isn't for me, I can't go to the woods." And by that time, I think he was seeing the writing on the wall, too, about that it was going to go that way [turns thumbs down], and he changed and went into business.

MF: And neither of the girls was ever interested?

JSR: Oh no, girls in that era, they were just starting to come into it. I think they had just one or two girls in the forestry school, and my dad didn't approve of that.

MF: So he still had a big influence on your family?

JSR: Oh yes, he sure did. And he, well you know he really ruled the roost because of his eating with us. Yes, I would say that.

MF: The children probably had that sense that there were eyes all over town.

JSR: Yes, he was on the school board, he knew everything that was going on. Did I tell you that story – they were trying to raise money for taxes, the school board was, and the man came to Lion's Club and my dad was very prominent in the Lion's Club. He was the one who started – I don't know if you've been reading these articles that Ken Mumford has been putting in, but he was one of the principles who started Avery Park. So the superintendent of schools, I think it was Dr. VanLeuwen, he came to the Lion's Club and made a plea for them to all vote for the increase in school property taxes. And my dad got up and said, "Well, I'd feel more inclined to vote for this, but my grandson was just kicked out of the first grade," and something about one of the other kids. Ken was kicked out of the first grade because he was a big boy, and

he had a little bitty teacher. She sent a note home and said that he was misbehaving, and what was I going to do about it? And I went down to see about it, and said, "What does he do?" And she said, "He won't keep his feet under the desk." And she said, "I tried putting him out in the hall, and he just sat out there and visited with everybody and enjoyed himself. So I guess that's not the way to handle it." And I said, "Where does Ken sit?" And I said, "Well, if you go down to the sixth grade and get a desk that fits him, he probably wouldn't put his feet out in the aisle." "Oh," she said, "I never thought about that!"

Anyway, my dad told this story at the Lion's Club, and Dr. VanLeuwen came up to him afterwards and said, "TJ, when you've got something like that, would you just come and tell me privately?" But you know, he had a lot of clout, because he wrote all these letters to the editor and had an opinion about everything. So the kids were pretty well... if they didn't see Pop, they knew some of his friends would see them. I used to worry he would have articles in the paper about how many acres of timberland that he owned, and I thought, "Why do you put it in the paper?" It was about the time of the Lindberg kidnapping, and I worried about that a lot. But nothing ever happened.

MF: How about your mom? Was she very involved with your children?

JSR: Yes, she was a good baby-sitter. And you know, she had that cart -- a golf cart. She would come by in the afternoon and take the kids with the golf cart, if she had to go down to the grocery store she'd take them with her. So she was very much involved with the children. I think she was more involved with Bond and Barte, because Bruce and Betty traveled more than we did, so she often kept them for several weeks at a time. I would take them for periods of time, because I knew she needed a break. Because she was getting older. The boys came down and made lots of logging roads with the trucks that my husband made. He worked at another business in Portland, I've forgotten the name of it, but it was during the war, at the beginning of the war -- not World War II but was it Vietnam that was next. He worked at this die-casting company, and they made log trucks, kid-sized. And the employees were allowed to take parts home that were not perfect, and Kermit made six or eight log trucks, and these were big log trucks. They had to buy the tires, they were little tires, but I think Kathy still has those log trucks. And he would convert them to flat-beds or dump trucks -- he sort of changed the configuration of some of them, and Bond and Barte and Ken and Kreg would make logging roads all over the place. They loved to do that. They would play and it was really no trouble for me to keep them sometimes to give my mother a rest.

MF: Were they about the same ages as your boys?

JSR: Yes, well there was Bond, then Kermit came into the family, then Ken, then Barte, then Kreg, and then Kathy and then Kim came along later. So they were pretty much the same age.

MF: Did you do holidays and things with their family?

JSR: Yes, we always had Thanksgiving and Christmas.

MF: I think you said in your interview with Wade that your dad was always shocked that your Christmases were so much more extravagant than what you had had as children.

JSR: Yes, we gave too much to the children. And I'm saying the same thing about mine!

MF: We talked a little bit about the trips the two of you took to Japan. Did you take any trips with the children?

JSR: Oh yes, we took them to Hawaii two or three times. But we didn't ever take them farther than that.

MF: Hawaii is a big trip for a family of six.

JSR: Yes, it's quite a jaunt. I think we went to the Big Island, cause we went up to the volcano -- we thought that was educational. And then Ken would sometimes come by himself or Kreg when they were a little bit older. We took the two girls to Australia when the boys were older -- Ken was married and Kreg, maybe he was married too.

MF: What inspired a trip to Australia? How did you choose that?

JSR: Well, Kermit always wanted to go that direction, he never wanted to go to Europe. And I think Kathy wanted to go. It was the time they were building the opera house in Sidney, and she was very interested in the way that was constructed. Cause Kermit and she spent one whole day of our trip photographing it and walking around it, going through it, and she did a report for one of her classes at Oregon Sate, she got some credits for all that.

MF: So she knew from early on that she wanted to be in architecture?

JSR: Oh yes, she loves architecture.

MF: And what does your younger daughter do?

JSR: She wanted to be a nurse, but she met her husband instead, so she took education. She's been a school teacher and a substitute teacher. I guess she never was a regular teacher, because when they were married, she had twins quite early in her married life, so I think she just did substituting. But she loves teaching.

MF: You stayed very close with your children.

JSR: Oh yeah, Kim and Walt are here now.

MF: Oh yes, because they're building The Courtyard. Are you involved with that project?

JSR: Yes, somewhat. When they get in a bind, I help them out. Not only financially, but other ways too sometimes.

MF: Have you worked with any of your other children on real estate or construction projects?

JSR: Oh no. Ken is very handy, he's like his dad, he can do anything. And Kreg's pretty handy, but his recreation consists of hunting and fishing.

MF: Is that something they used to do with their dad too?

JSR: Oh yes, they always got their deer. We had some forest lands out here and we reserved that for family hunting, so there weren't other people shooting around them. They've always hunted and fished. Ken doesn't do that much, but Kreg does a lot.

MF: I think it's admirable that you're so close with them

JSR: Well I think we're as close as – we talk probably every week at least. Sometimes, if there's something going on, we talk every other day. My grandsons call me every once in a while.

MF: You must have been the kind of mother that everyone was comfortable with.

JSR: I guess they were, because they keep in touch.

MF: We'll take a little break here if you'd like, and when we get back together we can focus on your years of community service.

JSR: I have a couple of things here about... when we lived over on Jackson Street, we had a whole row of holly trees, and then every Christmas we'd trim the holly trees and the girls would put the clippings in the wheelbarrow and go up and down Jackson Street asking everybody if they'd like any holly for Christmas. They just gave it to them, so that was kind of nice.

MF: Did you have some other holiday traditions that were left over from your growing up years?

JSR: We certainly had food that was very traditional. We always had turkey and we always had dressing – I can tell you some funny stories about that. And suet pudding, that was carrot pudding, steamed pudding. And we usually had boiled onions, little pearl onions, and cranberry ice, we always had that.

MF: What is cranberry ice – a dessert?

JSR: No, it's an ice that you eat with meat. Oh, a very fancy dinner has that, you know, to clear your palette. We always made it with a beater, and then we'd scoop it out into a sherbet dish, that was served with all the hot things. Sweet potatoes -- candied sweet potatoes -- and mashed potatoes and gravy. Standard menu, always. Still is!

MF: Except for the suet pudding – I've never heard of that before.

JSR: We always made carrot pudding, but it's made with suet. And we'd put that stuff on top – I can't think of the name, but I can still see my mother sitting in front of the fireplace before we had beaters, and she would whip that stuff. It took forever to make.

Did we talk about the Burlington family and Uncle Gus?

MF: I know you talked to Wade about Uncle Gus bringing you raisins as a kid.

JSR: Then we talked about that...

I think I was going to look up some dates for you. So Kermit died at 59, and he died in 1979.

MF: Had he been ill at all before that?

JSR: Well, he always was not... well we always thought that he was fragile, but we didn't realize what it was. You know in those days, heart things were just very different. Oh we've made big strides in heart. I guess that's all I had in my notes. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I think, "Oh, we need to talk about this."

MF: So Kermit died of a sudden heart attack.

JSR: Yes. He was just fine. We had just come back from a trip to Mexico, and he was building a photography studio in the basement -- he thought he might take that up as an avocation. And he came upstairs, and he said, "Are you ready to go do errands downtown?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm ready just as soon as I'm through with this note -- I'm writing thank yous to all the people who were nice to us down in Mexico." And all of a sudden, I looked over, and he was laid out on the bed. And I said, "Kermit, what's the matter?" And he just kind of looked at me. And I went over and I felt his forehead, and it was just sweaty. And I said, "What is the matter? I think I'd better call the doctor." And he said, "Yes, I guess so." And I think he knew what he had, but I didn't at the time. So I called the doctor, and he said, "Get him to the hospital!" And I said, "Can you walk out to the car?" And he said he thought he could, so he did. And we got him out to the hospital and some little man came up -- I didn't know him from Adam, but I think he thought I knew who he was. Apparently, he was the heart doctor. And all he said to me was, "Your husband is a very sick man." And I thought, "What's he sick about?" And I said, "Can I see him?" And he said, "Yeah, go in and see." But I still didn't know that he'd had a heart attack. So he lived that day and then the next day they took him to Portland to OHSU. And it was February, and it was icy, oh, there was ice on the streets everywhere. I didn't think we'd ever make it up Pill Hill. But the ambulance, I don't know if they had chains or not, but we made it up the hill. I knew he was very sick, but they made everybody get out of the elevator and let us in. I knew there was something bad going on. So he just lived that night, and he was gone the next day. So my life changed. You never know what the future brings, so you better live every day.

MF: Well it sounds like he enjoyed his life.

JSR: Oh he did. He enjoyed every day.

MF: I try to imagine you stepping into the property management business at that point. I guess you'd always been involved, so it wasn't that big of a leap.

JSR: No it wasn't, because I think he had a premonition all the time that I would outlive him, because my family had sort of an older reputation – whatever. His family had always died suddenly. So he was pretty insistent that I be aware of everything that was going on in the financial things. We always talked over every deal. So I just went on from there.

MF: Next time I'd like to talk more about not only your community activism but also Kermit's.

[Jean later read these two quotes from Ann Landers columns to illustrate the philosophy she tries to live by.]

JSR: "I have said many times that hate is like an acid that does as much damage to the vessel in which it is stored as to the object on which it is poured."

"Gem of the Day: When the tide of life turns against you, and the current upsets your boat, don't waste tears on what might have been. Just lie on your back and float."

Those are the two things that I look at, I keep those handy.