



Ruth Jones and Rita Kilstrom Oral History Interview, August 21, 2014

Title

“The Early Days of Theater Arts at Oregon State”

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Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Jones and Kilstrom provide insight into their upbringings as children raised in Corvallis in the 1940s and 1950s. They also discuss the early days of theater at Oregon State College as well as the community theater culture in Corvallis during their youths. The life of D. Palmer Young, Rita Kilstrom's father, is also a point of focus, as are the activities of Kilstrom's mother Catherine, a technical illustrator.

The bulk of the session is devoted to reflections on the Drama department and campus culture at Oregon State College in the mid- to late 1950s. Jones and Kilstrom share their memories of Drama faculty, memorable productions, the Mitchell Playhouse, and cast parties. They likewise note campus hangouts, including the Memorial Union Folk Club, dress codes, fashions of the time, campus jobs, and school traditions.

Interviewees

Ruth Jones, Rita Kilstrom

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

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

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Okay, today is Thursday, August 21st, 2014. We're at the Valley Library on the OSU campus to interview two members of the class of 1959. My name is Mike Dicianna, oral historian for the OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center, and also present today is Ruth Martin Jones, on the left, and Rita Young Kilstrom on the right, who are both members of the class of 1959. So, what I like to do is, normally I like to get a biographical sketch of people's early years and what led them to here, but Rita, you've got a unique story, really is going to be a window to what OSC was like through a child's eyes, because you grew up on campus. Your father was D. Palmer Young, he was professor of speech in speech department and theater craft from 1928 through the early 1960s, so you were a professor's kid. And so, what I'd kind of like to get is what was it like to grow up on, basically with the campus at your back door?

Rita Kilstrom: It was ideal. We had much to play with. My neighbors and I and my older brothers, well my older brothers were able to play during the time that the chemistry building was being built, right across from our first house, which was at 2202 Monroe, and my little brother was up there running around—I mean my older brother—and one time he fell out the window and hung on by his hands and screamed and Dad had to run over and try to find him up in the partly finished building. But anyway, we had many, many games on the fields behind—because we were right behind the then business, school of business. We had ball games there, we played over at the quad, we took our dog over to the quad and he jumped the little hedgerows, and we roller-skated in front of the Memorial Union, and in the Memorial Union, and Major Allworth did not like that. And we'd even play hide and seek in the women's lounge. I remember that vividly. And so we had, basically, the run of the campus. And the museum, Horner Museum was in the basement of what then later became the theater, and as kids we'd go over there and spend hours. I mean, little old ladies who ran that museum just shaking in their boots when they saw us come, because we'd dash in and out and we'd go into the room that had the black light for the rocks, you remember?

Ruth Jones: You bet I do, Mitchell Playhouse.

RK: Yeah, but it was the Horner Museum then.

RJ: Yeah.

MD: Originally the women's gym.

RK: I know. My mother told me that she was in gymnastics in that building. I thought really? She said there was a swimming pool down in the lower level. I don't know if that's true or not. So anyway, yes, it was a really great place to grow up and a great place to be a kid. We had, in those days, no closed doors, no locked doors, our parents lets us walk downtown, when we were five or six years old. Oh yeah. We'd go down, my little friends and I would go down to the Saturday matinees at the Whiteside. And you know, nobody ever worried about us. It was just wonderful. My dad and mom's kitchen faced the cul-de-sac that was right across from the new physics chemistry building, regular chemistry building, and the back door was always open or unlocked and dad's students would just stop in and have coffee. Just whenever. It was just so wonderful. We had apple trees and a huge cherry tree and you know, we used to throw apple cores down at the students when they went by to school.

MD: Well see, your dad was basically theater and the time that he was there, there was quite a transition in the theater department. He went from being a technical director, and he directed a number of shows, but so that was part of your father's career, now were you involved at all with theater as a kid, later years as a kid?

[0:04:53]

RK: Well, I remember him taking me over with him when he was building sets and having me help paint. Yeah, I painted. "God's Little Acre," I think, was the one I worked on there. That was when he was putting on shows in Benton Hall. And so I don't know what era that was but I was—

MD: That was early on, because Mitchell Playhouse didn't get started until later, and Benton Hall, was that in the basement of Benton Hall, or?

RK: No, there was a—

MD: It was one of the, oh well, that's, yes, there is a bigger room there that they use, it's music now.

RK: Right, but it was a theater then.

MD: Yes, I think that's where we see the sets. And now, so like I say, a lot of theater, I mean you're, the kids are just underfoot and they're just around, they're just part of the theater.

RK: Right, right.

MD: And so you were, did you ever get into—were you a kid in any of the shows that he did, or?

RK: I don't believe I was. But my older brothers probably were, and I remember when they put on shows down at the Majestic Theater downtown for a while, my older brothers were in those shows. I started working in the campus productions in the summers when I was like fifteen or sixteen, and so by the time I started college I already had I think nine units of A, so I started out pretty much with a good grade point average, because I had worked on the summer theater productions. We had a great time. It was just a lot of fun.

MD: Yeah, now they do a thing called Bard in the Quad where they do Shakespeare every year in front of the MU.

RK: Oh really? Wonderful.

MD: They just, yeah, they just got through with a production, as a matter of fact. Now, the women's gym, again we call it—it was an armory, it was a women's gym and then it became the Mitchell Playhouse. Originally it wasn't called that but it was named after kind of the original professor of the theater department, C.B. Mitchell. Now so, he was a—there when your dad was. Did you know him at all?

RK: Oh yeah, but he wasn't the one who hired my dad. When my dad was in college he worked under Miss Barnes, Elizabeth I think was her name, Elizabeth Barnes, and what happened was that he graduated in industrial arts education. He and mother were engaged, although she was two years behind him, and he went up and taught high school for one year in, I think it was Pullman, Washington, and while he was up there Miss Barnes called him, she said "Palmer, I want you to come back and work for me. You have to build my sets." He said "okay." And so in order to do that he had to go down to Stanford and take a summer course, in order to be on the faculty. I don't know what that exact course was or what the requirement was.

So, in June of that year, his, after his first year of high school teaching after Mother's final year of college—no, her junior year of college—they met up in Portland again and they were both going to go down to San Francisco on the boat. Well, they decided they'd better be married if they were going to do that. So, they ran into Dad's cousin on the street in Portland, and just happened to, and so they went up to the courthouse and during the Rose Parade they were married. And so they were on the ship down to San Francisco and they were the only ones, only passengers aboard who didn't get seasick. So they had the run of the place and all the food and anything they wanted. But then they had to part company in San Francisco and she had to go back to New Mexico where her stepfather was dying and he had to take that class, so that was sad. But then they came back and they were, he was his first year of teaching and she was in her senior year, and she was Home Ec. major and that was really shocking. Not only was she married as a student, but she was married to a professor as a student. Well, a teacher. So, that was pretty unusual. Pretty unusual. She had to do her, a lot of her practice teaching—or practice home ec. work at home; keep track of how long it took her to make a bed and that sort of thing, so that was there life and they just stayed right there where they were.

MD: And kids, and kids and kids? And now you have two brothers, was it?

RK: Two older brothers, yeah. And my mom always hired college girls to help take care of us, so we had lots of students in and out of the house all the time.

MD: Yeah, you have been part of, an integral part of the university from birth.

RK: From birth. And I remember dad bringing home—well like when he'd put on a matinee that was a costume play, he'd bring home the major actress, he'd bring home—she stayed at our house during the afternoon between the plays. So that kind of thing was just really comfortable, really fun for them, and for me.

[0:10:14]

MD: Now, you were here on campus during the war years as a child, or young child.

RK: Right.

MD: Very young child, but now your father, I understand, did do service?

RK: Yes, as a civilian.

MD: Yeah.

RK: Yeah, he went to Mare Island to work on ships and then they sent him over after Pearl Harbor to Honolulu and he installed radar on the ships, because during Pearl Harbor, this was the story anyway, they discovered that oh, those blips on the screen meant something and maybe radar was important after all. So, while he was there, I think he was there for only about a year, I don't, maybe longer, exciting things over there. He'd send back clothes to Mom and macadamia nuts and he, Joe DiMaggio went over there to play ball while he was there. I have a little tiny picture of that. But he didn't ever serve.

MD: Yeah. So, then he came back basically after the war and went right back into being in school. Now, also they, let's talk about a certain house. It's gone now, but you—the second house that you grew up on with the back, basically the backyard of the campus, was 2320 Monroe street and it was sold in the early sixties and it became the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center on campus for a number of years, up until just this last year, where it is, and it's gone now.

RK: Yeah.

MD: What are your feelings about that house and its legacy?

RK: Well see, I didn't move there, we moved a whole block when I was sixteen. The first house the campus bought, and then they wanted the second house, so Dad kept saying "you keep buying my houses out from under us." But the first house was a big old house, and they moved that house out of town, so as far as I know it might still be there, and that's where the physics chemistry building is now, right on top of that. So, when I was sixteen I moved to 2320 and there was a service station on one side and the Acacia fraternity on the other side and again, I was closer to campus than my sorority was, which was Alpha Ki Omega, down on 26th. And so, you know, we had people in and out all the time and we had a big old apple tree in front and the students would come and help themselves on the way to school. So, it was really very, very fun, very neat. And while I was in college, though, my dad pretty much insisted I keep the same curfew. We were just talking about that, as we had in the sorority. The girls had to be in by was it ten or ten-thirty?

RJ: Ten on the weekdays.

RK: On the weekdays, yeah.

RJ: And twelve.

RK: Twelve on the weekends. But I could check myself out of the house when I lived there and go home, but like I say, he was pretty strict about that.

MD: And so pretty much you, during your college years you lived in the sorority then?

RK: No, only two different quarters. It's all we could afford.

MD: Oh, yeah.

RK: You know, even then—

MD: Teacher's salary.

RK: Even then I never had to pretend like I was any richer than anybody else because everybody knew what a professor didn't make and Dad wasn't a full professor at that point. Because he didn't—he'd only had a bachelor's degree, he never had any further education except that one summer session at Stanford.

MD: Well lets, we're going to move on, actually, to your college days, but are there any other experiences or reflections about being a Beaver kid on campus that really stand out, that you want to impart with us?

RJ: Well, I just remember so many homecomings and so many parades and snow time when the students would get into toboggans and you know, all over the campus everybody was enjoying the snow and that kind of thing. I don't know what else I could tell you about that.

MD: But it was just part of your life.

RK: Part of my life.

MD: Yeah, the campus was, you know—

RK: I mean my dad and mom were in bridge club with the president of the university and four or five of the deans and so I called the president "Skook" and his wife "Molly." I mean, everybody looked at me funny.

MD: And that would be President Strand?

RK: Yeah, yeah. Because they'd take me along and I'd sleep in the bathtub or whatever while they were playing bridge and that kind of thing. It was cool.

[0:15:05]

MD: And so President LeRoy Strand's nickname with his peers was "Skook?"

RK: "Skook," S-K-O-O-K. You didn't know that before?

MD: We don't have that in the records.

RK: Uh-oh.

MD: That I know of. So, that's epic, that's epic.

RK: Uh-oh. Yeah. And Molly and—but you know, the faculty was on pretty tight reign then. No alcohol was—he didn't drink, you know. It was pretty conservative. I remember that very vividly, yeah. I mean it loosened up again way later, like in the eighties I guess, or no, sixties.

RJ: I was wondering about your wedding reception.

RK: Sixties, sixties, yeah. When I was married we had the wedding at the, what's now the art center downtown, the Episcopal Church, and we had the reception at my sorority house, which was brand new, and we couldn't have alcohol there. So, we had to go back to Mom and Dad's house and have our champagne later, just the family and stuff. But yeah, it was pretty tight, pretty tight.

MD: Well Ruth, let's go ahead and fill in your early days and where you grew up and your story.

RJ: Well, I never got away. I was born here and I've lived in numerous houses in Corvallis, but my aspirations were always to go to college. From the first grade I wanted to be a school teacher, so nothing doing but what I—my father saw to it that I got into college. He had a lumber yard at that time, a retail lumberyard which I eventually took over and

became my father's only son. But, I did it, had the opportunity. But, I think it was kind of interesting that I went to school, daddy would bring me up to the MU for my first class but I would sneak in to the O Club and have a cup of coffee and then go across the street to a Quonset hut for my English class. So we did have numerous Quonset huts around the area, and of course at that time the McAlexander Fieldhouse was not surrounded by very tall buildings. It was just out by itself sort of down the street, so that was a memorable building in my time.

MD: So, you went to Corvallis High?

RJ: I did go to Corvallis High School.

MD: And you graduated in what, '53?

RJ: '55.

MD: '55 Corvallis High, and grade school, I mean it was good, standard grade school experience?

RJ: Oh yeah, numerous grade schools, because Rita and I went to—there was only one kindergarten and it was at Harding School and she—

RK: We met then.

RJ: Yep. We met then and from there we went to our respective area schools, and I think there were only four or five.

RK: Maybe not even that many.

RJ: Well there was—yeah, but any rate, how did you put it earlier? That you went to the good one.

RK: Yeah, I went to the best one, I went—I stayed at Harding.

MD: Yeah.

RJ: But I can say I went to Harding because I went in kindergarten, but Roosevelt School, I went to Franklin, how's that? I got around.

RK: You did get around, yeah.

MD: Now, being a, you know, you were a college kid, but you were a—grew up in a college town. Did that, you know, was the fact that Oregon State College in Corvallis, did that affect your childhood at all? I mean, were you aware that you were part of a college community?

RK: Oh definitely, because both of my sisters went to Oregon State—well Oregon State College, so I was very aware that it was here. Not so much campus-wise. I never remember going on campus during those years, but yes, we were all quite aware of it.

MD: Everybody Beavers from birth, yeah. Now, let's get into college. I mean, it's probably a silly question, but why did you choose Oregon State College, or was there even any other choice?

RK: Never any other choice. Good lord, we'd never go down the road, and financially definitely not any choice. As we talked about briefly earlier, I could live at home and just have the school tuition and books. I always worked. Ruthie always worked. I worked on campus for different parts of the campus. I ended up most of my work in the physics department as a secretary and that was right next to the speech department, which was the little building next to it.

MD: Yeah, Shepard Hall.

RK: Yeah, Shepard Hall.

MD: Yeah, which was originally a YW/YMCA building.

RK: Was it?

[0:20:00]

MD: And Shepard Hall is now, it's still the Speech department.

RK: Is it?

MD: Yeah, it's been restored just recently, to a point. So your major, I understand, when you first—I've looked at some of your records and it said that you had interest in stenography and you were going to be a secretarial science—

RK: Yeah, my oldest brother's fiancé was a secretarial science major, and so of course that influenced me, because she stayed with us when he went into the service for a year, but after a year I decided I could never type that fast. That was BC; Before Computers, so I switched to education as a sophomore. But I had no problem. I finished in January of my senior year and then dad didn't want me to quit and start working, so I started my graduate, my master's program, and—

MD: Yeah, I see that you have your graduate and masters of education in 1961 and you graduated with a BS.

RK: A BS and then the Ed.M. we called it.

MD: Yeah, Ed.M., yeah.

RK: And that was a big thrill, to be able to march in the graduation parade with my dad. He had his full robes on and I had my robe—we weren't together, but we were both there. That was just really cool.

MD: Oh, both on the—and you're graduation was in Gill Coliseum? Yeah.

RK: And then I got to watch my oldest son graduate from college in Gill Coliseum, too. Unfortunately, his son, who should have graduated in June, decided not to walk. He was a fourth generation Beaver and he didn't want to walk.

MD: Oh man. So Ruth, what was your major and what—

RJ: There was no question what my major was, in education.

MD: In education. So, you started out as education and continued on.

RJ: Yes I did. I went straight through. And then taught for five years and then in the interim I did a number of other things, beside start my family, but I went back to teaching in 1962 after going to graduate school in 1991, to obtain my certificate so that I could go back, and I also obtained my reading endorsement here from Oregon State, so that was my...

MD: Your path. And you were both sororities, or?

RJ: I was—

RK: Different.

MD: Different.

RJ: I was AO Pi.

RK: I was Alpha Chi Omega. But we have so many friends from our high school class that went to school.

RJ: Oh yes.

RK: Went straight into, went straight to Oregon State.

RJ: Yes.

MD: Yeah, probably a lot of your peers just, yeah.

RJ: Well, we had classes in high school for those who were college oriented, and it was marvelous. English, what else that we had that was—

RK: Probably sciences, although I wasn't into those, but yeah, they were all what they call APs.

MD: AP, yeah.

RJ: Yeah, we went to those and—

RK: Well, the other thing about growing up in Corvallis school system was that we had student teachers all the time. We were we were so sick of them by the time we were through school. You don't remember?

RJ: I do not remember.

RK: Oh, we had—remember in high school, we practically ruined that one woman's career. Oh yeah, she was an older student and I think our English class just did her in.

RJ: Oh no, I don't remember.

RK: Yeah, we had student teachers. I remember that.

RJ: I remember I had student teachers when I was teaching.

RK: Right. Well, because they were all out of...

MD: Yeah, the College of Education here, so a lot of your classes and a lot of your time was spent just behind us here in the Education building, which is now Furman Hall, which has just been beautifully restored.

RK: And that was another funny thing, I like to go on and on, but the fact that I was an education major and my dad's hangout was next door; he had coffee with the education professors almost every morning. And so they all knew me.

MD: Yeah.

RJ: What a disadvantage.

RK: Yeah. Oh no, it was an advantage.

RJ: Oh, it was?

RK: Oh yeah, they didn't dare give me bad grades.

MD: Well, that was one thing I noticed about your transcript, that you didn't, you seemed to get a lot of A's from your father. Did you earn those, or was that just a given?

RK: Being on the cast or in the crew of a play, you pretty much got an A unless you didn't show up.

MD: Yeah.

RK: Dad was very adamant about anybody who took a class from him. They had to be there. They couldn't cut.

MD: That's theater.

RK: Well, even speech classes.

RJ: But you're being generous, you were very generous—or he was very generous, because I remember getting a B in speech and I thought I was going to die, and that was from my good friend Don Henry.

RK: Oh yeah the—yeah, Don came after, yeah. He was gone.

[0:25:00]

RJ: Yeah, he was one of the kids.

RK: He was one of the kids, yeah.

MD: He was a professor, but he was an instructor of a young sort?

RJ: Yes, he was a director and he was just a commensurate instructor. I always loved going to his classes, as I did her dad, because I had classes from him on stagecraft and on stage design. So, it was a—

RK: Dad told me the story of when my older brother was taking the make-up class from him, make-up for theater, and he's talking to him and calling dad over and stuff like that, and pretty soon one of the other students said "Hey Dad, would you come over here and look at this?" He didn't, well—

MD: Because he was calling by it, yeah.

RK: He didn't realize that's my brother's real dad. I want to just back up just a second to tell you a little bit about when Mom and Dad were in college.

MD: Oh, yeah.

RK: Because you might be interested in that. I have Mother's diary from when she was a freshman, before she met Dad. It is hilarious, because she must have been out with a different guy every night, or two in one day, you know, having coffee here, one, and after they got together they would court in canoes on the Marys River, and that was what they did. They took a portable Victrola and wound it up and had the music and they would float up and down the river. Isn't that neat? So, I just thought I'd put that in there.

MD: Yeah, see these are the, you know, these are the type of stories, these little vignettes like this that we capture in these oral histories that are just, they're nuggets. They're just nuggets.

RJ: Well, you made me think of something, and I was trying to date a different guy every night.

RK: I know, we both were.

RJ: And so I met up with this guy that the—I was introduced to him as Jones, so I didn't know his name when I was asked out on a date, so I called him "Jonesie" and that's what it has been for—

RK: She married him.

RJ: Sixty years—no, how long are we going? Yeah, we've been dating for sixty years.

MD: So, "Jonesie."

RJ: Yeah. He was a graduate student and he made me study, but it was really fun because one night it had snowed and we took the sled. Well, I lived just around, I lived with my folks around the corner and he at his fraternity, I'd pass by, and so I was to pick him up and then we'd go up on campus and one night it was snowing, so we took the sled up there. We were going to slide home on lower campus and I'd parked—parked—the sled up against the Mitchell Playhouse because I was going in for a rehearsal and he was going up the hill to the micropaleontology lab, or the paleo lab, and he left a note on it: "I'll meet you at so-and-so" and I thought that was just the most romantic thing I've ever—parked a note on my sled.

RK: That's hilarious.

MD: So, let's finish up a little bit about college. Now, who were some of your favorite professors, other than your dad, during this era?

RJ: Don Henry.

RK: Yeah, Don Henry.

RJ: In the Drama department.

RK: Yeah. I can remember the worst ones better than the best ones.

RJ: Oh, the most inspiring was my English teacher, Mr. Dubeé.

RK: I don't remember, I didn't have him, I guess.

RJ: He was wonderful. Wonderful.

RK: The one I remember most was actually my graduate course, and he was an education professor who had been retired, forced to retire at sixty-five, and then he went up to Alaska and taught until he was seventy-five, but he would come back and teach in the summer at Oregon State.

RJ: Who was that?

RK: Well darn, I don't remember his name but he was just fabulous and he was like probably seventy-sev—our age.

RJ: You mean what we are now.

RK: Yeah. Anyway, he was a neat guy, but lots, all the education professors were fun and we had to take a whole year of music, right?

RJ: Yes.

RK: And for those of us who are not musical, that was torture.

RJ: Hear, hear.

RK: And then we had a whole year of art, which I of course loved.

RJ: Yes, I remember that distinctly.

RK: But anyway, campus was just only about five thousand people. Four or five thousand?

RJ: You said hi to everybody and knew them.

RK: Everybody. You go across the quad and you just, and the hangout was the—

RJ: Folk Club.

RK: Folk Club. And it was wonderful because it was really small and we just jammed in there. We had ten people on a little end and we—

RJ: Yeah, you saw somebody you knew and that's when you just got in there with them.

RK: Yeah, and you'd table hop and we'd get in there at ten in the morning, we all had ten o'clock coffee breaks and it'd been raining and the place was just steaming. It was like a sauna, yeah. Wool cloaks. Nobody used umbrellas.

[0:30:08]

RJ: Oh, that's the other thing, the dress code. We could not wear pants; slacks on campus, downtown, anything. We had to wear dresses, skirts and they had to be a certain length and you had to wear your sorority pins—

RK: On the tip.

RJ: Just like this. That's how you judged.

MD: Oh, okay.

RJ: And it was, I mean everything was, it was—

MD: It was very regulated.

RK: Very regulated.

MD: Well the Folk Club was in the Memorial Union? Wasn't it in the?

RJ: East side.

MD: East side, that's right. Now, the Memorial Union is, you know, it's been a campus icon. What are some of your other—the ballroom, other memories of life in the Memorial Union?

RJ: Did you ever work down there in the ballroom, serving?

RK: Oh yeah, oh yeah, that's right.

RJ: At the banquets.

RK: Oh yeah, we served at the banquets.

RJ: And served from the left and the right and we had take-out burgers.

RK: As teenagers.

RJ: Yeah, we had to do that in high school.

RK: And then during summer schools when they had the 4-H out from all over the state here, I used to serve cafeteria lines for the 4-H.

RJ: I didn't do that.

RK: Yeah, but so the girls that had the cream of the crop jobs...

RJ: Are the waterers.

RK: They watered. They watered, they could wear their swimsuits and their shorts and they would lie there in the sun and then oops, move their hose.

MD: Oh, watering the plants.

RK: Yeah—

RJ: The grass. The grass was watered by—

MD: By hoses.

RJ: By all these good-looking women, or girls, that we went to school with, and I was not the chosen one.

RK: No, those were the cream of—they got such wonderful tans.

RJ: Yes they did, I was envious of Jean Wood...Paulson now.

RK: I learned to swim in the women's gym and that was gruesome. I mean it was enclosed, right? And it smelled to high heaven.

MD: Of chlorine. Yeah, in the Women's Building, over and adjacent to the, yeah.

RK: Yeah, and we had to walk through that chemical thing to get to it.

RJ: And we all had to learn to swim in order to graduate.

RK: One of our best friends, Sandra Malone almost didn't graduate because she couldn't swim.

RJ: Here was—and she was named as an honor student when—A.L. Strand, when we went through the line, she was given all the accolades, because—

RK: I think she never got anything but an A.

RJ: Yeah, she was just an A student, but to think, and now she swims every day for her health.

MD: Yeah, but she couldn't—almost couldn't get out of college because she couldn't swim.

RK: Right, right.

MD: Oh wow. Well, one of the reasons why I really wanted to talk to you guys is experiences in the theater program. I'm a theater person and theater folk are kin, but what are some of your memories of theater? Once I get theater people talking theater stories there's no stopping, I know. I really want to know about what Mitchell Playhouse was like during the early days, because by the time my wife was at Mitchell Playhouse, it was about ready to be closed because it was about ready to be condemned, and so her memories are much different than your guys'. You're—it was pretty high tech by—

RK: Brand new when we, yeah, when Dad got in there.

RJ: I basically got a minor in drama. It was speech and drama. I didn't care to perform but I loved working behind scenes and getting the props and I was a very popular prop manager because my parents had an antique house down on 8th and Van Buren, and many of the things that were asked from there, like that old Victrola and that type of thing, that was one of my fondest memories, and I think my other fondest memory and something I even thought that would be fun to go into after I graduated was doing make-up. I loved doing theater make-up. But I can remember we had to perform in a one-act play. Do you remember those that we had to perform in?

RK: Mhmm.

RJ: Well I was in one with Roger and I could not remember my line.

RK: Oh, I know.

MD: Line, yeah.

RJ: Yeah, he prompted me.

RK: I was the same way, believe it or not. I was scared to have any part at all unless it was a one-liner.

RJ: Yes.

RK: So, I never did a big part, but I held the book a lot, I did costumes for especially, I remember, "Teahouse of the August Moon." We had to make all of the white kimonos, all the kimonos for the Asian kids, and then I loved doing props also; we did a lot of that.

[0:34:47]

RJ: Well my favorite thing was I, when I took stage crafts with your dad, is there was a fourteen foot ladder to paint up above and none of the guys would do it. I says "I'll do it." So, I just went up there and no problem at all. You can't get me on a stepladder now, but. But her dad, he was, I thought, I was scared of him because I thought he was the final word and I found out that he was one of the most compassionate, fun people that I had ever gotten to know, and that was from taking classes from him. But I still want to say that he was the best seamstress I ever saw—or seamster—and you have become an absolutely marvelous quilter. A well-known quilter. And her sewing is meticulous, and I say you got it from your dad.

RK: I—it's because of my dad. He used a Singer Featherweight backstage, and then when I took Home Ec in high school and said I hated the cooking semester but I loved the sewing semester, he was thrilled. So, he bought me my featherweight, which I still have, and I found, after mother died, I found the receipt book and he had paid like a buck fifty a month or a week or something for years.

MD: To pay off on it?

RK: Isn't that wonderful?

RJ: And her mother was an artist, so and here she's an artist.

RK: She didn't do anything but mend. She didn't appreciate the sew—

MD: Now, she was a painter, right?

RK: Mhmm.

MD: Yeah.

RK: An illustrator. Technical illustration.

RJ: Oh, yeah. Some of that technical work she did with pencil and—

RK: Well, she worked freelance for—and did thesis work and professor work and she illustrated botanical cata—books for Miss Gilkey and she did the campus maps.

RJ: And then she did jewelry.

RK: Yeah, that was later. That was not, yeah that was—

RJ: I mean, she made jewelry.

RK: Yeah, but, I have some examples in my little stash here, the campus maps that she did.

MD: Yeah, 'cause we have a number of the illustrations of Gilkey's in her collection, the Gilkey collection, so it would be interesting to see the stuff that's attributed to your mother. That's neat.

RK: Yeah and also sketches of the MU. She—they were published, and so anyway, that was her avocation, yeah. She enjoyed that. She had a special talent for that. She wasn't a fantastic artist painter but she kept it up until her late eighties. Kept going to Tom—Tom? Tom Allen's classes. So it was good.

MD: Oh, that's neat. Now, the Mitchell Playhouse when you guys were there, it was fairly high tech. Now, did you do any lighting at all, or was that the guys, the guys doing that?

RK: That's funny that you should bring that up. I, for some reason, got the job of running the spotlight for "Oklahoma," and it was pretty bad. I mean, I'd turn the spot on and the guy would be here and there would be the spot, I'd go oops! So I, yeah, I remember that vividly. That's the only electrical thing I ever did.

MD: Yeah, it mostly was costumes—

RK: The other stuff, yeah.

MD: Now did you do make up at all, or?

RK: Oh yeah, yeah. We did make up a lot, and I had a bit part in two or three of the plays, but that was all.

RJ: I had a, like walk-on in "Father Knows Best."

RK: Oh yeah, yeah.

RJ: I could walk on, but...

RK: Well, we were both in that, weren't we? Wasn't I a maid in that one?

RJ: All I had to do was walk in. I had this really fancy costume. I would walk on and that was it. I didn't have to say anything.

MD: Now, as far as the theater department, did you guys do the things like sell tickets and put posters up and all of the other promotional things, or was that another part of the?

RJ: I don't remember doing promotional.

RK: I didn't, no I didn't do that at all, but we had awfully good cast parties.

RJ: Oh, they were good!

MD: That's the next thing I was going to ask, 'cause that's a tradition that, you know—

RK: That's a must. It still goes on?

MD: That still goes on, yeah. I was just in one a couple weeks ago and I, yeah. But, what was cast parties in the, you know, in 1958, yeah?

RK: In the summer—did you work in the summer? In the summer plays? I don't think that—

RJ: No, I didn't.

RK: Well, we went over to the beach.

RJ: We went to the beach one time, we went to Florence and Don Henry went with us.

RK: Yeah yeah, yeah. We have a cab—my family has a cabin over there, so we—

RJ: Did you go there?

RK: One time, yeah, I think. But—

RJ: And I missed out?

RK: I don't know. Anyway yes, the parties were great. The fun thing about the "Teahouse of the August Moon," Mike, is that we really put the Hawaiian kids to work on that.

MD: Oh yeah.

RK: And there were a ton of them in the play, you know. And I got to know one young man very well, and so when my husband and I went to Hawaii on our honeymoon, he showed us the whole island of Hawaii, the big island.

MD: Oh yeah. Yeah, when you're going there as a tourist, you're a guest, yeah.

RJ: Wasn't it Howie Smith?

RK: Oh Howie Smith? Yeah, I don't know. What is—

RJ: In that play?

RK: Yes, he was the—whatchamacallit—the main guy, the—

RJ: Yeah, that's what I thought.

[0:40:00]

RK: Yeah. Yeah. Anyway, that was a really fun show to put on.

MD: Yeah. So, see everybody has their memorable shows, and how about you?

RJ: Oh wow.

MD: Even if it was backstage.

RK: Remember "The Crucible"?

RJ: Oh my word, yes.

RK: Yes.

RJ: Alice Alcia [?]. Jean Wood also was in that.

RK: Yeah, and my sorority sister Lynn Bates Bryan was in that.

RJ: Was she in that?

RK: She was the queen, or the empress or something, yeah. Oh there were so many of them, gosh.

MD: Well yeah, that's the thing, the plays—

RJ: Oh, didn't—

MD: They spread into each other, yeah.

RJ: Dick Paul was "Father Knows Best."

RK: Right, he was.

RJ: Yeah, the dad.

RK: Yeah.

RJ: Oh my goodness.

RK: And when I went to a party in Berkeley many years later, my girlfriend just had a twinkle in her eye when she said "I want you to come on in to the party," and, well she introduced me to this neighbor of hers and he kept looking at me like he should know me or I should know him and he was in "Father Knows Best." He was one of the kids.

RJ: Oh my word.

RK: He was one of the red head kids. And it was so funny. I didn't remember him, you know. He was grown up by then. And he said I was so good to him and I showed him all the ropes, and I don't remember any of that. Anyway, that was just a side light. But theater stays with you.

MD: Yeah. And when you're—

RJ: Oh, good days, the fun days.

MD: And now, I imagine the theater envelopes your entire activities while you were on campus, but did you do other things, like through the sororities or? What other activities were you guys involved with?

RJ: Well, I've had to be in plays, which I didn't really want to be in plays, I found out, and to work on the *Beaver* staff, which was our annual, and I got to do social life, which was absolutely wonderful because the photographer that went with me was Warren Welch who had a photography studio here—a business here in Corvallis, and he later worked in the photography department of the OSU bookstore.

MD: Oh, okay.

RJ: And he was wonderful to take around because he took shots that were just incredible, and it was really fun. Oh my goodness, the beanies.

RK: The beanies.

RJ: The beanies that they had to wear. And he caught—kept picking up paw paws, in the paw paw patch, which was a must for freshmen.

MD: Yes. Now that we've had to—we've had a couple of different explanations of that, but I always like to ask, explain that because a student today has not a clue.

RJ: Well, I didn't even know what a paw paw was.

RK: None of us did.

RJ: I know.

RK: That was the whole point, as freshmen we didn't know what that was.

RJ: Yeah, but you just did it. And all the freshmen had to wear—freshmen guys had to wear beanies.

MD: And you guys had to wear green ribbons.

RJ: Oh my gosh, I forgot about that.

RK: Yeah, but it was a great mixer for the freshmen, we really had a good time. It was really fun.

RJ: Yep.

RK: That's when I met Roger.

RJ: Oh my word.

RK: Yeah, picking up paw paws, yeah.

MD: And so that's what it was, was a—

RK: It was a dance, basically.

MD: It was a dance, okay.

RK: Yeah, there weren't any paw paws. Just like you know, the chicken dance.

MD: P-A-W P-A-W? Paw Paw? Yeah.

RK: Mhmm. Yeah that was fun. When my oldest brother was in college, the tradition was that they—maybe it was a fraternity tradition, but they had to wear the same pair of white cords—

RJ: White cords, yes.

RK: And never wash them.

RJ: And Stradivarius shirts.

RK: Until they stood in the corner by themselves, they were so dirty.

RJ: And do you remember the reversible wool skirts?

RK: Oh yes, I loved mine.

RJ: By Pendleton.

RK: Pendleton skirts, yeah.

RJ: You could turn them in and out and get lots of use out of them.

RK: Oh yeah. We had the little string of pearls.

MD: Mhmm, and the little—or the sweaters with the little clips that held the, yeah.

RJ: Oh yeah, the Peter Pan collars.

RK: Peter Pan collars, yeah. Well anyway, those were the days, 'cause the skirts were down almost to our ankles, yeah.

RJ: And saddles.

RK: Yeah, white buckskin saddles.

RJ: Yeah.

RK: Well, we could go on and on about our clothing, but.

MD: Well, these are all little, you know, just the greatest little nuggets. And now our other interview with the Class 1959, we spoke with Harley Smith.

RJ: Oh, yes.

MD: And he told us about the petition, student petition to have OSC reclassified as Oregon State University. We're you guys aware of that happening?

RJ: At the time we were not. No, we found out about it after we graduated and it was changed.

RK: Yeah. But—

MD: Because as you were in grad school, that was when it was finishing up, yeah.

RK: Yeah. And I wasn't paying any attention to politics, campus politics. But I was in Mortar Board and Harley was BMOB and we had a Mortar Board ball every year, which you probably have heard about, and the women were supposed

to ask the guys, and I didn't have a date and Harley didn't have a date. He was one of the king candidates. And so everybody insisted that we go together, so I took Harley to the Mortar Board ball. It was really fun.

[0:45:14]

RJ: Explain BMOC.

RK: Oh, Big Man on Campus.

RJ: Thank you.

MD: Yeah, the kids of today don't have any clue of it.

RK: Don't have a clue about BMOC? Oh, and the football players, oh my god.

RJ: Do you remember Joe College? Did you know Steve Langengberg?

RK: Oh, was he a Joe College?

RJ: Oh, he was adorable.

RK: He's married to one of our high school classmates, and he was a doll.

RJ: Yes.

RK: But, do you remember the first Joe—was it Joe College as a sophomore, was that when he was? I don't remember. The first black one.

MD: Oh.

RK: Was during our era.

MD: Yes. And then the, the Rose Bowl appearance of—our second Rose Bowl appearance, 1957, now that was a big thing on campus, I imagine?

RK: Well yeah, but none of us could afford to go down to Pasadena. Some of my sorority sisters did, though, yeah. That was a big deal for them. But I just remember those football players would walk across the quad, we'd go [makes awed expression].

RJ: Yes, yes. Idolized.

RK: Oh, Joe Francis.

RJ: Oh, Joe Francis! And you remember Dixie?

RK: Dixie? Yeah?

RJ: It was his wife, and they were married in college. And later I was married in college.

RK: Yeah. That was very unusual, yeah.

MD: So, was there any other real, you know, reflections of being a Beaver during the late 1950s and your—what you really took from being a member of this organization here and that you'd like to impart? Words of wisdom.

RJ: Extremely—I felt extremely proud to be an Oregon State Beaver. It was a very outstanding time, and I felt above and beyond what anyone could achieve is to be a Beaver.

RK: Yeah. I still do, and I brag about it all the time.

RJ: I do too.

RK: Every time I see a person wearing a Beaver shirt or a—

RJ: And our two—my two daughters just drove to be at college, go to college—because that's all my husband and I would ever talk—you know we didn't say they had to, but it was just assumed they would, and they came and they loved Oregon State.

RK: Oh yeah, my son did too. Yeah. It was just a special place to—and it's still special but it's now too big. We both feel that way.

RJ: Mhmm.

RK: I mean because there's not as much of a community feel.

MD: Yeah, because you knew everybody.

RK: Oh, pretty, well not everybody, but.

MD: Well yeah, but.

RK: A large, I mean you ask me about what other activities we did, well I mean you know, I took art classes and I took, well we had to take P.E. for two years, didn't we?

RJ: Wasn't it—was it just freshmen and sophomores?

RK: I think so, at least. And I always did modern dance. Because you didn't have to learn any steps, you know, you could just do whatever. And also then when I was tapped to be Mortar Board, that was extremely special. I was shocked, very shocked, but that Mortar Board group that year was—are still very close. Most of us are still very close. And we would get together just to do philosophical talk, you know? And it was real heady. I mean because the sorority gals, we would—I mean they were all playing bridge and smoking in the smoking room and I wasn't a part of that, because I didn't live there, you know, but the Mortar Board group was very special to me. And then of course I loved Masque and Dagger and National Honor Society. I mean—

RJ: Yes, we were both in that.

RK: I mean National—what was that?

MD: National Collegiate Players?

RJ: Yeah, we were both in that.

RK: And so were my parents when they went.

MD: Yes they were, I've got pictures of them and then you.

RK: Yeah.

MD: Now those organizations were—you know, the Masque and Dagger is the honor society for dramatics on a national level. Now how was the chapter here on campus? Was it a fairly active chapter, did a lot of things, or?

RK: I don't know, we did stuff.

RJ: Yeah, we already did—

RK: We were all involved in theater.

MD: Yeah, so you were busy doing theater.

RK: Yeah, we didn't have club meetings, as such.

RJ: Well, there weren't that many of us.

RK: No, just a handful. But anyway—

MD: Yeah, you got together because you all were working on the same shows, yeah.

RK: Yeah. That really took a lot of time. Evenings, yeah. See my dad, one thing about my dad was he would never schedule a 1:00 class, because he'd come home for lunch every day, hot lunch, and then he'd take a nap. And his excuse was he had rehearsals at night, right?

[0:50:05]

RJ: Sounds good to me.

RK: Yeah. So that was growing up, was having to be quiet during that hour when dad was taking his nap.

MD: Now did you ever be in any of the plays that he directed when—or was he still directing by the time you were—

RK: Oh yeah, he was, yeah.

MD: Now did you work on any of his shows, or?

RK: When he was, well when I was in school, yeah.

MD: I mean when you were in school, yeah.

RK: Before I was in at college, as I said in the summer and after, yeah. Yeah, we had a good group, it was a good group. And they were very, very good friends with the other theater people, theater professors, the Courtright's and Don Henry.

RJ: Oh my god, yes they were.

RK: And then Benny. Benjamin. What was his first name? You remember Benny, yeah?

RJ: Yes.

RK: Well I was going to tell you, too, about the early days of them, do you remember? Each play would have a little miniature of it, of the set?

RJ: Yes.

RK: And that whole hallway was just lined with those. It was cool. I don't think they do that anymore.

MD: We do.

RK: You do?

MD: Yeah, we build set models. I mean it's, that's a standard practice.

RK: Really?

MD: But they usually end up getting a board dropped on them and end up crushed, but.

RK: Really?

MD: Yeah, and those, those models that you're talking about do not survive today. I'd love to see if there's any of them over at the theater department. But yeah, that's still a practice that's done today. That's how you—

RJ: I remember having to draw the set in 3-D and your dad was so good at it, he'd get dimension and he finally taught me how to do it.

RK: He was quite an artist, even though mother always claimed to be the artist in the family.

RJ: Oh, he was a beautiful artist.

RK: I know. But you know how that goes.

RJ: He was great.

RK: Do you have anything in your files about when he took a student actress down to Hollywood? Do you, you don't know about that?

MD: I don't remember seeing that, it might be in the news—it might be in the *Barometer*.

RK: I've got the whole story here. You can have it.

MD: Oh wow.

RK: Yeah, it's, I don't know if you want this on tape or anything, but her name was Jean Heatherington, very beautiful girl and Dad just knew that she was star quality. You know, you can sort of tell. And so he figured out how to get her some screen tests, and so he and mom accompanied her down to Los Angeles, and my mom wrote a journal about it and this is the journal and you can have this. And this is who she was and she was in some shows, but then she fell in love and got married.

RJ: She what?

RK: Fell in love and got married.

MD: She went—an Oregon State?

RK: Alumnus.

MD: Alumnus.

RK: Her name was—she shortened it to Heather, Jean Heather, but as you can see, she was a beautiful, beautiful person, and then—

MD: And one of his students.

RK: Yeah. So you'll enjoy reading that.

MD: Oh yeah, these are great stories for the history of our theater.

RK: I guess she—I don't know, then who is this, this must be the guy she married. Yeah. She married an actor. Okay, so she was in...what's the name of this show? Anyway, that one. This is "Going My Way," she was in "Going My Way." With Bing Crosby.

MD: Oh, yeah. So that, yeah, their connection with Oregon State—

[Tape ends 0:53:39]