

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Chester "Trip" Brown, Jr.

INTERVIEWER: Kathelene Smith

DATE: July 31, 2015

[Begin Interview]

KS: It's July 31, 2015. I am at 440 West Market at the Brown building. I'm speaking with Trip Brown today, for the Preserving Our History: Rotary Club of Greensboro Oral History Project.

Hello Mr. Brown, thank you for having me here today.

TB: Well, thank you.

KS: I'm going to ask you a few questions.

TB: Have at it.

KS: Okay. Please tell me when and where you were born?

TB: I was born in Asheville. I'm a hillbilly.

KS: [laughs]

TB: January 4, 1940. And my real name is Chester Brown, Jr.

KS: I was going to ask you about that.

TB: Although, I was born as Chester Brown, III, and when my grandparents died, I asked my father if I could be a junior. I thought that would be cooler than being the third and he agreed, so we had our names changed. So, it's kind of confusing to be a Trip. A lot of times people who have the name third, are named Trip. So, I'm Trip, but I'm a junior.

KS: Okay. [laughs] So, how was growing up in Asheville? You grew up in Asheville as well?

TB: Well I grew up there and moved here when I was nine. So, I went to Aycock School then. It was elementary and junior high in the fifth grade. And then I was there through

the ninth grade and then went to Grimsley [High School]. It was then, Greensboro Senior High through tenth grade and then I went back to Asheville to a school called Christ School, which is a boys' boarding school.

KS: Christ School?

TB: Christ School. It's in Arden, which is just outside of Asheville. It's three miles from the Asheville-Hendersonville Airport. And it was formed in 1900. And I was on the board there back in the 90's and we toyed with—we did more than toy, we almost went co-ed, and I am so glad we did not. We did not go co-ed. And so, that little school is thriving today.

KS: That's wonderful.

TB: It is really, doing very, very well.

KS: So, tell me what it was like growing up in Greensboro—what your parents did. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

TB: Well, my mother was a domestic engineer and a great mom. And my father came here in '49 and worked with my uncle, Jack Brown. And Uncle Jack had bought a company in 1946 called Hamill Mortgage Real Estate and Insurance. And Uncle Jack bought it and changed it to Brown Realty Co., Inc., and Daddy joined him in 1949. Uncle Jack was older than Daddy and they worked together until Uncle Jack died in 1978—October '78. I was living in Charlotte and came back in 1979. So, I have been here—it is thirty-six years and one month exactly to the day—of how long I've been back.

KS: So, what kind of things do you remember about Greensboro growing up? What were the things that you all liked to do?

TB: Well, my father was a golfer. When I say golfer, he was an amateur golfer. So my sister and I grew up playing a lot of golf and that's—that was kind of our family activity. And you say well what did mother do? [laughs] She had her activities. She was active in church and I think she had a garden club and was active. My father and mother played a lot of bridge. Daddy was—during that time there was a club called the Whist Club. Where are the pictures of the Whist Club? Oh, I had them.

KS: How do you spell that?

TB: Whist. W-h-i-s-t.

KS: Oh, like Whist, the game, Whist.

TB: That's right, that's where that started. A lot of the business leaders in Greensboro were members of that. Spencer Love, who is the founder of Burlington Industries. Ceasar Cone, a fellow named Willie Holderness. I need to find that picture. [Looks for a photograph]

[recording paused]

KS: Okay, we found the picture!

TB: We found the picture. [Naming the people in the photograph] I'll just mention the people that I know first, Spencer Love, he was the founder of Burlington Industries. Herman Cone, of course, of Cone Mills, and a fellow named Newt Farnell, who was a judge. Neil Vanstory, who was very active in banking and had a real important part in the founding of what was then, was it NCNB? Then Nation's Bank, then Bank of America. Willie Holderness, who was a very prominent attorney here. He was killed in a boating accident, but he was the father of Hayes Holderness, who is a member of our club and Chick Holderness, who was the president of Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company and Ralph Price who was the son of the founder of Jefferson. So, those were some of the men that I knew. Also Dr. Fred Patterson, Haywood Duke, Bob Baker, Pierce Rucker. I think that Pierce might have been the father or the grandfather of Jim Rucker. George Perrin, Miles Wolff. I think Miles Wolff might have been active with the newspaper. George Brant and Raymond Pierce are the people in this picture here.

KS: So, that's the Whist Club you were talking about?

TB: That's the Whist Club. Yeah.

KS: So, they started playing Whist and then probably went from there?

TB: To Bridge, it did, yeah. And Daddy, with these people—he went to national tournaments with them. Ceasar Cone is not listed here, but he was a member. They went to life tournaments and Daddy became a Life Master. As did some other members of the club, it was a pretty strong run of Bridge players there.

KS: That's amazing. I've never heard that story.

TB: Yeah. So, my sister and I played a lot of golf with my father. My sister was a much better golfer than I, relatively speaking. I mean she has won a lot of championships. She lived in Atlanta. She won the Georgia State, she won the Atlanta, of course women's. She has played in the National Amateur and National Senior Amateur. She is a very good golfer. I was "Eleanor Brown's brother" growing up. Because she was—she got Daddy's genes. Daddy was known—in Asheville he was the club champion at Biltmore Forest Country Club and up there he was known as "Birdie" Brown. But when we moved to Greensboro he had the putting yips. He used to be just an incredible putter, then he got the putting yips and had to putt left handed. But we would have a Sunday golf game, after church with another fella named Ed Morrisett who was a couple years older than I. And Ed and I played a lot of golf together. And Ed and Eleanor stood Daddy and me and they beat us most of the time, but sometimes Daddy and I would come through.

KS: [laughs]

TB: So, those were fun times.

KS: So, you said you went to Grimsley, what were some of your favorite subjects in school? Or did you have a sport? Did you play golf in school?

TB: No, I wasn't that good. One, of the reasons I went to Christ School was I was kind of a fish out of water. I went from this small elementary junior high school over at Aycock to this big school and I was pretty clueless. I remember Ms. Medlin[?] was my Latin teacher in the tenth grade, and there were a lot more girls in that class than there were boys and I was not the best Latin student. In fact, I was not a good Latin student at all. And she would sometimes come over when I couldn't get the answer that she wanted and she would pull on my hair. Which was not much fun, in front of all the girls in the class. [laughs]

KS: [laughs] Oh no!

TB: [laughs] She was a good teacher; I was just a bad student.

KS: So, you hopped up to Asheville, your junior year?

TB: Yes. Junior year and senior year. And at Christ School they—that was a great, great little school, I still get emotional talking about it. It had—still has a fourfold philosophy. Of course, education is very important. The name of the school would tell you that it had a strong religious life. Of course, it had at that time, it had sports. Now you can do the normal sports or you can do an outdoor program, they have service projects there now too. But the thing that set Christ School apart is virtually everybody who has gone there remembers the work program. So, not only did you have to clean up your own room, and there was of course room inspection, but you had jobs that you did that would take fifteen to twenty-five minutes in the morning and in the afternoon to kind of clean-up the campus--to help maintain the campus. And then the boys would wait on the tables in the dining hall. That was called “crumb.” If you misbehaved moderately you got a work list, which meant that you had to do extra work for two hours in the afternoon, rather than do sports. And if you were really bad then you had what was called the three C's. Which was “crumb,” which meant that you had to wait on the tables. For the time that you were on “crumb.” On the three C's you had to wait on the tables the whole time, otherwise it would alternate. And then “campus,” you couldn't go off campus. And then you had a “claim” which was really a stump. You had to literally go dig a big tree stump out of the ground, by yourself and if you had anybody helping you then that person would get a stump too. You had to dig it out yourself. The only time you could get help was when you were rolling the stump out of the hole. And these were some big stumps. I mean probably 10 feet across the hole

KS: That's hard work.

TB: We took a lot of pride in our work program. And then we got to go into Asheville on Mondays, and the story is, and I don't know how true it is, that we couldn't go on Saturdays because boys used to go in on Saturdays and across the river there was a school called Asheville School. Both of these schools were formed in 1900. It was Asheville School for Boys. Guess what they are now? Asheville School because they take co-eds. They take girls. We're still boys. Anyway, the two schools would get into big fights in downtown Asheville, if they went out on the same day, so we would go in on Mondays, so we wouldn't have to cross paths with our Asheville School adversaries. But before we could go in we had a two-hour work program on Monday morning too.

KS: To wear everybody out? [laughs]

TB: Well, no. So, we had one handyman to take care of the whole school. The boys did everything else, other than we had two cooks, Julius and Elizabeth. And a dishwasher named Pete. And that's how the school ran.

KS: And the rest of it was

TB: Boys.

KS: Student power.

TB: Student power. Yes. Well, I've digressed, you wanted to hear about Greensboro.

KS: Well, I was going to ask you about the Asheville School, did you play them in sports?

TB: Oh yes, oh yes. Big time. Big time. [laughs] Yeah.

KS: So a lot of the stuff was worked out on the field. [laughs]

TB: I think is the oldest high school rivalry in North Carolina. Certainly, prep-school rivalry.

KS: Now, when was Christ School started?

TB: Both of them 1900.

KS: Both 1900.

TB: So both of them 115 years old. And I dare say, I think that Christ School is doing much better than Asheville School right now.

KS: Were there local girls' schools too? Did you all have socials?

TB: There was a local girls' school called St. Genevieve of the Pines we called it St. Jelly Beans was a Catholic day school Catholic girls' school. And so, yeah we knew the girls at St. Jelly Beans. [laughs]

KS: [laughs] Well, that is nice that you have kept in contact with them.

TB: It was a good school. I'm glad I went. It was good for me.

KS: Well it sounds like a wonderful experience. Now after school, did you go to college?

TB: I went to Carolina, to Chapel Hill for four years. And then I went in the service for one year, nine months, and twenty-seven days. And then I went to Wharton School in Philadelphia for two years. So, that was my education.

KS: Any standout things about college? Favorite subjects? Or did you play sports?

TB: Well—I was a member of a fraternity. Beta Theta Pi. And that was—it seems like I flourish—or not flourish, but do better in a small setting than in a larger setting, so that gave me some grounding and some focus-being a member of a fraternity. And I've kept up with several of my friends from there. Actually of our Rotary Club, Walter Faison and Tom Presson are members, I think, of Rotary. Tommy Glascock, were all there. Jim Legget was, but I think Jim dropped out, but his father-in-law Tom Cochran is still a member of our club. Not only is he still a member, but he's got something like sixty-five years of perfect attendance.

KS: I've interviewed him.

TB: He is one incredible man.

KS: He's really nice.

TB: Yeah. Great, great man.

KS: So, you majored in business I gather?

TB: Yeah [laughs]

KS: [laughs]

TB: [laughing] I'm not very creative. I not only majored in business at Chapel Hill, of course, I went to business school at Wharton.

KS: But you can't beat that! What a great school.

TB: Wharton changed. Somehow, I got into Wharton and that is still a mystery.

KS: [laughs]

TB: When I got there, if you were on—if you made a “B” average you were on the dean’s list. When I left, you had to make a “B” average to stay in school. So, I got out just in the nick of time. I was—I’ve been naive much of my life and I was really, naive when I went up to Wharton. I got there and when you go to college you have a dorm. When you go to graduate school you don’t have a dorm. And there I was, “Oh, I need to find a place to live.” In the big city of brotherly love. So, I found a room in a rooming house. It had a bay window and when it snowed it would snow inside the bay window and I had a Murphy Bed, in there. So that was a growing up experience.

KS: So, then you went into the military, how did that happen?

TB: [laughing] I didn’t know what I was going to do when I got out of Chapel Hill.

KS: So, that was before Wharton?

TB: That was before Wharton, yeah.

KS: Before Wharton, okay.

TB: And I raised my hand, on October 31, 1961. And as I was raising my hand and they were pledging—taking their oath to be a good soldier, honorable and protect the country and everything, I said “Self, this is a mistake.” So, I went down to basic training at Fort Jackson. I didn’t particularly like the Army. [laughs] And went down there, as I said, October 31. And the last part of basic training is a week of what they call “bivouac,” which is when you live out in the field. You simulate being in combat. And I’m out there and my birthday is January 4 and I was so miserable that we went to chow and got chow, and then we had mail call and I got a birthday card from my mother and I had forgotten that it was my birthday. It was the only birthday [laughs] I ever forgot, until I got my birthday card from my mother. That’s how much I disliked the military. So I said—that was a three-year enlistment—I said “how can I get out of here early?” And I heard that if you went to OCS [Officer Candidate School] then you could get out and go to graduate school. So, I said, “I am going to look into it. Don’t have anything to lose.” They sent me because of my business background—they sent me to the finance core up in Louisville, Kentucky at Fort Knox, but I applied and got into OCS [Officer Candidate School] out at Fort Sill and that was six months. It’s a good thing that I never saw active duty. Because of my business I probably would have had the Howitzers (guns) pointed in the wrong direction—I was in a Lacrosse Missile battalion and the story is that this Lacrosse missile, during testing, it was more of a tactical missile and—do you know what a pill-box is?

KS: No. [laughs]

TB: Well a pill-box is a concrete bunker with just a little slat for you to look out to aim your rifle or machine gun or whatever out of. And the story is that during the testing for the Lacrosse Missile, that the missile went right into the slat of the pill-box and they said well that’s going to be an accurate missile for us, so they bought some of them. They

say that's the last time it ever hit a target [laughs] So, I was in a Lacrosse Missile outfit, that was being deactivated, so they sent me to OCS [Officer Candidate School] for six months and then sent me to a battalion that they were deactivating. So then I did, I got out early and went to graduate school.

KS: Well that's great and, then went to Wharton.

TB: Yeah.

KS: So, when you graduated from Wharton did you move back to this area?

TB: I mentioned that Uncle Jack's business that he bought was Hammill Mortgage, Real Estate and Insurance. In the early fifties, I think it was '53, Uncle Jack took the mortgage and the insurance portion and merged it with a mortgage company in Raleigh, run by a fellow named Cliff Cameron, and it became Cameron Brown Mortgage Company. Mortgage and insurance, just Cameron Brown Company, and they did mortgages and insurance. The real estate part Uncle Jack and Daddy kept here in Greensboro. And so, when I got out of Wharton, they said, "Well, you need to go to work for Cameron Brown Company." So I went to work for Cameron Brown Company. The going starting salary, this was in 1965, was \$400 a month. But since I had a master's degree, I got \$450 a month. That was a little bit lower than what most of my classmates were getting. One of my classmates was a guy named Ed Crutchfield and when he got out Uncle Jack—Ed wanted to go into the banking business and so I got an appointment for Ed to interview with my Uncle Jack. Because Cameron Brown Company had been bought by First Union Bank at that time and Uncle Jack and Cliff Cameron became some of the largest individual shareholders in First Union as a result of that merger. And Ed went to work for First Union and ultimately, became the CEO of First Union. And I went to work with Cameron Brown Company and I stayed there from '65 to '71. And then I went to work for a company called Charter Properties, which was a real-estate development firm headquartered in Charlotte that was owned by the Springs Company, which was the family company that owned all of the assets for the family. And we were a development company and I stayed there until July 1 of 1979 and I came up here because—Uncle Jack, when he died in October, there was no clear-cut succession plan. It's a long story, but anyway, but that's how I came back here. Interesting aside, one of the board members of Charter Properties was a guy named Erskine Bowles, who was the son of Skipper Bowles. And I got to know Erskine better by being on that board with him than I did—we grew up in each other's back yards almost. Erskine's older brother Hargrove and my sister were very, very close and they used to go run back and forth from yard to yard. But I remember, Erskine said that his father told him to always leave the wood pile higher than when you found it.

KS: Good advice.

TB: Pretty good advice. And I think that that's one of the things that Rotary does so well. Is it leaves the collective wood pile higher than when they found it.

KS: What a great phrase. Now during all this time, did you meet somebody special? Did you get married during this time?

TB: Well, I met my first wife in Philadelphia. And we got married when I was still in graduate school up there. And we came back to Charlotte and had two children, Maureen—we actually had three—our first son was born prematurely and he only lived a few hours

KS: Oh, I'm so sorry.

TB: And then had another son, Chester, who is now the CEO of our company. Chester was born at twenty-six weeks, two pounds and seven ounces about the same time as Morrison, but Chester is doing well now.

KS: Is he the third?

TB: No. Yes, excuse me. Yes, he is now the third!

KS: [laughs]

TB: What was I thinking? I was thinking about when he had his son Hardy, I said to him well is Hardy going to be the fourth. He said absolutely, not. Well is your son going to be the fourth? He said absolutely, not. No, but Chester's the third. He sure is. So, he got stuck with that moniker.

KS: So, you moved back to Greensboro about what year?

TB: It was, July 1, 1979, so I was going to say that's thirty-six years and a month.

KS: Okay that's great, so you have been back for quite a while. So, what's life been like back in Greensboro?

TB: It's been good. It's interesting when I first moved back, I had—there were a lot of roads that I didn't know where I was going. A lot about it changed. Wendover—well no, Wendover, was already—when we moved here, we lived there—Greensboro—I moved back the same year as the Klan shoot out.

KS: The massacre.

TB: Yeah.

KS: So was it tense?

TB: That was—that was.

KS: The racial or political situation?

TB: Yeah, it was.

KS: Were you surprised that it happened in Greensboro?

TB: You know what, I was working so hard then that I was letting Jim Melvin and the others handle that. When I was growing up—I worked for a company called Superior Construction Company, a guy named Gene Gullledge owned it. And Gene went on to be the FHA Commissioner. No head of HUD. He was head of HUD. And I dug the footings for a little shopping center that our company was building. This was back when I was—must have been fourteen or fifteen years old. Florida Street Shopping Center, out at Florida Street and Randleman. And there was a Klan rally. My father got a call one night and they were having a Klan rally on the parking lot of that shopping center back then. So, I guess racial tensions have always kind of been what's going on. Hopefully, we've made a lot of progress. We've got African American representation, which is good. Yvonne Johnson's been our mayor, so hopefully we are making progress. But as recent events show, we've still got a long way to go.

KS: So, when you were raising your family here—I am fascinated with downtown. Since, I've been here it's just been progressing, so much—what was it like when you came back? Was that still the main shopping area? I know some people have talked about the Christmas Parades down there—did your family spend time downtown?

TB: Well, shopping was big, they had Ellis Stone's and Meyer's Department stores eh I remember those eh Montaldo's was big—that was a big women's store. And they even had where VF [Vanity Fair], had Mitchell's Market—have people mentioned that?

KS: I don't think so.

TB: That's where the VF [Vanity Fair] headquarters are and it used to be Mitchell and Anthony—and mother would get her meat there. And I think they even delivered sometimes. It was pretty active and then our company bought land out near Friendly shopping center and Uncle Jack and Daddy wanted to build a shopping center, but a guy named Eddie Benjamin wanted to build one at the same time, i.e. Friendly Shopping Center. And that wasn't going to work with two of them. And I wish I could remember—I think that maybe Daddy and Uncle Jack sold—they probably sold the land to Eddie Benjamin, and Eddie Benjamin built the shopping center. But that's the land that we had—is where Wesley Long is now. But our company has built—over the years—several properties around—around Greensboro. But I think that Starmount Shopping Center kind of drained—that was the start of the drain.

KS: From downtown?

TB: From downtown. We used to go over to Summit Shopping Center in the summertime—to the Guilford Dairy Bar and get ice cream, several times a week, in the summer at night. I would get an orange sherbet, which they put in some pineapple with it that was really tasty. We went over there a lot when I was growing up in the summertime and that was fun.

KS: So, highlights from your career? You said you all were building buildings in the area—any favorite ventures that you'd like to talk about?

TB: Well, you know maybe the first time that you do something is always memorable. The first development project that I did when I came back—well the first thing, I was trying to find out where the restrooms were and get the company kind of stabilized—and then we built a project—a lot of our work, almost all of our work has been done with partners, either in a limited partnership, or a general partnership, or people bring stuff to us. A fellow named John Higgins, who is our attorney, had a friend called Ken Bell and they were trying to buy the Old Baker-Latham House over on Fisher Park. And they had a plan to convert that house into condos and then to build condos around it and they wanted a developer, so one thing led to another. We also brought in a fellow from Salisbury named Tom Kern, who is the father-in-law of Howdy Marsh, who is a member of our club. But Tom withdrew and we brought in a fellow named Jim Dixon who was a builder and we built Baker Place, which I'm glad we did that because another alternative would have been to tear that house down and build something from scratch. We kept it.

Interesting story about that, in my time in Charlotte, my boss, a great guy named, Bill White, he was a friend with an arborist. And one of our projects that we developed also was heavily wooded, so I learned about getting trees appraised. You—you can value trees. So, Baker Place had some beautiful trees to it. So, I had some of the trees that we were going to keep, appraised. Well, lo and behold, we were doing some tree work out there, after it was built and we were supposed to be doing some tree pruning. Well there was a mix-up, a beautiful, blue spruce out in front of the house was cut down. But we had our appraisal, so this was in eighty-three or four? We collected several thousand dollars for our blue spruce that got cut down.

KS: I had no idea you could appraise trees. That's amazing.

TB: Yeah.

KS: It makes sense.

TB: Yeah. There's a magnolia tree that was planted there now. So, I guess that is one of my favorite projects—because it will be there, Oh another interesting thing—Higgins found out that you could declare what's called a façade easement on certain property, and have them accepted by the North Carolina Historical Commission or whatever the name of it is and you can get tax credits for doing that. So Baker Place, there was a beautiful old library with black walnut in it, that is a façade easement there. The leaded windows are a façade easement. There's a beautiful stairwell that we declared and then there was a garage out in back that we renamed a carriage house and we got that declared. So, we put some façade easements on that property, so that was—that was a good project.

KS: So, have you worked with anymore historic properties like that?

TB: No. Not like that.

KS: I bet that's a whole different kettle of fish.

TB: Actually, I've got a picture of it in the hall when we go out, I'll show that to you.

KS: So, was your family involved with any local schools or universities here in Greensboro? We have a lot of colleges.

TB: We do—and no. I am really glad to see Union Square, that Ed Kitchen one of our members—you probably interviewed Ed—is doing. I think that it's great. And then of course the Nano Science and Nano Engineering school, that they have out—I guess we now call it Gate City Blvd. I think it's wonderful bringing in the colleges and universities like we are doing. No, I personally haven't, but I'm really glad that we are doing that and that's becoming an integral part of our economic development here. Cause that's what we've got to do. We've got to bring back—and at one time Greensboro was a number two city in population and number two city period only to Charlotte. We're number three now and I understand Durham is going to pass us soon.

KS: Why do you think that is?

TB: Well, we were a little bit asleep at the switch. You know we were textiles—heavy textiles. I live at Well·Spring [Well·Spring Retirement Community] and it's amazing the number of people that are connected with one of the old textile firms that are out there. Furniture, in Greensboro to a lesser extent of course, High Point very much so. I mean that is the furniture capital of the world. At least it was. I hope it still is. And to a lesser extent the tobacco.

I can remember when P. Lorillard came to Greensboro. In fact, that was one of my first summer jobs, was working on line at P. Lorillard. In fact, that's where I learned that I needed glasses. I was sitting in the cafeteria and the guy I was sitting with, he could read the clock on the wall and I couldn't, so I said well maybe I need to go—so I have been wearing glasses ever since I was sixteen as a result of—but I can remember when P. Lorillard came to Greensboro. Of course, now Reynolds bought it. Hopefully we won't lose many people. But it's not the same when you're not—like we lost Jefferson Pilot. There are more people working downtown now than when we lost them, but it's just not the same when you're not the top dog.

KS: Do you think just too many things left too fast and there just wasn't anything to replace them?

TB: Yeah. Yeah, I mean our area, our metropolitan area from 2000 to 2010 they lost 90,000 net jobs. That's a lot of jobs. Hopefully, what Action Greensboro and the Greensboro Partnership and the Piedmont Triad Partnership, hopefully we can rebuild. We've got just the most incredible road system of any place in the country for a community of our

size, the airport. We've got a wonderful airport. We don't have many passenger people using it, but

KS: I love our airport.

TB: Yeah.

KS: But it's so hard to get any—I mean—you have to always go through somewhere else either Charlotte or Atlanta. They have fewer straight flights

TB: Right

KS: Than they used to.

TB: Yeah, yep.

KS: So, tell me how you got involved with Rotary?

TB: We had a fellow, working here, a guy named Robin Tyler. Robin is a member of our club—Rotary club. He says "I've just joined this great organization," he said, "you might want to join." He got me in. I am, so glad that Robin asked me to join him there at Rotary. It's a great club.

KS: What year was that?

TB: February 1, I just looked it up because I couldn't remember, [laughs] that was February 1, 1989. So, what is that? That's twenty-six years?

KS: Wow.

TB: Yeah. I came in at the same time Jerry Ruskin did. Have you interviewed Jerry?

KS: I don't think I have.

TB: You need to interview Jerry, but I came in the same time Jerry did.

KS: So, tell me about your involvement in Rotary. Some of your favorite projects or did you take any leadership roles?

TB: Well, for some reason, I served on the board twice and enjoyed that a great deal. They asked me to do Family of Rotary which is to—when we have an illness or a death or a good announcement to kind of put the word out. Basically, we relied upon Anne Fragola to do that. [laughs]

KS: Sure. [laughs] And she's leaving or retiring from that position.

TB: Yeah we had our big deal. Were you there this last Wednesday?

KS: No, no I wasn't there.

TB: They had her going away party.

KS: Oh bless her heart.

TB: Yeah

KS: I've worked with her through this project, so I know that's going to be a loss.

TB: We should have had you there.

KS: Oh, that would have been great.

TB: Well you need to get the—you need to get our newsletter. This week's newsletter. Have you seen it?

KS: No.

TB: All kind of tributes to Anne.

KS: Oh, I bet so, she is special.

TB: Well, you know at the meeting, they had a few minutes where people could stand up and say things about her. I stood up and I said the thing that I think that is so great about Anne is that she makes you seem special. Every one of us. She made us feel special.

KS: That's a talent. That's a gift.

TB: It's a gift.

KS: So, what have been some of your favorite projects that Rotary has done, since you have been in?

TB: Well, Family of Rotary was good. I didn't do nearly the job that could have been done. I think my favorite project for me personally, is the ringing of the bells for the Salvation Army at Christmas. In fact, I sign up for a day for all day and then I distribute it out for people here in the company and they always enjoy going out and ringing the bell. My wife and I will go out about clean up and do the 7:00 to 8:00 time frame.

KS: So, do you go out to a public area and collect?

TB: Well, you know the Salvation Army, the kettle. Our last several years, we've gone over to Walmart on East Cone Blvd. And that has been a real heartwarming experience to see these people that look like they don't—like we should be giving help to them and

they come by and put their coins in or dollar bill, or five or—it's just the spirit of Christmas.

KS: Sure.

TB: Yeah.

KS: So, anything else about any Rotary projects that you've been involved with or really, liked or have you been involved at all in the international aspect of Rotary, it's been real interesting to learn about that?

TB: It has, one of my fraternity brothers at Chapel Hill, Norton Tennille. He's probably one of the smartest people I have ever known. He went through Carolina in three years and never made a "B." He was a Morehead Scholar, and went on to be a Rhodes Scholar, but he kind of had a midlife crisis. And went from being an environmental attorney in Washington. He just took off and ended up in Cape Town, South Africa and down there he started an organization called SAEP [South African Educational and Environmental Project]. And he started it just from scratch and basically this organization goes into the public-school system there in the ghettos in what they call the townships and they identify good students and they work with them because what happens is even though they have public schools they are nowhere near as good as our public-schools number one and number two the family conditions of these people growing up in these townships is a real detriment, to their being able to get a good education. But Norton's organization helps people and they do stuff, cradle through college now. They have different organizations—or different parts of his program where they take them they call creches which is the nurseries and then they get them in I think high school and then they have a gap year and then they go with them when they go to college and then when they get out of college because these kids are really, far behind. That's a long way of saying that our club has contributed to Norton's project. I think we've given three different times.

KS: That's great.

TB: And they have—Norton has also gotten a local Rotary Club there in Cape Town to participate. So, I'm not a Ken Keller or Bob Newton or a John Rosser kind of person, but that's the beauty of Rotary is you can do as little or as much as you want. It's still great fellowship. I think Rotary is the greatest organization outside of a church that we have.

KS: You all are about to have a big anniversary.

TB: Yes we are. In a couple of years, yes we are.

KS: Because I interviewed Bob Newton and he was talking about gearing up for that.

TB: Yeah.

KS: So, that's incredible.

TB: Bob is.

KS: What a celebration.

TB: I can't think of anything worthwhile in Greensboro that Bob hasn't somehow been connected with.

KS: What a tribute, that's wonderful to say.

TB: Yeah. Well, I had the blessing of being on the Moses Cone Wesley Long Community Health Foundation when it was first formed and Bob was head of that, so I had a chance to work with Bob there and get to know him. What he hasn't done his wife Donna has. But yeah, he. And then I'm working on the Greenway downtown—downtown Greenway now and Bob has been very active on that. In fact, the Moses Cone Wesley Long Community Health Foundation is now called the Cone Health Foundation. But we gave the seed money for the Downtown Greenway and we gave two-hundred-fifty or was it five-hundred-thousand. I think it was five-hundred thousand dollars to plan the Downtown Greenway and to plan the long-range plan for the trail system in Greensboro. So, Bob and I, we go back a ways.

KS: That's wonderful.

TB: Yeah.

KS: Well now would you like to talk a little bit about your family, your church, or any kind of hobbies you might have?

TB: [laughs]

Well, I have remarried. I was divorced and remarried. My wife is Nancy and we met at church. I go to First Presbyterian, we met at church. Her kids live in Ohio and we go to Ohio several times a year. My children Chester and Maureen, Chester as I said works here and runs the company. He just lets me use the office. [laughs] Really. People say he goes and asks you a lot of questions. Nah. Every now and then, but not—he's doing a great job. And he has his—actually, he met his wife here—in fact, I hired her. And Chester saw a good thing and they ended up getting married and they have two children, Hardy who is seventeen and Ellis who is going to be fifteen, in—going to be sixteen in October. Hardy is seventeen. Ellis will be sixteen. And Martha was a tennis player when she was growing up and in college, so she got the kids playing tennis instead of golf, but that's ok because right now, Ellis and her mother Martha, Martha also happens to be the name of my mother, so there were two Martha Browns until my mother died in 2011, but they're in San Diego playing in a national tournament. Ellis is. Both Ellis and Hardy they go to a lot of tennis clinics, they both go to Page, they both played number one on the Page tennis team. Girl's and boy's respectively as

freshmen. And this last year as a sophomore Hardy was named best of the best for boy's tennis players in the Greensboro, Guilford County School System.

KS: That is wonderful! Congratulations.

TB: Yeah. Yeah. So, they're both tennis players. My daughter Maureen, is a PA by training and a full-time mom right now. She keeps her PA up and. She has three children Haven who is also—well, Haven actually, will be seventeen on the twenty-seventh of August. So, Hardy and Haven are very close. Then Oliver is fourteen will be fifteen in December. And then Owen is eleven, he'll be twelve in September.

KS: So, you and Nancy have your hands full!

TB: Yes. [laughs]

KS: That's great!

TB: Actually, the parents have their hands full. We try to—the kids stay, so busy especially, Chester's children. I mean they play tennis all over the Southeast. Hardy just—Ellis is in San Diego and Hardy just returned from playing at Notre Dame, in a tournament there. So, don't see them as much as I'd like, but it's fun to be with them. I try to take them out for breakfast every now and then and just get them one on one and that's fun.

KS: That's wonderful. Well you were saying about First Presbyterian, I had interviewed Joe Mullin

TB: Oh! You did—yes.

KS: He's wonderful.

TB: I've got to tell you a story about Joe Mullin.

KS: And he is out at Well-Spring—aren't he and Betty out there as well?

TB: They are. They are.

KS: They're great people.

TB: They are. I have to tell you. I'll tell you two stories about Joe Mullin. One, Chester was Joe Mullin's paperboy.

KS: [laughs]

TB: And Joe Mullin did two things. One, he wrote Chester a letter telling him what a great paperboy he was.

KS: Isn't that sweet!

TB: And he even mentioned him one time in his sermon.

KS: That's lovely.

TB: Now that's—that's really, touching [laughs], but Mullin has got a great sense of humor

KS: He's funny.

TB: Give you an example, so he's preaching one Sunday and there's a roof leak. And its drip, drip, drip, right into the pulpit. Did he tell you this story? [laughs]

KS: No. [laughs]

TB: Drip, drip, drip right into the pulpit and he says "Oh my goodness, there's a drip in the pulpit!" [laughs]

KS: [laughs]

TB: Cracks everybody up including himself, he goes and sits down.

KS: He's really, something he's great. He and Betty are both really, wonderful, so when you said that I thought I bet—I bet he sees Joe Mullin. Tell him "hello," for me if you think about it.

TB: Okay, I will. You know interesting—his predecessor, Jack Redhead, was minister there and Jack's son John is in our Rotary Club, a new member. You might want to ask—even though John is new, you might want to interview John. Because he could. Anyway, but Joe Mullin and Jack Redhead both memorize their sermons. Neither one of them ever used a note.

KS: That's something. That's amazing.

TB: And I can still see Dr. Redhead in the pulpit. Our family sat on the back row on the pulpit side and see Dr. Redhead up in the pulpit, looked like Moses himself.

KS: Well that must have been a fabulous church because I have heard so much about it. So many wonderful things about it. It really, must've been amazing—and still is apparently amazing.

TB: And they say, I never heard him, but they say that Dr. Charlie Meyers, who was the preacher before Dr. Redhead, was an even better preacher than Dr. Redhead. And Dr. Redhead, have you ever heard of the Protestant Hour?

KS: No.

TB: Well, the Protestant Hour was on the radio this was back in the for forties, fifties, and sixties and maybe 70's and maybe still have it, I haven't heard of it in a long time. Dr. Redhead was big on the Protestant Hour. I mean he was a nationally known speaker and they say Dr. Charlie was a better preacher than Dr. Redhead which is—I don't see how it—how it could happen—how it could be.

KS: That's wonderful to have such a strong lineage of good preachers. Well, so have we missed anything? Any hobbies? Anything else you would like to talk about? Do you still golf?

TB: I try to play golf. I'm not doing real, good with that. I'd like to.

KS: It's been so hot lately, I don't see how anybody can get outside at all.

TB: Well, I've had a bum—I've had some tendonitis. I like to play and I used to play a lot, but I haven't much recently. I love Greensboro and I'd like to see it get back on its feet.

KS: I think it's going in that direction. Hopefully.

TB: I think it is. I think it is. Yeah. So, you moved here seven years ago? You say, to Winston?

KS: No. I've been working in Greensboro. I've been in Winston for—20 years.

TB: Oh. Okay.

KS: Well, Thank you so much. I appreciate the interview.

TB: I don't know if you got—anything worthwhile or not

KS: It was wonderful! I appreciate it.

[End of Interview]