

Reatha Clark King
Narrator

Madeline Mitchell
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Interviewers

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Reatha Clark King—RCK

Madeline Mitchell—MM

Amrita Jain—AJ

[ZOOM0006]

MM: Good morning. We are here at the History Center doing an oral history of Reatha Clark King. It is August 6th at 10 a.m., 2016. I'm Madeline Mitchell.

AJ: And I am Amrita Jain, and we have Reatha Clark King with us today. Thank you so much for joining us.

RCK: Thank you, thank you for the opportunity.

MM: OK, so we'll just jump right in.

RCK: Thank you.

MM: So you grew up on a farm in rural Georgia—what did working on the farm and growing up in rural Georgia teach you about leadership and your work ethic? How did that form your path?

RCK: In some remarkable ways, actually, that influenced life for my family as well as myself. That is, my immediate family—mother, father, two sisters, and our entire community. First of all, the farm life taught me how to get up early in the morning. [Chuckles] There was a lot of hard labor coming from my direct engagement with the farm. We were sharecroppers, so we did field work for other owners of the land. My sister and I were known for being good cotton pickers and tobacco helpers. We were tobacco stringers and tobacco handers—these are tasks that you do when the men bring the tobacco in from the field to the barn to be put on sticks to be put in barns to be baked before it is taken to market. But to be a good cotton picker, you need to be able to get up early, get to the field early, because then the dew is on the cotton and it will weigh more. We were paid by the hundred pounds, by the pound, and my goal was to pick 200 pounds per day, and my sister's goal was similarly, but she could even do more. I was following the leadership and good example of my older sister, who was a year and seven months older than I was, or that I am. She's still alive. So we needed to earn that money to help our parents with

expenses at home, and my mother was a maid, and my father was a field worker, but he was illiterate and didn't have an education, so farm life was all he ever knew, and he was very good at that. Along the way, he and my mother separated, and she became a single parent, and that made her even more dependent on our helping out, helping her meet ends to meet, as we would say. So the farm life taught me how to work hard, and, frankly, how to set goals. That was a goal. And when we started school it was a one-room schoolhouse, a church, community church served as the school. We had one teacher for all seven grades. Her name was Miss [Florence Frazier], and Miss [Frazier] would tell our community people how smart we were in school, and that played to our sense of pride, and my mom loved to hear that her children were smart in school. She had a third grade education, and a lot of people in the community were illiterate, because it was just a rural culture, and they didn't have opportunities for schooling. So that situation made the children the leaders in the community, and there was a lot of hope from the whole community connected with our being able to get an education, get better jobs, better work that paid more than the maid work and the field work, which the community people had as only options. So they would tell us, they would encourage us—get an education, get an education, go away. They knew we would have to go away for better opportunities, because rural Georgia at that time was segregated by law, and opportunities for blacks were very limited in our community, and that's why we didn't have good schools. We were restricted to schools in our community, and I don't know what arrangement there was with the state that the church would become our school, but for the first seven grades the church was the school, that church. That church was everything for us—worship place on Sundays, schoolhouse during the weekdays, and later when the civil rights movement started, it probably was a gathering place, as so many black churches were. It was sort of a safe haven for us. It was the place for weddings—don't leave that out—so it was the place for social gatherings, the place for worship, the place for education, and it's still standing, as serene and beautiful as ever, out in that open space alongside the road, alongside the highway.

MM: It sounds like you had the hopes of your whole community riding on you and your sister.

RCK: Exactly.

MM: Did you feel the pressure in that? Was it ever hard or feel like you had a lot weighing on you?

RCK: We felt the pressure in a positive way. It was a motivation. We were motivated, and that's positive pressure, that you can be motivated to do good and to use your head. They would call it using your head. That was their way of saying use your ability. But they didn't know the big word ability. It was use your head. So it was a positive pressure, so it was positive stress. Positive stress leads you to work every problem at the end of the chapter, for example—the hard ones as well as the easier ones. If you've seen a chemistry book, typically the elementary chemistry books, you have problems to work and solve at the end of a chapter. They get harder as you go through the list. So the smart students would aim to work all the hard problems, work the whole list. That was a challenge—you challenged yourself to use your abilities as your teachers and neighborhood people had encouraged you to do. But a lot of hope, their hope was riding on our ability to be successful. And I thought of that word hope the other day, and I'm going to sidestep here to share with you a thought that occurred to me, because I do a lot of

thinking. I thought about the word hope, and how important it was in our thinking in those days. Then I compared it with fuel, like fuel that pushes the car and energy, the source of energy. So I said—gee, we have numerous sources of energy. From wood—we have wood, we have petroleum, we have wind, wind power, sun, solar systems. We have gasoline, we have gas now. We are hopeful that that will replace the fuel, fossil fuels, and I said—gee whiz—my field of chemistry is thermal chemistry, so I have an affinity for energy. So I thought about those sources of energy, compared to hope, what hope meant to me growing up. Hope was my fuel. [Chuckles] Hope is the attribute, factor, that motivated me. So I said I was getting along on hope; I was fueled on hope. It was like the fuel that empowers an automobile to move forward, makes it possible. Now we have electrical energy, fuel. So I thought, I said, for the deprived spirit, if hope becomes your fuel, if you can see it that way, then you're not as deprived; you can move forward. So we will leave here thinking that hope was her fuel. [Chuckles]

AJ: Oh, that makes me think. You were talking about going away as something that your influential people in your community told you to do, to sort of move out of life that they had been seeing around them. And then you talk about hope. What were the things that gave you hope in life away from home?

RCK: Oh, there were some tangible things. I'm glad you asked that because we were not afraid of the thought of leaving South Georgia. Life there was very restrictive, as you can understand. You were restricted to just limited opportunities. Now we had relatives who had moved away and who were living up north. Typically they had to move north of the Mason-Dixon Line to find better opportunities. Even a maid job in New Jersey paid more than the maid work in South Georgia. Or you can get a job in a factory and earn more there. So we had relatives—my mother had sisters, my grandmother had a sister named [Lessie] who lived in Camden, New Jersey. Then my father had some sisters who lived in Trenton, New Jersey. One worked for the Campbell's Soup Company. The Campbell's Soup Company had farms where they raised their vegetables and their crops, so they employed migrant workers who would work the season up north, and then another part of the season they would go south and work in the fields. So we could go ... going up North meant either we could go away to school, to a school in Chicago or New York or someplace, once we went to college. We were dreamers. We would dream of going away to places where blacks were more accepted, and we would have better opportunity. So we were not fearful of going away. We were eager to get that opportunity. But there was the expectation that when you went away and did well you would send money home. So our relatives back there depended on our sharing with them. So the mailmen, as they were at that time, became a looked-forward-to person, because there might be some money in the envelope. Another big breakthrough in that regard was when my grandmother's sons went away to the war, enlisted in the army, the navy, and marines—that was very unusual, because there were not that many blacks in the marines. But mostly it was the army and those who were not married would have their checks, their monthly family support checks mailed to my grandmother, so she would eagerly await for the mailman to get those checks. But your question is very apropos, because we were not fearful of going away. We knew we had to, because in those days the laws prohibited the mixing with blacks and whites, so even though there were better schools, even public universities for whites, blacks could not attend those schools. There were some separate public colleges, three, in Georgia that blacks could attend—Fort Valley State, Savannah State, and Albany State College. But for specialized training like nursing and some of the medical field, especially, we

could not go to those institutions. We would have to go away. Georgia subsidized out-of-state tuition for blacks to go away because they could not attend a specialized school in the state of Georgia. But your question is very relevant, as to whether we feared going away—that added prestige to our family situation to have someone up north doing good, as they would say. And gee whiz, we would all look forward to their coming home for a visit. Sadly, though, they came back regularly for funerals, funerals when someone died in the community, a relative. And that was the case with my uncles who went to armed services, to get the word to the Red Cross that somebody in the family died, and they would arrange for that soldier to come back to attend the funeral. So the Red Cross became a well-known agency in the community, because we would dispatch our needs in that regard to the Red Cross, and they would find the relative in the armed services.

MM: You talk about in your community, growing up, the children were the leaders. It seems that from a very young age you have been a leader. What challenges, or how have you dealt with being a leader in almost every position you've had throughout your career? You seem to just take on these really fabulous roles and excel at them. What challenges have you faced, and how have you dealt with them?

RCK: Well, as you say, growing up, the children were mainly the symbols of hope, and that sort of placed on their shoulders the responsibility to lead, especially if you got a little more education, because you were to read for the illiterate people. My grandmother could not read and write the letters that came from her son. If she wanted to write back to them, I would do her writing, write for her. My father was illiterate. He could not read and write, and if he wanted to write a letter to someone, the children would do it, because we had gotten enough education to do it. So you had that kind of leadership and trust responsibilities, and along with it went a lot of trust in the other person. But there were some qualities that defined, early-on, the leadership style that you used in these other more professional positions. And I would say there were three that defined my style. And I keep them to myself, some of them now, because some of them, it can get you in a lot of detail. One, I was visionary. I had visions of change, a better life and change. Changed circumstances for myself, my family, and my community. So I was a visionary. Secondly, I was analytical. I loved to figure things out so that aptitude for sciences—that appeared early-on. Analytical. And my father had a reputation for being able to figure things out. I would hear people in the community say about him—Preacher—his nickname was Preacher—Preacher Clark can figure anything out. So I was analytical. I liked the thought of solving problems, and that quality proved well in all of my careers along the way. Thirdly, I was social. I liked engaging with people. I was never outgoing in the gregarious kind of way, but I took on the family values and the family qualities of being friendly to other people. That was an admired quality throughout our community, to be friendly to other people and not stuck-up. [Chuckles] Have you ever heard that expression? [Both interviewers chuckle] Oh yeah.

MM: Yeah.

RCK: Oh, that could earn you a bad reputation. We were taught that you were supposed to be friendly to other people. So those three qualities defined my leadership style all though the years, and I think they probably were evident in my professional and volunteer careers as well, beginning with, say, if I were to fast forward beyond the field work, farm life, into the high

school years, fast forward a little farther to the professional work, the chemistry, the college setting and the work as a research scientist, though I was very analytical there, I was engaging with my fellow scientists at the National Bureau of Standards. And then into higher education, as academic administrator, professor, and a university president, and then to philanthropist, as head of the General Mills Foundation, and then on to the volunteer work, work with associations in my various professions, was active with the American Chemical Society, the American Council on Education, especially, and the National Association for Corporate Directors—that's the association life. And then on to my work as a corporate director, serving on the boards of corporations and also non-profits. I think that that's about five categories of professional life. I think you will see evidence of being the visionary, the analyst, analytical, and with that the curious, too, but the analytical, but then the social, that pleasure from collaborating and engaging with other people. So that's a long answer to your question—the attributes that define your style. I think those would be my three.

MM: Do these things come naturally to you, or have you been intentional about developing these skills?

RCK: I think the analytical comes ... which one came so natural early-on. The visionary sort of evolved from the desire for a better life. That was the driver there, desire for a better life. And then later I was able to label it with that sophisticated word—being a visionary. Then taking advantage of opportunity, the visionary that drives you, to take advantage of opportunity. But there was a motive in that—for a better life, you know. We wanted to earn more money, and then because we were ready, work yourself out of a rut, take advantage of opportunity. I think the analytical part came sort of natural by nature, but I grew to appreciate that quality later in life and not be afraid that somebody was going to call me a bookworm. [All chuckle] Being naturally studious, and if people call you a bookworm, they label you. You can get self-conscious about being studious without recognizing that you don't have to tell anybody what you've become. You don't have to talk about it. You can just do it for your own self-satisfaction. I learned to do that. Even at my mature years now, I enjoy learning for learning's sake, and thinking concepts and thinking ideas. Being social, I've become a little more self-conscious about that one, because I find often that I can waste other people's time. [All chuckle] Like walking this morning, during my two-mile early morning walk, I would meet people, and I live by River Place, on the river here, so you meet a lot of people walking out there. And a lot of people are reading their iPhones, and in their hands, their hand gadgets. I don't know how they can walk and read, but I finally decided this morning that it was the difference in age. It's too big a risk for me to do that. But if they would look up, I'll do this—say hi! [All chuckle] And that's as much distraction as I would cause to them. But if it was somebody from my building, then we would pause and say more. I've become a little self-conscious about wasting other people's time.

AJ: I am curious when you said you were a bookworm and then the fact that people would respond to it in a way that, you know ... and I know, like, we face that, too, but that makes me think about your choice of pursuing a career in sciences, which was not something that woman would ... and even now, there is so much campaigning and stuff around putting women in science. How was it back then? Not only being so interested in pursuing academic interests, but also being in a field where ... and I know that this is a question which, unfortunately, we have to ask, but I am sure you faced something that there is a story in that.

RCK: Oh, yes. You hit upon a key issue, and that's first it was an obstacle for women seeking better opportunities. I had two obstacles going against me in my path. One was being black, black American. Then there was the notion in the minds of some that you were not capable of learning the sciences if you were black. The other obstacle—and people would put this in your path all the time—would be your gender, being a woman. And knowing that you would have to study hard and it would take a lot of effort. First, they would tell you that you that you were supposed to be looking for a husband, not seeking to get more education, particularly in the sciences. There was a bit of stigma in the teasing about whether women had the brains and were capable. But there was also the stigma that women, those were not appropriate careers, research scientists, for women. Women, the appropriate careers for women were the nurturing careers—nursing, social work, and now the ministry—church work. Service. We were seen as capable for these service kind of careers, professional careers. So the kinds of careers like being a medical doctor, being a scientist, those that required, perceived to be rigor in education and long years of study. Marriage was assumed to be an appropriate career, for a woman, and taking care of the children. We had the role differentiation very clear. As I said, there's a tool called being quiet. Learning things and not telling anyone. If you have to talk about it, you can get yourself in trouble. I didn't have to talk about it, and I had a pretty thick skin for being denied opportunities openly. I had a thick skin for that, yet I quietly pursued new opportunities without getting discouraged. For example, when I interviewed for a position after I received my doctorate degree from the University of Chicago—well, I was approaching graduation to finish it—I interviewed with a corporate head hunter, and he asked me openly—this was near Ph.D. completion—what if I would get married and have children. This was a test interview. And would I continue work. See, he was interviewing for his lab, and he was judging the disadvantage, pros and cons, for his company, for hiring me as a woman. He asked me that openly, and I said, well ... I think I said something like—I'll deal with that question when I get to it. I shrugged it off. I didn't go complain to colleagues or complain to other women, the friend women. But you knew that those issues were out there and you prepared to deal with them.

AJ: So then how did you deal with it?

RCK: Later ... well, I kept preparing myself. That's the main way I dealt with it. I kept preparing myself because, well, if the issue was gender at the time, I knew that I should be motivated by the disadvantage of being a black American if I didn't prepare myself. So I had that source of motivation to push me on. Even though I knew that was a gender issue. There were rumors, and we were aware from magazines, that there were organizations out there and individuals working to change the laws and to change the situation on behalf of blacks and women. For example, all through the years there was the NAACP, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Then, see, that organization was founded, I think, in early 2000s, Was it the early 1900s? Early 1900s. It was started sometime ago. So we heard about this legal work by the NAACP, working hard to change circumstances for blacks. So that was the source of hope. We were just hopeful that they would be successful. And they were in 1954, getting the desegregation outlawed—Brown vs. Topeka, Supreme Court decision. See, I was born in 1938, and that was the year I went to college. So that was a big deal. And then later, just before I came to Metropolitan State University, I was aware a few years before of the feminist movement. See, we had the civil rights movement then the feminist movement, so news about

those movements, that was good news for us. So that kept you motivated, too. But what you needed to be aware of was that somebody else was working to knock the barriers down, to knock the door open, and I was there to walk through the door once it got opened. If you had prepared yourself you could do that, and that's exactly what happened when I came to Metropolitan State University. I was nominated to the board for that position by some activist people in Washington, DC. They had a campaign to sponsor women for openings for colleges and university presidents. They were campaigning to get more women and minorities in college and university presidencies. They sent me a letter saying that my name had been nominated for this opening, and then I talked with my husband about it—we lived in Long Island—he says—you go ahead and apply. And I said—what if I get the job? He said—we'll move. And I don't think he realized, he thought that we would move, that I would get the job. And then I talked with our sons about it. One was 12, and one was, I think, he was going into the eighth grade, I believe. And the other one was in the fifth grade. The oldest one—he is very vocal anyway—he said—Mom, you're going to get that job. Well, the question to them—what if we need to move?—because by that time they were in grade school and quite bonded to their friends. And now the oldest one strongly encouraged me. He said—Mom, well, we'll just move; you're going to get that job. So he had a premonition that I didn't have. But to answer your question, I can see now how the activists took to a test case. I was probably a test case in their minds. But they were helping us prepare for the opportunities. But the activists, and you can take this out of the script if you want to, better known in those days as hell raisers— [All chuckle] Oh, they were—the Gloria Steinems and Betty Friedan and Bella Abzug and Shirley Chisholm. They didn't get kind names. They stuck their neck out to open the doors, get the doors open. And the rest of us who just walked through the doors—it was not the easiest thing to do, because we were in the hot seat, too. But without their work, their lead work, it would have been much harder for us, much slower.

MM: Tell us a little bit about that transition from New York to Minnesota. What was the reception here for you, taking on this new role at Metro State?

RCK: A blend of, from the public, the reaction from the public, it was ... I'll give you two perceptions—a blend of curiosity, excitement—there were many in the public excited about the breakthrough, as they called it, that Minnesota had experienced there. And how Minnesota, again, put itself on the map by accepting change, so that pride and the curiosity. And outreach for help—overtures and welcoming letters. Oh, the welcomes—many in the community rolled out the welcome mat. Evidence of this was the welcoming letter that I received by the time my family and I had moved back. After the interview it was about two weeks ... see, that was in August, and the board wanted me to report right away in September. So by that time, in response to those newspaper articles, I received a lot of letters, and there was a folder of welcoming letters waiting for me, and I still have them.

MM: Who were they coming from?

RCK: Business people. Women. Organizations. Graduates of Metropolitan State. See, Metropolitan State was six years old, and had some graduates by then. Just a lot of different people. I felt so ... and some, they were offering their help. I still have the folder of letters, and I'm going to offer them ... I'm going through my papers and I'll offer them to the historical ...

but that was the reception from the public. Luckily for me, some women called me, community people, volunteers, and gave me some tips on how to adapt and how to make friends quickly. They said reach out. Call people. Meet with them. And I did loads of that. And that helped me immensely. I think that reaching out across boundaries—the spirit of the Center for Integrative Leadership—it’s a great thing to do. And I encourage any newcomer to the community to do that for professional jobs, especially—reach out. Door knock, call people. And I needed to do that, especially with the state legislature, because Metropolitan State University is publicly funded and as a university we were an object of curiosity, still. We were a young university, non-traditional, without walls, as you will see referred to in those articles. We were known as the without walls university. But nationally we were seen as a bold experiment—bold, innovative experiment. The national higher education community just loved us. [Chuckles] But the people of Minnesota who were supporting us didn’t understand us, so that’s where I had a lot of work to do as president of the university. I had no difficulty doing that, because I had come from a public university, the City University of New York, one of the newest universities there, and we were getting ourselves established in a community, and we needed to reach out, too, to make friends. So I had no difficulty reaching out. And with a Ph.D. degree in chemistry from a rather prestigious university, the University of Chicago, and having worked at the National Bureau of Standards, a very prestigious research facility, I was confident about my skills. I had achieved some things that were sort of a calling card to the 3M people and people in corporations and Honeywell. I didn’t have to approach them apologetically for not being on par with them, their levels. What they were curious about was this different kind of university that you were connected with. So I had a good platform to stand on as I told the story of Metropolitan State University. What the public was accustomed to at that time was the traditional universities. Non-traditional was an odd word. It must be less quality, you know. And I had to convince them that it potentially was of great quality, high quality, and it could be higher, depending on the way the students applied themselves. But our students did not have that name, the name of the prestigious university along with their diploma, the graduates didn’t, so we had to educate the public, many, who thought that non-traditional must be less than, in quality. There was a lot of change, indications of change in the atmosphere to kind of that notion that this could not be a great learning resource for minds, top minds, because decentralized computers were coming on the scene. On-line learning, decentralized learning, decentralized library, so those resources were being taken off the campuses, which made it unnecessary for people to go to the Wilson Libraries to gain access to the top resources for learning. I love Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota, myself. And I have an approved card now to use it, which I’m going to keep for life. But you can go on line now, and if you’re the studious type, you could pull up some great learning resources and educate yourself real well to supplement a teacher. I mean, you’re not doing ... because it’s very educational to engage, learn from people. So my challenge as a president—I knew what the main expectations of the legislature and the board were, but the big challenge was to boost up the reputation of the university. And I enjoyed doing that. I enjoyed telling the story about the graduates and the students, because when you think about it, the essence of the university is the student. Not the building. The buildings are inspiring, but the essence of the student is the story. So I could make that point very well, that the student is the story, and just look how great we are, how great the students are, and how deserving they are of this opportunity. But I had some good luck, and I learned early-on, in reaching the legislature, quite a few of our graduates were directors of their campaigns in their districts, so these adult students had access to legislators that positioned them to tell our stories just naturally. So that

was a support for me that I loved. So I looked at the ... when I first arrived, surveyed things, I looked around conceptually to figure out where I was, and right away identified key people that I could work with, that I could learn from. And then I went door knocking. I had a special challenge presented to learn the demography of Minnesota, because in New York I had not worked with native people, Native Americans. I had not worked a lot with Hispanic, Latino people. I had worked with African Americans a lot in Queens, but at that time, and I knew what our agenda was, socially, but I didn't know the social agenda of our other minority groups—Asians, the Latino, Native Americans. So I asked them. I knew that the key concerns of blacks was getting elected to office, voting rights—that was a big issue back then, 1977. So I asked the Latino people—what's your biggest social issue? Do you know what they said? Undocumented workers. And later, after I got into philanthropy, the Council on Foundations did a skit, it was a skit on undocumented workers. And I asked the native people—what's your biggest social concern. They say—treaty rights. Back then treaty rights, that was the biggest issue. They were not that concerned about voting rights and getting people in office, but it was treaty rights. I learned along the way about the Asian people. There, early-on, that's when we had the settlement of the Hmong people in the community. The Hmong people were three percent of the population in the Saint Paul schools then. I remember when that statistic came out. Know what it is today? Over 20 percent, when I left there, over 20. So I saw that progression. So luckily I learned the makeup of the community about me, and now what their key concerns, issues were. Presidents, especially, should understand that. So that's the long answer to your question of how did the community receive you. I didn't give them much time to dislike me. [All laugh] Because I reached out to them, and those who had doubts about me, well, then, that gave them some tools to use to deal with their doubts, you know. But I made very clear the fact that Metropolitan State University was there to serve the community. I had to make the case, though, that adult learners deserved higher education opportunity, because at that time there was a notion that higher education was for young students, new high school graduates, and people didn't know what to make of adults going back to school. But shortly after I arrived at Metropolitan State, we could see a trend starting, people returning for more education. So I'm a believer in looking at early indications of trends that might grow bigger with time, and that's one. Decentralized learning is another one, and innovation is another one. It can happen anywhere—you don't have to be in a laboratory for innovation to happen. There's a saying that innovation is in the process, you know. The big discoveries come from the processes we are doing rather than from some big aha moment that's going to happen. It comes from tinkering. Have you heard that expression? You tinker and you discover, you create. So it's these kinds of things that you think about to yourself and don't tell anybody, otherwise they might call you a nerd. [All laugh]

AJ: And that's not good. I was thinking about your ... you know, just reading about your life transitions, and I probably would go back to your time in New York, and I see that you were pursuing science very strongly and making great headway as you were with the Bureau of Standards, and there you did ... with the space mission, your work with that, and then fluoride research and things like that, which is very "sciency." And then you were teaching chemistry, and then you took up this position which was of the associate dean, right?

MM: Um-hum.

AJ: That, and then, I think I see there a transition in ... was this like a conscious choice of moving towards roles which gave you agency to sort of influence change at a level that ... was it a conscious choice, moving in that direction? And how did your training in science affect your leadership, going forward.

RCK: Yes, that's a very good question about what influenced that choice to move from the research chemistry lab to higher education. It was a convenience. It was convenience that the changed situation provided. My husband was then at Howard University while I worked at the National Bureau of Standards, getting his doctorate degree. So when he finished his doctorate degree, he decided he would take a position at Nassau Community College as head of their chemistry department. That's Garden City, Long Island. So this meant it was my turn for us to move as a family from Washington, [Gaithersburg], to New York. By that time we had two children, so I then considered higher education as a more convenient professional life. It gave me more flexibility to care for my family than the long hours in the research lab. And then I looked at the commuter situation. We were going to live on Long Island. I would be commuting to New York City, perhaps, or research lab, or further distance from home. So the appeal of York College, where I accepted a position, was one of convenience. The reason was one of convenience, partly. And I say, well, I could go back to the lab in the future, I was thinking. I loved the research lab, but I had to consider family as well as work needs. At that time, too, something else happened along the way. There was another puzzlement that the public needed to deal with, with us working women, and it showed in the interview with the associate dean who hired me for the faculty position at York College. While my husband was looking for a house for us, or looking at his situation at Nassau Community College—we were in New York—I decided to go out looking for a job, so somebody told me about this new college, York College, in Jamaica, Queens. So I went door knocking there again, and contacted the academic dean. He was the associate dean for natural sciences and mathematics. That was his title. I presented myself as wanting to apply for a position as professor of chemistry or teaching position in chemistry. And his name was Lewis Bodi. He had quite a sense of humor. I got the appointment; he asked me to tell him about myself, my interests, and I chose to tell everything about my family, too. I had a six-month-old baby, then we had another little son, a little older. I told him about my work at the Bureau of Standards. He had heard all about the Bureau of Standards, and he knew that, because he was a scientist, too. He was a chemist. Dean Bodi told me later, he said—you know, from that conversation I was determined to hire you, because anybody who's stupid enough to say they had a six-month-old baby in an interview like that, I felt that they were a good bet. [All laugh] Women just didn't reveal everything like that. But that turned out to be a tremendous opportunity. I was able to ... but it was far more work and demanding than I had thought, thinking about this flexibility. I did it well, because I was promoted very soon, but it took all I could do to get the children to the babysitter, which was nearby in Hempstead, Long Island, and then one started nursery school, and the babysitter would pick him up, and then I could ... York was a new college. This was the second year when I started there. All they needed, though, were good heads, good hearts, and willing spirits, and you could do lots and move up the ladder fast. That happened to me—I started as an assistant professor and early-on I was promoted to a full professor, because I applied for NSF grant, and that was successful. I was going to continue my research alongside my teaching, and I loved the teaching part. But that was a delicate environment, because it's the unionized faculty, that was the beginning of faculty unions. Then Dean Bodi was promoted to be full dean of the college, and then he chose me to be associate

dean for natural sciences and mathematics. So that moved me into higher education administration. So I was supervising the faculty in geology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and these were good people, very strong, because they had come over from Hunter College, early-on—no, Hunter and Brooklyn College. That was a stand-out academic institution, and these were strong faculty members, because they were lured by the earlier promotion opportunities at York. So I was supervising people much older than myself, and then I moved to become an associate dean for curriculum and development, campus-wide. It was from that position that I felt that I was at the crossroads. I took a sabbatical and went to graduate school at Columbia University. My thinking that way was caused by the fact that I realized that if I wanted to advance higher in academic administration or be a president, without being able to demonstrate good knowledge for the financial management of organizations, I wouldn't have been taken seriously, being a black and a woman. So I wanted this business degree, business administration degree, under my belt so I could prove to people that I had the academic know-how for the financial management of organizations. Still, I was dealing with that disadvantage of being black and being a woman, asking myself will anybody have confidence in my ability. Will they doubt my ability. So I used my sabbatical year in that way, and I applied for a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation, and luckily I got that, and that paid for the expense of going to Columbia. They had a reason for that program—they intentionally wanted to train more blacks with those kinds of skills so the historically black colleges would have a pool of people to draw from. So they had a social purpose as well as to help institutions. Now it turned out that that was a good move, because that was the attractive part of my background that the state university board saw when I applied for Metropolitan State position. Metropolitan State had some fiscal issues, audit issues that the board wanted the president to attend to right away. And they saw that I had the skills, so my added education always proved to be a convenience at the time. Just in time, just in time. That's the long answer to the reasons for the transitions. It was convenience there, and that [lured] to ... like Metropolitan State, York College as a city university had a social reason for being established as well. The City University of New York board established that college in that community to help renew the community so it was urban renewal as part of its mission, and we did that well. And it's still going. It's very strong today. I've been back to visit, and when I went back I met some of the old-timers who were still there. It was ... but I got good counsel along the way related to those transitions. I remember in deciding where to do my sabbatical education, I looked around at the schools, and I researched some of the better schools. There was Columbia University Business School, there was Harvard. I didn't know how I was going to get there, commuting, but anyway I gathered the information. I recall flying up to Boston, and I went over and met with one of the admissions counselors at Harvard, in the Harvard Business School, and he was very helpful, and I told him about my circumstances, my being married with the children, and how I felt that I was at the crossroads. And then he looked at me, he said—you know, given your responsibilities, you have a great business school right in your back yard. Why don't you consider Columbia? And he told me about how I could commute from Rockville Center and down to where Columbia is, and I came back and looked into it, and then I called the admissions office at Columbia, and they told me, they said there's a fellowship program for African Americans over at ... it's at the Rockefeller Foundation—why don't you look into that? I did that. So by engaging with people you could find a trail, opportunity trail there. If you keep researching it, it will uncover some wonderful things. And, coincidentally, the program officer at the Rockefeller Center was from Saint Paul, Minnesota. [All chuckle] Yeah—his name was Bruce, and his best friend named Earl, he was recently president of Minneapolis

Technical and Community College—Earl Bowman. They have a building named after him. That was Bruce’s best friend. And just think—what a coincidence that was. There was another reason I was attracted to business. I felt that I could use the business education in case I went back into the corporation as well. I recall how much I enjoyed working with the sales people from businesses when I was in the research lab, buying those specialty chemicals, like oxygen difluoride and very pure helium and hydrogen and oxygen. See, we used these specialized gasses. We went to certain labs to do our purchasing. I loved relating to those sales people. They were such good role models and you’d say—I want to be like them. It never occurred to me that they were master sales people; they were selling something! [All chuckle] But I really respected them, and that’s when I got to know something about the business side of companies. Some of the companies are still around. They have merged with some of them—Air Products and Fisher Scientific. Seems like quite a few were in New Jersey, there. But I put all of that together—whom would I enjoy working with? But there was something I admired about businesses and their efficiency and their follow-through, and I learned from them. Now there were other transitions along the way, as you can see, career-wise. But I always had to keep several factors in mind—family, and what I would enjoy doing, and what I felt I could do well—always important to me to be able to do something well. I felt that if I could perform well, I could gain acceptance, if it was a worthwhile cause.

MM: We were talking about that before you arrived, actually, and I know you used a quote from your grandmother that if anything is worth doing it is worth doing right or well. And I’m wondering what do you do as a leader when you can’t do it well, or in times of failure? What do you do when you aren’t at your best?

AJ: And I think I would just add to that—it seems as if you—and you have been operating under the lenses of gender and race all your life—where with the additional burden of doing it the right way, because it’s all the more difficult operating in a context like that, and so, with that lens to answer what Madeline was asking.

RCK: You mean ... I would put it this way—how do I deal with the frustration of having obstacles to doing it well. Well, first of all, I’m a church-goer, and I reflect. I reflect on the situation and think clearly about whether there’s another way. I’m not a quitter. I’m not one to abandon a good cause at all. If I feel like the timing is not right, then I honestly face up to the fact that the timing is not right, but I must be transparent and say to others around me why I feel the timing is not right. If the cause is good enough, I feel that it’s worth advising people so that you can return to the table in the future. I’m not a quitter. What I do is to ... there’s a saying also we used to refer to in the country that—more ways than one to skin a cat. [All chuckle] So I thought that ...

MM: Good one.

RCK: That’s a very common saying in the low-income communities—more ways than one to skin a cat. So I start looking at the other ways to skin the cat. Now in the science laboratory, when you can’t solve a problem then, sometimes you have to have a new discovery. The solution had not been discovered, and we are pursuing those all the time—cancer research, Zika research, blending scientific information with social habits. On the news this morning there was a pretty

good explanation of what they are doing in Florida. They've now detected 16 cases. So they've roped off that community where the cases were discovered. So it's clear that they're going to have to have some more scientific information, but the community people are going to help, too. So I love to bring my skills to the table for situations that work across sectors. But there's nothing like honesty and transparency for getting you across complex situations, helping you deal with complex information. Now if this resistant personality and where people are being unwilling to work together because they don't like each other, I like being able to say candidly to the whole gathering—what you like and what you like—that's not important. It's what are we here for. That's the way I usually put it—what are we here for? What's the real agenda? And that's when Center for Integrative Leadership kind of teaching is so useful, so important. Because you are working across sector lines for mutual gain and common good and greater good—I see in your literature the word “common good” over and over—it's not for personal gain, unless you solve taking care of the mutual gain, right? So that's what a center like this helps our communities to understand, and that has been, I think, one of my strengths, but I work at it constantly.

MM: What do you do to work at it, how do you develop those?

RCK: I think about it—first of all, thinking, thinking about it. What are we here for? What do we want out of this for the common good for our communities? What do we want out of this for other people, not just myself? And I think that way for my family, too. But thinking outside of self, thinking beyond self. I must say, the older you get, the more able ... and the more means you get, the more able you are to do that. On the other hand, I have seen very poor people in my community, my neighborhood, to think that way, and they have been good examples. That grade school teacher, [Florence Frazier], she did everything she could to help us students in this one-room schoolhouse with seven grades develop. And then she [just thought] the schoolhouse, she went out into the community. She was talkative anyway—she would tell everybody about who was smart in school [for another]. And then she was probably one of my first mentors. The other two were women in my church, growing up. I was seven years old, I remember going to a church camp for one week, and we learned Bible verses. But within the church there were two women that my mother trusted us with. She knew they would look after us. My mother didn't feel like she had good enough clothes to go to church herself, so she would send us to church and Sunday school, and she would get reports from a lady named Savannah Williams and Marie Jackson. They would advise us how to behave, how to conduct ourselves and we would be in Sunday school with them. That kind of mentoring meant a lot, because they were examples. I am very attracted to mentoring by example. Following the examples of others. Sometimes they are mentors, they don't even know it, because I'm following their examples.

MM: Do you consider yourself a mentor or a role model to people around you?

RCK: They tell me that I am, and I find that encouraging and flattering at the same time. But I hope it is for the little things that I do as opposed to the big things. I do see myself as a nurturer to other people, in that when they ask my opinion—and now that happens more often—when they are shy about doing something or accepting an opportunity, and they want to know what I think, and I just say—go right ahead and do that. Recently a lady from the Bemis Company in Wisconsin sent me an e-mail saying that she had been invited to be on a panel at a national

conference that I'll be going to in September. She said—oh, it's so big, such a big conference. What did she say about it that caused her to be reluctant? The stage was going to be so big and all these influential people. I sent her back an e-mail right away and said—Sherry, stop shaking in your boots and go ahead and say yes. I just [Unclear] her to be there, and what I know about her is she is a shy person, anyway—shy about taking credit for something. She's just a wonderful spirit, studious, and she's done some great things with her board of directors. And I told her, I started a few of them, and I said just to tell the audience about those would be learning. Best practices that they can learn from. But I remember the words, “shaking in your boots.” And she sent me back the fondest e-mail saying—your e-mail makes me smile. [All chuckle] But it's that kind of low-profile mentoring that I do a lot. What people used to say back to me with respect to style is people don't judge women on style as much as they used to. They don't do it today. But they used to approach me when they don't know me and we've dealt by e-mail, say—you are so soft-spoken. Why do they expect us women to say things in a rage all the time?

MM: Right, yeah.

RCK: And that gets played back to me, and I think insights can be very helpful if we would share them back to people. I tend to share quite a few insights, because I'm observing people. And observing the potential in people, and the potential in organizations, the capacity of people to solve problems. I learned a lot of this in my work in philanthropy, because you're presented with situations all day long where people have the answer already, and all you have to do is endorse it. They have the capacity to solve their problems, and you become an enabler and their support. And that's a good word to use—an enabler. I think being a mentor, I hope ... I yearn to be a good mentor to my family, a good example for my family. You never hear them say directly to you that you're a good example for me. They might tell somebody else that. [Chuckles] As a parent, a grandparent.

AJ: I was just wondering, when you talk about family, and it seems that it has been so instrumental in a lot of decisions that you made. A lot of times men are not asked about what role did marriage play, or what role ... in your family, with your husband and your children, was it also like as hard for a man, or did you ... was it considered as not just you had to consider them in your ... or is it a skewed space even now, like people you see around you? Have we come far from that?

RCK: I'm trying to get it ... was it as hard for my husband?

AJ: Like was that something that was considered—was it an even space?

MM: I think a lot of times people ask, like you mentioned, asking about your family. Or you saying that you have two children, where if a man were to say—yes, I have two children at home—no one would bat an eye at it. Is that kind of what you were thinking?

AJ: Yeah, thank you.

RCK: Oh, yes, I was very open about it, because I was so conscientious about being able to do something well, and I wanted ... I was very open that people see that I was trying to figure out

how I was going to do this. Now I'm not sure—my husband had some hobbies. He just assumed that things would be taken care of. I don't think the mom assumes that. We kind of struggled with that. We had to work with it. I don't think men take on the burden of worrying about it. They leave it to us women to do the worrying. Even feeding the dog and taking care of the dog. My husband and our son went out and got this dog. We always had a dog, but I realized that they were the ones getting the dogs, but I was the one taking care of the dogs. [All chuckle] But we were a southern family, and that is it was, first, important to stay together. We grew up with that notion that we would work hard to stay together and support each other. But yet men do have certain traits that leave the burden of that work to women, particularly in those years. But I give it to my mother-in-law. She did, when there was need to nudge my husband in a certain way. He strongly believed in her. She lived in Birmingham, Alabama. She would apply that nudge, and yet she knew that I was flexible and would be first supportive of him when he wanted to do something special. Two examples: When we moved to Minnesota and our family in Georgia and Birmingham learned that we would possibly be moving to Minnesota—this was 1977—we knew that there was a quandary of would my husband give up his job and move with the rest of the family in my behalf. And my mother-in-law heard about this, she knew about the decision, and she said to him—his nickname was Buddy—she said—Buddy, you go ahead and move with Reatha to Minnesota, because no place where Hubert Humphrey lives will be all that bad. Hubert Humphrey was worshiped in the black community. He was a civil rights warrior, you know. And she loved Hubert Humphrey. She didn't ask about the cold weather or any of that. But it was Hubert Humphrey that she was worshiping—he was her hero. So that was a nudge in my behalf. But then after we moved here—well, he was already involved in aviation, with airplanes. He had a pilot's license, he had learned to fly, and later after we moved here he started working at 3M, and he started with an aviation club out there, with the employees, and he bought some planes—oh, that became a big hobby of his. My mother-in-law hated it, because she thought flying was dangerous. My father-in-law loved it, and he nudged him on with it. And I asked my husband one day, I said—is that expensive? Is flying expensive? He said—if you have to ask, you shouldn't be flying. [All chuckle] So you would have those ... we had vocal family members; they would express their opinion. But as far as I was concerned, I would support his hobby. Except he wanted me to learn how to fly—he wanted me to take flying lessons. I didn't have time. Care for the dog, two children, full-time job, and I'm now going to take flying lessons? Men have no ... they don't feel self-conscious at all expecting more of women in the household. But I would be quiet. I said no, no—I wouldn't start an argument over that simple question—just decline it! But he enjoyed that thoroughly. He even built a plane in our garage in Maplewood. He became a hero with his fellow flyers, doing that. That was quite a passion of his. But I cite that story to show how parents can weigh in, as we call it. My mother loved it, too. He would fly his planes down to Moultrie, Georgia, and she and my step-father would show him off to all of their friends. My son-in-law has a plane, and he flies a plane—that was the bragging [Unclear] for them.

MM: And he made a plane. [Chuckles]

RCK: Yes. But men come at things differently when it comes to that sense of responsibility. I watch our oldest son. He and his wife have three children. Two will be in college in the fall, one a sophomore at Princeton, the other one is a freshman at Syracuse. Those are not the cheapest schools, as you know. He's a radiologist, and I'm just observing how they are accepting that

responsibility now, the financial responsibility, their reactions. Now he's very much in favor of it. He wants them to go to good schools, he said. But my husband felt the same way. He left a little trust for them to help them with their education. He always talked about saving for the grandchildren's education, so it's a sort of family value. But I'm looking at how my son shares that family responsibility, what parts. Now, the financial part, that's very well. But how about all those other—the carpooling duties, the piano lessons and all of that. I would credit my daughter-in-law for being the force behind their taking piano lessons 14 years, or 12 years. She has been the one to remind them to practice and all of that. So we moms take care of the details. Now my son will go to the concerts and sit there [Unclear]. [Chuckles] But that's what you will find. It's shared responsibility [Unclear].

AJ: So then are men and women different in board rooms? When you work with them, how is it?

RCK: Oh, in the corporate boards?

AJ: Yeah.

RCK: They are, I would say, respectful. It was an adjustment for me, early-on, because there you are the only woman and the only black in the board room amongst 12-to-17 men, other board members, depending on the kind of board it was. You have by that time overcome being the only one. You've lived with that transition of being the only one black or only woman to the time when more ... there are being two or three. That's a learned comfortability. So you have gradually developed so that you know how to participate fully. You have learned how to adapt to the culture of that group setting, the culture of the board room. Just like there's a culture in the laboratory, a culture in the colloquium, the seminar, when you go to conferences, and you are in a seminar, in the colloquium, you want to speak, you want to ask the speaker a question. Do I stand out like a sore thumb if I ask this question? Am I comfortable with that? Am I self-conscious that I am going to fumble or be too detailed? You get comfortable with your style, and you grow into ... you learn how to focus. So that's the developmental skill itself. I adapted to that well, I think. I won a national award for best director of the year in 2004, but I would say that foundation knowledge of the business degree helped. See, I knew the corporate culture from that. However, corporate cultures vary slightly from company to company. One of the reasons for that is because of the nature of the industry. General Mills is a slightly different culture from 3M. The 3M culture is influenced by lots of engineers around. General Mills is lots of marketing people. But that serving on corporate boards connected very well with my having the business degree already, and also the basic discipline of being a scientist connected very well with the Exxon Mobile and the H. B. Fuller boards. See, they are science based. And then Allina Health System, that was all of it, all of those disciplines figured in. And public policy a great deal. See, if you are by nature interested in public policy, the health system is the place to be now, that board, because it's much about public policy as well as the medical sciences and the research and the discoveries. But any board where non-profits and for-profit boards, it helps to be studious and an observer. One of your questions here—you're dealing with a lot of change on boards, and you are very eager to help figure out what's around the corner, change. You had a question here—if you don't mind, I'd like to go to it. It's something about leadership changes in the future.

MM: Oh, here—is leadership changing in the 21st Century?

RCK: I'd say something like absolutely, and I'd give a main reason for that ... what number is that on yours?

MM: Eleven.

RCK: Eleven, yeah. Oh, yes, I put yes!!—double exclamation points. Is because one reason, impact of the media and new communication tools. That puts information, accurate or not accurate, out to your audiences, those you are working with every day, instantly. If you are the leader of something, you want to be ahead of that, at least with your audiences. I just give two examples. On the news this morning there was a panel, I heard in passing—will there be an October surprise for the candidates for president? And I heard the reactions to the question from the moderator, and I thought to myself—we might not have the October surprise this time, because the public will already have the information before October. They have such a capacity to dial in, connect in, and get the speculation, whatever it is, before October, so they will know in September what that surprise might have been. But in the past, before the media had such power to snoop out rumors, you might have waited until October. Now that might not happen, but the speculation, the power to speculate, and the tendency to speculate is so far out there that the candidates at whatever level they are, have to be prepared for speculations. The other ... so I said here the public will get the new information instantly, so that makes it less likely that we will have the overnight bombshells the same way we used to have. This show ... one of my biggest, I would say, integrative leadership experiences which I led was with public safety, improving public safety in North Minneapolis. We mounted a project called the Hotline Huddle that brought together neighborhood people, people from different sectors working on public policy—judges, the police precinct in North Minneapolis, the Fourth Precinct, educators, community people, and corporate people—just all these sectors. We convene the first Thursday of every month and strategize on how to reduce the crime statistics, make the community safer. Now that forum met the first Thursday of the month, and it still meets the first Thursday. I went last week; I popped in. It started in the mid-1990s, about 1995, been going that long, and they had a wonderful session on community trauma. It was very helpful. Anyway, I asked myself, now we were meeting the first Thursday of the month as a facilitator of that forum, and General Mills was the facilitator, if that incident of the shooting of the ... was it Castile? In Falcon Heights had occurred on the fourth Thursday or even the week of the first Thursday, that media news would have spread, permeated the community before that forum, that first Thursday. As facilitators and leaders of that forum, I would have had to be fully prepared. I probably should have been prepared on the racial strife around police-community relations. Now ours was perfect, we thought, when the Huddle was started in 1995. We had that. But what we did was to go to the community precinct, the police precinct, and invite them to be involved. These were the uniformed policemen, and with their weapons and all they would come to the forums and participate. They would give us a safety report for the month, and it was just wonderful sharing and problem solving together. Thursday morning the question came up, during the question and answer period from one of the participants. The observation was made—but the perpetrators of problems are not here around the table. And this same woman said—I don't see the police, are not here—they are not here around the table. I didn't say anything, but I thought to myself—you have to reinvite them. Reinviting them [at the incident]—they probably feel unwelcome. You

have to reinvite them. Now, in 1995 I recall how they got invited to participate. I went to the precinct. I remember it clearly, walking into the precinct on Plymouth Avenue, the building, about seven a.m. one morning, and wanting to speak to the head of that precinct. There was a man who looked like he was a receptionist, over-night receptionist. He looked up at me rather quizzically, and he told me the name of the person, and he said—you might want to meet with the neighborhood outreach worker, too. And he gave me some names, whom I got to know. But I walked out of there, now this was about 7 a.m. I was on my way to my office in Golden Valley. I walked out of there, thinking to myself—I bet he thinks I'm a snitch. [All chuckle] Because I had my little bow tie on, just like in that picture in there, and all professionally dressed. I drove to my office in Golden Valley, General Mills, and got my business cards, and I drove back to the precinct and gave him my business card. I said—this will identify me. He didn't know that; I was making myself official. But at that time Timothy Dolan, who later became chief of police in Minneapolis, he was head of that precinct. We got to know him, his people, and they would come to this Hotline Huddle every Thursday, the first Thursday. And besides that we had such a good reputation for community policing and race relations that we became known nationally. Harvard Business School did a case study, an excellent one, on it, which I still have copies of. And then he and I ... no, he was invited to come to a Police-Community Relations Association meeting. They were having a conference in San Diego, and he invited me to go with him and jointly present. I did, and his family went. He brought his whole family, his wife and his little eight-year-old son, at the time, and I. And there were some few other people from the precinct. I recall how they were picking me up at my hotel and I was getting in the car. Mr. Dolan was driving. We were out in the backseat along with two other adults. We ran short of seats back there, so his little son didn't have a place to sit. His little son looked in the back, he said—I have a seat—I can sit in your lap. [All chuckle] And I think about that now, and I bet his son is tall—he's probably taller than you, Madeline—but that just shows what a good time we had. And our panel was excellent at that conference. So we did things jointly. Now if I go back to the Hotline Huddle, another month, and I will whisper to the facilitator—they have co-conveners now—that they got their reinvite, the policemen, to come, the precinct people, all of them, the uniformed ones, especially. Not only that, but it occurred to me later—I kept thinking about my [Unclear], they probably would need to get the company more involved now. The police precinct might feel more welcome if they felt that the invitation was coming from General Mills as well as the community people. See, General Mills was very much involved in improving community safety. I must say we became known for being an even voice to everyone involved. Whereas the others, there was always ongoing tension between the two. So we were the perfect conveners, because we were even and more trusted, in a way. The other people in the community had to trust each other, so they got to rebuild the trust level. The other trick we used, and I told the people on the Huddle that were in the case study, amongst the partners, the conveners, the faith community, the ministers. With community settings like that you need a few ministers in the audience; just their presence is calming. So we had some ministers, very active, so the faith communities ... and we also had judges; judges came, and they were very knowledgeable about what motivates people who do bad things in communities, because they appear before them. So it was a wonderful forum to encourage collaboration. Identifying shared values—that's the perfect starting point for solving a problem where there's tension across boundaries. Discovering what values do we share, and working from that point. And now so often community people and other organizations would approach foundations with—how much money could I get? You have to start with—well, what's the problem? And get different people's perspectives of the problem, and then you go

to—what values do we share. You eventually get to that one. That's your starting point. Then you get people to stop fighting with each other and start focusing on solving the problem, the process—what's the process? That's where your ministers in the faith communities come in to help. It's a calming tool. So there was a question on here about the approach to integrative leadership. That's the approach. That's the starting point. That's the approach; you go from conceptualizing the situation before starting to solve the problem. Then you get the different notions of the problem. Then you have to identify whom to involve and their notions of the problem. I have a private notion of the problem. That's what I said, different notion—I have a private notion. But that doesn't matter as the notions of the other people I'm working with. First, it doesn't matter first—I've got to hear them first. Their notions of the problems, the shared values, and then you got to map out a plan, and then you're going to start talking about cost and the funding. And it was the community people who led us to mapping out the plan, because we went in there with sort of a, in terms of solution, the silver bullet—to just this one specific thing. The feedback from them—you going to have to do lots of things. You're going to have to improve the education; you got to improve the transportation. We have some deficits that are standing in the way of our being safer. Then you've got to work with the police. And guess what? We built a school—the Nellie Stone Johnson School came out of their council, and it was put in a site they wanted, not the site that the school board had designated, you know. So the corporation was able to get the powers that be to listen to the community. It was true the communities had a weaker voice than the company. I think community issues, that's probably one of the more complex integrative leadership situations. Big institutions like building the Vikings Stadium? [All chuckle] That one involves big bucks, and, unfortunately, you can get sustainability of the solution, get people to agree to sustain the progress there quicker than you can get them to agree on sustaining the improvements in communities. Too often with communities, local communities, we will do a fix it, and we say—this is good one time and for all—but you got to maintain it. And I think with North Minneapolis and some of our old initiatives, they were not maintained, and they're going to erode. The progress is going to erode. Look how that's human nature; we consume from communities, and we've got to restore and maintain. So that's what the thinking is important, it comes in. Like potholes in the street. You fix them this year, and the weather's going to wear them down. You got to fix them again; you've got to maintain. And quality of life in communities is the same way. That's where you can get another academic degree from those kinds of situations. There were other cross-sector leadership experiences in each of my other jobs, but they were happening over and over in the foundation. At Metropolitan State there were quite a few. I would say two of the most significant ones was expanding the degree programs, putting in more degree programs, and getting cooperation, different sectors to cooperate to do that, to work across the boundaries there—with the legislature, the unions [Chuckles], and we needed the advocacy of the health care organizations. I'm thinking of the nursing program here, putting in a degree program in nursing, and now we have two there, the baccalaureate level and a master's level. But those were not easy to get approval for. And then the business program. What was early-on the biggest barrier? The notion that the university would be without walls—it would not have traditional programs. It would be all individualized degree programs. To get the university approved by the legislature, those promises were made. By the time I came, six years later, it was six years old, people hadn't forgotten those promises. So I had to ... it was a selling job to get them to ... so the starting point there was with the state legislature, and then your other governing body, the state university system, that was another key selling job, because there were some people on that board who

remembered those early promises that were made by the first president—I was the second. And then the third key question was—what will the other universities think, particularly the University of Minnesota. So that was a selling job, but not as hard as the one with the legislature and the state university board, because President Peter Magrath at the university here said that he supported Metropolitan State University having a nursing program, and to get his go-ahead was pretty easy. There were many who thought that we could get something done if we got the permission of the powers to be at the University of Minnesota. They were traditional. The University of Minnesota has, to its credit, and well-deservedly, a lot of clout and voice over what happens to other schools. So in every kind of career, I've had the blessing and the benefit of opportunities to do cross-sector leadership. That's the only kind I've ever done, and one reason is that in each of my jobs I have inherited situations where there were problems to be solved. I have never gotten a leadership opportunity that didn't involve some issue to be addressed. I would say, early-on, for us women and minorities, those kinds of opportunities were easier to come by because men didn't want them. [All chuckle] If it was going to be a gravy of a presidency of a university, you have a lot of people applying.

MM: If not, you can have it.

RCK: Yeah, that's right—when a woman says—I was appointed president of a university, you knew that there was a tough problem to be solved.

AJ: That's very interesting when you put it that way. We heard one of the interviews that you had shared, and one thing that was very interesting was when you were offered the General Mills position you were given the statement of corporate values, and you said that that was something that made you sort of consider that position. What was it that stood out in that document? What was it that appealed to you the most?

RCK: Yes, thank you for mentioning that one. The fact that they were concerned about values, period. The fact that they were concerned about values. Especially a company. People assumed that corporations, especially, are only concerned about making money. But this said to me that they would be concerned about making money the right way. But the notion of values and connecting that with corporations, that was important. Then I thought about growing up we were encouraged in all that we did to have a values framework. That's putting it a very sophisticated way, but values framework. Some of the, I would say, the key points of that framework would be honesty, ethics, integrity, and this was important to me. But then I found something in General Mills' statement of corporate values that really appealed to me, having left the chemistry lab—innovation, creativity. Innovation is a big word. And having worked at Metropolitan State University, where innovation was one of our hallmark features. Innovation—we were known for innovation. The other thing in that statement of corporate values that I will—I am sure I have it in a box somewhere—there were three words that the company had a bias toward action. Can you imagine that? Coming out of a state system, this was more bureaucratic, perhaps, than most. Bias toward action—that appealed to me. It shows that it would be responsive to ideas, change. And that I found, that I discovered, so I would ... integrity—I think that word ... I love the word integrity. That is ... and excellence—I think that's there. There were about eight points. It was a little three-fold, and not a fancy document, and I was very impressed. After reading it I said—gee whizz, if they believe in all of this, I think I'd like to be connected with them. But it was

values, what values do you own—what values are important to you, and how do you live those values? You could ask that question about everything you do—how do you live the values that you believe in? Now you can believe in values, but do you live them? That’s the other question. How do we live the values we believe in? Honesty, being truthful ... I’ll leave it there. So thank you for asking about it.

AJ: That’s a beautiful answer.

RCK: I learned these values from my community, growing up. My illiterate father, my grandmother—I’ve seen them exemplified by learned people, and the wise but unlearned people. And you can have that combination—wise and uneducated.

MM: You can have the other way, too. [All laugh]

AJ: We have plenty of those.

MM: You mentioned the importance of innovation. What can a leader do, or what have you done to spark innovation in the organizations that you’ve worked in?

RCK: Thank you for asking that, because organizations that I work with, that I work in, I’ve wanted to know what other people think, and to reinforce their good thoughts, their good thinking. And quite often in their thinking you find some innovative ideas. Then the next step is to encourage them to pursue those ideas, or to test them out. That’s at all levels of organizations, not just the senior level people. That’s at the janitorial level, the post office or the mailroom level. We used to have switchboards, receptionists—I don’t know what happened to them. [All chuckle] Now we have the iPhones, cell phones. But that’s for all levels of organizations—encourage innovation and ideas, new ideas. Suggested ways to improve systems and processes. But I think the best organizations are those workers whose employees know that that kind of work is for them all throughout.

AJ: Just to follow-up that in one of your interviews you said if we don’t take care of basic functions very well, we don’t have time for innovation.

RCK: Oh, yeah.

AJ: Did you have to juggle a lot with taking care that the day-to-day things are happening? And then, how do you accommodate, in your leadership style, how do you accommodate for innovation?

RCK: Very easily, on the first question. The best way to do that is to make excellence a habit and a way of life. That’s in everything you do. Thoroughness—I could even add thoroughness, excellence, and a habit and a way of life. Aim for excellence. Use high standards for everything you do. Then on top of that, innovation will grow out of the solid framework that you have, solid processes. If you can combine those two, making excellence a way of life and innovation growing out of the solid processes, your whole enterprise will be more efficient, because you are doing less redoing. You have more time freed up for celebrating success. That’s it. Excellence is

probably my favorite word in the vocabulary. It's hard to judge whether there's an end to it. What's the end point? When is something excellent enough? I don't know. That was the short answer to your question, but that's it.

AJ: Um-hum. We were discussing about you've been very focused on developing your skills as and when it was required throughout your journey. It was interesting for us to see that you took speed reading classes when you were struggling to read a lot of material, and then you had to do ... you always supplemented yourself with like "pings" and like sort of reacting to, like stepping up to the situation that is ... so what made you so industrious? What is that ping in life, that ... I don't know, an episode in life or a person in life that made you feel like this is something that I need to, you know, inculcate.

MM: Striving for excellence all the time.

RCK: Oh, yeah, to improve on—because we get a degree doesn't say that we have learned all we need to know to get along and to contribute. Now, I took the Evelyn Wood Reading Dynamic course. I think it's that Evelyn Wood's sort of a speed reading course, I remember. By the way I still have my awards book from that, you know, [Unclear]. The Dale Carnegie course for public speaking, I took that, post-Ph.D. I took both of those in New York when I became the associate dean for Natural sciences and mathematics or associate dean for academic affairs. I saw my inbox building up with mail and I couldn't get through it fast enough. I was trying to read everything thoroughly rather than just browse and toss. My secretary would sort it—what was important, was less important, whatever, but still I wanted to read everything. So I said—I've got to handle this mail basket faster. Then I found that I, myself, presenting more, making more presentations. So I wanted to be more confident about engaging with people, and then the speaking, public speaking. There was another skill I desired; it was to be a better writer. I needed to do more memos, and I was either too long-winded, or I wasn't confident that my writing skills were good enough. Now this was post-Ph.D. What I discovered there was that when I took English courses in college, I didn't take them as seriously as I did my chemistry courses, right? Those courses you are required to take, basic courses for the degree, the bachelor's degree—art, that art course to satisfy the requirement. English—I discovered I did enough to get an A, but I wasn't as much in command of the skills I needed to be, writing, so I was confident. So I said—it's never too late to learn, to improve on these skills that I need to have to be a good dean, be a good university president. This kind of thinking motivated me to do the brush-up learning. So that's the way it happened. I discovered in myself the need for additional learning.

AJ: That's something to emulate.

RCK: And my husband was fully supportive. I remembered the Dale Carnegie course for public speaking was a four-hour course on a Monday evening, and it was ... maybe it was shorter ... it was three-to-four hours. Anyway, we would make speech after speech after speech, before our classmates. Extemporaneous—just get up and make a speech, a three-minute speech. You've got to make a four-minute speech. And you would just practice, practice, practice. And that was fun, that was fun. And fast-forward—I'm now in corporate board work, worked with a gentleman who was the CEO of the Dale Carnegie course, the company. His company purchased this business, the Dale Carnegie course. I saw it connected with his resume, and I told him about my

experience, and I brought to him some of the award pens that I had gotten for my speeches. Because we would get pens like this with the name of the company on it, as handouts when the class selected us for the best speech that evening.

AJ: [Chuckles] Wow. We've heard a lot of your stories, reminisces about people which ... small instances, basically, of who supported you. And it seems like gratitude is something that's always been an underpinning of how you have lived your life. You are very thankful for all of those people. What role does gratitude play in leadership?

RCK: What role does gratitude play in leadership—first, it's part of your nature. The best way to explain gratitude is connected with the person is to ask whether that is part of your nature, whether it comes naturally. I'm the grateful type. I'm the grateful type. First of all, grateful for—I call them blessings that I have experienced, some planned, some just coincidental or incidental. And I just am very grateful that they happen. But then I also feel that being grateful for the many good experiences I've had—it's my turn now to give back and to support others. Support can take on many forms, you know. It can be money, it could be ideas or suggestions, or it could be doing something for someone they're going to call a favor, but you're going to interpret it as something I ought to do. I ought to do. An act of kindness, that's the way you describe it. But I feel full of gratitude every day. And I don't know whether that's spiritual. It might be, I don't know. Or where that feeling derives from, that's what I mean. Or it's because I feel that the human being is such a complex but a natural and important resource as a source for progress. And I do feel that, honestly. We are complex, and we are natural, but we are probably the most important source for human progress that there is on earth. Like Einstein, I think a lot about the nature of the human spirit, the nature of human beings.

AJ: I believe that this, with this mindset that you have—has that served keeping controversies away? Has that helped in dealing with, you know, I'm sure like you must have had a fair share of sticky situations to deal with.

RCK: Yes, It has helped, and I tell you how. Regardless of what problems happen, I notice that typically those problems are instigated by humans, and if you seek to understand the human spirit, the human motivations, and particularly that anger, human emotions of anger. It's easier to deal with love than it is anger on the part of other people. And if you are not caught up in the anger yourself, if you fight getting caught up in that anger, you can more readily help deal with the anger of somebody else. So I have a tendency to seek to understand the other person. I was helped at General Mills by ... there's, I would say, a discipline of analysis that I would go through sometimes. And that is to look at what I learned from my various kinds of jobs. Like from being a chemist—is there something that I carry forward from that experience that I used later in my academic work, philanthropy work? And likewise you could ask—is there something you carried forward from your academic work that you learned later? And then when you combine all of those things that you carry forward from different kinds of work, you find that you're learning a lot. Your learning is compounded. You are growing; you grow with each kind of career. Now sometimes people ask me—have you left the chemistry lab? How do you feel leaving chemistry? My response is—I never left chemistry; chemistry never left me. I am referring to the part that never left me. Something I learned from my work at General Mills, that I wasn't as skilled at before that, and you know it's disaster relief assistance. We were

involved—that was the category of grant making for all kinds of disasters in communities that I learned how to manage and oversee. And I had a colleague in the foundation, David Nasby, our associate director of the foundation, who was outstanding in helping us map a plan for responding to natural disasters, whether they were tornados or weather disasters or the collapse of the 35W Bridge or community disasters or hurricanes. We were really good at that. Now, I learned how to be poised for community crises and disasters from having learned that so well in the foundation. That was the kind of learning that I added to, the learning from the unique skills that I carry forward from being a chemist or a higher education administrator or the corporate board room. I don't think there's any kind of community crisis that I don't feel half ready to deal with from that discipline in this work as the foundation head, because General Mills has that as an area of concern and community outreach. We were wired at the hip with the Red Cross. We knew how the Red Cross functioned. If they needed help, we knew how to deliver the help. We knew the contact person there to be in touch with, and they knew the contact person at General Mills. And I think to myself what a blessing it is to be able to add areas of knowledge and also preparedness. To feel that you've been developed to be responsive this way. My husband said, told me once, he said—you are just like the mayor; time you hear the fire truck starts, there you go. [All chuckle] He said—you follow fire trucks, you and the mayor follow fire trucks. Once you've dealt with community disasters, crises, you just get conditioned to be able to do this. And I think firemen are ready to go. They are half dressed, in the trucks, the truck is poised to move out—they are ready. So I think I feel blessed to be able to be wired that way. Living downtown, I just know my way with my eyes closed through the Hennepin County emergency room, the medical center emergency room, because I've helped people get in there and communicate their needs and what have you. Thinking of add-on learning, coming back—you know, we are not finished yet with add-on learning. This area of ... we are not finished growing regardless of what age we are at, that's it. Not finished growing. What concerns me is that there are so many communities in crises. They feel that they are in crises, but they don't understand, many of these communities, the capacity they have to solve their problems. And that's what we did through the Hotline Huddle, and that's what that forum continues to do, helping people observe and appreciate their own capacities for solving problems.

MM: A lot of these things that you're talking about, dealing with anger, and being prepared and reacting to community crisis, just communicating well. These are things, struggles that we're seeing right now across the country—police brutality and race relations, probably not unlike some of the situations you grew up in. But what we are also seeing is young people coming forward to lead these movements for change. What advice would you have to young people out there trying to work for change, in, especially, issues like race relations, police brutality, Black Lives Matter—what advice do you have for them, things that you've learned along your way?

RCK: Yes, I would have two pieces of advice from my own style and my own past work in dealing with the same issues. That it's going to take ... first, I would admire their pushing for change. But I would also call for them to understand the need to communicate the urgency they feel in respectful ways. And that word respect, now, might get a lot of push-back on that, because some people will think—oh, you're buying into the system if you don't show enough impatience. But I would also reassure them that change is possible, change will happen, but it has to be through a collaborative process. And I would also reassure them that they are not the only ones interested and eager for change, and the importance of these current problems and the

past problems. The younger voices—and they are not necessarily black races, but all kinds of races, the younger ones—want change right away, urgent, say the need for change is urgent. And they're right in that regard. The need is urgent, and they, with enough people working toward the change across the organizational boundaries and the racial divides that we see—not just black and white, but there are a lot of different races out there. With enough people working at it, we'll solve the problems. My working on the space program convinces me that there's no problem we can't solve if we put our minds to it. We can solve the problem, provided there is the desire. But with social problems especially, success in solving the problems of today won't be sustainable unless we maintain it. You've got to work at social systems to keep the progress in place. Now there's a tremendous responsibility for leadership at all levels and all kinds of organizations to bring people together. Call for people to come together. And the convener will have to allow time for and space for people to vent, to say how they feel. But a skillful convener can keep people at that table if they go step-wise, as I mentioned, contextually, seeing how everybody sees the problem, and then see where there are shared values, and then go from there. And I would say you need a few ministers in the room. [Chuckles] You need a calming voice. But with the activist-minded people, and that's what we are seeing today, a lot of activist-minded people coming forth. There's an article in today's paper that it's in London now—Black Lives Matter. I didn't read the article, but there were some people sprawled out on the street. With the activist-minded people and the rest of us, we have to remind ourselves of something I read in an article the other day in the current issue of *Crisis Magazine*. This is the magazine published by the National Association of Corporate Directors. This writer noted that the spirit that's moving and giving voice to the people in the Black Lives Matter campaign is the same spirit that moved Rosa Parks to act, not giving up her seat, or the Black Panthers to act, and calling for the outcry. Or even the spirit that moved Martin Luther King, Jr. to act. The person, in a beautiful way, talked about the spirit that causes the activist voices to come out now, and say—we've heard them before, but what happened? We've experienced setbacks. Now, for me to do an analytical treatment like that and try to talk with the Black Lives Matter activists, they'll say to me—you don't understand, you don't understand—and I lived through all of those days about that. So it's that spirit that's moving them. So I think the writer was saying—let's be patient and understand where they're coming from. Now another writer said his impression is—it's the New York City former mayor, I think—he said that he felt the Black Lives Matter label was racist, so I started thinking about that, why the label of black, and why black is put on there, and maybe what this person didn't understand, and that is the legacy of bad treatment around the black label, that it's a reminder of the legacy of bad treatment that's targeted toward the black people. And if you don't use that context to understand it, then you might think it is racist. So you have to pause and turn the clock back just a few years and then you'll understand why the activists would want to label it that way. And then because through the years there's been a ... the word black is an evolved meaning to label a people, and it evolved from color, the label of us as colored, or Negro, African American, and then black—no, it was black from the Black Panther movement, and trying to remind the world that black was not necessarily ugly, black is beautiful, that slogan. So it's the way we understand black today is an evolved terminology from all of these ways of helping a people label itself to get away from the stigma of racial coloration in the past. But if you don't spend all this time thinking about the evolution of black, then you wouldn't understand. You would think it is racist. We can edit this out—but that was Mayor Giuliani of New York City. I think he is the former mayor of New York City who said that. But I'm not sure that the younger generation of activists understand the full legacy of movements and issues that

have brought us to this point, but in terms of community relations. But I do feel absolutely confident that if we don't work at maintaining a healthy quality of life for community relations, you're going to have setbacks. Going to have setbacks. I think what can sustain it or get in the way of it are economic or racial disparities, and that is slower progress, but that's a very strong underlying problem. So that's a deep problem that touches on the need for new public policies. As far as training of people in our organizations, police departments, corporations, schools, government agencies, non-profit organizations and the U.S. Congress, there's work for everybody. I think it's responsible for leaders to call for progressive thinking on multi-cultural, cross-cultural relations, and for every leader to help map out an agenda for his or her particular organizations to attend to then. Now what they [Unclear] now, it's very common for them to have, like, for example, the General Mills Black Champions Network, they're working on the culture, the company agenda networks. Hispanic-Latino. The Asian networks. Within companies you have these networks to bring about improved cross-cultural understanding in the workplace. Well, that kind of progressive thinking should happen in every organization. Working on that culture to appreciate ... and they are understanding, to bring about understanding across racial divides. Now, the companies do something else. They conduct surveys with their employees to get employees' impressions of their workplace. And at Wells Fargo they report this to the board, the results. And the CEO is there during that session. So the CEO helps to set a tone. But still that doesn't deal with the problem. They have to go one step farther to really deal with the depth of the problem, because as hard as some companies try, there will still be some minority employees who will feel that they are not welcome, so you have to keep working at this. Now, the tension between blacks, particularly black men, and the police—that's 80 and 90 years—that tension has been there forever. Even professional black families, if you have a son in the family, when that son gets of age they can go out on the street on their own, you're going to caution them—don't get into conflict with the police. They get that advice and those warnings in the family. And they go on forever. So I think we need to talk openly in the community about this feeling of unease that persists there. But white families don't know that. They don't know that we're giving this kind of counsel to black children, black sons especially, because we grew up knowing of incidents that were perpetrated without any cause by us. But that was the fear. So how can we root out this fear that we're going to be mistreated? Rather than to encourage the fear by making people guarded, feel unsafe. You might be reinforcing the feeling that you're unsafe if I would say to our sons—I keep warning them every time they go out. And then to have the incident that happened in Falcon Heights happen, that just reinforces that fear, the cautions. Can you imagine the number of black moms the next day counseling their children? There's an editorial in today's paper in support of the prosecutor that was appointed. I think [Unclear] Lewis, the lawyer. This is in the *Star Tribune*. I didn't read the full editorial, but I know that some black leader criticized his appointment. They didn't like the appointment. He now is on the spot, but probably he is an experienced person, and he will approach it in a very professional way. But these issues, if we could bring out in the open all the things that we have been afraid of in our homes, and even discuss those, that would be a help. So I don't know whether I answered your question, maybe I over-answered it.

MM: No, you did, it was great.

RCK: But I've done a lot of thinking about this, and I think there's need for persistence, as much as to understand there are no easy answers. Persistence to find a solution and to sustain the

progress. Without efforts to maintain and sustain it, you're going to keep having the setbacks. OK. Other questions?

MM: I've got, I think, two more for you. One being what do you hope your legacy is, or think it is, might be now—what do you hope people will remember about you in 20, 30, 40 years?

RCK: Oh, hmm, my goodness—how grateful I am. It's a two-fold legacy. How grateful I am for the many blessings that I have received on this wonderful earth. That's all. That's my main legacy. Gratitude, gratitude is a legacy. And I can say gratitude to everyone, because I'm constantly learning from those I know, those I don't know.

MM: And then I guess our last ... or did you have ...?

AJ: Yeah, I was just going a little—you spent some time at Humphrey school as the Hill Fellow.

RCK: Oh yes, I did.

AJ: Any fond memory from that time?

RCK: Yes! Oh, I can ... it was the perfect transition experience, just perfect. And before I forget it, I brought a recent article from *Twin Cities Business* called "Building Your Volunteer Brand." It was written by Roshini Rajkumar, who writes a column for *Twin Cities Business*, and it's in small type, but she talks about my time at the Humphrey Institute and that fellowship, and why I chose it to transition from the General Mills Foundation, and it's very current, dated June 29th, so I'll give it to you.

AJ: Sure, that would be great.

RCK: I did a project called Philanthropy and Public Policy—Working Together to Make a Bigger Difference. She says—King says she wanted to make the area more productive in a unique way by having people come together across boundaries, organizational boundaries, and [Unclear] way of professionalizing volunteering. But it was a way of shared thinking to solve problems. That's how I got ... so I'll give you this. And, Madeline, I can send the link to both of you if you give me your e-mail addresses. I copied that out yesterday—I'll make another copy for you. But the other memories from the Humphrey Institute was the timing, when I could ... and again it was like the Rockefeller Foundation fellowship when I went to Columbia. It was the coincidence that this Hill Fellow [were] becoming available, and I could sharpen my thinking, my skills, by some academic approach. And this one was a research project, where I interviewed a lot of people, talked with a lot of people. First the elected officials and public policy people about their perceptions of philanthropy and philanthropists and foundations, and, gee, I got a bundle of [Unclear] [All chuckle], and then I talked with the philanthropists and non-profit heads about their perceptions of the community and how philanthropists could engage with public policy people and elected officials, and what elected officials could do. I interviewed more than 60 people, I know. First I did about 30 trial interviews, and then I interviewed quite a few more for the final interviews. But I was introduced to another tool at the university that helped me a lot. That is they have a protocol you must study. I think it's a NIH protocol on using human

subjects in research. It's about a three-hour course on-line that you take, and you must take and vouch that you have approved that course, that, tool, to be certified, approved to do this.

AJ: The IRB.

RCK: Yeah, it's ... that was the learning experience. So I would come every day and work on my project, and I met a lot of different people. And I had a marvelous research advisor, Melissa Stone.

AJ: Oh, I know her.

MM: Love Melissa Stone.

RCK: Yeah, she was my faculty advisor.

MM: She is great.

RCK: And then I had another administrative advisor, Marcia—what's Marcia's last name?—she's in the law school now. So they were my faculty administrative and research advisors. It was just the perfect setting for me. And what was the other part of your question, Amrita?

AJ: Just, I think, you answered both. Just fondest memories there, so ...

RCK: It more than met my objectives, that's what it did—more than that. I learned some new things. In summary, it was revealing to hear elected officials' impressions of why our philanthropy is so important to the community, and what philanthropists brought to the table to solve problems, if we worked jointly. They said that our image of integrity, respect, our ability to analyze situations, that all these were intangibles. They were not the money, for grant making, is in grant making. But they identified about five intangibles that they thought were most beneficial, features that we had that they didn't have—the respect of the community. They didn't have these things. On the other hand, they noted that ... so they would say all right, it wasn't your money, it's your voice. They would say that they felt that their power and advantage was that they could institutionalize the progress after we had done demonstration projects. They said they could pass laws to institutionalize the progress, and they had the power of the public purse that was far more money than we ever could dream of! [All chuckle] So those two things they brought to the table, but they didn't bring the respectability from the public that we had. Now whether we fall short as philanthropists—I can say one spoke for the group—and she was very vocal—she said—hiding behind the veil that the IRS is wouldn't allow us to engage with legislators in the public process. They said when you needed philanthropists to testify to committees, or to serve as a resource to committees, legislative committees, we were too absent and too quiet. We didn't show up, we didn't show up. Because, we said, we think we would be in violation of the IRS guidelines. And they didn't agree with that. That was very outspoken. But then I heard some very sane and nicely put counsel from some of the legislators. One said that, she said—we were talking about problem solving—she said—Reatha, we can solve any problem we have; all we need up here is some good minds and good hearts. I said—well, that sounds great. And I thought that was very well put, and the kind of people that you need at the table. Oh,

I heard from the head of the Metropolitan Council. I think some very good, sage advice on problem solving and monitoring progress. He said—you have to pause and judge your success step-wise. Don't wait to hit the goal posts to judge your success. Monitor your success step-wise. Identify those markers that would enable you to judge your success. And those markers would be like ingredients that are baked in the cake. [Chuckles]

AJ: Oh, that's lovely.

RCK: I'll go back and see—that was Peter Bell, he was head of the Metro Council then. I won't forget that. In the workplace you can celebrate small things—that helps.

AJ: Right.

RCK: Don't wait. These are the mile markers for progress. So I grew. I did, too; I grew with that experience. I had a roommate, an office mate. We could chat about things.

AJ: That's great. The Women's Foundation of Minnesota conferred the King Fellow on your name. Have you met any King Fellows yet?

RCK: Have I ...?

AJ: Have you met any ...

RCK: Oh, yes. Oh, I have grown from those meetings, yes. They graduated on to other positions, and I have seen them in the community and it's sort of like a wonderful reunion every time I see them. One is at the United Way now. Leu Lete. She is Ethiopian, and she recently went to the White House for a Women's Foundation program. I typically have lunch with the newest one. So I get together with them. Oh, yes, that was a ... I feel really honored to have that fellowship established in my name, I really do.

AJ: I think I would just ... I had one last question. You describe your life early-on, nothing short of a Hollywood drama. [All laugh] Right?

RCK: Yes.

AJ: And then you said there were like a lot of stories that have been told, but there are a lot of stories that haven't been. In the course of this discussion that we have had, we have shared a lot of stories that you said, but are there any stories missing? Is there anything you wish ...?

MM: Is there anything that you wish we would have asked you today?

RCK: Oh, there are lots of stories connected with travels that have been tremendous learning experiences. Maybe sometime I'll just write a little essay on those. One described in that video that you referred to was about my working as a maid in Upstate New York during my college years. That was ... there are stories within that story. That was like another academic degree, the learning from that. There are many stories from my services on corporate boards. With every

board experience there was a crisis sometime. How do you help your company get through that crisis or the emergency or what have you and come out ahead? Those are the stories that I learn from all the time, and you rarely talk about them publicly, because you don't want to give attribution to the situation, name the company, anything like that. But it's a growth experience. And there are stories around the saddest moments in your life, for sure, and how you evolve emotionally from those experiences—the loss of my mother, my sister, and my husband, those three. But then you talk about how you recover your resolve to move forward and the meaning of family there. There was a question—what accomplishments are you most proud of in your career? And I noted to myself the first thing I put down here was to be trusted by others. That, right away, illuminates and expands your capacity to do things. Trust is an asset, becomes an asset that's priceless to use in getting things done. Another accomplishment I'm proud of, so far, is to be loved by family. You notice I said so far. [All chuckle] I don't know when they will take it back. That to me is a ... both of these, the trust and the love by family, they are sources of power and strength. They empower you, really. Now, you might think it's money in the bank. And health—oh, good health. And they can empower you to good health, better health, frankly. Now you read everywhere about the detriment of stress, you know. Those are things that I can recall. I learned something recently that I keep thinking about. When Prince died, and talking about perceptions about self as black people in this life. Prince wrote a song called “Beautiful, Loved, and Blessed.” And I saw this on the celebration of life program that the Jehovah Witnesses gave for him. There was an article in the paper about the service then. It was noted there on the front of the program across a flower—“Beautiful, Loved, and Blessed.” I learned later that this was one of the songs. And I went and Googled it up, naturally, to confirm. But I thought of my life in this regard, and it might have been mentioned in the video, because I thought, well, I could embrace those, and then I pulled back from the beautiful part. And I said, well, I know how I'm loved and blessed, but I'm not sure about the beautiful part, because that seemed to be too self-congratulatory. And then I read that song, the words of the song, and it said that I'm beautiful because God told me so. And I thought about that in relation to being black and beautiful. Black people were taught along the way that they were ugly because they were black, that was the word, and I said—well, I've had to talk myself into being beautiful, so it's not referring to appearances or looks, it's referring to something else. So I've been thinking along those lines, and now I'm almost ready to embrace the whole song, that I'm beautiful, loved, and blessed—I'm quoting Prince. So that purple has grown on us, all of us, you know.

AJ: Yes.

RCK: But you about learn from everything. I think the older you get, frankly, the more you get to be like a little newborn—you're learning from everything. So the media tools have sent us all back to school, back to the books. [Chuckles]

MM: Any closing thoughts?

RCK: No, I think I like to re-engage with others. I like to connect, I like to engage with others, to enjoy success step-wise, you know, as Peter Bell says—it's baked in the cake, you have mile markers along the way.

MM: Well, thank you so much for joining us here today and sharing all of your stories.

RCK: Oh, thank you. I just talk, talk, talk. Oh, my gosh—it's one o'clock!

AJ: This has been great and a big milestone for us, too.

RCK: I hope it is helpful to you.

AJ: Definitely.

MM: Thank you.

AJ: It's beyond helpful.

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[ZOOM0007]

MM: Fortune 500.

AJ: Fortune 500 here—what do you think in your mind is the deal-breaker?

RCK: Yeah, I think it's, frankly, I think it's the, one, innovation, the atmosphere, the climate that supports innovation, community climate, and the image of ... the people are the image of stability in the community, that have that image, even with the recent uprisings. Minnesota has a reputation—the Midwest—Minnesota [Unclear] for planning. I think ... the question you raise is a good one. Even with the reputation for higher taxes. That goes against the trend. But when you look at the way a number of Fortune 500 companies started, it was from the tinkering and the garage discoveries, like 3M and Medtronic, and discoveries people have made. Yesterday in the paper there was the article about the Lew Lehr, the former CEO of 3M, who passed. He was 95. I knew him; he was a mentor and a supporter. I remember being in Nebraska attending a higher education business—ACA—American Council of ... education and business higher education forum was, and he was attending that forum, and he gave me a ride back to Minnesota on his plane. And then later I saw him on a plane going to and from Arizona. He lived in Arizona when he died. But thinking of that story, the way 3M started, it was the support of new ideas. And my guess, too, is that the centrality of the University of Minnesota in the community, in the state, and its influence on so many discoveries and the support systems for companies to solve problems—I think that's made a difference. There's a great centrality. I was at a board meeting for Mobil Company. We were doing a site visit. It was in Mobile, Alabama, and we talked about the Mississippi River emptying into the Gulf, and how that affected some of their logistical systems, and they had the quality of the water tested regularly, and guess where the test lab is? They say there's a test lab at the University of Minnesota on the Mississippi, and we sample and test the water up there, and guess where that lab is? Right off, walking distance from where I live. It was just—you can see it—water, something, earth, and something else.

MM: Oh yeah, right on, like, Saint Anthony Main, right there.

RCK: That's it, yeah.

MM: Yeah, I've seen that.

RCK: That's the test lab they were talking about. And I thought to myself—that's right next [Unclear]. They said it's at the University of Minnesota. And I said—oh, I live right near there. But that's what I mean by the support systems. And then you have, I think, the educational level must be pretty supportive of businesses at the higher level. The achievement gap is a bothersome problem at the lower level, but then you ... I was thinking as I drove here this morning, how educational systems in Minnesota, the different levels, community colleges, and what used to be the technical institutes that are now blended in, those levels are helpful to businesses, because their workers can start and come up to that level, and then the businesses can add the rest. They do a lot of specialized training within companies. And their workers are high school people who can start and come up to that level, and then have the businesses help add on the other two years with specialized training. Now, I live downtown, and my taxes are hefty, and I read everything the Hennepin County tax statement sends out explaining—see, they tend to be a broader collection system, and then they collect on behalf of the city, the county, the school board, and they might collect for the Metro Council, all in that one biannual tax collection. But they explain where it goes. I think they might have the parks in there now. I look at it carefully, that my husband has passed. I have to read it; I need to read it. And the question is how good do I feel paying the tax supporting all these things. Do they have the library in there? I think they do. But I feel there are some things in there that are special to me. One is the library, the park system, and with the metro transit, they—I think it's Metro Mobility—they facilitate, they subsidize transportation for seniors and differently abled people to be able to get out. You can call these [Unclear]. I like that very much. And the way the buses are equipped to pick up differently abled people in wheel chairs. The buses stop, they bow, and they roll out the platform. I stand there and look at everyone. I love that. So I think, as a taxpayer, I like to think about what I really like and what I would advocate for. You get that kind of citizen involvement here, and I think it's healthy and good for the community.

MM: I agree.

RCK: That citizens can have a voice. And thinking of that, Tuesday is the primary day.

MM: That's right—get out and vote!

RCK: I've thought about ... I've been reading the editorials every day to be reminded of what they say, their opinions.

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