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Interview with Ron Staats

Colin Walker

Ron Staats

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Interviewer: Colin Walker
Interviewee: Ron Staats
Place: Ron Staats's place of residence
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Co-workers present: none

Colin Walker: Here's just a little low-down on what we're doing: the Rural Life Center, uh, Howard has done a few projects in Knox County, um, one of which was about food, one of which was about the Kokosing River and its inhabitants and then this current one that we're working on public spaces in Knox County. So we've spent the past couple of weeks learning about the history of Knox County; reading archives of the newspapers, um, keeping up to date on current events in the newspapers and trying to identify what are the real public spaces in Knox County and how they've shifted and that's really the aim of our project. And by the end of the project we'll have some sort of presentation.

Ron Staats: Okay.

CW: Could be, you know, in downtown Mount Vernon, we've talked about the Buckeye Candy Building, could be a radio documentary, could be anything of the above, so, um, I have a few questions for you, but I hope that this can be a, you know, a conversation as well.

RS: Okay.

CW: So, for formality's sake: I'm Colin Walker, I'm interviewing Ron Staats, today is the first of November and my first question is: how long have you lived in Mount Vernon?

RS: Born and raised in Mount Vernon in 1941.

CW: So you've been here ever since.

RS: So I've been here with the exception, um, of, I guess I was out of town for about three and a half—four years, worked at other radio stations. So otherwise I've spent my entire life with exception of five years here.

CW: Great. Um, and, you're now retired.

RS: I'm now retired.

CW: Where did you work before?

RS: I worked at, uh, WMVO Radio. Worked there for—started there in—part time basis 1959. And left in 1963 and moved to Coshocton, and then to Wheeling, West Virginia, and then I came back to WMVO in 1967 and I was there until six years ago, which would

have been 2005. And that was—I was given my, I guess exit, and that was my retirement. So I haven't worked in radio since 19—er—2005. I did an online, uh, talk show for eight months and decided I didn't want to do that either, so, I'm now retired.

CW: And what—what was your main function at the radio station?

RS: Well I ended up being the, uh, program director and, uh, the, uh, sort of, uh, second in command. I wasn't the general manager, but I was the operations manager. I did everything there, really. I started out, uh, being a disc jockey and worked as a disc jockey for many, many years and ended up doing a talk show, um, which concentrated on local information. I mean we got into national events and talked about that, but, uh, what was happening in life, but, we concentrated a lot on local. A lot, I interviewed a lot of local, uh, officials, elected officials, heads of companies, and uh, so that was—and then we did things that were non-sensical, things that didn't mean anything at all, we just had a good time. But it was really, uh—that's what I finished doing was that and I was doing operations program director of WMVO. There is an FM station, at that time it was WQIO, they've now changed the call letters, uh—well, they've changed their moniker, I guess, but, uh, I did some work on the FM station for a while as a disc jockey and, but, uh, I ended up as a talk show host.

CW: What was your daily routine like at the radio station?

RS: I was in charge of personnel, and we had a number of person—part-time people, so that required quite a bit of time to schedule. I scheduled all the programming on the, the, uh, AM station MVO. Uh, dealt with the rules and regulations of the FCC, tried to make sure everything was operating according to, uh, you know. I didn't do sales, I didn't do any of that but I tried to keep things on the air and, uh, up to date with what was going on, whatever we were programming at that time. We did satellite at the end of my broadcast career. I had to make sure that all operated and I learned computerization. I—when I came into the business we didn't even know what computers were and so I had to learn that for the last ten, fifteen years of my existence, so.

CW: What was your favorite part about working on the radio?

RS: Working with people. Working, eh, talking with people. It's interesting to find out, uh, when you talk to a number of different people no matter whether their a CEO, uh, whether they're driving a truck or whatever, they are all human beings and it's just wonderful to see their outlook on life. And everyone has an opinion. Nobody ever thinks they know anything, but they all have an opinion. So, now I thought I had a lot of fun. I used to go out in the community a lot, I went to a lot of meetings, um, different kinds of meetings and met a lot of different people, that's how I met Mr. Sacks, by the way, that and, uh, being on the air, yeah. It was just—that was the fun part. I got to meet people at the fair, I worked at the fair during the Knox County Fair, local fair, one-one week, and I was out there for the entire week. And uh, covering events going on, meeting people. Um, one of my greatest people to meet was Johnny Cash. He was an entertainer there, uh, and, um, I forget what year that was, but, uh, I met him and he is the most notable person

that I have ever met that really appreciated me. He just seemed like a pure gentleman and like he really enjoyed meeting me at the same time I enjoyed meeting him.

CW: That's great, I'm jealous.

(laughter)

RS: Well he—he was funny, he had hands as big as my feet, I mean, boy, when he shook your hand you knew he meant it, he just—he was just such a nice genuine individual and, I mean, this was at the end of his career, it was like in the 80s or whatever, but, uh, it was at the end of his career. But he was a wonderful gentleman. So, yeah, that was basically it—talking to people, I enjoyed working out problems, 'cause that's what we did on the local scene. If they had a problem with government I tried to find out from the person in charge, how can we correct this? What's—why are you doing this this way? Can't it be done this way? We were there for—to serve the community in times of emergency we had, um, snow, uh, we had a blizzard back in, uh, the 70s, uh, we were on the air 24 hours a day. Uh, so we did things of that nature, which was very—got to know people very well.

CW: What time was your show?

RS: I did a program at ten o'clock in the morning. Ten til noon. It was called, uh, now what was it called, *turn that off!*-no (laugh) oh, it's-it's amazing how things go by. But anyway, it was ten to twelve.

CW: What, so then how do you see the role of radio in the community?

RS: Well I think it's a major role, if it's done properly. Uh, I came to believe when I—'cause I got in love with broadcasting when I was in High School and then I got the part-time job in 1959, the year I graduated from High School. Everyone told me—all the people at the radio station that I talked to, uh, said: you have to go to college, you have to go college, you have to go to college. Well I wasn't, uh, financially able to do that at the time, nor did I have an interest. Education was not my thing, uh, personally, though. But I just—I didn't go to college, but I worked very hard on what I did. I tried to do things on my own, to learn and I was very fortunate and I'm a strong believer that the Lord has brought me, uh, all the gifts that I have, uh, if I have any I—He's given them to me, not me—and the places I've gone, the people I've met. But, uh, they told I couldn't get in without it and I proved them wrong, I did get in. Uh, I worked part time while I worked in a clothing store full time selling men's clothes. Uh, I started there as a sophomore when I was 14 years old, so, I've, uh—when I retired back in 2005, I'd worked 50 years of my life, straight through, and, uh, so, uh. But it, uh—it was—I always wanted to be in broadcasting, I always wanted to entertain, I wanted to have fun, enjoy people, and have them enjoy me. Now, I may have lost track of your question, but, uh, I can get back to it if you direct me.

CW: Yeah, um, the role of radio in community.

RS: Oh, radio in community! Well, and I guess that all lead into why, because it was a community radio station. The AM was more of a community radio station than the FM. The FM came along and people wanted things—well now it's evolved into: it's just music they don't want to hear anybody, it's just music. It's a now—it's just replacing that with iPhones and iPads and everything else, but, we dealt with the community. It was a community station, you met all the people, you dealt—you tried to bring them information, that we felt they needed to know. They—a lot of times they may have wanted to know more information than we could give them. But they wanted to keep track of what's going on in the community and that's we attempted while I was working there and that's why I think the station still needs to do that. Now I know this station under new ownership, with—I never worked for them—they are attempting to do that, but it's on a small scale. Uh, they got about the same window of time, but they don't have the people, they don't have as many people, they've reduced the number of people and they don't cover the events that we used to cover on a regular basis. I was told towards the end of my broadcast career, when I used to cover school board meetings and city council meetings, and I used to cover those and report on—they said: "Well you shouldn't have to do that. You should be able to call them," and get somebody to get the information or what took place in the meeting. Well, yeah, you can do that, and I know that's probably the new way to do things, but you don't know people. You don't get to know people, and you don't hear everything that goes on in the conversation at night. Somebody tells you this and that not have exactly the way it was. So I got an opportunity by attending these meetings of—boring? Oh yeah, most of the meetings were boring and they were too long and I think people talk too much who don't say anything—I do that a lot, and—that's probably why I was in broadcasting. But anyway, it's the way you learn people and what's going on. You have to be there, and that takes people and what I keep hearing from broadcasters; my son's in the business, he's going through the same thing, he works in Columbus, and there's—they're cutting everybody out, there's just—I mean it's just like he and two or three people and they're operating two stations in Columbus. Well, you can do it, with technology, but it's *not the same,* it's not the same. We're cheating the people! But, the bottom line, you got to make money, got to make money, got to make money, and, so I guess what happens is we don't produce the product that needs to be produced. Even though you can kid yourself and say we are, no they're not. You can't produce the product with three people versus twelve people, doesn't work. Sorry, just doesn't work. May be wasted people, but not really, 'cause you're going to cover over in some areas and, you need them. And that—I think that's why radio always exist, uh, I never was afraid of all the people saying it's gonna go away, television, no, didn't take radio. People enjoy—it's like a companion, and when they really know it is when it's a disaster. During weather, or whatever, they glue themselves to the radio and they want to know everything that's going on. Just to hear a human voice on that radio, knowing that there's somebody alive out there even though they can't get out of their house. They may not have any electricity, but they have a bat—battery operated radio. It's companionship, it's a people—it's—it's evolved, but doesn't have to totally go away, I think it's necessary, but in today's market, it's, uh, not sure it's every gonna stay around like it was.

CW: How—how do you think having a larger staff allows t—to have, er, I guess, be successful, or more successful than the downsizing?

RS: Well if—and we did—we ended up going the same route. We got technology and used satellites and hooked up to music networks and so forth, because it's so expensive, the music and—what you have to pay: the license fees, and all that. But if you don't have that you've got people to do it and when they're on there it's not just a voice they recorded 16 hours before. They're there, and they can tell you what's going on at the time. I'm not sure anyone wants that because they now have technology that's providing that. They use their phone, find out everything instantaneous, that, you know, everywhere, and that's—you know. So it's—the competition is a lot different now than it was when I was around. But I think the more people is the more involved in the community and getting the information and finding out really what's going on. We used to always pride ourselves on being the newspaper on air, really. What—'cause newspapers carry—they do a lot of coverage of things that radio stations don't cover, and they didn't cover in depth on radio, brevity is the product of radio. And a lot of people, that's what they want, they just want a headline, well, a headline doesn't tell you the story, and, and newspapers—it's late, there's radio, you can get immediately if you got people. But if you don't have anybody there and it's all running by satellite and you hear a local voice, big deal, he's not there, and you can go back and get there but you don't usually do that, 'cause you've already cooked your hours, and that's a tough thing to do. But—it's—but I understand, how do you manage it? How do you make the money? How do you pay the people and still make money? It's not easy, and that's not easy. Because not everybody is sold on radio because advertisers, even though they need to advertise, some are still brainwashed into print. If they can see it then figure the advertisers—the person they're advertising to sees it, well, they see it if they read it, but if they don't read it, and of course as you're certainly aware now newspaper subscriptions are down, newspapers are going out of business, uh, internet's taking over that aspect, and everything else. I mean you can find everything now on a phone so, it really makes it much, much tougher. But if you grew up with that, that's tough to give up. It's just, you need people. I'm not—I'm not a product of not doing—I'm just believe in doing away with people, and now we have so many people out of work and people are trying to figure out what to do because we're operating the world on an economic basis I guess, but a lot of people are out of work. What do they do? Well they say there's jobs available, where are they available, without moving and so forth? So—and I always thought the small market radio station such as Mount Vernon would always be around. And I think they will be but it's getting tougher and tougher for them to do it. As I started to say about advertisers, if they don't like the music you play, if they don't like what you're saying, they want to control it, because they're paying money. That's not what they're doing, they're not doing that for them, they're doing it to reach their ad, their, uh—the people they want to bring in their business and buy their product. What makes a difference whether you like the product that you're on. You want to—unless it's terrible—but you—they lose sight of what they're supposed to be doing—is getting their name out there and their product, and telling people why they're the ones they ought to be, uh, visiting, shopping, whatever.

CW: How—how do you think that change in radio, and the character of the radio stations, has changed Mount Vernon—and the sense of community?

RS: Oh, I think, uh, the less involvement. Even though they are involved, uh they're not as involved as we were. We had an owner who was very involved in the community, demanded that we be involved in the community. Individuals were out involved in the community, but we were covering events, we were there. Uh, Mount Vernon Nazarene University has a radio station. And they have really taken over the role, in my opinion, of the local, uh, commercial radio station. They are providing these things. They're at every event. And of course there's arguments about that, say, well that's not fair because they don't pay their students, they don't have to have advertisers, they're not supposed to have advertisers, but people make donations and so forth, but they're at everything. They're at everywhere. Whatever—there's two people out there working at that station, governing that station, uh, imagine, you know, they work for us. So they know what it's like to be involved in the community, and they're still involved in the community. Um, and I think it has changed, uh, to a lot of degree, but there are a lot people that don't know—they won't know anything—'cause I had people while I was in it and we were very active—"I don't listen to local radio station, I don't read the Mount Vernon News, you know, I watch Columbus telivision," you know, "I listen to Columbus radio, or I listen to the—" Well that's not local. And they say, "well they tell me everything I want to know," well, so you don't want to know that much. You don't want to know what's going on where you live, and that's the thing that local whether it's a newspaper—I hate seeing this newspaper go out of business, um, and I know there's always a threat of that, but you don't want lose that loc—that local. Oh, as far as disaster? oh yeah the big cities will tell you about all your plaque marks (?), the murder we had a year ago, and, and all that here. Well yeah, they may even go in more than we will because we're a little more sensitive to the community—but, but we can tell you things that you're not going to find any place else by any other means. So I think—I think the community would really slowly die if they don't have that connection in a newspaper and radio station. I think they need both 'cause they both serve different roles: detail versus immediacy.

CW: Right. Well, I would like to go back for a second: you moved away for a stint of time and then came back—what, what was your reason for moving away, and then what was your reason for coming back?

RS: Well it was all selfish. They wouldn't give me a full time job and, uh, of course I thought I was ready. You know, we all get our egos to the point and I was—I was a young man, twenty two years old "hey, I know how to do this." Well they wouldn't hire me out here, ironically owned by the same people who hired me back. Uh-but-uh, they had to become desperate enough (laughter) But I was able to then go somewhere else where they weren't as particular about how I did my job. I got a chance to learn on air, on the job. And—And nothing teaches you like working, nothing. I mean, you can study all the books, you can read all the theories, you can do all that, but experience is a major, major contributor. And that's what I got by working in Coshocton, Ohio, a small radio station, it's a small community, just like Mount Vernon and I got a chance to, uh, do things with strangers, they weren't relatives, they weren't friends, they were total

strangers. I worked thre for two years. And then I had an offer to move on to Wheeling, West Virginia, a little larger market and I got a chance to go there and had, uh—was doing—I enjoyed that experience. And so then they called me 'cause they had an opening back here and somebody suggested that they call me and a see if I'd come back and the same person who wouldn't hire me was glad to hire me. I was here then from '67 'til 2005. Well, that's why I left. Now were those stations as involved in the community as this one? No. Not at any—not even close. Not—not at all. The one was basically a music station in Wheeling, West Virginia, that's basically all they did was music. They didn't have a large staff and we didn't do news, we didn't do any of that big time. Coshocton? Yeah, we did news and we did local stuff, but we weren't out in the community like Mount Vernon. This—people at the time that I was growing up, in the business here, '67 on, they were spoiled. They had more of a radio station than they realized they had. And now people don't know what it is, so they don't miss it. But, uh, it's a great—well it's just like projects at Kenyon does and they do things all the time—the radio station was involved in a lot of things, but if you take—if you don't have people, you're not going to be involved. There's nobody to tell the story. I mean you got a window, but there's more than that to talk about in the community, but that's the way it is. I think it's—it's—so that's why I left and I came back because this is my hometown. I like—I like the area here. I had an offer to move out again, uh, 'cause you always get to the point where you're restless and I—I wasn't ready to make that move because I—I liked it here, I wanted to raise a family here, it's comfortable here. Now, from where you're from I'm sure it's comfortable there and here it would not maybe into what you like to do, but that's—you have to be where you're comfortable and do what it is you're enjoying doing. And I certainly enjoyed—as you can tell, I love to talk.

(Laughter)

RS: I don't have to say anything, I just love to talk.

CW: I appreciate that as an interviewer. Um, how, I guess, how did—or, what about Mount Vernon made it so involved? Is it something about the character of the place? Is there something special about Mount Vernon specifically?

RS: I think it has a—it's like a community. And it's growing out of that, that's the other thing that I'm noticing more and more. Yesterday, uh, was Halloween—years ago high school students used to go in main—down Main Street when we had businesses down Main Street—'cause times have changed—and they painted the, uh, different Halloween scenes on the windows. I mean that was every year they did that. That was back in the '50s, and it was wonderful and I just commented about that 'cause there was something in the paper that showed a store that had a—a display and I said to my wife, I said—well of course she wasn't from here, I said that—we—they used to go down and paint every year. That's changed, because it was like a real a real community. They want to keep it that way but it's growing enough and we have a lot of people not from this area any longer. And, and that's good and bad. It's good to have fresh minds and fresh thinking but it's bad when you get to the point where you think any outsider is not welcome either. So it works both ways. But I feel that, uh, it was a community and they're—they're

neighborly, they're just very friendly. Uh, from the farm community up to the business community—I mean I met nice, nice people in all walks of life and I—I found out the CEOs put their pants on one leg at a time same as I do. And, uh, I—there was a time, 'cause I didn't grow up with anything. I was in a very, uh, what I considered a poor family—it wasn't poor—poor-poor, but it was poor and—compared to others. So I didn't know anybody. My family didn't know anybody outside of their relatives and so forth. It was a farm—it's a farming, rural community. But I got out and did things that they didn't do—my family—and they couldn't believe that I was doing what I was doing. And I'm meeting lots of people and the more people you meet the better it becomes and you get to know more ideas, different ways of life, and—and you don't have to agree with all of them, but it's what you need to sort of balance you. And, uh, so, it's just a community kindness. If you-If you're needy in this community, people help. Whether they have it or not, they help. One of the most giving communities I've ever, ever seen. And, uh, because it could be them, and that's the way they look at it. And, so—Politics is politics. Wherever you go: politics is politics. But I—on this area it's not quite as strong as it is on the national scene, just, uh—but it's—it's community, they—they really care about themselves and they care about their neighbors and, and they've got family here and they want to see things go well. We could use a lot more jobs, I'm sure, and, uh, things could be a lot better economically-wise across the United States. But, Mount Vernon's just sorta peaceful, quiet, to the most part—we have a stutter here and there, but it's basically—it's comfortable. I've raised three children here. I have seven grandchildren, uh, six of them are growing up here. Um, I feel very secure that they're here, and, and I think they're doing—they'll do as well as they want to do. I don't believe in this, you know, if you want to do, you can do it. I believe in that, strongly. But I believe in faith and I believe in strength and I'm a real—as I say I'm strong, strong, uh, Christian believer and I believe that that's what carries you. You got to have a foundation, 'cause you always have valleys and everything's not high and you got to have lows. You got to have something to carry you. You got to have character and you got to have something. And I guess I attempted to do that in my walk of life. Nobody was a stranger to me. Nobody was below me, nobody was above me—they may have known more but that's okay, that's, that's all right, because we're all human beings and we need to live together.

CW: Were—were there certain places in the community where people came together?

RS: Well, back in the '50s, uh, as we that grew up in the 50s always say: that was the greatest time of life. Well, I'm sure people in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, and now can say the same things, but, uh, downtown. They always gathered downtown, and they keep trying to get events to bring people downtown. Because, it's just—it's like a carnival atmosphere, people like to go and they see people they haven't seen and—but that was it. In the 50s when all of the merchants were downtown, people would go downtown just to sit on the street in their car to watch people go by. Uh, but they would always gather downtown. Now, we're—and we used to have, out here where Burger King restaurant is, it's on the point there of Newark Road and Martinsburg Road—we had a drive-in restaurant called Beck's Drive-In. That's where the young people hung out when I was in high school and a teenager. It was called Beck's Drive-In and everybody hung out at Beck's. Uh, the food was good—but—that's where kids went. Uh, we could—you

could—after a football game it was jam packed, and adults went there too, and—and that was the thing I see differently now—not maybe totally—young people and elder, or, older people—not elderly—they seemed to have a respect for one another. I don't see the respect aspect now that I saw then. It's, uh, you know, it's—I don't want them to feel sorry for people that are—'cause I'm old now and, uh—but it's, it's a—it was a respect thing. But downtown was where they gathered. Beck's was where they gathered. Uh, shopping—anytime to get out where you could meet people and do things. Knox County Fair was—is still a great way, uh—The Dan Emmett Festival brings lots and lots of people every year downtown, uh, from out of town as well as the locals, and, uh, it's just a gathering. I guess that's that rural atmosphere. Uh, we have what they call granges here and, uh—People just love to get together, they love to eat, and they love to have this fun atmosphere. It's a party atmosphere without going cuckoo. And, uh, but it's—yeah, that's what Mount Vernon, and, and people are still craving for that. People that happened to be here—grew up with that. They'd like to get downtown, back to that. Well that's not going to happen, you never go back, you can't go back. Um, you have to live now and do the best you can. But that's—that's the change. Now I go into stores I don't even know people. I don't have a clue who they are. I mean, they're coming in from different parts of the community, or they've moved into the community. Since I've been out of—on being—on the air for the last six years, I probably cut my base in half if not more. The people I go out and see on the street, I don't know them. And—and what changed? I wasn't out—I'm not out there meeting them day in and day out like I was. So new people come in and I don't know who they are. They're all strangers to me now. They don't know who I am. So, it's a—that's sad. That really is sad. It's a—I mean I can still be involved in community; I'm not involved as I used to be, but I guess I had a different purpose then. I was involved not only for the community but I was—could do things on the air and do things. Now I don't have that same option and, and I'm just like the average person getting out there and getting involved; should be involved, but, uh, it's tough. The bigger the community becomes, the diff—the more difficult it is to make it a community.

CW: So, why do you, er—why do you—yeah—why do you think downtown is struggling to recapture that? Or, or, why do you not believe that they will be successful in recapturing that?

RS: Because I think it were op—we're sort of controlled. Um, people control what goes on. There's a few people that would like to have downtown Mount Vernon be vibrant again. A few. I don't have numbers on that, but, the average person nowadays in my opinion: they want convenience, they want selection, they want variety. And the merchants thought that too, that's why the big Box Stores and everything. That's why we have malls that why we have—you know—now malls are dying. I mean, you know, the economy wavers and, you know, people enjoy it to a point. But, when you had a store—I'll give you an example. In Mount Vernon right now there's a store that's a store that represents Mount Vernon: and that's G. R. Smith's Hardware. You go in that store and immediately there's a clerk there to ask you if they can help you. Now we went through that phase, because I was in retail, sold clothes and that was the way we greeted people. Then we got to hearing: people didn't want to be bothered. Well, they got their wish,

‘cause you go into a box store and they don’t bother you. You have to try to look and find somebody. Then you may find somebody that doesn’t know anything because that’s not—they’re just a—they’re a handy person. They’re there, they may know some areas, they don’t know it all. But in a smaller setting like G. R. Smith Hardware they know everything that’s in that store and they’ll guide you to it and they’ll try to help you. That’s the way it was in the ‘50s, that’s the way. Gasoline stations, we used to go pull in and they pumped our gas and checked our oil and washed our windshields. Well, we got tired of that, we’d rather do it ourselves. Well, we have it. You know, it’s just—it—it’s—so the people have driven it to where it is in my opinion. I think it’s basically their—they’re that way. That’s why I don’t think it will come back that was because the merchants—your big store are controlling it—they’re not going back there. So you have to have entrepreneurs and they come and they open up a shop. And it’s not a general kind of shop, it’s spectacular, you know for a—you know, a specticular—a particular kind of merchandise. And not everybody is into that. So if they don’t have the backing moneywise, they’re in business and out of business pretty quickly. Um—But nobody wants to go downtown, there’s no parking, and, you know, people will walk sixteen blocks in a mall or a shopping center but boy, put them downtown and if they’re not able to park right in front of the store: “there’s no parking down here, I’m not going to walk that far!” And they’ve already walked in malls and everything else further than they ever walked in downtown Mount Vernon. But it’s a mindset, it’s just the way people look at things. And I was—I was in, uh, retail for, well, from the age of fourteen to the age of twenty-two: for eight years. I saw a lot of changes in the retail market and how it changed. We all want service, but we don’t want to be bothered. It’s hard to put a fine line—that’s a fine line between service and, and “leave me alone.” “Don’t bother me until I’m ready.” Well, okay, what happens if I’m not here when you’re ready? “Well that’s not right!” (laughter)

I mean—I mean, I’ve gone through these scenarios down through my life and br—radio’s the same way. It doesn’t matter, it’s just a different thing; your product’s different, but they want you when they want you. They may not listen to you at all, but if something happens that they want to know about, they turn it on and they expect it instantly. Well, not everything is like that and the way we’re getting—‘cause they can’t afford to do that and I don’t know how long this new technology is going to be able to stay up with what-all people want, they think they want. But anyway, we need—we need people who care. We don’t want a clerk, we want somebody who’s interested in you as a customer. And you don’t find that much any more in today’s world, I’m sorry. And if you find them, that’s an individual, it’s not a training from the business, that’s an individual who likes to help people. We put people up front in stores, on telephone services—teachers—have no business being where they are, ‘cause they don’t like people. And if you don’t like people you should never be in any kind of business that deals with people. Because there’s always people you don’t like, there’s always nasty people, you have to learn to adjust and, just—that’s the way it is. I always said, I gave a lot of credit to being able to get along with people and deal with people was my retail background. Because I got to meet a lot of people, people that would come into the store that I thought were dirt-poor, the most prominent person in the town, just ‘cause they didn’t dress appropriately to fit my image, but they were—nice people, you know, that’s the other thing. “Well, he’s a big wig, I heard he’s a big wig. He—he won’t talk to ya.” Well no he’s probably not

going to unless you talk to him. You know, so everybody has to give and I think that's the smallness of a community: it will work that way if everybody is willing to work it. But, if you want to be an individual—then you are getting what you—you don't—you may not want it but that's what you're getting. Neighborhoods, people don't know who lives beside them. I mean we've, we've experienced that here. I mean, people move in, move out, we don't know who they are. I mean, I'm as guilty as they are; I'm not blaming them. But that's the kind—that's what happens—when you isolate yourself, you're in trouble. And a farm community basically doesn't do that. They don't isolate themselves. They are—they stay together in some—mode and that's the way it works. And I think that's why I like Mount Vernon and Knox County. It—are—are everybody friendly here? No, no, they're not all friendly, they're not all nice. I went south, they're friendlier down south then they are here. I couldn't believe that, I didn't think it could get friendlier there. And when I tell people that it—"oh, people are friendly here!" "Well, it's just because of who you are!" No, no, no, no, there are people friendly. But you have to look friendly. You have to have a smile on your face, you have to be interested in people. That's what makes the world. You know—if you want it do be an enjoyable world. Doesn't make the world, the world will go on regardless. It'll go on whether I'm here or not. But those are changes and—and it's a loss, 'cause once it's gone, it's usually gone, and it won't come back. They can try, I'm glad to see they keep trying, but, good luck. Maybe someday they'll be enough people that are sick and tired of big, and they'll want that kind of feeling. 'Cause I know they are people that come to our community from larger communities and say: "ah, that's what I've been looking for." And that's it, yeah.

CW: Um, I'd like to talk about the fair for a second—

RS: Okay.

CW: You mentioned it as being a big part of your, um, time at the radio. Can you talk about the fair and it's place in this community?

RS: I think the fair's an outstanding event. Again, it just typifies everything I was just saying. It's a rural setting, it's not—it's now not as rural as it used to be. Um, you can have animal projects and you don't have to live in the country, uh, it's just a project. But, it's—it's got a festive atmosphere. The ride—carnival rides and things and of course that's sort of been put into background too because you have all of your different, uh, uh—where you—everyone has a big something, you know, like King's Island, and—But, these are just little rides usually, but it's again the community coming together to see what others do. It's interesting to see the animals and see how people raise them. I mean, you know, you talk about food, most people know where food comes from. They don't have a clue and what it takes to raise animals to, uh, livestock and so forth. There's a lot of work involved in that and growing crops. It's, uh—so they get a chance and any—young people, because of 4-H, and we have one of the best 4-H programs in Knox County, it's a lot of young people involved. And again, they work well together, they get along, they have fun, they have a good time, they mix with adults. Adults, I mean they get along, it's just really, really nice that we bring the merchants from down—from our—in Mount Vernon, they come out, local merchants come out and participate so people can

see what they do, what they're, you know, if they're selling this, selling that, and whatever. Lots of food, all kinds of food, unhealthy, but it's food. And, uh, but it's just an atmosphere, it's a pleasant atmosphere. Uh, I just probably met some of the most natural individuals at the fair. People I think who deal with the soil, they're in touch with God. They just—they don't have a clue what's going on, I mean they can't control it, but they just do it. They get frustrated and, you know—young people are lured away from it because they want the easy life. We're all looking for a better easy life, always have, but the fair really gives—you, you see the rural side of, uh—which is—that's what it was all about, was to show the agriculture community, which used to make up probably 50% or more of the community, was agriculture. Well, now it's not, it's very small in comparison now. But, uh, you still want to see what's going on and—and run into people that you haven't seen, haven't seen them for a year, and there they are. And they like to be entertained, so they put on shows, tractor pulls, truck pulls, uh, whatever. It's just—and young people love it, adults like it, they like music, they like—it's just a—it's an atmosphere that we'd all like to have everyday, and you sort of get away. And—but I enjoyed it, I was out there every day for seven—and I got tired, and I got tired of that too, but, uh, it was—but I met so many nice people I could talk to. We didn't say anything, we didn't change the world, but what we did was we existed better in the world. And, uh, it didn't seem to be as much complaining. We do a lot of complaining in this life. We're really never satisfied with what we have. We're always sorry about the past, or we don't know what's the future, we never really hold onto what's right now, and that's all we have, every one of us, that's all we have, no matter what our age is. And I think that when you get down to grassroots, that's what you do, is sort of: "this is the way, I like this, I want to stay this way." But the fair's a wonderful, wonderful event. And then they've tried to, you know, with our Dan Emmett Music and Arts Festival, it's a little more glorified, it's not the rural setting, they do a different—it's a different approach for different people, uh, even though some of the people go to both, but it's a different—a different atmosphere. But it's still a festival, kind of thing, yeah. There'd be some people that go down to the Music and Arts Festival would never be caught at a County Fair. Might go to a State Fair but, uh, not even that. But, it's just—it's just wonderful. I've met so many—young people, that are now adults, have families, I interviewed them all, I've—I've interviewed and I've run into them every once in a while and they'll say: "you don't remember me do you? You interviewed me when I was twelve-years old" Uh, no, I don't. I'm sorry (laughter) I had a guy say to me, he was one of the adults, he said, well, he says, you know, he says: "one thing about you, you never change." And I said: "Well that's nice." He said: "You look the same today as you did when I was a teenager." I said, "well that's wonderful." He said: "No, that means that you, you were old-looking then."

(Laughter)

RS: But that's the kind of corn and stuff we get. We enjoy it: one another's company.

CW: Great. Um, well I think that's all I have, um, is there anything that you felt—

RS: I think I told you more than you, uh, wanted to hear.

CW: No, it's been perfect. It's—you hit on just about everything that we're looking for and, um, I presume it will be a great help in our—

RS: Well, I hope so.

CW:—in the pursuit of our project.

RS: I hope so, 'cause I didn't think I had anything to say, but that—that's why I go into broadcasting, I didn't have anything to say, but I'll talk a lot anyway (laughter) but anyway, no, it's a—it's just—I enjoy broadcasting because I enjoy, as I told you, I enjoy people. I enjoy meeting people, I love seeing people laugh, hopefully they're laughing at something I say not something I do, but, it doesn't matter, as long as they're having a good time. Laughter is better for you than the other anyway, so. Well, it's nice meeting you.

CW: It's been great, great to meet you, and I'm going to turn this off.