

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Professor Robert MacDonald

INTERVIEWER: James M. Denham

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Florida Southern College

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M= James M. Denham ("Mike")

R= Professor Robert MacDonald

M: My name is James M. Denham, and I am here to speak with Robert MacDonald, Professor of Music at Florida Southern College. Today is November 18, 2010. We're here to begin a series of oral interviews with Mr. MacDonald, which will probably last many days. Mr. MacDonald, how are you today?

R: Fine, thank you.

M: What I would like to do first is begin by going through some very early information about your life. Where were you born and who were your parents? What year were you born?

R: I was born in Dillon County, South Carolina. That's the northeast corner, two miles from North Carolina. That two miles cost my father quite a bit of money because as an out-of-state student, I had to pay about twice as much.

M: Once you went to the university?

R: All of the people that I met that were from South Carolina, said: Are you crazy? We all just chose an aunt or uncle's name living in North Carolina. My father was absolutely deadly earnest about his honesty. He had been taught almost to extremes.

M: So you lived in Dillon County, South Carolina. What was the closest town or village to you?

R: The nearest place of any size was Myrtle Beach. It's not far from there.

M: What did your parents do for a living and what kind of a household did you live in?

R: My father was a farmer and he was brought up on a farm. It was a third-generation. His grandfather had come directly from Scotland. The community at

that time was 99 percent Scottish heritage.

M: So your father was actually from Scotland?

R: No, not even his father but his grandfather. And his father had been a farmer there. They had just the one child, my father. One of my father's sayings was that he was sorry that school was so hard on his children because early on in May, he didn't have enough hands to work so we would have to get out of school early and make a deal with our teachers in grammar school or high school as the case may be, and then start working.

M: Now going back to your ancestors from Scotland, that would have been your grandfather, correct, or your great grandfather?

R: My great grandfather.

M: Do you know what area of Scotland he came from?

R: Isle of Skye.

M: Isle of Skye. He would have immigrated to America in the 1700s or 1800s?

R: I'd say early 1800s.

M: And many of the people that lived in your community were also immigrants from the Isle of Skye?

R: From the Isle of Skye. That's why every name was pretty much guaranteed to begin with Mac. At the center of the community, not being a Town Center, was a Presbyterian church.

M: And your mother's family?

R: My mother's family was also of Scottish heritage entirely. Her name was MacQueen. This entire community was a spillover from Scotland County in North Carolina and it was more North Carolina than it was anything else. My father, in order to go to the bank, had to go to a North Carolina town. It was closer.

M: So you lived literally right on the border?

R: Right on the border, two miles from the state line.

M: And were the people in that community very strong Presbyterians, very strong Christian people?

R: Absolutely.

M: You learn very quickly the issue of black and white, right and wrong. Not much gray.

R: Oh, yes, right. It was the epitome of good and evil I guess you would say looking at it later. These two races represented in that cultured community loved each other and were endeared to each other to the extent that the thought of ever having to leave entirely from that kind of arrangement -- this sounds like a rationalization to somebody who doesn't know, indeed the worst part about it turned out to be its best.

M: You mean the black and white issues?

R: Yes.

M: And former slaveholders and emancipated slaves and freedmen who learned how to live together after the Civil War?

R: Yes, absolutely. And that was a deterrent oddly enough, not one of incredible treatment of either race, it was simply that nobody wanted to disturb this pattern that was working so wonderfully.

M: Now, in your community when you were growing up, were there warm, personal relationships between white and black?

R: Absolutely. My earliest playmates were black.

M: What would the ratio of the county be, black and white?

R: I would say probably 40/60.

M: 40/60 white or black?

R: 40 white and 60 black because there were literally the laborers on the farms. I forgot to mention it was an entirely farming community, cotton, tobacco and all of these things. My father regretted the fact that he had to grow tobacco because he was so anti-smoking.

M: Even in those early days?

R: Even in those early days. That was before any reports of cancer or whatever.

M: Now, why was he anti-smoking, did he have a sense that it was health or did he just have a sense that it was just wrong for religious reasons?

R: I think it was literally wrong for religious reasons.

M: Mainly that, okay.

R: And that going hand in hand with the health. That community was extremely what you might call overly virtuous.

By the way, getting back to race, I told you my closest playmates and friends were black. That notwithstanding, the front and back were where you went into the front of the house if you were white, and if you were black, you went into the back. This was true about my playmates and me. Literally, I would say, "I'll see you in a little bit," and I would go in through the front porch and they would go in the back. There was nothing thought about it.

M: It was just the way you did it without any thought about why you did it.

R: It was just the way we were.

M: In those days, there was obviously segregation. Were there stores in the sense of --

R: Little country stores.

M: And there was kind of a certain entrance for black people to use if they went?

R: And then there were cracker barrel circles of friends who in free time, which was very seldom, would sit around the oven.

M: Mainly old guys, right?

R: Yes, right.

M: Was there any miscegenation, mixing of the races, marriage, inner marriage? Was there any inner marriage?

R: Absolutely none.

M: You never even heard of such a thing.

R: I never experienced a person who was 50 percent of a race. Now, in that regard, my mother had eight children. Two died in infancy which was quite expected in those days. Two of them died. I never knew them, I just knew their names.

M: While we're talking about your siblings, why don't we go ahead and go through those. Tell us who each sibling was and their names, including you.

R: The oldest that survived, there were two brothers, Malcolm and John. Malcolm of course is a Scottish first name. And everyone resented it and called him Mac. For two reasons, it was acceptable to call him Mac just because the name was MacDonald. It was years before I really understood what that was. My oldest brother was a medical doctor. He was a great help to my mother. My father used to say Mary's health was bad because we had so many children. And my oldest brother would tell me stories of having been awakened in the night to get up and drive to get the midwife. After that, he went to Philadelphia on a full scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania.

M: So he was born what year?

R: He was the oldest brother.

M: And who were the next siblings?

R: The next two would have been the ones that died. And so the next after that would have been my one sister, Flora.

M: Flora MacDonald.

R: A very famous name.

M: Yes, very, very famous. Did your parents think twice before they named your sister Flora MacDonald or did they have any sense of irony there?

R: Oh, no.

M: Did they name her after Flora MacDonald?

R: Yes. Flora was very well known for one thing, the fact that she went back to Scotland to die. Whereas her husband and two sons –

M: Right.

R: Flora went to Queens College later on. By the way, Queens College was the old Chicora College. Then it became Queens-Chicora. Then it became just Queens. My mother had been a graduate of that, a music graduate in that little town, Red Springs, North Carolina.

And so she went into the Florida music ministry of the church and met there her husband-to-be, who was American heritage, but his father had been a missionary in Rio. So they visited several times. I decided early on that the most beautiful harbor in the world is Rio de Janeiro but I never got to go there. Anyway, they lived at various places but because he was a Presbyterian minister, they were

used to having to move around. After that, within the same 12 months actually, my mother was immediately pregnant again. My brother, Charles, was probably the most widely-known member of the family. He turned out to be a novelist and then a writer of World War II.

M: Charles MacDonald, a very illustrious World War II historian and veteran of D-Day himself, and then went on to be a historian for the U.S. Army History Branch.

R: Exactly. So he even included towards the end a Vietnam history.

M: How much older was he than you? You were about to tell me when you were born I think.

R: I was born in 1930 and he would have been about 1924.

M: Okay. So he was about six years older than you.

R: Approximately, yes. My sister was born within the same 12-month period ahead of him. So the two of them were like twins all the way through school and helped each other a great deal.

Then the next oldest brother was the only one who, praise God, become interested in farming. My father had a creed of that he was like all of his neighbors, fellow farmers, would have been ashamed to admit that any son of theirs would not go into farming too. Why my father didn't think that way, who knows, because he had literally I think a fourth or fifth-grade education. My grandfather, as my father put it: Times were hard and so I told him he had to quit school and drive a plow. That's how he put it.

This brother, Rae, we called him. His name was Alexander MacRae MacDonald. His name was to be a problem all his life because it was not R-A-Y; it was R-A-E. He was the only one that came back after World War II, and everyone assumed that my father had talked him into it. Thank God that was not the case.

After that, Donald was the closest to me. We were Donald and Bobby as I was called. We were four years apart. He was four years older than me. He was born in 1927 or '28. Early on, we became interested in the same things, the same books, the same movies. We were close enough in age movies were albeit a rarity because you didn't get to go 12 miles at night to go to a movie. If you went to one, it had to be a family decision. Everybody had to agree to go. I got to see probably quite a few films a little earlier than I should have, but at least they were not nearly as scary for youngsters then as they now are.

M: Tell me about the family farm. How many acres did your father farm and what kind of crops besides tobacco were there?

R: It would be embarrassing if I didn't give up those numbers but I would say there was about up into the mid hundreds, three or four hundred acres. There were actually three farms. They would have to drive from one to the other and they accumulated over the years.

M: Did you have to sharecrop, was it a sharecrop situation?

R: During his time, sharecropping became a lot more popular and that was the first time I noticed that you could have white people working for white people. Color was such a self-understood thing.

I meant to tell you something about my mother's substitute. As I said, she had failing health attributed to having so many children in such a close time to some degree. So there was a black lady who was my nurse. Nursing included the wholesomely of nursing, not bottles but nursing. And this comes as a surprise to most people that there would be that amount of --

M: So wet-nursing.

R: Wet-nursing, absolutely. In any case, she was my alternate mother for a long time growing up. I must throw in some information I haven't thought of more than two times in my life. I asked her one day when we were playing in the sand why the insides of her hands and the insides of her feet were so much lighter than the others. She told me that a long time ago, they had announced that all the water was going to dry up in all the ponds and rivers, and they gave them a deadline of when you had to go, and my black nurse didn't learn until the very end. She got there and there was just a little bit at the bottom in the clay and she could pat her hands and the bottom of her feet and managed to get that part white. That's a racial --

M: So the other part of her body remained dirty, right?

R: Right.

M: The soles of her feet were white and her hands were clean.

R: None of that was in any way but positive received by me.

M: So you obviously worked really hard when you were a kid on the farm.

R: Yes.

M: What were you responsible to do?

R: We had to plow. And of course until World War II, there was no plowing with

a tractor. It was old mules, and we knew the mules by first name and the horses. And that was all in the barn right behind the house. Many is a time I remember hearing the braying of the horses. I never did figure out what caused them to bray or what they were trying to accomplish with that.

But the consciousness of the farm was so important. My father was laughed at by his colleagues for not making us work harder. They never thought that he worked us hard enough. I'll tell it this way: When I got to high school, there was a 4H Club for the first time. You had to have a project. So I remember going home to my father that day and saying, "Dad, we got to have a project, what could I do?" He said, "Well, I think you'll be doing it in just a few minutes. Get dressed. You're going to be plowing the corn. So I'll let you mark off an acre of the corn and you say you were plowing that for your project." It was an interesting twist.

M: Who was the hardest worker in your family when it came to all the chores and who were the ones that were the slackers?

R: That's funny.

M: Could you say that?

R: Charles and Malcolm were both very – now, by brother, Rae, funny that that should be brought out. Some of us brothers thought he was an artist at slipping off. He was very sedate. And he would borrow the car and take off. But he had paid one of his hands to do the milking and the feeding of the livestock and my father never, never grasped that, Rae was the virtuous one. He never either admitted to himself or never realized that he was the gay blade who would go out nightly if he got his work taken care of.

M: What influences in your childhood directed you towards the arts, music, that kind of thing and also, your other brothers, both writers. What was it in your family do you think that nurtured that kind of approach?

R: Well, to answer passively, no one ridicules the arts in our family.

M: Like you might find in some other families in other socioeconomic groups.

R: Yes. And there was an in-between stage that was approved but not generally known to everyone. And that was if it was a religious project, if it had to do with a religion, that was okay.

So that leads me into the fact that we had an upright piano. My father had to agree to his future father-in-law that he would get my mother a piano if he said yes to the marriage.

M: So obviously she had that towards her?

R: Yes. She had been a piano major in college, Flora MacDonald College by the way; it was named after the heroine.

M: So she had actually been to college?

R: Oh, yes, she had graduated.

M: We need to go back to that a little bit and tell us a little about your mother. When was your mother born and what kind of background did she have?

R: I did my homework on that. She was born in 1893 and died in 1978, which meant she was 85 which was considered very old in those days.

M: So she actually brought that kind of interest into the family and obviously relayed that to the children?

R: Well, I actually heard the piano being played, which is so essential later on. I got to know many a parent who would bring his or her -- in and say: I don't know what's the matter, that young one doesn't want to practice. And I began to ask if anyone else of their generation, if their mother or their father played the piano. Oh, no.

M: It's like well, how come we don't want to read, well, I don't read myself so why should they want to read magazines or books.

R: Why shouldn't they in this case. Well, anyway, she always professed not to be able to teach the piano because when I found myself at the piano later on, everyone assumed that she had been an influence. The only thing of influence she was there was that my father would have her to play the piano so nice, the sort of pop music of that time, because he enjoyed that. He would straddle the long piano bench and turn the pages for her to play the piano. So I would get to hear music that way. It was not profound music but it was music.

M: So were these songs that were on the radio? Did you have a radio?

R: We had a radio, yes. That became an important part of my life because we got to hear the concert on Sunday afternoon, you know, the Philharmonic, and the Lux Radio Theater and all that. I would hear my mother playing in church on Sundays and then at home practicing.

I just remember figuring out things on my own. There was no one to teach the piano until I was 12 or 13 in the little school that was the high school 12 miles away. The only one who was musical in that town had a scholarship to London and her father became ill and she was called back to look after him. For that

reason, I had instruction but it was very late. I was 12 or 13.

M: Now did you pick it up on your own?

R: Very much. I was playing by ear.

M: So you had a real talent for that and you were able to pick it up?

R: Yes.

M: Were there any other instruments in your family?

R: Yes, well, there had been. My grandfather's generation, he had played the fiddle. They never called it a violin, they called it a fiddle. I remember that old violin. And for good luck, it had a snake's rattlers put into the slits on the case of it.

M: Back then, were there bluegrass groups and bands that would play around at various times at gatherings?

R: There probably were but we had less opportunity to do that out in the country as we were. But my father's father had been quite an entertainer to play for the dancing. Square dancing was very much instilled to my brothers from my mother's and father's time.

I will never forget the one trip we made to Scotland. My mother at dusk went straight to bed. She was tired of traveling. My father went with me to a dance we happened to find.

M: What year was that?

R: That was maybe '67 or '68. And he was the sensation of that evening because he was in his 70s. As they call it, he was light of foot.

M: He was dancing.

R: Oh, yes. He could get around that floor like crazy.

M: So is that the first time you ever saw your father dance?

R: No, no. I had seen him in the community. The church being the center of everything, there was also a school at one point connected with that service long before county schools had come in. Before busing came, everybody walked from the farm or whatever or rode a horse. But my mother had been the person who played for any kind of presentation. You might be interested to know though, we had one annual ceremonious occasion per year at that little church

and it was called the In-Gathering.

M: The In-Gathering?

R: Right. That meant that when the cotton crop was finished and the first bales had come in, each farmer would take a certain number of the bales that he felt he could donate and have them sell, one Saturday designated in November because of the crop being finished was dedicated to the In-Gathering. That meant picnic-style on these bales turned on their side with cloths over them to make the tables.

M: Cotton bales?

R: Cotton bales, uh-huh. So these ladies would come with food they had brought from home and put it there.

M: How many people would participate in those events?

R: Actually a hundred or two, because anybody who was from there, all that family, and people managed to because the food was so good. I was so persnickety about my eating food that I didn't want to eat anything that anyone else had made but my mother. But each time, I would go in the kitchen in time before it was transported to the church and I would notice what utensils or what plates they were in so I could get to the right one.

M: Do you remember was that also a time for political discussions or speeches?

R: Only one, which was the World War II. World War II of course began December 7, 1941. I remember that date very well and what we were all doing. We were on a little trip to kinfolks in Virginia and we stopped at a grocery store somewhere and my brother and my father had heard a radio broadcast. I remember him coming to the car and saying: Mary, guess what. Hitler's troops have moved in and the war has started. And I had no clue what all of that meant.

M: And you would have been about 12 years old at that time?

R: Right, yes, early teens. And if the war had lasted about three or four months longer, I would have been drafted, the fifth member of the family. My four older brothers were all in places of combat in the military.

M: And you were the youngest brother?

R: I was the youngest brother at home hoping against hope that we could keep going. I had a little newsletter that I decided to build up through the church. The community all knew each other and were kin to each other and so all the sons and just a few daughters that were in the military were bound together by this

home atmosphere, this family atmosphere.

M: When you were growing up, did you have any relatives or grandparents or even your father's father, what were his political affiliations? Of course, everybody was a Democrat back then. But when was it that you had your first notion of politics or governors or presidential elections or anything like that? When was it that you first became politically aware and what were the circumstances?

R: I must go on record as being basically--for that part of my life--apolitical more than you could imagine because I think that had to do with the rural isolation.

M: Do you remember your father talking about things like allotments or the Triple A, the AAA, Franklin Roosevelt's agricultural programs, anything like that?

R: There probably was.

M: But you just ignored it.

R: I ignored it. I think I was balancing that because each of us had to work on the farm. I think I was running to other sources, music of course. By the way, my father unfortunately had discussions after Sunday dinner. They were usually the local Presbyterian minister was invited because my father was the only one who was willing to keep going with those Sunday invitations for the Littlejohns or church regulars. The others were, oh, well, Mike MacDonald was invited, so he would be the sort of fall guy that always took that.

M: Was that a big feast on Sunday after church?

R: Oh, yes.

M: That was kind of the focal when it came to eating, that's when you really had the --

R: By the way, the newspaper of the time in that part of the world was The *Charlotte Observer*. It was considered a sin to read the newspaper on Sunday. So we would hurry home, run to the mailbox hoping that we would see it. His car wouldn't be there yet. We would run and grab that paper and run upstairs and set it for the afternoon where we would secretly read it.

The other thing you couldn't do on Sunday was go swimming. That was an absolute sin. What in the world initiated that, I have no idea.

M: What about sports, baseball, no playing baseball on Sunday afternoon?

R: What little sports we had in grammar school, forgive me for always dragging it

to me, but I felt sorry for that little guy that I was then. I was very ungifted in sports. I had to stand very often at recess time when they were choosing up softball teams, we called them baseball, I had to put up with seeing that I was the last one and I had to be taken by somebody. I will never forget hearing: We had him the last time. No, you didn't. No, we had him the last time.

M: Okay. Let's go back to high school. Did you have to go way away from the farm to go to high school? Was it like several miles?

R: It was 12 miles.

M: Twelve miles a day?

R: Yes.

M: Every day you had to go 12 miles?

R: Every day. You'd get home about 3:30 or 4:00. So it had a lot to do with what I early on --

M: Obviously you rode in some sort of a vehicle.

R: It was a big yellow bus.

M: You actually had a bus?

R: The County had begun that process. We came from so far away that the townies would ridicule us, Country come to town. And we'd only be in Dillon on Saturday because they had to get the groceries and so forth. Not very many because we grew almost everything, the garden took care of that. Tomato patches, watermelons and all that.

M: What were the subjects in school that you really enjoyed? Were there any subjects that you enjoyed more than others?

R: I loved English and English literature. I never was interested in the comics or those things. My selection of any movies was very different from my friends. For instance, I never wanted to go anywhere to see Betty Grable, it was always Bette Davis. It's interesting we were talking about that just recently because yesterday Rob Tate did a thing on Bette Davis for a club here in town.

M: Your favorite subject was English literature, okay.

R: My un-favorite was algebra. And the only thing I ever flunked in high school was algebra.

M: Did you have a sense in high school at all about what you wanted to do in the future or what you didn't want to do?

R: Uh-huh. A good deal, I thought for sure I was going to be a graphic artist. I was a graphic artist on our school paper. In those days, it was all mimeographed. You had to freehand the illustrations. I was the one who could do that. I would always get out of study hall by saying: I'm going to work on the newspaper, which I should have not been doing because if I'd studied harder in study hall, I would have made better grades. I was always told by my principal: I just can't understand. Flora and Charles and Donald were brilliant students. What happened with you? I was always putting up with that.

M: So you were in high school during World War II?

R: Right.

M: World War II was being fought literally as you were studying English literature and flunking algebra?

R: Yes.

M: So what was it like to be in high school in rural South Carolina while World War II was going on?

R: We were very conscious of the dress code and all these things, the military uniforms. One of the prizes would be if you had some garment from the Army that your older brother or sister had, you could wear that to school. That was really --

M: Yes.

R: I think I already mentioned to you that I had a newsletter going. It was called "Our Boys." No one ever thought it was downgrading to call a man who was 20 years old a boy.

M: Right. Who was that newsletter meant for, who was the audience for that newsletter?

R: The audience in that case was the church community.

M: And the newsletter pertained to various members of the church?

R: Yes. I corresponded with them.

M: What ever happened to all that stuff?

R: My sister made off with a great number of all those things.

M: What did you learn from your brothers, what kind of information did they write you back about what their experiences were? Do you remember if they were ever able to write you back?

R: Yes, they were. It's hard to realize that the only communication with your son or daughter in those days would be if you got a letter directly. It could be six weeks old or eight weeks old; there might come a batch of four or five because the Army couldn't help themselves.

M: So what was your source of information for what was going on, just *The Charlotte Observer*?

R: Yes, primarily the *Charlotte Observer*. We had the funny papers that we followed, Dick Tracy and all these were in there.

M: Was your family visibly shaken by the fact that your other brothers were in the military? Were they talking about them a lot?

R: All the time.

M: A sense of concern?

R: My father was accused within the family and sometimes outside of the family of having one favorite son, and that, of course, was Rae who became the farmer. Although he had never said to him you have to be a farmer, which is probably why it was successful that they farmed together after World War II. My source of information was that gradually, these young men and women themselves would write to me.

R: The word Bobby I hated so much. When I got to Chapel Hill, nobody knew any different, so I was called Bob for the first time. Sometimes it was Robert.

M: So how old were you; were you still in high school in 1945, when the end of World War II came?

R: Yes. I was 15.

M: And you graduated in what year?

R: 1946.

M: So you were actually still in high school at the time your brothers came home?

R: Yes, right.

M: So what was it like when you first saw your brothers after all that time? Was it a sense of exhilaration?

R: Yes. The exhilaration was more on my part than on theirs. I think they were still in the shock of changing back so drastically their lives. But I had no idea of the horrors of war, I only knew that when one of them had a furlough and was home, I dreaded the end of the furlough because I would hear not only my mother crying, my father I would hear crying. And I remember a phrase which I struggle to say, I heard him one afternoon, it was the end of the training in Paris Island, he was in marine basic training, and then left for the South Pacific, and that afternoon, I got home from school and I heard crying out by the windmill. My father was saying: They got my boy. It was a good while before I really understood that.

M: So they got him in the sense that they drafted him but he survived the war?

R: Yes.

M: So he didn't get killed, he was just snatched, he was drafted?

R: I do remember the Sunday morning, that someone seen the deputy sheriff of Dillon County as far as 12 miles away, but suddenly a car drove up and it was the police car and a gentleman had a telegram. How it was sent to him, I don't know why. It was notification that my brother, Charles, was wounded and was being sent back to I think Paris for recuperation. That was not the one that he said they got my boy, but that of course was a very strong concern that came from they didn't know how serious. I don't know how people stood it in those days. We lived without information on each other, you know? Now we know too much instantly.

M: Instant communication.

R: It takes a great deal out of the joy and endearment involved.

M: To know everything that's happened.

R: Yes. Getting back to my preferences during that time, the music, war influenced me from that time. That's why I have that CD, Songs of World War II. I would never play those in high school. I was king of the walk in high school with my music because I could play all of them by ear. I didn't read music yet when I got through high school.

M: In high school, what kind of formats did you play music? Did you play in plays, did you play in concerts?

R: I believe I mentioned that the one piano teacher had to come back home. Her husband had been hurt, and with his father, in the middle of her studies, so she, Rebecca Hensley, she started the only meaningful training. She was allowed to teach in the music room at the high school. You didn't have to go somewhere separate. I looked forward to those lessons. Although, I remember many a time forging my mother's signature on the practice sheet, every week you had to report how much you practiced and your mother had to sign it. It was indecipherable from the real thing.

M: So when Charles returned, he got well. What kind of shape was he in when he got back to the U.S.?

R: He was very lucky that he had no lasting effects from that. He also had the problem that he was footloose and fancy free against his will and lived at home. I remember that I admired him so much at a distance and cried so often about missing him. It was my first experience with an older brother to have him so irritated with me as a teenager. There was one famous time that we graduated from log fires because we had open fireplaces at this old house.

I should mention about the house by the way. My great grandfather had built it. The timber was cut by hand. They would take an entire tree and take the top and the bottom off of it and square it off. I remember when my father renovated the house and remodeled it. World War II was over.

M: The house would have been built before the Civil War probably, right?

R: Oh, yes.

M: Is the house still standing today?

R: It is. Because of those total trees that were used.

M: So the trees actually were in the ground and then they built the house using the trees?

R: No, my great grandfather ran it on his sawmill. It was within shouting distance of the house where we lived. I remember so well the sawmill and the grinding sound.

M: Did you actually know your grandfather?

R: No. I knew my maternal grandfather.

M: So as you near your graduation day and your brother is coming home from Germany, what kind of shape was he in when he got home?

R: Physically he was fine but it was many years before I realized how depressed he was. Yet within that time, he wrote *Company Commander*, the book. He sat with the typewriter, which was a little portable, he was so disciplined, had so much self-discipline, he wrote that thing within about five months.

M: After he got back?

R: Yes.

M: What was his thinking in terms of a career, journalism?

R: Right.

M: Was he able to go to college on the GI Bill or anything like that?

R: It was before the GI Bill. Of course, he was the next to the oldest of the sons. The tradition of the family was the Presbyterian college in Clinton.

M: Clinton, PC?

R: Yes. I think he taught one semester when he got out of the Army. But he had majored in journalism. For whatever it was worth in that small college, he got a good background. We all got a good language background because language was taught mercilessly as he'd probably remember too.

M: Again, some more thoughts on Charles?

R: There was an incident I have to tell you about. I started to tell you we had open fireplaces. But the one not-open fireplace was a heater, a coal heater, and it had a coal pile in each yard of the farms. That was the first time you got into anything other than the logs which were cut by the hands, the employees. Anyway, Charles had gone out, it was a rainy day, Charles had gone out and gotten the coal in the coal bucket and came back. It was a Sunday. We all had been to church so I had on my little checked suit, you know, the only suit that I had. And I was sitting, reading something from Charles. We were all just waiting for him to pull it out of the typewriter practically, reading it. I don't know how he survived that. I made some remark that came out the wrong way about it. It was something that was misunderstood entirely. Although I'm told in those days I had a rather audacious idea of what you could say and what you couldn't say. He was putting the coal into the heater, the wet coal with all the black soot and stuff connected with it. We were fighting by then. I made some remark like: But at least I'm not making money off my war experiences. Can you imagine that? He turned and in one gesture as he turned, he landed that entire bucket of wet coals into my lap onto my only suit. And I deserved of course everything. When my father found out about it, I thought he was the one who was going to kill me that I

would dare to say that to my older brother, the audacity.

M: Your other brother, Donald?

R: He was the next in line after me. We had some of the worst fights of all of course too because we knew each other entirely too well. Then we ended up at Chapel Hill together. He had been in the Navy B12 program, which was a study program for GIs you had to graduate from. You went to Westside Naval Base in or near Chicago.

M: Camp Douglas?

R: Great Lakes. From there he had won some sort of a scholarship which he could use at, among other places, Chapel Hill. At that point, I was supposed to go to college at the same Presbyterian college where all the others had gone. But they had no music department. Seeing the opportunity for me to be "Looked after" by an older brother, my father and mother conceded very readily that I could go to Chapel Hill to school. Also, we could hitchhike from Chapel Hill. That was close enough. We weren't worried about hitchhiking, you know, that was absolutely --

M: Everybody did it, no problems.

R: Never thought of the danger of it. One time when I was 15, the first piano concert from a professional, it was played by a guy named Jose Iturbi; he was in Columbia. A friend of mine in high school who liked music hitchhiked all the way to Columbia and had to hitchhike that night at the end of the concert at 11:00, got in at 4:30 a.m. Can you imagine what my mother must have been going through at that point?

Getting back to Donald at Chapel Hill, nothing would do but we roomed together. Fate must have decided that because there were some ex-GIs there where everybody had some sort of older uniform jacket. And they had taken up all the rooms. So we got a room in a little town, Carrboro, which was about a good four or five miles away from the center of Chapel Hill. We had to hitchhike every time. Can you imagine? Both of us had 8:00 classes. We were out in the rain and whatever God decided to send to us, snow or whatever, and we were out in it. If somebody cut a class when I first started teaching and didn't have a damn good reason, I would tell them this story of how I managed to finish a course in Chapel Hill that started at 8:00 and all that.

But we did room together. That was fortunately near the music building so I could stay late at night. Donald became very well known immediately. He was elected to be editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* and I was Donald MacDonald's brother whether my ego managed it well or not.

Looking back, I was damn lucky. That meant that he graduated earlier than I did. We had a lot of the same friends in common. His first job was in *The Charlotte News* in Charlotte, which as you maybe know is an evening paper, a little bit more in this direction. He had great success with that. I would come to visit him there. It was a sensation because by then I had taught myself to play jazz pretty much, not real jazz but pop tunes of the time, and he would help me pay my transportation to Charlotte if he would have a party and I could play for them. People danced to live music back then, probably because there was no CD player around.

Our knowledge of each other continued that way. I must say that it would move as far away as Scotland where he and I were married on the very same day but I married in Vienna and he married in Charlotte. He had started by then Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. So I was back and forth there several times of course. Very interesting people; the Scots' part was astonishing for most of the real Scots that were coming to visit, when they heard all of the North Carolina and South Carolina accents. Of course, I visited him in Scotland when he moved there.

M: You were saying about your family home, there was actually a name for your family home that you grew up in?

R: It's Killigrey, and it was a Scottish name. I can spell it even but I'm not sure if it has a second meaning. We were also conscious of the Scottish connection-- Chuck MacDonald, who upgraded or updated it by being there and then marrying a Scottish girl.

M: Did Donald study Scottish history or did he study Scottish folklore? Was that something that he had an inkling for even before he went to college?

R: He did. Through his job in the news, he had various connections and he had some that are international connections for Britain starting out in London and then on his own, he decided on the Scottish. I know what it was; the Scottish heritage had interested him from the beginning. He had learned so much more than I realized at the time about Scotland that it was only natural then to live there.

M: How many years was he with *The Charlotte News*?

R: Probably seven or eight years.

M: So through that newspaper, he gained international contacts.

R: Yes. He had the contacts through sort of a literary newspaper called *The Weekly Scotsman*, which was published in Edinburgh. That moved him to Edinburgh from London. Of course, his connection, he was back and forth to the

islands because he knew the Isle of Skye was our ancestral home. The Island of Lewis produced Owen, Dan MacLeod, who along with her sister, the MacLeod sisters were famous in the entertainment world. They sang duos in Gaelic.

M: Can you spell the name of your home?

R: Yes. K-I-L-L-I-G-R-E-Y.

M: And that's Gaelic?

R: Right. There's really another meaning but I've forgot it. The first time that I was able to go to Scotland, I hitchhiked with a friend of mine from Vienna. I had a summer job. I played in a bar. Let's talk about some of my jobs, can I do that?

M: One of the incidents you recall fondly was when you were at Chapel Hill, a trip that you took with your brother to Cuba. How did that all happen? How was it that you could both afford to go to Cuba and what were the circumstances?

R: That we knew anything about it and all was thanks to Donald, who during his Navy time, had been stationed very briefly there. He had done a lot of learning about Cuba from the bedside. He was always sort of our sexist in residence. My parents always thought, and this included when I was in Chapel Hill then, they always thought it was perfectly safe for me and all right that Bobby was learning these things because he was going to be with Donald. But it was from Donald I learned all the things I shouldn't have known about. We started out hitchhiking and we sometimes had some awful fights. I remember one time somewhere in lower South Carolina, we were on two different sides of the road and we swore to each other each was going to take whatever ride stopped.

M: And the other one wouldn't?

R: In the other direction. We were saving our money. We had heard that it was \$90 round trip, Cuban Airlines from Key West.

M: So you were going to hitchhike all the way to Key West?

R: We did.

M: You hitchhiked from Dillon, South Carolina all the way to Key West, Florida?

R: From Chapel Hill.

M: From Chapel Hill all the way to Key West. Well, that would have been more exciting than Cuba probably.

R: Especially when I realized that one of them was a quite attractive young girl whom Donald immediately enticed into the back seat and made me drive. I better stop telling you things about Donald.

M: So was it always the case that you would be picked up together and you always stayed together?

R: Yes. And by the way, not long ago, I realized that he loved the idea of keeping me as naïve as possible. If I learned early on if I had a few little adventures of my own, to not even tell him because he didn't find them credible at all. He was the one who invented sex. From Key West, I would have loved to have seen the airplane. It must have had seats for four or something.

M: So you actually made it to Key West?

R: Yes, made it to Key West and put the \$90 and got the round trip there. He had some connection with a private place he had stayed partially during his Navy days. Quickly on, I wondered why he encouraged me to have projects of my own that didn't involve him because he wanted to go to some of the inside places and the dives.

Prostitution was legal and the fact that it was legal is probably the reason he didn't die of some horrible disease because government inspections were required of all the young women. I probably told you this because I think I remember your laugh, but he told me I'm on my way to the first one of these warehouses, very elaborate rooms and buildings, wonderful old residences right in the center of town, and we got there and he remembered they had a grand piano. He said: There's the piano and I'm going upstairs. And with that, he disappeared with the prettiest one that was sitting around. They came and clustered around the piano between jobs. I distinctly remember, this is probably not a good part for publication, I distinctly remember this one girl who early on got a kick out of seeing how much she could distract me from my playing. She with the hands would travel to provocative places and me playing Gershwin. They were so impressed through me with him in every way, not only the little girls that he loved, I have no idea how many he went through in one night, anyway, but I furnished the background music for all of it.

Later on, when I had these two lieutenant friends that were with me, we were mustered out at the same time from Cocoa Beach, the Air Force, we decided to spend our mustering out pay in Havana because I could tell them all the ropes. One of the favorite ways to make money was that they would have demonstrations where you didn't partake yourself. It so happened that I knew both of my friends were virginal and I wasn't going to try to change their lives for them. I hadn't had enough experience myself to do much changing. But the three of us went to this elaborate house and were treated royally. Of course, many times we could take part too, but we always held off. We did go to one rum

distillery. That's the one thing that I can talk about. But the rest of it was very questionable in its cultural, a beautiful city though. I think I said that before. It was so elegant. I would not like to go again. They say it's very depressing. Have you been there?

M: This is the end of today's session. We will begin next time with some more anecdotes of your University of North Carolina years and then your post North Carolina years and graduate school, also your career as a musician. That's where we're going to go next time. This is the end of today, November 18th.