

**Oral History Interview of  
Frank and Ruth Kiel**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall  
October 26, 2017  
Comfort, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*Military Veteran Interviews***

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### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* David Marshall

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Frank and Ruth Kiel as they discuss Frank's service as a military pathologist. The two describe what they did after Frank retired from the military, and all the traveling they have done over the years

**Length of Interview:** 01:20:27

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Transcript Page</b>	<b>Time Stamp</b>
Returning from Germany, working for Health Services Command	06	00:01:46
Time spent in the army; later practicing medicine and law	11	00:10:29
Leaving private practice; serving in Saudi Arabia	17	00:20:46
Other major medical issues he encountered	24	00:31:22
Moving to Comfort, Texas; involvement with Pathologists Overseas	31	00:41:58
Training in Madagascar	39	00:51:30
Ruth volunteering at the Comfort Public Library	44	01:01:53
Ruth growing up as a preacher's kid, museums	51	01:11:44

### Keywords

Military, Medicine, diseases, healthcare, Comfort Texas

**David Marshall (DM):**

The date is October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017, and this is David Marshall along with Tai Kreidler interviewing Frank and Ruth Kiel at their home near Comfort, Texas. What would call this area? Is it just the countryside near Comfort or?

**Ruth Kiel (RK):**

Yes.

DM:

Okay.

**Frank Kiel (FK):**

It's a census designated place.

DM:

A census designated place?

FK:

Yes. You come from a census designated place at Canyon Lake, but it's not incorporated. We're not incorporated, but the census bureau has their boundaries and data.

DM:

Oh. Okay.

FK:

So you're in the Comfort area. Comfort place.

DM:

Okay. Okay. And it's a nice spot. It's kind of—there are other houses around here, but a bit isolated just enough where you can enjoy the natural beauty, and I bet you have a lot of deer around here.

RK:

Yes, we do.

DM:

Well anyway let's get—

RK:

The grandchildren go hunting.

DM:

Oh, really? Well let's get to some of the questions. We were talking last time about your stay in Germany and you had—you were in—you were already a full colonel. You had a battalion.

FK:

No, I had a brigade.

DM:

A brigade. Okay. I'm sorry. Yeah. And so we talked about that a little bit. We talked about your trip into Eastern Europe. I can't remember exactly where the medical conference was that you attended.

FK:

Two of them. Budapest and Holla.

DM:

Budapest. Okay. That's right. That's right. Let's get back home from Germany. We covered that pretty well, I think, so what was next in your career? You still had about five years left before you retired from the army.

FK:

There was a new structure created in 1973 to take care of army health, and Surgeon Neal was a general and put in charge as commanding general and he needed to build up a staff, and I was part of that buildup of a staff. I was the pathology consultant, but in the absence of a radiology consultant and in the absence of a nuclear medicine consultant, I picked up those jobs.

DM:

Oh my. Did they pay you triple? [Laughs]

FK:

That doesn't—

DM:

Doesn't work that way?

FK:

You don't get bonuses in the army.

DM:

[Laughs] What was the name of the facility?

FK:

Health Services Command.

DM:

Command, okay.

FK:

And it took care of all of North America, plus Panama.

DM:

Okay, and so how long were you in that position?

FK:

Five years.

DM:

Oh okay. That was right up to requirement then. Is that correct?

FK:

I retired from the Health Services Command.

DM:

Okay. Can you tell me some of the highlights of those years? Some of your experiences there?

RK:

Well he was supposed to visit every medical facility in the US Army. So he travelled a lot. Occasionally, I went with him, so we saw a lot of the United States, plus he was away in Alaska.

FK:

I conferred that part of the role to show that the command was interested in who was doing the real service and so we went to big hospitals, sure. And we went to little places like Umatilla or \_\_\_\_\_ [00:04:27] up in Oregon. And I visited a brand new captain, and his wife and baby.

RK:

Brand new baby.

FK:

They were all alone. It's pretty—they were chop chop and whether they wanted a full colonel to visit them or not, we didn't stay long. But what she remembers—

RK:

Oh, I felt so sorry for that wife. I mean, you are supposed to do things as an army wife. There are things you are supposed to do and if the colonel comes, you should entertain him. Their quarters were right next to the cannon that went off for retreat.

FK:

Every retreat at five o'clock.

RK:

At five o'clock the cannon goes off. In the morning, it goes off again and there they are with a brand new baby, and the colonel's coming to visit, and she is supposed to entertain, and my sympathies were with her.

DM:

Was she stressed? Was she visibly stressed?

RK:

She handled it well.

DM:

Oh good. Well how many people like this, or how many facilities did y'all visit? And were you along the whole time, Ruth?

RK:

Not always. I went on a lot of them, but not all of them.

DM:

Okay. Well about how many did you—I mean, all across the United States, Alaska, and Hawaii.

FK:

About a hundred and fifty.

DM:

Oh really?



FK:

I think that's right. We picked up the canals and about a half way in that career, around '77. That's Gorgas Army Hospital in the canals. I think the most remote I ever went to was Johnston Island in the Pacific, which is where we store meat and chemical munitions.

DM:

Oh really?

FK:

Great job. One contract civilian doctor. Not everybody was on active duty. I made a point of going to the army deputies, which were civilian run, but they're part of the big picture.

DM:

Right. What did you find? Did you find mostly that these were well managed or did you have to make some tough decisions about some changes at some of these locations?

FK:

I don't recall recommending anybody be discharged.

DM:

Okay.

RK:

But you closed the laboratories.

FK:

That's a different question. There was a real organization that goes with and a big system and I did close several laboratories and combined them with the medical center.

DM:

Were you central—oh okay. Okay. So all of those duties, those local duties, were brought to one center.

FK:

Five centers.

DM:

Into five centers. Okay. Yeah.

FK:

But it was interesting.

DM:

That's just another facet of this multifaceted career that you had. We were talking about this in August. About all of the different things that you were involved in, including the Himalayan bear [Laughs] episode. Oh yeah.

RK:

[Laughs] He's down there.

FK:

That's research and development.

DM:

Yeah, but see, just all of the different facets. That's amazing.

FK:

That's what the job is depending on. Certainly, outside traditional medicine.

DM:

It sounds like never a dull moment. Just never a rut. You're always involved in something else.

FK:

Hope so.

DM:

And even this five years, if you're travelling around the country, you're not just stuck in an office all day, you're out there really—

RK:

He tried to combine them as much as possible.

DM:

I see.

RK:

When we went to El Paso, I forget where else you went after that, and we—

FK:

Went up to the—

RK:

Is that when we went to Denver also?

FK:

The proving grounds.

RK:

Um-hm.

FK:

Well that's an old general life for the need to take care of the troops, and that was part of my role to go out and see the troops and see if they had problems or see if we could help them.

DM:

But apparently, you didn't see any problems big enough for a shutdown. Were there other problems that you did see, but they just didn't require closing a facility?

FK:

No, I didn't close any facility. I didn't have that power.

DM:

But did you have any—did you see any problems or was it mostly a successful program that you found?

FK:

I thought Health Services Command was a great command.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

We unified the medical service. Much of it was split into army commands and sort of unified it as a medical command.

DM:

Okay. Well when you came to the point—the decision of retirement, 1978, how many years did you have in the army at that time?

FK:

Twenty-four.

DM:

Twenty-four years. Okay.

FK:

Now, for the medical corps, you get credit for the four years of medical school, so I had twenty-eight for many purposes.

DM:

Okay. Well that's a lot of years in the army, but was there a particular reason? Were you ready to go into private practice or do something else or what was the—

FK:

Had to restate that. One of the—not mantras, but one of the rumors is that old army doctors can't cut the mustard in civilian practice and I wanted to challenge that.

DM:

Oh okay.

FK:

So we got a job in the Houston market, which is pretty competitive civilian medicine. I think we did all right.

DM:

Okay. So—

FK:

It's a good practice in medicine and I fitted in and refreshed my knowledge, which was twenty years old. I caught up pretty quick.

DM:

Good. Okay.

RK:

You were able to use your law degree also.

DM:

Oh really? In private practice?

RK:

In private practice.

DM:

How did that come together?

FK:

How did that come to be?

RK:

Oh. Somebody was being sued.

FK:

Oh, yeah. I testified on the pathology of unexpected deaths.

DM:

Oh okay.

FK:

When a woman died after being treated for a nosebleed. Not supposed to die after a nosebleed. I didn't find anything in autopsy to really explain it, so the questioning that the deposition was mainly on possibilities. I could tell them about nerve impulses. I think they concluded it was an overdose.

DM:

Oh really?

FK:

Yeah. We—I used the law.

RK:

And that was when abortions were big news. Would they be legal or would they not be legal, and who could do them and you got involved and you wrote a paper about it.

DM:

What was your take on that?

FK:

My particular—I wrote a couple of papers that were of interest to me. One was on abortion clinics. We had some big ones in Houston. They sent the specimen. Biggest specimen to my hospital for examination, and so I wrote a paper on thirteen thousand and some observations. And the reason you do that is you can't tell all the time whether there's an ectopic pregnancy up in the fallopian tubes. And so our rule was to confirm that the pregnancy was in the uterus and not in the tube, and if I couldn't confirm it, then that's sort of a quick response to the attending physician to look a little harder at the tubes.

DM:

Right, right. Okay.

FK:

So we evaluated our papers the other day, and that's the one with the greatest number of observations.

DM:

Observations. How many again did you say?

FK:

Thirteen thousand.

DM:

Thirteen thousand. Golly.

FK:

But they're not very big.

DM:

Well you were continuing your research all the time then.

FK:

I've been able to do some research in every assignment.

DM:

Yeah, and you're still doing research. The research y'all do on local history, for one thing. It's just research all your life. You would think as a—

FK:

That's what the Barber told us the other day. [Laughter] That we know more about Comfort then—

RK:

Well because we were born here—

FK:

We can be objective.

RK:

We can be objective.

DM:

Right, right.

RK:

Comfort's big claim to fame when we moved here and still, really, is that we have the only monument to the union South of the Mason-Dixon Line. Did we talk about that before?

DM:

You did, but you have found some others.

RK:

Yes, we certainly did.

FK:

Five.

RK:

And some of them are right here in Texas.

DM:

Weren't you looking for burials as well?

RK:

Well we've done—he's done other books about that. *The Civil War Dead*.

DM:

I'm talking about union burials in the South, though.

RK:

Oh, union burials in the South. Yeah, we found them in Greenville, Tennessee. That was the first one we found and it was by accident. We had gone to Greenville to visit the first president Johnson's home, and there on the courthouse lawn is this monument with the base of it saying, "In the hour of our country's peril, they were loyal and true," and we went from there to Vanceburg, Kentucky, because now, we were on a mission. And as I took the picture on the courthouse square, the judge came out of the courthouse and told me only monument in the union south of the Mason-Dixon Line so I invited him to come to Comfort and see ours.

DM:

I'm pretty sure—I'm almost definite you can find some union burials in Marshall, Texas too.

RK:

You can find them in Dennison. There are six union soldiers buried around a monument that was put up by the GAR [**Grand Army of the Republic**]. Now, I will not ask you if you know what that—

DM:

Grand Army of the Republic.

RK:

Good for you. I'm surprised how few people know that.

DM:

Really?

RK:

Yeah.

DM:

But anyway, there's another phase of your research, but even when you were in private practice, you've had—

FK:

That was in private practice.

DM:

Yeah, but you took time to do some pretty heavy research there.



FK:

I tested—one other paper that I was pleased with was on Hepatitis positivity or negativity. If you're Hepatitis positive, you can't donate blood, so I tested everyone in the hospital, including the cooks and the administrators and not many people do that. And the nurses. A lot of the nurses were from India and Philippines and tested positive and again, I interpreted results for every—what? Two hundred and fifty employees. I got it on paper. Showed not that they should discharge them, but to just tell them to be careful.

DM:

Right, right. Wow.

RK:

Well, the big disadvantage to it was that unlike the army where you got thirty days leave a year, you didn't get any leave in civilian practice. We got to go to our son's wedding in New Orleans. Got to go to another son's induction into the army reserve. That was probably the last time Frank wore his uniform. We got to go to San Antonio to watch Jeff get his PhD. And I guess we went to your sister's funeral.

FK:

We got to go to her funeral.

RK:

But that was it. Vacation, no.

DM:

Did you have an associate that would fill in?

RK:

No.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

Sort of.

RK:

Well sort of, but—

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FK:

Reluctantly.

RK:

Yeah, reluctantly. There was no vacation.

DM:

Oh my goodness. Well how long—you said, what? You were in this for five years.

RK:

Um-hm, and then one day—

DM:

Was that enough?

RK:

That was enough.

DM:

Oh.

FK:

Tell him what happened next.

DM:

Bob Turns [?] [0:20:55] called. Is that what you mean?

RK:

Uh-huh.

FK:

And he asked if I'd be interested in a position in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia had three or four advantages. It was a chance to serve in an underdeveloped country. Now that it was rich was a separate factor. It was still underdeveloped and the salary was better.

RK:

It was a lot better.

DM:

I can just imagine.

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FK:

And the chance to travel again opened up. They had the regular leave and they had educational leave.

RK:

And home leave.

DM:

Wow.

FK:

And home leave.

RK:

And they paid for you to come home.

DM:

Wow. So the schedule was more flexible. The money was better. It was an adventure. You'd not been to Saudi Arabia at that point, well then you had to go.

FK:

Very few people had been to Saudi Arabia in 1984.

RK:

Well, we had to go to Canada. Both of us had to go to Canada to where this firm was that was getting their personnel. We had to be interviewed to see if both of us—and probably me more than Frank—could handle the different lifestyle there.

DM:

How did you do?

RK:

We did well, and we thoroughly enjoyed the lifestyle there.

DM:

Did you—were you game for this from the start? Let's go to Saudi Arabia.

RK:

Well, it was a real surprise because once again, I heard Frank saying that he volunteered for something without having told me. He hadn't told me about this either and I got the phone call

from this man wanting to know if we could come to Canada on such and such a day and I said something real intelligent like, “Huh?” But we did and we both enjoyed it.

DM:

Can you tell me a bit about it? What were you doing? Pathological work there? Is that what?

FK:

I was in charge of the—clinical laboratory was my title, but we covered all of the laboratory. The surgical, pathology. And we did have a little flexibility. There were about three of us, usually, that handled the microscopic aspect, which is the real hurdle for most people.

RK:

He had gone to—when he found out that we were going there, he went to Rice to take Arabic and we got there and they, the people in the lab, I think all spoke English. Did they not?

FK:

The Philippines and the Indians, yeah.

RK:

Well, and the Saudis.

FK:

And the Saudis. Yeah, they had trained in America.

DM:

So you didn't have much use for the Arabic you picked up?

FK:

That's about right.

DM:

Wow.

RK:

I tried to learn it. They offered classes at the hospital and I tried, but we travelled so much that I would no sooner get started, then we would go off on a trip and we'd get back and I was so far behind that I had to start over again. So, and it really wasn't necessary. When I went shopping downtown, which it was quite possible for me to do, the dealers at the sooks, the stores, spoke enough English that we could communicate.

DM:

Well I'll be. Did you adapt pretty well?

RK:

I thought it was wonderful. I had no problem putting on an Abaya. I did not have to cover my face. That was not required. I was never stopped. I could go anywhere I wanted and I wasn't afraid. I could not drive, but I didn't want to drive. Driving was terrible. There were taxis right outside the living compound. I could go and get a taxi.

DM:

Oh good.

FK:

We had a good international staff. This fellow in Toronto is recruiting from around the world. We had people in the staff from Iceland and Paraguay and India and Pakistan and Egypt. Australia, Sweden. So a good—

DM:

Cosmopolitan.

FK:

Cosmopolitan.

DM:

That in itself is—

FK:

Good term.

DM:

Yeah, that in itself is exciting.

FK:

And she likes that.

DM:

Yeah.

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RK:

Well it's—I guess when we talk about Saudi Arabia, Abdula [?] [0:26:54], of course, that I think of. He was the assistant manager when we got there. Musaid [?] [0:27:00] was the manager. Abdula was so shy. When I'd see him in the hall at the hospital, he would drop his head. He wouldn't even look at me. By the time we left, he was the last person to visit us, and by the time we left, the last thing he said was, "Now you take good care of mom." And he has been here to visit.

DM:

Oh he has? How wonderful.

RK:

His parents were both dead and Frank became a surrogate father for him. He went to an army school of some sort and he won the prize, which was a very nice watch and he gave it to Frank, and he couldn't give something to Frank and not give something to me so he bought a watch for me.

DM:

Wow.

RK:

It was that kind of—the hospitality in that country is unbelievable. The first Sunday that I was there, he rented—Frank rented a car from the hospital and we stopped at a crossroads in the village just to decide whether we would go straight, left, or right, and we were surrounded by the villagers wanting to know if we were all right, did we need help, and would we come home and have tea?

DM:

They were vying for the opportunity to—

RK:

To be helpful.

DM:

To be helpful.

RK:

Hospitality is—it's greater than anywhere we've lived.

DM:

Yeah. That is wonderful. How were things at your work? There was—it was a different situation because you had people from many nations, but did you work together well? Did it click?

FK:

Yes, it did. There's a couple exceptions, but before you leave, Abdula—I have two people I consider prodigies. One is Abdula and he happened to stay in the military. He went through that National Guard and he made Brigadier General eventually.

DM:

Is that right?

FK:

And he's retired. And the other is Liyakat Hawa, who is a smart med chaplain with whom I worked on. He travelled around. HLA and chaos theory [0:29:35] and presentations. He's a—he went to medical school. He's in general practice up in South Hampton.

DM:

Is that right?

FK:

So that was two of the successes.

DM:

Yeah. Can you give me a spelling on his name?

FK:

Hawa?

RK:

H-a-w-a.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

Liyakat is L-i-y-a-k-a-t. Originally from Kenya. And I got interested in Islam over there. That's a natural thing to do. I actually had contacts with some of the descendants of the Wahabi group and worked up the answers for the newspaper quizzes at every Ramadan. That was pretty interesting. And I got—brucellosis is a big disease.

DM:  
Right.

FK:  
They got involved in that. I got to visit the troops again. We kept the patients in the hospital with brucellosis. How did they get it? They were drinking the raw camel milk out at the families. So we'd go out and visit the family, and milk the camel, and test it.

DM:  
And test it?

FK:  
That's a little micro-research.

DM:  
Yeah. Did you have other issues like that? Other medical issues that were widespread problems?

FK:  
Pretty healthy group, really. Cardiac disease, down. Lung disease, down.

DM:  
So what do you attribute that to? Was it the diet?

FK:  
Inheritance, probably. Pretty hearty people. And our particular group, there's two armies that were in Saudi Arabia. One is the regular army that's more urban oriented. I worked for the National Guard, which is more betterment oriented. Pretty hearty group.

DM:  
Tell us then—

FK:  
Our catch man area was I think fifty-thousand. With that many people, you're going to have some strange diseases, but you don't need to know about it. echinococcosis.

DM:  
[Laughs] But it wasn't anything widespread?

FK:  
No.



DM:  
Okay.

FK:  
My biggest paper over there was on Hepatitis being transmitted to the babies, so every mother had a Hepatitis test done the day of delivery and if it were positive, then we would immunize the child. That required morning rounds for five years to check on the test results and to see the children got immunized. I thought that was being rather scientific. I think they now immunize all the children. It was an easy solution. Whether they needed it or not.

DM:  
Yeah. Well was there any opposition to that? Were they open to you doing this?

FK:  
I'm not sure they had a choice.

DM:  
What's that?

FK:  
I don't think—they approved it.

DM:  
Okay. Sounds like—

FK:  
It wasn't secret.

DM:  
Yeah. Any other major aspects of your work over there that you would like to comment on?

FK:  
We were particularly interested in peripheral Arabia. A lot of people with this abundantly would go to Europe.

DM:  
Oh. Y'all had been there.

FK:

That's part of it.

RK:

That was part of it.

FK:

But we had a go of visiting around Arabia.

DM:

Oh good.

FK:

And so we went to Dubai and Ammon and Djibouti, which is just across the water. And Jordan.

RK:

Jordan, several times, helped to establish the Arab chapter of the international academy and had a meeting in Saudi Arabia and I could pull out the table cloth that was sent to me by the woman who came from Iraq, who had never had to wear an Abaya. Abaya, meaning the black robe that I wore anytime I went outside the compound. The next meeting was supposed to be in Mosul.

FK:

That was split, right?.

RK:

Well it was split. They couldn't decide.

FK:

Between—no. It was half. First half was in Baghdad. Second half was Mosul.

RK:

Oh. I thought they couldn't make up their minds.

FK:

No. They made up their minds. They split it.

RK:

Okay.

FK:

We didn't—that did not result in a paper, but it did result in a presentation.

DM:

Oh, is that right?

FK:

Peripheral Arabia. I think that made our music top three. Didn't it? Top five? In the memoir, we have a—in the epilogue, we have the top five.

DM:

Oh yeah.

FK:

Music. One of them was the drums in Yemen.

RK:

Yemen. Yemen.

FK:

The groom was waiting for the bride to come with her party and he was banging the drums. So that's up there along with the Wagner.

DM:

Right. [Laughter]

FK:

It was the third project, probably.

DM:

Yeah.

RK:

Well there was no Arabic music other than the drums. Occasionally, the Edinburgh Quartet, I remember, came to one of the embassies. There were different groups came from Europe to the different embassies, where they were permitted to perform, but there was no—there's no public. At that time, there was no public performance of western music.

FK:

So we went. Our trips often involved a music festival, so we got our—what's it called? Fix.

RK:

We got our fix.

DM:

You got your fix.

RK:

Right. And we tried, when we left the country, we tried to fly out on British Airways because you could get a drink once you got out of Saudi Arabia. Other than that, there was no alcohol. You promised that you would not drink alcoholic beverages when you went into the country and we didn't.

FK:

There was some cheating.

DM:

Did you see some bootlegging?

RK:

Well we found out after we'd been there for four years, at least, we found out that a lot of our friends were making their own wine. We didn't and we didn't know they did. Now, once they started to share, we didn't say no thank you, but—

DM:

Well you must've really enjoyed this because you were there six years, right?

RK:

Um-hm. We did enjoy it.

DM:

Great experience.

RK:

It was—the country is so beautiful. When we came back, the first place we went—after we came back here in 1990, first place we went was Big Bend and we had seen the sand dunes, and we had seen the sand mountain, and we weren't as impressed as we were supposed to be. There's nothing like Ammon, that just—and Jordan. Frank got a flat tire in Jordan because as we were driving from Ammon down to Petra or Kerak, I forget, I was oohing and awing. "Look, look, look." And he did look and he went up over the curb in the rental car and got a flat tire and could not find the spare tire, and another car came up from the other direction. Two young men got out.

“Can we help you?”, “Well, can you find this tire?”, “Sure.” They found the tire. They put the tire on. Frank said, “Can we pay you for this?”, “No, have a good time in Jordan.”

DM:

Oh, how nice.

RK:

They had gone to school in Biloxi. English was perfect.

DM:

Wow.

RK:

Help was appreciated.

DM:

Did you attempt to go into Israel from Jordan?

RK:

No.

DM:

Because that's been a problem at times.

RK:

No. You cannot. You couldn't get back in.

FK:

We saw it. We went up on Mount Nebo.

DM:

You looked across?

FK:

And we looked across the lake.

DM:

Yeah.

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FK:

Have you been to Mount Nebo?

DM:

I've been to Israel and I've been down the Jordan Valley, but I haven't been up on the Mount. No.

FK:

We could not get back into Saudi Arabia if we had gone.

DM:

Right. The contention used to be a bit of an issue. Not as much of an issue, but there is a bit if you go from Israel to Jordan or Egypt. If you want to avoid the complications, you don't do that. So, but it was pretty much a prohibition then, huh?

RK:

It was a prohibition. Right. And—

FK:

Well there are other questions..

RK:

What are the other questions? All right.

DM:

So you spent your six years here—there, was there anything else you wanted to add about that experience?

RK:

No. I get very annoyed with the people who are so anti-Arab.

DM:

Oh yeah. It's been my experience, too, in Muslim countries that they're always friendly to me. They're always out of the way friendly.

RK:

Yes. Exactly.

DM:

So I have the same issue with that. It bothers me to hear the anti, but anyway, then you came

back and that's when you came to Comfort, right? I want to know how it is that you came to Comfort, Texas, of all places in the world that you had been and seen. What drew you here?

FK:

You have the timeline on that.

DM:

Wasn't that ninety?

RK:

Okay. That was 1990. We bought this land in seventy—

FK:

Back to Doug's double header.

RK:

In 1975, Doug was playing—Doug is the youngest child and he had—he went to Cole High School on Fort Sam and he had a double header in Boerne. B-o-e-r-n-e. And they won the first game and to go back to Fort Sam and then come back, it would—we'd no sooner get to Fort Sam, then we'd have to turn around and come back. So we went for a ride and it looked so much like western Pennsylvania that we came out—our middle son, David, and I came out and got a real estate agent and this was her favorite piece of property. So we bought it as a weekend retreat and I'm glad we bought it then because we couldn't afford to buy it now.

DM:

Oh yeah.

RK:

Skyline Drive was not paved. It was a caliche road. The mansion that you came—I assume you came by the mansion?

DM:

Yes, up on the hill.

RK:

Right. Up on the hill. That was not there.

DM:

I can just imagine the property rates shot up after these were coming in.

RK:

Well there was—Rudy didn't even live next door yet. We were pretty much the only ones here. The people at the corner, if you go out our gate and go left, the people on the corner bought their land at the same time, but that was—

FK:

That's Mill Dam Road.

RK:

Mill Dam Road. Right. So we were pretty much the only ones here and we came out on weekends and then Jeff and Josette, oldest son, were married in '77, and had not finished school yet, so we asked them if they'd like to live here until they finished. Well, she finished and he got his BS in something and went on and got his PhD. So they lived here until 1990, when we came back.

DM:

Okay. Well, that's pretty good. It's nice to have it occupied.

RK:

It was. It was. And we enlarged several times.

FK:

You're in the room. That was it.

DM:

She was telling us this is the original room.

RK:

This room. Right.

DM:

Were these the original windows too?

RK:

No. No. NO.

DM:

So you put a view in.



RK:

Right. As you notice, we don't have drapes anywhere. There's no need.

DM:

No. It's so nice.

RK:

And I think we're safe. I don't think anybody's going to build an apartment complex next door. We know the neighbors.

FK:

Including at the mansion.

RK:

At the mansion. Yeah, which is—the mansion is Stasis Foundation.

DM:

Okay.

RK:

Do you know that?

DM:

No. Unh-uh.

RK:

You can explain that one.

FK:

It's a foundation that's looking forward into organ transplants and how to preserve them, and that's a big futuristic research aspect. That's what they're into with their six hundred and forty acres.

DM:

Okay.

RK:

But they didn't. They weren't the first ones. The first ones—the people that built that place, it was Bill Worth, who owned the quarry that is now Six Flags over Texas. And I don't know who the architect was. We've been through the building since it became Stasis. They did not

participate in life in Comfort. Eventually, they sold it to another family and the other family got divorced, and they sold it to Stasis. So it has evolved, but Bill Worth paved Skyline Drive up to—I think up to the road that goes to what he called the clubhouse. And so the county then paved the rest of it.

DM:

Okay. Well it's really helpful that it's paved. With such a steep grader, you would slip a lot trying to get out.

RK:

Yeah. People still have had wrecks on it.

DM:

Is that right?

RK:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Okay, but it makes for an isolated place back up in there, which is very nice.

RK:

Yes. It is.

DM:

So it's Western Pennsylvania without the snow?

RK:

Right.

DM:

That's good.

RK:

Occasionally, we've had snow, but not often.

FK:

Not like Lubbock.

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DM:

When did you get involved in Pathologists Overseas?

RK:

Oh.

DM:

Was that—

FK:

Shortly after coming here, 1992.

DM:

Ninety-two. Okay. Can you tell me about it?

FK:

It's a group of volunteer pathologists who want to do something different.

DM:

It's all volunteer?

FK:

It's all voluntary. Their first program was in Kenya, where we offered pathology. Surgical pathology service to about fifty hospitals. That's been transferred to another organization, but that's still going on.

DM:

Oh, good.

FK:

The second one was to the island of Saint Lucia, post hurricane. Their incumbent pathologists left for whatever reason and so we filled in for that pathologist.

DM:

Okay. How does—

RK:

For one month at a time.

DM:

A month at a time. That was the case in Kenya, as well?

RK:

Yes.

DM:

One month in Kenya?

RK:

Right.

DM:

Okay. Well that's—

FK:

Saint Lucia now has a little more permanence, I think. We got them through that post hurricane period and post discharge of the pathologists.

DM:

Okay. So pathologists will be there a month and they just have a rotation of pathologists into that position?

FK:

Strictly service type work.

DM:

It sounds like a lot of pathologists participating in this.

RK:

It is.

DM:

Okay. All retired from private practice?

FK:

Prefer them not retired.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

In fact, some of them who were retired, were a little rusty.

DM:

So they're on leave for a month from their practice? Okay.

FK:

And then Nepal came.

DM:

Where in Nepal?

FK:

Kathmandu.

DM:

Oh, you were in Kathmandu?

RK:

No, we were in Patna.

FK:

Do you know Patna?

DM:

I don't.

FK:

It's the sister town across the river from Kathmandu.

DM:

Okay. I've been to Kathmandu, Bakdapur, and up the valley that way, but not Patna.

RK:

Well you wouldn't know that you were in a different city.

DM:

Oh, it's part of it.

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RK:

It's like Kathmandu.

DM:

Oh okay. So again, a month there. So you're in Kenya. You're in Saint Lucia. You're in Kathmandu or near Kathmandu. You've seen totally different situations calling on very different skills.

FK:

And Madagascar came up.

DM:

And Madagascar.

FK:

And that was not a service thing. That was a training program, and it's now service. It's now twenty years old.

DM:

And this is Pathologists Overseas still? It's a training?

RK:

No.

DM:

Oh, it's something else. Okay.

RK:

Well—

FK:

I still give them credit.

RK:

Yeah, sort of it is. Pathologists Overseas—well, were writing the book about it right now. They got a grant. They agreed to try to set up a laboratory in Antananarivo, which is the capital. And they got a grant. Heins Hennagey [?] [0:51:56] and his wife, Alice, came to visit and went to—and liked what they saw and they went to USAID [**United States Agency for International Development**] and they got a grant of—I think it was two hundred thousand dollars for three

years to train three Malagasy physicians in surgical pathology. And Frank was the first one to go so we have pictures of him telling them where to move the furniture and pictures of the original furniture.

FK:

I did more than that.

RK:

Well, you certainly did. You wrote out all their forms.

FK:

I got it organized.

RK:

He got it organized for them.

DM:

Got it organized. Okay. Okay.

RK:

And when we go over there, I don't know what they do with it during the rest of the year, but when we get there, in the office that they turn over, the little room that they turn over to Frank, it's called a consultant's room. They have a framed picture. You can't see it from here. Of him getting the humanitarian award from the College of American Pathologists and that picture shows up every time we go.

DM:

Maybe it's up all the time.

RK:

I can't believe that they have that up all the time, but it's there when we go.

DM:

But you've been drawn back to Madagascar, what? About every year?

RK:

Every year, yeah. Except one when they were having a political crisis and they told us not to come.

DM:

Okay. And now they've got a plague.

RK:

And now they have a plague, yeah. They have an epidemic and it's—schools are closed. They'd had a hundred and ninety-four deaths. Thousands of people have become ill. Red Cross and the World Health Organization have set up stands to provide antibiotics for them.

DM:

What is the plague again?

RK:

Pneumonic plague.

DM:

Pneumonic plague.

FK:

*Yersinia pestis* bacteria. It's treatable.

DM:

You've been around there for twenty years. Have you seen this arise before?

FK:

It's got little caucus [?] [0:54:28].

DM:

It comes and goes.

RK:

But usually it's in the country, and this time it has hit the cities also.

DM:

What other issues? Have you seen—medical issues arise in Madagascar that really demand your attention?

FK:

The practice is heavy on tumors, mainly because those are the things that need diagnostic help. As opposed to America where the hospital rules require everything removed at surgery to be sent to pathology. That's not true in Madagascar. They're selective because it's a cost.



RK:

Pathology is a luxury.

DM:

Right, right. Okay.

FK:

So we see a lot of GYN [**Gynecologic**] tumors, but there's nothing unusual that the volunteers haven't seen somewhere before. I've got a few favorite diseases, but they're not rampant. I like chromomycosis. That's an unusual fungus disease in the skin.

RK:

Well, the grant lasted for three years and there was still a little bit of money left so they said we could keep it and go on and finish it out in the fourth year. That was when Pathologists Overseas stopped sending volunteers every month. They had found a new apartment building and we've been staying in that apartment for—in that building ever since it started in 1999.

FK:

They took on another big project in Ghana. We did not go to that.

RK:

We didn't, but one of our volunteers—

DM:

Oh really?

RK:

Frank trained. Did go. And well the first—during the first three years, well I guess she started in the first year, one of the volunteers set up a schedule of training using Robin's textbook of pathology, which they still have. When Frank got that award, Elsevier had just published their two volume —

FK:

Rosetta—

RK:

Rosai and Ackerman. And I asked them. I sent them a letter and asked them if they would give me a discount and they donated it, which people have been very generous. We have the best library in Madagascar.

DM:

Oh good. Good.

RK:

And we served the whole island. We have—I forget how many.

DM:

Gosh. It's a big island.

RK:

Yes. It is a big island and getting the specimens to the lab is sometimes a problem. They have to pay to send them and we have one hospital that I fuss at them every year.

FK:

Poor Doctor Harrison.

RK:

Poor Doctor Harrison. Doctor Harrison saves his specimens so that he can send them all at once because it's cheaper if you send them all at one time. Now, the fact that they may deteriorate and the fact that it's not going to do the surgeon or the patient much good if it's a month old, and the fact that if he sends twenty cases and some other hospital sends twenty or fifteen or so, the lab gets forty or fifty cases in one day, which is impossible to have a good turnaround time.

FK:

I've mentioned that we take care of the troops in a bunch of different assignments. We do the same thing in Madagascar.

DM:

Is that right?

FK:

We go out and visit the client hospital and when we go to Antsiranana bay.

RK:

Antsiranana Bay.

FK:

She talks the same way she did to you.

RK:

It's Antsiranana Bay.

FK:

We chastise them or command them.

DM:

Yeah, right.

RK:

That's how we decide where we're going to go. I keep a record of all the different hospitals. I keep a record of the cases for each year and which hospitals they came from, so if when we go back there this year, we'll probably do it. Well assuming we go this year. If there's a hospital that last year had sent fifty cases and this year, sent only three, we want to know why and so we will either—well we drive everywhere we go.

FK:

And fly.

RK:

Well, we flew to Berenty, but we don't fly very often.

DM:

Is it easy enough to drive around?

RK:

No, it's not easy, but it's easier than going to airport and getting an air med flight.

DM:

Right, right.

FK:

That's an ongoing project.

DM:

Wow. That is something. That's exciting though. Twenty years.

FK:

Twenty years.

DM:

Nineteen years.

FK:

Two thousand eighteen. That will coincide with a meeting of the association of pathologists of central, south, and east Africa. We got the bid, finally, to hold the meeting in Madagascar.

DM:

Good. That's great.

FK:

People are looking forward to it, I hope.

DM:

Oh yeah.

FK:

And as part of that, we hope to publish a booklet about the history.

DM:

Oh. That's wonderful. Wonderful. How many of your Comfort neighbors run off to Madagascar with you?

RK:

Well, a lot of them know where it is now because in the middle of all this, you asked why we ended up living here. One of the reasons, probably a main reason, was that I wanted to work. I wanted to be a volunteer at the Comfort Public Library.

DM:

Oh yeah. Um-hm. Well I had that on my list, in fact, I wanted to ask you about that. Your volunteer work, your Comfort Heritage Foundation work. You can give us an overview.

FK:

President of both.

DM:

Yeah, wow.

RK:

It—well I just said, our daughter-in-law introduced me to the library and it's—I wish we could

take you in. I don't know. Frank says no, we can't.

DM:

We might have to do that another time.

RK:

We'll do that another time, but I'm sorry you didn't get to see the old bank building, which the Heritage Foundation got it in 2000 and we completely remodeled it, but if you drive through Comfort at all, it looks the same now as it did over a hundred years ago. We've done the research on two of the buildings. Two of the old buildings. The cornerstone on one of them says, "Built by G. O. Mesker and sons. Evansville, Indiana. 1913."

DM:

Wow.

RK:

And that's another interesting project. They had catalogs and their salesmen went around all over the country to show their catalogs and the owner of a building, whether it was an opera house or a fraternal building, fraternal lodge, a small store or a big store, could pick the siding. The aluminum siding that he wanted and the—

FK:

Pediment.

RK:

Pediment and the doorway. The entrance. And they would make it in Evansville and ship it and then a local contractor would build it.

DM:

Wow.

FK:

We had a railroad then.

DM:

Right.

RK:

And Comfort has some of those. It has some buildings that were designed by Alfred Giles. Are you familiar? You know Alfred Giles? Built a lot of—designed a lot of the courthouses in Texas.

A lot of the houses in the King William area. We have some of his buildings here and unlike many towns, Comfort has not covered up its old buildings. We keep them and repurpose them.

DM:

Nice. It's good. It's great to see that effort.

RK:

It is and it runs largely on volunteer help. As Frank told you, we are not incorporated. The Chamber of Commerce has become more organized than it had been before, so they're doing a little bit more, but—

DM:

Well you must have a body of people here in Comfort then that are dedicated to this.

RK:

We do.

DM:

That's great. That's the ingredient that so many communities don't have. There's one or two people interested, but not enough to make a difference.

RK:

The churches and local organizations. The churches seem to all get along. Comfort was settled by free thinkers and that's how we ended up with the monument. They were trying to—a lot of them were trying to get away from being drafted into the Confederate Army and they joined a group of men from Fredericksburg and the Confederates found them at the Nueces River. Anyway, does that answer your question?

DM:

Yeah, and it's kind of interesting to me that you've gotten so interested in the local history here, for somebody who's in different parts of the world, but then also interested in the local history. I find that kind of intriguing and a good thing.

RK:

It is.

DM:

Yeah.

RK:

I mean, we still do other things. Tomorrow, we'll be off to Fort Sam because Frank's been on the board of directors for the army medical museum. If you haven't been there—

DM:

That's something to put on my list?

RK:

That's something to put on your list, definitely.

DM:

Okay. Well you know, we were talking earlier about how multifaceted Frank's career has been and you've been there for all of that, but you had your own multifaceted life. When he was in Vietnam, you went to school and got what? An art degree?

RK:

Oh, I didn't get a degree.

DM:

Okay. Well, you found things out there of interest and pursued them. And then what is the horsemanship that you were involved in? Can you tell me about that? Was that out here?

RK:

No. That started at Fort Sam.

DM:

Oh really? Okay.

RK:

The kids had all gone off to school. I guess we had your father living with us, but maybe not right at first. Anyway, I had the empty nest.

DM:

What time period are we talking?

RK:

Seventy-five. I went to the boots and saddle club and for a while, just rented a horse and went on trail rides, and then someone suggested that there was a horse for sale. And so I bought Chance, who was a Morgan, and started to take riding lessons and did hunter jumper.

DM:

Can you describe that, by the way?

RK:

Hunter jumper? Yeah. You've got different kinds—

FK:

No effort.

RK:

No.

DM:

Hunter jumper.

RK:

You had—you're on a fenced field, of course, and there will be different kinds of jumps set up all around the field, and you have to figure out which ones you're supposed to go over. Some of them are just low and some are high.

FK:

An Olympic event.

DM:

Um-hm. So trail rides weren't exciting enough for you, huh? You had to go jumping.

RK:

Oh. Well, I still liked the trail rides. Fort Sam wasn't as big then as it is now. So there were trail rides of a couple miles. He was a great horse, but he spooked over the strangest things. I mean he would—if I just got him to the jump, I knew he would take me over. Unlike the second horse that I bought who's had her own mind, but he spooked over things like a butterfly.

DM:

That's too bad. One little flaw.

RK:

Yeah. It was a little flaw. Yeah. That was why I went to Russia with my arm in a sling.



DM:

Oh no. How many hands was this horse? Were you way up?

RK:

Well he was big. Yeah. Not real big, but he was a good horse. Frank was going to buy me pearls one year because mine had been stolen [Phone rings 01:09:46]. [Pause in Recording]

DM:

Well go ahead and finish your thought there, first of all. Instead of the pearls—

RK:

Instead of the pearls, I said, “Frank, for that amount of money, I could have a new horse.” So I got a new horse.

DM:

Oh okay. Better horse. Didn't jump at butterflies?

RK:

Different. Different. Very different.

DM:

Is this a pretty big thing here in the Comfort area?

RK:

Oh no. No. No. No. There had been one girl who rode English, but everybody around here goes Western.

DM:

Okay. Had you heard of a polo tradition in this area? Do you know if there's ever been a polo tradition?

RK:

No, I don't. But are you thinking about the man that owns the polo store?

DM:

No.

RK:

The stories?

DM:

No. I don't know about this.

RK:

He belongs to an elephant polo group.

DM:

Elephant polo? Oh my goodness.

RK:

Elephant polo. Right.

DM:

There's a feature.

RK:

If you go into Comfort, you'll see the elephant store.

DM:

Really?

RK:

Which was one of our old buildings. That's the Mesker building that I was talking about.

DM:

Oh okay. No, we've been coming across stories of an earlier polo tradition in different parts of West Texas, in particular, and New Mexico, so I just wondered if you had come across this and this horse owner.

RK:

No.

FK:

I think Boerne had its—

DM:

Boerne did.

FK:

A little tradition.

DM:

Oh. An older tradition or a more recent?

FK:

Older.

DM:

Oh. Have you heard about that, Tai?

FK:

And target shooting, we had—

RK:

Well the *schuetzenverein*.

FK:

Well I was thinking of a man. Tuppen [?] [1:11:36]. He was this traditional shooter down here. Pretty good.

DM:

Well what is this other that you brought up? The PK?

FK:

She's a PK.

DM:

Okay. What is this?

RK:

Preacher's kid.

DM:

Preacher's kid. Okay.

RK:

My dad was a Methodist minister and so, unlike Frank, who lived in Pittsburgh from the time he was eight years old, I moved every three years and so I really don't have any old time friends. And we've discovered that as you move around as much as we have, we have very few long term friends. A few, but once you say hello and how are you and how are the kids, you don't have much in common.

DM:

Well you're probably not going to find many people who've lived in Saudi Arabia and—

RK:

Well—

FK:

Yes, we do.

DM:

Do you really?

FK:

AC.

RK:

AC's son lived in Saudi Arabia.

DM:

But with common experiences like you because your experiences have been very uncommon, you know?

RK:

Yeah, they have.

DM:

And at least your childhood seems like it prepared you for the moving around that y'all have done in later life.

RK:

It did, and you know, we listen to our children and they enjoyed the army life. David wrote an essay one time about being the new kid in class and fortunately, they all became sufficiently involved in sports that when they moved to a new school, they had an entrée.

DM:

Okay. Yes, right. So that was helpful. Put them into a—probably kind of a more visible group in that school.

RK:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. All right well I really don't have any more questions. If y'all have anything else that you would like to add. I don't know what all to ask about, but we've covered quite a few facets of your lives.

FK:

When you come back, we'll have two things to show you.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

We're—at the foundry at this time is our plaque to go on the side of the wall out here.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

And it's to accompany an article we've submitted for publication. It's called "Six Flags over our part of Texas."

DM:

What are the six flags? German flag?

FK:

Spain, Mexico, Comanche, Confederacy, Texas, and US.

DM:

Okay.

FK:

I tend to think that French flag, which occasionally gets into that list, is really insignificant in Texas. That little fork down on the badge just doesn't make it for me, so I put the Comanche's in instead. And you've got even more Comanche's.

DM:

Yeah. Ty, do you have some questions?

Tai Kriedler (TR):

I do have a question regarding the Comanche and the placements or the relatively new Texas

Ranger installation or museum or headquarters in Fredericksburg, and how that's working within the dynamics of the old population and the new population and their feelings of how that interacts and does well with the Comanche sensibilities, and their interaction with the old population via the Meusebach Treaty. If you'd kind of understand all that a little bit.

FK:

Fredericksburg is famous for the Meusebach-Comanche treaty.

TR:

Right. Meusebach rather. That's in air or differently.

FK:

Not many people think about the Comanche anymore down in this area.

DM:

But it was so important historically. You know, the treaty.

FK:

I'm trying. In my article, I give them a good thrust. They came this far down. They kidnapped people. They killed people.

RK:

And they put up the white flag—white feather.

FK:

Yeah. They spared the doctor's house. Doctor house. Doctor Hurt

DM:

Okay. Well I'd like to see that article and we would like to, you know, some of these historical writings y'all have done, I hope you're considering putting a copy in the Southwest Collection or maybe we can purchase copies. Any possibility of that?

FK:

Certainly. We intend to have most of our writings there.

DM:

Good. Good.

RK:

I think you already have.

DM:

Yeah, I think you mentioned last time that we have some.

RK:

Yeah.

DM:

But I know you have more coming.

FK:

At the moment, that's still an active program and so I'm not quite willing to give you our library.

DM:

No, no, no. Yeah. I'm just talking about some of these historical publications like your article. I think that would be—

FK:

It hasn't been accepted yet.

DM:

But y'all have quite a busy publication schedule it sounds like.

RK:

Yes.

FK:

We've got a shadow box was the second thing

RK:

Yeah. Frank—this is—

FK:

Got a picture of it. I was going to give all these to the Southwest Collection and I was cut down.

DM:

Wow, really? Okay.

RK:

His children said, "No. You're not giving those away."

DM:

Well you know, they're great heirloom items. Wow.

FK:

Those are the two ongoing projects. You'll see the next time.

DM:

Maybe we can get a picture of your medals. How about that?

FK:

We can do something like that.

DM:

Yes. Okay.

RK:

That was the shadow box and it was all done and guess what. We have two that aren't on there.

DM:

Oh really? Oh.

RK:

I didn't think they would be able to take it apart and do them, but they did.

DM:

Oh okay.

RK:

They called and it's ready.

DM:

Oh good. So you need to redo your photographs now.

RK:

We need to redo that photograph.

FK:

It your photograph isn't it?



RK:

Yeah. This is the photograph. I took that.

FK:

Oh you took it?

RK:

Yes.

FK:

Okay.

DM:

Well I hope, you know, since we've been talking here for a couple of interviews about your lives and career, I hope we can get a copy of your memoir.

RK:

You will.

FK:

That will really provide a framework.

DM:

Right. Right. Okay. All right. Tai, anything else? Anything y'all would like to add?

FK:

We haven't been to the Ranger. Is the Ranger Museum open?

TR:

We saw it.

DM:

We saw it as we came in—came through.

TR:

We didn't do anything. We just drove past.

RK:

We've seen the sign for it and we haven't gone. We've gone to the Museum of the Pacific War, which is wonderful.

DM:

Right, right. Yes. It's very good.

RK:

But we haven't yet gone to the Ranger Museum.

FK:

We have been to one at the Witte. That was the predecessor.

DM:

Okay. Anything else y'all would like to add before I turn it off here?

RK:

I don't think so.

DM:

Okay.

*[End of Recording]*

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