

**Oral History Interview of  
Karl Komatsu**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall  
May 22, 2017  
Fort Worth, Texas**

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Karl Komatsu as he discusses his Architectural career in Forth Worth, Texas. Karl describes some of the projects that he has worked on before and after joining his father's architectural firm.

**Length of Interview:** 03:12:48

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### Keywords

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**David Marshall (DM):**

Okay the date is May 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2017. This is David Marshall interviewing Karl Komatsu at Komatsu Architecture in Fort Worth Texas. We visited on April twenty-fifth and talked a little bit about your early life, and about your father and grandfather. Then we got into a discussion about your education at University of Virginia, and some related information there. But I'd like to pick up where we left off, and we were just talking about you looking for a job on the Eastern seaboard. You ended up working in Washington, D.C. Do you mind picking up right there, and just talking a little bit about some of your work there? And especially your National Parks Service preservation projects, as I recall.

**Karl Komatsu (KK):**

Right, right. Sure. Well I was looking for work in the '74-'75 timeframe so that was when, at least officially, they were saying fifty percent of the registered architects in the country were out of work. So I went back and forth, Boston to Washington, interviewing with a couple of firms who all said if I could bring work then I'd have a job. But fortunately when I returned to the Washington area after about three months—interviewed at two or three firms, and did land a position with—it was called Chapman & Miller, and later Chapman, Miller, & Wayne. That was an old Washington, D.C. firm, and they had local work. So I started out as a grunt there, and had a very good but very demanding project manager that I worked for. Even in those days women architects were not very plentiful, but Kay Lane was the project manager, and she put me through the paces, which later I was very glad that she did. She really gave me a great understanding about documents and technical aspects. Had me doing some things repetitively in terms of project-to-project, and that sort of thing. But most of their work was in the D.C. area. Public work. One of the principals, Grosvenor Chapman, was from the National Geographic Grosvenor family, so he had social connections and things. So we had some interesting projects there. The next firm I worked for after, I guess about eighteen months, was another Washington firm, Wilkes & Faulkner. They too had local connections, but we did some public work as well. That's where I first was assigned to some work for the Smithsonian at the Smithsonian's National Zoo. Then we had a couple of other projects related to the Smithsonian. Interestingly the ties to Texas—and this may be somewhat of interest—Win Faulkner was from an original Chicago family, so if you've heard of the—now I'm going to forget the full name of it. Think of it in a minute—it's the something-Faulkner residence done by Frank Lloyd Wright. That was his mother. I believe his mother. Yeah. It was one of the quintessential Wrightian homes that he designed—the whole thing. Designed furnishings, furniture, and even some of her clothes.

DM:

Okay. Thank—

Woman:

[interrupting] That goes into Al.

KK:  
Okay.

DM:  
Thank you.

Woman:  
Sure.

KK:  
And later, here, out of this office we were commissioned to do the Crosby County Courthouse.

DM:  
Really?

KK:  
And where the two tie together is in our research. Back in the twenties or thirties, or maybe even the teens, the story about Crosby County and Crosbyton; there was basically nothing out there so the county seat was created out of some land given them by the—I believe it was called—maybe it was called the Chicago Land and Cattle Company, or something. Well two of the Faulkner brothers were the original investors from Chicago, and because of their Chicago influence laying out the town they commissioned a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright to lay out the town. So Crosby's first, and there was even a sketch, it looks like a Frank Lloyd Wright utopia town.

DM:  
Where's the sketch? It's at the architectural firm still or?

KK:  
Probably—

DM:  
I wonder if Crosbyton has it.

KK:  
I can't remember if they have it. We actually may have a scan of it, because I did see it so it was either in a publication or something. But what was so astounding to me was this connection that I had when I worked for a Faulkner, and that ended up with that commission to work with Crosby County. So small world.



DM:

What did you do with the courthouse? What was your—were you renovating something? Okay.

KK:

Part of the Texas Courthouse Restoration Program. They had received a grant to at least allow the master plan and construction documents for its restoration. But because the grant required that it be taken back to its original, still today the county commissioner said—this was like 2000 when we were doing it—but still to this day they do not want to take the original courtroom back to its original status, so they haven't received any grants. So the drawings are done but the restoration work is still pending.

DM:

Golly that's—thank you.

KK:

So Wilkes & Faulkner that's where I got my initial exposure to some of the institutions and things in Washington, D.C. The third firm that I worked there was Harry Weese & Associates, and interestingly, headquartered out of Chicago and a noted twentieth century architect. They had gotten the design of the Washington metro system—the subway system. That was pretty much done except for a few of the suburban stations when I joined the firm in, I guess, 1979 or 1980.

DM:

How does that work? I mean that sounds like a civil engineering project, but you're in on design, I guess. So you're working with civil engineers, or?

KK:

Oh, very much so. In fact, in terms of fees the civil engineers got the lion's share, but Washington—you could imagine—wanted to be and have one of the great systems of the world, so they were not wanting it to end up like the New York subway. Even though it's a great system operationally, but if you've been in the stations and things. So they wanted a design befitting of the world capital. Which Weese delivered on. If you go to it, it was designed to make graffiti as difficult as possible, and has classic vaulted coffered design. The stations are all pretty much in that aesthetic. It's stood the test of time, pretty much. That firm was also then commissioned with what was called the Northeast Quarter High-Speed Rail Program. So all the stations between Washington and Boston were to be refitted for new ones if they were designed to accommodate high-speed rails. So that was really my first hardcore preservation—historic preservation—assignment, because I was assigned specifically Wilmington Station, Delaware which was by a famous Philadelphia architect Furness & Evans. Then a new station, which exists today up in—well, two new stations—Stanford, Connecticut and what they call Route 128

outside of Boston. But besides having those under my wing, I also was asked to work on Baltimore Station; 34<sup>th</sup> Street Philadelphia Station; Boston Back Bay; New London, Connecticut. So I had exposure to some wonderful historic architectural things.

DM:

Was there a station that was the pattern? For example, I don't remember how old Union Station is, but was there a kind of a standard that set the pattern for these other stations?

KK:

Well Union Station was certainly a classic one, after which, or maybe it was designed, has similar aspects to like the great ones in St. Louis, and—what is it?—Nashville, I think, and some of the other cities. But along the Eastern quarter each station was sided so differently that none of them are really similar. In a sense, they're all unique. Wilmington Station, for instance: Part of the station—the waiting room—is actually underneath the tracks, and they use the new technology of riveted bridge construction so the tracks are actually over. It was one of the new innovations where instead of having to cross the railroad tracks to get to a different train you entered stairways directly up to the platform without having to cross a track.

DM:

Very clever. How do you make these structures graffiti-proof?

KK:

Well they're probably—kind of like there is no “bulletproof” vest. They're “bullet-resistant” vests. [laughter] And maybe “graffiti-resistant” stations. One of the concepts was that the platforms that people are on were conceived to be floating within the tunnel tube. So they're actually held away from the walls of the stations. There's actually two tubes; there's the main tunnel—the structural tunnel—and then there's this sort of cocooned concentric inside one that has the vaults and things. It has structural aspects, too, but its primary purpose was to give light and architectural continuity to the inside. But the platforms—it's almost like you're on a raft inside. Although they're wide enough that that sensation is maybe just alluded to. But when you reach over the platform wall you can't physically touch the sides of the—inside—of the station. You're still probably arm's length plus maybe another three or four feet at least.

DM:

Oh, wow. If you can't reach it you can't paint it.

KK:

Yeah, even with a spray-deal, and somebody tried that but it's far enough away that it really doesn't.



DM:

Very clever. I just never have thought of or heard of graffiti-resistance. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah, yeah. And even the trains—the way they have it in the suburban stations, and that's typically where they get painted—say in New York is when they're parked in the suburban areas or the storage areas. All of that's much more secured and protected, so even the trains really don't get targeted.

DM:

That's pretty good. Wow. And it's effective as far as you've seen since then?

KK:

Yeah, yeah. And it opened in 1976.

DM:

That's an exciting project to be a part of.

KK:

It is. It was unique and we had access for a few years to it as it was under construction. It was at the time—still is, I guess—a colossal construction program.

DM:

And here you are, a young architect, getting to participate in this.

KK:

And a truly—when you're in architectural school, and even subsequent to that event, you hear about being able to influence and change lives and make life better. That truly was a dramatic change, although Washington, D.C. still has downtown gridlocked it's nothing like it was to go, say, from the East Side where a lot of the attorneys work because of the courts and things, to have lunch at a typical three-martini lunch place on Connecticut Avenue, would take an extra half an hour to an hour at each end of the lunch. All of the sudden now—and this was the other unique thing—one thinks of mass transit with just the lower-working class or something taking those things. Well in D.C., and still today, you have attorneys, diplomats, all sorts of folks in suits riding the subway along with everybody else. It really changed the inner-city lifestyle for D.C., because now you could come from one to the other, have a lunch, and still be back in an hour.

DM:

Right. I know I use it. [laughter] I stay out as far out on the end of the metro line as possible and use that thing. Whereas in the eighties I could drive in much more easily, it seems like. Early eighties.

KK:

It was early on in the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation embraced the idea. It wasn't labeled quite such then, but it was the early transit-oriented development. Where they put those stations became many development goldmines, anywhere near those stations. So you saw a dramatic change along the lines in terms of much higher density housing and office buildings and things. They actually created development packages that they offered to developers.

DM:

Interesting. Wow. Okay. That was your third firm in Washington, right? Did you work for another after that while you were in Washington?

KK:

No. In fact I got the order reversed. I guess the Wilkes & Faulkner firm was the third firm, Weese was the second, and after Wilkes & Faulkner I left to start my own firm.

DM:

Now that was—what year was that?

KK:

That was—Well, I guess that was '79.

DM:

So you were in Washington about five years?

KK:

Or '78. Well for a total of about seven years, I guess. So that would've been—let's see, I got registered in 1978, and started soon after. So I would say '79 was when I started.

DM:

Okay. So you spent about four years in Washington? Something like that? Graduated from Virginia in '74 or so?

KK:

Yeah, I was there until January of '81.

DM:

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Okay, yeah. Oh, okay. Yeah. So you registered in Washington, D.C. and you had your own firm?

KK:

Pretty shortly after getting registered.

DM:

Well here you were—you grew up with a father who was an architect, you went to architectural school in University of Virginia, and now you're out really doing the work. Was it was you expected?

KK:

Yes, I think perhaps more so than what many graduates are prepared for, only because I had seen the not-so-glamorous end, having worked summers, and a father who explained that right out of school no one's necessarily going to hand you an eighty story skyscraper to do. Just go off on your own and design this project. So it was a leap—an early leap, I guess—because a lot of times people don't go out on their own until much, much later if they do, and in fact, I went out on my own and six months later the senior associate from the firm that I was at last, Wilkes & Faulkner, called and wanted to join me.

DM:

Really?

KK:

And he was ten years my senior. And then about—

DM:

Golly. So you established some respect when you venture out there with your own firm?

KK:

Either that or I was the first crazy one to try and get out of the nest. Because then about a year later, two of the other associates—both older also—they approached us about joining us. So we ended up kind of with the core experience from the other firm, and not by rating, just by their own—Maybe it was setting a precedent for them that they had thought about but hadn't acted on. And of course—

DM:

Well that's a big compliment to you that you had worked for them, and then they thought, "Well, we'd like to hook up."

KK:

Yes, it was. The other thing, and I guess it cuts both ways, is when Dennis Brown joined me, we got our first sort of larger contracts, and one with the National Parks Service and one was with the General Services Administration, both of whom had their own—what they called the historic preservation architect at the head of each. They had—I don't know if they took pity on us or what—but they selected us for what they call IDIQ—indefinite quantity, indefinite delivery contracts. They could put small programs in it, they can put larger programs. But they put some historic preservation work in there for us, so we had this work but no employees. As yet we still weren't billing a whole lot, so a way to solve the need for expertise as well as just elbow grease and labor, employees you have to pay. Partners you don't. So all of the sudden we were a top-heavy firm. We had four partners.

DM:

It's more of a profit-share kind of thing.

KK:

That's right. So for the early going the four of us did all the work until we had enough in the pipeline that we could hire some employees to help. It eventually grew to sixteen people by '81.

DM:

Well this is National Parks Service work, mostly. Is that NGSA [**Natural Gas Supply Association**]?

KK:

Yes. A smattering of things. Some private sector kind of work. We did a house for one of the under-secretaries of the army. So there was some other work that followed us. We had a state department program. We had to draw straws as to who had to go, because this was after the coup and ouster Idi Amin, who is still alive but out of the country in Uganda. The State Department assigned us to reestablish the diplomatic mission in Kampala. What that comprised of was some housing and a secure communications facility that was also—we called it "The Alamo" because if there was trouble the staff was to retreat into what was essentially a communications bunker.

DM:

That's a new design, I guess.

KK:

The door. The door had to be able to take a direct hit from a hundred-and-five millimeter howitzer. I mean there were things like that. So we asked how safe it was, and they said, "Oh you'll be under our armed guard protection—State Department protection—all the time," and they said, "By the way, we're going to ask you to carry diplomatic pouches with you to take

supplies in to our folks.” And we said, “Whoa, what kind of supplies?” And they said, “Well toilet paper, tooth paste, living essentials.” So after all that we decided we were going to draw straws, because one of us as a principal had to go there. [laughter] Fortunately, I drew a longer straw. In the Parks Service work Hugh Miller was the historic preservation architect for the National Parks Service. He gave us several programs, including when they were starting to rebuild Harpers Ferry. So we did a number of buildings there. An interesting fellow named Karel Yasko was the historic preservation officer for GSA [**General Services Administration**]. He gave us several buildings, including rehabilitation of the exterior of the IRS [**Internal Revenue Service**] building, which some people asked us why we wanted to take that on. The Department of Agriculture buildings. We worked on some neat programs.

DM:

Some historic buildings you’re working with. You’re renovating historic buildings?

KK:

Right.

DM:

Okay. And that’s what you did at Harpers Ferry, as well?

KK:

Yes.

DM:

Okay. Golly, that’s interesting project. You’re really knee-deep now in historic preservation.

KK:

Yes, which was—I think I may have mentioned earlier—that was not necessarily the focus at the University of Virginia, even, though it’s steeped in history as well.

DM:

Now I think we barely touched on this last time, and you can correct me if I’m wrong, but I was getting the impression that the work at the University is more theoretical and now you’re into the more practical? Is that typical? Was that the case? You’re getting the theoretical training here, and then you’re out and you’re learning all the practical means of making this happen?

KK:

Right. Different schools approach it different ways, but at the time the trend was that while you needed some practical exposure, that you’re university exposure should really be to more design



and theory. Almost as a contrast to what you what you would have to plunge yourself into in day-to-day practice. The pendulum has swung all over.

DM:

That's very practical.

KK:

Yeah, I'm sure. In other fields as well. Academics.

DM:

Very much so. Very much so. It's the focus on profit, you know? It's more business-oriented, really, the running of a university. So it's like, "We need to hit the practical as hard as we can."

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

So that's pretty much a trend across the board in universities as far as you can tell, or you—

KK:

For architecture? Yes. There are some that are known to focus on practical, and you'll hear professionals say, "Oh the group that comes out of that school, they hit the ground running. Whereas so-and-so-and-so, they're still in dreamland," and that sort of thing. [knocking]

Male:

Hi!

DM:

Hi.

KK:

And there's pluses and minuses to both. Oh—[Pause in recording]—advantage of that I was going to tell you. If he was going to have you meet here that you should drive your own car over there. But since he's going to meet you there that'll be fine.

DM:

Bring my own car.

KK:

I get carsick when I ride with him. [laughter]

DM:

Okay. My dad doesn't drive anymore. I guess I should turn this off, I don't—[Pause in recording] Okay, so what is your personal preference? If you were going to tell a university how they should run a program would it be more toward the theoretic or the practical or some kind of combination of the two?

KK:

A combination, but perhaps still weighted more towards theory and design. I used to have, perhaps, somewhat of an opposite thought about that, particularly as trying to hire folks. But I served on the advisory board for the University of Virginia School of Architecture for a while, and that gave me some more insight, as well as just watching UTA [University of Texas at Arlington] and some other schools—Tech. I think it's difficult to replicate work, per se, because then you have firms that do things differently. So that your architectural education should be more exposure to works that have been done as well as an opportunity to think and design without all the encumbrances of real world.

DM:

You need the larger picture. You need to get a larger picture and then focus on the detail.

KK:

I think so. I think just as—well some years ago there was an article about candidates—ideal candidates—for business schools. I think this was either the *Harvard Business Review* or may have one of the ones, but they came out and said actually that architecture was one of the more desired undergraduate or backgrounds—given that you had other aptitudes—but for business. The reason was that they said there aren't that many other undergraduate programs that focus on problem-solving, or scenarios, or options and that architectural grads instinctively were educated or programmed to think along problem-solving lines, defining a problem and then finding ways to solve it. In fact there's a famous book done by William Peña, who was with a large firm in Houston, and it's called *Problem Solving*—I'm sorry *Problem Seeking*. So I think schools—the leading schools—seem to be doing a good balance. And again, it's not a fifty-fifty thing. I think it's probably weighted correctly in terms of design emphasis and exposure, that sort of thing.

DM:

Something else you just mentioned briefly last time was about travel—getting out and actually seeing examples—design examples, structural examples—so is that—where would you tie that in? As a very critical component, or are there other components that I'm not aware of that a young architect should be exposed to?

KK:

Right. No, I think travel and even if it's two dimensional study in terms of going through articles or photographs of work. I may—can't remember but from that last time it was Philip Johnson who gave me a lecture about that your education will start afterwards and you need to get out and see things. I really think since architecture is so sensory and three-dimensional that it is the education of the eye, and the experience, and the feel to walk through, and visit, or at least see other works. And whether they're preconceived works by professionals or indigenous architecture of sorts that didn't have a quote "designer" or "engineer," just the human resolution of their context, and their environment, and everything is essential.

DM:

Okay. Did you have time? Were you able to get out and travel about and see examples in different parts of the world?

KK:

I was fortunate, even though my father wasn't necessarily pushing architecture. I think I mentioned that we did do some traveling, and I actually did go on some conference trips with him to Chicago and New York—other places. And then in school my parents certainly gave me the luxury of being able to travel. Whether it was weekend trips or I'd spend Thanksgiving either in two completely different places—either New York City or I guess—what is it?—Georgia. One of my classmates, her family had a couple of houses in Sea Island, Georgia. So we'd go there and stay there for the holiday and see some very interesting, sometimes eccentric, house designs. Things like that. Much less some of that architecture. And of course New York. And then at Christmas I would come back and visit with my family for a few days. But I think for four or five Christmases in a row I headed by myself down to Mexico City, and spent time in the city looking at some very—there's their museum the anthropological there, which is a pretty—or for its time—a pretty dramatic, symbolic architectural design. And of course their historical designs, and then I think the Latin countries have always had—culturally—much more exuberant architecture. Less inhibited. So I got to see a lot of that. Did the classic European tour in my second year. Was the second class of our exchange with Venice, Italy, with the university. So we stayed there. Even though we were trying to translate to contemporary issues and things, just being steeped in the Northern Italy.

DM:

Yeah, golly. Very nice.

KK:

Historical.

DM:

Did you get over into Asia during any of this?

KK:

No. Our firms probably now completed about—probably two hundred and fifty million dollars' worth of work. During my time I have yet to make a trip. It's been most of our—not most of our—but our staff who's been assigned to those projects that have gone back and forth. The furthest I've been, really, is Hawaii and then Guam and Saipan.

DM:

Okay. You actually did some work on Hawaii, as I recall? Pretty large projects there.

KK:

Yes.

DM:

Shopping area?

KK:

Right. A shopping mall for the navy—the military—mall at Pearl Harbor. And then a very meaningful program there—we did the design for it's called the Kaneohe State Veterans Cemetery, and it's the sister to the Memorial Cemetery Pacific, which is commonly called Punchbowl.

DM:

And I'm pulling us away, kind of, chronologically. So let's go back to Washington. To your firm. This continued—you stayed in Washington until when?

KK:

1981.

DM:

Eighty-one. You had said that. Okay.

KK:

But kind of kept shuttling back and forth for another two or three years.

DM:

Did you have a destination in mind at that time? Did you think that you might end up back in Fort Worth eventually?

KK:

Oh yes. In fact we moved back in 1981 very consciously. Washington is an amazing place, but a rat race. You have to always have reservations to just about to eat somewhere. You would wait in a line to see a movie. Traffic, still, even with the metro having been open for twenty five years or so.

DM:

And now triple turning lanes. [laughter]

KK:

Yes.

DM:

Have you been in those? Oh my goodness. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah, I had to—this was way before the U.S. was really conscious about terrorism—I had two close call episodes in Washington and one in London with bombs.

DM:

Really?

KK:

And gunmen.

DM:

[laughter] You did?

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

Well can you tell a little bit about that?

KK:

Well I guess the later two—one was we had to barricade ourselves—it was called the D.C. office building. It wasn't City Hall but it was an office building that had a couple of the D.C. departments. A deranged gunman got into the building, so we barricaded ourselves in the conference room there while two or three of the floors were where he was targeting people. Fortunately he didn't kill anybody. Actually I guess there were two of them. One of them was



killed, and one wasn't. That was the latest one. Then prior to that—I guess it was maybe 1980—I was going through what they call the “Q Street Bridge” in Georgetown. I'd just entered what they call the Buffalo Circle. I think it's a general—Thomas? It may not be right. But anyway I was in the circle in my car, and the car behind me exploded. It was the Car Bomb Assassination of Orlando Letelier. He had been the sort of dissenting diplomat from Salvador. They think that—who is it? The Sandinistas or the—let's see—the Salvadorian rebel regime had taken him out, and unfortunately they also killed a young assistant whose car he was being driven in. But that happened right behind me. Then the earlier episode was, I was in London and I was on Piccadilly Circus on my way to pick up some theatre tickets. So I was in a London taxi. We were at a stoplight at Green Park Station, and we were in the second lane over—there were about six lanes—from the curb and my taxi driver had asked if I minded him cracking the windows, and asked me to lower the two back windows a bit even though it was cold and things because his defroster wasn't working. So while we were parked there the IRA [**Irish Republican Army**] had decided to resume their bombing, and they set off a bomb at the Green Park Station on the surface next to a bus stop. So it went off. Six lanes across there was an office building—six or eight stories—and it blew all its glass out. Sent seventy people to the hospital, and killed a pedestrian. Anyway when it went off, immediately after, my feet—my knees—were up in the air because the concussion had blown the floor and crumpled it up, and it blew all four doors open. [laughter] And his boot—the trunk. I was about to get out and couldn't hear. Of course there's smoke everywhere. But he reached through his little glass thing, and grabbed me, and he said, “Stay in the car. Stay in the car.” I said, “I'm going to go help.” And he said, “No, no, no.” So we closed the doors and he drove off a couple of blocks. He stopped and we got out and looked at the riddled side of his car and everything. He said they set off a second bomb when people come in to help. And just as he said that we heard a second explosion. So that's what it was. By cracking the windows it had equalized the pressure. The people who were sent to the hospital were—a lot of them were in cars that the concussion blew the glass in on them. So that's what popped the doors open. So he said, “I stopped here, and I'm going to let you out, because obviously I've got to take care of my car. But I stopped here on purpose,” and he said, “That's a good pub. You need a drink.” [laughter]

DM:

He had enough presence of mind to point you to a—[laughter]. Oh my.

KK:

And the bartender, I remember, I ordered, I guess, a scotch or something like that, and he said, “Sir, you look a little pale.” I said, “Well, for me to look pale, that's light.” I said, “That's where I was. At the—”so anyway. Those episodes happened at a time when this sort of thing was pretty foreign.

DM:

So much for life in the fast lane. Maybe move to Fort Worth.

KK:

Yeah. [laughter]

DM:

And coming to Fort Worth did you intend to join the firm of your father at that time? Okay.

KK:

Yes. In fact we had been in discussions where we were going to merge the two firms, and have a Washington presence and a Fort Worth office, because this office did a lot of federal work with different agencies.

DM:

Locally or a federal groups agency? Like GSA locally, that kind of thing?

KK:

Primarily this one. Most of their practice, except for they did have some state-wide work with the Postal Service and then with the Army Air Force Exchange Service, which we later expanded into doing the work internationally for them. At the time we thought we'd combine the two, and my father was going to purchase the forty-nine percent that I didn't own, and then we'd combine them. Then he got cold feet about having a remote office, and decided not to. So I was sort of already half-here half-there. My wife wanted to move. She's from Birmingham so Fort Worth was kind of similar, maybe even a little smaller than Birmingham. A little bit more out of the rat-race from having dinner together at nine o'clock.

DM:

Or a little more out of the line of fire, it sounds like. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah, that too. That too.

DM:

So that's nice. That worked out.

KK:

Well, yes, in terms of moving back. So we didn't go through with the merging, although we still keep up with, and occasional team with my old firm that has continued.

DM:

Okay. What was the name of that firm? What is the name of it?

KK:

It was called—once Dennis Brown joined me—Komatsu Brown. His wife suggested that because her reason was if we named it “Brown Komatsu” just because he was my senior, she said it might get mixed up with the Yellow Toyota. So it was called Komatsu Brown. And the two partners joined and we still called it just Komatsu Brown. They’ve since dropped Komatsu, so now it’s called Geier Brown Renfrow, GBR is the initials that they use. They were kind enough to invite me to their twenty-fifth anniversary, which was a few years ago.

DM:

Well you did found the firm. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. And your father’s firm was as it is now? Komatsu Architecture?

KK:

Started out at as Albert S. Komatsu, Architect. Albert S. Komatsu & Associates. Komatsu & Associates. That’s how we’ve first incorporated it, and then it got changed to Komatsu Rangel [0:57:19.8] in ’91, and then I bought out the Rangel. In ’97 we did the DBA Komatsu Architecture.

DM:

Okay, okay. So, back in Fort Worth. Can you talk about some of the projects you were involved in early on? Was it back then that you did some work for Fort Worth Zoo? You’d done work for the National Zoo.

KK:

Right. And the firm here was still doing some work at the Fort Worth Zoo, so we continued that for a couple of years.

DM:

Was it similar kind of work at the National Zoo and the Fort Worth Zoo? What specifically were you working in?

KK:

To a degree not as grand as at the National Zoo, because of budget constraints. Mostly animal habitats. Rhino and elephant exhibit. Giraffe exhibit. One of the nature education centers. That was pretty much it until—then there was a big gap and then in '97 we did the Texas Wild exhibit, which was sanctioned by and pretty much donated by Ramona and Lee Bass.

DM:

Right, right.

KK:

Had some connection with them, so we were chosen for that project.

DM:

When you were doing the rhino and elephant exhibits, this was at a time when there was a real push toward more of natural-type habitat, or maybe that was later.

KK:

That was a bit later. A bit later.

DM:

Okay. Well were you looking at—besides just design—were you looking at structural integrity as well? Trying to keep these large animals in?

KK:

Oh sure. Yeah.

DM:

It's really interesting. If you were involved in that you were involved in building a bunker, basically, to withstand an artillery blast. I mean it sounds like things that maybe I wouldn't think that anyone would go into the field thinking, "Well I'm going to be doing this kind of work."

KK:

Sure, sure. I think the one of the delights, or at least it has been for me—for us, there's two aspects that they probably don't emphasize enough in architecture education. One is that it's really about people. I tell young graduates or students that architecture is probably fifty percent people. Whether it's understanding what they need as far as your design goes, or it's dealing with different—from the plumber or the bricklayer to the president of a company. That human nature is very much a part of architecture in all its aspects. And the other great delight is it's like being in a—almost a free-for-all continuing education.

DM:

Absolutely, yes.

KK:

And I think one of the reasons why—and my father set the character and we still do it—that we don't just specialize in one thing. When you do a facility for somebody, whether they're conducting business or making something, you really have to learn what it is and how it is they do what they do. So that's where. And in the case of zoos we learned about, and fortunately had some fellows who had some great just mechanical intuitiveness. They were always having trouble, particularly with Indian elephants. They're a little more cantankerous than other species. So we designed a—and it kind of came after the cattle thing, only a much larger thing. But a pneumatic—what we called—squeeze gate. It didn't hurt them, but for their examinations or inoculation or just to calm them down these things would kind of close in and they would calm down. And the rhinos similarly, too. Although the elephants, interestingly, were much more aggressive in that respect than the rhinos were. So doing things like that, and control gates, and the keepers told us all the things that they had before. That a gorilla could reverse—you'd have these manual lock things and if a gorilla after a while caught on—or an orangutan—it became dangerous because they could just slap it back up. So coming up with hydraulic gate controls and things like that. How they ate, what kind of surfaces they felt more comfortable on. I mean you're almost like an animal psychologist too. [laughter]

DM:

What a great learning experience, though. But you would have to work so closely with the people who work at the zoo. The trainers or the caretakers who observe this every day. But I guess that's the case in most projects. You're just having to deal with the people who are using the facility.

KK:

Right. And it can be peculiarities of machinery that they use, or equipment, or in the case of zoos the types of animals that they deal with.

DM:

I'm reminded of the story you told last time of your father taking on the waterworks—

KK:

[laughter] Right?

DM:

—project and saying, “No, I haven't done this before, but hey, you learn it, and you do it. You learn it and you design it.”



KK:

Yeah. That was his answer to, "Why do you want this project?" He said, "Well I haven't done one before, and I'd like to know how it works."

DM:

Seems like you would just kind of need to cast yourself as a designer in the broadest sense, and say, "I'll look at that capability to the project at hand."

KK:

And it's interesting, our clients—there are many who weigh more, "How many have you done of these," and your experience in things, but interestingly, like that one, we've had a fair number that take the attitude that so long as you're competent and interested, what they often say is the most important: listen. You have the ability to listen. They would rather have you to work with—and we've been told this—than someone who thinks they know it, and they have to fight every bit of the way for what they know is the reality or the practicality of the thing.

DM:

It makes perfect sense. You're basically going in saying, "I'm ready to learn," and people appreciate that.

KK:

And that occurred when we changed the Carswell Hospital over to the Federal Bureau of Prisons medical center for federal inmates, and particularly women inmates. We were armed to the teeth with some consultants and we had one that was considered a prison expert. When we interviewed they said, "If you get—" or maybe it was after we were awarded it, but they told us—"jettison the expert. They are just going to get in the way. We have our standards. You follow our standards, we will be very happy."

DM:

"Okay. Okay." [laughter] Very [Inaudible]. So the Fort Worth Zoo thing came along, but you did the work on the Texas Wild—it's Texas Wild! wasn't it?

KK:

Yes.

DM:

I remember when it opened—that project—later on. What were some of the other early Fort Worth Dallas—I throw Dallas in too because I know you were doing some projects over there, or your father had done some. I've got Travis Walk restaurant area and the Highland Park Library. I don't know if that was in your era or before.

KK:

Yes.

DM:

Was it?

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

But then for Fort Worth I have some libraries, the YWCA—and that might have been your father. I don't—

KK:

No. That was—

DM:

That was you too?

KK:

Well it spanned both of us because he had done some work in the late seventies and then we did some work in the nineties and continue to work with them.

DM:

Okay. And then I found mention of the Fort Worth Public Training Center. Is that for the police training? Which you have actually right—

KK:

Right. Fire/police.

DM:

—Public Safety Training Center.

KK:

Yes.

DM:

Can you talk about some of those projects or others that I probably failed to mention that are—stand-out as important projects?

KK:

Sure.

DM:

In Fort Worth-Dallas.

KK:

Right. One of the early ones, I guess, that occurred within the first year that I was back was we won the U.S. Postal Service—the General Mail Facility. Which was one of the larger programs to go on in the area. It involved several hundred thousand square feet of office and administration, and then a large processing center. It had truck and vehicle maintenance facilities and everything. That was a real coup for us, because I guess the bookies were all betting on one of the three other firms that had made the shortlist. They were larger and—

DM:

Older?

KK:

—more prolific practices, and things.

DM:

More connected?

KK:

Yeah. Possibly that too. So that was one of the big hallmarks. We were asked to redesign the city/county jail and police administration facility that had come in a hundred percent over budget. So we were given the three year old bond money to try and make it come in budget. Fortunately we did.

DM:

Really? Wow, what a challenge.

KK:

There was a lot of innuendo in there. We got a lot of calls from subcontractors and things that now the parties have changed. They could reduce their prices without changing what they were providing. So we just said, “Well we don’t want to go there.” We told the city that, “Why don’t we just start from scratch?” So that was one of our things. I guess a lot of our work has been obtained by a reputation for finding a way to meet budgets and things. Travis Walk was a very unique and interesting program for a private developer from the Midwest. Was kind of a—we got an award from the Oak Lawn Forum, which was the business emergence forum for the Oak

Lawn area for being innovative in terms of how to develop a new type of—I say new type, but a retail center. It was basically modeled after things I had seen traveling in terms of old world retail places. Instead of just a strip block, you had a little muse that you could walk through with courtyards and that sort of things.

DM:

That seems another trademark, just from the things I've read about your firm. We'll talk about this a little bit more, but for example: in a courthouse restoration you talk about the surrounding area, and the impact on the surrounding area, and the square, you know. It's the outdoor spaces. Well—

KK:

Right, and I think we talked about that in terms of the bigger picture, even for the Southwest Collection. How there are positive and negative spaces. And not negative in the bad sense, but places occupied by buildings and places open for landscape, and that sort of thing. Our firm has, I think, always—and I've always embraced—my father has that architecture is not just from the wall to the inside. It includes the context. So whether it's an entry court or an internal courtyard that is used to bring light into the building. So that's always taken into account. Not every site and not every building program allows for that approach, but if there's an opportunity there I think our philosophy is it enriches. The outdoor space becomes a part of the building.

DM:

So Travis Walk fit into that concept nicely.

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

How about Highland Park Library? Was there anything unique about that project, or?

KK:

Well it was an existing, very small, space that I think people would say has become a polished gem. It was white and orange Formica in terms of the inside. Most of it. So we retrieved much of what was there, plus just added back period interiors and did some exterior restoration. I guess one of the unique things was that much of the work was done off-site, because they only wanted to close for two to three months. So things were built offsite, and when they closed, then the demo and then things were brought in. Very good contractor.

DM:

Takes a lot of coordination to make that work.

KK:

It worked out. Highland Park, they loved the design and redesign—overachievers that they were. And we played a part in the fundraising, but they had initially a budget of two, maybe two and a half million, and they raised four point two. So they upped some of the things and finishes, and—at our suggestion—I think the Clements and “Bum” Brights family entered in and gave donations late. So we asked them if their monies could be used to create an endowment for books—books programming and stuff. They graciously saw the benefit in that.

DM:

How often does that happen? Where the project starts collecting money along the way?  
[laughter]

KK:

Yeah, not very often. But I think for a long time to come they’re going to reap the benefits of having done that. We understand, even though Highland Park and its society—high society—they’re very proud of and use the facility.

DM:

Right. And what about Fort Worth libraries? You’ve also worked with some Fort Worth libraries, haven’t you?

KK:

Yes. We’ve done the East Regional Library, and that was a challenge. Nine year old bond money. But people say it doesn’t look like it had a budget challenge. The Northwest Library. Similar thing, totally different each. East Side Library had two not-so-agreeable associations, vying for what it should or shouldn’t be. So we played referee.

DM:

Oh boy. That’s an interesting aspect of being an architect that I never would have dreamed of, actually.

KK:

Yeah. More often than not, particularly with public works, the perceptions—in fact we’ve been asked a couple of times by the mayors—different mayors—to actually just be mediators. Whether it’s a project we’re involved with or not. It get backs to the having a sense and understanding human nature. That so very often lines are drawn before they understand the other’s issues and things. If you can get that realization and awareness and understanding that oftentimes those controversial or diametrically opposed positions kind of melt.



DM:

You're looking for commonality over common ground between the two?

KK:

Yeah, or at least understanding.

DM:

Sure, sure, sure.

KK:

So East Regional had that. Not so much at Northwest Library, but there they wanted it to kind of reflect a new elementary school that had been built across the way. It was set in a park. So every program is like a person. You have to gain an understanding of it. Its personalities are given by the users or the owners or the stakeholders, which can include neighborhoods. You weigh each one. I think that's why we were in a sense proud that there's not necessarily a signature Komatsu style, because one of the famous twentieth century architects, Eero Saarinen who did Dulles National Airport, he explained that his inspiration comes from the project itself and from the site, and he's not going to preemptively superimpose some vision.

DM:

Very good approach. Very open approach. Can you tell me about the Public Safety Training Center?

KK:

Sure. That's one of the larger building programs that we—that the firm—has been involved with.

DM:

How big is that complex?

KK:

Well it's on seventy-four acres. Five hundred and sixty thousand square feet, and was pretty unusual in a number of respects. I'm going to ask, could we do a quick break? [Pause in recording]

DM:

Well let's talk about that facility then. The Public Safety Training Center.

KK:

Yeah. It came about—and I lost sleep for about ninety days—but we had to assure the city that if they purchased the site and the structures, that it could be used for their intended purpose. Not

only fitting inside training facilities and the indoor firearm ranges could be accommodated, but also that it came from GSA with historic preservation covenants on it. So there were two later, but still World War II-era, warehouses. The same size as these. The whole idea would only work if they had room where they could put the track. So with my background with the Commission—Historical Commission—and preservation, we secured assurances as best could be made, that the Historical Commission was okay with saving the two earlier structures, which are concrete frame. It's sort of a trade-off. "We can save two if you allow us to take down two. How many days are you going to have somebody who can use that kind of land and stuff?". The city then was able to buy it for ten thousand a foot, so under six million dollars. So we told them that to replicate this—probably it was close to forty million dollars' worth of savings—which they liked. But in that interim period between their purchasing it and then us getting enough, because we only had limited visitation here.

DM:

Really? Okay.

KK:

That we were sure it was going to work. I would lose a little sleep because my name wouldn't be Komatsu if somehow it didn't work out even. It was a great buy.

DM:

What year are we talking about? When did all this happen?

KK:

We started in earnest in, I guess, 2012-2013. National Archives had this facility until the end—or I guess it was this one. So they terminated their lease, and there's a large vault that was inside of this one. They always said that primarily some of their records and the other one, IRS kept everybody's returns in the Southwest from there. But when they were clearing out that vault—and we didn't get to see any of the other papers or artifacts, no telling what came out of there—but out of that vault when we started the project they brought out the gurney that was at Parkland Hospital that transported JFK. So who knows? It almost kind of like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when they—[laughter]

DM:

Right. I'm just thinking the same thing: Wonder what was in that vault?

KK:

It's secured, if nothing else, just because they put it away in a major storage facility and no one would find it.

DM:

You don't think the Ark of the Covenant was in there, though, did you? [laughter] Oh man.

KK:

But anyway, a hundred and a two million dollar program. It's an all-weather training facility. The police had almost missed their annual certification because the 2012 heat-streak, and they were trying to start their gun training at twelve o'clock at night, but it was a hundred and five degrees then. They could only run a certain number of sessions during the night. So they were pretty fixated on being able to find a way to train year-round, regardless of the elements.

DM:

Even the village—I don't remember what you call it—but it's the simulated village that they walk through, for target practice, I suppose.

KK:

Well right. And then just hostage negotiation, and then familiarity with the layout. There's a convenience store, bank.

DM:

But all interior for climate control?

KK:

Yeah. Right. Classroom. A warehouse that they can simulate that. They can fill—there's two what they call—well they call it “Reality-Based Training”—RBT—but they call these mock-villages. So one's a mock warehouse and the firefighters come in. They've got the racks and stuff. They can fill them both with smoke and evac it out. There's catwalks above—I should've.

DM:

Oh yeah! I was reading on here. So that they can evaluate their progress—the supervisors can evaluate.

KK:

Yeah. Just see it from above as they move through them. Both use it. Police use clearing techniques and things. So it's a state of the art—

DM:

Is there something else like it in the country? Did this come about from them listing everything that they wanted? Like, “We need to be able to extract cars from the water”?

KK:

Partly that. The next largest one would probably be Orlando. I think it's about a quarter the size.

DM:

Really? This is the largest in the country, then? Well this has got to be a standard that people come and look at?

KK:

They have gotten visitors from all over. Federal agencies and things. It rivals, at least in total training capability, the places that you hear about like Quantico. Orlando was kind of the bee's knees until this one.

DM:

It says here in the summary that Komatsu was responsible for the architecture, the master planning, and also the programming. What does that mean, "the programming"?

KK:

Okay. Programming is that first phase in that book that I mentioned to you called *Problem Seeking*. So you meet with the users—the owner—to define what the needs are, what the issues are. They say that programming is problem definition, problem-seeking, and then design is problem-solving. To really design for a solution you have to understand what the need is.

DM:

Sure. I just didn't know that it was called "programming." Excuse my ignorance on that, by the way.

KK:

No. Well and you know, kind of like in the academic world we also say that, "Architecture is to house the academic curriculum. That's the reason for being." So we would consider the curriculum to be part of the programming.

DM:

Right. Right. Okay.

KK:

I think because of having existing structure that you could reuse—Orlando doesn't even have—A lot of it is outside, too.

DM:

Huge structures. So all of this wood is the original? The wood that shows in the photograph? The beams?

KK:

Salvaged wood from—

DM:

Oh, I see.

KK:

—existing structures.

DM:

Very interesting. Big project. Is this your biggest? Is this the biggest in the history of the firm? It's a huge project.

KK:

It is a huge project, I guess in terms of total size. The two larger ones would've been in Al's era.

DM:

University campuses? [laughter]

KK:

Well yeah, even though—it's interesting—Parker County College or—

DM:

Weatherford College?

KK:

Weatherford College. It was with George Doss, the first nine buildings and the site work and everything. I think cost a whopping four hundred thousand dollars or something in '66 dollars. And that was pushing his limit of expenditure. But the two largest in terms of scope were under Al's time. They were done for then-General Dynamics and then Bell Helicopter. So Bell Helicopter was the training village. So schools, worship facilities, housing, all the things of a new community.

DM:

This was here in Fort Worth, or is this the project that was in Iran?



KK:

Iran. That was under construction, and he's got one fuzzy airplane view as they were leaving, the last time he visited before the coup. It was under construction, but by today's dollars that probably would've been a two hundred and fifty million dollar thing. And then, likewise, the General Dynamics F-16 facility, which was kind of a newer upgraded replica of what they have here. Iran was going to be given the ability to produce F-16's as part of their deal. So that only went through schematic design in terms of layout.

DM:

So then as far as in the U.S. this is ranking toward the top?

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

Bigger than Northeast Campus? Northeast Campus project.

KK:

Well by today's equivalent dollars it may not, or it may be close. I think there were—I want to say they were either eleven or fourteen buildings under that initial startup.

DM:

Massive project.

KK:

Yeah. We've done some other close ones. Not in the—well, I guess Hawaii is U.S., but that was sixty two million in 2003 dollars. Kadena, which is in Japan. That was eighty-two million. But everything is so expensive in Japan. If it were built here it'd probably be sixty percent of that.

DM:

I can't remember what the square footage was in Hawaii. Pretty big.

KK:

Yeah, three hundred and twenty three thousand? Three hundred and forty three thousand square feet.

DM:

Suffice it to say this is one of the big ones? The Fort Worth Public Safety Training Center.

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

You want to mention some others in Fort Worth-Dallas, or have we hit the big ones?

KK:

Well, of course—well Al can mention, I guess, his church work, some of which were pretty extraordinary.

DM:

Yeah, I have that on my notes that that's the pre-Karl era. Is it not, or?

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

Yeah, I'll catch those tomorrow. Well how about—

KK:

So—

DM:

Yeah, go ahead. Any others that come to mind as major projects?

KK:

Well the athletic dorm at TCU. I think it just fits into that category. I think I told you, like Southwest Collection, there are some campuses or some grounds where we kind of set the tone for recapturing the spirit of the original campus, so that did it for TCU. Southwest Collection did it for Texas Tech.

DM:

I need to see that. I haven't seen that example, so I'll run by TCU sometime and take a look.

KK:

Yeah, well it's right there on Stadium Drive across from their basketball and part of their— Stadium Drive runs parallel to University, and it's just the next street over West, I guess.

DM:

Well I know that was a lot of the excitement on Texas Tech campus about the Southwest Collection when it came to be in 1996. Because it revitalized that idea, you know, that design concept. People were pleased to get back to that.

KK:

Yeah, particularly after the *Sports Illustrated* comment. Yeah, I mean you could just feel it, see it. When we explained that to President and the Board that, “You don’t have an ugly campus. It’s just that the stuff that you’ve been doing maybe individually as adequate, as okay, but it doesn’t contribute to the sense of the campus of what you have.”

DM:

And I’ll tell you that in the—you probably know better than I do—but in the next several years some of those misfit buildings were razed. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah, and now—gosh, when we were back for visiting with you and our seminar, being able to see the campus is—Tai drove us around through it. You know it’s very rewarding to see, because sometimes it’s not just the work that you do. If you’ve helped influence something, and helped recapture, perhaps, or make it better than the direction that it was heading that’s just as rewarding.

DM:

Were you able to pick out some examples of similar style that might have been even indicated to you that someone saw the Southwest Collection and was influenced by it? Like the English-Philosophy building? Is that one of them?

KK:

Oh yeah. I think almost—well, according to the—who was it? John Montford, I guess, he said everything, virtually—“We were going in this direction, you said lets go in this direction.”

DM:

That’s got to be a good feeling?

KK:

Yeah. Very much so. Very much so. TCU, same sort of thing happened. Once we placed that first one. It’s a more modest, almost an interpretation, but it still was just by contrast—what they were saying that they were grateful for, but unfortunately they were also told who the architect was going to be, and that’s the Richardson Communication Building. It certainly is a major resource for them, but it was done by Roche and Dinkeloo out of Hartford, which is Yale, which

is where the Basses went and the Richardson Foundation contributed to it. But it's a modern—on its own if it were in a green pasture it'd be a lovely example. But sitting on the doorstep of the campus it just has the same issues that Tech had. So when we had another doorstep to work with that's when they said, "That's what we're doing."

DM:

Good, good. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your courthouse projects, if you don't mind. I have that you've worked on at least fifteen in Texas?

KK:

Right, right. We're currently now maybe on our twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth county.

DM:

Really?

KK:

At various stages. Some of them like Crosby have not come to fruition quite yet for various reasons.

DM:

Can you give me the general, typical effort here? You're restoring a courthouse, but what does that typically involve? Are you talking about exteriors, interiors? Are you trying to match old wood types on the interior? This kind of thing.

KK:

Sure.

DM:

Because it seemed like materials—finding the proper materials for restoration—

KK:

Can be—

DM:

--be a real challenge.

KK:

Very interesting, sure. Sure.

DM:

If you could address that?

KK:

Yeah. Well under the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, it typically addresses both exterior and interior. Some of the thrust of the program is to restore the courthouses back to their original. So that may mean tearing off an addition, which now—just this year—they're revising that and going back to something they might have kept as part of their general philosophy that they had earlier, and that is that sometimes additions are part of the history. So they're not necessarily something to get rid of. They didn't consider that with the courthouses until just this year. So previous ones—typically to qualify for a grant—the main things you had to do was restore the exterior to its original, get rid of additions, and interior spaces—any of the public spaces—the corridors. The district court room was probably the heart of expression of original condition. So for instance, Crosby County. They don't want to get rid of a whole floor that they inserted into the tall courtroom. Some have cut them in half. Hamilton County was less than half the size that it originally was. To accept the grant it's now a major space—one of the larger district courtrooms in Texas, in county courthouses. So those are the two prong general areas. Materials, similarly, if you're going to repair, replace, reconstruct something that was torn down—if it's made out of looter's stone originally, you've got to go find that, if and where possible. So sometimes original quarries are opened back up.

DM:

Really?

KK:

Depending on how close one can get a match. Limestone is a little more ubiquitous and able to get it from different sources. You mentioned wood—wood species. Sometimes it's critical to find the—

DM:

Particular grain or?

KK:

Yes, and sometimes species. Not just yellow pine. Sometimes it's certain cuts like quarter-sawn or something to match the grain that was originally used or still there. Hardware replication. There are companies that replicate light fixtures, and hardware, and things like that. So as part of the Texas Courthouse Program those all certainly come into play. Paint analysis. They call it "paint serration." They can tell you not only the different colors, but the original color. Maybe even other things like the composition, what type of paint, or a stain.



DM:

What about wallpaper? Were there wallpapers used in interiors of courthouses or was it paint?

KK:

There are some. For the most part during the time of a majority of the courthouses there was stenciling. Plaster stenciling. Sometimes can actually be easier, although it's expensive for a stenciling restorer to work on. As compared to trying to find—or find somebody who replicates your particular wallpaper pattern. But that's less common than, say, stenciling and the different paints and things like that. I like to feel I've sort of come full circle because I was chairman when the courthouse program was created.

DM:

You were Historical Commission Chairman—Texas Historical Commission Chairman for about four years, right?

KK:

Six.

DM:

Six years. Okay. You also have helped—haven't you helped people—I guess with courthouse projects, to write grants or given them thoughts on how to approach the THC?

KK:

Right. Dana Compton, our director of Business Development, we do grant writing pro bono. We take the approach that if somebody's having to write grants to try and get money that it helps the cause a little more if they aren't charged for trying to get that money. So we have a stake in the dog in the hunt. If they don't get the grant then we don't get any.

DM:

Well why not provide the expertise? You know how it operates.

KK:

Well, and what we found out the first couple of times was when there were grant-writers—and I'm not putting grant-writers down. They certainly have a great place—but probably ninety or ninety-five percent of the grant application came from information that we wrote, prepared, provided, that sort of thing.

DM:

Sure. They should be very appreciative. [laughter] I'm sure they are.

KK:

But the program—Bullock helped push it through. I think I've told you, maybe, that part about it.

DM:

I don't remember you mentioning Bob Bullock.

KK:

I got to know him both with and without the fact that his wife Jan ended up as a commissioner. So that was kind of strategic, too. But I presented a two-page executive summary of what the program needed to be and his chief of staff wanted to have a number to present to him. Of course they were some guesstimates, but almost any number that you picked for the deficiencies and the courthouses was hundreds of millions of dollars. So I chose the initial number, and it was a symbolic number, but I said, "Two hundred and fifty four million." Symbolic of—you know. And at the time it was thought that if a county had torn down its historic courthouse, if it could come up with another county historic facility—maybe a jail—to restore, that they could be applicable to it. But that part didn't carry through. But the two hundred and fifty four million. So this two-page deal. I asked Jan, I said, "Look, give this to Bob. I don't need to be the one to—At least put it in front of him." I said, "This is all informal at this point." So she reports back to me. We were in—I forget—in Nacogdoches or something for a meeting and she said, "Well. Good news and bad news, Karl." I said, "Oh yeah?" She said, "Yeah. Well Bob and I like to read before we go to bed, so I gave him your synopsis in bed." [laughter] I go, "Okay? Is that the good news or the bad news?" [laughter] She said, "Well, normally he reads kind of laying down with his head propped up on some pillows and things." She said, "I handed it to him, and he read it. He sat straight up in bed and said, 'Damn, doesn't Komatsu want me to be Lieutenant Governor anymore? Two hundred and fifty four million dollars?'" [laughter] So sure enough, like forty-eight hours later, I was asked to come to Austin to meet with him and his chief of staff. So we did and he said, "Well, we still have two more years of the prison program that we've got to pay off. I don't want to be doing much in terms of debt." He said, "Gosh darn, two hundred and fifty four million?" He said, "Is that it?" I said, "You know Governor, that's just a symbolic thing. I think it's more." He said, "Well can you wait until the next biannual? Why don't we do this kind of bite sized chunks? Like maybe forty or sixty million every two?" I said, "I'll take that." He said, "Okay, we'll see if we can do it then. But what we can do is at least push through and get it on the books." So initially under Bush they passed it, but no funding. Then subsequent two years later—I had been off the commission by the time they had funded it. I went off and—I guess I went off maybe in—let's see—'96 or '98 they funded it. As of 2000—

DM:

What was the original funding amount?

KK:

It was—I believe it was—it was either forty or sixty million. It's gone up and down from there. For a long time it hovered forty, sixty, forty. One time I think it was maybe eighty one year for a Biannual. But then it got—well when Perry took office it was a rub between him and the chairman that succeeded me. So it got cut severely for a good bit. Still haven't totally recovered. We had twenty two million last year, or the last Biannual I'm not sure what we're going to end up with because of the prognoses for the state.

DM:

Was this proposed as an addition to courthouse restoration, also economic revitalization of a county seat or the area around the courthouse? Because it so often happens that way.

KK:

Yes, very much so. In fact the kick-off announcement of the program was at Lampasas, which we happened to do. So that got better. Bush came down to announce the program. His advance man came up to me and grabbed me and took me to the governor before the event started. He said, "Okay, give me four reasons that I should cite." So knowing him and the whole administration bent, I started off with economic revitalization. Then I said, "In terms of different grants and funds, typically you have the five metropolitan areas that win all the big federal monies and stuff."

DM:

Right, right.

KK:

So I said, "This can be Texas's own that reaches way down into the smallest, poorest areas and counties." If you think about a rural county—

DM:

That's the nice thing about the two fifty-four. It sounds perfectly spread out.

KK:

And then I said, of course, Texas heritage. It's just something that is unique to Texas, and we'll be the only state to embrace a state-wide program. When you talk about then heritage tourism, and you don't get any cleaner dollars. Even Texas highways have said that heritage tourism is a big growth thing and will be an ever increasing thing. And the thing that he smiled about is I said, "Just think, Governor, how many times has anybody talked about wanting to go through Iowa or somewhere for all their different things? You don't have paperback novels about the Midwest as opposed to Texas and Southwest." He smiled and he said, "I like this one. I can remember those.", [laughter] "Okay."

DM:

That's good. Yeah. So when you were working on a courthouse restoration project was part of that saying, "Well this is what can happen on the square." Did you actually make proposals as a part of the restoration?

KK:

Well it was not specific proposals, but we would in a sense talk about the creation of context of the courthouse and the courthouse square. Where possible—the counties always wanted—they would gripe if they had to be told that they were going to walk across the street to a new whatever—treasurer, driver's license place. So as much as possible we took the Main Street approach and said, "You want your square—you think about it for the city and the county—you want your square lined with tax-generating businesses. If possible things that stay open past five o'clock for night life and that sort of thing, where you can." A lot of the counties-- Lampasas was one—and the second-best thing is nobody else wanted to put anything in a pair of buildings. One had burned and one they had torn down in the middle of the block. So we suggested that the county buy that and they put their annexes in it. So it completes the square in terms of historic context. So there was a snaggle-toothed corner that just had a dirt parking lot. So those are new, but they fit in, and help complete the square. So the next-best thing is from an urban-design standpoint. You're able to help reinforce the square. And yes, it does though—I guess it's just human nature. When they see something getting cleaned up, even existing shops and things, they tend to spiff themselves up. Their window, storefronts, and stuff like that. Much less some others who go ahead and come in and buy in. Most of them say—most of the county seats—have said that when that their courthouse programs went—they definitely saw an increase in building permits and construction and stuff in the downtown.

DM:

What are some of the more successful examples in Texas? Some towns that have become more revitalized around the courthouse as a result of the courthouse restoration?

KK:

I think maybe the ones closest to us. Parker County. Particularly, Hood County. Gosh, even Albany I think has seen that. Lampasas. What is it where Marfa is?

DM:

Beautiful courthouse. I can't remember what county it is.

KK:

I forget which county. The name of the—Presidio?

DM:

I can't remember what county name is. Beautiful wood in that courthouse.

KK:

Yeah. So there's something. And again it's that human nature. Civic pride. Even just out of a positive spin. It's hardest to convince locals when they've seen something so run down for so long. Whether it's the town or the courthouse or something. They're skeptical until it happens. Then they're often the ones in the front of the picture when it's done. [laughter]

DM:

Well after you have a couple of successes, though, there's something to show them. They could see how effective this can be. Very nice. I'm going to pause. [Pause in recording] Let me mention another couple of projects on the Texas level, if that's okay. Historic depots. You've done some work with historic depots. Baird?

KK:

Yes. Baird's probably the most outstanding one. We've done some others with much lesser results. But Baird was more than a fixer-upper. Before I forget there's one that we—well two that we've just started on but one in particular—we're going to do a master-plan update for the Texas State Cemetery in Austin.

DM:

Oh really? Wow. Big project.

KK:

So that's got some interesting aspects to it, but Baird, again, because of the people we were working with. There was a group called the Baird Foundation led by Betty Henson a local merchant and longtime Baird person. She had been trying to write grants, but was just having no success at times. So we worked probably I think for three or four years. So since we do it pro bono [laughter], we were trying for three or four years and finally helped them win one point two million TxDOT ice tea enhancement grant when they were doing those, because it was the depot and related to the train commerce in Texas, among other things. It now houses their chamber. We worked with them for a long, long, time and had to cajole the county to be their sponsor, because the city had trouble seeing their way to doing. Even though it was a low-risk or no-risk thing for them. One of those issues that all—never going to change—that sort of thing. Yet the county judge, who's still a county judge, Roger Corn, was reticent about it and was doubtful. But he was one of the happiest folks with the ribbon cutting. And then, now, some years later we're working with him on his courthouse.



DM:

Okay. [laughter]

KK:

Which at the time he didn't want to—He said, "You can do the depot, but—"

DM:

He was so in love after the depot results.

KK:

Well after some years and some leaks and things later, yeah, at Callahan County. But rewarding because you go back into the history of that particular railroad. Baird happened to be a—trying to think what they called it—not a service stop, but it had a roundhouse.

DM:

Yeah, wow.

KK:

They had these—it's funny, the history. The railroads had standard facilities and one of them was called an "immigrant house" so it would be where laborers that they brought in would stay, because they couldn't necessarily stay in the local places. Either by capacity or by custom. But so none of that is existent that we're aware of, but we have the old maps showing where they were.

DM:

They're on display? The maps are?

KK:

Yeah. Yeah.

DM:

Nice.

KK:

So again you learn, and even they learned after the—just to— researched their own history a bit to understand what was there. So even some of the old-timers that have forgotten or didn't know that some of those things existed. One of the things we often see with the depots is that it's from, at, or before the era, where there was a white and a Negro entrance, and bathrooms, water fountains, all of that. It hadn't been touched. All those signs were still up.

DM:

Really? Golly.

KK:

So interesting walk-through history.

DM:

Right. Sure is. What about other depot projects? Have you done others?

KK:

We did a little work, I believe, on the Granbury Depot. Unless I'm forgetting, those are really the two.

DM:

Did you do the Granbury courthouse?

KK:

No, we did not.

DM:

That's another renovation—that's another economic success. I don't know how it's doing now, but I know at one time it really.

KK:

Oh it is. Oh yeah. Still is. Yeah, Granbury still is. I will say my father, back in the seventies, did a renovation there.

DM:

Okay. Really?

KK:

But it was renovation, so it was work that today you'd reverse, in terms of lowered ceilings and that sort of thing.

DM:

Okay, let's look at some other projects. I wanted to touch base on this. I saw a little write-up in—I guess a newspaper article—about an example where the preservation site or the push—or the claim for a preservation effort doesn't always pan out. I'm talking about the Grapevine community versus DFW. The runway? Do you know what I—remember that project? Where they were using the preservation angle. Could you talk about that just a little bit?

KK:

Sure. I'm not so sure that the mayor who's been there for forever has ever gotten over this. Grapevine had a various sort of young man who was their Main Street person, even though at the time they weren't official Main Street program. For various reasons it almost became a badge of honor that they were going to defy the airport, even though the airport was their primary source of funds. Happened to be chair at the time. Robert Bass was chair of the Texas Historical—I mean of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We were brought together to consider the merits or the issues involving the application and then the lawsuit, really, that Grapevine brought against DFW on the merits of basically the Department of Transportation. I believe it was—well partly the 4F thing about alternatives to plans that impacted a historic area. For Grapevine it wasn't proximity or any of those compromises being asked, but they chose—and I don't know if this young man at the time—chose to hang their hats on the acoustic impact. That it was going to be a detriment to the historic fabric, historic structures. It wasn't at the time—that we were aware of—any studies to that effect. But also just from noise levels and things. The acoustic cone and vibration and everything was that footprint didn't appear to be at levels that would impact—physically, scientifically—those types of resources.

DM:

They didn't really have any data then that said—they didn't have any data that said, "Yeah, this is going to affect this building, because of"—

KK:

Right, and part of the proposed mitigation. When you have historic preservation conflicts they have a process in the 106—section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act—calls for process and possible mitigation. So what was offered as part of the mitigation was monitoring and filling out a survey to see if there was. There were acoustic studies that were done. A motorcycle going down the street would make as much of a noise than the levels from the landing pattern. There were other—if a truck used air breaks or something like that. But the interesting thing was that it was waged as a emotional campaign, and he had what at that time was sort of a state of the art boom box. He took the—recorded tape—of the levels that were there and put it in this boom box. But then he turned it up. [laughter] So it wasn't being played—

DM:

Wasn't representative.

KK:

And then plus you get leaders in a room this size and turn it up versus outside.

DM:

So the community's inflamed?

KK:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh gosh.

KK:

Anyway they did. I don't know if they—they may not have continued with the suit because it required that the—the THC rule—that there was an impasse and a—what would you call it—well I guess it's adverse effect. The THC under my chairmanship, I queried our staff about all those things, so the determination was made no adverse effects. They didn't have that grounds for a suit. And of course with the expansion of the two runways, I don't know how many millions—tens of millions, at least, if not hundreds of millions. Grapevine, kind of like Deadwood, South Dakota had more money than they could give away for façade programs and installing sprinklers and all the billing. Unheard of funding capability, because of airport revenues. In my chairmanship there were quite a few of those types of interesting challenges and things. Dealey Plaza declined the governor's request to take on the ownership change of the Alamo. Of course that's since happened and now way past, but I told them that's not something. I said, "Besides look at me. I'm not the person to take on the Daughters of the Republic of Texas." [laughter] Mission Control and, gosh, Dealey Plaza. Those are some of the—Glorieta Pass, repatriation of the Texas Veterans. All of those were interesting skirmishes.

DM:

You've done a lot of work with public facilities. So how often are you involved in public hearings where there are inflamed issues? That sounds like that's probably a fairly common thing for you to have to step into.

KK:

Yeah when it comes to some of the historic preservation issues that tends to draw controversy and heated emotional opinions out of the woodworks. Our public work, like we were saying with the libraries, with some other programs, it's often being the facilitators for finding—like we talked about—that common ground. So certainly public more than private, although there have been a couple of private programs, too, that pushed the envelope in terms of public interests and that sort of thing. But pretty much ninety-nine percent of the interesting debates we've been a part of have been in the public realm.

DM:

Let's talk just a little bit more about—well I just want to clarify something on the university campuses. The master plans for UTA, for TCJC Northeast campus, that was pre-Karl? Is that correct?

KK:

Yes. Those were in the sixties.

DM:

But you have been involved—haven't you been involved with other campus master plans?

KK:

Let's see. I guess the—

DM:

Or is it individual buildings?

KK:

Mostly individual buildings. The one campus that had been involved twice, I guess, is Tarleton.

DM:

I wanted to just get your take on more recent—I'm thinking it's probably more recent—considerations about campus security, because of all of the incidents on college campuses in the last ten or fifteen years. That seems like a new and very strong consideration for an architect who deals with university campuses. How would you approach the issue of security on campus?

KK:

The physical security that we get involved in, or would get involved in, for facilities that are as open as academic campuses can be challenging. But they're also, I would say, maybe a smaller percentage of the issue than what fortunately we have, and that is the notifications systems that's really part of both the campus and maybe communications engineering and that sort of thing. That's probably the number one component.

DM:

Quick response.

KK:

Right. Then beyond that was does affect us—and different campuses approach it differently—would be entrance security. Most of them don't want to address the issue of being able to do things like facial recognition and that sort of thing. Of course in dorms we've had for some time now key, then keyless entry, ID access and exit, and that sort of thing. I think entrance—better observable public areas, and even sometimes simple stairway access. But also I think the biggest one that I like to try and ask academic facility clients about is compartmentation. There's a certain degree of security in terms of being able to lock out or lock in depending on who you are from different places. Lecture halls, even down to quarters where maybe you take advantage of



the fact that in large buildings you have to have fire doors. But those can be setup to also be security doors in an emergency situation. So some semi-passive measures, I guess, are—I think—the wave of the future. But by far the biggest offset, defensively, is notification.

DM:

Okay. Okay. Is it only incidental that, for example, the three towers of the Southwest Collection have no access to where anyone could poke out a window—I'm thinking of the UT sniper situation. Is that ever taken into consideration or discussed among architects? "We can't allow that kind of—m"

KK:

Well it has. And actually, if I recall correctly, that was fleetingly brought up about, "Well if there's no real purpose other than casual observation or something, then why do that?" But I believe either we brought it up or David may have brought it up just as a glancing, "Well we don't want another—" who is it? James White perch or whoever it is. So he said, "Yeah, that's probably true."

DM:

So it does come up?

KK:

Oh well and certainly in today's thing, very—yeah. Very much.

DM:

Let's talk about some more general ideas here. And let's start with this transition. In your career—your education and career as an architect—there's been a major transition from—just to put it simply, the drafting board to the computer. You were there for this. You must have started out on a drafting board, correct?

KK:

Yes.

DM:

And made the full transition to computer? Can you talk about that and the challenges, because it seems like a big challenge in your profession? And in all of our professions, but golly, really, I mean with all of the changes—

KK:

Yeah, I think the fortunate thing is that, again human nature, anything that's new, and particularly anything that's got a gadget sense to it—Fortunately not only the youngest

generation that might be in college level or entry working level, but human nature is you've got at least that middle ground of folks who are interested in that. So that's helped carry the momentum of use and application. I would say early on the big entry barrier was cost.

DM:

Okay.

KK:

Our first computers that we got—and we're a small operation—we penny pinched and went for a lower-class fifty-thousand dollars a station [laughter] one. And yet we were not at the forefront, but we were very much not at the tail end of that. We worked with an engineering firm who bragged that they paid a hundred thousand dollars a station. So the early entry to all of that was cost, and obviously more the—well this was pre-Apple and pre-PC sort of. So the expense was both the hardware and the software. And the software was incredibly limiting, too. Fortunately the architecture and engineering disciplines were the first to kind of embrace that.

DM:

What about all the hours of training on the drafting board, though? [laughter] Did you go, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute,"?

KK:

Well what was interesting about that evolution is there was linen. You drew on linen with ink and spent hours and then hours if you had to correct or change something. And then there was paper, and then there was drawing on Mylar as a more stable permanent thing. Then somebody came up with the idea of layering, right? So you actually layered Mylars to be able to change out—when you printed it—change what was on the floor plan.

DM:

That's such an—

KK:

Well you think about it, that carried over to the computer in terms of the layers that you would assign different things. So whether by happenstance or perhaps more by the evolution of the thinking of how to manage information those kind of came along. So at least those that started with the early CADD [**Computer-Aided Design and Drafting**] software things understood the concept of layers, typically. Although it happened so fast there were some who—and we called it "pin bar" because to register the layers of Mylar you had to punch each sheet at the top of your drafting board, still, you had this pin registration that the holes would fit in, and that's how you kept your documents straight. But I think the other thing, which was Xerox eventually learned—it was interesting—but they were still heavily into copying and read graphics and things. They

came out with a policy that said, “We’re not going to upgrade with each Word Processing thing,” because they were finding their efficiencies had actually declined because by the time somebody got really used to working with one, then you change it, and then it was sort of a—you added an extra learning curve. So they were the first, at least in a large published thing, to say that just each new iteration is not always beneficial from a work efficiency standpoint. Again, that human nature thing. Although that’s kind of gone away, I guess, with all the releases. But I think there is something behind that, and that’s why Microsoft and the others they service—Windows 7 is still at least operable for another year or two. Realizing that both economies as well as just human efficiencies are affected by that. It’s been a benefit overall to our profession and our services, I think. The big difference educationally is that—or education—you were talking about the difference between work and academics is you get young people who come out and they say, “Well, I’ve had CADD in school.” Well, you can draw proficiently, but you don’t know what to draw or how to draw it. So that’s a little bit of disconnect, and we’ve certainly seen an overrepresentation of, I would say, architectural capability that gets mixed up with their perception that, “Well I know how to do CADD.” So that’s been around for a while, in terms of that problem. But now we’ve seen it, and I think there is an understanding, that yes, being proficient in the operation of a program doesn’t necessarily equate to then the knowledge gained, lessons learned of [inaudible].

DM:

Right. Right. Don’t pin all of your hopes on your technological abilities there.

KK:

Yeah, in terms of how to pull programs together.

DM:

This must be a field that changes constantly for you, as in the entire realm of the computer world. So you handle this by watching for the major innovations? It’s not a year after year after year thing, I guess. I mean you were talking about like 2007—the 2007 version still being in use. Here are you careful to just wait for the next major innovation before you go into that new technology?

KK:

Well sometimes it’s not innovation as much as just the version released. Our software that we use, there’s a new a release every year. We will put off maybe by a year, sometimes by six months. What’s interesting is now architects are ahead for the most part of the engineering disciplines.

DM:

Oh really?

KK:

Yeah. A lot of our engineers are on 2012-'13-'14 and '15. We're operating on '15, but everybody in our shop has '17. The problems come. We can save back and then read forward, but if you have 2015 or 2012 you can't necessarily read forward. You can read back. So some of our programs have to be calibrated by the length of time and by who's working on it. We may have five different mechanical, electrical engineers, and they're on different releases or something like that. But we do have a tendency to not be the first. We never try and claim the bragging rights of being the first.

DM:

I think best to just kind of watch and see how it goes.

KK:

Yeah, yeah. Because as we've seen there's been a couple that have kind of fallen flat.

DM:

That's right. When was your first computer purchase, by the way? What year would you say?

KK:

Well, depends on how you define "computer". I guess our Word Processors, which were all so expensive big behemoth things, we had those I guess in what, '70—we had them in our Washington Komatsu Brown in the late seventies. Maybe I've told you this, we were early in getting a fax machine. We elected to get one from—have I told you that? Exxon Systems. Exxon as a subsidiary tried to get into the office equipment market.

DM:

You had an Exxon, huh?

KK:

I had an Exxon. State of the art, though. They had G1, G2, and G3. Those were releases. We went for the big time and got a G3, because it was the fastest. But it was a tube about like this, and you plugged the phone line into it and a power line into it, and it used thermal paper. So you'd open the tube—kind of like a bank deposit thing—and there's a little metal thing, and you clipped one piece of paper into it and you closed the thing. Then it had to do the modem sort of thing and connect. Then it would start spinning. Ours was real fast. It could do one page every, I think, three minutes. [laughter]

DM:

But the idea of being able to send a diagram? Amazing. Even if it did take three minutes.

KK:

Although they would accept faxes but they were still not accepting them as legal documents, because it was thermal paper. You had to make a copy of it otherwise a year in your files and it'd all be just blank. But I remember saying then that the woeful thing about that is a contract or some directions or a diagram—you lost the ability to say, “Oh, well, it's in the mail. Haven't you received it yet?” [laughter]

DM:

Can't blame it on the USPS anymore.

KK:

But, gosh, we just thought—because our old firm didn't even have a fax—and we just thought we were on top of the world with one that could do one page per three minutes. That was blistering speed.

DM:

Well we've lived through some exciting times, haven't we? [laughter] Okay, well let me ask you about aesthetic considerations a bit here. I wanted to—we've talked a little bit about your emphasis on landscaping, but I wanted to pick up a bit on use of windows. Somewhere, I was reading something about Komatsu Architecture that use of windows was important. I think I'm thinking in terms of—in the context of libraries in particular. Lighting is important. Study spaces are increasingly important. Stacks areas maybe not so much. Can you talk about—let's just use libraries as an example, and can you talk about some considerations there? Use of space, for one.

KK:

Sure. Well the technical role of the library and the social role of the library have evolved in different ways, as you know. So the technical role of the stacks—In public libraries we see those maybe leveling out in terms of dedication or allocation of space for stacks, because of either lending, sometimes online, not as big of reference collections as there are the other popular aspects. But by the same time people who say, “Well libraries are going to shrink and eventually go away.” We don't see that, both from the technical side which is access to books—real books—versus electronic books or online research only. So there's still—particularly for the higher education academic ones, we see a reinvestment in—sometimes they're closed stacks now versus open, more and more. But we see it particularly in public and academic libraries the social side of libraries as having changed dramatically, and perhaps for the better. Rather than being pictured as a warehouse for books, and then a few sprinkled chairs and desks and things, it's become what they call in academic circles “learning commons”. In public realm it's called the “community commons”. So libraries are seen as an upgraded community center in that you have something to do there or something to gain there, as well as it being a comfortable, relaxing, or sometimes maybe not recreational but entertainment venue. In the public realm some of them are



getting close to almost being like a de facto, almost kind of like a pool where you have a lifeguard chair, but there's a sign that says, "Swim at your own risk." More and more parents are having their children stay there until they pick them up from work. The elderly community is using it more as a resource and as environmentally just as a stimulating place, because they can sort of be alone but not be alone at the same time. So more, and in the academic world, collaboration. So hence the study rooms and things. More so than just picturing a student having to be quiet the whole time and just work by themselves—

DM:

Group stations.

KK:

--which is still there. But yeah, group cluster stations, rooms. So it's evolved, I think, into a very healthy direction from that standpoint. And it sort of does make sense that huge stack collections occupying primo space at least if you can condense it more and have an easy retrieval system, then you're using more of your library space for the human aspect. I mean beyond just reading, or the retrieval of information, which is all still good notwithstanding archives that have that technical role that reaches beyond the typical library.

DM:

You've really described exactly the direction that the Texas Tech University library—main library—is taking. What they're doing is taking some of the less requested materials and using off-site storage if they have to, to make more use of their space for group study and this type of thing. So yeah. I don't know if you've heard of other examples of off-site storage or how common that is.

KK:

More and more common. Almost every institution that we've touched or inquired on—certainly looking at that. What used to be—what was it—is it called Southwest Texas State University now, they've got a big push toward offsite stack and archival storage, and then quick retrieve for requested documents out of that. We see glimpses of it in the UT system, doing that. UNT recently just put out an RFQ for studying high-density offsite stack storage. You know it's still looked at that, quote: "the library is one of those prerequisites for a university to mark them or earn the—" what is it—"research," which I hope always is the criteria. Both for the health of the libraries but I think that's an excellent measure.

DM:

Kind of considered the interdisciplinary hub of the campus, often. This is where the bulk—and not all—but the bulk of research materials on campus are located. And then each college or each department has its own small holdings as well—more specialized holdings—but it still appears

as the interdisciplinary spot. And also the social spot. More and more often. But in regard to the emphasis on individual study space and group study space, can you address some ideas on the aesthetics that lend to that kind of atmosphere?

KK:

You know the—I try and read as much about generational characteristics of articles on millennials and that sort of thing—but I think maybe the older generations didn't admit this as much as the younger millennials actually put it on display. But there's an uncanny ability be in a place and yet be isolated, and perhaps that's with the use of personal devices and things. But it's almost a universal desire, but one is admitted, and one is probably more guarded about that human fascination about to see and be seen.

DM:

Right.

KK:

And yet also a higher demand with the younger generations about flexible types of spaces regarding sound, light, togetherness, separateness, and everything. So from an aesthetic or environmental perspective, I think we see a trend towards a lot more interior transparency. And yet you use glass partitions for some sound isolation or something. But it's almost that sense of frenetic. You know that something's happening around you. You find less interest in what—like the open classrooms tried to go to and then they tried to get away from it—where no distractions. Schools with—

DM:

Facing a blank wall.

KK:

Yeah, schools with no windows and classrooms. That I think eclipsed—not eclipsed—that didn't take into account the human spirit in terms of just light. There's a classic from a whole different discipline, but the NSSL [**National Severe Storms Lab**] facility, I guess, in Oklahoma that I've not seen, but I heard when we were doing a proposal for NOAA [**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**], this guy said, "You know, we all specialize in severe storm stuff. And what do they do in Oklahoma? They put us in a room and we can't even see the sky outside." [laughter] He said, "How counter-intuitive is that?" [laughter]

DM:

Now that's dependence on technology right there. [laughter] Oh golly.

KK:

So I think libraries and other facilities, I think there's a twofold aspect to—environmentally, in Texas you have to be careful because you offset energy use and comfort—ambient temperature comfort—with visibility. So lots of other aspects orientation. But in general, light is—and daylighting, they call it in sustainable design area—is important because there's obvious benefits from good air, good light, those aspects.

DM:

What about conduciveness to study? Is it beneficial, you think, to have a look at the outdoors? A look at something green? Is that a consideration as well? Because I'm seeing more—in my very limited way—I'm seeing more in the way of new libraries with large windows that look out onto a green space. So is that something that you look at when you're designing a library? Is there typically some visibility with a green space outdoors?

KK:

It can be. There's subcultural influences with any location. We would certainly try, as I think most designers would if there was a lovely green exterior somewhere. To somehow bring that into the building or extend the building out to it. There can be that in a sense quiet serenity, and you see it from some of the taller buildings. Thinking in New York, you can look down on Park Avenue or Madison Avenue and there's a lot of activity, but somehow there's a certain serenity that you sense that you gain because you can't hear it, and you're looking at it a little abstractly. Maybe a ground floor space with people constantly walking by and peering in could be distracting. It may not be a good physiological thing. Maybe the verdict's still out about whether this younger generation—Well there's two sort of types, I guess. There's the one that gets overstimulated—most of them—but then there's the other that could be in the middle of a NBA basketball court, and so long as they have their earbuds and— [DM laughs]

DM:

Own little world.

KK:

Yeah. Yeah.

DM:

Yeah, we have to be careful driving across campus. [laughter]

KK:

Yeah, that's right. That's right. Who was it? Jodi Foster said that, "I've never been so connected and felt so alone."

DM:

Right. Right. Just wanted your take on some of that. Well let me have a couple of wrap-up questions here. We talked last time about how this firm has been involved in over twelve hundred projects. Is that the right figure?

KK:

I believe so, if not a little higher.

DM:

What will this firm be remembered for? What's it known for now and what will it be remembered for? Or what do you hope it will be remembered for?

KK:

Maybe the same things present and future. I think our intangible legacy is that our buildings are enjoyed and appreciated, for the most part. Whether it's patrons or occupant users, the caretakers of the campus or the entity. In some ways I guess I think of our legacy as perhaps more intangible characteristics than the classic tangible ones. I think architects traditionally like to say, "Well I want somebody to know that I designed that building," or that "I did that building," or "That it's the most—if not inspiring it's the most eye-catching feature on the horizon." I would say that we, and my personal aspiration in that regard is different. We like to say, and it's not just an interview pitch, but we like to say that when a client or a user or an owner looks at a project that we've done that they recognize it as a reflection of them. That it's what they—it projects what their aspirations have been, or their vision. It may not, and probably isn't, what they might have sort of thought in their head that, "Gosh, I'm going to have this crystal chrome imposing box." But if that's their aspiration they'll look at it and this is their legacy, too, what it's going to be. So I think hopefully uncharacteristically as architects we have made different accomplishments in that regard.

DM:

Kind of relates to something you said earlier. That you're really not trying to put a Komatsu stamp on everything as much as letting that evolve from what the people need.

KK:

Yeah. You know regarding libraries, for instance, I guess, one our biggest compliments and if we're known for various library successes, one librarian said, "You know it's Komatsu building because the staff has got space to be able to do what they need to do." Or the police said, "It works because we actually can get our done work here, and we're not fighting—whether it's our chairs or our desks—the ability to do what we do in the processing of records or people or whatever." I think, obviously, we don't ignore. I think deep in our hearts certainly appearance

and image are all part of that. But it's that different philosophy that that's got to come out of this spirit of the people who are going to use it.

DM:

Well, it's a very unselfish perspective.

KK:

Well—

DM:

Because I would think—correct me if I'm wrong—but I would think there would be a lot of architectural firms that want to have a stamp, want to have a style that's recognizable and promotional to that firm.

KK:

Yeah, and they're certainly, probably, in many respects the more published or visible things. I mean we just visited a facility that was recommended that we go look at. It had won some design awards and was published. So when we got there the chief of police said, "Glad you're here. I want to walk you through this. I hope you have the philosophy that you can learn as much from what not to do as what to do. This feature apparently won an architectural award. It doesn't do anything for us. It's the joke of what does this mean? So take that at face value with what your aspirations are. We can show you what not to do." [laughter] So if we can avoid a legacy of that, then I'd say we're very happy.

DM:

You bet. You bet. Last question. The question is maybe the most important question: What have I forgotten to ask? [laughter]

KK:

Oh! Well between your good questions and my ramblings we've probably covered a good bit of it. Maybe—and you've probably touched on this in various ways—maybe one that's I think on our minds is what role will architecture play in the future of human existence, vis-à-vis depleting resources and energy, water conservation and that sort of thing. I would say that the studies are out there of the energy used and actually carbon-generation and things like that. While we all concentrate on cars and smog, for the past ten or fifteen years studies have pointed to buildings as being the biggest contributor. Like by anywhere from a third to two thirds in various categories. So we've got challenges ahead to play a smarter and perhaps kinder role in the long-term human history, so to speak.



DM:

You're talking more about use of materials in that regard, correct or?

KK:

Well use of materials, cultural practices in terms of potable water for everything, even for flushing toilets and things. When you fly into DFW I don't think there's—there must not be more than three hundred square meters that isn't lit or doesn't have some light on it, and you can fly in at two a.m. So there's got to be a lot of day-to-day living and cultural changes that—particularly we in the U.S. and globally—we have to influence that too for the long term. And I'm not a tree-hugger or a major climate change worrier, but you can see it, you can feel it, and the statistics—the facts. Scientific facts—they're at least in my world of built environment, so—and if that's playing that significant a percentage in the overall picture, then that's something of a concern and a strategic goal.

DM:

Right. Right.

KK:

That's it.

DM:

Okay. Well fortunately we don't live far apart. Sometimes you come to Lubbock, sometimes I come to Fort Worth. So if other questions arise I'll write them down. If there are other things that might occur to you, jot them on a scrap of paper and we'll put our heads together another time and we can always add to this.

KK:

Sure, sure.

DM:

So thank you very much.

KK:

Thank you.

*[End of recording]*