

**RG53.1 History of Wake Forest University Oral History Project  
Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library**

**December 5, 2014**

**Kenneth Zick, Professor, School of Law**

**Interviewer: Tanya Zanish-Belcher**

**Q: (00:00:15) Ok, this is an interview with Kenneth Zick and would you like to describe your family background and where you grew up?**

A: Please, Ken. So I was born near a farm, a family farm in Michigan. Parchment, Michigan and spent some time there, but most of my high school years were in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It's an interesting little vignette there because my dad was a speechwriter for Jerry Ford's first campaign and so Mike Ford and I, reputedly, played in a playpen at campaign headquarters at Grand Rapids and then came to live on the same street, Faculty Drive for a while. Small World.

**Q: (00:01:09) And so what led you to Law School?**

A: Well, a circuitous path because I attended graduate school in Political Theory at University of Michigan, as a Michigan Fellow and then I was bitten by the social justice bug. Which was going around in the late 60s, early 70s and felt that I must go to law school because lawyers knew how things operated and so I transferred to Law School and then I did postgraduate work in Michigan.

**Q: (00:01:44) Did it turn out as you envisioned?**

A: Never. No, well it did in a way, because when I entered graduate school, I wanted to teach and I ended up, you know, teaching and in administration, so yeah, I guess it did, but it was fortuitous.

**Q: (00:02:05) When you first arrived at Wake Forest, can you describe what your initial impressions were?**

A: A movie set campus. Well, I really have to diverge a little bit because the manner in which I arrived was completely serendipitous. I had been interviewing at the University of Virginia for a position and Richmond, University of Richmond and my parents happened to have moved from Grand Rapids to High Point. And so I stayed with them and when I returned from those interviews they said "Why don't we have a picnic up at Fancy Gap?" So we were driving to Fancy Gap, mind you, I was in my hiking shorts and my hiking boots and a blue work shirt and I saw a sign on I-40 that said Wake Forest University and I turned to my father and said "Do they have a law school?" and he said "I don't know, let's check." They were arguing because he had not taken Highway 52 and so had Dad not made that mistake I would not have seen the sign, would not have toured the school so I - we drove to the school I walked past Carswell Hall

which was the law school at that time up to Reynolda Hall and found a phone booth on the second floor phone booths, you know, that's an archaic piece isn't it? And called the law school. There happened to be a student attendant at the library desk and I asked if the Dean might be in and she said "You know, I think so." It was a Saturday, mind you, the law school still taught on Saturdays and so I knocked on Dean Bellman's door and he opened it and we chatted for a while and he said "you know, I think the - we've just advertised for a position in the Chronicle of Higher Education. You might just want to stay. Let me call the Chair of the faculty recruitment committee Mac Ferris," who came down and we had a discussion and they said "Of course, you must stay." They called all ten members of the faculty at that point and I stayed an extra day, interviewed and then it really became problematic because both of the other schools had extended their offer, but I had fallen in love with Wake Forest and it was - to me it combined the best of all worlds, you know and undergraduate campus with a law school and graduate schools.

**Q: (00:05:17) When you accepted the position, what do you remember about when you first arrived?**

A: Oh goodness. I remember my first day of teaching and I was very excited as most young instructors are. Loaded for bear, I had prepared and re-prepared and practiced my lesson plan and I was so proud of it and after the class, still very filled with my own hubris after teaching this class, walked through the library and encountered an elderly faculty member, Hugh Devine. Lot of stories about Foggy Devine, but I explained to him what a brilliant lesson plan this was and he listened so attentively and then he looked at me and I'll never forget, he said "But did they learn anything?" Well, that shot down my balloon pretty quickly and I've pondered that ever since. It's not about you.

**Q: (00:06:23) What was the law school like when you first arrived?**

A: You know, it was going through a transition. It was - there were a lot of new faculty from the east coast and the midwest and still a number of faculty that had grown up - some who had taught at the old campus, even going as far back as World War II, when Duke and Wake actually combined their law schools in order to survive. That may be the only collaboration in Duke and Wake history that I'm aware of. And, so Pasco Bowman was a new very exciting, energetic Dean, you know, from NYU. Left the law school, became a United States Court of Appeals Judge, he was very interested in faculty development, so it was a very exciting time, but at the same time it was a time of some tension. Pasco had brought with him one of his older faculty members, Sylvester Pietro, who had founded the Wake Forest Institute for Labor Policy Analysis, whose goal was to seek the unconstitutionality --to declare the unconstitutionality through the courts of the labor injunction - no, no, to improve it. I'm sorry, you know, I get confused because when I first met Sylvester, you know, I had done some graduate work in labor policy analysis in Detroit, and had worked for the UAW as a grievance adjuster for a while and so he took me by the hand and since he was very much in favor of reinstating the labor injunction, which I thought was terribly misguided and archaic, he said "We will change you from

your errant labor oriented ways.” He never did, although I helped him on a brief Supreme Court case that he argued, the Atwood case.

**Q: (00:08:37) You were at the law school for thirteen years and that involved, you know, clinical education, legal research (00:08:45) and writing, coaching moot court teams. What stands out for you as your main memories?**

A: And as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

**Q: And as Associate Dean. What sticks out for you the most, in terms of memories?**

A: I guess it would be developing the clinical legal education program because we did not have one. The faculty was not anxious to approve a clinical program. One faculty remarked - memory, remarked to me after a meeting in which it was proposed that “We only have these students for three years and we don’t want them polluted by practicing.” Well, times have changed obviously and now clinical education is fully embraced, but I was tasked with writing the first grant in collaboration with the North West Legal Aides Society to secure funding for a clinic and we did. It was approved and we hired a renowned young man, I won’t tell you from what institutions, but he had a real pedigree and within three months he ran off with the director of the food co-op, yes, and left cases, clients, students, a courtroom and I’ll never forget receiving a call from judge who was a Wake Forest Graduate who said “We’re down here in court and the clients are here and the students are here, but the director is not.” Well I was licensed to practice so I ran down there and then there were no more continuances to be granted, so I don’t know how I muddled my way out of that situation but it was a couple days later when the Dean came up to my office and said “Guess what? You’re the new director of clinical legal education.” It was exciting for this reason because I spent the summer, you know, touring other law school and studying their programs and developed a program that I thought met Wake Forest’s needs at that particular time and it really hasn’t changed that much, we’ve added a lot of clinics, but it was very exciting and then arguing cases before the United States Court of Appeals for the fourth circuit with students. Sometimes with students, sometimes without students, that was very exciting. I mean, developing the strategic plan, you know, for the law school the 440 plan, we called it the 440 because I think John Anderson, who was VP at that time and helped supervise the process wanted a racy car and so that dates you, if you don’t know what a four forty was, I think it was a Pontiac back in the sixties, but it meant four classes for first year students of forty students a piece. I’ll bet it was more - much more than that, it was - it involved some cultural change, but the faculty embraced it because it positioned us as a school, and the university supported it financially, it positioned us as a school that could really cater to its strength, which was promoting individual interaction with students.

**Q: (00:12:31) And you said that brought about a cultural change, in what way?**

A: Well, it required - it required faculty, I think - they wouldn’t get the same amount of course credit for teaching two sections of a first year course, they’d teach, you know one and one half instead of two and so faculty really had to sacrifice a bit, you know, which I thought was

admirable that they were willing to do that, in order to make sure we were rendering a personalized kind of education, that is our hallmark.

**Q: (00:13:12) Do you think the law school over the years has made more of an effort (00:13:15) to include practicing lawyers as adjuncts to kind of bring in that -**

A: Well, we did, we did at that time actually, in specialized areas, I think any school -

(Video 1 ends at 00:13:30)

A: (continued at 00:00:00 of video 2) that wants to offer a full breadth of - for instance specialized areas really, really has to and fortunately, you know, we were really able to attract a lot of really fine people.

**Q: (00:00:13) Anything else that you can think of? I mean -**

A: In the law school years?

**Q: (00:00:15) Yes, in the law school.**

A: Well yeah, there was one, one - one experience that I had that I probably will never forget. It didn't have much to do with the law school, but a lot to do with the idea of friendship at Wake Forest. One day, a third year law student named Trip Ward came into my office and had a Polish refugee in tow. Her name was Alexandra Sakowitz and Alexandra had been secreted out of Poland. Now, at this time Poland was still Communistic, Walesa was still protesting Gdansk and Father Popieluszko was leading marches, you know, in the streets of Warsaw, had been killed, actually, after protest and it was a tumultuous time and Alexandra had fled because she was a member of a solidarity cell. She was seventeen at the time, she would type up protest newsletters and carry them across town and distribute them in schoolyards. She was picked up, tortured by the Polish KGB, saw her boyfriend shot, you know, in front of her during a protest and when I first encountered her, I was - still remember walking outside my office and there she was sitting in a chair reading Kafka in German. She spoke three languages and I had never practiced nor did I have any desire to practice immigration law, but of course they couldn't find an attorney, she was indigent. I had done some clinical work, so Trip felt that he could approach me and I was so taken by her story that I decided to learn up on immigration law. So I represented her. What was unique about this story and what makes it a Wake Forest story is that we encountered difficulty, her petition for political asylum was originally denied in Charlotte. We went down there, had our hearing and the hearing officer did say if we could find - we couldn't find any evidence that there would be a strong probability of her persecution upon return and so if we could find any, any evidence, an affidavit, you know, from a person who was close to her that could represent the fact that she had been persecuted, that would suffice. Well, we hit upon the scheme of getting her mother, Isabella Sakowitz here, who happened to be Miss Warsaw, 1938. She was a physician and actually had secreted Alexandra after this protest rally in which she was arrested from one part of the hospital to another part of the hospital, but if

we could get Isabella out. Well, getting a person out of Poland at that time was nigh unto impossible. Now, Alexandra and Isabella carried out phone conversations in code, but it was very difficult. I contacted the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs, they said "Look there's no way, everybody wants to get out of Poland, there's no way we're going to issue a visa." Finally, I hit upon an idea. At that - I had had a former student assistant named Tom Ashcraft who was working in Senator Helm's office I believe at the time and so I called Tom and said "Is there any way you can help?" He made a few phone calls and said "You know, they're intercepting phone calls. I mean and there's no way that we can -" It happened that Isabella - I shouldn't admit this, you know, had a forged passport, but needed a visa and so I said "Why don't you call-" he came - he seized upon the idea that "I'll call and I'll tell the diplomatic official to extend every courtesy to a person who arrives who mentions the name Ken Zick." I said "Ok." Well two days later, I get a phone call from Tom and he said "Guess what? You'll never believe this. I called the diplomatic office there and I mentioned our stratagem and the reply was "Oh, you mean the Ken Zick at Wake Forest." It happened that that council official had graduated from the Wake Forest Law School. I had not known him that well, but I had talked to him at the last cocktail party before graduation and he had said that he was going to be posted someplace in Eastern Europe. So, Isabella was able to get to the back door and Marina escorted her up, she got a visa, she got out. When she arrived, you know in New York, Trip and Alexandra met her on the plane, she got walked down from the plane and said "So, when do I get to meet this illustrious national leader Ken Zick?" Because to her, doors opened. Too much time, but -

**Q: (00:06:25) You think that exemplifies -**

A: We were able to win eventually her - on the strength of that affidavit and also because the supreme court had been monitoring this case that had made its way up through the supreme court that liberalized rules through political asylum and Alexandra became - went - she took some courses at Wake Forest, then went to UCLA and graduated from law school and became an assistant attorney general for the state of California.

**Q: (00:06:55) Do you think that that is a good illustration of maybe the network of Wake Forest graduates?**

A: Yeah, yeah. Well and the magic of Wake Forest, I mean, because don't you think, I mean - when I think of stumbling upon Wake Forest, not knowing of Wake Forest and under those circumstances and then the circumstances of facilitating Alexandra's release,

**Q: Almost meant to be.**

A: Yeah, yeah. I mean you can't make up things like that.

**Q: (00:07:32) How did you move to student life?**

A: Tom Hearn entreated me and he entreated me at Graylyn. I'll never forget the night I was actually a finalist for a Deanship at another school and we had a wonderful dinner and I was

very intrigued with the idea of forming a division of student life because there had been none and that was very exciting to me and so I remember walking out, you know, the door and turning to him saying “So I think I can get back to you in a couple weeks.” and Tom looked at me and he said “Twenty four hours.”

**Q: (00:08:26) Did you have it in your mind what you planned to create or were you just intrigued by the (00:08:30) possibilities?**

A: I didn't know that much about what I was getting into. I knew that I loved working with students and I loved working with student leaders and had coached a number of moot court teams and worked with student organizations in law school and that was my first love. So, the idea of doing something similar, you know, for the college was wonderful, but no, I have to say that I relied extensively on certain staff members to take me to school, to educate me that first year. In fact I was very grateful for the fact that I would - I had a very organized educational plan for readings and conversations and listening sessions. So I'm a self-educated student affairs professional.

**Q: (00:09:35) Looking back on your student affairs portion of your career what were the major challenges?**

A: Well, you know, every new organization goes through some stages. You know, what? Forming, storming, norming and performing. So it's, you know, when I think of those years I think of dividing it up into, you know, those stages, simplistically speaking because organically that's not the way it often transpires. So, the forming stage was a very creative, exciting stage, just getting to know people, enlisting, you know, staff and developing a common vision and philosophy, you know, for student life which was built around, you know, student development, the love of students, understanding the stages of student development in the collegiate experience and I think that it may have been, perhaps more creative because I arrived with a tabula rasa. Now of course, one can look at it and say a lot of mistakes were made too because I arrived with a tabula rasa, but that forming stage was very exciting. Storming, in terms of initial implementation, I mean, these offices had never been pulled together and by those offices I mean campus ministry, the counseling center, the student health center, student development, leadership programs, Benson Center, eventually university police, but that was added later. Minority affairs we changed to multicultural affairs. So, pulling together those disparate pieces and building a team that was committed to a common vision was really exciting. And I had library too, and the library at the time, well there was no Wilson wing, we had not automated, I mean, students were still using the card catalogue. There was probably more storming than forming, you know, with the library because I was tasked with becoming the project manager for the Wilson wing, which was truly a labor of love since Ed was a mentor and he's Ed. So, that was lovely, but in the process, working with the library committee, that I must say, was rather entrenched in their ways. The staff wasn't, the staff was a wonderful staff, but the committee wanted more stacks. The more stacks you had, the better library you would have and so we shouldn't sacrifice any space for a technology center. So, we had to drag some people kicking and screaming into the twentieth century. It's hard to believe there was, you know, almost a

revolt when we revealed plans for a technology center, now where the HELP area is in and the very idea of displacing the card catalogue with an automated -

(Video 2 ends at 00:13:29)

A: (continued at 00:00:00 of video 3) system was treason to the printed word. Hard to believe isn't it? You know, today.

**Q: (00:00:13) By the time you came (00:00:15) to the end of your time at student life, what - were the challenges different?**

A: Oh my goodness, yes. Well, the advent of social media and for lack of a better word, we'll call it helicopter parents, that I think some of the staff called them stealth bomber parents because they - became significant challenges. The climate had changed, it was a more regulated, legally regulated climate, which you would expect that with my background, you know, I would've welcomed. Of course I didn't, because it tended to interfere with the developmental goals of student life. I mean, if your purpose is to shepherd students through, you know, this experience and to affirm their idealism with - in productive ways, to channel productive ways, to enhance their own potential. Sometimes, you know, social media or parents or legalisms get in the way of that so you kind of have to structure around it. Risk management, you know, after - particularly after 9/11. I'll never forget when 9/11 occurred, we were in a cabin - a president's cabinet meeting and the first plane went into the towers and somebody brought in that word to Sandra Boyette and then word was brought in that a second plane had gone in, at that point I'll never forget Tom stopping the meeting and saying "This is not by chance. Sandra can we - you need to assemble a crisis team." And we had many students that we had to put onto busses because of course there wasn't plane - air travel at that time and many of them had lost family or friends. So, it was a very tumultuous, tragic time, but that led to the formal creation of a crisis management team and somehow that morphed into - somehow I became the leader of that team too. Probably because of sitting in that meeting and responding as we did.

**Q: (00:03:13) What do you think, (00:03:15) when you think about your time as an administrator, what made you - what would you think would contribute to your success as an administrator?**

A: What would contribute - Oh, well an outstand - being surrounded by outstanding team members, I mean, in that the people in student life were truly outstanding, the people on the cabinet were outstanding and working together as a team, nothing could be accomplished in a decentralized environment of the university without clearly fashioned, you know, deliberative plans that engaged the community and that's true especially in student life because you have to engage student organizations in the buy in as well if you try to, for example, convert women's society to national sororities, I assure you, you need to consult not only the alumni, but the students in developing that process. So yeah, it's team and I was fortunate to have good mentors, you know, in Ed Wilson and Tom Hearn.

**Q: (00:04:32) What do you think was the most important lesson you learned as an administrator?**

A: Patience. I tend to be a very passionate person and so I had to learn not to jump too quickly out of the gate. To make sure that I understood the entire landscape of the university central administration is very different than being a department chair or a dean. Those cultures are discreet and unique in their own ways but when you're a central administration - administrator you have to worry about the entire university and act in the best interest of the university and that creates tensions because we are all advocates, you know, for our own areas, whether it be in advancement or public relations, legal, athletics or whatever and so there's always going to be some - some tension. So, you'd better form good relationships and good trusting relationships because if - I would say trust is the glue, you know, that assures excellence in performance.

**Q: (00:06:12) You've mentioned the mentorship of (00:06:15) Ed Wilson and Thomas Hearn. Would you like to talk about the role that they've played in your career?**

A: Yeah, I was just incredibly fortunate to have my office next to Ed's in Reynolda Hall. I mean, we had had several interactions before that, when I was at the law school, but - but Ed was very generous with his time, as he is with most people, but he would often stop by at five o'clock, you know, and I would have the opportunity to quiz him, you know, on issues and concerns in particular cases and seek his advice and it was always very wise advice, but I'll never forget one occasion when I was particularly distraught over a judicial consult case. We had - in fact, we informed the honor system to make it a more community-based system, but at that time, when I arrived it was entirely student-based and that's another story, but I went through this case at some length with Ed and he listened intently and then he paused and said - because I was wondering what to do with this young man, you know, what was the best outcome? What was the best sanction? And he looked at me and he said "Is he a good person?" and that kind of summed it up, you know, that beyond the facts of a particular case, as difficult as it may be, do you have a good grasp, you know, on whether that person has shown the potential, you know, for renewal.

**Q: (00:08:30) And President Hearn?**

A: Oh. Well, he was a moral philosopher and so I really enjoyed, you know, talking with him because I had taken graduate school a number of courses in philosophy and so we had that in common. Even though, over the course of time, I found myself presenting a more sociological point of view of student life as opposed to his moral perception of the way student life should be and so we had this continuing dynamic dialogue, but he always trusted my judgment. His integrity was unbounded. He was an extremely ethical man, who believed that we always ought to be asking the question that he asked at the beginning of every retreat, "Can an elite university retain its soul?" and so why are we here? We should be discussing strategic plans and he wants to be talking about the soul of the modern university, but that taught me that the spirit, the essence of place may be more important than its programs and its plans and then

there were also some moments where he demonstrated that integrity. I remember one moment in particular where a disgruntled alumnus, very upset because his fraternity had been closed, for good reason, and we were in the midst of a capital campaign and this alumnus was capable of making a big gift or as they say the big gift and he demanded a meeting with Tom, legal counsel and myself and I - in the president's conference room and I became very anxious about, you know, this conversation and went in to see Tom and said "Now, Tom, I have to tell you something. Kind of a working class guy and I will not take a lot of grief. So at some point, it would be better for me to just depart from the meeting." He said "Don't worry about it, don't worry about it." Well, in the meeting I had to chronicle a long litany of misconduct, you know, by students and it included stealing, rather considerable stealing for some kind of pledge party and I remember the alumnus quizzing me and my ire rising and at one point he said "Wow, but we stole stop signs when we were, you know, undergraduates!" and at that point I got up and kind of slid my chair back, but Tom with his lanky arms came across table and said "It wasn't right then, it's not right now and this meeting's over." You know, there's certain moments where you believe that you're really proud to be working for, you know, a man who leads in that way, but the next day I became rather remorseful because I realized how much money could've endowed faculty chairs and scholarships and so, I walked down to Tom's office and he was typing away at his computer and I said "Tom, I'm really upset because I started to calculate what this decision made." and we didn't get the gift from this person and he said "Don't worry about it, go back to your work. A university can never go down that road and sell its integrity."

**Q: (00:13:14) What do you think is the (00:13:15) largest challenge facing Wake Forest right now at this moment?**

A: Accessibility. I think every university wants to be in the position -

(Video 3 ends at 00:13:30)

A: (continued at 00:00:00 of video 4) of defining its own student culture. Which also means its legacy for alumni as well. So, being able to choose and to make sure that you have a diversified class and I'm talking about diversity in all aspects, you know, of life and I think we've done a pretty good job of that, but socio-economic diversity is important too and when I think of the roots of Wake Forest, which certainly intrigued me as I studied its history. It really is important, you know, to have a strong middle class socio-economically because I've found - it's been my experience and I think my colleagues' experience in student life that they are the bridges. They offer, you know, a balance that is really needed, so yeah, and that really - I mean we've done - I mean, I've been privileged to be at a school that has been I think the miracle child of higher education, I mean, from when I stumbled onto campus in 1975 to the present day, I mean, we have been blessed with great leadership, we've done more with less than probably any school in the country and yet we have retained our ethos and I should've mentioned in student life, I mean, the best thing we had going for us is our motto "Pro Humanitate." I mean, no other school has that motto in the country, so that provides a real springboard for enlisting students and thinking beyond themselves in service to others and that kind of permeates the culture and continues to permeate the culture. So, if that's the case, you know, you want to be able to

provide what is a very expensive model of higher education to as many people as you can and so I think the decision, you know, to be SAT optional is perfectly suited for, you know, Wake Forest, but at the same time we don't have the alumni base, we don't have the network having come onto the national scene to kind of develop the endowment that we need to develop to sustain the school as we know it.

**Q: (00:02:57) When you look back over your Wake Forest career, what do you think you've contributed (00:03:00) to the university?**

A: It's what I contributed as much as, you know, being part of a team that contributed because when I think - when I think of real contributions, they're all team efforts and I attribute them to other people. The creation of the Volunteer Service Corp. for example, I mean, I remember we just put up some posters, you know, in 1989, 1990, and said meet with us, you know, in the Green Room. I don't think it was a Green Room at that time though and we had six hundred students show up, when we were going to talk about volunteer service and that then morphed into the Volunteer Service Corp, which gave birth to international service learning projects, which allowed us to collaborate with faculty on service learning endeavors and that - that's, when I think of all the students that spawned campus kitchens and habitat for humanity projects, we built one on campus and I think that really energized, you know, students in ways that are really important.

**Q:(00:04:22) You have now gone back to teaching and I would like to know, what do you enjoy most about teaching?**

A: Well, I've always taught one course a term because I always thought it was important for administrators to keep their hands in the classroom and keep their relations with faculty strong because I really believe in the liberal arts being a product of the liberal arts. So, I love it. I mean, I believe the course was run for me and it was time. It's nice to be relieved of the stress of always being on call. God bless you, Penny Rue and I miss my colleagues, I miss the people, but I don't miss the situations, the crises, the grief, the tragedies, you know, that one has to deal with in student life. So yeah, it's nice to be with students who've had my classes over this week to house and just enjoy them and enjoy the improvement that they make living their dreams in academic ways, seeing them grow in their critical thinking skills, it's just wonderful. I don't like grading, I've never liked grading, but I do like the creative process of student engagement, you know, in the classroom.

**Q: (00:06:12) Well, is there anything else that you would like to share (00:06:15) about Wake Forest that we should know?**

A: Don't you think I've shared enough?

**Q: No, it's never enough.**

A: Well, it's - I think Wake Forest truly is a unique place, I mean, I've been a consultant at a number of universities, you know, a number of universities that have attempted to entreat me over the years to join them, but when you fly back into home, you know, North Carolina and you see the chapel steeple as you fly in and those green lawns and when you - when you interact with faculty, the alumni that return or you get emails from them, demonstrating their love, you know, for the place or what you contributed. There just is no better job and there's no better place in America as far as I'm concerned. It truly is unique in every respect and I think we deliver in large part on what we say we promise. So, may she long endure.

Q: (00:07:33) Well, thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

Video 4 ends at 00:07:36