JF: Today is July 9, 2009. I am James Fogerty of the Minnesota Historical Society. Today, I am interviewing E. Robert Kinney, retired chairman of General Mills. The interview is taking place in Mr. Kinney’s office in the IDS Center in Minneapolis.

JF: I thought we’d just start at the logical place, which is the beginning.

ERK: All right.

JF: Talk a little, if you would, about your family, and where you born.

ERK: I was born in a small town, Burnham, Maine, that still exists. It has about three or four hundred people. When I was five years old, my family moved to the next village, which was Pittsfield, and we stayed there until all of us were through school.

JF: What were your parents’ names?

ERK: Harry Kinney and Ethel Kinney. I had two brothers and two sisters.

JF: What were their names?

ERK: Henry and Kenneth were the males, and Elizabeth and Alice.

JF: Were you in the middle or were you the youngest?

ERK: Next to the youngest.

JF: What did your father do?

ERK: He was a dealer in horses. He imported horses from Boston, but they came from out West. He brought them to Maine either by boat to Bangor or over the road, and then worked with them so they were trained to be draft horses, working for farmers. He sold
horses to farmers, and he financed the horses that he sold to farmers through the bank. It was an interesting business in those days.

JF: Interesting, yes, sort of like selling John Deere tractors.

ERK: It was like selling trucks or something.

JF: Was he in that business all his life?

ERK: Oh, yes. He came off a farm in Aroostook County, Maine, right across the border from Canada. He came down to Burnham, Maine, and started in a very small town, as I said, of three hundred to four hundred people. Then, five, six years later he moved to Pittsfield, the next town over. He traded in that whole area. People who bought horses came to him. He had a small piece of land where he planted, and I used to pull weeds, I remember. [Chuckles]

JF: What did he grow?

ERK: Potatoes.

JF: Describe that part of Maine for me. What was it like geographically?

ERK: Flat as a pancake. In the area where we lived, a main river flowed through, in and out to the ocean. Little villages were along the river, and Pittsfield, where I grew up, was also along the river. It was called the Sebasticook River. It was an Indian name.

JF: What was the economy in Pittsfield?

ERK: Agricultural, basically. Lumber, as well. There was some lumbering around there. But my father raised potatoes, and his basic business was to sell horses to farmers. He’d take a train to Boston and buy horses, and they’d get shipped up by boat to Bangor and then over the road to Pittsfield, where he sold them.

JF: Interesting business.

ERK: Interesting business, yes.

JF: Describe the town of Pittsfield when you were growing up. What was it like?

ERK: We had started in Burnham, as I told you, which was a small town, five miles from Pittsfield. Pittsfield was an agricultural town, but it had something that was very nice for our family and all the other families. It had no high school, so there was a private academy there, the Maine Central Institute. There were four or five private schools like that in Maine. The Maine Central Institute was located in Pittsfield, and that’s where we
went to school because that’s the only high school there was. The town paid the tuition, or the state or some combination, so we went there. Having gone to college with kids that came from towns that had no private high school, I later found that we had the advantage of a little better education going into college. Our private school was headed by a man whose father was a professor at Bates College [in Lewiston, Maine], and he kind of engineered it for several of us to go to Bates. I think, basically, Maine Central Institute was a feeder to the College. That originated over the years because the Northern Baptist Association had a relationship with Bates. That’s how Pittsfield happened to have that school—the institute.

**JF:** Talking about growing up in Pittsfield, what did you and your brothers and sisters do for recreation?

**ERK:** We worked. We pulled weeds in the potato fields. [Chuckles] We mowed lawns. In the wintertime, we shoveled snow. We worked even though we were in school. We’d have a snowstorm, and on the weekends we’d get hired to clean up. They’d plow the streets and of course plug up driveways. We’d shovel those out. That kept us busy. My father also brought in coal in car loads and we delivered it in fifty pound bags—sometimes to second story boxes.

**JF:** What was the commercial area in Pittsfield like?

**ERK:** Agricultural, very modest. Like some of those towns, it had, when I was a very young boy, four or five textile mills. The American Woolen Company was a major company back in those days and they had a couple of small mills right in Pittsfield, and there were a couple of other small textile mills. One of the reasons they were there is the Sebasticook River ran through town, and they developed waterpower.

**JF:** Did you have to go to another town? I noticed on the map, when I looked up Pittsfield, that today it looks like about forty-five hundred to forty-eight hundred people, but was it that big at the time you were there?

**ERK:** No, it was around thirty-five hundred to four thousand population. It was kind of a major town in that district. As I mentioned, the town had no high school, so the Maine Central Institute got founded and put there and that was where we all went to school, which was a big advantage. They had boarding students also, and I would guess that about a fifth or maybe a fourth of the boarding students came from the surrounding area. Their tuition was paid somehow, so they went to this boarding school, the same high school I went to. It had two dormitories: one for women and one for men. They took these kids from other towns and boarded them while they were being educated.

**JF:** Did your brothers and sisters stay in Maine or did they move on, as well, later on?
ERK: I think, basically, they all stayed in Maine. Although my youngest sister, Elizabeth—Betty, we called her—she was in the educational field and taught and was married. And I think she spent quite a lot of her time away from Maine teaching in Connecticut or wherever. She went to Bates, as well.

JF: Did your brothers go to Bates, as well, or just you?

ERK: I went and then my youngest sister went. The other three did not go to college.

JF: What was it like when you moved on to Bates? Lewiston is a bit of a distance.

ERK: It was about eighty miles, and you didn’t go back and forth easily. When I went there, I had a one-year academic scholarship and had acquired a little money over time, and I had enough to pay my board and room for a few months. Then I got to the college and told them I’d have to go home if I couldn’t find some way to find the way to pay for the tuition. They said, “We’ll find you a job.” I interviewed with a family that owned a textile mill, the Libby family, and went to live with that family and drive their cars, mow their lawn, and do some household work inside and whatnot. I didn’t get any money, but I got board and room, which was a big deal. I stayed there four years. Then, when I went on to graduate school, Mr. Libby loaned me the money to go. My uncle was going to do it, and he got ill and cancelled and died before I finished college. Mr. Libby, of the family that I worked for during college, loaned me the money. It took me six years to pay it back. [Chuckles]

JF: I’ll bet that was a big deal.

ERK: Yes, I guess so.

JF: What was the student population at Bates like? Did they come from all over Maine?

ERK: All over New England. There were about—I’ve forgotten exactly—around eight hundred students. They supplied a ton of teachers. Around Maine, it was common to say that the headmaster of a private high school, like Maine Central, would be a Bates-trained scholar. They seemed to fill that field. Off the top of my head, I think well over half the high schools in Maine had a Bates person involved in the top level or close to it. Well, that’s all they did, really, because they didn’t educate people who went into business or law, though there were a few lawyers. But, basically, students were trained in education.

JF: What courses did you take when you were at Bates?

ERK: Basically, education courses, no business courses.

JF: Did you kind of think at that time you were going to go into education?
ERK: Oh, yes! Yes, I was going to teach. One of the reasons I didn’t end up teaching—this is fundamental to what happened to me—is that they didn’t pay anything. I can give you something to relate to. One job I got offered was board and room and a hundred dollars for the year. You know, I owed money. I think I owed, in round figures, a thousand dollars, and the interest that was due was sixty dollars a year. So you didn’t want a job for a hundred bucks. [Chuckles] The economics didn’t work out.

JF: It didn’t take you long to figure out that wasn’t going to work.

ERK: Oh, no. That’s one good thing about economics; it doesn’t take you long to run out of money and figure things out.

JF: So you stayed for four years at Bates?

ERK: I stayed four years at Bates.

JF: Did you go home in the summertime?

ERK: Oh, no. I worked for the Libby family. For the nine months of school, I got board and room. I had a space in the attic of the Libby family, a room of my own, across from the cook’s room. They had a cook and a governess who worked with the kids. I, in the summertime, stayed with the Libby family and they paid me—I can remember the number—sixteen dollars a week. I’m telling you, you worked. Twenty to thirty hours a week of work paid for room and board, and then I got paid for the rest.

JF: Did you get back to Pittsfield to visit your family very often?

ERK: Not very often, no. You didn’t get vacation time.

JF: Did you see them at holidays or anything like that?

ERK: Well, yes, to some degree. But, basically, when I worked for the Libby family, I didn’t go carting off for holidays. I would be there. He was a well-to-do man, given today’s standards. He ran an old textile mill in Lewiston. I was occupied. I can remember three automobiles. I could drive the kids to school, but I brought the car back and walked to school myself. It was a mile, and I walked back at noon a mile, and then walked back again. You didn’t drive their car, even though it might have worked out. That just didn’t happen.

JF: You got your exercise. [Chuckles]

ERK: You got your exercise. He was a very determined man. He just didn’t think it did any good to make things easy. He came up the hard way. He was a very good businessman. His family, I think, still survives, some of them. He had a batch of kids, six
kids. [Chuckles] It makes me laugh. One of them was an absolute devil. He was in more trouble. I went to Mr. Libby once—to show you what kind of a man he was—to complain. I said, “I can’t do anything with Paul.” He said, “When Paul’s with you, you’re the boss.” I got the message.

JF: [Laughter]

ERK: The next day . . . I’ll never forget this as long as I live; neither will he. They lived about a mile from school, so I picked him up from school, got to the house, and kept right on driving. Paul starts screeching. I drove about a mile to the other side down towards the edge of the city. I opened the door and said, “Out. You’ll get home by walking.” [Chuckles] That solved the problem. Mr. Libby had said, “When he’s with you, you’re in charge.”

JF: The kid got the message.

ERK: He got the message, yes.

JF: And the father backed you up.

ERK: Oh, yes. He was that kind. He had three boys and three girls in that family, but the middle boy was just a terror. We became great friends afterwards. I was chairman of the Bates College Board for seventeen years—and I got Paul to be on the board. He was a bright kid. The other kids were off and about doing things. They were quite a family.

JF: You’ve mentioned textile mills. When you got to Lewiston, what was the economy there based on?

ERK: I think there were four or five textile mills, not very big mills, but they were textile mills, on the Sebasticook River. They manufactured cloth. I suppose by today’s standards they were little small businesses, but they did enough to pay the bills and pay the help and so forth. Being privately owned, they were not attached to big companies. Well, one of them was the American Woolen mill. When I was a young boy, American Woolen owned two or three mills in the town that I was in, but they finally went belly up.

JF: That’s what I was wondering, thinking of Lowell [Massachusetts], where the textile mills eventually went out of business.

ERK: They couldn’t compete. When everything went south . . . the labor costs, good God! The northerners were left behind wondering, “Where has it gone?”

JF: Left behind.

ERK: It’s gone south.
**JF:** What happened to the economy in Lewiston after the textile mills . . .?

**ERK:** Very drab, and it kind of struggled along. One of the basic fundamentals, of course, was that Bates College was a main employer for that city and Auburn. They were across the river from each other. Bates was really a big employer there.

**JF:** An economic force in town.

**ERK:** An economic force in town, yes.

**JF:** Now, as you reached the end of your four years, how soon did you begin to realize that, despite your education, you were not going into education and started looking for other opportunities?

**ERK:** When I was getting out of Bates, I wanted to go to graduate school. I looked at the environment out there, and if you didn’t have that next stage, you could only muddle along. So I wanted to go on to school. My uncle was going to loan me the money, but he got sick and died. Mr. Libby found out I wasn’t going to go on to school because I didn’t have any money, and he said, “I’ll loan you the money.” He loaned me the money and I went on for a year, to Harvard, like a graduate school today.

**JF:** What did you take in that year of graduate school?

**ERK:** History.

**JF:** So you came out with a graduate degree in education?

**ERK:** No. I left after one year.

**JF:** Then what did you do?

**ERK:** I went to teach in a small Maine town. I didn’t teach very long. I almost immediately went into business, kind of for myself. But I know one thing, it was a very difficult time.

**JF:** Did you stay in Lewiston or did you move on to Portland?

**ERK:** No, I moved to Bangor, Maine.

**JF:** What was your progression after that? You went into business a little bit.

**ERK:** Yes.

**JF:** Eventually, you ended up in the crab business. How did that happen?
ERK: Well, let me think back. I remember now. I got a job with the Maine Industrial Development Corporation. It was a quasi-public thing, and its focus was to find businesses or jobs for young people in the area. It was kind of a program like the WPA [Works Progress Administration] in those days. I got a job with them, and my focus was to find ways to get the young people on the coast of Maine, and areas close to Maine, involved in jobs. One of the things that came to mind was that there were a lot of things to do with seafood, and nobody had directed a focus on the employment side of that. I kept at it long enough to say to myself, “Well, Jesus, if you started a business using the raw material here and you’ve got people that want the jobs, you could make the thing go.” I started in, and from there it grew into a quite a local business.

JF: How did you finance it? How did you get started?

ERK: I can remember this just as plain as day. I, of course, came from Pittsfield, Maine, which was a small town, four thousand people. I went to the bank to borrow money to finance myself in business. I remember the statement. It has stayed with me all my life. It was a local bank, and I courted the banker’s daughter a little bit, the daughter of the man who ran the bank. He was cashier; in those days, that was equivalent to being president of the bank. He was the mogul in the bank. He took my application to the board of directors—can you believe it?—to get approval. [Chuckles] This statement stayed with me all my life. One of the directors said, “We’re not going to back any hair-brained scheme of Bob Kinney’s.”

That’s how I got to a bank in Bangor. We were living there. I went into the Bangor bank—I’ve forgotten the name of it. The first thing the loan officer said was, “How are you going to pay it back?” I went through my litany. My wife was a nurse. I did have a job. Somehow or other, I got the money. I had signed a way to pay it back. I guess he was convinced enough that they loaned the original money that I started with. It was amazing. I can remember that I couldn’t borrow much—$10,000 was like a million. By the end of that first year, I had the ability to borrow $100,000 from the local bank, because I’d shown the evolution of the business. You loaned me the money, I used it. When I get earnings enough, I pay you back the interest and you loan me some more. It worked all right. You can stay in business forever if you pay the interest on what you owe and keep your nose clean. You can borrow a lot of money.

JF: But you built your credibility pretty quickly.

ERK: Oh, yes, very fast. Well, what the hell, there was no competition. You didn’t have to be a genius.

JF: If I understand it—correct me if I’m wrong—you got the idea of using crab leftovers.

ERK: Well, it wasn’t crab leftovers. What happened is that the lobster fishermen usually had a couple of hundred traps, and they hoped to get one lobster per trap in those days.
They didn’t get paid much for them, about twenty-five or thirty cents a pound, some of them. They had a going business, but when they pulled the trap, they usually had about four or five crabs ready to bite their hands off. They were a goddamn nuisance. One of the things I saw quickly is that they threw away the crabs; they were troublesome to them. I thought that if you could do something with the crabs, you’d be in business. [Chuckles] So I offered the fishermen—if I could figure out a way to use them—a penny a piece for crabs. It didn’t make any difference if they weighed a half a pound or a quarter of a pound . . . a penny a piece. So that’s how I got the raw materials to start in the business. I borrowed a little money.

The encouragement you could get in those days was great, and the rules were loose. There were two can companies: Continental and American. What they wanted were customers. [Chuckles] If you had a way to use their cans, and they got paid, they would finance the whole thing for quite a bit, because they wanted to sell cans. It was a great system. I didn’t have any money, but, the next thing I knew, I borrowed all kinds of money. Because the more cans I could use, the better they wanted a piece of the business I was in. It worked out very well. Everybody was after me. The American Can Company . . . I became one of their bigger customers.

**JF:** And you had to get a factory set up of some sort.

**ERK:** Oh, I got it started. That was a thing that took me a long time. I started in a building that was used by a man who bought and sold chickens. He bought chickens from you as a farmer, and then he slaughtered them and took them to Boston. He had a market for them. He had places where he would raise these chickens, but there were times when he didn’t want to use his buildings. I rented a building or two from him for nothing, almost. He had the buildings, but he didn’t have enough business to keep them all full. So I arranged to rent the building and started cooking crabs. I’d get a bunch of women. I started with five or six women, and within a year, I had a hundred to two hundred women cracking crabs. I think within the next year, I had two or three hundred women cracking crabs. They would put them in cans and process them, hermetically sealed, so that they were viable on the counter and in the store. I was the first one to ever do that with that particular product.

**JF:** You were like the Birdseye of the crab canning business.

**ERK:** Yes. There was a hole there, a vacuum. They wanted to get rid of the crabs, and if you could get them so that they were preserved . . . The market would handle them if you had them so they were shelf stable.

**JF:** Who did you sell them to? How did you get your sales set up?

**ERK:** It was easy. The American Can Company was the fundamental part of the business, because they financed the cans during the period that you got the crabs and
canned them and sold them to the customers. They carried you on their books. The stores liked it because they had a viable product and it was priced right, I guess. I can remember vaguely the numbers. When I got going, getting canned crab into the market, the next thing I knew, we had about thirty-five or thirty canners along the coast, people who canned sardines and clams and so forth, who just added crabs to their product line, because I assured them there was a market there. We had competition to beat the dickens. Anyway, the reason it took off so is there was no way to handle crabs before that.

Within a few months, instead of having my one cannery, I had all the business I could handle and more, too. The next thing I knew, those other canners along the coast just started getting into my ballpark. [Chuckles]

**JF:** How did that change your business?

**ERK:** It made it much more competitive. But, if you get first run at something, usually you get a chance to refine your thing, so you stay viable. I never made a lot of money, but I built quite a business.

**JF:** Did you develop a label, a brand name?

**ERK:** Oh, yes. Yes. Very quickly—you wouldn’t know them—S.S. Pierce, a high-priced grocery chain in Boston that covered the whole New England area, was hungry to get the product—the crabmeat canned by me. I sent them a sample can and a week later they ordered two thousand cases— with twenty-four cans to the case! Geez, I couldn’t supply the business. I was working out of a garage with a few women. Up until then, there was no way to get crab to the market and have it be able to stay there more than twenty-four hours. There was no refrigeration at the markets the way there is today. They might have had little refrigerators, but, in general, everything was all processed, canned or dry goods. The field was wide open. As I said, I got going, and the next thing you knew, there were twenty or thirty companies canning crab in Maine. Because I was ahead of the pack and started something that worked, it worked for other people. I got well-known fast. It didn’t make me much money.

**JF:** Did you travel around, Mr. Kinney, to sell your product or did people come to you? Did you go to Boston?

**ERK:** I went to wholesalers, but my biggest customer, lead customer and quality customer, was S.S. Pierce, which is a high-priced canned goods operation. They had the best of all products, and they took mine on. They labeled it themselves, and they were early in the game, because nobody was doing it. They became a good customer of mine and did things for me. I did for them, as well. It worked.

**JF:** How long did you have that business?
ERK: Oh, I can’t tell you exactly—I think it was about fourteen years. It was the lead thing that got me to Gorton’s, because they saw what was happening. I don’t think I got much money. Gorton’s was an old canning company that produced codfish cakes, but they saw this product I was producing—a processed product that would use tin cans. They had the marketing tool, so I became a supplier. It was attractive enough and they bought me. We were bought by Gorton’s. And then, eventually, Gorton’s got bought by General Mills.

JF: Did you then end up working for Gorton’s?

ERK: Yes. I ran them when they started to take . . . I can’t exactly tell you about the actual transaction, but I ended up working for them, and then they ended up being bought by General Mills.

JF: You must have been with Gorton’s for quite a number of years?

ERK: Oh, yes. It was about fourteen years.

JF: To back track for a second . . . You mentioned just a little while ago that you got married during this time. Did you get married early on, right after college?

ERK: Within a year, yes. I went to graduate school for a year. That year that I got out, I was married in December.

JF: So where were you and your wife living at the time that you were running the crab canning business?

ERK: We lived right in Bangor and eventually moved to Bar Harbor to be on the waterfront.

JF: Your family was still in Pittsfield, so eventually did you end up back . . .?

ERK: No.

JF: When you went to work for Gorton’s, when they bought your operation, did you stay in Maine or did you go down to their headquarters?

ERK: I stayed in Maine for . . . I can’t tell you how long, but I think it was quite a little while, three years or something. Then my business kept growing relative to Gorton’s business. Gorton’s was the most miserably run, half-assed operation that you ever saw. Well, it was a good education for me, because here was a company that was close to sixty or seventy years old at the time. It started, I think, around 1850-something. It was badly managed. If they’d had somebody who had the imagination to say, “Hey, where do we go with this thing?” they could have been more successful. They weren’t doing much with
it. It was a walk-in for me. You know, when there are opportunities, you don’t have to be smart. [Laughter] You don’t. You’ve just got to see the niches and have the energy to go through with it.

**JF:** Where were they headquartered at that time? They were in Massachusetts?

**ERK:** They were in Gloucester, Massachusetts, yes.

**JF:** Eventually, did you end up down there at their headquarters?

**ERK:** Yes, I did.

**JF:** You moved down there and became involved in their . . .?

**ERK:** Oh, yes, and then I got to run that. Then I got to be involved in selling that to General Mills. They got to buy us because they wanted us. You know, that makes the sale easier.

**JF:** Tell me a little about your years at Gorton’s. Once you got in there, how did you rise through the ranks?

**ERK:** At Gorton’s, their basic thing was dried salt codfish. I knew a little about that business because my focus was in processed, canned product that was shelf stable. When we got going, we bypassed them in terms of how we put the volume up against their business. They saw we had the business. [Laughter] It was a good business. It gave you a shelf-stable product. Gorton’s was basically dried salt codfish, pretty shelf-stable, but still and all, a perishable product. It isn’t like having a canned product. With cans, in a bad year you just carry over the inventory you don’t sell. If you’ve processed it properly, it should have a good shelf life of five, six, seven years. You’ve probably been eating canned goods that are ten years old. You just didn’t know it.

**JF:** [Chuckles] You were there for quite a number of years. How did it begin to grow, though, as you were there? It moved into frozen foods, too.

**ERK:** Yes. I was there when we did that. I think my associate came from the canning side of it, Paul Jacobs. I think he got into the frozen foods. He had the imagination to say, “Hey, we’re in the fish business, and freezing is going to be part of the future.” He got us into that. He was a very imaginative guy—a hardworking man. He and I worked together for four or five years inside of Gorton’s. We complimented each other. Gorton’s was an old, as I say, company. What made it work out was that there was a man whose family—the Putnams—owned a good piece of Gorton’s. Once you make people money, then they focus their attention on the issue of how can we make more? [Chuckles] That’s usually the standard move. He supported us.
Mr. Putnam liked me very much. Maybe he was wrong, but anyway, he liked me. He was enamored by what we were doing. He was one of those guys that looked around and said, “How the hell is this happening?” [Chuckles] He was not involved day-to-day in making it run. He wasn’t like that. He had a very good mind, and they had money, you know, relatively speaking. Relative to what I had, they were multimillionaires. They had the money. He made things happen. He really was why I got hired at Gorton’s.

We had a lot of direct conversations. Every week, I paddled my way over to his summer residence from May till September or so. The Putnams lived in Boston, but his summer place was right next door to us in Manchester. It was a very fancy place, Manchester-by-the-Sea. It still is a very swank place to live. It was six or seven minutes from where I was. He used to have me over there once a week.

Mrs. Putnam came from a very well-to-do, socially prominent family. After I took over at Gorton’s, I became a regular visitor over there. She was no dumbbell. She saw what was happening at Gorton’s. She took me to the door after one of the Fridays I was there, and I said something about the business. She said, “Well, just keep those dividends coming!” and shut the door, you know. She let me know. I always remembered that. I told my ex-wife that she let me know who was playing the music, and she was playing it. That was the power structure. She was a piece of work.

That’s how I got my start. Finally, things opened up and I moved into management at Gorton’s. I don’t remember the details, but I negotiated to buy a chunk of the company. If I hadn’t had the clout to negotiate, they would have found somebody else. You had to have some clout to wiggle the machine.

The colleague I mentioned earlier, Paul Jacobs, and some people that he pulled together, were instrumental in much of the success we had at Gorton’s. Paul was probably as good as anyone at sensing where the market was going and what kind of products would have a chance either on the innovative side or what was developing around us. I didn’t have that. He had it, and he had a great group of people working for him. We would end up being either in the forefront or close to it. You’ve got to be there. He ran a great development area.

He was really like a partner to me. We made a deal. There was an understanding with us that was part of this evolution about management. I had the same incentive, the same salary as Paul Jacobs, even though I ran it . . . I was the titular head of the company. In effect, you could say he reported to me, but he didn’t. He had his areas, and he was as good if not better than anybody. He was better at what he did than I was. He had a flair for marketing. His nose would tell him. He had a great market sense.

**JF:** It must have grown under your leadership quite a lot to make it attractive to General Mills.
**ERK:** Yes, it did. Once we got going, we went all over the country. As I said, Paul Jacobs had a sense of marketing. Don’t just sit there in Maine. Regionalize the country. Get the best. He had a focus; he always wanted the best wholesaler or the best brokerage guy in an area. We’d get him and develop sales. He was a very smart businessman, a good one.

**JF:** And you developed, of course, the famous fisherman logo with the yellow coat and Gorton’s of Gloucester and all of that?

**ERK:** Yes, he did that, really.

**JF:** It obviously became an enormously successful operation.

**ERK:** It was for a number of years.

**JF:** How did General Mills become interested?

**ERK:** General Mills was *fierce* to get into the seafood business, the frozen business. They had a real burn on to buy us, because they saw something that was a perfect market for frozen foods. So they wanted to buy, and they did.

**JF:** Who was the president or CEO of General Mills at that time? Was it Mr. [Edwin W.] Rawlings or was it Mr. [Charles H.] Bell?

**ERK:** Charlie Bell was still there. Charlie Bell was still there when I got in. Rawlings was there also. What happened is that Charlie Bell was smart enough to say, “I need somebody who can run this thing.” He had met Rawlings in the military. Charlie Bell worked for Rawlings. He was underneath him in some kind of government thing. That’s how they knew each other. He saw Charlie Bell as a good entry into the whole business world, which he was. They had money, and the Bell family had a fabulous reputation at that time, a good family.

**JF:** Who negotiated? You were head of Gorton’s at that time, so who were you negotiating with? When did General Mills come calling? How did you find out they were interested?

**ERK:** Well, by that time, Gorton’s had some substance. General Mills was there and wanted entry into that market and wanted to buy us. Our answer was, “No.” The more times you said, “No,” while you grew the business at that same time, the higher the price got, until finally somebody was going to give. [Chuckles] We had some shareholders that liked money, you know.

**JF:** Was it publicly held or was it private?
ERK: Well, yes, in effect, it was a public company, but it was so small. It wasn’t a big company. I think it only had, to give you a guess, twenty-five or thirty-five shareholders. In those days, if somebody had some money, they were looking for places to invest it. That’s what Gorton’s did with their capital to support what growth they had. And they had the reputation as an old dried salt codfish company. That’s where they got their base back in the 1850s. So they had the base, and the capital was there, because Charlie Bell’s family saw an opportunity. They followed the line, “We get in. We finance this thing. We own the business,” you know.

JF: As I recall, Mr. Rawlings particularly . . .

ERK: As I said, Charlie Bell was in the military and worked under Rawlings. When he got out, because he was related to the business and had the capital, he said to himself, “I need Rawlings.” Rawlings was a real driver.

JF: That must have been an interesting move. As I recall, from reading General Mills’ history, Rawlings was one of the very first outsiders who they brought in.

ERK: Oh, he was the outsider, yes. He was aggressive. He was like a bull in a china shop. He was good. He made things happen. He wanted to create more business and would find somebody who didn’t give a damn about the rules. This is what we’re going to do, and this is how we’re going to do it. We have a new man, now, and we are going to do it. [Chuckles] He was my first education in don’t always bow down to the policy that exists in the company. If you think something is going to work better, we’re going to try it. The only way you’re going to know is try it and fail or try it and succeed. I got that from Rawlings. He was really aggressive.

JF: He made an awful lot of acquisitions, I know, at that time.

ERK: He took the lead on acquisitions. When General Mills acquired Gorton’s, we had more subsidiaries than they did, or about an equal amount—things in Nigeria, or down in Mobile, Alabama, or out in Seattle or wherever. [Chuckles] It was a good education for me. We were so disparate that you had to say to yourself, “How the hell are we going to keep our arms around this damn thing?” I think when we went into General Mills, Gorton’s had as many subsidiaries for their operations as General Mills did, albeit smaller. We were spread all over hell’s kitchen . . . Peru, places like that. We were flying people in from all over. [Laughter]

JF: A lot to manage.

ERK: Yes.

JF: Did you stay in Massachusetts then after the acquisition by General Mills or did you move to Minneapolis at that time?
ERK: No, I stayed there.

JF: So you continued to run Gorton’s for them?

ERK: Yes.

JF: When did you move out to the General Mills headquarters in Minneapolis? How did that happen?

ERK: Well, you have to look at what was developing at General Mills. The people there looked around and said, “How did we let this happen?” [Chuckles] “This guy shows up, and he’s nothing but a fish peddler.” General Mills was so old and established. They had a system of taking in one or two MBA’s [Master of Business Administration] a year, and maybe they made it and maybe they didn’t. That’s how they developed a management team. They were so pissed off when I came in to General Mills. They called us fish peddlers. [Laughter]

JF: When did General Mills suggest that you come out to Minneapolis from Massachusetts? How did that come about? Did you meet with Mr. Bell at any time through that whole thing?

ERK: Charlie Bell was one of the great gentlemen of the world. He’d say, “don’t bother to write it down.” His word was gold. He’d tell you, “You don’t need a contract.” You just needed Charlie Bell’s word. He taught me don’t ever, ever break your word. If you agree to do something, even it’s it’s wrong, you better to do it, because that’s how you build your reputation. He had such a reputation. He really made it possible for me to build the kind of reputation that was viable. Nobody could challenge it. It’s hard to believe that you go to graduate school to be a manager, because in reality you only need to learn about two or three things and you’re really a viable manager. But they’re critical. If you’re doing them, don’t ever break them.

JF: Was it Mr. Bell who talked you into coming out to Minnesota?

ERK: Yes, yes. I thought the world of him. As I say, he was a real gentleman. When you walked into his presence, there was something about it. It wasn’t that he was a great operator; it was kind of a culture, you know. You keep your language clean, you keep your mind focused on what the issues are and you don’t wander off someplace. He was a good general manager. I’ve often wondered . . . I don’t know that Charlie Bell would ever have chosen to get in and walk around and run a plant with people screaming and pissed off about this, that and the other thing. [Laughter]

JF: That’s a whole different range of things?
ERK: God, yes. I’ll tell you, there are some progressions that . . . Early on in business at Gorton’s, they came to me and said, “What are we going to do about this stealing that’s going on?” I said, “Stop it!” They said, “You can’t.” Nobody dared challenge them. They were letting things happen. Stuff was walking out the door. It’s amazing to me how businesses survive with all the chances to have it badly managed. I assembled shifts coming in and going out on the next Friday night and said, “We know who is stealing fish. It must stop immediately.” And it did!

JF: When did you arrive in Minneapolis? What did you think about that move? Was that something you wanted to do?

ERK: Oh, I remember when that happened. I definitely didn’t want to go to Minneapolis. I had a place to go already. As a matter of fact, I was offered the chance to run something and stay in Boston. My ex-wife didn’t want to go to Minneapolis, and I had no particular interest. But when push got to shove, they kept making the offer better and better, and the next thing was I agreed to go and live in Minneapolis. They wanted me there. We made what was a good deal. It wasn’t long before I was a key factor in how General Mills was managed. Historically, Charlie Bell carried the weight. When I came out there, it wasn’t long before I had the leadership with the company. To me, it was a big deal, but it wasn’t hard to see how you got there.

JF: What was General Mills like when you arrived out here? Tell me what the company was like. It was in many different businesses. Was Mr. Rawlings still in charge when you came?

ERK: No.

JF: Mr. [James P.] McFarland?

ERK: Mr. McFarland was, and he brought me out here. Rawlings was still here. If you didn’t get blessed by him, that move didn’t take place. But, actually, Jim McFarland was the operating head of the company.

It was a loose confederation. The company had a bunch of different products, and the task was bringing them together through General Mills to get things to the market. There was a lot of opportunity there, as it turned out. It turned out to be quite a commitment. Along the way, it had what companies need—somebody that had capital. It had access to capital. It’s astounding what capital can do if you use it right. You’ve got to pay the freight to keep it coming. If you’ve got a lot of capital and it gets used properly, then the return is there.

JF: What did you think when you got out there? What was the impression? Looking at the timeline of the company, there had been what looked like . . . It was a food business, and yet they were acquiring toy companies, clothing companies.
ERK: I was part of that.

JF: Tell me about that. How did happen? That was really beyond the basic business. Eddie Bauer, Talbot’s, Kenner toys . . .

ERK: All those things. Yes.

JF: Play-Doh. [Laughter]

ERK: That was all part of the period I was there. It worked for a while. Then you get so that if you aren’t the best in this area or that area . . . You can’t have a disparate company like that and survive too well. When you get one competitor whose sole businesses is one of the businesses that you’ve got off here at the side, he’ll soon be better than you are. When I got out there, we came to the conclusion that we’ve got to be the best at what we do and peel off all the junk that isn’t really giving us a return. We knew we had competitors out there eating our lunch. We dismantled part of the company when we did that, but made it a much more effective company that didn’t have all those distractions.

JF: What do you think the philosophy had been for acquiring toys and women’s clothing?

ERK: To get big.

JF: It was the age of the conglomerate? Do you think that was sort of . . .?

ERK: It was that, period. It was the early 1960s into the edge of the 1970s. They went through a ten-year period when anything that moved, you’d try to buy it, you know. But that was a bad strategy, because you get yourself all distracted by too many different businesses. It didn’t take long, and we sat around and said, “If we’re going to survive, we’ve got to be the best in the areas that we’re in. We can’t be good or half-assed good.” You’ve got to be the best or you aren’t going to make it. So we started peeling off stuff so we could really get this company down where it was one competitive operation, and we did. It was a pretty good job.

JF: When you were an executive here at General Mills, Mr. Kinney, how much involvement did you have with the various parts of the company? It was, at one time, such a disparate group of operations.

ERK: Well, I had quite a lot to do with it, but I came from a culture that . . . I said when I got here, with all these operations, “You haven’t got any more operations to manage than I just left in the junk pile I had [at Gorton’s]. It’s a question of sorting it out and keeping the good ones and getting rid of the other ones and getting good managers and paying them.” We developed a good reward system. In the early days, they compensated people, but they didn’t understand how to design strategies that rewarded the best performers and
weeded out the others. It was not a difficult thing; you just had to decide, hey, if we’re going to get big, we’ve got to get good at being big. I mean, you had to manage well to be good and big. If you don’t, somebody will just tear off the pieces and keep at you. General Mills ran pretty well. I wouldn’t say it was perfect, by any means, but it ran good enough to become a major company, and competitors dropped along the wayside.

**JF:** But the food business really remained primary. Is that right?

**ERK:** We peeled off about everything but the food business, and that’s the basic heart of General Mills today.

You didn’t have to be very bright to decide you’d better be the best. If you’re going to get big in these areas, you better be the best, because if you aren’t, you won’t stay good. We spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to manage so that we were the best managers of these segments, and we could meet the competition on a pretty level playing field. I think that’s part of the success in how they grew, because we got to manage it better. They’d lumped it all together, but you’ve got to find out how to run it if you’re going to keep it. If you run it better than the other guy, you’re going to stay in business.

**JF:** It must have been challenging during that time with so many disparate pieces. The earning cycles and things must have been really different, I would think.

**ERK:** They were.

**JF:** Toys, women’s clothing, food.

**ERK:** You’re on a good subject. There were one or two times when apparel saved our bacon. Because the business was so good, you didn’t have to be smart. Just shovel it out and get it out to the market any way you could. Anyway, you had to get it down over time, so you ran that very well or you didn’t stay in that segment of the business. General Mills had a lot of businesses.

**JF:** And some of those businesses are notoriously cyclical, too, aren’t they?

**ERK:** Oh, yes.

**JF:** Like women’s fashions.

**ERK:** When you have a down cycle in one of those areas like women’s fashion, you can give stuff away and you can’t make it pay.

**JF:** Then it drags everything else down with it. During the time you were at General Mills, what was the company’s relationship with your arch rival, Pillsbury, across town? Did you have much to do with Pillsbury executives?
ERK: No! Deadly enemies. [Laughter] After we bought Pillsbury, we had the hardest time for a while to get these clowns of ours to recognize the facts. These people from Pillsbury—we bought them because they were good at what they do. We were such enemies. Everything you got every morning was, “How do we scratch them up a little bit, at the end of the day?” They spent too much time doing that than really developing the segments that are growing in the business. You get there, eventually, if you’re going to be a survivor. Pillsbury had some good segments.

It’s amazing that the culture of this country changed so dramatically. The Totino’s segment, for instance. When we first went to buy the company, the Federal Trade Commission [FTC] turned us down flat. Then, I think, Pillsbury did manage to buy it. And eventually the regulations got so loose that we bought all of Pillsbury and got away with it! I used to tell this story. “Don’t ever say it can’t happen, because these things can be so dramatic in terms of change. There’s the evolution as time goes by.” And it did. Gorton’s ended up buying stuff that, for gosh sakes, in no way could it have passed muster fifteen years before that, or ten years, whatever.

JF: Didn’t the FTC, at one point, try to get General Mills to get rid of Gorton’s?

ERK: Oh, Jesus, yes! They brought a case, and we won the case. It dragged on and dragged on. I can remember right where I was when the announcement was made that we won. They had sued General Mills to get rid of Gorton’s. They failed. That was part of the whole deal. In the end, they couldn’t succeed making them divest Gorton’s. They were two disparate businesses.

JF: But, as you say, it’s amazing to think that now it got so loose that General Mills got to buy the whole Pillsbury.

ERK: [Laughter] It’s incredible. If you had said that back thirty years or twenty years ago, they’d have locked you up for starting rumors that couldn’t be founded, you know.

JF: How would you describe—of course, it’s a buzz word these days—the corporate culture at General Mills when you came out here to what was, actually, the headquarters? What was the management philosophy? Was it pretty loose? Was it very corporate? Was it very structured?

ERK: Well, I think it was very individual-oriented. Charlie Bell had no job. [Chuckles] I can remember a common saying among top management out here was, “We’d better go find out what Charlie thinks.” At first, I wondered, you know, who’s running the company? In a way, it was Charlie Bell. They said, “You better find out what Charlie Bell thinks or it isn’t going to happen.” The Bell family stock, I think, got down to five or ten percent. They were big time money, still. They really carried the weight. It was a carry over, historically. You’d better know what the Bell family wanted or it wasn’t going to happen. Charlie Bell, you never knew him?
JF: I was involved in an oral history interview with him. I met him a number of times when he was in his last five years of his life. I didn’t know him like you did, by any matter of means.

ERK: His word was good as gold. The family was central. You start off somewhere, and because you’re related to a family with an interest in the business and that has got capital and you happen to be lucky enough to be part of it, that makes things happen.

I was astounded they didn’t have a program, a culture, to develop managers and follow through. It came along. They’ve got good programs now. It was a hit or miss thing when they were growing. It was putting pieces together and hoping some managers turned out to be good ones.

JF: They must have demanded a little management skill at one time to oversee toys and clothing and retail and food, everything like that. It must have been pretty wild.

ERK: One of the things that impressed all of us at that particular stage was to recognize that we can’t continue this because we’re not good enough in some of these things. We were up against people who were competitive because their total focus is doing a better job than we are. We’ve either got to find how to compete or get out of the business, one or the other, or change the structure. It didn’t take much to say if we’re going to be a big company, we’ve got to be the best at what we do or somebody will eat our lunch.

JF: Who were some people that you worked with? You mentioned Rawlings and Mr. McFarland. Were there other people you worked with that you thought were particularly good people to work with, particularly interesting, particularly influential at that time at General Mills?

ERK: Rawlings was certainly there. But, as I’ve said, without having a line operation or having a specific title, Charlie Bell was probably the most influential factor in the business. You really did need to understand that you’d better find out how Charlie felt about things. Charlie Bell had sense enough to get good people. He liked Jim McFarland, who was a good operator, and Jim ended up running the company. I replaced him—actually, I didn’t replace him; he was going to retire. He had a nose for picking people. But you can’t have that nose work for you when you’re starting with a company that’s five hundred people, and the next thing you know, you’ve got five thousand people, because it doesn’t work as well.

JF: Totally different equation.

ERK: Yes, a different equation; that’s the way to put it. Things get different.

JF: When you came out here, what were your duties when you were dropped into the corporate headquarters? What kind of things did you do?
ERK: When I came out here, they had some disparate business, but I had all the food business. Everything was mine to either make it or break it. The whole system all over, whether it was their food business in India or over here, they all came up to me. My focus was to make sure that in that process we had the best managers around for those disparate businesses that we hopefully could keep happy and attracted so that they would stay. A company is only as good as its managerial staff. It doesn’t take long to figure that out. It doesn’t manage itself; it never has, and I don’t think it ever will. Anyway, we developed some systems of training managers, getting people from the MBA system into a system and just training them to be managers. A lot of them didn’t make it, but what ones survived were the people who are running the companies that are part of the whole ball of wax.

But you had to be as good as your competitor, or a little bit better, or you don’t survive. We got, relatively, to be big. But if you want to get big, you’d better get better.

JF: So you really had the core business reporting to you?

ERK: Oh, most everything, yes. I had a basic philosophy. I would say to managers, “Don’t come here and waste my time telling me good news. I don’t give a goddamn. I want the bad news ahead of everybody if I can get it.” They had a standard rule: don’t go tell Bob good news; he’ll throw you out of his office. [Laughter] The focus had to be on how you get a business up to speed and keep it going. If you got big, you better pay attention to the profitable side or you won’t survive. If you don’t do that, then, the next thing you know, you’re in trouble.

JF: You needed to know where the problems were so you could fix them.

ERK: Fast. I said, “I want to be the first one that knows trouble! You’ve got an open door for trouble, but don’t come in and waste my time telling me how good things are. I don’t give a damn. I care, but it’s a different focus from the way we run this company.” We got good at what we did.

JF: How much did you get involved in product development? It must have been, in the food business, constantly wanting new products and better products. To see when frozen pizza was going to get big.

ERK: Yes. You know, you’ve got to be out front, ahead of people.

JF: Hamburger Helper, which became huge.

ERK: Oh, huge, yes. There was a story about Hamburger Helper. That came right out of somebody’s intuition do this.

JF: The Betty Crocker Kitchens . . .
ERK: That was a part of General Mills long before I was ever thought of. They didn’t ever leave it off hanging. They spent some time and money with people who were involved in the development of Betty Crocker products. They were smart enough to say, “Hey, keep ahead of competition in the development side of our business.” Betty Crocker Kitchens did a great job. I think they had a good feeling that if they had ideas, they’d get supported financially as well as in all the stores.

JF: Clearly, General Mills was either lucky or had some kind of genius. It was amazing to me when I found out, a number of years ago, that Pillsbury had its own Betty Crocker, Ann Pillsbury, but nobody ever heard of Ann Pillsbury. If you say, “Betty Crocker,” everybody knows.

ERK: Everybody knows.

JF: They clearly promoted it really well.

ERK: Oh, they did. They did an excellent job. They were having a session trying to decide how to identify the products and put advertising money into them. They were struggling for a name. Crocker was one of the management people. He was in that group. However the discussion went around, they simply liked the name Crocker because it relates to management. Somebody spoke up and said, “For cripes sakes, let’s call it Betty Crocker.” It happened. It was an accidental name. It didn’t come out of marketing or anything like that. Somebody said, “Let’s call her Betty Crocker.” Bang! That got adopted and supported. And then, of course, Betty Crocker became an advertised name all over the country.

JF: Advertising icon, really.

ERK: An icon, yes. Really. That just brings up what we don’t need to dwell on, but a lot of things in business are accidental. The choice of the name Betty Crocker was accidental. That’s how it happened. It was not a marketing strategy. Yes, it was a strategy, but it was accidental.

JF: An accidental strategy, but it really worked. Maybe the accidental ones work better sometimes, because . . .

ERK: I think sometimes they work better. It caught on like wildfire.

JF: Oh, yes, and the image and everything that went with it.

ERK: Well, when you’re lucky, you’re lucky. Somebody was smart enough to say, “Hey, this has got to have a great sound. This has got to relate.” It did all those things.

JF: Yes. Then, as you said, you really have to know how to promote it cleverly.
ERK: Yes. The other thing is that you get more and more impressed as you see these things. You can have a great idea but you had better be able to fund it. Don’t screw around and fund it for three weeks. You’ve got to take Betty Crocker and carry it through. The next thing you know, you are the business leader. The capital is critical. I ended up always being impressed, “Don’t go into business unless you know what the capital is going to be or where you can develop the support for the capital.”

JF: And make it work, grease the wheels, as it were.

ERK: Yes.

JF: Can you think of any other products that particularly were really big while you were there?

ERK: Bisquick was.

JF: Ah, yes.

ERK: Hell, that was one of those accidental things they were talking about. The biscuit product was a natural. All you had to do was pour milk in to the mix. They had a meeting—a lot of meetings—and they said, “What the hell are we going to call this?” [Chuckles] Somebody right out of the blue said, you know, biscuit—easy to make—“Let’s call it Bisquick.” Bingo! You’ve got the business. You identify a tag for the business. Bisquick. God Almighty! How lucky can you be?

JF: And it’s still a name that resonates. Everybody knows what it is.

ERK: Yes, everybody knows what it is.

JF: Absolutely. Talk a little about what was your impression of Minneapolis when you arrived up here on the tundra from down East.

ERK: Well, I’ll tell you. Coming from the Boston area—I lived in Manchester—I thought they had a bunch of farmers out here and what not. I came out here, and I was astounded by the culture, the backup of educators, the whole ball of wax. This is a center just like New York or whatever, but you’ve got to come out here to see it. I used to sit around and think, Minneapolis? Who the hell ever thought of Minneapolis? But Minneapolis is a great center. It’s got a good culture. It develops people. Somebody said, “How the hell do they live out there?” [Laughter] I say, “Just get them out here. If they’re here six months, they’ll stay forever.”

JF: Is that kind of how you felt when you got out here?
ERK: Yes! When I got out here, I saw we had culture. We had the schools. We had business support. And we had the greatest traffic distribution. It was a center of a lot of things. It worked, and it still does. It’s a great area.

JF: Where did you live when you first came here?

ERK: Out in the boonies. I lived out west of here, a little town. I lived a twenty-, twenty-five-minute drive from downtown on Smithtown Bay in Excelsior.

JF: It’s a beautiful area.

ERK: It’s a beautiful area with pretty good schools. They funded things that make places work, and the schools were pretty good. I was impressed. I didn’t think I would be. [Chuckles] I thought this was the end of the world. But I wasn’t here very long and I figured a good part of the center of gravity is right here.

JF: When you came to General Mills, did you get a sense that the company expected its executives to go beyond the company and become involved in community?

ERK: The first thing they used to do is bring people in, and you’d identify what your job was and identify what you’re doing in the community and how it relates to the company. That is a commission, just like your job is. It was considered part of your job, too. You have to identify in the community where you’re going to work and how you’re going to work and what not. That’s part of it. It was the beginning of your employment here in Minneapolis. The management here was very involved in everything. That was a must. I was very impressed. When I got here, I couldn’t believe that they had this kind of system of support for the city.

JF: Did you get to choose which organizations you’d like or did they have some suggestions for you?

ERK: They had a little session. I think there were half a dozen people there; maybe eight people. They said, “What do you want to do in the city? You’ve got to pick at least a couple of things. You’re going to have leadership of those two. You pick them, and we’ll see it happens.” They had that kind of clout. That was it.

JF: What did you pick?

ERK: I picked the YMCA and the Guthrie Theater.

JF: Did the executives at General Mills kind of form a little club? Did you see each other a lot? Did you belong to the same clubs?
ERK: Well, to some degree, yes. I remember when I was first brought out here for a visit, my boss in General Mills, who I reported to, we went to a meeting and then we were driving later out to Woodhill [Country Club, Wayzata, Minnesota] for dinner. He said, “Here’s a club you’ll never belong to.” [Chuckles] I remember saying, “What the hell? I don’t give a damn.” Anyway, that was the structure then. He was at the top level. He was an executive vice president. He knew that he didn’t qualify wealth-wise or status-wise to become a Woodhill member. Woodhill, you know, was the top. That was the feeling. That’s an exclusive thing not open to you. [Laughter] There used to be a joke in my family. I said, “Three times I was invited to join Woodhill: once by the man who ran it; once by one of the key stockholders; and finally, the third time, by Charlie Bell.” [Chuckles]

There were key things that made people say, “Well, you’ve arrived.” I said I wasn’t looking to arrive. When I got out here, one of the reasons I got asked to join Woodhill . . . I got my arms around the business and found places where we would do this or tweak that and tighten up that, and the next thing, we’re making more money. I’ve been a manager a long time, and you can have all the plans and all the bullshit you want, but you’ve got to just deliver gross earnings year after year after year, and then you can do what you want.

JF: Share price and dividends speak loudly.

ERK: Exactly. That’s the name of the game. General Mills is a great company.

I didn’t want to come out here. I put up a hell of an argument about leaving the company I was running. When they bought Gorton’s, they made three of us take three-year contracts. I said, “I haven’t had a goddamn contract in my life and I’m not going to have one now.” I ended up taking the contract. At the end of three years . . . I would have been out of here long before that, at the end of the first year. But I had a lot of support from Charlie Bell. Nothing would do then but for me to come out here.

JF: It turned out to be a good move.

ERK: Oh, yes.

JF: Did you stay on the General Mills board, Mr. Kinney, after you retired?

ERK: Yes, I stayed either five or eight years. I was believer when I left the board, you know, that you should be out of here, because it is difficult. You’ve got somebody else running the company, and you don’t want it to seem that supposedly things have got to be cleared with us. We went all through that, as I’ve noted, “Let’s go find out what Charlie Bell thinks.” [Chuckles] Then I got out of here and left them to run the company. But it was a hard thing, politically, because companies get to be a way of life. The Bell family was this company.
JF: Yes.

ERK: No question about it. A great family.

JF: You stayed kind of involved in General Mills even after you retired for a while, at least?

ERK: Yes, I did. Yes, I think I stayed longer than I planned. I think I stayed five years. But you need to keep changing. This develops good people. They had a good program of bringing people in. That’s what made them what they are.

JF: This is great. Do you have anything else you’d like to say right now?

ERK: No. I guess we’ve covered it all.

JF: This is great!