

Willis Kingsbury
Narrator

Betsy Vinns[sp?]
Interviewer

March 6, 1985
Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Moorhead State University Recording Studio
Moorhead, Minnesota

BV: This interview is with Willis Kingsbury, who served as the city's first planning director and the community development director from September 1972 until...

WK: December 1982.

BV: December.

WK: Or...yeah, ten years.

BV: This interview was held at Moorhead State University's recording studio on March 6, 1985. The interviewer is Betsy Vinns, representing the Heritage Education Commission. Ah, the first questions pertain to personal background. [Laughing] Some of them probably aren't terribly appropriate!

Your full name?

WK: Willis Leroy Kingsbury.

BV: Your home address?

WK: 422 Birch Lane, Moorhead.

BV: Age?

WK: Forty-seven.

BV: Place of birth?

WK: Minneapolis, Minnesota.

BV: Your parents' names?

WK: Cecil Richard and Ruth Kingsbury.

BV: Nationality?

WK: Oh, just a whole bag: Irish, Scotch, mostly English, and a little bit of Swedish.

BV: And your parents' birthplace?

WK: Ah, my father was born in Minneapolis, and so was my mother.

BV: When and why did you come to Moorhead?

WK: I had an opportunity in the spring of 1970 to come to Moorhead and enter into architectural partnership with Richard Elkin, who was an architect in the city of Moorhead. So at that time I came, I became his partner, and we started the firm of Elkin & Kingsbury.

BV: Okay. And your education?

WK: I have a five-year degree in architecture from NDSU [North Dakota State University], and I am just short of my paper for my master's in planning from NDSU.

BV: [Whispers] You should finish. [Speaking at normal volume] Your occupation?

WK: Presently, I'm a private contractor in community facility development, which basically means that with my architectural and my public background, I take difficult projects, put the funding, the architecture, the construction, and the program together, and get them built and put in place.

BV: The next questions pertain to governmental and political background, which is the focus of this interview. When were you involved with local government, and for how long?

WK: It was very interesting. When I came here and went into architecture in Moorhead, one of the first assignments I had was project architect for the new city hall, which is the keystone for the Moorhead Center Mall and urban renewal redevelopment. I worked well with the council committees, Bruce Kiefer, other people at the time, Everett Lacy, Neil Wohlwend. Ah, it came about that after about a year and a half of working with them, they approached *me* and asked me if I would like to take a part time position as planning director with the City of Moorhead. I've always been one to not...shy away from fate. And I figured, that's the craziest thing I ever heard in my life.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: So it must be for me! And I accepted. And it was one of the nicest ten years I ever spent in my life. And that's how I got involved; I was invited, I accepted, and it became a ten-year occupation.

BV: Ah...the next question is what was your involvement in government? I think you've probably already covered that then. Is there anything you'd want to add?

WK: Well, my involvement in government was really...a thing of day-to-day, one day at a time. The city hired me as a half-time planner, the first staff planner the City of Moorhead ever had; the first one that really looked at the broad picture of where the community was going and what it was going to do with itself. With that, and with my own abilities, I drove that position literally into a full time position, and from there into a grants and lobbying and other position, to where finally my involvement with the city was really...hmmm...I had all their planning, all their grants and funding, engineering, wastewater treatment, the mass transit system, community development housing, a great deal of economic development, and did most of the lobbying, state and federal. So it was a job that over the ten years evolved into a *lot* more than what I thought I was getting in, but it was the appetite that, ah, suited me. And I enjoyed the heck out of it.

BV: Are you currently involved in government?

WK: Yeah, really...I really am.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: Hmmm...I had gone into hard private development for a couple of years, and then into my own firm. And presently, the project I am working with (where I've contracted two years for about ninety percent of my time) is to finish the Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center in the City of Moorhead. It is extremely significant to city government, and I'm working very closely with them, and that, the building represents the last *major* vacant site in that broad urban renewal district of downtown Moorhead. It is probably the one most significant economic development factor in downtown Moorhead, when you get past this Moorhead Center Mall itself. And because of those factors, the need for very close representation of the city of Moorhead, not only in putting the package together, but completing it, hmmm, is an absolute necessity. And I work very close with city government, and the ten years of experience with them helps me a great deal in doing that.

BV: As an editorial aside, I don't think you'll ever really get out of city government as long as you live here! Okay. Now we get into the main part of the interview. Ah...what motivated you to become involved in government?

WK: I really don't know. But see...yeah, that's...that's a difficult question, because I really feel that God and fate took care of it. Hmmm. There was a time in the late 1970s, there was an extreme recession, and architecture is very recession-sensitive. And our firm was doing very, very, very poorly as far as flow. And when Neil Wohlwend and Everett Lacy came in the office one day and offered me an opportunity to take a position as the first planning director in the City

of Moorhead, I thought of it as a way to bridge some of the shortfall, and contract and make a little money. And I took the job. And it just...ah, it just fit me so well, and it worked so well, that I just evolved into it. It was never planned.

BV: So hmmm, the next question is: was your involvement a career decision? And is...?

WK: It definitely was counter to my base career, although architecture...if you went through the school of architecture that I went through, they basically trained you as a generalist. You took complete engineering, you took architectural, you took planning; you really were a generalist. And that is very, very close to the profession of planning. So although it definitely was a career change, I went from an entrepreneurial private enterprise architectural firm to a public sector planning...ah, the careers were somewhat dual, somewhat similar, and really assisted each other.

BV: So if I were to ask you how you arrived at the decision, it's just sort of been a natural evolution?

WK: Just a natural evolution. I honestly think fate just intended me to be that way. And ah...that's the way it ended up.

BV: I'm not sure if this question applies. Who were your role models?

WK: Ah...I look at role models in ah...planning and what I did with the city, and I still...I like old Keith Burkholder over at Fargo. You know, a lot of people have some difficulty with what Keith does and how he's survived, but you look at the turmoil and difficulty he has survived over there, and he is still there, and still doing an excellent job. I still appreciate him. And he is really...my contemporary. He and I are about the same age. We both have architectural backgrounds and degrees from NDSU. And I guess...I was somewhat, well, if Keith can do it, and do it that well, I feel I can, too.

BV: Did you...do you feel your occupation helped or hindered your involvement in government?

WK: Oh...absolutely helped. I think my professional background and the experience I had, which was mostly negotiating difficult...in my architectural background, what I did best for the Solveig[sp?], Mather[sp?], and Matson[sp?] firm in Northfield that I worked for, was I negotiated their difficulties for them. I was their hired gun, their problem solver. If they did a job, and it was under construction and they had a difficulty...ah...they trained me as a pilot. I took the company plane, I went out and solved the problem, got it done, and came back. And I think that type...that really groomed me for government. Because I think one of the primary needs in all governmental agencies or public entities is quick, solid decision making for problem solving. So I think my profession, my career development, applied beautifully to the new job, because it was one of just problem solving.

BV: Mmmm-hmmm. Were you involved in making any lasting changes in the community? And what were they?

WK: Hopefully, many, many, many, many, many!

BV: [Laughing] Many!

WK: I think that I came with the city just at a time when it had gone through the horrendous emotional and economical throes of tearing down the entire city. Ah...the city hall I was project architect on was built in 1972, I moved into that. That was the first major new building around which the mall was built for the redevelopment of downtown Moorhead. I was involved in much of the policy development, the funding, the design direction, ah, many of the aspects of what has resulted in what is now physically downtown Moorhead. Hmmm. I developed the low-cost housing programs, most of them, the funding for low-cost mortgages, the housing rehabilitation program, the historical preservation programs, I think many of the programs that today are still active and still vital, and those are major things. The new wastewater treatment facility was a facility that, ah, I think the investment of yesterday in that facility will really come home to roost as a *great* economical support for this community in maybe five, six years from now, when the right types of industries and developments that can use that complex a facility, finally find it, and find us, and come to rest here. So I think that I've been involved in a number of major changes. I'd go back to...one is, I can remember the day that Dwaine Hoberg walked down to the office and says, "Willis, you're running a bus system as of today."

BV: [Laughs]

WK: And what happened, and it became...that was literally that cold, and caught me flat, is that ah...our contractor—the city had been contracting with this person to provide bus service at the time—had decided that the compensation and this and that weren't adequate, and just pulled the buses off the street. Now we weren't serving a lot of people, but those people we were serving were dependent on it, and they were the public. So from there I literally got involved in building the funding and the background system to put the existing bus system (that operates out there today so well under Judy Haley) in place, complete with equipment, fighting the wars over buying the Mercedes buses rather than American buses...ah...

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: It's been interesting.

BV: Must give you a good feeling of satisfaction to drive around town.

WK: Oh, yeah. They're still running! [Laughs]

BV: I'm just thinking of all the things you've been involved with. What do you feel...?

WK: Oh, I've got one more, too. It's always been my prize, because I worked so hard on it, and it was—it's so insignificant to everybody—was clearing of all the flood plain.

BV: Mmmm.

WK: In Woodlawn. Which cost our local government and the federal government almost a half a million dollars a year in damage insurance. And we were able to get the first disaster grant ever given to a US community from HUD to do that. And then I was able to go back to the federal insurance agency, and the city of Moorhead got the first curvilinear flood plain map ever developed in the United States.

When they develop their maps, what they do is go out to the nearest highway. In Moorhead, what they did was go on out to Highway 75, went up Eighth Street, over to Highway 75 North. Everything west of there was in the flood plain, which put the whole city...put everything in the flood plain. We went and argued that the cost of that program was just outrageous and it put many properties that weren't in a hundred-year flood plain in there. It was just arbitrary, and capricious, and the worst case. And so we were...they thought about it, they came back—I made some good relations in Washington—and came back with the first curvilinear flood plain. Little things nobody'll ever know!

BV: I remember that one. What do you feel was your greatest failure or disappointment?

WK: I think the greatest failure I had when I was with the City of Moorhead was just being able to...bring some reality to real hard job creation and economic development in the industrial vein. It just seems that the nature of the beast isn't there. And along with that came this whole border city issue. And that thing to me is a very, very mixed blessing. Although in many ways it has helped us preserve some of our key industries today, the black eye of trying to get it is something that's very difficult to overcome. Ah...and I look at it with very mixed blessings. It had to be done. If nothing else, the Minnesota Legislature understands that border cities are effective differently than other cities. They...at least there's a recognition. How strong it is, and how much it will do to balance the situation, we'll just have to wait and see.

BV: What role did state and national problems such as war, the economy, finances, play in the community during your years in government?

WK: [Sighs] Well, I think of the federal government in my area of planning and development played a very, very great role. Because I came in, in urban renewal, in which there was nearly eight or nine million dollars of urban renewal money pumped into downtown Moorhead. Hmmm, I did a survey with a very good friend of mine, Mort Mazaheri, who did much of my grant writing and research for me when I was with the city as a freelance consultant. And Mort and I did a study once, that in the ten years I was with city, in one way or another, I impacted bringing some seventy million dollars of state and federal funds to the city of Moorhead to provide services of various sorts to the citizens of Moorhead. So, in the grand scheme, in the ability to have energy loans, and have loans for retrofit of housing for low income people, for code compliance work, for many things like that. The state and federal government had a *tremendous* impact on my stay.

Matter of fact, one of the things I became for the city—and I was probably the only employee who in his approved job description, a resolution for a job description, was authorized to speak

for the mayor and the council, in order to give me enough clout to go to the Legislature and stand before a committee and answer for the city. Ah, I think they were...they played a very significant role in my time with the city.

BV: What was the power structure in the city government during your tenure?

WK: [Chuckles] About the same as today's.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: Ah, interesting...hmmm...I think the form of government basically dictates what the power structure is going to be. And if you're in a weak mayor/council form of government, such as we are today, the players vary...but the effect stays the same. I don't think it makes much difference *who* the council members are. The mix is generally fairly consistent. And I think you find that they pretty much act in the mode that they're structured. This is why I'm very interested right now to see the city going into city manager, because I think what it's done is it showed a council that has recognized that the complexity of city government today is so much greater than it has ever been in the past.

And in these federal governments backing down from their participation in economic development, they have said, "Listen, we have coined a new phrase called public-private partnership." Which means that the local city government will get from its state the legislation it needs so it can cooperate directly with government or directly with private enterprise to do economic development. Now this means that government must be much quicker, much more responsive, and much...must take higher risks. And as you know, a weak mayor/council form of government is a zero risk, very slow, committee-oriented process that takes four to six weeks to give a decision on anything. Ah, in the private entrepreneurial side in this public-private partnership, three weeks can make the difference between whether or not a seven million dollar project can be built or absolutely can't be built. And either it's put together...

BV: So you think the manager will really expedite...

WK: Absolutely. Because see, now they have a person who can take the risk. Right now, in an elected form, really, no one wants to take the risk.

BV: Mmmm-hmmm.

WK: And the pay isn't significant for anyone on the staff level to take a risk. So no one takes a risk. Everybody plays it absolutely safe. It's better to say no than take a chance. I think that a city manager form of government will expedite the speed at which decisions can be made, and the amount of risk that a government will be able to take, in order to aggressively compete. So I think the power structure of old has basically been recognized, that that's the way that kind of government and power structure works. And then since the...I've only been involved with the city for fifteen years about...it's really never changed. The old guard power structure is still there, the Stordahl's, the Stenerson's, those people who are the old guard of the Chamber, and

business, and government. Hmm, most of the...what I'd call liberal activists, yourself Betsy, and Barb, and Mary, and Diane, and people like this, are the same people now that were here ten years ago. Basically, the structure hasn't changed a whole lot.

BV: It's curious. Was there someone that you called on for advice and/or support?

WK: Yeah. I have called on a number of people. I'm a people...a person who reaches out. When I have problems, I like other people to solve them for me, and I guess my strength is finding out who can solve them for me. And I've done it a number of times in government in the relationship. I always throw myself a hundred percent into whatever I do; if you're not going to do it all the way, you're not going to do it at all. And when I do this, sometimes it gets me in trouble, especially in a public sector where everything is done in a fishbowl, because I am smart enough that after working with a person for six months, I know what that person wants me to say and what that person doesn't want me to say. I know how to make him happy, I know how to make him sad; the same with a city council and mayor.

And one day that was really bothering me, because I knew I was hired as a professional, and what I was supposed to do professionally, but I knew what they wanted to hear politically. And the two were not the same. So I went in one day to Dwaine Hoberg, who was mayor at the time. I went into his office, and I said, "Dwaine, I've got to talk to you. I've got a real problem." I said, "The city has hired me as a professional. But on this issue, I *know* what that council wants to hear. What should I do?" And basically, he'd tell me right out. He says, "We hired you to use your professional...you're a professional. No matter what it does, even if you had to lose your job over it, you say professionally what you think. If they don't like it, that's their job is to make a decision. But you make your professional recommendation."

It was early in my public career. And I just took it as a base way to operate. They hired me for this, is this is what they're going to get. If they don't like it, they'll turn me down; I'll try and do something else. I'll do everything I can to make them agree with what I want, but they still have got the decision making as the elected board. And I am a professional, and it's not my job to make life easy for them. It's my job to tell them what I think professionally they should or should not do on a program. So I think Dwaine, in many ways—although he was a hard individual to really get to know personally—gave me some very good professional advice in my new career as a bureaucrat.

Hmmm, I've talked other times with a number of various people, including you and Barb Sipson. I've spent a lot of time discussing theory, and feelings, and programs with her, because I feel she is a person who I can relate to well. And, you know, and the trust is there. So yeah, I turn out to a lot of people depending on what I'm looking for.

BV: What kind of coverage did you feel you got...? What kind of coverage did you get from the media? Did you feel the treatment was fair?

WK: I love the media. I was the anomaly in a city government who was on an absolute binge that whatever you could do to avoid the media was good. I happened to work on programs that

the more you could say about them, the better off you were. And I found the media treated me extremely fair. A little corny at times or...a little half-truthy at times, as we all are, but I found that they really treated me very, very fair. Matter of fact, I think I finally developed, by the end of my tenure, an ability to literally use the media in its news form very strongly for my own benefit.

BV: Community...hmmm...community changes you have seen precipitated, been unhappy about?

WK: Well...[Sighs] Of course, I've seen Moorhead come from a basically vacant—matter of fact, I was in some of the office buildings—a basically vacant, deteriorating central community into what is now a...an oddity throughout the nation. And that's a very successful urban renewal project that created a downtown shopping center, which is doing very well. That is a good thing. That tax increment district right now out-generates the old area about five to one over what it used to generate before.

BV: Mmmm.

WK: So it was successful. And also in jobs; there's two or three jobs to one to what was there. And retail dollars, everything else, it *has done* what it was supposed to do. Things that didn't get done, is when the flow was going, you know...[Sighs] And it's a thing, I think, of the council form of government: you always do what's *safe*. Everybody thought that Bob Roberts was crazy because he wanted to go immediately into Urban Renewal II, which would have taken the area along Main Avenue from the river over to about Eleventh Street, I think it was, and about two blocks south, and do a renewal in there and get the same program going. The fact is, if we'd initiated it at that time—you know that hindsight's a hundred percent—that area could have very, very definitely benefited from the program. Now with the cutbacks in funds and aids, the ability to deal with the revitalization of Main Avenue is an extremely difficult task. Take a long...it may never get done. So that's one of the things that I think we should have done that we didn't do.

BV: I do think this question's been answered, but I'll give you a shot at it. How did the nature of your community involvement change over the years?

WK: Well, I think the biggest change in my relationship to the community is that just in the way my job evolved, and the programs I was involved in, I became involved with the public. I was basically that person who did all the community meetings, all the needs assessment meetings, all of the citizen's support of the citizen's groups, such as the citizen's advisory committee you sat on for so many years. And in that format, I think I got a sense of what people really want and didn't want, and that was a lot greater than anyone else that I worked with in city government. Ah, so I would guess that when I was involved, I was more involved than anyone in the community, and I think it's part of the reason I got some of the recognition I did get while I was going along, is just from that recognition.

BV: Mmmm-hmmm.

WK: People knew me. A lot people don't know...don't know other people in the city that are doing great things.

BV: Mmmm-hmmm.

WK: But I was out front.

BV: Did you assume other leadership roles in the community either before, during, or after your involvement in government?

WK: Yes...

BV: Such as school, church...?

WK: I...ah...in 1975, after our centennial, the two mayors of our two communities got together and decided that a significant facility or program should be started to be shown in our bicentennial as a product of this hundred years. That project was the Heritage Interpretive Center. I was involved on the task force to look at the viability of doing such a facility for five years, And matter of fact, we had breakfast...I bet you I didn't miss a dozen breakfasts in five years on Friday mornings.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: Ah, as that was going through. The report came out and it was positive. When...but due to those political strifes you have...and this was the strife really between Lindgren getting elected based on his bridge issue with Morrie Lanning on the other side, and became a mini-political war between the two communities. That project really got set aside, and policies were taken to make sure it wouldn't go. Because tied to it was the Twelfth Avenue North Bridge, which was highly controversial. So although the report came out and said it was doable, nothing got done. When the Heritage...Red River Valley Heritage Society, along with Vince Lindstrom's Convention Visitor's Bureau managed to put together a proposal that got the Hjemkomst, it came alive again, because we had a new wave, a new strength.

And in November of 1982 I was approached to become a policy member (and this was after I had left the city) a policy board member for the building of the Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center. I worked through that policy committee, became chairman of the building committee, and we have designed the building, put it together. And we got it about ready to build during that process. A new comprehensive nonprofit corporation was formed to own and operate the facility, to build, own, and operate it, and that was the Red River Valley Center of Moorhead. The State of Minnesota granted them a million dollars towards that construction. And I was appointed as a board member of that board.

What all of a sudden came to be a reality was now the project was funded or ready to go, and they didn't have anybody to do it. So we started the process of going out to look. Well, to do a search for an executive director would have taken them some six or eight months. So once again,

I was approached by a phone call to consider taking a sabbatical or a leave of absence from the development firm I was employed by, and look at taking a position as the facilitator to get that project done. I talked it over with my boss. He thought it was a good project in a good public vein, and agreed to it. So I have taken a two-year leave. I have started my own company, and I have taken a two-year contract to basically finish that last piece of Moorhead's urban renewal district, and do some more economic development, and some more relationship with city government, so...and I'm enjoying it so far.

BV: Have you had any other community involvement, service clubs?

WK: Hmmm, belong to Rotary. Ah...not a whole lot. I...I'm a person who between really, my beautiful wife and the relationship we have, and my family, and what I put into whatever job I do do, there isn't any time. There really isn't. We hardly have the time we need to keep our relations vital without going out and doing a lot of other things. So I've got to say, in that way I'm possibly somewhat community selfish. I'll do my major things, I'll work my heart out for them, but I'm not going to do a whole lot of them.

BV: Hmmm. Does your family support or discourage your involvement?

WK: Oh, just beautifully support me. Hmmm. They were one of the greatest encouragers to me to accept this two-year leave of absence in that, because they...they lacked the...or saw a lack in the vitality and in the energy I had in the position I had with the development firm. And it was just the fact that it's a small development firm, and you work on one or two projects, and there's a limited amount you *can* do. Where...where I had always been in city government, in that, there is just no limit, I mean, the limit is how much you want to do. And if you want to burn yourself up in a week, you can do that, or if you want to do it in a month, you can do that. Or if you want to do it in ten years, you can do it in ten years.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: And this project has got that kind of energy level. And I'm still involved with the development company doing nearly as much work for them as I was doing before, and still taking ninety percent of my time to do this other project. It's just much healthier. And they just...you know, my wife Laverne has told me that she just sees a vitality and a richness to my life that's been lacking. So, yeah, they're very supportive.

BV: I see that, too. I don't know you as well as she does! [Pauses] What effect did your involvement in government have on your family and family life?

WK: It was a mixed blessing. Hmmm...I think, Betsy, you know as well as anybody... that, literally, if I think you came down to the basic reason why I left city government...there were probably a multiple of them. But the major ones were, one, I burned myself out, plain and simple. I burned myself to a frazzle. Two, I had gotten myself to a position where I could go nowhere. There was nowhere to go. If you'd looked through my career with the city, every four or five years, I had a completely, entirely new job. I created a complete new emphasis. And it

had just run out. And that, along with being burned out...And that, along with the fact that I found lobbying to be extremely vital to the needs of the city of Moorhead, but the most emotionally *debilitating* thing I've *ever done* in my life. I cannot understand how people can make a living out of it. Because you need so much for your people...and it all depends on how wily, and crafty, and manipulative you can be to get it. And anyone who thinks the Minnesota Legislature is one man, one vote is crazy.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: Ah, you know, you can take that Legislature, and if you can get any four or five of those people who'll support you, if they sit in the right chairmanships and have the right pecking order within the party, you've got it made. That's all you need. And that's just a reality of this system. The border city legislation, God bless Roger Moe, and Willis Eken, and Keith Langseth as the majority side for doing what they did. Because Dwaine Hoberg, and Merlyn Valan, and these...Tony Statum[sp?] people like that, who are good people, were in the minority. And if I needed *them* to do it, it was impossible to be done. But because people like Willis Eken, who didn't even have anybody in his district that related to our program, would pick this up and do it, it got done. And because you had Keith Langseth, being as strong as he is, from his position, willing to take this to the Senate, and to work to get Roger Moe interested enough to support it, it all worked.

But it's just this thing of working all those people and the politics. If you'll do this, well, you do this; all the chips. And I think that it also took me away from home. I was always...I've always been away from home in city government, because I always had night meetings. But you go out for couple hours in the evening, Laverne does her homework from school for her kids, she does her marking and grading, I come home, we're still at home. With the Legislature, you'd leave every Wednesday afternoon and come home Friday night. And this gets to be old, week in and week out. That created a...that created probably the only real difficulty I've ever had in my married relationship with my wife.

BV: How did you deal with the stress that comes...well, as so often goes with public office?

WK: Not well. Not well. I...hmmm...I just kept bottling it up, and I kept holding it, and I kept holding it, and finally it just got to...everything turned ugly. And I could *not enjoy* anything. I just got so anxious...that life just wasn't worth it anymore. I'd do anything...that's the big...probably the biggest reason I moved on. I just burned myself out. If I'd have been smart...You know, the thing that's really dumb on the other side, I left with seven, or eight, or nine weeks of vacation, because I just never took the time I had when I should have. I just didn't manage my stress well at all.

BV: You should have taken up volleyball...or not volleyball, racquetball.

WK: Something.

BV: That's what Millie [unclear] do and...

WK: Mmmm...I should have taken some type of real...ah...and I thought about it, too. And so, soon as you think about it...I should have really got into some good, strong courses on stress management. And I just never did.

BV: Might be easier to take the courses and know how to do it though, then to...Would you like to see your children or grandchildren involved in government or politics?

WK: Oh, absolutely. I don't have any problem with that. Politics is what you make it. If you're a good person in politics, you're worth your weight in gold, if you're a bad one, that's just too bad.

BV: If you had your years in government to live over, what would you do differently, and why?

WK: Well, I might not have left, possibly. Hmmm. I don't think if I had gone in that I would have done much different, because I think I did everything I could, as hard as I could, when I did it. I don't know if there was much more that I could have done that I would have done. Hmmm. I *may* have split off the lobbying on that very early, as I tried to do in the last year where I passed it on to Scott Hutchins, who finally took my position. I started to pass off more and more of that. Because one of the things about government that's very, very uniform throughout whatever your form of government, a staff member's ability to get done what he wants to get done is directly dependent on the amount of time he spends individually with every elected official. Elected officials are like Holiday Inns; *no surprises*.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: They don't want any surprises. And if you have the time to plant the seeds extremely early in the process of...of taking Millie to lunch, or to breakfast, or coffee or something as a committee chairman [unclear] and saying, "Millie, we'd like to look at new buses. We're looking at this and that; and these are the circumstances." By the time that's all developed, everybody is well enough informed that you're pretty much going to get what you need to function. If you don't take that in-house time to do that, you've got real trouble, because you are going to surprise someone. Someone's going to come after you. What you do is you're not stroking the people enough to keep that...that inter-relationship alive. That friendship that truly is vital in any kind of relationship, ah...especially in that kind of relationship, where they...you have credibility and trust. That's got to be continually massaged. When I was doing all the lobbying, I spent too much time out of town. I couldn't keep up all the rest of it. It just got to be a house of cards.

BV: Do you think your standing in the community has changed since you are no longer a city employee?

WK: Well, I learned one thing, or that...I always *knew*, but I always tell the other people who are still around there, there isn't anyone anywhere who isn't replaceable...and probably replaceable with someone better than you. And you'd better believe that no matter what you're doing. What I have found is that when I left and went into private hard development, which is an extremely carnivorous business, my credibility was somewhat damaged and suspect. Let's say suspect. And

I think it is suspect because they feel you're doing it just for money. And for most of the people I relate to, that is suspect. But I have found as soon as I transition back, it's just like...all is forgotten. And it's just like business as usual. You wouldn't have thought I would have ever been away from the city or the experience I had then. So it is unique in that way.

BV: Media still remembers you?

WK: Oh, yes. They keep coming up to me and asking me for things. And I just tell them I don't have that many things anymore.

BV: [Chuckles]

WK: I'm not involved in that many things; I do a simple task.

BV: Oh, and I...again, I think you've answered this one. But what do you feel is your greatest contribution towards making Moorhead a better place?

WK: I think economic development. Ah, basically making it, the city, a more viable, sustaining community overall. And that goes from a better housing market to a better commercial market, to a better job market. Ah...that portion that is manageable under me. The great things that overlie all of that, of course, is Moorhead State University, and Concordia, and city government, and Clay County government that are here, will be here, are a great asset. But for those parts that are manageable, that I was involved in, I really feel that the amount of blight we've gotten rid of, the amount of redevelopment that has been done commercially in housing is truly where I feel that the...was the most vital to me.

BV: That's all the questions I have. Thank you.

[End of interview]