

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Robert Jones Interview
February 15, 2021
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DM: Good afternoon and welcome to the Rock Voices Oral History project of SRU. Today is Monday, February 15, 2021, and it is approximately 2pm. This interview is being done remotely, due [to] the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an interview with Mr. Bob Jones, the original Rocky the Rock mascot. My name is Deepam Mistry and I am the interviewer. Hello Mr. Jones and welcome.

RJ: Thank you. Nice to be here.

DM: Glad for you to be here. I'll be asking you some questions about the time you spent as a student, as well as the mascot, of Slippery Rock. Let's start off with some biographical information. What's your full name?

RJ: Robert Scott Jones.

DM: Okay, and what year were you born?

RJ: 1960. I don't mind giving away my age.

DM: And where are you originally from?

RJ: Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which is where I live today.

DM: Very nice. And what made you decide to go to college?

RJ: Well, in my house, I grew up in an education background-oriented family. My father was in secondary education. So, it was just sort of expected that I was gonna go, and I don't recall that it, it wasn't that it was forced, but it just was the next, natural progression to what we were gonna do.

DM: And what made you choose to attend Slippery Rock of all the other schools?

RJ: Well Slippery Rock, obviously, has a very unique name and so I was always interested in that. And I was looking for a small school, but yet one that was big enough that you could not only kind of lose yourself a little bit in it, but also have an intimate feeling as well.

DM: Okay, very nice. What did you hope going to college would do for you?

RJ: Like many kids, I didn't know what I wanted to absolutely do in life, so I was hoping that it would be sort of a stepping stone into life, where I could experience different things, check out different professions and areas of education, and hopefully decide and figure out what I wanted to do.

DM: What SRU era were you there for? The state college 1960 to '83, I'm assuming, and then kind of transitioning to the university at '83 to present?

RJ: Yeah, I started in the fall of 1978 and graduated in spring of 1983. So, if you're doing your math, yes that was five years, but there was a very good reason for that. I graduated in the last class under the state college name before it switched to university.

DM: Okay, very cool. What were your impressions of the college? What was it like when you first arrived? Did you live at the dorms, and how was that experience, if you did?

RJ: Yeah, I lived in what was called High Rise One, which later became, I believe, Dodds Hall. It's now the location where the student [center] is and Rocky's Café, I believe. And that was a really nice experience because you had a lot of people that were in a new place, experiencing new things, that were thrown together, trying to figure life out together, how to cooperate with each other, how to resolve conflict. And so I thought it was sort of a perfect little microcosm of getting into life.

DM: Sure. And then, this is kind of a side question, so you moved here for college, did you go home frequently? Or did you have enough friends and a lot of things going on, because I know you were an athlete as well. Were you always preoccupied?

RJ: I did go home a pretty fair amount, but because of being an athlete, and then later being involved as being the mascot, I didn't go very often. I typically would take off on Saturdays after a football game. I lived nearby in Indiana Pennsylvania, where IUP is. I mostly went home because I wasn't very good at doing laundry. I did my weekly laundry on Sundays and then came back Sunday night. So, I was far enough away from home, but yet close enough, where if I needed to go there, it was nice to do it.

DM: Yeah, and then of course the home-cooked meals by mom.

RJ: Nothing wrong with that.

DM: Amen to that. So, what was your major and why did you choose this? Did you change it, and if so, what prompted you to change?

RJ: That's a really great question and I think that it's a train of thought that's changed a little bit since I was in school. When I started, I remember, not that we really had to choose a major, but it was sort of expected that that's what you should do. So, not knowing what I wanted to do, I chose Phys Ed because of my sports background. I did a lot of Phys Ed classes. But while I was there, I really discovered sort of a business interest, and so I chose English, through my advisor Ed Walsh. I remember he told me that if you can read, write, and speak appropriately, you can adapt, pretty much, into anything in business. So, I switched, became an English major, and that worked out very well for me, later in life and in business.

DM: Very cool. I actually did start my program, before it went into moratorium, a masters in English at Clarion. And then I kind of switched gears to mass media arts in journalism so, yeah, that's kind of interesting that you were an English major.

RJ: Yeah, I kind of like what a lot of universities and colleges are doing now. I have three daughters that all went to school and it seems to be the trend now is not to declare a major when you come, and figure out what it is that you want to do. And that's exactly what I did. So I kind of like the trend that it is now, because I think there's a pretty high percentage of students that change a major not only once, but two or three times within the first year or two.

DM: Yeah, I have a couple student workers that work for me and they're like juniors and they're kind of established and they're gonna be done and then I'll talk to them are [they are] like, "Yeah, I changed my major, I'll be here for another year." And I'm like, "What?" So, it's interesting that you said that you were kind of thinking ahead of things, whenever you went to school, so it actually worked out right for you. That's awesome.

RJ: And that, that answers the question of why I was there for five years. That and plus I had a year of eligibility for sports left.

DM: Very cool, so we're going to dive into the next part. Let's talk about Rocky the mascot.

RJ: Fantastic.

DM: How did you decide to become the college mascot, and how did you come up with the idea and design for Rocky?

RJ: This is a really interesting story. So, even though I live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania now, and this is where I'm from, I actually grew up in State College, Pennsylvania. My father was principal at State College High School, and so we had season tickets to Penn State football. As a young child I was just learning about football, but I was always interested in the Nittany Lion mascot. And he wasn't just a lion but he was a Nittany Lion, so he was a kind of a unique lion, and I was always interested in the story behind what a Nittany was. Which kind of leads into, it's kind of odd that we're a lion, again, now.

I was always fascinated with the lion, the antics that he did, the entertainment that he gave the crowd, something different to look at besides just the sporting event. And he really appealed to, not only adults, but to me, a young child, as well. So, I was always fascinated by that. And so, when I came to Slippery Rock I was really disappointed at the first football game that there was no mascot. My father was superintendent of schools at that time, in Butler County, nearby. And so, I would have dinner with him on Wednesday nights. We would meet at a little Italian restaurant and I was telling him, after the first football game, that there was no mascot. And he looked at me and he said, "Why don't you create one?" I thought he was kidding, but really, we talked about it a little bit more, and it really made sense. So that night, at that restaurant, on a paper napkin, I drew what I thought Slippery Rock's mascot would be.

At that time, Slippery Rock was The Rockets, which was really great. I know before me, there briefly was a mascot that was kind of a Rocket Man, that didn't last very long. So I wanted, as I said before, Slippery Rock having a very unique name, I wanted to do something very unique, that was very descriptive of the university. At that time the football [team] had the words "The Rock" written on top of their numbers, on the front of their jerseys. So I thought, well okay, let's make a rock, and how can we make a rock kind of whimsical, and fun, and something that's very

unique, like Slippery Rock was. So, we drew it out. And then I took it home, and my mother, who was a pretty good seamstress, she actually started making the costume. We edited it and tweaked it a little bit to what it finally was, in its final version.

DM: So you were there with your father having dinner, and you wrote it up on a napkin . . . and then came up with a blueprint?

RJ: Yes. And so, we made the pattern ourselves, and it was really fun. It was something that was completely done from scratch.

DM: Sounds so cool. Now, were there other mascots? I mean, of course, Nittany Lions, but within the state college [system], were there other mascots at other universities, like IUP and Clarion? Because you said Slippery Rock didn't have one at that time.

RJ: Correct. Yeah, so interesting you mentioned IUP because, obviously, at that time they were the Indians, and one of my close friends from high school, who was the Indian mascot at Indiana High School, which is where I ended up graduating from, was also the Indian mascot at IUP. Clarion, you mentioned, had their chicken. So yeah, there were other mascots, so I felt like Slippery Rock really needed to have one.

DM: Absolutely. That's interesting. I thought all the state colleges had a mascot until you just said, when you came Slippery Rock didn't have one. So, that's kind of interesting that there wasn't, but then you were just like, "Yeah, I'm gonna make one."

RJ: Right.

DM: That's pretty cool. When did the mascot first make his debut, and did you keep your identity anonymous?

RJ: It was about two weeks after that first football game I went to, where there was no mascot, we finally had the first version of the Rocky suit finished. We added on to it, later on. [That] football game, ironically, or coincidentally, was at California State College. So, it was an away game, and I just showed up. Nobody knew I was coming--the cheerleaders, the band, the administration--nobody knew I was coming in to do this. So I drove there, got dressed in the parking lot, and just went out on the field and on the sidelines; acted like I belonged there.

DM: That's pretty cool. And so I'm assuming your identity was always anonymous. Nobody knew that Bob Jones was AKA Rocky the mascot.

RJ: Yeah, very few people knew, and I wanted to keep that anonymous because I wanted to have two separate identities. I wanted Rocky to be Rocky, and I wanted me to be the student, separate from that, and not have those lines blurred. So, it was really important for me never to be seen without the head of the mascot on, and also never to speak while I was in the costume. We finally revealed my identity, between the third and the fourth quarter of the last home football game, in the fall of 1982. And then we did it again at the halftime of the last home basketball game in 1983, in the spring.

DM: Wow, that's amazing! That long, only the people that you needed [or] wanted to know,

[knew] who you were. But other than that, it was very hush-hush.

RJ: Very few people knew. Only people that really needed to know actually knew.

DM: Makes sense. That's pretty cool. Any other memories, that you can think of with Rocky in the sense of, did people try to get your identity, or try to follow you? I mean, they didn't have camera phones back then, so people couldn't take pictures, but you know, were people chasing [you] around? Did they ever try to do something to find out who you were?

RJ: Oh, absolutely. People followed me all the time, and people were trying to look into the eyes of it. And I always wore, or most of the time, I wore mirrored sunglasses, so [when] they looked into the eyes, all they saw was themselves.

DM: Very smart.

RJ: People were always trying to pull the hat off of Rocky, but it was sewn on with fishing line, so it wasn't coming off. And it was affixed to--there was actually a football helmet underneath there, so I had a chin strap around my chin. Nothing was coming off unless I wanted it to it.

DM: Seems like you thought of everything to make sure that nobody found out your identity. Now you said earlier that you had the first version, and then a couple weeks later, you made tweaks to it. What were the tweaks that you made, down the line, from the first version? [How] did Rocky change?

RJ: The first version didn't have sleeves, so it was just a body, and I just wore a gray sweatshirt underneath it. We later added sleeves to it, and then we changed the shirt that he wore a little bit, and then permanently attached the hat. I think the first time that I showed up, we wanted to see how [the hat] would work. And then we sewed it down with fishing line and got it on there as a permanent fixture. Addendum: We also made the eyes much bigger, partly so I could see better but also because I wanted the eyes to be a more significant part of Rocky's face.

DM: Right, so what we have now, displayed the case in Archives, is the final version with all the tweaks from start to end then?

RJ: Yes, it stayed largely the same. Occasionally, I wore a different shirt, like [when] basketball was in the playoffs or something, I'd wear a different shirt, but largely, [it] was as you see it today.

DM: Okay, all right. What was your most memorable experience? I'm sure you have many as a mascot. Please share as much as you want, because this is really fun. Any particular athletic events that you can think of that really stand out, or any other events you attended? Because you just didn't go to basketball or football events; there were other events that you went to, the parade and such, so I'd love to know.

RJ: Yeah. Some of the big highlights were [when] we played, twice, at University of Michigan stadium, first against Shippensburg, and then the second time was against Wayne State. Being there, on a big stage like that, going to a small school, was really fun. And the first time we were there we set the small college attendance record. I believe there were 66,000 people that year at

Slippery Rock's game at Michigan Stadium, so what a thrill to get to kind of perform in front of that.

Prior to that, I was interviewed by the Ann Arbor newspaper, and it was revealed to me that, at that time, what was called the San Diego Chicken--later [it] became just The Chicken mascot that traveled all over--I knew that he was gonna be there, but he didn't necessarily know I was going to be there. So, what my whole game was, I would always find something to kind of play with, or mess with, or tease. I said, "Well I have to do something with The Chicken since he's going to be kind of the highlight there." So I took a plunger and I fixed the plunger on the butt of Rocky with a bungee cord around my waist, and I had a big pink flamingo-type feather hooked to the shaft of the plunger, so it was like a big tail and when he came out, I put the plunger on and started mocking him. He didn't think that was as funny as everybody else did. But I thought it was hilarious.

So being at Michigan was certainly a big thing. I was interviewed on ESPN several times. And one time I was on my way to a basketball game at Gannon. I traveled in my own car, and on I-79 my car broke down on the side of the road. So I was hitchhiking to the basketball game. This car stopped and picked me up. I had my costume in a big bag and I told him the story of where I was going. They not only drove me to Erie, but they actually took me right up to the Field House, at Gannon, and made sure that I was okay.

Dave Rooney, who was the [Slippery Rock] basketball coach at that time, was very instrumental in helping me through basketball games and support and everything. I talked to him and told him what happened. And so he said, "Don't worry, you're coming home with us." So, got home on the bus with the basketball team, went out to dinner with them, and that was certainly a really great experience.

But probably the best thing that ever happened to me was my fifth year, and again, we keep talking about this fifth year. There was a reason I was there for five years. I met my wife at an away football game. She was a Slippery Rock student, part of the band, but [I] met her at an away game at Towson State University in Maryland. And so, had I not been there that fifth year, and had I not been going to away games, maybe I would never have met her.

DM: You found love at Slippery Rock, look at that.

RJ: Absolutely, rock-solid love.

DM: That's a good slogan, yeah. So, best and worst experience of being a college mascot? I know, sometimes when you're wearing the suit [it] kind of gets hot, kind of gets sweaty. So, there's always pros and cons, but what are your experiences, the worst and the best part of being a college mascot?

RJ: Well, the best part, obviously, was just being part of the university and contributing to the university. I loved going to away games and kind of spreading the Slippery Rock love to other places. As I said, I was kind of a playful guy, so I was never out there to intimidate anybody, but just to [show], "Hey, these Slippery Rock guys are pretty cool and pretty fun." And because he

was a unique mascot, I treated him as having a very fun, charismatic personality, so it was always fun going to away games.

We were at Edinboro and I would always go over and mess with cheerleaders on the other sideline, and some of the band guys from Edinboro started chasing me. I would steal cheerleaders, but I would always take the cheerleaders back. So, I took the cheerleader back from Edinboro, and the band, some people from the band at Edinboro started chasing me. And [the] Slippery Rock mascot had tunnel vision in his eyes, so I was almost to the Slippery Rock sideline, and there was track, and then [there] was a curb before the fence, and goes up in the stadium. And I was gonna dive over the fence, to get away from the band guys, and I misjudged where the curb was and stepped on the edge of the curb and broke my ankle.

DM: Oh, my God.

RJ: Ambulance pulled up, [but] I wouldn't let them take the head off my mascot outfit until I was safely in the ambulance and the doors were closed. And then [the] next year, Edinboro came to Slippery Rock and dedicated their halftime to me. I was actually part of Edinboro's band's halftime, so that that was pretty fun.

DM: Yeah.

RJ: But you mentioned the heat, and that was definitely the biggest downside. Whether it was an early fall game, when it was sweltering heat, or like in Michigan, when I think the temperatures on the field that day were even close to 100 degrees. It was just unbearable heat. But you had to stay in costume and had to stay in character. But I tell you, the cold days were pretty nice because I could dress up and be pretty warm underneath there too, so it was give [and] take.

DM: So, how did you manage? Like you said, the hot days, sweltering heat, you're in the costume, you have to stay in character, and we didn't know if Rocky was male or female, and even the expressions were neutral. And Rocky never spoke, so that way you don't know if it's a male or female. How did you stay in character? Like you said, it's really hot out, how did you compose yourself? Did you take a lot of water breaks or were you just like, "I'm a pro at this, I got this?"

RJ: Well, back then, being an athlete, salt tablets were pretty popular to prevent cramps and things. So, I remember using a lot of salt tablets, drinking as much as I could, but away from the public view. When we're at home games, obviously, going underneath the stadium for a few minutes. But mostly, [I] just bared it. I figured if everybody else was out there, the team was out there, I was gonna be out there too.

DM: That's impressive. That's awesome. All right, any comments on the current mascot?

RJ: Yes, and that's a really great question because I mentioned earlier that the reason I chose Rocky, the way he was, was to bring something unique that matched the very unique name of the University, and so I think that we've kind of lost that. We talked a little bit about Penn State and the Nittany Lion, and there already being that famous lion residing in central Pennsylvania. So, I think that Slippery Rock has kind of lost some of that mystique, some of that uniqueness, with

just being called “the Pride” and having a lion as a mascot. I think that the university certainly has the right to choose, however they see fit, to move forward; but I think we can do a little bit better and bring some of the uniqueness back to Slippery Rock, and maybe build on a little bit of what I did, but just modernize it a little bit.

DM: Yeah, and what about the name of the mascot now versus what it was back then?

RJ: Well, they still call it Rocky, and as you know, there's Rocky's Café, which I'm deeply honored that they kept that. [Pause]. I understand having a Rock Pride, but I also thought Rockets were very unique. There's only one other school in the country--that's Akron, University of Akron--that's The Rockets. So, I think that Rockets were pretty unique. And I'd almost like to see it go back to that, but then having The Rock as the mascot, the way that we did at the beginning, to return to our roots a little bit.

DM: Sure, yeah. I remember when I first started at Slippery Rock, “The Rock,” it reminded me of the movie with Sean Connery and Nicolas Cage about Alcatraz. And I'm like, “My favorite color is green, so this job at Slippery Rock is a match made in heaven.” I said, “[The] color green is my favorite color, you got the Rock,” I said, “you know, this is perfect. So, it's kind of interesting when you say things like that, the uniqueness of the name. It just, you know, it really stands out. And just even the rock-solidness, you know, we stand together as a solid family. That's the way I've always seen Slippery Rock. That's the way I've always viewed it. Being there, you know, we work together as a whole, as one unit, and we always come together and in time. So yeah, definitely, that “rock solid” you keep saying, it does resonate.

RJ: Yeah, and you mentioned about being a family, and I mentioned earlier about being a small school, big enough, but yet intimate enough too. And being a family is really what kept me there, all those five years, and I'm just eternally grateful for the experience that Slippery Rock gave me.

DM: Sure, absolutely. Did you belong to any other campus activities or organizations? What was the social life like back then, on campus and even off campus?

RJ: Sure. So, I played two sports while I was there. I went there as a tennis player and then was also a swimmer my first two years. Then as the mascot grew, my time became a little more stretched, being the mascot. I just played tennis and was the mascot. I didn't have a whole lot of time for other things. [I] definitely was not in a fraternity or anything. At that point, there were fraternities and sororities, and they were definitely important. But it wasn't huge like it was in schools like Penn State, that I was used to growing up. So, I pretty much stayed in sports and being the mascot.

Social life--a lot of the sports teams were very close. So in itself, each sports team was almost like its own fraternity because we did a lot of things together, bonded together. So I got kind of the same thing that I would [have], had I been in a fraternity or other kind of a group. And I'm not knocking fraternities by any means.

DM: Sure. And when you said how you were an athlete, you being Rocky, it kind of made perfect sense because you could handle all that, because you were already an athlete. So, free to endure the heat, and run back and forth, and be chased by the other teams. You were good at it,

because you're like, "Well, I'm already in shape, so I can handle this."

RJ: It was kind of funny. One night was indoor tennis practice. If you remember, in Morrow Field House, they had a little tennis court, down behind the bleachers there, at the one end of the track. And at halftime of the basketball game, our tennis team was practicing. I guess they didn't understand why I wasn't at practice. So, I went back there and grabbed one of the guys' tennis rackets. They were pretty surprised that Rocky could actually hit a tennis ball pretty good, and they had no idea who I was. The coach did, obviously, because he had to let me out of practice.

DM: Right, but that's amazing. They're probably thinking, "Wow, he plays all the sports." Meanwhile, they never knew, "he's my teammate."

RJ: Yeah, not 'til the end.

DM: Not 'til the end, right. What was your favorite class and why?

RJ: I was thinking about that, and I'd have to say that it was a public speaking class. As an English major, my advisor at that time was Ed Walsh, and one of the things that he told me about becoming an English major, and then selecting Communication as a minor, he said that if you can write and speak, you can do just about anything. So, I took a public speaking class, and I think that was probably the most important class I ever took because I've given sermons at churches, spoken at funerals, weddings, celebrations, and, most importantly, given business presentations. So just being able to communicate well, express well, and present well, I think, was just invaluable to me. And it was almost kind of dumb luck that we did it but looking back, it was the most important thing I ever did.

DM: That's awesome. Any favorite administrator [or] a faculty member that helped mold you to the great man you are today?

RJ: Absolutely. There were two: the president at that time was Dr. Reinhard, and then Bobby Aebersold, who later became president. I mentioned that I was with my father and we drew the mascot up on a napkin, [but] unfortunately the fall of my sophomore year, my father passed away. So, it was a pretty hard time in my life. Dr. Reinhard had found out about this, and at a basketball game asked me if I would be in his office on Monday morning. So, I showed up with my costume on and he said, "No, I want to know who you are." I shook my head and basically was trying to say, "Yeah, I can't tell you," but later got to know him very, very well, and he helped me, not only through a difficult time, but helped me stay at Slippery Rock financially; helped me through that part of it. So he and Dr. Aebersold were just so valuable to me. And I felt like I could have picked up the phone, or even walked up to his home there, just off campus, at any time and just knocked on the door.

When you mentioned about family earlier, that's immediately what came to mind. And I don't know if I would have made it through college had the administrators not taken the interest, not only in me, but I think that they take that interest in every student there. And I think at a big school, that would have been lost. And so Slippery Rock, we keep saying, it's unique, and there's another aspect of why it is.

DM: Absolutely. That's why I always say, having that family/team morale, and Slippery Rock definitely does, goes far and beyond. And you're a prime example of it.

RJ: Thank you.

DM: Awesome. You're very welcome. Any other individuals who influenced you or were significant in the time you were at Slippery Rock? I know you mentioned those two gentlemen, but anyone else?

RJ: Ed Walsh, who was my advisor and one of my dominating English teachers, definitely was. And my tennis coach, Jim McFarland, who the [McFarland Recreational Sports Complex] is named after. He was the kind of guy that kept you in line, but also gave you enough rope to let you make mistakes and figure out how you were going to solve [them], and get out of those consequences that you got yourself into. And [he] was the kind of guy that kept in touch after graduation, as well. Even through the birth of our first children, [he] always stayed in touch. There's that whole family aspect again.

DM: Very cool. So, I'm kind of going back, I just thought of something. I know Rocky was very mysterious and always kind of mischievous, and I read somewhere there were times when you look back, and you're like, "Maybe I pushed the envelope a little too far, or maybe I shouldn't have done that." Any of those cases that really stand out?

RJ: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely there's one. We were playing Edinboro--seems that Edinboro always comes up, I'm not sure why it was always Edinboro--but we had a home playoff basketball game against Edinboro. And [the] Edinboro cheerleaders were all there, obviously. They had a pretty large contingent of Edinboro football players that were in the stands. And the Edinboro cheerleaders would come out and do this cheer, and at the end of their cheer they would flip up their skirts and they had words written on what they had on underneath their skirt that spelled out "Go Edinboro" or "Go Scots" or something like that. So, the next time they came out to do their cheer, I was messing with them and may have gone too far. [One of them] was the girlfriend of one of the Edinboro football players that was in the stands, [and] he didn't like that too well.

DM: Oh my.

RJ: He stormed the court with another guy and tackled me. Well, there were a lot of Slippery Rock football players there, so they all came to my defense, and it was quite a melee there for a while. So, yeah, I wished I wouldn't have done that, but it seemed pretty funny at the time.

DM: Yeah. When you tell the story, I'm like, "Oh, that's hilarious." But when looking back, you're like, "Yeah . . ." [because] you know [it] offended him, obviously, and then he had to come out and be brave, so, but that is [funny].

RJ: So the state police ended up escorting all the Edinboro [football] contingent out to I-79 and they were told never to come back.

DM: Wow, got the state police involved.

RJ: Absolutely.

DM: Rocky goes big; he goes big or he goes home, but he always goes big.

RJ: Absolutely.

DM: That's amazing. So, what was the greatest contribution of your Slippery Rock State College experience to your later life?

RJ: I think it was teamwork. Not only being the mascot on an athletic sports team, but we talked about the size of the school and just everybody kind of pitching together as a family. And so, I came out of there with a big sense of not only pride for where I went, but just a great sense of working together, coordinating with other people, resolving conflict. I don't know that I would have gotten that at a really big school, like a Penn State, for example.

DM: I know you mentioned Penn State a lot, because you grew up watching the Lions. Did you ever wish that you had gone to a bigger school then? Or looking back, you're like, "No, 100% Slippery Rock was definitely my heart and home"?

RJ: I can say, without a doubt, that 100% Slippery Rock was the place for me. I mentioned about my father passing away. If that would have happened, and I would have been at a school where you were just a number, I probably would never have graduated from college. But because I was at Slippery Rock, I fully credit the school, Dr. Reinhard for me getting through and getting my education. And once you have that diploma, nobody can ever take that away from you. So even if you don't know, totally, what you want to do, you get that diploma. You've gone through the process, and it's something to be proud of. So yes, [I'm] thankful every single day for my Slippery Rock education.

DM: That's good. That's awesome that you chose The Rock. So, any words of wisdom? Other things you would like for current students or future Rock community members to know? How would you like to be remembered?

RJ: I think your college experience is kind of like a bank account. If you put money into your bank account, you're gonna get interest back. If you don't put money in, you're not gonna gain any interest. So go be involved, participate in as much as you can participate in, of course, while doing your school work and [getting] your grades, but just embrace what the college has to offer. Because if you just sit back and just let your time slide by, you're going to miss so many experiences, things that can contribute to your life down the road, as I said, like meeting my wife my last year there.

DM: Now that's amazing. You mentioned you have three daughters. Did any of them go to the Rock?

RJ: Unfortunately, not. My dream in life was that one, or all three of them, would either go to Slippery Rock, Penn State, or some combination of the two. But [the] oldest one went to Catawba College in North Carolina; the middle [one] went to Liberty in Lynchburg, Virginia; and my youngest one was a field hockey player and played for Eastern University.

DM: Okay. Well maybe one day, when they're married [and] have kids, maybe the grandkids will get to go to The Rock.

RJ: Absolutely. Well, we have eight grandkids now, so that's a possibility.

DM: There you go, so we can hopefully see a future, a Rocky Baby Jr. mascot then.

RJ: Well, we may have to work on that mascot, a little bit, to get it back to its original.

DM: But I think if anyone can do it, you can do it, sir.

RJ: That's good.

DM: Absolutely. Anything else you'd like to share with us? I don't have any other questions but I'd love to know anything else that you'd like to talk about.

RJ: Sure. I would be very open to work with the university on kind of maybe revamping and modernizing the mascot, as we talked about earlier. It doesn't necessarily have to be exactly what we did before, but I think something that fits the Slippery Rock model today, but still captures the uniqueness, kind of the mystique. Everybody says, "There's that small school with a funny little name." So let's have a funny little mascot, something that's unique again, and I would love the opportunity to work with the university to do that.

DM: Now, have you been back, Mr. Jones? Visited much since, like I said, Lancaster isn't close by, but [do] you come over frequently or when you can?

RJ: After graduation I played in and taught tennis for a living for several years, so I was living on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, and then Atlanta. When we got married and had our children, Knoxville, Tennessee. So, I was living in the south for many, many years. My first time back was Rocky's 10th anniversary. And our oldest daughter, at the time, was only six weeks old, so that was the first time [we were] back in quite a while, when she was only six weeks old. I've only been [back] a few times since then, but it's all just because of the distance and having a pretty busy life with three daughters and now eight grandkids.

DM: Yeah, you're a busy, busy person. Whenever you do visit, does it always change and you're like, "Wow, this building used to look like this, now this change, and [has] become this" versus whenever you came initially?

RJ: Yeah, it's unbelievable. I remember when I came and met with the Archives department the first time, when I brought up the idea of bringing the costume back. We went to lunch up in what used to be, we called it New Café. There was Olde Café and New Café, that's Weisenfluh and Boozel now, I guess now. And [I] was just amazed [at] all the choices that the students have. It's like being at a smorgasbord restaurant. When I went, there were two lines, you'd pick the left line or the right line, and what they were serving is what you got. So, students today should feel very, very good about all the choices that they have.

And not only that, but also living [places]. I mentioned about High Rise One, that was torn down. And there's so many suites and apartments and really neat living places now. So, I think college students, today, have it pretty good and maybe they don't realize how good they have it.

People might talk about the good old days, but I think it's the good new days now. I still wouldn't have changed anything, but [it's] just nice to see that the university is keeping up with the times. The added sports facilities, academic buildings, it's just, it's just phenomenal. And Slippery Rock was fortunate to have the space of campus, to be able to expand and do some things. And that was kind of unique because it was small town, kind of out in the country, and had that opportunity to do that.

DM: Sure. Have you met and talked to our current President, Dr. Behre?

RJ: We exchanged emails when he got there, but I don't think he knows who I am. I would love the opportunity to meet with him and talk to him about his mascot a little bit though. I sent him a congratulatory email, and he responded very appropriately, pretty quickly afterwards.

DM: Very cool. And then when you were down meeting [with the] Archives, where was Archive located? Still in Bailey Library, or where was the Archives department whenever you came in to talk to Judy [Silva] and Kevin [McLachy]?

RJ: Third floor of Bailey library.

DM: Okay.

RJ: So, we came and met with them, and I remember Judy asked me, "So did you bring Rocky along?" I said, "Well, no, I wasn't sure I was going to leave him here. I wanted to talk to you first." So we made a second trip up there, and that's when we put the costume on a mannequin and put it in the case that it's in today. I have a couple more things to bring, so I look forward to coming back again soon. And maybe we can change his pose in the case a little bit, and make him look a little more realistic to what he was.

DM: Yeah. I close the building on Fridays and he's always up there when I walk by. The lights--you know it's darker out--so the lights are always down and I'm like, "Who's in there? It's just Rocky, no big deal, okay."

RJ: Please say hello to him for me. I miss him quite a bit, but I'm glad he's there; and glad he's on display, and he's where he's supposed to be.

DM: Absolutely. So, you were the first Rocky. No one else wore that suit after you, or did other individuals don that costume?

RJ: That's correct, so I took the suit with me.

DM: Okay.

RJ: I signed the rights to the design of it over to the University. And they tried to mimic it, a little bit. They had hired a costume company in Pittsburgh that I went down and worked with. They didn't do a very good job with the material. I don't think, at that time, there were [the] kind of mascot and costume-type shops that you have today, for some of the famous mascots that are out there. I think that's evolved quite a bit since then. There were some nice duplications of it, but

no, I was the only one that ever wore my suit. A couple times I was sick and one or two other students filled in for me, for a single event, but other than that it stayed with me.

DM: And then what year was it that you donated the costume, sir?

RJ: Probably three years ago.

DM: Oh, very recently.

RJ: Yeah, and it was pretty interesting. A professor in the [Communication] Department [Mark Chase], had a Slippery Rock shirt on eBay that had the picture of Rocky on it. And I bid on it, won it, and sent them the story of why I wanted that shirt, and then found out he was a professor at Slippery Rock. He contacted Judy Silva, and that's how we all got hooked up.

DM: Very cool yeah. Like I said, Kevin always speaks about you, and I [felt] like I already knew you before the interview. And he's like, "He's gonna be great to talk to," and I'm like, "Ah! this is gonna be fun." All the stories and, like I said, every day I see the costume, you know, in the case, so it's definitely an honor to be able to interview, and speak to you, and see you face to face.

RJ: Thank you.

DM: You're very welcome. And how have you been coping with [the] whole pandemic, kind of switching gears with stuff? I know it's impacted all of us, and you know, the last time you did an interview, it was face to face, I would assume.

RJ: Yes.

DM: But now, because of the pandemic, everything has to be done by Zoom; everything socially distanced. So how have you been handling it, sir, and taking all this?

RJ: I've had a very unique experience. Judy and Kevin may have told you a little bit about my wife. She suffered a near fatal injury just over two years ago, was life-flighted to Philadelphia with a ruptured brain aneurysm and cardiac arrest. She spent 47 days in Neuro ICU and 144 total in Philadelphia, at Penn Medicine. She's come home, and fortunately for me, during the pandemic, I've been here as her 100% caregiver. [I'm] fortunate to be in a position where financially, I could do that. So we've been pretty well quarantined anyway. That has helped me cope with it, a little bit, knowing that everybody else's out there, kind of holed up in their homes as well. [Pause]. She really embodies what it is to be Rock tough. She is learning to walk, learning to talk, and there's a case study being done on her at Penn Medicine. She's one of a few people to ever survive the type of injury that she had, and the magnitude of her injury, so I'm just blessed and honored to be able to be the one that gets to be here and take care of her.

DM: Yeah. God bless her and God bless you, as well. I hope she recovers really fast and comes back even stronger.

RJ: Thank you.

DM: You're very welcome. So, if there's nothing else you'd like to answer, we are going to conclude the interview.

RJ: That's it. Again, thank you, I look forward to coming back and doing this in person, one day.

DM: Yes.

RJ: And again, you tell the president, President Behre, that I'd be glad to talk, anytime.

DM: Sure. Hopefully when you come by next time, I can meet you in person. . .

RJ: Sounds great.

DM: . . . talk to you and see you, but yeah, absolutely. I hope you have a great rest of your day and thank you for taking the time to meet with me, sir.

RJ: Thank you, you too.

DM: Take care, sir. Bye-bye.

RJ: Bye.