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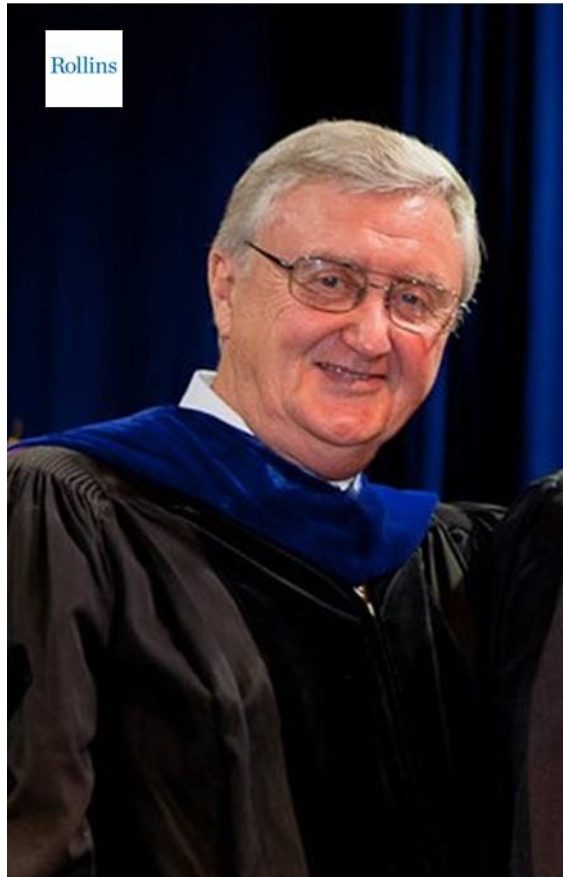
Patrick J. Powers

Katrina Jenkins

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Patrick J. Powers, Dean Emeritus of Knowles Memorial Chapel
(Photo: Rollins College Archives)

Interview with Patrick J. Powers and Katrina Jenkins

Monday, February 1, 2021

KJ: Good afternoon. This is Reverend Katrina Jenkins, and I serve as the Dean of Religious Life at Rollins College. Today is Monday, February 1, 2021, and it's one thirty in the afternoon. This will be an oral interview, or an interview of the former Dean. I am going to let him introduce himself. And so, please, Pat, go for it.

PJP: My name is Patrick J. Powers. I was the Dean of the [Knowles Memorial] Chapel for twenty-two years, until I resigned in 2018 [2014], I believe. So I was there for twenty-two years. I was under two presidents: Rita Bornstein and Lewis Duncan. Both were presidents during the time I was there. I was also very much influenced by Thaddeus Seymour, although he was not President; he was President Emeritus. But I was very engaged with him on many projects. He and his wife, Polly, came to services every Sunday. They helped me with numerous projects, like Habitat for Humanity, and Christmas Vespers, and just being good stalwart friends. So, three presidents: two active and one emeritus.



Knowles Memorial Chapel (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

KJ: Oh my goodness, wow. That sounds amazing, Pat. Let me ask you a couple of things. Tell us about—where did you grow up? If you want to share what day you were born, your childhood; anything you want to share with us.

PJP: Okay. Um, September 3, 1939; a Little Company of Mary Hospital. What a lovely name.

KJ: (Laughs) It is.

PJP: I was born there in Evergreen Park, Illinois. It's actually a suburb of Chicago, so my sisters and I grew up on the south side of Chicago, until my father was transferred. And he was transferred, when I was about in the fifth grade, to Indianapolis, Indiana. So we followed him there, and we liked Indianapolis very much, because we three children had our own bedrooms.

KJ: Oh. (Laughs)

PJP: Instead of living in an apartment, we had a genuine house to live in, with a screened-in porch and a beautiful collie dog. So we were very happy in Indianapolis. And then, guess what? My father got transferred again.

KJ: Oh my goodness (laughs).

PJP: He was on a roll. He got transferred to 195 Broadway; the Bell Systems branch. He was a vice president of Bell Systems by that time. He started out as a messenger boy for Western Electric in Hawthorne, Illinois, and worked his way up to vice president of AT&T.

So we moved with him to—his office was in New York City, but we lived in Summit, New Jersey, which was a commuter stop from New York. And we liked it there very much, because it was very new, and it was close to the ocean, which we loved to go to. We were very close to the shore; we used to call it *the shore* and not *the beach*. We used to go for vacation there every summer.

By the time that I and my sisters got to Summit, New Jersey—about that time, I had begun my odyssey, my pilgrimage, with a religious group called the Augustinians.

KJ: Oh, okay.

PJP: And by the time I was there, in New Jersey, I was a student at Villanova University. That's how my higher education began. I was there at Villanova; I earned a bachelor's degree there. I was fortunate enough, after my time—four years of philosophy at Villanova—I studied one year of theology in Rome, Italy,—

KJ: That's an incredible place.

PJP: —right across the street from the Vatican. So that was very exciting. It was during the time of the ecumenical council, so that made it particularly dramatic.

KJ: Yeah, I'm sure. Yes, I'm sure.

PJP: When I came back from that year of study, I finished my theology at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. [Augustinian College] (inaudible) with classmates, right down the street from the University. And so I got another degree, a master's degree in theology, there.

When I went back as a teacher, after ordination, to Villanova University, I then was told that if I wanted to continue to be a teacher at a university like Villanova, I would need a Ph.D. degree, which I certainly wanted to get. So I got it. And I got a Ph.D. in philosophy from Duquesne University. That was about 1976.

So that was a *big* accomplishment for me, because I *never* thought I would get a Ph.D., and I did. And it was magic, because once you had that degree, you could start applying for positions that you would never apply for if you didn't have it. So that really helped me in applying for the position at Rollins. I had a Ph.D. by that time.

KJ: So you should really be called the Reverend *Doctor* Patrick Powers (laughs).

PJP: Well, very few call me that, to tell you the truth (laughs).

KJ: My goodness.

PJP: By the time I got to Rollins, I settled for Dean Powers. I liked that better; it was more of a pastoral notion.

KJ: Oh, I see. I see what you're saying.

PJP: And it was easier for students to remember me. They used to call me D.P. (laughs)

KJ: (Laughs) I love that. D.P. See, I'm learning something new all the time. That's amazing.



Dean Patrick Powers, 1996 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: And so that's how I got a nickname from them. They didn't call me Dean Powers, they just called me D.P. I liked that very much, so I never scolded them, or I never forbid them for saying that.

KJ: I love that, too. You know, I love how they nicknamed you, right? It seems like when you come to Rollins, they're good with the nicknames, so—.

PJP: They are. And they nickname each other as well.

KJ: That must have been amazing. So before you came to Rollins, you were actually teaching, then. That's amazing.

PJP: When I got to Rollins, yes, I did teach. I wanted to continue teaching when I came to Rollins. I had done a little bit of campus ministry work at Stetson [University] and at UCF [University of Central Florida]. But most of that work was as chaplaincy and as a pastoral assistant, but never as professor. But when I was offered the job by Rita Bornstein, I said I'd like to continue teaching, because that's what my degree is in. At that time, when I started at Rollins, almost concomitant with my hiring, it was Thad Seymour who introduced the notion of the conference courses.

KJ: Oh.

PJP: RCC, the Rollins Conference Courses [Rollins College Conference courses]. And when he explained it to us, I really liked that idea: that it was going to be a course in which students sat around a desk, and they would all be participants. It would be active learning; it wouldn't be passive learning. It wouldn't be: I would be parroting, and they would be taking notes.



A class at one of the college's oval tables, 2013 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

KJ: Okay.

PJP: It would be interlocutive. We would be talking to each other, and they would be responsible, and I would be responsible for the conversation. And I really liked that. So I told Thad, "I'd like to teach a course in your new series, called Rollins Conference Courses," and I did that. I taught a conference course, I think almost every year, for twenty-two years—

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: —that I was there at Rollins. I also taught in the Hamilton Holt School.

KJ: Oh, okay. What did you teach there?

PJP: They just needed teachers for theology and for philosophy, and I really liked that, because they were a different clientele. The students were wonderful, but the ones in Hamilton Holt—these were adults that had, for the most part, been working all day or were single parents, and they were coming because they were zealous for a degree. And they wanted to learn, and they wanted to be there. So I loved teaching them.

I think that almost every year that I was at Rollins, I taught not only a course in RCC, but I also taught a course for the Hamilton Holt School.

KJ: Wow, you know, that's pretty amazing, that RCC was just beginning when you arrived at Rollins.

PJP: It was just beginning. And actually, it was Thad Seymour who got this idea. I think he probably amended it from what he knew about and what Hamilton Holt [former President]

wanted. He [Holt] wanted that kind of a classroom situation, and Thad Seymour seconded that in his own heart and life. He's the one that really brought it to fruition at Rollins.



Dean Patrick Powers and President Emeritus Thaddeus Seymour, 2010 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

KJ: My goodness. Dr. Seymour's legacy definitely lives on, as you know, to this day—

PJP: I know.

KJ: —at Rollins. Let me ask you a quick question. When you first stepped foot on Rollins, what was it like? What was the climate: the administration, the faculty, the staff, the students? What was it like?

PJP: Um, it was very interesting. I almost had to push myself. You know, as the Dean of the Chapel, I was not part of the hierarchy of Rollins. Let me put it that way.

KJ: Oh. Wow.

PJP: Although I reported directly to the President, I was never considered part of the President's Council. So I was kind of left alone. I don't want to make that sound melodramatic.

KJ: Right.

PJP: But I had to push myself to get into RCC, to get into Hamilton Holt, to be a moderator for fraternities and for various groups on campus. I had to be the one to kind of push myself into it.

I remember one time, just before I was full-time at Rollins. I was on a tour and the Director—no, she was the Assistant Director of Student Affairs, and she was taking me around to different fraternity houses. And I remember stopping at one fraternity house, and there was a fraternity member there. I said to him, “I’m going to be the new Dean of the Chapel. I want to help you; I want to support you. What can I do to help make your fraternity better?” You know what he said?

KJ: What?

PJP: “Nothing.”

KJ: Really?

PJP: He said, “We would prefer if you just leave us alone.”

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: Yeah, I distinctly remember that. Now, not every—(laughs) I’m picking out one example, and it was probably the worst example. But I do remember that. In other words, fraternities at that time didn’t want to be encroached upon. They didn’t want supervision; they didn’t want faculty advising. They wanted their independence, so that they could bend the rules or have their own rules.

KJ: Of course, yes.

PJP: So I learned very early on, you know, that there’s sort of a caste system at Rollins. Not just among the faculty, and I learned *that* pretty early on, but also among the students. I learned that, not only by that one extreme example that I gave, but I remember as Dean of the Chapel, almost every day, I would go over and eat in the student cafeteria. It was called Beans at that time.

KJ: Oh, Beans, all right.

PJP: I would notice that fraternities ate together, sororities ate together, Black students ate together, international students ate together. And so what I did was, I just kind of forced myself into a table. And I said, “Do you mind if I eat with you?” Now, they never—they were very polite, and they always said, Yes, please join us. But the point was, as I looked around that cafeteria, that eating space, I saw what was going on at Rollins: that we were a caste system.

KJ: Wow.

PJP: Some called it cubbyholes. It was very clubby. We all had our little houses, we all had our little groups, and it was hard to break into them. That’s why I say when I would go over there, I would have to introduce myself and sit down with them. They would never think, I don’t think, of inviting me. I would have to sort of jettison myself into their life. But I didn’t mind doing that. I really didn’t mind doing that, because I got to know them that way. And they began to realize that I wasn’t an ogre.

KJ: (Laughs) Right. You're human.

PJP: I wasn't going to scold them. I wasn't going to say to them, "You're a bunch of scoundrels." I just had fun with them, and then they learned to like me. And that took a while, believe it or not.

KJ: Yes.

PJP: I think you can believe it.

KJ: I think that's the interesting part, because even back then, Rollins folks were siloed, or they weren't intermingling. And you had to be that pioneer to initiate contact; to say, I'm a human. I think sometimes people forget that deans, especially of the chapel, are human. We have lives, right? And fairly interesting ones, if people give us a chance. But how you had to really put yourself in that position to say, I want to eat with you; you know, let's just talk to each other.

PJP: By the way, while I was there—for all the twenty-two years I was there—in Beans, where the students ate, I would never see any faculty members, any administration people eating there. And if they were, there were two possibilities for them: one was a faculty dining room.

KJ: Oh!

PJP: Faculty would eat there. And then there was the president's dining room. So the president and his or her guests could eat there. So in other words, walking into Beans, you were walking into the caste system. Right there.

KJ: My goodness.

PJP: I was the only faculty kind of person, I was the only dean that ate with students.

KJ: So there were distinct lines that people were not going to cross. It's the faculty over here, the students over here, the staff over here. Did the staff eat there as well, or did they find—

PJP: Yes, I'm thinking that they did, for the most part, but what I'm also thinking is that many staff brought their own lunch.

KJ: Okay, that makes sense.

PJP: And they ate at their desk or in their little spaces. They all had little kitchenettes, where they would eat, and they all had little tables and chairs, so they would probably eat together in their own designated spaces, yes.

KJ: Oh my goodness, so that's quite—and campus looked much different, I'm sure, you know, than it does now. Was Knowles [Chapel] looking different? Did you inherit much of what Knowles looks like now, or were there any major changes that happened during your time there?

PJP: The chapel itself?

KJ: Yes, um-hm.

PJP: I know that while I was there, we got the bell tuned up.

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: One of the things that happened was, you know the chairs that are in the Frances Chapel [inside Knowles Memorial Chapel]?

KJ: Yes, yes.

PJP: I had all of them redone.

KJ: Oh.

PJP: That was a big project. I also had the front doors resealed.

KJ: Now that's amazing, too (laughs).

PJP: They were rickety. Those front doors—when I got there, they were really rickety.

I still remember funny stories about—and I tell people, “When I was at Knowles Chapel, we had bats in the belfry” (laughs).

KJ: Oh, really? (laughs)



The Tower Room and belfry, Knowles Memorial Chapel (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: Yes, and what I had to do with—I could see them flying around up there in the nave of the chapel. And they would open all the doors of the chapel, and I would say to them, “Okay guys, let's get out of here.”

KJ: (Laughs) My goodness.

PJP: I would lead them out one of the doors, and I swear they would follow me, because I could see them over my head. They wanted to get out.

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: Yeah, so I took them out that way.

KJ: Bats in the belfry (laughs).

PJP: Bats in the belfry. Also, while I was Dean of the Chapel there, we used to have the [Algernon Sydney] Sullivan Scholars initiated in the chapel.

KJ: Yes, we still do. Still do.

PJP: And part of that initiation was, I took them up into the Tower Room. The Tower Room is probably off limits now.

KJ: It is off limits now. We try to get up closer, but we are unable to, so we're in the balcony.

PJP: That happened during the time I was there. I tried to get a key, and I tried to get Maintenance to open it, but it was like, presidentially sealed.

KJ: (Laughs) I know that feeling.

PJP: I think they thought I was going to push the students out the window.

KJ: Oh! (laughs) Never your intent.

PJP: (Laughs) That was never my intent. But anyway, so that ended—that we used to have part of the ceremony up in there. And the students *loved* it, they loved that part of it.

KJ: I bet they did, I bet they did.

PJP: Oh, yeah. Because they thought that was a thrill. Because no one else—I had the key at that time. There was a lock on it, and I had the key. Of course, they took that key away and they changed the lock.

KJ: Of course, of course.

PJP: I think they saw it as a liability. And I kind of grudgingly had to respect that.

KJ: They still do. I still have that. I was told that when I first came to Rollins a few years ago, so they're still treating it like Fort Knox (laughs).

PJP: Right.

KJ: Are there other funny stories that you could tell about chapel? What was chapel service like? What was really going on?



Dean Powers at Knowles Memorial Chapel, 2010 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: When I first got there, I wasn't quite sure how to get students to come to chapel. I know that the Catholic students had their Mass in the chapel, and that was fairly well attended. I thought, How am I going to get students to come to my nondenominational service on Sunday? So I thought, Here's what I'll do: I'll switch the time. Instead of having it at eleven o'clock in the morning, I'll have it Sunday afternoons at five o'clock in the afternoon.

KJ: Oh!

PJP: Well, that was a dismal failure.

KJ: Oh (laughs). I can understand.

PJP: That's when I realized that it didn't make any difference *what* time I—(inaudible; laughs).

KJ: (Laughs) Oh my goodness. I can totally understand that.

PJP: That students are taking a sabbatical from their religious practices.

KJ: (Laughs) Especially in college.

PJP: But what happened after that was, thankfully, people from the community, and the Seymours, came to the service in the Frances Chapel. So there was a fairly decent crowd in

the Frances Chapel. If I had the same amount—twenty or thirty people—in the main part of the chapel, it would look empty.

KJ: Same. Oh, I understand that completely.

PJP: But if I had twenty or thirty in the Frances Chapel, it would look great.

KJ: Yes (laughs). I totally understand that.

PJP: So that worked. And I got to know a lot of people very well. We became a little church community, and we shared time together, and we shared holidays together; we had lunches together, and so forth. So I was very satisfied that I had a little crowd. And remember that having this nice little crowd—mostly grown-ups from the community—it still was not an attraction for students. Maybe a couple of students would come, but certainly not in the amount that anyone would expect.

KJ: Yes, I can understand that, too. It's a very similar experience that I'm having. And I'm so blessed, because you left me with a such sweet congregation. And they still come. And so I think that's probably the most amazing thing: they see this as their church home; Knowles is their church home. And they definitely attend.

PJP: That's right. And they are sweet people, you're absolutely right.



Chapel service commemorating the 125th anniversary of Rollins College, 2010 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

KJ: They're very sweet. You know, Pat, did you do any kinds of—I know you taught courses. What were the names of them? And did you do any kinds of research when you were at Rollins, or—anything you published?

PJP: One of the things I became attracted to, and I studied up on, was the notion of the historical Jesus. And I got to know—almost as a friend, because we used to socialize together—John Dominic Crossan, who was a great member of the Jesus Seminar. I took courses from him, and I learned a lot from him. And we became very close. And believe it or not, after a while, I would invite him to go to my classes on the history, and he would come.

KJ: Oh! That's a great resource. I mean, my goodness.

PJP: And I would pay him back by taking him out to dinner; by taking him and his wife out to dinner. That's the only payment I would have to give him. But, you know, since he's such a reputable scholar, when he would give a talk anywhere else, it would be in the thousands of dollars. That's how he made a living.

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: But he was very, very thoughtful, and he would come and talk to the students and sign their books—because I would use his books in the class—and he would answer their questions, and he was very considerate.

So I taught various courses in Hamilton Holt on the historical Jesus. I also taught courses to the undergraduates on the New Testament as well. But I kind of reserved the historical Jesus for the adults, because I thought that they would be a little more ready to hear that kind of stuff. And they were, and they loved it. And I also became interested in the Gnostic Gospels.

KJ: Oh my goodness, now that's quite an arena to be in. The Gnostics are great.

PJP: It *was* an arena to be in. I really love the Gospel of Thomas, which was one of the prominent Gnostic Gospels, but there's a whole passel of them in addition to Thomas. And I taught various courses on the Gnostic Gospels. Once again, I reserved that for the Hamilton Holt School.

And then there's a group of students called Liberal Arts [Master of Liberal Studies]. These are students—they're in Hamilton Holt, but they're studying for, I think, master's degrees in liberal studies or liberal arts. And they were really good. They really ate it up. So I liked teaching them as well. And there were a lot of them.

KJ: I bet; I mean, it sounds like there was some vibrancy for you to teach.

Let me backtrack for one minute, Pat. What faith did you grow up in? You grew up as a Catholic or a Protestant?

PJP: Yes [to Catholicism]. Yes.

KJ: Oh, okay. Okay. And then that just continued on your trajectory, or did you switch out at some point, or have you always maintained?

PJP: No, I did switch out. I guess it was—I don't know what the year was; it was before I came to Rollins. Before I came to Rollins, I was the Executive Director of the Christian Service Center downtown.

KJ: Oh! All right.

PJP: I was there for, I think, seven or eight years. I am thinking that by that time, I was out of the collar for a while; so that takes me into the 1980s, I think. So that's when it happened. And along the way after I started that, I met Sandra. And so that's when we eventually got married.

KJ: So you were a Catholic priest, then?

PJP: Yes.

KJ: Oh, okay. I just wanted to clarify that for our audience. And then you switched over; okay. All right.

PJP: And when I was a candidate for the position of Dean of the Chapel at Rollins, I knew I had to have some kind of credentials.

KJ: Right.

PJP: So I went to the First Congregational Church in Winter Park. Jim Armstrong, at that time, was the pastor there, and he became a close friend as well. I told him my story, and I said, "You know, I don't have any clerical credentials right now. What do I have to do to become a Congregational minister?" And he said, "Let me take you through it."

And it wasn't that hard. I mean, there was a little inquiry board; I had to write down some things about what I believed in. And they were very gracious to me. So it was smooth sailing, thanks to Jim Armstrong. He kind of paved the way for me, because before he came to be pastor of the First Congregational Church, he was a Methodist bishop.

KJ: Oh! Wow. Different things here.

PJP: Yeah. This is a lot of stuff—I don't know if I'm giving you too much information.

KJ: That's all right; no, that's okay. This is very helpful, I think, because it explains your path at Rollins, and who you were.

PJP: Yes. In other words, he made the transition from a Methodist to a Congregational. So he kind of knew the ritual. He knew the process; he knew what it entailed. So that's why he kind of guided me through it. He did it very well, and I was very grateful to him.

So once I had that, then I knew that I was in better shape to apply for the position at Rollins.

KJ: What made you want to apply to Rollins? What initially said, Yes, I want to take on this position?

PJP: At the time, I was Executive Director of the Christian Service Center. And I got a call one day from Anne Kerr [former Vice President for Institutional Advancement]; I don't know if you knew Anne Kerr.

KJ: The name sounds familiar, but...

PJP: At that time, Anne was in—what would they call it? What would be the marketing branch of the college? What's that called?

KJ: Marketing and Communications?

PJP: Marketing and Communications, or something like that. I, as a Catholic priest, when I was at the University of Central Florida, married her and Roy Kerr, who was a member of the faculty at Rollins. I married the two of them. She eventually came to Rollins, so the two of them at one time were at Rollins together.

She called me at the Christian Service Center and said, “They’re looking for a Dean of the Chapel here at Rollins College. Are you interested?” And I said, “Sure, I’m interested! That would be great. That would be a dream come true.”

KJ: (Laughs)

PJP: She said, “Okay, why don’t you apply?” And she said, “And guess what? I’m going to be the chairman of the search committee.”

KJ: Oh my goodness. So that’s great.

PJP: So that was great, and that was kind of another sign for me that this was going to happen. And it was really due to her governance of that committee. She brought me in for interviews; I interviewed several times. There were other candidates, I’m sure, that were involved in it, but eventually, it came down to, I think, two or three; and then there were two; and then there was one.

KJ: And then there was you (laughs). And then you took over.

PJP: By the way she, at present, is President of Florida Southern College.

KJ: Oh really?

PJP: Yeah.

KJ: So she went on, it seems, to have a great career as well.

PJP: She did. And she’s a wonderful person. She has done very, very well as President of Florida Southern; which is, I think, in Lakeland.

KJ: In Lakeland, yes. I’ve heard about the school before. I heard it’s a really good school, so—

PJP: It is.

KJ: —kudos to her.

When you came to Rollins, did you have student groups that you were in charge of? Because that’s what I was curious about, too.

PJP: Well, I was in charge of what I would call the campus ministry groups.

KJ: Okay, could you talk a little bit about that? What were the groups consisting of?

PJP: I had InterVarsity [Christian Fellowship], the Newman Club; um, what was the other one called? Campus Crusade, did I mention that?

KJ: Yeah. Which is now known as Cru, right? Okay, yes; so you had IV and Cru. All right.

PJP: Yes, I did; I had both of them. And for a while—and this was really thanks to Robert [Whetstone, Student Outreach Coordinator, Center for Inclusion and Campus Involvement]

because he was terrific—I was also kind of like the moderator of the Black student group. They weren't a church group, but they were a group. The Black Student Union, I think. Does that sound right?

KJ: Yes, they're now called the Black Student Union, yes. Okay, so you were their moderator. That's great.

PJP: Yes, I was their moderator. And I loved them, because after every meeting, we would all get up and dance together (laughs).

KJ: Oh, that must have been really fun. You had to have some dance moves, too.

PJP: Oh yes.

KJ: Wait, so when we say Robert, is it the same Robert I'm thinking of?

PJP: Yes.

KJ: Oh, okay. Robert—why can't I think of his name? I will in a minute.

PJP: Robert Whetstone.

KJ: Whetstone. Oh my goodness. All right, so that's right, because he was there at the same time. Okay.



Dean Patrick Powers (left), Prof. Julian Chambliss (second from the left), Robert Whetstone (third from the left), and students with Martin Luther King III (center), 2012 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: He's been at Rollins a long time.

KJ: He has. He's still there.

PJP: He's still there. Yes, I know.

KJ: Still there; still going strong.

So you were working with a variety of groups. Were there any Jewish student groups?

PJP: Oh yes, [Rollins] Hillel. I'm sorry; you're right. I had Hillel as well.

KJ: Did the Muslim group begin at your time?

PJP: I think there were, but there were only a few. By a few, I mean maybe just two or three. I suspect that there were more Muslim students on campus, but they didn't self-identify themselves.

KJ: Okay, okay. So did these groups meet regularly? Were they vibrant?

PJP: Yes, they met regularly, and they did very well. They all had followers, and they all had retreats. They all did community service; I helped them out financially and otherwise with that. They were all very good students. They were smart students, they were good students, and they were some of the best students on campus.

KJ: I bet. Usually that's what happens with our students, I proudly say. They're very involved in everything.

You were saying you had to put yourself at the table for a lot of things on campus. Did you have to do any particular programming for—just in general, like orientation, those things?

PJP: I would ask Steve Neilson [former Dean of Student Affairs]; he was the Director of Student Life at that time. And once again, he didn't ask me, but I would ask him, "Steve, do you mind if I go to the meeting, and address the parents about possibilities for their students here at Rollins?" He always said yes, but he never invited me. I always had to put it to him.

KJ: You had to invite yourself (laughs).

PJP: Something like that (laughs).

KJ: Some things never change (laughs).

PJP: I did it as courteously as I could.

KJ: I bet. So, are you the person—correct me if I'm wrong—who began Candlewish?

PJP: Actually, I inherited it from Arnold [Wettstein, former Dean of Knowles Memorial Chapel].



Dean Powers (left) and former Dean of the Chapel Arnold Wettstein (right) with Fred M. Rogers '51 '74H (center) at Knowles Memorial Chapel, 2001 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

KJ: So tell me about Candlewish. I've inherited it from you, and it's of course the big celebration where students set the intent. So tell me about how you inherited it, and what happened.

PJP: First of all, it got to the chapel by accident, but that's the (inaudible). First off, when I came there, there was a Candlewish, but I think it was outside. I think it was around—there used to be kind of like a semicircle around the [Warren] Administration Building there, and it would be held there. And it was very optional. You know, you could come if you wanted; it wasn't a big deal. There wasn't a lot of ceremony connected with it.

And then after I got there, I began to want it to become more of a ritual. And I had a ritual, with student leaders, and with student speakers, and so forth. I originally had it around the [Alfond] Swimming Pool.

KJ: Really? (laughs)

PJP: And it really looked beautiful, because I had them turn out the lights, and all you could see were the candles being lit. And then at the end, I had them all raise their candles up and they would chant, Let there be light.

KJ: So is this the same swimming pool we still have behind the [Cornell] Campus Center? I'm just curious.

PJP: The outdoor swimming pool, yes.

KJ: Okay. All right, I was just curious. All right, sorry.

PJP: But one time when it was scheduled, it was raining. And so I said, “Where are we going to have it?” I think Micki [Meyer, Lord Family Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs & Community] said, “Why don’t you have it in the chapel?” I said, “Okay, let’s have it in the chapel.” I was worried because of fire in the chapel.

KJ: Oh. That’s understandable (laughs).

PJP: So the first time we had it in the chapel, it was by candles that were lit. We didn’t have time to switch over, because we had to make a plan on the run at that time. Then when we realized, boy that really looked good—because we had all the lights in the chapel out, we had students in the balcony, we had students all around; it really looked great. And I thought to myself, This is great! Let’s have it in the chapel from now on. But then I was told, Well, you’ve got a fire hazard there.

KJ: Ah, yes.

PJP: That’s when we got the battery-run candles.

KJ: And which we now use to this day (laughs).



Candlewish ceremony at Knowles Memorial Chapel, 2014 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: There you go. So that’s how it started. We were given permission by the fire department, by the administration, to continue to have it in the chapel, provided there wasn’t any fire in the chapel.

KJ: Was it hard to get buy-in from students to make it more—

PJP: No.

KJ: Really? That's great.

PJP: No, because by that time, I knew most of the student mentors—you know, from my RCC days.

We used to have really a good time before the semester began. All the RCC teachers and the student mentors, we would meet for a day out at a camp, and we would have fun together, and we would have lunch together; we would get to know each other. They discontinued that, and I never liked that discontinuation, because it was such fun getting to know all the different student mentors and getting to know all the other teachers. But anyway, so I knew most of the students.

The students would line up in front of the quad there, the grassy—and then they would bring them into the chapel one group at a time—or one living center at a time, one dormitory at a time.

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: And that's how they built it up.

KJ: And now it's everybody. It's the whole class that comes, and still doing the same ritual, basically (laughs).

So, my goodness, you started so much at Rollins. Did you have Vespers at that time? Did you inherit Vespers, too?



Christmas Vespers, 2011 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

PJP: I did, and I changed it somewhat, because Arnold had the readers never being part of the procession in. The readers would come out to the lectern—not to the pulpit, but to the lectern—and they would just come out from the side there, where there are curtains. And they would do their reading and slip back in, and I thought, I don't like that. So what I had was, when the procession would come in, the students would come in: the cross bearer and the candle bearers, then all the students, and then the readers. And then I would be the last one in.

I had the readers sit in those half-seats, half-pews, right in the front there. So that they would be there—the readers would be there for the entire service, and I think they liked that better.

KJ: You just gave me a couple of ideas, because I'll have to go back to that model (laughs). I think I changed it around, so I will go back to that; I like that. See, this is what these interviews do; it gives you ideas of how to go back.

PJP: Good! Good idea.

KJ: What would you say is your proudest accomplishment by being Dean of the Chapel while you were at Rollins?

PJP: The fact that as Dean of the Chapel, I was pastor-teacher. I liked doing both; I liked the combination. I liked the hyphenated title: *pastor hyphen teacher*—I liked that. That's how I ingratiated myself into Rollins; became part of the Rollins family and circle and so forth. Because I would see students in the classroom that I would never ever see in the chapel. And so that's how I kind of ingratiated—I was going to say, that's how I became part and parcel of the Rollins student body. Because when they saw me in the classroom, they saw me different than they would see me as pastor of a church.



Dean Powers at Convocation in 2010 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

KJ: Oh, I see what you're saying.

PJP: And because I was a teacher in RCC, think of all those students that I advised over the years. The RCC teachers became the initial advisors for those students. Some of those students kept me as their advisor for all four years that they were there, and they still contact me on Facebook.

KJ: That's the highest compliment, I would think: that they still keep in touch, and they care enough to still share their lives with you.

Did you do a lot of weddings? Because it seems like I inherited some of the weddings. Did you do weddings and baptisms as well?

PJP: I did a lot of weddings; a lot of baptisms. Weddings would probably be in the hundreds.

KJ: Oh my goodness.

PJP: There are some, very few, Saturdays when I would do a wedding at one, three thirty, and six. But that was very, very few. Usually, I would have one wedding on a particular Saturday. And prior to marrying that couple, I would meet each couple three times prior to the ceremony. I did that as well. And that took a lot of time.

KJ: So you did the premarital.

PJP: Yes, I did; that's the word I was looking for.

KJ: Which I have carried out, Pat. I still do that (laughs). I have carried on with that—to do premarital.

PJP: Good for you.

KJ: What would you say is your legacy? If people listen to this, our interview, way down, years from now, what would you want your legacy to be? What do you want to be known for at Rollins? Or remembered for?

PJP: (Pauses) Well, I think I was a good friend to many students. It wasn't just a professional relationship; I got to know a lot of them as friends. And when they graduated, and they came back to the college to be married—and then I continued the relationship, and I continue the relationship with them today. So I would say that I bonded with students—and faculty as well. I feel good about that: that when I left Rollins, I said, "I'm leaving a building, but I'm not leaving relationships."

KJ: Oh, that's amazing. And that's so true.

PJP: It is.

KJ: So true.

PJP: I'm sure you're doing the same thing, because I know people love you there; they always rave about you. I'm thinking that you're a good friend to students, and to faculty as well.

KJ: Well, I inherited it. I thank you for that kind remark. I inherited such a great base from you, so I'm very thankful to you and the foundation you built upon. I appreciate that, because I get to see all this (laughs) and live through it.

Do you have at least one more memorable story? You talked about bats in the belfry, which makes me laugh. I often hear there was a ghost in the chapel. I don't know; were there—?

PJP: One of the things that I remember which was such fun, and I really enjoyed it, was the pancake flip.

KJ: Oh, yes.



President Rita Bornstein (right) at the annual pancake flip, circa 1995 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

PJP: That would be like, twice a semester, at the end of each semester, before they had their exams.

KJ: Yes, we continued that on for a while.

PJP: I would have the [Algernon Sydney] Sullivan students do the pancake flip, and that was always well attended. And to make it even more fun, I got a steel drum band to play during the pancake flip. So everyone had a jolly good time, and they loved catching the pancakes from the students that would flip the pancakes to them. And then the students and I would dance around to the music of the steel drum band.

KJ: We did have the pancake flip up until COVID, so that's one of the great traditions we are continuing to do at Rollins.

PJP: Good.

KJ: So, as we wind down, are there any other thoughts that you want to share with us?

PJP: (Pauses) No. It's just that—because I served under two presidents, and because I intentionally wanted to shy away from politics.

KJ: Very true.

PJP: That didn't always work. Toward the end of my time there, we had this very contentious argument with InterVarsity. And that did not end the way I would like it to end. And by the way, Lewis Duncan, who was President at the time—he was very supportive. So it was like, Lewis Duncan and I against the rest of the faculty. It was almost, *almost* that way.

KJ: So that sounded like it was such a big challenge for you all: to make sure that these groups were able to stay intact on campus.

PJP: Yeah. Even though both Lewis and I disagreed with their position on gays, we thought, and we said, You know, if you walk down the streets of Winter Park, and you knocked on each church door, and you asked them, “What do you think about gays?” you would get different answers from every church.

KJ: Very true.

PJP: It's a religious option. It's not really a cultural one; it's not really an ethical one; it's a religious one. And if we say, here, at Rollins, you know, that we respect religious freedom, it doesn't mean we have to agree with it. We don't have to agree with being a Muslim, but we have to give them the right to be Muslims here at Rollins.

KJ: So you saw that, too, with the LGBTQI issue and that people had a different way—a variety—we're saying liberal arts, so a variety of ways of seeing that that didn't quite play out towards the end of your tenure as you had hoped.

PJP: No. The side that won, against InterVarsity, was the side that said, Well, what about discrimination? We cannot discriminate here at Rollins. So, aren't we discriminating? And I said, “Well, do we give discrimination to fraternities and sororities? They only allow men into fraternities, and sororities only allow women into—.”

Okay. Anyway, it was a losing cause, because it went to the Board of Trustees. And the ones on the Board of Trustees that made the arguments for discrimination were all lawyers.

KJ: Oh. I see what you're saying.

PJP: So they didn't want any suing. They didn't want any legalities involved.

KJ: So the politics stood out, it seems.

PJP: Exactly, exactly.

KJ: Hm. Hm. Yeah, the politics seemed to stand out.

PJP: But what happened—I don't know if you knew this part of it. What happened was, the students—and they were *great* students—they found at least a temporary home across the street at All Saints [Episcopal] Church.

KJ: Yes, they did. They're back on campus; InterVarsity and Cru are all back on campus. That was one of the things we carried over and figured out. I know that you worked hard, and you fought a good fight. So they are back on campus and thriving.

PJP: Yes.

KJ: And really, again, because Pat, you laid a really wonderful foundation for these discussions to happen.

PJP: By the way, when I left Rollins, all the members of InterVarsity—they knew where I stood. Even though I was not in favor of what they were doing, they knew that I was defending them in the name of religious liberty. They sent me a card, and every name was on there. Every name of those students who were in InterVarsity at that time was on that card.

KJ: And I'm sure that made you happy, that you had the support.

PJP: It did.

KJ: And the love.

PJP: You're absolutely right, it was a great satisfaction.

KJ: Wow. Well, I'm going to, if it's okay with you, leave it there, on that note. I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank you so much for your time and your insights and giving us a snapshot of the history. Because a lot of what we do today is really based on the foundation that you built. So thank you.

PJP: Oh, thank you for giving me the opportunity. It was kind of like a trip down memory lane here.

KJ: (Laughs) I appreciate it. I appreciate it, and I appreciate you, Pat.

PJP: Okay. And some day when we're allowed to eat together here at the Mayflower [The Mayflower at Winter Park], you can come over for dinner or for lunch.

KJ: I will be back!