

Me: So, you're Dr. Robert Keys, correct?

DRK: Bob Keys Jr.

Me: So you're the second. So I guess, sort of, tell us about growing up and what religious organizations you were a part of growing up, in Kansas or not, just sort of your life growing up.

DRK: Well, yeah, I'm not very Kansas, I was born in New York City, but grew up in Connecticut, in South Western in Darien. My father was an orthopedic surgeon there and we were members of Baptist churches when we were there, growing up.

Me: And how many siblings did you have?

DRK: Two sisters, both younger than myself.

Me: And your parents, were they both Baptists before getting married.

DRK: No, my father comes from Jefferson County here in KS and he was reformed Presbyterian, and my mother was German-Lutheran and she grew up on Staten Island, NY.

Me: So where did Baptist come from, do you know?

DRK: Well, we actually did attend a Presbyterian church when we lived in Bridgeport for a while and we started to go to one in Stanford, Connecticut, when we moved to Darien, but my father felt it was too liberal and it didn't take the bible very literally. So we went across the street to a Baptist church, it was American Baptist, or Northern Baptist, however you want to define it. There we found a really good pastor who really preached the bible.

Me: So then, between your childhood and Baptists, did that lead into High School? How long were you a part of the Baptist community.

DRK: Well yes, that went through High School, I went to college in Western Pennsylvania, Geneva College and that's reformed Presbyterian and while I was there I went to Reformed Presbyterian churches. I didn't have a car most of the time and the Reform Presbyterian churches were right there and for my purposes they were fine.

Me: So then, you went to college there, so what brought you to KS then?

DRK: Medical School, so I lived in Kansas City and while there I attended a Reformed Presbyterian church for four years, well three years; the first year of Medical School was in Lawrence and while there I attended a Southern Baptist church.

Me: So what differences did you find in the Reformed Presbyterian and the Baptist communities that you attended.

DRK: Well, there's a number of significant differences. Probably the biggest most people would notice is that the Reformed Presbyterians only sing songs a cappella, whereas the Baptist churches sing hymns with organs and guitars or whatever. That would be the biggest difference. As far as the preaching is concerned you wouldn't notice near as much difference although the Baptist churches put definitely more emphasis on personal salvation. The reformed Presbyterians believed in that, but they don't talk about it as much.

Me: And so for a person in college, or starting medical school like you were, what kind of programs did they have? Did they have any programs specific for your age group?

DRK: Well in college they did and the college had them, the programs. The local churches did not. We didn't have campus crusade or intervarsity or anything like that at our college, the Reformed Presbyterian church wanted to control that and of course, those aren't Reformed Presbyterian belief; campus crusade, intervarsity and so forth. So any youth programs were organized and run by the college. Medical school, of course, at KU there wasn't any of that; you were on your own there.

Me: What age groups did you see attending your churches then?

DRK: Well, I don't know, it was pretty normal spread. There wasn't any extremes. And then I had four years of residency in Galveston, Texas and there we were members of Southern Baptist church.

Me: So you were in Galveston Texas then, were you married to Joyce by then?

DRK: Yes, just before. Four days after I graduated from medical school I got married. Worked out very well.

Me: So did you have your first kids down in Texas or did you have them up here?

DRK: Yes, in Texas, two of them born Galveston; two oldest children.

Me: So what was the Southern Baptist Church like for younger families?

DRK: Oh, it was great. Yes, this was a good sized church, had a large active Sunday School program and yeah, there was plenty of stuff for the little kids. Now they were pretty little when they were there, so. Preschoolers for sure.

Me: What did just a normal Sunday look like schedule-wise.

DRK: well usually it was Sunday school at 9:30 and then the church service around 11:00, might have been 10:30, I kind of forget exactly how long it was, but it was pretty

traditional, standard church service and the other churches I went to would have been the same way.

After the residence we moved to Ohio where I was in the Air Force for two years and then we were members of a regular Baptist church. That was of course, wasn't as different as you would think, regular Baptist churches, I guess, a lot of people would say they were fairly conservative type Baptist churches, but the pastor of this church was not the normal regular Baptist preacher. He was much more similar to a Southern Baptist preacher, so we hardly noticed the difference in the way that things went there. I'm away that many regular Baptist churches are very conservative and don't like to have much to do with other churches, at least that's my impression. Whereas this church wasn't that way.

Me: What kind of programs, did they have any programs during the week like bible studies or anything else that you participated in?

DRK: Well they had prayer meetings but that would be about it, I guess. I don't recall really anything else. While I was in Ohio I was on the church board, so we had meetings in connection with that, but that would be it. Now that church in Ohio was a small one, so the program was not near as great, as the one we came from.

Me: So after Ohio, where'd you go from there?

DRK: Topeka!

Me: And did you come directly to Topeka Bible Church?

DRK: Well, we visited a couple churches before that and one of them was a regular Baptist church, but it was a more traditional regular Baptist church. It was very conservative and how do you define that term? Well, that's tough to do for me. But it was a smaller church, we probably went to another one or two, but I quite honestly don't remember what they would have been because we found TBC pretty quickly and we became members just two months after we got into Topeka.

Me: So what did you find so attractive about Topeka Bible Church when compared to the other places.

DRK: We felt the bible teaching was really good, ya know believed the bible was God's word, cover to cover and made no bones about it. Also, the pastor was a graduate of Dallas Seminary.

Me: Who was the pastor then?

DRK: Carl Wilbur. He was, well, he was just a very good pastor. Yeah, so we've been with that ever since, we haven't left or come back and so forth, but we stayed with it the whole time.

Me: What did Topeka bible church look like back then.

DRK: It was much smaller, although it was meeting in the present building, but I would say attendance was about 350 at the most.

Me: Around what time was this?

DRK: 1968

Me: How old were your kids by this time?

DRK: Well, they were getting ready to go to school, and so they went to Gage school.

Me: So at this time did they have programs for kids their age?

DRK: Well, there was Sunday school and I don't recall if they were involved much with Wednesday night programs. They may have been, but it was primarily Sunday school.

Me: Did they only have the one pastor at this time? How many pastors did they have at the time?

DRK: Yeah, Carl Wilbur as I remember was the only pastor.

Me: So how did leadership change in the next few years at Topeka Bible Church, was he there for a long time?

DRK: No, in fact he died about a year after we got to Topeka, He was not an elderly man, he was not old, I think only mid 40s, 50s, something like that. So there was quite a bit of transition going on then with two different pastors before the present one.

Me: What were they like?

DRK: What were they like? Well, they were good men, in that they preached the bible, they believed it, cover to cover and so forth, but they of course were very different personalities and I would say during their tenure the church did not grow. It wasn't until the present pastor came that the church started to grow, much more than it had in the past.

Me: What year did the present pastor come?

DRK: Well, Pastor Jim Congdon came around 1976. He came first as an intern, under the senior pastor he had at the time, Tom Burberage. Tom Burberage then left at the end of Jim's internship and so the church was then looking for a permanent senior pastor. It so happened that Jim graduated from seminary about that time, so he came, we brought him. And what was about a year later that our youth pastor was hired, something like that, about a year later. Yes, I remember that very well. The church had a youth pastor before that, so he wasn't the first one, but it hadn't been going on just too long.

Me: What was outreach like for the church back then? Do you remember? Like, how the church interacted with the public, with the community.

DRK: Well, I don't recall any outreach, specifically any outreach programs. It's just that everybody's welcome to come to the services. As word got out with Pastor Jim about his ability to preach out of the bible, he's really a bible teacher more than a preacher. That brought many people in, just on its own. You know, I was saved in Stamford, Connecticut at their First Baptist Church there with an evangelistic program that was put on. They brought in a preacher for New York City; William Ward Ayer was his name. And he came for a week of evangelistic meetings, every evening and I went forward at one of those when I was 12 years old. I don't recall that TBC has ever had a series of preaching's like that. We've had missionary conferences in the past, that in some ways would resemble that, though it wouldn't be quite the same either. Just off hand, I don't remember any specific evangelistic campaigns as such.

Me: You mentioned that Jim was a huge part of the community's growth. How did you see the community grow over the next few years?

DRK: You mean the church community?

Me: Yeah

DRK: It was steady, steady growth of the years, but always seemed like we could always handle the increased growth and then it got to where we had two church services instead of one. We'd had one church service like any church and suddenly when the group got larger. But it was a gradual increase, it wasn't real dramatic, although we were impressed at how the people came. Eventually we had to go to three services. Well actually now we have four to five with Xenos and the Lower Auditorium services. It's been a struggle at times to figure out where to put all the people.

Me: Back to membership, you mentioned that you became members two months after you moved here. What was required for membership back then?

DRK: I think the church constitution states that you should meet with the elder board, but I honestly don't remember doing that. I remember meeting with the pastor and him signing a membership card for us, which I stuck on a souvenir book somewhere. Yeah, I may have met with the elders and Joyce was with me of course, but I don't remember that. I just remember meeting with the pastor. In fact, he came to our home rather quickly when we moved here. He was really on top of things in that regard. You could do that when the church is smaller, now, of course, for a pastor to meet all the new people that come in, it'd be just totally impossible. He wouldn't have a life if he had to do that. But that time you could do it.

Me: How have the facilities changed over your time at the church?

DRK: Well, they have changed quite a bit, although we're still in the same building, but the auditorium has had to be enlarged. Well, the main auditorium was enlarged and of course, now it has three services instead of one. And then we've instituted a Xenos service in the building across the street. The church bought the Methodist home across the street several years ago and the church is now using what used to be the chapel in the nursing home, but even that's been enlarged some to hold more people. In the last year, the fellowship hall is being used as an extension to the main service, with TV feed and so forth.

Me: What sort of, for you and Joyce, what Sunday school programs have you been in through the years?

DRK: When we came we joined the Adriel Sunday school class and that was at the time the young marrieds class, which fit us perfectly. They didn't name it the young marrieds class like so many churches do because they knew they wouldn't always be the young marrieds. So they picked a name that they thought would not indicate age so much. I think the word Adriel was found in the Old Testament, it means little flock or something. Paul Clemor was the teacher at that time. But it wasn't long after we came that Joyce started teaching Sunday school; fourth and fifth graders. In fact, I taught the 6th grade boys for a number of years also and so I didn't attend the Adriel class much during those years and then after that when I didn't teach them anymore I attended several other classes, kind of moved around some. Finally, eventually, I settled back at the Adriel class and because of teachers dropping out I ended up as the teacher in there.

Me: So how long have you been the teacher?

DRK: I've been the only teacher now for three years, maybe. But I was helped team teaching for several years before that, but the others dropped out and left me by myself. So I continued that.

Me: You mentioned that when you started it was the young marrieds class, how have you seen attendance for that one change?

DRK: Well it isn't the young marrieds anymore, it's the oldest class in the church, so to speak. Many Sunday school classes at TBC have a mixed age group, ours does too, but it generally has the oldest people in the church.

Me: OK. What about for your kids, what was Sunday school like for them through the years that they'd been in attendance there.

DRK: Well, as far as I can tell it was a pretty standard Sunday school program. Of course, Joyce being part of it would help, but our impression was they had quite a number of good teachers and everything seemed to go quite well for our kids in the Sunday school. Again, I don't remember much about Wednesday night programs, I must admit. I'm sure they may have been involved in some of that, but I don't think those were as big

as they are now. Those Wednesday night programs have gotten a lot bigger, church is putting more effort into them than they used to, I think.

Me: So they had elementary school classes, and then Jr. High/High school. Did they anything for students after then, when you kids were in school then.

DRK: Yeah, they had up through high school, but then all three of our kids went to Wheaton College so that's when their association with the church went down a lot. They'd come home in the summer time and quite honestly I don't know which Sunday school they went to.

Me: Then you mentioned, a while back we were talking about staff and the different Pastor hiring's. You had the senior pastor Jim, and then the youth pastor Hank was hired. Who has come after that that you've seen?

DRK: Quite a few people. Wow, you know I'm a little at a loss to name them off hand, you know my memory isn't all the greatest about personnel changes. Certainly Hank is still with us and there have been quite a few. I remember when Sandy Balocca was hired for the Sunday school program. Nat, yes Nat. He's been with the church, we was hired as the music director quite a few years ago and he's still at TBC, though not as music director. Yeah, there have been a number of people, but overall the staff has been at TBC for a long time, for the most part. There are some exceptions. There haven't been, really, a whole lot of changes. I don't have the memory some people have when it comes to things like that. I was on the church board there for a number of years, well, like when Jim came and so forth. But I gave it up and also the Sunday school teaching I gave up too because I had to work so much at the hospital. I had call. When I first came to Topeka, call wasn't half bad. I could teach Sunday school and it'd be very unusual to get called out. But after I'd been in Topeka for, oh, 5-6 years, the call started getting a lot more significant than it had been such that it really wasn't practical for me to teach because I had to miss so many Sundays. And also for the board meetings, there were a lot of times I couldn't come because I was working. So I dropped out of that, too, didn't come back to that until after I retired.

Me: Did any significant groups of the church ever break away, was there any fragmentation over the years for whatever reason?

DRK: Was there break-offs? Yeah, well yes, Southwest Topeka Bible Church was a voluntary break-off and pastor Chet Evens, he interned at TBC for a while and then led a group out to South Topeka. There was, well Fellowship Bible, too was formed by several elders at TBC. As far as I'm sure, of course, there are people, probably all the time, that are coming and going and some have formed other churches on their own. I know there's one now that meets at Cair Paravel, the school in their theater. I think there've been other little groups also, but there has not been any church split that was involuntary in some way. And it also has been true, particularly since Pastor Jim has been here, that the business meetings are very quiet. I don't recall any controversy at them.

Me: So of course, we have the normal Sunday schools for kids, are there any community groups, is there support for that from the church. Are there any special interest groups?

DRK: I think there are and we have an annual discovery day, which speaks to that. I personally haven't been involved in many of those, quite honestly. There was a mac group for a while that Dr. David Robinson headed up, but he, of course, was very busy and he couldn't keep it up. But yeah, there's various outreaches of that, certainly the women's ministry has really been effective, far beyond anybody would have thought. But my involvement in those, admittedly, has been pretty limited. Now that I'm retired, I do Meals on Wheels once a week. I know there have been some TBCers involved in the staffing of that over the years and TBC officially invites people to work in that area.

Me: You mentioned the reasons you came to TBC and why it was attractive in those cases. Are those same reasons the reasons you stayed through the years.

DRK: Yes, definitely. It's my impression that many churches in Topeka have bible teaching that has some doubts about the authenticity of the bible and so forth. I wouldn't care for that at all. Bible teaching at TBC has remained very strong through the years. Now there are other churches that do have good bible teaching, but we've always preferred Pastor Jim's approach to it, and his manner. I'm aware that not everybody agrees with me on that, but for Joyce and myself, he's a perfect fit. And the youth pastor's also, well you were asking about youth ministries at the church and so forth. Yes, Pastor Hank Nelson and Nan were very involved in the youth ministry when our kids were at that age. Went on bike trips and so forth. Those are the ones I remember, are the bike trips, and the kids really got involved in that and really enjoyed it and I think that helped a lot to keep our kids interested in the church.

Me: Are there any interesting characters, interesting people you can think of that you remember from your time at TBC that just really stand out? You've mentioned Jim and you've mentioned Hank, any other major people?

DRK: Well, I'm not sure what you're looking for there. Like, well, it's been interesting that Senator Sam Brownback has been coming to TBC fairly regularly for several years now and I've talked to him just casually a time or two. But he's certainly someone I notice. When we came to Topeka Bible there were still some of the original founders of the church that were a part of the church that were active in it and it was interesting to meet them and get to know them some; see what kind of people it takes to start a new church.

Me: Do you remember when the church was started?

DRK: I think their first meeting was in 1939 in someone's home. And it was a pretty small group for a while. The founding pastor was, I'm told, I never met him, I'm told he was a former Methodist preacher and decided eternal security was something that was really true in the bible, whereas many of his colleagues at the time didn't agree with that.

But quite honestly, I never met him or heard him, so I don't know for sure, but he felt, I believe, that at the time the Methodist church was showing signs of becoming quite liberal, and being very increasingly critical of the bible and not accepting parts of it as God's word. So that was another reason, certainly, that he separated from the Methodist church and really, with a group of believers, started a new church which was Topeka Bible.

Me: I guess I could have asked this much earlier, but it's a *bible* church and you're nondenominational, how does that function when compared to other denominations; being nondenominational, I guess?

DRK: It's funny, from my point of view, it doesn't make much difference. There are some advantages, though, I know when you're part of a Southern Baptist church, at least many of them, not all of them are this way, but many of them, just to give to missions through the Lottie Moon offering, to support the Southern Baptist Mission Board and often just don't see missionaries very often come by because their missionaries don't have to do deputation. The convention, the Southern Baptist convention supports them, quite well in fact which is the way it oughta be. But for a church like ours, that really wouldn't work very well, so we're much more involved with faith missions. We get to see our missionaries a lot more than we would otherwise and certainly when we were members of a Southern Baptist church, I quite honestly don't remember meeting any missionaries. I know we were certainly aware that they supported them, in fact I took a missions trip around the world once and stayed in a Southern Baptist mission in Eastern java for a couple of weeks, I guess it was. It was a very well run mission. It was a hospital with several doctors there, but they had a lot of other support personnel. Admittedly they sort of had a compound like the old-fashioned missions do. But even then at that time a number of the missionaries didn't live in the compound, they lived out in the community. But I thought it was very well run and they were doing good work there. To do what they were doing does require, well, generous resources to support them and pay for running a hospital and so forth.

Me: You mentioned missionaries being a large part. Has that been the case at Topeka Bible Church since you got there, have you seen that grown?

DRK: Yes there's certainly quite a few more being supported, partially supported by the church, than there were. The numbers have grown, I couldn't give you the numbers we have, but yes it's grown quite a bit.

Me: You mentioned that you've been at TBC the entire time you've been in Topeka, did you ever, did leaving ever come into the picture at all, did you ever think about leaving?

DRK: No, but we were aware of some others that left and then came back. So, now I'm sure there were some that left but didn't come back, but for some reason I noticed the ones that came back after having gone for a while. But no, that was never, really never entered our minds.

Me: Do you have any memories that sort of stand out as some of the best moments you remember being involved at TBC, any anecdotes or anything? It's OK if you don't.

DRK: Well, we had a 50th anniversary a number of years ago, over at the East Topeka there's a conference grounds over there, Forest Park, yeah Forest Park. We had a 50th anniversary one summer there at Forest Park and that proved to be lots of fun and a lot of former members came to visit and so forth, some missionaries even. That was very good. And then I imagine in recent years, Pastor Jim's trips to Israel. We've gone on a number of those, and also to Greece, and those have all been very outstanding.

Me: What do those trips look like?

DRK: Well actually the first one was conducted by Jim's father, Roger Congdon. He took us on a trip that Pastor Jim would probably never take us on, because we visited 5 different countries in two weeks, something like that. We went to Egypt, first and went and visited the pyramids and Cairo museum and then we went down to Carnac, Valley of the Kings and went into King Tut's tomb and all that. We sailed in the boat across the Nile River. It was a fabulous trip and then we went to Jordan and Amman. We were in Amman for New Years Eve. And then we went to Israel and toured Israel and then we went to Damascus and Straigh St. and, by the way, Damascus has the world's roughest runway for airplanes. It was something; it's hard to believe commercial airlines will use it. And then we went to Rome and spent about three days there. Seeing the Vatican museum and so forth. Oh, and I forgot about Athens, we went there, too. We went to the Parthenon, you know, and there's a big museum there, too that we went through, guided through. Went out of town to one of the old Temple sites. Yeah, so, we saw a lot of stuff on that trip Well in Rome, of course, we went to St. Peters, but the Vatican museums are really...wow, we only had a part of a day there but you could easily spend a couple of weeks there. There is so much to see and it's so beautiful inside. Have you been there?

Me: No, I haven't.

DRK: Oh, Rome is really something to see with the Titus' Arch, inside the pictures of the Roman soldiers hauling away the Menorah, and oh there was a box, too, they were carrying. Of course, the arc wasn't it because that wasn't in the temple in Jerusalem at that time. They had a little incense altar box and two trumpets are pictured in there, that were taken out of the temple. So yeah, that was a fabulous trip, but Pastor Jim's trips tend to be centered more on Israel itself. So we spend more time in Israel seeing more things and that's very good too, certainly. And then here, a year or two ago we went to Greece to follow Apostle Paul's footsteps in Greece to see what things look like. That was a very good trip it also included an inter-island cruise for several days. Got to visit Patmos and Crete and also Ephesus in Turkey. So that was very good. We only spent a couple hours in Ephesus and you could easily spend a whole day there. Next time I go we'll have to make sure we spend all day there, but there's a lot to see in Ephesus. So I guess those would be the highlights that come off the top of my head.

Me: Yeah, that's great. I guess is there anything else you'd like to share before we finish this up.

DRK: Has it been an hour yet?

Me: You're good on time, we're good. This is perfect.

DRK: I just can't think of anything just off hand. It's been interesting to see how Pastor Jim's style of preaching has changed over the year. He still preaches out of the bible but he's much more topical than he used to be. His notes, the sermon notes he hands out each week are pretty brief now compared to what they used to be. They used to be single page, typed, single spaced covered a whole page, like the Romans series particularly. Well one series of messages that was outstanding was his Route 66 series where he preached on a different book of the bible each week. That was an outstanding one, we still listen to those occasionally, cause we bought the tapes and find that those are still good to listen to. Things like that don't really go out of date very much.

Me: Yeah, I guess, how has technology changed over the years.

DRK: Well yeah, that's changed quite a bit. Used to be you just had a mic for the deaf. Yeah they used to have little earphones in some of the pews so deaf people could hold them up and hear the preacher, but yes that's changed a whole lot so that now video is used quite a bit and the sermons are recorded, video-wise and also put on the internet. Pastor Jim uses powerpoint virtually, almost every week. Which for many years, of course, we didn't have that. But Pastor Jim's ability to preach without powerpoint is very good, but admittedly, powerpoint does help. It makes it easier for him in some ways, I don't know, but it is nice to have that and I think a lot of churches are using that now. Not all of them, but I think a lot are. 'Cause you can illustrate sermons so much better with a video and the powerpoint. Also, the music in church has changed quite a bit over the years, particularly in recent years. For many years it would be a piano or organ and you'd have a choir up front with robes and so forth, but that's kind of a think of the past almost. Organ is rarely used now, except it was last week, and the piano, except they call that the retro week. But normally there's a band with guitars and so forth. My wife and I are like many of the older people; we actually prefer the older, retro style than the newer style, but we seem to be able to adjust for the most part. I supposed it's possible some people have left the church because of it, but I'm not aware that very many have, and I'm also aware that many churches have gone over to the newer contemporary music styles. But the music isn't what brought us to TBC, although we appreciated it. There was a good music program when we came to it in '68, and we appreciated that. But that isn't the reason we chose TBC, it's because of the preaching.

Me: Yeah, well that's great, I think we covered everything, I think we're good.

DRK: Oh OK, good!

Me: This is great, thanks a lot.