StoryCorps interview with Roe Green
Kent State University
Why don’t we start off with something really simple. What is your full name? Roe Green: The full name is Roe Green. And I was born in Cleveland Ohio and was raised in Cleveland Ohio. So the one thing that I wanted to say was to talk a little bit about my childhood which happened to be very interesting from the standpoint that I had a father who was involved with politics but he never ran for office. So he he was the chairman of the Democratic Party or I should say the chairman of the Board of Elections and Treasurer the Democratic Party. And as a child growing up we always had like political figures around us. My dad was very very active in Kennedy’s campaign and knew both John. I mean knew John and Bob about Robert Kennedy and my mother of course would be running around with Jackie Kennedy. So it was a very very interesting relationship there. So today I am probably the most apolitical person you know because that's what happened in my home and it was something that just I don't want to be involved with politics if I can help it today. I'm an independent. And I try to vote for the best person there is so that's that's the politics. But I did meet John Kennedy growing up I was 14 years of age when my father was appointed the first Jewish circuit court judge in the country. Wow. So this to me I'm very proud of this and also this my father had a reputation when they said if you want a fair trial you get into Judge Green's courtroom. They called him Gentle Ben. I mean on and on he had these wonderful nicknames and when I run into people today and they say you know everyone's now it's Hi I'm Roe Green and they know who I am. But at one point it was oh you're Judge Green's daughter. So you know I grew up in the shadow of being somebody else's whatever you know and it's happening. And my cousin was very involved with the Jewish Federation and that in the Jewish world. And I wasn’t I have to tell you I became involved with the theatrical world. I knew everybody in theater you know. But I didn't know anybody in the Jewish world and all of a sudden I'd be introduced to different people. Oh your cookies cousin. Well now they're saying Oh. Oh cookie Marcus is your cousin. But it's funny how these things kind of snowball. They have their own full circle. That's what I find so interesting is they do go full circle. So now I know who I am and I am Roe Green. And I'm proud of it and I'm. And so. So you mentioned you mentioned your child growing up in Cleveland. What was that like. You'd said you know your your father was really influenced. It was really influential in politics but what was it like you know just growing up. Do you have any memories from that. Yeah I mean I was an only child. So one of the things I have to tell you is I learned I learned to be able to be with myself. And I think only children in particular I mean they have a special relationship with themselves you know either it's either a love hate but I mean I happen to like myself. So I mean but it took a long time to get there. And but but I think as an only child you learn that well there are other people that you can go to. So you rely on yourself for a friendship. And one of the things I learned to read very early. My mother was an avid reader. I also have to say my mother was a firm believer in education and she said they can take everything away from you. But what you know so I give my mother so much credit for that. And of course my father was just he was brilliant brilliant kind wonderful wonderful man. So where did you go to high school. Well I went to high school at Beechwood high school. So I grew up here. And the funny story is that just a few years ago I was inducted into the Beachwood High School Hall of Fame and it was probably one of the most political thing I've ever done. I mean I needed like 10 references and I mean all of this you know I mean it was it really was political. And I didn't expect it. I didn't expect that at all. But I am in the Hall of Fame now so all I can say is I'm there you go. So what made you decide to attend your first college which college. Well I went my undergraduate degrees from the University of Colorado. So I'm going to just run with this a little bit. As a freshman Of course I really didn't have a major and we had a takes. I almost flunked out of school. We had to take a geology course and that really was not something that I was terribly interested in. It had a rough time and then so then what I did is I somehow I took a theater class and I don't know how it happened I've been involved with theater in high school but nothing major. I mean just you know. And so when I went to college and I got into this one class and it's a story I like to tell there was a man and I got into a class and it was he was he was teaching mostly graduate students and all of a sudden he says in this class like the first or second days of I need somebody to be a note taker for me for one of the shows that he was directing the show actually was Arms of Krupp because I'll never forget it. And all of a sudden I'm like going oh you know and I'm raising my hand. So I said you know you can't be afraid to take chances and especially when you're in college. I think this is the time to make all the mistakes you want and because you know what. You're not perfect. And so what if somebody left you. Or you know or you don't do something right. Big deal. But now is really the time to take the chances. I think when you're in college and when you're young because as you get older you become more you become aware. Of what's the word. I'm scared you know and I and people say to me Well you know I do give speeches a lot to different people they'll say how can you get up in front of people. And I said Look five million Chinese could care less what I'm saying. So I look out there there's 3000 people so what. You know there's there's millions who don't care. So you had mentioned you know you said you were undecided when you first met in college and then you took this course and that just launched you into it. Yes. What happened was after that. Then the man who was the head of the department came up to me and said You did such a good job for Denault. I'd like I'd like you to be. I'd like you to be my. Yeah by my assistant director. Wow. I. So that launched it. So by sophomore year I was definitely involved with theater at school and I did end up with my degree was in theater. And at that point it would have been theater and communications at the University of Colorado and that was 1970. Now one of the things this is an interesting week because Ken Burns is doing his show on Vietnam and that was my war. I lost friends in that war. But not only that when I graduated in 1970 we weren't sure if we were even going to have graduation and we ended up having graduation. We all wore black armbands because it was right after Kent State. So this was you know and my father had one small small case that was involved with against Kent State really interesting. But I think nothing major you know and in around that time too I mean I think you have to realize in one of the things that's come
out is this was a very volatile point in history because it was all had to do with busing and you know all kinds of things were happening. So it wasn't just the war. There were other things going on. And that's was a very important time. It was an interesting time to grow up in and now people say to me I start to talk about the war my dad had a lot of what we call the conscientious objectors would come in because we have a group of of Amish you know so much of the Amish are in this area and they would go before the court and say it was a conscious conscientious objector and I remember talking to a class about well about 10 years ago and it was a class of law students and I said that they asked me about Dad's cases and I came up with this one and they said oh I did a history paper on that. Oh great. Now I feel like I'm antiquated. I mean this was my time. So you know college really is. It's a very important time in your life. That being said you did talk to me. You said your mother was very invested invested in education for you to have an education right. You have B.A. in theater you have an M.A. from Kent State. Did you enjoy school? After everything I you know I have to tell you I think there were parts of it that I did enjoy. You know I was looking back on it the other day and I said there were certain parts that I did not enjoy. It's a tough time it's growing tired. I think I enjoyed really. I mean I got my masters in 1980 and my B.A. in 1970. So there was a ten year period in that 10 years. I was married and divorced. I went to secretarial school in Boston because my father believed that if you could take shorthand and type you could do just about anything you'd always be able to get a job. So I mean you know there were all kinds of things that happened in my life. I also went to I went to art school. That was my my major in high school. Oh and I realized that wasn't good enough to be an artist. So I became like an art minor. And and in college it kind of you know just drifted away yeah. So I went back to art school after afterwards for about three years and took classes and then I said you know this is going to be an artist either. So let's see what's going to happen here. So I decided to try and see what counted. And I reached that point there were two phenomenal instructors. Bill Zuccero and Lou Erdman and so I said I applied and they said they would take. I had been taking classes at Kent at Case Western and in theater like theater history classes and because they were mostly there thing was for actors. I am not an actor. I don't even pretend to be an actor. I have trouble memorizing lines you know. I mean I just my I was a backstage person. So they took some of my credits and it gave me a little bit of a leg up. When I when I was working on my masters now that's so cool and one of them one of the things is is that I did not have to write a dissertation either because they had a program where I could do my masters as a project I well. And so I went to the University of Cincinnati and I was an intern there and I interned in stage management and in the in the business area of this of I did books for about four months. And that's and then I wrote I wrote up my my master's on that experience. Oh cool. And that's. And that's how I got my master's. Yeah because I'm not I'm not I don't think I kept saying or what should I go for my Ph.D. but research is not really. I mean I certain amount of it but to delve into something really I don't think I have the patience and again the older you get the harder it is because you know you've got a home you've got you've got things happening outside of school that you don't have that's the nice thing when you're in college you can focus on school and school is your main thing. You know but when you get out the world intrudes so that's just thinking about college now if you had a chance would you go back. If I could go back to school today I do go back to school actually. I take a lifelong learning class in Florida. OK. OK. So I do still take classes. OK so tell me about that a little bit. Well at the class I take actually is about. Well one of them is I took an animated film class and loved it. I in fact I sponsored it for three years there because it was it's not that I learned how to make an animated film. But it was fun to see the animated films that were picked and some of them were very very political. Now if you ask me the one the one that I remember it was an Israeli film and it was about a war. And I can't remember the name of it. It won an award. And so a couple of them you know were very very political. And I think you know so animation animation was able to to show something that was so horrific that if you'd seen it in real life you wouldn't believed it. So so there I saw I saw a different part of animation there. I also take a class on what's happening in the world. And the man that teaches it he said this group is hard to students because we're here because we want to be here and we don't care about grades. And when he first started teaching he said this is tough because we really we we probably these are people in the class that are presidents of Fortune 500 companies or companies. So you know you've got guys that know what they're doing. And the average age of course is somewhere between 70 and death I think. But I'm one of the younger students so it's so interesting actually speaking of that. You had mentioned this an animated film had just shown something so dark and so you know foreboding and kind of going back to theater a little bit. Do you feel like theater does the same thing. Yes yes I think. I mean you know I used to call it propaganda theater theater is that exists. Well first of all theater arts the arts make us human. So there's there's several there's several different types of theater there. I mean that I consider theater and one is just pure spectacle and that's the Cirque du Soleil is this to me is not even theater anymore it's just it's just fantastic. I mean you know phantasmagoria it's something that's that's not. It's beyond beyond theater. Then there is there's what I called the propaganda show which is there to teach you a lesson and then there's those shows that are just for pure entertainment. You know I mean you can check your brain at the door and just enjoy it. You know and there's nothing wrong with that. And I know a lot of people especially when I was in college that I didn't learn anything. I mean there was nothing what you don't have to. You know sometimes it's fun just to have to be there for no reason whatsoever. And just to enjoy it but not all theaters going to do that and theater can teach lessons and can teach something so I know I know I've I've I've listened to people say oh my gosh I really had to think about that. So you know what. Normally you don't check your brain at the door. When you go to the theater. Exactly. So backtracking just a little bit. So you finished saying you finished school at the University of Colorado correct. And then what did you do after that. Well I got married I got divorced. I went to Catherine Gibbs secretarial school and then then I went I decided to take classes at Case
It's important to give whether it be money or of yourself or time. I mean whatever it may be because whatever you do about as some of my philanthropy or just my philosophy of life and I'm sure people that know me they've heard it one side and I think that's true of everything. So you know about Israel. I mean I think I think that's about you know I mean but I'm not one of these people running around you know beating my chest and influence me in some ways. You know as I said I mean because of the you know my art connection with the arts. I

Now one of the things I have to tell you is my father loved to travel. He and his thing was organizing the trips. He loved to organize them. I go on what I call wonder trips I wonder where I am I wonder where I'm going. And isn't it wonderful. I just do not do the research until after I get back because. Because when you do the research before you really don't know what you're researching as far as I'm concerned. But anyway so we did travel quite a bit as a family. And one of my one semester. By the way I did take in college. It used to be called Univers just seven seas. It was called the World campus afloat. When I went and it's now out of I think Pittsburgh. And yeah I think it's out of Pittsburgh and it's called something else now not afloat. It's something else. But I spent one semester doing that and visiting went to Europe and we went over to Israel and then cut across to South America for a semester so travel has always been something that's been very very important to me. And so when he died I said I would take all this money and I'm going to go one year out of the country. And that's what's I did for a while. And because I feel that when you go to another country I don't go there. I've been with people that say oh why did they do it this way and why did they do it the way we do it. That's not why I'm there. They've been doing something. A certain way for many years. I'm there to learn from them. They not there to learn from me. And so that's part of the. Enjoyment for me. And. I can't tell you I mean how many I don't know. I mean it's a wonderful world and people all over the world are just they're amazing. I mean there's no fine good people all over the world. And that's what I like to think of. Do you have a favorite location to travel to or a favorite movie wherever I am. Yeah I just you know I love I love the world. I mean I love love it all. There are certain countries I'm uncomfortable with. I mean come on you can't love everything it's like not everybody's going to like you. But you know it just it's it's a big world and there's a lot to do and there's a lot out there. So you said you had mentioned you traveled to Israel. Yeah. What was that like for you. Well I have to tell you the first time I went to Israel I hated it. It was about 1968 it was on the world campus afloat and this was a very bad year for Israel. And I didn't go back and I had no desire to go back. And then several years ago and I can't tell you how many now because time gets you know screwed up the head of the Jewish Federation said to me I will take you to Israel and I promise you you will love it. OK. So I went back to Israel and guess what. I loved it. There was just a movie I saw the other night of the man who runs Batsheva ballet. Called Mr.. Darn...... But it's about his dancing and it's amazing. But I met this man you know I was in the room with him. And I met you and I've been back several times now and now I am the cochair of it's called the Israel ERT's connection for the Jewish community for the Jewish Federation. So now I'm very involved with Israeli artists playwrights like several years ago we went back we did what they call a mission and it was it was I don't remember about 10 or 15 of us. And I insisted we go to the theater. Now one of the things that I had done that was years several years ago about 10 years ago was I made sure they were doing Hamlet in Israel and I had a bra. I was one of the people that had brought here and this probably was the most exciting thing that I've ever seen. We couldn't give tickets away when it started before it started. People said what I want to see Hamlet in Hebrew for. Well unfortunately they didn't have someone who marketed it right after opening night. You couldn't find a ticket to could not find a ticket this thing. Because people realized how and I kept saying it's extraordinary you've got to go see it. Oh yeah. What do I want. And then all of a sudden there was I mean calls coming in by by droves wanting to see the show. And the end and they could hardly give the tickets away. The week before. So you know I mean but what Israel does as far as theater is just amazing. They make it a uniquely Israeli. And B it's now it's it's. And I think part of that is because these people are living under something where they don't know if they will be around tomorrow. So there's a real now attitude a real living in the present system. So you said that you were involved with the Jewish community. You said you were involved a lot of things here. You know your trips to Israel has influenced you. How do you feel like the Jewish community has influenced you now. Well I'm pretty pretty well involved with it so I guess they do influence me in some ways. You know as I said I mean because of the you know my art connection with the arts. I don't think it's so much. I think the Jewish community in general is a very giving community and they give to the arts. And so that's about you know I mean but I'm not one of these people running around you know beating my chest and you know about Israel. I mean I think I think the colleges unfortunately the Palestinians the kids don't see both sides and neither side is perfect. Neither side is perfect. But let's show the other side too. You know I mean I don't just show one side and I think that's true of everything. So you know one of the things I want to. I would like to talk a little bit about as some of my philanthropy or just my philosophy of life and I'm sure people that know me they've heard it millions of times. But I believe I have five oranges. I eat when I save one and I give the other three away. So to me it's important to give whether it be money or of yourself or time. I mean whatever it may be because whatever you do
for someone else you’re going to get back tenfold and that I think it’s just to be charitable. And that’s what the word Christian really is to be and to be you know it’s to be charitable to be a good person. And yeah there’s a lot of things I mean none of us are perfect. I’m certainly not perfect. I try to keep my halo shining but you know I do slip once in a while. I can’t think of when. But. But you know. I mean but it’s important. It’s really important. So you definitely enjoy your philanthropy. Would you call that your job your mean. Oh absolutely. Oh yeah absolutely. I mean that is my job. And and I’m very comfortable with it. I mean I found my niche in life. I mean this is I’m standing right now at the top of my game and I’m where I’m supposed to be. OK go ahead. You always known that that was something you would be interested in. No no I like you. I think I think you just as you grow when you just things sort of just fall in line. I mean they just sort of again things snowball things happen for a reason. The first couple of things that I did had nothing to do with theater. The first one was I have a battered women’s shelter in Ohio. And somebody they came to me and asked me if I would do this. And I did. I agreed. And I said it’s my one. One thing that I want you to do is I want you to call the greenhouse. And they liked that so. Because it means a lot of things. It’s not just my name. So it actually that will be 10 years. They’re celebrating their 10th anniversary this year. So. And we opened up on my birthday. That was my birthday. Ten years ago. And the kids from Kent came to sing and they perform. You know that was one of the things they did. So I mean so that was that one of the first things that I did. And then after that the other then the next thing I did had to do with my dad and I made sure that the long library case Western Reserve is named after him. So it’s the Judge Bensedrine law library. And and then then after that then I started to do. You know a few of the other things. And one of the things that I did was John Crawford and I was now of course the dean of the school there. He and I were sitting in his car one night and we were talking and he said well we’ve got to fix this place up Roe and we’re doing this and we’re doing that and. And we’ve thrown this out we’ve thrown it. I said look I said you put in every single thing you want. I said the first thing they’ll throw it is the golden toilet seat so don’t worry about what you put in everything you want. You’ll be surprised what you’ll get. And look what we have today. You know the green center. So I mean I walked through this building as I said this building isn’t even doesn’t even belong on the same campus as the fashion school. I mean we walked through the fashion school it was gorgeous. Well now we have a gorgeous building and something to be very proud of. And I’m very proud every time I walk in. So it’s beautiful it’s something and to have resources for it especially for students like us. It's incredible. It’s absolutely incredible. That’s why I think well that’s why you do it. I mean that are you. That’s why I do it. I do what I do for you guys. Yeah. I mean why do I do the visiting director series every year. It's not for my health but I want. I want you to have the opportunity to get together with people you wouldn’t have that otherwise have that opportunity. Somebody who is a little different or somebody who can show you something that’s that’s maybe makes makes you a little bit more professional more or helps you out or you know whatever you learn something from them. And that’s what’s important. So you know so we’re nearing the end here soon. But I just wanted to say I wanted to ask you know a couple of questions that you know you’ve talked about school you’ve talked about your life you’ve talked about all of his philanthropy and all these things that you’ve done but what would you like to do for fun. Like what. What is there. Well I read I guess for me this is fun. You know I don't think too much about it. I mean unfortunately I like to play games on the internet too. And people say to me Well what do you read and I said Honestly I read garbage. I read I read for pure entertainment. I love the romance mystery yes. And you know I mean I do some of the more difficult things. I'm too busy my mind won't know for you know I can’t can’t concentrate on that stuff. That’s why going back to school be very hard for me now because I'm too scattered over you know to I'm doing too many different things. So that would be hurt. But for fun what do I do when I go to the theater actually. You know. Yeah I guess that’s about it. I mean and I travel and that’s fun for me too. Do you perform at all. No not if I can help it. Why do you say that. Well the students got me to perform when they did Sweet Charity and they I played the fairy godmother a few nights out of port. Right. That’s right. Yeah so. But no I normally don’t perform. You don’t know I it’s not. It’s not it’s not where I belong. I mean it you know I think my space is somewhere else. And and I don’t need to be on the stage. Also I have a terrible memory. I mean I have to tell you when I was learning the the two lines that I had for Sweet Charity and I just said OK now I know the lines. Oh but I have to put them somewhere you know and then I you know. OK. Now I have to remember where they come you know so it’s you know it’s there’s a lot involved even though it’s a couple of lines. There's so much because of just even to like any show you have so much more value that they hoard. Speaking of value what are you proudest of. You know I don't know. I mean because I'm proud of I don't like to think of myself as being so proud when I do is when I do something I say I hope my parents are proud of me. You know and one day I have to say that and John Crawford's mom was sitting next to me at that time and she looked at me and she said Oh roll your parents are very proud. And when she said that to me I think that's what made me feel good. It's it's there's so I try to do a lot when I see things that need to be done and then I I feel close to and I have to tell you there are no shortage of good causes. You also have to learn to be able to say no in this world and sometimes it hurts and sometimes you know it’s hard to do. But you know you can't you can't do everything. So I have just certain you know pet projects and there are long standing projects. I mean they’re not things that just came you know up you know there’s a few that are like one shot most of them aren't you like the Visiting Artist series that I have here. I have a visiting or the Visiting Artist series in Colorado. And then I have the visiting directors series here. And at the University of Colorado they asked to have a visiting artist series so they could have a little more leeway with who they would ask and so they can have like you know an actor come out they can have a director come up you know so they have a writer you know so they have a little bit more openness. And what's happened now to that is that they asked me in Colorado they had no. Endowed professors in the arts at the
University of Colorado. They said in the arts at all. So they said what are they. So they made a very a not say good deal but they made it so that it would encompass the the the are the Visiting Artist Series and they would endow a professor in the arts and the professor in the arts doesn't necessarily have to be the head of the department but he will be or she will be the one that runs and brings in the the row green visiting artist. And that's what we've done. And that's what's happened now. So at the end it's it's it's a good program you know. So I'll be going out there in November for their visiting artist series. The first part of November and the one here at Kent will be in April and this year is very funny because both of the schools are doing inj it is inj Hedda Gabler And and doll's house. Oh so so a chance to do that on Broadway. No no I don't see. I've seen so many productions of it though I know I know I know both shows that the show's pretty well but I guess the thing is I think they do inj because they know I hate Chekhov. So I said please talk to Chuck. Chuck. Actors love Chekov audiences sit bear Barrett. You know it's just it's just really it's hard. But everybody should learn it. I mean you know you should study it learn it. But I don't have to sit and listen to it. You know during your schooling were there any professors or instructors that left an impact on your life. Yeah I have a few from high school that were very important and one that's very funny now. He was my 5th grade math teacher. He now is a critic and I help support his blog and that's Roy Birko. And yeah. And so you know and so Roy and I have known each other for oh my god. I just had my fiftieth high school reunion not too long ago so I mean we've known each other for almost like 50 years over 50 years now. So Roy and Eunice have become very good friends. And but he's the one I remember most because I see him. But yes there's always professor said Dr. Newdow who was the one that I raised my hand for. I mean I remember him he's since passed and you know there's some of the professors when I was here I mean Lou and Lou and Bill I mean we're just wonderful wonderful teachers. So you hope that you have. And there were some teachers here actually that that I thought were just terrific. I mean this was just a terrific program. When I was going for. And it still is. So you know. So you know it's just it's a little different you know when I was here. Yeah changes all the time very well. Every day you can stand still and change happens for sure. Do you have any regrets. Yeah I do but I can't honestly. I mean. Yes but I just can't really think of what they are. I mean when I do things differently. Not much. You know I think everything that I did I did was for a reason. It was a learning experience. And I mean maybe I wouldn't have gotten married. You know I mean when I did because at that time it was important. But you know it was a different era a much different time and. But but it's you know. I mean do I ever. Sure. I think we all. If we don't there's something wrong with us right. You know I mean but again it was a learning experience I learned from them and you move on. You don't dwell on them. So I don't really think too much about them. How would you describe yourself. Oh well I'm a philanthropist and basically mostly what I do is in theater although I have things that are outside the box. And I think that's that's you know and I'm an I'm and I'm getting to be a middle aged woman. The older I get the higher middle age goes. So you know I I'm I'm I'm I'm hoping I'm a person that's that's that helps others. And you know I try to be kind. But listen I get behind the wheel of a car. I'm a demon. You know I'm not that I'm why is that guy going so slow when I roll. You can't beat that. Yeah. Question Shenae Well I was interested in hearing about your religious or spiritual beliefs. Well you know when I talk to God every day. So I mean yes I just went to temple yesterday you know and I only I kid everybody and I see you know the Jewish people are really smart. I said we have you know one day of the year which is you know next week. And we ask God to forgive forgive us for all of our sins and I know for the year and I said all of the Christians they go you know they go every week and ask God to forgive them. I said we only do it once a year. So I think we have a better deal that way. But. You know I mean it's just it's it's too. I don't need I don't think you need are I don't need the crutch of of the ritual. And I like it. I think it's beautiful. I think that there are certain things that we all need you know. But I definitely I believe that there is a higher power. And I know I talk to I always say him you know every day I think I sort of think of him as my dad you know a little bit. I can't help but because that's the age I grew up in. You know and I like to think he's a good person you know and not the one I mean when I see all the killings and the wars and that's hard for me to you know to take. You know I have one last question for you how would you like to be remembered. Well that goes back to this. I mean I'd like to think somebody said it earlier I'd like to be remembered as somebody who was a good person was a good human being and tried to do for others. And I know when I have people interviewing me I always say please I said I'm working very hard to do good things for the community and community wherever I am because not only am I involved here I'm in velvet Florida I'm involved with you know things around the country and internationally. So are theaters internationally so you know it just I just hope I am remembered for trying to help others. And I always they always say if you can help one person you've done good job. Well I hope I've helped somebody and I continue to do it. Well nonetheless we thank you so much. And by far and long you are helping every single person here and everybody everything that you do and it is noticed everywhere. Thank you. Thank you so much. Very grateful. Thank you.