

Robert "Woody" Woodland

interview by Mary Atai, August 2019



Robert and Barbara Woodland

Reverend Woodland has been the minister of the Community Church of New Boston since 1982.

Mary Atai: Interview with Reverend Robert "Woody" Woodland by Mary Atai for the New Boston Historical Society, on August 2nd, 2019.

Mary Atai: Woody, let's start with your childhood, because I think who we are comes from how we were raised. So, tell me as much as you can about your childhood.

Robert Woodland: Well, I was the adopted son of Howard and Katherine Woodland, and I do believe my biological father was JFK, but that's another story for another time. (Woody likes to joke that he could be JFK's son, since he is adopted). So, I was born in Washington, DC, and then we lived in Arlington. My dad worked at the Carnegie Endowment for International Affairs. In fact, the overall boss at that time at the Carnegie Endowment was a fellow named Alger Hiss.

Robert Woodland: So, my father was a lifelong Republican, but he would never vote for Richard Nixon. When I was about three or four, we moved to Garden City, New York, because my dad got transferred ... He was a bookkeeper ... to the Carnegie Endowment in New York City, which is right across the street from the UN.

Robert Woodland: So, I grew up in Garden City, and it was a wonderful time to grow up. I mean, it was just a good time. Almost all the fathers in Garden City, New York, worked in New York City, and took the Long Island Railroad in and back. And most of the mothers in those years were home. It might not have been a good year for them, a good time for women, and certainly not for blacks. There were no black people in Garden City, unless somebody had a maid.

Mary Atai: Was this in the 1950s?

Robert Woodland: In the '50s. Yeah. I was born in '45 and I graduated from high school there in '63. Funny, I was at a high school reunion, I guess it was our 50th, so it's been a couple of years ago. There was a football game that we all went to and the high school team was playing a team from Brooklyn, and they were just about all black, and one of my classmates sitting in the stands said, "This is probably the most African American people that have ever come into Garden City since people used to pick up their maids."

Robert Woodland: But it was a nice place to grow up. It was a great high school.

Mary Atai: Were you an only child?

Robert Woodland: Yes. My parents were going to adopt a second child, but they had to take in my grandmother, so as a result, she was with us for a while. Then they put her in a nursing home, but then they couldn't afford to adopt another child. So I was an only child.

Mary Atai: Okay. Were you a religious kid?

Robert Woodland: Not particularly. I don't know if I'm a particularly religious person, to tell you the truth, but I grew up in the church.

Mary Atai: Okay, Reverend.

Robert Woodland: I grew up in the church, you know, in the community church in Garden City, which was a Congregational church. It was a wonderful church, and the ministers were terrific. This fellow named Jim Gettemy went on to become the president of Hartford Theological School. The senior minister after him was Avery Post, who became the president of the United Church of Christ for a period of time afterward. And the fellow that taught us confirmation when I was in 9th or 10th grade was a man named Bob Dewey. He was fabulous, and he ended up writing the confirmation curriculum for the United Church of Christ.

Robert Woodland: Now, my father thought he was too liberal, so as a result, much against my will, when I was in high school, I became a Presbyterian. The Presbyterian minister, he was a wonderful guy, too. He was Dr. Miller in Garden City and was a friend of my father's. My father thought he would be more conservative, so that would be good.

Mary Atai: Do you think these pastors had any effect on your wanting to become a minister?

Robert Woodland: Yes. But the one that probably had the most effect ... Well, Bob Dewey certainly got me interested in explaining how the New Testament was set up, where the writings came from, why the Bible was considered the word of God, but it wasn't dictated by God. You know, it was written by human beings, some of whom were inspired to write it, obviously, probably all of them, but it's not a literal, word-for-word account of what God said, or says.

Robert Woodland: So, I mean, I turned out to be like Bob Dewey, I guess, pretty liberal. But the fellow that had the most effect on me ... I thought when I first got to college about becoming a minister, but then I thought I wasn't religious enough. I mean, I kind of hung around with a conservative group of fellows who were intending to be ministers, and they were praying every second, and I just thought, "I'm probably not cut out for this."

Robert Woodland: But, I met my wife working in the summers up at Geneva Point Camp, which is in Moultonborough. This was a conference center owned by the National Council of Churches, where my father had later transferred to work. We used to go up there as guests on vacation when I was younger, because one of his responsibilities at the National Council ... They had two camps, one there and one in Wisconsin, and he had to visit the camps and go to board meetings there. So, that's how I first started going to camp. When I was 16, I started working there. That's where I met my wife.

Robert Woodland: But the camp manager was a United Church of Christ minister named Bob Ripley, and he was just a character. He was the one who taught me that you could be kind of a regular person and still be a minister, and help people and do what you thought was God's will. So, that was kind of an inspirational place, in addition to my meeting my wife there, back in 1963, the year I graduated from high school.

Mary Atai: And would you say that, at that time when you were growing up, like when you were 16, were you a funny guy, like you are now?

Robert Woodland: I was probably funny looking. I don't know. Yeah. I mean, I guess I always liked to joke around.

Mary Atai: Were you always outgoing and kind of gregarious?

Robert Woodland: I was. In my high school class, I was very fortunate to be named friendliest of the boys. They used to have those polls. I don't know if they do those anymore.

Mary Atai: So, you were never a shy kid when you were young? You were fairly-

Robert Woodland: Well, people that make a lot of noise, sometimes are shy, but they overcome it by making-

Mary Atai: Making all that noise?

Robert Woodland: Yes. Exactly. So I think probably some of that was involved, but yeah. I mean, we liked to joke around. It was a pretty simple time to grow up. Like I say, that there were serious problems in the country, but we didn't know that. We didn't know that women were treated as second-class citizens, or until Martin Luther King came along, most of us growing up were kind of ignorant of the plight of African Americans.

Robert Woodland: It was just a time when you played baseball, or you went home from school, you got a snack, you changed your clothes so you wouldn't rip your school clothes, and then went out and rode your bikes. Or as we got older, we played baseball in baseball season, and football out in the street in front of the house during the fall. It was a simpler time.

Mary Atai: So, what was your first job, other than the camp? What was your first regular job?

Robert Woodland: Well, I used to be a newspaper boy. I used to deliver papers, and that was my first job, I guess. When I was in high school, my father was very smart. When I took driver's ed. and could drive, he told me that I was going to have to pay half the insurance bill that it would cost him for me to drive. So that way, I got a job, and I found a job as an usher at a movie theater.

Robert Woodland: I always tell people I saw "Dr. No" thirty-five times, one of the early James Bond movies. Because not that I liked the movie, although it was a great movie, but after 35 times, even seeing Ursula Andress was a little boring.

Robert Woodland: But, I got this job at Roosevelt Field, which is the field that Lindbergh took off from and flew to Paris. Many years before that, it was an airport. Now it's a shopping mall, and back then they had a movie theater.

Robert Woodland: That's kind of where I began public speaking, because the guy said, "Well, you have a loud voice, and you can ad lib. Get out there," and he gave me a megaphone on the weekends. This went back when movie theaters only had one movie at a time. There weren't six movies to choose from.

Robert Woodland: So you had pretty big crowds on the weekends, so I would go out with this megaphone and people would be lined up to come into the movie theater for the next show, and I would go, "Please keep the line against the buildings. Tickets are available in all parts of the theater, loge, orchestra, and balcony. Please have your money ready at the ticket window so the entrance of patrons into the theater may be speeded up." And I said, "Keep the line against the building," because that's what they told me to tell them. One day, one of the

prettiest girls in our class, and she was brilliant, too.... She was an example of a girl who had very few choices for careers. I mean, you were a nurse, or you were a teacher, maybe a bank teller. That was about it, you know, and she was brilliant.

Robert Woodland: So anyway, she was dating a guy that was in college and they were kind of out in the middle of the sidewalk, in line, and the line was drifting out that way. So, I go out and give my spiel, and this college guy, who I was intimidated by, I thought, says, "Why should we keep the line against the building?" Well, I didn't really know. So, I said, "Well, that's in case the elephants come through." So, he turned around to see if there were any elephants coming, and everybody laughed at him, and they got against the building, so ... it was fun.

Robert Woodland: It was kind of fun to do that, you know. When you've swept up the popcorn, and you showed people to their seats in those days, too, you know, in the-

Mary Atai: With a little flashlight, you'd take them down the aisles?

Robert Woodland: Exactly. Put it on the back of your pants leg so they could follow you when the movie was going, so you wouldn't have the light interfering with anybody watching the movie. So, yeah.

Robert Woodland: And then I worked at camp between my junior and senior years in high school, and then some years afterward. I think I went back the next year. That's when I met Barbi. And our friends, Chuck and Gina went up there, and Barbi's brother met his wife there. It was a great place for guys, because there were like, 15 guys and 35 girls, because they were the waitresses.

Mary Atai: You have a great interest in baseball, so what have you done with baseball in your life? I think you called games, didn't you?

Robert Woodland: I did. I played very ineffectively through Little League. I mean, I was no good. I hit .125 my last year in Little League. I remember somebody threw a curve ball, a 12-year-old kid that could throw a curve ball. I remember being at bat. The ball was coming at me, so I fell down in the dirt to get out of the way, and the umpire says, "Strike." I said, "What?"

Robert Woodland: Next pitch that happened after that, I knew that I wasn't destined for a major league career. But we started announcing games when we played stick ball. That was a big sport in those days, and you had to line up for the team that you were representing. You had to bat left-handed for left-handed batters ... We knew all the batting orders, and all of the right-handed for right-hand batters. And the pitcher, because they used to play with friends that wanted to be ... We all wanted to be sports casters when we found out we weren't going to make the major leagues as players. So, the pitcher would have to announce the game. Well, it was me playing, and it was my first announcing experience.

Robert Woodland: But, yeah. I umpired some in college. I got into refereeing quite by accident when I started at Miami of Ohio, when I used to referee fraternity and intramural on-campus there, football and basketball. And then I umpired some softball.

Robert Woodland: But I've always loved baseball-

Robert Woodland: ... and then in Nashua, when I was working in sports casting, they had a minor league team. The Angels were the first team, and the Pirates, and I used to do their games. And actually, when I had a sports talk show in Nashua, during the baseball strike, we recreated games, because I wanted to go see my girls play. They were both on the same softball team, my girls. I wanted to see them play a game, and I was on 6:00 to 8:00 every night, on the radio, so you couldn't usually get their games, which started at 6:00.

Robert Woodland: So, the baseball strike was going on. I got this idea. Maybe I could do what they used to ... Ronald Reagan used to do this. He recreated baseball games. Now, he used to do Chicago Cubs games on the radio, and in those days, there were no contracts between radio stations and teams. If you could set your equipment up at Wrigley Field in Chicago, where ... He was near there. He was on the radio in Iowa. He could do the home games. And the road games, the Associated Press had what was called, a wire, that would send in ticker tape in his day. What was going on pitch by pitch.

Robert Woodland: And he would read the wire, he had the lineup sheets in front of him. They had crowd noise going, and he had a block of wood with a ... I don't know what he had, but I used a screwdriver head, and "Here's the pitch," and you'd hit the piece of wood with a screwdriver head or something that would sound like a bat hitting a ball.

Mary Atai: It's like a play.

Robert Woodland: Yes. Exactly. In fact, when I interviewed him [Ronald Reagan], I talked to him about that. He loved to talk about that. It was great fun, but I just did it once a week during the baseball strike. The first time I did it was just to see my girls play, and I had a friend who was the athletic director. He used to play Strat-O-Matic baseball, which they used the players that were in the major leagues, and each one had a card, and you spun a wheel to see what they did, and the cards were figured out so if the guy hit a lot of home runs, the number one on the card was pretty big space. If he struck out a lot, the number 10 was a big space, and that would tell you what he did.

Robert Woodland: So, this fellow, I called him up, Bill Dodd, and he's now the baseball coach at Souhegan. He's been doing that for years. But he was the athletic director and the baseball coach. So, he thought this would be fun. So, we played an

imaginary game between us. We had the Red Sox playing somebody, and then I got a crowd noise sound effect, and a block of wood, and I recorded the game in advance, you know, just like we were at a real game.

Robert Woodland: And so, I went in the next day, and the general manager wanted to see me. I said, "Oh, boy. Either I'm not working here anymore, or he didn't like that, or both." And I went in there, and he said, "That was great." He said, "I was in a store downtown. The guy had the radio on, and he looks up, and he goes, 'Geez, I think the baseball strike must be over. Listen. There's a game.'"

Robert Woodland: So, we did it once a week for the rest of the baseball strike in that year. That must have been 1971 or '72. So, that was great fun.

Robert Woodland: No. Wait a minute. Let me take that back. It was 1979.

Mary Atai: So, I was thinking you met Barbara when you were 16?

Robert Woodland: I was 17. She was 16.

Mary Atai: Okay. So, you must have dated for quite a while.

Robert Woodland: Four years, all through college.

Mary Atai: All through college, and then when you graduated from college, was that theological school, or was that-

Robert Woodland: No. At that time, I had decided I wasn't religious enough to be a minister.

Mary Atai: So, you still weren't thinking in that direction.

Robert Woodland: So, I became a school teacher for a year.

Mary Atai: What were you teaching?

Robert Woodland: Well, it was supposed to be seventh grade American history. I renamed it, Social Studies and Spitball 101. I hadn't seen a seventh grader since I was in seventh grade, so I kind of thought this was going to be like ... Remember that movie, "To Sir, With Love"? I thought it was going to be like that, you know. Everybody would be ... You know, I would save all these kids and I'd help them out. But, it was an interesting experience. I was in an intern teaching program at Temple [University]. It was for liberal arts graduates.

Robert Woodland: I'd been a radio/TV major in college when I started. Then, when I thought about becoming a minister, I thought I should change my major. Bob Ripley, this minister that we knew, was married to Barbi's cousin and was the camp manager. I talked to him about it, and he said, "Well, don't become a religion

major, because you'll retake the same courses in seminary." So, I became a History major.

Robert Woodland: I taught History that one year, and I was a regular teacher, but I supervised once a week. That was student teaching, and if I'd stuck with it, I would have ended up with a master's degree in education. They took liberal arts graduates and turned them into teachers, and you got a Master's in Education at Temple. So, we lived in Philly the first year we were married.

Mary Atai: How did you really feel about teaching?

Robert Woodland: Well, there were parts of it I liked. But I wasn't a good disciplinarian.

Mary Atai: No. I can imagine you really wouldn't be. You wouldn't love that.

Robert Woodland: No. The seventh graders sensed that. But we had some interesting experiences, and there was one ... I still remember. It was 1967/68 school year, so there was a lot going on. It was a pretty wealthy town. It was Abington, that was the town, right outside of Philadelphia, and they had been at the Supreme Court, interestingly enough. They had been taken to the Supreme Court about prayer in school.

Robert Woodland: So, we were instructed that you could not use the word prayer, but they kind of compromised and they said you'd have a moment of silence at the beginning of school every day. And any excuse to get silence in my room. Even the home room was a good idea, so that worked out.

Robert Woodland: But I remember the one time I violated the rule. It was in June. I was already not going to be back there the next year, and it was the morning, I didn't know, after Bobby Kennedy had been shot. I watched the primaries the night before, and he'd won, and it was pretty late. It was in California, so it was midnight and I went to bed.

Robert Woodland: I was in school not an hour before the kids came in, and it must have been June 6th, I guess, and there was this thing on the P.A. [Public Address loudspeaker in the classroom.] So, they were running the news on the P.A., something about Senator Kennedy being shot ... I thought they were replaying something to do with the President being assassinated. I went down to the office. I said, "What are you playing down here?" "Well," they said, "You didn't hear? Senator Kennedy was shot after his victory speech in California.

Robert Woodland: And so, at the beginning of school that day, I said, "We'll have a moment of silence," and I said, "And anyone that believes in prayer, can say a silent prayer for Senator Kennedy and their family, if you'd like to do that," you know, because he's been shot.

Robert Woodland: But after the day Martin Luther King was shot, the next morning, we weren't allowed to mention that, and us, teaching American history and social studies. We did current events.

Robert Woodland: There was one section of town that was mostly African American, and sadly, most of those kids were in the lower rosters. It was based by ability, so, supposedly, these classes, and so most of them, were the lower roster kids. But I couldn't mention that.

Robert Woodland: One time, we were talking about Presidents as part of the curriculum, and I still remember this. This was a seventh grade class girl, who looked like she might have been 16. I mean, she was a large girl, and certainly older than 12 or 13, who had been held back a couple of years, I think. Ruby Ferguson her name was, and she put her hand up. We were discussing Presidents. She said, "Mr. Woodland, how come we've never had a black President?" She might have used the word, Negro President. I'm not sure. In those days, the word was just changing.

Robert Woodland: I said, "Boy, that's an excellent question, Ruby. Who can answer that?" And this little black boy puts his hand up, and I said, "Paul, you go ahead. What do you think?" He said, "That's because we black men too stupid, Mr. Woodland." I said, "Does everyone believe that?" And Charlie Underwood who was a little white boy that was in that class, put his hand up. He said, "That's not true, Mr. Woodland. Black people are just as smart as white people, some of them smarter."

Robert Woodland: I said, "Thank you," and then we talked a little bit more. We discussed slavery. We talked about that and segregation. But, I remember we couldn't mention that Martin Luther King had been shot.

Robert Woodland: And then the next day, I had gone to the grocery store in the morning. No. I guess it was the morning after Bobby Kennedy was shot ... Or not the morning after, but he was shot on a Tuesday night. They had his funeral, it was on Saturday. And I was in the store, and the funeral had been at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and the train ... They had him on a train that came down from New York to Washington, and he's buried at Arlington National Cemetery next to his brother, and went in the grocery store. And some kids, African American kids, had been hit by the train. I guess they tried to get too close or something. The people lined the tracks from New York to Washington. It was really something to see. And a lot of them were African Americans. I mean, Bobby Kennedy meant a lot to them. And here, these two men had been killed within a couple of months of each other.

Robert Woodland: And these guys in the grocery store are laughing because a couple of African American kids had gotten hit by the train because they got too close to the tracks. And this is outside Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. One white man says to the other, "Hey, did you see those two dumb n----rs?" They got hit by the train. They're so stupid." It was just-

Mary Atai: Ignorant.

Robert Woodland: ... the way the world was. It was a different world. It was that summer after that, that I decided to try to go to seminary. I woke up one morning and felt like I should do that. I didn't hear any voices, or you know, but I had this feeling that I should do that. And so, I went down there to Andover Newton and talked to them, and got my papers in, and references, and I got accepted. Barbi was pregnant with our first child. We were at camp for the summer. We moved out of our apartment in Philadelphia to her parents' house in Littleton, Massachusetts, and after camp was over, we were there a week or two, but somebody that I'd worked with at the camp, their daughter had worked at the camp, and when she got home, their church had a new Methodist minister. Methodist ministers change pretty frequently because they're appointed by the district superintendent, and they'd always had an assistant minister, but he didn't want an assistant minister. He wanted a youth director.

Robert Woodland: So, she told her parents about me. They told him. He called me and I went down and met with him, so it was a wonderful thing for us, because we didn't know how we were going to pay any bills. We were able to move. They had a manse. The church owned a house that the assistant minister always lived in, so we lived in that, so we had no rent, and they paid the utilities.

Mary Atai: What city was that?

Robert Woodland: It was in Waltham, Massachusetts, the Immanuel United Methodist Church, and I did the youth groups there. We had no rent. They paid the utilities and they paid me a grand total of \$50.00 a week, so we made it by. Our first daughter, our oldest daughter, was born in October of that year. I started school in September, so it was-

Mary Atai: It was hectic.

Robert Woodland: Yeah.

Mary Atai: So, the ministry wasn't exactly a calling for you. You kept thinking about it.....

Robert Woodland: I did keep thinking about it. Yes. I felt like it was some kind of call to do that. Most people don't have calls as dramatic as Moses or Isaiah, or something like that, you know. Maybe there are some people that do, but ... I also found out that there were kind of liberal parts of the church as well as conservative, and you didn't have to believe that the Bible was literally dictated by God to people, as some people do.

Robert Woodland: So, yeah. I was at Andover Newton for three years, and then graduated. We had a wonderful time there. It was a great group of kids. It was kind of a blue collar church, and I guess it was mostly white, except the advisor of the youth group

was African American. He was a great guy, McKinley Hackett. He and I had a lot of fun together.

Robert Woodland: We took the kids on a trip to Washington. Most of them had never been to Washington, DC. We took a trip to New York City, stayed at the church that I was at there, that I had grown up in, the Presbyterian church that I grew up the last couple of years of my high school life in. So, it was a good experience for me, and it was for those kids. I still hear from a couple of kids in that youth group, on occasion.

Robert Woodland: Then, we went out to Meadville, Pennsylvania, where I was again, the Youth Minister. Now, I had always been wanting to be, after I found out I wasn't going to be a major league baseball player, a sportscaster.

Robert Woodland: So, out there, as the Youth Minister at a big church, I got into a-

Mary Atai: So, the Youth Minister, does that mean you didn't give the sermons on Sunday?

Robert Woodland: I did. Usually once a month, he'd have me preach. There were three ministers there, when I first went there, and a full-time music director. I mean, it was a big church, seated 400 people. Or when he went on vacation, but later ... I was there ... Let's see, 1971 to '79, so eight years. And eventually, the associate minister retired first, so then there were two of us there. So, I did a lot more calling and stuff than I used to do.

Robert Woodland: And then when the minister retired, while they were looking for a minister, I was the senior, the only, minister at the church, in addition to the lady that was the minister of music. But she was called director of music. She'd been the minister of music. She and Sam Gorton, who's the wonderful lady at our church, that does the music, are similar. We used to call her the Director of Music, and Don Chapman suggested to me that, "Why don't we make her a Minister of Music, because she ministers to a lot of people?" Not just for music, just the kind of person she is. And I said, "Boy, that's a good idea. I only wish I had thought of it." The session approved that, and that's what we did.

Robert Woodland: Becky was very much like her. In fact, I just wrote her a letter recently, and I was telling her about the choir. We're going to go to New York City. She's had a terrible stroke, but she eventually had gotten married, so her husband was ... sad that she can't play music any more. She was a wonderful musician. And the choir was big, with 30 people in the choir. It was a big church choir, and she was great. I had a lot of fun with her.

Robert Woodland: She had come here at one time. She was up on vacation when she stopped by, and she brought the bell choir here. Actually, we had a bell choir at that church, and they came and played here, one of my early years here, and she met Sam, I think. I don't think she would probably have remembered her. That was many years ago.

Robert Woodland: But, I was telling her about the choir and going to Carnegie Hall, and you know, I wrote her just to see how she was doing, and said what a great influence she'd had on me, teaching me how important music was in worship. I mean, she was just great.

Robert Woodland: So, I was there eight years. But I also got into sportscasting there, because as Youth Minister, we started a church basketball league.

Robert Woodland: The Catholic church had a gym. So did our church, but it was a very small gym in our building. I used to supervise the gym in the afternoons, and kids, whoever wanted to come in, they didn't have to be church kids, could come in and play.

Robert Woodland: So, we started up a church league, and played games on Saturdays at the Catholic Church gym and a bunch of churches had teams. The Y had a couple of teams, so I used to referee a lot of those games. Sometimes, I'd do seven or eight games on a Saturday. That was pretty tiring, but anyway ...

Robert Woodland: I'd do that, but then I knew the fellow that had to be in the gym most of the time, too, to keep it open, because it had to be open for the Catholic church, so it was Dave Hanahan, who was our local station's play by play guy. So, he and I got to be friends.

Robert Woodland: So, one day, he said, "What if my color guy can't go to the basketball game Tuesday night?" One of the first games of the year is down at Warren, Ohio. He says, "Do you want to come? You could do that." I said, "Well, that'd be great." Always dreamed of doing this, you know.

Robert Woodland: So, I went down with him. I was all excited about it. I still remember this. And I was just in awe of watching him set up the equipment, and then talking into the microphone. It was really very exciting for me.

Robert Woodland: I got home and said to Barbi, "Did you hear the game? How did I do?" She said, "Well, I forgot that's where you were," because I was out almost every night. That church had meetings and meetings. And she said, "I forgot you were going there." I said, "Aw, this is probably the only time to do it."

Robert Woodland: Then, they started doing games on the FM. They had both an AM and an FM for this local station, which is about the only station you could hear in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

Robert Woodland: The station manager was a Roman Catholic. He thought it was a hoot to get a Presbyterian minister on the radio. So, I started doing the games on FM, the county league games, as the play-by-play guy. And then I moved up.

Robert Woodland: Oh, first I was the color guy for Dave on the football and basketball games. Then I did the FM games, and then, when Dave went into something else, I started

doing play-by-play for Meadville High and Allegheny College football. I called Meadville high basketball and an occasional Allegheny College basketball game.

Robert Woodland: So, I got into sports casting, which was great. Then, the manager wanted me to do a commentary on the news every night. At 6:15, they had sports commentary, and I would come in and record these in the morning. Sometimes I'd do two or three at a time, and then they'd play them at night.

Robert Woodland: One time we had a church dinner, and somebody walked in and I said, "Hi. How are you?" to whoever it was, and he said, "Woody, how could you be here? I just heard you on the radio." I said, "Oh, that was taped." But it was funny. At the church door, you know, when people are going out, they'd like, say hi. They might discuss the sermon, or just discuss something, but people, if they don't know what to say, I'd get these ... Especially, I had these professors at Allegheny College in the congregation. They'd come out and say, "Woody, do you think Allegheny should have gone for a first down in the fourth quarter, or punt it?" You know?

Mary Atai: You're a natural for this.

Robert Woodland: Well, I talk a lot, you know.

Robert Woodland: I used to do the P.A. for football and basketball during my senior year in high school. They had tryouts, and the lady that ran the drama program at our high school would judge you. My friend, who wanted to be a sportscaster, Dick Sand and I got chosen. So, we were the P.A. announcers for football and basketball.

Robert Woodland: The lady that chose us, her name was Inez Spires. She was the speech teacher and also the drama coach at the high school. If our high school is really known for one thing ... In fact, I can always get people that I don't know, not so much anymore because the soap opera is not on anymore, but used to be if somebody asked me to go see somebody I didn't know, and who might not be in the church, or something, I would come in, and we'd talk and they were watching the soap opera. If I was kind of having trouble breaking the ice, I would say, "Joe, is that a soap opera?" I said, "Do you ever watch 'All My Children'?" "Oh, yes. Always watch it. I said, "Well, I went to high school with Susan Lucci." She was a year behind me in high school. Well, then they'd want to talk, you know?

Robert Woodland: I read an interview with Susan one time, who was probably one of the most successful graduates of Garden City High School, and she gave a lot of credit to Mrs. Spires, the drama teacher, for going into drama, and she's a wonderful actress. So, she gave credit to Mrs. Spires. She was a year behind me in high school, but she was fabulous. They did West Side Story. She was Maria. She had a wonderful singing voice, too. I guess she's filled in on Broadway a couple of times over the years, so ... But we're getting way off subject.

Mary Atai: So how about your time with the McGovern campaign? Did any of your announcing experience lead into that? Are we getting up to that timeframe?

Robert Woodland: Well, yes. Yes. Well, first of all, in 1972, when he ran for President, I was in Meadville, and we were just volunteers in the campaign. In fact, I almost got fired from the church for that.

Mary Atai: Really? Because you were taking sides?

Robert Woodland: It was quite a Republican church. Yeah. We were trying to stop the war, you know? He was a hero to me. One thing I did do in '72 that was kind of fun was, I filled in. They had a voter registration rally downtown, and the fellow that was running the campaign, Jeff Parker, whom I just had lunch with the other day ... We've been friends ever since. He and his wife, Michelle are wonderful people. They were college students at the time. They're a little bit younger than us.

Robert Woodland: But we volunteered at the campaign. We had our second daughter born just before we went to Meadville, and Barbi would bring the kids to the headquarters and she'd do a lot of the secretarial work and answering the phones, and licking envelopes, and so forth.

Robert Woodland: So, anyway, they had a voter registration rally on the common, and Mama Cass Elliot was supposed to come, from the Mamas and the Papas.

Mary Atai: Loved her.

Robert Woodland: She was delayed in Erie because there'd been threats on her life. So, people were starting to leave. It was a big crowd there. So, Jeff says, "We need somebody that can speak." He said, "Woody, get up there and say something in the microphone. Try to keep these people from leaving." I said, "I don't think that's a good idea." Well, the assistant minister at the Methodist church, (we did a lot of stuff together. We used to do the UNICEF drives and youth stuff. He was a great guy). His name was Dan Stensen. He was originally from Brooklyn.

Robert Woodland: He says, "Yeah, Woody. Go ahead. Get up there." He says, "I dare you to say, 'I want to make one thing perfectly clear'," the old Nixon line. So, I did get up there, and the very first thing I said was, "I'd like to make one thing perfectly clear. I'm not speaking for our church. I'm just speaking for myself." Then I gave a little talk about McGovern and ...

Robert Woodland: And she did finally come. I was a little disappointed we didn't get to sing California Dreaming together, or something, but that would have ruined her, because I'm a terrible singer. But, she did come and speak, finally.

Robert Woodland: The paper covered this. We had a daily paper out there. They didn't put in that line of mine. Boy, the minister was pretty angry about that, and he never could understand why we were so much against the war in Vietnam. He said more

people die on the highways every year, then. Well, that didn't seem like the same thing to me. But he was a wonderful guy.

Robert Woodland: He had stood up for civil rights. I mean, we had black kids coming in the church to play basketball, and there were kids, people in town, that didn't like that, you know, but that's ... He was very good on that issue. Not so good on the war.

Robert Woodland: So, anyway, that was '72, and of course we'd lost 49 states and carried one, Massachusetts.

Robert Woodland: So, then in '84, I was doing news in Nashua. 1983 this was, in the summer. I used to get out to pick up the paper, the Telegraph ... I think it was the afternoon paper in those days ... to see if there was any news I should know about in town.

Robert Woodland: So, I was down picking up the paper, and they had the USA Today there, which was new around that time. I'd never seen that paper. So I picked it up. It was an interesting paper. We still get it. But, there was a little article in there. George McGovern was thinking of running for President in the 1984 election. I said, "Wow." I said, "I wonder if I could get to talk to him. I would be thrilled to do this."

Robert Woodland: So, I called Washington. I actually got a phone number. I called. It was his office. He wasn't in the Senate anymore. Had an office. And the lady there said, "Oh, well, he's-" I told her who I was. I was Woody Woodland calling from New Hampshire, wanted to see if I could do a little interview with Senator McGovern, who apparently is thinking of running for President.

Robert Woodland: "Well, he's at an inn down in Tennessee." She said, "I'll give him the message." So, she took down my number. Just before the next newscast, the phone rings ... Newsroom, got a phone call, pick it up. He says, "Woody, it's George McGovern." "Holy cow. This is wonderful."

Robert Woodland: So, I tape the whole thing with him, and I gave it to the Associated Press. I sent it along, that he was thinking of running, and I had the voice on it because we shared news. That's how the Associated Press collected news. Then I wrote him a letter, and I said, "You know," I said, "You're my hero," I said, "But you know, I can't do much for you because I'm doing news. I can't be endorsing a candidate." That's before news got the way it is now. We had to be impartial, and we tried our best.

Robert Woodland: So, I said, "If there's anything I can do behind the scenes, I'd do anything I could to help you." I heard back from them. It was some guy that was running his campaign, and he said they were thinking of making a trip to New Hampshire. Could I suggest any things he could do. So, we set up a coffee at a friend of ours' house in Merrimack.

Robert Woodland: They owned the Merrimack Deli, where I used to work part-time before I started at the church. On Sundays, I would work at the delicatessen over there, because we needed extra money. That's when Barbi was getting her registered dietician courses in, and so we set that up, and then Jeff and I ... Jeff had moved up here, and he actually ... That's the guy from the McGovern campaign ... got me my first radio job in Nashua, because there were no Presbyterian churches looking for ministers. So, I was full-time in radio, and I was working at the deli, and when we went to church, we went to the Methodist church over in Merrimack, St. James, which is a nice church.

Robert Woodland: So, anyway, they called, and we set this up. That's where we met George. He came to the ... I still remember. I walked in their house, and everybody was saying hello, and I said, "Hello, Senator." He said, "You're Woody Woodland." It's my voice. Because he had talked to me on the phone. I was thrilled he knew my name, you know. And I said, "And here's Barbi."

Robert Woodland: Jeff and I drove him up to Dartmouth, where somebody else was going to drive him. He was speaking up there. And on the way up, we asked him a bunch of questions. But, I remember before we went, we stopped at ... Burger King used to have a salad bar. We went in there. We were having Whoppers, or whatever, then as we were walking around the salad bar, I said to Michelle, Jeff's wife, I said, "Did you ever think we'd be at the salad bar with George McGovern?" I mean, it was just amazing to me.

Robert Woodland: And so, the fellow that was running his campaign had to drop out of doing that, and the guy in Washington that was the chairman, called me up, asked me if I would do this. And I said, "Boy, that's a big decision." Got to leave the radio station. But they paid me \$50.00 more a week than the radio station did, only I knew it wasn't going to be for a long time, unless he pulled a miracle off and became elected President, or something, you know.

Robert Woodland: But, it was a wonderful experience. I mean, he's a wonderful man. Whether you liked his politics or not, he's just a wonderful guy. And he's the son of a minister. His dad was a minister. He and Bob Dole, that was a great friend of his, put together a lot of the nutrition programs, school lunch, school breakfasts with their programs that they introduced bills to get passed.

Robert Woodland: Women, Infant, and Children Program, feeding pregnant women, and then women after they had kids, so they could get good nutrition for poor women

Robert Woodland: We had a wonderful time together. He had a great sense of humor. I mean, I remember one of the first times I was his official campaign coordinator in New Hampshire, he had been in the debate up in Dartmouth. So, on the way back, he wanted me to ride in the car. He had secret service guys, and it was the first time I had ridden in a car with secret service.

Robert Woodland: So, Barbi was going to drive our car back. We got in the car, and he says, "Woody," he said, "How do you think I did?" I said, "I thought you were great." He said, "Do you think I should have said this, or this?" I said, "You're asking my advice?" He was just a very down-to-earth guy, and even after the campaign ... We finished fifth out of eight, so it was not a great success, vote-wise, but it was just a wonderful experience, and he was received very warmly from people that said, "I should have voted for you in '72." I mean, they took a poll a year later, after that election, and he would have won if they had the election that day, because Nixon turned out to be very bad. I mean Watergate and all that stuff was coming out.

Mary Atai: Yes. Big mistake.

Robert Woodland: But, George was just a nice man. Got along. Some of his best friends were Republicans. Barry Goldwater was a good friend of his. Bill Buckley was a good friend of his. I remember having lunch one time. Barbie and I went down ... George owned an inn in Connecticut later on, and I had heard Bill Buckley on the radio say he was going to go do an interview at George McGovern's inn.

Robert Woodland: So, I called George up. I said, "George, I'm doing these interviews for this magazine I'm working for. Could you give me Bill Buckley's phone number? Do you think I could get an interview with him? He said, "Done." He says, "He's speaking here Sunday. Why don't you come down?" He said, "If you get down here, you can stay for free. We'll feed you."

Robert Woodland: So, I got somebody to preach for me. I was already working here [in New Boston] ... Came down and we had brunch with him and Bill Buckley, which was a funny experience, because Buckley was funny. George was funny. They were complete opposites, but they were both very funny.

Mary Atai: Yeah. That's a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

Mary Atai: So, you were in New Boston when you started working for the campaign.

Robert Woodland: Yeah. It was 1983.

Mary Atai: But you thought it was only temporary here, correct?

Robert Woodland: Yes. But I also thought, "I'll probably get fired for this." I kept debating how to announce this to people. I was just part-time, and so I was working at the radio station. I was going to give that up.

Mary Atai: When you came here, wasn't the church in a bit of a turmoil?

Robert Woodland: November, 1983, was the first time I was here. In fact, the first week I was supposed to come, the chairman of the committee on minister relations called me up. He was a character. He would always call you by your last name. Just,

"Woodland." I'd say, "Yes?" "It's McBee here." His name's Barrett McBee. He said, "Can you preach next week somewhere?" I said, "Well, where?" He said, "I can't tell you that." I said, "You can't tell me?" He said, "No, but it's 10:00." I said, "Okay."

Robert Woodland: So, I got somebody to fill in for me at the delicatessen, which was where I was working in Merrimack. In fact, my father-in-law filled in.

Mary Atai: So, now at this time, you hadn't really done any preaching for a bit, right?

Robert Woodland: No. Well, wait a minute. Let me make sure I've got it right here. This was 1982. Okay. This was 1982, in November, and yes.

Mary Atai: You were working for the news.

Robert Woodland: No, when we first moved here, I had preached in Litchfield. That's all I did. They didn't want anyone to moderate the session, or visit any sick people, or ... But they wanted a preacher, so I used to go over there on Sundays and preach. That's all. And Litchfield, that was the Presbyterian church for the Presbytery.

Robert Woodland: So, then McBee calls me up and it's 1982, November, and so then he says, "I'll call you Saturday and tell you where it is." So, I got my father-in-law to fill in at the deli for me, Barbie's dad, and so, Saturday night, the phone rings. "This Woodland?" I said, "Yes." "It's McBee here. Don't go." I said, "Don't go where? You haven't told me where ... " "It's New Boston," he says, "But, don't go. There's going to be a confrontation," and he hangs up.

Robert Woodland: So, I didn't go. Then he calls me back up, and says go the next Sunday. He thought there was ... I guess at the Presbytery meeting, Andy Templeman, who was the minister, had been removed, and he was pretty mad, and there was a bunch of people mad, and he didn't know if there was going to be some rioting in front of Dodge's store, or in front of the church, or something. That's what he told me.

Robert Woodland: So, I went the next Sunday, and then after I was there a couple of weeks, I think I did a few hours a week, if anybody needed to be visited, or anything like that. But, for a couple of weeks I did this, and I'm the session man, and they were going to decide whether they should invite me to stay longer or get an interim minister, or something that would be more full-time.

Robert Woodland: So, I said to the session, "Why don't I wait outside so you can talk, and I won't be here, and it'll be fine." So, I'm walking around outside, and it's dark. I mean, it's November, and a voice behind me says, "Hey, what do you think you're doing there?" So, I turned around. I could see a shadowy figure, and I said, "Well, who wants to know?" He said, "I'm Chief Ballou. I'm the Police Chief here." I said, "Oh. Well, then I'll tell you what I'm doing." So, I told him.

Robert Woodland: So, they wanted me to stay, so I stayed, and the hours built up a little bit, but I was still part-time and that continued for several years. But, in 1983, now, I'd been there a year, and there I was, agreeing to be George McGovern's state coordinator. So, I thought, "Geez, getting involved in a political campaign. I'll probably get booted out of here pretty quick." So, I'm debating when to announce this, and one Sunday in the Globe, I looked at the paper before church. And David Nyan, who used to be the political writer at the Boston Globe, had called me that week. He got an interview, and he wrote a column called "McGovern's Man in New Hampshire." I wish I could get a copy of that. I still don't have a copy of that.

Robert Woodland: But anyway, it was all about me, in an interview we did one day. So, I said, "I guess I should announce this." So, I announced it, and I mean, one of the prominent people in the church at that time, was Roland Sallada, who was our state rep. Roland and I became great friends. I mean, he was just fun.

Robert Woodland: So, he thought this was a hoot, you know. So, nobody objected, and a couple of weeks later in the first debate, I started on this job, and George stopped at the church. I was waiting at the debate in Hanover. We were going to go up after church, Barbie and I. So, he came to church and Roland says to me, "Woody. I'm going to wear my Reagan button in the choir loft." I said, "I think the Senator wouldn't get ticked off. That would be great. But his wife talked him out of doing that. Marian was another great lady.

Robert Woodland: Marian had a wonderful story one time about ... She used to work at the clothes-making place in Manchester. And she said, "Boy, one time, Woody," she said, "in 1960, the Democrats brought a candidate in there and of course, there were no cell phones," and she said, "He had to use a desk and a phone, and he asked me if it would be okay to use ours and I said, 'Sure.'" So, I let him use the desk. I said, "Who was it? 1960? Was that ... " She said, "Yes. It was John Kennedy." "Holy Cow! Another one of my heroes." I said, "He was a pretty handsome guy, wasn't he, Marian?"

Mary Atai: And possibly your father, right?

Robert Woodland: Yeah, and possibly my father. (Woody's joke about being adopted). And Marian says, "Well, he was good looking, but nothing as good looking as Roland."

Mary Atai: Wow. That's a nice thing for a wife to say.

Robert Woodland: At two other times, way after the election was over, and I was no longer working for him, George came up to the church. One time, his secretary that he had for many years, Ruth Clevolous, had been looking for a house in a small town. She wanted to retire and get out of Washington, DC area, so I said, "Come to New Boston." So, she bought a house, and he came up at the closing. So, he came to church that Sunday.

Robert Woodland: He had told me he was coming, so I kind of announced at church that next week, George McGovern would be here. So, the next Sunday, some lady comes running up to me before church and she says, "Woody, Woody, Woody, George McGovern just came into church." I said, "Well, I told you last week he was coming." She said, "Yeah, but nobody believed you." I said, "Well, if you can't believe a minister, who can you believe?"

Robert Woodland: And then another time, he came up and he spoke about what he and Bob Dole were trying to do, even though they were both retired from the Senate, bringing the school lunch program to third world countries, and he spoke at the church on that evening, some Sunday night.

Robert Woodland: I would drive him around whenever he came to New Hampshire for anything. He sometimes spoke for peace groups, or if he had a book he was promoting, he'd go to bookstores and we'd take him.

Mary Atai: So, when all this was happening, you had a very important position for George McGovern, and you were at a new church that had had some issues, and you were trying, I'm sure, to please the people and keep peace. Did you feel you were terribly stressed?

Robert Woodland: I don't remember that. I felt like it was pretty exciting.

Mary Atai: You know, because you seem like a guy that lets stuff roll off your back, but I could be totally wrong. You seem like life just happens to you and you just go with it, not like you're trying to direct things, you know, like most people are trying to direct their lives.

Robert Woodland: Well, no. I've never been somebody that plans way ahead, or anything. No. I mean, I get more stressed now with people's problems, probably, than I did. I mean, the church was kind of trying to rebound. One of the first things I did, thanks to Jay and Dotty Martin, they said, "Why don't you come to our house for dinner after church?" I was just commuting from Merrimack. We didn't live here then.

Robert Woodland: "And then, we'll tell you the people at church that are most upset about what happened to the previous minister. Maybe you could visit them." That was a very good idea. So, I visited everybody that was a fan of Andy's. Andy was brilliant, but he had some problems.

Robert Woodland: And like the Harvells down the street, or the Nixon family, and various folks, who had been very supportive of Andy, and I just tried to make friends and say, "Look. It wasn't my idea to get the poor guy fired, but I'm here. I'm just here for a short period, probably, but I'm doing the best I can, and I hope you won't leave the church." So, we tried to mend the fences as best we could, but, well, I mean, it was pretty busy.

Robert Woodland: The campaign was really intrusive. Barbi drove George a couple of times, too, but you know, we had three kids at home, and that was really stressful for her. She was commuting ... I'm trying to think where she was working at that time. I think down in Lowell. She had gotten her master's degree and became a registered dietician, had her internship, and she was commuting to Lowell. But, I wasn't home, you know, sometimes days at a time. I mean, we'd be traveling all over the place. Just in New Hampshire, but ... So, that was real stressful for her.

Mary Atai: It seems like mostly you were always doing two things at once.

Robert Woodland: I guess that's true.

Mary Atai: You know, you always had your life here, and life over here.

Robert Woodland: That is true. That's a good point.

Mary Atai: So, think back, and think of how you can answer this best. When you first came to New Boston, I'm very interested to know. What did you think all around about New Boston? Of course, it was different then than it is now, but

Robert Woodland: Well, it was a small town. I thought the people were very nice.

Mary Atai: Okay. Did you love it, or did you have reservations? Did you-

Robert Woodland: No. I didn't have any reservations. I thought, "It's a nice group of people, a nice little church here." It was disrupted because the minister ... Well, Andy kind of liked turmoil. He would've been a great college chaplain, because he would challenge kids, I think, but he was brilliant, much smarter than I am. He was teaching Greek to a lady in the church. Very intelligent.

Robert Woodland: But, he liked confrontation and turmoil.

Mary Atai: And this is a rather traditional, non-confrontational town.

Robert Woodland: I think that's true. Yeah.

Mary Atai: All right. So then, you didn't know that you were going to stay, and you didn't think that you probably were, and ...

Robert Woodland: No. So, after the campaign, you know, I got a job ... What was the first job? I guess I got back and I became the manager of a radio station in Derry for a while, WDER, and then I worked for a couple of magazines. One of them was Nashua Magazine. That's now New Hampshire Magazine. And then I got a job at WSMN, which I'd worked at before. I worked there for a while, and I did radio, and then I finally got ... the best talk show I ever had. I'd kind of gone from doing a sports talk show to doing a political talk show, and I got this job at WGIR, which had a wonderful ... It was the biggest audience I had for a talk show. You

could always get calls. It was wonderful. All the politicians wanted to come on. It was great, you know, all the presidential candidates. It was a fun place.

Robert Woodland: But that only lasted a short time. That was like a year and three quarters or something. And now... Let me think about this. This must have been 2000. I had a lot more hours at the church than I used to have. I would do that morning radio show at GIR, and then I'd come over here.



Woody interviews Senator John McCain

Robert Woodland: So, at that point then, when I lost that show, the church made me full-time, and gave us a nice raise, and we were able to survive that. So, that's when I really became-

Mary Atai: So, you stopped being in news and radio, and became a full-time minister.

Robert Woodland: Yes. Right.

Robert Woodland: Although actually ... Let me think about this. Yes. But then I actually did another morning show in Manchester after that, but I was always back in by 9:30 or something, so it didn't really interfere with anything. Yeah. But the church is very supportive, very tolerant. They obviously know my politics. This is a pretty Republican town, you know, but I try to be respectful of everybody.

Robert Woodland: What did a lady say to me the other day? We're doing a series this summer on women in the Bible. We did the story of Ruth and Naomi, and of course, Ruth is a Moabite and Naomi, her mother-in-law, is Hebrew. Then Ruth's husband dies, and Naomi's husband dies. So, here they are. They're both widows. They're in Moab, but Naomi is going to go back to Israel because the famine is over that brought her and her husband to Moab.

Robert Woodland: And so, she has two daughters-in-law, because both their sons have died, too, while they were there. So, she says to them. "You probably want to go back to your families in Moab, you know. Since we're here, and I'm going to go back to Israel." And the one is very sorry. They both loved her very much, and one of them goes back to her family. The other one, Ruth, says, "No. Wherever you go, I will go." Or, "Wherever you die, I will die. Whatever God you worship, I will worship." It's a wonderful story.

Robert Woodland: So, at the end of the sermon after going through this, it hit me. I said, "You know?" "It's just a good thing nobody chanted "Send her back" when they got to Israel and Naomi was Jewish, and Ruth wasn't, you know?"

Robert Woodland: One lady came up to me after church and says, "Why do you always get a Democratic dig in?" But, she was laughing.

Robert Woodland: The people in this town, I think, are very tolerant.

Mary Atai: I find that, too.

Robert Woodland: Just wonderful. If there's any divide in town over the many years, I would say it's a very natural one. It's between people that lived here all their lives, and people that move in. But, you've gotten involved in town. That's been amazing.

Robert Woodland: But, I think the people are very accepting of new people. It's not that they're biased against new people, or something, especially people that become kind of part of the town.

Mary Atai: Yes. I think that's what the long-timers want. They want the new people to be part of the town, not just to live here and go elsewhere for everything. They want them to be part of the town.

Mary Atai: So, can you think of the changes that you've noticed over the years? Obviously, there's a lot more people. What else?

Robert Woodland: No. I think the town is a lot more ... especially in this era now, it's a lot more Democrat. I mean we have Democratic state reps now, you know, all of them. I think New Hampshire has changed. When we first moved to New Hampshire, we lived in Merrimack. I always tell people I went down to the town hall to register and at the clerk's office, she says, "Hey. Democrat or Republican?" I said, "Democrat." She says, "How do you spell that?"

Robert Woodland: But, I mean, the state has changed. It's a state that's a purple state now. But, both our Senators, and both our Congressmen now are Democrats at the moment, and one of them is a Congress woman. The governor's Republican, but our state reps now are Democrats.

Robert Woodland: So, yeah. I think it's a more bipartisan state, or purple state, I guess you could say that makes a difference.

Mary Atai: What are your favorite things about New Boston? You've lived a lot of places, so you have lot to compare.

Robert Woodland: Well, I think ... Usually most places I've lived, I've liked. I think it has a small town nature to it, but it's a town where people come together to try to solve problems. People are very supportive of other people and people in need. And I think, people come to funerals. I mean, when I was in Meadville, very few people ever would go to funerals. I mean, you didn't go to the funeral, even if you were active in the church, I don't remember doing a funeral in the church there.

Robert Woodland: But here, if you get somebody well known, like Bea Peirce who just died, you fill the church because people come, you know. So, I think it's a town where community is very important. Look at the volunteers in this town. It's amazing.

Robert Woodland: You know, we couldn't have done half of what we have done at the church ... The minister doesn't do all these things. It's the people, and the volunteers.

Robert Woodland: Just incredible. Look at the historical society, and look at the fire department.

. I mean, anyone that needs anything gets it. People are amazing.

Mary Atai: Is there anything about the town that you really wish was different, and that you really don't like?

Robert Woodland: Well, I think there are people in need. That's not the town's fault. We do what we can.

Mary Atai: Are there more people in town here that are in need, than we even realize?

Robert Woodland: Yes. I think that is correct.

Mary Atai: It's hard to see it.

Robert Woodland: It is hard to see it, and because of kind of Yankee pride, which is not a bad thing, but people ... I mean, it's very difficult for some people to pick up a phone and say, "I need some help." You know, but sometimes you get that, and so we have the food pantry. People are very generous. The generosity in this town is amazing. I mean, every year at Christmas it's great. We used to do presents for

kids in foster homes. Mrs. Delvacario always had foster kids for many years, she and Frank. So they would get lists of kids ... Most of them were in Manchester in foster homes, and we would get presents for them. She would get a list of what they needed.

Robert Woodland: But we don't do that anymore because we've got so many kids here that are in need, and the amount of money and people not even connected to the church that bring gifts and are part of this, is amazing. And you know, the baskets. We never used to do baskets, food baskets at Christmas and we never had a food pantry, for that matter, until ...

Robert Woodland: I said one time, "Does this town have a food pantry?" "No." So, we put a little closet upstairs in Nan's house, but it's grown far beyond that now.

Mary Atai: It's very nice. I've been in there.

Mary Atai: What is, do you think, the biggest challenge in your position?

Robert Woodland: I think my biggest challenge is, there's a few people that are very needy and have no help and no family, and it's trying to help them.

Robert Woodland: But I think that's a big challenge, and trying to be relevant now with a kind of a new generation of people, you know, who do things differently. I mean, it's an age where everything's on the computer, and everybody's on smart phones. I'm not smart enough to have a smart phone. I do have a flip phone, but you know ... Barbi is very good at that, fortunately.

Robert Woodland: I just can't get over how generous the town's been to the choir and this trip to Carnegie Hall, trying to raise money, for instance, and it's just been amazing.

Robert Woodland: So, you know, I just think it's a great town and as it grows, you just don't want to lose that kind of small town vibe, which is a good thing. But so much goes on here. I think it's amazing for a town this size.

Mary Atai: I totally agree. Now, as far as the church itself, the community church, what do you think is going to be happening there in the next 20 to 30 years?

Robert Woodland: When I retire, I think we'll get obviously, a younger minister. You hire an older one, that'd be a big mistake. I'm pretty old, but they wouldn't do that. I think the worship service might be a little changed to be more contemporary. Other than that, it's hard to foresee.

Robert Woodland: You know what made a big rebound in church attendance when it occurred, was 9/11. I can remember ... I think that was a Monday or Tuesday. We opened the church that night, and I announced on the radio we're opening the church, because I was over there doing my talk show when this happened, at WGIR. I had some listeners there.

Robert Woodland: And a few people just stopped by the church to talk and pray and ... But then, Friday, we said we'd just do a church service, and you couldn't get in the door. I mean, it was amazing. People were just ... Well, that's the biggest attack ever by another country, and then the United States, probably since the War of 1812. I mean, World War I, World War II ... I mean, Civil War was, we were attacking each other, but that was just a huge shake-up of people, I think.

Robert Woodland: So, you don't know. I think the church always tries to respond in any historical situation, to whatever's going on in the world, as well as in the town. So, I think ... Who knows what will take place in the future, but I think the church will try to address that, and still do the things that you try to do, bring comfort to people, and visit the sick, and visit the lonely, and try to help the people that need a little economic help as best you can. I mean, I think this town could use a social worker.

Mary Atai: For the town?

Robert Woodland: For the town, yeah. Because, Peter Flynn and I do the best we can. Peter's a wonderful guy, the town manager. He and I talk about some things he can do, some things I can do, to help people. But, some people need help from a bigger entity, it's very hard to deal with the system that exists. I mean, it was well-intentioned and people that I like, liberals, put a lot of the system in place. But, there's a lot of fear if you've been on the system, of how you get off without immediately losing all your benefits. And then, if you're afraid you haven't had a job for a while, you're afraid that you might not be able to keep a job, and then you've got to figure out how to get back in the system. I think a social worker could be a real help to the town, even if it was in a part-time sort of situation.

Mary Atai: That's a good idea.

Robert Woodland: Peter and I could refer people, and maybe pastors of other churches, if they have people like that, could do that, as well.

Mary Atai: How do you feel about the kind of a fine line that you walk because the church is Presbyterian, but you serve everybody of various denominational backgrounds and sometimes, Catholics?

Robert Woodland: We do. We do.

Mary Atai: And how do you feel about that? Is that hard, or you just do what you do, and ...

Robert Woodland: No. I tell people, this is a line that my wife's heard thousands of times, parishioners hundreds of times. I said, "We're a Presbyterian church, but we're under cover Presbyterians, because we're a community church. And we do have Catholics. I mean, I see people crossing themselves at the end of prayers. So, that's fine. I think that's ... you know, Christians are supposed to do things

together. It doesn't matter to me whether somebody's a Catholic or a Presbyterian-

Mary Atai: But, it strikes me that not every minister could do that as well as you do it. You have to be kind of liberal, and you have to be kind of easy, and very accepting, as they must be accepting of you. It seems to work out beautifully.

Robert Woodland: This church has always been a community church. I mean the minister's been a Presbyterian because that's the kind of government we have. We belong to the Presbytery which installs the ministers. They're chosen by the congregation, but actually, the minister at this church is not a member of the church. Their family probably is, but we're members of the Presbytery, so the Presbytery kind of oversees what they do, and they try to visit now, as a result of what happened here, 37 years ago, whatever, with Andy. They visit every couple of years to make sure everything's okay, rather than getting a call that everything's not okay between the minister and the congregation.

Robert Woodland: I do moderate a church over in Manchester because their minister is a Salvation Army guy, so you have to by Presbytery law, have a Presbytery minister moderate the session, which is the governing body, so I do that once a month. I'm on a committee for people trying to become ministers, kind of oversee that for the Presbytery. But, no. They really are unobtrusive, I guess I would say.

Mary Atai: I would say you're just a person who really enjoys people.

Robert Woodland: Well, yeah. That's absolutely true. I think that's what the gospel's all about, loving one another, you know. We're not very good at it sometimes, but I think that's what we're called to do, and even though we might not share the same beliefs, I think the basic human beliefs, the basic human characteristic in any world religion, and even by most people that would call themselves agnostics, or even atheists, is to care about other people. I think that's what God is most concerned about, that we do that. So, we do the best we can.

Mary Atai: So, you're burying and marrying and baptizing and counseling and feeding people. This would be hard to give up. I hope you plan to continue as long as you possibly are able to.

Robert Woodland: Oh, I think that's one reason I'm still doing it.

Robert Woodland: And it's still paying the bills, but I mean ... Of course, in the midst of this, we've raised three kids, and they were basically about raised by the time we moved over here. We didn't move over here until ... I don't even know. Was it '91, '92, something like that.

Mary Atai: So, quite a while, you were commuting.

Robert Woodland: When we were still in Merrimack with our original kids, and then we had grandchildren, and then two of them. Our daughter could not raise them. I mean, she was in a mess and suffering from alcoholism, and so we got the kids, and we thought, "Well, before they get of school age ... " We got custody. We don't want them to go to the same schools that both their parents went to, and didn't do too well in.

Robert Woodland: So, it was a wonderful time to move here, and so our grandkids grew up here. And then we have three great grandkids across the hall. Yeah. But it's a wonderful place to raise kids. The school here is terrific. I didn't mention the school. It's great. The teachers are spectacular.

Robert Woodland: So, it is a hard thing to let go. I have to give it up some time.

Robert Woodland: I mean, somebody fresh will have new ideas. You know, younger, maybe have a little more energy.

Robert Woodland: But, anyway, it's been a great blessing to be the minister here. I mean, I've just been very fortunate.

Mary Atai: It's a blessing for the town.

Robert Woodland: I think God is tolerant, and I think these people are very tolerant to put up with me.

Mary Atai: Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

Robert Woodland: Well, if people would like to contribute ... No. Just kidding. No. I mean, it's been fun to talk. I've probably told a lot of irrelevant stories there. I apologize, but it's a wonderful experience and a blessing and an honor to be the minister here, and I could never have made it without the people. The church would never still be going without the people of the church and the people of the town, who are very tolerant and supportive and just good people.

Mary Atai: Thank you so much, Woody.

Robert Woodland: Thank you. That was fun.