AN INTERVIEW WITH BOBBY PATTON

Interviewer: Pat Kelly

Oral History Project
Endacott Society
University of Kansas
BOBBY PATTON


M.A., University of Kansas, Speech & Drama, 1962

Ph.D., University of Kansas, Speech Communication, 1966

Service at the University of Kansas

First employed at KU in 1966

Professor of Speech; Drama; Communication & Theatre

Retired in January 1988
Q: It is September 1, 2010. I am Pat Kelly, representing the Endacott Society at the University of Kansas. I will be talking with Bobby Ray Patton, who was professor of Speech and Drama. He was here at KU in the years 1966 to 1988. In 1966 it was called the Department of Speech and Theatre. We might as well start at the beginning. When were you born and where and who were your parents?

A: I was born in Fort Worth, Texas, on December 18, 1935. My dad was Elton Guy Patton and my mother was Violet Daniels Patton. We lived on the south side of Fort Worth, Texas. At the time of my birth my parents owned a small café, that had originally been a trolley car.

When the war started and I was getting ready for school, my father took advantage of an opportunity for a job at Convair, a leading aircraft manufacturer in Fort Worth. He worked for the fire department there. Unfortunately, he had a bad fall from a ladder and injured his back. This was in the time before Workman’s Compensation or any sort of special insurance. So from the time I was about 10 years old, my mother had to be the primary breadwinner for the family, and my father had a series of medical problems and surgeries that resulted from that fall. He had a very uncomfortable life as I was growing up. He was the person who stayed at home. I have a sister Carol, who was born eight years after me. Our father was the primary caregiver for her as she was growing up.
I attended public schools in Fort Worth. We were a lower middle income family and I lived in the same house all the way through high school and college. One historical notation is that we lived only a block from the home of Lee Harvey Oswald. But the strange thing is—and I have talked to other people around—none of us ever saw or heard of him at that time. We went to the same elementary school and would theoretically have been there at the same time. He would have been a few years younger than me. It is unusual that we never saw or heard of him because all the kids played together and knew each other in the neighborhood.

I had a paper route for the Fort Worth Star Telegram that started when I was in junior high school. It provided a fortunate opportunity because each year they gave a scholarship to the news carrier with the best grades. And as a result, I believe I was in the ninth grade when I received the Aiman Carter Jr. Scholarship, which provided full tuition for a year’s study at Texas Christian University. So that immediately gave me the target for college. I was a good student. My parents expected me to do well in school. I did have the good fortune, I think, to have good instructors, good teachers throughout my education.

Q: Did you have any grade school teachers that were particularly influential?

A: Yes. I would say all were influential but my first teacher was Camille Gaines. Mrs. Gaines was a person who was not only demanding in terms of the fundamentals of reading and writing, but she was also able to be compassionate. She let students know that she cared for them. She acclimated me to education as a positive experience. So I think that she laid the groundwork for my success in school, both on an affective as well as on an intellectual basis. I had other good teachers that I remember positively. In junior high school I had a very good math teacher—Mr. Cox was his name. I took my
first speech course in the ninth grade. I learned that I had been mispronouncing a lot of sounds and words growing up in Texas. As a matter of fact, I still have a Texas nasal twang that I started early in life. But I was able to correct a lot of the pronunciations. I learned to pronounce the letter “L,” I think, for the first time. I was positively impressed as I was giving some speeches, by the reaction of students. I received some positive reactions that I think encouraged me along those directions. When I got to high school I became active in theater events, as an actor and as a backstage participant. We did radio shows, radio plays as well as stage plays. I had an outstanding teacher, Merriam Todd, who was an excellent drama instructor.

I was also interested all my life in sports. Unfortunately, I did not have the abilities to measure up to my ambitions nor did I have the size and aptitude that it might have taken to be outstanding. But nonetheless I did play softball and tried to play baseball in high school. I went to a very large high school, Paschal High School in Fort Worth, Texas, which at that time had about two thousand students. So it was a major school and very competitive. I wanted very much to be a basketball player. But my lack of height, speed and abilities kept me from being able to make the varsity team. I did, however, continue to play in Boys Club competition and by the time I was a senior in high school, I coached a 16 and under team. I really enjoyed it and I would have to say I was successful in that we went to the state semifinals and we defeated some teams along the way that were made up of varsity high school players. I had all nonvarsity players on my team. It was a very gratifying experience and it caused me to think that I might be a coach for my career. I thought about that as I went into college.

As I entered college I didn’t have to declare a major that first year. I was able to live at home and by virtue of my scholarship all of my tuition and fees at Texas Christian
University were paid. I still worked part time in a restaurant. I think I started as a dishwasher. I moved up and finally did some grill cooking. The restaurant was a forerunner of today’s fast food places. It was charcoal broiled burgers and fried chicken. I even had a stint—I believe it was my sophomore year in college—when I was allowed to manage the place in the absence of the owner while he was on vacation. But, again, it was low wages, low pay. The job did provide me an opportunity to fund fully my education because while my parents were not in any position to provide money, they readily provided my housing, food and accommodations. I was able to focus on education.

I took a heavy load my first year since the tuition was paid for by my scholarship. I continued to do coaching in Boys Club basketball and took basic college courses. Entering my sophomore year I had decided to follow my high school interests in speech and drama. One of the requirements my sophomore year was to participate in a debate class, and one of the requirements of that class was to participate in an intersquad tournament with Baylor University. I was paired with one of my classmates, Robert Roddy. Rod went on to fame as a radio and television announcer. He was noted for coining the phrase “Come on Down” on The Price is Right. Rod Roddy was scheduled to be my debate colleague at this intersquad debate tournament with Baylor, but Rod, for whatever reasons I’ll never know, did not arrive that Saturday morning. The schedule was already made out. So rather than throwing things out of kilter, they decided to use an upper class student from Baylor, who had come along as a judge, to be my debate partner. Well, the woman who was my debate partner in my first debate was Ann Richards, who went on to be governor of the state of Texas. We had a successful four rounds of debate, winning all four. I enjoyed it thoroughly. She let me see how much
fun it could be. I have to say then that I found an activity where I thought I could excel. It satisfied a lot of my competitive urges that had been focused on athletics.

So from that time on I spent all my extracurricular time, between drama, where I did have opportunities for some excellent roles, and the debate and forensics activities, where it introduced me to travel. I had not had the opportunity to travel that much, and the debate tournaments took me to a number of campuses. We had at that time a part-time debate coach. He was an accountant in town, but he had been a successful debater himself. His name was Worth Dalton. I was also influenced by Edward Pross. Ed was the chair of the department and a very well-regarded scholar in the area of speech communication. He taught me several basic courses, including the debate course that I just mentioned. It so happened that my success in debate, the things that I was doing gave me enough substantiation of my abilities that I felt very much encouraged by that.

My senior year a full-time debate coach was brought in to TCU named Dave Matheny. Dave is still a friend. He resides now in the Houston area. He has a daughter who is a debate coach in the Topeka area. I did have an opportunity to reconnect and see her just a week ago. One value of debate is we make friends with students along the way who are important to us throughout life. I feel fortunate to have been around long enough and to be able to reconnect with many of these people from my past.

When I graduated in 1958 I married Bonnie Ritter two days after my graduation. I graduated on Friday night and on Sunday we were married. Bonnie had been a debater at TCU as well, but she had just been a freshman during my senior year. During my senior year I thought about graduate school and I was encouraged by Dr. Pross to pursue graduate school. But, again, money was an issue. It was traditional at that time if you were going into education to start at the basic level, the high school level. Through my
debate coach, David Matheny, I met people in Kansas, one of whom was Tom Kelly, the debate coach at Hutchinson Junior College. Tom advised that there was an opening at the high school in Hutchinson. I applied to Hutchinson and Garden City because in Fort Worth there was not debate in high schools. Even though by our current standards teaching salaries were quite low, they were higher in Kansas than they were in Texas.

I recall my first teaching job in the fall 1958. I believe my salary was $4,300 a year. Bonnie and I had selected Hutchinson, where she was then able to go to the junior college to continue her education and, as a matter of fact, debate for Tom Kelly. Tom was a fascinating man. He had coached at Russell High School. Two of his debaters, separated by a few years, were Arlen Spector and Bob Dole. To have two future U.S. senators in the same relatively small high school is quite an accomplishment. Arlen’s colleague from high school, Steve Mills, is still a friend of mine. Mills went on to be vice president of CBS. So there was a very successful group there. But Tom was very successful in Hutchinson Junior College winning the national championship numerous occasions. As a matter of fact, my wife Bonnie and her colleague, Bill Nelson, won the national championship that year, 1959.

I had an outstanding time. It was a good time to be a high school teacher. I inherited a senior class of people who were very receptive to what I had to offer. My top debater, Don Worster, is now a distinguished professor here at the University of Kansas in History, American Studies. He has won a number of awards, including recognition by the Sierra Club. As a matter of fact in high school he gave an oration on the Dust Bowl. Some years later his book on the Dust Bowl won the Sierra Club award. It was sort of nice to have that linkage and I still see Don occasionally now. Unfortunately, his colleague, John Neil, died a few years ago after a successful career in law and business,
including a term as mayor of Hutchinson. I have proud memories because Don and John went on to Hutch JUCO and won a national championship there.

As a high school teacher, I became active in the Kansas Speech Association. It so happens that last week (August 2010) I was invited to give the keynote speech at Kansas Speech Communication Association annual meeting in Salina, Kansas. I had the opportunity to go back and review my materials from the earlier period. It reminded me that back in 1962-63 I was president of the association and I was able to select the keynote speaker that year. So in 1963 I selected E. C. Buehler. Buehler gave the keynote speech and I had a copy of it so I was able to remind people of things that he had said, because he talked about speech activities in Kansas since 1910. So I was able to give a 100-year history. 1910 was the year that Bill Buehler entered high school. He talked about all the changes that had taken place from 1910 to 1963. I was able to take it up there. So we got in 100 years of speech-debate history in Kansas. It was fascinating to me to go back over the names. Many friends that I made at that time became close friends, such as Jim Costigan at Fort Hays, who died a few years ago and Harold Loy, who was at Pittsburg, Kansas, at the College High School. He shared a home with Bonnie and me as we went through our doctoral residencies here at the University of Kansas in 1964-65.

I had started in the summer of 1959 here at the University of Kansas working on my master’s degree. In the summer of 1962 I was invited to join the faculty at the University of Wichita. Hiring was much more informal in those days. It was on a phone call that the invitation came to take the job as assistant debate coach and instructor of speech. I talked to my principle because it was late in the year. He said that it would create no great problems. Bonnie and I went to Wichita in a matter of days. She
obtained a job the first year teaching in a junior high school. I accepted the job as
instructor at the University of Wichita.

I continued on with my masters in the summer of ’62 and finished my thesis in the
fall while I was teaching at Wichita. After my first year there the head debate coach, Mel
Moorhouse, moved to a position as associate dean of the University College, and I was
elevated to head debate coach. I was promoted to assistant professor. My opportunities
were great in terms of being able to work with outstanding students and I was only 25
years old. I knew I wanted to finish my doctorate by the time I was 30.

In terms of historical significance, the final debate tournament that ever I
managed as a debate coach, was the weekend of the John Kennedy assassination in
November of 1965. We were forced to make many decisions: do you continue the
tournament since we had debaters from all over the United States? We cancelled all the
events like the dinner but we did continue with the competitive activities. Obviously,
teams who wanted to leave did so.

I thought I would probably stay with debate. As I asked for and received a leave
of absence in the year 1964-65, I received a fellowship to the University of Kansas. I did
not have to teach and it provided compensation comparable with what I would have
received as teaching assistant. This allowed me to take a full load. It was a good
opportunity for both me and Bonnie because she was able to continue with her graduate
work. She had finished her undergraduate degree from Sterling College and her master’s
from KU; she started on the doctoral program. The year of residency was a busy year,
not only with the course work but with the language requirements and the various exams.
I reached the point by the summer of ’65 that I had completed my comprehensive
examinations and had approval for my dissertation topic.
I had the opportunity to return to my post at the University of Wichita. But if I went back as debate coach it would mean the persons who had been hired in my absence would have to lose their positions. So I chose another option that was made available to me. That was to be director of speech education at the University of Wichita. That was an interesting year because that was the transition to being part of the state system as Wichita State University. I was able to design the master’s degree program, and work with teacher training and the supervision of student teachers.

I completed my dissertation during the course of the year and graduated in May 1966 from KU., as I was offered then a position at the University of Kansas by Bill Conboy and Will Linkugel. Bill was chairman of the Department of Speech and Drama and Will Linkugel was head of Speech Communication division of the department. They offered me a one-year position at the University of Kansas. The idea was that there were many excellent jobs available at that time for Ph.D.s in the growing field of speech and debate. I could use that year to find the best fit. One job that I was interested in was at the University of Texas, having grown up in Texas. They were starting a doctoral program there.

Kansas had an outstanding academic program in communication, as well as theater and communication disorders and radio, television, film. They were all going very well. Before my one-year appointment was over, there were some resignations in the department. Bill Brooks, who had been assistant to Bill Conboy, left for another campus, and Will Linkugel decided to step out of his role as director of the basic course. They offered me a position, which was a combination position of assistant chair of the department of Speech and Drama and director of the basic speech program. The Fundamentals of Speech course was required of all students at the University of Kansas.
As I looked over the other places and the opportunities available, I readily accepted this offer. I was worried about the transition from being a student to a faculty member, but I was pleased that year that I was readily accepted as a colleague. Exciting things were in the offing here at the University of Kansas.

The doctoral program was growing in prestige and a change was made in the requirements. I was able to be part of that, in that the human relations program merged with the communication. It was speech communication. This was a decision that was made because the dean, George Waggoner of the College of Arts and Sciences, decided that all programs needed to be affiliated with departments. Human relations sought out other possibilities with psychology, sociology or communication. There were good relationships with the people in our department, some of whom were already teaching some courses for them, such as Ken Giffin. After faculty meetings in the year ’66-’67 we brought in Human Relations and merged it with Speech. It became Speech Communication and Human Relations, a division of the Speech and Drama Department.

As director of the basic course, I was given the task or how do we implement the integration, that is to bring the human relations down to the freshmen level? I was able to be instrumental in developing a course that paralleled a public speaking course. This was Interpersonal Communication. And I have to say with great pride that we had the first large enrollment, multisection course at the freshmen level in Interpersonal Communication. Students here were given a choice of Fundamentals of Speech: Public Speaking or Fundamentals of Speech: Interpersonal Communication. The summer of ’67 it was a very interesting time because I taught a graduate seminar and we worked collaboratively to develop a course of study that was to be this new course. The pride is that we thought we were doing it just for the University of Kansas but it turned out to be
a model that was picked up throughout the country. Now virtually every college in the
country now has an Interpersonal Communication course. We were there first and I have
to say that the outline that we developed is still present in most of those courses.

This integration also opened up scholarship opportunities for me, because while
there had been a lot of research in interpersonal communications/human relations, it had
been at the upper levels of university instruction. The very popular human relations
course at the University of Kansas was a sensitivity, “T group,” (training group) activity
that was for upper class and graduate students. We didn’t want to have that sort of
activity at the freshmen level, but we had structured exercises with predictable outcomes
that could serve as learning opportunities for the students. The course proved to be
extremely popular in terms of the outcomes, in terms of relevancy. We are talking now
about the late 60s and 70s when relevancy was one of the keys and where students don’t
think of public speaking as being something “here and now.” They were able to see that
the interpersonal communication courses were completely relevant to the issues they are
having with housemates or with parents, or with dates.

There were no textbooks in Interpersonal Communication. We had to borrow bits
and pieces from other disciplines and articles rather than books. My colleague Kim
Giffin and I decided we would write a textbook for the course. We started work that fall
of ’68 and we called the book Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication. It was fun
and challenging because there wasn’t any model, there wasn’t any pattern. We used our
KU course outline for what should be included in the text: interpersonal perceptions or
our orientations to other people. There was multidisciplinary work from psychology,
from speech, from sociology, from human relations. We were able to pull all of this into
what proved to be a very valuable textbook. We had the book prepared in ’69 and readily
found a publisher, Harper and Rowe, even though there were no courses at that time. We designed a teacher’s manual to outline the course since we had time—they were very slow in bringing it out for publication. It took about two years. It was not a high priority, obviously. So we put together a book of readings that supplemented it. We called it *Basic Readings in Interpersonal Communications.* While the *Fundamentals* book was hardbound, the *Readings* book was paperbound and contained 36 articles that were designed to be understood by freshmen students. We were very fortunate because as it turned out, other colleges were thinking along the lines of the University of Kansas in terms of expanding the field of speech to include interpersonal communication. We had adoptions by over 200 colleges and universities all the way from the major universities, such as Harvard, to California State to Michigan.

Q: That’s good.

A: It was the timing, the placement, the visibility that was given. Both books sold in excess of 50,000 copies. While we thought we were writing a book for our needs, it turned out to be received nationally. The field really started at that point. I expect that there are now over 100 titles available. Kim and I continued to write 12 textbooks in the area of interpersonal and small group communication. We also edited a series of eight books for Bobbs Merrill, an interpersonal communication series.

As far as my own administrative work, Bill Conboy elevated me to associate chair of the department in 1968 and in the spring semester of 1970 Bill took a sabbatical leave. I was made the acting chair of the department in the spring of 1970. It turned out to be an interesting time to be an administrator. That was the semester, the year of the student uprisings, during the Larry Chalmers presidency. Unfortunately, I was in the heat of it because in the Department of Speech and Drama one of our faculty, Fred Litto, was
proposed for promotion and tenure, and regents became involved as they blocked his promotion and tenure because he was supposedly directing subversive, dirty plays. It was an unfortunate situation. Those of us in the department were highly supportive of the Fred Litto case, the Board of Regents blocking it. It was part of the political protests that were taking place during that time.

I remember our theatre program at that time and I remember fondly one of the most theatrical shows I’ve seen was entitled “Quantrill.” It was being performed in our small, black-box theater, that is now the Inge Theatre. The show changed nightly. It was based upon the parallels of Quantrill’s raid on Lawrence and Abbie Hoffman’s recent visit. The same actor played Quantrill and played Abbie Hoffman. He went on then also to play Judge Hoffman in the Chicago Seven trial. They were having to do multiple performances a night because people were standing in line waiting to see the show. It was so relevant and changed every night, adjusting to what was happening in Lawrence and what was happening in the United States. Of course that was the year of Kent State, and Larry Chalmers declaring at the end of the spring semester a time of options for students to take their grades and leave or do makeup work or subsequent work, depending on negotiations with the instructors.

Q: Burning the Union?

A: The Union had happened earlier. In that summer of 1970 we had those unfortunate shootings of Rick Dowdell and then also the young man who was shot in front of the Union. All of these incidents were happening so I guess my point is that to be administrator at that time…

Q: A baptism of fire.
A: It was a baptism of fire. But then I was granted sabbatical leave for the following year. During that time Bill Conboy elected to step down as chair of the department, and a national search was initiated. So in the year 1971-1972 while I was on sabbatical I was selected as Bill Conboy’s successor. So in 1972 I became the third chair of the Department of Speech and Drama following Alan Crafton (1923-56) and Conboy (1956-72). The Department of Speech and Drama consisted of four divisions. Each one had grown and was virtually autonomous, having its own faculty and curriculum. The four divisions were Speech Communication and Human Relations, which I mentioned earlier; Theatre and Drama, Speech Correction, which became Speech-Languages-Hearing: Sciences and Disorders; and Radio, Television, Film, which was a joint program with the Journalism School. We shared faculty. Generally they were half time in Speech and Drama and half time in Radio, Television, and Film. The administrators, when I became chair, were Wil Linkugel in Speech Communication and Human Relations, Jed Davis in Theatre, James Neeley in Communication Disorders, and Bruce Linton in Radio, Television, Film. We would meet weekly. I would have lunch with the four division chairs as well as my assistant chair, Glen Price.

We were so fortunate in the seventies because it was such a time of growth, resources from the University. I am most proud of the fact that in the 1970s they did national rankings of all the doctoral programs in the country. In the three doctoral programs: in Speech Communications and Human Relations we were ranked in the top 10. In fact, we were ranked in a couple areas first, including interpersonal and small group communication. Our theatre was also in the top 10, and our communications disorders was in the top 10.
It was a time when we had wide recognition, wide visibility. It was a great time to be an administrator and to be able to get the rewards, the recognition, and the honors we were receiving. We were extremely active in the national organizations and associations. Several of our faculty and former students went on to presidencies of the national associations. It was very rewarding to see the quality of a work that was being accomplished at the University of Kansas.

Things changed when we moved into the 80s, in terms of resources, in terms of capacity to fund programs. By virtue of fundraising that was going on, the plans for the expansion of new facilities, Radio, Television, Film opted to go with Journalism. We had the remnant of Film that was left behind. I established a professional advisory committee of some of our successful alums, such as Mike Robe, Doug Curtis, Hoit Caston, and Ken Marsalis. We came up with the idea of a merger with Theatre, so it became The Department of Theatre and Film. We did not have enough faculty or resources to have a free-standing program in film. But there was strong student demand. We knew that there were opportunities for graduates. Our idea was that by combining film with the strong program in theatre we could have actor training for both theatre and film simultaneously. Many of our former students have gone on to successful careers in film, even though they had been trained in theatre.

On a personal note, in the 70s my marriage to Bonnie dissolved. She had gone to a job opportunity on the East Coast as affirmative action director for Montgomery County, Maryland. There was a lot of stress on our relationship, and we terminated it in 1976. I was fortunate to meet Eleanor Gilroy, who had been a faculty member at the State University of New York in Oneonta. In 1978 Eleanor and I were married. I have to
say parenthetically, that, sadly, Bonnie died several years ago, unfortunately with an early onset of dementia. I gave the eulogy at her funeral.

In the 1980s the Department of Speech and Drama became the Division of Communication and Theatre. Our dean of Arts and Sciences, Bob Lineberry, wanted us to parallel the division of Biological Sciences. Instead of a department with divisions, we became a division with departments: Each of the three programs became separate departments: Speech Communication; Theater and Film; Communication Sciences and Disorders. Each program became more and more autonomous, to the extent that as resources were declining it became very difficult to maintain our quality. I have to say that the environment imposed by the dean made our programs competitive with one another. And it became very difficult to maintain the quality of programs when you have declining resources and are told to move funding from one unit to another. I was not inclined to eliminate one of the three programs to support only two. I could not see in good faith diminishing any one of the three programs. Each one is unique. Each one is special. Each one had different things to offer and give. All were recruiting and graduating good students, who were finding successful professions.

I began to explore other options as an administrator. You reach a point where issues become redundant. Allen Crafton was the first chair of the Department of Speech and Drama. He was chair for 32 years. He was replaced by Bill Conboy, who was chair for 16 years, who was replaced by me and I was chair for 16 years. So we had a 64-year history of the Department of Speech and Drama. But when I left we made the decision to dissolve the division, so that each department then became a separate entity, as opposed to a unified division.

Q: How interesting.
A: Each went its own way in 1988. My last semester here in the fall of 1987 I had to work out what went where in terms of resources and space. But I think that it was time. Each was unit strong enough. They didn’t need the reliance upon the other, as had historically been the case. Each could make its own case with strength. I think that all three departments have grown since then, as they were on their own rather than being forced to compete with one another for resources.

It was time to go and I was selected to become Dean of Arts and Letters at California State University, Los Angeles. As I visited them during the search, I saw the opportunities that were there I thought would make it a good place to be. Plus, Los Angeles provided professional opportunities for my wife Eleanor that were not readily available in the Lawrence area. Eleanor had completed her Ph.D. in Theatre and done work with some of the professional dinner theaters in Kansas City. But everything was sort of an ad hoc arrangement, rather than permanent employment. A film was made in Emporia, Kansas, in 1982. It was a miniseries called “Murder Ordained.” It was about a minister and some murders that took place in Emporia.

Q: Right.

A: It was written and directed by someone I mentioned a moment ago, a Kansas alum, Mike Robe. He gave Eleanor the opportunity to sort of intern in the wardrobe area on that project. As a matter of fact, he also gave me the opportunity for a small role as an accident reconstructionist. The miniseries, I think, was about four hours long. It has been edited down to a movie which sometimes appears on television. He gave Eleanor an opportunity to see the opportunities in film and also opened some doors in terms of personal contacts, and to learn the craft and the differences in film from the stage work that she had done extensively.
Q: Mike is still pretty active in film, isn’t he?
A: He certainly is, film and television. He is doing some episodic television now and he’s done a number of successful films. So at the end of ’87 I wrapped up here at the university and we transitioned officially into the position in January of 1988 into the greater Los Angeles area. We lived in the south part of Pasadena the first year. I began a very challenging position of a relatively new unit on their campus. They had broken up the large College of Arts and Sciences and this was a College of Arts and Letters. I had 10 departments. A former KU person was president there, Jim Rosser, an African American. He had been an administrator here as an associate provost, I believe, under Amby Saricks. Jim had other administrative opportunities but was and is still the president at California State University, Los Angeles.

So it was a challenging situation because I was also responsible for the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts located on our campus. We shared facilities. We shared faculty. This was a new endeavor. The idea was that students would audition, in effect, for entrance to the school. It started out with very little visibility but it didn’t take long before we received great visibility. The number of students who wanted in before long far exceeded how many we could accommodate. We did get great attention and it gave us connections to the theatrical world, the film side as they would come on as guest lecturers. We had Audrey Hepburn come to our campus as an honoree for a fundraiser. Sammy Davis Junior would teach some courses. I was able also to work with notables who taught in our English department. Amy Tan was one of our instructors. Kate Braverman was head of our creative writing program. It was an exciting place to be, but it was also an aggravating place to be.
We were there for seven years. We were there for some of the riots. We were there for earthquakes. We bought a home in Altadena and we were there for Altadena fires. We were there for the mud slides. Between nature and person-made catastrophes, you could never plan a schedule. In 1988 I began my deanship at California State University, Los Angeles. It was, as I said, a stimulating learning opportunity and an introduction to higher administration. Some of the issues involved testifying in front of the California Legislature on behalf of a new building or a remodeled building for our music department, which we were successful in getting funded, and acquiring private funds for what is now the Luckman Fine Arts complex. It is on the campus of Cal State, Los Angeles. We received a major lead gift from the Luckman family and we had to find other funding. It’s a wonderful facility and it was completed after I had left. But I was instrumental in all the planning for it, fundraising, and the development of that facility.

I was also involved in the major activities of the departments including all of the accreditations, and the work that we had to do in terms of the declining budgets. I was there when Proposition 13 started having a major negative impact on higher education. Having to do more and more with less and less, nothing equaled in my life the amount of sudden distress that was placed on the educational system as language and English classes had to rise to a level of about 50 students per section, because we were obligated as a public institution to take the eligible students. We were having to accommodate more and more students with less and less resources, including one summer in which we could not afford to turn on the air conditioning. And in Los Angeles I recall going home every day soaking wet. So we’ve had bad times in Kansas, difficult times, but nothing that quite equaled the sudden and abrupt changes that took place in California.
I also learned for the first time all the issues of faculty unions and different bargaining units for various segments of the university that sometimes dictated our decisions rather than what might be in the best interest of the students or the programs. There were some difficult learnings for me. They were different from what I had experienced at the University of Kansas.

But there were also positive opportunities for Eleanor in the Los Angeles area. She did some part-time teaching at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts and also did some substitute teaching in the public schools as she was trying to get work in costuming, wardrobe and film. She worked on such miniseries as “Oliver North” that Mike Robe directed. She got a break working on certain episodic shows. Probably the best known were the *Hart to Hart* television movies with Robert Wagner and Stephanie Powers. She worked on several feature films, but the one in which she was given the opportunity to be a designer was called “Judicial Consent.” It starred Bonnie Bedelia and Dabney Coleman. She gets a full line credit for the film as a costume designer for that film. She also had an opportunity in a little-seen series called “Johnny Bago.” It was a summer replacement series. But the significance was the executive producer and director was Robert Zemeekes, a well-known director of “Back to the Future.” Eleanor moved up the line to the extent that on one episode of “Johnny Bago” called “Big Top Johnny” the costuming was considered for a Tony award. She had to submit materials. It was not nominated but it was considered for nomination for the Tony award. Most often, she costumed TV movies.

On a personal level, my mother was advancing in years. After my father’s death in the mid 1960s, my mother had taken over the family business at the time, a bicycle shop in Fort Worth. She managed that until she was in her 80s (born in 1910). There had
been some mental slippage. She was physically limited. She was looking forward to
retiring. We considered Los Angeles. We had her out visiting in 1993. But it turned out
to be the week of the Rodney King riots. It was not a fun time to be out and looking for
retirement facilities. We decided the better choice, and it was a good choice, was
Emporia, where my younger sister Carol was teaching high school. I’m very proud of
Carol. She has not only been Kansas Teacher of the Year but she was inducted about 10
years ago into the National Teacher Hall of Fame.

Q: Is her name still Patton?
A: Her name is Carol Strickland. Now that she is retired from high school teaching, she is
teaching at Emporia State and works part time at the Hall of Fame, fundraising and doing
some other work there. So I’m very proud of Carol. Her husband Glen has been a
longtime faculty member. He was the debate coach at Emporia State University. So it
made good sense for Mother to retire to Emporia. She lived in the Presbyterian Manor
there, starting with independent living and then as difficulties came, assisted living and
then finally the nursing care unit. She died in 2003 at the age of 93. Mother’s presence
in Emporia when we were in Los Angeles and our desire to have closer ties with her…It
was very difficult. She was no longer able to travel. And it was difficult for me in my
position to have much time to travel.

So I was particularly amenable to relocation to get back close to her. Fortunately,
a position opened up at Wichita State University for the vice president of academic
affairs, the number two position at the university. In 1994 I applied for the position and
after making campus visits…One thing that was interesting was going back to a campus
where I had been a faculty member some 30 years previously. A few people still
remained. Some of my students at the time were now faculty members there. It had the
disadvantage of Eleanor having to give up a very viable and rising professional career in film. But on balance we decided that would be a good place to be. So in 1994 we moved back to Wichita, Kansas.

For me, it was one step up the administrative ladder. I decided that once I had started that track that I would like to be a president. And this was a necessary next step. And again my age was starting to become an issue as I had now entered my 60s. I think I was about 60 at the time. So I took what I had learned in California in terms of the budget reductions and some of the issues, program accreditation, as Wichita was getting ready for its periodic review and accreditation.

There were challenges for the new administration. Gene Hughes was in the second year of his presidency. The previous vice president had left. They had an interim who was also in competition for the position. But when I was selected I appreciated a good relationship with the Hughes. He let me learn a lot of things in terms of management of the university. He was having some difficulties with the health of his mother, so he was gone for periods of time. He allowed me to step in as interim president including going with Chancellor Bob Hemenway to the legislature and making some presentations. I got a taste of what it would be like to be a president.

And surprisingly, Eleanor got some great opportunities in terms of film costumes, because of the films that came to the area. She was able to work on “Mars Attacks” when some of it was done in the Wichita area. She was selected to work on the film, “Kansas City,” the Robert Altman film that was made in Kansas City.

Q: About Truman?
A: No, this was a jazz film, set in 1935. It was a film about a kidnapping and Altman’s early life in Kansas City, what the politics were like, and some of the interracial issues. It was
a good project for her with such actors as Harry Belefonte. She also did some TV movies and had some opportunities in the area that kept her busy. She also worked with the Stage I Music Theater, a professional company. So she was creatively gratified in terms of the opportunities that presented themselves.

And I was comfortable in the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs. One thing that I’ve said to communication colleagues is, “The things that I’ve learned and taught in interpersonal communication and persuasion and decision-making are really what it’s about as a university administrator, working with people, how you solve conflicts, how you work together collaboratively for the best outcome, teamwork. All the things that we try to teach in our courses are practiced in university administration. I was comfortable obviously in public speaking opportunities and the things that go along with it. So that was gratifying. It was also gratifying to renew friendships with some of the people I had known for a long time and to introduce Eleanor to Wichita. So we enjoyed very much our time there.

But Gene Hughes decided to take a relatively early retirement and this was in 1998-99. And when his successor was chosen, Don Beggs, an excellent choice coming in from Southern Illinois University, Don obviously wanted to have his own team. He was certainly willing to look at me to continue on, but I was sort of on notice. So I started to explore and I said, “Now is the reasonable time to look for the next step, the presidency.” And again I was still tied to the area because I wanted to be close to my mother.

Fortunately, again, a position was open at Warrensburg, MO, at Central Missouri State University for the presidency there. I put in my application and I was selected to be the 13th president of the university, beginning August 1, 1999.
Central Missouri State started as a teachers’ college. It had matured over the years. One thing that I found appealing was that it reminded me, the town of Warrensburg, the size and university, reminded me of the University of Kansas in the 60s. Again, in terms of the size I found it very appealing, having 11,000 students. It gave me the opportunity to be the responsible party in terms of decision-making, trying to promote activities that I thought would be in the best interests of the students of the university. Among the things I’m proud of, we took on sponsorship of 10 charter schools in the Kansas City area. This was done as a result of trying to do something in what has been a very difficult environment. We established schools with special focus. One thing I thought was in our favor was the fact that students were motivated. The parents were involved. It did provide incentives for teachers. We think we made a positive difference. I think now it’s still catching on in terms of the national scene. Now the Obama administration endorses the idea of charter schools.

I tried to greatly enhance the visibility of Central Missouri in the Kansas City area. For example, we had an office center at Union Station. We were able to bring in students there and acquaint them with the programs. We had a good international program that we made better. We’ve had cooperative opportunities for our students to study abroad. We implemented a number of positive programs that enhanced enrollment and we also had to deal with the state budget problems.

It seems a characteristic of the last 30 years of my administrative life was trying to do more and better with less and less. We went through the state withholdings, which was particularly unfortunate because you have everything budgeted out, you think. Then all of a sudden you find out that the money is not there, is being withheld. Again, since this was the first time for that university to encounter budget shortfalls and shortages, for
them it was an all new culture, one I had been in before. I tried to say, “Things aren’t as bad as you think they are.” But the sky was falling for many people as resources were starting to decline.

I do feel that it is unfortunate nationally that higher education is no longer considered a public good. More and more legislators are believing that people should have to pay their own way and carry more of the weight. I think that this is a mistake. I think one of the greatest things that happened in our country was the G.I. Bill after World War II, opening the doors for the opportunity to higher education that really has paid the dividends for the generations since that time. I worry that higher education is becoming less and less affordable. I would have real difficulty now, with the economic situation that I was in at the time to be able to attend college at Texas Christian University, the amount of fees that are required now. I don’t know what would have happened to me in terms of paying my own way. Anyway, it is an unfortunate circumstance, I believe, we are in now. I hope that some things happen that turn this around. But I was gratified throughout my professional life to be at places where I had opportunities to grow, to expand, to learn and to try new things.

I also have been able to maintain a creative aspect to my life. I’ve participated in some theatrical endeavors while I was at KU. I directed some major theater productions for the university as well as for the Community Theatre. I directed *Inherit the Wind* and *Goodbye My Fancy* on the KU main stage. I did a number of shows for the Community Theatre. I became well acquainted with people like Amby Sarricks and Charlie Oldfather. I was just reminded today that Bill Kelly was in one of my shows, *Goodbye My Fancy*. When I went to California I also continued my theatrical direction. I directed an original Australian play called *The Department* and gave it its U.S. premier. The play
depicts a university department meeting. The show was fun and well received. I also directed a bilingual show in Spanish and English on alternate nights, *Corona de Sonbre, A Crown of Shadows*. The play is about Maximillian and Carlotta, and we did it in the main theater of Cal State, Los Angeles. We had big crowds in attendance. We brought in the Spanish-speaking audience that often is not accommodated in terms of university theater. I did not have the chance to do any directing while I was at Wichita or Warrensburg, but I did have a few small roles in films. The same is true now that I have retired here in Lawrence.

In 2005, in what was my 70th year Eleanor and I decided it was time to leave the administration. The question was, “Where do we go from here?” We had and have positive memories of Lawrence. My mother was now deceased and my sister was still in Emporia. We thought that Lawrence would satisfy our needs as well as being able to reconnect with friends, people we had known before, some of whom are retired now, but many of whom are still around, including members of the Endacott Society, with whom we plan to become more active. We have redeveloped an interest in contract bridge and we play regularly with a Lawrence bridge group including Virginia Seaver and Jim Seaver. We reestablished contact with many of our friends, Chuck and Beth Berg and Jack and Judy Wright and other people that we’ve known throughout our marriage. So we have a social network.

We have intellectual challenges. I am continuing to work on a book that I hope I can get around to finishing called *Keys to Healthy Communication*. More and more research has shown the linkage of our communication behaviors with our physical as well as our mental health. Our social networks, the people we deal with, affect everything from longevity; even the common cold is impacted by our communication behaviors.
I’m working with a co-author, Rusalyn Andrews, who is a faculty member at Cottey College in Nevada, MO. We’ve identified what we think are the three keys: being authentic, a willingness to be yourself and to be real in relationships; second is empathy. We are seeing the importance more and more of the capacity to empathize with others; And finally, empowerment, the fact that we have control of things, that we have control of our lives and we have power to change things. We think these are keys to healthy communication. And we are going to look at it from the standpoint of self, relationships, and society.

Q: You let me know when that book comes out. I want to read it.

A: Good. As I said, we first tried to do it as a textbook. But then it doesn’t really fit. It doesn’t fit the courses. It is intended for you and for other people. But, again, the writing style, we are having to adapt to what we hope is an interesting writing style. But we think we have something to say and I hope that we get it said. That is occupying some of my time now. I am continuing to work on the Community Theatre, now Theatre Lawrence, board. We just changed the name and we are fundraising for a new facility. I have a board meeting this afternoon, as a matter of fact.

So I feel very fortunate. I have had good health. I have had energy. I have had friendships. I have had the support, from Eleanor in particular, that has made my life rewarding. So I just feel that I have led a fortunate life. And I’m glad to share these comments.

Q: That is wonderful. I think you have had a wonderful life too. I’m fascinated listening to this. You look healthy.

A: I am healthy.

Q: That’s another big advantage to being at this point in time.
Yes, I’m looking at my 75th birthday coming up. I feel very fortunate. Eleanor and I have been able to travel. Our health has been good enough. I’ve had some vision difficulties, double vision and that sort of thing. But I’ve learned to live with it and not allow it to compromise my life, driving and those sorts of things.

Yes. Film has now split away from Theater. It never fully meshed, as I had hoped it would. It was two separate units of faculty, but both grew, particularly film grew to the extent that it can sustain itself now. And that’s the important thing. I think it would have been a tragedy if the university had lost Film Studies. It’s been such a positive…See, that was the danger. The administration was perfectly willing to see it die and go away and we were fighting to keep it, to maintain it and to promote it. Theatre continues to be strong and now Film is strong enough that it can make its own way.

Good. And Leland Goff. He must have been in his glory while you were here.

He was, particularly while I was here. He left while I was still in the associate chair position. He went to Iowa. Then he came back. He came back in guest roles. He directed some shows for us. Then he came back after I had left, in his retirement.

He was active in the Endacott Society and actually did a couple plays.

Did he?

Right. You were mentioning Jed Davis and Amby Sarrick. He directed a play of William Inge. While Inge was a student here he wrote a short, one-act play that later he developed into Bus Stop.

Oh, really?

This play was called People in the Wind. Lewin had the idea to promote that and my husband, Bill Kelly, we read it, this play. And it was a book in hand sort of thing. Lewin
adapted all of that so that we could. During that play, when we did it here for the
Endacott Society and whatever, and I was the daughter. No, I’m confusing two of these
things. The first play that we did was *The Honeymoon*.

A: Was that an Inge also or was that something else?

Q: No. Lewin took that to Los Vegas.

A: Oh, really.

Q: He discovered that there was an older theater group that did things and they met together
once every two years or something and performed for each other. So he took us to Los
Vegas. This was the book in hand that Bill Kelly…Anyway, Amby Sarrick….Jed Davis
was the husband. I was the person’s daughter. Jed was my husband here. Then he
couldn’t go. His wife’s health was not good. Jed couldn’t go when we went to Los
Vegas, so Amby Sarriks was my husband. So you see, I’ve just been married to lots of
people.

A: You did well. Would you happen to still have a copy of that script or know where one is?
If there is one?

Q: I don’t know. I’ll have to check and see. Jed…

A: I’ll ask Jed about it. It’s called *Into the Wind*?

Q: No, *The People in the Wind*.

A: *People in the Wind*, okay.

Q: Bill Smith, ex dean of engineering, was in it and his wife Carol. Oh, we had a great time.

A: See, the reason I raised this, I’m doing a script in hand at the Unitarian Fellowship in
November. I’m doing the editing myself on events in Lawrence in the summer of 1970.
So that’s why I’m remembering some of the incidents then. But this is the sort of thing
that might work out at the Unitarian Fellowship sometime.
Q: Yes. In fact some of them have probably seen it because we performed it.

A: It’s been awhile, so a new audience.

Q: It’s been quite a while. And here I’m reminiscing confusing the two but *Honeymooners* was the first one.

A: We’ve had a lot of history in common in terms of the people and a little bit different here and there.

Q: Right. Are there any other thoughts at random that you’d like to have included?

A: I think I have inserted them as we went along. I mean there are obviously things I didn’t think to say. I hope that was sufficient. But I think we were mainly interested in the KU. That would be reasonable.

Q: Right. Do you have any thoughts about KU and the department? Things now…

A: I really don’t because I have not tried to become involved. It’s sort of nice not when there are certain sides being taken on this issue or that.

Q: Right

A: It’s better to be on the sidelines and listen but not judge.

Q: The advantages of having been around awhile and gotten smarter all the time. Well, it sound like you’ve had a wonderful career.

A: As I said, I have been fortuitous—some of it was timing—but the friendships I’ve been able to make and retain over the years. This week I got an invitation to a 50th wedding anniversary and I haven’t seen my friend in 50 years.

Q: Isn’t that something.

A: So I’m wondering. I was at their wedding. I think that was the last time I saw him. I’m sure you have some of that too, reconnection.

Q: Right. I’m so glad that you were available to be interviewed.