

Oral History Interview
with
Kathleen Laster

Interview Conducted by
Jerry Gill
August 26, 2010

O-STATE Stories
Oral History Project

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O-State Stories

An Oral History Project of the OSU Library

Interview History

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The purpose of O-STATE Stories Oral History Project is to gather and preserve memories revolving around Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (OAMC) and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on October 5, 2006.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Kathleen Laster is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on August 26, 2010.

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About Kathleen Laster...

Kathy Laster was born in Dallas, Texas, but grew up in Del City, Oklahoma with her four siblings. Never afraid to take the initiative, Kathy developed an early interest in gymnastics and became a cheerleader as a teen, serving as head cheerleader, and taking on multiple responsibilities and activities in school. Due to the subtle influence of a neighbor, who was an Oklahoma State University heavyweight, and a close friend who was an OSU student, Kathy fell in love with the school and was the only person in her family to attend OSU. Enrolling in 1973, as a freshman she hit the ground running, working part time with the High School and College Relations Department, giving tours to new students and representing OSU in a most professional way. Over the next four years, she took part in various clubs and activities, earned a President's Leadership Council Scholarship and a Willham Scholarship, was in Mortar Board, and was Homecoming Queen her junior year. She was a Cowboy Coed, helping recruit football players, was an alternate on the pom squad, was named senior class president, and was chosen as a Top Ten Senior. Kathy entered and won the Miss Oklahoma USA pageant, and from there went to the Miss USA pageant, which forced her to miss graduation and being awarded Top Female Graduate. At OSU, she also met Charlie, her husband-to-be.

After graduating in 1977 with a degree in communication consulting, she accepted a job with Southwestern Bell in management development and began earning her MBA at Oklahoma City University. Kathy worked at Southwestern Bell headquarters and managed some of their phone centers, but when the company split in 1984, she went with AT&T. The job provided travel opportunities, as well as marketing and managing experience, but it distanced her from her husband who was still in Oklahoma. Giving up the AT&T job, she went back to school to earn a master's degree in community counseling, then a PhD in psychology.

Even though she was (and is) away from Stillwater, Kathy never broke her ties with OSU. She served on the Alumni Association Board in 1985 for approximately three years, served on the executive committee, then served as president during the 1997-98 year, which was also the Alumni Association's centennial anniversary. She also later served as national president of the association. She remains closely connected to OSU, and her goals as part of the Alumni Association have always been to keep the association strong, self-sufficient, and a beacon for all students, past and present. She and her husband live in Shawnee, and they have a son and a daughter (who is currently enrolled at OSU).

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Kathleen Laster



Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Jerry Gill
August 26, 2010
Shawnee, Oklahoma

Gill *My name is Jerry Gill. Today is August 26, 2010. I'm visiting with Dr. Kathleen Malchar Laster here in her office in Shawnee, Oklahoma. This interview is for the O-STATE Stories Project of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program. Kathy, I appreciate you taking time from your practice to visit with me and do this interview this afternoon.*

Laster You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

Gill *Kathy, you have quite a tradition and history at Oklahoma State University, and we're going to talk about that a little later, but could we start with your early life, where you grew up, parents, family, a little bit of that information?*

Laster I grew up in Del City, Oklahoma. I was actually born in Dallas, and my parents moved to Florida, New Jersey, and then to Midwest City. I could have been a [Midwest City] Bomber, but I turned out to be a Del City Eagle because we moved to Del City when I was in the third grade. My dad worked at Tinker Air Force Base, and he was an airplane mechanic. He wasn't in the military, but he was a civil person, and then my mom was a secretary. For a few years she didn't work, but about the time I went to school, she started working. We had five kids in our family. I am number four, next to the youngest, and was actually the first one to go to Oklahoma State, the only one to go to Oklahoma State. I had an older brother and sister who were OU fans, but neither one of them actually finished college at that time. So, I was the first one in my family to go to college and graduate. My dad died when I was about fourteen. My mom had divorced him earlier, when I was maybe in the third grade, and remarried, so that's a little bit of my background.

- Gill** *Kathy, what about some of your activities in the community, particularly in high school? I know you were very active.*
- Laster** I was very active in school, always. I think what really started my life off was I became a tumbler. That was a big deal in the Midwest City/ Del City area. That was back when the Oklahoma Twisters first started up, and I learned how to tumble and do some gymnastics. That kind of parlayed into then I was one seventh-grade cheerleader, and then later they added another one. One success can often lead to another. Through that activity, I became pretty active in school, was in a lot of leadership roles, and was head cheerleader really all through school, but back then you didn't even have sponsors. As head cheerleader, you did everything. You called all the practices, you picked up the uniforms, so it was very different than we know it today. There was even hazing back in my day. (Laughter) That has all kind of stopped now. But, yes, I loved Del City High School and still have lots and lots of friends from there.
- Gill** *Kathy, were there some values, some principles growing up that you learned that helped make you successful later in your life?*
- Laster** You know, I think some of it maybe was just genetic. All my sisters and brothers, we were very active. We just all take a lot of initiative, and we're hard workers. We had a fairly chaotic family life, so I think we learned kind of how to deal in difficult circumstances. I know one thing my mother always said to me that kind of stuck with me was, "The whole world can't be out of step and you the only one that's right." So, I think whenever things really felt—I was upset with everything going on in my life, I learned to kind of look inward and see what it was I was doing to contribute to that. I'd say a lot of hard work and closeness as a family, and that you can make it through anything if you just persevere.
- Gill** *Kathy, you were talking about your other brothers and sisters that were interested in OU. Was there an influence, something that influenced you to come to Oklahoma State and to enroll at OSU? What was that?*
- Laster** When I went to cheerleading camp. Well, first of all, across the street from me lived Marsha Wooten, who was a big OSU person and was recognized at the Alumni Association for her service to the alumni. She lived across the street, and her family was very OSU oriented, and my brothers and sisters were OU oriented. So, Marsha and I would have our little—I'd say OU was better, and she'd say OSU was better.
- However, when I got into high school and I went to cheer camp at OU and saw all the hippies lying around (I graduated in high school in '73, so I was going to cheer camps in the late '60s), I didn't want any part of OU. (Laughter) I just didn't like the atmosphere at all. There was one

person who was two years ahead of me in school named Debbie English who went to Oklahoma State, and we got to go up and spend a night or weekend with her, and I totally fell in love with OSU. I went to a football game. I totally fell in love. By that time, Marsha had moved away. (Laughs) We reconnected again when I got to OSU, and we saw each other on campus, and I'm sure she wanted to say, "I told you so." But, anyway, I fell in love with OSU.

Russ[ell] Conway was the high school and college relations director, and Russ just took me under wing. I got a President's Leadership Council scholarship, and he just took me under wing from the moment I was introduced to OSU. Early on, I offered to do some tours at OSU to take other students around, and so he offered me a job to work in high school and college relations. So, from a freshman on, I worked part time there all through school, so I really saw OSU through the eyes of staff as well as a student.

Gill *Kathy, you said you fell in love with the university. What were some of your first impressions that you remember about the campus?*

Laster It was just so friendly. It was just so friendly, welcoming, and fun. Of course, there was the wave at the football game, and I don't know. It's just a feeling.

Gill *Howdy Week activities and all that?*

Laster I don't know that I knew the difference at that point when I first visited there. It was just the feeling that I had. Then, like Russ and others just embraced me, and then, actually, that's when I first met you because you worked in that office, and you extended every opportunity to help me or anything that I needed as a student and would listen. I got mentoring from day one, walking into OSU. I don't think my experience was unique. I think many students feel that way about Oklahoma State.

Gill *Kathy, to say you were involved would be an understatement, at OSU, but could you share some of your activities and organizations you were in, some of the things you did as a student, just to talk generally about your undergraduate experience?*

Laster When I first went to Oklahoma State, I took potluck on a dorm. In my high school years, I had been named All Sports Queen, and that had created a lot of jealousy among my—it was the only year at our high school that they picked princesses for all the sports, and there was only one queen, and I was it. That didn't bode well among female peers. (Laughter) So, at that point, I knew a little about sororities but not a lot, and I just kind of thought, "I don't want anything to do with groups of

girls for a while. I just want to go up to college.”

So, I took potluck on a roommate. I move into my dorm room, and I have my cute little gingham comforter, and I bring my little cheer doll and put it up and all my little jock stuff, because back in the day that was jock stuff in my high school days, and I leave. Then my roommate comes in, and she puts her stuff up. Then I came back, and she was gone, and she has wine bottles, hippie-looking stuff, and it’s just like, “Oh, my gosh! What have I done, taking potluck?” (Laughter) But her name was Carol Dobson, and we ended up really getting along, and as it turned out, the resident assistant, the RA, turned out to be Debbie English, which was the girl that I had come up to visit. She was right next door to me, and down the hall was another high school friend who ended up being on that floor, and then two floors up was another high school friend. But we made friends with all the girls in our dorm. Even now, I went up and visited with my daughter. And the old traditional dorm, it’s wonderful, even though most kids don’t choose that today, because you do build this camaraderie. Of course, we did all kinds of pranks with the Vaseline on the doorknobs, answering the phone, the shaving cream. We’d crawl up in the closets and lay up there, and then when they got asleep we’d make noises. (Laughter)

We kept leaving our door open, so they decided to teach me and Carol a lesson. One day when we were out of our room they came and took a bunch of stuff out. When we came back, we thought we’d been ripped off, and they told us they were teaching us a lesson. But, that group of girls, we went down to Padre Island at spring break in my car by ourselves as freshmen in college. I don’t know why! It’s amazing that we did that. They were just great friends, but the next year they were all dispersing and going to sororities.

Gill

What hall was that?

Laster

It was Willham. Yes, it was Willham North because it was close to the jock dorm, and I ended up dating Charlie Laster, who was a tennis player and lived in the jock dorm. So, sometimes they would come over and run up through the halls at the hours they weren’t supposed to be there, and the girls would all scream. Really, that freshman year of living in the dorm was probably one of my favorite years because at that point I just went to classes. I took a 7:30 a.m. history class, (you’ll appreciate this story, Jerry) and I made it to every class because I was an overachiever. I made it to every class, and I made a really high A. One day the professor said, “Would you come in and see me?” and I said, “Sure.” I went in, and he said, “Are you interested in majoring in history?” I said, “No. What gave you that idea?” (Laughter) He said, “Well, it’s a 7:30 a.m. class, you never miss, and you make really good

grades. I thought maybe you had a little interest in history.” So, anyway, that was the last 7:30 a.m. class I ever took at OSU, that’s for sure.

So, my freshman year, mostly, I just was in the dorm, I did President’s Leadership Council, and just had fun. I’m sure there were a few things that I participated in. I just don’t remember. I did go through Rush my sophomore year, and I joined the Kappa Kappa Gamma house. I actually Pi Phi’d. My preference was Pi Phi, and after I joined, Bid Day, I decided I had made a mistake because all the girls I wanted to pledge with went Pi Phi and I should have pledged Pi Phi.

So, all of a sudden, Rush was over, and everyone was so friendly during Rush, and then they moved us right into the house because we’re sophomores, and they weren’t friendly anymore. Not that they weren’t friendly, but they were just busy getting on with their lives, and nobody was catering to us anymore. It was just like, “Oh, I don’t know if I like being in this house.” So, I went to the person in charge, the president, and I said I wanted to depledge. They said, “Go move back in the dorm, live there a semester, and think that over.” I did, and I decided to go ahead and stay in the sorority and ended up becoming president.

Junior year, I was elected president for my senior year. I was in Mortar Board, and I was the recipient of the Willham Scholarship. Dr. Kamm was president at the time. He was wonderful. Honestly, there’s just so many activities, I don’t know. We did intramural sports, I was in lots of different clubs, and anything I could be in, I was.

Gill

Kathy, did you have some favorite student hangouts, places you liked to go on campus and off campus, as well?

Laster

Well, the Fox was big in my day, and Eskimo Joe’s was just a little dumpy place around the corner. Hardly anyone went to Eskimo Joe’s. The Strip was the big place. I started dating my husband, now, second semester of my freshman year, and I’ll never forget our freshman year. It was the Thursday before spring break. I was in the dorm, and I’m thinking my husband, my boyfriend at the time, was with me, but I can’t remember that for sure. I remember hearing this loud noise, and all the sudden you look out the window, and all the dorms are blinking lights. You start hearing this swelling noise, and when we looked out, we saw this huge crowd of people moving toward us, and we just filed out of the dorms like we were little ants, just all went to the elevators, filed out, joined the mass as it continued to go through campus and pick up all the students. I mean, there were thousands and thousands of students. I don’t know if you even knew about this. The crowd made its way to the Strip where people began to rip off their clothes and start streaking through the crowds. It was really the inception of the streaking movement in the

United States, and that's when it hit Oklahoma State, and I was there. The crowd went down and got the big bull from Sirloin Stockade and pushed it down Washington Street and pushed it into Theta Pond. People went nuts with spring fever that year, so that was a really fun incident.

But I met my husband at the Fox, second semester, after a basketball game. He and his tennis team came over and joined my friends from the dorm. My husband sat across from me, and he was sitting next to the cutest person in our group. Her name was Linda Beaty, long blond hair, and I thought, "He's the cutest, but she'll get him. She's the cutest girl." (Laughter) He talked to me kind of across, in the loud room across the table. It turned out, he was at Girls State, and so was I, in high school. He got to go because he helped put on the trial. He was part of law analysis from his high school. I was the district judge at Girls State, and so he remembered me from then. He grabbed my arm as we left that night and asked if he could call me, and that's kind of how it started.

Gill *The blond-headed gal didn't win out after all, huh?*

Laster And then another little thing, I didn't drink in high school. I went to college, and I was a good girl. I didn't drink. I went home at Christmas break, and I talked to my mom that maybe it might be okay if I drank a little bit. So, that was the very first night we'd gone out, and I had ordered a beer. I took one sip out of it, but I'll always remember I met my husband the first night I started my drinking career at OSU. (Laughter)

Gill *You have a long relationship. (Laughter) Kathy, you mentioned earlier Russell Conway. You were talking about Bob Kamm. Were there faculty members or other administrators who influenced your development as a student, that you recall that stand out in your mind?*

Laster Well, I remember Dr. Parker. My major was communication consulting, and he just always made an impression on me. The people that really stand out are Russell Conway, Dr. Kamm, you. I remember—was it Ray who was...

Gill *Ray Sharp?*

Laster Yes, he was always so friendly. I applied for Outstanding Senior Woman, so I went and talked with the alumni people. They didn't have the Alumni Board back then, the Student Alumni Board, but I got to know them through that. There were many teachers along the way, but I don't remember names.

Gill *You achieved some significant success as a student. You mentioned a*

couple things, but could you talk about some of the recognition awards that were particularly meaningful to you?

Laster

Most of those really kind of come your senior year, although I did receive a scholarship, the President's Leadership Council. I was always proud to be a part of that, receiving the scholarship as a freshman, the Willham Scholarship, getting Mortar Board, and getting into those honorary kind of organizations. But as a junior, back then for Homecoming Queen, I guess you applied. You turned your name in, and some people encouraged me to do that, so I turned my name in. You had to go through an interview process, and so I went out on the field. I think there were maybe three seniors and myself. It might have been two seniors and myself, but I did not expect to win because I was just a junior. My mother had had an aneurism that luckily they caught right before it burst, and she had had brain surgery. I always remember this because she was in a crowd with her scarf on from the brain surgery, and I got to wear her white leather coat in the parade.

Gill

Did she know that you'd been selected?

Laster

No.

Gill

I know you didn't, but she didn't know, either.

Laster

No, you do the parade first. So then, when they announced my name, I literally was shocked because I no way expected to win that. I was surprised to even be a candidate. That was a very exciting honor. What was neat about that was then the next year at Homecoming, I got to play a role as having been former Homecoming Queen. Then my senior year I got to be president of the sorority, and I got to take my first plane ride to go to the national convention for Kappa. First time I'd ever been on a plane.

College opened up so many opportunities to me. I did apply for the top senior awards, and I was picked as one of the top ten. Then, I was at a wedding, and this woman came up and asked if I would enter the Miss Oklahoma USA pageant, and so I did. There was a girl that was in the pageant, Karen Keenan, who was also at OSU. She was a pom girl, and I was also a pom girl my senior year. She had done a lot of pageants, and I hadn't, so I just watched Karen and turned the way she turned and walked the way she walked. (Laughter)

It was when they did onstage interviews, so I was able to get the audience to laugh when I did my interview, and, anyway, I won. I won that. So, the Miss USA pageant that I went to was the very night of my college graduation. It was also the day that they did the luncheon to

announce the top senior man and woman on campus. That day, I was away in Charleston, South Carolina, and Russell Conway was there, and I was named the Top Female Graduate, so he accepted the award on my behalf, and I got a telegram because that was not in the days of texting. (Laughs) So, I got a telegram telling me that I had won that award.

I remember being in Charleston, and while it was fun and exciting to get to be in the Miss USA pageant, at that point I knew I wasn't going to make the top twelve. You could tell because they interview you onstage, and they were all over me at first, and then they weren't talking to me anymore, so I kind of knew I hadn't made it. I remember thinking, "This is fun, but what really is meaningful to me is my college graduation and to have been there to accept that award." I just remember having that moment that, "This is a neat experience, but the OSU stuff is what really has definitely the greater meaning for me." So, I did not go through a college graduation until I got my PhD.

Gill *Oh my, gosh! (Laughter) Kathy, this is a serious question. Where did the passion come from, the drive to be involved in all this, not only just involved, but knock-the-top-out leadership? I'm not trying to embarrass you, but where does that drive come from, to just plunge into things and do them? It kind of defines your whole life.*

Laster I don't know. I honestly just think I was born with that kind of personality. We had some kind of rough things in our family life, and the way I dealt with that was to just involve myself in activities. Honestly, I think I got a lot of feelings of worth from achievement, and really later in life kind of worked at undoing that kind of programming, so to speak, where you didn't have to knock the top off of everything. You were still okay. (Laughter)

Gill *Do you have some favorite memories of some special times as you think about your undergraduate experience and reflect back on some things that stand out in your mind as being special to you?*

Laster Well, I have mentioned some of the highlights. The football games, I can remember being a Cowboy Coed. Now, that comes back to me. I was a Cowboy Coed when that first started, and we would help recruit football players. We got to fly on a few private planes to go out. There are probably rules against that now, (Laughs) but that was fun to be associated with that. I don't know about meaningful, but this was fun.

As a pom girl, I was actually an alternate my senior year, and the other alternate was Sherry Brand. We did not get to go to the Tangerine Bowl as a part of the pom group because we were the alternates, but the Posse Club funded the two alternates to go. So, we got to go on a private plane.

We were given spending money. We didn't have to follow all the rules that everybody else had to follow, (Laughter) but we still got to go on the field and be a part of the pom squad, so we got the best out of both worlds on that deal.

It's hard to say exact things or happenings as much as it was just the friendships that you develop, the experiences that you had, and how much you learned about yourself. It was a time that you almost just feel like a butterfly, that you came into your own. I felt like those were the years that I came into my own, that I really discovered who I was and what I was capable of. It exceeded beyond what I thought was possible for me. I've done studies now, as a psychologist, about self-efficacy and about what drives our career decisions. It's what we believe we're capable of becoming. It really wasn't until I was in my thirties that it occurred to me that I actually could be a doctor.

I started out in the Business College, and after about a month I went to an undecided major in arts and sciences because I decided I could be more than a secretary. Not to say that that's a bad thing, but for me to go in the Business College, all you could do in the business world was be a secretary. So, if I didn't want to be a secretary, I needed to change colleges. It didn't even click with me that you could be business management or business marketing. So, I ended up in the business world, but that's the thinking for females. This was 1973. This was a very still enlightening time for women.

Gill *So, what was your major, finally, before you graduated?*

Laster Communication consulting, consultancy.

Gill *You enrolled in your freshman year in what year?*

Laster Nineteen seventy-three. I went as a seventeen-year-old because I didn't turn eighteen until September.

Gill *And you graduated in '77, four years later?*

Laster Yes.

Gill *Kathy, as I understand, you accepted your position after graduation in '77 with Southwestern Bell. Can you talk a little bit about following your graduation and into your career with Southwestern Bell and with AT&T, and then we'll talk about the later part of your career later?*

Laster If I could go back just one moment, I want to say this.

Gill *Sure, absolutely.*

Laster I just can't say enough about Russell Conway and what he did for me in those years during OSU. Russell mentored me. He was kind of a paternal figure to me. He taught me about leadership. He would talk to me about his reasoning for the way that he did things. He truly guided me and then wrote me letters of recommendations, opened doors for me in ways that I don't know that my career at OSU would have been what it was without Russell Conway. So, that is a man dear to my heart, just as you became to me later, even after I graduated and became involved with the alumni. So, I just wanted to say that.

Gill *Thank you. I think you went straight after graduation to working with Southwestern Bell, and later AT&T. Can you talk a little bit about your career path? Just pick some highlights and share a little about that?*

Laster That was back when there were a lot of interviews on campus. I went into the Management Development Program with Southwestern Bell, and my brother-in-law actually worked for Southwestern Bell at the time. So, I went right into management, and you were a little bit resented coming right out of college and supervising people who had been there for a long time. You spent maybe a month or two doing the actual job. I went and managed business offices for Southwestern Bell. That developed into a job where I did management development training, and then I did some work on the headquarters. Then I went into phone center stores, and I managed phone center stores. You might remember some of those things from back in the day.

When Southwestern Bell and AT&T divested, it was 1984, and they were forced to split off. I chose AT&T to go with at the time, so I continued to manage phone center stores, ultimately over a three-state area. At that time, we would have quarterly meetings, all the zone managers from across the United States, in nice places all over the United States. Those were wonderful years in the corporate life, when you really got a lot of management development training. You got to go to a lot of nice places, and you got to really develop a lot.

Then I was offered to go to a Senior Management Development Program where they decided at AT&T that they needed to begin developing people for those higher levels of management down the line to get people in the pipeline. I was selected to go on that program. The idea was to put me in a lot of cross-functional positions. So, I did some manufacturing, I went up to headquarters in New Jersey, I was over marketing, domestic and international, for the cordless product line, and I worked with a consulting company to help develop where that line needed to go over time. It was really kind of neat. I got to work with Bell

Labs and work with overseas manufacturing concerns in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Germany. It was just a lot of neat experiences.

I actually commuted for my husband. He stayed in Oklahoma. I lived in New Jersey for a year and a half and negotiated a good expense package with the company, but I ultimately came down to go on with AT&T. Then, my husband really wanted to stay in Shawnee, so it was going to be either split up our marriage or I needed to rethink my career path. We had a career conflict, and I took about a year and a half to kind of reevaluate. I actually even interviewed for the High School and College Relations Director job at OSU at the time, but, ultimately, I decided to go back and become a psychologist, where I could be a professional in the community that I lived, Shawnee.

I still am doing that. I have a clinical practice here. But after a few years, I decided that my real love still was working in business, and so I have evolved now to a consulting psychologist, and I have a company called Impact. We do organizational development with companies, leadership development, culture change, executive coaching, and those sorts of things. So, I still have a clinical practice, and I do the organizational work.

Gill *And your family...*

Laster Along the way, when I went back to get my PhD, we decided to start our family. We were later, older parents, but I had a daughter in 1993 and a son in 1996. My daughter is now seventeen, and my son is now fourteen. I am an older mom, but...

Gill *Kathy, I think you maybe said it, but I'm not sure I picked up the year you made your career change from AT&T to come back to school. What year was that?*

Laster I think it was around 1991. No, it was '93. I took a leave from AT&T, and then AT&T called and asked if I would manage a service center in Oklahoma City. I did, and they closed that. I helped close that, and that allowed me to have a buyout from the company. So, it was about '93 when I left AT&T permanently and started my work. I went and got a master's at OSU at that point in community counseling. From there, I went into the PhD program.

Gill *You had a fast track. You mentioned a position with AT&T, national and international. How tough was it to make that kind of decision in your life? It had to be pretty tough.*

Laster Yes, I forgot to mention, too, I had gotten an MBA right after I got out

of school and was first working for Southwestern Bell through OCU's [Oklahoma City University] night program. It was really tough because I have been a high achiever all my life, and my career with AT&T was on the senior level track program. It was a highly selective program. My career could have gone great guns, but it really came down to a value conflict. Actually, I did my dissertation on work/family balance because for women to break through the glass ceiling, there are so many prices you have to pay that, honestly, men typically don't. Most men that are CEOs have families, they have children, but most women that are CEOs don't have children and aren't always married. I'm not saying that's 100 percent across the board, but percentage-wise that's a pretty drastic difference between men and women.

Gill *In that era, back in the early '70s?*

Laster Well, that was the early '70s when I went to college, but this was probably still in the '80s, like mid- to late '80s. So, yes, I could have had that career that would have gone gangbusters, but I was going to have to give up a marriage and the opportunity to have a family. I had to seriously weigh what was more important to me. I chose to hold my marriage together and to start a family. I can't say that I regret that decision, but it was really a shift to give up the prestige, the status, and the money that came along with that high-powered career. But I'm happy with what I'm doing right now. I have a good balance in my life of work and family. But there were some prices to be paid either way you went, and you just had to choose which one.

Gill *Do you feel challenged and fulfilled in your new endeavors and your new career?*

Laster I do. I do. I really enjoy my clinical patients, but I don't want to do that full time because I found I'm a real extrovert and I have a real business head. I've been on several boards. I've served on a hospital board and then a chairman of a hospital board here in our community since 1993. I was a chairman a couple of those years. The work I did at the Oklahoma State Alumni Association was very meaningful to me.

Gill *Kathy, that's a good segue into the next part of our conversation about your relationship with Oklahoma State University and the Alumni Association. You've always remained closely connected to Oklahoma State University throughout your career and in your life. Why are you so loyal to OSU and passionate about Oklahoma State University? I think those that know you know that you are deeply loyal to Oklahoma State University. You feel very strongly about the university and your experience. Why has it been so important to you, that you've been willing to give so much of your time and energy to Oklahoma State?*

Laster I think other graduates get this because that experience that you get at OSU lays the foundation for the rest of your life. It's at such a critical time in our development as young people. What OSU did for me at that point in time of my life—I came from a middle-income family. I wasn't even upper-middle, middle-middle. It just opened doors for me, and it started my life off in a way that just made a huge difference in my life. I don't know how you describe the loyalty that you've developed for an institution, because it is an institution, but it's all the people that touched my life during that time and that invested in me and cared about me and gave me more belief in myself. How do you define the value of that? So, it just goes to your very heart. It just goes to your very core, the appreciation you feel. I guess it's the people. It was the people at OSU that made that possible. That's where the loyalty is.

Gill *You've served over many years in numerous leadership positions in the Alumni Association, including your tenure as national president of the Alumni Association. Can you talk a little bit about some of the leadership positions that you had in the Alumni Association? I'll ask some follow-up questions about your participation in strategic planning. We can laugh about that one now, but can you talk about your progression in leadership positions you've had?*

Laster When I was working, before I went to New Jersey, I had the opportunity to go on the Alumni Board. I went on as an at-large member, and I don't remember how many years I served on that, but it was probably at least three.

Gill *Do you remember which year you were on the board?*

Laster I went to New Jersey in about 1989. It was prior to that, so it had to be in the mid-'80s. Around 1985 would be my guess. But I rotated off of that position, or it could have even been that I left. I can't remember exactly. Anyway, there was a period of time I served. Then, when I came back from the year-and-a-half stint in New Jersey and I'd interviewed for the High School and College Relations job, it kind of reconnected me with some people at OSU.

At some point then, I was asked again to come back onto the board, pretty soon thereafter. Pretty quick, as a matter of fact, because I think I served as president in 1997, and you serve out your term. I was asked to be on the executive committee. That's a few years', as I recall, commitment. From there, you either go off the executive committee (at the time this is how it worked) or you're tabbed to be the next president. You go into that sequence. So, I was president in '97 and then past-president the year after, and have remained fairly connected and

involved since then.

Gill *Kathy, what years exactly did you serve those two years as president?*

Laster Well, I know it was 1997 because it was really one year, but it crossed over a calendar year. I'm thinking it was '97-'98 because it was the centennial of the inception of the Alumni Association, which I believe was 1897. So, I got to be president the year we reached our centennial.

Gill *Kathy, as I recall, there'd been one female president about four, five, six years before you. Before that, it had been back since the 19-teens since there had been a woman who had been president of the Alumni Association, so you're just the second woman president of the Alumni Association since the 19-teens. Was that special for you?*

Laster It was. Again, it was like, once again, OSU just kind of reaching out to me, saying, "You know, you're really capable of a lot of things. Here, let's tap you again!" because it was another experience where I learned I was capable of more than I thought I was capable of. So, again, Jerry, obviously, you're doing the interview here, and you were the alumni director at the time, but since, that position was renamed to CEO and president due to many of the efforts that we worked together on through the years for the Alumni Association to become an independent entity from the university.

Gill *Speaking of names, Kathy, think back if you can about some of the colleagues that you had, some of the leadership teams during those years that you remember.*

Laster When I became president, that was the year that First USA came along and wanted to pay a lot of money to have access to our database. They offered us ten million dollars, which was an infusion of revenues that were unheard of before in Alumni Association's life, so we had to decide what we were going to do with that. We had a team, an executive committee, and some of the people—God, I hate to even name names because I'll forget some, but I know that Kirk Jewell was on with me. Gene Batchelder, and—gosh, help me out, Jerry, because there were several. Paul Schulte. Do you remember?

Gill *Rhonda [Hooper]?*

Laster I don't know if Rhonda was on the executive committee yet.

Gill *She was right behind you.*

Laster She was a few behind me. I'm not sure she was on my executive

committee. At one point, Greg Massey. At some point, I served with Greg on that. Of course, Ike Glass and...

Gill *Was Leonard Court a part of that? Leonard may have been a couple years before you, actually.*

Laster Well, Leonard was, maybe. When I was elect, he was immediate past, I believe. It might have been Leonard, Ike, myself, Kirk. And then I believe it was Paul, and then maybe Gene, and then maybe was it Rhonda? It's hard to remember the exact order.

Gill *Pretty powerful individuals there, aren't there?*

Laster Yes.

Gill *When you look back, does it amaze you how at that one point of time in history in the Alumni Association and the university that you brought that kind of firepower, if you will, to the Alumni Association?*

Laster Yes. [James] Halligan was president of the university at that time. There were some pretty significant things that changed in the Alumni Association at that point. I don't know if you want to go into that, but...

Gill *Do you remember some of the key challenges and goals of the association during your presidency? First of all, do you recall when you came in as president, some of the challenges?*

Laster Well, we were really working to get a lot more alumni leader ownership, the feeling of ownership, into the Alumni Association, which was really your vision. We had term limits at that point, also, but we were trying to get new blood in at the same time. We were really trying to give the alumni more say in the leadership of the Alumni Association. You, as the director, were really willing to hand off some of that power in order to get the kind of involvement that you knew would really propel the Alumni Association to the next level.

What we did at that time was we really began to evolve it to more of a team leadership approach because, how it was up until the time I came in as president elect, you didn't have much of a role, and then you step in, and you have to make all these appointments of at-large board members and make a lot of decisions. So, as I walked into those shoes, I thought, "I'm not sure that I've had the opportunity to know all of this. Let's go right now and get the president elect in the room so that they can see what's going to happen their year so they can begin preparing."

We then made some changes on the executive committee where we

started electing the president elect-elect earlier. Then we started making a really strong effort to involve the past president, the president, the president elect, and the president elect-elect. So, it really began to create a momentum of whatever initiatives we were working on. Everyone bought in so it would go on beyond one more year because I think up until then, whoever the president was would have some bent that you would work with as the director, and the next year it might be something completely different. It created some continuity of leadership that I think really made a difference.

Some of the challenges were that we were somewhat encumbered by whoever the president of the university was, because however their feeling was toward the Alumni Association made a difference in what our role was. So, we very much wanted to attain independence and become self-sufficient, financially. There was also a strong desire to create our own space, which was, I know, a dream of yours to eventually have our own Alumni Center. Even if the ten million dollars that came in—at OU, a lot of that money went straight to their athletic department, and there was a movement afoot at OSU to siphon that money to the athletic department. So, we worked with President Halligan and the Athletic Department to give them—I think we gave them one million of that. Then the rest—we convinced Dr. Halligan that we have some very important plans for the Alumni Association, and we were allowed to keep those moneys and to put them to good use.

Gill

Kathy, then at this point, you really set the stage for that, in terms of we had this sense of where we were going and how we were going to be structured organizationally. At that point, you took leadership, and under a strong leadership and strategic planning, this wasn't just a strategic plan. This was a significant total re-look at the Alumni Association. Can you reflect back on how the inception of the strategic planning process helped change the Alumni Association?

Laster

Well, we were afforded an opportunity that no prior leadership group of the alumni had ever had the opportunity to do. Because of my work at AT&T, I had gone to the Wharton School of Business for a leadership executive training program. I had been introduced to a man named Mark Sebell of Creative Realities. He had come back, and I had invited him to AT&T. We had developed what we wanted to do with the product line, so I knew I had that experience. Then it was like, “With this ten million dollars, what is the vision for our Alumni Center?” There was a mission statement, but we needed to develop a really common vision as to what we wanted to become about as an Alumni Association. Through that association, we were lucky to be able to get him at a much reduced cost.

To start that process, we really needed to go ask our alumni what did

they want. So, we went around, and we did focus groups throughout the state and in other states. We did some out-of-state focus groups, and Rhett Laubach was on staff at that time. We had him trained as a facilitator by the consultants. We went around, and that's when I think I first met Burns Hargis because we did one in his home in Oklahoma City. But we gathered alumni, had a really creative session, and really kind of pulled together the wishes. We also did a quantitative survey. We pulled data everywhere we could, and then we put all that together into the key nuggets of what we had learned from our alumni. From that, we came up with four basic directions that we needed to go.

Even before we got to that work, the consulting company said, "Let's do one thing before we start this work," and it was probably the most important work that we did. They asked us, "Let's define the core purpose of the Alumni Association." We had gathered for this, kind of, what we called "invention session," but a session where we had a lot of representation, young, old, involved alumni, alumni that weren't as much involved. We pulled together a lot of different representative samples into this group and spent about three days in a think tank and developed where we wanted to take the Alumni Association. But that first task was to develop the core purpose, and what we came out of that with was connections for life. We were about making connections for life. Ultimately, when Rhonda became involved, with the marketing background that she has and the advertising, that evolved to the Orange Connection.

Gill *Rhonda Hooper?*

Laster Rhonda Hooper, yes.

Gill *We developed about three or four overarching priorities. Do you remember what some of those were?*

Laster One was IT [information technology]. We definitely needed to work on information technology because that was the way of the future and how we could really reach our alumni. One was about "OSU is where it's at," and how we can go out and really connect with the alumni, that it's not just about being in Stillwater. We had to find a way to really reach. I don't know if this ended up being one of the major ones, but the whole thing of how we needed to do more target marketing. That's when we developed a lot of programs to try to bring babies in, the Legacy Program, the Grandparents' University, and sending gifts out to kids as they grew up. What am I missing?

Gill *You were talking about earlier, one priority was to put the parking lot in for the Alumni Center. That was one of them.*

- Laster** Oh, that's absolutely right. That was just kind of a given when we did our interventions, like, "Okay, we know we need to do this. That's a given." That was a huge initiative, and really, the work—it was maybe born and gotten on the planning sheet at the time that I was president, but the real work of that was the several people behind me. Clayton Taylor was one big person involved in that.
- Gill** *Financial support of the Alumni Association, long-term, was maybe one of those overarching priorities.*
- Laster** Yes, self-sufficiency, becoming self-sufficient. What was so great for the Alumni Association is about the time that the Alumni Center became a reality, which is an amazing building. I mean, I think it's more than any of us ever envisioned or dreamed of. But it was about that time that we became self-sufficient, so it was like, "Bam! Bam!" It all started falling into place. I know we still have the challenge today of raising enough revenues to just maintain and operate that center and make it kind of pay for itself, but it's still a huge accomplishment.
- Gill** *Kathy, we were talking about the strategic planning and the priorities that had come out of there and how it impacted the Alumni Association. In your mind, how did the Alumni Association change after we initiated some of these things? How is it different after these?*
- Laster** Well, the board really evolved. Really, at one point, as a member of the board you would come and get updated on the university, but it was really the executive committee that made all the decisions. Then, really, it was mostly the president working with the director of the Alumni Association. What I saw change, with the term limit change and with moving to the concept of an alumni leadership team, more and more of the decisions and responsibility began to fall upon the alumni leadership. At one point, when you would go to an alumni meeting, the director, which was you, would mostly carry the meeting. It became more about you were just a short part of the meeting because the leadership and the alumni themselves began to really feel a lot of ownership for what we were doing and became a lot more involved.
- Along with that, I think there were more efforts at fundraising. I think more people saw and understood the value the Alumni Association has to the university. I think there came to be more of a collective effort among alumni to do the things we needed to do to make the Alumni Association the purposeful organization we wanted it to be for the university, which is to be the friend raisers, develop the relationships, and make the experience of OSU go beyond the undergraduate year for the graduates, create those connections, and bring value to alumni across

the country. So, we saw those changes.

Gill *Kathy, you alluded to a couple things I wanted to ask you about. The organizational structure of the Alumni Association and its relationship with the university, we use the terms “self-governance association,” “independent association,” or basically one driven by the alumni itself. Can you speak about how you feel about the organizational structure of the Alumni Association?*

Laster I just think it’s so critical for the alumni leadership to be able to have its own organization because there’s a hierarchy at OSU, and the president is at the top. The alumni director, at the time, was not even seen in the high, senior-level hierarchy. They were invited in, I think. The director was, you, but you didn’t always get the voice that the alumni deserved to get. It very much depended on the philosophy of whatever president of the university we had. There was not a lot of control over our own organization because we were always at the mercy of whatever the prevailing thought was about what the role should be.

By becoming self-sufficient, it allows the Alumni Association to truly be the voice of alumni and to define our purpose and value. Of course, we work very closely with the president of the university to make sure that we’re helping, bringing value, and doing the things that everyone wants to make OSU a better place and to continue those connections. I think it’s critical to the voice of alumni to have that independence.

Also, it’s important that the alumni stay separate from the Foundation because the Foundation raises the money. But we want alumni to feel like they’re a part of OSU, and it isn’t always that you’re just coming to ask for a handout of money if OSU contacts you. There needs to be an organization within OSU that just cares about keeping the connection, the value, the camaraderie, and the spirit of OSU alive, and serving our alumni, not just raising money, although sometimes that’s a part of it.

Gill *We talked a lot about initiatives, but thinking about programs and activities of the Alumni Association, did you have some favorite ones that you enjoyed, some of the programs of the Alumni Association that stand out in your mind?*

Laster Oh, gosh. True, near, and dear to my heart was when we started the program I mentioned earlier, the Legacies, because what does an alumni want more than anything but for their kids to understand the value of what that university meant to us? To have that engrained in the kids early on, and to make that investment. Where we got that idea from was Sony did that, years and years ago, when they started making little kid toys so they’d have that brand loyalty by the time you become an adult.

It was along that idea that we started thinking about, “What do we need to do for our alumni?” Grandparent university—my daughter is a senior this year, and so she’s gotten all these gifts all the way. She got to go to Legacy Weekend last year, and it really gave her a flavor of OSU and what the students are like. So, I didn’t have to sell my daughter on OSU. By the time she was a sophomore, she was saying, “Oh, of course I’m going to OSU!” Now, it didn’t hurt that her dad would say, “Kara, you can go to college anywhere you want, but if you go to OSU, we’ll pay for it.” (Laughter)

Gill *A little bit of extra incentive, Kathy.*

Laster Of course, she knew she could go wherever she wanted.

Gill *Kathy, backing up and starting at the front end, as early as when they’re little kids, they’d send Pistol Pete books and coloring books and different things. Can you share what some of those are?*

Laster Yes, like a coloring book, and at one point there was a bank that they could save money for college. They got a little backpack, a cute little OSU backpack, at one point. They would get birthday cards. I can’t remember all of them.

Gill *It seems like they loaded the information when they joined, if the parents would consent. They’d actually put it in the database. Then, when they got in high school, freshman year, they’d be switched over to the High School and College Relations database for prospective students, and then they’d start getting critical information.*

Laster Right. Another thing I loved was the Student Alumni Board that started. I don’t know that we really get credit for that, but I just think that is a really great program. We begin to grab those students while they’re in college and give them those opportunities for leadership, expose them to alumni. That’s a great program. Recently, they started the Orange Door Program, which was something we kind of conceptualized way back in 1997-98. The idea that if you’re an OSU business and you join the Orange Door and you want to do business, you can go on there and see who are OSU people if you need a particular service. You can see alumni, and we can be loyal to each other.

Gill *That was started mainly for out-of-state chapters, wasn’t it?*

Laster A lot of the strategies that were discussed back then we knew would take awhile to implement. So, I mean, really, even today we’re still seeing things come to light that were part of the long-range strategy.

- Gill** *Asking in the general nature about alumni, why is it so important to keep alumni engaged with Oklahoma State University?*
- Laster** There's an emotional value to that. Of course, for the university it's great to keep alumni engaged. It kind of depends on how you want to look at it. The university needs alumni to be engaged because we can be amazingly helpful in recruiting and fundraising and just the general perception of OSU. There are tons and tons of ways the alumni can come back and contribute to colleges with their time and mentoring or efforts or whatever.
- One thing we looked at really strongly when we were doing the strategic planning is, "What value does the Alumni Association have to the alumni, to the alumnus?" We really wanted to look at, "Why would you join the Alumni Association?" We really worked hard to provide some benefits and also educate our alumni as to how that small little membership fee pays for so many of the programs like, right now, Homecoming. Homecoming is supported by Oklahoma State Alumni Association. We're in the middle now of a fundraising campaign to save Homecoming because some of the living groups are beginning to think about pulling out because of the cost involved. Not only has the alumni funded it, but we need to fund it at a higher level to keep the pressure off of those student groups because one pulls out, research shows that other universities, others start pulling out. And Homecoming is the greatest tradition at OSU. It is the best in the United States. It is one of the top homecoming celebrations. We don't want to lose that because it is part of our tradition. So, it's the emotional attachment that we have to those traditions that I think the Alumni Association helps us to connect to and that emotional value.
- Gill** *Kathy, one aspect, it's not why you do it, but in your leadership and the new programs created, two or three of those have received CASE national awards, Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. There are about six schools that receive that and are recognized in the entire United States and Canada. For about three years running, three out of four years, OSU Alumni Association received the CASE Recognition Award. Pretty impressive, isn't it?*
- Laster** It is very impressive. OSU has an Alumni Association far and above many universities. Compared, for example, to OU, the kind of connection OU would make with the alumni would mostly be through athletics. OSU is kind of more of a comprehensive connection. Certainly there's a lot through athletics, but there's also another way to connect with OSU beyond just athletics. It really is one of the more superior alumni associations, and I think that's great.

- Gill** *You can look at some of these and try to capture or pull some thoughts together. From your perspective, what should be the primary mission and purposes of a university alumni association?*
- Laster** Well, I just go back to our core purpose: connections for life. It's about connecting alumni to the university. It's about the university being able to connect to the alumni. It's about relationships. I say this, and this has not happened to me yet. I still have not met one OSU alum that I do not like. I mean, they're just great people that go to OSU. (Laughter) Every once in a while in the crowd at an athletic game, you'll hear one person that gets overly negative, but, mostly, OSU people are just great people.
- When you're out here in the communities and you meet another OSU alum, there's just this instant connection. It's like this bond, this almost unspoken bond that you both know what you experienced. I was recently on the OU campus, and one of their administrators was just so excited about the OU experience. I know, internally, I was just thinking, "You just have no idea how great the OSU student experience is!" (Laughter)
- Gill** *"If you only knew," huh? (Laughs)*
- Laster** We put out more leaders than most universities. We just have amazing, well-rounded, wonderful students, and it's a great place.
- Gill** *This will be a tough question. It's not intended to be tough, but of all your memories, can you share with us some special memories and highlights of your time at the Alumni Association?*
- Laster** You're talking about in terms of serving on the board?
- Gill** *Just in the alumni activities, period.*
- Laster** Of course, it's always fun to go when there's a big athletic event, like before the Big 12 tournament, the basketball tournament, just going to those and feeling the camaraderie of OSU and the orange. There's just nothing that beats that feeling. I've got chill bumps. Just those moments that you get to be a part of that, knowing that bowls want to come after us because of the loyalty that our alumni have to OSU.
- I love doing all that strategic planning work. I loved going out and serving the alumni, and hearing from them, and spending the time to really think how we could be meaningful to alumni. I love that. I love the camaraderie of the board meetings when we could collaborate about how we could better serve our alumni and also know what's going on at the university and feel that connection. There's such emotion among the alumni. The passing of the gavel of one president to the next, often there

are tears as those things happen because of such emotional connection. This is not just an organization you're a part of to get on your vita or your résumé. It's an emotional connection. It's something you do that goes to your heart. So, it's just the relationships. It's all about relationships.

Gill *Kathy, looking forward now, we've talked a lot about the association, looking back and to the present. Looking forward, how do you feel about the future of the Alumni Association? What do you think it needs to do to continue to grow, continue to be of greater service?*

Laster Well, first and foremost, it has to maintain its financial stability. It has to continue to be funded at a level that it can remain self-sufficient. I think that's critical to be able to accomplish its purpose and its true mission, which is to serve the alumni and the university. I think continued, strong leadership, and then enough cannot be said about the Alumni Association staff and the president and CEO who run our Alumni Association day to day. That role is a critical role to the success and the people that we have on our staff that do the work. They're dedicated, they've been there for years, and they love the university. Many of them are prior graduates, so the quality of the people we have on those staff roles and the leadership role is going to be important.

I think continuing to connect with our alumni and help them understand the value of the membership is really important. Continuing to come up with programs that make it relevant for our alumni to be a part of the Alumni Association is important. I think the best thing we have going for us, in addition to the history and the passion that people have for OSU, is our Alumni Center. It is now a testament to the importance of alumni on our campus. The building represents that. It's a huge building. It's a beautiful building. It's rich in tradition and aesthetics, and it's something to be proud of. It's a physical representation for alumni of what we feel toward Oklahoma State University. You can never dismiss the value of alumni on the OSU campus because that building is forever.

Gill *Where it's located.*

Laster Oh, it's just amazing! Across from the Student Union, right by Old Central, and one of the first things you see when you come into campus. The brick pavers that have names and names and names of our alumnus. It's wonderful. It's a great tribute to Oklahoma State.

Gill *Kathy, how do you think the Alumni Association is going to need to change, and how is it going to need to be different going into the future?*

Laster Just continue to be dynamic and marketing-oriented, and continue to

stay in touch with our alumni. We need to continue to stay relevant.

Gill *On a personal note, we talked about your daughter Kara. You said earlier she was a senior this year. I understand that the OSU legacy in your family may be continuing?*

Laster Yes, she's definitely planning to go to OSU. We have an eighth grader, as well. He's very into basketball, so it depends what happens with his basketball career, if he gets a scholarship somewhere. But if he doesn't, I imagine OSU will be his pick, too. It's a neat thing when your whole family can bond and rally around your affinity to a university. I can't wait for her to go and have some of the experiences. Even now, as I am a little sentimental about this being her senior year and the last year she'll be at home, I know what's ahead for her. I know how wonderful an experience she's going to have at Oklahoma State. It gives me great comfort as a parent, as a mother, to know. So, I'm not quite as sad about it sometimes as she is because she is a little scared of what the future may bring, but I know what awaits her. It'll be a wonderful experience.

Gill *Kathy, thinking of all the things that you've accomplished in your lifetime and your practice today, what professional and personal challenges remain ahead for you?*

Laster Well, I always enjoy the opportunity to somehow give back a little bit because I've talked today, there's been a few times I could have even got a little emotional if I'd let myself go there because it's just been such an important part of my life to be a part of Oklahoma State University. So, I want to find a way to give back. I've tried to give back in my time, and hopefully at some point I can even give back more, financially.

Work/family balance is always a big deal to me. I did my dissertation on that, and I think it's a challenge how you give the time you want to your kids and your family and the thing that matters, really matters most in life, in my view, and still maintain your professional passions and interests. I love working with organizations. I love making a difference in people's lives, whether it is in a clinical setting or whether it is in an organizational setting. I love doing that kind of work, so continuing to balance all that is a big challenge for me. Of course, taking care of my health—as alumni, we're getting older. (Laughter) We're now part of that older group that is alumni, and so that's important to maintain that. I want to maintain our affiliation always with OSU. I look forward to our kids going through.

Gill *Kathy, perhaps something that some of us in this interview might not have picked up on at this point, you made the major change in your life, major decision, to go from corporate America to going back to*

Shawnee, America. You also made a little bit of change in your career from your private practice as a psychologist to more of some business consulting. Can you talk about that and your decision? You're kind of balancing those two worlds right now, but can you talk about those two areas in your life and what it means to you?

Laster

I enjoy doing the clinical work, but sometimes people find this early in their careers, and some people still try to figure out really what they're about. For me, I finally connected the dots at the ripe old age of around fifty, just slightly over. I just realized that that's where my passion is, is working with groups of people and organizations. We spend a lot of time in our work life, and when you can connect a person's individual passion with where the organization they work for is going, it is the people—OSU is an institution, but it's the people in the institution that make it great. You can have a company, but it's the people in it that make that company great.

My business is about trying to help tap into the potential of the people and align their needs with the organization's needs to really get the buy-in and the passion that helps the organization achieve what it wants, as well as the individual get the personal growth that they want. I love doing that kind of work. I look back. My undergraduate was speech communication consultancy. It is exactly what I have ended up doing. I went the path of business, psychology, travel, stay home, the whole gamut. I have come back full circle to what I graduated in. I needed all those business experiences to be able to make a contribution to organizations in this role.

Gill

You've worked, Kathy, with a lot of different kinds of organizations: non-profit, corporations, Phillips. Can you talk about some of them?

Laster

Well, we've done work doing culture change in organizations. I've worked individually with executives on their own leadership development, even on their own, defining what they're about and how they might want to evolve their professional and personal life at this point. I've worked with leadership teams. I love doing work with leadership teams to help them really engage.

I work with this model called the Five Dysfunctions of a Team where we really help the organization build trust and deal with conflict and really get committed and hold each other accountable and really focus on their results to become a higher performing group with a lot more satisfaction for everyone. We also do selection assessment. If someone is going to hire someone, we can help do an assessment to see if it's the right fit for the job, or if someone needs to be promoted. So, we just have a lot of tools to help organizations maximize their people.

- Gill** *Personally, in your consulting business, you've worked with ConocoPhillips. You've worked with hospital boards in addition to coaching.*
- Laster** Banks and just different organizations, universities. I've actually done some work for the University of Oklahoma, and just a variety.
- Gill** *Maybe I could ask it this way, Kathy. What do you want to do with the rest of your life?*
- Laster** Boy, that's a deep question. (Laughter)
- Gill** *Well, I mean your consulting office or counseling office.*
- Laster** The first thing that comes to mind is I want to live long enough to enjoy my kids and their kids and make a difference in their lives because I didn't have my kids until I was thirty-seven and forty. So, it's important I take care of myself if I want to be around for them. I love this work that I do. I see myself doing this.
- Gill** *So, you'll continue to balance both.*
- Laster** Yes, I do. Eventually when the kids aren't home, maybe we'll enjoy more time with our friends and old acquaintances, reconnect. My husband played tennis at OSU, Charlie, and he had a tennis partner, Glenn Nakazawa, and at Homecoming last year they did a reunion of the tennis team. We stayed in Parker dorm overnight. Our families, we got in a dorm room and ate Taco Bell late at night and did all the things we did in college. (Laughter) As a result of that, we went out to visit them at their vacation home at the Sea Ranch, north of San Francisco, and totally reconnected. Now our kids with their kids, and it was just a wonderful thing that, really, Homecoming created that opportunity for us.
- I'd love to have the time with friends and family and continue to work with my clients and just stay viable for as long as I can. I want to keep our connection with OSU, and I think we'll be very involved in the next few years because of our kids. I love that I was president of the Alumni Association because forever more you get to be a part of the board, and I can always stay connected. I value that greatly.
- Gill** *Kathy, you have gotten far enough in life that you'd be thinking about your legacy a little bit. Let me ask you this question. How do you hope people will remember Kathy Malchar Laster?*
- Laster** Boy, that's a tough one. I guess I would say as someone that really tried

to make a difference in other people's lives, whether it was my own kids or my siblings or my extended family or my friends or my mentors or my clients. I guess I just want to feel like I somehow made a difference for them.

Gill *Kathy, what should we bring up that maybe someone looking at this in twenty years might want to know? Have we missed something? Is there something you'd like to say or some topic we haven't covered?*

Laster I think maybe a little bit, to go back to the female thing. It was a great opportunity to get to be the president of the Alumni Association as a woman. I do think women bring things in leadership. We use our brain in different ways than a man does. Not to say there aren't great male leaders, but female leaders can bring many things to organizations. Oklahoma has been traditionally a pretty good-ol'-boy state.

I actually want to credit you because you kind of gave that opportunity to me to come on and be on the board and to have the opportunity to serve as president. It's people like you who make that possible for women that then begin to change that view so that women do have the opportunity to show what we offer. I do think that I probably brought a different set of things to the Alumni Association by having the opportunity to be president, and I think there are many, many capable women out there. I would like to see women step up to those kinds of roles and to be given the opportunity to be given those kinds of roles. So, that's a challenge I would put out there.

Gill *Kathy, it's been great. I appreciate your comments, your perspective, and your insight on your relationship with the university and the Alumni Association. Is there anything else before we close?*

Laster I just have to say this. I know you're the one interviewing me, but my association with you has been so incredibly meaningful to me because you're one of those people in my life that reached out and touched me and saw potential in me and believed in me, even before I believed in myself. The leadership you brought to the Alumni Association, you, Jerry Gill—I know you didn't want this to be a part of this, but the legacy you have left at this university to help evolve the Alumni Association to what it is today, not only does it set us up to be really successful going into the future, you've just personally touched so many people's lives in your role as the director of the Alumni Association. I just want to thank you because you have made a difference in my life, and I thank you for that. I thank OSU and all the people that made a difference in my life.

Gill *Thank you.*

----- *End of interview* -----