

Oral History Interview
with
Nancy Finley

Interview Conducted by
Jerry Gill
November 22, 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 Nancy Finley is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 22, 2010.

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About Nancy Finley...

Nancy Finley grew up in Lubbock, Texas, where she attended Coronado High school, active in the spirit squad, Mustang Tri-Hi-Y, and other school clubs and organizations. When she graduated in 1967, she enrolled at Texas Tech University and later went into the nursing program at Texas Tech Methodist Hospital School. In 1978, she met Eddy Finley who was in school on a rodeo scholarship. Nancy was a Phi Mu sorority member, active in social clubs and organizations, whereas Eddy was a full-on cowboy, Nancy's complete opposite. They were married eight months later, in 1979. After Eddy had earned his bachelor's and master's degrees, and Nancy had completed nursing school, they moved to Stillwater where Eddy pursued his doctorate at Oklahoma State University. After Eddy's PhD completion, the couple moved back to Texas for a short spell, but came back to Stillwater in 1982 after the birth of their daughter.

Eddy was offered a position at OSU in the Agriculture Department, with focus on international agriculture, and gradually worked his way from assistant professor up to full professor. Nancy went to work in 1984 as a university staff nurse after the birth of their son. Also in 1984, OSU approached Eddy about developing a mascot for the band, and he quickly initiated OSU's Spirit Rider program. Having brought the rodeo club to the top of its game, Eddy knew the best way to implement a horse and rider into OSU's band program. Little did he know that the Spirit Rider would immediately become an icon for the university as a whole, and not just the band. Along with her paying job, Nancy had also been an integral member of the Spirit Rider team for its first couple of years. She soon realized, however, that the program needed more than she could offer, and she stepped aside to let OSU students take the reins under Eddy's leadership. In 1992, she became Assistant Director of Nurses at OSU, and later became the health unit manager at Mercury Marine in Stillwater.

In her interview, Nancy Finley discusses her late husband's role in OSU's Spirit Rider program, his selfless commitment to it, and his dedication to the students with whom he worked so closely in the program and in the classroom. She shares insight into Eddy's life as a private person, educator, and team leader, and how the university, city, and state (and more importantly, his family) continue to hold him in such high regard with much-earned respect and the fondest of memories.

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An Oral History Project of the OSU Library

Nancy Finley

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Jerry Gill
November 22, 2010
Stillwater, Oklahoma



Gill *My name is Jerry Gill. Today is November 22, 2010. I am visiting with Nancy Finley on the Oklahoma State University Campus in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This interview is for the O-State Stories project of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program. Nancy, I appreciate you taking time to come and visit with us today.*

Finley Well, thank you for asking me.

Gill *I know your husband, Eddy Finley, was instrumental in helping initiate OSU's Spirit Rider program...*

Finley Yes.

Gill *...and I want to visit with you a little bit about that later, but first let me ask you a little bit about your background, where you grew up, and your early life.*

Finley I was born and raised in Lubbock, Texas. I graduated from Texas Tech University back in the '70s. I married Eddy in 1979. He pursued his doctoral degree at Oklahoma State University, and that's how we ended up here.

Gill *When you started, you enrolled at Texas Tech in what year? The fall of...*

Finley Oh, gosh. Let me think. It was the fall of '67.

Gill *So you graduated from high school in 1967?*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Which school did you graduate from?*

Finley Coronado High School.

Gill *Any activities, things you did in high school? Do you recall?*

Finley Oh, I was a member of the Mustang Tri-Hi-Y, the spirit squad. Let's see, various and a sundry different clubs.

Gill *Brothers and sisters in your family?*

Finley I have one sister. She lives in Plano, Texas, and she's about nine years older than I am.

Gill *What did your dad do for a living?*

Finley My dad was a mechanical engineer for the government, and my mother was a homemaker.

Gill *So, again, you met Eddy at Lubbock. Is there a story there about how you met? There has got to surely be a good story in there somewhere.*

Finley Yes, I was a senior in nursing school when I met Eddy. I had just finished my surgical rotation in nursing school, and my girlfriend and I went out to have a beer at a place called Coldwater Cattle Company, and that's where I met Eddy. We met in November of 1978, and we were married in July of 1979.

Gill *Didn't take long for romance to blossom, then?*

Finley No, not long.

Gill *That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about Eddy, his early life, where he grew up, and kind of how he got to Tech?*

Finley Eddy grew up in a little place called Alanreed, Texas. It's right off of I-40, off of Cap Rock of Texas. It's about sixty-seven miles southeast of Amarillo, Texas. He went to school at McClain High School and played basketball and football. He also rodeoed. He was a member of the PRCA Rodeo, Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. His parents owned around fifteen sections of land so they had a fairly large ranch there. He went to Texas Tech at the same time that I went to Texas Tech, but we kind of went in different circles. I didn't date cowboys. I was in a sorority, and I basically dated fraternity guys and football players.

(Laughter) We found out later that we knew a lot of the same people. I'm sure our paths crossed, but we never paid much attention. I probably never paid much attention. Eddy got his master's and his bachelor's from Texas Tech, and then he got his doctorate in ag ed from Oklahoma State.

Gill *What was his major there at Tech?*

Finley Agricultural education.

Gill *What about yourself? Were you in nursing school?*

Finley I was in nursing school at Texas Tech through...

Gill *Is that like a two-plus-two program? How does that work?*

Finley Well, we didn't have a regular baccalaureate program back then so it was Texas Tech Methodist Hospital School, a nursing four-year program.

Gill *A BS degree program.*

Finley Yes, it was a combination. The year after I graduated was the year they got the baccalaureate program at Tech, but we were still considered Tech graduates.

Gill *You're a registered nurse?*

Finley Yes, I'm a registered nurse.

Gill *Eddy obviously had a passion for horses and ranching from the get-go. I mean, wow!*

Finley Yes, he went to Texas Tech on a rodeo scholarship. He was a header, a roper, and a saddle bronc rider.

Gill *He didn't bulldog, huh?*

Finley No, no bulldogging. (Laughter)

Gill *That's good. What about student organizations Eddy was involved in, do you recall, when he was at Tech?*

Finley He was a member of the Rodeo Association. He was a member of various and a sundry agricultural associations. Eddy was involved in about everything. He was just one of those go-getters.

Gill *So, now, you were in a sorority. Which sorority were you in?*

Finley I was in Phi Mu. Eddy was not in a fraternity.

Gill *Your activities in college?*

Finley Oh, well, probably the same thing the kids do nowadays. I remember the Homecoming Committee.

Gill *Did you get to pomp and do all that good stuff?*

Finley No, I didn't do any of the pom stuff. I wasn't a member of the pom squad. (Laughs)

Gill *No, the pumping. Putting it in the...*

Finley Oh, yes. All the little tissue paper?

Gill *Yes.*

Finley Yes, I got to do that. (Laughter) Our homecoming wasn't quite as grandiose as Oklahoma State's, but it was good.

Gill *So, again, what year did Eddy graduate with his bachelor's degree?*

Finley Let's see. Eddy graduated with his bachelor's degree in 1971. He graduated with his master's degree in 1973, and then he went to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, for about four years and was chief consultant to the crown prince on agricultural affairs. He had just gotten back to the United States when I met him. He was telling me he was going to go get his doctorate, and I thought, "Okay." (Laughs) He kept telling me that. I finally asked him, I said, "Why are you telling me that? You've already told me about twelve times," and he said, "Well, I just wanted you to know that after we're married, that's what we're going to be doing." (Laughter) This was about fifteen minutes after I met him, and I thought, "Okay." (Laughter)

Gill *Did you check and see how long he'd been there?*

Finley Well, I thought perhaps I might have married Norman Bates, the psycho, or met him or whatnot. (Laughter)

Gill *Let me back up. This is something I didn't know about Eddy. After he finished his master's degree, which was in agricultural education, as well, then he went to Bahrain?*

Finley Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Gill *For four years?*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Wow. Some of his activities there, do you recall? Did he tell you about it?*

Finley Well, mostly he was a consultant for agricultural matters over there, what they could grow as far as crops, and basically just consulted with the crown prince. I don't know. There are several crown princes in the Saudi Arabian dynasty. Basically just worked with him off and on, would come back to the States in intervals and whatnot. But, yes, he worked over there for a while.

Gill *Kind of back to Texas Tech. If you'd grown up at Tech and gone to some games, you'd have seen the Masked Rider even before you were in college, right?*

Finley You bet.

Gill *Do you remember what some of your first memories were, or your thoughts about the Masked Rider?*

Finley Probably when I was a sophomore in high school, some of our good friends had a son that went to Texas A&M who was in the corps. We were playing Texas A&M, and so he asked me to go to the game with him. I think I was maybe fifteen and he was twenty-some-odd. We had been lifelong friends, our parents had, so I went to the game with him. The first time I saw the Masked Rider I thought it was really neat. Of course, we grew up with that tradition, but just basically going to see the horse. Yes, it was really pretty. The horse at the time was called Charcoal Cody. There's a track that goes around the football field of Texas Tech where the horse runs so the horse never goes out on the field.

Gill *The Masked Rider, of course, I guess is the official mascot for Texas Tech. What does he symbolize for Texas Tech people?*

Finley Well, it's kind of like the Spirit Rider in that part of the country because Lubbock is really built on land called *Llano Estacado*, because that part of Texas was part of Mexico at one time. It's just kind of a symbolization between the Spanish heritage and the American heritage. Texas Tech—I don't know if you've ever been on their campus, but

many of their buildings are in the Spanish format, the engineering buildings, the mathematical buildings, and they have kept that tradition all these years. So the Masked Rider symbolizes kind of like a Zorro-type. If you looked at the Masked Rider and didn't really know what the Masked Rider was, you would think it was Zorro because they do wear the cape, they do wear the bolero hat, and they have the mask and whatnot and are on a solid black horse.

Gill *Thank you. We'll come back to the Masked Rider later, in just a couple minutes. After Eddy came back, you met him after he'd come back from Saudi Arabia.*

Finley Yes, he was back about six months when I met him.

Gill *Then you got married a few months after that. Can you kind of trace your career before you came to Oklahoma State, and after that?*

Finley After we got married?

Gill *Yes. After you got married was there a time in there before you came to OSU?*

Finley Well, I was still living in Lubbock because I was working at Methodist Hospital. Eddy had been teaching at Roosevelt High School, about eleven miles south of Lubbock. After the end of his teaching there, he moved back to the ranch to help his parents out a little bit before we came to school. At the time, Eddy really didn't know where he was going to go to school. He had applied at nine graduate schools and been accepted by all nine so we were kind of trying to figure out where we wanted to go. The first place that we were going to go was Fort Collins, but unfortunately I couldn't get a job in Colorado because nobody likes to leave Colorado. Everybody that graduates likes to stay there so we ended up coming to Oklahoma State. Eddy moved back to the ranch. We were married July 14, 1979. He came up from the ranch, and we were married that weekend. Had about a two-day honeymoon, he went back to the ranch, and I stayed in Lubbock and worked. Then, on my days off, I would drive to the ranch. It was about a three-hour drive from Alanreed to Lubbock. We did that until he was accepted to OSU, and we came here.

Gill *Was that in 1980?*

Finley No, that was 1979. Yes, September of '79.

Gill *So you had opportunities to go to several different graduate programs. Was there a reason that he was influenced to come to Oklahoma State?*

Finley Well, actually, when we found out, we were sitting in a Denny's in Fort Collins, Colorado. (Laughs) I was telling him that I could work per diem, or part-time, as a nurse. Of course, with my husband being in graduate school I needed full-time employment. He said that Oklahoma State had presented an interest in him to come and work on his doctoral studies there. So here we are, and he said, "Why don't we just drive to Stillwater?" We got in our car, and we drove all day and part of the evening, and got into Stillwater and met with Dr. Robert Terry later on that afternoon of the next day when we arrived. He offered Eddy a graduate assistantship. One of the reasons why Eddy was accepted is from the time they actually were recording grades, keeping grades, he only made one B in the whole time.

Gill *Wow.*

Finley Very, very intelligent man, but you wouldn't know it. Very down to earth man.

Gill *Was Dr. Terry the chairman of his education committee?*

Finley Yes, Robert Terry was head of the department at the time, of Ag Ed, and kind of his confidant. Dr. Robert Price was really more of a mentor to Eddy than anyone.

Gill *How long before he finished his doctoral program?*

Finley He started in September of 1979, and he graduated in May of 1981.

Gill *That's pretty quick.*

Finley Yes, and then we moved back to Texas. We moved to Vernon, Texas. I told him one of the stipulations of him coming to Oklahoma is that we had to go back home to Texas when he finished. (Laughter) I didn't want to live in Oklahoma, didn't like Oklahoma. I mean, I was born and raised in Texas, as well as he was.

Gill *Specifically, west Texas.*

Finley Yes, we moved to Vernon, Texas, for about fourteen months. He was the head of the junior college Ag Ed Department and the rodeo advisor. Then our daughter J. J., or Jessica, was born in Vernon. When she was about four months old in October of 1982, we moved back to Stillwater.

Gill *He got a position, then, on the faculty?*

Finley They offered him an assistant professorship. From there, he just kind of gradually went up the ladder.

Gill *During these periods, were you working in nursing?*

Finley Kind of off and on. I started, basically, back to work in 1984, about four months after Justin was born, at the Student Health Center.

Gill *So you moved back, then, to Stillwater. What year would that have been in? Eighty-two?*

Finley October of '82 is when we moved back.

Gill *Then you worked at the...*

Finley I didn't start working. I kind of worked off and on at different per diem jobs, just fill-ins and things, because we had a new baby and I was staying home. Then I became pregnant with our son, Justin. Basically started back to work full-time in April of 1984.

Gill *And you were working here at the university?*

Finley I was working at the university as a staff nurse. Then in 1992 I became the Assistant Director of Nurses.

Gill *And Donald "Doc" Cooper was the head.*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Have you got some good Doc Cooper stories that you can tell?*
(Laughter)

Finley Oh, yes. (Laughs) I worked for Dr. Cooper for a while.

Gill *Do you remember when Eddy started first thinking about the Spirit Rider concept?*

Finley It was in—let's see. It was in May of '84 because the Spirit Rider, which many people don't know, is really the mascot for the band. The band wanted a mascot, and so William Ballenger, who I think is now the band director at Texas Tech, was at OSU at the time. He and another gentleman in the band department called Eddy, knowing that Eddy had gone to Texas Tech and that we had a rider, a Spirit Rider-type, the Masked Rider, and asked him if he would consider maybe coming together and talking about getting a mascot for the band. At that time, Eddy was doing a lot of traveling because one of his jobs was to certify

first-year ag teachers in the state of Oklahoma so he was doing quite a bit of traveling. He said he would think about it. He came home, and we talked about it. He said, "This is what I kind of thought we might do. I want to see what you think." He talked about the similarities between the Red Raider and something similar for OSU.

Gill *So he was influenced by the Masked Rider?*

Finley Yes. Mostly what he was influenced by was the horse aspect because of being raised on a horse and cattle ranch, because he was a member of the PRCA Rodeo Association, and because he had worked with horses all of his life. He wanted to kind of bring that influence since Oklahoma A&M was a state-supported school and there was agricultural influence here. He thought that we would bring something because you already had Pistol Pete so he thought he would bring something similar to what Texas Tech had. He talked about it. We thought about it. We went over a lot of different scenarios, and finally he asked me what I thought about maybe having a guy on a horse that just rode out on the field carrying the OSU flag, dressed like a working cowboy. I told him I thought that would be really good. I also told him, I said, "If you're going to have that happen, then it has to be a real cowboy. It can't be somebody that just wears boots and a hat. They have to have a ranching and farming background." He agreed with that.

His first person that came to mind to be the first Spirit Rider is John Beall. John Beall and Eddy were good friends. He was John's advisor. Also, John was the president of the Rodeo Association. Eddy had been asked to take over the club because the kids were really wanting to resurrect the Rodeo Association. In the first year and second year, (I think it was the first and second year, it may have been the first and third year) Eddy brought them from the very bottom of the clubs at Oklahoma State to the very top. They won top club in the College of Ag. Whatever Eddy did, he didn't do on the spur of the moment. Whatever he did, he put a lot of thought process into it. He thought about it. He planned it out. He mapped it out. He committed to nothing until he had everything completely organized. Fortunately, he wasn't that way at home, (Laughter) but about his students, his studies, the Spirit Rider, the Rodeo Association, anything that he was asked to tackle took great thought and planning. He just never did anything by the spur of the moment.

Gill *To your knowledge, did Eddy or anyone else visit with Texas Tech about the Spirit Rider program at OSU?*

Finley No.

Gill *Did Texas Tech ever have any issues with OSU creating a similar kind*

of, but slightly different, mascot?

Finley No, not really because Wyoming also has a—of course, they have a Shetland pony, but they are the Wyoming Cowboys. They have their cowboys run out with the little horse and stuff. When the program first started, it was Eddy, John Beall, his horse Della, and then Hooker was John Beall's little cow dog, little cattle dog. He was a little blue heeler. He came to all the games and sat on the sideline because when John got ready to run out onto the field, he would tell Hooker to stay. One time, he forgot to tell Hooker to stay, and so Hooker ran out on the field with him, and everybody loved it. For a couple of years after John had graduated and we had new Spirit Riders, everybody wanted to know where the little dog was.

Gill *What happened to the dog, huh? (Laughter)*

Finley Yes, Hooker became very, very popular. The boys rode their own horses up until—the last thing Eddy did before he turned over the reins of the Spirit Rider to Don Topliff was to find a horse for OSU. What he was looking for was a very gentle horse that children could come up and pet, pull the tail, just do whatever, and the horse would not kick, that was not frightful of the crowds, because they used to have to stuff cotton in the ears of the horse because it was so loud out on the field. Sometimes it would spook the horse, especially Penny, who was the Bailey boys', who was Brad, Kenny, and Steve Bailey. This was a concept that he took just a little bit of what Tech had to offer and kind of made it his own. He was very precise. There was no Spirit Rider corps at that time. There was no trailer. No pickup was donated. Everybody had their own thing. What we were basically looking for was just a mascot that the band would be happy with, that the tradition could carry on.

Gill *Let me come back and ask you a couple of questions about that. If I understood right, the band, did they come to Eddy?*

Finley No, the director of the band came to Eddy.

Gill *Bill Ballenger.*

Finley He called Eddy, and there was another gentleman, too. I think his last name started with an S, but I don't think he was in the picture much, but basically Bill Ballenger. Then on down the line, Myron Roderick and Dave Martin worked with Ed, also.

Gill *You alluded to a couple of things. First of all, the horse and the Spirit Rider: who came up with the term Spirit Rider?*

Finley Eddy.

Gill *It was Eddy's? He came up with the term?*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Of course, the Masked Rider is the rider, but what were his thoughts on the Spirit part of it?*

Finley Just the spirit of OSU, and you had an experienced rider. He thought Spirit Rider was kind of a catchy name that people could remember. (Laughs)

Gill *Do you remember some other names he was thinking about as he came up with that?*

Finley No, he really wasn't thinking of any because, again, when Eddy was asked to do something, or there was a plan or whatnot, he thought about it for a long period of time. When he came up with Spirit Rider that was what it was going to be.

Gill *You alluded earlier to the fact, of course, OSU already has a mascot: Pistol Pete. Why did Eddy and others feel that they needed a Spirit Rider in addition to Pistol Pete?*

Finley I think that the band just always felt like they needed something to kind of define who they were. They wanted something to make them stand out and, probably, to this day because the Spirit Rider started in 1984, and now we're in 2010, so we are looking at twenty-six years. I doubt very seriously if you were not involved at that time with the Spirit Rider that you would not realize that that Spirit Rider is the band's mascot.

Gill *Is it still that way today?*

Finley Well, it was, as long as my husband was in charge of it. Whether it is, I don't have a lot to do with that anymore.

Gill *Nancy, you were talking a little bit about the riders. First, you had John Beall.*

Finley There was John Beall, then Raymond Russ, then Brad Bailey, Kenny Bailey, and Todd Honer.

Gill *These are the ones that worked under Eddy?*

Finley Under Eddy. As time went on, one of the things that he always did that

we always thought was nice, these pictures hung in Ag Hall for a long time. Now they're at my house packed away, but the boys each got a picture. Eddy always had a professional picture made of the boys on their horse, either in front of Ag Hall, the Seretean Center, or the An Sci [Animal Science] Arena. I'm trying to think where else. I think those were the only places, maybe in front of the library, carrying the flag and dressed in their regalia, and had a little nameplate underneath their name saying their name, what year they were the Spirit Rider, and then my husband's name and that he was the advisor. Eddy was the advisor of the Spirit Rider Association from 1984 to 1989.

Gill *Do you remember some of the ones that followed him? You mentioned Don Topliff.*

Finley Don Topliff was a good friend of Eddy's and took over the program when Eddy decided he had done it long enough and wanted to turn the reins over. It was pretty fortunate because not long after he turned over the reins of it, my husband became ill. Don Topliff, David Freeman, and that's really all I can remember, at that time. After Eddy became ill, I didn't have much to do with the football program or didn't go to many football games.

Gill *You were mentioning something about being involved. Do you recall, in the process, who were some of the decision makers? You mentioned Bill Ballenger. Was Gerald Frank—was that the other person that you were thinking about?*

Finley Yes, that name sounds familiar.

Gill *You mentioned Myron Roderick, who was the athletic director.*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Were those the decision makers involved when they actually...*

Finley The decision for what the mascot was going to be was all Eddy's.

Gill *Okay.*

Finley They asked him to come up with a mascot. He came up with one. He presented it to them. They all thought it was pretty good. In September of 1984, myself, Eddy, John, Della, and Hooker were the only ones out there on the field. When OSU scored their first touchdown, John ran out full blast on the field with the flag flying. At that time, they could run from end zone to end zone. People just went crazy. I mean, they just loved it. A lot of people wrote in saying it was great. As the program

built, then Eddy started putting together a Spirit Rider corps. From what I can see when I go to the games now, not much of that has changed too much from the way that Eddy did it. There are girl riders now. I think most of the Spirit Corps right now are girls. I haven't seen too many guys. He got Tener's to donate the outfits that the Spirit Corps and the rider [wear]. One of his good friends in Tulsa tooled the saddle for Bullet, and the reins. He had another good friend in Chickasha at Stidham Trailers that donated the first Spirit Rider trailer.

Gill *Do you know what year that was?*

Finley Let me think. I believe that was 1986. Ron Shirley also donated a pickup truck because Eddy was using his truck to pull the trailer, so a lot of things were donated. The program grew and grew, and then the process of picking a new Spirit Rider every year was pretty tedious. I mean, they had to have a farm and ranching background. I believe Eddy did an oral examination of them, watched how they rode, how they handled their horses, just to make sure that they really could ride.

Gill *Talking about the horse, going back to Bullet, can we talk about Bullet? First of all, there was no Bullet, by name, for the first three or four years. When did they first name the horse Bullet, and do you remember what year that was?*

Finley It was right before Eddy decided not to be the advisor anymore. It was 1989. He and Raymond Russ, Rusty Russ' father, (Rusty was the second Spirit Rider) were out looking for a horse. Right outside of Chandler they found a horse. (Laughter) Eddy said that was the ugliest horse he'd ever seen, but all dolled up he'd look pretty good. Gentle horse, sweet horse. Had been, I think, the children's horse of these people. So for \$500 and season tickets, Bullet was purchased. Only Bullet wasn't named Bullet at the time. Bullet was named Possum.

Gill *Possum! (Laughs)*

Finley The horse's name was Possum. Ed told me, "We can't have a horse running out onto the field by the name of Possum," (Laughter) so he got together with some gentlemen and decided that they were going to have a campus-wide naming contest for the new Spirit Rider horse. The students picked Bullet, and that's how Bullet got his name.

Gill *Just trivia, but you wouldn't happen to remember the name of the student who won the contest, would you?*

Finley No, I wouldn't. I don't know who won it. I'm sure it was published, but I don't know who won it. Eddy would always say, "There's a \$500 horse

with a \$10,000 tack,” because the saddle was beautiful. The bits were beautiful, and all fixed up, Bullet was a gorgeous horse. I always thought Bullet was pretty, period, but I’m not a very good judge of horses...

Gill *Now, Possum was black. They were looking for a black quarter horse. Isn’t that right?*

Finley Yes, his name was Possum.

Gill *By my understanding, visiting with the Cunninghams, with Ty, it’s not that easy to find an all-black quarter horse. They are not bred very much anymore. It was interesting.*

Finley Bullet was more of a deep, deep brown color than a black color, but all shined up, prettied up, and dressed up, Bullet looked pretty good. The original Bullet was an extremely sweet horse, just a very gentle horse.

Gill *Back to your comments about the tack and saddle and how it evolved because it’s fairly elaborate, can you describe that first year or two when you had John Beall and Rusty? Those first couple of years, what was their tack, their saddle, and their apparel like?*

Finley Well, they had their own saddles. They had their own saddles because they had their own horses.

Gill *Just regular rodeo saddles?*

Finley Yes. They wore jeans, chaps, white shirts, a vest, kind of a light orange vest with “OSU” on it, and black hats, and carried an OSU flag.

Gill *How has that changed or evolved, the apparel, over the years?*

Finley Well, they’re more into black now.

Gill *The shirts.*

Finley Well, they’ve got white shirts, but everything else is mostly black.

Gill *Black jeans and black chaps, etcetera.*

Finley Yes. When the Spirit Rider first started, Eddy didn’t want to put a lot into it until he wanted to see how it was going to catch on. I think even he was kind of surprised how it caught on. One of his very, very good friends, Jim Hamilton—the statue that sits out in front of Gallagher Iba—the university wanted a statue made of Bullet, or made of the horse and the Spirit Rider. We didn’t have Bullet then. The rider that sits on

top of that horse out there is actually fashioned after John Beall and Della, the first Spirit Rider. Eddy and Jim drew the design. Jim molded it, and then the casting for that statue out there was from a foundry in Lubbock. It was poured in Lubbock and transported here.

Gill *That first year when you said you weren't sure how it would catch on, was it sort of a trial year, or a "let's see how it works" attitude?*

Finley Yes, it was kind of a trial. Well, you had Pistol Pete, who is really the iconic figure for OSU, and you had to be careful not to step on anyone's toes because, again, you're coming in with something new. You didn't want people to think that you were trying to replace Pistol Pete with the Spirit Rider so what Eddy did, he was very careful in the way that he presented the Spirit Rider versus Pistol Pete. He didn't run out there and try and overshadow Pete. It was after the touchdowns that the horse came out.

Gill *From the get-go, from the very first year in '84, they would actually run out on the field after the touchdowns and the field goals?*

Finley Not the field goals, just the touchdowns, and they had the full field. They ran from goal line to goal line.

Gill *Which is what the Masked Rider does at Texas Tech. Isn't that correct?*

Finley Yes, but around the field at Tech is an oval track, and the horse runs around that track so it's never out on the field. The reason the horse only goes out to about the twenty yard line now is because when Kenny Bailey, who was the fourth Spirit Rider—we had scored a touchdown, and OSU used to have this huge drum that they would pull out on the field. The Bailey boys (again, Brad, Kenney and Steve, now, Steve was not a Spirit Rider under Eddy, but Brad and Kenny were) rode their horse. She was a quarter horse. Her name was Penny. She was an all-black horse, very beautiful horse, but very, very highly strung. Anyway, Kenny is getting ready to ride out onto the field, and they pulled this drum out, and the ref came around the other side of the drum and ran into the horse, and it knocked him down.

He got really angry, and he said the horse knocked him down, which, in fact, it didn't. He actually ran into the horse. Well, after much negotiations, Eddy said that he would take the Spirit Rider off of the field if they didn't get rid of that drum. He used some adjectives there, but he hated the drum. He thought it was a very big deterrent. He thought it was really a hazard out there with the horse because you're dealing with over 50,000 people, you're dealing with people out on the field, you're dealing with the drum, you're dealing with Pistol Pete,

you're dealing with cheerleaders, pom girls, so you have to be careful. That's why he was very, very careful about the safety of everybody. He felt like...

Gill *That's a very unnatural act for a horse to run out on a field with 50,000 screaming fans, isn't it?*

Finley Well, that's why Penny always had cotton in her ears, so she couldn't hear. (Laughter)

Gill *So John Beall, the Bailey boys, and Rusty, they all rode their own horses for those first four or five years, then?*

Finley Yes, Todd Honer didn't have a horse of his own, so he rode Penny.

Gill *That was the Bailey boys' horse?*

Finley Yes, the Baileys had Penny. She rode every year that they rode. I don't know about Steve. I don't know if he rode Bullet or not because, again, when Eddy quit being advisor and really gave up the program, then I really quit going to the games and really didn't pay that much attention to it.

Gill *Nancy, again, pretty high-strung horses we've been talking about and all the distractions, etcetera. Did they do some pre-work with the horses to prepare them? Did they just bring them in and run them around the field, or did they practice in advance some? Did they get used to music or anything?*

Finley No, not really because—they put cotton in their ears. But you have to understand these were the boys' horses. These were horses that were roping horses, that were their rodeo horses, so these boys could handle their own horses.

Gill *These horses had been in parades and rodeo events...*

Finley Well, they had been in rodeo events. Della was John's. Rusty had his horse. Penny was the Bailey boys' horse. I mean, they could handle their horse so it wasn't like you had a rider that could not handle the horse. That's why it was very important for them to have a farming and ranch background, because they had to know how to handle the horse. That's why Eddy was very adamant about getting a horse that was going to be able to be ridden by anyone. If a child should run up behind the horse, that the horse wouldn't kick the child in the head. If somebody came up and wanted to pull the mane of the horse or the tail of the horse, the horse wasn't going to be fidgety. The first Bullet was like that, very,

very sweet, docile horse, just kind of laid back, loved to run out on the field, so that's what he was looking for.

Gill *What can you tell me about, talking about that first one, John? It's pronounced Bell, but it's...*

Finley Beall, B-E-A-L-L.

Gill *Tell me about John, his personality a little bit. Being the first Spirit Rider, we've got to know a little bit more about him, his personality, where he grew up, what he did, some things you know about him.*

Finley John was cute, cocky, a great guy. We loved him to death, pretty full of himself. His father was an equine vet in Norman and worked on a lot of show horses and whatnot. John had been around horses all his life, excellent horseman, I mean, could really ride. Adored my husband, thought he was wonderful and worked very closely with Eddy. The years that the rodeo club got up and going, he became president of the Rodeo Association, and, really, the transformation of John from a really cocky, young eighteen-, nineteen-, twenty-year-old guy to a very mature person by the time he graduated was in large part due to Eddy. Eddy loved his students. He loved teaching. He loved doing what he was doing, but he was a disciplinarian. "You do it my way," or you didn't do it at all, because his way was a way that was thought out very carefully.

Most people think that on game day, you get on the horse, you score a touchdown, out goes the horse, and then out comes the—there's a lot of planning that goes into that. I don't know Ty real well, but from what I can tell, not too much of it has changed from the time it was first started. I don't know how they pick their Spirit Riders now. Tony Payne is a good friend of mine, and John Martin, they co-wrote the "Cowboys Forever" song. When they were doing the filming of Bullet riding in the range and whatnot, I was out there with them when they were doing that because one of my good friends is Jamie Payne, Tony's wife. There's been some changes, of course, because we're talking about a program that's been going twenty-six years. You would expect some changes, but there hasn't been dramatic change to the program. Probably, the most dramatic change is that most of the Spirit Riders of late have been girls, and that's fine.

Gill *How would Eddy have felt about that? (Laughter) Was he more of a traditional guy?*

Finley My husband was very traditional, very traditional. (Laughter) It's not that he was chauvinistic at all. If he ever had a female that could've ridden the way those guys did, which I'm sure there were plenty of them

around, but, again, this was at the very beginning of the program. This was in the '80s. This was when this program first started. He was not comfortable with putting a female on the horse. Now, if he were alive today, if he were choosing today, I would venture to say he would probably have chosen a female, but back in the day, he wouldn't have felt comfortable with it.

Gill *Also, it seems like when you think about John and Rusty and the Bailey boys, they all knew each other, all on the rodeo team and together, so the first four or five years it was sort of like one buddy handed it to the next buddy.*

Finley Yes, kind of, but it was opened up. Applications were taken, and there was a committee that looked at the applications.

Gill *They still had the pretty strict application process even those first three or four years?*

Finley Yes, oh, yes. As long as my husband was the advisor, that's how it went. Applications were taken. The applications were reviewed, like with any job. The most qualified candidates were the ones that they re-interviewed. It just so happened the most qualified applicants were all rodeo boys. These were boys that were out there on saddle broncs or bareback, or bull riders, or ropers, and that's what you wanted when you put somebody out on that field.

Gill *Particularly those first two or three years when you're trying to be sure nothing goes wrong and things are right with the program.*

Finley Eddy didn't want, first of all, anybody to be injured so that was his main concern, the fans. As the program progressed year to year and as it became more and more popular, everybody wanted their picture with the horse. Everybody wanted their picture with the Spirit Rider. They were really in demand to do this, that, and the other, go to this function and that function, and Eddy did take the horse to El Paso. It was when Todd Honer was the Spirit Rider so that had to be in '88.

Gill *Is that the Sun Bowl Game?*

Finley Yes, that's when we had that big Ice Bowl. (Laughter) He got stuck there. He was with another professor, one of his good friends, James White, who was also in the Ag Ed Department. James went with him. He called me and said, "Boy, the weather's gorgeous here." He said, "Not a bit of forecast. Looks like they just made a mistake." The next day they dubbed it the Ice Bowl. (Laughter) That was the only time he took the horse.

Gill *Picking up on that, today they will make a few other appearances at different places, but then, those first four or five years, other than home OSU football games and the one event in El Paso, did they tend to participate in the '89er Parade in Guthrie or anywhere else at all?*

Finley No.

Gill *Were there requests, as you indicated formerly, to...*

Finley There were some requests, but Eddy didn't, he didn't want to do it. He just felt like it caused—well, been a lot of trouble. He would take the horse off the field in the fourth quarter with about three minutes left in the game, three to four minutes, to take the horse back to the An Sci Arena to avoid all the traffic and whatnot, people trying to come up and pet the horse and do all of that.

Gill *One other question that comes to mind is that first group, especially, and it has kind of continued today, one year per Spirit Rider. For Pistol Petes they'll normally do two, maybe one, but normally a couple of years. Was it decided that one year would be...*

Finley It was usually a senior. I don't know if it's still that way, but when Eddy was the advisor it was a senior.

Gill *Did they talk about, "We really want them for just one year and turn it over to somebody else"?*

Finley No, I don't really—when he decided that, John was a senior. Rusty was a senior. All the boys were a senior under Eddy. Then they graduated. I don't know if that tradition is still the same. I think it is because it seems like there's a different Spirit Rider every year.

Gill *We talked about pulling Bullet off the field early during games. Where did they keep Bullet when he wasn't performing at the ballgames?*

Finley Well, it was kept at the An Sci Arena.

Gill *Animal Science Arena.*

Finley Yes, in the stables over there. That's where Bullet was.

Gill *Somebody was assigned to take care of Bullet?*

Finley Yes.

Gill *Was that usually the Spirit Rider?*

Finley No, the Corps boys would go over and check on Bullet, but it was usually who was at the stable.

Gill *It was whoever was working?*

Finley Yes, to make sure the horse was fed and taken care of. Bullet was a highly pampered horse.

Gill *Did Eddy help any with the training of the horses?*

Finley No.

Gill *Just up to their owner?*

Finley Yes. These horses were the boys' horses. They were used to the boys, and the boys were used to them. These were their roping rodeo horses, their horses they rode all the time. There really wasn't any training per se. I guess if you don't have that, that farming ranching background, you don't really understand that there really wasn't any training for Bullet either. I mean, you were a cowboy, you had grown up on a horse, you knew how to ride a horse, you knew how to handle a horse. That's why it was so imperative that when the new Spirit Rider was chosen that they had that background.

You couldn't take somebody that went down to the Territory and bought a pair of boots and put a hat on and said, "I'm a cowboy," and put them on a horse, because if you had never ridden a horse before, you wouldn't be able to handle a horse and a flag. That flag is heavy. When you are guiding your horse, or Bullet, with one rein, and you're holding a flag up above with one hand, you've got to have the experience that it takes to ride that horse. To put someone that didn't have that experience would not have been a wise choice. To my knowledge (and I talked to Ty Cunningham about this) that hasn't changed. It's still a farming and ranch background with the people that ride the horses.

Gill *Let me go back and see if I understood right. When we were talking about the incident with the official, you used to run the length of the field. What year was that?*

Finley Oh, gosh. Let me think. What year was that? Let's see, Kenny was the Spirit Rider. That probably would've had to have been '87-'88 year. It really shook Kenny up because the official came up screaming and yelling at him. The head ref actually came up to Eddy and said, "Don't worry about it." They did look at the films and found out that the ref was

really at fault, not Kenny and not the horse. They decided right then and there, Eddy and the head guy decided, that they'd just run out to the twenty yard line and get the drum off the field.

Gill *They let them fudge a little and get out to the thirty or forty now, I think.*

Finley Yes, they go out just a little bit further.

Gill *How did Eddy feel about the development of the Spirit Rider program and his role in helping it? Was it a source of pride for him?*

Finley Not really.

Gill *He didn't feel just a little bit good about it?*

Finley Not really. You would have to know my husband. My husband was, he was a very intelligent man. He was highly thought of by his peers and his students. To this day, if you mention my husband's name on campus and those people that knew him, you will hear people say what a great guy he was. He really was. He never looked for any kind of glory for himself. He never liked to take credit for himself. All the credit he gave to his students and to the boys that rode the horse, he gave to his Spirit Rider corps. He wanted them to succeed. He gave them the foundation for success, and then he gave them the tools to be successful, and he guided them in that direction, but he never, never said, "Oh, yes, I started the Spirit Rider program."

He just was not that kind of man. In fact, the garden at Ag Hall that is dedicated to him with the plaque, the plaque that's on the back of the Spirit Rider statue, Eddy would not have liked that. He was not a glory hound. He loved what he did. He loved teaching. He loved being a mentor. He loved being a father, a husband, a friend. He loved being all those things, but as far as being somebody that took a great deal of pride in his participation in anything, he was not like that. So if he were here today and you were to ask him if he was prideful that the Spirit Rider tradition has survived as long as it has, he would tell you it has only survived because of the people that are behind it.

Gill *Was he proud of the program itself, though?*

Finley He was proud of the program. He was proud that his students had recognition because it brought a lot of recognition to the College of Ag. The boys were coming out of the College of Ag. It brought them recognition, but as far as Eddy went, as a personal glorification, it just—no. He didn't seek that.

Gill *Looking back, what are your thoughts on the Spirit Rider program, Nancy? How do you feel about it?*

Finley I'm very proud of the Spirit Rider program. I am very proud that it has sustained for as long as it has. I'm very proud that when I watch that horse run out on the field I still see my husband down there on the field. It's kind of a bittersweet episode for me because Eddy and I were very good friends. We were very best friends. Everything that was decided as a couple, we decided together. The Spirit Rider program was no different because when the Spirit Rider program, the Rodeo Association, and the advisorship, and the working towards being a full professor, and working towards being a full member of the graduate college, that took my husband away from home quite a bit. We had two young children at the time, but it was something that we discussed. It was something that was important to both of us, to his career, and to our family.

So when I look at the Spirit Rider now and all the accolades that it has brought, and when Eddy passed away in May of '96 and I was coming down Hall of Fame and I looked over at the statue and there was a big pile of yellow roses lying there, it made me feel pretty good because their tradition has not changed that much. The faces have changed. The advisors have changed, but the way the program has been run, and the way that it is still, "Here comes Bullet!" and people just still get excited, I take a great deal of pride in that for my husband and for all the boys that went before, and young women that went before that.

Gill *Can you pick out some special moments, some special memories of your and Eddy's participation in the program through the years?*

Finley Oh, let's see. Probably at our rodeo banquets. The boys always wanted to do something special for Eddy. One year, they gave him a beautiful, beautiful statue of a rider and a cowboy with a plaque that really said, "For everything that you've done for us, for all you meant to us, Dr. Finley, we appreciate you so." That was very touching for Eddy because he wanted them to feel like they had accomplished something, and if he were a small part of their accomplishments, then he was happy with that. Going out to the barn on Sundays and brushing Bullet, putting the kids on the horse, and just our family time that we had. Not Bullet—well, yes, Bullet. Yes, we had Bullet by then. Eddy only ran Bullet for about one year before he gave up the program, but it was a hard decision for him. We talked about it.

He had already accomplished—Eddy always set goals. "In this many years, I'm going to do this. In this many years, I'm going to do that," His goals were, "I'm going to get tenure. I'm going to become a full professor. I'm going to be a member of the graduate college by this time.

The Spirit Rider program is off to a good enough start that someone else can pick it up and go with it. If they want to change it, whatever they want to do with it, it's their thing," because once he was finished with something, he was done. He didn't advise anymore. He didn't give any kind of pep talk to the new person. He didn't tell them how they should run their program, because then it was their program. So the moments that I think we had with our family.

It was a source of pride to Eddy that the program was doing as well, but was it a source of personal pride to him? No. It was a source of pride that the right guys rode the right horses at the right time and that the public had accepted the Spirit Rider. As far as Texas Tech goes, they've never said a single thing about, "Well, you tried to take the mascot away from Tech," because they're really two different things. They both run out after the touchdowns. The Masked Rider runs out after the field goals. The horse doesn't. They aren't dressed the same way. The horses aren't the same color. The Masked Rider's horses used to come from a place called Post, Texas, and they were all quarter horses, black, pure black horses. The first Bullet wasn't very pretty to look at. I thought he was beautiful, but Eddy said he was ugly. (Laughter)

Gill *He would know.*

Finley Yes, he would know. I said, "This is the most gorgeous horse." He goes, "This is the ugliest horse I've ever seen, Nancy, but he's sweet," and he said, "That's what I'm looking for."

Gill *Nancy, I want to kind of back up, had a couple of questions I wanted to ask about Bullet, wanted to get a confirmation on. When Bullet first started training, coming out on the field—we talked a bit earlier about he ran the length of the field. Now Bullet runs out at the beginning with the band, pre-game. Did Bullet at that time do that as well, run down the middle of the field with the band, in those first few years?*

Finley Yes, at the very beginning.

Gill *So the routine has pretty much stayed the same with the exception of running the length of the field.*

Finley Right, and by the time Bullet was Bullet, Bullet wasn't running the length of the field. Bullet was only running to the twenty yard line because after the incident with Kenny Bailey and Penny, then it was twenty to about the twenty-two yard line is as far as the horse ran.

Gill *You mentioned earlier that the first year or two, you were out there. You were a part of the crew, the Spirit Rider crew.*

Finley Yes, I was the crew. (Laughter)

Gill *You, Eddy, and John Beall, that was about it. (Laughs)*

Finley Yes, that was it.

Gill *When did that change? Now they have a crew of about four or five that help.*

Finley Oh, yes. It probably changed starting the next year. Eddy decided that they needed a corps because we had two babies at home, and I told him I couldn't be the crew all the time.

Gill *If you got hurt what would you do? (Laughter)*

Finley He started saying we needed a Spirit Rider corps, and then he started looking at sponsors like for the clothes and for the trailer. When Stidham's contacted him and said they wanted to donate a trailer, the Spirit Rider program was not just a big deal for Oklahoma State. It was a big deal for, really, the surrounding communities including Tulsa because that saddle, the original saddle, came from Tulsa. That is a beautiful saddle.

Gill *Do they still use the same saddle?*

Finley I don't know if they still use the same saddle or not, but it was a beautiful saddle. If they don't, it's a shame that they didn't because that was one gorgeous saddle.

Gill *Could you describe that a little bit for us? It had the neck...*

Finley Oh, yes. It had the halter and all the breast pieces. It was silver-inlaid and tooled. I think Ed said it was between a ten-to-twelve-thousand-dollar tack.

Gill *Wow.*

Finley All that was donated. Then, of course, Tener's donated the clothes.

Gill *Did the Spirit Riders get to keep the clothes that they had through their years as Spirit Rider?*

Finley Yes.

Gill *They'd find boots, as well?*

- Finley** No, they wore their own boots and their own hats. If you're a real cowboy, you're particular about those kind of things. (Laughter) I found out a long time ago.
- Gill** *One thing about Eddy, we were talking about his connections with the Spirit Rider and OSU, but can you share a little bit about his career? He had a life besides the Spirit Rider. After he finished his doctorate, he came back on as assistant professor, worked his way through the ranks as a full professor. Do you remember some of his research, some of his activities, some of the things he did?*
- Finley** Yes, Eddy taught several courses. He taught an international agricultural course that he basically put all the material together himself (there wasn't a textbook) and wrote the syllabuses for that. A company contacted him and asked him if he would write a textbook. It's called *International Agriculture*. There is a copy of it in the public library here. I don't know if there's a copy at OSU. I would pretty much think so because it's still sold. He wrote that book at home and at work. He also asked Dr. Price to go in with him on that. Dr. Price really didn't write the textbook, but because he thought so highly of Dr. Price. At that time, Dr. Price was an emeritus professor here. Ed had several publications. He wrote the textbook. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, that honorary fraternity. Again, as I said a while ago, highly intelligent, very successful man. Had a waiting list for his international agriculture [class] up to two years.
- Gill** *His courses were International Education and what others?*
- Finley** In Ag International Education, Agriculture. It was called International Agriculture. He was an advisor to many undergraduate programs. He had waiting lists, because people wanted Dr. Finley to be their advisor because he made sure that they had everything they had to have before they graduated, which a lot of advisors didn't take a lot of time. On any given week, we had three or four students in and out of our house at a time, because he would bring them home to work with them so he wouldn't have to stay at the office so late.
- Our house kind of had a revolving door because back in the early years when the Spirit Rider and the corps and all of that, they would come in the house, and they would eat, and they would go out, because every Friday we'd bring the trailer over to our house and wash it and polish it. The boys would get things ready. He was a member of about everything. As I said before, he set goals for himself. He gave himself a time limit, and during that time limit he accomplished those goals. Once he finished with his goals, then he said, "I'm done. I'm giving up the Rodeo

Association. I'm giving up the Spirit Rider. I'm giving up all of that because you've put up with me doing that all these years, and now it's going to just be time for us. I'm not staying late anymore, and I'm not doing this," and he did. Then he gave that up, and three months later he got sick.

Gill *Did the Spirit Rider crew—we talked about the second year kind of put a crew in. Did it consist primarily of students who had applied but perhaps didn't get the Spirit Rider?*

Finley Not necessarily, and, again, it was most of the members of the rodeo club. Most of everything in the early years was taken from the rodeo club just because of the experience that they had. The fourth year that we had it, there was one young lady that was a member of the corps. She really wanted to become Spirit Rider but she couldn't handle the horse. She wasn't very happy when she was not chosen. I think her name was Amanda something-or-another.

Gill *You mentioned that there is an Eddy Finley memorial garden by the Ag Hall.*

Finley Right in front of Ag Hall.

Gill *Right in front there on Monroe Street. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about and what the memorial says?*

Finley Well, Eddy died in May of '96, and Bob Terry contacted me in January of 1997 and said that he had met with the Board of Regents and with the president (I'm trying to think of who the president was at that time) [James Halligan] and that they wanted to do something in honor of Eddy because of everything that he had given to the university in the name of the Spirit Rider (it's kind of hard to tell you about that because you didn't know my husband) and just because of who he was. My husband was a great prankster. He was just fun. He was just a fun person. He said that they wanted to take that area right in front of Ag Hall and develop a garden, and they wanted to dedicate it to Eddy. I said, "Well, okay, that was fine." He said, "The only deal is that we want to present you with a citation from Governor [Frank] Keating, and [Representative] Terry Ingmire was going to present it to you and the children. Would you be willing to do that?" I said, "Well, we can do that," and I talked to the kids first.

My son wasn't really up for it, but he said he would do it because he was only twelve when his dad died, and then our daughter was thirteen. So in October of 1997, John Beall came for it, and most of the Spirit Riders came for it. All of the Spirit Riders that had been under Eddy were there.

We dedicated this, and it's a very pretty garden. The Landscaping and Architecture Program keeps up the garden, and the Physical Plant, and all that. Eddy had a favorite saying, and it was, "Teaching is art. You, too, can be an artist. Choose your paintbrushes carefully." On this granite plaque is that saying that he said, and then it has his name on there. That's right in front of Ag Hall. Then I believe it was in 1999 when they wanted to dedicate the plaque that's on the Spirit Rider.

Gill *We were talking earlier about the Spirit Rider initially being the mascot of the band. I sense that there are not very many people that understand that at Oklahoma State. Do you want to kind of elaborate on that a little bit?*

Finley Well, Eddy was in his office, and the band director at the time (I believe it was Bill Ballenger) called and said that the band wanted to have a mascot. They wanted to have their own mascot, separate from Pistol Pete, separate from the big OSU drum. They want something that would distinguish them so he was wondering if Eddy could come up with something that the band could say was their mascot. That's kind of how the concept of the Spirit Rider evolved. Probably, as I just said, the Spirit Rider has probably now been incorporated into being one of the mascots of Oklahoma State, but in the early inception of the Spirit Rider program, probably the band members at that time and maybe a couple years down the line knew that that was their mascot. Today, I doubt very seriously if they do because it really wasn't a widely publicized fact whenever Eddy started the program.

Gill *What do we need to know about Eddy Finley that we don't know, that most people wouldn't know?*

Finley Eddy was a very fun person. He was a huge prankster. You were lucky if you could pull a prank on him because he knew every prank there was and pulled many of them on his colleagues, as well as students, as well as his family. He had a great passion for what he did. He loved teaching. He loved his students. They loved him. He was a very humble man, a very simple man. Meeting him, knowing him, you felt like you knew him forever. He had no airs about him. Highly intelligent man, very goal-oriented. Wonderful father, amazing friend, wonderful husband. He was just the total package. He accomplished a lot in his life. It ended too quickly.

But his lasting legacy to Oklahoma State University and to Texas Tech University is the remembering of who he was by the people who knew him, by the family that loved him, by the Spirit Rider program, by the things that he accomplished in the short time he was a professor here at OSU, for twelve years. That would have to, I think, be his legacy, would

be what he brought to the university in the short amount of time that he was alive and able to accomplish what he did in the short amount of time even after he became sick and continued to teach and to mold, as he always said, young lives.

He didn't think that when you got your bachelor's that that was enough. You needed to go ahead and get your master's, and when you got your master's, he thought you needed to get your doctorate. He always wanted to push you just a little step further. "You can do this, you can do this, you can do this." A lot of people went on to accomplish those goals. Again, if you ask anybody that knew him, very few people will ever tell you that he wasn't a great guy. In fact, I can't think of anybody that would tell you he wasn't a great guy. He was just the kind of person that you really like and you liked immediately. He could be tough as nails. He could dress you down, and while you were walking off, you'd think, "Did he just get on to me about something?" He was very quiet. He was very mild-mannered, but I think what people didn't realize about him more than anything was he had a great zest for living and people that fell prey to his pranks. (Laughter) I'll tell you about that, too. He and James White were very, very close and very good friends. James was an exceptional guy, and he's greatly missed, too.

Gill *The Eddy Finley Memorial Garden not bearing, people had more on this campus for him, (and he was only here twelve years) paying tribute to the man whose vision and persistence were critical in launching the OSU tradition of the Spirit Rider. Got to be pretty proud of that.*

Finley I am very proud of it. I'm proud of it for our children. I'm proud of it for the legacy that he has left for Jessica and Justin and for their children, my son's daughter, the granddaughter that Eddy would've just been crazy about. These are things that can't be taken away. These are things that are immortalized, that, "This is what your dad did," or "This is what your granddad did." He's missed every day by his family as if it was just yesterday. We miss him. We miss his guidance, and we just miss him. He's been gone for fourteen years, but he's still greatly loved and greatly missed.

Gill *So tell me what's happening in your life now, Nancy. What are you doing?*

Finley My life, I raise my children. Our daughter, Jessica, graduated from the University of Kansas. She graduated with a degree in human biology and with a minor in toxicology, and she's now a paramedic for Johnson County in Kansas and lives in Lawrence. Our son, Justin, is a sergeant in the United States Army, and he has served two tours of duty in Iraq. He is an Army Ranger. He is a two-time awardee of the Purple Heart.

Outstanding young man. Engaged to a beautiful young lady who is also a sergeant in the Army. They have a beautiful little precious baby girl, seven months old, and her name is Sage Elizabeth Finley. She and Mama are right now stationed in Belle Chasse, [Louisiana], and so Daddy and Mama put lots of miles on the airline because one of them's going back and forth either every month or every other month. They'll be getting married in this next December. I am the health unit manager at the Mercury [Marine] MerCruiser plant in Stillwater, and that's about it.

Gill *I appreciate you taking time. Is there anything we've missed, Nancy, we want to talk about or bring up that we haven't covered?*

Finley I think we covered the program very well. It was important that this program succeed for Eddy because it was a program that he felt if it caught on, the university would really like, so he was very cautious with how he presented the program. He was very cautious not to go overboard when it first started. One of the reasons why John was the first Spirit Rider is because, again, of the relationship he had with John, and he said the only way that he would become advisor or founder of this program is if John Beall would become the first Spirit Rider. So John didn't have to go through all the rigmarole of everything. They talked about it. John would come over to the house. They talked about it, kind of cooked up a plan of what they were going to do, and, again, it was just a little dog—Eddy called it a dog and pony show when it first started, because that's kind of what it was.

Gill *It really was. (Laughs)*

Finley And from there it has grown into this great tradition for the university, so no matter where I go or no matter where his children go, they can look back on pride that, "Yes, my dad started that program." My friends, to this day, when I'm on campus and they introduce me, they always say, "Well, her husband, Dr. Finley, started the Spirit Rider program." "Oh!" Which is nice, but it's not necessary, really. Bittersweet. Bittersweet when you see the horse running out on the field, and I'm seeing my husband standing down there on the field. But the program, the tradition, has only gotten better and hasn't changed too much, and that's, I think, a very big pat on the back and respectful of the people that have taken over the program, that they have stayed within the tradition. That shows the integrity, I think, of the program because you still have those people that know how to ride a horse going out on that field, and that's all Eddy ever wanted. He wanted people to enjoy what they were doing, to be safe while they were doing it, and to have a good time. I think that they do, and I think it's been a lot of fun. I'm proud in that aspect that it has sustained as long as it has, and I think it will continue to. I mean, this is

an agricultural university, and the Spirit Rider is a...

We're the Cowboys, after all.

Gill

That's right. This is a great figurehead for that. It doesn't take away from Pistol Pete at all.

Finley

Did you sense that the Spirit Rider, being sort of the western motif, the rodeo, the cowboy, the western heritage, being Cowboys, is that where you felt like it fits in with that?

Gill

Finley

Yes, and Eddy wanted the Spirit Rider to be symbolic of a working cowboy. That's what he wanted it to be like. People had ideas of, "Oh, let's put him in a white outfit with orange chaps and fringe, and an orange and white hat," and Eddy goes, "Absolutely not. These people that are on this horse are going to know how to ride, and they're going to look like a working cowboy. They're going to look like a cowboy that's getting ready to go out and go branding or roping or going on a cattle drive because that's what this school is. This is an agriculture school so we're not out there to have some kind of silly looking guy sitting on a horse."

Some dude.

Gill

Finley

Yes, with a ten gallon hat that's white, trimmed in orange. Eddy said, "Absolutely not." Pretty much, what Eddy asked for, he pretty much got just because he was always prepared. He was never caught. He never did anything by the seat of his pants, nothing, including stuff at the house. When he had a project, it was perfect. When he built the deck at our house, every slat, every post, everything was completely and specifically set perfectly because he did not do anything unless he knew that it was going to be perfect, and that's just the legacy of the Spirit Rider. It was a perfect fit for this university at that time, and it has continued to be. When you see the plane crash that occurred with the basketball team, the first picture they went to was the Spirit Rider horse. It's a symbol of what Oklahoma State has become, and that, I do take a great deal of pride in. I take a great deal of pride in my husband and what he started.

And well you should. Thank you, Nancy. I appreciate it very much.

Gill

Thank you.

Finley

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