

Oral History Interview
with
Frances Stromberg

Interview Conducted by
Juliana Nykolaiszyn
September 25, 2014

O-STATE Stories
Oral History Project

Oklahoma Oral History Research Program
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O-State Stories

An Oral History Project of the OSU Library

Interview History

Interviewer: Juliana Nykolaiszyn
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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 Frances Stromberg is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on September 25, 2014.

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About Frances Stromberg...

Frances Ireland Stromberg was born July 25, 1922, in Glendale, California. She and her mother moved to Kansas when Frances was not quite three, after her father passed away. A family friend in Stillwater encouraged Frances' mother to apply for a local teaching position, so the two moved to Stillwater where Frances grew up, attending Stillwater schools and graduating in 1939. She enrolled at Oklahoma State University (then Oklahoma A&M College), earning her bachelor's degree with focus in Spanish and office administration. Over the next few years, Frances earned her master's degree in Family Relations and Child Development, got married, had three sons, and became a widow, ending up back at OSU to teach two-year-olds at the FRCD lab school. After one year, she relocated to the University of Arizona to run their child development lab. While there, she was awarded a grant from the Danforth Foundation toward PhD research, so she packed up her mother and three sons, and moved them all to Tallahassee where she attended Florida State, earning her doctorate in child development. After the PhD, she went back to Arizona to teach for a few years, but before long, OSU beckoned once again.

Frances and her family moved back to Stillwater, and she took a faculty position, teaching graduate classes in the College of Home Economics, specifically in Family Relations and Child Development, under Dean Lela O'Toole. In 1975 she became department head of FRCD, unexpectedly staying in that position for approximately ten years. When she wasn't teaching, she continuously researched state and federal programs available to families with children, and she participated in extensive group work relating to Latin American culture (utilizing her Spanish degree), to gain a better understanding of families of that heritage. During her time at OSU, Frances thoroughly enjoyed her ongoing research, the teaching, and the camaraderie among her colleagues and students. She also held board and presidential positions in the Oklahoma Association for Children Under Six and the Association for the Education of Young Children, always keeping children and families as her focus. In her interview, Frances discusses her youth, her cross-country academic career, and her undying passion for childhood education.

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Frances Stromberg

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn

September 25, 2014

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Nykolaiszyn *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn with the Oklahoma State University Library. Today is Thursday, September 25, 2014. I'm in Stillwater, Oklahoma, interviewing Frances Stromberg about her life and career at OSU as part of the O-State Stories Oral History Project. Frances, thank you for joining me today.*

Stromberg Thank you for asking me.

Nykolaiszyn *Let's begin. Can you tell me the year you were born and where you were born?*

Stromberg Well, my birthday is July 25, 1922, which means that I am now ninety-two years old. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *And where were you born?*

Stromberg I was born in Glendale, California.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, tell me a little bit about your parents.*

Stromberg Well, my mother was the main person that I hung onto all my life because my father died before I was three years old. Now, people say, "Oh, then don't remember him." Well, I do remember him because we had moved to—well, back up just a minute. My parents had purchased ten acres of Thompson Grapes up in the San Joaquin Valley, north of LA a bit. They thought that they were going to be able to make a great living out of that. Well, it just was not a good choice to begin with because my father was an older man. He was the same age as my mother's father. He and she were trying to do all the work of taking care of ten acres of grapes that needed to be harvested. We had been up there since November.

This was just a week or so before my birthday in July when my father died in his sleep. I remember some of the things that he did because they had a big pit out there where they had some very powerful pumps and pumped water out of an underground river in order to water the grapes. I remember so clearly hanging my head over the edge of that pit and the lectures that I got, very sweet ones from a loving man. I just worshipped him, that's all there was, as long as I had him around. I think he worshipped me because I don't think he thought he was ever going to have another little one.

Nykolaiszyn *Could you tell me his name?*

Stromberg His name?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Stromberg Henry...

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Stromberg ...which was a family name. Henry Ireland. I use my maiden name as my middle name now, and that's Ireland. It's nice because that family came from across the Atlantic Ocean to America. By the time they got to America, there was one little boy whose either one parent or both parents had died. The people who were the managers of that ship, that boat, that he was on didn't know his real name. All they knew was that the family had gotten on the ship in Ireland, one of the ports in Ireland, so I became Ireland. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *What happened to the raisin farm after he passed away?*

Stromberg My mother and I just had to leave it. We were back to visit it a time or two after I was grown up, but I think that she was able to sell it at some kind of a reasonable price.

Nykolaiszyn *Tell me a little bit about your mother.*

Stromberg Oh, well, my mother was the [second oldest of five children]. Her mother was very ill all along with what I suspect was liver cancer because she was in the hospital in Kansas City on several occasions before she passed away. Lela, my mother, had to take over, and she did. She had just younger sister and [two] little brothers. That whole family loved little folks. Her dream was to become a teacher, and she did. She has a reputation here in Stillwater among some families who are still living here who had children who started to school, too, because my mother was a first grade teacher. They still tell me what a marvelous first grade teacher she was.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, how did your family get from California to this neck of the woods?*

Stromberg That's an interesting story. Maybe you ought to know about how they got from northeastern Kansas to California first.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay, sure.*

Stromberg My mother grew up in northeastern Kansas. She had finished high school while she was taking care of all this little crowd of younger children, and decided she wasn't going to continue in that way. She managed somehow or another to get enough money put together that she could go down to Emporia to the state teachers college. She finished down there, one year—I don't remember the whole story about how many times she had to get back there, but she did get a degree from Emporia and had a teacher's certificate that was a lifetime certificate in Kansas with whatever degree it was that she had, whatever schooling she had. She decided she wasn't going to do anything except teach in a country school. First year she decided that, she got a job selling encyclopedias, and they sent her to Colorado.

She got to Colorado, Greeley area. Somebody (I don't know whether it was with the book company or just somebody she met) said, "We know a nice place for you to live since you're alone and you'll be coming and going and whatnot. Mrs. Ireland lives over here." Well, okay, she went over there. Mrs. Ireland had a son, and they were married at the end of the summer. That's how they got as far as Colorado. The Ireland family was just as clannish as some of the rest of the Scotch Irish. They had lived in West Virginia. They were called contractors, but they were wonderful carpenters. They could build houses and all this kind of thing. The newlyweds went to California with all of them. The newlyweds went to California with the ones who went on to California that summer.

They were out there, but then I guess my father decided that what he was asked to build in the neighborhood of Los Angeles didn't suit what he knew how to build and he better do something else. That's when he decided to invest in the ten acres of grapes. Of course, you know, all of this just came one after another, after another. My mother had no other relatives in California other than the family that she married into. Her sister and her brothers said, "You get back here to Kansas, and we'll see about you." All of them were just as dear as they could be about moving over and making room for us. I laughed here a while back and said to myself and told somebody that in that situation as a little girl, I thought everybody in the world loved me because everywhere we went, people were so eager to make my mother feel more comfortable and entertain me. That's the way we got to California and back.

Nykolaiszyn *So you went back to Kansas.*

Stromberg

Yes, and my mother got a job in Salina. I don't remember whether she happened to know this family before she went out there. I'm just not clear about that at this point. The man who was the principal or superintendent of schools, whichever it was, in Salina had a family there, and he offered my mother a place to live. I guess they had me there, too, come to think of it. Anyway, she taught there. At that particular year, well, it wasn't right after we came back from California that we ended up in Salina. We did something else for a couple of years. The man who was superintendent of schools out there had interviewed my mother, and I guess he saw me too. Invited my mother to live at their house. She got to be feeling a member of their family, which she still does, or she would if she were around. People just kind of took care of each other.

Interestingly enough, the man who was superintendent of schools said, "I'm really tired of this job," and he went to Kansas City and went to dental college. That gets back and straightens things out a little bit. By the time we got back, somewhere along the way before very long, he had finished dental college and had moved down here to Stillwater and established a dental practice. My mother and his wife had kept writing letters all along. He wrote to my mother and said, "I'm in Stillwater. I have a good dental practice. I'm a member of the school board. As a matter of fact, I was elected president of the school board last year, and I believe we need a first grade teacher if you would like to come down." We liked, and we came down. We were in Topeka at the time that this offer came because my mother's only sister lived in Topeka.

If you want to know how we got here, then we got on a train in Topeka, came to Arkansas City, got off the train at Arkansas City and on the little doodlebug [rail car] that came on down here. I think it's Shawnee where it ends up down here. I got a geography tour all the way. "See this; see this; see this," all the way down here, but it was not all to the good because it was a very hot miserable summer. It was, of course, late in August when we were coming, and things were so badly burned. It made my mother sick at heart to think that she had been told that this was good corn-growing country around here and all she could see was dried-up corn plants along the way. She said, I did hear her say many times when we got off the little doodlebug down here at the train station, which is still the same train station down there, she said if there'd been another train in that afternoon, we would have been back on the one going north. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn

What school did she start in, teaching first grade?

Stromberg

Jefferson.

Nykolaiszyn

Jefferson.

Stromberg The only school she ever taught in, first grade, Jefferson. People sold houses and bought houses in Jefferson's district so that their youngster could start to school with Mrs. Ireland because her reputation kind of spread around the town. I think that she was happy to have—I think she had, oh, I don't know, sometimes as many as forty first graders in her room, no help. She persuaded those youngsters to be very good students in her room. I know after I was in college and I visited sometimes, I could sit in the coat room and see out into the room when I had to kill a little time for something. I've heard her call the children up to sit around her in her reading circle and explain to them what the room was like and what it was for, say to them, "Now, we don't have desks. We have tables, and we have chairs. We have a reading circle while some people are working at their tables, and we need to be sure that we don't interrupt each other. We need to be helpful to each other." You know, those youngsters swallowed that, hook, line, and sinker. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *When you and your mom moved to Stillwater, where did you live?*

Stromberg You know where the corner of Miller and Knoblock is?

Nykolaiszyn Yes.

Stromberg Right there.

Nykolaiszyn *Describe the house for me.*

Stromberg Well, the first house was a little white house with just regular siding on the side of it. Not a very big house. It faced over onto the campus. It's the house that—goodness, I'm going to need help with this. Who is the woman who has written so much about this part of the country, of the state, and lived over around Enid? Her statue is down at the library.

Nykolaiszyn *Angie Debo.*

Stromberg All right. Angie Debo lived in that house while she was an undergraduate student. She had just left. That's why the house was available for my mother and me to move into it. Actually, we lived in another house over here on Lowry Street that had a basement apartment when we first came. It was a wet, cold, yucky fall. I guess I got tonsillitis that I didn't get over the whole winter. It was between Thanksgiving and Christmas when we were able to move into that house. I had never seen the like of a place like that to live. I had lived—when we were in California before we came back to Kansas, we had gone out to Banning [California]. I don't know if you know California. If you go almost straight east of Los Angeles over almost into the middle of

California, because it's very close to Palm Springs and all that desert area, we lived over there for three years.

I played outside all winter long. All year long wore little black sateen shorts and a visor so that the sun wouldn't get in my eyes. That was all I ever knew. Came back to this little house there on Knoblock Street. They had open gas burner was the only thing, of course, to heat the house at that time. That has a tendency to collect moisture and dampness in the house. In that little house, the dampness froze on the wall. It was a terrible winter. There was plenty of dampness on the house. There was ice as thick as the one-inch wood that was around the windows, that went from the windows all the way up to the ceiling. I was miserable. We had found another place to live by the next year.

Nykolaiszyn *Where would you attend elementary school?*

Stromberg Well, the first year that we were here, when we lived in that white house over there on Knoblock Street, I went to Eugene Field. There's quite a story to that, too. My mother was teaching at Jefferson. We were just around the corner from what would have been the Jefferson district. No, they had to follow every direction about where children lived and what school they went to, so I had to go to Eugene Field. I had to walk by myself, and it was kind of a long walk. I went down Knoblock Street, and there was a family who lived down there, almost to where the fire station is now. Lived across the street. They had two boys just a bit older than I.

The father was a faculty member. I don't remember what the mother did, other than not be at home when she probably should have been. Anyway, those boys just pestered the life out of me when I walked down Knoblock Street, and I decided that I didn't have to put up with that. I would just walk across the campus. By doing that, I became acquainted with President [Henry] Bennett's two younger children. The two younger children were twins: a boy and a girl. They saw what those other boys were doing, chasing me and pestering me. They decided that wasn't going to happen, so I walked on just happy as could be to have a fun walk. Usually the twins were walking with me, and we enjoyed Eugene Field as a school. You know what is on the ground where Eugene Field used to be, now?

Nykolaiszyn *Is it the IGA?*

Stromberg It is, exactly.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you go there your entire elementary school?*

Stromberg No, no because they didn't serve lunches at school, so my mother decided that we would find another place to live that would be in Jefferson district.

We only lived there on Knoblock Street for the rest of that spring term and then moved down to a little house on North Main Street over here. That way we were both going to same school, and she could see to it that I had lunch and all that. They didn't have lunchrooms at school, in that year anyway. I don't know how many more years before they had lunchrooms at school.

Nykolaiszyn *Do you have any fond memories of your time at Jefferson School, attending Jefferson school?*

Stromberg Yeah, I enjoyed it. I don't know if you were ever in Stillwater when the old building of Jefferson was there.

Nykolaiszyn *No.*

Stromberg Okay, it was a big, old, red brick, two-story building and had big tunnel-like things, one on each side of the upstairs. Those were the fire escapes. We kids just thought it was absolutely wonderful to climb up those tubes and turn around, sit down, and slide down them. Also, we had that whole big block for playground, and they had ballgames of one kind in one corner, and another kind in another corner, and another kind in another corner. Besides that, as long as I was going to Jefferson school, they always had a woman who was principal of the school. It seemed to me that women principals were more likely to be out walking around on the playground and didn't hesitate to help children understand that there were certain things they didn't do on the playground. Playground was fun at Jefferson school. Also, because my mother was teaching there, I was kind of special to all the other teachers who were there. I had a pretty easy life right at that time.

Nykolaiszyn *Where did you go after Jefferson?*

Stromberg Junior high school.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay, what was that like for you?*

Stromberg Just fine. I liked it because it was the first time we went to classes, each different class in a different room and different hour. We got up and changed to a different room for a different class every hour so that I didn't have to sit still for the whole day or half a day or whatever. By that time, I'd had a great growth spurt. When I was in the seventh grade, first year in junior high school, I could walk out in the hallway when we changed classes, and I could look over the heads of every boy in that school because I had grown so tall so quickly. We never had any problems with sizes or anything. In junior high school, the teachers and the administrators kept a pretty close eye on things. School children at that time, I think, heard lectures from their own parents. Also, they had teachers who were able to tell the youngsters what they were expected to do in that class, and they

were expected to do it. We had no playground at junior high school, so we had to sit still a good part of the day.

Nykolaiszyn *For high school, did you attend the old Stillwater High?*

Stromberg Oh, yes, indeed. Yes, indeed.

Nykolaiszyn *Tell me a little bit about high school.*

Stromberg Well, it was in an old building. I like old buildings, and I enjoyed being there. They had a different schedule. Every hour, you went to a different class. I got into classes. School was easy for me, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed all the teachers that I had. We just kind of had a good time and good friends.

Nykolaiszyn *Were you involved in any activities?*

Stromberg Well, I said I played the violin in the orchestra. Believe me, it wasn't true. (Laughter) I could do this, but I couldn't. (Laughs) I was not very musically inclined. I was not able to sing a note, so I didn't do anything like that. We did have some other things that gave us a chance to be in kind of a contest with other students, and I found that I learned to be a very good typist. Also, I could take shorthand and transcribing and some of that thing. I was proud of what I could do there because, well, I know the first summer—I had typing two years. I know it was the—well, no, I don't know. It was either the summer after my first year of typing and shorthand or the next summer. Anyway, I know that a family had a business where they prepared deeds to go in the courthouse. One of the rules for a deed (I didn't know before that) was that it has to be typed originally, no erasure.

Nykolaiszyn *Wow.*

Stromberg If there was a mistake made, tear it up and start all over again. The family who had that business called the people who were there in the typing and shorthand area and said, "Do you have anybody who could help us out?" The typing teacher said, "I know only one. Her name is Frances Ireland. She's the only one I know who could look at one letter and have the right finger hit the right key on the typewriter, and it's good to go." I worked for them the whole summer, and earned some money! I was so proud of myself.

Nykolaiszyn *Was that your first job?*

Stromberg Yes.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, did you always think you were going to go to college?*

Stromberg

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I may not have thought it, but my mother did. I realize that she was—well, she never would've twisted my arm if I said I wasn't going to go. She told me all about the things that she got to do in college. That first summer after we moved down here, (we lived here a year) she had to take one three-hour course at the college in order to get her Kansas certificate recognized as one that she could teach on until she finished getting the requirements for an Oklahoma certificate. She decided that first summer that we were here—lived over there on Miller Street around the corner in the duplex. The backyard of the duplex and the backyard of that white house that I was telling you about met like this. Anyway, we were right close to the campus there. My mother decided that she didn't really know enough about food, and what would be the best thing for us to eat and stay healthy that way.

She enrolled in a class that lasted three hours every morning, and she didn't have anything else in the world to do with me. She asked the woman who had a doctor's degree from the University of Minnesota, very well known researcher who had come down here to teach this special class, she asked this woman, "Would it be possible, if I sit on the front row, if my seven-year-old could sit beside me?" Evidently that didn't bother the woman, so I got all the lectures about how I had to sit there absolutely still, not even wiggle my toes. I sat there, and I soaked up the thing.... That woman who was teaching was an absolutely wonderful teacher because she had all the college students like this, too. I was like that, too. It hadn't been so long ago when I was remembering something that I heard in one of those classes. That was all the more.... My mother said, "Okay, see, you can go to college. You are going to go to college because that's the only way you can get a job you will fit for or will fit you." "Oh, okay."

Nykolaiszyn

What year did you graduate high school?

Stromberg

Thirty-nine.

Nykolaiszyn

What colleges were you looking at?

Stromberg

OSU. (Laughs) We didn't have the money for me to go anyplace else because living right here and usually within walking distance of the campus and all, my mother's salary would keep us going and also pay for my expenses to get into college. There was no way that I could go off to another place. They didn't have so many scholarships around here, there, and everywhere then.

Nykolaiszyn

What were you interested in majoring in?

Stromberg

Like some other kids who weren't really old enough to start to college, I didn't really know. (Laughs) Let's see. I guess the very first year, you get all

the standard English and whatever requirements, you know. I remember thinking, "I already know enough to be a good secretary, so I'm going to go in and get more training in office machines," and all this time kind of thing. I got my first degree in, actually, it was under the College of Business with a degree in office administration. That was just fine, except that I don't remember exactly any particular reason that I decided there were plenty secretarial jobs around here that I could get. I wasn't going to move off anyplace and leave my mother here by herself. We were still living together, but I was getting tired of all that stuff by that time.

I was, at least part of the time, saying, "I'm going to leave school and go do something else." It scared my mother to pieces. She thought, "What if she means it?" As a first grade teacher, my mother tried to get acquainted with not only the children in her room (she had about forty of them) but also their families. One family that she got well acquainted with and enjoyed so much, the father was the head of the Foreign Language Department on campus. They had a daughter and then some younger children in the same age group as I. I know they invited us to come out to their house to have Thanksgiving dinner. They lived right down here on Stallard. The house is still there. Anyway, I overheard my mother telling them that she didn't know what in the world she was going to do with me because she thought I was getting whatever, whatever, that I was going to have trouble staying in college.

Dr. [Almon] Arnold, who was the head of the Foreign Language Department said, "Well, Lela, let's talk about that a little bit. I bet if we would reorganize her schedule for spring term, we might be able to find some classes that she would thoroughly enjoy, and maybe that would give her a chance to think about something else." You know, it did. I found out that I loved Spanish, so I really got a degree with a major in office administration and a minor in Spanish. That has served me very well over a lot of years. I've lost all the Spanish that I really knew, but it was very easy for me. I don't know exactly why, but my mouth let me make the sounds that you needed in Spanish to, like, [makes trilled R sound]. You can't do that unless you're born doing it. I don't know that I was born doing it, but I sure learned to do it early. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *What year did you graduate from Oklahoma A&M?*

Stromberg I graduated from high school in 1939, so I think it was 1944 when I got a bachelors degree. I took the whole five years. Then I stayed and got a master's degree in five more years.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you go right into the master's program, or did you take some time off?*

Stromberg No, I still liked school. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn *What area were you studying for your master's?*

Stromberg Well, I'll have to stop and think about that. I guess that's when I got into Family Relations and Child Development.

Nykolaiszyn *How did that come about? I mean...*

Stromberg Well, I'll tell you. (Laughter) By that time, I was back here in Stillwater with three rascally little boys.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Stromberg I'd been out a little time in between and all. Dr. [Virginia] Stapley who was head of the Family Relations and Child Development Department came up in serious need of a nursery school teacher. For whatever reason, she decided to ask me if I would be interested in interviewing for a job as a nursery school teacher. This kind of got me up here. I thought, "I don't have that in my background." Then I got to thinking, and I have thought over the years since then, yes, that lady had seen me with three rascally little boys that would just climb the wall if you gave them a chance, and she knew the kind of teacher that my mother was, and she figured that was as good a background as she could find on anybody that particular year, and she'd just make a gamble with it. Well, she gave me the two-year-olds. How can you miss if you've had three like that at home, and have a place with all kinds of toys everyplace, and a big yard, and all kinds of things to do? How can you miss.... I think I had eight two-year-olds in there. We had a ball.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, let's back up for a second, and tell me how you met your husband.*

Stromberg Well, that was the time when America was in a war. It's been long enough ago, and it's been out of my mind long enough, I can't tell you all the details about that. All the guys who were on campus were realizing they were going to go into the Army and all of this. The Army was getting groups put together and sending them to different schools, colleges, around the country to give them specialized training because they didn't have enough places to put them on the regular Army bases. The year that I was—I guess I must have been a junior working on a master's degree because two years, and then in another two years I graduated with a master's degree. Anyway, they sent a whole great big group of these guys who had been drafted into the Army.

They had the highest scores on the entrance exams that all of them had to take at that time, and they were sent to OU and here, also. They were supposed to learn some pretty stiff things like math and all that kind of thing. It became the intention of the sororities around to have parties and invite these guys to their houses to have a little social life and whatnot.

Several of us started dating regularly some of the guys in this one group. It ended up that within a year after that, I was married to one of them. He had been sent away from here. We had about six months of getting acquainted here, and then he was sent to Johns Hopkins University. He went to high school in South Chicago.

Nykolaiszyn

Okay, wow.

Stromberg

He got to the school, Johns Hopkins University, and he was expected to get into the things that they were teaching at sophomore level in college. We didn't realize what all that was going to bring. We decided that we were going to get married. We kept in touch, telephone, letters, all this kind of thing, you know. The ultimate thing was he was going to have to stay there in Baltimore. We decided that I was going to go back there, and we were going to get married in Baltimore, which we did in the Lutheran Church right downtown. At that point, he decided that he couldn't deal with that program that he got put in, either. He wasn't the only one. They sent a whole big crew of the guys all together that had been kind of together over to France. They were in France for I don't remember how long. It was quite a while. When he got over in France, he was put in Airborne. Now, that doesn't really mean the same thing that we thought it was then. It was that he was an infantry person, but he didn't go marching around. He had to get into a glider.

They pulled the gliders where they were going to get—this whole group of guys were all in there with their weapons. They'd get pulled in, and then they'd turn the glider loose, and it would go in and settle down. Then their job was to scramble out of that glider and go get after whatever other soldiers were there. Yeah, well, anyway, that really was not a very good fit, either, so I decided that I needed to come back to Stillwater and get things organized a little better than we were getting them organized out there. He spent, I guess, two and half or three years in Europe before he got out of the Army. When he first got out, he came back here, but he didn't fit in Stillwater any better than I fitted in South Chicago or any of those other places. He was in an automobile accident within just a few months after he got out of the Army. None of the boys remember seeing him. As a matter of fact, I think Stan, the oldest one, might have vague recollections, but the other two wouldn't have. So they grew up with two parents in their family, two women parents, both of them school teachers.

Nykolaiszyn

Was your mom just tickled that you started teaching?

Stromberg

Oh, yes, yes. She was tickled that I found a job here in Stillwater. She was tickled that I was still here. After all this happened with Lee's getting the situation that he got put into, she was glad that he got out of that, too. I know that he told us that he had sat in a glider with his weapons all morning one

day, waiting to be towed away, and then turned loose and put down. He said that was as hard a thing as he ever had to do.

Nykolaiszyn *So you're in Stillwater, and you're doing the two-year-olds, teaching the two-year-olds in Stillwater. Are you teaching them at a facility on campus?*

Stromberg In the lab school.

Nykolaiszyn *In the lab school. I want you to kind of describe the lab school for me back then.*

Stromberg Well, it was half of the first floor of the old Home Economics building which had been built back in, what, 1920s or teens or something. The lab school had two play rooms: one for the older children, and one for the little folks like the two-year-olds. Then we had that big beautiful yard out behind the building. It was always kept mowed and trimmed very well. It was a beautiful yard, and the children loved playing in it. We had a kitchen there, and Mrs. Bennett was our cook. She cooked wonderful lunches for all of us. I think many of the children came to nursery school because [they'd] heard how good the lunches were, and they all looked forward to lunch. I mean, they didn't have to learn to eat different food. Whatever Mrs. Bennet cooked was delicious. We had morning and afternoon programs in both of those rooms. No, all-day ones.

Nykolaiszyn *And did you stay with the twos, or did you get moved to other levels as time went on?*

Stromberg I was only there really one year. A woman who had been one of my advisors when I got my master's degree, which I had by that time, had gone back to her home in Colorado. Then she had taken a job at the University of Arizona as head of Home Economics. University of Arizona was a land-grant school and had the same arrangement as any other land-grant school at that time had. If it was a home economics school, it was under the College of Agriculture. Ruth called me and said, "Frances, I'm desperate. We have a child development lab here, and we can't leave it sitting empty. We need to do something about it, and I do not have anybody who looks like even a possible teacher. I need you!" (Laughs) This was in August. By that time, I decided I'd just as soon get into a different situation, too, not that anything was bad. Several things were such that I was ready to kind of make a change.

She said, "Now, Frances, I have to tell you. I don't have any money to pay your travel expenses." I said, "Oh Ruth, I can buy a ticket on the Greyhound bus," which I did to go to Tucson. Now, that's another story coming up when you want to hear that. Anyway, I went out. She showed me their building, and it was a lovely building and a beautiful yard. They had hired a

cook. I think I only had to teach one class. I did have morning and afternoon groups at nursery school. Afternoon groups were so near kindergarten that they didn't need a lot of leading around to do this, that, or the other thing.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you have your PhD then, by then?*

Stromberg No, that was my master's degree.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Stromberg The PhD is coming up. Do you want to hear that now?

Nykolaiszyn *Well, how long were you in Arizona?*

Stromberg Well, I'd have to figure that out. I was given a job out there as the director of the lab school. I can't tell you—it was several years, three or four or five years that I was there in that position. Then, as I told you, I did have the great wonderful thing of getting Danforth [Foundation] teacher grant which paid me so that I got a PhD in two years by going back to Tallahassee. That only happened because the man who'd been my advisor when I worked on my master's was then back at Tallahassee. He was calling me. "Come back here. We need somebody back here. Come back here. I'll be your advisor. We'll get you through." (Laughs) I mean, it's just unbelievable how things like that happened. Are you ready to hear the next step?

Nykolaiszyn *Sure.*

Stromberg Okay, well I got out to Tucson. Of course, I had gotten there on the Greyhound bus, and so I was staying with Ruth, the woman who was now head of Home Economics. She had taken me into campus and into her office. She said, "Well, you know, Dean [Harold] Myers is the dean of Agriculture just like it was in Stillwater. Home Economics dean, also. He wants to see everybody who's going to be on his faculty, so I have an appointment for us to go over and meet him." I said, "Well, that's all right. I've met deans before. I don't mind. Let's go," so we did. Went into the dean's office. He got up and greeted me. He said, "I like to know a little something about the families of the people who come to work for me." I said, "My mother and I have been the ones in our family, along with some cousins and whatnot." He said, "Where did they live? Where did your family come from?" I said, "Northeastern Kansas."

He came up in his chair like this, and he looked at me. He said, "Where in northeastern Kansas?" I said, "Oh, Nemaha County." Well, he was even more than this. He sat there, and he looked at me, and he looked at me, and he looked at me. I thought, "Oh, dear heaven, what did I say that was wrong? What was wrong with that answer?" He said, "Hmm, was your

mother's name Lela or Lenora?" Well, by that point I could have fallen flat on my face off on the floor because how in the world would a man that I had just met in a dean's office at the University of Arizona take a good staring look at me and ask me what my mother's first name was. Well, come to find out, then—oh, he said, "I'm going to tell you that your uncle Earl and I were very best friends the whole time that we went to country school and during the time that we were in high school and had to go to town to high school." I couldn't even breathe. I couldn't even breathe. (Laughter)

From then on, he just kind of adopted me. His wife decided she was going to adopt me, too. He couldn't do enough things to be helpful to me. I think that was because he knew what a hard time my mother's family had had and was appreciative of how all of them had turned out to be very good people. Two of my mother's brothers learned how to make radios. This was before you could buy them. They went into making radios by hand, and, oh, a lot of things like that. They were smart, as well as very upstanding kind of people. Anyway, he could tell that I was just like this about it. As long as I was out there, he just never could do enough to help me. I know that not too long after that first year I was out there, I looked up from my desk, (I think it was the first year, maybe the next year) I looked up from my desk, and here was Dean Myers at my office door. I thought, "Oh, boy." I saw he had a great big white envelope in his arm. I said, "Come on in and sit down." I always had a chair by my desk.

I said, "Please, sit down." Well, he flopped that big envelope down on the desk. He said, "I want you to apply for this." "Yes, sir." He said, "Now, there's not much time left because there was just a few weeks to get all the papers together and get them in." I said, "I'll work on it as best I can, okay." He said, "I won't stay to visit with you, then. Just get after it." I did. I think I had just three weeks to get all the papers together and sent in and whatnot. I got word that they had had something like over four hundred people had applied for those. If you are acquainted with those, you know that Danforth had enough money that anytime they were going to offer something, everybody in the world would try to get in line to get some of it. Anyway, they told me that over four hundred had applied. More than four hundred had been selected to go to Los Angeles for personal interviews. They were paying the expenses, so I thought, "Sure, I'll go. That's fine with me. I like a trip to Los Angeles every now and again." ... Okay, I believe the last thing I said was that I was given word that a little over four hundred people had been selected for interviewing.

I don't know how many of the four hundred went to Los Angeles. That's where I was asked to go. There were seventy-three out of that over four hundred who were selected to get those marvelous scholarships. Lo and behold, guess whose name was on that list? (Laughs) I never dreamed that I would ever get that kind of help about getting a PhD. Sure enough, I think I

mentioned that the man who was my advisor for my thesis at my master's degree had gone to Tallahassee to Florida State. He was urging me to come back there. They had an opening. Can you imagine that? Off I went. I knew several of them because we'd gone to national meetings. It wasn't that I was going into a bunch of people who didn't know me, and didn't know what kind of programs I could do for them, what I had taught, and all of that kind of thing.

I was lucky enough to—I don't know how anybody else could be as lucky to have that kind of help to get through a PhD in two years, especially with the fact that we had to move a few thousand miles across the country. My mother and all three of my children went with me. We had to find a house to live in and help the boys get into school. They were very, you know, adaptable. They'd lived where they went to different schools, too. They were old enough by that time that they could pretty well take care of themselves. They grew to be immense, so they didn't have too big a problem taking care of themselves. When you're in junior high school and well above six feet tall, you can have a little more respect than some other people get.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you have to do any time in the lab school in Tallahassee?*

Stromberg Did I have to? No. A PhD is based completely on observational research, really focused on a particular thing. If you get into doing anything in a lab school, it's very difficult to get a lab school that will make room for you to do anything. One of the problems, also, is that parents are not too keen about having their children in a project that might have some impact on the child and that kind of thing.

Nykolaiszyn *Tell me about your PhD research.*

Stromberg Oh, well, let me think now what I can say about it. Actually, it was more or less based on what children do in certain situations at home, and about what kind of relationships the children and their parents have in getting them to agree about certain things so that life at home is a little more pleasant for some people than it is for other people. The parents filled out a number of questionnaires for me, and we had to do quite a lot of data gathering and analyzing and whatnot. Of course, one of the requirements was getting it published, which we did, but I doubt anybody has read from the first publication. (Laughs) I always thought it was just one of those little jobs that they said, "This is what you have to do. You don't have to make a mark in the world. You just have to do this job."

Nykolaiszyn *Well, after Tallahassee, what happened? Where did life take you next?*

Stromberg Right back to Tucson.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Stromberg All of us were so glad to get back to the hot weather, the hot, dry weather. We had left a house out there. I'd purchased a house, and we rented that house while we were gone to somebody else. We were so anxious to get back to that house and get into the neighborhood where the boys had had friends. There were a lot of other families with children in that neighborhood. They liked the schools that they had in Tucson. We were all eager to get back there.

Nykolaiszyn *At this point, are you teaching on the faculty at the University of Arizona?*

Stromberg Yes, some graduate-level courses. I believe after the first year I was back that they got somebody else who would be in charge of the lab school, that I couldn't do all of that, teaching classes at that level and keeping things going at the lab school. I didn't stay very long. That's when they called from here and said, "Come back, come back."

Nykolaiszyn *I was going to ask how you got back to Stillwater.*

Stromberg Well, I had a few phone calls. "Come back here. Help us out. We need you." They were people I knew and who knew me. I thought, "Well, I think they're telling the truth if they say 'we need you'," because I kind of knew what they needed. By that time, I could teach graduate-level classes. That's what I did. I had some responsibilities to the lab school, but mostly teaching graduate-level classes. I think I was only here two or three years, the last two or three years before I retired.

Nykolaiszyn *You came back to OSU in 19...*

Stromberg Who knows? I'll have to look that up for you. Well, I'll tell you. I do know that all of us got back to Stillwater in [1967].

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Stromberg Now, that is right. I know that. There was just so many things that I was having to remember, related to time, dates, places, and all that kind of thing. I had so much in my mind. I tell you what. Getting a PhD in two years was a thing I don't want to do ever again.

Nykolaiszyn *That's quite a feat. So, coming back to Stillwater, tell me about the people in the department: who's the department head, who's the dean, what's going on.*

Stromberg Well, Dean [Lela] O'Toole was still the dean at that time. The department head was Mrs. Stapley. I knew all of them. It wasn't hard to fit back in the program since I'd been a student, a teacher, an administrator, and had all these other experiences. I could fit in pretty well. Besides that, by the time we got back here, my boys were near enough being grown up that I didn't have to be paying attention to what they were doing at that time. My mother was still well at that time. Later on, she had several years of needing help. She couldn't live alone for several years toward the end of her life. She lived to be ninety-five years old, or ninety-eight. She lived to be ninety-eight.

Nykolaiszyn *Wow. Well, tell me a little bit about Dean O'Toole.*

Stromberg Some people thought—I think some people were very anxious about living up to what they thought were her expectations. She was not an easy going, talkative kind of person like I am, but I always found her very pleasant to deal with. Never had any problems. I got to all meetings and got to meetings on time, and I got my reports in. That's kind of helpful, you know, when faculty members do that for the dean.

Nykolaiszyn *How did the facilities change through the years over in Home Economics?*

Stromberg Well, they changed enough—see, they'd gone to the new building by the time I came back. To me, it was never the same. They had the lab school, oh, over out back of the new building. I don't remember what all they put in the area that had been the lab school's location in the old building. They tore the old building down before very long after that. It was just going into a different place.

Nykolaiszyn *Tell me a little bit about some of the different courses you taught.*

Stromberg Oh, I can't believe that. (Laughter) I tell you what. I didn't teach the same ones both semesters every year. I had different ones. I had to study as hard as the students did, a good many of them. At that time was the time that there was so much financial problem in the country. There were so many, I can't say organizations, but government groups that had been established to help people who needed help do this, that, and the other thing. So many of those things that folks needed help with had to do with families with young children who did not have sufficient income to take care of all of them. There were a lot of things that we had to learn that were purely sociology.

That was kind of neat that I had a minor in sociology, too, at my bachelor's level. We didn't teach the same classes every year so that students could go through almost the whole three years—first year in school, it's just general courses that everybody has to take. Then after that, there's kind of a setup of courses that each department teaches every year. I got into being with a department where I got to teach several of those classes in that department

that I had taught before. That made it a little easier than having to teach three new ones every semester.

Nykolaiszyn *Yeah, it's tough to do a new prep every semester.*

Stromberg It's kind of fun, though, because you can get interested in the new things and get in the library and find all kinds of things you didn't know were there. That was the time, also, whenever so many federal programs were being distributed to states all around. I think all the schools that I knew were teaching classes relating to some of these federal programs that were developed to try to help families with children.

Nykolaiszyn *Like Head Start?*

Stromberg Well, yeah, that was part of it. We had Head Start then.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay. So at what point did you end up department head? How did that come about? Did you just volunteer one day and say, "I'll do it"?*

Stromberg No, I'd have to think about this for a minute. Give me a minute to think about this. I can't tell you for sure because I don't think I came back from Arizona to be department head. As a matter of fact, I know I didn't. Mrs. Stapley was going to be old enough to retire within the next two or three years. Now it's beginning to come back to me. The college and the university began advertising for somebody to come in to have the qualifications to be department head. I cannot imagine how much money some departments' budget put into paying travel expenses for all the people that they invited to come in. This went on for a year. Late in the spring I was sitting at my desk, and Dean [Beverly] Crabtree called and said, "Frances, I need to see you." "Well, I'm here." "All right, I'll be right in." She came in. I don't know if you ever knew her. Probably not.

Nykolaiszyn *No.*

Stromberg She was like this. She came into my office that way and sat down. She said, "All right, I have something to talk to you about." "Yes ma'am." She said, "Will you agree to be considered for the position of department head?" I nearly fell off my chair. I said, "Oh, come on. That's not what I am best fitted for." She said, "I don't care whether you're best fitted for it or not. I've been talking with your faculty and have mentioned to them how many people..." I don't remember how many people had been brought in to interview, how many people had come in. "I said to them, 'You folks have said no to me for everybody who's come in. Now, you tell me what we're going to do.'"

She said the answer was, “We’re going to ask Fran Stromberg to be head of the department.” (Laughs) I was just absolutely speechless. She said, “Frances, we need you. If you’ll just do it for a while, help us see what we can do....” I did it until I retired, which was only about three years, I think. I knew all the people on the faculty, and we’d all worked together. When you’re all teachers in the same general area and you’ve known each other for a number of years, you work together very well, ordinarily. I’m not too hard to get along with. We usually could figure out something. With a little arm twisting, I agreed that I would do that for a year or so, anyway. It lasted a little longer than that.

- Nykolaiszyn** *Throughout your time teaching here at OSU, what were some of the major shifts you saw in terms of how you taught students the curriculum?*
- Stromberg** Well, my feeling about that is in view of the fact that I taught the very first classes and first in the nursery school quite a long time ago. Most of us in our department, and most other departments that I knew, relied on textbooks that were published, readily available. As a basis for whatever class, we’d have a different textbook for every class. There was published material already that was accepted and served as a basis for the course material. By the time I retired, I was in the office. I didn’t have to deal with that planning coursework for classes the last few years that I taught. By that time, everybody was going to research journals and putting together their information that they wanted to use and in a way they wanted to use it so that students didn’t have to hear the same story over and over again, or have cousins who went to that same class and had all the papers for them, or something like that. It was, I think, a much better learning situation for students by the time I.... I mean students all over the whole campus. I don’t mean just in our department.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Within your department, was there a big focus on the faculty to publish, or obtain grants, or...*
- Stromberg** Oh, yes. I couldn’t even get a PhD unless I already had my dissertation on the way to being published. It’s kind of nice to have friends along the way. You know where to go, where you can get, find a place that would be accepting of what work you’ve been doing.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Would you have to work with other departments on campus such as Agriculture or the home demonstration agents? I know the name has changed through the years. Now it’s Cooperative Extension.*
- Stromberg** Let’s see. We had the demonstration—what are they called now?
- Nykolaiszyn** *Cooperative Extension educators. The name keeps changing.*

- Stromberg** Yeah, Extension, right? Of course, we always worked with Extension folks. During the whole time that I was department head, part of my salary came from Extension. It was my responsibility to go to the quarterly meetings for every area in the state. I tell you what. I grew to weigh 137 pounds. Oh, those ladies could cook such good food.
- Nykolaiszyn** *At these meetings, what would you talk about, or are you just going to listen?*
- Stromberg** Well, I just went because it was my responsibility to be there.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*
- Stromberg** I got to choose wherever I wanted to go. Didn't have any responsibility to do a program when I got back about what I'd heard or anything like that. It was just mother hen was kind of going along with the chickens.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Through the years, Home Economics has changed their name. We went from Home Economics to Human Environmental Science, to now Human Sciences. How do you feel about the name changes through the years?*
- Stromberg** Well, probably a good thing because Home Economics was really a very limiting title for a program as wide as the one we had here. I think over the years it would have limited the expansion of the program and made it harder for the program to appear to be teaching things that were being accepted in the area at that time. When you have little children and grown-up attitudes and the government getting into all kinds of things that had to do with family and young folks and all that kind of thing, you needed the elbow room to be able to change things. You couldn't be locked into the information that had been taught in one particular area in the same way for years and years and years, which is what I think it would have become if the name hadn't changed.
- Nykolaiszyn** *What's been the best part of the job for you?*
- Stromberg** Getting to know the other teachers, the people, I think. I respected all those folks. They were such—they were well educated. They were nice, pleasant. They were nice to work with. I knew that in some other departments, some of the times the faculties didn't quite get along that well, but I tell you, as long as I was in that department, we never had faculty members who made problems for each other. There were several different department heads, so I wasn't the one who did that. We were nice folks, and we were nice to each other.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Do you hear back from your former students?*

- Stromberg** Yes, sometimes, once in a while, yeah. As a matter of fact, we had a funeral, oh, here early, mid-spring, I guess it was, of one of our faculty members. She had been one of my students, too, one of my very favorite students. She was such a, just a fine person, and she died unexpectedly. I was so interested that so many of her students came to the funeral, but they also came and told me, (I was there at the funeral) they came and told me how glad they were to see me, whether I had been one of their teachers or not. It made me feel good.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Well, looking back on your career, what are some highlights that just really stick out for you in your mind, career highlights?*
- Stromberg** Well, I have to say that I did not have a long-term goal in my mind when I first started to college that I knew was going to still be there twenty or thirty years from then, but my mind was open. Sure enough, there were things that happened. I got to take classes in different areas, and I found I was always excited about learning something new. That meant that I met different people as well as different subject matter. I never got bored with what I was learning about over all those years.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Well, looking back on your work, what legacy do you hope to leave? When people remember Frances, what do you hope people remember about you?*
- Stromberg** Well, I'm not sure how to put this, but I hope they will remember that I did a fairly good job of every job I was given and worked together pleasantly and productively and enjoyed it. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity for me to have faculty members I worked with when I was a teacher and when I was department head, that we all could get together and have such a good time. We liked each other, and I think we all did a good job in our particular position.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Was it a hard decision to decide, "Okay, now I'm going to retire," or were you ready?*
- Stromberg** I tell you. I was either going to have to put my mother in a care facility or I was going to have to retire because, living to be as old as she was, some things appear with the way they do for a lot of us as we get older. I'd gotten to the point where I knew I could no longer leave her at home alone. I didn't know anyone I could get who would be one that she would accept and would be able to come and live here with her because when you're department head, you're just about working twelve or fifteen hours a day away from house. It bothered me because she thought she better answer the telephone every time it rang. Then they would ask for me, and a time or two I was here and heard her in a very cross voice respond to them, "Don't you know where she is? She's at work." Something like that. I couldn't have that because the calls were ones that were reasonable calls and I needed to be

able to take care of them. I couldn't take care of them when I found out that that was the way some of the phone calls were being answered and all of that.

Besides that, her general health was going down, I think. She went from a fairly active person to almost a bedridden person in a matter of about four or five years. I could see all the clues coming on, and I knew that she was going to have to go into a care facility. I knew she would not be happy about that at least for the first while. I wouldn't be happy about it either. Fortunately we found a place that was—oh, it has Head Start and I don't know what all else across the street from the fire station down there on South Main. There was a very nice daycare facility down there a long time ago. She lived down there I think four years and never complained about it. I went to visit her as often as I could, maybe not every day but almost every day. I was able to see how she interacted to the teenagers who were hired as caregivers down there. She just bloomed when one of those kids came up to the door and greeted her and began to visit with her.

She just came up and bloomed and chatted with them. They were happy, and she was happy to see them. I never ever had one complaint about one of them not being nice to her. A lot of people did complain. The older people who were not able to defend themselves didn't do very well in a good many of those daycare facilities, but she never complained that anybody down there did anything but take good care of her. I know that she'd sit up, and she'd see them. Very often, she'd call the—these were kids, eighteen, nineteen years old, maybe seventeen, probably not, or early twenties. She knew several of them by name, and she'd sit up and call them by name when they came to her door. Of course, that just pleased them no end. It pleased her no end that they would do so many things for her.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, you two had a very special bond.*

Stromberg I did have a very special mother, very special. When I thought about—I mean, I still think about how she had to do so many things that must have been very hard for a girl child or a young woman to have to deal with, and yet she grew to be well up into her nineties, and she was still just so glad to see these kids who came to her door. They beamed back at her just the way she beamed to them.

Nykolaiszyn *I'm sure she was very proud of the work you were doing, as well.*

Stromberg Well, probably, probably.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, before we close out, tell me a little bit about your children.*

Stromberg About my children?

Nykolaiszyn

Yes.

Stromberg

Well, I have three boys, three sons. Susan's husband, [Stan], is the oldest one. [Stan earned his BS degree in Animal Science at the University of Arizona. He is currently the Director of Food Safety for the State of Oklahoma.] Dave, who lives out in the country, was assistant fire chief for a while, but then he had to retire. His back was injured. He was hauling hose on a ladder. He lives out in the country now. Then, Jim has a master's degree from OSU. He got out of high school and didn't know what he was going to do, but he decided that he would go in the Navy. That was just at the time of the Vietnam War, and he signed up to go in the Navy. We were back in Tucson by that time. He signed up for a four-year hitch. He was assigned to an old World War II destroyer that left San Diego, went to the Philippines, and then went to Vietnam. It only came back to San Diego one time in that whole four years. Here he was, he had graduated from high school, but so had a good many of the boys on the ship.

He developed some friends who are still his friends. Like, he's leaving—I don't know whether it's today or tomorrow. He and one of the friends he made on that ship, who lives back in Illinois or Indiana someplace, that man, [Rick], comes by here. Jim lives out outside of Bartlesville. I don't know if I told you that. This guy comes by, and he pulls a trailer and pulls [it] with his motorcycle in it. He comes by, and they put Jim's motorcycle in that trailer, too. They head off for Colorado to visit another man they knew in the Navy, and on to Las Vegas where [Rick's] mother and sister live, then on up to Northern California as far as they can go, where another one of Jim's very favorite friends on that ship is. It's like family for them. This is all these years, so much later. Jim is married to a high school math teacher. I don't know how much longer that they're going to...because Jim is old enough to be retired. She is, too. If she works for two more years, she'll get a lot better teachers retirement.

Nykolaiszyn

Oh, yeah.

Stromberg

She would get—if she retired now, she could retire. I'm very fond of her. They don't have children. She had a sister who was not a bit nice to her. She didn't want to have to put up with anything like that.

Nykolaiszyn

What are you doing in retirement now, these days? Are you enjoying retirement?

Stromberg

Oh, you bet. You bet. I can go wherever I want to go. I can read books when I want to read books. I can knit and crochet. I have fifteen great-grandchildren...

Nykolaiszyn

Wow.

Stromberg

...and every one of them has had a hand-knitted blanket that Ma-maw made. It's so much fun to see these children. They are so different because somehow or another, the boys' father didn't look like any big Scandinavian, even though he had carried the Scandinavian name. Five feet, nine inches tall, kind of an ordinary-size person. Well, his dad was even shorter than he was and very chunky, Pop Stromberg. They had a moving and storage business. Pop had such big hands where he lifted so many things, he could not buy leather gloves that his hands would go into. When I began to see what size the first boy was, (grew up to be Susan's husband) and the other two coming along and they were going to be just as big or bigger, why, I thought, "Good grief."

I asked my husband, "I can understand where y'all got the blond hair and the blue eyes, but I don't understand where you get this six-feet-six-or-so height." He said it wasn't from Pop. Pop had a brother who was a fairly tall man, and he had a family of I've forgotten how many sons, five or six or seven or so. Every one of them was over six feet tall. He said it's just in the family somehow or another. You either get it or you don't get it. Good many of these big guys turned out to look like Vikings: blond hair and blue eyes, tall, big shoulders, and all of this. I'm kind of proud, and they all grew up to be very nice men. I'm very pleased with them, and I think that my mother and I had a few things to do with that.

Nykolaiszyn

I'm sure you two did.

Stromberg

You know, they're all just as pleasant as they can be. They've done well by themselves. Jim, the youngest one, I didn't tell you got a master's degree in [mechanical] engineering up here. He worked for Haliburton. They gobbled him up as soon as he graduated. After about [fifteen] years or so, Haliburton decided they were going to clean house down there, and he was let go. He decided he wasn't going to hunt in certain places. He was just going to hunt to see if he couldn't get a job that was well away from Haliburton by that time. He ended up with a job with a private engineering company in Bartlesville. The man who owned, (I guess he still does own, but his son runs it now) owned the business, got his engineering training in India and [the University of Arkansas]. He was over here, and he had this business.

Everybody—well, I say everybody. I don't know. People who had special needs in engineering field would go to Vasu, and he would always be able to get answers for them. Jim thoroughly enjoyed working for him, and Vasu thoroughly enjoyed having Jim work for him because when he would get focused on a job that he needed to do, you couldn't get his attention away from anything. I don't know how he could figure out everything that he figured out. Anyway, Vasu could give him any of the problems that came in.

If none of the other engineers, (and there was a time when he had eighty or ninety] others working for him) if they couldn't do it, "Hand it to Jim. He'll take care of it."

The first time I met Vasu was up there when some of us went up to hear the Bartlesville music thing that they have up there every week in the spring. We were all going to one of their big programs. Jim and Vasu and his wife came in the door, and that was the first time I'd met Vasu. Jim used to smoke, and he realized he'd left them or lost them or something. He went outside and left Vasu standing right there next to me. As soon as Jim was out the door, he turned around and said to me, "I want to tell you, God sent Jim to me. I could not have kept my business if I did not have Jim." You know, that's kind of awesome. He still gets called every once in a while to go solve some engineering problem for somebody who knows that he can do it.

Nykolaiszyn

Do you make it back to campus much these days?

Stromberg

No. I don't have any permit that allows me to get on the campus. I could walk somehow or another and get over. I don't know whether it's in the Student Union now or whether over in the garage office over there. I could get a parking permit annually for my car, but in the first place, I'm not walking very well, as you can see. I can't find any place to park where I can walk to get over to one of those offices. Besides that, even if I had a parking permit, most of the places on campus I can't park because they don't allow folks who just come by with little parking stickers to go in there and all. It's just too hard for me to get on campus and go where I would want to go. It's too demanding, and I won't make that demand to my body. You may have noticed when I get up, see, I have a metal thighbone from here up to here.

I had had a tumble one night when I'd gone to dinner that the food and nutrition department puts on every year. They always serve a little bit of wine, and food, and coffee, and all that kind of stuff. Friend of mine picks us up and was driving home, and I had had more water and wine and etcetera than I could hold. I was doing a great job of that. She let me out—no. I was driving myself home that night. I got in the garage, got in the house, and I had a brand new bed in my bedroom in there that cost a couple thousand dollars because it was one of those that had the jiggle in it, and this under the knees, and this up under the head, and all of that. I just had it a few weeks.

I thought, I am not going to have to buy that bed, get into that bed and wet on that brand new bed. I tore in there to try to get to the bathroom. I made a right-hand turn, and I lost my balance. I fell kerplunk, right on this side. Actually didn't hurt all that much. I just stayed there; I couldn't get up. I was the only one here, and Stan just happened to think (next day was

Saturday, he was in town) he just might come by and see me. Well, that's when he found me still on the floor. He gets panicked and still does. That's why I have this, [the Lifeline personal help button]. He and Susan both got so, "You're going to fall again. You're going to fall again."

Nykolaiszyn *Well, it's good to have family close by.*

Stromberg Right, right, exactly. Now I kind of got myself sidetracked from all of that.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, is there anything else you'd like to add before we close on out here today, anything else you'd like to mention?*

Stromberg I've just about drained out, I think, everything that I...

Nykolaiszyn *You've done great. Thank you so much for your time today.*

Stromberg Well, I've enjoyed having you here. As you can tell, when I live by myself and I've had as many friends and done as many things as I have in my life, I miss having company that I can visit with, so it's been my pleasure to have you here.

Nykolaiszyn *It's been great. Thank you so much.*

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