

Oral History Interview
with
Dorothy Leven

Interview Conducted by
Juliana Nykolaiszyn
October 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 Dorothy Leven is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 22, 2010.

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About Dorothy Leven...

Dorothy Leven grew up in Lansing, Michigan, and spent a year at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, when a friend suggested she look at a catalog from Oklahoma State University. Having already taken some home economics and nutrition courses, she was drawn to OSU's curriculum in that field, so she hopped a train for Stillwater and enrolled in 1957. She lived in Murray for a year, then moved to Willard Hall, and took courses focused on foods and nutrition. Her sights were set on eventually doing public work, helping the underprivileged with nutrition needs. As a student, Dorothy occasionally went to the movies, spent a little time socializing at the Student Union, and was active in Newman Club, a Catholic students organization, where she met her husband to be.

Dorothy graduated in 1960 and got married shortly thereafter. One of her most enjoyable jobs was at New Mexico State University where she was the dietitian and catering manager of their Student Union. There, she planned menus, coordinated functions and gatherings, and fed the masses of students, staff, and visitors on a daily basis. Her husband had joined the Army almost immediately after college, which resulted in several transfers over the years, taking them all over the country. They lived in Hawaii, Maryland, and Arizona, among other states, and they began their family just a year after getting married. Everywhere she lived over the course of years and miles, she focused her efforts on raising their children, at the same time working on projects and fundraising for food programs, homelessness, and nutrition awareness in her community. Dorothy and her husband have lived in California for over thirty-five years and are currently enjoying retirement. In 2010, Dorothy came back to OSU for her fifty-year class reunion. In her interview, she reflects on her time as a student and on the many reasons she loves Oklahoma State University.

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Dorothy Leven

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn

October 22, 2010

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Nykolaiszyn *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn, and today is October 22, 2010. I am visiting with Dorothy Leven on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This interview is one in a series of interviews with members of the OSU Class of 1960 who are back on campus for their fiftieth-year reunion today. This interview is part of the O-STATE Stories Oral History Project of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program. Thank you so much for joining us today.*

Leven I'm very glad to be here.

Nykolaiszyn *Let's begin by learning a little bit more about you. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?*

Leven I grew up in Lansing, Michigan. I always wanted to be a teacher, and so when it came time to go to college, first of all, I went to St. Mary's College of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana, across from good old Notre Dame. They had a good education program there, but I had taken a home economics course, and I really liked it. Actually, it was a foods and nutrition course in home economics, and I thought, "You know, that might be an area I would like to concentrate in." So I knew that that wasn't a major college for that. They were basically liberal arts.

I had a friend there from Oklahoma, and when she learned that I was interested in, maybe, dietetics, food and nutrition, institutional management, she said, "I've got the place for you." She was from Oklahoma City, but she knew a lot about Oklahoma State University because her boyfriend went there. She said, "I think you should look into

that.” So I went to the library at the college and got the catalog. I liked the curriculum, and it sounded very friendly. We are talking, you know, back in—this would’ve been ’57 because I was already in college the first year.

It sounded very nice. I have to say that was one of the best college catalogs I had read as far as friendliness and really making you feel welcome there at the school. So I decided to enroll, much to my parents’ chagrin, because they thought I should go to school closer to Michigan or Michigan State, which was actually rated one slot higher at that time in nutrition because there was Cornell, then Michigan State, and then Oklahoma State was rated number three because they had a dietetic internship already at that time. This was over fifty years ago.

I went ahead and enrolled and went to school there. I graduated after three years in 1960, and I have to say, it was just an excellent choice. I am just so happy I made that choice to come to Oklahoma State. It was just as good as the catalog promised. They gave me every help, anything that I needed. The faculty was very good. Anytime I needed any counseling of any type, academic counseling, I had help everywhere. I really can’t say enough about it, and this is a Michigander talking, coming down as a Yankee, down to Oklahoma.

Nykolaiszyn

What were some of your first impressions? First, how did you get to Stillwater?

Leven

I took the train. My parents actually did not come down with me. I thought maybe they were going to because they were a little concerned about me going away so far from home, but, actually, I took the train down, and my friend from Oklahoma was with me. There were orientation activities going on, and she actually stayed with me during orientation. She ended up going to OU, but they didn’t start at the same time, so she stayed with me a few days. She said, “I think you’re going to be happy here.” I encountered no big obstacles. Like I say, everyone was very friendly. My dorm was very good, I thought. It was Murray. It had nice roommates. It was very nice, a very good transition.

Nykolaiszyn

Did you remain in Murray your whole time?

Leven

No, I actually only was in Murray a year, and I met other people, other gals, who were in Willard, and so I changed to Willard and had another really nice roommate. I became quite active in Newman Club on campus and was president of that within about another year. I met some wonderful friends through there. In fact, one of them who was in Newman Club was Allen Reding, who I saw today for the first time in about thirty years. He was the Hotel and Restaurant Director [at OSU]

for a certain number of years. I can't remember how many. That was nice to see him, besides my three other classmates of '60 who were in foods and nutrition.

Nykolaiszyn *What is Newman Club? I've never heard of that.*

Leven It's a Catholic students association on campus. We had a church service there on Sunday. If not there, we would go into town to that church, but if there was an [extra] priest, sometimes he would say mass out there. They had regular meetings and socials. I don't know how many—I actually compiled a [student] directory that second year, I think, and we had quite a few Catholic students there, a lot of them here on campus. Quite a few of them did show up at Newman Club on, I think it was Friday night, maybe, or Saturday night. It's been too many years for me to remember which. It was a nice [place] for meeting [people]. Of course, there were the other organizations on campus [I belonged to], and to tell the truth, I can't remember all of them except I was elected into [an HES] honorary, because I saw my picture over there today in the HES [Human Environmental Science] Building. (Laughs) I found myself and one of my classmates in that picture. Those two organizations, and I believe that one was for grades. Do you know which one I mean?

Nykolaiszyn *I do not.*

Leven [Phi Upsilon Omicron] or something like that. Yes, and maybe there were one or two other organizations I was in, but you know, it's just the most welcoming place. What's not to like about Oklahoma State?

Nykolaiszyn *While you were here did you have a job?*

Leven I did not. Most of my friends did have jobs, telephone operator, working in the lunchroom and that. I didn't need to at that time. My folks—actually I think I asked them about it, if they'd like me to. I think they said, "Right now we can afford to send you, so just go with that. If you want a job later, you can get it." But it was a pretty daunting curriculum, too, and they knew with all the chemistry and everything that I had that it would be good to have the extra study time.

Nykolaiszyn *Let's talk about the curriculum.*

Leven Okay.

Nykolaiszyn *What were some of the classes you remember taking?*

Leven I probably remember my first-interest classes the most, which were

foods and nutrition, quantity cookery, diet therapy. I was very interested when I first started out in foods and nutrition, of eventually being able to volunteer in the community and maybe other countries in helping with food programs and feeding programs for the poor, Third World country type of thing. I kind of started out with that interest, so those things appealed to me, but really just anything in foods and nutrition [where I could fill a community need].

I am kind of science oriented, and so everything behind it, chemistry, biology, physiology, and microbiology, and all of the things we took were very interesting. I'd have to say all of those were interesting, but being in the School of Home Ec, even though we were concentrated in foods and nutrition and science, we still had the requisites of the home ec school. So, we had to take certain things like clothing, interior design, et cetera, and I enjoyed all those, too. I really did. It was a well-rounded program even way back then.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you have to spend time in the practice house?*

Leven I think we did. (Laughs) One of my classmates reminded me of that, and for some reason I don't really remember that. She said she thought we spent about a week in there, and I kind of remember doing that. I remember doing meals, like three meals a day for a certain amount of time, but I just didn't remember staying overnight. She reminded me. She said, "Well, I think we did." Whether we did or not, [after] fifty years I can't quite remember, but I do remember the meals and preparing everything, buying everything, going to the stores, if that is what you're referring to. I don't know what they called it then.

Nykolaiszyn *Any instructors or advisors that stand out?*

Leven Yes, oh yes. We had wonderful instructors. We had Mary Leidigh, and I believe she passed on a couple of years ago. We had Ms. White, Ms. Carter, Ms.—I believe her name was Barnes. Those were our major ones because we were not a very big department. I know there were other instructors, but those were the major ones. They were here—I'm not sure how many years they all taught here, but they were here for a while, most of them ten or twenty years, I'd say.

Nykolaiszyn *Any of them have a big impact on what you were doing?*

Leven Yes. I think they were interested in all of our goals. There were only, like I say, six or eight in our [major]. And probably just because of our numbers being so small, they could really concentrate one-on-one with all of us because we all had the same feeling about it. We really got a lot of attention from them and a lot of personal interest, so that was

wonderful, to have that with an instructor really taking an interest in what we're interested in. They liked the idea of what I had wanted to do eventually because I didn't, per se, just want to go into hospital dietetics at the clinical level as much as going out and doing feeding programs other places, places where people were poor and that type of thing and doing feeding programs. They were interested in all the different ways that the student wanted to use their knowledge gained in nutrition and quantity cookery.

Nykolaiszyn

Did you have to participate in an internship?

Leven

It was required to be a registered dietitian then, and so I was going to go to Houston for a VA [Veterans Administration] internship. They had told me that I could do that if I wanted. It was competitive, but my grades were such, and my interests, that they let me know I could if I wanted to. But do you know, my husband and I had decided that we would get married at the end of graduation, so I decided rather than going on and doing an internship anywhere, (I could've done it either here at OSU or gone to Houston) we decided to get married and I would just do an internship later. So that was the plan because I could've done it at any time. As it turns out, you could've either done it in a hospital, or you could do it under a registered dietitian at any hospital. They work out the program for you. They also had, of course, the internship programs at a lot of hospitals in the US. I'll tell you more about that as you ask questions. I'm sure it will come out on why I didn't go on with that part.

Nykolaiszyn

Tell me how you met your husband.

Leven

It was through Newman Club, actually. He was a Catholic student, also. He was pouring coffee at a church breakfast or something that Newman Club was putting on, and I met him. He was very, very nice. He is from Newkirk, Oklahoma, so he [lived] not too far, maybe an hour-and-a-half drive or something away from here. I met his parents, and they were very nice, too. That's basically how we got together.

Nykolaiszyn

So what was a typical date like?

Leven

Oh, maybe going to a Newman Club activity or going somewhere on campus. They used to have some movies, some cheap movies, somewhere. Being students, we were pretty frugal. Just things like that, maybe. He was in Farm House fraternity, so we had some functions over there to go to. But the thing is, he was only really here when I was here for about a year because he graduated in '58, and I really wasn't down there until '57. He went over to [UMSU to] do his master's. He got an assistantship at New Mexico State. He actually wasn't here, so we

corresponded, you know, phone calls, letters, and an occasional visit, but it was kind of a long distance relationship after he left here. Then we got married when I graduated [in 1960].

Nykolaiszyn *Were you involved in any sororities?*

Leven The one I was telling you about, which was an honorary type of thing. We did have some activities through that, but to be honest I can't remember because there weren't a lot of things. It does seem to me like I did do something. We had some activity that I helped with, but to tell the truth, I didn't bring that documentation with me. I probably should have looked it up. I didn't even think about that question, but we definitely had some things going on through that.

Nykolaiszyn *Dances...*

Leven I don't think dances as much as maybe something else with, maybe, scholarships, maybe working with kids at high schools or something. There were different things we could've done. I know that.

Nykolaiszyn *Service...*

Leven Service-type of things. To be honest, I didn't really get involved in that part of it, I just sort of did the basic things [of being a college student, studying hard for my grades].

Nykolaiszyn *What do you remember about Homecoming when you were a student?*

Leven Oh, it was just so much fun! It was just like now, coming back. They had all of the fraternities and sororities and campus residence halls all decorated. I worked on a float or two before for the residence halls. Just really nice. I have to say homecoming is really a lot of fun everywhere. When I was at St. Mary's at Notre Dame we had a really nice homecoming too. I know at Michigan State they had really nice ones, so it's just really festive and nice. But I do think Oklahoma State does a really good job [and has the best school spirit I have seen].

Nykolaiszyn *When you were a student, I know you were busy studying with your curriculum, but did you take time out for sporting activities?*

Leven I played tennis, but I don't think I—I may have played in one tournament. They may have had something going on here on campus, but I honestly studied a lot, so I did not really spend a lot of time doing things. I did go to a few football games, but, basically, I studied a lot. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn

So tell me what happened as you were getting ready to graduate. What did you have in your mind? Did you have a plan?

Leven

Well, other than getting married, we couldn't really plan because my husband—at that time everybody had to go in the military if they had put it off to go to college, so we knew that was next. We did want to have a family right away, so we figured it would be awhile before I would do my internship. This proved to be true because we moved around, when he went to the military, and he was in intelligence, Army Intelligence, working with infrared. He was kind of in demand because it was this very small unit of people that knew how to read infrared [photos]. That became very important in defense and all that, so we did move around in the military, to Hawaii and Baltimore. So I really couldn't do an internship. It was really funny because I kept thinking, "Okay, now this is the year I will do my internship."

Well, we did have a baby within just a year. We were married about a year and a month, and we had our baby. I had thought when I had my second baby, "Okay, now, after the baby is old enough I will do an internship," because I basically could've done it anywhere where there was a hospital with a registered dietitian. I thought, "That'll be easy if I can find a good babysitter." We were in Phoenix at the time, and I was checking out the hospitals. In fact, I was going to, maybe, work at a hospital under somebody that went [to OSU], and for the life of me, I cannot remember her name. But our third baby was born with a slight handicap and was a special needs kid. She had borderline cerebral palsy. She had to have about seven surgeries in the space of about four years. By five years, she was okay. There was no specialized daycare back then, not for any child with special needs. I felt I really did need to give her my full time and attention, which I did, but on the other hand, it did give me some leeway on working for the public in community centers where they needed help. So I taught diet therapy classes and nutrition classes, and, you know, that worked for me. I felt productive that way, too. I knew that I really needed to be there for my daughter and my other two children, but at the same time, I got to give back to the community, so that was fine, and my husband was making a [good] salary. I didn't need to worry about that, thank goodness. I know that doesn't work for everyone, but for me it worked.

Nykolaiszyn

Wonderful.

Leven

Would you believe I did that for a long, long time? (Laughs) Once you start with that and you kind of build on it, they give you bigger and bigger projects as you go along. I pretty much did stay with that, feeding programs with the homeless and some community organizations wherever we've been, and now in California. For the last thirty-seven

years I have done that. Although, as of about last year, I've decided I'm not doing anymore major programs. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Well, it has to be very rewarding.*

Leven It has been very rewarding. I know almost all of my friends actually did go on. They were even able to work when they had their children. I could've actually worked after mine were in school, but by then I was doing all this other stuff. I kind of hated to have my time infringed upon when I could be doing what I was doing on my own time. I honestly have to say, I have no regrets about it just because I have been able to do what I wanted to and pass on my knowledge.

Nykolaiszyn *Why do you feel it's so important to give back to the community in this—it's kind of an important facet, the whole nutrition education. We don't really think about it.*

Leven Yes, I just think it's important because I feel like I've been given an opportunity that a lot of people haven't. I've been educated in something which can help the public. There is rampant obesity. There are a lot of diabetics around that need help and education. People just do not know what they need sometimes when they have a certain disease or syndrome or how to feed themselves. I feel like if I can help with that, why not? I just have always been that way. I just like that.

Nykolaiszyn *Have you been back to campus since...*

Leven Yes, we were here about ten years ago, but we [also] were back early on after we graduated. Came through here maybe about ten years after I graduated, and then ten years ago we were here again. So we did see the growth of the campus. Oh my goodness, all these buildings, beautiful buildings, a new stadium.

Nykolaiszyn *Lots of changes.*

Leven Definitely. It's a beautiful campus.

Nykolaiszyn *So we have lots of changes, and what I want to know, I need you to tell me about the old HES Building.*

Leven Which one? Oh yes, yes. But what did we call it back then? When you said "old HES," it was just [called] the Home Ec Building. Oh, it was old, but lots of good memories there. It suited all of us because we were such a small group. We would've been really hard-pressed if it was teeming with students in foods and nutrition, but it just wasn't. There were a lot of home economics students, and they had their classes there.

I'm sure those classes were huge, but we didn't have all that many [in FNIA]. I mean, you know, like I did have the clothing and textiles and interior design. I'm not sure how many I took, probably at least eight or ten other classes, but in Foods and Nutrition, we did not have big classes. We did have some hotel and restaurant [students], mostly men in that field at that time, maybe two women, and they took some classes with us because that was part of their major. They had to take some nutrition classes and quantity cookery, but other than that we did not have large classes. I'll tell you, our major was the one to be in if you really wanted one-on-one [learning]. Maybe six students to every one instructor. It was pretty good.

Nykolaiszyn *What were the classrooms like?*

Leven Like I say, it was an older building. It wasn't bad or anything. Everything was painted up, and it was good, but it was nothing like all these buildings are now. These are all new buildings compared to what we had. When we went there that building was pretty old.

Nykolaiszyn *Did it have any specialized equipment, refrigerators, stoves?*

Leven Oh, yes, we had everything we needed for our nutrition studies and things. Although, the year that I graduated, in '60, they already had the new HES Building built, and I know they took us on a tour up there, I believe way up in the top where those windows are. I think they had nutrition labs, rat labs, and rat study labs because we had a couple of girls in FNIA [Food, Nutrition, and Institution Administration] who had research going on. I don't know if they were going on to Pre-Med or what, but they had some things going on up there, so we were able to see those. I believe before that, the old building is where they had these studies going on. I can't remember if it was in the basement or what, but that building was pretty much it for our foods and nutrition classes.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you take classes in any other buildings on campus?*

Leven Oh, yes. We took chemistry, physiology, bacteriology, microbiology. We took those all over the place.

Nykolaiszyn *Any classes in Old Central?*

Leven Yes, I believe. Now was that the one we had English in? That was that the big old building. I believe has that been condemned since then.

Nykolaiszyn *The big old building was probably Williams Hall that's been condemned.*

Leven Maybe. I don't remember the name, but it had a lot of steps, and we had huge classes in there. There were other classes we had to take there, too, like maybe English and history. I can't quite remember. It's been a long time. (Laughs) Yes, we had classes in—I was trying to think. Was it Whitehurst or maybe the Classroom Building? The Classroom Building we had some classes in.

Nykolaiszyn *And that was fairly new.*

Leven Yes, that was one of the newer buildings on campus. Of course, the library was just wonderful. I spent lots of time in the library, and I know since then it's been expanded a lot.

Nykolaiszyn *What buildings had air conditioning on campus?*

Leven Oh, I don't know if any had air conditioning. Did they, back in 1960?

Nykolaiszyn *Well, the library did.*

Leven Oh, the library did, that's right. I'm glad you mentioned that. That was where we went to get cool if it was a hot day, but I thought the weather here in Stillwater was really pretty good. I was never here in the summer, so basically from May when we got out, and then it started again in late August or whenever it started, it wasn't really too bad. August sometimes was a little bit warm. That's probably when I remember that, yes, air conditioning was a real plus. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Did you ever visit the Y-Hut? Does that ring a bell?*

Leven Do you know, I don't remember the Y-Hut.

Nykolaiszyn *The little coffee shack?*

Leven No, because we usually went to the Student Union.

Nykolaiszyn *What floor?*

Leven Wherever it was we got the short Cokes. I remember my roommate was in education, and we'd take a break at 9:30 or 10:00 sometimes when we'd be studying for an exam and go over for a short Coke. I'd never heard of that before and thought maybe it was an Oklahoma term, but we went to the Union, and we'd have a short Coke. It was just a Coke that was about this tall, you know, just half a Coke by today's standards. No, I thought the Student Union was just great. I can see now they're totally redoing it.

Nykolaiszyn *Yes, it's going to be awesome.*

Leven Yes, in 1960 it was great. I don't know when it was built, like maybe ten years before I was there or five years, because it was pretty new.

Nykolaiszyn *Do you remember, being a nutrition major, the first time you had pizza? Did you have pizza at Hideaway for the first time?*

Leven I don't know—was Hideaway there then?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Leven We probably rarely went there. If we went out, we usually would go over to the Union. We ate mostly at Willard. Like I say, I was really a study-holic, I guess you could call me, (Laughs) so on weekends—and of course, Andy was somewhere else by that time, too, after the first year, so other than with my girlfriends, we really didn't do a lot other than a movie once in a while or something like that, or just going out to eat close. But I don't remember Hideaway Pizza. I did just see that on Thursday, we came through here and went to that spirit store [Chris University Spirit] next to it, but I do not know. That's really bad. I don't remember Hideaway Pizza.

Nykolaiszyn *They were in a different location then.*

Leven Oh, they were?

Nykolaiszyn *So they weren't in that location.*

Leven Oh, okay because I remember the fire station and all that, and that is just across from there, isn't it?

Nykolaiszyn *Right.*

Leven I don't why I didn't know about Hideaway Pizza. (Laughs) We didn't have as much money in those days to have those extra treats either. That would be extra.

Nykolaiszyn *Oh yes, sometimes people will say, "The first time I had pizza was..." You know, "This strange food!"*

Leven No, no. Oh, I'd had pizza in Michigan, so yes. I thought you just meant at that specific place. No, I'd had pizza before, and it was good. (Laughter) We had good pizza in Michigan, yes.

Nykolaiszyn *I want to get back to the food in the dorm. How was meal service in the*

dorm?

Leven

Meal service, I thought, was excellent in the dorm. Of course, one of the things being a foods and nutrition major is by the time you're about ready to graduate, you yourself go through all of the dorms and their food service areas and everything, and actually work in them, too. You know, it's like a mini-internship, so you kind of get used to that before you go for your own internship. So I got to see the workings of everything, but when I was just there before doing that, like my first year when I was there and I was in Murray, I thought it was very well run.

The only thing I got a little tired of, because I thought the food was prepared just fine, everything tasted good, pretty good, was that I got tired of the sameness. They had a revolving menu. You always knew what you were going to have on each day of the week, so I think it's just one of those student things. You know how it is. You know you've got to eat at "X" place, and so you just think, "Oh, I wish I could go once a week somewhere else." But I was trying not to spend too much money because I wasn't working, myself, and I didn't want to have my folks pay for a lot of extra things, so I pretty much just stuck with the dorm food. That was one of the reasons I wanted to go to Willard, because I had heard that you had choices there, on what you could eat. I could not find actually any fault with the food at Murray. You know, just the sameness of it and not as much variety in what you could choose to eat. There might be a choice of two entrées whereas at Willard maybe there were four or five or six.

Nykolaiszyn

Interesting.

Leven

That was the only thing. I know when our kids were in college (they all went to different colleges in California) it was the same thing. If they were in the dorm—they all stayed in the dorms the first year, and it was always the same complaint from students: "I always knew what they were going to have a certain day," or, "I can't wait until I can go somewhere else, have my own apartment and cook." (Laughs) And there is not a thing wrong with the food usually. It's just the sameness of it. By necessity they have everything planned out on what they are going to make at these places. It's a quantity-cooking situation.

Nykolaiszyn

Sure.

Leven

So I empathize with them. I know they got a lot of complaints, but there was absolutely nothing wrong with the food.

Nykolaiszyn

Since you kind of had a behind the scenes look at the preparation, did they ever repurpose? Like if they had leftovers, did they try to create

something new?

- Leven** Maybe occasionally. Maybe it was just because I knew more about the food preparation and everything, but I didn't think they recycled a lot of stuff. I think once in a while they probably did, but it was in an appropriate way. Like, if we had roast chicken one night, we might see leftover chicken chopped up in a salad or something later that week. I don't think they took that to an extreme, but there could've been more of that than I knew. When I worked in there I did not see that. As far as in that mini-internship, I didn't see them recycle food. I'm not privy to that information, I guess. (Laughs)
- Nykolaiszyn** *Do you remember who the president was?*
- Leven** Gosh, he was a guy with white hair even at that time, but I can't—do you...
- Nykolaiszyn** *Was it Bennett? Or Willham?*
- Leven** Oh, Willham. I was going to say I would know the name when you said it. It was Willham, I believe, in '60. I could be wrong, but I believe it was.
- Nykolaiszyn** *I think it was Willham.*
- Leven** It was either that or he was Alumni Director by then, retired from the—but I believe it was Willham. Yes. He must've been a pretty good president because everybody really liked the school. I virtually did not talk to anybody that did not like the school. I guess, I would assume anyway, that they would leave if they didn't like it.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Right.*
- Leven** I certainly didn't know anybody that left because they didn't like it. Yes, if anybody left—I did know one person that left, but it was financial. They could not afford to go, had to go back to work, and then came back later.
- Nykolaiszyn** *What was graduation like?*
- Leven** Graduation was very nice. My parents came down from Michigan. My roommate's parents came, too. Everybody's parents came from wherever, and I just think it was really nice. I don't specifically remember a lot because my parents were here and we did other things, too, but there was a lot planned. Even back then, there was a lot planned for you to do with your parents. Your families were here, and they made

everybody feel very welcome. In fact, it was interesting because my folks, over the time I was there, maybe that was only the third time they had been there. They said when I graduated, “We’re really glad you did come down here. We kind of wanted you to be closer to home, but we’re really glad. We can see it was a very good school for you.” They were very impressed with the instructors and the caliber of everything.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, that’s good.*

Leven Yes. It was good. It was a good school to graduate from.

Nykolaiszyn *It’s kind of interesting, you come from Michigan to Stillwater. That’s a big...*

Leven You know, it is a big thing because I could’ve gone there. But part of it is you’re a teenager, you want to go away from home and study. It’s good there, too, but yet on the other hand I did have a recommendation about how good it was here. I have to honestly say that was one of my main reasons for coming down, plus the fact that the catalog was so inviting. Whoever did their catalogs at that time did a really good job of really nailing everything down as to what you’d be taking. There weren’t any surprises, and so if that was what you were interested in, then you’d be well-served to go there.

Nykolaiszyn *When I talk to alumni, I always find that they feel this great loyalty to Oklahoma State. Why do you think that is?*

Leven I think part of it is because of your good experiences here. You have good faculty, people smile at you, you see instructors that you have, and they’ll actually smile at you if you see them somewhere else. You don’t always see that everywhere. We’re out in California, and we have so many colleges and universities out there, and I know friends of mine have said, “You know, I saw that teacher twice or three times a week for almost a whole year in chemistry, so I knew him or her very well. Would you think he would speak to me when he saw me out on the street? No!” And you know very well they know who you are, but maybe they’re just not interested in talking with students all the time. I know that isn’t everyone’s experience, but it’s definitely out there that you don’t have this more personal relationship with your faculty, your instructors. I think that’s nice. Also, maybe they tell them here to be friendlier to your students, or if it’s just the friendliness of Oklahoma. I don’t know. I do know people talk and say hello on the street a lot more. In California you do not say hello to everybody you see on the street. (Laughs)

I really think it’s unique to Oklahoma.

Nykolaiszyn

Don't you think?

Leven

I'm not from here, but it's very unique.

Nykolaiszyn

I think so. I do. Or students, if you're walking down the street or something, a lot of students will say hi to you, you know. That's kind of nice.

Leven

Well, you're back here for your fiftieth reunion.

Nykolaiszyn

Yes.

Leven

Wow, fifty years.

Nykolaiszyn

I know. Makes me feel old! (Laughs)

Leven

What are you looking forward to most this weekend?

Nykolaiszyn

Well, I was looking forward most to this today. Not the interview particularly, but that was fine. I only found out I was going to do it about three or four days ago. (Laughter) But seeing my classmates. I have kept up with half of them in my class, and those people were here today. As I said, there were four of us total here today besides our husbands being here, and so I was looking forward to touching base with them again. Also, I have a niece who graduated from here, and she was at the luncheon today. She is now a 4-H Extension agent in Tulsa County, I think. Her daughter is an HES major. She is in nutritional science, I think they call it. Now they've got about six different areas you can major within the foods and nutritional sciences. Back then, we only had the one which included several different things. You had to cover foods, nutrition, and institutional management. Now you can be nutritional science, you can do this, you can do that, go into pre-med. She may go into pre-med, but she's in nutritional sciences now. I was really looking forward to seeing them, and they were at the luncheon sitting with me and with my classmates, so that was very nice to have a niece and grandniece who is a student here now.

Leven

Keeping it in the family.

Nykolaiszyn

Yes, yes. The other thing I was looking forward to was seeing about—oh, gosh, we must have eight or nine other nieces and nephews who [are going to OSU or] graduated from here because they are all from the Ponca City area and the Newkirk, Oklahoma City, and Edmond area. So we have actually quite a few family that have gone here.

Leven

Wonderful.

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

Yes, we'd have our own cheering section. In fact, we will have tomorrow at the game. My husband's going to be at the game with a lot of them.

Wonderful. Are you going to the game?

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

Actually, I can't. One of the reasons I'm not doing my community work so much anymore is my arthritis has gotten quite bad, so I can't actually sit in the stands for however long it takes, two or three hours. I need to get up and walk a lot, so I'm not going to the game. But there will be other people who aren't going to the game in our family, so I will be with them.

Good.

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

We will check the game on monitors wherever we are. (Laughter) I don't know where we'll be, but we will be either in our families' homes or somewhere on campus.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, we kind of did a little fast forward through your life here at Oklahoma State and got caught up with what you're doing. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we end our interview today, anything we've missed?

Leven

I don't think so. Let me just check and see if there was anything else. I think maybe I told you most everything as far as what I was trying to do, even though I wasn't able to be in the workforce. Maybe I skipped—actually there was one year we were at New Mexico State University living there after our marriage, so we were there for one year [while my husband got his MS]. Then we went to the Army. Oh, I forgot that part. That was just the best job in the whole world. I was dietitian and catering manager of the brand new Student Union they had.

Oh, wow.

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

It was a huge Student Union. It was the biggest thing on campus. That, I have to say, was the most fun job in the whole world. But you can probably tell I get excited about the quantity cooking and quantity feeding programs. So we had 2,500 students, I don't know how many faculty, and then visitors that came each day to eat there. That was really just more fun to plan menus and see everything through the whole production of the foods. We had alumni functions. We might have eight or ten functions going on at the same time we were feeding the students in the day. Of course, there were lots of people to help, but I got to direct that. It was just fun. To me that was fun. It wasn't really work. Of

course, that was before we had any kids or anything, so, you know, things change.

Well, it's good that you were able to bring passion to...

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

Yes, I would say I had a passion for it. It was fun for me. That's right. I had forgotten to tell you about that, but I think I've told you about everything else, basically. That, and I was going to say I did do fundraising, too, besides actually planning out menus and meals and all that. I did do fundraising, also, out of the nutrition field a little bit into just the community center area where I did teach classes [over my lifetime].

I know this one place really needed fundraising on a big scale to build their center and had no funds. They were trying to get federal funds but still had not received them, so we did a fundraising cookbook, and we had lots of people involved. This was in Oakland, California, and it really got the community involved. The women that were in my classes, many of them with high blood pressure brought in their precious family recipes, and we compiled this cookbook. We did raise a lot of money for the center, which pleased me because there were after-school programs for the kids. The community benefitted from that, so the fundraising, I would say, is the only other thing I would add.

I liked helping with that because, often people haven't had the opportunity of education like I have. They don't know how to talk to the right people to get funds to do whatever they wanted to do at the center, [such as] the educational programs. So that's just something I could do for them, and I was glad to do it as long as I had the time to do it, and I did. I was glad to do fundraising, and I did other things, too, you know, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and all that type of thing.

And now retirement.

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

And now retirement, so now we just have fun. We go on trips, and we do whatever we want to do on our own time. The only thing is by the time you get to my age, (I'm now seventy-one) it's like the body starts going out a little bit. Now we have the time and money to go on trips, but the body doesn't always want to cooperate. But we still do our share. We're very blessed to have fairly good health at this age.

Well, we welcome you back to Oklahoma State and your fiftieth reunion here, and I wish you many more.

Nykolaiszyn

Leven

Well, thank you. I feel very welcomed. [OSU is a great school to graduate from.]

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