**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Sylvia Duncan**

Interview Conducted by

Brandon Neal Jones

July 16, 2015

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Brandon Neal Jones

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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 the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Sylvia Duncan is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on July 16, 2015.

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**About Sylvia Duncan…**

Working from President Dwight Eisenhower’s inception of Sister Cities International, Oklahoma established a relationship with Kyoto Prefecture, Japan, in 1985. Eisenhower’s nonprofit organization was established for the purpose of creating and maintaining global connections, and since its origin, the relationships across the globe now number in the thousands. As a result of the Oklahoma-Japan connection in 1985, Stillwater became the sister city of Kameoka. To maintain the new relationship, a local council was formed, in charge of creating by-laws, guidelines, and city government connections. The original council consisted of nine members, one of whom was Sylvia Duncan.

In her professional career, Sylvia Duncan was the first woman president of the Oklahoma Society of CPAs and the first woman chair of the State Board of Accountancy. She was treasurer of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy and was on the American Institute of CPAs Board of Directors. On the Kameoka council, she was able to work with her passion for international relations, helping write the council’s by-laws, and remaining on the council for its current thirty-year duration. Since 1985, Stillwater and Kameoka have shared cultural and educational exchanges and programs, and have worked diligently to create cross-cultural acceptance and integration within the different societies. In her interview, Mrs. Duncan discusses the development and growth of Sister Cities International in Stillwater, and the work that has been accomplished between Stillwater and Kameoka over the years.

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**Sylvia Duncan**

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Brandon Neal Jones

July 16, 2015

Stillwater, OK

**Jones** *My name is Brandon Neal Jones, and today is July 16, 2015. We are here in the Kameoka Room of the Stillwater Community Center as part of the Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Series of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program. I will be interviewing Mrs. Sylvia Duncan on the Sister Cities International relationship between Kameoka, Japan and Stillwater, Oklahoma. Thank you for joining me today.*

**Duncan** Thank you.

**Jones** *So Mrs. Duncan, let’s just start right at the beginning. Let’s start with the founding of this relationship and who the key players were.*

**Duncan** All right, we’d need to go back to 1985 when the State of Oklahoma and, I think, principally, the Department of Commerce formed a relationship with Kyoto Prefecture in Japan. Then they decided, the Department of Commerce, that it would be good if there would be a city in Oklahoma that would be a sister city [to Kyoto Prefecture], Japan. Now, going way back to 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had the idea that there should be citizen diplomacy. He had presented [his] idea, but it was not until actually in 1967, I believe, that Sister Cities International was formed as a non-profit organization. The whole idea was that if relationships could be built between citizens of cities around the world from them that there would be common understanding and it would be truly citizen diplomacy.

Now, back to Stillwater. There were some people who thought this would be an excellent idea for Stillwater to have a sister city relationship. At that time, the mayor of Stillwater was Mayor [Christine] Salmon, who was an architecture professor at the university, however, she was not the [mayor] who really signed the agreement. Kameoka sent a three-member, fact-finding delegation to Stillwater to see if the City of Stillwater would fit what Kameoka wanted, which was [a city] not too far from the capital of the state, an economy based on agriculture, and also the home of a university. All those things seemed to fall in place. Finally then in November of 1985, a twelve-member delegation went from Stillwater, and at that time it was headed by Mayor Calvin Anthony. In Kameoka, on November 3, 1985, Mayor Anthony and Kameoka Mayor Yoshihisa Taniguchi signed the formal documents establishing the sister city relationship, which, as I think you noted, is now in our thirtieth year of that relationship. The delegation did come back to Stillwater, determined to develop a dynamic program, and I feel that has happened.

**Jones** *Can I ask, were you a part of that original twelve-member delegation?*

**Duncan** I was not a part of that original twelve-member delegation. However upon their return to Stillwater they did make a call for interested individuals to come together, and I was one of those who met at the City Hall. We were given the charge to form a council, write by-laws, and become an integral part of the city government. I was one of the original nine members of that council, and I actually did the major part of the work of writing the by-laws. Actually, I am known as the charter member of the council because I have been on the council continuously for these thirty years. Now, Larry Jones was on the original council, but he took a leave from the council duties when he went to Kameoka to be on the faculty of OSU-K, which was established in the city of Kameoka.

**Jones** *Okay. So, now, let’s go back to that founding of the sister cities council. The original twelve-member delegation, they went over in November of 1985, and then on November 3 in Kameoka, Calvin Anthony and Mayor Taniguchi signed the agreement. Then they came back, and they sent out a call for citizens to begin this council. Tell me about those first days with the council. You mentioned that you had written the by-laws, but tell me a little bit of your personal experience with the council and what made you want to join this council. What was your original interest?*

**Duncan** I had, prior to that time, been involved in teaching English to international students here on the OSU campus. I just had an interest in international affairs and relationships that were peaceful and enriching. On that original council, in addition to Larry Jones was Dr. Harold Sare of the Political Science Department at the university, Ken McKinley, a woman named Dee Dutt, and we did have a city liaison, one of the staff people whose name I do not remember because he was a young man. He did not stay in that position long. Rather, the Assistant City Manager, Mary Rupp, became the city official who was assigned to the council.

**Jones** *Her name was Mary Rupp?*

**Duncan** Yes, R-U-P-P.

**Jones** *And in those first days of being on the council, what were some of the highlights, activities that you participated in and that you led that really founded the starting of the council? What are some things that really come to your mind as—those first few days, what activities were you a part of?*

**Duncan** Well, the first few days was actually the by-laws. I don’t remember too much, other than we decided that since the Japanese were so into beautiful Japanese landscape gardens that it might be appropriate if we established a Japanese garden at city hall. A Japanese garden is called a koen, K-O-E-N. We did set about to build a Japanese garden to the north of the municipal building. We did it with volunteer labor, and we had a beautiful wooden sign fabricated that we hung [first] on Main Street but later at the Kameoka Koen which indicated how many miles west that Kameoka was from Stillwater.

**Jones** *Oh, okay.*

**Duncan** Then we did have a large delegation come from Kameoka in 1987, and that really was the time of our second anniversary. It was November of 1987, and at that time we did establish—well, we had prior to that time, but at that point we dedicated a walking trail called the Kameoka Trail that starts in Couch Park. The head of that trail is just across the street north from what is the Senior Citizens Center now, and goes clear to Boomer Lake. That is a walking trail.

**Jones** *I have walked that trail a few times, myself, out towards Boomer. That was my first experience with Kameoka and noticing the sign and kind of asking myself, “What is this that I’m seeing?”*

**Duncan** Then we did have a dedication of the Kameoka Koen.

**Jones** *Okay, and that was in 1987 for the second anniversary.*

**Duncan** Yes, that’s true. See, we entertained that delegation from Kameoka and got individually acquainted with all those people who came.

**Jones** *And tell me a little bit more about the entertainment aspect of it, as far as—were you introducing them to native Oklahoman food? Were you introducing them—I mean what kind of events do remember about that?*

**Duncan** Well, I remember hosting one in my home.

**Jones** *Tell me about that.*

**Duncan** I think this was the one that we had in the backyard. It was a cookout, but we had to quickly move inside when a rainstorm occurred. (Laughs) Anyway, that was the kind of thing we did. We had meals in homes, generally, sometimes in a restaurant. We had some homestays. I remember one of the persons who was at our home had been in World War II, and so had my husband. They developed a very good rapport, and if I remember correctly, the man gave my husband a Japanese kimono. It was a lady’s kimono. I mean, there was [a good] relationship that developed even though they had formerly been wartime enemies. That’s the whole idea of the sister cities: to develop friendships and understanding that we’re all alike as human beings. That’s what we did.

**Jones** *Now, so that was the second anniversary. Let’s discuss your first trip to Japan. Have you made it? You have…*

**Duncan** Yes, I went to Japan, I think, in October of 1988, and I traveled with two others: a man named Dr. Joseph Fox, who was on the council, and then the mayor, Mike Henson. We actually were invited to come to attend the forty-third national sports festival, which is held every year, I think every year, in Japan. It could be less than every year. Anyway, Kameoka was hosting some of the events of that. Some were taking place in Kyoto but some were [in Kameoka]. I think maybe they have those events in different prefectures each time. In Japan, the prefecture is the equivalent to our state. Kyoto City is the capital of Kyoto Prefecture, but the city of Kameoka is just about thirty-five miles from Kyoto City.

**Jones** *It’s due west, isn’t it?*

**Duncan** Pretty much.

**Jones** *Your first time in Japan, what are some of the feelings, the emotions, you know, your experiences while you were there? Did you fly in through Tokyo, or did you fly in through…*

**Duncan** Kansai. Well, that time we came through Tokyo, I’m pretty sure. The next time I went, we came through Kansai, the city of Osaka. Well, we were just waited on, hand and foot. I mean, we were treated so hospitably. Of course, I was a little dubious of some of the food. (Laughs) I tried to not show that too much and go ahead and eat it. I believe it was on that trip that we stayed in a traditional Japanese inn with the tatami mats.

**Jones** *And those are called ryokan?*

**Duncan** I think that’s right, something like that.

**Jones** *But you stayed at the traditional Japanese inn, with the tatami style…*

**Duncan** Yes.

**Jones** *Those are very beautiful. How long were you there, kind of even an estimate?*

**Duncan** It was probably nearly a week. As I said, my eighty-six-year-old memory eludes me sometimes when things happened nearly thirty years ago. I forget all the specific details.

**Jones** *No, I do understand that.*

**Duncan** I do remember about that traditional Japanese inn, in the lobby they had a beautiful white, richly embroidered, embellished, wedding kimono.

**Jones** *Oh, I bet that was beautiful.*

**Duncan** I know that Mayor Henson and I both, you know, had oohed and aahed over it. The innkeeper said, well, “Would you like to try it on?” (Laughter) We both had the opportunity to try this beautiful wedding kimono on.

**Jones** *Nice! That’s a memory that you probably just can’t forget, isn’t it? That was a wedding kimono in the lobby of the inn.*

**Duncan** Yes.

**Jones** *So that was your first trip into Kameoka, and what would be, you know, the next major event? Would you have gone back to Japan, or did we have another delegation come between then?*

**Duncan** Well, we had quite a few delegations. Then there was also the sister school relationship, which was established where we had—well, the first delegation that went from the middle school to Japan was a rather large delegation of students. That was led by John Mills, who was the principal and also a member of the sister city council. Then, in turn, in that sister school agreement, they would send at least a teacher and two students to Stillwater. That alternated. It got to where we sent a teacher and two students, and then the next year they would send a teacher and two students. That happened up until the time that there was, oh, some fear or apprehension about safety and then also the economic downturn in Japan, so there have not been as many of the educational exchanges.

**Jones** *Do you know what year that would have began, approximately?*

**Duncan** Oh, I should know exactly. Let me think about that a little.

**Jones** *Okay, we’ll come back to that in a minute.*

**Jones** I do know that we had the opportunity through Sister Cities International to apply for some grants, and they were called trilateral grants where it involved Stillwater, Kameoka, and a city in a third-world country. I actually had applied for, and I did the work in sending in the proposal to apply for—the first grant had to do with early childhood education. I believe I’m correct on that. We had one on early childhood education and another on lifelong learning. I know I was at an organizational meeting in Irvine, California. We got both the grants, but they were years apart. One was, like, 1993 and ʼ4, and the other was like 1996 or ʼ7. When I was in California for this organizational meeting, of the first grant, we had a large group of Japanese come [to Stillwater]. They were members of the social welfare foundation. … They came while I was gone, it just so happened.

**Jones** *Okay, and they came here to Stillwater…*

**Duncan** They came here to Stillwater.

**Jones** *…okay, while you were in California.*

**Duncan** Yes, at least during the largest part of the time of their stay. Those visitors to Stillwater at that time were divided into groups and went to different places that would have been of interest to senior citizens, people with cognitive impairment, and maybe working women or women with home offices. This was a social welfare group, and so these were some of the issues that they were interested in. Places for them to visit were in those areas.

**Jones** *So they were coming not only to open up this relationship and to create this dialogue between two communities, but they were also coming to learn about some of our programs and offerings that we have here in Stillwater, Oklahoma.*

**Duncan** For our citizens, yes.

**Jones** *For our citizens, okay. So it was very much a learning experience for both cities.*

**Duncan** Right. The second time I went to Japan was in 1995, in May of 1995. This was sort of an evaluation meeting for representatives of all the cities that had been involved in the trilateral exchange.

**Jones** *By the way, a quick question: The third city that was involved, we had Stillwater, Kameoka…*

**Duncan** All right, the third city, it was Jandira, Brazil, a sister city to Kameoka. It’s rather interesting because lots of Japanese people had immigrated to Brazil. That’s one reason they had…

**Jones** *That was the connection there for Kameoka, okay.*

**Duncan** ...the connection, yes. In some of that trilateral exchange we actually had the mayor of Jandira and his wife to visit Stillwater. Then later we had, well, John Mills and his wife went to Jandira as our [representatives]. So there were…trips to all three cities.

**Jones** *Okay. Now, you said your second time to Japan in May of 1995, that was an evaluation?*

**Duncan** Yes, it was an evaluation meeting, and it was actually there we flew into Kansai because the meeting actually took place in Osaka. At that meeting, I stayed in the Intercontinental Hotel in Osaka, but I did go to Kameoka, as well. Mayor Taniguchi was present at the meetings, of course. At that time, there were three of us who went, and that was John Mills, Mike Henson, and myself. I believe at that point, Mike may not have been the mayor, but, anyway, she [went]. Mike sounds like a boy’s name, but she was a woman, and she was a very close friend of mine. That was the second trip. John Mills [went] because he [had traveled to Brazil] on the early childhood education trilateral exchange. Even though he was the principal at the middle school, his wife was a specialist in early childhood education.

**Jones** *Were there goals that were trying to be accomplished at this meeting? What was being evaluated, I guess, is a better question.*

**Duncan** All right, well, I will tell you, and I had sort of written out…. On the one with early childhood education, one of the results was that there were informative curriculum booklets for preschoolers developed, and innovative teaching methods were shared. In regard to both grants, there was the realization on the part of all the participants that basically human beings are all alike regardless of age and ethnicity, that we’re alike in so many ways. It led to the idea that these quality-of-life issues can impact world peace.

**Jones** *Let’s see. We’re in May of 1995. Is this getting close to about the time that the Japanese gardeners came over to build the garden that’s outside the Community Center?*

**Duncan** I believe they came in 1997.

**Jones** *Could you tell me a little bit more about that?*

**Duncan** All right. The idea arose in Kameoka that this garden would be a gift to Stillwater. They let us know that’s what they wanted to do, and so they posed the problem of where it should be built. We wrestled with that before they came, of course, but it was decided it would be here at the Community Center. There were seventeen gardeners who came, and they did ship rocks from the Hozu River, which runs through Kameoka, large rocks, or stones I should say, to use. They shipped the two different—I say two. I can visualize two different Japanese lanterns, but the large one that is in the garden. We had another one that they had given us that we had in Kameoka Koen. Anyway, they shipped those stones. They made arrangements to rent large equipment, everything they could in Stillwater, but they had to get some things from Oklahoma City. They bought plant material and probably expended, including their travel and accommodations, in excess of a hundred thousand dollars.

**Jones** *Quite a gift for Stillwater, isn’t it?*

**Duncan** Quite a gift. Then there were people who would come nearly every day the gardeners were working and watch them work, and bring them something to eat or drink. [The gardeners] would sit on the lawn and eat. One gentleman who lived somewhere in the neighborhood of the Community Center wanted to give them OSU football tickets. It was in the fall of the year for football season. That was what he did, and they were able to go to a Saturday football game.

**Jones** *How nice.*

**Duncan** Then, I think maybe about three years later, three or four of the gardeners returned to check on how the growth was taking place. Actually, we had a little ceremony, and [the garden was officially named] the International Friendship Garden. There is a plaque that has all the names of the gardeners engraved and is in the garden. Now, in addition to the garden here at the Community Center, they did build a small Japanese garden at the Botanic Garden at OSU.

**Jones** *That was done at the same time?*

**Duncan** It was done at the same time they built the garden here.

**Jones** *Okay, and just to clarify, the Kameoka Koen, is that still….*

**Duncan** No, the Kameoka Koen went the way of many things in this life because it had to be destroyed when [the current police station addition was built].

**Jones** *Okay, so we still have the International Friendship Garden out here, and then we have the smaller garden at OSU Botanical.*

**Duncan** Yes, at OSU, yes.

**Jones** *Okay. So now we’re up to about 2000s, aren’t we?*

**Duncan** Okay.

**Jones** *I don’t want to rush anything, so if we skipped some major events that you would like to cover, please let me know because I know there’s thirty years of history, and it’s a rich history.*

**Duncan** Well, I was trying to think. One thing that we did in 1992, (and that’s really going back prior to the garden) Sister Cities International annually has their annual international conference. In 1992, Tulsa, Oklahoma, was chosen as the locale for that, or the host, and so we did invite a large Kameoka delegation to come to Oklahoma to attend the international conference in Tulsa. We entertained them there and here. [Stillwater] did help with the conference in Tulsa. There were activities at Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa where Native American Indians performed. One thing I remember about being at the conference in Tulsa was meeting the mayor of Timbuktu. (Laughs) You know, [we often] use that word, but we don’t know where Timbuktu is.

**Jones** *It’s an actual place, yes.*

**Duncan** Anyway, that was a fun time. We brought [the Japanese delegation] back to Stillwater…. If I remember correctly, we brought the delegation back via Pawnee Bill’s.

**Jones** *Oh, okay.*

**Duncan** That’s one thing I remember about 1992, and that’s sort of, you know, backing up before the social welfare group came. In 1998, there was a group of Stillwater citizens who went to Kameoka for the dedication of a new building in Kameoka called Kameoka’s Galleria. …Steve and Becky Irby, I believe, were in that group. Becky is a member of the council. Then also that year we accumulated and received donations of [books] by Stillwater authors, and those were taken to Kameoka as a gift from Stillwater to Kameoka for placement in their library. Then…moving on to the year 2000, that was the fifteenth anniversary of our relationship. We had a Japanese delegation [come], and Mayor Taniguchi came with them at that time.

Then in 2002, (and this was in January, it was the dead of winter) a group called the Kameoka Terreno Tono Ensemble came and presented a concert. They were musicians who played what’s known as an ocarina, which, I think when I was a child, they were called a Jew’s Harp. These ocarinas that they played were made from clay [when the Galleria was built]…. There was a large group of them, and we had a concert. Their performance [was] at the Wes Watkins Center. It was on a January night when it was extremely cold and icy. Then we had a breakfast [held in the basement area of the Public Library for them the next morning before they left that day].

**Jones** *The ocarina group from Kameoka in 2002, you talk about that being in the dead of winter. Could you tell me, if you guess, how many people showed up to see this, because that’s…*

**Duncan** It was a huge crowd.

**Jones** *That’s what I thought.*

**Duncan** It was a huge crowd.

**Jones** *So the snow and the ice did not stop them.*

**Duncan** It did not deter them. That next morning when we had the breakfast, the sun was shining, [and] everything was just sparkling because all the trees were covered with ice, and all the shrubbery. We told them goodbye [as they departed Stillwater].

**Jones** *Let’s see. So that’s in 2002? I think the next big event is our twentieth anniversary, is it not…*

**Duncan** Well…

**Jones** *…or did we have a little something in between there?*

**Duncan** There might be some things in between that perhaps were not directly sister city connected. One of the professors from the Horticulture Department at OSU, Dr. Paul Hsu, who happens to be Chinese, had been taking groups to Japan to study the Japanese gardens. That was taking place in 2004, in that timeframe. In 2005, there was a Stillwater delegation that went to Kameoka.

**Jones** *This would be around the twentieth anniversary.*

**Duncan** Yes, that’s correct.

**Jones** *And this was a political and citizen delegation?*

**Duncan** It was mainly just a citizen delegation.

**Jones** *Just citizens, okay, and you were on this trip?*

**Duncan** No. The two trips that I’ve mentioned: 1988, to the forty-third national sports thing, and then the trip in ’95 to Osaka and then also to Kameoka. One thing I might mention that happened prior to the 2000 decade, you know we’re here in the Kameoka Room. My professional life has been as a certified public accountant, and one of my longtime clients was Winfrey Houston, who’s been very active in the development of this old school building to become the Stillwater Community Center. He kept talking to me. He said, “We need a Kameoka Room in the Community Center,” and so he sort of placed it upon my shoulders. He interceded with the Board of the Community Center that we be given a space designated as the Community Center.

**Jones** *And about what year was this?*

**Duncan** Well, I would really have to look on this plaque that’s on the wall over there that lists on brass plates the people who donated. Each of the three lighted cases which are behind me have a brass plate on them saying who donated the cases.

**Jones** *The objects inside or the cases.*

**Duncan** The cases. Now, all of the artifacts and things inside the cases are gifts from various official delegations or just friendly gifts to the City of Stillwater. Some of the things have been given to individuals, and then the individuals have given them to be on display here. That was really one of my projects was…

**Jones** *Was putting together the room?*

**Duncan** …putting together the room. Then in addition to these three lighted cases that you see behind me, there is one in the lobby outside the Lowry Center. It’s just like these cases here, and it’s full of artifacts. Then there is another case in the room now, which is to my right, which the case and all of the artifacts in it were donated more recently by a doctor, a retired doctor, who is leaving Stillwater, Dr. Charles Johnson, and his then-deceased wife, June. Most of the things, the artifacts, in that case were given to Mrs. Johnson through the years based upon some friendship that she had built with Japanese who were here in the military at different times. Then we have other cases in the room that were donated by Calvin Anthony, the then-owner of Tiger Drug.

**Jones** *The former mayor who started the…*

**Duncan** Who signed the sister city agreement, that’s correct.

**Jones** *Yes, and I know there’s another case here in the Stillwater Community Center with a Samurai…*

**Duncan** Yes. And that was given to the city early on…

**Jones** *Oh, that’s an older gift, okay.*

**Duncan** …very early, very early on. Let me tell you: the case was not given; the Samurai warrior was. The case was fabricated by one of the city employees. [John] McClenny is his name. It was built specifically to house the Samurai warrior. Actually, the original intent was for it to be in the Kameoka Room in the area in the west end. He was very dismayed, as were all of us, when he couldn’t get it through the door into the room. He had measured so that all the Samurai fit in beautifully, but that’s the reason it’s also in the lobby outside the Lowry Center.

**Jones** *So we’ve done the twentieth anniversary, and I believe there was a twenty-fifth anniversary.*

**Duncan** Yes, there was a twenty-fifth anniversary. We had a special delegation here at that time from Kameoka. On October 17, 2010, we had a special program, and, again, it was in the auditorium area at the Public Library. There we had the Stillwater Middle School string [ensemble]. Well, it was a group called the Touring Strings. It wasn’t their whole orchestra. They performed. Former Mayor Anthony spoke. Larry Jones spoke. At that time, one of the men at the university, Dr. James Hromas, was serving as a board of directors member for Sister Cities International. He was never really on our Stillwater sister cities council, but he was a board of directors member of Sister Cities International, and so he had a part in the program. Then there was a [Japanese] group from the university, a choral group, that sang, students from OSU. A group from the—well, I think it was really the major part of the Stillwater Community Singers sang that day, and John Mills and Cindy Petree told about the Sister School program.

**Jones** *Now, John Mills is the principal and Cindy Petree is a teacher with…*

**Duncan** Stillwater Middle School. She’s been the one to spearhead the international exchange program. Actually, she was one of the original sister city council members way back, but then she left Stillwater and moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Then she came back to Stillwater at the middle school, and she is currently now a member of the sister city council. [Back to the twenty-fifth celebration], they gave me the duty of making the closing remarks that day. We had a very nice twenty-fifth anniversary program. The program highlighted everything that we had done in the first twenty-five years. I say everything. Probably not everything, but the main things like the school exchange.

Also, I hadn’t mentioned that our program has won some awards. We were awarded for having the outstanding youth exchange, and Larry Jones was named the International Volunteer of the Year in 2001. Then Sister Cities International recognized what they called a distinguished circle of volunteers…on the fiftieth anniversary of Sister Cities International. There were several of our council members who were included in that distinguished circle of volunteers. I was trying to think of something else that—oh, we have been involved with the Sister City art competition, and then [Sister Cities International] enlarged the art competition to include young authors. We’ve taken part in that every year since it was started.

**Jones** *And how long has that been going on? I believe there was some art hanging out here a few months ago that was for that.*

**Duncan** Well, generally, the winning art hangs at the international convention, which is usually held in July. Then they have a traveling exhibit, and we usually [have] had it come where it can hang here. It’s usually not until, like, in January. It’s usually here in the winter.

**Jones** *So just if I understand this correctly, Sister Cities International holds this art competition for young people…*

**Duncan** Within certain age range.

**Jones** *…and then we do a local competition to select a winner to send to the national.*

**Duncan** That’s correct.

**Jones** *Okay, I see, and we’ve been doing that for as long as the….*

**Duncan** As Sister Cities International has had that program. I don’t remember exactly the date.

**Jones** *And they’ve now opened that up to young authors.*

**Duncan** Yes.

**Jones** *And are we involved in that aspect of it, also?*

**Duncan** Yes, and we do give an award locally to the winners that we select that we send on to the international competition.

**Jones** *So we’re getting to a point where we’re almost up to contemporary, to now. Would you like to tell me about this doll that you brought with you today?*

**Duncan** This is a kokeshi doll, and a kokeshi doll is one that has no arms. They are the rage in Japan, however the Japanese love all kinds of dolls. At one point, I remember (and again, I don’t remember the exact year) one of our council members, Nancy Simpson, and I put together a very large doll display in one of the closed cases at the Public Library. This [doll] was given to me by a visitor from Japan, and I’ve had it for several years. Just a few years ago I had a catalog from the Chicago Museum of Art, and I happened to see this exact doll pictured in there. The price on it was eighty-five US dollars. We have a lot of kokeshi dolls in this room. We have two cases, one on the west wall and one in the corner, that are from a collection of Pauline Kopecky, who was a teacher at OSU-K [who] collected the dolls while she was there, and she has donated them now to the City of Stillwater for the Kameoka Room.

**Jones** *I’d like to know a little bit more about—do you know about the materials of the doll? Is this a hand-crafted—can you tell me a little more about that?*

**Duncan** Yes, I think so. A lot of them are wooden. This is out of wood, but there are dolls made out of other materials and some that are covered with, like, tapestry…[which is] punched into the crevices.

**Jones** *One other thing that has been mentioned a couple times that I think we should discuss at least a little bit is OSU-K. I don’t know that very many people are familiar with this.*

**Duncan** All right. In the very early days of our relationship with Kameoka, Mayor Taniguchi, who is the one who signed the agreement, was very interested in having Oklahoma State University establish a university in Kameoka. He met with university officials nearly every time he came, and so this came into fruition. They built a building in Kameoka, sort of on the outskirts of Kameoka. The main part of the building is a replica of Old Central on the OSU campus. Then there is a rectangular addition to house classrooms. The idea was that they would have students come to Stillwater, the Stillwater campus, and learn English, and then they would…go back to study under English[-speaking] professors at OSU-K.

**Jones** *And so they would come here to Stillwater and spend time in intensive English instruction…*

**Duncan** Right.

**Jones** *…before going back to finish their diploma at OSU-K?*

**Duncan** I think that is [in]correct. I had known specifically. [I think two years at OSU-K and then return to Stillwater for their final two years.]

**Jones** *Can you also—I had the pleasure of joining you all for a sukiyaki dinner…*

**Duncan** Yes.

**Jones** *…and that is something you all hold twice a year?*

**Duncan** No, it is one of our annual events. We have quite a few things that we have done every year, and we usually have the sukiyaki dinner in April. Becky Irby and her husband Steve have been generous to host it in their home. Usually, you know, we invite the OSU students who are involved with the Japanese Student Association. We invite them to come, and usually the city councilmen and the mayor, as well as our council members and their spouses. [Council members] do the cooking…. Larry and Kayo buy the meat and all of the ingredients, but we usually meet about three o’clock in the afternoon and chop the mushrooms, chop the Napa cabbage, and chop onions and all the rest of the things.

**Jones** *It was a very delicious dinner. Now, you said you have a few different annual events. What…*

**Duncan** Yes, we do. Well, if you start, like, in January, one of our first things is getting sure that we publicize about the young artists and young authors competition to the art teachers at the high school and whoever might enter. That’s one of the first things in the year. Then we usually have the sukiyaki dinner in April. We have the recognition of the winners of the competition and sending that material on, you know, the winning entries to [Sister Cities International]. We publish what’s known as the *[Kameoka] Tomodachi Newsletter.* The word *tomodachi* means “friend” in Japanese. We don’t always publish four a year, but at least two, to highlight our activities for the friends or volunteer people that help us with various things we do, entertaining guests, etcetera, so there is that.

I really probably need a list, or I’ll forget something. Usually, some of our members of the council go to the International SCI conference, which is usually in July. In August we have always participated in and helped with what’s known as the Mayor’s Welcome on the campus to welcome all international students. It so happens that in 2014 because of construction in the parking lot at the Wes Watkins Center, we didn’t have it, but every year we had had that. We always have a Sister Cities booth there, and usually one of our [council members] has been the emcee lots of times, [especially John Mills].

We also usually host an ice cream social for incoming Japanese students, particularly those at the English Language Institute. That, of course, is usually early in the school term to welcome the Japanese students. Then we usually have a holiday potluck meal late November, say, maybe between Thanksgiving and Christmas [to which] we invite the Tomodachi Club members. We invite the Japanese Student Association officers or other students who want to come…. We usually participate…in the OSU Homecoming parade where the Japanese students ride or walk, as the case may be. Sometimes we’ve had someone in a samurai [armor], and I’m sure there are some other things that we….

**Jones** *Well, if nothing else, you all stay very busy with the activities because on top of all this you have your monthly meetings, also.*

**Duncan** Yes, we meet once a month.

**Jones** *And tell me a little bit—those are typically held….*

**Duncan** Those are held on the fourth Thursday of each month unless that happens to be a holiday or something. We usually meet here in the Kameoka Room. One thing I did omit, just didn’t think about it, when I was listing what we do every year is in the fall we usually do have a meeting, a little recognition ceremony, at the high school to recognize all exchange students [from various countries] who are going to school at the high school…. It’s been a long time since we’ve had a Japanese student there. They’re [mostly] from more European countries and South America. We do that after school on a set day and serve refreshments and acknowledge them, and we invite not only the students but their host families to come. We usually have it on a Thursday, which is our regular meeting day, the fourth Thursday. The recognition might not fall on the fourth Thursday, but whenever we have the recognition at the high school then we have our meeting immediately following it at the high school rather than having it here in this room, just for convenience sake.

**Jones** *Well, Mrs. Duncan, I think this has been a wonderful interview. Now, if there are any things that you would like to add, but I think we did a great job of covering thirty years’ worth of history…. Now, I still have Mr. Larry Jones and Kayo Jones to speak with, and Cindy Petree, so I’m sure they’ll provide a few more details to this rich, rich history.*

**Duncan** Oh, yes. Well, one thing I do think we need to mention, (and Larry might mention it) here in Stillwater we do have the Osher Lifelong Learning program…called OLLI, which [is] the acronym for Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. It’s commonly known as OLLI where they have programs for lifelong learning [retired] people…mainly. Larry has taught, along with one of our members in particular…Nancy Simpson, [about] our Sister Cities program and various aspects of Japan, like wedding traditions, calligraphy, and all kinds of things that are…unique to Japan. We’ve taught those classes.

**Jones** *And that’s at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.*

**Duncan** Yes. Now, the classes usually meet at the Public Library, or they might meet somewhere else but all over town. It’s open to the community. Not only are their classes here in Stillwater, but there are also classes in Tulsa. I think Larry and Nancy had gone to Tulsa to teach….

**Jones** *To provide a little bit of that insight that has been gained from the Sister Cities International relationship between Kameoka, Japan and Stillwater, Oklahoma, and we are about to celebrate thirty years…*

**Duncan** That’s right.

**Jones** *…this November.*

**Duncan** This November. We will be having our special thirty-year ceremony on Sunday afternoon, October 25, is it?

**Jones** *I think it’s the 25th. I’ll have to check to make sure.*

**Duncan** I don’t have a calendar in front of me, but that is the Sunday of Homecoming weekend here at OSU. We will have a delegation coming, an official delegation of three individuals, and then a citizens delegation of [four] people. Maybe in closing, I think it was when we submitted information about Larry Jones to the Sister Cities International for recognition as volunteer of the year, the cover that we put on the material we sent was the idea of “we have been weaving a fabric of understanding.”

**Jones** *Weaving a fabric of understanding. That really does sum up this wonderful program and project, and the dedication that you all have put into this, and what has been learned through it. It has been. It’s wonderful. Well, I thank you, Mrs. Duncan, for sitting here and discussing this with me for the oral history research project.*

**Duncan** Well, thank you for taking your time to interview me.

**Jones** *Well, thank you very much. You have a wonderful day.*

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