

University of Houston-Clear Lake Oral History Project

Interviewee: Hans C. Olsen
Interviewer: Shelley Henley Kelly
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Kelly: This is Shelly Henley Kelly, and I am interviewing Dr. Hans C. Olsen in the library classroom. Today is Friday, May 19th, 2006, and I'm interviewing Dr. Olsen for the UHCL 30th Birthday Oral History Project.

Okay. I thank you very much for being here today, and I would like for you to start by just giving me a little bit of personal background, where were you born, who were your parents.

Olsen: I was born in Kearney, Nebraska, and my father was director of teacher training at Kearney State Normal, I think it was then. Then it became State Teachers College. Tell me what else now.

Kelly: What did he teach?

Olsen: He was a professor of teacher education, specialty was ed leadership.

Kelly: And that's your specialty, isn't it?

Olsen: Here, yes.

Kelly: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Olsen: Yes. I have just one sister.

Kelly: Is she older or younger?

Olsen: She's younger. She lives in Lubbock [TX] with her husband.

Kelly: What did your mother do?

Olsen: She was a housewife.

Kelly: What were their names, your mom and your dad?

Olsen: His name was mine, same as mine.

Kelly: Oh, are you a junior?

Olsen: Not officially, but yes. [laughs] Her name was Florence Miller Olsen. She had gone to Kearney State, and my dad was an instructor there. Yes, when she went there he was an instructor. She went there because the president, a relatively new president at Kearney

had been the superintendent of schools in Nebraska City, Nebraska, where she grew up, and she was very close friends with three of his daughters. So when they moved to Kearney, they invited her to come and go to school, and she did that. After she got done with her degree, she became secretary to the president. So she did that for I think it was three years before my folks got married, and in those days when you got married, as a woman many times you became a fulltime housewife.

Kelly: How long did you stay in Kearney?

Olsen: Until I was nine, I think it was. Went into the fourth grade at—we moved to Charleston, Illinois, where my dad was professor of, at that time, well, his professorship remained the same, but he became director of what they called rural education, because they were preparing teachers for rural schools particularly, as well as larger town schools. There weren't many cities as we know them now, in that area.

Kelly: How long were you in Charleston, Illinois?

Olsen: Well, let me see. I left when I finished my degree, bachelor's degree in physical education, social sciences, and, anyway, there's a third one. I guess I was twenty when I finished. I went through college in three years, by going to summer schools and taking a course overload each quarter.

I suspect you want me to go ahead, since you've got me on a roll here. I took a job at Harvard, Illinois. I may have mentioned that the other day. I was there a week short of a semester. I was a seventh-grade teacher, eighth-grade social studies teacher in a junior high, and high school football coach, and I left because of the army.

Kelly: What year did you get your degree, your bachelor's?

Olsen: Well, that's personal. [laughs]

Kelly: You're going to make me go look it up. [laughs]

Olsen: If you want me to go back, I'll go all the way back. I was born in 1929. [laughs] So I guess I was just barely twenty-one or so when I graduated; yes, twenty-one.

Kelly: My records show that you received your B.S. from Eastern Illinois University.

Olsen: Yes. That was in Charleston. Well, go ahead.

Kelly: I picked this room because it was quiet, and here we have the trash trucks outside.

You said you were interrupted in your teaching by the U.S. Army. What happened?

Olsen: Well, Uncle Sam decided that I was needed in there, along with lots of other guys at that time, because the Korean War was still really heating up at that time. So anyway, I was drafted and went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for basic. We were in an aviation-engineer outfit, and that was a new kind of operation. So we went through basic training, and engineering basic, and then we were shipped to California at Beale Air Force Base, and our job was to build an airstrip there.

But we were there from August, I guess, to first of May, and they decided before that, but on the first of May we were put on C-124s, the big jobbies that they used to have that the front opened up, and they flew us from Fort Lewis, Washington, to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska. We were there six months, the construction season, so we didn't get in the really cold. Then we were shipped back to Beale, and by that time I only had three months to go. Mary was pregnant, so I was very glad to be discharged.

Kelly: You didn't get any farther than Alaska.

Olsen: And that was far enough, thank you. [laughter]

Kelly: When did you meet Mary?

Olsen: Well, actually, I met her in—she was a year behind me in school, so she was a freshman when I entered the sophomore year, but I really didn't know her. When I got in the army, she was from Marshall, Illinois, which is about thirty miles southeast of Charleston, and

her father was a former superintendent of schools in that county, and had retired from that, and was high school chemistry and aeronautics teacher, which is kind of interesting. There was aeronautics; you don't hear much about it anymore. But anyway, she went on to Eastern ., and the only reason I know I met her was that I was in a fraternity and she was in a sorority, and as a pledge she had to get signatures of guys from various fraternities on something, and my name was on there with my signature, but I don't remember doing it.

While I was in the service, a common friend who also was in school with us, both with me in high school, and both of us in college, who lived in Charleston, fixed us up on a blind date. And that was it.

Kelly: When did you marry?

Olsen: About six months, I guess, after. No, it wasn't that long, about five months, four months after we met. So it was August in 1951, I think. We missed just about nine months of making fifty years. I know the date was August fifth, but I'm not sure what year.

[laughs]

Kelly: Which fraternity were you in?

Olsen: Sigma Tau Gamma. You're asking me about stuff I haven't thought about for a long time.

Kelly: I told you I was going to start with early stuff. Okay, so we can move on. After you were discharged from the army, what did you do?

Olsen: Well, I was discharged in January of '53, and they had filled my job at Harvard [University] with a person who knew that it was a job they were holding for me. But since it was in January, right at semester time, the superintendent asked, since I had the G.I. Bill, and my dad had been pushing me to—and I wanted to go to graduate school, the superintendent pushed me to think about it, but I was all for it. So that let that person go ahead and finish the year.

So we moved from Marysville, California, from Beale Air Force Base there, to Champaign, Illinois, to the University of Illinois, now the University of Illinois-Urbana, Champaign. So I went that spring semester and the summer, and then we went back two more summers from teaching—yes, I guess it was two more summers—and I finished the master's degree.

My dad was pushing me, and again, I really wanted to go, but he pushed me enough so that I went in to see the director of doctoral studies at the College of Education at the U. of I. [University of Illinois], and asked him about getting started and so on. He told me all about it, and I said, "Well, when can I start?"

And he said, “Well, we’ve got a teaching assistantship in the college in elementary education, and if you’re interested you can have it.” So I grabbed it right then. So then we had three more years there, and I graduated in 1958.

Kelly: You’ve mentioned a few times that your dad influenced you, or pushed you, or encouraged you to do your graduate work. Did you ever have any impulse to have another career besides education?

Olsen: Not really, no. I’m not sure I said this. Physical education was my first major. I wanted to be a coach, and coaching basketball with junior-high kids convinced me, and football with high-school kids, that’s a young man’s job. Plus the fact that, for me at least, it was very interesting, I had a lot of fun doing it, I learned a great deal, but at the same time I knew that was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my career. Part of it was that. The other part, though, was the opportunity to get into teacher education. That teaching assistantship lasted three years. We lived in barracks, which as you probably know were common on almost every campus at that time, in the nation at that time.

Then from there I went to Mankato State in Minnesota, and was there a year. A three-person team from Purdue [University] had come over, the director of the School of Education, and the chair of the Elementary Ed Department, and one other elementary ed professor had come over, and they interviewed a couple of us for different jobs. They chose another person from Iowa, and that was okay, because I went to Mankato and I learned a lot there.

The next spring, after the spring semester of that year in Mankato, I got a call from the director of the school at Purdue, and he said he had another opening in elementary education, “And we’d like to invite you to accept it.” [laughs] Just out of the clear blue sky. It was a new program, I should say that, because Purdue at that time was the cow college, cow university for the State of Indiana, and Indiana University was the comprehensive university. There were, let’s see, about three men to every woman on campus, and so it was something new. I’d not experienced that. So I got a chance then to be there three years, and help continue building the new program. It had started a year and a half before I got there, and that was a very good experience.

But then I had a friend who had some connections, who was a graduate student from the Detroit area, with me there at Illinois, and he had suggested that Wayne State in Detroit was a very good institution, and building, and urged me to submit an application. I did that. I got the job, so I was there for six years in elementary education.

We were doing a very great deal nationally through Brooke Smith, the chair of elementary education, and couple of others who had national connections. I got very active in the Association of Teacher Educators, and that opened up a whole world of opportunities. Wayne was a very good place. It was one of the most democratic places I’ve ever worked, in fact.

Well, from there I went to University of Missouri-St. Louis. At Wayne I had been coordinator of the master's program in elementary education, and there we had over 700 students a year. That was in the graduate part. So while I was there, the institution grew from 15,000 to 30,000 in six years. [laughs] Near the end it didn't affect me, but the race riots occurred, burning and so on. We had had very good relationships with the whole black community. You could go anywhere in Detroit and be safe, and the people who were going to school or were at the university had no inkling that this was brewing at all. It just was spontaneous. A lot of people thought that was one of the reasons we left, but it really wasn't, because it hadn't developed to what people thought.

During that sixth year, Wally Ramsey [phonetic], who was a nationally known reading person who had been with me at Purdue, and had gone to University of Kentucky about the same time I went to Detroit, had taken a job at the new University of Missouri-St. Louis. They were building, and he recommended me, and I went there first as assistant dean for undergraduate programs in the School of Education. I was assistant dean for about three years, I guess; I can't remember. Then they made it associate dean, and for the last six years or so I was the associate dean. We had a lot of fun, because we built new programs, and we worked all over the state with the other colleges and universities, and we had a lot of fun.

But then this job here, and I was interviewing for some other deanships, but this was one that was particularly attractive, because one of my graduate students at Wayne had come here as a, what do you call that, not a visiting scholar, but anyway as a doctoral student

she had gotten a fellowship to study, or visit and learn from various other colleges and universities. I've just forgotten the name of the program. But she was very impressed with Chancellor Neumann and his ideas, and the fact that this was so new, and she recommended me, and recommended that I apply. So between the two, I got down here and got the job.

Kelly: So was the first time you heard about U.H.-Clear Lake City from this graduate student?
It hadn't been in the mainstream other than—

Olsen: No, it was too new. Interestingly enough, Texas, except for the big institutions, the prominent ones politically and so on, were the only ones that were known much at all, in our part of the country anyway. And I have to confess, I wasn't real sure where Houston was when I came down for the interview. [laughs] We had a lot of things going in St. Louis, and I talked with whomever it was, probably Lou Rodriguez; maybe not. Who would be the chair of the committee?

Kelly: Dr. Steinbrink?

Olsen: Yes. I guess he called, and I think maybe that's between the two of them, anyway.

Kelly: How did you hear about the position being available?

Olsen: Well, through Diana Jordan, who was the student. She had followed me to St. Louis, and was there for about four years, and then moved back to Michigan, but she was kind of instrumental in that kind of thing, and I guess that's enough.

Kelly: So you sent in a packet, then, to be considered?

Olsen: I guess I did. I don't remember, I'm sorry.

Kelly: That's okay. Was there anything particular that initially attracted you to the university, or was it just another place to be considered for a deanship?

Olsen: Well, I'd had quite a bit of experience in building, or I shouldn't say I built, but we built programs. In the twelve years I was at UMSL [University of Missouri-St. Louis], we were building the whole time, but the early years is when we had funding. Then after about five years or six years, something of that sort, things began to be tight financially in the state, and so we had to cut back some of the things that we had done and were doing. And I found out it's always nicer to be building than to cut.

Kelly: Can you describe for me the interview process? You had a telephone interview first?

Olsen: I think I did, but I'm not sure.

Kelly: Tell me what you recall of your first visit to the campus.

Olsen: I don't remember. [laughs] I hadn't thought about that for so long. Well, one of the things that even today people remark about is the beauty of the campus, the trees, how well kept it is, and this was still really a new building, so it was impressive. Dr. Neumann was impressive in his own way, and the faculty that I talked to in the School of Education particularly were enthusiastic. You didn't run into [imitates muttering] kind of thing, or you didn't have, as I've had in many cases, not just this but NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education] visits and all that kind of stuff, somebody wanting to pull you aside [imitates whispering]. There wasn't any of that.

People seemed to be very positive about the whole place. Chancellor Neumann, for example, was saying, and it was a fact at that time in the minds of people on this campus, and that was that we were an autonomous university within the U. of H. System, and that we would not be dictated to by the big campus. They were building or talking about building the Woodlands campus, and I've forgotten, there was another one. I don't think it ever eventuated. But in any event, those were kind of impressive, and most of the people, they weren't just brand-new doctorates taking their first job. The institution had been looking at people with experience, because they needed to build, and you don't do that with brand-new doctorates who really didn't know much about making a university, which sounds kind of snobbish perhaps, but in fact it's true.

I guess it was all of that, plus it was a new opportunity, and I'd been at UMSL for twelve years, and it was a chance to do something new. Now, I went past your question.

Kelly: That's okay. What were your first impressions of the Clear Lake area, the community?

Olsen: I have to laugh because we had lived in those various towns and cities, and it's pretty much you go where the job is. While I was finishing up, I guess Mary came down with me once. Then after we took the job, she and my youngest daughter, Karen, came down and house hunted while I was over here trying to get started on the job, before we arrived, obviously, to live. But it was kind of nice. It was open in one sense, but it was also beautiful in terms of the trees, and things weren't laid out just like that, as they were in some other cities. But somehow that didn't really make a big difference.

Kelly: What did your family think about relocating to Houston?

Olsen: Well, the only ones of us who relocated were Mary and me.

Kelly: Didn't any of your children come down at the time?

Olsen: Karen drove down with me, and she took a couple of courses that first summer, because I started, as I pointed out, the first of June. So she's the only one who's ever lived here. The other three have visited, but mostly we went to visit them.

Kelly: They were already finished with school by the time you came to this job?

Olsen: Oh, boy. Yes. Yes, come to think of it, they were well past that.

Kelly: Do you think that your active affiliation with NCATE had anything to do, to affect your application and your selection here?

Olsen: Sure, because one of the things that Dr. Neumann had in mind was, just as rapidly as we possibly can we were going to be NCATE accredited, because he saw the accreditation as being a very important part of being a university. And one other thing. They had called the NCATE office and talked to the associate director of NCATE at that time, and I got a good recommendation, I guess. [laughter]

Kelly: Were you aware when you started that the School of Professional Education had very recently been created?

Olsen: Oh yes. That was one of the reasons for coming. I'm sorry, I skipped that part. No, that was one of the things, because again it was an opportunity to help build. As I said, it's always a lot better to build than to cut, or even just to maintain the status quo. If you can build some things, you can always, if there's support, you can always get things done.

Kelly: Tell me about your relationship, your involvement with Dr. Neumann, your impressions of him as the chancellor.

Olsen: Well, in that regard, one of the things that impressed me, too, is that he wanted a doctoral degree just as fast as he could get it, because again, that was, in his mind and in the minds of lots of people, is that you're really a full university when you do that. That played a big part in the decision, too, but that was the building part, and he had promised that within three years we would have a doctoral program. But he was gone by that time. I'm not sure I answered your question.

Kelly: He was off about twenty-three years. [laughs]

Olsen: Yes. [laughs] As a matter of fact.

Kelly: I guess the question was more, how did you feel about him as the chancellor of the university.

Olsen: Well, he was a very interesting man. He had his idiosyncratic ways of operating and seeing the world, just as we all do. I didn't learn it until after I got here, but this had been built from his idea of, this would be a university liberal arts institution, not a college but a university. I didn't find out until well after I got here, because we don't have the labs, but they didn't put any labs in for science, and Dean McKay undoubtedly told you that. So in some ways, in my judgment, partially in retrospect, obviously, he had a vision and he wanted it to succeed. This was his university. This was his building, and he didn't allow people to forget that.

On the other hand, he was about as compassionate, if somebody was in trouble, a person as you could find. Like most humans, he had his contradictory characteristics. I don't think he foresaw—he had his vision, and some of the other realities he did not allow to intrude, and I guess that's probably true of most of us. I'm not sure I'm saying that well, but I guess the best way is to go back to the statement, this was his university, and he essentially made the decisions. He could get pompous if he wanted to, and did, and he loved to be chancellor. But as I say, he was also compassionate. He wanted this to succeed. His style, though, was one of, you almost had to watch to see what it was, because he wanted to know what was going on all across the institution, and outside, too.

Kelly: According to the research I've done, when you arrived in June you hit the ground running, and really, really started reorganizing and setting goals for the new School of Education. What were those challenges that you had to overcome, and how did you devise your goals?

Olsen: Well, one of the things that made it difficult, and I didn't realize it till I got here, how difficult it would be with some of the people who had been here for, well, who had been here any length of time. Early on there was no—and as you would obviously know, people were just hired because they were good people, and then they were asked, “What do you want to teach?”

So you had people who were nice people, but they didn't fit the academic slots that I think most of us who came in a bit later—I know the other folks who were deans while I

was were facing the same thing. What do you do with somebody who's a nice person, but doesn't know much about what the program has to be? Because they came in with the notion they could put anything, work out a course or courses, and that was their domain. So we had to get past that, it seemed to me, obviously. And as I say, the other deans were struggling with that kind of thing as well. That was one of the biggies. And many of them didn't really have much experience in higher education, other than being graduate students, so we had to find ways of introducing them to the university focus.

Another one was to meet his mandate, to get NCATE. And another one was to get relations established with not so much the Coordinating Board, but TEA [Texas Education Agency]. That wasn't too hard, because I knew through ATE [Association of Teacher Educators] many of the Texans who were active in teacher education at the national level, but nobody here. So one of my goals was to tap in—really didn't have much choice, but just to get with Ed—oh, boy, I know too many Eds. Anyway, he was not the chief person at TEA for teacher education, but he was one that I had known in ATE. So I tapped into that, I guess, mechanism.

One of the things that I also had to try to cope with very early on was that Texans didn't look at teacher education or policy making or structure in the same way that I'd experienced in any of the other states. For example, one of the things was that the legislature and TEA were extremely involved in making the basic policy decisions about what teacher education would be, and could be.

So it was difficult for me to make an adjustment. It took about a year, year and a half maybe, and I'm not sure I've even made it fully yet. But the central policy-making function and the way everybody looked to the state, and my experience had been that if there was a policy, and if it didn't specifically touch on a certain point, then you worked around it, and you tried to find loopholes. I don't mean under the table, but you tried to find wiggle room, is a better term. And here I was shocked, because you talk about some of those things and people would say, "Is that right? Well, we've got to call TEA and report it," instead of, how can we use that in ethical ways, and also at the same time to build what we need to build, without just being a creature of whatever the state says we have to be. So those were some of the big things.

Within the school, Tom Gee had taken over, and the older lady that—

Kelly: Josephine Sobrino?

Olsen: Josephine. I only met Josephine a relatively few times, because she was sick, and Tom had taken over from her. But he didn't have much experience at that point in academic administration. So Dr. Neumann had said we could have two associate—I guess we didn't call them assistant deans then, and we'd have two, in effect, departments, although we couldn't call them that. I guess we called them programs.

Nolie Mayo; women, in my judgment, were not in great number in administrative positions, and so I couldn't say that too loudly, but it seemed to me we needed to have a

woman, and Nolie Mayo had not much more experience than Tom, but she was a sharp lady. She knew what she was doing, and she turned out to be a good choice, I think. Then we had to start looking at other certification programs and so on. Those were all pieces of the pie.

Kelly: Tell me about getting the NCATE accreditation. What steps or what procedures did you have to go through to get the campus accredited by them?

Olsen: Well, we had to go through the normal routines. I had been on the NCATE Council, and I'd been on visiting teams, and chaired visiting teams.

Kelly: So you really knew what they were going to be looking for.

Olsen: Yes, and "Mac" McClintock, Bob McClintock was one of those guys who has a facility for working on that kind of stuff, I learned, and I think it's fair to say between us that I knew NCATE, and he knew more about the institution, because he'd been, I think, one of the founding faculty members. He was one of the few who had really been in an academic role of leadership before I got here, so he brought a lot. But he kept saying, "I don't want to be an administrator. I don't want to be an administrator."

"So okay, help us out on NCATE."

Kelly: How much did the campus really have to do to get ready for it? I guess what I'm trying to ask is, did we have everything in place that we needed to be qualified, and it was just a matter of going through the process, or were there certain things that had to be done before we could apply for the accreditation?

Olsen: Good question. In one sense we had the critical things that we needed. That is, we had full support from Dr. Neumann and from Lou Rodriguez and the other offices, because those two were very powerful, so we could make things work, not that they had to bend many arms, or twist many arms, but they were for it, and we didn't have to convince them.

Because accreditation was important, and Rosemary Pledger was the dean of the education programs, as well as business, and she was very much in favor of splitting, not in a negative way but in a positive way, we had a lot of support that way. In the one sense, we had to pledge that if we need to have something, we'll do our very best to get it. It wasn't a matter of going in and begging. It was a matter of, you had to make the case. We got some people in the next couple of years, faculty members, on that basis, and all of that fed into NCATE.

One of the problems was that very few people here knew what NCATE was, because many of them had not really been in professorial positions in the School of Education I mean, and before they came they hadn't been much aware of that form of accreditation. One of the hang-ups was that we also had to go through TEA accreditation almost

simultaneously. So Bob and I worked on that with Nancy Boze, for example, and, oh, I've forgotten names now. But that was another piece of it. In one sense it was a double pain, but in the other sense, you could play one off, and I don't mean negatively, but you could use material from this for that, and vice versa.

I think those are the kinds of things, anyway. I don't know whether I'm answering your question. You're a good listener.

Kelly: Was there anything remarkable that you recall about the NCATE site visit?

Olsen: Probably should be, but I don't—part of my problem was I've been through so many of them that I don't remember that one in particular.

Kelly: I almost said, "The first one." [laughter] How often do we have NCATE re-accreditation?

Olsen: Well, it depends. NCATE has changed drastically since I was on the council. Maybe a little history might help a bit, I don't know. I went on the council in about '63 or '64; no, it's later than that; '73 I guess. Anyway, that being so long ago, let me rephrase that. In those days accreditation was a much different kind of animal. It was something that colleges and universities, at least in teacher education—institutions tended to really work at it, not because, "Well, we have to," but because, "We want to, because that will help us in our quest for funding. We can always use that, we're fully accredited," and so on.

And today, in my judgment, it's much more the other way around. It's, "Oh, god," because it's much more complicated now. The requirements are much different. In those days what you looked at were resources, for example, human, but also physical, in the library, was the library adequate to support the programs that you have? That was one of the things that got many of the small schools in trouble, because they just didn't have much in the way of libraries. Nowadays, I don't know whether anyone looks at libraries, unfortunately, kind of like here. You can look around and shoot off a cannon, but you're not going to shoot many people in the process, because—that doesn't mean they don't use the library, but they do it in different ways, accessing resources and all of those things. That's just an illustration.

Kelly: And you haven't walked through here during finals week, either. [laughter] We're swamped in finals week.

Olsen: Is that right? I should have known that.

[End of 1st CD. Begin 2nd CD.]

Kelly: Okay. So we're back, and I did want to ask you what new instructional programs you introduced when you came here.

Olsen: I was afraid you'd ask me that.

Kelly: You said you liked to build things up.

Olsen: Well the building, in one sense, was just to add to the diversity of what we were offering.

In another sense, it was the matter of building in a development way what we already had, to push it further. In one sense, as far as programs are concerned, one of the things that I did not realize until after I got here was how much the extent to which the State TEA, Texas Education Agency, really dictated what program must be, courses. There were requirements for student teaching that were statewide, for example, and those were things I had not anticipated and had not thought to ask about, because in all the other places I had been, those were more institutional. So one of the things I had to do was build my own perception of reality.

Another one was that unlike UMSL, which was a brand new institution, really much like this one in the sense of length of time when I arrived, of its existence, and when I started. And they built in a different way, and it was hard to adjust to that. For example, instead of going out and just finding good people, however defined, what they did was as they built, at least in the early days when building was still possible in the largest sense, was they went out and because they knew they could not attract as a new institution with their resources, world-class academicians, that is the acclaimed, world-class in that sense, well known.

So what we had done there was to go and attract a cadre, attract some of those people who were kind of on the cusp, and showing the potential to move into that level, which meant that we didn't have to start from almost base zero in terms of, what is a master's program? That may be an overstatement, but the idea was that at UMSL we had the chance to say, "Okay, you've been doing this at the University of Kentucky, or at the University of Missouri-Columbia," which was the centerpiece of the system until they opened those other institutions, and then we had some from Minnesota and so on. So they came with the idea of a university, as opposed to a kind of an open forum. That was one of the main differences, and one of the things I had to get used to. Didn't mean they're bad people here. They just had a different perspective, many of them.

Some, for example Mac McClintock, had been a full professor in Maryland, I think it was, and then at U. of H. And John Carter had been down at U. of H. There were a couple of others. But it's a different ethos, and in some ways still is.

Kelly: How did you get along with the other deans of the other schools? [Olsen laughs.]

Olsen: At least from my perspective we got along very well, because Rosemary Pledger was relieved to have somebody take the education section out of the School of Professional Education, or whatever it was called. We got along very well. She was a good mentor as far as the university was concerned. The other two deanships changed fairly rapidly. But in any event, we always seemed to have good relations, and we went to lunch together

very frequently, just as friends. But at the same time, we were talking about business. So in my judgment, at least, it was a good atmosphere in that respect.

Kelly: As dean, was your office part of any interdisciplinary setting?

Olsen: Oh, boy. I don't know, I can't remember that part. We've had so many things come and go that I'm sorry, I'm just blank on that.

Kelly: That's okay. Tell me your impressions of Dr. Rodriguez.

Olsen: He was here only a semester while I was here. He was very nice. He was very professional, and he was very supportive of the School of Education and so on. In one sense, I got to know him better personally, simply because we had to talk about a whole range of things, and set some priorities, and all of that kind of stuff. But he was gone so soon that I can't go much further.

Kelly: Did the role of the School of Education change when Dr. Stauffer came to become chancellor?

Olsen: Well, it wasn't an immediate change, I think. I don't know. To be fair about it, I'm not sure it was just him and his wanting something different, although there was some element of that. Times were changing. Certainly the university had changed drastically, especially with Dr. Neumann's retirement. And they were such different people that I

think my sense is that almost everything was different because of that. Alfred [Neumann] was pretty much hands on. Tom [Stauffer] was two words, rather personally distant, and equally idiosyncratic compared to Alfred, but in a different way. For example, he came in and not for program particularly, although it did have some affect on program, and that was that he had built a walking or a running trail, and stations all along, because he was a runner. And he just did it, as far as I know.

I guess I'm just wandering around there. If you can push me in a direction, I'm willing to be pushed.

Kelly: Where was Mary employed on the campus?

Olsen: She started in the chancellor's office with Mary—

Kelly: Mary Ann Shallberg?

Olsen: Mary Ann. Goodness gracious. I know there's two names, and I couldn't remember the second. She was there I think as a temp, and then when the job opened up I think she worked there for six months or so. She liked it and they seemed to like her, but they didn't have—she wanted a permanent one if she could get it. So it opened up in placement and whatever it is now.

Kelly: Career placement?

Olsen: Career placement, yes. She had macular degeneration, and their people were always very nice. They helped her to get a reader, so that she could read. Yes, she liked it.

Kelly: Juanita Bridges had a primary school here, like an early-childhood-education school here. I want to say it stopped around 1993 or so. Can you tell me about that, how that fit in, and why it's no longer here?

Olsen: Yes. I think that happened when I was—in fact, I know it was; I was associate dean then. There were several factors. One was that we had a big and pretty well-known pre-primary program for the preparation of teachers and others at that level. The problem was that the demise was at a time that Glenn Goerke came. Glenn had the unhappy in one sense, although I don't think it was a matter of unhappiness on his part, it was just part of the job, because he could make the hard decisions—we went through massive cuts, at least relatively speaking.

In the School of Education we got a very big cut, and so we had to cut some faculty positions, if I'm recalling correctly, or maybe it was just the discussion, but certainly we didn't have the adjunct monies and so on that we really needed. And we cut the pre-primary school, because that was running on support, not the payment of fees, and that sort of thing. So that was the demise of it. It was a hard decision that Dennis [Dean Spuck] made after we made it.

We also cut—we had a program for the preparation of school supervisors, which I had been working in between the deanship and the associate deanship, and it was a relatively small program. We had a program for diagnosticians. It was a small one. And there was a third one that doesn't come to mind right now. I think there was a third one, plus the pre-primary school. So we cut all of those.

Kelly: Now, you stepped down as dean around the mid-1980s.

Olsen: 1982, I think.

Kelly: What was your reason?

Olsen: Charlie Hardwick [Provost] and I didn't see the world the same way.

Kelly: The provost? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Olsen: Well, it was interesting because I was the chair of the committee resulting in his arrival.

This is a biased view, obviously. He came in and the deans, the four of us, had been working together, and we were pretty much on the same page. I didn't mean that we always agreed totally, but overall we did agree on where the institution could go and should go with our programs. It wasn't time to dictate beyond that, really, although obviously there was some of that exuded, I suppose. We had grown to have more autonomy over the short period, but it was more of a coalescing of understandings as to

what our role was, where the university was going, and that sort of thing. Again, in my judgment, when Charlie pushed us on a couple of things, we kind of pushed back. I was the first to go, but from my perspective again, he got all four of us.

Kelly: Can you tell me one or two of the points where y'all disagreed and the pushing occurred?

Olsen: Well, one was, you have to go back to the structure of the university. Jimmy Hale was here, and he was extremely powerful. I don't know whether this should go in the record, but, for example, one of Mac McClintock's points of view, since he was one of the four first faculty members, and had worked with Alfred [Neumann], I think, on the other campus as well, one of his favorite sayings was that Jimmy kept Alfred out of jail, because he didn't always think of the consequences financially, or appeared not to until Jimmy would kind of straighten him out, say, "No, you can't do that. That's illegal," or whatever. It wasn't that he was oblivious, necessarily, but that wasn't the highest priority as far as he was concerned.

Van Wyatt was the dean of students or whatever; that wasn't the title. Anyway, it evolved into what Darlene has, or had. They were pushing for things and getting them, and we were pushing and not getting some things we thought were important, or at least we thought not just for ourselves but for the academic side, and I think in the process Charlie, more than anything, just thought we weren't loyal, which was not really, that wasn't the main point at all. But as I say, in my judgment, and I think really if Rosemary were still alive, if you'd ask the other two you'd find the same answer.

Kelly: Were you asked to step down as dean?

Olsen: We had a meeting and I resigned.

Kelly: Do you want to tell me any more details about the meeting?

Olsen: No. [laughs]

Kelly: That's very interesting. But you did stay on as a full professor in educational leadership.

Olsen: Yes.

Kelly: Why did you choose to stay at UH-Clear Lake?

Olsen: Well, I looked at a number of deanships, and I decided after a while that I was getting too old to do that. I was an administrator, as I think I told you, at Wayne State. Well, actually, I started as coordinator of clinical experiences in elementary education at Purdue. I had that for three years, and then at Wayne State I had the master's program in elementary ed, and then twelve years of administration at UMSL, and that was about enough. And Mary didn't want to move after she'd finally gotten a job and had made friends and all of that, so all of that entered in.

Kelly: What was your attitude toward this campus after you stepped down as dean?

Olsen: Well, really, in some respects because of the direction I thought it was going, I was not very pleased, not satisfied with what I thought had been done with what Dr. Stauffer's idea was, that this should be an autonomous institution within the U. of H. System. So that was one of the kinds of things that was very disappointing. Another one was that early on we began to run into the financial problems, and we didn't have a core of full professors, either in the school or on campus, that really understood what it meant to be a university, in my judgment. So in one sense I kind of backed out of leadership roles, but I kept getting a couple of grievances, for example, hearings that I sat through and chaired, and some others that I sat through, or worked with people to try to prevent it to reach that level. You know, after a while you get to be fifty-five, sixty. Moving isn't all that important anymore.

Kelly: I don't have time to go through each of Dr. Goerke and Dr. Staples, so I'm going to kind of jump forward a little bit and ask, how do you feel about Dean Spuck and how he's managed the school?

Olsen: Well, Dennis and I haven't always seen eye to eye. On the other hand, we worked together pretty well. I wish he'd done some things differently. We're much different in many respects. His approach is that the dean makes the decisions with advice from the faculty, and mine is the reverse, that basic curriculum decisions ought to be made by the faculty. That doesn't mean that the dean hasn't a role, not at all, but rather that

ultimately, curricular matters at a university should be the province of the faculty. So we didn't see eye to eye on that kind of thing.

On the other hand, we went through a very difficult time when Glenn Goerke was here and we had to cut budget. I talked about it a bit before. I guess that's probably enough.

Kelly: Well, I forgot one big question. I wanted to make sure I get it in. Can you tell me your involvement in developing our new Ed.D. program?

Olsen: Yes.

Kelly: What was your role?

Olsen: I was a professor.

Kelly: I don't think it's any small wonder that we're getting an Ed.D. in educational leadership when that's your focus, and that you and Dr. Neumann shared that goal twenty-six years ago.

Olsen: Yes. Well, I think I'm all for the degree, and I hope this doesn't go too far anyway. I've voiced it a few times, but it's hard to build a doctoral program when you don't have faculty members who have worked in one, other than as a doctoral student. James Sherrill has done some of that, and Dennis himself has. On the other hand, they weren't

the ones who were doing the grunt work on it. And then we got Joe Licata very late in the game, but most of it was done by people who are quite well meaning, but they really didn't have that kind of background that I believe we—that's why I, in a sense, went back to UMSL and talked about how we hired people who had that kind of experience and were on the cusp of becoming nationally or internationally known scholars, in reading, for example, but other fields as well. And we don't have any of that.

The vision, the picture of a doctoral program that doctoral students get is much more personal, and you don't see all of the things that go into the basic decisions in building the program, and that's what we've lacked. Now we've got the program. Our problem is going to be, how can we do it in ways that are academically sound, and professionally sound at the same time, with well-meaning people, no question of that, but who have not been blooded in doing that? And a doctoral program is quite different from a master's program.

Kelly: It sounds to me a little bit like you're saying that we're going to have, what's the word, like a learning curve, a period of adjustment to—

Olsen: We already had been on that, and it'll be interesting to see what eventuates out of it.

Kelly: I know I can look this up, but what courses have you taught here that have given you great satisfaction?

Olsen: Well, in recent times I've been teaching a policy course for school administrators, not superintendents but principals, basically, and supervisors, I guess, and then a curriculum course as well. Those are the two that I guess I've enjoyed the most. Early on I taught courses in supervision. I'd done some student-teaching supervision here. I'd done that every place I've been, and so why should this be different?

Kelly: Last couple of questions. What would you say is your most significant accomplishment at this campus?

Olsen: Staying twenty-six years. [laughs] I don't know, Shelly.

Kelly: Do you have any one particular thing that stands out over your years here as something of pride, something you're glad you were part of, that you're walking away from with?

Olsen: I hadn't thought of it that way. I guess I'd say that in spite of all of the hassles and problems and disappointments, there have been a lot of satisfying and good experiences. I guess in one sense maybe the most satisfying was to get through NCATE the first time, because man, did we work. I guess that's probably it.

Kelly: Is there any one person, or more than one person, I guess, that you'd like to comment on, that really influenced you here, or that you've had a particular kinship with? You had so many people stand up and give wonderful testimony at your retirement party, and I hated that I didn't have a recorder going.

Olsen: When they spoke, I forgot everything I was going to say. Yes. Without doubt, the most significant one was Angus McNeil, and the most satisfying and the most disappointing two things were with him. He came from Nova Scotia by way of South Carolina. He'd been a school principal for twenty-some years in Nova Scotia, and Nova Scotia's education in many ways is similar to what we know, but has some significant differences at the same time. But he's a very sharp man, extremely well-educated and well-traveled. He works well with people, but he doesn't put up with fools easily.

We hired him in '98 or something, about that time, and the ed-leadership program was pretty much faltering. We'd kind of lost focus, and people were kind of doing their own things, and you know, you can survive in that if they'll let you do the same thing, so that's about what was happening. Angus came in and we kind of hit it off, and we worked together, because he didn't know our higher education except what he had experienced in University of South Carolina. Because there was turnover, Henry Williams had retired, and Jo Ann White, Jo Ann House now, had retired or at least moved. We had another lady from North Texas who was here about five years. She moved on, and so Angus and I were about the only ones left.

So we kind of took the bull by the horns, and we built a program that required building. We did some things that were different, changed the philosophy. Big thing was to have people learn, not to have them pass courses, get As or whatever grade. But the purpose was to learn, not to get that certificate or degree. So we initiated a lot of things that are

almost all gone. So probably at least one of the more recent highlights was working with him, and it was a matter of personalities as much as anything that he left. But he went down to the other campus and has done extremely well there, which doesn't surprise me. But I couldn't move by that time. [laughs] That's kind of a snide remark, aside.

Kelly: That's okay. Was there anything that you wanted to mention about your years here that I haven't brought up?

Olsen: Well, I didn't plan anything, because I didn't know what you wanted. Well, I think there are a couple of things. One is that I think we've done very well under Bill [Staples]. He's been different, well, all presidents differ from each other. But he, in my judgment, has, from what I've seen, because I haven't worked with him as an administrator, but from what I've seen, pretty much he wants the units to do what they're supposed to do, and he doesn't dictate what supposed to do is necessarily, but there's a framework. Now he's gotten some deans that in my judgment pretty well do that. So I think one of the things is that with him we've kind of turned the corner.

Each of the previous presidents and chancellors have contributed something. Some, in my judgment, was negative, but I think they all meant well. Glenn Goerke in many respects did this very well, because he's a politician, and he loved to go to Austin and play the field. And he could make the hard decisions at the same time. He saved our bacon on many things, for example, the Delta Building, in my judgment is just one illustration.

But I think with Bill, he's pulled things together in kind of an unobtrusive way, in spite of some of the faculty members' beliefs. But that goes back to some of the things I was saying about experience and knowledge that they brought with them about what a university is.

Kelly: Well, we're out of time, and I want to tell you thank you very much for speaking with us today. I did say noon, and straight up. Thank you.

Olsen: I've not had this chance before, and so it's kind of interesting. I hope I gave you something of value.

Kelly: I think so.

Olsen: I haven't done this for a long time.

Kelly: Really, what you were saying about Dr. Staples is that some of the faculty have been—this year and actually the last eighteen months have seen an attempt to revise our shared governance, and I wanted to ask you your opinion on what's going on. You seem to have a keen viewpoint, and many years of background and experience.

Olsen: Well, let me build just a bit. I said, or I guess Dennis did at the reception, about my dad and Mr. Dewey.

Kelly: Though that's not on the tape, so if you want to tell the story of your dad and Mr.

Dewey—

Olsen: Well, okay. I was just going to build on it is all. But when my dad went to Columbia and Teachers College, one of the courses he, I guess, had to take, I'm not sure, but anyway, he took at least one course from Mr. Dewey. And he in retrospect said it was probably the most boring course he'd ever had, because Mr. Dewey just stood at the window and played with the cord on the blinds, and talked. And it didn't dawn on him till afterwards that what Mr. Dewey was doing was just thinking aloud on very significant things as far as education was concerned, some of the basic notions that you have to take society into account in building an educational system, and people's beliefs are one of the most powerful forces, for example, in why they do what they do. And you don't force people. The more you force people to do things, or try to force them to believe, often the outcome is resistance, and anything but buying in. And if they had a chance to experience things in life that are important, and make their own decisions, with some guidance to prevent them from getting into legal trouble and that sort of thing, you'd have a quite different outcome, and they're much more likely to learn what you want them to learn, and what we think they ought to learn. So he didn't really learn that, though, until after Mr. Dewey's book came out, and he was a college professor, and it dawned on him then what it was.

I went to the University of Illinois, obviously, and [unclear] at eastern, and most of those people knew, and at Illinois five or six of the professors had been at T.C. [Teachers College], and many of them were old enough to remember Mr. Dewey in his very late years in the thirties, and they were Deweyans. So that's what I learned, and I've not changed much since then. Now I've lost track of where I was going.

Kelly: The recent turmoil about shared governance and what appears to be a power struggle between faculty senate and the president and the provost.

Olsen: Yes, and where I was going then is that, as I said earlier, at Wayne State was the first time I'd really seen a faculty where the dean was not the chair of the group. We had our own, and it a senior faculty member, not the same one every time, but they were terms of about three years. And the dean was strong enough to say, "If you make those decisions and you have thought them through carefully, and I can't find any major problem, we'll go." That's quite different from saying that, "This is what we're going to do."

And that piece of it is, I think, a part of where I am. For example, in leadership I don't think, in spite of all the rhetoric, I really don't think you can get people to buy into your ideas. You have to work with them, and they have to have experiences, and they have to make their own judgments, and we haven't really been doing some of that.

Kelly: What do you think of Jim [Edward J. "Jim"] Hayes?

Olsen: I think in many respects Jim has a very difficult time. I think he was surprised when he got here. I don't know him well. I was associate dean and sat in on some of the administrative meetings with him when he was here for his interview and when he first got here. But I think he is sometimes combative, when there are other battles that might be even better won.

Kelly: Okay. Well, anything else?

Olsen: No.

Kelly: Okay. Well, we'll stop it again.

Olsen: Okay.

[End of interview]

Index

Association of Teacher Educators, 9, 18

Biggers, Darlene, 30

Boze, Nancy, 22

Bridges, Juanita, 28

Carter, John, 25

Delta Building, 37

Dewey, _____, 38, 39

Eastern Illinois University, 4, 6

Gee, Thomas, 19

Goerke, Glenn, 28, 32, 33, 37

Hale, James, 30

Hardwick, Charles, 29, 30

Hayes, Edward J., 40

Indiana University, 9

Jordan, Diana, 12

Licata, Joseph, 34

Mankato State, Minnesota, 8

Mayo, Nolie, 19

McClintock, Robert, 20, 22, 25, 30

McKay, Charles, 16

McNeil, Angus, 36

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 35

Neumann, Alfred, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 26, 27, 30, 33

Olsen, Florence Miller, 2

Olsen, Hans C.

birthplace, 1

daughter of, 14

education, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 40

employment, 4, 7, 9, 10, 31

father of, 1, 2, 3, 7, 38

first impressions of Clear Lake, 14

fraternity membership, 6

impressions of Alfred Neumann, 16, 17

impressions of Angus McNeil, 36

impressions of Dennis Spuck, 32

impressions of Edward J. Hayes, 41

impressions of Glenn Goerke, 37
impressions of William Staples, 37
military service, 4, 7
mother of, 2
shared governance views, 40
sister of, 2
wife of, 5, 14, 27, 31
Olsen, Hans C., Sr., 1, 2, 3, 7, 38
Olsen, Karen, 14
Olsen, Mary, 5, 14, 27, 31

Pledger, Rosemary, 21, 25, 30
Purdue University, 8, 10

Ramsey, Wally, 10
Rodriguez, Louis, 11, 21, 26

School of Education
 challenges, 17, 21
Shallberg, Mary Ann, 27
Sherrill, James, 33
Smith, Brooke, 9
Sobrino, Josephine, 19
Spuck, Dennis, 28, 32, 33
Staples, William, 32, 37, 38
Stauffer, Thomas, 26, 27, 32
Steinbrink, John, 11

Texas Education Agency, 18, 21, 24

University of Houston, 13, 25, 32
University of Houston-Clear Lake, 10, 31
University of Illinois-Urbana, Champaign, 7, 40
University of Kentucky, 10
University of Missouri-St. Louis, 10, 12, 13, 24, 31, 34

Wayne State, Detroit, 9, 31, 40
White, Jo Ann, 36
Williams, Henry, 36
Wyatt, Van, 30