

University of Houston-Clear Lake Oral History Project

Interviewee: Philip G. Hoffman
Interviewer: Shelly Henley Kelly
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[Also present: Mary Ann Shallberg.]

Kelly: My name is Shelly Henley Kelly, and today I am interviewing Dr. Philip G. Hoffman, who was the president of the University of Houston, main campus and the System, and today is July 5th, 2005. It is a Tuesday morning. We're in the UHCL [University of Houston-Clear Lake] President's Conference Room.

Thank you for joining us today.

Hoffman: My pleasure, thank you.

Kelly: I see that you were born in Kobe, Japan. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Hoffman: Yes. My parents were missionaries in Japan. I was born in Kobe, and later we moved to Tokyo, and were there until I was about five, at which time my mother and I came back, and my father went back for a year to wrap up the work that he was doing. But I was five when I came back, and could speak Japanese. But when I went to school, the fellow students, little brats, said, "Oh, you were born in

Japan. You're a little Jap, aren't you?" That was before that was not politically correct, but I didn't think it was politically correct, so I was rather eager not to continue to remember too much about it, so I forgot the language except for a few words. But it was an interesting beginning. I've been back to Kobe and Tokyo several times since, and it's nice to reminisce.

Kelly: Where did you settle in the United States when you came back?

Hoffman: Came back first to Portland, where my mother and I lived with her mother for a year until my dad came back, and then we continued to live in Portland a while, and then in Seattle for a year, and then back in Portland until I was twelve, when we moved to California, to Pacific Union College, where my father became a professor, and where I continued to be, except for one year—my junior year I went to George Washington University, and came back and graduated at Pacific Union College.

Kelly: What faith, what denomination were your parents?

Hoffman: My parents were Seventh-Day Adventists.

Kelly: Is that the same religion you've shared your entire life?

Hoffman: No. I'm afraid that I've backslid. I'm a Presbyterian now, but I have great respect for the Seventh-Day Adventist denomination, many friends in it. My father was a professor of religion at Pacific Union College. It was a good environment for me to grow up in.

Kelly: Tell me how you met your wife.

Hoffman: I met her when I was in Washington, D.C. At that time my father, who was an expert in the Japanese language, had been hired by the Navy Department with the war looming with Japan, so I went back to be with him for a year, and he also, in addition to the Navy Department, taught at Washington Missionary College, which is now Columbia College, taught in the first hour from eight to nine, so I took a course from eight to nine there before going down; we drove down together.

But Mary was in one of his classes, my wife, and he asked me whether I'd grade papers for him that year, which I did. So I began grading her papers, and I found it necessary to confer with her several times about her work, and that's how I met her.

Then I'll go one more step. I went back to Pacific Union College and finished my work, and was hired by Mary's brother as credit manager of the Harding

Sanitarium in Worthington, Ohio. Mary went into nursing, but after a year came back and I persuaded her to marry me, which we did in 1939 on August thirty-one, and the next day Hitler marched into Poland, so our honeymoon, which included stops at Niagara, was somewhat interrupted because of the security precautions taken by our country all around Niagara Falls. You couldn't get close to it. You had to view it from afar. They were afraid of sabotage, of course.

That's more than you asked, but I gave it to you anyway, didn't I?

Kelly: That was fine. Her brother's name was?

Hoffman: Dr. George Harding, and he was a nephew of Warren G. Harding, the president, as, of course, Mary is a niece of Warren G. Harding.

Kelly: Your *vitae* that I picked up is missing the years 1940 to 1945.

Hoffman: All right. 1940 I went out to USC [University of Southern California] and took a master's degree in history, came back in the summer of 1941, and resumed some work at the Harding Sanitarium, but also began working on my Ph.D. at Ohio State, and in 1943 I became an officer in the navy, first an ensign, and then later lieutenant J.G., working in the field of communications intelligence, and living in Washington, D.C., during those years. So that takes us from 1940 to 1945.

Kelly: Thank you. Do you have anything, before I get into the UH?

Shallberg: And then you went back to—

Hoffman: Yes. In 1945 with the war coming to a close, we went back to Worthington, and I continued working at Ohio State, and got my Ph.D. in 1948, and taught most of the time. In fact, as a graduate assistant for a while, I was teaching fifteen hours a week for fifty dollars a month, which I thought was a good experience, and I thought the fifty dollars was quite nice. Of course, I had the G.I. [Bill] educational support also during that time.

Kelly: Aside from a short stint at the University of Alabama, you went back to the West Coast.

Hoffman: I was at the University of Alabama four years.

Kelly: And then you went back to Oregon State?

Hoffman: Yes.

Kelly: And then Portland State?

Hoffman: Yes. I was the dean of the General Extension Division for the state system in Oregon for a couple of years, and then became dean of faculty at Portland State College.

Kelly: So what brought you to Houston?

Hoffman: Good question. We were very happy in Portland. One day I had a telephone call from Clanton Williams, with whom I had had friendly relations at an earlier time at the University of Alabama. After he got out of the service, he went back into higher education, and came to the University of Houston, first as the dean of faculties, and then later became president when General Bruce and others feared that Clanton would be asked to go back to the University of Alabama as president. He was made president here, and General Bruce then became chancellor.

So Clanton called me and asked me if I'd come back and give an Honors Day speech, which I agreed to do, and he met me at the airport at midnight, and the next day he had set up appointments with me for all of his department heads and deans, department heads in arts and sciences, and deans of the university, which I thought was a little bit of extra courtesy for a visiting fireman, and didn't read anything into that, until after giving the Honors Day speech Ellen Goodman, who is a reporter for the [*Houston*] *Chronicle*, rather the [*Houston*] *Post* at that time,

came up to me and said, “I understand you’re going to be the next dean of faculties.”

I was talking to a group of people, and I said, “I don’t know anything about that. Could we take a walk when I’m through here?” We did take a walk, and I told her that nothing had been said to me, and this would be very embarrassing were it to be made the subject of a story at this time. I also promised her that if I could control it, she would get the story when it broke.

So our trip around the campus walking was entirely confined to her asking me questions about the University of Houston and how I thought its future might lie, and I was happy to be very optimistic about that future, because I could see the potential which was inherent in the situation. And she held the story until it broke, and that’s something that I don’t think you could expect anybody to do today, but she did it for quite some little time.

Subsequently, after I got back I was offered the deanship of faculty, and I wrote Clanton Williams and told him that I had observed that there was a vice president for business affairs, and I didn’t think that they wanted by my appointment to suggest that the academic was less important than business, so the answer came back, vice president and dean of faculty.

Kelly: How did your wife like moving to Houston?

Hoffman: She didn't like it too much. She had gotten very fond of Portland, and I brought her back one weekend. I was here a month before getting the family here. I brought her back one weekend to look for houses, and it rained the whole weekend. This was in early August, and it rained the whole weekend, and this was not a happy introduction to Houston. In fact, she cried just a little bit during that weekend, and we didn't find any houses we liked, although we saw one in Bellaire which we liked from the outside, but we couldn't get in because although it was for sale it was locked, of course. But we looked at it and liked it.

So later on, before going back to Oregon to get the family I looked at that house again and liked it, and drew her a floor plan of the house, sent it to her and said if she liked it I proposed that we buy it. She liked it and she liked the neighborhood. It was right near Bellaire High School. So Mary has always been one to like where she is. I think we both have. We've gone to any new assignment believing we'd like it, and we always did like it, and so she liked Houston very much from the time we arrived here as a family.

Kelly: You were the vice president and dean of faculties for just four short years, I believe, and then became the president. Tell me how that came about.

Hoffman: All right. Well, I would like to say it was by dint of hard work and personality and all those other things, but some of that figured into it, I know. But we had an interesting situation. We had General Bruce as chancellor, and Clanton Williams as president, but Clanton Williams had a serious heart attack within the first few months after I arrived, and while he recovered from that and came back for some time as president, the relationships were a little bit strained between General Bruce and Clanton Williams, because General Bruce was just beginning to understand that there was confusion in the City of Houston as to who was the chief executive. So for quite some time he devoted himself to making speeches in which he made quite clear that he was chief executive, and this was a little demeaning to Clanton, who knew that he was not chief executive, he was president.

But at that time, not being a system, it was a little bit difficult. It would have been with, I think, anybody, a little bit difficult to have a chancellor and a president within a single institution. So after a time, Clanton Williams went to Burma for an extended period with AID, and during the time that he was away, in fact, when it was about time for him to return, General Bruce informed him that he would not return as president.

In the meantime, a firm by the name of Cresap, McCormick and Paget had been invited to come to the university and study its administrative structure, and to

make recommendations about its future. One of the members of that commission was Douglas McClain, who later became assistant to the president, and subsequently vice president for business affairs. After some time in the university, the Cresap, McCormick and Paget people interviewed me and said they'd come to the conclusion that there should not be a chancellor-president head, that there should be a single executive officer with no confusion, and asked me would I be interested. Well, I said, "Certainly I'd be interested, but I understand that's it not within your prerogative to make such an appointment."

But I believe they ultimately recommended me to the board as the next president, and there was a committee formed of board members and faculty, alumni, and I think one student. I was interviewed by that committee for, oh, perhaps an hour and a half, during which one of the older members of the board said, "Don't you think you're a little bit young to be president of a university?"

And I said, "Well, I'm younger than the president of the United States," who was then Jack [John F.] Kennedy, and that produced a little merriment in the group. I remember a little later the faculty representative, or one of them, asked me what changes I would make in the curriculum were I named president, and I said, "I would not presume to make changes unilaterally as soon as I became president, but in consultation with the faculty there might be changes, which would be

determined by that consultation.” So I was named president of the university in July, and it became effective in September of 1961.

Kelly: It was just within that same month that NASA announced Houston would be the site for the Manned Spacecraft Center.

Hoffman: That’s right. That was an exciting announcement, and we had many pleasant relationships with the early astronauts, and a close relationship between the university. In fact, one of the early announcements and further delineations of NASA was made from Cullen Hall, with some of the key people here from Washington, as well as the Manned Spacecraft Center. We hosted that.

Kelly: Paul Purser worked as the primary contact between JSC [Johnson Space Center] and the various educational institutions, including U of H, Rice, and U.T. Austin. Tell me about your dealings with him.

Hoffman: Paul Purser and I had a fine relationship during the context to which you alluded. As time went on, he intimated to me that he would really like to be assistant to the president of the University of Houston, which was a little bit awkward because of the relationship with NASA, and I told him that if he could get the appropriate clearances with the blessing of NASA, that I’d be pleased to have his assistance.

He came aboard, and I think—I don't have the dates on this—was in that capacity for about six months, and then he went on to other activities.

Kelly: Paul Purser in his oral history interview said that he received a year of leave without pay from NASA to work—

Hoffman: Was that it?

Kelly: —and specifically, he mentioned that it was to help the graduate center get started. Can you tell me a little bit about how the concept of the graduate center got hashed out?

Hoffman: Early in the sixties there began to be a demand for graduate work, a demand from NASA and also from the space-related industries which began to cluster around NASA, the concept being that they wanted some graduate work for current employees, but also the opportunity of such graduate work would serve as an inducement in recruiting. So this interest became more and more vigorously expressed, until we began offering some extension courses at NASA, and also in I think one or two schools and other sites, but it was obvious that we needed an onsite presence for a graduate center.

So we began, and at just about this time the Humble [Oil] Company, through its Friendswood Development Corporation, offered fifty acres to be the initial site of the graduate center. So we had a site and great interest in it, but we had no cash to build it, so we had to go into a fundraising campaign, and I enlisted the assistance of Bob [Robert] Gilruth, who was then director of NASA-Houston to help me, and he thought it was a great idea, too, because it was in NASA's interest.

We began to map out a series of visits which we would make, and the first one was with Dan Haughton, the president of Lockheed. One morning about eight o'clock Bob and I met at the airport and flew to Los Angeles, and when we arrived there was a guy with a placard with our names on it, and we followed him. Mr. Haughton had sent a car for us, and had laid out a lunch with his senior executives. We were there about two hours, and received a pledge of \$75,000 for the graduate center. We caught a plane and were back in Houston in time for me to meet Mary and attend the opening of Jones Hall that night, so that was one of the busier and more productive days.

Bob and I then began to think of our next step, and we mapped out two or three. But the next one was going to be Boeing in Seattle. That appealed to us in several ways, because they had become rather convivial trips, too. We enjoyed each other's company, and I would bump up his coach ticket, which NASA had a

ceiling on, to first class, and we had pleasant times. But someone talked to the people in Washington about whether it was quite ethical for Bob Gilruth to be putting what they considered gentle pressure on contractors to contribute to the University of Houston's graduate center. His position was, yes it was ethical, because it benefited NASA.

But the decision was made in Washington that he couldn't continue these activities, and so I went to Seattle alone, and without Bob Gilruth's gentle pressure along with it, I struck out. Had a very nice time, they had a beautiful lunch and toured me around, but I didn't get anything, and we didn't get very much from other contractors. But we raised enough funds so that in January of 1972 the Arbor Building was dedicated, and we were underway with the site nearby here which became the focus of our graduate work. Of course, as time went on the whole opportunity for work and space was greatly expanded.

Kelly: The off-campus classes were offered as early as 1964. You must have initiated those discussions fairly soon after NASA Houston arrived.

Hoffman: Yes. We began to get signals from them around '62 or '63, and we began offering courses as you suggest in '64 in various locations, several locations at NASA, and some others. Then we began the fundraising shortly after the gift of the land, and then it wasn't until 1972 that we could finish the building.

Shallberg: Did you share with Shelly the fact that the first class of astronauts was announced at the University of Houston?

Hoffman: I did. Yes, indeed, that was a big day in Cullen Auditorium.

Shallberg: It's before my time.

Hoffman: Almost everything is before your time, except for the ten years with me.

Kelly: Tell me about the day the astronaut class was announced.

Hoffman: It drew a big audience, as you might expect, and they were announced one by one with a good deal of supporting biographical information. It was an exciting time, and the University of Houston was very proud to be part of it in terms of furnishing the locale for it. A lot of things went on after that. They had big parades downtown, and a big party in what was then the convention center, which has long since been torn down, roughly in the location of what is now the new Hobby Center [for the Performing Arts]. But parades and a general sense of jubilation that this great activity had been attracted to Houston and that we all could feel a part of it, and we did for a long time. Mary and I attended two or

three of the liftoffs in those very exciting, kind of yeasty years, partially because of the relationship with NASA.

Kelly: I noticed in the early years President [John F.] Kennedy made his speech about going to the Moon at Rice [University].

Hoffman: Right. I was there.

Kelly: Rice University donated the land that became the Johnson Space Center, and yet—

Hoffman: The land I think had been given to Rice by Humble [Oil Company], I believe, and they in turn donated it to NASA.

Kelly: So I'm kind of curious how it came about that University of Houston had the graduate center presence down here, as opposed to Rice.

Hoffman: I think it was felt that the University of Houston, being a young institution, one which was rather dynamic in its outlook, could adapt more quickly to such an opportunity. I've never been asked that question before, but I think that might be one of the reasons. Plus, I think we had closer personal relationships at various

levels, and I think that they thought that we would be more adaptable and more ready to do this quickly.

Shallberg: I think possibly, too, in thinking about that, the University of Houston was a relatively new public university, and individuals would have more access to a public university than to a private institution.

Hoffman: Exactly. That's a very good point. We had become a state university in 1963, so you see it was a very new one, as you suggest.

Kelly: I did not realize we had just become a state university then.

Hoffman: Yes. The first bill passed in 1961, but it was fought tooth and nail by other institutions, mainly A&M in Texas, with lots of opposition in the form of—can't think of the word for the moment, but it's been in the news lately—filibustering. Senator Moore of Bryan, Texas, representing the university of Texas A&M filibustered at great length, and also did again in 1963 when we had to correct the initial bill, which because of the opposition came out that it would be a state university, but without any support for graduate work, which, of course, was completely unacceptable to us. So we had to go back in 1963 and fight the same battles with the same people all over again, and again filibustering by Senator Moore, and after a great deal of difficulty and a hard fight we passed that one. So

in '63 when we came in, we came in with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto, including support for graduate work, which they had tried to deny us.

I might add parenthetically that down the road when we, in 1969 I believe it was, worked on the Clear Lake bill up there, once again it was Senator Moore who filibustered. In fact, Pat Nicholson and I knew he was going to filibuster on the final day when we planned to bring up the bill, and we had friends from Houston invite Senator Moore to have dinner that night, with the understanding that he would be plied amply with scotch. He had a fondness for it.

Pat and I were also in the Headliners Club in the bar the night before, and we invited Brian or Senator Moore to come over and sit with us. We didn't know until later that as he would go out to the men's room, he would stop at the bar on the way back and order a double on our tab, and we thought he would not be able to filibuster the next morning. But he was there bright and early in great shape. This is more than you asked for, but as long as I'm at it I might as well continue.

He noted as he walked in—I think he'd already planned this—but as you walked in there are two statues, one on either side as you go into the State House, of famous people whose names escape me. But he came in and began his filibuster, talking at great length about how these statues needed to be cleaned. He was shocked at their condition. But then using this as a springboard, he went into

great biographical detail about the lives of each of these men, which he was able to continue for at least a couple of hours, and then he began reading a book about one of them. This went on till about noon, and he then had to relinquish the floor for reasons of a biological nature. He had to relinquish the floor, and a friend of his picked it up, but he didn't have the same zeal. So after a time he faltered and we brought the bill to the floor, and it passed.

Now, I can understand to a degree Senator Moore's opposition to the original University of Houston bills, perceiving them to be somewhat of a threat to A&M, but I can't for the life of me understand why he would feel compelled to fight Clear Lake. He also was very active in fighting the effort to have a campus in The Woodlands. I had the votes all lined up for that one day, had them lined up the night before, and then we got word through the director of the Coordinating Board that three people wanted to come in and speak on this subject the next day before the vote.

One of them was Senator Moore, another was the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and the other one was a man by the name of Green, who was a representative whose base was in Conroe, but he represented the Sam Houston State area. So these three came in and one after another said that they were opposed to the bill, and even with that we came within a very small margin, but hands down it would have been passed except for this. The Coordinating Board

was in a vulnerable position itself, because it was dependent on the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee approving its funding, and they felt they could not go against this sudden display of force, which I thought was most unethical under the circumstances. I wanted them to stay so we could engage in dialogue, and I asked for that privilege and they just marched out. I considered it something like the parade of the wooden soldiers.

I took you quite far afield there, I realize.

Shallberg: Very interesting.

Kelly: It was, it was. Dr. Gilruth sent you a formal letter in September of 1965 in which he suggested establishing a permanent facility for undergraduate and graduate facility here in Clear Lake. At the time, in September of '65, they were anticipating over 600 course enrollments. I've gone through the JSC records, and the classes that University of Houston was offering through the graduate center included physics, math, four or five different kinds of engineering, business and management. However, when the University of Houston at Clear Lake City campus opened, none of those courses, well, some of the courses were offered, but we did not have a strong engineering or physics program, and so my question to you is, why?

Hoffman: Because it takes time to develop such a program, and we didn't begin classes at UH-Clear Lake until 1974, and this building was dedicated in '75 as I recall. But it takes time to develop strong departments in such areas, and I think we continued to operate the graduate center, although it was incorporated. I'm a little fuzzy about that relationship, frankly, at this point. But it takes time and resources. It's a very good question. You would think that it would have happened more quickly than it did, but it did not.

Kelly: Well, from a young person as an outsider looking back at that time, to me it seems obvious that you would have made this campus a really strong engineering-physics-science-oriented base, but that wasn't what happened.

Hoffman: I wish Alfred [R.] Neumann were here to talk about this subject, too.

Kelly: Well, since you've mentioned Dr. Neumann, why did you choose Dr. Neumann to head up?

Hoffman: His relationship and mine went back before that some time. I had the privilege of naming him, or recommending him for the deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences, one of my last recommendations before I left the dean of faculties position to become president. I had great confidence in him. We had a fine working relationship, and I believed that he would do an excellent job here at UH-

Clear Lake. He was appointed almost two years before we got underway, and did a lot of planning during that time. We had many discussions.

His orientation, of course, was more in the liberal arts area, and I don't know whether this has a bearing on your earlier question or not, but he certainly made an excellent beginning, I think, to University of Houston-Clear Lake. I'm proud to have appointed him, and proud of our relationship and what he accomplished.

Kelly: Had you considered any others?

Hoffman: Not really. This was before—of course, we didn't have to go through the committee process so much, because it was a brand-new institution. It could have been argued that we could have formed a committee in the central campus and had a long search, but the prospect didn't appeal to me particularly at that time, nor did I think, given the special circumstances of it being a brand-new institution, that it required more than my recommendation and the approval of the Board of Regents.

Kelly: What do you think he brought to the job that others couldn't?

Hoffman: That Alfred Neumann brought to it? A great personality and an ability to work with people, and a keen mind, and administrative ability which he demonstrated

on a broad scale as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, with fifteen departments under his administration. I felt that he was the best man for the job then, and I do now.

Kelly: I think many here would agree with you. You've already described a little bit about getting the bill passed through the legislature. Was there anything else in the early part of it that you want to add, perhaps about writing the bill or who sponsored the bill, and how you worked with that person?

Hoffman: Trying to remember. Babe Schwartz sponsored the bills in '61, '63, with the help of another senator, and whether he sponsored this one, the Clear Lake bill, I don't remember, do you?

Shallberg: I believe he did. There is a photograph on the wall in the president's office in the next room, and he's in that picture. It's you and the governor—

Kelly: Right, and Alfred.

Shallberg: I believe you have one of those in the archives, too.

Kelly: Yes.

Shallberg: So I believe it was Senator Schwartz. He was the senator from Galveston.

Kelly: I forgot to look, but I think you're right.

Hoffman: He was a great help. Also Senator Chris Kohl [phonetic] I think was the technical sponsor in the 1963 bill, but he was blind, so he couldn't see who was in the room at a given time. Pat Nicholson and I would be sitting in the gallery watching, and as it became clear one day that enough of the opposition had left the room, Babe Schwartz went over and whispered to Chris Kohl, and Chris called up the bill. It was a very touching moment, and it passed.

Kelly: How did it come about that you should work with the junior colleges to make this an undergraduate junior-senior level only?

Hoffman: In 1968 the Coordinating Board passed a resolution directing University of Houston to consider the addition of two campuses, two new campuses, one to be to the north, one to be to the south, and it was pretty well understood that the one to the south would be in Clear Lake area. It was pretty well understood, too, that the one to the north would be The Woodlands. They suggested that one of these be a four-year traditional institution, undergraduate, and the other would be four years plus masters.

I might say parenthetically that one of the reasons they wanted this not only was the serving areas, which could be served better this way, but they also were keen on the central campus not exceeding 30,000, and they also hoped that other major universities in the state would put a lid on their enrollment, so this was also part of the reasoning.

It seemed obvious to us that the institution with the masters degree should be here, and as the word began to leak out what we were considering, and as we were talking about it very freely, we received an immediate and rather zealous response from the junior-college presidents. There were six junior colleges sort of circling around Clear Lake, who were concerned about the negative impact on their freshman-sophomore junior college enrollment, and they were very zealously guarding that because there was a very close connection between that enrollment and the funds that they received from the state.

So we understood their concern, and at this time there was a new movement beginning in the United States of upper-level institutions. I think there were only some half dozen at this time, and this appealed to us as an opportunity to join somewhat in pioneering a new area, but also it would placate the concerns of the junior-college presidents. So the next year, 1969, the board approved the resolution for the setting up of the upper-level institution, junior, senior, and

masters in the Clear Lake area. But that wasn't approved by the legislature until 1972.

Kelly: That seems to have worked out very well down here.

Hoffman: It did. Yes, it did.

Kelly: So you had a lot of early contact then with the community junior colleges.

Hoffman: Quite a bit. The bill included a provision that there be an advisory committee of the junior-college presidents to advise in terms of the development of the Clear Lake curriculum. Actually, this was a politically correct inclusion. But we met two or three times, and it was apparent that while it was pleasant to see these people, that it wasn't the type of interaction which would be terribly helpful, because their work was at the freshman-sophomore, and we were not offering freshman and sophomore work. So I think we had two or three meetings, and without meaning to, that sort of went by the way.

Shallberg: It's still included in the legislation, and the committee still exists, but does not meet regularly, because truly the close relationships, rather than among the presidents, needs to be at your admissions level, enrollment services, to develop articulation agreements. We do have those very close ties with those nine

community colleges. There were eight originally, and then in 1982 when the name of the university was changed to University of Houston-Clear Lake instead of at Clear Lake City, a ninth community college was added, Wharton Community College, so that group does not meet, but it still exists.

Hoffman: That's very interesting. I didn't know it still existed. Mary Ann knows a great deal about the development—

Shallberg: Dr. Neumann continued to hold meetings—

Hoffman: Did he?

Shallberg: —and Dr. Stauffer did as well, and Dr. Goerke and Dr. Staples as the last two presidents have sort of let it drift away. The list of the Community College Advisory Council is still in the town hall, but it's not an active group.

Hoffman: That's very interesting, Mary Ann. As you may know, Mary Ann was my right-hand administrative assistant for ten years at the University of Houston until I retired, at which time, and it speaks well again for the judgment of Alfred Neumann, he asked her to join him.

Shallberg: Best move I ever made.

Hoffman: It certainly was a good move for Dr. Neumann and the University of Houston-Clear Lake, and I can readily understand the logic of it.

Kelly: Once Dr. Neumann took over down here, in what ways do you recall supporting him in his decisions?

Hoffman: My general recollection is that I supported virtually everything he asked for and wanted to do. That's my general recollection, and I don't have a type of memory at this stage which allows me to break it down into individual points, because I just don't. But I began with the confidence, which I've already told you about, in his judgment, and I know we had lots of discussions in which we—it was an exciting period, and he knew that very few people get to start an institution from scratch. I was sharing in some of that, because I had had a connection with it, and did, so we had lots of interesting discussions, but the final recommendations were almost always approved by me as made by him.

Kelly: I'll introduce one or two and let you see if you can recall those. Dr. Neumann organized the university into three schools, and he set them up with non-traditional program clusters. He mixed the departments up so that no one school had their own faculty suite. Did you have any particular thoughts about that organization? Did he clear that with you?

Hoffman: Oh yes, he cleared it, and such organization would have also cleared the Board of Regents. My thoughts were that this was an innovative way to begin, and let's do it. I might add parenthetically, we're talking about a period in which a lot of other things were going on. [University of Houston-] Victoria was emerging, [University of Houston-] Downtown College was emerging, and that was a very difficult and stressful period, because it had to be done in a short period of time. I don't think you want me to go into all that. But suffice it to say that we were able to start classes at Victoria in '73, and at the Downtown College, which we acquired by purchase, in the fall of 1974. Of course, the central campus required a good deal of attention, too, so I did not become too immersed in the detailed development of the University of Houston at Clear Lake. I would be proud to claim more than I can honestly.

Kelly: It sounds to me like you trusted Dr. Neumann and let him go his own way.

Hoffman: I did. I did.

Shallberg: One thing I remember from the time I worked with you was that a number of the senior faculty and administrators who Dr. Neumann was considering for positions at Clear Lake—this was between '72 and '74—he brought up to the president's office at UH for you to interview and meet—

Hoffman: I recall that.

Shallberg: —like Dr. and Mrs. Floyd Boze—

Hoffman: Yes, indeed.

Shallberg: —who both were charter faculty members, and several others. You might also at least want to mention how June Hyer came to be the first provost here.

Hoffman: Yes. June at one time was very active in the central campus, first as a faculty member, and she had political excellent instincts. Did she serve as an assistant to me for a time?

Shallberg: Yes.

Hoffman: She became very active in the Austin scene, and had a good deal to do with the Clear Lake bill, as I recall. A very forceful personality, and was regarded highly in Austin, and I think by some almost fearfully. Her presence was never unnoticed, and she did not mind pressing individual representatives and senators. Then did she come directly from that to Clear Lake, or did she come back to the central campus for a while?

Shallberg: I really don't recall. It seems like she may have come directly from Austin here.

Hoffman: I think so. But she was a remarkable lady.

Shallberg: A very dynamic woman.

Hoffman: Yes, indeed.

Kelly: How did you feel Dr. Neumann got along with the other administrators in the UH system?

Hoffman: Very well. The university in general at that time was a pretty happy family. We had the usual problems, but generally we all got along very well within the campus of the university and the central campus. There was very little unpleasantness, as I recall, and he certainly contributed to the feeling of camaraderie and well-being which existed on campus and transferred to this operation.

Kelly: We're almost done, just so you know. According to some information in Dr. Neumann's papers that are housed here, it appears that in May and June of 1973 he and Dr. David Jamison, who was the associate dean of the Clear Lake

Graduate Center, it appears that they got into a little bit of a tug of war over what we now call the Arbor Building.

Hoffman: I don't remember anything about that. It could well be, but I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Kelly: I'll tell you my impressions from the papers, and then I'll let you tell me if anything strikes a chord. It seems to me that there was some concern that the UH-Clear Lake Graduate Center, which was owned and run by the main campus, was going to continue, and continue to own the Arbor Building, even after the UH at Clear Lake City campus opened on the other side of the bayou, in the Bayou Building. It appears that Dr. Neumann first requested the space to use as temporary classrooms, and then added a wing for the library and the wing for classroom space, and that by adding those two wings you had to spend money that was earmarked for Clear Lake City, and it sort of forced the issue. It also appears that he did it with your blessing, although I can't find it anywhere very clearly stated.

Hoffman: My guess is that it was with my blessing. I don't recall the issue very much, except I do recall my feeling then and now that it was the logical thing.

Kelly: My question was going to be, why was there so much confusion about whether the graduate center would continue as a physical presence on an adjacent site.

Hoffman: I don't really know, really. I've forgotten a lot of things, and that's probably one of them.

Kelly: Well, I'll just let the records speak for themselves then, the correspondence that we have. I noticed in reading background information about you that you announced in February of 1979 that you were planning to retire immediately after your sixty-fifth birthday in August of 1980, but you actually resigned just a few months later in September. Can you please recount for me what preceded your resignation so early?

Hoffman: This was a situation in which Allen Commander, who was our vice president for public affairs with particular responsibilities in Austin, had created a relationship with some regents, some of whom believed that he was partly responsible for their appointment to the board. He had developed a very close relationship with the man who was the appointments secretary to one or two of the governors during that period.

Then Don Boney, who is chancellor of the Downtown School, died, leaving a vacancy there, and it was my desire to appoint Joe Champagne as temporary or

acting chancellor. Joe Champagne had at one time been president of the community college, and had a great feeling for the community, and in many respects the relationship with the Downtown College was a natural one. He was also a fine scholar, and at that time held a vice-presidential rank in the university. He did not want the job permanently, and said so, so it seemed to me that it made sense to appoint him and then take time to search in a leisurely fashion for the right person to be president or chancellor.

I've never talked about this on camera or off camera, really, but it's okay to do it now. Allen wanted the job. He wanted it permanently, and without my knowledge he began working with the Board of Regents, just telling them of his interest in it. They liked Allen and I liked Allen, so some of them were not as sensitive as they might be to—

[End file Hoffman.wma. Begin file Hoffman2.wma.]

Kelly: If you'd like to continue, you were mentioning that Dr. Commander did want the permanent position.

Hoffman: Yes, he wanted this position and began lobbying with the Board of Regents without my knowledge, and some of the members of the board were fairly recently appointed and, I think, felt some gratitude to Allen for his influence in

their appointments. Also, they were not very aware of the nuances of the relationships within the university, and so he got pledges from quite a number of these to support his bid to be—he knew that there would have to be a search committee, but he wanted to be named acting chancellor so that he would, he thought, be in an advantageous position to be named chancellor later.

I learned about this just about three days before the board meeting at which I was going to make the recommendation for Joe Champagne, who parenthetically, later went on to be president of Oakland University in Michigan, the third-largest university in Michigan. I had the pleasure of recommending him for that position. But I began to pick up little rumors that Allen was doing this. By the time I learned about it, he had sewed up by pledges, he thought, a majority of the Board of Regents, some of whom regretted it later, but they had made the pledge.

So when the time for the board meeting came, I, when we got to the personnel section, recommended Joe Champagne. Let me go back just a step. When I learned of what he was doing I called key board members and told them what I planned to do, and that I was going to make this recommendation and I wanted them to know it. I also called Allen Commander, who at that time was in Washington, D.C., on a trip, and I told him I wanted him to pull down his quest, that I was going to recommend Joe Champagne and I wanted him to step down on the issue. There was a long pause, and he said he'd pray about it.

So on Sunday night before the board meeting we had a reception at our home with all of the board members, and Allen did not attend that that evening. We had other key university people, and I picked up during the evening that some of these board members were solid in their pledges, and I had a pretty good idea of what was going to happen the next day. But I made the recommendation of Joe Champagne, and they immediately asked to go into private session and they discussed it again. I came back and they said that they wanted Joe Champagne, which I felt for the board to initiate any appointment except that of a president or the chief executive officer was not standard procedure at all. In fact, it's almost unheard of in fine universities.

So when I came back and met with them, just the board members, they said they wanted Allen, and I suggested we go ahead with the regular agenda, because this was a meeting in which we passed the annual budget for the university. It was a cumbersome thing and I needed to be able to walk them through it without any other interference or any other confusion, so I suggested we put the personnel item at the very end of the board meeting. So I walked them through the budget for probably an hour and a half, and we got that approved, did some other things, and we came to the final item which was now personnel.

I once again nominated or recommended Joe Champagne. They went into private session again and came back, told me what they wanted, and I nominated Joe Champagne in the public session again, and one of the members of the board then moved that the acting chancellor be Allen Commander, and that passed. So at that moment I said with the greatest goodwill to the university which I had served for a long time, I offered my resignation effective immediately.

I knew that it would be a very difficult thing for me to work, first of all, with Allen Commander under these circumstances, and it would be difficult for me to continue to work with the board, having capitulated to what I thought was an unwise demand. I've never talked about this before.

Kelly: Dr. Neumann kept a copy of your remarks in his papers, and they sound prepared.

Hoffman: I had them in my mind, because for several days, and particularly from the night before, I was pretty sure what was going to happen. They were not prepared in the sense that they were written down, but I think I had sketched a few notes. But Farris Block, our information man, said the press wanted a copy, and I said, well, you'll have to let me dictate what I think it was to Mary Ann [Shallberg], and it came out about the same way. One word was different, which caused a little furor later, but I didn't take time to change it, so she made copies and they were

distributed to the board, but it was extemporaneous in the sense that I did not write down the statement beforehand.

Kelly: How did you share that with your wife?

Hoffman: First thing I did, I went into my little study, which is off the main room, and called her and told her so that she wouldn't hear it first in the press. And she said, "Well, come on home."

Kelly: Had you discussed it with her over the weekend prior?

Hoffman: Yes, a little bit. She knew the possibility. It wasn't a complete shock. Actually, it was only a short time until I had said I was going to retire, and we had just bought a new home at Pirates Beach or Pirates Cove, where the fishing was good, and I had a boat down there, and I enjoyed the extra time. So I didn't grieve about it, I never have, but that's what happened and I resigned. If the board had said to me, "Bring back another recommendation next time," I would have agreed. I wouldn't have retired. But when they assumed the prerogative of initiating the appointment of an acting chancellor, that was invading the prerogative of the president of the university, and so I felt I needed to resign.

Kelly: What did you do after you retired?

Hoffman: Well, within a short time I became a consultant to George Mitchell on the educational and other developments in The Woodlands. I had an office in the Shell Building downtown on the thirtieth-some floor. It was not a fulltime position. It was roughly considered to be about a third-time position, and we were living at that time fulltime in Pirates Cove, so I went back and forth to the office and to The Woodlands several times a week.

Then after doing that for about a year or two, I was offered the presidency of the Texas Medical Center. I had been working rather closely with Jack Williams, the former executive of the Texas Medical Center, on cooperation between the medical center and The Woodlands in terms of the programs and developments, and had taken a number of the executives of the hospital and other institutions out to The Woodlands by helicopter, so that George Mitchell could give them his dog-and-pony show with all the exhibits. He was fabulous on that.

Then I was offered the presidency, and in accepting it I told them that they needed to know about my connection with George Mitchell and the efforts I had been making, and they accepted that, had no problem with it. So I became president of Texas Medical Center for a three-year period, which went well and I enjoyed it, but I was then ready to retire for good.

Kelly: Can you think of anything that I've omitted that you'd like to say about our campus and how it came about?

Hoffman: Well, we've talked about how it came about. I must say that when I drove in I had a wonderful feeling. This is such a receptive, welcoming, beautiful campus, and this building is fabulous. I knew it was because I had quite a bit to do with the building, but as the years went by—you see, I'll be ninety next month, and a lot of time has gone by—you forget exactly the atmosphere, which has been augmented through the years of knowing the campus and the country, which has a more welcoming aspect as you drive in than I experienced this morning. I'm very proud to have been part of the impetus for this campus.

Kelly: And just think, all those years ago when you and Dr. Gilruth sat down and talked about the possibility.

Hoffman: We had a good time for a while with our efforts to raise funds from the aerospace industries, until it was nipped. I still wish we could have gone to Boeing. We would have gotten at least \$100,000 there.

Kelly: Probably would have. Well, I will close with some remarks that Dr. Neumann made at a dinner in your honor, and I apologize, I couldn't figure out exactly

which dinner in your honor, there were so many. But he closed his remarks to you with, “May you go from strength to strength, and live to be 120.”

Hoffman: Bless his heart. I wish he could have lived to be 120. I miss him a lot, and I appreciate his comments then, and am warmed by them now. I wouldn't bet on the 120, but ninety isn't bad, though I don't plan to stop there.

Kelly: I wouldn't.

Hoffman: It's been a great pleasure to talk to you, Shelly, and I appreciate the sensitivity with which you asked the questions, some of them difficult questions. You've elicited more candor from me than had been the case up to this point on one or two issues. But it's been my pleasure.

Kelly: Thank you. It's been an honor.

Hoffman: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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