Q. This is Raimund Goerler and I’m interviewing Barbie Tootle for the OSU Archives Oral History Program on December 8, 2011. Thank you, Barbie, for agreeing to do this. Why don’t we begin at the beginning by taking you back to your student days? What attracted you to OSU? What kind of experiences did you have as a student here, including student employment?

A. I came to Ohio State in 1961 as a freshman. I graduated from high school in Columbus, a private girls school, Catholic school, 55 in my class, small, all women, all Catholic. And then I came to a “heathen” university, despite the nuns’ best efforts to direct me toward other church-affiliated universities. Living in Columbus I just fell in love with Ohio State. I just thought, “This is the place to be. There’s so much going on. I want to see if I can make it there.” I was willing to take on the big challenge. And it was in the price range for my parents. I couldn’t have gone far. My sister went to Ohio University. I could have chosen another Ohio public [university], but I could not look at anything beyond that financially. I came to Ohio State as a commuting student and lived at home. And that was an interesting experience. The University had a lot of initiatives at that time for commuter students, especially for women students. The Dean of Women’s Office had quite a commuter program and I got involved in that right away. We were assigned a big sister, mentor, for example, another commuting
student who was a junior. It was someone who met with me. We met at the Union every couple of weeks and would chit chat. And then I volunteered to be one of those mentors the following year. It was very nice to have somebody to turn to, to ask questions and that sort of thing. It helped you get connected. I enrolled in the College of Commerce, which at the time had a miniscule number of women enrolled, relative to today’s Fisher College. So I went from an all-women’s environment to, in most of my classes, there were two, three women in the class at the most. I was in the honors cohort, which was a relatively young program at the time, and the honors program cohort that I was in, there were two or three women. It was a very small number of women. But I felt very well prepared. My high school had been very heavily academically oriented. St. Mary of the Springs, which is now Ohio Dominican University, prepared me to compete academically. I think that gave me the confidence to take on the gender challenges and the bigness of the school and all the rest. I was ready.

I joined a sorority. I joined Pi Beta Phi in January of my freshman year. That gave me a home on campus at the sorority house. It gave me a chance to get involved in leadership. I was president of my pledge class and started to stretch my leadership wings a little bit. I got involved in the Women’s Self Government Association, which at that time was a parallel organization to Undergraduate Student Government, focusing on issues for women on campus. And I began to kind of see where some paths would take me in terms of leadership.

To help cover some of the expenses for school and give me some of the spending money to be able to join the sorority and other things, I worked in the
College of Commerce office. I worked in the records area, which at that time handled a lot of folders and paper in the back room of Hagerty Hall. The office was in the southeast corner of the building. Hagerty Hall had a large suite that was the college office. Sometimes I would fill in out at the front desk if somebody was sick or not around, but mainly I worked in the records area. As advisors would pull a student’s record to meet with a student, we would have to re-file it or file any kind of forms that students had filled out or whatever. It gave me the opportunity to get to know the entire college staff.

Dean [James] McCoy was the dean at the time, a very, very kind and interesting man. Katherine Allen was the College secretary, a woman I admired very much. There’s plenty I remember about her, just saying her name. At Christmas one year she received a gift from a friend of a fresh bouquet of flowers every week, and every Monday the florist would bring something for her desk. And I just thought it was such a wonderful touch. She was a very gracious woman and very competent. The College relied on her for many things. Merwin Potter was the Assistant Dean. Colonel Potter was retired military, a no-nonsense, tough-as-nails kind of guy. He didn’t put up with anything. And so he was pretty much the guy that would handle the dismissals and some of those situations, and had a very heavy hand, I would say. We were all a bit afraid of him because of his particular rough manner. Isabelle Duncan was the senior counselor. She helped you graduate. Helen Bates was a long-time advisor. It was a great team of people, fully committed to students. I felt very supported there.
The best part of my job was putting up the mail, which meant going to a little room down the hall on the first floor of Hagerty, a small room that was lined with little cubbies. Each faculty member had a slot. And the building was, of course, filled with the College of Commerce, as well as Sociology and Geography were in the building with us. And so I got to know many of the faculty. When I walked into class, the professors knew me if not by name, by face. “Oh, you’re that mail person.” They were always eager for the mail. They were vultures for the mail. And, of course, this was before e-mail or any electronic communication. So if you were getting a notice from a journal or a paper you were doing at a meeting or something, it would come in the mail. Or I suppose royalty checks or other things that might be of interest. So the faculty were perched on my shoulder, and when I knew someone was looking for something, I would try to put theirs on the top. It gave me a chance to get to know the faculty in a different way. And I think that always demystified it a little bit and helped me be a better student. That was very valuable.

Getting involved in student organizations gave me a chance to find my place as a commuter. I moved on campus my sophomore year. My parents moved out of town; it was very generous of them to do that. It gave me a chance to live on campus. I lived in the sorority house for three years. I lived in a residence hall one summer when I was an Orientation Leader. We lived in Bradley-Patterson [Hall]. That was my only experience living in a residence hall, and it was not exactly an authentic experience, because while I was there the whole summer, our students, orientation students, only stayed two nights. And so it was a change in
population. But still, it gave me a little taste of it. In those days orientation was a two night experience. We really got to know the students very well. And being an Orientation Leader was considered – I believe it still is today – a very good job, a very prestigious job, if you are selected for it. And it was a great experience. You’re meeting new people all the time and trying to connect with them, giving out a lot of information. It was hard work but it was really a lot of fun. I enjoyed that.

I was also on the Council on Student Affairs. That was the end of my junior year and my senior year. CSA was and is an important policy body and it was a very good group for me to be with. John Bonner was the Vice President. I remember the first time I ever ate lobster. Mr. Bonner took us to the Athletic Club downtown for dinner at the holidays, as kind of a thank-you dinner. It was very elegant, beautifully done. But they served lobster and most of us are looking at one another like, “Exactly how am I going to go after that?” It was a bit of a social etiquette challenge. Talk about not knowing what fork to use! My parents had raised me pretty carefully, and what they hadn’t done, the nuns had taken care of. So I knew how to go to a dinner party – but not lobster. Mr. Bonner and I joked about that later as I saw him periodically throughout the years following my undergraduate days. I said, “Don’t ever serve lobster to a group of students who have never seen it before in the shell, for heaven’s sake.” That was a lot of fun. CSA was just starting to deal with the first half of the ’60s, starting to deal with student unrest a little bit, not very much. The first half of the ’60s were still more like the ’50s than the ’70s, if you will. It was more like an extension of the ’50s.
Q. So what was CSA dealing with?

A. Well, at the time there were a lot of rules for women. I would say gender issues were very high on the list. Women had to be in at 11:00 on week nights, midnight on the weekends. You had to sign in. They had to know your whereabouts and I think there was a lot of discussion about whether those hours should be changed. There was just more, I would say, protecting/controlling women students who lived on campus or in the sorority houses. And so there were gender issues. Alcohol was the drug of choice at the time. In my experience, there were not other drugs around. I certainly knew people who maybe would have made the choice of experimenting, had it been available. But it simply was not part of the scene. Drugs were not offered to us. It was not an issue I ever had to deal with. But alcohol was the drug of choice. We had 3.2 beer, so you were legal to drink this lighter form of beer. And as a senior, some people would have wine, and that was considered quite a big deal. But it was mostly beer and it was mostly trying to make appropriate decisions about drinking and driving.

In CSA we talked some about civil disobedience, but it was a really different time, I guess. I remember that there was an incident with a student who was jay-walking in front of the Student Book Exchange, SBX, on High Street. She jay-walked and was arrested. The police were trying to cut down on jay-walking, I suppose, for the safety of everybody. But she darted across the street as many of us had done many times, and was arrested and taken downtown and purportedly not treated very well by the arresting folks and literally put in jail for walking across the street. She was in a sorority, and it quickly flashed around
through the student population (despite the absence of cell phones). We did manage to get the news around to one another. People were just irate that this happened. And by later in the day, in the early evening, there were hundreds and hundreds of students filling the sidewalk and then walking across the street, jaywalking and stopping the traffic, and then walking back and chanting and holding signs. I remember getting a call from the CSA folks saying, “You need to contact the other Greek organizations and get them to not participate. They need to get off the street.” And so I knew the other sorority presidents and many of the fraternity presidents, and walked around to all the houses and said, “Hey, this is the word we’re getting.” I don’t think it had a tremendous effect, but I certainly did my duty.

CSA was dealing with fees. I remember money being an issue there, what things cost. In terms of student activity fees, there weren’t very many I don’t think. Somehow I remember insurance. Tuition was something like $100 and insurance was like $8 more, or something like that. But I remember dealing with insurance issues a little bit. When I left, the civil rights movement and response to the Vietnam War were ramping up, in discussion and actions regarding social justice and then the war. So the first half of the ’60s were more like the ’50s. We still had a Dean of Women. The Dean of Women was Christine Conaway, a very influential person. She had been in that area from 1947 until she retired in 1967. Mrs. C. was a woman of influence nationally, highly regarded among other Deans of Women and the recognition societies – Alpha Lamda Delta, Mortar Board – groups that were national recognition groups for women. She was very much
considered a leader. She singled me out. I don’t know why or how we even first met, but she knew who I was and she would ask me to come by the office and encourage me to get involved in more things. She’s the one who said, “You might want to be an Orientation Leader.” She really wanted me to get involved in CSA. CSA had a person who was Greek-affiliated around the table and that was me. So she really took an interest in me and nudged me in different directions.

I remember her secretary, Eileen Kehlmeier (later secretary to the Dean of Students). I remember Eileen telling me about one of her daily duties. I had an early-morning appointment and Eileen was in the Dean’s office in Pomerene Hall. She walked out and said, “She’ll be with you in a minute,” as she was kind of wiping her hands. And she said, “My first duty of the day is to fill her fountain pen.” And I thought, “What?” That is a snap shot, as I think of that, of the time. She would fill her pen and have it all cleaned up, so that when she signed something she wouldn’t have ink all over her or whatever. But that was the time that it was. The office was in Pomerene, which was mainly women’s phys ed. There was a gym in there and some big rooms for phys ed. And then there was a big lounge where we had many activities. In Pomerene Lounge, we would have teas and socials, mostly for women. It was the women’s union. It was really built for that because women weren’t allowed in the other union except for a special invitation event. It was a men’s spot. So Pomerene was really built for women. And it was the home base for the Dean of Women’s Office.
Q. At the social event, I’m curious as to how you met the Dean of Women, given the number of women, women students on campus. Was it at one of these social events or did the Dean reach out to individual women?

A. I think both. I remember when we had sorority rush, recruitment in the winter. It was in January 1961 and she spoke to all of us assembled who were interested in being in a sorority. She got up and spoke to everybody about what that meant, what was available. She was also a member of Pi Beta Phi as an undergraduate, a very active student leader herself. But of course that was a big mass audience. And then when we were chosen, we went to Pomerene to find out what sorority we were invited to be in. And I remember she was there congratulating individual people, just kind of part of the scene. I don’t know exactly how she found out about me. There were several administrators – [Assistant] Dean Jane McCormick and [Associate] Dean Ruth Weimer. Her assistant deans were more hands-on with us in our organizations, and I worked with Jane McCormick on the sorority side and on WSGA. So she may have said to her, “Here’s somebody that’s starting to get involved.” I really don’t know the chain on that, but we were friends to the end.

Dean Conaway was a big-time student leader here. Her brother was very active on campus and so was her husband. She was Mortar Board. Her brother, Howard – Yerges is the last name – I think he had been on the football team. S. Steele Conaway, and Christine Yerges were married by President William Oxley Thompson, who presided at their wedding. He knew them well as student leaders. She was president of the Women’s Council (1922-23) and he was treasurer of the
Student Council (1922-23). Dean Conaway told me that he had married them. That was a surprise to me, because I hadn’t realized he was an ordained minister until I heard that from her a long time ago. Dean Conaway was very influential. And when I was in Greek Affairs later in my career, I had the opportunity to reconnect her with students while she was in her retirement years. I would make sure she attended our annual Greek recognition event. The Outstanding Senior Sorority Woman Award is called the Conaway Chase award. It was called the Chase award in 1965 when it was begun, for character, honor, achievement, scholarship, and excellence. And when she retired, her name was put on the award. So it is the Conaway Chase Award. At the big banquet each spring, I would ask her to help present the award, so the students would know who she was, and why it was named for her. I would send students over to pick her up and bring her over and escort her and everything. She loved it and very much enjoyed that opportunity to meet the students of that time.

[During] my undergraduate days [there] were the dances in the Ohio Union, the homecoming dance and those kind of things, a very traditional May Week, and those kind of activities. I was focused on getting my degree in business and developing the leadership skills that I thought would be good for the work place. I got interested in going to graduate school and did graduate work in Sociology. And that introduced me to the Disaster Research Center. I was a graduate assistant for the Disaster Research Center during my master’s program. The Disaster Research Center was part of the Sociology Department. The Disaster Research Center, DRC, studied organized responses to natural catastrophes. There
were three founders: Henry Quarantelli, Russ Dynes, and Eugene Haas. Haas left and went somewhere else and I never really got to know him. But Dynes and Quarantelli ran it when I was there. It was a wonderful research organization, which was funded largely by federal grants from the Air Force, Office of Scientific Research, and the Office of Civil Defense. They were interested in figuring out how to do better disaster planning. Our field teams would go into a disaster setting immediately. I mean, they were on the same plane with the Red Cross or the military or whoever needed to be there. We got very high clearance to get in. There would be a huge tornado and it would wipe out a town, Topeka or someplace, and then our people would be there and see how the organizations functioned under conditions of enormous stress. And then you would go back and look at what their plans had been, what worked, and what didn’t work, in those kinds of situations. What were they ready for, what were they not ready for. And the graduate students would study how people reacted in a variety of settings. We had people who were very interested in the medical institutions: How are hospitals functioning? Or people who were interested in police.

We had one person, Verta Taylor, a very accomplished sociologist in her career, who looked at responses to religious organizations. Did a natural disaster that wiped out your house and perhaps some of your family and friends draw you closer or push you further away from a religious organization. How did those churches respond? I remember she was involved with a natural catastrophe in the south, and she got involved in studying a snake handling kind of religious group and some “revival tent” groups, and how they came in and whether they
prospered or not in those kinds of circumstances, when people were just at their lowest point. There were a lot of interesting research opportunities. It was clearly an applied research topic that was extremely relevant. And most of the people that were involved in the program were interested in mass communication, group behavior, social movements. And so people took different directions on it.

Today the Disaster Research Center still exists at the University of Delaware, in Newark, Delaware. When Dynes and Quarantelli retired, the University had never put a lot of money into DRC. It was all soft money. When I worked there full time, after I received my master’s degree, I worked there full time. And I was employed by the Sociology Department, and I was the only DRC staff person that was on their payroll. There were 15-20 grad students, a really big operation. I was the administrator of the office and we had a secretary. We had a full-time transcriber to transcribe all these many interviews that took place in the field. And all that was just soft money. So when Dynes and Quarantelli retired here, they wanted to keep the center going, and the University wasn’t in a position to or chose not to as a priority to keep it. The University of Delaware was very eager to have it. DRC is prospering today with a mission broader than natural catastrophes, to looking at terrorism and human made disasters. So when I was there, it was just natural disasters and catastrophes. A worldwide focus from the beginning, we had fellows from other countries who would come and spend time with us. We had conferences and meetings in other parts of the world. We had a conference in Japan that I did not attend. And they certainly all came to our conferences that we held. We had a conference in Paris that I did attend.
Worldwide, people are interested in this topic. And it still is a leading research group on this topic.

So it was a great asset to Ohio State, and it was good for me. I edited all the publications and we published a lot. There was pressure to publish all the time. Everything from all the standard scholarly journals to things like Psychology Today, Smithsonian, or those kinds of magazines that are popular in focus but have a pretty strong academic base. So we were writing for a mass audience sometimes, and sometimes it was all the scholarly work. But I edited everything. We did a newsletter called “Unscheduled Events.” And so I did a lot of writing and editing, which served me well later in my career. It was a good personal experience. We were over on Tenth Avenue in one of those houses the University owned, and probably still owns. So it had all the woes of frozen pipes, and the bathroom had a big claw foot tub in it. It was an old house. As we grew, we got the house behind it on Ninth [Avenue] also for our offices. You would go across the alley and into the other house, because we had so many grad students, and they all shared a couple of desks in what was probably at one time a bedroom. Upstairs we had offices all the way around for all the grad students and so on. It was a pretty good-sized operation and very well done. That was good for me. That taught me a lot.

While I was doing that, I was also a volunteer advisor to my own sorority. As a graduate, I was on the Alumni Advisory Committee for Ohio State’s chapter of Pi Phi, and then the person who worked in Student Affairs with sororities, Alex Thomson, approached me and said there were a couple of other sororities that
didn’t have very strong alumni support in Central Ohio. Would I be willing to be one of their advisors and help them out a little bit? And I said, “Sure, I’m an equal opportunity helper here.” So I worked with a couple of other groups. [In] one group I worked with their recruitment program to try and help them increase their numbers. In another group, one of their issues had more to do with managing the housing situation, getting along in the house, making the house environment a more positive one. And without an advisor to turn to, they were really struggling with roommate conflicts that you deal with in any housing situation. They just didn’t have a very good structure for figuring out how to do that. So Alex Thomson tapped me to do a couple of projects as an advisor, which I did.

As I got to know him better, he asked me to lunch with him one day in the Terrace Dining Room at the Ohio Union. Alex was affectionately known as Sandy. He said, “I’m going to announce within the next couple of weeks that I’m going to leave to go over to the Development Office and become a fund raiser. And I want you to apply for the job.” And I said, “Well no, I’m not a Student Affairs person. I’m not a student personnel person.” And he said, “Yes, you are. You just don’t know it.” I couldn’t imagine that you would get paid to be an advisor, something I enjoyed doing as a volunteer. So I had not considered that as a career option. But he asked me to throw my hat in the ring and I did. That started me down a whole other path. I was at Disaster Research for five years. I had just turned 30, and I think I was just in the mood to do something different.

Q. Okay. What sort of issues did you deal with as Coordinator of Greek Affairs? And I’m also curious, in the early ’60s there was a stereotype about Greeks, that they
were all kind of alike. And [talk about] the challenges of dealing with diversity issues in the ’70s.

A. It was not a stereotype; it was pretty much true. Visually all alike. I would say probably not as much alike on other issues. But clearly, it was a white middle-class phenomenon. The inaccurate stereotype was that these people had a lot of money. I know that was not true in any of the groups that I knew well. But it was clearly a largely white group when I was in school. In the ’20s, many of the chapters wouldn’t have asked a Catholic person to join. And when I was in school in the early ’60s, when I first got involved, all the women in the group were ostensibly Christian, and none were Jewish. We didn’t know any Muslims. I went to Catholic school so most of my friends in high school were of that persuasion. But the fact of the matter is, by the time I was a senior in ’65, we had asked a Jewish woman to join, which was a big deal. Then, when I was an advisor in the early ’70s, we had invited an Asian-American woman to join. In any case, it was quite controversial in the eyes of some of the older alumni. How could you allow this to happen? How can you have somebody so different, etc., etc. But the groups were ready to make that move, and we were ready as advisors to encourage them to do so.

For a long time, Ohio State has had chapters of the national African-American fraternities and sororities, many of which are founded in the Midwest. Indiana University was a founding spot for a couple of the groups. They have a very strong history in the Midwest. So we had had all these chapters. And when I got to Greek Affairs, all of the African-American based fraternities and sororities,
national ones, were advised by the office of what was then called Black Student Programs, they were not in with Greek Life at all. I was there from ’74 to ’85, and by the time I left, we had shared advising responsibility in as much as they were Greek organizations. We had groups that were historically Jewish in their rituals and traditions. We had one group that was historically Catholic in its rituals and traditions. We had these groups that were historically African American in their rituals and traditions, and yet that latter group was not part of the same conversation. We were able to pull that together and bring that governance group in. I would say by 1980, that’s an informal guess, but as I think about individual students that I worked with and issues I worked with, I would say by ’80 I had the opportunity to work with those groups as well. They still maintained a sort of “dotted line” relationship also with Black Student Programs, because they did a lot of programming, especially social programming. The social programming at that time for African-American students was done by those Greek groups. The dances that were hosted by these Greek organizations and the step shows and events were very much at the heart of the social life of an African-American student on campus. So if Alpha Kappa Alpha had a dance or Phi Beta Sigma had a dance or if there was a step show, it was the place to be, the thing to go to. And they could fill the ballroom in the evening pretty easily.

Historically, those groups, nationally and locally, have a tremendous influence post-college. Many people join as a community member, not when they were in school. The Alumni Chapter invites and initiates people. And they have a very strong presence in the community. So not everybody who is in the group is
also involved in college. And you also have chapters in smaller communities, Athens or Oxford or smaller towns around Ohio where there is not a lot of social support for African Americans. Everything from where to get your hair cut to where do you go to church to where do you socialize, all those kind of support things were not always available in other towns. So they would often come here to socialize. That’s true elsewhere. In Georgia, Atlanta is the big social center. And African-American students from many schools go to Atlanta for these huge parties. It’s true in Florida; it’s true in a lot of places. We would have a number of people attend these functions who had no affiliation with [the] institution. They go to another school or maybe they’re not even enrolled in school. And sometimes that created tensions as far as the expectations and rules. I think every time there was any kind of incident, it was seldom our students, but people who sort of glommed onto it and showed up with maybe a different set of expectations. Whether it was having a firearm or I don’t know, being a bully and a problem person. When I first started in Greek Affairs, I was told that I had nothing to do with those groups. Omega Psi Phi at the time had a house, up on Indianola. They had a house for a few years. And so they were a housed chapter and the issues they had were more like the other housed Greek organizations than they were different. And yet there was that kind of line put up there.

At the time that I advised the groups, a diversity issue that I think was starting to make a bigger move was the groups that were historically Jewish in their rituals and their traditions. Not every Jewish student was attracted only to those groups. They were looking at all the groups, and increasingly, and the other
groups were welcoming them. That started to happen when I was in my junior and
senior year in school. So all of a sudden Jewish students started to say, “I’ll look
at all the groups,” and yet people who were not Jewish were not looking at the
historically Jewish groups. It was one way. They were recruiting against all the
groups, but for themselves they had a pretty small pool. I think they would have
gladly taken women who were not Jewish, but it didn’t work that way, for
whatever reason. And so they struggled. They continued to have an important
place and they still do. A student from a small town in Ohio said to me, “I lived in
a small town where there were almost no Jews. So I haven’t really had a Jewish
experience in my life, and I really want that, and I’m looking for a Jewish group
who will give me that.” It filled that spot fabulously for more than a few students
that I knew personally. They said, “I want that kind of identity, that kind of
support. I want to be in that culture and see what that’s like because I have never
lived that.” But the groups struggled to maintain their bigger numbers. I think that
was probably one of the bigger diversity issues.

Gender was a pretty big issue in the fraternity/sorority community when I
got there. It was “men” and “girls.” That was the language and that was the
behavior. “Men” and “girls.” They would refer to themselves as men and the
other people were girls. And the girls called themselves that as well. So I started
with language and thought maybe some behaviors could be changed if we could
get the language right. And I became pretty well-known among the students for
being relentless on that subject. But I think if you understand what your words do,
maybe that gives you a reflection on your behavior as well. I tried to get them to
stop using diminutive language. I can remember that they would have theme parties that were very degrading to women, even as bad as pimps and whores. They would have a theme party like “Roaring Twenties” and you would dress up in costumes. But pimps and whores, come on. That was not unique to Ohio State. That was all over the country. People thought that was a humorous theme. It took some talking on both sides to say to the women, “Do you think if you dress up that way that’s going to have implications for how you are treated later that night? Or the next day or the next night?” And, “What do you think that says about how you feel about yourself?” I often said, if somebody would tack up a sign on the phone pole that said, “Wet T-shirt contest,” I could tell you people who would sign up. I’m afraid that’s probably still true today. There is a group that would sign up for that. And so I worked to try and educate both the women and the men as to the implications of those issues. That was very important to me. Many of the men had had women teachers in elementary school, and then in high school about half and half women and men teachers. But having a woman advise the fraternities was a pretty big deal to them.

The job had been separate for many, many years, with an Assistant Dean of Men for fraternities and Assistant Dean of Women for sororities. When Dean Conaway and Mylin Ross, the Dean of Men, retired the same year, 1967, they put those jobs together into a [single job], Dean of Students, and Ruth Weimer became the first Dean of Students. As the Assistant Dean positions came open, they collapsed them. They didn’t just overnight say, “Okay, all these things that have been gender-separate are going to be put together.” It took a while on the
Greek side. And so around ’73 I think it is, Alex Thomson, and his counterpart, Pat Boyd Moore, both were leaving, and so he had sororities for a short time as a kind of Acting Coordinator, and then I was the first person hired to do both, which was fun.

Q. Okay.

A. I had 63 groups. The Greek system was huge, very popular. We had really good numbers. We had lots of people wanting to join. My predecessor said to me after I got the job, he said, “Greek Week,” which Ohio State had just about invented, was arguably the first one or two in the country to hold something called Greek Week. And he said, “Barbie, you’ve got to look into this Greek Week thing, because it is becoming a different place to get drunk every night. It’s really, really degenerated into too much partying.” And so that was something we took on. And I’m very proud of the way that changed. We had an art show, we had a house mothers’ bakeoff, because in those days we still had head residents and house mothers. They really were house mothers, the older women who lived in and supervised the house staff and set sort of the tone. In Greek Week we had a big parade down 15th [Avenue] and a rally behind the Union, sign contests, a wonderful talent show, just a terrific talent show. It was held at Mershon Auditorium several times, I think at least four times, which was “big time” both in expense and opportunity for the students to perform in such a gorgeous place. And really good talent. We would hire professionals to come in and emcee it, which was just terrific. Jerry Seinfeld, little-known Jerry Seinfeld came and was the emcee, and Sinbad and others. They would do comedy and I would always
have a little chat with them beforehand about things we don’t talk about and things we do, and where the lines were. Most of these guys were pretty good touring comics and they knew where the boundaries were and where they could have their fun. And the talent show was just remarkable. In fact, the young man who first put the talent show in Mershon, Mark Steele, went on to work in New York at Radio City and he worked for TV Guide, and a number of people doing big production events. He kind of got his start there, putting on a show in Mershon. This wasn’t a Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, “Let’s put on a show.” This was pretty sophisticated stuff. The Greek Week Committee became a very prestigious place to be, and the students did all the work and I was very much just an advisor. I instituted a lot of leadership programming to try and bring along their leadership skills. The students that were involved in Greek life were also involved in other places on campus, increasingly so, so that they didn’t limit their leadership to just east of High Street but kind of came across the street and started to get involved.

In the middle of those years, and I should probably remember when it was, but I want to say it was maybe ’79, ’80, ’81, ’82, the Makio, the University yearbook, stopped [being] published. Makio had been started by Phi Gamma Delta, our first fraternity on campus. The Phi Gamma [Delta] Chapter was founded the same year Ohio State had its first graduating class. Fraternities have been at Ohio State as long as there has been an Ohio State. The Phi Gamma Deltas started the yearbook, the Makio. They had published continuously for a long time. Well, as sort of a sign of the times, I guess, the yearbook wasn’t selling
very well. People were not interested in a book that had their picture in it as a graduating senior, didn’t feel any affiliation to that at all. And so the yearbook didn’t [get] published one year and it was quite the talk. The students in the Greek community said, “We’d like to have a yearbook. We’d like to have a memory book of our college days.” And so for, I think there are five issues, [the yearbook] was published as *The Encore*, a Greek-produced yearbook. And they chose their editors and all that, made it work financially, and did their own yearbook because there was no other possibility. Then the Makio was revived and *The Encore* didn’t want to compete with the Makio; they just wanted to have a yearbook. They did fill that gap, which was interesting.

The chapter houses at the time struggled with maintenance issues in these older homes, and they were starting to move into things like accessibility issues. Clearly, we were taking a stronger interest in the safety issues, everything from smoke detectors to fire escapes. And so I spent more than a small amount of time on issues of quality of life in the housing situation. The houses are magnificent in the sense that the Greek chapters have saved a part of this neighborhood that would be gone but for the fraternities and sororities. The University District Organization has always been extremely proud of what the groups have done. The old Neil mansion, which is the Kappa Sigma House. Another house that was on the Neil property, Alpha Sigma Phi on 15th, the old Hagerty family home, Sam Derby’s family home, the house at 14th and Indianola (Phi Psi) that was built to be a Governor’s mansion, but the Governor never lived in it. The Phi Kappa Psi house, which just underwent a $3 or $4 million renovation, is a gorgeous historic
home. The Kappa Alpha Theta house on Indianola at 16th and the Tau Epsilon House on East 17th were both designed by the same architect—beautiful examples of the period and gorgeous stone homes. These properties have been valuable and remain so. But like any old house, they have their woes. And having strong enough individual housing corporations that cannot live day to day but put aside money for when the roof is needed and that kind of thing, I spent a lot of time organizing the house corporation people and the alumni advisory people to say, “You need to talk to one another because the people next door are having the same problems you are, and we can learn from one another.” And of course all were national organizations with strong, national groups behind them. And so I tried to get them organized to talk to one another, and that was very effective and I think people were helped in figuring out where they got their insurance or where they had this or where they had that, so that they could maintain these properties. Several new houses were built also and/or major renovations were done, which are big investments in our community, which was great.

During that time also, when I first got the job, there was a Big Ten advisors meeting that had been a little bit sporadic. The first year I was there, I think it was at Michigan State, and the guy at Michigan State was fabulous and continues to be a terrific student affairs professional—no longer at Michigan State, of course. We decided the Big Ten group needed to meet every year because we had many of the same issues. Over-celebrating after a victory of the football team, that’s a Big Ten across-the-board issue, or alcohol or whatever else. So the Big Ten group met annually. Then in 1976 with a group of other Greek
as advisors around the country, I was one of the founding members of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, which is a national professional association for university advisors who work with fraternities and sororities. The group is flourishing today and provides support, training, an annual conference, and leadership on many issues and topics. It’s really a great organization. If you work with Beta Theta Pi at USC or at Baylor or at New Hampshire or Ohio State, it’s the same national organization, the same people at the top. And so there’s a great opportunity to talk back and forth about who is doing a really great job and where you can get help.

Some of the national organizations and campuses were doing terrific alcohol education programs. We got sponsorship from an Anheuser Busch distributor to do alcohol education programming for the Greek community when I was in the office, which I think was very valuable, even with 3.2 beer. My last year we didn’t have 3.2 beer anymore and [students] being over-served and the behaviors that resulted from that were a continuing issue that I had to work with. Sexual identity issues, particularly on the men’s side, were part of my office’s agenda. Homosexuality, coming out or not, and how that was perceived by others in the group—issues we dealt with, both in individual counseling one to one, and then with groups who would say, “We think we’ve got a couple of people who are gay in our group and we don’t like it.” We helped walk them through the issues. And the national groups were working with this, so I got a lot of support from the national groups. This was a time in our society when it was becoming more openly talked about. And of course, it’s going to affect the fraternal groups as
well, men’s and women’s, but it seemed especially so on the men’s side. Gender issues. Sexual identity. Alcohol. Those were some of the issues that I had to deal with.

And then you know, the risky behaviors—students getting themselves hurt or killed by a variety of horrendous things happening to them. I had too much of that, more than I can even express. I was no stranger to the emergency room and the funeral home, I’m sad to say. But I always went. Wherever it was, I made sure we were there to talk to a mom or a dad or, especially, to help the friends. Whether it was a student who took his or her own life or whether they wrecked their car or jumped overboard on a boat during break, it wasn’t always on campus. But they were our students and I needed to be attentive to that. I often knew them because I knew my groups pretty well. And one of the guys I was with after an accident, I just saw on Facebook—God bless Facebook—he just asked me recently to friend him. He’s living out in California. He’s an actor and has been a news broadcaster. As an undergrad he fell off the third floor roof of his fraternity house in the early morning hours after his 21st birthday. He literally walked out of the dormer window and off the edge of the roof, and regrettably, instead of falling into the bushes, he fell partially into the bushes which saved his life, but onto the adjacent driveway. He was a terrifically strong kid, weight lifting kind of strong, looked like a football player in terms of upper body strength, strong neck, big shoulders. He broke his neck, but the doctors said the reason he was not negatively affected in his spinal column was he had these tremendous muscles and [they] kind of held everything in place. But I’m the one they call in the
middle of the night. I went down and they’re screwing the halo on his head while he’s talking to me. His parents got there and his fraternity brothers, the place was kind of chaotic. But he wanted to see me. I remember thinking, “I don’t want to see this.” But he recovered magnificently and in his Facebook profile, as I looked at it, in his bio for his acting portfolio, it says that he is a survivor in many ways, and that he had fallen off the roof of his fraternity house. I knew him from other activities. He had been a leader, so I knew him. It wasn’t like it was an anonymous person to me.

I had two graduate students, student personnel assistants, one was a master’s and one was a Ph.D. candidate. I would have the Ph.D. candidate for two years; the master’s person was new every year, and they taught me the student personnel literature. Sociology is not so far afield from it, but student personnel administration was not a field that I knew anything about. But when I got over there in ’74, I had these grad students and Bob Rodgers ran the student personnel assistant program, and he gave me the reading list that they recommended—things I really needed to look at. He got me involved in professional associations in the field—invited me to co-present with him at the American College Personnel Association, started me getting to know people there. I became a committee chair there at the national level. He mentored me to catch up with the lingo of the field. I think I knew some of the principles from Sociology and some years of working with groups, but I didn’t know the jargon of that discipline. But I learned a tremendous amount about student development from him, what’s happening to these people at those stages of their college career. And so I became
a student of that, and then my colleague in Student Affairs at the time, Rich Hollingsworth, was also not trained in student personnel, and he and I learned together. Rich is a very creative person who came up with a lot of great ideas and helped me get involved in some different ways. When we had that bad behavior after football games, Rich was the one who had the great ideas. We used to go out and walk the streets and try and keep people from setting themselves on fire, let alone a car or a bus or something. The department decided to put on a big program as an optional activity. Rich and I had a lot of fun working on that.

The Beat Michigan Weeks were great. One year—I remember it was the year that Luke and Laura were getting married on General Hospital. I’m not a soap opera person but it was a huge thing and we got them to come for our party. ABC’s theme was “Love in the Afternoon,” and they were marketing that label. And we called our Michigan week “Love in the Afternoon,” and some of the stars of the show came for a big party at the Union on that Friday, and I believe that was the day after or the very day that Luke and Laura got married. So it was high profile media-wise for a TV event. Another year we had, “Who Shot JR” as our theme. And we had a cowboy hat autographed by the guy. So we always tried to come up with something that would mesh with popular themes that the students might buy into at the time. And offer alternative things for them to do. Big band, lot of noise, and we could serve beer because it was 3.2. So, get your beer here and party on the Oval and don’t be down there at 11th and High where the traffic is and you’re going to get hit by a car or whatever. We provided an alternative. And it worked, it really did. It was very successful for the time.
Q. When I started here in the late ’70s, the Beat Michigan Week was always a tension-filled week to begin with, but there were numerous incidents of people with Michigan licenses having their cars damaged. And certainly in the ’80s, there were so many other constructive activities for Michigan week.

A. Oh yes, we had had the blood drive in Greek Week for a long time which was, at that time, the largest blood drive they had in Central Ohio. And it’s funny – Tom Calhoon said to me in a meeting the other day, that he was off to go to donate blood, and he said he’s donated something like ten or eleven gallons of blood, a regular donor. He said, “I would never have done that except when I was a Delt we were all told we had to go and participate in the blood drive because we wanted to win the blood drive. My first donation was at the Ohio Union for the Greek Week blood drive and I’ve never stopped giving.” And I think the Red Cross feels that way. Well now we have the Blood Battle with Michigan and there are a lot of charity things. But I think the tone for that really was, let’s celebrate this rivalry and put it in context. And I think we made a contribution to that. The party on the Oval, there was a lot of angst about it among administrators, “Oh my, they’ll desecrate the Oval and [the] William Oxley Thompson [statue] will be knocked over,” and whatever other things. It was not an issue. We had porta potties everywhere and the buildings were all locked. People climbed up in the trees but that was about it. Some people took off their clothes. I guess that was about the worst thing that happened.

Just this past weekend, Oklahoma State University had a horrible incident on a campus after a football game where some people were trampled, many were
injured. It was just a nightmare. Too many people rushed the field and jumped off of walls that were 15 feet high or were pushed off, broken ankles, and all this. It was terrible. And they were caught by surprise. But someone that I talked to said their Greek Advisor, the person who works in Greek Affairs, got a phone call saying, “Well you’ve got to do something up there in that Greek neighborhood because there’s people dancing on the walls in front of the houses and they were very scantily and inappropriately clad. Something needs to be done.” First of all, in the great scheme of things, it’s like Mardi Gras. Do you really worry about somebody lifting up their shirt? I don’t know. Maybe there are more important things to worry about. But anyway, she goes up there to see what the situation is and the kids were wearing like tank tops and shorts. They were dressed like they are when they’re out and around. And this person that observed it has apparently not been around students that much to say, “Well, they were really dressed pretty much like they wear every day.” It was a warm night and there they were. Nobody was naked or anything. So she was kind of laughing about it. But when we organized things like that, there were nervous people who said, “When it’s on High Street we can at least blame it on the students, but bring it over here we have to take more responsibility.” That’s exactly the point. Let’s take some responsibility. We can do this. I wasn’t afraid of students. I think there were a lot of people who were afraid of students and that may still be the case sometimes. But we had moved away from the in loco parentis years of the Dean of Women saying, “Let’s back way, way away because these students are nothing but a lawsuit waiting to happen. They are not students; they are potential litigants. They
are not students; they are our enemies.” Or some other mindset that just drove me nuts. So I thought it was really important to say, “We have a duty to care. We cannot be absolved of that and we need to do this.” And it was fun and most of the people had a wonderful time and had great memories of some of these big events. And we were able to pull it off.

One thing that helped pull off the Oval event was that they said it would be too dark because we didn’t have adequate lighting out there for an event. And I got the Igel Company, which is a big construction company, a long-time Columbus company, more than 100 years, and I knew them because of my dad’s business with them. I called them and said, “Would you be willing to loan us those big lights that you have out on the highway when you’re working at night that make it nearly daylight?” And they said, “No problem, you’ve got them.” And we had these enormous lights. And it was like daytime out there. That was a really good safety move because there were no dark little pockets or anything. We could see everything that was going on. That was really exhausting, afraid of anything that might go wrong or whatever, but I have absolutely great memories from those times.

Q. You’re mentioning trying to hold or trying to move students from east of High onto the campus. One should perhaps note that this is a time when the High Street environment was pretty rough.

A. Yes, and frankly that created a little bit more headaches in the Greek Affairs office because there were not very nice places to go to party. The bars were just awful for the most part. Your foot stuck to the floor if you stood still very long.
The bathrooms were not where you wanted to be. And it was not a collegiate environment; it was something else. And so where would you go for fun? You would go the fraternity house. The fraternities, the men’s fraternities, became party central. That’s where they had their parties. And the women brilliantly don’t allow this to this day, and never have allowed alcohol in the house and all that, so the women would go over and throw up on their couches. Their property took the hit. The women’s houses looked beautiful. People would say, “Why do they look so beautiful?” Well, because we take all our bad habits over to their [the men’s] house. The house corporation would say, “Oh my gosh, we just had this all fixed and painted, and how did this happen?” “Well, other people were here and one thing leads to another.” But one reason those parties were so focused in the fraternity community is because there weren’t other choices. There really were not other good choices to go to, not very many places where you would feel that you could just kind of kick back and whatever. Now, there are so many choices of places, that you’d rather go to a public spot than to have it at the fraternity house because there are more bathrooms and they are nicer and there’s more chairs and tables. While they still have parties at their houses, I do think the development of High Street into offering other things, coffee places, and I don’t know, things other than beer halls. I can remember some places we went when we were in undergrad that I can’t believe the Health Department let them operate, but they did. So it was a tough scene.

And I think, too, that was a time when certainly in the late ’70s into ’80s, Greek organizations were doing fine. Numbers were good, but you didn’t wear
your letters when you went to class because there were people who were so strong anti-group feeling. And so you didn’t see people choosing to wear their letters when they came across High Street. And it took a long time to get past that and to say, “It’s an okay choice.” Some people need a small group environment. There’s some more recent research about what happens to students in their sophomore year, that they really have a need to belong and even cocoon with a group that they feel supported by. From that, they start by the end of that year to move out and have enough of a base, of knowing who they are, to go out and find out who are these other people. And within that junior year is when you start looking outward and testing boundaries that may be in their brain. And so that kind of cocooning would happen in a sorority or fraternity organization.

That first year in a residence hall you’re sort of thrown in there with everybody. And then you find those people who are going to be in your social and support group, and you connect with them and all decide to live in the same apartment or rooming house, or maybe it is four people, maybe it’s two people, maybe it’s eight people. You find a group – whether it’s an athletic team or a campus organization or club – that becomes your “fraternal experience,” if you will. It is a group that you’re going to be friends with longer than just that quarter. People you’re going to hang around with and stay in touch with, that kind of thing. And so some people have a very great fraternal experience without ever joining a fraternal group. But for others, that sense of identity and of, almost family, comes from joining a fraternity or sorority. I’ve had students say to me, “I lived longer in the fraternity house than I’ve ever lived anywhere in my life.” Or,
“These people know me better than anybody in my whole life.” Maybe they’ve come from divided families. Maybe they’ve been moved around here and there and they would say, “This is really the place that’s taken the biggest investment in who I am of anywhere I have lived.” That always made me both sad and happy, proud and sad at the same time. So I think at that time Greek groups really were serving a function of being that kind of base of support from which you could go out and deal with these much bigger issues. I just heard recently that one of the historically African-American sororities has initiated a Caucasian woman. By their account that’s the first time that’s happened here in that particular sorority, that they have pledged a Caucasian woman. So 2011 is an interesting time.

Q. I would think having been so many years responsible for so many organizations plus sometimes the tragic events that you have participated, you would have some burnout after so many years.

A. I was 11 years in Greek Affairs, and Ohio State had a tradition of people staying in that job. [OSU Dean of Men] Mylin Ross was the first advisor to the fraternities who had that title. But there had not been very many. And so it was expected that you would stay. Not that I was rewarded enormously, I didn’t make very much money, but it was a job you stayed in. And after I left in ’85, I think, they had maybe four different Greek advisors in about the next seven years. Nobody stayed. And it made a difference in a lot of ways, because the students don’t get to know that person. There’s no trust. I made it a point to be in every single fraternity and sorority house every year to meet with every group. I felt like I could walk in any time. I was smart – I didn’t walk in at 11:00 at night. When
they invited me to a party, I would always go when it began, so no one is embarrassed. Go early, whatever it is. They had tons of service activities, lots of service, and that still is the case. They are very engaged in community service. And they would often ask me to their service events and I would go. I really enjoyed seeing them in those settings and they knew me.

Some of them thought I was the wicked witch from the University because I had to come down on them about some dumb thing they had done, and I was the voice of the penalty sometimes. But for the most part, I think they respected me because I was consistent, even if they didn’t like it. I really worked hard to be consistent. If I got wind that some fraternity had a prostitute at the house, I was on that with both feet. And I knew enough people on the police side – and they knew I knew people – that I could pick up the phone and it would a big problem. I remember having a fraternity president come to me and say, “I want to be a dentist. I want to go to dental school, but there are some things happening in my fraternity house that, if they were known, I would not be able to go to dental school, because I’m the president and I fear that I would be arrested or held accountable.” I said, “That’s right. What are your choices?” And he said, “Well, I’m thinking of quitting.” And I said, “Why don’t you?” And he said, “Because I really love it and I really believe in it and I’m mad that a couple of people are kind of making me make this decision.” And I said, “Well, throw them out. Throw them out. Don’t you quit.” And he did. He got his national [fraternity office] involved. He admitted to them what was going on. And they cleaned it right up and people were gone and it turned it around. It was very unpleasant for
him. They were his friends. But he realized – and that’s the kind of thing I really tried to hit home to these student leaders – these accountability things, and said, “You’ve got to be responsible for this, if there’s hazing going on. The law doesn’t say you have to know, it says ‘should have known.’ The Ohio law says “if you knew or should have known.” Well, he should have known. And it’s like any issue, like parents serving alcohol to underage kids and the parents say, “Well, we told them not to do it.” Well, you should have known. You were right there and you didn’t do anything. So I tried to get them to see that they had to be accountable and that they had some control over that. They had the ability to make change. And all he had to do was stand up. I knew others would stand beside him because I knew the group had very strong academics and had a number of members that were on professional school tracks. They knew that they couldn’t be in a place where somebody was dealing drugs. And you can’t have someone who lives down the hall being a drug dealer. You can’t live like that. And it’s not like you were in a rooming house and can’t do anything about it. You’re the landlord. And they took care of it. So some people made some really tough choices, big decisions, that changed [the situation]. He’s a wonderful dentist, and he’s been very successful. He’s had a wonderful practice, been a great community leader, wonderful family. And I like to think that some of the roots for that were in that choice he made.

Q. Why don’t we turn our attention to the next page of your career?

A. That was an interesting one.

Q. The President’s Office.
I wasn’t really thinking about leaving Greek Affairs in ’85. I had been there 11 years, but I didn’t burn out because the students were different every year, for one thing. Every year, you got a whole new crop of students, and in Student Affairs, every year I got a new boss, it seemed like. Every couple anyway. There were all these reorganizations. So the years weren’t really the same. Yes, I could predict in the fall, there’s going to be this recruitment and then there’s going to be this event and the scholarship dinner. You could predict what events would be there. But the people were so different. That kept it fresh. Plus, I kept adding more things all the time. “We started to deal with that issue last year, let’s take on something else this year,” and kept kind of growing that. So I was able to shape that job into whatever I wanted it to be. And that was very satisfying. I didn’t change jobs; I changed the job. And I think that’s a really good strategy for people that like where they are but want to grow. Well grow the job and I did.

The Greek Advisor is a person in a real small box in a big organization; Student Affairs is a big box, but Greek Affairs has very high visibility because your constituency has high visibility. So people in senior roles at the institution know who you are. People in the community know who you are. That’s just the way it is. So as a consequence, that’s both good and bad. They know you because you responded to a catastrophe well. No President wants to be surprised by a headline the next day in the paper. So when there was an incident, I knew that had to go right up the line really quickly to my boss and [on] up the line. And then their question always was, “What are they doing about it?” And often that would be asked directly to me. So I knew the leadership folks in the University, as do
most Greek Advisors because the chapters ask senior leadership to dinner and invite them to judge their contests and do all kinds of fun things with them. University Presidents usually like that. And then the negative things, they see you in action. So I knew the people in Bricker.

They had a position open up in what was called editorial projects, and Lisa Holstein was the director and she had an assistant who was going to be leaving. And she posted a position for someone that had a set of skills that was remarkably congruent with what I had done. Part of it was writing, editing, that kind of thing, which I had had a lot of experience with. And while I was in Greek Affairs I did a ton of speaking and training around the country, and certainly around the campus. I probably delivered, I don’t know, 1,000 or more programs all over the country. People would ask me to come and speak. So I had done a lot of stuff like that and knew how to do that and how to write that. And then another part of the job that proved to be an asset for me is someone who knew students and knew how to connect the President to students in an effective way. And someone who knew how to do programming a little bit, kind of make things happen. Well, I know how to make things happen. We had made a lot of things happen along the way. So I thought, “Well, maybe I might throw my hat in the ring for that. That might be sort of interesting.” And from afar I had admired [OSU Pres.] Ed Jennings And when I was offered the job, a lot of people said, “It’s really dangerous to move from line to staff.” And I was in a line position, I could have potentially moved up to be the director of all the student activities or whatever, and kind of move my way along on that track. But when you go in a staff position, particularly with
someone as volatile as the President — here today, gone tomorrow. You’re going
to be sitting on a curb. You’re going to have no job. I thought, “I’m willing to risk
that.” So I went over there, and in the beginning I did briefings, preparing the
President for where he was going, what was expected, who was there. Because I
had been around a long time already, I had already been 11 years in Greek
Affairs, five years in disaster research, four years in undergraduate. I mean by the
time I went over there in ’85, I had been there since ’61. I knew a lot of people.
Between ’61 and ’85, I had met everybody once. I was meeting them all the
second time. That was an advantage. I had a history. And I knew people in the
community because I had been involved in a lot of community things. When
doing all these briefings and things, I proved to be helpful. And so when I went
over to Jennings, I did briefings, I did bullets, short remarks, evaluated student
invitations. I would say “yes” to this, “no” to that. Some of the fraternities would
figure out how to get the President to come to something and he would go to it
every year. And there were other fraternities that never ever had the President
come because they didn’t know how to ask him or didn’t think of it or something.
And I’m like, “Maybe, instead of going back there again, maybe we should go to
a different group.” So I was able to do that kind of thing.

And then after I was there a couple of years, Lisa left and I was offered the
Director position, which meant that I was doing all the major speeches as well as
a lot of smaller ones, too. I had a person then who worked with me, who was
doing what I had been doing. And I had two people who were part of the letters
process, handled all of the President’s correspondence. And kind of got my arms
around where the President’s name was being used. Jennings launched this fund-raising campaign in a way that had never been done. But you had people over in development using his name on letters and brochures and quotes and all kinds of things. And we wanted to get a handle on a consistent message. And in those days, most everything was printed at the University print shop. And so the print shop had what they called the samples box, which was everything they would print, they would put a sample in a box for themselves, and they made a box for me. And every week I got a big box with everything they had printed, a copy of everything they had printed. And I would go through and it might just be internal publications or whatever. But I could see if somebody designed their own letterhead that wasn’t University letterhead. I would pull those out and walk down to [Director of University Communications] Mal Baroway’s office and say, “Look at this. W is this letterhead? Why doesn’t it look like the rest of it?” And they could kind of get on the matter. Somebody would be having a conference and I would always look and see and it might say, “Welcome by the President.” Then I would look at my calendar and I’d see, “Well, we don’t have anything like that on here.” And I’d call upstairs and say, “Do you have anything on there for this? It’s got the President’s name and it says he’s going to be there.” That kind of stuff. We were able to catch those kinds of things. Sometimes it would be a message or a quote or something, but most people got the idea pretty quickly that if you wanted to have something, send it over to my office first. And I would put my eyeballs on it, and most of the time it was fine. But we started to get a handle on that. We started to get a handle on messaging as related to the campaign,
making sure, I would always ask them, “What are your two or three biggest themes right now that I can insert in things he’s doing, that you want him to talk about every time.” And I did that.

Jennings was a great guy to work with. He was very kind to the staff. He started the [University] Staff Advisory Committee. That’s not a surprise because to me he was very staff-aware. He treated us wonderfully, like colleagues, and respected everybody on the team, whatever their dues were. He was a fun speaker to work with because he could do a pretty good job. He did a little better than pretty good. He didn’t like big speeches. He didn’t like big crowds, big speeches. But he could do them. He sounded gravelly-voiced and he kind of looked the part. He was much better in Q&A or a smaller group. We tried to get him into smaller, rather than larger [groups], even in a student context. Instead of meeting with 200 students in some kind of conference theatre in the Union, he would do much better to go to dinner with 20 students ten times. That was much more effective. For him too, he would enjoy it more.

Q. I remember when I was invited once to the University Senate and President Jennings introduced me, and I was struck with how nervous he was. I could see him back stage and he was just surprisingly uncomfortable in a large group. He must have addressed many large groups.

A. Many. It never was real easy for him. Lisa told me when I first got there that one of his nervous habits was to put his hand in his pocket and jiggle his change or his keys, which could become very annoying to the audience, and certainly get picked up on the microphone. And so she would literally say, “Give me what’s in your
pockets,” before he would walk out. So you learn what somebody’s foibles are, I guess. He was very engaging in a small exchange, and it was hard to get the big audience to see that. So he appeared to be more distant in the big groups than he really was or is as a person. He was very much a product of the business school: business school vocabulary, business school context. So in writing speeches and remarks, any examples I could find or use that were more business-oriented, he was comfortable with that. He had worked with the World Bank in Tanzania. It was helpful to me that I had been in a College of Business, but also I really tried to follow the business page and look for good examples of something that he would latch onto very easily. Because the world of finance was very much his expertise, I would love to be sitting next to him today to talk about this world monetary situation, because he sees the big picture, and he really knows his stuff. He’s so good. But if he were President today, those would be examples or issues he could talk about with great comfort and ease.

You have to find what’s their comfort zone and for him the business vocabulary was very easy. He was a good baseball fan, growing up loving the Washington Senators. You just find out areas where he can easily talk about things, even use these topics, which was great. When I got there was really when the more controversial years came along. We laughed about how often he used the word “excellence,” but I do think he is the first President who really got us there. I knew [Novice] Fawcett when I was a student because his daughter Jane went to Columbus North with my husband, and was very active as a student leader, same age as me. Jane Fawcett was a friend and they were her parents. It wasn’t like he
was the University President in that sense, but I got to know him early on, which might be another reason Mrs. Conaway took interest in me is because I’m sure in a situation where my name came up, he would know I was one of Jane’s friends, that kind of thing. We had known Jane a long time, and her family was wonderful as is she. So I knew Fawcett as a student leader and as Jane’s dad. I’ve mentioned this to other groups; I’ve spoken to a number of alumni groups over the years about the University presidents – that Fawcett came to us having been a Superintendent of Schools. Then Enarson comes to us having been president of Cleveland State [University], the first President of the brand new Cleveland State. Jennings came to us as having been President at [University of] Wyoming. The thing was ratcheting up. There’s a progression there. I don’t think when we were looking for a President the last couple of times, or whenever the next time is, that the Superintendent of Schools is going to get put in the stack. I don’t think the President of Cleveland State would be a likely choice.

Q.   And Enarson was also our first President with a Ph.D.

A.   That’s right. And then when Gee was chosen, there was some controversy, as there always is, because his doctorate was in Education, not one of the core disciplines of the University, not in a liberal arts and sciences frame. So to some people, that was as good as him having gone to trade school, I mean in the most cynical sense. So we’ve had to come along a pretty long continuum, I think. Each President is good for his time without question, but there’s no going back when you look at where we are. Jennings probably led us on the biggest leap. William Oxley Thompson undoubtedly was the biggest leap. In my view, Thompson made
the biggest leap of what this University was going to be. But I think Jennings
made a big leap by saying, “We’re not just the best school in Ohio; this isn’t
Columbus State. This is Ohio State and this is a national institution that can be
excellent.” And he hammered that message so hard. It was a new way of thinking.

Q. It was also, I believe under the Jennings administration, that [there was] the
emphasis on The Ohio State University, whereas previously there had been
differences in the orthography. Sometimes it was capitalized “The,” sometimes
not.

A. We used to use OSU. Remember? We had that square Ohio State logo appear all
of a sudden, because there are other OSU’s. So why would you want to call
yourself OSU? That could be Oregon, it could be Oklahoma, or it could be us.
There’s no doubt The Ohio State University is a singular institution. The new
design of the logo and the new way we talked about ourselves was important. In
Ohio when you say OSU, everybody knows what you mean. In Columbus, they
know what you mean. But he started getting us to think, in the big world campus,
how are they going to know us? We’re Ohio State. We’re The Ohio State
University. Yes, he really changed the vocabulary and the thinking, elevated the
ambition. Isn’t that when all those Board of Regents programs started to come in?
The excellence money? So it was not just at Ohio State, but at the state-wide level
elevating the whole thing. And all of a sudden we started thinking that the best
people in their discipline in the world can be here. That whole selective-
excellence business was a different way of thinking about doing things. We didn’t
just spread the money around evenly; we invested in areas of strength. Jennings
really saw the possibilities there. He had been at Iowa, greatly influenced by his
time at Iowa, I believe. He had a good President there, whose name right now is
going to escape me, but I think a lot of his thinking was developed with his time
at Iowa. And also, North Carolina. Bill Friety from North Carolina was one of his
mentors. So Jennings came into this armed with some perspectives that were big,
broad, ambitious. And that was the first time that had happened. And I think he
really said, “Ohio State can go places,” and we did. But it was not without
controversy. He had some tough times and that was hard for his staff, and of
course, very hard for him. The biggest issue from a public perspective was the
whole firing of Earl Bruce and the way that got kind of complicated with the
personal issues. And boy, that was like wild fire.

Q. What was it like to be in the President’s staff during the Earl Bruce crisis?

A. Well, I thank God there wasn’t electronic media. I can’t imagine what it must be
like today. But without electronic media it was still sufficiently challenging. The
letters folks, the people that opened the mail, they sorted the mail, and pulled the
things that went directly into the President. There were things that he never
needed to see. There were letters that needed responded to and the people that
worked for me drafted those letters for his signature. If he would dictate a letter,
that would get transcribed and done by my team. So the Earl Bruce letters, what
are we going to do with them? I’m confident that I am the only person who read
every one of them, and there were more than 1,000. The number 1,000 sticks in
my mind. And I read them all. They all got answered unless there was any
obscenity involved. If somebody used an obscenity, we did not answer it. And so
we developed some standard responses that we thought would be useful. But still those letters, I just kept looking at them. I had a box in my office and put them in there.

And so the old sociologist in me went through and figured out, who are all these people that wrote to us? The computers weren’t nearly as sophisticated as they are now, so it required more work. But the person who said, “I’m not going to give you another dollar,” had very often never given us a dollar. And the person who said, “I’m not going to send my kids to your University,” had never sent anybody here. Many of them were from out of state. Many from other big sports college towns. If you counted them all up as to how many were in Ohio and not in Ohio, and I did all these kinds of reporting on them, I’d say for the most part, they were sports people. The kind of people who call into sports shows and all that. I’ve listened to a lot of that and I have even called in twice in my life. The letter writers were not a cross section of people in any kind of interesting way. They were not Ohio State loyal people. They were from all over the place. I think people who really cared a lot about Ohio State through all of this are not the ones who write a flaming letter to the President. They express their views in other ways, I think, and make their opinions known. It was depressing to read them. I gave him a summary, and I pulled out five or six I thought were typical of the genres. But some were really, really hateful and awful. Many of them were just uninformed, and the writers just didn’t know what was going on. I’m sure the mail after Woody was fired must have been a huge amount after Dr. Enarson had to fire Woody. And so it goes. But it was hard. It was hard on morale. It was hard
to hear the University attacked and the President attacked. But when you looked at it closely, opinions that really matter, somebody who had graduated from here and maybe sent their kids here, maybe they were a school teacher in Ashtabula and they’ve always loved Ohio State and loved sending their students here but are really having second thoughts. That’s the letter you want to spend some time with. But they are so rare. It’s more likely some yahoo, people venting.

It was hard, though. I think we felt a responsibility. I did and I think others did too, to keep him cheered up and to keep him reinforced. That he was doing a great job for the University, because he was. We didn’t have to make that part of it up, we tried not let the rest of us get too down. When Jennings was President, the staff had great parties, and Herb Asher was one of my co-conspirators because he was on the team at the time. I got a certain reputation for being able to come up with funny things. And so we did, almost at the height of this, he and Barbara had been married and we did a holiday party and we did the whole thing around “The Dating Game” and the “Newlywed Game.” And I remember we had this stage set – all at our own expense, of course. We dealt with all the stuff that had been sort of floating around on the scandal sheets but made jokes of it, with a very light touch. Everyone had so much fun. It broke all the tension, made everybody laugh. It was really fun, and I know he appreciated just everybody saying, “Hey, that’s over.” We made a lot of jokes about whatever war was going on. And then we made some videos, too. I guess I made some of those after [Jennings], when Gordon was there. The University did a very fancy campaign video on the Jennings years, the first one we had ever done. It was very nice. And then I just
took the video part of it and laid a different audio track to it. So the whole thing was about money, money, we want your money, we’re going after your money. It was really pretty brutal in the sense of not, “We’re a lovely University that changes lives, American dreams and all that business.” It was all about money, money, money, money, money. And every song that had “money” in it we used to put behind these things. And the scene that I thought would probably end my career but was really funny, was when Les Wexner was announcing the fabulous Wexner Center gift and there was a podium. If you fiddled with the video, you could make his arms go up and down repeatedly. Obviously that didn’t really happen, but we did it and the soundtrack was, “If I were a rich man …” And I remember at the party Ed Jennings put his head down on the table like, “Oh my gosh.” It was a very funny moment – shown only once, to our own small group. The whole thing was a satire on fund raising and Jennings was easy to joke with, was a lot of fun. He could take a joke and frankly we needed some of that at some of those points. So we honed in on using a little humor. He had a place out at Apple Valley and he had us all out there one time. We had a wonderful office picnic and people brought their kids and everything. He was just great with them. He really was. They had a boat, and he took kids out on the boat. It was just fun. He was really a joy to be around. One other thing I wanted to mention about Jennings that I thought was important is, he’s the guy that brought Woody back and had him speak at Commencement and got him back in the fold. He doesn’t get any credit for that, I don’t think, but he should. The time was right. It was a
different President and he was able to just gracefully do that. It closed a circle that needed to be tidied up, and I thought was just wonderful that he did that.

And the other thing that he did, he’s the one who said we could have concerts in the stadium. Remember when we had Pink Floyd and U2 and Elton John and George Straight? Those were wonderful. I’m so sorry we don’t do those anymore. They were on Memorial Day weekend, and I remember at the time [that] the other Vice Presidents were really nervous about it. Dick Jackson, who was the Business VP, fabulous guy, gosh I loved Dick Jackson, because he loved students and he never forgot what this place was about. He was very student-focused. And his area was going to really have to do a lot. And he was very excited about it. A can-do kind of guy. I know he was worried about all the different security issues and noise and damage and this and that, all the “rock and roll” stuff. But those guys made that happen and I really appreciated Jennings saying – I really think it did come down to Jennings saying, “Don’t tell me why we can’t do it; tell me why we can.” Because other Big Ten schools had been doing it. A student who brought the idea forward had researched it pretty carefully and a lot of Big Ten schools had been doing it and making money doing it for their Student Affairs divisions. And those were wonderful community events. And I believe Ed thought, "Why not? Why don’t we jump all over this?" And we did and they were very successful. Sixty thousand people. That’s pretty neat when you can put those fixed stages in there. I went to every one of them and they were absolutely great. The Rolling Stones – that was really something to see. A real community builder. So he took some chances and did some things like that, too.
He announced he was leaving and everybody said, “Well, now you’re going to be out of a job.” He hired me, his people hired me. And so get your resumes ready, gang. And we literally had a staff meeting where we talked about that. I remember Sue Mayer, who was our office director, took care of everything. Sue said, “The transitions are always a challenge and some of you might not want to or be able to be here. We just don’t know.” So certainly something as intimate as writing for somebody has to work on a personal level. So, we didn’t know what would happen.

They hired this guy from Colorado [E. Gordon Gee]. In the summer he was coming to meet with the staff. And I was in Arizona at a board meeting of a higher ed group that I was on their board. And I had to go to this board meeting. So I thought, “Well, I’m out because I’m not there for the meeting. I’m going to be just passed over on this one.” I was just horrified that I couldn’t be there. But I couldn’t afford to fly in and back and back for just a meeting. I didn’t have the money to do that. So I thought, “Well, if that’s the way it is, that’s the way it is.” So I wasn’t there for his first casual meeting with the staff. But as soon as I got back, the next time he was in, I got to spend a little bit of time with him. And then I went out to Colorado and met with the people there. A little group of us went out to find out how they handled their correspondence and appearances and how they handled all kinds of business.

Q. Okay.

A. Well, we were in a different league, believe me. We saw what he was doing out there, volume wise. We were just like, “Oh my God, we’re going to have to really
step it up.” The biggest differences were volume right away. We were doing more
than 300 preparations a year for speeches and briefings. Not 100, we were doing
300. And the thousands of letters and personal handwritten notes and all that kind
of business. So we really knew we were going to have to ratchet it up and make
sure we had it perfect. One of our first meetings was about football because it was
summer and we were getting ready for the fall. I remember the meeting. He said
he wanted to have more VIP treatment so he could use the game to raise money.
He didn’t think we were really using the game as well as we could to tell Ohio
State’s story, which was true. So, we didn’t have the big boxes or anything, and
he said, “What if we had this section of seats where we could invite people to
come and sit and they can have, like, either servers or waiters and we could put
backs on their seats?” He wanted to make this kind of VIP seating section. And I
just thought it was a terrible idea. I thought, “It’s going to look like all the “fat
cats” are over here getting their lovely treats, and we’re over here eating a half-
cooked hotdog.” I just thought it was bad because it was so public. It was so
exposed. And it was different in a way that would be noticeable. People would
say, “What does this guy think he’s doing?” So anyway, I didn’t think it was a
very good idea. We got out of the meeting and we’re still mulling it over and
everybody is kind of rolling their eyes and trying to figure out what we should do.
How can we do this? So I very bravely went up and I said, to Mary, “I’d like to
see the President.” His door was open and he could see me and he said, “Come on
in.” And so I said, “I’ve been thinking about that meeting all day and I just want
to tell you that I don’t think that’s a very good idea, and here’s why.” And I told
him why I thought it was a bad idea, in terms of public perception. There was a bull horn next to his desk that was the property of West Virginia University, so it was a souvenir of this presidency before, and he picks up his bull horn and turns it on and says, “Barbie Tootle just called me a dummy.” And they could hear it, all over the second floor of Bricker, and he said it like two or three times. “She told me I’m really dumb, I don’t know what I’m doing.” And I thought, “What is with this guy? What’s going on?” And a couple of people came in then that were in the hall and I said, “Is this a goodbye party? Are you all coming in to say goodbye to me?” And he said, “This is just what I want to see happen. Tell me what’s going on. How am I going to know if you don’t tell me?” That was it. He was thrilled that I did it. I couldn’t believe it. But with him, that’s how it was. You knew by the way he would tell you. I knew then that I really wanted to work with him. We’re a year apart, not quite a year apart in age, and so we had a lot of the same reference points, touch points in our growing-up lives. So we really did click as a team. But that was my first experience with his way of doing things!

Q. You’re mentioning the president’s pre-game football event. That has some history to it. I remember the first one I went to, which I think was under Jennings, it was a very casual event. You went to your table. I think there was somebody playing a piano and it was held in Drake Union, that I remember. And that was it. You got your food, maybe the President made a remark or two, but it was very brief, it was very low-key. But under Gee, things changed greatly.

A. Yes. When I was an undergraduate, Novice Fawcett was President. The Chimes junior honor society had the opportunity to be hostesses for the President’s pre-
games. Fawcett invited guests to come and have lunch before the game, and the
games were always in the afternoons, of course. In those days TV didn’t rule
anything. And he had it in the Stadium Dorm cafeteria. And the members of
Chimes would have guest lists and we would greet people and show them to their
tables. It was a buffet walk-through lunch in the cafeteria. Legislators, donors,
friends of the University would come to that. Its function was, you got a nice hot
lunch, you’re already at the stadium, you’ve probably got a good parking place to
go along with your invitation, so you got to park close, you got to have a hot
lunch, and then go in and sit down at the game. The President, he and Marjorie,
would stand in the foyer and greet people almost like a receiving line. “We’re so
glad you’re here, hello, hello.” And then once everybody was in, they would walk
around among the tables and talk with people and host in that way. But that’s all it
was. With Enarson, I think that’s when we moved to the Drake. The Drake must
have been built during the Enarson years. Is that true?

Q. That’s correct, early ’70s.

A. And so that provided a more attractive venue in the area because prior to that,
there wasn’t much of an area. So anyway, we went over to the Drake. For the
Enarsons it wasn’t a particularly big deal. And then, with Jennings, we invited
more people because we were doing fund raising. And so I think he upgraded the
food a little bit, too. It wasn’t just hot dogs and stadium food; it was more of a
nice lunch. You’d come in the door of the Drake and there would be Ed standing
at the end of the hall, and he’s say, “Hi Rai, how are you? We’re so glad you’re
here.” And then you would go in and get your food and sit down and have your
lunch, and that was about it. Gordon had figured out at West Virginia, and then had polished at Colorado – the idea of using the game as an opportunity to advance your message. One thing he said to us from the start is, “We are never going to have a party. There will be no parties. We will have events to advance the purpose of the University. And we want them to be fun.” Lord knows he loves fun. But there will not be any parties. And these pre-games were not considered just a little perk for you as a donor, that you get a good parking space and a hot meal; you would come to that event and go away with a different view of the University. Information that you would maybe later that night in a social setting say, “You’ll never believe what I learned at the University today or who I met or what I saw, what I heard.” Water-cooler talk for many. He wanted people to be saying, “Oh my gosh, this is so amazing.” So they were themed elaborately and carefully and creatively. Sometimes we would theme them around the opponent. When we played Minnesota – his first year I believe it was – we did a whole Lake Woebegone thing. We had a picnic kind of idea. The tables had picnic cloths and ants and an old pickup truck as the stage. He stood in the back of like a ’40s or so, really neat pickup truck, and that was his platform to speak to the group. And we featured some of our [agricultural] programs and WOSU/PBS programming. And he did a whole funny Keilor thing about, women are beautiful, people are above average and all that, and all that kind of “pretty good grocery” routine that, “We’re not just a pretty good place; we’re extraordinary.” But it was fun, it was interesting. We did a Snow Bowl thing for the Michigan game, where we featured the Byrd Polar Research Center.
Q. I was there.

A. You were there, oh, well, good. Then you know that we had mementos from their collection. We did a thing for a Penn State game I remember that was fun that featured the Chemistry Department. We had a woman who taught an introductory chemistry course who did sort of a Mr. Wizard, Bill Nye the Science Guy, kind of thing. She had this big table and huge beakers and she was able to turn blue water red, like Penn State blue and Ohio State red. She had a lot of little funny lines she would put with it, so that people weren’t coming to a fun pre-game lunch and then getting chemistry shoved down their throat. She got their attention and showed them some small experiments, and then she took it up to what were some of the more sophisticated. She was just fabulous. We had some great people participate in those. We had great fun themes. I remember he arrived at one riding in the side car of a Harley, that was funny. One time when the Vet Hospital was not yet open – the new Veterinary Hospital, the Galbreath Center – but anyway, it was not yet open and we had the pre-game in the surgical suite. And he came in on a horse. That was big risk [but] it was a lot of fun. The architecture and engineering library was not yet open. We had one in there. And it gave us a great chance to talk about those programs. We had one in the lobby of Bricker – the second-floor lobby of Bricker – that focused on the business school, the Fisher College. And we had a drill team, the brief-case drill team, which was really our NROTC drill team with brief cases full of money and they were wearing suits and ties. But they knew how to drill. I knew if I got a group that knew how to drill, it would be easier to have them do it than find a group of business students and try to get them to learn how
to drill. They did the brief case drill and it was very funny and they were standing at attention and the drill sergeant was barking at them about, “What did the Dow close at yesterday,” and all these kinds of things. And then the punch line of the whole thing is that they opened the brief cases and threw the money up in the air and all this paper money fell down over everyone, because it was a fundraiser for the Fisher College. It was a lot of fun. And a very memorable opening. The guy who ran the student investment program in the Fisher College, where the students are investing some of our endowment money, he did a PowerPoint of that whole program. It was so impressive; it was just fabulous. And we had the people out of the audience making choices of investments. It was really fun.

But the main thing was, they were creative, they were tied to something of the day, and the people walked out of there excited. We did one at the Wexner Center where the guys at ACCAD [OSU’s Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design], they were so good to me. Wayne Carlson was the best. We had them morph Brutus Buckeye into Gordon Gee, in a cartoon way when he was first introduced as they were eating their lunches. Time for the program, this comes on and we talked about computer art, that whole thing of computer graphics and Chuck Csuri and all of that. Karen Bell was at the time chair of dance, later to become Dean of [the College of the Arts], but she was chair of dance and we were talking about the great dance department. And we got volunteers from the audience, she had them come up and she taught them a little dance routine. And I remember Cheryl Krueger of Cheryl’s Cookies was one who participated, a couple of other people that we knew who were good sports, and they’re up on the
stage and she taught them a little dance and the crowd had the most fun and it got them involved and they went away knowing that we have the premier academic dance program, not conservatory program but academic dance program in the country. It was great. So we had to come up with great ideas, hands-on fun, interesting, quick, it’s a pre-game, out you go. And I would say that is typical of the way he ratcheted up almost every kind of social occasion. We didn’t just have a party; there was always a takeaway message.

When we did the student scholarship recognition dinner that became more of an event where you would focus on an academic area. It looked beautiful and it was dignified and wonderful and clever. Another good example is the Distinguished Teaching Award. We used to send people a letter that would say, “Congratulations, you’ve received the Distinguished Teaching Award. There will be a banquet in your honor on so and so date at which time it will be presented.” And he’s like, “Why are we hiding our light under a bushel here, folks? Let’s make these awards something more.” And that’s when we went out and gave apples. And I remember that people, some people around the table said, “Maybe we shouldn’t give them a real apple; maybe we should get like a brass apple or a glass apple or something like that.” And he said, “No, a real apple. It’s the event, it’s the meaning.” They’re going to get a check, a pay raise, whatever it is, and they get a nice plaque. But the real thing was walking into their class by surprise, here’s the President, who walks in and says, “You’ve won this award.” In front of all of those students. We would invite their colleagues, the chairman, we’d bring the college colleagues, they’d walk in behind the President and line the wall. And
all of a sudden you’re receiving this award in front of people that really matter to you. Your partner would be invited to come and be there. So it became a kind of family thing. It was wonderful. You [could] get a letter, or you [could] get the President of the University walking in and telling you, “You are excellent.” That’s the way he thinks about stuff. And it made a huge difference.

He said he wanted to go around and visit every county in the State every year. Well, he didn’t know there were 88. I think West Virginia had many fewer and Colorado had many fewer, although the distances were challenging there. A story about West Virginia: I went to West Virginia with him one time, to Charleston, and some of the people that had been on the Board at West Virginia were there, who had recruited him. He was the Dean of their law school. They made him President. And he told [a] story that was funny, that he was traveling the back roads of West Virginia raising money for West Virginia [University]. And Schoenbaum was one of the big names in West Virginia, the Elby’s thing. And so he goes to call on Alex and Betty Schoenbaum and he said, “I’m the new President of West Virginia [University]. I’m trying to raise money for West Virginia. You are great West Virginia citizens, a great success and inspiration to everyone. And I’d really like you to the help us.” And Alex said, “I’m an Ohio State man and I’m going to support Ohio State. But I love what you are doing and good luck.” Fast forward. He went back to him, “Do you remember when I came to you as President of West Virginia? Well I’m back and I remember what you said.” Alex and Betty were great, wonderful friends of this University. They were just generous in so many ways. But I love the story that, “I give to Ohio State.”
Then he becomes President here and goes back, because those big gifts don’t happen overnight. Ed Jennings made many trips to Max Fisher’s in Detroit, to talk to him about a gift that Gordon had the good fortune to accept. But that had been a long time coming. A lot of Presidents had worked on that. But the State Tours, visiting all the counties, was something I was very involved in. He wanted to do it, and we made a committee to come up with ideas. Where could we go? Who could we see? And I went on all of them, every mile. And they were interesting. I’ve seen all of the State of Ohio and I’ve been in very interesting places that I would never have been otherwise, from Heinz Ketchup to Dannon Yogurt to a coal barge to a steel mill, to you name it. That was such an important strategy, to make the University seem more like it belonged to everyone in Ohio.

Q. We should mention for the record that these were the Roads tours.

A. Roads, no, that’s something different. The Roads Scholars is a different thing. Those roads trips were to take new faculty before school started in the fall, and staff, senior staff, around the state so they could see where their students come from. One overnight generally, one overnight, and they would go either north, some years they would go south. And they would get to see some of this state and get familiar with Ohio. So that was mainly faculty-focused. It was a program that, I think maybe Graham Spanier [president] at Penn State [University] started it, and Gordon thought it was a great idea, to get your faculty to have a better sense of where the students are from. Get out on the road in Ohio and see some things. So we would be sure to go to small towns. The State Tours, he would go out and he still does go out in the summer for days at a time and visit all different parts of
the state. We visited all 88 counties in two years. I know I’ve been to all 88 counties three times, every county three times. So we would plan an itinerary. We’d usually be gone two nights. So you might go to the Rock “n Roll Hall of Fame, you might go close to the lake, west of Lorain, where there’s a lot of migrant workers. Went to a migrant camp where, during the day, they had a child care program that had people from Ohio State Extension coordinate others who were doing dental care, teaching the kids how to brush their teeth and giving them all these little tooth brushes and stuff. They were just doing wonderful things as part of this child care [program] because the parents were in the fields picking tomatoes and cucumbers for the pickles and the ketchup.

We went all over the state. We would drive down the highway and somebody would have an Ohio State flag in their yard and we’d stop and go up and knock on the door. We would always go, and this is a really important part of it, visit the legislator in their own neighborhood. How much do they love sitting in Betty’s Diner with the President of Ohio State? You know it’s in the paper the next day. We talked to more small-town newspaper people than you can ever imagine. Weekly newspapers. When we were in a county or in an area, we’d always talk to the newspaper people. And then, they would have a story about “Ohio State President visits our area.” Guidance counselors, high schools. We didn’t always go in the summer, but it was easier usually to go in the summer. But we would go during school, too. Alum clubs, the evenings were always alum functions. So we’d start with the breakfast with somebody, then we would go to whatever industry was most important to that county or that area. And then we
would always find some tie to Ohio State. I remember going to Rothchild’s [Robert Rothschild Farm Market & Café] over in Urbana that makes these gourmet fruits, jellies, and all kinds of high-end stuff. They are still marketed a lot in real fancy containers. And they said when they had the idea to start that business, they didn’t know if blueberries would really hold up or fall apart. They would want them to look beautiful in these containers. And our food science people really made a huge difference in that company even being there. The big potato farm [Michael Farms] over there that the Michael family has in Urbana – and Todd is one of my fraternity boys – I knew people a lot of places, and that always helped when we were having our meetings. I’d say, “Well, what about this and what about that?” We went all over the state. We went to the training facility for the Cleveland Browns in Berea. We were in Jacobs Field when it was under construction. Talking to people about economic development in their area. The urban farmers program in Cleveland, I remember, was fabulous. This master farmer was so neat and they had people doing window boxes and pocket gardens. Extension is really doing unbelievable things all over the state. And then our students now, with Tracy Stuck over at the Ohio Union, in Student Affairs, she organizes these tours now. And they take a group of students along who provide kind of ground support when you get there and when you put on these events. And they also do parent events. It's really grown, a wonderful outreach.

A typical story, more typical than it might sound: We were going up to Cedar Point and having a luncheon with people that were fishing, wanting to develop the recreational fishing industry on the Lake [Erie] as an economic
development strategy. And the zebra mussel and all that business, you know? But the event was being held at a restaurant at Cedar Point. And so we drive up to the gate at Cedar Point. We never had Gee drive because he was always so distracted; he’s terrible. So he’d be in the passenger seat and someone else would drive, usually Greg Brown in Mal Baroway’s shop. And I was usually in the back seat. And so we pull up to this booth at Cedar Point and to this person, whoever it is, we said, “We’re going to a luncheon that’s at the so-and-so restaurant and we were told just to tell you that and we would not have to pay admission to come to Cedar Point.” “Oh, that’s right,” and then she kind of looked in and said, “Is that Gordon Gee?” And he said, “Well I sure am.” And she said, “Oh my gosh, wait right here.” And she runs over to the next booth and gets another person, cars backed up behind us, brings the over person over, “Oh, we’re so thrilled to see you. Oh my gosh, you’re Gordon Gee.” And he said, “Are you Ohio State students?” One says, “No, I go to Bowling Green, but I just love you.” Now, come on. It was just incredible, backing up traffic.

He was the face of the University, there’s no question. And I think those kind of events had a big impact on what I was doing, and they also generated a lot of correspondence because he would always follow up everything legendarily with a handwritten note or a very personal quick letter. People say, “How on earth was he able to do that?” And he uses his time really well. When in the car, he would either be jotting a note or he would be dictating something, or I would be jotting a note and say, “What about this? How about we say this?” And whatever. So the letters would be out really fast with his personal touch to them, which I
think is really terrific. I would say that putting a face on the University downtown
with the legislature, with the donors, with the families, with the students was his
great contribution to Ohio State.

Q. At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, I do recall that there was a concern when
Gordon left us the first time about that transition, because he had been so closely
associated with the persona.

A. That’s the danger, you’re right, that absolutely is the danger. I think the outreach
kind of thing we really needed at that time, to get out and around. Jennings had
really built the infrastructure here, if you will, to get to another level. But the
people of Ohio didn’t realize what had happened nearly as much. And so Gordon
really wanted to make that external story. And Gordon loves students, loves to be
with them, loves the crowd. And so he did all these student events all the time,
too. Elizabeth had died very quickly after they had come here, really. We were
out on a state tour in Dayton and we had an alumni event that night. We had
checked into the hotel, and we had about an hour and then we were going to have
this alumni event. I remember Mabel Freeman was there. And he got a phone call
from Mary Basinger saying, “You have to call Elizabeth now.” And then Mary
told me that it was bad news. Elizabeth had gone back to Colorado to see her
doctors whom she had been seeing all along for cancer, earlier iterations of it.
And it was back and it was back with a vengeance. So we were able to get him a
flight out of Dayton in the morning to go out there. And then in the meantime, he
went in and talked to that group. I don’t know how he was able to do it but he did.
He knew that it was bad. So she wasn’t with us that long. I think after her death,
he was already in extremely high gear, and she was a great partner in that. I remember she called me one time and left me a voice message that said, “Barbie, I met two students this weekend who have no idea who Gordon is. Get on top of it.” I was like, “What, what?” But that was it. There are two people who don’t know him. Let’s fix that.

One of the things when people ask me what I am most proud about those times, I’m most proud of Rebekah Gee. This young woman is just remarkable. She was just a young girl when she came here. She really was just a kid. She was what, 14 going on 15? And here she has this calamitous event happen. She’s just turned out great. But he worked all the time. I think that was just his way of coping, was to work more. So we did more. We had to do more, I guess. But I think he did make a big University seem smaller with that personality. We’d get letters from parents who would say, “My daughter met you and I feel so good about that.” I remember there was a swimmer who was from Hawaii and when she graduated, her parents gave him a beautiful lei that they had brought. And his mother said, “I always knew that she was going to be okay because I knew that you knew her.” That matters.

Q. I recall, correct me if I’m wrong, Commencement changed, because there at Commencement he instituted an opportunity for parents to take a picture with the President. I think it was usually done at Larkins Hall.

A. We move it around a little bit. We did it at St. John. We didn’t have as many choices of places like we do at the Schott, where we have a little bit more space. But that became kind of like going to see Santa Claus in a way. You would have
people lined up, and we made the decision right away to not have a professional photographer. A lot of schools have a professional photographer who snaps your picture, and then they sell it to you. And this was not done this way. We had people line up. And I was the one who took the pictures with their cameras. It was office staff from our President’s Office, my letter team. And they loved doing it. It was fun. Some worked the line and then I would take the picture with their camera. So you had every kind of camera in the world. I’ll tell you about taking a picture after Commencement. Disproportionately, students of color, doctoral students, not unexpectedly, international students, but a huge big long line. And here would be mom and dad from Kuala Lumpur and the most gorgeous native dress, typical of their culture, who were just so proud. They would be bowing to the President. He is a very revered figure, and the opportunity to have their picture made with the University President was just huge. And he being very well traveled would almost always have something to say about their home. And you would have a doctoral student with a wife and a baby in his arms and the parents and the whole pictures. People who had worked so hard for their degrees. Generally, we would take one picture with just the student and then one with the [whole] family. So two people together is really nice, but if the family was there, a mom and dad, make a picture, snap. And then there would be some fleeting boyfriend who would be there. And I would always say, “Instead of standing next to grandma, you’re a little taller, why don’t you stand on the end,” figuring you could always cut him off. Twenty years from now people are going to say, “Who is that?” So I’d always try to get them on the end so they could always cut the
frame off. People would say lovely things, would want to come up and just thank him and thank the University.

I think the Gateway Project is a typical Gordon thing of saying, “This neighborhood over here is a problem. We can either put up a wall, sort of like USC or some places like that that are not in the best parts of town. We can put up a big wall or we can try to fix it.” I think that’s what frustrates him so much now about this crime situation that is currently on the front burner. You want to try and make that area better. You don’t want to put up a big electric fence. I think he was really pleased to get the Fisher College [of Business] done, and I remember when he hired [then-Dean of Fisher College] Joe Alutto, I was in the car. Of course, cell phones were not quite what they are now. And he said, “I’ve got to call this guy.” And we stopped because we didn’t want to lose cell contact. In those days it wasn’t so good. So we stopped by the side of the road. We were in a little town and I said, “Why don’t I go in a shop and look around?” And he said, “No, just wait here, that’s all right.” And he was giving him the hard sell about why he had to come here. Joe was in Buffalo. And I remember, “Joe, you’re going to be a difference maker. We’ve got to have you come here. This is the time. This is the place. We’re going to build the best business school in the country.” And there you go. But I remember him recruiting Joe, because I think he really cared deeply about getting that done.

Because Gordon was a good speaker he got asked to do a lot of things. And of course he loved to be funny. He would come down to my office at 3:00 and say, “I’m doing the Dublin Rotary tonight and I want a Top Ten List.” I’d
reply, “No, you’ve done enough Top Ten Lists.” And I would add, “Look, David Letterman has twenty people, all of whom are making big bucks sitting around the table to do this.” And he would say, “Oh, you always come through it.” So I’d get my letter team and we’d sit down and come up with something. We did some great ones. The ones we did for the bowl games were just wonderful, and they are still doing great ones for him. His staff comes up with some wonderful stuff and he delivers it well. But because he’s engaging as a speaker, people want him. So he did a ton of appearances. He got asked to do other commencements. I went with him to Florida State. They had two ceremonies – one the night before and one the next morning. So we had to stay over one night and we attended two ceremonies. Gordon got a standing ovation. Their President said to me, “The only other person that’s gotten a standing ovation in the memory of anyone else on the platform was, interestingly enough, Margaret Thatcher.” They were just shocked that a President of another school could get a standing ovation. It was pretty exciting.

It was on that trip he told me that he was being wooed by Brown [University]. We had that conversation about Brown on the Florida State plane. We were talking about raising money, remembered when he was thinking of going to go to California – they had wanted him to head the California system. So he was re-recruited by the board, which was great. The new people were not there when he was chosen but they re-recruited him, which gave him another four or five years of support. You’re only as good as the Board that chose you, so to speak. In the [California] situation I remember specifically a woman in
Westerville sent a handwritten letter. He had received many letters saying how glad they were that he stayed, beautiful letters. But this one I remember and I’m sure he does too. She wrote a very nice note about how grateful she was that he was staying. She felt so good about him being here. She and her husband had just had a child in the past year and the child had some health issues. So she said, “We don’t have very much right now because we’re spending a lot on her care, but I wanted you to know how much it means to me that you decided to stay,” and put $20 in that letter. Best money he ever raised, I think. That’s the difference. That’s the kind of thing he could do, connect to people in a way that says, “This is a good thing.” And when that happens, then the people who can give you the large dollars, they come along. He makes people believe. He recruits fabulous faculty. He recruits like crazy. He has big dreams. We really had a terrific amount of fun. It was very hard work. I don’t think there’s ever been a period in my life when I worked any harder than when I worked for him. And I think all of the team would say the same thing. We just knocked ourselves out to make sure everything was perfect. We had three mistakes. One was Jean Hansford. Do you know Jean?

Q.  Oh yes.

A.  Great guy. He was a great friend of mine. Jean received a letter that was part of a mail merge, so it wasn’t a custom letter we did in our office. But nonetheless he was referred to as “Ms. Jean Hansford.” So he comes up from the basement of Bricker, “I put in all this work and you know …” I was in the Ohio Staters with Jean. [The letter] called him “Ms,” and it was our responsibility, even though it was a big merge that some other office had done. It was terrible. Gordon wrote
him a very nice handwritten note as a result of it. And the other mistake I remember, he had been to see somebody over in the medical complex. And he had gone over to see this doctor because he was having some back issues. When Gordon comes back, he dictates a note, which was transcribed. It sounded on the tape like he said, “Thank you very much for all you put me through, including the insoles.” It sounded like insoles. So the letter goes out that way. But it was supposed to say, “all the insults,” because they apparently had a very fun, lighthearted relationship. So the doctor gets the letter that says insoles and fires it back with a very funny note to Gordon – very funny. We went back to try to figure out what happened, and it really didn’t sound like insults, and insults is not something you would ever think of. So then we had to have a funny letter go back the other way. And then the third mistake we made was – I mean, these are all there were. Thousands of letters of year, thousands literally. But we mistakenly killed off Dick Hill, the Dean of Optometry, who is very much alive because the Richard Hill who had passed away was with the Research Foundation. And the condolence letter went to the wrong Mrs. Hill. A big problem, big mistake. At a very large President’s Club event held the very next week, which I attended with the President’s Parent Advisory Committee, he was introducing a lot of people that were there. He said, “Now I see Dick Hill over here. Now Dick, do you want to stand up? This is our very distinguished Dean of Optometry and Barbie Tootle tried to kill him.” And then he tells the story, attached it to my name. That’s why I remember that one. But nonetheless, you could not make a mistake. You did not want to; you didn’t want to disappoint him. He created that environment in the
office. He’d pop in regularly for my folks, because I could get upstairs in Bricker and do things with him, especially a lot of speech stuff. But he would stick his nose in our office every couple of days, stick his head in, “Hey, what’s going on in here? What’s happening?” So it was really a pleasant work environment. You were killing yourself but he would leave you a little note or he’d call you up on the way home from the event and say, “That was just fabulous.” I remember writing a speech for him for the CASE Conference in Montreal his first year. He was a speaker at the CASE Conference. And I got a phone call from the car, he and Mal Baroway were in the car going back to the hotel, and he called me to say, “The audience really appreciated it. It was right on the money. What a great job. It turned out great.” I had knocked myself out on it. He and I had spent a lot of time on it. But to get that feedback was really valuable. It was fun, it was hard work, he's very demanding of high standards, both because he does expect it but also because you want to work as hard as he does. Then he left, and here I am thinking, “Now, this really is it.”

Q. Okay.

A. When Gordon decided to go to Brown, that was kind of a choice point for me in the sense of, did I want to stay or go? What did I want to do? And we went up and looked at it and met a neat team of people. But it was not a good fit for me. In all candor, I wasn’t sure it was a great fit for him, either, which is easy to say in hindsight, but I really sort of felt that way. I didn’t want to go there, but I thought, “What do I want to do? This would be a time when I could do something different. I was so closely identified with Gordon, people knew that I was one of
his confidants and I was with him a lot. And so I thought, I can’t really shake that. I think I’m kind of labeled with being Gordon’s person, even though I had been there long before. [Then OSU-Provost John Richard] Sisson had the interim term, and I, of course, knew him very well because of his being the Provost. He’s a wonderful person, no doubt about it. And so I was able to help him with similar kinds of calendar issues in the office and communications.

And then [OSU Pres. William E. “Brit” Kirwan came along. Brit Kirwan is a really nice guy. He’s the guy you’d want to live next door to, for sure. Really nice and entirely different in personality, which was great. He was a good listener. That’s not one of the first things you think of with Gordon. And when Gee would work a room, he’d walk in and give everybody 15 seconds. That was his style. Kirwan would go in and talk to ten people for fifteen minutes each, and the rest of the people wouldn’t get to meet him. Obviously, the happy medium is in between there, to kind of get around to everybody. But it was a different style and we had to figure out how to make that really work well for him, because he was so good with talking to each person, making them feel valued. Obviously, he came in as a very savvy President. He had been a long-time President [at the University of Maryland], and knew what he was doing on that score. I thought it was really good that they were so different, because you couldn’t compete with that. And we probably needed Kirwan before we could do anything else. I always felt like the one that followed Gordon probably wouldn’t be a “lifer.” You probably needed to have your four-, five-year person, not your nine-, ten-year person. I really thought that would be smart, and then the next one would have the better chance to make
a big impact. So Kirwan is a mathematician. I had Jennings with the business mind. Here’s Gordon, very much the lawyer in thought process, but used tons of really emotional words that would not have been Ed Jennings in the least.

Well, here comes Kirwan. He’s a mathematician. If A, then B. He was more logical, more measured, and more academic. He didn’t have the suede patches on his jacket, but he might as well have in that sense. So he had a different kind of vocabulary. From my vantage point, those were the key things I had to start picking up on. What does he like or do? Kirwan is an excellent Q&A guy, and we got him up to speed with great examples. Kirwan is very poised, not shy. Because he was such a good listener and he didn’t fly through a room, that was sometimes perceived as reticence. But as soon as anybody watched him for very long they knew he wants to get to know people. He’s not just working the room. And so they got used to his style. I remember one of his first big speeches was at the [Columbus] Chamber of Commerce annual meeting downtown at the Convention Center. He did a great job and my custom after those kind of speeches was to mingle with the crowd as they are leaving the room. Sometimes if they were waiting for the elevator, just blend in with that crowd and listen to what people are talking about. Or go in the restroom and listen to what people are saying. And I had to laugh, and he did too, because after this particular event, I went out into the big foyer there and people were getting on the escalator. People were generally impressed with the overall meeting and were saying nice things. I went into the ladies’ room and these two women were talking loudly from stall to stall, “Well, he certainly is a great looking man.” “Why, yes, he’s so handsome.”
The whole conversation was how handsome he was. I said to him, “I don’t know how the speech went, but they thought you were mighty handsome.” Of course, he laughed at that. But Kirwan looks like a President. He carries himself beautifully. He’s athletic and he looks athletic. There is a certain grace about his movements. And at the podium that was also true. Because he was experienced, no bad habits. His father had been President at [University of] Kentucky, I believe. He had been around senior administrators and had seen how people work. He knew what he needed and wanted. He liked bullets.

My big thing with him on speech prep was to get him in (started) and get him out (closing). That’s true of a lot of speakers. They know what the meat of the message is. They know what they want to say. But it’s that opening salvo that tells the audience you know where you are, and you’re not just giving campaign speech number one or two or whatever. Let them know that you know where you are. And so sometimes it would just be a matter of briefing him with “These two people that are in the audience are great, great long-time friends of Ohio State. You’re going to meet them for the first time.” Then I would have some kind of a line about, “One of the best things about coming here was finally getting to meet Joe and Mildred. What great assets they are to your community and to ours.” I could help him with those kinds of things. Or maybe he had a couple of stories he’d like to tell. With any of the people I write speeches for, you get to know what their favorite stories are and the outline would be, tell this story, or this story would be a great example for this audience because... And I would try to match up stories or examples from the University and say, “This would be a good audience
that would like to hear a couple of those engineering examples and a couple in education.” [Or] “This town’s got a very strong board of education. They are under a little bit of an assault. It would be very helpful to you to say good things about education.” So I’d research the community or the organization or whomever. He didn’t tell a joke, but would tell a story well. The only help that Kirwan really needed was how to get into it, and then what’s the memory. I was the institutional memory for him. So I stayed, probably a year and a half, two years, after Gordon left, with Sisson and Kirwan. I told Brit, “I’ll get you started but I’m not going to stay.” I was getting close to 30 years. I said, “I think two Presidents are enough.”

Q. Okay.

A. Brit was a storyteller as opposed to a humorist. He wanted to know who these people are, who were the important people? What were the references? And I would say, “Well, John Mount’s going to be in the audience and you absolutely must acknowledge that, because everybody in Ohio knows him.” We never went anywhere in the state that people didn’t know John Mount. And so I would say, “That’s someone you should really acknowledge,” or “Be sure when you walk in the room to go over and pay your respects or whatever,” just to give him that little bit of a hint.

Q. Sure.

A. It’s funny, though, how things have changed now because of technology. At St. John Arena with President Gee, one of the things I would do is at the four-minute time-out of the first half of the basketball game, I would go down to where he was
seated. He was always on the aisle and I would tell him who was there that he might want to say hello to. I’d say “[U.S. Rep.] Chalmers Wylie came in late, probably from Washington.” He was a big fan. We knew where Chalmers sat, but I’d say, “He’s here.” But then I’d say, “The track coach is standing over there by that entry, and you might want to stop by and say hi to Russ.” That kind of thing. Now, at the Schottenstein Center with the boxes and the seat licenses and all, you know where everybody is that you need to see. So Kirwan had a little more of that kind of support, although we weren’t as far into it as we are now technologically. But I think I was a great help to him to identify who were the people in the room, and he could make some hay with that. I think I was helpful to him. The Kirwans were not big entertainers; he didn’t want to have something every night. Whereas if we didn’t have two things a week at the house, Gordon was angry. “Why aren’t we doing more? Why aren’t we having more dinners or people over, receptions,” or whatever. Kirwan was glad to keep that in bounds and that was probably a good idea.

Q. Okay.

A. And then I left.

Q. But you left with some significant legacies, one of them being the Barbie Tootle Spirit Award. What was that all about?

A. Well, Varsity “O” is the organization of former student athletes who earned a varsity letter in their sport, and they receive, in the old days, literally, a Varsity O sweater, blanket, jacket, whatever. A Hall of Fame was created for Ohio State Athletics, into which a number of inductions were made, none of them women.
When Gordon came, the first time he had to go to their event, he said, “Where are the women? Why aren’t they here? Let’s fix that.” And then Associate [Athletic Director], Phyllis Bailey (Phyllis had been one of my phys ed teachers back in the day) was working on it. So [Gordon] said, “We’ve got to make this happen and I’ll put myself behind it.” He asked me to represent him on the committee. So I did. Gordon knew my husband and I really enjoyed intercollegiate athletics. We go to many kinds of events. We’ve finished 51 seasons of football sitting side by side, because we bought our tickets together as freshmen. Before freshman year we started dating in July, and he said, “Do you want to get our football tickets together?” And I thought, “Oh my gosh, what if we’re not dating by the end of the season? This will be a nightmare.” But I said, “Oh, okay let’s do that.” And we’ve sat side-by-side for 51 seasons of football and we’re in our 51st season of basketball. But we also like women’s basketball and we go to volleyball and gymnastics. You can see world-class athletes at this University for not very much money, and they’re just thrilling to see. When Gordon was President, he loved athletics but was very concerned that it not be perceived that he only cared about football and men’s basketball. So on my suggestion, we visited every varsity sport in either practice or competition every year. We would go to a gymnastics practice or a wrestling practice or a synchronized swimming practice. And he would visit with the team and they would all gather around. It was great fun. And I went with him. And so I knew all these groups.

So he put me on the Varsity O Women’s Committee, and boy, there were some really great people on that. They finally decided that they would start
inducting women. The Hall of Fame is all one – men, women, it’s all identical. The plaques are the same, everything is the same. But their recognition event is held separately because there is a different culture. The women’s event is wonderful. The honorees say the most wonderful things about what a life-changing thing it was to be a varsity athlete. But in any case, I had helped them through the years. I think those events will eventually come together to a single event. And the men’s event will be better because of it. But it will be longer. That’s another thing: It was nice to have them separate because if you end up [with] four women and they induct four or five guys, that’s a long evening. You want to hear the stories. The woman who says, “I didn’t know we had a meal allowance when we were traveling, and we stopped at a restaurant and I only had a couple of dollars, so I just [got] water and didn’t order anything because I didn’t know that it would be paid for.” And other people were getting sandwiches and everything and they go, “Why don’t you get something?” “Oh, I don’t really want anything.” She said, “I was too embarrassed to say I didn’t have any money.” Come to find out she didn’t need any money. A woman athlete of a certain age doesn’t assume all these benefits are going to come her way. On the other side, there are some people who would probably expect you should be at a nicer restaurant. But anyway, I love those women. They are fabulous. And I really tried also to get them involved in some other things community-wise, to nominate their women for awards and recognitions and so on.

My husband, Jim, taught a class for student athletes, a UVC [University College] class, back when UVC was around. He had sections of just student
athletes. As part of that, he would try to go to see every student that was in his class in competition to show his support. That’s when we started going to fencing and all kinds of “obscure events.” They may have only two or three home meets or whatever. It was a lot of fun, though. And it set us on a lifelong path of doing that. So I remained ex officio on that Hall of Fame committee all along. Another thing I think I was helpful for them, was coaching them on the “politics” of selections and making sure that the classes were as diverse as they needed to be, to not forget those women in the past who were not NCAA but were in the AIAW [now-defunct Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women]. Some were playing three sports and buying their own uniforms. We really spent a lot of time digging up those pioneer women, making sure they got inducted. They felt like one of the things they wanted to do to kind of round out their event, was to recognize people who are so supportive of women’s athletics, whether it’s financially supportive, whether it’s people who just give their passion to us, people who give their time, people who organize booster clubs, and all that kind of business. And so they created this award and surprised me by putting my name on it: The Varsity “O” Women’s [Alumnae Society] Barbie Tootle Buckeye Spirit Award. This year we recognized [former Athletics Director] Andy Geiger, who added two women’s varsity sports and three women’s facilities on his watch, and really was a huge booster for our women’s programs – which he was at Brown, earlier in his career, and they didn’t have much of women’s sports, and he made that happen. He’s been a real advocate for women’s sports all the way along. But anyway, they did that for me and they’re a wonderful group. I still sit with them
every year on the selections for Hall of Fame. I don’t have anything to do with who they choose for this award; they just tell me who it is and I tell them how much I admire them. And then the meeting room in the Union, I see that’s [the] next thing. That’s a great story.

I had an office in the Ohio Union for eleven years, and practically lived in the Union as an undergraduate student. Jim was a commuter all four years, and so we spent a lot of time in the Union studying together, going to dances or whatever. The Union has always been a part of me. And so when they were going to build the new Union, I got involved. Tracy Stuck asked me to be involved in the planning process. My husband, Jim, and I led about thirteen focus groups with different constituencies around faculty, alumni, staff – different groups – getting information about what they would want in an Ohio Union. And then I tried to help them raise some money. And Tracy would roll out the plans and I’d say, “Well, this room, why don’t we have a name for that one? We ought to be able to sell that; it’s beautiful space.” And there were four other rooms down that hallway and they were getting donors for those. And I said, “Well, what about this gorgeous room?” And they said, “Well, we’ve got a couple of people on the string.” And I’d say, “Well, let me meet with them. I can probably get the check. I’m going to help you here.” She said, “Well, let me see, I think we’re close. I don’t want to screw it up.” I said, “Okay.” She said I nagged her a bunch of times about that, but she had invited these two guys, Brad Kastan and Jim Curphey, former students of mine in Greek Affairs, to head up a campaign to raise the money to name the room for me. And so Jim and Brad solicited people who had
been students of mine from ’74 to ’85, when I was in Greek Affairs, and they raised the money to name the room. I didn’t know, Jim didn’t know either, neither one of us knew what they were doing. They said, “It’s going to be a big secret, keep your mouth shut.” They exceeded the goal by a substantial amount, which as it turned out was great, and brought in quite a number of new donors, which was another good thing. And of course the people that were there in ’74 are not kids any longer.

I’ll tell you the day that it was that I found out about it. They had a surprise dinner for me and it was the day that President Gee was introduced as coming back at the Fawcett Center. And so Gordon had asked us to be there at the announcement. So we were there in the room and he was introduced. By then they had told Jim because they needed to get me to this dinner. And then afterwards, Jim said, “I need to drop something off at Thurber House.” He had been on the board and I’m on the board now. He said, “I’ve got to drop something off to Thurber House. Why don’t we get something to eat as long as we’re out and around and we’ll run Downtown.” And I said, “Fine.” So we get to Thurber House and we park in front of the Thurber Center and he said, “Do you want to run in with me?” And I said, “Oh, I’ll wait in the car.” And he said, “Oh, come on in with me.” And they were all inside Thurber Center in that big room there. That is where we had a dinner and they said, “Surprise,” and then they had these easels with all these renderings. And then the next three days I had to go down to Moody Nolan [architecture firm] because they were making all the choices, like the ceiling fixtures and the lighting fixtures. It’s a faux tin ceiling and I had three
choices there. They had narrowed it down. I didn’t start with a blank room by any means but they had narrowed it down and wanted me to make the final choices on some things, and I did that. And I still can’t quite believe it. It’s funny that people are surprised when they meet me in the Union because they think that people that things are named for are dead. Now all the people on that hallway – with one exception – are women, and they are young women. A woman graduated in ’06 and she and her family named a room. Another woman whose family said they wanted to do something for her to help her maybe buy a condo or a house or something. And she said, “Well, no, they’re going to build a new Union and I’d like you to …” She had earned a lot of scholarships and stuff and they had money left in her college fund. But in any case, young people named those and they are all women and then this one guy and then me. But it’s funny, when I meet people and they’ll say, “Oh, I think I’ve heard your name,” and I think, “Oh, they’ve just been to the Union.” That kind of thing. I met a guy yesterday at the Union. He was an intern. And when Tracy introduced me I saw his eyes just get a little bigger. I said, “Yes, that’s me.” He just laughed. But it’s nice, it’s just fabulous. Whoever thinks that would happen in their life? And I love it that it was the students. You don’t know sometimes when you’re in Student Affairs, especially, you don’t know if you’re really making a difference or not. You work at it but you don’t know. And I’ll be darned, but it does matter. They changed my life in some really important ways and apparently there were things that stayed with them. I was surprised, some of the people who had donated were people that had
not always been pleasantly interacting with me. But apparently they thought I straightened them out. It was really nice to see.

Q. Barbie, this brings us to the end of our interview and I appreciate all the wonderful insights that you have provided here, and your cooperation. Thank you very much.

A. How about names? Didn’t you want to ask about names?