

# Interview with Karen Meyer

July 31, 2020

Ms. Karen Meyer, Hannah Stoll

**Hannah Stoll** 00:02

The following interview was conducted with Ms. Karen Meyer on behalf of The Ohio State University for the Knowledge Bank and the Voices of Women Oral History project. It took place on Friday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, via Zoom Video Communications. The interviewer is Hannah Stoll.

**Hannah Stoll** 00:17

Hello, Karen, how are you?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 00:19

Hi, I'm fine. Thank you.

**Hannah Stoll** 00:21

Tell me about why you decided to enter higher education and then later work in the same environment?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 00:28

Well, actually, it kind of came to me. I went to Ohio State Lima campus and got my undergraduate in education, went on to start teaching school. So I taught for a few years first grade, or second grade, third grade, and then took some time off to have my children. And during that time, I decided I wanted another side job, and so I started with adult education. So I started to teach the GED program at Lima Senior and some at Apollo at that time, and I found how much I enjoyed the adults. And also what I realized was that there are many adults who did not finish high school and needed their GED because they had a learning difficulty, and that was what kind of stopped them. Because at that time, there weren't many special ed programs or many resources available. So I started thinking how much I really liked that, also went on to teach a little bit in the adult education program, just the different subjects for those who were completing their high school diploma. Then, I decided, well, I like this, so I decided to go on and get my master's degree in education with learning disabilities as the focus, and that kind of says it all. I went to UNOH, started their Learning Center there, worked with students with disabilities and then came to back to my alma mater, OSU Lima, so I was glad to be able to do that.

**Hannah Stoll** 02:12

What were your first impressions of your college experience and how did being a woman affect your experience?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 02:22

I grew up in a large family and without – my parents had not gone to college. And so I knew always that I wanted to be a teacher. However, I knew that also the finances wouldn't be there. So, I worked jobs

while I came to college, but it was just a passion of mine. So when I first started at OSU Lima, it was very small, only a couple buildings, and drove my Volkswagen bug there, old one, tried to keep it running with no heat you know, like a lot of college kids who, you know, finances aren't there. And but for me, it was a very positive experience. I did, as a woman, I did not feel like I had anything – I had as many advantages as the as the males did, and at that time in the education, it was mostly women. So, I felt very comfortable anyway. Yeah.

**Hannah Stoll** 03:30

What would you have changed about your early college experiences?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 03:34

I think I would have taken more advantage of some of the extracurricular activities. I was working, trying to work full time to pay for my college and so I just didn't really have many opportunities to be really involved. I was involved somewhat, but I think I would have probably been more involved, maybe in leadership positions, more.

**Hannah Stoll** 04:00

What was your experience like teaching elementary school?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 04:05

I loved it. It was very challenging though, because I had, let's see, I was at a Catholic school. So I had maybe 30-35 kids in the class. And my one class I had this whole group of blond haired, blue-eyed little boys that were darling. But I think they all had ADHD. So it was pretty challenging, but I did love it. In fact, one funny thing that had happened was one of the moms before Christmas break, gave me a bottle of wine and told me to relax. Because she knew how active they were, but yeah, I loved it. It was fun.

**Hannah Stoll** 04:49

Please describe the positions you have held at Ohio State Lima, in what units and over what time period?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 04:56

Okay, well, I started in 1998. I started as the learning disabilities specialist – I was only part-time at that point – and they didn't really have a full-time available. So then around 2000, I also took on some academic advising responsibilities because I was in that physical area with the advisors. And so ever since then I've been kind of half and half, part coordinator for disability services, and academic advisor. I wear two hats, but it's enjoyable because it's such a great variety. And I feel like when students maybe come to me for disability services that they know me as an advisor, too, so they don't feel quite as self-conscious if they come into the office and want to see me, so it's been good.

**Hannah Stoll** 05:52

Describe your position as the coordinator for Disability Services. How has this position affected you personally?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 06:04

It's made me a lot more empathetic to students, to people who have disabilities. What I do is a – step by step pretty much – if a student comes in who has been diagnosed with any type of disability, physical, emotional, or learning, then they would come to me, we would meet, talk about what their needs are, they would need to have some documentation, if it's a disability that is not readily viewed, if you can't see it, obviously. And then we talk about what accommodations might work best for them. And then I help them get those setups. So usually it's extended time on tests, maybe separate room for tests. A lot of students have books in alternate format, so I have to then get those books in alternate format, which is time consuming, but it's good. Now with all the technology, it's wonderful because computers have screen readers and that's good, we just need to make sure everything's accessible. So it's been challenging in that way. But again, it's made me more empathetic to students. Another thing that added to help me, I think, understand better is my mom was wheelchair bound last few years of her life, and so I would take her places and I could see the barriers. We would try to get into maybe a restaurant and it was very difficult with a wheelchair and it just made me more aware of how things need to be accessible to all people, no matter what your ability, what your disability is.

**Hannah Stoll** 07:56

Tell me about your position as an academic advisor.

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 08:00

So in academic advising, I'm helping students figure out what classes they need to take in order to pursue the career that they would like. I've been the business advisor for a few, three, since pretty much the beginning, although I've advised in all different areas, now and again, but, we go through the curriculum, what they need to get their degree, how they need to apply to the program, and get their classes set up every semester so they can graduate in a timely manner.

**Hannah Stoll** 08:34

How has being a woman staff member on a regional campus changed over the time you've been at the Lima campus?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 08:42

Probably, I feel for me, at least, Ohio State Lima has been very – I haven't felt many barriers or anything as a woman. In fact, when I was hired on, Violet Meek was the dean and she – a woman – and at that time in, well, it would have been 1998. So she was a strong woman and I looked to her as a really great example of a leader, a servant leader. She was kind, but yet powerful, but yet firm, so she had both areas and people respected her a lot. So, for me, I haven't – I felt respected and everything just because, I haven't felt any type of discrimination or anything like that as a woman.

**Hannah Stoll** 09:41

What makes being a staff member on the Lima campus different from being on the Columbus campus?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 09:48

Our relationships, I feel, are a lot more, so to speak, intimate. I feel like I can get to know people a lot better because there's fewer of them. As far as the advising staff, we're pretty close because we help

each other out. And you have to, so we work very well as a team. I feel like there's a lot of team building and it's been a good way to interact with others. I mean, the good and the bad, and the good is that yes, we can. The downside might be maybe the diversity of people you don't really see on a smaller campus just because you have less people than in Columbus, there's just such a diverse population there. But yeah, it's been good though.

**Hannah Stoll** 10:44

Please describe, if applicable, a specific point or incident that shifted your awareness about equity issues at Ohio State Lima.

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 10:57

I don't know if it's as woman as much as maybe my age. I'm a little bit older than a lot of staff members and sometimes I have felt maybe there have been promotions or things that have not been offered just simply because of my age, so I felt more of an age type of a bias maybe, not bad, but, that might have been the only thing I would say for that.

**Hannah Stoll** 11:36

Please describe, if applicable, a time or times when you experienced a "chilly climate" in a professional setting because of your gender. How did this incident affect you?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 11:53

Honestly, maybe I'm naïve or something. I really haven't felt that, because we have this same number actually, there's probably more women in our area of advising than there are men. Do you mean like at the university or anywhere or?

**Hannah Stoll** 12:22

Anywhere – in general.

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 12:24

Oh, okay. Okay, in general. Okay. Well, I can say one time because I did teach a class, at the time it was the tank plant, I was teaching in math class and it was all males. And so when I got the some of the reviews back, there were some comments about maybe how I could have dressed and things like that, which was a little bit disturbing, but it was that type of climate. It was off campus – it was actually at the tank plant, and so I don't know if they weren't used to having a woman teacher or what, but that was a little– yeah, that was a little difficult there.

**Hannah Stoll** 13:14

What work have you been involved with regarding institutional change at Ohio State Lima? What did you do and what was the outcome both personally and institutionally?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 13:26

I've been part of the Diversity Committee since it was started. And that has been an experience – it has been very good, very eye opening. In order to help awareness of more of the disability issues, but it has

helped me see a lot of different views. And it's been good because I felt like I have been heard in helping to promote, and advocate for, especially people with disabilities.

**Hannah Stoll** 14:04

That's great! How do you or other women in your field balance academic life and private life?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 14:14

That's a tough one. Fortunately for me, at this point, I don't have children at home. But it would be very difficult, I can see. I mean, even me, especially working from home, these past few months have been very difficult because I feel like there's no separation between work life and personal life. It's always there. And so at least when you go into an office, you can leave it, but balancing everything for me, especially balancing personal, taking care of myself, I really work hard to get exercise and do things for myself, but sometimes it is very difficult and that's something I'm coming to terms with and really trying to make a separation, so I have more personal time and don't let work take over my entire life.

**Hannah Stoll** 15:08

How has COVID-19, or the whole issue of COVID-19, affected your job and what you've been doing lately?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 15:17

Yeah, that kind of is the – what I was saying before – it has just made it a lot more difficult. Because I feel like we are being asked to do more. And because we're home, it's a little bit tougher because we have the less resource, some of the resources I just don't have here. And so I have to go in – I've gone in periodically to maybe get some things I need. I have special computers for Disability Services at work. And so that makes it difficult to try to do that work here at home. But, it's been very challenging, but we're good, we're good.

**Hannah Stoll** 16:02

What do you think it is important to keep in mind as we – as students and faculty move forward into the upcoming semesters?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 16:15

I think just remembering that everybody is dealing with something. It seems to me like lately we're quick to judge others for their, maybe what they say or their actions, when we don't really know behind the scenes what is really going on in their lives. It's easy to – I'll give an example, like, if you're in traffic or something and someone cuts you off, you just want to – if you're not in a good mood, you just want to like, ah, but I guess it's stepping back and thinking, what is going on in that person's life and maybe they are oblivious and to try to think the best of people rather than to think the worst. I think that would be good for the kindness thing. You know, choose kindness over maybe anger or judgment.

**Hannah Stoll** 17:14

What do you believe remains to be done relative to the progress of women or anyone at Ohio State Lima?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 17:24

I think the biggest thing would be listening. I think it's very important to listen to what people are saying as far as, like, jobs. How this is going to affect them. There are a lot of decisions that are made, that – people are not consulted, who may be the ones who are having to implement those changes. And it's good to be heard, at least listen to other opinions. Listen to our thoughts on things because we all have opinions, and we all can give maybe a different perspective. And if our perspective is at least taken into consideration, I feel that gives us power, a little, it makes you feel like at least you're not just being rolled over, if you want to put it that way, I mean that you're being listened to and your opinion is valued, I guess that's the big word, is being valued. That's very, very important, at least to me.

**Hannah Stoll** 18:34

And we're at our final question, is there anything else you would like to talk about or mention?

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 18:43

I can't really think of anything. For, again, for me, it is, for the most part, it's been a great thing to be at OSU Lima, and as a woman. And I wouldn't probably change a whole lot. But you know, there's always ways to improve, but at this point, it's been a really good, really good, good run for me. I've enjoyed it.

**Hannah Stoll** 19:08

Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

**Ms. Karen Meyer** 19:10

You're welcome, Hannah.