AN INTERVIEW WITH LARRY MARSTON

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Oral History Project

Endacott Society

University of Kansas
LARRY MARSTON

B.S., Speech Pathology and Audiology, K-State, 1963

M.S., Audiology, KU, 1968

Ph.D., Audiology, KU, 1976

Service at the University of Kansas

First employed by KU in 1968

Assistant Professor, 1971

Associate Professor
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Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Q: I am talking with Marry Marston, who retired in 2000 as associate professor of Speech, Language and Hearing at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on February 17, 2001. Where were you born and in what year?

A: I was born in Eskridge, Kansas, in 1941.

Q: What were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was Ted Marston. My mother's name was Edna.

Q: What was your parents' educational background?

A: My father graduated from high school. My mother also finished high school. They never had the opportunity to go to college.

Q: What was your father's occupation?

A: He was a manager of a poultry farm and hatchery.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I had one sister. After my mother passed away, my father remarried. I have one stepsister and two stepbrothers.

Q: Did you grow up in Eskridge?

A: No, but I did grow up in Kansas. My family settled in Junction City, Kansas, when I was about three years of age. I graduated from high school there.

Q: What elementary school did you attend?

A: That's going back. Franklin Elementary was the name of it.

Q: This was about the time World War II was going on. Did this affect your family? Were there relatives in the service?
A: This was an agricultural area. That was considered an important commodity for the war purposes. Actually, I only had more distant relatives, second or third cousins, who were in the service at that time.

Q: Were you in Boy Scouts or other organizations like that?
A: Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. I didn’t follow through with Explorers.

Q: What junior high and high school did you attend?
A: There was only one junior high and one high school at that time. So they were just the Junction City schools. I think at the time I was graduating, my senior year, they did build a brand new high school. They closed the other one down and made that one a junior high.

Q: Do you remember influential teachers from those days?
A: Yes, there were some that stood out in my mind, especially after I got into high school math, physics, and chemistry. Some of those teachers were really important to me as role models.

Q: Were you involved in extracurricular activities?
A: I was through junior and senior high a member of the band. I played on the football team. I was in theatrical plays. I was in student government. I was elected president of the Student Council. I spent a lot of time in extracurricular things.

Q: What did you play in the band?
A: I played the trumpet.

Q: Did you have summer jobs?
A: I was also almost always working with my father’s poultry farm and hatchery.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?
A: In 1959.

Q: Were you ever in the military?

A: I spent my first college year at the United States Military Academy at West Point. I decided to go back to a regular school at that point. So there was an obligation. I spent six months in the Army and then five and half years as a U.S. Army reservist.

Q: So you didn’t like West Point?

A: I grew up in Junction City near Fort Riley and being an officer appealed to me at that point. But once I started out I think that was the time of the Vietnam War I just didn’t know if I wanted to make that a career.

Q: But it was always assumed that you would go to college somewhere, is that right?

A: I had an older sister who had gone to college and probably set a good example. I always felt that I would go to college.

Q: Did you go directly to some other college when you got out of West Point?

A: There is Kansas State University at Manhattan near my home. So I went there and completed my undergraduate degree in 1963.

Q: Did you live at home while you were going to school?

A: I did most of the time. I was commuting. It was about a 15-mile drive. My senior year I was married at that time my wife and I lived in Manhattan. We lived in student housing, much like they have here at the University of Kansas.

Q: Was your wife a student also? What was her name?

A: Yes, she was.

Q: What were you majoring in?

A: I was majoring in the area of speech, language and hearing. We called it speech
pathology and audiology at that time.

Q: How did you happen to choose that field?
A: I think it was the result of an elective course that I took that was in the area of social sciences. It was sort of a survey or introductory course in communication and that topic was included. Particularly because of the faculty member who taught that portion, I talked to that person and just became interested in pursuing that. It was probably the influence of that course and that particular faculty member.

Q: What was your wife majoring in?
A: She was majoring in history.

Q: Do you remember influential teachers from that time, other than the one you mentioned?
A: This was a small department on that campus. There were only a few faculty members. There were some instructors and T.A.s. There are two that stand out, the professor who taught that introductory course and then another faculty member.

Q: Did you have jobs while you were going to college?
A: Part-time. I worked in a clothing store and my wife worked in the County Court House in the Treasurers Department.

Q: When did you get your bachelor's degree?
A: I got my bachelor's degree in May of 1963.

Q: Then what did you do?
A: I was hired as a hearing specialist by the Department of Health in Topeka. They had a division called Maternal and Child Health that took care of many issues relating to children. One of the divisions they had was hearing conservation. I did a lot of traveling, mainly through the rural areas of the state introducing them to the benefits of the early
identification of hearing loss. We used a mobile van, a large, buslike unit that had test booths in it. We would go to schools, mainly elementary schools, and do sort of like a demonstration project to show the school and the community that there were a number of children who had trouble hearing. We would identify those losses and refer them to their family doctors and then try to follow up on the statistics. That was what I did for about three years in Topeka.

Q: Is hearing loss then not a rare thing in children?
A: The incidence in school children is about five to 10 percent. So it is pretty common. There are a lot of middle ear troubles, particularly in early elementary school.

Q: You mean ear infections can cause hearing loss?
A: Yes, temporary hearing loss. It can, if left untreated, become a permanent condition. Early identification is important both to prevent damage to the ear, as well as repercussions of the delays caused in speech, language and educational achievement that can be problems. Even today they are doing screening at the preschool age. We were starting with five-year-olds at that time.

Q: How long did you do that?
A: For three years. I did that from 1963 to the summer of 1966.

Q: Then what did you do?
A: Then I went to the University of Kansas Med Center. They had a master=s program in audiology. The person I had been working with in Topeka already had a master=s degree, and he had gone back to that program at the KU Medical Center to get a doctorate. As a result of that, I looked into it and went back to get my master=s degree.

Q: Who was your major professor for your master=s degree?
A: My major professor was Dr. Cornelius Getzinger. He was the chief audiologist at the KU Medical Center in the department that treated ear, nose and throat diseases.

Q: So this was 1967 when you started that.
A: Yes.

Q: Were you living in Lawrence then?
A: Since most of the master's program was at KU Medical Center, we moved to Kansas City at that time.

Q: So you missed out on some of the things that were going on in Lawrence in the late sixties. Or were things going on at the Med Center too?
A: Actually, there were some major problems in Kansas City in the late sixties. We lived in Wyandotte County near the Medical Center. There was a lot of racial tension there at that time and other factors related to the war, I'm sure. The neighborhood we lived in had some difficulties too.

Q: Did you have children?
A: Later. In 1970 we had a daughter, an only child.

Q: What is her name?
A: Her name is Elizabeth Marston.

Q: Did you have to write a thesis for your master's?
A: Yes, there was a thesis requirement at that time. I completed a thesis and finished my degree in 1968.

Q: What was your thesis on?
A: It was a study of a newly developed device to protect hearing that an audiologist had researched and designed and needed to have it evaluated. We actually used an (unclear)
chamber that the psych department in Lawrence had built in the basement of Fraser Hall. We ran subjects wearing this device. It was sort of like a water-filled balloon, a very miniature one, that was inserted in the ear canal to determine the effectiveness of that water to protect the ear from loud sounds.

Q: Was this for people who were working around loud machinery, jack hammers, etc.?
A: Actually, they had been approaching the military service as using this. They needed to have it evaluated by an objective third party to determine its effectiveness. We did compare it with what are called circa moral ear muffs and found that it was even superior to ear muffs. Most ear plugs at that time were not nearly as effective as ear muffs. The down side was that it wasn’t extremely practical or durable and so, although the prototypes were improved upon, it never really was marketable because of the practical side of it. It was not a durable, easy to use product.

Q: Did you go directly on for your Ph.D.?
A: I was employed for one year, the last year of my master=s degree, as a clinical instructor by the Ear, Nose and Throat Department as an audiologist. So I worked at the KU Med Center for a year. Then I did enter the Ph.D. program at that time.

Q: And that was at the Med Center too?
A: Right. That was in 1968. I started on the master=s degree in 1966. In 1968 I started on my Ph.D. program.

Q: What were you studying for your dissertation?
A: I became interested in the problems that so many adults express of understanding voices, understanding speech. Most of the clientele that I deal with are acquiring hearing loss because of aging. The typical complaint is that people sound like they are mumbling.
When I get in a noisy place, I just can’t pick out the voice. So I researched what is referred to as speech discrimination ability. I looked at that across a group of adults as they aged and compared the changes that occurred. It was looking at these differences across age and how we understand speech.

Q: Did you have the same professor for this?
A: Actually, I did. Dr. Getzinger was the professor for that too.

Q: When did you get your Ph.D.?
A: In 1971 I finished up.

Q: Did you begin teaching at KU then?
A: Ironically, there was an opening on the campus in Lawrence for a faculty member in audiology in the Department of Speech, Language, Hearing. So in 1971 I started teaching. I was finishing the dissertation too. I was a part-time instructor. Once I completed my degree, I was appointed assistant professor near the end of 1971.

Q: What building was that department in?
A: They had just recently moved in Haworth. Before it had been in a number of places, including Bailey. They had just occupied the second floor of Haworth Hall at that time.

Q: Who was the chairman of the department then?
A: The chairman of the department when I entered was James Nealey. He was a phonetician. He was in the Department of Speech, Language, Hearing but his specialty was phonetics. He had just become the chair, following Margaret Burn, who had been chair before that.

Q: While you have been at KU, what classes have you taught?
A: In the Department of Speech, Language, Hearing the classes I taught were in the hearing
area. The basic course is referred to as Introduction to Audiology, a course that students
majoring in both speech pathology and audiology take as their first hearing course. I
taught courses relating to pediatric audiology, courses that were in the area of hearing
aids, which is sort of a specialty of mine. Also courses in hearing conservation, which
has been an interest of mine since my master’s thesis.

Q: Does this mean that people can do things to keep from becoming deaf?
A: Hearing conservation is primarily limited to minimizing and preventing hearing loss from
noise exposure. There are some other hearing conservation considerations, such as trying
to not have damage due to photoxic medications, but hearing conservation primarily
concerns noise.

Q: You mean industrial noise?
A: It used to be primarily that. Now we find that there are so many recreational noise
exposures, including music.

Q: That’s what I was thinking of. What other sorts of recreational noise are there?
A: A lot of damage can be done by a limited amount of hunting. There are a lot of hunters.
There are people using snowmobiles and people doing things related to power equipment,
such as chain saws. There is an educational program. Hearing conservation information
is being given out by school audiologists to school children. That is probably the best
way to do it, to catch them real early so that they know that if they are going to be around
those noise levels they need to use some form of hearing protection. As I understand,
they are now even giving out ear plugs at concerts to people who will wear them.

Q: There wouldn’t be much point in going then, unless you were a parent. What about your
research while you have been here? Did you say that was in the area of hearing aids?
A: Hearing aids is one of the areas I have done research in. Actually, I continue to follow up on the adult problems of the discrimination of speech with some research.

Q: You mean what can be done about it?

A: Actually, it is a real thorny issue as to what can be done. Hearing aids are primarily the remedy and the intervention for it. However, there was just a need, and there still is, for better understanding of what causes this problem and what are the factors. Is it due to nerve deterioration or is it due to some problem in what is referred to as the inner ear, the cochlea? There have been a lot of studies looking at different forms of hearing loss and how that affects our understanding of speech. Those were the main areas of interest.

Through some of the student research interests I did some projects related to other factors. One I recall was looking at hearing loss in smokers versus nonsmokers.

Q: I didn’t know that there was any difference. Is there?

A: We looked at not only hearing but also at the ear drum mobility. There is a test for that.

We didn’t find much difference in the younger smokers, but for people who were long-term, high-level smokers we were seeing some differences in their upper respiratory condition, which was affecting the middle ear. All of this is connected through a tube, the eustachian tube at the back of the throat. It appeared that maybe there was some change due to heavy smoking.

Q: There has been a lot of progress in hearing aids, hasn’t there?

A: It’s been a giant stride, especially as hearing aids have been able to incorporate some of the new technologies, such as digital technology. We have been able to do a better job of actually fitting the hearing aid to the patient’s needs. It used to be the patient had to fit to what the hearing aid could do. Now we are seeing much better acceptance, better
results with hearing aids.

Q: Have you belonged to professional organizations?
A: Yes. There are several now. The major professional organization, called the American Speech, Language, Hearing Association, is the group that board certifies clinicians in my field. Unlike a lot of faculty, we have sort of a dual role of academics and research and then also the practitioner side. We train a lot of master’s degree students, and so we ourselves have to be board certified to be clinicians with our clients, and this American Speech, Language, Hearing Association is the national certifying body for that. Then there is a state counterpart that I belong to. There are some other more specific audiology organizations in rehabilitation and diagnostics that I also belong to.

Q: Did you have publications?
A: I’ve had publications in a number of professional journals. The American Speech, Language, Hearing Association has several audiology journals, as does the Auditory Society. Those are the main journals that I publish in.

Q: Have you had honors?
A: During the eighties I was acting chair of the Department of Speech, Language, Hearing. At that time I received a (unclear) of the Speech and Drama Department. At that time we were a division under Speech and Drama, along with Radio, TV.

Q: That’s an unusual combination
A: Yes. Speech Communication was also one of the divisions under the Department of Speech and Drama. I think it must have been in the later eighties there was a repositioning of these divisions so that they were all departments. I was involved with some of that and received departmental recognition at that time, a distinguished service
award.

Q: Is that when it became what is was when you retired, Speech, Language and Hearing?
A: That’s right. Before that it was called the Speech Pathology and Audiology Division under the Department of Speech and Drama.

Q: Have you had sabbaticals?
A: No, I have never taken a sabbatical.

Q: Have you had outstanding former students who have gone on to greater things?
A: One in particular who went on to do very well. Her name is Lynn Marshall. She attained a Ph.D. She was one of my first undergrads. Like a lot of undergrads taking first courses she told me at that time that she had decided to continue on through the bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs. She is a research audiologist. She started off doing some research at a place that wouldn’t be expected by most people, but it is one of the premier research facilities in the United States for audiology, Boystown, in Omaha, Nebraska. They have a very well-funded program for research there and do excellent research in audiology. From there she ended up going into United States government research in Connecticut and is doing a lot of publishing. I am really proud of Lynn’s work.

Q: Have you been involved in community activities?
A: No.

Q: You are retiring a little bit earlier than some people do. I understand you are now employed in a different way.
A: That’s right. In fact, as I mentioned before, my field is both academic and clinical. I think probably because of my roots at KU Medical Center, where I was involved with a
lot of the practical side of my field, I was interested in continuing to grow in that area. That really did help my teaching and my academic work that I have continued to have that interest. We had a clinic at the University, where I was quite active seeing patients with hearing problems and teaching students. I am continuing to work in that arena now, with little or any teaching. I have affiliation with the University, where students can be placed in my private practice. I also hire some career work-study students and do some instruction there. But now I am basically in private practice, at least on a part-time basis.

Q: Have you been doing that for a while, or did you begin doing that after you retired?
A: My schedule at the University didn’t really allow me to be active outside the University, especially the last 10 to 15 years. So I was not able to participate in outside active work myself. In 1975 I developed relationships with some of the physicians in the community that both used my private services and then also used the clinical services at the University. So I have a lot of close affiliations in the medical community. I continue to do some service for some of the physicians.

Q: Are you doing anything else in retirement?
A: Yes, an area of recreation for me is fishing, particularly fly fishing. So I have an interest in traveling to some areas where that is done.

Q: Where do people go to fly fish? I don’t know anything about fishing.
A: In the United States it has to be some of the northern states, Idaho, Montana. There are some fishing areas in Colorado and even in Missouri and Arkansas. But the water has to be cool for trout to live. Outside the continental United States Alaska and Argentina have good fishing.

Q: Have you been to those places?
A: No, but that is on my agenda.

Q: What is your assessment of the division of Speech, Language and Hearing or KU, past, present, hopes for the future, that kind of thing?

A: I think everything begins with leadership. I think Chancellor Hemenway certainly has leadership skills and the important values of making the University a top ten program, particularly as it relates to research funding and research productivity. I think that bodes well for the future of the University as a whole. That has been right down to our department level. We just recently hired a new chair in Speech, Language and Hearing. His selection was based in large part because of his research productivity and grant acquisitions. Although I have not had an opportunity to serve under him, the word from my fellow department members is that the department is really moving along well. I would say things look very bright for the department.

Q: Has it grown during the years you have been here?

A: It has grown considerably. When I started the number of faculty, as well as the number of students, was very small. Just over the period of time that I was there, the department doubled in size in both students and faculty.

Q: Anything else you would like to add?

A: I think I would just say the retirement opportunities to meet other faculty from other departments sounds very interesting. I think the research you are doing and the histories that you are taking are certainly a valuable contribution.