AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS HANKS KARPOWITZ

Interviewer: Pat Kelly

Oral History Project

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University of Kansas
DENNIS HANKS KARPOWITZ

B.A., University of Utah, 1968

M.A., University of Oregon, 1970

Ph.D., University of Oregon, 1972

Internship, University of Colorado Medical Center, 1971-1972

Service at the University of Kansas

First came to KU in 1972

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, 1972-1977

Director of the KU Psychological Clinic, 1973-1983

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, 1977-present

Associate Chairperson, Department of Psychology, 1984-1993

Interim Chairperson, Department of Computer Science, 1992-1993

Chairperson, Department of Psychology, 1993-1999

Assoc. Chairperson and Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Dept. of Psychology, 1999-2010

Professor Emeritus, 2012
AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS KARPOWITZ

Interviewer: Pat Kelly

Q: This is February 1, 2013. I am Pat Kelly and I am going to be talking with Dennis Hanks Karpowitz. He retired from the University of Kansas May 15, 2012 as associate professor of psychology. Dennis, we’ll start at the beginning, if you will tell us when you were born, about your parents, who your parents were, and things like that.

A: Very Good. I was born February 3, 1943.

Q: Almost a birthday.

A: Coming up right away. My father’s name is Frank Bruno Karpowitz and my mother’s name is Alice Josephine Hanks. Interestingly, both of them are still alive. My mother is 92 and my dad is 90. I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. I’m the oldest of five boys. At our house there was always a lot going on. In fact, I thought maybe we could employ a pediatrician because we were always getting hurt. But my childhood was a very delightful one. I had a number of friends and spent a lot of time playing with them, enjoying that experience. My mother was a medical technologist. She was always involved in some interesting piece of science or research. One of her jobs was a researcher for a fur breeders’ lab. They were looking at a disease in mink that paralleled a disease in human beings. She made things interesting. She didn’t mind if I brought home a frog or a snake. On the other hand our next door neighbor lady jumped right over the four foot fence she was standing next to, when I held up a garden snake. The snake really scared her. But my mom was not shaken by such things. My dad was the representative of a paint company.
We lived in a neighborhood where there were lots of fellows my age. And so I had a lot of fun. By the time I was 14, I thought that I would like to be a professional basketball player. I brought two things to the game. I was short and I was slow. So I wasn’t picked up, even in my high school. But I loved to play and it was a lot of fun because all of my friends enjoyed playing also. I went to a grade school called Libby Edwards School. What was fun about that was that I learned the school song. It was written, I think, by a sixth grader. So after I had my own family came, we would drive over to my parents. We would drive by Libby Edwards and I would sing the song. I’ll start it. “There’s a school that stars above the rest. Libby Edwards is its name. Its faculty and students are the best. Perfection is our aim.” Anyway, that was fun and it would just drive my kids nuts. So I had great fun singing it.

I went to Evergreen Junior High School and then Olympus High School. At Olympus I especially enjoyed debate and was on the debate team. My partner, Lee Rudd, and I won quite a few debates. So I got a little scholarship from that. Debate was very enjoyable. The Korean War was just ending when I graduated from high school in 1961. I did not want to be drafted into the military. So I joined the Army Reserves. If I joined before I was 18, I had fewer meetings to go to, fewer years of meetings. So right after high school I went into the Army and went to basic training at Fort Ord, California. It turned out to be a very good experience. I had grown up primarily with white individuals. There was one black young woman in our junior high school and none in our high school. When I got in the military there were lots of African Americans, lots of Mexican Americans. What was interesting about them is I think they saw the Army as a place to get greater equality. They were very bright, capable people with whom I
enjoyed associating. I thought some of the white guys were in there because they were hoping the Army would take care of them for the rest of their lives. So it was a good learning experience for me, to find that skin color had really little to do with what people are really like. I'll always treasure my brief military duty for the experience I gained.

Q: Were there people in grade school or high school who were particularly helpful to you or interesting?

A: My best friend was Ron Kelly. He had bright orange hair. He lost it about like mine but it stayed orange for a long time. He is a great fellow. In fact, when we get back together it’s like we’ve never been apart. It’s a wonderful friendship. My wife and his wife know each other. We just have a good time. But we aren’t able to get together as often as I would like. Lee Rudd, who lived in our neighborhood, was my debate partner. He was a very interesting young man. He became lawyer. He followed that debate track more than I did. In grade school my closest friend was Russell Cundick. He lived just across the street. Sometimes we would get in arguments and we would wrestle around. Then one of us would go home. Then in five minutes we would be back at the other one’s house saying, “Hey, can you come out and play?” So I have a lot of enjoyable boyhood memories.

I didn’t date a lot. We went to dances and other activities with our church. I belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. Sometimes we are called Mormons. There were a lot of activities for young people. I enjoyed dances even though I was somewhat shy. I remember a couple of young women that I especially liked. One was Tracy Lindorf. Then she gave me a picture of herself which I first thought that was great. Then I turned it over and on the back it said, “I hope that we may always be good
friends.” But I didn’t want to be just her friend. I wanted to be her boyfriend. That was not to be. I did date a young woman whose name was Jeanie Braithwaite. She was a very fine young woman. Ron Kelly and his girlfriend, who he later married, and Jeanie Braithwaite and I would often do things together. We had a lot of fun.

Q: That sounds wonderful. Were there courses that inspired you, since you weren’t going to play basketball?

A: I can say for sure that in grade school my favorite course was recess. [laugh] But in high school I really enjoyed debate. I did stop playing the trumpet in order to take debate. Sometimes I get out my old trumpet and wish that I had stuck with playing a musical instrument. Music gives such beauty to life. I loved history. I remember one of the teachers standing on the desk with a long coat on and a comb over his nose and his hand raised up like Hitler. He played all the parts of these great characters of history. When he was standing on the desk pretending to be Hitler, in walked the principal. That didn’t bother him a bit. He just went right on. He made history come alive.

My grandfather was born in Germany and grew up in Berlin and spoke German. So I thought I would take German. I did take German but I didn’t do very well in it. I remember that the instructor was Mrs. Zuess, which means sweet, but she was not sweet. She was very tough on us. But as I’ll get to, I spent some time in Germany later. It proved to be very helpful to have at least that little bit of background in German. I had an English teacher in my junior year. I don’t recall her name at the moment. But she was wonderful. She introduced us to Shakespeare and did it in a way that I enjoyed reading and rereading classical literature.
After high school I went into the military and had those experiences that I talked about. When I finished the military, which was just about five and a half months, I got home for Christmas and enjoyed that time with my family. I then served a mission for my church. That was a tremendous experience. I spent just a little over two and a half years in Berlin, Germany. At that time Germany had been divided between the British, the French, the United States and the Soviet Union. All of the allied powers wanted Berlin because it was the capital. The city of Berlin was in the middle of East Germany, which was the area controlled by the Soviet Union. So the allied powers divided Berlin into four areas just like they did the whole country. When I was in Berlin from 1962 to 1964, the English, French, and United States sectors were all together without any physical separation. The Soviet Union built a wall isolating the American, British and French sectors from the part of the city controlled by the Soviet Union and from the rest of East Germany. I did have an opportunity to go into East Berlin and twice into East Germany. I met a number of very wonderful people there. They lived hard lives. The government sent much of what they produced off to the Soviet Union. Economically East Germany never really functioned effectively. Communism, as practiced in the Soviet Union and her satellites, didn’t function economically in an effective self-sustaining way. Eventually things fell apart. I knew a man in East Berlin who had a wonderful Mercedes-Benz automobile. He could not get any parts for it. So we were able to buy some pistons and rings in the West and took them through check point Charlie without them asking them too many questions. He put those parts in his car and the people were just amazed at the craftsmanship, the quality. In the East that was not the case. In fact, to get one of the typical cars that average people could afford, you had to
order it and pay for it all and it would be delivered a year or more later. The body was literally made out of wood and cardboard. The car was a Trabant.

Q: I saw those when I was on a trip in Germany. They were still driving them at this time.
A: Oh, yes.
Q: They ran.
A: But they wouldn’t go fast and if you were on the autobahn and in a western made car, you would be going along at 60 or 70 miles an hour. There is no speed limit in the left-hand lane. People pass going 90 mph. But for these little Trabants, 40 miles per hour was about the maximum speed that they would do. It was an interesting experience because you would have to pass the Trabants but you needed to watch for fast sports cars. I never felt very calm and relaxed when I was driving a car. But I enjoyed Berlin a great deal. I enjoyed learning to speak German and learning about their culture.
Q: It was much easier to learn it being in Germany.
A: It was. We rented a room. I always had a companion, a fellow who was also on the mission with me. We would rent a room, usually from a widow. There were lots of widows in Berlin after the war. Then we share use of the kitchen and the bathroom. The room had a couple of single beds, chests of drawers and a “Shrank” for hanging up our suits and shirts. But most all day we were out talking to people, talking to them about our religious message and inviting them to learn more. So we met hundreds and hundreds of people over that two and a half year period. That was wonderful.
Q: German people can be quite nice, can’t they?
Q: They are. I describe German people as like a soft boiled egg. The shell, you know, is hard to get through. But when you get through that shell, there is a lot of warmth and
kindness. We were treated very well. People often invited us to dinner. It was a kind thing. So we met many people that we enjoyed there. Some people were kind of stuck on the war, and that was kind of sad. If only we had done this. If only Hitler hadn’t gone into Russia, or some other thing. If they had put Rommel in Russia instead of somebody else . . . . Most people wanted to put the past behind them. Most people were sad and ashamed about the way Jewish people were treated. So it was just a few who were stuck on the past.

Now I want to jump forward because my oldest son, Chris, also served a mission for our church and was called to serve in Germany. He was in Berlin when the wall came down. I was there six months after the Berlin wall went up. He was there when it came down and also spent some time in East Germany. It was an interesting connection. I’m sure my grandfather would have been very pleased with that connection. He was born in East Prussia and grew up in Berlin. He loved Germany. One of the things I remember about him at Christmas time is we would always sing, “Oh Christmas Tree.” Only it was “Oh Tannenbaum.” I still can still hear in my head his very thick German accent as he would sing. He would always get a little teary. He loved his homeland. He loved America too.

After my mission I attended the University of Utah. Oh, I have to tell you this. I didn’t get home in time to register, so my mother registered me. She decided I should be a premed student and she signed me up for an invertebrate zoology course. Every other person in the class was a senior and I was a freshman who had never been to college. I worked very hard in that class. I didn’t do very well. I did scrape through with, I think, a B-. Many of other class members belonged to a fraternal group that was premed
students. But you couldn’t get into it as a freshman. They had all the handouts and everything that we had to do in the lab. So while I was making the required drawings, they were actually studying the specimens and learning something. That was a traumatic entrance into college. I thought, “I don’t think I am going to go to graduate school if I can’t do better than this.” But then I started taking actual freshman classes. My grades improved. I stayed in premed for a while. But a couple of things happened which say something about teaching and teachers. I was in a chemistry class, which was a difficult class. There were a lot of students in it. There were banks of seats that went way up and the teacher was down in the pit. The professor would write on the chalkboard until it was full and then pull it up and there’d be another chalkboard and the chalkboards would go up and up and up. He would stop the instant the bell rang. He would stop in the middle of a sentence. The next day when the class started, he would start in the middle of the sentence he had stopped in the class before.

Q: Oh, my.

A: In the hall one day I heard him talking to the dean. “I’ve got this course worked out so that I can eliminate 90 percent of the premed students.” And I thought, “Whoa! What a sad thing.” What if he had just said the opposite? I’ve got this class so that 90 percent of the students will be prepared in chemistry for premed.” But I also heard him say one other time, “This would be a great university if we just didn’t have any students.” I wasn’t enjoying chemistry very much. I had taken one psychology class, Introductory Psychology. I then took a child development class from Professor Donna Gelfand. She was a student of Albert Bandura, the father of modeling theory. She was a wonderful teacher. I loved that class. I loved the topic. I had brothers who I enjoyed and our
family was important. So learning about child development was terrific. So I took another psychology class and then another.

I became confused about what my major should be. I went to the career development center. They gave me, the Strong Vocational Inventory. The counselor who was looking at it said, “This is very interesting. Your profile looks just like mine. You should become a psychologist.” I was really interested in psychology. So I switched my major and became a psychology major. It turned out to be a great choice. I enjoyed my psychology classes. Most of my course work was focused on the cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral study of humans. I did take one experimental psychology class which focused on animal behavior. I really wanted to get into the applied aspect of psychology. So I applied to graduate schools with programs in clinical psychology.

In the meantime at the beginning of my senior year I married my wife, Dorothy Diane. Her maiden name was Carpenter. I’ll maybe stop and talk about that for a minute. I met her on an arranged date. A good friend of mine and her best girlfriend were dating. So they set up the date and we went out. I remember that I had one date with someone else that I already had planned before I had gone out with Diane. I went on that date. Then I called her and was only interested in dating her. We dated for two years. We were both from families where we needed to work part-time jobs in order to get through school. We thought we’d better get one of us finished with school before we got married. I’m two years older than she Diane. She was ahead of me in school because I had gone on a mission for the church and been in the military. So we got married when she graduated from the University of Utah. She is an amazing woman, a professional and community leader in her own right. We have had a wonderful life and experienced much
joy together. Our lives together have been rich and full. I think that is one of the reasons marriage, family, children the focus of my research and teaching at the university. I’ll come back to that.

I applied to graduate school and was accepted at the University of Oregon with a really helpful stipend. By the time we actually got to school, we had been married about a year and a half when our first son, Chris, was born. But that was just my first semester at the University of Oregon. So it was really nice to have the stipend. Diane worked part time, substitute teaching. It was at a time when programs in clinical psychology were being well funded by the government. We greatly benefit from those resources.

The clinical psychology program at the University of Oregon had a behavioral focus, but was beginning to move toward cognitive behavioral psychology. I enjoyed my professors. Hal Arkowitz taught a class that I really enjoyed. I just thought we should have written a paper, Arkowitz and Karpowitz. It would have just been hilarious. No one would have remembered who wrote it.

Q: Or no one would forget.

A: That’s right. I remember Ed Lichtenstein taught a wonderful class, on the theory and practice of psychotherapy. One of two professors who most influenced was professor Joseph La Piccolo. He came to OU as a clinical psychologist interested in human sexuality and interested in sex therapy. He was a terrific supervisor. He would sit behind a one-way mirror and I would be in there counseling with someone. Afterwards, we would go over what I had said. He was the kind of a person who made you feel good, made you feel like you could learn to counsel effectively. At the same time he would say
things like, “Have you considered this? Have you considered that?” So it wasn’t as if he just nodded his head at everything I did. I learned a great deal through our interactions.

My research, my thesis and dissertation advisor was Steve Johnson. Steve was interested in family interaction. However, my master’s thesis was actually not something he was interested in, but my own interest. It had to do with the idea of how you help children to comply in a family setting or in a school setting, without increasing the negativity, without increasing punishment or without directly rewarding them in a behavioral way. Were there other ways that one could increase children’s appropriate compliance? One idea I wanted to study was rehearsal, the idea of going over what you’d done that was incorrect and how you might do it correctly. So I did a little experiment. That turned out to be my first published piece of research and it was exciting. I discovered that an adult could assist a child to either rehearse behaviorally, where the child actually went through the actions, or you could do it in your head, cognitively. Both of those rehearsal strategies were much more effective than not doing anything. So, for example, if your child comes in the door and drops his coat on the floor, and you tell him 30 times to pick it up and hang it up and he never does, what this kind of research suggests is that you say to the child, “Why don’t you put your coat on, walk out the door and come in again and hang up your coat.” The child rehearse what he/she did and how to do it correctly. This interventions turns out to be quite effective.

Q: I never thought of that.

A: That became an interesting little line of research that I followed. Several of my students found this same effect. I used young students that were in second grade. We found that it worked right up through junior high school. So it turned out to be an interesting applied
piece of work. In other words, something we found in the laboratory could apply in real life situations. The rest of my research followed that kind of pattern even though the topics were different. Steve Johnson was my advisor for my dissertation. He received a large grant for observing family members interact in their own home. We went into two types of families. We studied one group of families who were never referred for counseling and another group who had been referred for counseling. We used a very extensive behavioral coding system. Middle aged homemakers were taught the coding system. They would go into the home and code the family behavior every 10 seconds. They coded for one hour, five days in a row. There was this huge amount of data that we collected. The results were enlightening. Several papers were published. Professor Johnson had specific hypotheses in which he was interested. We collected enough data that I could answer some questions interesting to me. One of the results I found was that you couldn’t differentiate referred families from non-referred families on the basis of the amount of negative interaction. The difference was that there was much more positive interaction in the non-referred families. It is the positive things that go on in families that are critical to functional interactions. Every family has arguments. If they don’t, they have ulcers because they are holding it all in and it is grinding out inside them, or asthma or something else. But that’s not the issue. If you can heal from those little arguments, if you can forgive each other and move on, if you have something positive going on, then you have a functional relationship.

My mother was the most positive person. When I’d come home from school, she’d say, “What did you learn today?” I’d say, “Oh, nothing.” She’d say, “Oh come on. You learned something.” So I’d have to remember something. And we’d have this
discussion. And it was always positive. “Isn’t that interesting?” Or, “Wow! You should look at that a little more deeply.” She emphasized the positive. So it was easy for me to latch onto that. But it was Steve Johnson’s research and his grant that allowed me to collect the data my dissertation. I finished all the data collection before I left on internship.

I was accepted at the University of Colorado Medical Center to do a one-year internship. While I was there I was also writing my dissertation. So that was a challenging year for our family. We had just had our second baby, a little girl, and she was sick the whole winter there in Denver. So it was a hectic time. I was working at the medical center trying to learn everything I could because they had so much available there. I spent about 60 hours a week at the medical center and tried to spend about 20 hours a week writing on my dissertation and sending it back and forth to my chair, Professor Johnson. Fortunately I got it done and finished my dissertation about the time the internship was over.

During my internship, I applied for an academic position at several universities. I had a couple of excellent job offers but when we came to KU and I talked to people and we thought about it and looked around at the community, we decided this is where we wanted to come.

Q: That was what year?
A: That was 1972. And that proved to be a wonderful decision.

Q: It’s a nice place to live, isn’t it?
A: It is. It really is. We didn’t really know how great Lawrence and KU were when we first came. It was snowing when I left Denver. When I got off the plane in Kansas City in
March, it was one of those early springs and it was beautiful here. We enjoyed the people here. Eric Wright was the head of the clinical program. I enjoyed him so much and his wife Beatrice. Eric has passed away, but I still visit with Beatrice periodically. She lives in Milwaukee Wisconsin.

Q: She’s a gem, isn’t she?
A: She’s just one of a kind. Eric helped me get started in a very wonderful way. I was allowed to pursue what I wanted, teach the classes that I wanted. It was an atmosphere that encourages growth and exploration. In the beginning we thought we would stay here five years and we would go back Salt Lake and Utah, where all of my family is. By the time five years came we were knee deep in wonderful things here. We kept postponing it. Now we have been here 41 years and we are really Kansans. A meaningful transition occurred.

Q: We have pretty good basketball here too.
A: Oh, my. I love basketball. Sometimes it is so anxiety provoking to watch I can hardly watch it. I want those young men to be successful in life. We’ve had a series of coaches who cared about the boys. And that’s what I’ve enjoyed most. Not only do they win basketball games, but they are interested in boys. I had a very interesting experience with Coach Self. Our grandson, Trenton, who loves basketball, came to Coach Self’s summer camps for several years in a row. Coach Self would come around. So we are sitting there. Our grandson was playing and I was talking to the Coach. He said, “Are you here at KU?” I said, “Yes, I’m a psychologist.” He said, “Oh, I’ve got to come and see you. I need some parental guidance.” He was just kidding, but he felt an obligation to the young men. That’s what I appreciated. Several of the earlier coaches did that also. If
sports are like that, I’m in favor of them. The idea of making a lot of money and pro
stuff, that isn’t nearly as interesting as making good men, good women.

Q: A good life.

A: That’s right. That’s the critical thing. So we came to KU. I taught one of my favorite
courses early on. It was called The Mental Health of Children, which combined
development with the kinds of problems that lots of kids have, not big time problems, not
conduct disorders, sociopathic kids, but the kinds of problems that normal families would
have. What do you do when I child has nightmares or wets the bed? How do you stop
arguments between siblings? I tried to combine research findings, not only my own but
that which I was reading in the literature with applied ways of working with kids. Eric
Wright helped me arrange to spend 20 percent of my time in a private practice. The
university administrators indicated that many professors spend 20 percent consulting so
was allowed to spend my 20% in private practice. Fridays was my day to practice. I
would teach and do research the other four days and evenings and Saturdays as I could.

I really believe in families. So we had one night every week that we just spent
together as a family. For us it was Monday night. There were fewer activities in the
schools and community on Mondays. It was interesting when the kids went off to college
they called us sometimes on Mondays and say, “Are you together?” We’d say, “Yes, we
are here.” They’d want to listen and be a part of it. It was amazing because they wanted
to get out of the house and go but once they were there, our stock went up. I should
describe my family. We have six children. The first five are all two and a half years
apart. Our children came boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, and girl. Of course I tell people that
we psychologists know how to do that, which is, of course, silly. We have wonderful
kids. They are a joy. Our kids all did a good job in school. Our oldest son, Chris, decided to continue in school and got his master’s and Ph.D. in political science. He got his Ph.D. at Princeton and now teaches at Brigham Young University. But just to show you that family influence really does occur, his research is about the psychological aspects of the political process. So I enjoyed discussing his work with him. He is a superb researcher. I think in the long run as his career moves along he will be a much better researcher than I was. I probably have enjoyed the teaching aspects of the university more. But he is just superb in teaching and research. He and his wife, Jordan, have four children. Our daughter, Wendy, got her bachelor’s degree in child development and in psychology at KU. She has three sons and lives in Lawrence. Our next son Matthew, Matt, was interested in radio and television and received his degree in that field. For a while he was a news producer on the radio and television. The producer is the person who writes the script that the person you see or hear reads. He would get early news feeds. He would call us and say, “Hey, there’s a tornado in Kansas.” We weren’t even aware. But he’d get the news early and share it with us. That was fun. He now has gone more into business communications and works in Henderson, Nevada. He and his wife, Leah, are expecting their fifth child. Our daughter, Jenni, received her degree in design. She gives us good advice about decorating our home. She married a wonderful fellow, Josh, who works in advertising. They have three children. Now he and some other people are starting their own business. They live in Utah. So we have two children in Utah. The rest are spread all over. Joel is our youngest son. He married a girl from Lawrence, Amelia, her maiden name was Buhler. They live in Brunswick on the coast of Georgia. He received a master’s degree in English from Penn State. He teaches at a
private high school on St. Simons Island. Only really wealthy people live on the island. So he lives in Brunswick, which is on the coast. But it is a beautiful area. The climate is like northern Florida. We are going down there in February. It is a great place to be in February. Our youngest daughter, Beth, became an English teacher also. She married a fellow from KU who got his degree in engineering and they live in Fort Worth, Texas. Time works for Exon Mobile. They seem to have a happy life. They have a 19 month old daughter and are expecting a baby in five months. We have 15 grandchildren and two more on the way. We just found out that the 16th is a little girl and the 17th is a little boy. Both families expecting children are happy. So my family is wonderful, and what I like more than anything else is being together with my family. It’s a joy.

Back to KU, after teaching the mental health of children for a while I decided that our department needed a course in psychology that was about families and about marriage. Most of those courses were taught in the sociology department. But the sociology departments teach using kind of macro variables, big variables like ethnicity and socio economic class. Those are important variables, but I wanted to look at more micro interactions, especially the relationship. If I do this and they do that, how does that go? So I developed a course. I think it was one of the first in the United States that was taught in a department of psychology. The other place you could get family courses was in like schools of home economics or nutrition. I wanted a course that was empirically based. What does science tell us? How can we apply it? That was really important to me. So I developed a course that was called The Psychology of Families. That became my favorite course.
As time went on, it became my turn to teach a large child development course with about 400 students. That’s an experience. It’s hard to have the kind of student and teacher interaction that I would really like. As I was moving toward retirement, I got interested in how computers can assist us in large classes. For example, professors can make some podcasts that can be watched at the student’s convenience. I believe such innovations will improve the quality of large courses.

Q: Was this a part of the Life Span Institute?
A: It really wasn’t. The Life Span Institute came out of the Department of Human Development, which is now the Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences. When they changed their name and focus, the child psychologist moved from their department to ours. So we had an even larger body of individuals interested in developmental psychology. Some of our developmental psychologists have written and received large grants with the help of the Schieffelbush Institute.

Q: They got a good one recently, didn’t they?
A: They are amazing. But I was never a part of that. I think that I tended to do research that answered questions that had primarily to do with my applied interests. The government wasn’t as interested in funding those projects as I was in doing research.

I had been at KU less than a year when Jim Stachowiak left. He was the director of our psychological clinic. We didn’t have anyone to direct the clinic. So very early in my career I got involved in administration. I enjoyed directing the clinic because my own interest was in the application of psychological principles identified through empirical research. We had an in-house clinic where our students saw clients and we supervised
them. The experience was terrific. I enjoyed directing the psychological clinic for 10 years.

Then an amazing thing happened. The dean of the College came to me and said, “We have a problem in computer science and we want you to be the interim chair for a year.” Well, the only thing I knew about computers was just a little bit of programming that I did for some of my research. But I decided try and be of help. I left our department for a year and became the interim chair in computer science. A terrible thing had happened there. They had divided into two groups and they just couldn’t work together.

Q: I heard that.

A: And it was the saddest thing. My job really was to make sure the graduate students didn’t get hurt. And so I would go to all of the oral examinations to make sure that they were carried out fairly. The dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the dean of School of Engineering got together and they developed a plan to put computer science in the School of Engineering, which they did. In the United States back then about two thirds were in schools of engineering and about one third were in colleges of liberal arts and sciences. But it was a sad thing because I think a lot of careers were not as successful as they could have been because they got angry with each other, spending their time putting each other down.

Q: Almost throwing rocks at each other.

A: Yes, throwing rocks at each other and being mean. Whoever was the chair had the power and was hurting the others who didn’t have power. It was just sad. I thought the dean was very wise. That was a hard thing to take on to move those individuals into a
situation where (1) they weren’t hurting each other and (2) those who wanted to, especially the younger faculty, could move ahead. That happened and I was pleased to play a small role. It was interesting and it taught me that it was a joy to be in psychology because we got along, not so much because we agreed. Psychology is a big department and we have many different areas, social psychology, child development, cognitive psychology, clinical psychology. In many ways it is difficult to understand the research of each other because they each have their own language and science base. But for some reason, it has been a real joy that the people who were hired tended to be people who just were able to get along. That made the department function effectively. When I finished the year as interim chair of computer science, there was a need for a chair in the Department of Psychology and so I applied to be a chair. I thought, “Wow. If I could last a year when people were at war with each other, surely I could manage a department when there was a different attitude.” And it turned out that way. I had a wonderful time the six years that I was the chair. I thought the department moved ahead smoothly. We hired a number of people. The chair and the associate chair of the department now are people we hired when I was the chair. I feel somewhat parental in seeing them succeed and seeing what they are accomplishing.

Q: Have you considered going into politics now and seeing what you could do?

A: I don’t know. They’ve got gridlock in politics. I think what happens there is they get so involved in their own reelection that they don’t think of the good of the whole. In psychology most faculty think about, “How are we going to make our department stronger?” I think we can all get what we want if we work together better than if we argue. For example, we found a way to hire people without too much arguing. If you just
look at the present year, a social psychologist wants to hire a social psychologist, a
cognitive psychologist, a cognitive psychologist, etc. So we did a simple thing and that
was to look several years ahead and line up a queue. Then if the university had openings,
we knew what kind of psychologist we wanted for that year and were ready to go. It
stopped all of that bickering. But I think you can’t do any better than the people you are
working with. It’s not just the chair. It is everybody working together.

After a total of 8 years as chair at the department level, I wanted to try something
different. I really liked working with undergraduates. And so after I left being the chair,
I became the director of undergraduate studies. And then later that was changed to
associate chair and coordinator of undergraduate studies. That was really worthwhile
because almost all undergraduate problems are solvable. It’s a problem when every
faculty member comes to you and says, “Look, I’m the best faculty member you have in
the department. I need the biggest raise.” You can’t please 30 people who feel that way
and who are doing very well in their careers. Almost all are doing extremely well, but
often there were unsolvable problems because they couldn’t always be first. You can’t
have 30 people all be number one. So I enjoyed administering with undergraduates
because so many of their problems were solvable problems. It was fun to see them
succeed. I still have students write me. I got a letter recently where a student said, “You
allowed me to retake a course that I had not done well in. I just wanted you to know
what happened.” She said, “First of all I took the course again and I got an A- in the
course. I went on to graduate school and I just finished my master’s degree and I have a
job in my field.” You know, that’s gratifying. And it’s those kinds of things that were
for me the most important. I think that I made a contribution in research in a number of
areas, but probably not as much as some of my colleagues. I think that my work in administration and teaching were probably the things I emphasized the most.

Q: It takes all kinds.
A: We had a big enough department that we could do that. For example, when I was chair we had a man who was one of the best mentors for graduate students you could imagine. We wouldn’t put him in front of undergraduates for anything. In a class with 40 or more students he was disorganized, he didn’t teach well, he couldn’t give a really good lecture-discussion. But mentoring graduate students and helping them with their research and ideas about where their research could go, he was tremendous. So that was wonderful that we could do let faculty focus in their areas of strength. And it was wonderful that the university allowed me to use the strengths that I had to do the things that I did. I was happy when the undergraduates nominated me for the HOPE award. I didn’t win but I was a finalist. And that meant a lot to me. I was a finalist twice. It’s one of the few awards you don’t apply for. The undergraduates choose you.

Q: That’s an important notice.
A: How students felt about their education when I was doing the teaching was important to me. Of course there are other elements. You can’t just be a “fun” teacher, an entertainer. You have to be able to help students see the concepts and the research that supports them, and to think critically about issues.

Q: They have to be able to go away with something, don’t they?
A: I treasure on award in particular. A graduate student went to California and 10 years later nominated me as the teacher who had most influenced him. The state of California gave me the award and it means a lot to me. While we could have a good time in the learning
process, we could also learn a lot. Knowledge is exploding. We need to be able to use information coupled with wisdom. We need to be able to work together for the good of the whole. This can only happen in a world where there is peace. When I was a boy and I saw all those pictures of people who were killed in the Second World War and the Jews and how they were mistreated, I thought, “Surely we’ve learned. We’ll never have another tragedy like that.” How naive.

Q: That was a war to end all wars.

A: But we continued to have war. So one of the things that I am most interested in in my life is what do we do to help other people? I spend a lot of my time since I’ve retired volunteering. I do it in my church. I love working as a group to help worthwhile things happen. Here in Lawrence, for example, there is the LINK program. People who are homeless or have very little may come three times a week and get a really good meal. Church groups work together to make this happen and it’s not great burden for any one group or individual. That is a great thing. Those who participate also learn empathy for those in dire straits. I hope if I am remembered for anything it will be for being a good person and a person who cared about other people and wanted to see them succeed, whether they were faculty and I was the chair, or whether they were students and I was their professor. That’s what a university is about. It is about ideas and it’s about helping people to develop and expand their horizons.

Q: Right. Were there students of yours who went on to have successful careers?

A: Yes, the vast majority of them went on to lead productive professional lives. Most of the students I worked with, the graduate students were clinical graduate students. Because my interests were more applied, they chose me to work on applied problems in their
dissertations. Most of their careers were as psychotherapists and directors of mental health facilities. I remember Renate Welch. She was born in Germany. Her mother told her she would always be a “washer woman.” She didn’t think she could go to college. However, she took a few courses at the University of Oregon. One of the classes was taught by a young assistant professor, Bob Welch. After the course was over they started dating. They married and his career brought him to KU. Renate decided to finish her degree here. She overcame all of her challenges and finished her bachelor, masters, and Ph.D. degrees. She went to the San Francisco and in time became the director of a family psychology program at a prodigious VA hospital. When one sees such growth and success, it is very satisfying. I just wanted to mention one other interesting student, who others might recognize. Dr. Wes Crenshaw took a graduate course from me in family psychology, family therapy. What was interesting about Wes was that he went on to establish his practice here in Lawrence the Family Therapy Institute Midwest. If you read the Lawrence Journal-World, he has a regular column, giving advice about marriage and family. That’s kind of fun. So he’s become someone that maybe the community as a whole is aware of. I enjoyed seeing his professional development. I didn’t have a lot to do with his career. But it was fun and certainly he took seriously the issues of family because he not only works with individuals, but marriage and family is his focus. That was gratifying.

I retired one year earlier than we had really planned because I had an opportunity to serve in my church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not have a paid ministry. Almost everyone in the church volunteers their time and energy. So I earlier in my life, I was the bishop of our congregation. That’s sort of like the local
minister. The units are smaller, about 500 – 600 people. Then I became the stake president. A stake is like a diocese in the Catholic Church. I watched over 11 congregations in eastern Kansas, about 3500 individuals. I was doing this while I was at the university. So I was in the community in this other way. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints built a temple in northern Kansas City, MO. That was a great joy to me. I had an opportunity to take part in a leadership role there. There’s a presidency of the temple composed of three men and then three women. My wife and I are two of the individuals involved. There’s a president and a matron of the temple. There are two counselors to the president and two assistants to the matron. So we spend about 35 hours a week there. There are about 750 volunteers involved in the temple. So we train and supervise those volunteers. In addition about 300 people visit the temple each day. Marriages are performed there, for example. I’ve had the opportunity to marry a number of people. So it’s a wonderful experience. It’s a beautiful building. It’s a lovely place to be. Our service in the leadership is for three years, but I think we’ll continue to play some a role there over a longer period of time. This service leaves time for me to spend with my family.

Q: Even on the job.

A: I have continued my private practice. I see fewer patients. The temple is closed on Monday so I do my private practice on Mondays. I’m grateful that KU allowed me to have a small private practice while I was employed there. I don’t think I would want to be in private practice full time. In fact, I’m amazed at people who for eight or 10 hours a day can see one person with challenges after another. I was refreshed by the students, my research, and some administrative duties. I think it allowed me to give more of myself in
the counseling part. My practice is with people who are quite functional. It is a joy. I work with some couples and help them with their marriage and sometimes with their parenting issues. I also see individuals, primarily with depression, anxiety and a few individuals who have suffered abuse in their lives.

Q: Eight hours a day would be a lot of that. My husband was a law professor. He’s been in private practice. He said, “It’s such a joy. Students are so much nicer than clients.”

A: That’s right. I think that’s allowed me to counsel in a better way than I could if I was doing it 40 or 50 hours a week. In fact, I often tell my students, “If you really want to be in private practice, do something else in addition to your practice. Teach some courses.” So I have a number of graduate students who arranged their professional lives with a combination of activities including a private practice. Laurie Schwartz took some courses with me. She received her Ph.D. at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in their counseling psychology program. She has a little private practice. Then she teaches at a couple of the small colleges in Kansas City. I think that’s a better combination than just seeing patients. I’m not sure everyone realizes the emotional challenge that is part of being a therapist or counselor. In order for people to be helped in a maximum way, they have to know that their counselor cares about them. It’s true of teaching too. When I ask students to suggest the characteristics of teachers who have been influential in their lives, they include that she or he cared about them, in addition to them being good teachers. I think my wife and I will spend volunteering as long as our health is good. I plan to continue my private practice. I’ve been thinking to move my practice a little more toward individuals who in retirement and getting a little older. I’ve stopped seeing children and adolescents. Adolescents look at me and say, “Were you born before or
after the flood? I’m sure you knew Noah.” So I don’t do as much with that age group. I’m very blessed to have good health and strength. So I hope that can continue. I think that’s a good place to stop, except to say how much I love KU and how much I appreciate the great university it is. You know, it’s one thing to get paid for a job, another thing to get paid for a job you love to do.

Q: That’s almost like play, isn’t it?
A: It is. I’m grateful not only that they paid me but that they allowed me to pursue the things that I was good at and that I enjoyed. I think that’s how people do their best. My wife and I were talking about Ford, Henry Ford. He had great ideas, but as man, he hurt a lot of people along the way.

Q: I had no idea until I watched that TV documentary.
A: I’ve always had this very positive view of him and then I saw the documentary and thought, “Oh, how sad.” His own son just couldn’t please him. One of the greatest joys in my life is my children. I just can’t imagine having that kind of relationship. It’s just sad. So I’m grateful to KU for the attitudes of the administration and having people get excited about what they were interested in and pursue that. That’s great. That’s a good place to end.

Q: I’m so glad that you were willing to come and do this. It’s been very delightful.
A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you so much.