

Interview with Jean Keffeler

Interviewed by Ann Pflaum

Interviewed on July 25, 1999

Jean Keffeler - JK

Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Ann Pflaum. I am interviewing the Honorable Jean B. Keffeler, who is an alumna of the University of Minnesota and a former member of the Board of Regents and formerly chair. I will do this interview for the history, as all the other interviews are, beginning, Jean, by asking you to describe how you got to the university, how you heard about it, and what you studied.

JK: By the way, is this taped?

AP: Yes, it is taped. This will be a public record. This will go into the archives.

JK: Will I get a copy of the tape?

AP: You can have a copy of the tape.

JK: Sounds good to me.

How could I not go off to the university? I grew up in Minneapolis. One aspiration in our family was always to go to college and there wasn't much question about where one would go. It either was going to be the College of St. Catherine—we were a Catholic family—or it was going to be the University of Minnesota. I went to St. Kate's for about a year and a half and, then, transferred to the "U". I studied French as an undergraduate and did master's degrees in both social work and public administration.

AP: That would have been in the pre-Humphrey Institute? Is that correct?

JK: Yes.

AP: It was called the School of Public Affairs then, I think. What did you study? Was it city planning or urban government?

JK: Ann, if we had those distinctions, I don't remember.

AP: It probably didn't. That was just a wild guess. I don't know.

JK: If they had distinctions, I probably would have been taking something like organization and management. In social work, they had casework, group work, and administration and I was in the administration [unclear] sequence.

AP: I know that your father was the executive director of the precursor to the United Way.

JK: Yes, the Community Health and Welfare Council.

AP: That was a kind of organizational business office that would oversee the working of the agencies? Is that correct?

JK: Right. Both he and my mother were social workers.

AP: So, that your degree in social work came with a kind of lineage.

JK: Yes, my sister also has a master's in social work.

AP: I think I knew that. I had forgotten. What year did you graduate from undergraduate?

JK: In 1967, summa cum laude.

AP: Summa? Oh, my gracious!

JK: Get it straight, Ann.

AP: I've got to get that straight, absolutely! That's wonderful. The MSW then was Graduate School, so the undergraduate degree was CLA [College of Liberal Arts]...French?

JK: Right.

AP: Then, you went on to social work. What did you do after you graduated from social work?

JK: I, simultaneously, got degrees in both social work and public administration. My plan had always been... Why do you want to know all this stuff?

AP: We're asking everybody. It's a cultural history of the university, so how people's careers evolved and their choices are just plain interesting to us.

JK: I was kind of going through school in the Great Society Era. It was my observation that there were many social welfare or community action kinds of programs that had laudable intents but were very badly managed or there were people who were just dynamite managers but didn't have sensitivity

for the nature of the programs they were managing. So, I thought the combination of administration and social welfare would be a good combination.

After I finished my graduate degrees, I immediately went to work for the city-planning department and I was an urban social planner. I, then, left the city of Minneapolis, after a short couple of years, and went to work for Hennepin County. If you really are interested, I took a pay cut to go work for Hennepin County. Hennepin County was kind of an unknown entity at the time. All the action was in the city of Minneapolis. I worked for Hennepin County as a budget analyst. Because it was a new and growing organization, I was able to grow with it. I was young in my career when the county was taking over the court system, taking over the hospitals, and public health system, consolidating the library system, developing the park system, and that was a burgeoning time for me and for the county.

After becoming the major budget analyst for all the county's health and social services program, which had the largest and still are the largest here of the county budget, I became the first director of the county's Office of Planning and Development—I think I was probably twenty-nine, at the time—and, then, became the deputy administrator of the county at age thirty-two some years thereafter. Stan Cowell...did you ever know Stan?

AP: Yes.

JK: When Stan resigned as county administrator, the deputy administrator became the county administrator and I moved into the deputy spot. That's my early work history.

AP: Didn't you have some health care, hospital administration, later on?

JK: At the time of the divestiture of the *baby bells* from AT&T, I was hired by Northwestern Bell to oversee the financial aspects of the divestiture of the marketing operation and, eventually, became the general manager [unclear] for Northwestern Bell business accounts, five states. Then, I went to work for Control Data Corporation as the vice-president of strategic planning, becoming the chief financial officer of the Disk Drive Division of Control Data—which is where Larry Fromen and I formed or association. I was, then, recruited by Health One. I had been on the board of a predecessor organization, Health Central. They recruited me to run the west region of what was the precursor of the Allina and Life Span merger.

AP: Was that the business side or the hospital side or over the hospitals?

JK: I had responsibility for all of the west regional operations. The hospitals I was responsible for were Mercy, Unity, Mt. Sinai, Metropolitan Medical Center, and a handful of nursing homes and home health care kinds of services.

AP: When, then, did you join the regents?

JK: Ann, you'll have to look up any dates because I am terrible with dates.

AP: I will get your vitae if I may from the regent's office. I think they keep them on file.

JK: I believe it was 1989. I was at Health One at the time I joined the regents. I remember that.

AP: Did you have an at large seat?

JK: I had a Fifth District seat.

Another piece of history that's probably pertinent here is that at the time that Governor [Rudy] Perpich appointed the so-called Blue Ribbon Commission to look at the university... Do you remember what I am talking about?

AP: I do. It was chaired by Ed Spencer, I think.

JK: Yes. I was a member of that commission. Gus Donhowe was the chairman of one of the major committees of that commission and I was the chairman of the other major committee of that commission. That's really where my involvement with the university was reactivated, although I did teach for a while in the School of Social Work.

AP: What did you teach in the School of Social Work?

JK: Organization and Administration. Remember Peggy Lucas?

AP: Yes.

JK: Peggy was one of my students. Isn't that a gas?

AP: That's interesting. Gracious!

As I recall, the Donhowe and Spencer task force was appointed after [President Kenneth] Keller had resigned and was a kind of reexamination of institutional directions.

JK: Right.

AP: I think it's considered one of the most important reports. I remember, at that time, and it's my impression looking others, that among the thousands of reports every year that are done on the university, that it stands up very, very well as thoughtful and forward looking. Do you remember it all?

JK: I remember it well. I would say it was the finest public service task force or commission I had ever served on or have served on since and I've been on many. I was on the Latimer Tax Commission appointed by Perpich. I was on Governor [Al] Quie's Commission on Public Sector Compensation. I headed up the city's reexamination of the Community Development Block Grant Program. My whole history, after leaving government, included [unclear] in the public sector, so I'm sure that's what brought me to the attention of Governor Perpich after the Ken Keller situation. Yes, it was a superb

commission. Ed Spencer did an absolutely magnificent job. It was a sensitive, thorough, and competent study. We were charged with two things. One was to take a look at the financial systems. Does this sound familiar at the university?

AP: Yes.

JK: Gus took over the examination of the financial. The other was to take a look at organization and governance issues and, would you believe, I was responsible for the organization and governance issues?

AP: I do and I recall that. Were you on the board, at that time?

JK: No.

AP: But, shortly thereafter, then, you would have joined the board?

JK: Exactly.

AP: One of the things we want to write about is the culture of the board. One of the questions I'm going around asking, and I haven't found the answer to yet, is where the tradition grew of calling the regents "the honorable"? Do you have any feel for that?

JK: I have no idea.

AP: It's very nice and there aren't very many people in the state... I think judges are occasionally called "the honorable".

JK: Know what, Ann? I wonder if anyone who holds a constitutional office is called "the honorable".

AP: That's a thought. I'll call the secretary of state's office.

JK: That would be one avenue I would check.

AP: What was it like to join it? There were men and women, persons of color. It was a moderately diverse group? What was it like? You're in a particularly interesting position to comment because you've been on a number of boards.

JK: I'm happy to respond to that, but I just don't even begin to know where to take hold of it. [pause] I don't know where to start, Ann. Get me jump-started.

AP: Let's just pass on and we can come back to it. It was just a thought.

JK: Maybe somewhere to start is... I'm sure you're going to be going through all of the business about efforts to improve the selection of regents.

AP: Right, we will talk a little bit about that.

JK: There's a committee that John French put together and they came up, then, with a change in the legislation that provided for the citizen review group. Mary Page, Allen Page, Darin Rocha and I were the first people to come out of that process. I guess I'd have to say that what it was like began with what it was like to participate in that process. I guess I was struck, even at the outset, by all the differing and tightly held views that people had about what was or wasn't an appropriate role for a regent and by what was and what wasn't seen as an appropriate way to engage in the necessarily political process of appointment. So, I guess my first impression would have been surprise that there was so much ado about it. [laughter] I suppose I thought that I was responding to a nomination and embarking on a process and very quickly found myself, and everybody else who was in that process the first time around, to be the subject of a lot of...

Oh! I know my first... Here's an interesting thing. [laughter] I remember in my interview process being asked about the [Shyamala] Rajender Decree. Now, here I am a person who certainly has good understanding of the popular press and good awareness of what's going on generally in the world, but it had been a while since the Rajender Consent Decree and I'm being asked in this interview, "What do you think?" It was... Helen Swanson? I can see her sitting there and asking me this question, "What did you think of Rajender?" I looked her right in the eye and I said, "It's familiar, but I'm not placing exactly what the... It probably has something to do with personnel, but I'm not quite on it." The next morning, there was a headline saying, "Would-be Regent Fails to Answer Sex-Biased Question," or something to that effect. It was kind of like, oh, boy! a recognition that everything that you do is so terribly public. I'm rambling.

AP: No, no. This is very cogent and very helpful. One of the groups for whom this book is written are people that, perhaps, are new to the state and want to get caught up on what is this university, so something like this is very helpful, very germane.

JK: Dale Olseth got nailed on that, too. Then went on to say that Olseth had failed to answer the same question earlier. I guess if one wanted to [unclear] insights, Ann, I would be a little hesitant to do this, maybe there's been a quicker inclination to criticize weaknesses than to applaud strengths. There surely must have been all kinds of responses that Dale Olseth gave that were good responses. Certainly, there must have been responses I gave that would have been good or [unclear] responses, but the climate of the time, even then, was one of scrutiny.

AP: Moving along then to your time as a regent, are there particular issues, as you look back on them, that you'd like to comment on? I've got a question for you on one in particular, but want to have you feel free to comment.

JK: I think, in general, the time I that I was on the board was a time of great financial pressure for the "U". It was a time that there was a desperate need to clarify the strategic direction that had been, however, falteringly enunciated by President Keller, but it was unclear as to whether the Commitment to Focus was still alive or whether the baby had been thrown out with the bath, so to speak, or, if in

fact, a new strategic direction was necessary. There was a powerful sentiment outside the university that it was a time for organization and management systems to be, indeed, reformed, the findings of the Spencer Commission having pointed so clearly to the arcane and broken systems, all the way from financial systems to the human resources to the academic management kinds of issues. So there was a very full agenda. There were so many things. It's kind of like, why don't you review what happened during those years and I'm sure I could go on for an hour about each one. [laughter]

In the midst of all of these systemic issues, the bread and butter issues of organizing, managing, and reviewing a large and complex organization, we had the ALG [Antilymphocytic Globulin] issue raise its head.

AP: Yes.

JK: It seemed that there was always one crisis after another. ALG was one of the biggest. Then, later, of course, was the tenure issue. Whether it was Chris Voelz—I don't mean that in a personalized sense—whether it was animosity in athletics or allegedly improper FDA [Food and Drug Administration] compliance, the issue of consent compliance, there were big public controversial issues that made it very hard for the board and I'm sure the administration to tend to the necessary business of organizational renewal. So, that's one thing that I would reflect in terms of an overall climate of those years. It was a very full agenda, in short.

AP: One of the interesting issues, that undoubtedly you remember, was the General College issue?

JK: Right.

AP: What I've picked up from other interviews is the impression that there must have been a misunderstanding. We have some quotes from Phil Shively, who was the provost, and from Nils Hasselmo. There's an interesting quote from Shively, something to the effect—the "they" in this sentence is the regents—"They had to know we intended closing a college." I've talked to Wendell Anderson and I'm going to talk to Tom Regan. My impression is that the regents didn't know that that was what was in the minds of the administration. Do you remember that at all? Do you have any light to throw on that? There was the sort of lead-up: the regents said to the administration, "Do something big. We need major decisive action." So, you're all quoted as sort of encouraging them to take bold action. They deduced from that that it was understood that a college closing might ensue.

JK: I think that we were encouraging them to take... I just am uncomfortable with encouraging them to take bold action. I don't think anybody wanted stupid bold action. I think we were concerned that there had been too many years of incremental chipping away without being able to discern a strategic thrust behind it. When U-2000 was put forth in its boldest and broadest outline, it was just that, Ann. It was a very high-level outline, necessarily and appropriately so for a first visionary stab at it. But, we were eager to get on with flushing that out, to see what the implications would be of implementing that kind of vision when you aligned the vision with the financial realities we were facing. Somehow, the next step of... What did they call it—clusters or something?—as it worked its way down into the collegiate unit? That next peel of the layer of the onion was never

revealed. Instead, what the administration did—I'll get to the question that you asked; this is a long run at it—is they focused on organizational structure issues and, suddenly, instead of talking about strategic programmatic issues, the administration was agonizing over which parts of Central Administration ought to be moving into other parts. They started going into this business about whether there were going to be two provosts or three provosts or five provosts. I don't know if you were aware of any of that stuff from the part of the university you were interacting with? Are you at all relating to what I'm saying?

AP: I remember, indeed.

JK: Yes, it was that whole convulsion of organization chart activity that took center stage rather than any strategic initiative. Meanwhile, when the budgeting would go forth, there seemed to be one directive after another issued to departments. The directives were sometimes inconsistent. They certainly didn't illuminate strategic thrust and the board would, ultimately, get budgets that were incremental rather than substantive. So, we were encouraging the administration. It's interesting that you think the General College was a bellwether decision. Interestingly, the issue of the appointment of Phil Shively as provost was, in many ways, a more symbolic decision in terms of some of the underlying issues. We were encouraging something strategic and substantive. I'm not surprised that the administration might interpret that as, do something bold, but that would be a wrong interpretation, I think. I can imagine a Wendy Anderson or a Tom Regan or any member of the board saying something like, "We want bold action," but I don't think it's bold in the sense of, "Give us something dramatic"—although, we had questions on the overall organizational overhead. Nils, frankly, had been saying so long that departments needed to be closed or collegiate units needed to be abolished that the administration had itself set the stage that one key to strategic renewal would involve consolidation. Okay?

AP: Okay.

JK: No, there was utterly no preparation on the part of the board for the closing of General College. One of the dilemmas about lack of clarification on U-2000 was... What was it? You probably remember? There was something called University College.

AP: Yes.

JK: There was always confusion on the part of the board about what University College was and how University College related to General College. No matter how we wrestled with that one, it tended to just kind of squirt out between our fingers. [laughter] At one point, I think rather early on, people assumed, okay, General College is going to be closed and University College is going to somehow replace it [unclear] move it or whatever. When questions were raised about that, in fact, the university administration bent over backwards assuring us that General College wasn't being closed. It was going to be bigger and better than ever. So within that context, I think the announcement—it was an announcement; Phil Shively called members of the board and said, "This is what we've decided to do"—was a surprise.

AP: Then, in the materials we've got so far from Shively and Hasselmo, they, then, felt betrayed when the board voted them down 11-1 and the issue was effectively closed.

JK: I think that that was a really—now that we're talking about it and I'm refreshing my recollection—unfortunate outcome, because it was easy for people who were not on the inside track but very concerned about the university, whether foundation types, alumni association type, that second tier of interest, to think, here you finally have an administration that's willing to take courageous action and what's happening? The regents aren't supporting them. The difficulty on the part of the board was that there was no underpinning whatsoever for the nature of the decision that the president was asking. It was the wrong decision to call that card on. So, it was a bad deal all around. I don't know exactly what I'm trying to get across. I guess I would maybe just say, I felt that my vote on that was between the rock and the hard place: the rock being the need for strategic renewal and the hard place being the *wrong-headedness* of the particular decision that we were being asked to make, both in terms of the governance process of the decision and, also, the utter lack of thought as to what was being done and why it was it was being done. I remember asking and the board minutes will probably reflect that I asked, "What will be the financial consequences of this move?" The administration hadn't done any financial analysis whatsoever. I even sent a memo, before the meeting, asking Dick Fitzenreuder to show me the quantitative analysis that accompanied the recommendation. There was none. When you can predict that a decision will be sensitive, even if they predicted that the Board of Regents would all love this decision, you could have predicted that there would have been a lot of people in the community concerned about it because it isn't as if we haven't been around this [unclear] before. So, you would have thought that the underpinnings of the decision would have been well thought through. Instead, it seems to be a precipitous reaction to some perceived urgent need to—quote—do something. That's probably enough on that, isn't it?

AP: Sure, I think it is.

Do you want to say something about the tenure issue?

JK: Sure, I'm happy to talk about that. Where would you like to start?

AP: The short version, as I recall it—you're, I know, a greater expert on this than I am—is that we ended up with several plans and approaches. There was a pivotal meeting at Morris and there was a regents' plan and an administration plan. They were different and, then, it led to a faculty vote for unionization which was, basically, a device for those concerned about one of the plans to use the cease and desist rules to get the issue in abeyance for several months and, then finally, a plan developed by the dean of the Law School, Dean Sullivan, ended up the coin of the realm, as it were. The popular view among the faculty now is that although a very painful sort of way to make a pudding, it has ended up in a pretty good place. So, that's the sort of buzz that we're picking up as part of the history. Now, I would welcome any corrections from you, additions or any place you want to jump in.

JK: Yes, I'm sure your chronology of this is essentially accurate. When I say, "essentially"... If there's any part of what you said that was out of sequence... Permit me to give you kind of a ground level perspective from one in the eye of the storm, at the time.

AP: Absolutely.

JK: I'd been on the board. I was beginning my second term. Every year, we would approve tenure recommendations. We never had any discussion of those tenure recommendations, except to the extent that people questioned diversity. But the diversity discussions generally came up in the context of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity and in the hiring of administrative officers. Are you with me?

AP: Yes, I'm with you.

JK: But, discussions were not in connection with tenure. I guess my main point is that the only discussions that there ever were about tenure would have been those related to how many minorities and women do we have who are tenure track or tenured or up for tenure and being proposed for tenure? Keep in mind that this is a time when the university was under great financial pressure, when we were being told about the difficulty of... We had tried to reap some savings from the closure of Waseca, only to find that most of the savings were dissipated by the fact that we couldn't make any personnel changes. You may remember that there were special lines created in various departments to absorb the positions from Waseca and those lines were kind of grandfathered in for a number of years. Am I talking sense at all?

AP: Oh, yes, yes.

JK: I raised the question that I thought that tenure was one of the most important decisions, that the granting of tenure was one of the most important decisions that the board made. We had been through, before, the issue of whether or not tenure was something that the board ought to grant when we were renewing all of the administrative and—I guess we called it—regents' policies and procedures. The issue of whether or not the board ought to grant tenure as opposed to the president or the provost granting tenure is something that had already come up in favor of the board ought to grant tenure. I'm losing myself a little bit because there are so many different ways of going about this and I'm mindful of the fact that we don't have a whole lot more time here. Ann, it just seemed to me and I mused aloud to the board that I thought that we ought to take a look at our tenure practices. It wasn't anymore complicated than that. I said, "I'd like us to step back to educate ourselves on what all was involved in tenure and to take a look at how the University of Minnesota stacked up in its tenure practices and policies. I probably said things at the meeting—if you go back to the tape—things like, "You know I hear people say that we've got a really strict tenure code. I don't know what a strict tenure code means. Do we have a strict tenure code?" I did reflect on the fact that once we grant tenure that our particular code certainly does not allow us to, then, make the kinds of changes in terms of departmental restructuring, so maybe we should be looking at the distribution of tenured positions across departments with an eye to what our goals are for the growth or shrinkage in a strategic sense.

I, basically, asked the administration to undertake a review. That didn't cause too many ripples—I didn't think. Everybody thought, oh, yes, that's a good idea. The administration was supposed to report back with a plan on how they were going to go about that. Unfortunately, not unlike situations in many areas, the report back on the plan didn't just come immediately. [laughter] In fact, it kind of went into a hole and you didn't hear anything about it. I think if the administration had felt this was ill advised, it would have been a good idea to say, "This isn't a good time for us to talk about tenure." Instead, there was no response. So, naturally, we asked again in committee, "What's the status of this? We want a report back." The report back, Ann, was ever supposed to be just a report on how we might go about... It wasn't a report that was going to be the definitive report on what is the nature of the university's tenure system and doing these changes. It was simply a set of recommendations on how we might go about educating ourselves and finding out what the issues were that we ought to be looking at.

Without going into chronology that I'm very rusty about, I guess maybe I can just talk about some impressions. I think the impression that the faculty leadership, the official faculty leadership, had was that... I don't know what their impression was, but certainly the strategy that they embarked on was to attenuate the regents' request, a request that had begun as how can we learn about the issue was quickly characterized as the regents' intent to destroy the tenure system, to end tenure. We walked very quickly across the bridge of let's look at this on the one side to, on the other side, academic freedom at the University of Minnesota will be dead. It was very effective because it made it very hard to do any real analytic work that would have given either the faculty or the regents or, for that matter, the administration common ground on which to have a discussion. We, as a board, asked for information like, what is the distribution of our tenured faculty and how does it compare with other universities? We asked for side-by-side comparisons on tenure policies. The fact of the matter is the information either wasn't supplied or was supplied so late that the fires were wildly burning before there could be any real look at it.

[pause] I have heard some people's analysis that there really weren't many changes made. I've heard other people say, as you said, that all in all, what came out of it was positive. I think that we could have understood much better what the issues were, if we...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

JK: I often reflected that for a faculty leadership that was dedicated to preserving academic freedom, it was ironic that there was so little tolerance for academic inquiry in as central an issue as tenure. Unless you want to motivate me to say something else, these are kind of my off-the-cuff reflections about that whole situation.

AP: That seems like a very cogent, thoughtful... Would you do anything differently or look back on it and play any of the hands, cards, differently? Or would you, essentially, handle it the same way?

JK: No, I think it should have been handled very differently, Ann. Boy! where do I start on that? I think that we shouldn't have pursued the question in the environment... Go back and reflect on the fact that the board had voted twice to begin an orderly session process with President Hasselmo retiring on a certain agreed upon schedule. You remember that whole context of... The president wasn't ready to retire on that schedule. [laughter] The board's appetite for standing by that decision dissipated pretty quickly in the face of pressure from some of that second tier of influence. So, you have a situation where the relationship between the board and the administration had been breached and within that context, I suppose the board should have been on alert that the kind of support and cooperation from the administration maybe wouldn't be of the usual high caliber. The administration never said, "Let's not study this. In fact, the president brought forth a resolution early in the process that would have had the board adopting a set of tenure reforms before the faculty committee ever even submitted its plan. So, at one point, the president and the administration were even ahead of the board on it. Are you recalling...?"

AP: I do remember the faculty committee, right.

JK: Then, midstream in the process, it became very clear that the president was not supporting the effort. I'm not talking about the effort to have a particular code adopted. The president was essentially saying, "Adopt the faculty recommendation. The board should go no further." Well, the board had embarked upon a process that was saying, "We want to look at the faculty recommendation in the context of other information that we have asked you to gather and that we're hoping to get." It was never not wanting to adopt the faculty recommendation. It was, I think, not wanting to be put into a position where that would be the only proposal we could look at. My point is that the board found itself in a position where the president was not supporting the board in the conduct of the initiative. I'm talking about the initiative to look at the tenure code and determine what needed, if anything, to be changed. In fact—I discussed it with some of my colleagues on the board at the time—in that context, we probably should have stepped back and said, "This effort ought to wait until we have a better governance situation," meaning, by that time, everyone knew that there, in fact, was a time schedule for Nils to be going, a different time table than the board had agreed to before but there was a time table. In fact, I know recruiting for the next president was underway. The other view was, we either do it now or forget about it because who wants a new president to have to look at this issue? Let's get it over with, do the best we can with it. Let's put it behind us and hope that five years from now, ten years from now, there's an appetite to take a different and better look at it—which is, obviously, the view that prevailed. I suppose if you would really ask yourself what could we have done differently, I think one would have to say that, given the context, it was foolhardy to think that an issue as sensitive as tenure could even have been approached from a philosophical perspective because the desire to attenuate conflict and controversy was so high at that point that this was a natural issue for feeding the fire. Now, the question having been raised, did all kinds of parties have a responsibility to say, "Wait, a minute. Let's not do that now?" You bet, but none of those parties said that. The parties all kind of said, "Yes, let's take a look at that." [laughter] And there we were off and running. But, it was, take a look at it and, then, nothing is done. Do you understand what I am saying?

AP: Yes.

JK: That kind of thing, instead of dissipating an issue, hardens position. I think the board would have been very willing to step back. Tom Regan has just become the chair. I think that if the administration had said, "For all kinds of reasons, this is not a good thing to do at this time," I think Tom would have used his leadership and I know I would have used whatever leadership I had to say, "Let's not do this now." Instead, we had an administration that was saying, "Yes, let's do it and we'll get back to you right away," and, then, they never got back to us until, suddenly, they brought forth a resolution and said, "Pass it tomorrow," at which point the faculty was furious because this is before the faculty had come through with their report. Now, the faculty comes up with their report and the administration says, "You must adopt it and you must adopt it immediately." And the board is still saying, "But, wait a minute, what about taking a broader look at this? You still haven't told us where we stack relative to other universities." That's my perspective on that history.

AP: To move to a different topic, sort of to wrap things up, what makes you proudest of the university?

JK: It's spirit. I think it's an energetic, lively, wonderful place. What is that wonderful award for creativity? Is it the MacArthur Award?

AP: I think so, yes.

JK: I remember a faculty member, a woman writer—who would it have been, Ann?—won that award, maybe five years ago. When she came before the board to be recognized for receiving it, I remember her likening the University of Minnesota to New York City. [laughter] Maybe that's a stretch, but her point was, many people can't stand it and many people just love it. I've always been in the latter category. It groans and it squeaks and has all kinds of controversy. It probably bumbles along more than it is elegant in its movement. But, by gosh! it's alive and it's in the center of things. It's my university. It's just a gut reaction more than it's what makes me proudest.

I've worried about the university and still do. I think we've squandered much of what could have carried us into a competitive position in the future by not making decisions on a timely basis. I now look back on my concern about the financial fragility of the university and boy! if you look at the financial statements and take a look at the rates, that we were eating into departmental reserves and so forth, I think any prudent manager with an eye to the asset position of the university would have been foolish not to be concerned. But, my desire for strategic focus, for more definable decision making, I mean where you understood the underlying rationale, why you were making the trade-offs that were being made, more strategic moves, less incrementalism, was led by a concern about the university's financial situation. When I look now at the economy of the last year and the bull market of the last year, the legislative synthesis of the last year... We're not even worried about Social Security [unclear], let alone cutbacks. [laughter] We've been in a very good situation. So, when I say, "I'm concerned that we may have squandered some of our opportunities for being competitive," I also recognize that could be a very dramatic statement. Maybe somehow, there's plenty of money for everybody. I think initiatives like business education and the true creation of centers of excellence...

I'm concerned that we're really late to the table on some of that. It's a shame. In the Health Sciences, if you take a look at the reports that continue... I'm just kind of musing.

AP: People say the students are awfully good.

JK: I don't know what that means. The overall caliber of entrance requirements doesn't bespeak a strong student body, but if you take the position that... If you kind of say the students are self-motivated... Go to the University of Minnesota because it's your choice to go there not because you can't go anywhere else. If you choose the University of Minnesota, you're choosing an environment that requires you to engage to truly be successful. You're going to have to go after what you want. It's not going to be spoon fed to you. I think that people who go after what they want are people who are going to be successful in life. In that sense, if that's what people mean when they say the students are good, yes, I'm sure that the students are good. What do you think is inside that statement?

AP: Oh, I think that in the early 1990s, there was a kind of malaise and we're finding more recently, under the [President Mark] Yudof Administration, the improvements in the physical look of the campus, the freshmen convocations... I think the centers of excellence, a number of them, are really sort of finding their legs.

JK: Right.

AP: It seems like a very good time. It seems as if the pieces are coming together.

JK: From everything that I can see, everything that you've said is absolutely on target, Ann. That's certainly what I pick up and from what I read from the newspaper, that's the way things are. But, I don't think that that's particularly apropos of the statement that the students are good.

AP: Oh, okay.

JK: I think the students in that sense have always been good. I think that some of the institutional move to create maybe a more student friendly environment that have been implemented whenever and are certainly coming to fruition these years and allow us all to see capacity and energy of students in a way that... It's different from the frustrations of the past, right?

AP: Right.

JK: Frustrations of bad systems. Now, the registration process, look at it. Three years ago, we didn't have that, but five years ago, most major universities did. So we're late, but once you put that kind of thing together, the problem isn't whether or not the students have the capacity to take advantage of good systems. I think it's a great time for the university. Every thing that I see is really very exciting. I'm very pleased about it and I'm very pleased to have had a part in the university's history.

AP: Do you want to say anything about women in the senior administrative posts? One of the things that's been pointed out is that Nils did appoint a fairly large number of women.

JK: [laughter] I guess he did. I think we had concerns about retention. There seemed to be a lot of turnover in the administration, particularly among the women. I'm not sure what conclusions one can draw from that. Certainly many of the women in university administration moved on to wonderful positions elsewhere: Ann Peterson with the NSF [National Science Foundation]—I think it was the NSF—Marvalene Hughes, the college out in California; Louella Brady becoming general counsel for the city of Minneapolis after her stay in a very significant position with the Justice Department. I am aware that the general book on the university administration and in many of the departments is that it's not a good environment for women. In the same way, once again, we saw the headlines today in the paper about the purportedly bad environment at the university for African-Americans. There's a reputation that the institution has yet to be able to shake. I don't claim to have any particular insight on what all that's about.

More than any other organization I ever was affiliated with and that would included, as you know, government, health care, telecommunications, computers, I have never experienced an environment where there was so much preoccupation about issues of justice and discrimination in the workplace. I can remember being surprised at the university that the women in administration were in support groups. Support groups are certainly known in the corporate sector but their time was past, I would say, in the corporate sector, the women's groups. So, I was struck, I guess I will just say, by the preoccupation with those issues. You understand that I'm not saying that that preoccupation was illegitimate. I'm not being critical of that preoccupation. But, you noticed it.

AP: Any other things you'd like to add? I've taken more of your afternoon than I promised to take.

JK: I don't think so, Ann. What a fun project to work on.

AP: It certainly is...lots of things to learn and a very interesting story. Perfect. I will arrange to send you a tape.

JK: All right. It's a deal.

AP: Terrific. Thank you.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of the Interview]

Transcribed by:

Hermes Transcribing and Research Service
12617 Fairgreen Avenue, Apple Valley, MN 55124
(612) 953-0730
bhermes1@aol.com