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Interview no. 782

Thomas F. Meagher

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Thomas F. Meagher
INTERVIEWER: Charles H. Martin
PROJECT: History of the University
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 25, 1989
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO: 782
TRANSCRIPT NO: 782
TRANSCRIBER: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Student in College of Nursing, UTEP 1972-77, received Masters degree 1985, serves as administrator at Thomason General Hospital.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Describes student life in early 1970s, lived in Kelly Hall, then a coed dorm, played tuba in UTEP band; discusses nursing curriculum, clinicals, early links of UTEP's nursing program to Hotel Dieu School of Nursing, the health care market.

Length of Interview: 25 minutes Length of Transcript 11 pages

Thomas F. Meagher
September 25, 1989
Interviewed by Charles H. Martin
UTEP Diamond Jubilee (75th Anniversary)
Conducted at Thomason Hospital

I: Instead of going chronologically through your life at UTEP. Before we get through UTEP I guess I should ask you where were you born and where you grew up?

M: I was born of military parents in Landstuhl, Germany while they were at military base. Landstuhl with umlauts over the u, of course. You know you can't write in German . . .

I: Okay.

M: . . . without things like that. I grew up in Las Cruces and moved to the big city, El Paso on graduation in 1972.

I: Okay, so which high school did you actually graduate from?

M: I went to Las Cruces High School.

I: You came here in . . .

M: Came to UTEP, started UTEP in September of 1972. What was a real attractive thing for nurses at the time was that we were experiencing a nursing shortage in the country. The tuition for nurses at that time was \$50 a semester tuition.

I: Sounds good.

M: You can get your college education paid for at \$50 a semester. That was really great. The other attraction was that I also played in the band while in high school.

I: Hmm.

M: I got called by the person who was running the band at the time and said, "Would you like to come and go on a scholarship." I said, "well, I'm a nursing major." He said, "Oh, that's all right. You have to do your

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first two years down here and we'll give you a band scholarship to come on down and play in the band." Since I played tuba and not many -- it's worth money to someone to have you carry it around. I said, "sure, you bet!" So I came down and went on a scholarship at UTEP for the first two years -- on playing the tuba; doing my pre-nursing courses.

I: How did you chose to come to UTEP as opposed to going inside the state of New Mexico?

M: It was the cost. The other thing is, I went for an interview for UNM -- went to look at their program. I also went to the program I believe was in Tucson or Phoenix. The people there were extremely rude when you just went in to ask for the catalogue and asked people about the program. When I came down to UTEP and asked about the program and the catalogue it was like -- my gosh, please come here. I got so much literataure and so much help and so much information and it was only forty miles away . . .

I: Sure.

M: . . . that I thought, you can't pass it up. You can't really turn this down.

I: Hmmm.

M: So I started UTEP. It's interesting timing in '72 in that it was the first semester that the dorms went coed. Kelly Hall went coed. And they authorized -- it was just prior to them authorizing you to have alcohol in the dorms.

I: Oh, okay.

M: So there's a lot of time and energy spent on how to get it in and out.

I: Umm, hmmm.

M: A lot of fun. I remember a keg party we had in the dorm room one

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weekend. We snuck the keg up, snuck the ice in, and had a keg party in the dorm room. Just

I: This was considered really daring?

M: Well, yeah, it was because if you got caught you'd be out real quick. At least out of Kelly Hall. Remember the football team, to say the least, wasn't very good at the time. I remember all the fans when the football team was doing bad singing "Bye, Bye, Bobby" in the stands. Cause Bobby Dobbs was the coach at that time. A change was needed.

I: Did you go on road trips also with the band?

M: Well, we went to band trips. In fact, I met my wife on one of those trips to Tucson. Play [at] football games.

I: What else can you think of about the band trips?

M: Well, at that time the band, now has-are much more formal, I would agree. The band was a little, real rowdy group. I remember we used to dance in the stands and carry on. We use to do picture shows and theme marching shows at the time. We'd go from one picture on the field which might be a Mexican hat, to another picture field, which might be a pair of castanets. It seemed to be Helter Skelter between one picture and another picture. Organized confusion might be a better way of describing it. It was just a lot of fun. A lot of color and a lot of fun. It was Gene Lewis first year at UTEP at that time.

I: Is it very common for nursing students to be in the band?

M: I didn't see many of my latter colleagues in nursing who remembers the band. It sure got me through my first years in college.

I: What attracted you to nursing in the first place since historically that wasn't an area which too many men had been involved?

M: Personally I had a situation where I came across an individual who needed

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a lot of medical assistance and no one including me at that time knew what to do for this person. She was having a seizure. I really got the urge at that time, was probably my last year of high school that I didn't want to be in the situation ever again when I didn't know what to do.

I: Yeah.

M: . . . for someone who needed help like that. I decided at that time to start looking into nursing schools--seeing how that could happen.

I: What did your parents think of your interest in nursing or family members?

M: Well, my parents didn't think much of it. My parents wanted me to go into a "manly" profession or go into the service or go into the army or go and do something like that. They thought it was unusual and strange that I wanted to go to be a nurse. But they learned to accept it. They're very glad now they did.

I: When you entered the nursing school. Let's see now maybe you should go over with me exactly what the first two years you do one thing and then you do . . . ?

M: Yeah, the first two years are your preliminary courses, your sciences.

I: Okay.

M: . . . and the last two years you get your clinical courses which focus on the starting for care of the well patient to care of the very sick patient and their families.

I: Okay. At the time you entered these courses -- these various levels, worth how many whole (???) would you say were the number of male students to female or whatever?

M: The class that I was in I believe there were only three males in the course. Out of 43 who graduated there were only three males in the

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program. It didn't range any more than, 10% of the people who were in the program were males. And that's true in the profession today -- it's 95% female profession.

I: How did your fellow classmates and also instructors respond to having at least a few males in the program?

M: Actually, we weren't treated any differently as far as I could see, from anyone else -- just another student in the class who's working real hard to get through nursing school.

I: Hmm.

M: It's a very difficult program to get through -- a lot of studying a lot of clinical time. Just a lot of work. They didn't really ever recommend that you have a part-time job while you were going to school, because it jeopardized your success. It didn't stop me though. I had two part-time jobs and got married and had a kid all about the time I was going through nursing school.

I: Where did you work?

M: Oh, I worked at Smugglers Inn, at Momma Trees as a waiter. Then I also worked my last semester as a student at the old Hotel Dieu. I was a nursing student and they paid you to learn . . . nursing, go to school at the time.

I: You mention Hotel Dieu. Maybe you could to the best of your ability kind of retrace just a little bit the administrative history of how the school of nursing came to be a school of nursing?

M: Well, I'm not all that familiar with it, but what I do remember is that Hotel Dieu used to have a three year diploma program; it was run by the Daughters of Charity. It was the Hotel Dieu School of Nursing, a very respected school for years and years. I don't know exactly how long they

were there. But it was a very respected school throughout the country. I would guess that many of graduates from that diploma school, which is a three year program, remain in El Paso. The sisters ran it. Then the sisters sold the school to the University of Texas System. It became part of that [UT] System School of Nursing. There were many campuses for the System School of Nursing at that time. At that time, although the Daughters of Charity didn't take on the administration of the school, many of the sisters continued to teach in the University System school. It wasn't totally "nuns" but many of the Sisters continued to teach. Then in the neighborhood of 1974 [1976] the System School of Nursing dissolved (for lack of a better term) into the regional campuses. And then what was then System School became part of the University of Texas, El Paso, College of Nursing. And then it became the College of Nursing and Allied Health, I assume a few years ago. I don't exactly when that occurred.

I: When you were doing your professional work in these last two years, could you describe some of the activities you might enter in, in terms of the classes or laboratories, or things like that?

M: Sure. We spent a lot of time in the library--a lot of time in the library. And at that time the library was located [downtown] at the College of Nursing (the Nursing Library, was located at the College of Nursing) which saved you a lot of work and made it real parochial, for lack of a better term, in that the College of Nursing students were down at the college, and distant from the UTEP main campus. Now the college, of course, I mean the library, in the main university library, so all the students have to go up there and they are more integrated into the college up there. There was a lot of work, a lot of clinical time in

various hospitals. We had a clinical at different hospitals throughout town, depending on the affiliation and the course. There's a place called the "Sim" lab, which has been nationally recognized as, I think one of the best equipped Sim labs for nursing instruction in the country. And they have mannequins and a mock hospital setup and that kind of thing where you practice your clinical skills.

I: Who were some of the instructors or administrators that ran the nursing program in those days that had some effect on students or if anybody that was a classic instructor or feared instructor?

M: Well actually there were some people who were very excellent. Eileen Jacoby was the dean of the college at that time. And she is and was a worldwide nursing leader; nationally known for her leadership in nursing. The one classic instructor that was at the college is a lady named, Dee Corona, an excellent nurse. Clinically strong, politically astute, a smart educator and a real supporter of students for the profession of nursing. Someone who, you spend one class with her and you've got a role model for nursing. She was excellent. She was also, in that period, editor of a magazine, Nursing Leadership.

I: Are there any special activities that nursing students engaged in, socially or educationally, that were totally separated from the other students, other than the fact the school and library were located down there?

M: Not really, during the period where the University of Texas System was transitioning over to UTEP, there was a lot of fear at that time of whether [nursing education] would go back [under] doctors. [It must stay under] the control of nursing and nursing education. And around '74 there were marches around the school with placards that said, "Save our

school!" There was a delegation of folks who went to Austin to fight for or to prevent the dissolving of the System School of Nursing with that concern, by being decentralized they would lose the power of a System College of Nursing.

I: What about other campus activities that you were aware of at that time: of social nature, frivolous nature or whatever?

M: Way back, way back in '72, of course, there were the so-called "riots" at UTEP. I don't think anybody who was actually on campus thought they were really riots. There were people who were out there talking about "Viva La Raza" and that kind of thing but they were mostly very peaceful people who were trying to have a say and voice their feelings. However, there were FBI agents on the roofs snapping pictures, and everyone would come out in the SUB [Student Union Building], in that area out in the SUB, and watch, which added of course to the masses of people which added to the anxiety of the administration, but no one was really doing anything except watching a bunch of people speak. But there was a big concern. It's funny to watch the nightly news at the time and hear about the "Riots" at UTEP, and you say, "What riot? Was I there today? What riot at UTEP?" And there really wasn't, but that's what they were talking about. The other thing that was interesting is a little after that I guess in '73, '74, we had a rash if you want to call, it that of streaking. Everyone was streaking. We had a guy who streaked the band hall. We had on main campus, there was an old guy that I remember who was a very old man riding on top of car going through campus -- and on his briefcase that was shielding his less important parts, I guess, was a bumper sticker that said, "I'm proud to be a grandpa," on it. He was riding down the campus on top of the car, down University Avenue, right

in front of what use to be the L.A. Building. I don't know if it still is . . .

I: Yes it is.

M: . . . and the Union.

I: So you had a . . .

M: Get up on the (???)

I: . . . wide variety of ages?

M: Yup. Sure was.

I: How did the administration or other students react to that?

M: I think all the students saw it like the riots, in its perspective, as a big joke, as something that's part of college life. Hey, what's the big deal. It was something to laugh at and something to be fun about. But of course the administration had to assume a more authoritarian role. I believe that they were threatening to throw people out of college, out of school and that kind of thing -- if they get caught streaking. I don't think they needed to throw them out -- the embarrassment alone of being caught. I think there was also somebody who streaked the Sun Bowl that year, from one end to the other. I don't recall, but I'm sure it's in the Prospector somewhere. That was interesting.

I: Streaked the Sun Bowl. Supposedly once in Magoffin Auditorium somebody streaked one of the history lecture classes in there.

M: With 400 people.

I: Right.

M: Imagine. There use to be this guy named -- what was his name, Shover or something like that, . . .

I: Hmmm.

M: . . . who used to go on and on and on with his lectures. There were huge

classes like that with 400 people in the class. Can you imagine streaking this class.

I: Yes, well this one got streaked -- really rattled by it apparently.

M: But what I think it was all in good fun, you know. Shoot. Which it was.

I: Ummm.

M: No nursing students that I know of.

I: No nursing students. Alright, sic (???) I bet. When did you graduate and then what did you, what where you plans then after that?

M: Well, I graduated in '77, and I spent my whole nursing career in El Paso. Went back in '81 to work on my Masters in nursing and got that in '85. I now teach at the graduate level in the College of Nursing.

I: What's the percentage of male to female students now at the College of Nursing?

M: I really don't know?

I: Any female (???)

M: It's seems to have expanded but I don't know what the percentages are.

I: Okay. What positions did you occupy?

M: Oh boy. I started off on course as a staff nurse. After about four years I became a head nurse in an operating room in El Paso. Then I went to Director of Nursing. I was Assistant Administrator for Nursing Service at one of the hospitals in town, about a year and half. Now I'm an Assistant Administrator for Professional Services here at Thomason.

I: Is there any particular feeling you have about where schools of nursing are going and where the nursing profession is going as we enter the 1990's?

M: I think that the profession of nursing is, despite the shortages, a growing profession. There are more patients and sicker patients than

we've ever dealt with before, which requires an intelligent nurse and a committed nurse to care for that type of a patient. In 1984 the government instituted the D.R.G. System, which instead of being a "cost plus" method to pay for patient care it became a "fixed" method of paying for patient care. This has caused a limitation of services, a limitation of funding for services to patients. The health care market although it's 11.5% of the gross national product, is a very competitive market place. The nurse who's going to be successful in the future is going to have to know how to deal with tight resources; health care policies that impact on how those resources are [allocated]. And is going to have to be a smart professional business person in order to succeed. And not forgetting that the reason that they're there is to care for the patient.

I: Hmm.

M: Cause when everybody else is gone, when the doctor's at home, when all the other practitioners aren't there, it's the nurse who's at the bedside. And whether that's critical care or pediatrics or geriatrics or, from birth to death and from wellness to illness, it's the nurse who's the true primary care giver. It's fun to be the angel of the lamb, even as a male.

I: That's pretty good. Is there anything else I should add or whatever?

M: Not that I can . . .

I: I don't want to take up all day.

M: . . . think of. The high points and the low points.

I: This seems like a good point to . . .

[End of Tape and Interview]