

Delmar T. Oviatt, Track 4

Tape 2, side a

DO: The first—oh, this is Dr. Oviatt, so that for the record, you will know who's speaking. The first Dean of Students at San Fernando State College was Dr. Morton J Renshaw. Mr. Renshaw was the Dean of Students at Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles State College, and the San Fernando Valley campus of Los Angeles State College. Obviously, he could not spend very much time on this campus. The main student activity responsibility fell on Robert Lawrence. Um, Bob Lawrence came here as, I recall, Director of Student Activities. Mr. Lawrence had formerly been a student at Los Angeles State College. I believe, if I'm not mistaken, that he may have been Student Body President there, at one time. He had then, after graduation, moved into student personnel affairs at Los Angeles State College, and was appointed to the supervisory role here on the campus. Bob Lawrence was a very interesting person. Very outgoing, dynamic personality, very good looking, vivacious, a fine speaking voice, as a matter of fact, for a good many years, Bob Lawrence was the, quote, voice, end of quote, at our graduation. In those days, every student, as they marched across—as he marched across the podium, or the stage, had his name called over a P.A. system. Bob Lawrence worked out a very detailed plan whereby just before the

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student stepped onto the platform, he handed Bob Lawrence a card with his name written on it. And Bob Lawrence, then, would have to pronounce each of these names, sometimes in a very scribbled handwriting, as the student went across the stage. Incidentally, Mr. Lawrence had had a considerable experience in acting. He had been trained as an actor and as an announcer, and he used this theatrical voice and very often a theatrical manner in dealing with students. Bob was a most effective Director of Student Activities. He gave endless hours to the task, he moved his home here to the San Fernando Valley, and was really the sparkplug for student activities on this campus. He had a fine rapport with the student body leaders, he served as advisors to student body government, he organized clubs, he was in many ways responsible for getting our first student newspaper off the ground, and it was remarkable what one person, well really, two people, Bob Lawrence and his pretty little secretary, her name was Sue Bender. They worked out of one small office over in the temporary buildings, and the amount of activity that centered around that office was phenomenal, to say the least. One of the first activities that Bob Lawrence was most interested in was student government. I suppose elsewhere, you will be able to get a list of all these student body presidents, if you wanted, for your purposes. As I recall, the first student body president here was a man named Ben Rude. And Mr. Rude was a transfer student from Los Angeles State College. I—I can't remember the names of all the others, but they were, without exception, excellent choices as student body leaders. One of them, Bob Hilburn,

I note, is now an outstanding reporter for the Los Angeles Times. And one of them, Tom Casamassima is now a lawyer employed in the Chancellor's Office. One of them, Mr. Sulfur, I believe, is also in law practice here in the area. One of them, incidentally, so far as I recall, only one of them ever was a casualty, the student body in one of the very early years leased some facilities over in one of the city parks here in the Valley for a student body affair of some kind, including a dance and a little program and so on. The president of the student body, who went outdoor—out of the hall during the evening and was accosted by a group of non-students who wanted to crash the party, and when he refused to let them in, they beat him up in the—so far as I know, was our only president who suffered physical harm in the performance of his duties. We, very early, had a number of clubs on campus. I, I regret that I can't recall many of the names of those clubs. There was a SAM, Society for the Advancement of Management, as I recall. I believe the Blue Key was a group who was started here fairly early, various other fraternities and sororities got underway, one of the early active groups on the campus call themselves, I'd better not try the name in Spanish, it was a Spanish name, and it meant the grandmothers. This was a group of women in our evening school, and that was—parenthetically, one of the interesting things, when we moved out here, we had a large percentage of married women coming to school. They were women who had interrupted their education to rear families or to take jobs, and now found a college in their community and a great many came back, and started to pick up the threads of formal education. One of them, one year, actually, was elected campus queen. Suppose we're the only campus, at least

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that I'm aware of, that ever had a campus queen who was in reality a grandmother. Another of the student activities that we got underway very early, here, was in the field of athletics. As a matter of fact, it was, by some, apparently a confusion in ordering, but one of the first deliveries of materials onto this campus was twenty-five football uniforms. At any rate, the first year, we organized a football team, but since we did not have enough equipment, had no schedule, and so on, as I recall, we eventually ended up with a touch football group. Our first intercollegiate football game was against Los Angeles State and I, as I recall, we won. Which was a surprise to us as well as to them. Another of the interesting activities that we developed with students was a college band. This was really not a student band. It enrolled about fifty percent students, about twenty five percent faculty, and the rest of the band was made up of other people such as a couple of grounds men, Dr. Addie Klotz, our medical officer, and the leader of the band was Mr. Virge Heliker, who is the officer in charge of receiving supplies on campus. As a matter of fact, that first musical idea has hung together in a fashion, over all of these years, and I believe Virge Heliker still has a little orchestra, I think he calls it now. But it is still made up of a few faculty, a few students, and a few staff in the—people from other assignments here on campus. I believe they play each year for the Faculty Wives' Christmas party or something of the sort, but—Virge Heliker could give you a

detailed history of that. But the first musical group, then, was composed of the entire college community. Oh, yes, we had picnics at Hansen Dam, as I recall, was our first all-school picnic. Bob Lawrence went out and arranged for all the reservations, the fun, and so on. The—there was another school picnic up somewhere at Lake Sherwood, as I recall. School picnics were a big deal in those days. Another one, I recall, was at one of the parks here in West Los Angeles. West Valley, rather. Out near Topanga, or in there, in that area somewhere. Incidentally, one of the big events at the school annual picnic was the softball game in which the faculty challenged the students. And interestingly enough, it was a hard-fought battle, and while my memory is undoubtedly biased, I would recall that the faculty defeated the students at about the ratio of two to one. Incidentally, this was an interesting situation, because we had an exceptional number of young faculty, and many of them were only a few years out of their own college experience, and consequently were pretty good athletes, still in good shape now. Of course, the faculty was—picnic was always—picnics were always on Sunday, and I'm not sure that on Monday we could—the faculty team would have beaten anybody. But at least, for a seven-inning game, we could do pretty well.

USP: Selection of the schooling, pretty(??)—

DO: Yes, we—we decided that, as a branch of Los Angeles State College, we were still entitled to our own school name, school colors. As I recall, again, we had a series of all kinds of competitions, and I wish I could recall some of the suggestions, but we had—I know that one of them, I recall, was that we should be known as the Valley Woodchoppers. Or Pumpkin Pickers, something else to

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do with a rural environment. Eventually, of course, we settled on the name, "Matadors," and have retained that name, and though the black and gold colors from that time on, black and gold, white and red, it's white and red, isn't it? Black and gold went to L.A. State. That's right. We first used the L.A. State colors, then we got our own, it was the—it was the white and red. The name of the paper was The Sundial, and we used, in those early days, variations on this theme, a great deal, for example, the—the handbook that was given out to the freshman, I recall, was called Sun—Sunrise? Wasn't it? Sunrise, The Sunrise, you know—we had three or four other, The Sunburst was our first student body manual—annual. One of the first sculptures, I'd guess we'd call it on the Valley, was an actual sundial, it was mounted out in front of the—student—or one of the temporary buildings. I think it still sits there, probably, long neglected now, and will be dug out by archaeologists eventually. The name Woodchoppers, incidentally, came from an interesting development. The proposal for the name, Woodchoppers. The whole campus at that time had been covered with walnuts and orange trees. The contractor, by arrangement, took the big pieces of the trees as he cut them down, cleared them, those that were good for firewood, and piled them very nearly where the boiler plant now sits. The result was that we had a pile of firewood a hundred yards long, twenty

feet high, and forty feet wide. All the faculty and students were invited to come, and cut all the firewood they wanted, at a price of three dollars a cord. And every Saturday, for during the entire fall, the students and faculty turned out, in considerable numbers, with power saws and axes and so on, to work on the wood pile. When we finally had all the wood we wanted, or were at least completely exhausted, we had hardly taken a dent in the huge pile of wood. The result was that we arranged for professional woodmen to come in and cut the wood and stack it and pile it up. Then, we offered it for sale again, this time at fifteen dollars a cord, because it will cost us twelve dollars to get it cut. As we sold them a good deal of the wood. And when students and faculty would no longer buy any cord wood, we opened it to the public at twenty dollars a cord and sold a lot of it—at that basis, as I recall, somebody came in one night and stole the last two cords of wood. But anyway, we didn't become known as the Woodchoppers, we became Matadors instead.

USP: _____ (??) the attitude would be students since the beginning? Are they really gung-ho, or—

DO: Well, the students consisted, as I indicated, of really two groups. We had a considerable number of adults who picked up their education again. But the—what we would think of as a standard student body was a most enthusiastic and, in many ways, delightful group to work with. Student felt that they were in on the ground floor, they were, as I recall, the first year, total of around a thousand or twelve-hundred students here. The accommodations, of course, were minimal. Both for eating facilities and for any kind of activities. We had a few grass areas. Faculty and students shared the same cafeteria. Mr. Lawrence was able to generate a large amount of faculty involvement. There was no problem in getting

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faculty sponsors, for example, as a matter of fact, we had more sponsors, almost, than people we could use. On several occasions, for example, we had academic planning conferences. One or two, for the first two years held over in the old Bel-Air Country Club, not on Stansbury Street in Van Nuys, now long since—gone. But we, at a conference of that sort, would have a turnout of, say, a hundred students and forty faculty. The graduation dances were well supported by faculty. The Spring Sing was another event that Bob Lawrence got started, along with our music department. And the various clubs would come up with skits and choruses and musical groups of one sort or another. We held some of our Spring Sings on campus, but generally we were off campus. I remember in one case, we—or two cases, we leased the outdoor amphitheater over in Burbank, and had some very excellent presentations. Another case, we rented the auditorium at Northridge Junior High School, also at the Reseda High School, to hold musical events or our Spring Sing activities. But there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm, a tremendous feeling that the students were indeed setting the tone of an institution. And I must say that I've never experienced a

situation where the faculty were as cooperative in terms of sacrificing their own weekends, their own evenings, and their spare time in participation. Now this, of course, reflected, also, the attitude of the faculty. They were young, they felt that they were building in the foundations of a first-rate college, and they gave of their time, generously. For example, during those early days, the registration procedure. The place simply never shut down until every student had a program. If we had to stay open until ten o'clock at night in order to get all the registration finished, we did. But nobody, nobody left the registration area without a program of studies if it meant that we had to expand classes, we could find the professor or the department head because the registration was expected to be handled by the faculty, and was one of the expected responsibilities of the faculty. The result was that the question of counseling students of opening classes for added enrollments and so on, was an expected responsibility. One year, in the early days, for example, we had a student teacher ratio on this campus of one to twenty-two. At the present time, our ratio is now about one to eighteen, one to nineteen, something of the sort. And those, at that time, we actually used our teaching stations, on one occasion, when we made the count, as many as fifty-four hours a week. When you think that from eight o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night gives you a total of twelve hours. You can see that we were using our every teaching station, almost solid, in order to get in that many hours. Out of a possible sixty-hour utilization, we were using fifty-four hours of time in our various classrooms. And, of course, this was possible simply because the faculty was willing to make that kind of sacrifice, and the students were willing to make that kind of an accommodation and their class attendance hours and so on. It was an interesting cooperative arrangement between faculty and students with in a sense lesser roles being played by administration and by the supporting staff, such as our grounds man, and our foundation officers, and people of this kind. But the spirit was essentially generated as a combination thing between student body and faculty.

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USP: When you were starting to allow freshmen, sophomores into school, who was the PR program we have—you've heard me draw a rule, friends turn out first—Mr. Lawrence is telling me they wrote each prospective freshman and told they're having a meeting, meet everybody, and they were expecting twenty and three hundred showed up—

DO: Bob Lawrence would remember many more details of those early student body meetings than I do. We, we made an active appeal to the high schools in the Valley. The actual decision to enroll freshman, of course, was made by the faculty. There were no freshman here to participate. But the response that we got from the public schools, the graduating classes in the public schools was—was tremendous. And incidentally, again, the thing that we tried to avoid was setting any kind of quota and saying we can take so many. We tried, as I say, mentioned in our—in connection with registration: The policy of the college was to accept everyone who was qualified. And for that reason, we had to hire instructors, we had to over utilize our space, we had to expand the enrollment

limits in classes, but to the best of my knowledge, this college did not turn down a qualified student in the first ten years of its existence, at least. The doors were open if you met the qualifications. You were here and you had a program. And I think it was this kind of spirit on the part of the faculty, and being willing to accommodate to this situation, that would engender much of the good spirit. Now, mind you, at the same time, the faculty, at the same time, set out to make this college a top-quality institution in terms of academic excellence. Almost, if anything, we overdid the emphasis on academic standards. It used to bother me as the Academic Vice President when occasionally I would find a grade report where a professor was giving fifty percent of his class D's or F grades. It seemed to me that was, in many cases, as much a reflection of his inability to teach as anything else. But there was this, this spirit amongst the faculty, and incidentally, apparently well-accepted, at least in those days by the students, that there was no royal easy road to learning. And the professors, they really cracked down on the question of attendance and assignments and a high quality of academic education. As a matter of fact, I think an examination of our records would show that during our first years, the probation rate amongst freshmen sometimes reached more than forty percent. More than forty percent of our freshmen. Sometime during the semester would have received a notice of—they were in academic difficulty. But this, as I say, was part of the—the spirit of the new institution. In hindsight, it may have looked as though for new—it looks as though for a new institution we may have been setting our sights unreasonably high, but at the same time, as I say, we certainly offered educational opportunity to anybody who wanted to join us as—as a student. The—the one thing, that perhaps, we should have done—and—or, at least one of the things, perhaps, that we should have done but did not do, as an institution we did not perhaps capitalize nearly as much, in our early days, on the opportunity for innovation. We started as, pretty much, a standard curriculum, a standard traditional structured college. As I say, a great many people think that a new college ought

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to be an innovative college, it ought to be full of new ideas, and new curriculum, and new structures, and so on. Another point of view, and one I suppose this college espoused, at least in those days, was that our first task was to establish ourselves as solid members in the academic world. That we would—our first task was to prove that we could do well, what a college was expected to do. And having once done that, we can then become innovative. Of course, the question is as to whether a college that starts out as a standard tradition-oriented college will ever become genuinely innovative, I'm not sure this college ever has really become a genuinely innovative institution. But certainly, we were not innovative academically in the sense of being any kind of a far-out institution in those early days. If there was an innovation, it was in the—in the spirit, in the associations and the relationships between students, administration, faculty, and the community. Now, I don't know how many other things—okay.

USP: Um, one—you're saying, in the beginning that we had made it work so well would be the cooperation of the student faculty group together—

DO: Oh, yes. No question about it, that the, that the college had a tremendous community support, and this reflected in the student body. It—it reflected in the faculty. They felt that it was a—a chance to provide service and—and to be part of a new development, and of course, the development at that time was—of a spirit, was enhanced by the spirit of growing. You see, this college grew at such a tremendous rate. If we had had a college that was going to stay small for many, many years, it might have been hard to keep up this kind of esprit de corps, and so on. But we knew from the very day this college opened, it was obvious that we were going to be a big college. It was just a question on are we going to be a good college? And—and it was plain from the numbers of students and the enthusiasm, as I say, that we're going to have lots of people, lots of opportunities to teach, the question was how well we were going to meet the challenge. And as I say, students and—and faculty seemed to accept it as a challenge. And every semester, every—certainly every year, there were new buildings. There was an expansion of facilities, an expansion of enrollments, there was a hiring of new faculty. A tiny college like this to hire as many as a hundred faculty, new faculty a year, which we did in those early days, was you know, quite a task as we look back on it. I used to point out in many of the speeches, and I suppose I talked to more service clubs and more PTAs in those early years than one would hardly believe, but I used to point out that one of the main tasks as a college administrator was the hiring of staff. That, no matter what else we did, that if we hired the right staff, our problems would be solved. If we hired the wrong staff, our problems would be multiplied. And as I used to mention to them, to hire a hundred faculty meant that you had to hire a new professor every Monday and every Wednesday of every week in a whole year in order to keep up with the demand.

USP: Well, thank you very much.

DO: It's my pleasure, my pleasure.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]