Oral Memoirs

Of

William G. Thurman, MD

An Interview
Conducted by
Clinton M. Thompson
April 8, 2016

Development of the Tulsa Medical College:
An Oral History Project

Schusterman Library
University of Oklahoma – Tulsa

Interview History
The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed at the Schusterman Library, University of Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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Collection/Project Detail
The Development of the Tulsa Medical College Project was conducted by the Schusterman Library at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa from January 2016 to June 2018. The project focused on the development of the Tulsa Medical College, which later became the OU-TU School of Community Medicine. The project consisted of 28 interviews with former and current employees of the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa.

William G. Thurman was the provost at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and interim dean at the Tulsa Medical College.

Clinton M. Thompson was the first Director of the Tulsa Medical College Library and went on to become the Director of the Robert M. Bird Health Sciences Library at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

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William Thurman, MD
Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 2

Interviewed by Clinton M. Thompson
April 8, 2016
Anacortes, Washington
Also present: Dr. Thurman's wife Gabrielle Thurman

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THOMPSON: April 7, 2016. [ed. note: The interview was conducted on April 8, 2016.] Dr. Thurman?

THURMAN: The, my interest in OMRF [Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation] started not long after I came to Oklahoma City at the Health Science Center because it had some things that we did not have, and would not be able to duplicate in a short period of time at the Health Science Center. So, we were looking for some type of cooperation, not a wedding, but some type of cooperative effort. And, the, I was, at that point in time, I was on the side, of course, of the University trying to work with OMRF. A gentleman by the name of Sam White was president of OMRF at that point in time, and he in essence had taken it over. And he'd been president, I want to say, five or six years when I came along. Sam was a graduate in the sense of the word, no nothing about it that was structured, but the institute in New Mexico that is very well known for medical research at the clinical level, no basic science level. And Sam was the walking example of their people and how they felt about it. And every time you sat down with Sam, you prepared yourself by drinking water and getting ready to listen to about what happened in New Mexico. So, he was not open to any discussion with the University because of the fact that the one in New Mexico—and I'm blocking on the name, but it will come back—the one in New Mexico was also a private one, nothing to do with the state or anything else. And the guy who was running it—and it was named after him that's why I'm having troubles with it—the guy who was running it hated the university [University of New Mexico], just hated it. They often said if the guy, someone from the university came along and he didn't know they were coming, he'd probably shoot them thinking they were an intruder. But it was that kind of feeling, and Sam inherited it, and really practiced it.

The, we invited, anytime we had a really good guest in any one of the disciplines because to some degree OMRF had the capacity then to do a lot of different researches that weren't really being followed through. The, I kept pushing from the University side, let's talk to each other about when we have a very important guest, and we can have them in our areas or you can have

them in yours, and we'll help you with the money, we'll to do the rooms, the auditoriums. Sam wasn't the least bit interested. His answers—I will forget his answers one of these days—"Hell," he said, "I've got a lot more money than you've got, guy." And that was his whole approach to it. But, so I'd been working for some type of liaison and it never came. And so I started working the reverse and I told Sam about it—it was a heads up thing. I said, "Sam, I'm going to educate some of your board to what the University could offer to OMRF, and why we should be working together. Now, you say no, and I won't do it. But the reverse of it is, we're wasting very valuable time in the labs and animal facilities that we could be doing a lot more with, and both of us would be better off." He didn't see it that way.

And we got to talking about it last night, but the thing that was the kiss of death in my working outside of the University for a while trying to educate people on what that match could be were the apes. The monkey unit was fine inside the building, but they brought in some apes for microbiology—I'm blocking on her name—Margaret Smith. [They] brought in some apes for one of her studies, and they put them in open cages on top of the public health building, which was a little bit aggravating to the apes because humans and cars were going past in steady streams. So, the apes starting throwing feces. Every time they had feces they'd throw it. And half of it hit on the sidewalks and cars and everything. And the, we hired a gentleman to do ape patrol because it really—Phillips Street was a danger if you were a pedestrian. And, of course, my office was on the other side, I was up in a house on 13th, and I had to walk right down to the College of Public Health, and if I wasn't thinking and cut down the street there, I had a chance for catching some of these. But finally this guy came out from the newspaper, said, "I'm going to write a story about this." And I said, "I can't stop you, but I don't know what you're going to say. That's what they do." He wrote the story and they didn't think it was newsworthy, that this was a small, local scene. I thought it was funny; everybody at the University really thought it was funny. People at OMRF didn't know anything about it really because it was sheltered by the College of Public Health building from the sidewalk episodes.

But it gave me another opportunity to work with Sam about trying to get into a relationship. We worked at it for about a year, Marty, and it, I'd say I've never met a more [re]calcitrant individual who was as smart as a whip, but couldn't see the forest for the trees. He, I asked him one day, which was a bad mistake on my part, I said, "Sam, I'd like to get a copy of all the papers you all have published in the past two years." And nothing was said, no yes, no no, but we went on. And I kept assuming I was going to get this. And finally when I didn't get it in about a month or six weeks, I called him and asked him on the telephone. I said, "Sam, I never have gotten that if you sent it. Can you re-send it? Or else I'll send somebody to pick it up." And he said, "Don't bother, I haven't done it." And it just flat, but absolutely honest—I haven't done it. And I said, "Well, are you going to do it?" And he said, "No, it's not yours to know." He said, "You can get it, go to the library of medicine and click on—." You know how that goes. And, one of the first times I was a little agitated about things that went on up there was that day

because most of the time the people who didn't like the Health Science Center, most of the practitioners in town and others like that, they were small little hurdles to go over every day, but not a problem really. But Sam, that was a problem.

So, I started working with some members of his board, and found out the first stop was Ben Wildman at Penn Square. And he was just upping all the rents in Penn Square. And he owned that and two other shopping centers. And he said that Addie May needed a new—that was his wife—needed a new Cadillac, so he was going to up the rents again. I just, I, you know, and he was dead serious. Ben didn't have what I would refer to as a strong sense of humor, and he got me many times I'd say for that. But the, he said, "Well," he said, "You know," he said, "We've been thinking about firing Sam." And this was the first I'd ever heard of it. Of course, I did not know that many members of the board of OMRF, and none of the Regents even knew OMRF was there. So, that's not, not correct—very little knowledge on the Regents of OMRF. So, I asked him one more time if we could work it out. After talking to Ben Wildman I did not want to go and say, "Sam, you're on thin ice here." But I talked to him again about us working together, how it would strengthen both of us, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And it just plain and simply didn't work. Well the, Wildman and Dean McGee, Harvey Everest, the banker Harvey Everest, were the three big guns on the OMRF Board. And between them they pretty much supported OMRF during the lean years when NIH [National Institutes of Health] research grants were just really beginning to build, but we had very little NIH money because of the caliber of the research we did there. So, those gentlemen carried that institution through everything, and asked me to put together a five-year plan for it even though I was not an employee of OMRF at the time. And included in that plan they wanted a building program, et cetera, et cetera.

Dean McGee was probably the strongest planning individual you've ever known in your life. If it wasn't in plan one, plan two, plan three and on his desk where he could look at it at night, and more importantly, so he could take it home and show it to his wife—she did planning and analysis as a career. So, he wanted to play the whole game that way. And all the decisions, interestingly enough that Kerr-McGee made about in investments in fields like North Sea Field, the heavy field they have in Peru, and the one in Australia, she was the person who convinced him that they should go to all three places. I'm sure there were some failures, but boy, those three made Kerr-McGee. And he gave us two chairs at OMRF when I got over there in his wife's name for that reason. But, so the, Ben Wildman called a meeting in his office out at Penn Square, and we—. Meetings in Oklahoma City at time were funny because if you didn't have Dean McGee or somebody else like that, no one was going to come. Everyone was jockeying for what position am I going to be interested in, not University or OMRF, but is that Health Science Center area going to develop or not? Is downtown developing more? You know, little clusters of people, but not a whole lot of people involved, which was a shame because Oklahoma City at that time was loaded with planning talent. And it changed over the next couple years; people left and nobody came in to replace them and we suffered for a period. But at any rate, they put

together, at McGee's request, a five-year plan. And the, I unfortunately was asked to critique it and lead it in that sense of the word, and it threw me into direct conflict with Sam as president of OMRF and Paul Sharp and Bill Banowsky because that was just about the time of the change. Everybody was jockeying for position is what it amounted to. And I was in position because I was already working for these people—had nothing to gain and had an awful lot to lose. But, it, that's when they, and they ultimately after about six months of looking at the plan—.

I doubt you were ever in Dean McGee's offices in the old Kerr-McGee building. Well, it was like going into the inner sanctum, you know, and you went up on a special elevator with security, and security guy had his buckle undone on his holster when he was taking you on the elevator. You could look like you were Jesus Christ—I don't mean that—you could look like you wouldn't harm a flea, but the security was thick around the—they tried to kill him one time and he didn't get over it. So, but you went up on the elevator and you went through three secretarial offices, stopping at each one and looking at photographs and things like that, and I said to myself, "Gee whiz, this must be a drug operation or something." But I told Dean McGee that and he said, "You know, I never thought about that, but we could have made some money on the side." He had a great sense of humor. He was wonderful. And so was his wife, except she did not like to be in an open meeting. It was, you think back to those years, women weren't much of the planning of anything, and so, but—. I never saw her in the Kerr-McGee building. I'm sure she went there but I never saw her there.

But they sat down and figured it all out, what they could and couldn't do. Harvey Everest was Liberty Bank. He founded it. So he was, at that moment in time, was floating in money—this was before the first crash. So, they put together, and one night Wildman asked me to come to dinner at the Petroleum Club. So, I went up to the Petroleum Club in one of the little side rooms with about twenty waiters and four people because they really—that wasn't for me, that was for Harvey and Dean, but they put together, and they asked, sat down and said, "What would you do if you were president of OMRF?" And I said, "Well," I said, "I didn't have a lot of thought that this meeting was going to go this way." And I said, "But here are some things that I would want to do, yes. Because we've been wanting to do them from the University standpoint with OMRF's cooperation." So, they're right here on the edge of my tongue, but I said, "They really need more money and space to do what they're trying to do." And about a week later they asked me if I would leave the University and come over there.

Well, the timing couldn't have been more fortuitous because Banowsky and I had hit head on about the Health Science Center that week in between. And he said that we were getting too much money; that he and Dunlap had sat down and figured it all out that we were getting too much money for the five schools. And he said, "The other thing is that we're thinking seriously about closing two of the schools up there." And I said, "Who is we?" I said, "Because they report to me and I ain't heard that." And Bill didn't have a sense of humor either. He was very—oh

boy. But the, we, he and I really came apart. He, they had told him, the Regents had told him, "Move the pharmacy school to the Health Science Center." Well, for some reason he didn't want to move the pharmacy school to the Health Science Center. And I was trying to explain that I'd done the groundwork, and we can take it; and they'd have classroom areas; we're lacking a little bit on private office areas, but it was something that we could address by putting two or three trailers up in the parking lot behind what became the O'Donaghue Rehab Center. I said, we'd just put another parking lot there, use the auditorium at O'Donaghue and, you know, get it all done that way. And he said no. He said, "Either we're going to do it really big and really satisfactorily or we're not going to do it." But he said, "I'm recommending we not do it." And I said, "Well, that's one school I don't have to worry about." And, of course, well, we got the pharmacy school. But I got the blame for that, and I don't mind that, but I really had very little to do with it. They shot themselves in the foot over and over and over again with the help of some people that they had in their group for staying on the Norman campus. They wanted to stay on in Norman. So. And Bill and I fell apart on that one.

And then the University Hospital thing came up. And Presbyterian, and the guiding group for Presbyterian nationally came to Bill and said, "We'd like for Presbyterian HCA to be the guiding force for the University Hospital. And we'll cut you a deal, et cetera, et cetera." And so, by the dark of night this was done. And when it surfaced the next day, or over the next week or so, it really created a highly negative effect, which turned out to be very positive for a lot of things. But the idea was that no, you're not going to do it. Instead Lloyd Rader gets University Hospital, we'll make a contract of some type with Presbyterian so you won't leave town and all that. And Lloyd, of course, swept in there like he did with everything else and practically tore it down that night and then re-opened it the next day in much different context. But the, Banowsky blamed me for that, and that was one I played no real role in.

But it was clear that the president and I could not work together easily or well, and that the University's Health Science Center would suffer. OMRF really wasn't in our conscious thinking at that moment in time. And, the, so having made that decision—I was just laughing with Gabrielle last night about it—I was in the Sheraton Washington Hotel, some fancy hotel up for a meeting up there, and telephone rang and it was Ron White had become chair of the Regents; and he said, "We want to talk to you about your resignation." And I said, "Well, how did you know about my resignation because I told Banowsky that I wasn't ready for it to be announced." And he said, "Oh, he announced it to the *Times*." Seatt—not the Seattle. What was the name? What's the name of the? Anyhow, the Oklahoma paper. And that was it as far as I was concerned. So, I immediately sat down and made an agreement with the lady who does the typing at the hotel. And I sent a letter to god and man resigning, and everybody I knew and could think of in Oklahoma. And so that when I came back it was a fait accompli, it was done. And the, I was, in my letter I had dated it out six weeks so I had time to clean up my office and a lot of the things that were hanging up in the air. And the big three came back and said, "Okay, if you're

not going to work with him, don't leave Oklahoma, come to OMRF." And we worked it out that day. And then they said, "You tell Sam White." I said, "Oh, boy." And so, he really got the news from me, immediately followed up by Dean and Harvey Everest. Ben Wildman was in Palm Springs and didn't want to fly back for a little matter like that, which I have told him many times about that little matter. But the, what I did was, the rapidity with which it happened, I said, six weeks is too long, let's make it a month. And I'll get out and 825 NE 13th Street will be free. And that's how I got to OMRF was because of the fact that the president of the University and I could not get along. He was my boss, clearly. And I worked on the old feeling that if you and your boss can't get along, you better be looking because he is the boss. And that was very much the way I felt about it. So, I moved in a matter of, less than three or four days from one side to the other.

In the middle of all of this, Boren begins to make noises about becoming president. And up until that time he was sitting senator and really had not been under consideration because everybody thought he wouldn't be the least bit interested, but turns out he was very interested as you know. So that, I didn't play any role in that. David came, we'd talked several times. David doesn't, didn't drink openly then, and I don't think he does now, but he would constantly ask me when I was in Washington for NIH or anything else to make time to see him. And we had a lot of talks about the University, where it was going, and the Health Science Center, where it was going. Because Banowsky then was beginning to build his own departure. And he, it was clear that he was going, and so that meant that I needed to have two plans: one with him, and one without him and with the next president. And so that's the way we did it.

I got to OMRF, found out that we were very short of space for the people that we had. Although the leadership felt that we had too much space, but we were very short on the space we had. And we were not producing quality science. I'm not that deep a scientist, wrote lots of research papers and things like that, but you know, I can't hold a candle to some of these people that are really good at it. So I, for me the role was administration, not being a scientist, but knowing how to recognize good scientists. And so that I sat down with three people from outside Oklahoma on a long weekend to look at every scientist that we had, their CVs, what they'd done, et cetera, et cetera. And unfortunately news of that got out. I probably did not make it clear enough to those consultants that there had to be a ranking of some kind from that. Number one, we didn't have the money to pay the people; number two, we didn't have the space; and number three, they weren't working that hard anyhow. So, that's when the, not famous, the infamous working rules document came out, not from me, but from some of the people that I met with, saying you ain't cutting the mustard here, let's get with it; you've got the capability, but you've got to get with it; and by x date you're going to be supporting at least 50 percent of your own research or you're not here. And the NIH was flush with money at that point in time, and you could have written any kind of research paper about the cross breeding of ants and get it funded. It was just ridiculous, but at any rate. The three consultants were pretty out spoken. They agreed pretty

much with my original feeling about it, not that it was hard to do because some people were basically coming in at 10:00 in the morning and going home at 2:00 in the afternoon and running a research program.

But, the, I met with the entire group at OMRF and told them about the group, and that they had evaluated everybody's CV, and that I'd be meeting with each person on the scientific staff at OMRF to go over what people outside felt. And you could imagine what an uproar that caused, but it actually went off very well when I look back on it. There were three people who were non-touchables really, and they really were good and good at what they were doing. But that was, I'm sorry to say, Marty, that that was all—those three people. And we had a scientific staff of about twenty or twenty-five people. So, you know, that's a lot of wood to cut. So, but the, everybody agreed that the organization, because we had a very nice endowment from the Chapman Trust that came in every year, I didn't have to apply for it or anything else, I got x percent of the Chapman Trust every year. And that was, Mr. Chapman himself had negotiated that, and Bill Bell was the person who monitored it. And I working in the University side with Bill Bell, and so this became a natural. But it, with the agreement that I gave the faculty was that we'll support—you make the budget, we don't—we'll tell you how much money you have yes, and then we'll add to that sum, relatively speaking, free money. If you need a lot of equipment or something else, we'll do it on an individual basis. But the, you've got to get outside review of your research on a continuing basis by having research grants. And, the, several people resigned. None of whom I had wanted to keep anyhow, so they made that easy for me.

But we started working our way through it, and we started putting it into how much lab space can they really use because they'd been given blocks of space when then came to OMRF, and some of them were using this much of the block and this much was empty. And so that became Thurman space. If somebody needed some space, we were able to provide it because we had a lot of dead wood. The library start was right then because the foundation came along and said, "We want to make a gift on behalf of our father who has died, and he had an interest in libraries." And I said, "Well, we can always take care of that." So, that's how the library was put out there. I had to have a stable piece of ground for an electron microscope. The, we were able to put together what amounted to five really nice lab areas to which we could recruit people. And in the breakdown of the money the first time around, I had put aside salaries for five people all the way from really a top gun all the way to somebody who was going to be the thought of tomorrow. That's when the recruiting really started.

I'm again sorry to say that there was not a single person, with the exception of Fletcher Taylor and his group at the University, that I was the least bit interested in. If you looked at everybody's success rate with the University and at OMRF with NIH and others, American Heart, all the rest, that was the only group. Well, it was funny because—and not so funny in some people's minds—but I had been talking to Fletcher with my University hat about I'd like to make you

happy, don't cut and run here because he and Phil Smith, the dean of the School of Public Health, were like putting a cat and a dog in a bag and shaking it, you know, you could really get them started with no effort at all. And Phil came to me several times saying, "I want to move these people, they don't belong in public health." I said, "Well, how can you say that when they are working on cholesterol, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and its effect on the diet?" You know, clearly they had an interest in public health. It really was that he couldn't say I hate that SOB, but that's the way he felt about it I found out later. A lot of it from his wife, because Vivian, of course, was a faculty member and she never failed to tell me when everything was right or wrong. But the, we, that was the only one in the entire University framework—Bill Brown had nothing in dentistry, not a soul. Phil, Phillip had a couple of ones in School of Public Health, but nothing like what a land-grant University's College of Medicine should be doing in places like continental Africa and all that. It was really a tough thing on the faculty of the College of Public Health to have to drive to Woodward to have a project. The idea of going to Kenya would never cut it. But that was—. And so I made sure that I discussed that openly at the board meeting of many of the board, the larger board had responsibilities within the University for college of x or college of y. So, we covered all of that ground and, yeah, there was a lot of unease. Banowsky was on the downhill slide by now, and you didn't have to worry about Banowsky, he was going to take himself out, but, you know, it—.

I'd say that we were able, within three or four months of getting all the pieces started, of putting them together. I had been very active in the NIH, and therefore I'd made site visits out the kazoo. Well, the only thing that's interesting about a site visit is that you would learn is how somebody else is doing it. And I had done that, and I knew a lot of people across the country who had either good, young people in their framework, or were interested in moving themselves. And so I sat down one night and figured out that all I needed was the money for twenty-two new investigators, and I said, "Twenty-two? I can't even pay two." But that was just before they came along and established all the things there.

Look at that boat coming out of the fog. Which way do you go? Where's the landing? Washington Park, here I come. You hope.

But it, so we started. And I categorized it by—I wanted it one star, a real star. And I recruited two or three people, and I had one of them signed up to come, and Jim Hammarsten wouldn't give him a faculty appointment in the College of Medicine. So, had nothing to do with my ultimate run-ins with Hammarsten, but he just, as I told him again to his face, I said, "Jim, the reason you don't want him is he's better than anybody you've got." And I said, "You don't understand his research." And I said, "Don't try to backfire that one on me." I said, "I can tell you I know nothing about his research except that it's well funded and well thought of by everybody I talk to." And little run-ins like that kind of didn't do much for public relations or personal things, but.

So, we recruited in that first wave of people. We got Bob Good, who was the only member at the time of the National Academy of Science in Oklahoma. We brought him from New York. He, when I left Memorial Sloan Kettering, my whole line of research was taken over by Bob. And the, he had a really good team including one bright, young scientist who wasn't sure whether to tie his shoes or what to do, and that was Paul Kincaid, and now Paul is head of research for OMRF. But Bob brought Paul Kincaid, Linda Thompson, and a biochemist—I'm blocking on her name—and himself, and they started the cancer research program at OMRF. And in less than ninety days he had the research program completely funded, included buying some very expensive equipment, which I'd been sweating blood about, but he, Bob, you know, he had a, he was handicapped, he had that bad limp, dragged his foot along. But on his feet, I have heard very few scientists talk that could bring a picture into place that made you sit there and think, just like a television, ah, this is what that is. He could do that better than anybody I've ever seen. Good clinician, not great, but a good clinician, and despite being a scientist, he could relate to parents for children. And that again made him super in my mind. So, he was the first one that came. Phil Silverman and Margaret Clark were the second and third ones. The, blocking on the kid's name from Duke, but we got another person out of Duke. And then the last one's that we had gotten in the first wave, were the numbers two and three with Jordan Tang. And so that we picked up all those people in the midst of an academic year, so some of them we had to wait until the end of a contract. Others the universities where they were said go ahead.

And from that point on the recruitment ran out of my office, but I didn't have to run it like I had the others. I recruited all the others, but Bob Good said, "How many people can I bring?" And I said, "You can bring three." And he brought two immediately and then decided he would take his time filling out the third one. And eventually brought in a guy from Israel, whose wife incidentally painted that picture over the wine cabinet. His wife had nothing to do in Oklahoma City—had a few choice words because it was a lot like Israel—and she said, "The sand here is just like the sand in Israel;" and she said, "At least we know how to irrigate it." She was a real charmer, but she painted a lot.

But from that point on, the modus operandi was that we would take all of the endowment income and give to every scientist the so-called OMRF funds, and the OMRF funds were theirs to use however they wanted to do it. They could do a research program, get a piece of equipment, they could bring a visiting scientist for a year in. It wasn't a specific fund as much as it was, you present me what you think you would like to have most and I'll see if we can fund it. And that's when I turned into a fundraiser. But, it, they recruited all of their own people. I continued to use the head of each program as a scientific executive committee, and as they identified other programs that we needed—we had to improve animal program, we had to bring in an electron microscopist because we had a great machine and a great place that is great, but. Those people I recruited. The individual scientists working in groups they recruited. Once or, I can think of twice I turned down somebody they sent in to think about, but one thing a scientist never thinks

about is vetting somebody. And so I'd been working at this job like this about six weeks or eight weeks and this one appears on my desk, and I starting vetting him and he'd been in jail for child abuse, he had been, had his medical license taken away because of inappropriate behavior with female patients, you know. I said, "Boy, I don't think we need this guy." And sure enough we didn't. So that's the, from that day on OMRF became self-sustaining at the recruitment level with a level of oversight that was significant. You talk about oversight sometimes and it's kind of a kiss and tell and that's it. It wasn't that way. If they were bringing somebody in that we were committing ourselves to, we always told everybody who came young or old: your original appointment is five to seven years, we'll write that down if you want it, you can take it verbally or whatever you want. And if you, if we fire you, now that's an entirely different thing, but we have to have reason to fire you, we listed some of the reasons, but it became a really self-sustaining institution. And Fletcher Taylor and Chuck Esmon, they more or less led the crowd, and they were such good scientists, as well as such good human beings, and Fletcher, of course, superb cardiologist, absolutely superb, so that we began after about three or four years we had stability, and so we began to think then about how would we cross develop, and they were doing quite well with each other, but it was almost eight years before we had good relationships with the University. Rainey Williams in surgery and Jack—oh, we, I, used his name yesterday.

THOMPSON: Soulcatch(??)?

THURMAN: Soulcatch(??). You know, he became, when the older gentleman stepped out in microbiology, Jack became the, he was interested in clinical microbiology as well as his own, and so that he worked both sides of the street. We gave quite a few joint appointments, not enough to, in my mind, threaten the University in any way, which, because I was worried about that part of it, having lived through what we lived through to get where we were. It, I was concerned that they would be threatened, and they were, particularly the Department of Medicine. And that was not Hammarsten as much as it was the Department of Medicine. Soup to nuts, we were able to recruit people and give them the time to do research, not overload them with clinical things, and only one time in all those years at OMRF did I ever have to talk to somebody about not devoting the right amount of time to his research. And so that, it worked very, very well. The new provost came on, Clayton Rich, and a new president, whose wife was a psychiatrist, came on. And each of those were little bumps in the road that you had to take care of, but not a difficult situation. Good people.

So, OMRF became our bellwether for the term that you can recruit to Oklahoma, because that was the issue when I got there. I came from Tulane, it isn't hard to recruit people to Tulane, you know, you're in New Orleans, you've got all that good food, good fun, good everything, and a decent weather pattern, and other institutions, independent institutions for research with whom to make affiliations. So, we didn't have any problem. The only thing that bothered us was one of the better research institutions was on the other side of the Mississippi, and they only had one

bridge, so that if that bridge was out for any reason, you had to catch a ferry or drive up to Baton Rouge and drive back down to go across the river. Interesting times. But the, I think that the University really gained tremendously with OMRF. Some of the programs, and again, let's go back to Fletcher Taylor for a moment. Fletcher, Fletcher never met somebody he didn't like, and he never saw a piece of research that he couldn't do better; and those two things are a remarkable pair in one person. But Fletcher—I got a letter from him the other day—he's retired and he, all through the times down in Oklahoma City he kept this farm in North Carolina. And when he left it he'd made agreements with them about this and that, and he had two or three sheep, well now he's got a whole herd. And it, he said, I didn't know this, but he's having some trouble adjusting to being a farmer part of the time. But he, he stuck right in there with some of the things that they were doing collaboratively. Fletcher could come up with more ideas—they just seemed to float off Fletcher—he could keep a whole group of people going for ten years.

But he, they, he primarily, but also Chuck and Bob Floyd came to see me one day collectively. So, obviously it had been bothering them in talking to them about it. They said, "Have you ever thought maybe that we ought to patent some of the things that we're doing that may have commercial value?" And I said, "Nope." I said, "I've never thought about it and I don't know that I want to, but tell me why I should." Because to me part of the commercialization of our research was anti, well anti-scholastic in every sense of the word. The, we had a fine, old gentleman on the OMRF Board of Directors—I'm blocking on his name now—but he had been running a major research program out of the old tuberculosis institute, Trudeau, in New York. And he came in one night, early, and so he and I went to dinner out at my house and sat there and talked for a while. Drank too much bourbon, I'm sure of that. But it, he left me very strongly with a feeling that once you start, don't ever look back because you'll wish you hadn't; but he said, "Also, don't ever not look because some people will try to patent things that clearly don't have any value and it's going to eat your lunch for money." And he was right down the line. Boy, it couldn't have been more clear. But we started, they wanted the ability to patent and I said, "Well, I'm not for that. Give me a little time to think about it." Well, we thought about it and it turned out that in talking to a lot of people around the country, it was going on at places other than Stanford and Harvard and all that. A lot of other people were getting into it, so I started looking for the right person for OMRF. And it turned out to be a little girl in Atlanta. I'm sure that if she heard me say little girl I'd get whacked upside the head, but she, she was in a big law firm there, about thirty or forty lawyers. But her, she had been a medical technician at the University of Texas Hospital in Austin. And she got engaged to this guy who ran off with somebody else just before the wedding, and so she went to law school. She needed something to really fix her mind, she went to law school. And Patria was just one of those very interesting people in which she, you'd be sitting there, and she'd say would you quit talking and all that BS, my time is worth money. And then the next thing you knew she was running the conversation, and nobody was talking. Anyway, we hired Patria, Patria Pabst on a contingency for OMRF. And Bill Bell funded her salary. I will forget that because when she told me what I had to pay

her to hold her together for the first year, it was a significant amount of money, which we didn't have. But he came in town a couple days and I put it up to him and he paid for it through the Chapman Trust.

But we started, Fletcher and Chuck had the very first one, Bob Floyd had the second, Tang the third of the patent runs. Then it really became an issue that I needed to address, so we hired Patria for a couple of days to come down and hold seminars for the whole faculty in the morning and then break it down to individuals in the afternoon. And she knew enough science that she could buffalo them without any problem at all, but they couldn't buffalo her back. And it, we ended up, the very first year, we ended up submitting nineteen patents; and of those nineteen, sixteen were granted. And, you know, the board of directors of OMRF, all of whom were in businesses of one type or another, and all of whom had patents it seems to me, were just gaga about the fact that we did so much. And I pointed out to them that that was true for the medical thing across the world and they needed to be waiting and aware that when the medicine started, really started doing patents it was going to be Katie bar the door. And that was not psychic on my part, it was actual demonstration.

Fletcher and Chuck patented the antibiotic background for the drug that the VA uses for sepsis, and you know, half the patients who come into the VA have gotten sepsis at one time or another. And it ain't cheap. I've forgotten the name of the company that's got it, but we get that, and for almost everything everybody does is patented. And that, to try to pull that off and not have everybody patent how to tie your shoes was a major effort because money is money, and when you're that, at that level of salary, you're obviously interested in money, and somebody else is all the sudden driving a Lincoln, and you're still driving your Ford. So, it had a bad effect for a period of time, and it was not an easy one to overcome.

We had a group of people at OMRF though that quickly learned that they could get a lot done because the people at OMRF, regardless of whether they were in the library, in the central labs, or whatever they were in, if you were half-nice, you were going to get that response from them. And a guy at the University might have to work his way through everything, but we didn't have any of that at our place. If you needed something, and if we couldn't do it, we had other places to go. So, but the, I don't—and this is prideful, and therefore possibly sinful on my part—I don't think that I have ever seen in fifty plus years of doing this, ever seen as collegial a group as we developed at OMRF, and part of it was, yes, we paid their salary, they didn't have to worry about that, but their research could be funded, their equipment needs could be funded, et cetera, et cetera, if they could produce and were producing, even if they had down times, and everybody has a down time. My world ended when I lost all my support once, and for about eight or nine months I had no support for my research—I was ready to go commit suicide. The, we just had an environment where you invited people in to be with you for either grand rounds, maybe one day, or for six months. It made no difference to me as long as they could demonstrate that it made

their research better. And that was the only category that we had. And very few schools and educational institutions can do that because it ain't cheap, again. But we had the money to do it. That's the OMRF story.

THOMPSON: In your opinion, because you've been around, how do you rate OMRF in comparison to other research centers around the country now? After you left, let's put it that way. How would you have rated OMRF?

THURMAN: Well. Excuse me. You know we have an association of independent research institutes; and as the ex-president of that association a couple of times, I was totally opposed to any of the rankings and ratings that people get into. But the, my opposition amounted to a bunch of spit in the wind, and it really didn't make any difference at all to people what I thought, so that we had the rankings. And at one point in time—Marty, I'm going to guess that this was right around 1990, which meant we'd had a good solid ten or twelve years to build on—we were ranked as the number eight research institute in the country. That, the reason I was opposed to it was, are you going to rate them on size? You going to rate them on grant income? Are you going to rate them on number of papers? What are you going to rate them on? And if a really good institute at the Scripps doesn't publish for a year, does that mean that they fall from two to twelve? Or is that the fact that everybody did it one time? You know, that kind of thing.

So, don't misunderstand, I very much appreciated the ranking because the thing that bothered me the most about coming to Oklahoma—excuse me—was that there was an attitude here at that time, or there, that you couldn't recruit good scientists to Oklahoma. And I subsequently had to re-do that whole episode with the Noble Labs down in Ardmore about their scientists. But I just plain and simply didn't believe that, and I would not take it as an excuse from any dean at the Health Science Center. And Tom Lynn as dean said, "Well, I agree with you." He said, "We recruited you from New Orleans and Tulane." And I said, "Yeah," I said, "But I was over the hill." Tom never got over that one. But I'd say that we remained in the top twenty to twenty-five the whole time I was there. Right now, Steve Prescott has brought on the clinical piece of the having the MLS Clinic. I avoided that. We ran cancer programs when we were researching the cancer drug; we ran heart programs when we were researching heart, but we weren't that to anybody on a continuing basis. Steve and I talked a long time about it, and his concern was that even though he's a cardiologist, that he was, would get out of touch if he didn't have some time, and I understand that.

It used to be—Lloyd Rader—I'll never forget—Lloyd Rader—I went across the street five hundred times a day it seemed to me, but one time Lloyd was coming down 13th Street when I left OMRF going over to Children's Hospital, and it was something like nineteen degrees and I was wearing that blue coat thing, and he called me up that afternoon, and he said, "You know," he said, "I've often thought this," he said, "but you're an idiot." And I said, I don't know what I

said, but anyhow he thought it was kind of smart mouth, probably was. But I did not find any reluctance in the University framework to recruiting good people, except for the fact of commitments. If you were going to hire somebody, all of the older ones wanted tenure, which fortunately is dying its natural death, won't be too much longer. But when you have to do those things, and you have to go through a University committee, it takes forever. I remember that I tried to recruit a new chairman of medicine the first time Hammarsten threatened me how hard it was going to be, because Jim threatened every other day he was going to retire, so you needed to be ready for that. And so I was, I had no trouble at all finding four or five of the best chairs in medicine in the country would have gladly come to Oklahoma. Oklahoma is a nice place to live, it's got all kinds of negatives, but man, look at this, water, fog, everything. So, well, I never found it was a problem, and certainly if you look at the people we recruited to OMRF, they came off the top of the line, they really did. And I never found that as an issue. So, in so saying, I think that it probably was a mistake to create a clinical program there, and I told Steve that. I said, "I think it's a mistake because you got a research institute running a clinical program. How are you going to equate the clinical side of taking care of a patient to the research program of taking care of a patient?" I said, "I think it's going to be hard to do." And we'll see. But it's—. I don't—if I had to rate them right now I'd certainly say that they're still in the top twenty.

THOMPSON: You've mentioned a few of the researchers, are there any other people at OMRF that stand out in your mind over the years that you were there?

THURMAN: Paul Kincaid is still there. Terrible, terrible misuse of a person in an administrative role. He's a vice president for research or something like that. Paul has that natural feel for an idea, and you can see him almost glaze his eyes over when somebody mentions an idea that he suddenly has caught on to, and saying, "Hey, that's a thought." And you know, it's just kind of—and I used to tease him all the time about it. It, he's to me, when he came he was a kid, when he came; and he has done more in those years from a research standpoint, been head of the national societies of immunology and all that kind of stuff. So, he knows how to walk the road, but he also doesn't let anything get in his way. It just, if he's going to do research on this cell or that cell, he may have to go to Stockholm, Sweden himself and pick up a vial of cells, but he'll do it. He's well read. He's well read outside the field of medicine, too. Paul's a real, he's a humanist of the first order, art and music and all. When he came up and was on the boat with us, he got upset with Gabrielle's choice of music on the thing, but he told her about is, so it all went well. But he and I were in New York together one time and he wanted to see a new museum, and I was really impressed with his knowledge of art. Mine is peripheral to Gabrielle, of course, which means I don't listen half the time when they're talking about it, but boy, Paul knew all the details, he really was. But he is, he's a quintessential young investigator who's now getting older, but he was just a dog with a bone when you really got down to an issue. He'd not go home at night, he'd be sitting there at one o'clock in the morning when you came in for some reason he'd be sitting there, and when you came back at eight in the morning he'd be sitting there. You know,

he's that kind of guy. So that I'd say he's one of the people that has met every goal in every sense of the word. He's got a couple of patents, and he's got this money coming in for this and that. He's, I'd say Paul is probably, speaking for me, my best recruitment effort any time. Bob Good used to get mad when Paul would say that I recruited him, but I did. I recruited Bob, but I recruited Paul separately from Bob. Bob said, "It would be nice if this kid could come." That was the last time he heard of it until Paul had signed on, that kind of thing.

But Bob Floyd is another person who, bulldog type of scientist, it can drive you out of your mind. You know, he, it seems to me that when I listen to Bob, every couple of months we'd talk about how his research was going, that he was presenting the same thing, I would call him on it, and he'd say, "Well, you don't understand." And he was right, I didn't understand and he could make it clear to me, or maybe couldn't make it clear to me, either way. But, he—his, relatively speaking, stoic approach to research was a disadvantage for him and his interpersonal relationships with others, and in his ability to get good people at institution x who were doing exactly what he was doing and could save him three or four months in getting this piece in there. He, you know, he had to do it; he had to do it all himself. So, he's not achieved probably twenty or thirty percent of his potential, but he never will because he can't change that type of approach.

And so that Jordan Tang, probably the most acclaimed scientist there is an individual who is probably, when we went to China, Tang was there. I sat and talked to him for hours because there were long airplane flights and long waits here and there. And he taught me an awful lot of protein biochemistry, which I was terribly weak in and I knew it. So, he taught me all of that. He's probably one of the best protein biochemists in the world. We published that China series, and naturally he came back the following year, and said "You know what we need?" And I could see it coming. But several times we published things for Jordan that he could not get accepted in a refereed journal. And one or two of them turned out to be sparklers. So that I think Jordan, Jordan has gotten tremendous appreciation and acknowledgement for what he does, and it has not all panned out. His original idea about HIV, if he had pursued it, of course all of us are great and smart as we can be looking back here, and I certainly am one of those. But, Jordan had a hand on HIV earlier than anybody in this country really, when you sit down and read the papers of that age about HIV, Jordan is here and everybody else is down here. So, he now is passed that. And again, just like Paul and others—have you ever seen any of Jordan's pottery work?

THOMPSON: No.

THURMAN: He makes bronzes, he makes pottery of all type. But he's got some bronzes he made of individuals in the government here. And he paints. He plays the piano beautifully. And he's just one of those people.

If I had to pick a single person, or could have two, I would pick Kincaid and Chuck Esmon. Chuck Esmon is again one of those people that if you were a fellow in anything or were following Chuck, you'd walk down the hall behind and watch these ideas just float out. And he isn't working on any of them. But he said, "We ought to look at that." You could grab any one and make a major project out of it. Chuck, but he floats in his own world, and it's a terrible pun because he is probably the best diver in Oklahoma, all of Oklahoma. He and Naomi have made, he's not married—he's married, but no children, and they've dived, dove, they've dived all over the world. And they take all of their time. And one year they were diving in Fiji, the next year they were diving in the Suez Canal, things all that. All the beautiful places for diving, they've done them all in this area, and by that I mean the US and the South American countries, but, and now they're about to finish all the overseas ones. It's probably a good thing because Naomi was just mashed up in an automobile accident, so her diving may be limited now. But Chuck is a scientist nonpareil. He really is. And sometimes you sit there, and I occasionally—he likes to sit on the end of the row, and when I came in late to anything, which was frequent, he would have saved a seat so I could sit there. And you could see Chuck, and half the time he was like this and you could see his eyes going like that, and I'd say to myself, he's going to sleep, he's not going to know that went on around here. And for the next month we'd all be working on the things he'd picked up in that short period of time. But he, I would certainly rank him as the older—he was the older guy, not that old, but older than Paul. Those two would be my first choices. I'd start a research institute tomorrow with those two guys if I needed.

THOMPSON: Very good. Any other comments that you think of about OMRF? It appears that you really enjoyed those years.

THURMAN: Oh, I did. Um-hm. There was never a day that I really didn't enjoy going to work. We had such tremendous people after that first couple of years. I mean the first couple of years I'd have given not to go, after that first couple years, so much happened for OMRF, for the University, and for Noble Labs.

I was laughing at these, this is one of the oil rig things. Gabrielle and I served on the board for Noble Labs afterwards. They chopped this tower off and put it down on the crane, they were taking under the bridge, take it back to the other side, put it on top. And they cut down their travel time because these things rent for a million dollars a day in drilling. But the cost of them and the ability to keep them going is something else.

But, the—to me the Oklahoma experience, and you know, the Tulsa Medical College was early in the course of all of this. And, as so often happens, you spin the grease where the wheel really needs it. And Tulsa didn't need me after a period of time. It needed it me longer than it had me from the standpoint of the University, but from the standpoint of ultimately succeeding and doing very, very well, it did itself. And the people who succeeded me, beautifully, really did.

And it, I look back on it, we could have done it faster, but I'm not so sure that the underpinning that's there now, and making it permanent, and you brought up the one yesterday, that still I read the budget very, very carefully each year. But the College of Medicine and the College of Osteopathic Medicine remain an issue that they need a person to step into and say, okay—. And it's not going to happen; that's the trouble. When Bill Bell died—my person for that job was Bill Bell because, you know, he was Mr. Big in any volunteer thing in Tulsa. He, you know, lord knows how much he got for shepherding all the money, and he was a very conscientious shepherd. But the university in San Antonio and about eight or nine institutions in Arkansas got Chapman money because that was his home. But OMRF got into that game—couldn't go to a state agency. That was the big hooker. Bill made some conscious efforts to help OMRF at the time when it was first really coming along. Then he made the big effort with Mr. Chapman to make a part of the money designated each year for OMRF. That money, if it had gone to the University, TMC [Tulsa Medical College] would be further along than it is, because it would have had a batch of money, it would have been free money, stand for only(??) if you want to buy a bottle of bourbon it was fine, you could do that. But it—that flexibility of money becomes a real issue at times, and you have to either prostitute yourself or lie, one of the two to get it done, and neither one of those are pleasant things. So, I don't know.

But I think the time for TMC—one of the reasons I was so pleased that you took this on—the time for TMC and the rest of the problems in Tulsa to emerge from under the University cloud, relatively speaking, is now. And it needs a strong person who basically is an SOB to get in there and really get it all worked out about bringing those two schools and those various supporters of community things together. And it can be done, with not that hard an effort, but, but I think that—. It's like everything else that we do, if you don't get it done in the magic time, it tends to tail off, you know. And that's, I see that happening, particularly in the osteopathic school right now. The osteopathic school should be one of the better ones in the country, and there is no way that you can rank it very high. And I don't see that changing under the present leadership and the present management arrangements. And if you're not careful, it's going to poison the well for TMC. So, I'm hoping there's a Bill Bell in the wings, but I haven't seen it. For one thing, if the state senator, not state senator, but the senator who's been there so long and has had so much of an impact doesn't understand the medical schools and he doesn't understand healthcare, but other than that what else is there to know. But the reason I'm so pleased you all are doing this now is that there's somebody sitting out there on his duff who's number two to the guys at the bank and all these other people that could do this, and I'm hoping you all are going to reach him, because Tulsa deserves it. They really deserve it.

THOMPSON: It is an interesting community.

THURMAN: Um-hm. It is.

THOMPSON: With interesting, influential people.

THURMAN: Uh-hm. Most of whom don't speak to each other regularly about anything except my golf game.

THOMPSON: That's exactly right. But they have that potential.

THURMAN: They have that potential. Same potential as Harvey Everest and Dean McGee provided for Oklahoma City. You know, Dean McGee said we were drilling a pipeline from Lake Atoka into Oklahoma City for the water through 2020, most people would say, "Forget it, buster." You didn't to Dean McGee because he was buster. So, but I was looking this morning, just because I was bored to death on the first part of that telephone call before I got involved, but I was looking at that year that I was chair of the United Way, they gave me a pen and pencil set, and on the middle of it there's a block of red granite, and it's from the old building, the Federal Building [Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building]. But everybody that did work with the United Way, or everybody who did work down there that day—and see, OMRF had one of the highest concentrations of people down there, many of them just to give blood, but on the other hand, they were there. But that, it sounds strange, but the Federal Building probably did more for Oklahoma thinking as a community than it did to hurt things. A hundred and sixty-eight people aren't a small number, but on the other hand, I think so much of the development in Oklahoma City came as a result off and on tangentially from things that happened that day. You couldn't move inside that building without running into somebody from the University, from OMRF, from the business community. And usually people run away, well, people were running to there, and it was very impressive. Very impressive. But, so I think that the only concern I have about Tulsa is not seizing the moment.

THOMPSON: Very good.

End of interview.