

Oral Memoirs
of
Reuben Davis, JD

An Interview
Conducted by
Clinton M. Thompson
November 15, 2016

Development of the Tulsa Medical College:
An Oral History Project

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Interview History

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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.

Reuben Davis is the lawyer who negotiated the terms of the Tulsa Medical Education Foundation.

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.

Alyssa Peterson was a Medical Librarian at the Schusterman Library.

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Reuben Davis, JD
Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Clinton M. Thompson
November 15, 2016
Anacortes, Washington

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THOMPSON: This is November 8—15, 2016. Would you like to introduce yourself?

DAVIS: My name is Reuben Davis.

THOMPSON: Would you like to tell us a little bit about your educational background?

DAVIS: All right. I attended Edison High School here in Tulsa. And then I went to Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and graduated from there. I did a stint in the, little over four years in the army, and went to Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division. And then when I got back I taught down at Fort Sill, and decided to go to law school. And I then made application and went to law school and graduated three years later. Pretty good grades. And I was, started looking for a job and came back to Tulsa. I took a job with Boone, Smith, and Ellison was the name of the firm at that time. At that time Jim Ellison represented Hillcrest Medical Center, and that was my first taste of legal medical issues.

THOMPSON: All right. Now, as I understand it you were involved in the early days of the Tulsa Medical Education Foundation [TMEF]. Would you like to talk—and I assume that was a result of your firm being involved in the legal aspects.

DAVIS: That's correct.

THOMPSON: So, can you talk a little bit about your knowledge about the Tulsa Medical Education Foundation?

DAVIS: The, I was given an assignment by Jim Ellison to create the TMEF, Tulsa Educational Medical Foundation, and I did that, qualified it as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. And so that was my first, the first time I had anything to do with medical legal issues, and that was the assignment that I was given and carried out.

THOMPSON: Now, that involved all of the hospitals in Tulsa at the time?

DAVIS: The big three hospitals—Hillcrest, St. John's, and St. Francis.

THOMPSON: Okay.

DAVIS: And one of my charges was to that—periodically hospitals will have a difficult time getting along with each other. With the advent of TMEF there was an avenue for the three hospitals to share ideas and concepts, and I thought it worked very, very well.

THOMPSON: So, initially was the purpose merely for them to be able to interact and work with each other? Or were the residencies part of the issue of that early interaction?

DAVIS: The resident, residency programs grew out and probably were the impetus for the creation of TMEF. You would have residents which would work at Hillcrest, and they would be going through a residency program at one of the other hospitals, St. Francis, for example.

THOMPSON: Just to ask some interesting questions, at least to me: in the establishment of that 501(c), did you build that from the ground up, or did you find other entities like that around the United States that allowed you to create that entity? Or was it a totally new entity in your mind?

DAVIS: It was totally new.

THOMPSON: And the reason I ask that question is that having been around healthcare for—this was an interesting city when it came to the relationship between the three major hospitals. That is not an unusual—that is an unusual, interesting relationship to move healthcare forward. Typically, they were in an adversarial, which you mentioned, situation, and that I never saw in Tulsa. I mean, they had their own interests—

DAVIS: Yeah, they had their own interests, and I think that TMEF was the, was the catalyst for the three hospitals getting along as well as they did. And they did, what I perceived, to be a damn good job.

THOMPSON: Who did you set up on the board? How were the hospitals represented inside TMEF?

DAVIS: Well, each, as I recall, each hospital then would put representatives on a board of directors. The, I worked very closely with Dr. Steve Landgarten, who was the medical director at Hillcrest. I worked with, I recall, with Dr. Burr Lewis, who was a St. John's physician. And not

at first, but later on I started dealing with Leeland Alexander, and I think that was after the creation of the Tulsa medical school.

THOMPSON: That would make sense. He had been brought in by Dr. Fitzpatrick to do a lot of the operations work, so that would make sense. Did they do—do you remember what other activities they did as the Tulsa Medical Education Foundation? Do you remember any other early initial cooperation that they did through this organization?

DAVIS: No, I—.

THOMPSON: No. That's fine. I was just wondering. Did you stay on and work with the board day to day? Or did you merely get them going and let them go?

DAVIS: Initially just to get them, get it off the ground. My participation, I think, was not needed after the formation of TMEF, and particularly when the OU Medical School then came to Tulsa, everybody was used to working with each other, and I thought they did a pretty good job at it without having to have a lawyer looking over their shoulder all the time.

THOMPSON: Did, was it difficult for them to agree to create TMEF? I mean, did you have negotiations that you had to accomplish, or did you fairly well just lay it out on the table and they accepted what they had asked you to do I assume?

DAVIS: Yeah, right.

THOMPSON: A group had asked you to be involved and then they just went from there?

DAVIS: That's correct.

THOMPSON: Very interesting. Were there other people that you—?

DAVIS: But there would be issues that would come up from time to time, but those were generally solved in-house by the affected hospitals. I cannot recall an issue that was not solved by the Board of Directors or Board of Trustees of TMEF. I think they did a pretty good job of it. And they had some pretty strong personalities also. Steve Landgarten being right up there.

THOMPSON: Among those?

DAVIS: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Well, that would be said for the entire physician community in Tulsa.

DAVIS: Yeah.

THOMPSON: It was a very strong, very qualified healthcare professionals in this city, and again, I think that speaks to the fact that they were able to create an organization that allowed them to interact in a manner that moved healthcare forward in Tulsa and didn't cause it to be a battleground.

DAVIS: No question about it.

THOMPSON: Now, did other members come on to TMEF after those original three? Or was that pretty much TMEF?

DAVIS: I think that was pretty much TMEF at the start, yeah.

THOMPSON: So, the three major, major hospitals.

DAVIS: Right. And the kind of, you know, there might be an imbalance in resident distribution, and the Board of Directors, Board of Trustees of TMEF did a pretty good job of equalizing the use of the TMEF assets.

THOMPSON: Now, when did you do the TMEF, the original? Do you remember what year you created that original group? Best to be said that it was done during the seventies?

DAVIS: Yeah. Seventy-three to '75.

THOMPSON: Okay. So, that was about the time that OU was then involved, and the legislation to create the medical school. Was that medical school involved in those original thoughts when TMEF was being put together?

DAVIS: No.

THOMPSON: No. So, the medical school came in later?

DAVIS: That's correct.

THOMPSON: Were you involved at all in the Tulsa community with that early legislation that created the osteopathic school and the OU College of Medicine?

DAVIS: No, I was not.

THOMPSON: Not. Okay. Do you remember at what point that TMEF realized that they wanted the OU College of Medicine to be the controller of the residencies that they were going to be offering in the Tulsa area? Because up until then they were all hospital based.

DAVIS: That's true. That's right. And I think, as I recall, Leeland Alexander was the, kind of the touchstone for the creation of the cooperation between the hospitals and the medical school.

THOMPSON: To develop that?

DAVIS: Yep.

THOMPSON: Are there other things that you remember? I give you a lot of credit. I've been around, been involved in health education for a large number of years. This was really a unique concept. You know, the hospitals, at that period of time, not so much nowadays, but in that period of time, really unique in hospitals agreeing to work together for a purpose. I don't care whether it was hiring the housekeeping staff, it was unique that they could come to an agreement about what they wanted to do, and didn't see it as affecting their ability to get their piece of the market, you know? Was that you that allowed, provided that groundwork with the creation of this group? Or do you think they were already committed to the concept, and then you were able to take their concept and make it a reality?

DAVIS: I think I facilitated their concepts.

THOMPSON: Now, did you stay involved in healthcare legal activities with Hillcrest after the creation of TMEF? Did your firm continue to represent them?

DAVIS: Yes, that's correct.

THOMPSON: Did you do that for the rest of your career?

DAVIS: Well, until Hillcrest sold—

THOMPSON: Okay.

DAVIS: —and became a for-profit.

THOMPSON: For-profit. So that's when your firm then dropped out. So that's when, if I remember correctly, Hillcrest was a city hospital, wasn't it?

DAVIS: Yes, it was.

THOMPSON: The city, it was their original city hospital.

DAVIS: Right. And that's where the Tulsa Police Department would take people that they had picked up and, you know, it was kind of the hospital you went to when you couldn't, you know, get in any place else.

THOMPSON: So now, you indicated that you went to Edison, so you obviously grew up in Tulsa.

DAVIS: Right.

THOMPSON: What do you remember about the hospitals when you were growing up? Did you have any knowledge that there was one hospital or another hospital?

DAVIS: No, I did not. I'll be honest. I knew there were several hospitals, but they, it didn't mean much to me.

THOMPSON: Now, did you go to a local physician of family practice?

DAVIS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Or a general practitioner is probably what they would've been called in those days.

DAVIS: Yes.

(phone ringing)

DAVIS: Tex Goins(??).

THOMPSON: Oh my gosh, that is a name out of the past. That—.

DAVIS: He was, he was our family physician.

THOMPSON: Family physician. Any other things that you remember, since you worked with Hillcrest during that period of time, any other legal issues, things that you remember about healthcare?

DAVIS: I think being a novice in the healthcare industry I still was able to recognize the unique ability of TMEF to solve what could have been major issues between the hospitals. And I was always very proud and happy that I had something to do with it.

THOMPSON: Well, as I said earlier, I think you should be. In my mind, one of the unique—I won't say it's unique because you always get in trouble when you do that—but I think that not many other communities were able to come up with that kind of an organization to be able to set that up. Were you involved with other lawyers at the other two hospitals at the time? Or did TMEF just totally rely on Hillcrest legal counsel to do all of this stuff?

DAVIS: Well, I do not, I do not recall the need for a lawyer to represent one hospital against another. I think it was a pretty congenial group once you got outside the inner workings of TMEF, and I think that's where the disputes would have been adjudicated.

THOMPSON: Now, I'll ask you another question about TMEF. Did they agree to finance TMEF? Or was it just all done on the generosity of the three hospitals as a foundation for the support of residencies in Tulsa? Were there any financial obligations of that group?

DAVIS: That I don't recall.

THOMPSON: You don't remember that.

DAVIS: Yeah. I probably would not have been involved in that. You have to remember going through this I was a novice lawyer, and as such probably didn't have much stroke when it came to division of assets or, or the such. What I would do was to be able to identify problem areas and, with the help of Steve Landgarten and Dr. Colonel, Colonel Jim Reeber worked for Hillcrest, and he was instrumental in ferreting out problem areas and getting them taken care of. (phone rings) Excuse me.

THOMPSON: No, you are fine. You are fine, sir. We totally understand. All right. Are there any other things that you would like to say that I haven't asked you about that you know that I was in error in not asking you?

DAVIS: I don't, I don't believe so.

THOMPSON: You don't believe so. Can I ask you a couple of personal questions then?

DAVIS: Sure.

THOMPSON: Since of the people that we've interviewed, I think you, at least having spent time in Asia, maybe one of the first people that we've talked to that spent any time in Vietnam. Where were you with the 101st in Vietnam?

DAVIS: Up in I Corps. Spent six months in the A Shau Valley, was on Hamburger Hill, saw some major, major action.

THOMPSON: What years were you there?

DAVIS: November '68 to November '69.

THOMPSON: Now, were you in the artillery? Since you were at Sill I'm making that assumption.

DAVIS: That's correct. I was an artillery officer.

THOMPSON: Now, did you do ROTC in college?

DAVIS: Yes. Went through ROTC and then went in and went to artillery officer's basic school, airborne and ranger, and then I spent a year and a half in Germany, and commanded a battery over there as a second lieutenant because all the captains were in Vietnam at that time. And then from Germany I went to the 101st.

THOMPSON: They got their four years.

DAVIS: Hm?

THOMPSON: They got their four years?

DAVIS: Yes, they got their four years.

THOMPSON: I understand that concept. I understand that concept. Now, when you went back to Fort Sill, were you teaching at Fort Sill on base?

DAVIS: Taught in the Tactics Department.

THOMPSON: Now, that's inter—how did you end up back there? Just because you'd been there before?

DAVIS: Because the, Fort Sill is the home of the field artillery, and so I went back to the artillery school to teach.

THOMPSON: The other question is: your law degree is from TU [University of Tulsa]?

DAVIS: OU.

THOMPSON: OU. So, it's from OU. So, you came back to the University from Lawton to get your law degree.

DAVIS: That's right. And was a managing editor of the Oklahoma Law Review. And I graduated with the Order of the Coif, which is the same thing as Phi Beta Kappa. And moved to Tulsa and went to work for the law firm that I continued with until I retired.

THOMPSON: Until you retired. The rest of your practice, was it, you said this was your first medical experience, so what was your specialty?

DAVIS: I'm a business trial lawyer.

THOMPSON: So this was a little different then to set up the—

DAVIS: Well—.

THOMPSON: It was in business, but—.

DAVIS: Yeah. The, back then if you were a lawyer you would examine abstracts, you'd draft agreements, you try lawsuits, do a little criminal work, usually on a pro bono, or free, basis. And so that's the way it was in those early days.

THOMPSON: Very good, very good. Well, do you have anything else that you'd like to mention? People? Things that you remember that you think might be important for people to have—?

DAVIS: Yeah, I remember Dan Duffy, who impressed me as one of the finer individuals on the earth, and, but I can't remember exactly what he was doing back when I knew him.

THOMPSON: He was pretty much in charge of Internal Medicine and the residency program.

DAVIS: Okay, that's what it was then.

THOMPSON: And he and Dr. Landgarten, if I understand things well, were very close.

DAVIS: Okay.

THOMPSON: I'm not sure whether it was just professional or whether that was personal, but they were very close, so I'm sure that he was very involved with him as that developed. So.

DAVIS: I can't think of anything else.

THOMPSON: Well, I can't tell you how appreciative I am of you coming in. You give us a perspective that, you know, we've had a lot of people make comments, but nobody, I don't think, had the insight that you had, and were at the hub of all of this like you were in that initial. So, I really appreciate you agreeing to talk to us and be a part of that.

DAVIS: Well, you're certainly welcome.

THOMPSON: Well, you can tell since your name was the name that everybody associates with it that there are a lot of people that think that, not just me because that was obvious that everyone said that you were one of the individuals that we needed to talk to. So, we greatly appreciate you being willing to come in and talk to us.

DAVIS: Well, it's a pleasure. Thank you very much.

THOMPSON: Thank you. We appreciate it.

End of interview.