Interview History

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The purpose of O-STATE Stories Oral History Project is to gather and preserve memories revolving around Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (OAMC) and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on October 5, 2006.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Jerry Gill is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on August 6, 2008.
About Jerry Gill...

Jerry Gill spent his elementary school years in Norman and Chickasha, Oklahoma, ultimately landing in Lindsay, Oklahoma, where he stayed through high school. As a Lindsay Leopard in a class of fewer than seventy students, Jerry was a star football player, capping his senior year with a state championship. After graduating in 1963, he received offers from multiple schools but, with the help of a football scholarship, chose Oklahoma State University (OSU), which really was his first choice. He pledged Sigma Alpha Epsilon, lived in Bennett Hall in the athletes’ wing, and devoted close to forty grueling hours each week to football, at the same time keeping his grades above average. In fact, his academic performance was so impressive that he earned a graduate teaching assistantship while still an undergrad. He married his high school sweetheart (who was also attending OSU) during his sophomore year, and the couple lived in married student housing. Jerry completed his bachelor’s degree in history in 1967.

After completing his undergraduate degree, he started graduate school but was also working to support his growing family. He held down multiple jobs over the following years and continued to teach at OSU, and he eventually completed his PhD, also in history. His dissertation, published as *The Great Adventure*, was so thorough and well-researched that it became the *History of International Programs at Oklahoma State University* book in OSU’s *Centennial Histories Series*, two publications of one work, a considerable feat. He was also associate director of High School and College Relations, which required travel all over the state. In the mid-1980s, he began working with the OSU Alumni Association, becoming president and CEO, dedicating twenty-two years there and retiring in 2007. In 2008, he went to work at the OSU Library to lead the *O-State Stories* oral history project with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, conducting close to two hundred interviews in a two-year span before retiring again.

During his nearly-forty-year tenure at Oklahoma State, Jerry made noteworthy strides in recruitment, fundraising, strategic planning, and campus growth, resulting in awards and recognition for himself, campus departments, and the university as a whole. In 2011, he was recognized by OSU as a Distinguished Alumni for his contributions to the university and the community. In this interview, Jerry shared memories of high school, highlighting his love of Lindsay High School football, and he discussed what it was like playing under OSU coach Phil Cutchin. He explained his love of history, the discipline it took to be a student athlete, and why he will always be loyal and true to his alma mater, OSU.
First off, I want to thank you for your time. I know time is precious for all of us. Thank you for your time being here today and granting us the permission to interview you for this O-State Stories project. My name is Jacob Sherman with the Oklahoma State University Library. Today is August 6, 2008. I am in the Angie Debo Room in the Edmon Low Library, interviewing Dr. Jerry Gill. This interview is being conducted as part of the O-State Stories oral history project at the OSU Library. Again, thank you for joining us. First off, describe where you grew up and what your family life was like.

Well, my early history, I don’t like to tell people about. I went to elementary school in Norman, Oklahoma. (Laughs) That’s where my parents grew up, actually, on a farm east of Norman during the Depression. I went to grade school at Jefferson Elementary through the fifth grade. Well, actually let’s see. I spent two years in Chickasha. Second and third grade were Chickasha. Then in the sixth grade moved down to Lindsay, and then I graduated from Lindsay High School in 1963.

What was your high school like? Was it a small town?

Probably the greatest time of my life.

Really? Why so?

I played on state championship football teams. I was an All State football player. Just had a great time and great faculty. It was a small town, about four or five thousand population. I guess it was about sixty-some-odd students in my senior class. Knew everybody in high school and half the kids in junior high. Just this great environment to grow up in. Had friends and hanging out and doing things you do. It was a great time. I loved it.

How many students were in your graduating class?
Gill  About sixty, somewhere in there. I think around sixty-nine students, as I recall.

Sherman  Okay. And you said you won the state football championship for Lindsay High?

Gill  It was like dying and going to heaven.

Sherman  Really? What was that like?

Gill  Football was the thing down in Lindsay. It was a farming and an oil field community, a lot of blue-collar, working families. Football was the way of life there.

Sherman  So, football was king on Friday nights?

Gill  It was, and Saturday and Sunday, every day. You hate to lose a football game and then have to go to the barber shop on Saturday morning. (Laughs)

Sherman  That’s right.

Gill  It was great.

Sherman  No free haircuts that day.

Gill  We lost, let’s see, one game my junior year. We were ranked number one in the state and got beat the last game of the season. At that time, only one team went to the playoffs, so our season was done. So we lost one game my junior and senior year but just got the state playoffs my senior year.

Sherman  What level was that?

Gill  Well, it was class B then. AA was the largest class. Then there was A, B, C. We were a fairly small school.

Sherman  Okay. Did you know that you were going to go to college when you were in high school?

Gill  It’s an interesting question because I’ve thought about that since. … Really there was an expectation that I was going to go to college. The only question we had was probably money. I tell people this sometimes, and I may be getting ahead of the story, but Oklahoma State University literally changed my life, being able to go to the university. I probably would not have been able to go to a major university if it hadn’t been for getting a football scholarship. I think there was expectation. Neither of my parents went to college. In fact, neither of them graduated from high school. I was a pretty
good student. I think there was that expectation I was going to college. Somewhere, I don’t know when it became conscious, but by the time I was in high school I knew that I was probably going to go to college somewhere.

Sherman  

Did your high school prepare you to come here?

Gill  

It really did. I came up and took the Honors English class freshman year. Made a B in it. It was a little bit deficient, perhaps, maybe in math and science, but I felt very well prepared. We had great faculty. The superintendent had been there, when I graduated, had already been there twenty-some-odd years. The principal had been with him twenty-one years. It was a great team. They had a great teaching team. My junior year in high school, I had my third history class. My first two were under my football coach, who was not very good. (Laughter)

Sherman  

Uh-oh. Why was that?

Gill  

Well, it was, “Read chapter three and answer the questions at the end,” and a multiple-choice test kind of thing with no class discussion. I always loved history. My point I was making there was that in my junior year, for example, my instructor, my teacher for American History really brought it to life, and I really realized how much I did love it. My four years of high school, English I through English IV were outstanding. Then I had an English Comp course my senior year, as well. They were really, really tough. Mrs. Durbin had a rule. If you broke one of the six major rules, subject-verb relationship, dangling participle, incomplete sentence, or run-on sentence, one of those major rules, if you scored an A on that test and you made one of those mistakes, it was a B.

Sherman  

Oh, wow.

Gill  

You really learned those things. It was good grounding. I look back, and I’m really amazed at the quality of teaching from a real small school that we got.

Sherman  

Did you have, like, a favorite teacher when you were in high school?

Gill  

Well, Urel Lacy, who I was talking about [earlier]. I was president of... Student Council. I got to work with [Urel] in that capacity. He was sponsor, [and] I had the history class that was under him. He was a great guy. Later on after I left, about a year, I guess, after I left, he became one of the two counselors. Mary Durbin, that I talked about, in English was wonderful. Was good in Latin. Just a lot of good teachers, actually.

Sherman  

You had Latin back then?

Gill  

Oh, yes, Latin I and Latin II.
Sherman  
*Really? Do you remember any of it?*

gill  
Little bit. (Laughs) It really helps with your grammar when you learn verb conjugations. It really helps more with English, I guess, than anything else.

Sherman  
*Oh, wow. Now, OSU offered you a football scholarship. Is that correct?*

gill  
They did…and I accepted it.

Sherman  
*Obviously. Was there, like, a recruiting process back then?*

gill  
You went up for a visit. I made a visit to the University of Oklahoma and a visit to Oklahoma State, my two recruiting visits. I got letters from Cameron, Northeastern. I got an offer from New Mexico State. It wasn’t nationwide but some local interest. Until I got the offer from Oklahoma State—OU did not offer, but Oklahoma State did. I really thought I was going to go to either a community college, you know, a junior college for a couple years and play football and then maybe go finish my degree, not playing football, somewhere else.

Sherman  
*At that time, what was considered, like, a junior college?*

gill  
Well, Cameron was a two-year school. Cameron, about two years before I graduated, won a national championship, JUCO national championship. They were interested in me playing there, so I [considered] that. Northeastern A&M…and possibly four-year at East Central. I really wanted to go to a four-year major college, so my thoughts were I probably ought to have gone to a junior college. I wasn’t sure if I would have been able to afford it after that, so I was really concerned about the cost factor of it. The offer from Oklahoma State University really opened up just a new world for me. That’s really where I wanted to go, anyway.

Sherman  
*What kind of accolades did you receive as a football player at Lindsay High?*

gill  
Accolades. (Laughs) You know, all backyard I guess, small, all-conference, but a big thing for me that really surprised me, (I say that humbly and sincerely) was being All State football. At that time, it was the *Daily Oklahoman’s* All State. There was only one. It was Coaches *Daily Oklahoman* All State. I was really surprised that I made it. Probably if our team hadn’t won the state championship…. I was, I think, a pretty good high school athlete, but I don’t know if I was outstanding. Playing on a state championship team helped, probably, get more recognition.
Sherman: That’s good. … What positions did you play? What position did you receive All State at?

Gill: Of course, you play both ways in high school. You did then. You don’t now, in the big schools. Then, you played both ways. I played running back and was leading rusher and scorer. I also played defense, defensive back.

Sherman: Now, did you prefer playing offense, or did you prefer playing defense?

Gill: Either way. I just enjoyed hitting people. (Laughs)

Sherman: There you go. That’s the right answer. Charge up that line. Bam!

Gill: I enjoyed it. You have to understand, I mean, with our [players], it kind of put that in perspective. See, I’d haul hay in the summers. I’d cut broom corn. I worked in oil field, worked on the pipeline. A bunch of us, just blue-collar working families and grew up on farms or worked summers, so pretty tough group of guys. When we played, we’d usually just outlast them. We weren’t necessarily more talented, but we’d just finally wear them down.

Sherman: Yeah, no wonder why you won the state championship, a bunch of tough guys.

Gill: A couple of them I went to school with, Roy Goldston, who was our big lineman, he weighed 205 pounds.

Sherman: Two hundred and five nowadays is like a d-back.

Gill: Cecil McCoy and myself, we still get together. We’re having a class reunion in October this year, class of ’63, our forty-fifth-year reunion, so very close class. I was class president freshman through senior year. We were all good friends and maintained contact. Our football team played that way. We really played as a team. You watched the other guy’s backside, and you did what you were supposed to do and worked as a team. I tell people there’s three or four major things in my life that are significant to me in my formation. Obviously my parents, and I mean that sincerely. I had wonderful parents. …

Sherman: Wow.

Gill: I think team sports, (I say “team” sports because it really teaches you to work in a team, build a team relationship) those years when we’d really play together, it was sort of magic almost sometimes how well we played. I learned a lot of lessons about life, from the discipline that you have from two-a-day [practices] and sweat and the hard work, discipline, doing things right, being prepared, more than anything else, depending on and being
depended upon by other teammates. [They were] very important in the lessons that I learned.

**Sherman**  
*Now, I have a question. What was your high school mascot, just for the record?*

**Gill**  
We were the Leopards, Lindsay Leopards. You know what? Leopards never change their spots. (Laughs)

**Sherman**  
*That’s true. That’s true.*

**Gill**  
Once a Leopard, always a Leopard.

**Sherman**  
*That’s true. Now, what were the colors?*

**Gill**  
Orange and black. Can you believe that?

**Sherman**  
*Orange and black? So you didn’t change any colors when you came here.*

**Gill**  
Since the sixth grade I’ve been wearing orange and black, so it was great.

**Sherman**  
*You bleed orange and black. That’s the scary thing.*

**Gill**  
I do. I started to say, my first [two choices were] OU…scholarships, but my first choice was Oklahoma State. If they both offered, that’s where I would’ve gone, so I was really pleased and excited about going here.

**Sherman**  
*That’s good. Speaking of nicknames, how did you acquire the nickname the Blond Bomber?*

**Gill**  
I did not, (Gestures to his dark hair) I promise you. You can tell, Jacob, I didn’t. That was…Bob Fenimore. Went here in ’45, ’46. He was the Blond Bomber. He was a great, great running back. I don’t think I had many nicknames. I was just lucky to play.

**Sherman**  
*Oh, nice, nice. Sorry, wrong questions.*

**Gill**  
It’s okay.

**Sherman**  
*Can you describe, like, the move up from your parents’ place to Stillwater? What was that transition like?*

**Gill**  
You know, like probably any freshman, first of all, you have to understand when you make the move just as a student, (you did; we all did) it’s just a chance to really step up in terms of academic level, the competition level. My classes were normally, you know, there was ten, fifteen people in a
class. You come up here, and there’s three hundred in a general introductory class. There was just the competition of everybody around here is good academically. Then there’s the social, where you move and you really feel you’re small-town, and a lot of people are from big schools, and trying to fit in. Then there’s the natural: you miss all your friends and relationships you had.

All those things are going on, then you add on top of that, athletics. My first day out for football, Phil Cutchin, I was in his first recruiting class. We had [sixty-six], including scholarships and walk-ons, [sixty-six] people in my freshman class, so that’s four teams. When I stepped out on the field the first practice, they didn’t know anyone’s names, so you’d have it taped on your helmet, your name. I’ve got “Gill” on white tape on my helmet. (Laughter) After the first week, they did a depth chart. This is for—the freshmen weren’t eligible to play in those days in football. You just played sophomore through senior year. Just for the freshman team alone, I was fourth team in the depth chart.

Sherman  
*Oh, wow.*

Gill  
That was pretty devastating. (Laughs) You have all of those things going through your mind, and you’re trying to figure out, you know…. I couldn’t find my way around the [campus]. I kept getting lost in the Student Union. (Laughs) It was bigger than my whole high school. So all the issues and adjustments you go through, if you make it…. Phil Cutchin didn’t let the freshmen—I came up in August for…report. The first time I got to go home was Thanksgiving. It was pretty tough, too. When I went back home (Laughs)—I hope you don’t mind me telling this story. I went back home. We’re in a modest, probably eleven-hundred-square-foot, *small*, three-bedroom home. My room—I had two older sisters. They shared a room. Then my next sister had it for a couple years. Then I had a room to myself. I come back; they had converted it to a den. All my stuff on the wall and my little place in the world was gone. I remember thinking, “I don’t belong in Stillwater yet. I really don’t belong at home anymore. Where do I belong?” So all those kind of feelings that go through your mind.

Sherman  
*Where did you live when you first moved here?*

Gill  
I lived in Bennett. That’s where the athletes stayed, Bennett Hall. Our dining table was McElroy Dining Hall in Bennett. It was just right across the road from the Fieldhouse.

Sherman  
*That was the athletic dorm then?*

Gill  
Yes. Well, it was also students, but a couple of wings were just for athletes. My roommate was Halsey [“Happy”] Marvin Settle III.
Sherman  *Nice name.*

Gill  We called him Happy, Happy Settle, one of the best things that ever happened to me. He’s a medical doctor in Austin now. He grew up in Corsicana, Texas. Played high school ball there. Great, great guy, and we still communicate regularly. Hap and I were on the—we got a corner room, which I thought was really cool. That was neat until I found out the corner room is where everybody congregates. It’s hard to study when all the football players are in your room. (Laughs) It was great, great times.

Sherman  *Great times. Can you describe, like, the practices, like the August practices? Did the coaches believe in water breaks at that time?*

Gill  No, and it’s a wonder, probably, one of the guys didn’t die. I say this. Let me say something that may sound contradictory. In a lot of ways, I deeply respect Phil Cutchin, my coach. He was really, really tough. I use this word honestly: If you survived his practices and working with him, you’re tough. The teams we played were tough. Maybe not a lot of talent, but they were tough. He was Bear Bryant’s main [coach’s] assistant. He was with him at Texas A&M when they had the…. Remember the movie that came out about how they ran the camp?

Sherman  *Yeah, The Junction Boys.*

Gill  Yeah, *Junction Boys.* He was one of ones that coached…

Sherman  *Oh, really? I didn’t know that.*

Gill  …on Cutchin’s staff at the time. He went back to Alabama with him as his main administrative assistant. He had that toughness and so on, but sometimes it was a little ridiculous. Cutchin was tough. My class of [sixty-six], ten of us finished.

Sherman  *Oh, wow.*

Gill  Yeah, when he came here that first spring, I was still in my senior year [of high school], so fortunately, I missed that. There were about ninety guys on scholarship; thirty-three survived spring practice. When we came out that fall, [sixty-six] in my class, ten of us made it. If you survived, as I said, Phil Cutchin made you a tough person because a lot of people didn’t make it.

Sherman  *How long were the practices?*

Gill  The longest I remember is three and a half hours. We practiced for about two and a half hours in spring practice, and we had a lot of contact. We
always started every practice with tackling drills. I still got scars on my nose because he wouldn’t let the running backs or defensive backs have anything other than a single-bar helmet. If you ever hit a single-bar, it moves on you. Someone gives you a forearm, you get a shoulder pad in your tackling, and you bloody your nose. You’d get all busted up the first of the year, so the rest of the year, I had a scab on my nose. First practice, you’d break it, and it would bleed every day.

Sherman

Like a hockey player there.

Gill

That kind of mentality, but you learn how to form tackle when it hits your face and you tackle right. We’d have about fifteen minutes of form-tackling. That’s just one-on-one tackling, first drill after calisthenics every practice. That one practice—so we did all those kinds of drills, grass drills, and everything you can think of and all the contact for about two and a half hours. We were just exhausted. He called everybody up, and we were excited. This is on the practice field, the same practice field that we use right now. He said, “Now we’re going over to Lewis Field and work on the kicking game,” so we worked another hour at Lewis Field. You’d go, and you’d about drop. It’s all you can do to get in the shower and get your pads off.

Sherman

Do you remember any particular drills that stick out as dreadful or that you didn’t want to do?

Gill

Not necessarily. You didn’t ever go in with the attitude of something you didn’t want to do. Just like a lot of people talk about, you know, about fear in the game. If you’re ever in football, and probably a lot of sports, you really can’t have fear when you play. It’s not in your mind at all. I never went in—I mean, I was sort of generally dreading practice sometimes but always tried to get myself psyched up. Tackling practice was always tough. We had what we called the outside drill. The outside drill was where you’d have a half line. You’d have three linemen and a running back and a quarterback. Then you’d have a defensive end, a linebacker, and a defensive back, so you’d practice sweeps, how to contain a sweep and play off a blocker. Most of our drills were live drills like tackling drills, outside drills. Of course, you had your passing drills. The ones I hated the worst were just simply the ones that were just…. You know what my least favorite drill was?

Sherman

What was that?

Gill

Calisthenics. I hated calisthenics for some reason. (Laughs) All it did was just make you tired, and you never accomplished anything. Calisthenics, grass drills, you know, where you’d get up, hit the ground, get up, hit the ground. The worst thing, if you ever messed up, was the whistle stops. After
practice, you’d run. You’d run about ten yards; coach would blow a whistle; you’d drop down and get in the stance; he’d blow his whistle; you’d go about ten yards full speed, drop down. You’d go to the end of the field, come up the field, down the field, up the field. That was after about two, two and a half hours of practice. You didn’t ever want to get those drills. Fortunately, I only did that a couple of times, but that’s in the back of your mind all the time. Didn’t want to mess up.

Sherman

See, I’ve played high school football. That’s not probably to the level that you played at, but I can understand. I can relate to you. What was your typical week like when football season was going?

Gill

It was interesting. I had a—I was very blessed. Homer Knight was head of the history department. If I can, kind of fast forward and I’ll come back. With all humility, we were very surprised and very excited that I got a teaching assistantship, graduate teaching assistantship in history, with only having a 3.0 grade point average. What Dr. Knight took into consideration was the other things we did. Happy Settle, my roommate who was a pre-med student, Hap and I sat down and figured in fall football, including time on the practice field, scouting reports that you go over, watching films, game films which you watch for hours.

In everything, we put in over forty hours a week in football alone before we did anything else. Then what you have to understand is, you get off the football field, and you’ve been beating each other up for about two and a half hours. You’re just worn out, exhausted. You’re really not always real excited about studying, which I always did. Fortunately, I had a good roommate, and we kind of disciplined each other. Just mentally, it’s hard to get focus because you’re so tired. You know, if you got behind, you couldn’t pull the all-nighters or early mornings. You just had to be ready for the football game on Saturdays. The interesting thing is, I made my best grades in the fall every year.

Sherman

Why is that?

Gill

Just concentration and time management. You really utilize your time a lot more. You didn’t goof off. You didn’t get bull sessions. You’re either at practice or studying or going to class. That’s what I tried to do.

Sherman

Did Coach keep track of his players’ grades?

Gill

And attendance.

Sherman

And attendance?
Gill: Yeah, I learned about the second week. I cut a class, and then I was off the meals for two days.

Sherman: *How did he find that out?*

Gill: He checked with professors. They had an academic counselor. That was his job. Jack was good at it. These days, you couldn’t do that. It would be cruel. … You couldn’t go into McElroy Dining Hall. You could not eat. Whatever he’d decide, either a day or two days, or if you did it a second time, it was a week. You learned to go to class. Even if you slept through it, you went to class.

Sherman: *At least you were present, right?*

Gill: Yeah, you were there.

Sherman: *So when he cut off the food from you, how did you…. Did you have to go out to a grocery store, or did someone order food for you?*

Gill: Yeah, a little both. You’d scrounge around. Actually, it only happened to me a couple of times. You learn pretty quickly.

Sherman: *Now, was there a spring football here at the time?*

Gill: That was the worst.

Sherman: *Why was that worst?*

Gill: Because you didn’t taper off. In the fall, you’d put on pads Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Usually you didn’t have pads Thursday. Normally, you’d wear shorts, maybe shorts, shoulder pads, and helmets. Friday was just warm-up. Then you’d play the ballgame on Saturday. Sunday, you’d come out in shorts and just simply kind of break a sweat, loosen up. As you got closer to the ballgame, you wanted to keep your legs fresh and so on. By the way, most teams in the Big Eight we found out later, when I played in the old Big Eight, would only put on pads Monday and Tuesday. We always put them on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. We’d be full speed on Wednesday, as well. Anyway, my point is, in the spring you do that every day. You’re hitting it hard. They didn’t have limitations back then on so many practices. In the spring, you could go every day you wanted. Normally Saturday would be more of a scrimmage type situation. You had pads on six days a week.

Sherman: *Was there a spring game back then or no?*
Gill: Yeah, we just had the inner-squad game. It wasn’t as big of a deal as it is now. The team that won got steaks, and the team that lost ate beans. I mean, literally. He’d take the team out, so if you were on the losing team…. Phil was into winning. He was a real competitive guy.

Sherman: So how many times did you eat steaks then?

Gill: You know, I really don’t remember. I think maybe twice and beans once, something like that.

Sherman: Now, speaking of food. Was there, like, a pregame meal, a pregame ritual deal?

Gill: Sure.

Sherman: The night before or the day of?

Gill: Well, even on home games, we went up to Perry and stayed at the hotel up there, or motel. (there’s no hotels in Perry) the motel there, even on home games. Phil wanted us to get away from distraction, all the people. We had a whole ritual. One of our rituals was we’d go to a movie at the movie theater. Let’s see. I saw the first half of Von Ryan’s Express three times and never saw the end of it. We’d go in to watch, and whatever time it was when you’d need to leave, didn’t make any difference where you are in the movie, we left. (Laughter) We’d always do that. Then you had your breakfast deal. You just had a whole set of rituals. You’d get taped. Then you’d get on the bus and go. You’d do this whole set of an incredible amount of ritual things you go through.

Sherman: So you said there was distractions. What was a kind of distraction? What would be a distraction here at Stillwater? Why did you guys have to go up to….?

Gill: Just friends, neighbors calling wanting tickets. Some people wanted to talk about the ballgame to see…. Phil wanted the team together, thinking about nothing but the football game.

Sherman: Now, was that just normal pressure, or was it intensified because we’re here in Stillwater?

Gill: Well, that was not unusual. Most teams did that in those days. I mean, they didn’t stay in their dorms. Then used to, there’s a situation where the dorms were there with the public, too. It wasn’t like just an athletic dorm by itself. That probably was not a bad thing. It was probably a good thing.
Sherman: So how did you manage coursework and football? Let’s go back to that for a little bit.

Gill: Well, you just did what you’ve got to. I think sometimes the moniker of dumb athletes is not fair. Most athletes, if you look at scouting reports that they have to go through and the films, all the things that you learn, there’s a lot of credible richness to what you learn and what you have to be able to do. I think part of it is just because, as I explained earlier, just the physical, all the hours you put in, the time. Then frankly, adding on that some athletes, because they were good athletes, kind of got an easy pass on some of their courses in high school. I have a lot of compassion for student athletes. It’s really, really tough to do both. Most of the guys I played with were pretty intelligent. Several of the guys I played with got doctorates, medical degrees, dentist. I’ve got a PhD. I mean, some of our guys really did well. Somehow, I think that’s a misnomer, really, about the dumb jock.

Sherman: Now, do you have any advice for, like, a current student athlete that you would give them?

Gill: First of all, get up there and realize how lucky he is. You get to put on the orange and black and, in football, play in front of fifty, sixty thousand people. It’s just a phenomenal feeling. I had been on an airplane one time in my life before I got to OSU and got to fly several places, up to Lincoln, Nebraska, and down to Houston, Texas. It’s just a great opportunity. I don’t think I’d really give any advice, just say congratulations, but give it the best shot you’ve got every day. It’s a wonderful opportunity.

Sherman: Okay. Was there any pregame rituals that you guys had, like, leading up to kickoff? Can you describe that experience for me?

Gill: Yeah. Jacob, if we had about an hour really just to…. It’s just everyone has their own deal. It’s a whole…I guess probably all sports. Football is a lot more than just hitting people. It’s the mental aspect of the game. For example, from your scouting reports and from all the film, (you watch hours of that film) you have what you call reads. You look at formations and sets. You look at how people are in their stances. From the first snap of the ball, you see what the motion is. What’s the quarterback doing? Where’s the blocker? How are the lines blocked. If the line blocking comes down across the line, it’s a run. If you’re sitting back, pass protection. You’re reading all these things. You’re reading about eight or ten things in about two seconds’ time. The thing is not to make any missteps. I wasn’t a real fast defensive back. I was small, anyway. If you take one wrong step, you’ve taken two wrong steps because you’ve got to correct that step that you took wrong, so you’ve really got to get all your reads.
It was a lot of things that are happening incredibly fast. It’s like a computer. It’s hitting. You’re not really thinking about it. You’re thinking, “Gee, the quarterback dropped back, the lineman blocked here. The back’s coming this way. The pattern looks like it’s coming across here. It’s third and long. In those situations, they like to do this kind of pass. It looks like it’s that pass.” Your mind just, (Claps) it’s happening. It’s all happening literally within a second, two or three seconds, so you’ve got to react. That’s what all your preparation’s about. You’re talking about rituals. Your ritual starts Sunday for the ballgame on Saturday. … The worst time of my life was Sundays. You get up. You’re beat up. You’re tired.

I’d have bruises all over my body. Sometimes I wouldn’t be able to lift up my shoulder any higher than that (Gestures) because you’re tackling a 235-pound running back and you’ve got a 250-pound pulling guard coming at you. The adrenaline high of the game is gone. You’re beat up. You’re worn out. Sunday is really just a dog day. Monday, you get out and start all over again. Actually, Sunday nights sometimes you get your first scouting report, so you start thinking about the game. Then you’re hitting. You get more excited by Wednesday and Thursday. It builds, and it builds. Then by Saturday, you’re really higher than a kite. You’re pumped and ready to go, so just that cycle that you kind of live with.

**Sherman**  
*Now, did you have any, like, superstitions that you had to do before each game?*

**Gill**  
Yeah, my superstition was, late in the fourth quarter you didn’t want to be behind. It was a bad sign. (Laughs) No, I didn’t have any. I mean, certain quirks and things you do, but I didn’t have any magic socks that I wore. I did wash my t-shirts. I didn’t stay in the same t-shirt. Some players did.

**Sherman**  
*I know. Do you remember any of them?*

**Gill**  
No, those were more like baseball players and people like that, not real athletes. No, I’m just kidding. (Laughs)

**Sherman**  
*Oh, man. Don’t say that around here.*

**Gill**  
No, I love baseball. I played a year of Legion baseball myself.

**Sherman**  
*Oh, you did? What year was that?*

**Gill**  
Golly, it’s ancient history. I played peewee baseball in Norman. When we moved to Lindsay, they didn’t have a baseball program, so I went four years and didn’t play any baseball. Then a little small town, Maysville, next to Lindsay, had a Legion program for the first time. Coach asked me to come and play. I said, “Coach, I haven’t played in four years.” He said, “Well,
I’ve seen you play basketball and football, and I’d like for you to come over.” Then I hit over .300 and had a great season. Baseball was my favorite sport growing up, so I really missed it at Lindsay. We never had baseball. Reason is, the spring was for track, and track was really a conditioning program for football. Football was the sport in Lindsay. One of my sad moments is missing baseball.

Sherman What do you think is your biggest highlight of your football career?

Gill The one that comes to mind, obviously is beating OU in ’65, ’65 or ’66, get it right. We hadn’t beaten them in, like, twenty years. We beat them down in Norman in their home place. That was great. You know, the whole school just went crazy. President [Robert] Kamm called off class the following Monday. We had a bonfire down Washington Street.

Sherman Oh, nice.

Gill It was amazing. It was super. It was one huge party all over Stillwater. You know, that was a great experience. I guess starting in the first football game against Arkansas. We played Little Rock my sophomore year. I was fortunate to get to start three years, all three years I was eligible. When you’re coming out of the locker room just to kind of get on the field, Arkansas had just come out ahead of us. Fifty thousand people would all stand up and yell, “Sooie, pig!” Just scares the heck out of you. (Laughter) That first college game was just a great experience for me. The Nebraska game, we played Nebraska really, really close in Lincoln and at home, two years back-to-back. We were leading them with less than a minute to play, and they scored here in Stillwater at Homecoming one year. They were ranked number three in the nation, so I remember them. Let’s see. They were leading us twenty to thirteen, something like that. Sorry, I’m trying to think back there. Anyway, a couple really great games, I remember those games. Playing in the Astrodome the second year that it was open, we played Houston. That was a big highlight to get to play in the Astrodome.

Sherman Was that, like, a hotbox back then?

Gill Yeah, and the turf was really bad. I wound up with huge strawberries on both of my elbows, my knees, and ringing in my head after the game. They didn’t really have the padding under it that they have now. The turf was real rough, coarse. It was when they first created that artificial turf. It was really bad to play on.

Sherman Some people say it was like concrete.

Gill It was like getting a tennis court and putting out carpet on it and playing. It was not really fun, but it was exciting. It was kind of like the first rodeo or
county fair you ever go to. It’s all, (Gestures awe) all the lights. (Laughter). Which is probably why we got beat thirty-three to ten, I think, something like that.

**Sherman**  
Now, was Nebraska or was it Oklahoma the team to beat back then in the Big Eight?

**Gill**  
Nebraska was a good team. They were the team winning every year when I was there. We played Arkansas three times, and one of those years, Arkansas was national champion. The year they were national champion, they beat us twenty-eight to fourteen. The other two years, they beat us fourteen to ten.

**Sherman**  
So it was close games.

**Gill**  
They were winning the Southwest Conference and National Championship. Nebraska was winning—OU was a big rivalry, obviously, but Nebraska…. Missouri was really strong in those days. Colorado had a pretty good program, but particularly probably Missouri and Nebraska. They were basically running teams.

**Sherman**  
Missouri was under Dan Devine then, right?

**Gill**  
Yes.

**Sherman**  
Now, let’s get off the football. I know it’s great to talk about the glory days. What do you think was your biggest highlight academically wise, academically speaking?

**Gill**  
Are you talking about undergraduate?

**Sherman**  
Undergraduate, yeah.

**Gill**  
Well, getting a graduate teaching assistantship was a real highlight, going in towards graduate school. It was very special for me. It kind of validated what I wanted to do. My original desire was to be a college professor. I wanted to teach history, as well. To get the teaching certificate, that was really great. You know, undergraduate, I just remember a lot of really good people, Dan Wesley, who was director of student services of the College of Arts and Sciences. Bob Kamm was my dean at the time before becoming president. I guess, really, probably because of Dan Wesley and his Arts and Sciences Orientation class that he taught, (it was two hours a week; you got one hour of credit) I got to know Dan. We were both United Methodist in our background. I got to know Dan. He’s a really neat guy. When they formed—I guess it would have been my sophomore year, they created a committee. I don’t know how, but I helped chair the committee. The
students in Arts and Sciences wanted to develop the use of students as discussion leaders in Arts and Sciences, so one hour, they’d have a large meeting of three hundred people.

Then it would break down into smaller groups of about thirty and have discussion classes. I was an Arts and Sciences Orientation discussion leader, I think was the title, for two years, my junior and senior year. It was pretty special. I really enjoyed being in front of a class and doing that, so that helped me to think about teaching as a profession. That, I think, was key, and I guess getting married. I married my high school sweetheart after my sophomore year, the summer before my junior year. That was a big, huge change for me. I’m trying to think in school…. There’s a whole lot of them that I think of, but I’m not sure any one…. I guess one that I do take pride in is graduating in four years, playing football and still getting out in four years and having a 3.0, which is…. Full disclosure would compel me to mention I really had, like, a 2.97 grade point average, but I always say three. (Laughter) Doesn’t 3.0 sound better? (Laughs)

**Sherman** 
*Got to round up.*

**Gill**
Anyway, so that’s why I think I was very fortunate to get the teaching assistantship. That was key.

**Sherman**
*When you led these discussions, like what kind of topics did you discuss? Was it history-related?*

**Gill**
We’d talk about what the transition into college was like. I shared with you some of mine. We talked about practical things, too. We’d feel more comfortable talking to an upper-class student than they would Dan Wesley or someone like that about, “What do you do on Friday nights? What are the best places to hang out?” Things like that, “Do you really go to class?” We’d talk about things about how to study your professor, how do we learn what the professor wanted. We’d talk about some really practical kinds of applications and things. I think the students, that was much more enjoyable and much more meaningful for them than being in a class of three hundred people and hearing some general stuff about college and the university, not in any way depreciating that. There was a need for it. I think they really enjoyed the practical application end of it.

**Sherman**
*Now, did you join any other student organizations here at OSU?*

**Gill**
Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, SAE. My roommate and I were both Sig Alphas. That was fun. It was a little bit different experience because I’d never lived in a residence hall because Phil Cutchin required all the guys to live, obviously, there with the athletes in Bennett Hall. Then when I got married, of course, then I lived in married student housing for a couple of years. I still
really enjoyed that experience and getting to know a lot of people through the fraternity. It helped me in terms of relationships and meeting a lot of people.

Sherman

*Do you still keep in contact with your*....

Gill

I do, but I really haven’t been real active because my fraternity’s Oklahoma State University, generally, having been alumni director for twenty-two years. I really spent a lot of time with a whole lot of groups. It probably wasn’t as close a relationship with some people, but it’s still a very good experience. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed my first Homecoming in graduate school, first one I ever saw. (Laughs) First parade I ever saw was in graduate school, so that was kind of a highlight for me to finally get to do Homecoming after football.

Sherman

*Yeah, did Coach keep you away from*....

Gill

Remember, we were always at Perry on Friday nights…

Sherman

*Oh, that’s right.*

Gill

…so never saw it.

Sherman

*As football players, because Homecoming was so central as part of this university, did you guys feel like that you were being left out at all?*

Gill

No, you felt like you really wanted to win. It was added incentive to win for Homecoming. You really wanted it for the alumni who come back. You really wanted to do well for the school and students and alumni.

Sherman

*Now, did your wife go here, as well?*

Gill

She did.

Sherman

*What was her degree in?*

Gill

In French. She taught. She just retired this past summer after thirty years of teaching here in Stillwater school system.

Sherman

*Oh, wow.*

Gill

*Madame* Gill. I told her, some of them probably just Damn Gill, some of the students. (Laughter) Susan’s tough. She taught junior high level and middle school. Man, she deserves a star in her crown for working with middle school and junior high students. (Laughs)
Sherman  
*Now, did you ever think about going into teaching, like education-wise, high school or middle school?*

Gill  
Well, see I thought about coaching. You always do if you’ve been in athletics. First of all—well, I’ll just say this. They didn’t pay teachers enough. That wasn’t a profession that…. I’m sorry to say that, but I thought that for something in my life, to make a contribution and not be teaching and coaching in high school, so I thought a little bit maybe about coaching at the college level. Phil Cutchin asked me to be kind of a student assistant coach when I went into grad school…after my fall, my senior year, and that spring. Then I got the offer for the teaching assistantship in history. That might have changed my life there, too, a little bit. You never know. There’s a lot of turns in life. You never know which direction you’re going. I thought about it, but I thought I wanted to teach. Then thinking about that, I got the assistantship, and then my focus shifted to college teaching.

Sherman  
*Now, what kind of relations did you have with Coach after you graduated?*

Gill  
Very good, very good. You know, the first time that you have a drink with your old football coach, it’s a really funny feeling. (Laughs) We had some of our, we called ourselves the Cutchin Cowboys. Walt Garrison was a year ahead of me and Jim Click and really some successful people. We continue to meet. I’m kind of the coordinator of that. I keep all of the addresses and email addresses still to this day. The first time we got back together, it must have been ten years after. When you sit down, really found out Coach Cutchin’s a really nice guy. (Laughs) Well, he really had almost two personalities. When he took off his football coach personality and took his whistle off, he truly was a very engaging person, very warm person, a side of him that I’d never seen before that I wish I’d seen more of. (Laughs) I appreciate all the things that he did for me and allowing me to start and play and things I learned. That was very interesting.

Sherman  
*How did he help you, like, personally-wise?*

Gill  
Well, we just maintained contact. I traveled extensively around the state when I was High School and College Relations assistant director. I traveled to all the high schools and would give presentations. After he left here, (I guess it was three years after I graduated) he went and worked for Merrill Lynch down in Dallas. Made a whole lot more money than he ever made coaching. It was probably the best thing that ever happened to him. He retired at the Coves on Grand Lake, so I can go by and see him and Betsy, his wife, occasionally. Still communicate with Betsy. She’s a sweetheart. She moved to Tulsa recently. I’d bump into him. We’d communicate occasionally, and then at our reunions I’d see him. We did our lives. We didn’t directly—he didn’t get a job for me, but I didn’t ever ask him to.
Sherman: Did he help any other people with jobs afterwards that you're aware of?

Gill: He did, and he was really good to his assistant coaches and his graduate assistant coaches, helped them get positions at other schools.

Sherman: That's good. Now, what was your major here?

Gill: Well, I'll confess, for one semester, it was poli sci, political science. Then I decided I liked history a whole lot more. As a discipline, it appealed to me much more. I thought there was a lot more speculation. Political science is a lot more political than I wanted.

Sherman: Well, they don't call it political science for nothing.

Gill: Exactly. I realized history is what I wanted to do, so I transferred, I think, second semester of my freshman year back to history.

Sherman: Why history?

Gill: People. As I look at one of the common denominators of my life, it’s been people, people that have influenced my life and relationships. In the Alumni Association, our mantra was “connections for life.” It’s true. I mean, there’s connections you make. I don’t mean connections and what makes you successful. I mean connections in terms of relationships and people. I think history is really about people. It’s not about wars. It’s not about dates. It’s not about events. It’s about people and how people are acting together collectively, individually, changing and affecting things. History always appealed to me in that sense of history as life, its people, its relationships. I just like that.

Sherman: Now, what areas of history did you like most? Did you like Western, American....

Gill: Oh, what some people refer to as “cow chip history,” you know, American West. I worked under Odie Faulk, did my doctorate under Odie Faulk in American West, and then LeRoy Fischer in Civil War. I wrote an article on Civil War and Indian Territory. In fact, my dissertation was on Confederate forces, (it sounds strange) Confederate Indians outside of the Indian Territory. It was the refugees who went into Kansas [and Texas] in the Civil War. American West, Civil War American West were my primary interest areas. Of course, when I taught, it was a Survey of American History course. It was the early and the later, both.

Sherman: Now, did you have any favorite courses? What were they?
I really enjoyed my Russian History class under [Alfred Levin]. He was a second-generation Russian himself. His parents emigrated from Russia. He did just a phenomenal job, just fascinating. We really stopped around the Revolution. This was Tsarist Russia. I still remember his three tenets of history that he had.

What were they?

Expansion to defendable borders, autocracy, and monarchy. He really preached those. I really learned an awful lot about the background of why Russians feel the way they do. It was a good course. Other courses, gosh, let’s see. LeRoy Fischer, I got a B in one of LeRoy’s classes, in Civil War. Really, I wanted to do well in that class. I was still a student athlete at that time when I had the course, but I really put the time in. He had a funny system. Let’s see, 90 to 100 was an A. On the final, if you scored the highest score, it was 100. I scored the highest score of anybody in the class. My average came out 89.5, and he gave me a B. (Laughter)

I still remember to this day. I wasn’t in an argument with him, but he explained to me that, you know, 89.5 is not 90. (Laughs) That was one of my…but I enjoyed the class a whole lot. That was mighty frustrating. Odie Faulk’s writing course, I did precis writing, where you learn to go from something like a three-page paper. You write it, and he says, “Okay, it’s pretty good. Now I want you to do it again and do it in one page.” It was on the Battle of San Jacinto. I go down and work and work, just everything to get it down to one page. Finally, I got most of the basics in there. He comes back and says, “Now write it in one paragraph.” (Laughter)

Oh, man.

Yeah, yeah. What he was trying to say is, “Cut out all the wordiness. What’s really the story?” I really gained an awful lot from Odie’s class. I really enjoyed that class. I had a lot of good professors at OSU. I truly did. Some not so good, but most of them were really good classes.

Now, did you have any particular favorites, ones that, like, “Oh, man, I have to take this class just because so and so’s teaching it”?

Well, if I’d had one more class, I’d have had a minor in English. I enjoyed English. I always enjoyed reading. I was a big reader, so I sort of picked that as my…. You have upper-division-related classes that you have so many hours. I took most of mine in English. [David] Berkeley, Dr. Berkeley, I took his course, Shakespeare and some of his courses. It really was good and amazing because I was an athlete. He just couldn’t imagine a football player taking one of his poetry classes or literature classes. (Laughs) I enjoyed
those English classes a lot. I’m trying to think. I’m probably missing some here and there, but those are the ones that come to mind.

Sherman: *Now, what did you do to relax when you were a student here?*

Gill: In football season, you didn’t. (Laughs) I mean, honestly, you didn’t. What in the spring did we do? Oh, gosh, we’d hang out. Enjoyed a lot of the establishments.

Sherman: *Establishments?*

Gill: Well, I don’t want to say beer joints. That wouldn’t be right, would it? (Laughs) Some of the watering holes, locally. We’d do some of those things. I don’t recall a whole lot. My life wasn’t very exciting because of football, and then I was married the last two years. I don’t mean I didn’t have fun, but I was not a party animal, certainly. I had good times. We’d hang out with some of the couples. Some of the people would come up from Lindsay, my high school. Believe it or not, out of a class of sixty-nine people, seven of us came to Oklahoma State, which is amazing. We’d hang out with some of those friends, too. I think three of those got married, and Susan and I were married, so our junior and senior year, we’d hang out. We’d get something like Coke and whiskey or Coke and rum or something. It was the big deal on Friday nights when we’d get together as couples. I can’t think of anything really we did big time, just little kinds of stuff.

Sherman: *Did you go home often?*

Gill: Not very much. My parents left [Lindsay] after my sophomore year. Moved back to Norman, so really it wasn’t much to go back to. My sister was married and lived there about one more year or two, and then she moved [to Ardmore]. We kind of lost our Lindsay connections.

Sherman: *Now, have you gone back to Lindsay? Do you still consider Lindsay your hometown?*

Gill: I still have friends there. I go back occasionally. It’ll always be my hometown and be a special place in my memory. That’s where I grew up. That’s where I met Susan. That’s where, you know, we played football. That’s where we did all the crazy things we did. You know, this sounds bad. In some way, I probably just flat enjoyed school and sports probably more in high school than I did in college because in college, a lot more pressure, a lot more performance issues. You can still be a kid and have a good time in high school. Really enjoyed it. It was probably the highlight of my life, was there in high school. I don’t mean like my life was all downhill after that (Laughs), but just in the sense of being the small-town hero, knowing everybody and all the stuff that goes with that, just a good feeling. Very
active in our Methodist youth group. We did a lot of great things, had a great youth director. Those kinds of things, I probably enjoyed that more than anything.

Sherman  
Now, what propelled you to go pursue your master’s and PhD? Was there an epiphany, like, “Oh, I should go do that graduate-level history work”?  

Gill  
It was pretty simple. If you decided you want to teach at the university level, you knew you had to get a doctorate, so it pretty much sets that up for you. I’m just competitive, too. I just felt like I wanted to stretch myself more. As an undergraduate, I didn’t put everything I had into it. I had a 3.66 grade point average in master’s and had a 4.0 on my doctoral program. It was just more of a challenge, but I was able to really focus all that into academics then. I really wanted to challenge myself more in the academic side of it, so I was really excited about going into graduate school. Of course, the interesting thing, another story for another time, when I was a graduate teaching assistant, I was making $180 a month and was married. Then a year later had our first child. We were pretty much starving. Actually, I sold Bible books door to door on commission in the summers to help make money to go to graduate school. We had about six hundred or so in our division. I was in the top twenty, two summers in a row. My best summer, I made, like, $8,000, so that helped quite a bit to keep from starving. I like challenges. I like competition. I always have.

Sherman  
Did you live in graduate student housing?  

Gill  
Married student housing. Then after we lived there a couple of years, after I graduated—trying to think for what reason. Oh, I remember. It was because I was working summers, like I said, with Southwestern Company, selling Bible books. I couldn’t afford to continue paying the rent. If you ever got out, then the waiting list, you couldn’t get back in. I had my athletic influence. My coach called over and helped me get in my junior year, frankly. We started renting places, and we lived in some stuff that I… I have two sons and two daughters. I wouldn’t want my daughters living in some of the places that Susan and I stayed in. (laughs) Again, money’s an issue, but we never knew we were poor. Everyone around you is poor, all the other graduate assistants and people you’re going to school with. I really enjoyed graduate school, too, my master’s program. PhD, I was married, working full-time, and finishing my PhD. That was a different matter. It was just a grind. I mean, I would sometimes work all night on a paper, get up from the table, shower, and then go give presentations at high schools the next day.

Those were tough, tough days. You just had to do what you had to do to get it finished. I really enjoyed my master’s. I was really into that. … I kind of got burned out, so we went and made some money for a couple of years
down in Texas working with the director of recruiting and training for a
chain of men’s retail stores. LeRoy Fischer, [my thesis advisor], finally
about two years later called me. He said, “Jerry, you’ve got one year left.
You’ve done everything but the last chapter of your thesis. Would you like
to finish it up?” I finished that on the side. Then really got to thinking about
it and really missed it, so then we come back to the university. I got a job
full-time with High School and College Relations. Anyway, long story
short, I enjoyed the PhD program. It’s just more of a grind once you’re
doing it. I really enjoyed being the teacher and smoking the pipe and stuff
that went with being a…. (Laughs) It was just a lot of fun.

Sherman

Now, what was your master’s thesis on?

Gill

Let’s see. Let me get the right title. Believe it or not, I’ve got about a two-
doctoral] thesis. LeRoy was thorough. He wanted it all. I’m trying to think
of the title of it. What’s really important about a thesis if you can’t even
remember the name of it? (Laughs) Wasn’t it E. E. Dale, [professor at OU]
that said [history was like] digging up bones in one place and burying them
in another? It helped LeRoy. He wrote his book on the Civil War in the
Indian Territory, so I think I helped him, probably, with some of his
background. LeRoy taught me how to do multiple citations and research. He
was a great, great guy and personal friend to this day, good, good guy.
…During the Civil War the [Five Tribes], you know, they had the split.
Some of them went with the North, some on the South. The Creeks and the
Choctaws and some Chickasaws that went with the South were pushed out
[of their tribal lands]. It was the refugees and all that, the movement,
Opothleyahola and the Creeks. They went up into Kansas. It was really
pretty interesting. You know, it’s one of those real narrow but with depth.
I’m probably the world’s expert on that right now to this day, still. (Laughs)
It’s a [very] narrow [slice] of history.

Sherman

Everyone has their own little niche in this race. What was your dissertation
on? What is the same topic or completely different?

Gill

No, it was [completely different]. I really appreciate Odie Faulk. … Odie
was really interesting. He was a sergeant in the Marines before he got into
graduate school to become a professor. Odie was a no-nonsense kind of guy,
but Odie and I talked about something that I could do that maybe would
have publication possibility. We really moved out of my American West
field and wrote a history of OSU’s involvement in international education
projects. I had about a month or more of annual leave built up, and then
Dick Poole helped me get a scholarship. At the Foundation, he was vice
president at that time. I worked under that area. Dick was one of my
mentors. Dick got money for a scholarship for about six months to support
me, so over a period of about seven months, I wrote all my dissertation. Part
of his deal was you had to have it written, completed, and back to High School and College Relations by September. I took [a leave of absence], I think, in March or something, so it must have been about six months. I wrote the history, and Odie talked to Dr. Poole…about the possibility of us getting something that we could publish and then having some money to do that. We published it through the Oklahoma State University Press.

Sherman: What was the title of that?

Gill: The Great Adventure. Then we added a chapter to the end of it, updated it. It’s now in the Centennial Histories, that we did, Series. It’s the international history volume [History of International Programs at Oklahoma State University]. We updated it, so it’s actually been published twice. Pretty neat to get two publications out of your dissertation, right?

Sherman: Nice.

Gill: It was nice. …

Sherman: All right, we’re back here with Jerry Gill. We’re still in the Angie Debo Room. We’re discussing his graduate student work. Where did we leave off?

Gill: We were talking about my dissertation.

Sherman: Oh, dissertation and it being published.

Gill: It was actually published twice. We published it as The Great Adventure by Oklahoma State University Press. … It was kind of a small operation, but they had [set aside] some money to do that. Then we updated it. That was in ’76, I guess, when I finished my doctorate, so it would have been around ’77 or something when we published it. Then in the ’90s, early ’90s, we turned around and added a chapter and updated it. It’s in the Centennial Histories Series of twenty-three, twenty-four volumes. The title of it is International Education.

Sherman: Now, so it dealt with international programs that…. 

Gill: Henry G. Bennett, he was director of the Point Four Program, which is the predecessor for, kind of, USAID. He stepped down as president, took a leave of absence, and chaired that under President Harry Truman. That really got Oklahoma State started in the Ethiopian program and a lot of programs in Thailand. I was just back in Thailand in late June for two weeks. We have several hundred Thai alumni, OSU alumni in Thailand. We have an alumni association, OSU Alumni Association of Thailand.

Sherman: Oh, really?
Anyway, there, and we have a couple home economics colleges in Karachi and Lahore Pakistan. Then let’s see. South America is extensive, and Brazil. Real extensive, OSU has been involved and still continues to be involved in international programs. Very interesting facet of OSU history. Henry G. Bennett really saw international education as just natural outreach of the land-grant philosophy of educating people.

Now, Bennett died in Tehran.

Plane crash, December ’51.

Was he working on the program at that time?

Yes, he was visiting. It was an international trip. He and his wife and…one of his main administrative aids, they were all killed.

Now, how did you get onto this topic? Did you say, “Oh, this should be written about”?

I just sat down with Odie Faulk and talked about some aspects of our history and what would be of interest, general interest to the public and be publishable. That was the topics that we come up with. I’d picked up a little bit on that in some of my studies I’d done in graduate school.

Now, did your master’s thesis ever get published?

No, it did not.

Would you want it to get published? It sounds like a fascinating topic.

Would I want it to? Sure. Probably everybody would, I guess, anything they write that is publishable. It really doesn’t have enough general appeal, not to take away from it historically, just the general appeal. Like I said, it was very, very thorough. I’m trying to remember. I had 200-some-odd pages. Most theses are 150 or smaller, and the dissertation is larger, but it was around 230, 240, 250 pages in length. It was pretty definitive but would not have a large general interest to enough people to be worth publishing.

Now, as students of history, what do you think we can learn from both topics, your master’s thesis and your dissertation topic?

Well, let’s get back to reality. I mean, most theses and even dissertations aren’t really done to be published. What they are, it’s a two-fold. Usually, the person has what they learn about teaching. You really learn about historiography. You learn about footnoting and documentation. I mean,
you’re learning that through graduate school, your coursework, also. It really becomes a culmination that you’re learning how to research, write, document, go to primary source records, go to libraries, to archives. It’s a learning process that that person is going to go through to become a professional historian. When you’re writing a thesis, you’re not really writing it for publication purposes. The other part in our writing is to perhaps then take some narrow niche of history and put it together, settling facts and information about it. Normally, what happens is that other professors, other people in that narrow field will pick up on some of that. Normally, the interesting thing is theses are rarely ever quoted, but they use them a lot. They’ll go back to your primary sources and quote your primary sources. That’s fine. It’s what we all do.

Sherman

Yes.

Gill

No, I mean, you’re not disappointed. You don’t expect it to be published, but the purpose, again, is two-fold. I got what I wanted. Working with LeRoy Fischer was wonderful. LeRoy’s, you know…boy, he’s specific, and I really learned about it. When we sat down the first time he agreed to co-author an article with me on a similar paper I wrote in his class, he really did it not to get a publication. LeRoy wanted to do it to train me. I remember sitting there. He said—I had already gotten my course, and the course was over. A month later, we started working together to get it up to publication standards. He said, “Well, bring in your documents. I want to see them for your article.” I go through. I’ve got my photocopied documents, Xerox-copied documents, etcetera, every bit of it. I had it, every footnote and citation. He said, “No, Mr. Gill, you don’t understand. I want to see the books. I want to see the journals.” I had to go back and get every book, every journal and physically look at it, very thorough. I learned about multiple citations and how to use them, when not to use them. It was a great experience.

Sherman

Now, when you were doing your PhD, was this when the program was in its initial birth?

Gill

Yeah, it was one of the earlier ones that I had. Paul Lambert had worked with Oklahoma Heritage Association for several years. Bob Blackburn was the executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society. We were all three in grad school together. I think the first PhD candidate was—I think Joe Stout got the first PhD, either first or second, here at Oklahoma State. It was in the early years. When I was doing my master’s, when I first started my master’s program, we did not have a PhD program. This was in the early ’70s, I guess, when [OSU] came up with the PhD program [in history].

Sherman

Speaking of that time period...did the Vietnam War have an effect on campus? What was the campus climate at that time?
Gill Sure. It’s interesting. You know, I missed most of the activist [activities]. That was more in the late ’60s here. It wasn’t too much. Everything happens about five years later in Oklahoma than it does everywhere else in the country. Really in the early ’60s, it was building nationally, but it didn’t really hit here until the late ’60s. I was in graduate school, married. Even as an undergraduate in football, I didn’t have time to engage in a lot of those kinds of things. It reached the campus, and there was protests and deals on the Library mall and so on. I really was not very much engaged in anything, so I observed at kind of a distance.

Sherman *Now, what kind of campus was this? Was it still more conservative, or was it liberal at that time period, or no?*

Gill It’s never been liberal. (Laughs) You said the right words: “still conservative.” I’m not saying politically OSU is left or right. I don’t mean that. I’m just talking about thought process. It’s probably more conservative. I don’t mean, you know, archconservative or anything, but I think in Oklahoma it just reflects, probably, the people of Oklahoma more. That’s not a bad thing, necessarily. I mean, the values are more traditional. There’s more in terms of the discipline, work ethic, way you conduct your life. I mean, when you look at the world, it’s just a little different, I think, than living on the East or West Coast, still to this day, probably even more so maybe in the ’60s. We really didn’t—the Vietnam era and that wave of the ’60s and early ’70s did impact us but not to the extent that it probably did a lot of universities.

Sherman *Now, in that sense, do you think the campus was pro-war?*

Gill No, I don’t think any of the students were pro-war, really. Well, I mean, you say pro-war. There’s a difference between pro-war and support of our soldiers. … A lot of people were supportive of the troops there but not supportive of the war generally.

Sherman *Okay. Now, when you think of Oklahoma State University, what stands out the most? In your mind, what, like, instantly pops into your head?*

Gill Well, on a personal note, and like I said earlier, the thing that stands out to me about it is the special place it has in my heart. It changed my life. It truly did. Going to school here at Oklahoma State impacted the rest of what’s happened in my life. Of course, you know, I’ve worked at the university thirty-four years and have three degrees from here, [attended OSU on a football scholarship], so, obviously, it’d be so. I think even people that are here four or five years, undergraduate degree, there’s just a feeling about being at Oklahoma State that’s very special. The next thing I think, like we
talked about earlier, is about people. When I think about Oklahoma State University, I think about the people.

Certainly the athletes, the student athletes are part of it, the student body, and grad school people, and I just mentioned several names to you in our conversation here. Then even more so, as I worked in the Alumni Association as president and CEO for twenty-two years, I met literally thousands of alumni. A lot of them are very special in many ways and are wonderful people. You think of an institution like Oklahoma State, I think of faculty and staff that make a difference in people’s lives. Even right now, every day, I think of all the alumni. They go out and make an impact on the world and what’s happening to them. I think of people, really, when I think about Oklahoma State University.

**Sherman**

*Do you think that overall the university’s headed in a good direction, bad direction?*

**Gill**

Oh, I think good direction. When I would talk to students about coming to Oklahoma State University when I was in High School and College Relations, now called Undergraduate Admissions office, when I’d come in there, I would suggest that they narrow it down to, maybe, three or four schools that they’re really interested in and go visit those campuses. If you knew someone who was there, they could even spend the night with and get involved in campus activities, really get a feel for it. At Oklahoma State University, I’d tell them (and it would surprise them sometimes), “Oklahoma State is not for everybody.” We don’t try to be, but here’s what we are if you like that environment. I think there’s a special environment when people come to Oklahoma State and really get a good look and get a sense because of the people, the friendliness. I think the caring is there, not always but, I think, generally. It’s really very enticing to people. I think Oklahoma State has had that all along.

I think adding on to that now, I think we’re really coming out of it in terms of the developments that are on campus now. It’s been happening for many years. I think the growth in the status of our faculty, the quality of our faculty, our teaching faculty, particularly, and research, as well, facilities, things we’re doing. Certainly being a part of the Big Twelve has helped us more than just athletically. There’s a lot of academic things that happen in clusters around the Big Twelve. I think being part of that environment, Oklahoma State University’s recognized. I think what we truly are—I don’t rank schools. We’re an outstanding land-grant university and everything that means. That’s our mission. We need to continue to stick to our mission and try to do it well. I think Oklahoma State is recognized regionally, nationally, and because of our activities, internationally in the world. There’s a lot to be proud of at Oklahoma State.
Sherman  

*Now, is there anything you would like to add that we discussed and possibly flush out more?*

Gill  

No, I probably rambled on a lot more than you wanted me to. I guess it’s difficult to have a conversation about yourself. I’d a lot rather talk about other people. I think one way my story probably is similar to a lot of other people’s, as I said earlier, is the impact that Oklahoma State University’s had on my life and the impact that it’s had on tens of thousands of lives. That’s what’s special about a university, because of the impact made, but a land-grant university impact it makes through teaching and through instruction. We talked about all sorts of research and the products and the processes and the things that are discovered that help people’s lives. Then Extension, our outreach programs that we have, particularly through the seventy-seven counties but in all areas where we take that knowledge and information out to help people. That’s sort of, in a sense, what Henry G. Bennett did, even on the international level, with our programs.

I think the thing about my life that has really been special to me that I look back on and wouldn’t change at all is that, while I sometimes would want to be more actively involved in the academic end of it, my role is to support that and to help those things happen, whether it be fundraising, connecting people to the university, helping recruit students…in some way give back to Oklahoma State. In regards to what I gave in my career, I could never give back as much as they gave me. I think my story is not—I mean, most are not going to work for the university for thirty, forty years, but I still think a lot of alumni would have that same story about what Oklahoma State University did for them in their lives and what they give back, in turn, to OSU. Again, I think that’s kind of special about our school.

Sherman  

*Well, thank you very much for your time today. I do appreciate it. Hopefully, I think we’ll probably eventually end up doing an interview about your Foundation career, just assuming. Thank you for your time.*

Gill  

Appreciate it. Enjoyed it.

Sherman  

*Thank you.*

Gill  

Good luck to you.

------ End of interview ------