

INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH HARRIS, PH.D.

First Faculty Member

Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine

Conducted by Ray Stokes

Dr. Elizabeth Harris, the first faculty member of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, was employed in the Spring of 1970. Dr. Harris is in my office today and we are reminiscing about the things that took place in the very beginning, as she was one of the first employees and faculty members of the school. I know Dr. Harris has lots of thoughts about her contribution to the college of osteopathic medicine here in Fort Worth. I know she has an interest in TCOM, but I'd like to find out just what was your introduction to osteopathic medicine? What gave you the thought or the idea to pursue that part of the health medical coin--the osteopathic side? What gave you that idea in the beginning?

Dr. Harris: Well, in the beginning--the place where I entered the picture at TCOM--I really didn't have an introduction to osteopathic medicine. I was completing work toward my doctorate degree at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. My thesis was finished and I was awaiting the decision of my committee when I received a letter from Dr. Henry Hardt who stated he had been authorized by the Board of Trustees to begin a feasibility and development program for the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. He stated in this letter that he was looking for individuals to put together a faculty for the school and he had obtained my name and curriculum vitae from Dr. Durwood Smith, who was Chairman of the Biology Department at TCU. Dr. Hardt's letter outlined some of the activities, including the development of curriculum, establishment of procedures, admission of students, etc., that would be conducted prior to the opening and he stated that if I were interested in such a venture, would I please write him? So, immediately, I telephoned Dr. Hardt and told him that I was certainly interested in discussing the

potential of this opportunity with him. The date was February 18, 1970, and we made an appointment to meet the following Wednesday, the 25th, for lunch, and he told me that he would introduce me to the two other employees of the College, Ray and Edna Stokes. I remember the date vividly because that was the day that my father died. I regret that, even though I talked to my daddy that day, that I didn't share with him Dr. Hardt's letter, and, of course, even then I had no idea of the ultimate potential that the first meeting would hold. It was very difficult for me to get ready to meet Dr. Hardt a week later because I was depressed and I was grieving a great deal. It is a really cherished memory that about twenty people called me that morning to encourage me to meet Dr. Hardt and go ahead and fulfill my appointment and it is a very special remembrance that God loved me so much that I was very tenderly treated. When I met the Stokes and Dr. Hardt, Dr. Hardt shared with me his vision for a medical school. He was fond of saying "Few people will have the opportunity to found a medical school". And he was right.

Mr. Stokes: Yes, he was.

Dr. Harris: It was an exciting experience and I'd do it again. I don't know if all of us would, but I would do it again. My initial introduction to osteopathic medicine was through Dr. Hardt and you, Ray, as you outlined to me some of the characteristics of the profession, their dreams for the State of Texas. And, I went away from that meeting excited about the possibilities of teaching in a medical school. I had long been interested in medicine



and it almost seemed impossible that an opportunity to combine my two first loves--teaching and medicine--into one career was about to present itself.

Mr. Stokes: As the first faculty member, Dr. Libby, do you have any<sup>particular</sup> reflection of some unusual or unique experience that occurred in the very founding days--or the first few months of the school even before it was opened? Of course, it opened, you know in October, 1970, but lots of work had to be done before it opened and you certainly were<sup>, in part,</sup> responsible for the success of that. Can you reflect on anything that's unusual in that to that extent?

Dr. Harris: In thinking back over that spring and the activities that went on, I would like to first comment that I feel as Dr. Hardt has stated in his reminiscing--that it was almost as though a providential declaration had occurred to begin movement toward the establishment of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. I feel that a group of people were brought together, each of whom brought his own talent, his own educational experiences, his philosophy, his commitment to the establishment of the institution and that it was through the interaction of people, each with his own particular style that gave to the College many of its characteristics. And, it was certainly the dedication of many of these people that allowed it to become a reality. I am very grateful to all of those people who took part, no matter how small that part might have been. Secondly, as I think about our interactions, I realize that it is impossible to separate the historical event from the interpersonal relationship that we all shared. And these re-

lationships weren't always well thought-out, highly intellectual, rational, step-wise, interactions. Many were selfish,<sup>many</sup> were conducted in the heat of emotion, there were, in fact, some difficulties to overcome. And, as I reflect, of course, my personal view will be part of that. But, in no way do I ever want to be misunderstood to be critical of anyone or of any of these activities. I think that God truly brought together a group of people who had a very definite thing to share in the development of the College and that it was a very special opportunity for all of us and certainly I agree with Dr. Hardt that few people would ever have such an opportunity. Some of the unusual experiences that I think about, just quickly, are in the early times--the way we were able to get done critical procedures or applications--critical steps without back-up of large amounts of personnel or equipment or funds.

Mr. Stokes: You can say that in capital letters, believe me.

Dr. Harris: I recall, specifically, how many individuals were especially generous. The first typewriter that was available to the faculty was one that Dr. George Luibel gave us from his office because he knew that we needed it desperately. I remember that my husband, Joe, was always available to haul tables or chairs or equipment in his pickup truck. I remember that Dr. Charlie Rudolph, the first biochemist, willingly participated in some of the maintenance or carpentry activity. In fact, Charlie used to laugh and say that everyone thought he was a general contractor and he wasn't known as a biochemistry professor. Back of it all,



I think, was first of all, the dedication of our founders, Drs. Luibel, Everett, and Beyer, and their determination to override obstacles to spend their own money and their own time unselfishly. Never seeking attention for what they had done. And, secondly, Dr. Hardt's great wisdom which he brought to us out of a lifetime of experience in education but also great experience in the real world of dealing with other people in such areas as the State Board of Medical Examiners in the Basic Sciences where he had served as founding president until he resigned to take his position at TCOM . . .

Mr. Stokes: Pardon me for butting in, but I think because of his concern, I don't know that there would have been a conflict, but he certainly thought there was and that was why he resigned from the job that he had with the Basic Science Board.

Dr. Harris: Which illustrates the kind of person Dr. Hardt is. I recall his statement that "Sir, on one issue this College will never compromise and that is integrity."

Mr. Stokes: Amen!

Dr. Harris: I am proud to have been associated with such a man. Well, we had the commitment of our founders' unselfishness and we had Dr. Hardt's wisdom, and then we had a lot of hard work that was added to that mixture and I believe with all my heart that we were blessed with providential oversight of all of our activities. At times, when things looked very bleak and then, almost miraculously, some new contributor--as the couple from Dallas were--  
(Drs. Marille and Sam Sparks)  
would make a donation of the size that it would pay one faculty

member's salary for the entire year or Dr. Luibel would obtain a grant from a foundation. That was one of my unique experiences. I wrote the first pharmacology proposal by the seat of my pants, on your old typewriter, using catalogs and a whole lot of common sense, and just ability to put together a logical discussion. A foundation funded us for about \$10,000, I believe, in order to buy the first equipment that was used in the physiology and pharmacology laboratories. Another thing that I remember are the times that, in a frantic rush for deadlines for various items, frequently in the pile of papers, Dr. Hardt thought I would loose some important document and we used to laugh how some paper could get lost when there were only two desks for it to be lost in. One of the things that we might talk about are the students that first year. I remember, of the twenty students plus one special student, I'd call them all outstanding for one reason or another.

Mr. Stokes: You had a particular interest in that didn't you, Dr. Libby, because weren't you on the first Admissions Committee?

Dr. Harris: That is correct. Of course, about the time we started to select the class there were probably only about four of us employed as full-time faculty and one of our functions was to serve on the Admissions Committee. We did not solicit students for that first year. It was, I think, the wisdom of Dr. Luibel, perhaps that should there not be adequate funding or should any of a number of events not occur then we would not have spent a great deal of effort in soliciting students and then have to turn around and say "Well, we're sorry, but we're really not going to open."



All of the applicants approached TCOM from personal contact. I, in taking the time to meet them, believe it is extremely significant and probably still holds true that the most important contacts that osteopathic medicine has made in terms in recruitment has been a personal contact where opportunities are given to explore the meaning of this school of medicine. Anyway, we had a number of faculty and the first interviews were held in the Board Room at the hospital. Dr. Bob Nobles, Dr. Virginia Ellis, and Dr. John Kemplin were faithful, dedicated partners in the selection of the first class and were faithful to attend meetings and attend interview sessions and to take a very active part in the process. One of the students that I remember--he came to that first day's set of interviews--had come up from Port Arthur and he arrived breathless to the hospital Board Room and suddenly said, "Oh, my goodness, I've got to go! I'll be right back!" He rushed out because he was certain he had left the engine running in his car. That was Ken Brock.

Mr. Stokes: Ken Brock. Yes. The first class of 1974.

Dr. Harris: We wound up with 18 out of that group. Of course, there are many outstanding members among that class. But I remember them all, remember their names, remember the interaction that we had. And that was a unique and very special opportunity to teach such a small group of students and have the wonderful teacher/student interaction. But, secondly, these were men and women who had the most outstanding motivation of any group that I have ever seen. They felt as though they had suddenly been given a very special

opportunity to become physicians--something that they each wanted to do but for some reason or another had not had the opportunity until TCOM was founded. And that reminds me of something else. You know, Ray, it is really my pet peeve to hear people say "T-COM".

Mr. Stokes: That goes on quite a bit now.

Dr. Harris: I remember, also, when that term was first used and I wish that everyone would stop and say "T-C-O-M" and, I guess, as part of historical documentation, that is my prerogative to have a pet peeve.

Mr. Stokes: It certainly is. And you<sup>are</sup>/certainly justified in having it.

Dr. Libby, you have been with TCOM now since its beginning and when we did open the school, it was opened on the fifth floor of the Fort Worth Osteopathic Hospital and, so naturally some people have said--I believe it was Dr. Henry Hardt that said we were born in a hospital and where else would be the best place to be born for a medical school. But I would like for you to give your own personal description of the physical set-up, the physical layout, of the utilization that we endeavored to employ in the 10,000 square feet that we had in this unused floor of the hospital. What is your description of our physical layout at that time?

Dr. Harris: The hospital graciously allowed the College to remodel the unfinished floor of the hospital to our specifications. We had a spacious reception/entry area which was complete with paintings donated by Dr. Carl Everett and his wife. There were three faculty offices--Dr. Tom Graham, physiologist; Dr. Charles Rudolph,



biochemist; and I each had an office on the fifth floor. Mrs. Diana Rudolph was our secretary and "Girl Friday" and she had a small office area. The classroom and library were located across the hall from the offices and beyond the classroom, which was quite spacious for a class of twenty students plus three or four visitors who might be present, we had a special prep room for the various laboratory courses and then the main area was not walled off into individual laboratories but because it was a large area, we had space for a microscopic lab, for osteopathic techniques, we had McManus tables, and then there was an area for a biochemistry lab and finally, a fourth area that was kind of a super lounge where the students had a coffee pot and area where they could relax between classes. One of the reasons we were able to operate in this kind of an arrangement was the fact, of course, that the class was small, there were only twenty students, and they were always doing the same thing at the same time. So there was no conflict with the fact that the laboratories were all sort of in a large open space. The Little White House, as it has come to be known, housed, as you recall, your office and Mrs. Stokes; Dr. Hardt; Dr. Bannister, who was a microbiologist; Dr. Mary Schunder, our anatomist; and, later, in that first year, we were joined by Billie Westbrook, our first college secretary, receptionist, phone operator, etc. Then, our third facility was located behind the Little White House and this was the upstairs, over the garage, where we, again, did a little remodeling and had the gross anatomy lab. It also was very nice and

spacious, since that year we had four cadavers and in that building, we also had room for a prep room for anatomy and a small area that was later used as an animal facility for labs and microbiology.

Mr. Stokes: Thank you for giving us that very good description of our physical layout during our first year, Dr. Libby. Dr. Libby, in addition to your responsibilities as the head of the Microbiology Department and your faculty duties--teaching, etc.--you did have some tremendous administrative responsibilities as well. You were voted, by the Board of Directors--it was called Board of Directors at that particular time, sometime in 1972--to become the Assistant Dean. Now there was a little confusion about that title for a short period. Would you give me some clarification about your title and with reference to being the Assistant Dean?

Dr. Harris: Certainly Ray. I believe it was in early November that I received notification from Dr. Coy, our chief administrative officer, of my appointment as Assistant Dean under Dr. Hardt. The minutes of that Board meeting later reflected this same terminology; however, because of a rush of business, the minutes were not approved at the meeting immediately following my appointment. There was some question raised about my title. Dr. Newell, I believe, began to refer to me as "Assistant to the Dean" and I told him that that was not my title, I had been appointed "Assistant Dean" and showed him my notification from Dr. Coy. He was most apologetic and said he had misunderstood, but that was what he had



been told my responsibility--or title--was. I checked again the Board minutes, which were yet to be approved and found that they had been altered and now read "Assistant to the Dean". I was very distressed over this, as you recall.

Mr. Stokes: That is understandable because I was involved to some degree.

Dr. Harris: Dr. Hardt was distressed. And, Dr. Danny Beyer very graciously agreed to present a motion at the Board meeting electing me officially Assistant Dean of the College. And this was done. Now, with hindsight, I can see what may have happened. Perhaps it was the intent of the Board that I be appointed an "Assistant to the Dean". I don't know, and probably never will know, why it came out "Assistant Dean", but nevertheless, it did. I don't know who altered the minutes, although I have spoken with Dr. Luibel, who told me that he was not aware that this had been done. My tenure as Dean was short--nine months--but probably that is a fair length of time, as I understand the<sup>average</sup> life of a Dean in a medical school is three years. I would also like to point out, by way of a personal reflection, that, in addition to responsibility for curriculum, admissions, and the North Texas program, I had a baby during this time. Heather was born November 10, 1971. This was four days after the Coordinating Board/<sup>was</sup>expected by us for our first official visit as a State of Texas . . .

Mr. Stokes: That was the Texas Coordinating Board.

Dr. Harris: We had prepared a lengthy report and members of the Coordinating Board were here on Friday before I had the baby on Wednesday.

Mr. Stokes: That was a close call.

Dr. Harris: Very close! Now, did you want to talk a bit about the North Texas involvement? That was going on at this time.

Mr. Stokes: Yes, I would like to discuss with you, if we have time here and I think we can, about December, 1971, there were some meetings that started out on a social level that became very serious, possibly with some type of a cooperative joining together of some of our basic sciences with the North Texas State University. So, I think it was in January, 1972, that we had a series of meetings and one or two visits to the Denton campus and then later, of course, we did become a part, under a contract--we did have a contract and working agreement--where the basic sciences were actually taught in Denton. Now, you had a very responsible role and played a very dramatic part. I believe, as far as the TCOM designation, you were the coordinator for TCOM in that particular project. Could you elaborate on your duties and responsibilities of making that possible?

Dr. Harris: As you have recalled, we began talking with North Texas in late 1971 and began entering exploratory talks in January of 1972. We set up a schedule and a program for the instruction of the first year only in Denton, to begin in the fall of 1972. Dr. Hardt gave me the responsibility for carrying on those negotiations that involved scheduling, student related matters, while he was personally responsible with the budgetary elements, along with Dr. Ferre. We did begin instruction in 1972 on the North Texas campus and the freshmen were bussed to Fort Worth once or twice a week for their classes in psychology, osteopathic technique.



We employed Transportation Enterprises to transport students and that was one of my responsibilities--seeing that they got to Fort Worth. I also went to Denton once a week to see that things were operating smoothly there. Usually, they weren't! And, so there were a lot of headaches to deal with that aren't any different from any of the administrative matters that we still contend with today.

Mr. Stokes: May I interject this question. I think there was a possibility or, the matter of being accepted--here again, I don't mean to be sounding uncomplimentary as far as the personnel and the students of North Texas were concerned, but you had a little difficulty in being acknowledged that you were there for a while--recognized, didn't you?

Dr. Harris: Oh, that is certainly true. Many times, no one knew what Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine was or that we were there. It was probably two years before we finally got a sign on that campus that did reflect the basic sciences of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. Another area that I think is significant is the fact that the faculty for this first year teaching in Denton was mostly made up of individuals who were employed by TCOM. There was some assistance by a few people from North Texas, but most of the teachers were people who were employed by TCOM and who commuted to Denton. Dr. Tom Graham, who is no longer with us; Dr. John Gaugl, in physiology; Dr. Tom Weilepp ; Dr. Carnes, in anatomy; and others drove from Fort Worth to Denton to take part in the classes there. The following year, in the

placed  
fall of 1973, those of us who were employed by TCOM were/under contract by North Texas State University and we taught the first year and a half in Denton from 1973 until 1977. During that time, still, the majority of the teaching was by those of us who formed a nucleus of the faculty at TCOM, although some individuals from North Texas assisted on a part-time basis. This is still reflected in our Biochemistry Department, where many of the faculty are part-time at both institutions.

Mr. Stokes: This concludes an interview with Dr. Elizabeth Harris, Chairman of the Microbiology Department of TCOM. Dr. Harris' memoirs were recorded on two separate occasions, November 19th and December 17th in 1980. She asked for a copy of a transcript before giving her unconditional permission for her memoirs to be used in any way in the Oral History section of the TCOM Library choses.