

Oral History with Gibson Lewis Transcript
Interviewed by Daniel Burgard on May 25, 2022

Daniel Burgard

Gib, thanks for coming to visit us today to talk about your work with the UNT Health Science Center. I want to start off today by having you give us a quick review of your personal history in Tarrant County, and how you got connected with the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Gibson Lewis

Well, we'll have to go back to 1970, and how it all came about. When I had just got elected to the Texas legislature at that time, and they was having a political gathering down at the Old Worth Hotel which was about where the Fort Worth Club is right now, I think, somewhere in that area. And that used to be where all the politicians hung out, and I had just got elected and they had a reception for all the members of the legislature and all of the elected officials and the Chamber of Commerce, I think, had put it on.

And I made the mistake of getting cornered in by Dr. Beyers and Luibel and two or three other osteopathic hospitals. And mind you, at that time, I could tell that everyone wanted chiropractor and an osteopath. I mean, I was that far out of the medical arena. And- and after, I mean, they got hold of us and started telling what they did and what their concern was and that's kind of what the whole reception for, is meeting people in different professions and whatever.

And so they took advantage, and they knew I was naive and had no clue. And so they said, "We have fresh meat here." And so- and after- they sold me on- on osteopath medicine. And I mean, I told somebody, I said, oh yeah, I've been in the used car business. I said, they can sell anything I tell you, and they did. And I think those guys, and several others just like them, you know, Luibel and Beyers and those fellows and they, they took it to heart. They had- they had a goal in mind and they was going to build a hospital, and they had already kind of semi started it. But they had to get all the nuts and bolts together before they could actually do it.

And I have never seen anybody work as hard as those guys did on trying to put this thing together. And of course, at that time, you know, a hospital like that got no funding at all.

Daniel Burgard

Sure.

Gibson Lewis

It wasn't even hardly created at that time, I don't think. I never forget the first bill we that helped the- and it was because of them talking to me and talking to a fellow named Cordell Hull, who was also a state representative. And we passed a bill just to give them funding, not for the school, but

for the for the profession itself and where it would be just a little bit of a stipend that would go into the, you know, the cost of putting the hospital together. And so anyway, they, that's where my beginning with them was and the relationship that we had was great.

I mean, they had a guy named [inaudible] that they hired to do some work with him. And he did a wonderful job himself. And I tell you what, after I started comparing apples and oranges. And, you know, I said I don't think I'll ever to go to an allopath again. I mean, this is where I want to go. I- I liked their concept and I liked what they are doing and it was because just, you know, those guys were open about everything. And so that's my first introductory to 'em. And of course, it never faded after that.

Daniel Burgard

So you started off working with the trio of founders on the Osteopathic Medical Center of Texas-

Gibson Lewis

Right.

Daniel Burgard

Is the hospital-

Gibson Lewis

Right.

Daniel Burgard

Then you transitioned into working with Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, right? To get it situated in this location, I think? And to start getting it attached to the UNT system?

Gibson Lewis

Well, at that time, there wasn't very much here.

Daniel Burgard

Right.

Gibson Lewis

I think they had a two-story house over in the corner of whatever.

Daniel Burgard

It's still there.

Gibson Lewis

And so, but I think- I think that's something. And those guys I mean, of course, they got the Texas Medical Association. They've got 50 lobbyists, I mean, they got a huge building practice right across the street from where I have an office there in Austin now. But these guys were just out working. I mean, that's showed me what you can do if you get determined and got the goal in mind and you got the right stuff to sell. And they did.

Daniel Burgard

You came to Fort Worth, you were in the Air Force, and you eventually became a state legislator. What motivated you to become- to go into public service to begin with?

Gibson Lewis

Well, one of the best moves I made, it was probably coming to Fort Worth.

Daniel Burgard

Right.

Gibson Lewis

And after I got out of the service, I went to work for a company named Amstead Paper Company. And they were a wholesale paper firm that sold to people in the publishing business, in the printing business, you know, and whatever it might be. And the fellow who owned it, their headquarters was in Dallas named Bob Amstead, and he wanted all his outside salespeople to be- to be members of civic clubs. And that was his big deal. I mean, I mean, I was a member of the Kiwanis Club. In fact, I served as the president of the Fort Worth JC's and we'd have 5 or 600 members at a meeting every Wednesday. I mean, and I started out the president of the JC's.

Gibson Lewis

We got the Lion's Club, I was president of the Lions Club. And first thing I know, I was president of most of those clubs and, and, and it came election cycle, and I had two members of the legislature at

that time who knew me and I knew them. And they asked me "you know you ought to think about running for the legislature." And I said, I never even thought about that. I don't know. I've got too much other things, and I just started my own business about a year before that also. And I said I don't think I ought to do that. I said, well, let's listen. You know, here's the- I said I don't have time. They said, "Well, you know, you got more time if you just regulate your time like you should, set a good example." They said, "You know, like we do." They had an office supply store, what they had together.

And they said, "You know, we go and we sit there with the employees early in the morning, then we drive like heck." They don't give you a ticket if you got S.O. plates on. And so, you get in there, and you, you know, you take like one session and you'd be there in time. And the next day Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. And on Thursdays, he said, "we come in real early we can get out and you can get back to your office by Thursday afternoon."

And I said, well that doesn't- And so you're in the office all day Friday. And he said, "plus you make \$300 a month." And I said, well, I was paying myself a thousand a month. And at that time and that was a \$300 raise. And then in those times, we ran countywide. Now they have a single member district. We ran countywide, well, it was not- not a blood sport like it is now cause at that time, you know, you filed for a place on the ballot. You know, you go one, two, three. Mine was place four. Then all the campaigning was done in civic clubs or gatherings, somebody had luncheon, and you get up tell 'em your qualifications, and the fella I would run against was an incumbent, and he and I became the best of friends. I mean, we didn't get after each other.

Gibson Lewis

I said here's what- here's what I've done. Here's what- [inaudible]. And he was a lawyer and a great guy. And in fact we became very close friends and- and I defeated him, you know, and, and the first thing I did when I got to Austin, I befriended the governor, and got him appointed to a judgeship.

Daniel Burgard

There you go.

Gibson Lewis

About like we would talk about lawyers want to be judges.

Daniel Burgard

Right.

Gibson Lewis

See, he thought that was a good deal, and I always- I could always depend on him for a campaign donation.

Daniel Burgard

So, you served as a state representative for this area for many years. During that time, you were working with some individuals at the, well, it was still called Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine on various projects. TCOM grew into the U- current UNT Health Science Center. Tell us just a little bit about some of the individuals you worked for, and you know their work style, their traits they had that you admired that wanted you to keep your relationship going with our school.

Gibson Lewis

Well, you know, the people that was involved in putting this thing together were dedicated, as I said earlier. And I became part of the family, and all the legislators now, you know, they would have dinners and stuff like that, and private dinners and whatever it might be, you know, let people know what was going on, and that kept us informed at all times. Every step it made. And then, of course, the longer that I stayed, the better I got in a position to help 'em more. And of course, when I became speaker, well, that's what turned the spigot on and cause the speaker can get anything he wants.

Daniel Burgard

I heard they used to call this the speaker's school.

Gibson Lewis

That's what they did. They did call it that.

Gibson Lewis

The best move they ever made. They hired a fellow by the name of Danny Jensen. Jensen was a, I mean, he, you know, he'd get hung on to something and he stayed on it. Like one of those little- little bearcats and everybody loved him. I mean, he worked all day long. I mean, he would go out to the capital and he would be in 20, 30 offices before the day was over. You know selling the school and what they were doing. And, of course, me being the speaker of course I could pretty much direct where all the funds were going at that time and, and back when, I think when we built this library this was going to be all the state money spent that year.

Daniel Burgard

Yes. So, we are sitting in the Gibson D. Lewis Health Science Library. We're very appreciative of the effort you put forth to help us get funding for that. I know that must have required some heavy lifting. But thank you. I don't know if you have any more information about that process.

Gibson Lewis

Well it was, like I said, it was the only state money spent that year and we put it here. That was tough fiscal times for the state. Well, my chairman, of course, I- You know, the speaker appoints all the chairmen and all the members of the committee. Well, he and I had a lot of real interesting conversations about why can't we give this a little bit- a little bit over here and we'll make it up next year. I said no, we'll do it this way.

Daniel Burgard

Well, it worked out.

Gibson Lewis

It worked out just fine.

Daniel Burgard

Thanks. Talk a little bit more about some of the individuals you worked with at TCOM, and the UNT Health Science Center, and some of the projects that you were involved in over the- over the years.

Gibson Lewis

Well, let me assure you, there was a project every year, there was a need for money every year, and that was why it was important that you had- that they had hired Danny Jensen because he knew the process. And like I said, every morning when I came in my office, he was sitting there. He was waiting on me. And the first, the first thing he'd asked "what have you done for me today? What have you done for me and the school today? What have you done for me and the school today? That's what I want to know."

Whatever you have me in the school today. What does that have to what have you done for me in the school today as well? I want to know. They had a very sincere you know, they, they would go out and it was door knocking over doors. Good. We always had a project. We always had something we had, you know, we always and say what we need to find for this and that. So, he never got a day off. And, uh, and by doing that what they did, and what we was able to do is to let people know what osteopathic

medicine was all about and, and, and the way we did it was just, you know, basic simple hard work, education. And a lot of people never realize, you know, how many osteopaths are in rural areas.

Well, if you look at Texas, Texas got a lot of rural areas. And when I passed a bill to create the school, well, that's, you know, to make it a state supported school. You know, with, that's how, when I was on the mic, in fact, I've got a recording of it somewhere. And talked with 'em, I said, you know, every one of you from rural school, I mean from a rural community, or you have a rural city. I said, I said the allopathic doctors, I said, they're all nice people, but they don't go there. They want to be a heart surgeon, or they want to specialize in something. These people out here, they specialize in whole bodies and getting people well. And I said, that's who you gonna be supporting and that's what you're going to do.

You're creating people who's going to go out and take care of your constituents, not somebody else. And that was, that was my selling point from the day one. And they bought it. And that's exactly what they were doing. That's what the osteopathic, uh, profession does, is, they go to rural areas, go in for full body health. And, and once they were able to explain it, it was an easy sell.

Daniel Burgard

Interesting, we're talking, that's about 40 years ago probably roughly. You know that urban-rural divide for school issues is still a motivating factor in a lot of coalitions down in the legislature.

Gibson Lewis

Oh yeah.

Daniel Burgard

It's interesting that that sustained for 40 years, that kind of discussion.

Gibson Lewis

Well, you have to do because, you know, you get a fellow who's running for reelection, whether in the House or the Senate, well, he's going to each one of them, the people he got to know is all the mayor, the council, you know the people there, so he, he knows he's got a responsibility to make sure that when asked, when he goes home and the mayor asks him you know, "What have you done for me today this week?" They can say, "Well, here's what I've done for you."

Daniel Burgard

OK. Looking at the Gibson D. Lewis Library in our Health Science Center campus today, how do you feel about the growth, and the legacy of this institution, your contribution to that?

Gibson Lewis

Well, I consider, knowing all the people who really put the work into it, my contribution was very small, even though, it might have been large to some extent. There's steps, had to be taken and made. But I think, you know, I admire the people who built this place, and who've been here for the last 30 or 40 years. However long- it's about 50 years now. And, you know, I admire what they've done and made contributions and all of it. And they've done it, you know, unselfishly. I mean, they, they've done it 'cause it's in their heart to do it. And, and I think that's what, you know, that it made it what it is. And of course, too, you know, Fort Worth needed a medical, uh, school. That's what we always said, that's what we do.

And we had, we did have to step over some people to get here I tell you that If you think this was easy, you never saw the opposition 'cause the opposition was out there and strong. I never will forget that how the bill was on committee, when it was an education committee, and I said, I've already talked to all the members. I said, now you want to vote for my bill? And "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll do it." When I got a call from my staff person and they said, "The chairman had decided he had a few visits from some of his constituents," who were all allopath. And he said he's not going to hear that bill. And I said, Oh, really? So, I got on and I called him. I said, I said Becky said that you were not going to let that bill out tonight. "Well, you know, I've got problems with that, and a lot of constituents got problems with that." And he kind of crawfish around more. So, I had to make a little threat to him. That if that bill didn't come out of committee that night 'cause I told him I got all the votes.

Gibson Lewis

And I said, they all want to vote for it. I said if it didn't come out, I said, you're going to be amazed how much pressure you'll get tomorrow when you and I cross each other on the House floor. I said 'cause nobody ever knocked the hell out of you but I'm 'fixin to. And so... Well sure enough it came out of committee that night.

Daniel Burgard

Yep.

Gibson Lewis

And Jay Beck would think that's a funny story, because he was part of it. I don't know if you know Jay Beck. He was a local doctor.

Daniel Burgard

Right.

Gibson Lewis

And he thinks, that's his favorite story.

Daniel Burgard

I know there was, there's to this day, probably some, you know, back and forth between the allopathic osteopathic communities. You did a lot to help break that down, get the school authorized. Um, did they, did you ever feel there was a point during that process when you thought "We've won, we've, we've got acceptance from MDs," which is a little different than, you know, getting the bill passed? I think you were instrumental in maybe helping the osteopathic profession progress to that level of acceptance.

Gibson Lewis

That was always the most frustrating thing, it was acceptability to get the osteopathic uh, uh, profession brought up to where it was acceptable by everybody. And uh, and, and it always bothered me, you know, about trying to get students in these internship programs. And that was a big issue I took on was doing that and trying to get some of these hospitals to open up, and John Peter Smith is a good example. So, we and I mean, that took some doing to get them to find out. But once they did it, they were tickled to death. I mean, I guarantee you go over there right now they'd rather have a D.O. than a M.D. any day of the week over there. And I mean, it just and that's what I always say, just get that acceptability. And once we got it, you don't have to worry about it anymore.

Daniel Burgard

Let me come back to the library building specifically. I've mentioned this to you before, but it was very clear when this building, you know, you helped get the funding, get it authorized. This building was a statement to the medical community at large, not just Fort Worth or Texas even the medical community in the United States, that this school had a grand vision. They were going to become more than, than TCOM, they were going to grow into a full spectrum health science center, that osteopathic physicians could do that. I think you had a big role of, clearly as I already mentioned, the building being built. This building was a symbol, specifically mentioned as a symbol, by our school's administration back then that this school was big. It had big ideas and big motivation, so you played a huge role in that process.

Gibson Lewis

If I recall I think this was phase three in our program.

Daniel Burgard

Yes, this was building three.

Gibson Lewis

Yeah. And, and one thing at the same time, I served on the board of the hospital here, they were so kind to appoint me to the board. And, and, and of course, I learned a great deal because, you know, you had all those doctors, you know, on the board. I think there was 20 on the board. I think 10 were doctors, 10 were laypeople. And you get a pretty good education there, and then and what happens too, you become knowledgeable about what the real needs are. And once you got that, then you have a vision that what's happening and what you got to do to get there.

Daniel Burgard

Yeah. So, I think you deserve maximum credit for helping them make their vision into a reality and making the school what it is now. You were there to help give them the resources they needed.

Gibson Lewis

Well I'll be honest, I'm very, very honored when they chose it. And named it after me. That's probably one of the nicest honors I've ever had, is to have this, this library named after me one I take a great deal of pride in. And that's why as we went along in my latter years as speaker when, when Dan would come up to me and said, "What have you done for me and the school today?" I just gave you a library.

Daniel Burgard

That's a great gift.

You know, we're, we're talking about Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, UNT Health Science Center, very particular kind of education but general education, K through 12, college education, is important to our school. I'm sure you heard from Danny Jensen a lot about support for education at all levels. I know one of the things that our school was interested in and cared about was that Education Reform act in, I think, 1984 and you had a role in that. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Gibson Lewis

Well, matter of fact, I had a very big role. It came accidentally, came by accidentally and I was noticing in my own company I was hiring people and I was getting young people out of school and I had, and I had hired about three young ladies to work in the front office just being together, and answer the telephone and that when you walked in they said, "Can I help you?" and do whatever and do the typing

and wha- and all of a sudden I couldn't find anybody that could spell a word, that really could just carry on a conversation with somebody on the phone and I started saying, I said, what in the world is going on here? And I started talking to other business people and they were having the same problem, and I got elected speaker and, and that was in the back of my mind. And I had Mark White, who was a good friend of mine, and he was elected governor at the same time.

And he had came over to my office and he said, "Well, here's what I want. I want to put emphasis on, on, my, my year as governor." And I said, well, I'll tell you what I want. I said, I want a better education system than we got. And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, and I told him, I said, you know, I've hired people. And I said, I, they're just are not qualified because they're illiterate to some extent.

And so, he said, "Well." He said, "I want to make sure we get a increase in salary for the school teacher." I said I'm all for that, too. But at the same time, I want something for my money. I want a better educated student coming out of it. And so we, we sat down and we had the lieutenant governor and, and we, the three of us came together and decided what we would do is get a committee. And we appointed what we thought were the key people that we knew in education or in business or whatever. And we created this committee of all, no legislators, nobody elected officially. And Ross Perot, we put, we asked him to be the chairman. And so he took over the chairman. And I'll always wonder, many people want to know why some people are rich after watching him work.

I know why he was rich 'cause I've never seen anybody that had much go and fire and determination as he did. And they did a great job, and they brought it back to us and their recommendations and we put them in a bill and we passed that bill and we made a lot of people mad because, you know, anytime you change up the system, you got, you got people who was against it. But we changed it, and we did it. And, and it was accepted nationwide as the big step in improving quality education.

Daniel Burgard

That's, that, that has to rank as one of your best contributions to this school. Every one of our students, well at least 90%-ish of our students, come through Texas school systems. So, having them better educated helped this institution immensely progress with their education.

Gibson Lewis

I felt like it did.

Daniel Burgard

Thank you.

Gibson Lewis

And that was I think one of the if I have a star in my crown, that would be it.

Daniel Burgard

Awesome!

Daniel Burgard

I'm glad we had a chance to talk about that a little bit. That certainly impacted the future of, of this school. You know, one of the final things I wanted to just discuss or mention was just the growth of this library we're in, the Gibson D. Lewis Library Building. You know, it's changed a lot over the almost 40, yes, almost 40 years of its existence.

It's morphed from a very traditional library, quiet, books on shelves into much more of a student center. This building, your building, is very important to the daily life of all of our students. And I just want to get your reaction to that, that ability of the building to adapt and grow. You know, we have now going in on our first floor a medical simulation center with amazing technology. All that contained in that one building that so long ago you worked to help get funding for.

That's a great accomplishment that we're very grateful for you, to you for doing that.

Gibson Lewis

You all will be amazed what that's going to do to the quality of these docs when they get out of here.

Daniel Burgard

That simulation center.

Gibson Lewis

That simulation. I mean, you're not reading it in a book thinking you understand what that book says. You're looking at it. You got a hands-on. And I got, my favorite joke years ago were Dr. Beyers and Dr. Luibel, and I said you guys, how y'all going to put somebody on table, you want to be on a table one day and you go over you giving instructions and Luibel, you going to the next day. Where you could have a hands-on experience. The student can have a hands on. That was always a funny joke with those guys. I thought it was funny.

Daniel Burgard

Well now, we'll have patients that are virtual who never get tired, never complain.

Gibson Lewis

And I've seen I've seen those and, and I tell you what, that that's going to move, that's going to move medical care forward, I think, 50 years. And I mean 'cause that's going to make an education hands-on. Where they see what it is, they're not guessing. I mean they see, you know, those little dummies or whatever they got. I mean, you get to really put your hand on and work on and don't have to worry about 'em getting off the table.

Daniel Burgard

Little did you know 40, 45 years ago, when you were working with our people on this building's funding that that was going to be taking place. That was so- that's like future stuff from the Jetsons. And it's coming true starting in a couple of months. Super exciting. I mean, that's it. We're hugely in your debt for all that work you did long ago. It's given us the buildings, giving us great service for so many decades, and it's only getting better.

Gibson Lewis

You're giving me way more credit than I deserve, but I tell you the credit belongs to- I've known every president that y'all had here, and the quality people y'all had over the years and the people that had the desire and love to do what they're doing. That's who gets the credit, not me. I happen to be in the right place, right time. Tried for the funding.

Daniel Burgard

I still think you deserve maximum credit, equal credit to the founders of the school. You made a lot of dreams come true over the past several decades here. And we're all in your debt and we greatly appreciate that.