

Jolene Koester
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interviewed by Susan Resnik
for California State University Northridge
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SUSAN RESNIK (SR): Today is Wednesday, May 15, 2013. This is Susan Resnik. I'm in Del Mar, California, with President Emeriti Jolene Koester, of California State University Northridge, about to begin recording her oral history. This interview will become part of the Campus Leadership Oral History Project. President Koester is currently an associate with Penson Associates, where she assists presidents and chancellors in achieving their institutional missions through student success, institutional effectiveness, and service to their communities.

She served as president of California State University Northridge from 2000 until she stepped down in December of 2011. As president, she was committed to furthering the excellence of the university she led and in increasing retention and graduation rates, while remaining accessible to qualified students and maintaining the historical commitment to diversity. She received acclaim as an intellectual, cultural, and economic driver of the university.

Prior to her role at California State University Northridge, she served as provost, vice-president of academic affairs, and prior to that, assistant associate professor and chair of communication studies at California State University Sacramento.

In an earlier stage of her career, she served as the educational coordinator at the International Travel Center at the University of Minnesota.

Her educational background includes a B.A. magna cum laude, in speech communication, from the University of Minnesota in 1971; her M.A. from the University of Wisconsin Madison in communication arts in 1972; and her Ph.D. in speech communication from the University of Minnesota in 1980.

She has received numerous honors and awards, and she has published widely and given many professional presentations. She is highly regarded nationally for her leadership in the area of higher education. She has served as a member and past chair of the board of directors of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and in many other higher education organizations.

She's served in the Los Angeles community as an active member of boards of directors for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, and the Los Angeles Jobs and Economic Committee, among many others.

For the California State University System, the largest public education system in our nation, she served on the systems-wide budget and advisory committee, the human resources advisory group, and other committees as well.

It's an honor to be with you today, President Koester, to have you tell your story, sharing your remembrances and insights. Good morning.

Jolene Koester (JK): Good morning, and please call me Jolene—everyone always has called me Jolene.

SR: Thank you. Well, let's start at the beginning. I'd like you to share something about your early life, where and when you were born, something about your family.

JK: I am the eldest of five children born to an auto mechanic and a stay-at-home mom in a very small town in Minnesota called Plato, 250 people, a place that I publicly characterize as one of extreme cultural homogeneity. I went to school in Plato and then high school in Glencoe, a town six miles away, starting in seventh grade. German Lutheran background—as I've indicated, a really culturally homogeneous environment. Always for me I—how shall I say this?—I looked out of that world from early on as one of my earlier recollections, and was very involved in high school in a variety of activities, but very eager to leave.

SR: I understand. Tell me about high school—were there role models, teachers, anybody that sparked your interest?

JK: I've always had teachers or professors who have made a difference in my life, and in high school there were several of those as well: a high school speech and debate coach, and an English faculty member—he taught a variety of subjects—but both of those were very instrumental in shaping sense of self, sense of confidence. And I credit my high school speech and debate instructor with taming a pretty animated tongue, predilection to speak, predilection to take positions. His work with me really allowed me to develop logical, coherent, articulate presentation abilities, and I'm *always* going to be grateful to him for that.

SR: We always find it interesting, as we start to look at what brought you to where you went in the future, and I think for most of us, teachers, role models, are relevant.

[00:06:38]

JK: Yes, yes, yes: very, very relevant; very, very influential for me.

SR: Right. Did you read a lot?

JK: Yes, I did read a lot. The little school that I went to really didn't have much of a library. It was a three-room schoolhouse, but at some point in time I started to be able to take books out of the library in Glencoe where I ultimately went to high school. And that started to open up other worlds to me, and I think was very, very influential in terms of allowing me to have that aspiration to leave, to imagine other worlds.

SR: And thinking ahead to your going to college, did you and your family *assume* you'd go to college, or was this something that was unusual?

JK: It was less typical. Neither of my parents had even a high school education. They grew up on farms, and their responsibility to their respective families of origin was to help on the farm. But I have always said that I knew in the womb that I would go to college. They were both smart, they both believed in the American dream. They both believed that the pathway to that dream was through higher education. I can't ever remember a time when I didn't know I would go to college. Now, I knew I would go to college—I was never, as a female, shaped to want to *be* something. I was shaped and persuaded and socialized to go to college. And the other message that I received, primarily from my mother,

although I think she spoke my father's points of view as well, was to use my God-given talents. That was a very, very common refrain from her, in terms of my decision-making about a variety of things. So I knew I would go to college. The same message was given to my siblings. And there was no question about whether or not I would go to college. I think frankly I bought the message; I bit down harder on the message than my parents really were ready for, because as soon as I could imagine experiences outside of Glencoe High School in Plato, Minnesota, I was seeking those experiences. As a fifteen-year-old—maybe I was sixteen—I went to a speech and debate institute at the University of North Dakota. The next year I went to a speech and debate institute at Northwestern University in Chicago. And I quickly began sort of pushing the envelope with my parents, in terms of really their comfort level with what it is I wanted to do. But to their credit, they facilitated, they didn't put a blockade up in front of me.

SR: Nice. So how did you decide where you were going to go to college, and how did that all happen?

JK: I began to look at college “view books” as we call them now, the college material, in my junior year in high school. And I started receiving some of them, without asking for them, in the mail, then discovered what they were through that process actually, and then started writing for others from all across the United States. I can even remember getting them from the University of Redlands in California. Here I am in Minnesota, I'd rarely even been out of the state, and never been on an airplane at that point. But I had to be realistic about what I could afford to do. My family was working class. As I said, I'm the eldest of five children, there

wasn't a lot of discretionary income. So I ended up applying—after fantasizing about all of these different places—really applying to the University of Minnesota and Macalester College, which is a very fine institution in St. Paul, Minnesota, that had really some strengths in areas that I was interested in: international affairs, speech and debate, and political science. But I was also pretty pragmatic, and Macalester was a private institution. I got a financial aid award letter from them. I remember this happening, and it was for me a lot of money. But if I compared that amount of money to the actual cost of going there, there was still a big delta that I would have to come up with on my own. And that high school speech teacher really wanted me to go to the University of Minnesota, because he wanted me to debate for the University of Minnesota. And he had contacts with the debate coach at Minnesota, and was able, through those contacts, to learn for me at a much earlier stage than the Minnesota financial aid award process, how much money I would get from Minnesota. And I would get a sufficient amount of money so that the delta, the cost that I would have to come up with, was so much smaller than it was at Macalester. So that's how I chose. It was sort of a back-door, pretty pragmatic way of choosing. But having said that, I felt like I had just entered a candy store, as a child would feel, when I got to the University of Minnesota. I *loved*, I loved—I mean, I use that phrase deliberately—I just felt empowered and emboldened and thrilled with being on that campus in those initial weeks and months of being a freshman there. It was *exactly* the right place for me.

SR: How wonderful.

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JK: Yes, it was.

SR: I know that in your speeches and in your writing, you refer to the culture of a community and a campus. What was it about the culture at the University of Minnesota that made you feel like that?

JK: It was filled with all of the things that I didn't have when I was growing up—all of the choices; the cultural heterogeneity; the intellectual stimulation in so many arenas; the presence of faculty in multiple disciplines, who at that stage were very accessible to me, even as a freshman. I was at the University of Minnesota, I started in 1966. I never had anything other than a full-time faculty member as a teacher in a course. I had instructors who were teaching assistants, but I guess that's an accurate statement in my major, which was speech communications. So I had, even for introductory political science courses taught in this huge lecture format, I had people who were assistant/associate/full professors who were the faculty members. Now, you had recitation sections that were taught by graduate assistants, but I was never shy, I would go in and see those full-time faculty members, and they were *there*, they were accessible.

SR: Wonderful.

JK: So the University of Minnesota was just sort of a playground. It was an intellectual, it was an emotional arena that allowed me to test myself in a variety of new ways. And it was just so big and so complex and so diverse that it was a great choice for me.

SR: It's very exciting. I mean, I can just feel, when you share this. You're so animated that it really must have been a wonderful beginning.

[00:15:23]

JK: Oh, it was, it was.

SR: How nice. Because, you know, you could think about, coming from a small homogeneous town, et cetera, going to someplace like that, some people would have been overwhelmed. But it sounds like you were the opposite.

JK: I think I *was* the opposite, and I do think it's one of the interesting points, because many individuals who had my background might have responded in a different way. But I think for me I had pushed the envelope so much already, when I was in my high school years, that it just worked for me.

SR: That's great. What about your friendships during those years? Other students?

JK: Well I lived in a residence hall and I established friendships with people who lived in the residence halls. But ultimately those friendships lapsed because there wasn't enough shared experiences. I was on the debate team for two years. I think I did it for two years. And I saw some of those.... Actually, I maintained relationships with faculty members more from those years, than other debaters. But the really pivotal experience for me was as a junior—actually it was when I was a sophomore I was selected to be an exchange student to a university in India, Osmania University. And it was a reciprocal exchange program. Minnesota had seven of those reciprocal exchange programs with foreign institutions, where a student from that institution came to Minnesota, and a Minnesota student came and went to study in that institution. So I applied as a sophomore, and I was

originally selected as an alternate. And I was pretty pleased with being an alternate. It was like I had competed for this, but I hadn't gotten it, but I had done very well. And then by a real quirk of fate, the woman who was selected was unable to go, and I was offered the alternative of the choice of going. So I went. It would have been my junior year in college. And that really was a watershed point for me, because that experience transformed and changed me in so many ways, including then when I returned to Minnesota, my choices of individuals that I was developing friendships and relationships with, because that experience was so profound that I wanted to continue to have the elements of that experience in my life back in the U.S.

[00:18:38]

SR: Yeah, that kind of immersion in a whole other culture and world, it's amazing. What a wonderful educational experience.

JK: Yeah, it was pretty dramatic. I studied there in 1968-69, and when I left to go to India in the summer of 1968, when I got on that plane, it's the first time I'd ever been on a plane. So it was a good thing I was as naïve as I was, because that was a huge deal, to be getting on a plane at that point, going to live in a country like India for a full year. Now having travelled.... I think it's hard for people now to imagine that kind of a world. It was also a world in which for one year I didn't communicate with my family except through aerograms, which no longer exist. In fact, I was having a conversation with somebody recently, and I used the word aerogram, and I could see the kind of blank look on his face. And so I had to

explain. But for one year, I wrote to my mom and dad, and they wrote to me, and that was the only way in which we communicated.

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SR: I think that's such an important part. And looking at the historical context *and* the technology that has developed progressively over time is so important. I so appreciate you sharing that, because I think that it is, it was a whole other world. I recall making long distance phone calls was a big deal, and we only talked for a few minutes. It was just another world.

JK: No way to make a phone call at that point in time, because I lived in a hostel, which was a ladies' dormitory basically. There were no phones in the rooms. There was a phone in the warden's house, the woman who was in charge of the hostel. But to book a trunk call—that's what it was called—to the United States, was an arduous process, it was very complicated, and I couldn't afford it, even if I had been able to manage to do the complicated bureaucratic legwork involved in making the call.

SR: Tell me more about what it was like studying there, being there. What was it like?

JK: Well the most important thing I would say is it was very normal. That was one of my overriding senses, is that I would wake up in the morning and I would go about my business, getting ready for the day, and having breakfast, and giggling and chatting with my friends in the hostel. And I would go to classes. Now, they weren't classes in the same way that I had at the University of Minnesota, but it felt normal. I didn't feel.... It's hard to explain. I think I expected to feel

abnormal all the time I was there, and instead I felt comfortable; it felt like I should be there. I felt like other people who were living there. It was my life. It wasn't anything extraordinary, except it *was* extraordinary. But the day-to-day was very ordinary.

I also learned who I was. You get sort of the artifacts around you stripped away when you're all on your own, away from family, friends—away from being basically closeted by the cultural norms and values, customs of your own culture. You sort of come down to who you *are*. And so I learned a lot about what parts of me were really energized by the expectations of others, and what were energized by me, Jolene as a person. I learned a lesson I learn every time I go to another country, which is that cultures are different, and that people are very similar in a lot of core issues, but those cultural differences mean that we manifest and operationalize our desires and needs differently. And those desires and needs *are* different, based on cultures.

I learned that I was probably an Indian in a past life. That's said with some humor, but I don't know that I believe in reincarnation per se, but I fit in, in India, in a way that is not explainable by typical kinds of predictions. In the U.S. I was already a pretty verbal, outspoken, energetic—to use a more positive term—female, in a time when women were less rewarded for having those characteristics.

SR: I recall it well.

JK: I was opinionated, and yet in India I could so easily behave appropriately as a female. And so it was the mothers of my Indian friends who concluded that I had

to have been an Indian in a prior birth. So for what it's worth, that's sort of my history back into other lives.

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SR: That's marvelous. And then in your studies, who were the people teaching, were they Indians?

JK: Yes, they were Indian faculty members. I will say that the formal part of the educational experience was *less* potent, for a variety of reasons, including that in January of that year—this was an academic year that ran from about July to May—in January the university was shut down by a political agitation related to the desire for a part of that state. It was in the state of Andhra Pradesh. There was a group that wanted a smaller state to be created. It was called the Telangana Agitation. And the university was shut down. So my formal learning then began to have to be nurtured through informal channels, rather than the formal channels.

SR: Well *that's* an interesting experience in itself.

JK: Absolutely.

SR: Yeah. Wow. So you were there for one year?

JK: I was there for about a year, not quite a year, and then came back to the University of Minnesota, and had pretty serious re-entry shock—is the slightly formal theoretical term applied to it. In summary, I understood that I had been sort of a marginal—a person who lived on the margins *before* I went, certainly was someone who was living on the margins of sort of the cultural norms when I returned. And I began to try to reestablish relationships that were those residence hall relationships, and that ultimately just didn't work. And I ultimately became

involved with others at the University of Minnesota who had a similar interest in....

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SR: How did you find them, or how did that happen?

JK: Well, I went on a program that was sponsored by the international student advisor's office, and I came back and got a job working as a student assistant for somebody in that office. And that was just the nexus. From that I just met all kinds of other people.

SR: Great.

JK: So I had ways to express my interest in the international and intercultural through relationships that were presented to me.

SR: I'm just curious, because it's part of my personal pathway, whether you got involved in cultural anthropology during any of this in any way.

JK: Sure. I ended up coming back to Minnesota and deciding to study intercultural communication as part of my speech communication degree. And in fact, I was trying to do a double major in political science and speech communication, and then ultimately just decided for pragmatic reasons not to finish all the work for the double major. But my interest in intercultural communication really was crystalized by the time in India, and it gave a focus to a discipline that I had been studying before I left, that I enjoyed. But it was a different focus, and that area of study obviously involved a lot of reading and theory and scrutiny of cultural anthropology as well as psychology. It's a very interdisciplinary approach.

SR: Fascinating. Yeah, it's wonderful. So as you now are back at the university, did you think about your future life being based in academia, or how did that happen?

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JK: Well, I confess that what I knew how to do was go to school well. I didn't know what I "wanted to do," quote unquote, with my life, and my reference earlier to growing up at a time when women were not, for the most part, taught and socialized to want to *be* something. It really came to a head for me at the point when I knew I was going to graduate from college. I then decided to go ahead and go to graduate school. And honestly, I think that choice really was—I didn't know what else to do. So I decided to go to graduate school and pursue a master's and a Ph.D. and ultimately decided to go to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and did that with *some* ... trepidation is the wrong word ... but with a commitment to doing well, but without a clear commitment to what a Ph.D. would allow me to do professionally. So I went and I finished a master's degree after three semesters, and I had a Ford Foundation fellowship from Wisconsin. I mean, it was a full fellowship. So I faced a dilemma really, because I was quite unhappy in that graduate program. It seems to me if you don't have a burning desire to do what it is it's preparing you for, then that explains why I was not particularly happy with it. And on the other hand, I wasn't a quitter. So I decided that I would take the Ford Foundation fellowship and go to India to do research for the second semester of that academic year, the fourth semester of my doctoral program. And I was able to convince my advisor and committee that that would be a useful thing to do with my fellowship money. And my goal was to go to

India to try to, once again, face this issue of where I fit in. At the same time, I would continue to make progress on the doctoral program, but do so away from the formal institutional setting. So I went to India and did the research, but was very clear that I didn't want to go back to the graduate program. So I quit graduate school, quit my Ph.D. program, went back to Minnesota where I had family and friends, and then ultimately got a job working at the International Study and Travel Center at the University of Minnesota, where I became the educational coordinator, and could do part of what I loved.

Just to complete that story, at that point I decided that I wanted to be the director of an international education office in a university—the only career goal I'd ever had that was a formal, specific goal. And I knew enough about universities at that point to know that having a doctorate would give me a great deal more credibility and flexibility in that profession. So I decided to go back to the University of Minnesota speech communication program to finish the doctorate—frankly, because it was a very healthy graduate program. The faculty created a healthy culture for graduate students. And because it was pragmatically easy. You know, I knew Minnesota, I had family there, I had a support system, and if I was going to quit working full-time and make myself poor to go back to graduate school, I knew that I would benefit from that kind of a system of support. So I went back and finished the Ph.D.

[00:33:18]

SR: What was your dissertation topic?

JK: Well, that's another.... One thread that you'll hear throughout much of what I think I've already said is that I was, again, very pragmatic about what it is I did my doctoral dissertation on. I wanted to work with a man named Ernest Bormann, who actually I had known as a high school student, and then as an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. He was just an incredible faculty member at Minnesota who just was sort of the best in a doctoral dissertation advisor any graduate student could ever hope to have.

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SR: That's wonderful.

JK: So I was clear I wanted to work with Ernie, and therefore I chose a doctoral dissertation topic that I knew Ernie would be interested in, and one that *I* would find interesting. So I did a rhetorical analysis of popular self-help books that gave women advice on how to be successful in business. And so it was a topic I liked, it was one I was inherently interested in. I knew it was something *he* would be interested in because I was using a rhetorical analysis methodology that *he* had developed. And it meant that we both could do it, and he could be as brilliant and as giving as he *was* with graduate students. And so I did that as my doctoral dissertation. I'm sort of a dilettante, in the best possible meaning of that word. A lot of people react to it negatively. For me it's always been constructed as a positive characteristic of who I am. I'm interested in lots of things, I'm easily enticed to be interested in lots of things. But I've never been somebody who, you know, will just stick with one thing—although there are common threads in my life. So the choice of a doctoral dissertation topic and the work with Ernie was

pretty pragmatic. I did work in intercultural communication when I was in graduate school, I did organizational communication work, and when I finished my Ph.D., I went to the University of Missouri in Columbia and decided to take a faculty position first, because I knew I could do the faculty position, and from that move to the international education office directorship, but I couldn't go the other way easily.

[00:36:12]

SR: Interesting. So you analyzed it.

JK: Oh yeah, I knew what the choice meant. I did know what the choice meant.

(recording paused) So I worked at the University of Missouri in Columbia for three years. It was not the best fit in terms of my predispositions and skills set. It was an institution that was still very much guided by the past, and by the norms of the past, where it was much more difficult for a new professor, beginning professor particularly, I think a female professor, to find a place. And I also really was not happy living in a college town, which had too many of the emotional evocations of living again in Plato, Minnesota, where people could keep track of what I was doing: my personal, social, and professional life all on top of each other. There were not very many jobs in academe at that time, but in my third year I applied for, and ultimately got this job at Cal State Sacramento as an assistant professor in their department of communication studies. And I figured, eh, I'll move there, I don't have a lot to lose. I was getting ready, really, to say that I was going to quit at Missouri and move back to Minnesota and try to do corporate work, human resources—which my background prepared me for, and if

I could begin in an entry-level position I thought I could do that work quite well. So I got the job in Sacramento, moved across country to Sacramento, to an institution with a very different kind of mission than one I had ever been in. I'd been at major research universities. And I didn't really understand the mission of the California State University. I asked a lot of questions about the role of research, and the place of teaching in the sort of professional portfolio of faculty members. And it was really only after I'd been there for a while that I began to understand that comprehensive university mission, versus the research university mission.

I came into a department with a great department chair, who was very, very helpful in mentoring me. And it was a good fit in all kinds of ways, because it was a university that hadn't hired a lot of new faculty because of the budget cuts in the late seventies and early eighties in California. And here *I* came along, a new faculty member in a department that had a couple of new faculty, and I was very eager to get involved in the university, because I *liked* to be involved, and I had been thwarted in that at Missouri. And so in no time at all I was *too* involved, and I had so many opportunities there for professional growth. I mean it was almost dizzying. A new president came in at the end of my first year there, Don Gerth his name is. And in my second year I was on the senate executive committee—the executive committee of the academic senate—and so got to meet and know Don, and got to meet and know other people across the university, and that just sort of opened up all these opportunities. I became department chair in another one of those quirky things that happen in life. My life is filled with those

sort of unpredictable turns. And then after doing the department chair work for three years I was going to be department chair again for another three-year term, but they opened up an interim assistant vice-president position in central academic affairs, and I applied for that and got it. So then I began to do this administrative work. Did that for eleven years—four years as assistant, then associate—and then seven years as vice-president and then provost, and then went to Northridge. I was selected in November '99 to become the fourth president of Cal State Northridge, but I didn't start until the first of July, so I had a long, long, long president-in-waiting time.

[00:41:21]

SR: Interesting. I just want to go back for a minute to Sacramento, because I'm curious. It sounded like it was just great that you did go to Sacramento. Had you thought at all about going to California?

JK: No, California was not any particular drive or motivator for me. California has a positive valiance—I think it still does—for a lot of people, but there was no particular interest. There were no jobs, and I was at a point where I was unhappy enough where I was that I was planning on making a move regardless. I needed to get out of where I was. So this was a chance to make a move with a professional foundation, a professional parachute/umbrella, however you want to characterize it. And I said to myself, Well, if this doesn't work, I can always move back to Minneapolis and pursue that alternative pathway that I was considering at that moment in time.

SR: Okay. [Please tell me] about your beginnings with Northridge.

[00:42:42]

JK: I officially began at Northridge on the first of July 2000. But as I said, I had had a little over six months as the president-in-waiting. That was long, it was tortuous, to be in both places, Sacramento and Northridge, at the same time, or feeling really the pull of both sets of places with their issues. But I do also believe that for *me* that time was very, very important in helping me understand Cal State Northridge in ways that allowed me to begin officially with a lot surer footing. I would have made mistakes that I didn't make if I hadn't had the opportunity to go and visit the campus. I came down once a month at least, sometimes more often. And I had the opportunity then to have conversations with a very, very wide range of individuals, and that was really influential to me. So I started officially on the first of July. Northridge at that point was still in the work of the earthquake recovery. The president's office was still in a double-wide trailer. The administrative staff was still primarily in these Mylar domes that were really quite awful in terms of the nature of the working conditions. The double-wide trailer was heaven in comparison to where the administrative staff of the university was doing its work. There were still many trailers on parking lots that were the classrooms of the university.

The previous president, Blenda Wilson, to whom I will *always* feel indebted, had done, along with her team, a *remarkable* job in saving that university, in assuring its very existence. And more importantly, what I think a lot of people really don't understand, is that they had been courageous enough to rethink how the university should look physically, how the parts of the university

should be arrayed in relationship to each other. And that planning took time, and it meant that the buildings weren't immediately reconstructed or built, but it meant that ultimately the university that I was able to work at and serve was physically a better place.

[00:46:06]

SR: That's wonderful.

JK: And it took me a little bit of time to understand that. I didn't get it immediately, but I very quickly began to understand the magnitude of their task, and the magnitude of the impact of their choices. So I have just the *highest*, highest regard for her, and those who worked with her—Louanne Kennedy and others. Now, it also, though—the earthquake and the *enormous* institutional energy that had to go into rebuilding, planning, and then the other thing I've often commented on, those offices at the university had to move constantly over that six years, because they were in multiple temporary spaces. We all know how much work is involved in moving our own home, and there's an equivalent amount of work involved in moving one's office or departmental offices. So the energy of the staff of the university was directed toward moving and planning to move and creating new spaces, as well as maintaining the instructional focus of the university during those earthquake recovery years. So when I started, and what I learned as I was the president-in-waiting, was that there was a lot of work that hadn't been attended to, that had, in fact, been going on at other universities, but needed to be done at Northridge. So that was very influential in terms of shaping how it is I said I wanted to focus my time and energy.

The board and the chancellor were quite clear with me that fundraising needed to be a priority. They were also quite clear with me that issues with the community needed to be a priority, because there'd been a lot of tension with primarily the neighbors of the university, around plans that President Wilson had had. So I knew that those were going to be two priorities. The third priority needed to be framed around those aspects of the running of the university, a sort of behind-the-scenes aspect that *hadn't* received attention. So I call that becoming a more user-friendly university. It was a ubiquitous term, phrase, somewhat ambiguous in terms of goals. It was a catchall. And I understood it as a catchall.

[00:49:16] And then finally I had conversations with Louanne Kennedy, who had been the interim president, been the provost before, was the provost again. She and I had been colleagues as provosts when I was at Sacramento. And she and her colleagues in academic affairs said to me, "Our graduation rates are terrible. Will you consider taking that on as a major priority?" And it was an area of interest that I had, because I had been doing a lot of work on emerging issues in accountability measures for public higher education. So it was just a perfect confluence of our interests. So that was the fourth priority, improving graduation rates. And those priorities really became the foundation for the way in which I and the leadership team focused our work during the entire time that I was at Northridge. We added academic excellence. I sort of naïvely thought everybody would understand that we would sustain academic excellence, which was a silly

and sort of a—well it was naïve, that’s all I can say. And it needed to be more explicit as a priority of the institution.

[00:50:41] And then over time we also understood that we needed more aspiration in the way in which we talked about the future of the university. So we talked about becoming a learning institution. Early on, prior to that, in terms of the community, mending relationships, building relationships and connections with the community. And that was both externally and internally. I had—actually, I think this was mine—began to describe the university as the intellectual, economic, and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley. And then people wanted me not to limit it to the San Fernando Valley, and that’s why we added “and beyond”. So in every speech I would give, every opportunity I had to introduce myself anywhere in the community, I said I was “Jolene Koester, president of California State University Northridge, which *is* the intellectual, economic, and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond.” And I could say that in my sleep and not trip over the words. And really faced—the university was an unknown, even in the San Fernando Valley, which just shocked me. So at any rate, I digress. Those were the priorities.

[00:52:12]

SR: Okay. And so you’re entering this whole cultural community as it was then, and I think as you continue you’ll help lead us to where it is now, what’s different, what’s the same, what changed, how did you change it. But let’s go back to then, the beginning, and talk about that whole Los Angeles area. I always found it fascinating to read about the choice of finally getting the school to *be* in the San

Fernando Valley. That was very interesting. But so many of the students are first generation going to college, students which you relate to.

[00:53:06]

JK: Right.

SR: And I think it's so marvelous that with this excellent faculty, and interviewing Louanne, for example, similar, that you have these people of excellence who also understood in their hearts what it's like for a first-generation college entry student. Tell me about what the culture was like when you first got there.

JK: Well there were a couple of characteristics of the culture I think that are most important. One, it was then, as it is now, very culturally, racially, ethnically, religiously, linguistically, heterogeneous for the students. And there was, I think, almost a bimodal distribution probably in terms of socio-economic background. There were a large number of individuals there who came from upper middle class wealthier families, but there were also large numbers of students—an equally large number of students for whom the family background was lower socio-economic. The campus itself, those who work there, were by and large, individuals who chose to be there, who found it satisfying to work with the students we had. The faculty had, again, I think different profiles. There were some who had come, the more senior faculty, who had come to the university probably with much more of a focus and interest in research, than they were able to build as part of their professional career. On the other hand, there were faculty there who either by choice or by adaptation, really came to understand and appreciate the role of a comprehensive university.

[00:55:12] Faculty at Northridge were described to me in a fairly common way, as I was considering applying there, and as I was trying to understand the place before I started. And the conversations would go like this: these would be conversations I would have with others in the CSU. CSU is like a small family in some ways. And I would say, “So what do you know about Cal State Northridge?” And I would get the following answer multiple times, “You know, they have a really good program in ‘X,’ and a really good program in ‘Y,’ and a really good program in ‘Z.’ Faculty in those programs are outstanding. But they’re pretty quiet about what they do. They don’t talk about how good they are, and nobody really knows that they’re as good as they are.” Then I would have another conversation and it would be programs “B”, “C”, and “D.” And then I would have another conversation, and it would be “T”, “U”, and “V.” So the common thread was excellence, as well as they’re quiet about it. And the third is that nobody knows how good they are.

So my sense of Northridge when I got there was that the parts didn’t add up, that individual faculty members and staff members thought that what they did was good, they had pride in their work. They thought Department “X” did a good job. I’m not going to use any department names. They thought that their department was extraordinary, and that they were special, but they didn’t see that excellence as leading to a judgment of excellence for the institution as a whole. And so it was very clear to me that one of my jobs, one of my responsibilities was to help the whole have the judgment of excellent, that the parts needed to be celebrated and identified as excellent in order to have the *whole* celebrated and

judged as excellent. The official priority was community relationships, internally and externally—those were my code words for not only rapprochement with the neighbors’ embeddedness and presence in the San Fernando Valley, and then ultimately Los Angeles. We had to do that incrementally, but also internally so that there would be a sense of community that would spread beyond a small number of people, and that there was a judgment of excellence by those who were there, not just of *their* work, but of the university that they were part of. So I really said to myself from the beginning, I have to be a president that is both externally focused and internally focused. Sometimes presidents would be told, “You have to be externally focused. You have to be internally focused.” For me, which was dizzying in terms of the demands on my calendar, I understood that I needed to be present in both arenas in order to accomplish what that institution needed to have accomplished.

[00:59:14]

SR: Yeah. And you came at a time when it’s this building and recovery time. It’s an extraordinary time. And then to.... As I am looking, you were involved and became involved, in all kinds of community boards.

JK: Yes, I did. And I needed to do that, because the university presence needed to be marked. I don’t know how else to say it. There needed to be somebody from the university in the major civic organizations, first in the valley. To begin with, I only worked in the valley. I declined working in the greater Los Angeles [area], like the L.A. Chamber [of Commerce], L.A. World Affairs, the Trusteeship, et cetera. I did the Valley Economic Alliance; VICA, the Valley Industry

Commerce Association; I went to as many of those meetings as I could because first the *valley* had to celebrate the university. That was the general region that we were located in. And that's where a lot of our students came from. So that's where I focused attention. And then ultimately as we judged that we had a better footing there, then we decided—we, the leadership team—that I would also then join the chamber, become involved in some of the county activities, the World Affairs Council—you know, the variety of things that represent the greater Los Angeles area. Because Northridge is an interesting place. And other parts of Los Angeles I think might have similar stories. There's no *there* there. Northridge is not a city, it's part of Los Angeles. We had a city councilperson who was located very close to the university, but in some ways we were a problem for him, we weren't a celebration. Because we were a big university, we created trouble with the neighbors: fraternities, sorority issues, the use of our athletic fields, the traffic we brought in. So it's not like we could immediately go to—first it was Hal Bernson and then Greg Smith, and in the final year Mitch Englander. There was no elected government that was really for Northridge. There were five city council people who had parts of their district in the San Fernando Valley, for L.A. City Council. So it was a very complicated community organization, community—trying to solidify respect and influence and reputation in the community.

[01:02:18]

SR: Well it seems, like as you said, you started incrementally closer and then moved out.

JK: Yes. It's very hard to judge the accomplishments that are achieved during one's own work. I do believe that the university became far better known in Los Angeles over the eleven and a half years that I and those working with me were seeking to achieve that goal. I think there's still a great deal of work that needs to be done. It's tough when you have a USC, a UCLA, those really fine liberal arts institutions. And with the university that didn't pay attention to identifying itself, strengthening the knowledge of what it was in the community until post-earthquake.

[01:03:22]

SR: I know just from my brief experience being there recently, I felt this kind of wonderful warmth of the people, and people like each other. And was it that way when you entered, or did you help to nurture it to become that way—or both?

JK: Well, I think both. I think that people who work there for the most part like working there, and have had good relationships with a lot of others. I hope that what I added to that inherent positive predisposition was a very public valuing of the contributions of everyone to the institutional mission and to student success, and to a very public valuing of everybody being part of the community. I'm pretty extroverted. I've always enjoyed talking with people. And so one of the things that I did sort of by happenstance after I got there, is that I started going around to all the offices to meet the people who worked in the offices. It just sort of happened first because I wanted to know where things were. And then I got such positive reaction to it, after people got over being freaked out by the fact that the president of the university had walked into their office, and their question was,

“What did I do wrong?” But then I systematically set out to visit offices to learn who the staff were. I systematically set out to know who the faculty were. I always invited all of the full-time faculty to coffee—an hour-long coffee in groups. I always knew the student leadership, and I would also try to meet with other student groups every year. So by the time I left Northridge, I knew people in all the offices, and I knew things about who they were as people, and their contributions to the university. They were very helpful to me, because they helped me learn what was going on in the university. So I think in that way I added to a culture of collegiality, and also because I was very explicit about the need for collaboration rather than territoriality among the administrative leadership. That pervaded and influenced the campus. I will say for the record that one of the compliments paid to me when I left—well, that was truly a compliment that I will always cherish in my memory—came from a custodian who I ran into at a men’s soccer match in the last semester that I was at Northridge. I would regularly go to athletic events, and student theater, and musical productions and things. And he and I then sat together at that soccer match. He could understand soccer better than I could, so he was a translator for me of what was going on. But he said, “You know, Jolene, you made us all feel like we were part of the family.”

[01:07:28]

SR: That’s wonderful.

JK: And I was very touched by that, and I hope that’s what I helped people feel.

SR: That's a *great* contribution, absolutely. That's wonderful. Well also you were facing all kinds of rather daunting challenges from what I have been reading in the communication with the budget cutbacks and Schwarzenegger and all. What was that all about?

[01:07:56]

JK: You know, I think I said that I did twelve budgets—"I", "we"—I mean, I should never use "I". "I" is such an inappropriate pronoun for leadership, because no president, no "I", ever gets anything done without multiple others. So officially on the record let me say I never pulled anything off on my own. It was always with others. I think we did twelve budgets, and I think four of them didn't include cuts to big parts of the budget. So it was a normal feature to be juggling. It's not that we didn't have some new revenue, because we were growing enrollment, and then we would have the student fee money that would come in, that would be part of our base budget. But it was never a time of plenty, budgeting was always done in a time of constrained resources. Now we managed to get ahead of the last years of budget reductions when I was there, because both Harry Hellenbrand and I were old CSU folks. I mean *old* CSU folks. The two of us combined had I-don't-know-how-many years of CSU experience—Harry going back to Cal State San Bernardino as a faculty member, and I think he was an associate dean. And then he was at Cal Poly LSO, and I was at Sacramento. And we *knew* that sometime in the latter decade of the 2000s there would be another major budget reduction. It had these smaller budget reductions at the beginning of the decade, 2002, '3, '4, I think. And we knew. We didn't know why it would happen; we

didn't know how serious it would be; we didn't know what form it would take; but we knew. So we started planning *ahead of* the actual reductions, because we'd had the history. There'd been a major budget reduction every decade, back to the seventies. So we began to do some things that were different than we would have done. We didn't allocate all the new money. We were chintzy. We started *reallocating*. We started doing some things differently, small projects that would produce economic efficiencies for the institution. So we were better positioned to handle the budget cuts when they did hit in full force—not that it was easy—but this was also a leadership team that for the most part, not 100 percent, but for the most part figured out how to decide on handling those budget reductions in a collaborative, rather than a competitive, way, and made the right decisions.

[01:11:28]

SR: That's terrific. I don't remember the letters, but there was something I read about: You requested or you worked with others to try to have Schwarzenegger not eliminate programs that reached out to these students.

JK: Yeah. They were called outreach programs, but they were really programs designed to support in elementary, middle, and high school, the development of aspirations among primarily students of color, but there was an overlap between race and ethnicity and lower socio-economic status—to have them understand and grow in believing that college was a route for them. At various points in time, I don't know why this happens at the state level: there were attacks on those kind of programs. They were small, and it's all part of the State's ... not

schizophrenia, but ... reaction, to try to not spend money, to allow those from previously underrepresented groups to have special access to anything.

[01:12:55]

SR: Uh-huh, but you somehow worked around that.

JK: Well, I think the CSU, the chancellor, Chancellor Reed, was very, very up-front in opposing that. He was a champion, so it was easy to be a champion with him.

SR: Okay, that's good. (recording paused)

JK: One of the challenges for any president is the vibrancy, the accuracy, the reliability, the frequency of internal communication with faculty, staff, students—and those who are right around the university, because they really become part of the university community as well. There's another set of challenges with the larger external community in terms of communication. But one of the challenges at Northridge for me, for us initially, was that communication from the president, from the leadership team, to a pretty dispersed, physically, campus community—it's a large campus, there are a lot of people. Right now—and it was as I was leaving—a small city of 40,000 people. So how *do* you get messages to them about decisions that are made? And there was a formal governance structure, and one honors that formal governance structure and uses it to communicate *official* messages as well as some *unofficial* messages. I described to you that I put a lot of time into developing the *informal* communication with walking around campus. I actually scheduled about three hours every week for me to be on campus. That was the goal. We didn't always make it. Sometimes, though, I would end up with *more* time, because if I had cancellations or changes in

schedules, I would “make it up”, quote, unquote. But those times were for me to be out on campus just informally talking to staff in department offices and students. I visited every academic department office, every semester—kept track. I wouldn’t have remembered where I’d been. But I did that very, very systematically. And then I would go out, I would find where students were, and I would talk with them, or I would talk with the custodians, the gardeners, maintenance people. I would wave and chat, and they would be driving around in their little carts.

We also evolved different ways of communicating more formally to the larger campus community during the time that I was there evolving choices and techniques. To begin with, I think both Blenda, and then Louanne when she was interim president, had a column, sort of a weekly or monthly newsletter that did go out, I think electronically, that was called “From the President’s Desk”. I don’t remember at what point in time we decided that that was no longer influential or useful. We would communicate regularly on major issues, and we always tried to decide who the e-mail should come from. For example, with the budgets, when we were giving tactical information, it came from the administration and finance vice-president. When it was something strategic or bigger, more global, then our rule of thumb is that it would come out from me. We communicated about major issues. And I actually, as I say, can’t come up with a specific example, but the start of the academic year, the thanks at the end of the academic year....

[01:17:28]

SR: Well, 9-11.

JK: Nine-eleven, absolutely a great example.

SR: I recall reading what you did, yeah.

JK: But over time we struggled with other ways to use the electronic technologies that are now available. We started a blog, but sort of a quasi-blog, because after discussing blogs with other colleagues across the country who had used them, I decided that it was not *really* what I wanted to do, to have a blog that was interactive. We could just end up being completely bogged down in trying to answer all of the comments that somebody would make in a blog. It's open to anybody. So the blog appeared almost really in a new version of what had been "From the President's Desk".

We used—not as frequently, I think, as we would do if I was in the role now—videos, to students and/or to the campus community. I think the most notable video was the one that I did when I knew we were going to have to do furloughs. The conversation among the president's staff was that doing a video would be a more personal way to convey that set of messages around something that affected people so personally, their paycheck. So we did a couple of university-wide meetings that were available to anybody, where people could ask questions of me and others. And then I did this video that described to people what was going to be taking place in terms of furloughs that went to everybody. I've never watched the video. As I said to you on the phone, I don't really like watching myself on video. But we used videos a couple more times, and I think it's a technology that a president now would be well advised to try to use, because

the university has greater band width, the e-mail system, and people now are very used to watching videos, and I watch CNN videos on my i-phone, so I just think it's a technology that ought to be used to make a large institution—to bridge the distance that a large institution creates for a president or a leadership team.

[01:20:28]

SR: Well certainly, just in looking at what happened, and how it increased over the years, it's wonderful how you can reach all of these people so quickly.

JK: Yeah. You know, though, Susan, I would also say that one of the reasons I believe the videos that I *did* do, although small in number, were effective, is that for the most part people also knew me as a person. They'd had that face-to-face interaction with me, so that the more sterile, if you will, more distant, non-immediate video also allowed them to conjure up, to use in a positive way, to recall their more genuine face-to-face interactions with me. So that the authenticity of the face-to-face communication influences the judgment of authenticity in the video.

SR: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, it really does. (recording paused)

JK: Northridge really needed to change how it thought about the university's responsibility for students' graduation from the institution. As I indicated, one of my major priorities from the very beginning was improving student graduation and retention rates. Frankly, this was something that if you go back and read my convocation addresses, I talked about in every single convocation address. And we were right to anticipate that it would become a major public accountability issue. So again we were a little bit ahead of the curve. We began working on this

before it became a big public issue, public debate and focus on universities. We were a university like many universities, that assumed that students came to us and that we were sort of a neutral agent in whether or not they graduated or not. I think the sensibilities of a lot of folks was it's up to the student to decide if he or she wants to graduate. And what we did was to reorient that understanding to one that said, *We* do something, as a university that impedes/interferes/inhibits becomes blocks to students graduating. So what's *our* responsibility to helping them graduate? A lot of students at Northridge came in not baccalaureate prepared in English and math. So what is the appropriate type of remediation courses? Just using that as an example, if you take a student who comes in not prepared in either English or math, for baccalaureate-level work, and put them in six to nine units of remediation, out of a twelve to fifteen-unit course load, first of all they're not taking courses that are necessarily going to excite them about being in college. And secondly, they're not earning credit toward a degree. So they're automatically extending the amount of time that they have to spend in the institution. Now, that the remediation needs to take place is indisputable. But the nature of that remediation, how the pedagogy occurs, its relationship to baccalaureate-level work, all of that needed to be looked at. In addition, we needed to do something, some *things*, to improve our own business processes. We had a general education program that was filled with so many requirements and so many exceptions and so many refinements that *faculty members* couldn't explain the requirements. So how could we hold students accountable for understanding those requirements and completing them? And to the faculty's

credit at Northridge, they took that on and revived the general education program, reduced the number of units, cleaned it up, made it understandable.

[01:25:20]

SR: Great.

JK: Oh yeah, it was really.... I mean, they were quite remarkable. The faculty senate was quite remarkable in the work that they did when I was there.

SR: Wonderful.

JK: So we also built support programs. We had a great partnership between academic affairs and student affairs in coming together to create ways to have students develop an alliance with each other, and an identification with the institution. And one of our success stories is that over the first seven, eight, nine years—it takes that long, Susan—we increased the graduation rates and we reduced the achievement gap between students from previously underrepresented groups and other students. We cut that gap in more than half. So it was hard work, but hard work defined by multiple-pronged approaches, a kind of a comprehensive buying, affirming, that it was important to the institution to help students graduate. And this wonderful partnership between academic and student affairs. It was an all-university responsibility.

SR: That's marvelous.

JK: Yeah, it was. It was.

SR: That's a great model.

JK: Yeah, it was, it was a great set of teamwork partnerships. Everybody knew it was their job.

[01:27:06]

SR: And it established, I guess, models that have been built upon since, hopefully.

JK: I hope so, and I hope that sustained changes in leadership. So yes, yes, I do.

Now the other topic that you suggested I might want to talk a little bit about is how as a president, in my years as president, we dealt with controversies. I will simply say first that we had, we often felt, more than our share of controversies. I doubt that we had more than our share—I think that we just sometimes felt almost beleaguered or assaulted by them because they were so many, and they become so demanding. Universities now, as always, have constituencies that believe they have the right to tell the university what and how to do things. And those constituencies have principles, things that are in their view right and wrong—research on animals, the behavior of faculty members, the behavior of staff members, even though that behavior may be completely in their private lives, nothing to do with their work in the university. The behavior and actions of students. The university's decision about which academic programs to offer. University decisions about what programs to have on our public radio station. The consequences of accidents and natural disasters and phenomena right around the university. The increasing attention of the public to security on universities. The presence, or the alleged presence, of somebody with a gun on a campus. I would simply say that the variety of issues—and I'll just put quotes around the word "issues" because it's a term that I'm using to cover a wide range of pretty disparate communication challenges to a university—are such that we had a pretty well-grooved process that we used to try to appropriately respond to

those kinds of challenges. And that well-grooved process was one where we had an understanding that any vice-president, or my chief of staff, or me obviously, but my chief of staff often on my behalf, could call what we called an issues management meeting where they would bring together in a room all the key individuals who had information and responsibility to a particular issue that *might* become public, that *had* become public, that *would* become public, or that was *evolving* over time. And that issues management group had the task of collecting as much information as we had, of agreeing on what the university's position would be—something we called the message points, or the message bullets—and we agreed on who would be the university spokesperson. Also that issues management group would make any recommendations to me for official university action. Let me just give you a couple of examples of how we used this.

We had a situation early on—I think it would have been in about the fourth or fifth year—with a parent who took his child out of a daycare program that was run in conjunction with an academic program. And he made a citizen's arrest, or asked our police officers to make a citizen's arrest, and the law was such that they had to do it, of a daycare worker. And the details escape me somewhat, but I think it had to do with rough treatment of a child. So as soon as that happened, the police folks left. I think the provost—I'm not sure of the direct chain of command—but somebody.... You have to make sure that the culture of the leadership of the campus is such that that information immediately goes up. I think it was the provost [who] called an issues management meeting because that's news.

[01:33:09]

SR: Absolutely.

JK: And they figured out how that should be handled, and what the public response should be, but they also made some recommendations to me related to that child learning environment, in terms of what the university should do, which I agreed we needed to do, and we ultimately, I think, stopped offering that particular part of the curriculum, because we didn't have the resources to sustain it at an appropriate level of staffing. That's one example.

A second example is that we had a faculty member who had a private blog that had as its subject, hotels in Thailand in which prostitution took place. We had received a complaint about this blog from outside the university, asking us to shut down the blog. I'm just going to do this in simple, not in the whole complexity. We had several points in time in which we had action of an issues management around this, that ultimately culminated in those who were sending the complaints to the president's office, going to the local newspaper, and there was a story. Now, this was a private blog, it wasn't on the university's website, we saw no evidence that the faculty member had used university resources. People do have a right to have their private lives. We also had no evidence of—let me be very careful about the words I use here—we had no evidence of an impact on his professional responsibilities. I'll try to leave that at a fairly high level of ambiguity. But there was a lot of attention on this, and so we had a process by which we handled the evolving nature of that.

Another example was we had a student who was an Iranian American, who was in Iran, staying with her parents, doing some preliminary work for a journalism master's project in which she was videotaping women's organizations in Iran. And she was ultimately arrested by the Iranian secret police and held in Evin Prison. So again, we had an issues management group, and we had people who pulled together information, made recommendations to me about actions we needed to take, and created the university's public position, as well as agreed who would be the spokesperson. And that kind of issue, that kind of incident, that kind of work focus was in fact a fairly frequent, fairly demanding, time-intensive part of what took place.

[01:37:06]

SR: That's a whole layer.

JK: Yes.

SR: Huge.

JK: Yes.

SR: That's very interesting. (recording paused)

JK: You had earlier asked me about the state of the campus when I arrived, given the reconstruction from the earthquake, and I vehemently praised, I hope, President Wilson and her leadership team in terms of reshaping, redirecting, if you will, the physical resources of the campus. One of the other elements that happened at Northridge during my service there as president is that we tried to honor the principles and values in that. There was a new master plan for the campus—physical master plan for layout and location of buildings and shrubbery, greenery,

pathways, pedestrian walkways, et cetera. But I hope as well that history will show that during the years that I and others worked together at Northridge we added to, and we really enhanced, the physical capacity of the university to deliver its mission effectively. We did a fair amount of building—most of it not on the State side or with State support, but through auxiliaries. We had a renovation of the student union, which was very, very important. We built three parking structures, which over time the student union and one parking structure, and then the student rec center which I'll talk about more directly, really is shifting the locus of activity, the physical locus of activity on the campus, more to the east side. We built three different areas that were new for eating and social gathering during the time that I was at Northridge, under the auspices of the University Corporation. And we built the new science building which *was* built with State money, also on the east side of the campus. So there was, during those eleven and a half years, real and genuine improvements to the physical characteristics and capacity of the university. And really one of the sweetnesses, if that is a word, one of the things that just always makes me smile, was student leaders, about midway through the time I was there, when the campus really started to look pretty, would come in from their statewide meetings with presidents of other associated students—this is student government—they would come in and they would say, “Jolene, we were at such-and-such a campus, and we were at such-and-such a campus, and you know, we have the most *beautiful* campus in the CSU.” And I would always smile and say, “Yes, I agree.” Now, there are several other beautiful CSU campuses, but they *noticed* that the physical

beauty of their campus was great, and they embraced that and celebrated it. They felt proud because of it. And I would simply say something I learned from Louanne Kennedy—our students deserve to have a beautiful learning environment, that it makes a difference. So the physical beauty of the campus, I think, and the capacity of the campus to serve people well, changed.

There were two major building projects that are signatures of my time at Northridge: One that I was able to see in operation and be filled with great joy, and that's the Valley Performing Arts Center. And the other is the student recreation center. So let me quickly talk about the student recreation center, which was just getting ready to be opened as I left. And I only was able to tour it as it was being constructed, and I tried to climb the rock wall. I got about a third of the way up before I left, but I did try rock climbing, which I was never ever going to be able to have a chance to do, since I would never be able to do it unless I was in that kind of a controlled, safe environment. But the student rec center, the project out of the student union, under the leadership of Debra Hammond and her team, and in student affairs William Watkins and Terry Piper who was the previous vice-president for student affairs, and they built this marvelous student rec center that I think is changing the face of the student presence at Northridge. There are thousands of students in there every week. They hang out there. It's a place where you sit and you do some of your homework in between exercising. And it's just an incredibly up-to-date modern facility. Everybody was so proud of their efforts, and I think students at Northridge are really benefiting from it. So

that's one building that I *wished* I had been able to *use*. I wish it had come online a year or so before I left.

[01:43:19] The other is the Valley Performing Arts Center, which is a major performance venue, as well as instructional space, on the very south side of the campus, a project that by all *reasonable* estimates should have never been brought to fruition. There were a number of times when we were just a hair's breadth away from shutting the whole thing down, because the pieces just weren't there to move forward. It's a facility that we began thinking about in, I think, my second year at Northridge, when the arts dean and the provost said, "You know, this is something that we've had on the campus master plan for years. We don't have a decent facility for arts performances. We have a fine theater department, we have a fine music department, but we have no inside venue that's got any capacity or any modern features. And we need more facilities." That's sort of kind of a gross overview. And so we conducted a feasibility study of what we would put in a new performance venue, where we would locate it, and sort of the internal university issues with it. We completed that, I believe, in the spring of 2002. Ironically, in June of that year, Zev Yaroslavsky, who was, I think he still is, one of the L.A. County supervisors, called me. I was on jury duty, and he said, "Jolene, we're working on a bond measure for the County to try to raise some County money to improve the natural science museum, to improve LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], as a way of trying to achieve greater support in the outer areas of the county. We'd like to know if Cal State Northridge would *like* an auxiliary or satellite site for LACMA that could have some money from

this bond issue.” I said, “No, we don’t want a LACMA site at Cal State Northridge, we want a performing arts center. This part of Los Angeles does not have a venue that will hold fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hundred people. Our arts programs at Northridge are underfacilitated—if there is such a word—so that’s what I would like, if you want to think about including Northridge.” So Northridge was included and a performing arts center was floated as part of this bond issue. And the bond issue failed by two percentage points—you needed two-thirds. The County rules were two-thirds. But by that time we had gone public with the idea of having a performing arts center at Northridge. And I had to make a decision about whether or not we were going to go forward with trying to raise about half of the money from private funds, and about a little more than half from State funds, because of the instructional facilities that were going to be in the larger performing arts center. So I said, “Let’s go ahead”.

[01:47:33] Now, we had no business doing it, from the standpoint of thinking that we could raise all of the private money—and we did in fact have trouble raising all the private money, because Northridge did not have a donor base, Northridge did not have a mature development operation. I mean, we were skating on the thinnest of thin ice while still not sinking. But risks not taken are gains not achieved. And so we went ahead with this. You know, there’s many steps in this process, and I’m not going to belabor all of the steps, but one critical moment was whether or not a State bond issue would pass that would provide the *State* funding. That passed. Then there were other critical moments where we needed to have some major gifts in order to keep sustaining the *private*

fundraising side of it. And while we never got the naming gift, we got two and a half million here, two million here, seven million there. We managed to keep the private fundraising going, and then ultimately did get approval from the board of trustees, which was also—we had to work very hard to be sure that we had a financial plan in back of what we would do if the private fundraising didn't culminate in all of the money that we needed. Then we started construction, and then the State halted all construction on State-funded construction projects as part of the 2008 December, January 2009 concerns about the budget. So we had a two-month shutdown of this big massive construction project. So the opening of it was delayed. We opened it in the fall of 2010. We had the grand opening. We actually had the inaugural of the Valley Performing Arts Center January 2011. We did a couple of concerts in there that were thank you concerts in the fall. It is a beautiful building. Most people—not everybody—but most people who enter it are stunned by the simplicity of design, the elegance. We had an architect from a Minneapolis architectural firm that was the architectural firm on it, but this architect loved the building, and she worked with three people on our campus who also treated that building's design as if it was their own building, their own home.

[01:51:02]

SR: How wonderful.

JK: And every decision, the architect and these three people—Jerry Luedders, Bob Bucker, and Colin Donahue—forever they can know that they created this *splendid* building. They made every decision as if it was important. There was

nothing that was trivial. And so it's an esthetically beautiful facility that provides a kind of a public common for the San Fernando Valley, for people to come to, that's on the university campus. It's wonderful for our students. We have agreements that allow several performances every year by university ensembles in this large hall. It's too big for most of these ensembles to fill, but nevertheless it gives the Northridge students a chance to perform in this splendid hall. There's a small black box theater that is just efficient and elegant in design, and allows the theater department to have a great performance space. There's labs for the theater department. It is a—well let me just say when I go still.... Well, I'll describe actually those concerts that we had before it officially opened, that were thank you concerts: one was for the construction workers and their families, and we invited university people to it; and then the second was for the university community. And then there was the gala that opened it. And then there was another—it was a ballet. And in all of those performances, the audience responded with enthusiasm, with standing ovations, et cetera. For me, the high was turning around from my seat near the front—of course they gave me great seats always—but turning around and looking at this hall filled with either university people or community people who wouldn't have been at the university for any other reason. And I would cry. I loved it, because it was experiencing the dream.

SR: Exactly.

JK: So the Valley Performing Arts Center is one of those buildings, along with the student recreation center, that are part of what took place when I was at Northridge. (recording paused)

[01:54:24]

SR: Now we're into two hours plus, which is great.

JK: A key aspect of my approach to leadership at Northridge was to hope for, to expect, and sometimes demand, a collaborative approach to leadership, teamwork, to do work non silos. Universities are inherently cross-divisional organizations: you can't make a decision in one part of the organization without the implementation of that decision having repercussions elsewhere. So from the beginning with the leadership team, my expectation was that they learn how to work across those divisions, not be territorial, not work in silos, but vet appropriately and collaboratively decisions together. That involved not just the vice-presidents, but also their associate vice-presidents and those directors that worked with them. And I do think that we had generally, not a perfect, but for the most part, collaborative approach to leadership and decision-making in the university. I hope that's sustained over time. It's one of those things where not every leader, not every good leader, has that particular desire, so there's no guarantee. But I think it contributed to people enjoying each other, to respecting each other, to working well with each other, to being good *university* officers, not an officer of a particular division. And for me, it's axiomatic in terms of the way in which one would lead a university. And so it was critical to the way in which I

approached the work with the vice-presidents and the leadership of the university over time.

[01:56:47] So what do I hope for the future of Cal State Northridge?

Well, that's a little hard, because after a year and a half, there is a new president, and there are elements and work going forward, and I don't want to say anything that in any way implies positives or negatives about what she and her team are doing. But my hope for the university in general is that it is able, and the new leadership is able, to continue to build the prestige—the brand, if you will—of the university; that it continues to grow and influence in reputation in the greater Los Angeles and national arenas; that it continues to hold onto its comprehensive university mission, which is one that focuses it primarily to serve the needs of that region. Not a research university—it shouldn't be a research university, that's not what it's intended to be. I hope that it continues to serve as the pathway to the middle class for so many underrepresented students—or more accurately, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who haven't had access necessarily to the best education at the high school level, or elementary, middle school. I hope that over time the university's role in intercollegiate athletics is sustained and supported in new and different ways. I hope that the community begins to—well, community and alums—begin to give back, give larger amounts of their resources to support the university. It's a place that I will *always* just care deeply about.

SR: Well, as I said when I began, it's an honor to share this with you, and to collaborate in producing your oral history. And clearly you have nurtured the

university in so many ways. We all so appreciate you sharing your perspectives.

Thank you so much.

JK: You're welcome, and I'll just say as a final note, the decision to step down as president was a very difficult one, but after eleven and a half years, *I* wanted the chance to try to reinvent myself one more time. And that's what I'm trying to do.

SR: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]