



For immediate release — Wednesday, January 11, 2017

Oral history project celebrates U of L's 50th anniversary with 50 Voices

The [50 Voices](#) oral history project has woven a tapestry of perspectives about the University of Lethbridge over the past 50 years. From the early days, when Dr. Van Christou (LLD '84) worked to convince the provincial government of the need for a university in Lethbridge, to the turn of the century, when Dr. Bryan Kolb was shocked but pleased by then-president Dr. Howard Tennant's promise to construct a neuroscience building, the project captures the U of L's impressive emergence as a leading university.

Undertaken as an anniversary project, the Centre for Oral History and Tradition (COHT) wanted to portray a diverse assortment of voices—faculty, staff, students, alumni and administrators—in the 50 Voices project. COHT was still in its infancy when it adopted the project to commemorate the University's 50th anniversary. Dr. Jenna Bailey, a post-doctoral fellow with COHT, suggested the idea as she had been involved in a similar project at the University of Sussex.

The 50 Voices project committee, which includes Professor Emeritus Dr. Jim Tagg, Dr. Chris Hosgood, Dr. Heidi MacDonald and U of L archivist Mike Perry, brought Tracy McNab (BASc '81, MA '09) on board as project manager to begin planning for 50 Voices. The beauty of oral history is that it provides a way to tell a story from multiple perspectives, something that befits the U of L's beginnings.

"I don't think a traditional top-down narrative suits the U of L; it was a grassroots university," says McNab.

"The two best features of oral history are highlighted in this project," says MacDonald, a U of L history professor and COHT director. "First, oral history allows us to interview people from a variety of walks of life and I think we've come through. Second, the richness of oral history allows the participants to interpret the event as they saw it."

After McNab set up the terms of reference and the study had been approved by the Human Subject Research Committee, the difficult process of selecting interviewees started. They built on the interviews done by Tagg for the First Generation Oral History Project. They wanted an

equal number of men's and women's voices. After seeking help from the U of L's 50th anniversary steering committee and numerous other constituencies, names started pouring in and, once the 50 had been chosen, invitations were sent.

"They were thrilled to be asked. Only one person declined our invitation in favour of someone else in the department they thought would be more representative," says MacDonald. "Tracy deserves an awful lot of credit for that; oral history is all about relationship and communication."

Students were also involved in the process, whether conducting interviews or transcribing them. In addition to Jenna Bailey, who served as a consultant on the project, Johanna DeVisser, Diane McKenzie, Nicole McMullan and Jasmine Saler conducted the interviews, transcribed them and chose representative excerpts for the 50 Voices website.

"It was amazing and I really enjoyed working on the project," says Diane McKenzie (BA '16), a graduate student who conducted 13 interviews for 50 Voices. "The people I interviewed were fantastic. They are so interesting and have accomplished so much in their lives. This project is a great way to capture the U of L's history."

A theme that emerged from the interviews was that the U of L was a community from its very early days. That's a sentiment that Sheila Matson, one of the 50 Voices, agrees with. Matson, who joined the University in 1968 as support staff in the Registrar's office, says the U of L was like a second home—a place where she felt welcomed and safe, had adventures and was encouraged to grow.

"I was a kid when I started and it's wonderful to still be around this place," says Matson. "I feel like I have a real history here. My first husband, Grant Pisko (BASC '70), and my current husband, Alan Matson (BASC '71, BEd '77), are both alums. My son Matt (Pisko) (BSc '97) and my daughter Lindsay (Pisko Ganske) (BA, BMgt '01) studied here and worked as lifeguards at the pool. Our family has really been linked with the U of L."

The full interviews will be deposited in the University Archives and will be available on the web through the library for generations of students, community members and scholars in the years ahead.

"This is truly a legacy gift for the University," says Perry. "By acquiring, preserving and making this project available to the wider community, the 50 Voices Oral History Project will make a lasting contribution to the University's historical record."

"The interviews provide context and emotion and the result is an account with breadth and depth," says McNab.

This news release can be found [online](#).

—30—

Contact:

Caroline Zentner, public affairs advisor
403-394-3975 or 403-795-5403 (cell)

caroline.zentner@uleth.ca