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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE December 2, 1987

July B Thomas
(Signature - Interviewee)

400 Sunset Drive
(Address)
Wickliffe, Ky 41091

DATE 12-2-87

Michelle A Thomas
(Signature - Witness)

Thomas, Judy
MUT-YS-12

SOCIETY OF YEAGER SCHOLARS

TAPE #12

December 2, 1987

AN INTERVIEW WITH: Ms. Judy Thomas, Aspland Oil, Inc.

CONDUCTED BY: Michele Shank

TRANSCRIBED & TYPED BY: Gina Kehali Kates

MUH - YS - 12

This is one in a series of taped interviews on history of the Society of Yeager Scholars. My name is Michele Shank and with me today, on December 2, 1987, is Mrs. Judy Thomas, Director of Foundations, for Ashland Oil, Incorporated.

MS: Okay, Judy. We're ready to go. First of all, let's learn a little bit about you. Uh, where were you born?

JT: Well, I was born in Hope, Arkansas. My uh, parents, both, are from that Southwestern Arkansas area. Uh, my father was with the U.S. Prison system, and there was a federal prison at Texarkana, Arkansas, where he uh, started with the prison system. Uh, he was transferred then to the federal prison at Ashland, and that's how we came to be in Ashland. And they came to Ashland uh, when I was three years old, so I consider myself essentially a native of Kentucky. (Mmm-hmm) That's the home I've known (all your life, right?) Mmm-hmm. (And you went to Ashland schools?) I did. I did. I ah, finished high school at a small high school, just outside of Ashland, Fairview High School. Uh, and then, had two years of college at Ashland Community College; at that time it was called uh, Ashland Center for the University of Kentucky. I then started to work at Ashland Oil, deciding that uh, I would...that I didn't see much of a future for myself. I was in accounting and the opportunities for a woman in accounting, I was told, were not great. So, that was my excuse, and I was also beginning to think I wanted to get married to a young man, so that was my rationalization, which of course, upon reflection, was not good. But that uh, that is how I went to work at Ashland Oil, as a Secretary. Uh, I...was there about six years and I was promoted to be the Secretary to a gentleman who was

executive vice-president for external affairs. So, I was then working in the senior management suite, uh, and had an opportunity to just observe at close range, how a major corporation functions - how the senior management ah, thinks, how they approach problems. It was an education in itself to uh...to uh have that opportunity. Ah, as the years went by, obviously I learned alot. I learned that uh, my rationalization for uh, dropping out of college had been incorrect. I....(Did you marry the young man?) I did. (You did.) I did. Uh...I ah, was beginning to see opportunities opening up for women. Uh, when I started for Ashland Oil, uh, the highest a woman could aspire to be was an executive secretary. (When was this? The time of the year) This was in...it...I started in 1964 and, and uh, it was the mid-70's-it was not early. It was into the mid-70's. (But you were with Ashland Oil about ten years really) Yes. Uh-huh. Things were beginning to change uh, and, and opportunities were opening up. But I recognized that I had to have a degree in order to take advantage of the opportunities that would be there, if I were prepared to take advantage of them. Uh, towards the uh, late seventies, 1978, the young man I was married to and I began to realize that things weren't working out, uh, we had grown up so to speak, and we weren't the same twenty year olds that we were when we were married. Ah, so that marriage ended and I...I recognized that it was at a point in my life that it was go back to school and do it. And it was something that was really within myself that I had...it was growing over the years, that I had regretted that I had not finished college. And uh, also, of course, the uh opportunities for advancement within uh, the company, so I started back to school at Marshall. And uh, I was uh, working (this was

executive vice-president for external affairs. So, I was then working in the senior management suite, uh, and had an opportunity to just observe at close range, how a major corporation functions - how the senior management ah, thinks, how they approach problems. It was an education in itself to uh...to uh have that opportunity. Ah, as the years went by, obviously I learned a lot. I learned that uh, my rationalization for uh, dropping out of college had been incorrect. I....(Did you marry the young man?) I did. (You did.) I did. Uh...I ah, was beginning to see opportunities opening up for women. Uh, when I started for Ashland Oil, uh, the highest a woman could aspire to be was an executive secretary. (When was this? The time of the year) This was in...it...I started in 1964 and, and uh, it was the mid-70's-it was not early. It was into the mid-70's. (But you were with Ashland Oil about ten years really) Yes. Uh-huh. Things were beginning to change uh, and, and opportunities were opening up. But I recognized that I had to have a degree in order to take advantage of the opportunities that would be there, if I were prepared to take advantage of them. Uh, towards the uh, late seventies, 1978, the young man I was married to and I began to realize that things weren't working out, uh, we had grown up so to speak, and we weren't the same twenty year olds that we were when we were married. Ah, so that marriage ended and I...I recognized that it was at a point in my life that it was go back to school and do it. And it was something that was really within myself that I had...it was growing over the years, that I had regretted that I had not finished college. And uh, also, of course, the uh opportunities for advancement within uh, the company, so I started back to school at Marshall. And uh, I was uh, working (this was

1978) This was 1978. Uh, I continued to push, working full-time. Uh, within about a year, year and a half after I started back to school, I was taking...I started out taking one three hour class, because I hadn't been in school in a number of years, and I was of course, a little bit frightened at the prospect of going back, and not knowing just how I could cope with it. Uh, but uh, then the second semester, I took six hours. Uh, within the next year, the uh, the gentleman that I had been working for's secretary retired, and I was promoted from a secretarial position, into what's termed as exempt position, in advertising, with the...at Ashland Oil. And (Did you...did they feel you had expertise for this or did you just, by) Well, that was an area that the gentleman I had worked for supervised, and so I did have knowledge of it, and it was a very entry-level position, and it was an opportunity for me to learn more. (And it was a promotion) And it was a promotion. And it was....a change of career-track, if you would. It was out of the secretarial track, into a different career-track. Uh...so, I continued school; it took me seven years of night school, to finish, un, and it was un, it wasn't easy, but I, at the same time, I had a lot of responsibility. I was doing a good bit of traveling, in the nature of advertising, of course. Uh, there's no way around that, so, it was..it was one of those things that I kept plugging along at it. uh, but i...it just wasn't possible for me to...totally focus on me going to school. I had to continue working. Uh, so (You were unmarried at the time?) That's right. So uh, I un, I kept at it, but I did finish. So I, think I got mighty...it was the first year that Dale Witzacke was here, so it was about 1983, 84. Uh, but I finished, and I was un, very

proud of that. Um, within a year after I got my degree, I was named President of the Ashland Oil Foundation.

MS: Do you feel that degree was a definite....

JT: A definite, very, very definite um, um, asset to...to receiving that promotion. I don't think I would have been considered for it without a degree. Um, the uh, the entire organization of that function was uh, revamped and uh, it's ...it's been expanded quite dramatically, uh, and in the seven...six....no, it's been five years since I was named president.

MS: When you first came into the Ashland Foundation, basically, what were they doing?

JT: Okay, the Foundation itself had been established in 1968 by the company to be it's primary philanthropic arm. Uh, it was set up, uh, very much a standard setup for companies to establish foundations and fund them through the donation of...by the corporation to the foundation an, excess appreciated properties, real estate. Uh, Ashland Oil was, of course, a petroleum marketer, and during the course of that business, they acquired a lot of...a good bit of property, speculatively for possible service stations, and of course, many times, those properties did not pan out as they originally had anticipated, and they were not used for the purposes for which they purposed...for which they were purchased. Uh, so there was...within any company, there's a...many times a pull of real estate properties that were purchased and not used for their original intention, and they become of ...of no use an, immediate use to the company, so they can be donated [coughs] many times they will appreciate in value, and they can be donated to the

foundation. The foundation in turn, could sell those properties, and use those funds for charitable purposes. That was the original way that the foundation was established. And it pretty much was a...a very low key operation in those early years, in the...1958, into the early seventies. In the...early in the mid-seventies, Ashland Oil grew dramatically. Uh, increased in size, quite substantially. Profits were extremely good during those times. And, companies were just about in that period of time, late sixties, early seventies, coming into that period of time of corporate, social responsibility. And beginning to be much more a...received request from uh, outside organizations, communities, those areas where...they operated and organizations and institutions looking to them for support, for their operations. And the companies recognizing the need to.....that it did have a responsibility in that area. Uh, the foundation began to move in a different direction, and there was another arm, so to speak, within the corporation, that began to be the primary philanthropic arm. It was called the uh, the community and education support committee. And that was the arm of the company, that began to be...provide the most financial support for charitable purposes.

hS: Where does these funds come from?

JT: They came directly out of the corporation. [inaudible] Directly out of the corporation, (not [inaudible]) Not in through any matter of anything else. (And who served on this committee?) Ah, various management just over the years. (just within the corporation) various management people within the corporation. The foundation was beginning

to...to operate exclusively as the processor of the matching gifts program for employees, where the foundation provided a two for one match to employee gifts, to educational institutions, An, United Way contributions, that employees made, and a very limited number of what could be termed as discretionary gifts of probably less than \$50,000 a year. So, it was operating on a budget of 6-700,000 a year; that would be it's very top an, amount, that it ever gave away in the that period of tim....in those years. The an, the corporate area, on the other hand, was growing substantially, and an, very quickly went over giving away a million dollars a year, and then went over giving over 2 million a year, so that it was, it was quite a substantial program.

MS: And the....the corporate hand then uh, the people that sat on that committee (mmm-hmm) decided who receive the gifts? (That's right...that's right) and if someone was applying for help from Ashland Oil, they had to....

JT: They...it..it was very confusing because people would not know what to do. They didn't know whether to go [coughs] to the people that...that works on the corporate committee; many people knew about the foundation, and would naturally assume that the foundation would be the proper an, area for them to go to, so it...it was quite confusing to outside constituents, as to how they approached Ashland Oil and to whom they went. So, that...that state was set up for a number of years, 10-15 years that existed in that manner. When I was named president of the foundation, uh, as I said, we completely reorganized [clears throat] and, but I was given responsibility for both of those functions, and it was all brought under one umbrella, and the decision was made to

revert back that the foundation would be the primary philanthropic arm of the company. And, even though it would not likely be able to be totally funded in the manner that it had previously been funded through the sale of properties, that the corporation would provide the funding to the foundation, uh, and it is essentially working as a corporate flow-through foundation. The corporation simply provides us month to month funds for operation.

MS: Okay. What is your budget?

JT: At the present time, it will run about 3-3 1/2 million.

MS: And mainly, this money goes towards education?

JT: Primarily 60%.

MS: I know, though, I see the ads on the t.v. for uh, Ashland Oil's educational and they're very, very good. Is that your advertising department?

JT: That is the corporate advertising department, and that is money that is over and above the money that I'm...am responsible for. That's uh, uh, money that uh, would otherwise be used to talk about Ashland Oil. (Mmm-hmm, but they're choosing to talk about education). They're choosing to talk about education. That program was developed about 5 years ago, and I was in the meeting when ah, we sat in the boardroom talking about uh, the plans for the coming year, about uh, for advertising. Um, (pause) Ashland had for a number of years, supported Marshall University and the University of Kentucky, primarily, and their sports broadcasting, radio and t.v. broadcasting. (mmm-hmm) Uh, and of course, when you...when you support that kind of broadcast, you have to...you get time...you get commercial spots, and when you have those spots, you have to have

educating children, that parents had to be responsible, that uh, community leaders had a responsibility, that uh, companies and other businesses in areas had responsibilities to uh, support education, that for too long, we had looked uh, had been guilty at looking at teachers without a true sense of respect for what they did. That they were very dedicated individuals, uh, that they had...played a very vital role in our society of educating our children. And that we had not been sufficiently rewarding them monetarily and that we had not given them the...the respect of our society in general. So, that...those were the...the underlying reasons for Ashland's entry into this program of uh...of our educational advocacy program.

MS: Mmm-hmm. Does Ashland Oil have any type of special teacher award or anything like that, that honors teachers?

JT: Ah...we have just started a program in Ohio, it's our first...for the first five years the program...the advertising program uh, on education, was exclusively done in Kentucky and West Virginia. Ah, just in this year, starting this fall, ah, we begin to do some similar advertising in Ohio and working in conjunction with the Ohio Education Association. Ah, that program is going to honor outstanding teachers and the official announcement of that program will be made Saturday, at a meeting of the Ohio Educational Association, in Columbus. But there will be an, an award, five awards actually, for individual teachers, and five awards for uh, team teaching, building level teaching. And the nominations can be made by anyone: applications...uh, entry forms will be made available throughout... (Is this a monetary award?) yes, it will be uh, a total amount of \$50,000, there will be five \$5,000

something to say in them. So, for a number of years, Ashland had been, every year, we'd have to think of new commercials to put in, and the nature of Ashland Oil is such that we really had very few products that were known under the same brand name, across a wide region because so much of our uh, gasoline marketing were...was done under private brand labels. Uh, so we really didn't have one particular product that we could talk about, so, what was...we talked about was Ashland Oil, and it's called Corporate Image Advertising, just talking about what Ashland Oil was, that it was a concerned corporate citizen. And in this meeting, in the boardroom uh, Bob McKown and Bob Bell, who is administrative vice-president at the time. Ah, we're responsible for the...the advertising area, and the studies had just begun to be released on the state of education within America, and it was of course, of great concern to uh, to everyone that...that we were realizing that education in our elementary secondary schools is not what it needed to be. And that was even truer in Kentucky and West Virginia, where Ashland has it's home and has major marketing area. So, that was....that was one of the reasons that uh, we felt, our management felt that Ashland should, instead of spending it's money to develop commercials to talk about Ashland Oil, should really begin to step out and to uh, to uh, talk about issues in education. Not that we had answers to them, but that we could just...use the company's position as a major corporation to increase public awareness of the need for individuals and companies to be aware of the problem, one and to get involved. Either through (education) volunteer time or through monetary systems, that...that people begin...needed to recognize that they had a responsibility, that education could not...teachers

awards for individuals and five \$5,000 awards for teens.

So. [MS inaudible]that's right.

MS: That's exciting. [coughs] Let's talk a little bit about Marshall University. Before the Yeager program was in place, what kind of support was Ashland Oil giving to Marshall University?

JT: Um, Ashland was giving.....had long...long...had, you know, for a number of years, had supported various activities at Marshall. We were giving oh, probably at uh, a total of amount of about a hundred thousand a year. Uh, we were giving to the uh, to the president's discretionary fund, and we provided some funding for the chemistry department, we provided some nursing scholarships. Uh, we uh....within the school of business uh, we had a...some small gifts, so it was spread over a wide variety....(question inaudible) Yes. Yes. Yes. Some...but not of a major proportion, but there wasa portion of that was designated for the Big Green.

MS: When did you first get wind of a special scholarship program?

JT: Well, it was uh, after a luncheon [coughs (excuse me)] Ah, just as I have come from today, it was at one of the new...at one of the luncheons that Dale Nitzschke had instituted to have legislat...legislative leaders come on campus to speak, and I had been invited that day to come to the luncheon, and after the luncheon, Dale asked me if I could stay for just a few minutes, that he had someone he wanted to introduce to me, who had something very important that he needed to discuss with me, so after lunch, uh, Dale Nitzschke, Keith Scott, uh....Joe Hunnicutt and Carolyn Hunter and I went over to a corner and Dale introduced me to

Joe Hunnicutt, and to Carolyn Hunter, and...Joe then began to tell me about this vision [laughter] that he had, driving the highway, that he...that his interest in seeing Marshall uh, recognized for uh, for something other than...than sports, although he was an avid sports enthusiast, wanted...was trying...was looking for som...a special program that could put Marshall on the map. And...and he needed a hook for ...he kept saying...you know, something that would really make it really, really special, and he wanted these special kids, and he had this...this concept...all...all fixed in his mind, but he couldn't think of the hook, and then suddenly, he said, it just came to him [laughter] Chuck Yeager. Uh...and if he could get Chuck Yeager to, to uh, lend his support and his name to this program, and then it could just develop, he...he had all these ideas that he could just develop from that. But what they needed [clears throat] then, right...right at that moment, they...they wanted to talk to the governor about it, to develop some...some p.r. around this uh, if they already had Chuck Yeager, Chuck Yeager's endorsement of...uh, and his agreement to uh, to be the mentor of the program [clears throat] but Joe Hunnicutt specifically stated that they needed some...some seed money, that they could develop some brochures, a...uh, a tape, and the other promotional items that would be needed to get this program sort of on...into the public to...to uh, give it publicity. (Hmm-hmm) He had um, a plan to announce the program officially uh, at the National Press Club in Washington. And he wanted to have this tape ready to show at that time; they wanted to make the tape at the Air & Space Museum. General Yeager had agreed to be available at a specific time to do that.

Uh...he had been...he had a firm in mind that he knew could

a brochure. And he had a lot of needs. And the university did not have the money to...to be able to fund this. It was totally outside of their ability to handle. And it wasn't a huge amount of money, but, in order to do it right, and...if Joe Hunnicutt does anything, he does it right. [laughter] (We know that for sure!) Uh...[inaudible] he...he just needed some seed money. So, Ashland Oil agreed to contribute, I think, it was \$25,000, if my memory serves me correctly, and I think Governor Moore agreed to put in \$50,000. So, that was the seed money that uh, the Yeager program began to develop the uh, (What convinced you that this was the right thing for you to do?)

[mixed replies-inaudible] My first reaction when Joe said, Chuck Yeager, you know, will be the...the name and it would be the Yeager's Scholar Society, I said, I don...I don't see Chuck Yeager as being...I had read his book, and I knew that Chuck Yeager did not...had not graduated from high school and had gone immediately into the Air Force, and of course I knew that he had, in essence, uh, through the Air Force, had completed several degrees, but he had never portrayed himself as being [clears throat] particularly supportive of education. But uh, the more I thought about it, then I recognized that uh, that he was, he had a charisma about him, he had...he had done something that no one else had done at that time, obviously, in breaking the sound barrier, he was...he had great name recognition, and he had never received really, the recognition that he deserved, particularly in his home state. And I recognized that, that uh, it was...it was just a, a real unique match for an institution to be able to have a person of his caliber, to be able to be their...their spokesperson, so to speak.

(Um-hmm) Uh, and so uh, to lend his support to the program, and then I, through Joe, learned that he was indeed very committed to the program, that he certainly uh, was...would be the first person to say that uh, young people today needed education, above everything else, that he had happen to have simply be lucky enough to uh, as he keeps saying, being in the right place at the right time. And had had opportunities that...that young people now could not really expect to have happen.

[break in tape-end of side 1]

MS: So, when did you first meet Chuck Yeager, then?

JT: I met Chuck Yeager in Washington, at the uh, announcement.

(Uh-huh) I uh, I went to Washington. (Did you go up on the train with everybody?) No, I didn't go on the train. I had uh, an opportunity...there was a company plane going up, so [laughter] so I opted to fly. But, I did uh, attend the announcement, the press conference that morning, at the uh, national press club, and uh, it was very exciting to be there with all of the uh, Marshall people, and uh...to uh, have the Governor there, and General Yeager was there, and to see the reaction of uh, of those with the press to Chuck Yeager and his endorsement and sponsorship of the program. And I recognized that it was going to be a very exciting thing (Um-hmm) for Marshall and that uh, it was going to be something that would put Marshall in a real spotlight, in a real unique position, to uh, to attract some...some scholars that would never think of coming to Marshall University, uh, without this type of unique program.

MS: Now when...when Dale and Joe requested the seed money, uh, what...are you able to say "Yes" on \$25,000 without going higher up? Are you the decision maker?

JT: No, I'm not the decision maker. I can recommend, and I did take it back and uh, uh, presented it both to the...the committee, with the Foundation, and to Ashland's senior management, to make them aware of the program. And received support from....

MS: What was their initial feelings that....

JT: [clears throat] It was a little bit...it was [MS starts talking at same time] there was a little bit of skepticism but, still, there was that uh, thing of, well, if they feel that this can really be a program that can bring this level of student to Marshall, and can...can offer Marshall something of a unique niche, if you would, in attracting the scholars, and we know that there is a lot of competition for these top students, and uh, we had been involved and provided support for Transylvania University, in their Thomas Jefferson program, and, so we were familiar with that program, and what it had done for that small university, in a very short period of time. And what twenty kids initially, and then as time goes on, forty and sixty and so on, but what those kids of the caliber that...that these scholars we knew would be, the uh, the impact that they can have across the campus, in every facet of university life, that uh, it...it...we knew that it could be an, a real turning point for Marshall University.

MS: So that decision was made with John Hall (mmm-nmm) included in this meeting, of course.

JT: Hmm-hmm. So, it was an, a consensus with support across all of Ashland's management to uh, to go ahead with this seed money. Um...after the an, program of course was announced, I had another call from Joe, saying that we need to sit down and we need to explore what Ashland can do toward's support for the program. So, we began to talk and had several meetings, and uh, [clears throat] they were very helpful that Ashland could committ to two million dollars, initially. And...i told them that I felt that was really out of the question, at...during the period of time. The industry that Ashland is in, the oil industry, uh, is very volital and it's uh, it's very difficult to...to project beyond three months of what is going to be happening within the oil industry, so ah, that's a major, major commitment. The company had never made such a commitment of that level and I...I simply did not feel that it would fly, and uh, so I...I counseled against making that level of request, and we then agreed that...that uh, Marshall would submit a request for funding of one million dollars for the Yeager program, and uh, that was...i presented that again to the foundation board and to Ashland's senior management and that was supported; one of the primary reasons that level of support was supported was uh, that Ashland has more employees who are graduates of Marshall University than any other colleges represented within our employ base.

MS: That's interesting enough. So actually they felt like they were supporting the university as well as the Yeager scholar students (that's right) the image of the university (exactly, exactly).

JT: As I say, the...the impact the students can have across the university and everything that they are involved with, is...is uh, dramatic and I think it's being proved now the scholars are on campus, and although I'm not here on any regular basis, if I have met them, and I'm sure at the end of this year, when evaluations are made, uh, that there will be definitely an impact seen in...in every area of this university, by these students.

MS: In the Yeager program, Judy, we emphasize the word leadership and creative thinking, and critical thinking and what do you feel the definition of leadership is?

JT: I think leadership is the ability to think clearly, on your own, on your feet, so to speak, and to stand up and...and so positive in that thinking and reaching a conclusion, and being unafraid to stand up and state that position and convince others that that position is the way they should go.

MS: Okay. Well, thank you very much for this interview. I appreciate it.

JT: You're very welcome.

End of interview.