

**Frederick Becker, M.D.**

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**Interview Session: June 19, 2008**

**Chapter 00A**

***Interview Identifier***

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[00:08]

This is

Lesley Williams Brunet about to record an oral history interview. (inaudible) couldn't hear from Mr. Gray since then. But I'd like to talk about how you first became aware of MD Anderson and your view of it. You know, before you came here.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[00:53]

You want to test your recording device?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[00:55]

I tested them before I came over here.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[00:59]

But now you're here.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[01:00]

Right. (inaudible) There has to be an easier way. When did you first become aware of MD Anderson?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[01:23]

Test it.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[01:25]

Yes, I can see. It has meters.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[01:28]

OK. But you're sure the tape is recording it?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[01:29]

Yes we --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[01:30]

Because I'm not go--

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[01:32]

Well I wanted to know how -- how you -- how Dr. [Parker?] convinced you to come.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[01:44]

When you're ready. You ready?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[01:46]

Yeah, I'm ready.

## ***Chapter 01: R. Lee Clark Chooses His Chairman of Pathology***

A: Joining MD Anderson/Coming to Texas

Story Codes:

A: Joining MD Anderson; C: Portraits; A: Professional Path; C: Evolution of Career; A: Professional Values, Ethics, Purpose; A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents; A: Personal Background; C: Funny Stories;

<sup>1</sup> B: Research; B: MD Anderson Culture; D: On Texas and Texans; A: Joining MD Anderson; A: Personal Background; B: MD Anderson History; B: MD Anderson Snapshot; C

Abstract:

In this chapter, Dr. Becker discusses how he was recruited to MD Anderson to be the chair of the Department of Pathology.

### ***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[01:50]

In late 1975 I was contacted by Dr. Jose Trujillo, who was the head department chairman -- titles have changed frequently here -- of Laboratory Medicine; and someone I had known through serving on NIH grant review committees, and someone I had learned to respect and admire for his humanity and also for his foresightedness in being one of the first to apply then modern chromosomal techniques to the analysis of leukemia. He approached me and told me that the then chairman of pathology, Dr. William Russell, was going to retire and that a search committee was being established and that he, Dr. Trujillo, was on that search committee and wanted to present my name to the search committee: Would I be interested in coming to the MD Anderson. My response was, "What is the MD Anderson?" He told me a good deal about the fact that it was in Houston, Texas; that it was a young cancer center, one of the first to be designated a comprehensive cancer center; that it had been in existence for approximately 30 years; spent a great deal of its effort in growth; that it had some extraordinarily distinguished clinical oncologists, whose names I did know, and those were Dr. Frei and Dr. Freireich [oral history interview], and asked if I would be willing to let him submit my credentials. I told him that I was willing to let him submit my credentials, but I was probably not at all interested in coming to Houston, Texas, which was almost an unknown site to me.

Then I was contacted by Dr. Clark's office -- R. Lee Clark's office -- who said that Dr. Clark was going to be in New York and wanted to interview with me. He called on a one-on-one basis because my name had been submitted, and the search committee expressed great interest in me as a potential chairman, the next chairman of Anatomic Pathology. I had an extraordinary visit with Dr. Clark. Anything with Dr. Clark was extraordinary because he was extraordinary. We met first for a cocktail, and he told me about what had been done here, and his realization that now having devoted a great deal of the energy of the place to physical growth, clinical growth, clinical research growth ... He told me some of the people whose names are all enshrined, that they were looking forward to the next phase of the MD Anderson, and that that phase would encompass in particular a lot of modernization of clinical facilities, reevaluation of research, and

certainly bringing in new clinical chiefs like myself who were both clinically adept and had significant research reputation.

As part of this interview or discussion, he then took me to dinner at the Marco Polo Club in the Waldorf-Astoria. I quite impressed by this because as a New Yorker, I had never heard of the Marco Polo Club, and here was this ultimate Texan who was enormously impressive -- vital, intelligent, and handsome. Just an unbelievable character. What he didn't tell me was that we were having dinner with the board of trustees of the American Cancer Society. That was rather a tickle to me because it was an unusual way to have dinner and an interview. Now I might say that although I had been the acting chairman of pathology at NYU, and the director of pathology and research at Bellevue Hospital, the interesting thing was that I was only tangentially or partially involved in cancer research. A good deal of my research was liver research. At the time I had written a couple of books on liver disease. It was an interesting dinner, because it was a social dinner of the major figures who ran the Cancer Society, which means that they had nothing to do with dinner; they were mostly important political and financial figures who sat on the board.

Dr. Clark made me laugh because he announced that I was the next chairman of pathology at the MD Anderson, which I remarked was a big surprise to me. And there after dinner we remanded to his hotel room, which was in the -- if I remember correctly, the Plaza Hotel-- wherein Dr. Clark broke out a bottle of Crown Royal, and we proceeded to drink and negotiate. But at the time, Dr. Clark, who was such a powerful personality, negotiated in a way that I was not used to. I had looked at several chairmanships of pathology, and his discussion was mostly about what a wonderful opportunity it was, how I would love Tex and Houston, and only tangentially did we discuss what the job was, if it paid anything, were there any laboratories.

Towards around two in the morning, Clark turned to me and said, "I have become convinced that you are the person I want as the next chairman of pathology." And I said that I would have to have a lot more information than that, and so on. Dr. Clark remarked -- and I will never forget that -- he realized that I was in the center of medicine and so forth in this great city of New York, but I had an opportunity to be a pioneer and come to Houston. I remarked that I wasn't of a pioneer type, but I was the person who usually would come in after the pioneers and class it up a little bit. Then I went home, woke my wife, and told her that I had met this extraordinary guy and blew the whole job with my last remark -- that I came in after the pioneers. Turned out he thought that was very funny. So I agreed to come to Houston, and be interviewed, and see what was what, and maybe get a little more tangible idea of what they were going to offer.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[11:27]

And you said that you thought you blew it?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[11:30]

Blew the job!

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[11:31]

But that suggests that you were a little interested then?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[11:37]

Well, no. It was my analysis. I'm an analytic person with a terrifying sense of humor. She did say, "Who cares. I don't want to go to Houston anyhow." We had a beautiful apartment at 75th Street and Madison Avenue, and I had more than a little respect at NYU. Albeit I was not then chosen to be the chairman at NYU because there was a changing of the old guard. They were looking for more people who were then not so much inbred, and they wanted perhaps someone who was more purely a researcher -- a usual thing. But I could have stayed on without any problem. And I had several other offers on the table. I was be -- looking at a job in California and elsewhere. So I came to Houston.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[12:44]

What time of year of was that?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[12:46]

Early 1976.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[12:50]

Winter still?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[12:51]

There's no winter here.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[12:52]

Well, I mean --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[12:53]

There's no winter here.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[12:55]

What time --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[12:55]

Around January. (laughter)

*Lesley Williams Brunet*

[12:57]

OK.

## **Chapter 02: Stories: The Pathology Department in 1976 and MD Anderson as a Texas Institution**

### **B: Building the Institution**

#### **Story Codes**

B: Research; B: MD Anderson Culture; D: On Texas and Texans; A: Joining MD Anderson; A: Personal Background; B: MD Anderson History; B: MD Anderson Snapshot;

Abstract:

In this chapter, Dr. Becker discusses the Department of Pathology at MD Anderson when he arrived in 1976 and his impressions of the MD Anderson President, Dr. R. Lee Clark.

#### ***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[13:01]

Something like that. And I was shown the physical plant, I was shown what was pathology, I was given a sketch of what I would inherit, et cetera. I met with a number of the people in the department, and those people were very consistent in the sense that many of them were world-renown anatomic pathologists with specialties in a variety of disciplines. None of them did any research in a laboratory whatsoever.

#### ***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[13:41]

They just did clinical?

#### ***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[13:43]

Yeah, no, that was perfectly all right. Interestingly enough, when I asked one of them -- there's a tendency of people to complain to potential chairmen. I mean, I've had that happen a dozen times. When I finally asked one, "Well, why do you stay? Your office is terrible, you tell me, the support is awful, and so on." The answer was quite consistent, and that was that no where in the world would they have the kind of material -- meaning, to a pathologist, pathologic specimens -- that they had here, and therefore the opportunity to study them and to publish them. There were some indications they were quite concerned about me as a possible chairman because I came from the most academic research-oriented department in the country. That was NYU Department of Pathology. Albeit --

#### ***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[14:58]

The most competitive -- what did you say -- in the country?

#### ***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[15:02]

Probably the most outstanding research department -- research-oriented department. It was a department that had a large number of people in it who did no pathology; they just did research. It managed to produce four or five members of the National Academy and the Nobel Prize in

addition. But there were also pathologists who could compete with anybody in the world in their knowledge of pathology. And it was a very exciting place.

I then interviewed with the search committee, which was made up of a lot of people who were here practically all their lives. They came as fellows and never left.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[15:53]

Do you recall who they were?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[15:55]

Oh yeah, I recall a number of them, but there's -- Jose Trujillo was one of them. The other one that was the greatest fun for me was Taylor Wharton, because Taylor Wharton -- albeit a superb gynecologist, oncologist -- was probably one of the people -- probably still is one of the people -- who personifies the non-Texan's image of a Texan. He was tall, warm, reticent, and extraordinarily dubious that someone of my ilk would want to be here, that I could adjust to the Texas way of life. We got into a large discussion of my image of what I thought Houston would be in the years to come. Well, I said, "Right now it's flat, everything's one-story high, and I believe that before we would pass on, we're going to see tall buildings all over Houston." Then he said, "Impossible." He later told me in an anecdote publically at an award's ceremony that he went to see Dr. Clark and said, "Dr. Clark, this candidate, this Becker, is extraordinarily smart, and very verbal, but he won't fit in here. He never sits down. He's too active." No, no, now that's -- and we always laughed about that, Taylor and I, in years to come because in years to come, he claimed that I was one of the people who carried Clark's image forward better than almost anybody who'd ever been here, and I took that as a giant compliment. So we became great friends.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:14]

I'm hoping to talk of him.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:17]

Bring a beer. The --

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:21]

Zimmerman wants to do it in a bar too.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:24]

Zimmerman -- well that's more stories than you can reach today.



***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:35]

So you --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:36]

Much to my surprise, they offered me the job.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:42]

Well now why would you be surprised?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:46]

Because --

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:47]

You're not --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:47]

-- up until then, the institution was very limited in the backgrounds of people who came here. I'm a New York Jewish person. There were no such human beings here except Mel Samuels, who's a brilliant person who actually created the therapy that later Lance Armstrong got and cured him. There was a reputation here of it being very southern and very restrictive. There were people who weren't from Texas -- Bob Hickey, J Freireich [oral history interview], Tom Frei -- but it had a very restrictive image. Hm?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[19:51]

I was going to say Gutterman [oral history interview], but he's not from New York.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[19:54]

No, but he was not at a level at that time of leadership. And in fact, if you read the book that Dr. Olson's writing, which I read, Dr. Clark talking to the head of Sloan Kettering Memorial and asking him how could he enlarge the image of the Anderson said, "You've got to stop" -- I forget which person at the Sloan Kettering told him this -- "You've got to stop. You've got to bring in people of other dimensions." It's considered a very WASPy, narrow, southern place.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[20:45]

Male, too.

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[20:47]

Hm?

**Lesley Williams Brunet**

[20:47]

Male.

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[20:49]

Oh, yeah, male. Of course. Of course.

**Lesley Williams Brunet**

[20:53]

Well it was the medical center.

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[20:55]

I'll get back to the fact that I was first to ever appoint a chairman of a depart-- a female chairman of department -- whose name is Margaret Kripke [oral history interview]. In any case they asked me to come back, but the then director, Bob Hickey and his wife, came to visit us in our apartment in New York, which is an amusing anecdote because Dr. Hickey's wife, Rose, was a very well and respected sculptress. She walked into our beautiful apartment in New York at 75th Street and Madison Avenue, and her first comment was, "You're going to leave this to come to Houston? You must be crazy!" At which point Bob Hickey said, "Can I have a martini?" (laughs) He felt he made a tactical error in bringing Rose along.

So we came back for a visit, and that visit was characterized by two incidents -- positive incidents. The first was that another acquaintance of mine was the head of the graduate school, and his name was Al Knudson [oral history interview]. Al's reputation as a geneticist thinker and human being was universally at the highest level. He did something very clever with his wife. I almost said "at that time wife" because they divorced soon after. That was he gave a dinner party for us in which everything served at the dinner party came from Texas. All the fruits, the vegetables, the meats, et cetera. Not the wine because at that time, wine hadn't come to Houston -- to Texas -- which it has now, and I drink wine from the Becker vineyard, which is not mine unfortunately, but I'm supportive of it. And there's a wine called Becker Vineyard Iconoclast, and I drink that wine. It seems so appropriate. And we were impressed by the fact that that was all available here.

And then we went to a dinner party that the Hickeys gave at which point Dr. Clark, the gorgeous Dr. Clark, came over, took my beautiful wife by her arm, and led her away. My wife had had an interesting life up until she met me because she was a renowned ballerina at by the age of 18 and had lived in London, and New York, and Hollywood, and had been in the movies and in television -- none of which she was very thrilled about. She's quite happy being my wife and having a little baby. She spoke to Dr. Clark for about ten minutes, and she came back and she

looked at me -- and this is a woman who is quite cynical and certainly about so-called famous people and celebrity -- and she said, "Dynamite. That man is dynamite."

So we had many discussions. I looked at a couple of other chairs, and then accepted the chair here. There's two aspects of that acceptance -- or three. First, the people in the Northeast felt that I was playing an elaborate practical joke on them. That I was really not going to take the job; that I was just teasing them. Second, one of my dearest friends, a former fellow and later quite famous research pathologist, said, "You'll be lynched within one month. They're going to kill you." Third, I was given an enormous book filled with Texas jokes at a dinner in farewell. My wife and I decided that this was pretty much like an adventure, and that if Neil Armstrong could land on the moon, we could move to Houston, Texas. Actually later we realized he was better prepared to land on the moon than we were to move to Houston, Texas. But that's another story.

## **Chapter 03: *Stories: A Vision for Pathology and an Office for a New VP of Research***

### **A: Overview**

#### **Story Codes:**

A: Personal Background; B: MD Anderson Culture; B: Working Environment; B: MD Anderson History; B: MD Anderson Snapshot; C: Funny Stories;

Abstract:

In this chapter, Dr. Becker discusses his vision for the Department of Pathology; the retirement of Dr. R. Lee Clark; and his work with the new MD Anderson President, Dr. Charles LeMaistre.

[26:10.035]

The other part of it was that I then wrote Dr. Clark a five paged, single spaced document telling him what I would need to do the job he was asking me to do -- modernize pathology, bring in research, et cetera. At that time, the head of finance here -- and I don't remember what his title ...titles have changed so much -- was a chap named Elmer Gilley. Elmer Gilley kept all the money in his desk and doled it out only in small envelopes. Elmer Gilley called me in to talk about this agreement, which he referred to as "Becker's Bill of Particulars," because apparently no one had ever written such a document to Dr. Clark. Everybody predicted Mr. Gilley would be really down on me. Instead, he said, "I am so grateful. Because with all these recruitments he does, people come in five years later and would say, 'And by the way, Dr. Clark also promised me this.' Out of thin air. You've written something in paper." So I was really quite taken. Mr. Gilley thought this was terrific.

In later years, he would challenge me repeatedly on other items, but I'll get to that maybe. Well maybe I won't. Maybe I'll tell you what happened when I became vice president since it's a Gilley story. I inherited Dr. Clark's office. It had been sitting there since he retired, empty. It was a store room, and I thought that was incredible because his office on the seventh floor was at the crossroads of the whole cancer center at that time. On one side was the clinic, on another were the research areas, rehabilitation -- physical rehabilitation -- was right across the hall with another story.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[28:42]

But he -- he --

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[28:44]

He was gone. He had retired.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[28:47]

[Lomata?] didn't move into that place?

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[28:48]

No, no. He took -- the first space Dr. Lomata took was across the street in the Main Building. That huge office suite with the gigantic terrace.

**Lesley Williams Brunet**

[29:00]

Oh, OK.

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[29:01]

OK? Now you've brought up something that's a bit of a shocker, and I've leapt ahead three years. It was a giant shock when Dr. Clark retired. An enormous shock. One, not in my wildest dreams did I think he was 70. He was still [erect?], gorgeous, moved like a tiger, acted like a tiger, and everything in the place was done with Dr. Clark. I mean, you bickered your salary in that same room under a lamp, you talked to him. Dr. Hickey as the director was the person you went to for toilet tissue or cyclotrons, things like that.

So the story leaps ahead a little bit now. Three years later. I have -- Dr. LeMaistre [oral history interview] graciously gave me Dr. Clark's old office, which I thought was a fabulous place to be. But I hated it because it had sort of an avocado green rug, and avocado green drapes, and brass fixtures -- it looked awful. So as you know, everything was bought through state contractors who we never saw. We all had this hateful ironware or whatever it was called -- Steelcase, Steelcase furniture, which I thought was like a prison or a camp or something. I asked, "Who were these contractors?" You realize I'm leaping ahead three years, but I'll come back a little bit. It turned out they were real people. They were human beings, and indeed, there was one of them right here on Katy Freeway. Now what it was is that they were all furniture people, but they had a separate thing through which they fulfilled state contract. I went over to this person, and I said I'm the new vice president -- this is why it's three years later -- oh, and he was so gracious, and so on. I said, "You're a state contractor. Does that mean you have to sell Steelcase or that kind of furniture?" He said, "No." He said, "Come with me," and we went from the gray, green institutional area --

[Break in audio]

**Frederick F. Becker, MD**

[00:00]

-- lot of money on it. So it was pretty much like the Wizard of Oz. I was Dorothy and suddenly I had gone from Kansas to Oz. And here were all these beautiful pieces of furniture. Well you're sitting next to a piece of furniture that I bought in 1979 from a state contractor for pretty much the same price as Steelcase, only it's white enamelized with an oak top. The drawers still come out and go back in without grinding and without replacement. And there's my desk, and there were other pieces which I've given away because they didn't quite fit in the 98 square feet I'm in now.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[00:51]

(inaudible)

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[00:53]

However, I knew I might have some problem with Mr. Gilley, and so I looked around for a couch, and there was this beautiful leather couch, and I said to the owner of a contract furniture place, "What is that?" "Oh," he said, "that's Moroccan kid glove leather couch." I said, "How much is it?" He said, "\$8,200, but you would get a state discount." I said, "Write it up with the rest of the stuff." So he wrote the couch up and then all the rest, and we submitted the order to Mr. Gilley. Very shortly thereafter, Mr. Gilley called me up and said, "OK, OK. Get rid of the G-D couch, and you can have the rest of it."

Now at the same time, the person who ran this place as Dr. Clark's operating officer was Frances Goff, who is another story all together. In the book it's written up. She was enormously known, and powerful, and well thought of out in the state, and one of the great moves that Dr. Clark made was to steal her away from the legislature. But she became the arbiter of everything. Now I hated the green office of Dr. Clark. I felt like I was in an aquarium. So my wife went out and looked around and found a beautiful bittersweet carpet -- bittersweet color -- and lovely venetian blinds, and wonderful light fixtures. One of the high points was that, when I presented this to Francis, who had to approve that, she said to me rather sternly, "Well you know the carpeting has to be flame retardant." I pointed out to her that even bittersweet carpeting can be flame retardant, and it didn't have to be a poisonous green color. That broke her up, and we became great friends. This strange little New Yorker and all of the classic Texans. Course they knew I was a little bit different. That's how that office was decorated. For as long as I was there, we never had to replace any fixture, the carpet, or the venetian blinds. So that was kind of a new era.

## **Chapter 04: Building the Department of Pathology: Clinical Service, Research, Education**

### **B: Building the Institution**

#### **Story Codes**

B: Building the Institution; B: Research; A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations; C: Discovery, Creativity and Innovation; C: Discovery and Success; D: On Research and Researchers; C: Professional Practice; C: The Professional at Work; D: Understanding Cancer, the History of Science, Cancer Research; D: The History of Health Care, Patient Care; D: Technology and R&D; C: Patients; C: Patients, Treatment, Survivors;

In this chapter, Dr. Becker discusses building up the Department of Pathology and its focus on research.

Now, going back. When I got here as chairman of pathology, I had to learn a great deal. The first thing I had to do was to prove to the faculty here in pathology, in surgery, that I was a pathologist. And I was a very good pathologist. I had been trained by one of the great pathologists.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[04:30]

I want to come back to -- later your -- how you picked your field and everything.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[04:35]

Well that's -- have to buy my autobiography. In any case, I made it clear to everyone that I would not do a thing in research -- recruit or anything -- till I was sure that the -- what we used call service pathology-- the actual anatomic pathology, was at my standard. When they heard that, they looked at me rather grievously because here they were a whole bunch of world renowned pathologists. But I pointed out to them that none of them had any backup. That they had plowed a long -- one was in breast cancer, one was hematopathology-- and that was ridiculous for where this place was. They sort of tearfully said to me, "You mean you're going to get us help?" I said, "You bet your boots!" I also took a rotation in the pathology -- surgical pathology. I did autopsies. Shortly thereafter, their desire to challenge me pathology-wise ended, and we enlarged the pathology department, we increased service to the surgeons, we changed the milieu of how reference cases were done. Meaning, pathology slides would come in from around the state mostly, and we would read them and give them a diagnosis.

In fact, that leads to another story because I propose that we put a charge on that, which had been done gratis because we were state pathologists. I thought this was insane because it took time and effort, and sometimes we had to re-cut them, and nobody was paying us for it. These people in pathology were making a fortune.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[06:46]

Do you think that was just a holdover from the really early days? Trying to win people over?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[06:50]

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I haven't gotten to that yet. There was a lot of "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The first call I got -- the first call I got as chairman of pathology here was Ducks Unlimited. Do you know what Ducks Unlimited is?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[07:13]

Yes, yes I do.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[07:14]

I said to my officer manager, "From whom?" Ducks Unlimited. Because my predecessor had been a renowned hunter. Member -- founding member -- of Ducks Unlimited. They assumed that I had been recruited on that basis.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[07:34]

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[07:35]

So that was a little -- that was amusing to me. Not that I wouldn't eat a duck on a moment's notice. Actually when we instituted a minute reference charge, one of the leading private pathologists in Texas flew in his Cessna here to personally protest to me that I was a state employee, that it cost him money to send the slides here for (inaudible), and that often we disagreed with the diagnosis of the pathologist elsewhere -- occasionally let's call it -- and that why would he want me -- why would he want to pay me to be proven wrong? I answered that by saying, "To prevent someone dying from the wrong diagnosis." At which point he looked at me and realized that it was no scratching of one's back. Sometime later he offered me a position in his practice, but that's --

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[08:45]

Now this was Russell? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[08:47]

No, no. No, no. A private practitioner who had a Cessna to fly here to protest a charge.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[08:55]

Must have been pretty bumpy, wasn't it?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[08:57]



No, I'm not talking about (inaudible). So we mend again in pathology to recruit some outstanding young people -- people who had already had pathology training but also had outstanding research training. We began to add them to the faculty. I was completely in accord with the distinguished pathologists here that these people had to prove themselves qualified, because the type of pathology done here was almost unheard of in general pathology training. The reason for that is --

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[09:47]

(inaudible)

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[09:50]

-- that, in general pathology in a general hospital, cancer was often the minority of specimens one saw. While here, we didn't see tonsils, and herniorrhaphies, and gall bladders. So these people had every right to want new pathologists to prove their skills and so forth. People here could see a hundred specimens of a rare tumor that in another general hospital would never be seen. So we made demands that anybody hired here had to in effect undergo a kind of fellowship training. As a matter of fact, that was the instigation of the fellowship program here. We then began to recruit pathologists who wanted to get specialized treatment in cancer, and now it's one of the largest and most successful programs in the world. At the same time, some of these new and relatively younger pathologists also were given laboratories, support --which was somewhat of a new concept here-- and began their research as well. And a number of ... It's the end of the world outside, don't turn around. You won't believe it right now. It's gone. The building's gone.

I want everybody to know that I love my wife, and if this going to be the end of the world --

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[11:48]

How can you see out there?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[11:49]

-- somebody might give her the tape. In any case, it worked beautifully. The pathologists who were here became extraordinarily receptive and supportive. They loved the idea of training fellows, they were very receptive of the idea that no one would do pathology here on a clinical basis till they had the say that these people were effective. And we had a wonderful department with wonderful people of great skill, and they were part of the growth process.

At that time -- now jumping ahead again -- suddenly and amazingly to most of us who knew him, it was announced that Dr. Clark was retiring. It didn't seem possible. He seemed eternal. He was the blood, the heart, the pulse of this place, and a pleasure to deal with. A pleasure. We were all proud to work for him. And my wife and I had bought a tacky-tacky house because we had almost no money. My wife is one of those people who says hello to a geranium, and it grows six inches. I'm one of those people who says hello, it turns brown and dies. She had begun to convert our beautiful backyard into a prize winner. Our daughter, who was a baby at

the time, was accepted into preschool into Kinkaid, which itself was a bit of a miracle because Kinkaid was one of the enormously social prominent schools -- legacy schools -- and we were told flat out by everybody that our daughter would never get in it. But they underestimate themselves here sometimes. The head master was a man named John Cooper, and he was extraordinary. He was the founder of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Houston. To give you an idea of his stature when he retired from Kinkaid, he moved to the woodlands where one of the best schools up there is the John Cooper School. When he met us, he said, "Let me tell you something. You are exactly the parents we want here. Your daughter is going to have to take some tests and so forth, but we want to change the image of this school. We want to make it diverse. We want people from elsewhere. So anytime you bring someone here who has children, please give us a shot at them." My daughter took a -- I think she was two and a half or something -- had to sit and take a test, and she talked to a psychologist or something. And while they were talking she looked outside where there were a bunch of children playing. She said, "Is this going to be over soon? I'd like to go out and play with the children." And the psychologist said, "You're accepted." OK.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[15:25]

I picked (inaudible).

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[15:27]

OK. And we became very loyal to Kinkaid. Later on I was elected the first Damen Wells Fellow of Kinkaid and gave science lectures and tried to help them with the curriculum.

## **Chapter 05: *The Search for Dr. Clark's Replacement and Charles Lemaitre's Administrative Impact***

B: Overview

Story Codes:

C: Portraits; B: Building/Transforming the Institution; C: Leadership; D: On Leadership; B: The Business of MD Anderson; C: The Institution and Finances; B: MD Anderson History; B: MD Anderson Snapshot; C: Funny Stories;

In this chapter, Dr. Becker discusses his insights into the administration of Dr. Charles LeMaistre.

Well, a search now began. A search now began for the new president. And here we had Dr. Clark, who was the only president of the MD Anderson.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[15:59]

(inaudible)

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[16:00]

What's that?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[16:01]

It's hailing.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[16:02]

Yeah, well I mean it's probably going to be a tornado in a minute, so we might as well -- I have no alcohol because you're not allowed to drink. That was one of the depressing things I learned about it.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[16:14]

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) alcohol like in your desk?

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[16:18]

You have no alcohol. This is a University of Texas campus. And unless something has changed, if you're caught drinking alcohol on this campus at an unauthorized event -- meaning anything but an authorized event -- you can be fired whether you have tenure or not on the spot. Now, I don't know if that's changed. The only events at which alcohol can be sold -- given out or whatever -- is at one authorized by the president after 5 o'clock for an event. Now I'll be very frank with you; I was one of the people who said, "And no whiskey. No hard liquor." Because

I'm not big on people drinking hard liquor in a professional environment, so that was sort of a stickler.

So now we're looking for a president. And here's the president who hired me, and who had -- we so admired. Somewhat, it was a shock to everyone. I was asked by the search committee, "You have to go back and look into that." That search committee was headed by the chancellor of the University of Texas. Someone named Charles Mickey LeMaistre [oral history interview]. And on it sat the governor -- several ex-governors, chairmen of the Board of Regents -- I mean really high level people. I have one funny anecdote about that, and that anecdote was that I was asked -- since I was the first outside chairman who had been recruited in many years, and certainly from New York-- to bring one of the candidates to his luncheon interview. That candidate was Dr. Paul Marks, who at that time was the vice president for medical affairs of Columbia University and dean of the medical school, and I knew him. The luncheon was held in one of the nice rooms over in the Doctor's Club. Another anecdote all together.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[18:45]

I was here. I may have gone (inaudible).

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[18:53]

And when we came in to the Doctor's Club, Paul and I, there were all these distinguished figures in a very agitated discussion at the other end of the room. Paul said to me, "My goodness, they're certainly animated about this search," and I said, "Paul, it's more likely they're discussing the Texas, Texas A&M game." And I was right. They were trying to break a television blackout on local games. Just an anecdote.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[19:33]

Well, the mayor is very much a fan.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[19:39]

Well, Dr. Marks didn't get the job, but he did become the chancellor and head of a little organization known as Sloan Kettering Memorial. But the dealings of the search committee -- which are totally private, and I have never been privy to-- were that Dr. LeMaistre had been distinguished head of -- I mean one of the first physicians or first physician to be the chancellor of the university. He had extraordinary credentials. He was trained in New York at New York and did research at the Rockefeller Institute. He had been the first, I think first vice chancellor in charge of health affairs of the university, had written the manifesto on the need for medical schools, and had a good deal of training in pulmonary medicine at Dallas Southwestern, where he had been recruited by the --I'm going to forget that name-- but he was the founding head of medicine there --Don something or other with an S-- and so forth. So he had unusual credentials and had been the chairman of the President of the United States' committee on smoking. Chancellors have a certain limited life expectancy as chancellor. So at some point, I gather, the committee turned to him and said, "Mickey, how about you?" And Mickey said, "That's quite

interesting, but I should step down as the head of the search committee." This is my understanding; I have no insight into it. And Dr. Charles LeMaistre was the second president of the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Now, the MD Anderson Cancer Center from its real beginning --meaning after Dr. Bertner, when Dr. Clark took it over --was really quite interesting, because it was like a mom and pop store. Do you know what that expression means?

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[22:22]

Mmm hmm.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[22:23]

Yeah, OK. That had become Randalls, or Safeway, or Rice or something but was still administered the same way it had been. I.e., Dr. Clark made all of the crucial decisions, Dr. Hickey was the operating officer, and Mr. Gilley ran the finances. So after some 30 or so years --and by the way, many of the chairmen were the people who had been the first chairmen of that department and *amusement*, as we say in French, I was the seventeenth director of pathology at Bellevue Hospital dating back to the 1800's where William Welch, the founder of American pathology was the first. Now I was the second chairman of pathology, dealing with many chairmen who were the first chairmen of their departments -- the founding chairmen. Dr. LeMaistre is a champion in his understanding of administration. I mean by background, by experience, and everything. And he looked around and could hardly believe that the place had grown to where it had grown; had a budget of what it had, which of course is a joke compared to today; had thousands of people working; and in effect, three people were running it. And he then set out to reorganize the administrative setup of the MD Anderson. (thunder) I hear you Dr. Clark.

My part in this was as follows: Dr. LeMaistre knew me very, very well but slightly from a distance. He knew me because as chancellor, he sat in the Board of Regents, and my appointment had to be approved, so he was familiar with my background and where I came from. Also, since he had a New York background --I say that for somebody who comes from Alabama. Remember he trained at New York Hospital and at Rockefeller and knew the people that -- well that's very odd. I just remembered something. The person who actually told Dr. Clark that he would have to change the image of the MD Anderson was not at Sloan Kettering. He was the brilliant -- well he may have been at the time -- I guess he was -- was Lou [Lewis] Thomas. Lou Thomas was one of the great philosophic writers of science still quoted today. But his first job in New York was his chairman of pathology at NYU, and I was his first fellow. So it was a rather odd leap that some years later as the head of Sloan Kettering Memorial, he would tell Dr. Clark the way to make the recognition of the Anderson greater would be to bring in a much more diverse type of person. Then incidentally, completely incidentally, Dr. Clark recruited me, Dr. Thomas' fellow. I thought --I told Olsen that. I thought that was funny. I didn't even know that by the way, but I read Olsen's book, and it said that he had gone to Dr. Thomas to ask advice. OK.

Dr. LeMaistre called me in to ask him how I felt after being here for a little over two years maybe. Yeah, two years. I told him that I thought the potential of the place was extraordinary, almost unlimited based on not only the patient population, the availability of tissues to study, et cetera, but also the tremendous support of Texans in general -- their cooperativeness, their appreciation of what we did. I told him a funny story. An anecdote which wasn't true, but I made -- to give an example. I said, "If I was in New York at Bellevue, and I went to a party, and someone asked me where I worked, and I said, 'Bellevue,' they would punch me in the nose and say, 'You killed my mother.'" If I went to a party in Houston, and they asked me where I worked and I said, 'MD Anderson,' they'd take me in their arms and say, 'My mother died there, but you did so much for her, is there any way I can help?'" In effect that was fairly close to the truth.

"But," I told him, "there were real problems, which were causing me concern and consideration as to whether I was going to stay." They were the fact that it was so inbred. The chairmen never left; that many of the science departments or areas were run by people who'd come here as graduate students; that there was a lack of criticism; a lack of review; a lack of hard-nosed expressions of opinion, which where I came from was part and partial of the daily life. And he, that tricky devil, having lived through administration, asked me if I'd be willing to review research here and give him what's generically called a "white paper" on what I think had to be done to improve it. Foolish me. I did it. He then turned to me --it took some months -- and said, "I am going to change the administration here, and I need to have a number of vice presidents, such as one for patient care, one for the hospital administration, and one for research. I am offering you the job as the first vice president for research and head of" --what was called-- "the Tumor Institute." That took me quite aback, and I asked him what he expected me to do. He said, "I expect you to accomplish all the goals that you've put in the white paper." End of dictation, end of tape. It's now 4:30. We have to call it quits.

***Lesley Williams Brunet***

[30:40]

That's fine. We're almost at the end of the tape.

***Frederick F. Becker, MD***

[30:42]

There, perfect.