

## **John Dycus and Dorothy Estes**

### **Co-founder of UT Arlington's Handicapped Students Association and Arlington Handicapped Association, former advisor for the UT Arlington Shorthorn**

*Interview conducted by*

*Dr. Sarah Rose and Trevor Engel  
in 2016 in Arlington, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor

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## **Biography**

John Dycus was born in 1949 and grew up in Arlington and Fort Worth, Texas. He obtained his K-12 education in Fort Worth, attending Paschal High School, class of 1965. Between kindergarten through eighth grade, Dycus attended special education classes, which were not offered when he reached high school at Paschal High. After graduating high school he attended the University of Texas at Arlington and graduated in 1970.

While in college, he met the charismatic Sam Provence and Jim Hayes and advocated with them for independent living and other disability rights in the Arlington area. He was one of the founders of Helping Restore Ability (HRA, originally the Arlington Handicapped Association). He served as president of the board in the 1980s. In 1997, HRA named him their Man of the Year. In the 1970s, Dycus served on the Texas Developmental Disabilities Council, which is a governor-appointed committee that advises the state

legislature on policies related to disability and people with disabilities. In 1974, he was given a Governor's Citation for his work on the council.

Apart from his activism, he worked for thirty-five years as student advisor for the UTA student newspaper, *The Shorthorn*, and a copy-editor for the Fort Worth Star - Telegram.

Most recently, in 2010, Dycus received the prestigious Howard S. Dubin Outstanding Professional Member Award journalism from the Society of Professional Journalists; Dycus also served two consecutive terms as president for the organization's Fort Worth chapter.

## Topics discussed

- Undergraduate years at UTA
  - Student Publications
  - Career options for John Dycus
  - John Dycus's work with Student Publications
  - Dorothy Estes's journalism career
  - Community ties within Student Publications
  - Dorothy Estes autobiography
  - Interactions with other disability rights activists
  - Estes's and Dycus's contributions to Student Publications
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## Rose

This is Sarah Rose.

Engel

And Trevor Engel.

Rose

Speaking with Dorothy Estes and John Dycus on August 17, 2016 at John Dycus's home in Arlington. And Dorothy, you had some memories of your daughter talking about Jim Hayes.

Estes

Yes, when I told her what we were doing, she said, "Oh, I remember him."

When she was still in high school, she would occasionally come and spend a day with me at TCC. And she always liked to go upstairs where Dr. Wood's office was because his students were different from mine and she liked both of them. And they were very different because his were the ones doing all the activities and mine were the ones who would try to record it and make history and herstory out of it.

So anyway, she said that when she first met Jim, he told her, and everybody knew with some pride. But he had been a real hell-raiser in high school. And he seemed proud of that. And then she said he would get very wishful. She said, "He missed it several times."

And as he got wishful, he said, "Well I guess I am going to have to reinvent myself. And I'm not quite sure who I am going to be now."

And I thought that was a rather profound statement from a young freshman because he must have been a freshman at that time.

Rose

So did you meet him here at his first year at TCC?

Estes

Uh-hmm.

Dycus

I wrote a story on Hayes for *The Shorthorn*, or for somebody, early in his ascent at UTA. I think he was married at the time. One of his marriages. But he was willing to interview. Had a good time. And we got around talking about how he was so ahead of his time and seemed so poised and so...Everything about him was amazing. Everybody wanted a piece of Jim Hayes. And he said, "I was just faking it for the first ten years."

That's on another tape that I think I did for you.

Rose

I think it was when you...when we spoke with you...

Dycus

Yeah, I thought that was a profound...

Estes

Well I think this related to what he was saying, he didn't know how to be someone who was confined to a wheelchair. And it evidently shaken him to the bottom of his soul. And that would be such a challenge for a young man who had been an outstanding athlete. And I think he thought that what his future was going to be like.

Rose

I don't think you gave us the date on that. When you said...oh, what it was. It was ten years. You didn't say it was nearly as long.

Dycus

He had already...He was well on his way to determining who he really was at the point that he said that. But I do remember him distinctly saying, "I was faking it for the first ten years."

Everybody said he was so together. And I think the implication was that he wasn't together at all.

Estes

Well he was together enough to know. And that's more than most people are. So he really was ahead of his time. And even when he took his first baby steps as this new persona, he was real. Even if he...if it was something he had to learn how to do, he was authentic. You never doubted Jim do what he said.

Rose

So can you tell us a little bit about the Rebel theme controversy? I know you were really involved in that, Dorothy.

Estes

Well, it had been going on a number of years before I got here. And again, this goes back to Dr. Harrison, the president that we were discussing on the way here. The way he handled decision-making. He was a very complicated, extremely intelligent man with a PhD in Psychology and a medical degree. And he had never worked with ordinary, university students. He had always worked at a medical school. Students don't really care that much about school activities and least of all, the school motto. The college motto. And he really didn't understand why this was such a personal issue to so many students. And he would never just say no or make a decision. He wanted to use logic and he wanted everybody to be logical. And of course, a number of college students are quite logical some of the time. Some of them, none of the time! So they would have an election to decide what the theme would be because it was tearing the campus open. And they were having riots on campus. I remember one of my first experiences on campus was when the black students came in and stabbed...they took all the furniture and I had sat on these couches at a social event. But never had paid much attention to the patterns. And they were actually little, tiny figures of slaves picking cotton.

[Phone rings]

Dycus

You want me to mention that? Dorothy's right about you actually have slaves plowing fields and picking cotton in the upholstery in the Robert E. Lee Suite. The Robert E. Lee Suite was upstairs. It's...geographically, it's right there. But it's all been reconfigured.

Estes

It's in the University Center.

Dycus

Upstairs in the University Center.

Rose

Is it called Carlisle Suite now?

Dycus

No, no. It was on the front end, south.

Estes

But all of the rooms, nearly all of the rooms, had some Rebel theme. And of course, to the people who hadn't had that painful experience as part of personal and family history, it's hard that the students didn't realize the pain that it was causing.

And so they would have an election, and they already had several elections before I got here. And it seemed to me we just had one election after another. And every time, the students would vote unanimously to keep it because we had a majority of Caucasian students. And then there would be conflicts. And there were even at the ball games. I remember one time, they had live ammunition. And some of that live ammunition was on the sidelines and my son was playing football. And he had been knocked over to the said. He said he frequently was because he was a defensive lineman. His head could have struck that and it would have blown his head off. Fortunately, that didn't happen. But many of the ball games were interrupted by...And because the minute the band would strike up and play Dixie, there would be a demonstration. And then we had a...let's see. What was the man that rode the horse? It was Colonel...

Dycus

Stroobe.

Estes

Colonel Stroobe.

Dycus

S-O-O...

Estes

He was in his nineties.

Dycus

He could have been. Certainly the eighties.

Rose

Can you spell that?

Dycus

I want to say E-S-H-E-L. Middle initial O. S-T-R-O-O-B-E. I think.

Estes

Colonel Stroob I believe was the way it came out.

Dycus

Colonel Stroobe. And he rode...and he didn't ride the horse.

Estes

Of course he did. And I'll tell you why.

Dycus

I thought he rode the Cadillac because he couldn't ride the horse.

Estes

At the beginning he did because...what was his position? Do you remember what...?

Dycus

He was Johnny Reb.

Estes

Johnny Reb. Well so, when he ran, he was in one of the fraternities. And when he ran, they said, "Well, you can't ride a horse."

He said, "Well I was in the carvery."

And they said, "Well the carvery doesn't ride horses."

Well he said, "They did when I was in it."

I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's a direct quote because I remember it.

Dycus

Well so you're saying he rode a horse on a field?

Estes

At one point, at one time, he did. But I know later...As he got older, he did endure some personal things that would make sitting on a horse very painful. And that was one of the jokes that went around. Well that's going to be the end of Johnny Reb. But all the titles...there were things that so many of the students just didn't think about. And even some of the faculty were very opposed. One of the faculty members that I worked with...that I will not name...used to hold up a brown paper bag in class and say, "If your skin is any darker than this, I think you need to find a new class or transfer."

So anyway, this went on and they would have an election. And I know there were five elections, at least five elections at all. And each time, the Rebel theme always won. And the conflicts continued. And then

finally, the Voices of Reason prevailed and they said, "Why don't we just tell them it's going to be...the Rebel theme is gone and that the election will be what determines what the replacement will be."

And the election was almost a joke because some of the things they suggested, like the aardvark or the armadillo were I think two of both choices. And they had a hard time taking it seriously. And I'm sure now that many of those students are embarrassed and regret the pain that they caused. But they were working out of ignorance.

Rose

Our related notes, something that Trevor and I saw in the archives was to hire more black faculty.

[Phone rings]

Estes

I want to go further back on the issue that you just mentioned in 1976. During part of this election, when Donna was here and I think this was the year maybe before I became...I think it was the year before I came because Donna was downstairs by herself. And they had run the Rebel theme and at first, Donna supported it because she was just like so many people. She just didn't think about the pain it was causing people. And they had run *The Shorthorn* and they had superimposed the blue, rebel flag over the top half of the front page of *The Shorthorn*. And this was just like throwing acid in the face of the black students. They were livid and they came running down there and she was all by herself. And she had to explain that her position...And of course, you know Donna is very courageous, but she would never really hurt anybody. And she said it was a revelation because for the first time, she knew she was completely outnumbered and she knew that she had to listen. And she said, "And listening..."

She said a lot of them were just screaming vicious attacks and that didn't bother her. But she said some of them were very rational and very emotional attached. And she said, "For the first time, I was able to get outside my background and look at this issue from somebody else's point of view."

And from that time on, then she changed over and supported changing it. Then everyone else on campus was attacking her. And I came about this time, so we just did I think one summer together. And then...but by that time, she was graduated and I think moved over to News Information. But I've always admired Donna because she did the right thing when she realized that she had been making decisions that were wrong for the university. But she had the courage to admit that it was wrong. And as I said, she ended with people on both sides being angry at her. But that didn't bother her as long as she made the decision that she felt was right.

Rose

That's a great story.

Dycus

There was a dueling...before I get to that, didn't we run a *Shorthorn* one day? There was supposed to be raindrops on the cover of the page. But they got the ink messed up and it was red. So you had these red drops all over the front page.

Estes

Maybe that was all before I got here. I don't remember that.

Dycus

Seems like we did. I could be making that up.

Estes

Well I do remember some production...

Dycus

And it was a really awful accident because it looked like we were saying, in blood red, blood on the paper of The Shorthorn.

Estes

Well then blood was shed. One of my...I think I haven't been her very long and I think this was a protest about the...it started out about the Vietnam War I think. But for some reason, it went over to the...Seemed like every protest would evolve back to the Rebel theme. And I remember that someone took down the flag and burned it. And we had a photograph of it. I think it's in the 1971 yearbook, that pink and green cover. And I was sure that's the one that had that photograph burning the flag on. And I think it was the Confederate Flag they burned. And that was when I was beginning to wonder if my life was in danger.

There's another funny story that happened that first year I remember that was related to the black students. I was down there by myself one afternoon and these black students came in, and this was when they were wearing that big hair. The hair was almost like it was a bushel basket. And I looked up and the office was just filled with this hair. People wearing with this hair. And they were livid. It was a black fraternity, I think. And they were furious because the yearbook had come in their fraternity wasn't in it.

And of course, I never had that experience and I didn't even know how they had all of the finances of the yearbook pages. But at that time, they were a student organization. You had to pay I think \$80 for half a page. And so I asked them, "Well how much did you pay?"

"Well we paid \$80."

And I said, "Well I'll refund your money and I'm so sorry that this happened."

Actually, the staff that was supposed to finish the book used up all the wage money, but they didn't even get it started. It wasn't even halfway done. It wasn't even a third way done. So my first step had to do the current year plus the past year's book and they were working with two different styles because they were designed completely different. And so I wrote out a voucher and I asked somebody, "Well how do I get a...arrange a refund?"

Well they said, "Well you write a voucher, sign your name and then they take it over to the business office. And then they'll get their money back."

So I thought, "Well here my life is worth \$80 of university money."

And so without checking the record to see if they really had paid, I wrote the voucher. Didn't even think about checking the records. I was trying to think about how I was going to save my life. And they took the voucher and they went over. And I think they used that money to buy gasoline to go to Austin to take part in another protest. Well when the students came in, Gary Koffmann was the editor of the yearbook that was supposed to be my first one. (15:19)