what I've learned

Mike Melarkey

'72 (political science)

Lawyer, Proud Alumnus and Former ATO President, Philanthropist

The biggest influences in my life have been my parents. My mother Betty attended the University during 1940-42, and my father James ’47 (engineering) attended both before and after World War II where he was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy flying dive bombers as an aviator. He was a fair basketball player in his day for the Nevada Wolf Pack and was inducted into the Nevada Hall of Fame in 1976.

My father always instilled in my sister and me that you should treat people the way you want to be treated, and, if you have nothing nice to say, you shouldn’t say anything. I have tried to adhere to that as best I can. In 2007, after my father died, we honored him by establishing the James E. Melarkey Memorial Scholarship Endowment at the University.

At the University, I studied political science and sociology and pledged the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity as a freshman in 1968. I had some really good professors: Don Driggs, Stanley Pearl, Harry Chase and Eleanore Bushnell. The student body was around 6,000 students with many coming from rural Nevada, rural California and Las Vegas. I remember the tuition was $400 more for out-of-state tuition than in-state, which was $180, regardless of credit load. That time, during the Vietnam War, was a difficult time to be on campus. There was a great deal of change during my time as a student and it overlaid my University experience.

I was active in organizations on campus like the Blue Key service club and Coffin and Keys. I was very involved with ATO and lived in the house on University Terrace. As its president, it seemed I spent quite a bit of time in the dean of men’s office. But my involvement with ATO was a very meaningful experience and becoming ATO president was a highlight of my college career.

I have learned that it’s a real benefit to work in the community where you went to school (or to go to school in the community where you live). At the University I met a lot of friends, and many of the friends I met back then are still friends. Whatever success you get is mostly just hard work, but nobody does it alone. You’ve got to have help from time to time, and the friends I made at the University, especially the ATO house, have really helped me.

I have had some good mentors who helped me out early in my career when it came to practicing law. When you graduate from law school you know a lot of law, but not a lot about practicing law. Ultimately, whatever business you are in, including law, winds up being a people business. I have found, in dealing with people, it’s better to listen than talk. It’s hard to learn anything when you’re talking. And there are some things I have learned the hard way—I’ve had to take a couple of mulligans.

It has been exciting to see how the University has grown and prospered, and it has been enjoyable giving back. I like the growth that I’ve seen on campus in the last 10-13 years because the new buildings are architecturally consistent. It always was a pretty campus and it has kept that. It has been fun to watch it grow.

Through my work with the charitable foundation, I have learned that giving away money is not easy to do, at least to do it effectively and in line with your mission statements. It was a big step for the Bretzلاف Foundation to commit to the University’s new engineering building, but it was a good time to make that big step. I am glad to say that the University has always been a very competent recipient and that’s to its credit.

My wife Karen ’85 (French) and I have five children between us and four of the five are Nevada graduates. Four are employed locally and I think their education at Nevada has served them well. They are the fourth generation of Nevada graduates in my family which began with my grandparents, Alice Boynton Melarkey (attended 1916-19) and Clinton V. Melarkey ’18 (mechanical and electrical engineering).

I have had a good history with the University. Looking back, the biggest part of my experience at the University was the people I met and the people I have stayed in contact with through the years.

From a conversation in July 2016 with Director of Donor Relations Keiko Weil ’87. Melarkey is a Reno native and third generation University alumnus, receiving his B.A. in 1972 in political science. He received his J.D. from the University of San Francisco in 1975 and master of law in taxation from New York University in 1976. Melarkey has been an attorney for 40 years, practicing primarily in the fields of tax law and business planning. He served as counsel to the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation from 1980 to 2004, served as a Foundation trustee from 2005 to 2010, and is now an emeritus trustee and emeritus member of the Planned Giving Advisory Council. He is a Silver Benefactor in the University’s Honor Court and received the Nevada Alumni Association’s Professional Achievement Award in 2006. He is currently a board member for Southwest Gas, an officer of the Robert S. & Dorothy J. Keyser Foundation, and president of the Bretzلاف Foundation. He is married to Reno Realtor Karen LeMond Melarkey ’85 (French) and the couple have five children, four of whom are Nevada graduates.