

ALPHA OMICRON PI:
LAURA "MAMA" REID, HOUSE MOTHER

"I wish that we could get all of the girls in the house to eat dinner, because it's the one time they actually get together. Some girls in this house, they haven't been in that dining room since they've been here."

--Laura Reid

FULL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION:

Laura "Mama" Reid, House Mother
ALPHA OMICRON PI (AOPi or AOII)
The University of Mississippi
DATE: April 5, 2004
LOCATION: Ms. Reid's room
INTERVIEWER: Kendra Myers
LENGTH: n/a

On Monday, 5 April 2004, I sat down with Laura "Mama" Reid, the House Mother for Alpha Omega Pi (AOPi or AOII) at the University of Mississippi. Joining us was Katherine Muller, a recent graduate of the University of Mississippi and AOPi sister who is now the Chapter Adviser. We had enjoyed the "sit-down" meal with the sisterhood of AOPi, and then we settled in to talk in "Mama" Reid's room in the house.

Kendra Myers, interviewer, is K. Laura Reid is LR. Katherine Muller is KM. Other abbreviations are: KD is Kappa Delta sorority, Tri-Delt is the Delta Delta Delta sorority, and Zeta is Zeta Tau Alpha sorority.

K: This is Kendra, I'm talking to Mama Reid at the AOPi house at Ole Miss on Monday afternoon, and I'm going to ask her a few questions about food! My first question is, how long have you been here at AOPi? I know you've done a lot of different things.

LR: This is my fourth year at AOPi.

K: Where were you before?

LR: The Tri-Delt house at Mississippi State, the Kappa Delta house here, and Kappa Alpha Theta. I've been a house mother for about twenty years.

K: Really? Do meals work mostly the same way in the houses, where there's a sit-down dinner maybe one or two nights a week, and then girls are on their own?

LR: Sit-down dinners are Monday night and Tuesday night. Wednesday and Thursday are buffet. We don't serve dinner on Fridays.

K: What do the girls do on Friday night? Are they on their own?

LR: They're on their own.

K: Is it the kind of setup where if somebody's studying and up until two o'clock in the morning, they can run to –

LR: We always have snacks out. We keep cereal out, we keep peanut butter and jelly, there's all kind of cookies and crackers, Goldfish [*crackers*], everything that they want.

K: Who plans the meals, do you plan the meals?

LR: I plan the meals.

K: How do you, what goes into the planning? Do you try and get a balance?

LR: I get meat and vegetables too, I try to give them the lowest fat possible. And the girls have input, they'll tell me what they want, what they don't like. Could we have this, could we have that. And I listen to them, and – [*laughter, phone rings*] So it's all right, you know.

K: Have you noticed, in your experience, college students getting more health-conscious as time goes by, or less, or have you not noticed a change?

LR: **[021]** Yes. The girls, actually, they are more health conscious, I'll say more health conscious.

K: What about fad diets? How do you deal with those?

LR: Some girls, some of them can go a little overboard, I think, at any place. But I don't think any of them – [*to Katherine*] Who was that?

KM: Your sister, she's going to call you back in a few minutes, she's going to go eat. [*laughter*]

LR: Years ago when I first started, I think, I don't think the girls complained as much as now, we've got to have this and that. Like you said,

any fad diet that comes on, the girls want that, the low-carb right now, or fried foods, what-have you. Not realizing that a low-carb diet's really bad for you. And so, but I just go along the best I can. I got low-carb, I get low-carb pasta, I got low-carb bread. We always have a salad bar out constantly, with all the fresh vegetables and fruit on it. So I try to give them a variety, and balanced.

K: Are there any particular recipes or dishes that the girls love?

LR: Their favorite, I would guess, would be baked chicken breast, chicken tenders, and poppy-seed chicken.

KM: Oh, I love that poppy-seed chicken.

K: Poppy-seed chicken! You are not the first I have heard talk about poppy-seed chicken!

KM: It is excellent.

K: That is so funny!

KM: No, seriously, like it really is amazing.

LR: Tonight is very unusual, we usually have more than this. But now, since the weather is warm, it's close to school's out, the time change, we'll probably have about thirty or forty "late plates" back there or more.

KM: Right.

LR: Because the girls don't want to come in. So. The last, since Spring Break, they don't come in and sit down as much. But if you'd been here, all last week we put it on buffet, you can't walk in the kitchen! You can't walk in the dining room! *[laughs]* So.

K: Do you notice, it seemed to me just sitting there at dinner tonight that it was a great time for the girls, and Katherine and I talked about this –

LR: Yes.

K: The time, they're so busy, and they're running around, and it seems like such a great time for them to get together.

LR: **[043]** I wish that we could get all of the girls in the house to eat dinner, because it's the one time they actually get together. Some girls in this house, they haven't been in that dining room since they've been here.

K: Really?

LR: But that's something we can't make them do, you know. I can't drag them in there and make them eat. So, but they eat, they take food from the grill and eat it. Why, I have no idea. *[laughs]* But I think it's great, I think that's one, one time, and we're not asking that many, because right now, we only have sit-down dinner once a week because it's this time of year. In the fall, we'll have more sit-down dinners. And it's not asking them, it's, you know, I think they should get together and have, it's the one time they can get together, talk, and be friends and join in.

K: I really liked being, it meant a lot to me to be invited to dinner and to see the rituals that you have, singing the AOPi song –

LR: Mmm-hmm. Sing the blessing.

K: And ring a bell, and make announcements.

LR: Girls can't be seated until I'm seated.

KM: And they don't start eating –

LR: And they don't start eating until I start eating. Now, they do follow the rules very nicely on that. They do a good job.

K: I asked Katherine, I was surprised by the house boys! *[laughs]* I said, how do I get one in my house? *[laughter]* What is behind that tradition?

LR: That's just, I have no idea.

KM: I don't either, we've just always done it.

LR: Well now this is, now, at Tuscaloosa, the university there, they don't do that.

K: They don't?

LR: They, I know, I'll put it like this – I know one sorority, this friend of mine is a house mother, they had the maids that came out, so the cooks could have more help. It depends on the size of your house and what you do. And they came out and serviced.

K: Oh.

LR: They get the food, they get to eat, that's why they do it. **[062]** They don't get paid, they get to eat free meals.

K: And they're from one particular fraternity?

KM: No –

LR: They don't have to be in a fraternity. In fact, most fraternities will ask you sometimes not to get fraternity boys now, because they, that's how they help support their kitchen, is to pay for it, so most of mine are independents.

KM: They want to stay with their houses!

K: I see, that makes sense. They seem like they're part of the family –

KM: They are, they're very nice.

LR: *[laughter]* I guess so, some of them I've had for four years! *[KM laughs]* I had one house boy, at the Tri-Delt house at State, was with me for eight years, the whole time I was there, I think. He was like my son! *[KM laughs]* I couldn't get him to leave! *[laughs]*

K: The food was too good, he wasn't going anywhere! You couldn't get him out of the nest!

LR: He wasn't, we've had other girls, other sororities here, constantly eating, and I said that's great, I don't mind, you know, I'm glad that they enjoy the food enough to ask someone to come and eat.

K: That's high praise, because they know they're going to get a tasty meal.

KM: Lots of people love to have a meal here, they say it's the best, and I mean, that's good!

LR: You need to come back at a buffet, now, if you want to see chaos in the dining room! *[KM laughs]*

K: You know, I think that's when I'm going to bring my camera, is buffet night!

LR: Well next time I have poppy-seed – no, next time I think of it, fajitas –

KM: That is crazy.

LR: Or chicken spaghetti, that's another one of their favorites!

K: Chicken spaghetti? **[076]**

KM: Oh, yeah.

LR: Chicken spaghetti.

KM: It's excellent, that's what we had last year –

K: I want to steal that recipe from you, that sounds wonderful!

KM: It is excellent.

LR: Ro-tel chicken spaghetti.

K: How big is your staff? How many folks work –

LR: Four.

K: Four.

LR: Actually have a breakfast cook that comes by herself, and she kind of helps, she helps with lunch, and she leaves. And I have two that come in, which really – I have four total, and two in there right now that's really, **DeLores** is my main cook at night. Tina helps, and they've got one that helps wash dishes and clean up. She comes, she only works about twenty hours a week.

K: That seems like a pretty small staff – Katherine said they cook for ninety to a hundred a night.

KM: Isn't that how many?

LR: More than that, sometime.

KM: Oh yeah, I guess it depends on –

LR: We serve, actually – I would say we feed at least, compared to other sororities, we have more eat than most of them do. Chi O and the Tri-Delts have, like two hundred girls, and I bet I have more that eat than they do at theirs. I would say a hundred and thirty. Hundred-twenty to a hundred-thirty some nights. They may be, like I said, "late plates" or take-out plates, but now, when school first starts, that dining room will be packed.

KM: Right, totally packed,

LR: Then they get their schedules, the classes, and some of them can't have, you know – but most of the time, it'll be at least the five long tables and four of the short tables around there.

K: Do you notice – I know that when I am homesick, I long for my mother's, with me it's my mother's chicken pot pie, it's different with other people.

LR: Uh-huh.

K: Do you sometimes see girls come through, and they're homesick, and they might ask you for something special, or – do you see the food as a kind of second home for them?

LR: I don't guess the food is – well, we're sure close. I've got some girls just like, girls in the sorority I really am their mother away from home. Then you've got some that speak to you, nod at you, and that's it. *[laughs]* But that's in any sorority, you're going to have the girls that's a little bit closer to you than the other girls. **[099]** Now, they will ask for certain things that they want, oh, can we have this, like I said before.

K: Mmm-hmm.

LR: And I try, I try my best to get everything that they ask, because I know I'm not going to please everyone in the sorority, every time, at every meal – that's just impossible to do. But we keep snacks, like I said, we keep snacks out for them. If there's something they just don't particularly want, or either they don't eat that much, they can go in there anytime and get cereal, peanut butter and jelly – they eat cereal around here for snacks and everything else! *[laughs]*

KM: Right – and I notice you have Moon Pies out, which – *[laughter]*

LR: Yep!

KM: Which is, that's a new one!

LR: Yeah!

KM: I've never seen Moon Pies here!

LR: Yeah, I ordered Moon Pies last week, and there was Grandma's cookies, the big –

KM: I know, those ones –

LR: Let me tell you something, those are good.

KM: Those are very good.

K: I'm moving in!

KM: I know! *[laughs]*

K: Y'all are killing me!

LR: Stuff like that stays out all the time. And always fruit.

KM: Right.

LR: We have juice out all the time, they can drink juice anytime they want to, we have fruit punch, cranberry juice, and orange juice out at all times in a machine that they just – we have yogurt, we have a yogurt machine. Have yogurt for lunch, and –

KM: Salads.

LR: Yep. We have salad bar at night, too, except for sit-down. Most of the time, unless they have Caesar salad – sometimes I'll have Caesar salad instead of salad bar. And Monday, last Monday night, or two Mondays – were you here that night I had the Caesar salad for dinner?

KM: Oh, it went fast.

LR: Yeah. So I said, I'm going to try this, because that way I give them a salad, you know. I thought about trying a pear salad for them, see if they'd eat it. Mandarin orange. Fruit salad – they love breakfast at night, too.

KM: That's what I was telling her.

LR: **[117]** Yeah, we have breakfast – we have it Thursday.

K: That's great comfort food.

LR: Where are, Kendra, where are you from?

K: I am originally from Atlanta. That's where I grew up.

LR: Oh, okay. Okay.

K: That's where I grew up. And learned to cook. *[laughs]*

LR: *[laughs]* Are you a Southern cook, then?

K: At my grandmother's side! *[laughs]* She taught me things. Well, where are you from, and how did you –

LR: Oxford.

K: You're from Oxford. And how did you get involved with the House Mother business? *[laughs]*

LR: I had a sister that was a Tri-Delt House Mother for twenty years. My husband passed away in '81, I had two sisters at that time that were House Mothers here. And my two youngest children got married, and they said, Laura, come back home. Why don't you come back home and try this. I worked for the government then, I worked for the Navy Exchange.

K: Oh, interesting.

LR: I said okay, and so I came and interviewed for – *[tape jumps]* when I first came here, and I interviewed for the Zetas, the Pi Phis, and the – ADPi. ADPi was on campus at that time. **[129]** Loved the Zetas. Loved that house, it was beautiful.

K: I was a Zeta. *[laughter]*

LR: Let's hear it for Zetas! *[laughs]* I want to give a yell for all of them!

K: *[chants]* Z, Z, Z with an E ...

LR: Have you ever been in this house?

K: I have not been in that house.

LR: Well, it is –

KM: It's gorgeous.

LR: To me, it was one of the – see, this, I was hoping the AOPis would buy the Zeta house when they went off-campus. And, because, it's such a beautiful – it's got a spiral staircase that goes up.

KM: It really is beautiful.

LR: It was a beautiful house, and arranged great.

K: really?

LR: And they could have gone in there and taken that, put new appliances in the kitchen, remodeled it, and just did a real, it would have been beautiful. So yeah, Zeta – I loved the Zeta house, and that's where I went. But they were in trouble then, and not on campus, so they stayed about two years. Then I went to KD house. Then they came back on campus –

KM: Yeah, when I was here.

LR: After that, though.

K: Huh.

LR: And I think if they, just one more year and they would have made it.

KM: They would have made it. I knew, I had friends there, they would –

LR: I think if they'd have just left them alone one more year –

KM: Actually, speaking of food, I used to eat at the Zeta house more my freshman year than I did here! *[laughs]*

LR: Because, you know, the Zeta house, Zeta has one of the strongest nationals anywhere.

KM: Biggest, the biggest.

K: Oh, yes we do.

LR: And we had, State has a beautiful house.

K: Do they?

LR: It's right across from the Tri-Delt house.

KM: I've been to that, when I was, last spring –

LR: It's a pretty house.

K: I did not know that.

KM: Yeah, but Starkville – *[laughter]*

LR: Zeta's real big in Texas, too. Texas and Virginia.

K: Mmm-hmm.

LR: See, that's where my children – are in Virginia.

K: Oh, really?

LR: So I know Zetas. I've been enough to where I know – I know more, you know I was with the Tri-Delts for eight years, I said, my sister was over

there for twenty years, but I worked with more national people, I knew more than she did from being over here at Tri-Delt –

KM: Right.

LR: -- for twenty years, because National built our house at State, so I worked strictly with National people, mostly. But I've enjoyed being here. This is, you know, this has been great.

K: It seems great.

LR: **[151]** This one's run a little bit different than most sororities. AOPi, they're not run like other sororities.

K: I was getting that impression from talking to Katherine, that it was different.

LR: *[laughs]* Well, you know you've been in a Zeta – it's quite different from the rest, from some of the sororities.

K: It is different – how much involvement does Nationals have in how you run your business – run your business! – run your house, like do they –

LR: As far as, I don't know, see, I've worked strictly with the House Corps –

KM: Which is, they're a separate entity – they have nothing to do with *[tape jump]* they're alums –

LR: See, National, I never see National people.

KM: No, you wouldn't.

LR: The field consultant will go out there, come back, but other than that, no –

KM: No, you won't, they don't – our house isn't owned by, it's owned by us, not by Nationals. And like, some sororities, like, it might, Zeta might be like this, but –

LR: Would not really own the house, but National would be involved with House Corps and have the House Corps –

KM: Right, right.

LR: National, House Corps would have to answer to Nationals.

K: To Nationals, right.

KM: Well, we used to, they still have to, too, but they're more on their own when it comes to, like, you know –

LR: What do you, have a field consultant come? I know when I was at the Zeta house, many of them. When they came, I always had meetings with them, they went over with me everything that happened in the house, and when they left, always got a little note from them.

KM: Right, you're like a –

LR: So here, but that part doesn't bother me as far as, you know.

KM: Right.

LR: You know. It's just a little – here it's a little bit different.

K: Interesting. Let me look here and see if I have anything – **[168]** Do you like to cook, yourself?

LR: Well, I had five children of my own, *[laughter]* and I haven't cooked in so long!

KM: *[laughter]* Miss Reid, you need to cook one night!

LR: I do cook –

K: Miss Reid cooking night! I'll be here for that! *[laughter]*

LR: I cook when I go home for Christmas, I cook for my children. And for Easter, I cook – myself, I eat by myself, I used to have to fix Easter dinner, see, I have a son that lives in Olive Branch who comes.

K: Oh!

LR: And I have one that lives in Orlando. The rest of them live in Virginia. Well when I go home Christmas, yeah, Mama cooks. *[laughter]*

K: Uh-huh, I bet she does!

LR: And, or either, I always – when I go home, I fix meals for them. All of them get together for Easter, and then I take them all out at one time, you know, it costs an arm and a leg, they've got grandkids along with them – thirteen grandkids.

K: Thirteen grandkids?!

LR: No, nine.

KM: Nine.

LR: How many grandkids have I got – nine, I think! *[laughs]*

KM: Nine.

LR: I've forgotten how many I have! *[laughs]*

K: The one last question I wanted to ask was –

LR: Okay.

K: If y'all have any special traditions or special events –

LR: Here?

K: Here for the house –

LR: **[182]** Here we always have Homecoming, Parents' Weekend, which will be coming up pretty soon.

K: Yes.

LR: And – I guess that's the only one, the two that the sororities, that I'm in, you know – well, I'm really not, it depends which officer's in charge, if she wants me to say anything – the one we've got right now, doesn't.

KM: Well, but you helped with the Alumni Weekend –

LR: Alumni Weekend, yeah, but I'm talking about the officers. And then we have the alumni stuff. But that's – most of the functions that we have.

K: So you have a barbecue for the Alumni Weekend?

LR: Uh-huh. Now the girls, the girls – they participate in Derby Day and all that.

KM: All that stuff.

LR: Yeah. Which, you know, a lot of stuff goes on at the house, but – our three main functions would be, when we have anything for the alumni, it could be different things, you know. Homecoming is actually mostly for alumni, but they invite everybody else, too. And Parents' Weekend will be – I've always enjoyed Parents' Weekend. Because I get to see so many

parents, and after, your house, after you're at a house for a while, you really get to know a lot of the parents, just like – ooo, hey, I haven't seen you in this long!

KM: Right!

LR: You know. And like the girls, this formal? One of the girls came in wanting me to meet, go see her boyfriend. I thought he was cute in the pictures. *[laughs]* So I went out front, we were standing on the porch, and the bus was sitting out front. And about four of my girls had left in December, saw me standing on the porch, they were all waving, they all – half of the girls jumped off the bus, ran up there on the steps, *[laughter]* was hugging me, I said – one of them said, Mama, aren't you supposed to have shoes on in Mississippi? I had barefoot! *[laughter]* And the bus driver's sitting there looking, what's going on? *[laughter]* But it was some man says, I was running outside to say hi to them, so I was barefoot! And like I said, it's really, there's a bunch of them that's real close, that I hear from.

KM: What I think is, I know for your position, you're like a mom – there's times when you're the only person around, and somebody's having a bad day, you look after them.

LR: Yes. I still get letters from – I still get cards. **[206]** All the time, from my Tri-Delts. I see some from my KD, they always seem to get married – all of them, I still get cards from, and they're all addressed to "Mama Reid."

KM: Mama Reid.

LR: They address it. *[laughter]*

K: That is so special.

LR: Actually, I have, over the years, I've probably got thousands and thousands of kids.

KM: Oh yeah, because you've been at State for years –

LR: And more here.

KM: And more here, yeah.

K: So when you say you've got five kids of your own, that's just the first level! *[laughter]*

LR: I have four sons and one daughter.

K: Well, all right.

LR: Sure do. *[laughter]*

K: Well, it's after six, and I know you have something to do. I really appreciate the two of you taking some time to talk to me.

KM: Oh, it's no problem!

K: Signing off now!

[end of tape]