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## Colette A. Eddy : USF 50th (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project: interview by Lucy D. Jones

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Colette A. Eddy

Lucy D. Jones

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USF Florida Studies Center  
Oral History Program  
USF 50<sup>th</sup> History Anniversary Project

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of Aerial Photography Firm, Aerial  
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TRANSCRIPTION

- J: Today is Wednesday, March 17, 2004. My name is Lucy Jones. I'm a graduate assistant with the Florida Studies Center. Today I'm continuing a series of interviews with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni, commemorating fifty years of university history. Today I am with Colette Eddy at her office at Aerial Innovations in Tampa. Thank you for being with me today.
- E: You're very welcome. Actually it's Colette Eddy. That's okay. No problem. I'm glad to be here.
- J: Just start by saying what your current job is so we can get a sense of where you've ended up since going to USF.
- E: Ok. I own and operate a ten- person aerial photography firm which services most of Florida, and, of course, will go anywhere in the world for the right amount of money. My passport is in my purse. I'm actually leaving for Madagascar in May to go shoot lemurs, but that has nothing to do with this job. At any rate, we document construction, environmental issues, zoning, marketing, EPA cleanups, [and] sunken ships. You name it. [We photograph] mostly out of a helicopter, sometimes an airplane. It involves just shooting either regular film or digital, right

now. Sometimes the clients don't know which one they want, so we can do both. It's a job I wouldn't trade for anything because I never get up in the morning and say, ew I have to go to work.

J: That's a good thing.

E: Yes, it is.

J: Before you got to this most wonderful job in the world, you were a student at USF on the St. Petersburg campus. Thinking back, how did you end up there?

E: It was a decision that had to do with transportation. At the time I did not have a car. I had a roommate. She and her aunt Helen had a small little college that was on the border of the USF campus. When I tell you what we had to pay for rent, you'll probably laugh because Aunt Helen was very gracious and giving. Ellen had to pay twenty-five dollars a month, and I had to pay twenty-five dollars a month for the other side of the cottage, and I could walk to school.

J: That's great.

E: I didn't have a car. I had a bicycle. That decision is what drove me to that campus. Plus, I like the water. It was just interesting every day to walk to school and be able to smell the breeze off the bay.

J: What year was that?

E: Probably 1971 to about 1973. I basically finished up my last years of school at USF. The other years were spent at St. Petersburg Junior College at the time. Then I went away to Pennsylvania, and I spread some time out between Bloomsburg State College and a teeny bit at Bucknell, but not much because I was on a student loan, and it would bleed me dry. That's why I came back to St.

Petersburg and ended up down there. I'm the oldest of eight kids, so my family did not have like a buttload of money to afford my college education. I had to pay for it myself. Anyway, that was a driving factor. Then I just ended up staying there. Eventually I got a boyfriend who did have transportation, and I was able to do some classes at the USF campus in Tampa. That's how the original manifestation happened.

J: The practical...[interrupted]

E: Yes, very practical.

J: What did you major in?

E: Psychology and then geography. That is an interesting combination for business, actually, especially for this business. I just love geography. There was a professor that was very charismatic at the time, which Sudsy remembers. His name was Harry Schaleman. Harry passed away about ten years ago. Harry had been everywhere. He lived with a Masi warrior and a daughter. He had traveled to the far corners of the earth. He made that subject of geography extremely interesting. That's why I ended up there.

J: What did you do after you graduated?

E: We were in a recession. It was 1973. I actually used the rest of my student loan money to go spend two and a half months in Europe. I saw fifteen countries. We were on a Mercedes bus. We traveled all over the place. When I got back, I had no boyfriend because he didn't go so he lost interest. I had no money. I was in JFK airport with a ticket home and \$2.63 and no credit card. When I got home I needed to find work immediately, and the easiest place to work was at Aunt

Hattie's, which was a restaurant, which was near the campus at the time. I started, and the only position they had open was sandwich girl. Trust me, with a degree, that was the last thing I wanted to do, but money will drive you to do interesting things. I started as a sandwich girl and principled my way up to manager. I did that for several years. Then the business changed hands, and I was without a job. I was picking up a copy of a newspaper, and...in the middle I got married, but I was without a job. I ended up working for an aerial photography company as a sales person for seven years. I went from one place to another place, but if you work in restaurant business, I'm serious, you can do anything.

J: True.

E: Anything. It sharpens your people skills. You become very humble. You also realize what people in that industry go through every day. When they wait on you, it's nice to be polite. That was the progression on that.

J: Did you make any contacts at USF that helped you? Was that how you got job at Aunt Hattie's?

E: Not really. It was just persistence. One job that I did get when I was with the boyfriend, he and I actually had an on-school job, and that was managing the pool complex. At that time we had a little coffee house there at USF that we also were responsible for. I would do laps in the pool and hang out there. One day somebody printed an ad. Actually we got two jobs out of the USF campus, in between studying and actually playing. One of them was assisting a veterinarian to sail his boat from St. Petersburg to Merrill Steven's Marina in Miami. That was a lot of fun. The second one that we did was [being] caretakers on a 143 foot

schooner that was docked right there at Bayboro Harbor, right by the campus.

That was just fun. The contacts, I suppose through those jobs and just doing what we had to do at the pool....Contacts are good, and you do, you know...like the Sudsy contact. That goes way back until then. That's a long time ago....I think basically you take those skills that you learn at an institution. If the school and if you have done a good job with your education, you can go perform on the world stage. I was glad to be at the little campus. Truthfully, I felt it was a more intimate setting. I loved going there. That's how I ended up kind of going from there to here.

J: You mentioned the Sudsy contact. That's Sudsy Tschiderer? How did you meet her?

E: You know how gregarious Sudsy is. She was heading up programs. Actually, she was the one responsible for us - my boyfriend, whose name is Chuck Bohac, who I'm still in contact with, [and I] – [getting] the job there at USF through Sudsy. We would not have been involved in that whole pool deal. Trust me, that's when that pool did not look as nice as it does now. We really had a good time with that. I actually remember the freedom; we had keys to the pool complex so it was so much fun. I could go there and swim laps any time. It was very convenient.

J: Were you in the sail club as well? You mentioned sailing.

E: Chuck, who was the boyfriend, he was a big sailor, but no, he wasn't in the club. He had a star. He would sail with the Star Fleet. That was about it. That was a lot to do because I had a full load of classes plus the responsibility of the pool thing. The social life was not a whole lot, and I didn't have a whole lot of money. We

made fun where we could. Of course it was fun seeing everybody that came into the coffee shop, that came into the pool thing, [and] plus the people that you do meet. [It was a] good experience.

J: What were your responsibilities at the pool? What did you do?

E: [They were] making sure the thing was clean. I think Chuck just about blew himself up one day in the chlorine room. Oh well. Now he's at Grubb & Ellis, and he's a vice president so at least he made it through that.

J: You learn from the experience.

E: You learn. Absolutely. Don't go in a big room with a lot of chlorine. We had to just keep the facility looking good. It had to be clean. The pool had to be up to standards. The coffee shop, we had to mess with entertainment and food selection. It was just a very eclectic load of responsibilities, but it was fun. To have pretty much your own personal Olympic size pool pretty much in your back yard...I liked it. Anyhow, I suppose doing all those laps got me in good shape. It was a meditative thing, too. I loved it.

J: Do you remember any other faculty or students in particular, other than Schaleman and Sudsy?

E: Yes, there was one, I don't know if he's still around. His name was Robert Fowler, Dr. Fowler. He was my psychology professor. Wouldn't you know, I would have to have the stupidest rat in the whole damn program. I named the rat Zero because zero was a zero. I had to do my best to convince Fowler that it had nothing to do with my experimental modification. The rat was just dumb. I actually convinced him that the rat was stupid, and I got a good grade on the

whole thing. He was very patient, and I was very, very, very, very persuasive. I am not going to get a bad grade. The other thing was statistics, and I really wasn't at that time good in math. I am now because my business counts on it. At that time it was the whole female thing where nobody really took a lot of time with women in math. I can never forget; when I was done with that statistics class....I had a high GPA, by the way. [It was] very high. I was on the dean's list. That class I was awful at. I remember taking that statistics book, and I went out into the bay, which was very convenient, and I hurled it. It's somewhere in the bottom of Bayboro Harbor right now. Those were the outstanding people, really. Then there was this one guy. Sudsy would remember him, but I cannot remember his name. He taught a theology class. We nicknamed him Baby Jesus because he was very into all the religions, probably too much so. I think he ended up being dismissed for some obtuse reason. He was kind of influential, just in terms of being so eclectic in his religious ideas. He had no one particular thing, but he knew an awful lot about world religions and stuff. That was cool. Other than that, it was like anybody else. You drug yourself out of bed every day to go to school and drug through that. [You were] just fulfilling your days with working hard and doing it.

J: I know you've hired a lot of USF graduates in your business. Was that on purpose or coincidence?

E: I don't like to go through placement agencies because you pay a fee as a business owner. That's the number one thing. Secondly, no one knows your business like you do. Generally, when we need people, we just start putting the word out. One

of our ex employees is working on her master's in art history at USF right now. We just start putting the word out, and we have a good pipeline into available people at USF currently. Even though the demand is not that big for a ten-person firm; when we do have a hole to fill, it's nice to be able to pick up the phone and start that coconut telegraph going. It goes pretty fast. We get very, very, very interesting people here who have....I don't know whether it's the facility, but I think USF has obviously grown to the point where it's definitely a significant presence.

E: Do you look for a particular major or just a variety of experience?

J: I just look for people who want to work. I don't like to date myself, but I go, damn I can work rings around some of these people who are younger than me because it has to do with attitude. What I look for is really a good work ethic. Whether that means you come from the northeast. I'm not really particular. You could come from China. As long as they understand that when they're in here, they work, and we're all productive. Being a small company, I'll vacuum the floor in this place just as much as they have to vacuum the floor in this place. That's part of the job description. You come here with an idea that you're going to be in some sort of corner office on the eleventh floor...I don't think so.

J: Well you do have corner offices.

E: We have corner offices, but in the two stories we have to do something seriously high about stretching this. At any rate, I just look for people who want to work. USF has, like Jeff in there, he grew up on a farm in Kissimmee. [He] went to school on communications at USF. He's very good. He's selling for us up in

Jacksonville right now. Karen and the girls upstairs do have some background in photography, fine arts. That was not planned on, necessarily, but it just evolved. A lot of the women on staff here – Jeff is the only guy – do have a fine arts background. We do exhibit and show our work. Including me, which was something I wasn't trained for at USF, but I think with all the other stuff; I just love photography. Outside of the aerial work, we do other things that are creative. It's an evolution.

J: You've probably read all the newspaper stories. Do you have any opinions or thoughts about the St. Petersburg campus getting larger or changing? Do you think that it's good or bad?

E: I just think that St. Petersburg campus has a lot to offer. I think as St. Petersburg morphs itself into a more cosmopolitan city, which it's in the process of doing; we not have residential facilities within walking distance. [That] was the attraction for me way back when. You have more of them so they are just simply meeting a demand. It was nice when it was a small, intimate little campus, because everybody did know everybody, pretty much. Growth demands expansion. If you're going to stay in your little cubbyhole all the time, you're not going to keep pushing the limits. They have acquired the land. I think it's interesting because it has its own beat down there. [It's] much different from the Tampa campus. Much different. I'm sure you know that.

J: And you took classes at both campuses, so...[interrupted]

E: I did. Even then you would go to Tampa because you had to go to Tampa to get a class. You wouldn't go to Tampa because you wanted to go to Tampa. The people

that are involved in Tampa love that campus. I do think once you go to Bayboro and then you go over there, there's a big difference in feeling.

J: I agree.

E: Maybe it's just the water. There's something peaceful about it. It's very nice.

J: So all of the barracks were still there when you were a student?

E: Yes.

J: Had they built the Bayboro and Coquina, or anything when you were still there?

E: Oh, no. They were still painted puke green, puke military green inside. It was pretty barebones. You know, it was a place to study. Peter Betzer and I were swimming laps in that pool a long time ago in that pool when he first got there to start working on the marine science program. That was a long time ago. I used to do laps with his wife Susan Betzer, who is now an MD. I'm very partial to that campus. I really like it.

J: Do you still have any connections with it?

E: No, Lucy. Mostly we've shot it for the development coordinator – I'm talking the aerial end of it.

J: The other would've made the news.

E: Yes, absolutely. I think there's a new building that you're just starting somewhere. I can't remember the name of it or what science it applies to, but it's a new facility that's going to be under construction soon. We're going after that. Sudsy was a primary person that I remember from way back when. Actually, Susan Betzer, who I told you I did the laps with...I was on the phone with her just

last week because I'm trying to get some help for my older parents now, and Susan's very good with that. That connection is still on a thin line that continues.

J: I know that you have a lot going on today. Do you have any last thoughts that you came up with, knowing that I was going to come by and talk to you about USF?

E: Well, I love the school. I think it's progressive. I know when I graduated, if I say I got my B.A. at USF, people would kind of go, 'So what? I went to Florida or I went to FSU.' Now it's more like, 'Oh really, well I did, too.' I think that mindset has changed completely. Before it was like, ok you're going to school at that stupid cow pasture in Tampa or the barracks in St. Petersburg, or whatever. Now I think it's really grown. Back then, we did not have a basketball team. We did not have a football team. We did not have the major sports impact that we do now. That's not what makes a great university, but that's what gets people juiced up about coming to a university. I think all that has changed in the past thirty some years; It's continuing to change. It's place for research in the medical fields there is significant, and I think it will continue to be significant. It's got the whole campus with Moffitt going on. You've got a major cancer hospital right at your back door. It's got the Veteran's Hospital, which is right across the street, which is also good for med students to practice what they need on. Significantly, that whole campus and the Bayboro campus have changed in those thirty years since I went to school. I would suggest it to anybody that wants a great education.

J: Thank you for meeting with me today.

*End of Interview*