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Lance Rowland: This is Lance Rowland here with Rob Lorei at WMNF Studios, located at 1210 at East Martin Luther King Boulevard, in the heart of Tampa, Florida. It's Monday, October 10, 2005, and Rob is the News Director and Public Affairs Director for the station. Thank you, Rob, for agreeing to be with me today and talk a little bit about the station and your life. Can you start off by telling us where and when you were born? Where are you from?

Rob Lorei: I was born in 1954, in Erie, Pennsylvania, and I went through school there for all my twelve years, lived there my whole life as I was growing up and then graduated. Went to Cathedral Prep High School, which is where Tom Ridge went to school, who was the former Homeland Security czar here in the U.S.

LR: At the same time?

RL: No, he was ten years ahead of me, although he did come to one class function. I went to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

LR: That's a small school, is it not?

RL: Yeah, it's a small school. At the time that I was there, it was about 2,000 students; it's even smaller now. That's where Coretta Scott King went to school, and there was a lot of people that went to school there—Rod Serling from *The Twilight Zone*. On campus, I worked for the campus radio station, which was an NPR station, and I began to

volunteer there in about 1974. I entered school there in seventy-two [1972], volunteered in seventy-four [1974]. Worked in the news department, did some music programming, produced public affairs for the radio station, and graduated with a degree in journalism in 1977. Went back home to Erie, worked in the inner city with kids for a while, but still wanted to get a paying position in radio. When I worked at WYSO in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which is right outside of Dayton, I wasn't paid except for those times that I would occasionally fill in for the news director.

So I went back home, worked with inner city kids, saw an ad in *Mother Jones Magazine*; the ad said they were starting a radio station in Tampa. This would've been 1978. I applied for the job in 1978, sent my resume—and I had done a bunch of things in school, because there was a co-op work-study program in school, in college, so I—that was all part of my resume, and I got accepted to come down here. I was under the impression, by the guy who hired me named Joe Fox—Joe had gone to both Harvard and to Stanford Business School.

LR: Both of those?

RL: Yeah, he was a bright guy. But Joe told me that we were going to be on the air in a matter of months. So I drove down in May—well, actually in June of 1978. I had a beat-up old car and I had a few hundred dollars in my pocket, and Joe said, “You know, it's just a matter of time before we get on the air.” Well, it took us from—at least when I got here, June of 1978, to September of 1979 to get it on the air, and it seemed like an eternity.

LR: I don't want to interrupt you, but—so how does one support himself while you're trying to get this off the ground? You know, I assume they're not—are they paying you a salary?

RL: Yeah, we were paid; we were paid \$65 a week. And let me just back up and say that the idea for MNF came from a USF student. In 1975 the student-run programming on WUSF Radio was taken off the air by the university president, Cecil Mackey. And Cecil said that, “We want to have a fine arts radio station, and we don't want to have all this rock-n-roll and R&B”—the kind of programming that students wanted. “We want to have classical music, arts programming.” So he bumped off what I think at the time, and I wasn't here, but from what I've read and understand, about eight hours a day or so of student-run programming.

LR: Do you know if there was public affairs as well?

RL: No, I don't think there was. I mean, I think there were announcements, but I don't think there was really public affairs programming. And so, there were demonstrations on the campus of USF. I've read those articles. People were very angry. A student named Arnie Schlansky, in the next year or so, came up with the idea of starting a new radio station, another second public radio station in town. And Arnie got a board of directors together to get a construction permit, but he wasn't able to raise funds, and this is where the money comes in. Joe Fox worked for a group called AM/FM, which was an offshoot of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. And Joe's idea was—he said, “Arnie, I'll take over the radio project and get it on the air.” Because Joe thought that what he could do was go door-to-door, ask people for donations, and use that to parlay it into a radio station.

LR: That was going to be the primary funding?

RL: That was the primary funding source, and this would be 1978 now.

LR: And how much money was the goal to reach, to launch the station?

RL: Just keep raising it until you've got it on the air. When I got down here we were in our second office, and our second office was at 305 South Boulevard in Hyde Park, in Tampa. And we rented the office—it was a two-story house—for \$300. Every afternoon, I and about six or seven other people would go out and start knocking on doors. And we had targeted neighborhoods around Pinellas County, Polk County, and Hillsborough County, neighborhoods in which we would knock on the doors, we would ask people for donations, and we would also take a survey and ask them what kind of programming that they liked to hear on the local radio station, a new public radio station. And we gathered tens of thousands of replies.

I think overall, from the time the canvas was started to the time we went on the air, I think we raised about \$25,000, which nowadays doesn't sound like that much, but back then it was real money. And from that, from that money that we were able to raise every week—and I would go out, you know, from maybe five o'clock to nine o'clock along with my co-workers, and we might, on a good night, raise \$30, maybe \$100 dollars on a good night. From that we paid our own salary, which was \$65 a week; and we paid the \$300 a month it cost to rent the building we were in. We paid our phone bill; we paid for everything that we needed.

LR: And how many are on staff at this point, canvassing and fundraising?

RL: Uh, the staff varied. I think from time to time we had as many as seven staff members. Most of them, too, would go out and canvas, from Joe Fox on down. Joe was not elitist about it, he made everybody go out and raise money for this project. And you know, sometimes we would get great reaction, and other times people would look at us like we were from Mars and say, “What? Raising money for a radio station? I can get radio for free. I don’t need to give you guys money.”

But luckily, there were enough people that had the trust to give us enough money to keep the project going for months and months. There was a whole lot of turnover, though, because it was very hard work. You’re—you know, I was a kid from Pennsylvania. You know, five o’clock in the afternoon, that’s thunderstorm time for much of the year down here in Tampa. So, we would brave the humidity, the thunderstorms, and the dark, and people calling the police on us because in some locales we didn’t have the proper licenses to go door to door and ask for donations. But luckily, we got through it all.

Some of the other canvassers that were with me at the time were Cam Dilley, who still does a show here. He does a folk show, a morning show on Friday mornings. Ed Miller, who’s now in the real estate industry here, he was one of our canvassers. Andy Rooney—or rather, Andy—now I’m going to forget his name. Mimi Barron was another canvasser. I’ll remember Andy’s name in just a moment. Uh, Kevin Rooney was one of our canvassers. So these are some of the names of the early, early founders of WMNF Radio staff.

LR: That’s amazing. So—

RL: Andy (inaudible), I’m sorry.

LR: Andy (inaudible). So obviously there is nothing like it, nor, I guess, has there been like WMNF at the time. Maybe that was some of the impetus, how you could raise funds for something that didn’t already exist, I guess, possibly.

RL: Yeah. It is very hard to explain, though, because the betting was, in local media circles—and we had local radio reporters tell us, from the [*St. Petersburg*] *Times* and the [*Tampa*] *Tribune*, that nobody would really listen to a station like this, because there were stations that were similar to what we were planning. The first community radio station was in northern California, KPFA. The Pacifica network was out there; that had a reputation for being left-wing and a little bit wacky. But then there were community stations across the country in places—WYSO was considered a community station, outside of Dayton in Yellow Springs. There were community stations that were either on

the air or in the planning stages in places like Seattle and Cincinnati; across Texas, there were several in the planning stages. Houston already had a station, a Pacifica station. California had a bunch of stations that were either on the air, in the planning stage, or just about to go on the air.

So it was a concept that that was around the country, but it wasn't in Florida. We were the first community radio station in Florida. 'Course, you know, the decision on programming; it's not a lock that you're going to carry everything that Pacifica does. What we tried to do, and we had many meetings about it, we decided based on the surveys that we were taking door to door that we wanted to carry big band music, we wanted to carry bluegrass, we wanted to carry some folk music, we wanted to carry jazz, we wanted to carry R&B, we wanted to carry reggae. So we made a schedule in the beginning that was largely those types of music and very little public affairs. I think the first year we might have had an hour or so of public affairs on every week. And we didn't start our news department till about a year after we went on the air. It was a while.

LR: Well, in 1979 in the Tampa Bay area, which would include Polk County and some of the surrounding areas, what is the political climate like? Is it very conservative? Can you explain, maybe, what laid the foundation for you to be able to launch this?

RL: Well, I think the area was quite conservative. I can remember going with one of our board members, Betty DeMooney, just out of curiosity, out to Palm Harbor, across from the Innisbrook resort that's out there.

LR: Semi-affluent, people with money.

RL: Very affluent place. But across the road, on U.S. 19, was an orange grove on a hillside. And at that orange grove, there was a KKK rally. So when you talk about the climate, it wasn't unusual to see KKK literature and that sort of thing. The USF campus was quite active in the early 1970s, even a little bit in the sixties [1960s]. There were demonstrations against the war in the early 1970s. It was an active campus. But politically around the area, that was unusual. I think the one issue—we were asking people about issues, too, on the doors. And the one issue that came out over and over again that people wanted us to talk about was the environment. These were the days of Roger Stewart as head of the EPA—he was kind of a maverick—and I think people were seeing what was going on to their community, their state, with all of the development that really was roaring in at this point in the 1970s. And they wanted the pollution stopped; they wanted, you know, all the paving over of beautiful wild places stopped.

There were some other things that had gone on. There was a lot of protest against the way that the Sulphur Springs Arcade was torn down. This would have been about a year before; this would have been about 1976, seventy-seven [1977]. So there was some low-level activism, but I think those predictions by the local media that we wouldn't make it were based on their reading of politics here. And frankly, you know, the politics of MNF were going to be decided later. They were going to be decided by who was listening. We had a commitment early on to peace and social justice, but you can interpret that a lot of different ways.

LR: Broad terms, I guess.

RL: Yeah. And the evolution of MNF, you know, now we've got a really strong and, I think, powerful block of news and public affairs, which is very well supported. But I don't think that we would put it on the air unless there was a demand locally. We try to be very responsive. In the early days we were mostly a music station. Now we still are mostly a music station, but we have a whole lot more talk on, and news and public affairs.

LR: Well, when you started out, you mentioned you wanted to have blues and folk and big band. Were they in blocks like it is now, like you had a big band show and a folk show and a blues show? Was it like that?

RL: From day one, we knew that we wanted to have some continuity day to day. There were community stations across the country that were patchwork, so that one day you would hear a blues show, the next day you would hear a bluegrass show. And we thought that the audience for blues and bluegrass was distinct and separate. So we made a schedule that said that five days a week, we're going to do X, whether it's folk music or big band or reggae and blues and jazz mixed together, or bluegrass. And that's the way that we envisioned our schedule.

We wanted to be different than some of those other stations around the country. Like Memphis has a station, WEVL, and it's very patchwork and it's never caught on in Memphis. It still exists, but it hasn't built itself. It was on before we were on, and it hasn't built itself into the kind of station that we've built ourselves into. And part of that is that you've got to meet listener expectations at some level. You've got to please them on some level. So give those blues fans—our intention was to give them three hours a day in the afternoon—blues, jazz and reggae was mixed together in the early days. And then we had some block programming at night and on the weekends, so we had specialty programming that we were planning. In the early days we'd plan to have a classical segment, because we found a good classical host who formerly worked at WUSF. So we were willing to give block programming on the weekends.

LR: And not so much with news and public affairs, initially.

RL: Not initially. We began to do news headlines about 1980. We began, about the same time, to do a half-hour evening newscast; this would have been maybe 1981. After our bluegrass programming, at 6:30 we did half an hour of local news. And that was the early days, and then the other big part of our public affairs block was on Tuesday nights at 7:00: we would carry a speech or a documentary. Those were our early forays into news and public affairs.

The half an hour news block lasted for maybe—I'm just guessing three or four years. We found that it wasn't really connecting like we wanted to: it wasn't building an audience, it wasn't fundraising well. And eventually we took it off, in favor of doing five-minute news headlines throughout the day. We did a lot of our local news in the mornings and in the afternoons. For instance, it varied in time. Sometimes we'd do the news at 6:15, 7:15, 8:15. Over time, that evolved into doing five-minute newscasts at 6:30, 7:30, 8:30, and then doing them in the afternoons at 4:30 and 5:30. We found that those were very successful for a while. We eventually then put on another evening newscast that's now an hour long, and we began about three years ago doing that, at 6:00.

LR: Now, the initial studio was in Hyde Park?

RL: Yeah. We were in an old two-story wood-frame house that probably had 3,000 or 4,000 square feet. It was an old doctor's office. Downstairs was ACORN, because we still had a connection with ACORN; they were still a pretty viable community organization. Upstairs was MNF. There were about four or five bedrooms upstairs, and a bathroom, and there was a sun porch. The house belonged to a notorious slumlord. The wood was rotting; it was rarely painted. He really—this landlord, Emilio Ippolito, rarely took care of the building.

We began to build the radio station in 1978. We went around, we begged for—we went to glass companies and we said, "We need some glass to build our studios," and we got some pieces of glass donated to us. There was a bank building that was being torn down in downtown Tampa, and we got chairs donated and wastebaskets and some shelving donated to us, and file cabinets. We went to carpet stores and we asked them for used carpeting so that we could put it on our walls as soundproofing.

We had a series of engineers, including—one of our first engineers was Ed Kosco, who worked in the military industry locally; he was designing guidance systems for missiles.

But he was also a big fan of pirate radio: he had started several pirate radio stations in North Tampa around the university area in the 1970s. He was our first engineer, and we built our first control board by hand. We hand soldered it; Ed would tell us what to do and where to solder. And we gathered pieces from old radio boards—WSUN was getting rid of some of its radio equipment, and we would pull knobs off and toggle switches, and we built the control board by hand.

We built a record library next to the sun porch in an old bathroom on the second floor of this house, and so the bathroom—we pulled out all the porcelain and all the fixtures, and we put up shelving to hold LPs. Two people that were instrumental in that—both had connections to USF. Michael Naronia was a former librarian at USF and then quit his job, and George Hardy was the head of the bookstore at USF; he might still be affiliated with the bookstore. And Michael and George came down and they were handy carpenters, so they built this segment.

And we also—you know, I don't want you to get the impression that we just took the \$25,000 that we raised at the doors. But we also got a grant from the Campaign for Human Development for \$50,000, and that enabled us to buy a lot of used equipment. We bought a used transmitter, used antenna from KQEB in San Francisco. And we bought a few things that were new: we bought some microphones, some tape recorders and turntables. But that was all kind of low-level stuff; the really big expensive stuff, like transmitters, we had to buy used.

We actually hung our antenna by ourselves. We were renting space from Channel 13, on their auxiliary tower. And because we couldn't afford to hire a tower crew—this is very dangerous work, tower crews. People die on tower crews every year. Joe Fox was so brilliant, though. He just read radio manuals, figured out how to hook up the antenna to the coax cable that leads 500 feet in the air to our antenna. And he decided, "We're gonna hook this up ourselves." Ed Kosco helped him a little bit. At this point—this is mid-1979—Lia Lent was here, too, working; she was another early person at WMNF.

But what we did was—antenna bays are like two arms, and they're made of aluminum. Our antenna bays were about three or four inches in circumference, the arm was, and it was about maybe three feet in length. They're all joined by a joint in the center. And we had twelve of these bays that we had to lift 500 or so feet into the air. So our—

LR: Where was this located, this station?

RL: Our transmitter was located, and still is, in Riverview. We were at Channel 13's auxiliary tower, which is southeast of Brandon, maybe ten miles, maybe less than that.

And we got Channel 13 to give us a deal on—not their main tower, which is really nice and modern, brand new, but we got their auxiliary tower.

We lifted these antenna bays via car. We tied a rope onto my 1971 Volvo—the rope was more than 1,000 feet long—and I drove away from the base of the tower with the other end of the rope tied to an antenna bay and a pulley. The rope was put through a pulley at the top of this auxiliary tower. I drove away from the base of the tower in my car, pulling up the antenna bays one by one. And Joe would talk to me on a walkie-talkie and say, “Slow down, you’re pulling the tower over. Stop, stop.” He’d go, “Stop, stop!” (LR laughs) We almost pulled the tower over. Joe, of course, is on the tower watching the progress of this antenna, and he’s climbing up and down the tower, from the base up to about 500 or 600 feet into the air. Then we—

LR: Literally climbing step by step.

RL: Step by step, watching the antenna go up. And if it caught on anything, he would radio me on the walkie-talkie to stop. But these towers are fragile things, and had I put enough torque on, I could have pulled the tower over. Now, luckily, we had good communication.

LR: With him on it.

RL: Yeah. I mean, there’s a lot of stories about how we built it and the kind of things we went through to get it on the air. But we couldn’t afford a tower crew, which would have been very expensive and would have eaten up our whole budget. Joe was an expert on budgets. I mean, part of going through his business school experience was he knew how to budget and he knew how to stick to it. And he just couldn’t find the money in the budget, the amount of money we were taking in, to hire a very expensive tower crew.

LR: Now, that grant, was that a federal grant?

RL: The Campaign for Human Development is the social action arm of the Catholic Church. It’s probably one of the most liberal arms of the Catholic Church. And we told them that among the things that we were going to pay attention to in Central Florida was the plight of the farm workers, which we have over the years. They just knew that there was a problem and hardly anybody was paying attention to it, and we promised them that, as part of our mission, that would be one of the subjects that we would focus on when we did news and public affairs.

LR: Now, the operating license is issued to the Nathan B. Stubblefield Foundation.

RL: Yeah.

LR: He's the—I guess you would say one of the avant-garde pioneers of radio. Whose idea was that, to use that name?

RL: Well, the names around MNF are all good stories. But Nathan B. Stubblefield was the guy that Arnie Schlansky had pulled out of the history of radio. Stubblefield was a guy who lived, by all accounts, in Kentucky; he lived at the top of a hill or a mountain. And he invented a way to send audio signals into primitive speakers at distances. So his friends would come and visit him on the mountain, and this guy Stubblefield would plant primitive speakers on the mountainside, and as he saw his friends come up the path he would say, "Hey, Farney, I see ya. I'll see you in a few minutes." He would say something to just scare the heck out of them. And he figured out a way to send voices long distances, and his invention, at least by the accounts that we've heard, was stolen by some of the big radio manufacturers in the early part of the twentieth century and turned into viable radio. Stubblefield died in poverty, although the radio history books say that it was his invention that was one of the keys to developing modern radio.

So the Stubblefield Foundation, it only exists to hold the license of WMNF, and that was kind of what community radio stations were doing across the country back then. They were trying—they were taking names out of radio history past, kind of funny names, and putting those names on the license. And that really came out of a guy named Lorenzo Milam, who wrote a book about starting community radio stations called *Sex and Broadcasting*. Lorenzo Milam had meetings with Arnie and said, "Arnie, you ought to pick this name out, because it hasn't been used," and I think Arnie picked it and begun with that.

LR: Right. So the station is the sole entity under that umbrella.

RL: There's no big fat cat foundation somewhere sitting on 10 million dollars, no. The only reason for being of the Stubblefield Foundation is to operate MNF.

LR: It doesn't sound like a big media conglomerate.

RL: (laughs) Some people think it was. You know, they say, “What’s this foundation?” because on the doors we would have them make out the check to the Stubblefield Foundation. I think 1 in 10 people was the number that we decided would give us a donation, and it might range from a few dollars to thirty dollars. I think that the skepticism that we had on the doors when we were asking for money was in part due to this question: what is the Stubblefield Foundation?

LR: Right. So, it’s decided from the beginning that you’re going to be a—it’s a 501c3 charitable?

RL: It’s a nonprofit, right.

LR: Nonprofit. Saying that entitles people to deduct donations made from their taxes.

RL: Right. And the left-hand side of the FM band is set aside for nonprofit stations. When the first community radio station was started at KPFA in Berkeley, California, hardly anybody had FM radios. FM hadn’t taken hold of the public’s imagination. And even back then, when we started WMNF, there were still empty frequencies on the FM here in town. Now you can’t find an empty frequency, because if a university station or a community station hasn’t taken that part of the band, the religious stations have. And they’ve gotten the idea that they can be successful if they’re on that part of the band. So the only radio stations that can be on that part of the band, from 88 to 92 on the FM, can be non-commercial.

LR: Yeah, I have noticed more religious stations popping up down there in the last ten years.

RL: Yeah, religious stations have become very successful. They can raise a lot of money. And they’ve taken over—there’s probably seven or eight frequencies allocated here in the Tampa Bay area. And out of those seven or eight in that part of the band, only two are non-commercial educational stations.

LR: Do you know—has there been any legislation, what with the rise of consolidation and whatnot? Is there any legislation pending or talked about to edge toward the end of the dial there and to let corporations in on that? Do you hear about that?

RL: No. I haven’t heard of corporations making any inroads there. But we do know that the FCC is allowing some low power stations to come online, but it looks like there’s a

lot of shenanigans related to that. Ideally, it's a local nonprofit group that gets a low power FM, but that's not always the case. There's a real problem going on.

LR: I guess they have enough beyond the other frequencies.

RL: Yes, they've got all the rest of frequencies on the dial anyway.

LR: In the early days, if you're running an NPR program, do you have to pay for that?

RL: Yeah. We didn't run any NPR programming in the early days. It wasn't until the 1990s that we began to put on NPR news and *Fresh Air*. Prior to that, most of our public affairs came from Pacifica. We did start, in the late 1980s, buying the Associated Press. They have an audio service, and we used that briefly. But it wasn't until fifteen years or so after we went on the air that we began to buy NPR programming.

LR: I'm just curious—the AP wire, what did they charge you for that when you began? Do you recall?

RL: I don't recall. It seemed to me that it was around \$4,000, \$5,000 or \$6,000.

LR: For the whole year?

RL: Yeah, for the whole year. And that gave us—as much as we wanted to be alternative and try to look at news stories that meshed with our mission, also, you can't ignore some of the big stories that are going. So the AP is an easy, quick way for our news reporters and volunteers and anchors to see immediately what are the big stories going on around the world.

LR: And so now you have—well, you run *Democracy Now!* and several others. It's really amazing, the assortment of programs you run. That's a mainstay, though, *Democracy Now!* Is that something that you have to pay for, or is that complimentary?

RL: Yeah. *Democracy Now!* we do pay for. We pay Pacifica our membership fee, and from Pacifica's membership fee we get three things. We get satellite access. Pacifica owns its own satellite channel, so we get any programming we want from that channel from Pacifica, including the *Free Speech Radio News* and *Democracy Now!* And we get

those other two shows, *Democracy Now!* and *Free Speech Radio News*. And I think Pacifica's fee is probably something like—I don't know, but it's based on how much money our budget is. I would say it's probably \$19,000 this year, give or take a few dollars either side.

LR: And WUSF also runs certain NPR.

RL: Yeah. USF runs the big magazine shows like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. Where we have overlap is that both stations carry the *Headline News*. They carry it at a little bit different time because they're digital now, so if you switch back and forth between USF and us right now you don't hear the exact same thing at the exact same time. The show that they did carry for a while that we've picked up was *Fresh Air*. We didn't carry it from the beginning, but in the mid-1990s USF had dropped it, and we decided that it meshed really well because—

LR: Yeah, that's a keeper, isn't it?

RL: Their film reviews, their music reviews, and a lot of their political interviews are things right up our alley.

LR: Yeah, I think that seems to fit nicely in everything else you do.

RL: One national program that we almost picked up was—about 1985 or so, the producers of *A Prairie Home Companion* called us. This was at a time where USF was only doing a little bit of national programming, national public affairs or talk. They were doing *All Things Considered*, but they weren't doing *Prairie Home Companion*, nor were they doing *Morning Edition* at this time in 1985. So we began to get feelers from both National Public Radio and the producers of *Prairie Home Companion* saying, "Would you like to carry *Morning Edition*? Would you like to carry *Prairie Home Companion*?" We said no to *Morning Edition* just because our morning show was a success, but we said we would consider carrying *Prairie Home Companion*, because it was a fabulous show, USF wasn't carrying it, and we said to the producers yeah, we'd entertain it. Well, they then took that information, the producers did, to USF and said, "If you don't carry *Prairie Home Companion*, we're going to give it to WMNF," and within a few months USF began to carry *Prairie Home Companion*.

LR: When do you finally make the move from South Tampa over to Martin Luther King Boulevard?

RL: Well, 305 South Boulevard was our home until 1981. It became real clear that the station was catching on. We had lots of volunteers; we were running out of space. Our record library was in this old bathroom, and it was expanding by hundreds of records every month. So we knew we had to get out. There was a minister who was at the United Methodist Church, which was located at the corner—near the corner of Nebraska Avenue and what was then Buffalo Avenue. There's now a Kash 'n' Karry on that site.

We took the minister up on his offer. He said, "You can have our old school building, the second floor of it." This was for us an increase in space of about 50 percent. And so what we did was we converted the second floor of this old school building, which was basically classes, into offices and air studio and live music studio. We were there until 1989, and then in 1989 we decided we were out of space and we wanted our own building. We bought a building at 1210 East Martin Luther King Boulevard. It was an old carpet warehouse showroom that was initially in the fifties [1950s] kind of a ranch-style concrete block house. We moved into that in 1989.

One of the interesting things there was that we—in the early days, we sent our signal from the radio station out to our transmitter via phone line. Well, the modern way to do it is by microwave. So in the mid-1980s, we switched over to microwave. Well, microwave—

LR: That's what those big dishes are, correct?

RL: Yeah. We have a big tower next to us—that's more than eighty feet tall, next to us, and that's our microwave tower. And that's how we get our signal from here to there in Riverview. In order to make the move from Nebraska Avenue over here to Martin Luther King, we had to carry the tower by hand. And so about sixty people got together one day, we took the tower off its brackets in its concrete anchor, turned it over on its side, and we marched it from where the Kash 'n' Karry is now over here, which is about four blocks away. And we marched through some of the back streets with this antenna, and at one point almost touched a power line with it and almost fried—well, that might be an exaggeration, but we came very close. And then we re-erected the tower over here, and that was—and that was made famous in a t-shirt and a program guide cover by Steve Smith, who's an artist in Gulfport; he did a cartoon of that that became one of our most popular t-shirts.

LR: So this is a recurring theme, these almost impossible odds to overcome, and then this continuity community idea, I guess, is able to conquer that. To me, it sounds like the—it reminds me of the Egyptians building pyramids or something, you know, just everyone getting together and—

RL: Yeah, there's a lot of elements of handmade, do-it-yourself, we can do it here in Tampa; we don't have to get a grant for it. If we can do it ourselves, we will. There's a lot of that.

LR: I think a lot of government—I'm thinking education—could probably take some lessons—you know, they're always in need of supplies and money—and take some cues from you folks. What is it like, you know, the eighties [1980s] or the Reagan era, and of course being a progressive radio station left of the dial? Are you constantly being criticized in editorials? What's the climate like for the station? Are you kind of in your own progressive world here?

RL: Well, I think the newspapers in town have been very good to us, and some of the television stations have been very good to us. The move in 1989, Channel 8 did a great story about how the station was running out of room. Channel 8, again, in maybe 1987, visited a spaghetti dinner we did over at the old church on Nebraska Avenue and did a glowing report.

The climate—I think there were some problems. One of the first problems I noticed is that we tried to do a Spanish language music show. This was at 305 South Boulevard, about 1981. One of our programmers then was Sandina Robbins, who later went on to become the spokesperson for the Oakland, California, School District. But Sandina wanted to do a program of folk music from South America, and on that program she put on Victor Jara's music, who was killed during the Chilean coup in 1973; his brand of music is called new song. We got a death threat when we did that. If you played—a person with a Spanish accent called us up and said, "If you play that music again, we will bomb you." That was our first kind of brush with that.

LR: What year was that?

RL: This would have been about 1981. Later on, about 1985 or eighty-six [1986], one of our volunteers—well, actually, our news director back then, a person who I worked closely with, Roger Adams. At this point I was the program director; Roger was the news director. In about 1985 we got a knock on our front door from the Secret Service. Roger had been active in a group called Casa, and it was a group that was opposed to U.S. intervention in Central America. At the time, there were two conflicts—three conflicts, actually—going on in Central America. The U.S. was involved in each one: in Nicaragua, in El Salvador, and in Guatemala. Well, Casa was designed to try to get the U.S. to take a more holistic approach to those conflicts and not just take the side of the

right wingers in those countries, but look at the needs of the people and the Indians and the low income population.

Well, because Roger participated in this group, the Secret Service came to us and said, “We understand that there’s a plot to assassinate President Reagan, and it’s being hatched with this group, Casa, and we want to investigate Roger.” And they took Roger into the newsroom and sat him down. We were—the manager and I were excluded from this. At this point, our station manager is Janine Farver.¹ We were excluded from that, and Roger, after a half an hour meeting or so, is shaking. He comes out and says, “They think I’m trying to assassinate the president.” Well, it was ludicrous, I mean, and at this point we do have news on. We are covering the issues of Central America; we have added, at this point in 1985, the Pacifica news, which was a half-hour evening newscast that was produced in Washington. So we felt very intimidated.

There have been other times, too, where we would get death threats called into us: after 9/11, we got death threats because we went on the air and we had call-in shows. Some of our callers suggested that our Middle East policy was making enemies in the Muslim world. We got death threats because of that. There have been other times, too.

LR: Threats from people that disagree that possibly U.S. foreign policy could be initiating these attacks?

RL: Right. Yeah.

LR: Did people, in these cases you mentioned—well, I guess the latter more so, 9/11. Did you experience a drop in fundraising? Did people pull their support to a degree?

RL: MNF has never experienced an overall drop in fundraising. From the first Marathon, in seven days we raised something like \$29,000. Every year, every Marathon, has pretty much gone up. We might go back just slightly. The Spring Marathons tend to be better than the Fall Marathons. But most of our money comes from these seven-day on-air drives that we call Marathons. Occasionally we’ll do a supplemental one, two, or three-day drive. But in a typical year we might do as many as seventeen days on the air, and that’s where we get 70 percent of our money. And in the history of MNF, since we started in 1979, in no year have we raised less money than the previous year. Every year, our fundraising goes up.

¹Janine Farver was also interviewed for the Carlton-Anthony Tampa Oral History Project. The DOI for her interview is U11-00109.

LR: In talking about fundraising, a few years ago I think the station caught some flak for playing an Iris DeMent song. Was there a representative or Congressperson that heard this? Can you elaborate on that episode?

RL: Yeah, this would have been when Rich Eiswerth was our station manager, and it would have been in the mid-1990s. State Senator John Grant was keeping an eye on us. We had struggled for years—since the very beginning, we had asked the state to include us in state funding. Every year they give every public radio station and television station a grant. In the state's case for radio, it's about \$100,000 a year; in the case of the televisions, about \$600,000 a year, currently. John Grant was never a fan of that. Finally, about 1993 or 1994, we were able to convince the state that we met all of the criteria, even though we thought we had met it back in 1979, but we finally convinced them to include us in that grant process. John Grant almost immediately objected. He was a Republican legislator from this area, North Tampa. And John had apparently assigned a staff person to listen to us.

There were three songs that that staff person reported back to John and objected to. One was Iris DeMent's "Wasteland of the Free," which she wrote right after the first Gulf War, and it's a very angry song. You know, there's a line in there about politicians taking corporate cash; you can't tell me that they don't turn around and kiss the people's ass. There was another song by Robert Earl Keen that had a line in it about backseat sex, and the senator objected, I think assuming that we were promoting promiscuous sex. And then there was a Dan Bern song in which he was lamenting the early deaths of Kurt Cobain and Marilyn Monroe. The Dan Bern song was also one that the senator's staff person objected to. So he wrote—

LR: Is this "God Said No"? I think that line occurs in there. I think I know the song.

RL: I think the song is "Marilyn," but I might be wrong. I should know that, because this is part of our important history. Anyway, so the senator thought that we were slapping politicians in the face, we were promoting backseat sex, and we were encouraging drug use, because I think he thought that we were lauding Kurt Cobain's drug use, which we weren't. I mean, this is a very sad song that Dan Bern wrote. He wrote us a letter. He said, "Because I don't think that"—and this is not a quote, but he says essentially because of these songs, I don't think that you should be eligible for state funding, so I'm moving to take your money out of the budget this year. He was successful. He did it. He pulled the money out of the budget.

Our station manager, Rich Eiswerth, who was a great guy, he said, "Oh, we can't talk about this on the air." Well, the whole staff disagreed with him and said, "Rich, we got to

talk about it on the air, maybe even do a fundraiser for it.” So we went on the air and talked about it, we did a fundraiser, and in less than a day, less than twenty-four hours, we had raised the whole money that we had lost from the state. Eventually we were restored; the next year, we were restored in the state budget. And in that battle, the *Miami Herald* editorialized in our favor; several of the local newspapers wrote pretty good articles about us. Channel 13 did a nice television spot about the controversy.

So, you know, going back to that question earlier, I never really thought the press was hostile to us. We even had a spot on WFLA Radio, on the morning show with Jack and Tedd and Sharon, and they interviewed our station manager and our program director about the controversy.

LR: Which is usually fairly conservative, you could say.

RL: Yeah. I think Tedd and Jack are proudly conservative, but they were concerned. So, I think overall, the fallout was worse for John Grant than it was for us, because I think people looked at those songs in context and realized these are important statements about the state of America, the state of politics, drug use. I mean, it’s not as if we’re telling people, “Shoot up heroin.” That is not our intent.

LR: Right. Well, the station has a history of, again, this community spirit and pacifism, and it’s just a pleasant—almost an oasis on the radio dial. And on Sunday mornings for many years you had a show on, *Straight Talk* with Connie Burton. She is a proponent and a worker for the Uhuru movement. Is that correct?

RL: Right. Yeah.

LR: And she was taken off the air in the past year, January of this year, 2005. Did the show take a turn, do you think? Did it become more about, say, the Uhuru movement than, say, just equality and civil rights?

RL: Well, yeah. You know, our intent was always to have shows that would be very broad based. And whether it’s the *Polka Show* or any other show, we said, “Look, you gotta broadcast to the whole community.” You can’t just broadcast to your friends at—for instance, in the *Polka Show*—at the Suncoast Lodge. You know, there’s dozens of organizations that treasure polka: they’re German, they’re Hungarian, they’re Polish, they’re Slovakian. And that was our attitude towards every show.

The evolution of *Straight Talk* was that the first host of that was Michelle Patty, who was a well-known local radio host who was taken off WTMP because WTMP owners didn't like what she was saying. And she would deal with everything: police abuse, what's happening in education. She would interview mayors and politicians and teachers and School Board officials. When her show was dumped from WTMP, we brought it over here.

LR: What year was that, do you recall?

RL: This is late 1990s, maybe 1997. You know, all this is written down somewhere. It would take some research to find the exact date.

But Michelle came over, and within two or three years her sidekick became Connie Burton. Connie was not initially involved with the Uhurus. Eventually, Michelle left. Michelle's husband was working more out of town. She couldn't make the commitment to come and do the show every week. So she—in community radio fashion, she kind of willed the show to her sidekick. And there are examples of that here at community radio, where the decision isn't made by the central program director or news director. The decision is—

LR: Whoever's at the mike at the time.

RL: Right. Because you know, a radio station where you've got maybe fifty or sixty people on the air, it's easier to say yes than it is to say no, because you got to train somebody new.

Anyway, so Connie took it over, and initially, I think for a tiny brief time she was open to everybody in the community. Over time, she began to criticize people in the community, and we began to get feedback from people within the African American community saying, "Hey, how can you let that show on the air?" We had businesspeople who were called Uncle Toms, who were criticized by her. And I think it all came to a head when we had a retreat at Chinsegut [Hill], and we had our board and staff there, so—

LR: Which is a USF facility. (laughs)

RL: Another USF connection. And up there we had our staff, board and some volunteers and it's a very—it's a very diverse meeting. And some of the African Americans on our board said, "Why do you have this show on the air?" They practically interrupted the

retreat and said, “There’s an issue here that we’re not even talking about that I think is the biggest issue for MNF, and you’ve gotta talk about it.” So the retreat, after—this was probably four hours into the retreat—began to switch, and we had a long conversation about the show. The board then made a move to say we want this show off the air, which is really unprecedented.

Now, there have been complaints that I received from businesspeople and all that, before that. And I was dealing with Connie on these complaints.

LR: So, you were sort of the envoy between the station and her, so to speak?

RL: Yeah. There is a timeline—it’s probably still on our Web site—that you can find, if I’m missing a piece here.

The board said, essentially, “You’re not working fast enough, and if you don’t take her off the air right now”—my intention was to provide more training for her, to talk to her again. These were subjects, though, that we had talked to her about in the past, including libel and slander, which we felt that we were in that territory. There were also some calls to violence on that show. At one point, one person was—they were talking about Civitas, and they had a guest said, “You know what they did with sellouts in the black community in South Africa? They necklaced them.” Well, necklacing means they would put a tire around somebody, you fill it with gasoline and set it on fire, and you kill them. The hosts of the show, including Connie and her co-host, said, “Right on.”

We took that as an approval of violence, where our mission is for peace and social justice. We’re very—as you said a moment ago, pacifism is a big part of what we try to do. We talk about wars; we talk about alternatives to wars. The history of these community radio stations, when it began in 1949, the main leader of the group that started KPFA in Berkeley was this guy named Lew Hill, who was a pacifist. He objected to World War II. He wasn’t pro-fascist or anything, he just objected to war, and he was interned with Japanese Americans in internment camps. He had to serve at least a year; he might have been in more than that.

But kind of our reason for being is that we really believe that if people can talk to each other, in a responsible and respectful way, that they might be able to resolve their problems. That’s really the idea behind this. So when you suggest that somebody who disagrees with you should be necklaced, that really goes against the tradition that we’ve tried to establish. I mean, just as we don’t like John Grant telling us what to say, we were very loathe—we didn’t jump in right away when the necklacing remark was said. We

were planning to do training and we tried to have several meetings. She wouldn't show up for meetings, so she delayed having a meeting with us for months.

LR: She did show up at your home, with her supporters?

RL: Yeah. Connie and her supporters picketed my home in South Tampa for three weeks in the early part of this year.

LR: Every day for three weeks?

RL: No, it was Sunday mornings, Sunday morning at 9:00 when the show started. They showed up with bullhorns on Sunday morning and did it for three weeks. I think they started with thirty-five people, and every week it got smaller.

LR: Shifting gears, the station recently did a survey among, I believe, 500 listeners.

RL: Yeah.

LR: Fifty-nine percent of your listeners believe music and information programming are of equal importance. Has there ever been kind of a tug-of-war between the two? You know, the station is so well known for both things. Are the DJs and yourself grappling for more airtime at times?

RL: It's not open hostility, but I think there is—you know, there is a little bit of grumbling. For instance, when we carried the John Roberts confirmation hearings a few weeks ago, some of our volunteers said, "We'd really appreciate it if you didn't carry the hearings." So, it's not open warfare, it hasn't led to any sort of (laughs) angry meetings or anything like that. But I got to say, there is a little bit of tension and push and shove. The volunteers' position is, "We give up our time to come down here and volunteer our time for you. We prepare our shows, sometimes prepare them a week in advance, and you shouldn't just interrupt our show for the John Roberts confirmation hearings." As a staff person, my argument is that from time to time, there are gonna be major hearings that we want to carry, whether it's the hearing into the gay rights ordinance in Hillsborough County or whether it's the Iran-Contra hearings and the Judge Bork confirmation hearings or the savings and loan scandal hearings. From time to time, we want to do it. We're not going to do it every day.

LR: But historical events usually will take precedence over blues or what have you.

RL: Yeah. I mean, this goes back to Fred Friendly, and this goes back to CBS. The reason why Fred Friendly quit CBS was that the CBS network refused to interrupt its soap opera programs to carry the Gulf of Tonkin debate in 1964, over whether the U.S. should get into a war, fight back against North Vietnam. Now, that was a little lesson that I learned in journalism school, is that you don't take the easy way out; sometimes you got to throw out the commercials and the regular thing and maybe anger some of your regular listeners in order to bring something of historical significance or national significance. And I learned that lesson; at least, that was a lesson I learned from reading about Fred Friendly and hearing about that controversy. He quit CBS News because of that, their top guy, and had worked with Edward R. Murrow. This was where he took his stand, and I agree. I admire him for it.

LR: You also host a weekly television show called *Tampa Bay Week* on WEDU, the local public broadcasting station. How long have you been doing that?

RL: I started as a panelist on that show in the early 1990s, when Syl Farrell was the host. I was also a panelist on WTOG's *Bayside* program, which is a similar kind of chat political show. WEDU cancelled *Tampa Bay Week* in 2001, just maybe four months before 9/11. Syl was let go as the host, and then they tried to revive the show. They went to Syl—they got a lot of negative feedback for cancelling the show. They went to Syl and said, "Do you want to host it again?" He was very hurt by them cancelling the show, because he had done such a good job. He said no.

They came to me; they said, "Would you host it?" because I had been a panelist and somebody down there liked me—I'm not sure what it was. I tried out to be the host: there was kind of a competition, three other people did tryouts. They selected me, and we went on right about—we were preparing to do the show, and then 9/11 happened. I think my first show was the first week of October 2001, so we were in the middle of all the 9/11 issues. And, indeed, it came up on the show, even though it's designed to be about state and local politics.

LR: Is that a live show, or do you tape that earlier in the week?

RL: We tape that at four o'clock—somewhere between four and five o'clock on Friday afternoon, depending on when the crew and everybody's ready to sit down and tape.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

LR: And with, you know, given that and your job here—I mean, a typical day for you starts when and ends when?

RL: Well—(laughs)

LR: There is no typical day?

RL: There is no typical day. I'll tell you what I do tomorrow. Tomorrow at 5:30 or quarter to six, I come in. I'm working with an intern who's learning how to do the newscast, and so what I'll do is I'll prepare the first newscast for 6:30. I'll begin to read the Associated Press. I'll make sure that I've read both newspapers, the *Tampa Tribune* and the *St. Pete Times*. I'll go to some of the collections of stories from around the state; there's a thing called (inaudible) Review. I'll begin to assemble just a kind of breaking news headline cast for five minutes for 6:30.

At the same time, I'm also talking with this intern and helping him decide on what stories he's going to do. He'll do the newscast at 7:30. Between 6:35 when I'm off the air and 8:30 when I'm on the air again, I'll be editing sound for the newscast. I'll be looking for fresher news and things we haven't said. I'll be rewriting from the newspapers or from the wire. And then at 8:35, I'll be done with that process, having anchored that newscast. And then I begin to set satellite feeds for *Democracy Now!* and begin to answer my voluminous email, which I hate. I get several thousand emails a week.

LR: Wow.

RL: Not all of them are personal, but many of them demand some sort of interaction with me. Sometimes it's a press release that we just need to hand on to our PSA department or to other news people. I frequently will get news releases and talk with Mitch or send them on to Mitch, our assistant news director, who's preparing the 6:00 evening news. He really does that whole cast; that's his thing.

And then, once I get through the backlog of emails, I begin to plan my 1:00 show. I usually try to pick something topical; sometimes I've already recorded an interview and I just need to edit it. I'll also edit listener comments from the previous day. I might get anywhere from zero to eighteen comments about the show the previous day. I always ask people to comment about the show, because I really believe that media should be interactive—and it gives the people a chance to correct something or complain about something if they feel like we've been remiss about something. I don't want people to

feel like they have no way to respond, and I think that's the purpose of letters to the editor in the newspaper. I think it's a beautiful invention. I agree with it.

And then, I'll begin to call people or email them, try to line them up for the 1:00 show. And at the same time, I'm also running the air studio, I'm running the shows. At 10:00 we put on *Fresh Air*; I usually bring that in to the host, or I put it on myself and begin to play it, sometimes do all the breaks between the shows. At 11:00 we do everything from *CounterSpin* to *Exploration* to *Alternative Radio*. On Fridays we have *Art in Your Ear*, which is a locally hosted show, but the others are pre-recorded. And then at noon we have news and *Democracy Now!* right after that: news for five minutes, then *Democracy Now!*

At 1:00 I've got to be ready to do my show, with a guest lined up or guests. I've got to have my comments edited, I've got to know where I'm going to go with the questions I'm going to ask, and then can take off and we do the show. Now, sometimes, like I said, I'll have an interview taped ahead of time, so in those mornings, in addition to everything else I'm doing, I might also be taping an interview. I'm trying to think what I did. I've interviewed a former CIA agent, Larry Johnson. I put that on tape. There's a new book out called *The Republican War Against Science*, and I interviewed that author a few days ago; haven't played the interview yet. So during the day, it could be a live or taped interview.

And then at 2:00, it's cleaning out the emails, getting rid of that stuff, meeting with the station manager. On Wednesdays I have a staff meeting with most of the people in the building, and we talk about everything from Marathon to fundraising to some problem with the programming. I'm also—what I'm doing and what I've been doing the last few weeks is kind of monitoring what books and DVDs have come out that I think our listeners might like for our fall fundraising drive, which starts in just a few weeks. And so I'm ordering books or I'm ordering DVDs, and making sure that we have thank-you gifts that are going to be attractive to our listeners. My job is to, in the midday, raise about \$20,000 a day from 10:00 AM till 2:00 PM during our fund drive. And that is—it's usually the highest goal of any four-hour period in the Marathon. They put a lot on us here in News & Public Affairs.

Now, I have help. Mitch Berry comes in and he'll pitch with me; he's the assistant news director. Andrew Stelzer is our reporter. This is the first time we've had three people in the news department; this is huge for MNF! Usually it was just me.

LR: You're going to need another new building soon, right?

RL: But this is good. We're at a good spot. So Andrew will come in and help us pitch, and then we'll have people—some of our volunteers will help us pitch. So it works out. I mean, I'm not too scared about \$20,000, but that's the biggest nut that we've got to make during the drive.

LR: Well, that helps to support this brand new facility we're in; you moved in earlier this year—was it April?

RL: Yeah, February of this year we moved into this new building, which cost us more than \$2 million; we're still adding up the bills. Most of it was paid for by donations of \$1,000 from people, and they didn't just give us a check for \$1,000: most people paid for it \$28 and some cents a month, and they did that over three years. You know, I know a lot of the staff donated—I donated 3,000 bucks, and that's how I did it. I just had a little bit of money taken out.

LR: Installments.

I kind of think this is sort of an echo of the social clubs that are in Ybor City. I mean, here we are two miles north of Ybor City, and down there you've got the Cuban Club, you've got the Jose Martí Club, the Maceo-Martí Brigade—Martí-Maceo Society; I've forgotten the name. But you've got the Spanish Club; you've got the German Club. All the cigar workers, when they were around back in the late part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, in order to build these clubs, would donate twenty cents a week or a nickel a week or a dollar a week, and it would go into the fund for the club and they would build these great social clubs, like the Centro Asturiano or the Centro Español.

I think this is the modern-day manifestation of that, where ordinary people, not rich people, not the fat cats, but people that work as teachers and auto mechanics and people that work regular jobs. I mean, we do have the occasional lawyer or doctor, too, which is okay. But they gave their \$28 a month, and maybe they were fortunate enough to write out a check for \$1,000. But we all pooled our money, people from all walks of life, and we pooled our money and we built this building, which I think is a monument. As community stations go across the country, I don't think there's any building as big as this.

LR: It's amazing.

RL: Maybe KPFA's building is as big as this. But we're probably—we've got to be in the top two. I don't think any other community really supports their community station the

way the Tampa-St. Pete-Sarasota area supports this one. I mean, I think we've got to be one of the most supported community stations in the country.

LR: It certainly is a testament to what you do here, and to the people here in the community.

RL: Right, exactly. The people in the community, the 200 volunteers, the fourteen or fifteen staff people. I mean, nobody's irreplaceable, so it's all of us. You know, I can't say that we work without tension, we're not a tension-free place, but it's a pretty good place. With all that diversity and people coming and going and people sometimes quitting their shows and trying to assimilate new people, people from all backgrounds, all religions, we get in this building and we pull together. And we don't always agree; we've got a Jewish program and an Arab-Muslim program, and people are able to coexist and find some common ground.

LR: So, you're metaphorically always kind of carrying that tower down the street together, I guess you could say.

RL: Yeah, it's that team effort that we do every day. Not as dramatic every day as the tower, but it's still the same idea.

LR: You're certainly—hopping in your car that day, seeing the ad in *Mother Jones*, heading south was a life changing experience, obviously. You would meet your wife here, Janine Farver—

RL: That's right.

LR: —who was station manager for a while, and now she works for the Florida Humanities Council.

RL: Yeah, where'd you get that?

LR: Somewhere. (laughs) Do you ever think about if you hadn't seen that ad or hadn't made that decision at the crossroads to head south, where would you be now, do you think? Any ideas?

RL: (laughs) I always wanted to be a lawyer, and probably would have gone to law school had I not sidetracked. In fact, my first few years here, I kept thinking, “One of these days I’m gonna quit and go to law school when I save enough money.” And the problem in the early days is that we weren’t paid very much, so I couldn’t save very much. (laughs)

LR: So you never actually officially applied?

RL: No, never applied. And then Janine and I had kids in the mid-1980s, and that really changed our lives. We had to get serious about what we were doing then. Yeah, I think about it all the time. I mean, frankly, I think how many other people work at community stations for this long? Not too many people, although there are a few—Larry Bensky, again, at KPFA, and some of the people at [W]BAI. I think I’ve been fortunate that people haven’t gotten so sick of me that they’ve drummed me out. I mean you know at least we have this kind of esprit de corps, and I haven’t broken my welcome yet.

LR: So, you seem very comfortable here. Have there ever been aspirations to, say, move on to NPR somewhere in California, or Pacifica—up the community radio ladder, if you will?

RL: Yeah, there is no ladder.

LR: I guess there isn’t one.

RL: This is the top of the ladder. A lot of people want to come here.

LR: Or, say, for the BBC?

RL: You know I would love to do that. I mean, I think about that all the time. What I want to do is serious journalism. I want to make a difference and be something really important. I want to work for an organization that is committed to serious journalism, doing things straight. I would have felt really good, I think, at CBS in the 1950s under Fred Friendly and Edward R. Murrow. The problem is that I don’t think there’s many places I’d feel comfortable at today. I think NPR has its problems. I think if there’s going to be a role for me, if I’m lucky enough to continue journalism, I think what I’d like to take over a place like WEDU and turn it into—produce more local programming, maybe change the ethics so that it wasn’t so reliant on underwriting and canned shows, and really show the PBS world that MNF could be a model. The kind of thing we do here on the radio could be a model for PBS. That’s really what I’d like to do. I mean,

who knows? Maybe I'll end up going back to law school. (both laugh) But I would like to do—I mean, frankly, this has been a great place, but I don't want to stay here forever.

LR: Well, I thank you for your input and your perspective. Is there anything we left out that perhaps you would like to include?

RL: You know, there's probably a lot of stuff—we could get into a lot of detail, but I'm not sure it'd be that interesting to people.

LR: Well, Rob Lorei, thank you so much, on the behalf of the University of South Florida. Thank you for your time and your story here at WMNF.

RL: All right. Well, thank you.

End of interview